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“Aesthetics Bridging Cultures”**

**“EASTERN-WESTERN FANTASIES”: A
REFLECTION ON SOME NEW STRATEGIC
LINKS OF CONTEMPORARY ART AND
CULTURAL PRACTICES WITH THE
AESTHETICAL AND THE POLITICAL**

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At the beginning I would like to explain that the aim of my presentation to this congress is to illustrate upon my thesis regarding aesthetic strategies in the contemporary visual arts with theoretical consequences of the so-called “East-West fantasies” through a special case of an artistic project of historicisation. In my doctoral thesis, I research the “aesthetic strategies of the visual arts in Slovenia after 1990”. I analyse a framework to my thesis from the perspective of philosophical aesthetics, which has its own specific history in Slovenia (I have to leave this historical genesis in brackets here). Aesthetics is in general perceived as an exclusively academic discipline and quite distanced from current artistic events, although it isn’t necessarily so. I am interested in those aspects of disciplinary aesthetics, which try to reflect contemporary visual practices in the fields of art and culture. I’m talking about aesthetics, which in Slovenia separated from “academic purity” about two decades ago by opening itself to other theoretical approaches and analyses of culture. Besides the so-called post-modern(istic) changes at the beginning of the 1980s, this opening up helped to decipher the happenings in the art field in Slovenia. In order to do this, a review of the past was needed. First expert conferences of then established Society of Aesthetics (1983) were focused on the reflection of historical avant-gardes, which were theoretically vastly neglected in Slovenia; next step was deliberations in the ground-breaking conceptual neo avant-garde and the so-called retro-avant-garde (which already had strong theoretical support). The latter is connected to the questions of the “new Slovene art” and the phenomenon of the multidisciplinary artistic collective Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK). Our discussion is focused on one of its aspects (the recent work of visual art group named Irwin).

Starting-point

A reflection of history and its re-articulation plays an increasingly important role in the creation processes of many artists and artistic groups (as is proven by various exhibitions like the recent Interrupted Histories at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana in 2006), not just on the local or regional perspective but also on the international context. In this respect, a prominent role in Slovenia has been played out by the artistic collective known

as NSK (1984), which started to "conquer" the East in the 1990s. The NSK project *State in Time* was one of the starting points of this campaign. The project developed through the idea of the transformation of the European space after the fall of Socialism and through the struggle to redefine the East (akin to the Balkans a little later), which ran in parallel with the passivity of formal institutions. Within this project, the NSK established numerous "artistic embassies" (with the *NSK Embassy Moscow* as the most widely recognized), serving as examples of the intense processes of self-reflection, where the recycling of different histories was not referred directly to the West, but to self-positioning and the research of proper conditions for production in the East. Up to this point the only valid or hegemonic option of viewing the East was to reflect the mirror of the West, where the achieved degree of invasion from the East was partly a fantasy of the West itself (as Eda Cufer and Alexei Monroe have already pointed out), the East positions and understands itself with ever increasing confidence. There are numerous examples of attempts to transgress the so-called Eastern-European and also Balcanian cultural paradigm. The *East Art Map* by the group Irwin from 2002, with which they tried to reach beyond national borders is also a consequence of this. The ideology and historicisation in the world of art, which are present in Slovenia since the 1980s are simptomatically expressed as self-historicisation and self-institutionalization (where the afore mentioned collective is internationally the most recognizable) can be productively reflected with the assistance of new media technologies and art theories linked with them. They show new strategic connections of contemporary art with the aesthetical and the political in the real (economic) conditions of globalization (Marina Grzinic, Inke Arns).

For further reflection on these starting-points, we need to explain and study the following:

- (1) Methodology;
- (2) The construction of the thesis, especially from the point of terms crucial for our discussion (aesthetical, strategies, East-West dualism) and their context;
- (3) A synthesis and a draft of the Irwin's *East Art Map* analysis, and the positioning of this theoretical reflection with specific reference to the project discussed.

Regarding the Method

Now it should be clearer as to which theoretical platform my analysis is based upon. Nevertheless, I'd like to explain the following regarding my methodology: I strived for firm empirical and historical foundations (phenomenologically established receptivity of artistic works themselves; the insight into the accompanying archival material and occasional records) where I'm aware that by doing so, I contribute to the construction of a specific history of art. The next stage is the "theory of art" as a study of artistic phenomena in the field of the world of art. Last but not the least is the "aesthetics" as the most abstract of theorizing, which nevertheless enables a thorough and topical questioning of the theoretical approaches to art from a broader cultural phenomena, which go beyond the field of art (in this respect I'm especially interested in encounters with the philosophy of culture and political philosophy from the critical theory of society, the French theory of society to contemporary studies of culture and society where one of

the possible lines can be drawn from Benjamin on the one hand, and from Bourdieu, Deleuze, Foucault, Badiou, Rancière, Agamben, Hardt, Negri, etc.).

In the present, the explanation of theoretical choices is much more concerned, as Bourdieu points out, with "anthropological presumptions, implicated in all the humanistic sciences"¹ and not just philosophy in its function of totalization, which "positive" (Hegelian) aspects is today presented especially with a tendency to bring a particular field to its idea or concept and not to postulate it as the norm. The idea has both a function of conceptualization and indicates to a cluster of phenomena; it has the function of defining. Nevertheless, this can be - regarding aesthetics - used more as a tool for establishing and describing than for planning and defining how we can use and understand a certain term and therefore inductively discover, present and interpret the meaning of an individual term. When we more or less succeed to separate the phenomena and embrace them under the umbrella of concept, we can start designing a theory by establishing the quality of these phenomena. In order to do this, we need to re-articulate the history of aesthetic ideas, questions, concepts and theories. So instead of making a thorough list of concepts, I had to choose those most representative for our discussion. The most characteristic qualities of artistic phenomena in Slovenia thus formed the basis for the preliminary classification of elements, models and systems. This called for a specific theoretical selectiveness and an appropriate level of generalization, in order to obtain a review of typical cases (both objects and sensual experiences and other reception processes concerning artistic activities and events, communication with the public, production, etc.)²

Modern philosophical-aesthetical views on art are the result of numerous attempts, points of view and methods to unearth and articulate a meaning where the history of aesthetics is full of transformation of its own concepts, definitions and theories. In my paper, I try to consider them consistently, especially through break offs and turning points in culturally-societal, artistic and theoretic paradigms of the late 20th century. Despite opposition and attempts of preserving the old distinction between disciplines, structuralism and the events in the late 1960s caused a comprehensive restructuring of the humanities and social sciences. Critical theory and post-structuralism with a stress on eventfulness and performativity played a crucial role in this process, while later (multi)cultural studies (including post-colonialism, feminism, queer and other culture studies) theoretically focused up until then the marginalized areas of culturally-artistic and social production. This is only one step away from questioning the field of art in relation to ideology; discursive social practices and the production of meaning; construction of history and the unstable, fluid, fragmentary, performative identity politics in the present (also in their distinction from the representation of emancipatory politics in the 60's).

Through my analyses, I will try to discuss the artistic events in Slovenia in the 1990s through the aspect of potentials of the present time, which doesn't overlook that these phenomena are the successors of important cultural and societal turning points: the first important turning point is in the emancipating 1960s and already announces the so-called "post-modern turning point" in the 1980s, which is in the 1990s succeeded by a divergence toward intensive globalization processes.³ These turns and transformations of paradigms are accompanied by processes of transition from the late industrial society into informational, capital and media based global consumer society ("critical theory of society"; the establishment of British cultural studies; Lyotard, Jameson, and the expansion of theorization of post-modernism, etc.). We deal with successive misgivings

in metaphysics, meta-narration, pretensions to universality and totality on different levels - both in the sense of political "narration of emancipation", which is typical for the French paradigm and philosophical "speculative narration", which are more characteristic for the German paradigm. Both types are important for theoretical contextualization of art and culture from the last decades of the 20th century in Slovenia as well.⁴ The post-modern turn in the post-socialistic conditions is accompanied by a strategic turn from a model of binaric opposition of East-West to plural and hybrid models of integration in globalization flows of the 90's. Furthermore, we must focus on the bio-political shift of modern times, which is according to Agamben still working.⁵ We must not forget paradigmatic turns in the field of the humanities and social sciences and art itself: a linguistic turn with the rise of structuralism in the 60's is followed first by the so-called performative and later post-modern(istic) visual turn (the influence of the so-called American paradigm of visual culture). Within the field of the philosophy of culture, there are many discussions regarding the "aesthetic turn" (Welsch).⁶ In Slovenia, this subject is from aspect of "demonic aesthetic" extensively researched by Janez Strehovec⁷, etc.

Key Terms and Contextualization

Aesthetic:

The banishment of the aesthetic in the sense of the beautiful, sublime and similar ideas as successors/remnants of the so-called aesthetic regime of the arts (Rancière)⁸ is still operating today. In the domain of "critical theory" and philosophy of culture, the beautiful is discussed only as a key dimension of commodities, which seduce our senses, or as a means of its commercial success, while beautiful in art, as Nicolas Bourriaud points out is seen as a cliché, and is as such only a by-product of an artistic project/process.⁹ From the historical genesis of aesthetic ideas (and ideas are subjects of philosophic aesthetics) points of view, the beautiful and aesthetical overlapped at the beginning (Hegel provides the key turning point here, with the transition from aesthetics as a reflection of the sensual, also the naturally beautiful to aesthetics as the philosophy of art), but we must not forget that the aesthetics and aesthetical are one thing, while the multitude of mainstream aesthetization and territories of the aesthetized profane culture are another.¹⁰ Postmodernism liberates itself from the avant-garde realization of its own specified criteria and strategies regarding the choice of the instruments by "rejecting the pragmatic aiming and reasoning of the aesthetical".¹¹ It doesn't renounce itself from possible aesthetical radical poses by taking over numerous avant-garde processes. Nevertheless, according to Slovene aesthetician Lev Kreft these processes, are, due to the loss of their mission (progress, revolutionization of society) only tactics or traces of former strategies, dissolved in ambivalence, in "unsolvable enigma".¹²

From the Aesthetic Function to the Aesthetic Strategy (Art, the Aesthetical and the Political):

The Avant-garde is according to Janez Strehovec always "a certain 'more' and a certain 'less' of art. 'More' in the sense that it is a reasonable and requisite transfer of aesthetical creativity to a non-artistic world and 'less' in the sense that artistic and purely aesthetic

functions are efficient only when they are complementary to political, ecological, pedagogic and ethical effects."¹³ One of the consequences of this is that the artistic avant-garde is aligned to often controversial and contradictory processes, which are defined as politization, pedagogization, ecologization, technologization or scientification of art. Among them, the most important and the most controversial is the process of the politization of art, which has been subjected to many condemnations (Benjamin) and also approvals.

A special case is self-contextualization, self-historicisation and even self-institutionalization of the NSK movement, which works between art and politics by drawing both from avant-garde iconography and totalitarian ideology.¹⁴ This defines NSK's artistic, methodological and philosophical practice as a retro-garde Slovene avant-garde or "retro-avant-garde".¹⁵ Art critic and theoretician Boris Groys finds the unique meaning of the Irwin's artistic practice "in the fact that it questions the twentieth-century habit of assuming an opposition between the critical and the affirmative positions in art"¹⁶. The critical position is usually linked with the aesthetic of the artistic avant-garde, while the affirmative position is on the contrary linked with traditionalism and the triviality of artistic instruments and is often treated through the optics of Nazi totalitarian or Stalinism in its hatred towards anything avant-garde. According to Groys, the key difference between the Western and Eastern avant-garde is in the fact that the avant-garde in the East has both a critical and affirmative function. The general demand of the historical avant-garde is the emancipation from the criteria of quality, tradition, taste, craftsman skills and any control by an observer or a critic. The goal of the artistic strategy is to take an independent, external and comfortable position from consumer of art, by including him in the production of an artwork "through aesthetic shock or through the transformation of all his everyday surroundings"¹⁷. Especially Eastern European art, orientated in ideology and content instigated mistrust towards purely aesthetic and formal criteria as the key quality of Western art resulting – more as a specific repertoire of artistic forms – "the idiosyncratic social and artistic-strategic application of already familiar forms"¹⁸ where special attention is devoted to the mechanisms of such usage.

(Aesthetic) Strategy of the Group Laibach/NSK:

A typical and influential interpretation of the Slovene musical group Laibach was done with the help of Slavoj Žižek who says that the group succeeds to subvert the totalitarian ideological ritual with repeating it literally.¹⁹ According to Žižek, we deal here with the so-called strategy of over-identification²⁰. German theoreticians and curators Inke Arns and Sylvia Sasse, later uses over-identification as a basis when discussing the strategy of subversive affirmation.²¹ Our expectations are disappointed regarding the content: we get a repetition of a totalitarian ritual instead of a critical distance and irony. We should understand the subversive concept of the group and its new artistic procedure, which the group introduces in art and culture in this sense.²² Adopting aesthetic methods of the classic avant-gardes (copying, simulation, mimicry and camouflage) is common to various contemporary artistic practices, in ways which allow an artist a certain participation in a particular social-political, ideological and economical context, which they apparently affirm and simultaneously undermine. They adopt an image within this said system in order to disrupt it.

According to Arns and Sasse, over-identification and subversive affirmation are forms of critique and use affirmation techniques, involvement and identification to put the viewer or listener in a specific position or situation, which he/she will later criticize. "Thus, when speaking of subversive affirmation we are not dealing with critical distance but are confronted with a critique of aesthetic experience that – via identification – is about creating a physical/psychic experience of what is being criticized."²³ Thus the strategic aestheticism of the NSK works (which can be understood as attempts of Gesamtkunstwerk) can be from their very inception in the 1980s discovered in the ambivalence of the strategy of exaggerated identification or over-identification, which is interwoven with pleasure (we can actually enjoy in the participation in a totalitarian ritual of a Laibach spectacle, or in one of the monumental works by Irwin). Therefore we don't deal with an open critique of ideology or an ironical distance but with an ambivalent strategy of subversion through repetition and adoption of certain ideological elements. Arns is convinced that both Laibach itself and NSK as a whole played a crucial role in designing the present subversive-affirmative media-activist strategies. Therefore she (together with Sylvia Sasse) starts researching the parallel histories of subversive affirmation in the East and the West. Their research is based on the premise that the methods of subversive affirmation, which started to emerge in the 1960s especially in the Eastern European art, became one of the few "export goods" to the West in the 1990s. Arns writes about a reversed perspective, where no one is asking what the East has taken from the West, rather is pointing to the opposite situation instead: namely that it is "now possible to learn much from aesthetic strategies, which were developed in so-called 'repressive political circumstances'"²⁴.

"East-West Fantasies" and Globalization

If we look at the socio-political contextualization of aesthetic strategies' potential, we can agree with Agamben's statement that the modern economic and political project of the West with an aim of abolishing poor social classes by scientific and technological progress reproduces exclusion within itself, and bars all less developed regions of the so-called Second and Third World.²⁵

But the globalization project of technological modernization also weaves a complex network of multinational capital, which increasingly operates in hyperspace, which is protected by the media and technology. The renowned theoretician Frederic Jameson launched an idea of art and the "new aesthetics", which would improve the comprehension of (whole) social reality, with the help of cognitive mapping. Some Slovene philosophers of aesthetics (Ernest Zenko) researched into this idea too.²⁶ Although Jameson couldn't imagine such art, he nevertheless placed it within the context of space metaphors or "internal space representations", which play a key role for an orientation in both a physical and social space. Alas, according to Jameson a person as an individual can't define his/her position in the conditions of the post-modern hyperspace and globally spread multinational capital, a person can comprehend only his/her immediate environment. Therefore a new form of political aesthetics has to be invented: an aesthetics which places social and environmental issues as the crux of this aesthetics. Jameson names this aesthetics, the aesthetics of cognitive mapping.²⁷ Zenko establishes that Jameson strives (in a Marxist sense) for a representation of social totality and that

this leads him into the domain of ideology, according to Althusser's model: "cognitive mapping is in a way an imaginary representation of our relation towards our actual conditions of existence"²⁸.

Let's have a look at the phenomenon of mapping as a meta-artistic discourse at the beginning of the new millennium, which is practiced by the group Irwin (*East Art Map*, 1999–) and which seems somehow appeased not only with the incapacity of "representation of social totality" but also with the incapacity of exhaustive mapping of artistic practices in regions, which the mainstream of Western modernism bypassed. The recent history of these regions after 1989 still resists and eludes itself to a critical reflection even from the Eastern point of view. Eda Cufer for example asked in 2004: "*But what were we actually seeking and pursuing through all those years and decades of the Cold War? What were we fantasizing about in the more or less grey reality of Real communism? Was it the West? The bright colours of the West? Or about how the West was fantasizing us? About ourselves in the colourful fantasy of the West?(...) What did the imaginary world of the past transform itself into?*"²⁹

Romantic polarization of East-West, which defined the representational politics of the Cold War was in the 1990s preserved in popular memory through cliché characters within the popular media culture (cartoon heroes, etc.). But in reality we deal with a complex structure of relations, which had connected and separated both poles for decades. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, huge simplifications in the world of art were possible, mainly due to the non-existent cultural history of the former communist East. While the West gazed and saw in this artistic production, namely an imitator of Western trends, the East demonized the cultural hegemony of the West. Now, the basic problem of re-establishing identities is based upon the absence of reflection. This preserves the vulnerability to be described and defined by others ("capital expansionism of the West" replaced the repressive state apparatus).

About the Historicisation of Incision

The effects of NSK operations can be understood as an incision in the continuity of Slovene art. It calls for the questioning of the foundations of Slovene art and its relevant interpretations. Many prestigious exhibitions by the group Irwin within the context of Western institutional system of art and general international success of groups within NSK are more the result of their international actuality and simultaneous specificity of concepts used, rather than due to some sort of Slovene exotics.

At the beginning of the 1990s, Ives-Alain Bois (in line with the French semiology tradition) besides the perceptive, technical and symbolic model of painting extracts also a so-called "strategic model".³⁰ What is important for him is the understanding of the structural or "strategic" nature of denotation, where the strategic reading is strictly anti-historic, in a sense that it is prepared to follow the market's demand and its incessant search for new products. In contrast with the majority of art historians, strategic model doesn't believe in the order of a homogenous linear time without disconnections. What is especially interesting in this respect is that the art historian Tomaz Brejc in a review of Kemp's history of Western art for an Oxford publishing house in 2000 stresses that Irwin

turns up "at the end of history".³¹ According to Kemp, the planetary post-modernism elapses with the Irwin's installation *Capital* set up in New York in 1991. Irwin arises at the end of Western European canonical history, at the point "where this canon is broken and lost in globalism and multiculturalism, in a material point of view and deconstructional interpretation".³² Brejc on the example of Kemp's historicisation of the Irwin group discovers the same point of disconnection, which by the recognition of the so-called "Eastern European art" and due to the globalization process entered into the then canon of Western European history.

In the Second World, in post-socialist countries, among those is Slovenia, we often observe the thoughtless fascination with symbolic products of the First World. Key historical facts have real and material influence in the present (poor infrastructure, reduction or absence of state support, etc.) despite numerous possibilities of different explanations. Historical conditions therefore confirm the argument about specific forms of art, which were until recently largely excluded from the mainstream of Western art due to an underdeveloped artistic infrastructure. In the middle of the 1990s, Ales Erjavec wrote that "this art remained largely unknown outside its own environment just because it didn't receive proper media promotion and social interest, and because it didn't master the mechanisms of penetration toward a symbolic market"³³.

But there are some exceptions: the NSK movement became more and more tolerated even after its initial public rejection and was in the 1980s, after its aesthetic and commercial recognition abroad (without state subsidies or support – this absence of support is typical for a large section of alternative culture) was generally accepted into the artistic mainstream in Slovenia. NSK's provocative stance became "aesthetic provocativeness and has lost its former political and ideological charge"³⁴. Unlike in the Western capitalistic world of art, the role of art and culture in socialism is limited by the strong ideological and political blockades of the state apparatus. The NSK strategies using mimicry tactics, act subversively upon state mechanism with an apparently strong structure. "But doesn't the very same case show that the conditions at the end of the decade and mostly at the transition to a multiparty parliamentary democracy call for a different artistic approach and a different creative energy?"³⁵ As Slovene theoretician Marina Grzinic points out, different strategies and tactics from other cultural and artistic practices emerged in Ljubljana's subculture or alternative scene in the 1980s – some of them also with an alternative use of media society tools.³⁶

The transition period of the 1990s is linked to the Eastern and Central European cultural and political space after the fall of communism. This space increasingly integrates itself in the global environment; therefore we have to bear in mind both aspects together. From a theoretical aspect, the question of national identity can present a productive link to experiencing on the level of the Imaginary or on the ideology level (Althusser) and with its articulation on the Symbolic level (Lacan). In an uncertain period of socio-economic and political transition, the mythical establishment of individual communities, which is not historically grounded, offers an imaginary space for identification in the sphere of culture (Zizek in line with Lacan points out that "reality is ruled by fantasy"). Nevertheless, it seems that a national cultural identity can become successful in post-modern conditions, only by its commodification with the market of symbolic goods.³⁷ The contemporary critical theory (for example Hardt and Negri in their work *Empire*)³⁸ and that artistic and cultural practice, which offers a critical insight into the existent state

of affairs (by mediating aesthetic strategies) and tries to resist this trend and is in this sense also a direct source for theoretical inspirations.

Fantasies, Misunderstandings, Failed Encounters³⁹

The psychoanalytical approach bases the rejection of ideas and phantasms of positive or progressive modernistic project of the West, by referring to the argument that every art except that which uses the language of politics is subjected to political manipulation⁴⁰ where retro-garde is seen as a symptom of disclosure and shows the constellation of the manipulative social mechanism. While a shift from the ideological-political to an economic-social orientation in the globalising processes dictated by Western capital has been made, the so-called "army of amateurs"⁴¹ from the region of former communist countries tries to resist the commoditised Western art market: this region is besides its unprofessionalism is also oppressed by "sins" of collectivism, utopism, masochism, cynicism, laziness and a love towards the West, as it was treated in exhibition *7 Sins: Ljubljana–Moscow* (2004/05) at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana. The exhibition was held at the central artistic institution in Slovenia and according to curators continued the trend, outlined with its *Arteast 2000+ Collection*⁴² with the goal of "establish links between Eastern and Western Europe through international collaboration capable of eradicating borders that had until recently divided Europe both socio-politically and culturally".⁴³ The recent exhibition *Interrupted Histories* at The Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana (2006) was completely dedicated to artists who strive for updating the artistic system and its historiography by adopting the role of an archivist, curator, historian, ethnologist, etc.⁴⁴ Artists usually decide upon this kind of activity due to the lack of proper historical and contextual discussions, which should be done by existent institutions in post-socialistic conditions. Boris Groys in his thoughts about museums and collections claims that the collection itself becomes an art form. The interesting examples are also Groys' discussions with his students under the curatorship of Barbara Vanderlinden, presented in Small Gallery of Museum of Modern Art (Ljubljana, 2001). Slovene artist and theoretician Polona Tratnik appraises these "philosophical discussions about art as a new form of the exhibition" as conceptually problematic: in this case the art work is "not meant as an open form of work, which counts on the interactivity of the viewer"⁴⁵.

When works of art and artistic projects become tools, a platform for new processes for the historicisation and contextualisation of art – presuming also an active participation of the viewer –, they gain a new function after losing its primary function when entering a museum. Art thus gains a new function (non- or less formal) of tools for (self)historicisation and (self)contextualization, even for the establishment of its own parallel (phantom) institutions as a method of mapping very heterogeneous phenomena in the present. Among those strategies of historiography as a meta-artistic discourse, Irwin's multi-phase project *East Art Map*⁴⁶ holds a special place. The first phase of the project was between 1999 and 2002 and the second between 2002 and 2006 (and it still continues).⁴⁷ In co-operation with local curators and theoreticians from former communist countries from Eastern Europe, who chose 10 representative local artists/groups, the group Irwin formed a map of (overlooked) artistic production from 1945 to 2000. The production was collected in a common folder, regardless of national

frameworks and as a repost to the Western hegemonic historicisation.⁴⁸ The ambitious project by Irwin is a result of conviction that it is possible and necessary to intervene in the contextualization and historiography of artistic practices under the conditions of post-socialism. Both contextualization and historiography are in a highly developed market system, an inseparable part of the work for the appropriate institutions.

Irwin's Project of Historicisation and Theoretical (Self)positioning

Irwin's project *East Art Map* as meta-artistic mapping (self-historiography of the East) is crossing the boundaries of the world of art in order to question specific cultural norms and policies, which are crucial for production conditions: non-financing, insufficient infrastructure, lack of historicisation and proper education, etc. This stresses the importance of symposiums, organized on the incentive of artists and art theoreticians. Connecting with theoretic practices outside universities can induce a natural dissemination of the critical impulse within the humanities and social sciences in relation to the art market, publications, advertising, nationalism and globalism, ideology and politics.

The subject of Irwin's project (self-historiography of Eastern European art) is consolidated through symposiums: they connect a specific string of art objects, projects and people who are involved in art and theoretical thought under production conditions (of post-socialism in transition) in former Eastern Europe, which became more interesting for the Western art market not until the 1990s (this interest moves to the Balkans at the end of decade).⁴⁹ Unlike the discipline of art history with its straight outlined mission, these art studies seem to be to some degree uncertain as to what and for whom their knowledge may prove useful: this is not a question of history itself, because history is always a kind of construction⁵⁰; it is a question which history, for whom and with what purpose.

What is of interest for us here is both the generative and reactive moment of these theoretical platforms, i.e. how to bring forth practices and criticize them at the same time. New subjects (practitioners), new theoretical methods and fields of thought and operations (also regarding competition on the global market, which demands proper conditions for research, etc.) articulate through this process. Maybe this is already the second step (in accordance with first and second stage of the *East Art Map* project) towards dismissing misunderstandings, which are often based on myths, stereotypes, exotics and fantasies (or phantasms), failed intercultural encounters, disagreements and doubts regarding the role of theory in the world of contemporary art and culture. But isn't the "cognitive mapping" within the theoretical sphere as one of the products of Irwin's meta-artistic project becoming an imaginary representation of our relationship toward our actual living conditions? For me, this raises the question as to whether this is a proper method to make visible, something not yet existent on the global map of knowledge but can nevertheless with particular self-positioning participate with the dialogue in the global networking and distribution of knowledge instead of being self-evidently "ideologically interpellated".

¹ Cf. Bourdieu, Pierre. *Science of Science and Reflexivity*. Oxford: Polity, 2004.

² Cf. Tatarkiewicz, Wladislaw, „Introduction“, in: *A History of Six Ideas: An Essay in Aesthetics*. The Hague [etc.]: Martinus Nijhoff, Warszawa: PWN, 1980. 1-10.

³ Cf. Jameson, Fredric. *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983–1998*. London, New York: Verso, 1998.

⁴ Cf. Zenko, Ernest. *Totaliteta in umetnost: Lyotard, Jameson, Welsch*. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU, 2003. 166.

⁵ Cf. Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

⁶ Cf. Welsch, Wolfgang. *Undoing Aesthetics*. London: Sage, 1997.

⁷ Cf. Strehovec, Janez. *Demonško estetsko (Od filozofske teorije k estetiki kot teoriji estetizacij)*. Ljubljana: SM, 1995.

⁸ Cf. Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. London. New York: Continuum, 2004.

⁹ Cf. Megla, Maja. “Lepota je stranski učinek. Pogovor z Nicolasom Bourriaudom”, in: *Delo*, November 14th, Ljubljana, 2006. 17.

¹⁰ Cf. Strehovec, Janez. *Op. cit.* 11–16; 20: Aesthetization is the transfer of aesthetic, which is inherent to the arts and to the reality and activities outside art. Often, this is a manipulation in order to provide a higher exchange value with a beautiful form as a “disguise”. The aesthetization of politics is a sensually likable arrangement of political contents (programmes) within the realm of political marketing. Aesthetization of products is focused on the enhancement of their attractive form as stimuli for successful exchange. The aesthetization of environments (artificial, virtual worlds) attracts and seduces visitors with the contents of these environments. Strehovec names the aesthetical, which prevails at the end of the second millennium as “the demonic aesthetical”, i.e. the aesthetical in order to seduce the senses regardless of the consequences (the famous case of the Gulf War).

¹¹ Kreft, Lev. “Avantgarda, retrogarda in napredek”, in: L. Kreft, *Estetika in poslanstvo*. Ljubljana: ZPS, 1994. 156–173, especially p. 164.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Strehovec, Janez. *Oblika kot problem. Razprave iz estetske teorije*. Ljubljana: CZ, 1985. 239.

¹⁴ Cf. Erjavec, Ales, Grzinič, Marina. *Ljubljana, Ljubljana, The Eighties in Slovene Art and Culture*. Ljubljana: MK, 1991. 100.

¹⁵ Cf. Suvaković, Misko. *Postmoderna (73 pojma)*. Beograd: Nova knjiga/Alfa, 1995. 138–139: Retro-garde is a postmodernistic concept, which characterizes simulation and eclectic representation of totalitarian models. It paradoxically quotes and directs to utopian avant-garde iconographies and their exploitation in the postmodern society.

¹⁶ Cf. Groys, Boris. “The IRWIN Group: More Total than Totalitarianism”, in: *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s* (Eds. L. Hoptman, T. Pospiszyl). New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002. 289.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 192.

¹⁹ The identification with a symptom as the final moment of the psychoanalytical process in correlation with the transcending of a phantasm, is identification with a particular form, which is adopted for us by a sullied substance of pleasure (identification with a letter, which is not a “mere dead letter”): Žižek suggests that we should understand the strategy of the Laibach spectacle in this sense. We enjoy the spectacle despite the nauseating sensation which it evokes (cf. Žižek, Slavoj. *Pogled s strani*. Ljubljana: Ekran. 1988. 72).

²⁰ Cf. Žižek, Slavoj. “Why are Laibach and NSK not Fascists”, in: *M'ars – Ljubljana Modern Gallery newspaper*, Nos. 3–4, 1993. 4.

²¹ Arns, Inke. “Affirmation and/as Resistance: Regarding the Strategy of Subversive Affirmation in Today's Media-activist Projects (Together with Examples from the Field of Contemporary Performance)”, in: *Maska*, Vol. XX, Nos. 1–2 (90–91), Spring 2005. 53–56; Arns, Inke, Sasse, Sylvia. “Subversive Affirmation. On Mimesis as a Strategy of Resistance”, in: *Maska*, Vol. XXI, Nos. 98–99, Spring 2006. 5–7.

²² It is accompanied by a typical interpretation using psychoanalytical theory of signifier, which is based on the theoretical background formed in Slovenia published in papers and given in lectures by Slavoj Žižek, Rastko Mocnik, Braco Rotar and Zoja Skusek-Mocnik (all were part of the neo-avant-garde OHO

movement from the late 60s and were among the first contributors to its theoretical support. Later they published articles in the magazine *Problemi*).

²³ Arns, Inke, Sasse, Sylvia. *Op. cit.* 7.

²⁴ Cf. Arns, Inke. *Op. cit.* 53.

²⁵ Cf. Agamben, Giorgio. *Op. cit.*

²⁶ Cf. Zenko, Ernest. *Op. cit.* 86–91.

²⁷ Cf. *ibid.* 89.

²⁸ . 168.

²⁹ Cufer, Eda. "Remember Octobriana", in: *7 Sins: Ljubljana – Moscow* (exhibition catalogue). Ljubljana: Museum of Modern Art, 2004. 77 (my accentuation).

³⁰ Cf. Bois, Ive-Alain. *Painting as Model.*, Cambridge (MA), London: The MIT Press, 1990.

³¹ Cf. Brejc, Tomaz. "Irwin na koncu zgodovine", in: *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, Nova vrsta XXXVII, Ljubljana, 2001. 164–179.

³² *Ibid.* 165.

³³ *Ibid.* 123.

³⁴ Cf. Erjavec, Ales, Grzinic, Marina. *Op. cit.* 115.

³⁵ Cf. Erjavec, Ales. "Drugi svet", in: A. Erjavec. *K podobi*. Ljubljana: ZKOS, 1996. 123.

³⁶ Cf. Grzinic, Marina. "Punk: strategija, politika in amnezija", in: *Punk je bil prej: 25 let punka pod Slovenci* (Eds. P. Lovsin, P. Mlakar, I. Vidmar). Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, Ropot, 2002. 66–85, especially pp. 79–80.

³⁷ Cf. Erjavec, Ales. "Drugi svet". *Op. cit.* 127–128.

³⁸ Cf. Hardt, Michael, Negri, Antonio. *Empire*. Cambridge (Mass.), London Harvard University Press, 2000.

³⁹ Cf. *Platforma SCCA (Kaj storiti z balkansko umetnostjo?)*, No. 4, SCCA Ljubljana, 2005. Cf. also Buck-Morss, Susan. *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000.

⁴⁰ Cf. Laibach Kunst, "Totalitarizem: akcija v imenu ideje", in: *Nova revija*, Nos. 13–14, 1983, p. 1456; and also "Neue Slowenische Kunst", *Problemi* (special edition), No. 6, 1985.

⁴¹ Cf. Degot, Jekaterina. "Army of Amateurs", in: *7 Sins: Ljubljana–Moscow*. 69–72: Regarding the idea of deprofessionalization as an anti-aesthetic and anti-commodification strategy of art under the conditions of socialism, where amateur culture and free creativity are praised against the capitalistic machinations of institutions – in its demand for cultural consumption of "artistic products".

⁴² The collection started in 2000 (cf. 2000+ Arteast Collection: The Art of Eastern Europe in Dialogue with the West: from the 1960s to the Present: Exhibition of Works for an Emerging Collection: Museum of Modern Art, New Museum Premises at Metelkova – Site under Construction, 24 June – 24 September 2000. Ljubljana: Museum of Modern Art, 2000), before the ambitious project of forming the Kontakt collection in 2004 (with the first public presentation in 2006 in Vienna) and which is a part of (corporate) aspirations of the Erste Bank Group to contribute to the social and cultural transformations in the region of Central and Eastern Europe <<http://www.kontakt-collection.net/>>.

⁴³ Cf. Badovinac, Zdenka, Misiano, Viktor, Zabel, Igor. "7 Sins: Ljubljana–Moscow" in: *7 Sins: Ljubljana–Moscow*. 8. Another important step of recognition for the so-called Eastern European art was made by the Ljubljana Museum of Modern Art Body and the East in 1998 (curator Zdenka Badovinac; cf. *Body and the East: From the 1960s to Now*. Ljubljana: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998).

⁴⁴ Cf. *Interrupted Histories. Arteast Exhibition* (exhibition catalogue). Ljubljana: Museum of Modern Art, 2006.

⁴⁵ Tratnik, Polona. "Filozofsko govorjenje o umetnosti kot 'nova' oblika rastave" ("Philosophical Discussions about Art as a New Form of the Exhibition), in: *Likovne besede/Art Words*, Nos. 55–56, Summer 2001. 146.

⁴⁶ Cf. *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (Ed. Irwin). London: Afterall, 2006. 11–15 (Irwin, "General Introduction").

⁴⁷ Cf. *Mind the Map! History is not Given!* (Eds. M. Grzinic, G. Heeg, V. Darian). Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2006.

⁴⁸ A fine example is the anthology of Eastern and Central European art: cf. *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s* (chapter "Pioneers and Their Manifestos": Pogacnik, Marko, Plamen, Igor, G. "OHO Manifesto", pp. 92–95; chapter "Onward Toward the Retro-Avant-Garde!", which deals mainly with the Slovene NSK movement, pp. 285–301).

⁴⁹ Cf. *Platforma SCCA*, No. 4, Ljubljana, 2005.

⁵⁰ Marina Grzinic productively theorizes with particular reference to this connection. Cf. Grzinic, Marina: *Fiction reconstructed: Eastern Europe, Post-socialism & the Retro-avant-garde*. Vienna: Selene, 2000. It deals with the theoretical confrontation with specific cultural-artistic and media events in the region of the former Yugoslavia, also in the context of the broader, the so-called "Eastern European space".

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