

Franc's way of thinking is similar to that of a "nomad" whose objective is not to point, but to ask: How do we live in society? How do we inhabit the earth? For him, the vital experiences of life are on the margins. But these margins are not simple oppositions to the powerful center, rather they become sites of creativity, resistance and transformation.

Bojana Piškur

Franc Purg – unlike the politicians – takes the slogan Crisis is opportunity! very seriously. In his work he shows how the areas of crisis, and social, economic, ecological and political margins, are the birthplace of human ingenuity and alternative knowledge of survival skills, from which there is a great deal to be learned. Franc transforms this knowledge into artworks that act as determinately oriented pointers indicating the cancerous ulcerations lacerating the tissue of contemporary society, but simultaneously searches for remedies accessible to all. The work of Franc, however, does not lack subtlety or humour, qualities which characterise him as an artist of exceptional social sensitivity and incurable hope for a better world.

Martina Vovk



WHAT IS IT THAT MOVES US?
Franc Purg



FRANC PURG

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A Map

How to map the work of Franc Purg? Where does this art belong? Margin or centre, local or global, artworld or lifeworld? Charting all the places where the artist has visited, where projects have been produced, and where works and documents have been displayed, is unsatisfactory. A meaningful map of Purg's art must be one that locates it within a field of possibilities. This field is what Althusser called the 'conjuncture', and this idea spawned what Fredric Jameson called 'cognitive mapping', which connects experience to 'the conception of some (unrepresentable, imaginary) global social totality'¹. We need a map of what is possible in art, what is thinkable and doable for an artist. Only then can we locate Purg's work within its own field of possibilities.

I'm not thinking, here, of determining the 'family resemblances' that Purg's art shares with his contemporaries (which is connected with the journalistic attempt to find the correct category for the work), but this: the starting point for our map must be the fact that Purg is a politically engaged artist. A map of contemporary art can be no map of schools or movements, nor of regional variations. Every geographical centre of art is occupied with multiple conceptual centres. But a map of the contemporary artworld that merely identifies this harvest festival of practices is meaningless: data – dead facts – in

need of interpretation, theory and articulation. A map in need of a map. A 'cognitive map' of contemporary art must be a map of rival positions, protocols, practices, techniques and strategies. What is possible, thinkable and doable in art's political key is best understood – best mapped – in terms of what we might call the grammar of art's relationship to politics.

For Rancière in 'The Politics of Aesthetics', aesthetics is immanently political (and politics is conceived of as the aesthetic labour of 'redistributing the sensible'). Badiou, in his 'Handbook of Inaesthetics', puts more emphasis on truth and philosophy but also argues that art is immanently political. Gerald Raunig's 'Art and Revolution' also calls for a political art practice that is defined in terms of art's own version of activism. Recent attempts to theorize this relationship leads back to the debates on politics and aesthetics in Germany in the 1920s and 30s. This Germanophone debate, understood not as rival attempts to theorize the politics of art but as a spectrum of positions, provides the map of what is possible – what is thinkable – in the relationship between politics and art.

It was Georg Lukács who first argued that social relations were present within the form of artworks. Reification, a mixture of Marx's concept of 'commodity fetishism' and Max Weber's sociological theory of 'rationalization', gripped everything. 'Instead of reducing bourgeois thought to the economic conditions

of its production, Lukács argued that the nature of those conditions could be found within the intellectual phenomena themselves.'² So, every 'fragment' of the world 'expresses' the whole because the totality of social relations is present, through reification, within materiality itself. These two ideas are picked up on by the likes of Adorno and Benjamin, who argue that social contradictions appeared within the material of philosophy and culture.

For Adorno, no particular is 'identical with itself' because of its mediated relationship with society. Every particular is a hieroglyph of the bourgeois social structure, which strenuous interpretation can disclose. This is the key to understanding Benjamin's interpretation of material culture as if it had a life of its own, which he called 'aura'. Both were influenced by Bloch's 'category of "concrete Utopia" or the ontological principle of hope'³. Politics in art for Marxists after Lukács, therefore, consisted in the artist critically negating the (reified) material of art itself, which contained in a mediated form the antagonisms of the very society within which the critical art is produced. This could lead to Adorno's championing of dissonance in Schönberg, to Benjamin's allegorical redemption of ruins and fragments, and Brecht's alienating effect.

Without the Lukácsian internalization of the

social totality within the artwork, then there can be no politicization of art in its modern sense. The map of contemporary politically engaged art is delineated by the permutations of art's immanent politics. It should not be assumed, at this stage, that art is only immanently political when its formal or technical characteristics carry the entire burden of its radical force. Activist art today is based on the demand that art *does something*. In fact, the more that politics is embodied by the work of art, the more mappable it is by the aesthetic debates of Western Marxism. However, Lukács establishes the immanence of politics to art in the same moment that he insists that the relationship between the work and the world is *mediated*. Nevertheless, Western Marxism also provides the main arguments for the distancing of art from direct political action. In fact, since the proximity of politics to art is one of the key issues raised by Marxist aesthetic theory, the degree of their separation or correspondence is one of the features that is mappable by Western Marxism.

Western Marxism covers the whole range of engaged art practices. It reads the utopian impulses of cultural banality, but it also provides the strongest case against optimism and sentimentality, and regards artworks as social hieroglyphs, didactic tools and expressionistic revelations. Adorno was speaking for the whole of Western Marxism when he insisted that the 'need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of

¹ Fredric Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Nelson, C. and Grossberg, L. (eds). University of Illinois Press, 1990, p.356

² Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, The Free Press, New York, 1977, p.26

³ Stanley Mitchell, *Walter Benjamin: Understanding Brecht*, Mitchell (ed), New Left Books, London, 1973

all truth.⁴ Here, the 'totally administered society' (and the victory of the commodity form over every aspect of lived experience that the Western Marxists took from Lukács) is met with Adornian 'demythification', Brechtian 'refunctioning'⁵ and 'alienating effects', Bloch's 'spirit of utopia' or Benjamin's 'profane illuminations'. All of the first generation Western Marxists put a premium on technique, but between them they advocated everything from montage to dissonance, allegory to estrangement, and expressionism to Surrealism and Realism. Despite the old-fashioned terminology, today's debates on the politics of participation, digital technology, the pedagogical turn, craft, beauty, the everyday, the cinematic, the archive, nature, failure and chance are all anticipated by Western Marxism. The differences among the Western Marxists are therefore the landmarks of a map of socially engaged art.

Where is Purg's work on this map? We can get a more precise location by dividing the map into several clear zones according to the key operative concepts within Western Marxism. Some of these thinkers put an emphasis on relations of production (e.g. class) while others emphasize forces of production (e.g. technology) and still others put the stress on ideology (e.g. theology). Ernst Bloch's expressionist utopianism, which converges bodily transcendence with revolutionary transformation through shock, primitivism and intoxication, combines the three key areas of Marxism in a specific way.

4 Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p.17-18

5 See Bertolt Brecht, 'The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre' (1930), *Brecht on Theatre*, edited and translated by John Willet (1957), Methuen and Co., London, 1964 (reprinted in 1990).

The body, as a force of production, is read as ideologically loaded and therefore both reified and full of revolutionary promise. Adorno's bleak insistence that exchange value has so completely subsumed use-value, and that any avowed opposition to it is nothing but sentimental, sees the relations of production and forces of production as coextensive with the ideological horizon of thought. The Benjaminian argument for the critical effect of technological reproduction connects the forces of production to relations of production in order to release the ideology critique of proletarian class-consciousness⁶. The Adornian argument for formal strenuousness is a materialism of the artwork itself, understood as a concrete particular through which social contradictions appear in a mediated form. 'Politics', Adorno said, 'has migrated into autonomous art.'⁷ That strain of Adornian thinking that calls more specifically for blankness, silence and erasure takes the political negation of the world that political art calls for and presses this against art and aesthetic experience. By contrast, Brecht's artistic critique of art was intertwined with art's political content so that the abolition of theatrical spectacle is at one and the same time the transformation of the audience into 'an interested party' in the narrative of, for example, the revolutionizing of a mother.

Purg occupies several key locations within this Western Marxist map. He employs an immanent

6 Walter Benjamin, 'Über Haschisch', (1927-1934) Tillman Rexroth, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972, p.202

7 Adorno, 'Commitment', *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (eds), Francis McDonagh (trans), Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1978, p.318

technique based on the hidden meanings carried by the material, redeems the ruins and fragments of consumer society, refunctions dominant techniques for radical purposes and assembles critical meanings from ideology. Where Purg's priorities lie is indicated in his interpretation of the behaviour of the poor indigenous people of Egypt, known as the Zabbaleen – the people who collect the garbage – in terms that are strikingly Benjaminian:

They are descendants from Coptic farmers, indigenous people, who were destitute at the beginning of the 20th century and figured out a way to survive in a big city. ... In order to survive, they first collected organic waste in Cairo ... Later, with the growth of the city and the rise of consumer society, they began collecting other garbage as well, sorting, reworking and reselling it. They collect organic waste, paper, plastic, bags, metals and textiles, and recycle more than 90 percent of the waste..., which they sell back into the city.⁸

Here, Benjamin's ragpicker, montagist and proletariat converge in an image of versatility and refunctioning that draws value from the discarded, redeeming the toxic elements of a toxic society through labour and inventiveness. If the activities of these indigenous people are taken as a mediated portrait of the artist, then we see Purg in the mode of the Benjaminian artist who scrutinizes the world for those concrete details that release us from the given reality principle.

8 Franc Purg interviewed by Urska Jurman, November 2008. <http://francpurg.net/interview.html>

Purg describes his position, as an artist working in some of the world's poorest communities, in terms of resisting the 'condition of the omniscient white man' and a concomitant commitment to occupying the position of an exploring student. In fact, Purg often spends a considerable amount of time observing the activities of the dispossessed, learning from them (rather than regarding them as lacking culture or knowledge) and studying their techniques. After learning from street children, for instance, Purg has said 'they have a very sophisticated knowledge of how to survive in the utmost difficult urban conditions.'⁹ This corresponds to Benjamin's argument in 'Author as Producer', which opposes 'the conventional distinction between author and public' with new relations of cultural production in which 'the reader is at all times ready to become a writer' because the producer is recognized as 'an expert ... on the post he occupies'¹⁰. Benjamin calls this setting loose of the voice of the public 'the literarization of the conditions of living'. Purg's transformation of the artist into a viewer – a listener, observer, student – is the other half of the transformation of art's relations of production.

In 2006, Purg responded to the illegal dumping of waste by local residents on the Machtesh Ramon crater in the desert near Mitzpe Ramon in Israel. *Red Cross*, a work on the scale of Land Art, was made by pulling out red articles from the pile and arranging them into the shape of

9 Franc Purg interviewed by Urska Jurman, November 2008. <http://francpurg.net/interview.html>

10 Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer' (1937), Edmund Jephcott (trans), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, 1978, p.259

a cross. Not only is this a site-specific work (the red cross is located in exactly the same spot where the junk is dumped), it is also a critically engaged artwork produced *immanently*. Like Benjamin, whose investigation of nineteenth century Parisian shopping arcades 'refunctioned' the ideology of consumerism by reassembling its fragments, Purg redeems the materials and processes of the consumer society's impact on the natural environment by converting it into a sign. The work resembles a John Heartfield photomontage, assembling critical meanings from the dominant culture, but this time not with images but with the material itself. The answer to the problem of this ecological neglect is present immanently in the material and the techniques of assembling them.

By contrast, John Russell's defiantly ugly montages and Mark Titchner's slogans and ritual objects are prefigured by Bloch's expressionistic utopianism, but they also resonate with a reading of Benjamin focusing less on the relations of cultural production and more on the radical interpretation of 'the opium-eater, the dreamer, the intoxicated'¹¹. Santiago Sierra, Alfredo Jaar and the Yes Men take the immanence of the social world within the materials, forces and relations of artistic production as the cue for art's direct intervention in political and economic controversies. They also share Adorno's conviction that nothing escapes from power and the commodity form. Ai Weiwei and Doris Salcedo give priority to yet another of Western Marxism's demands, namely, to bear witness to

suffering and barbarity. This is present in the work of Nancy Spero, too. Thomas Hirshhorn's library-like 'monuments' to great thinkers takes up Adorno's constellational concept of truth. Purg's work is immanent, material, redemptive and interventional, not ecstatic, messianic, melancholic or pessimistic.

Privileged Tactics is a series of projects Purg has developed with Sara Heitlinger focusing on techniques of survival. This series began with a work drawn from observations of street children in the Ukraine in 2006. Purg and Heitlinger did not illustrate or document the social condition of homeless children but learned their techniques for survival and passed these techniques on. The focus of this project was a bag that thwarts the electronic sensors for detecting stolen items at a store exit. The installation consisted of audio instructions of how to construct such a bag, along with a workshop in which the artists taught people what they had learned from the street children. On top of the Benjaminian inversion of the relationship between author and public, two of Brecht's slogans come to mind. First, 'use what you can', which is not only Brecht's advice to the montagist but also to the revolutionary. Second, Brecht says, 'first comes a full stomach, then comes ethics'. Taken together, these two slogans seem to capture something essential to Purg's approach to the shoplifting bag, which he expresses in the following way.

We must begin to change our habits, thinking, needs, if we want to survive. We consider the margins, the edges, as a kind of indicator and incubator for questions of the future: if we

understand events on the edges, we can "read" the future. That is why we maintain that the practices of the margins will be very useful in the future. The subject of Privileged Tactics is actually creativity – the challenge of how we can function outside established practices in crisis situations.

Purg's retooled bag is both a vivid journalistic device for telling this story of redemption, lending a voice to suffering within the context of conspicuous consumption, and also an object that immanently and materially expresses a social contradiction, like an artwork according to the Marxist tradition of philosophical aesthetics.

The techniques of the dispossessed are full of promise, partly because they carry a critical charge and partly because they implement hope. In the social life of street children, these techniques resonate with Brechtian and Benjaminian force. In art, the techniques of the amateur and the philistine have been called 'practices of negation'¹² by T.J. Clark. We can understand Clark's guerilla aesthetics as the dialectical combination of art and non-art in a tense, temporary, contradictory whole. Purg's politically charged appropriation of the shoplifter's bag adopts a specific practice of negation from the social life of the dispossessed directly. Shoplifting resonates with the history of Appropriation art both technically and conceptually. Purg brings these two worlds of appropriation together within the conflictual totality of private property and

structural poverty (this unhappy combination of unprecedented wealth and extreme poverty is a totality because capitalist accumulation presupposes mass poverty). Shoplifting is a practice that sits right on the fault line of the contradictory social whole of capitalism. This was brought out during the London riots of 2011, when members of the government argued that the looters were not political protestors but superannuated shoppers. What shoplifting and looting implies, however, is a fundamental and revolutionary revaluation of economics in which use-value is everything and exchange value is nothing. Rather than confirming the values of capitalism by desiring its products, then, looting and shoplifting subvert the very basis of capitalism as an economic system, the economic transaction.

So, we can map Purg's work onto the complex conceptual and strategic territory of Western Marxist aesthetic theory, but it is not an academic reiteration of classic gestures. *Privileged Tactics I* is a sharp example of social commentary in contemporary art that shares the legacy of Baudelaire's 'painters of modern life' with the allegorical impulse of postminimalist practices, the documentary principles of 'the return of the real', and the forms of address of art's recent social turn. It is also a new exemplar for montage today. Shoving several commodities in a bag has echoes of Lautréamont's 'chance meeting' which the Surrealists generalized into practices of montage. Objects are brought into contact with one another and then placed in a new context. This work is a perfect example of a new kind of montage, what we might

¹¹ Walter Benjamin, *On Hashish*, Harvard University Press, edited and translated by Howard Eiland 2006, p.6

¹² T.J. Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art." *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, Francis Frascina (ed), Paul Chapman, London, 1985, pp.47-63

call *performative montage*. Unlike montage in Surrealism and Dada, the elements are not pictures cut together or objects combined to make pictorial meanings, nor, like Appropriation art, is the combination of objects brought about within the aesthetic and intellectual institution of art. Purg's *Privileged Tactics*, whether they deal with the dumping of waste, shoplifting technology or, in *Privileged Tactics III*, intimate relationships, montage elements of the world within the contexts of social life itself. Montage is the work of transformation. Purg turns montage on the world, applying the Western Marxist aesthetics of redemption onto social life, following Jameson's reversal of Walter Benjamin's dictum that 'there is no document of civilization which is not at one and the same time a document of barbarism', namely that there is no element of the barbarous reality that is not simultaneously a carrier of utopia¹³.

The dialectical relationship between reality and utopia, or what Adorno called a 'damaged life' and what Benjamin called 'redemption', is articulated in a different way in Purg's 'Global Debt' project. This is an interactive work in which a screen is affected by a pedal. On the screen you can see numbers indicating the rapidly growing sum of global debt, derived from publicly available statistics. When the visitor uses the pedal like a brake, the ever accumulating figure freezes temporarily. The amount 'saved' through this process is indicated on the screen under two headings, 'you saved' and 'recently saved'. Like Brecht's 'learning-plays', Purg uses conspicuously political content, audience participation and

¹³ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, Routledge, London and New York, 1983, p.276

associates activities (and inactivities) within the arts to activities (and inactivities) in social, political and economic life. If Ernest Mandel¹⁴ is right that competitive capitalism is replaced by industrial capitalism and then 'Late Capitalism', which is the phase in which finance capital is dominant, then mounting debt is as necessary to the current economic system as workers are to industrialization. From the banker's point of view, debt is an asset, and therefore the ascending figures of worldwide debt are seen by them as economic growth, so long, of course, as these liabilities can be adequately repaid. Only five years ago, economists were celebrating finance – and therefore debt – as one of the most profitable sectors of the advanced economy, but they have since changed their tune and are almost unanimously advising governments, businesses and households to make sacrifices in order to reduce their debt. Austerity measures are, effectively, an act of assault by one class on another, to extract the value lost by the owning classes in the credit crunch from the working class. However, in principle, the elimination of debt is a utopian drive – if not, in fact, utterly revolutionary – because it eliminates interest, dividends and other profits derived from capital.

Utopia is a versatile dialectical concept. As such, it is not only the halting of debt that has utopian overtones. The spiraling debt is also utopian. Like the fabled Land of Cockayne, which promises an abundance of material and bodily satisfactions without exertion, debt allows immediate enjoyment of that which we desire. According to this version of utopia, the brake

¹⁴ See Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, Verso, London and New York, translated by Joris De Bres, 1978



Global Debt, interactive installation, Likovni Salon, 2011

is an accountant's constraint on what we may enjoy according to what we can afford. Here, the reality principle puts an end to the dream of a world in which the allocation of resources is determined by needs and wants rather than wealth. But pleasure is not, in itself, utopian. And Purg's 'Global Debt' is not naïve about pleasure. Next to the screen and pedal there is a wheel on a table which, when moved, generates 'canned laughter'. This last element attaches the politically charged content of the work to the Culture Industry's false reconciliation with its audience. Canned laughter stands on the fault line between exploitation and redemption, promising the latter but preserving the former. The objective and spontaneous collective experience of laughing together in an audience or crowd is denied the isolated, individualized audience of TV and radio but is returned to them subjectively in the sound of laughter

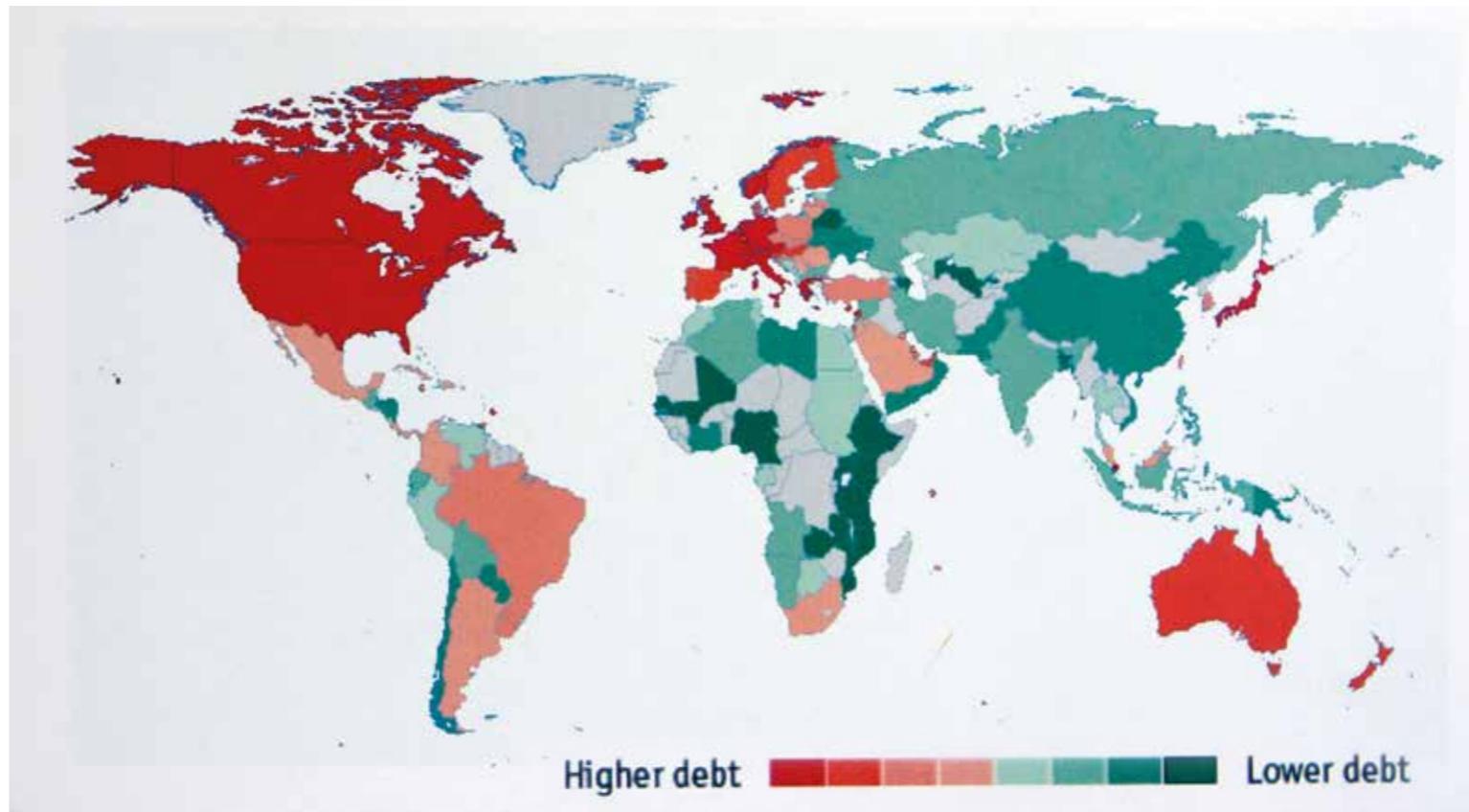
broadcast at the moments predetermined by experts. Placed alongside a screen depicting rising global debt, the canned laughter montages high finance with the Culture Industry, economics and comedy, calculation and pleasure. Spectacle monopolizes the official place of the collective response to economic crisis, even preserving a token space within it for representing the Occupy movement – the genuine collective retort to crisis – as a folly. It is this sort of conflict that divides utopia from the possibility of real change.

Irena Čerčnik

Margin to centre

In my paper, I will focus on three of Purg's works in which the subject of critique is the space of the world economy and social inequality. These works – *Privileged Tactics I* and *II* (both made in collaboration with the artist Sara Heitlinger) and *Global Debt* – are not only political because of their “political” content, or the problematics they deal with, but all the more so because they search for possibilities and initiatives that may contribute to the creation of a more responsible and just world, and also because they create situations and models capable of influencing the individual's critical thinking and decision-making. These works touch upon the existing world economic-political paradigm that, by making possible corporate supremacy and by posing rules established and protected by wealthy countries, divides the world unbearably into the rich and the poor. While, on the one hand, an enormous part of humankind is threatened by social and environmental problems, on the other hand a handful of wealthy people are prospering outrageously. This paradigm has created a state of crisis in various parts of the world, where a large share of the population is unable to provide the basic necessities of life for themselves. It has also created ever more chaotic and restless environments in the central states of Europe and North America, which are faced with a dramatic increase in poverty. Practices that might contribute to the reduction of social and economic inequality run counter to the value logic of capital that has all the political

power to be able to remove from the social scene all those who represent an obstacle or stand in its way. *Privileged Tactics I* and *II* as well as *Global Debt* prompt us to reflect on the nature and consequences of the existing world order and on the urgency for change, encouraging (particularly in view of the current crisis situation that has significantly undermined the belief in the stability of the system) the opening up of the longstanding issues that for decades were considered utopian but are now becoming increasingly topical as a result of the current circumstances: Does it suffice for oppositional



Global Debt, postcard, Likovni Salon, 2011

movements to provoke changes only within the system itself? Are new, radical changes of the world order possible at all? Are new circumstances and consciousness being created that reflect the need and the possibility of a new and different world order? Are radical beliefs that were long considered utopian gaining legitimacy again?

Let's take a closer look at the two examples explored by Franc Purg and Sara Heitlinger in their work *Privileged Tactics*.

In the city of Cairo, the Zabbaleen community with a population of 70,000, have for decades been collecting and, according to 1997 data, recycling at least a third of all the waste produced by the fast-growing city with its population of approximately 18 million. They have created one of the world's most efficient sustainable models of recycling, and have developed the infrastructure and tools that enable them to recycle more than 80% of the collected waste. In contrast, Western companies recycle only up to 20%, with the remainder being disposed of in landfill sites, which poses a huge environmental threat. For the Zabbaleen, the collecting and recycling of waste from which new materials and products are then made has represented, for generations now, a way of life as well as their only source of income. This last, however, has been at risk since 2003, when municipal authorities stipulated annual contracts worth millions of dollars for municipal cleaning with three multinational corporations (two Spanish and one Italian) that found in Egypt a new profitable niche.

The shift from state-regulated to free market economy has had catastrophic consequences in many European countries, with the majority living below the minimum subsistence level and only a handful who have grown particularly rich. Neoliberal reforms have provoked the phenomenon of street children. According to unofficial data, in 2006, Ukraine alone registered

between seven hundred thousand to one million homeless children.

The self-organized, peripheral local community of the Zabbaleen has run afoul of the interests of the local municipal authorities as well as the interests of monopolists. *Privileged Tactics II* takes as its starting point the Zabbaleen system of informal economy considered by the artists as a model that can be used in spaces similar to those of the Zabbaleen. It deals with environmental issues, underlining the importance of personal responsibility for the environment. The Zabbaleens' sustainability-oriented practice has been transformed and upgraded into a project meant for the Western consumer. Conceived as an intervention into reality, the project performs the function of informing. Products were tagged each with a radio frequency identification (RFID) tag or code that would inform the buyer, by means of a reading device, about the level of contamination caused by a given product and company in the process of production and transportation. We are faced with absurd situations –not from the perspective of capital interests though – when a certain product that can be bought, for example, in Europe travels huge distances, and often comes from a completely different part of the world. Normally, there is no real need for this practice, which puts at risk the smaller local producers supplying similar products. Fundamentally, *Privileged Tactics II* seeks to create a situation that would enable the consumer to contribute significantly – with his or her own decision as to whether or not to buy a product

– to environmental protection and sustainable development. It poses the simple question of when is capital most vulnerable, if not when one refuses to buy its products? In *Privileged Tactics II*, the artists emphasize the fundamental importance of sustainable development, the significance of personal responsibility and the awareness of the individual that with his or her decisions he or she can influence the economic processes and thus also the future of society. They have designed and offered a model as a concrete technical solution.

The homeless children in Ukraine have come up with unique stealing tactics that allow them to survive. Has the society that was unable to provide these children with the most basic social security the right to ask about the limits between the permissible and the forbidden when bare existence is in question? Or is there a point beyond prohibitions at which certain acts can no longer be considered transgressions? The artists have transformed the experiences and practices of homeless children into an installation, *Privileged Tactics I*, that can be read on many levels. In encountering the installation we are asked to reflect on the mechanisms that are a legitimate instrument of power of those in the position to make economic and political decisions. We are also required to reflect on the spaces of non-differentiation where the border between a transgression and the permissible, the legal and the illegal, is blurred. Furthermore, *Privileged Tactics I* mediates concrete knowledge and skills, and can be seen as “small tools of resistance” for personal use. The installation

consists of sound recordings with instructions in different languages on how to perform a successful theft, and an object/bag with added materials that block electrical security devices. The installation is accompanied by a short artists' statement that places the work within the context of anti-system gestures. Besides the installation, the artists organize workshops in which the participants are taught how to make such a bag to be later used to perform an action in public space (big commercial enterprises). *Privileged Tactics I* can be seen as a subversive use of strategies inherent to capitalism (in which theft in the form of appropriation and expropriation is a daily reality of corporate interests and a legitimate act enabled by political and legal structures) within its own structures. The work, that functions as a suggestion in the artistic context, is transmuted into a real transgression, passing from a discursive field into the space of the real. The position of critical distance is thus substituted by the artists' active practice and intervention in reality. By taking an approach that could be interpreted as taking the situation into one's own hands, the artists apply the very concept they attack, and the spectator may therefore easily understand this work literally at first glance, i.e. understand it as an affirmation of what the project actually undermines. *Privileged Tactics I* represents a sort of disruption in the usual order and an opposition to the existing order that is grounded upon injustice, exclusion and competitive interests. While listening to the suggestive instructions of the installation that sound like an accurate and practical manual, the spectator's attention moves from the field of the

social into the field of the personal, prompting him or her to revise his or her own views and limits. At this point, the work poses itself as a question, leaving the spectator to figure out the answer alone.

Both works surpass the institutional (museum) representation of the identity and issues of a community through the position of speaking on behalf of the other. They are not used as a space for action, even though the artists originally planned an action with which to join the organizations, experts and activists who support the fight of the Zabbaleen against the municipal authorities and corporations. In the artists' view, the Zabbaleen community and homeless children in Ukraine are not a terrain or *the other* about whom to speak, but rather they represent a social environment in which the two subjects of their research are creativity established within a state of exception and the possibility of self-organization. The artists were inspired by their capability of producing ideas, knowledge and tactics that within the existing situation can actively contribute to a more just and responsible way of organizing the life environment or changes within it. *Privileged Tactics* stands somewhere between being an instrument and a creative and responsible attitude towards the world. The artists speak about strategies of self-initiative and activity at the micro level as well as about activation of “bottom-up” changes. They represent a kind of micropolitics of decision-making and forms of organizing and networking able to subvert as tiny little cells the positions of power. *Privileged Tactics*

can be seen as opposing a passive acceptance of the given situation where one waits for changes outside oneself. Rather it encourages individuals and communities to seek alternative solutions, and to assume an active attitude towards the world based on collaboration and networking, exchange and mediation of knowledge in order to gradually change the situation. The artists call such practices creative practices: their power resides in agency that is meaningful in the most common situations, and not in utopias. They define *Privileged Tactics* as critical design. An important element of this approach – with which, through the designing and planning of a product-model, they establish a critique of the existing economic and environmental situation, promote critical thinking and responsibility, and consider and address each individual as a decisive creator of the world and society – is real use value. *Privileged Tactics II*, which diverges, as much as possible, from the concept of the work of art as it was established by modernism, would gain its real value only outside the artistic context, in the space of everyday life and (ideally) of mass use.

Purg's interactive installation *Global Debt* consists of a red carpet, a screen displaying the current global debt, and a table and a reel with built-in microchips with recordings of laughter. By combining associative, designed and real elements (data about indebtedness), it creates a space for the spectator to experience absurdity, powerlessness and exclusion. The interactivity of the work, in which the spectator can intervene in the situation and actively participate in the

course of events, points to the absurdity of the spectator's activities, which are just as absurd as the current financial situation in which the most indebted are the very states with the highest GDP. The spectator feels as powerless as the majority of the population who are experiencing the consequences of the financial speculations of a handful of actors. The spectator is degraded to the level of a meaningless foot pedal meant to bring a halt to the ceaseless and alarmingly increasing numbers that represent the global debt, and at the same time is faced with the illusion of the momentary expectation of being able to bring about a change. One's wish to alleviate debt is immediate but soon ends in failure, accompanied by waves of laughter that further accentuate the feeling of being manipulated and excluded. In his installation, in which the central role is played by the spectator as a failed participant and more a victim than an actor, the artist uses experience to simulate the reality of capitalism that has provoked in the very richest states a deepening of inequality and an ever-faster expanding of the margin within the centre.

A characteristic that defines all three works, *Privileged Tactics I and II* and *Global Debt*, is that they transcend the static mirroring and interpreting of reality and establish a dynamic environment that opens up communication and demands a reaction. Their political dimension originates, as already stated, in the way in which they involve the spectator and exert an influence on him or her. Of key importance for these projects is that the spectator is

pushed into a surprising situation that forces him or her to revise his or her views on and perception of the world. *Privileged Tactics I* represents the violation of rules and incorrect conduct, a direct "encouragement to steal" that is shocking, disturbing and attention-drawing. The installation negates the passive acceptance of interests of power, and demands that we question our own position. *Global Debt* gives the spectator the possibility of literally experiencing the subject of critique. It establishes a situation in which the spectator is confronted with the fact that things occur without his or her participation. Neither has the spectator caused them nor has he or she the ability to change them. All he or she can do is but feel the consequences. As stressed by Noam Chomsky (who doesn't exclude the possible demise of the world system and by looking into the past that often falsely proclaimed the "end of history" and "finality" firmly denies the claim of neoliberalism that there is no alternative and that we have reached the highest point of development), neoliberalism requires that the public believes in it and supports it as the perfect and ultimate economic system. In order to achieve this, it makes recourse to the most varied instruments to educate the "passive" and "submissive" public, which finds it unnecessary, and above all impossible, to change the image of the world.¹ Purg's works ask us the fundamental question as to what kind of public we are or wish to be.

¹ Chomsky, Noam. *Profit Over People*, New York, Seven Stories Press, 1999, pp. 43–62.

Privileged Tactics I and *II* find inspiration on the edges created by a world system that is accepted, maintained and protected by the wealthiest countries. Shortly after producing these works, Franc Purg, who has always reacted quickly and directly to the world in which we live and has been particularly attentive to marginal situations that affect human beings, was compelled to make *Global Debt*. Critical states of being on the edges of society and caused by these wealthy countries, have now expanded to a new "location". The main crisis has become the crisis of the centre, of the Western world. The crisis is not something external any longer; it is not only the crisis of a segment of the system, but is an inner crisis of the West and of the world system, its values and the essence of its identity. How about the future? Is Europe heading towards a future of experimentation with the destinies of entire nations and the social security of their people? How can a look into the future influenced by current events delineate the global division into the centre and the periphery? Are the locations of the central states gradually being displaced? Is it possible that other countries will slowly take up the central position? And where will the margin move to, considering that the centre and the margin are a relational pair and that they cannot exist one without the other, and that centres of power reject and do not permit a world without this duality and without the ideology that for centuries has been based on its dichotomy?

Interview with Franc Purg on *Privileged Tactics* Conversation with Urška Jurman

Urška Jurman: *Privileged Tactics* are a series of projects you developed with Sara Heitlinger on the theme of how people create their own survival solutions, existential as well as emotional. With *Privileged Tactics I*, the two of you started with the creativity of survival strategies and techniques of street children in the Ukraine, where you lived for two months in 2006. In *Privileged Tactics II*, which are still in development, you thematize the survival strategies of Coptic people in Cairo, whose economy is based on the collection and recycling of a large part of the waste products of the city of Cairo. Another aspect is that with these projects, you also draw attention to questions of personal responsibility to the environment in the developed world.

Privileged Tactics III is a project which you are currently developing in which you concentrate on the intimate relations of people who live in different environments and on their creativity – the effort to maintain connections in the distances of life. Would you start off by presenting the conceptual points of departure and work methodologies which are developed within the project? It is interesting to me that you have constructed *PT I* as well as *II* from two parts: from an exploratory part in the field (streets of the Ukraine, and Cairo) and from created objects/models which you implement as critical design.

As a part of your installations in a gallery space, these objects – a bag for stealing for *PT I*,

and for *PT II* a model for increasing personal responsibility to the environment – challenge visitors with the uncomfortable task of reestablishing their own stance toward dealing with questions of what we think about theft as a concept compared to theft from necessity, how we contribute to the pollution of the environment, and so on. It seems to me that with this, what interests you above all is how to shake the established positions and dispel the certainty of the Subject in the developed world.

Franc Purg: Marginal, or better said, fringe groups have interested me for a long time. They were also the starting points for my older projects, such as: *Where is the line* (1998), *Leon* (2001), *Kids* (2002) among others. In the case of *Privileged Tactics* the children of the streets in some parts of Eastern Europe, the Zabbaleen, who are the smallest group of Coptic people in Cairo; and finally, partners who live in different geographic and linguist environments. In *PT* the two of us were not interested in the social aspects of these groups as much as the creative practices they use in their work and survival. We consider the question of creativity to be an important question of the times, as we find ourselves in a great crisis which is neither economic nor financial. The global warming situation also shows us that the sphere of our existence is changing drastically, and we do not know what is still to come. In this situation it is revealed that the borders between the centre and the margins are very slippery, and

that the centre can be marginalized, or vice versa. Essentially, it seems to me that our entire world situation is forcing necessary changes in thinking and creativity. We must begin to change our habits, thinking, needs, if we want to survive. We consider the margins, the edges, as a kind of indicator and incubator for questions of the future: if we understand events on the edges, we can “read” the future. That is why we maintain that the practices of the margins will be very useful in the future. The subject of *PT* is actually creativity- the challenge of how we can function outside established practice in crisis situations.

Urška Jurman: So, in *PT* the two of you are showing that solutions for the future are being established today in edge or marginal situations?

Franc Purg: Exactly. Although it sounds ambitious to say that the margins are ahead of the centre in questions of the future. It looks as though the centre has been overconfident in comparison with the margins. Now something is happening in the centre. It is certain that our environment is changing greatly and that the order of the world is changing. Neoliberal capitalism, which usually passes as the only possibility, has revealed itself to be a nonfunctional system. If we hope to survive, we have to be creative in all fields – we need to cease with established practices and search and experiment with new habits, solutions and thought processes.

Urška Jurman: How do you then see your task, or role as artists, in relation to the marginalized

groups from which you draw inspiration for necessary creativity on one hand, and to global problems on the other hand? Is it a role of mediation?

Franc Purg: When we went out to the Ukraine and later to Cairo, we had a very clear vision of our position. We resisted the condition of the omniscient white man and told ourselves that we would work above all from the position of some kind of exploring students. We learned about street children and later about the Zabbaleen. They have a very sophisticated knowledge of how to survive in the utmost difficult urban conditions. Of course we did a great deal of documentation during our visits to the Ukraine and Cairo, but that was never the reason for our work. Right at the time we were in Kiev, there was the large traveling photographic exhibition, World Press, full of miserable scenes. That exhibition cast us into doubt about the plausibility of documentation and raised a lot of ethical questions. The two of us did not want to cast the street children as victims.

The survival practices which we discovered among them, in the context which impacted their situation, we understood as a kind of new system. Now I would say – a model. And that is how we presented them afterward. In *PT II* the approach is a somewhat different. We marvelled at the economic system of the Zabbaleen, which is based on exceptionally effective recycling of garbage in Cairo. We would like to promote – as much as possible – their unbelievably sophisticated model

of collecting and processing garbage as an enduring development in the developing world. In conjunction, based on the activities of the Zabbaleen, we are devising a model of personal responsibility for the environment in the developed world. How could something with similar long-term effectiveness, as demonstrated by the system of the Zabbaleen, be attained in the developed world? We created a model of offering information about the environmental impact of a product to individuals, consumers, when purchasing different products.

This model opens a space for individual participation in relation to environmental problems. That is how we subvert the tactics of liberal capitalism in *PT I* and *PT II*. I doubt that the global market desires environmental responsibility of buyers, were their choices to work against the principle of maximizing profits, which leads to outlandish cases such as being able to buy water from Fiji in London. The same goes for the model from *PT I*, a bag to facilitate stealing, which enables us to start doing what capitalism does legally.

Urška Jurman: Do you have a plan laid out for the themes you will address in the framework of *PT*? And what actually are, according to you, Privileged Tactics?

Franc Purg: No, we don't have blueprints for the themes. As we were doing *PT I* we did not even know that we would be doing a *PT II* and now *PT III*. Later we discovered that the concept of *Privileged Tactics*, which we developed in the

framework of the first project, was something we could also use for following projects. It was felicitous for us, we couldn't say otherwise. As we did *PT I*, we associated with homeless children on the streets and talked with different people in the Ukraine about this phenomenon – we learned that this situation did not exist in socialist times. A great number of stories we heard went more or less like this: factories shut down, parents find themselves without money, a new owner buys the factory for a comparatively low price, raising the rents of the factory housing, and because there is no work there is no money and the family must move out. The parents usually separate, the father vanishes who knows where, the mother drinks, and the children wind up on the streets. In order to survive, these children develop strategies and tactics which are criminal according to established norms. In short, they steal. On the other hand the events which are associated with this, which put the children on the streets, the rise of capitalism, are legally approved. In *PT I* of course we did not illustrate the condition of homeless children, we did not document, rather, we showed a model of possible resistance to the system which pushed them onto the streets. We first exhibited *PT I* in the year 2006 in the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana. The installation had audio instructions of how we can steal and how we can manufacture gear for making stealing easier. We constructed a model – a bag which thwarts the electronic sensors for detecting stolen items at a store exit. We also had a workshop, in which we taught people these things. It is necessary to understand this

object, the bag, within the context of deciding for yourself when, from whom, and why you will steal. In the exhibition we also incorporated a statement in which we wrote, among other things, that stealing represents resistance to liberal capitalism, with its own numerous criminal actions which are in that case legally approved. In *PT I* we were therefore asking; when is theft criminal and when is it a privileged tactic?

Urška Jurman: Is it a privileged tactic therefore when you do have the possibility of choice and that you do not do something out of necessity, as in the case of the street children of the Ukraine or the Zabbaleen group in Cairo?

Franc Purg: No. Privileged Tactics are not the possibility of choice or freedom, especially today in a democratic system where freedom is one of the basic human rights. Accepting the possibility of choice or freedom as privileged would mean that we would passively renounce the United Nations declaration of 1948. In ancient Rome, to be privileged meant that you were free. Street children certainly do not feel themselves privileged. Quite the contrary. They live in an extremely tough environment and precisely in those surroundings figure out strategies, methods and tactics in order to survive. It will sound pathetic to those who have never been in such a state of affairs, but: to live and survive is a privilege. Another way to put it would be to say that privileged means that someone creates their own rules, strategies, which are not a part of the generally accepted system or laws. The root

of the word "privilege" is the latin "privilegium", coming from "privus", which means "one's own, personal" and "lex", which means "law". In Slovene colloquial language it would mean "to take one's fate into one's own hands", which the street children have also done.

Urška Jurman: Could you describe *PT II* in more detail?

Franc Purg: As an introduction to this project I would mention the project *Red Cross*, which I constructed in 2006 in the Machtesh Ramon crater in the middle of the desert near the town of Mitzpe Ramon in Israel. The platform which is intended for the observation and admiring of the spectacularly beautiful crater is used by the locals for illegal dumping of various waste. On the slope of the crater, I built a giant red cross mostly from red junk. The local government was not pleased with this, of course, and organized a clean-up afterward. Later Sara and I started thinking about a joint project in which we could work with our shared interests about environmental problems. The inspiration for *PT II* was the Zabbaleen, which means "people who collect the garbage" in Arabic. They are descended from Coptic farmers, aborigines, who were very destitute at the beginning of the 20th century and figured out a way to survive in a big city. In the region of the Nile delta they moved to Cairo, or rather the backwaters of the city. In order to survive, they first collected organic waste in Cairo and raised livestock in the city of Mokattam, where they live and which has become a part of the city of Cairo. Later, with

the growth of the city and the rise of consumer society, they began collecting other garbage as well, sorting, reworking and reselling it. They collect organic waste, paper, plastic, bags, metals and textiles, and recycle more than 90 percent of the waste. They have workshops in which they manufacture equipment for processing waste into products and semiproducts, which they sell back into the city. For example, they make compost from organic waste; they mix plastic bags, which are known as expensive to recycle, with sand and make such things as covers for sewage systems. Until 1980, they were the only people cleaning Cairo, where between 20 and 25 million people live today. In the nineties the city government contracted four multinational concerns to clean the city, but the plan quickly revealed itself as a failure. Some absurd things happened; for example some contractors brought trucks to Cairo which were too wide for the streets, for they had not even come earlier to inspect the city. Of the four concerns, only one still remains, which obviously does a poor job of cleaning the city, as Cairo is drowning in garbage. The economic system of the Zabbaleen is still under question; it is not clear whether they will be able to stay in the city of Mokattam, as the city government wants to resettle them elsewhere. Today, in times of over-pollution and saturation with waste, the example of the Zabbaleen appears very progressive to us. Their system should be studied and promoted. That is also our intent. As Sara and I began to work intensively on the project, we discovered that the model of that group, which recycles a large part of the waste

products of Cairo, is not something we can carry over and use in the developed world. But we believe that it is very suited for the developing world. That is why we created the second part of the project, in which we propose the so-called model of personal responsibility to the environment in the developed world.

Urška Jurman: Why does it seem to you that the model of the Zaballen is not suited to the developed world?

Franc Purg: Taking a model from one context into another is problematic. Just as Cairo wanted to implement the western model of city waste maintenance, and this proved to be ineffective, I believe the model of the Zabbaleen would not work here. The model of the developed world is different. For the developed world we created a model of personal responsibility to the environment. With this model the consumer can make decisions as to which products to purchase based on information about the environmental impact of each product.

Urška Jurman: *PT II* has been running since 2006. How has the project changed from the original ideas since your recent trip to Cairo in October 2008? How has your own understanding of the economic and environmental model of the Zabbaleen changed in that time, regarding your plans for what you realize in the project as well?

Franc Purg: When we first visited the Zabbaleen in the summer of 2006, their recycling system fascinated us. Our first reaction was to try to

help them within the framework of the project, but we were aware of the plans of the city government to resettle the Zabbaleen out of the city of Mottakam, where about 70,000 people live. We developed a proposal for the project and submitted it to the UNESCO Digital Arts Awards, where the idea was selected for second prize. The prize enabled a three-month residence at the Santa Fe Art Institute, where we were able to continue developing the project. Another consequence of the UNESCO prize was that we established contact with the Free Dimensional organization from New York, who helped us greatly in the development of the project. Our original idea was to carry out an action in Cairo which would entail distributing 10,000 plastic water bottles and tracking them with a GPS system. We foresaw that the result would be a great percentage of the bottles winding up recycled by the Zabbaleen. We intended to then work with this statistical data, saying, "look how important the Zabbaleen are to city of Cairo." GPS quickly turned out to be an overly expensive and unsuitable system for us, so we changed tack, to a radio frequency identification system, RFID. Upon modifying the action with plastic bottles, we reconsidered, as it would still be very expensive. In the process of working we started to intensively rethink in the direction of how it would be possible to promote their model. I think that the role of the artist is not just to produce objects – you can also promote something that already exists. Here we can link to the idea of the "ready-made". If we are to conduct the action with plastic bottles in Cairo, that will also be in conjunction

with promoting the model of the Zabbaleen, which we consider very actual.

Urška Jurman: Wasn't the idea of promotion part of the content of the project from the very beginning?

Franc Purg: No, we did not know that we would be doing that. Now we are aware of it. We only learned in the process of the work itself. The white man likes to step into the third world to teach and subjugate. That is the idea of colonialization. Our position is reversed. In *PT I* we went to the Ukraine in the position of learners and not teachers.

Urška Jurman: I would like to know if that is why your ideas about promoting awareness throughout the development of the project as well as your understanding of what kind of promotion makes sense, is necessary, changed upon meeting the Zabbaleen?

Franc Purg: They need promotion in Cairo. This year the Austrian photographer Hermann Huber wanted to exhibit his photographs of the Zabbaleen in the Townhouse Gallery in Cairo, but for political reasons, which is a commentary in itself, was refused. The Zabbaleen are still on some kind of blacklist in Cairo, which is paradoxical. The other thing however is the promotion of that model in the rest of the developing world – to spread their knowledge to other groups who could implement it.

Urška Jurman: You speak of blacklists – do you

mean by that blacklists in the city government or in the residents of Cairo as well? How do the residents of Cairo relate to the Zabbaleen?

Franc Purg: At first I thought that the root of the problem between the city government and the Zabbaleen was a matter of religion. The Zabbaleen are not Arabic, they are aboriginal people with Christian roots. As we grew to know the situation in Cairo however, we realized that questions of religion are not the reason for the negative actions of the government toward them. The president of the non-governmental organization Association for Environment, which was established by a wealthy Coptic family and supports the Zabbaleen, also said this. I think the source of these problems is primarily a great appetite for the physical space in which the Zabbaleen live and from which the government wants to move them.

Urška Jurman: I read that the residents were not exactly inclined toward the international contractors because they had to begin paying for a subscription to the garbage removal services, even though the contractors were not able to match the Zabbaleen in recycling a large percentage of garbage.

Franc Purg: The paradox here is that the foreign contractors cleaning Cairo do not even recycle, but dump the garbage in the middle of the desert. You can imagine how much garbage 20 to 25 million people generate each day. The garbage they dump is buried in the desert without any protection. When it rains in winter,

polluted water pours into the river Nile, which is the source of their entire water system. That is the catch-22 of the multinationals' cleaning of Cairo. And as you said, with the multinationals, people had to pay to subscribe to garbage removal services. What is the implication of importing the Western model to the cleaning of Cairo? The system doesn't work. Even more, it is ecologically, economically and socially damaging. Then you have the existing model of the Zabbaleen, which they do not grasp, but which they actually should support.

Urška Jurman: How is the stance of the city government toward the Zabbaleen now, after the obviously unsuccessful experience of the city with international contractors?

Franc Purg: At the moment they maintain the status quo. And that is why it seems to me that this is the right moment to promote the model of the Zabbaleen.

Urška Jurman: In what way does the Association for Environment support the Zabbaleen?

Franc Purg: Until recently the Zabbaleen manufactured semiproducts – they recycled paper, cut plastic bottles into strips and sold them for example for the manufacture of synthetic fabric, and so on. That organization, which has about 60 volunteers who are all Copts, help the Zabbaleen with advice, and financially as well. For example they opened a workshop in which compost is made from organic waste, and a workshop in which they process old

clothing into finished products such as bags and rugs, which they design themselves. In some workshops they make covers for sewage systems out of plastic bags and so on. In short, the organization supports in selling various semiproducts and products along with the collecting, sorting and processing of garbage.

Urška Jurman: And how is the city of Mokattam organized – the garbage city, where the Zabbaleen live?

Franc Purg: In Mokattam, it stinks – how could it be otherwise? It surprised me that a part of the city is Arabic, although the Copts are Christians. In the city there was no feeling of tension or visible borders which would divide the city into two parts. The city is organized on the basis of families which specialize in the collection and processing of different materials. They have schools, a kindergarten, doctors and nurses.

Urška Jurman: You speak of individuals, but the city has 70,000 inhabitants.

Franc Purg: Yes, that's it. The doctors have not been there long and half of them work as volunteers. People there are very poor and have great health problems with hepatitis b, which is their perpetual curse.

Urška Jurman: We spoke about the incompatibility of models. Do you think that the model of the Zabbaleen could be taken to the Western world, but on an individual level? Is it possible on an individual level, in everyday

life, to follow the model of the Zabbaleen, who recycle the bulk of garbage? It is difficult to imagine people after an eight hour work day collecting and processing more garbage than they produce.

Franc Purg: I don't think we have another choice. Until now we have believed too much that the government will do something about this. But governments are bound to four-year mandates. The introduction of unleaded gasoline, which was a governmental measure, was positive of course, but what happened? – at the same time, the number of automobiles tripled. In my opinion the planet could possibly begin to change at the individual level. Every individual must decide how to create less pollution. I don't see large systematic possibilities. Who will force you to throw your paper into the paper bin? Here I see the perspective of our personal responsibility. We have already gone so far in polluting the planet, that if we don't seriously wake up and radically change our thoughts and actions, there is no future for us. As I said, I think that we can not import the the model of the Zabbaleen system into Slovenia. It is about two different structures, but we could take it to the developing world. What could we do in the developed world? Within the scope of our project, we develop a model of personal responsibility. The developed world is the world of a consumer society. The reason for the universal crisis we are in is our over-sized appetite for gain, consuming, and so on. The model of personal responsibility which we suggest could be implemented practically. It is

based on the fourth principle of consumption. If we are currently making purchasing decisions based on price, quality and design, Sara and I introduce a fourth dimension, which is personal responsibility. The suggested model shows the pollution that different products produce, from cradle to grave. For example: how much greenhouse emissions are created in the manufacture of the product, its origin, what distance it travels to the point of sale, how it is transported ... on the basis of this information the model shows the amount of emissions generated by the transport of the article, and so on.

Urška Jurman: Your model is actually a model for the aware consumer. You have not brought the system of consumerism itself into question, and there is still the open question of what happens to the packaging of the product.

Franc Purg: What is the aware consumer? Our model also includes information about whether the manufacturers of various products are responsible for recycling packaging or not. The model is constructed so that products are embedded with an RFID microchip linked to all relevant data. Scanning the chip shows a database, on which the consumer can make decisions. This model is suitable for the Western, developed world, and we believe in the importance of personal responsibility for the future of our planet while at the same time we are aware that change cannot happen overnight. But if we turn back, we destroy radically, quickly and decisively.

Urška Jurman: In connection with the model you develop in the framework of *PT*, you talk about the concept of critical design. I understand these models as criticism which at the same time suggest: as criticism of established prevailing practices, thoughts, and which suggest “something different”, which could seriously be carried over into, and practiced in, real life. Your combination of the symbolic and the real is interesting to me – developing models as some kind of abstract proposal, which could be seriously implemented into daily life. Why do you find it necessary to develop models/proposals which could potentially be applied as solutions to different problems?

Franc Purg: It would be too simple and boring to be a passive critic, and that is the source of the desire for some kind of useful models, proposed systems, which we call critical design. Critical design is the opposite of affirmative design, which is the melding of function, aesthetic concerns and not least, profitability. With models which in some way subvert the capitalist system, we are trying to stimulate critical rethinking and formation of personal conditions, and perhaps new practices as well.

Interview was conducted November, 2008, and first printed in Likovne Besede-Art Words

Igor Zabel

Untitled essay written for the exhibition at Mala galerija, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana in 2003

Purg's video triptych is constructed of quite distinct elements. Each of them deals with a different theme and uses a different approach and strategy. *Leon* deals with a particular individual story and is completely focused on the protagonist and his narration; *Kids* tells the story of childhood in the suburbs of Belfast, using sharp, abrupt editing techniques, similar to those used for video clips; and *Vrnjak* is composed entirely of long, slow-moving shots panning an abandoned and overgrown Istrian village of that name. These works, connected into a whole, establish complex new relations through their very differences, through parallelisms and contrasts. Purg's video works could certainly be said to address a wide range of issues: urban life, the life of underprivileged social groups etc. But what I find more interesting is a common characteristic found in all three works which might be described as the *external view*. The camera seems to represent the viewer in his or her confrontation with something that is essentially different from, and alien to him or her.

In the contemporary world, especially in the mass media, the camera often functions as an instrument that brings distant reality very close to the viewer, keeping it at the same time at a safe distance. Images of battlegrounds, mass demonstrations and street fights, natural and man-caused disasters, poverty and exotic ceremonies remain, in an essential way, merely images. The reality in them is suppressed: of course we know they are real, but we somehow

refuse to believe that. Through the mass-media images we seem to possess, as it were, all this reality, but merely as an image, in a detached way. Although Purg's images might appear to resemble those in the mass media, they are, in fact, quite distinct. The relations of distance, proximity and possession are defined in a very different way. In Purg's work, reality emphatically confirms its otherness.

The media image aims to be a window into reality, but it remains only an image. Purg, on the other hand, works with his camera in a way that enables the reality beyond the image to speak through it. This is by no means to say that he attempts to hide the medium itself; just the opposite, the way in which he develops his specific strategies and aesthetics in each of his pieces is quite obvious, from the way he defines space to the movement of the camera, the angles of shooting and the editing. The “minimalist” approach in *Leon* and *Vrnjak* is no less deliberate and explicit in constructing and organising the images as the “maximalist” whirl of *Kids*.

The medium of video, however, the “surface” of the image, is in constant tension with what the image represents. Keeping Freud's distinction between *Darstellung* and *Vorstellung* in mind, we should understand this in two ways. First, the image presents something, puts something in front of us, *stellt dar*. In Purg's work, the effect of confrontation is very strong. We know that the mass media images are real, but we cannot

believe it; Purg, on the other hand, convinces us that we should believe his images, but the stronger we believe, the less we actually know. This intensity of confrontation with the other and the different is possible because the artist greatly reduces the distance that the mass media maintain between the viewers and what they see in the images.

This is, in fact, a paradox. The distance of the viewer has been reduced, reality stands in front of him or her in a very direct way, but it nonetheless seems to grow increasingly foreign and becomes actually lost. We are aware that what the image presents (*stellt dar*) is real, but this reality is elusive. The weight of reality becomes more obvious because we cannot reach it.

These relations might be better explained on the example of *Leon*. The camera brings him very close to us. We are directly confronted with

Leon, who always sits in the same chair, in the same corner, always wearing the same clothes, although the different parts of the video were clearly made on different occasions. Then, we are confronted with his narration. But what he speaks about, what his narration represents (*stellt vor*), becomes gradually more and more foreign until it is eventually lost beyond the limit of what we are capable of grasping. What we do have are his words, the changes of his voice, his gestures and moves; the camera enlarges all such details, just as if it was a magnifying glass. But the present is merely a sign for something we cannot reach and grasp. This something is really present, but only through a sign, through Leon's presence. Eventually, the subject of the video is Leon's presence rather than the events he describes; but his presence is completely permeated with his story, extremely real and endlessly distant at the same time.

A video artist dealing with a story such as Leon's,

or with scenes of destructive children's games as seen from a window in Belfast, or even with emotionally charged subjects such as an empty village, always runs the risk of having his or her work described as sensationalist, voyeuristic, sentimental or even immoral, since such works ostensibly exploit human misery in order to enable the viewers the perverse enjoyment of seeing others suffer. Maybe it is true that an artist who deals with subjects such as Purg's necessarily comes close to sensationalism; after all, the lines dividing sensationalism from art are not clear, which makes such qualifications rather relative. Many critics accused some of the works presented at *Manifesta 3* in Ljubljana in 2000, and dealing with such themes as the war in Bosnia, the conditions on the Mexican-American border etc., of being sensationalist, sentimental, and immoral. Conversely, these same works were understood, e.g. in Sarajevo, as a relatively objective and even moderate insight into reality as it was, and not in the least

as immoral exploitation. Thus we could assume that such accusations also serve as defence mechanisms against the danger of looking at something real without the protection of irony, cynicism or formal transformations.

The represented reality is perhaps so very foreign not due to some metaphysical reasons, but because it is part of a world that is essentially different from our own. Empathy is only possible with a certain range of experiences, but as the viewer probably lacks such experiences, he or she cannot reach the empathic connection with Leon's narration, although the narration offers enough points to attract and direct the viewer and confirm the effect of reality. With his experiences and views Leon remains strange to us, while at the same time so close that it feels as though we had established a strong personal relationship with him. It is because of this tension that Purg's videos represent a world that is at once close, foreign, and traumatic.



Vrnjak, photograph, 2005

Nevenka Šivavec

Here is the line

Franc Purg's large scale exhibition *Coming Soon, the Future* held in December 2011 at the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Celje was initially intended as a retrospective of the artist's complete oeuvre, but mostly ended up as a self-reflection and re-interpretation of his work on the one hand, and a representation of his current projects and beliefs on the other. In physical terms these were two completely separate shows as well, each held in its own gallery space.

Purg's approach to his art career spanning over 30 years was distinctly self-critical, selective, even unrelenting, since he opted for carefully chosen elements, even fragments of individual completed works or installations, in order to establish new relations and dialogues between them that best suited his current sensibility and present time. In order to do this he freed his work from modernism and the traces of various formal influences from the 1980s, he cleansed it from the theatricality and verbosity of the 1990s, the collective actions and excessive confidence in the effects of artistic social engagement of the beginning of the new millennium – to draw an elegant arch over his works from the mid-1980s to his premiered latest work from 2011. The oldest exhibited work, the drawings made with silver pencil on black paper that elicit universal cosmological associations, and the current *Global Debt* established a surprising connection of mystery and inexplicability symptomatic of both. Economists, Purg tells us,

provide us with a number of explanations for the absurdly abstract world debt dealt with in his latest work, while in private they admit to their own lack of understanding of it all: "The most calculable phenomenon has at once turned into a metaphysical question."



Untitled, silver pencil on paper, 1984

I will begin my written piece on Purg's work¹ with metaphysical questions, in the same way as he began to make work by posing the same

¹ I had the chance to follow Franc Purg's work very closely for almost 18 years (from 1988 to 2006), several times all the way from his very first ideas up to their final realization, as we shared an intensive experience during this period, together with our son Fabijan, born in December 1990.

sorts of questions right at the beginning of his art career.

Using an identity paradigm, I will present the gradual passage of the artist from modernist sculpture into the field of social action, leaving out his interventions in public spaces, collective initiatives and projects, since these are analyzed by Petra Kapš in her text.

CONTINGENCIES AND MISTAKES

Among our family photographs, there were some black and white ones from the time of Franc's studies at the Ljubljana Academy of Fine Art. I recall the almost faded outside shots of the big polyester egg from 1978, which would end up as his degree project, and was made on his family estate in Videm pri Ptuj. A solemn atmosphere could be discerned from the image as something huge was coming into being and the artist's father and grandfather followed that strange experiment with respect and astonishment. Solemnly inaugurated together with the big cosmic egg, was also the artistic identity of the young sculptor, who could not have anticipated, not even in his most eccentric futuristic dreams, the turbulent circumstances in which he would be active as an artist, and how often and intensely his artistic and social identity would change in the decades to come. The polyester egg was one of the first physical manifestations of his interest in the phenomenon of contingency. He was interested in contingencies, causes and effects, from the aspects of philosophy and astronomy at the time, while in his sculpture he linked coincidence with the discovery that material also had a "life" of its own and could function according

to its own natural laws, and that coincidence could be an occurrence that defines a piece of artwork. The final image of the polyester egg was influenced by the moving and expanding of the polyester mass from the centre outward, which caused cracks on the egg's surface as it broke through. In his earlier works, Purg also explored the effects of the movement of material provoked by various physical interventions into clay, polyester and metal. His interest in coincidence arose while he was studying Sculpture at the Ljubljana Academy of Fine Art, which was at the time grounded in a rigid modernist paradigm and was represented by the respected art personalities of the time, Slavko Tihec in particular.

Franc often mentioned his enthusiasm for Professor Tihec,² who exerted his influence on him mainly through his modernist consciousness of the fact that a work of art must possess vividness, a vitality of its own, independently of what it represents, which was reflected in Tihec's own works, as well as for the artistic philosophy of Lucio Fontana, who distinctly affected Purg's notion of contingency. Purg was obviously particularly influenced by Fontana's body of works *Concetti Spaziale (Spatial Concepts)*, which finds its origin in the fascination with the findings of the time in the field of physics and quantum mechanics, and particularly with the idea of contingency. Formally he took only a few elements, forms

² Slavko Tihec (1928–1993) was a prominent Slovenian modernist sculptor, who experimented intensely with various materials and forms. What stands out most in his oeuvre is his kinetic polyester sculptures named aquamobiles, in which the movement of materials randomly influences the water flow and optical effects on the surface of his sculptures.

and procedures from Fontana: what prevails in Purg's works is the egg form, the oval or ellipse, which are evident in the pencil drawings made according to the principle of automatism, the unconscious, contingency and mistake, or in some cases made by patterning with incisions into paper. A similar principle can be seen in the series of aluminium sculptures which he pierced or created patterns on their flat surfaces using metal rivets. By combining contrasting materials (wood/metal, granite/aluminium), Purg satisfied his need for contrast, tension, penetration, surprise. The already mentioned drawings that were almost entirely created from the unconscious particularly stand out in his early work. The artist consciously renounced the controlled, rational movement of the hand, trying to achieve the effects of an uncontrolled and unmotivated gesture through various procedures. His pencil drawings on paper are therefore sorts of psychograms that, although chaotic, look surprisingly orderly, rational and in some cases even incisively poetic, which is especially apparent in the already mentioned black drawings. Again, these come closer to Fontana and his "art of the space age", only this time not just formally, since Fontana's work, as well as that of other artists of the time, possesses a far-reaching component that – in the atmosphere of the debates about the end of art, the end of God and the conquering of space in the 1960s – was manifested as the search for universal symbols of man's presence. In fact, it is not relevant whether Franc Purg was familiar with the Lucio Fontana's *White*

*Manifesto*³ from 1946 at the time, or whether he merely "read" it from Fontana's works. In a later interview, Fontana points out that piercing the canvas does not involve destroying but rather opening, and termed these incisions concepts as they represent the opening of a new concept – seeing the invisible, the spiritual. Through its unconscious iconography, Purg's early work emanates a sort of metaphysical, poetic excess that would always unconsciously persist in the background of his later works.⁴



Lucio Fontana, *Concetto spaziale, La fine di Dio*, 1963. Oil on canvas. Fondazione Lucio Fontana.

But it was another aspect of Lucio Fontana that resonated with Purg, which was his open

3 The *White Manifesto* from 1946 talks of art passing through a period of transition. Namely a force exists that cannot be depicted by man, so four-dimensional art should be made possible. The manifesto calls upon scientists to take part in this process. After millennia of analytical art development, the time had apparently come for synthesis. Science and technology, as well as all art genres separated up till then, should be joined in this endeavour.

4 When the author first read this text, he reminded me that he was during this period (when he was interested in how to enter the cosmic order through contingency) very much influenced by a big exhibition of Japanese modern art in Ljubljana.

subversiveness and almost blasphemous attitude towards the canonized and untouchable modernist object of the time. The cuts, incisions, penetrations and various physical desecrations resonated with Purg's explosively creative character and would therefore be present, not in physical but rather in symbolic, didactic form, as principle and method, in his later works regardless of changes in style, paradigm and belief.

From the very beginning, Purg's works present us with an obvious disregard for the clear-cut categories of the sculptural medium, a conscious neglect of standard canons as well as a conscious digression from the formalism of high modernist sculpture; there is generally no trace of reference to art in his work as he gives absolute priority to his own intuition, imagination and association to real objects.

The next significant station in Purg's work, which consolidated his position as an artist whose work contained an immanent critique of sculptural formalism, was the spatial installation or staging of *TrueClueRocket*, exhibited in 1989 at Likovni Salon in Celje, and in 1990 at Mala galerija, a prominent exhibition space of Moderna galerija (Museum of Modern Art) in Ljubljana. The installation consisted of three objects and a video. All the exhibits alluded to real objects linked with technological progress, while the video in this context functioned as a performative paraphrase of the sculpture clearly suggestive of a rocket. A performer, dressed in a white rocket-like costume, wore a crinoline rim around her waist, around which she spun a Plexiglass sphere – a scene shown

on a looped video.⁵ The infinity and absurdity of the spherical rotation gave the impression of a status quo, movement without effect. From the perception aspect, Zdenka Badovinac described the installation as "if the spectator is here in order to discover, in the non-functional infantility of the installation, a commentary on development and progress."⁶

TrueClueRocket was an individual statement about the urgent need for the deconstruction of the modernist autonomy of sculpture and an announcement of the great change in the formulation of the artistic subject and identity. The sculptural formulations indicated in this work were also used in a later series of individual relief objects made from a combination of metal and silicone that followed the tension in the contrast between the soft transparency of the silicone and metal polished to a shine. A distinct feature emerges with the introduction of the element that Purg, in the early stage of his artistic process, calls the inclusion of the mistake. Its origin and inspiration stems from a misprint on a postcard – a lapse occurred when the individual colours were being printed which resulted in the doubling of the image. Purg used the reproduction several times on different objects; usually by integrating this image of a sunset into the surface of a relief object, which he then covered with a silicone coating or glass. A clear example is the object entitled *Two Suns*

5 At the opening of the exhibition, the costumed performer performed the turning of the sphere live.

6 Zdenka Badovinac, *Slovene Sculpture Between Formalism and Imagination*. In: *Art in Expanded Spaces*. Slovene Art 1985–95, p. 93. (first published in: *Sinteza* [Synthesis], 1992, nos. 91–94.)



Two Suns, postcard, 1990

that was included in the exhibition *De-figure*⁷ at the Škuc Gallery in 1993, where it was installed into the gallery floor like some kind of primitive optical device. The mistake in the reproduction was further deformed by a membrane of thick glass with which it was covered. Purg's object completely "abolishes the material presence of the sculpture",⁸ directing the spectator's gaze into the kitschy, disfigured image on the floor. The sculptor's statement was wittily obvious in the gradual transformation of objects from sculpture to "eye". At this point, the artist's development in the direction of creating aesthetic objects came to an end.

⁷ With its selection of ten artists of the younger and middle generation, the exhibition curated by art historian Nadja Zgonik addressed the current entry of postmodernist figurative art and narration, the blending of high and popular culture and the transformation of nature into culture.

⁸ Nadja Zgonik, *De-figure*, exhibition catalogue, Galerija Škuc [Škuc Gallery], 2003, p. 14

FRUSTRATIONS AND ERECTIONS

The year 1994 marks a significant turn in Purg's work. Besides his step towards a new art language in terms of form and content, a shift also occurs towards a change in his own identity paradigm, artistic subject and thematization of social issues linked to the establishment of various new identities. At this point, the social and political situation of the artist's immediate local environment should be described briefly. Slovenia as an independent state was still experiencing transitional shock and as a result battling numerous social changes such as recatholization, the reinstating of identity on new grounds, the free market, as well as consumerism. In the same way the period of transition allowed for another aspect worthy of mention to take root, "globalization in the direction of surpassing national borders and creating a common trans-national and

trans-cultural commodity fetishism."⁹ The Slovenian cultural arena had thus entered the free market of postmodernist iconography, images and local reproduction of global icons. A part of art also became a significant indicator of these social changes, springing up alongside the ideological conflicts over the national and cultural transitional identity. The brutal passage from socialism to capitalist liberalism in art was reflected in the turnaround to the postmodernist paradigm with all the accompanying postmodernist mockery, cynicism, parody, travesty and grotesquery.

At that time, Purg was particularly susceptible to the big social changes occurring in his immediate life and professional environment, and, as we shall see, he responded in his work to more or less all the social processes of the time, above all to consumerism, to the attempts at establishing a national identity, to recatholization and to the changes in the construction of identity.

At the outset of the 1990s, Slovenia was awash with consumerism that resulted in people flocking en masse to big shopping centres. The arrival of the free market was visually and acoustically aggressive, too. The urban landscape changed significantly with the onset of advertising, the first radio and TV stations emerged with new programme concepts, the media landscape changed radically. Concurrently, the new state generated an all-encompassing and omnipresent creation

⁹ Ksenija H. Vidmar, *The Female Body, Global Consumerism and Slovenian Transition*. In: Teorija in praksa [Theory and Practice], vol. 40, 5/2003, p. 855.

of a new collective national identity that appeared like a pitiful social regression within the artistic and intellectual circles of the time. These social circumstances gave rise in 1993 to the installation *May Height*¹⁰ that introduced into Purg's work a number of postmodernist characteristics and a simultaneous relinquishing of the fundamental modernist postulates in which he had been educated and raised. Abandoning the latter meant losing the proven constitutive foundations of artistic subjectivity that the artist would have to re-establish in the decade to come.

In contrast to the aforementioned *TrueClueRocket*, the *May Height* piece was much easier to read owing to its postmodernist characteristics. The most evident reason for this was undoubtedly the use of narrative or the narration process that had been practically prohibited in modernism. The work features iconic signs of national culture on the one hand, and those of global consumerism on the other. The installation made of piles of wheat alluded to a hilly landscape with churches and chapels.¹¹ In the exhibition catalogue, Nadja Zgonik cleverly linked this image to the images of Slovenian nostalgic folklore from the 1920s.¹² Each of these featured a window – a peephole revealing a scene of a sexual game between a male figure with a comical, huge erection and a Barbie doll. The male figures were roughly chiselled from lime wood (as if

¹⁰ *May Height* is a town in the heart of Haloze, a steep and hilly landscape from where the artist's relatives originate.

¹¹ The Slovenian hillsides are scattered with over 6,000 churches and chapels.

¹² Zgonik gives as example Maksim Gaspari's work.

made by an unschooled, local carpenter), while the masculinization of their appearance was pushed to the extreme as a result of their pose and action (the naked Barbie dolls were forced into total submission). The installation clearly alludes to tradition, familiarity, Slovenian-ness, in short, it alludes to the Slovenian national ideological context – the lime tree as a Slovenian mythological sacred tree, the wheat, the little churches, patriarchal dominance. The piece was among the first radical artistic critiques of consumerist culture in Slovenia and not only did it illustrate the infantile fascination for consumerism, but it further parodically interpreted consumerism as a libidinal excess and a social regression from urban culture to provincial, familiar cultural identity.

May Height was the result of a complex subjective transition of a sensitive artist who realized that a formally determined modernist language and ideology no longer suited him within the new social circumstances and that he had to evade any content and formal constraints to follow less restricting rules.

The wish to consistently substitute the creative paradigm can also be seen in the selection of the space¹³ for the first set up of *May Height*, which was placed in the Celje factory of enamel cookware, Emo. The setting up was a huge organizational feat, since the show had to be installed among the machines in the

¹³ One of the characteristics of art in the 1990s was the transition from the gallery "white cube" into other urban spaces. As part of this transition Igor Zabel also sees the establishment of social relations and traditions formed by and reflected in these relations. (Igor Zabel, *Teritoriji [Territories]*. In: *Razširjeni prostori umetnosti. Slovenska umetnost 1985–1995 [Art in Expanded Spaces. Slovene Art 1985–1995]*).

big production hall over a weekend, and the specificity of the industrial environment, in which the smell of 30 tons of wheat blended with the smell of machine oil and metal, was a further reference to the traumatic relationship between the urban and the rural.

Almost axiomatically, *May Height* gave rise to the next installation, which presented the artist with quite a few dilemmas already during the creative process. The reason for the peculiar iconoclasm, which was actually in conflict with Purg's own searching spirit, was without a doubt linked to the fact that the installation was made during a time of general appropriation of religious symbols, above all in the field of popular culture and advertising, while the relation to the religious was also common in contemporary art, in particular in the new art production of the post-socialist states. As a result of their enduring absence from the public, especially from political life, ecclesiastic institutions in the period of transition were intensively, at times even aggressively, gaining ground in the socio-political discourse. Slovenia, too, was faced with the so-called recatholization that was as with other new democracies marked with a political past, although it failed to take on social dimensions and exert influence, as was the case, for example, in Croatia or Poland. Additionally, Slovenia saw a huge increase in the presence of various non-institutional religions and very diverse spiritual movements.

The installation *What makes me look like this?*¹⁴ was similarly based on a simple narrative and scene like *May Height*, well surpassing the latter with its rhetoric grotesqueness and theatricality. It consisted of five sculptures roughly chiselled from lime wood that did nothing to hide their role of representing the crucified, and of a "carpet" made from a myriad of laminated photographs of roadkilled cats. The "Christs" were hung on a background of red draped velvet. They had exaggerated erections, just like the lime figures in the *May Height* piece, whereas their "skin" was covered with fur-like hair – human hair. The work is a typical postmodernist deconstructed allegory that can also be read (at the time of its origin, no one interpreted it this way) as a commentary on war: massacres of innocent people taking place in the name of God and religion. In fact, Bosnia was still at war when this installation was produced. The title of the artwork with the first-person rhetorical question implies the artist's intensive subjective emotional involvement: one can sense the frustrating tension between accusation and apology in the carefully constructed syntagma of the title.

Later, Purg produced some works in which he used the motif of the cross, although the next stage of the iconoclastic process was diametrically opposed to the first one. In these works, he used a cheap industrially manufactured plastic Christ figurine and

¹⁴ I am here describing the installation as it was exhibited at the Kapelica Gallery in Ljubljana, which in the 1990s presented a range of radical, predominantly body art practices. The first installation, however, dates back to 1996 and was exhibited at the Ujazdowski Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw, where the sculptures were censored and were replaced by the artist with details of instruments of torture.

smoothed out the mantle around its loins so as to obtain a naked, sexless Christomorphous figure that would serve him as a photographic motif from that moment on. He used these photographs in works that dealt with the topic of the general degradation and selling out of spiritual and cultural values in the period of transition and the social frustration and castration that emerged as a result. In this context, Purg employed photography in his work *Sanded C* produced in 1997, in which he used a simple advertising rolling board to display two interchanging elements, a photograph of the "castrated" Christ and a passage from Matthew's Gospel that speaks about the fact that rigid self-concealment and self-punishment are the only possible ways to redemption.

Somewhat later, but also much more aestheticized, was the photograph *Sanded C II*, a huge close-up of the "sanded figure" against a sky-blue background, representing an icon in its ultimate commodification. The erection and castration of the crucified in the retrospective show were represented by one selected example each, only this time they were linked in a new exhibition context: hanging in front of each was a censorship plate that was supposed to symbolically cover up the genitalia, while at the same time the two pieces were juxtaposed with the later video works that again deal with traumatic social content.

TRAVESTIES AND DISPLACEMENTS

An interesting point in the gradual building up of Purg's new, provocative and iconoclastic artistic identity in the transition period is

also marked by a peculiar travesty – the establishment of an alter ego formed in 1997 for the purposes of the several times exhibited installation entitled *Self-Portrait*.¹⁵ The installation consisted of two elements: a toy Ferrari with wheels cast in concrete and a series of the artist's black-and-white photographic portraits during the moment of orgasm. For this occasion, Purg transformed himself into a uniformed, moustached, mediocre middle-class man dressed in an old-fashioned polyester suit from the 1970s. In addition to the universal feeling of powerlessness, the work also shows a significant shift towards the reflection of one's own position within the social context; pleasure, potency and power of the artistic subject are confronted with frustration, powerlessness, blockade. On another occasion, Purg's alter ego made an appearance in public at the opening of an exhibition of a young photographer at the Maribor Art Galley (UGM). The curator announced him as a respected academic that would present the photographer's work. Purg went on stage in the same outfit and solemnly delivered an opening speech about the young photographer's works. The speech was a collage of texts about the phenomenon of "new Slovenian sculpture", only that sculpture had been replaced by photography and the names of sculptors by the name of the photographer in question. After the event was successfully carried out, the curator impulsively invited Purg to another opening that same evening at the Maribor Kibla, a non-institutional multimedia

¹⁵ *Self-Portrait* was presented at one of the first exhibitions of Eastern contemporary art, *After the Wall*, at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm and in video version in the exhibition *Body and the East* at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana.

centre where the opening of an exhibition by a young sculptor from Poland was being held. He read the appropriately adapted text again, leaving the Polish artist, who had unknowingly become the collateral victim of the ad hoc organized travesty, without any explanation. This event or incident has never been regarded as a work of art, even the artist himself has never mentioned it in his CVs, although it is a symptomatic phenomenon of the process of identity reformulation.

In this work, Purg made a symbolically caricatured act of deconstructing academic values. He was now a chameleon-like transition artist who had left the safe hermetic environment in which he had been raised as an artist and in which he had been successfully active for some time. At this point in time, he was already well-known as an artist/provocateur that chose a different medium and means for each new project, an artist who shocked and broke taboos. Had political and economic overthrows not occurred, his art career would have perhaps been somewhat more or less predictable. The conditions for artistic creativity in socialist Yugoslavia were steady if as an artist one followed the pre-ordained path of academic art education. The size of the country allowed artists to appear in big and culturally active cities. An artist with an academic education was a socially respected and renowned person who was not denied symbolic value by the system. What prevailed and what was fostered was the contemporary modernist paradigm, the so-called moderate modernism that generally did not, at least explicitly, deal with the current social reality. The position of

the academy trained artist within the Yugoslav socialist system was rather stable, neither was it existentially threatened, nor was it subject to direct ideological instrumentalization. The circumstances then changed to the extent that the myth of the devoted modernist artist closed up in his studio was no longer compatible with the artist's firsthand position of experiencing a totally different reality. The strong modernist subject who experiences art as his own nature¹⁶ and creates original works, managing at the same time to control or exceed his existential conditions, became completely unsuitable in the eyes of the artist who regarded himself as an inherent part of social consciousness.

The ultimate displacement¹⁷ of artistic status or subject in Franc Purg's work occurs in the performance project *Where is the line?* At this point, the artist no longer experienced his art as nature, but rather as a means to change himself and the world. He linked the performance into two parallel events: the feast in one room and the slaughter of a calf in the

¹⁶ I partly summarize the definitions of the artistic subject from M. Šuvaković. In: *Pojmovnik moderne i postmoderne likovne umetnosti i teorije posle 1950. godine*. Beograd, 1999.

¹⁷ In the second half of the 1990s, an important element in the transformation of Purg's artistic identity was his encounter with theosophy, especially the writings of Helena P. Blavatsky. Particularly during the time when the "Christs" were produced, her work *The Key to Theosophy* supported the decision for the emotionally stricken critique of Catholicism, in which he had been raised himself. At the time of a general downfall in values, he obviously found an appropriate mental model in the theosophical notion of religion, especially in the provocation of Christian beliefs and dogmas and their substitution by an alternative so-called universal religion that needs no mediation and "redemption through innocent bloodshed" (source: www.teozofija.info). The trenchant critique of lies and hypocrisy that Blavatsky directed towards the society, ruling religion and politics of the time was casually applied by Purg to contemporariness and implicitly integrated into his works at that time.

other. The real slaughter of the animal in the gallery functioned as an unexpected slap in the face of postmodernist falsity, simulation and appropriation. The displacement of the subject can clearly be seen in the fact that the artist took on an active role (of a butcher's assistant) in the performance: he was at one and the same time the creator and an active participant of his work.

In line with postmodernist dispersion, he would assume different positions in the years to come – that of an urban cosmopolite, an engaged activist who reflects the various traumatic points of the social situation, and later, an artist as a conscious member of civil society who is not merely an observer or commentator on the world in which he lives and works, but is fundamentally defined by his belonging to the ideology of personal responsibility.



Where is the line?, performance, 1998

Franc Purg's site-specific projects (2000–2012)

Variations on the occupation of space with people (bodies), words, sounds, statues, sculptures, plants.

What does this city need? What does the individual need ... and the people who either permanently occupy a specific space in the city or merely happen to be there, as passers-by ... what do they need? These are unpretentious and straight-to-the-point questions, devoid of any premeditated definitions, locations, taking of (op)positions ... rather, these are questions aimed at identifying lacks and concrete needs. For Franc Purg, these questions represent the doorway into the establishment of a relationship between space, location, an individual, and the collective. Or if we pose to ourselves the introductory questions from a more personal perspective: What can I, as an individual, possibly do for you? Speaking in the second person seems inappropriate, for in the here and now there is but the first person perspective, and is inappropriate because of the actions that follow from the first person perspective ... perhaps to merge at some point ... and to fall on fertile ground.

After a time of light-hearted focusing mainly on one's self and one's singularity, when the idea of self-sufficiency represented an important orientation in people's behaviour and in the functioning of society, the activation of the individual in relation to the other has finally,

and once again, gained value and achieved a constructive role in society. One should always keep in mind that we people enliven cities, places, houses and sheds; our needs, welfare and a stimulating climate are in an interdependent relationship with a number of factors. Among the decisive factors, an active and responsible attitude of each and every individual is of extreme importance. When municipal and state institutions, local and global, economic interests and hierarchic ladders of importance and power, as well as a regulated access to a qualitative education, become axiomatic and secure their permanent position among the spiral movement of needs, the individual easily dissolves into numbness, a lethargy imbued with fear, forgetting about self-organization, about the autopoiesis of life in some location – urban citizen, townspeople, villager – and about the other. His or her power and concerns relocate to the abstract structures of municipal institutions, creating a fertile environment for concealing and evading the “feeling” for the good of the other and the world, although private interests of others and his or her own interests – and most importantly, those of corporate organizations (abuse of fossil fuels, water, air ...) – are being pursued there.

Purg's site-specific projects are situated in the framework of open space,¹ and have also been

¹ The terms public space, open space, etc. are elusive, their meaning essentially differs depending on the context in which they are used.

realized in private spaces and even on personal surfaces. Such teasing of relationships between the personal/intimate field of identification – in which there are those who (still) possess some sensitivity, the exploration of movable margins at which somebody reacts, successfully articulating his or her own views, and indifference and slogans of the type “that's none of my business, that doesn't concern me as a civil being”² – are issues dealt with in these projects. Their exteriors are outdoor areas, the urban and (conditionally) natural reality that is not completely under lock and key – at least seemingly – yet is a carefully governed, organized and regulated space. And those who inhabit it, let us stress this once again, are the principal addressees and guests.

Franc Purg approaches the place or location of choice in two ways: either as an area in the middle of which he then places his interventions, which serve as a means of communication with the people, or he uses objects that are already there and by transforming these objects gives them a different function from the one that they are axiomatically ascribed to. This last approach has an effect at the aesthetic, ethical, ecological and existential levels.

Celje, Ljubljana, Belfast, Sibiu, London, Machtesh Ramon are the locations of the projects discussed here. These cities are defined by different aspects of political, cultural, historical and religious activities. However, despite their diverse forms of organisation, they share the same structural regulation of public areas that

² The etymology of the word *civis* has its foundation in meanings such as to teach, to settle, home, love.

is entrenched in institutions rather than the civil society.

Discussing the usefulness, role and effects of art in public space seems to be more important in some contexts than in others. The polemics, such as were (and some still are) provoked by Purg's interventions in the above-mentioned cities, are quite in place. The reason for this is simply because, among other things, people either fail to recognize themselves (fully) as being responsible and constitutive elements of the limitations within which they live or else because they have established an active position and consider the artistic intervention as an impulse, a possibility of reflection.

In projects with an accentuated aesthetical starting point, the perspective shifts from polemics to aesthetical experience, and thus to sensation, perception, memory, sensory perception, imagination and other complex cognitive-neurological processes. However, such projects successfully avoid slipping to the decorative level.

If in the first years of the 21st century, *in situ* projects and the art of intervention were still intensively involved in engaging the institutional layers of the city (which resulted in the emergence of several forms of institutional critique from the 1960s onward), today it is the individual and civil society that are being animated by art. The artist's active (not necessarily meaning activist)

attitude is the generator of artistic activity³ – it is a critical corrective, orientated towards an even more heightened personal responsibility.

If we take a look beyond these projects, what can we discern about “what is it that someone or something needs”? What is that something that an artist defines as such? (On a different tack, it would be interesting to reflect upon the distinction between imagination and fantasizing. While the latter lacks the potential outward impulse, failing to produce a concrete response and focusing rather on the *status quo*, the former holds the potential for change and implies an alternation, a metamorphosis, and therefore action.)

What someone/something needs is of a pragmatic nature. It is a most elementary “need” and it means a roof above an individual’s head (*Borut Holland’s Cottage*). However, an individual

also comes up against the articulation of different needs that likewise represent the rudiments of humanity – art and the aesthetical experience (*Fountain*, a statue in public space; *Sibiu*, an ambient of sound with field recordings of water, *Celje*, an ambient of sound with recordings of cicadas; *Machtesh Ramon Cross*, installation and photograph; planting of raspberries, strawberries, tomatoes in London parks). What is needed is a trigger of the reflective critical consciousness able to articulate problematic areas of the current geo-national-state and economic contexts (*I Hate Celje*, *Proposals*, *Broken Glass*, *Waste – Spare the Animals*, *Ce+je*, *Be+fast*, and *Machtesh Ramon Cross*).

In view of the questions posed at the outset, site-specific projects are unconcerned with complex concepts, nor do they occupy an extensive physical and/or mental space. There are, however, two exceptions: *Fountain* and *Machtesh Ramon Cross*, which despite their concrete dimensions redirect the attention onto the specific and the intimate, rather than dissolving into an emptied spectacle of magnitude. The focus is on simultaneous, fast, fleeting interventions into the city and into the individual. The artist’s attention is drawn by an element that is already there. The Slovenian expression *zatečeno stanje*⁴ is an interesting syntagm that can be used for this purpose. It can have at least two meanings; firstly, it means swollen, inflamed and therefore hardly movable, a state of paralysis that requires

considerable effort for the transformation to occur (both figuratively and literally); secondly, it denotes seeking shelter, a circumstance in which a person is compelled to search for help, be it a roof over his or her head in the middle of a downpour or a friend’s advice and support. The term is normally used in the first sense; however, for the purposes of this text, we will propose the other version on our own initiative. Franc Purg’s work can be analyzed from the perspective of both connotations conveyed by the syntagm in question.

I would classify quick interventions, simultaneous actions and ad hoc initiatives – that are reactions to, or comments on, the situation in society, its climate and current events – as projects dealing with the *status quo* in its meaning of a swollen, paralysed state. *I Hate Celje* (2000) is the first action performed by the Skupina group,⁵ of which Franc Purg is co-initiator and an active member. The action involved a round table that was held outdoors in the centre of Celje (specifically, in the court of the Lower Castle). “Emigrants” were invited to participate, while numerous local people formed an audience that was openly challenged and ready for the debate. The theme and format of the round table were well considered and at the same time local and universal, so that it could easily be held anywhere. The title syntagm invested with an exact dose of irony, playfulness, provocation and critique elicited a response and contributed to substantial audience participation. In a short report, the symptomatic finding of the

discussion reads as follows: “ ... the majority of Celje residents love their town, yet they expect from others, rather than from themselves, that they treat it well, that they take care for its spiritual revival, while they themselves would stand there nagging.”⁶

Proposals (2003) is another action performed by the Skupina group. On the eve of the Slovenian cultural holiday⁷ and a year before Slovenia joined the European Union, the group amended public signage – including street signs, and the names of stores and other building signage – in Slovenian with a translation into English and vice versa. These were not literal translations. The group members drew the attention of passers-by by establishing humorous relationships between ways of writing and reading, as in the rephrasing of the trademark BIGSTAR into STARI BIK (OLD BULL). In terms of concept and realization, the intervention is based on the well-known event from the beginning of World War II (1941) when the Germans, upon entering and occupying the town of Celje, changed Slovenian street signs to German. Thus they added their own language, the language of the conqueror, to the language of the local population. With this gesture, the Skupina group emulates the principles of conquest, the tactics of space occupation and of re-programming of conceptual paradigms of the community. In Western culture, the (re) naming of the world has a long tradition; attaching names is always closely associated with property.

3 When I was writing this text for Franc Purg, the world traveller, witness and activist Tomo Križnar posted on YouTube a documentary and propaganda film entitled *Eyes and Ears of God – Videosurveillance of Sudan* (directed by Maja Weiss, Tomo Križnar, 2012, link: www.youtube.com/user/TomoKriznar). I joined the initiative through my own “media channel” *OR refleksija*, sending through my personal media list an appeal to watch the video and a commentary that starts with the following lines: *Indigenous people televise their own death, showing us our future ... meanwhile the film acquaints us with the history, context, the background of massacres for land, oil ... with the genocide that we carry out and watch at the same time on YouTube. How are we to overlook what it shows to us?* [...] Tomo Križnar is an individual that with the help of a few colleagues and through his films, books, performances and promotions bears witness to the events occurring among the indigenous people of Sudan, and addresses European and American political, economic, military elites as well as the vastest public accessible today through YouTube. For the purpose of this text, I hereby put emphasis on the relationship between the activation of an individual and a clearly articulated objective, task, mission performed by such an individual, which is a very important factor in the transformation of the “herd into a flock”, if I borrow today perhaps an obsolete, yet incredibly inspiring illustration.

4 *Zatečeno stanje* translates as “status quo” or “the existing state of affairs” in English; however, in Slovenian, it can also be used to mean a “state of shelter”. In order to maintain the play on words in English proposed by the author, we will apply the terms status quo and state of shelter according to the context. (t.n.)

5 *Skupina* is a flexible group that meets when necessary. The group, following its official public confirmation by a manifesto, now performs actions and interventions.

6 In the catalogue *Celje – Blow up*. Celje: Zavod za kulturne prireditve – Galerija sodobne umetnosti Celje [Gallery of Contemporary Art], without pagination.

7 The Slovenian National Cultural Holiday is celebrated on February 8th, marking the anniversary of the death of the Slovenian national poet France Prešeren.

Symptomatic of both actions is a gentle penetration into the consciousness of fellow townspeople, an intervention that causes a disruption supposed to trigger polemical thinking. The act is simultaneously a political statement, although it does not function in the direction of a moral corrective. Rather, by referring to historical events that are still relevant today, it establishes a context, and comments and moderates concepts of citizenship, national belonging, multiculturalism and relationship towards the Slovenian language that, traditionally, represents the main constitutive factor of a Slovene, placing him or her in context as a European.

I will analyse the projects *Ce+je* (2003) and *Be+fast* (2003) through the processes of loosening the paralyzed *status quo*, this time specifically from an individual perspective. These projects are variations on working with words, in these cases they are variations on the creation of the "logotype", its application to clothes, and distribution to the people. The two logos have a direct bearing on the names of the two cities in which the projects were realized, namely Celje and Belfast, functioning simultaneously as derivatives with multiple meanings, with ironic designations (let's mention the ethno-political conflict and sporadic violence on the occasion of the Irish commemoration of "The Troubles"). The signs have a clear meaning and symbolic-formal dimension.

The artist's experience of distributing clothes reflects the differences between the two cities and the level of their residents' civil awareness.

In Celje, the attention was rarely given to the sign itself, what seemed to be more important was the t-shirt that was delivered for free. In order to participate, the receiver of the t-shirt had to put it on immediately. In Belfast, the situation was different. Before the artist was able to distribute the clothes – the act of giving is central to this project – people were asking for all kinds of explanations, even the artist's identification. They were concerned about the potential possibility of abuse, manipulations and the political dimensions of the coined word. Not until they took sides with the artist and the artistic project were they really convinced.

Generally, site-specific projects don't produce artefacts to be exhibited in galleries, but are focused on the act, the gesture. On the contrary, the *Ce+je* and *Be+fast* projects consist of the "red cross" sign simultaneously defined by the characteristics of the artefact and symptom. It is already in the very first variants of manifestation of this suggestive sign that we can detect the focal points that prompt its presence.

The symbol of the cross is already present in other of Purg's works, such as *What makes me look like this?*, 1997, and *Sanded C.*, 1998. The works imply a deconstruction of the iconic form of the Catholic culture – the phenomenon of the crucified and the cross – and are centred on the split between the nutritive, vegetative, animal, sexual man and man as an excessive, spiritual, speaking human being.⁸ Or in other words, the works present us

⁸ The mentioned split is defined by Giorgio Agamben in his book *The Open: Man and Animal*, where he makes reference to the concepts of Aristotle, Aquinas, Bataille, Heidegger, etc. Stanford University Press, Stanford California 2004 (tr. Kevin Attell).

with a situation that goes from the reduction, censorship, castration and extermination of the natural, wild, uncivilized ... on up to completely systematically programmed human beings and societies.

In Western culture, red stands for revolution, communism, power, fighting spirit, guilt, passion ... as well as for emphasis, warning, peril. A "red cross" refers most directly to the international humanitarian organization and represents just as often the sign of first aid.

Besides the symbol of the cross, more specifically the "red cross" that is of our particular interest in the exposed perspectives of Franc Purg's work, let's mention a meaningful homology – Kazimir Malevich's "black cross" and his variations with the red cross known to us from his paintings. While one finds it difficult to avoid the referencing in art to the phenomenon and echo of the "black cross", in Purg's "red cross", it is possible to detect a subtle relationship with the Russian avant-garde, in particular in his relations with the cosmic.

Falling within the framework of the "red cross" are the STOP-interventions, imperative formulations with white letters printed on a red background and pasted on STOP signs. Commands read as simplified, culture-specific slogans; among others, *STOP trying to look younger!*, *STOP flushing toilets!* The STOP-interventions take effect through the occupied locus, through the exposure of a traffic sign. While taking consideration of its original meaning, the interventions upgrade the sign without posing a threat to the driver who would

stop the vehicle reflexively. Despite having the form of an octagon, the STOP sign easily takes on the effective impulse of the cross, a symbol that, at least in the Catholic religious practice, poses restrictions.

The newest "red cross" can be observed in the *in situ* sculpture and photograph *Machtesh Ramon Cross* (2006). The photograph depicts a spectacular view of the beauties of nature in the Machtesh Ramon⁹ crater as well as, considering the vastness of the photographed landscape, a seemingly miniature artist's *in situ* installation. This last consists of a pile of "rubbish" tossed from the verge of the lookout platform and arranged by the artist to form a cross. Although the slopes of the crater wall are not disclosed by the photograph, this was a particularly physically demanding feat. As the artist tells us, the constitutive elements of the sculpture, found at the location, are large-sized machines of various kinds, household appliances, traffic signs and the like. An unusual location, which maintains the installation untouched through a "safe" distance (except for the natural forces that might affect it), simultaneously establishes an interesting relation between thrown things, recycling and the aesthetic of the location that verges on absurdity and irritates artistic and other "feelings" of the spectator.

The "red cross" in *Machtesh Ramon Cross* manifests itself not only as a logotype and sharpened, ambiguous words, but also as a huge blaze, something between a warning, an

⁹ Machtesh Ramon is a town in Israel's Negev desert. From the viewing platform, located next to the park of sculptures, the view opens onto the eponymous crater.



Broken Glass, site-specific project, 2004

exhortation and an aesthetic experience. The relationship between the locus of the work, its dimensions and the feeling of smallness on the one hand and the power of nature on the other seems to be an eminent revelation of the sublime, as if one defined the work with modernistic language and questioned it at the same time. From the perspective of the above-mentioned cosmic dimensions, the threads of the cocoon of associations can also be traced.

The procedure of “marking of terrain” is already present in the project *Broken Glass* (2004) in which a big homonymous logotype inscription that strikes one’s eyes shifts between its denotative and its basic function. The artist detected, marked and framed the broken glass among the waste on the walking trails and spots for late night gatherings in Celje that had been “waiting” there for the street cleaners to take away. In another intervention, the artist equipped cardboard boxes (2005) with the

sign *Waste – Spare The Animals* and placed them at locations where youth gather. These two actions inscribe themselves within the series of ephemeral interventions into the *status quo* of the axiomatic nature of the urban – spoiled and careless life.

Purg’s logo-based works frame the chosen phenomenon and through the act of labelling make it visible; they expose it to heightened visibility despite their inconspicuousness. These works function as sign frames for the concentration of the visible. The predecessor of the “denoting – marking” interventions is perhaps the work *Dinosaur*. A piece of playground equipment created by the artist himself on his own initiative and placed at the location where children usually play, and at a time when there had not yet been any such equipment there.

All these projects are prompted by the questions: *What does someone need?, What can I do for the other?* Their use dimension is obvious, and ecological, too. This strategy can be defined as that of an *artist as worldthropist*, where the world means nature, human beings, plants, animals, city and urban life.

The aesthetic dimension of interventions into the tissue of the city/location is consistently present in Franc Purg’s works – either through formal aspects, the language of sculpture, ways of constructing the installations or also, emphatically, through transformations of the material reality and word meanings by changing, adding, expanding of ambiguity. Purg’s art, owing to his agency, reveals itself to

be benevolent, which is not to be confused with charitable. The artist does not promote charity as help for disguising real causes; he promotes benevolence as an orientation that does not necessarily have a friendly effect, but rather can be dangerous, disturbing, unpleasant – its real intention is to see the *status quo* and not lessen its consequences.

For some years now, the artist has been planting, when time is propitious, raspberries, strawberries, tomatoes and other invasive plants in London parks. Considering this intimate gesture, there is perhaps no need to point to the aesthetic dimensions of such doings (the red colour of ripe fruits, their taste, pleasant smell) as well as its usefulness for people and animals. As Franc Purg puts it: *“I simply don’t – or don’t want to – understand such aesthetics, the concept that something useless and inedible is beautiful. This is but obsolete modernism. After all, parks in Europe were mostly designed in the middle of the 19th century.”*¹⁰

The centrepiece of the sound intervention *Sibiu* (2007) is the aesthetic experience and the overall, cosmic perspective opening itself in the direction of an appeal for correction of today’s society; it addresses the passivity and insensitivity that are often protective membranes of the *status quo* that such projects try to pierce through. After considering and doing some research about the needs of a city, the artist opted for water. He created an environment of sound played over loudspeakers that were placed all over the main

street. This was a composition of various “types” of water sounds from field recordings – from the gentle murmuring of the stream to the massive, wave-like, deep breathing of the ocean.

The artistic interpretation of the missing element operates with the introduction of something unexpected. A city cannot exist without water, it simply cannot survive. Rivers flowing through cities have, in addition to water supply, other functions as well – they reflect cities, people and their attitude towards nature. *“Thus the traveller, arriving, sees two cities: one erect above the lake, and the other reflected, upside down. Nothing exists or happens in the one Valdrada that the other Valdrada does not repeat, because the city was so constructed that its every point would be reflected in its mirror ...”*¹¹ With the sound environment, Purg has not created a concrete mirror; yet, from the aspect of water as a good for which people are being sacrificed (in many a place, water is not publicly accessible but is privately owned), the artist raises awareness about the fact that water should not be taken for granted. Cities supplied with water distribution systems, flushing toilets, regulation of water sources persistently (violently, although this violence is not felt anymore by anyone) distinguish between man as a natural and man as a fully organized and regulated being.

Fountain (2006) is a stone sculpture placed in the middle of the public park in the centre of Celje. In view of the works dealt with so far, this sculpture is specific both in terms of the time

¹⁰ Franc Purg’s words from his personal correspondence with the author of this text.

¹¹ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities, Cities and Eyes 1*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1974 (tr. William Weaver).

in which it came to occupy its present place and in terms of size and the role it performs in the city. Spatially comprehensive, its physical presence in stone occupies a “fixed” position. With it, the momentary, transient, unstable character of Purg’s site-specific projects turns into a permanent presence. A diptych consisting of stone massif and water as an interim, relational dimension. Numerous associations are elicited by the element of water jets passing from one part into the other – through the man and woman principle, from giver to receiver. The acoustic dimensions of jets of water that splash up front on the stone surface opposite the placed object and the hapticality of the sculpture are stimulating and invite us to touch and play with them, to freshen up. *“Once this was a small park that nobody would visit, except for the homeless who dwelt below it. There still exists a huge shelter, a sort of labyrinth of corridors. Now, when the weather permits, many people, including the youth, gather here sitting around. I consider it a success that a forgotten part of a town has been reactivated in this way. A proof of this is also the fact that lots of people were asking how we managed to plant in such a short period of time so many (30) old linden trees in a circle. At first I was surprised, but then it made me laugh. We never planted any linden trees, they have been growing there for 30 years without anybody noticing their presence, let alone that they form a circle.”*¹² The mentioned social dimensions loosen the rigidity of stone that has marked a number of sculptures that as a result of purposeful isolation from people’s interventions were left abandoned to disinterest and removed

¹² Franc Purg’s words from his personal correspondence with the author.

as an alien object in the environment.

The starting question *What does someone need?*, and other variants of the meaning of *status quo*¹³, reaches its climax in *Borut Holland’s Cottage* (2003–). In a time that promised a positive outcome, the answer centred on the problem of providing a residence for the Celje artist Borut Holland. The project was again made on the initiative of the Skupina group and resulted in the construction of an inhabitable house, along with all the circumstances regarding land, water supply (there is a stream in the vicinity of the house), construction materials, and physical work. After a long and successful coordination with the town’s municipal rules and regulations and with the support of numerous individuals, the artists finally managed to build the house.

A part of the construction materials contains imprints of another house – *A House* (2001), a project conceived by the artist Jože Barši and exhibited at the Mala galerija gallery of the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana. At the time of the initiative, which one could call *artists for the artist* (a welcomed model of “rank” solidarity, considering that, along with the waning of interest in our fellow man, the concern for the fellow artist had vanished as well), *A House* had already been disassembled and put in a depot. The remaining material needed for *Borut Holland’s Cottage* was found on waste dumps, among bulky waste and houses that had been demolished. Through joint endeavours, the artists transformed the collected material into a functional home, furnished with equipment that suits the circumstances, such as a bicycle-light,

¹³ The author is here referring to state of shelter. (t.n.)

a foot pedal dynamo that provides light for the artist’s evening readings.

The procedures used for creating the cottage are a result of a combination of skills, proficiency in working with materials, *bricolage* and improvisation. DIY, resourcefulness, creativity, learning by doing and from one’s own mistakes are strategies that pass from art and everyday life to finally converge in a ‘social sculpture’. By coining this term, Joseph Beuys promoted the concept of an expanded artwork, social organism as a work of art. Artists of the Fluxus movement used the social sculpture, too, to promote creativity, transformation and digression from individualism. The term denotes events between people, interpersonal relationships as the key paradigm and interest of art and life. *Borut Holland’s Cottage* is a literal and figurative social sculpture. Created by a collective and its dynamics, it contains the required characteristics of a sculpture, transcending them with its permanent functionality. The project opens up a series of questions relevant for the philosophy of art and aesthetics – from the passage of construction material from one work of art into another through the processes of recycling, DIY and ready-made, to artists as active participants in the realization of a house and with an opposing view to the established exhibition protocols: the house is no longer a gallery or museum exhibit¹⁴ but a totally functional object with specific production conditions and a number of dimensions beyond

¹⁴ The artist Marjetica Potrč is known for exhibiting housing units, with an energy and communication infrastructure, which are constructed for the express purpose of being exhibited.

art (administrative, legislative, civil rights, etc.). *Borut Holland’s Cottage* is a radicalization of the concept of site-specific projects as well as of those that abolish the bricks of the gallery space, while continuing to act as if they are still entitled to the privilege of the elitist and exclusivist space with a particular status of a carefully protected environment (many site-specific projects may be considered as such today).

Finally, I will leap into the future and quote myself, as I wrote for the occasion of Franc Purg’s exhibition at the Gallery for Contemporary Arts and Likovni Salon: *“Coming Soon, the Future! The enigmatic title of the exhibition appropriates the slogan of Hollywood rhetoric. The entertainment industry is inexhaustible, persisting in occupying the individual’s mental space though sticky sediments of fossil fuels and staging shiny reflections upon which collective hypnosis of the future thrives. The slogan in the title seduces the visitor, who is attracted by the belief in the axiomatic nature of the causative and by the command: Expect! Both are informed by an ineffable mixture of fear and excitement.”*¹⁵

¹⁵ *Fenomenologija roba* [Phenomenology of the Margin], a reflection on the exhibition *Coming Soon, The Future!*, in the daily Večer, February 16, 2012.

COMING
SOON
THE

FUTURE!

The Margin, installation, 2011

ROB JE VEDNO NAJBOLJ UMAZAN IN SE SRAMEŽLJIVO SKRIVA PRED CENTROM. NAJVEČ SMETI SE NABERE PO ROBOVIH IN KOTIH. KO SE TEMPERATURA NIŽA, SE PRVI KRISTALI LEDU NABEREJO NA ROBU REKE ALI JEZERA. KO SE SEGREVA VODA, SO PRVI VRELNI MEHURČKI OB STENI LONCA. KJE ZAGORI NAJPREJ, KO ZANETIMO OGENJ? NA GOJIŠČIH BAKTERIJ PRVE DOZORIJO RAVNO NA ROBOVIH. TUDI OBIČAJNA BELA SVETLOBA SE NA OSTREM ROBU SPREMENI V BARVNI SPEKTER, KI JO V RESNICI SESTAVLJA. NEMIRE, UPORE, DEMONSTRACIJE ZANETIJO LJUDJE IZ SOCIALNEGA ROBA. PRIZORIŠČA NEMIROV SO NA OBROBJU VELIKIH MEST, VOJNE IN NAJVEČJE GOSPODARSKE KRIZE NA OBROBJU KONTINENTOV. NAJPOMBNEJŠA UMETNIŠKA DELA SO OB NASTANKU NA ROBU UMETNOSTNEGA SISTEMA. OB ODLOČILNEM TRKU SE VEDNO SESUJE CENTRE, NE ROB. OKENSKO STEKLO SE, KO PRIDE DO TRKA S TRDIM PREDMETOM, RAZBIJE IZ CENTRA NAVZVEN, ROBOVI OSTANEJO CELI. ROB JE NEPREDVIDLJIV IN ČE GA RAZUMEMO, SENZIBILNO BEREMO, LAHKO NAPIŠEMO: COMING SOON, THE FUTURE!

THE MARGIN IS ALWAYS THE DIRTIEST PLACE AND BASHFULLY HIDES FROM THE CENTRE. THE MAJORITY OF RUBBISH ACCUMULATES AT THE MARGINS AND IN CORNERS. WHEN THE TEMPERATURE GOES DOWN, THE FIRST ICE CRYSTALS FORM AT THE MARGINS OF RIVERS AND LAKES. WHEN WATER IS HEATED, THE FIRST BOILING BUBBLES GATHER ON THE WALLS OF THE POT. WHAT IS THE FIRST THING TO CATCH FIRE WHEN A FIRE IS LIT? ON A BACTERIA GROWTH MEDIUM, THE FIRST BACTERIA GROWS JUST ON THE MARGINS. ORDINARY WHITE LIGHT ON A SHARP MARGIN TURNS INTO THE COLORS OF THE OPTICAL SPECTRUM, WHICH IN FACT IS CONSTITUTIVE OF LIGHT. RIOTS, REVOLTS, DEMONSTRATIONS ARE ALL STARTED BY PEOPLE FROM THE SOCIAL MARGINS. WHILE RIOTS BREAK OUT AT THE MARGINS OF BIG CITIES, WARS AND THE BIGGEST ECONOMIC CRISES ERUPT AT THE MARGINS OF CONTINENTS. THE MOST RELEVANT WORKS OF ART EMERGE AT FIRST ON THE MARGINS OF THE ARTISTIC SYSTEM. WHEN THE FINAL CLASH OCCURS, WHAT COLLAPSES IN RUINS IS ALWAYS THE CENTRE, NEVER THE MARGIN. THE GLASS OF A WINDOW, WHEN HIT BY A HARD OBJECT, FALLS INTO PIECES FROM THE CENTRE OUTWARDS, THE MARGINS REMAIN INTACT. THE MARGIN IS UNPREDICTABLE, AND IF WE UNDERSTAND IT AND READ IT SENSIBLY, WE CAN WRITE: COMING SOON, THE FUTURE!

Privileged Tactics

Collaboration with Sara Heitlinger

Privileged Tactics is a series of projects about how people use creativity to survive.

Privileged Tactics I is based on our experiences with street children in the Ukraine. Before the arrival of capitalism to the former Soviet country, street kids didn't exist, but now number in the hundreds of thousands. The project consists of an audio installation giving instructions for stealing; and a bag that can be used to block security alarms in shops.

The project tries to ask, when is stealing a criminal tactic – and when is it a legal, or privileged tactic.

Privileged Tactics II is a project about environmental sustainability. It takes as its starting point the Zabbaleen community of rubbish recyclers in Cairo, and uses RFID technology to present models for increasing personal responsibility for the environment.

Privileged Tactics III asks how people from different religious, national, ethnic, linguistic and geographic situations can use creativity in their interpersonal relationships. It presents models that raise questions about an increasingly diverse society and about the ways that technology mediates our relationships.

Privileged Tactics I, sound installation, 2006

Collaboration with Sara Heitlinger

Artists' Statement:

Stealing has always existed and always will as long as money is in use.

The neoliberal capitalist system facilitates the process of legal theft from the poor to the powerful. Unregulated commerce driven by profit alone, without regard to human values or environmental concerns, has increased the gap between developing and developed nations. In wealthy countries we see nothing wrong with exploiting the developing world for its natural resources and cheap labour. We do our best to protect our privileges through immigration controls such as the Schengen border. But it is an illusion to believe that our prosperity is secure and capitalism will never end. Every day the pressure grows for the majority of the world's population.

Stealing from multinational corporations is a form of resistance. We can use the same tactics as the global capitalist system in order to survive, as well as to undermine that system.

When is stealing criminal, and when is it a privileged tactic? This project takes something that is hidden and puts it in the collective arena. Like a homeopathic remedy, a small amount of criminal activity within the safety of our society may help cure delusion and indifference to bigger crimes.



Street children in the Ukraine/2006

Background:

PTI is based on our experiences with street kids in the Ukraine. This project does not simply illustrate the phenomenon of street children; it asks how such a phenomenon can exist. Taking the street children's talents for creative survival as a model, PTI tries to open up discussions about the inequalities existing in the world today. The project uses cheap, low-tech methods to survive creatively by foiling the high-tech apparatus of control and consumerism.





Installation: In a white room ten speakers line the walls, from which ten voices talk at once. They describe tactics for stealing, each in a different language (all from the developed world). In the centre of the room hanging from the ceiling is a bag. Beneath the bag a statement reads:

This bag blocks signals from Electromagnetic (EM), Radiofrequency (RF), Radio Frequency Identification (RFID), and Acoustomagnetic (AM) security systems.

These are the most common security systems used as theft-prevention in retail environments.

At the back of the room is a shelf, with a stack of CDs. The CDs contain the audio tracks of stealing techniques. A sign states "CDs = €1". Nobody supervises the CDs or the pile of euros left on the shelf.



Workshop in the Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana/2007

Visitors are invited to participate in a workshop where they learn how to make the bag. Participants who decide to use this bag are encouraged to bring back their stolen objects to display in the exhibition.



Goods stolen by workshop participants and displayed in the gallery

Instructions for Stealing

1. Appearance is important. Blend into the crowd as much as possible. Wear clean, elegant clothes to look like a respectable citizen.
2. Buy some things while you steal other things. Join the two together in your bag. If you get caught you can say the checkout person forgot the stolen items.
3. Gain the trust of security guards and salespeople. Go up to them directly and ask them a question, for example, where the toilets are, or how to find the cottage cheese.
4. Avoid suspicion by making no attempt to hide the object you are stealing. For example, if it is something you can wear, carry it visibly on your body.
5. Have a suitable bag of dark colour, or deep pockets. Shoulder bags are the best for inserting objects easily.
6. Practise your technique at home. Look straight ahead, or pretend to be distracted by something on the shelf in front of you, while your right hand takes an object and puts it inside the bag by your left side.
7. Join your possessions with the object you want to take. For example, if you are in a bookshop, bring some of your own books, make a pile with the books you want to take, stick them in your bag and walk out of the shop.
8. Carry your coat on your arm. Hide the object under your coat and walk out.
9. Do a Buy-and-Return scam: Buy an item from a store. The next day, return to the store, pick up the same item from the shelf, go to the checkout, produce your receipt and the object and ask for a refund.
10. Stealing is a mental – as much as a physical – skill. Prepare your mind for stealing. Believe you are doing nothing wrong. Be calm and centred. Know that stealing is easier than you are led to believe.
11. Convince yourself that you are simply carrying out your duty as a member of the consumer society, by desiring products and removing them from the shelf.
12. Turn object into subject by replacing the word 'stealing' with 'liberating'.
13. Tell yourself that you would like to pay but you refuse to support a store that exploits workers in the third world/staff/production workers.
14. If you're not feeling confident, leave it this time. If you steal it you will probably be caught.
15. Have a good excuse. People who suffer from Alien Hand Syndrome are not aware what one of their hands is doing. When you are stealing, convince yourself that you suffer from this psychopathology, so that if you are caught, you can honestly say you didn't do it.
16. Don't steal the most expensive items. Make judgements about what to take as though you were a regular consumer. This will help your mental condition.
17. Visualise yourself outside the store, walking freely down the street with the object of desire in your bag.
18. Check all items for electronic tags. Then check again. If you cannot remove security tags with ease use a magic bag, or do not take the item.
19. Remove all price tags and store labels. Do this in a blind spot away from cameras.
20. Look out for cameras. Find a blind spot. Put the item in your bag where no one can see you.
21. Don't be too worried about cameras. Usually the person watching the monitor has too many feeds, and, unless you make very strange movements, it's not possible to recognise if you are stealing.
22. Don't steal too much in one session.
23. If you are going to steal from a few stores in a single session, try to leave the items stolen from previous shops somewhere else, or with someone else.
24. Don't steal too much from the one place. As with any crime, if you repeat it too often, you increase your chance of being caught.
25. Work in a team. One way is to pass items back and forth to confuse the security guards.
26. Use your partner's body to conceal you while you put your item in your bag.
27. Have a friend prepared to answer a phone call from the police, who is ready to confirm your fake name and that you suffer from a mental illness, such as Alien Hand Syndrome.
28. Use your mobile phone as an alibi. As you walk out of the store pretend to be making a very important phone call.
29. Opportunity maketh the thief. Look for your opportunity where there is abundance.
30. Enjoy the sensation of freedom as you walk out of the store. Notice how the street is more vivid than before, the colours are stronger, the sounds more intense, and you are more alive than everyone around you. Remember this feeling for the next time you are considering stealing.

Privileged Tactics II, interactive installation, 2006-2008

Collaboration with Sara Heitlinger

PTII is a project about environmental sustainability. It takes as its starting point the Zabbaleen community of rubbish recyclers in Cairo, and uses emergent technology as a way to increase awareness and to create models for individuals to take greater responsibility for the environment.

Background

In the Egyptian capital of Cairo, 70,000 Zabbaleen (“people that collect rubbish”) survive by collecting and recycling the city’s rubbish in family-run cottage industries. They are a major contributor in processing solid-waste in this rapidly expanding city of 17-20 million people. More than 90% of all the waste they collect is recycled. (To compare, in London, only 40% of the rubbish collected for recycling is actually recycled.)

But despite international recognition for their low-impact and low-energy techniques, their livelihood is under threat by both international garbage contractors and government plans to move the Zabbaleen out of the city. The international sanitation companies dump most of the rubbish they collect in land-fill sites in the desert.



Mokattam town



Zabbaleen family



Central Cairo



Recycling plastic in Mokattam, where 70,000 Zabbaleen survive by recycling Cairo's waste

The project has two aims:

- 1) To promote the Zabbaleen model for environmental sustainability
- 2) To present a new model for the developed world based on increasing personal responsibility for the environment

Visions for Future Research

In a public place in Cairo, 10,000 bottles of water are given away. The bottles are discreetly tagged with RFID¹. RFID readers are placed at the entrances to the Zabbaleen's recycling plants. Information collected about the tracked bottles acts as a starting point for raising awareness about the Zabbaleen and future development for the project.

¹ Radio Frequency Identification, or RFID, technology is currently being used in security and object management systems in many industries and products.

New Model



Prototype Model



Bottle B



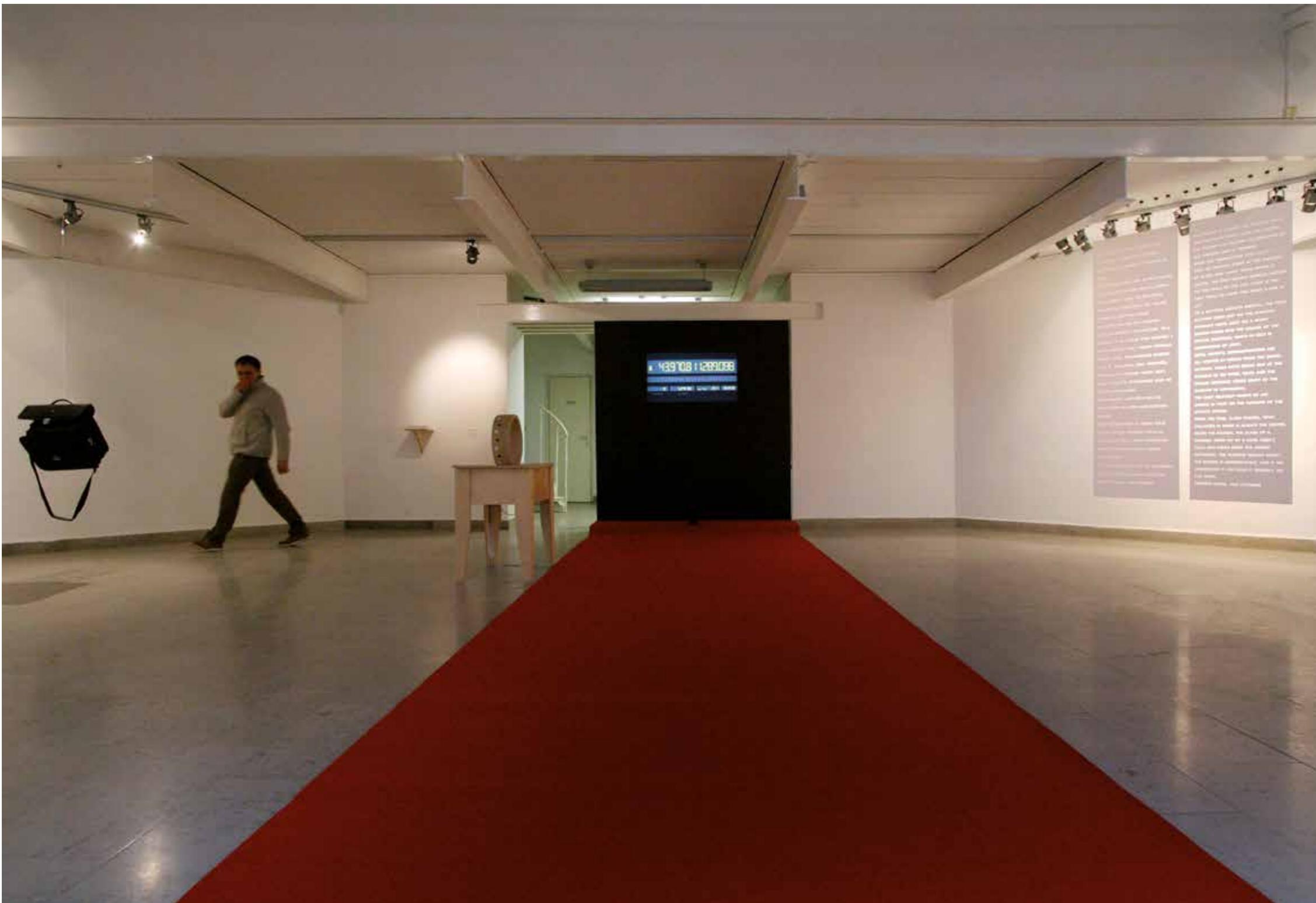
Produced in	Fiji
Point of Sale	Hamburg
Distance from origin	16284 km
CO2 produced in transport	44 kg
Energy used in production	0.06 kw
Percentage recycled materials used	0%
Plastic Production Pollution :	
Hydrocarbons	40g
Sulfur oxides	25g
Carbon monoxide	18g
Carbon dioxide (CO2)	2.3kg
Nitrogen oxides	20g
Water required to produce 1 kg of this plastic	17.5 kg

New Model for Personal Responsibility

Today consumers make decisions based on a wide range of complex factors including quality, design and price. The proposed model encourages consumers to choose products based on a further consideration: its environmental impact.

Using RFID technology, consumers can scan products and access information about the environmental impact of a product, such as:

- its carbon footprint (CO2 production)
- other waste/pollution produced
- how far it travelled to reach the place of purchase
- what percentage of recycled products are used in the manufacturing process
- how this product will be disposed of/recycled
- the environmental policy of the manufacturer



This is an interactive work in which a screen is affected by a pedal. On the screen you can see a thirteen-digit number that reflects the current growth of global debt, rapidly increasing from second to second. These are real numbers that are associated with statistical information about Global debt. A pedal rests on the red carpet. If you press it down, you can stop the global debt from running for a few seconds, or until you take your foot off the pedal. On the screen you can see how much debt you saved and how many millions of dollars visitors have saved that day. This virtual and absurd function reflects the absurd phenomenon of global debt.

By depressing the brake, participants are forced to take an active personal position on global debt, to reflect on the numbers they are generating or saving, and to be ultimately confronted with feelings of powerlessness to stop the numbers running.

There is a table next to the red carpet with an interactive, or – as the Austrian philosopher Robert Pfaller might say – interpassive wheel. Moving the wheel triggers the sound of canned laughter. The wheel serves to offset and destabilise the possibility of a moralistic or literal understanding of the brake-pedal.



Detail of wheel which when moved plays canned laughter



Detail of pedal which when depressed affects the numbers on the screen

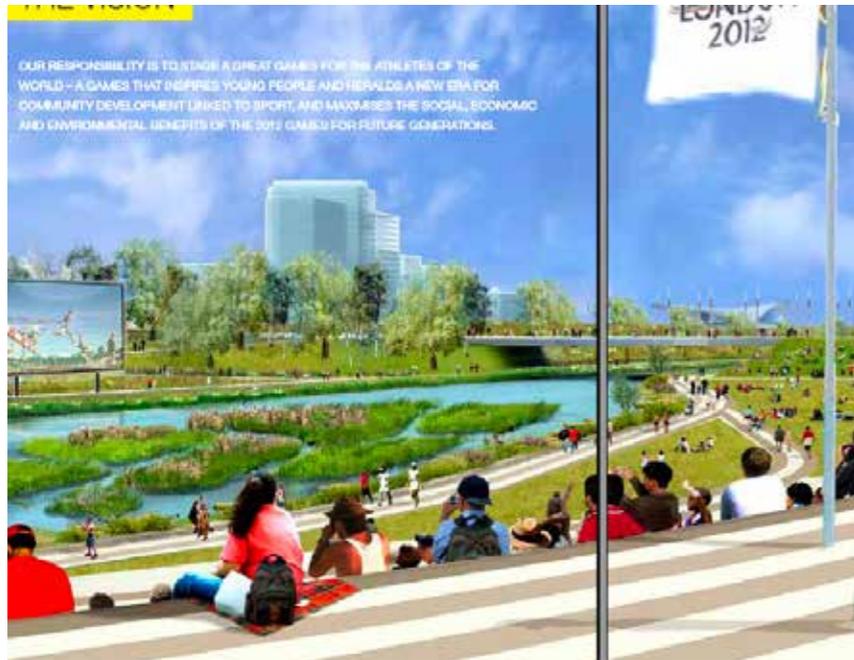
What is it that moves us?, installation, 2008

Collaboration with Sara Heitlinger

The project consists of a sound installation and a visual map. Both parts use repetition and symmetry to create a sense of uncanny.

This project explores the fears of our society. The following images were taken from official 2008 London Olympics propoganda material, a beautiful village with happy families, athletes, and plenty of nature.

What does the Olympics committee fear? Is it an accident that these images use the visual language of totalitarian propaganda? Throughout history, totalitarian systems have been built on fear.







Olympic site in London, May, 2012 →



Artists' March, action, 2006

When the economic climate deteriorates, conditions for artists are the first to suffer. The artist's situation is a barometre for the future of mainstream society.



Artists' March, action, 2009



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Vrnjak, video, 2003

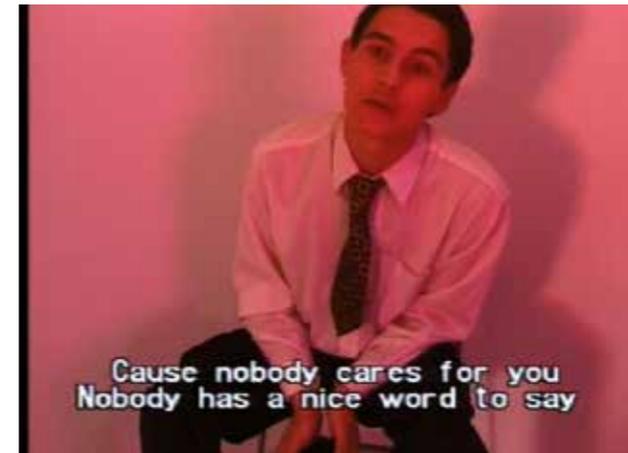
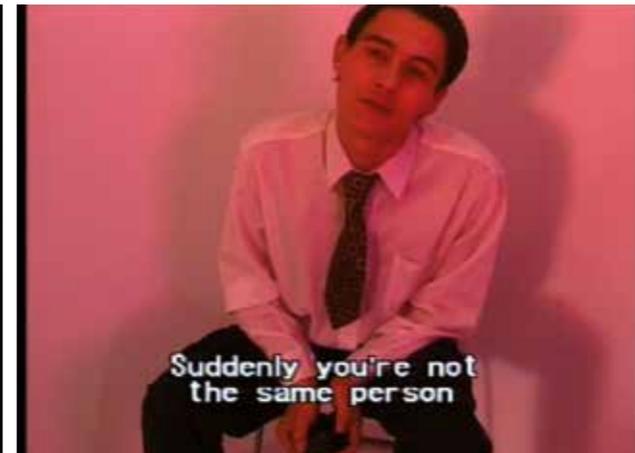
Close to the Adriatic seaside in Croatia and full of huge houses, Vrnjak has stood empty since the Second World War when its inhabitants deserted it.

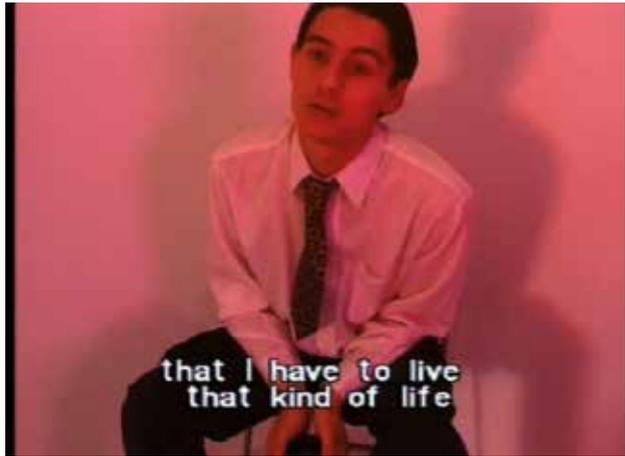




Leon, video, 2001

This is the story of 19 year old Leon, a Macedonian, born in Slovenia, whose life was forever marked when he killed his father at the age of 11.

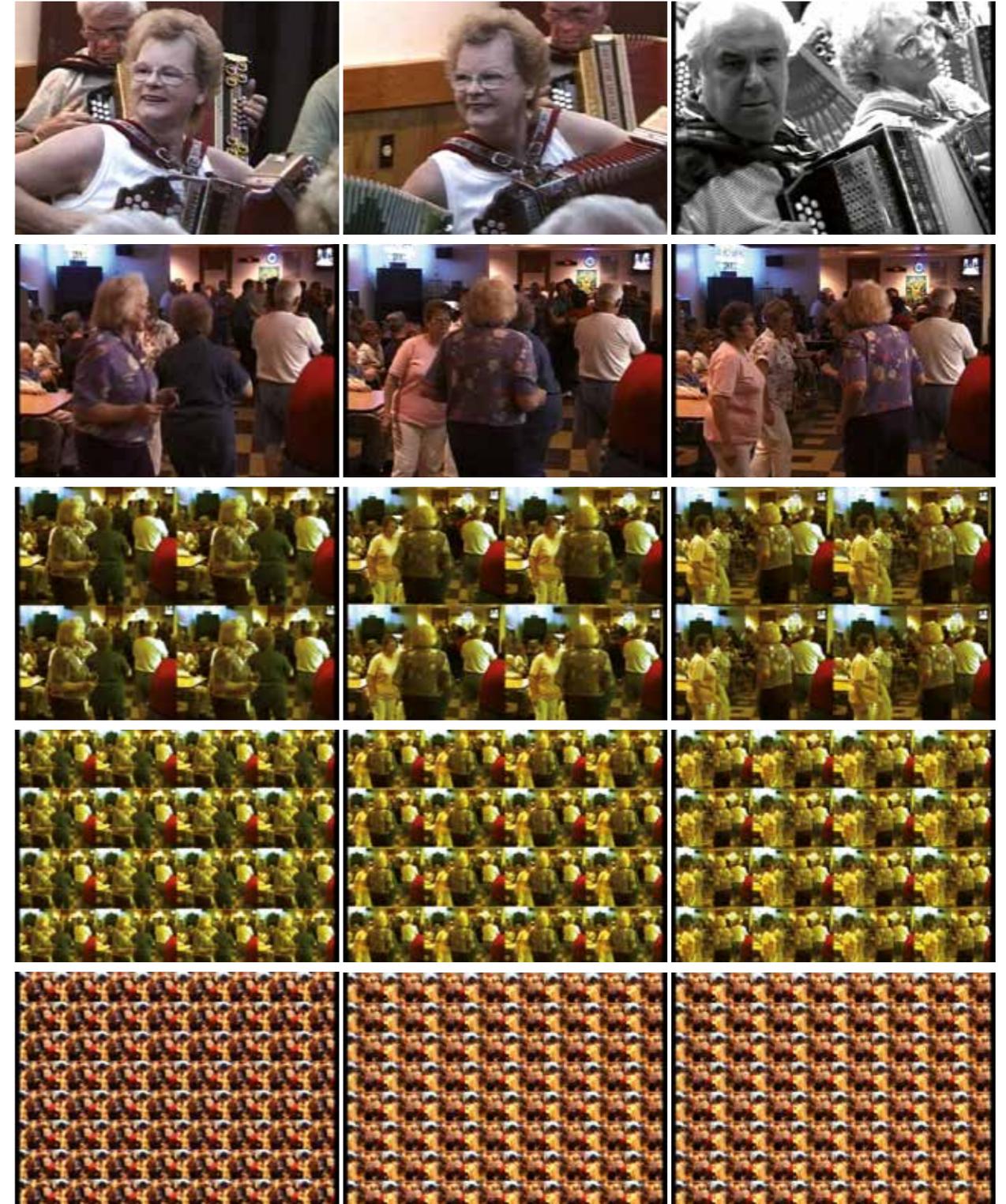
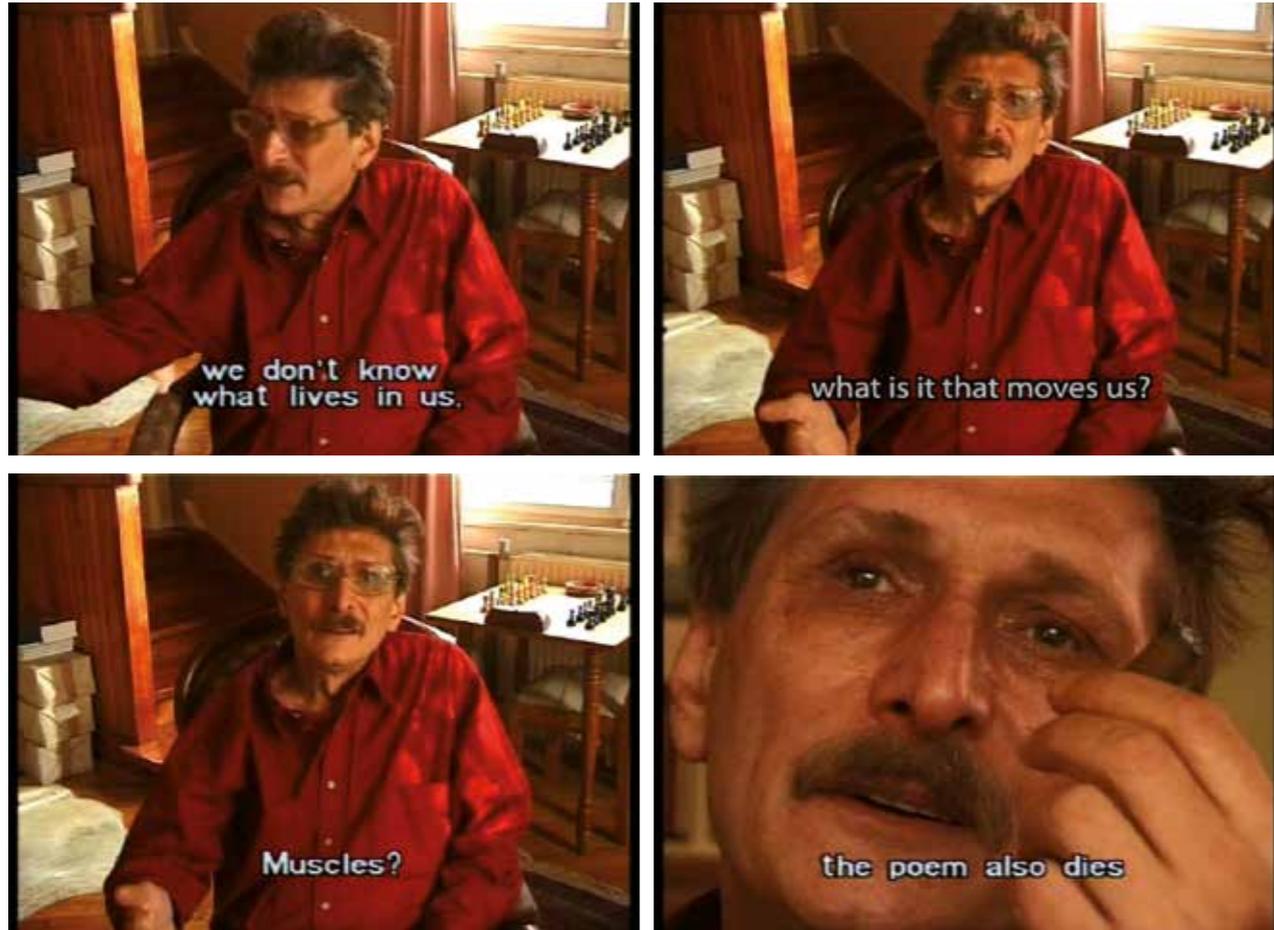






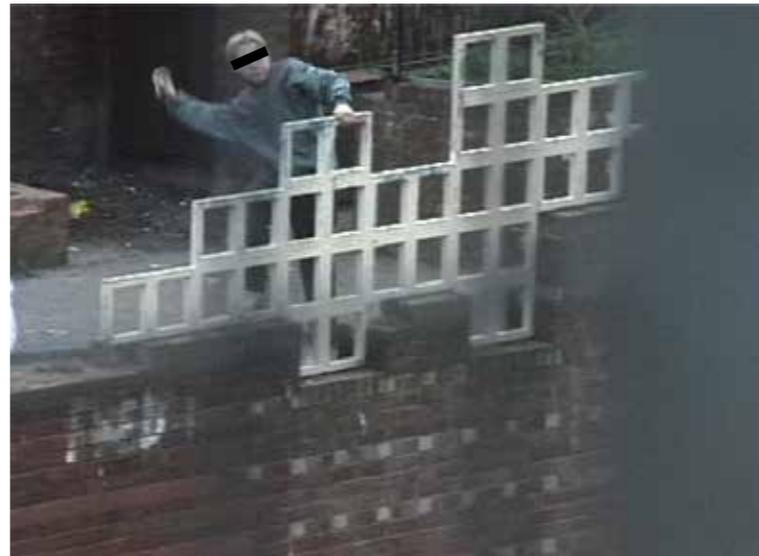


A video about aging and what happens when life approaches the end.



Kids, video, 2002

This piece was filmed mostly in Crumlin Road, Belfast and a little in New York. Kids tells the story of childhood in the suburbs of Belfast, using sharp, abrupt editing techniques, similar to those used for video clips. It shows scenes of unusual children's games.



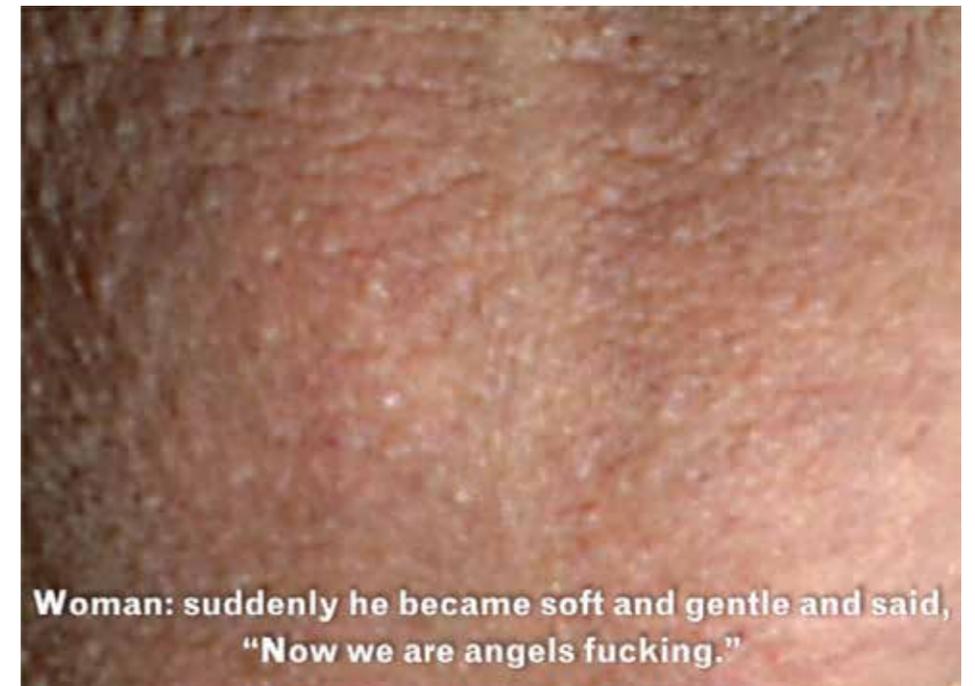




Irresistible Flux, 2-screen video projection, 2006

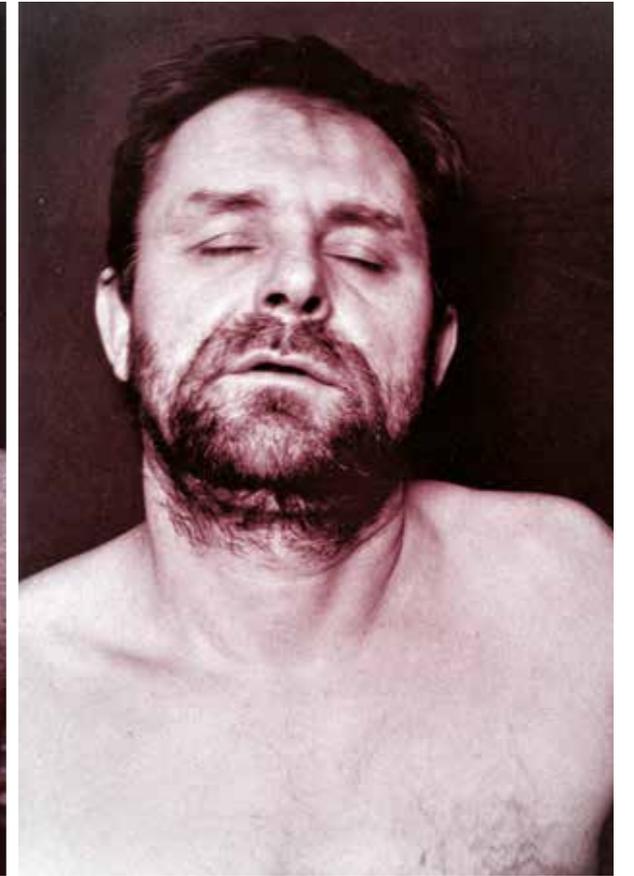
Collaboration with Sara Heitlinger

What connects a large kettle of buzzards soaring in the sky with the intimate details of the human body? The answer lies in their movements, and in the intimate conversation between two lovers who meet in the desert.



Self-Portrait, installation, 1996-1997

The installation consists of two elements: a large toy Ferrari (200x110 cm) with wheels cast in concrete; and a series of my black and white photographic portraits depicting the moment of orgasm. For this occasion, I transformed myself into a uniformed, mustached, mediocre middle-class man dressed in an old-fashioned polyester suit from the 1970s.





Trees, 2-screen video projection, 2011

A couple of months after my father died I often saw the empty chair he usually sat in.
This was much more difficult for me than his funeral. This experience forms the basis for Trees.





Paths, video, 2006

A video conversation between myself and the Brazilian artist, Daniela Mattos.

The piece which I have been working on with Franc Purg deals with the issue of distance, which is also used as a means of getting closer. We exchanged several short videos of 'Paths', sending them via email to each other, maybe as a way to find ourselves. I think this kind of 'visual conversation' makes it possible, as a rhizomatic relation, for us to somehow access what has become of us and our emotions.

Daniela Mattos

Can a work of art be created by two people who don't know each other, who are of different sexes and who come from a different generational, geographical and cultural background? What happens with the roads we tread and drive many times a day, the roads on which we don't see or notice anything exciting, if we watch a video document of them on screen? Do we really constantly need to reflect on our lives? Is life itself not enough? These are these questions that follow me, while I have been working with the Brazilian artist Daniela Mattos.

Franc Purg



3 Daniela →



← Franc 4



5 Daniela →



← Franc 6



1 Daniela →



← Franc 2



7 Daniela →



← Franc 8

Rabbit, video, 2005

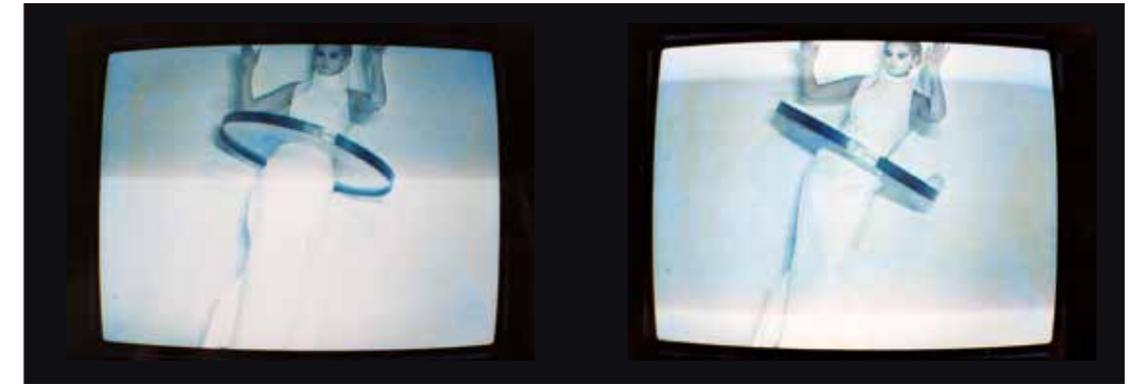
I was in the hills in Serbia, and was fascinated by the sounds of the crickets. Without my knowledge, my camera captured a rabbit. The sound of crickets is transformed into electronic music.



COINCIDENCES AND MISTAKES

TrueClueRocket, Installation, 1989

The installation consisted of three sculptures, a video and a performance. The sculptures alluded to objects, linked with technological progress, while the performance and video in this context functioned as a performative paraphrase of the sculpture which was clearly associated with a rocket. The performer was spinning a Plexiglass sphere for about 30 minutes, without a plan.





Untitled, drawings, 1978-1981

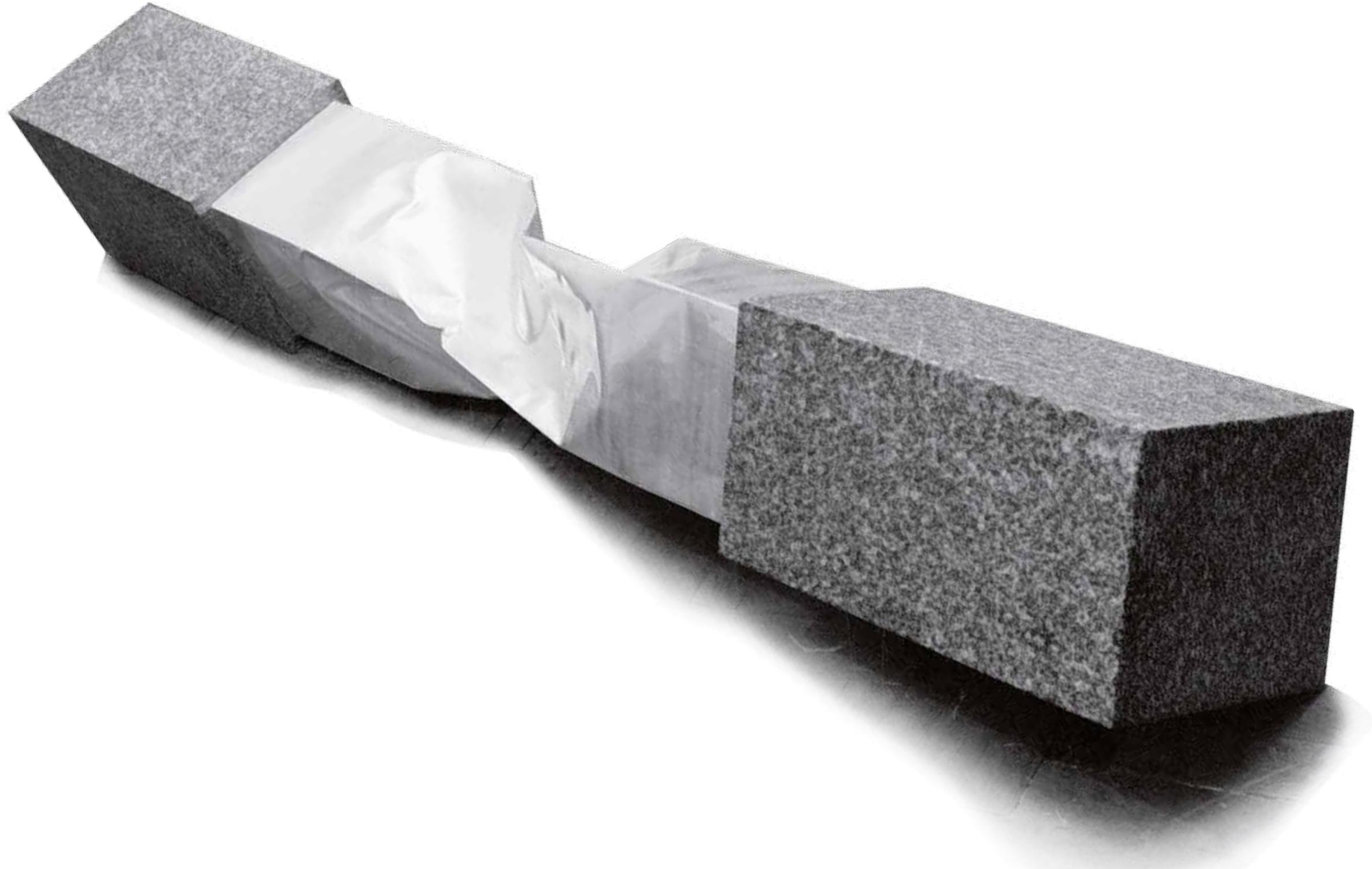
These drawings from the early eighties were made with closed eyes. The first challenge was to use automatic and coincidental drawing, based on the physiognomy of my hand. The second was how to transmit the images in my mind's eye onto paper.





Untitled, sculpture, 1978-1981

I was obsessed with contingencies, mistakes, and the coincidences in my life, especially with the sculptural materials, which I used in my work. I tried to understand material as though it was alive. I believed that coincidences were the key to the universe.





ANGER



At the exhibition opening of a young photographer at UMG, Maribor's important art gallery, the curator introduced me as a respected academic who would present the photographer's work. I went on stage dressed in a suit and tie and solemnly delivered an opening speech about the young photographer's works. The speech was actually a text of a famous writer on the phenomenon of the "new contemporary Slovene sculpture", only the word "sculpture" was replaced with "photography", and the names of sculptors by the name of the photographer.

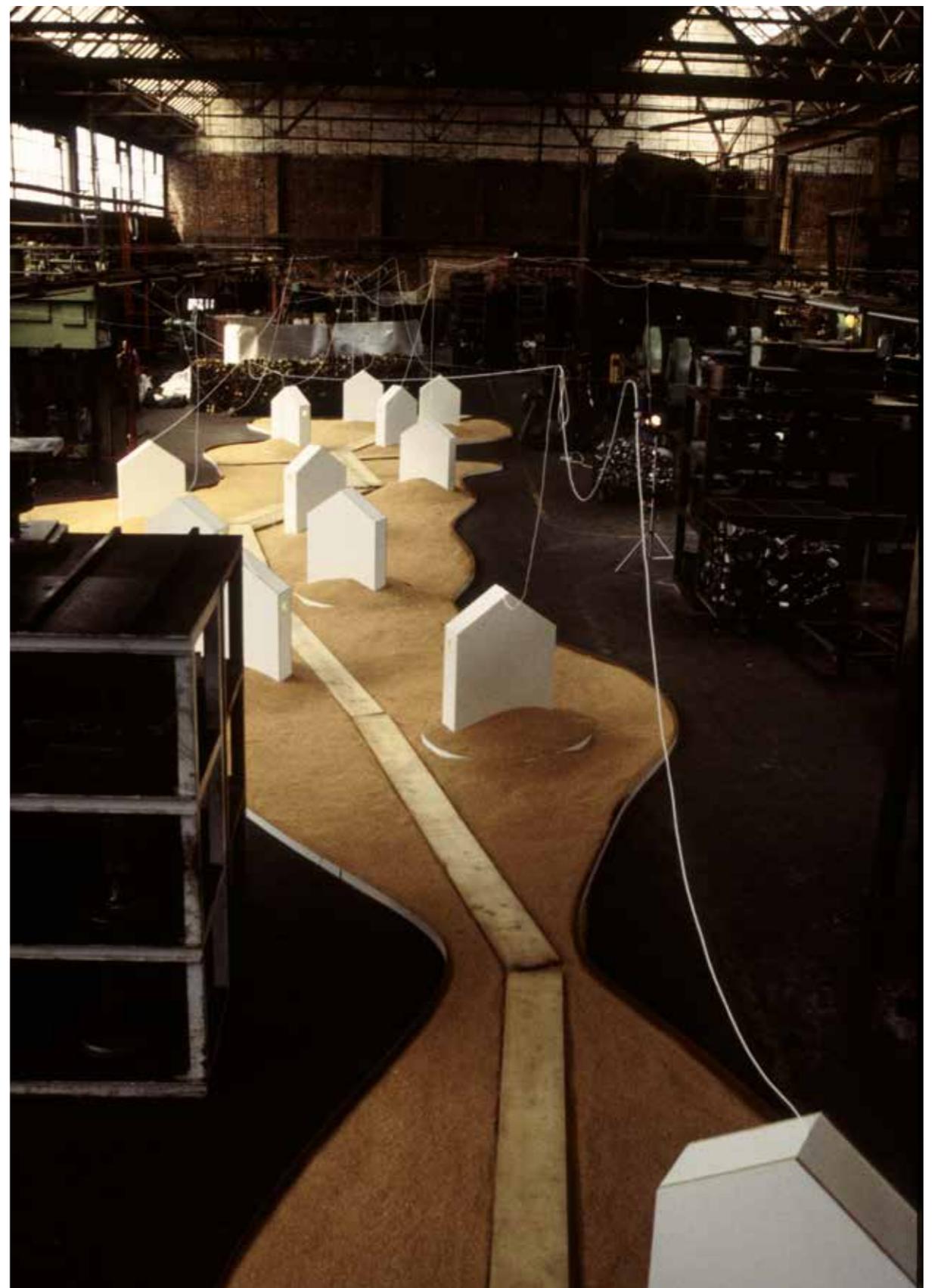
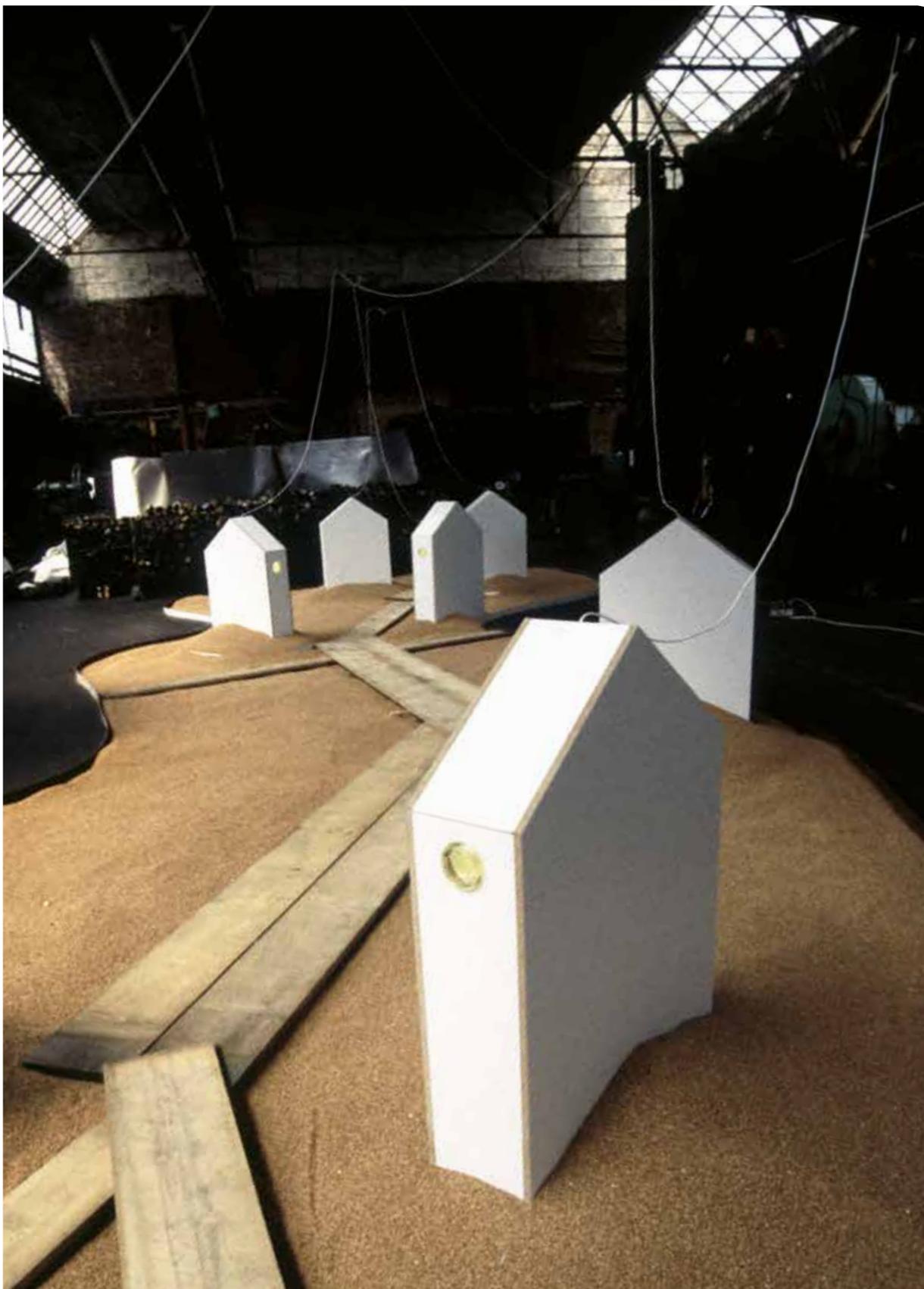
The curator impulsively invited me to another opening that evening, that of a young installation artist from Poland, at the Kibla, Maribor, a non-institutional multimedia centre, where I read the rearranged text again, this time talking about Polish contemporary art.



May Height, installation, 1993

The installation made of thirty tones of wheat alluded to a hilly landscape with white chapels on the peaks. In each was a round window, 10cm in diameter, a peephole revealing a scene of sexual games between a male figure with a comical, huge erection and a naked Barbie doll. The male figures were made roughly from linden wood. The installation was exhibited inside the EMO enamelware factory, on a weekend when the factory was closed.





Detail of the interior of the houses as seen through the peepholes.



May Height II, installation, 1993



What makes me look like this?, installation, 1996

The installation consisted of red velvet drapes, five sculpted figures roughly chiselled from linden wood, and a "carpet" made from the laminated photographs of roadkilled cats.





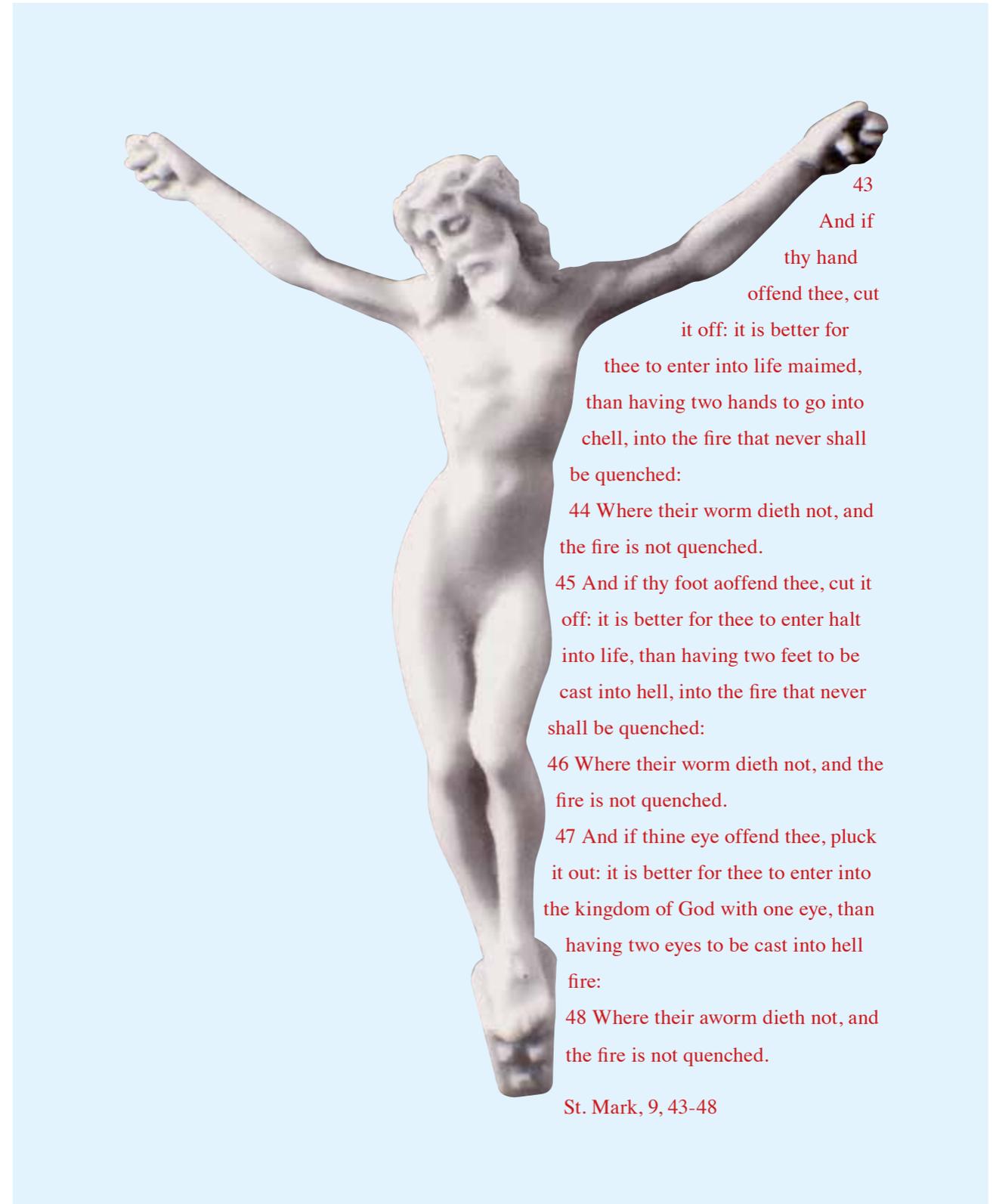
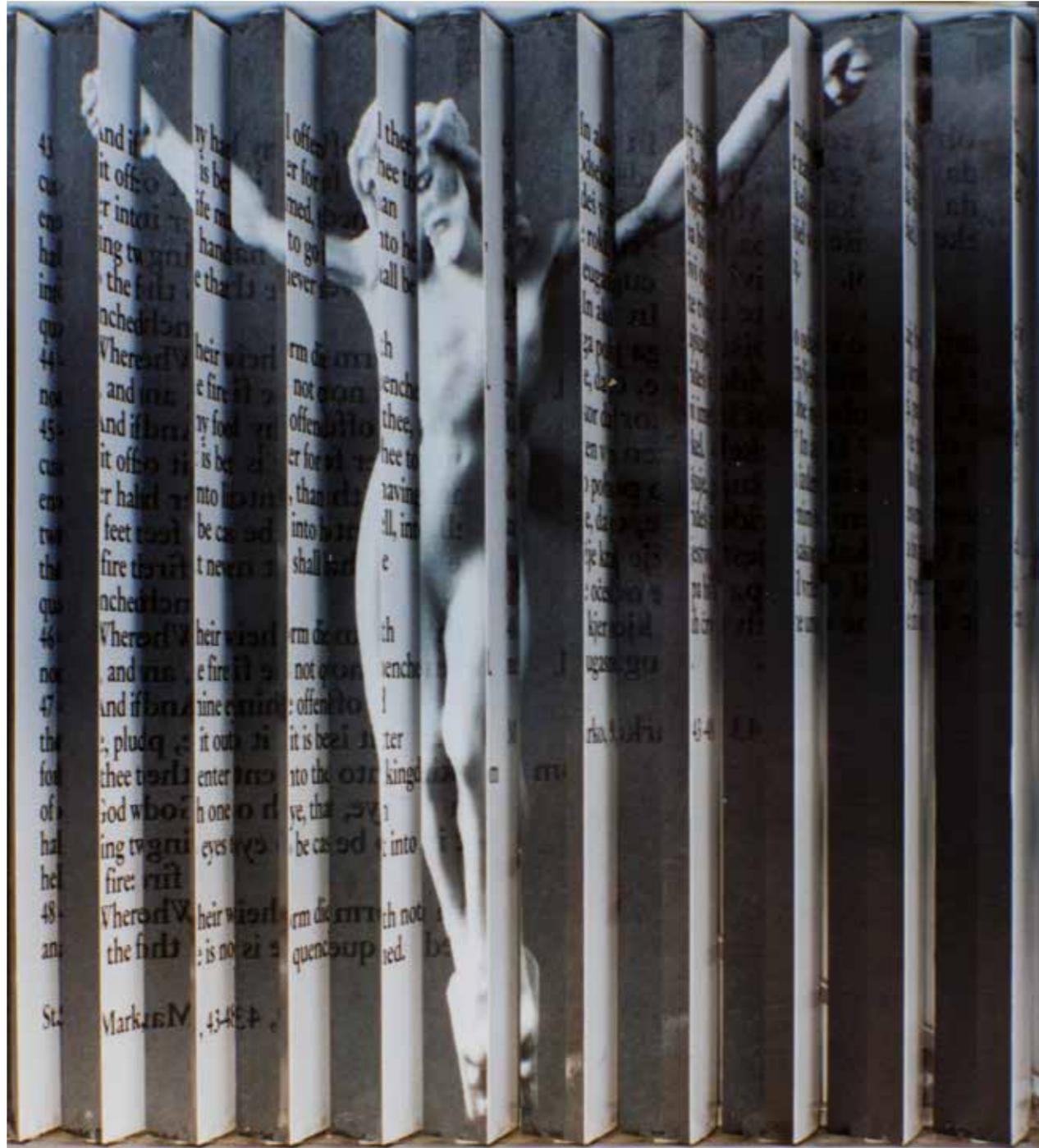
What makes me look like this? II, installation, 1996

In the Centre for Contemporary Art, Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw my original installation was censored. Instead of showing the five wooden sculptures I exhibited a variety of small objects which I had loaned from a local natural history museum. These objects, which came from various periods from the 19th-20th centuries, had been fashioned from human skin by prison guards.



Sanded C., installation, 1997

The installation consisted of two elements. The first, is cheap industrially manufactured plastic Christ figurine that had the cloth covering its loins smoothed out, revealing a naked, sexless Christomorphic figure. The second, a passage from Matthew's Gospel. The Christ figure served as a photographic motif in later works.



Where is the line?  1998

The original performance was staged at the time of the pre-Christmas and New Year festivities in 1998. A large table heavily laden with food and wine was set in the front room, while in the back room stood a wooden box with a live calf. Visitors gathered around the table and began to eat, drink and chat. I slipped away and changed my clothes. Together with my assistant, a professional butcher, we went to the back room and killed the calf as practiced in the slaughterhouse. Some visitors noticed our departure and followed us to the back room while others continued with the feast. Finally we put the dead animal onto a stretcher and carried it out of the gallery.

For the exhibition *Continental Breakfast* in Belgrade (2004) I created a video installation of this project. One projection showed the Škuc gallery where the calf was killed. The other showed close-ups of people eating at the opening breakfast outside the 25th May Museum, where this exhibition took place.







WHAT DO

YOU NEED?

Calling, performance, 2010

A group of participants and myself chose a word together, then we dispersed throughout the neighbourhood, remaining within earshot. We called out the word at spontaneous intervals, like a mantra.



BE+FAST, performance, 2003

In a busy market place I gave away hundreds of new winter clothes with the logo BE+FAST, which I designed and printed on them. The action itself is conceived as a simple act of giving. But people's reactions were reserved – they thought it was connected to a political party. The action was an emotional reaction to my visit to Belfast in 2001 during the time they call the Troubles. The same year I made the same action in my hometown of Celje.



CE+JE



Machtesh Ramon Cross, social sculpture, 2006

At the edge of the town of Mitzpe Ramon in the Negev Desert in Israel lies the Ramon Crater. A platform overlooks that crater from which visitors can watch the spectacular view. But below the platform are all sorts of strange objects thrown off the edge of the cliff. I collected this rubbish to make a huge red cross inside the crater.



Asphodelus albus, Mitzpe Ramon - September 2006

Machtesh Ramon Cross, photograph, 2006

A monumental photograph (450 x 215 cm) depicts the landscape of the Ramon Crater with the red cross. With this work, I was inspired by the still lifes of Caravaggio. His pictures of nature are beautiful from a distance but when we approach, we can see a rotten apple or a worm coming out of a pear.

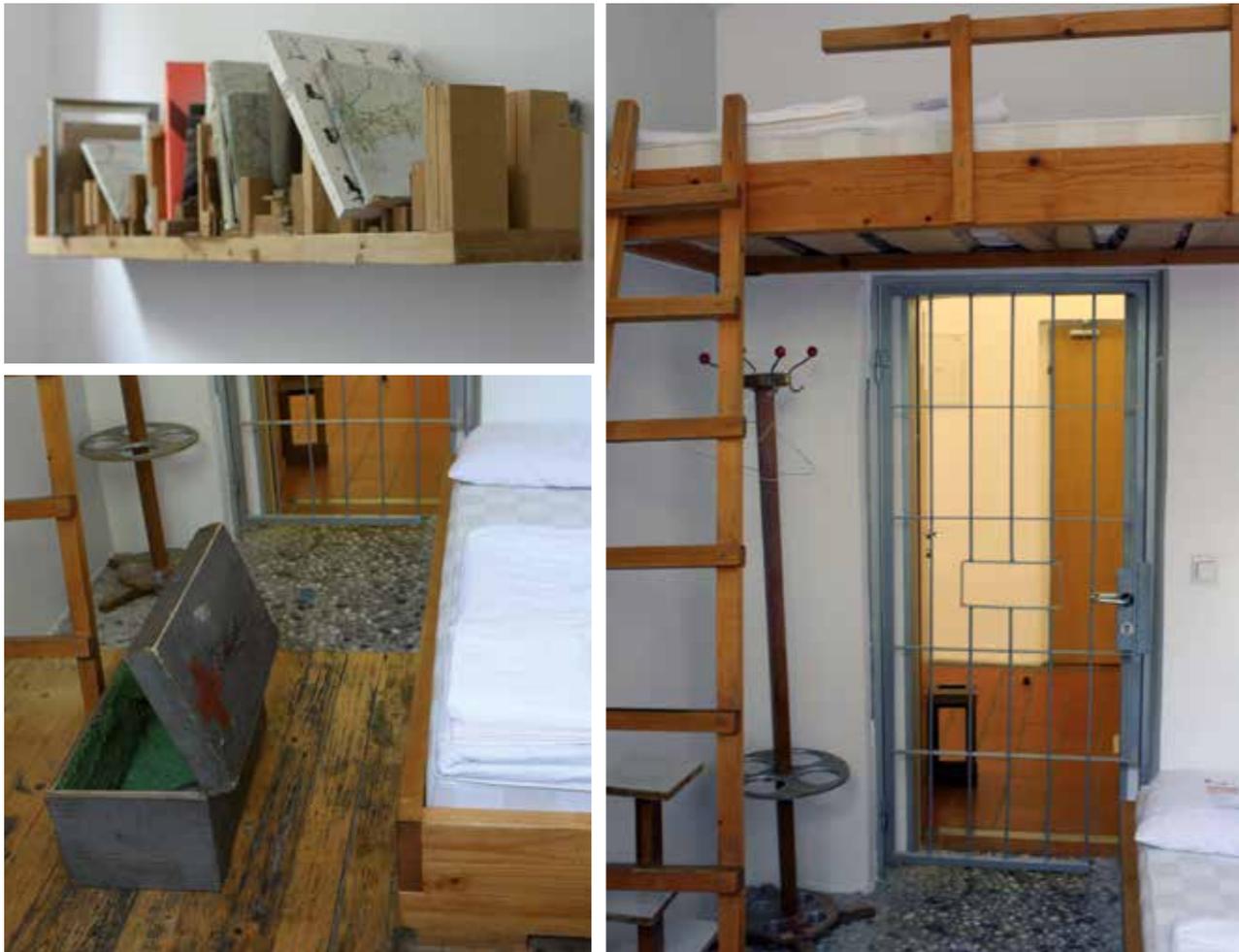


Cell 101, installation, 2003

Collaboration with Irish artist Aisling O'Beirn

The former Yugoslav army barracks, Metelkova in Ljubljana, were demilitarised between 1991-93. Squatters subsequently occupied the entire complex, setting up studios, workshops, galleries, concert halls etc. The army prison was transformed into a youth hostel, in which each former prison cell was converted into a room for two guests. Artists were invited to design the room conversions. The room that I converted together with the artist, Aisling O'Beirn, consists of functional pieces of furniture customised with drawings and texts from a collection of books left in the room for use by the guests.

The books, housed on a customised bookshelf, are designed to be a library. They form an eclectic mix, in various languages, covering travel, philosophy, politics, language and survival amongst other topics. The guests are encouraged to borrow them but also to donate books of their own.





DEMONSTRATIONS OR RIOTING IF TROUBLE BREAKS OUT

1. The middle of the crowd is the safest location. If there is any trouble at the beginning, or on the peripheries of the crowd, that's where people tend to get hurt or arrested.
2. Sensible shoes are the preferred option, never heels. This is especially true of illegal demonstrations. If the demonstration is charged the protestors may have to run.
3. Seasoned demonstrators tend to wear old practical clothes, this in case there is trouble at the demonstration where people can get crushed dragged etc.
4. If tear gas is used it stings and burns the eyes, the idea being to immobilise the crowd temporarily. People sometimes carry a scarf to protect the face.
5. In Spain marbles were rolled along the streets. Police horses could not avoid them or balance on them. This effectively immobilised the horses.
6. In Italy Anti Globalisation anarchists wear padding made of plastic bottles and cardboard to demonstrations. This gives limited protection to the body in case of confrontation with the police.

SLANG TERMS

1. Lifted = Getting Arrested
2. Scooped = Getting Arrested
3. Screw = Prison guard
4. Peelers = Police
5. Pests (used by Irish speakers) = Police
6. Comm = Secret message on cigarette or toilet paper
7. Pig = Army personnel carrier
8. Tout = Police informer
9. Supergrass = Police informer (generally someone who acted as a double agent)
10. Stretch and Seal = Cling Film used to wrap Comms
11. Dixie = Canteen or container used to store prison food



WHAT TO DO IF ARRESTED

1. You are entitled to know why you are being arrested.
2. If stopped for a "P" check you just have to give your name and address. If asked your age and you are over 21 just say "over 21"
3. You are entitled to a phone call to get legal representation
4. You do not have to say anything until you get advice from your legal representative.
5. In questioning the police might insinuate that your silence infers guilt.



Diversity, intervention, 2008 - ongoing

I have been planting edible plants in public parks in various cities and towns. These illicit actions aim to challenge the Modernist concept of European parks, in which ornamental trees (such as plane trees) and lawn dominate, and to resist the idea that edible plants cannot be beautiful.



Playground, action, 1998

In the small town I made this ride-on “dinosaur” in a place, where I felt a playground was needed. Five years later an official playground was created in the same spot.



Litter, action, 2004

The small town park is a favourite gathering place for teenagers, particularly on Friday afternoons and nights, and on early Saturday mornings. The visitors throw all kinds of empty food wrappings and bottles into the Savinja river or onto the footpaths that run alongside it. Huge amounts of broken glass are left in the park, and this is particularly dangerous for dogs as well as for wild animals such as snakes, hedgehogs and frogs.

There are no rubbish bins on the river promenade.

On a Friday afternoon I placed five carton boxes with a sign: *Litter– Protect the Animals!*

Three of the boxes ended up in the Savinja river; two remained and were filled to the top with rubbish.



Sibiu, sound installation, 2007

This site-specific installation in the old Romanian town of Sibiu, in the Carpathian Mountains, asks: "What does this place need?" As you walk through the public square you hear the answer – the sound of water, from a small spring to the ocean – filling the air from speakers lining the streets.



Fountain, public sculpture, 2006

For this commission I created a public monument and landscaped square celebrating Slovenian independence.

Once this was a small park that nobody would visit, except for the homeless who dwell below it. There still exists a huge shelter from World War II, a sort of labyrinth of corridors. Now, when the weather permits,

many people, including the youth, sit here. I consider it a success that a forgotten part of a town has been revived in this way. Many people asked how we managed to plant thirty mature trees in a circle. In fact we didn't plant any trees – they have been growing here quietly for thirty years without anyone noticing their presence, let alone that they formed a circle.



ART SYSTEM, installation, 2008

"This intervention, with its annoying direction of the visitor towards the gallery entrance, imitates at a metaphorical level the absurdity and imperative dominance of any system and its rigid forms, as well as tests the individual's obedience, which is also submitted to systematic rules of power positioning and distribution within the art system."

Martina Vovk, from exhibition catalogue, What about power relations?



Text printed on stickers and applied to STOP signs around the city →

STOP, action, 2004

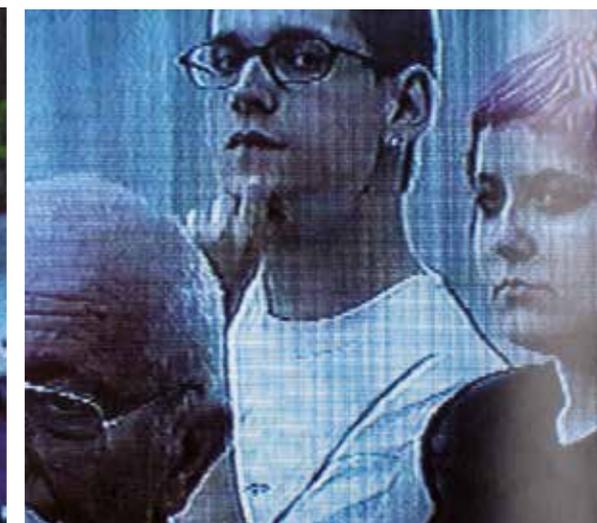
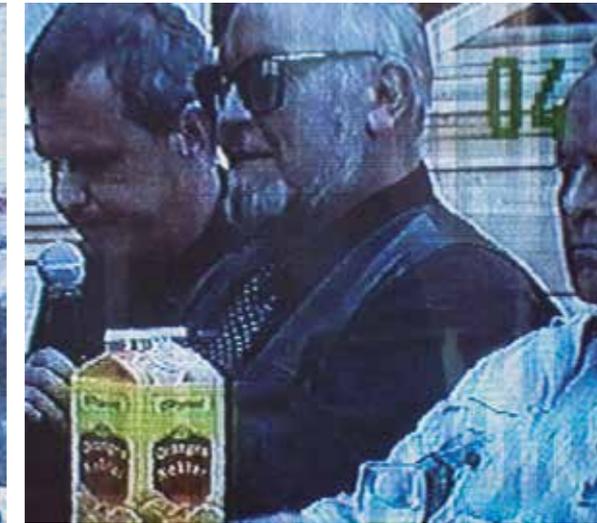


Manifesto

Established in the "historical" town of Celje, we are an informal and voluntary group that does not bow to any pressures or interests dictated by capital, political parties or institutions. We feel there is a void in the civil sphere and public activity, which we wish to fill by freely responding to problems in the town. By means of public manifestations of our different opinions, and through provocation, we wish to encourage critical thinking and action on the part of the population of Celje. We aim to transform Celje into a place that welcomes the coexistence of diverse social groups and individuals, and to combat the passivity and increasing negativity towards open-minded initiatives. We are working to improve urban culture by making the streets a place for communication, social events and the expression of creativity accessible to all inhabitants and visitors.

Miha Ceglar, Brane Piano, Tone Zimšek and Franc Purg are the founders of Skupina. Skupina's activities centre on the local society. Its membership is flexible, changing according to each project.

Skupina's first action was a roundtable discussion with speakers (mostly former citizens of Celje, who now live elsewhere) who hold a critical view of the town and its life. They spoke about how Celje left them indifferent, and how the passivity of the local environment cancelled almost all possibilities for articulating differing opinions, both artistic and creatively urban. The provocative title was a challenge to the common perception of Celje as an idyllic town with its panoramic views, local sites and famous past, which in fact only serve to capture it in a vicious circle of stagnation.



Proposals, action, 2003

Skupina - Group

Skupina made this action on the night before the Slovenian national cultural holiday of 8th of February. We transformed the public signage – including street signs, shop names and other signs on buildings – by adding English translations. But the translations were not literal, rather they created humorous word games. The aim of the action was to draw attention to the possibility of a new language totalitarianism, since in the following year, in 2004, Slovenia was to join the European Union.

There was a very strong national reaction. The project was associated with the actions of the fascists when they occupied Celje in 1941 and quickly changed the public street signs and building names into German.



Borut Holland's Cottage, action, 2002-ongoing

Skupina - Group

Skupina constructed a new home for the outsider artist, Borut Holland, who lives in the forest.

The wooden cottage was based on a design by the Slovenian artist, Jože Barši, which was originally shown in a gallery. We recycled the materials of Barši's work, using them to reconstruct the house in a forest for Borut to live in. We adapted and improved the function of the house by using recycled and salvaged materials.



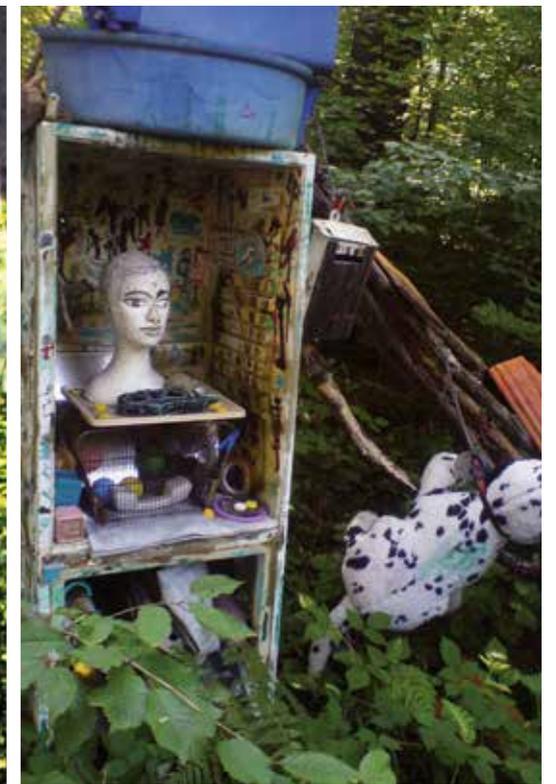
Building the house,
March 2003



Borut outside his
home, May 2004



July, 2012



Borut's installations

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS AND PROJECTS

- 2011 / 2012
Coming Soon, the Future !, Gallery of Contemporary Art and Likovni Salon-Center for Contemporary Arts, Celje, curated by Irena Čerčnik
- 2011
The Event, The 29th Biennial of Graphic Arts, Ljubljana, curated by Beti Žerovc
- 2011
Others' Stories, Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast, curated by Peter Richards
- 2010
Consume, Exit Art, New York, curated by Papo Colo, Jeanette Ingberman, Lauren Rosati and Herb Tam
- 2009
Gender Check, Mumok, Vienna, curated by Bojana Pejic - invited, but refused to take part on principle
- 2009
Vidéos Europas, Le Fresnoy, Lille, curated by Pascale Pronnier
- 2008
Images in the Night, Le Fresnoy - Studio National Des Arts Contemporains, Grand Palais, Paris
- 2008
Privileged Tactics II & III, P74 Gallery and Centre, Ljubljana, curated by Urška Jurman
- 2008
Researchers/Forscher, Schute [MAKNETE], Hamburg, curated by Urška Jurman
- 2008
What about power relationships?, Škuc Gallery and Vzgalica Gallery, Ljubljana, curated by Martina Vovk
- 2008
Museum in the Street, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana, curated by Zdenka Bodavinac and Bojana Piskur
- 2008
Young Identities – Global Youth, European Festival of Media Art, Kunsthalle Dominikanerkirche, Osnabrück, curated by Hermann Noering
- 2008
Invented Worlds – New Media Art from Slovenia, Titanik Galleria, Turku, Finland, curated by Simona Vidmar
- 2008
Sound Proof, E:vent Gallery, London, Curated by Colm Lally and Monica Biagioli
- 2007
Urban ambient project, European Capital of Culture, Sibiu, Romania
- 2007
SevenSeven Contemporary Art, London
- 2006
U3, 5th Triennale of Contemporary Slovenian Art. Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana. Curated by Juri Krpan
- 2006
Conversations, Škuc Gallery, Ljubljana, curated by Ricardo Basbaum and Bojana Piskur
- 2006
Midbar, Austrian hospice Jerusalem, Israel. Curated by Rafram Chaddad
- 2005
1995 – 2005, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana
- 2005
Attitude, Magaza Cultural Centre, Bitola, Macedonia, curated by Biljana Petrovska Isjanin
- 2005
Peti evangelij/Fifth Gospel, Galerija sodobne umetnosti, Celje
- 2005
Now's the time, Montage audiovisuel, Kunsthaus Graz. Curated by Sandro Droschl
- 2004
Seven Sins, Ljubljana –Moskau. Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana. Curated by Zdenka Badovinac, Viktor Misiano, Igor Zabel
- 2004
Continental Breakfast Belgrade. Curated by Anda Rotenberg
- 2004
Twinklings/Zmirkanje, Gallery PM, Zagreb, curated by Alenka Gregoric
- 2003
Vrnjak, Mala galerija – Moderna galerija / Museum of Modern Art Ljubljana
- 2003
U3, 4rd Triennale of Contemporary Slovene Art. Museum of Modern Art Ljubljana. Curated by Christine van Assche
- 2003
Blood and Honey, The future is on the Balkan. Essl Sammlung Vienna Curated by Harald Szeemann
- 2003
Constructed life. International/media/art/award 2003. The 50 best. Zentrum fur Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe
- 2002
BE+FAST, The Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast
- 2001
The Eye and its Truth, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana
- 2001
Art of Tortures and Executions – Art agaists Tortures and Execution. National Centre for Contemporary Arts, Kaliningrad
- 2000
VIPER International Festival for Film, Video and New Media, Basel
- 2000
The Nude in Slovenia, Ljubljana, curated by Lev Menaše
- 1999
The Nude in Slovenia, Ljubljana, curated by Lev Menaše
- 1999
After the Wall, Moderna Museet Stockholm
- 1999
Art from the Rucksack, City Arts Gallery Limerick, Catalyst Arts, Belfast
- 1998
Body and the East, Museum of Modern Art Ljubljana, Exit Art New York
- 1996
For your eyes only, The Centre for Contemporary Art, Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw
- 1996
What makes me look like this? Triskel Art Centre, Cork

SELECTED WORKS IN COLLECTIONS

Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris – New Media collection

UGM Maribor, Slovenia. Video Collection

Museum of Modern Art -MSUM, Ljubljana

Okolje Consulting Art Collection

The Israeli Centre for Digital Art, Holon, Israel

SELECTED AWARDS

2007
UNESCO Digital Arts Award

2006
Award and commissioned project for the Slovenian independency monument

2005
Rihard Jakopic National Slovenian award

2003
International media art award. The 50 best.
Zentrum fur Kunst und Medientechnologie

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Art of Dissent: edited by Hilary Powell and Isaac Marrero-Guillamón, London 2012

Chris Sharp, *Flash Art International*, May 2007

Jurij Krpan: *Franc Purg*. Cat. After the Wall, Stockholm 1999

Body and the East, From the 1960s to the Present. The MIT Press, 1999

Igor Zabel, *Vrnjak*, cat. Museum of Modern Art, 2003

Harald Szeemann, *On the Exhibition catalogue Blood and Honey*. Vienna, 2003

Anda Rotenberg, *Exhibition catalogue Continental Breakfast*. Belgrade 2004

Alenka Pirman, *Customs and Traditions IV*. MASKA, kulture magazine, no. 109 – 2007 and Franc Purg, *Skulpture Magazine*, USA, September, 1997

Nadja Zgonik, *May Height*, 1994, catalogue text

OTHER SELECTED EXPERIENCE

2008
Artist Talk, Santa Fe Art Institute, New Mexico

2007
Artist Talk, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana

2003-2005
Art Director, National Association of Artists, Slovenia

2006
Board member, OHO Award for Emerging Artists Award

2004-2008
Trustee, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana

Contributors

Dave Beech studied at Leicester Polytechnic and the Royal College of Art. He teaches at Chelsea College of Art, publishes in magazines, books and conferences, and makes art with the Free collective. He co-curated the exhibition 'We Are Grammar' at the Pratt Institute with Paul O'Neill.

Irena Čerčnik is a curator at the Center for Contemporary Arts Celje.

Urška Jurman studied art history and sociology of culture at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana. She works as a curator, researcher, writer, editor and enthusiastic sceptic in the field of contemporary arts.

Petra Kapš is an independent author. Recent projects conceptualised and realised with artists include: OR - changes of art; Being poetic in correspondence with an oracle; and Art of Imagining. She researches "textual fragments" through "aleatory leaf novels", performative readings, writings and lectures.

Iztok Skok is a designer and inventor. He works on creative and socially-engaged projects of varying scale.

Nevenka Šivavec is a curator and editor. Currently she is the director of MGLC – International Centre of Graphic Arts in Ljubljana.

Igor Zabel (1958 – 2005) was a Slovenian curator, writer and cultural theorist, actively involved in many fields of theory and culture – as a philosopher, essayist, literary and art critic, translator, and model for new generations of contemporary art professionals.

List of photographers

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Cecilia Järdemar
Robi Ograjenšek
Andraž Purg
Franc Purg
Nevenka Šivavec
Damijan Švarc
Miroslav Zdovc



The artist with his three sons, 2010

