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NIC DO OCLENIA

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NOTHING TO DECLARE

Za każdym razem, kiedy składam wniosek o wizę, a potem czekam w kolejce do kontroli paszportowej na lotnisku, zaczynam się denerwować. Nie popełniłam żadnego przestępstwa, nie mam powodów do obaw, a POMIMO to, odkąd zaczęłam podróżować 16 lat temu, cały czas boję się, że nie dostanę wizy i że odpowiedź, której udzielię urzędnikom, będzie niewłaściwa.

I do końca nie wiem, czy to ma związek z tym, że jestem z kraju postkomunistycznego/ socjalistycznego, skąd ludzie raczej nie wyjeżdżali w prywatnych sprawach, czy raczej wynika to z faktu, że jestem z regionu ogarniętego konfliktem/ kraju Drugiego Świata (jakkolwiek osobiście uważam, że mój kraj jest raczej częścią Trzeciego Świata, choć oficjalnie państwa postsowieckie zaliczają się do Drugiego Świata), którego mieszkańcy postrzegani są jako przestępcy lub potencjalna „nielegalna” siła robocza...

Zawsze mam takie poczucie, że jeżeli ktoś zaprasza mnie do jakiegoś obcego kraju, to nie w wyniku myśli czy idei, które reprezentuję, albo pracy, którą tworzę – tak jakbym ja sama nie była tego do końca warta. Nie – ważniejsze jest miejsce mojego pochodzenia. I tak właśnie jest. Ja/My borykamy się z trudnościami zupełnie różnymi od tych, które spotykają innych artystów europejskich. Jesteśmy zmuszeni do toczenia całkiem poważnej walki politycznej, jeżeli chcemy być częścią tego [artystycznego] obiegu.

W ostatnich latach pojawia się coraz większa liczba wystaw koncentrujących się na temacie Wschodu w relacji bądź opozycji do Zachodu. Co symptomatyczne, większość tych przedsięwzięć jest organizowana przez zachodnich kuratorów lub pod egidą zachodnich państw. Zgodnie z tym, co mówi Borut Vogelnik, z którym się całkowicie zgadzam, „koncepcja ‘sztuki wschodnioeuropejskiej’ lub ‘sztuki wschodniej’ powstała na Zachodzie. Ten sposób mówienia o Wschodzie oraz o sztuce ze Wschodu zdecydowanie bardziej przyjął się właśnie na Zachodzie. Dlatego ten termin istnieje, choć w krajach Europy Wschodniej jest on niezwykły, a wręcz problematyczny”¹.

Ja osobiście na tego typu wystawach zawsze mam poczucie uczestniczenia w szczególnym pokazie osobliwości, w jakiejś sensacyjnej ekspozycji odkrywającej przed widownią fakt, że w owym „Drugim Świecie”, który wyobrażano

tyki mobilności, procesy migracyjne oraz światowy rynek sztuki, to zdecydowanie ważniejsze tematy do lokalnej dyskusji niż populistyczno-heroiczne atrakcje wznoszone w całym kraju.

W przeciwnym razie naszych skarbów narodowych będziemy musieli szukać w innych krajach, a na granicy nie będziemy mieli nic do oclenia.

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Every time I apply for a visa and then wait in a queue for passport control at the airport, I am always nervous. I do not have a criminal record, there is no reason to worry, BUT for the last 16 years now I have been travelling and I am still afraid of being denied a visa and not being able to give a proper answer to the officials.

And I am not sure if it has something to do with being from a post-communist/socialist country, where people did not travel much on individual matters or if it has more to do with being from a conflict region/Second World country (my personal feeling is that of being part of the Third World, but officially post-Soviet countries are listed under Second World), where one is perceived either as a criminal or potential "il-legal" labor force?

One is always left with a feeling that I, on the basis of my thoughts, my ideas, the work I do, get invited to some foreign country, but the fact that I have been invited, and that I am valuable, is not enough. The first thing that counts is my origin and that is where it stays. I/We face difficulties that are completely different from those faced by any European artist and we have to wage quite a political struggle to be part of this circulation.

In past years there has been an increasing number of shows dealing with the topic of the East in relation to or as opposed to the West. It is symptomatic that most of these shows were curated by Western curators and/or were organized in Western European countries. According to Borut Vogelnek, with whom I totally agree, "The concept of 'Eastern European Art' or 'Eastern Art' is a concept of the West. This way of talking about the East and about Art from the East in general exists far more in the West. The term therefore already exists. In the countries of Eastern Europe this term is rather unusual and even difficult."¹

Me personally, at these types of shows I always have the feeling of being at some species show, some kind of sensational attraction, where the spectator society is discovering that in the "Second World," which they imagined dark and wild and retarded, there were and are artists, considered leading, interesting, creative and controversial.

1 Hito Steyerl, *Taught der Osten als ästhetische Kategorie? Ein Gespräch mit Rastko Močnik, Miran Mohar, Oliver Vodeb und Borut Vogelnek*, w: *Sprung in die Stadt. Chisinau, Sofia, Pristina, Sarajevo, Warschau, Zagreb, Ljubljana*. Katrin Klingan, Ines Kappert (Hrsg.), 2006, s. 535.

2 Marina Grzinic, *On dramatizations of performance and feminism in the former-Yugoslav space*, w: *Re-politicizing art, theory, representation and new media technology*. Schlebrügger, Editor, Vienna, 2008, s. 105.

3 Newsletter e-flux z 12 marca 2011.

4 Artykuł ten został po raz pierwszy opublikowany pod tytułem *Als die Freiheit Kinder brauchte*, w: Boris Buden, *Die Zone des Übergangs: Vom Ende des Postkommunismus*. Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2009, s. 34–51. Tłumaczenie na język angielski: autorka. Zob: http://www.radicalphilosophy.com/default.asp?channel_id=2369&editorial_id=28990

5 http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/second_world.htm

6 Jacques Derrida odnosi się do noweli *Roberte, ce soir* francuskiego autora Pierre'a Klossowskiego, w: Jacques Derrida, Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality (Cultural Memory in the Present)*. Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2000 (oryginał wydany w roku 1997).

The reason for Western society being surprised and not familiar with contemporary art tendencies from “Eastern Europe” is also ambiguous: what they are mostly exposed to from these countries is national heritage: folklore songs, dances, examples of medieval art, and, in the best case scenario, academic painting. Certainly, this is the case regarding the cultural politics of Georgia’s Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection. One glimpse at their website would suffice to get an impression of where the priorities lie. It also has to be mentioned that in the last couple of years Georgia’s Ministry of Culture has started to support the contemporary art scene in some way: for three years, the Artisterium – International Contemporary Art Exhibition has taken place in Tbilisi, but the fate of this only contemporary art event in Georgia in 2011 is not clear yet. The official word is that there is no budget for it, while at the same time some very disputable monuments, financed by the state, have been erected over the past few years. Most of them glorify the historical past of the once very strong Georgian monarchy, its Christian tradition and uprising nationalistic values. A memorial to all the heroes killed in action for Georgia’s independence since 1993 was erected in Tbilisi in 2010. The same year a World War II memorial in the Georgian city of Kutaisi and a Stalin monument in Gori were demolished. A monument dedicated to all the victims of Russian aggressor politics during the Soviet period as well as during the war in 2008 will replace the Soviet dictator.

There is not much to say about the aesthetic value of these newly commissioned works, the most important criteria nowadays is for the monuments to be tall (to be seen from anywhere), sparkling and populist.

What seem to be negative characteristics for Marina Grzanic, to me seems to be a sign of cosmopolitan view by artists from Eastern Europe, their broadened world-view and conviction to deal with global issues and not to be trapped in nationalistic ideology, flourishing in most post-communist countries.

“The so-called touchy nodal point of contention in art today is the cannibalistic attitude toward the art’s edifice by capitalism that displaced, abstracted and expelled everything and everybody for the sake of its own survival.

Works of art are completely abstracted from their historical roots by the capitalist art market.”²

Artists and curators need to participate in the discourse on contemporary art, to catch developments in the respective art spaces and to reflect on social developments in the world around them and beyond their borders. I hold that networking and exchange create new opportunities for artistic cooperation beyond national borders and identities. I am personally very much interested in exploring new forms of artistic practices and curatorial strategies, through which art reaches its audience and analyses their significance for broader relations between art and society and art and politics, focusing on contemporary Georgian art with an intention to open a new perspective on the changing roles and positions of artists, as well as contributing to the formulation of relevant categories that can enrich the art history of the region.

A private, local issue treated in a globally perceivable context determines the value of an artwork or an art project. Politics speaks of globalisation, of a European context, of equality, but at every step of our lives and activities we face the opposite: we are not from the same world, we are Second World, we need a visa, we pass the border at a separate counter, we are labelled different, but different from what?

I was positively surprised reading the freshly published concept note for Manifesta 9 in 2012 in the Province of Limburg, Belgium “emphasizing regional issues such as the social repositioning of a postindustrial society, finding new possibilities to deal with material and immaterial cultural heritage and the search for a joint European identity and forms of collaboration, while at the same time not letting go of one’s own distinctiveness.”³

The three notions of joint European *Identity*, *Collaboration* and *one’s own Distinctiveness* seem most important to me in this concept.

Who are we, what are we valued for and where are our common interests? We do not want to feel more as an immature child in the Boris Buden sense:

“Who, if not the civil societies of Eastern Europe brought the ancient régime to collapse?... How has it suddenly become so weak if yesterday it had been able to overthrow communism?... Who – and in whose interest – has put them

thereafter in children's shoes, diagnosed their children's illnesses, sent them to school and to exams?... The 'children of communism' remain what they once already were, namely mari-onettes in a historical process that takes place independently of their will and drags them with it to a better future."⁴

Cultural policies and politics go hand in hand with economics in determining the situations of the artists and cultural entrepreneurs who are in circulation. Countries like Georgia, which lack an understanding of contemporary visual art on a social and state level and thus face a complete non-existence of a funding system in the field of art, are dependent on external, mostly European grants; with Georgia included on a list of eligible countries (by reason of being on the threshold of Eastern Europe and Western Asia [in doing research for this conference I found a new term regarding Georgia – Western Asia⁵], whereas Georgia is not included on most grants aimed at South-East Europe). Therefore, operation margins become very narrow and the chances of being awarded a grant very unreal. We are forced to obey regulations directed from above.

"... The inviting host becomes the hostage of the guest and thus the guest, the invited hostage, becomes the master of the host, he becomes the one who invites the one who invites. Because of these substitutions everyone becomes everyone else's hostage. *Such are the laws of hospitality.*"⁶

It is probably worth mentioning here that Georgia experiences a huge lack of a permanent collection of Georgian contemporary visual art since the 1980s and there is still no intention to carry on with enriching it. Due to political and economic instability since the 1990s, in Georgia, no attention has been paid to artistic development in the country, and most of the works by artists from that generation (60s, 70s) are scattered all over the world, mostly in private collections, and rarely in international museums or galleries. Documentation for most of them is missing, and of some, even all traces are lost.

The facts that a contemporary visual art collection is a rich cultural legacy and provides a valuable artistic testimony to the cultural development of any country, that it is very important for further generations to start filling in this gaps, research the topic, gather information about artists and their works, analyze it and

build a permanent collection of Georgian contemporary visual art including painting, graphic art, sculpture, video, photography, installations and related media, which have been produced in great numbers in the last decades, is not yet a topic of discussion on the state level. But perhaps, if some Western European advisor proposed such a project, local officials would listen to them?

Facing such a situation in their homeland, since 1989 Georgian artists have been leaving their country to build a career abroad. On the one hand there is a desire to escape stagnation and desperation in the country, and on the other hand there is a hunger for novelty and education amongst the young generation, a desire for understanding and development. Many of them will never return to Georgia. Emigrated as well as remaining artists are struggling for acceptance and recognition, with the difference being that the emigrated ones can rely upon financial support by the state or ample funding in Western countries where this is still common practice.

This migration tendency leaves us who stayed in the country, and especially the curators, with a huge problem: we are running out of human artistic resources. If one researched projects realized over the past few years both in Georgia and outside, he/she would come across the same names of participating artists.

Maybe topics such as educational institutions and methods, national cultural policy, mobility policies, migration processes, and the global art market are far more urgent issues to be discussed locally than populist and heroic attractions built all over the country.

Otherwise, soon we will have to search for our treasure outside the country and at the border there will be nothing to declare.

1 Hito Steyerl, *Taugt der Osten als ästhetische Kategorie? Ein Gespräch mit Rastko Močnik, Miran Mohar, Oliver Vodeb und Borut Vogelnik*, in: *Sprung in die Stadt. Chisinau, Sofia, Pristina, Sarajevo, Warschau, Zagreb, Ljubljana*. Katrin Klingan, Ines Kappert (Hrsg.), 2006, p. 535.

2 Marina Grzinic, *On dramatizations of performance and feminism in the former-Yugoslav space*, in: *Re-politicizing art, theory, representation and new media technology*. Schlebrügger, Editor, Vienna 2008, p. 105.

3 e-flux newsletter from March 12, 2011.

4 This article was first published as *Als die Freiheit Kinder brauchte*, in: Boris Buden, *Die Zone des Übergangs: Vom Ende des Postkommunismus*. Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2009, pp. 34–51. Translation is by the author. Can be seen at: http://www.radicalphilosophy.com/default.asp?channel_id=2369&editorial_id=28990

5 http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/second_world.htm

6 Jacques Derrida referring to *Roberte, ce soir* of the French author Pierre Klossowski, in: Jacques Derrida, Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality (Cultural Memory in the Present)*. Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2000 (original work published in 1997).