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By Fahim Amir

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26th of April to 15th of May 2008

A project, World-Ex-Position '08, curated by Vienna-based artist Alexander Nikolic in cooperation with Gulsen Bal (Open Space - Zentrum für Kunstprojekte) and Thomas Jelinek (Labfactory), is likely one of the most interesting art shows Vienna will be offering this year.

“The monolithic desire of this world-ex-position knows one aim only: the final de- and reconstruction of all formations in Austrian civil society.” Stefan Lutschinger (media activist)

The curatorial approach

The curatorial practice of Alexander Nikolic can be partly conceptualised within the analytical framework of the recent works of French historian and philosopher Jacques Rancière. In *Disagreement* (1999), Rancière uses the term “police” to refer to “the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution”. Politics, by contrast, is “an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing: whatever breaks with the tangible configuration whereby parties and parts or lack of them are defined by a presupposition that, by definition, has no place in that configuration”.

The project, World-Ex-Position '08, centrally structured around questions of national representation, critical artistic re-appropriation, the relationship of art, economy and institutions, and last but not least, around the problematic of world expositions themselves in the midst of an exhibition that covers a wide range of artistic works, performances and lectures. World-Ex-Position '08 attacks well established aesthetic relations and conventional hermeneutic practices, that perform the function of “police” in the spheres of art and culture.

For that reason Nikolic’s exhibition as whole opens up the unconventional aesthetico-political strategies, without dictating some totalising artistic master profile and draws on a broad spectrum of artists of diverging national origins.

An overview on the venues

Performing art works and lectures were presented at LABfactory, a cooperation-platform for productions at the interface of new and old media, often, like in this case, live-streamed via giss-tv. As the historical location of the planning office of Vienna’s first world exhibition in 1873, the venue was well chosen in the light of the exhibition’s programmatic questions. It served as intellectual and artistic battleground for interventions into what may be seen as contemporary artistic critique.

Works of fine and applied art found their temporary home at Open Space - Zentrum für Kunstprojekte (centre for art projects). Open Space is a new venue in Vienna, which already took parts of the local and national art scene by storm. In her initiation with Open Space, Gulsen Bal, the director as well as head of program, has achieved through a dense series of well-curated exhibitions in the shortest possible time, what a long list of others failed to do in months and years of work. Since its opening in January 2008 Open Space has become one of Vienna’s premier venues for new art, positioning itself in the context of the urgent questions of our times and in contrast to usual and “normalized” modes of their treatment in the context of contemporary artistic practices. Open Space

has united different creative practices and created an accessible collaborative forum for diverse kinds of projects. It has become one of the best places to encounter the most interesting Viennese critical art scene.

The pieces: a continuous dialogue

Austrian feminist grrrl-Zine-project Cuntstunt presents a feminist âhandapparât, a collection of texts, pictures and collages confronting the cleansed politics of artistic âprofessionalismâ that usually equals to copying commodity-aesthetics. The assemblage âTake it as a Gift!â, arranged in a black box, succeeded in combining feminist Punk aesthetics with political radicalism, politicising apparently ordinary questions of daily life and paying heed to historical partners-in-crime â all of that in an entirely unpretentious way. Cuntstunt #3 is eagerly awaited!

Zampa di Leoneâs âselectionsâ are anonymously published caricatures of protagonists and relationships in the international and âBalkanâ-related art scene. They were âcreated at the time of a fictional history (tradition) in order to negate this fabrication in the most brutal fashionâ (Sezgin Boynik). The viewer is left clueless as to whether to embrace this sniper-like critique of the politics of aesthetic distinction, the âdispositivâ (Foucault) of the creative âauthorâ, its attacks on the definitorial light towers, hermeneutic monopolists, heroes and heroines of the art-world or to reject it as cheap post-adolescent pillorying from the safe position of the hideout, that levels all nuances that matter. Certainly the works of Zampa di Leone are occasionally intelligent and funny.

Politically urgent issues of textile surface embedded in the fashion of the Nazi elite and its post-Fascist present in the icon of Hugo Boss are focus of Tanya Uryâs works âwhoâs bossâ and âboss runeâ t-shirts. SocietÃ© rÃ©aliste â a French cooperative project initiated by Ferenc GrÃ©f and Jean-Baptiste Naudy, deals with the history of âtemporary free zonesâ and the possibilities of their âergonomic partitioningâ. Christoph Teilerâs work âwechselstromâ questions dis/continuities of historical and contemporary artist-patron-dependencies. Rudi HÃ¼bls âART- & CULTURE-SAUSAGESâ are board sausages made of posters of Austriaâs âhigh cultureâ, thereby criticising Viennaâs new regulations prohibiting public and free placarding. Kasimir Malevicâs âblack cross â draft ca. 1985â questions authorship and biography in the field of fine art. Jaesper AlvarÃ©s piece âThe banana tree stereoscopeâ brings into focus the relationship between post/colonial international trade and the unholy traditions of world exhibitions. It achieves this effect by using a stereoscope, which only works when you unfocus your eyes: politically aware, conceptionally strict, and even fun.

Lukas Puschâs two pieces in the âVienna VoÃ³dooâ-series, however, disappoint as mere copies of a bad reality: why simply reproduce the shit? In a photograph taken in an African slum, Pusch can be seen dressed in a white tuxedo, handing out little treats to children. He here reproduces and reinforces a phallogentric image, showing merely how the attempted re-appropriation of racist imagery fails and collapses into stabilizing the conservative and reactionary relations of asymmetry: The black crowd is visually represented phallogentrically as gravitating around the big bold white man. The other piece, which is a drawing, makes the same mistake by mainly reproducing, instead of criticizing, shifting or explaining, sexist-racist imagery. Erasing all debates about progressive and emancipatory politics of the visual, and neglecting all worldly contradictions and interdependances, Puschâs two VoÃ³doo series pieces simply reinforce repressive normalization. Puschâs obviously progressive intention proves irrelevant in light of the highly problematic form and content of these pieces. Fortunately his oeuvre encompasses more than these two works.

However, Stefan Rusu's three videos, LAZO, SARS OPERA, and JEREZ, magnificently explore the construction of myths and legends in the former Soviet States and the post-Socialist present. Working with archival material in combination with contemporary contexts and situations, staged or not, Rusu's docu-fictional pieces are a highlight of the exhibition and must-see.

By the same token, Ira Hadzic's video "Visoko - Flying High", a 45min piece showing the effects of the "discovery" of pyramids in the Bosnian city Visoko, make an equally positive impression. The Pyramids, heavily overgrown with trees and vegetation, are presented as material-semiotic artifacts, half reality, half fiction, partly material, partly narrative, mediated through 21st century communication technology. A cyborg-entity coming to life via the affective and economic investments of a Texan with Bosnian roots, who is described by a local as a Tito II. With a female restaurant-worker's confession that she believes in the pyramids' existence, because her life improved due to the evolving pyramid-tourism, the post-war-dilemma crystallizes in all its depth and width as a projection of national(-ist) hope, interconnected with German economic restructuring, science wars, and the profound belief in a brighter future through a better past. Hope is a productive force, and Ira Hadzic's video is an excellent visual social and cultural anthropology at the beginning of the third Christian millennium, a temporal space in which technobiopolitics is standard, and NATO is bombing dissenters. And in the end, you -the viewer- want to believe, knowing that it won't matter. Ira Hadzic's piece, produced as part of the duo "meereshund", impresses long after the immediate sensory experience is over, and wows in its simple but well applied means, and its neither voyeuristic nor objectifying design.

Speaking of technobiopolitics, and all subjectivity as mediated through 0 and 1, Sister0 (a.k.a. Nancy Mauro-Flude) performed the film-lecture-performance "My First Burial" in collaboration with Jesse Darlin (a.k.a. Jessica Errey) "I was a teenage porn star". In a middle section, both talk about the pieces' artistic means and their political and biographical vectors. They thereby bring the performers' intentions, their social and historical contexts, back into the discussion as well as into the artwork itself, propagating an intelligible aesthetic of transparency.

Jesse Darlin's performance examines heterosexism and structural violence in the porn-industry through performative means, projections and loudspeakers. The - formerly objectified - performer, proves against all difficulties of the office-like ambiance of LABfactor, that a performance can be powerful, by taking delicate matters seriously. The performance accomplishes to be inspiring and provocative at the same time, but never embarrassing (the oldest danger of performances). Sister0, who calls herself the "queen of uncensored data", connects in "my first burial" the Shaman Rattle of an exoticised elsewhere with today's technopolitics.

Here, Sister0 shows in lines of thought and performance the desire to transcend time and space as patterns of continuity, while the concrete historical fields change, but she never forgets about the sexual politics immanent to these fields as situated practices. It was hilarious and serious, funny and destructive performance, dealing with questions of life and death as it was encapsulated in Marx reading: "making the ossified conditions dance by singing them their own melody".

Media activist and co-founder of the XL Terrestrials Pod p Podinsky performed "TRANSMIGRATION OF THE TELEPRESENT", an interactive cinema installation, that deals with the change of course of telematics, human communications and social relationships.

UK-based political scientist Richard Barbrook presented another intellectual punchline of an exhibition already rich in highlights. In his lecture he argued that the vision of an imaginary network-society community can be a powerful and mass-inciting weapon in the arsenal of the cold warriors from east and west, still echoing today. Drawing on his recent publication "Imaginary

Futures. From Thinking Machines to the Global Village", Barbrook analyzed the history of futures from the 1964 World's Fair onward in a visually excellently supported tour de force.

His politically apt and historically well informed argument presents a strong antidote to the euphoric manifestos of the net's postmodern leftist theorists of the likes of Antonio Negri, without falling for the techno-pessimistic traps of an oversimplifying critique of ideology. Indeed, to quote Barbrook, "those who forget the future are condemned to repeat it".

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For more info please check:

Alexander Nikolic
www.eroticunion.org

Open Space
www.openspace-zkp.org

LABfactory
www.labfactory.at