

SYMPOSIUM

THE REINVENTION OF THE BALKANS: GEOPOLITICS, ART AND CULTURE IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE

Organization: Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel in co-operation with ifa,
Stuttgart

Concept: Marius Babias und Bojana Pejic

Place: documenta-Halle, Kassel

Time: October 25 and 26, 2003

Free admission.

The Reinvention of the Balkans: Geopolitics, Art and Culture in South-East Europe

The geographical area called the "Balkans" which comprises many different linguistic as well as religious and cultural ethnical groups, states and state-like formations in South-East Europe, is the discursive product of a century old struggle for political influence and power and the acrimonious conflicts of World's religions and ideologies.

Discourses are functioning as double agents, they are structuring the thinking process and the subconscious. Cultural appreciations are outlasting generations and the particular political systems, they are generating moral concepts and beliefs. The "Balkans" are primarily a Western invention invested with prejudices, resentments, political and cultural projections. Recently many authors and authoresses from the Balkan region are opposing this Western "Balkan"-image with their own personal, political and cultural definitions.

The symposium **The Reinvention of the Balkans** intends to challenge this Western view in a most critical way and tries to deconstruct the existing "Balkan" representations. By naming the Western motives and interests, and releasing the Balkan "images" from resentment and romanticism, the manifold political and cultural relations between West-

and South-East Europe could be redefined. It is about time for a new discourse between equally posited dialogue partners.

PROGRAMME

Saturday, October 25, 2003

10.00 Screening

„Dammi I Colori (Give me the colors)“

Anri Sala, Paris

10.30 Address of Welcome

René Block, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel

Ursula Zeller, ifa, Stuttgart

11.00 Inaugural Lecture

„New War Economy, Ethno Pluralism and the Politics of Representation“

Marius Babias, Berlin

12.00 Lecture

Rastko Mocnik, Ljubljana

Title was not available before deadline.

Lunch break

15.00 Screening and discussion

„Kenedi comes back home“

Zelimir Zilnik, Novi Sad

Moderation: Hito Steyerl, Berlin

16.00 Panel discussion

„The Balkan-Hype – Why, why now and what comes next?“

Markus Bickel, Sarajevo

Marina Grzinic, Ljubljana

Vesna Kesic, Zagreb

Melih Fereli, Istanbul

Moderation: Boris Buden, Vienna

18.00 – 20.00 Occasion to visit the exhibition

„In the Gorges of the Balkans. A Report“

Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel

Sunday, October 26, 2003

11.00 Screening

„Kenedi comes back home“ in Bali-Kino

Discussion with the director Zelimir Zilnik, Novi Sad

Occasion to visit the exhibition

„In the Gorges of the Balkans. A Report“

Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel (11.00 – 18.00)

14.00 Lecture

„Balkan for Beginners. A (Theoretical) Picture Show“

Bojana Pejic, Berlin

15.00 Panel discussion

**„Sexing Up Balkan Art“: Processing Origin, Marketing Identity, and Making Sense of the
`Global´ Art World“**

Marina Abramovic, Amsterdam

Sokol Bequiri, Kosova

Calin Dan, Bucharest

Sanja Ivekovic, Zagreb

Jannis Kounellis, Paris (angefragt)

Moderation. Bojana Pejic, Berlin

17.00 End of the Symposium

Marius Babias

Inaugural Lecture „New War Economy, Ethno Pluralism and the Politics of Representation“

This inaugural lecture is meant to implement the topic of the symposium and gives reason to the urgent need for an East – West dialogue which has been thrust into the background in the past years. The basic coordinates of the Balkan topic will be discussed in five segments. Initially a historical example for an identical Balkan construction - which still is effective -, will be examined. It is about Greece, which under a Western perspective has been going through a cultural and political metamorphosis throughout the centuries. Secondly one of the most important construction elements of Balkan identity will be examined: the violence imagery, which was and still is inseparably bound with the South-East of Europe. The third part deals with the traditional dispositive of civilization, which interprets the Balkans as demarcation line either between Europe and Asia or between civilization and barbarianism. The fourth part mainly addresses a critical clarification of the still dominating images and ideals about the Balkans. It will examine the representations of the “Other”, the “culture of mingling” and the problematic concept of “ethno pluralism”, which was imbedded in a modernized theory of neo-racism against the background of the Yugoslavian Wars in the 90ies and their follow up flows of migration. The fifth and final part concentrates on the politics of self acquisition and representation. Based on the question why the West so massively intervenes politically and military in the Balkans during the last decade it will try to reveal new perspectives on the if at all and how, new political landscapes, liberated identities and options for acting can be created, which at the same time serve the self liberation and the dialogue between equally posited partners.

Marius Babias

was born 1962 in Romania. He studied literature and political science at the Free University in Berlin. In 1996 he won the Carl Einstein Prize for Art Criticism. Since 2001 he has been Head of Communication at the Kokerei Zollverein – Zeitgenössische Kunst und Kritik in Essen. He has edited *Im Zentrum der Peripherie* (1995), co-edited *Die Kunst des Öffentlichen* (1998), *Arbeit essen Angst* (2001), *Campus* (2002) and *Handbuch Antirassismus* (2002). Marius Babias is also the author of *Herbstnacht* (1990), *Ich war dabei, als ...* (2001) and *Ware Subjektivität* (2002). He lives in Berlin and Essen.

Rastko Mocnik

teaches Theories of Discourse and Epistemology of the Humanities and Social Sciences at the Faculty of Arts and the faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. BA in Sociology and Comparative Literature. *Doctorat du troisième cycle* in linguistics - literary semiotics at the Université de Paris X (Nanterre). Doctorate in sociology at the University of Ljubljana. Member of the international board of directors of the Institute for Critical Social Studies, Sofija. Member of the international advising board of the Center for International Studies of the University of Montenegro. Member of the international advisory board of the journal *Eszmélet*, Budapest. – Writing on epistemology of the humanities and social sciences, theory of ideology, discourse and literary analysis, sociology of culture, of the arts, of literature, theoretical psychoanalysis.

Recent publications: *Altercations* - essays on "totalitarianism", the "alternative", nationalism; Biblioteka XX vek, Belgrade, 1998 - in Serbian; *How Much Fascism?* - essays on post-communist politics; Arkzin, Zagreb, 1998 - in Croatian; *Theory for Our Times. Levi-Strauss, Mauss, Durkheim* - a historical and epistemological study; Magor, Skopje, 1999 - in Macedonian; *3 Theories - Ideology, Nation, Institution* - a rationalised presentation of respective theories and their mutual articulation, with some historical, critical and actualistic digressions; *cf., Ljubljana, 1999 – in Slovene; *Zasreštanija: istorii, prehodi, vjarvanja* – essays on the theory of institution, nation, media, contemporary speech-practices, artistic practices and film; Panorama, Sofia, 2001 – in Bulgarian; *Theory for Politics* – interventions on political issues, developing theoretical background for political activism and reflecting on concrete actions and activities; *cf., Ljubljana, 2003 – in Slovene.

Zelimir Zilnik

Kenedi se vraća kući / Kenedi comes back home (2002)

Screening and Discussion

Moderation: Hito Steyerl

Zelimir Zilnik lives and works in Novi Sad. Already his first film *Frühe Arbeiten (Rani Radovi)* of 1969 turned into a heavily discussed and almost forbidden standard work of Yugoslavian Film history. The story about a few idealistic youngsters who despair when facing the red Bourgeoisie and initiate their own agitation campaign, which fails due to the animosity and apathy of the population, reflects the formal innovative and radical anti-conventional cinematic approaches of the so-called Black Wave in Yugoslavian Cinema, directors like Dusan Makavejev e.g. belonged to. Also the later works of Zilnik, like *Marble Ass* (1995) for instance, the story of a Drag Queen Prostitute living in Belgrad surrounded by a military and macho dominated climate during the Balkan Wars, characterize themselves through a detailed analysis of the social conditions. Zilnik's recent film *Kenedi se vraća kući (Kenedi comes back home)* of 2002 - as well as *Fortress Europe* produced in 2000 – are both dealing with the absurdities of the Schengener migration politics. Zilnik accompanies Kenedi, a Roma once deported from West Germany, on his everyday tour through Novi Sad. Kenedi is earning money as a cab driver for other deported Roma, who are arriving at the airport of Novi Sad without any money or perspective and facing the nothingness. This semi documentary film differs from other Balkan documentations mainly through a viewpoint completely free of any humanitarian pathos. The homelessness of the Roma is not perceived as an exotic cultural phenomena, but as an involuntarily displacement caused by the absurd EU-migration politic.

Films by Zelimir Zilnik

Rani Radovi / Early works (1969)
Sloboda ili Strip / Freedom or cartoons (1972)
Das Paradies. Eine imperialistische Tragikomödie / Paradise. An imperialist tragicomedy (1976)
Bolest i ozdravljenje Bude Brakusa / The injury and recovery of Buda Brakus (1980)
Vera i Erzika / Vera and Erzika (1981)
Dragoljub i Bogdan: struja / Dragoljub and Bogdan: Electricity (1982)
Prvo tromesečje Pavla Hromisa / The first trimester of Pavle Hromis (1983)
Druga generacija / The second generation (1983)
Stanimir silazi u grad / Stanimir descending (1984)
Beograda dobro jutro / Good morning Belgrade (1986)
Lijepe zene prolaze kroz grad / Pretty women walking through the city (1985)
Posrnule ovcice / Stumbling sheep (1986)
Vruće plate / Hot paychecks (1987)
Brooklyn gusinje / Brooklyn gusinje (1988)
Tako se kalio celik / The way steel was tempered (1988)
Stara masina / Old timer (1989)
Crno i belo / Black and white (1990)
Tito po drugi put među Srbima / Tito's second time among the Serbs (1994)
Marble ass (1995)
Kud plovi ovaj brod / Wanderlust (1998)
Fortress Europe (2000)
Kenedi se vraća kući / Kenedi comes back home (2002)

Hito Steyerl

is a filmmaker and author living in Berlin. She is working in the field of essayistic documentary films, of postcolonial critic and feminist representation critic on the border between film and visual arts respectively between theory and praxis. Activities as guest professor, assistant professor and art critic at diverse art- and film academies. Political journalist, film critic, catalogue- and book author as well as curator of feminist film programmes.

Panel Discussion

„The Balkan-Hype – Why, why now and what comes next?“

Moderation: Boris Buden

The brand-new interest in the art and culture of the Balkans seems to strangely coincide with the disappearance of this region out of the headlines of political news. Three exhibitions within one year, all dealing with Balkans Art - *In Search of Balkania* in Graz, *Blut und Honig. Zukunft ist am Balkan (Blood and Honey. The Future is on the Balkans)* in Klosterneuburg near Vienna und *In den Schluchten des Balkan. Eine Reportage (In the Gorges of the Balkans. A report)* in Kassel – point to the complex symptoms of this „Balkan-Hype“. The new interest in the art and culture of South-East Europe is taking place in front of the background of a political project which is radically changing the geopolitical status of the Balkan countries as well as their relation to Europe in general.

In the foreseeable future this whole region is supposed to be a part of the United Europe. How far now does this interest in Balkan Art correspond with the political process of European integration? Which interaction between culture and politics emerges in this context and which ideological mechanisms does it require?

“Europe” and the “Balkans” are also standing for a relation of power. How far can art and culture have influence on this hegemonical constellation? Does the role of cultural inclusion exhaust itself by paving way for political integration, or does it follow it’s own logical rules? A need is not always a sign for deficiency. What the West European cultural interest is looking for on the Balkans is not necessarily what the West is missing. Couldn’t it be possible to explain the Balkan-Hype as an outcome of the global arts market own dynamics? Are these Balkan exhibitions just a fashionable trend which soon will be replaced by another one?

The exhibition *In den Schluchten des Balkan. Eine Reportage (In the Gorges of the Balkans. A report)* in Kassel is setting on more lasting effects instead. The whole project will continue 2004 with activities in various Balkan cities and with two further exhibitions of Mangelos and Marjetica Potrc in Kassel. What can the final outcome of such a project look like? What makes Kassel become a center for Southeast European art? Will the relations between the center and the periphery be twisted through such a project? All these questions are the topic of this panel discussion.

Markus Bickel

was born 1971 in Caracas / Venezuela. He studied political and communication science in Munich and Berlin. In 1996 he made his finals as an editorial journalist at the Deutsche Journalistenschule (DJS) in Munich. After five years working as editor for politics for the weekly magazine *Jungle World* he moved to Sarajevo, where he is working as a freelance journalist for the magazines *Zeit*, *Berliner Zeitung*, *Standard* and the Austrian Press agency *APA*.

Boris Buden

was born 1958 in Croatia. He lives in Vienna and Berlin. He studied philosophy in Zagreb and cultural science at the Humboldt University in Berlin. Since 1984 he is working as a freelance publisher and journalist. Several publications in various newspapers, magazines, culture and literature journals in former Yugoslavia, in Europe and the USA. Participation in Documenta11, Platform_2 in New Dehli (2001). Translator of the scripts of Sigmund Freud into the Croatian language. Book publications: *Barrikade*, Zagreb 1996; *Kaptolski kolodvor*, Belgrade 2001.

Melih Fereli

was born 1948 in Istanbul. He received his B.Sc. degree in “Fluid Mechanics” from Robert College, Istanbul in 1970. Fereli was appointed General Director of the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts in 1993, which organizes four international festivals (Film, Theatre, Music/Dance, Jazz) each year and the Istanbul Biennial. He quit this post in February 2001, having organized 32 international festivals, 3 international biennials, numerous private cultural events, panel discussions and workshops. In November 2000 Fereli attended “The White House Conference on Culture and Diplomacy” on invitation of President Clinton, representing Turkey. Fereli is the Chairman of Proje4L (The Istanbul Museum of Contemporary Art), a member of UNESCO’s Mediterranean Council for Culture and a trustee of Turkish Educational Volunteers Foundation as well as serving on the advisory boards of Forum Istanbul, Borusan Culture, Mersin Festival, ITU-MIAM, ITU Management Program for Cultural Tourism, Suna&Inan Kirac Research Centre on

Mediterranean Civilizations, Afife Jale Theatre Awards, TAC Foundation and Turkey-Spain Forum.

Marina Grzinic

Prof. Dr Marina Grzinic lives in Ljubljana. She works as researcher at the Institute of Philosophy at the ZRC SAZU (Scientific and Research Center of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Art) in Ljubljana. She is Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. She also works as a freelance media theorist, art critic and curator. Grzinic has been involved with video art since 1982. In collaboration with Aina Smid she has produced more than 30 video art projects, a short film, numerous video and media installations, Internet websites and an interactive CD-ROM (ZKM Karlsruhe). Grzinic has published hundreds of articles and essays and edited 8 books. Her last book is titled *Fiction Reconstructed. Eastern Europe, Post-socialism and The Retro-avant-garde* (Edition Selene in collaboration with Springerin, Vienna, 2000). Presently she is program co-director of the Kyoto Biennale 2003, lead by the Director Hiroshi Yoshioka.

Vesna Kesic

is a journalist, peace and feminist activist, researcher. She is the co-founder of several initiatives and NGO's (Civic Initiative for the Freedom of Public Expression, Zagreb Women's Lobby, The Centre for Women War Victims, BaBe). She received her MA at the New School University („The Status of Rape as a War Crime in International Law: Changes Introduced After the Wars in the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda“). She published throughout Croatia, the countries of former Yugoslavia and internationally. Recently she edited the book *Women Recollecting Memories: The gender dimension of war and nationalism(s) and women's resistance in former Yugoslavia*. Right now she is working on the research project on „Gender dimension of transition and transformation processes in former Yugoslavia“ (together with Doris Goedl).

Bojana Pejic

Lecture “Balkan for Beginners. A (Theoretical) Picture Show”

Cultural stereotypes are a powerful means of communication between “us” and the “others”, whoever these others may be. Over the past two decades, much has been written about the manners in which the West constructed a number of (if not all) non-western parts of the globe in terms of their “otherness”, through the mechanism Edward Said named *Orientalism* (1978), performed in / by Western human sciences, literature and visual arts. When coining the term *Balkanism* in 1996, Maria Todorova primarily had in mind Western (primarily Western European) imaginings of the Balkans, which, as does Orientalism, also has a centuries-long tradition.

This talk won't be concerned with the Western gaze on the Balkans, but with something that one could more appropriately call *home-grown Balkanism*, which describes practices “we” use for manufacturing an image / concept of ourselves, presumably without anybody's (read Western) assistance. Here, things are complicated from the start: while the outsiders (may) tend to perceive “our” homemade Balkanism as an unanimous expression of the “other”, the Balkanians know that among themselves there are many different “others”, which “we” like to position in a hierarchical order.

This operation implies that there is always an "other" who appears to be more "other" than we (Greeks, Rumanians, Turks, Albanians, Bulgarians etc) are. Even though a homemade "Balkan" image or rather *images* produced in "our" literature, theory, film, print media and "our" works of art are often believed to transport our "authentic" Balkan selves to the rest of the world, these images may turn out to be just as stereotypical as Western "Balkanism." However, these images could also break with some time-honored typecasts. The best way of undoing stereotypes is perhaps humor. Now, given that humor as a critical (and artistic) method and as an attitude towards life is often taken to best exemplify the "Balkan mind," aren't we once again trapped in an out-dated / age-old stereotype?

Bojana Pejic

was born in Belgrade in 1948. She studied art history and worked at the Student Cultural Center in Belgrade from 1971 until 1991, where she organized many programs and curated shows. She has been practicing art critique since the mid-1970ies, and was one of the editors of the art-theoretical journal *Moment*, edited in Belgrade (1984 - 1991). She moved to Berlin in January 1991, and is now working as a freelance art critic / curator. She was chief curator of the exhibition *After the Wall – Art and Culture in post-Communist Europe*, organized by Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 1999, which traveled to Budapest and Berlin (2000). She held the Rudolf Arnheim Guest-Professorship at Humboldt University (Berlin), Art History Department, during the Summer Semester 2003.

Panel Discussion

„Sexing Up Balkan Art“: Processing Origin, Marketing Identity, and Making Sense of the `Global Art` ”

Moderation: Bojana Pejic

During the greater part of the twentieth century, the Center-Periphery "paradigms" have been primarily "resolved" by artists' leaving their native countries - widely known as nice places to *come from* - and their migration to art centers where they could exercise "universal" art and benefit from the art market with more or less success. Certainly, in trying to break away from the "destiny of geography" or rather periphery, artists may have had different motivations. In addition, these motivations were presumably also dependent on time and place: Jannis Kounellis left his native Athens and moved to Rome in the late 1950ies, Marina Abramovic departed from Belgrade in the mid-1970ies in order to practice, together with Ulay, their "mobile art" initially based on nomadic (art) existence, and in the late 1990ies, Calin Dan, originally from Bucharest, decided to settle in Amsterdam.

On the other hand, the Center-Periphery paradigm is "solved" in a different manner by those artists who decided to stay in their native places, whereby "staying home" implicates a position pregnant with contradictions. Since the 1970ies, Sanja Ivekovic had been a renowned artist in Croatia, and SFR Yugoslavia, where she was the one and only feminist artist in the art scene, but achieved international success as late as the 1990ies, and today even has more exhibitions abroad than in Zagreb, - by the way a city with a remarkable institutional infrastructure. Exactly due to the lack of such structure in Kosova (which did not exist even before the recent war), Sokol Beqiri, living in Peja, took part in many international shows during the last three years, but has had no relevant representation in his native Kosova, devastated by the war.

Till around 2000, the term "Balkan art " was hardly ever used, and if so, it was a derogatory term, standing, as the region itself, for non-modernity, a bellicose spirit (as well as warlike practices) and cultural backwardness. The question is, in which manner - and if at all - the Balkan cultural "origin" and presumable Balkan "identity" is to be detected in the artworks of artists who either still live in or were born in the "region," which recently has become *sexed-up* (also) via several exhibitions held in Western Europe. In our age of *global art*, it is certainly useful (and even necessary) to redefine the Center-Periphery paradigm and to rethink the local-plus-global strategies (as well as those local-minus-global ones) by talking with artists "from" the Balkans who may - or may not - be interested in processing and marketing their "Balkan" identities. The main question is as follows: how can artists negotiate their individual artistic strategies by going beyond the discourse of "fixed" cultural identities, given that identity, artistic included, is forever a work-in-progress.

Marina Abramovic

(born 1946 in Belgrade), who once described herself as a "grand mother of Performance Art," started to make Body Art works in 1973, testing the physical and spiritual limits of her body. She moved to Amsterdam in 1976 and began her collaboration with Ulay (1976 - 1988). After their last piece, *The Great Wall Walk* (1988) performed on the Great Chinese Wall, she continued to work alone, continuing her performance practice and now also producing sculptural installations, or "transitional objects." She has been a Professor at the Art Academy in Braunschweig, (Germany) since 1997, where she teaches performance. For her performance / installation *Balkan Baroque*, she was awarded the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennial of 1997.

Sokol Beqiri

(born 1964 in Peja / Pec, Kosova) graduated at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prishtina in 1989, and later studied in Ljubljana. After having refused traditional art education, and confronted with the war imposed on Kosova, Beqiri started to make an art that related to a given brutal war-reality in a direct and uncompromising manner. By unmasking militarism, he places "Balkan barbarianism" with its damaging "local" impact on the same footing with Western "humanitarian" warriorism (as in his photo work *Fuck You*, 2001). Western media dream world and war condition are contrasted and questioned in the video *Superman* (2002), in which he, in an unseen manner, presents his non-heroic and fragile male subjectivity, thereby opposing the (war)-reality, which demands (in Kosovo as elsewhere) "heroic" national subjects.

Calin Dan

(born 1955 in Arad, Romania) an art historian by education, founded the group *subREAL* in 1990, together with Dan Mihaltianu (who left the group in June 1993) and Josif Kiraly. This group with its projects such as *Draculaland* (1993) was the first to deconstruct the (Western) myth of Balkan identity. Having gained an international reputation in the early 1990s, *subREAL* turned to exploring the "archeology" of (Romanian) Communism, inquiring into the role of art and artists within it, while at the same time asking questions relevant to the post-Socialist condition. They represented Romania at the Venice Biennial in 2001 (along with Dan Perjovschi). Calin Dan has been

living in Amsterdam since 1999 [2000]. At our panel, he will present his own project, titled *Emotional Architecture*.

Sanja Ivekovic

(born 1949 in Zagreb) was one of the first artists in Croatia to use the medium of video (initially together with Dalibor Martinis) in the early 1970ies. In her early solo and video performances, she explored the issue of communication and in her photographic series she was concerned with the image of women as constructed by mass media, taking a feminist stance. She sharpened her political / feminist position in the face of post-Socialist nationalism and the subsequent Yugoslav wars of the 1990ies, which induced (at least) two phenomena she critically relates to in her videos and photographic works. The first is a collective amnesia, which nationalism (not necessarily Croatian) constructs in reference to the Communist past (and consequently its antifascist tradition); the second is a "redefined" role of woman, idealized by the Nation as mother. In her internationally performed project *Women's House*, she deals with the reality of women who have been victims of familial violence.

Jannis Kounellis

(born 1936 in Piraeus, Athens) moved to Rome in 1956, where, already by the mid-sixties, he became one of the leading artists, then associated with *arte povera*. In his installations, produced during the late 1960ies, he was interested in "societal structure behind the gallery," and its "bourgeois origin" wherein his concern was not the gallery system itself but the "position of the artist within the system." Such a critical attitude of questioning the art system, as is known, was central to the generation of '68. Kounellis understands the (art) form "as power and as resistance" and over the last thirty years, his "politics of form" have been based on his belief that artists are practitioners, "constructors of image." On one occasion, he stated that even though the term Mediterranean is vague (because Greeks, Italians and Spaniards differ) he considered himself a Mediterranean exactly because he had two homelands.