

Image / Time dialogue

Nemanja Mićević: You were born in Sarajevo; you have spent most of your life in Trebinje, and you have attended postgraduate and doctoral studies in Belgrade. You got your bachelor's degree from the Academy of Fine Arts in Trebinje. Did your undergraduate studies play a part in your decision to research new media, video installations, i.e. video art in general, which has generally prevailed in your art? Were they of any relevance? Is formal academic training in our country as well as in the region up to changes in contemporary art production, and does it have the potential to prepare students - future artists - for contemporary art practice in an adequate way? I ask this last question bearing in mind the fact you also work as an assistant at the Academy of Fine Arts in Trebinje, teaching the subjects (or rather courses, as they are commonly called nowadays) painting, photography and extended media. In your master's programme you researched the theory of video and film, and it has also been your focus in the doctoral program. In what ways has your art been shaped by the research you have done in the course Theory of Art and Media, as part of your interdisciplinary study programme? **Igor Bošnjak:** In a way, my undergraduate programme had a lot to do with my decision to shift the focus of my research to the field of photography as a medium (stationary images) and video or film (moving images). Back in those days in 2003, which now seems like a distant past, there was not even a photography course offered at the Trebinje Academy, let alone a course in extended media. Consequently, it all came down to my own research. In fact, it was the need to see my ideas through using relatively 'new' media, and not those in the predominant, traditional range (painting, drawing, printing) that put me in a situation where I began to research video, animation, photography, both theory and practice, meticulously, but within a generally adopted digital framework, of course. I believe formal academic training in this country (Bosnia and Herzegovina) has only had the potential to educate adequately students, future artists, for contemporary art forms in the last five or six years. Also, the triangle of cities (Sarajevo-Trebinje-Belgrade) where I have spent most of my time, statistically speaking, which have both shaped and framed me in a way, as a person and artist, have probably been crucial, in a subliminal kind of way, for my growth and bearing. Each of these cities has its own specific genius loci, and I have been built by them as a kind of hybrid structure, in terms of the most general traits of my personality, the kind of man or artist one needs to be. When it comes to my interest in the theory of moving images, in my master's and doctoral programmes in Belgrade, I believe they have had a considerable influence on my practice of art. There I intentionally let theory and practice intermingle, fluidly, channel one another, and this broad take produces, again, a kind of a hybrid final product.

N. M.: Back in the 1960's, the works and experiments of Nam June Paik and Les Levine, along with Bruce Neumann's video installations, gave a foretaste of video art. In the 1970's and 1980's, video technology became increasingly present in the practice and systems of art (video was used in performances, so-called video sculptures, i.e. video installations were staged, artists created narrative video works and techno-aesthetic experiments, which entered exhibitions in galleries and museums). If we remember that we live in a time of omnipresent software (with various programs being distributed for free, through sharing) and a domination of the spectator culture (today, people use youtube to listen to music, or we may even say watch music), fifty years after video art was born, its products are accessible to everyone and it is fairly simple in terms of production, in comparison with the period twenty years ago. What is your approach in the production of your video works? How important for you is the process of production itself and the quality of the material, as opposed to its reading? Even though I may sound banal, I will still venture to ask about today's artists: do they opt for video art without hesitation (I mean the new generation of Bosnia and Herzegovina's artists), as it greatly facilitates the making of any project (with works transported using ordinary DVDs, TV, video beams and DVD players) and is a lot simpler and cheaper in comparison to other, more complicated types of production (sculpture, more challenging installations, etc.)? **I. B.:** Yes, you definitely have a point here. Today, video is accessible to everyone, kids and old people alike, and pretty good results can be obtained with very little expertise, with a medium-quality video camera and any commonly used software. I find that truly exciting, because viewed from a marxist, utopian kind of perspective, all people are potentially artists. My approach to how I create my art, including video works, is utterly conceptual. I carefully select the best medium for an initial idea I wish to materialise, or better still visualise. After selecting the medium, I contextualise the idea, collect theoretical background, research texts, Internet sources, and only then do I move on to the production

process. Neither the production nor the quality of the material are the most important, they only come second, although I do try and use minimal standards for galleries and museums, such as miniDVD or HD video. Again, the final product, any work in its complete form, will depend on the kind of effect it is meant to have on the audience: subversive, challenging, psychological, etc. It is difficult to think about grand productions in the regional setting or the setting of Bosnia and Herzegovina, so one has to keep within the limits of what is possible and available. Personally, when it comes to concepts and production, I believe it is not at all important if a piece of work is created as a high-budget production in an elitist Western European artist-in-residence programme, or in the wilderness of the poor 'art system' of the Balkans. The only relevant thing is that the work be based on a good concept, i.e. serve a purpose in a kind of way. I think it is important for any piece of work to upset, excite or put a smile on the faces of its audience, affect them in any kind of way, provoke any sort of critical thinking. I don't find your question in the least banal; I think it tackles the central issue of the regional 'art systems'. Practically all artists from the region who I know have produced one good video, because that is the cheapest, and quite often the only way to exhibit abroad. You record a video on DVD and send it by mail for an exhibition abroad. I think this pretty much legitimates the current state of affairs.

N. M.: Certainly, you belong to the new generation of Bosnia and Herzegovina's artists. Being a consequence of the unfortunate circumstances in the 1990's, this traumatising place is frequently seen as the common denominator for the new generation, in terms of the subjects they choose for their art. Is this art overloaded with social and political issues? More specifically, your artworks are subversive, analytical and critical in how they challenge and re-examine the social and political setting in which you work and act, which is somewhat in line with the critical model of engaged, leftist art (Walter Benjamin, critical theory of the Frankfurt School, Situationalism, etc.). We bear witness to a public that is absolutely irresponsive to the often provocative kind of art activism (undoubtedly, a paradox and one of the region's peculiarities). In that sense, what would be the most engaging element of your art? I do not support escapism in art, searching for universal values, or academic experimentation with form for the sake of personal, inner satisfaction. However, is the ultimate accomplishment of art which reflects the everyday and has the task to impact the public (evidently with no success) also personal, inner satisfaction, which makes it little or no different from art choosing to deal with universal themes? In that case, is your position as an artist a cynical one? **I. B.:** A thousand-page treatise can be written on this topic, but let us try and cut a long story short. Yes, the well-known events of the 1990's played a pivotal role in the destinies of the people, of the region, its economy, politics, as well as "oh, art", even if it came last. After the end of the conflict and post-war apathy, the destinies of the people, region, economy, politics, as well as art, have not changed to this day. Only the instruments are different. Instead of granades, bombs, blood, pillage, displacement of people and paranoia, today we have transition in delusive disguise, 'privatisation', dirty media, cheap loans, impoverished guarantors, collective schizophrenia. What I listed above is all too common and everybody is sick of it. I believe the art produced by young artists is by no means burdened by social or political issues, but by issues coming from a pretentious reality we are immersed in. In connection with that, art and culture, always the last to finish these typically bloody Balkan races, can produce nothing else but the given hermetic reality. If for no other reason, I believe the works of the new generation of artists, from the perspective of the future or a sci-fi film, may make great wayposts and artefacts to reconstruct and demystify this defective, makeshift society or state. Again, my opinion is we are still not capable of offering or staging something that would be big globally, until we have relieved ourselves of both the burden of the past and this one of the present. The situation is such that personally, I have no other choice. My stance has to be cynical, but I would also gladly deal with universal themes in my art.

N. M.: The exhibition staged at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Republic of Srpska is entitled Image/Time. The medium that prevails is the video, together with video installations, prints and performances. In this exhibition you present artworks grouped around several different concepts that have marked your work to date, the most prevalent being moving images, and all of it included under the title Image/Time, in the spirit of Deleuze's theoretical postulates. One of the key terms found in Deleuze's criticism of structuralism, i.e. in his post-psychoanalytic theory, is the event. The concept of event as seen by Deleuze and Guattari is characterised by permanent, albeit discontinuous existence: continual variation, constant modification, mutation, flux, motion, movable machines, promotion, film, duration, territorialisation and deterritorialisation, correlation, rhizome. To what extent is the manifestation of an

event, or rather of a series of events, used by ideology to fabricate life (especially in terms of the consumption of post-ideological refuse in this region), recognisable in your works shown in this exhibition? In what way has Deleuze's concept of movement, whereby he argues that film is not an image of the world, but a machine playing an active part in the creation of the manifestations of the world, had an influence on the production and selection of the works we see in this exhibition? **I. B.:** As far as this exhibition is concerned, I have brought together some of my earlier work, the works belonging to the Messiah, Balkanisation series, and some of my most recent works, which are concerned with the times we live in. The concept of Image/Time is such that it allows a broader interpretation of all the artworks included on Deleuze's theoretical platform. I have been greatly influenced by Gilles Deleuze, because I came to realise that all his postulates on the theory of film and moving images may easily be applied in any analysis of any work that has to do with moving pictures (film, video, installation, environment, etc.). Also, his terminology and his thinking opened the door for me into a world of both practical and theoretical dealings with moving images, because Deleuze developed a complete philosophy of moving images. There has been a change in new video art in terms of what is seen as important, from what images show to what they provoke and how they affect the body and senses, resulting in complex audio-visual and haptic effects. Deleuze considers moving images (film, video) as an integral, complete field, wholly built on movement-images. These movement-images consist of perception-images, action-images, affection-images, etc. In terms of the rhizomatic or network-like structure, prevalent in Deleuze's and Guattari's work as the Rhizome Theory, today everything is so interrelated and entangled (in terms of cognition and information) that it is impossible to be independent of all 'side' influence. Some of the works which are basically objects or items (e.g. Dictionary), or works which are primarily performances, cannot be presented simply as such; they have to be compounded with a video, a text, a theoretical statement, etc., because it is precisely this interconnectedness that allows an artwork to operate as a meta-medium, i.e. as a database, an archive, within which it is possible for the viewer or visitor to relate meanings one to another in new ways and read or 'reload' the work anew, in his or her own special way. For instance, when it comes to films shown at cinemas, it is the happening or event contained in the audio-visual image that supports the narration, while in most of my video works the narration becomes an audio-visual event which does not exist beyond the media staging. As for the 'event' itself understood in the way of Deleuze, the majority of the works are in a way the staging of my events (or of commonly known events, such as Signing the Dayton Accords), which are transposed into a different medium for the purpose of creating an affect. The concept of affect should be distinguished from the concept of emotion. An emotion is a kind of affect. Emotions are content-specific affects, while affection is the very influence or intensity of something that has an effect on the beholder, listener or participant, without indicating the specific content of the emotion. Affection is the intensity of the effect of an image, object, body, text, etc. It was through the agency of affect and affection that Deleuze and Guattari tried to formulate the theory of the effect on the senses, which marks the transition from the position of the subject to the position of the event. In connection with that, most of the works in this exhibition explicitly consume post-ideological refuse of the region and attempt to 'digest' it in one way or another. Deleuze's notion of movement has had a great influence on the production and arrangement of the works, because beside film as a machine that plays an active part in the fabrication of the world, it may be said that reality is also generated or produced by global television and radio networks, as well as the Internet, as the all-encompassing medium of our time. If there is advancement in art, not in a historical sense, but in a sense that it is getting closer to the truth and quintessence, the reason for that lies in the fact that it (art) may exist only as long as it creates new percepts and new affects.

N. M.: Deleuze and Guattari introduced the term schizoanalysis to make up for the failure of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis channels desire by means of censure and auto-censure. In that way, the subconscious and unconscious serve the preservation and reproduction of the system, instead of liberating man, in accordance with their unlimited creative potential. According to their theory, those are the ultimate limits of capitalism. Schizophrenia thus becomes the essential determinant of postmodern culture, a sort of media ecstasy, i.e. media-generated collective fanaticism. In the work 4 in 1 you multiply (clone) yourself into four Igor Bosnjaks. You act simultaneously as an artist, theoretician, critic and curator, creating a multiple schizotypal personality. Does the splitting of the contemporary artist's personality relate only to your experience of creating up-to-the-minute art forms, or may this work be interpreted as common for the practice of art nowadays? Is this construct applicable to the broader social environment you work in? **I. B.:** Anti-Edipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia opens up new possibilities for

reading and understanding the role of the subject in today's global society. The video work 4 in 1 is perhaps the most explicit expression of this, of this very desire, i.e. of the relations between subjects and desiring-machines. Decoding fluxes and deterritorialising the Socius thus represent the strongest tendencies of capitalism. It is constantly coming closer to its limits. It strives with all its might to produce a schizophrenic as a subject of decoded fluxes on a body without organs. When it is said that schizophrenia is our illness, the illness of our time, this does not only mean that modern living makes people crazy. In fact, we wish to say that capitalism, in its process of production, creates a powerful schizophrenic charge, which it suppresses with all its repression tools, but which does not stop from being reproduced as the limits of the process. It is exactly through the agency of this imposed framework that capitalism restores all kinds of artificial, imaginary or symbolic territorialities, within which it tries to re-code those individuals who have broken free from abstract quantities. In a way, 4 in 1 attempts to dymistify the generally acceptable stances and norms in the system of art. The splitting of my personality as seen in this work comes from my practice of contemporary art, my theoretical writing and thinking, work as a critic, as well as some curating projects I have been involved in. The linear narrative reading and exposition of me as multiplied, i.e. of me as an artist, then as a theoretician, as a critic and finally as a curator (who is lighting a cigarette in a theatrical manner, while the artist, theoretician and critic are looking on silently), really speaks about the currently dominant position of the curator. Because in my opinion, today, the whole system of art, the global art market, the great biennial exhibitions are mere playgrounds used by curators to make decisions and select. What the artist, theoretician or critic do is not too important. In fact, everything is sublimated through the curator's selection, who decides on who is an artist and what is art today. For, the schizophrenic is positioned at the very limits of capitalism: he is its strong tendencies, its hyperproduct, proletarian and angel of death...

Nemanja Mićević & Igor Bošnjak