

## ON THE REPOLITICIZATION OF ART THROUGH CONTAMINATION

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This article examines, first, the postsocialist (transitional) condition of Eastern Europe in relation to the issues of creativity and resistance (i.e., forms of activity that counter capitalist expropriation). By “creativity” I mean a system of art and artistic activity that attempts, productively and imaginatively, to improve society and culture—in other words, art as an experimental and socially responsible project. Next, I offer some reflections on the (new) European identity in order to reformulate a conception of (Eastern) European art. Finally, I suggest a certain oppositional conclusion, one intended to disrupt common artistic analyses. I take into account those practices and theoretical approaches that offer our contemporary world its only possible way forward—namely, by changing our perspectives on the relationship between art and theory through politics.

It will be soon obvious that I am insisting here on a certain cartography. Its logic is conceptually akin to both Fredric Jameson’s mapping processes and Brian Holmes’s diagrams.<sup>1</sup> I am also insisting, via Holmes, that these diagrams display relationships of hierarchy rather than simple networking. Although, according to Holmes, his complex *visualisations* of power and influence are almost enough to wake up the global public today, I am insisting here, on the contrary, on their constant repoliticization.

In fact, I am insisting on the repoliticization of art—that art should attempt to reconnect creativity and resistance. The capitalist art system and the art market are constantly trying to sever the dangerous liaison between creativity and resistance.<sup>2</sup> This liaison frightens the capitalist cultural and educational machine; consequently, the global

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<sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991); Brian Holmes, *Hieroglyphs of the Future: Art and Politics in a Networked Era* (Zagreb: Arkzin, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> On the capitalist art system, see, for example, Naomi Klein, *No Space, No Choice, No Jobs, No Logo: Taking Aim at Brank Bullies* (New York: Picador, 1999).

capitalist machine is constantly trying to *dissociate* creativity from resistance. The same is true today of universities and academies. The university is seen by contemporary state educational policy as a managerial enterprise. The ideal embodied in the educational policies of European post-industrial states, including Slovenia, is to transform educational institutions into efficient managerial organisations that are easy to control and that will produce, instead of thinking citizens, new generations of consumers (today, delicately renamed “users”) and effective bureaucrats. We cannot talk about any open democratic project in art and culture until we rethink the possibility of a radical artistic experience that would function as an open source and would be capable of switching into a radical political experience shared by the wider community.

1.

In her essay, “The Twilight of the Victim: Creation Quits Its Pimp, to Rejoin Resistance,” psychoanalyst Suely Rolnik, a professor at the Catholic University of São Paulo, where she directs the Centre for Research on Subjectivity, makes the following observations:

At present, certain artistic practices seem to be particularly effective in dealing with these problems [relating to the dissociation of creativity from resistance]. Their strategy consists of precise and subtle insertions at certain points where the social structure is separating, where tension is pulsating due to the pressure of a new composition of forces seeking passage. It is a mode of insertion mobilised by the desire to expose oneself to the other and to run the risk of such an exposure, instead of opting for the guarantee of a politically correct position that confines the other to a representation and protects subjectivity from any affective contagion. The “work” consists in bringing the forces and the tension they provoke into existence, which entails the connection of the power of creation to a piece of the world grasped as energy-matter by the resonant body of the artist; and it consists at the same time in activating the power of resistance.

According to Rolnik, in order to understand these processes it is necessary to reconnect the power of creation with the power of

resistance, and to free both from the “pimp” (expropriator of people and resources), the capitalist system: “We need to place ourselves in an area where politics and art are intertwined, where the resistant force of politics and the creative forces of art mutually affect each other, blurring the frontiers between them.”

She proposes that we attempt to place ourselves in a thoroughly contaminated zone of activity, one in which art is infected by the social and political: “first on the side of politics contaminated by its proximity to art, then on the side of art contaminated by its proximity to politics—in order to try to discern strategies of this kind.”<sup>3</sup> Rolnik’s theoretical stance, employing psychoanalysis, echoes the importance of theoretical psychoanalysis in Slovenia of the 1980s, when Žižek outlined a new critical approach to art and culture.

The failed encounter between, on the one hand, theory, criticism, and the institutional framework and, on the other, contemporary art occurred in Slovenia precisely in the field of resistance. I would even say that if there has been a missed encounter between contemporary art and theory, it is because theory failed to rearticulate creativity with resistance. To put in another way, what contemporary theory, criticism and official institutions all happily share is creativity, but it is a creativity without resistance. This has resulted in other important repercussions, too. It is inherently necessary for the capitalist machine to have new productions and expressions of creativity, which means that new forms of art, as well as new forms of life, have to be constantly produced, according to Rolnik, in order to give all these structures (theory, criticism, and official institutions) subjective consistency or integrity, while other artistic and cultural productions are swept off the stage along with entire deactivated sectors of the economy, from certain forms of agriculture, to footwear and coal mining. This wellspring of “free” inventive power has been discovered by contemporary capitalism as a virgin resource, an untapped vein of value to be exploited. To describe this process of giving fresh blood to the capitalist system while deactivating entire sectors of troubled artistic, cultural and social strategies, Rolnik introduces the formulation “kidnapped inventions”; these are innovations that have been kidnapped by various kinds of systems, theories, criticism, institutions and

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<sup>3</sup> Suely Rolnik, “The Twilight of the Victim: Creation Quits Its Pimp, to Rejoin Resistance,” *Zehar* 51(2003): 36. Available at [www.arteleku.net](http://www.arteleku.net).

practices.<sup>4</sup> Here we are speaking not only about the need to reconnect art and life, as was the case in the modern period, for, as Rolnik puts it,

If art and life are still divided, it's no longer because of the deactivation of creation in the broad sweep of social life and its confinement to the artistic ghetto. That situation has already been resolved by capitalism, much more effectively than it ever was by art.<sup>5</sup>

Simply to remain in the ghetto of art, as a separate sphere to which the power of creation was confined in the earlier regime, means to keep art dissociated from the power of resistance, and to limit it to being merely a source of value, from which its pimp, capital, can make an easy living. I would emphasise that we have to think in a much broader sense about the pimp, capital, and take into account its linkages with the art market, art institutions, theory, criticism, tourism, and educational institutions, from art academies to universities. What is, in fact, happening today in contemporary art is the formation of a specific set of technologies for de- and/or re-territorializing capital, which puts into process the rearticulation of hierarchized structures that include people as a component and which integrates and exteriorizes people and their practices in accord with institutional models.

The new vocabulary proposed by Rolnik—which in addition to “kidnapped invention,” includes such terms as ‘contamination of art and politics,’ “contagious art practices,” “radicalised theory”—has rarely been used previously in the field of art and culture. But if we consider certain events in the art, culture and socio-political arenas of Slovenia, on the local level, and more broadly in relation to Documenta and the various biennials, Manifestas and big Balkan shows, we can see the importance of using such paradigms to name in precise terms the processes of expropriation and exhaustion, abstraction and evacuation that are taking place in contemporary art and culture.<sup>6</sup>

What Rolnik calls “kidnapped invention” is exactly what happened to the “underground” or “alternative movement” that

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<sup>4</sup> Rolnik 35.

<sup>5</sup> Rolnik 35.

<sup>6</sup> On these events, see: Marina Gržinić, *Situated Contemporary Art Practices, Art, Theory and Activism from (the East of) Europe* (Ljubljana and Frankfurt: ZRC SAZU and Revolver, 2004).

developed in the 1980s in Slovenia. This movement was literally kidnapped, taken hostage, and released when it was already symbolically dead, abstracted from interpretations and segregated by academic writings and theoretical non-writings beginning in the 1990s and continuing today. Throughout the 1980s, the whole underground, or alternative culture in Ljubljana was kept under harsh political and economic censorship, a hostage of the communist political space and totalizing communist discourse, which was segregated from civil-society space, where human rights and freedoms might be respected. Although this same underground was of crucial importance in the formation of the civil society of 1980s, which supported the emergence of numerous, heavily marginalized sexual, political, and cultural minorities, a good index of the present state of affairs may be seen in the fact that a recent book about the period, *Punk je bil prej* [*Punk Was Before*], published in 2003,<sup>7</sup> has not yet received a single serious theoretical or critical review in Slovenia.

What is more, these alternative practices were not merely evacuated and abstracted, they were literally “kidnapped”—excluded or marginalized—at least twice and in very blatant ways. The first time was in 1997, when the city of Ljubljana was declared the “Cultural Capital of Europe”—precisely because of its reputation in the 1980s and early 1990s for non-institutional strategies that were, for the most part, conceptualised, produced and organised within the alternative and, later, independent spaces. The event proved to be a disaster for the independent scene, which was left without any infrastructural investments or a substantial programme. The second “kidnapping” took place in 2000, when Manifesta 3 was held in Ljubljana. Although proclaimed as a pure act of transnational and global artistic vision, Manifesta 3 was, in fact, commissioned by the Slovene state, government and Ministry of Culture, along with the main managerial artistic and culture institutions in Ljubljana, and not the other way around. Manifesta, with its outside reinforcements, legitimised on an international scale the power of the major national institutions of art and culture in Ljubljana (led by Cankarjev dom). Once more, the leading independent(!) institutions, such as the ŠKUC Gallery, Metelkova, and the Kapelica Gallery, which had been crucial in constructing the

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Lovšin, Peter Mlakar, and Igor Vidmar, eds., *Punk je bil prej: 25 let punka pod Slovenci* [*Punk was before: 25 years of punk among the Slovenes*] (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2003).

paradigm of contemporary political art and new media production in Slovenia, were not included in the Manifesta project. Manifesta offered a perfect camouflage for the codification and acceptance of fake and abstract internationalism in the so-called national realm.

As Rolnik argues:

At issue here is an operation of great complexity that can intervene at different stages in the process of creation, and not only at the end. Its effect at that point is just more obvious, because it coincides with the moment when the *dissociation* makes itself felt on art's products, reifying them in two ways: either transforming them into "art objects" separated from the vital process whereby the creation was carried out, or treating them as sources of a surplus glamour-value, attached to the logos of businesses and even of cities, like Bilbao, for instance.<sup>8</sup>

Rolnik cites the example of Bilbao with its Guggenheim museum building to illustrate the operation of evacuating resistance from creativity, which transforms the object of art into a pure trademark. For Slovenes, this is precisely what occurred in 1997 and 2000 in Ljubljana.

The case of Metelkova represents an intermediary point in this genealogy of the dissociation of creativity from resistance. The situation may be summarised as follows. Metelkova is the name of a street in Ljubljana on which the barracks of the Yugoslav People's Army had been located. After Slovenia's Ten-Day War for independence, in June–July 1991, the Yugoslav army withdrew from Slovenia. The new generation of underground hard-core punk activists and independent artists and activist groups asked the City Council of Ljubljana in 1991 to give this former military complex of empty buildings to independent artistic and cultural organisations. After promising to do this, the Ljubljana City Council secretly reneged and began demolition of the Metelkova buildings with the aim of constructing a commercial centre on the site. Activists, intellectuals and artists then occupied the area as a squat in 1993, and to this day it remains a site of conflict between the independent art and cultural scene and the Ljubljana City Council. In 1993, the municipal authorities cut off the water and electricity supplies to Metelkova in an attempt to put a stop to the cultural activities and force

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<sup>8</sup> Rolnik, "The Twilight of the Victim" 36.

the activists, intellectuals and artists to leave the squat. By depriving the activists and artists of basic services, the city essentially took Metelkova hostage. The city of Ljubljana then “kidnapped” the Metelkova invention of organising the area as a central cultural and artistic space in Ljubljana for the new millennium. In fact, the city is now financially supporting the development of the Metelkova site by constructing a complex of museums there.

It is necessary to rethink Metelkova within the context of a biopolitics through which the state produces and administers the life of its citizens.<sup>9</sup> Giorgio Agamben argues that global states today play with and against two entities of life: modal life and bare (non-modal, naked) life. Modal life exists in Western democratic states in the form of life-which-chooses, life with style, and consumer life. Bare life is, on the other hand, life that serves only as the foundation of sovereignty. According to Agamben, the foundation of sovereignty is, then, based on a concept of bare life; the sovereign body fulfils its role of being sovereign based on its right to take or give/permit life (rights or style) to citizens.<sup>10</sup> This is what happened with Metelkova when, in the 1990s, the city of Ljubljana cut electric and water supplies. The kidnapped Metelkova citizens were transformed through this clear biopolitical action into *denizens*, or “denied citizens,” to borrow a term from Thomas Hammar.<sup>11</sup>

Šefik Šeki Tatlić, a theoretician and media activist from Sarajevo, helps us to develop this even further:

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<sup>9</sup> The concept of biopolitics underlies a new view of judicial power and disciplinary techniques. The theory of sovereign right functioned on the basis of the pre-determined and complementary notions of individual and society, which, at the end of the sovereign constitutive process, are transformed into the contracting individual and the social body constituted by the contract, voluntarily or implicitly. Cf. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977).

<sup>10</sup> See Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 2004), originally published in Italian as *Aperto. L'uomo e l'animale* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002), cited in Šefik Šeki Tatlić, “Post-Modal Reproduction of Power,” *Art-e-Fact: Strategies of Resistance*, Marina Gržinić, ed., 3 (2004), published online at <<http://artefact.mi2.hr>>.

<sup>11</sup> See Tomas Hammar, *Democracy and the Nation State*, Research and Ethnic Relations Series (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1990).

Besides the illegal practice of Guantanamo existence... what displays sovereignty is a model where bare-life is not destroyed, but converted, exposed as a cultural practice of life-with-modality in cases where Western pop and heavy metal music allegedly have been used to torture prisoners and may serve as a banal example or a display of the power of sovereignty where cultural practice is displayed as a weapon by exposing differentiation.<sup>12</sup>

If we consider the recent construction, in 2003 in Metelkova, of the youth hostel Celica (“cell”)—whereby the former Yugoslav army barracks prison was renovated, with financial support from the city of Ljubljana, into a shiny youth-hostel theme park, painted in hues of red, yellow and orange—we see just such a turnover. This can be understood as the city re-establishing subtle control over partially autonomous spaces without the open use of force and in a way that is directly related to the systematic gentrification politics of the contemporary city and state.<sup>13</sup> As a result of these processes of evacuation, the alternative scene was literally swallowed up and exhausted by over-institutionalised (official) culture in Slovenia, while theory was usurped and commercialised by the capitalist system (a pimp indeed, as Rolnik puts it), becoming part of the theory industry.

Rolnik theorizes such processes in precise terms:

In order to extract maximum profitability from this inventive power, capitalism pushes it even further than it would go by means of its own internal logic, but only to make an ever more perverse use of it: like a pimp, it exploits the force of invention at the service of an accumulation of surplus value, taking advantage of it and thus reiterating its alienation with respect to the life process that engendered it—an alienation that separates it from the force of resistance. On the one hand, you have a turbo-charged inventive power freed of its relation to resistance, and on the other, a tension. Easy-to-assimilate “ready-to-wear identities” are accompanied by a powerful marketing

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<sup>12</sup> Tatlić, “Post-Modal Reproduction of Power.”

<sup>13</sup> See R. Mayer, K. Lampert and M. Hille, “Example Celica, YOUTH HOSTEL, Metelkova, Ljubljana,” Marina Gržinić, ed., *The Future of Computers Arts* (Ljubljana: Maska and Maribor: MKC, 2004).



opération concocted and distributed by the media, so as to make us believe that identifying with these idiotic images and consuming them is the only way to succeed in reconfiguring a territory, and even more, that this is the only channel by which one can belong to the sought-after territory of a “luxury subjectivity.” And this is no trivial matter, for outside such a territory one runs the risk of social death, by exclusion, humiliation, destitution, or even the risk of literally dying—the risk of falling into the sewer of “trash subjectivities,” with their horror scenarios made up of war, slums, drug trafficking, kidnapping, hospital queues, undernourished children, the homeless, the landless, the shirtless, the paperless, those people who can only be less, an ever-expanding territory. If trash subjectivity continuously experiences the distressing humiliation of an existence without value, luxury subjectivity for its part continuously experiences the threat of falling outside, into sewer-territory, a fall which may be irreversible. The prospect terrifies it and leaves it agitated and anxious, desperately seeking recognition.<sup>14</sup>

Are not the stories we receive daily through the mass media evidence enough of the deepening gap between these two subjectivities? In Slovenia, for example, we witness the horrors of life and sheer chaos endured by the Roma people, as well as by others such as the “erased.” Abroad, in the world at large, we see the horrors of wars supposedly intended to preserve civilization, as well as such atrocities as decapitations, and many other kinds of misery.

The most appalling situation at home in Slovenia is that of the *izbrisani* the “erased.” On 26 February 1992, eight months after declaring independence from Yugoslavia, the new Republic of Slovenia deleted some 28,000 residents from its civil registries. This happened long after hostilities between Slovenia and Yugoslavia had ended, so war cannot be used as an excuse for the mass cancellation of these residents’ legal status. These people, eventually known as the “erased,” are not ethnic Slovenians, but rather Serbs, Croats, Bosnian Muslims, Albanian Kosovars, Roma, and others originally from other parts of the former Yugoslavia who had lived and worked in Slovenia for many years (some

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<sup>14</sup> Rolnik, “The Twilight of the Victim” 35.

of them for decades). Now suddenly, they were deprived of all official status in Slovenia. Their citizenship papers were confiscated, destroyed, removed or invalidated, which meant that other official documents were now also invalid; as a result, they found themselves deprived of the right to work, the right to have social insurance, and, to put it simply, the right to live a normal life (to go to the doctor, receive a pension, etc.).

There are many ways to name this massive violation of human rights, this murderous act of social policy by the Slovenian state: soft genocide, administrative genocide, administrative ethnic cleansing, civil death, mass denationalisation, and so on. These are all paradigms of social and political subtraction, elimination, of the de- and re-territorialization of bodies and lives, the eradication of rights and the deprivation of basic necessities. What we are dealing with here is almost a textbook case of contemporary biopolitics.

As a result of this policy, some 12,000 members of the targeted groups (out of approximately 30,000) left Slovenia. The 18,000 “erased” who remain in Slovenia exist, as it were, between two deaths: a physical one, since without papers they cannot function, and a symbolic one, resulting from the horrific psychological pressure of being expelled from the social context, cut off from their own families and from all manifestations of public life.

Such expressions of dominance over bare (naked societies perceive global capitalism not through future inequalities, class divisions, but with a willingness to prepare their states/economies to adopt global capitalism. European Union demands from transitional societies are seen as an implementation of several extremes, such as, for example, the implementation of an information society, but with the false predisposition that it is a mere technological structure, followed by extreme economic imbalances, extreme class divisions, fascistic nationalistic regimes decoded as mere figures in endless political games, with the following unequal distribution of knowledge to certain local social structures which conduct the whole process<sup>15</sup>) lives allow the political oligarchy in transitional societies to constitute itself as sovereign, to demonstrate the practice of sovereignty to the nation. As Tatlić explains:

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<sup>15</sup> Tatlić, “Post-Modal Reproduction of Power.”

Post-socialist and former Eastern European societies perceive global capitalism not through future inequalities, class divisions, but with a willingness to prepare their states/economies to adopt global capitalism. European Union demands from transitional societies are seen as an implementation of several extremes, such as, for example, the implementation of an information society, but with the false predisposition that it is a mere technological structure, followed by extreme economic imbalances, extreme class divisions, fascistic nationalistic regimes decoded as mere figures in endless political games, with the following unequal distribution of knowledge to certain local social structures which conduct the whole process.<sup>16</sup>

The biopolitical in Slovenia decodes itself in a way that, as Tatlić says,

firstly patches its own linear progress toward modal civilizations by accepting a “non-repressive” democracy, but only as a countermeasure to the former, “repressive,” communism. Functioning as a fictional platform, which if read through post-modernist practices, works as collective phantasm: the West should accept us, because we were oppressed by communism.<sup>17</sup>

The process is completed, first, by taking advantage of the deepening gap and, then, by strengthening different political positions and developing fake solutions, which are ultimately processed through the mass media.

2.

Let me propose a further theoretical-political positioning. The idea of this positioning, of taking a (conceptually) specific ground, is to philosophically denote and articulate a proper Eastern European position. This idea is not grounded in the simple game of identity politics, whereby specific monsters/entities search for their rights in cyberspace; rather it is a militant response to the constant process of fragmentation and particularisation. What is more, I insist on the repoliticization of the cyberworld by taking a ground that is not a geographical space or a location on the geographical map of the New Europe, but, as Edward

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<sup>16</sup> Tatlić, “Post-Modal Reproduction of Power.”

<sup>17</sup> Tatlić, “Post-Modal Reproduction of Power.”

Said would say, a ground that is a concept, a paradigm of such a space. My rethinking of the position of (post-)feminism and gender theories today is also a direct answer to the frequent populist remark that today is not the time to distinguish between East and West (Europe), since thanks to the ideology of globalisation it is only one's home that matters: "No East, no West, home is the best!" Despite the ideological blindness of such a statement, which fails to take into account the claustrophobic tendency and totalitarian flavour intrinsic to every ideology of intimacy, we must again ask, where is this home? In which spiritual or conceptual context is it located, if, indeed, we have one?

Instead of reflecting myself as an academically gender-positioned female writer, and therefore as a (cyber)feminist from Eastern Europe, I propose a radical reversal in the possible interpretation of this Eastern European position or paradigm. I would like to propose articulating my proper Eastern European position (or if you prefer Lyotard's term, my Eastern European condition) as a (post-)feminist—a cyberfeminist—paradigm.<sup>18</sup> Eastern Europe is to be seen as a woman-paradigm, or as the female side in the process of sexual difference and grounding ourselves in the real world or the cyberworld. This can be perceived as the militant theorisation of a particular position in the crucial debate, at the start of the third millennium, over ways, modes and, last but not least, protocols for entering the (cyber)space of hopes, uselessness, theory and terror.

"Eastern Europe" has always been subjected to different readings.<sup>19</sup> It was often viewed as a land of romantic mythological events. Seen through a Marxist-Leninist filter, the region's technological backwardness offered the myth of a grand brotherly community and total sexual freedom (which was, due to its materialist nature, devoid of ethics and morals and thus capable of the worst sins) or an exclusively totalitarian project and the realisation of an Eastern despotism in which poverty and misery reign amid endless rivers of mucus and blood. It is

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<sup>18</sup> See Marina Gržinić, "A theoretical-political positioning of philosophy, media and cyberfeminism," Claudia Reiche and Andrea Sick, eds., *Technics of cyber<>feminism <mode=message>* (Bremen: Thealit Frauen.Kultur.Labor, 2002) 141–54.

<sup>19</sup> See Marina Gržinić, 'Encountering the Balkan. The radicalisation of positioning', in Gianfranco Maraniello, ed., *Art in Europe: 1990–2000* (Milan: Skira, 2002) 115–26.

this last myth that over past fifteen years has assumed its most horrific form as it moved from the realm of the symbolic into the realm of the real, even as we all still hoped it would remain nothing but a Western phantasmagoria. The events in the former Yugoslavia are a materialisation, the entry of the real into the place of the symbolic. We should also consider in this regard the influx of refugees and illegal immigrants, especially if we think of the European Union integration processes that have forced former Eastern European states to become police watchdogs, as well as disintegration procedures (the need to have the right kind of passport) and, last but not least, the wars in the Balkans and the former Soviet Union. These facts and changes in the East have brought about a new view of Europe. A reading of the East on the part of the West is exemplified by an absence of communication and with an attitude of “looking but not seeing, listening but not hearing.” This attitude continued throughout most of the recent events as people in the former Yugoslavia died by the thousands and sought refuge by the millions. Although all this was happening in the heart of Europe, this same Europe could repudiate its heartland, for it renamed it “the Balkans.” Due to the recent atrocities, some people have given up the pleasure of contemplative and philosophical reading. With reference to history, philosophy (Kant) and the arts, we can elaborate the idea of Eastern Europe as the indivisible remainder of all European atrocities. Eastern Europe is a piece of shit and the bloody symptom of the political, cultural and epistemological failures of the twentieth century.

For the East, there is but one characteristic topic: History. The reappropriation of history. The whole socialist machine was aimed at neutralising the side effects of a pertinent interpretation of its reality and of art production, at covering up history, effacing and renaming it. At the discursive level, this was a struggle for the formation and interpretation of the history of the East, for a reappropriation of the history of socialism by the East as well as by the West.

What we are dealing with now is a deconstruction and a renewed construction of the same History, but a History which is now augmented by thoughts, images and facts that have so far been inexpressible. What we are interested in is the “internal rearticulation” that is being engendered beyond the neo-colonial positions of the West, the one that lives “here,” without being recognised as such. What we are witnessing is a process of mirroring and the reflection of one’s own self and one’s own

“Eastern” position, in which the recycling of different histories does not refer to Western but to Eastern positions and conditions.

An alternative history of the East of Europe signifies a demand for the redefinition of relations within the contemporary constructions and relations of power.

3.

At present, I can state that there is an anthropological machine operating at the basis of globalisation and it is developing a secret connection between man and animal. The idea is to make them both more human; humanisation is at the basis of this connection. This idea of humanity is the idea of Being and its inclusion in civilization. But who is it that decides what is human and at what point non-humans should take part in the process of humanisation? It's the machine of capital, of course!

In his 2002 book *The Open: Man and Animal*, Giorgio Agamben in fact warns us that it may be time to insist on the dissolution, or better yet, the separation, of the connection between man and animal.<sup>20</sup> This animal, indeed, can also be seen as the body of the modern slave. Rather than imagining the slave in the Roman Empire, one can in the present context think about the body of the immigrant or the refugee, paperless and poor, as well as the rest of the proletarian population. Agamben proposes a break with this constant hybridization. To be left out of the anthropological machine, not to be saved—this is our only possible salvation. Not to be part of the process of capitalist humanization, to be left out of Being, is perhaps the only possible way to have a decent Being.

“Outside of Being” is, in fact, the title of the last chapter of Agamben's book. Let me now briefly, but at a deep level, try to establish a possible genealogy behind the “Outside of Being” that Agamben proposes. I would put forward the following thesis. In the history of modern philosophy, three books, or positions of thought, have marked the way we understand Being (*Sein*), which Derrida defines as “we and our life.” These books are Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927), Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943), and Alain Badiou's *Being and the Event*

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<sup>20</sup> See note 6.

(1988).<sup>21</sup> To this list, I would add Agamben's chapter "Out of Being," from *The Open* (2002).

Heidegger's *Being and Time* is about the (Western) temporisation of History. Sartre's Being is about nothingness in relation to the Holocaust, although I would agree with Derrida that Sartre's 'nothingness' is only a modality of being—something as nothing.

Alain Badiou made a cut into the line of Being by means of "the event." Françoise Proust, in 1998, defined Badiou's event as a cut in the house of Western philosophy, which resembles the capitalist anthropological machine in theory and philosophy.<sup>22</sup> Badiou is very well aware that the house of Western philosophy resembles the anthropological machine that is today compelled to engage in what is merely empty panic-driven rotation, producing the total evacuation of histories and practices from the First Capitalist World. Proust describes this house of philosophy as Western metaphysics, which has been transformed into an airless house that stifles our breathing. Badiou's event is, according to Proust, the gesture of opening a window, or more precisely, windows, so as to breathe again. But is not this merely an attempt to bring fresh air into what remains the same, unchanged, old house of Western metaphysics?

In this trajectory we can identify other paths, or modifications, through history in relation to Being. We might consider the Deleuzian never-ending of Being, as Being in the process of Becoming. Derrida introduced the notion of *différance*. It claims difference by means of a single character (*a* instead of *e*). Within this context, Badiou made a far more radical gesture, indeed. He at least tried to start to think about Being from the beginning. Badiou's event should be perceived as something similar to the gesture of the professor who, after listening to us and making corrections, tells us, "Once more from the beginning, please." But the text, the house, and the single (solely Western) history remain the same!

I would argue that such moves lead to a modification in the Western Institution of Metaphysics, or in the great philosophical and

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<sup>21</sup> Alain Badiou, *L'être et l'événement* (Paris: Seuil, 1988).

<sup>22</sup> Françoise Proust, "Kaj je dogodek" [What is the event?], *Filozofski vestnik / Acta Philosophica* (Ljubljana) 19.1 (1998): 9–19.

civilizational edifice, but in the final instance, the edifice remains unchanged. Agamben is the one, then, who provides us with the most radical gesture. Agamben's "Outside of Being" is not the simple gesture of opening windows within the old anthropological machine. What he tells us is that in order to be saved we have to leave the house entirely! To get Outside of Being! To go Outside of Being may itself be perceived as Badiou's radical event, one that was, indeed, invoked by Badiou himself.

It is important to understand that this Outside of Being is not a gesture of foreclosure, of being suddenly dragged into a queer space without time, or outside of time. It does not mean finding ourselves in some weird suspension of time. To go Outside of Being means to open ourselves to another temporality. Or to be even more precise, to begin the projection of a completely different film, and not to spend time, as is Badiou's suggestion, on redefining the one single sequence, even if it is the opening sequence.

To go Outside of Being is to be open not toward the space of Otherness, but toward the Other, the Second, the Third Space.

A good example is the Irwin project *East Art Map* (2002). In this project, a history of avant-garde art from the former Eastern Europe is re-constructed through hundreds of images and references. Taking its cue from Alfred H. Barr's seminal diagram illustrating the development of Western abstract art, Irwin's *East Art Map* is a retrospective (re)construction and mapping of Eastern European Art (1920–2001). It implies, as well, placing a radical hold on the process of the too-fast historicization (equal to the process of forgetting) of different spaces, places, and territories in the world. The *East Art Map* makes visible what was for decades outside the gaze of Western (First Capitalist World) history. The *East Art Map* is important, as it opens a way of perceiving the (new) avant-garde movement as not simply the space of (disturbing) Otherness, but as the Other space. With this project we can perhaps think about Aesthetics in a new productive form, namely, *Easthetics*.

To offer a kind of a coded sequence, then, we can read the story of Being and of the mad anthropological machine of humanisation run by capital in the following way:

- Badiou: beginning (with his event, he wants to re-question once again the beginning of the edifice of Being and asks us to start from the beginning),



- Deleuze: becoming (he insists on the never-ending becoming of Being),
- Derrida: *différance* (he establishes *A* difference of Being),  
and
- Agamben: outside of Being.

Agamben is aware that the anthropological machine of Being rotates today uniquely and solely as a mad machine that nobody can correct or upgrade (despite efforts at rethinking it from the beginning or in its never-ending becoming and/or difference), which is why he suggests an end to it—outside of being.

Scientific Research Center of the  
Slovene Academy of Sciences

1. 关于1950年12月15日

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