

The Situation "beyond" as a situation "behind"

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Assumptions :

- The falling-down of political walls in the world is in the past;
- But that does not mean that there are no more walls especially cultural ones - there still remains the problem of understanding;
- There is the possibility that in the future there are going to be some cultural "wars" and this is something one should not necessarily fight against.

Definition :

The situation beyond "walls" and "wars" is a situation that could be described as "context in search of a text". It is a situation where the movement of the contextual synchronization is producing a text. It is this text that we are part of here at this congress. The text expresses a collective utopian desire for a normal and unified world. This may very well turn out to be the world in which everything is said and yet nothing is heard.

The dream of normalcy and unification will undoubtedly get explicated as an ecstasy of communication. But communication does not necessarily mean understanding. Understanding presupposes subject-object relations which in itself raises suspicions as to the reciprocity of exchange.

The text, if completed, might become a new "wall", a new new type of definer-devider in a new world.

I. Beyond "wars" and "walls" there lurks the perspective of "walls" between form and meaning and still more "wars" between the greatness of form and the ideological convertibility/inconvertibility of meaning.

The new split between form and meaning in this situation could be exemplified by one possible interpretation of the career of the Bulgarian-born American artist Christo /Javashv). The fact that he was born in Bulgaria is irrelevant. The relevant fact is that he was raised, received his formal education and original inspiration for the "wrapping" concept in the real communist utopia of Stalinist Bulgaria in the late 1940's and early 1950's. The other relevant fact is that now his art, as a process and a product, works with and functions in the reality of the so-called West.

One immediately visible characteristic of the plastic form in Christo's works /preparatory, as well as, final stage, is its absolute classical greatness. It is so fluent and perfect in terms of execution, coordination of materials, hierarchy of the changing viewpoints, etc. that it is almost apersonal in its totality. The astonishing thing is that when his recent works (mainly preparatory ones) are compared stylistically with his early and student works (preserved in some museums and private collections in Bulgaria) it becomes obvious that they are both equally based on the strong traditional academic education Christo received while studying at the Academy for Fine Arts in Sofia. The ambition has grown, the self-confidence is immense, but still, this is the same plastic idea and principle. These are the same eye and hand, devoid of any personal ~~views~~ plastic expressions, which have

grown to great dimensions (of the academic style, of course - something rare nowadays). Thus, it could be said that Christo the draftsman actually "stayed" in the East.

On the other hand, it could also be claimed that his "wrapping" concept, as developed and practiced in the West, is equally strongly based on his practice as a student - ~~www~~ member of the summer youth brigades in the mid-1950s in Bulgaria. ~~W~~ As is a well known and by now a proven fact, the art students from these brigades were sent to help the peasants from the cooperative farms along the route of the Orient Express to arrange "artistically" their farmyards. The art students arranged the machinery in a dynamic way, repainted the decrepit buildings in joyous colors, covered the backyards with gigantic murals, depicting powerful socialist peasants in the process of jubilant labor activities. Thus an illusion of success and affluence was produced and it was ~~www~~ meant for the eye of the foreign (Western) traveler on the train. As it turned out later on, this "technique" of substitutions became paradigmatic for the entire practice of construction of the socialist/communist utopia as a reality. For it was undoubtedly built, at least on the level of language, as a symbolic ^{shell} reality. Words, metaphores, illusions substituted entirely for things. Reality was only what the ruling Communist Party said was "actually" happening in the country. The only existing reality was that of the symbolic shell, the illusion of the "wrapping" made-up- of slogans, murals, monuments, economically defficient, but symbolically efficient factories and still more and more ideological simulacra. Material reality was only functional through it's symbolic

not it's economic productiveness. Keeping in mind the above mentioned it could be argued that after each successful Bolshevik revolution of the Lenin/Stalin ~~type~~ variety, a post-modern type of cultural situation in society is always already there. Real utopia was only possible as an illusion and Christo at first participated in it's construction.

One can see that later on in the West, Christo uses similar type of utopian procedures. First, he creates the project and it is entirely arbitrary. Then, he creates the public which is already participating in the realization of the project by force of the expectations it has. Then, the project is realized by force of the sheer willpower^W of the artist, now acting as a "leader of the masses". And finally, it transforms~~to~~ totally some portion of the preexisting "natural" reality. There is the metaphore and the dream (and utopia is always a dream at first), then there is the technology for putting ~~it~~ them into practice, then there is the radically redesigned reality. Christo's realized projects are just the same "temporarily" real utopias, as "real communism" turned-out to be. And I think that is why Christo occasionally claims with a touch of self-irony that he still is a good Marxist.

But identical as it may be, the substance of these practices of his as plastic form and procedures there are relevant differences in their meanings, i.e. functions, in the East and the West. Christo, the draftsman may have "stayed" in the East, but it is very likely that Christo, the conceptualist, "avantgarded" the West. For his simulated avantgarde

activities in helping build-up real utopia ~~in Stalinist~~
~~Bulgaria~~, were ^{Hotel} transformed by the force of the cultural
context ~~in~~ the West into authentic avantgarde subversiveness.
Christo's projects in the West fulfill an anti-utopian func-
tion once they are realized. If in the context of communism
Christo used to transform real objects into the reality of
utopia, then in the West (may be without actually intending to)
he must be unmasking through his actions the existing reali-
ty as a utopian one. For his wrapped objects (boundaries, ter-
ritories, etc.) reveal their new, transformed identities as
just things - monumental shapes stripped of any symbolic ~~value~~
value. And isn't ~~value~~ precisely this displaced, pushed-aside
symbolic value the reality of the world he is working in
and with? Isn't Christo making visible the arbitrariness of
the "real" in the West? Isn't the suggestion ^{of} his art ~~value~~
that what is consumed in this world is not at all material?

Christo's failure to complete his Reichstag pro-
ject for Berlin exemplifies the anti-utopian function of
his art in the West. The memory of the Berlin Wall and of the
Iron Curtain is still very new and painful for the new
Europe which is moving towards westernized unification. If
Christo finally wraps (transformed) the newly-brought-into-
function Reichstag Building this might bring upfront the
unwelcomed revelation that the vision of a totally unified
Europe could turn-out to be just a new utopian vision.

II. Beyond "wars" and "walls" it is possible to achieve an international consensus on the question of how good or bad a given artist or a work of art is, but it is not advisable to look for (because it is hardly possible to get to) a consensus on why we do or don't think of an object as a work of art. This is so because a consensus in the realm of art is possible for as long as we stay in the context of art as it is traditionally defined. But the consensus is impossible if we think out of the specific contexts ^{then} of different cultures and realities of the recent past. Here the historical approach gets in the way of understanding. Which is so much the better - a postponement of understanding gives more chances to the development of distinct identities.

Again Christo's case could serve as an example.

His art and concepts are authorless in the sense that he is not creating an imaginary world all of his own. But when we think out of the two different contexts - East & West - in which he has been functioning, it becomes apparent that in them there are two very different types of absence of the traditional author's function.

a/ The culture of the former East - the world of "real socialism", is a collective speech culture. It's logic is the logic of becoming, as if by itself. The function of the author is totally overtaken by the supreme authority of the Party and its apparatuses which double-up the social to the full. There, it is as if the technology which is building-up reality of utopia is working all by itself. The simulacrum of the ideology is sucking-in all reality until it's final annihilation. The vast majority of artistic acts

are performed in the non-specialized spheres of the social. Actually each act of the supreme political power in the speech culture is an "artistic" one by intention. The individual body here is only a cell in the total collective body. It is just a resource for the self-perpetuation of the whole towards the horizon of some endless orthodoxy.

The collective speech culture is necessarily interiorized in every creative act. Here, the author is not dead. Here, the author simply cannot ever be born. Here, the demiurgical pretensions of the creator are only possible as a parody of the creativity of the social as a totality.

The speech culture of socialism knows nothing external to itself. In contrast to the prostheses or the ~~www~~ technical simulacrum, the social simulacrum is a simulacrum squared. Simulacrum of the simulacrum, which is not limited by anything. It is not that the manifestations of a reflexive culture here are suppressed. It is that the very conditions of its appearance are eradicated ontologically, so to say. Here, the rule is the potlatch, the symbolic exchange. This culture, being the culture of the utopia of production, produces only collectivism. And the effectiveness of the collective bodies is the effectiveness of their internal burning which does not go on to produce a product. They are so intensive internally that they simply have no strength left to be productive on top of that. They are their own sole product. They live in a state of ecstatic sociality. And this sociality is becoming a text in itself, which interiorizes all features of authorship. The work of art is only becoming possible as ~~www~~ a text which has written in it the very impossibility of the individual author to be born.

Had Christo stayed in the East as a conceptualist, the ultimate act of his as an "author" here would have had to be the "wrapping" of a spaceship and its subsequent launching into outer space in a wrapped state.

b/ If we indeed call the above described culture of "real socialism" a utopia of production, then we can call the culture of "real capitalism" a utopia of consumption. Here the market guarantees the conditions of consumption. It does so through, for instance, the institutions of the authorship, the signature, the frame, the archive, etc. But it does so without the help of reflection. The market is not anti-reflexive (as is potlatch) but is hyper-reflexive. And hyper-reflexiveness is identical to the annihilation of reflexivity by its own force and action. Here, the author is dying (or is already dead, as Roland Barthes has it) because of his/hers overproductiveness, overintensiveness, overexhaustion in the act of "writing".

Here, the author is dying because of the commodification and, in the end, of the self-consumption=annihilation of his own "authoriness". The state of the death of the author here is comparable with the state of the not-ever-to-be-born author there only in terms of the always already manifested absence of the ~~author~~ individual author's function in both cases. But this is a synchronic, not a diachronic statement. Which could be possible to verify only if we think in post-historical terms - if we can claim that the utopia of production is dead as much as is dead the utopia of consumption.

If this is so, then it could ~~be~~ explained why Christo has not yet performed in the West something which might make him here an author in the traditional sense. ~~is~~

He has not yet wrapped himself. He has entered the situation of the death of the author as an author not-ever-to-be-born. This is probably his good fortune. Because it is not necessary to die for something that is not even born yet. It is his genius of intuition probably which prevents him from wrapping himself - for this act of the birth of the Author Christo would be the "wrapping-up" and the death of the ~~www~~ legend Christo with all implications following from this in the market and the real Western world in general.

There could be only parodies of this situation performed not by him, but with his participation. I have in mind the famous photoportraits of the supposedly wrapped Christo made by the photographer Annie Leibowitz.

In this case the very peculiarity of Christo's situation is being commodified as a parody of the author's function. Had Christo come-up with a project for the wrapping of himself (we can only imagine the preparatory stages of this project - for how could Christo make "Selfportraits" in drawings if he is fully self-wrapped, how could he imagine visually his own birth=death?), he would be participating in the rebirth of the status quo - the utopia of consumption turning into a state of consuming consumption (as Fredric Jameson has it). I think it is Christo's subversiveness which prevents him from committing such an act of self-commodification. The author is not even born, yet he doesn't want to die.

Christo is himself both a rudiment- a simulacrum out of the ideological world of real socialism, and an extra-terrestrial commodity, not yet fully consumed, in the world

of real capitalism. For as long as he can sustain this absurd status of his, he will be able to preserve his relevancy as an artist.

The consensus on what we do or don't think of as a work of art now would be possible only inasmuch as we are capable of bypassing our traditional technologies of thinking about art and switch to "authorless aesthetics" which see the artefact as a rudiment of a very specific ~~indeed~~ discursive situation. I am trying to hint that it is very possible that the culture of post-modernism in the West is moving towards a state of collective individualism which lends itself with a surprising ease to interpretations from the viewpoint of somebody who has had the experience of living in a totalitarian society.

III. Beyond "wars" and "walls" you encounter ideological dollars and cents fighting against ideological rubles, zlotas, cronas, levas, etc. and winning in the process of exchange.

Approximately the same manipulation as the one with the Annie Leibowitz-Christo photographs was performed recently through the publication of the first issue of the Russian edition of Flash Art magazine.- hyper-reflection annihilates reflection with the help of its own force and action.

I do not doubt the noble intentions of the publishers and the editors of this magazine. ~~I am simply~~ I am simply thinking of the effects any attempt at understanding and communication has in the post-divided world of today. And the effects of this particular action are very informative as to the future developments of the present situation.

For those present here, who are not familiar with

the first issue of Flash Art in Russian, I should state that I share the view of its publishers and editors that the, developments and the diversity within the framework of the Soviet art discourse (and to a large extent the Eastern European one as well) as artistic and critical production are totally compatible and indeed synchronic~~ww~~ with the ones manifested in the Western situation. What I doubt is the existence of a common territory and reciprocity of exchange within these similarities. I think (and I tried to show in the previous parts of this text) that the genesis of the two phenomena is different. That does not mean a comparison is not possible, on the contrary. I only mean that it is necessarily done from within the context of some reflexive authority overriding both phenomena - in this case, it is the authority of the Western art market. And I think that if a repressive interpretative comparison is called for, at least it should be done from a different angle.

Why do I think so - Because the stated aim of the magazine is to create precisely a common territory for East and West, governed by the powerful discourse of post-modernism, peopled by individual "authors" who speak identical languages. The strange thing is that such a territory does not exist in reality (at least not yet). There are no reciprocal market structures common for both East and West. The movement is entirely one-directional. Which makes me think that the basic function of the magazine is to be a mechanism for the transformation of the symbolic (for the West) values ~~fw~~ of the Soviet art discourse into exchange values again for the West. The Russian Flash Art transforms recent Soviet art into

an ideologically convertible commodity. Soviet "underground" art is turned into so many pieces of Perestroika (or Gorbachev if you like).

Admittedly, this is done in a very intelligent way. The indoctrination of the Soviet discourse does not try to change anything. It merely consists of holding-up to the face of the Soviet discourse a mirror where the latter can see for itself what is (or is not) suitable for the market in the West. This is done through inclusions, as well as, through exclusions of names, paradigms, etc. By placing side by side Western and Soviet samples of post-modern discursive practices the issue makes-up a map of the territory it so desperately wishes existed in reality. One is reminded of the famous Borges fable about the cartographers of the Empire which wanted to create a map so detailed that it ended up covering the whole territory of the Empire. One is also reminded of the way Jean Baudrillard turns the fable around by saying that in the age of the Precession of Simulacra it is the map that precedes the territory. Thus, the Russian Flash Art could be hailed as the map or indeed the plan according to which the territory of the future unified art-world is going to be structured. Again one thinks of the utopia of normality and unification which in this case is stripped of its illusions by the sheer power of the market as its new reality principle.

Let us hope that the Soviet "underground" art (what is left of it) will benefit at least in a commercial way from this edition. For it already had its seminal figures, texts and images institutionalized at home a few years ago

in almost the same combinations (but without strong western presence) in several issues of the Iskousstvo and ^{the} Dekorativnoe Iskousstvo in the USSR magazines. Since the individuals, the language and the reading public for both Flash Art and the two soviet art magazines are the same - one can only hope that the external gaze of Flash Art will contribute to the opening-up of the Soviet culture in its own territory.

IV. Beyond "wars" and "walls" you experience the end of "progressive" history and the proliferation of the poetics of after-the-end existence. = Art. But this is so only if you are an Eastern European by birth and place of residency. Otherwise you experience it at least once removed and it only counts as an art (not existential) experience. This creates new "walls" by itself - the Eastern European experience and culture are being commodified. The case of the Russian Flash Art is one example. But I realize that my speaking here now is also contributing to the process - because it too is an image, a representation. That's why I will limit myself to saying just a few words about the situation of the advanced art in my country.

The advanced art there is the art which tries to brake free from the situation of the not-ever-to-be-born author. This art deconstructs the immenseness of the collective sociality. Unlike the original deconstructors though which worked away on the excesses of reflection, the artists in Bulgaria (and perhaps not only there) are trying to dissimulate the ecstatic consciousness of the collective body in socialism. Their deconstruction is more of a primary reconstruction of the individual as a possibility for reflection.

This is work on the establishment of an embrionic reflexiveness, of a minimum of reflexive culture. Actually reflection is a doubling-up of the world in the apparatus of reflection. But in order to have something to be doubled-up it has to be created (or re-created) first.

Thus some artists in Bulgaria are performing work on the reconstruction of the distance from the world, of the meditative position and of the culture of the gaze (of seeing). Still others are reproducing the void of the author's function in Bulgarian speech culture as precisely this and not ~~w~~ some other concrete form of void. Theirs is an art using the simulationist paradigm which brings them closer to some of the trends in the West. Within this paradigm the differences in the situation East-West become less pronounced because here, there are only two types of the ecstatic - the market and the symbolic ones, that are coming to collision. It is here that the similarities between the ideological simulacra in the East and the market commodity in the West are easiest to locate. And it is on the level of this type of art alone that there appear the problems of the actual compatibility and exchange within the world art-market. Regrettably the market might again prove to be the lowest common denominator in the East-West communication .

~~----- SLIDES ----- ????~~

V. Beyond "wars" and "walls" you can see that Jean Baudrillard was wrong when in his book "America" (1986) he wrote:

A/ "What is thought in Europe becomes reality in America - everything that disappears in Europe reappears in San Francisco" (p. 84 of the 1991 Verso edition). Baudrillard

is wrong here on two counts -

1/ What is thought in Europe becomes reality not only in America but in Eastern Europe as well (see Utopian Socialism-Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism-Socialism-Perestroika and the whole problematics of achieving utopia.). For in Eastern Europe utopia was achieved just like in America although these were two vvery different kinds of utopias that were achieved.

2/ After the 1989 events in Eastern Europe one can also claim the opposite - what is thought-of in America (the death of modernism and the "birth" of post-modernism were conceptualized here but were never played-out in real life) becomes (or has already become) reality in Eastern Europe. Communism as the ultimate paradigm of political modernism was killed-off successfully long time ago by the so called socialist revolutions. They established at the same time post-modern situations which in their turn dissolved into a past-post-modern vacuum of reality - i.e., the end. The world as image ^{has been} broken down.

B/ "To see and feel America, you have to have had for at least one moment in some downtown jungle, in the Painted Desert or on some bend in a freeway the feeling that Europe had disappeared. You have to have wondered, at least for a brief moment, "How can anyone be European?" (p. 104-105 *ibid.*). Of course now Europe as it was has disappeared. But Baudrillard was wrong here too because after 1989 and the first "natural" death of a real utopia in Eastern Europe, the first such death recorded in human history you might ask: "How can anyone not be European?". If the death of one real utopia was possible then maybe real utopias of other types could also die?

VI. Beyond "wars" and "walls" you can also see that Jean Baudrillard was incredibly right when he wrote:

"Ours is a crisis of historical ideals facing up to the impossibility of their realization. Theirs (in America) is the crisis of an achieved utopia, confronted with the problem of its duration and permanence".

Excluding Eastern Europe from Baudrillard's "ours" I can say that my "ours" is the crisis of the total collapse of all reality - symbolic, as well as, material. This puts us in a position to have experienced for real the negative resolution of both of the abovementioned crises. And this gives us in Eastern Europe certain privileges since we have advanced knowledge on some of the alternatives facing the rest of the "civilized" world.

These alternatives could ~~www~~ be summed-up by using again a text of Jean Baudrillard's - "The Precession of Simulacra". If we agree with him that the world as we know it is after all ~~an~~ only an image without origin, we can illustrate the state of this new world=image in Eastern Europe after the breakdown of the previous one in the following way:

- first to remind you - Baudrillard describes the successive phases of the image as:

1. it is the reflection of a basic reality
2. it masks and perverts a basic reality
3. it masks the absence of a basic reality
4. it bears no relation to any reality whatever:
it is its own pure simulacrum.

So after the end of the utopia of communism as a social reality, we in Eastern Europe are completely in the fourth

and last phase of the world=image - we are producing pro-
duction on all levels of society and culture. Or to paraphra-
se the french author who did not even know how prophetic
he was:

phase 1. fact, no power

phase 2. fact as power

phase 3. power as fact(i.e. real utopia)

phase 4. POWER, NO FACT.

But otherwise, returning to the abovementioned passage, Baudrillard made a terrific point which allows us to say: "If Western Europe can understand Eastern (formerly socialist) Europe then perhaps the whole of Europe will be better able to understand America (USA) or at least California. And vice versa."

The other of Europe is no longer America, It is Eastern Europe now that is the other of both America and Western Europe. For Europe was a whole - politically one part giving legitimacy to the other, etc. The problem of Europe now is that it can not allow itself the luxury to divide itself again, this time strictly culturally, for the benefit of its own "progress" from now on.

it is Western Europe and America that
from ~~on~~ according to which the world=ima
lf.