



Jasna Jakšić

On total work of art, dismantled



Abstract

The text discusses several recent works by five artists and one artistic duo originating from Croatia: through the works in question it seeks to accentuate some of the key elements that could describe something as the “national art scene”. Issues of cultural identity, recent history, art history and its myths exist along with artistic practices whose means of expression are far from any local context, but all of them call for international audience. The point of departure is the notion of “total work of art” coined more or less in times when the nation state and, consequently, national art were invented. But, just like the totality of artistic experience, once established, has been dismantled, works by Ana Hušman, Lala Rašić, Ivana Franke, David Maljković, Damir Očko, and Fokus grupa (Iva Kovač and Elvis Krstulović), questioning perception, identity construction, modernist past and present of permanent transition, language and its performativity, do not corroborate national self-presentation in contemporary art. On the contrary, they cut into its weak points, not only with their double and plural identities, but also with their multilayered openness towards other cultural contexts.



The second panel of *Contemporary Art 1. Didactic Exhibition on Abstract Art*, a travelling exhibition which took place in 1957 at Zagreb’s Gallery of Contemporary Art - today’s Museum of Contemporary art Zagreb - and aimed at offering a modernistically structured view on contemporary art and its sources to the widest public throughout Yugoslavia - contained a translation of the famous diagram by Alfred H. Barr, which offered a synthesis of art with Bauhaus as its centrepiece (Kolešnik 2011, p. 139), branching off towards the abstract art of the time. We are in the late 1950s, and along with high modernism it is the upcoming neo-avant-garde that increasingly takes over the language of the mass media, preparing an extended reading of the interpretation and reception of artworks. As one of the historical sources to which art recurs in its experimental currents, the utopia of the artistic synthesis, a total work of art, inherited and subverted from the Wagnerian world and the revolutionary visions of a totalizing, omnipresent art intended for the popular masses at large, sporadically resurfaces (Roberts 2011, p. 8). The discipline of Bauhaus, focusing on rationality and everyday life, has translated it into the total

design of private, working, and public space, where the borderline between art and life has become blurred, creating a fundamental political responsibility that has been readily accepted by the neo-constructivism of the post-war period. Considering these tectonic shifts in the creation, reception, and presentation of artworks from the positions of today's contemporary visual production, it seems remarkable as opening up those fields of form and content that are now increasingly considered self-evident. Thereby it was not the present-day type of total art, which inevitably includes monumentality and universality. In accordance with the medium that has introduced the total experience in the first place, namely cinema, its potential can also be viewed through the prism of multiple channels through which the artwork, or its process of creation, are distributed, mediated and presented in a gallery or in any other context where art is displayed. Modernism promoted a seemingly neutral, self-sufficient and universally intelligible art object: so what has remained after the fall of that modernist utopia? Often emptied of the object, the context has remained bare, and is used to derive strategies of interpretation, presentation, and substitution of the artwork or the activity as such. The totalizing role is no longer played by the opera, but rather by the artistic installation or, in an extremely reduced form, by artistic documentation, that, according to Boris Groys, reconnects art and life in biopolitical terms, when through the means of documentation life becomes art itself (Groys 2006, p.12).

When describing the contemporary Croatian art scene and its links to Italy by means of artworks and artistic procedures, the simplest way would be to analyze the opuses of several contemporary artists who are active in the Croatian context and were at some point connected to Italy during their training or professional life – and these are truly remarkable artists such as Zlatko Kopljarić, Vedran Perković, Igor Eškić, Nemanja Cvijanović, and Marko Tadić, to name just a few. However, in the following pages, through the narratives on these authors, my aim has been to outline the tension between interpreting the image of the national scene today and the way in which art relates to the national in the first place, as well as today's reflections on the internationalism of the historical avant-garde and neo-avant-garde. Attitudes towards a different culture, to which Croatia has been historically linked in many ways, varies from one case to another - be it in terms of influence of individual artists, references to former cultural collaboration, present-day initiatives, or the location in which particular artworks were created. Or perhaps it is something that may be a common trait of artworks emerging from cultural contexts that are not easily interpreted by using international standards - the very format of self-representation beyond the rather uncomfortable setting of the official national culture.



Fig. 1: Ivana Franke, *Seeing with eyes closed*, 2011. Courtesy of the artist.

The art of Ivana Franke builds on the tradition of the avant-garde, both the historical one and the neo-avant-garde: the concepts of total and open artwork unite in her minutely planned ambiances, each of them in itself an exercise in visual perception. The totalizing mandate of achieving a fusion between life and art, imposed by the historical avant-garde, overlaps here with a carefully construed synthesis of artistic and scientific research: in her recent piece called *Seeing with Eyes Closed*, inaugurated at Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice in June 2011, and subsequently presented at Zagreb's House for People and Art Lauba in 2012, Franke constructed an environment for perceptive stimulation and an analysis of the emergence of visual images. But the ambience, which is completed only when the spectator has entered, is only a part of her research, albeit perhaps the most spectacular one: it is complemented by a lecture held at the exhibition opening and an artist book. In view of her collaboration with scientists, Franke can quite consistently be classified as continuing the research of the neo-avant-garde of the 1960s. Moreover, the form of her *monadic room*, as Elena Agudio has called it (2011), as a space left to the flashes of light flickering at frequencies ranging from 10-50 Hz, has the features of a nomadic, travelling structure for the analysis and production of images. The construction itself was preceded by a research on perception, carried out by neuroscientist Ida Momennejad, while Franke's models in the use of flickering light include *Dreamachine* by Bryan Gynt from 1964 (Agudio 2011). Getting away from the visual impressiveness of this stroboscopic artwork and

towards what precedes our perception and construes it, we will get to the conditions of image production and the reflection of perception in their performance, even their eventfulness. For images happen in our brains after all, as a segment of the complex process of mediation, projection, and editing of the external world. It is through the image of the self that we see the world, while the way in which it is created, under the impact of our environment, is subject to the basic political question of how the world comes into existence and how we operate within it.

In this segment, Franke's work may be comparable to the environments of Gianni Colombo (Beccaria 2009), reminiscences of which are certainly present. A common element is that his artworks would acquire their final form in the very eye of the observer, due to his use of pulsating light in his early ambiances. But whereas Colombo's art involved a sort of social dynamics, engaging groups of visitors in his ambiances, that of Ivana Franke, at least in this particular case, is meant entirely for an individual perception, even when more than one observer is allowed to enter the room, as in *When I close my eyes, I see a flock of birds*. Reserved, without the baroque scenic quality that is so characteristic of Olafur Eliasson, with whom she shares some common traits, her work makes a decisive cut away from the stroboscopic dispersion of the visual sign and the aggression directed against the ocular nerve. Its fundamental democracy resides in that almost bare segment of the modernist utopia: it is an artwork submitted to naked perception, in an almost equal collision with both science and art, demystifying and re-mystifying the latter at the same time. As neuroscientist Ida Mommenejad, with whom, as well as with Alexander Abbushi, Ivana Franke developed her works *Seeing with eyes closed* and *Waking background*, stated in her lecture held at the exhibition opening, those works create an environment for critical reflection on how we see ourselves and how the seeing ourselves shapes us. Mommenjad interprets it as a mode of political action in the almost Bauhaus-like idea about the impact of the perceived on the performance of the self and the way it operates in the world, as well as the responsibility for creating and operating in the world of visual images and signs.



Fig. 2: Ivana Franke, *When we close our eyes we see a flock of birds*, 2013. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 3: David Maljković, *Images with their own shadow*, 2008. 16mm film installation. Courtesy the Artist, Annet Gelink Gallery Amsterdam, Georg Kargl Fine Arts, Vienna, Metro Pictures, New York, Sprueth Magers, Berlin London.



Fig. 4: David Maljković, *Images with their own shadow*, 2008. film still. Courtesy the Artist, Annet Gelink Gallery Amsterdam, Georg Kargl Fine Arts, Vienna, Metro Pictures, New York, Sprueth Magers Berlin London.

The *oeuvre* of David Maljković recalls the neo-avant-garde on several levels. The most famous example is his video *Scenes for a New Heritage* from 2004, which almost iconically warned of the demise of the modernist utopia as embodied in the artworks of sculptor Vojin Bakić. As a protagonist of Croatian and Yugoslav modernism and author of some of the most successful abstract sculptures in public space, mostly placed at commemorative localities related to the anti-fascist struggle in World War II, Bakić witnessed at the very end of his life the destruction of so many artworks in the Croatian war of the 1990s: at that time, monuments commemorating the struggle of the Yugoslav partisans were a challenge and a provocation to a part of the Croatian population, and in Bakić's case, his Serbian origin and the partisan tradition of his family could only be a disadvantage. A long-awaited retrospective exhibition of his work is soon to be opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art. Maljković's film takes place in front of one of Bakić's most controversial monuments: the commemorative complex in Croatian WWII memorial site Petrova Gora, a futuristic construction from 1981 that remained uncompleted, and which the contemporary art critics could barely accept as it was far ahead of his time.

Unfortunately, the monument was devastated after the territory was returned under the jurisdiction of the Croatian state in 1995: it lost a part of its steel plating. In Maljković's post-apocalyptic video, the visitors approach the monument and discuss in a non-existing language - translated in subtitles - about the enigmatic uses and functions of the monument. The author almost prophetically heralded the visual travelogues that have been presenting Yugoslav abstract sculpture in the recent years, rather superficially and with a good dose of exoticism. But among the most relevant investigations on the public monument sculpture of the 1960s and 1970s, which have explored the modernist legacy in an artistic and academic context, and have been on the increase since the early 2000s, a particularly important one is the project called *YESTERDAY TOMORROW* by curator Vesna Vuković, who has more than once and from various viewpoints raised the question *What is to be done with Petrova Gora* by means of exhibitions set up at the very locality of the monument and at Gallery Nova, as well as in debates and a publication.



Fig. 5: David Maljković, *These days*, 2005.
video stills. Courtesy the Artist, Annet Gelink Gallery
Amsterdam, Georg Kargl Fine Arts, Vienna, Metro Pictures,
New York, Sprueth Magers Berlin London.

The ensuing video *Memories of These Days* (2005), created shortly afterwards, was shot in the former Italian Pavilion at the Zagreb Fairgrounds¹. Its main protagonists, people of Maljković's age and active on the Croatian cultural scene, utter bizarre sentences in English, unnaturally slowed down and in a distorted voice. We could interpret them as ghostlike, and, according to Anselm Franke, "for Maljković, ghosts do not come from an elsewhere, they are simply there; reminding that the past is still with us" (Franke 2012, p. 85). It is the generation that spent most of its most productive years in the waiting room of the transition period, at the time when the entry of Croatia in the EU was speculated to happen in 2009 (Cerizza 2007) The video was presented in the interior of a standing car, its wheels blocked by a cardboard prop, an exhausted and abandoned counterpart of *Nike of Samothrace* from Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto*. This world delivers modernity realised as a psychological condition; no longer mythological, it has become mental reality and then a reality of de-mobilisation, states Franke in his essay *Modernity Realized* (Franke 2012, p. 105). Voice, which is perhaps the first element introducing intermediality and totality into the well ordered visual world of modernism, is what has been taken away from the young (and beautiful!) people featuring in a film shot in 2008, in front of artworks made by artist and architect Vjenceslav Richter at the Collection of Vjenceslav Richter and Nada Kareš-Richter. They have been given Richter's voice, and by using this director's intervention, Maljković has transformed his imaginary spectators and the fictive audience of Richter's work and museum into a medium, into those who transmit the message. Vesna Meštrić, curator of the Richter collection states in her introduction essay that *Images with Their Own Shadows* have their origin in the legacy of the EXAT 51 ideas, expressed in one of Richter's less familiar statements:

[...] if there were such a thing as architecture without function, if it were actually a collage crucified in space, it would be a real spatial image experienced by the viewer from the inside, but in that case a part of the image would always be out of his range of sight (Meštrić 2011).

At the series of exhibitions *Images for Secession*, this artwork has been represented by a crystal-like stage set and a screening frame, as a window into utopias that were perhaps never as topical as today. Its shape has its origin in one of late Richter's works, as Vesna Meštrić writes, *Truncated Cube* from 2001, which marked his explorations in the field of deconstruction «by opening the inner spaces of a cube as new artistic facts» (Meštrić 2011).

¹ For an analysis of this work, see Valentina Rossi essay published in this volume.



Fig. 6, 7: Ana Hušman, *Postcards*, 2013. film stills.
Courtesy of the artist.



A stage set, this time cinematic, likewise accompanies the gallery staging of one of the most awarded films by Ana Hušman, *Lunch* from 2008. A study on the rules of proper behaviour, taken from traditional cookbooks and manuals on etiquette, has been dramatized on the basis of an almost exaggerated evocation of social gatherings in the 1970s, when such literature was very popular and widely read. The rather archaic sentences describing the desirable manners when entertaining guests for lunch problematize rather openly the issue of woman's work and her responsibility for the household, additionally underlined by the stage set and the costumes, which recall the era of intensive struggles for women's rights. At the same time, with regard to the thirty-year time gap, the film draws its spectators, at least those from the European cultural circle, onto the slippery ground of nostalgia. A different type of nostalgia, now for one's homeland, has been used as a basis of small educational sketches in the textbook of Croatian language intended for the children and grandchildren of Croatian emigrants, which Hušman has staged in her most recent film, *Postcards* (2013). Learning a language that these protagonists did not suck in with their mother's milk, but must learn as a second language despite their origin, proves to be an excellent medium for communicating bizarre commonplaces and reasons for national pride. In order to corroborate national identification with the linguistic one, the emigrants' children are thus taught that they belong to one of the most ancient peoples in Europe. It is known that Eugène

Ionesco used to borrow texts from handbooks of English language for his theatre of absurd, but these sentences, whose meaning is often reduced to exemplifying a grammatical rule, or teaching the correct use of a word, seem even more grotesque in their function of awakening and triggering national pride. Thus Croatia and Zagreb are considered very ancient - unlike America, discovered only in 1492 - famous for their beautiful old houses and their caring and hospitable people, who drink brandy before their lunch... These expectedly stereotypical situations are enhanced by means of cultural and tourist information about Zagreb, which sound equally absurd and are in some cases simply incorrect. As Ana Hušman states in the interview published in the exhibition leaflet:

for the play I use dialogues from handbooks for studying language and they are interesting because they are written in a way you cannot stage. That is the dialogue that cannot be realized. The impossibility of the performative of the text and the possibility of ending it at any given moment is interesting to me in work with actors and the text itself (Hušman 2013).

The film alternates sketches in the form of reading exercises with acted segments, moving picture postcards of Zagreb and their emotional descriptions, and with textual sequences containing sentences that actual people have written on postcards sent to their dear ones or relatives back home in Thirties. That often insecure, uncouth and even incorrect language is contrasted in its living history to the artificial language standard that permeates the tacky dialogues falsifying the past and the present for the sake of propaganda rather than education. In her text *Postcards* Leonida Kovač added to *History and Photography*, which Barthes recognizes as inventions of the nineteenth century, nation state and postcards:

In this nineteenth century, in which the industrial revolution was accompanied by the invention of mass, reproducible media and mass migrations of the population, the nation state set up a monopoly on the postal system, and the first printed picture postcard the visuals of which were meant as souvenirs appeared in 1870 in France, at Camp de Conile, the training camp for soldiers in the Franco-Prussian war (Kovač 2013).

Let us finish the line with the notion of *Gesamtkunstwerke*, which emerged after the national uprisings in Europe of 1848. Three music intermezzos bring songs that are repeated beyond the limits of the spectators' patience, performed by an orchestra dressed as animals in the national coat of arms. However, that musical heraldry,

inspired by songs that bear actual national significance, is exhausted in its symbolical meaning, as it is, alluding to the continuity of national statehood in a period that did not even know the idea of nation, void of all content in the present context, or even for the times when the national coat of arms was designed.



Fig. 8: Fokus grupa, *A Proposal for the Monument to the New (Inter)Nationalism* (installation detail), 2012. Courtesy of the artists

National parks and memorial localities are places in which the territory of a state is inscribed emotionally, intertwined with personal histories and daydreaming. They have an important role in recent installations by Fokus grupa (art and life partners Iva Kovač and Elvis Krstulović), presented for the first time at Miroslav Kraljević Gallery in Zagreb in 2012. The smallest, most basic unit of the installation, which provides the common title to the entire exhibition, is the sculpture *A Proposal for the Monument to the New (Inter)Nationalism* - a faithful replica of an oak twig: a powerful tree that is at once a symbol of numerous and diverse Indo-European identities, but also a historically marked economic resource and, in some cases, a stronghold of national or regional economies. Like its counterpart from the animal kingdom, the eagle, the oak features in numerous national emblems, and their strong mythological foothold among, for example, the Slavic nations, lies in the fact that both symbols allude to the supreme deity called Perun, an archetypal figure of patriarchal power. Similar attributes are ascribed to the Greek Zeus, “the father of gods and men,” as well as to his Roman counterpart, Jupiter, and these ancient pagan deities are replaced in the Christian version by the Old Testament Saint Elias or the celestial

warrior Saint Michael. In times of national revivals and awakenings, as well as the creation of nation-states or at least mythologies on the European soil, the pagan heritage and its atavisms are used as a foundation for youthful nationalism, more often than not with a visual backdrop of the newfound beauty of the untouched, virginal, and sometimes wild and cruel nature. But the frail twig appeared in the exhibition as an emblem of resources, that is, the utilitarian application of symbols, functioning as a reminder of the former economic importance.

Seen symbolically, the frail twig, made out of polyester, is a tree substitute dedicated to the divine father, whose sanctuaries were often located on mountain tops or at least hills. A more contemporary version of such an altar is the *Altar of the Homeland* by Kuzma Kovačić, erected in 1994 in Medvedgrad above Zagreb during the questionable restoration and reconstruction of the medieval fortress which had roused the popular and literary imagination at the time of late Romanticism. Combining the location of the pagan sanctuary dedicated to an altitude deity with the aggressive royalist tradition of the original, nineteenth-century Altar of the Homeland in Rome, a monument was designed that stands apart from the formal lines of late minimalism thanks to a few descriptive details which locate it in a specific historical context. In the gallery appropriation of the purified altar form, Iva Kovač and Elvis Krstulović used a far more perishable and modest material than precious stone, utilizing recycled discarded chipboard furniture for creating the sculpture *Behavioral Furniture*. Kovačić's altar's neutral cubes recreated by Fokus grupa direct the motion through the Gallery Miroslav Kraljević, in a way almost becoming gallery furniture, a sculpture that not only can be touched but also sat upon, reduced to its basic form and some fundamental utilitarian uses, like sitting on it while watching the film projection.

According to the authors, the starting point of the film *There Aren't Words for What We Do or How We Feel so We Have to Make Them Up* and of the entire project is their foray into nature which had begun precisely at Medvedgrad. Their trips to Medvednica were not escapist protests like the work *Hallelujah the hills* by the group Weekend art - filmmaker and performer Tomislav Gotovac, Ivana Keser Battista, Aleksandar Battista Ilić -, but a pilgrimage to the place that has in recent media reveilles become one of the new iconic images that affirm the identity of the inhabitants of *Our Beautiful*. The authors' forays have resulted from them, followed by a professional camera through national parks with the intention of being openly exposed to the celebrated landscape. Giving up the safety of the ironic tradition and distance, Fokus grupa embarked on a quest for "genuine national identity" in a landscape devoid of immediate markers of civilization and historical sediment, even in the form of ruins so dear to Romanticism.

The film *There Aren't Words for What We Do or How We Feel so We Have to Make Them Up* opens with an allusion to an anecdote that affirms the myth of "the most beautiful county in the world" - Alfred Hitchcock's famous admiration for the sunset on the shores of Zadar - but the filmic quest for Arcadia and the authentic emotions it awakens becomes a meditation on the failed attempt to construct the image and vision that would directly, nonverbally, mediate concepts such as origin, unity, purity, timelessness. Language, another stronghold of national identity, is performed in the film by a male speaker, in international English seasoned with a Slavic accent.

Embarking on a trip outside the secure city street raster as well as beyond their usual media of artistic work, Iva Kovač and Elvis Krstulović commence their search for the "real places" that lie outside the media-mediated instruments of national self-identification and pay visits to all the more or less present mythical topoi, like the Velebit's Holy Hill. Their characters are not recorded by camera, but inscribed in the editing process, integrated only by the seemingly neutral suggestive baritone who confesses the search in the first person. The work's procedural aspect, indicated only by the confessional form of the text, can be glimpsed through the dramaturgy of attempting and giving up which the spoken testimony is based on.

International English, but in written form, appears in the artist book *Perfect Lovers* (2002 - 2012). The very choice of language distances itself from the form of the private, and the confessional character of the real stories is blurred by the shifts and overlaps of the protagonists' identities. The texts, short love croquis, are followed by the authors' private photographs, thus physically exposing their intimacy, hidden behind words in the language performance and displaced narration. The confession thereby takes refuge in the secure domain of sexual fantasy, and the documentary in fiction. The couple's photographic exposure takes place with separate protagonists, in moments of relaxation and outside any roles, revealing them only in their physical presence. The internationalism introduced by the oak twig, a symbol of identity and the ancient basis of economy but also of the space created by man, is conveyed through a public display of confessions and intimate stories. Love is derived from the acceptance of the world through the division of difference, and that is the beginning of the universalist potential of each of these personal, intimate stories, as Alain Badiou would say in his book *In Praise of Love* (Badiou 2011, p. 51). But while discussing the comparison of love and politics, Badiou also touches on the subject of internationalism, this time through the somewhat anachronistic notion of "fraternity."

There are two political, or philosophical-political, notions one can compare at a purely formal level to the dialectics present within love. Firstly, the word “communism” encompasses this idea that the collectivity is capable of integrating all extrapolitical differences... But what on earth is “fraternity”? No doubt it is related to the issue of differences, of their friendly co-presence within the political process, the essential boundary being the confrontation with the enemy. And that is a notion that can be covered by internationalism, because if the collective can really take equality on board, that means it can also integrate the most extensive divergences and greatly limit the power of identity (Badiou 2011, p. 60).

«National landscapes use their nature, in which image and reality are intertwined, in order to naturalize the nation’s legitimacy. Like the altar, the image of the national landscape summarizes their complexity into visual clarity» as Paul Wilson (2007, p. 155) writes in his text *Banality and critique: Contemporary photography and Finnish national landscape*. Contemporary Finnish photography and the famous Helsinki School, which Wilson discusses in his essay, are often cited as an example of the coupling of art and nationalism which seeks to internalize the representation of nature into something called the national space and, consequently, through the process of self-legitimization, the national imaginary. As an opposition to such instrumentalization Wilson cites the aesthetics of banality, used by some artists to rebel against that kind of identification. In the case of the work of Iva Kovač and Elvis Krstulović, that is, Fokus grupa, it is precisely love speech, but also the risk of love, through the prism of emphatic emotion which they are unreservedly given over to, that is the origin of the liberation of language, of landscape, and finally the very medium of the safe cradle of national culture.

The process and collaboration network of the Individual Utopias project

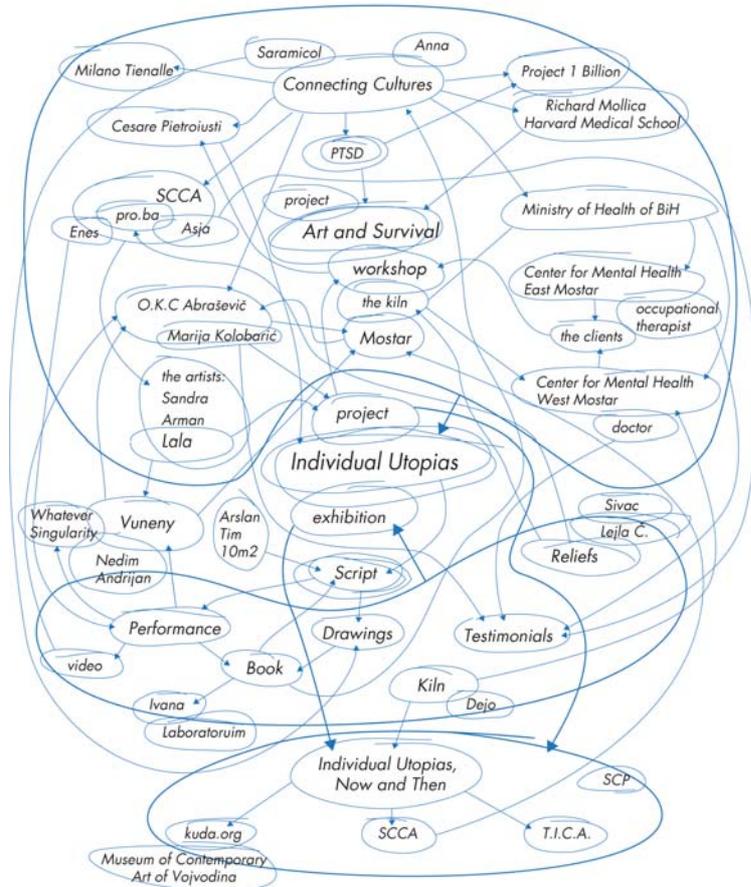


Fig. 9: Lala Raščić, *Individual utopias*, graph (as published in Raščić 2010). Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 10: Lala Raščić and Vuneny, *Individual utopias / rehearsal for a performance*, 2008, video still. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 11: Lala Raščić,
Individual utopias. terracotta relief, 33 x 32 x 5 cm, 2008
(2010). Courtesy of the artist.

Individual Utopias is the title of an artist book and a performance by Lala Raščić from 2008. The expression has been borrowed from a sentence uttered by Italian artist Cesare Pietroiusti during the five-day conference held in May 2007 in Mostar, organized by the Milanese Centre of Connecting Cultures in the framework of the *Project 1 Billion* (Raščić 2010, p. 39). It was an engaged and collaborative art project in which Lala Raščić - who currently lives and works between Sarajevo, Zagreb, and New Orleans- together with two younger artists from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Armin Kulašić and Sandra Dukić, was to participate and moderate a workshop at the Centre for Mental Health in Mostar, divided into two factions. The artistic and humanitarian initiative was meant to train the patients, diagnosed with the Posttraumatic Stress Syndrome, to work creatively and produce ceramic souvenirs, which in a utopian budget proposal figured as a basis of self-financing for the project. The whole process was also to be recorded and assembled into a documentary on the workshop and the project by the production house pro.ba from Sarajevo. However, although supported from various important institutions, among others the Federal Ministry of Health, the project failed to serve as an example of healing war traumas by using the power of art and surpassing the divisions by means of creative energy. Since its basis was the donation of a ceramic oven to the Centre for Mental Health, on which patients from both eastern and western embankment of the divided city were supposed to work, it got into a cul-de-sac as a consequence of imprecise communication, the impossibility of cooperation between the two centres for mental health, the lack of a target group of patients in the centres, and the unrealistic expectations, as well as the obscurity of statement by the centre itself on why it needed the oven. Eventually, the expensive device that was brought to Mostar proved to be inadequate for use by the patients, and also out of order. The final result

of the workshop was indeed a joint project, but in a negative sense, carried out by Lala Raščić herself, with a motivation that was almost self-therapeutic, as a performance - performed live several times - on the basis of a script published in the artist book *Individual Utopias* - designed by Ivana Vučić for Studio Laboratorium -, and the name was then taken over by a regional collaborative initiative, *Individual Utopias Now and Then*, which gathered together three regional centres and one museum of contemporary art: kuda.org from Novi Sad, SCCA from Sarajevo, T.I.C.A. from Tirana and Museum of contemporary art of Vojvodina from Novi Sad. Eventually even the ceramic reliefs, modelled on the video stills from the workshop, could be actualized after a few failed attempts, and will probably be reproduced next to the script in the book of scripts that is in preparation. Thus, the therapy took the form of bitter irony and satire (Detheridge 2008, pp. 55-56), the working methodology showed that, whatever the attempts at instrumentalizing art for a particular goal and the maintenance of a community may be, if one does not ensure and generate support and need from below, the project will hardly become more than a good-willed proposal.



Fig. 12, 13, 14, 15: Damir Očko, *SPRING*, 4k transferred to full HD, 2012. Courtesy the artist, Yvon Lambert, Paris and Tiziana di Caro, Salerno.





At the last year's presentation of the Croatian visual scene in Paris, the solo exhibition of Damir Očko, held at Palais de Tokyo, attracted considerable attention. His work *SPRING* (2012), which was first screened at the exhibition, was partly shot at one of the two active volcanoes of Europe, located on one of the best known islands in the history of film, the volcano island of Stromboli. Shots of dark stony deserts, of volcano fumes and eruptive movements of lava, blinding in its fiery colourism, alternate with three acrobatic numbers, three contortionists who use their body language to create visual and corporeal interpretation of four poems read by a female voice². The extreme situation, located in the midst of nature, where the link with the glowing mouth of the planet seems immediate, is complemented by an extreme situation of the body, which does not stop at the acrobatic skill of the performers: the glottis, part of the throat used to produce voice before it is articulated in the mouth, is indirectly visualized by a sustained touch of the neon tube that the contortionist is pulling out of his throat. The text of four poems, the script in four acts, verbalizes the very process of creating voice, whereas its filmic superstructure seeks

² «SPRING is a collection of poetry, musical scores and a cinematic structure, exploring the notions of oppression and resistance. The title *SPRING* doesn't mean Spring-time, however it doesn't exclude itself from a notion of a Spring-time. It also doesn't exclude itself from a meanings such are Spring-the mechanical device, Spring-the political movement, Spring-the release from a constrained position, Spring-to come into being; rather it establishes itself between all those meanings» (Očko 2012).

to present it from both the inside and the outside, within the throat and outside of the body that produces the voice. In an interview published for the exhibition, Očko has revealed how he used the structure of music on film in order to obtain a series of filmic images - their rhythm relying primarily on music (Očko & Balit 2012). In this particular film, which he considers the least narrative of them all, he started by translating all the meanings of the word "spring" referring to an eruptive movement or breaking out of some sustained state, into a filmic image. Even though conceptually born in a well darkened chamber, Očko's films call for, but without imposing, total attention to which the spectator is forced in a cinema theatre, which suspends his movements and dislocates him in terms of space and time. They create a context that is both associative and rational by exhibiting the text and the collage in their roles of a script, a sketch, and a visual music score. Thus, this comprehensive work becomes multilayered and complete by being inscribed from the spectator's perception, be it static or in movement, among its layers of meaning.

From the avant-garde to the national movements and utopias, the described artworks and their authors explore a general level of interpretation in works of art and their contexts. There are no pure, perfected forms or autonomous objects here: they are mostly blurred or fluid in their borders, but one may almost say that their openness is modularly extended rather than totalizing. By opening up the possibility of additions in terms of interpretation and meaning, and by getting away from the orthodox purity of their medium, they remain open for various interpretations and revive in dialogues, as impetuses in the distribution of sensible. Since, according to Jacques Rancière, in the «level of the sensible delimitation of what is common to the community, the forms of visibility and of its organization» (Rancière 2006, p. 18) is where the question of the apparent dichotomy of aesthetics and politics should be raised. By sharing images, sounds, words, appearances, hopes, signs, shapes and histories, works discussed above refer to linguistic and, moreover, cultural communities, that from the very conception extend far beyond the borders of nation state.

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