

**Branislava Anđelković  
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Murder, or Happy People

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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](http://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.

## Branislava Anđelković & Branislav Dimitrijević

### Murder, or Happy People

*In the appeal in the sentence passed upon Pelosi, the fundamental question remains. Was he alone? Or was he used as bait, an accomplice in a planned, ruthless attack? The Juvenile Court, sentencing him to nine years in jail, concluded that Pelosi had committed the crime with the help of other unidentified persons". ... The conviction was influenced by medical/legal testimony to the effect that the young man showed no evidence of injury, although he said he had been attacked and had struggled with the victim for a long time. His hands were clean, as were his clothes, which should have been stained with blood.*

Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi on the trial on Pier Paolo Pasolini's murderer<sup>1</sup>

One of the observations arising from such a murder which initiates a huge number of political, sexual and ethical questions a murder like that of the famous Italian director, poet, homosexual and expelled member of the Communist Party of Italy Pier Paolo Pasolini is the one on the occasion of his death by Alberto Moravia: "Pelosi and the others were the arm that killed Pasolini, but those who authorised the act are legion, in fact, all of Italian society."<sup>2</sup> Pasolini simply had too many enemies, from fascists to those communists of strictly moralising views, so a consensus was created in Italian society that he had "been asking" for what happened to him, thus sharing (or completely assuming) responsibility for his own murder. While in Pasolini's case we have a political murder which was "accidentally" committed by a rent-a-boy whom the famous director had picked up that evening and could have been committed by anyone else, both according to the logic of those who are aghast at the murder and those who consider it was to have been expected the second "introducer" example is not a political murder, but an apparently "ordinary" killing

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, "Pasolini: Murder of a Dissident", in *October: The first decade*, The MIT Press, p. (first published in the Rome daily Repubblica, 2 November 1977).

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

committed out of carelessness. In an essay on the "paranoiac spaces" of the racist and nationalist consciousness, Victor Burgin mentions a case which occurred in the US state of Maine. Mrs. Karen Wood, who had just moved to a small town in this north-eastern state, was killed, in the yard of her new home by a local hunter who mistook her for a deer. The case never came to trial, and the local press concluded that Karen Wood simply did not know well enough the traditional way of life in her new neighbourhood, and that she should have worn "blaze-orange" clothing and not white gloves which led the hunter to mistake her for a deer.<sup>3</sup> Thus both Pasolini and Karen Wood committed incursions into the "paranoiac space" of the social community, and the community, in turn, understood their murders as a natural defensive mechanism activated against such incursions. In both cases, when it turned out to be impossible to prove first-degree murder, the killing was seen as an "example" for the victim, an expected case in the usual economy of social movements.

The matter of authorisation of killing muddies the usual legalistic understanding of an act for which responsibility is born by the perpetrator or whoever directly ordered it, committed in a way which can be proved in court. In democratic systems, society is not responsible for the government it elected, on the contrary, government is responsible for itself before society, it becomes the normative "ethical" institution of society. This was so in democratic states such as Weimar Germany, in which those who in 1933 voted for the National-Socialist Party could not be found responsible for the policies which Adolf Hitler subsequently implemented. In other words, at the level of state affairs there is no collective or national premeditation.

From today's official and unofficial national perspectives<sup>4</sup> in Serbia (excluding semi-official national perspectives), the war in Yugoslavia is seen to have been a misfortune for the Serbian people primarily because it was lost. Victims are recognised on all sides, and nobody (unlike Croatia, where the official national perspective is triumphalist) is feeling after this

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<sup>3</sup> See Victor Burgin, "Paranoiac Space", in L. Taylor (ed.), *Visualizing Theory: Selected Essays from V.A.R.*, Routledge, New York - London 1994, pp 230-241.

<sup>4</sup> As this text is not concerned with the political situation in Serbia, the differentiation of these "perspectives" serves only to present concisely some of the political options created in this territory since the late 80s. The official national perspective is that cultivated for the last ten years by the ruling party, and which has undergone changes, mostly for the pragmatic reason of staying in power. Unofficial national perspectives are nowadays generally the province of opposition nationalist groups (either parties or organisations of "independent intellectuals") which usually use the prefix "democratic". Semi-official perspectives are those of groups which are completely or partly organised by the ruling party in order to represent a more extreme version thereof, thus showing the regime to be moderate in comparison to these options (e.g., Vojislav Šešelj's Serbian Radical Party, ultra-rightist "intellectuals", various "white eagles", etc.).

war the way they wished they would feel when it all started in the late 80s. Between 1987 and 1990, what are now the official, unofficial and semi-official formations were then a monolithic apparatus of the national re-birth, and the logistics were being laid down for determining the national and territorial aims: perhaps very few people at the time had the ability to face their own imaginations. This period will remain a blind spot in Serbian history (as is the period of Nedić's rule<sup>5</sup>), simply because too many people took part in the premeditation of war. The events of 1991 were authorised by a large majority of the Serbian population, including those civic layers now fragmented into various options, some of whom unwillingly remember their former thoughts.

Speaking of the flowing out of meaning of the names of social classes, of the haemorrhage of names such as "bourgeoisie" from reality into representation, from "economic man" to "mental man", Roland Barthes notices that the "leakage" (or haemorrhage, as he says) of the name "bourgeoisie" is expressed precisely through the notion of nation<. The term "bourgeoisie" is submerged in the term "nation" because thus this class finds new allies in the series of formless strata created in modern society.<sup>6</sup> To speak of a bourgeoisie in a totally impoverished society such as the Yugoslav one is impossible from the position of "economic man", but is possible from that of "mental man". The Serbian bourgeoisie has shown how easy it was to transform its idea into the idea of nation. Before the beginning of the war it lightly gave up its idea of itself because its economic reality was just as lightly deprived of its economic reality. The return, or "revival" of the idea of bourgeoisie during the war and after it is based on the force of representations to which this class was exposed, representations of suffering which were ignored as much as their morale about national identification was absorbed, after all. However, there was no way back, the only exit was to create again a system of representations which would return to the bourgeoisie its original identity. One of the rare films made in this fallow period of the Yugoslav movie industry, Zdravko Šotra's *Diary of Insults 1993*, is symptomatic of this forced attempt of bourgeois revitalisation. The film laments over the difficult position of respected Belgrade citizenry exposed to the economic crisis, over the "unjust" sanctions imposed upon it by the international community, but never over the representations of killing and destruction coming from only a few hundred kilometres away. It laments over the economic fact that the bourgeoisie now must engage in the most inappropriate practices in order to survive, and one of the heroines is forced to earn a living by making rag dolls (which is an allusion to Miloš Crnjanski's *Novel About London*, the

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<sup>5</sup> Milan Nedić, a head of the Serbian quisling government established under the Nazi occupation.

<sup>6</sup> See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Paladin, London 1973, p 150

arch-example of the Serbian bourgeoisie's inability to adapt to the logic of its class abroad).

The illusion of a national flowering into which so much was to have been invested becomes not a national defeat, but a class defeat: unrealisable national heroism/martyrdom is replaced by the possibility of class martyrdom.

What the thin layer of the bourgeoisie, the champions of the great game of psychological repression, especially identified with the never-lived "belle époque" was the concept of culture, of Culture which in these "murky times" was the only thing to remain depoliticised, non-partisan and above party politics, beautiful and autonomous, elevated and consoling. There was a broad consensus on the "autonomy" of art, although this autonomy was also interpreted in diametrically opposed ways, showing thus that the ideological position on which the interpretation depended was the key precondition for a view of art, and so unconsciously undermining the very concept of "autonomy". However, the idea of "art above the situation" usually boiled down to classical aesthetic judgements.<sup>7</sup> The extreme rightist bloom of "Kampf" art which marked the preparations for war among those of the bourgeoisie who were interested in art, in time started causing either revulsion or laughter (the moment when "Kampf" changes to "camp"), and any thought of a different politicisation of aesthetics (unlike the aesthetisation of politics carried out by the "official national perspective" during the war) was refused as unseemingly in the traditional bourgeois view of art. According to this logic, it was art that was supposed to provide consolation in dangerous social relations, in a situation when the original idea of the national re-birth had become so complicated that the whole class realised it was living in a mutant state in which the heritage of civilisation which this class took for granted had degenerated. Further, the idea of an "art of safety" provided refuge from the impossibility of solving real social problems caused by the boomerang effect of the Bosnian war, which, for the first time in Belgrade after World War II, brought about a

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<sup>7</sup> Even art critics who occasionally stepped beyond the boundaries of the artistic practice which they favour applied the "aesthetic dimension" to part of the production which usually revolted them, thus showing the "autonomy" of their position. For example, Đorđe Kadijević (known in the local scene as an apologist of conservative artistic production), when invited to offer a selection for a project which belonged to the practice he generally defines as "conceptual art", answered with a choice of artists unusual for him. He explained this by the existence of two tendencies in "art of the conceptual tendency" "the radical tendency, characterised by extreme anti-aestheticism", which "negates the historical notion of art", and another which answers the "rigid censure of aesthetics of the beautiful". Through such a definition, and by pleading for this second "tendency", the aesthetic safety of "conceptual art" is achieved. See text in catalogue *De Valigia in Yugoslavia, Beograd 1997*, pp. 16-17.

general fear for one's life. Institutions of the system were recognised not as adversaries, but as instigators of criminal activities, so the society we live in can be simply described as a "society of danger".

Taking shelter in the art of safety offered comfort, but above and beyond this, it was supposed to mark the vitality of the bourgeois class, its ability to survive, to endure. The endurance of the class was in a way reflected in the idea of the endurance of art: for example, unlike the extremely scarce reports on cultural events during the time of "big television" in late Titoism (when cultural broadcasts were conceived as infrequent but carefully prepared, which is why some of them became important parts of the cultural production, and not only of information, e.g., Fridays at 10 or TV Gallery), nowadays numerous TV stations follow practically every cultural event in Belgrade, every "cultural worker or "important Artist" gets his or her three minutes in the media. The reaction by multiplication turns out to be a manifestation of the survival instinct, a consensus is created against the newly created primitivism in culture, "turbo-folk" sub-culture is vilified, "ruralisation" is recognised as the main threat to high culture (as if this process were the result of a sudden strategy by peasants and the lumpenproletariat to attack the institutions of high culture), and, therefore, the rhetoric of haemorrhage of the bourgeois into the national creeps in again, albeit through the back door this time, and salvation is again sought for the shaken image of one's own people. Intellectuals, writers, artists, all are suddenly shocked by the fact that the people did not follow them in the desire to achieve national re-birth, that after playing their role in the war, the people did not want to embrace ascetic spirituality and traditional norms of civilisation.

The whole situation thus is reminiscent (in a certainly far-fetched, but useful comparison) of the failure of the idea of rock'n'roll formulated in the 60s, described by popular culture theoretician Greil Marcus in his *Secret History of the 20th century*. Marcus illustrates the failure which came in the 70s (and which gave birth to punk) by a series of records which appeared within a short time of each other and all included the word "survival" in their titles (*Survival*, *I Will Survive*, *Soul Survivor*). Art, therefore, survives, its survival is a moral triumph, as Marcus (in his context) says, exchanging a guarantee of dying of boredom for one of not dying of hunger was not only a good deal it was the only game in town.<sup>8</sup> Of course, the art that survives must be "real", devoid of "dirty" politics which threaten its famed autonomy, and, of course, immortal, so the category of "murder" is quite irrelevant for such an understanding. There are many symptomatic examples of

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<sup>8</sup> Greil Marcus, *Tajna istorija kulture XX veka*, (trans.: D. Marković), Gradac 120-121, Čačak 1997, p. 20.

"meditations on immortality of the fine arts, a series of remarks like that of a critic who said of a photo-installation of which he did not approve that *"technically speaking, it was really well executed, but is this sufficient for us to consider it a work for all times and, thus, art?"*<sup>9</sup>(authors' italics). Also symptomatic is the conversation a Scandinavian art historian recently had in the National Museum in Belgrade. He asked (as many other, not too well-informed nor well-intentioned visitors from abroad had frequently asked before) how it was possible that during these past years no significant critical artistic practice had developed relating directly to the social situation (the answering argument is often based on the myth of the autonomy of art, to which the authors of this text were repeatedly forced to resort); one of the curators answered that such a practice would simply serve current needs and, thus, would not represent a value for all time, would not be an immortal artistic act. The intentional mandate of art history (as different from the interpretative one, in Norman Bryson's terminology) passes here through pandemonic moments of pseudo-religious conviction: every "real" artist creates for future generations, that must be his only intention, and his success in this intention is measured by the intensity of his self-exclusion from the context he lives in.

Some artists naturally did not accept this division of labour and were not excluded from the context in which they lived, if for no other reason, then because of consciousness of their own catastrophic economic position. During the war, there were projects which dealt with the need for a more committed position of the artist and the spectator, but they suffered precisely from the "I will survive" syndrome. For instance, the interesting premises of the "Ice Art" group are founded on the action of symbolic "freezing of art for some better time", i.e., on contextualisation through decontextualisation, or through a turn which confirms the possibility of, after all, surviving through a "mental game" in a world unwelcoming to artistic creation. The system of "contextualisation through decontextualisation" was embraced by most important Serbian artists of the younger and middle generations, and a system of "subtle reactions" to social reality was created, and its success, naturally, measured by the acuteness of its subtlety. Much rarer were cases, such as that of Raša Todosijević's series of works "Gott liebt die Serben", in which the need to react was not founded on simple binary oppositions (the most frequently used being "culture" vs. "unculturedness"), but on the creation of a strategy of action through ambiguous slippage of meanings and ideological

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<sup>9</sup> See: Luka Salapura, "Ivan Ilić, Zoran Naskovski, Ivan Šijak", *Likovni život* 65/66, February-May 1997. p. 49.



positions. Todosijević's works subvert the whole system of thought which led to the situation in which we find ourselves these past ten years by "virusing through appropriation", that is, by taking over models, or patterns, and dealing with contexts in which a statement such as "Gott liebt die Serben" can be found.

At this point, a clear retention should be taken on art which deals with politics and ideology. Politically "committed" art, or call it something less awkward, if you wish, does not have for its aim the "toppling" of the system, the changing of ideology, as it realises this is impossible, occupying as it does only a virtual space, a space, though, which we inhabit as well. In the history of modern art, the most famous example of "political painting" is certainly Picasso's *Guernica*. However, questioning the importance of this painting, an American critic who questioned the importance of political art in general, said that this "most celebrated, widely reproduced, and universally recognisable political painting of the twentieth century didn't change Franco's regime one inch or shorten his life by so much as one day".<sup>10</sup> Of course, this is quite true, but nobody can seriously think that painting pictures, shooting videos or constructing installations can change some regime. Even Hans Haacke, the most celebrated political artist of today, does not aim directly at this, although in his case there is intervention in the direct level of real social relations (e.g., the "Shypolsky" project). The reason that somebody feels the need to engage in political art after all is then not so much a matter of art's ability to change the world, but of its ability to change itself in relation to the world, in its inability to exclude itself from the surrounding world, and, finally, in its desire to subvert and provoke the ideological mechanisms which threaten it. Art is about representations and occupies the virtual spaces which usually serve as a "substitute for the world". In the eyes of the usual consumers of art, coming from the bourgeois classes, this is perceived as a "better replacement for the world", a site of desire, even of pleasure. However, the virtual world, which can be as rich as the real one (if not richer) is supplied with information in the real world, which is its data-base. How this information will be later processed depends on the artist, but the less data deleted, the greater the artist's ability to put unpleasant questions. Certainly, many negative preconceptions about political art (especially in the Yugoslav scene) are the consequence of the expected negative attitude towards committed art, art which sacrifices its nature and its virtual status trying to intervene in the language of daily politics by using simplified metaphors.

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Hughes, quoted in Wendy Steiner, *The Scandal of Pleasure*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1995, p. 37-38.

On the other hand, this approach had a very important role during the student demonstrations of 1996-97, but not as a "meditation" on art, but as real creative resistance to the ideological machinery. Problems arise when somebody tries to proclaim this practice to be an "artistic project", an individual action which thinks it is radical because it does not follow traditional criteria of artistic action, but which is not at all radical in its romantic understanding of the artist as a person who stages a performance in order to get arrested if possible, to become a news item, thus "making art public". What an artistic project of this kind can do is to show the relationships between what we react to and what we are, between our principles and our pleasures.

The attitude towards war, as well as towards growing crime, which is becoming a trademark of life in Serbia, is reduced to the remark that we live in a society of danger, in a society in which much has been said about the links between organised crime, the police and the state, which produces a general atmosphere of insecurity and lack of trust in institutional mechanisms. The opinion has already been voiced that this is not simply a totalitarian mechanism (fascist or Stalinist), but a loose synthesis of many societal options, in which the feeling that there are no rules becomes the "strong arm" of the regime and a guarantee of its remaining in power. As the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek noted in an interview, life in Serbia is not characterised by the situation in which police presence on the streets guarantees that you will not be attacked: an on-duty policeman will not attack you, but neither will he protect you from an attack he will simply not do anything. This interview dates to long before the Belgrade demonstrations of '96'97 when the police played the usual role of protectors of the regime, but also when the atmosphere of danger was mostly produced by plainclothes guardians of the system who beat up demonstrators, trying to create a feeling that you did not know who was beating you up the police, the Mafia, martial-arts enthusiasts, paramilitary formations, or somebody altogether else.

This feeling of danger as the dominant psychological category in Serbia today was the starting point for the concept of the exhibition MurderOne. The idea departed from real societal relations, but also from possible affirmations of artistic practice in such a context, outside of the usual categories of survival/hibernation of art within a system which is hostile to it. The survival of a calm, moderate, "beautiful", discreet, intimate artistic practice under such conditions is possible, but it presupposes total discreditation of ideology on the one hand, and of the role of the body and its endangerment on the other. It can, naturally, be said that this

"defensive" practice was expected, as societal "excess" forces articulation of the need for safety in the virtual world, in the world of personal production of meaning. In the history of art, this position is well known, including the fact that even regimes which invented propaganda art in order to represent cultural support for realisation of national aims left some space for "intimate" artistic activity (pastoral painting and other "safe" genres flourished in Nazi Germany). In the case of modernism, it was precisely the Yugoslav art of high modernism that was marked by the practice of mostly geometrical abstraction which Sveta Lukić famously defined as "socialist aestheticism". The Serbian modernism mainstream developed mostly from this idea, confronted with the rightist anti-modernism arising from the Mediala project, which represented another version of comfortable art as ideological basis for awakening of national myths and xenophobic connecting of modernist art to "mondialism" as cosmopolitan "pollution" of inborn "cultural habits" of the Serbian people.<sup>11</sup> It turned out that the answer to the open conservative logic of the Serbian rightists was the academic mainstream, which also displayed all the characteristics of conservative guarding of the "heritage" of modernism, and which was not ready and able to accept the changed context and new logic in which the art of the 90s inescapably found itself.

The exhibition MurderOne starts from a hypothesis which does not aim to make art more conscious of the context in which it lives, but to question the ability of the virtual world of art to be a "fatal mimesis" of reality, to take unto itself and incorporate into its world those societal and psychological anomalies which make the society we live in almost unbearable. In a quite different context (addressing architects at a symposium), English theoretician Mark Cousins spoke of the disdain for the notion of "safety" in the dominant logic of the modern world, as opposed to some theories, mainly feminist, which use the problem of the body to pose the question of "safety as the key question of political theory. As for art, Cousins says the following: "I no longer think that an artistic strategy and a political strategy need in any sense to reflect each other. On the contrary, I am persuaded that it would be more productive if they went in opposite directions..."<sup>12</sup> accordingly, Cousins will understand the orientation in art which deals with the fragility and endangerment of the body from disease, violence and war as an expected reflection of such a reality, but also as a strategy of "representational appropriation" of such images, linking it thus to similar

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<sup>11</sup> More on Mediala in B. Stojanović, "A Contribution to the Libidinal Economy of Local Art", published in this book.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Cousins, "Danger and safety", *Art History*, vol 17, no. 3., September 1994, p. 418-423.

ideas already studied by Julia Kristeva.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the art of danger appears as the counterpoint for what we desire in society, which is the politics of safety.

The discourses of conservatism, liberalism and classical Marxism have not developed theory of societal tolerance. Conservative logic clearly considers such a theory impossible, but Marxism does not have one either, even though it has a magic wand for intolerance in the notion of "prejudices" which can be cured through strict education no better example than Titoist Yugoslavia is needed to show the failure of this proposition. Liberalism, on the other hand, poses this problem as a question of human freedoms and rights, of respect for differences, but becomes helpless when the chain reaction of intolerance starts to unravel, as every intolerant position, recognising that the liberal logic is dominant in the modern developed world, will take advantage of the possibility of representing its intolerance as the result of violation of its own rights the years during which all sides in the Bosnian conflict have led the international community on a merry-go-round show how liberalism collapses the minute that somebody who does not respect the starting pragmatic premises of such theories enters the game. Without a new questioning of the ethical traditions (which are in modern theory mostly questioned by feminist thinkers), without new questioning of notions such as virtue, and of course, of democracy founded on the principles of classical Athens (and not, say, those of Ottoman Damascus, as Cousins suggests, citing Paul Hirst), that is, without a new questioning of those norms which are taken for granted, the questions of tolerance, and, therefore, of safety/security, cannot even be posed. That is why there has been no real attempt (except in Žižek's book *Metastasis of Pleasure*) to explain the matter of the horrific violence in the Bosnian war, that is, that question which surpasses the usual geostrategic and sociological analyses and, is addressed solely to the issue of the body.

The idea of an art of danger which disturbs current societal relations is not new, but it has gone through many modifications in comparison with some of its forerunners. Cousins openly points to Kant's sublime scene which becomes "all the more attractive the more fearful it is, provided we are in the safe place".<sup>14</sup> In high modernism, similar ideas were linked to the power of abstract art to achieve a danger function which "no reality can humiliate" by refusing to be a mere representation of the world. Thus, in the *Philosophy of the New Music*, Adorno would say: "The inhumanity of art must, for the

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<sup>13</sup> In *Powers of Horror - An Essay on Abjection*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982.

<sup>14</sup> From Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, quoted in Cousins, "Danger and Safety", p. 423.

sake of humanity itself, overpower the inhumanity of the world". The modernist myth resided precisely in the tendency to achieve a critical counterpoint to existing societal relations through extreme autonomy of art. The "Copernican mobilisation" which, according to Sloterdijk, characterises the modernist revolt against the self-evident is a mobilisation of creativity which demonstrates that "we do not see the world as it is, but in our thoughts must confront its 'reality' to the impression of the senses, in order to 'understand' what the matter is with it". However, the time characterised by this principle underwent such a vertiginous development of technological and constructive possibilities, in such an acceleration and multiplication of processes, that it is no longer possible to have insight into complete processes: "When Copernicanism achieves the point of total vertiginousness, when it sets free the unbearable in the guise of strategic, informative, industrial and cognitive evaporations of the world, then the Copernican truth becomes more untrue than the Ptolemaic illusion".<sup>15</sup> That is why Sloterdijk says that the basic concept for a theory of aesthetics can no longer be creativity but perception. In this sense, even though art has remained within the framework of the language developed by modernism, it ceases to be the "art of omission", that art whose purism does not insist only on "tension of form", but also on the significance of omission, of self-denial, of avoidance of the traps of seductiveness, of aesthetic taboos.

In this regard, the exhibition *MurderOne* did not offer a "topic" but tried to open up perception both for aesthetic and political taboos. In the case of redefinition of some ethical concepts, such as virtue, the direct experience of war, during which the taboo on killing disappears, and this supreme ban within the community is lifted, was kept in mind. Under such conditions, art mostly preserved its aesthetic taboos, which enjoined it to remain autonomous in its "resistance". The need for representation was, in any case, supplanted by popular representations in which the representation of murder is the most widespread motif: some US studies have shown that by the age of 14 a child has already seen 20,000 murders on TV. The child is thus taught to perceive murder as an "aesthetic act", murder is offered as representation, and not as a "reality which we confront to impressions of the senses". In this respect, the impression persists that the greatest societal taboo has become a trivial topic. It is a trivial topic for modernist logic as well, simply because it points to the narrative arts, it points to a flow, a chain of events, which is vulgar for the modernist "neolaocoonism". However, murder is not simply a flow, it can also be represented as a cut, as

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *Kopernikanska mobilizacija i ptolomejako razoružanje*, *Bratstvo Jedinstvo*, Novi Sad 1988, (trans.: Z. Krasni), p.47.

a narratively immeasurable moment which separates presence from absence, and thus as one of the key problems of visual representation. Finally, even abstract painting is part of this topic, as it is itself a cut, a membrane between two worlds which have the tendency to mirror each other, so it is part of both worlds, but by concentrating on itself leaves both of them out.

This exhibition was not an invitation to "all of the sudden" form a political art corresponding to the time and place we live in. It only pointed to the possibility of a perception of the world around us, a perception which shapes the representation/image through which we can understand the full danger we are here discussing, and also understand art's departure from the passive zone of comfort/consolation. The ideological strategy manifested through the "politics of danger" is, therefore, also marked by the persistent official maintenance of the "culture of safety", the aesthetics of comfortable passivity which is the functional counterpoint and mask of political irresponsibility. If we start from the proposition that encouraging thinking about an art of danger can suggest if not a "real" then an "artificial" counterpoint to what we desire in society, which would be the politics of safety, we shall arrive at the possibility of thinking our own frustrations in relation to political reality. In his "Project for a Glossary of the 20th Century", J.G. Ballard wrote the following under the heading of "war": "The possibility at last exists that war may be defeated on the linguistic plane. If war is an extreme metaphor, we may defeat it by devising metaphors that are even more extreme".<sup>16</sup> If art reflects reality, it does so, as Brecht would say, with the help of "special mirrors". That is why the image is unexpected and cannot always be controlled. Artistic and political strategy certainly function simultaneously, but are also effectively opposed: it is precisely art that can question some of the ultimate consequences in order to try at least symbolically to deprive of this kind of experimentation the structures of political power.

The story of murder is firmly connected to the question of representation: both with murder as representation (murder as the most represented phenomenon in popular culture, serial reproduction of murder), and with representation as murder (the desire to represent inevitably means removal/murder of the present and actual). Murder turns out to be in the essence of representation, the initial event which announces representation, even, as Michel Serres says, the "birth of representation".<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> J.G. Ballard, "Project for a Glossary of the 20th Century", in J. Crary, S. Kwinter (eds.), *Incorporations*, Zone, New York, p. 279.

<sup>17</sup> Serres is referring to representations of murder primarily in television reports and to crimes committed by those who are capable of not coming to the aid of someone on whom violence is being perpetrated in order to get a picture. Taking as an example the killing of a Somali woman, which was

In this respect, the event is lived through the image/representation: To live an event as an image is not to remain uninvolved, to regard the event disinterestedly in the way that the aesthetic version of the image and the serene ideal of classical art propose. But neither it is to take part freely and decisively. It is to be taken: to pass from the region of the real where we hold ourselves at a distance from things the better to order and use them into that other region where the distance holds us... (Maurice Blanchot)<sup>18</sup>. According to Blanchot, the image/representation resembles the corpse: we are faced with something which is not reality, it is not the "deceased", either, that is before us, as he, having died, is no longer there, "with us", what is before us is what, having been left behind, confirms that departure and, thus, some other world. However, the image could be the murder as well, the very event, and not only the "legacy".

In any case, the intention of the exhibition was not to offer artists a topic but "only" a title for an exhibition. This title can be interpreted as a "trick" to transfer the logic of trivial literature or B-movies to "high art" by using verbal bombast to attract attention, attention sorely needed after the self-isolation of the visual arts in this country. The title also attracts attention because of the secret fantasy replayed constantly by every dissatisfied subject of this country, a fantasy which only shows how agonistic he is in the inability to resolve the problem of the relationship of power and subjectivity. Finally, the title also points to the murder which, unlike the aforementioned fantasy, is happening all the time, the murder authorised within the paranoid spaces of the whole community. The only remaining question is, where will one recognise oneself. And so, one of the models for this exhibition was the story about a film about a murder. The film is entitled *Murderer, or Mörder M* for short and was directed by Fritz Lang in 1930. It deals with a childkiller (played by Peter Lorre, and reputedly inspired by the worst serial killer in Germany at that time, Peter Kurten), who is pursued by both police and the local criminals. It is a classic crime movie. However, the background of the whole project looked something like this: the original title of the film was *Murderers Among Us (Mörder unter uns)*, and this drove the increasingly powerful National-Socialist party, which was on the brink of formally coming to power, to think that the film was about it. The censor did his job, and the film's title was changed. Lang did not need to (nor did he intend to) make a film about the Nazis, as they already recognised themselves in the subject matter. Finally, the film was gutted by

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filmed from various angles by US TV cameras, Serres poses the question of the image as the key mediator in such events, the question of its transparency and invisibility. See L.A. Rickels "Theory on TV - Making a Killing" (an interview with Michel Serres). *Artforum*. no. 8. April 1995, P 116.

<sup>18</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* (1955.), University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln 1982.

the Nazis, and parts of it used to produce the "documentary" *The Eternal Jew* (1940) in which Peter Lorre becomes a Jew who cannot control his perverse impulses. Hitler and Goebbels admired Lang's *Metropolis* and the latter tried to persuade Lang to become their "official filmmaker". Lang left the country regardless.

As is usually the case, reality again "imitated" art, so several days before the exhibition opened, Serbian police chief Radovan "Badža" Stojičić was killed in the Mamma Mia restaurant, close to the Veljković Pavilion. Reflections of this murder brought the question of ambivalence towards this act to the very emblematic core in which the many agonistic relations which were the starting point of the project are projected. As chief of police, Stojičić symbolised power in his function of "co-ordinating" the society of danger which, in his murder, showed the first signs of caving in. Authorisation of such power was the product of a blend of cynicism and fear in the nation, so the question of solving this murder, just as many others, will not be posed aloud. The public's ambivalence towards this murder is in the relationship between the facts that the murder of the chief of police is a symptom of a society of danger in which it is impossible to establish order, on the one hand, and that this same chief of police had authorised beatings (including one with a fatal outcome) during the '96 - '97 demonstrations on the other, not to mention the years he spent on the "pacification" of the Kosovo problem. The ambivalence, therefore, depended on the need to live in a country in which the chief of police will not be so easily killed, on the one hand, and on the need not to have a chief of police with such a job description, on the other. The neighbouring gallery was concerned with this problem, as well. Having in mind the way in which it came about, this exhibition could not safely count on the "expected reactions" of the artists, and the project's orientation to support of production of new works steered the exhibition into the risk zone, reflected in a series of incidents involving the exhibits (generally too trivial to mention in a catalogue introduction, but this time somehow attuned with the whole concept).

Therefore, to represent murder under conditions of its occurrence as part of everyday life, and when popular media of representation bombard our senses to the point of saturation and anaesthetised lethargy, certainly was not established as the artists' aim. Uroš Đurić's painting **NON-OBJECTIVE AUTONOMISM MURDER OR THE TWO GREATEST SERBIAN PAINTERS CALMED BY THEIR EMINENCE** contains practically the only representation of murder in the whole exhibition, in which this painting was the only "conventional" oil on canvas. However, in this painting, as well,



murder is in the second or third plane, just an accent referring to the information which we got from the title. For Đurić, Malevich's late phase is indicative as the moment of birth of a new figuration from the abstract paradigm, which was the first radically "retrograde" act of modernism, no longer "murder" of the actual through representation as in illusionist painting, but "murder" of the autonomy of the painting through implosion of that same painterly vocabulary. However, unlike Malevich's, Đurić's procedure is not devoid of "humanist" tendencies which are manifested in finding possibilities, within a very reduced paradigm of painting, for painting attributes of identity and sexuality which introduce "recognisability" and tension into the "dead" world of Malevich-influenced style. The murder in the background, therefore, represents a prepared incident, but as the very title of the exhibition is a "trick", so is the presence of this murder. The painting can work with or without it, but as the "subject" demanded such a representation, it is now there. In this way, Đurić affirms the ambivalence of the relationship between artist and buyer/maecenas: the artist persists in his "poetics", while the buyer's "wishes" are subtly woven into the tissue of the work. In the final analysis, are not the main events in many of Poussin's canvases shown in the background, sometimes barely visible, so that only study of the network of gazes can fully affirm them?

Raša Todosijević's work also subverts the need to formulate a "response to the topic" and articulates it through bringing to life a network of the provocative strategies to which artist is inclined. Todosijević, besides the above-mentioned series *Gott liebt die Serben*, has been known since the early 70s for his work dealing with the questions of violence and the relationship of art, body and violence, this time decided to produce a "designed" poster announcing an imaginary film by Raša Todosijević (with well-known collaborators you would not expect to see in these roles) entitled MURDER. A photograph on it shows Todosijević facing a mysterious female figure. Murder, therefore, is not linked to representations which point to direct physical violence, but is identified with a discursive system in which such representations are omnipresent. Like the title of the exhibition itself, Todosijević's MURDER is an expression of luring and seduction of the audience still interested in representations of danger. The sonorousness of the word "murder" is the only means of "threat" with which we are faced here, and its "iconic" nature creates a disturbing impression of pop-relativisation of the signified. A different kind of statement is to be found in Ivan Ilić's installation; it reads: **WARNING! THIS IS A VERY HEAVY PLAY IT'S REAL LONG IT WILL LEAVE YOU FEELING SAD AND EMPTY** At first glance, a very "romantic" expression

is opposed to the "font" in which it is written, and which points to a highly industrialised civilisation which corresponds to the cold and inexpressive context which, generally, radiates the aseptic atmosphere of a bathroom or clinic. Glass tubes, like magnified test tubes, hold a liquid which simultaneously makes us feel revulsion and the conviction it is medicinal, bringing to mind the ambivalence of our relationship towards our own bodies, especially under conditions of "institutionalisation" of its vulnerability in places such as hospitals. The relationship between the text, which sees murder as a long and theatrical process (and which is, after all, taken from a theatre announcement) and the flash of cold metal, glass and starched white linen produces an image which does not see the "art of danger" through the category of "abjection", through direct physical reaction of the observer to a repulsive scene, but through the question of the institutionalised "cleanness" coming before and after every murder, here defined as an "exchange of fluids", either natural/bodily or artificial.

In Mirjana Munišić's work INVOLUNTARY, the object itself (an hourglass filled with oil) is also the direct object of a possible accident its fragility reminds the observer of easy destruction. On the other hand, the tension created by the impossibility (or minimal possibility) of the liquid's performing its function of passing through the bottleneck achieves the symbolic effect of this work poetisation of the cut as interrupted or very decelerated time. For Bata Krgović, the cut, or CUTTING EDGE, as his work is entitled, is a transparent category which separates two symbolic worlds caught in the same environment defined by the redness of perfectly taut silk in the intensity of which the observer sinks (into blindness) upon entering the glass-partitioned labyrinth of this work. In the compartments separated by this glass cut, there are headphones on which can be heard two different manifestations of the spiritual poles of our world: a sample of Laurent Garnier's techno music and the ecstaticity of a Tibetan mantra. The observer is also caught up in a trap in the work UP JUMPED THE DEVIL by Simonida Rajčević, which presents the setting for transformation of a popular imaginarium into a real physical space in which the observer is bombarded with sensations to which s/he was only "two-dimensionally" accustomed, for example, watching films by David Lynch or Stanley Kubrick. This work, to be consumed from inside, is a "bastard" construction from the outside, disrupting classical values such as harmony or unity of space. Thus, in its form, it represents the "fatal mimesis" of the society in which it was created, as well as of the space in which it is exhibited and its opposing uses (gallery & theatre).

Instead of "abstraction" and polyvalence in the general orientation of the project, the work ANONYMOUS AUTHORS (which stands both for the title of the work and for authors behind it) points to a very concrete and omnipresent societal problem to homelessness and begging. The work consists of two large photographs of "urban scenes" and of a "real" contact between beggars and visitors to the exhibition. In her book on photography, Susan Sontag says that "photographic images tend to subtract feeling from something we experience at first hand and the feelings they do arouse are, largely, not those we have in real life".<sup>19</sup> The photographs of Anonymous Authors represent a simulation of such a photographic subtraction from reality: the recorded images are out of focus (that is their "photographic reality", they have not been subsequently "blurred"), thus simulating our "after-image", the image which stays imprinted in our memory, and which our mechanisms of repression aim to delete. Such photographs take us back to the fact that we were not capable of perceiving an unpleasant and insoluble scene, that we ourselves commit "murder" when repressing our perceptions on the way to the "art-show".

In a special project executed by the Association Absolutely in the spaces of the telephone network, we are "forced" to decipher a Morse-encoded message manifested in the sounds of single and automatic fire. This work, entitled INSTRUMENTAL, posits equality between sign and bullet as means of achieving the same aim. Before hearing the message recorded on an answering machine, we are directed to "German radio Belgrade" as the key to identification of the message to come, which is actually the coded text of the song Lili Marlen, first broadcast from occupied Belgrade. The work establishes a relation between Morse code as a "murderous" but also "dying" way of transmitting (military) messages (Morse code will be phased out by the end of the millennium) and the song Lili Marlen as an emblem of the ambivalent relationship between politics and any art form (an ordinary love song as symbol of Nazism, but on the other hand a song which the other side in the war also listened to, and even loved).

However, of all work at the exhibition, Milica Tomić's video installation XY UNGELÖST comes closest to a direct political context. Inspired by a popular German TV series launched in the 70s in which viewers took part in solving unsolved crimes, this video reconstructs a crime which "nobody" saw, a crime on which only restricted "unofficial" documentation exists, containing mostly the names of those killed. In the video, all that connects us to the event is the date written at the beginning and end of it 28 March 1989 a date which in itself does not say much more than "3 May 1808", the

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<sup>19</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, Doubleday, New York 1977, p. 168.

date which Francisco Goya's painting made "recognisable". 3 May was the day when 33 citizens of Albanian nationality were killed in Kosovo: in another context, and in other exhibition spaces, this day is also known as the day when the new Constitution of the Republic of Serbia was adopted, and, therefore, as Statehood Day. Within the expansiveness of the system of representation in which murder has a special frequency, this work poses the question of the iconography of such representations. This question becomes urgent when we take into account the political crime which is being concealed, which is being deprived of its "mimetic" iconography. The iconography of murder, especially of "political murder", was created in the late 18th and early 19th centuries: in examples such as David's *Dead Marat*, or, on the other hand, Goya's above-mentioned "3 May 1808". There is a great difference between these two historical events, but what links them is that, thanks to the two paintings, both the method of political assassination in a civic state (*Marat*) and the method of military-political massacre (3 May 1808) have been visualised. Lack of information about political executions in this country, especially in Kosovo, is substituted in Milica Tomić's work by the repeated demand that the existence of political crimes be confirmed by a representation which is a challenge to political and artistic iconoclasm as the dominant characteristic of the attitude to state-perpetrated violence in this country.

The video consists of two simultaneous projections. On the front wall of the gallery we see the re-enactment of the crime itself: 33 "extras", remorseless rhythm of their falling into the snow, the trace in snow as an index of the event, index of the murder. There is also a female face with the eyes closed, but with eyes wide open painted on her eyelids. On the side wall of the gallery, a more "artificial" segment is being projected. As a homage to a Cindy Sherman photograph, the same female character is depicted in an emotional and physical tension, her look is now directed to the viewer, while tiny figures multiply on the artificial snow in the background. The same projection is interrupted by a quick succession of all the "extras" who participate in the re-enactment. The aim is not to make this crime a "universal one" (or to abstract it all the way to the level of an irresponsible generalisation), but to make it a specific one, and identify it as a real but typical case, that turns out to be a general rule. Hence, the basic means of communication and narration in this case is the identification with the victims through the identification with the participants in the re-enactment.

THE VOICE OF THE HAND, an installation by Zoran Naskovski, delves into the manifestations of the "society of danger" and articulates what can be seen in other works, as well the finding in clear and inexpressive artistic

procedures those questions which western art nowadays puts in other ways. The concept of the abjection in 20th-century art (coined by Julia Kristeva, and /mis/used and "popularised" by many artists and critics) depends on the specific societal state of the western societies: an ultra-conformist milieu in which the hyper-bourgeoisie resides in an illusion of total aseptic cleanness, but through which media images of disease, war, hunger and violent threats from the Other continually pass. To represent impurity becomes a way of threatening this structure, as in this way art brings back to memory the fragility and limitation of the body, the body which becomes the only link between "observer" and "scene", the only identification between "us" and "them". Although conscious of such currents in modern art, artists who work in a societal and cultural climate marked by different co-ordinates start from displaced/liminal strategies of discovering the imperilment of body and existence. This is a society far from aseptic, a society in which the rituals of purification are much more imaginary and manifested primarily through rituals of deletion to the point of vanishing. In these rituals (of which the Stalinist purges were the most extreme cases) anything that sticks out is deleted, information disappears, traces are covered up. However, what is most important in this case, is that the "justification" for these techniques of deletion is never in the special hygienic diligence of those performing the rituals, but in the justification of their carelessness or negligence in which everything, including the very act of the ritual, disappears.

Naturally, in the cases of both western society and the still unidentified and undefined "society in transition", what is at stake is the functioning of an ideology which eliminates all elements which escape the coherence of its system. The central point of Zoran Naskovski's installation is, therefore, the "transparency of evil", this crucial invisibility which in the surge of purification deletes even the body. It is in regard to such an order that an answer is formulated which takes into account the strategy of appropriation, that is, the possibility of constructing a "clinical trap" which simulates all the functions of power but turns out to be a "virus" undermining them. On the other hand, this perfection has contrasting characteristics relative to the society of apparent safety, openly dictating a feeling of danger as the real mental state in which we are. The notion of murder is, thus, treated as a question of life, and not of death. Or, actually, as that liminal question of life which freezes transition at one point, but a point which still belongs to our active living.

In the hand's movement over the glass, in the contact between the bodily and the clean and transparent, and in the sound which this contact will (expectedly) produce, "clinical murder" coincides with the ritual cleansing

caused by shrinking from that same murder. An ambiguous position is taken up, adopted from as a strategy of resistance from ideological systems endangered by the feedback of their own power. Irritation, danger, coldness, asperity, tension produced as very physical sensations by this work represent transgression of the norms precisely because artistic strategies are executing an irruption into the strategies of the functioning of power, akin to a hacker's software break-in into the Pentagon's computer system. The confusing and paralysing result depends as much on the hacker as on the system being broken into. In that contact, as local apparatuses of power do not function according to the Pentagon's principle of aseptic illusionism, a short-circuit occurs which causes both systems to hang: the artistic system, because it has included this in its strategy, and the ideological system because a strategy on which it alone was supposed to rely has been taken over. System hang<sup>20</sup> is both murder and the ritual of purification caused by the murder, as one and the same process. This is a disturbing simulation of excessive resolutions, of resolutions which demonstrate the importance of "provocation" on the behalf of the subject, the "subject in agony" which is not decontextualised and introverted, but achieves its autonomy precisely through stylisation of the concrete possibilities which are imposed on us, but which we otherwise consciously avoid.

The lack of representations of blood and violence at this exhibition, unlike their constant presence in our societal environment and in popular systems of representation, does not signal a retreat by art from the idea of aggressive approach and involvement in problems of the body. What is at hand is primarily the recognition of murder as an authorised societal act in which the hands of the perpetrator remain as clean as those of Pasolini's murderer, mentioned at the beginning of this text. After all, the largest mass crimes in history have always been termed cleansing.

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<sup>20</sup> "System hang" is directly approached by the homepage of this exhibition, prepared by Borut Vild as a separate project entitled WEB CUT. A series of data about the exhibition finally leads to two possibilities: one enables visitors to this Internet site to send in reactions and suggestions, while the other is so programmed as to eject visitors from the net-work, causing their systems to hang temporarily.