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"One War, Two Towns, Two Artists"

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Croatia. In 1990, after the referendum, the country declared its independence. In the spring and the summer of 1991 the Serbs and the Montenegrins representing the Yugoslav National Army mounted the aggression against Croatia. The occupation, in respect of territorial claims, culminated in 1992.

In spite the fact they were almost thoroughly surrounded, two towns managed to defend their territories. Osijek, in the north-east of Croatia, near the Serbian border and Dubrovnik, in the far south-east, in close vicinity to Montenegro. The citizens of Osijek lived under a siege and were constantly and regularly bombarded from 1991 to 1995, those of Dubrovnik from 1991 to 1992.

A medieval-like siege brought a real, physical blockade which was a complete one, whereas the informational was unsuccessful. The position in which these towns were placed was all the more terrifying as their inhabitants could, almost daily, watch, transmitted by television, their own dying, being destroyed and tormented. The whole world was an audience, while the citizens of these towns were active participants and later on an audience themselves.

In such circumstances, which imply long-continued stress, a feeling of isolation and danger, the nearness of death (it occurred daily), the lack of any kind of real interest on the part of the public throughout the world, a feeling of being left to the tender mercies of destiny, there developed a specific form of artistic expression which as a basis and a foretext has all the above mentioned elements. The saw "When there is gunfire rumbling, the Muses keep silent" did not hold true in Croatia. Quite on the contrary.

However, their way of speaking was now different, their ^{speech} vocabulary was changed, just as was their communication code. In the above mentioned cases the town is not the scene of conflict as Belfast, for instance, is. It is a scene of anxiety, suffering and survival. Danger comes from outside, it is outside the town walls. However, conflicts are present

in the town as well. It is the kind of internal conflict in which it is necessary to overcome fear, horror, terror, disgust, hatred and time. It is time that in geometrical progression intensifies all the manifestations of our human fragility. For artists the only possible answer to the similar situations is art itself. Although the number of examples almost equalled the number of artists producing their works in Croatia, although the number of exhibitions put on in the country and abroad, at the time of the war was an astonishingly large one, let us, as demonstrative examples, examine works produced by only two Croatian artists.

The first of the two is Ivan Faktor from Osijek. Born in 1953, Faktor is an author whose pre-war interest had to do with the photography, experimental film and video, whereas in his later works, by means of installations, settings and performances, he connected his old with his new experiments.

His first wartime work was entitled "The Slavonian Tombstone" (Slavonia being the Croatian region in which Osijek is situated). The first version saw the light in 1993, the last in 1995. An installation which is a work in progress, "The Slavonian Tombstone" is composed of burnt TV screens, photographs (snapshots of video-records), the light and the sound. The sound was recorded in Osijek on 20th November 1991, the day Vukovar was taken. That was the sound of a deserted town whose population had been reduced to 15% of its standard number of inhabitants (120,000). It was at the beginning of 1992 that the remnants of the TV screens were found in thoroughly burnt industrial premises in the neighbourhood of Osijek, towards Vukovar and in the front line. Faktor treated those remnants as archaeological valuables by collecting the pieces of each of them, the dust and ashes included, and placing all in specially designed

e idea/word

boxes. Beside classical archaeology which is reminiscent of human bones, he tries to touch off an association ~~which~~ to industrial archaeology and by adding the ^{ideal} word war orientated which is to be used attributively, he produces war orientated industrial archaeology. Faktor's primary interest in the film and video is not to be neglected, either. In the light of that, his collecting the remnants of burnt TV screens we can take as a ritual act of saving (burying) our own tendencies as regards the media, our own ways of artistic expression, i. e. the objects of our own artistic identity or the objects of identification.

The photographs on the walls are the video-copies of the video-record of the "No-men's-land" landscape and of some sites burnt down during the war. The crosses on the walls and on the floor directly suggest a tombstone while the whole floor setting suggests an artistically worked out and systematized war landscape.

The title of the second work in the original runs as follows "Ein Stadt Sucht Einen Mörder 1931-1991" ("A Town Searches for a Murderer") including the endings in conformity with the place in which a particular exhibition is being put on (Berlin-Osijek, Split-Osijek). The work saw the light in 1994 and is composed of photographs ^{etc} the video-copies of video-records, the tape-copies and the video-copies. However, being a "work in progress", each new presentation brings forth new elements and more complex connotations. The title of the work is actually the subtitle of Fritz Lang's film "M" made in 1931. In Lang's film the whole town is after a maniacal murderer of children, while in Faktor's Osijek the whole town knows who the murderer of the town is. Just as in Lang people living on ^{town} the side-lines get organized so as to find the murderer, so the people living on the side-lines in Osijek, and Faktor primarily intends artists for the group, organize themselves in order to expose the murderer, to spotlight him and to unmistakably

..., Split-Osijek, etc.)

bring the crime to light.

Faktor videorecorded Osijek on the day Vukovar was taken and applied the dialogues taken from Lang's film to the re-recorded photographs. The sound of the video-record is a three-part rhythm made up of the sound of the town, the sounds from Lang's film (the hubbub in the street, church bells, a church-scream^{etc}) and of 15 seconds long silence. ... a scream, etc.)

In Split, candles are the key element of the work (a reminiscence of the days when candles flickered in the windows of houses throughout Croatia, in memory of those perished in the war). In Berlin, the snapshots taken immediately after a young man got killed by a shell (including a statement made by an eye-witness, blood, tufts of hair and fragments of the skull)^{etc} are added together with a snapshot of a fire ... the skull burning in a scene of Fritz Lang's film "Krimhilda's Revenge" (1924) and a house in flames in the town of Pakrac. In Vinkovci, the portraits of dead persons, removed from the tombstones in Jewish cemeteries (some of which were hit by shrapnel so that, in a way, their holders died twice), are added. Since it can be superstructured and offers a constant possibility of being overlapped, extended and criss-crossed, this Faktor's work is to be understood and taken as the author's internal need for the transfer of the communication of an experience which left a lasting mark on him.

The second of the two authors is a native of Dubrovnik, Božidar Jurjević (born in 1963). Unlike Faktor, whose native town, Osijek, is situated in lowlands, Jurjević happens to be the inhabitant of a town which throughout its history was a sort of an island. Throughout the Middle Ages up to Napoleon times, Dubrovnik was a town-republic surrounded by the sea and mountains. A feeling of being isolated was intensified by the impossibility of communication as well as the ethnical and cultural sensation of being in a sort of appendix of Croatia.

So, it should come as no surprise that Jurjević, as early as 1990, with his work entitled "The Desert of Freedom",

anticipated the events to follow in the near future. As a part of the annual exhibition of the Croatian Association of visual artists from Dubrovnik, some twenty tree-trunks were transferred out of the nearby forest, devastated by a summertime fire, and into the art gallery. A full year did not pass after the action² was taken and in town one had no difficulty in finding the burnt rafters of the houses which caught fire during bombardments. As a part of the same action, Jurjević made a performance entitled "The Blind Man" in which by the man's dangerous walking on the edge of safety, Jurjević clearly and precisely presented the isolation, impossibility of communication, its being restricted and the possible consequences it may bring about (the fall and all that following afterwards). following

The performance entitled "Titleless", made in the ~~titless~~ Ethnographic Museum in Dubrovnik in 1991, is the part of the story which began in the war. With a hood over his head ("the oppressor who cannot see"), the author tried to find a way out from the show-case in which, in times before the war started, a national costume had been displayed. Having been placed in a safer place, this exhibit left empty the ~~place~~ space in which another kind of energy entered. The glass-house are Dubrovnik and the oppressors going astray, the void of one's ~~oppressor~~ own inmost feelings and the wish of a fly to reach the sky.

In the same year, a performance with the similar conceptual starting-points was made and was entitled "Ubi fluxus, ibi motus". At that point Dubrovnik, as a town-museum, registered in the world's cultural patrimony of UNESCO, took works of art out of its museums and put them in metallic boxes trying to protect them at least that way. Jurjević used such a metallic box to save the artist, the one who produces art. The metaphors of this work are thoroughgoing, unequivocal and precise as it is about the protection of man, while at the same time, it is about their being shut in, buried, about their isolation³ and their being shut out, about the transformation of the real life ~~the~~ into a reserve. Also, it is a bitter irony on the situation in which the whole world cared for Dubrovnik as a monument to culture, but at the same time it did not take into consideration ~~consi~~ the destiny of its inhabitants.

The performance "Encirclement - O" saw the light in 1994, after Dubrovnik stopped experiencing war atrocities. The basis of the physical performance are preserved remnants of burnt bed-clothes and towels of the "Imperial" hotel which was devastated by fire. Found in a warehouse, they can be directly connected with Faktor's war orientated industrial archaeology. With the material fixed to the ground and serving him as the form, direction and limit of the progression, Jurjević starts with slow rotation and the rotation turns into the vicious circle going on until the moment of the fall. The direction is changed twice or three times in the same proceeding until the centripetal force is too strong, causing physical pain before the fall. An attempt to maintain the stability (physical, spiritual and mental) within a limited space has to do with both the internal stream of consciousness and the external factors. An extremely narrow sphere of progression is defined by the material remnants of the destruction inflicted by the war as the symbols of a country in a stage of war, i. e. under a siege. The dynamics of progression (one can as well walk within a circle) is conditioned by the internal necessities which sometimes do not pay heed to the external ones. state
internal

I would now leave off any further attempt of interpretation, since I am certain each of you will easily create an interpretative situation of his own. In conclusion, it may be said that Ivan Faktor deals with video installations (the audio component being included). They can be referred to as videos only as regards the material remnants or photographic transfer of their media, and are very clearly and definitely orientated towards the present day media culture and their manipulative character. as

Using the performance as his means of experiment, Božidar Jurjević transfers to us his individual, personal existential experience, dealing with the theme of being limited as regards both space and the physical and spiritual ego.

In any case, we are dealing here with experiences unknown to the modern western world. Such as they are, the value of these experiences is all the more greater. experiences

Berislav Valušek