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# **ARTIST'S PROJECT : Over the Resnik Horizon**

ByMute Editor

Lutham Blissett on gender, networks and the PGA conference in Serbia

"Strange En counter 2004"

"It is often better to write your account of a conference before you go, then the facts don't get in the way of the truth", Lutham Blissett

## **Strange En counter 2004**

If you just wanted a cheap holiday in the New Bel(sen)grade, then it would have been a mistake to go to the 3rd Peoples' Global Action Conference in Europe held in Resnik, an industrial suburb of the Serbian capital. You have probably heard the horror stories of people arriving at their holiday destination only to find the builders haven't finished work yet. We found out that we were the builders. We arrived several days early - to avoid disappointment - and soon found more than enough to keep our idle hands from finding trouble. We decided to concentrate on installing showers in the school so that the queues would not be too long when the conference finally got underway. Nevertheless despite our best efforts, we still had to get down there at 5:00 a.m. to have a shower if we didn't want to hang around.

We knew it would be a rough ride. Azin, a Yugoslav women's group dropped out of the organising process early on, and the debate about men-only groups had got quite heated. Perhaps this was why people had been avoiding a debate about gender – it could only lead to big bust ups. But I suppose that's what you get from being involved in a network – there's always the third you like, the third you feel luke warm about and then there's the third you'd like to detest but were too polite to dis. Don't worry, you don't have to speak the same language to know who sees you in which category, just watch the way the sparks fly. Needless to say the heated debate in Serbo-Croat was only roughly translated, mostly by shrugged shoulders, nervous laughs and smouldering stares. We aligned ourselves with those who had the sort of gestures we liked.

## **STIRRING THE CAULDRON OF DESIRE**

The geezer from Sans-Titre had warned us - if anyone from the opposite sex talks to you about gender it's probably because they want to get off with you. Apparently this is called 'Horizontal Networking', and lots of people were getting excited about the forthcoming London Eurocentric Social Forum, where the 'Horizontals' hoped to meet lots of flesh-blood. They were very worried about the 'Virtuicals' who disapproved of all this and were more concerned with recreating nineteenth century social democracy in the twenty first century as if the twentieth century had never happened.

As vegans we had to be very careful as we did not want be eating any meat. So perhaps we missed out on some of the tastier dishes being served. However this did not stop us getting involved in the process of cooking.

In practice it is usually better to have sex with the landscape, so we resolved to spend the gender day wandering around the vicinity looking for psychogeographical hotspots. A nearby ruined monastery was clearly a very powerful erogenous zone. The Tower of Avala reminded us of Glastonbury Tor. It had been well fucked by the NATO bombers.

For those who like the dead, there is an excellent cemetery or 'dead-only space' where we spent several hours exhuming our passions.

We were well shagged out by the time we returned. We discovered that those comrades who had stayed secluded in the conference had not even started discussing whether or not there should be men-only groups. Everyone was too scared to say anything in case they were accused of trying to seduce someone else.

Still, we felt glad to be back home.

### **Europe as Male: Belgrade as Genitals**

*In western societies sexist advertising and scenes of rape on television are open threats of patriarchal society against women and express patriarchy's claims of authority over them. Gender Binarism, Sexual violence, the military and war, Crossover Conference, Bremen 2002*

Part of our remit in visiting the nether regions of Europe was to uncover one of the mysteries which has puzzled the world since the days of Herodotus. Is the myth of Europa and her rape by Zeus merely a patriarchal smokescreen to hide the essential masculinity of Europe, which could be better termed Zeusburbia.

An ancient map by Opicinus de Canistris has lead us to believe that Europe is a man whose Ball-Cans hang into the mediterranean represented as the Sea of Sin. In the inscription a compliant Africa whispers *venite commiscemini nobiscum*: Come fuck with us. The accuracy of the map could only be confirmed by an exploratory mission within the soft folds of the Yugoslav countryside. So on the second day we headed off into the hills and valleys to see what we could find.

However the landscape refused to submit to our bipolar ideology. By the monastery we entered a tunnel thrust into the hill. Was this a naturally produced cleavage providing proof of Europe's femininity? Or were we entering a man-made construction, transgendering the masculine nature of Europe? Either way, it was a military installation and we were only just able to scramble out when a person in army fatigues started shouting at us.

Bipolar thinking is a part of patriarchal oppression and is very important for war. Friend-enemy, man-woman, civilisation-barbarism, Serb-Croat, healthy-ill, white-black form the pre-requisites for societally legitimised murder.

For us this can only mean that we should come to a way of thinking and acting that breaks the repeated war polarisations instead of letting us be pressed into bipolar structures. The male/female concept guarantees oppression, yet it is so much part of European thinking.

It is not cultivated transitions from a to b, from red to blue that we have to organise, but a kind of resistance that seeks to destroy the principle of gender binarism as a central foundation of patriarchal domination. We fumbled for our copy of Asger Jorn's *Naturens Orden: De divisione Naturae - Silkeborginterpretation contra København-interpretation*. This text developed an artistic science or a science of magic: "Only when confronted by two unambiguous explanations, which were both satisfactory yet mutually excluded each other was it understood that one absolute unambiguity for the whole of scientific description was an impossibility. Thereby, however, the way was open to gather up these ignored observations and investigate whether they too could form an independent unambiguous description."

Jorn's approach had followed on from Neils Bohr's attempt to reconcile the conflict between wave theory and particle theory in atomic physics. Bohr had proposed 'complimentarity' which allowed each view to co-exist as non-absolute explanations. But Jorn wanted to go one step further using the

triolethical principles of the Roumanian philosopher Stéphane Lupasco. Red and blue discover green as the compliment to their combination.

“If the opposition between symptom [the direct experience of reality] and signal [willed experience created by consciousness] can reveal the opposition between natural and artificial, then it is only by the manufacture of false signs or symbols that any antagonistic relationship can be established between what we call lie and what we call truth.” Jorn then says that this “establishment of subjectively acting causal relationships is magic, or art”.

Our heads had begun to spin. This theory was getting too much. We had to head back to the conference where the discussion about men-only groups was drawing to a close and our comrades from SUS were organising a three-sided football match. Surely the bump and grind of contact sport would take us to the next stage of our alchemical quest.

### **Peoples Global Action: Network Or Federation**

From the Organisational Principles:

*“The organisational philosophy of the PGA is based on decentralisation and autonomy. Hence, central structures are minimal. Following the same idea, each region’s participating organisations and movements will decide how to organize locally. Nevertheless, there needs to be a point of contact and coordination for each of these regions, decided at regional level and known to all the participating organisations and movements of the network.”*

These “regions”, comprise of such “spaces” as “Asia”, “Europe”, “Latin America”, “North America”, “Pacific”.

To regard these areas composed of billions of people as being in someway “local” is perhaps to stretch language unsustainably. Some of these regions are geographical (North America), others cultural/linguistic (Latin America), some even ideological (Europe). Some overlap (Pacific, Asia and Latin America), while great swathes of the globe are not touched (Africa, the Caribbean).

Despite claiming to be a Network, PGA turns out to be a federation of these regions with power centralised in the regional bodies. Thus an attempt to get information from PGA Asia on the embedding of Bi-Polar Gender Essentialist positions in the structure of their Dhaka Conference (20-25 May 2004) was met with contempt. Questions linking the gender debate there with similar proposals for the Belgrade conference had been left unanswered for over three weeks. They still remain unanswered. Despite claiming as the third objective of the conference to be to: “Establish a strong solidarity among Asian people.” The response seemed oblivious of the existence of an Asian Diaspora.

These issues got posted to both the PGA Europe and PGA Asia lists, yet there was a marked reluctance of anyone in the PGA process to try and discuss these issues. One European activist did however take the trouble to recite the PGA dogma that “No-one speaks in the name of the PGA” when clearly political positions were being presented in how the conference was structured.

As Bi-Polar Gender Essentialist politics are being pushed by both PGA in Europe and PGA Asia, it seems more than relevant to ask what is going on. When the response hides behind some sort of “regional autonomy” this is much more a defense of centralised power at the regional level than a defense of autonomously organised politics.

The fetishisation of regional autonomy as opposed to the autonomy of all constituent elements is undermining the claim of the PGA to be a Network. The creation of unrecognised centres of power erects a facade behind which different groups with different agendas can quietly foster the extension of

their power. This runs counter to a sense of openness and the decentralisation and autonomy proclaimed in the PGA Hallmarks.

Of course, it is easier to uncover a problem than to come up with a solution.

Next morning as dawn's rosey light tickled the minarets of the Resnik mosque, languid bodies emerged from their sleeping bags like butterflies welcoming a new day in the history of the human race. Soon we were swarming around the central podium ready to here Lutham Blissett give his presentation on Networks and their subversion by hierarchical organisations, both vertical and horizontal.

Although it was still early in the morning, the sound system was cranked up high, repetitive beats massaged the sub-conscious of the assembled masses who were thus rendered into a suitable state of receptiveness, all critical faculties lulled into torpor.

Lutham Blissett began:

It is foolish to regard networks as something distinct from the Horizontal and Vertical organisations who operate within them. Networks never exist on their own, they need the energy and the focussed activities of more specific organisations to create the dynamism which gives them life.

Centralised and decentralised organisations are often set up to carry out specific functions, e.g. to organise a particular action or activity. However they can degenerate into a gang if they become an ideological apparatus used to control the network.

This has been illustrated by the attempt of Anarchists to control the London Social Centres Network.

### **East-West Bi-polarism in Europe**

The term Eastern Europe is often used in the Western countries to refer to all European countries previously under communist regimes, the so-called Eastern Bloc.

The concept of Eastern Europe was greatly strengthened by the domination of the region by the Soviet Union after the Second World War and the takeover of the nations of the region by communist governments. The idea of an "Iron Curtain" separating Eastern and Western Europe was an extremely common view throughout the Cold War.

This strict dualism caused problems, however, as it failed to account for the complexities of the region. For instance, Yugoslavia and Albania refused to be controlled by Moscow, but this division was often ignored by many in the west. Such a view is considered pejorative by the population of all such countries, especially since the fall of the Berlin wall and Communism in Europe overall. They do not see themselves as Eastern Europeans, and most of them prefer to include themselves in other groups, associating themselves with Central Europe, with Scandinavia (in Northern Europe) or with Southern Europe. Note that countries that were never under Communist influence, such as Finland in the north and Greece in the south, are never considered part of Eastern Europe, while conversely several countries much further to the west but which were under Communist influence, are.

### **Bipolarity and . . .**

“Pushing people into the categories “male” and “female” is the starting point for every-day role assignment. This means sexist life and work conditions which have to be violently enforced. Bi-polar thinking is a part of patriarchal oppression and important for war.”

“For us this can only mean that we should come to a way of thinking and acting that breaks the repeated war polarisations instead of letting us be pressed into bi-polar structures.”

Go to [www.agp.org](http://www.agp.org) for more information about the PGA

Bipolarism: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern\\_Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Europe)  
Checkout

For more on the Crossover Conference, 17 - 20th January 2002 Bremen:  
<http://summercamp.squat.net/reader.english.pdf>