

## ON PARALLELISM

In this paper I am going to analyze colonial and occupational processes parallelly. My presentation will point out the parallelism of the processes concerning the theme discussed by this seminar in different regions of the world. In this paper I am going to analyze colonial and occupational processes parallelly. With this objective in mind, artistic developments will be analysed in two levels - artistic environment and artistic self-expression.

I would like to start my discussion of the parallel experiences of occupation in Eastern and Central Europe and of colonialism in Africa and other post-colonial countries with a contemporary situation. The narrative in *The Counting of Plaits* (2001) by a young Lithuanian videoartist Laura Stasiulytė represents the most recent reality. Laura from Vilnius and Rackie from Dakar met in 2001, in Vienna. Their meeting was not accidental. Young artists studying in different continents met in a house allocated for artists-in-residence with common kitchen. Laura came with the Austrian Kultur Kontakt programme, Rackie - with UNESCO's fellowship programme. Both girls, from small (minor) developing countries, found themselves in a new, alien, developed (major) environment. The fabula of Laura's video is multilayered. Laura uses Austrian German (which Rackie does not understand) to count the plaits of her new exotic friend. The action as well as the film lasts for half an hour, Laura counts 632 plaits and Rackie falls asleep from the monotonous sound of an unknown language with a melancholically peaceful expression in her face. What is the feedback from this dialogue of civilisations? Laura thinks this interaction of contrasting cultures does not grow into a third, mixed one, but helps to understand one's place in a diverse world of large and small oppositions and unities more adequately. To understand that the former soviet colonies, the minor Central European countries are not as attractive as the former colonies of Western European countries or the important economical (new industrial Asia countries) and political (Iraq). And this means that only quality of the artist's work can guarantee him success without any *privilege credit*. The Nobel Prize winner expatriate poet Yosif Brodsky's idea that *provinciality is not a geographical concept* is still valid.

In today's post-industrial society, the networks of global corporations enveloping the world, information technology, the hidden enemy of terrorism, the active wave of migration to the West change the meaning of *centre* and *periphery*, *minorities* and *majorities*. In the open society of knowledge, the significance of personal communications (economical, social, political, cultural) grows, guaranteeing feedback. Decentralisation (regionalism), the disappearance of borders between central and parallel highways changes the meaning of the 20th century art centre. A multicultural matrix - a networking system of intertwining major and minor processes - is under formation (Documenta 11 Platform, Arsenal exposition in 50 Venice biennale). Economists talk about new national diversity models stimulating the innovative developments of the state, enlarging religious, cultural, educational, economical *etc.* powers. Some theories give the dominant role to the peripheries. Frederick Buell (*National Culture and the New Global System* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994) allows the possibility that the contemporary cultural condition of former colonies - pieces brought together from everywhere - is the future of the world "and a metropolis will be looking more and more for its models in periphery, not *vice versa*" (p. 27). But perhaps, the differences between active and passive peripheries will become more remarkable. (V. Kavolis. *Centras ir periferija*, Metmenys, 68, 1995).



After the fall of The Berlin Wall in 1989, the ranks of post-colonial countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, were joined by the former colonies of Soviet Russia (post-communist) Eastern and Central European countries. Those who focus on the processes of changes in this region (as does this paper) sometimes use the terms post-colonialism and post-communism as well as colonialism and occupation as synonyms (*Lithuanian encyclopedia*, T.12. Boston, p. 233-240). In order to use the possibility to compare attitudes from different systems provided by the organisers of this seminar I would like to suggest a hypothesis and argue for it.

The post-colonial - post-communist experience in Central Europe allows us to differentiate two parallel models - the Western *open* model and Soviet *closed* colonialist model. Their differences become apparent, when the questions of environment (social, political, economical, cultural, etc.) and artists' possibilities of self-expression are discussed. It is the modernist era that legitimised the alternative concept of the creator encouraging changes in the environment. The ideas he or she generates break the settled norms. Soon they become officially recognised and only then - commercially profitable. Following the laws of successful marketing, the creator has to appear in the right place at the right time. Only few are so lucky, perhaps, usually posthumously. Only an open system is able to initiate an innovative alternative in the environment, and in a closed one they are condemned to die or remain locally unremarkable.

I shall try to found the latter hypothesis by marking the differences between the Western and soviet colonial systems.

*Western colonial system - open*, that is focused not only on economic benefits such as mining and cheap labour, but also on adaptation of the principles of western civilisation (health care, education, administration etc..) in a *different, other*, exotic environment. The starting point for the discussion of this attitude could be a quotation from Jose Ortega y Gasset's "Reflexion on the Frame": (...) There are no frames in Chinese and Japanese art. But will I get any closer to the revelation of the essential difference between the perceptions of an Asian and a European person? Why is the South Pole the reference point for the Chinese, not the North Pole as it is usual everywhere? Why do they dress in white when in grief, and not in black? Why do they start building a house from the roof and not from the foundation? And why do they say "no" by nodding their heads like us, when we are saying "yes"?"

Due to the openness, it not only changes the other environment, but changes and develops itself by creatively assimilating its otherness. Openness guarantees a mutual feedback. In such a situation other members of the community have a choice. The culturologist Alan Rolan who focuses on the problems of identity in India and Japan, points out that the colonisation of India ended in forming identities in three directions: some Indians completely identified themselves with the aggressor, adopting western values and life style, although the basic "I" remained quite Indian; others rejected anything western and idealised their nation's spirituality thus contrasting it to the materialism of the West; the third group established their Indian identity by reforming culture and society, which not only incorporated traditional elements, but also attempted their synthesis. In the arts we can observe a unique synthesis, western styles, movements and traditions synchronised with those of the *other*, exotic place.

The first one should be related to the appropriation of the *major*, Western in this case, point of view, its integration in the exotic, *other* (Asian, African, Latin American) environment. If certain fundamental laws of one society were transfered to a different, *other* environment, the host society would try to adapt them to the existing principles. In parallel we can talk about the effect the exotic Oriental or African cultures have on the developments in western modernisation (from Vincent van Gogh to Yoko Ono). Thus, in



art, like in the economy of such a system, we could state the condition of a mutual feedback, that is openness. Openness of the Western colonial system not only allowed to modernize the minor countrys. The old Metropoies did not lose their conections with then former colonies – not only in the economical, but also in cultural space.

*Soviet (totalitarian) colonial system* - closed, ideologically regimented, impeding synchronical processes of modernisation in the occupied countries with western culture. After World War II the Soviet Union occupied *The tract of Europe from Estonia to Bulgaria with almost 100 mln. inhabitants, whose literacy oscillated between 80 and 99 percent.* (*Lithuanian encyclopedia*. T.12. Boston, p. 235). Lithuania was conquered by Russia and turned into its colony in 1795 for the first time. In the 20th century after World War I, in 1918 independence was restored; however, in 1940 the state, had been quickly developing in the direction of western modernisation and was occupied by the Soviet Union again. While analysing the processes of soviet autocratic rule, the historian of Russian art Igor Golmshtock points out that *from its very formation the totalitarian state starts creating an artistic culture following its image and idea:*

- *it declares art (as culture in general) to be its ideological tool, means in the fight for power;*
- *it monopolises all forms and means of the country's artistic life; creates an all encompassing apparatus to control art and government;*
- *from the variety of all tendencies that exist in art of the present day selects one (always nearly conservative), most closely matching its goals and declares it as official, the only and generally obligatory.*

An identical model is valid in politics, economy, education and others. Politically unreliable people who think differently are destroyed, deported, their property is nationalised. In 1940 -1941, before the Nazi occupation, from 3 million Lithuanian inhabitants 30 000 people were deported to Siberia. At the end of the war, with the prospect of the second Soviet occupation in 1944, 70 000 Lithuanians (76 artists among them) emigrated to the West. In the country, guerrilla war against the occupants lasted from 1944 to 1952. 20 000 partisans fell as casualties of this war. In 1944-1947, 70 000 peasants were deported to Kazakhstan.

In this closed „*the struggle against formalism "bending knee" to the West bourgeois art and expressions of cosmopolitanism in artists' work*“ system Lithuanian artists had three options. The first - to collaborate with new authorities. The second - to refuse creativity (silent writers or not to sell their hands). The third - attempts to express an alternative view, which used to end in imprisonment, deportation or during the "Thaw" (after 1956) - prohibition and public isolation. They strategy concerns the minor *seminonconformist, silent modernism* in the environment of totalitarian regimes as an alternative to the official clture of majorities. The latter strategy is manifest in the European countries (with Western mentality) that were occupied by the Soviets. The efforts of Lithuanian artists during the 1960s-1980s to bring their work closer to the principles of late modernism and postmodernism fit into this scheme. The point of departure towards the modernisation of their expression for the artists was the example of the modernist heritage of the interwar period of the 1920s-1930s, which was closely related to the contemporary developments of Western art.

Due to this closed system *Lithuania like other Eastern European countries were doomed to "catch up" with Western Europe, which dictated and still dictates the ideals of economical, political and intellectual life. If, in the West, the move from a classical tradition to the post-modern plurality happened slowly, gradually, in an evolutionary way, then the Soviet occupation separated Lithuanian culture with an Iron Curtain from the modern forms of mentality in the West. The last break in Lithuania, as usual sudden and painful, occurred*



after the restoration of independence in 1990. Only from that moment Lithuania really starts to synchronise with the Western Europe and United States (A. \_liogeris. Kult\_rin\_situacija: Vakarai ir Lietuva: I). During the last decade Lithuania has to experience such social and political tensions during a historically very short period, which were "divided" into long historical periods and lasted decades and sometimes even centuries in the European and American civilisational processes (L. Donskis. Kult\_rin\_situacija: Vakarai ir Lietuva: II, in: Metmenys, Nr. 65, 1993, p. 114).

While acquainting the audience with the creative peculiarities of Lithuanian artists from different generations, I will try to point out the differences between the *open* and *closed* systems. In order to do this, I will compare the work and its effects on the environment by Lithuanian artists, who worked in exile (emigration) and in Lithuania.

#### The first story

76 artists emigrated from Lithuania to the West in 1944. Among them - the leader and ideologist of FLUXUS movement George Maciunas. In the context of this paper two aspects are important. The first one - the already mentioned openness of the West (not of colonies, but of a metropolis), which created the conditions for this post-dada movement to become an important and influential power in the art scene. Post-fluxus reverberations mark contemporary art. This only confirms the active spread of ideas and their effect on the environment in an open system. The second circumstance returns us to Lithuania, occupied-colonised by the Soviet Union, during the "Thaw" period, when the curtains of the closed system were opened slightly and this activated the contacts between the expatriates and those who stayed in Lithuania. George Maciunas was writing letters to his childhood friend and classmate, musicologist Vytautas Landsbergis. In his letter of 1963 the leader of *Fluxus* presented the programme and purposes of the movement. "FLUXUS art is:

1. Concrete and realistic, for it is not susceptible to artificiality or illusionism or intellectualism or abstraction - neither in the stage of composition nor form, nor expression.

2. Popular art - because it is not meant only for specialists, critics, artists or other intellectuals. Everybody - literate or illiterate - can create, understand and transmit such art. It is meant for everybody.

3. Social - since such an art would finally eliminate artist's profession and would give to (former artists) a more socially productive work." In 1966 Vytautas Landsbergis together with his students from the Pedagogical Institute organised a closed *Fluxus* action. However, it remained only a closed and local event. The *Fluxus* ideas could not be integrated into the closed system that did not tolerate diversity of viewpoints. However, the reverberations of this rebellious movement became concrete, materialised in only 1988-1990, when Landsbergis became the leader of the Atgimimas (Rebirth) Movement, that rose in the environment of cultural intelligentsia. That is - after 30 years.

#### The Second Story

On the movement of "Silent Modernism" that rose during the "Thaw" in 1960s and united alternative, officially unrecognised artists who were exhibiting their work in remote spaces (a conference room of a state publishing house, theatre hall, sports hall of the City Construction Institute, private houses. It is interesting to remark that the most alternative and radical representatives of this thaw movement were from applied arts, not from the politicised fine arts - architects, textile artists, designers. Thus, the abstract works of the architect Linas Katinas and textile artist Kaz\_Zimblyt stood out for their unique poetic associations. These authors created the first public installations. However, their works were known only within the narrow environment of their colleagues, they never made official



exhibitions. Kaz\_Zimblyt\_ exhibited her works unofficially for the first time in the Vaga publishing house in 1968 one day after the opening be closed and transfer to private speace. Her solo retrospective took place only in 1988, when the liberation movement started, that is it took 20 years to be recognised officially.

Her manner seems to be close to that of abstract expresionism, to the Spanish trendo f *informel* painting the representatives of which use textile applications, engravings and sprayers (A. Tapiés, J.J. Tharrats)This method enables the artist to fully immerse himself into the experiments with colour, space and texture. Confined space restrains the freedom of the artist. She goes out to the countryside meadows and gardens: rice paper wrapped round the old trunks of the apple trees streams in the wind (1979), ribbons of celuloide paper spread on the meadows reflect the floating clouds (1989). The harmony of woman and nature reveals the unity of earthy and eternal life. This revelation is depicted in the painting cycle displayed in the interior of the Vilnius Funeral Palace („In Memoriam I-VIII. 1980-1988).

The ribbon - continuing and breaking linkage, - becomes especially significant in the works of the artist in the current decades. Its motive repeats in her cycles of engravings, it rhythmically waves in ink and coal drawings testifying mutability – rather than the end.

„Existence in space without any dates...”.

#### The Third Story

On the peculiarities of the break period - the move from the closed to the open system. They are exemplified by the review of the conceptual sculptor Mindaugas Navakas's work (b. 1952, 1995 Herder's prize, 1999 National Prize for Culture and Art, the first artist to represent Lithuania in the international Venice biennial). His 1981-1986 sculpture projects that irritated soviet functionaries were carried out only when Lithuania restored independence. That is - after 10 years.

While working with traditional materials (granite, concrete, steel), Navaka's works display a strong influence of conceptual art. He is interested in tools, equipment, building constructions, benches, thrones or vessels - the objects which can have a ritual character, preserving an ordinary, everyday purpose. He does not exploit these objects as finds but transforms them into archetypal sculptural signs. Navakas' works are determined by a many-layer tension. His sculptures display harmony between an image and symbol, everyday and ritual, functional and non-functional as well as noble and the comic aspects are united in them into one whole. (R. Jur\_nait\_. Mindaugas Navakas. In: *100 lithuanian artists*. Vilnius, 2000, P. 120). Such an associatively abstract plastic expression breaking the concept of decorative human figure could not be tolerated in the Soviet environment, which controlled the options of plastic expression.

The artist's resolution to break the accepted understanding of decorative sculpture and to integrate conceptual objects into the architectural environment of the city is testified by the postmodern photomontage projects *Vilnius notebook* of hybrids of sculptures and urban buildings, which he started in 1981 (*Vilnius notebook*). *Conceptual solution serves here as the starting point. The artist does not yield to the charm of the Old Town and at the same time does not strive for a subtle harmony with it. He also makes no attempt to decorate monotonous typical contemporary architecture with his works. His sculptural projects manifest themselves as conscious paradoxical antithesis which enable the sculptor to look for an ironic dialogue with urban cityscapes or individual buildings. In Vilnius notebook he constructs a bulky joiner's bench on the roof of the department store, two gigantic wigmans flank the solid post-war "Neo-classical" building of the Pedagogical University,*



*an archaic rough work cuts into an embellished Neobaroque building of the Philharmonic and two sculptures even wade into the river Neris. (R. Jur\_nait\_ (.....)). A flying zeppelin-piglet cuts into a multistorey hotel, a strange defence object blocks a neoclassicist arch and an aggressive hook protrudes on the front of the railway station instead of a clock. The latter position of the artist had radiated subtle social irony, which the art nomenclature functionaries hated and closed the first public presentation of these photoprojects in 1986 two hours after the opening.*

After restoring independence and liberalising artistic expression, started the most active period of Mindaugas Navakas's work. This is the time, when the photomontage projects created a decade ago were finally brought to life and the expressive possibilities of sculpture in public space have been actively enlarged. The artist creates at home and abroad, participates in international symposia, realises great award winning objects. The exceptional feature characterising Navakas's exterior sculptures of this period is their conceptual link to the location, when the environment and the sculpture tame each other and grow together thus surprising the viewer. The artist is not content with the autonomous dynamics of sculpture anymore.

Without losing their monumental character Navakas's granite sculptures start to acquire the volume of a sliding object (*Axis*, 1992, granite, 205x205x400, Eckernferde, Germany) open for visitation (*Shelter*, Kwangiu Bienalle, Kwangiu, 1995, granite, 230x70x110 and *P. Balcony*, 2000, granite, 360x170x160, Pusan Olympic Park, Korea). Soon they seemingly return to their initial, original state - the granite rock becomes a structural support for a sculptural object (*Instaliation for a Granite Rock*, 1995, granite, steel cable, 650x90x80, Kotka, Finland) or a surface for the future polished sculpture (*This Place*, 1995, polished Granite rock, 650x90x80, *A Landscape Piece*, 1998, polished Granite rock, 180x80, Finland). The author emphasizes the interdependence between the three-dimensional object and environment, which is conceptually very important to him, by creating sculptures in water (*J. Shelter*, 600x450x400, five granite boulders, zinc-covered steel, Rannila steel, wood construction, Juodkrant\_, Kursi\_bay, Lithuania).

The artist expresses the eternal relationships between the opposites by association, when he occupies architecture of different styles with dependent supports (*A Large Reliant Sculpture*, 1994, welded steel sheets, rust, 900x140x60, CAC, Vilnius; *Two Large Reliant Sculpture*, 1996, welded steel sheets, rust, 900x140x60, 850x290x70, Zacheta Gallery of Contemporary art, Warsaw, *Three Large Reliant Sculpture*, 1999, welded steel sheets, rust, 900x140x60, 850x290x70, 800x300x90, CAC, Vilnius and other) or attaches massive hooks and loops (*A Hook*, 1994, 1994, welded steel sheets, rust, 450x350x120, *Meno Lyga*, Vilnius ) or constructs architectonic objects from coloured Rannila steel on the roofs of new buildings in Berlin (*Reconnaissance*, 1997-1998, Rannila steel, 10 objects, height from 1100 to 500, Hellerdorf, Berlin). Thanks to that his sculptures have an active relationship to the environment.

*The transference of the representative function of these forms from the historical centre to the town-dwellers' houses in the periphery of the city does not only turn the "aristocratic" building into a "living castle" in the general democratic sense, but also expresses the change of vision and perceptual habits occurring in one's mind. We are used to ascribe more meaning to events and conventions happening in the centre than to life and happenings in the margins or, to speak in spacial terms, thanks to our perspectival vision, things in the middle look larger than things in the margins. Navakas's sculptural ensemble*



is designed to "turn" perspective around: if in the centre of a city vases on the roofs are small, then symbolically moved onto the roofs in Helersdorf they "grow up". However, while collecting material, the author keeps an ironic distance from the objects represented and their sociohistorical context; the rough material of the tin-plates of industrial steel, produced in advance, contradicts the idea of any aesthetic improvement and at the same time does not encourage any inadequate "claim to rule"; they rather radiate with playful carelessness and joy of the artist, who allows himself to confuse the order of things. (Brigitte Hammer. Schlosser am Stadtrad. In: *Mieter Journal*. 1998 Nr. 12. P. 2).

The most recent works by Navakas expanded the topic of one discussion. Interest in the possibilities opened by the slide projections, the sculptor turns a minor object into an major one. And this brings our discussion back to the issue of active (effective) or passive (ineffective) art.

To conclude this paper, I would like to emphasize that:

1. The Soviet closed colonial system differently from the Western open one, hindering modernization.
2. Individual opposition by separate members of the community to the occupational system created for the disintegration of the Soviet Empire.

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1982 - 1987 Lithuanian State Art Institute (now Vilnius Art Academy),  
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**Occupation:**

Since 1999 the lecturer in Vilnius Art Academy and Vilnius Gediminas Technical University

Since 1987 the curator of the Lithuanian contemporary sculpture  
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(150 positions),  
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Since 1991 the member of International Art Critic Association (AICA) Lithuanian section, Since 1999 the  
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**Selected Exhibitions and Catalogues:**

2002 *On Production*. National M. K. Čiurlionis Art Museum, Kaunas (catalogue)

*A longing for the Classics: Juozas Mikėnas (1901-1964). Creation between Paris  
and Lithuania* (with Giedrė Jankevičiūtė). Lithuanian Art Museum (catalogue)

2001 *Tradition Today* (with Ieva Kuizinienė). Vasa Konsthall, Stockholm (catalogue)

*Tradition and Future* (with Ieva Kuizinienė). Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius  
(catalogue)

1996 *Quiet Modernism in Lithuania (1962-1982)*. Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius  
(catalogue)

1996 *The Other Time* (Lithuanian painting of the artists of the middle generation), Lithuanian  
embassy, Moscow (Russia)

1994 *Petras Mačiūnas*. (Lithuanian sculptor). Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius (catalogue)

*Gediminas Karalius*. (Lithuanian sculptor). Contemporary Art Center, Vilnius  
(catalogue)

*Lithuanian sculpture. From Figure to Sign*. (with Rasa Andriulytė). Piritä, Pavilion of  
Flowers, Tallinn (catalogue)

*Signs of a Man*. Sculpture, drawing, photography (with Rasa Andriu\_yt\_). Klaip\_eda Exhibition Hall (catalogue)

**Selected Publications:**

*Tylusis modernizmas Lietuvoje / Quiet Modernism in Lithuania 1962-1982*. Vilnius, Tyto Alba, 1997. 269 p., ill.

*Skulpt\_ra 1975-1990*. Vilnius, Aidai, 1997. 212 p., 217 ill. (editors Giedr\_Jankevi\_i\_t\_, Elona Luby\_t\_, texts by Rasa Andriu\_yt\_, Giedr\_Jankevi\_i\_t\_, Laima Kreivyt\_, Elona Luby\_t\_)

*Lietuvos skulpt\_ra 1940-1990 Lietuvos dail\_s muziejaus rinkiniuose. Katalogas. / Lithuanian Sculpture 1940-1990. Collections of the Lithuanian Art Museum. Catalogue*. Vilnius, Lietuvos dail\_s muziejus, 1998. 140 p., ill. 128

*Kaz\_. Tapyba, monotipijos, pie\_iniai / Kaz\_. Painting, Monotypes, Drawings. / Kaz\_. Malerei, Monotypien, Zeichnungen*. Vilnius, "Lietuvos aidai" galerija, 1999. 86 p., ill.

(text by E.Luby\_t\_)

"Major Events in Lithuanian History and Culture. XX century." In: *Art of the Baltics. The Struggle for Freedom of Artistic Expression under the Soviets, 1945-1991*. General editors: Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Doodge, Wilsted and Taylor, a co-publication of Zimmerly Art Museum Rutgers and The State University of New Jersey, 2002

*Mindaugas Navakas. Po de\_imties met\_ / Ten Years After*. Vilnius, AICA Lithuanian section, 2002, 88 p., ill. (editors Elona Luby\_t\_, Mindaugas Navakas)