



CRITICIZE

On. criti- cizm

At the end of Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest* the main character dies in agony. Pain in the stomach (the kind which, years later, Kurt Cobain would have) has been already for a long time unbearable, just as unbearable as the people who go out of their way to make priest's last days hell.

And yet, before his last sigh, the priest, with great peace and certainty, utters the famous sentence: "Whatever it is, everything is God's grace."

This is the moment when one completely renounces critical approach, renounces question, renounces, answer, when one abandons every familiar model of analysis and every self-made interpretive model, and the question of one's death and the purpose of one's life, the entire life story with all its possible meanings is delivered into the hands of the great Other.

Slavoj Žižek claims that totalitarian is not "the one who has all the answers, but the one who has all the questions."

Q&A form, conceived as democratic, is actually totalitarian.

As long as the game of asking questions is on, as long as we can convince ourselves that out there, somewhere, there is someone who can give an answer, our symbolic

order is preserved. The guarantee of its entirety is the great Other.

In life, the hysteric has all the questions – that's why in democratic societies public opinion is permanently hystericized – *it has the right to know*, therefore it has all the questions. Equally hystericized are people in temples, with countless questions "oh why" directed at God, who has obviously abandoned the world, running away as a special kind of political emigrant from the repressive order he created himself wherein he is submitted to 24 hour interrogation.

In death, from the Christian perspective of Bresson's priest, God has all the answers – it is to him that we will have to answer for every thought and look, particularly for all the questions we addressed to him. And vice versa, every asker will be asked: on the onset of democracy, the defeated will have to answer for the crimes of ancien régime, the interrogators will be publicly interrogated.

Let us now imagine the situation which was pointed out to me by Aleksandar Bečanović: let's imagine that we have convinced ourselves that critical thinking doesn't lead to answers, even less to the change of unbearable social, economic and existential situation which seems to be

made of reinforced concrete; let's imagine that after the life long struggle with the world and ourselves, tired of everything, we utter on the death bed: well ok, whatever it is, everything is God's grace; utter that like a desperate gambler, who has already lost everything, when playing his last ace.

Let's imagine that we say this, that in the end we utter those words which are supposed to solve everything. We utter. And then, ... nothing. Everything remains the same: so many questions and not a single answer.

Isn't it absolute horror? The moment when it's too late for fight, because we have already given up, but too late for giving up too, because giving up doesn't mean anything either, because we have nothing to give and we have nobody to give it to.

The question of faithfulness to critical thinking, therefore, needs to be posed like this: it is not about what we will gain (in the sense of intervention in the field of social, in the sense of the change our critical writing will generate), but about what we may lose.

Which leads us to the position of the one who writes: which position, even at its most aggressive, is actually defensive. Critical thinking and writing are par excellence *reactionary* activities: ultimately, we do them not to change the world, but not to be destroyed by the world. Not how to change, but how to survive the world. Brain function eventually doesn't differ significantly from liver function: it is its job to process all the poisons that with every look, touch, thought we take in.

To be faithful to one's own critical thinking – it is not an easy thing. Because the results will necessarily fail, the world will, anyway, remain deaf to all our analyses, projections and warnings; all those pages

and sentences that you filled with great effort and passion, that you filled with great hope will silently sink into the printing ink black opaque ocean at which bottom already await countless lost works of spirit. No matter how bravely you shout, the answer will be indifferent silence. And when it seems that you have changed something, you will only be fated to watch those who mould the society according to your ideas creating a freak – in the end you will be condemned to watch the thing that was supposed to be a monument to your ideas turning into an unconvincing condemnation of those ideas.

Yes: it is likely that by continuing critical struggle we will not gain anything. But by giving up, we may lose everything.

Being faithful to your own critical position, notwithstanding all objections which can be given to you from personal to impersonal, thus becomes a mighty weapon: there is tremendous force in what happens *despite everything*.

Finally, and despite everything, critical thinking is a matter of style. You know the rest: style is taste, taste is character, character is fate.

So if the role (or choice, as Wilde says: a true gentlemen always fights for an already lost cause) of critical intellectual is to be defeated, because s/he is a bee which resents other bees while they are pollinating flowers, because s/he is an ant which resents other ants their excessive submission and discipline, because s/he is a wolf which resents other wolves their bloodthirstiness, even so, one is free to choose the style of one's defeat.

It is not nothing. It is everything.

Andrej Nikolaidis

The Return of the Trivial Genre in Women's Prose: The Establishment Strikes Back

In the long gone year of 1981, in the cult character of the plain and naïve typist Štefica Cvek, Dubravka Ugrešić found the perfect prism through which she reevaluates stereotypical cultural and literary models that are imposed on women as necessity and ideal. By parodizing banality and the clichés and kitsch that often follow women, she presents the question of female identity and their position in society in a new way, especially focusing on the position of women in literature.

Fourteen years later, Jasmina Lukić analyzed Ugrešić's work in the influential column titled *The Romance Novel as an Archetypal Genre*, concluding that the subversive usage of the trivial romance genre is a legitimate literary process comparable to the utilization of science fiction elements in high literature. Furthermore, Lukić shows that "in all these texts literature is treated

as the true object of seduction. "(1) The author's main interest is always literature itself, which is why the readers' expectations, which are in accordance with the conventions of the genre, often have to be betrayed. Such showdowns with the unsatisfactory (imaginary) reader, the re-examination of the marginal position of women's writing and, above all, the determination to dedicate the work to finding original and appropriate forms of expression are all elements that make the work of Dubravka Ugrešić high literature.

Thirty years later, you will most likely find Štefica Cvek in the romance or chick lit sections at bookstores, which Štefica would surely love, but which her author would most likely look upon with mixed feelings. The ignorance in regards to the worth of this novel and equating it with trivial literature isn't the real issue, although it is

irritating. Štefica Cvek has already fought for her position in the Croatian literary Pantheon. The blossoming of trivial literature that fills the shelves even quicker than self-help guides, cookbooks and spiritual guidebooks isn't the issue either. We all sometimes need to escape the bleak reality. Some find escape in action movies, others in the promise of a future or the discovery of a past life, others still in sassy stories about bold girls who gain new job victories in their high heels then go out for cocktails with their princes. The issue is that such elements can today be found in the serious works of authors who have received awards, as well as the fact that they treat them without the smallest dose of irony and in fact use them as realistic works and important literary constructions. What is further worrisome is the fact that literary critics view them in the same manner with a serious blind spot for precisely those characteristic banalities, clichés and kitsch that Dubravka Ugrešić made fun of in her novel *Štefica Cvek in the Jaws of Life*.

By analyzing a few authors from the region of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia, I will attempt to demonstrate the elements and the manner in which they are manifested in individual works and analyzed in critiques. I by no means wish to suggest that these works are representative of women's writing in the region, but rather to point out a dangerous trend that can have negative effects on the domestic literary production. As can be seen from the work of Dubravka Ugrešić, or the work of almost any great world writer, literature first and foremost deals with itself and builds on that which has up until then been written. Thus, what kind of example is being set for present and future generations of writers when the following titles are considered to be a part of our literary canon?

A Symphony of Stupidity: *Who's Crying*, Sanja Domazet (no pun intended)

Published in 2005, Sanja Domazet's novel *Who's Crying* was praised for being "a femininely conceived and written novel ... "(2) (Tihomir Brajović) that was "as much a literary work as it was a work of music ..." (3) (Mihajlo Pantić) "at the same time full of emotions, poetry, music and sensation ..." (4) (V. Roganović) and was awarded the Female Author Award in Serbia (Žensko pero) as well as the regional Meša Selimović Award. The novel deals with the fates of three women: Mozart's lover from the end of the 18th century, a thirty-three year old woman with psychological problems, and a fifteen year old pianist.

From simply just looking at the list of characters that includes the gods of music, time, love, lust and death; the entire collection of lovers, intellectuals, dreamers, psychiatrists, and, in the end, Mozart himself, it becomes clear to the reader that only Woody Allen could save such a travesty from being miserably pathetic and melodramatic. Sanja Domazet, however, has no intention of joking about serious questions such as love and death. She writes about these terms with the endless self-confidence and determination of an eighteenth century gothic novel writer, completely unaware of the two centuries of literature and intellectual, literary and critical turmoil that separate her from that period. The three characters of different age groups, different environments, life situations, and even historical time periods, all act, speak, and think identically, and in the end, tortured by the disappearance of love and the point of life, kill themselves or are killed by another. The idea that the three protagonists obtain their meaning for life from their (typically older, talented, even genius) lovers, as well as the fact that they lose all

function for themselves and their author without their relationship with the *Other* is a fairly old and atypical one in women's writing as described in feminist literature. Although, the male audience may very much be pleased with the book.

The fact that "the characters and the plot are merely described in traces and reduced to mere hints"(5) (Goran Lazičić) doesn't phase these same critics, because the author allows herself more space in this way to "tell us about that which is the most difficult to speak about, about the internal conditions of the human consciousness which are intuitive and sensual"(6) (Mihajlo Pantić). And it seems that this is in fact what is considered to be the real domain of women's writing; no characters, no way, girls, let go of the *firm* male perspective and drown yourselves in the beauty of your own feelings and ranting about eternal and abstract truths! And the precision with which the author describes the tact and sensuality of the female soul (yes, there is only one female soul! We are all the same on the inside) the reader can witness in nearly every endless paragraph of this novel. Who among us hasn't "caressed music notes, caressed handwritings...hasn't wanted to caress the walls...hasn't wanted to caress his eyebrows, his ears...who hasn't wanted to simply, caress ..." (7) or, for example, hasn't walked down the street and suddenly "asked herself whether the sidewalks were in silent lust with her feet, if the snow was as crazy about her as she was crazy about him..." (8)

If the reader suddenly asks themselves whether they are reading the tame parts of *Fifty Shades of Gray*, they can be at ease when they come to realize that this is in fact a work of high literature, which is confirmed not only by the fact that there isn't a happy ending (although patriarchal pat-

terns have already been confirmed in the above mentioned manner), but also by the fact that it is clearly written in an amazing and innovative style. Bathed in light, spices, pearls and gold from beginning to end, Sanja Domazet's prose offers us unique and rich solutions such as the following description of the young Mozart: "He watched the musicians with the shiny eyes of a musical tiger trapped in the birdcage of a child's body ". Aside from the fact that *musical tiger* sounds more like a description of some turbo-folk singer with his shirt unbuttoned half-way down his chest to reveal his gold chain, the author also places the imposing task on the reader to try and imagine a tiger in a birdcage that is at the same time the body of a young boy. If that doesn't take your imagination to new levels, then I don't know what will.

Thesis plus antithesis equals synthesis: *The Bride's Abyss*, Nura Bazdulj Hubijar and *Scurry via Vranduk*, Fadila Nura Haver

If female characters are "angels with lead wings" (10) for Sanja Domazet – so, some kind of almost abstract heavenly creatures that strive towards erotic and aesthetic climaxes merely to, much like Icarus, fall down to earth due to their inability to achieve these wishes – then for Nura Bazdulj Hubijar, a bestselling and numerous awarded Bosnian writer, female characters are true *Victorian models of house angels* (which Virginia Woolf successfully got rid of for the western literary canon in *A Room of One's Own* nearly a century ago, much to the enthusiasm and gratitude of future generations). The quiet, chaste, and zealous little wife who turns her husband's home into a little piece of heaven, is presented as the ideal of femininity and, in other works by this author as well, usually opposes other female characters who are punished for being overly sexual and who lack mater-

nal instincts, etc. This is also the case in *The Bride's Abyss*, the main story from the collection of short stories of the same title. The protagonist describes her mother in the following manner: "My mother was slender, tall, and beautiful. She had a quiet and gentle voice...She worked a lot, both hard and easy labour, and she did both with incredible ease, as if it were no big deal, as if the real work just awaited her...I believed that beneath her wide white sleeves there were the wings of an angel".(11) The protagonist herself, on the other hand, with the loss of her parent's authority (which is clearly presented as being exceptionally dangerous for women) slips into a state of meanness which is first described in her grotesque physical appearance and sadism during childhood, and later, in her uncontrolled and pointless sexual urges when she is older. The fact that her father is a drunk and, judging by a scene in the book, abuses them, and the fact that her mother withholds her love and emotional support after she gives birth to a son, the author uses to further make the protagonist's fate clearer and sadder, but all that doesn't prevent her from stating at the end that her parents "were honest people".(12) The story consistently follows the conventions of the romance genre: the plot is based on mistaken identities and it consists of the idea according to which an isolated, sexually unfulfilled, incomplete girl becomes an extremely intelligent, attractive and talented (for music) protagonist when she meets her ideal partner, thus becoming a mature and sexual woman who achieves her full potential as the partner of a smart, brave, and charismatic man. The main difference here in comparison to other similar stories is that the protagonist is at the same time the antagonist as well, a negative force behind the majority of bad events that occur in the story: "I haven't helped anyone, I've made things worse for as many people as I could...I hated that same / that plot-

ted against others, that separated those in love, broke up happy families, poisoned dogs, killed birds with a slingshot..."(13) As the list of her sins goes on for too long for the reader to be satisfied with merely her redemption in love, the author resolves her fate, yet again, in accordance with the expectations of the genre, but in a way that is also reserved for antagonists. She kills herself, thus freeing her lover to be able to find a worthy partner, while the pointlessness of her death justifiably emphasizes the wasting of a life dedicated to the selfish indulgence of one's own needs instead of caring for one's environment: "I'm going to sweep the snow off the antenna (she must be tall) with a broom, and then my feet are going to slide off the frozen fence. 'What a terrible accident!' they're going to say for the next few days, and then they'll all forget."(14)

Considering this magnificent whirlwind of misogynistic motifs, it is especially surprising when Nura Bazdulj Hubijar is presented as an example of a very necessary female voice on the Bosnian literary scene. What is also surprising is when her works are included in school curriculums with the explanation that they represent positive and simple ideas that teach children true values. Simple, that they are, but they could be considered positive in some other century, more likely in the nineteenth century than in the century that has just come to an end. Jasmina Bajramović and Jasna Kovo analyzed this problem in detail based on the author's other novels in 2010, in an article in *sic!* magazine, concluding that: "Not raising the awareness of her own *female subject* in a topos of the general imposition of patriarchal ideas and agreeing to a union of mutual profit doesn't undermine but affirms that which is nonetheless dominant in a flat and chauvinistic culture."(15)

Instead of repeating the additional conclusions of the two above-mentioned critics, it may perhaps be more interesting to subposition the work of Nura Bazdulj Hubijar with the novel of another Bosnian author of a younger generation, who is slowly catching up to the former in terms of popularity but who is also considered to be a serious writer. Her name is Fadila Nura Haver and her first novel is called *Scurry via Vranduk*. Although similar in its dramatic title, *Scurry* offers precisely the opposite perspective of *The Bride's Abyss*. It deconstructs the manner in which a patriarchal society creates standards that women find impossible to respect, and then it punishes them under the pretense of transgressions.

In this family saga, the fates of two women are emphasized: that of a girl named Nihada, who later grows up to be a woman, and her great aunt Behka. In the eyes of society, Behka is a fallen woman, slightly legitimized through her marriage to a reputable member of society. However, she is nonetheless the constant target of spiteful neighbours, fellow citizens, and even her own family. By gradually revealing the real truth about her shameful seven marriages, along with an almost unbelievable array of injustices done to her, from her sale to the most suitable suitor, to her being forced to live with a clearly twisted and inadequate husband, to her rape by her own brother after she runs away, to half a dozen other marriages arranged for practical, material or, in best case scenario, ethical reasons, the author portrays the difficult fate of a woman in a traditional marriage in a patriarchal society. On the other hand, in Behka's resistance towards these assigned situations and imposed norms, we can see a model for future (present) generations: Nihada and Behka's granddaughter Almasa. Thus, Nihada, instructed by Behka's example as well as that of her mother (her mother deals with her own frustrations as

a subordinate member of a marriage during the mid 20th century), decides to take a different path. She rids herself of her own dependence on her clearly manipulative and unworthy lover and shocks him by openly expressing her freedom of thought and sexual instincts. Because of this, *Scurry* seems to be a feminist, subversive, and self-aware work of female prose that, in the words of one critic "sheds light on the life of a woman in a strictly patriarchal society and, most importantly, reminds us, with its realistic plot, that women are not only different in any given segment of society, and not only worthy of attention as much as men are, but that they are also just as real as men are." (16) (Edin Pobrić)

This comment may seem to be unclear at a glance; not even the most hardcore misogynists negate the physical existence of women in reality. However, it clarifies the way in which mainstream critics in the region interpret *women's writing* – as books that talk about women and confirm their value while revealing their personal and intimate view of the past, or, possibly, the present. The author of the same text continues by writing that "the values of this novel lie in its resistance to blatantly imitate great feminist narratives of western European literature. Here, the feminist discourse is wrapped up in the cultural context of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian reality that makes up the story with its characteristics." (17)

The formula for writing a so-called complex novel begins to become clearer and clearer. For starters, all you need to do is rewrite that which for decades has been considered an appropriate theme for progressive dames (do you notice anything strange about this sentence?), "such as the status of an urban female intellectual in a patriarchal and small-town environment, her relationship towards her own body,

the relationship between mother-daughter and family as an institution in general, playing around with female stereotypes, and the like". (18) Sound familiar? Actually, it sounds like a recipe according to which this book was written. The problem, of course, doesn't lie in the themes themselves, but in the fact that they have been present for long enough already that they have lost any form of effect or sharpness in cases when written about without any kind of irony, further consideration or a dialogue with other works that they rely on. That is when they become stale and uninteresting, thus causing boredom in the reader as well as a feeling that the overall themes and issues of women's writing have been exhausted. Jasmina Lukić talks about "the potential of pop culture to be the stabilizer of a given social situation...that will recognize subversive potentials and subversive themes that occur in society, marking them and using them".(19) Thus, the ready-made form of a novel such as *Scurry* is utilized with the aim of appeasing and satisfying critics, but by doing so it loses its function as a social engagement, which, in their eyes, gives primacy over secondary works. Not to mention the fact that something that was imagined as a celebration of the *Other* and of individualism has been turned into a mere pamphlet which, it seems, the general female experience fits into. Perhaps this is where the flatness of female characters comes from, whose goodness, conscientiousness and good intentions we are not allowed to doubt for a second, but whose fates always rely on marriage and the man they love. This is why they are still, although rebellious and independent, characterized with a certain dose of the irrational as opposed to their wise fathers and husbands. Their story focuses on the analysis of their intimate life without any attempt at drawing brave conclusions about the broader social context and the implicit cause of their prob-

lems. This is why the novel ends in a sappy tone with a denouement that implies that female troubles are merely a thing of the past and that by telling the story of their unique tales magically corrects the harm already caused. It seems that we are still within the domain of the romance novel.

The second element of a successful literary work, to go back to the words of the abovementioned critic, is a joyful ode to one's own cultural and historical milieu, no matter how difficult it may be to relate it to the subversive portion that reassesses set social values. Written in the vernacular, the novel nostalgically reminisces about social and family rituals, glorifies the historical and geographical characteristics of the region, and even includes a historiographical section on Vranduk, while its final goal is the legitimization of the Bosnian national idea instead of the development of the plot and characters. It is precisely here, in the language and style, that it is clear just how similar Nura Bazdulj and Nura Haver are, although at first they seem to be ideologically opposite. They both use the vernacular (perhaps we could even say the language of a past time) although they do not manage to achieve that playfulness that such language can achieve in better novels, from Andrić's to Irwine Welsh's. Aside from the language, the authors both share a frequently melodramatic and sublime style that easily borders on the pathetic, for example when the protagonist of *The Bride's Abyss* describes her mental state: "Restless, I stand by the window. The pill I took didn't drive him away, nor did the memory of our painful past, nor did the vodka, our nation's drink that I tasted for the first time with you grew to love. Nothing can save me from him tonight. So I stand, my burning restlessness and I, in an embrace..."(20)

The inclination for preaching banalities,

or rather, pardon me, small life wisdoms that will more often be found on fridge magnets than in great literary works, goes hand in hand with melodrama. I pose the following challenge before the reader to determine which quotation belongs to which author: "But life isn't art, although it is an art form to live." (21) And on the other hand: "They say that everyone carries the truth in their heart. Thus, can anyone speak about another's life without straying into gossip, pointless assumptions and fabrications?" (22)

This kind of language, which is extremely simple, made up of simple sentences, full of expressions, idioms, exclamations, and repetition – rightfully assumes a simple audience as well; an audience that doesn't wish to be challenged, that doesn't have the need to learn anything new or to reassess that which it has learned, an audience that simply wants to waste its time with postcards from its (literary and linguistic) past. Hence, the same audience as that of Carrie Bradshaw's *Diaries* and the *Da Vinci Code*.

The Exorcism of an Angel: *May Your Mother Give Birth to You*, Vedrana Rudan

Croatian literature is practically drowning in works such as these – from erotic and romance novels, to the *urban stories* of journalists in high heels, to detailed works about female intimacy and artistic sensibility published in twenty volumes. It is difficult to stand out on such a market, but the appearance of Vedrana Rudan is really rather unique. Better known to the public for her numerous dismissals from various television and newspaper houses and the offsets that preceded them, Vedrana Rudan has published five novels until now and three collections of columns. Although her works have been translated into sev-

eral foreign languages and although some of her works have been written for stage performances in a few countries, critics in Croatia rarely mention her. When she is mentioned, however, her name serves as an example of trivial literature that dishonestly deprives a large section of the audience of great works by legitimate authors. Thus, Jagna Pogačnik concludes that in Rudan's work, traces of feminism are reduced to "simplified stereotypes", black and white gender characterizations, thus hematized and sharpened, without any proper analysis or sensibility, and brought to a trivial level. (23)

The author whose almost every public appearance seems to become more and more a performance and often serves in a scandalous manner, the audience either loves or hates, but no one starts reading her books because of their potential literary quality. It is thus taken for granted that her books deal with a special kind of prose that doesn't pretend to be anything more than a human rights manifesto that raises its small fist for female justice.

Someone who goes into reading a novel like *May Your Mother Give Birth to You* with such expectations might be pleasantly surprised, unless their personal dislike of the author completely jades their reading experience. The book is, yet again, about reassessing the relationship between mother-daughter, but this time from the radical standpoint of a previously abused victim whose mother represents a monster and a figure of betrayal as she tolerated her husband's violence and abuse. Forced to care for her in old age, the protagonist presents the dilemma between love for her mother as a natural fact or a social construct; does the love come automatically or is it something that every parent needs to earn. Rudan doesn't give a definite answer. The protagonist doesn't recognize her emo-

tions as being love but she also isn't able to free herself from them, and in time they become the strongest element of her reality. Thus, a challenge is placed for classical birth roles and a character that refuses to respect them. At the same time, however, the high personal and psychological price is also depicted for someone who refuses to play by the rules.

The old lady's constant nagging about her demands and complaints drives the reader crazy as well, making him irritated and loathsome and placing him in the position to sympathize with the protagonist, only to leave them both in shock (the reader and the protagonist) when, at the end of the novel, it turns out that the old lady really wasn't making anything up and that the pain she was in was due to her illness which was literally eating her body from the inside out. The mother's behaviour is further explained (although not justified) by the fact that she herself comes from a brutal environment and a tragic family situation which shows the manner in which violence is passed down from generation to generation. The protagonist also doesn't correspond to the frequent stereotype of a victim and her identity; her character is made more complex by the pettiness of her mother when she counts every spent penny (such a human yet disgraceful act that any worse writer would skip altogether in order to ensure the reader's sympathy for their character), and the calculating manner in which she deals with people who come to her store that sells angel figurines and seek some sort of compassion or just to vent about their own personal traumas. In this story, the wooden angels that are being sold to naïve and desperate people as kitsch or as talismans without any real value or power are the only angels in this story.

It is clear that Rudan's characters are

anything but flat. She doesn't offer any cheap solutions, healing relationships and spiritual metamorphoses, but instead follows, with a morbid fascination, the fatal deadlock of two old women rolling towards death, who are incapable of getting over the unforgivable and unsurpassable obstacles that have determined their lives. In this merciless interest in human cruelty and limitation, this novel reminds us more of Margaret Atwood's or Muriel Spark's prose than anything else than can be read in our region. Of course, there is no comparison in terms of their styles and the literary values of their works; Rudan more frequently relies on shock value and generalizations as opposed to the subtle characterization of characters and elegant structure solutions.

However, the author utilizes shock consciously and skillfully, while that same debonair of hers towards the laws of logic, reality and social norms that often bring the readers of her social commentaries to the brink of insanity (for example, when she tries to prove that homophobes are funny because they enjoy soccer, which is also a merely concealed homosexual activity) is precisely what makes her novels interesting and coherent. What holds the readers' attention is the author's obsessive desire to deal with a given idea all the way through and to find a solution for it. This is why she holds the title of a good writer as she manages to hold on to her reader with her sharp sense of humour, her great timing for humour, as well as her concise and steady style, while her reader remains completely unaware of the fact that while reading her work, he is accepting someone else's logic and conclusions, which he may not usually accept. Thus, for example, contemplating the reasons for violence against women and the role of other women in it, the author writes: "But, we are frustrated because men, the rulers of the world and

our lives, sell us stories about how that isn't normal and how that's not our fate. All I need to do is call the social worker, the police, or tell mom. Mom? What mom?... Mom is merely a beaten up, raped woman. She can't help us. And why would she?"(24)

But that's what art is for – to force us to view the world for a second from the eyes of someone else, but not to tell us, much like a teacher, the way in which we should view it.

It is important to separate the media character of Vedrana Rudan, who, dressed up as a nun, swears at the pope, the Church and the State, from her image as an author who is far less interested in real-life abused women and the opinion of the public than in her own characters and stories. Perhaps this is why readers of Rudan's books never leave happy, satisfied, and warmly snuggled into the beliefs with which they began the story. And perhaps it is this alone, if not the fact that she provides real-life characters, a carefully intertwined story written in a reduced and functional manner without being pathetic and melodramatic, that sets her kilometers ahead of the works of the other, more respectable, authors mentioned in this essay.

Conclusion

The genre isn't what it used to be. Comic books, or rather, graphic novels receive Pulitzers; historical novels have proven to be just as utopian and naïve as SF novels where thought to be in the past, and it is nearly impossible to speak about serious modern American or British literature without those same fantastic elements. Critics pose the question of the existence of serious literature; has postmodernism completely eliminated the difference between high and pop literature and

culture? But perhaps the question itself is altogether wrong. Perhaps postmodernism has merely shown the way for the academic community to that which writers and readers had much earlier instinctively anticipated, and that is the fact that every genre can produce a great work of art whose worth doesn't lie in the topic it deals with, but the manner in which it deals with the topic. The real question is then how to differentiate between a work of art and the trivial, if we can't rely on the old division of value? If "triviality isn't the problem of the genre, but the problem of the author," what criteria do we use to evaluate the work of an author? It is difficult to answer this question in theory, since the majority of theoreticians and critics provide different answers or they merely refuse to give any. In practice, however, it isn't that difficult to figure out which works utilize used-up ideas based on convention instead of innovation and which focus on the mass public instead of on the awake and thinking reader. Perhaps the author of this article is a bit too harsh, however she is of the opinion that the world needs another story about the *whimsical female nature* and a *healthy female intuition* as much as it needs another novel about mysterious and seductive vampires. And the author that is capable of uttering other similar clichés with a straight face, the author of this article would really like to send away to a deserted island for a number of years without anything except her own writing, until one day she breaks down and starts yelling, "Why? Where did I go wrong?"

Jasmina Lukić writes that "kitsch isn't dangerous until it starts pretending to be of great value, giving as an example a book by a female author who uses the interest of the modern audience for female topics to plant a book that is, in reality, an anti-women's book."(25) While this is clearly a seri-

ous problem worthy of critical attention, and applicable in the cases of the first three authors mentioned in this essay, it isn't the only issue that arises in terms of the mentioned value system. The characterization of inferior works as the highest achievement of female authors shows the fact that their intellectual and creative abilities are seriously underestimated, while at the same time sending the message to the reading audience that this is all they can expect from women writers in general. Jasmina Bajramović noticed that the Bosnian and Herzegovinian literary pamphlets remind us of the concept of "children's games that are divided into girls and boys – it is made clear which books are made for the female reading population, but it is also clear as to the positive and established life decisions that are spoken about in these books." I would go one step further and say that, in the region, there is a difference between literature and women's books. Everyone reads Jergović, Dežulović, Perišić, etc, while the books of female authors are reserved for, it seems, depressed housewives and tired working women. Moreover, books such as the ones mentioned earlier in this essay are presented to current and future female authors as a model for their own work, due to the market viability and the critical attention for such works, which demeans the quality of literary production, while the canon drowns in a sea of pointlessness and banality.

The sleeping literary critique is perhaps the leading bad guy in this story, while all the others merely do their jobs. The female authors (as well as male authors) of trivial novels write trivial novels; cultural studies analyze their function in society; the authors of serious novels complain about the dominance of such works on the market and the general collapse of intelligence and morale. The last link in this chain should be critics who bring some

sort of judgment about the value of these novels and help shape the discourse that will determine the further development of the literary flow. Unfortunately, they are currently not available. Please call back later.

The motives of the critical establishment are surely various and wrapped up in mystery in terms of its disgraceful promotion of mediocrity at the expense of more interesting and better written works. Be it by taking the side of dominant literary clans, glorifying nationalistic ideas, their non-critical solidarity towards women's writing, or simply their opportunistic and aesthetic numbness, generous critics are giving women's writing the death sentence in an extremely ironic way. Critics one, women nil.

Ivana Ančić

NOTES

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A Shaved Head and High Heels or Theatre of Resistance Queer Zagreb and Others in the Croatian Cultural Space

At the fifth edition of the *Queer Zagreb Festival* held in 2007, an intriguing and controversial public debate on the issue of the body took place. On the festival poster announcing the latest festival edition was the Bulgarian performer Ivo Dimchev virtually naked (his crossed legs hid his genital area). The poster was considered provocative on two levels. The first being the naked male body itself, which constituted a breach of public morality and honour, something that cannot be said of the naked female body which is there to be exploited. The second level of provocation, not less important, was the representation of the same body.

The body was clearly masculine, muscular, flat chested with a shaved head, but at the same time it was feminine – smooth, hairless, with crossed legs in high heels and the face covered in make-up.

What exactly did we witness? We witnessed the break down of the dominant model of the representation of the male body in the public sphere that favours the images of naked torsos of athletes at soccer games, the images of gym toned men on front covers of magazines dedicated to men's health and the images of eligible men in women's glossy magazines. Ivo

Dimchev's androgynous body forces viewers to change their perspective of looking at him is a paradigmatic example of basic postulates of both queer theory and its practice. Postulates which include the undermining of gender and sex foundations and their necessary separation, the raising of issues of gender identity, the intensification of struggle for personal and individual freedoms, and the liberation of society from inflexible attitudes on the biologically determined destiny of human beings.

The poster was also telling on other levels. Its main functions of advertising and communicating designate it for the public sphere, the same sphere which, besides the couple of months in the spring when *Queer Zagreb* and *Pride* take place, is not open for conversations on diverse gender identities, gender expressions, and different, non-heterosexual orientations. On the one hand, the poster seemed to confirm the stereotype of *queerness* of gays, lesbians, and men wearing makeup, and in so doing facilitated attacks on *Queer Zagreb* and the queer community as such. On the other hand, its *in your face* poetics and the re-appropriation of the visual vocabulary to which the *the moral majority* appeals when it aims to discredit events such as *Pride*, were a symbol of (Q)queer strength.

What needs to be explicitly addressed is the problem of the theatrical context and the boundary that separates art from activism. The political context of the theatre based on the physical co-presence of the performer and the audience has a great transformative power but is often of a limited expiration date. In view of their transitory and fleeting nature, the *there* and *then* often remain trapped in their own spatial and temporal signifiers and the only way to transcend them is through the memory of what Gernot Böhme calls atmospheres, i.e. "spheres of presence". As Erika

Fischer Lichte writes, Böhme locates these spheres neither in the objects which seem to emanate them nor in the subjects who experience them physically, but rather in the space between and inside them contemporaneously. Lichte adds that Böhme developed his own atmospheric aesthetics as an antithesis of semiotic aesthetics which has its origin in the assumption that art needs to be understood first as a language, that is, semiotic aesthetics focuses on the processes of creating meanings while atmospheric aesthetics is focused on the physical experience.

The physical experience can serve as tool in drawing closer to the Other and in the weakening of the erosion of memory, especially when, consciously or unconsciously, there is a connection with the space and circumstances in which the coming together took place. In her essay collection *The Dictionary of the Body*, Andrea Zlatar writes of "bodies that inhabit the space and bodies remembering the spaces they inhabited, and this is the way in which experiential memory achieves its spatial extension." The issue of physical experience raises the question whether what's at stake are the viewers' perceptions of their own physical reactions or the reactions of the body of the Other and the Other's corporeality. And what does this have to do with art and activism? A lot, if a successful performer in the role of the Other or the Double Other, who arrives after the Žižekian "neighbour", that is, everybody that is not *I*, through processes of identification and rejection, curiosity and disgust, shame and comprehension, with a perceptive and emphatic viewer manages to build a relationship of mutual recognition of humanity, a relationship which eventually leads to an opening of space for a potential dialogue. This is the territory where boundaries between art and activism gradually get blurred and even erased.

The Bulgarian performer Ivo Dimchev created the character of Lili Handel, whose body tells the story through ageing, smudged make-up, and the expiration of the body's existence. The performer tries to prolong his life duration by selling his own image which he does by shouting "Take a picture! Take a picture!" to the photo reporter who is present in the audience. The artist subjects his own body to strenuous enervation and with an almost lyrical voice in a frenetic alliance of physical discomfort and vocal expressivity painstakingly draws his own blood on stage and raises the blood-filled vial in the air offering it up for bid and is determined not to give up the sale until he gains profit from his own blood and sweat. He finally succeeds in doing this, which represents a continuation of the theatre tradition that had its origins in Richard Schechner's *Commune* from 1970 when it was left up to the viewers whether the show would continue or not. The director randomly selected 15 members of the audience and invited them in a circle on the stage explaining to them that they had been assigned the role of a Vietnamese villager. The viewers had four different options to choose from. They could either enter the circle, find somebody from the audience to take their place, go home - which would not stop the show - or stay in their seats and be responsible for the performance ending. Therefore, non-participation was not allowed. Almost four decades later, when Ivo Dimchev refers to our own participation in this neo-liberal game which goes by the name of commodification, in which people, things, and ideas have their price and expiration date, and consequently by holding the performance in the Zagreb Puppet Theatre, which is by definition a space where culture is commodified, the artist sends an unambiguous and somewhat painful message. Dimchev's importance is also confirmed by his recent nomination

for the prestigious Bessie Award.

Activist and political elements in the Festival's program are not limited to Ivo Dimchev's performance. *Corpo Illicito: The Post-Human Society 6.9* is the third performance from the *Mapa/Corpo* series by the collaborative team La Pocha Nostra. Latin American performance artists Guillermo Gómez Peña and Michèle Ceballos staged a radical story about the Other, a story about colonialism, about the disciplining of the brown body, both Latin and Arab, but also a story about redemption. When the acupuncturist inserts needles with American flags into the female body laid out on the table, she brings to life the eco-feminist analogy between the incursions on the female body and the colonial territorial occupation. The fact that the volunteer lying on the table was Biljana Kosmogina, a Belgrade journalist, writer, and an activist for women, minority, and LGBT rights, gives additional weight to the performance. The link is clear: America would exist even if Columbus had not *discovered* it, but it would be outside of the western white man discourse. Amidst other powerful images, which make this performance piece an activist tableaux vivant, one image stands out. This is the image that is connected to the illusory nature of the threat that the Others represent. In one instant, Peña is seen kneeling on the edge of a raised platform, empty handed, with his shirt unbuttoned and one leg of the trousers rolled up to the thigh. He is wearing a phantom hoodie used by terrorists to conceal their identity. The performance artist is without identity - vulnerable and different with a military boot on one foot and a high heel shoe on the other. A man from the audience who is given a replica of a machine gun aims the gun at Peña's head. The image of power relations becomes crystal clear at that moment, but fortunately it is not the last image the audience is left with. The last image was the image of decolonializa-

tion. Everybody who wanted to could have come onstage and pulled out one of the acupuncture needles from Biljana Kosmogina and by this act decolonize her and put an end to the farce. Media reporting on the show was far less rewarding than was the end of the performance. The artists re-interpreted the Christian iconological theme of Pietà in a scene in which a woman with naked breasts dressed in a Latin American national costume with a masque of a chimpanzee on her head and the word *odio* written over her breasts held in her arms another entirely naked woman and Peña shouted “That’s the final image! Photographers, go for it!” and by this act almost prophetically predicted the headlines of articles and photo galleries in the Croatian media. *Nudity in Jedinstvo for a Society Without Borders* and *Naked Women in Passionate Physical Games* were just some of the headlines.

The American performance artist Keith Hennessy in his piece *Crotch* performed in the Zagreb Dance Centre at the same festival edition also established close contact with the audience. The performer who is always the Other does not share the space with the audience, given that his space is the stage and the audience’s space is the auditorium. Hennessy dedicated his entire performance to Joseph Beuys and his idea of social plastic, the expanded concept of art in which every person has the creative potential indispensable for the transformation of society. The audience participated multiple times in Hennessy’s performance. They ate chocolate, browsed through the scenography and the props, photo documented the show at its very beginning, during the raising and the lowering of the canvas on which Hennessy wrote the history of art and philosophy in the set time framework of 7 minutes, and at the very end of the piece the audience participated in an intimate symbolic bonding. The art-

ist invited the members of the audience onstage and after he was surrounded by the viewers, amongst whom some were standing while others were sitting in chairs or on the floor, Hennessy started to create very carefully a web both literally and figuratively and he did this first by inserting a needle with a red thread through his skin and afterwards by inserting the same thread through the clothes of the members of the audience and so symbolically united his own blood with the blood of the others. The pain experienced by the audience was an indirect pain, an illusion of pain, in the same way as theatre visits are experiences of life. At the same time, the performer’s body felt real pain and by this, the make-believe element of the theatre was eliminated and the blood was transformed into reality, which was further underscored by a sentence that accompanied the viewers on their way out: “All the references to Joseph Beuys cannot cure pain, confusion, regret, cruelty, or trauma.” Unfortunately the often-utopian strength of performance lies in the fact that the performance artist, by subjecting his or her body to certain bodily practices, takes over the role of the vessel of sadness, pain, and misfortune and so turns the performance space into a space of empathy. A parallel can be drawn to Marina Abramović’s performance in which the artist gets saved by viewers who react to her physical suffering in accordance with their own ethical judgments.

Diana Pornoterrorista, in her performance piece shown at the Autonomous cultural centre Medika during the ninth edition of *Queer Zagreb* in 2011, tackled the topics of post(porn), queer, and trans(feminism) as well as diverse political issues. Some considered her performance unnecessary, some despicable, others entertaining, some thought provoking. On the one hand, the basic premise of the performance

was to talk openly about oneself through one's body and sexual practices, and on the other hand, to condemn the array of repressive methods that queer persons throughout the world are subjected to. By exploiting the dominant discourse of conservative political options, a discourse which hyper-sexualizes queer persons by placing the equal sign between people and their sexual practices, and by re-appropriating their vocabulary and practices - a method historically used by many minority groups in their fight for their rights, from African-Americans, to feminists and finally to the queer population - the artist openly put forward what she is supposed to be ashamed of. That is, she presented the audience with an imperfect female BDSM body with the eyebrows perforated with medical needles, a body open to accept a fist in the vagina just because it wants to, a body which does not allow to be disciplined because of an *inappropriate* desire, gender, or sexual orientation. Her approach resembles the *in your face* theatre poetics based on Artaud's concept of the theatre of cruelty which does not let the audience watch the performance disinterestedly but forces them to engage emotionally, to react, to create an opinion, and to be constantly aware of the following image or scene, because they might get the urge to join in or get up and leave. Diana Pornoterrorista's performance once again confirmed the importance of space and the right to space, since besides the right to body autonomy and sexuality we have the right to space. The squatted abandoned factory is one such space that currently functions as an autonomous cultural centre.

La Pocha Nostra, Diana Pornoterrorista, Ivo Dimchev, and Keith Hennessy are engaged artists, but there are many others who contributed to the creation of the Festival's identity with their performances.

Raimund Hoghe's minimalist choreography to the music of Debussy and Ravel, his vision of *Swan Lake* in which every dancer can either be the White or the Black Swan, and his repeated presence onstage which makes the audience acquainted with his physical appearance, short and with a hump on his back, was a provocation in itself to those viewers accustomed to the proportionate bodies of dancers. There were also artists in drag who used cross-dressing as a tool and a weapon, as was the case with the African-American drag king DRED of DRED in her piece *Gender-Illuminating Woman*. There were also artists who used gender as another layer of meaning that is possible to literally strip down, as Mark Tompkins did in his *Song and Dance*, or artists who thought of gender as a given fact which needed no additional explanations as was the case with Antonia Baehr's *Rire*. Jeremy Wade in *I Offer Myself to Thee* tackled the physically and socially inappropriate grotesque elements of everyday life, that is, physical reactions that are out of human control. By renouncing the glorification of order and rationality over the different and the unpredictable, he opened up a space of freedom in which, in the guise of a shaman who uses light, sound, and movement, he completely unwound and relaxed the viewers and reconciled them to a theatrical and comforting *it's OK*.

It needs to be said that the selection of the theatre performances at *Queer Zagreb* is not an activist act in itself, nor are the majority of performances openly queer, since similar or even same shows could have been presented at the *Eurokaz Theatre Festival* or at the *Contemporary Dance Week Festival* as had been the case with Jérôme Bel's dance work. The same can be said of the pieces shown at the Contemporary Dance Week Festival which could have easily been presented at *Queer Zagreb* - for example, the monodrama *Look, Mummy, I'm Dancing*,

in which the Belgian transsexual actress, screenwriter, and radio-hostess Vanessa van Durme talks about her sex change operation and the life of a transsexual woman, or *Errance* by the Haitian choreographer and dancer Ketty Noël, in which she portrays the suffering of the Other as an almost organic and tangible experience. Each theatre performance is a political act. What kind and how much of a political act it will be depends on the context in which it is presented, and this context depends on the festival selectors and their ideological position and economic goals. Given the fact that *Queer Zagreb* has both a narrower and a wider definition, performance as the only performing art form at the Festival can change its positions and accentuations, thus corresponding with the wider definition, while the remaining events of the Festival program are often more narrowly, that is, topically defined. The Festival has, over the years, included non-performing or only marginally performing arts. The program also comprised feature, documentary, and even pornographic films, exhibitions such as *Nazi Persecution of Homosexuals 1933-1945*, presentations of published works amongst which *Queer Fables* and *Queer Stories* stand out, conferences *Heteronormativity of Childhood* and *Cheers Queers*, or even public actions/performances such as the lesbian wedding of the ex-porn star, sexual educator, and performance artist Annie Sprinkle and her partner Elisabeth Stevens, as well as the unveiling of the plaque in memory of Vladimir Nazor and Ivan Goran Kovačić.

Who writes and what they write, how and where one writes about performances that, regardless of their form, deal with serious social issues, is a matter of vital importance. After the curtains are drawn and the collective memory fades what remains are word-of-mouth communication and the critical text. Ideally, what we have

in front of us is responsible and ethical journalism, words that sometimes need to be looked up in the dictionary of foreign words. Both in domestic and world media we need to look into the politics of editing, journalistic (in)competence, and even the underestimating of the readers. The case of *reporting* on the *La Pocha Nostra* performance on a rather widely read mainstream web site was a slap in the face to the people who actually attended the performance. The half-page long text reported on “naked female bodies in an uncontrolled sexual frenzy” and it neither informed the reader of the political aspects of the performance, of the dissection of racial, ethnic and gender stereotypes, nor did it enter into a polemic about the sense or nonsense of a potentially controversial imagery or about likely parallels with our own society. The situation, fortunately, is not desperate, as *Queer Zagreb* with its activities managed to initiate a public discourse on all that cannot be reduced to a repertoire that includes rosaries and Homeland, or the *Healthy Croat in a Healthy Heterosexual Body* poetics. From this perspective, its position as an artistic festival sets *Queer Zagreb* off centre stage in comparison with the more unambiguous activist efforts of Zagreb Pride Association, but the latter lacks the discursive width of *Queer Festival*, whereas only in unity do they transmit an unmistakable message which addresses far more issues than just gender and sex.

In a society where children suffer abuse because of a wrong hairstyle, wrong accent, or wrong sexual orientation, a society in which the Church and the State are deeply involved in the personal lives of individuals and in which a motley crew on the Split Promenade can cause public (out)rage and be accompanied by fascist salutes, a society in which the football supporters of Dinamo and Hajduk can cause a traffic deadlock in the city centre, in such

a society the young people of today should invest their energy in their personal education and the creation of a better world. In such a society it is of vital essence to encounter the Other both inside oneself as well as in others who surround us, as repression and denial of what is innocuous can only bring about the death of the individual. If we want a society in which human rights are respected, we need to educate the public on all levels. This education includes seeing, speaking out, and writing about all that we do not understand or, what's worse, do not want to understand. The famous words of Martin Niemöller, the German Lutheran Pastor and opponent of Nazi ideology: "First they came for the communists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a communist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me," might be the easiest way to express why this festival is an aesthetic weapon in the hands of the activists as much as an indicator of the active spark of every artistic creation.

Ivana Anić

The Concept of Political in the Plays *Cowardice and Zoran Đinđić* by Oliver Frljić

Twenty years after the breakup of Yugoslavia and ten years after the fall of the Milošević regime, the theatre in Serbia has turned to plays that in a brave and provocative way deal with our past, most often leaning on documentary material. Of course, the reasons for the investigation of consequences of political repression and wars can be found exactly in the shift of these two decades – the time that has passed since the breakup of Yugoslavia gives us a corresponding shift to the question that is not only political but also personal, stressing the importance of dealing with the past and taking personal responsibility. The importance of the development of this kind of theatre in Serbia is so much greater taking into consideration that, up until perhaps two seasons ago, our theatre has avoided a critical relationship towards the political past, as well as confrontation with collective blame, while the public in Serbia still distances itself from facing the weight of war crimes and the consequenc-

es of long term dictatorship. In his text *New Views of the Political in Theatre: the Case of the Ex-Yu* issued in the Teatron magazine, teatrologist doctor Ivan Medenica stresses the link between current circumstances and those from the end of the twentieth century. He also stresses that the critically engaged theatre does not need to change its focus but that that focus needs to be broader and needs to become much sharper, more penetrative, comprehensive and more multi perspective.

The motive for dealing with Yugoslavian myths and the dark nineties is not only the marking of the twentieth anniversary of the breakup of the country. Nationalism of the Milošević period is getting stronger today through different right-wing organization, while structures responsible for the crime in the civil war at the beginning of the new millennia assassinated prime-minister, most probably with the support of authorities. Return to power of certain

representatives of the previous regime can only make confronting past crimes made in the wars of nineties more complicated. Only the perception of the relationship between therein and recent problems is reason enough to view these two periods together and treat them critically as a whole.

When talking about a documentary template as the starting point of most of the politically engaged shows of the region, we are faced with two different directions in the approach and in the process of the mentioned document – one is that which was made through the collaboration between the director, actors and a group of dramaturges that shape the confessions of the actors and their personal memories into material that makes a significant part of the show (*Hipermnezija (Hypermnnesia)* by Selma Spahić, *Rođeni u Yu (Born in the Yu)* and *Patriotic Hypermarket* by Dino Mustafić). On the other hand, we have director Oliver Frljić's work for whom the document is only a starting point that he develops in the personal poetry of mixing fiction and reality, constantly challenging the reactions of the audience, and the non stop questioning of the theatre's role, the possibilities of the existence of the truth inside of him in contrast to reality. In this sense, the focus of this essay will be on two of the shows that Frljić has directed in Serbia, and that are based on a documentary template, radically and directly treating the independence of Kosovo, the relations between Serbs and Hungarians (*Kukavičluk (Cowardice)* NP Subotica, a drama in the Serbian language), as well as the assassination of Zoran Đinđić (*Zoran Đinđić, Atelje 212*).

The importance of Frljić's opus is found in the bravery of the director pointing out delicate subjects of our past as well as in his approach to the subject. With

precise theatrical means he investigates the responsibility of the audience through the actors' responsibility for, as Medenica states in his text, "participating in the experience that will happen to them in the theatre, and which can be very disturbing, not necessarily only on a moral or spiritual plan, but also in a pure perceptive, sentimental way"(1). Therefore, the important characteristic of Frljić's theatre is that he uses the document not only as a means of critical questioning of our recent history, but also because in terms of researching as to how this template will, through a certain theatrical language, be accepted by the viewers. This can best be seen in the last scenes of *Kukavičluk (Cowardice)* and *Đinđić*, which we will say more about in the pages that follow.

For the interpretation of Frljić's poetics on the engaged theatre and the clear critical interpretation of both recent and ex-Yu conditions, Hans-Thies Lehmann's theory about post-drama political theatre is especially important. In his book *Post-drama Theatre*, the German theorist, among other things, questions the possibilities of pointing out the political aspect in contemporary theatre, how much it deals with public everyday life and in what ways it can be done. "The theatre as a means of class-specific propaganda or political auto-affirmation which is a sociological and political anachronism, and the theatre as a media of the revelation of social pathologies can hardly be compared to the media, news, magazines, and newspapers that are responding more and more quickly." (2). Lehmann's thesis is primarily that the theatre has to avoid daily political, almost reporter-like dramaturgy, and find other means of critically reacting while also leaving the commenting of current political questions to the media and to the public, because "the theatre is no longer a place in which social conflicts of value are happening and are being thematized." (3) However, this kind

of testimony on the position and function of the contemporary theatre, as well as of the connection of political and post-drama theatre can hardly be completely affirmed when talking about theatre in the region. All that Lehmann is argumentatively saying in his book would be acceptable if the Serbian public, its media and its politicians felt any kind of responsibility in the civil war, in its consequences and in the huge spread of nationalism. All the problems of the nineties, from isolation and the assassinations of reporters, to religion and national intolerance are being transferred onto the next decades. For the domestic public, as well as for the theatre in a way, the forbidden subjects remain the ones that deal with the responsibility for war crimes, of which the best example is the persistent negation of the genocide in Srebrenica.

“The question of political theatre in the conditions of informational society is being radically transformed. Displaying the persons on stage that are being politically discriminated is not making the theatre political. (...) It can hardly be said that the theatre can be more political by directly thematizing areas of politics.”(4) According to Frljić, this is not the case anymore: “Since the theatre has lost its monopoly in representing the whole of the political society, it has turned to the implicitly political.” (5). As has been said earlier, the public in Serbia is the first that is not ready to talk about the important social and political weight that has been following us for the last twenty years. This is why the theatrical scene is completely and legitimately becoming a place in which issues such as these can be freely and bravely spoken about, for example Kosovo and the issues of war, as well as about the power that the institution of the church has in this country. Of course, it is important to mention that both Frljić and Lehmann themselves agree that it is not enough to only point

out the problem with which today’s society is struggling, but also to find adequate scene solutions, to question all the possibilities of the theatre and find the right way to implement the documentary template.

Frljić and Lehmann also represent two different views of the power and the possibility of the theatre to influence an individual. According to Lehmann, the theatre cannot quintessentially contribute to a greater and a more serious change. Frljić is a little closer to Brecht in terms of these views and holds the idea that the theatre can push the viewer towards revolution and wishing for changes. In Frljić’s plays the belief that the theatre can be a starter and an anticipator of revolution and changes can be clearly seen, thus the aspiration of the theatre to change social relations is not a new thing. In his dialog with Lehmann, published in *Teatron*, Frljić highlights, “Lehmann’s rejection of the idea about the theatre as an anticipator or an accelerator or, why not, a starter of the revolution inside social circumstances, should be discarded. Instead, conditions should be found to bring back the hypothesis about the theatre as a generator of overall social changes.” (6) Also, looking at Frljić’s work, we cannot easily accept Lehmann’s belief that the political theatre is always pointed towards followers, with which Lehmann, among other things, argues the statement of the impossibility of a more serious change. Frljić’s ideal viewer is not one that represents his opinion or by nodding his head accepts the critique of celebrating war criminals as Serbian heroes. Quite the contrary. Frljić’s ideal viewer is one that doesn’t share the same opinion as the director himself, one who expresses his disagreement by possibly walking out of the room or by clearly objecting to the scenes that are being played in front of him. To demonstrate this best perhaps is the example of a scene in the play *Kukavičluk*, which was performed

in Subotica, in which one of the actors walks out into the audience, pushing between the rows, randomly asking provocative questions about the trial of a folk singer, about stands towards homosexuals, the Generals in the Hague, making the viewer answer shortly, with only a yes or no. This kind of procedure, which does not allow cornered viewers to think or even explain their stand, making him unprotected and naked in front of everybody, is an act of the emphasis of the problem, a kind of *scanning* of the audience that Frljić does before he confronts it with the final scene of the play – accepting of the existence of genocide during the war in Bosnia.

In the last scene of *Kukavičluk*, the actors that are sitting on the edge of the stage recite all the five hundred names of Bosnians killed in Srebrenica. The importance of this scene is primarily in the courage and readiness of the director to directly speak about something that the highest government officials do not want to face, thus, it is acceptable, even desirable, to thematize the constant denying of the responsibility of Serbia for the crime. At that moment, the genocide is not being looked upon as an abstract crime over some group of people. Listening to the names and surnames of every human that was killed makes the genocide rather real. Of course, we cannot say that Lehmann and Frljić completely differentiate in their theories of political theatre. Frljić accepts and uses Lehmann's thesis about the aesthetics of responsibility, because through this final scene the audience becomes aware of their personal and social responsibility. "The aesthetics of responsibility is based on a special way of observing the social reality and putting the viewer of the theatrical show into situations to which he has to actively relate and in this way confront his personal presence which makes him responsible for his decisions." (7), which Frljić does if we take into

consideration that the audience is almost being forced to listen. The audience might want to look away, it might even want to leave the room, but what is certain is that, at that given moment, the crime becomes clear and visible. You cannot run away from the consequences. The last scene does not only point out the existence of the genocide, but also of our insufficient courage to deal with it. However, it is not only the mentioning of the Srebrenica victims that makes the last scene of the show meaningful. It is also the means by which it is being conducted - in an exquisite staticity, the silence in the room, the flat tone that is being used to pronounce the names, without any physical activity, or any kind of other elements following on the scene. In this way, the accent is completely on the senses, the experience is less theatrical and perhaps closer to radio form. The actors pronounce all the names in a cold manner, however, the distance is not completely there, and the effect that is being made by this procedure is highly emotional and disturbing for the audience. In this way, Frljić moves the boundaries of scene enactment with a clear critical stand towards the cowardly relation of society towards a specific crime. The responsibility of the viewer is not separated from the responsibility of the actors of the play – "the individual responsibility of the actors on both sides of the ramp is one of the deepest layers of the political in the theatre in terms of the spirit of Lehmann." (8)

Frljić extends the responsibility of the actors towards the past and the present onto questions of responsibility that the actors take towards the characters they play. At the very beginning of the show, one of the actresses steps out and tells the audience that the actors of the show are acting in it under extortion, that they are being made, under threat of being fired, to express political stands that they themselves do not

agree on. It is important to say that this statement is far from the truth, that it is only a part of Frlić's constant play with reality and fiction in theatre, the questioning of the documentary template against the aspect of the personal, intimate interpretation of our past, touching the history of the Subotica theatre exactly at the time of the formation of the KPGT. Actors with panels around their necks for a moment take the roles of the people that made the heart and soul of this theatre – Ljubiša Ristić, Dušan Jovanović, Inga Appelt, and Miodrag Krivokapić, suggesting that once upon a time this was a place of brave and radical political and social engagement, of innovative and fresh theatrical poetics. However, Frlić doesn't allow the actors to *hold on to* these parts, but in the scene of the trial of the actors, every one of them gets sentenced to play – himself. The actor no longer hides behind the fictive characters of the writers, "stoned in his eternal existence"(9), nor is he trying to be somebody else. He is made to be what he is, and with that alone, he is responsible for what he is playing, going deep into his personal decisions and choices, not running away from responsibility. The responsibility is on the one hand personal and directed towards the political aspect, and on the other, it is purely artistic - acting for what it represents on the stage. In the same manner, giving us some sort of reminiscence of the strength of the social critical theatre that the KPGT once had, Frlić questions what kind of theatre we need today and whether it can be developed, he provides room to explore new possibilities of the influence of the theatre in society, mentions Brecht's ideas of revolution, and actively includes the actors, and with that the audience as well. The *Apprehension* and *Trial* of the actors by taking off the panels with names of former members of the KPGT and the sentence to play themselves is done through a very violent,

uncontrolled, almost animal like capture and arrest, with resistance, screaming, and a chase from the stage into the audience and them being dragged into the courtroom. It is not only that compulsion and coercion are something very recognizable to our society, but Frlić shows with this how much a person is ready to desperately defy and run from fear of self knowledge, although it is all in vain.

By exploring the actor's responsibility and the readiness of a person to face his personal choices and actions, to discover certain fears and dilemmas, Frlić continues to deepen the representation of truth in the theatre and questions again the boundaries of reality and fiction in the scene that through the *confessions* of the participants problematizes the relationship towards the minorities in Vojvodina. It is no accident that the director sets the show precisely in Subotica, a city in the north part of Vojvodina, where Serbs and Hungarians live together. In this way, aside from critically analyzing Milošević's Kosovo myth and the consequences of his politics and bombings, he also highlights the question of the conflict of the Serbs and the Hungarians. Lined one next to the other, the actors talk in sequence about their experiences which, in a way, relate to the relationship with the Hungarian citizens. Then, from right to left, again in sequence, each of them talks about practically the same intolerance in Hungarian, only this time from the *Hungarian point of view*. In this way, he talks about the attack of the Serbians, among whom there is, supposedly, one actor as well, on a Hungarian. In another instance, it becomes a story about Hungarians that attack a young Serb. This kind of inversion of statements does not have the function of searching for whether the statement of the actors or actresses is true or made up, nor which of the versions is correct, nor is it trying to find the perpetrator. Playing

with the fictional and the real, Frljić shows that aggression and national intolerance is deeply rooted in our society, thus the conflict on one side becomes the conflict on the other. They are connected but also manipulated.

Like the *Kukavičluk* (Cowardice) performed in Subotica, in the show *Zoran Đinđić*, Oliver Frljić continues to investigate the ways in which the audience in the theatre will collectively face the past and accept its personal responsibility, pointing out the importance of the possibility to talk about what the public does not want to talk about (one of the scenes in the play is also the trial of Vojislav Koštunica, which did not actually take place in reality). In the show of *Atelje 212*, Frljić touches on the subject that has burdened Serbia for nearly the last ten years. It doesn't only deal with the assassination of the prime minister and the consequences that his murder had on the development of the democratic society, but also with the connection between the government, the church and the military, thus trying to highlight the fact that the murder is a political act and still an unresolved case. He also shows with this play that the problems that currently press Serbia drag roots from the past, which is all thrown in the audience's face in the first scene of the play – the glorification of war crimes, nationalists, a corrupt justice system, church pedophilia, uncontrolled violence, the political repression and assassinations of journalists, the setting of embassies on fire and, of course, the assassination of Đinđić, thus insisting that it finally face the causes of our social and political downfall. Although in the play Frljić constantly refers to concrete events from the recent past, to the relationship between the state and paramilitary formations, and in this way investigates those responsible for the assassination of the prime minister, one of the last scenes only

appears to distance itself from the political plan and the journalist-like treatment of the documentary template, focusing on the question of artistic freedom and the existence of censorship through working on a play such as *Zoran Đinđić*. Two actors appear on the stage and interrupt the show with the announcement that the work on *Đinđić* had been stopped the very moment they found out they were being spied on. They then read to the audience a record that provides information about the beginnings of work on the play, disagreements and conflicts between management, and the director himself with the ensemble, only to *call out* all those that have left the play (Anita Mančić, Jakov Jevtović, Dubravka Mijatović, Marinko Madzgalj, etc.). First of all, this kind of insight into the situation “behind the scenes” is not only a need to “talk behind one's back” about the conflicts among members of the team, but it is also very much a political context. No matter what is true or made up in the statement (the idea is not to tire the viewer while trying to figure out the truth in the records), the fact that is being highlighted is that today, theatre is not completely independent and spared of censorship and threats, hence the responsibility of the actors towards the role that has been given to them here gains a bigger dimension. The actors come out from the show because they do not have the courage to accept their responsibility towards the characters, while the fact that they are not ready to take responsibility for their characters is a sign of the unreadiness of our society to take responsibility for the assassination. Even Lehmann's statement that the theatre must not be a political commentary of reality, like newspapers or television, is being denied here because it shows that even if the theatre's critical commentary is being initiated, it is not ruled out that it can be obstructed in this kind of system. In this way, not even the theatre with its

participants is a completely free place for a provocative and brave confrontation, but it still has a certain effect and echo as is.

The scene resources that Frlić uses are a contrast to the final scene of *Kukavičluk* (*Cowardice*). Although here we have motionless actors, a physical staticity and the accent on the auditive, silence and moderation are being substituted by a microphone and shouting, everything is magnified, highlighted and aggressive, almost rebel like, and it all becomes more resemblant of a protest speech at a political forum.

As we have seen, the political engagement in Frlić's case is large based on Lehmann's theory of post drama theatre. Through scenes of the trials of the actors in *Kukavičluk* (*Cowardice*) and the public revealing of the retreat of the actors in *Zoran Đinđić*, the importance of the actors' taking personal responsibility is being pointed out, and with that, that of the viewer as well, with the goal of critically viewing personal acts connected to today's political circumstances. The importance of Frlić's theatre expression is found in the readiness to bravely and directly speak about the problems of our recent past, while at the same time provoking the viewer to actively interpret scene acts, waiting on his reaction, while constantly playing with the theatrical and *our own* reality, moving thus the boundaries of contemporary theatre in the region.

Tamara Baračkov

NOTES

1. Medenica, 2011, p.11
2. Lehmann, 2002, p.122.
3. Lehmann, 2002, p.123
4. Lehmann, 2002, p.124.
5. Frlić, 2001, p.54
6. Frlić, 2011, p.55
7. Attila Antal, 2011, p.20
8. Medenica, 2011, p.16
9. Lehmann, 2011, p.51

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3. Bertolt Brecht (1966). Dialectics in Theatre. Belgrade, Nolit.
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5. Oliver Frlić (2011). The Political and the Post Dramatic. Teatron, no. 155/154 Spring/Summer, p.54.
6. Nataša Govedić (2011). Will the Truth Set Us Free? Teatron no. 154/155 Spring/Summer, pp. 26 – 33.

On the Borders of Visibility From observer to participant

“Does modern art have any visible social effect or political importance?” asks artist Artur Zmijewski. While speaking about shame as a barrier for rebellion, he disappointedly states that “art can be politically oriented, as long as it remains at a distance from politics; it can work politically inside a gallery, but not in public discussions.”⁽¹⁾ However, the fact that art holds the paradoxical position of the involved observer cannot be denied, as it has developed strategies of social critique. In this sense, we are talking about an art that tackles the construction of public space and social relationships, or perhaps it even produces them itself. According to Chantal Mouffe, this is an art that “encourages disagreement and reveals that which dominating consensus tries to exterminate,” and it consists of a series of practices whose goal is to give a voice to those who have been shushed in the framework of the ex-

isting hegemony.⁽²⁾ Despite this, defining the concept of public art or art in a public space remains controversial in the sense of modern theory and critique, and every discussion about it inevitably brings to question the theory of the public sphere and democracy, which complicates things even more.

What is of interest to us here is the role the public sphere plays in art and in the public space and, more importantly, the role that this kind of art could play in the public sphere. The lack of artistic discourse that formulates this problem in an appropriate manner is precisely the reason why political theory is essentially resorted to when discussing public art today. In her essay *Agoraphobia*, Rosalyn Deutsche suggests that public art should be that which partakes in the political space or that which creates it. Similarly, “the artistic public, in contrast to the artistic audience, is not made into

an entity ahead of time, but instead occurs and is created by its own participation in political activity.” Hence, art in a public space includes its audience in the discussion or it partakes in political battle, thus contributing to the production of the public sphere.

Nonetheless, my intention isn’t to give my opinion in regards to this discussion, but to present concrete examples of works that deal with the relationships of power in society, with the question of ethnicity, and the (de)construction of *the other*, thus depraving the dominant representation models, while primarily focusing on projects by artist Andreja Kulunčić. She deals with participatory art and projects that address social themes that are specific for a certain area, while at the same time trying to include the greatest number of participants and experts as possible in order to find new ways of communication. This kind of practice can be called relational art (Nicolas Bourriaud), and it deals with a “series of artistic methods whose theoretical and practical starting point lies in the overall human relationship and social context, and not in some independent and private space.” The abandonment of the museum exhibition model is also an important aspect, since art takes on a political dimension when it enters the public sphere. However, Kulunčić does not completely throw away the white cube. Indeed, the majority of her work, after the initial presentation in a public space, returns to the museum or the gallery. The artist herself explains this by stating that she doesn’t consider the white cube a neutral space, an emptiness in which there are no appointed attitudes, stereotypes or discourses ahead of time. Apart from being extremely problematic, this claim points to the fact that despite the fact that the traditional museum model isn’t adequate anymore for the (re)presentation of artwork in a public space, new and appropriate models have

yet to be invented.

Seeing the Other

I will begin with a few related examples from an international context. Santiago Sierra, a Spanish artist, often uses controversial methods in order to point to the problematic position of immigrants and the exploitation of workers (especially those that are not registered) in the capitalist system. Sierra attracted attention because he blurred the lines between artistic collaboration and exploitation when he paid workers minimum wage for doing pointless manual labour, such as pushing large cement blocks around the gallery space. This leads to the impairment of their humanity to objects in a situation in which visibility is achieved only through complete pointlessness, as Heidi Kellett describes.⁽³⁾ For example, the work of art titled *Workers Who Can’t be Paid, Remunerated to Remain Inside Cardboard Boxes* (Berlin, 2000), consisted of six boxes inside which Chechnyan workers were closed for four hours a day. These workers, being refugees, had to be paid in secrecy. Kellett states that Sierra is in the position of “jeopardizing the mental, physical, social, and emotional health of his subjects, because they do not exist within the legal parameters of the country in which the work of art is being exhibited.”

Krzysztof Wodiczko, a Polish artist, uses the term *xenology* (“the science of foreigners”) to describe his own personal activity, while reexamining the sustainability and success of democracy. This is a multimedia research production project in which Wodiczko constructs various instruments that allow immigrants to speak in a public space. One of these examples is the *Alien Staff* (*Immigrant Instruments*, 1992), a staff that has a small monitor and speaker on it, which can be used by immigrants to ad-

dress the public and to communicate with it. The second work of art that is interesting in this context is *Guests* (2009), which was exhibited at the Polish Pavilion at the 53rd Venetian Biennial. This project also deals with the visibility of immigrants, that is, it points to the inability of their equal presence and participation in the public sphere. The work of art consists of a projection of windows that are incorporated into the architecture of the pavilion. The projection shows immigrants washing the windows of the pavilion, conversing about their problems such as the legalization of their stay, unemployment, etc. However, since the glass is blurry, the picture that we perceive isn't entirely clear. In this way, Wodiczko points to the ambivalent position of immigrants: we are aware that they are around us, but we don't really notice them.

Hansel Sato, an artist from Peru and Vienna, also deals with the post-migrant subject. His work of art *Osterreichische Nachrichten* (2010) was presented in the form of a daily newspaper. By exploiting the typical visual language of the yellow pages, he parodies the Austrian right-wing newspaper, thus placing himself within the tradition of guerilla marketing. However, by altering the context of the news by inserting messages that speak against discrimination, xenophobia, and racism, Sato criticizes depictions of immigrants and foreigners in media pamphlets, and points to the role of media in the reproduction of racism.

All three of the above-mentioned artists deal with the same theme, but use different methods in doing so. In order to point out the border-line legal status of immigrants, Sierra himself chooses a border-line legal and morally questionable approach, and his works of art are brutal, direct, and actionist. In Wodiczko's artwork the

metaphor and the idea are stressed (even in his series of artwork titled *Immigrant Instruments*, which are intended for use in the public space). His video titled *Guests* is traditional, that is, he doesn't radically disrupt the museum exhibition model and he isn't inclined towards direct action, but instead towards creating an ambient. Andreja Kulunčić's approach is most similar to that of Hansel Sato. The news, newspapers, advertisements, and billboards are all a part of our everyday lives and they are thus a means of consuming stereotypes and prejudices. An intervention into such contents is an indirect and subversive way of speaking up, and it can be compared to Sierra's work in terms of the shock-effect, although it operates on a level of awareness raising, encouragement to think critically and to reshape the consciousness.

Us and Them

In each of the above-mentioned examples, we are faced with the concept of migrants not only as individuals who are on the edge of social invisibility, but also as apartheid, or as that which Giorgio Agamben defines as *homo sacer*. By referencing Roman law, Agamben talks about a person who is excluded from society and with whom the sovereign power deals beyond the borders of the law. This often means that migrants are placed in the position of slaves, that is, emphasizing the fact that he is excluded from society – not entirely however, because society needs his workforce. In terms of this, the residence of the worker is always considered as being exclusively temporary, and because of this, the worker can never become a proper citizen. The State, thus, labels immigrants, but it doesn't want to completely ban them from its borders, and in this way executes its biopolitical surveillance over *guest workers* and illegal workers.

Here, we are talking about the relationship towards migrants who are called, according to certain ethnic theories, the *differential exclusion*. This is a situation “in which migrants are included in certain social areas (above all, in the labour market), but on the other hand, they are unable to enter other areas of life and the operation of the local society, and they are thus forced to live *on the margins*, in the suburbs of a society that, at any price, wants to preserve myths about their cultures being static.”(4) In modern society, nationalism and the idea of citizenship form the dominant model of belonging. In this framework, the migrant takes on the role of the *foreigner*,(5) which is a figure that represents a threat, an element of backlash in the homogeneity of national identity. He is neither a friend nor an enemy, but instead represents the penetrability of the internal and the fallibility of the movement. Foreigners are the *others*, those who already belong somewhere, but have stepped outside of their own borders.

In many of Andreja Kulunčić's works the foreigner plays the leading role. To avoid being pathetic or stressing the exoticism of *the other*, she doesn't deal with the stories and fates of the individual, but instead presents her examples as symptoms of broader problems and conditions of society. As Silva Kalčič explains, the artist takes her methodology from sociology and marketing and interferes with the regular media flow, thus inviting the audience to actively participate, and in this way establishes “interdisciplinary networks that recognize artwork as a process of collaboration (co-creation) and self-organization.”(6) Since “changes in the function of artwork and the manner of its representation represent the growing *urbanization* of the artistic experience,” as Bourriaud points out, art thus becomes intertwined with sociology, ethnology, and other simi-

lar disciplines, to the point where it becomes more and more difficult to differentiate between them. Thus, works of art take on a social responsibility, as they deal with themes that are of social and political importance and they, in general, play an active role in formulating problems – art becomes “a state of encounters.” According to Suzana Milevska, this also includes the question of *the other* in society. She sees art as a reaction to social demands for marginalized groups that are unable to participate in the social environment or in public cultural life, to be seen.(7) The projects that I am going to talk about in the text that follows, I've singled out because all three were exhibited in a public space and they deal with the question of the nation, that is, the belonging of immigrants, as well as with their representation in the media but also in the social consciousness.

Be quiet and do your work!

The work of art titled *Bosnians Out! (Workers Without Boundaries)* was created for the exhibition titled *Museum on the Streets* at the Modern Gallery in Ljubljana (October/November 2008). It was presented in collaboration with Osman Pezić, Said Mujić, and Ibrahim Ćurić, construction workers from Bosnia who renovated the Gallery. The artist's intention was to, in her own words, “open up new channels of communication for workers to enable them to actively communicate with the public in regards to their situation in Ljubljana.” The topics at hand were related to urban margins: migrants, strategies of survival, hostels for workers, forms of self-organization, etc. Kulunčić used the fact that it was precisely these types of people who worked on the renovation of the Gallery, and thus decided to include them in the artistic process. In an interview, she explained that the theme of multidisciplinary collaboration

and the destabilization of the institution of authorship don't destabilize her, but on the contrary, that they make her stronger. "Allowing or releasing doesn't mean destabilization and renouncement of authorship, but it changes the form of authorship. For me, authorship is collaboration." (8)

The idea of realization with combined efforts consisted of five versions of posters that were exhibited in the form of city lights in the center of Ljubljana, which were taken down by local authorities without any explanation during the duration of the exhibition (they were put back after reactions in the media). The posters contained quotes in Slovenian and English (e.g. *Enough for you!, Tiho bodi pa delaj!* (Be quiet and do your work!), *Za kogar je, dobro je!* (This is good enough for them!)), and were divided into two parts: on one part, there was a photograph of a luxury Slovenian home, and on the other, there was a worker, a Bosnian migrant, on a construction site, in a hostel for workers, looking at the photograph of the family/luxury home, etc. This almost caricature-like stereotypical image of the worker, in his construction outfit with a helmet on his head eating his lunch, is in direct opposition to the idyllic image of the life of a Slovene. Despite the fact that they represent the source of a (cheap) labour force and in this way contribute to economic development, migrants pose a challenge for the nation's identity, which stresses the dominant culture's unwillingness to accept *foreigners*. In other words, "we are witnesses to the gap between the conditions of economic development and participation, and social and political development (...) in which low-skilled and non-qualified workers become victims of political alienation and the bearers of new demands for citizenship." (9)

The work of art *Bosnians Out!* doesn't deal with only the position of Bosnian workers in Ljubljana, but also stresses the irony of

the fact that *progressive* institutions such as galleries and museums, even when dealing with the theme of migration and social integration, require the labour of these same migrants. Here, Kulunčić brings the workers "from the shadows" and they thus become participants in the creation of a work of art, by choosing their own way of representation. "I stand up for a certain group of people, I work with them and I try to give them the tools that will help them to strengthen their positions (...) I'm not trying to be the mediator, but instead, I try to enable those involved to directly participate," explains the artist. In this manner, the disempowered subjects shift, if only temporarily, from an inferior to a superior position. (10) However, it is necessary to stress this *temporality*, but also to raise awareness regarding the double altruism and the privileged position of the intellectual artist who puts herself in the position of the mediator, and in the end, she is the only one who gets any sort of recognition (the workers are only recognized because their names are listed in the description of the work of art). This is why her cooperative-participative approach nonetheless maintains elements of the self-affirmative figure of the author.

A Career as a Janitor or Cleaning Lady

The work of art titled *Austrians Only* was created in 2005 in the framework of the regional Festival that, with each new edition, deals with a certain area of Upper Austria and its specifics as well as problems. Kulunčić presented her artwork in the form of newspaper ads, posters, and direct mail. Her focus were prejudices and the more or less concealed discrimination of foreign workers in Austria who are "victims of economic, political, and social segregation, trapped in a system of production without access to benefits,

and marginalized from complete participation in society.” (11) The ads are simple, bright-coloured, with motivating headlines, emphasized sections of “WANTED” and “OFFERRED,” along with a phone number that people who are interested can call. The artist explains that idea of the project was to come up with employment ads that were exclusively aimed at Austrians, but these ads described working conditions to which they themselves would never agree, but which they consider appropriate for *the others* (non-Austrians). These are people whose existence is ignored and suppressed, but who, at the same time, work the most tedious jobs. At a glance, these ads seem to be designed in an amateur manner, and they offered Austrian citizens with high school diplomas or university degrees job positions such as janitors or prostitutes, with all the *benefits* that go along with them: low wages, strenuous labour with no breaks, no protection at work or health care, no traveling expenses, no paid overtime, no legal status or access to social networks, with the possibility of violence, exploitation, and racial or nationalistic discrimination.

Curators Ivana Bago and Antonija Majača call Andreja Kulunčić’s approach a *tactic of mimicry*, which is a skillful and subversive exploitation of conventional forms. At a glance, these ads aren’t much different than typical mass media commercials and ads. However, by utilizing this form but by altering its content, the artist attempts to “awaken” and almost shock the “observer,” thus “ejecting” him from a dazed “state of spam,” saturation of consumer incentives, and the prevalent political passiveness.” (12) This is manifested here with the reversal of roles – the undermining of the sense of belonging and being privileged in Austrians by facing them with ethnical and class segregation. Kulunčić does not consider her work to be blatant activism,

but instead tries to include her messages almost unnoticeably, which is enabled by surreptitiously relocating or destabilizing the observer. For the most part, the media is responsible for the strengthening of stereotypes and for suppressing differences, thus the decision to begin precisely with them to deconstruct myths regarding national identity seems logical.

Anyone but a Roma!

Just like the communication instruments by Krzysztof Wodiczko give a voice to immigrants in the public space, the interventions by Kulunčić in mainstream media content allow minorities in Croatia to make themselves seen in the public sphere. The project titled *About the State of the Nation* (Miroslav Kraljević Gallery, 2008) was produced in collaboration with journalists and minority groups, and it can be compared to Sato’s *Oesterreichische Nachrichten*. All of these project function not only as a critique of social segregation based on ethnic or national belonging, but also try to come up with “models of creating toleration and the possibility of deconstructing *the other*.” (13) The problem of *the others* isn’t present only marginally – it involves the inability of full and equal participation in cultural and political life, and with that, in the control of stereotypes and their reproduction via the media. Media discourse doesn’t only reflect social entities and relationships, but it also forms and shapes them. Racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, and other similar media discourses have concrete consequences in the real world. Since relationships of power are formed depending on who has access to the media, on whose voice is heard and whose is repressed, it is clear that the dominant group of people will have control over representation pamphlets. News on television, the Internet, and in the newspaper contribute to the creation of an image

of a homogenous nation, while *foreigners* are automatically placed in specific (negatively tainted) categories and are generally under-represented. The artist explains that “opinions aren’t formed on the basis of personal attitudes towards *the other*. The aspect of *the other* is constructed in us, mainly due to newspaper headlines and subtitles.”(14)

Kulunčić and her associates published *virus-news* that remind the typical Croat about the existence of homosexuals, the Chinese, and the Roma people – groups that are demonized and whose visibility is filtered in the public space. The tactics of mimicry once again proved to be a good way of facing people of dominant cultures with their own prejudices as well as of changing the *negative* into the *positive*. The goal of inserting these *virus-news* (which presented these minority groups in the same way that the general public is presented) was to open up a dialogue that would include the collaboration of both of these groups in an affirmative and educational way. The artist explains that there isn’t a great similarity between the representation of homosexuals, Roma people, and the Chinese in the media.(15) The intention of this complex and long-term project wasn’t only to stimulate thinking about inclusion and exclusion mechanisms and tolerance, but also to develop activity models that help us overcome ethical, national, and class discrimination, as well as to form relationships with others based on “pleasurable antagonism” and dialogue, and not on dominance, silencing, and violence.

Where does activism end and art begin?

Collaboration as a form of production stresses precisely the socially conditioned character of art. Teamwork, the exchange

of skills and ideas, and collaboration with various institutions are just some of the ways in which the position of art within the social division of work becomes visible as a form of social work, as critic John Roberts explains. (16) The abandonment of the idea of the autonomy of authorship has opened up space for its definition as multi-layered and scattered, while the figure of the individual artist has been replaced with the idea of a collective. However, in the end, someone has to sign the work of art and take responsibility for it. Kulunčić isn’t just the coordinator or organizer, but also the holder of the idea. Although she always stresses the collaboration with those who are excluded, and always mentions her collaborators, she is ultimately the one who is responsible for the projects, and she travels in order to exhibit them and obtains the resources, and so on. This is why we can talk about the scattering of the institution of the author only conditionally.

Ideally, art can occupy the public space and disrupt the refined image of corporative capitalism. “Under capitalist conditions, art, paradoxically, needs to be defended as being art, as the other in comparison to non-aesthetic reasoning, so that it can resist complete instrumentalization,” says critic John Roberts. Kulunčić herself stresses that her goal was to provide tools for capitalism resistance, outside of the classic political organization structure. However, in reality, art doesn’t have the power to bring down capitalism and to create revolutionary changes, since it is merely a part of capitalism. This doesn’t mean, however, that art is completely impotent or that it becomes void with the actual *staging* of rebellion. Its political potential and activity take place on a micro-level, where it creates points of resistance with small and localized steps. In her work, Kulunčić poses the question about how art

can participate in the public sphere, how it can affect the creation of the discourse regarding *the other* and change the prevailing stereotypes, as well as what it means to place certain groups of people on the borders of visibility and the law. However, in the end, she remains in the elite castle of art and distances herself from direct political action (“I don’t see my artwork as open activism”), and when asked about the concrete results of her project and interventions, she stresses only that her goal is to stimulate people to reexamine their personal attitudes and to listen to one another. In other words, art remains a part of the system in this case, and not its subversion.

It is sometimes difficult to ask oneself how to evaluate such projects or what the difference is between art and, for example, activism or sociological research. Or, “if collaboration in art is part of the collective fight against the capitalist value form, then how can this activism be called art and not, for example, politics?” (17) Roberts claims that it is impossible for art to completely melt into social practice, because art always returns to the world of art in order to confirm its status. Otherwise, we wouldn’t be able to differentiate it from other practices anymore. (18) I have to admit that I don’t have an answer to the question posed in the title excerpt. The above-mentioned works of art fall into the category of practices that are located on the unstable and undefined borders of disciplines, and they represent a challenge for traditional definitions and functions of art. Perhaps today, at a time of distinct interdisciplinarity, there is no need to search for borders. Perhaps it is unnecessary to broaden the range of activity, to give it new forms and tactics, to legitimize differences and allow for participation, but instead, for starters, to formulate a new understanding about what art can do and what it represents today.

Tihana Bertek

NOTES

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2. “Umjetnički aktivizam i agonistički prostori,” *Operacija: grad. Priručnik za život u neoliberalnoj stvarnosti* (2008), Zagreb: Savez za centar za nezavisnu kulturu i mlade, Multimedijalni institut, Platforma 9,81 – Institut za istraživanja u arhitekturi, BLOK – Lokalna baza za osvježavanje kulture, SU Klubtura / Clubture.
3. Heidi Kellet, “Santiago Sierra: Homo Sacer and the Politics of the Other.”
4. Ružica Čičak Chand, “Oblici etničnosti u Europi i osnovne značajke odnosa zemalja imigracije prema novim etničkim manjinama,” *Etničnost, nacija, identitet* (1998), Zagreb: Institut za migracije i narodnosti, Naklada Jesenski i Turk, Hrvatsko sociološko društvo.
5. See: Étienne Balibar, “Strangers as Enemies. Further Reflections on the Aporias of Transnational Citizenship”; i Zygmunt Bauman, “Modernity and Ambivalence,” *Theory, Culture & Society*, no. 7 (1990).
6. “Umjetnost bez iluzije”, *ORIS: Časopis za arhitekturu i kulturu*, no. 40 (2006).
7. Ibid.
8. Petra Novak and Tamara Sertić, „Stvaranje mostova, From Consideration to Commitment: Art in Critical Confrontation to Society: Belgrade, Ljubljana, Skopje, Zagreb 1990-2010.
9. Liette Gilbert i Mustafa Dikeç, “Right to the City: politics of citizenship,” *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre* (2008), NY and London: Routledge.
10. Ivana Bago and Antonija Majača, “Andreja Kulunčić,” katalog “Andreja Kulunčić” (2009), Novigrad: Galerija Rigo.
11. Note 13.
12. Note 14.
13. Note 15.
14. Dea Vidović: “Razgovor s Andrejom Kulunčić”, katalog O stanju nacije (2008), Zagreb: GMK.
15. For example, the Chinese see themselves as oppressed, and they represent the smallest threat to the Croatian national identity. The Roma people are the discriminated against the most: their ethnicity is often stressed (e.g. A Roma killed..., but never A Croat killed...), or they are only allowed to speak about exclusively “Roma-related” topics.
16. “Collaboration as a Problem of Art’s Cultural Form,” *Third Text*, number 18:6 (2004).
17. Jasna Jakšić, “Zajednički rad,” *Život umjetnosti*, number 86 (2010).
18. Note 8.

Books without borders

Regional literary manifestations and market ideology

Punctuated (r)evolution

“ I am happy and excited to see so many book lovers. It is a rare sight, and it is even more thrilling to be a writer in a nation of so many readers. “

(Dobrica Ćosić, opening ceremony, Belgrade Book Fair, 1996) (1)

Traditionally, cultural festivals in Yugoslavia began during the 1930s. The first and the oldest among them in Serbia and Yugoslavia – *Vukov Sabor* in Tršiće – was launched in 1933 as an annual conference of cultural workers, artists, academics and their audience. Its objective was to present and popularise national tradition and culture, including the life and works of Vuk Karadžić in national, cultural institutions. Since it was conceived as a national festival from the start, *Vukov Sabor* has fulfilled this ideological purpose during the last decades, as well as today, in conjunction with national

ideological tools: state, schools (*Student Vukov Sabor* marked its 41st anniversary in 2012), academy and university, *salon* or mainstream art, etc. Since 1964, the centennial of Vuk Karadžić's death, *Vukov Sabor* has grown from a local event to an important state affair, which is the case to this day. (2)

Vukov Sabor is a national festival and as such, it gathers a wide array of cultural segments and different types of art. However, it also specialises in annual conferences dedicated to individual segments of culture and art. The first event of the festival variety in Yugoslavia (literature and publishing) – The International Book Fair – was also initiated in conjunction with the state and its ideological apparatus in 1956. It started in Zagreb, but was moved to Belgrade the following year. In 2012, the 57th Book Fair was sponsored by the city of Belgrade; with minimal conceptual changes since 2000 (such as, “honorary guest coun-

try” introduced in 2002). (3)

Meanwhile, many literary events have been established across Yugoslavia. Some of them maintained their local significance, while others became more widely known. Poetry evenings in Struga were first held in 1962, grew from a local event to a national festival, and have been an international poetry festival since 1965, marking its 51st anniversary in 2012. The concept of the festival has been more or less the same since 1966 (in 2003, UNESCO award for best newcomer was introduced). (4)

Therefore, during the 1960s, the so-called *cultural map* of Yugoslavia was being drawn, at least when it came to literary festivals. In this relatively short time period, within merely two decades, a significant number of festivals was launched, in addition to old events being redefined and reconceptualised. During the following four to five decades, however, the cultural map would remain static and unchanged. No matter how rapidly it had evolved, it also went into a long stasis very quickly. In a wider context, the cultural map was drawn in other areas, not just literature: majority of museums, libraries, galleries, some theatres, even universities were established in the 1960s. That was the formative decade for most institutions in the SFRY, after which they went into stasis.

In 1972, Eldredge and Gould introduced the theory of punctuated equilibrium in the study of biological evolution as an alternative to phyletic gradualism in the traditional understanding of evolution. According to phyletic gradualism, entire species evolved gradually, accumulating mutations from generation to generation. Theory of punctuated equilibrium, on the other hand, points out the relevance of stasis during the evolution of species, assuming cladogenesis of species and taking

into consideration external factors which influence the evolutionary flow. Gould and Eldredge’s theory was applied to humanities in order to account for punctures in social evolution – in linguistics, sociology, political science, etc. (5) Changes in social systems are explained by rapid, radical changes that are caused externally and take over the entire system at once; not by slow and gradual evolution of the system from within. In this way, the impact of external factors acquires more significance, because the system is influenced by conditions and circumstances to a much larger degree in comparison to its gradual evolution over time.

When it comes to evolution of literary festivals, we can apply the principle of punctuated equilibrium to explain their history, most importantly the external factors. If certain periods and eras were more suitable for the establishment of literary festivals than others, if there are periods when festivals are stagnant and inert, then there must be external, macrosociological factors that shape this punctuated (r)evolution on the cultural scene.

A cultural/art festival is any event which is: a) periodical – usually annual, consigned to a more or less specific time of the year; then b) current – presents latest production created in the interim; and c) within the public domain – there is interaction with the audience: it is not a closed conference, its primary goal is promotion of culture to a large audience. There are other features, such performance and uniqueness (festival interacts with its audience only at a certain venue and at a specific time); but this is secondary. Festivals are, therefore, all cultural events which occur periodically, present current content and interact with audiences; including book fairs, conferences, literary evenings etc. – all of these events are structurally and

ideologically similar enough to be subject to this analysis.

In that respect, every festival aspires to become traditional, i.e. to take place successively. Stases in the evolution of cultural festivals are immanent. With phases of punctuated (r)evolution, however, when all of these festivals are frequently and quickly established within a short time frame, they become specific to certain eras, and their specificity can only stem from ideology. Therefore, it is not hard to guess why the cultural scene of Yugoslavia needed to draw its so-called cultural map during the 1960s after the Second World War, the Socialist Revolution and the end of the Informbiro. The young ruling class had to implement its ideology, which included culture and art. Literary festivals are part of that, alongside literary criticism, publishing, literary awards, etc. (more often than not, festivals often unite all of that). Their access to large audiences is far more direct and systematic when compared to other aspects of literary reception (such as criticism, competitions, etc), which makes them all the more suitable for ideological and cultural propaganda.

So, when talking about “book lovers” and “the nation of readers”, Ćosić openly and uncritically caters to the ideological purpose and concept of these literary manifestations. From his speech during the opening of the Belgrade Book Fair in 1996, we could gather that literature in Serbia and Yugoslavia exists because there are so many book lovers and the nation is packed with readers. In fact, it is the other way around – the nation of readers is produced by fairs and festivals, just like the “the nation of warriors” (a concept Ćosić is also familiar with) is an ideological construct supported by patriarchal and nationalistic mythology of Kosovo and Saint Sava, i.e., the regime to which Ćosić is closely as-

sociated with.

Cross-border

“The most important regional festival is Crocodile in Belgrade. It is now in its third year. It is a truly great event, with 600 to 700 visitors. It lasts for three days, there are five authors and a band.”
(Kruno Lokotar, interview for *Radio Free Europe*)(6)

With the benefit of hindsight, especially after political turmoil in Yugoslavia and regime change – and the ideological shift – it is easy to talk about *that* ideology. It is more difficult to analyse current ideology, the one in which we live in, where we work and create, without the proper distance and awareness.

The fact of the matter is that this essay is produced under similar, if not identical, ideological conditions within the *Criticize This!* project in support of regional art criticism by cultural associations from Zagreb, Belgrade and Ulcinj. Its position is shaped by the dialectics of margin and mainstream on several axes, as an alternative to national cultural scene, but also central as a liberal, regional alternative. It comes from a radically left margin within the alternative centre, with the intention to criticise its liberalism within the mainstream, meaning it has lost its marginal position, but not its critical potential. Since this essay is sponsored by the EU, but *does not represent the opinion of the European Union and the European Union is not responsible or liable for any use that might be made of information contained herein*, this means that the author can talk using the means of the EU, within the discourse of the regional literary scene, but may not share the views and opinions of either the EU or the literary scene. In this kind of discourse, it is possible to speak of a regional literary scene

from a radically leftist point of view (in this case neomarxist, with elements of deconstruction), despite – or precisely thanks to! – the fact there is a multilayered structure, a web of different discourses.

The puncture in the history and progress of literary festivals in Yugoslavia which happened during the 1960s was not the only occurrence of that kind in their evolution. Something very similar took place in the past decade. Since 1995, there has been a book fair in Pula – *I dream about books in Istria*, now in its 18th year. The 35th *Interliber*, part of the Zagreb Fair, also acquired a regional dimension after 2000. The former function of the Belgrade Book Fair in Yugoslavia, then Serbia and Montenegro, after that just Serbia, had to be taken up by *Interliber* and Pula Festival after the collapse of the common state and market. Since 2006, after the separation of Montenegro from Serbia, these festivals invited the Montenegrin delegation with great ceremony.⁽⁷⁾ After Montenegro separated from Serbia, a book fair in Podgorica started, now in its seventh year.⁽⁸⁾ In other words, establishment and survival of book fairs is closely related to political circumstances. Apart from fairs, there have been numerous new festivals since 2000, following the principle of punctuated (r)evolution. They are mostly regional, which is an important aspect of their identity, (or they somehow allude to it, such as *Half Way Through* in Užice).

First of these festivals, however, never managed to become traditional, because it was extinguished after four intensive years – a travelling literary festival *FAK* started in Croatia in 2000. It premiered in Osijek; its last date was in 2003 in several Croatian cities (Zagreb, Pula, Rijeka, Varaždin), in Serbia (Novi Sad, Belgrade), and even abroad (London). The acronym initially stood for *Festival of alternative literature*, and turned

into *Festival of A-list literature*. This ideological shift from alternative to quality is paradigmatic in the context of regional festivals in general – more on that later.

Half Way Through started in Užice in 2006. The festival focuses primarily on high school students and takes place within the premises of the local high school. As such, it shares a lot of similarities to *Student Vukov Sabor* or the school day at the Belgrade Book Fair; but the ideology is different – which is the reason why it started in the first place. The festival promotes contemporary post-Yugoslav cultural and literary regionalisation, while the other more traditional literary events promote the national canon and ideas relevant to the ruling regime. In other words, these festivals constitute a battlefield for schools – schools being one of the most important ideological instruments.⁽⁹⁾

That same year in Kikinda, there was the first *Kikinda Short*, now entering its 7th year. This festival also includes publishing: short stories read at the festival are collected and published. Additionally, the festival promotes regional literature in schools, young authors from the region and inter-regional collaboration.⁽¹⁰⁾

The town of Subotica also has a festival since 2008, *Focus on Writers*, by the Danilo Kiš Foundation for youth culture and creation. The goal is to promote modern literature from the region and collaboration. It is also partly focused on high school population. They are celebrating their fifth year in 2012.⁽¹¹⁾

The *Crocodile festival*, the supposed acronym of *Krokodil - Književno regionalno okupljanje koje otklanja dosadu i letargiju* (*Regional literary conference to fight boredom and lethargy*) first took place in 2009 at the 25th May Museum in Belgrade. In 2012, it was

held in Zagreb and Belgrade. Apart from the summer edition, *Crocodile* also had five additional issues over the past three years – *Fantastic February Crocodile* in 2010 (Belgrade), *Crocodile on the road* – India (2009), then at Pula Book Fair (2010), in Ljubljana (2010) and Leipzig (2011). (12)

The same year when *Crocodile* started in Belgrade, a bookstore in Podgorica called Karver organised a regional festival *Odakle zovem* (*Where I'm Calling From*). In 2012, it was in its fourth year. There is a short story competition and a prize awarded by the bookstore and publishing house. In part, the festival is dedicated to the works of Raymond Carver. (13)

The youngest festival in this wave of punctuations is *Polip*, established in 2011 in Pristina. Despite the language barrier, this festival is not much different from the previously mentioned, regarding participants, topics and main idea – international literary collaboration. (14) This is possibly the most striking example of the spreading of the market, which is at the heart of cultural regionalisation since 2000, because it crosses the cultural border for the purpose of commercial networking. (15)

Sporadically, similar manifestations have taken place in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and other former republics; in the region, literary festivals were more numerous than ever in the past decade. It is obvious that contemporary literature is gasping for more airing; it has been overlooked on account of the national academic scene. During the 1990s it was dissident and underground, but after 2000 it finally won enough media coverage. It turned mainstream, more precisely, an alternative mainstream; following the same principle which forms the national centre in relation to the margin, the margins are also structured as a centralised system, respecting

the logic of market competition and other crossovers within the network – naturally, with the centre – for publicity, circulation, advertising, money. Liberalisation of the market implies competition. This was confirmed when *Crocodile* went to Leipzig and Serbia was the focus country – this was the scene that was being recognised, not the academic, national literature.

Similarly, in other post-Yugoslav republics – the alternative scene, competing with national literary establishment, has gained more ground in recent years. For instance, in Croatia, books edited by Lokotar (Algoritam publishing house) are the ones that keep winning more and more awards. (16) In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is a predominance of war writing and engaged topics, (17) which is also the case with Kosovo and their young generation of post-traumatised authors. (18) In Montenegro, after the official secession from Serbian nationalism, the mainstream became liberal. (19) In Slovenia, there is controversy surrounding novels and films with nostalgia for Yugoslavia. (20) So, on the book market, the mainstream includes all of the above: engaged topics, issues of identity and transition, facing the past, rising above national, regional and cross-border.

With the decline and destruction of Yugoslavia during the 1990s, cultural ties between the former republics were severed. If there was such a thing as Yugoslav literature, then it was deconstructed on several grounds. On the one hand, borders of national literature were clearly drawn in all the Serbo-Croatian speaking republics (with an extended period of union for Serbia and Montenegro), including severing any mutual ties. On the other hand, there was an opposition, an alternative to national cultural elites with a tendency for preservation and restoration of the (post)Yugoslav cultural space. Dispersion

of the cultural scene happened on several levels – on territorial or national grounds, but also on an ideological basis.

During the 1990s, however, political circumstances catered to the nationalistic elites. They were in charge of not only the academy and universities, but also of all the cultural events, almost the entire media, publishing, criticism, literary competitions, educational system and textbooks – the public sphere in which they propagated their ideology. This was a time when the anti-nationalist literary scene was truly alternative and subversive – self-published, fighting against censorship, media silence and state oppression, the example being *Feral Tribune*. The first *FAK* in Osijek was indeed a festival of alternative literature. Nevertheless, once this literature reclaimed some of the media, it indicated a shift in the larger scheme of things, leaning towards political opposition and turning into a festival of A-list literature. Lokotar is right to glorify and give so much credit to the legacy of *FAK* for the contemporary scene (21) – it was a turning point in every sense.

Now, when the alternative scene is dominant, when nationalistic elites are buried in the past, as well as all their myths and propaganda – since 2000 there have been slight changes in the programmes of national festivals, universities, schools and the media – there is a strong pro-European liberal tendency, without any mention of subversion or opposition. This is A-list literature, top-shelf, it dominates the scene, no more underground for them, now they have publishing offices, libraries, media coverage and, of course, the market. Since the ideological fight is also an economic fight; and vice versa, what is essentially an economic fight for the market is only manifested as ideological on the political level.

In that sense, Lokotar is no different from Ćosić in the 1990s. Both of them are thrilled with the number of visitors, growing circulations, awards and recognition, the revival of literature – or, in other words, they are in awe of their own success on the market. The nation of readers has turned into a “truly great event, with 600 to 700 visitors”. Only the rhetoric is different. The same way Ćosić was the main propagandist of national culture in the 80's and the 90's, so is Lokotar as editor, critic, head of festivals or committees in the region; from *FAK*, to *Pričigin*, the *Prozak* award, *Crocodile*, *Karver* to *Kikinda Short*. The illusory difference is that the former was a pseudorightist – in fact, transitional leftist contaminated with nationalism; while the latter is some sort of pseudoleftist – actually a right-wing social-democrat or liberal democrat, contaminated with post-socialist legacy.

Panem et circenses

„Relaxing the borders and then letting all in was more due to business, import-export rather than a comprehensive and targeted cultural policy. Capitalism does not tolerate borders or customs, it destroys them and expands the markets (...) There is not a lot of humanism in all this, the renaissance and joining of Serbian and Croatian culture is a credit to capitalism.” (Kruno Lokotar, interview for *Vreme*) (22)

When discussing inventing traditions, such is the case with propaganda in capitalist national states, as a reaction to modernisation from the 19th century onwards, Hobsbawm(23) points out the role of mass communication – which also results from the formation of middle classes and national states – in constructing and propagating these pseudotraditions. In other words, in order to establish their ideology, the ruling class needs strong propaganda

in the public sphere and the people's consciousness so that, according to Althusser(24), the dominant ideology can sustain that class as the ruling one. A cultural festival is no more than a propaganda tool – in the struggle for dominance, social systems, i.e. ideologies, fight for their share on the market. This was the case with capitalist production, especially literary production in Yugoslavia, in the 1960s after the liberalisation of economy, as well as during the 1990s and the 2000s after the new period of transition.

This is why literary festivals have to occupy public space and the media as a means of mass communication and propaganda. Not only that, they became an excellent marketing platform to present and sell books. The market logic at the festival scene is mirrored in these capitalist concepts, for instance, numbers (visitors, participants, days, books, etc.), exclusiveness (*Dubravka Ugrešić at the Half Way Through* festival in 2009, Beqë Cufaj at the 2010 *Crocodile*, unable to attend). (25) The supply adapts itself to the market, it has strong marketing to appeal to the audience (literature plus a band, live acts and performances, badges, trips, parties, *circenses*). (26)

Inventing traditions, according to Hobsbawm, is the ideological and market procedure on the regional literary scene, as the most obvious example of confluence between ideology and economy. By this I mean inventing tradition in a more narrow sense – the tradition of festivals; and also inventing tradition in a more general way – tradition that they uphold, which is also a construct, albeit a more complex one; it is, naturally, the regional, so-called post-Yugoslav tradition, the restoration of culture and bonds between the countries of the region. There is a very indicative observation by Ivan Čolović regarding *Half Way Through* in Užice in 2012. He notes,

calling into mind previous experience, that there was no such thing as the Yugoslav cultural scene or Yugoslav cultural space as an integral phenomenon or entity within the SFRY. There were, however, completely independent scenes in the republics which kept in touch, to a greater or lesser degree. In contrast, Čolović continues, festivals such as *Half Way Through* create the common regional cultural sphere retrospectively, resulting in a Yugoslav cultural scene or Yugoslav literature. (27)

Since ideology and mythology go hand in hand, here we also have an entire arsenal of symbolics related to the constitution of Yugoslav heritage: literary congress in Užice, *Odakle zovem* was opened with *Tito – the final testimony* by Lordan Zafranović, *Crocodile* takes place in the amphitheatre of the May 25 Museum, etc. The iconography, and invented tradition behind it, belongs to an ideological context and the market. In terms of ideology, it interprets the regional as a so-called point of restoration, as a continuity against the nationalistic discontinuity of the 1990s (so-called because it is a construct of the past). On the other hand, it adopts anti-nationalistic and anti-fascist legacy of the SFRY, in opposition to national policies (primarily Serbian, still the most powerful political and commercial competitor, resulting in the largest number of confrontations between the academic and the alternative scene). The context of the market comes out of nostalgia for Yugoslavia and Tito.

Apart from the construct of tradition, another ideological element of self-interpretation is the construct of quality regarding the regional literary scene. While becoming mainstream and institutionalised, this scene is building its infrastructure using the process of punctuated equilibrium, from publishing to criticism, competitions

and festivals. This is also what keeps it on the market, but an ideological justification is also needed – in this case, it is, in fact, the construct of quality declared by the literary scene. (28)

Another ideological construct worth mentioning is the construction of subversiveness and alternative edge. Although the literary pseudoleftists stopped being alternative the moment they conquered the media and became mainstream, they still perceive themselves as subversive and alternative, emphasizing this autoperception in the metalanguage when referring to themselves. Even though it is impossible to remain independent from the position of mainstream, let alone subversive, each of these festivals communicates the message of “we are independent, we are alternative, we are subversive.” It is precisely this constructed awareness of their own independence that is the strongest point of their ideology. Let us not forget, Ćosić also considered himself to be an independent and alternative thinker in Serbia, as a dissident and an outcast, someone outside of his own time, forced to act from the margin and under pressure – “the last dissident of the 20th century.” (29) The last bastion of national cultural mainstream in the region is Serbia, since in all the other former republics the liberal and the national scene are one and the same. Therefore, the mainstream media in Serbia are the only ones who do not explicitly support events such as *Crocodile*, *Kikinda Short* or *Half Way Through*. There are gradual steps towards gaining more press (which includes winning the market against the national scene) and this has become more apparent over the years: *Half Way Through* was initially covered by *Danas*, liberal paper of the Other Serbia, with a growing number of Serbian media outlets showing interest. This is not only about numbers, the festival is regularly reported on by Ra-

dio Television Serbia!(30) Even in Serbia, all the media will cover *Crocodile* in Belgrade. This, of course, is the opposite of being alternative and marginalised.

The social engagement of post-Yugoslav literatures as their ultimate goal is certainly damaging from an aesthetic point of view because it is as an inert product of ideology. As such, it does have the capacity to achieve what the paraliterary stands for, meaning it is not and cannot be subversive. (31) On the hand, the scope of these engagements is not revolutionary. In essence, they do not cross the boundaries of that same nationalistic epistemology that they are allegedly confronting – subverting stereotypes, (32) confronting the past, overcoming boundaries as paraliterary objectives of this pseudoleftist engagement, are concepts (constructs) which reproduce and perpetuate the nationalist epistemology because they are so declarative. When the anti-nationalistic the Other Serbia talks about “confessing crimes committed in the name of the people”, they are, apart from condemning nationalism, perpetuating the same nationalistic concepts of state and identity, basically legitimising the nationalistic logic. The Other Serbia will condemn the consequences of nationalism (crimes, wars, discrimination, segregation), but not nationalism in its essence (the concept of nation and the nation state – whether it is based on ethnic or constitutional nationalism). By agreeing to neoliberalism, they also accept its nationalist legacy.

This is obvious in the phrase – *the concept of condemning crimes committed in the name of the nation*, which epistemologically does not touch upon the essence of nationalism, construction of national identity and state; only its negative, destructive impact, i.e. how it affects the market because the neoliberal the Other Serbia does not possess an epistemological tool powerful enough

to critically approach the nationalist paradigm as such – it takes *the nation* for granted. Or, as the rector of the University of Belgrade said during the student strike in late 2011, “student has a name and a surname, Serbs are not a genocidal nation”, supposedly criticising the pseudonationalistic, collective outlook on nation, but not the essence of nationalism, because Serbs and nation are still self-explanatory notions. In the same vein, overcoming boundaries, subverting stereotypes, confronting the past – these ideologisms are thrown around carelessly, without any consideration for bringing together antagonistic ideas/constructs. They are always a given, there is no analysis (boundaries, stereotypes, the past). What is criticised are only their negative outcomes, i.e. economic effects. Therefore, when the contemporary pseudoengaged post-Yugoslav cultural scene overcomes boundaries and subverts stereotypes, it does this by legitimising them as well. This epistemologic trap that the contemporary liberal cultural engagements also falls into, is the result of accepting the market model. Accordingly, at its core, this neoliberal pseudoengagement on the post-Yugoslav cultural and political scene is no different from its competition, ethnic nationalism. This is also the reason why the difference in ideology between Ćosić and Lokotar, as well as between the cultural policies they represent, is only an illusion. Economically, they both accept the logic of the market and neoliberal terms of production. Lokotar rightly observes that the current post-Yugoslav renaissance is a credit to capitalism. As far as nationalists and Ćosić are concerned, “Essentially, supporters of the market and nationalist intellectuals in Serbia dealt with practically identical concepts, because their interests were the same, materialistically speaking. Communism is often presented as the Eastern plague, an imported ideology that

hindered Serbia from participating in the modern European mainstream as an independent national state. We must not forget that Slobodan Milošević also started his career as a keen supporter of modernisation via market economy and keeping up with the rest of the more developed Europe. *Rise of the Serbian nation* in the 1980s, therefore, was merely a means to overcome the crisis of real-socialism and come closer to Western Europe.” (33)

In that respect, the cultural and institutional punctures in the 1960s that formed the independent scenes in Yugoslav republics according to Ćosić, while carefully maintaining cultural relations when they were economically or politically necessary, is identical to punctures since 2000, when the current cultural infrastructure was institutionalised in post-Yugoslav republics, championing the idea of crossing borders, when that crossing is economically justified. In other words, market liberalisation in the SFRY and real subsumption of work in literary and cultural areas, which started after the Informbiro period, interrupted during the wars in Yugoslavia, are now restored after the war in the same manner. Wars in Yugoslavia shook up the market only briefly, but it found a way to regenerate itself. Literature and culture are predecessors and successors of that regeneration. True cultural resistance towards neoliberalism, as well as a real left wing, remains to be articulated.

Gjorgje Bozhoviq

NOTES

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13. Knjižara „Karver“, Carver Bookstore [http://www.karver.org/] (September 11, 2012).
14. *Polip*, [http://polipfestival.wordpress.com/] (September 11, 2012).
15. Comp. N. Bobičić & Gj. Bozhoviq, *Albanian literature in translation in Montenegro*, the 31st international seminar on the Albanian language, literature and culture, Faculty of Philology in Pristina, August 24, 2012.
16. “This year, the books that I edited for Algoritam really made an impact and received all major awards. It is the first time the same publisher and the same editor were awarded by *Jutarnji List* and *tportal*, not to mention the Vladimir Nazor award and the City of Zagreb award *Sfera*”, Lokotar in an interview for *tportal*, [http://www.tportal.hr/kultura/knjizevnost/146099/Obrazovana-publika-bi-nasim-drzavama-sudila-vlast-razvlastila.html] (September 11, 2012).
17. Comp. M. Sokolović, *Engagement as kitsch*, [http://www.sic.ba/rubrike/temat/mirnes-sokolovic-angazman-kao-kic/] (September 11, 2012).
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26. Comp. T. Dadić-Dinulović, *Savremeni grad kao prostor spektakla — pozornica ili scena, The modern city as a venue — stage or scene*, *Kultura*: 126 (1), p. 84—93, 2010.
27. I. Čolović reading at the *HalfWayThrough* festival, National Theatre in Užice, April 26, 2012.
28. “We still want to perform anywhenever where there is an audience interested in us. In any case, we wish to have a truly diverse festival, regardless of age, politics on any other basis for exclusion. When it comes to author selection, there is only one common thread, and that is the quality of their writing. V. Arsenijević, interview for *Deutsche Welle*, [http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,16028445,00.html] (September 11, 2012).
29. “As a dissident, I was not free to discuss, so I became indifferent over time”, Čosić in an interview for *Politika*, [http://www.e-novine.com/entertainment/entertainment-licnosti/47943-osi-vie-nee-pisati.html] (September 11, 2012).
30. Comp. press site for *HalfWayThrough*, [http://www.napolaputa.net/press/] (September 11, 2012).
31. Comp. M. Sokolović *Angažman kao kič, Engagment as kitsch* (footnote 16); and N. Bobičić, *Subverzija, Sub-Version*, for *Criticize This!* (in manuscript).
32. “If we talk about festival such as the *Crocodile* in Belgrade, the former *FAK* in Zagreb, or the Carver festival in Podgorica, then we have to say it is all about subverting stereotypes, not only about others, but also about ourselves”, Lokotar in an interview for *RSE* (see footnote 6).
33. G. Musić in an interview for *Samostalni srpski tjednik Novosti*, [http://www.novosti.com/2012/07/pred-levicom-je-uzbudljiv-period/] (September 11, 2012).

The Chapel Gallery and post- Yugoslavian art (1995 – 2010)

On the map of exhibition spaces dedicated to modern art in Ljubljana, the Chapel Gallery holds a special spot in terms of the intensity of artistic activity, provocativeness and the variety of the program. It was established in 1995 on the initiative of the students' association from the University of Ljubljana. Since then, and until today, it has been run by art director Jurij Krpan in collaboration with curators and producers Sandra Sajovič and Petar Milič. The technical aspect is run by Jura Sajovič. The basis of the gallery's program has been the designing, organizing and maintenance of that which Krpan calls "modern research art." Krpan and his colleagues avoid traditional visual art and common artistic objects. Instead, they wish to present experiential ambients and installations, that is, performances and artistic activity. They strive to avoid common one-way, academic lectures as well, and want to present those artists from whom both the team as well as the audience can learn and profit. Clearly, the gallery's program cannot always meet such strict criteria, however the gallery's setup is mostly focused on this framework. It is among the more progressive in terms of

the local context. In the 1990s, the gallery gained an international reputation as one of the leaders in international body art performances (Ron Athey, Orlan, Franko B, etc.), while the influence of the gallery on the European art scene was definitely confirmed with its performance at the 2008 *Ars Electronica Festival* in Linz (the center of art, science and technology), when the Chapel's program presented the Ljubljana new art media in the Featured Art Scene section. 1995 until 2010 is the timeframe for which we will attempt to (with an overview of a few significant artists' performances at the Chapel Gallery) determine and evaluate the gallery's position in the context of the geographical, political and cultural space of the post-Yugoslav transition, with an emphasis on the area of performance and body art.

Performance and body art in the narrow sense of the terms came around in the mid 1960s in the former Yugoslavia. By the early 1970s, they became legitimate and very frequent ways of artistic expression. During this period, the entire alternative and neo-avant-garde artistic scene (which

was assembled around the tightly-knit web of nationally funded student groups, magazines, galleries, and theaters) started focusing on that which today we call *New artistic practices*. Generally speaking, since the former Yugoslavia was very open to outside influences in terms of cultural views, we can draw parallels in the development of Yugoslav modern art and that of western European countries (with a mandatory temporal and cultural shift) that were radically aborted with the fall of the country and the bloody war that followed.

The leading term of New artistic practices was introduced by a famous Serbian historian, Ješa Denegri, in order to stress the differences and innovations of neo-avant-garde and post-modern Yugoslavian art of the 1970s. By doing this, he encompassed conceptual art, film and video, performance (including body art), as well as various novelties in traditional visual arts, such as land art, assemblage, etc. In her text titled *Body and the East* (1998), Slovenian curator Zdenka Badovinac assumes “very different artistic practices that are based on the author’s own body as the main carrier of various social, political, existential and cosmological contents” when using the term *body art*. Since in this text, as well as in the context of the Chapel Gallery’s program, we conceive body art as a component of performance art, it is important to stress the processual and non-material character of such practices, as well as the temporal characteristics of every artist/audience relationship, especially if the performance includes elements that are de facto impossible to reproduce (e.g. the artist’s process of self-mutilation and the experience of pain). As we can see, New artistic practices assume a very heterogeneous area to which it is impossible to attribute a single denominator. However, individual theoreticians, at least as far as performance and body art are concerned, have suggested

a more detailed systematization, which can be applied today as well, with certain modifications, of course. Thus, in her text titled *Body-based Art: Serbia and Montenegro* (1998), Bojana Pejić, a Serbian theoretician, suggested the following division of Yugoslavian body art up until the year 2000, in terms of the function of the artist’s body in performance - the (post) socialist body, the political body, the anarchistic body, the body of change, the non-disciplined body, the erotic body, the body of ritual, and the body in music. The post socialist, the political and the anarchistic bodies generally belong to the same group, that is, to that group in which the body of the author during the performance primarily assumes a group of political paradoxes and contradictions, the symbolical entity in which the inconsistencies of the ideologies of the (post) socialist space are broken down in relation to the individual or social groups that the individual represents. Thus, we will call this group the political body.

The second group of this systematization of body art encompasses the body of change and the non-disciplined body. The concepts of these two are fairly similar. This set of concepts assumes the author’s introspective approach to the phenomenon of the body, and, with that, his own personal individual and collective identity in the multimedia and interdisciplinary post-modernist world. The third group in the systematization of (post) Yugoslav body art is, logically, made up of the erotic and the ritual bodies. If the ritual is defined as the set of definite actions that, when performed in the determined sequence, obtains a symbolical value in regards to the social and cultural context, then it is clear that a large number of performances fall into the ritual category. This is especially the case with the type of body art that includes transcendental attempts of stepping over the boundaries of the author’s body

and soul. During such attempts, the author is often placed in a situation in which he is in physical danger (sometimes even in danger of dying) as he strives to achieve a metaphysical experience on the border between the Eros and the Thanatos, which is supposed to result in the physical and spiritual cleansing of the author and the viewer, that is, of the society in a state of collective catharsis.

The significance and characteristics of the political body, the ritual body and the body of change will be analyzed in terms of the Chapel Gallery's program during the set timeframe between 1995 and 2010, that is, in terms of the authors' performances that fall into the respective categories. In the broader economical, social and psychological surroundings of late neo liberal capitalism, the body of change (along with the ritual and political bodies) of the post-socialist world moves between various ideological extremes of the globalization of society, from the idealization of development and science to reactionary radicalizations of politics due to the international economic crisis. Post-Yugoslav authors have adapted to the modern developments of performance and body art, thus presenting carefully produced performances of complex events (where the author of the performance isn't necessarily its subject as well), with which, in the conjunction between art and natural and humanistic sciences, they attempt to reveal the mechanisms of social manipulation and provoke various effects of the foreign monotonous everyday life among their audiences.

Let's give supporting evidence of the above stated with concrete examples. The term *body of change* coincides with the works of Ivo Tabar, a Slovenian artist, and Zoran Todorovic, a Serbian artist, which we will further explain in terms of a couple of their performances and artistic actions.

The idea of the political body coincides with the work of Slovene Peter Mlakar, a philosopher by profession and orientation. His performances and speeches, however, although they don't fall into the category of body art in the narrower sense, reassess in a very lucid and provocative manner the numerous deeply rooted Balkan political myths, in the recognizable manner of the NSK collective, of which he has been a member of for many years. Examples of the ritual body within the program of the Chapel Gallery's program can be seen in all of the abovementioned artists and performers, since a certain kind of ritual is always present in the subtext of the performance. However, if we want to emphasize some of the artists whose approach to body art is entirely pervaded by ritual, then we need to mention the group Eclipse, a young female duo who has been working with the Chapel for many years and who call their fourteen-year artistic practice "rhetorical soft porn kitsch." By utilizing their nude bodies and an array of various props with which they emphasize the vanity of consumer culture, the artists treat numerous taboo themes of the Slovene past and present in a humorous and erotic manner, from collective political traumas from the period of socialism to gender, racial, class and sexual prejudices in the neo liberal world of today. Although they have caused scandalous and vile reactions with their performances from the side of the Catholic Church and various conservative groups, they have become one of the most significant and most provocative figures on the Slovene art scene since 2000 until 2010.

Artist Ivo Tabar is distinguished among the other artists at the Chapel Gallery due to the fact that he isn't academically educated in the arts or the humanities. Instead, he is a medical nurse by profession, and he is employed at the intensive care unit at the

general hospital in Izola on the Slovenian coast. From 1997 until 2010 he continuously performed at the Chapel Gallery, and every time his own body was the center of his performance. Smaller or more complex surgical operations were performed on his body, and in simpler cases Tabar would perform the operations himself. Although Tabar often expresses political messages with his work, in this text we will focus more on those performances that deal with intimate and introspective themes that can be described by the term *body of change*. In his performance *Acceptio corpus alieni* (performed at the Chapel in 2004), Tabar made a three-centimeter long incision on the outer wall of his abdomen (the part of the body between the chest and the pelvis in which the majority of the organs of the digestive and urogenital systems are located) and inserted a wedding band inside it. He stitched up the wound using surgical instruments, leaving the ring inside. The ring was later removed and the wound was medically treated. With this radical procedure, which was that much more striking due to the fact that he performed it himself, the artist exposed his body to a really rather disturbing change since he brought the wedding ritual, one of the most important in every known culture, to an extreme in which the matrimonial alliance is solidified through strong physical pain. The symbolism of this complex act is also multifaceted, almost archetypal to the term *body of change*. For starters, we could stress the obvious inversion of male and female birthing roles in the act of marriage. By accepting an inorganic object (the ring) into his body, Tabar, from a male perspective, twists the process of the entire ritual. He receives instead of gives, feeling the intense pain that (most likely) isn't comfortable, but acts in a committing way. It almost seems as though the man offers the woman a humble sacrifice during this kind of wedding, thus identify-

ing with her pain during childbirth. In this case, the man also feels physical pain during the process of the birth of a new entity, a strong spiritual and exotic union of two beings that are institutionalized through the ritual of marriage. We can assume that, with this performance, Tabar wanted to revitalize this ritual and renew and cleanse it through pain and suffering, which is actually the basic concept of Christian metaphysics. Individual suffering is supposed to act in a cleansing way during a process that is extremely important for the entire society, with which Tabar consolidates the nature of the body of change and the body of ritual. If for a moment we can talk in traditional terms, we could say that the beauty of performance art lies precisely in this – it often feeds our immanent need for partaking in a ritual that stands out among the standardized rituals of our everyday lives.

While Ivo Tabar demystifies medical science and practice with his performance, the goal of Zoran Todorović's performance is (according to Miško Šuvaković in his text *The Critical Effect and the Intensity of Affect – Analyses of Zoran Todorović's Artistic Productions* (2009)) "to reveal the rationality of scientific research in ghastly divergences and *scientific* metastases outside of the discourse of its idealizations." Certainly, such a goal has political connotations based on the fact that scientific thought has paradoxically become the unofficial dogma of technologized civilization and that it is often used to justify controversial political decisions. Nonetheless, it is more appropriate to place Todorović's work in the category of the body of change, not only because of the literal and rather radical changes on his own body and the bodies of others, but also because of the fact that the constant changing of the body is a constant theme in his performances, or as Šuvaković calls them, "events." Of course, it is not about

changes of the human body due to illness or aging, but instead changes caused by society, and not biologically – changes that cause our body to become a foreign entity over which we no longer have any power. Todorović's performances place the problem of the alienation of the body into the focus of artistic discourse, while his installations and other similar works often question the possibilities of our senses, thus facing the viewers, that is, the artist's collaborators on the project, with border perceptive experiences. "Todorović provokes the broad metalanguage of humanism (science, technology, religion, politics, sexuality, culture and art) and creates *small* or *localized*, that is, singular excesses: the construction of the machine that produces sound waves of dangerous frequencies, the assortment of food made from human skin and flesh, exposing one's body to insects, the usage of a serum that alters certain senses of the body..." (Šuvaković, 2009). We will further analyze Todorović's work titled *Warmth*, a complex project that encompasses several fields of his activity – installation, video, body art, as well as a carefully directed and produced performance, or rather, event.

Warmth was first exhibited within the Serbian pavilion at the 53rd Venetian Biennial in 2009. It was presented at the Chapel Gallery by Todorović one year later. This is a multi-medial installation and action in which Todorović and his team documented an entire army of people (roughly 240 000 people) getting their hair cut during 2009, after which they gathered all the hair that had been cut off and used it as raw material in the production of their installation – an artistic object that actually has utility value as well. Over 1200 squared meters of felt was made from the hair through an industrial procedure. For one square meter the hair of two hundred people was used. After the presentation at the

national pavilion at the Venetian Biennial, Todorović pragmatically began selling the felt made of human hair for 200 euros per meter squared, stressing that the profit will be invested in the further development of the program. However, the process could have ended with the improvement of the production of this extravagant item and turning it into a lucrative business, which would have cynically brought the nature of today's global art market to an absurd level. It is precisely the relationship between art and the market, the market and technology, and technology and the limitations of natural raw materials that makes up the central theme of *Warmth*, thus it is appropriate that the work of art had its premier at one of the largest international markets of modern artistic trends. The felt that was produced from dead hair, which is merely a radicalization of the usual way of making felt (when it is made of sheep's wool), is a strong illustration of modern industry that produces a huge amount of its products from dead organic matter, that is, slaughtered organisms. In this manner, death, which is the greatest taboo of today's western neo liberal society, is put on the pedestal as the primary industrial raw material, while the mass consumption of death makes even life seem fairly banal. Todorović confesses that *Warmth* may remind the viewer of the products of the Nazi concentration camp industry of death, especially since this kind of production is, sadly, brutally close to us, thanks to the genocides that took place during the recent Balkan wars. "Thanks" in this context is clearly not meant in the positive sense, but *Warmth* is also a paradoxically morbid term, because although we have an inherent hostility towards anything that is made from the remains of human bodies (apart from death, cannibalism is also another untouchable taboo in modern society that Todorović examines in his other works), felt is a warm mate-

rial that makes one cozy and warm. Since in *Warmth* human hair is the resource for production, instead of the usual parts of an animal's body, we can say that Todorović brings into question the anthropocentrism of the modern world as well, which in best case scenario can serve to the audience as a warning that is difficult to ignore in this case. In short, it is clear that *Warmth* is a very complex work that opens numerous questions and issues, and although Todorović deals with the body indirectly here, it definitely falls into the body of change category, since the change in this case is final and irreversible.

The body of Peter Mlakar is without a doubt political. Since he became a member of the Neue Slowenische Kunst collective and the founder of the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy in 1987, his work in the area of philosophy, literature, cultural and musical activism (and temporary acting roles in experimental films) has become enriched with both experience as well as with performance. He has been present on the Slovenian alternative and punk scene since the late 1970s as an activist, ideologist and concert organizer. Since the late 1980s, he has been the spokesperson at Laibach concerts, reading his provocative political texts in front of audiences in a pompous militaristic manner that the NSK continually deliberates throughout its entire activity. With their ambivalent relationship towards extreme ideologies, Mlakar and the other members of the NSK stress the imminent inhumanity of totalitarian societies, and warn about the deeply rooted human need for submitting to authorities, which, with all the available media research, they brought to disturbing and multifaceted absurdity. Mlakar has also accepted the visual identity of the NSK, thus symbolically taking the stance of an unscrupulous Balkan politician whose crimes he revealed and judged.

In his speeches during the 1990s in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina he attempted to free his listeners of any collective guilt they might have felt for the crimes committed in the name of the entire nation. He wanted to provide his audience with an opportunity to become aware of the need for collective forgiveness through the ritual of political gatherings instead of through murderous instincts, thus emancipating them from any political conspiracies to which they had submitted themselves. This approach later led Mlakar to problematize the theme of religion and sex in conjunction with the effects of modern technology, which subjects transcendental experiences of enlightenment and salvation, as well as the liberating experience of the orgasm, to the production of artificial experiences of wellbeing and leisure, thus trivializing both the sacred and the profane. Hence, in Mlakar's works we can also perceive elements of ritual practices, although in his case the political content always comes first, thus emphasizing the fact that ideology constantly has access to the intimacy of the individual through the mechanism of social and economical organizations. In 2002, Mlakar performed at the Chapel Gallery, presenting his lecture and performance titled *The Logic of the Triad of Torture*, with which he revealed the position and function of the mythical G spot in the female body. He designed a scheme for transplanting artificial erogenous zones in the vagina by means of nanotechnology. The mass sophisticated industry of wellbeing and leisure in the modern neo-liberal society has long been one of the cornerstones of economic prosperity, and Mlakar's concept of the perfect machine for achieving orgasms is a warning as to the possible future development of industry. Ideology and technology can definitely turn one of the most elementary human experiences, tightly related to reproduction and new life, into subjects of automatic production,

into merely another banal, cheap and predictable experience. Emphasizing the necessary support of political will in order for anything like this to occur, Mlakar relates the numerous themes of his thought into a multilayered symbol of the decadence of the West.

With this brief overview of chosen works by significant post-Yugoslav artists of performance and body art (frequent performers at the Chapel Gallery), we have attempted to explain the position of the Gallery in the broader artistic corpus of the region, where it really does represent non-everyday aspects of *modern research art*. The influence of the Chapel has, over time, stimulated the beginning of other similar initiatives in other former Yugoslav countries, such as the Kontejner association in Zagreb (founded in 2002), the bureau of modern artistic practice, which works closely with the Chapel (but unfortunately still doesn't have a steady exhibition space of its own). Considering the experimental and interdisciplinary nature of its activity, along with the existential themes that it presents in a provocative and liberal manner, the Chapel Gallery team provokes expected controversies with its program concept, but it also stimulates a continuous interest of the better knowing audience, which partake in artistic actions in the full sense of the word. The financial support of both local and international funding along with the institutionalized networking of the Chapel shows that traditional culture has recognized the research and intellectual capital of the gallery. The Chapel Gallery, regardless of the reach of its team's activities, can be an exemplary factor in the further liberalization of culture in a small environment such as Slovenia, as well as of the intense collaboration of artists, engineers, scientists and various cultural workers. This will not only broaden the possibilities and boundaries

of modern art, but it will also contribute to the stronger integration of the humanities and natural sciences on projects that can educate and emancipate various social groups in a world that is becoming more and more inhumane and chaotic in the social and political context. From the perspective of the Croatian society, the *mission* of the Chapel is also extremely important, as it points to the reality of cultural practice, which hasn't really been represented until the foundation of *Kontejner* at least not in the form of a more serious social project. In the future, the Chapel Gallery will without a doubt continue to influence *modern research art* in both the Croatian and Serbian speaking region, where many harmful social myths from the 1990s need to be enlightened, revealed and cleansed. In this task, the art of performance and body art holds an inspirational and effective weapon.

Bojan Krištofić

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On/Of(f) Trauma

Or how do texts about war deal with the phenomenon of trauma?

Esad Bajtal, *Bite of the Snake of Memory*. (from the anthology of Bosnian and Herzegovian stories *Time Slips Away* (2010)),

Damir Nedić, *I am going to the toilet alone* (from the collection of short stories *Outside the Corridor.Vranac – Best Short Story* (2011)) (1)

Krešimir Pintarić, *The Osijek Masquerade* (anthology of Slavonian war writing *Poetics of Noise* (2010)).

“(...) it is always the story of a wound that cries out.”(2)

The topic of the Homeland War in ex-Yugoslav literature is omnipresent and endless. In his foreword to *Poetics of Noise*, an anthology of Slavonian war writing, Goran Rem points out that there is a certain sensitivity at the thought of possibly forgetting about the war and a responsibility that the survivors share to remember the war for themselves, as well as others. It is as if the war trauma feeds the need to tell stories, whether they are personal or someone else's, as if to witness these atrocities and horrors forces a person to share the secret of trauma with others. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996), Cathy Caruth, a theoretician of trauma, whose quote is at the beginning of this story of writing about trauma, concludes that the whole of Western history can be called the history of trauma, because the trauma of a particular subject is closely connected with another's trauma, which enables writing about other person's wounds: “the history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas.”(3) Whether we agree with this or not, we can still say that contemporary literature in our region is obsessed with war and trauma, and even without exploring all the reasons, we can define it as post-Yugoslav literature of trauma.

Following the contemporary regional production, it has been noted that the trauma of the (post)war experience is constantly repeated, both with acclaimed authors, as well as newcomers. While reading the anthology of Bosnian and Herzegovian stories *Time Slips Away* (2010), the author was surprised by the preoccupation with the traumatic experience and the topic of war which seems to be prevalent even in a work of literature whose title clearly indicates that the wars of the 1990's are over.

She was not shocked to find so many war-themed stories, but was surprised by the way this topic is dealt with – often it was mediated storytelling of the war horrors. The writers in the anthology emphasize realism and authenticity of their stories by pointing out the fact that the narrator heard the story from a survivor or they found someone's confession. Time is slipping away, but we are standing still, it seems, was the initial thought of the author of this text. They are just trying to find a new way to go back to the trauma, but most of the time these attempts are unsuccessful and aesthetically lacking.

This is not about the resistance of the younger generation toward (post)war literature, which is often completely justified, even today. This is about trying to explain why the writing of some of the authors in the anthology is a failure, turning into little (post)war stories that cannot even shock the reader, which is to be expected considering the genre. By following certain psychoanalytic theses and contemporary theory regarding trauma, we will try to answer what trauma is, what its representation in literature could be, or if it is even possible. What is the mystery of life and death entangled in the phenomenon of trauma, which are only hinted at in some of the (post)war stories? Why do some theoreticians consider art to be hiding the lie of trauma?

The aim of this comparative analysis is to explain the stylistic procedures the writers use to achieve a certain effect and illustrate how this can correspond to the trauma phenomenon. The analysis of three stories, which can, in a way, serve as three examples, will not relate the narrator with the author of the story, although Freud's theory of sublimation could easily lead us down that path.(4) Instead, the focus will primarily be on the text, its form and

content. Therefore, this text can be a form of constructive criticism of authors who take the task of writing about trauma too lightly. After all, trauma implies mystery of survival that cannot be fathomed or told.

Meeting the Real

The Greek word *trauma* refers to physical injury, while Freud refers to it as a specific mental wound, that is to say, it is defined around the idea of penetration, the idea of injury. The subject who suffers trauma relives the forgotten, violent past in the traumatic present (Freud uses the term *acting out*), and the repetition of what has been suppressed happens without the subject knowing what is being repeated. The suppressed is revealed only symptomatically and indicates a gap in knowledge and how it is manifested physically. In the aforementioned text, while examining soldiers' war traumas, Freud describes repetition of a traumatic event which is impossible to leave behind. This repetition is beyond the self and therefore out of the subject's control. In this type of neuroses, the trauma is revealed retrospectively, and survival equals confrontation with death (which had been experienced unconsciously), which is a sign of the impossibility of moving on with life. The phenomenon of trauma is placed within a complex relation between knowing and unknowing because the subject who survived the trauma cannot recall the suppressed event, but has to act it out all the time. In this way, trauma does not refer to the original violent event, but to the fact that there is no knowledge of an event that haunts the subject afterwards.⁽⁵⁾

Following Freud's footsteps, Lacan explains trauma by going back to structural procedures of subject's existence in the imaginary. He believes that subject's initial trauma is the loss of partial objects which metonymically represent the Mother, that

is to say, the Real, (6) and the (Oedipal) loss of identification with the Mother, which allows the primary processes to enter the narrative world of secondary processes that consist of conscious thoughts, i.e., language. Basically, Lacan claims that a violent event can have an impact on subject's life only because the fracture is inherent, that is to say, the subject builds an illusory image of their own integrity and consistency during the mirror stage. When a terrible event manages to undermine subject's integrity, the inconsistencies of the initial structure come to light, if we come across a hole (not a symptom), and a void (not an object). Pieces of the Real return to language on the other side of the signifier, the trauma represents the regression of the subject to primary processes, i.e., the unconscious.

The French psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche shares very similar views on trauma. According to him, there is the primary trauma which he calls *seduction* and it represents the manner in which the ego is constructed. Like Lacan, Laplanche points out that ego is always open to the possibility of being traumatised again. He explains this by relating two scenes which construct a traumatic event and says that trauma can never be placed within a single scene. It is the game of deception that produces the effect of fluctuation between two events. Each event or anything that means something can be a message, which is related to previous messages. In confronting the foreignness and the weirdness of the message, the ego has to develop a structure in order to process, i.e., to translate the message. However, when it comes to a traumatic event, understanding becomes impossible and the message cannot be assimilated. The trauma implies a puzzle which makes us wonder why the violence happened, so that eventually we are able to symbolise it.

Finally, in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Cathy Caruth interprets psychoanalytic theses and explains how trauma is a callout by the voice of the Other through the wound. As mentioned before in the introduction, one's trauma is related to another's trauma, and there is the possibility to call out someone else's wounds. The story of life and the story of death are interwoven in trauma because the story of the traumatic event is, in fact, the story of avoiding death and the subsequent survival. The survivor has to confront death over and over again due to the fact they were not completely aware of death during the terrifying experience. In this way, trauma as the effect of destruction as well as the mystery of survival, asks the question: what does it mean to survive, what does it mean to be aware of life, that is to say, death? When analysing Freud's example where a father dreams that his dead son is burning,⁽⁷⁾ Caruth explains how trauma exposes our ethical relation to the Real, i.e. the ethical dilemma at the centre of our consciousness that is essentially linked to death, especially to the death of the Other. The burning son who appears in front of the father and the Real that wakes the father up can be a response of the survivor to someone else dying, but can also represent responsibility of the consciousness in the original relations with others. Father waking up (meeting the Real that can only appear as either dream or fiction) is not only the imperative of survival, but also a commitment to tell the story of someone else's death, a story that can be passed on once he is awake. Caruth concludes that the function of literature, i.e., art could be to initiate the process of acting out the trauma.

On the verge of representation

Protecting what is outside the signified, trauma manages the Real, and repression and oblivion always come up in twisted symbolic forms, such as dreams, symptoms and acting out. The unspoken comes back to language and appears as a symptomatic puzzle that produces anxiety. In the case of trauma, there is always a surplus that cannot be symbolised, and representation of trauma in art becomes extremely problematic.

Literature of trauma and (post) war writing contains an aporia of what cannot be told. The most important question is perhaps the issue of representation of trauma in art. How is it even possible to reconstruct trauma, how can it be renewed? For instance, Lacan names the object of the Real that the subject is striving for the Thing, and emphasizes that the Thing does not have a signifier, an object can only represent the signifier's absence.⁽⁸⁾ There is still the issue of how to reach the core of the trauma, the Real, and how to reconcile the gap between a reality which cannot be represented and representations without a specific field of reference (which means they contain nothing). Does this occur in memory or by forming apparitions through metaphors/aporias which give shape to the unfathomable point of real giving it meaning? Moreover, several theoreticians wonder if it is possible to distinguish the representation of trauma in art from its repetition.⁽⁹⁾

While observing the (im)possibility of witnessing trauma, Shoshana Felman notices a dislocation in language and a tendency to silence. She answers the question of representation of trauma by relating the suppressed, the unknown, forgotten event, with the decline of language. Since the

testimonial is composed of memories regarding situations which cannot be understood, the language of the testimonial is constantly processed and always elusive to the speaker, as well as knowledge and conclusion.⁽¹⁰⁾ The act of witnessing is illusory because language is being violated (and vice versa). Caruth finds a solution by pointing out how the narrative of trauma talks about entering the Other's life, and writing brings us back to *Old Wounds* regardless of the author's intent.

However, Lacan thinks that art hides the lie for the trauma by concealing the Real with images of suffering that are supposed to contain the Real, which is only another illusion that is supposed to support the belief in consistency and stability of society, its integrity. Art speaks (falsely) of the inability to speak and becomes merely a symbolic illusion that wants to distract us from the Real. In times of war, the Real comes out through disintegration of the body, blood and ability to experience life, while in literature the representations of trauma circles around the core of the trauma, around the Real that still remains out of reach and the truth about trauma is lost in the density of language. Nevertheless, in art, if pleasure turns into displeasure or anxiety, the representation of the imaginary ego can be shattered. This is when the Real appears, Lacan states, but the possibility to reconstruct trauma is still inscrutable and has to be explored further.

Bite of the snake of memory – explaining someone else's pain

Let us begin with Esad Bajtal's *Bite of the Snake of Memory* from the collection of short stories *Time Slips Away*. The text reflects on the documentary by F. Sokolović from 2009 called *The Soul-Soothing Search*, which follows mothers over the

course of fifteen years on their quest to find the posthumous remains of their sons who died in the war. The narrator refers to the film directly, there is a footnote and he tries to describe, explain and interpret the movie, that is to say, the horrendous moment when the shocked mothers stand in front of the bones of their lost sons. Their horror and pain when they have to face the death of their sons, their helplessness, ignorance and denial is a great representation of survivor's trauma, as in Caruth's interpretation of Freud's example when a father dreams about his dead son burning. This image is a mystery of survival in itself. In the centre of the phenomenon of trauma, there is the issue of how to survive when one is aware of death, i.e., the Real that surfaces in the moment of facing death. By illustrating the responsibility of the consciousness to show someone else's wound and re-testifying the confrontation with death and the inability to live, that image is sufficient in itself. Precisely because the moment is so difficult to represent, it brings us that much closer to the phenomenon of trauma.

Also, the story clearly talks about the inability to go on with life after the trauma, how life after trauma is constantly impregnated with death. An obvious example would be: "But these dry and unmoving bones are not the only ones that are dead. Before she buries them, they had already buried her alive. Any purpose of the rest of her life, now finally lost, is buried alive with her. From that moment on, it is irreversibly consigned to an unreal memory of a time long gone."⁽¹¹⁾ Trauma, therefore, according to Cathy Caruth, has a deconstructive effect and holds the mystery of survival.

However, the narrator in Esad Bajtal's story is the one who knows about the unspeakable suffering of the mother. The story starts off with a universal statement

and the narrator becomes the all-knowing subject: “Meaningless violence of ruthless killers makes the death of innocent people more than cruel.”(12) This kind of discourse continues throughout, emphasizing artificiality by deliberately using caps for certain words or putting them in italics, listing adjectives and adverbs in order to produce as much of an emotional impact on the reader as possible. Sometimes the sentences start in a new line so that they could stand out more, which makes them look like poems. For example: “In this tragic and shocking confrontation, her real world tumbles into the dark abyss of Nothingness. In the eclipse of this Nothingness, her dried out eyes have nothing else to look for. And nothing else to see.”(13) The text is obviously extremely poetic and the author carefully inserts adjectives like dark and dried out, capitalizes words for a more illustrious effect, and by repeating the form of the sentences, a regular rhythm is established as well. With his illustrious and pathetic speech, the narrator tries to explain how the mother felt and what she thought in that moment: “But, in reality, she is squeezed between the shocking Painful Truth and Hope that she has finally lost, she simply refuses to believe that she is seeing what she is seeing.”(14)

Further, we can compare the following: “In the name of what?/ And why? // In the name of Politics!// In the name of the Nation!// In the name of Faith!// Whose Politics?/ Whose Nation? / And whose Faith?// And what is Politics, this Nation and Faith, compared to the painful Unfaithfulness of this lost woman? “(15) Here, apart from the stylistic procedures already mentioned, capitalisation of words, moving sentences to a new line, we can feel that the narrator is trying to get a reaction out of the listener at all cost. He speaks almost like a politician and seems to be aggressive about trying to win the reader over.

Naturally, there is an attempt to erase the boundaries between different discourses and intermedia, but these literary procedures miss the idea of the text.

What is more, this is the narrator’s reflection of the film, found by a notary in 2048, which is explained in the paratext. So, not only are we distanced from the Real of the trauma, but also the story of the trauma creates a chain: mother in front of the bones of her sons – director – narrator – notary – (reader). We are moving further away from the narrated reality and we miss the Real. This is neither a memory of a trauma (which the title tries to imply), nor is it acting out of the trauma, this is an elaboration – an elaboration on moving pictures. Meanwhile, we have to wonder whether this sort of elaborate pathos is inappropriate, depriving the moment in question of its shock value and sublime eeriness. Are not the big words the author uses actually obsolete when it comes to mother’s suffering and the traumatic event which warns us of death and silence? Using mediated narration and big words, the author achieves the opposite effect, and the text turns into a parody of someone’s pain, instead of a reminder. (16)

I am going to the toilet alone – wound on the mind

The story I am going to the toilet alone by Damir Nedić, a young Serbian author, is entirely different text from the previous one and deals with trauma in a far more direct way. Nedić’s story introduces the reader to the mind of a traumatised person. Author uses an intradiegetic narrator and everything the reader finds out equals what the narrator knows. Narrator starts telling about events that have completely changed his life, exactly as he had experienced them when he was a child, as well as the traumatised subject. Seeing the

events as consequence of war – his father being arrested, his mother's insanity, being abused because he is a Serb – the reader can understand everything from the narrator's perspective and more, and manages to remain shocked to the end. It is precisely the relation between the known and unknown, the discrepancy between the reader's and the narrator's perspective that produces the estrangement. Since the last paragraph changes the perspective on the story and surprises the reader, compromising the cognitive position, Nedić's story successfully manipulates the complex relationship between the known and the unknown.

This is because the narrator's perspective and understanding of the world is extremely naïve and simplified, which is immediately clear in the first sentence: "I have a room and there is a carpet in it with a hole in the middle (where I throw marbles), a little stove, an old dresser, a table and two chairs, a pull-out couch, a plastic washing basin, a punctured ball, mom and dad." (17) We see what the narrator conceives of the world while he is listing his possessions; he mentions the room, a plastic wash basin and mom and dad, without making any distinction. Then he goes on to say how he was beaten up at school because his name is no longer Our name, (18) which is incomprehensible to him and just keeps relaying it as others had said it. Any further information goes through the same treatment. He reports a conversation with his neighbour Mile as he remembers it, although he does not understand what the neighbour is talking about: "Our neighbour Mile says that it is normal that it did not hurt because it is still fresh, but when it gets cold, you will feel it, just like them, just like us, he said looking at the ground wistfully. I cannot really say I understood where he was coming from, but he was right about them getting cold,

tomorrow it did hurt, it hurt a lot." (19) Here, we can see the narrator is confused about the tenses and uses tomorrow to refer to a past tense, which puts additional focus on his level of understanding.

Naivety and sincerity of the narrator are also revealed in the way in which he explains how he loves to watch his grandfather go to the toilet: "I love to watch my grandpa when he is going to the toilet, although they say that isn't nice so they boom-boom hit me on the head and tell me I'm sick, but I run away and hide behind the house and watch him furtively," (20) or when he remembers how he got a chocolate from some boy on the street: "I don't care about chocolate, I ate chocolate last month, so what (some boy gave me a piece of chocolate on the street, I don't know what, but he did, I'm not lying, I didn't steal it, I only stole a headpin from Ivana once and that's it)." (21) The simple sentences and narrator's naivety still make us think that a boy is telling this story.

However, after the narrator's mother loses her mind and they take her away, the narrator says his head keeps hurting him more and more and he begins to forget things. The reader finds out that the narrator is in fact in a mental institution and that he actually has no idea where he is, nor how he got there or how old he is. Given that the story begins in the present tense ("I have a room..."), the reader has the impression that the story is a memory of a mental patient, whose mind somehow got stuck in the past which he cannot understand. Only at the very end can we realise that this is a story about a trauma, which is surprising and shows that this young author is on the right track. Going back to the start, we can see the inchoative sentence which prepares us for the issue of trauma with the introduction of the hole in the middle of the carpet, referring

to the gaps in the mind of the traumatised. As explained in the theoretical part, subject who goes through a trauma never understands the original event that triggered the trauma and its repetition only circles around the core of the trauma. When his neighbour Mile says the wounds will hurt more when they go cold, he actually foreshadows that specific mental wound which will only be manifested later to haunt the subject. As Laplanche explains, the uncanniness of the message forces the ego to develop structures for processing the message. Since the narrator could not assimilate the message, its mystery forces him to wonder why certain things happened. This produces anxiety, even for the reader. We can only imagine the narrator sitting by the window of his hospital room, staring at the sky and replaying the same events over and over again, but never discovering their meaning.

The Osijek Masquerade – the Real comes out

Krešimir Pintarić's *Osijek Masquerade* was chosen because, unlike the previous two stories, it talks about war explicitly and directly. The narrator is a civilian during a war⁽²²⁾ who tells us about his experiences, while the war is still happening in the narrative time of the story. Pintarić's postwar writing is neither a recollection nor a confrontation with a trauma, but an ordinary experience of everyday life during a war. The text, seemingly devoid of emotions, puzzles the reader with the narrator's indifference towards war events, functions as the exact opposite of the previously analysed texts. There are no pathetic attempts to capture the sublime horrors of war, as in Bajtal's story. The narrator talks matter-of-factly about the predictability of war, calling it a soap opera and an open air tour, as if it was an everyday conversation. The reader who expects seriousness and

emotional explosions can find this unnerving because Pintarić's text goes the opposite way to produce an extremely shocking effect.

"First, a man can get used to anything, even that"⁽²³⁾ the narrator speaks up about war, almost comparing it to brushing your teeth. He even manages to be funny when raising the issue of ideologems: "A chetnik is a chetnik, there is nothing more to add to that, except a bullet."⁽²⁴⁾ He is not the subject who knows what he is talking about, as is the case with Bajtal's narrator, he is only sharing his thoughts with an imaginary listener, whom he sometimes addresses,⁽²⁵⁾ and rhetorical questions often come up as in a real conversation. Furthermore, the whole story is written as if the narrator is picking his own brain while talking, which is obvious in the short and simple sentences that often start with conjunctions of opposition and colloquial stylistic features such as totally, fuck, man and I think. Even though the narrator appears to be calm and cynical when war is concerned, as the story progresses, so does his confusion: "Anyway, every morning I sit at the bar and try to gather my thoughts. And every morning I wonder if I am normal."⁽²⁶⁾

Narrator's bewilderment culminates in an ending that may be shocking for the reader. The last sentences are important for our analysis because while talking about death looming over his life, the narrator introduces the Real of the trauma to the story. So, the *Osijek Masquerade* ends on a high: "Man, ever since this war started, I feel so fucking alive."⁽²⁷⁾ I mean, every time I feel death breathing down my neck, I feel so fucking alive. Also, the inchoative and finitive sentence of this story are connected, because in the beginning the reader is told there will be a short, but straightforward answer in the end. ⁽²⁸⁾ The finitive sen-

tence is addressed to the imaginary listener and asks: "Are you living?" (29) For the reader, it may be a shock to find out that death is actually life, and the war can disrupt the symbolic. In other words, the bloodbaths and the constant threat of death are pieces of the Real that enter language from the other side of the symbolic. The somewhat appalling bareness of Pintarić's text and subverting expectations is so much more suitable for the Real to come out than Bajtal's pathetic attempts, with accentuated imagery and metaphors.

Since (post)war writing contains the aporia of the untold, or, as Lacan would say, it represents a deceiving lie by feeding into our illusion of wholesomeness and consistency. Perhaps we can approach these kinds of texts by asking which one is the least deceiving. There is no compromise between a reality that cannot be told and representations that cannot find the appropriate field of reference. If we insist on literature of trauma, it could be concluded that this literature is successful if it causes anxiety, and leaves the reader in a state of shock or awe.

A brief analysis of three contemporary stories has shown that the topic of war can be approached in very different ways. While certain texts try to deal with trauma, others try to explain it vicariously. Esad Bajtal's *Bite of the Snake of Memory* approaches the phenomenon of trauma most indirectly. The plot starts fifty years after the war and it is the best illustration of what Goran Rem observes in the foreword, as well as our trauma crossing paths, which is discussed by Cathy Caruth. However, by using pathetic and high-and-mighty rhetoric to explain a single scene, the author does not achieve the desired effect and only pushes us away from the Real and the trauma. Nedić's *I am going to the toilet alone* faces trauma in an interesting way.

We discover a gap, there is a discontinuity in both form and content which rests in the mind of the traumatised subject. By toying with the complex relation between the known and the unknown, Nedić delves deep into the problem of trauma, reminding us of Felman's thoughts on testimonials and how illusory they are. Finally, Krešimir Pintarić's story does not deal with the issue of trauma at first by introducing an indifferent and cynical narrator who thinks war is utterly predictable. Still, there is a surprise in the end which touches on the problem of trauma in the best possible way and brings out the Real.

(Post) war writing in this region is a symptom of a collective trauma and points to the inability to live after facing death. While analysing contemporary texts, many theoreticians have wondered how to keep up with death, since death only multiplies if we keep writing about it and the Real remains inaccessible. If we do not choose silence, when it comes to what cannot be told, (30) we have to find a narrative in which trauma comes out somewhere between content and form, jeopardizing the reader's position. For this, the entire potential of language has to be used with impeccable style that fits the content of the story, bearing in mind the collapse of structure, rather than its integrity, which is what Bajtal and Pintarić do. If we insist on trauma, there should be new narrative procedures to reach it and this is something we expect from our authors to learn.

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NOTES

1. *Izvan koridora.Vranac – Najbolja kratka priča, Outside the Corridor.Vranac – Best Short Story* – a short story collection, Carver award 2011 for best short story in former Yugoslavia, Podgorica. The committee: Enver Kazaz, Božo Koprivica and Teofil Pančić. They selected twenty-two out of five hundred stories, and awarded three in total. Damir Nedić's story won 2nd place.

2. Caruth (1996: 4)

3. Caruth (1996: 24)

4. Freud's analyses of Leonardo da Vinci's and Dostoevsky's works in *Leonardo da Vinci: A memory of His Childhood* (1910) and *Dostoevsky and parricide* (1927), respectively.

5. This is why the aim of psychoanalysis is to fill in the gaps in patient's memory and overcome the resistance to recall.

6. Lacan's the Real, one of three psychological registers. The Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real were introduced in 1936, *Beyond the Reality Principle*, and the Real is a central notion in his seminar *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*.

7. A dream from Freud's Interpretation of Dreams. A father leaves his dead child to a stranger who takes care of it in the next room and goes to sleep. The son appears in his dream and tells him: "Father, can't you see that I am burning?" "In reality, a candle fell and burned his corpse in the next room. Lacan wonders which reality wakes him up. Could it be that another, failed reality appears in the dream, a reality that cannot be, but can be repeated endlessly, because he can never truly wake up? See Lacan (1986: 65)

8. comp. Matijašević (2006: 168)

9. comp. Peter Ramadanovic *In the Future....: On Trauma and Literature* in: Belau, Ramadanovic (2002)

10. Felman argues that poetry about trauma is expected to be disintegrated and discontinuous, with broken lines, lack of poetic imagery. Focus would be on naming, spatiality, obsessive and compulsive repetition, apostrophes and dizzying explosive sentences.

11. Bajtal (2010: 31)

12. Bajtal (2010: 23)

13. Bajtal (2010: 30)

14. Bajtal (2010: 26)

15. Bajtal (2010: 28)

16. Under the title, author's quote by F. Alfirević: "Death is in the oblivion, /not in the fact. /A man is dead/only when no one remembers him anymore, " emphasizing the intent of the story, based on the responsibility to document someone else's wound and not forget death.

17. Nedić (2011: 107)

18. Nedić (2011: 107)

19. Nedić (2011: 107)

20. Nedić (2011: 108)

21. Nedić (2011: 108)

22. Pintarić (2010: 314)

23. Pintarić (2010: 315)

24. Pintarić (2010: 315)

25. comp. *There is me and there is you*. In: Pintarić (2010: 315)

26. Pintarić (2010: 315)

27. Pintarić (2010: 315)

28. Pintarić (2010: 315)

29. Pintarić (2010: 316)

30. comp. Moranjak-Bomburać (2004)

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Art as the result of society's transformation

An overview of contemporary visual arts in the Republic of Srpska

When we talk about contemporary art in the Republic of Srpska, its origins and progress, we roughly take into consideration the past ten years. In terms of territory, this separation of entities within Bosnia and Herzegovina is necessary and understandable for various reasons. Mutual division and isolation in the aftermath of civil war of the early 1990s, after which there was a slow and painful process of recovery and normalisation of conditions of cultural production, as well as the activities from the domain of visual arts in the Republic of Srpska and the BH Federation which happen independently of each other.

Soon after the war ended, the preconditions were met for emergence of a new art scene in the BH Federation with the centre in Sarajevo, mitigated by the existing struc-

tures such as, the Academy of Visual arts and museums, whose activities are largely supported by foreign donations. Foundation of the Soroš Centre for contemporary art was of particular importance in 1996, which was later named Sarajevo Contemporary Art Centre. Since 2006, they have been awarding the Zvono award, the only prize for contemporary visual art in BH for young artists of both entities in order to promote them abroad.

During the 1990's, the art scene in the Republic of Srpska functions in isolation in relation to other parts and is limited to modest achievements of the local community, with a certain number of mostly older active artists. New artistic tendencies appear much later with the establishment of a cultural and political centre in

Banja Luka, mainly the Academy of Arts in 1998 and the transformation and renaming of the Art Gallery into the Museum of Contemporary Art of the Republic of Srpska in 2004. We should also mention the Academy of Fine Arts in Trebinje established in 1995, with several successful artists of the younger generation. Additionally, there is namaTRE.ba, an online platform for contemporary art, set up in 2006. Its main focus are video, film and performance. Nevertheless, a real generation of artists, interested in new media, but also aware that they have to position themselves in relation to current parameters of the place and times in which they appeared with the first graduates of the Academy in Banja Luka. The cornerstone is collaboration with similar institutions and presentation of recent artistic tendencies in the region. As the main institution and the strongest link in the process of creating contemporary art in the RS, it became a venue and a platform for this group of young artists. They stepped into the spotlight in 2007 during the *Interspace* exhibition in regional centres: Sarajevo, Novi Sad, Skopje and Belgrade. The activities of Protok, Centre for Visual Communication, a non-profit organisation formed in 2005 by several of Banja Luka's artists, stood out as another important factor in the process of revival of the local art scene. Their most important projects include the International exhibition *Spaport*, first of its kind in BH, which has been held three times so far.

If we take into account the different time frames, local features and circumstances, we can detect two separate scenes in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole. However, their functioning and mutual relation is not well defined and established, given that opposing political, ideological and propagandist factors inevitably come into play. Generally speaking, visual art in

BH goes hand in hand with the complex socio-political reality of the past twenty years. Transformation of the Bosnian and Herzegovian society, marked by a series of political processes, from the decline of the SFRY, many years of war and to the Dayton Peace Treaty and re-establishment of a new, complex state structure to enable co-existence between the warring peoples is the context which undoubtedly determines and relates to all internal developmental processes. Since its inception, contemporary BH art is manifested as a direct consequence of all this, inseparable from contemplation of war and conditions in its aftermath. There is a country divided according to ethnic entities during transition into a democratic and neoliberal state. In order to reveal the principles which govern the representation of the socio-political map and its reading in visual art, here is a selection of several works, considered to be the most representative of contemporary art in the Republic of Srpska. In this way, there is a tendency to discover issues and unresolved conflicting fields which are results of an artificial and essentially dysfunctional model of co-existence within a single state, while maintaining ethnic divisions. Artists insist on finding ways to confront and overcome these issues.

Most authors favour repetition of motives that refer to Bosnia and Herzegovina as the dominant thematic corpus, regarding the relation to the recent war past, as well as the present which is oversaturated by intranational ethnic rivalry, especially when it comes to issues of language, writing and state emblems, often resulting in absurdity and contradiction. All of these elements are frequently seen as impositions, foreign and debilitating factors. Artists from the RS approach them from a more or less critical and subversive standpoint.

Video artwork "BHS" (2010) by Igor

Bošnjak (from Trebinje) deals with language as a means to establish and point out mutual diversity and equality of the three constitutional nations in BH. The former Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian, alongside the processes of formation and affirmation of national identities – Bosniak, Croatian and Serbian – was transformed into three separate languages, based on minimal and far-fetched differences which became mandatory in the public domain to stress political correctness, often with absurd results. One example would be sign language, more specifically, something that happened a few years ago, when a television station addressed the need to have three sign language interpreters. The video repeats this situations with three simultaneous sign language interpretations which logically do not differ from each other in any way, underlining how grotesque this sort of manipulation is. Apart from language, there is also writing, i.e. two alphabets, the Latin and the Cyrillic, obligatory in all aspects of institutional activities as a public manifestation of equality. On the other hand, using or choosing one of the alphabets, depending on ethnicity is often a parametre of correctness or (in)eligibility. In her video *Write yourself...Erase yourself* (2010) Borjana Mrđa (from Banja Luka) writes and erases her name and surname on a piece of paper, alternating between Latin and Cyrillic. This mechanical action gradually becomes more intense and aggressive and the paper is eventually torn up. The alphabet is one of the key aspects of artist's personal identity because she is used to using both alphabets. But, in the new political context which insists on separation based on alphabet, it becomes a sign of national ethnicity. The duality causes confusion, so writing and erasing your name quickly and demonstratively unravels as a physical manifestation of artist's introspection.

National emblems in the works of artists from the RS detect and observe different models of political manipulation, since it is precisely these elements that are used to dispute or cause misunderstanding of political factors, while ignoring real problems in BH, most importantly poor economic and living conditions. Further, the flag, coat of arms or the anthem were not adopted through mutual agreement, they were imposed by the High Representative for BH. *Very bad design* by Igor Bošnjak (2010) is composed of six oils on canvas with actual design suggestions for the BH flag in 1998. These are attempts to find the proper forms and colours according to diversity and equality among the constituent peoples. By presenting these examples of bad design, the author reveals limited possibilities of finding a neutral, acceptable and applicable solution, since the flag was a burning issue for many years between the political elites. Finally, the only reference to BH on the flag is the yellow triangle, as a geographical reference, while other elements place it in a broader European context. Nevertheless, the RS has had a separate ethnic flag since 1992, constitutionally confirmed in 2006, while the state flag refers to the Federation of BH, because the actual federal flag was revoked in 2007 because it did not represent the three constituent nations. In that regard, the relation to state emblems varies from adoption to ignorance, depending on the ethnic group, as a symptom of opposing sides which infrequently tend to exclude each other. Bojana Tamindžija (from Trebinje) attempts to confront the opposing factors within this problematic construct in her performance *I am not naked, I am not alone* (2009) at the Banski dvor Cultural Centre in Banja Luka. It consisted of reciting the national anthem in three varieties, respectful of the three languages, but in reality without any differences, while the author was naked and draped in the BH flag. Intentionally

pointing out controversial state emblems in an institution which is marked exclusively with RS emblems, is additionally supported by statements such as “I love my anthem, I love my flag, my body is the body of my state.” This kind of provocative and direct intervention within one’s ethnicity indicates manipulation methods which are present everywhere and applied by all political structures in BH, that treat the individual as only a body, unable to resist or make any change.

The immediacy of the war experience as a permanent source of trauma, both individually and collectively for all BH citizens, provides constant artistic production at the RS art scene. Dealing with this extremely difficult and painful topic primarily confronts personal traumas to find a way to overcome them using different artistic strategies. We have to bear in mind that years after the civil war, that same war has been systematically exploited through one-sided interpretations of the past, determining the levels of responsibility, as well as identifying the roles of criminals and victims. Also, the external experience of the BH conflict implies the accepted and well-rooted image of the Serbian people as the only culprit, supported by the media. *Occupation (2007-2008)* by Mladen Miljanović (from Banja Luka) are on-site interventions on specific locations, such as exhibition spaces in New York, Graz, Philadelphia and Hegenheim. The author occupies the sites by wallpapering the interiors and exteriors with a matrix of multiplied soldier figures in black and white, in regular, endless rows. This piece functions as an *invasion* on the world of art centres, mirroring subtle, clever and complex processes of transformation from military to artistic as the core concept. The artist, Miljanović, attended military school and instead of furthering his military career, the school was shut down, the army was

reduced and the former barracks in Banja Luka became the Academy of Fine Arts. This is what caused his drastic transformation from soldier to artist and determined the type of art he would be engaged with. In his work, there is an awareness of the stereotypical views of the ethnic group he belongs to, the imposed identity of the occupator, which he tries to deconstruct by overstressing this component when showing his work on the international scene.

The role and power of the media in constructing the truth and perspective regarding specific events, in this case the war in BH, is examined by Radenko Milak (Banja Luka) in his work *And what else did you see – I could not see everything* (2010). In a series of more than twenty oils on canvas, the author uses a motive from a photograph taken in Bijeljina in 1992 by Ron Haviv, an American photographer. The motive is repeated in same formats and same colour schemes, with minimal difference. It is a violent scene depicting a member of the Tigers paramilitary unit terrorising non-Serbian civilians. The image circled the world as one of the most brutal scenes ever documented during the war.

Its revival through the painting medium many years later is part of a personal process which deals with the past and questions collective responsibility. In the present context, where BH nations live together, the war trauma functions as an active point of conflict in the process of assigning, escaping or absolving blame. On the other hand, there is the issue of the manipulative potential of the media image – how this photograph can allow insight into the truth about war crimes in BH – because no matter how valid it is as a document of a moment in time, it is an excerpt in a wider chain of events which remains invisible and can be selectively overlooked.

Artists in the RS feel the need to determine their own position and perspective as creators with regard to art outside the BH domain. They are aware of the isolation, marginalisation and the impossibility of stepping out of the complex and self-limiting internal field of politics, which has resulted, among other things, in two art scenes and an undefined art policy for production and presentation of art on national level. Under these circumstances, promotion of contemporary BH art on the cultural map of the world is left to individual efforts and aspiration of NGOs. Veso Sovilj's *Art of Bosnia and Herzegovina is within the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2006) talks about precisely this issue. As a professor at the Academy of Arts in Banja Luka, he has influenced many artists of the younger generation. The piece consists of a print of the BH borders on a white surface and a short text: "Art of Bosnia and Herzegovina is within the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina, limitlessly, enormously I multiply the limited borders (...) production is without support, post-production is without support, without support the artist stays within the territorial borders..." These statements refer to author's personal fate. He was part of the neo-avangarde movement during the 1980s, and one of its most talented representatives in Yugoslavia. His rising career was cut short by the war and years of isolation. Also, this is a realistic presentation of the BH situation when referring to the art system, or lack thereof. *BH Imaginary Pavilion* is a project/action by Tač.ka (from Prijedor) from 2007-2009. It is based on the fact that BH does not have a pavilion on world art events, such as during the Venice Biennale. The first action was performed in 2007 as a protest and an attempt to symbolically construct the BH pavilion. Members of the group visited the 52nd Venice Biennale and documented their interventions – putting or inserting black cardboard

dots, 80 centimetres in diameter, in the pavilions. In relation to the exponents, the dots corresponded in form and content, so the intervention curve went from one work to the next to symbolically draw in a BH pavilion. The action was presented at the University Campus in Banja Luka with a sign at the entrance to the exhibition saying "Bosnia and Herzegovina", just like at the Venice Biennale. This led to the university issuing an order to take down the sign because it is potentially controversial and uncalled for from an ideological standpoint. It is precisely this kind of reaction that is one of the symptoms of the comprehensive political context which hinders the presentation of BH art abroad, due to inability, incompetence or lack of interest shown by relevant authorities. Given that in the two years leading up to the next Biennale, the issue had not been resolved despite open discussions and public appearances, Tač.ka group organised another action in 2009 called *Can you imagine a BH pavilion at the Venice Biennale?* They asked forty random people and staff members at the Biennale to show them where the BH pavilion was. All of them were eager to help them, convinced that such a pavilion existed, since every country in the world is allowed to participate. This underlines the absurdity of the situation in which internal organisational barriers prevent the presentation of art at an important event.

Ljubija kills (2010) by Sandra Dukić and Boris Glamočanin (from Banja Luka) deals with postwar reality during transition in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including consequences of political and economic processes over the past twenty years which directly terrorised ordinary people, pushing them to the side, who are now disenfranchised and left to survive under extreme conditions. A typical example can be found in Ljubija near Prijedor, a small min-

ing town in former Yugoslavia. The mines stopped working when the war broke out and went back to business after twelve years when a foreign company Arcelor Mittal, bought a major share. This, however, did not solve unemployment among large numbers of refugees and returnees, ignored by the state and ethnic constituency as *social waste*. Since Ljubija foundry made sewage manholes for the entire region, artists used the motive of the manhole as the symbol of Ljubija, its past and present. *Ljubija kills* consists of a table for four in the form a manhole and from which we can hear confessions of people from Ljubija. Then there is *Man-hole*, where artists left imprints of manholes in various public places, as well as coordinated action with women's association Rudarka from Ljubija, called *I don't see and I don't hear*. Women from Ljubija made little eye and ear patches with the logo of the mine, on sale during every exhibition to help them out financially. Presenting a clearly critical attitude to a problem that has been overlooked by society, *Ljubija kills* is a reminder, a warning and a call for change to which it contributes to a certain degree.

Since its beginning, contemporary art in the Republic of Srpska is an active field for detecting anomalies in Bosnian and Herzegovian society and their critical analysis. It is a young, developing scene, and the authors selected have shown they are willing to provoke and reveal frustrating, conflicted focal points that shape their reality. There is a subversive tendency towards any kind of internal political manipulation. The topics they are dealing with are typical indicators of bigger issues, always in the context of BH as a whole. When considering war traumas, however, artists in the RS have not dealt with loss and terrors of their own ethnic group, although they have all experienced the war directly. There is a tendency to universally approach the

horrors of war critically without ignoring the burden of responsibility of the Serbian nation, which is openly demonstrated in some cases. This phenomenon could be explained in the context of external perception of the civil war in BH, or the constant ideological climate that benefited the artists of the Federation. The dominant theme with a significant number of Sarajevo authors relating to the war from the position of the occupied victim, is correspondent and immanent to the international view of Bosnian Serbs as aggressors and criminals. Therefore, the way artists from the RS deal with this topic, stepping into the international scene almost ten years after federal artists, is consequently steeped in trauma and frustration caused by internal processes and awareness of how they are perceived as a nation. In this way, their ambition to be recognised outside BH, as well as to require foreign funding to revitalize the local art scene, inevitably implies an awareness of the reduced possibility to speak out about the war, a need to adjust and take an acceptable ideological stand.

Žana Vukičević



After years of deliberate nation building narratives in Balkan countries in which state supported art was particularly instrumental, some national myths have impregnated the society at large. Mainstream contemporary art in these countries still very often reflects this sentiment, openly promoting prejudiced stereotypes and justifying national ideologies or political agendas. Simultaneously, these countries have witnessed a significant decrease in critical reflection on contemporary art.

Having this in mind, *Criticize This!* was conceived as widening the public space for critical discussion on contemporary art. It used criticism of contemporary art to reveal the way in which contemporary art (de)constructs nationalistic myths, national identities and images of the other as well as the ways contemporary art deals with neuralgic and traumatic points of these societies.

Criticize This! was a project implemented by cultural organizations from Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia and dedicated to the affirmation of art criticism and critical reflection of literature, performing and visual arts. The project educated young art critics from the Balkan region who wrote and published art reviews and essays for a year both online in Booksa.hr, Kulturpunkt.hr, Seecult.org, Elektrobeton.net and Plima.org as well as offline in dailies Danas and Pobjeda and in the weekly Novosti. The selection of best essays written during that time is collected in this publication.

Young art critics who participated in the project are: Ivana Ančić, Marija Andrijašević, Ivana Anić, Zvezdana Balić, Tamara Baračkov, Tihana Bertek, Vladimir Bjeličić, Nađa Bobičić, Ana Bogdanović, Gjorgje Bozhoviq, Nikola Đoković, Slađana Golijanin, Lejla Kalamujić, Anita Kojundžić, Nino Kovačić, Luka Kurjački, Bojan Krištofić, Srđan Laterza, Morena Livaković, Milena Milojević, Lamija Neimarlija, Vanja Nikolić, Milena Pejović, Dalibor Plečić, Marko Raguž, Sandro Siljan, Nikola Skočajić, Leda Sutlović, Kristina Špiranec, Ivan Telbar, Žana Vukičević.

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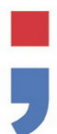
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