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Until the Recent Time

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This text was archived at the Institute for Contemporary Art in Zagreb collection, as part of the **Research project** conceived in 1997 by a SCCAN – Soros Centers for Contemporary Art Network, funded by the Open Society Foundation, New York.

The purpose of the project was to select, collect and disseminate texts on contemporary art practices in the Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, around Soros Centers for Contemporary Art, written in and about art of the 1990s. The coordination of the project was carried out by Janka Vukmir, SCCA – Zagreb, today the Institute for Contemporary Art, Zagreb.

We did not intervene in any of texts more than just correcting obvious typos and spelling. On the occasion of collecting texts, we were given permission from all authors, to rightfully use them. If anyone now has different instructions, please, contact us at the info@institute.hr.

All of the texts we have collected at the time have been later published on the website of the I_CAN, International Contemporary Art Network, the short-lived successor of the SCCAN.

On the occasion of the exhibition **90s: Scars**, revisiting the art practices and social and political context of the 1990s in the postcommunist countries, the Institute for Contemporary Art is now reoffering a collection of **89 texts and a comprehensive list of then proposed further readings**, on the website of the Institute for Contemporary Art, www.institute.hr.

The exhibition 90s: Scars is curated by Janka Vukmir and organized by the Institute for Contemporary Art and the MMSU – Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rijeka, on the occasion of the **European Cultural Capital Rijeka 2020.** Originally planned to open May 14, 2020, at the MMSU in Rijeka, due to COVID-19 crisis, is postponed until further notice.

Olexandr Solovyov

Until the Recent Time

Until the recent time one could hardly suspect the new Ukrainian art in heightened interest to sociality (excluding, daresay, the Kharkiv photography art). What is more, it was satisfied and even consoled with such a status - to be asocial. At the time, when in Moscow the ETI-group used their bodies to pave the word "cock" on the Red Square, Kiev proceeded in making "beautiful art".

The last season somehow gradually increased the topicality of social problems for the Ukrainian art. However, at the same time drawing more attention to the inner world of a subject. So, the quite universal for the moment "problematic" pair "inside-outside" have not passed over the Kyiv exhibition halls either. As for the sociality, it's topicality has increased not at a usual observing-subject level, but on a new - the very level of subject participation. This level was a bit effusively, but with maximum exactness determined by B. Mikhailov in his interview to "Parta" magazine: "The new sociality must generate a new character, an artist - hero, one must go at pistol point, to shed blood (the own blood) or again to go away into metaphors". However today there is another, a bloodless way - computer, that allows the artist to firmly establish himself by means of huge opportunities of simulative cybernetics.

It seems symptomatic, but this way at the epoch of mass reorientation on computer has not become yet the major way amid Ukrainian artists, that until the present time create their work mainly by means of photography, while computer is content with the "reserve" role, - being used only as applied means of high technology. At this point till the present time prevails the natural - trick, subterfuge, or to say bluntly, "stunt". When, for example, I. Chichkan for his work "The Dreaming Princes of Ukraine" takes out of the formalin jars the real mutants, puts on their hands and ears the real (but very cheap) jewelry, and then shoots all these in a near studio conditions. When S. Solonsky manually sticks together his herbofallic collages, instead of

doing all that by means of computer. Or when the above-mentioned B.Mikhailov goes to photograph to the lair of strays and beggars, being aware, that he possibly will not came back from there.

What is it? So to speak, absence of competence or a deliberate position? Is not it a manifestation of that - not provocative, but a conservative opposition, of which Paul Virilio was speaking, but which, quite possibly, in a certain context becomes either provocative or fundamental?

The above described as well as a number of other works of Ukrainian artists, related to shocking (the season of 1997 - 98 was extremely distinctive with this), suggest themselves to be described as "photoshock without photoshop", remembering of the chapter "Photo-shocks" in the famous "Mythologies" by R. Bart. By the way, in this chapter he speaks against the superstructural horror, against too skillfully made but not touching photo-shocks, calling for naturalness. How long ago it was! It seems, that today in this line we've got an opposite suggestion - artificiality.

And now about some events of the last Kiev season.

The talk is first of all about the "Deepinsider" photoproject by A. Savadov and A.Kharchenko, with its, at first sight, "blasphemy", "desecration" (though it would be more correct to speak about iconoclastic tradition), which caused not only sharp objection in the everyday mentality, but a diametrically opposed reaction in artistic environment. In full scope it was presented in Soros Contemporary Art Center Gallery in February 1998 disregarding in a nearly pointed manner the norms of exposition and exquisity and having scarcely fit into exhibition areas. As a matter of fact - this is a mega-project, that consists of several sub-sections, each of them requiring its own detailed analysis. Here only the general remarks are possible.

Within the "Deepinsider" project by means of contemporary dynamic (sometimes close to cinematography) thinking a vigorous attempt was made to revise self-parasitizing and self-serviling cultural area, having endowing to it a so missing ability to convert with society. "Only in this relation one may speak of "Deepinsider" as of a project, as from the point of view of inner mechanisms of representation, it is deprived of traditional "cultural" self-reflection and is rather "plunged" into mass-culture genres as a highly adapted "show".

It should be stressed that here the mass-media semantics is being reformed, rather than exploited, which today is in some respect considered as a vector of longing cultural aggression.

Real life surveying was being made in real, and what is more, extreme conditions, and were related with the high risk, either of physical or moral origin. To say, during the survey in mine, it was necessary not only to go themselves through the "purgatory", passing the ritual of descending to the

shaft, but to find the "creative" contact with the characters of the story, with their secluded environment with it's internal codes and rules, with the quite understandable notions about good and evil, to say in one word, with their unique "catacomb culture".

Thus, having put the possible extreme points, the artists passed from the methodology of appearance to the methodology of presence. At this point the understanding of "Deepinsider" as operative determination of total outside to the today's culture, on one hand, and formal-literal immersion in Donbass project on the other is appeared decisive.

"Deepinsider", generally speaking, is not only abundance of plasticity-expressive and to some people shocking representations, but also a certain symbolic figure of mind, "new chemical structure of marginals", as the author evocatively represent it, where the strategy of outer annexation is replaced by cult of profound introspection.

The other big exhibition of the season - "Intermedia" was open in the same Soros gallery immediately after "Deepinsider", but it was of a group character. Briefly the essence of the conception, problems and the character of the work is the following. It is generally accepted that contemporary art, firstly, obeys the "crazy logic of modernization", replaces the humanitarian program with the technologized, along with that not only its own esthetics, but the ethics; secondly, exists amid the "performance"; thirdly, forms a part and at the same time an opposition to all-swamping culture - the performance where mass-media is starring. One of the intrigues of "Intermedia" project - the complicated and "criminal" collisions between different kinds of media. They are caused, if to believe J. Baudrillard, by the modern relations between "visible", as constantly controlled, operational, that is related first of all with newest technologies, and "sight" as a chosen point of view, which is now a prerogative of more archaic art kinds and techniques. This conflict was visibly reflected, for example, in the cinema installation by O. Hnilitsky "Work in Progress" - a kind of documentary animation of his own paintings, installations of I. Chichkan, S. Bratkov, sculptural comics by K. Protsenko. The informativity of the project was caused by the determining peculiarities of the quasi-intermedia genre - a short improptu insertion, with certainly inherent play with the phenomenon of comic, that is close to Hegel's interpretation as a "comprehensive deformation" of life and subject itself and not of something from the lower hierarchy level. It is the level of such deformation that characterize the comic of comedy era of de *L'Arte* and the time of prevailing of the *noir* comedy.

The spacing solution of the project had the form of "exposition performance", the media itself together with its transmitters and carriers representing themselves as simultaneous "decorations". The monitors were placed in the halls with the necessary spacing and showed non-stop mixed

program with zapping intervals of some real and mystified TV channels, resembling the endless "soap" media series. The intervals and caesuras themselves undertook the function of intermedia - the author's "inserted" scenes, made in different techniques and kinds, including cinema, video, sculpture, painting, object, installation, but mostly - photography.

In the conception basis of V. Tzagolov's installation "Studio of Solid Television" ("STV") punned on transferring the notion of "show" ("performance") from the philosophy to TV-media. The artist's supposition is that "with the coming of mediacratic era the existing for the moment existential maxim "to be - means to be in the world" will be replaced by the new maxim "to be - means to be shown in live TV broadcasting program". The existence will no longer be ontologically provided and obvious and will be transferred into a goal and technological problem. To prove his authenticity a man will have to apply not to existence but to the work of TV channels and studios. Television will abolish philosophy, but at the same time will appropriate its metaphysical function, and, proceed from its own ideology interest will allow who and what will be realizing in the show, in TV-life".

At last, about one more event of the season - the video festival "Dreamcatcher" in the framework on the Third Kiev Art-festival. The curator of the video-program N. Prigodich succeeded in gathering together all significant works of Ukrainian authors in this domain, created during recent years. So, one had a chance to look on a still young Ukrainian video as on a quite balanced thing.

The reasons for increased interest to video, media in Kiev and Odessa coincide with inevitable transformation of picture-centricity and a new Ukrainian art consciousness. So from here, from the pictorial idiom, comes out one of the features of Ukrainian video - often heightened narrativity. (Besides, earlier, during "picturesque" period here there was an interest to "motion" image, to "motion" picture, to "objective" - in photorealiity, for example in "non-stop paintings" by O. Golosiy...).

The Ukrainian video, certainly, is not in the forefront of working out the philosophical strategy, that could touch the gist of the cardinal problem - the problem of Vision.

The global technological culture, as it is well-known, is now on the earliest stages of changing the very nature of visual perception, destroying such usual notions from cultural points of view as "observer" and "image", that is the evidence of increasing intrusion of artificial visual "spaces" that substantially differ from the imitative possibilities of cinema, photography and television.

In this respect, the Ukrainian video is still an imitative video. The once established status -quo between the "observer" and the "image" has not yet been disturbed.

Being uninvolved in these newest art environments, the Ukrainian video remains an art (in the very traditional meaning of this word) and is described by the categories of Art, rather than by cybernetic categories.

The screen here is still not an instrument, as though from the palette of an artist, that is not able (or may be doesn't want?) to come off his umbilical cord - fine arts. The Ukrainian video is hard and realistic video. The works do not design the cyber-utopia, but rather reflect both the psychology and social-economic reality. "As for realistic images, - from the point of view of J.-F. Lyotard, - can produce reality only in nostalgic or burlesque form, giving rise rather to sufferings than satisfaction". In this sense Ukrainian video is an emotional video.

This short review deliberately lacks the critical point of view on situation in Kiev as the multipolar whole. In many respects it was caused by the fact that in Ukraine there is only one institution directly supporting the actual art - Soros Contemporary Art Center, it draws to its grant orbit all that is in the slightest degree creatively reliable.