

blahobytí. Budou usilovat o vyloučení konfliktů ze své mezinárodní hospodářské politiky  
principles upon which these institutions are founded.

a budou podporovat hospodářskou spolupráci mezi jakýmkoli smluvními stranami  
of stability and well-being. They will seek

nebo mezi všemi smluvními stranami.  
national economic policies and will encourage

or all of them.

ezinárrodních

ěnní

stabilitu a

ářské politiky

trnami

**Les parties contribueront au  
développement de relations  
internationales pacifiques et  
amicales en renforçant leurs libres  
institutions, en assurant une meilleure**

**compréhension des principes sur  
cesse Einrichtungen**

**lesquels ces institutions sont fondées  
e Voraussetzungen**

**et en développant les conditions  
d das Wohlergehen**

**propres à assurer la stabilité et le bien-  
être. Elles s'efforceront d'éliminer**

Die Parteien werden zur weiteren Entwicklung friedlicher und

freundschaftlicher internationaler Beziehungen beitragen, indem

sie ihre freien Einrichtungen festigen, ein besseres Verständnis

Τα Μέρη θέλουν συμβάλλει εις την περαιτέρω ανάπτυξιν ειρηνικών και

für die Grundsätze herbeiführen, auf denen diese Einrichtungen

φιλικών διεθνών σχέσεων δια της ενισχύσεως των ελευθέρων αυτών

beruhen, und indem sie die Voraussetzungen für die innere

θεσμών, δια της επιτεύξεως καλλίτερος κατανοήσεως των αρχών εφ'

Festigkeit und das Wohlergehen fördern. Sie werden bestrebt sein,

ων οι θεσμοί ούτοι έχουν εδραιωθή και δια της προαγωγής συνθηκών

Gegensätze in ihrer internationalen Wirtschaftspolitik zu beseitigen

σταθερότητας και ευημερίας, θέλουσιν επιδιώξει την εξάλειψιν των

und die wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit zwischen einzelnen oder

συγκρούσεων εις την οριστή αυτών οικονομικήν πολιτικήν και θέλουσιν

allen Parteien zu fördern.

ενθαρρύνει την οικονομικήν συνεργασίαν μεταξύ τινών ή του συνόλου

αυτών.

**The Parties will contribute toward the further development of**

peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening

their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding

of the principles upon which these institutions are founded, and

by promoting conditions of stability and well-being. They will

seek to eliminate conflict in their international economic policies

and will encourage economic collaboration between any or all of

them.

Die Parteien werden zur weitere

friedlicher und freundschaftliche

naler Beziehungen beitragen, in

freien Einrichtungen festigen, ei

Verständnis für die Grundsätze h

auf denen diese Einrichtungen b

to eliminate conflict in th

policies and will encoura

between any or all of the

[konsequenZ







*A thinker erects an immense building, a system, a system which embraces the whole of existence and world-history etc. – and if we contemplate his [sic!] personal life, we discover to our astonishment this terrible and ludicrous fact, that he himself personally does not live in this immense high-vaulted palace, but in a barn alongside of it, or in a dog kennel, or at the most in the porter's lodge.*

Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849)

To all those who are building their castle in the air, their “Palais idéal,” and have at one time or other preferred delusion, if only they can get it built

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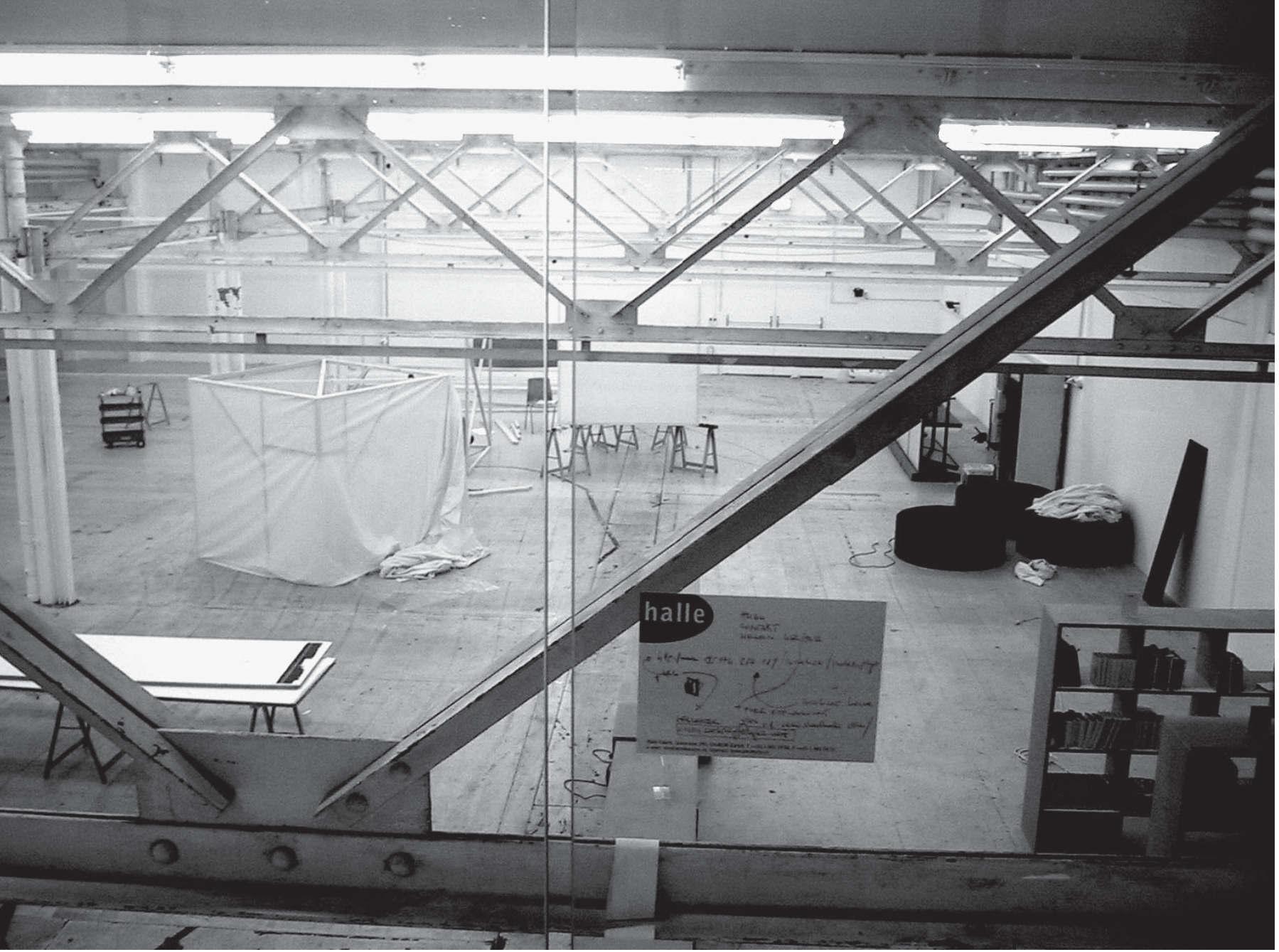
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[konsequen**Z**

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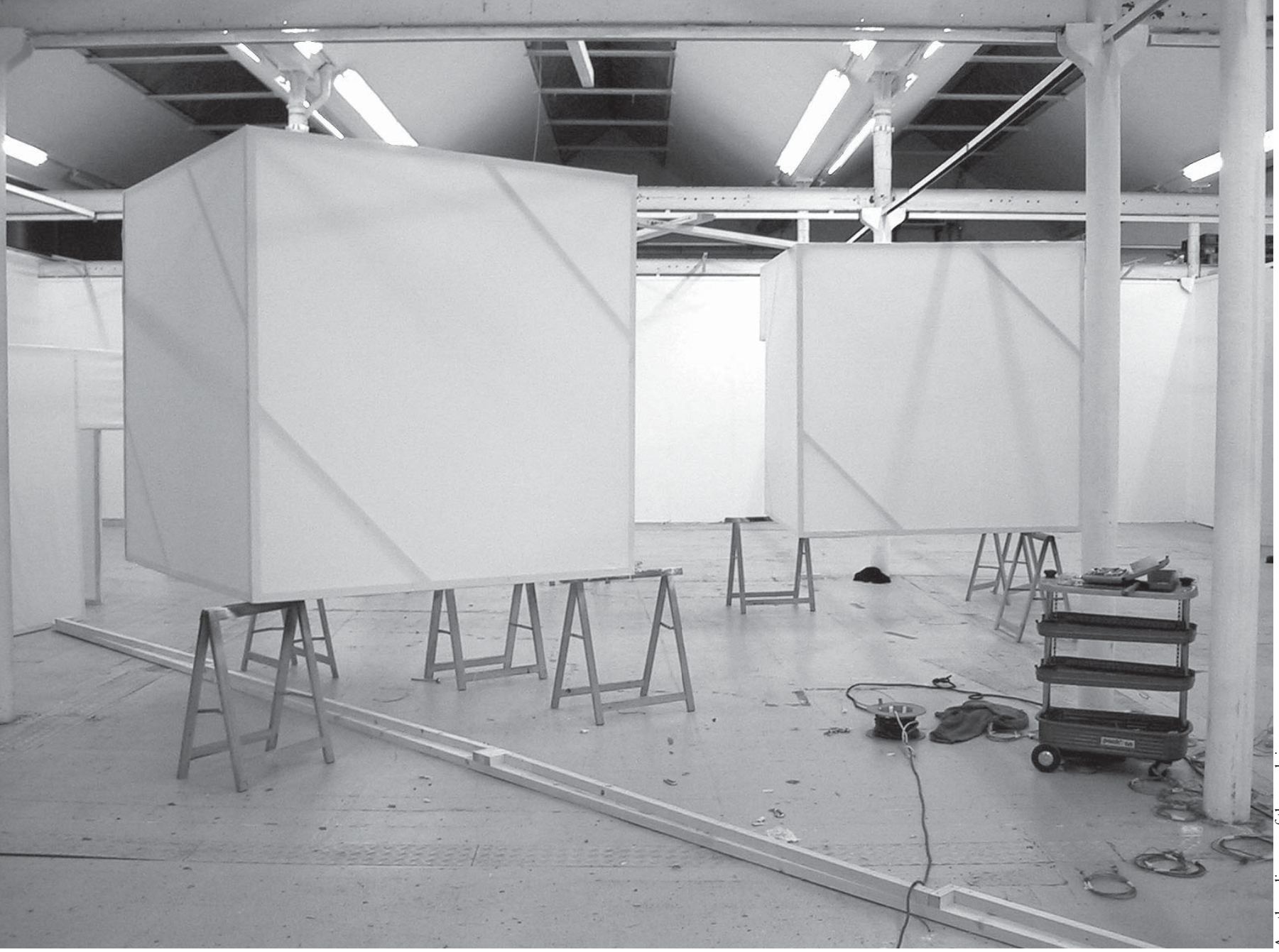
Shedhalle  
code flow





View on the preparatory work for the exhibition *Konsequenz* from the office of Shedhalle





Another glimpse of the work in progress



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## Intro

This little book is the outcome of a workshop held at the Shedhalle, Zurich in December 2002. It is not the kind of book that would, with an explosion, destroy all other books in the world – to quote Wittgenstein’s metaphor for true ethical insight. However, it does intend to touch on matters of an ethical character.

The focus of the book, as of the exhibition project that gave rise to it, is on discrepancies between the values we profess for society at large and our disposition to put these values into practice in our own everyday lives. It is crucial to understand that this disposition must be seen in the larger perspective of one’s access to economic, educational, social, and cultural resources, and to the decision-making processes of the political system one happens to be living in.

Where there is behavior, there is education – a process of forming patterns of thinking and reacting. While education helps us understand and survive, it also makes us vulnerable to the mechanisms of control. If we refuse to submit ourselves to these mechanisms we are forced to look at the discrepancies between, on the one hand, the material conditions and social dependencies and, on the other, our greediness for knowledge, popularity, beauty, information, riches, power and personal comfort.

Ethics is a slippery plane where moral and immoral are often just a small step apart. Any effort to call existing concepts into question readily combines with the thrill of the new. Together, the attack on the old and the kick of the new make up the immoral force that will install the next system of concepts on which the next elite will surf.

The workshop at the Shedhalle was held by Alain Kessi and Dimitrina Sevova and was part of a larger exhibition



project curated by Frederikke Hansen. It started out with the presentation of the international electronic and media art project Communication Front and the homonymous book (<http://www.cfront.org>) and went on to discuss perceptions of ethical and cultural questions in Eastern and Western Europe in the light of differences in material and historical conditions as well as in the status of institutions.

The title of the exhibition project is Konsequenz – a German word referring to staunchness and the consistency between personal ethics and actual behavior. Even if this book adopts the title of the project and features various works from the exhibition it is not a documentation of the Konsequenz project. The exhibition is carefully documented in the catalog Shedhalle 2002. This book further explores the subject matter of the exhibition and sets out to discover visual and textual fragments towards a new approach to the question of Konsequenz.

For this volume we are indebted to everyone who contributed to the Konsequenz project. We would like to thank the visitors of Shedhalle who filled in the personal ethics poll and posed in front of our Polaroid camera, the artists, curators and theorists who joined us live for the phone interviews, and the women of the housing project “Goldregenweg” who agreed to share their experiences with and reflections on gender and communal living. Likewise we thank Group Bardo for sharing their experiences with poverty and the power of body and mind.

Our special thankfulness and appreciation reaches out to Mascha Madörin for the insightful interview as well as to Corinne Gerber who helped doing it, David Shrigley for his witty drawings and Ingo Niermann for letting us have his thought-provoking interview with filmmaker Hiroshi Shinomiya.

Last, but not least, ‘big shouts’ to Yolanda Hug and Sarah Mehler for their practical assistance and patience, to Emil Miraztchiev for his work on the documentation and for getting the book printed, and to Yavor, Andreas and Alex for bravely holding out when their parents got swallowed by a little book.

Frederikke Hansen, City of Berlin  
and Alain Kessi and Dimitrina Sevova, Village of Glattbrugg  
November 2004

## NATO Poetry

The terms are taken from the *NATO Only Terms* section of the *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* at [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddict/natoterm\\_index.html](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddict/natoterm_index.html).

The poetry was produced by the participants in the Konsequenz task force and exhibited in the gallery space.

The task force: Nicole Henning, Kristine Roepstroff, Daniel Truniger, Raluca Visinescu  
– with middle-school students from Otelfingen

FLOATING LINES define the stretch of a  
In photogrammetry, lines connecting the  
determine whether or not the points are in  
superimposed by means of strips of transp



When i entered the room she turned towards me with a DOUBTFUL expression on her face...  
In artillery and naval gunfire support, a term used by an observer or spotter to indicate that he was unable to determine the difference in range between the target and a round or rounds.

ARTIFICIAL MOONLIGHT illuminates the process of thought  
Illumination of intensity between that of starlight and that of a full moon on a clear night. See also battlefield illumination.

THE PURPLE COMMANDER has left her cocoon... she is looking for a new nest  
The officer designated to exercise operational control over purple forces for a specific period during  
RULES OF ENGAGEMENT are to be endlessly re-written in the sa  
Directives issued by competent military authority which specify th  
continue combat engagement with other forces encountered.

ambivalence in the general landscape  
same two points of detail on each print of a stereo pair, used to  
ndivisible. The lines may be drawn directly on to the prints or  
parent material.

I was asking the guy if he wants to go out with her. I thought it would be END OF MISSION.  
In artillery and naval gunfire support, an order given to terminate firing on a specific target.



As a child, my mother gave me a BLUE KEY on a long chain that I still wear, just in case.  
A blue image on any medium which is not reproduced when the superimposed work is reproduced, used as a guide for scribing or drawing

He became menacing like a DRIFTING MINE.  
A buoyant or neutrally buoyant mine, free to move under the influence of waves, wind,

om which to begin an action or phase of an operation, or to which to return  
e easily found terrain location at which visitors to units, headquarters or facilities  
also contact point.

It was here I had my first RENDEZVOUS.  
1. A pre-arranged meeting at a given time and location fr  
after an operation. See also join-up. 2. In land warfare, an  
are met by personnel from the element to be visited. See a



We COCOONED ourselves in blankets we found in the house.

The spraying or coating of an aircraft or equipment with a substance, e.g., a plastic, to form a cocoonlike seal against the effects of the atmosphere.

BLACK FORCES has the bad habit of blinding the eyes. The landscape will appear hazy and approximate.

In artillery and naval gunfire support, a spotting, or an observation, by a spotter or an observer to indicate that the rounds fired resulted in both air and impact bursts with a majority of the bursts being airbursts.

I always loved to sit at the BEACHHEAD at sunset

A designated area on a hostile or potentially hostile shore which, when seized and held, provides for the continuous landing of troops and material, and provides maneuvering space required for subsequent projected operations ashore.

THE CONE OF SILENCE forced all the animals away from their natural lands. An inverted cone-shaped space directly over the aerial towers of some forms of radio beacons in which signals are unheard or greatly reduced in volume. See also Z marker beacon.

PURPLE FORCES make you act opposite

Those forces used to oppose both blue and orange forces in NATO exercises. This is most usually applicable to submarines and aircraft. See also force(s).



The colors of FIREPOWER UMBRELLA are red, blue and pink

An area of specified dimensions defining the boundaries of the airspace over a naval force at sea within which the fire of ships' antiaircraft weapons can endanger aircraft, and within which special procedures have been established for the identification and operation of friendly aircraft. See also air defense operations area.



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WHITE FORCES grow from the rabbit holes in order to give you direction

A term used in reporting of intelligence on Warsaw Pact exercises, to denote those units representing opposing forces during such exercises. See also force(s).

PERMANENT ECHO

tells you stories of  
truth and false, but  
once you listen it melts  
into air

Any dense and fixed  
radar return caused by  
reflection of energy  
from the Earth's  
surface. Distinguished  
from "ground clutter"  
by being from

definable locations  
which the fire of ships' antiaircraft weapons can endanger aircraft,  
rather than large areas.

BLUE  
FORCES

are  
rendering  
the  
power of  
orange  
shadows  
Those  
forces  
used in a  
friendly  
role  
during  
NATO  
exercises.  
See also  
force(s).



MIXED AIR  
blows the corn  
of the field  
In artillery  
and naval  
gunfire  
support, a  
spotting, or an  
observation,  
by a spotter or  
an observer to  
indicate that  
the rounds  
fired resulted  
in both air  
and impact  
bursts with  
a majority  
of the  
bursts being  
airbursts.

TWILIGHT merges good into bad, right into wrong, up and down is the same line

The periods of incomplete darkness following sunset and preceding sunrise. Twilight is designated as civil, nautical or astronomical, as the darker limit occurs when the center of the sun is 6 deg, 12 deg or 18 deg, respectively, below the celestial horizon.





Polaroid poll action ...

**Part of the Workshop East-West, Shedhalle, December 2002**

Visitors of the Konsequenz project volunteered to pose in front of the polaroid camera and fill in a short questionnaire about their dreams in life and their notion of society. The action was initiated by Dimitrina, Alain, Emil, Frederikke, Alice.



Brigitte (26)

A.

To keep my inner freedom, never lose my passion, intensity & yearning and to be embedded in a circle of friends.

B.

A society in which peace & tolerance are lived out, a society that is always also critical & raises questions



Reto (21), artist

A.

So that the fairy tale is my life.

B.

Where freedom + respect are central. I think that the structure of society should be influenced by all people, i.e., it should not be only flexible, but changing. (→ generative form) And this notion is not only about myself.



Corinne

A.

Love and be loved, be happy and never forget that happiness can also be very small. Not always a dream, but sometimes: open up the corset of job, family and adapting-oneself, and get out! (But would I then really be happy?)

B.

In a world in which every one has the same worth as a human being, and in which there are no scary, sick psychopaths.



Melanie (24), works at the counter of a social assistance office for asylum seekers

A.

- Travel and get to know other cultures
- Start a family
- A house at the sea-side

For the world:

- Peace
- Every one's basic needs are covered
- A healthy environment

B.

I would like to live in a multicultural society in which there is space for every one, and solidarity and mutual respect are not a foreign word!



Jeane (11), dancer and performer

A.

To be a doctor or a lawyer

B.

Communitarian



Marcondes (28), artist and performer

A.

I don't have any

B.

Primitive society





Dagmar (45), professor of human geography, curator

A.

- Life?
- Photographer of clouds and seeker of a working title for artistic work on a world tour

B.

Actually in the world as it is (even if I'd sometimes like to shoot someone to the moon (e.g., G. Bush)).



George (25), IT support

A.

- Peace on earth
- A better distribution of resources among the world's population

On a personal level:

- Be healthy and find fulfillment in profession and leisure

B.

In a multicultural society in which every one accepts the other the way he is (culture, religion, world outlook)



Viola

A.

- To travel the world as a twosome on horse, motorcycle + car + write about it
- Get to know cultures
- To do good with my work
- To leave marks

B.

- A society in which each living being is tolerated + estimated
- ... in which every one contributes to the "big picture" without having to let go of his personal freedom



Niklaus (25), artist

A.

- If one could cut life in halves like an orange and experience it in cross section
- House, car, wife, plants

B.

E.g., I'd rather like to be a blue spruce in a light forest in Alaska

A. What is the dream of your life?  
B. What kind of society would you like to live in?



*THE PURPLE COMMANDER has left her cocoon... she is looking for a*  
The officer designated to exercise operational control over purple forces for a specific period during an exercise.





Censored nature morte with boxes of polaroid film



... polaroid poll action



Alice in action

Panorama  
picture  
and all  
other color  
photographs  
by Emil  
Miraztchiev

Konsequenzen  
32

## An interview with the Japanese director Hiroshi Shinomiya

INGO NIERMANN

February 2002

Over the past eleven years, Japanese director Hiroshi Shinomiya, 43, has made two long-term documentaries about garbage collectors in Manila: *Scavengers* and *God's Children*. Shortly after he had started shooting for his second film, persistent rain led to a landslide in the Payatas dump. On 12 July 2000, an estimated one thousand inhabitants were buried in the ruins of their huts. Subsequently the government decided to close the dump for future garbage deliveries. The garbage collectors lost their source of income.

**In the announcement of your new film it says: "We are convinced that this film will change your system of values." How?**

The film asks the question: What does it mean to be happy? The children on the garbage dump say: If we can eat three times a day and the family stays together we are happy. Death is ever present. In contrast to this, the Japanese have so many dreams and ambitions that prevent them from feeling happy. The less dreams and ambitions one has, the happier one is able to feel.

**You believe that the people living on the garbage dump are happier than the Japanese?**

I do not know if they are happy, but I know that they feel happiness. It could indeed be that the people living on the garbage dump experience more moments of happiness than does the average Japanese.

**Are we to conclude that it is better not to help them?**

When after four months finally a truck brings garbage they say: We don't need anything else, just garbage. Of course this can be true only because before this there was no garbage. The

contrast is so sharp. The moment the trucks resume their regular garbage deliveries and they can eat three times a day, they want to send their children to school, and maybe they want to build a nicer house. It occurs to them that they should have themselves vaccinated. People naturally develop more dreams and ambitions as these come within reach, and as someone helping you need to carefully consider which measures to take.

**You have filmed people as they were suffering from malnutrition.**

Since I am documenting, I cannot intervene and cannot help the people. But when it comes to the point where people are in actual danger, the singular life has more weight than the documentary. I have not personally given money, but I have organized for donations to be given, such as canned food, rice and noodles, and I have handed this over to them. There is this tactical moment: They let us shoot, and so we have to accommodate.

**A premature baby was put in an incubator. Who paid for this?**

The child had a lung hemorrhage. Before we found out about this, we did not want to cover the hospitalization cost. But when it turned out to be a matter of life and death and it became clear that the incubator can save the child, we took on the expenses.

**You left a child with hydrocephalus without treatment, because you considered that its life was worth living as it was?**

We had discussed that we would take the child to the hospital after the shooting and would pay for the operation. The child's father refused this because many wrong decisions are made at the hospital and this might precipitate the child's death. We asked: If you do not want an operation, what then could you imagine? A wheelchair, they said – which we provided. Part of my film team lives in Manila, and that's why we said: If you need help, let us know. They still make use of this help.

**How did you decide which families to film?**

When no more garbage trucks arrived the government handed out relief packages. On the garbage dump, however, there was a



region that was not reachable by car, where there was no road. I picked precisely that spot where the rations did not arrive.

**The shooting for your first film lasted several years.**

At the time I had not yet mastered the language. This is why there were considerable delays in selecting the families. This time, I rented a room on the garbage dump for the time of the shooting, and lived there for two weeks on end. Furthermore I had four or five inhabitants of the dump in the film crew who coordinated appointments and made the detailed arrangements. Of course at times demands were made: Come on, give us this, make us a present of this. Such things I have dealt with through these people. It has made a number of things easier.

**When the garbage deliveries are stopped, the inhabitants react with composure. A demonstration takes place peacefully.**

In the beginning they still had savings. If they work hard, garbage collectors make the equivalent of an average salary for the Philippines, which corresponds to 600 yen a day [Eds.: slightly more than 7 CHF]. Besides, they did not know how long the garbage deliveries would fail to come. There were lots of rumors and always the hope that the trucks would be back the next day. They would then fall back on relatives and friends who had received donations, and borrow rice from them. I had not

expected them to stay so calm, and had pictured brutal scenes, all the way to murder.

**Do many children manage to find another job by getting a school education?**

This hope does not really exist. In the Greater Manila area over fifty percent of the adult population is unemployed. People know that even with a good education they will not find a job. In fact, many quit school due to this. It is quite usual for families to have lived on the garbage dump for generations.

**Has the government considered demolishing the huts for the sake of the inhabitants' safety?**

Of course there were such considerations, but there are no houses these people could go to. Ninety percent of the Philippine population is poor, and unless something happens, this poverty will not change. Beyond the films I have also written books and given talks in order to make the subject known in Japan. After the first film about the "Smokie Mountain" dump there was broad public attention, and the Philippine government provided new accommodation to the inhabitants. This drastically lowered the infant mortality rate.

**As long as poverty remains acute, there will be people for whom it is attractive to live on the garbage dumps. Is this not a much more far-reaching problem?**

It really is a very difficult problem. One must really listen very carefully to the opinion of those who live there.

## A Brief History of Group Bardo

### GROUP BARDO

A group of young artists moves to an old neighborhood by the sea. Families that work for the wealthy houses in the surrounding areas form the population. Some ladies are married to the few resistant fishermen that keep fighting the big companies, which rule the fishing business in town. Most men are unemployed or have no permanent job.

Hidden, isolated but still downtown (you just get off the main road, turn right and then downhill), that is Villa Brandão. In the past, a bold community living by the bay, with its own rituals and traditions based rather on African rituals brought by the slaves in the beginning of the 19 century than on the ancient European culture of Portuguese colonizers. A small piece of land that, by fortune, had not been demolished by the construction business, although that's always been a sad menace for everyone in the village: the ghost of becoming homeless.

There we were looking for shelter, searching for an environment that would stimulate the flow of our ideas, the practicing and consequent development of our art. We wanted to be anywhere away from the middle-class neighborhoods we originally came from, but still not too far... close enough to use the phone, open the mail box and keep some contact with our families as to the external world.

Marcondes was the first one to arrive; he had been working on combining video and dance theater with a group of professional actors for years. He wanted to continue experimenting, but this time, with people that would face theater practice as part of their own lives, as a spiritual matter rather than a professional activity.

In the beginning it was just the three or four of us to occupy the central little plaza of the neighborhood, a site of children's



play where adults sit together to watch the sunset, talk about daily events and update information about the most popular “artform” in Brazil: TV Soap Opera. The plaza was the best place for us. There was also a soccer field downhill... but when it started raining it was impossible to keep on rehearsing in the red mud. Besides that, people in the village didn’t really dig the idea of that group of crazy folks making strange movements in their soccer field – the soccer field is kind of a sacred place here.

We went on practicing, every day at the same hour. After maybe two months, we noticed some children had started to imitate our movements. They would walk behind us and mimic every movement. First it seemed that they were just making fun of us, but if we took a close look... they could do it even better than us! They were so natural, not afraid of falling on that harsh ground, so creative when improvising! ... Somehow, they were really willing to participate. Far from our eyes, a whole world had opened its doors to them.

### Let’s play with Marcondes...

The same week we invited them to do the practice with us. About 15 children came at the start.

Many others wanted to get on the training but they were still too small, we were afraid they would hurt themselves. Parents were not familiar with such practices of theater and dance improvisation. They found it unusual but never opposed their children participating.

Now by sunset, everybody in the Villa had something else to watch...

### Santa Fábula – Mixed Media Performance

After some months of practice it was time to think of performing with the group. Marcondes thought of a play that would give us room to improvise with body consciousness and express the memory of our own body experience, our basic instincts and the way we deal with them in a social situation. Nobody had a special role or act, the subjects themselves should give shape to their sensitivity using the techniques of dance and theater

improvisation. We worked on body sounds but had no special dialogue or speech.

The play, as most of Marcondes work, was very influenced by the writings of Antonin Artaud (*The Theater and Its Double*) and Nietzsche (*Beyond Good and Evil*). He was trying to make a parallel between theater and religion, ritual and practice, bringing to the surface that precious part of the individual that often gets oppressed by education and society.

### What does it look like

The costumes are very simple, made of low-cost material, but still impressive under the lights. We wear stockings as a second skin; some wear also a white robe made out of a thin material over the stockings. Then we rub on healing clay all over our bodies. The clay is available at health food stores. Sometime we also get it from friends who live near river areas.

The decor is made of little plastic bags filled with colored water. We fill the bags and then tie them to nylon threads that we hang on the ceiling of the stage area as curtains. That gives an amazing transparency effect under the lights. Everyone in the group works on the decor, it’s like party day when we do it.

### How could little children get into it?

They didn’t have to go through complex intellectual questioning. They could feel it in themselves, in their breathing that changed as they became stronger and life was still not perfect, but for them life was not as heavy as to their parents and to other children who were not involved with the performance. The difficulties of daily life in a low-income family continued, but now they felt somehow stronger, they felt like individuals with a will and power, with a choice. They could communicate better and even fascinate the others with their acting skills.

We started performing the play at the rehearsing site. The most important was to be spontaneous, to keep our concentration and feel at ease in front of the audience as during the rehearsals, to make acting become as natural as playing for everyone. We performed at the Villa a couple of times till we were confident enough. Then we started presenting at some theaters in town.

## The friends of Bardo

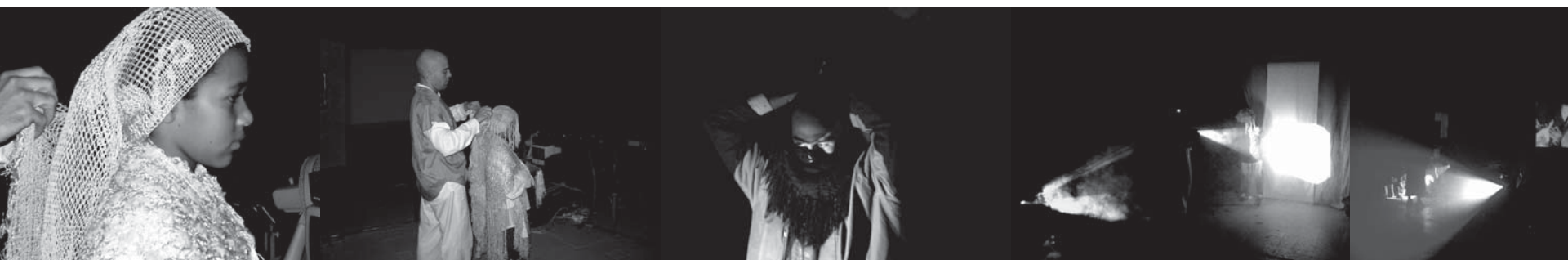
Some families would get more involved in the project than others. Some mothers would support their children and help us get them ready every time we'd go perform somewhere. They recognized how important the rehearsal was to them and would hurry them to the training instead of keeping them at home to do the households or sending them to church. Others would look down at our efforts, claiming that it was "a crazy idea that didn't bring bread home." In a community like Villa Brandão, where survival is the priority, to go on with the practice of theater was sometimes insane. Children had other needs and it was hard to keep on practicing and close our eyes to it.

In an attempt to provide a better and self-supported living standard to the children's families, we started to show them how to make a living selling handicraft, selling food, etc. We also gave

The friends of Bardo never existed as a formal institution. They are people who would gather and be there every time we had to organize a performance or take the children somewhere, like visit to museums, plays, music shows... the list includes some mothers whose kids were not necessarily in the play, other artists, our families and the bank cashiers' trade union.

## Art and Politics

In April 2001, we organized with the community a festival called "The Assembly of the Gods Festival." The name was chosen as a joke in reaction to the protestant church "Assembly of God" which is right in the middle of the little square where we rehearse. It was also a response to the Protestants' negative attitude to our practice. All the publicity was made over the Internet. We had an audience of 400 people that night who came downhill to see



Photographs by Emil Miraztchiev

Performance by Group Bardo and friends, Shedhalle, 13 December 2002

them information on how to prevent some diseases and how to treat them. We even got involved with local politics to encourage the sense of community and the understanding of laws and institutions. We didn't go too far in that direction, though.

Simone Dourado, Marcondes' sister, started to teach classes of jewelry handicraft to some mothers, Pascal Heranval had the children come to his house for painting workshops, Mariella would give singing lessons as a part of the training for the play, Alana and Leo were giving history and literature classes to the ones going to primary school or about to enter high school... We had a lot going on.

video exhibitions, painting exhibitions, music performances and a big variety of handicraft, and delicious food made by excellent cooks of the Villa was available.

Many people wanted to move to the Villa after that. Its amazing view and fresh cultural life attracted them.

By then we thought our peaceful days there were over.

## The People who came to the Villa

Some would just fall in love with the project and wanted to get involved with it straight away. We were visited by doctors, professors of sociology, agriculture (rational use of the urban



space), education experts that came and gave lots of ideas... We were very criticized for our informal procedures that had nothing to do with the way professionals of the social science work with their communities. But nobody seemed to have the magical key to all problems either.

We knew that we are not politicians, and each one of us had his own way to go. We had other art projects that required a lot of energy from all of us to take care of. We had our own bodies and souls to take care of. Up to that point, all we had been doing in this project was based on enthusiasm. We loved the practice, but who wanted to write a project and give it to the government, then enter a dog eat dog competition to get sponsored and be supervised by the state? Who among us was willing to get in the bureaucracy machine? – Deep silence.

We refused to be trapped by procedures that would kill our will to create with people. We refuse repetition. The Villa should emancipate itself without giving up to the system, learn to deal with the laws that rule the city and with its lords, learn to surf on a sea of institutions and create new possibilities not to drown.

Things were happening to fast. Mariella had won a prize that would give her the opportunity of recording her first album after 11 years of singing. Pascal had dates for exhibitions of his paintings and had to concentrate on it, Luciana had a proposition to tour with a big company and Sr. Antonio, the founder of the Villa, who is now 94 years old, was very ill. Many among us were so stressed. We were all running out of money for the expenses with the children, and lots of strange responsibilities were coming to us all at once.

There was no room for creation any more, and we decided to give it a break.

We finally understood that our action in the Villa had its limits: We could not go against the flow that way. That process was hurting us. People would even blame us for exploiting the children and making money out of their artwork. We wanted to quit, to go back to the times we didn't know the Villa, to forget the project and even move from there.

But it was not so easy for us to let go an ideal just because of gossiping and human misery. Besides that, some children wanted to go on with the play, and mothers complained that children

had nothing to do after we stopped, that the grown up ones would sit on the sidewalk of the main road after school and not come back home after class. We were upset.

## **Santa Fábula 2002**

Santa Fábula has become an independent entity, like a being with a soul and its own life. It would stand regardless of the obstacles; it survives with its own inner power.

We decided to cut all kinds of involvement with the Villa but still continue training, rehearsing the play and giving history and Portuguese classes to a small group of children.

## **Children are growing...**

When it comes to call people's attention we have big competition here: the 6, the 7, and the 9 o'clock TV soap opera. No matter where they are, people jump to go sit in front of their TV screens to watch it, it's stronger than their biological clock. The girls want to dress fancy as the stars they see on TV, and the boys want to have big cars... besides that, their spontaneity to improvise has suffered, many try hard to imitate the manners of TV characters and can't give themselves to acting anymore. The environment is taking over with no mercy. Parents are hardened by the tough lives they have, some even become violent, and life at home turns to be like hell.

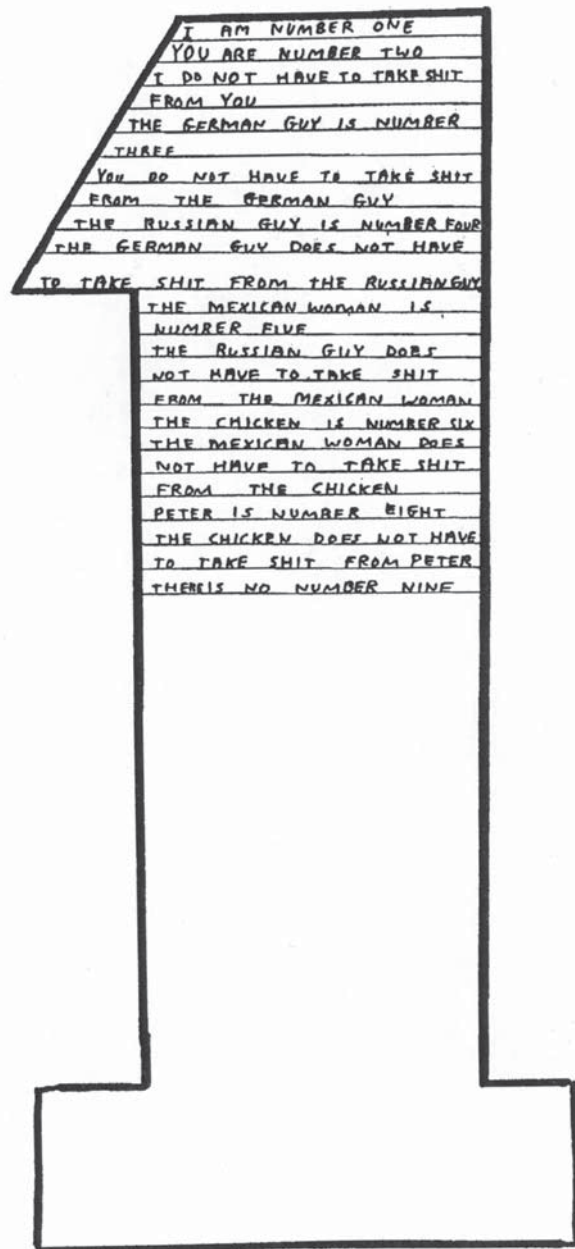
Here we come to another phase of the project. The adults as the kids who still practice with us are the ones whose interest in the project is greater than any catastrophe. Children who even consider acting as an important alternative for their lives in the future.

We keep practicing at least three days a week, and the training is open to any one who wants to participate.

We are fewer but in a way more decided. Maybe more prepared to go further in the fields of creation.







## An interview on money and powerlessness with Mascha Madörin

FREDERIKKE HANSEN AND CORINN GERBER

7 March 2002

Mascha Madörin lives in Basel, Switzerland. She is an economist and the author of numerous publications. She is a co-founders of the forum *Aktion Finanzplatz Schweiz* (<http://www.aktionfinanzplatz.ch>).

### The World

#### Why do we not distribute the money of this planet evenly?

The question that poses itself is whom this 'we' refers to? You would have to ask those who have the money. That is the first problem. The second is that there are people making a lot of money, and others making less, and these very people are working together on the same projects. Here we are again faced with the question of why we do not distribute the money evenly.

Actually, purchasing power is a massive issue. If the countries of the South had more purchasing power, different things would be produced, because different items would be purchased, for instance in terms of health care. When we speak about the distribution of money, the question is always what is being done with the money in terms of consumption. Then there is the question of the distribution of wealth, of the control over raw materials, the control over technology and the control over the media. This, however, is a question of the distribution of wealth, not the distribution of money. And the question of wealth is a question of power. You could just as well ask kings: Why don't you abdicate? On the one hand we have questions of everyday life and personal possibilities. On the other the question of power, an old question that has to do not only with capitalism. Why does the ruling class not yield its power? The central form of power we experience is that of economic control.

Why do we not distribute the money? If we were to divide the money among ourselves here in Switzerland... the distribution of wealth here is one of the most biased in the world. The distribution of income is also very uneven, but even if we divided the income evenly here, this income would still be extremely uneven in relation to the rest of the world. Let me just mention one example: In the seventies I was working as an employee at the university in Mozambique. If I compare my income to that of the worst paid position at the university, *i.e.*, that of the cleaning staff, and set that income to one, I was making five. If, however, I had worked for the Swiss Aid to Development in the same position, I would have made twenty-five times what the cleaning staff was making. Today, this relation is 1:150:2000.

This relates not only to Swiss conditions, but is a question of the distribution of resources worldwide. Nowadays a professor at an African university makes about 300-400 Swiss Francs a month. This means she cannot afford travel specials, nor an Internet connection or anything of the kind. Meanwhile, there is a huge difference to the possibilities that were still available in the seventies. This drifting apart of income, of access to regional as well as national economic resources, is scary. I have lived in Mozambique and spent time in South Africa, at the time of Apartheid. I think that the sense of powerlessness, if we may at all speak of powerlessness here, is the powerlessness of a ghetto, of a society of Apartheid, where it is evident that our situation is out of proportion with anywhere else. This of course creates feelings of powerlessness, too – being part of a system without really wanting to. On the one hand, I may not have much of a chance to change my life situation. My situation may be so difficult that most opportunities are out of my reach. On the other hand, I am part of a world ruled by a reality out of proportion with the situation in Africa. We are in the situation of the white in South Africa, before the end of Apartheid and perhaps even today.

#### **In relation to what exactly?**

To the big rest of the world. To 85 percent of the world, and that goes for all of Europe. It is a fact that Europe and the United States account for about 15 percent of the world's population, while controlling about 90 percent of economic resources. This

applies also to those who do not want to be part of this world... after all, we do not decide to be part of this world. At the most, we can decide whether we will do something about it. This creates an incredible sense of powerlessness. We live in a permanent neurosis of the rich – no matter if we happen to be rich ourselves or not.

#### **The I**

**Virginia Woolf wrote in her book, “A room of one’s own”<sup>1</sup>: “Intellectual freedom depends upon material things.” This means that intellect is not possible without money. Is that still so today?**

Yes, I am convinced it is. I have worked in a private research institute of the directorate of a large bank, the “department of world interpretation,” so to speak. I have worked on a survey for the State – in the finance department of the State of Basel-Land –, and then I have worked at university. I have worked on the topic Switzerland-South Africa and, until today, I am working on Swiss banks, and for many years I have been working on feminist economics. I must say that when it comes to women or alternative understandings of the “world picture,” especially knowledge and women, we are lacking the media. It is extremely difficult to publish anything. It is all unpaid work, or miserably paid work. The second thing is that there are hardly any spaces where real professional discussion can take place. There are quite interesting, ‘hot’ questions relating to feminist economics. Also in the leftist scene they are not being discussed. It is always the same, the same question, the same data, the same approaches – whether it is trade unions or the autonomous left, it is always the same. With minimal modifications and variations I seem to be reading the same things that were being said in the seventies already. Where a new generation of men is reproducing itself intellectually, is reproducing itself in terms of leftist politics, the women are not reproducing themselves. In fact, not even

<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) / *Three Guineas* (1938), Oxford World's Classics (1992), p. 141.

the level of debate of the seventies is being reproduced. So the question is: Why? I think that one reason is low payment, which has something to do with economic resources. A second reason is perhaps related to changes in how the younger generation of women experiences the world. Indeed there are today other opportunities for women until the age of thirty. Only when children arrive, these opportunities are radically restricted. The most elementary economic questions that pose themselves to women are very seldom discussed.

**Virginia Woolf said you need five hundred pounds a year<sup>2</sup> in order to be able to do anything at all. How do I get myself these five hundred pounds? What is the idea? Should I study law, so that I may become an attorney and make a lot of money and then become active?**

When I was twenty, many worlds were barred to me because of being a woman. As a woman, when I was looking for a job, I had a much lower income from the very outset, whatever I did. Nowadays there are areas in which a woman can make good money: I just have to become an attorney. But not every woman wants to or can become a barrister. Then there are areas – anything to do with the care economy, whether paid or unpaid –, from catering and alternative psychotherapy to anything that is simply badly paid. If you are an artist, you are badly paid at any rate. But you have even lesser chances than do male artists who are also badly paid. In short, your chances are in general worse, but in certain areas they are no longer worse than they are for men.

However, the number of areas in which chances are bad is increasing. There is a segregation of labor markets, also for men, and where wages are low there is always a surplus of women. All the data show that there are two criteria according to which you will not make more money even if you have a job. One is when you get married. The guy becomes more pretentious and wants to

<sup>2</sup> *op. cit.*, pp. 47 ff. Virginia Woolf refers to her aunt Caroline Emelia Stephen's (referred to as Mary Beton in the text) leaving her "five hundred pounds a year for ever," which she considers more important for her intellectual freedom than the right to vote, given to women around the same time.

be served. The second is when you have a child. A child is more than a full-time job. It's not just a forty-hour week, but a 7 × 12-hour week as long as the child is small. This simply means that you have to invest a lot of time in a child. A child also costs, and all the data point out that this is when the guys start to drop out. There are comparative studies with women with a top education at elite universities in Japan and the United States, a younger generation than the one I belong to. This is what the studies show: It is all the same, whether you are this or whether you are middle class. If you make less money, you may be forced to continue making money with an absolute double load. The end effect is that women get the worst of it. All studies, including in Scandinavian countries, show that men do not actually take over more responsibility. Rather, the state may compensate better, at the most. Or the private economy may provide household-related services to women moving out of housework. But who can afford this? How are women with low income affected?

Today in the allegedly feminist women's scene, all these debates are absent. They are waiting for someone to take care of it, but no one will. And I think that there needs to come a younger generation that learns this from its own experience and is disappointed with all the promises that have been made but not fulfilled. This is also a form of powerlessness. Polls show that young women have completely different expectations from life than my generation did, expectations that are more in accordance with what the feminists have actually demanded: compatibility of job and children, self-realization, less dishwashing. To be able to, say, combine a comfortable private life with a comfortable, interesting professional life. I think this is an illusion, and I think that now there is a new generation of younger women who are confronted with it. They are being eaten up by their work and then labeled apolitical because they are tired. The lines of conflict have been displaced. In part, these are lines of conflict between young women who have no children and women who do. In my opinion, this contradiction has intensified. The situation in Switzerland is a catastrophe. If you look at the statistics on unpaid working hours, you will see that a large part of it is spent preparing meals. There are day schools, for instance. They guarantee that children, from the age of three, are taken care of



until 5 pm. This takes care of one part, but the entire question of a full evening program for the children remains unsolved... the fact that women cannot go to the movies then, that it is difficult for them to meet in women's groups. Even if so-called family life should change, what incredible stress families get drawn into just because one income is missing. I am certainly no defender of the family – least of all the nuclear family –, but I must say that for eighty percent of the population, the entire ultra-neoliberal program has lowered the standard of living. It is the most efficient family-destroying program in the world. And that is why they keep talking of the family, because real families can be seen only on television, in the soaps so to say, because family is not attainable any longer. And what about the enormous change, also in terms of personal life, and perhaps also personal options, expectations: What opportunities do I have, what does my future look like, what can I have, what does a heterosexual relationship with children look like? What would need to change so that this is bearable at all? These are all questions that could be asked. As a social scientist I ask myself when and how women will take to the barricades again. Or perhaps they will not do it at all, and the problems will be solved by other means, perhaps through social destabilization.

**To what extent is the feeling of powerlessness linked to a lack of relations? What relation could I have to money anyway?**

When I lend money to a friend or a member of the family, and we have a conflict because she does not pay me back, then I can go to court and claim the money. But what cannot be claimed is the interest. The interest is a price for converting a contract to the present. If I pay interest, I have no more obligations towards the bank. But a relation is an entirely different time horizon. And I have quite precise expectations towards my friend, a contract, an invisible contract which says: if in ten or fifteen years it is me who needs money, then I can come to her. Social relationships always mean obligations in time. In my opinion, this is what characterizes capitalism: The money economy is the grip of the present on the past, on what has been accumulated, and on the future, on the stock exchange. This means that in the present I can continually modify my obligations, which in principle I only

have in the future. I think this is the great problem, including the problem of our powerlessness and insecurity. Powerlessness also means the feeling that we cannot influence the future any more. There is the problem of mobility, i.e., what we call sustainable – networks of relationships that hold... This is not about ad hoc relationships and how they work, but rather about the time horizon of relationships. I am convinced that so many women still marry because it is still a long-term contract secured by the state. And I think that is also the big misfortune of alternative projects, that there are no longer any economic obligations. In my opinion, in alternative projects the settling of accounts between generations would have to work differently. You cannot have mobility and at the same time dream of relationships. That does not work. Capitalism means to settle all accounts in the present, and the further removed the future is, the less it is worth, and the further back the past lies, the less it is worth, too. This is the factor of capitalization. And this is a huge problem for instance in the health sector as regards chronic illnesses. When the health sector today applies conventional efficiency calculations it becomes completely inadequate to the way we experience our lives unfolding. I think the old feminist problem was that a strict separation was made between two regimes of time. There was the personal, and there was the economic. The personal had its own regime of time, in which women were responsible the entire time along – first for the children, then for the parents. This regime of time, the fact that women are automatically drawn into a duty of relationships, into a duty of care and responsibility in the family domain, is one of the things the feminists have fought against. Where is the alternative? No person can live without this occasional responsibility, without this occasional dependency on other people. How this will be dealt with by society in the future without falling back on women in the traditional manner, this is a question that remains to be resolved. I think that perhaps you belong to the first generation that asks this question at all. Before, this was automatically resolved, inasmuch as women always felt responsible. It is then resolved with emotions, with motherly love, with compassion... and what all women keep saying is that they want contracts. And this entire question which always gets solved spontaneously, so to speak... Men do not want

contracts. They keep talking of spontaneity. They have long since been reckoning with the present. I am an absolute opponent of spontaneity. It thrives from the circumstance that in relation to women, contracts are constantly being spontaneously breached.

#### **Do I lose power if laws are replaced by economic principles?**

No! Every businessman makes contracts. We do not necessarily need laws. Women need contracts. Women must make contracts, and I think also that we have to make new contracts that are more adequate. What Foucault already said about neoliberalism, and he was right about it, is that firstly it is an answer to questions that the left raised without having answers to them. And secondly there is the entire question of paternalism, the question of oppression in the family. The market is attractive because it gives you an opportunity to negotiate, an opportunity that has always been legally denied especially from women. The discrimination coming from the state has been to take away from women the opportunity to negotiate. As a married woman, it is only at age 41 that I got full economic freedom to enter into contracts. The whole bourgeois revolution demanded the freedom to enter into contracts in economic questions for the oppressed people. And the WTO does nothing else but constantly restrict the freedom to enter into contracts for certain people. The law can also deny us this freedom. The bourgeois revolution means the freedom for all to enter into contracts. Property means contractual freedom.

The capitalist hegemonic response to contractual freedom is the monopoly over economic resources. Although I am free to enter into contracts, I have nothing in my hands to negotiate about. We need to consider other things. My thesis corresponds to that of Foucault: Neoliberalism is in fact a response to the diffusion of monetary economy into areas that were traditionally identified as non-economic areas. We must consider what may be the alternatives in an extremely monotonized world.

### **Taking action**

#### **Strategies for engaging power – are there any?**

I do not know. I do not feel powerless with respect to possibilities to take action. I ask myself why, and I think that in part it is due

to the fact that I am from another generation. The consumers' society is – also in terms of how we think economy – in fact an El Dorado society, a society of opulence. Somewhere wealth is produced, and I work for money and produce wealth. Then somehow money flows into my household while I lie on my back, so to say, feeling happy that I live in the land of milk and honey. One thing is that as a woman I have always known that you get nothing for free. I never had any illusions about getting anything if I don't go out and get it, do something for it. The second thing is that I am from another generation, in which work and self-realization had something to do with each other. Not work as in disciplined work, but as in producing, putting something out there. To make a product was more important to me than to have relationships. I have entered many a relationship in order to be able to work together. This to my mind is a very important point. On the one hand we have profit centers producing in a very teamwork-oriented way. On the other, we have the entire question of the collectivity of producing, of putting things out there – which is a big problem especially among women. There are very few spaces in which women produce something together. The question is where this comes from. Is it a consequence of the denial of resources? What is it exactly? I do not know. I cannot answer this. I have lived in Africa and have seen what real poverty is. I have seen real incapacity to take action due to lack of resources. It is my contention that feeling powerless is a luxury of those who are sufficiently well off to look for individual solutions. Not knowing how to survive on a daily basis is a completely different story. There really are situations that have touched me deeply, in which there are also no collective solutions, because the poverty is simply too great or the power of the ruling class is too great, so that I can indeed do nothing more. Here, in Switzerland, it is not the case that I cannot do anything. I was in a war, in one of the greatest massacres of history, in Burundi, the neighboring country of Rwanda, where an incredible number of people had already been massacred, following the same seemingly ethnic conflict that resulted from a long political process. There students, people I knew, were simply picked up by the military. The only thing I could wish them was that they would just be shot, rather than tortured to death. This I call feeling powerless.

If we talk about people in Switzerland who feel powerless and do not really live in great poverty or are ill or depressive, I would tell them: Are you out of your mind? I do not understand this! Cut the crap!

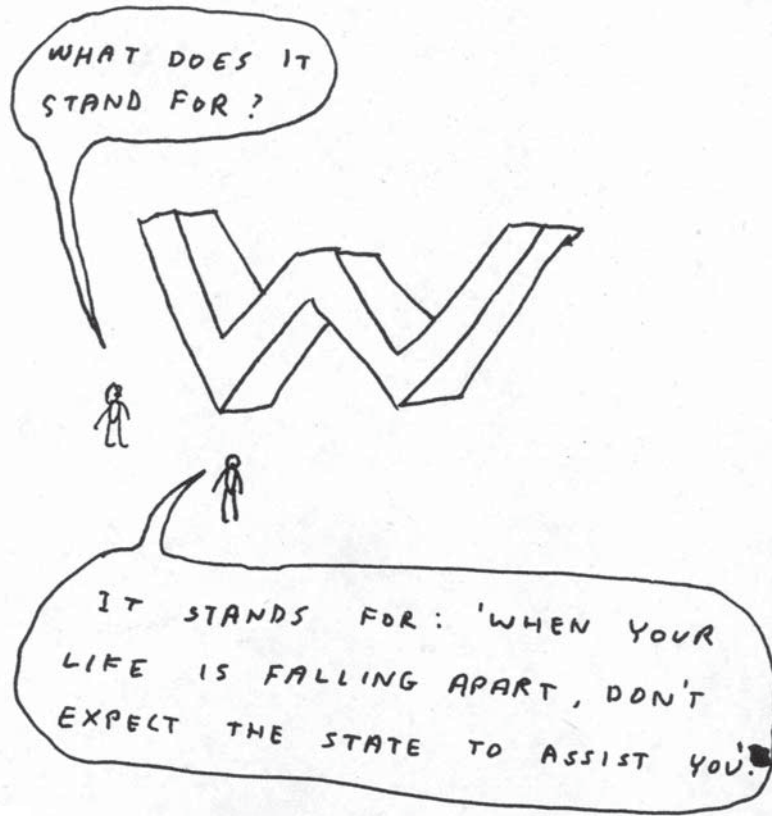
**Yes! But if you wish that money be evenly distributed globally, that there be no poverty... this may be naïve, but with this wish one can feel powerless, even here in Switzerland.**

Of course I feel powerless with this wish, too, but I make a difference between political powerlessness and personal powerlessness. I think that these are altogether different things. The question for me is: What is the purpose of this powerlessness, what is it supposed to justify? I am convinced that through the expansion of the monetary economy, along with a consciousness of personal freedom of action, a feeling of powerlessness arises, which then expresses itself in the assault on Davos, so to say, which I honestly find completely absurd. The campaigns on Davos are great, but a fetish is created. It is not true that the economy works outside of the law. There are thousands of laws, thousands of government decisions that make the economy work the way it does. I think it is not deregulation we are witnessing – but a re-regulation in favor of the rich and powerful. The term deregulation is wrong and misleading in my view. Constantly, new regulations are invented, which simply work differently. It is not about dismantling the state, either, that is all rubbish. Under Thatcher, the proportion of state expenditure rose. The money was simply collected, and spent, in more anti-social ways. Look at how much a society like the Swiss state provides for big corporations. The question is how much human and other resources are at the disposal of the big corporations and the banks for their accumulation, and what the state does to ensure that this is how things work. I think this is an essential point, to understand that there are a lot of regulations. That is a possible starting point for struggle. When the course is set for major developments, for instance in genetic engineering, nuclear technology, traffic policies, trade policies or international loan conversions, it is quite relevant to know who will be disadvantaged by the decisions made, and how drastically so. But the system as such will not be changed by such struggles. This must be addressed on a much smaller scale. The question is

then: how do we do alternative politics, how do we speak, publicly and critically, how does a movement function, how are women represented nowadays in these anti-globalization movements, for instance. How are all the things we have been referring to, like democracy or justice between genders, present in the alternative scene? Why is there such a backlash? That's what I would like to know!



## CIVIC SCULPTURE



## Women's House

DIMITRINA SEVOVA

Why is it that some of the most interesting social experimenters and their experiments gain no visibility in public space, especially if they are dealing with women's issues? Not only do they not get their due attention, but usually they fall into oblivion without having had the opportunity to provoke the discussions so direly desired. Except if some sufficiently committed and conscientious researcher makes her appearance on the scene and takes up the issue and records at least some of their ideas for future reference.

This is no new phenomenon, as we will convince ourselves reading about the following case, related with care by Virginia Woolf in "Three Guineas."<sup>1</sup> It concerns the father of this Barbara,<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Leigh Smith, who did not comply with the traded ways of paying allowances to children and was of the opinion that the same sum should be paid to daughters as to sons. This is how, when his daughter attained her majority in 1848, he gave her a sum unheard of in those times – three hundred pounds a year. She in turn was bold enough to invest the sum in something useful. She founded a "school that was open not only to different sexes and different classes, but to different creeds; Roman-Catholics, Jews and 'pupils from families of advanced free thought' were received in it." The result was a "most unusual school,' an outsiders' school." She did not stop at this, but even

<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, in: *A Room of One's Own / Three Guineas*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, pp. 355-356.

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that Virginia Woolf leaves Barbara with only her first name. She is referring to Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, one of the most famous feminist leaders and intellectuals of the 19th century. Cf. <<http://athena.english.vt.edu/~jmooney/3044bios-a-g/bodichon.html>> or <<http://www.girton.cam.ac.uk/about/history/bodichon.html>>.

dared challenge the English Law, publish a magazine for women's issues, of found the first girls' college in Cambridge.

Not only in this text, Woolf points out that one of the fundamental problems of women is their economic oppression, which throughout the centuries has led them to complete dependency and submission to the conditions of patriarchal society. It comes as no surprise that to this very moment we continue to be irritated by this fact: unfortunately women still are poorer than men. This is true not only of the so-called "Third World," but also of some of the socially and economically most developed countries in the world. Such as Switzerland for instance. In spite of the claim that a social revolution and evolution has taken place in Western societies following the movements of the sixties of last century, in spite of the enormous work indeed put into subverting power relations and mechanisms, in spite of the great achievements, if I continue digging, I come across a whole range of unresolved problems. This conflict even today provides the backdrop on which most women's initiatives, discussions and struggles are taking place.

Speaking of the financial side of human survival, I cannot but note the continuously and steeply rising concern about making a living, including in "developed countries." In your role as a user and client of the social state, that darn money quickly melts away for the sake of the rent, services gradually become more expensive, and pension and health funds absorb the rest, lightheartedly gambling with your money on the stock exchange. All that remains for you is the stress of reading in the newspaper comments on whether after twenty years you will get a pension or not.

If, having made this choice in life, you have to deal with all of this alone, with all of daily life, with raising one, two or more children, we're getting closer to the situation that has prompted these nine women with their twelve children to look for alternative ways to organize their lives, such that together they could better deal with social and everyday problems. While at the same time finding more free time for themselves, for their own personal development, and wanting, looking for, building a common place: the women's house. A community offering them and their

children a better quality of life in the midst of the hostility of their environment.

This is the only project of its type in Switzerland. The project has no followers, no mediatic advertising, no budget or fees paid out. It does not look for sponsors. There are no "professional development and sustainability plans." It has no professional management, office or accountant. In spite of this, the project has turned out to be sustainable over time. It continues to develop its own way, without becoming institutionalized or turning into a formal or commercial structure the like of most NGOs.<sup>3</sup> Such is the fate of most informal organizations and groups of social activists who have started with the best intentions, regardless of the focus of their priorities, central goals and strategies. Whether they deal with women's issues, with protecting rare mountain plants, or with hungry children in a region sufficiently remote from their headquarters. Whether they are located in the East or the West, in the North or the South.

Nevertheless, non-infected islands of human self-initiative and women's solidarity can still be found. The project "Verein Goldregenweg",<sup>4</sup> or "the project" for short, or the "women's house", has survived over the years due to the efforts and self-discipline of a group of "strong" women who apply a set of strict inner rules – complete equality and lots of work. Perhaps it also helped that all women in the community share one social identity, being "single-parent" families, regardless of their profession or personal interests. And if the main reasons that have brought them to the community are linked to the survival and raising of the children, the women in the project have succeeded not only in developing a common space, in sharing, showing solidarity

<sup>3</sup> NGO: non-governmental organization.

<sup>4</sup> The project carries the name of the street it is located at, Golden Chain Street. The "golden chain" is a poisonous bush (lat. *Laburnum anagyroides* or *Cytisus laburnum*; not to be confused with the Chinese golden rain tree, lat. *Koelreuteria paniculata*) with bright yellow flowers in hanging clusters. In German, its name coincides with the Golden Rain of the ancient Greek myth of Danae, which may give rise to allusions to the patriarchal norms and violence contained in the myth or other, more far-fetched interpretations. We are convinced that the well-intentioned bourgeois of the neighborhood have had in mind that very bush, so that any relation to Greek mythology is purely coincidental.

between themselves, but they have also learned to love each other.

Historically, women have always been placed by and in the discourse developed by men, in a situation of competition with others, “being the object of private ownership.” Consequently, if their struggles are to be effective, it was necessary to create a “place among themselves” – a place of personal and collective “consciousness-building.”<sup>5</sup> The project “Verein Goldregenweg” succeeds based on its internal social construction and the way it interprets the personal and collective space of the house – a “place among themselves.” In the house, each of the women has her own apartment, a kind of autonomy of her personal space, and on the other hand the collective space, especially around the common apartment in which daily life in the community unfolds. This is where they cook, where they feed the children during the day. It’s also a space for playing, sharing, meeting, partying...

If I start out with some of the early feminist theorists, make my way through the feminist struggles and the entire range of



political movements and activism, take into account the bitter experience of the generation of the 60ies with its attempt to build the social heaven it was imagining, and get to the theories and visions proposing a society without hierarchies, I might come to the conclusion that the project contains nothing radical – there are no squatted buildings, no protests, no problems with the

<sup>5</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This sex which is not one*. Quoted from the Bulgarian edition, p. 140. Questions II, asked by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe during the preparation of the broadcast “Dialogues” of 1975.

police. I cannot find the spirit of “traditional” communes of the sixties, or the squats of the eighties.

The shared experience allows “this experience to become politicized,”<sup>6</sup> to contribute to the struggles. If it was not so, the project would become marginalized. Seen from this angle, the women of the “Women’s house” can be criticized for their lack of political activity and public visibility. If I compare to similar projects of twenty years ago, I find a historical link which is not completely accidental. It is not so much a question of ideology, but of the concept as such. I shall use as an example the women’s fraction of the SDS<sup>7</sup> – the sixties movement that stands at the origin of Commune 1. Despite their countless points of criticism towards the men in the movement, the women see it as the most progressive at that moment, given that in their opinion besides it there is nobody else to work with. For the women of the SDS, it is essential to raise together broader social questions, to work on them while intervening in a political space within a broader social context that breaks out of the personal and private. In the sixties



and eighties with their radical and expressive political gestures, it was unthinkable that a social project could be realized without public visibility, public debates and political demands.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Luce Irigaray, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> SDS: Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (Socialist German Students’ Association).

<sup>8</sup> It seems important to me to provide the opportunity to confront the project with the political context in which the discussions and struggles of the women



On this background or historical foundation, the project “Verein Goldregenweg” is contradictory just like the political context in which it has evolved. The women in the Project have realized the necessity of creating a common space for themselves. They have managed to define their wishes. And their reluctance towards publicity may be explained by the lack of a politicized context. One can only regret the lack of shared experience, because the “Women’s House” can give a serious input and experience to other women on how they may take their life into their hands.

The recession and crisis of the nineties does not hit only the economic sphere, but also the social and political spheres. This includes a sizeable crisis of the individual or of personality, with the not-so-innovative idea of the lost identity in an ever more global world,<sup>9</sup> regardless of whether we are wired geeks or marginalized social outsiders in the overall spectacle of money, petrol and muscles. Under this cover, we find an economy of power and war.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, over the past decade we have been witnesses to the migration and massing of an unexpected number of people linked to the great political protests and movements. Nevertheless, the opportunism and pragmatism of the system, characteristic of the last years of the past century, but also of the present moment, superposed to our everyday egotism dictated by our own survival, forces all of us to remain merely some lonely people, frustrated from the lack of optimism and opportunities. Any attempt beyond the theoretical interpretations and utopian logic, as marginalized as it may be, which may point out some path towards toppling the current values, a step in the direction of a non-hierarchical society, gives rise to true hope and rouses curiosity.

of the SDS towards the end of the sixties developed. We publish in this volume excerpts from two texts: *Resolution for the 23rd Regular Conference of the Delegates of the SDS, November 1968, Hannover* and *Speech of the Action Council for the Liberation of Women, held by Helke Sanders at the 23rd Regular Conference of the Delegates of the SDS, September 1968 in Frankfurt*.

<sup>9</sup> ... identity is always lost, exists always in crisis.

Ivaylo Ditchew, *From affiliation to identity. Politics of the image* (in Bulgarian), Sofia 2002, p. 23. Ivaylo Ditchew refers to Erik Erikson.

<sup>10</sup> Term used by Luce Irigaray in “*This sex...*”, *op. cit.*

Viewed on a theoretical level, the Project provides the tools for deconstructing the concept of the home. The private home – sanctuary of the family, a small social formation which has found its concrete definition when it was created for the use of the modern state and industrialization. And which has bolstered up its “unalienable right” to exist by providing a vital pillar in the construction and smooth functioning of the institutions, as well as in the perpetuation of the mechanisms of control. Historically, the home presupposes property – private property. The home is the first form of property, and correspondingly of oppression. In the grammar of the home, women and children are the objects of the male subject.

The “Women’s House” as a social formation breaks out of the traditionally imposed scheme of the family home, in this world structured by the Law of the Father and the concepts defined by it. The project proposes the alternative of “collective motherhood,” an essential means for women in the community to deal not only with their everyday problems linked to the complicated combination of having to make their own living while at the same time raising and educating their children, but also finding time for themselves. “Collective motherhood” is an opportunity to work towards the social and moral development of the children in their education under the effect of the community. At the same time, there is no effort to “tip over the pedagogical relationship,” through which some sort of truth would be imposed, and which would lead to a marginalizing and seclusion of the children from their peers and from reality. “Collective motherhood” works as a fundamental unifying mechanism for the community, through the equitable daily distribution of responsibilities and work among the women.

What will become of the children from the project? What personalities will they have formed, in the context of this “social experiment”? To what extent will they be prepared to continue to take down taboos? And how will they deal in the future in their personal life with their role of “programmed rebels,” when, coming out of their “home”, concepts will be defined under the pressure of established social consensus. We ask this question without going into the theoretical and practical spheres of psychoanalysis or Oedipal system of Freudian theory with all

the research that followed in its step, including existing criticism. Our interest remains focused on “collective motherhood,” that social practice that was used in the sixties in some groups of activist women in order to manage to reconcile their wage-labor with their active participation in the struggles and their responsibilities as a parent.

In a bolder interpretation we can find how “collective motherhood,” with the opportunities it can provide, contributes to the ideas for an anti-Oedipal system that would come close to the theoretical ideas of the “fluid mechanics” or “flows.” Because if we reject fatherhood from a discussion, we should also try to deconstruct motherhood, itself defined by (and through) this same “sole existing” discourse and its language.<sup>11</sup>

Coming from a context which lies partly outside the authoritarian discourse of the fathers, for the girls and boys growing up and being raised in and by the community, at least at first sight there is no possibility for everyday identification with the favored figure of the father and his power. Unfortunately of course, outside the house and “home” the irradiation by this entire phallic culture remains – in school, on the street, by friends, television, advertising.

“Phallocracy” is still solidly anchored within the traditionally prevalent model of family life, and the message reaching our children from all hip-hop videos, schoolbooks and billboards is clear: you really want to be part of this. In the average family, it’s as if a great part of the creative energy of the “couple”<sup>12</sup> goes into maintaining and perpetuating the power of the father.

These are some of the broader, long-term questions raised by the Project as a social experiment: How can we deal with that difficult undertaking that is the education of our sons, an education with which we do not serve the power interests within the existing discourse? What kind of personalities do we want to, are we able to and would we really foster in our sons, careful

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Derrida, lecture held in Sofia at the conference “*The Balkans and Europe. Deconstruction of the political*,” 16-18 November 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Here I use the designation “couple” in quotes in reference to feminist theory, which discusses the social influence in the construction of the married “twosome.” In other words, it takes more than two to make a “couple.”

not to repeat the model provided by the men in the existing economic and social system? Are we able to escape the pattern of privileging our sons with respect to our daughters? Can we give our daughters the tools not only to survive in a patriarchal world, but to find new ways of struggling and undermining?

I am reminded by the flow of these thoughts, of the answer of the Romanian artist Stela Lie, in an interview I made with her in a completely different context:

*It’s equally difficult for men and women to work in contemporary art in Romania. At the same time the men are lagging in their development. For instance, in my personal experience, they expect food on the table, and this food someone has to prepare it and put it on the table, and that is the woman. All this takes a lot of time, and that is time that could be put into our professional work. Yes, and here’s my husband! Meet my husband! He is an architect, he’s not stupid, a contemporary person, and in spite of it all he almost completely relies on me for homework. But all this is the women’s fault, with the way they’re educating their sons. For me it’s always easier to speak out of personal experience, and not from a feminist or gender theoretical point of view. But what I can permit myself to say, generalizing the question: Society is always patriarchal. So much for my answer to your second question, does it do?*<sup>13</sup>

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*What struck me most on the way was the insistent repetition of one and the same picture. Stopped cars and, next to them, on the very pavement, casually half-turned to the side, men relieving themselves with visible calm. Strikingly this turned in my mind to understanding, as we were drinking coffee in a little restaurant. I saw how a young mother took her boy to the very middle of the lawn in front, turned him around to face the path and slowly started unbuttoning his brand-new pants. Indeed, who better than a woman could educate patriarchal thinking in a man?*

Milena Kirova, *Belgrade from inside*, in: Kultura, No. 25, 21 June 2002 (in Bulgarian) <[http://www.online.bg/kultura/my\\_html/2233/belgrad.htm](http://www.online.bg/kultura/my_html/2233/belgrad.htm)>

<sup>13</sup> Dimitrina Sevova, *Interview with the Romanian artist Stela Lie*, for the project “*Exchanging Places*” <<http://xplaces.code-flow.net/stela-lie-en.html>>.





The interviews below were made by Dimitrina Sevova on 16 December 2002 in the common kitchen at Goldregenweg.



## Interview with Mirjam

**Mirjam, how did you get involved in the project, and what does it mean to you on a personal level?**

For each woman in the house you could write an entire story. The reasons that have led them to this project are quite different. Most of us were looking for a new form for their life, a means of compensating for their problems stemming from their situation as single mothers, in order to be able to better look after their children and themselves. This question is especially sensitive for

those women with a single child, because in most cases it turns out that it grows up isolated and lonely. On the other hand, here in the project there are four children to three women, which makes it easier to deal with part of the multitude of our responsibilities as parents, as well as to find time for ourselves. In my concrete case, I didn't want my daughter Luschka to grow up alone. This is a problem for most families with only one child. That's how even before knowing about the project, I tried to find ways to compensate as far as possible for this situation my child was in. Led by this wish, some time ago I chose to live with a woman and her three children, from three different fathers. Then, this woman got married, which completely changed the situation for Luschka and me. We had to find a new place to move to, which had to fulfill my ideas with respect to raising my daughter. The project completely fulfills my criteria. Here it's ideal also for me, since I have an apartment of my own and a private life, and at the same time also the community.

**What do you mean? You were saying that at one point for you it became a problem when the woman you were living with got married. This probably meant that her husband would move in to live with you. Is it not in contradiction with the idea of the project to have a relationship, for instance with a man? I mean the situation in which he may stay here, when and however often he wishes?**

Of course! Men are all welcome. It's quite open, it's a coming and going. Our friends are welcome. The project encompasses the entire building, that is both entrances. We are nine women, and each of us has an apartment of her own, but we also have this common apartment, where the social activities of the community take place. I have a friend, who at the moment is cooking up in my apartment. He's surely waiting for me by now, and I need to put Luschka to bed. She has to go to school tomorrow, which means I cannot stay much longer.

**How do the children feel as part of the project? This is a different situation from the average, at school, on the street?**

From the beginning there have never been problems for the children, neither at school nor on the street. This is a center

for children. In the house there are a lot of children. It's fun, and there's always something to eat. Only the neighbors have a slightly strange attitude. But I think there's nothing to it, it's just the usual curiosity. They'll ask in a specific tone: "You're from the women's house?" Nothing more. Without comments. They do not ask superfluous questions, only this suggestive question... Perhaps because we are a minority and this tickles their curiosity. You know, the women's house and what they may be associating us with. They're afraid of witches, but even that is not true any longer, because the children from the neighboring houses now come regularly to play here, and apparently they find it a lot of fun, they like it.

**And how do you deal with men, so they won't settle here for good? I mean, it's comfortable and there's always something to eat.**

This would completely change the situation, it's out of the question! So far there has not been a man who expressed the wish to move in here. So we have not been forced to think about how to deal with the problem. For men it's attractive, but from a distance. And then they, too, are afraid of witches...

## Interview with Cecilia

**Cecilia, how did you end up in the project?**

My situation is different from that of the other women in the project. I am from Peru. I have two children and am divorced. I have lived in this neighborhood for a long time, here nearby in a neighboring house, where I continue to rent an apartment even today. We cannot move to live within the house, because there are no free apartments. Otherwise, we are here most of the time, together with all others.

Luschka and Andrea's children went to the same kindergarten. I knew Andrea as a parent. Once in a while we would see each other when we brought our children or got them from the kindergarten, and we would then talk. This is how I've long known about the project, and was thinking to myself that it's a good way

for women to manage their lives themselves. In the following, I got separated from my husband. In the process of separation, when I didn't know what to do nor how, I was asked whether I could help out here in the house. I think that as women, we must help each other whenever we can. This is why I started coming here regularly to work. In this way, I had the opportunity to get to know the women, and we became friends. I liked life in the house, and realized that more and more I was becoming part of the community. Imperceptibly and little by little, I became integrated in the project. At some point, they proposed that I become a member of the community, despite the fact that I was living in a different place, and there was no way for me and the children to move into the house. Despite the project's spatial limitations, together with the women we found a form, a solution that suited us. Not only did this enlarge the community, but it broadened the idea of the project.

**What place does the project have in your life?**

The project is for me a great advantage in my life, for several reasons. The children feel well here, because they know other children in a similar situation and don't feel odd or isolated. There's also my friendship with the women, which is very important to me. But mostly, because here I have found true solidarity. This gives me strength to face the future and go on.

**How do the children react to the project?**

Quite well. I have talked with them a lot about this new situation, about this change in our lives, and I think that the children take this situation quite well, their mother in one place, their father somewhere else... And here in the community, my children have made many friends. They play together and have fun. I think they like it.

**In a few years, the children will have grown up and will perhaps want to live their own lives. Do you have any idea what you'd like to do after this? What is your vision of the future?**

I haven't given this concrete thought. My children are still small, and I've got plenty of time ahead of me to deal with this. But for



sure I know that I want to stay here, at least until my children have grown up. I don't know how the project will continue in the future, but I suppose that we'll think up something interesting, together. At present, my children are the most important thing in my life. To have time for them, to give them understanding and love, is of the foremost importance for any child, for it to grow up normally. If you give this, you get everything in return. And that's how the system is, you see how they are manipulating us. You need to work a lot, you think that in this way you'll get everything. Then you come home dead tired, you have no energy or time to speak with your children, to spend time fully with them. And this is the most important for them, otherwise you lose them. Here in the community, through the project we have the energy to give them this support. Communication and solidarity in the group are very important. When one of us has problems, we can help each other, materially or spiritually. When one of us comes home dead tired, the others try to spend time with her children, and the children feel that there is someone they can trust. This is not a family with blood ties, but it gives a feeling of a real family.

## Interview with Sophie

### How did you get involved in the project?

At the moment I work as an assistant in a pediatrician's practice. But four years ago I used to work in a collective practice, shared by four women doctors of different specializations and their assistants. One of them was a gynecologist, though I was not her assistant. The woman who used to live here in the house before me was a regular patient of this gynecologist's. This whole story started out in a quite funny way for me. One day, while at a check-up sitting on the gynecological chair, this said woman asked the doctor whether she knew about a single mother who might show interest in the project and who would at the same time fit into the community. The woman for some personal reason had to leave the project and was looking for someone to suggest as her successor in the house. As we were working, at some point the

gynecologist cried out: "Sophie, come quickly, I need you!" I was worried and didn't know how to react, since I was busy with other work. I was assisting with a surgical intervention and in the chaos I had not understood what it was about. I thought the gynecologist was calling me to help her with something, and I had to react immediately. After this, I had the opportunity to talk with the woman in detail about the project. It turned out that I had been living nearby, in the same neighborhood one street over, and that I had not known anything about the project all along and had not even suspected its existence. All night after this I was too excited to fall asleep. The explanations of the woman had left a strong impression on me. I thought a lot about my life and things around me, and the same night I decided to come here if they accepted me, to move into the house, because I understood even then that the quality of life here is incomparably better for a single woman with a child. That is why on the very next morning I found myself at this address. This is how everything started out for me.

### What does all this mean for you on a personal level?

I had been living for six months in Zurich. I was continuously running this place and that place, without ever finding time for anything. I had to work a lot, over 80 percent. I was constantly tired, and my time was never ever enough, neither for my child nor for myself. Before I moved into the house, my daughter Emi used to spend half of the time with me in Zurich, where she was going to a day nursery, and half of the time with my mother in the countryside. This entire chaos was making me nervous. It was good neither for the child nor for me. Through the project, I mainly found much calmness both for me and for the child. Now we are together at all times. I even find time for my hobbies, which I love. I sing, and I make sculptures in stone. I am also involved in Yoga. We have a Yoga teacher who comes here to us, and we practice collectively. I feel very well as a part of this community.

## Interview with Andrea

**You are the only one here who has lived in the house since the very beginning of the project. Can you tell us how you came up with the idea of this project and how you started it off?**

The actual idea for this project predates its realization by about three years. Some time was needed to arrive little by little at the materialization of these ideas. Two women, in similar situations, who knew each other and were alone with their children, expressed the wish to live together. They organized a summer holiday and invited all kinds of women with their children in a house they had rented, so they could spend some time together. Most of us didn't know each other. During the two weeks of vacation, all of us together formulated the idea of the project, and when we came back we continued to meet, discuss and work on the project. We needed to think about the form, the structure, the aims and the purpose. We needed to formulate all sort of things, to discuss also purely pragmatic questions, such as how much money we had at our disposal and whether we would manage to buy something together or whether we would have to look for a house that we could rent together. And we started looking for a place sufficiently big to fit us all, which corresponded to our ideas for the project and at the same time provided good conditions for raising our children. When our choice fell on this place, the house was almost empty, because the owners, a co-operative, wanted to renovate it. This meant that all of us could move in at the same time. Eight years ago, in the summer, we moved in with our children, and this was in a sense the actual beginning of the project. At the moment, there are nine women participating in the project, but we are not the same group of women as in the beginning. At the beginning, we were seven women, and there was more coming and going. In fact I am the only one remaining of the founders.

**Why did the others leave?**

That's a hard question! Don't you want to eat your soup first?

**Were there intrigues? I have myself taken part in a artist women's group, and behind the seemingly feminist**

**platform you would find a heap of commercial and personal careerist interests. Discord and intrigues were the constant background to our "purely artistic" work and activities. This stood in the way of communication within the group, and I also felt personally hurt by it. By this I don't want to imply that I do not believe there can be real solidarity, trust... between women.**

Oh, there are! There are intrigues! When I arrived, you were already talking to Cecilia. She was speaking quite highly and positively of the project, and this is how she feels about things. Of course now the situation in the house is rather different from what it was at the beginning of the project, much more positive for the community. Things evolve, and I was speaking about the beginning. Then, there was a lot of tension. For instance, at the beginning of the project two women left, saying they could not live in this way any longer, here together with the others, and another two had driven them to making that decision to leave.

**You had problems with hierarchies within the community?**

The beginning was very emotional, and there were various reasons for conflict. It was not so much the hierarchy in the group. Two of the women were commenting on the way the two others were raising their children, which is a sensitive topic for a mother.

**Are there any direct links between the project and some political movements or women's organizations?**

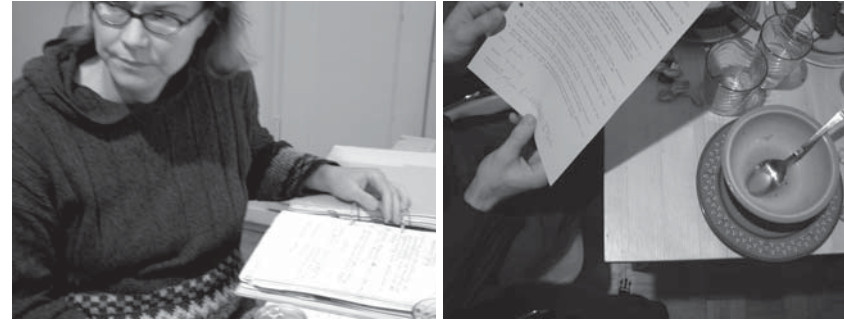
In the generation of the founders, we were more politically involved and were fighting for women's rights. At the beginning we were thinking that we could spread the idea, and that other projects could evolve in similar ways, benefiting from our experience. Such efforts are no longer being made. The project has no followers. We are looked upon as strong women, and people wonder how we manage. One generation ago it was harder, now it's easier, the situation has changed, and even this is not of prime importance any more, since our goals have also changed. The main goal we set in this project is to create a good environment for raising our children. Everything else has become of secondary importance.

**Doesn't this change the form of the project? Does the lack of clearly expressed political activity and of a link to women's movements not have a negative impact on the community?**

No, because from the outset the idea and the form have been sufficiently stable, and in the course of the project evolving, the idea and form have remained. To this day, since the inception of the project we have made only one single slight amendment to the statutes: It is now allowed for a single father to join the project. In any event, none has yet shown up. In a sense we do have some followers, but this is neither a group nor an organization, but two other women who have joined us. They do not live in the house, because there are no more free apartments here. But they have rented apartments in other buildings nearby and otherwise have joined the activities. But that was the end of our efforts to make the project grow.

**Given that it is the only such project in Switzerland and it has evolved so successfully and lastingly, I'm surprised that to this day nobody has taken professional interest in the community. How is the media's interest in the project?**

At the beginning we were an object of interest to the media. We were much more often in contact with them, although this was mostly due to the problems we initially had with the building, and the conflict with the owners. We were under pressure from them because of the overall renovation of the house, with which we did not agree. We ended up in court and contacted the media in an attempt to have the problem solved more to our advantage. In the course of time, the problems we had with the cooperative that owns the building evened out. As women who are trying to actively build something, we gradually won their sympathies, with the help of some people from the Social-Democratic Party. For the past three years, we have even received a solidarity donation from the cooperative. It covers our electricity and phone bill, furniture for the common apartment and material for the children to draw and be busy with (basteln). Some part of the cleaning of the common apartment is remunerated, and we are not paying rent for the common apartment any longer, in which we meet, talk, celebrate, raise our children together, etc.



**You mentioned that you have statutes. What type of questions do the statutes of the project cover? How is the community, how life in the house structured?**

Everything is very democratic. There is no hierarchy whatsoever in the community. Our statutes rather deal with the way in which a given question is to be solved. We hold meetings every two or three weeks, or more often if there are urgent questions to be solved. We discuss all sorts of questions in regards to how we organize our common life. We have a good documentation, with minutes of all the meetings. At the moment there are very few questions pertaining to tension between the women, next to none. That's how when a new woman wishes to join the project, not only does she have to get to know everyone, but the others all need to get to know her well. This can happen little by little, as she comes to the house for a few hours every day in the beginning and gradually joins in with the life and work in the community. After a time, all need to decide unanimously whether they want her as a member of the community. If one of us opposes this decision, we have to refuse her candidacy. One of the principles of the project is that all the women have to work equally much. For instance if one mother's children are old enough so they do not need special care, she has to join in with raising the smaller ones who do. If any one of us wishes to change the principles of the project in this way, it means that she has already half left the project. What is important is that there is work to be done and distributed, and there must be no privileges with regard to this.

## Rules at Goldregenweg

### Lunch table:

- Children must be announced, or excused, with the supervising woman.
- Friends of the children can be invited if the supervising woman agrees.
- The supervising woman is in the common apartment starting 11 a.m. (exceptions according to the schedule, or when her children are ill)
- Shoes have to be taken off at the door, and stowed away.
- Lunch is ready at 12:15 p.m.
- The table is lifted, and children may stand up not before 12:40 p.m.
- Each child takes its own dishes to the kitchen.
- Children brush their teeth after lunch.
- Menu, checklist, write down amount of shopping bill immediately if possible.
- Write a note for the shopping list of the next woman in case something runs out.
- The children are not forced to eat, but must at least try a tiny bit of everything.
- Frank and Manuel eat no meat, Frank eats no cheese, either, the Khodaris children eat no pork meat, Sergio eats almost no vegetables.
- General rule: little meat, little sugar and few finished products.
- Leftovers are stored in the fridge, where all can get something when they want. If the portion is large enough, a meal check goes onto the list.

### House rules:

- The house doors remain open during the day; at nights, at least Goldregenweg 27 should be locked.
- The laundry room must be locked at all times.
- Laundry can be done whenever the laundry room is free, even during the night or on weekends.
- Take the laundry from the clothes-lines promptly, so that there is room for the next person.
- Garden: for Goldregenweg 25, Andrea takes care of it; for the common apartment, everything is public; with Sawsan, the best is to ask her first.
- Pots on the window sills are officially forbidden; they should at least be securely fastened.
- Barbecues are officially forbidden, but we have not had complaints so far.
- Ladders on the balcony are also officially forbidden; however, in the common apartment we need them (despite complaints).

## Contract between the Association Goldregen and the women of the association

The undersigned woman hereby enters the following obligations towards the Association Goldregen:

- to transfer monthly 1/7 of the rent and incidental expenses of the common apartment to the account of the association.
- to transfer a deposit, defined by the association, to the account of the association. The deposit is restituted when moving out, upon deduction of all open debts.
- to pay one seventh of the co-operative capital for the common apartment. When a woman moves out, her share of the co-operative capital for the common apartment is restituted only after her successor has moved in.
- to participate in all expenses defined by the association with one seventh part of the expenses. Revenues, e.g., from the heating bill calculation of the common apartment, dividends from the share certificates for the common apartment, donations, etc., remain in the association's funds.
- to fulfill the babysitting chores defined by the association.
- to declare absences falling within the babysitting periods (school days) at least a month in advance, and agree on time with the women of the association on a replacement.
- when moving out, to notify in writing not only the landlords, but also the association, three months in advance as at the end of the month.
- upon exclusion from the association, to terminate the contract with the landlords with three months notice.
- in case of notice of termination outside the contractual deadlines, to notify the landlords only of a successor who has been selected by the association.
- not to enter into a subletting contract without the consent of the association, and notify the association of it at least three months in advance.
- during the three months notice, the babysitting chores continue to be mandatory, as well as the contribution to the costs of the common apartment.

Place:

Date:

Signature of the member of the association:

Signature of the president:



Resolution for the 23.  
Regular Conference  
of Delegates of the  
SDS, November  
1968, Hannover

**presented by the Action Council for the Liberation  
of Women, West Berlin**

1. The reproduction of the bourgeois separation between private life and social life in the SDS has long enough paralyzed its political work.
2. The SDS defines its political activities in a biased way, by making a taboo of any reflections on problems of personal development (which are not identical to the bourgeois ideas about them).
3. Although the campaigns of the SDS can be communicated rationally to women, they are lacking the preconditions for addressing the subjective needs of the women, whose oppression is experienced directly and most harshly in that 'private sphere' that is excluded from the political struggle. A double frustration awaits women in the SDS when they try to become politically active there, i.e., when they want to go beyond participating in demonstrations, when they want to hold presentations, speeches and submit contributions to discussions.
4. These initiatives of women are understood as transgressions, which they have to pay for by acknowledging the rules of the society of efficiency, aimed at compensating male traumata. The perverting of the social opportunities for men to compensate go from holding speeches through bar-room discussions all the way to lecturing pillow-talk.
5. The class division of the family with the man as bourgeois and the woman as proletarian – master and servant – implies the objective function of the men as the class enemy. The denial of the leader principle in the SDS is nothing but grotesque, given that each member of the SDS who is married or living in a long-term relationship is the leader and thus at the same time the exploiter of a family, or a family-like group. The terms class, class enemy, exploiters are auxiliary constructs that serve women in getting their act together, i.e., in reaching a level of gender specific solidarity which allows them in the political struggle to turn the sensual experience of this patriarchal society against this same society.
6. This implies not the 'politicizing' of private life, but rather the lifting of the bourgeois separation between private life and social life: the point is to understand the oppression within private life not as private, but as conditioned by political economy. It must be our aim to change private life qualitatively and to understand this change as a political action. This act of cultural revolution is part of class struggle.
7. This implies that the revolution, as the aim of class struggle, is not so much a question of taking over power as a question of realizing those bits of anticipated counter-society which are beginning to emerge in the existing bad society. This includes that the claim to happiness,

currently pushed away into private life, but not satisfied even there, must be fulfilled in a social action.

8. Personal development must thus become identical with a praxis that already now anticipates possible moments of a future society, a society that eroticizes all conditions of life and makes aggressions productive.

Excerpt from the  
speech of the  
"Action Council for  
the Liberation of  
Women"

**held by Helke Sanders at the 23. Regular  
Conference of Delegates of the "German Socialist  
Association of Students" (SDS), September 1968  
in Frankfurt.**

Dear women comrades, dear men comrades,

[...]

Comrades, your discussion events are unbearable. You are full of inhibitions, which you are forced to exteriorize as aggressions against comrades who have said something stupid, or something you already knew. The aggressions come only in part from political insight or the stupidity of the other side. Why don't you finally admit that you are shattered from last year, that you don't know any longer how to bear the stress of wearing yourselves out physically and intellectually in political actions without getting any pleasure out of it? Why don't you discuss, before planning new campaigns, how they could be realized at all? Why do you all buy Reich? Why do you speak here of class struggle, and at home of difficulties with your orgasm? Is that no topic of discussion for the SDS?

We refuse to continue to have any part in these repressions.

In our self-chosen isolation, we thus did the following: we concentrated in our work on women with children, because they are worst off. Women with children can only start again to think about themselves when the children have stopped continuously reminding them of what society is withholding from them.

Since political women have an interest in no longer educating their children according to principles of competitiveness, the consequence was that for the first time, we took seriously the expectation of society according to which it is women who are to educate the children. We took it seriously in the sense that we refuse to continue to educate our children following the principles of competition and the principle of efficiency, of which we know that their maintenance is the precondition to the very existence of the capitalist system.

We want to try to develop models of a utopian society already within the existing society. In this counter-society however, our own needs must finally find a place. In this sense, our concentration on education is not an alibi for our own repressed emancipation, but the precondition for solving our own conflicts productively. The main task consists in not driving our children on islands far off from any social reality, but rather, through supporting their own emancipatory efforts, to give our children the strength to resist, so that they may solve their own conflicts with reality in favor of a reality to be changed.

At this moment we already have five of these children's shops (Kinderläden); four more are being organized, and a few are at the planning stage. We are working on the model for the kindergarten of the FU (Free University Berlin), are organizing kindergarten teachers or helping kindergarten teachers organize themselves. On the theoretical level, we are trying to criticize the bourgeois principle of rationality and the patriarchal understanding of science.

We have such an immense success, so many people joining, that we can barely deal with this on an organizational level. [...]  
Frauenjahrbuch 1, Verlag Roter Stern (1975)



## Phone Interviews

Eight-hour performance, publicly broadcast live and in real time in the exhibition space of Shedhalle, Zurich, Switzerland, 8 December 2002, 2-10 pm. Moderator: Alain Kessi. Idea and selection: Dimitrina Sevova and Alain Kessi. Transcription of the texts from the recordings: Alain Kessi. Technical support: Emil Miraztchiev and Alice Cantaluppi. The interviews are part of a week prepared by Dimitrina Sevova and Alain Kessi in the context of the two-month project "Konsequenz" curated by Frederikke. Hansen.



## High and Low Technologies for Interviews Across Space

ALAIN KESSI AND DIMITRINA SEVOVA

We were looking for a way to present the Communication Front book in the context of the “Konsequenz” project, a way that would go beyond the stereotyped and well-known presentations of books and media platforms in an exhibition space and in front of a large audience. This is how we came to the idea of phone interviews as a performance creating a situation in which the visitors would be involved in an engaging meeting – something more than a verbal process of consuming artistic objects.

Via the methods of this old media, in relation to the Internet – the telephone –, we worked out an action with interviews publicly broadcast in real time, in which the visitors would be grabbed and thrown directly in the role of witnesses. Extending the real exhibition space where the objects are exhibited and the ideas outlined, we created a situation in which the theme of East-West would be confronted with the platform of the “Konsequenz” project, which investigates the correspondence between personal values and actual behavior.

Inevitably we stumbled on questions to do with the identity of the artist. Starting out with the personal, we had a “look” at the personal space of the artist or curator, at the space in which the objects and ideas are being prepared – their workday life and social background in which their everyday efforts as an art worker take place. Surfing between the personal and the public, we sought to personalize the discussion and explode the geography of the exhibition space.

The working language of the interviews is English. No direct translation was used for the visitors from English to German or back, or between some other language and yet another, or between

the moderator and the persons interviewed. At any rate both the participants and the public found themselves pressed, entangled, pulled into the diverse interpretations of the translation. In most cases the persons interviewed were forced to translate their ideas, to try to express themselves in a language that is to them rather formal. A working language different from the language they use in their everyday life and work. Most of the visitors were faced with the same problem, as they were forced to find an approach to a foreign point of view, conceptual framework or logical structure, but also to concentrate on the very process of translation. This leads us to the ambiguous language question well-known from networked communities like the different Internet societies, the globalized conference tours relating to various disciplines of knowledge, or the international art exchange.

Not only authors directly included in the CFront book were invited to participate in the phone interviews, but also other artists, theorists and activists involved in this East-West discussion. For this version of their publication we had to select and abridge, and are publishing here only a few of the interviews made. In our selection we were led by our wish to present those of the persons interviewed who are not only involved, in their artistic work, in the East-West topic, but who have also personally chosen to situate themselves, in terms of the material conditions of their lives, between these geographical and cultural spaces. Some of them were born in Eastern Europe and live and work in the West, or the exact opposite.

The full version of all interviews can be found at the address <<http://konsequenz.cflow.net>>.

We thank all those who have accepted to participate in the phone interviews: Athanasia Kyriakakos, Güven İncirlioğlu, Darko Fritz, Dimos Dimitriou, Susanna Paasonen, Nina Czegledy, Houben Cherkelov and Georgi Tushev, Iliyana Nedkova.



## Phone interview with Darko Fritz

Media artist from Croatia based in Amsterdam about life as an artist and some “Balkan things”

ALAIN KESSI

We find Darko in his studio in Amsterdam, where he picks up the phone immediately.

**It's great that we are able to reach you between two trips.**

I've come back here to Amsterdam about a week ago, after a long stay in Zagreb. These days there is the World InfoCon conferences, and Zoran from ApsolutNO is here, and Eda from Kuda Center in Novi Sad. They're at my place for a few days, and we go every day to exhibitions and symposiums and social events.

**Can you first describe the space you are in?**

I'm at my home in Amsterdam, which I just renovated half a year ago. I tried to make the design as minimal as possible, because I'm overcrowded with things, since my home is also my studio. I'm sitting at a desk which is some four meters long, and which has plenty of technical equipment on it, like a scanner, an old-fashioned phone/telefax, which I'm speaking from. In front of me I have a 17-inch monitor, a keyboard and on the left side I have a laptop, and there is a desktop computer, a big huge laser printer, very old, from '94 I think, still works great; and there's another two inkjet printers, and then this Ethernet hub because all devices are connected, and some manuals and some Betacam tapes... this is like what I can see now.

And there are no pictures on the wall, because I have an overload of pictures anyhow in my life, so I decided to display just a bare minimum on my walls. As a color I chose a yellowish color, because my previous walls were white and because I'm a hard-core smoker. I think this nicotine yellow is kind of fitting. It will last a few years longer than the white walls.

When I turn around, I see my only picture on the wall. It is a digital print on canvas, it's quite big, it's like 1.70 by 1.20, and it's...

**This is your print?**

It's my print; it's my own artwork. It's a digital print on canvas, from the series “Internet porno weekends.” It's actually a hard-core porn image, very manipulated. Some people have spent hours in this room without realizing what it is. It looks quite abstract.

And that's about all, except for the small coffee corner there with a low table and a very nice sixties-like very plastic-like fauteuil and sofa. That was a gift from a neighbor of mine. He meant to throw it away when I moved into this apartment, and he asked me, “Hey, Darko, would you like to have this sofa?” And when I saw it, I just like flipped out, it's the most beautiful sixties, square-shaped sofa, and it's very... it's made of plastic, so it's a little bit torn, after all these years in use. So I made cushions, I put some extra silver on, and added some silver candles on top of it.

**So do you feel comfortable, in this space?**

Yes, a lot, yeah. It's great! At the beginning of the year, I put a lot of efforts into it. Because I'm from Zagreb, and I have two notions of home... at least – one in Zagreb and the other in Amsterdam. There are two places where I feel at home. And basically, my life as an artist and whatever... creator, whatever I am, that I'm traveling all the time, as probably you do as well, and that's... over the past twelve years I've spent like let's say half-half: half in Zagreb and half in Amsterdam. And I'm traveling many-many places... The previous time I was on my half-year shift in Croatia, it turned out that I had traveled to ten countries within those six months. That means crossing the borders twice a month.

**What made you choose Amsterdam as the second half of your life?**

When I came to Amsterdam I did not plan to stay. I came in 1990, for post-graduate studies at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam. At the time, this was the only



academy as far as I know, in Europe at least, which had a media art department. This may sound strange nowadays, because just about every art academy has a media art department. But at the time, not so long ago, in 1990, this was not the case. I came here to study, and it was great... At the time, media art meant all disciplines that are not traditional – performances, installations, any use of prints, photo, video, electronic media... anything that lies outside the traditional disciplines of painting, drawing and sculpture.

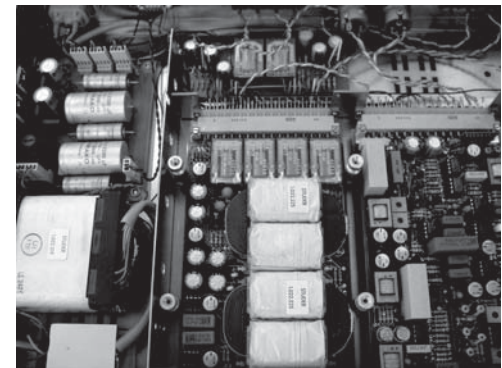
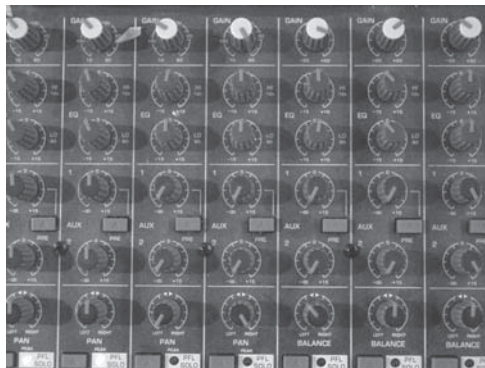
During my first year at the academy, the war broke out in former Yugoslavia. And then, it was... a little strange, you know. I watched television, called friends in Croatia. Then I made a short trip, just to see if everything is ok – and came back to finish my studies. It was such madness in Croatia. The war was still going on in '92. I decided to make two homes: one in Zagreb, and one in Amsterdam. From then on I was kind of semi-legal. I didn't have the right to work legally. Through a private lawyer, I had applied for a status, but the Dutch authorities held back their decision for more than a year. They were supposed to answer within half a year, yes or no. But the Dutch authorities didn't

And I found my way, working and living in two cities. This in itself is out of the ordinary. No country in the world provides a status for people living in two countries. The system likes to control, so you need an address. You can have a second address, but one has to be your main address. I lead a sort of double life. I have double health insurance, I pay double taxes, and so on. If you have your address and your fixed telephone number and income, they can control you easily. If your existence is spread over two countries, this is harder. Authorities on both sides would need to collaborate, and this hardly happens.

### What position does work take in your life?

Huge. Too large, I think. I kind of dedicate my life to what I'm doing.

Take the following example: A friend kept inviting me to visit him in Hong Kong. Last February I figured that I had some money and could afford it, so I went. Mostly, when I travel, it's connected to work. And that's great. It's the nicest part of the profession, traveling a lot. You don't make a lot of money, actually hardly any with the kind of art I'm doing. But you meet people



know how to deal with people from Ex-Yugoslavia, because there was still war going on and they hadn't made a clear policy about that. So I was in a kind of gray zone, neither legal nor illegal, but I couldn't apply for a phone, and couldn't find a job. I ended up getting a positive answer, and so I've been legally in Holland since.

you like, travel great places and have a great time, do interesting projects. That's worth much more than some cash, I think. If I had the cash, I would probably invest it to create such a situation in which I can travel, though short of cash.

At the same time, when I travel I'm never a tourist. I don't know what it means to be a tourist. When I get somewhere, it's

into a work environment. This time I decided to go to Hong Kong as a tourist. When I got there, they were selling really good digital cameras at a great price. So far, I had been working with an old Hi-8 camera, which is quite... great, but I now have this new Firewire stuff, and I was tempted to switch to a digital camera, and Hong Kong's the place to buy one. I bought the camera, I said, ok, let's try it out, I made some shots, and then on my way I started meeting all these media artists from Hong Kong. I ended up going to one appointment after the other, to hang out with these people, and gradually I found myself in the same old working situation, talking with these people about work. I felt it could be interesting to document their statements on video, and I ended up recording something like twenty interviews, all taken on the fly, at exhibitions and such. I then called up the guys at "Transfer", a broadcast on Croatian national television. I occasionally work with them, when I come across something interesting, I shoot it on video, they edit it, and it becomes a two, five, ten minute item on their program.

That's on national television, which is great, because it's broadcast nation-wide. Even in Novi Sad, they tell me, they get the signal, and also in Bosnia, in some neighbor countries, this is great, to have access to the mainstream media with such content. I've done stuff on the "Next 5 Minutes" festival, this kind of stuff, media art and political activism. Even during the Tudjman's HDS regime, with its right-wing, old-fashioned centralistic view of the media, and tight control of 95% of the media including of course national television, nobody cared about culture, so that nobody took a closer look at "Transfer". Forty minutes every two weeks, you could place anything you like, hard-core criticism of the system, what have you. This is different from the West. There, you have a clear division between mainstream media and alternative media such as Indymedia. In Croatia, you could reach large audiences with radical stuff on the most controlled medium, national television.

**So you didn't manage to become a tourist in Hong Kong...**

No... the usual problems. I did this piece. It will be broadcast this summer - a 35-minute documentary about media art in Hong Kong. I really enjoyed meeting all these people, hanging

out with them, having dinners, discussing stuff, having parties, participating in panels there, showing my works on some panel and... no, I didn't succeed... a little bit I've done, like, a guided tour, a day in Macao in China, this kind of stuff. But I like my work too much, to answer your question.

**What context would you need in order to realize your dreams? You say that there's too much work in your life. How do things have to change so that you can realize your dreams?**

Oh, I don't know... there's always... hmmm dreams, I have... I could be ambitious about dreams, I mean... there are plenty of private dreams, plenty of working, professional dreams. In terms of professional dreams, I'd really like to be able to find better methods to realize my work, whether in Holland or in Croatia. Holland has too much bureaucracy, while in Croatia money is lacking and there is too much chaos. This means that there is no perfect environment in which to realize the projects I'm involved in. I do put a lot of efforts in this work, and it's not easy. And maybe this is my wish, maybe not a dream, to have these better... better circumstances. Although I suppose this applies to everybody. In terms of private dreams, there's plenty of stuff. I'd like to have my place in Zagreb, something I don't have now. I have a random address in Zagreb. And my dream... I don't know what would be my dream... it may be to... I like laziness! We keep talking about work, but I think laziness is the greatest thing you can achieve. I can be lazy. I can switch off, even if sometimes I work very hard. I have this... I'm very proud of myself having this great capacity, of turning, switching off everything and just being lazy for a day, two, a week or so.

Ana Peraica is one of those people you can spend lazy time with. We spent a week this summer in a weekend house just doing nothing. Like nothing nothing. One week... We had the seaside 50 meters from there. We were with another friend of ours, Vladimir Pakotin. He's a great programmer, also on the Syndicate and other mailing lists, and he's a great friend and great artist, and a great VML programmer and, yeah, great guy. It's his weekend house. Vladimir is another one of these great lazy persons. You work when you work, very focused and very concentrated, very hard. And when you don't work, you just

really don't work, without any feeling of guilt, you drink and smoke joints, you just enjoy, talk about something else... and it's great. It's my Balkan genes, working one hundred percent.

In Western society, you're forced to concentrate on your work. You are what your work is. Especially here in Holland. It's that same protestant working ethics which rules over the business flow around the world. I found it fascinating when I heard that protestants find you are closer to paradise the more you work, the more capital you accumulate. To me it was a strange concept, because I had always felt Christianity to be linked to poverty, to heart and mind and a belief system, but not to the material world. On the contrary, the less you have, the closer you are to God.

**Does this difference between religious backgrounds, and the work ethics that comes from it, translate into concretely different approaches to work in your context in Croatia and in your context in Amsterdam?**

Yeah, it's entirely different. Of course, I'm talking on the level of stereotypes, of generalizations. All over the Balkans I've found the same type of easiness about life. Let's forget about work for now, sit and relax, have a glass of wine and enjoy. We are rich or we are not... it doesn't matter. I've come across this same pattern in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Croatia, which are quite different countries in other respects. It's a Balkan thing, perhaps connected to the South, to Southern countries. The less you work and the more money you have... that's great. You work for results and not for the sake of working. Work sucks. But you do it, because you need the money, or you need to achieve some result. In the North of Europe, on the other hand, you have to constantly work. The result doesn't matter. In Holland, I found that artists will go to their studio every day, at times pretending to do something. There's a huge self-discipline, working habits. When you sit down for a coffee with these people, they're not relaxed. They've booked exactly half an hour for the coffee, and cannot help but speak about work. Then they have to move on, back to work, have a deadline to meet.

Of course, this is all not black and white – people in Croatia like this, people in Holland like that. But there are differences,

and it's great to have these differences, to enjoy the differences and get the best of both worlds. At times I've made use of the chaos in the Balkans to realize projects I could never have done in Holland. When you do a project in Croatia, you won't get a large budget for it. But the lack of regulations can help getting things done without a budget. For one artistic intervention in urban space I got my own tramway in Zagreb, number 17, which was labeled "time=money" as its destination, and was just circling round and round around one and the same square. People would get on, it was a free ride, and after some minutes they would find themselves at the same stop. If you want to realize such a project in Amsterdam, you'll need backing by a solid network of institutions, all very mainstream and powerful, with a lot of money, let's say like the Stedelijk Museum, and after two years of work, lots of paperwork, maybe you'll realize the project with an enormous budget. In Zagreb, it's possible to arrange the same intervention with a total of three appointments, to explain the project to the guys at the Zagreb Electric Tramway Company. They liked the project and said: "Ok, we'll arrange that." I said "Great." So we did it in something like two weeks, with no money at all. It's possible, you know, it's so chaotic, it's not a regulated country, and it's possible to realize such stuff. That's a huge advantage of Balkan countries. There is chaos, just take that as a given. They're chaotic countries. It is great. I like it. Everything has its good and bad sides. In Holland everything is very regulated. On the other hand, there's a great system for subsidies. You can get subsidies for amazing projects. That's great. Nothing like that exists in the Balkans.

## Phone interview with Athanasia Kyriakakos

Old and new media artist from the USA and Greece, currently based in Greece, about the artist's multiple roles in society

ALAIN KESSI

We catch Sia on her mobile phone in the midst of animated activity at the Yarmouth Hippodrome <[http://fo.am/txoom/2002\\_hippodrome/08-12](http://fo.am/txoom/2002_hippodrome/08-12)>. You can get a glimpse of the space Sia set up for the project she mentions in the interview, in Plovdiv at CFront 01, on <<http://cfont.org/cf01/workshop01/ssbradley/cfpeople/ima/exh/ex5.jpg>>.

**Hello Sia, how are you?**

I'm great, I'm in Great Yarmouth disassembling a circus. I was with a group called txOom, we were performing in this mixed reality environment, and we're just disassembling it. Today is the closing.

**Is this a place where you work?**

Nononononono. I'm just collaborating with the group. I was performing the entire week.

**So Sunday is a working day for you?**

No. We built this together. This is a collaborative effort.

**Can you describe the space you are in?**

Right now I'm in the middle of a circus ring with a big star in the middle, a swimming pool underneath the boards. There's red and yellow and blue curtains all around. And there used to be projection screens. We projected images that were distorted and affected the audience that entered the space.

**Why are you there? What led you to this collaboration?**

A common interest: to affect the audience and allow the audience to affect us. The f0AM group creates spaces that are interactive

and change with sound and image as the audience moves through the space. The work that I usually do involves coffee readings – performative interventions that are constantly changing through the interaction of the audience. They revolved around the interaction with the audience, and how the audience affects me, and I create an extended family out of them.

**Can you present the people you work with, and perhaps also they want to present themselves?**

I don't know if they are prepared for this, but let me see if I can find the leader of the group, which is Maja Kosmanovic. Where is she? I'm walking through the circus, through some green curtains, and... I found a person named Nat who's very involved, who was building the space, collaborating with us. Maybe I'll ask her whether she wants to contribute.

**Do you want to present yourself? We are here in a live performance in Zurich, and you are also in a performance setup...**

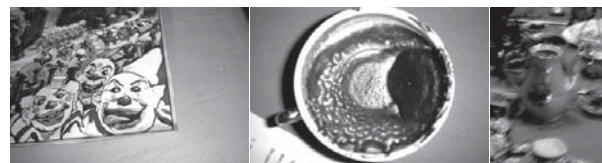
Nat: Yeah, actually we're deconstructing at this very moment. So we're taking down fabrics dangling from the whole circus space, and ... unplugging everything, and there's like fifteen people running around not knowing exactly what to do but somehow doing it.

**What is, or was, your role in the whole setup?**

Nat: I am part of txOom Holland, it's txOom Holland and txOom Belgium, and they were the initiators of this event. And I'm a writer and a critic, and I've been doing user research the whole week. I've been interviewing people about how they experienced the environment. I've been interviewing people the whole time, and asked them about their response, and there'll be a DVD and a publication about this project.

You'll find more information on <<http://fo.am>>.

[The conversation gets interrupted by a technical line problem. We call again.]





Hello Sia, I think we got interrupted, but we're back online.

Oh, great, I can hear you better now, too.

**What are your plans after this project? We understand you are breaking up the setup now.**

I'm leaving for Greece in a few hours, where I'm preparing for the Venice Biennial actually, which has been an accumulative research project, and actually I'm going to be representing Greece for it. So it's gonna be like six months of hard work until summertime.

in my life, to just seeing everybody else's dreams and trying to realize them with them. Even this research that I've been doing, like... you can see how people all want... desire just about the same things. I mean, we all have our basic needs, first of all, happiness and love. And so... how do we achieve these things? So for me, it has to do... through my art work, really, and I've decided that our life as people is just marked by the people that we meet along the way. So what I do is try to have a positive effect on other people, and in return, I get that back. And that's what is my biggest, really, my biggest dream in my life, is to connect. And I think



**You'll have to tell us all about it as it goes along.**

Actually it's a project I started with CFront when I was invited by you to come and participate in the workshop that you were doing in Plovdiv, where I set up a video installation about dreams and daily life in Greece, and I interviewed back then people who lived in Plovdiv to tell me their dreams, and this has continued for the past two years, so wherever I go, I try to go out into the street and interview people about what they see at night and record their daily life simultaneously. So it's been an ongoing-process piece. And this is part of what's going to be presented as well this summer.

**We are also dealing with dreams here. Not so much the dreams at night, but the dreams in life. Can you tell us something about your dreams, and the context in which you think you can realize them?**

My own personal dreams evolve from anything from childhood aspirations, who I want to be and what I want to accomplish

I'm doing ok with that, and it makes me very happy. But because we live in a society that disconnects us at this point, and creates situations in which we are not sharing any more.

**What position does work take in your life?**

Work as in a way to make money or work as in art work?

**Whatever... well, work as being busy, well... I don't know. Perhaps you don't want to distinguish like this between personal life and professional activities... work as in professional activities, I intended to say.**

I involve myself in activities that have to do with people, like... whether it is in my art work, where I create performative spaces where people can interact with me, or when I am teaching, because that's the way, professionally, how I actually am able to make a living, because you... when I'm in the classroom, I give to my students a lot, but I think in return I get even more. It's that

sort of situation that I try to achieve also in my art work, where it's a give and take situation. So, does that answer the question?

**Sure... but also, how does your work relate to your family? ... to your family life?**

Oh, it's very evolved. First of all, my art work is... I try to recontextualize daily ritual in Greece which I borrow from my family, or other things that I have learned within my family, within the people who have brought me up, the villages that I have grown up in. I use all those things in order to create the new spaces, so I take something as simple as coffee reading, or when you read, drink coffee with your family, and then read the coffee grounds. And I create a performance out of that, it's creating a really intimate space in a public arena. So, I use everything that my family has given me. And I also believe that very simply, like that all the things that my grandmother knew how to do are embedded in my head, like I can do the exact same things. So, it's really important to me. I don't separate it.

**How do you feel as a woman artist in Greece? Are there any problems relating to your work from this?**

Well, it's very easy to be, first of all, when you are a woman, to... your work to be labeled as feminine. But... and in Greece, there is enough discrimination anyway, because it is a bit of a sexist society..., but also most of the curators in Greece happen to be women, which helps incredibly.

**That sounds pretty good, yes.**

So, the best curators in Greece are women. And very powerful women at that, too. I think if your work is honest and you work really hard..., you might have to work a little extra, but it gets recognized, with time. Yes, with time. And it's about patience and persistence and really believing in what you're doing, and making it as truthful as possible.

**You have lived for some time in the United States, so you have two contexts in which you have been working, an American context, and the Greek context, perhaps even more contexts. How do these relate to each other? How are they different?**

**What are the differences in opportunities, in one and the other, in the way of working?**

Well... well, being an... being an American, there's an efficiency in the workspace, and there is opportunity that is equal. In Greece, it's really about whom you know. Unfortunately. There have been... for me, in my life, trying to sort out being an American woman and having all those choices in a free society, and also being a Greek woman and all the expectations that your family might impose on you, or that society might impose on you, has been a bit difficult at times. But at some point I found some peace in the fact that I was a person, and I could make choices for myself, and I left behind, from the Greek, let's say, side, the things that I did not like, and I made the choices that I wanted in my life, in the way I want to lead my life. So it's been a real strength in my work, the schism that has created me in many ways. It's... I also have a real critique about America and its policies, and especially its foreign policies, so I think having somewhat of the... an outside approach as well, being Greek, I can see that, and being there, and living in Greece, gives me a double perspective – really, living in the Balkans, not just Greece.

**Your description of Greece reminds a lot of Bulgaria, or other countries of the East. To what extent is Greece part of the West? It's part of the European Union, but how do you position Greece in this geography?**

It's a really interesting question, but for me, Greece is somewhere in-between. Greece is between the West and between the East. Even in aesthetics. Greek aesthetic is... you can say that... shall I say that very Turkish sort of look that persists through the Balkans. The music which is part of the Balkans. The food, we can find some Greece and goes East and a little bit North. But yes, it's a Western country. And it's... being part of the European economy, even within the past two years, that I have returned to Greece, I have seen an accelerated change in Greece, not necessarily good, sometimes, because people leave behind values, ways of life, ways to communicate, that had... that were unique to Greece, and which made Greece the special place that it is. And now they become much more individualistic and work-oriented and family-oriented, and things that made Greece

strong are being left behind. And they're adopting new ways, and none of this... that are not necessarily good for them in terms of defining themselves. Even the way they dress is... much more... less individualistic, they're starting to all look alike, you know, the shops are filled with the same pairs of pants. Where has the personal taste gone? I don't know?

**Sounds a bit like Bulgaria und Communism, when you had no choice when you went to the shops, you had only sort of uniforms.**

Yes, we're going into a Western uniform, is what we're going in, and that's a very extreme comment, you know like a way of life, how many hours do we work a week? When is the appropriate time for somebody to go into retirement? You know... I disagree with a lot of these policies. Yet on the other hand maybe this is a change that Greece needs to go into... in order to go forward.

**How do you personally intend to go forward? What are your ideas? In what direction do you want to develop your work, yourself? ... for the future?**

Hmmm... big question. My... I think I'm one of those people that observe, borrow, and then throw back out. So, what I want to do is just... see the world, feel how it's built, and learn about the people one by one basically, and use all this knowledge to create the next round of work. Each time, using things that are familiar to all of us, and then just recontextualizing them somehow. I'm throwing them back into the city, taking them from villages and bringing them into a cosmopolitan space. Or taking something from a cosmopolitan space and taking it out into a village, and mixing that sort of reality and focusing on what is human and basic to all of us.

**How would you wish the future of the society in Greece to be? You were talking about which direction it has taken but what would you wish?**

I don't know, perhaps... very difficult question... I would want people to think before they acted I mean it is huge demands and a big critique and for example when the option of credit cards opens up, instead of everybody rushing to buy a credit card, figure out what it means to have a credit card, and owe money

back to a bank for the next thirty years. People are just being pushed... not pushed around, but presented with this modern economy, and they're buying into it without thinking about it. I don't have a problem with it, I just want... I would like for the Greek and the whole world to be better educated in their choices. Perhaps that's what I would want.

**You say that you work with people and that people and their reactions are very important to you. This is on a micro-level, let's say. Do you think your work can somehow help on a more macro-level. How do you make the link between this micro-level of working with people very closely, how do you make the link to politics or social questions at large?**

I think that we can make a difference one person at a time. And that person can touch another person. For me it's... in politics or at a bigger scale, I can't push that, but just put the idea in somebody's head, and through conversation or through gesture, through motion, I think it's enough sometimes for it to go further to the next person. And at that point it becomes something bigger and broader.

**What do you think the artist's place in society is, or role in society?**

We have multiple roles. And we play multiple roles in order to exist within this fighting. I mean, first of all, it's to do, to be a reflection of it, to reflect back the way we understand our community, and our society and the politics, create a... it's a bit... create a critique about what is happening and find a way to express it in a way that people can understand it at many different levels. We do multiple things, from PR for ourselves to becoming engineers and all, architects, we're teachers, we are advocates for all sorts of causes. We're newpeople, reporters, we... I don't know, like... we're in everything.

## Phone interview with Nina Czegledy

New media artist, curator and theorist from Canada, whose projects often have a strong link to Eastern Europe, about the importance of “pragmatic dreams”

ALAIN KESSI

When we call her, Nina is in Tirana holding a digital story-telling workshop under the title *Windows and Curtains* with women of the Cultural Center Lindart <[http://www.lindart.org/project\\_info/projekte02/index.html](http://www.lindart.org/project_info/projekte02/index.html)>. We got to know Nina years ago through her series of video production events *Crossing Over* <<http://www.ljudmila.org/co>>.

**What is the situation in Tirana? It's difficult, I understand from your e-mail. You don't have electricity part of the time.**

Well, I think that – first of all, hello everybody! – I think that it is not something that is just a temporary difficulty. In Tirana, it's generally about two hours, but the rest of Albania has several more hours of power... not having power, daily, so everybody has to kind of organize their life around when is power, when is not power, and some of the shops have generators in order to maintain electricity throughout the day. But I think it is a thing which people try to live with and try to make the best of it here.

**Has this been going on for a long time, or is this...**

It has been going on. I was here a little over a year ago and it was... actually, then it was even worse in Tirana in terms of electricity.

**Yes. You mentioned that you are in Tirana for a workshop. Can you tell us more about it?**

Well, we are doing a workshop about digital storytelling, with young women artists. These are actually students in the Art Academy in the last year, and while they are quite well informed about many issues and they are very creative people, they didn't have any access, or very little access, to technology and computers.

So, consequently, we are trying to do a very basic workshop on digital storytelling, local stories, their own stories, through text and still images, which to incorporate into our collaborative Web site.

**What topics are you working on?**

We have a theme for this workshop, and the theme is windows and curtains. And this is a metaphor for the windows and curtains in the everyday life and the general life of Albanians and the people of Tirana.

**What is your impression of the political situation in Tirana? You know several countries of Eastern Europe, of the former Eastern Bloc quite well, so you have some comparison. How would you situate the development of the situation over the years in Albania?**

I have very little exact details about the political landscape here, because what I see is mostly what I see on the street and talking to people, and what I do see is the economic changes, and I see a tremendous building fever, there is construction all over the place, and the city has a mayor here called Edi Rama, and Edi Rama is actually an artist by education and origin, and he has done a number of things which many people welcome, because he decided to clean up the river which is flowing through here, and tries to green the city, and tries to get rid of some of the small shacks, which were selling, you know, fast food, and Coca Cola, and so forth, in order to get a city into a more presentable and more esthetically pleasing way.

**You would say that there is hope around, when you speak to people? They see a future?**

Definitely, I mean those people who are in my workshop are young women in their early twenties, and they are very positive. They would like to enter the workforce as soon as they graduate, and they already have jobs, and through their graphic design, they are able to get jobs in advertisement, and print publication, and they do hope that they can continue this.



**Can you describe the space you are in?**

I am staying with a very lovely landlady, who has a few rooms she rents, and this is a very clean, very nice house. On the other hand, you cannot enter it from the main street, you have to go in to back alley, and then surprisingly, there is a garden, and behind the garden there is this nice, clean house. And this is where I'm staying. And where I'm working is Lindart, and Lindart is actually a Pro Helvetia project.

**Oh, Pro Helvetia seems to be very busy in Eastern Europe currently.**

It definitely is, and so, Pro Helvetia is... has been for the last two years providing operating funds to this very unique organization, which is generally focusing on women artists and not just arts, but also social activism, and through art often, and it's very unusual and unique here, to have projects of this nature. So Elen Laperi, who is the director of this, she's a very outstanding pioneering woman in my eyes, and they already have organized a major exhibition of women artists from the Balkans. And they are working on other international projects that they want to bring in. Artists not only from the Balkans, but internationally.

**You are quite mobile, you travel a lot.**

Yes, I just came back from China and Japan... and so forth, yes I am very happy that I can work in many places, it's a big fortune in my life.

**What do you work on at the moment?**

I am working on my own work, which has to do with electromagnetism, and it's a collaborative project about using the Aurora Borealis, that Northern Light, as a metaphor, and I also curate some exhibitions, and touring projects. Most of these start from Canada, because that's where I am able to get some steep funding, and also a lot of support. So I am working now on a touring exhibition between Canada, New Zealand and Australia, which is supposed to open in February.

**What is your incentive for doing this kind of work?**

Because I firmly believe that despite of artists' e-mail and online communication, physical presence once in a while is very important, and we have to do our best to bridge across cultures.

**And more generally, what position does work take in your life?**

That's my major reason for my existence, because my work and my private life totally intertwined with each other. I work with my friends, and my... it's just the same thing, actually.

**Yes. And so what would be the dreams of your life, and in what context could you realize those?**

Well, because I'm independent, I don't have to follow institutional policies, consequently I generally dream up a concept, and I share it with some people, and together with people like I was at CFront with you, or when I am working with Iliyana Nedkova, and on Crossing Over, or when I am working with others, because I couldn't do anything if it wouldn't be for all these other people. Anyway, so we dream up something, and every body says, this is impossible, you cannot do it... and then we do it.

**That sounds really good...**

I am an optimist.

**So you think that the dreams you have, you do realize them.**

I am a pragmatic dreamer, you know. So most of these dreams can be realized. It's a question of time and money. And somehow I try to get some money.

**Are there moments when you do not work? We hear that you have a house South of the Alps, in Northern Italy. Do you go there to work, or do you do something else there?**

I go there to read.

**To eat?**

To read and eat and drink.

**To read and eat and drink...?**

But I go very seldom. It's rented out, because otherwise I couldn't keep it. So I go there every year once.

## Phone interview with Houben Tcherkelov and Georgi Tushev

Artists from the Bulgarian radical arts scene based in New York about their desire to "live in a real world"

ALAIN KESSI

After quite some time of ringing on the other side, Houben picks up the phone. Tushev joins us for a bit despite being down with the flu.

**Can you describe the space you are in?**

HT: Right now I'm here in a huge loft, it's like 7000 sqft, which is pretty much like 300 m<sup>2</sup> or something like that. It's a former factory, a meal factory, I don't know. It's our life and work space. We're a couple of guys.

**Together with Georgi Tushev?**

Yes, he's over there. Do you want to hear from him?

Yes, sure.

GT: Hi!

**How do you feel in New York?**

At the moment I'm ill. This place is huge, but it's cold!

**Are you happy in New York?**

Oh, yes, definitely... it's interesting, that's the right definition for it. I don't know if I'm happy or not.

**Why are you there? What made you choose to go to New York?**

It's a long, long... list of reasons to be here. First... ok the galleries are here. The center of the art world, if we can talk about a center... the most interesting stuff happens here. And I'm interested in New York and New Jersey hardcore, the bands, so I'm quite often at some dance and concerts.

**Which bands?**

... I have a girlfriend here. Couple of reasons. It's enough, right? My friends are here also, my best friends.

**In Bulgaria, you were a superstar. Why did you choose to leave and go to New York?**

Really? Is it possible to be a superstar in Bulgaria?

HT: In Sofia, everything is fake, so I was kind of a fake superstar. Everything is fake, nothing is real over there. So... we decided just to move, to leave this... Bulgaria. I don't really feel myself like a Bulgarian artist. I mean, I'm Bulgarian, but I don't think it's something very important, to be Bulgarian, or Eastern European, stuff like that. I don't like the Bulgarian art, or stuff like that. This conceptual or... I don't know. It's so stupid; it's ridiculous, really. So, right now I'm pretty much happy to be here... I feel great.

**Do you have a possibility in the United States to be the advertising faces of Lucky Strike?**

Oh, no, no, no. No, no. Nothing, no. Simply I work doing interior design, stuff like that, just like pay job, but... no, to work for Lucky Strike... first of all, it's pretty much illegal to advertise cigarettes, tobacco, tobacco products here.

**Yes, the times are achanging...**

It's very, very cruel... it's... actually, I quit smoking, like, five months ago.

**Congratulations!**

Yes, it's not... it's not healthy.

**To what extent do you feel "radical", in the States? I mean, you certainly were in Sofia.**

Oh, radical. I don't know. It's pretty tough to be radical because everything is so radical here. I mean, the most radical part coming from the government, from... you know, the military guys. So the artists here is like, not that radical... it can't be. You know, it's very tough competition. But you got artists like Eminem, you know,

Flare, stuff like that... for visual artists it's not that... you know, it's not that possible.

**You are being missed on the Bulgarian scene! You left a hole there when you left.**

Look, I don't know. There is a lot of good artists over there, and a lot of good persons, too. I don't think that there's going to be a huge problem, no, not at all. I mean, I spent – and George also – like ten years to doing art and stuff like that and finally... so what? We're supposed to move, I mean, it's nothing... nothing really could be possible happen over there. So, I'm pessimist about that.

**What are your dreams in life, and in what context you think you can realize them?**

Hmm, I'd like to earn money doing art, and to live like a normal person. If it's possible at all, I don't know. But... to live in a normal country. I mean, I don't want to be afraid because of my life or life-style, stuff like that. I don't... simply I'd like to live normal, to travel a lot and... you know... to have fun.

**What is for you the American dream?**

Wow... to be successful, to... I mean, to be able to sell artwork for a price over 20000 US dollars. That's the American dream. That's very commercial, but...you know... here it's almost impossible to think about... I mean, if I don't think about money and success, I rather stay in Bulgaria to live like, happy life, if it's possible.

**Can you tell us something about your context in New York? Like who do you work with, whom do you see every day? What is your context in New York?**

Actually I work pretty much by myself. I'm working here in my studio. I don't see a lot of people, but... you know, during the night, usually we spend a lot of time in East Village and West Village drinking and we... Actually I got a lot of friends from... I was in one so-called AM program, "Artists in the marketplace" it's called here in a number of museums so I got a lot of friends there and... so we see each other and drinking and talking about... the art, how difficult it is, you know, the regular stuff, but... you

know, sometimes less alcoholic, much more... you know, bad conversations.

**You probably still follow what is going on in Sofia, you have certainly heard of the new project by Ventsislav Zankov, "White straight male"...**

Yeah, I heard about that.

**How would you comment on this project, looking at it from your new context?**

First of all this project is typical for Bulgaria, not for Western world. It's related with Bulgarian complex of inc... impossible to be understand like... on a regular basis, like we... spread Bulgarians, a lot of Bulgarians are out of that: "Look, I'm very conservative, and straight, and stuff like that, and nobody understands me." – which is so stupid, or ridiculous, I don't know. But this context is typical Bulgarian. I'm... I'm against that. I don't know if you understand, but... As far as I know, this project is for people who are proud to be... to live in isolation... Am I right? I'm not proud of that. I'm living in a real world. So I do some kind of effort every day to stay in the Western world, and to be accepted as a normal person without my complexes.

**How do you feel you manage with this?**

Difficult, difficult. It's very difficult, but you should supposed to put some effort on that, you know. It's worth it. Because it's not a matter of one month or one year, it's... let's say, maybe after five years or ten years I could say that I'm accepted from the other, from the regular, you know, Americans, like American also.

**Can you describe some concrete problems that you are fighting with?**

First of all, you know, the language... it's not that difficult, but every, actually every Bulgarian gives this kind of strange... pronunciation, you know, it's the accent. Which is ok, but it's not that... you know, it's... it's better not to have an accent.

**So people react strangely when they notice your accent, for instance?**

Yes, because they... it's a very few Bulgarians over there, and they... it's very hard to locate where you come from, actually. Bulgaria is a small country, very small population, and here there is no... there is not any kind of Bulgarian artist... probably Christo... Christo is Bulgarian, but he's like Americans for... you know, twenty years, or thirty years. But since that... there is not much Bulgarian stuff, over there, so I suppose to prove that this country is part of Europe, first of all that... then that you are normal, you know, everything... so... I don't know, it's not much stuff.

**How do you imagine your future, how do you wish it to become?**

Hmm... I don't know. So, marry for a rich woman, you know, just... I don't know, to earn money, to live and to, to work, and that's... that's it! So, like, to spend my life in a desert island... you know... No! I would like to stay here in New York for as much as I can, and... yeah, to work.

## CFront Ending<sup>1</sup>

DIMITRINA SEVOVA

*"What is this third world artist?" - you will ask me. "Which third world are you talking about? There is no second world, is there?"*

*Yes, I will answer, the second world - the world of ungifted, clinical, weak-minded socialism - does not exist, but the third world is still around. It is the world of fragmented obscurantism, the world of old technologies, the world of indigent market, the world that has suffered the catastrophe of communal ideology, the world of semi-decayed ethic and aesthetic rags. This world does not belong to the West, East, North or South. It is everywhere. It is localized in a great number of spaces, as a torn scrappy blanket, which covers the gorgeous overripe body of modern neo-liberalism. The third world is the world of despised discourses and wasted hot flesh outbursts, spit and sperm in the poor districts of Mexico City and Brooklyn, in the Viennese Turkish ghetto and in the heart of Moscow. This excited, tongue-tied, pimple-faced third world also needs an artist. How else could it be? Then why can't I be this artist and explain to you what kind of unpleasant art he is trying to create?*

Alexander Brener, *Third World Artist*<sup>2</sup>

As I enter the production of epilogues in order to announce that a project is ending, I may be tempted to declare the bankruptcy of a discourse. If I need justification, I can always make it clear that such a conclusion is inspired by postmodernism. My atrophied sensibility towards the "shocking" effect of any discourses on the "end"<sup>3</sup> is easily explained by the contemporary cultural climate - characterized

<sup>1</sup> After the title of Woody Allen's 2002 movie *Hollywood Ending*. Hollywood and its machines for producing illusions are falling apart like the tower of Babel. The cinema from around the world, and the people making it, cannot communicate without translators. Every one speaks their own language, the translator is fired, and the canon gets lost in translation. And Hollywood does not cease to be ending.

*Communication Front* /international project of electronic and media art and culture/ took place in Plovdiv, Bulgaria in June 1999, 2000 and 2001. You can find the CFront 2000 book online at <<http://www.cfront.org/cf00book>>.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Brener, *Third World Artist*, 25 March 1998 <<http://www.cfront.org/cf00book/en/alexander-thirdworld-en.html>>.

<sup>3</sup> Apologies to the "end" had something of a boom after 11 September 2001.



as it is by contradictory stipulations inherent in expressions such as postsocialist, postmodern, posthistorical, postindustrial, postcolonial, or postfeminist. I can continue juggling with the concepts, closely following the contemporary political, social and cultural events. I may however end up giving in to the inertia of my assessment, and be left with no choice but to debate the usage of ending and post.

The stream of speculative stories of the Hegelian type is not at its end, despite the general apathy towards them. They continue to arouse the curiosity of an unprejudiced part of the public. Whether they announce the end of history (Alexandre Kojève, 1946; Francis Fukuyama, 1992), of ideology (Daniel Bell, 1960), of art and art history (Hans Belting, 1984; Arthur Danto, 1996), of work (Jeremy Rifkin, 1994), of the nation state (Kenichi Ohmae, 1996), of utopia (Russell Jacoby, 1999), or yet more daringly the end of democracy (Jean-Marie Guéhenno, 2000), of imperialism (Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, 2000), of the West (Patrick Buchanan, 2001), or globalism (John Ralston Saul, 2004). Similar to hypertext, the list keeps swelling up, accumulating everything on its way. What at first glance may look subversive hides behind an urge to restructure the contents of whatever is supposedly ending, and ends up at the service of finding arguments for assembling the skeleton and proving the historical inevitability of the New World Order.

### Some background, or Globalization revisited

*It should be remembered that the word 'democracy,' which is used so frequently in the modern mass media, is by no means the same word 'democracy' as was so widespread in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The two words are merely homonyms. The old word 'democracy' was derived from the Greek 'demos', while the new word is derived from the expression 'demo-version.'*

Viktor Pelevin, *Generation 'P'*<sup>4</sup>

The radical changes in social identity and the organization of social life both in the East and the West, which became evident at the end of the eighties, have been termed by some, somewhat

<sup>4</sup> Viktor Pelevin, *Generation 'P'* (1999), translated from Russian by Andrew Bromfield, Faber and Faber (2000).

daringly, 'Revolutions.' The series of 'Revolutions' is not formed only of the 'Velvet' revolutions, the events around the fall of the Berlin wall, but also the revolution in information technologies, the rise of the Internet and genetic engineering. Some experts classify the latter as the "Revolution of Knowledge 1950-2001".<sup>5</sup>

After the fall of the Berlin wall and the toppling of ideological taboos, revolution(s) with their entire arsenal of symbols and historical experience, once more turn out to be a good capital investment. At this point we can see revolution as a convertible strategy or an advertising instrument of business.

Kojève,<sup>6</sup> as one of the first in the multitude of heralds of the end, immediately after the Second World War announced that henceforth the "social revolution" was impossible.<sup>7</sup> And declared the capitalism of Marx's day dead. The term 'capitalism' appears in the nineteenth century. And while Karl Marx provided it with a precise, specific meaning, according to Kojève his prognoses will not come true in the new global capitalism. This is because these so well argued prophecies about "social revolution" as a historical necessity, based on the theory of added value and capitalism destroying the social balance, are stripped of their logic in the new capitalism. Marx and his followers were wrong in only one point: They assumed that the capitalists would remain naïve, superficial, blind and would always lack understanding. In contrast, the new capitalists "have rearranged capitalism in a Marxist kind of way" in order to present capitalism not so much as "revolutionary" or "dictatorial," but as peaceful with a democratic face.

<sup>5</sup> This is the title of an article in my nine-year-old son's encyclopedia of history: *Das grosse Arena Lexikon der Weltgeschichte*, German edition of: *The Kingfisher History Encyclopedia*, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Alexandre Kojève, French philosopher of Russian origin (born Aleksandr Vladimirovich Kozhevnikov), specialist of Hegel who introduced Hegel to French scholarship, held important positions in the French Ministry of Economic and Financial Affairs, was influential in the GATT treaty negotiations and the shaping of the EEC (European Economic Council), cf. <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/k/kojeve.htm>>.

<sup>7</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Colonialism from a European Perspective*, published in English translation in *Interpretations*, 2001/1, pp. 115-130. Online in Russian translation at <<http://www.politizdat.ru/article/16>>. This is Kojève's lecture at a conference in Düsseldorf in front of a group of businessmen on 16 January 1957, which Carl Schmitt invited him to do on the topic of "Underdeveloped Countries."

Kojève also speaks of the new colonialism. For the type of colonialism typical of the new capitalism, territory is not of primary importance. The new colonialism is not based on political, but rather on economic colonizing. In this process even the highly developed countries end up self-colonized.

After the end of the Cold War the Western world has imposed the neoliberal model to the countries of the former Eastern Bloc – through democratic standards and the free market, the neoliberal ideology, wars, the pressure to innovate or the “idea of Human Rights.”

Just like in Marcuse’s and the Frankfurt School’s “critical theory,” Kojève rejects the notion that there is a principal difference between capitalism and socialism, arguing that the two systems are modifications of industrial society, in which technical progress sustains the creation of a “total” system.<sup>8</sup> Some contemporary theorists of the crises of capital accumulation, such as the circle around “Materials for a new anti-imperialism,”<sup>9</sup> use similar arguments to explain some of the phenomena related to the Yugoslav Republic, the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc, and the “transition” of the countries in this category from “state capitalism” through privatization to “market capitalism.”

At the same time, even such conservative authors as the French linguist of Bulgarian origin Tzvetan Todorov have almost understood, and note that communism is a sinuous path leading from capitalism to capitalism.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> In an art context, Boris Groys develops a similar argument: *Now, the Communist project in itself was an extremely radical utopian universalist project, as I already said. And the self-isolation of the Communist nations, of the Communist states, of the Communist world, had nothing to do with a kind of a pre-modern way or mode of existence of a closed, traditional society.* Boris Groys, *The Complicity of Oblivion*, presented at the MoMa symposium of 23 March 2003, *East of Art: Transformations in Eastern Europe* <<http://www.artmargins.com/content/moma/groys.html>>.

<sup>9</sup> See, in German, their analysis of the beginnings of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, “Ethnicizing the social – The transformation of the Yugoslav society in the medium of the war” <[http://www.nadir.org/nadir/archiv/Internationalismus/jugoslawien/materialien\\_06/](http://www.nadir.org/nadir/archiv/Internationalismus/jugoslawien/materialien_06/)>. Not available online, but also relevant here, in German, is “Das Ende des sowjetischen Entwicklungsmodell – Beiträge zur Geschichte der sozialen Konfrontationen mit dem sozialistischen Akkumulationskommando” (“The end of the Soviet development model – Contributions to a history of the social confrontations with the socialist accumulation command”), 1992.

## The Eastern Bloc meets the Western World

*Levi Strauss & Co.*

*Original Riveted*

*Quality Clothing*

*Trademark*

*Since 1873*

*For over 130 years*

*Our celebrated high quality denim riveted jeans have been before the public.*

*This is a pair of them!*

*Created by Levi Strauss in 1873 – has become an American tradition, symbolizing the vitality of the West to people all over the world.*

*We shall thank you to carefully examine the sewing, finish and fit.*

*See that this pair bears our famous red tab.*

*Levi Strauss & Co.*

Printed on the inside of a pair of blue jeans, size 29/32, on the back of the front pocket.

The Cold War was the only war to be won in advance – the end of this war being marked by the beginning of the wars in South-Eastern Europe. The essence of these historic events, which dramatically changed the lives of millions of people, can be condensed into one little sentence: “One red was replaced by another red.” What I have in mind is how the red flag, symbol not only just of revolution at large, but concretely of the revolution of the councils, the Soviets, was swiftly replaced by the red color of the trademarks of Coca Cola and Levi’s red tab,<sup>11</sup> where once again the color red is meant to symbolize the shortest path to freedom.<sup>12</sup>

What totalitarian technocratic universalism had failed to achieve – the new type of capitalism took care of with no effort. All ideological considerations left behind, the pragmatic needs and convenience are the driving forces of contemporary events.

The feeling of total universality is achieved through the hegemony of the free market. The world of trademarks excludes

<sup>10</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *L’homme dépaycé*, 1996 (published in Bulgarian under the title “In a foreign land”, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> ... and McDonald’s, and Kentucky Fried Chicken, etc.

<sup>12</sup> Inspired by Iyaylo Ditchew, *From affiliation to national identity. Politics of the image* (in Bulgarian), Sofia 2002.

any differences. Prejudices based on race, gender, age and territory no longer affect the statistics of who comes into the category of the average citizen with consumer power. In this unified world the complacent consumer is regarded as the transterritorial subject of the new class, the genuine new engine of historical progress.

The standardization of life thus imposed has given rise to a new feeling of global mutual dependency. Of course this feeling does not lead to a yearning for freedom, equality and solidarity. It is, rather, the dependency of the stock exchange on armed conflict, or the omnipresence of the mass media and communication channels in a bundle with CNN's global weather forecast.

### Ending or New

*"Political correctness" – this type of public consensus producing complex discords, decent inequalities, appeased clashes, peace-kept conflicts.*

Alexander Brener, *The Art of Leading a War Against an Institution* <sup>13</sup>

In his essay *"Three Decades after the End of Art,"* Arthur Danto confirms that he indeed had the intention to announce the end of the historical development of art, and *"that an era of astonishing creativity lasting perhaps six centuries in the West had come to an end, and that whatever art was to be made from then on would be marked by [...] a post-historical character."* <sup>14</sup>

There is something attractive in Danto's idea to categorically break with historicity, and correspondingly with totality. This radical breaking, contrasting with the slow and sometimes sluggish natural "evolutionary" development in which it is difficult to define the exact beginning or exact end of a period, should be sufficient guarantee for the rupture with the conservative tradition, with the discursive whole and discursive conventions.

If on the one hand Hegel has proclaimed totality and shaped it, on the other its critique, again acting within the same conceptual framework of cultural totalities, in fact contributes considerably

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Brener, *The Art of Leading a War Against an Institution*, The Moscow Art Journal, No. 23 <<http://www.guelman.ru/xz/362/xx23/xx2301.htm>> (in Russian).

<sup>14</sup> Arthur C. Danto, *Three Decades after the End of Art*, in: Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art*, New York (1997), p. 21.

to the writing of a global history, in which the decentralization contributes to confirming once again a privileged position. <sup>15</sup> This is not a true encroachment on the hierarchical structure of history, or a kicking <sup>16</sup> of historical dialecticism or of the conservative tradition of high and true art. Again according to "historical" notions, this time Hans Belting's, another male theorist from the Western world, it is important to note how a non-negligible quantity of art was created before the era of the arts, <sup>17</sup> or rather what Hegel had defined as such. Hegel, who defines Africa as "no historical part of the world," <sup>18</sup> erasing also other geographical locations from the map of "true," total art.

Of course, we are separated not only from Hegel, but also from Hans Belting by an ample amount of time and by different critical theoretical practices. What is the situation now, as the central streets of the great Western European cities are full of less or more chic galleries for "authentic" African art? I will not comment here on the origin of these collections, or the misbalance in what their authors, their masters are paid, or the speculative profits of the dealers. In the West, African art standing in the folkloristic tradition is often presented as contemporary. This is

<sup>15</sup> In this argument I follow loosely Michel Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*, 1972 (French edition: 1969).

<sup>16</sup> Bobo, Toshio & Tabakov and Limbourg Brothers, *Da naritash kulturata* (Bulgarian: *To Kick Culture*), CD published in 2000 in Sofia.

<sup>17</sup> Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, Chicago (1994).

<sup>18</sup> *The peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very reason that in reference to it, we must quite give up the principle which naturally accompanies all our ideas – the category of Universality. In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence – as for example, God, or Law – in which the interest of man's volition is involved and in which he realizes his own being. This distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his essential being, the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained; so that the Knowledge of an absolute Being, an Other and a Higher than his individual self, is entirely wanting. The Negro, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality – all that we call feeling – if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character. [...]*

*At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it – that is in its northern part – belong to the Asiatic or European World. [...] What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit,*

not “correct” towards African artists making contemporary art. They are of course right to protest that this is not contemporary art from Africa. At the same time, the “true” contemporary art from Africa that is exhibited does not differ substantially from Western contemporary art.<sup>19</sup>

This constitutes an argument in support of the following idea, contrary to Danto’s: that with globalization we come across a new totalization, which in this variant indeed does not leave any room for the existence of the Other. Gone is the familiar tension between the vertical methods for measuring history based on the universalist Western system of values, with its imposing of unified, common standards from the “era of art”, and the Undefined, the Other that populates the non-Western world.

Nevertheless, art from this posthistorical period is just as compromised by power relations as anything that may be recognized and defined as such in the times before. I doubt that it is really desirable to define as art what can be recognized as art before and after the “era of art,” despite the pluralist readiness of the posthistorians of art to accept everything as art, proclaiming that “no art is any longer historically mandated as against any other art. Nothing is any more true as art than anything else, nothing especially more historically false than anything else.”<sup>20</sup>

But following the motto of the digital generation: “Be creative!,”<sup>21</sup> I fully realize how I fall victim to chronological and historical inadequacy when I pursue the inevitable and natural end of the “East-West” discussion within the discourse of contemporary art and the networks. I know that in this endeavor I will not be the first. Some have already done it. Others have

moved on without much effort, arguing that one can always find more exciting topics, fitting in with the newest tendencies in funding programs. In contemporary art, the new forms of artistic creativity are still widely seen as linked to digital and communications technologies. It may well be more advantageous to take part in yet another project gravitating around the topic of the city or the necessity of prompt action to protect robots, or something entirely different. As Giancarlo Politi, publisher and editor-in-chief of *Flash Art*, explained to an amazed audience in a public lecture in Sofia on 11 March 2001, the trends in contemporary art, and the interest in their authors, change so swiftly that they survive no longer than a collection or tendency in the fashion circles and garments industry. After one, if you are lucky a few seasons it turns out that you have become unbearably boring, and you find yourself useless, lying about in the sales baskets with other reduced stocks, a bargains sticker attached to your toe.

In a concept of the “end” synthesized from and in the context of media art and theory, or contemporary art, or what we recognize as such, it is first and foremost a question of taste and personal priorities whether we look for its concrete manifestations in one or the other of two discussions produced in those same contexts: “East-West” and “North-South.” The two pairs of opposites are equally well suited to an analysis leading to this type of conclusion. The more optimistically disposed may object that both discussions have existed precisely in order to be eliminated with the imposing of a new set of standards, and their inevitable end was coded in their very beginning. Both are part of a broader and more general critical discussion related to cyberdiscourse, to the discourse on identity and the question of localizations. They express the contradictions between local histories and canonically imposed norms of Western culture and art. They are mutually related also by questions born out of the conflict between the real possibilities of translation and its possible interpretations – questions also concerning the input and output between art inside and outside the context of the Euro-American Art World.

*still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World’s History.*

Georg Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, translated from German by J. Sibree, Batoche Books (2001), pp. 110-111, 117 <<http://socserv2.mcmaster.ca/~econ/ugcm/3ll3/hegel/history.pdf>>.

<sup>19</sup> The exhibition “*The African Exile Museum*” at the *migros museum for contemporary art* in Zurich, 22 March-25 May 2003, may serve as one example.

<sup>20</sup> Arthur C. Danto, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>21</sup> The digital generation, like Joseph Beuys before it, bases its ideology on creativity. Joseph Beuys’ aesthetic credo, and arguably the substrate of his philosophy, is: *Creativity = Capital* (slogan on a poster by Joseph Beuys), in: Isabel Siben, *Joseph Beuys, Plakate/Posters* (2004), p. 45.



## A specter is haunting Europe...<sup>22</sup>

*Then Saint Nicholas foams with rage:  
Look at him on this very page!  
He seizes Caspar, seizes Ned,  
Takes William by his little head;  
And they may scream, and kick, and call,  
But into the ink he dips them all;  
Into the inkstand, one, two, three,  
Till they are black, as black can be;  
Turn over now and you shall see.*

*See, there they are, and there they run!  
The black-a-moor enjoys the fun.  
They have been made as black as crows,  
Quite black all over, eyes and nose,  
And legs, and arms, and heads, and toes.  
And trowsers, pinafores, and toys, -  
The silly little inky boys!  
Because they set up such a roar,  
And teas'd the harmless black-a-moor.*

Heinrich Hoffmann, *The Story of the Inky Boys*<sup>23</sup>

Even though the unfolding of such discussions as “East-West” and “North-South” should have helped the figure of exoticism that had then surfaced<sup>24</sup> to be absorbed in the multicultural strategies of liberal democracy, the two discussions continue to boast an

<sup>22</sup> From the *Communist Manifesto* of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to the mailing list <spectre@mikrolisten.de>.

<sup>23</sup> Heinrich Hoffmann, *The Story of the Inky Boys*, in: Heinrich Hoffmann, *Struwwelpeter* (in German; 1844), English edition: *Slovenly Peter or Cheerful Stories and Funny Pictures for Good Little Folks*, Philadelphia (ca. 1900), transl. from German by anonymous <<http://www.fln.vcu.edu/struwwel/bubeng.html>>.

In the German original, the black-a-moor is termed “kohlpechrabenschwarzer Mohr.” Literally, this means “coal-pitch-raven-black moor.” Quite an achievement of German bourgeois imagination to describe how other the Other is.

<sup>24</sup> *Sometimes - rarely - the Other is revealed as irreducible: not because of a sudden scruple, but because common sense rebels: a man does not have a white skin, but a black one, another drinks pear juice, not Pernod. How can one assimilate the Negro, the Russian? There is here a figure for emergencies: exoticism. The Other becomes a pure object, a spectacle, a clown. Relegated to the confines of humanity, he no longer threatens the security of the home. This figure is chiefly petit-bourgeois. For, even if he is unable to experience the Other in himself, the bourgeois can at*

entire range of polar confrontations, stereotyped definitions and negativism. It is no accident if the two discussions have almost simultaneously lost part of their nimbus as relevant and important for the international art community, and have of late been sounding banal, old-fashioned even. Structured as they were up until now, they are not exciting to anyone besides a handful of remaining activists and a few funding schemes whose assets have not yet been fully exhausted.

It would be easy enough to find an explanation for this truly new situation as a consequence of the changed geography. This relates not only to cyberspace and its “new digital world borders,” described with clarity some years ago in an interview by the Austrian theorist Christian Hoeller with the American artist of African origin Olu Oguibe in *Springer* magazine, focusing on those excluded or ignored by this discourse. The high technologies suggest an additional type of discrimination, along with those well known from before. Looking for a typical example of inequality, we find that the question of access to technologies and the use of the Internet is most often mentioned. I am far from saying that it has lost its currency. However, entering the complex of questions linked to cyberdiscourse, we should not forget that outside its discursive borders, a majority of people are left with no chance whatsoever to access technologies. As a “method” for identifying the different social categories of the users some would propose to use a four-dimensional model reflecting the arguments that have led to their using the Internet: business, entertainment, education, services. Few are those, seen in proportion, who fit into all four categories, so that in this research framework many people may well fall overboard from the category of the high-tech elite. This includes the economically “highly developed” states. In the periphery or the center of a post-industrial city, your alienated children are banging all day on the “death” button of their playstation while you are producing microchips for Nokia. This immersion in technology is not suited as a letter of

*least imagine the place where he fits in: this is what is known as liberalism, which is a sort of intellectual equilibrium based on recognized places.*

Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957), p. 152, translated from French by Jonathan Cape (1972).

introduction guaranteeing you a privileged position in the digital circles. At the same time, you may well fall out of this category because on a quite personal, psychological level you are unable to deal with the challenge of all these wires and buttons. This is something more than technophobia – it is a social question.<sup>25</sup>

Now everyone has realized that the geopolitical map is not subject to the old concepts.<sup>26</sup> The argument about cultural differences, used by some to emphasize the communication difficulties between such polar opposites as “East-West” or “North-South,” can be sharply criticized. It would seem that the argument becomes much more convincing if we speak of differences in education, gender, social origins and others. Contemporary culture makes use of a host of instruments through which it attempts to convincingly hide the antagonistic contradictions of class differences, seeking justification for social tension around the folkloristic phantasmagorias of artificially created ethnic problems.

In an interview with the artist Shirana Shahbazi in *Flash Art*,<sup>27</sup> we are once more faced with the contradictory systematic formulation of the Other by the liberal and multicultural Western society. A problematic identity dwelling in that no man’s space which is neither East nor West. Not somewhere in the far corners of peripheral regions where identities based on this liberal model are unstable at best, but destabilizing the very center of universal culture. Shirana Shahbazi was born in Teheran, but grew up and received her education in Germany, where she moved with her family as a baby child. She thus finds herself, due to her very life

<sup>25</sup> Christian Hoeller, *The New Digital World Borders*, Interview with Olu Oguibe, in: Springer: Hefte für Gegenwartskunst, No. 31, September 1996. English translation online at <<http://www.camwood.org/springer.htm>>.

<sup>26</sup> After the economic and the corresponding political transformations, and negotiations that have lasted for years, two political acts this year, on 29 March and 1 May 2004, drew the end of a long and painful process. After the official ceremony in Washington and a fervid speech by the American President on this occasion, the new member countries of NATO were announced – a second wave of former Warsaw Treaty countries joining NATO. One month after this, the borders of the European Union were extended to include the first of a list of countries from the former socialist bloc which had fulfilled the conditions and complied with the requirements for membership.

<sup>27</sup> Michele Robecchi, *You are here*, Interview with Shirana Shahbazi, *Flash Art*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 233, November-December 2003, pp. 77ff.

situation, in the “disadvantageous” position between two frames of reference.

The artist opposes the curatorial approach of classifying artists based on the stereotypical methodology of a system under the influence of their ethnic and geographical features, and of interpreting their work through the lense of the folkloristic traditions and the mythology of a given geographical territory.

*I’m not doing typical Iranian photography. It’s much more like German photography or European photography. But people still put me under this Iranian banner. We have strange discussion, and it’s crazy how you can’t escape from those terms. And when I do something else, such as in the Biennale, people are surprised to discover an Iranian woman dealing with a subject such as the Madonna. [...]*

*I recently went to two Shirin Neshat lectures, and I don’t know if it came through her success or if her success was also enhanced by the fact that there was a big ‘Iran boom,’ but there are many exhibitions in which I am invited to partake such as “Iranian photographers in Spain” or “Iranian artists in Berlin.” I don’t take part in every single one because I am trying to stay outside this movement.*

In the same interview, Shirana Shahbazi mentions how one of her photographs keeps being cited in all articles concerning her work. A quite banal picture with documentary character. A picture of a woman sitting on a sofa smoking.

*It seems to strike people as a very touching or moving matter that a woman with a veil should be smoking. I wasn’t aware of how touching it could be for a Westerner to see that. To me it is completely normal.*

It goes without saying that this sight is not as inoffensive as it would seem at first. This is also the strength of this picture. The artist acts subversively, using an inoffensive visual language. The way she presents a scene from everyday life, an insignificant moment from the life of a woman, the “exciting” or “exotic” is “channeled” exclusively and obviously through the veil. A disturbing question can be asked: whether in the case of this photograph, the unprejudiced Westerner’s voyeuristic uneasiness or thrill derives from this only fact. As if through an allusion to all those exotic scenes from harems in paintings by Ingres, Delacroix, or Gérôme which have aroused the curiosity of the

public.<sup>28</sup> In which the naked bodies of the women, absolutely forbidden to the outside observer, are on show. These compositions, characterized by the typical colonial view of the world, have in fact been inspired and provoked by a revolt against the quite real political and cultural life, and not by the wish to legitimize some foreign and Other cultural identity. Some sort of escape. An aesthetic rebellion. But this time not to the village and into the pastoral, but into romantic imagination expressing the yearning of the Western spirit to overstep the bounds of the forbidden. All this without leaving the framework of one's own ethico-philosophical problems.

Returning to the visual language of Shirana Shahbazi's photograph, it excludes any esthetic assumptions in the spirit of the traditional interpretation. This woman with the veil is not an exotic object from far-away places. You could well meet her as she takes her children for a walk in the park just like you, goes to the hospital just like you, gives birth to her children just like you do, and her children later will be in school with yours. You could well be waiting in line behind her as she pays at the cash register at the local supermarket, then bump into her again in the parking loading her groceries into the car, or even in the town hall where you are handing in your tax return form, always loyal to your country. She, the woman with the veil, always remains at a due distance, and she'll look almost just like you. What easier way to explain the differences around this "almost" than by pointing to the exterior distinguishing mark, the veil? This veil, guiltily reminiscent of the existence of something Other. Such as wild and primitive patriarchy – for instance. The veiled woman as a symbol of the ghetto in your own city.

A veiled specter is haunting Europe and troubles the sleep of a majority of the citizens of the Western world. This is not an image of Islamic fundamentalism or a symbol of the threat of possible attacks. It is the materialized specter of your own fears and uneasiness with the unknown, with the corrosion and the

<sup>28</sup> Jean Dominique Auguste Ingres (Montauban, 29 August 1780 – Paris, 14 January 1867); Eugène Delacroix (Charenton-Saint-Maurice, 26 April 1798 – Paris, 13 August 1863); Jean-Léon Gérôme (Vesoul, 11 May 1824 – Paris, 10 January 1904).

decline of the very center of the Western world. Subverting from within its very foundations, calling into question the universal values of the constitutional state. It is, rather, the image of the enemy that liberalism points the finger at when trying to explain the collapse of the welfare state, the loss of what had been reached in long struggles.

## On the offset

*Nonetheless, today the "context" became a magic term for evaluating and dis-evaluating contemporary productions that come from the non-Euro-American art world. The question is why we presume that only when the audience knows the "context" it would be able to "understand" art in Eastern Europe, Central Europe or Russia.*

Bojana Pejic, *What Comes After the Wall?*<sup>29</sup>

In the context of contemporary art the beginning of the "East-West" discussion is inevitably linked to the beginning of the 1990s. This is when, after the disintegration of the USSR and the former Yugoslavia with the consequent economic, political and social transformations, the effects of globalization became categorically visible, became part of the landscape of Eastern Europe. On the other hand the discussions touch on the painful complex of questions around imposing the Western model, where cultural politics is part of the general bundle of "reforms." They are animated by the spirit of the politico-geographical principles behind the concepts for defining the European borders of cultural identity. The institutionalized discussions went about the intense and hectic defining of a European identity with its cultural, political and economic borders, as part of the project for a Greater Europe.<sup>30</sup> The discussions had the blessing both

<sup>29</sup> Bojana Pejic, *What Comes After the Wall?*, presented at the MoMa symposium of 23 March 2003, *East of Art: Transformations in Eastern Europe* <<http://www.artmargins.com/content/moma/pejic.html>>.

*After the Wall: Art and culture in post-Communist Europe*, 16 October 1999–16 January 2000, Moderna Museet Stockholm, Sweden; curators: chief curator Bojana Pejic (Berlin), with David Elliott, director of Moderna Museet and Iris Müller-Westermann, curator of Moderna Museet.

<sup>30</sup> *Imminence, in 1939, was not only a terrifying cultural configuration in a Europe built in strokes of exclusion, annexations and exterminations. This imminence was also that of a war and a victory after which a partition of*

of the local and the supranational institutions and were almost always the invention of the system itself. They represented a rather political act – cultural politics, stimulated by the numerous mechanisms of power.

According to Bojana Pejic there are not many curators who try to show mainly good art, without being influenced by this context. Most of them, and even of those who have contributed to “breaking the ice” and lived out the role of activists in this discussion, have always maintained a distance appropriate to the status quo of their own class affiliation – led by their petit-bourgeois prejudices despite their politically correct behavior.<sup>31</sup> It comes as no surprise if the problem of migration tacked itself to the discussion, from a new perspective.

This question, complex for the Western world, took on a renewed meaning with the economic immigrants from the new democracies and a substantial number of refugees from the wars following the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Before the “end” of the Cold War, more or less every Eastern European who dared pass the Iron Curtain was declared a dissident and accepted with open arms by the West. Subsequently, after the ideological arguments

*European culture was to get frozen for the time of a quasi-naturalization of the borders, in which the intellectuals of my generation have spent most of their adult life. Today, with the tearing down of the Berlin wall, the prospect of German reunification, a perestroika still lacking resolve, and the wide range of “democratization” movements, the legitimate but at times quite ambiguous aspirations to national sovereignty, is the reopening, the denaturalization of these monstrous partitions. We find today the same feeling of imminence, hope and menace, anguish in the face of the possibility of other wars with unknown forms, the return of old forms of religious fanaticism, nationalism or racism. We are faced with the greatest of uncertainties with respect to borders of Europe itself, to its geographico-political borders (in the center, in the East and in the West, in the North and in the South), to its so-called “spiritual” borders (around the idea of philosophy, reason, monotheism, of Jewish, Greek, Christian (Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox), Islamic memories, around Jerusalem, a Jerusalem itself divided, torn apart, around Athens, Rome, Moscow, Paris, and we must say, “etc.,” and we must divide each of the names with the most respectful of relentlessness). Derrida, *L'autre cap*, Paris (1991), pp. 62-63. Translation of this passage by code flow. Published in English as *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, translated by Michael B. Naas and Pascale-Anne Brault, Indiana University Press (1992).*

<sup>31</sup> *The petit-bourgeois is a man unable to imagine the Other. If he comes face to face with him, he blinds himself, ignores and denies him, or else transforms him into himself. In the petit-bourgeois universe, all the experiences of confrontation are*

have turned into a useless attribute of power, the emigrant flow streaming in from these geographical places is classified as an enraged crowd of greedy consumers. In other words, they have come only to take a free ride on the achievements of the highly evolved Western social community. This opinion, often stated publicly in the Western world, turns out to be a conception shared by a host of theorists, activists and curators. Of course they are led by the purest of intentions, and their assurance roots in a certain dose of idealism. They'll argue that the local economy needs to be helped, that jobs need to be created locally, etc.

On the other hand, a critical position has always sneaked into this discussion and made itself felt. It represents the position of existing criticism towards the institutions of the Art World system itself, expressed from the point of view of those very artists or curators whose careers depend on the existence and evolution of this framework. This is something of a reaction against the lack of results of cultural exchange activities, against the difficulties in integrating themselves in the Western model and in “the art market” structures. A kind of protest against the unequal distribution of wealth in the system of cultural funding. In spite of this, it is hard to make out demystifying tactics built around this critical position, because in its essence, it also expresses dominating interests of power – in this case, the pressure via the dominating interests of the funders and the institutions representing them.

To those looking in from the outside, the historical development of contemporary art in Eastern Europe may look chaotic, normal or like a completely natural consequence of the multilateral processes related to the opening of these societies towards the world after so many years of ideological oppression.

*reverberating, any otherness is reduced to sameness. The spectacle or the tribunal, which are both places where the Other threatens to appear in full view, become mirrors. This is because the Other is a scandal which threatens his essence. [...] There are, in any petit-bourgeois consciousness, small simulacra of the boogman, the parricide, the homosexual, etc., which periodically the judiciary extracts from its brain, puts in the dock, admonishes and condemns: one never tries anybody but analogues who have gone astray: it is a question of direction, not of nature, for that's how men are.*

Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957), translated from French by Jonathan Cape (1972), pp. 151-152.



However, taking a closer look it turns out that this beginning is always linked, through a direct or more winding path, with the activities, politics and interests of the network of Open Society foundations in Eastern Europe or the local Soros Centers.<sup>32</sup> While the artists are taught, funded, guided and protected by the corresponding office of this institution. This kinship includes the entire exchange and circulation of information, ideas, people and events. Both from the headquarters to the peripheral offices and in the opposite direction, via channels specially set up for direct communication using the technological potential of the Internet, channels which establish a social web known under the term of network. Consecutively, an active part in this network is played by the newly appeared “new” art and by its representatives, both of them at the service of a certain political line and the interests that can be presumed behind it. It comes as no surprise that from its inception, this art is predestined to serve some institution, or system of institutions which act within the framework of the neoliberal model.

Since its appearance as a cultural phenomenon in Eastern Europe this art has been seen as *elitist, creative, export* art rather than some underground, alternative, political or social involvement. It therefore comes as no surprise that politically engaged art never made its appearance on the local eastern scenes. Nor did any other form of art as resistance that could have evolved out of similar discussions and social engagement, with the exception of its ideological forms of extreme propaganda.

In spite of this, in the public space in Eastern Europe even today one speaks of contemporary art as of *young, non-conventional*, even “*avant-garde*”, continuing to search for the alternative, that unattainable ideal of contemporary people from the twenties of last century to the beginning of this century, from Dada art to the advertising imagery of Diesel. And so out of inertia, contemporary art still presents itself as in opposition to

<sup>32</sup> George Soros, “Eastern Europe’s uncrowned king and the prophet of ‘the open society’” and at the same time the “archetypal amoral capitalist” according to Neil Clark, *New Statesman profile – George Soros*, New Statesman, 2 June 2003 <<http://www.mindfully.org/WTO/2003/George-Soros-Statesman2jun03.htm>>.

official art.<sup>33</sup> At the same time in these geographical latitudes the official local institutions, as much as they have been radically restructured, remain natural carriers of the conservative, of the past (if they do not merely simulate their own existence), there are hardly any local funding programs.

Attempting to understand the local institutional framework of Eastern European contemporary art, we will usually find that contemporary art is driven and legitimized by external institutions, both in financial and ideological terms. Regardless of whether these are external state programs, as is the case of Pro Helvetia in Switzerland, KulturKontakt in Austria, or the French, British or German cultural information center, or private corporate interests, as in the case of the Soros centers. With their contradictory strategies supported by the official institutions, many of the funding programs were intent on contributing, through cultural exchange, to the construction and maintenance of a European identity.

### “History” of the network in the context of media art

*Despite increasing interest and exhibition events, artists from the East have a problem with access to the market. We find that many artists from Eastern European countries are deeply disappointed because their work is so little accepted in the West. This applies not only to the art market, but also to the readiness of museums and exhibitions to take account of their work in exhibitions. The artists still feel excluded, and some even talk about Eastern Europe as the “ghetto of the art world.” One reason for this perceived isolation may be the fact that new art forms and specific networks that question the traditional art business are growing up in Eastern Europe in particular.*

Nicolaus Schafhausen and Ursula Zeller, *Preface – Artistic Developments in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe in the Post-Communist Era – A European Dialogue?*<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Attila Tordai-S., *Aperto Romania*, Flash Art, Vol. XXXVI, No. 233, November-December 2003.

<sup>34</sup> Nicolaus Schafhausen and Ursula Zeller, *Preface – Artistic Developments in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe in the Post-Communist Era – A European Dialogue?*, in: ifa dokumente 2/1999, 1<sup>st</sup> Congress about Art and its Mediation in Central and Eastern Europe, 20-22 November 1998, Stuttgart.

East European contemporary art is still faced with identificational difficulties, not only in terms of the legitimizing “meta”-discourse. It is often called into question at the local level, or it creates its own discursive crises, like in the case of the debate on whether this or that can be regarded as art. In this way, it legitimizes its identity on the basis of polar opposites, while at the same time it is based on the tension caused by internally unclarified categories, like high/low, official/alternative, old/new, conventional/non-conventional.

And if I assume that the contemporary and the new link in with the Western World, whereas the traditional bears the stamp of the past and the old communist system, I am ready to claim that the very contrasting of East with West has turned into a fundamental question on all identificational levels of contemporary art made in the East, both locally and internationally.

This art is characterized by a strong desire to move on beyond the territorial, political, social and discursive frameworks of the local contexts in which it is created. The desire to eliminate difference between themselves and the world, to close the gap, is the fundamental complex of the everyday life of the “young” and “new” artistic elites. It is self-understood that it has been difficult to locate in such discourse any political or social commitment. In order to circulate in the international exchange of the art system, in order to be interpretable in a fundamentally foreign context, this art must feature total traits.<sup>35</sup>

*In spite of this, the Moscow artists have understood early on: a career in contemporary art in essence means an international career. At the same time these artists are outside the institutions – because the institutions do not want to bear much of Russian artists. The institution discriminates. And in this direction the Russian artists are frustrated: they, like all artists in the world, are seeking success, attention, fame, understanding, recognition, money and power, eventually... It's hard for them, hard...*

Alexander Brener, *The Art of Leading a War Against an Institution*<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Nedko Solakov, *A bitter text that ends in a joke*, in: *Communication Front 2000 Book*, Sofia 2002 <<http://www.cfront.org/cf00book/en/nedko-bitter-joke-en.html>>.

This is why it becomes a real local problem when most entrances and exits towards and from the international Art System are obstructed by those artists who were the first in the starting blocks, to some extent taking advantage of the political constellation of the moment, and their experience as cunning players in the old communist system. For instance in the Komsomol,<sup>37</sup> an organization in which the necessary optimism and obedience were the building blocks of hierarchical structures and flows reminiscent of the undercurrents of the international art world. To this day, these artists are passably good at launching their image as young and convertible artists, even if some of them have gone into their fifties.<sup>38</sup> They jealously defend the positions they hold, and cannot tolerate even a hint of competition, nor any wish to build up a local scene, which would potentially contribute later on to their being more quickly and miserably deposed. The lack of certain institutions vital to the art world, or the impossibility of their functioning normally at a local level, additionally poison the atmosphere and intensify this identificational crisis.

The Western world is almost always either idealized or naively cursed in the local East European art context, not only in its cultural, ethical aspects. The meandering between what would seem at first sight to be polar opposites reflects a typically provincial point of view and mind set: *The scene here is all too insignificant, the criticism inopportune, the theory full of misunderstandings, whereas there, my efforts and talent will be valued* – if it's not the exact opposite.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Alexander Brener, *The Art of Leading a War Against an Institution*, The Moscow Art Journal, No. 23 <<http://www.guelman.ru/xz/362/xx23/x2301.htm>> (in Russian).

<sup>37</sup> Communist Youth Organization, from the Russian *Komunisticheskij sojuz molodjozhi* (Communist Youth Association; in the Soviet Union, specifically the All-Union Leninist Communist League of Youth); very often, the Russian acronym was used even in Bulgaria, in place of the official DKMS: *Dimitrovski komunisticheski mladezhki syjuz* (Dimitrov Communist Youth League).

<sup>38</sup> For reference, cf. the CVs of the East-European participants in the various editions of *Manifesta*.

<sup>39</sup> This duality leads us to the Hegelian mechanisms of the overturn in the dialectic of the “inverted world” in the chapter on consciousness, *Phenomenology of the Mind*.

The consequences of this condition are so drastic that a feeling of shame and inferiority accompanies the local events and public discussions in almost all cases. The inner conviction, often one of the driving forces in the work of an artist, is not always able to cope with this state of affairs leading to self-discrimination. A mechanism that incites a feeling of collective insufficiency or leads straight to a condition of complete "impotency" of the artistic discourse in the local scene.

This leads us to the paradox of the "unanalyzable" Slovenian – cunningly used by Slavoj Žižek to present the function of the ego-ideal, i.e., the symbolic identification with the ego's imaginary correspondence, with the ideal (virtual) place from which the subject looks upon itself when its own life looks like an empty and repulsive spectacle.

*"What does it mean, in psychoanalytical terms, to be a Slovenian?" [...] We Slovenians, 'unanalyzable' according to Freud, had to wait for Lacan in order to meet with psychoanalysis."* Žižek lets orthodox Freudianism collide with Lacan's logical paradox 'of the prevention of the subject' in which the absence of law is responsible for universalized prohibition. *"Freud's Slovenian shows the inadequacy of this logic of the 'liberation of desire from the constraints of internal repression.'"*<sup>40</sup>

The word "Slovenian" is found only once in the entire opus of Freud. According to Žižek this reference is more than sufficient, since it contains within itself a whole series of questions that are key to psychoanalytic theory and praxis. The passage mentioned is from a letter by Freud to the psychoanalyst Eduardo Weiss on 28 May 1922. Weiss has asked Freud about his opinion on two of his patients, both of whom suffered from the same

<sup>40</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do – Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (1991), quoted from the Bulgarian edition, Sofia (2001), p. 17.

The book contains a collection of six lectures that served as an introductory course on Lacan, organized by the Slovenian Society for Theoretical Psychoanalysis and aimed at a "sympathetic neutral" public of intellectuals, who were the initiators of the democracy movement.

*The lectures were held in the unique atmosphere of those months: a time of intensive political agitation, only a few weeks before the 'free elections,' when all possibilities still seemed open, the time of the 'short circuit' which mixed political activity with 'high' theory (Hegel, Lacan) and unlimited delight in the 'lower' mass culture – a unique, utopian moment.*

Slavoj Žižek, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

symptom of impotency. According to Freud the methods of psychoanalysis cannot be applied to one of the two patients, the young Slovenian. In his answer to his student and follower, Freud presents the Slovenian as someone who does not deserve being helped by psychoanalysis, implying that his is a simple case of immediate, superficial evil and amorality without any of the 'depth' characteristic of our unconscious psychological dynamics. Without transition, in the next sentence, his case is presented on the contrary as one who cannot be analyzed. The barrier here is not of an 'ethical' nature (does not deserve analysis), but epistemological (the case is in itself unanalyzable).<sup>41</sup>

One can say today that the illness is diagnosed. And the panacea is found. It is called communication. Communication at all sorts of levels. Communication as an instrument, a category, a method, a fundamental criterion for signifying, assessing and interpreting. A gage of success. It warrants that you'll be able to secure yourself access to all spheres of the system, both in the mental and in the purely physical sense of the word.

The rise of the Internet and the elaboration of an 'actually active' network, first strategically built up by the Third Sector<sup>42</sup> and later broken up by some alternative networks,<sup>43</sup> shed new light on the euphoria of communication and the desire for quick self-realization, progress and the consciousness of freedom. While pushing the idea that through communication and information, or rather through wiring and the free market, one can ensure everyone gets their chance. A sort of remake of Lenin's dialectical slogan: electrification + Soviet power = communism.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>42</sup> The NGOs successfully imitate the notion of civil society, with its "good" and "soft" institutions. A type of privatization of a part of the public sphere was accomplished. At the same time, this is pure netocracy, i.e., they serve exclusively their own interests, or in the words of Ivaylo Ditchev:

*Despite their aura, non-government organizations by definition represent no one except their own members. Hence many of the paradoxes regarding them.*

Ivaylo Ditchev, *From affiliation to national identity. Politics of the image* (in Bulgarian), Sofia 2002, Footnote 1, referred to from p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Syndicate, nettime, and other more recent lists mostly related to the global anti-capitalist mobilizations.

<sup>44</sup> *Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country.* Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Report On The Work Of The Council Of People's Commissars*, Eighth All-Russia Congress of Soviets, 22 December 1920 <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/8thcong/ch02.htm>>.

## In search of freedom and change – the new artistic revolution

*The aim is primarily to show net.art as an extremely social art form.*

National Museum of Contemporary Art, Norway, *The short and hectic history of net.art*<sup>45</sup>

In the mid-nineties, with the headlong development of communication technologies and the Internet, some artists in both the West and the East realized the benefits of the emerging opportunities for network art. The new form of media art that had then appeared experienced identificational difficulties. The question arose whether it can be recognized as art. In its more positive instances, it did not even want to be legitimized as such. In the meantime the international network art community, with the legitimacy it has acquired, and some experts who have established themselves in this context have defined subtypes like net.art, software art, social and political activism, institutionalized art and other forms using the potential of the Internet and the World Wide Web to various degrees.

Moving on the borders of the system, network art, net critique and the various practices and activities developing from there have given rise to a feeling that the discourse can indeed be undermined. Some saw in this the “alternative” to the dominant cultural discourse, or a way to escape the institutional framework of the Art System itself. A possibility to give a real social aspect to art. To develop political interests in order to go beyond the aesthetic concepts and the cultural norm of the official canon. For instance by undermining the author, the claim to authorship, both in the spiritual and in the most pragmatic and literal sense, by rejecting the notion of copyright, or by creating social software with open code.

Even if they were for some time perceived by the more heavyweight institutions as a whim, an obsession or a fad, network art and its representatives at one moment found themselves in the center of attention of that very same official canon. Losing some

<sup>45</sup> *The short and hectic history of net.art* <<http://www.museet.no/English/exhibitions/netart>>.

of their “mythical” aura of radical activists, they were swept off by the centrifugal forces of the very thing they had been struggling against, in order to be swallowed by the flow of the system itself. But what is to be done?<sup>46</sup> History teaches us that this is what happens to most “alternative” cultural movements that have fought the official discourse and have subsequently been incorporated or tamed by it. While legitimately and correctly they are given the right to create, represent and maintain their difference.<sup>47</sup>

With the disintegration of the Syndicate family<sup>48</sup> – or rather its transmutation from a community with common political and social interests into a communication channel – the network art community has left its childhood behind. A period filled with a hope for some kind of change and with a responsibility towards economic, historical and cultural processes has come to an end.

These remarkable events did not happen without the active contribution of the media terrorist Net Tochka,<sup>49</sup> who had the

<sup>46</sup> See also Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *What is to be done?* (1902) <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/>>.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Robert Pfäler, *Vom Kanon zum Schibboleth. Sieben Thesen über Parteilichkeit und Erbarmen in der Kultur*, in: *Kunstforum* No. 162, Nov/Dec. 2002, pp. 54-63 (in German; *From canon to shibboleth. Seven theses about partisanship and mercy in culture*). Quoted here from the Bulgarian translation published as: *The wars of the canon*, LIK, No. 7, July 2003, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> *Initiated by a meeting of 30 people at the Next Five Minutes in Amsterdam 1996, the Syndicate was established as a platform for the exchange of information between East and West European cultural activists. [...] Syndicate network is an experimental research project on the possibilities of building open transcultural communities by using the advantages of tactical media in decentralized structures as the Internet provides them.*

Description of the Syndicate mailing list by its administration team <<http://sympa.anart.no/sympa/info/syndicate>>

*The syndicate list lost a consistent amount of its relevance together with the change of the policy of the Soros network. Less support, less money, less interest went together hand in hand.*

Anna Balint, post to the nettime mailing list on 2 June 2003 <<http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l0306/msg00014.html>>

<sup>49</sup> Actually: Netochka Nezvanova, name borrowed from Fyodor Dostoyevsky's first novel. The name translates to something like Nameless Nobody. In the case of the phenomenon of the network art scene mentioned above, with “tochka” meaning “dot”, we are left with “Net.” as in “Net.Art”. Ostensibly of East-European (or any other) origin, Netochka reminds of another Balkan tradition of terrorism, which played a key role in getting World War I started. A tradition which has also seen the first woman kamikaze terrorist on the



impudence of bombarding the mailing list with an impressive quantity of everyday spam. Spam which, without irony, had the privilege of being recognized by some experts as pure network art. As some sort of apotheosis of communication, which in some interpretations in the network context would easily arouse sympathy.

At the same time, a media community losing its faith was slowing down in its activities, and languidly arguing about what a mailing list is all about. The discussion revolved around the difficulty in moderating the list, including the worries about fulfilling all sorts of wishes and different interests, like what is the acceptable limit of traffic of information, should information be censored, is there a need to sustain a mailing list just to accommodate the megalomania of some bombers and a handful of active graphomaniacs.

It is clear to everyone at this point that interpreting is *démodé*. What the artistic networks primarily need now is impartial information, free from any personal judgment. As if inevitably, with this act the haze of romantic mood that had surrounded the new technologies was gone, along with the conviction that a new artistic revolution was imminent as a result of their use.

Some of the media artists and activists, frustrated from the general discursive crisis in contemporary culture, suffering from the lack of adequate ideology, embittered by the institutional framework or simply having come to terms with it, took the path of the subcultural movements linked to the new technologies. On the border between complete commerce, the aquarium, alternative gestures and fashion attributes – the context of some festivals, night clubs, DJ and VJ parties or an e-zine looks quite free at first glance, outside any discursive norms, giving rise to the feeling that every one can choose for themselves. Then again we can remind ourselves how illusory freedom can be when it is granted by the alternatives produced by mass culture.

European continent, again in the same region, where Mara Buneva killed the chief of a secret police in 1928 before killing herself.

At the same time, a deep mystery surrounds Netochka. She has been used by a variety of groups and individuals as an avatar, and has become a virtual, collective identity, somewhat like Luther Blissett (perhaps Netochka is in real life a football player?) – a form of intervention pioneered by the mathematician Nicolas Bourbaki <<http://www.bourbaki.ens.fr/>>.

## Alternatives and Manifestos

*In short, the elitist cultural industry of discourse digests all of this in its lovely meat mincer and crams it on your plate in the quality of, let's say, "incorrect" politically correct art, savage social art, cyber-feminism, savage feminism... Spicy cuisine has always been the strength of the art system.*

Alexander Brener, *The Art of Leading a War Against an Institution* <sup>50</sup>

Traditionally in the history of modern art, the manifesto defines some movement or style that proclaims itself to be the one and only type of *in* art at that moment, i.e., the art that pretends to open a new paradigm which will destroy the existing norms of the official canon in order to impose the standards of the new and creative. Danto claims "it is part of the post-historical moment of art history that it is immune to manifestos and requires an altogether critical practice."<sup>51</sup> Trying to apply, to the extent that this is possible and necessary at all, this method of an "altogether critical practice" to contemporary culture and specifically contemporary art, and like this to analyze more carefully this "posthistorical" situation, in practice this period will also appear fragmented by a great number of examples proving the opposite. We do not cease to be confronted with the antagonism of statements held in the spirit of manifestos such as they accompany most contemporary art events and projects. *Ars Electronica* may serve as a good example:

*"The Digital Revolution is whipping through our lives like a Bengali Typhoon," wrote Louis Rossetto in the first edition of WIRED.<sup>52</sup> If we continue this comparison, the typhoon will not only whip through the fields of economics, but also*

<sup>50</sup> Alexander Brener, *The Art of Leading a War Against an Institution*, The Moscow Art Journal, No. 23 <<http://www.guelman.ru/xz/362/xx23/x2301.htm>> (in Russian).

<sup>51</sup> Arthur Danto, *Three decades after the end of art*, in: *After the end of art - Contemporary art and the pale of history*, Princeton (1995), p. 29.

<sup>52</sup> *Wired*, life-style magazine for the electronic generation, founded in 1993 <<http://www.wired.com/wired>>.

*Wired is about the most powerful people on this planet today - The Digital Generation.*

Louis Rossetto, in: *Wired 1.01* (Premiere Edition), March-April 1993 <<http://premiereissue.blogspot.com/2004/07/31-wired-premiere-issue-of-wired.html>>

*the constructs of ideas and art, yet at the same time, it will also be clearing the ground for a new cultural era.*

Hannes Leopoldseder, *Cyberart: Art of the Future - The Future of Art*<sup>53</sup>

All this desire to redefine, through the new forms of artistic creativity or through new technologies, theory and art itself or any other intellectual activities that are so far recognizable as art, continuously hurls us back to the crisis of modernity with its host of manifestos. It is not difficult to draw a parallel between some statements of post-historical authors and the statements of the modernists that have become history. Again in the same spirit, but this time using completely different media, “[Pablo] Picasso told [Françoise] Gilot that he and [Georges] Braque were endeavoring to ‘set up a new order,’<sup>54</sup> one which would do for art what the canon of rules of classical art did, but which broke down, he thought, with the impressionists. That the new order was to be universal was marked by the fact that the paintings of early cubism were anonymous, and hence pointedly anti-individual because unsigned.”<sup>55</sup>

In this entire race to “set up a new order,” stimulating progress and innovation in art, “Manifesta – European biennale of contemporary art” stands out as a more than adequate example. The newer of the great, institutionalized events has been contributing for years to the development of art in the direction of progress.

“What is Manifesta?” – the answer is published on the official site of the first edition of Manifesta: “Manifesta is a network and a process.” A trans-European NGO wrapped in the aura of mysterious alternative, providing a chance to young artists who are not integrated in the system, and at the same time intimately

linked, both in terms of ideology and funding, with the Soros network and other supranational institutions. They symbolize intercultural cooperation, multicultural progress, but also the pressure to integrate the “new democracies” in the Western world, with the totality of the network, via the channels of efficient and instantaneous communication – the trans-European cultural apparatuses of control and unification subordinate the artistic discourses and practical norms in order to impose the hard rules of the correct, the hegemonic culture.<sup>56</sup>

With its first manifesto, “Manifesta” does not proclaim anything different than the manifestos of the “modernisms” preceding it, long ago tamed and legitimized by official discourse. As if trying to subvert only within the framework of the officially imposed academic norms and modernist canon. “Manifesta” activates a process which, if anything, pseudo-politicizes the existing contemporary artistic discourses. This leads me to think that most attempts to write manifestos after the modern era prove the very “historical” inadequacy of such linguistic exercises.

Already the generation of 68 “kicked ass”, deconstructed, demystified, fragmented or derided any attempt at declaring a one and total, cosmopolitan standard, a common interpretation of the dominant metadiscourse. In the meantime there have been a few attempts at rehabilitating and dusting off, shaking off the naphthalene from this epistolary form. Today’s manifestos rather express the desire of marginalized groups to clearly structure their identity in order to demarcate themselves from the dominating majority, which in due correctness grants them this possibility. The writing of manifestos today is a lonely business,<sup>57</sup> old-fashioned. Over the past 20 years, it is the writing of obituaries that has imposed itself as more state-of-the-art, the writing of conceptions, e-mails or, even simpler, reducing the genre to true minimalism – SMS.

<sup>53</sup> Hannes Leopoldseder, *Cyberart: Art of the Future - The Future of Art*, in: Hannes Leopoldseder and Christine Schöpf, *cyberarts - International Compendium Prix Ars Electronica*, Edition 97.

<sup>54</sup> We were trying to set up a new order, and it had to express itself through different individuals.

Françoise Gilot and Carleton Lake, *Life with Picasso*, 1993, p. 69.

<sup>55</sup> Arthur C. Danto, *Three Decades after the End of Art*, in: Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art - Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, 1997, p. 30.

<sup>56</sup> “Europe” is defined in the widest possible geographical sense, as stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals and from northernmost parts of the continent to the shores of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. At a conference held in January 1994 in The Hague, an overwhelming majority of national representatives agreed to cooperate in this new European network. From the official site of Manifesta 1 <<http://www.manifesta.org/manifesta1/advboard.htm>>.

<sup>57</sup> Speaking with Ray Bradbury.

## The Manifesto of “Manifesta 1”

*you will be amused and bewildered  
you will not find paintings or monumental sculptures  
you will not see a traditional presentation  
it will not be a form of art involved only with itself, with art*

From the official site of Manifesta 1<sup>58</sup>

If there is one key question hiding behind the concept of the “Alternative” – the alternative proposed by events like “Manifesta” –, not only does it not escape the official discourse imposed by the global Art Scene. It conjures it up, produces, reproduces, presents and represents recognizable current conflicts in order to create its own alternativelessness.

*“Manifesta is a pan-European event, which aims to be open, fresh and ‘alternative.’”*<sup>59</sup> It is thus no accident if “Manifesta” succeeded already with its first edition in gathering under its warm institutional wing most of the media projects that had so far had some visibility, as well as other experimental and new artistic practices related to the Internet and communication technologies. This includes the works of some of the “half-institutionalized” but still quite “alternative” and “forever young” East-European artists.<sup>60</sup>

## The Global Art Scene

*But the so-called “contemporary art” is a product of the contemporary neoliberal political system, and to my perhaps to some extent barbarian eyes, this is one of the most effective and actively working models of this system. [...]*

*This system is deep, structured in complex ways and incessantly incorporates into itself new elements: starting with the latest sorts of yogurt to immigrant families from Africa or Asia, from ultra-*

*contemporary models of weapons to the newest artistic movements. Yes, yes, precisely! The artistic movements in the contemporary world also secure the system of control and the system of production, like for instance sports and tourism.*

Alexander Brener, *The Art of Leading a War Against an Institution*<sup>61</sup>

If I try to map out, to study the distribution of contemporary art, there is no need to draw a new map. Basing myself on the “objective” and “neutral” discipline of geography I can use one of the marvelously prepared geo-economical world atlases, for instance the “Atlas of Globalization” published by the French monthly newspaper *Le Monde Diplomatique*.<sup>62</sup> Susan George of the French “anti-globalization” NGO ATTAC<sup>63</sup> advertises it as follows: *“In this atlas you’ll find everything one needs: maps with background information, informative data and charts as well as competent explanations about the fundamental economic, ecological and political questions of globalization – all this presented in useable and clear form. It is a great achievement of Le Monde Diplomatique, a dense compendium and, not least, the indispensable handbook for all those who want to stand up for a more equitable world order.”* Of course, despite the expert words of praise, I need to partly fall back on my imagination, or rather make use of an elementary comparison to superimpose my real-imaginary map of contemporary art with the maps in the “Atlas of Globalization.” I then find that the distribution of contemporary art in the cultural space of the Third World coincides marvelously with the

average age of 30-45 years, this slogan was a take-off on the state of things at the time – one had to wait in the rows of the AMH until the age of 40 before one could become a member of SBH.

<sup>61</sup> Alexander Brener, *The Art of Leading a War Against an Institution*, *The Moscow Art Journal*, No. 23 <<http://www.guelman.ru/xz/362/xx23/x2301.htm>> (in Russian).

<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, no English edition has been published to date. The French edition is called “L’Atlas du Monde Diplomatique”, the German edition “*Atlas der Globalisierung*.”

<sup>63</sup> ATTAC stands for the French “Association pour une Taxation des Transactions financières pour l’Aide aux Citoyens” (Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for Helping Citizens), an effort to NGO-ize the global anti-capitalist mobilizations that have emerged since 1998, using a platform based on the Tobin tax on speculative flows to herald the taming of wild capitalism.

<sup>58</sup> Manifesta 1 <<http://www.manifesta.org/manifesta1/index.html>>.

<sup>59</sup> From the official site of Manifesta 1 <<http://www.manifesta.org/manifesta1/statemnt.htm>>.

<sup>60</sup> In Bulgaria, after the fall of the Berlin wall, in an attempt to survive in the new economic and especially political conditions, a fraction of SBH and AMH, respectively (SBH: Association of Bulgarian Artists; AMH: Young Artist’s Studio), renamed itself to Club of the Eternally Young Artist. With an

opening up of the most remote and least industrialized territories towards the technologies and the economic, social and ideological processes of globalization.

With its entire range of power systems, the institutional framework of contemporary art includes the role of museums, galleries, kunsthallen and the gigantic networks of exhibitions, but also the function of art theory and criticism, the art market and the entire system of cultural funding, with the special programs for helping and correspondingly incorporating the art of the less developed regions where the processes have unfolded more slowly and less successfully, or the non-Western regions that have not been colonized at all, into this system. The “detrterritorialized” – or global – art is a phenomenon of central importance for the very process of “integration” of the newly acquired territories. At the same time, it constitutes a very convincing and ingenious means of imposing strict rules and common standards.

The Mongolian, Tibetan, Bulgarian or some of the other artists positioned outside the center of the Art System are just as open, inventive, up-to-date and contemporary as their colleagues based in the very center. They might feel somewhat offended if their art was looked upon from a different perspective from that applied in the analysis of the art of their New York or London based colleagues. Their colleagues who are lucky enough that leaving their studio, they can immediately participate in the preparation of the context itself, in the very center of the factory of metadiscourses, not in one of its remote subsidiaries.

### “The Show Must Go On”<sup>64</sup>

*Being subjected to this external judgment on it, this art becomes Eastern European; becomes informative about what Eastern Europe is, what Russia is, what the Czech Republic is. So we can't ignore that. And in this sense, Eastern European art is really Eastern European art and nothing else.*

Boris Groys, *The Complicity of Oblivion*<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Song by the world-famous British pop group Queen, released on 14 October 1991 as a single, then on 28 October on the album *Greatest Hits II*.

<sup>65</sup> Boris Groys, *The Complicity of Oblivion*, presented at the MoMA symposium of 23 March 2003, *East of Art: Transformations in Eastern Europe* <<http://www.artmargins.com/content/moma/groys.html>>.

Boldly I can assert that despite all the convincing arguments that can be heard to the opposite effect, a part of the art produced in the East is absolutely not fake or an imitation of anything else, pre-existing. It is rather, like all other contemporary art, a replica of some other replica of some quote taken from someone, sometime and somewhere. In this sense it too is free to have quite up-to-date, total and global character. In spite of these engaging arguments the stereotype in the selection of East-European artists as well as the way in which their work is interpreted have been marked and continue to mark the lines of discrimination in which they have been crammed already with the first projects to which they have been allowed to participate.

In most cases, even now towards them and their art arguments are used which are based on some geopolitical details or historical facts. Their art is selected and presented based on regional principles embraced by the curators and the institutions. This method often stands in contradiction to the criteria used when it concerns the art of the Western World.

At the beginning of the nineties, after the fall of the Berlin wall, described by some theorists as an infantile period of mutual interest, a number of large projects and exhibitions were produced to enable East-European artists to join in the international artistic exchange and overcome the isolation and frustration. Their thematic accent lay on the region, the new names and East-European contemporary art. And if the titles from this early period are saturated with theoretical sense and testify to political and social involvement, like “Ostranenie”<sup>66</sup> or “After the Wall: Art and culture in post-Communist Europe,”<sup>67</sup> currently the thematic and sizeable presentations of East-European art in the Western World refer us rather to the entertainment cultural industry and show business. Titles dripping with a dramatic

<sup>66</sup> Ostranenie, from Russian: estrangement, specifically as used by Viktor Shklovsky in his 1916 article “*Art as Device*,” one of the founding texts of the Russian formalists. *Ostranenie Festival* at Bauhaus Dessau, 1993-1997, which aimed at presenting artists from Eastern Europe and make their work visible. The Web site <<http://www.ostranenie.org>> unfortunately does not exist any longer.

<sup>67</sup> *After the Wall: Art and culture in post-Communist Europe*, from 16 October 1999 to 16 January 2000, at the Modern Museum Stockholm, Sweden.



sexual energy characteristic of erotic films, skillfully combine with the illusion of the dynamic sequences of an action film: “*Blood & Honey / Future’s in the Balkans*”,<sup>68</sup> or “*In the Gorges of the Balkans*.”<sup>69</sup>

There is still the possibility that these associations contain ironic references to the entertainment industry and the show business. It is clear that politically and socially engaged art will have difficulties in attracting that object of desire – the public. And when the big names are absent from the exhibition – those who could guarantee you that it is worth the effort – your failure is guaranteed. The bloody public will not show up anyway. The formula for success lies in those exhibitions that even with their title promise the experience of a spectacle. After all, the deficit of visitors is not an peculiarity of the East. This painful question is on the agenda not only in the system of the hallen, but takes on an increasingly important and greater part in the complex of questions around the exhibitions of every major international event in the World of Art. The sponsors become more and more capricious, want to know what happens with their money. For them the most important thing is the result – added visibility in terms of its societal and mass-media reflection. More visitors – this is one of the fundamental reasons for the pressure on the curatorial team from the board, the sponsors and the institution. More and more, the vision that is in demand is that of the curator as an impartial manager who juggles well between her/his intellectual aspirations and her/his business responsibilities as a TV host. On that Front the battle cannot be lost, since the formula is quite simple, flexible, transparent and correspondingly easy to master: “Due to the extremely graphic nature of this show, you may end up watching it over and over again!”<sup>70</sup>

... THE END

<sup>68</sup> *Blood & Honey / Future’s in the Balkans*, The Essl Collection, Klosterneuburg/Vienna, 16 May-28 September 2003 (curator Harald Szeemann).

<sup>69</sup> *In the Gorges of the Balkans*, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany, 30 August-23 November 2003 (curator René Block).

<sup>70</sup> Warning from the short animated film “*When animated animals attack*” on MTV (1’50”), itself a take-off on a reality show on Fox, called “*When animals attack*”.



Photograph by Alain Kessi (who found this object on a sunny summer afternoon while out for a walk with our children along the river near our house as I was writing this text)



blahobytí. Budou usilovat o vyloučení konfliktů ze své mezinárodní hospodářské politiky  
principles upon which these institutions are founded.

a budou podporovat hospodářskou spolupráci mezi jakýmkoli smluvními stranami  
of stability and well-being. They will seek

nebo mezi všemi smluvními stranami.  
national economic policies and will encourage

or all of them.

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**Les parties contribueront au  
développement de relations  
internationales pacifiques et  
amicales en renforçant leurs libres  
institutions, en assurant une meilleure**

**compréhension des principes sur  
cesse Einrichtungen**

**lesquels ces institutions sont fondées  
e Voraussetzungen**

**et en développant les conditions  
d das Wohlergehen**

**propres à assurer la stabilité et le bien-  
être. Elles s'efforceront d'éliminer**

Die Parteien werden zur weiteren Entwicklung friedlicher und

freundschaftlicher internationaler Beziehungen beitragen, indem

sie ihre freien Einrichtungen festigen, ein besseres Verständnis

Τα Μέρη θέλουν συμβάλλει εις την περαιτέρω ανάπτυξιν ειρηνικών και

für die Grundsätze herbeiführen, auf denen diese Einrichtungen

φιλικών διεθνών σχέσεων δια της ενισχύσεως των ελευθέρων αυτών

beruhen, und indem sie die Voraussetzungen für die innere

θεσμών, δια της επιτεύξεως καλλίτερος κατανοήσεως των αρχών εφ'

Festigkeit und das Wohlergehen fördern. Sie werden bestrebt sein,

ων οι θεσμοί ούτοι έχουν εδραιωθή και δια της προαγωγής συνθηκών

Gegensätze in ihrer internationalen Wirtschaftspolitik zu beseitigen

σταθερότητας και ευημερίας, θέλουσιν επιδιώξει την εξάλειψιν των

und die wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit zwischen einzelnen oder

συγκρούσεων εις την οριστή αυτών οικονομικήν πολιτικήν και θέλουσιν

allen Parteien zu fördern.

ενθαρρύνει την οικονομικήν συνεργασίαν μεταξύ τινών ή του συνόλου

αυτών.

**The Parties will contribute toward the further development of**

peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening

their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding

of the principles upon which these institutions are founded, and

by promoting conditions of stability and well-being. They will

seek to eliminate conflict in their international economic policies

and will encourage economic collaboration between any or all of

them.

Die Parteien werden zur weitere

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