



Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki plac Małachowskiego 3 00-916 Warszawa www.zacheta.art.pl

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Interrupted Connections

27th of October – 26th of November 2006

Mobility, nomadism and the liberation from geophysical borders and social barriers are amongst the most significant strivings of the contemporary global elite (including cultural producers) and, in particular, artists. The freedom of movement is a privilege which, according to Zygmunt Bauman, divides society into those who can make use of it and those who are degraded by their immobility [1]. It is speed and mobility which shape the contemporary public language of economics and culture. In the post-communist countries, going through systemic change, subjected to late capitalism-fuelled deterritorialisation [2], this polarisation has been particularly intense, a factor perhaps caused by the desire to accelerate and make up for lost time. In line with the diagnosis about the 'end of geography' – in other words, the notion that now distances and spaces should be understood as a social construction dependent on the speed with which you can cover them or negate them by moving in cyberspace or 'real time' [3] – a different style of life may now divide people who in physical terms live not far from one another, members of the same nation, local community, of family. For young artists entering the global art world through international exhibitions or residency programmes, nomadic exterritoriality represents a particularly powerful aspiration. At the same time it is precisely they, those who benefit from globalisation, who ask the question of the emotional costs of adapting to a mobile life and who raise the themes of disintegration and alienation, as well as those of one's roots, identity and memory, and who direct their attention to those who stay put.

The video works by Jakup Ferri and Marcell Esterházy deal with the problems created by functioning in two different planes of space and time, and thus in different social realities. Jakup Ferri's film *Jakup, Come Back* was made for the exhibition "In den schluchten des Balkan" curated by René Block at the Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel in 2003. This was a particularly exciting event in the life of the young artist from Kosovo who was thus able to take part in his first exhibition in the West with its promise – one which has later turned out to be fulfilled – of the beginning of an international career. Ferri put his parents in front of the camera and asked them to thank the curator for inviting him to the exhibition. His father, obviously moved, greets those who are in the place 'where there is more imagination'. One gets the impression he addresses invisible, inaccessible representatives of a better world. The artist's mother, full of longing after her son, breaks out of the convention and asks the son to take care in the unfamiliar world, to be careful in contacts with strangers, and to return home as soon as the exhibition is finished. Posing in a static scene in its flat, the artist's family functions in an immobile reality, a locality respecting borders and distances set by rootedness, and knowledge horizons limited to close coordinates. It is the 'neighbourhood', or, as Bauman writes, the 'space where one feels at home, the space where it's hard to get lost', whereas their son is 'far away (...) where you go only seldom or never at all, where unpredictable and incomprehensible things happen to which you never know how to react' [4]. In reality, thanks to global demand for 'imagination', Jakub has found himself outside the territory they know, beyond even the nearby-far away division, and will never return home fully, even if physically present there. Despite its light, jocular mood, the work speaks of the sadness of inevitable parting and the longing that follows it.

The phenomenon of alienation, of an exclusion provoked by the social inadequacy, immobility and slowness that are the characteristics of old age are the entry point of Marcell Esterházy's film *v.n.p. v2.0*. The artist documented a family Sunday lunch in which his grandfather was a participant. In so doing he used an acceleration effect thanks to which his grandfather's usual, very slow, movements look calm and noble, while the gestures and conversations of the other participants seem deformed, incomprehensible and absurd due to their excessive rapidity. Were it not for this editing trick, the grandfather's slow movements would be completely 'uncinematic', totally beyond the boundaries of the patience of the average spectator. The artist's approach breathes media life and dignity back into the old man at the cost of shortening and deforming the time of his younger surrounding company. Age and time thus assume the character of relativistic, social constructs. Slowness, as seen by Esterházy, brings to mind Sten Nadolny's famous novel "The Discovery of Slowness", in which slowness is presented as a virtue and is connected with heightened awareness, sensitivity and memory, confronted with the rapid, mad pace of modernity [5]. The protagonist's dignified concentration on every gesture, his celebration of the meal has one more aspect – it reveals the old man's need to familiarize and tame the uncontrollable and chaotic reality through familiar gestures, repetitive rituals. Our contact with this slow-paced reality cannot, however, be completely successful: though appreciated, it remains alone in its strangeness.

Marzena Nowak and Angelika Fojtuch both make an attempt to open up a communication with their family and the past, to confront their roots and identity. In the video *Short Stories*, Marzena Nowak filmed her father in their family home telling an anecdote about an adventure that he went through just after his marriage to the artist's mother. The father tells the story that is old and well-known to the intimate family in a lively, emotional way, as though it had only just taken place. The film thus speaks of the demands of concentration and patience required in intimate communication, in the transmission of history that relies on the limited capacities of individual memory. This kind of communication – slow, 'settled', often perceived as imperfect – can function solely in the private sphere and is impossible in the public discourse with its rapid exchange and information overload. Giving the family situation a media representation, Nowak takes it out of the niche of the private and shows personal relations and memory as decisive in the formation of identity.

The sense of separation, of the necessity of leaving one's home, of redefining it, is present in Nowak's other video works: *Short Stories 1 (AR)* and *Olivia*, which is shown at the exhibition. The latter's action takes place in an empty apartment in Dessau. The film shows the final moments of a young girl just before she leaves her flat: these are moments of farewell to the saturated memories of a childhood room. The situation is oneiric, bringing to mind the narrative and atmosphere of a dream. Olivia's gestures – tearing off the

wallpaper and the infantile poster showing a little girl with a cat – evoke a sense of her ‘communicating’ with the ‘uncanny’ house which lives and looks, a sense of erasing the traces of memory from it. This brings to mind what Lacan said about the gaze as a quality of the object rather than the subject: ‘the gaze defines the point in the object (the picture) from which the subject’s very act of seeing is watched, which means that the object looks at me’ [6]. The subject’s disintegration is the result of the sense of a lack of safe distance and control over the field of vision, a sense of being stared at by the object whose gaze manifests itself as a stain on the picture disrupting its transparency. The stain is a traumatic crack of reality gaping open in a familiar symbolic space. The poster girl’s penetrating gaze seems to play this role here. The wallpaper and the poster, torn off, trampled, and thrown out to the rubbish, suggest an attempt to free oneself from past memories, and, consequently, an acceptance of the present. The girl’s cheerful mood suggests the whole situation makes her happy.

The identity that emerges from roots, from family ties, from a surname functions in Angelika Fojtuch’s video work *onitoja* (they are me) as a code inscribed in the psyche and body, independent of one’s life choices. The work is a kind of self-portrait – the artist introduces herself by her name and surname, and then proceeds to state, in first person, the names and surnames of her parents, grandparents and further ancestors, identifying herself directly with them. Simultaneously, as she gets to the ever more distant layers of time and ever more distant relatives, the screen becomes whiter and whiter, and the image of the speaking artist gradually fades, until it disappears completely. The past and family heritage seem to be both a support here and a burden, a fate over which one has no control.

All of the works shown in the exhibition speak of the need to re-establish interrupted, weakened, or difficult-to-maintain ties with family history, with the locality left behind, one’s home territory.

Returning to the imagined home proves impossible, however, because the viewing perspective is moving and encompasses ever new places, whereas the territorial ‘rules and codes’ are invalidated in the process of creating the ‘reality of new territory’, a ‘new type of reality’ [7].

curator Joanna Sokołowska

see the folder accompanying the exhibition

Artists presented in the exhibition:

Marcell Esterházy – born in 1977. Lives and works in Marseille and Budapest

Jakup Ferri – born in 1981. Lives and works in Prishtina

Angelika Fojtuch – born in 1978. Lives and works in Gdynia

Marzena Nowak – born in 1977. Lives and works in Warsaw.

[1] Z. Bauman, *Globalizacja*, Warszawa 2000, published in English as *globalization*, Columbia University Press, 2000.

[2] G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *L’Anti-Edipe. Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, Paris 1972.

[3] P. Virilio, *Un monde surexposé: fin de l’histoire, ou fin de la géographie?* “Le monde diplomatique” August 1997, p. 17.; Virilio’s arguments are quoted by Bauman, see *Globalizacja*, op.cit., p. 4; on the *Tyranny of Real Time*, see P. Virilio “Desert Screen: War at the Speed of Light”, London 2002; J. Thommesen, Virilio: *From space to Time, From Reality to Image*, ephemera. theory & politics in organization, 2003, <http://www.ephemeraweb.org/journal/3-2/3-2thommesen.pdf>.

[4] Bauman, op. cit., p. 19.

[5] S. Nadolny, *The Discovery of Slowness*, originally published as “Die Entdeckung der Langsamkeit”, Munich 1983.

[6] S. Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass. 1994.

[7] M. Herer, G. Deleuze, *Struktury – maszyny – kreacje*, Warszawa 2006, p. 128.

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