ART AND DEMOCRACY IN POST-COMMUNIST EUROPE

Piotr Piotrowski

translated by Anna Brzyski

reaktion books

Published by Reaktion Books Ltd
33 Great Sutton Street
London EC1V 0DX
www.reaktionbooks.co.uk

First published as *Agoraphilia* in Poznań, Poland, by REBIS Publishing House Ltd in 2010
Translation of this book was funded by the ERSTE Foundation

ERSTE Stiftung

English-language translation by Anna Brzyski

Printed and bound in China

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Piotrowski, Piotr, 1952–
Art and democracy in post-communist Europe.
1. Democracy and the arts – Europe, Eastern.
2. Art and state – Europe, Eastern.
3. Art, East European – 20th century.
4. Art, East European – 21st century.
5. Post-communism – Europe, Eastern.
I. Title

ISBN: 978 1 86189 895 1

Contents

introduction
Agoraphilia After Communism 7

one
1989: The Spatial Turn 15

part one
History and Contemporaneity

two
From Geography to Topography 55

three
From the Politics of Autonomy to the
Autonomy of Politics 80

four
Anarchy, Critique, Utopia 125

part two
Memory

five
Between Real Socialism and Nationalism 155

six
New Museums in New Europe 202

part three

Democracy after Communism

seven
Art and Biopolitics: Ilya Kabakov and Krzysztof Wodiczko 225

eight
Gender after the Fall of the Wall 243

nine
Unfulfilled Democracy 262

References 289

Photo Acknowledgements 307

Index 308

introduction

Agoraphilia after Communism

Although the term agoraphilia most commonly refers to the pursuit of sexual satisfaction in public places, the concept's Greek etymology suggests a much broader meaning, one that is only minimally suggested by sexology. In this broader context, agoraphilia describes the drive to enter the public space, the desire to participate in that space, to shape public life, to perform critical and design functions for the sake of and within the social space. When applied to the analysis of art produced in the countries of post-communist Central and Eastern Europe after 1989, this word provides a key to the description of at least a portion of the region's artistic culture, a part that responded to the call emanating on the one hand from the new map of Europe taking shape in the wake of the Cold War and, on the other, from the earlier geopolitical division of the continent. Of course, a negative point of reference is provided here by suppression of public life in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. The strategies of limiting political and social participation and of restricting culture and cultural production constituted, irrespective of the degree of actual restrictions, an important part of communist rule and served as an instrument of the cultural policies carried out by the state apparatus. The state possessed various methods for enacting those policies, but its main goal was to render individual and collective initiatives of its citizens, members of the particular societies, more or less dependent on the monopoly of the political apparatus and to subordinate the public sphere to the ideological doctrine. One could describe this type of practice as agoraphobic. Its opposite is agoraphilic, a practice predicated on transgression of barriers separating cultural sphere and civil initiative, one grounded in the critique of the status quo undertaken with the goal of reshaping the social organism.

The fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe does not mean that agoraphobic tendencies have disappeared entirely from public life. This book will provide many examples of such attitudes. Post-communist agoraphobia can be distinguished from agoraphobia of the pre-1989 period by its more dispersed, less substantial character. Its methods are sometimes

more subtle than the clear-cut (if one could describe in such terms), the prophylactic censorship of the communist regimes. Naturally, contemporary manifestations of agoraphobia are at times equally brutal and include political as well as legal repression, instances of hooliganism, vandalism and so on. I will address them here. However, more often agoraphobic techniques are more refined. In general, references to 'censorship' are avoided. Instead, one speaks of societal interests, respect for religious feelings, traditions, the good name of institutions and public figures, and also of the interests of taxpayers. In this sense agoraphilia represents both a critical attitude directed against those types of efforts aimed at limiting free speech, as well as a call for realization of the creative and civic freedoms.

Manifestations of agoraphobia are in part symptomatic of the society's and the 'new' regime's level of comfort with the mechanisms of the old system of power, often the only system of law and order familiar to the new establishment. But they function in reverse and are enacted by the formerly negatively defined institutions and areas of public life, such as the church or market institutions, corporations and so on. In turn, the power of those institutions, which finds new popular and political support, is measured by the pressure, real and implied, directed against the governing structures. For example, the Volkswagen Corporation, which has a factory producing cars near Poznań, forced the local government to postpone the exhibition of a young Polish artist, Rafał Jakubowicz, entitled 'Arbeitsdisciplin' (Work Discipline), which was scheduled to open at the municipal art gallery. The work consisted of a short video and accompanying photograph that showed the factory tower with a visible VW emblem seen through the barbwire fence surrounding the plant. The resemblance of the VW tower to a watchtower provoked the corporation to launch a complaint with the office of the mayor and, in effect, to stop the show. This type of intervention reveals the relationship of agoraphobia to neoliberalism and demonstrates how it has become a function of the neoliberal politics recently embraced throughout Eastern Europe. Within the neoliberal ideology freedom to maximize profit constitutes an unproblematic priority that does not always coincide with the freedom of expression. In fact, as demonstrated by the experience of countries with much more extensively developed neoliberal practices, such as the United States, those two freedoms almost never coincide.

However, the neoliberal market economy and the interests of the corporations do not constitute the main source of the agoraphobic attitudes in post-communist Europe. They are equally promoted by religion, especially in Poland and also in Russia, as well as nationalism, in particular in the Balkans.

In the first instance, the court case of a Polish artist, Dorota Nieznalska, is highly revealing. The artist, who used in her show a photograph of male genitalia superimposed on a cross, was charged with blasphemy and sentenced by a court in Gdańsk to six months of unpaid public work. The decision was overturned on appeal. The most extreme example of the second is the process that prevented the opening of the exhibition of art from Kosovo in Belgrade. Both of those episodes are described in this book.

However, it appears that the most frequent targets of agoraphobia are members of sexual minorities. Those attitudes as so strong, at least in some countries of post-communist Europe, that they have managed to block almost entirely public presentation of this type of work. But, the situation is dynamic. A great deal is changing in this part of the continent, even in Romania, which until recently had some of the most restrictive laws, as well as Latvia, where powerful conservative tendencies have made a particularly strong show of force during efforts to organize gay pride parades. In Poland, where radical conservative and nationalist groups have put up strong opposition to similar efforts and where governments of some cities (Poznań and Warsaw) had banned such parades, the situation has changed significantly. Not only have such bans passed into the infamous history of those cities, but in 2010, for the first time, the first Euro Pride Parade organized in Eastern Europe took place in Warsaw. The institutions of the cultural establishment, such as the National Museum in Warsaw, have participated by presenting an exhibition curated by Paweł Leszkowicz dealing with the problematic of homoeroticism. The show reinstated into the public view this historic and artistic tradition, only relatively recently excluded from the mainstream. It included not only works of contemporary art produced in post-communist Europe, but also historic paintings and sculptures beginning with Greek antiquity. Undeniably this is a sign of the changing times and without a doubt it is a symptom of the growing strength, not only in art, or rather not just in art, of the agoraphilic attitudes. The demand for recognition of the civil rights of those who, to different degrees, have been deprived of those rights, the claim for the right to those rights, as Hannah Arendt has observed, constitutes one of the territories of post-communist agoraphilia.

The concept of agoraphilia is not reserved, therefore, for artistic attitudes and activities, or perhaps it is not the most apparent within that sphere. As a matter of fact, it can be seen much more readily operating within civic and political initiatives, specifically in the formation and activities of various political associations and groups. This is a much more common phenomenon, one that on the one hand responds to the years during which such activities were

1 Rafał Jakubowicz, *Arbeitsdisciplin*, 2002.

restricted, and on the other not just to a desire, but rather the necessity of creating a civil society. By defining for itself similar goals art has participated in this movement. However, it operates with a different set of methods, even though some of those resemble actions of the political and social advocates. Moreover, considerable numbers of artists have adopted the methods of the political activists. Some of them will be discussed here. However, their actions, employing similar methods and aiming at analogous goals, constitute something different and, consequently, have to be read on an artistic level, since art creates its own spheres of reference and it is perceived primarily through them. This happens sometimes contrary to the wishes of the artists themselves.

The concept of post-communist Europe also requires definition. It has a much more political than geographic character. Although the terms Eastern Europe or the former Eastern Europe, East-Central or simply Central Europe appear in the text as its synonyms from time to time, the book deals with the eclipse of Eastern and especially Central Europe in the post 1989 period. Naturally, those geographic designations also had political character under Soviet domination, even though, especially in Central Europe, they were inscribed within a much longer historic tradition (one that also had political dimensions). They signalled a desire to distinguish the area from the Soviet

Union and its cultural policies. In contrast, the concept of post-communist Europe has par excellence political references, or more precisely, historically political ones. It refers to the countries that to different degrees, though more or less simultaneously, rejected the communist construction of the state and communist ideology. It seems that with the acceptance of such terminological perspective it should be easier for us to comprehend the departure from the traditional ways of thinking about this part of Europe, above all those operating within such categories as Central Europe. I think that this concept still used to describe contemporary artistic phenomena has lost its appeal. On the other hand, the concept of post-communist Europe, which may not be very attractive either, brings with it certain neutrality. It has a descriptive character both in the political and historic sense. What makes it potentially problematic and less than comfortable for the inhabitants of this part of the continent is the fact that it carries with it the stigma of the old regime. This is intentional on my part. Irrespective of the fact that in some countries the legacy of the former system is still clearly visible, I assume that its traces can be found throughout the region. Those traces are often very subtle; they appear in behaviours, in the ways of thinking, in


WOLNOŚĆ

Marsz Równości poszedł w Polskę

Poznaniane protestowali w sobotę przeciwko rozpędzeniu Marszu Równości sprzed tygodnia. Na ulicy Półwiejskiej zebrało się około 250 osób. Maszerowano też w innych miastach. W stolicy na ulicę wyszło ok. 2 tys. osób. Przemawiali artyści, politycy, ludzie mediów, Mirosław Chojecki, działacz opozycji w latach 70., mówił do tłumu na pl. Konstytucji: – W Polsce demokracja nie jest zagrożona, dopóki będziemy jej pilnować. Publicysta Jacek Żakowski mówił ze śmiechem: – To niesamowite, że nowej władzy udało się w parę tygodni uruchomić taki proces społeczny. W sobotę i niedzielę podobne protesty odbyły się też w Krakowie, Katowicach, Łodzi, Gdańsku, Toruniu, Rzeszowie i Wrocławiu oraz za granicą. Wiec poparcia dla protestujących Polaków zorganizowała wczoraj w Londynie brytyjska Partia Zielonych, a w sobotę w Berlinie – niemieckie organizacje gejowskie i politycy Zielonych.

ALEKSANDRA KRZYŻANIAK-GUMOWSKA

Szczegóły – s. 5 oraz na stronach lokalnych: Reportaż Włodzimierza Nowaka o udziale z pokojowej siłki zatrzymanych w czasie Marszu Równości w Poznaniu – czytaj w „Dużym formacie"

2 *Pride Parade*, Poznań, 28 November 2005.

customs, and so on. Often they affect only part of the society; sometimes, however, they can be observed in the functioning of the institutions, in the habits of their officials, in the societal expectations concerning order and discipline, in lack of tolerance, and so forth.

By contrast, the concept of democracy requires less extensive definition, though this does not mean that I am not partial to particular theories of democracy. Throughout this book I refer to the concept of agonistic democracy defined by Chantal Mouffe, which is built on the basis of a belief in the necessity of conflict in a democratic society and on the critique of consensus. I do not aim to develop this theory since I am not a political theorist. And, as a citizen, rather than a theorist, I realize the need for certain concessions in the name of pragmatic consensus. I am not going to deal with those either. It does seem to me, however, that this theory is very useful for the understanding of contemporary agoraphilia, especially within the sphere of artistic experience. Because it engages in a critique of the status quo, or liberal democracy, it is sometimes able to identify clear instances of wrongs committed against specific social groups, as well address a peculiar form of utopia of tolerance and coexistence (that always has a hierarchical and enabling character), as well as equality of rights.

Finally, a few words about the book itself. While it certainly grew out of the experiences I gained working on *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989,* it is an autonomous project guided by a different research programme. Above all, my research and presentation methods are different. No matter how far *Yalta* may actually be from a historic survey of art in East Central Europe after 1945, it represented an effort on my part to systematize an enormous amount of historic material. By contrast, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe* problematizes living contemporary culture. In other words, the project of *Yalta* was historic in character: the book's scope was defined by the dates designating the beginning and the end of communism in Eastern Europe between the years 1945 and 1989. This project is focused on contemporaneity, on the world that surrounds us, often changing in dynamic ways. Therefore, *Art and Democracy* signals existence of particular issues in contemporary artistic culture, without any effort at their proportional presentation in their substantive as well as geographic dimension. It functions as a map of problems that can be observed within the artistic culture of post-communist Europe, but a map that includes barely a dozen artists who have engaged this problematic.

Dealing with this problematic in greater detail, I begin with a general discussion of the significance of the events of 1989 for the culture of the eastern

part of Europe and beyond. Next, I examine changes in the structure within which culture has been perceived since then and the shift from a geographic to a topographic perspective, from the sphere of cultural analysis focused on individual countries towards regional analysis focused on metropolitan areas, which have changed their character during this period, becoming – still within a regional perspective – far more cosmopolitan. This shift in the analytic perspective from artistic geography to artistic topography, from a national and transnational character to a cosmopolitan one, is significant from a broader, not just local, point of view. This process appears to be a product of the cultural globalization that began to pull in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc in the wake of the Cold War and the collapse of the binary geopolitical world structure. The third chapter investigates changes in attitudes towards the status of artworks. It traces the shift in emphasis from the politics of the work's autonomy (highly characteristic of the modernist conception of painting, sculpture, installation and so on) that responded to the cultural policies of the communist state and its efforts to pull art into the gears of the party propaganda machine, in the direction of political autonomy, or instigation of activist and political actions within the work itself. The fourth chapter deals with anarchistic traditions of critical art, or its anarchical attitude, as well as a new utopian vision emerging on its horizon. The following chapter analyses the function of memory and critiques of nationalism in artistic actions, closing with a discussion of several projects by Marina Abramović, which address the specifics of the Balkan situation. Following this discussion of art and complexities of communist memory, I move to an analysis of several museums of contemporary art recently founded in post-communist Europe, in Bucharest, Tallinn, Warsaw and Vilnius. I address the question of the role of historic experience of trauma in contemporary museology. In the seventh chapter I use the example of two artists, Ilya Kabakov and Krzysztof Wodiczko, to examine the issue of biopolitics, and in the eighth I explore the problematic of gender after the fall of the wall. The final chapter addresses the functioning of art in post-communist Europe, above all its restrictions and more or less (frequently more than less) hidden censorship mechanisms.

The research that led to the writing of this book could not have been completed without the generous support of the Collegium Budapest, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in Warsaw, and the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute. I am extremely grateful for their encouragement and financial assistance. I am also thankful to the Erste Foundation in Vienna for providing a grant for this English translation of the book, which was

published originally in Polish by Rebis Publishers as *Agoraphilia*, Poznań, 2010, as well as institutions and artists who have permitted me to publish their works free of charge.

one

1989: The Spatial Turn

In his book *Art History after Modernism*, Hans Belting, one of the leading European art historians, writes about the 'two voices of art history', the Western and the Eastern. For him, one of the main tasks facing art history today is to ensure 'the coexistence of very different and sometimes contradictory [art historic] narratives'.[1] Belting believes that art produced in Eastern Europe, especially after 1945, is fundamentally different from art produced in Western Europe. That difference rests, according to the author, on the '[Eastern European] conviction in the power of art, something that had vanished long before in the West'. Citing Ilya Kabakov, he observes that for Eastern European artists 'art was formerly "a necessity of life, not a professional activity"'.[2]

Hans Belting is not alone in showing interest in this issue. Christoph Tannert, former East German art critic and currently director of the Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin, observed in 1991 that

> After the political changes brought about by perestroika in the USSR, the West expected an inrush of beneficial, exotic powers from the East. A 'crisis of meaning' in the West – the result of speechlessness and surplus – had nourished hopes for a mythographic renewal from the East.[3]

His answer to the question of what exactly could bring about such a cultural renewal of the West was Eastern European dissident art. According to Tannert, the main task facing contemporary culture is not how to maintain Eastern European institutions, but rather how 'to protect and stabilize [its] moral attitudes', in other words, how to preserve the Eastern European culture of nonconformism.[4]

It seems that the response to this challenge came early on, at the time when Eastern Europe, in particular Russia, opened its borders to Western capital as well as to Western artistic cultural industry. This was the context for Joseph Bakstein's 1995 statement about the changes affecting the Russian art scene:

> In just a few years life in Russia has changed so much that we have found ourselves in an almost wholly different society, living a different life. For nonconformist artists of the 1970s generation, this is especially true: after having risked everything to challenge Soviet official culture, they now find themselves celebrated in the international art world. Strange to say, this sort of success is the most difficult thing for a nonconformist to handle.[5]

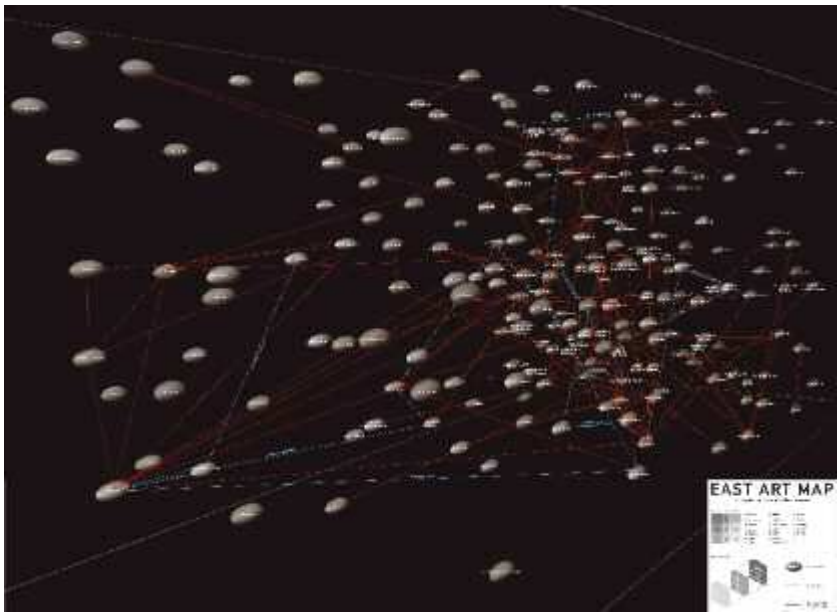
Let us note that at the time when Belting was wishing for a harmonious coexistence of the two voices of art history, another art historian and curator, Ryszard Stanisławski, was attempting to speak with one voice in his monumental exhibition 'Europa, Europa'. I do not intend to engage here in a critical analysis of this landmark show, which took place in Bonn in 1994, since I have already done so elsewhere.[6] I only would like to observe that Stanisławski's approach, which focused exclusively on Eastern European art, but in a context established by universal, or rather Western, art history, is very typical of Eastern European art critics. It is a form of compensation for a long period of isolation and closed or, under the best circumstances, barely opened borders. Of course, this is an understandable reaction to the historic process. However, it does not allow for recognition of either the historic, pre-1989 or contemporary cultural identity of the region. Yet this type of discourse is embraced by a significant number of Eastern European art critics, curators, artists and art historians, who wish to see themselves as participating in the Universal (or rather Western) culture. By trying to wilfully forget historic sources of their own cultures, they attempt to locate their positions on a global and universal plane, rather than within a regional (understood as provincial) frame of references. In his exhibition catalogue *After the Wall,* Bojana Pejić quotes Lithuanian artist Deimentas Narkevičius from Vilnius, who told her: 'I am a little bit tired of being a "Lithuanian artist". I would like to be just an artist.'[7]

In her interesting book *Dvojhlasne dejiny umenia* (Two Voices of Art History) Slovak art historian Maria Oriškova attempts to resolve this tension.[8] Although the book's title is inspired by Hans Belting, the work functions as a critique not just of Belting's text, but also of the larger issue, namely the exclusion of Eastern European art from art history textbooks written after 1945. By analysing work produced in Eastern, or rather Central Europe, as well as its reception within the Western art discourse, Oriškova attempts to uncover the complex network of factors that have led to this state of affairs. In her opinion, both sides are to a certain extent responsible. Eastern European art critics

provided their Western counterparts with a simplified view of the local art scene, based primarily on the so-called 'dissident paradigm' of art making, which valorized resistance against the state. Western critics simply reproduced this paradigmatic understanding of Eastern European art, while assigning the art itself peripheral position.

The most radical response to the methodological approach represented by the exhibition 'Europa, Europa' appeared in Ljubljana, where the local museum of modern art (Moderna Galerija) began programmatically collecting Eastern European art,[9] and where the Slovene art collective IRWIN began a long-term art historic project to create a map of Eastern European art.[10] The first example, namely the curatorial project under way at the Moderna Galerija entitled '2000+ ArtEast Collection', aims to provide an alternative to the prevalent West-centric museum practice by establishing a collection of art produced in Eastern Europe, a region informed by particular and quite different set of artistic experiences from those of the West during the period from 1960 to 2000. The collection project began in 2000 as a result of an international collaboration among art critics from the region. The second project, the map of Eastern European art undertaken by artists associated with IRWIN, who from the beginning were highly sensitive to the issue of macro-regional identity – if one could characterize Eastern Europe in this way – was also initiated in cooperation with an international team of art critics from the region. In contrast to the museological project, the artists went a step further by trying to actually create a type of map of Eastern European art, a map that included not only specific works and artists but also, more problematically, their links

3 *2000 +ArtEast Collection*, exhibition poster, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana, 2000.



4 IRWIN (group), *East Art Map*, 2002.

and artistic relationships. Although these two projects are quite different, they have something in common. Both aim to produce a visual or art historic landscape of Eastern Europe or, to borrow Hans Belting's terms, the second, idiosyncratic voice of art history, one that can function as an alternative to the first.

The 1990s revealed a need for confronting such different experiences in reflections on art as well as in art practice itself. One of the most significant manifestations of this tendency was the exhibition 'Interpol' (Stockholm, 1996), which attempted to provoke an art dialogue between the East and the West. It is worthwhile to try to analyse the history of this exhibition in order to demonstrate how complex that problem could be. The initial idea for the show, developed by the curatorial team of Ian Åman from Stockholm and Viktor Misiano from Moscow, envisioned inviting a number of artists from the East and the West to select partners from the opposite side of the Iron Curtain for work on collaborative projects. Unfortunately this plan was never implemented. If the planning of the show was riddled with tensions, the exhibition itself ended with a scandal. It is notable that Viktor Misiano, one of the organizers, referred to the entire undertaking as the exhibition 'that divided the East and the West'.[11] One of the sources of the greatest disagreement or even conflict was the violent reaction of the 'Western contingent' to the performances by Alexander Brener,

a Russian artists known for his attacks against the art establishment, who destroyed the work of Wenda Gu, a Chinese artist living in New York, and by Oleg Kulik, who while playing a dog (a piece that he had already performed at other locations throughout Europe) bit several guests who came to the opening and was arrested by the police. Kulik later explained that this was not his fault: the organizers were to blame for tying him to a chain that was simply too long, as were those members of the public who ignored the warning 'beware of the dog'. Unlike them, Kulik approached this performance, just like all those he has ever engaged in, with the utmost seriousness.

I do not intend to track here the motivations of those two artists that led them to such acts of aggression. Neither am I interested in analysing the grievances of Wenda Gu, whose work was completely destroyed, or the complaints of those bitten by Kulik. The negative reactions of the Chinese artist and of the guests are completely understandable from a purely human and emotional standpoint; no one wants to be bitten and no one wants their work to be destroyed. Instead, my main objective is to analyse the significance of the violent protest by all the Western artists who participated in the exhibition and their accusation that all Eastern European participants were engaging in 'Eastern European barbarism'. Kulik's performance appears particularly significant in this context. As noted by Renata Salecl:

> Kulik was invited as a peculiarity – as a Russian dog. I am certain that if an American artist played a dog, he would be of much less interest to the international art scene than the Russian artist. We all know that the majority of people in today's Russia live a dog's life. And the first association with Kulik's performance is that he represents this reality of contemporary Russia. Kulik the dog thus interests the Western art world because he is the Russian dog.

Referring to the *Interpol* exhibition itself, Salecl added,

> The trauma of the West in regard to Russia in recent years is that the West regards Russia as a superpower, but only on the condition that it does not act as one. And, in regard to Kulik's performance, the West finds aesthetic pleasure in observing the Russian dog, but only on condition that he does not behave in a truly dog like manner. When Kulik ceased to be a decorative art-object – the Eastern neighbor who represents the misery of the Russian dog-like life – and started to act in a way that

5 Oleg Kulik, *Dog House*, Stockholm (Interpol), 1996.

> surprised his admirers, he was quickly designated the enemy. His performance . . . was described as a 'direct attack against art, democracy and the freedom of expression', and as 'classical model of imperialistic behavior' . . . The Other has to be passive, submissive victim-like Other; but, when the Other does not act in this way, he or she is quickly designated as imperialistic, fundamentalist, totalitarian, etc.[12]

In this case it was not important that Kulik did not intend to be perceived as a Russian dog. His goal was to pose a much more general and universal question of the relationship between a man and an animal, a problem that has been taken up with some regularity in the context of the humanist critique of anthropocentrism. For the Stockholm public, however, as for the Western artists participating in the exhibition, this problematic was largely irrelevant. They were interested in identifying Kulik's 'bad behaviour' with the core of his identity as a Russian – the Other but also the Stranger, if not the Enemy.

Looking at Brener's action, we must consider the fact that destruction of art constitutes a highly significant element of the Western cultural tradition, as do performers' attacks on the public.[13] Approched from such art historic perspective, what happened in Stockholm was nothing new: one could even say it was rather banal. What was new, and what became the focus of the outrage, was the fact that the agent of the artwork's destruction was an Eastern European artist and that the destroyed object was a work by a Western European artist (though of Chinese background) and the target of the aggression was the Western public. Igor Zabel, the author of an outstanding essay dealing with the *Interpol* exhibition, invokes the words of another Russian artist, Ilya Kabakov, in his analysis of this event:

> [Kabakov] was describing his experience of a cultural relocated person. One of the aspects of Western culture [Kabakov] was interested in, was the permanent tendency to criticize, provoke and even destroy within this culture. He compared his experience of this tendency to the experience of an orphan living in a children's home who is visiting the family of his friend. This friend is sick of his home and his behavior is aggressive and insulting, while the visitor himself sees a totally different picture: a nice home, and kind and intelligent parents. But there is another thing that is essential, the friend's family is strong enough that it is not in danger because of the boy's outburst. The same is true of Western culture, says Kabakov, and continues: Western culture is so vital, its roots are so deep and so alive, it is so productive that it, speaking in the language

> of the parable above, absorbs, recasts and dissolves in itself all destructive actions by its own 'children', and as many believe, it sees in these actions its very own development – what is elegantly referred to here as 'permanent criticism'. But I would like to add a footnote here [Zabel continues quoting Kabakov]: this criticism, like the destruction itself, is permitted . . . only from its own children. That same mom described above would have behaved quite differently if I had started to act up at the table the same way as her son. Most likely she would have called the police.[14]

According to Zabel, something like this happened in Stockholm. He writes that, despite the end of the Cold War, the West continues to play the role of a master, and any dialogue with a master cannot be a dialogue of equals. The East, sometimes referred to as the former East, is the Other of the West. One could even say that the West needs that Other to define itself. During the Cold War the East functioned for the West within a different ideological framework. It was an object of modernist universalism, which functioned as an instrument of Western expansionism, or even a manifestation of its imperialism. After all, it was the West that was universal. Art that was understood as universal art was in reality produced in the West and Western art was understood in reference to universal categories. Eastern European artists, critics and cultural workers sanctioned this situation because its acceptance gave them the illusion of belonging to the 'Western family' instead of the culture of the Eastern Bloc, as communist propaganda attempted to convince them. This was the real reason why the exchange between the East and the West took place only in one direction. Although the West does not need any longer the modernist ideology of cultural universalism, it does need the Other to preserve its identity and its system of values by referring to its otherness. This strategy has not been received well in the East, as the history of the 'Interpol' illustrates. Eastern European artists do not wish to be instrumentalized as the Others for and by their potential Western partners. I should add here that this is nothing new. Western culture has a long tradition of 'orientalizing' Eastern Europe, a tradition that can be traced to eighteenth-century travel accounts of journeys to Poland and Russia.[15]

Let me consider one more interesting example, that of Alexander Brener's act of artistic vandalism. In 1997 Brener destroyed Kazimir Malevich's painting *Suprematism (White Cross)*, 1922–7, at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam by spray-painting on its white surface a large dollar sign. Interpreting this gesture of doubtless destruction exclusively within categories of hooliganism, more-

over from a 'national' perspective, in other words seeking its source in the artist's Russian identity, constitutes not only an abuse, but also, and above all, a complete misunderstanding of the situation. Such frame of reference makes it impossible to explain Brener's action. Any effort to find a link between Brener and Malevich will likely yield little useful information. Malevich, who was also a Russian artist (or Russian-Ukrainian of a Polish background),[16] was keenly aware of the fact that his art represented a rejection of Western cultural values. He was also conscious of the cultural differences between Eastern and Western Europe. It is also impossible to reduce Brener's gesture to a protest against or critique of the Western ownership of Malevich's art and its fetishization within the commercial politics of the Western art establishment. On the other hand, it is important to point out its specific historic context, namely the changes that took place in the 1990s: the fall of the Berlin Wall, collapse of the Soviet empire, and the growing commercialization of the old Russian nonconformist culture, a process mentioned earlier by Joseph Bakstein. It appears that Brener wanted to assert through his action (contradicting Tannert's assessment of the situation) that indeed everything has changed. He wished to maintain cultural difference not so much between the East and the West, but between the official culture (earlier communist, now commercial) and the nonconformist culture. He wanted to convince the art world, in the East and in the West, that the nonconformist attitude survived and continued as a living tradition that posited itself as an alternative to the attitudes described by Tannert. Such interpretation of his action does not participate in the mystification of Eastern Europe (in this case of the Russian culture) carried out within the context of the 'Interpol' exhibition by the Western art critics and artists. Rather, it is an effort to reconstruct the relations taking place between the subject, place and time. It also is not an apologetic for the aggression and vandalism, concepts functioning within a very different interpretative order and referring to a completely different problematic. Instead, this is an attempt to reach for a new tool, that of relational geography in order to come to an understanding of a particular gesture – destruction of an artwork.[17]

I would like to bring up one more issue, addressed earlier in a very different context by Igor Zabel, by interpreting the meaning of the act of applying a dollar sign to Malevich's painting. If we assume that in the wake of the Cold War the art world (at least in Europe) remains divided into the East and the West, and that the West still dictates the terms and still directs the infrastructure that makes possible such control, if, in other words, we assume that the West has won the Cold War in a cultural as well as political sense, then given this situation what attitude should the Eastern European artists adopt?

Attempting to answer this question, Zabel advocates a regional strategy of internal deconstruction of the artistic field, in other words a strategy of active resistance that takes place within the art system and that seeks within that arena its political identity.[18] Zabel does not provide any concrete examples, however I think it is possible to see Brener's action in precisely those terms, as an extreme form of such strategic thinking. The quest for identity would be in this context similar to guerrilla warfare carried out by an Eastern European artist against the Western art system with the aid of instruments, such as destruction, immediate attack and aggression, that have been legitimized by Western culture through its mythology of cultural rebellion. In order to validate my claim of such legitimization let us recall, for instance, Mary Richardson's attack on Velázquez's *Toilet of Venus* (the Rokeby *Venus*) in 1914. Richardson's action has been treated by feminist historiography as a paradigmatic feminist gesture,[19] and since feminist perspective has long been incorporated into the mainstream of Western art history, one could say that this act has been also viewed as such within that mainstream. In effect then, one could find in Brener's action a close resonance with Zabel's argument concerning the need for an alternative, or rather oppositional attitude, based in the cultural difference (the Western institutional culture of the spectacle versus the Eastern 'private' and anarchical attitude of nonconformism), an attitude that is, however, entirely compatible with the cultural tradition of rebellion embraced by the culture that is being attacked.

Let us return now to Hans Belting and his appeal for a harmonious coexistence of different and sometimes opposing narratives of art history, or at least for 'the two voices of art history'. Of course, one could ask if such an appeal makes any sense in the context of the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the fall of the Berlin Wall. There are those who have argued against such 'pluralism', favouring instead the notion of a 'singular art history'. Others contest this view, mainly with reference to the past, but also, more controversially, with reference to the present and the future. Those voices can be heard in the East and in the West, for example in an issue of the *Moscow Art Magazine* entitled 'The East is looking at the East; The East is looking at the West',[20] and a touring exhibition accompanied by a book edited by Maria Hlavajova and Jill Winder, *Who if not we should at least try to imagine the future of all this?*[21] Neither project provided a solution to this dilemma; they merely revealed a need for further discussion.

Before I start addressing this issue from a much broader perspective, which I am referring to as 'the spatial turn', I would like to note that not everyone agrees that such discussion is needed. Above all, this is the position of mainstream art history.

Art since 1900, a book published a few years ago by several authors associated with the quarterly *October*, stands out among other synthetic surveys of twentieth-century art.[22] Arranged into chapters focusing on the artistic events taking place within each decade, the book covers an enormous volume of material. Individual artworks are analysed in the book from the perspective of historic intellectual processes, rather than as autonomous phenomena. The historic narration is interrupted in several places by the co-authors' round-table discussions. The analysis is grounded in contemporary methodology, in part developed by the authors themselves. Moreover, each part of the book provides indices and cross-references to other parts, allowing the reader to track particular artistic movements and follow events or the development of particular artists by skipping over certain portions of the text. The book includes a glossary of the art historic terms pertaining to twentieth-century art, an index and an enormous bibliography. In short, *Art since 1900* is an excellent textbook. The text is clearly structured and uses contemporary language.

However, there is a problem with the book's artistic geography. While it is clear that *Art since 1900* functions as a textbook of Western art, namely art produced in the cultural and political centres of the West – Paris, Berlin, Vienna, London, New York and others – this does not mean that artworks produced outside or on the margins of the West are entirely excluded. The reader will find a discussion of Russia and of Moscow and St Petersburg, as well as mention of select artistic phenomena from Brazil, Mexico, Japan or Central Europe. This is perhaps the first time that a textbook has expanded to such an extent the art geography of the twentieth century. The problem is that the text does nothing to revise the unspoken assumptions of modernist art geography, nor does it make any effort to reach for what Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann has referred to as 'geohistory'.[23] In other words, it does not reveal the historic significance of spaces and locations within which given art was created, nor does ir deconstruct the relationship between the centre and the margins of the global art history of modern art.

This is rather curious, if one considers the fact that the authors belong to a circle of art historians who have made great contributions to the revision of the art historic paradigm. Drawing inspiration from such disciplines as social science, psychoanalysis, feminism and queer studies, this group was a source of numerous efforts to produce critical art history. However, it did not take up the task of critiquing the modernist art geography, nor did it attempt its revision in the spirit of critical methodology. As a result, art from areas other than Western Europe and America is presented in *Art since 1900*

from the perspective of the Western geographic paradigm. The only exception is the attention given to Russia, which simply cannot be ignored because of its great influence on the development of the world (Western) avant-garde. However, this does not constitute a departure from the norm, much less a significant innovation, since the history of the first or the Great Russian avant garde has been an integral part of the Western twentieth-century art canon ever since Alfred H. Barr Jr became its great admirer. In contrast, the art history of other areas is presented as a fragment of the global or universal art history. The assumption that the models for those art histories were produced in the West reveals the book's essentially West-centric perspective on art history and clearly reveals the modernist premises of its art geography.

This is an instance of a vertical art historic narration. This type of art history is primarily characterized by a hierarchical approach. The city or cities where the paradigms of specific artistic tendencies are created constitute its heart. Those are generally the great cities of the West: Berlin, Paris, New York. It is assumed that from there models of artistic practice spread throughout the world, eventually reaching the peripheries. Therefore, art of the centre sets up the paradigm; art of the peripheries adopts models developed in the artistic metropolitan centres. The art canons, hierarchies of value and stylistic norms are all created in the centre; on the peripheries those canons, norms and values are at best received and assimilated. It can happen, of course, that significant artists appear within the margins of the artistic geography, but their recognition and art historic consecration must happen within the centre, through Western exhibitions and publications. This happened to the great Polish constructivists Katarzyna Kobro and Władysław Strzemiński, as well as contemporary artists such as Mirosław Bałka, or earlier to Krzysztof Wodiczko, who still lives in New York. The same could be said about the outstanding Czech surrealists such as Toyen or Jindřich Štyrský.

Naturally their Western contemporaries recognized them as equal partners. For example, André Breton noted in his speech presented in Prague on 29 March 1935 that surrealism developed simultaneously in Prague and in Paris.[24] Earlier, artists of the international avant garde did not perceive the art scene from a vertical perspective. For the Dadaists, Bucharest or Tokyo were no less important than Berlin or Zurich. The vertical, hierarchical discourse ordering the artistic geography according to the notions of the centre and the periphery was created by art historians. Staying with the example of Dada, I will only mention the extremely valuable multi-volume history of that movement edited by Stephen Foster. The fourth volume in the series, *The Eastern Dada Orbit,* dedicated to the area beyond the (Western) centre, includes

descriptions of Dadaism in Central and Eastern Europe as well as Japan.[25] It is significant that those areas beyond the centre are located in the East, and that this East is defined rather broadly: it reaches from Prague to Tokyo. This form of art historic construction, which I am identifying as vertical art history, is unmistakably implicated in cultural 'orientalizing' of the Others, in a way described by Edward Said.[26]

However, a critique of the vertical paradigm is not easy. Although there have been many publications dedicated to art produced outside the Western art centres, in Central Europe, South America or Asia, and dealing, with varying degrees of success, with the methodological issues stemming from the East–West or the North–South divide, the problem itself is much more deeply rooted. It goes to the question of whether there is such a thing as non-Western modern art. Modernism and its mutations – antimodernism and postmodernism – have been inherently Western phenomena and hence, from a modernist perspective, have had universal significance. According to Igor Zabel, modern forms and art values are Western and as such universal.[27] Nevertheless they functioned in the East and the South as well as the West and the North. That is why when we address the issue of 'world' art history we have to repeat the question recently asked by Suzana Milevska: can world art history come into being outside such geographic dichotomies?[28] Of course not. In this context Gerardo Mosquera's critique of cultural asymmetry presented in his essay 'The Marco Polo Syndrome', which assumes that the West provides models and the rest of the world either adopts them or becomes 'traditionalized' and 'exoticized' in ethnographic museums, not only oversimplifies the issue, but also functions virtually as an instrument of dominance in the hands of the cultural centres.[29] Although modern art produced within peripheral regions clearly developed by taking up models provided by the centre, for those with experience working on such areas it is also clear that the significance of art produced there goes well beyond mere adoption and imitation, or functioning as a 'supplement' to art seen from the perspective of the modernist centres.

John Clark's book *Modern Asian Art* is one of the most successful efforts to address the full complexity of this problem on a much broader scale. It deals not so much with a single case study as with a synthetic survey of a considerable non-Western area, in this instance Asia.[30]

Clark constructs the history of modern art in Asia in relation to Western culture or, to use his term, Euramerica. He produces, however, a highly complex and varied image of that history, suggesting that nuanced knowledge of Asia is fundamentally lacking in the West. The diversity he describes does not

result exclusively from the differences in cultural policies of the various Asian countries that adopted Western models of modernism, but rather, and perhaps foremost, from much deeper cultural processes taking place in given locations. Clark observes that, in reality, the Euramerican influence and its specific artistic models constitute only one element among many that any art historian of the region must take into consideration. The internal dynamics of a given culture, its selective need for adaption and absorption of particular models, as well as the role played by such transfers in specific locations constitute the other. In other words, Clark is as much interested in the reception of Western art in Asia as in its function and the functioning of art institutions in particular locations. This approach represents a much more dynamic understanding of contemporary art's reception in Asia than the model generally presented in the (Western) contemporary art textbooks. The artist, the artwork, or the culture of a given country function within Clark's text as engaged actors, rather than passive fields that merely receive Western influences.[31] Paradoxically, Western art styles are often used in the local context as an instrument of resistance against cultural colonialism and imperial dominance of the West within various forms of neo-traditionalist art, a fact that further complicates the local situation. The same applies to the diversity of the art scene and creation of the local schools working within the 'Western style'.

Every art historian working on art from the marginal regions of the world has to struggle with the problems addressed by Clark. This is also true for the post-war art history of East Central Europe. The difference between work done on Asia and on Eastern and Central Europe rests in the fact that the latter areas remained part of Europe, even when they fell under the control of the Soviet Union. Although it was difficult for artists to maintain contact with the Western art scene, the art produced in the region remained unmistakably European. The artists were Europeans even though they faced considerable difficulties travelling through Europe. Yet if one were to apply the vertical perspective to the culture of East Central Europe, it would be impossible to discern specific meanings of art produced there. This is because art in Eastern Europe developed under completely different historic conditions, though from a strictly geographic perspective, as for instance in East Berlin, it was created a stone's throw away from the West. It is clear, therefore, that in order to produce a historic account of the region's art one has to pay close attention to the political context of the reception of particular Western artistic trends. This context frequently changes in a dramatic way the meaning of artworks. That is why *art informel* signified something entirely different in Poland than it did in France, happening meant something else entirely in Czechoslovakia than it did in the US, and conceptual

art functioned in a very different way in Hungary than it did in Great Britain. Any art historian from this part of Europe has to reconstruct the context and to construct a local analytic 'frame', to use Norman Bryson's terms.[32] Such historic particularity of the region and the strong political pressure on art (which, paradoxically, often led to its radical depolitization), irrespective of the direct artistic influences, could tempt one to postulate the 'two voices of European art history' thesis cited by Hans Belting.[33] However, too single-minded pursuit of such a thesis could lead to a fundamental misreading of the historic record.[34] Art from East Central Europe may have had different meaning than art produced in the West, but it was produced within the sphere of Western influence. Moreover, the aspiration of the artists in the region functioned, to a certain extent, as political compensation vis-à-vis the official cultural policies of the communist states. That is why instead of writing about the 'second voice of art history', it is much more productive to formulate a different paradigm of art history.

It is true that there is considerable difference between Asian art and art from Eastern and Central Europe, especially when we approach the issue from the perspective of the Other. I am not addressing here the considerable diversity of Asian art. After all, the history of Indian art, which also includes assimilation of Western modernist influences, is completely different from the history of Japanese modern art. However, even if one assumes that the Other and the art of the Other are exoticized within vertical art history, the relative positions of Asia and of Central or Eastern Europe within that discourse are completely different. The Asian Other functions as the 'true' Other, whereas the Central or Eastern European Other is the 'not quite' Other or the 'close' Other.[35] This was not always the case. According to Larry Wolff, the eighteenth-century Western Europeans perceived the inhabitants of Eastern Europe (Lithuania, Poland or Russia) as the 'true' Others.[36] This understanding changed in modern and contemporary culture. Within them, the place of the 'close' Other is located on the margins of European culture, beyond the centre, in the provinces but still within the same sphere of European civilization. That of the 'true' Other is not a consequence of marginality, but rather of colonialism. The 'true' Other's identity is constructed through a tension that exists between the colonializing agency of the metropole and the local tradition. This difference in position and definition is reflected in the difference of perception. The Eastern and Western European share the orientalizing gaze when it is cast on the 'true' Other, but the Eastern European perceives the existence of a scale of otherness. The Asian, irrespective of where he or she may come from, perceives Europe as a rather small and culturally homogenous

continent. From that perspective, German, French, Hungarian and Polish cultures are all European, though they differ in their degree of continental and global influence. Moreover, Czechs, Hungarians or Poles want to be seen as Europeans and want their art to be seen as European. They especially wanted this during the years of communist control. Their desire to be European provided them with a certain degree of psychological compensation for the attempts that were made to impose Soviet cultural models in their countries. By contrast, Asian cultures do not manifest any such desire to identify with a shared Asian cultural core. On the contrary, they have a deeply rooted sense of difference, also when it comes to their reception of the Euramerican modernity.[37]

The problem of modern art looks slightly different from the South American perspective. First of all, the area is comprised of culturally similar countries and at least different parts of this continent are 'comparable' and characterized by much less dramatic differences than in Asia. As a result, it is much easier to speak here of a relatively unified region than in the Asian context. Even such a popular art history text as *Art in Latin America*, edited by Dawn Ades, operates only in a very limited way (in a few chapters) within national categories.[38] The linguistic uniformity is reinforced by the fact that ethnic diversity is much less significant than in other regions. This does not mean, however, that this area is homogenous in either a cultural sense or in terms of visual culture. Nevertheless, different external geohistoric conditions have created a very different frame for the art of the region than those that inform art in Asia or Eastern Europe. Above all, there is a view that modern art in South America is much more closely implicated in revolutionary politics than in either Europe or Asia. Also there is a strong link between modernism and attempts to construct local identity based on locally ethnic cultural traditions.[39] Of course, as in other areas located outside the Western centres of modern art, here also one can see hybridization of artistic styles and their superimposition, which disrupts the Western or the chronological order of art history. Such mutations and the locally specific reception of Western art gave rise to highly original art phenomena, such as South American surrealism, especially in its Mexican beginnings. In reality, despite close personal contacts between André Breton and artists from the region, it is difficult to speak here of surrealism; it is rather a completely original form of art. Such phenomena certainly should give art historians impetus to question and revise the traditional Western framework of art historic terms and to establish the distinct character of South American artistic culture not only in reference to the West but also to other regions.

World art history, were it to be written according to the expectations of geohistory,[40] in other words, taking into consideration specific meanings of art produced in the marginal regions, must function as a critique of the hierarchical art historic narration produced within the context of vertical art history, and therefore must be written from a different paradigmatic perspective, one based on the horizontal model.[41] It is clear that such world art history must use the methods of relational geography or geography of cultural differences described by Irit Rogoff.[42] This conception of cultural geography attempts to analyse the relationship between the subject and its location, with the understanding that both the location and the subject – in our case the artistic region and the art produced there – are neither stable not fully formed. On the contrary, both are produced through a dynamic process and in relation to other regions and subjects, local traditions and external influences. Relational geography is therefore critical by definition and as such rejects the essentializing attitude of the traditional *Kunstgeographie*.

The paradigm of horizontal art history provides an alternative to the vertical art history.[43] A point of departure in constructing such a paradigm should be a deconstruction of vertical or Western art history. Such a critical analysis should reveal the speaking subject, the one that makes pronouncements, as well as allow us to determine in whose name and for whom those pronouncements are made. The goal is not to diminish the contribution of Western art history, but rather to identify and name its narration as 'Western'. In other words, the goal is to separate the two terms so often used together: Western modern art and universal art, by relativizing and locating Western narration – in accordance with the principles of horizontal art history – in relation to other art historic narrations. One of the consequences of such a move would be, or rather should be, a rejection of a traditional view of the relationship between 'our' (Western) art history and art history of the Others. Although it appears self-evident that modern art of the Others developed under the influence of the West, the opposite, namely the question of the influence of non-Western art on the history of Western art, or, to be more precise, on the perception of Western art, seems much less obvious. One must ask, how does the art of the margins change the perception of the art in the centre? Going a step further, one should inquire how is the centre perceived not just from the position of the centre, or a location traditionally occupied by contemporary art, but also from the position of the margins, namely places that have, in a number of ways and for different reasons, better visibility.

A view from the margins reveals, above all, fractures within the centre. If the centre perceives itself within categories of homogeneity, then the margins

receive those categories, transform them for their own use, and note their internal tensions. There are two such basic categories, which homogenize art history written from the position of the centre: the canon and the style (here understood as a particular art tendency, such as Cubism and Futurism). The history of art from the margins, understood in terms of art historic events, their description and analysis develops within the context of the Western art canon and of the Western stylistic categories. Artist and art historians relativize their own artistic and analytic experiences in order to fit them into those categories. The Western canon of particular art movements serves as a point of reference for their reception and transformation within particular locations beyond the centre.

However, the canon does not provide a criterion of value, but rather a historic frame, within which more or less autonomous operations take place. Those operations, in turn because of local mechanisms, create their own hierarchies and relations – in other words, their own canons. The local canons, however, cannot be coordinated since there is no single art history of the margins. There are as many canons as there are margins, even though they may be negotiated from a primarily critical perspective towards the centre. Because the canon seen from the perspective of the margins undergoes relativization, it appears that one should also relativize it within the centre itself, to accept, in other words, that it is a product of analytic construction and as such has a particular historic character – historic in reference to the art historian rather than the art under consideration.[44]

This process is also clearly visible from the perspective of stylistic categories. Neither the art of the margins nor its history ever accepted the Western ideal of stylistic 'purity'. The conclusion one must draw is clear if one considers such examples as Russian Cubo-Futurism (the very name of this phenomenon reflects its heterogeneity), Hungarian Activism, Polish Formism, South American Indigenism (created by the Uruguayan artist Rafael Barradas), Vibrationism, global Surrealism (which appeared in many parts of the world and took on very locally specific forms), Japanese Dadaism, South American Concretism and global conceptualism, which routinely departed from the Western (Anglo) linguistic model.

The work on conceptual art provides an interesting material for the discussion of horizontal art history. Recent analyses of the movement produced in the West, among them those by Benjamin Buchloh,[45] leave no doubt that the dominant paradigm of conceptual art has an Anglo-American character and that the genesis, development, problematic, theories and attitudes of global conceptualism have their roots in the Anglo-American experience.

However, research produced outside the West dealing with other forms of global conceptualism has persuasively demonstrated that this is not the case. No one questions the role of the leading American and English conceptualists, but it is clear in light of this research that the Anglo-American paradigm cannot explain conceptual art produced in non-Western countries. Luis Camnitzer's book, which provides an excellent discussion of conceptual art in South America, reveals for instance entirely different artistic experiences, different genealogy, development, attitudes and so on. The author stresses the considerable influence of local, South American contemporary as well as historic literature. He also argues that political movements, in particular the Uruguayan urban guerrilla group Tupamoros, played a crucial role in shaping South American conceptualism, as did liberation theology, which was extremely influential within the local political-religious context. Moreover, South American reception of French theory (such as structuralism, post-structuralism and semiotics) differed significantly from its reception in the United States, since it came earlier due to close contact between local and French intellectuals. Because of this context, it is impossible to produce a purely 'formal' history of the movement's development (from minimalism to conceptualism) as one could for the United States. Above all, conceptual art in South America was not only implicated in politics, but had a real political function. In other words, it was not just 'politically engaged' in the Western sense, but political in its essence. Especially during the 1960s, its strategies and concrete forms were understood as *fundamentally* political. Camnitzer also describes its pedagogical and didactic significance.[46] In effect, he provides a rather interesting comparative definition of the South American phenomenon. He characterizes artistic production taking place within the orbit of Western art history (to which he refers as history of the mainstream) as 'conceptual art', while defining the South American phenomenon as 'conceptualism'. His choice of this term suggests that South American work functioned as something other than just a form of art (as it did in the West) and that it was perceived as a broadly understood response to the specific conditions of the local and regional historic reality.[47]

The exhibition and catalogue 'Global Conceptualism: Points of Origins' provides another excellent example of such horizontal art historic approach to conceptual art.[48] It combines two perspectives: geographic and historic. In other words, temporal narration is inscribed into the spatial system that contains global manifestations of conceptual art. Moreover, the history of Western conceptual art is divided into two components: Western European and North American, with neither functioning as the paradigm for the rest of the world.

On the contrary, they are both treated as any other area. The first section of the catalogue, which deals with the period 1950 to 1973, includes such regions as Japan, Western and Eastern Europe (treated separately), South and North America (treated separately), and Australia and New Zealand (treated as one region). The second section deals with the period from 1973 to the late 1980s and focuses on the work produced in the Soviet Union, Africa, South Korea, and China, Taiwan and Hong Kong (treated as a single region). The third and final section of the catalogue addresses conceptual art in Southern and Southeastern Asia during the 1990s. Of course, one could disagree with this particular model of the geohistory of conceptual art, or with the specific claims published in the catalogue, which includes essays by a number of authors representing diverse methodological perspectives. However, it is clear that this project represents a worthwhile effort aimed at breaking down the dominance of the Western paradigm in analysis of conceptual art worldwide and revealing differences in experience, meaning, as well as political and ideological attitudes of this work in different parts of the globe. This constitutes a very interesting step in the direction of a horizontal description of one of the most common forms of art practice in the post-war era and a rejection of the dogma of the dominance of the Western model of art practice (based on the art centres of Western Europe and the United States) and its supposed 'imitation' by the artistic peripheries.

Such methodological attitude allows for recovery of the historic, political and contextual specificity of the work produced in each area by addressing particular local resonance of its meanings, its diachronic character and function within given societies. This type of analysis has given us much more information about art in Japan and China, in South America and in Africa, regions that disappear entirely from the historic world map of conceptual art produced from a West-centric analytic perspective. This also could be said of Eastern Europe. László Beke wrote about conceptual art from this area:

> In comparison to this Western notion of conceptual art, the Eastern European variant was never so rigorous. Rather, it was flexible and elastic, ironic, humorous, nonprofessional, communicable, always ready to become a social activity of a group of young people or even an alternative movement . . . On the other hand, the 'immaterial' nature of conceptualist works, and the 'poorness' of the media employed – 'just an idea', words and concepts, paper and pencil, typewriter, postcards, a telephone call, ephemeral actions – made communication easier and censorship more difficult. This is why conceptual art had to be invented in Eastern Europe,

> and its function as a strategy for evading authority should be considered a feature specific to its development in the region.[49]

I think that Beke, who was not just an observer but also a participant in this movement, captured the essence of the issue. In Eastern Europe, conceptual art afforded an opportunity for development of instruments of resistance against the state. It is a different matter whether and to what extent that opportunity was realized. The answer to that question would require much more detailed comparative analysis of the region.

When, after such a horizontal methodological venture, enriched by the experience of the margins and simultaneously of the world, we return to the analysis of art produced in the centre, we realize that conceptual art in the West, and therefore in the centre, was not nearly as orthodox and homogenous as some of those who have written about it suggest. Moreover, the linguistic model and institutional critique, both understood as analytic categories developed on the basis of work created by the movement's leading English and American protagonists, cannot account for the whole range of works produced in the West. What I am claiming is that we have an opportunity to revise both the history of art produced within the centre and the world history of modern art written from that perspective by drawing on the studies of the art margins by construction of horizontal art histories.

Any effort to relativize the history of Western art, by deconstructing, among others, analytic and geographic categories as well as 'locating' the centre, must include analogous efforts aimed at 'other' art histories. In other words, the Other must look at himself, define his own position and location from which he speaks. Truth be told, there is no more privileged position than that of a narrator located within the centre. The latter, often unconsciously, precisely because of the ideology that universalizes modern art, does not ack - nowledge the importance of location. The Other, much more conscious of the context and much more aware of the consequences of 'relational geography', is able to make us sensitive to the fact that we never speak from 'nowhere' but always do so from a particular place. The centre is also such a place; it is a particular location that has concrete legal, national, cultural and other parameters. Because he is located in the centre, however, the subject forgets that he is in the centre, at a location well marked on the world map. The Other, who is never allowed to forget, may be able to make him aware of this reality. After all, a historian of modern Argentinian, Czech or Indian art knows very well from where he speaks, whereas a historian of French or American modern art often ignores that knowledge in order to universalize the subject of his study.

We have arrived at a key problem of horizontal art history, namely the problem of location. If one examines production of books dealing with the history of modern art one can easily see a bifurcation. On one side there are books on 'the history of modern art', which do not identity the location, on the other we encounter a profusion of different adjectives referring to particular places, both regional ('South American art', 'Eastern European art') and, at least in part, national (histories of 'Polish', 'Korean' or 'Mexican' art, for example) The problem of national art historic narratives appears very characteristic of art from outside the centre, even though, as Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann argues, their genesis lies elsewhere and is much older than the history of modern art.[50] One could say, then, that we have on the one hand histories of modern art in particular countries, and on the other international history of modern art. This type of art historic narration reveals the actual dynamics of modern art history. On the one hand, there are 'international' artists, even though they come from particular countries and one can see influences of their native culture within their work (as for instance in the case of Pablo Picasso). On the other hand, there are 'national' artists, some of whom may have even won international recognition (for example, Władysław Strzemiński, 'the Polish constructivist'). Certainly this bifurcation reveals geographic tensions: on one side Paris and later New York as international cultural centres, on the other regional ones located within a national context, such as Prague, Tokyo or Buenos Aires. Within the hierarchy of art historic narrations, the former constitute the focus of attention, while the latter always play a subordinate role.

This form of localization, which is based on a modernist understanding of nationalism and which assumes the existence of a system of nation states,[51] is currently undergoing transformation under the influence of the processes of globalization, which are linked to the postmodern perception of reality and the changing character of the state, from a national into a cosmopolitan model.[52] Globalization as such does not have a single dimension. Homi Bhabha identifies its two forms: cosmopolitan and vernacular.[53] Arjun Appadurai writes that within the regime of globalization, the concept of the location becomes detached from a physical place and becomes transnational,[54] a phenomenon that can be identified with Bhabha's vernacular globalization. Although this is an accurate observation, I would add that the place, as marker of identity, never disappears. On the contrary, it acquires new significance. Opening of the borders and, above all, globalization of the art institutions (for example proliferation of biennales) on the one hand weakens artists' links to particular locations, and on the other, paradoxically, often made them stronger by

creating particular local identities for sale. The globalized world needs this type of strategy. One could even say that it creates it for commercial and political reasons. Mari Carmen Ramirez provides an excellent description of this phenomenon based on a case study of South American art, by identifying the role played by cultural brokers, art historians and especially curators in this process.[55]

It is worthwhile to develop further this line of argument by inquiring into the relationship between the postmodern and the postcolonial conception of the 'nation', and hence world and national art history. Without delving into various discussions of this problem, which have occupied many scholars working in this area, let us note that the main issue within this problematic has to do with the definition of the subject. In general, postmodernism supports the notion of a decentred subject, whereas postcolonialism tends to be much more invested in defence of centred subjectivity.[56] Seen from a postmodern perspective, a nation is devoid of any essential qualities. By contrast, within the practice of postcolonial studies certain forms of national essentialism seem necessary for identification of strategies of resistance and critique of the centre. Perhaps the greatest paradox of postcolonial studies rests in the fact that they investigate national essentialism imposed on the colonized by the colonizers. In order to defend decolonized nations, they must once again engage in the construction of the national subject. Similarly, in horizontal art history, which also operates with the concept of a nation, some way of stabilizing and defending the subject also seems necessary. In this approach such a project would be more closely linked with the postcolonial or post-totalitarian, rather than postmodern perspective. On the other hand, shifting the discussion from the general to a more particular level, or from a global to a national, one has to scrutinize such essentialization in a highly critical way. Art produced within particular countries can never be 'national' either in ethnic or political sense. Adoption of such a perspective would be synonymous with the repression of other groups functioning within a particular country dominated by a particular 'nation'. From this methodological perspective it seems necessary to adopt a critical strategy towards the issue of national subjectivity and to develop a levelled playing field for all those art subjects active on the scene. In other words, if horizontal art history written from the macro perspective cannot ignore the national subjects and, in a way, must defend them by engaging in the critique of the centre, then from the micro perspective it must also critique the notion of national subjectivity, to deconstruct the nation-subject, in order to defend marginalized culture of the national minorities against the claims of the majorities.

However, before we can fully develop this argument, we must raise another question: what were the material (in addition to ideological) factors that influenced constructions of national histories of modern art? One of those was certainly the lack of communication among those cultures. If they did communicate, the contacts were usually mediated by the centre. This phenomenon can be observed on the macro and the micro scales. The cultures of different regions (Asia, South America or Eastern Europe) looked to the West, rather than to each other. They drew inspiration from there, rather than from other marginal areas. The same could be said about individual national art historic narratives produced within a particular region, such as Eastern Europe. For instance, Poles still know very little about the history of Romanian art; what's more they wilfully ignore it, prompted by a false sense of cultural superiority that motivates them to align their own culture with that of the West. Similarly the Czechs are generally ignorant on the subject of Ukrainian art history, and so on. The Other looks to the Master and not to the other Other, adopting, often unconsciously, the hierarchies of the centre that have victimized him. If there are any exchanges of values, experiences or knowledge, they happen exclusively through the mediation of the Master, or the West, which alone has the power to validate the Other in the eyes of the other Others.

The relationship between the centre and various nationally defined localities is changing. Whereas modernist culture was characterized by the tension between national and international identifications, contemporary, postmodern and globalized culture, which functions within the context of the doctrine of multiculturalism, has to reach for other points of reference. As I mentioned earlier, the issue of identity is gaining recognition globally. Modernism avoided individual identification – one could even say any identification: ethnic, local, gender, sexual and so on – in the name of a universalizing utopia of unity. The adjective 'international' means 'among' nations, or 'beyond' and 'outside' national characteristics and identities (as in 'international style' or 'international art scene'). Of course such rhetoric conceals Western imperialism, which appears even on the most basic level of the language used by the 'international' coterie, first French, then English.

The new situation requires adoption of new strategies, while the collapse of the universalist utopia, among others as a result of global conflicts, forces acceptance of the same marks of identity, at least as a starting point. The latter attitude can be seen in the work of such artists as Marina Abramović or Ilya Kabakov. While they acknowledge that national or local references are essential for their work's proper understanding, both, unlike earlier artists, neither

frame their work in the context of 'exoticizing' discourse (as did Diego Rivera), nor annihilate its sources (as did Marcel Duchamp). Moreover, this tendency favours reconstruction of the national sources of avant garde art, which were suppressed within the internationalist modernist paradigm, as is demonstrated by the recent reconsiderations of Marcel Duchamp's work in the context of the French tradition and that of Kazimir Malevich in the context of Russian. This is not an entirely new approach. If we look at the work done on those two artists in the 1930s, '40s and '50s, we will fail to find any significant traces of the national context. But such references began to appear later, within a context defined through the notion of transnationalism, a term that functions in a very different way from that of internationalism.

The concept of transnationalism should be employed in the construction of horizontal art history – art history that is polyphonic, multi-dimensional, devoid of geographic hierarchies. Of course, this open model of world art history should also rely on concepts borrowed from fields other than critical geography, namely based on gendered, ethnic or subcultural perspectives. But such revision of art history, for instance from a feminist perspective, which has been going on for a number of years, often leaves in place the geographically hierarchical paradigm of modern art history. By contrast, transnational art history, which is currently being written (as is demonstrated by the emerging regional art historic narrations I described earlier), defines values and concepts in terms of a very different axis from the national-international one. The attractiveness and potential of the transnational discourse gives us an opportunity to open art history to a much more interesting perspective, which negotiates not only transnational relations within a regional context, but also takes up negotiation of the local art historic narratives on the transregional level. This would not, and in fact should not, lead once again to production of a unitary, this time horizontal, world art history. Rather it should engender pluralism of narrative transregional options, which would function as a critique of the West-centric art historic narration. That is the great challenge facing art disciplines, or at least those parts dedicated to work on modern art. Just as horizontal modern art history – or rather horizontal modern art histories – have to engage in a critique of the vertical, centralized art history, so world art history should function as a critique of the universal or imperial art history in the literal sense of that word, an art history that imposes its own hierarchy, epistemological categories and metropolitan system of value onto various localities. In other words, world art history must be horizontal, not vertical. But, as Hans Belting has observed, it does not have to be global. The issue here is not whether global art history is the history of global art, but rather

what the term 'global' means in this context. Belting responds that it signifies globalization of Western art history and, as such, is a form of intellectual imperialism and neocolonialism. However, he adds, this does not have to be the case. He provides a number of examples of art historic counter-narratives based primarily on the museological practice of the great cultures of China and India, adding also examples of Western institutions that have drawn positive lessons from those practices, as for instance in the case of Goldsmiths College and its transdisciplinary curatorial programme.[57]

Here then is my thesis: the fall of communism in Europe in 1989 was one of the factors that supported the development of the horizontal approach to art history. It is not my intention to argue that we need to break up the global artistic culture through an approach such as that suggested by Alexander Alberro, who bases his efforts to 'periodize contemporaneity' mainly on the observation of global culture, including art engaged in global problems, exhibitions with a global reach, technology that enables global communication, as well as changes in the perception of what constitutes an 'artwork' (shifts in the understanding of the avant garde tradition, return of 'aesthetics', affective conceptualism).[58] My thesis addresses a different issue, which is related to a broader perspective on the periodization of contemporaneity. We need to construct a horizontal cultural plane that includes art history, understood as a discourse on past and contemporary art practice. In other words, Belting's call for 'the two voices of art history' should be read only as a first step in a much broader project aimed at refashioning art history as a discipline. The fall of communism in Europe, which coincided with a series of much more profound historic shifts, functioned as a catalyst for this project. It is important to note that the events in Eastern Europe, namely the Polish Round Table Agreement signed on 4 April 1989, which led to the first (partly) democratic elections in Eastern Europe, the tearing down of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, coincided with the collapse of apartheid in South Africa (instituted as a state policy in 1947, again coinciding with the introduction of Stalinist cultural policies in the countries of the Eastern Bloc) and a dramatic increase in interest in postcolonial studies. The year 1989 also witnessed the Tiananmen Square massacre and the shift in the 'new' Chinese policies initiated in 1978, which did not, however, stop the development of Chinese contemporary art. On the contrary, its development became much more dynamic and its Western reception (including its energetic rise within the international art market) began to reach ever-widening audiences, soon becoming a global phenomenon. However, this growth was not accompanied by a sustained art critical discourse within China. Rather, Chinese contemporary

art attracted attention mainly in the West, but also in Eastern Europe, as demonstrated by the work of Polish art historian Monika Szmyt.[59] Of course, one cannot describe contemporary China using the (Eastern) European post-communist categories. The contemporary Chinese single-party, totalitarian political system differs significantly from European pre-1989 communism and the system in place in Cuba, which could be described as a political museological artefact. The Chinese hybrid, which combines communist ideological and power system with neo-liberal capitalism, provides a very interesting comparison with the old Eastern Europe. After all, pre-1989 Eastern Europe believed that capitalism would liberate it from the communist oppression. To a significant extent the concept of the 'free market' was identified with that of 'free speech'. Capitalism for Eastern Europe embodied mystified hope for freedom; China has no such hopes.

If we add to that horizontal historic plane established by the year 1989 earlier events that culminated in the rejection of the totalitarian regimes by various South American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile), as well as discussions about the 'former West' that began taking place on the eve of the new millennium, we could arrive at a conclusion that the collapse of the Eastern Bloc was a component of a much larger shift that impacted politics and culture on a global scale. However, before developing this line of thought any further, let us consider in greater detail what has been called the post-communist condition.

The debate surrounding the post-communist condition has become multifaceted and extremely abundant. Any effort to do it justice would require a substantial monograph. I will only mention that this discussion includes, among others, voices that emphasize the rootedness of contemporary cultural 'shortcomings' in this region in the history of the totalitarian system and, in particular, certain aspects of communist thought that cannot be eliminated within the recently developed and still relatively new post-communist democracies. Such voices stress the impact of the historic memory of the former political system, which can be found in habits of thought and behaviour, cultural models and, paradoxically, in 'nouveau riche' attitudes that range from wilful forgetting to self-conscious adoption (mimicry) of Western models. This type of analysis dominates studies on the post-Wall Europe. However, there are also efforts to articulate a position that considers the problem of the year 1989 from a much broader perspective. It raises two basic questions: what has been the significance of the fall of communism, not only for Central and Eastern Europe but also for the world, and how is this event situated within the conditions of global contemporaneity? In a recently published

short text, Susan Buck-Morss noted, for instance, that the post-communist condition is not only affecting Eastern Europe. In other words, it does not have a spatial, but a temporal character and therefore describes a historic moment in which we are still situated. In other words, the post-communist condition described the historic and universal condition of present.[60]

Boris Groys presents a much more detailed and multifaceted attempt to define this phenomenon.[61] He also discusses the post-communist condition from the perspective of universal categories. Groys defines it as a particular current vision and description of the world, its parameters and points of reference. However, he moves well beyond Buck-Morss. He tries to reanalyse the historic significance of the post-communist condition in the context of the evolution/fall of communism as well as postmodernism. He argues that the historic process, which shaped contemporaneity, began with premodernism and has continued through modernism and postmodernism. The last phase, which discovered, once again, difference and returned to the idea of individual expression, did not rejecting modernity; on the contrary, it intensified its experience. Groys associates modernity with 'artificiality', which functions as the opposite of the pre-modern notion of 'natural'. However, it is artificiality with universal ambitions. In reality, this shift from modernist uniformity (artificiality) to postmodern diversity constitutes a move towards the market. It is this postmodern market that generates purely aesthetic intensification of artificiality and stands behind the idea that difference sells. At any rate, this shift towards diversity, which has aesthetic-commercial character, leads to ever-greater artificiality.

On the other hand, the evolution from pre-communism, through communism and post-communism, has a somewhat different trajectory, or at least its trajectory initially appears to be different. Communism created the first model of a post-national society. According to Groys, this model, associated with the processes of modernization, constituted an ideological effort to embody the notion of modernity and social progress. Therefore the shift from communism to post-communism cannot be seen as a shift 'towards' modern diversity or artificiality (as in the postmodern project), but rather away from the notion of utopia and towards a pre-modern or 'natural' pre-communist state. Those differences can be easily tracked within the concept of the nation. Postmodernism provides a further stage in the development of the model of a post-national society. On the other hand, post-communism, as in the case of the break-up of the USSR (or for that matter of other federal states, in particular Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, and the explosive appearance of nationalism in many post-communist countries) signalled the return of

national rhetoric. The most interesting questions here are what is the significance of the Western interest in Russia (the texts that I am referring to here were all written in the 1990s), and finally to where exactly are we 'returning'?

The answer to the first question is fairly obvious. Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Europe were of interest because they were marked with difference. In other words, the interest was motivated by commercial considerations. We should recall the great market boom in Russian art after perestroika, auctions held in Moscow by the great auction houses, as well as, somewhat later and on a more modest scale, an interest by the international art market in Polish art. The answer to the second question, namely what is it that hides below the surface of the turn away from communist modernism, seem much more surprising. Groys arrives at it by analysing architecture, more precisely by examining the project of rebuilding the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, which was destroyed in the early 1930s to make way for the new monumental Palace of the Soviets (a project that was never realized; in the late 1950s the government constructed an open-air public swimming pool on the site). Groys sees in the project a desire for a return to a 'folkloric' pre-revolutionary Russian identity, which fulfils expectations of the postmodern aesthetic and market diversity. However, that is only the surface. Groys argues that below it, hidden from view, one finds another dimension, that of Stalinist aesthetics, or more precisely of a Stalinist conception of aesthetics.[62] After all, it was Stalin who, after the initial period of avant garde radicalism, went against Russian ideologues of the avant garde – Constructivists, Futurists and Modernists – turning away from the future and towards the past. He was aided by a peculiar dialectic that combined opposites and which Groys sees still functioning today. Contemporary Russian historicism and rejection of the models provided by modernist architecture recall as an aesthetic attitude that earlier turn away from the future and towards the past. However, the author notes, this shift is not dogmatic, as neither was the Stalinist aesthetic doctrine. The 'invisible hand' of the ruler steered the former Soviet artistic culture; it controlled censorship, the handing out of permissions and their withdrawal, the implementation of legal provisions and prohibitions. The contemporary mechanism of control is also hidden. It can also be compared to an 'invisible hand', but it is no longer the hand of a ruler, but that of the market. On that plane, despite many differences, post-communism meets postmodernism. They are both, in different ways and in different contexts, interested in aesthetic diversity and the market controls both.

Irrespective of how problematic some of Groys's claims may be, in particular his tendency to apply the notion of the 'retro-shift', which conceals

the Stalinist model, to the analysis of the culture of the entire region of Eastern and Central Europe, it worth noting the complexity of his discussion of the prefix 'post'. Of course, it describes what happened 'after' communism, but it also, simultaneously, problematizes the historic point of reference, or the permanence of the communist models. Contrary to what one would expect, the post-communist condition does not require a rejection of communism and a return to the 'former' state. In fact, it can signal a certain type of continuity, if not of symbols, then certainly of the modes of thought, customs and habits, as well as ways of wielding power by the former adversaries of the fallen system, now mainly identified with the political right.

At the fifth Prague Biennale in 2007, Romanian artist Ciprian Mureşan presented a work that consisted of a statement in English: *Communism never happened* (the work was originally created in 2006). By fate or the organizers' technical incompetence, which in and of itself can be seen as a manifestation of the post-communist condition, sometime during the exhibition the word 'never' lost the letter 'n', changing the slogan into *Communism ever happened.* This *quid pro quo* was not just humorous. I think it was meaningful because it functioned not only as a literal suggestion, but also because its effect was unintentional. Perhaps that is how communist traditions have persisted during the post-communist period, by being an unconscious presence.

While discussions of the post-communist condition have been wide-ranging and have achieved certain visibility, those applying the postcolonial perspective to the analysis of the post-communist Europe have encountered certain difficulties. Such discussions, when they occur on a more sophisticated level, tend to take place within the context of cultural anthropology[63] and literary studies,[64] more rarely within art criticism and art history.[65] This does not mean that postcolonial studies have made no impact on our discipline. On the contrary, their influence has broadened significantly since the end of the twentieth century. The work of such authors as Rasheed Araeen, Okwui Enwezor, Saloni Mathur and Partha Mitter, to mention just a few, has mainly focused on the colonial diaspora in Europe, and on historical studies of the modernist culture of European colonies and postcolonial countries.[66] However, art historians who have embraced this type of perspective have by and large avoided the 'intra-European' problematic, even as they have tried to generalize their critical analysis. One could use here as an example an interesting exchange published in the *Art Bulletin,* which consisted of responses to the earlier mentioned article by Partha Mitter, 'Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery'.[67] Mitter's conclusions concern the so-called new art history, which was supposed to have a heterogeneous

6 Ciprian Mureşan, *Communism Never Happened*, 2006.

character, break down the monolith of Western modernism, reveal through art historic studies the resistance of the colonial world to the dominance of the metropole, be contextual and transnational, and, finally, deal with such regions as Asia, Africa, South America and Australia. However, the author does not mention the tensions internal to the metropole, or the 'Old World', which has its own centres and peripheries, and where development of modernism should also be decentred. The other respondents did not mention them either, though they did make some very interesting observations concerning 'provincializing of modernity' (Rebecca M. Brown) and 'comparative modernism' (Saloni Mathur),[68] which suggest their consistency with the conception of horizontal art history.

The problematic of the 'other' Europe is also completely ignored by another important publication, *Cosmopolitan Modernism*, edited by Kobena Mercer, even though its bibliography included Steven Mansbach's *Modern Art in Eastern Europe: From the Baltic to the Balkans, 1890–1939*.[69] This attitude is worth noting because it clearly demonstrates that, contrary to the explicit assertions, Europe is still perceived in broadly generalized terms, without regard for its internal complexity, divisions and so forth. Because those authors

see the postcolonial world as located outside Europe, their work does not have the character of a universal critique of the analytic apparatus of the West. Instead it must be seen as a particular instance of identity politics practised by a postcolonial society. Seen from that perspective, the 'old' Eastern Europe does not belong to the postcolonial world (at least not within the sphere of art history). And perhaps they are correct. It is rather difficult to use the postcolonial perspective as a political methodology and cultural critique within work addressing art produced in the Eastern part of the continent. At most, one can look for overlapping frames of reference.

Postcolonial studies developed out of an entirely different range of historic and geohistoric experiences. In general, their aim has been to critique the centre from the position of a 'far' Other or, in other terms, to critique the cultural hegemony of Europe. For Dipech Chakrabarty, such a critique 'provincializes Europe'. He is not referring to a form of 'postcolonial revenge' (a shift of power from the centre to the periphery), but rather to a 'renewal' of European thought from a marginal position through its 'translation'. Chakrabarty writes that European thought – he focuses mainly on the analysis of two authors, Marx and Heidegger – is simultaneously 'necessary' and 'insufficient' for the needs of the postcolonial world.[70]

One could say that the fundamental difficulty in adopting postcolonial studies to work on the European margins has to do with the very different status of the not-European Other vis-à-vis the Eastern or Central European Other. The former occupies the position of the 'far' Other, while the latter has that of the 'close' Other; one is not European by definition, while the other is certainly European, but marginalized. The question one has to ask in this context is who has been colonized by whom, when and in what way?

The answer based on common sense would certainly have to point to the Soviet Union, which colonized Central Europe after 1945. But is that the correct answer? Certainly in many ways it is, but perhaps not with regards to art. Although one could point to the introduction of Socialist Realism as the official art doctrine in most of the Eastern Bloc countries as well as in the newly added Baltic Soviet republics, which functioned as independent countries before the war, its penetration was never complete. Even if it functioned as the official ideological facade in the majority of the countries, it never appeared in some (Yugoslavia), while it had only a brief duration in others (Poland). In fact, one could say that it was modern art, not Socialist Realism, that defined the cultural identity of Central Europe between 1945 and 1989.

Juxtaposition of post-communist and postcolonial studies is also problematic from a historic point of view. At the time when the so-called Third

World was engaged in its struggles for independence from Europe, Stalinism gripped East Central Europe. India gained its independence in 1947. A year later the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia took over full control of the country's public life. This was also the year when 'hard-line' cultural policies were introduced in Poland. However, the problem rests not just in chronological differences, but also in the non-compatibility of the art historic processes, since we are still operating within the field of art history. The art historic work does not have to be rigid: there is no single, 'universal' method for studying art's history that should be applied irrespective of the character of the work under investigation. To a large extent it is the work that determines the methodology. In this context, the art of the postcolonial and post-communist periods constitute two very different objects of study.

It also makes sense to mention in the context of this discussion, even as an aside, the problem of self-colonization (more contemporary than hist - oric), addressed so brilliantly and problematically by Alexander Kiossev.[71] To be precise, what matters are answers to two questions: in the first place, whether the embrace of Western art in East Central Europe should be seen as a symptom of such self-colonization, and secondly, whether the current interest in postcolonial studies and the 'forced' adoption of fashionable theoretical approaches could also be seen in similar terms? The answer to the first question is simple and negative. The spread of Western art movements, in particular modern ones, had very little to do with colonialism (at least in the way colonialism has been understood within postcolonial studies), because those movements were not aspects of the official colonial doctrine. In fact, they were often subversive and directed against Western culture, for example in Cubism, surrealism, conceptual art and body art. The official cultural institutions in the countries where those movements originated often viewed them with suspicion, seeing in them embers of rebellion and anarchy. If that were the case, what was the identity of the purported colonizer? Moreover, at least some of the modern art movements, in particular constructivism but also to a certain extent Dadaism, originated in Eastern Europe.[72] In other cases, one simply cannot speak of a single point of origin. To borrow László Beke's humorous description of the genesis of conceptual art: if conceptual art did not appear in the West, it would have been invented in the East.[73] It also happened that modern art, for instance Cubism in its Czech or the 'Eastern' edition, was used as a tool directed against the conservative West (Vienna), which functioned in the political sense as a colonizer. Finally, we should note that Western artists, before and after the war, did not treat their Eastern colleagues in a paternalistic way and often openly acknowledged

the parallel or even pioneering character of their work. Because geographic cultural hierarchy was introduced later by art history, it is difficult to see modern art as a colonial instrument used by Western Europe against Eastern and Central Europe, in the way that one could perhaps see it in the context of Mexican or contemporary Chinese art.

The answer to the second question concerning self-colonization is rather more complex. It is true that Central European intellectuals avidly consume academic fashions current in the West. Slovak artist Roman Ondák comments on this phenomenon in a work that consists of boxes and packages labelled with names of famous theorists such as Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Martin Heidegger or Ludwig Wittgenstein, which are arranged on tables, in closets or cupboards, sometimes in spaces reminiscent of pantries. In such a kitchen, Central European intellectuals use Western products to make local meals. This ironic view of the Central European intellectual diet reveals complete dependence on foreign, mainly Western provisions. But there is also the opposite tendency, which manifests as a fear of the so-called new paradigms. Edit András observes that Central European intellectual elites, in particular art critics and art historians, approach contemporary critical theory with a great deal of apprehension and distrust, which can be attributed to a certain phobia of Marxism.[74] The legacy of communism and the function of Marxism as the official state ideology provoked negative reaction against the left-leaning theoretical and methodological tendencies (the New Critical Theory) that emerged from the experience of 1968. This could also be said about sociologically and politically based art historic studies, as well as feminism, gender, cultural, queer or postcolonial studies. András observes that as a result the majority of work produced within the region tends to operate within the modernist paradigm. Similar observations were made in Poland within art history in the early 1980s in the wake of numerous experiments and discussions that took place in the 1970s. Andrzej Turowski addressed this issue in an essay dealing with the applicability of Marxist methodology to work on art of the interwar period.[75] Although in general András is correct, the reality is much more complex and the situation depends completely on the local context. In Poland, for example, in contrast to Hungary, which András uses as her case study, critical theory and in particular feminism remain highly popular, irrespective of statements made by conservative and right-wing intellectuals. Based on current publishing volume, it is also highly likely that postcolonial studies will soon become equally trendy.

Leaving aside ironic commentary, one could say that the efforts of Eastern and Central European intellectuals resemble the strategy of mimicry described

by Homi Bhabha, in which the colonized emulates the colonizers, and even exceeds them in their 'metropolitan behaviour'. It is impossible to ignore such behaviour. On the other hand, we only have one, namely the Western paradigm of academic practice, and one could certainly say that we – Europeans from the margins – are as 'European' as our Western colleagues and consequently so are our methodologies. One could also add that Western Europe and the United States have equally embraced 'fashionable' academic trends. Moreover, both here and there one can easily distinguish superficial fascination from serious engagement and application. Each new method provides an opportunity for a new approach to the subject, for finding answers to questions that have not yet been asked, for revealing unexplored dimensions of reality. Certainly we should pursue such opportunities. Whether postcolonial studies will provide them, and whether their theoretical apparatus can be used within work on the post-communist countries, remains to be seen. But I would certainly caution against describing their popularity in terms of self-colonization, even though I am aware of the difficulties involved in their adoption within studies dealing with Eastern European visual culture.

Without rejecting the need for comparative art history or questioning the desirability of 'decentred' or 'provincialized' modernism, there are several fundamental problems in adopting the postcolonial perspective to work on contemporary art of the (former) Eastern Europe. Instead of the postcolonial framework, post-apartheid and post-authoritarian conditions in South Africa

7 Roman Ondak, *Sated Table*, 1997.

and South America could perhaps provide more promising prospects for post-communist studies. As I mentioned before, chronological coincidences are certainly intriguing. In South Africa, 1989 marked the fall of the apartheid system and the election of Nelson Mandela as the country's first black president. In South America the first half of the 1980s witnessed the collapse of a series of military dictatorships and the return of democracy. In Argentina and Brazil the military gave up power in 1983. In Chile a national referendum resulted in the departure of Augusto Pinochet in 1988 and, a year later, the return of democratic elections. In Paraguay the long-lived military dictatorship was abolished in 1989. In Uruguay the process of erosion of the dictatorship and the return of democracy took place in the second half of the 1980s and was finalized by the end of the decade.

It is true that such comparisons are not unproblematic, especially if we consider the art world. John Peffer observes in his wonderful book on the art of the apartheid period that the work produced under such conditions reacted to the politics of racial segregation and continued to do so even after 1994, when they ceased to function illegally and politically.[76] Of course in the case of South Africa we are dealing with a single country and therefore with a much more homogenous environment, even though South African society is far from homogenous linguistically. In the case of Eastern Europe, we have to consider many different and distinct administrative and political systems, pursuing different, sometimes diametrically opposed cultural policies, even though until 1989 they were all officially embracing the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. We will also notice considerable differences if we consider art itself, its institutional apparatus, symbolism and reception. But that is not the main issue. There are also significant differences between Polish and Hungarian art. What matters is that in both instances, in South Africa and in Eastern Europe before 1989, artistic cultures functioned under conditions of confinement that limited their development, but also provided a challenge. Moreover, the fact that the societies of South Africa and Eastern Europe defeated totalitarian regimes at virtually the same time creates a possibility for a comparative perspective encompassing not only artistic production, but also, and primarily, culture released from the authoritarian straitjacket. Such analysis still awaits us, mainly because these processes have not yet been fully digested by art criticism. The same could be said with regards to South America. One can observe here certain similarities in the development of art, in particular neo avant garde of the late 1960s and the 1970s. However, South American art, and especially conceptual art, was much more profoundly engaged in politics. According to Luis Camnitzer, it could even be described as a form of political

strategy or activism, especially in the late 1960s.[77] That was generally not the case in Eastern Europe, perhaps with the exception of Hungary, though even there one cannot speak of political artistic activism of the type found in South America. After the fall of military regimes (in different countries at different times) there was a reaction against such intense political engagement and political activism gave way to 'art business as usual'. In post-communist Europe, the situation is neither as simple nor as uniform. But the greater degree of heterogeneity does not constitute the most significant difference. Much more important are different historic, political or ideological frames that conditioned discussions of artworks and art culture – differences in the development of art criticism, curatorial and museological practice, as well as academic art history, in other words those frames that also structured processes of political and social liberalization. Our inquiry has to deal with the post-totalitarian condition in the countries or rather regions that experienced totalitarian systems at approximately the same time and at approximately the same historic moment returned to democratic freedom. We have to ask what attitudes were adopted by art in such post-totalitarian space, what problems did it take up, how has it functioned and signified? It is clear that such comparison will yield highly varied results. The post-dictatorial systems in South America are quite different from the post-communist ones in Europe in terms of access to consumer culture, economic development, free market structures, art institutions and so on. But it is precisely those differences that are important. This type of comparative, pan-regional art history must aim to establish such diversity. What connects contemporary art produced in the regions emerging from the totalitarian systems with the postcolonial countries such as India and Pakistan is its marginalization vis-à-vis the mainstream art culture, and its neglect and omission within the Western art discourse, in art historic narratives produced from the perspective of the centre or the position of symbolic power, such as the earlier mentioned *Art since 1900*. The centre and its power are still identified for many reasons (including economic, political and cultural) with the West. That is why the new world art history should not consist of the history of Western art appended with other art histories; it should be the history of both – the West and the Other, on equal terms. To borrow Dipesh Chakrabarty's term, such world art history should 'provincialize' the West; it must identify it as one of its regions. By locating the West within a historic and cultural context as one of the regions of the art world, admittedly a very influential one, it will make it possible to analyse its influence from a historic perspective, to deconstruct it and to approach it axiologically in a way that we have been approaching art of South America, Asia,

Africa or Eastern Europe. This horizontal approach will have the effect of provincializing the West. I am not arguing that we should deny or negate the existence of the West, since its continuity is assured on many levels, for example as an artistic tradition, system of values, institutional infrastructure and an art market. What I am arguing for is a need to see Western culture not in terms of its hegemony, but its geographic specificity: as a culture of one of the regions of the world. This is the key to any horizontal approach. The revision of our discipline represented by Hans Belting's call for 'the two voices of art history', cited at the beginning of this chapter, represents, therefore, just an initial step in a much more ambitious project of horizontal art history, a project that will lead to a geographic localization of the West.

part one

History and Contemporaneity

two

From Geography to Topography

Let's begin with two seemingly naive questions: does Central Europe (still) exist and does it (still) have anything significant to say? These questions posed in such a way already contain their answers. If we are asking whether Central Europe has anything to say, we have to assume that it (still) exists. This is not the place for tracking historic processes that shaped modern Central Europe. However, it is important to note that even if this term was not widely used during the period of Soviet domination, at least not within art criticism, nonetheless a sense of distinctness was felt in this part of the European continent. When communism collapsed, the question of whether Central Europe exists began to be raised, or more precisely, a considerable number of artists, critics and curators began to question the usefulness of such geographic framing of art. If the old system was gone and a number of the post-communist countries has been incorporated into the (Western) European structures, while others, to a greater or lesser extent, aspired to do so in the future, if in the new post-1989 reality the world (or at least Europe) became more free, if the borders have been opened (including the new ones that were just created), then why should we maintain such an anachronistic geographic frame? These are not isolated voices. Maria Hlavajova, a Dutch curator with a Slovak background, is certainly one of them. Hlavajova does not see any need for maintaining such a geographic construction after the collapse of the Iron Curtain. On the contrary, she believes that there is a real opportunity for free competition among artists working across borders and creating artistic culture without boundaries. Moreover, she notes that there are quite a few 'really good' artists and curators from the former Eastern Bloc who have done very well for themselves in the West and for whom the old divisions are meaningless. Also, there is a movement in the opposite direction. Increasingly, Western artists and curators are showing interested in the post-communist countries, not as exotic localities, but as potential partners.[1] As mentioned earlier, this is not an isolated reaction. However, it can certainly be seen as a reaction against the old atmosphere of communist claustrophobia, closed borders, control of the artistic culture and repression. It can also be

seen as a response to being condemned to provincialism and to being de facto seen as a second-class European culture. This was a response to the calls for a return to 'normal' existence, whatever that was supposed to mean, after the fall of the Berlin Wall.[2]

There are also, of course, other opinions. Marina Gržnić provides one of the most interesting. Reaching for psychoanalytic terminology, she defines Central (or rather Eastern) Europe, in the wake of fulfilment of its historic mission, as Europe's 'surplus' and, simultaneously, as 'insufficient' Europe. This formulation echoes Jacques Lacan's Oedipal definition of the human being as someone who has already fulfilled his destiny. To diagnose this condition, Lacan uses the term 'plus d'homme', which simultaneously signifies excess and lack of humanity. This part of Europe can be compared, therefore, to excrement, which has, however, a crucial function. The subject (Europe) cannot construct its own identity without such excrement, just as a human subject needs its own 'waste' to create his own identity.[3]

Igor Zabel approaches the problem of the East-West from a different perspective, using different vocabulary. In his essay 'The (Former) East and its Identity', the author argues that while the fall of communism, and hence the end of the world's division into two opposed blocks, certainly opened the (former) Eastern Europe, it did not eliminate differences that have divided the continent.[4] They are still visible within the cultural infrastructure and can be seen in the characteristic underdevelopment of the institutional system, critical discourse and analytic vocabulary that allows the West to (still) function as the guarantor of values. It is (still), but not exclusively, the West that creates and controls the system of concepts and the hierarchy of institutions. However, the issue of the difference between the West and the (former) East, or post-communist Europe, has much deeper roots. One could say that it has its origins in the desire for diversity that is a feature of the postmodern worldview. If modernism strove for unification and universalization of culture, then postmodernism feeds on diversity. It is difference that functions as the foundation of identity. In effect, it is the West that is interested in maintaining the tension between itself and the East, or between the Self (the West) and the Other (the former East), since this tension allows it to identify its own position and to construct its own identity. It appears, therefore, that Zabel's conclusions, arrived at by the use of a very different analytic apparatus, are rather similar to those of Marina Gržnić: it is the West that needs the East (including those parts of Central Europe that belonged to the former Eastern Europe) in order to define itself, and not the other way around.

Irrespective of the ongoing discussions about the existence or non-existence of Central Europe after the fall of communism, the bonds that hold contemporary Central Europe together have been forged by history or, to be more precise, by political history. Although this history is rather varied, nevertheless it creates a point of reference for contemporaneity. That is, of course, if one assumes that history could perform such a function for the present, which is far from certain. The concept of 'post-communist' Europe as such contains a chronological element; it describes a temporal sequence, something that followed a particular historic experience (of communism). I think that even though communism ended more than twenty years ago, history and historic or art historic memory can still provide effective frames of reference for the analysis of contemporary political and historic processes.

Such an interpretative frame for art historic analysis has two mutually attracting poles that mark the common denominator or a shared point of reference for the post-1989 culture in Eastern Europe. One is the idea of the autonomy of art, the other a critique of the system. The first concept, compatible with the modernist system of values, was not at all apolitical. On the contrary, if official art, or more precisely Socialist Realism, which endured in many countries of the region for a long time, was perceived as political propaganda, even when it did not carry explicit political messages, then the search for artistic autonomy and rejection of 'political engagement', or more precisely of political propaganda, could not be apolitical. That is how artists and dissident intellectuals perceived the notion of artistic autonomy. One of the most common attitudes of the post-Stalinist artistic culture was the flight from the official aesthetic doctrines in the direction of autonomy, the embrace of personal expression and individual creative freedom. On the other hand, the number of those who were engaging in a more or less direct critique of the political system was much smaller. Their critique did not necessarily challenge the system of power itself, but rather was directed against its supporting machinery, institutions and discourses. This type of art, mainly growing out of the neo-avant garde practice, developed at different pace in different countries. In the 1960s in Czechoslovakia there were Prague-based 'actionists', such as Milan Knižak and Eugen Brikcius. The 'happsoc' group (Stano Filko, Alex Mlynarčik and for a short period the art historian Zita Kostrová) and Július Koller were active at approximately the same time in Slovakia. In Poland there were artists associated with the Gallery Repassage in Warsaw and later grouped around Józef Robakowski in Łódź. Hungary produced the most political artists in the Eastern Bloc, who engaged in a direct critique of the system, especially around 1968 in response to the invasion of

Czechoslovakia by the armies of the Warsaw Pact. They included László Lakner, Tamás Szentjóby, and somewhat later Gyula Pauer and Endre Tót. In East Germany there was Robert Rehfeldt. Those neo-avant garde critics of the system and the modernist proponents of artistic autonomy shared a subversive attitude. It was this variously expressed opposition to the communist system that functioned as the basis of the artistic culture of Central Europe and represented its most significant contribution to the culture of those times. Today, however, one must inquire whether such an attitude could provide a sufficient basis for the production of art in the post-communist era? In other words, can such art revise its own subversive tradition under the post-communist conditions?

It is tempting to answer in the affirmative, but unfortunately such a response could not be unequivocal. As we know from experience, the fall of communism ushered in a period of vigorous growth of the art market. And market-based subversion of the type one could see in post-perestroika Russia had very little to do with actual critique. The Soviet symbols, which were used critically by the art of the 1980s, turned in the following decade into mere commercial devices produced to satisfy growing market demand. Such commercialization of the perestroika culture characterized the collapse of the critical attitude most closely associated with Moscow conceptualism and the Soc-Art movement. According to Joseph Bakshtein, the nonconformist tradition provided contemporary Russian art with a significant historic point of reference. It remains an open question how younger Russian artists will use that tradition.[5] In Central Europe similar processes took on different forms, mainly based in late neo-expressionism. But it is clear, that the power and attraction of the art market significantly diminished any interest in critical and political art in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. Jana and Jiři Ševčik christened this phenomenon 'new conservatism' in the Czech context.[6] In Poland, wrenched by ideological conflicts surrounding the role of religion and the authoritarian position of the Catholic Church in Polish society, there was a different situation. However, it is important to note that despite such negative influences of market capitalism on the art scene, there have been many artists interested in commenting on the transformation of the system and later on the entrenchment of the new system of power.

Three different artworks, each with a different critical and metaphoric resonance, all providing commentary on the historic date of 1989, serve as good examples of such ongoing interest. They are Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Leninplatz-Projection*, 1990, David Černý's *Pink Tank*, 1991, and Tamás Szentjóby's *The Spirit of the Monument to Freedom*, 1992. Each work took the form of an

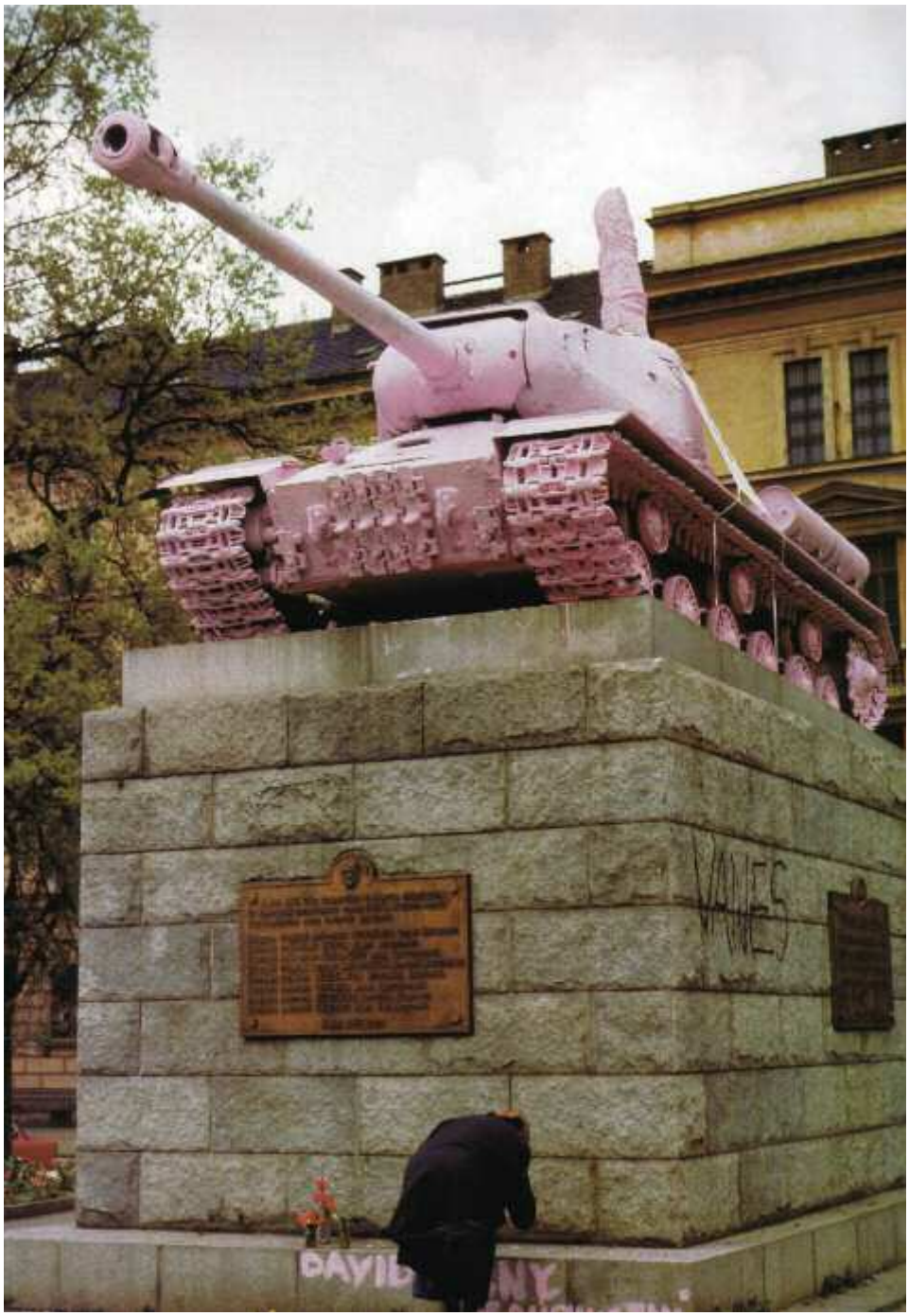
intervention in a public space and each referred to the transition from the just concluded past to the just beginning future. The embrace of the public space is extremely important in this context, since the access to public space was until recently strictly limited, controlled and for the most part completely unavailable to artists. The change in the political system brought a fundamental change in the status of public space. After all, democracy requires and is supposed to guarantee everyone free access to public space. Of course, this provision has been a subject of wide-ranging theoretical debate. From the perspective of 'deliberalizing democracy' (Jürgen Habermas), public space is subject to consensus, whereas critics of liberalism and proponents of radical or 'agonistic' democracy (Chantal Mouffe) see public space as the place of continual, endless resistance that guarantees democracy. Its preservation prevents the possibility of exclusion from the agora. Rosalyn Deutsche, drawing to a significant extent on the work of critics of liberalism (Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau, Claude Lefort and Étienne Balibar), believes that continual problematizing of the public space is necessary for democracy.[7] Of course, before 1989, and even now, the development of democracy has encountered many difficulties in post-communist countries. This precisely makes artists' participation in the debate concerning public space so important. After all, their frequently controversial projects provoke public debate without which democracy withers. It is such debate, which reveals deeply seated conflicts and allows for the airing of opposing views, rather than the building of consensus, that by definition eliminates and excludes radical voices from the public sphere; it is debate that creates the necessary conditions for the development of a democratic society. The art projects I mentioned earlier were some of the first manifestations of such a use of public space in post-communist Europe, and constituted, therefore, some of the first steps towards democracy.

The earliest of those works, Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Leninplatz-Projection*, 1990, created in conjunction with the exhibition 'Die Endlichkeit der Freiheit', which took place at various sites throughout Berlin, used the monument to Lenin located on Lenin Square in the former East Berlin.[8] The artist projected onto Lenin's figure an image of an Eastern European consumer, dressed in a striped shirt and holding a cart filled with different consumer goods. It is clear that this image was referring to the invasion of the West by the citizens of the former Eastern Bloc, who came to buy such as electronic goods, Western groceries and clothes. The fall of the Berlin Wall and opening of the borders was initially associated primarily with access to such consumer goods and it was precisely this association that drew Wodiczko's attention. This was one of the most characteristic aspects of the 'autumn of nations'. This phenomenon,

8 Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Leninplatz-Projection*, Berlin, 1990.

so often ignored and concealed by politicians and intellectuals, in fact defined the character of the first contact between the East and the West right after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The next project, David Černý's *Pink Tank*, 1991, referred to completely different values. The Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia did not inspire iconoclastic gestures, at least not at the time. A tank used as a monument symbolized (not only in Czechoslovakia) the Soviet Union's 'liberation' of the region from Nazi occupation. During the 'liberation' of 1989 and for some time afterwards, the tank, which in this context signified the oppression of the Soviet Union, remained as if nothing much happened. Černý decided to domesticate, tame and adopt it, thereby stripping it of its former symbolic function and giving it a new one, much more appropriate to the mood of the moment. In the spirit of Dadaism, the artist aided by a group of accomplices tested the nature of the transformations taking place by painting the tank pink,



9 David Černy, *Pink Tank*, Prague, 1991.

a colour that had nothing to do with militarism, and adding an appendage to its cupola in a shape of a finger, which allowed the tank to make a rather rude gesture. Those actions were certainly successful in provoking a response. The conflict they engendered, so necessary for the emergence of the public space and the development of democracy, revealed interesting tensions within contemporary Czechoslovak society. In addition to being applauded and supported, Černý's action was also criticized and condemned as an act of vandalism, revealing that mental and cultural transformations did not necessarily follow political ones. A considerable part of society, despite the traumatic experience of 1968 when tanks with Soviet stars were associated with aggression, was simply unwilling to accept the symbolic annihilation of its own history. This negative response demonstrated that the official history of the CSSR was not just an ideological discourse of power, but was in fact accepted as true by a large numbers of Czechs.

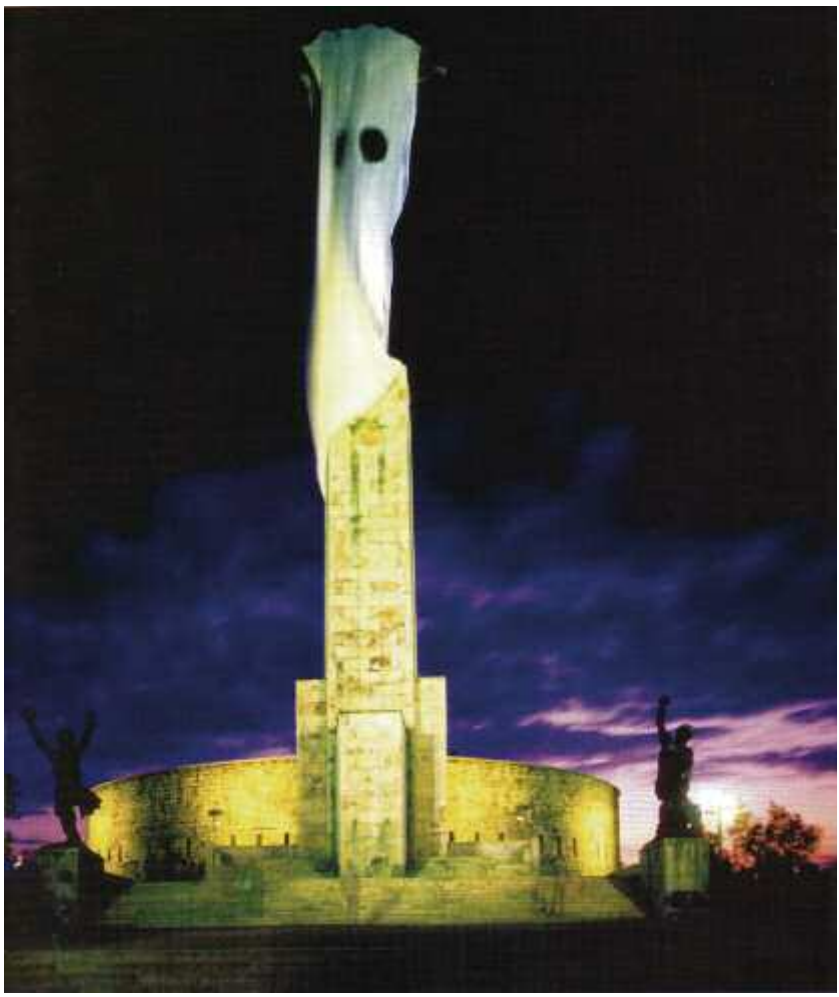
The third work, Támas Szentjóby's *The Spirit of the Monument to Freedom*, 1992, likewise involved subversive appropriation of the existing communist-era monument. Szentjóby covered the figure overlooking Budapest from Gellért Hill with a massive tarpaulin with two cut openings for eyes, which recalled popular representations of ghosts. In contrast to the reaction in Prague to Černý's guerrilla action, the transformation of the Soviet era monument into a ghost, which took place in conjunction with an official 'Festival of Farewell' organized by the city's government to commemorate the first anniversary of the departure of the Red Army, did not provoke controversy and was greeted with general approval. The artist certainly fulfilled the expectations of Hungarian society by transforming a historic symbol of the former Hungarian People's Republic, a country marred by horror, terror, repression and functioning under the watchful eye of the Soviet Red Army, into a ghost of history, a phantom that can provoke fear, but, like every ghost, more in nightmares then in reality.

All three of those projects used existing monuments linked with the old regime to inscribe them with social and political changes taking place. As such they were engaging in the discourse of historic revisionism; they looked at the past from the post-communist position, but also directed their gaze at the future. Addressed to the local viewer, they confronted experienced and known contemporary reality with historic memory provoking critical reflection on the relationship between the past and the future. Slovak artist Roman Ondák produced a similar work in 2001 in Vienna, this time, however, situating his intervention in the international public space, that is in the sphere of contacts among neighbouring nations: those from the East (often perceived

as economically less advanced and not quite equal partners) and those from the West. In the work entitled *SK Parking*, 2001, Ondák parked several Škodas with Slovak licence plates for two months on the car park of the Vienna Secession. Although the cars were not identified as a 'work of art', they eventu - ally began attracting the attention of passers-by and especially of the gallery's visitors.[9] Škodas with Slovak licence plates were not uncommon in Vienna after 1989. On the contrary, since Slovakia was within easy driving distance, they became a common sight. Whether they were welcomed, that's a different question. Leaving aside the issue of air pollution by these much less environmentally friendly Eastern European cars, their presence on the well-ordered streets of Vienna functioned as a symbol of the not always welcomed presence of the 'close' Other and drew attention to the proximity of the East, as well as to the open border and the influx of a cheap, mostly illegal workforce. Parking several such cars for a prolonged period in front of an architecturally distinguished art gallery constituted an all too visible intervention, not so much into the city's traffic (since the cars did not move), as into its public space. This symbolic intervention raised questions concerning the status of the Other in this space, the limits of democracy and, above all, its cosmopolitan, transnational character. It also simultaneously subjected to a critique the notion of ethnic or national democracy commonly practised in Western Europe, though perhaps more often in the political arena than the discursive one. By introducing Slovak Škodas into the streets of Vienna, Ondák problematized the public space of the city. He stripped it of its neutrality and at the same time created a potential for conflict, which was not supposed to resolve into consensus, but invoke permanent competition. In that sense his *SK Parking* participated in the work of agonistic democracy.

In order to create a democratic system, it is absolutely necessary to define the agonistic character of the public space by removing its 'deliberating' neutrality and maintaining its potential as a site of conflict. This cannot be accomplished by introducing into such space various visual forms of communication, such as posters or billboards, in the manner of the Billboard Gallery EU active in the Czech Republic and Slovakia or Outdoor Gallery AMS, operating in a different manner and for different reasons in Poland.[10] Art that approaches public space as a neutral 'empty' space that should be filled, even if it aims to saturate this space with the most subversive content, will not do. What is necessary is a much more performative approach that shapes the public space though subversive and critical projects. The particular history of Central Europe, the history of the totalitarian system, also creates specific ideological and politic context for public art or art in the public space.

Artists of international rank, such as Krzysztof Wodiczko (who now lives in New York), have come out of this context. One could argue that his works, which use the architecture of the city (in Poland Kraków, Poznań and Warsaw) to give public status to those who are marginalized and excluded, have contributed much more to the development of democracy than the work of many politicians. To do justice to the artist's role in this process and fully acknowledge his art would require a separate monograph. Instead, keeping to a Polish theme, I will look at the work of another Polish artist, Joanna Rajkowska, who is shaping the political discourse through interventions into the public space. Although she has produced numerous public works, I will



10 Tamás Szentjóby, *The Soul of the Statue to Liberty*, Budapest, 1992.

discuss only one, her 2006–7 piece *Oxygenator* (*Dotleniacz*).[11] The work was installed in Warsaw on Grzybowski Square, located in the rather neglected area of the former Warsaw Ghetto. The square houses a large Catholic church, a synagogue and the Jewish Theatre as well as many small shops and apartment buildings. The green space in the middle of the square attracts a diverse group of people. There are men who spend their entire days in the vicinity, mainly drinking beer, retirees out for a walk, often with dogs or grandchildren, workers from nearby banks and other businesses, a few local Jews going to the synagogue or the Jewish Theatre and more numerous Israeli tourists, whose itineraries invariably include a mandatory visit to the Warsaw Ghetto. In the middle of the green lawn at the centre of the square, Rajkowska installed a pond with an apparatus that produced oxygen, which appeared as bubbles on the surface and created a delicate mist over the pond. Around the pond, the artist installed several benches. The work's meaning functions on a number of levels. One certainly has a temporal character. On the one hand it refers to the history and memory of the place, of the old Jewish quarter, then the Warsaw Ghetto and its tragedy, on the other, to the contemporary rather neglected and unattractive Warsaw neighbourhood. The second level, which has a social character, draws attention to the various groups that populate the square and which have had no contact with each other. The third level is created by the urban nature of the site, shaped both by its somewhat

11 Roman Ondák, *SK Parking*, Vienna, 2001.

accidental character and by the artist's intervention. However, the work is not supposed to 'improve' the square, introduce the past into the present, or encourage interactions among people. It only creates possibilities for such temporal and social encounters; its only aim is to create a potential for such interactions. The project does not impose any social or political solutions; it only engenders the possibility of transforming the impersonal square into an agora, a site of dialogue as well as conflict. It is not the work, but the different people and social groups, who generally avoid one another, that can activate history here and begin a conversation with it and with each other.

I would also like to mention the Hungarian group Hints (Monika Bálint, Aniko Szővényi, Tamás Ilauszky, Ester Szabo and Rebeka Pál) and their project *ScriptCity*, 2004. The work consisted of placing numerous commemorative plaques throughout Budapest. The signs were similar to those installed on the streets, squares and buildings by the city's government to inform tourists about important individuals, events and locations that should be commemorated, remembered and visited. The signs installed by the group, however, were entirely fictitious, describing such as individuals who never existed and events that never took place. They not only cast doubt on the discourse saturating the city, but also directed attention to its dominant ideological and political functions. The problem of the ideological and political function of information becomes particularly urgent when a city undergoes political transformation, when some places disappear from its map, while others appear, and when streets change names. This happened with regularity in post-communist cities, where certain events were wilfully forgotten, while others were wilfully remembered. As a matter of fact, every city is saturated with the discourse of power and its ideology, which undergoes change according to the political system in effect; the buildings in general do not disappear, streets, parks and squares remain the same, yet their meanings and designations often alter. Introduction of a fictional discourse on the streets of Budapest caused certain confusion, but it also, and most importantly, problematized the official discourse of historic information, subjected it to doubt or at least provoked reflection. It is also significant that five signs remained after the project's conclusion at the express request of the owners of the buildings where they were installed.[12]

It is clear that there is no such thing as full democracy: there is liberal democracy, its leftist critics demand radical democracy, there was people's democracy, and so on. The current political system in Central Europe could be described as post-communist democracy, or democracy that formally resembles liberal democracy, but which is governed by different mechanisms of

ownership and exclusion. Also, to borrow Rosalyn Deutsche's terminology, it exhibits different forms of privatization of the public space, different relations between critique and affirmation, what is public and what is private, differently constituted publics. Moreover, the situation varies from country to country. It is a different system in the Czech Republic, the most atheistic state in the world, and in Poland, a country dominated by a rather conservative form of Catholicism. Those local characteristics inform different countries' democratic constitutions. However, in all Central European countries the current political system has as its point of reference the communist system, which ended twenty years ago. It is that failed system that defines the historic horizon of the contemporary democracy or rather contemporary democracies in the region. Although communism took different forms in different countries, it shared certain characteristics. One of them was the greater or lesser degree of constraint on freedom, civil and creative liberties, human rights and access to the public space. Artists reacted in different ways to this situation; they are also reacting in different ways to the current one.

I think we can state with a degree of certainty that history, irrespective of the scope of this concept, functions as a key point of reference for contemporary art in post-communist Europe. However, the question that I posed at the beginning of this chapter is more concerned with geography, or more precisely, geopolitics than with history.

It is also clear that artistic culture in post-war Central Europe, between the years 1945 and 1989, despite similarities in the ideological context, was far from monolithic. In fact it was highly varied. Moreover, the region's political history, which functioned as its frame of reference, was also heterogeneous. The year 1945 seems a logical place to start. It marked the end of the Second World War and the beginning of Soviet domination of the region, though some countries, in particular Czechoslovakia, were able to maintain some more or less illusory features of parliamentary democracy for a time. The situation facing the arts also varied across the region. In the Baltic states, East Germany, Romania and Yugoslavia, the year marked the beginning of a systematic effort aimed at restricting independence of the art community. By contrast, in Czech - oslovakia and Poland, similar efforts in the late 1940s were rather anaemic. In Czechoslovakia, where the communists did not yet have complete power, they were simply not in a position to implement Stalinist cultural policies. In Poland, where they had such power (despite the facade of political pluralism), they did not yet wish to fully demonstrate it. Hence artistic life and discourse developed here without much restraint. Three years later, the situation changed radically.

In 1948 hard-line Stalinist cultural policies were introduced in almost every country of the Eastern Bloc. As a result of a coup d'état, communists gain full power in Czechoslovakia. Although this dramatic shift in the country's political power structure did not yet mark the end of an alternative artistic culture, it did lead to its almost complete marginalization and restriction. There was no need for a coup d'état in Poland, since the communists already had full control of the government. However, they decided to place the art scene under their full control, introducing Socialist Realism as the only official form of art. The so-called 'First' Exhibition of Modern Art, which opened in December 1948 in Kraków and provided an overview of the art produced during the turbulent post-war years, was closed in January 1949. Considerable restrictions were also placed on the artistic culture in Hungary. They were aimed among others at the artists associated with the European School. Only Yugoslavia escaped this enforcement of Stalinist cultural controls. Its rejection of Soviet domination in 1948 provided the impetus for a gradual process of cultural liberalization, which led by 1951 to the formation of the group EXAT 51. The outcomes of this process were rather unique in the context of Eastern and Central European art history. They signalled the beginning of the development of Yugoslav post-war modernism, which was soon accepted as the official style and as such subjected to a critique by the emerging neo-avant garde. This critical reassessment and reaction began as early as 1959 with the formation in Zagreb of the group Gorgona.

The year 1956 is the next significant date for the region, especially for Poland and the Soviet Union. It marked in those countries the end of Stalinism and the beginning of the 'thaw', which led to liberalization of cultural policies. However, in other countries, for example Bulgaria and Romania, there were no significant changes. It should also be noted that the Polish 'thaw' bore little resemblance to the Soviet one, especially with regards to culture. It created a veritable explosion of modern art, which, paradoxically, began to occupy the same institutional infrastructure and therefore function within the context of the same state ideological apparatus that was previously reserved for Socialist Realism. The opening of the so-called 'Second' Exhibition of Modern Art in Warsaw at the National Gallery 'Zachęta' in 1957 attracted some of the country's most important political figures, including top Party leaders and government ministers, even though it featured almost exclusively abstract art. In Czechoslovakia similar efforts to return to modernism took place somewhat later, and most significantly in private apartments and artists' studios, rather than official venues. This was true in Prague as well as Bratislava

(the exhibition 'Confrontations' was held in Prague in 1960 and in Bratislava in 1961). Moreover, at the Moscow Exhibition of Art from Socialist Countries in 1958, everyone showed Socialist Realist works – everyone that is except for the Poles, who brought modernist art and provoked a furore of protests from the Soviet comrades and a great deal of interest from the public. In the Soviet Union itself, art 'thaw' took place along the margins, not in the centre of the cultural establishment as it did in Poland, and did not begin until 1962, the year when, in a strategic move, Nikita Khrushchev was taken to see a show of 'abstract art' on the fifth floor of the Moscow Manezh State Exhibition Hall, in rooms very rarely seen by visiting dignitaries. As expected, Khrushchev was outraged. His negative response saved the jobs of the leadership of the Artists' Union, who were being internally challenged by the reformers, and led to renewed restrictions on the limited artistic freedom. This began a period of repression, reaction and stagnation in the official artistic culture of the USSR and the development of the artistic underground, mainly in Moscow, and to a lesser extent in Leningrad and Estonia.

The years 1968 to 1970 provide the next turning point. In some countries they mark the beginning of the so-called 'normalization', which turned back liberal cultural policies and even signalled a return of repressive measures. This happened in Romania and, above all, in Czechoslovakia after the suppression of the Prague Spring. In other countries, those years witnessed a return of a (limited) artistic freedom. This was the situation in Poland after 1970; by contrast, during the same period, Slovak and Czech artists had to go underground and leave the public sphere. The same was true in Romania, where Ceauşescu (at first a liberal, later a dictator) proclaimed the so-called 'July Theses' in 1971, which announced 'a return' to the values of the socialist culture. During the same period Polish artists had complete freedom, as long as they stayed away from politics. The only other country in the Eastern Bloc where this was true was Yugoslavia.

Finally the early 1980s revealed equally diverse cultural landscapes. In Poland they marked introduction of martial law. In Hungary the 1980s witnessed rapid development of the so-called 'goulash socialism', which redefined the socialist state in terms of consumption, economic engagement with the West and cultural liberalism.

The diverse political or rather geopolitical situation in Eastern Europe led to a certain isolation of the art historic narrative, development of art and its critical assessment. Art, art criticism and art history in Eastern Europe developed mainly within national (or state) borders and, simultaneously, in comparative analogy with the centre, or Western culture. This dual orientation

engendered regional incompatibility of local art historic narratives, artistic canons and hierarchies. In a manner typical of isolated cultures, local hierarchies of value were very often determined by social considerations reinforced by institutional hierarchies. It was difficult for an outsider coming to Romania from Czechoslovakia, to Hungary from Poland, or to East Germany from Bulgaria to grasp those local systems of value. However, despite this reality, there were efforts aimed at breaking the national isolation and creating transnational relationships and networks. The communist regimes did not support them; on the contrary, they tried to stop them, as was the case with Jarosław Kozłowski's NET project, which created an international (including Eastern Europe) network of artistic exchange. The local regimes, precisely because of differences in the implementation of 'real' socialism in different countries, did not favour transnational artistic exchanges, especially, but not exclusively, within the sphere of independent art practice. The official international policies that governed and were supposed to encourage cultural exchange were a facade that masked mutual hostility among leaders of different countries. They did not have any real impact and, at most, served a political function. They often afforded officials of various ranks opportunities to engage in regional tourism, but certainly did nothing to encourage artistic exchanges or transmission of values and ideas. Even so, artists were able to bypass such controls by smuggling their works abroad and showing them in venues that were accessible to them. This was the case with the exhibition *Arguments,* which featured works by artists from Czechoslovakia, at the Crooked Wheel (Krzywe Koło) Gallery in Warsaw in 1962. The show's curator, František Šmejkal, had to smuggle into Poland works by his Czech and Slovak colleagues.[13] It is important to note that this exhibition played a key role in the development of transnational artistic exchanges and the breaking of inter-national barriers put in place by the communists, who were interested in maintaining the isolation of local artistic cultures. It not only gave Polish viewers a unique opportunity to see independent or unofficial art by their southern neighbours, but also allowed Czech and Slovak artists, who separately were showing abstract art through independently organized 'Confrontations' exhibitions (twice in Prague in 1960 and once in Bratislava in 1961), to encounter each other. Moreover, this transnational 'confrontation' or meta-transnational artistic encounter, which took place outside the borders of the country shared by Czechs and Slovaks, resulted in the first effort to define the identity and character of *art informel* in Czechoslovakia.[14]

Let me list, a bit more systematically, other similar examples of such transnational, independent artistic exchanges, which broke through state efforts

to isolate artistic cultures of the communist countries. One of them was the previously mentioned NET project developed in 1971 by Polish art historian Andrzej Kostołowski and Polish artist Jarosław Kozłowski, both from Poznań. Briger Jesch describes it as 'the first noncommercial, free, international artistic exchange [of information]'.[15] The Poznań Gallery Akumulatory 2, founded and directed by Jarosław Kozłowski, allowed concrete implementation of the NET principles and also functioned as a truly international venue. It not only crossed borders, but also tried to counteract geographic hierarchies by showing Western as well as Eastern European artists, including Carlfriedrich Claus, László Lakner and Jiři Valoch. Both NET and Gallery Akumulatory 2 functioned as regional transnational projects. With a fair amount of farsightedness, both regularly crossed the Iron Curtain and moved across geopolitical regions in order to counter ghettoization of Eastern European art. To a significant extent they were able to break the historic isolation in which artists and intellectuals of the region have been kept as a result of the Yalta Agreement. At the beginning, both initiatives encountered a certain amount of resistance from local officials: one of the first NET shows in Poznań in 1971, for example, was interrupted by police who began to search Kozłowski's apartment. Later, with the gradual limited liberalization of cultural life in Poland – literature did not benefit to the same degree as art from the change in the political climate – such police harassments generally ceased. Also it should be noted that, owing to the efforts of János Brendel, a Hungarian art historian living at this time in Poznań, the city's Office of Art Exhibitions (BWA), which runs its main art gallery, organized one of the first (if not the first) exhibition of Hungarian modern (and therefore alternative) art outside of Hungary. This could be seen as the second show, after the Czech - oslovak 'Arguments' exhibition in Warsaw of 1962, that allowed a particular art movement developing in a particular Eastern Bloc country to 'see itself' through an exhibition organized as a result of unofficial transnational artistic contacts in another Eastern Bloc country. In Warsaw the Gallery Foksal, much more visible due to its central location, became actively involved in the international neo-avant garde movement, organizing, among others, an exhibition of the Hungarian neo-avant garde, including works by Miklós Erdély. Another Warsaw gallery, Remont, was also very active during this period, hosting, among others, a show in 1976 that featured three Czech performance artists: Jan Mlčoch, Karel Miler and Petr Štembera. On the Polish map of international and Central European contacts we should also point out Wrocław with its active art scene and museum as well as Lublin, in particular Gallery Labirynt, and Łódź.

In the 1970s Polish venues were in a unique position to show neo-avant garde art and to facilitate transnational artistic exchanges. Therefore it is not surprising that Poland became an important destination for artists and intellectuals from other Central European countries. László Beke recalls his hitchhiking trips through Poland as one of the key components in his education as a Hungarian intellectual.[16] Jiří Valoch also mentions Poland as one of the favourite destinations of such intellectual tourism during the period when the Czechoslovak regime made travel to the West virtually impossible. Valoch also mentions Hungary and, significantly, East Germany.[17] Poland and other Central European countries functioned in this context as a substitute for access to the international art scene. Artists and intellectuals from the former GDR, who travelled east to Poland in order to have access to Western culture, confirm this. Paul Kaiser and Claudia Petzold, curators and authors of the exhibition catalogue *Boheme und Diktatur in der DDR*, write that East German artists went there to find Western books, records by popular Western groups, to attend jazz and film festivals, international art exhibitions (some of international rank such as the Krakow Graphic Biennale), to visit bookstores and libraries that stocked books that were banned in the GDR, or to participate in informal screenings of Western films at the Łódź Film School. It was also often here, in this neighbouring communist state, that they had their first taste of marijuana.[18] Sometimes Central European artists saw their participation in Polish exhibitions as a substitute for participation in the international (that is Western) art scene. The regional Eastern European transnational exchanges had to function, for the time being, as a surrogate for the 'real' trans- or rather international contacts. It is notable that Robert Rehfeldt, one of the initiators of mail art (which was very popular at the time in the GDR), who actively sought Western European contacts from the late 1960s, organized the first show of mail art in Poland at the Gallery Studio in 1975. The exhibition, entitled 'Art in Contact', featured works by 50 international (and not just Eastern Bloc) artists. The first exhibition of mail art in the GDR took place in East Berlin at the Arkade Galerie in November 1978. Rehfeldt developed contacts with Polish artists in the early 1970s.[19] His choice of Poland was dictated by the political situation. Jürgen Weichardt writes that Rehfeldt, who wanted to function as a mediator between East and West, chose Poland because the situation there in the mid-1970s seemed so different from other communist countries in the region. Let us recall that 1974 witnessed the demolition of the so-called 'bulldozer exhibition' of unofficial art in the Mos - cow suburbs (the name comes from the tools used by the police to 'close'

the show; the exhibition provided impetus for considerable growth of the local underground art scene in the late 1970s). At the same time, Czechoslovakia was being 'normalized' in the wake of the Prague Spring, and in Hungary the neo-avant garde was just beginning to function and overcome administrative barriers.[20]

Compared to Poland, artists in the other countries of the Eastern Bloc faced much more difficult political, economic and administrative situation. The art scene in Czechoslovakia was in a state of crisis due to repression directed against the country's intellectual elites that followed the suppression of the Prague Spring. Cultural life in Romania had to contend with the new hard-line course. In the GDR, which was still perceived as the 'frontier' and as such subjected to special local and Soviet controls, a few changes were taking place, however, especially within the sphere of international contacts. Here too exchanges among artists of East Central Europe continued to develop and grow. Some artists from the region began to show in East Germany, mainly due to the heroic efforts of the unofficial, and in reality illegal, entirely or partially private institutions, such as EP Galerie operated by Jürgen Schweinebraden in his Berlin apartment at Prenzlauer Berg. Schweinebraden recalled that such 'countries as Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary were interesting, because [their] art traditions were not interrupted to the same extent as in the GDR'.[21] Be that as it may, of those three countries, Poland was certainly the most attractive for East German artists, because the art scene in the other two was subjected to much stricter control due to political circumstances. In Hungary, where in the early years of the decade the situation was rather dire, a gradual improvement led not only to rapid development of the local neo-avant garde, but also to burgeoning international contacts. László Beke, perhaps the best-informed art critic in the region, played a huge role in this process. He provided the initial link between the Polish organizers of the NET (Andrzej Kostołowski and Jarosław Kozłowski) and Hungarian artists.[22] He also organized the exhibition 'Tükör/Mirror' in 1973 in an alternative gallery located in a chapel rented from the Catholic Church in Balatonboglár (after the exhibition, the gallery was closed by the authorities). The idea for creating such a venue came from György Galántai, a very active artist, organizer and collector of neo-avant garde documentation, who later founded in Budapest (with Julia Klaniczay) the Artpool Research Centre dedicated to the neo-avant garde.[23] The 'Tükör/Mirror' project, undertaken under very difficult political circumstances that cannot be compared to those in either Yugoslavia or Poland, included works by Hungarian and also foreign artists working on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

The situation in Yugoslavia was even more favourable than in Poland from the perspective of trans- and international exchanges and contacts. The art scene more closely resembled that of a Western European country than any Eastern or Central European one. That was one reason why any contacts with Yugoslavia were treated with a great deal of suspicion by the authorities of the other Eastern European countries, whose distrust was amplified by Yugoslavia's independence from the Soviet Union. Economic considerations also affected contacts. As a 'semi-Western' country, Yugoslavia was simply much more expensive than any other country in the region. Also local artists were less interested in transnational exchanges with Eastern Bloc countries than in international ones with the West.

In general those Eastern European contacts and trips, with few notable exceptions, focused on efforts to follow Western culture, understood here as the universal contemporary culture. They involved to a much lesser extent direct interest in the culture of the other Eastern Bloc countries. As mentioned earlier, the transnational contacts within the region functioned as a substitute for international contacts. The juxtaposition of those two concepts had significant implications. The category 'international' was much more positive and carried a higher value than 'transnational'. It signified the crossing of not just internal but, above all, external borders. The term 'transnational' itself was introduced much later by comparative art history. It signifies local presence, national (but not necessarily ethnic) identity that is not lost in an exchange with another locality, but which instead gains value. In this context 'transnational' functions as the opposite of 'international'. We can certainly see the value of such a methodological approach. Examples of reflection or self-reflection on Czech and Slovak art of the early 1960s shown abroad in Poland, amply demonstrate the advantages offered by such a theoretical perspective. However, from the perspective of art history, this is a fundamentally ahistoric concept. If one takes into consideration contemporary statements, it is clear that artists of that period would in fact have rejected the transnational perspective, since it would have meant valorization of what was national and simultaneous depreciation of what was global or international. That would have been unacceptable, since the international sphere provided compensatory values to the policies of the communist regimes aimed at the region's isolation from the West, control and regulation of contacts, and, contrary to the official ideological statements, its support of national particularism within the implementation of 'real' socialism.

However, such historicization of the concepts should not prevent us from finding in them potential value. The fact remains that any designation

of something as 'international', 'universal' or 'world' contains within itself a certain strategy of Western domination. The understanding of modernism or modernity as an international phenomenon reflects, in its genesis and function, a Western perspective. The transnational perspective (even if adopted at the cost of the international one) allows for simultaneous contextualization (localization or nationalization) of the West and its culture, and its perception through the transnational lens. From that perspective it could be seen as part of the project described by Chakrabarty as the 'provincialization of Europe', though perhaps not exactly and not entirely. The goal is to deconstruct the concept of the 'universal' (and therefore 'modernist' and 'international') and to situate it in its proper historic context.

The outcomes of 1989 complicate this approach to a significant extent by affecting the manner in which geography is perceived. They include the opening of borders, more or less actual but certainly experienced on both collective and individual levels, above all in the former Eastern Bloc. They also involve certain problematizing (though not elimination) of national identity and the engendering of competing potential identities: gender, sexual, subcultural, locally regional and so on. In general, it is clear that after 1989 we see rejection of such terms as Eastern Europe, Eastern Bloc or even the much more politically neutral Central Europe (understood as a geopolitical or geocultural construct). In other words, we are observing a certain de-regionalization of Central Europe and hence rejection of the geographic perspective. In reality, besides history, which I mentioned earlier, contemporary artistic initiatives are shifting their emphasis from geography (of a region) to topography (of a place). We prefer to speak of cities (Bratislava, Budapest, Bucharest, Prague, Warsaw, Vilnius), rather than regions such as Central or Eastern Europe. The latter way of describing the artistic region (one that was fairly unproblematic before 1989) is today particularly burdened by political associations. This does not mean that efforts to construct a regional identity have been completely abandoned. If we ignore ineffective political initiatives, such as the Visegrad Group, the notion of regional cultural identity appears most appropriate for consideration of the Balkans, where we see extremely dynamic development and cultivation of a distinct regional identity through various art initiatives and publishing projects,[24] and in the Baltic states, where such efforts are much more modest in scale and certainly are far less spectacular.[25] When compared to those two highly dynamic regional constructions, especially that of the Balkans, similar efforts in Central Europe seem very modest indeed. As I mentioned earlier, they tend to focus on its metropolitan areas, rather than transregional initiatives. Because of this it is difficult to see efforts aimed at

legitimization of artistic identity of the post-communist Central Europe in geographic terms. Instead they appear topographic. This signals a shift from geography to topography in the historic as well as methodological sense.

With such a shift, the concept of 'transnational,' so useful (despite its ahistoric character) for studies dealing with the communist period, must undergo certain erosion. At first sight one could assume that its place may be taken by the term 'international', which would signal a certain return to modernist language. After all, it was modernism that made internationalism into a virtual cult or a fetish of the new culture that was supposed to eliminate all contending identities: ethnic, gender or geographic. Deconstruction of the modernist language and value system demonstrated the mythologizing function of such terms and its historic analysis revealed hidden political agendas.[26] Of course, if we were less careful and more colloquial, we could say that cultural exchange approached from a topographic perspective appears much more international than transnational in character. But such a formulation reflects a fundamental lack of precision. In reality, we are talking about something else, a third term as it were – cosmopolitan. I understand this concept literally, in terms of its original Greek meaning, which combines the notion of a city (polis) with that of the world (cosmos). *Cosmopolis* is a world city, city-world, city as a cosmos; its inhabitants are citizens of the world, for whom debate takes place not just in the local agora, but also in the universal space. The new culture, which began to emerge before 1989 within the context of globalization, is cosmopolitan by definition. Therefore the interactions between individual cities or metropolitan areas should be referred to as trans-cosmopolitan. If art geography and comparative methodology used to study art of the communist period entail transnational relations, then art topography and methodological perspective used to study post-communist culture, considered as part of the global structure of artistic exchanges, require trans-cosmopolitan ones.

In other words, after 1989 cities have gained at the expense of countries in the former Eastern Europe. Of course, cities always had their own identities that did not always coincide with the national ones. This was also true during the communist period. Cities, especially capitals, but also competing provincial centres, such as Brno in Czechoslovakia, Ljubljana and Zagreb in Yugoslavia, Leipzig in the GDR, Łódź, Kraków and Wrocław in Poland, Leningrad in Russia, or Cluj and Timişoara in Romania, functioned to a significant extent as signifiers of national identity. It appears, however, that at the present moment, following a general trend towards increasing urbanization of culture on the global scale, large cities of the former Eastern

Europe are achieving a more and more independent character, gaining ever greater autonomy and distancing themselves from national identity. This tendency can be readily perceived within contemporary art discourse, as exemplified by a book edited by Katrin Klingan and Ines Kappert, *Leap into the City*, which contains chapters dedicated to different post-communist cities (not always of a metropolitan scale), such as Prishtina, Warsaw and Zagreb.[27]

There are a number of factors that have influenced this situation. One of them is the development of significant art institutions of a European, if not world, rank in the region. They include museums, which I will describe later, as well as contemporary art centres, such as the Centre for Contemporary Art at Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw, which is the largest and the most active of such state-sponsored public institutions in post-communist Europe (with the exception of the former GDR, which, due to its incorporation into West Germany, must be treated as a special case), or among private ones, the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art in Prague. Those institutions have been actively engaged in organizing large exhibitions with cosmopolitan character. Another factor that has been favourable to development of cosmopolitan attitudes is migration, in this instance migrations of artists. It has often been observed that artists frequently choose to live in a different city from where they were born. Communist Europe was unaffected by this phenomenon, or rather experienced it on rare occasions. Instead of influx, it was the source of outward migration of artists, intellectuals, cultural organizers, gallerists and curators, mainly to Western Europe and the United States. Since 1989 many of those cultural migrants have returned, but have also begun to move between Eastern European cities. Moreover, one can also observe a still relatively small migratory trickle of Western artists eastward, which may in time assume more significant dimensions. This could be said not only about artists, but also curators and art critics who have lived and worked for years in Western Europe. Those newly cosmopolitan cities now also host significant large art exhibitions, which help to create a new image for the metropolis. Sometimes, as in the case of the October Salon in Belgrade, local events are transformed into 'international' ones.

Perhaps the most significant phenomenon that has given cities their cosmopolitan character is the ever-growing numbers of biennales. The biennale problem is interesting in and of itself. Although the biennale phenomenon has a long history (the Venice Biennale has now been staged for more than 100 years), rapid development of this form of exhibition seems to typify the period of globalization. Biennales have taken over the world. They are held in Australia, China (mainland as well as Taiwan), Europe and elsewhere.

Often they are organized by curators of an international rank (a fact that gives them a certain visibility) and include artists who occupy the highest levels within the global art culture. Frequently enormous sums of private as well as public funds (from local governments) are invested in those projects, with the hope of promoting the area as a cultural and tourist destination. For the local public, such exhibitions provide an opportunity to survey global art trends; for the international audience, they afford an excuse for a bit of cultural tourism and they also attract the attention of the world press and media, including art publications. There are biennales with a very open organizational structure as well as those that focus on a particular region or problematic. The former Eastern Europe has also become a site of several, including Bucharest, Iaşi, Moscow and Prague. In fact, Prague hosts two competing biennales, one organized by *Flash Art* (Giancarlo Politi, Helena Kontova), the other by the National Gallery (Milan Knižak). Of those in the region, the Moscow Biennale is certainly the most visible and probably the best financed; it is also, of course, organized in the only true metropolis (measured by global standards) east of Berlin. By contrast, the biennale 'Mediations' organized since 2008 in Poznań by Tomasz Wendland, although significant in its aspirations and scope, is certainly conceived on a much more modest scale. It originated in the exhibition 'Asia-Europe Mediation' organized by Wendland in 2007, which had the ambition of mediating between those two continents. This goal has been maintained by the biennale. Although initially the emphasis was on Asia, the exhibition has now extended its scope to a global reach. What is interesting is the fact that Central Europe has been inscribed into this global perspective as a plane of mediation among different cultures.

The shift from art geography, which focused on countries and as a result on regions, to art topography, which focuses on cities, in and of itself constitutes a very interesting characteristic of contemporary culture. Its most significant feature is the increasingly cosmopolitan character of the cities, in particular cities of the former Eastern Bloc, which have been perceived as 'provincial' both from the perspective of Moscow and the West and as such 'closed' or self-centred, at most capable of bilateral exchanges. Since 1989 those cities, which are still rather modest in scale by global standards, are gaining metropolitan character and becoming cosmopolitan in the Greek sense of the word. Because of that, contacts between urban areas have lost a transnational and have often acquired a trans-cosmopolitan character. This process poses a significant challenge for art and culture, as well as art history as an academic discipline, which includes, after all, art geography. Moreover, our discipline

is not unaffected by art topography. The processes of globalization and cosmopolitanization on the world-scale point to a growing need for horizontal rethinking of art history (see chapter One).

seven

Art and Biopolitics: Ilya Kabakov and Krzysztof Wodiczko

The term *homo sacer* identifies a man dedicated to a god, but also a man who is an outcast or cursed, a man given over to the gods of the underworld, who exists outside human law, who can be killed, but cannot be saved. This concept was introduced into the lexicon of contemporary humanism by Giorgio Agamben. In his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life,* Agamben extends Michel Foucault's analysis of power by arguing that, in so far as the mechanisms used to subordinate 'naked life' are concerned, the modern conceptions of totalitarian and liberal power cannot be seen as opposites, but rather should be considered in terms of their similarities.[1] Moreover, the modern conception of the state has succeeded in gradually gaining the power or a particular type of freedom to shape the 'biopolitical body'. According to Agamben, the ancients distinguished the concept of biological life from that of political life. The moderns, on the other hand, introduced biopolitics, which links biological and political life, subjecting both to the rule of the sovereign power. Agamben adds that the 'naked life' belongs to *homo sacer,* a human being who 'can be killed, but cannot be sacrificed'. Of course this describes a concentration camp, which here functions not only as a metaphor of Nazism and Sovietism, but also of the modern power. In fact, one could say that it is a paradigm of such power. Following in Carl Schmitt's footsteps, Agamben adopts the following definition of sovereignty: 'one is sovereign when one can make decisions regarding the state of emergency'. This definition, which brings life itself to the level of 'naked life' and politics to the level of biopolitics, means that in its very essence the modern state is sovereign.

In his short but extraordinarily significant book Agamben develops this idea, creating, in my opinion, one of the most important twentieth-century theories of power after those of Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault. The author traces the development of biopolitics, or life's subordination to power, within historic context, noting the importance of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* (1789). This document unambiguously states that with his birth a man acquires certain rights. But by acquiring them, he also becomes a citizen, and as a citizen he becomes a subject of the state and,

therefore, part of the structure of power that politicizes 'naked life'. Other legal acts and political practices reinforce this convergence between life and politics. Paradoxically, seen from this perspective, Alfred Rosenberg's *Blood and Honour* (*Blut und Ehre*, 1936) does not constitute a denial of the Declaration but its extreme development. Similarly, the Nuremberg Laws do not invalidate the liberal-democratic legal codes of citizenship introduced by European countries at the beginning of the twentieth century, but merely develop them into an extreme form. Agamben observes that as a consequence of this logic, the concentration camp appears not so much as a historic anomaly but as a peculiar product of the modern legal system, and as such a quintessence of modernity. It would be easy to find examples that clearly demonstrate the propensity of the so-called democratic contemporary states to rely on 'camps' as a method for exercising power; most do not necessarily do so in as spectacular way as did the United States with Guantanamo Bay. But that is beside the point. What is important is to realize that a camp does not represent a negation, but the extreme of a system of jurisprudence based in biopolitics; it is a system that kills on the one hand, while on the other protects health, prenatal life, and regulates genetic research and abortion. This conception assumes that the state owns the body, or that it is in a position to make decisions concerning 'naked' or biological life, a fact that has diverse, sometimes extreme consequences.

Giorgio Agamben's ideas have become well known though a series of new editions of his books available in translation, and through commentaries, summaries and as reprinted in anthologies. This frees me from the obligation to provide a detailed account of his work. I am only interested in developing a certain train of thought provoked by this author in order to situate it within different aspects of the art of Ilya Kabakov and Krzysztof Wodiczko. Although both coming from Eastern Europe but working mainly in the West, these artists have addressed different aspects of the problematic of man's entanglement in the mechanisms of power in different ways. Both are interested in the issue of biopolitics. However, they represent two aspects of this critical approach: one more constrained, the other much more expansive. The first aspect, which applies to Kabakov, associates 'the state of emergency' and biopolitics with the omnipotence of the state or, to be more precise, with the totalitarian state (in this instance the USSR), or rather its memory invoked as a reference point in a post-Soviet discourse. The second, which applies to Wodiczko, takes the opposite route. It represents an effort to expand Agamben's observations and relate them to a broader empirical context than that of a state. In this second field it would be easy to surmise that the principle of biopolitics can be applied

to a very broadly defined concept of power exercised by corporations, social institutions and organizations, which binds human beings in many different ways to political and economic structures. This constitutes the basic mechanism that locates contemporary man within broadly understood social order and, as such, has a fundamental significance for our understanding of contemporaneity.

Housing is one of the basic human rights. A man should not only have a right to a home, but should also have a right to adequate and decent housing. He should have a right to privacy, safety and the ability to create his own space. A home is a shelter and its defence should be guaranteed by the state through laws. However, in the USSR, a state under a permanent 'state of emergency', those human rights were violated by the totalitarian legislature and social apparatus of power. Communal apartments, created after nationalization of apartment buildings during the revolutionary period, were de facto turned into barracks. Families and single individuals were assigned rooms according to strict criteria that allowed a few square metres per person; under those conditions the apartments ceased to function as homes. In addition to the administratively allocated spaces, which the regime could give away and take back, the communal apartments also had shared areas, including kitchens, bathrooms and corridors. The state not only decided who would live with whom and therefore who would share those common spaces, but also controlled the character of the communal life by instigating tensions among tenants and creating circumstances under which they would control and police themselves, as well as report on each other, often in revenge for unavoidable conflicts. Because the private spaces assigned to families or individuals were both very modest and very precious due to a general housing shortage, tenants guarded them against any potential newcomers, 'unofficial' tenants, relatives or lovers, who through personal connections could 'squeeze' themselves into a 'valuable' apartment in Moscow or Leningrad. In this way the regime secured efficient control over the movements of its citizens and oversight of the correspondence between the official place of residence (the totalitarian system required its citizens to register) and the actual one. Those multi-family societies also functioned according to certain rules, in the context of certain hierarchies, which defined who and when could use the bathroom, what one could store in the hallway or the cupboard. All this in obvious ways provoked conflicts and divided tenants into warring factions. Those disputes were arbitrated and resolved by administrative organs, made up of bureaucratic party committees (often called 'popular' to underline their supposedly self-governing character). To a certain extent they were necessary, in so far as they prevented people from killing each other, but they were

also very convenient since they made it easier for the regime to control the society. In short, the system of communal apartments was part of the bio-political project of the Soviet state.

Victor Tupitsyn writes that in 1921 there were 865 housing communes in Moscow, and their number grew through the end of the decade. At the beginning of the 1930s, however, Stalin expressed dissatisfaction with this form of societal self-organization. In 1932 the housing communes were eliminated and replaced by a system of communal apartments under the administrative control of the government. Tupitsyn compares this form of housing to Western urban ghettos. There is, however, a significant difference. Whereas in the West the government-administered public housing is filled with the poor who live on society's margins, in the USSR this was a widespread form of shelter, which even gave rise to a certain type of person, *homo communalis*. This engendered very interesting implications for the system of social communication by creating a new form of language, 'communal speech', which had its own laws, vocabulary and rules.[2] The artists themselves experienced this system as citizens of the Soviet state and people who lived in such communal apartments. They experienced it not only as part of life, but also as part of art practice.

The communal apartments were spaced where art was practised in the 1970s. In the USSR independent art did not function in the open, as it did during the same time in Yugoslavia or Poland, or earlier, in the mid-1960s, in Czechoslovakia. It did not have its own public, it was not surrounded by journalists and art critics, curators and collectors. The artists associated with Moscow conceptualism and intellectuals who befriended them functioned in a closed social circuit. Everyone or almost everyone was simultaneously a producer and a consumer, a critic and a member of the audience. They organized events in their cramped apartments shared with other tenants and visited others where someone else was showing his work.[3] This isolation from the external world and the idiosyncratic nature of the environment produced a special form of communication used by the artists, which may have been rather hermetic but also very specific and above all highly contextual. The most important thing for those who used it was that it was clear and legible. It was only during the period of perestroika, when the USSR began to open somewhat and its political and ideological foundations began to lose their stability, that Russian independent culture began to receive significant recognition. During this period it was noticed not only for its exoticism, but above all for its value.

Ilya Kabakov belongs to the second Russian avant-garde,[4] or, to follow Western terminology, neo-avant garde. More specifically, he operated within the orbit of Moscow conceptualism, which often addressed the problem of

communal housing. The artist returned to this problematic after the fall of the USSR. Kabakov is one of the best-known contemporary artists to have come from the former Eastern Bloc. Certainly his oeuvre has been subjected to the most thorough examination: a two-volume *catalogue raisonné* covers his paintings (1957–2008) and his installations (1983–2000), respectively.[5] The publication of a *catalogue raisonné* of a contemporary artist from Eastern Europe is a noteworthy event and demonstrates a high regard for Kabakov's work. In addition to this monumental work, there are numerous monographs, exhibition catalogues, essays, reviews and other publications. Many authors, mainly in the West, but also in the East have been writing about his work. Boris Groys, who has long been following Kabakov's work, deserves particular mention. Among his extensive bibliography, there is a small book dedicated to a single work, or rather a fragment of a larger work, *The Man Who Flew into Space from his Apartment* (fragment of the installation *Ten Characters*, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, 1988), published under the same title. Despite its modest size and narrow focus, the book provides in-depth examination of Kabakov's work and its historical context. In particular, it deals with the social, cultural and political implications of Soviet space exploration.[6] However, I am interested in another aspect of Kabakov's art, namely the problem of communal housing, and will be looking at three of his installations: *Ten Characters*, 1988, *Communal Kitchen* (Sezon Museum, Nagano, 1993; since 1995 at Musée Maillol, Paris [Dina Vierny Foundation collection]), and *Toilet* ('Documenta IX', Kassel, 1992).

The installation *Ten Characters* developed Kabakov's earlier *Albums,* which the artist created in the first half of the 1970s. One could say that this particular piece realized that earlier idea through the means of an installation.[7] The entire gallery space was subdivided into seventeen rooms. Ten of these were 'occupied' by different characters: 'The Man Who Flew into his Picture', 'The Man Who Collected the Opinions of Others', 'The Man Who Flew into Space from his Apartment', 'The Untalented Artist', 'The Short Man', 'The Composer', 'The Collector', 'The Man Who Describes his Life through Person - ages', 'The Man Who Saved Nikolai Viktorovich' and 'The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away'. These identifications of the inhabitants of a communal apartment are interesting in and of themselves. The artist did not use proper names (as before he had done in the *Albums*), but instead gives descriptions that characterize each individual. This strategy created simultaneously an impression of anonymity and renders them immediately recognizable by attributing to them certain traits. This seems a typical response from a society in which members maintain their anonymity, do not concern themselves with the lives

of other tenants who share their living space, may not even know each other's names, yet must identify each other. They do so by describing particular individuals using particular characteristics, often negative ones. Some of those descriptions seem absurd, but the traits attributed to individuals by others do not have to be logical; they are often mythical, based on something someone may have said that has been remembered and become associated with that person 'forever'. Each of the characters in the exhibition had his own highly detailed description, dealing, for instance, with who was interested in what opinions, how he behaved or what he collected.

The next work, *Communal Kitchen*, 1993, focused on one of the shared areas in the communal apartment, the kitchen. On a conceptual level it inscribed itself into the perspective described above, but it took a completely different visual form. The work consists of a tall, octagonal room. Hanging in the room's upper portion are paintings from the *Kitchen Series*, dark canvases with kitchen implements (such as a jug, pan or mug) fixed to them and attached catalogue-like descriptions or an inventory of a kitchen, filled with personal, caustic commentary: what the item is, who it belongs to, what state it is in (for example, dirty). On the walls below are located the same objects. Near the ceiling smaller objects with attached labels hang from about a dozen ropes. Below, at eye level, there is a text consisting of various notes that can be read as an exchange of opinions among the tenants of this communal apartment.

The third work, *The Toilet*, created for the Documenta IX in 1992, should be seen from a different perspective. It consists of an unattached structure built in one of the Fridericianum's courtyards. It does not refer to a Soviet-era communal apartment, but to a grimy public toilet, one with few comforts, open stalls (never provided with doors), broken windows and a less than pleasant atmosphere. Kabakov's *Toilet* is divided into men's and women's sections. But those spaces are furnished like two modest apartment rooms typical of the Soviet era: the living room (in the men's section of the toilet) and the bedroom (in the women's). The rooms are cluttered and messy, with items of clothing, books, toys and everyday objects scattered around. The rooms also seem inhabited, or at least they would have seemed inhabited if the installation were shown in Russia. In Germany, a country with very high sanitation standards, highly developed hygiene and a fondness for order and good quality furniture, the work was more exotic than realistic.

If we set aside references to the artist's background (mentioned by Kabakov in his conversation with Groys, in particular information about his mother's employment at his school, as well as his apprehension at participating in the Documenta, one of the most important contemporary art exhibitions in the

48 Ilya Kabakov, *Toilet*, Documenta IX, Kassel 1992.

world),[8] it becomes clear that one of the key elements of the work is its problematization of the boundaries between the public and the private, or to put it a different way, its engagement with the problem of violation of privacy.[9] Of course, such violation, or the signalling that the right to privacy has been violated, is symbolic. After all, communal apartments were introduced in order to violate privacy. Privacy was treated by the biopolitical regime of the Soviet Union as the enemy. It was associated with the individualism of bourgeois culture, which the Soviets opposed to the collectivism of communist culture. Victor Tupitsyn has noted that Kabakov's attitude towards such 'communal' living, and more broadly towards living conditions within the Soviet Union, to which the communal apartment had a metonymic relationship, is to a significant extent paradoxical. On the one hand, the artist has undoubtedly been one of the main chroniclers and deconstructionists of this 'communal world order', and as such could be said to have been 'crusading' against it; on the other, he has not freed himself of this system, and therefore could be considered its 'prisoner'.[10] Perhaps he is kept captive by a sadomasochistic mechanism, a prisoner's fascination with the system that imprisons him. Approaching this problem from a broader perspective, one could say that Kabakov is interested

in the dialectic of identity and non-identity, something that is mentioned by Tupitsyn, who cites Theodor Adorno in reference to the broader issue of 'communal language'.[11]

The concepts of 'naked life' and biopolitics traced by Giorgio Agamben from Foucault's and Arendt's texts seem extremely useful for describing the Soviet system. Naturally I am not referring here to direct inspirations, but rather to the descriptive method and rhetoric that is capable of capturing the essence of the 'emergency state'. It is also irrelevant that Agamben's book is missing from the published 'bookshelf' of Krzysztof Wodiczko, this chapter's other protagonist.[12] That bookshelf contains many other very interesting texts, from Althusser, Arendt, Benjamin and Brecht, to Tocqueville, Turowski and Žižek. Agamben's ostensible absence, however, does not mean that he is missing from interpretations of the artist's work.[13] It has been frequently noted that a key place within Wodiczko's library is occupied by texts on ethics by Emmanuel Lévinas and by theorists of democracy (Claude Lefort), including those critical of liberal democracy who have developed the concept of radical democracy (Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau). Analysis of Wodiczko's work has often followed those paths. One could mention here one of the most significant interpretations of the artist by Rosalyn Deutsche,[14] or the catalogue of Wodiczko's 2005 Warsaw exhibition, edited by Andrzej Turowski, which opens with a text by Chantal Mouffe.[15] I do not intend to undermine this interpretative approach, negate the importance of ethics for Wodiczko's art, or question the role of ethics in the creation of radical democracy by mentioning Agamben. Just the opposite, I am arguing that by revealing mechanisms of contemporary biopolitics Wodiczko's art engages in a profound critique of a broadly understood contemporary system of power (a conception based on Foucault's model). This critique, which prompts the viewer to question liberal politics, is guided by a deeply ethical perspective based on the encounter with the Other and the equally important conviction that such critique is furthering the development of democracy. Agamben has provided me with a theoretical framework, no less significant than those furnished by the often mentioned Lévinas and Mouffe, which when applied to Krzysztof Wodiczko's work will, I hope, reveal its fundamental meanings.

However, we must remember that Krzysztof Wodiczko's art does not originate in thinking about biopolitics. If one considers as significant *Vehicle*, 1973, one of the artist's early works, then the genesis of his oeuvre must be sought within a certain type of avant garde tradition. Andrzej Turowski writes the following about *Vehicle:*

> Although built with an almost engineer-like precision, it was not characterized by technological perfection. In fact, it bore greater kinship to Vladimir Tatlin's fantastic *Letatlin* (1929–32) – the impractical, human-powered 'air-bicycle' Tatlin hoped would become an object of daily use by the masses – than the shiny surfaces and aerodynamic shapes of present-day high-speed vehicles. Tested on the streets of Warsaw – 'perfectly functional', one might say – it fulfilled its function in that the 'stationary movement' of its author, who walked up and down in the vehicle, produced the 'forward movement' of the entire vehicle. Through its allusion to function and progress, *Vehicle* was a caricatured version of both the grounded Icarus of Tatlin's utopia and the socially useful machines produced by the Bauhaus. One may well see in this work the origin of what was to become Wodiczko's primary ongoing focus: the critical project as artistic creation.[16]

Although Wodiczko approaches the engineering artistic utopias associated with Tatlin and the Russian Constructivists from an ironic perspective, this is not his only concern. His *Vehicle* moves in only one direction, forward. The direction of the artist's movement on the *Vehicle* does not impact its course. There is only one condition – the artist must move. And perhaps this is the ironic metaphor for the Constructivist utopias as well as historical dialectic: the direction of one's movement is irrelevant, since one always moves forward. This was the leading principle of the official ideological doctrine of dialectic materialism as well as of the historical Russian avant garde.

Wodiczko's later projects and conceptual vehicles, such as *Café-Vehicle*, *Platform-Vehicle* or *Podium-Vehicle*, which preceded the well-known *Homeless Vehicles* and *Poliscars*, should be viewed from a somewhat different perspective, suggested already by the 1972 *Vehicle,* namely that of an ironic political metaphor. They relate to a certain aspect of European culture by moving in response to spoken words, or more precisely in response to a certain type of political 'chatter'. *Café-Vehicle*, as the name suggests, invokes the topos of a European café, which functioned as a quasi-political institution. This was a place where arguing intellectuals met to comment on current events and spin political projects. This was also the case under communism, though such discussions were conducted in lowered voices. This made it more difficult for secret police agents at the neighbouring tables to conduct their surveillance. The latter often sat around cafes, 'just in case', to catch circulating opinions, usually critical of the regime. What this meant was that the communist regimes did not ignore the café as an oppositional institution, which continued the European

custom of political debate over a cup of coffee reaching into the nineteenth century. The other vehicles, *Platform-Vehicle* and *Podium-Vehicle*, referred to a different form of 'chatter': seemingly endless official political speeches. This unbearable practice, which currently survives only in China, North Korea and Cuba, forced thousands of inhabitants of the communist countries to listen to tirades that attempted to hide impoverished reality behind discourse filled with clichés. Six-hour speeches were not uncommon. Some of us still remember the outpourings of Władysław Gomułka, the First Secretary of the Polish Communist Party in the 1960s. As in the original *Vehicle*, here too, irrespective of what was being said, the vehicle moved forward in accordance with the principles of materialist dialectic. Wodiczko seemed to be suggesting, with a dose of irony, that the vehicle was moved not only by speeches made from the 'podium', but also by 'café gossip' and 'café opposition'.

Although those metaphors were created using the language of engineering utopia, Wodiczko's vehicles were not supposed to serve as models of the future world, as was the case with the classic avant garde, but as commentaries on a certain type of caricature of such a utopia. One could say that this 'engineering' dimension of Wodiczko's art was here driven not so much by practical considerations as by metaphoric and, above all, semantic ones, and as such has never left his sphere of interests. *Homeless Vehicles*, *Alien Staff* and *Porte-Parole Mouthpiece* also fit this tradition, although they are enriched with other levels of signification linked to biopolitics.

The biopolitical dimension of Wodiczko's art appears almost incidentally, sneaking in by the back door, in the work *References* shown at the Gallery Foksal in Warsaw and at Akumulatory 2 in Poznań in 1977. This was the first instance of a direct political statement in Wodiczko's work. From a technical standpoint the piece was rather modest; from a standpoint of meaning it was incredibly rich. The artist's intention, to a certain extent ironic, was to order the world ideologically with the aid of a line, which appeared earlier in his work. On this occasion he actually used three lines: horizontal (for social reality), vertical (for reality of power) and diagonal (for reality of art). The artist projected a series of slides showing images associated with the discourses describing and referring to each reality onto three different types of lines. For example, one of the slides projected on a horizontal line showed a line to a supermarket, an image that provoked general glee among those present. Long lines in front of stores selling basic groceries and consumer goods were a common sight during this period in Poland. They indicated shortages of food, the distribution of which was under the control of politicians. As we know from the history of the USSR, the Stalinist regime limited availability of food as a calculated and perfidious

strategy in subjugating Ukraine in the 1930s. Although the post-Stalinist administrations in Russia and other countries of Eastern Europe did not rely on such drastic biopolitical methods, through structural manoeuvring they did gain control over production and distribution of food, turning it into an instrument of power and hence an element of political strategy. The image of a line in front of a supermarket, which was greeted with smiles and even laughs, represented in a more or less intuitive way something more than a familiar image of a commonplace phenomenon found in any Polish city. It revealed the biopolitical mechanism of power.

Wodiczko's later works, or at least a significant portion of them, clearly moved in this direction. *Homeless Vehicles* broached those issues, since the problem of homelessness is by definition a problem of a 'naked life'. Those *Vehicles* revealed the consequences of the contemporary biopolitics' entanglement with the economy; they functioned as a metaphor for 'naked life' and simultaneously as a critique of exclusion. Wodiczko formulated the problem of 'naked life', or at least of one of the incarnations of the contemporary *homo sacer*, much more forcefully and directly in *Alien Staff* and *Porte-Parole Mouthpiece.* Those pieces represent more than a critique of immigration policies or the state's policy towards aliens; they address the condition of an alien in a broader, much more universal sense.

An immigrant in a contemporary world that only appears open, but is in fact defined by closely guarded borders, is treated a priori as *homo sacer* and as such faces enormous challenges. He is often held in refugee camps. In order to stay in a foreign country, he must go through a series of unpleasant interrogations, medical examinations to prove that he is healthy, and subject himself to various legal procedures. In reality, the officials only care about his 'naked life', which their measures and procedures politicize and hence incorporate into governing mechanisms. After all, the immigration rules that sort foreigners according to their country of origin, wealth, qualifications and other criteria are essentially political. It is the politics of immigration, which every country has, that determine who receives asylum, citizenship, temporary residence status or even a tourist visa, that define who and to what degree an individual is alien in a given society. Every immigrant is therefore treated as *homo sacer.* The immigration agencies are not interested in his history, identity, culture or anything that he brings with himself. They only pay attention to the likes of vaccination records, HIV tests, skin colour and criminal records. By creating *Alien Staff* and later *Porte-Parole Mouthpiece,* Wodiczko has attempted to reverse this bureaucratic process of alienation, to give back to the immigrants their identity, history and emotions. The artist often stresses that he is trying to

give immigrants a voice though his instruments. *Porte-Parole Mouthpiece* seems to be a machine that speaks on behalf of an immigrant, who often does not know the language of a given country. It answers standard questions posed by officials (who do not ask any other). But the language is not the only issue here; the main problem is how to give back to an immigrant his human status, in other words how to prevent him from being perceived within categories of 'naked life'. Of course, neither *Alien Staff* nor *Porte-Parole Mouthpiece* can change the fate of immigrants. They can, however, reveal their presence and societal status. Thanks to such instruments, which appear within symbolic circulation, we may find out about the fact that refugee camps exist; by listening to immigrants, we may find out how they have been treated by their country, which is also our country, whose government we elect and fund with our taxes. In reality those devices, which function as metaphors for one of the categories of contemporary *homo sacer*, are directed at us. They remind us about our responsibility towards the other. Because of this the potential of this art is enormous and its value significant.

It is worth saying a few words about one of the first projections created by Wodiczko in Poland, shown in Kraków in 1996. The artist used the tower of the old Town Hall in the Market Square (Rynek Główny), which 'spoke' with the voices of those who have been deprived of their ability to speak within the public space, such as victims of family violence, generally women, drug addicts, homosexuals, the homeless and those suffering from AIDS. In 1990s Poland, a country where virtually all the post-communist parties, not to mention those (most numerous) with right-wing, nationalist and clerical sympathies, had to pay attention to a conservative majority, the representatives of the groups speaking from the tower functioned on the margins of the society, and in many instances beyond them. They were excluded from the official discourse filled with references to so-called traditional family values. The tower gave them an opportunity to speak up and remind others of their existence. The selection of the location and the structure was also highly significant. The town or market square is the centre of any European city; it is a plaza where merchants used to gather to sell their goods, but which was also a meeting place for citizens. It is a traditional European space of the agora. On the other hand, the Town Hall represents the city government: not that of a prince or a king, but a government that represented the citizens before the monarchs. A tower, which is a traditional European symbol of power (marking a church or a castle), here identified the power of the city and of a form of self-government that represented the inhabitants' interests to the sovereign, prince or bishop. It was from this place, in one of the oldest Polish cites, the country's medieval capital, that those citizens

49 Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Cracow Projection*, Cracow, 1996.

excluded by the contemporary power discourse spoke. They were excluded by the discourse created by the highly influential Catholic Church and the political establishment. Those gathered at the market square heard the voice of their co-citizens, who were never mentioned in the media, Sunday sermons or political speeches delivered during electoral rallies. They heard their voice and saw their hands, in a similar way to Wodiczko's later Hiroshima project. They did not see the faces of the actors/participants, a fact that, together with the atmosphere of the night, enhanced the expression and impact of the projection. Above all, here for the first time the artist used video. Because the projection of moving images onto architecture proved so much more suggestive and effective than static images,[17] from this point Wodiczko began to use this format in his other projects.

Commenting on another project created in Tijuana, Mexico, in 2001, whose protagonists were maltreated and terrorized women, the artist noted:

> their chance for survival rests with their ability to transform themselves into a political subject, into someone who plays a key role within the city's scene. The political mission creates a new perspective on their experience and gives hope. A person detaches herself from her own tragedy and sees it from a societal perspective.[18]

Returning to Agamben's terms, one could say that through the act of speech revealed in Kraków, within this particular, uncanny architectonic agora, 'naked life' was transformed into political life, or the life of a citizen.

Writing about this transformation, about art's role in the birth of political consciousness, we touch on an interesting paradox. Agamben argues that the birth of biopolitics coincides with the birth of Western democracy, with the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.* Its opposite are the literal and metaphorical concentration camps, places, whether in China or in Tijuana, that provide a concentration of cheap labour. On the other hand, Wodiczko reveals in his fascinating project that politicization of the 'naked life', its transformation into political subject or citizen, becomes the condition for emancipation and the method for defence of human rights, an opportunity for ending persecution, humiliation and violence. This paradox defines the path for the conception or rather utopia of art that Wodiczko embraces, utopia understood as a refusal to accept a particular 'place'. As the artist has stated: utopia is not a 'no place', but rather 'no! place'.[19]

Such an approach to artistic practice defines it as political; it is the work of a citizen on behalf of democracy. Here, as I mentioned earlier, meet two

different understandings of reality: Agamben's 'biopolitical' perspective and Mouffe's conception of radial democracy (see the Introduction above). The latter, which is very often invoked by Wodiczko, operates within the framework of 'agonistic democracy'.

Chantal Mouffe argues that radical democracy, or democracy expanded and built on the theoretical bases that give everyone opportunity to participate in the political process, has to have agonistic character; it is, therefore, agonistic democracy.[20] The term *agon* referred in ancient Greece to a contest, completion or rivalry. In the spirit of that source, the project of agonistic democracy is based on two premises, both critical of liberal democracy: firstly that such a project undermines the principle of consensus not only because this principle functions as the *quasi* basis of the system, but also because it neutralizes or attempts to eliminate conflict (antagonism), which in effect leads to suppression of pluralism; secondly, and both simultaneously and paradoxically, liberalism, which contrary to its declarations cannot manage antagonism, engenders tension between 'us' and 'them'. Mouffe argues that such antagonism, hidden within consensus, ruptures liberalism. In its place she proposes acceptance of conflict, disagreement or conceptual rivalry as a necessary feature of constituted democracy. She argues against suppression of conflict in the name of 'common good' and for its maintenance on the surface as something that cannot be eliminated. However, the participants in a conflict should not treat each other as enemies who should be destroyed, but as 'opponents' against whom one must compete. This way 'antagonism' will be transformed into 'agonism' and a relationship of hostility into one of rivalry. In his art, Wodiczko follows this path. He clearly articulates this idea:

> aliens . . . want to become citizens, democratic subjects; they do not want to be exclusively objects of political manipulation. They want to be integrated into society and to contribute to the dynamics of democracy, which rely on disagreement. Basically, that's the only thing that matters. This comes together with hope . . . for agonistic democracy, derived from the word *agon* as a point of competition in speaking of truth, or even shouting down one another.

Further, the artist connects this perspective with an ethical position. He states:

> democracy . . . arises when Lévinas's ethical theories are connected with political theories of Chantal Mouffe, agonistic democracy with ethical,

> asymmetry of ethics myself-for-others (other as someone who is more important than I), which is in constant conflict, with the symmetry of egalitarian [read: liberal – PP] politics of myself-as-an equal-of-the-others. In order for the rights to be equitable, they have to grant the other greater rights, they must treat him as someone more important . . . This is similar from the agonistic perspective: in the first place, that which is most bitter and difficult to hear and say should be spoken. This does not mean that there should only be constant disagreement, constant discussions, but rather passionate competition in protest, in demands, fearless critical speech and giving witness to truth.[21]

This 'truth' refers to the 'naked life' of the others, to the biopolitics of the liberal world. Wodiczko gives it witness though his highly precise art practice, which is based in the tradition of the avant garde and in contemporary technology. Collision of those two areas creates notable outcomes. Here, and especially in the artist's later works, technology is an essential tool without which there would be no art; there would be only an idea, no artwork. Technology is a necessary component of this art practice. However, the artist's attitude towards technology is more complex than its use as a mere tool. Wodiczko not only rejects the conservative critique of technology with its murky philosophy of 'nature' and even more questionable metaphysics of a 'true experience of craftsmanship' (Heidegger).[22] He maintains that only technology provides opportunities for communication, breaking through alienation, forming contacts; only technology can transform an alien into a political subject in our society. It is clear that the artist is close here to the utopia of the Russian avant garde, towards which he initially seemed to have had an ironic attitude. Moreover, it is he who is realizing, to a certain extent, the dreams of the avant garde. With the aid of his 'fantastic' technology, the artist creates spectacles that have performative character. He creates a work-performance though technology, which is not only a symbol, but also an instrument of modernity. After all, his projects have none of the 'humour' of Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*, which was supposed to be a massive construction of steel, but remained a small-scale wooden model. They are quite literally monumental. The avant garde of the October Revolution could only dream about that which is realized here in his art. It could not join the critical and the utopian impulses, since in its practice it was moving more and more in the direction first of Leninist, then of Stalinist propaganda. Wodiczko reveals that this tradition can still live on and can still be effective, provided that it engages in a critique of power, rather than serves as its instrument. This constitutes honest art, whereas the

work of Alexander Rodchenko, especially from the period of his collaboration with the magazine *USSR under Construction,* where he published propaganda 'photo reportages' from the construction of the White Sea Canal, compromised the utopia of the 'brave new world'. The White Sea Canal, later referred to as the Gulag Archipelago, was a place where 'workers' were supposed to have laboured to the accompaniment of an orchestra for the glory of Joseph Stalin. Using the tradition of the avant garde, Wodiczko shifts its meaning from propaganda for the victorious Bolshevik regime towards ethics and solidarity with the victims.

On the other hand, from an ethical rather than political perspective, the tradition of the avant garde in Wodiczko's work seems problematic, since ethics (rather than morality) play in it a key role. A number of authors have written on this subject;[23] the artist himself has addressed this issue on numerous occasions. We know, therefore, beyond any doubt that Emmanuel Lévinas's philosophy, which is critical towards Kant's universalism, defines an ethical perspective close to the artist's own position. Lévinas describes an encounter of the 'self' with the 'other' and a view of him ('his face') as someone who is more important than 'I', as someone whose presence challenges me and also makes me realize my own 'otherness'. This is ethics of the primacy of otherness over 'selfsameness', ethics devoid of egoism and moralizing, and, above all, ethics of humility. Avant garde, or to be more precise Russian avant garde, which in other ways is close to Wodiczko, was far removed from such humility. On the contrary, it was a formation defined by arrogance and confidence stemming from certainty that it owned the 'truth' of revolution and history. The man, or Lévinas's 'other – face', represented for the Russian artists value only in so far as he was not other, but similar to them, and acted within the historic Leninist project of *żiznostroitelstwo* ('life-building'). If he did not, the other was 'nobody', someone on the historic margins, a type of *homo sacer.* The political powers, with which the avant garde wanted to identify, and to which, in the end, it fell prey, left no doubt as to what were their ethics. This type of gaze at the 'face' has nothing in common with the ethics of Krzysztof Wodiczko, based in Lévinas's philosophy, and the role that those ethics play in his art.

It appears that Wodiczko's art has a very complex relationship to the avant-garde tradition. Its utopia recalls only to a certain extent his utopia. While he conceives it in critical ('not! place') terms, the avant garde understood it within absolutist ones. His fascination with technology and its role in shaping social relations also serves something else. It is grounded in ethics, rather than historicism conceived as an objective process of social development, in which

the avant garde wanted to participate. Finally, Wodiczko is close to Benjamin's history of victims, while the avant garde was part (contrary, as we now know, to its own survival interests) of the history of the victors. Wodiczko proclaims his solidarity with the victim, whereas the Russian avant garde proclaimed its solidarity with the regime.

eight

Gender after the Fall of the Wall

'Hello, my name is Kai Kaljo, I'm an Estonian artist': so Kai Kaljo introduces herself in English in a short video entitled *A Loser*, 1997. We then hear a laugh from an invisible audience, in accordance with conventions established by television sitcoms. Unperturbed, the artist adds: 'I weigh 92 kilos' (it seems from the film that she weighs much less) and again we hear laughter; 'I am 37 years old and still live with my mother' – again laughter; 'I look married' – laugh; 'I am studying at the Academy of Fine Arts and I earn 90 dollars per month' – longer laughter; 'I think', she adds, 'that freedom is one of the most important things for an artist' – loud laughter; 'I am happy', she concludes – again laughter, but this time she also smiles, suggesting that the idea of 'being an Estonian artist' and at the same time 'being happy' seems somehow rather funny.

A year later, in 1998, Hungarian artist Kriszta Nagy put up on a billboard a photograph of herself in black underwear, resembling an advertisement tinged with a large dose of eroticism. The image was accompanied by a text that was rather surprising in this context: 'I am a contemporary painter'. The Hungarian language, unlike English, allows for identification of gender in nouns. The artist could have written 'I am a contemporary (female) painter', but she did not. Instead, she chose the male form of the word 'painter' (in the original: 'Kortárs festőművész vagyok'). I think that by avoiding identification of gender, she wanted to stress the significance of this statement. The word 'painter' seems much more 'serious' than 'female painter'. Grounded in everyday linguistic practice, the masculine form identifies the speaking subject much more powerfully with a social position, profession and cultural tradition. Moreover, the juxtaposition of such a statement with a stereotype of advertising eroticism emphasized the rhetoric contrast. This simple presentation has rather complicated significance. It was certainly provocative in a way, but not because of the erotic content, or because this erotic content was presented in an apparent advertisement, a undoubtedly commercial medium. It was provocative because the image, associated with outdoor advertisements and erotically attractive models, was juxtaposed with a personal declaration, associated with

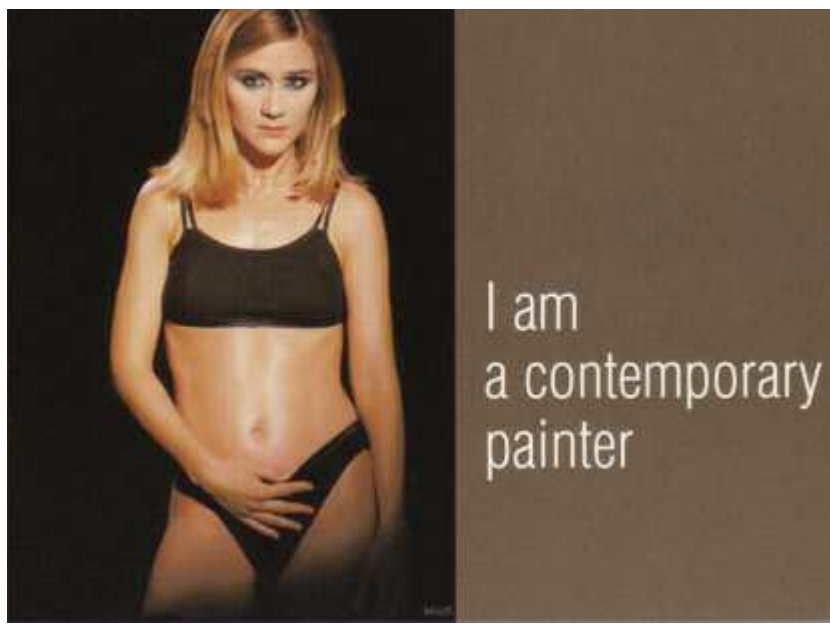
50 Kai Kaljo, *Loser* (detail), 1997.

the tradition of high culture. The words 'I am a painter' are being spoken by an attractive model, dressed in black underwear and photographed in a somewhat suggestive pose. The juxtaposition of those two orders, moreover within a public medium (a billboard) not only breaks conventions of rhetoric narration, but also – and perhaps above all – juggles gender stereotypes. On the one hand, there is nothing strange in presentation of an attractive model in an underwear advertisement. The statement 'I am a contemporary painter' is also not that unusual of itself. However, the linking of those two stereotypes breaches not only common identification of gender, but also cultural identity of painting as a profession and its social status.

A somewhat later work, *Super Mother* from the series *Domestic Games*, 2002, by the Polish artist Elżbieta Jabłońska, was shown on billboards in Polish cities as part of the Outdoor Gallery organized by the advertising firm AMS. This project seemed to promote the artist through a wide distribution of her works throughout the city. The image depicts a young woman holding a small boy on her lap, in a pose that recalls the motif of the Virgin and Child. In different places on the poster appear the words 'washing, cleaning, cooking'. The woman is dressed in a Superman costume, a comic hero blessed with great strength and physical prowess, who uses his uncommon attributes to aid

those who need help. The connection of goodness with strength, of using physical prowess in the (effective) struggle against evil, inflames the imagination of the young, especially boys. Certainly a mother dressed in a Superman costume would cause a certain amount of confusion in a child sitting on her lap; here is a mother, not only associated with 'domestic games', but also with warmth and safety, dressed as an indestructible male hero, whom all small boys want to imitate. However, boys do not want to emulate mothers; they want to follow models provided by men, their strong and attractive heroes. That is why they are drawn in their imagination to professions such as policeman or firefighter, which are identified with integrity and strength. A mother dressed as Superman could succeed in entering a boy's 'male' imagination, but not with her female attributes, towards which he has, one could say, an external relationship, but instead with the male ones that impress him.

Jabłońska's poster goes beyond those meanings. If the game of 'dressing up' was directed towards the child, it would have had a private character. Displayed on billboards in the street and in art galleries (a different context that affects its meaning), the work acquires completely different significance. It becomes a cultural commentary not so much on 'domestic' but on 'gender' games. A woman dressed as Superman, smuggled into the public sphere, becomes the Super Mother of the work's title and at the same time



51 Kriszta Nagy, *I am a Contemporary Painter*, 1998.

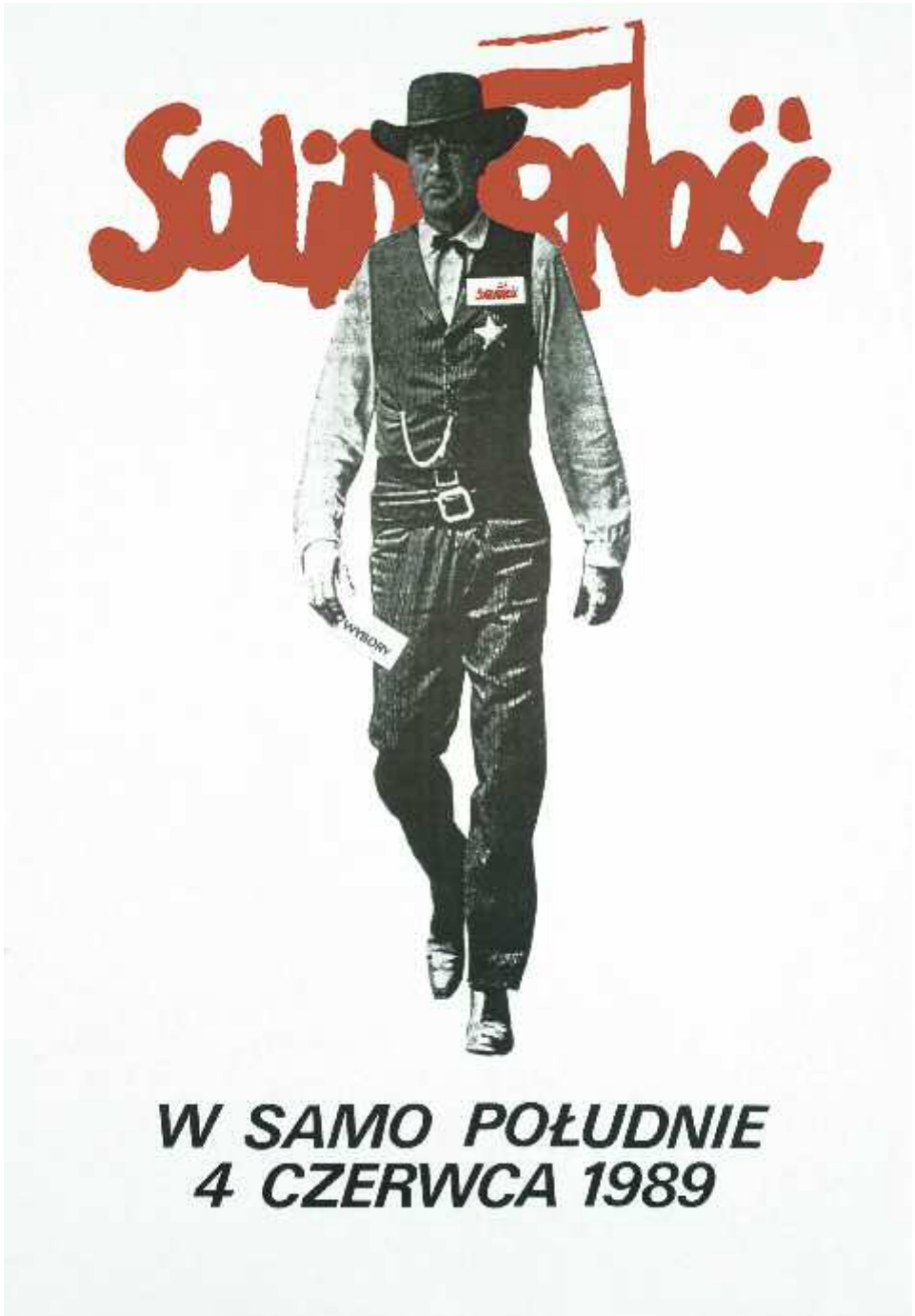
52 Elżbieta Jabłońska, *Home Games – Supermother*, 2002.

undermines a number of stereotypes. One of them is of course the stereotype of masculinity, as well as (by implication) of femininity; another is the stereotype of representation, that of the 'Virgin and Child', a sacred image; yet another is the stereotype of a mother, no longer holy, like the Mother of God, but 'ordinary,' preoccupied with raising children, cooking, washing, cleaning and other domestic chores assigned to her by traditional, socially defined gender roles; finally, there is the stereotype of Superman himself, associated with qualities such as masculinity and power. However, it is worth keeping in mind something that those who saw Jabłońska's poster on the Polish streets did not know, or at least most of them did not know, namely that the poster featured the artist herself.[1] In addition to all those functions, the poster dealt with the issue of identity. It was saying: 'It is I, the artist, dressed as Superman, who is a Super Mother.' That is why I am raising this work in this context, together with the others. In all of them, we are dealing with a particular manifestation of female identity confronting a masculine world. In all three instances, we are addressing identifying strategies of women artists living in post-communist Europe, where, as noted by Ewa Grigar, the problem of female identity has became not only one of the most basic, but also the most popular, and perhaps even the most common element of art orientated towards feminism.[2]

It is abundantly clear that we live in a world of male culture, irrespective of the considerable success achieved in many fields by feminism. The problem of post-communist societies rests in the fact that they seem to be much more phallocentric than developed Western societies. This structure is determined, among others, by the pre-1989 tradition of anti-communist opposition, which

ignored the feminist problematic and was thoroughly masculine in character. Elżbieta Matynia makes interesting observations concerning this issue. She analysed an iconic Polish political poster, produced in 1989, that urged people to vote for the Solidarity Citizens' Electoral Committee in the first (only partly) free elections in communist Europe. The elections were a result of the so-called Round Table Agreement that reached a compromise between the opposition and the communist regime. The poster used an image of Gary Cooper from the famous western *High Noon*, 1952. The figure, dressed in a manner typical of the genre, wears above his sheriff's star, on a lapel of his waistcoat, a very characteristic 'Solidarity' pin. Below a text proclaims: 'at high noon – 4 June 1989'. This was supposed to mean that a decisive confrontation between the opposition (identified with Solidarity) and the enemy, or the communist system, was coming. And that is exactly what happened. Solidarity, which constituted the core of the Citizens' Electoral Committee, a coalition that gathered almost the entire political opposition, won the 'showdown'. At the same time, as Matynia notes, the imagery of the poster suggests that this defined the masculine character par excellence of the post-communist transformation. This observation is confirmed by public opinion surveys cited by the author, which revealed that among many possible identifications, gender appeared in last place.[3] The masculine basis of the democratic political transformation is not only evident in Poland, but throughout the former Eastern Europe and may very well be one of the main characteristics of the post-communist societies.

As a matter of fact, when one surveys the intellectual landscape of the former anti-communist opposition in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, it is difficult to find there any clear interest in the problem of gender. Within the art context, the situation is significantly more complicated, since there were female as well as male artists who dealt with the feminist problematic, sometimes in a radical way.[4] Examples of such attitudes are relatively easy to find in the works of artists such as Marina Abramović, Geta Bratescu, Sanja Iveković, Natalia LL [Lach-Lachowicz], Ewa Partum, Jana Želibská and many others. But this art was not always accompanied by ideological and political declarations inscribed into feminist theory and politics. Often what was visible (for instance in Natalia LL's *Consumption Art* of 1972) was associated with a general problematic of neo-avant garde art theory, rather than with feminism. The reasons for this must be sought in the complexity of Eastern European art of that period, in the lack of available theoretical instruments, as well as an intellectual climate inhospitable to that problematic, something I have already mentioned. Another basic cause of resistance to



53 Tomasz Sarnecki, *High Noon* (election poster), 1989, Poster Museum, Wilanów.

those types of declarations was a widespread aversion to leftist discourse within which Western feminism was formulated during this period and which reminded inhabitants of communist Europe too much of the official language of the local regimes. Yugoslavia, whose intellectual circles seemed much more closely connected with the artistic culture of the West rather than those of Russia or Central Europe, was to a certain extent an exception to this norm. Moreover, for the same reasons political engagement and ideological critique in art were also treated with a certain distrust. The oppositional character was associated more closely with the notion of a work's autonomy than its political engagement. Nevertheless, irrespective of this discursive spectrum of the artistic culture and a number of ideological and political barriers, it must be emphasized that art and artists assumed a leading role in addressing gender problematic in the former Eastern Bloc. In this respect, they not only distinguished themselves from the anti-communist dissident movements, but also outpaced political thinkers, who showed themselves to be extraordinarily conservative in this area. This was the main source of a significant impulse driving a later revision of the attitude towards gender problematic, female and male identity, as well as social mechanisms aimed at repression of sexuality and, connected with it, identity politics. One could say that politicians, including those who were quite liberal and critical, were 'left for dust' by the artists. Unfortunately they were the ones defining the political, ideological and intellectual post-Wall landscape and the key points of reference of the transformation period, something that is also mentioned by Matynia. Therefore they have been ultimately responsible for the lack of understanding and sympathy within the society for the problematic of women's emancipation, equal status, repressive policies within the job market, and economic as well as political disadvantaging of women, sexual minorities and the entire gamut of issues linked to gender.

Such a state of affairs has inspired considerable interest in this problematic within the new, critical opposition. Those circles include male and female artists, female art critics and art historians engaged in revisions of history. The strategy adopted after the fall of communism and the return of freedom of speech was mainly oppositional in character and resembled the Western feminist strategy of the 1970s. This opposition naturally appeared to have two wings: one was developing essentializing attitudes and attempting to define 'femininity'; the other was critical, confrontational and ready for a fight.

The works of Ilona Németh, such as for instance *Polyfunctional Woman*, 1996, provide one of the examples of the first attitude, despite certain critical features directed mainly against male expectations concerning female sexuality.

In the piece, the viewer is asked to lie down on a large, red sofa and, in that position, listen to a woman's voice, taped in intimate situations. In reality, one could say that the artist is more interested in defending women's intimacy than in analysing male expectations. A work produced by Németh a year later, *Private Gynaecological Surgery*, 1997, pursues this trajectory even more directly. It consists of three gynaecological examination chairs, each covered with a different soft, partly organic material: rabbit fur, velvet and moss. Another example is provided by the work of Egle Rakauskaite, who in her early and best-known performance project, *Expulsion from the Paradise*, 1995, first realized as a 'living sculpture', then recorded as a video in 1997, touched on the problem of femininity, or to be more precise 'girlhood', a state of virginity (the paradise of the title) that precedes the encounter with reality marked by experience of gender difference and phallocentric structures. The artist showed twelve young girls dressed in white (the symbol of virginity), who were connected to each other by their braids. This symbolized their solidarity in the encounter with the world, defined, for obvious reasons, as male. In Poland, Izabella Gustowska, who for many years has been making very subtle video projects, and who once argued against their connection with feminist ideology, has developed this type of reflection on the subject of femininity on a broad, one could even say monumental scale, while maintaining delicacy or even intimacy of the message, as in her 2007 project *Live is a Story*, which appropriated the exhibition space of the National Museum in Poznań.

There are also many examples of the confrontational attitude. One could mention here a work of the Czech artist Veronika Bromová, *Views*, 1996, which depicts a naked woman with spread legs revealing her vagina. The piece refers to Courbet's famous painting *Origin of the World*, 1866, painted as a private commission and intended for private contemplation. Bromová reveals the mechanism of the obscene male gaze by not showing the labia. Instead, the image reveals the muscle hidden by the skin, in a way recalling anatomical illustrations. In Poland, where the political context is to a large extent defined by the Roman Catholic Church, Katarzyna Górna produced a series of photographs referring to Christian iconography, and in particular, the motif of the Virgin and Child (*Madonnas*, 1995–2001).

The confrontational strategy is sometimes inscribed into much lighter forms and invokes the always effective method of relying on humour, especially when dealing with the subject of male sex appeal. A couple of artists, Anetta Mona-Chisa and Lucia Tkáčová, have problematized heterosexual relations and expectation associated with certain images and words in a rather amusing way, unmasking in the process masculine culture. Although

the title of their work, *Erotic Video*, 2004, suggests that we will encounter erotic content, all we see is a static image of a sex shop. After a few minutes, the two artists exit the shop and the film ends. In another piece, *Porn Video*, 2004, we witness a series of erotic scenes, but in a very unexpected form. The artists imitate heterosexual sex taken from a pornographic repertoire clearly aimed at arousing male pleasure. They reproduce movements, gestures, close-ups and sounds typical of such films, but do so while entirely clothed. A completely different approach to male sexuality, likely problematic for male viewers, is presented in several video projects in which the two artists discuss the sexual attractiveness of various men. In *Late Night Video*, 2006, they evaluate politicians (the most attractive appears to be Silvio Berlusconi); in *Seductive Verwertung*, 2005, and *Home Video*, 2005, world-famous curators and art critics; in *Holiday Video*, 2004, figures in the small, one could even say intimate art scene of Bratislava. They are all evaluated and discussed with respect to specific conditions – 'in return for what?', 'for how much?', and 'for what services?' – under which the interlocutors would be willing to go to bed with them, ignoring their numerous (also physical) faults. Of course, one could assume that Tony Blair, George W. Bush, Jacques Chirac

54 Anetta Mona-Chisa and Lucia Tkáčova, *Dialectics of Subjection # 4 (Late Night Video)* (detail), 2006.

55 Lenka Klodová, *Dolls*, 2001.

and Gerhard Schröder are not familiar with the work of Anetta Mona-Chisa and Lucia Tkáčova and therefore would not be concerned by the artists' evaluation. The response of curators and critics, however, especially those from Bratislava, could be quite different. Here male egos could be subjected to a difficult test. After all, no man (or at least very few) would want to hear themselves being described, especially in public, as unattractive, sexually off-putting, as someone with whom sex could end in disaster, and that not even a promise of a solo show or significant article on the front page of a major newspaper would be sufficient to warrant going to bed with him.

Lenka Klodová also plays with erotic expectations. In her work *Folkwomen*, 2001, we see female models whose faces suggest that they are

experiencing sexual ecstasy at the moment when the photograph was taken. We see only their faces and hands circling erotically sensitive body parts. However, we do not see the bodies themselves, since the artist has 'clothed' them in colourful and richly decorated folk costumes. Klodová has painted appliqués over pornographic images, thereby 'covering' their erotic meaning. In another work, *Dolls*, 2001, she proposes a 'do-it-yourself' approach for achieving a similar result. Here we see photographs of naked, suggestively posed models, whom we can dress using various cut-out 'costumes' provided by the artist. In yet another piece, *Locker*, 2002, Klodová takes the opposite approach. She realizes male fantasies by introducing into typical workers' lockers, which are often decorated with photographs of naked women, life models or (in another version) life-size mannequins. Moreover, at a certain point Klodová completed a series of works dealing with pregnancy and maternity, typically female states, by ascribing them to men. She photographed men looking pregnant or assuming poses associated with breast feeding. One of her works, linked closely with presentation of one's identity, imitates a Czech personal identity card. In the place where one would normally find a face, however, there is an image of a female torso (from neck to upper thighs). The artist suggests that the body, especially its erotically inscribed parts – breasts and genitals – function as a substitute for female identity within male culture. Men, and therefore culture, associate everything with sex and sexual anatomy. In 2000 and 2001 Klodová published two pamphlets, *Birch* and

56 Lenka Klodová, *Locker*, 2002.

Chimneys: in the first we see photographs of the branches and trunk of birch trees arranged to suggest vaginas; in the second, chimneys are in an obvious way associated with phallic forms.

Both attitudes belong within the framework of oppositional strategy, and as such are inscribed within a broader political project aiming at women's emancipation. Of course, this follows the historic tradition within which, according to Griselda Pollock, feminism was and continues to be ideological in character. It is a political movement engaged in the struggle against exclusion and for emancipation and equality, and not an academic methodology confined to the universities and museums.[5] However, Pollock also notes a significant shift in emphasis within feminist art of the last few years. The oppositional strategy seems to have moved into the background and has been replaced by a different one, deconstructive rather than confrontational in character. This new strategy is concerned with destabilizing gender differences, rather than producing 'dissimilarity' or undermining phallocentric hierarchies. Pollock writes: 'The art made by women may in effect not be about Woman but about that space of difference, dissidence, diversity, and rupture.'[6] It seems that this attitude is also visible in the art of the former Eastern Europe, something that in effect points to another very contemporary aspect of the culture of this geo-political area and simultaneously provides an opportunity for more extensive discussion of the post-communist condition. In this context I would like to examine several works by the Polish artist Katarzyna Kozyra. I will be dealing with two versions of her *Bathhouse* project ('women's' from 1997 and 'men's' from 1999), as well as a series of performances and videos produced since 2003 under the shared title *In Art Dreams Come True.*

Hanna Wróblewska begins her essay on Katarzyna Kozyra with a remarkably apt statement: 'I am someone else.'[7] The problem of Kozyra's art is, to paraphrase the title of Rosi Braidotti's book, the problem of a 'nomadic subject'. Agata Jakubowska, writing about a different Polish artist, Alina Szapo - cznikow, notes that a 'homeless', nomadic, itinerant subject reveals the basic position of a woman in the world, which is by definition male-centric.[8] Therefore this is not a stable subject in any sense of that word, including, as we will see later, gender; it is a 'performative' subject, to use Judith Butler's terms. Kozyra has been very successful in implementing the strategy of problematizing gender differences proposed by Pollock.

The two versions of the *Bathhouse* project were created separately, with a certain time lag and in relation to one another: namely *Men's Bathhouse* functioned in a way as a complement and also an answer to the questions posed by the earlier *Women's Bathhouse.* The artist suggested a set of meanings,

above all related to the problem of gender in the context of undefined subject, that emerged from the two works in a conversation with Christopher Blase and Artur Żmijewski.[9] In the first *Bathhouse*, Kozyra entered the women's bathhouse located at the Gellert Hotel in Budapest with a hidden camera. She filmed the old and the young, the attractive and the unattractive women she found there. Similar to her earlier work, *Olympia*, 1996, here too Kozyra was making art historic references to paintings such as Ingres' *Turkish Bath* or Rembrandt's *Susanna and the Elders*. In general, Kozyra notes that while working at the women's bathhouse she realized how much art history conditioned our 'looking' at women's bodies.[10] It is also worth noting, as a number of art historical studies have pointed out, that such seeing is phallocentric. By entering the space of a women's bathhouse, the artist took on a male role, despite the fact that she herself is a woman; she was secretly looking at, observing, seeing bodies of (other) women from what could be identified as a male perspective. However, the women in the video do not display themselves or pose. They are entirely self-involved: they wash and dry themselves, move around the bathhouse, rest, exercise and talk with one another. They behave as if they were not observed (by a man). In general it seems that they are not interested in the bodies of other women, just their own. It is the artist who gives this scene the character of a performance. Equipped with a 'male eye', the eye of an observer, she situates this seeing within the cultural frame of a phallocentric structure. She not only mentions this but also refers what she sees to well-known paintings. Of course, the bodies themselves break the canon of art historic aesthetics; they are not nude (even though that is how they are seen), but very obviously naked.

Kozyra is aware of this confusion and of paradoxes in which vision is implicated, of what one could call certain type of dialectics of representation. That is because the hidden camera does not provide a solution to the problem. The artist had to confront the fact that she could not reject the culture of vision, its phallocentric regime, even though, in a biological sense, she herself is a woman. In the other video, *Men's Bathhouse*, she attempted to approach the problem from a different perspective: as a woman 'dressed' as a man. Wearing a fake penis, she entered the male bathhouse in order to make another film with a hidden camera, and, one could say, thereby take a revenge on culture. Of course, already in *Women's Bathhouse* the question raised by Hanna Wróblewska, 'who am I?', has already appeared. Am I a woman taking on the male role of an observer, one inscribed into male culture of vision? Or am I a man embodied in female biology? This ambivalence of 'I am someone else' appeared even more emphatically in the video *Male Bathhouse*.

Not only from the technical, but also the psychological and cultural perspective, Kozyra's decision to create this work was rather unusual and produced interesting results. When comparing the two version of the *Bathhouse* (since the works themselves suggest such a comparison), we will notice certain differences. First of all the character of the space is quite different; it is much more decorative in the men's bathhouse. While the space of the women's bathhouse is simple, the men's is richly ornamental. Although this detail is significant, it relates to a lesser extent to the issues discussed here, and more to the gendered character of the architectural tradition of such structures. As far as the behaviour of men is concerned, they certainly have reasons for behaving differently than women. Irrespective of where they are, in whatever social situation they find themselves, they are always observed since they themselves create the culture of vision. One can see in the video that many men observe, looking around, sitting 'without any purpose' as they scan their surroundings. They are not preoccupied with themselves, in the way that the women were in the women's bathhouse, who were not aware that they were being observed, since other women (conditioned by cultural roles) are not supposed to look. There is another far-reaching observation, made among others by Izabela Kowalczyk, that the men in the male bathhouse not only observe, but also make themselves available for observation, or to be more precise, they present themselves, since being in male company they know that they are being observed. The author identifies a trap that ensnares the men. It is a trap of power. Kowalczyk writes that men 'are the observers as well as the observed. They pose, transform their bodies into objects for looking to a much greater extent than the women shown at the bathhouse. One could say that men are subjected to a much more normative power than women.'[11] In other words, men, irrespective of whether they find themselves in an open or closed space, behave the same way, as if they were being observed. This intuition and simultaneously a difference in the behaviour of men and women is confirmed by the artist who says: 'with women [in the bathhouse, in comparison to an open place] one sees a significant difference in behaviour; with men not.'[12] However, what I noticed was the fact that men, much more frequently than women, covered their genitals. Most often the only male genitalia visible in *Men's Bathhouse* is the fake penis worn by Kozyra, who unlike the bathing men, wears the bathing apron in a way that covers her rear but reveals her (fake) penis. This seems significant. The men know that they are in a public place, and therefore, that they are observed, since other men are present whose role is to observe. In general, it is not customary to reveal one's genitalia in public. On the other hand, women, who

think that they are not being observed (there are no men), do not cover themselves in the same way. In other words, they do not see the bathhouse as a public space where they would be subjected to the gaze. Kowalczyk concludes that they treat this place more like a 'bathroom than a bathhouse'.[13]

Therefore Kozyra, biologically a woman but performatively a man, since she is equipped with a penis, a male attribute, takes on a male role and a phallic function. By this, the fake penis is transformed into a phallus. Is it, however, a fake phallus? In my opinion the video avoids this question, and by avoiding suggests that perhaps it has always been 'fake', dependent on a culture that is, by definition, phallocentric. That is why the artist at the women's bathhouse, even though she did not have a 'fake' penis, de facto played a phallic role.

The problem of 'I am someone else' appears in a much more complex way in the last of the selected works, the series *In Art Dreams Come True*, 2003–. From the beginning it comprised a number of performances and videos in which the artist assumed various roles, including a fairytale character, opera singer, a cheerleader for a male sports team and a reincarnation of Lou Salomé. Two pieces from the series are particularly important for us, since they deal with gender transgression in a particularly spectacular way. One is a striptease performance at a birthday party for the artist's friend, the Berlin-based drag queen Gloria Viagra (*Tribute to Gloria Viagra*, 2005), the other a performance and a film (*Il Castrato*, 2006, 2007).

In the first instance, during the birthday celebration organized at the Berlin club Big Eden, Kozyra, impersonating Gloria Viagra in dress and behaviour, begins to undress imitating a professional stripper. When she is finally fully naked, a fact that provokes an enthusiastic response from a mostly gay audience, she is revealed as a man with uncovered genitalia. In the next move, she 'takes off' her penis, revealing herself as a woman. The action of the film *Il Castrato* is more dramatic. It also takes place in front of a gay audience. A crowd enters the stage; among them are Gloria Viagra and Maestro, Kozyra's singing coach (Grzegorz Pitułej). At a certain moment, the artist is undressed and in a rather theatrical fashion castrated. This act is greeted with expressions of horror from the audience. After the castration, now as a 'castrato', Kozyra sings Schubert's *Ave Maria* and then, accompanied by the audience's applause, she is carried offstage triumphally. Harald Fricke has summed up the entire project:

> Unlike with drag shows, the aim of Katarzyna Kozyra's *In Art Dreams Come True* is not parody, but getting completely carried away in the

> drapes of the Other. The opera diva, the dominatrix, the cheerleader, the castrate – every identity is negotiable. These opulent stagings bring about what Judith Butler refers to vis-à-vis gender identities as 'performative subversion', as instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. *In Art Dreams Come True* enables every person involved to take a position in the twilight zone of mixed gender[s]. As an opera diva Katarzyna Kozyra shares indeed a divine power: the deceptive equality between male and female.[14]

Performative, rather than biological gender, to stay with Judith Butler's terminology, or negotiated gender, clearly provokes the statement 'I am someone else'. The problem, however, does not rest with what role the artist adopts, but with whom she pulls into the sphere of reception-observation. If looking is a male prerogative by definition, and if art is supposed to subvert it, then art must redefine the viewer by noticing his/her uncertainty and hesitation. Kozyra is trying to confront this head on, at least in the performances described here, by staging her performances in front of a gay audience, which is itself struggling with the problematic of gender identity.

57 Katarzyna Kozyra, *Il Castrato* (detail), 2006, 2007.

Moreover, the main figure in that audience is Gloria Viagra, a drag queen, who functions as a point of reference for a deconstructed visual perception. Gloria Viagra and the public of gay clubs and festivals, which serves as another example of a performative strategy of gender identity and 'nomadic subjectivity', seems to provide Kozyra with an opportunity to develop her strategy of problematizing gender difference within a sphere of visual culture and to move beyond the enchanted circle of male vision with which she struggled in her earlier works.

The question that must be posed now addresses the historicity of such a strategy; it is a question concerning 'gender after the Wall'. We should enquire as to what extent the works cited here that problematize gender difference respond to this issue. I am not concerned here with a simply juxtaposition of this work with the frame of a post-communist condition, or discovering the post-communist genesis of the performative strategy of gender identity and nomadic subjectivity in the art of Kozyra and other female artists. Of course, one could trace such elements in some examples of feminist art, in particular from the 1990s. But in general, such an analytic project would likely prove unproductive and would have no bearing on the heart of the matter. The historic frame must be constructed in a different way.

We must assume that the post-communist condition does not refer exclusively to the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, but to the entire 'post-Wall' world. Susan Buck-Morss writes that the post-communist condition (she calls it 'post-Soviet') refers primarily to the ontology of time, not to the ontology of a specific society, in this case the society of the post-communist countries. As such it has a historic, rather than spatial and geographic dimension. In short, it has a universal, not particular, character.[15] However, we should not look for the end of 'the era of ideology' in the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. Instead, we should seek deeper conceptual structures within the altered situation of global politics, a different philosophy of perception of the world. Certainly the discussion that has been going on for some time, not only about the 'former East' but also simultaneously about the 'former West', gives us something to think about. If we approach the post-communist condition from this perspective, as a universal frame of contemporary culture rather than a factor deterring a specific artistic strategy, or even more specific works of art, including works created in the former Eastern Europe, we could develop much broader reflection on culture 'after the Wall'.

During the period of communism, which affected not only Eastern Europe but the entire modernist condition of the twentieth century, the

world was understood in terms of a binary structure. Since 1989 such a structure has seemed completely useless as an instrument for defining the world. Modernism, which included the communist utopia, something that Boris Gorys has written about,[16] manifests itself in a binary, oppositional thinking. Although this conception was being undermined much sooner, it is only now that we can see the proper, global or universal critical frame of the 'modernist subject,' or, in a broader sense, of the subject as 'nomadic', 'unstable' and so on. In other words, even though the critique of the Cartesian subject began a few decades earlier with a broadly conceived revision of humanism, mainly within philosophy, the effects of those discussions, especially within the widely conceived field of global culture, could be seen only in the last years of the twentieth century. The aforementioned books by Judith Butler and Rosi Braidotti, which undermined the stability of identity in a radical way, appeared in the 1990s. As often happens, artists, including those from Eastern Europe, were ahead of such cultural critiques. I will mention here only Ion Grigorescu's pioneering efforts.[17] Of course, in Eastern Europe there were fewer such projects due to the conditions indicated at the beginning of this chapter. The oppositional understanding of culture and politics – us (democratic opposition and dissidents) versus them (communists) – did not encourage this way of thinking and as a result those processes developed much more freely in Western than in Eastern Europe. Moreover, when the former Eastern Europe freed itself from the Soviet/communist domination, the activists and artists from this part of the continent joined the emancipation movement in large numbers. As a result, a form of deconstruction of gender that was taking place during the last dozen years of the twentieth century coincided with the erosion of communism and its eventual failure, something that led to a fundamental reorientation of the worldview. I am not claiming that one determines the other, that discussion of 'nomadic subject', 'performative gender' or 'unstable identity', for example, is directly connected to the demise of the binary perception of the reality, and the failure of communism as a political system and a worldview; I am only suggesting that those phenomena are mutually illuminating.

The work of Katarzyna Kozyra represents for me an excellent example of the 'post-Wall' attitude towards gender, among other reasons, paradoxically, because it breaks away from the communist legacy with its intellectual and cultural limitations. It breaks away from it physically because it transgresses freely geographic borders of perception and reception; mentally because it undermines binary and therefore stable understanding of identity; and historically, because it rejects the modernist tradition of feminist art. Therefore the

art of Katarzyna Kozyra provides an outstanding example of the new situation, one that allows us on one hand to speak simultaneously about 'the former East' and 'the former West', and on the other to see the conception of cultural, performative and unstable gender as a trans-border phenomenon.

nine

Unfulfilled Democracy

In the history of European culture art has been more closely associated with undemocratic systems of power than with democratic. The reason is abundantly clear; democracy is a recent phenomenon. Of course, I am referring here to its modern form, the liberal democracy, and not Athenian or Sarmatian democracies, which probably would not qualify as democratic systems under modern standards. Art has been associated with authoritarian power, the rule of aristocracy, nobility, the church and even totalitarian regimes. It is worth remembering that art had very high status in both Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. The mechanism that connected artists to the structures of power was relatively simple. As we know, princes, kings, bishops, popes and wealthy nobles, as well as commissars and dictators, looked to art to create an impression of splendour and to astonish through sheer luxury. Art confirmed their privileged status and merits. It was also used as a means of forestalling death by perpetuating their memory among future generations. Their power needed a tool for creating propaganda. As Anatoly Lunaczarsky, with his unique subtlety, observed, 'Art as a branch of ideology is a powerful weapon of agitation', and the regime cannot forego its services.[1] Artists who managed to fulfil the expectations set before them could live quite well. Of course, those who had the money and the power dealt the cards, but in the majority of cases this was not a problem. The mythology of an independent, ostracized artist, one who rebelled and was simultaneously rejected by society, appeared relatively late. Its development coincided precisely with the rise of capitalism and modern democracy. The mechanism by which this myth emerged has been well described and I will not repeat this analysis. Let me just mention that democratic power has adopted Lunaczarsky's conclusions to a much lesser extent. Very often it has been completely uninterested in art, or has shown interest only on the occasion of public art commissions. On the other hand capitalism has concentrated on purchase of ready-made products (this situation altered with the emergence of late capitalism), shifting the risk for market fluctuations onto the artist. The artist, accustomed to adulation, could feel abandoned and uncertain in the new situation. He needed a myth to explain his new circumstances. In return, he

gained much more freedom. More willingly than before, he began to speak on his own behalf. He became a visionary as well as a critic. Because of the latter function, he sometimes entered (and still enters) into conflicts with society or even the power structure, which, if it can, is more interested in suppressing criticism than encouraging it. This model of the artist-critic appeared relatively late, in the twentieth century, and at certain moments became rather popular, for example during the 1960s. I think it is one of the most interesting paradigms of the modern artist.

I will begin my detailed discussion of the functioning of art within the post-communist context with the example of contemporary Poland, which is treated here somewhat more extensively than other Eastern European countries because the history of Polish art produced since 1989 provides an exceptionally rich trove of material for the discussion of 'unfulfilled democracy'. When one reads the Polish constitution, it seems at first that it is a clear example of a discourse on liberal democracy. Certainly its authors followed this model. Yet even though the Polish constitution includes references to respect for 'otherness', it seems to me that this respect refers much more to tolerance than equality. We know that those two concepts are not synonymous. Tolerance is hierarchical and reveals existence of a hierarchy: the majority tolerates a minority, but does not treat it as its equal. Moreover, the liberal philosophy has not been followed consistently in this document. Because of the 'compromise', the authors have inscribed 'Christian values' into the constitution as one of its foundations (they are the only ones explicitly named, other values are simply glossed as 'other'). This declaration, which certainly broke with the republican tradition that serves as the basis of liberal democracy, has serious consequences and suggests the ideological foundation of the potential consensus. In practice, this has encouraged various symbolic appropriations of the public space, including the official state space. I will mention only the presence of a cross in the hall of the Polish parliament, which has become a key element in the symbolism of this most important Polish state institution. Although its presence clearly violates the republican principle of the separation of church and state, this violation is one of the consequences of the introduction of ideology into the constitution. Perhaps there is no such thing as a realized radical democracy. Radical or agonistic democracy, as I have discussed a number of times already in this book, functions both as a conceptual horizon and as a critique of liberal democracy. For such a project to succeed, it is not only necessary to challenge the consensus, but also to eliminate all the ideological foundations on which it is based. According to Claude Lefort, democracy, unlike the *ancien régime,* was not supposed to have such foundations; it is supposed to be based in

the ideologically ungrounded power of the 'empty place'. Neither God, nor History, nor anything else can serve as an ideological 'justification' of the democratic system.[2] Post-communist democracy, however, at least in Poland, resorts in theory (the constitution) and in governing practice to such ideological foundations, namely to the Christian tradition.

A rather interesting situation has arisen as a result. While it is difficult to critique liberal democracy in Poland, since even the country's constitution does not fully commit to it, its proponents must defend themselves and its principles against the ideological force of the consensus. In Western systems this consensus is seemingly unideological and neutral. In Poland, however, it is openly ideological, supporting only one of the optional worldviews. At the same time, the defence of liberal democracy seems intellectually rather dubious, given the current state of historical knowledge and the level of theoretical discussions. It is difficult to ignore its obvious faults. However, how can there be a discussion of radical democracy in Poland, if even its opposite, liberal democracy, has not been fully realized here. Moreover, conservative and right-wing groups have often attacked the principles of liberal democracy. Risking an over-exaggeration, one could almost say that it seems as if we have found ourselves at the end of the eighteenth century, when the republican tradition, its principle of the separation of church and state, and ideologically 'groundless' democracy were for the first time entering the minds of the public. However, we do not live in the eighteenth century but at the beginning of the twenty-first, and I am not certain whether Poland can afford the 'luxury' of anachronism.

It is worth remembering that the project of radical democracy does not reject all the values of liberal democracy. On the contrary, it hones some of them. Therefore, irrespective of which democracy we may champion (with the exception of extremist forms that have nothing to do with democracy as such: theocratic democracy or the people's or communist democracy), it is quite clear that its foundations must be based in respect for human rights, including the right to free expression. There can be no democracy without freedom. Lack of freedom reduces democracy to a mere name, as in the case of the 'people's' democracy. That is why when the struggle against communism began in Poland there were two key demands: freedom and independence. The second clearly has been achieved. The achievement of the first, as demonstrated by the history of the 'constitutional compromise', could be more difficult. Its problematic character suggests even greater need for examination of the situation of contemporary art in Poland.

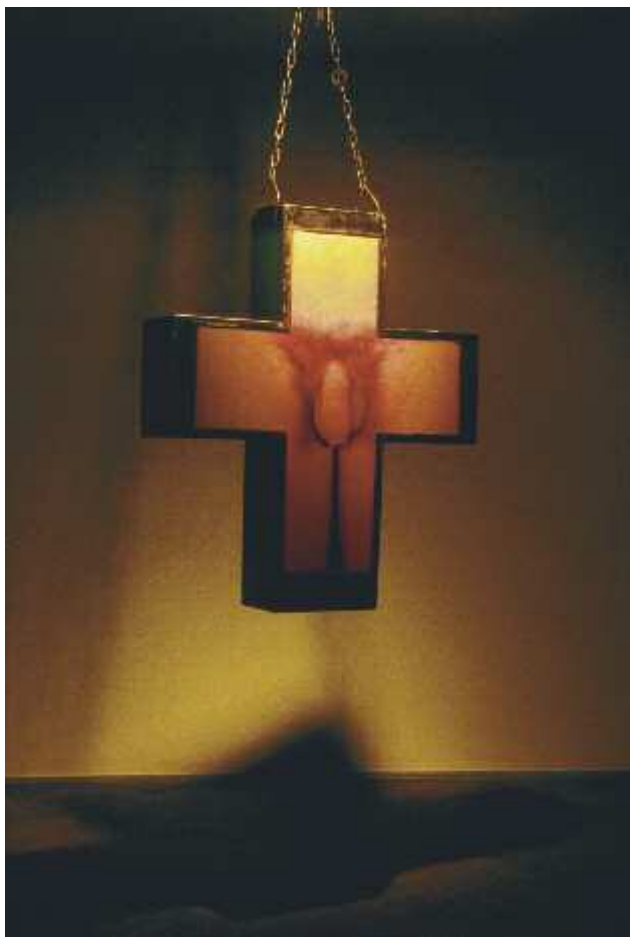
Art constitutes a very specific form of speech. I do not want to suggest that it should be privileged at the expense of other forms of speech. On the

contrary, freedom as a human right is non-negotiable; one either has it or not. If there is freedom, them everyone should be able to enjoy it, not only artists, but also those whose statements could hardly be identified as 'cultural'. Freedom of speech should not have an aesthetic character. That is not what is at stake here. What is worth noting is the fact that art to a much more significant extent than other forms of communication relies on symbolic language and routinely breaks widely accepted conventions. Although the use of symbolism and the breaking of conventions are key art values, they are also sources of conflict, especially in conservative, more closed and less educated societies. On the other hand, art provides a society with an opportunity to examine its environment in a more reflective way, and a means of penetrating into the essence of reality. As a result, there is often a reversal of the traditional relationship between power and art. Contemporary art frequently does not support the power system. On the contrary, it wants to reveal its oppressive techniques. That is why art often enters into conflict with the power structure. In many instances, the latter has its hands tied and the only weapon at its disposal is ignorance. Unfortunately it also frequently resorts to the use of repressive measures, sometimes drastic ones.

The degree of artistic freedom (or more broadly, freedom of expression) is highly variable across the contemporary world. The situation in the United States looks differently from that in France or Turkey; it is also different in Great Britain and in China. However, we should not be guided by such far-flung comparisons, since it is unlikely they will yield productive results. Because we are interested in the situation in Poland, it is much more effective to limit the comparative analysis to the framework provided by post-communist Europe, or countries that began to develop their own political organisms in the early 1990s under similar, though by no means identical, historical conditions.

If we ask in which countries the state and its organs (the prosecutors, police, courts, or what Louis Althusser, following Marx, has identified as the Repressive State Apparatus) are engaged in the prosecution of artists, we will arrive at a surprising, though rather symptomatic answer. In 'our' part of Europe there are only two such countries: Poland and Russia. Only in those two countries have there been court judgments against people associated with art. In Poland in 2003 the first district court in Gdańsk sentenced the artist Dorota Nieznalska to six months of limited freedom (in practice, six months of unpaid community service). The Gdańsk appeals court reversed the judgment in 2009. In Russia two individuals were sentenced to pay a fine of 100,000 roubles. One of them was Yuri Samodurov, the director of the Andrei Sakharov Museum and Public Centre for Peace, Progress and Human Rights in Moscow,

and the other was Ludmila Vasilovskaya, the museum's chief curator. The Polish artist and the Russian art activists were sentenced for similar 'crimes'. Nieznalska's 'crime' was to show a fragment of her work *Passion* at the Gallery Wyspa in Gdańsk in 2001; this consisted of a Greek cross to which she attached a photograph of male genitalia.[3] The Russians were fined for organizing the exhibition 'Caution, Religion!' in early 2003 at the Sakharov Center Museum. One of the most controversial works in the show was Aleksander Kosolapov's piece *Coca-Cola: This is my Blood*, 2003; the artist himself was beyond the prosecutor's reach since he has been living in New York for many years. The Moscow exhibition was vandalized by 'hooligans' shortly after it opened. Rather than pursuing the alleged vandals, the prosecutor decided instead to charge the show's organizers with 'incitement to religious and ethnic hatred'.[4]



58 Dorota Nieznalska, *Passion* (detail), 2001.

59 Dorota Nieznalska, *Passion* (detail), 2001.

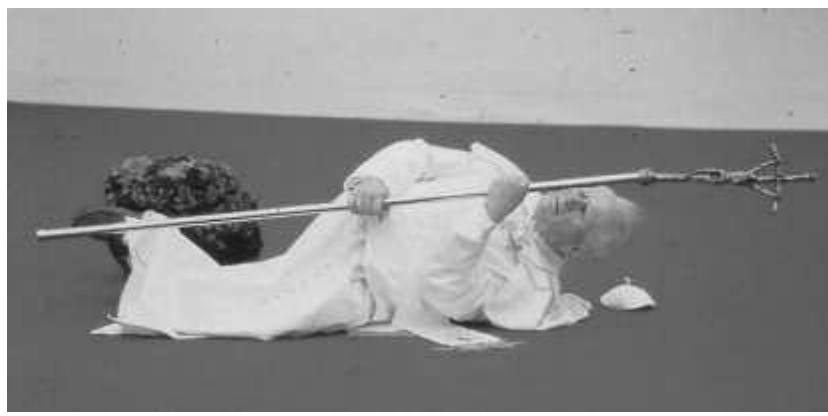
Parenthetically speaking, there was an analogous situation in Poland, when the office of the prosecutor refused to pursue a clear case of vandalism by Witold Tomczak and Halina Nowina-Konopczyna, two members of the Polish parliament, who broke the statute protecting cultural products. In 2000 they destroyed Maurizio Cattelan's sculpture exhibited at the National Gallery 'Zacheta' in Warsaw. Instead of pursuing a case against the vandals, the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Kazimierz Michał Ujazdowski, forced the director of the National Gallery Anda Rottenberg to resign. It is also worth comparing the hysterical reaction of the government, the church and the right-wing press in Poland to the exhibition of Cattelan's work to the complete lack of any (including legal) reaction to a similar project in Romania by Ciprian Mureşan (*The End of the First Five-Year Plan,* 2004). It is true that in this instance the protagonist of the work was not the pope (whose presentation would quite naturally fail to provoke any reaction), but the local patriarch. Although the patriarch is not the pope, he is clearly someone with special status in Romania. The Polish hysteria can be explained by a particularly insightful diagnosis made by Harald Szeemann upon his decision to show Cattelan's work at the Warsaw National Gallery. Organizing an exhibition of Polish art, he wanted to show something that would touch and disturb 'Polish visuality'.

60 Aleksander Kosolapov, *Coca-Cola: This is my Blood*, 2003.

Because he did not find anything appropriate to this task in the history of Polish art, he reached for Cattelan's *The Ninth Hour*, 1999. I am quite certain that he was interested in Poles' sensitivity to the image of the pope, who has become a key cult figure in the Polish imagination. In the piece, John Paul II does not stand on a pedestal, does not gaze on us from up above, and is not heroic; just the opposite, he lies on the ground and, in addition, appears to be crushed by a meteor. This was visually shocking. One could walk very close to the figure of the pope, virtually stumbling upon it. Szeemann reached his goal to a certain extent; he succeeded in deconstructing our visual perception of John Paul II, but he also failed. The Poles (at least some of them) showed themselves completely incapable of discussing and analysing their visual relationship to the pope, and some politicians demonstrated visceral aggression instead of thoughtful reflection. It is worth remembering that Witold Tomczak (then a member of the Polish parliament, later of the European parliament) not only never expressed any regret for his role in the destruction of the sculpture, but instead called aggressively for the removal of Anda Rottenberg (something that in fact took place through the decision reached by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage).

The exhibition of Mureşan's work took place under completely different circumstances. First of all, it was conceived as a direct citation of Cattelan's piece. This connection was obvious and basic for the viewers. The true pro - tagonist of the piece was not the patriarch, but another artwork, Cattelan's *The Ninth Hour*. Therefore the reference to the patriarch was mediated by another work and another religious figure. This mediation provoked completely

different interpretations. Above all the patriarch was likened to the pope not only as the head of the church, but also as someone who struggles with the burden of progressive secularization of the social life. In Europe and in Romania this process is quite obvious. The Romanian Orthodox Church, unlike the Polish Catholic Church, is not triumphalist as an institution. On the contrary, it is compromised by its not entirely commendable past record of collaboration with past regimes, beginning with the monarchical and ending with the communist.[5] This is irrespective of the fact that the regimes, especially the latter, did not always treat the church as a partner. Because of this the Romanian faithful and the clergy have a completely different attitude towards faith and its social role. Mureşan's work was seen more as an ironic metaphor of concern, rather than a vehicle for an attack. But above all, efforts were made to interpret the work.[6] Those were published mainly in Romanian cultural periodicals, since mainstream newspapers were not interested. The opposite was true in Poland. I do not recall any deeper analyses of *The Ninth Hour* or the curator's decision to show the piece in the context of Polish art. The coverage in the Polish press (mainly mainstream) was dominated by sensationalism. Given the media coverage of the event, one cannot give the Polish journalists writing about cultural matters and art critics very high marks. It is clear that one of the basic factors defining the difference in attitude towards the two exhibitions demonstrated by the Polish Roman Catholic Church and conservative politics on one side and the Romanian Orthodox Church on the other is related to the fact that art is not given much weight in Romania and its critical potential is not treated very seriously. In Poland, likewise, art has not been the most important concern of the right-wing



61 Maurizio Cattelan, *The Ninth Hour* after the removal of the meteor, Warsaw, Zacheta National Gallery of Art, 2000.

62 Ciprian Mureşan, *The End of the First Five Year Plan,* 2004.

politicians and the church, but it turned out to be a convenient tool for their political campaigns.

It is worth noting that Cattelan and Mureşan are not the only artists who have used images of the heads of churches or the churches themselves in their works. Another artist who has done so, this time using the image of the patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, is Živko Grozdanić. In his work we see multiplied images of the patriarch, or more precisely we see four figures of the patriarch adoring a painting created by another artist, Raša Todosijević (*Four Patriarch Pavles watching 200.000 lines made by Raša Todosijević,* 2007–8). The situation here is not as dramatic as in the pieces by Cattelan and Mureşan, rather it is ironic. Although a work showing the patriarch looking at an abstract painting by a contemporary artist may carry certain critical weight (since the churches in this part of Europe are not that interested in contemporary art), its criticism or rather ironic commentary did not provoke significant reactions from either the Orthodox Church or the faithful. The work was exhibited without any problems or controversy.

Returning to the comparison between Poland and Russia, or, more precisely, between Nieznalska's *Passion* and the exhibition 'Caution, Religion!', it is clear that it raises a number of questions. Even though we are dealing with

two different countries (Poland, which considers itself a free and democratic country and which is a member of the European Union; Russia, which is essentially an autocratic country where human rights are sometimes openly violated), the similarities in the engagement of the state authorities in the prosecution of visual arts are rather interesting. Is it possible that Poland may be closer to autocratic Russia than to liberal France? This may be a rhetorical question, however the fact that only in those two post-communist countries have the prosecutors and courts become involved in repression of art does not give either Poland or Russia any reason to be particularly proud. The second question is what type of art is being persecuted in Poland and Russia? Here the answer is quite clear: it is art that deals with religious iconography. It is also worth noting that in both countries the governments tend to react in a dramatic way to political satire using religious motifs. The politics of religion in Russia, especially during the presidency and then premiership of Vladimir Putin, has been full of opportunism. The president/premier's gestures towards the Russian Orthodox Church appear to be calculated for immediate political effect. In Poland the problem is deeper and seems connected with the ideological character of the state. Because the principle of the separation of church and state has been violated and the state has taken upon itself the responsibility

63 Živko Grozdanić, *Four Patriarch Pavles watching 200,000 lines made by Raša Todosijević*, 2007–08.

for representing Christian ideology, it feels called upon to repress those who do not share that ideology and demonstrate their opposition. That is why repressions carried out against art in Russia are essentially opportunistic, while those in Poland have a much more structural character.

From the perspective of human rights, or the right to freedom of expression, this distinction is irrelevant, since in both instances freedom is being violated. However, from the perspective of the legal framework, it is crucially important. If the next president of the Russian Federation does not want to play the religious card, the organs under his control will adopt a different strategy towards blasphemous representations, which of course will not make them any less culpable. In Poland, by contrast, there is still a consensus concerning 'Christian values', a fact that may not bode well for the freedom of expression, though certainly one cannot predict the future. Dorota Nieznalska, Yurij Samodurov and Ludmila Vasilovskaya were in fact all convicted of blasphemy. Although the Polish artist was cleared of an 'offence against religious feelings' by the appeals court, the judge in his summing up stressed the priority of the right to religious freedom over the right to freedom of artistic expression.[7] He suggested that, even though Nieznalska's work could have offended religious feelings, this was not the artist's intention. That was the main argument behind his decision to reverse the judgment against the artist. The train of thought behind this conclusion seems too convoluted and rather unsatisfactory. The defence should have rested on the artist's right to blasphemy and desecration. It is in the citizens' interest to acknowledge this right, the exercise of which may not always be elegant, but is much safer than any effort to limit the right to free expression. As Giorgio Agamben has argued, it is in their interest to recognize the right to political as well as religious desecration and therefore dissent, since desecration allows for recovery of that which has been taken away, for the return of that which belongs to us.[8] Freedom of expression should not be instrumentalized; it should be absolute and not relative. This simply makes sense. Violation of freedom of expression in one case may create a dangerous precedent for the undermining of the entire framework of civil freedoms. In this particular case it also seems that the desire to see the work as blasphemous is as much a result of bad faith as of political manipulation. After all, Nieznalska's *Passion* consists of two elements, the earlier mentioned cross and a video showing a man exercising with weights. This important semantic context has often been ignored or at least marginalized in the Polish media. It is important because it points to the fact that the work deals with the cult of the male body, which is a common phenomenon of the consumer culture. The practice of working out, which is motivated more by a desire to achieve a muscular

appearance than a need for a healthier lifestyle, becomes many men's passion, both in a literal and metaphoric sense (in relation to suffering). The work's title only potentially refers to the Stations of the Cross and Christ's Passion. After all, Nieznalska used a Greek rather than Latin cross in her installation. The prosecutor and the judge should have known that Christ was crucified on a Latin cross. The Greek cross symbolizes the ideal; the genitalia symbolize masculinity. Together, in the context of 'passionately' performed physical exercise, they reveal the artist's ironic attitude towards the cult of the male body. Therefore discursive reference to the Passion here is completely ironic, and the irony is directed against the cult of the male body, rather than Christianity as such.

Let us now take a look at Aleksander Kosolapov's work *Coca-Cola: This is my Blood*. Unlike Nieznalska, Kosolapov is a famous Russian artist and the author of many well-known works that use irony to reveal mechanisms through which mass culture appropriates ideological, historical and religious symbols. He has juxtaposed the image of Lenin with Coca-Cola's advertising slogan (*It's the Real Thing*) and a pastiche of the McDonalds logo (*McLenin).* He has also created a sculpture showing Disney's Mickey and Minnie in the iconic pose of Vera Mukhina's famous Soviet sculpture from 1937 (*Mickey and Minnie, Worker and Farmgirl*). The artist's work *Malevich Sold Here* mimics a Marlboro cigarette ad. The rhetoric and style of Kosolapov's work is based in Sots Art, or to be more precise, in the collision of Sots Art and the world of Western consumer culture. Religion as such does not interest him as a subject. Of course, for the Russian press, the hooligans who attacked the exhibition *Caution, Religion!,* and finally for the prosecutor who charged the organizers, this was completely irrelevant. For Putin's regime it was simply a good excuse to demonstrate to the Orthodox Church the government's 'concern' for the religious feelings of the nation.

Poland as a country is particularly sensitive to the use of religious iconography, even more so than Russia or any other European country, although in Russia the case of 'Caution, Religion!' was not entirely isolated. In February 2004, a year later, the Gallery S.P.A.S. in St Petersburg was vandalized by hooligans during an exhibition by Oleg Yanushevsky that featured portraits of famous politicians in the form of traditional religious icons. The exhibition 'Russia 2', organized at the Gallery Marat Gelman in January 2005, also caused considerable controversy. The organizers of these other shows, however, unlike those of the exhibition at the Sakharov Centre and Museum, did not end up in the courts. Polish sensitivity towards religious representations, which has been shaped since 1989 by extremist and radical groups associated with Radio

Maria, a local branch of an international Catholic broadcasting system, has simply been accepted by the Polish political establishment as a fact.

It is worth noting that if we ignore the particular comparison with Russia, Polish sensitivity to the use of religious iconography constitutes a completely isolated and exceptional case on the map of post-communist Europe, not to mention the other European countries. That is why it deserves particular attention in this chapter. Moreover, Poland is also exceptional in terms of the prevalence and, one could even say, a certain acceptance of art's censorship. Not many people are surprised by mechanisms by which representatives of the government at almost any level, even the lowest, can (if they have such power) make arbitrary decisions censoring and repressing art; if they do not have the opportunity to do so themselves, they run to the prosecutor's office. The latter is confronted with the aporia of choosing between constitutionally guaranteed freedom of expression and 'defence of religious feelings'. Just how unique the situation in Poland is can be seen when it is compared with the experience of almost any other post-communist country (with the exception of Russia). I will demonstrate this by comparing it with the situation in the Czech Republic, a comparison suggested by 'Shadows of Humour', 2006, an exhibition of Czech art first shown in Wrocław and then in Bielsko-Biała.

The exhibition was organized by William Hollister, an American who has lived in Prague for many years and who was very aware of the fact that Poland has a problem with art censorship. The first version of the exhibition took place without major problems, though it seems they were anticipated. The Czech art group Kamera Skura presented in Wrocław the installation *SuperStart*, which consisted of a life-size figure of a gymnast frozen in a pose recalling the crucifixion. The League of Polish Families, an extreme right-wing Christian-nationalist political party, which belonged during this period to the governing coalition, expressed disapproval of the work. However, a serious con - frontation did not take place. When the exhibition was taken down, the figure fell and was damaged, eliminating the potential for conflict. The original *Super-Start* was commissioned for the Venice Biennale in 2003 and was shown at the Czecho-Slovak pavilion (Czechs and Slovaks continue to share the pavilion formerly occupied by Czechoslovakia) as the official exhibit of the Czech Republic. It is worth noting that neither the Czech nor the international public expressed any reservations concerning the work during the Biennale.

The second version of the exhibition 'Shadows of Humour' did not have any references (even obscure ones) to religious iconography. As a result Hollister and the other organizers worked on its installation with considerable relief. They were greatly surprised when David Černý's piece *Shark* was singled

out and censored. The work consists of a naked, bound figure of Saddam Hussein floating in a huge rectangular container filled with liquid (this was before the dictator's execution) and functions as a parody of Damien Hirst's famous piece by the same name (1991), formerly in the Saachi collection. Zbigniew Michniowski, the deputy mayor of Bielsko-Biała, did not like the work and without any hesitation or shame ordered it removed from the exhibition. In the name of historical accuracy, it must be noted that this was not the first time Černý's *Shark* encountered difficulties. When the work was going to be exhibited in Middelkerke in Belgium (2006), the organizers were concerned about the reaction of the city's Muslim population, divided and conflicted

64 Kamera Skura, *SuperStart*, 2003.

over the war in Iraq. The artist shared those concerns and withdrew the piece from the exhibition. After the unsuccessful attempt to show the work in Bielsko-Biała, *Shark* was transported to Cieszyń, where it was shown at the Szara Gallery.

In order to complete the account of Polish censorship of Czech art in 2006, one should also mention the removal after only one day of the piece *You are all Faggots*, created by the group Guma Guar, from the exhibition 'Bad News' organized at the Kronika Gallery in Bytom. The work consists of a manipulated photographic image showing Pope Benedict XIV holding the bloody severed head of the pop singer Elton John. The image draws on the iconography of Judith with the head of Holofernes or the related theme of David with the head of Goliath. Judith, a patriotic Jewish heroine, used her female charm to gain access to the camp of the Assyrian invaders in order to kill their leader Holofernes by cutting off his head, thereby saving her people. The story of David and Goliath is also taken from the biblical history of the Israelites' struggle against foreign invaders, this time Philistines. The smaller and weaker David defeats the larger and stronger Goliath and cuts off his head. This act horrifies the invaders and contributes to the Israelites' eventual victory. However, what is more important in this instance is the fact that David's victory foreshadows the victory of Christ over Satan, a motif that is

65 David Černy, *Shark*, 2006.

66 Guma Guar, *You are all Faggots*, 2006.

closer in spirit to the Guma Guar's work in which the pope triumphs over evil, symbolized by the gay pop singer.

In both instances of the classic iconographic schemata we are dealing with heroic acts that save the nation from foreign oppression and, within a broader context, signify victory of good over evil. However the image of Benedict XIV, the leader of the Roman Catholic Church well known for his homophobic attitude (as well as not infrequent scandals involving instances of homosexual molestation within the Church), showing off the severed head of Elton John is also (and perhaps above all) addressing the triumph of power, oppression and

politics of exclusion. The work's title, *You are all Faggots*, reinforces that meaning. This is the evil targeted by the church; here is its indictment and the threat of punishment that awaits us (since we are all faggots) – all of us who do not agree with the pope (this one or the former or any other). All of us who think differently than the Roman Catholic Church have been branded and are in danger of meeting the fate of Holofernes or the strongman Goliath. The response that we should give to Benedict XIV ought to be the same as that given by students to the French government in May 1968. When the government accused some of their leaders of being German Jews (a fact that was supposed to diminish their credibility in the eyes of French bourgeois public opinion), the students responded: 'We are all German Jews.' This was a powerful gesture of solidarity. Guma Guar seems to be suggesting that in the name of democracy we should make such a gesture of solidarity with the sexual minorities of gay men and women.

However, my discussion of this work is not so much concerned with its meaning, as with something completely different, its censorship. Although the work was controversial, this does not justify its censorship, especially under pressure from the media. The piece was shown in the exhibition 'Bad News'. A day after the opening, due to the negative response from the right-wing press, the curator of the show made the decision to remove it. The press, irrespective of its political leanings, has the right to be critical. That is its function. It certainly reflects the opinions of some of its readers. However, this does not mean that such criticism should provoke self-censorship. A viewer in a democratic country has the right to determine independently whether the work is good or bad, relevant or misguided. No one has the right to take away his or her ability to formulate such opinions; no one should deprive him or her of this opportunity. The censor, whoever he or she may be (a politician, prosecutor, judge or a curator), by making the decision on behalf of the viewer violates his or her civil rights.

Although all these examples deal with censorship of art that uses religious motifs, there have also been other instances involving sexual imagery. I would like to mention briefly one example about which I have written elsewhere. It concerns Zofia Kulik's work *A Home and a Museum*, which was excluded from the artist's monographic exhibition 'From Siberia to Cyberia', held at the National Museum in Poznań in 1999.[9]

The work's full installation, put together before the opening, consisted of two parts: an obelisk placed in the middle of the museum's monumental main hall and a series of photographic close-ups of male genitalia taken from fragments of sculpture in the Hermitage collection in St Petersburg. The photographs were highly aestheticized, one could even say aesthetically refined in character. To be

precise, these were mediated photographs extracted from a video filmed at the Hermitage. Underneath each image was a photograph (produced using the same technique) of the original museum label in three different languages. The information in Russian was printed first and in a larger font. The strong visual presence of the sensual and aestheticized photographs, which saturated the space of the museum with the male element, hanging along the two side walls of the monumental hall, functioned as an antithesis to the neutral architectural frieze running along the upper portion of the wall. The 'masculinity' of the series of photographs was also relativized by the presence of an obelisk placed in the middle of the hall. The obelisk itself was rather complicated structurally. Every form of an obelisk is associated with the male element. However in this case, its upper (one could say essentially male) portion was separated from the lower one by a frieze that used the image of Hestia, the ancient goddess of the domestic hearth, taken from an advertising campaign for an insurance company. This strong female accent was enhanced by a fabric draped around the lower part of the obelisk, which brought to mind an image of a skirt. Finally the obelisk was surrounded by a balustrade made from balusters taken from the artist's home balcony, which echoed the form of the monumental staircase located at the western end of the museum hall.

A Home and a Museum has a complicated structure of potential meanings, which operate through a series of contrasts: gendered (male-female), functional (public museum-private home), national (Russian-Polish) and architectural (vertical-horizontal forms). At the centre of this structure is the artist herself, or her personal position, her own inquiry into the problem of identity within a complicated play of elements. Woman has been associated by the force of tradition (Hestia) with home, part of which has been literally moved to the museum, a public institution. Similarly, the profession of an artist taken up by a woman imposes on her a male frame of reference. This is especially true because art is a traditional domain of the (male) genius and involves very public activity.

It should be noted that until 1987 the artist collaborated with her male partner Przemysław Kwiek and her own artistic identity melted into their collaborative actions and projects. Moreover, her melting away took place in the context of gender tension that could not be symmetrical. It is also important to add that Zofia Kulik is a sculptor by training. Sculpture constitutes the most 'male' of arts, next to architecture, a fact that was emphasized in the installation by the fragments of sculpted figures. The tension among the national elements – Hermitage, a Russian museum, and the National Museum in Poznań, a Polish museum – constituted another personal and very important component of

the artist's strategic search for identity. It is connected with the artist's biography and the tension between her father, who came from the east and served as an officer in the Polish People's Army, an ideological military formation implicated in shoring up Soviet (Russian) communism, and the artist herself, who by subjecting the communist system of power to a critique in her earlier works turned into, according to Ewa Lajer-Burcharth's psychoanalytic and historical analysis, an artist-dissident.[10]

67, 68 Zofia Kulik, *A Home and a Museum* (fragment), The National Museum in Poznan, 1999.

The then director of the National Museum in Poznań did not approve of the planned placement of Kulik's installation. What seems particularly interesting from the perspective of this analysis is the fact that he did not allow the work to be exhibited in the main, 'shared' space of the museum, but had no problem with its installation in a side room. This means that the special, central position of the main hall within the museum also defines its special ideological and political position. This place functions as the 'scene' and therefore must be free of any 'obscenities'. It is the core of the museum. Since the museum is at the core of culture, it is itself located at the very centre of the 'scene'. As has frequently been noted in French feminist literature, since this 'scene' is supposed to be gender neutral, any demonstration of gender identity politics within it is identified as violation of its neutrality, or charged with 'ob-scenity'.[11] The appropriate places for such demonstrations are outside the 'scene', or at least beyond its most visible centre, for example in the side rooms of the museum. This was the background of the gender censorship of Zofia Kulik's work at the National Museum in Poznań.

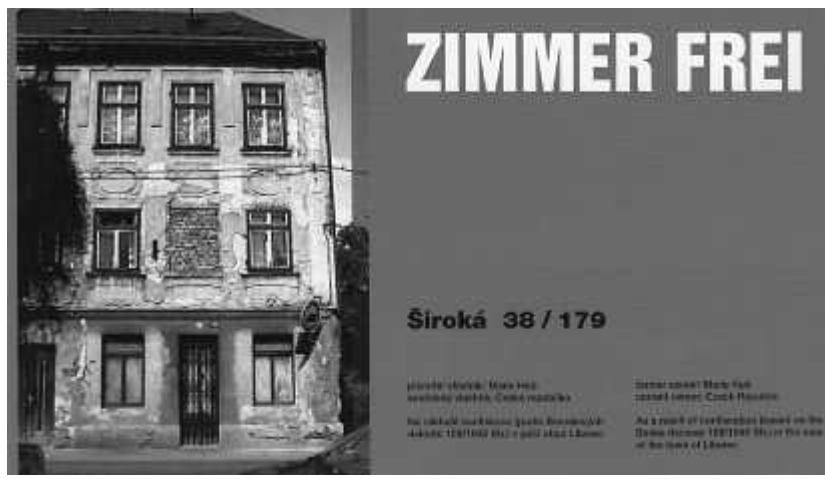
These examples of censorship of Polish art at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century constitute the proverbial tip of an iceberg. What has caused this phenomenon? We must keep in mind that we are dealing with art or visual culture, which in Poland, with the exception of history painting at the end of the nineteenth century, has not been considered of great importance. The defence of artistic freedom, unlike that of literary freedom, does not have a tradition in Poland. Because art has been perceived as a field dominated by the activities of rather eccentric individuals, who like to operate through scandal and to shock 'serious people', it does not deserve defence (with the exception of art that has taken up national themes). Literature has been perceived in completely different terms; it has been seen as a treasury of national thought and feelings, where utopias and spiritual programmes of national revival were formulated. Censorship of literature was a violation of national independence. The history of censorship in Poland under communism is very interesting from this perspective. The censors were almost completely uninterested in visual culture, but they demonstrated considerable sensitivity towards literature. It is interesting to note that currently there appear to be no censoring interventions into literature; I have heard nothing about the League of Polish Families intervening in the business of Polish publishers or of prosecutors pursuing cases in this area, even though both have been quite visible within the territory of the visual arts. Happily, it seems that censorship of literature, after the experience of communism, for many still constitutes a taboo. This 'handicapping' of art is connected with a typical educational profile of

Polish intellectuals, within which visual arts have played a very minor role. As a result, the 'patriotic education' and 'social engagement' that form the traditional basis of this social group have generally been taking place outside the realm of visual culture (with the exception, once again, of history painting). Perhaps something else, much more profound, is here also at stake. It seems that Polish intellectuals have been educated to defend collective rights, in particular the national right to independence, rather than individual ones. They have been capable of highly heroic deeds in defence of national sovereignty, but have not attached particular significance to individual rights or individual freedom of expression. Last but not least, the traditional struggle for independence has been connected with religion due to well-known historical circumstances. Poland has defined itself historically as a Catholic nation; its sacrifice had religious character and that is why the hopes for independence were often formulated using religious symbolism. In general, Polish culture does not have a strongly developed tradition of individual identity permitting transgression, atheism and therefore religious desecration. The years of the communist regime strengthened conservative tendencies in Polish culture and its traditions, both positive and negative, were taken over by Solidarity, which was responsible to a significant extent for shaping the attitudes of the 1990s.

As a result, the most extensive censorship of art at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first took place in Poland. However, Poland's special status does not mean that there have been no instances of art censorship in the other post-communist countries. Examples can be found even in a country as liberal as the Czech Republic. I will only mention one example. In 2002 the exhibition 'Politik-um' at Prague Castle coincided with the official visit of the German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, who was being hosted by the president of the Czech Republic, Václav Havel. The exhibition included a project entitled *Zimmer frei* by the Czech group Pode Bal, which consisted of a large number of balloons with images of abandoned houses, some of which were in the Sudeten Mountains. Those homes belonged at one point to Germans, or more precisely to citizens of Czechoslovakia of German descent who were expelled from the country by the socialist regime. This was a substantial group of people. The balloons were removed from the square by the security forces, which were supposedly acting to ensure the safety of the official delegation. Pode Bal responded by showing a video documenting the entire event in the gallery. During Schroeder and Havel's visit to the exhibition, however, the monitor showing the video mysteriously disappeared. When the official guests left the exhibition, it reappeared. Václav Havel himself commented on what happened but did so in a rather conventional way, without any significant reflection, adding

nothing new to the matter. He noted that every exhibition involves a selection, and every act of selection requires rejection of some works. He also stressed that as the Czech Republic's president, he felt responsible for the country to a much greater extent than an ordinary citizen. Concluding his brief remarks he added that 'perhaps a German would not understand the Czech sense of humour, since it is well known that only a Czech is able to comprehend it'.[12]

Another example comes from a different post-communist country, Hungary. In 2002 the Ludwig Museum in Budapest cancelled Rose El-Hassan's show 'Blood Donation'. The project made reference to a famous media event, when Yasser Arafat together with a group of five hundred Palestinians donated blood for the Israeli victims of the Gaza pacification. The organizers of the exhibition were terrified that El-Hassan's project could be read as an expression of pro-terrorist and simultaneously anti-Israeli, or even anti-American, sentiments. The situation was complicated by the artist's Hungarian-Syrian background. Moreover, to this day Hungarians (and not only they) have not become fully reconciled with the history of their own anti-Semitism during the Second World War, in particular atrocities committed by the homegrown Nazi Arrow-Cross militias. All this was happening during the period when Hungary was already part of NATO. It is well known that the new recruits were expressing their faith in the American-led coalitions and their sympathy for the various 'anti-terrorist' phobias plaguing the US government with the doubled enthusiasm of the newly initiated. In the end the show did take place, but not at the Ludwig Museum. It was staged first at the Budapest Blood Bank and then at many different art venues beyond Hungary's borders.



69 Pode Bal, *Zimmer frei*, 2002.

70 Csaba Nemes, *Remake*, 2007.

A more recent example from Hungary is provided by the rejection of the exhibition project 'Remake' curated by Maja and Reuben Fowkes for the Hungarian pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2007.[13] The project consisted of Csaba Nemes's animated films reflecting media coverage of the anti-government street demonstrations that took place in Hungary in October 2006. Although the jury evaluating the submitted proposals awarded this the first prize, the Ministry of Culture did not permit its presentation in Venice. It should be mentioned that the Venice Biennale, as an event featuring official exhibitions of the participating countries showcased in national pavilions, has often witnessed conflicts between curators and governmental officials. We should remember that at one point New Yugoslavia, a country consisting of Serbia and Montenegro and which no longer exists, rejected an exhibition proposal featuring Marina Abramovic's *Balkan Baroque* (see chapter Five). The work was finally shown in Venice but at an independent exhibition, rather than the official one held in the national pavilion of New Yugoslavia.[14] Jerzy Onuch, who was then the director of the Centre for Contemporary Art in Kiev, encountered similar problems when the Ukrainian government rejected his exhibition project.

A drastic and at the same time highly complicated example of intervention in an art show can be found in Belgrade. It relates to the history of

the travelling exhibition 'Exception: Contemporary Art Scene from Prishtina'. The first version of the show took place without any problems in Novi Sad. The second was supposed to open at the Gallery Kontekst in Belgrade on 7 February 2008. This never happened or, more precisely, the show was closed at its opening by the police, who explained that they could not guarantee the

71 Dren Maliqi, *Face to Face*, 2003.

safety of the participants and artworks due to mounting and increasingly aggressive protests by Serbian nationalists. The exhibition never reopened; it was never made available to the public despite numerous protests and petitions submitted to the local and state government, and also to international bodies.[15] The very fact that the exhibition featured artists from Kosovo provoked serious tensions. Street demonstrations organized by right-wing groups, leading up to and during the show's opening, culminated in a very sharp exchange during which *Face to Face*, 2003, a work by Dren Maliqi portraying one of the leaders of the Kosovo Liberation Army, Adem Jašari – unquestionably a hero for Albanians and Kosovars, but a terrorist and criminal to the Serbian nationalists – was damaged. Jašari, holding a Kalashnikov and nonchalantly draped in his military coat, was shown in a double portrait resembling Andy Warhol's double portrait of Elvis Presley. The image suggested more a warlord than a soldier, much less a leader of a regular army. The juxtaposition of this portrait with a reproduction of Warhol's painting was supposed to emphasize the iconic character of this figure and the 'mass consumption' of this very popular image in Kosovo. However, in Belgrade it provoked an extremely aggressive reaction. All this was taking place just a few days before the announcement by Kosovo of its independence (17 February 2008), which provoked a wave of demonstrations in Serbia, including attacks on the US and Slovenian embassies (during this period Slovenia held the presidency of the European Union). From the legal perspective the situation was rather interesting. The gallery was trying to show works by artists who were still citizens of the country whose capital was Belgrade. This provoked a nationalist reaction and the de facto (since it is difficult to speak here about *de jure*) closing or rather censorship of the exhibition. This interpretation is supported by the fact that no one was able to reopen the show. It is quite clear that the seeming helplessness of the government hid its sympathy for nationalist groups and circles and that its supposed concern for the safety of people and artworks was just an excuse, a rhetorical ploy. The declaration of Kosovo's independence just a few days after the opening/closing of the exhibition and its acceptance by the United States and some members of the European Union further incited such sentiments. Therefore this can be seen as one of the rare instances when a non-existing exhibition provoked heated discussion, and art that was not visible gave rise to political conflict and repressive actions.

In this respect, it seems that Belgrade is an exceptional city. The strong polarization of political positions, nationalist tensions and discussions about art's entanglement in historical processes taking place 'here and now' has given rise to a very dynamic art scene, which often reacts in a radical way to social and

political processes occurring in Serbia. The 49th October Salon provides evidence of such a high level of engagement. Although the Salon was initially organized by the local artists' union, over time it has gained an international reputation. The 49th October Salon, held a few months after the events described above (which were evoked during the exhibition by the showing of a documentary by Eduard Freudmann and Jelena Radić, *The State of Exception Proved to be the Rule*), was organized by Bojana Pejić, a curator particularly interested in the political engagement of art. The Salon was entitled *Artist/Citizen.* Although it featured an international selection of artists, it was dominated by the work of artists from the former Yugoslavia, something particularly interesting given the situation.

There isn't and there will never be an ideal democracy. Democracy is a real, not an ideal political system. It always has faults but there are also always ideas for how it can be improved. What is important is that those ideas increase democracy and do not replace it with an authoritarian system. Eastern Europe has gone through an excruciating experience of the latter system of government. That is why it is particularly painful to see democracy, which has been formally adopted by all the countries in post-communist Europe, fail to meet the expectations invested in it and realizing only in part the dreams of freedom. Censorship of art, no matter in which country it takes place and for whatever reasons (religious, nationalist, cultural), always recalls the functioning of the former regime. It is never consistent with the dreams of a new fair and free system. However, the censorship practices in post-communist Europe cannot be seen as isolated incidents. The problem rests in the fact that they are often accepted by at least part of the local population. This acceptance is not solely a result of a 'habit' or conviction that the 'Others' who threaten 'Us' must be silenced to avert danger. The perception that this is the only way to defend oneself is a result of the lack of a culture of public debate. One could say that post-communist societies did not have an opportunity to learn those skills, and that they need time to acquire them. However, this 'simple' wish is complicated by the rise of populist movements throughout the former Eastern and also in Western Europe. Populism is a widespread phenomenon of the contemporary world, one that cannot be easily eliminated. It acquires broad support and favours authoritarian forms of government that practise censorship of artistic expression. We should denounce such practices, write about them, reveal and analyse them, fight against them. Democracy cannot defend itself, neither will it be defended by politicians inclined towards populism. Although strictly speaking not all politicians can be classified within the politological nomenclature as 'populists', the fact remains that they are all concerned with attracting votes,

something that certainly creates populist temptations. It is up to intellectuals and artists, who cherish freedom as an ideal, who feel the discomfort of unfulfilled expectations, the discomfort of unfulfilled democracy, to argue and agitate for democracy. Intellectuals and artists who see their place in the agora, in the midst of public debate, are guided in their behaviour by agorophilia. This book is about some of them.