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NEW AVANT-GARDES IN EASTERN EUROPE AND RUSSIA, 1987-1999

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

New Avant-Gardes in Eastern Europe and Russia, 1987-1999

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This dissertation examines the resurgence of avant-garde art in the work of three performance artists from different post-communist countries under the Soviet sphere of influence: Russia, Latvia and Poland. I examine the work of Latvian artist Miervaldis Polis, Russian artist Sergei Bugaev (Afrika) and Katarzyna Kozyra from Poland as a means of evaluating the changing circumstances in which new art was produced in the late-Soviet and Post-Soviet era. Through a case-study analysis of artistic performances by three artists in these contiguous but contrasting countries of the former communist region of Europe, I demonstrate how the divergent experiences of late and post-socialism were uniquely presented in the visual arts and also uniquely received by audiences. Because performance is ephemeral and foregrounds artist-audience interaction, by focusing on performance art in these countries, I am able to specifically orient my study around the exchange between artist and viewer. The artists represent neither their nation nor their generation, but their performances address both the shared and specific conditions of cultural practice the wake of socio-political change.

Dedication

For Mom and Dad

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Introduction

This thesis is an in-depth, comparative examination of three performance artists from different former communist countries in the Soviet Bloc. It is the first to examine the work of Miervaldis Polis (b.1948) from Riga, Latvia, Sergei Bugaev (Afrika) (Sergei Anatolevich Bugaev, b. 1966) from St. Petersburg, Russia, and Katarzyna Kozyra (b. 1968) from Warsaw, Poland as a means of critically evaluating the changing circumstances in which new art was produced in the late Soviet and Post-Soviet era. My purpose has been to document the resurgence of radical, or avant-garde,¹ practices and

¹ For the purposes of this dissertation I am using the term *avant-garde* to refer to art that is novel or experimental, and pushes the limits of what is expected. See for example Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968); Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986); Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," reprinted in Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*, 3-21 (Boston, MA: Beacon Press; 1961); Linda Nochlin, "The Invention of the Avant-Garde: France, 1830-1880," in Linda Nochlin, *The Politics of Vision*, 1-18 (Oxford, England: Icon Editions, 1989); Rosalind Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, 151-170 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985); Hal Foster, "Who's Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde?" in *The Return of the Real: the Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, 1-32 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). My use of the term in this dissertation invokes both Poggioli's characterization of the avant-garde as remaining slightly outside of society in order to critique it and keep culture moving forward. Poggioli conceives of the avant-garde as reacting against the dominant culture, because, "as a minority culture, the avant-garde cannot get by without combating and denying the majority culture it opposes" (Poggioli, 108). For him, the artist has become alienated from society owing to the advent of mass culture. In his words, "It is not the society against which the avant-garde means to react, but against the civilization it creates and represents. The specific historical reality it opposes is just this mass culture seen as a pseudo culture. Faithful to qualitative values, the artist facing the quantitative values of modern civilization feels himself left out and rebellious" (Poggioli, 108). Finally, he states that the artist must be aggressive in its fight against the mainstream, in order to change it and keep it moving forward. According to him the artist must "agitate *against* something or someone. The something may be the academy, tradition; the something may be a master whose teaching and example, whose prestige and authority, are considered wrong or harmful. More often than not, the someone is that collective individual called the public" (Poggioli, 25-6). I also draw on Peter Bürger's theory of the avant-garde art as an attempt to reintegrate art into everyday life, eliminating the distinctions between mass culture and high art. For Bürger, the autonomy of art came about because "Aestheticism had made the distance from the praxis of life the content of works," (Bürger, 49) meaning that the subject matter of art for art's sake was simply the fact of its separateness from everyday life. When the avant-garde appeared on the scene, it attempted to rectify the disjuncture – and for Bürger this was its main task. He explains that "the praxis of life to which Aestheticism refers and which it negates is the means-ends rationality of the bourgeois everyday. Now, it is not the aim of the avant-gardistes to integrate art into *this* praxis. On the contrary, they assent to aestheticists' rejection of the world and its means-ends rationality. What distinguishes them from the latter is the attempt to organize a new life praxis from a basis in art" (Bürger, 49). In other words, only would art be eliminated as a separate institution, but

strategies used by artists to engage audiences in Russia, Latvia and Poland from the late-communist to the early independence period (1987-1999).² Although I cite a number of theories of the avant-garde as background for the commonly accepted term “avant-garde” while examining radical artists from Eastern Europe and Russia, what my thesis no doubt demonstrates is the inadequacies of such theories developed in the capitalist West, with regard to Western European and American art, for accurately describing the situation of artists working in and creating art in the communist “East,” namely Eastern Europe and Russia. Through a case-study analysis of artistic performances by three artists in these contiguous but contrasting countries of the former communist region of Europe, I demonstrate how the divergent experiences of late- and post-socialism were uniquely presented in the visual arts and also distinctively received by audiences. The artists represent neither their nation nor their generation, but all of their performances address both the shared and specific conditions of cultural practice in the wake of socio-political change.

The performances examined in this study – Miervaldis Polis’ *The Bronze Man* (1987), Afrika’s *Crimania* (1993), and Kozyra’s *The Women’s Bathhouse* (1997) and *The Men’s Bathhouse* (1999) – are important because they each address major issues relevant to both a local as well as international audiences. The audience response to the work is both indicative of the significance of these issues to local viewers, and is also revelatory with regard to the method of engagement employed by the artist. My dissertation reconstructs these three avant-garde artists’ strategies in the late and early post-Soviet

by integrating art and the everyday, artists would forge a new type of transparent lifestyle where the transition between art and life would be seamless.

² This period coincides with the introduction of Gorbachev’s Perestroika (economic restructuring) in 1987, and the accession of Poland into NATO in 1999.

period, and considers how those strategies corresponded to audience concerns, expectations, as well as expected documented response. The performances present distinct avant-garde concerns that were dealt with by artists in specific historical moments at the end of the Soviet era.

Because performance is ephemeral and foregrounds artist-audience interaction, by focusing on performance art in these countries, I am able to specifically orient my study around the exchange between artist and viewer. The principles and tenets of performance art also stand in stark contrast to those of Socialist Realist art, which was the state-enforced official style of art-making during the communist period. The transition from totalitarian rule to free-market democracy necessitated the active involvement of the general population in order to succeed, in the same manner that a performance calls for the active engagement of its viewers and participants. In this regard performance art was well-suited to authenticate and support these socio-political shifts. My study highlights the significance of the interaction between artist and viewer for both the viewer himself and the greater society at large, in the post-communist and post-Soviet context.

The Artists

I have selected these particular three artists as the focus of my study for several key reasons. First, Polis, Afrika and Kozyra are all well-renowned artists in their own countries, and are also known as international artists in their own right. Kozyra and Afrika, for example, are quite well known in the United States. This ensured both the availability of and access to materials on these artists both at home and in the field. Furthermore, the performances of each of these artists, along with their *œuvres*, are notable in their manipulation and handling of issues highly relevant to this time of

transition, for example Polis' questioning of appearances in the face of the crumbling of the Soviet myth of Latvia's voluntary joining of the Soviet Union, Afrika's probing of the Russian language and Soviet symbols in order to get to the root of the matter of Soviet versus Russian identity, and Kozyra's examination of gender and sexual identity against the backdrop of a post-communist hyper-Catholic Poland. Each of these artists, in his or her own way, has made a unique contribution to the socio-cultural landscape of his or her own country, as well as being a part of an international history of performance art that has hitherto remained missing from studies in the West. My inclusion of their work in this study not only highlights their significance, but also provides documentation and testimony to it.

In 1987, Miervaldis Polis, a Latvian artist, donned a bronze suit, painted his face and hands bronze, and paraded through the streets of Riga as a living, breathing statue (Fig. 0.1). The idea was originally that of a German TV and film director, who had been looking for an artist to do the performance simply with his face painted bronze. When Polis agreed to do it, he informed the director that he would walk around completely covered in bronze paint. Although such buskers can commonly be seen on the streets of many Western European cities nowadays, the act was radical for Soviet Latvia. Nevertheless, owing to the political situation at that time (in the wake of Glasnost and Perestroika³), and Latvia's position on the periphery of the Soviet Union, the scene did not attract much negative attention; although Polis was followed by the KGB, he was not

³ Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1985-1991), introduced the policy of Glasnost (openness or transparency) in 1985, aimed at stimulating a stagnating economy by combating corruption and abuse of privileges by those in power. It also aimed to gradually increase the freedom of the press, and therefore everyday freedom of speech in general. Perestroika (economic restructuring) began in 1987, which involved the gradual introduction of a semi-free market economy.

arrested. Instead, his performance piqued the curiosity of his audience – the random passersby on the streets of Riga who then followed him that day. Polis' *Bronze Man* performance brought art out of the gallery and into the streets; he made public space in Riga a site for the consideration of issues that were not normally raised so openly. This walking statue's verisimilitude brought to the fore the issue of truth versus appearances in a society that had long been plagued by the contradiction between the two, but lacked the capacity to initiate public discussion on the matter.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, St. Petersburg artist Sergei Bugaev (Afrika) began to concern himself with the loss of identity that every Soviet citizen suddenly faced, and undertook the task of creating a new and different sense of individual integration within a changing society. For Afrika, language was the key element that both contributed to this feeling of identity loss, and could also aid in creating a new one. In an attempt to explore these issues, in 1993 he spent three weeks in a psychiatric hospital in Crimea (Fig. 0.2), and later exhibited the fruits of his performance, a series of rebuses and installations which he uses to engage with and manipulate signs and symbols, in an exhibition at the Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna in 1995, entitled *Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka* (Fig. 0.3). Although the performance focused on problems specific to his fellow countrymen, neither it nor the exhibition was directed toward them. Instead it was a personal journey, but one that he hoped might contribute to the process of healing a nation that was struggling to redefine itself. With the performance, his audience was a select group of patients in the psychiatric hospital, and for the exhibition, the audience was mostly Westerners, one already sympathetic to the pursuits of a performance artist and artist-shaman.

The art of Polish artist Katarzyna Kozyra has sparked controversy ever since her MFA project, *Pyramid of Animals*, opened to scandal in Warsaw in 1993. The work consisted of four taxidermied animals exhibited as a sculpture (Fig. 0.4). Her subsequent performances also invoked harsh criticism, for example *The Woman's Bathhouse* (1997), where she entered a bathhouse in Budapest and filmed women bathing (Fig. 0.5). In *The Men's Bathhouse* (1999) she did the same, except that this time she disguised herself as a man, in order to gain access to the space, and was filmed by a hidden camera as she walked among the bathers (Fig. 0.6). This work represented Poland at the 1999 Venice Biennale, and for that it invoked relentless criticism from the Polish public. Kozyra's art touches on themes that are not unusual to contemporary art: life and death, gender and identity construction. Still, it continues to shock Polish audiences whose tastes remain conservative well after the end of the communist regime. This conservatism can be linked to both the deliberate distancing of artists from critical art during the communist period, as well as the lingering influence of the Catholic Church on the majority of society.

Each of the artists examined in this study experienced the decline of Soviet influence and communist ideology differently during their training and professional lives and each addressed the specific changes they had witnessed in Latvia, Russia and Poland. Polis was educated as an artist during the Soviet occupation of Latvia, in the 1970s. His official training was in monumental painting, in the style of Socialist Realism.⁴ Afrika moved to Leningrad from Novorossisk to become an artist. His social circle there included bohemians and non-conformist artists, musicians, and film-makers. Although he had no official training as an art-maker, he was educated by the top people in the humanities, such as John Cage (1912-1992) and Felix Guattari (1930-1992), whom he

⁴ The specificities of the government-imposed style of Socialist Realism will be discussed in Chapter 1.

knew personally. Like Polis, Kozyra had official training as an artist, at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts (*Akademia Sztuk Pięknych*, or ASP), but unlike him she studied under a professor who was known for his encouragement of experiment and use of alternative media and genres in art – Grzegorz Kowalski (b. 1942). Furthermore, Kozyra studied at the Academy from 1988-1993, while major political and social changes were taking place in Poland.

All three of these artists have enjoyed considerable success both at home and abroad, although their careers have taken divergent paths. Polis' paintings from the 1970s speak of an artist who longed to go abroad, but owing to travel restrictions in the Soviet Union was unable to do so until after Latvia regained independence in 1991. While he was an active performance artist in the 1980s, he has since 'retired' from the public life and now works only on commission, functioning as Latvia's 'court painter'⁵ for the *nouveau riche* as well as political figures.⁶ (Fig. 0.7) Both Afrika and Kozyra have traveled and exhibited abroad extensively, and Kozyra now divides her time between Berlin, Germany, Trento, Italy and Warsaw. Both have represented their respective countries at the Venice Biennale, coincidentally both in 1999.

Performance art and the return of the Avant-Garde

Performance art came to be popular in the West in the 1960s and 70s, having grown out of the Happenings of the 1950s, as well as Action Painting and Installation

⁵ Polis is often referred to in the popular press as Latvia's "court painter," for example in Niks Volmārs' article "Miervaldis Polis, the Most Expensive Court Portrait-Painter." ("Dārgākais galma portretists Miervaldis Polis") *Privātā Dzīve* (October 28, 2003): 23-26.)

⁶ Polis was commissioned to paint the official portrait of Latvia's previous two presidents, Guntis Ulmanis (b. 1939; President of Latvia 1993-99) and Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga (b. 1937, President of Latvia 1999-2007). Both of the portraits were revealed at the end of the respective Presidents' terms, and are on display in the President's Chancellery in Riga.

art.⁷ In the former communist countries of Eastern Europe and Russia, the genre was not included in the program of Socialist Realism, which was the only officially acceptable style of art production. Performance art as we know it in the West, therefore, developed as an underground or unofficial phenomenon in the East, and did not become as widespread until the 1980s, when Perestroika and Glasnost opened up new opportunities for artists in the form of free- or less-restricted-speech and expression, and in the 1990s, after the communist governments had for the most part been replaced by democratic ones. Thus the manifestations and implications of performance art have much different valences for artists and audiences in the former-communist countries of the East than in the West. Furthermore, owing to diverse art historical traditions, as well as varied experiences of communism, these performances had a different resonance for artists and audiences with respect to each country examined here, both internally within the Soviet sphere and in Poland as well.

In Russia and Eastern Europe, because performance art was prohibited during the communist period,⁸ working in the genre took on a political dimension by default, whether or not the artists used it to engage with specific political ideas. On the other hand, however, when they did use it as a forum to touch on current socio-political topics, it provided an alternative space for this discussion, removed from both the field of official art as well as politics. Artists developed alternative types of art-making to address subjects that could not be dealt with in everyday social settings. By the 1980s, the

⁷ See Rose Lee Goldberg, *Performance: From Futurism to the Present* (New York: Abrams, 1988).

⁸ The only officially acceptable type of art was Socialist Realism, as outlined by Soviet theoretician and politician Andrei Zhdanov and writer Maxim Gorky, among others, although by the 1980s considerable flexibility was allowed in some artistic centers, including those discussed in this dissertation. After the threat of the Stalinist terror had ended with his death and Khrushchev's Thaw, not only did artists fear repercussions for experimentation less than they did before the 1950s, but there were also fewer punishments for artists engaged in unconventional activities, such as performance. For a more thorough discussion of this phenomenon see Chapters One and Two of this manuscript.

relaxation of policies regarding free speech and expression enabled artists to present these performances in public spaces with considerably less risk of persecution than ever before in the history of the Soviet Union. Audiences were often eager to enter these spaces to at least observe or consider these topics, if not actively participate, because the threat seemed to be lessened. Politics could be discussed under the guise of art and art under the guise of performance.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, democratic governments replaced totalitarian ones in Russia, Latvia and Poland. With this change came the freedom of expression, on an official level, that artists had been waiting for. While artists in the region used this opportunity to openly make use of contemporary genres and techniques, such as performance and conceptual art, audiences did not necessarily share their concerns. Everyday citizens had to adjust to new living conditions, new economies, currencies, and the problems that came with such vast social changes. Consequently the strategies used by artists and the audience response to their art work not only reflect the changing socio-political environment, but were also a result of those changes themselves.

Throughout the late- and post-Soviet periods, the methods of engagement used by artists in different countries varied, as did audience response, based on individual historical legacy.⁹ The three performances discussed in this dissertation were targeted at

⁹ Russia and Poland are both Slavic countries, sharing a language group and having a similar cultural background. But Poland is a Catholic country, whereas Russia is Orthodox. Latvia is a Baltic country and its language is in the Baltic language group, and it is predominantly a Protestant country. The country was under Prussian and Russian rule for most of its existence, ever since the 13th century, consequently to this day it retains that Prussian influence. Furthermore Latvia, as does neighboring Estonia, considers itself more of a Nordic than Eastern European country. It was only in 1921, in the aftermath of World War I, that the country achieved independence as a sovereign Latvian nation. The Polish-Lithuanian Empire was one of the largest in Europe, and a major rival of the Russian Empire until it was partitioned among Russia, Prussia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the late 18th century. But just like Latvia, Poland became an independent again nation in 1921. Finally, in 1939 Latvia was made a Republic of the USSR, becoming

quite distinct audiences, with varying aims at being radical or subversive, yet all were equally ground-breaking and innovative, for they were received in ways that could not be anticipated under the changing circumstances of the late- and post-soviet era. This feature united them as avant-garde works of art. My study reveals that the viability of avant-garde practice in these countries was a consequence of regime change, and also shows how avant-garde practice was shaped by its individual realization in each country.

Methods

Owing to the aforementioned socio-historical circumstances, the study of Eastern European and Russian art from the second half of the twentieth century poses a different set of problems and issues to the art historian than does the study of Western art, and consequently requires different methods to address these issues. The use of comparison by country or region has been used to great success as a way of beginning the process of filling gaps in the literature – just one of the many legacies of communism that scholars are currently attempting to sort out. Susan Reid and David Crowley have used this method to address themes as various as “space” and “style” in Eastern Europe during the communist period.¹⁰ Their books are a compilation of scholarly essays by authors in various fields, all addressing a common theme as it occurred in different countries in the Eastern Bloc. The essays in *Style and Socialism*, for example, investigate the diversity of the significance of material culture for different people under different regimes in Eastern Europe. This volume makes no claims to being a comprehensive study of this issue or the

subject to the rule of Moscow. After World War II Poland also came under their influence, but was never a Republic. The country retained a modicum of independence as a puppet state of the USSR.

¹⁰ See *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, ed. Susan E. Reid and David Crowley (Oxford, England: Berg, 2000); and *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, ed. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (Oxford, England: Berg, 2002).

region, but rather contributes to the ongoing investigation thereof. My dissertation has the same aspiration.

When this field of study opened up in the early 1990s, there was such an overwhelming body of material that needed to be dealt with critically, that appropriate methods also had to be found in order to pose relevant questions. It is not surprising, then, that most of the publications in those early years have taken this very form of case study and regional or country-to-country comparison. The use of comparison has enabled me, as it has other scholars like me, to critically engage with a particular topic without having to resort to monographic studies or simple descriptive art historical chronologies. The comparison provides a broader scope, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of performance art in the region than could a monograph.

An important volume that has served as a model is Laura Hoptman's and Tomáš Pospiszyl's *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*,¹¹ which also provides a series of case studies of significant art works, projects and exhibitions, in addition to primary documents that are available for the first time in English. These documents are crucial to art history scholars of the Soviet period owing to the fact that, in the absence of an official written history on many of these artists and works, these writings are in fact the only available record of their existence. As Russian artist Ilya Kabakov (b. 1933) has written in the foreword to the anthology, "deprived of a genuine viewer, critic or historian, the author unwittingly became them himself, trying to guess what his works meant" "objectively."¹² Hoptman and Pospiszyl

¹¹ *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, ed. Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospiszyl (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2002).

¹² Ilya Kabakov, Foreword to *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, ed. Laura Hoptman, and Tomáš Pospiszyl, 8 (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2002).

support Kabakov's claim in their introduction to the book, by reminding us that art criticism as we know it in the West hardly existed in these communist countries, therefore "much of the most interesting art writing comes not from art historians or critics but from artists themselves."¹³

One of my aims, then, is to fill a significant and lamentable gap in the history of performance and avant-garde art by discussing these three artists in the wider context of international performance art and the avant-garde. While a number of artists like Polis, Afrika and Kozyra all abandoned traditional art making during the Soviet period for alternative forms of expression such as performance and conceptual art, little of this history has been discussed in the West in detail. This is due not only to the language barrier¹⁴ that inhibits Western scholars from studying art further afield from even Russia, but also to the lack of critical literature available in the countries in question. Decades of state control over art, art history and art 'criticism' (insofar as it existed in the former people's republics) has rendered problematical the very notion of an art discourse in the post-communist period, a situation which is unparalleled in the West. Furthermore, what literature is available from the communist period focuses on official media, such as sculpture and paintings. Art historians and critics are only now beginning to reassess the histories of conceptual and performance art in their countries.¹⁵

The type of materials and their availability varies from country to country, and also depends on the time period in question. For example, while there is little material

¹³ Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospiszyl, Introduction to *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, 9.

¹⁴ At least in the case of Latvian and Polish, which are considerably lesser-studied languages than Russian.

¹⁵ For example, the exhibition *Post-War Latvian Art* at the Latvian National Museum of Art's exhibition hall Arsenal, which ran from September 2005-July 2006 was the first comprehensive exhibition, since independence, of art created in Latvia after World War II.

available on Polis's performances from the Soviet period, there are a few articles published about his painting from the 1980s, and a significant number of interviews with the artist, as a public persona, that were published in the 1990s, yet virtually no critical material available on his painting or performances in general. This will be another contribution of my dissertation: the chapter on Polis will include the first critical discussion of his performance art in general. Afrika's work was also poorly documented, although a catalogue for his *Crimania* performance and exhibition does exist. To date, there has not been any significant critical analysis of the pieces in the *Crimania* exhibition, nor of the performance. Kozyra's work, however, being both the most recent and from Poland, a country that was to some degree less affected by Soviet policies toward the arts, is the best documented. There has even been some critical discussion of her work published recently by young Polish art historians, such as Izabela Kowalczyk and Hanna Wróblewska, which will be addressed in my chapter devoted to her. My chapters on Afrika and Kozyra will contribute to a critical analysis of their work that is only just beginning to form in writings by local art historians.

The lack of materials such as press reviews and reporting that Western scholars have become used to working with has made it necessary to find other methods to reconstruct the wider circumstances in which "dialogues" among viewers take place. Namely, I account for the public dimension of the work by collecting and interpreting verbal accounts by those present during the performances, and interviews with the artists. Consequently another contribution of my dissertation is pure text – in documenting these oral histories I give them substance by providing written documentation where there previously was none.

Chapter Outline

In the first three chapters I will provide the historical context for the artists in question, addressing both common and dissimilar issues relevant to artists working in St. Petersburg, Riga and Warsaw at the time that these artists were there. I will also discuss the history and development of performance art in each of these cities, and how that history created a legacy for the performances that Polis, Afrika and Kozyra were later to create. The subsequent chapters will be case-studies of the artists and their performances: Polis' *Bronze Man*, Afrika's *Crimania*, and Kozyra's *The Men's Bathhouse*. These performances will also be discussed in the context of the artists' other art work and performances, thus having a monographic function as well. Through a comparison of these performances I hope to reveal both the commonalities between them owing to the similar political backdrop behind them, as well as their originality in approach and strategy, as evinced in the varying effects they had on their respective audiences, and manifested in the different audience responses.

The strategies of engagement varied from artist to artist owing both to the socio-political environment in each country at the time, as well as the artists' personal experiences with avant-garde and performance art, and the outcome they were seeking in each performance. In taking his performance into the streets, Polis was specifically addressing the "man on the street" with the *Bronze Man*. His aim was simply to observe how random onlookers reacted to him, and indeed he attracted a considerable amount of attention. Despite this performance taking place during the Soviet period, however, Polis suffered no negative repercussions for his performance. The artist managed to create a

space for public dialogue during a time when all spaces, public or private, were still subject to governmental control.

Afrika, on the other hand, was addressing a much different audience. *Crimania* was more of a personal than public performance; since none of the patients in the mental hospital were aware of his (or their) participation in it. Still, like with Polis' performance, the reactions of those surrounding him were spontaneous and genuine. Although one of Afrika's aims was to find a way to heal his fellow countrymen, neither his performance nor the subsequent exhibition addressed them directly. Instead, the exhibition, having taken place in Vienna, was oriented toward a Western audience. For Afrika, the significance of its location was most important, as it took place in the city that has a direct link with modern psychology, having been the home to Sigmund Freud for most of his life(1856-1939). His aims were far-reaching, as he hoped that his explorations into alternative methods of communication and the development of signs and symbols would contribute to the creation of a new language. At the time when the artist was working on *Crimania* (1993-1995), Russia was undergoing a period of intense re-adjustment, massive inflation, and dramatic instability as a result of citizens' uncertainties about not only their future, but also their present condition. Afrika's project hoped to someday alleviate that suffering, through an exploration of the roots of illness that had had this ill effect on Russian society – the fall of the Soviet Union.

Kozyra's *Bathhouse* performances attracted by far the most media attention of the three performances, despite the fact that they were created nearly a decade after Poland had become a free and independent nation. Unlike Afrika and Polis, the artist attempted to address an audience that would be the most receptive – the art-viewing public in

Poland and abroad. Nevertheless, she drew much attention from the general public in Poland, which was not as receptive to the avant-garde techniques employed in her work. Like Polis, her art created a public space for discussion, but the efficacy of that discussion remains debated. While art historians and critics were keen to enter into a discussion about the issues she addressed, most of the general population simply criticized and dismissed it, in some cases sight unseen, based on both its form and content. Their conservative attitudes toward the art work reflect the looming influence of the Catholic Church, with its traditional attitudes toward gender roles and femininity, on Polish society.

When looking at the diverse socio-political contexts of these three art works it becomes clear, then, that the difference between the reaction of Polis' audience and Kozyra's, for example, can be traced to different local traditions and circumstances as well as to the different character of public interaction between artists and their viewers, and different audience expectations regarding the work of art. Furthermore the issues that each of the artists raised in their works were specific and relevant to their current conditions, a result not only of historical legacy, but also of contemporary experiences of imposed Soviet socialism. In discussing these three artists both in the context of one another and in their own socio-historical context I highlight the similarities and differences between artists' strategies and audience reception alike, in order to reveal their uniqueness in the dynamic late- and Post-Soviet period.

Chapter One: Historical Background

In this chapter I present an outline of the historical background of the socio-political situation guiding artistic production in order to show the commonalities between the three artists who are the subject of this study: Miervaldis Polis, Sergei Bugaev (Afrika), and Katarzyna Kozyra. I trace the history of the interrelationship between art and politics in the three countries of Russia, Latvia and Poland, and, more specifically, in the three cities of artistic production that are central to this study: St. Petersburg, Riga and Warsaw. Although this reciprocal relationship was not unique to the former Soviet and communist countries of Eastern-Europe and Russia, the policies of the Soviet government were such that artists had a markedly different experience of modernism than their counterparts in Western Europe and America. Furthermore, I identify the points at which traditions and historical circumstances in the three countries diverge, so as to dispel the homogenizing myth of post-communist and post-Soviet studies. While all three of these countries underwent a similar imposition of communist rule on their governments, the structure on which these politics were imposed, as well as the effect it produced, was unique to each individual nation.

Visual Arts in the Soviet Union

In the 1930s, the fate of the direction of the arts in all countries that were then or soon to be under the control of the Soviet government based in Moscow was decided. In 1932, Joseph Stalin¹⁶ introduced the doctrine of Socialist Realism at the Seventeenth

¹⁶ Joseph Stalin (1878-1953), born Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's Central Committee, 1922-1953.

Party Conference of the Soviet Communist Party.¹⁷ Two years later, the concept was codified by Andrei Zhdanov¹⁸ in his speech to the Soviet Writer's Congress; this was the first official proclamation of the strategy of Socialist Realism in the arts. As a result of these decrees, over the course of the following two decades, the pluralism of the avant-garde was suppressed, as artists were expected to conform strictly to these guidelines. The path of artistic production in the Soviet Union, however, had been charted as early as a decade before, starting with the formation of the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russian (AKhRR)¹⁹ in 1922,²⁰ and the Russian Association of Proletarian Artists (RAPKh)²¹ in 1924. AKhRR was formed by realist painters, among them artists who had been members of the Wanderers,²² and were instrumental in developing the style of Socialist Realism, which in many ways had its roots in the realistic and figurative paintings of the Wanderers. In 1928 Stalin and the Politburo visited an exhibition of RAPKh artists and following their approval of the works on exhibit, this style began to be promoted as the appropriate style to express the goals and aims of the new communist state.²³ In this way, the foundations for the support of figurative painting as the basis of

¹⁷ See Margaret A. Rose, *Marx's Lost Aesthetic: Karl Marx and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 144-163; and also Paul Sjeklocha and Igor Mead, *Unofficial Art in the Soviet Union* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 37-59.

¹⁸ Andrei Aleksandrovich Zhdanov (1896-1948), Soviet politician.

¹⁹ *Assotsiatsia Khudozhnikov Revoliutsionnoi Rossii* (1922-1928)

²⁰ In 1928 the organization changed its name to the Association of Artists of the Revolution (AKhR), or *Assotsiatsia Khudozhnikov Revolutsii* (1928-1933). It was this group that formed the foundation for the USSR Union of Artists (*Soyuz khudozhnikov*) that was formed in 1933.

²¹ *Rossiyskaia Assotsiatsia Proletarskikh Khudozhnikov*

²² *Peredvizhniki* (1870-1923); a group of artists in Russia who promoted a type of Social Realism in art, depicting real people in everyday situations. They advocated realistic and naturalistic painting, and were opposed to the avant-garde styles of abstract and non-objective art that started to develop in Russia in the nineteen-teens. Most of the members simply joined AKhRR when it formed in 1923.

²³ See Brandon Taylor, "On AKhRR," in *Art of the Soviets: Painting Sculpture and Architecture in a One-Party State, 1917-1992*, ed. Matthew Cullerne Bown and Brandon Taylor, 51-72 (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1993).

the style of Socialist Realism had already been laid before the implementation of the actual doctrine.

In his speech, Zhdanov criticized “bourgeois” art, and set it in opposition to the new Soviet art that artists of the Soviet Union were to produce. While Stalin called on writers to become “engineers of the human soul,”²⁴ it was Zhdanov who outlined how to do it, in terms of style and subject matter. As for the latter, only the individuals typically considered heroes of the Soviet states were considered acceptable, such as workers, farmers, and political figures:

In our country the main heroes of works of literature are active builders of a new life – working men and women, men and women collective farmers, Party members, business managers, engineers, members of the Young Communist League, Pioneers. Such are the chief types and the chief heroes of our Soviet literature.²⁵

This meant that all other subjects, genre scenes, expressionistic portraits, as well as any images of bourgeois activity, were prohibited. Zhdanov went on to describe the way in which these subjects were to be depicted, using a realistic style, as opposed to abstraction or expressionism. He stated that the artist must know life “so as to be able to depict it truthfully in works of art, not to depict it in a dead, scholastic way, not simply as

²⁴ Joseph Stalin, *Speech at home of Maxim Gorky*, 26 October 1932. For a discussion of the impact of these policies on the arts, see Gleb Prokhorov, *Art Under Socialist Realism: Soviet Painting 1930-1950* (Australia: Craftsman House, 1995); Margaret A. Rose, “Avant-Garde Versus ‘Agroculture’: Problems of the Avant-Garde – from Lenin to Stalin and After,” in Margaret A. Rose, *Marx’s Lost Aesthetic: Karl Marx & the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Art Under Stalin* (Oxford, England: Phaidon Press, 1991); Christine Lindey, *Art in the Cold War* (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1990); Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). For a nuanced discussion of the policy of Socialist Realism, see Evgeny Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) and *Socialist Realism without Shores*, ed. Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1997).

²⁵ Andrei Zhdanov, *Speech to the Soviet Writers’ Congress (1934)*. Reprinted in *The Debate on Socialist Realism and Modernism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977), 20.

‘objective reality,’ but to depict reality in its revolutionary development.”²⁶ Therefore the interpretation of a subject should be realistic, but also dynamic, so as to inspire viewers. Finally, in addition to adhering to a realistic style in the portrayal of figures considered integral to the Soviet state, the artist also had to play a role as educator, and his art work needed to carry an ideological message: “the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic portrayal should be combined with the ideological remolding and education of the toiling people in the spirit of socialism. This method in *belles lettres* and literary criticism is what we call the method of socialist realism.”²⁷ So the work of art needed to have ideological content as well. Indeed, the three main concepts of Socialist Realism were *ideinost*’ (ideological commitment), *partiinnost*’ (party mindedness), and *narodnost*’, (national/popular spirit).²⁸ It was this proclamation by Zhdanov that set the standard for all artists in the Soviet Union, excluding all subject matter that was not socialist in content and ideological in message, and all styles other than realism, from the realm of possibilities available to artists.

That artists adhered to these guidelines was guaranteed by the restructuring of the system of governance in the arts, which also took place in 1932. According to Paul Sjeklocha and Igor Mead, it was the decree on the “Reorganization of Literary and Art Institutions” that consolidated party control over the arts, by specifying “that all independent or unofficial art and literary groups be liquidated and replaced by unions...carrying out Party policy.”²⁹ The party policy that they enforced, then, was

²⁶ Ibid, 21.

²⁷ Ibid, 21.

²⁸ See Leonard Heller, “A World of Prettiness,” in *Socialist Realism without Shores*, ed. Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko, 51-75 (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1997).

²⁹ Paul Sjeklocha and Igor Mead, *Unofficial Art in the Soviet Union* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 42.

Socialist Realism. In her survey of the visual arts during the Soviet period, “Soviet Art and the State,” Elena Kornetchuk described the All-Russian Cooperative of Artists (*Vsekokhudozhnik*) as having had “the greatest daily impact on Soviet professional artists, since it [was] their major official employer.”³⁰ This meant that artists were paid for services rendered; commissions were provided by the state, for works of art to be completed in accordance with the guidelines of Socialist Realism. Furthermore artists received studios and art supplies, which would not have been available to them otherwise. Anyone who was not a member of the Artist’s Union and wanted supplies had no other alternative than to steal them, or illegally share with friends who were members of the Union.

While both the policy of Socialist Realism and the Artists’ Union remained the dominant forces in the visual arts until the collapse of the Soviet Union, the death of Stalin and the beginning of the Khrushchev³¹ era ushered in a period of liberalization in all aspects of life, including the arts.³² A major re-evaluation of the policies regarding the arts under Stalin took place, and new possibilities were opened up. Most significantly, the Party line toward art widened, and now “artists would no longer be judged by their conformity or nonconformity to government dictates,”³³ which meant that Socialist

³⁰ Elena Kornetchuk, “Soviet Art and the State,” in *The Quest for Self-Expression: Painting in Moscow and Leningrad 1965-1990*, ed. Norma Roberts, 17 (Columbus, OH: Columbus Museum of Art, 1990).

³¹ Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev (1894-1971), First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 1953-1964.

³² See Sjeklocha and Mead, “Liberalization of the Arts in the Khrushchev Era,” in *Unofficial Art in the Soviet Union*, 60-84; *Drugoe iskusstvo: Moskva, 1956-1976. Khronike khudozhestvennoi zhizni*, vol. 1, ed. L. P. Talochkin and I. G. Apatova, 99-120 (Moscow: Moskovskaia kollektsiia, 1991); Andrei Erofeev, “Russkoe iskusstvo 1960-1970-kh godov v vospominaniakh khudozhnikov i svidetel’stvakh ochevidtsev (seriya interv’iu – pervaya chast’),” *Vopros iskusstvoznaniia* 2 (1996); Andrei Erofeev, “Russkoe iskusstvo 1960-1970-kh godov v vospominaniakh khudozhnikov i svidetel’stvakh ochevidtsev (seriya interv’iu – vtoraya chast’),” *Vopros iskusstvoznaniia* 1 (1997); William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2003), 588-92.

³³ Kornetchuk, “Soviet Art and the State,” in *The Quest for Self-Expression: Painting in Moscow and Leningrad 1965-1990*, 20.

Realism was no longer the only choice for the artist. A pluralism of various styles and subject matter was tolerated, and furthermore international art exhibitions took place within the Soviet Union, where artists had the opportunity to view works of art of all modern and contemporary art styles, which had been hitherto banned in the Soviet Union. The 1957 Sixth International Youth Festival in Moscow was one such opportunity where the public could view art work ranging in style from abstract to realistic. What ensued was the first open and public debate regarding that which had long been prohibited as an artistic style under Soviet rule: abstraction. According to Kornetchuk, in conjunction with the exhibits at the festival, “the Soviet press printed many of the arguments given by proponents of modern art. The public could openly view artworks – abstract or realist – by artists who defended one or another viewpoint.”³⁴ For the first time since the institution of the policies of Socialist Realism art was not only allowed to be, but actually *was* ambiguous, and the public was allowed to confront and explore that ambiguity, through open discussion and consideration.

The increased liberalism in the arts, brought on by Khrushchev’s Thaw³⁵ in the late-1950s was interrupted by an event that occurred in 1962. Following an exhibition of abstract paintings that took place in Eli Beliutin’s³⁶ studio in November of that year, the artist and his students were invited by officials from the Ministry of Culture to show their work at the *Thirty Years of Moscow Art* exhibition that was already in progress at the

³⁴ Ibid, 22.

³⁵ The period of relative liberalism ushered in by the death of Stalin in 1953, and the subsequent denouncement of his Cult of Personality by his successor Nikita Khrushchev in his Secret Speech to the Twentieth Communist Party Congress in 1956, is referred to as *The Thaw*. The name is a reference to Ilya Ehrenburg’s 1954 novel, *The Thaw*, which condemned the political terror and repression of the Stalin era.

³⁶ Eli Beliutin (b. 1924) was a controversial figure in the art world during the Soviet period because of his stubborn refusal to abandon abstract art, and also for continuing to teach it in his studio. He was banned from the Institute of Graphic Arts in 1959 for painting abstract works of art.

Manège Gallery near Red Square in Moscow.³⁷ On December 1st, Nikita Khrushchev himself visited the exhibition and was given a tour, during which he made several infamous comments regarding the art works, and even confronted several of the artists in the exhibition. After visiting the halls where the abstract paintings were hung, he asked the artists present: “are you pederasts or normal people?” and said that the art hung there was “simply anti-Soviet. It’s amoral,” and further suggested that it could only be useful “to cover urinals with.”³⁸ He also commented to a painter, Zhutovsky, that the government wasn’t “going to spend a kopek on this dog shit.”³⁹

In a recent study on Khrushchev’s visit to this exhibition, Susan E. Reid demonstrates, through a close reading of the comments in the guest book for the Manège exhibition, that although Khrushchev claimed to be speaking for the people, public opinion was, in fact, divided with regard to the art on view. Furthermore, Reid shows how the very existence of such contradictory opinions is another form of evidence of the Thaw and Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization policies. In her words, “the comments book for a major and controversial art exhibition allowed [the public] not only to voice views on art but, through this medium, to express attitudes toward Stalinism and de-Stalinization and, at the same time, to find ways to articulate something like class distinctions in a supposedly classless society.”⁴⁰ In this way both the exhibit itself, as well as the audience reaction to the works in it, as evinced in their public comments, are indicators of a temporary Thaw in official policy toward the arts.

³⁷ See Kornetchuk, “Soviet Art and the State,” in *The Quest for Self-Expression: Painting in Moscow and Leningrad 1965-1990*, 25.

³⁸ Nikita Khrushchev, commenting at the *Thirty Years of Moscow Art* exhibition, Moscow, 1962, in Priscilla Johnson, *Khrushchev and the Arts, the Politics of Soviet Culture, 1962-1964* (Cambridge, MA; The MIT Press, 1965), 103.

³⁹ Khrushchev, in Johnson, 103.

⁴⁰ Susan E. Reid, “In the Name of the People: The Manège Affair Revisited,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6/4 (Fall 2005): 715-16.

Despite the fact that a portion of the audience that went to see the exhibition at Manège expressed support and admiration for even the abstract works on view, Khrushchev's opinion nevertheless remained the overriding opinion of the State. Consequently, for a while following the event there was a move back toward conservatism in the arts.⁴¹ For example, at the Central Committee meeting of the Party that followed the event, the Party spokesman expressed to the artists in attendance that the Party "was reassessing its policy of liberalization in the arts and expected the creative community to adhere to the principle of Socialist Realism."⁴² This crackdown did not last for long, and from that time artists experienced an ebb and flow of tolerance and strictness, liberalism and conservatism in the arts, which began in the Khrushchev Thaw.

In the 1960s, although artists felt that the tight grip that the authorities had had on them during the Stalin period had loosened, and began to exercise their new freedoms, there was still not complete and total autonomy. On the contrary, the threat was there, it was simply not as great as it had been in previous years. As Andrei Erofeev has written in his article about non-official art in the 1960s, "the artists were constantly under threat of having extreme measures taken against them, an impression which was thoroughly cultivated, but, with a few exceptions (Viacheslav Sysoev's arrest and the suspicion that Evgenii Rukhin fell victim to a trumped-up murder), never materialized."⁴³ Erofeev describes the Thaw as the liberalization of one's private, as opposed to public, space: "within the framework of one's domestic private existence, an individual was freed from

⁴¹ For further documentation of these events see *Drugoe iskusstvo: Moskva, 1956-76. K khronike khudozhestvennoi zhizni*, vol. 1, edited by L. P. Talochkin and I. G. Apatova, 99-120 (Moscow: Moskovskaia kolleksiia, 1991).

⁴² Sjeklocha and Mead, "Liberalization of the Arts in the Khrushchev Era," in *Unofficial Art in the Soviet Union*, 99.

⁴³ Andrei Erofeev, "Nonofficial Art: Soviet Artists of the 1960s," in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, ed. Laura Hoptman and Thomas Pospiszyl, 40 (New York: Museum of Modern Art: 2002).

playing the hierarchical and ideological role assigned to him or her in the public ‘performance’ staged by the authorities.”⁴⁴ As a result, artists began to congregate in private spaces, apartments and studios, and share the work that they could not exhibit publicly with each other. One group of artists formed in the early 1960s at Oskar Rabin’s (b. 1928) and Lydia Masterkova’s (b. 1927) home in Lianozovo, a suburb of Moscow. Rabin described the meetings as social, an opportunity to speak about art that was just beginning to be tolerated by the authorities:

When we first began to meet, it was to socialize, to share commonly held ideas. Our cultural and artistic interests coincided. At first we never thought of calling ourselves a group. Artists would come to visit us in Lianozovo or we would visit them. It was really a group that wanted to socialize, to talk, and to show each other our work.⁴⁵

This circle of artists, who met regularly at Rabin’s country house during the 1960s and 70s, is historically known as the Lianozovo Group. Eventually, the private spaces of homes and apartments, however, were not enough for artists, and they began to yearn for an exhibition space where they could share their work and openly discuss it with the public.

In September 1974, several artists, led by the aforementioned Oskar Rabin and Aleksandr Glezer, set out to organize an outdoor exhibition of their unofficial art in a vacant lot. Although the artists sent a letter to the Moscow City Council informing them of their intention to hold the exhibition, they received no answer as to whether it would be allowed to take place. Instead, the deputy head of the Department of Culture at the

⁴⁴ Ibid, 40.

⁴⁵ Oskar Rabin, interview by Renee Baigell and Matthew Baigell, in Renee Baigell and Matthew Baigell, *Soviet Dissident Artists: Interviews after Perestroika* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 94.

City Council simply told Rabin that “he cannot forbid the exhibition but would not recommend that it take place either.”⁴⁶ The artists did go ahead with the exhibition, which was destroyed by the militia. Works of art, as well as artists, were bulldozed, paintings were thrown about, and there were fights between the artists and their audience, as well as with the authorities who had come to put an end to the exhibition. The US Embassy in Moscow sent a telegram to the US Secretary of State, detailing the events, and the story made the front page of *The New York Times* the following day. The result of all of the negative publicity for the militia’s disruption of the exhibition, both through diplomatic channels and the press, was that the artists involved in this September 15 “Bulldozer exhibition,” as it came to be called, were allowed to have another exhibition of their work in Izmailovsky Park, in Moscow, two weeks later. The authorities also tolerated more such exhibitions of unofficial works of art in future. Here we can witness the impact that art was able to have in the political sphere. In the case-study of the event in *Primary Documents*, it was said that

...international reaction concerning the Bulldozer events forced Soviet authorities to change their treatment of unofficial artists. Following the Izmailovsky Park show, further exhibitions were mounted with state approval, and selected artists were allowed to travel and exhibit abroad, but state aggression toward unofficial artists persisted in less-overt ways and did not end until Gorbachev’s *glasnost* reform period in the late 1980s.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ “A Case Study: Repression; Bulldozer Exhibition, Moscow, September 15, 1974, Izmailovksy Park Exhibition, Moscow, September 29, 1974,” in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, ed. Laura Hoptman and Thomas Pospiszyl, 66 (New York: Museum of Modern Art: 2002).

⁴⁷ Ibid, 71.

The steps taken by these nonconformist artists in the 1970s led to small gains that were felt throughout the Soviet Union, and eventually led to greater and broader achievements in terms of personal and artistic freedoms for all.

It was with the Khrushchev era that we can begin to talk about a history of nonconformist art in the Soviet Union. While there were artists who continued the avant-garde traditions and experiments begun in Russia in the early 20th century, such as Vladimir Sterligov⁴⁸ in St. Petersburg and Eli Beliutin in Moscow, for the most part, during the Stalin era, the fear of persecution was too great to risk any kind of openly nonconformist activity as an artist. Once this fear of terror was lifted in the late 1950s and 1960s, nonconformist and unofficial art started to become more visible in society, even challenging the authorities with exhibitions, as in the aforementioned examples. Igor Golomshtok, a Russian art historian, and Alexander Glezer, an art collector from Russia, have described unofficial art as having truly emerged in the 1950s, in opposition to the official culture that was that was supported by the state or propagated by art institutions:

Unofficial art as a social phenomenon in the Soviet Union was born in the middle of the Fifties, when with the death of Stalin the Iron Curtain, which had firmly separated the country from the rest of the world, was raised a little. It immediately became an opposition movement, opposed however not to the state structure but to its official culture, not the regime, but to the deceit which the regime disgorged along the channels of artistic information. The movement had two basic principles, one coming from within – and the other from without – Soviet official art.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Vladimir Sterligov (1904-1973) was a painter from St. Petersburg who had studied with Kazimir Malevich in his Institute for Artistic Culture in the 1920s. He continued to teach the lessons of Suprematism that he had learned from Malevich throughout the Soviet period.

⁴⁹ Igor Golomshtok and Alexander Glezer, *Soviet Art in Exile* (New York: Random House, 1977), 85.

As will be discussed in the following sections, artists working in an unofficial capacity aimed to develop art and experiment with styles and techniques outside of the relatively strict canon of Socialist Realism. It is out of this legacy of nonconformist art, where such tendencies as performance and conceptual art in the Soviet Union and the communist countries of Eastern Europe developed, that artists such as Miervaldis Polis, Sergei Bugaev (Afrika) and Katarzyna Kozyra emerged in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. In the following sections I will discuss the traditions of non-conformist art that developed in each of their respective cities: St. Petersburg, Riga, and Warsaw.

St. Petersburg/Leningrad

The city of St. Petersburg has a special significance not only in the history of Russia and the Soviet Union, but also in the history of Russian art history and art history in general. It was in St. Petersburg that the Russian Revolutions of 1917 took place. Because it had been built by Peter the Great⁵⁰ as a Western-oriented city to connect Russia with Europe, after the Revolutions the capital was moved to Moscow, as a rejection of the bourgeois ideals that it represented. St. Petersburg also witnessed the avant-garde experiments of Kazimir Malevich (1878-1935), Vladimir Tatlin (1885-1953), Natalia Goncharova (1881-1962) and others in the early 20th century and early years of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, it stood as a symbol of resistance and perseverance during the three year Siege that took place during World War II, from 1941-1944. It is not unusual, then, that many consider the developments in art and culture in St.

⁵⁰ Peter I the Great, or Pyotr Alexeyevich Romanov (1672-1725), Tsar of Russia 1682-1725.

Petersburg (or Leningrad, as it was called throughout the Soviet period) within a separate and distinctive trajectory from those in Moscow.⁵¹

Unofficial art, as both a phenomenon and social group of artists, began to develop and become more visible in St. Petersburg after Khrushchev's Thaw, as it did in Moscow. It was in the late 1950s, like in Moscow, that modern art from abroad began to be exhibited in St. Petersburg. As Selma Holo has mentioned in her exhibition catalogue to *Keepers of the Flame: The Unofficial Artists of Leningrad*:

There was no visible break in the ideological hard-line until the nineteen fifties and sixties. Just about that time, one could see the cautious emergence of an unofficial art in Leningrad. This phenomenon has been attributed to the brief thaw in the Cold War, between 1958 and 1962. Exhibitions of Malevich, the Impressionists and contemporary artists Jim Dine, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg were mounted in Leningrad during these years, and a crack in the armor of the state machinery vis-a-vis the visual arts (never again to be completely sealed) appeared. The lie of Socialist Realism as the only true art was first exposed during these years.⁵²

Soon artists began to take advantage of this leeway, seeing modern art tolerated in exhibitions, they began to experiment with new styles of their own. Groups began to form, and eventually the underground artists of Leningrad were a group to be reckoned with by the authorities. Holo has described them as having become "an identifiable

⁵¹ See for example *Keepers of the Flame: The Unofficial Artists of Leningrad*, ed. Selma Holo (California: Fisher Gallery, 1990); *Self-Identification: Positions in St. Petersburg Art from 1970 until Today*, ed. Kathrin Becker (Kiel, Germany: Stadtgalerie im Sophienhof, 1995); Alla Rosenfeld, "'A Great City with a Provincial Fate': Nonconformist Art in Leningrad from the Khrushchev Thaw to Gorbachev's Perestroika," in *From Gulag to Glasnost: Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union*, ed. Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge, 101-134 (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995); *The Quest for Self-Expression: Painting in Moscow and Leningrad 1965-1990*, ed. Norma Roberts (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1990); Charlotte Douglas, *Gennady Zubkov and the Leningrad "Sterligov" Group: Evidence of Things Not Seen* (Contemporary Russian Art Center of America, 1983).

⁵² Selma Holo, "Keepers of the Flame: The Unofficial Artists of Leningrad," in *Keepers of the Flame: The Unofficial Artists of Leningrad*, ed. Selma Holo, 9 (California: Fisher Gallery, 1990).

class”⁵³ by the nineteen-seventies. And, like in Moscow, their art was political by default. Given that all art was the official domain of the State, any desecration of that phenomenon, or suspicion of its desecration, was considered to be an act against the State. In the words of Holo: “unofficial artists became politicized. Creating and then exhibiting their work was a profoundly political act, angering the officials who saw their activities as inimical to society.”⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the threat of repercussions seemed to have been diminished, in comparison to the Stalin era, and artists began to push for the freedom to express what they, not the state, chose.

In Leningrad there was a direct link with the avant-garde experimentation of the Revolutionary period through Vladimir Sterligov⁵⁵ (1904-1973), who had been a student of Kazimir Malevich and continued to teach his methods at the Herzen Pedagogical Institute in Leningrad during the Soviet period. He taught his students geometric abstraction and his own system of painting that was based on Malevich’s. Gennadii Zubkov studied under him in the 1960s, and recalls that Sterligov had received threats from the KGB to stop teaching these techniques. Eventually he and his students met in his home for lessons outside of the official institution. As Zubkov recalls, “I joined a group of five or six artists who met at his home once a week during the winter months. He would pose a problem to us, we would spend the week working out the problem and meeting the following week for a critique. This was my real art education and was the time when I became really serious about art.”⁵⁶ In this way the artists of Leningrad had a direct connection with the avant-garde experimentation that preceded the Stalinist years

⁵³ Ibid, 10.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 11.

⁵⁵ See Isaak Kushner, *Prostranstvo Sterligova* (St. Petersburg, Russia: Plekhanova, 2001).

⁵⁶ Genadii Zubkov, interview by Renee Baigell and Matthew Baigell, *Soviet Dissident Artists: Interviews After Perestroika* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 236.

of repression and the restructuring of the arts and artistic policy under the rubric of Socialist Realism.

In addition to seeing previously forbidden art in exhibitions, artists also began to have easier access to both Western art and examples of the Russian avant-garde art that had been suppressed during the Stalin era in printed form. Critiques of contemporary art began to appear, with illustrations of abstraction or Constructivism as examples of what *not* to do. Still, the artist was able to see these previously banned works of art and make decisions for himself. As Tatyana Shekter, in her “Brief History of Leningrad Art” writes, in the 1960s

...suddenly Russian art of the early twentieth century, the twenties, was “permitted,” art which for a long time had seemed too bold and so had been carefully protected behind the securely locked doors of museum storerooms. The first publications on twentieth century art began to appear. True, they were sharply critical of the art. But young artists and art historians were not bothered by this...It was not the author’s opinion that interested them in these books. That was thrown out in the first few pages. They were looking for any information they could get about contemporary art, a chance to see photographs of the works of the masters whom they knew only by hearsay.⁵⁷

Even though the purpose of publishing these ‘forbidden’ images was to denounce them, artists viewed them and drew their own conclusions. In this way, they were making use of the new freedoms that The Thaw had provided, though not in the way that the Soviet government had intended.

In order to produce work that was not officially accepted, artists had to be clever and resourceful. Alternatives had to be found to do the things that most artists in the West

⁵⁷ Tatyana Shekter, “The Unofficial Art of Leningrad, A Brief History,” in *Keepers of the Flame: The Unofficial Artists of Leningrad*, ed. Selma Holo, 16 (University of Southern California: Fisher Gallery, 1990).

take for granted, for example, obtain materials and studio space, and stage exhibitions. Constantin Kuzminsky, in his article about artists in Leningrad from the 1950s-70s, tells us that “professional studios, with overhead lights and conveniences, are allotted almost exclusively to members of LOSKh⁵⁸ and MOSKh.⁵⁹ For ‘unhonored members’ and ordinary candidates and also members of GORKOM,⁶⁰ ‘uninhabitable premises’ were allocated – cellars, lofts and attics, often without toilets.”⁶¹ And further, regarding materials, he tells us that “French brushes, Dutch watercolors and German paper are, as a rule, sold only to specialized clients, or to members of the Union... ‘Procuring’ essential materials for non-Union artists meant having to steal them from Soviet institutions.”⁶² Consequently, it often occurred that artists would maintain Union membership and paint official works of art to receive a studio and supplies, producing their unofficial works of art for themselves and friends, in their free time.

It was also difficult to exhibit unofficial art publicly in the immediate years after The Thaw, especially following the events of the Manège exhibition in Moscow in 1962. But artists gradually found ways to exhibit their work. As Selma Holo has stated, “they were always calculating how to be a step ahead of the authorities, to discover a way of exhibiting that had not been explicitly forbidden.”⁶³ In the 1970s, artists began to feel free enough to organize more public exhibitions and even organize themselves into loose associations. In December of 1974, just months after the Bulldozer exhibition took place

⁵⁸ Leningrad Department of the Union of Artists

⁵⁹ Moscow Department of the Union of Artists

⁶⁰ Associated Committee of Graphic Artists

⁶¹ Constantin Kuzminsky, “Inventors? Alcoholics? Dissidents? The Early Years: The Fifties Through the Seventies,” in *Keepers of the Flame: The Unofficial Artists of Leningrad*, ed. Selma Holo, 22 (University of Southern California: Fisher Gallery, 1990).

⁶² *Ibid*, 22.

⁶³ Selma Holo, “Keepers of the Flame: The Unofficial Artists of Leningrad,” in Selma Holo, ed., *Keepers of the Flame: The Unofficial Artists of Leningrad*, 9.

in Moscow, an exhibition of unofficial artists, with work that was not Socialist Realist in style, took place in Leningrad, in the Gaz Palace of Culture.⁶⁴ A similar exhibition took place in the city in September 1975, at the Nevsky Palace of Culture. Also in 1975, TEV was established, the organization of the Fellowship of Experimental Exhibitions (*Tovarishchestvo Eksperimental'nogo Vistavkov*), followed by the formation of TEII, or the Fellowship of Experimental Art (*Tovarishchestvo Eksperimental'nogo Izobrazitelnogo Iskusstva*), in 1981. During the 1980s this fellowship organized exhibitions and worked together under the principle of 'strength in numbers', in order to gain greater freedoms for artists doing unofficial work. According to the artist Sergei Kovalsky (b. 1948), artists "came to the Fellowship on the grounds of social defenselessness."⁶⁵ Until 1986 it was still forbidden to mention TEII in conjunction with the exhibitions that they organized, exhibitions that were still censored.⁶⁶ The exhibitions that took place, such as Gaz and Nevsky, as well as organizations such as TEV and TEII developed parallel with the social and political progress that was taking place on an official level. Likewise, they also contributed to those developments that were taking place in politics at the same time, by making headway in the realm of freedom of speech and expression.

Afrika arrived in Leningrad in the wake of these developments in the 1970s.

Originally from Novorossiysk, on the Black Sea, he moved to Leningrad in 1982, when he was just fourteen, to join his friend and fellow artist Georgii Gurianov. He quickly fell

⁶⁴ The exhibition lasted for four days. Fifty-three artists took part, and 206 works were exhibited. See Constantin Kuzminsky, "Two Decades of Unofficial Art in Leningrad," in *New Art from the Soviet Union*, ed. Norton Dodge and Alison Hilton, 28 (Washington, DC: Acropolis Books, Ltd., 1997).

⁶⁵ Sergei Kovalsky, "Post-Petersburg Art of Leningrad: The Eighties," in *Keepers of the Flame: The Unofficial Artists of Leningrad*, ed. Selma Holo, 28 (University of Southern California: Fisher Gallery, 1990).

⁶⁶ Ibid, 28.

in with a group of artists that had formed around Timur Novikov (1958-2002) (whose friendship with him will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Two), and became involved in artistic pursuits, although he neither attended art school nor was a member of the Artist's Union. Afrika got around the rules in a variety of ways. First, he paid a friend of Timur's to marry him so that he could be officially registered as a resident of Leningrad.⁶⁷ Next, he found a job, in order to be officially registered for one, but instead of going to work he paid someone to sign in for him every day since his arrival in Leningrad.⁶⁸ Although he did paint, his work was mostly in performance, therefore he had no real need for materials or a studio. What materials he did require he borrowed from friends or acquired through Timur, and the latter's large and empty communal apartment served as a studio for a number of the underground artists in his circle.⁶⁹ When the authorities had finally found out about Afrika's negligence on the job and his sham marriage, it was too late for there to be any repercussions. By then it was 1987 and he had already gotten the lead role in the major official film production *ASSA (ACCA)*,⁷⁰ and had his official papers to leave for Crimea, where it was being filmed, within a few days.⁷¹

Riga, Latvia

The policy of Socialist Realism cast a shadow over art production in all countries in the Soviet Union, as well as those under its influence. While the situation in Russia

⁶⁷ See Andrew Solomon, *The Irony Tower* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 136. Also confirmed by Afrika in a conversation with the author, September 16, 2007.

⁶⁸ See Andrew Solomon, *The Irony Tower* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 136.

⁶⁹ By 1981-82 all of the occupants of Timur Novikov's communal apartment had moved out, having been relocated to private apartments. Timur remained, and opened up the large space to many of his friends and fellow artists, and the place became somewhat of an open studio/artist hangout during the early 1980s. See Andrew Solomon, *The Irony Tower* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 132.

⁷⁰ The significance of this film and Afrika's role in it will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.

⁷¹ See Andrew Solomon, *The Irony Tower* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 136. The KGB actually interrogated Afrika, but when he produced the official papers regarding his role in the film and official tickets to Crimea, issued by the authorities, there was nothing that they could do, and they were forced to let him go.

remains consistent with that described above, in Latvia and Poland, however, the policies of Socialist Realism didn't come into effect as early as the 1930s, because at that time both were independent democratic nations. During World War II, in 1940 and then again in 1944 (until 1990) Latvia was occupied by the Soviet Union, and it was only after that point that artists came under the jurisdiction of the Artist's Union. Džemma Skulme,⁷² a central figure in the Latvian art world and President of the Latvian Artist's Union in the 1980s, remembers the situation as being different in Riga than in other areas of the Soviet Union. In an interview with Renée Baigell and Matthew Baigell, she stated that: "...we were free until 1940, so we had around twenty more years of freedom than Soviet artists. Therefore, we were able to maintain our own traditions because we had a memory of the past."⁷³ This "past" included the Latvian avant-garde artists of the early twentieth century, who worked in a variety of modernist styles, such as Expressionism and Cubism.⁷⁴ While the Soviet government had made efforts to suppress the modernist legacy in Russia, this task was more difficult in Latvia, which had been an independent country during the initial crackdown on the arts in the 1930s.

While the Soviet government attempted to maintain control over artists in Latvia by enforcing the policies of Socialist Realism, the effect was not the same as it had been in Russia. This was a result of both Latvia's temporal 'distance' from the Soviet Union – the fact that it did not become subsumed into the Soviet Empire until 1939 – as well as its physical distance as a Republic. When asked to compare the situation between nonconformist artists in Russia and those in Latvia, Skulme indicated that Latvia did not

⁷² Džemma Skulme (b. 1925), Latvian painter and Chair of the Latvian Artist's Union, 1982-1992.

⁷³ Džemma Skulme, interview by Renée Baigell and Matthew Baigell, *Soviet Dissident Artists: Interviews After Perestroika* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 66.

⁷⁴ For example, Jēkabs Kazaks, Uga Skulme, and Niklāvs Strunke, to name a few.

have the same division between official and unofficial artists as they are often referred to in Russia. There weren't the same restrictions regarding exhibitions, and there was always the possibility to find a way around the rules. She stated that

For us [in Latvia] it was somewhat different. We gradually assumed authority over ourselves, and we were successful at it...Our Latvian artists' union was subordinate to the USSR Union of Artists, but as the leader of the Latvian Union, I managed to hold our exhibitions anyway. So we really did not have any dissident artists because they could exhibit officially...If we were reprimanded in some way, if somebody showed up from Moscow, or a person from the USSR Union of Artists was in Riga and saw such works, there would be some problems. But we would say that our viewers were ready for this kind of work, that every person from the countryside would understand this art.⁷⁵

Owing both to the fact that Latvian artists didn't have the same restrictions to rebel against as their Russian counterparts, as well as the fact that even the Latvian avant-garde painting from the 1920s remained rather traditional, there was not a strong tendency toward the type of experimental and performance art that could be seen in Leningrad and Moscow at the same time.

Another reason for Skulme's notion that there was nothing that could be called 'dissident' art in Latvia during the Soviet period is the fact that Socialist Realism never really took hold as the official style. Aleksis Osmanis, in his essay "Ideology of Power and Transformations in Latvian painting," has described the takeover of Latvian art by the Party as only partly successful. Although artists had to adhere to the dictates passed down from the Latvian artists' union, their dedication to the promotion of the socialist way of life, mostly owing to the fact that they were an occupied country, was not very strong. Osmanis states that the government would

⁷⁵ Skulme, in R. Baigell and M. Baigell, *Soviet Dissident Artists: Interviews After Perestroika*, 67.

...have to live with the fact that Latvian painting would produce only vague, often ambiguous, even more naïve but almost always “provincial” variations on the official Moscow line. The natural processes in art were replaced by socialist realism as a form of colonial representation that had only to guarantee expressions of resignation and submission.⁷⁶

Because Socialist Realist art was something that artists simply resigned themselves to, it could not really take hold as a dominant form of art. For Osmanis, this means that “we almost cannot speak of real, ideally and artistically fully-fledged, socialist realist art in Latvia.”⁷⁷ It follows, then, that if socialist realism did not have a strong hold on artists, there was less for them to rebel against, and thus the concept of a dissident art, as such, did not really exist, at least not in the understanding that we have of it from models witnessed in Russia and under other communist regimes.

Because of the totalitarian form of government in the Soviet Union, in all of the socialist countries under the rule of Moscow there were varying degrees of official, semi-official and unofficial artists. While it has been debated whether there was any actual dissident or underground art in the Baltics,⁷⁸ as there unarguably was in Russia and other Republics, the purpose of this chapter is not to debate that fact. I simply aim to demonstrate that the situation for artists was relatively more liberal, and there was slightly more tolerance in Riga and Latvia as compared to Leningrad or Moscow. Artists in Latvia also felt the shockwaves of events happening in Moscow, for example, the 1962 Manège exhibit or the 1974 Bulldozer exhibition. Skulme recalls a crackdown after the

⁷⁶ Aleksis Osmanis, “Ideology of Power and Transformations in Latvian painting,” in *Painting: Witnesses of an Age*, unpaginated (Riga, Latvia: The Latvian Artist’s Union, n.d.).

⁷⁷ Aleksis Osmanis, “Ideology of Power and Transformations in Latvian painting,” in *Painting: Witnesses of an Age*, unpaginated.

⁷⁸ See Mark Allen Svede, “When Worlds Collide: Comparing Three Baltic Art Scenarios,” in *Art of the Baltics*, ed. Norton T. Dodge and Alla Rosenfeld, 17 (New Brunswick, NJ: Zimmerli Art Museum, 2001).

Manège incident: “things were good for a while. But then, in 1962, another wave of repression came... These repressive waves would start in the Soviet Union, particularly when there were economic problems, and we would feel the effects in Riga.”⁷⁹

Furthermore, artists were disciplined, and to a certain extent had to fear the KGB, but nothing like that which happened to Evgenii Rukhin in St. Petersburg.⁸⁰ Skulme recounted her experiences: “the KGB did take some illustrations out of my books on one occasion. And in 1968 my husband and I were summoned before the central committee in Riga.”⁸¹ For the most part, while artists operated under the assumption that the KGB was watching and could discipline them at any time, in practice the risk of death or deportation was not as strong as it had been during the Stalinist era, or even as it would have been in Russia. Artists in Latvia were not only physically situated between Russia, as the center of the Soviet Union, and the West, but also experienced a type of personal and expressive freedom that was mentally and emotionally located somewhere between the two.

Riga also witnessed its own ripples in the wave of the Soviet monolith in the form of controversial exhibitions bearing experimental art work. One of the first exhibitions that included alternative art forms such as performance, pop art, op art and installation art took place in 1972,⁸² in the Institute of Scientific Technical Information and Propaganda

⁷⁹ Skulme, in R. Baigell and M. Baigell, *Soviet Dissident Artists: Interviews After Perestroika*, 66.

⁸⁰ Rukhin (1943-1976) was killed during a fire in his studio. Because of the artist's outspoken nature and refusal to conform to state policy regarding art production, as well as owing to the mysterious circumstances surrounding his death, many believe that the fire in his studio was set up by the KGB. For a complete account of the circumstances surrounding Rukhin's death see John McPhee, *The Ransom of Russian Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994), 39-51.

⁸¹ Skulme, in R. Baigell and M. Baigell, *Soviet Dissident Artists: Interviews After Perestroika*, 71.

⁸² Jānis Borgs has gone so far as to call this the “first major official manifestation of Modernism” in Latvia. Jānis Borgs, “The Cock on St. Peter's Steeple Sings its Early Song. Free Art – A Soviet Product?,” in *Nature. Environment. Man. 1984.*, ed. Inese Baranovska, 30 (Riga: Artist's Union of Latvia, 2004).

(*Zinātniski tehniskās informācijas un propagandas institūts*)⁸³ on Cathedral Square (*Doma Laukums*). It was entitled *Celebration (Svētki)*, and took place within the 9th *Show of Works by Young Artists* exhibition. *Celebration* contained a number of unconventional art works such as abstract sculptures and mobiles, all of which was allowed because of the fact that it took place under the rubric of a “design exhibition”⁸⁴ as opposed to painting or sculpture.

Celebration paved the way for the event that is widely considered one of the most significant points in the development of contemporary Latvian art, the *Nature. Environment. Man.* exhibition (*Daba. Vide. Cilvēks.*), which occurred in 1984 and was forced to close after being open for just a few weeks. Thousands flooded the gallery space, which was in St. Peter’s Church (*Pēterbaznīca*), in the center of the Old Town. It was not only the location of the exhibition (a church) that was the reason for its ultimate demise, but also the fact that one of the installations was a modern interpretation of *The Last Supper*, which included plaster casts of local artists in place of the twelve apostles.⁸⁵ The church made a complaint to the city authorities, who were forced by that pressure to close the exhibition down. Despite the fact that it closed early, both this and the previous *Celebration* exhibit were steps in creating a space for alternative artistic creations to be shown in public spaces in Riga.

Polis, like Afrika, was at the beginning of his professional career in the 1980s, in the midst of all of the changes and liberalization in the arts. In stark contrast to Afrika,

⁸³ Now the Riga Stock Exchange

⁸⁴ After Khrushchev’s denouncement of “formalist” artists at the 1962 Manège exhibition, the Communist Party made a compromise with artists. Architecture, design and applied art were cut off from ideology and were allowed to develop abstract and non-objective styles. Consequently an abstract pattern in a textile was permissible, but would suddenly become subversive if painted on a canvas. See Inese Baranovska, “On the Sense of Time,” in *Nature. Environment. Man. 1984.*, 14.

⁸⁵ Both of these exhibitions will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Two.

however, Polis had undergone official training at the Latvian Academy of Art⁸⁶ and was a member of the Artist's Union of Latvia. He was as official as one could be, unlike Afrika, who couldn't have been more unofficial. Polis needed to be official in order to receive supplies and a studio, because his main interest was painting; the performances that he did were, in his opinion, something cursory, and not part of his job as an artist. When asked whether he received money for his *Bronze Man* performance in 1987, he replied: "I refused. He [the German director – AB] was ok with that. He had already promised me money, but I refused. I didn't do it for money; that's not my job. My work is to paint, it requires my time. I only ask for money for that."⁸⁷ Since Polis considered painting his job it only followed that he would have officially registered himself as a painter in the Artist's Union.

Polis, like Skulme, feels that there was a greater deal of freedom in Latvia than in other parts of the Soviet Union. He recalled the Brezhnev years, in the 1970s, as "a happy and free time. Everyone was telling anecdotes about Brezhnev in the streets."⁸⁸ Still, it wasn't until the late 1980s when, as a result of Perestroika, the borders between Soviet and non-Soviet countries had somewhat opened up, that a foreign television and film director was able to travel to Latvia and approach Polis with the possibility of creating *The Bronze Man* performance. Even then, however, Polis encountered limitations when he attempted to find the bronze paint to cover himself with, owing to a deficit of

⁸⁶ Polis studied at the Janis Rozentals Art High School (*Jaņa Rozentāla mākslas vidusskola*) from 1959-1966. He began his studies at the Latvian Academy of Art's Monumental Painting Department (*Latvijas Mākslas akadēmijas glezniecības nodaļa*) in 1969, after completing his mandatory two years' service in the army, and graduated from the Art Academy in 1975.

⁸⁷ "Es atteicos. Viņš jau bija ar mieru. Viņš jau piesolīja man naudu. Es atteicos. Par naudu nestrādā. Tas nav mans darbs. Mans darbs ir gleznot. Tas prasa man laiku. Par to es prasu naudu." Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

⁸⁸ "jautrs un brīvs laiks. Visi sātīja anekdotes par Brežņevu uz ielas." Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

materials in the Soviet Union. The artist recalls that several friends had to help him, and he finally ended up using a special kind of paint specially made from gelatin by Andris Grīnbergs (b. 1946), a fellow artist who sometimes did performances, and friend of Polis.⁸⁹

With regard to the performance itself, there was not much that the KGB could do to stop it. Although the artist recalls that the bus driver, who drove the public bus that Polis had taken to the city center, was later sent for by the KGB, Polis himself was not questioned. He said that “They summoned the bus driver to the Cheka [KGB – AB]. I heard about this later from the organizers [of the performance – AB]. They summoned him and that was it. They just asked the driver whether he thought I was imitating Lenin or not.”⁹⁰ Polis, like Skulme, doesn’t feel that he had any major limitations placed on him as an artist in the 1970s and 80s. Still, the artist did state that he felt viewers saw *The Bronze Man* performance as “some kind of expression of freedom.”⁹¹ While artists in Latvia may have enjoyed more relaxed regulations in Latvia than in Russia and other republics, limitations did, in fact remain, in terms of access not only to materials, but also opportunities with regard to exposure to other forms of art-making and lack of experience, in general, with conceptual and performance art when compared with the West.

Warsaw, Poland

⁸⁹ “Andris Grīnbergs...Man te mācīja tehnoloģiju gleznošanā. Un to es arī pielietoju. Šinī gadījumā želantīnu. ... Šite ģīmji un rokas želantīnā...Galertu.”

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

⁹⁰ “Autobusa šoferi aicināja uz “čeku.” Man pēc tam pastāstīja viens no tiem organizatoriem. Šoferi aicinājuši un viss. Jautāja šoferis galvenais, “bija Ļeņins vai nebija?” A bet šoferis tāds pats krieviņš.” Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

⁹¹ “AB: Kā konstatēja, ka cilvēki redz to? MP: Viņi sajuta kaut kādu brīvības izpausmi.” Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

In Poland, the political situation was quite different from than in Latvia or Russia, which were both republics of the USSR. First of all, the country had experienced a much shorter period of Stalinist rule, in comparison with Russia, as it had only become a Communist People's Republic in 1947. Secondly, the extent to which Soviet policy was enforced in Poland was also considerably less in comparison to both Latvia and Russia, owing to the fact that the country had retained more of its independence as a People's Republic that was not a Republic of the Soviet Union.

In Poland, Khrushchev's Thaw meant new leadership; in 1956, Stalinist leader Bolesław Bierut⁹² died and was replaced by the more moderate Władysław Gomułka.⁹³ While destalinization meant significant changes for Poland, as in Latvia, they were not experienced as dramatically as in Russia, which had undergone a full thirty years of the Stalinist terror. For artists this meant less than a decade of the imposition of Socialist Realism as the dominant style. Therefore in Poland it was much easier to return to the modernist and avant-garde traditions that had been developing during the 1920s and 30s. How Polish art developed after the Thaw was unique not only because of the specific socio-political climate in the 1950s, but also because of the artistic traditions that had come before.

In 1945, after World War II, the process of rebuilding the country began. Although the 1945 Yalta Conference had already decided Poland's fate, leaving it, along with its Eastern European neighbors, under the Soviet sphere of influence, it wasn't until the end of the 1940s that Stalinism began to make its way into the social and political arena. In the arts, 1949 was the year that Poland's cultural policies were changed in order

⁹² Bolesław Bierut (1892-1956), President of Poland 1947-1952, Prime Minister of Poland (after Presidency was abolished) 1952-1956, First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party, 1948-1956.

⁹³ Władysław Gomułka (1905-1982), First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party, 1956-1970.

to conform to those decreed by Moscow. Andrzej Paczowski details the steps taken toward reform in the visual arts, stating that the cultural revolution

...entered a decisive stage at the beginning of 1949, in virtually all fields at the same time. A succession of working congresses or working conferences, beginning with writers (Szczeciń, 20-23 January) and ending with filmmakers (Wisła, 19-22 November), cleared the ground by eliminating from decision-making bodies all those who wanted to retain creative autonomy, and provided a forum for pronouncements concerning the "new stage." The next step toward centralization of control over cultural life was the establishment of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions (21 February), The Central Publishing Commission (29 July) and the Central Commission for Theatrical Repertoire (13 December).⁹⁴

Until that time (1949) Polish modernism had developed in a similar manner as in the West. Artists such as Władysław Strzemiński (1893-1952), Katarzyna Kobro (1898-1951), Henryk Stażewski (1894-1988) and Stanisław Witkiewicz (Witkacy) (1885-1939), among others, worked through Cubist, Constructivist and Expressionist styles⁹⁵ in an attempt to discover a new, modern Polish style that would express the aims and ambitions of a newly formed nation.⁹⁶ After 1949, however, that development was *officially* halted, as the policy of Socialist Realism was implemented in all branches of the arts, and regulated by the aforementioned commissions set up specifically for that purpose.

The policy of Socialist Realism, however, was not in effect for long, and never took hold as the prevailing style, regardless of official decree. This is in part due to the

⁹⁴ Andrzej Paczowski, *The Spring Will be Ours; Poland and the Poles from Occupation to Freedom* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 258.

⁹⁵ For a brief overview of the development of Polish modernism after World War I, see Stephen Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe: From the Baltic to the Balkans, ca. 1890-1939* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 83-140.

⁹⁶ In the aftermath of World War I, in 1921, Poland became an independent nation once again. In the late 18th century, a series of partitions (1772, 1793, and 1795) divided Poland among three neighboring super-powers, the Russian Empire, the Prussian Empire, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. With the final partition, in 1795, Poland virtually disappeared from the map until it regained its independence and statehood in 1921.

fact that the policy was only in place for a mere five years, in comparison to other countries in the Soviet Union, such as Russia. Furthermore, the inherently rebellious nature of Poles made them resistant to much overt manipulation from above, especially with regard to artistic production. In fact, it became a source of pride to go against the authorities. As art historian and curator Anda Rottenberg has stated, in Poland, “illegal activity not only enjoyed social sanction but became one of the key patriotic virtues. It was the generally accepted norm, a keystone of Polish *savoir vivre* until the late 1980s.”⁹⁷ Rottenberg attributes this defiance to Poland’s “deep-seated tradition of civic freedom going back to the 16th century,”⁹⁸ as well as years of experience in dealing with foreign occupiers, during the partitions. It was this experience that, according to Rottenberg, “ingrained the habit of undertaking illegal activity in opposition to alien rule.”⁹⁹ These rebellious attitudes carried over into the visual arts, and when foreign doctrines, such as Socialist Realism, were put into place, they never completely took hold. For Rottenberg Socialist Realism was “a marginal phenomenon in Poland, lasting only from 1949 to 1954. The doctrine was not taken up by any mature or important artist, so, unlike in other countries, there was little to contest.”¹⁰⁰ Like in Latvia, there was neither a strict adherence to Socialist Realism nor a strong reaction of dissident art to counter it.

One of the methods of control that the authorities undertook with regard to artistic creation in Poland was the attempt to curtail the production of abstract art. Knowing that they could not abolish it altogether, they did their best to limit the amount of abstract art

⁹⁷ Anda Rottenberg, “Between Institution and Tradition: The Artist in Search of Freedom,” in *Beyond Belief: Contemporary Art from East Central Europe*, ed. Laura J. Hoptman, 27 (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995).

⁹⁸ Ibid, 27.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 27.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 27.

that was exhibited in state-run galleries, to not more than fifteen percent.¹⁰¹ Even this humble attempt at control in the arts was unsuccessful. According to art historian Piotr Piotrowski, “not only was it never put into practice, but modernist art became an identification mark of Poland.”¹⁰² In fact, a number of exhibitions took place during the 1950s that included abstract paintings; the most notable among them was the *Arsenal* (*Arsenal*) exhibit that took place in Warsaw in July 1955. Officially known as the *National Exhibition of Young Art* (*Ogólnopolska Wystawa Młodej Plastyki*), it is generally considered to be a marker of the beginning of destalinization in Poland, as it “reflected a general mood of artistic freedom and the rejection of socialist realism.”¹⁰³ The works on display were not representative of Socialist Realism, and reflected the independent spirit of Polish artists that was to remain throughout the communist period.

Piotrowski also regards a later exhibition, the *Exhibition of Pictures* (*Wystawa Obrazów*), held in Krakow in November 1955, as not only significant in terms of the Thaw, but also in terms of modernist expression.¹⁰⁴ “It is here in Krakow, in that first public manifestation of modernist art after socialist realism, that one should locate the threshold of the Thaw in the visual arts.”¹⁰⁵ One of the artists in the show, Tadeusz Kantor, began exhibiting Art-Informel canvases just one year later. As a result of these

¹⁰¹ See Piotr Piotrowski, “Art Versus History; History Versus Art,” in *Art from Poland, 1945-1996*, ed. Anda Rottenberg, 217 (Warsaw: Galerija Sztuki Współczesnej Zachęta, 1997), and Anda Rottenberg, “Between Institution and Tradition: The Artist in Search of Freedom,” in *Beyond Belief: Contemporary Art from East Central Europe*, ed. Laura J. Hoptman, 28 (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995).

¹⁰² Ibid, 217.

¹⁰³ Piotr Piotrowski, “Modernism and Socialist Culture: Polish Art in the Late 1950s,” in *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, ed. Susan E. Reid and David Crowley, 137 (Oxford, UK: Berg Publishers, 2000).

¹⁰⁴ Piotrowski considers the Arsenal show as having had more to do with a tradition of expressionism and social comment than with modernism as he defines it in his article, “Modernism and Socialist Culture: Polish Art in the Late 1950s,” in *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, 133-147.

¹⁰⁵ Piotr Piotrowski, “Modernism and Socialist Culture: Polish Art in the Late 1950s,” in *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, 137.

early liberties taken by artists in the 1950s, in later decades Poland came to be seen as a bastion of freedom by artists in other communist-bloc countries. As Rottenberg has stated, “1970s Poland was viewed with envy by citizens of other countries in the bloc who went there to attend film and music festivals, learned Polish to be able to read world literature, and flocked to exhibitions of ‘independent art.’”¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, Poland still remained closed off from the West, and despite its early years of communism being relatively carefree for artists, the crackdown was yet to come with Martial Law in the early 1980s.

Solidarity (*Solidarność*) was founded in Gdańsk, Poland in September 1980 as the first independent self-governing trade union, and thus the first non-communist union in the communist bloc. This was an extraordinary feat for a nation under communist rule, and its significance was not lost on everyday Poles, including artists. According to Donald Pirie, what was important about that brief period after Solidarity and before Martial Law was “the sense of liberation from a censorious State, and an awareness that the arts’ position needed to be fundamentally reassessed in a totally new situation.”¹⁰⁷ In December 1981 a Congress of Polish Culture took place, where representatives of the creative arts pushed for artists to generate new work that addressed the Polish people in their current situation. Speaking on literature, Andrzej Kijowski addressed the Congress by saying that

Literature, in these months of crisis, has not managed to fulfill its role as a creative source of ideas and opinions, rather it has left civil society in an

¹⁰⁶ Anda Rottenberg, “Between Institution and Tradition: The Artist in Search of Freedom,” in *Beyond Belief: Contemporary Art from East Central Europe*, 31.

¹⁰⁷ Donald Pirie, “Introduction,” in *Polish Realities: The Arts in Poland 1980-1989*, ed. Donald Pirie, Jekaterina Young and Christopher Carrell, 16 (Glasgow: Third Eye Center, 1990).

ideological vacuum and is thus equally responsible for the chaos that has possessed the mind of the population at large... What is needed now is not a system that promotes 'high art', or one that is merely insurrectionary, but something along the lines of the reformist model of Enlightenment literature, which must look critically not only at the way Poles are governed but also at the manner in which Poles live and think.¹⁰⁸

For the most part, until this time, artists had refrained from any political engagement in their art. The easing up on policies with regard to society and the arts, which was a bi-product of Solidarity, not only opened up an opportunity for them to address their audiences more directly, but also gave them the encouragement to do so, as there was the sense that their voice actually could make a difference.

During the period from after World War II until the 1980s, artists in Poland generally avoided political issues in their work. There were two main reasons for this, the first being that in the 1960s, the Gomułka administration was less tolerant of any type of art that veered from the state-endorsed Socialist Realism. Consequently any form of experimentation in art was considered extreme enough to be a political statement in and of itself. As Wojciech Włodarczyk has stated, "any work which was radical in form and utilized new media was seen, at least by the artist himself, as 'progressive,' thereby releasing him from the need to make his political position clear."¹⁰⁹ Abstraction, installation art, performance, etc., were extreme enough in their own right, and consequently there was no need to make any overtly political pronouncements otherwise. Secondly, the legacy of Socialist Realism influenced artists to maintain a strict separation of art and politics. Thus Włodarczyk also contends that "artists working in the twenty-

¹⁰⁸ Andrzej Kijowski, from his speech made on December 12, 1981 at the Congress of Polish Culture held in the Palace of Culture and Science, Warsaw. Printed in *Kultura* 6 (1982): 12-13.

¹⁰⁹ Wojciech Włodarczyk, "Visual Arts," in *Polish Realities: The Arts in Poland 1980-1989*, ed. Donald Pirie, Jekaterina Young and Christopher Carrell, 74 (Glasgow: Third Eye Center, 1990).

five years between Socialist Realism and Solidarity, whatever the artistic attitude, consistently defended the principle of the autonomous nature of a work of art and this was understood as a form of protest against the official brand of ideologized culture and, by extension, a sign of protest against the authorities.”¹¹⁰ Whatever their political convictions may have been, Polish artists emphasized the importance of their artistic “freedom,” no matter what the cause.

This attitude changed drastically after Solidarity, and also after first part secretary Wojciech Jaruzelski’s¹¹¹ declaration of Martial Law (*Stan Wojenny*),¹¹² on December 13, 1981, which was an attempt to curtail the activities of Solidarity. The institution of a police state severely restricted the everyday lives of Polish citizens, and constrained artists.¹¹³ Artists responded by taking a clear political stance in their work, a measure that they had previously avoided. Włodarczyk maintains that “whereas before August 1980 taking a political position had been considered unworthy of a true artist, after December 1981 it was regarded as both a duty and evidence of personal integrity,”¹¹⁴ and has gone so far as to say that “the year 1980 separates two totally different worlds in Polish art, or so it seems from today’s perspective: two different sets of artistic personalities, two distinct concepts of meaning in a work of art and of its place and role in culture.”¹¹⁵

In Polish, Martial Law is called *stan wojenny*, which literally translates as “state of war.” One of the effects of Martial Law was, in fact, a war on art and artists, as all exhibitions were canceled, the Artist’s Union was abolished, artistic magazines were

¹¹⁰ Włodarczyk, “Visual Arts,” in *Polish Realities: The Arts in Poland 1980-1989*, 74.

¹¹¹ Wojciech Witold Jaruzelski (b. 1923) was General Secretary of the Polish Communist Party and Prime Minister of Poland from 1981-1985 and the first President of the Third Republic of Poland, 1989-1990.

¹¹² Martial Law lasted from December 13, 1981 to July 22, 1983.

¹¹³ See Włodarczyk, “Visual Arts,” in *Polish Realities: The Arts in Poland 1980-1989*, 81.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹¹⁵ Wojciech Włodarczyk, “Visual Arts,” in *Polish Realities: The Arts in Poland 1980-1989*, ed. Donald Pirie, Jekaterina Young and Christopher Carrell, 74 (Glasgow: Third Eye Center, 1990).

closed down, and many artists were arrested. This impelled artists to band together in order to regain artistic freedoms from the previous decade, and push further for more liberalization in the arts. According to Włodarczyk, “Martial Law forced artists and intellectuals to come to terms with the fact that no re-establishment of the artistic or cultural scene would be permitted that did not confirm the Communist authorities’ policy on the arts. This post-Stalinist ideological determination to attain a unified, supportive arts scene survived at least until the end of 1986.”¹¹⁶

One of the ways in which artists asserted their political views was simply on a practical level: by boycotting official institutions, such as the artist’s union, and refusing to exhibit in any official locations, such as the Zachęta Gallery, which were funded by the Ministry of Culture.¹¹⁷ The Church, which was also fighting against the communist regime, offered support to artists in the form of exhibition space, and many alternative art exhibitions in Poland, in the 1980s, took place in churches. While this political activism was the approach of the older generation of artists, who had come to regret maintaining an apolitical stance during the 1960s and 70s, many of the younger generation supported the continuation of apoliticism in the arts. They chose to maintain their independence as artists, and considered painting to be enough of a political gesture. Many of these artists made use of alternative media and techniques in their work, as well as the genre of performance, creating antagonistic works of art that upset the status quo and challenged *any* institution, regardless of whether it was the mainstream or an alternative institution.

¹¹⁶ Włodarczyk, “Visual Arts,” in *Polish Realities: The Arts in Poland 1980-1989*, 82.

¹¹⁷ After Martial Law was instituted, actors also called for a boycott of the mass media. According to Kathleen M. Cioffi, throughout 1982 virtually all actors refused to be seen on television (actors often supplemented their meager incomes with TV and radio appearances). Audiences showed support for this boycott in the “Week of Solidarity with the Theatre” (which actually lasted several months), giving standing ovations and flowers after every theatrical performance. See Kathleen M. Cioffi, *Alternative Theatre in Poland 1954-1989* (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1996), 147.

Kozyra, as an artist, was not entirely a product of the communist system in Poland. Although she received her artistic training in Poland in the post-Perestroika period (she attended the Warsaw Fine Arts Academy from 1988-1993), graduating from the Sculpture Department there under the tutelage of Professor Grzegorz Kowalski, as a child, she had spent a great deal of time abroad. When she was three years old, in 1966, her family moved to Austria where they stayed for five years. After that they returned to Poland for two years, and then moved to Munich, where they spent another six years. It was only when Kozyra was seventeen, in 1980, that her family moved back to Poland permanently.¹¹⁸ Although she claims to never have been interested in art theory, being more of a practical person herself, she chose to study under Kowalski, because he was, according to her, one of the few intelligent professors at the university. As she recalls:

During the first year I took a required course with Kowalski. We had to sculpt a nude from clay. After that we all [those students – AB] went to Kowalski. Then we had to choose a workshop. I chose Kowalski's, because I had heard that he was the only intelligent guy [on the faculty – AB]. There was this kind of aura surrounding him, and everyone was afraid of him. Of course I was afraid of him, too. With regard to theory I'm sort of off-kilter, I'm better with practical things. I always focus on practice, and I don't theorize, and I've always been this way. But it's true that under Kowalski we could do whatever we wanted, and it didn't just have to be conceptual stuff.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ “Urodziłam się w Warszawie, ale jak miałam 3 lata to wyjechaliśmy na 5 lat do Austrii, potem przyjechaliśmy na 2 lata do Polski, a jeszcze potem na 6 lat do Monachium. Czyli właściwie dopiero jak miałam 17 lat to wróciłam do Polski.”

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

¹¹⁹ “Na pierwszym roku to były obowiązkowe zajęcia u Kowalskiego. Trzeba było robić akty z gliny. Wszyscy szliśmy wtedy do Kowalskiego. A potem można było sobie wybrać pracownię. Wybrałam sobie Kowalskiego, bo słyszałam, że jest to jedyny taki inteligentny facet. Jego postać była otoczona taką aurą, że wszyscy się bali tego Kowalskiego. No oczywiście ja też się bałam tego Kowalskiego. Z teorią ja jestem raczej tak na bakier, ja jestem raczej praktyka. Zawsze praktykuję, a nie teoretyzuję i zawsze tak było. Prawda jest taka, że u Kowalskiego można było robić to co się chce, a nie jakieś tam konceptualne tylko rzeczy.”

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

She also emphasized that she felt completely free to express herself in Kowalski's studio, "in fact, we were able to talk about whatever we wanted to – it wasn't just about doing some studies from nature. He allowed a wide range of other types of art, for example photography...although we didn't have video art yet. Everything was allowed, including performance. Anything that you wanted do you could simply do."¹²⁰ In addition to feeling that there were no limitations as to what she could create during her studies, Kozyra recalls that there were not the same limitations for artists in Poland, for example with regard to the nude, as there were in, say, Russia. She remembers that the artist Jerzy Nowosielski (b. 1923) painted nudes throughout the communist period, and she even recounted a performance involving naked women that took place in the 1960s.¹²¹ She herself did not feel restricted with regard to what she could create as an artist, how she could create it, and with which materials.

The only limitations that Kozyra indeed had to bear were quite similar to that of Polis – access to and exposure to performance and conceptual art in the West, as well as the theory that went along with it, including feminist theory. According to her, students at the Art Academy in the late 1980s and early 1990s were not taught feminist art theory. In her words, "during my time in school there was no such thing as lessons in feminism.

That only started to become popular a few years ago. When I was at the Academy I didn't

¹²⁰ "Faktem jest też, że można było pogadać jak się chciało, że nie chodziło tylko o to żeby zrobić jakieś studium z natury. Dopuszczał też wszelkie inne sztuki, wiesz na przykład fotografie no wideo jeszcze wtedy nie było. Wszystko to było dopuszczane jakieś performance i tak dalej. Wszystko, co chciałaś zrobić mogłaś po prostu sobie zrobić."

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

¹²¹ "AB: Ale wtedy też były pewne ograniczenia w sztuce w czasach PRL jeśli chodzi o akty...KK: "Możliwe, ale ja tak dokładnie to nie wiem. Może były ograniczenia. No, ale na przykład Nowosielski też gołe kobiety malował. Ale tak naprawdę to nie mam pojęcia. A na przykład ta sztuka ciała co robili te performance, ta cała Natalia LL i tak dalej to one też raczej gołe te kobiety. To jeszcze w latach '60-tych robili na przykład jakaś tam goła pani naprzeciwko policjantki. Ale wtedy też ta sztuka nie była taka wszechobecna w świadomości wszystkich."

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

know anything about those things. But nevertheless Kowalski taught us something about conceptualism.¹²² Although she was introduced to ideas of conceptual art by her teacher, she claims that the students didn't really understand exactly what he did as an artist. As she stated: "we didn't even know what he did, it was only after my studies that he started to have some exhibitions and some catalogues were published. It was only then that we really became familiar with what he did. Before that all we knew was that he was an intellectual and a conceptualist. But beyond that we didn't really have any idea what that was all about."¹²³ In Kozyra's words, in her day, art history and the philosophy of art ended somewhere around the 1940s and 1950s,¹²⁴ and thus her theoretical lessons with Kowalski were the closest that she was able to come to Western art theory and methodology.

In this chapter I have summarized the divergent socio-political histories in St. Petersburg, Russia, Riga, Latvia, and Warsaw, Poland that provided the conditions for artistic production in each of those areas. What my outline shows is how the experience of state socialism varied from country to country and city to city. It was in this environment that performance art began to develop in the later part of the twentieth century in Eastern Europe and Russia, also in very distinct and unique ways depending on the country. These differences not only resulted from the individual experience of state control over the arts in these separate nations, but also from the disparate incidences

¹²² "Za moich czasów w szkole w ogóle nie było czegoś takiego jak nauczanie o feminizmie. To dopiero jakieś kilka lat temu zostało wprowadzone. Osobiście ja na akademii to nic nie wiedziałam o tym. No ale ten Kowalski jednak coś nas uczył o konceptualizmie."

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

¹²³ "My nawet nie widzieliśmy co on robi, dopiero po studiach zaczął robić jakieś wystawy, jakieś katalogi zaczęły wychodzić. To żeśmy się dopiero zorientowali co on robił. Wcześniej było tylko wiadomo, że był to intelektualista i konceptualista. Ale o co tam więcej chodziło to nie wiedzieliśmy."

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

¹²⁴ "właściwie filozofia i historia sztuki kończyła się na latach 50-tych, czy tam 40-tych nawet."

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

of performance art in Russia, Latvia and Poland before the first World War. The next chapter will explore how those differences were played out in the performance art of the 1970s and 80s in Leningrad, Riga, and Warsaw.

Chapter Two: Performance Art in Russia, Latvia and Poland

Although performance was an integral part of Dada and Futurism in the early part of the twentieth century, it wasn't until the 1970s that it came to be understood as a genre in its own right. Rose Lee Goldberg defines "performance art" as the type of art in which artists use their own bodies as the substance of their art work.¹²⁵ In her account of the history of performance in the twentieth century, she states that performance art in the 1970s "reflected conceptual art's rejection of traditional materials of canvas, brush or chisel, with performers turning to their own bodies as art material."¹²⁶ Goldberg has classified the different types of performance art that appeared in that decade as: performances that consisted of instructions, those that focused on the artist's body in and of itself, that focus on the artist's body in space, those engaged in rituals, living sculptures, autobiographical works centered around the body, and the construction of entire lifestyles.¹²⁷ Critics have also defined body and performance art as central aspect of postmodernism because these genres subvert the idea of a fixed and stable meaning of the work of art, as well as the traditional artist/viewer hierarchy.¹²⁸ From Polis' living sculpture as *The Bronze Man* to Afrika's ritualistic confinement in a mental institution in *Crimania* and Kozyra's autobiographical as well as ritualistic performances in *The Women's Bathhouse* and *The Men's Bathhouse*, all of the artists in this study were engaged in one of these types of performance in their work.

¹²⁵ Rose Lee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988), 152.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 152.

¹²⁷ See Chapter Seven in Rose Lee Goldberg, *Performance Art: from Futurism to the Present*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988.

¹²⁸ See C. Carr *On Edge: Performance at the end of the Twentieth Century* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press, 1993); Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Henry Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde Since 1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

The notion of performance art that we have in the West is quite different from that which developed in Eastern Europe and Russia. In retrospect, we can witness the development of performance in American art as coming out of a variety of occurrences in the 1950s: action painting, the experiments in alternative media undertaken by John Cage and Merce Cunningham (b. 1919) at Black Mountain College, as well as Alan Kaprow's (1927-2006) Happenings. Artists in communist countries that were required to adhere to the requirements of Socialist Realism did not undergo the same type of artistic experience; they were not able to experiment, in any official capacity, with alternative media and forms of expression. As performance art was not a traditional genre, like painting or sculpture, it could not be accommodated in the tradition of Socialist Realism. Because it is, as Hubert Clocker has described it, "an ephemeral and participatory event,"¹²⁹ it engenders a variety of interpretations, whereas a Socialist Realist work of art was supposed to be unambiguous. It was only with the arrival of the Thaw that artists in the East began to experiment and develop the genre of performance art in a manner specific to their circumstances, meaning that they had to take into account the limitations on art production that were enforced by the authorities.

Restrictions on the exhibition of art in the Soviet Union forced artists to find not only alternative ways of expressing themselves, but also alternative spaces to show and display their work. These circumstances had an impact on the development of non-traditional genres, such as performance art. Because any kind artistic performance, as we know it in the West, was not condoned by the authorities as an acceptable form of artistic expression, any public display (at least within the confines of public spaces in the city) or

¹²⁹ Hubert Clocker, "Gesture and the Object. Liberation as Action: a European Component of Performative Art," in *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object 1949-1979*, ed. Paul Schimmel, 159 (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, Thames and Hudson, 1988).

exhibition (in any official or public exhibition hall or museum) witnessed by officials would be prohibited. Thus artists took to the countryside, far away from the watchful eyes of the KGB, to stage their performances. Much like environmental art arose in the West during the 1970s as a way of creating an alternative space, outside of the gallery, to show art, performance art in Russia also developed as a way to take art out of the studio and into a freer, less politicized space. As Margarita Tupitsyn has described it:

The artists of the 1970's were willing to give up the city and find an alternative space for alternative culture. Thus, they initiated a process of the insertion of culture into "a vast, wild life" and along with that a conversion of the rural no-man's-land into a limitless exhibition space. These activities toward "culturizing nature" – as opposed to "naturalizing culture" – formed the nucleus of Moscow artistic life through the late 1970's.¹³⁰

The artists who promoted these ideas through their actions were part of the Collective Actions Group (*Kollektivnye Deistviia*, or *K/D*), formed by Andrei Monastyrski in 1975.¹³¹

The performances of Collective Actions followed a pattern: viewers were informed of their participation in the action by an invitation to a remote location in the countryside, on the outskirts of Moscow. These audience members traveled independently by train to the specified location, where they awaited further instructions or were met at the station by another participant, who then led them to the location of the action. Once the performance was over, everyone would return home. The performances involved procedures ranging from very simple to rather complex. *Appearance*, from

¹³⁰ Margarita Tupitsyn, "The Decade "B.C" (Before Chernenko) in Contemporary Russian Art," in *Apt Art: Moscow Vanguard in the 80's*, ed. Norton Dodge, 5 (Mechanicsville, MD: Cremona Foundation; 1985).

¹³¹ The other three founding artists were Nikita Alekseev (b. 1953), Georgi Kizevalter (b. 1953) and Nikolai Pantikov.

1976, consisted of two participants emerging from the forest, walking toward the viewers and handing them notes confirming their presence at the action.¹³² *Liebllich*, from the same year, involved simply an electric bell buried under the snow, which tinkled during the viewers' presence, and continued until after they left.¹³³ A more complicated arrangement can be found in *The Third Variant*, from 1978. As Tupitsyn has described the events of the action:

Twenty viewers were seated in a field close to a forest. From the right side of the forest appeared a participant dressed in a violet costume. He walked through the field and lay down in a ditch. After three minutes of so-called "empty-action," a second participant, in a similar costume, stood up from a second ditch thirty meters from the first. Where his head should have been was an orange balloon. He pierced the balloon with a stick, and the explosion released a cloud of white dust. "Headless," he then returned to the ditch. Simultaneously the first participant, already back in street clothes, arose from his ditch and went into the woods. The "empty action" of the "headless" participant (lying in the ditch) continued until the audience left the field.¹³⁴

A performance as ephemeral and ambiguous as this one, leaving the interpretation open to every viewer present, and without any clear ideological content or Socialist Realist program, would have been censored if it took place in the city, where it would be within easier access of the authorities to witness. Thus performance art in Moscow, in the 1970s, developed first within the undefined space of the countryside.

Although one can note similarities between Western genres such as Earthworks and Site Art, as well as Western Performance art, these genres have different and distinct origins and meaning in the East than in the West. While the Earthworks that appeared in

¹³² See M. Tupitsyn, "The Decade "B.C" (Before Chernenko) in Contemporary Russian Art," *Apt Art: Moscow Vanguard in the 80's*, 8.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 8.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 8.

the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, by artists such as Robert Smithson (1938-1973), Michael Heizer (b. 1944), and Robert Morris (b. 1931), among others, were an attempt to create works of art that were not purchasable commodities, Russian artists in the 1970s had no art market/commodity culture to react against. Art was only commissioned and purchased by the State, therefore art did not have the chance to become commercialized, as it did in the West. Furthermore, since art was not for sale there were also no galleries in Soviet Russia. Thus these performances that took place out in the landscape were not an attempt to create an alternative space away from the commodified space of the gallery, as it was in the West, but simply one of the only options for artists to be able to create a performance piece outside of the politicized space of the city.

Another option was to stage a performance behind the closed doors of a private person's apartment. Eventually an entire genre, unique to the former Soviet Union, developed out of the strict governmental policies concerning the exhibition and display of works of art: "AptArt," or Apartment Art. This art was created expressly for exhibition in artist's apartments; they were works of art that could not be exhibited publicly, in official exhibitions. The concept of apartment exhibitions in St. Petersburg has been described as follows:

Under the exhibiting policy of the Soviet regime from the 1930s onwards, unofficial art was deprived from any form of publicity. Only those artists whose work complied with the official canon of Socialist Realism participated in the art exhibitions organized by the state.

In this context, the term *unofficial art* refers to those forms of art which deviated from the method of Socialist Realism in form, content and ideology. In this way, unofficial artists in the Soviet Union were subjected to spiritual isolation.

The practice of *apartment exhibitions*, therefore, which began during the 70s, signified a first opportunity to break through this isolation. The first exhibitions of unofficial art were organized conspiratorially in private flats and cellars. Word of the time and place of these events was passed from mouth to mouth among a small, select group of artists, friends and collectors.¹³⁵

Apartment exhibitions arose out of a necessity – the need of the artists to find a space for the exhibition of work that would be considered unacceptable within the rubric of Socialist Realism.

Whereas in the 1970s artists moved to the countryside in order to find this alternative space for art, in the 1980s they returned to the cities. Although AptArt exhibitions had been taking place since the 1970s, it was in the 1980s that it truly took hold as a distinct genre and style, as a commemoration of the long-standing tradition of holding private exhibitions in secret. The difference between AptArt and previous apartment exhibitions was that AptArt art was deliberate, it was work that was specifically created for these private exhibitions. Margarita Tupitsyn describes the inception of AptArt as follows:

In 1982 the younger breed along with members of the Collective Action group formed a circle called the MANA (Moscow Archive of the New Art). They began to show on a regular basis at a gallery in [Nikita] Alekseev's¹³⁶ apartment on the outskirts of Moscow. From it the whole movement came to be called "AptArt." The title celebrated the twenty-year-old tradition of showing the alternative culture in apartments or artist's studios, with this difference, however. In the early 1980's to exhibit in the AptArt gallery was a style, not a grudging necessity.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ "An Apartment Exhibition," in *Self-Identification: Positions in St. Petersburg Art from 1970 until Today*, ed. Kathrin Becker, 52 (Kiel, Germany: Stadtgalerie im Sophienhof, 1995).

¹³⁶ Nikita Alekseev (b. 1953), member of Collective Actions group.

¹³⁷ M. Tupitsyn, "The Decade "B.C" (Before Chernenko) in Contemporary Russian Art," in *Apt Art: Moscow Vanguard in the 80's*, 10.

While artists took advantage of a relatively more relaxed climate in the 1980s, their willingness to take the risk of organizing apartment exhibitions of unofficial art also signified a push for more freedom on their part. While there was still not any real possibility of exhibiting such alternative work in any sort of public exhibition hall, artists maintained and developed this long-standing tradition of exhibiting unofficial art in their homes.

St. Petersburg/Leningrad

Collective Actions was perhaps the most prolific and well-known artistic body that produced performances in Russia. In Leningrad there was even less of a tendency toward critical and analytical art that developed among non-conformist artists. While most of the experimental activity that occurred was centered on abstract painting, there was a small and insular circle of artists, musicians and filmmakers who represented another side of Leningrad's nonconformist art scene. While the painting that was created in Leningrad in the 1970s and 80s can be regarded as more conventional than that of Moscow, the underground film and punk rock scene that developed there in the 1980s was something quite unique.

Whereas Moscow artists, under the unofficial leadership of conceptual artist Ilya Kabakov (b. 1933), dealt with linguistic and ideological problems in their work, and used conceptual art as their preferred genre, Leningrad painters were often more traditional, focusing on questions of form and issues of beauty. This is especially evident in the prevailing artistic concept developed by the so-called leader of Leningrad nonconformist artists, Timur Novikov. His *New Academy of Fine Arts* (*Novaya Akademiya Iziashnikh Iskusstvo*, or NIAA) was formed in 1989, with the aim of "preserving classical aesthetics

in the [*sic*] contemporary artistic practice.”¹³⁸ This concept developed out of the union of *New Artists* (*Novie Khudozhniki*) that was formed in 1985, also under the leadership of Novikov. Paintings by exponents of the New Academy, such as Novikov himself or Oleg Maslov, are executed in a kitschy neo-academic style, nevertheless emphasizing skill in painting and technique above all.

When comparing the Leningrad and Moscow art worlds of the 1970s and 80s, critics are quick to point out the differences between the two. Although Leningrad was once the seat of revolutionary activity in art (in the immediate post-Revolutionary period of the late-teens and early 1920s), during the second half of the twentieth century it was Moscow that was the center for such unconventional artistic practices as conceptual and performance art. Ekaterina Andreeva, in her essay on the art from St. Petersburg, “Gay Art,” has described the focus of Leningrad artists as “neo-romantic,” stating that

The modern art of St. Petersburg quite obviously differs from that of Moscow (the collective image of Kabakov’s school) and Western art, with occasional exceptions. In comparison to the intellectual exercises of Moscow conceptualism, not too long ago it offered a decidedly archaic impression, having preserved its loyalty to such neo-romantic paradigms as aestheticism and physiology which had become, in the 20th century, synonyms for kitsch. If the Moscow conceptualist tradition superbly mastered the strategy of deconstructing ideological systems, the object of analysis being personal life and consciousness, then Leningrad art seemed to be completely immature from the analytical point of view.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ The Pushkinskaia-10 Art Centre, “The New Academy of Fine Arts Museum,” http://www.p10.nonmuseum.ru/new%20acadimy/index_e.html, last accessed December 30, 2007.

¹³⁹ Ekaterina Andreeva, “Gay Art,” in *Self-Identification: Positions in St. Petersburg Art from 1970 until Today*, ed. Kathrin Becker, 113 (Kiel, Germany: Stadtgalerie im Sophienhof, 1995).

Viktor Tupitsyn has also remarked that artists such as Ilya Kabakov and *Collective Actions* “share no aesthetic programs”¹⁴⁰ with their peers in St. Petersburg. Furthermore, Andreeva describes the focus of St. Petersburg artists as aesthetic, versus the conceptual focus of Moscow artists: “as opposed to Moscow conceptualism, which interpreted Soviet ideology as a second reality...the New Artists put their accent either on aesthetic qualities of ideology – which would find their reflection in neo-academism – or on the physiological side.”¹⁴¹ Indeed, even Andrew Solomon, in his book on the events surrounding the first Sotheby’s auction in Moscow in 1988, noted this difference between Moscow and Leningrad. In his words, the Leningrad artists “were deeply conservative, and when the word “avant-garde” was used by official critics to describe their work, they considered it a disparagement. No one in Leningrad was interested in conceptualism or performances or installations or objects; they made paintings, and though they made them to be meaningful, they also intended them to be beautiful.”¹⁴² That said, he does go on to describe some of the alternative forms of art-making that took place in Leningrad in the 1980s. Despite the focus on painting there, there were some attempts at performance art undertaken by artists in Leningrad, although the tendency was not as widespread as in the capital.

The “occasional exceptions” that Andreeva mentions are the other activities that Novikov and members of his circle engaged in, such as alternative film-making, punk rock music, and absurdist ballets. Afrika was a central figure and participant in many of

¹⁴⁰ Viktor Tupitsyn, “A Journey from Moscow to St. Petersburg – Part I,” in *Self-Identification: Positions in St. Petersburg Art from 1970 until Today*, ed. Kathrin Becker, 121 (Kiel, Germany: Stadtgalerie im Sophienhof, 1995). Incidentally, Tupitsyn states that “an exception to this rule is Afrika (Sergei Bugaev),” a phenomenon that will be discussed later in this manuscript, in the chapter on his work.

¹⁴¹ Andreeva, “Gay Art,” in *Self-Identification: Positions in St. Petersburg Art from 1970 until Today*, 106.

¹⁴² Andrew Solomon, *The Irony Tower* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 129.

these activities. Novikov and his friends formed such groups as the aforementioned *New Artists* and also the *Friends of Mayakovskii Club*. Within these clubs they were involved in a variety of different activities, such as planning concerts, exhibitions and alternative ballets, as well as costume design and mail art. Their aim was not the creation of performance art *per se*, but rather the fusing of art and life, as in their *Museum Palace Bridge* exhibitions. These took place between 1991-1993 during the White Nights in June in St. Petersburg, the shortest nights of the year. During the exhibition works of art were hung on the raised bridge near the Winter Palace.¹⁴³ One cannot help but connect this outdoor gallery with the outdoor performances of Collective Actions in the 1970s, or even the failed Bulldozer Exhibition in 1975. The only difference being that *Museum Palace Bridge* took place in 1991, after the Soviet Union had already fallen, and artists had regained their expressive freedoms.

The 1980s saw a flourishing of experimental music of the pop and punk variety in Leningrad. In 1982 a friend of Timur's, Sergei Kuriokhin (1954-1996), created the rock group *Pop Mekhanika* (*Popular Mechanics*), a group that was more interested in experimenting with sound and performing than creating hits. Afrika was a part of this group and even toured internationally with them, to Stockholm, Berlin and Liverpool in 1989.¹⁴⁴ Also around the same time the painter Viktor Tsoi (1962-1990) formed the group *Kino*, with Georgii Gurianov, a member of the *New Artists*, as their drummer. This group eventually went on to be featured in Sergei Solovyev's (b. 1944) cult film *ASSA*, which starred Afrika in the lead role of a bohemian artist and lead singer in a rock group whose character's name was Bananan. When it was first released, it gained a cult

¹⁴³ The exhibitions were organized by Ivan Movsesjan (b. 1966); participants included other *New Artists* members, including Novikov.

¹⁴⁴ Andrew Solomon, *The Irony Tower* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 133.

following owing to the fact that it was one of the first Perestroika-era films to feature non-conformist artists and present an alternative picture of the Soviet Union, with mobsters and underground music. According to Afrika, “due to Solovyev’s *ASSA*, the whole country could see for the first time the most radical art works of the late USSR.”¹⁴⁵

ASSA was a ground-breaking film in the 1980s and as such it had a huge impact on audiences throughout the Soviet Union. Although it was made by an official filmmaker, Solovyev, it featured unofficial artists. In many ways, the character Bananan resembles Afrika, and in many ways Afrika is Bananan, for example, in the film Bananan created strange devices like a “communication tube,” a simple cardboard tube that one can use to communicate one’s feelings with others, made abstract, dream-like paintings, and performed outlandish rock music wearing crazy costumes, much like Afrika did in real life. Even Viktor Mazin, Afrika’s close friend and participant in the *Crimea* performance, has commented on the similarities between Bananan and the actor who played him, stating that “the most important thing about the whole movie *ASSA* was that the movie represented life itself, so Solovyev was not inventing things, he was just taking things from the surroundings and bringing them to the cinema, just like Afrika’s character Bananan in the film.”¹⁴⁶ The fact that this was an official film produced by Mosfilm, and not an underground production, meant that average, everyday viewers could witness the bohemian world of nonconformist artists right before their very eyes.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, this film

¹⁴⁵ Afrika, in an untitled interview, *Contemporary Russian Art Newsletter*, ed. Olesya Turkina 9 (May 2007) http://www.newsletter.net.ru/index_vol9.htm, last accessed September 30, 2007.

¹⁴⁶ Viktor Mazin, in an interview with the author, September 23, 2007. When asked whether the character Bananan had parallels with Afrika in real life, Mazin replied in the affirmative.

¹⁴⁷ *ASSA* is remembered fondly to this day by virtually everyone who was around to watch it in 1987. Owing to the film’s tremendous popularity, Solovyev was asked to make a “sequel” to the film twenty years later, in 2007. Although Afrika has a cameo role in the film, the lead character role has been passed on to another artist and rock musician who is nowadays equally as controversial as Afrika and Pop

made Afrika an instant cult hero and popular figure, and to this day he remains so in Russia and throughout the former Soviet Union owing to the *ASSA* legacy.

Afrika also appeared in several films by Yevgenii Yufit, the founder of the Necrorealist group in Leningrad, a punk group that was fixated on the concepts of death and dying, both in their performances and their films.¹⁴⁸ He also participated in a well-known project by Sergei Kuriokhin, *Lenin Was a Mushroom*, which broadcast on television in Russia in 1991. The entire program was devoted to proving that Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, leader of the October revolution, was actually a mushroom. Afrika appeared on the show as the great-grandson of Russian poet Andrei Bely (1880-1934), because they share the same surname (Bely's real name was Boris Nikolaevich Bugaev).¹⁴⁹ Afrika commented on the fact that owing to the popularity of *ASSA* and *Lenin Was a Mushroom*, he is able to reach a broader audience with his artistic work. As he stated himself, "fortunately, thanks to *ASSA* and my film background, I can express some ideas publicly, and [create] projects that are connected to formal art, and I can get them [people/the public] personally involved."¹⁵⁰

Another example of a performance artist from Leningrad is Vladislav Mamyshev-Monroe (b. 1969), who began appearing on the streets of Leningrad in the late 1980s as a Marilyn Monroe impersonator. But even his performances were not intended for a wide audience. According to Margarita Tupitsyn, "Mamyshev's text is saturated by a full-grown self-reflexivity and irony which targets a small circle of his colleagues, Timur Novikov, Afrika, Georgii Gurianov...he thus establishes rather narrow parameters for the

Mechanics were in the 1980s, Sergei Shnurov from the group Leningrad. The film, *2ASSA2*, is set to come out in March, 2008.

¹⁴⁸ See Andrew Solomon, *The Irony Tower* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 134.

¹⁴⁹ Afrika, in a phone interview with the author, December 24, 2007.

¹⁵⁰ Afrika, in an interview with the author, September 23, 2007.

reception of his ideas.”¹⁵¹ Although Leningrad did have its own unique variety of performance art that was much different from what was going on in Moscow, instances of it were concentrated around Novikov’s small circle of artists. Novikov was the figure who had held all of these various groups together – from the *New Artists* to *Pop Mekhanika* and the Necrorealists. When he died in 2002, what was left of all of these groups consequently fell apart, leaving Afrika one of the sole performance artists left on the St. Petersburg art scene.

Latvia

Like St. Petersburg, Latvia also does not have a strong tradition of nonconformist performance art from the 1970s and 80s, although there was a small group of artists who experimented with this genre. On the whole, Latvian artists focused on painting, as opposed to conceptual art, and aimed at being as non-confrontational as possible. In 2002, Solvita Krese, Director of the Latvian Center for Contemporary Art, had gone so far as to say that

Latvian artists have never tried to shock the society by means of direct, provocative manifestations that would reflect a critical view about the social-political situation and its consequences – as displayed by a single person or a layer of society. In comparison with other post-soviet territories Latvia is nearly devoid of “socart” [*sic* – Sots Art – AB] samples, radical political manifestations or direct critical commentary.¹⁵²

While Latvian artists remained faithful to the traditional media of painting and sculpture, there were some artists who, beginning in the 1970s and even more so in the 80s, began

¹⁵¹ Margarita Tupitsyn, “A Journey from Moscow to St. Petersburg – Part II,” in *Self-Identification: Positions in St. Petersburg Art from 1970 until Today*, ed. Kathrin Becker, 128 (Kiel, Germany: Stadtgalerie im Sophienhof, 1995).

¹⁵² Solvita Krese, “You See, Bread-and-Butter Are Political, Too,” *Mare Articum* 2/11 (2002): 30.

to experiment with performance and other alternative media such as installation and environmental art.

The most notable figure in the Latvian performance art scene in the 1970s was Andris Grīnbergs, who has been credited with staging the first Happening in Latvia,¹⁵³ when in 1972 he married his partner Inta Jaunzeme in the Latvian countryside. This two-day event was entitled *The Wedding of Jesus Christ*, with Grīnbergs assuming the messianic role of Christ. Like in Moscow, in Latvia Happenings or performances such as these often took place outside of the city, away from the observation of the KGB. Grīnbergs then went on to organize a number of Actions throughout the 1970s, with a changing cast of characters as collaborators.¹⁵⁴ A small Hippy subculture began to grow in that decade, with Grīnbergs at the center of it. The group organized Happenings, jam sessions and private exhibitions in and around Riga.¹⁵⁵

While the seeds of experiment in the visual arts were planted during the 1970s, with exhibitions such as *Celebration*,¹⁵⁶ it was not until the 1980s that contemporary art reached its full bloom. In 1982, the Artist's Union of Latvia came under the progressive-minded leadership of Džemma Skulme, which left more room for experimentation among the Union members. Cafés and venues such as The Goat (*Kaza*) Planetarium (*Planetariums*), and God's Ear (*Dieva Ausis*) became places where artists would meet and discuss ideas about contemporary art, and even burst into spontaneous performances or improvisations. As long as there were no anti-state or anti-party content messages, artists were for the most part left alone.

¹⁵³ According to Mark Allen Svede in his essay "Many Easels, Some Abandoned," in *Art of the Baltics*, ed. Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge, 207 (New Jersey: Zimmerli Art Museum, 2001).

¹⁵⁴ See Mark Allen Svede, "Many Easels, Some Abandoned," in *Art of the Baltics*, 207.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 207.

¹⁵⁶ See Chapter One of this Manuscript.

Finally, the Art Days (*Mākslas dienas*), which had been an ongoing tradition since 1959, but truly began to be cultivated during the Brezhnev era, were the greatest opportunity for pushing the boundaries of art in Latvia. The festival was held during a few weeks each April, and involved exhibitions and performances, both indoors and out of doors. Artists opened up their studios and entertained audiences there. During these days censorship was partially lifted, and in cities all across Latvia there was a carnival-like atmosphere. According to Mark Svede, the annual Art Days

...evolved over the years into such a large, complicated enterprise that artists and curators began to regard it as an opportunity to present nonconformist work. Not only was government monitoring at its most diffuse during the week-long, republic-wide programming, but also funding was more likely to underwrite spectacle.¹⁵⁷

In the 1980s artists truly took advantage of these days as an opportunity to stage performances, create installations and even experiment with kinetic and environmental art.¹⁵⁸ Although throughout the 1980s some of the more experimental shows that were part of the Art Days festival were closed by the authorities,¹⁵⁹ and some of the artists were detained, for the most part the risk that anyone would interfere was considerably lessened.

It was during the 1984 Art Days festival that the aforementioned controversial *Nature. Environment. Man.* exhibition took place in St. Peter's Church in the heart of the

¹⁵⁷ Svede, "Many Easels, Some Abandoned," *Art of the Baltics*, 256.

¹⁵⁸ Svede mentions a piece that he describes as "kinetic environmental art," a fifteen-foot high version of a Lithuanian mobile that was installed in Riga's Cathedral Square (*Doma Laukums*) during the 1983 Art Days. It was entitled *Puzurs* and was by Valdis Celms and Eduards Milašs (b. 1948). Svede, "Many Easels, Some Abandoned," *Art of the Baltics*, 256

¹⁵⁹ F.e. a group show by Breže, Mailitis, Pētersons and Putrāms was closed during the 1985 festival, and in 1987 one artist, Oļegs Tillbergs (b. 1956), was escorted away from his installation/performance piece that had been set up in Philharmonic Square by him, Sarmīte Māliņa (b. 1960) and Sergejs Davidos (b. 1959). Svede, "Many Easels, Some Abandoned," *Art of the Baltics*, 256.

Old City. One of the participants in the *Celebration* show, Ojars Ābols, had had the idea for a more conceptual exhibition than the first, but it wasn't until ten years later that he was able to turn that idea into a reality. With regard to the concept of the exhibition, Ābols focused on "the process of the creation of the exhibition and the participation of all of its authors in its organization."¹⁶⁰ The show included a number of installations, multimedia works, and pantomime shows were held alongside more traditional studio art, such as paintings and prints. The centerpiece of the entire exhibition was an installation called *The Third Table for Ourselves* – a collaboration piece created by a team of artists. The piece was a parody of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* (1495-98), and was installed in the apse of the church. The faces of the twelve disciples seated at the long table were actually plaster casts of the artists themselves.

Ramona Umblija writes of the way that the installations "came towards you, 'touching' and 'challenging' the viewer."¹⁶¹ This was, in effect, contrary to the aims and effects of Socialist Realist painting, which was not supposed to provoke the viewer in any way. Such provocation or defiance would suggest an ambiguity or uncertainty in the art work, yet Socialist Realist paintings were presented to their audience with a prescribed reading, an ideological message to the viewer about the glory of the Soviet State. The installations in this exhibit were by nature ambiguous and thought-provoking, and meant to inspire discussion among viewers in a way that Socialist Realist painting never had. *Nature. Environment. Man.* was not only the title of the exhibition in St. Peter's Church, but it was also the theme of the 1984 Art Days. According to Umblija, in conjunction with that particular festival, "discussion of the relationships within this trinity, debate on

¹⁶⁰ Ābols, in Inese Baranovska, "On the Sense of Time," in *Nature. Environment. Man.* 1984., 11.

¹⁶¹ Ramona Umblija, "The Event 1984. Measuring Time with Asides," in *Nature. Environment. Man.* 1984., 52.

the possibility or otherwise of humanizing the environment and on the social role of art, developed into an invitation for people to suggest new approaches, to seek out appropriate tactics for tackling economic issues, to recognize the need to develop interdisciplinary thinking.”¹⁶² Thus it was significant in its involvement of the audience, and the use of art as a catalyst to prompt citizens to think about their relationship to nature and the environment, and, moreover, to provoke thought and development, especially among average citizens, all within the context of art. Svede has even pointed out that the figure of Judas was notably absent from the *Last Supper* installation, to be filled by the viewer as he attempted to view the work of art, thus underscoring the centrality of the viewer to the success of the exhibition.¹⁶³ And Uldis Pīlēns and Viktors Avotiņš, in their article following the exhibition in *Literature and Art (Literatūra un Māksla)* of May 1984, wrote of the exhibition as a “mobilizing moment” and said that the “playful basis of many works achieves its aim of provoking, of bringing the viewer to a different view of reality.”¹⁶⁴ In this regard it comes as no surprise that the show eventually came to be seen as threatening by the authorities.

Nature. Environment. Man. was more popular than its predecessor, *Celebration*, and drew huge crowds; over 50,000 people attended during the space of less than a month.¹⁶⁵ It was set to remain open for three weeks, but a delegation from East Germany visited it, a group of people who have been described as, “more pious than the Pope.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Umblija, “The Event 1984. Measuring Time with Asides,” *Nature. Environment. Man.* 1984., 52.

¹⁶³ Svede, “Many Easels, Some Abandoned,” *Art of the Baltics*, 262.

¹⁶⁴ Uldis Pīlēns and Viktors Avotiņš, “Un tālāk?,” *Literatūra un Māksla*, May 4, 1984, as qtd. in Umblija, “The Event 1984. Measuring Time with Asides,” *Nature. Environment. Man.* 1984., 69.

¹⁶⁵ According to the State Archives of Latvia. Col. No. 232, Reg. No. 1, File No. 700, Minutes No. 21, as mentioned by Umblija, “The Event 1984. Measuring Time with Asides,” *Nature. Environment. Man.* 1984., 70 and 72 (FN 6).

¹⁶⁶ Borgs, “The Cock on St. Peter’s Steeple Sings its Early Song. Free Art – A Soviet Product?,” *Nature. Environment. Man.* 1984., 40.

The visitors threatened to inform Moscow about the “‘massive invasion of bourgeois ideology’ in a fraternal Soviet Republic,”¹⁶⁷ so the authorities had no choice but to shut the exhibition down one week early.¹⁶⁸ According to Jānis Borgs, the exhibition “marked a significant paradigmatic change on the almost 40-year-long road from penned-up orthodox Soviet art to liberated modernist expression approaching Western perception.”¹⁶⁹ He maintained that “although Soviet Latvia had since the late 1950s witnessed many ‘excesses’ of modernistic art, until that day there had been nothing to match the scale and force of conviction”¹⁷⁰ seen in *Nature. Environment. Man*. It was only a matter of years after it that Gorbachev’s *glasnost* lifted censorship, paving the way for an almost complete unfettering of Latvia’s artists in the late-Soviet period.

The artistic communities in St. Petersburg and Riga share a number of similarities. Despite these cities’ physical distance from Moscow, the artists in both cities held a conservative position with regard to artistic production, and maintained traditional approaches and solutions to their art work. In this regard Polis, like Afrika, stands out among his colleagues for the performances that he created in the late 1980s and early 90s. But unlike Afrika, Polis nevertheless addressed his performances to his fellow Rigans. While in the 1980s Westerners would have been accustomed to the presence of street performers clad entirely in bronze, gold or silver outfits, working for spare change, Riga

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 40.

¹⁶⁸ Polis also feels that the Church had more objections to the exhibition than the communist government, and it was the former that forced the latter to shut the exhibition down. In his words, “It was the church that asked to close the exhibition down...the church asked. And then the Cheka [KGB – AB] did it.” Later he stated that this was because the artists had created an altar, and at that time “the Church didn’t have any power [to close the exhibition – AB]. The power was in the hands of the communists.”

“Baznīca pieprasīja, lai slēdz...Baznīca pieprasīja. Un tādēļ “čeka” aiztaisīja...Tāpēc, ka tur bija altāra daļā, mani draugi bija sataisījuši ...Baznīcai jau nebija vara. Vara bija komunismam.”

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

¹⁶⁹ Borgs, “The Cock on St. Peter’s Steeple Sings its Early Song. Free Art – A Soviet Product?,” in *Nature. Environment. Man. 1984.*, 19.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 19.

had never seen such a thing. Furthermore, the ubiquity of bronze statues throughout the country made the vision of a real-life mobile one even more striking and provocative for viewers who were accustomed to the still figures. The fact that Polis' performance garnered a special reaction from its audience, and that it had such resonance as an artistic performance in and of itself, can be attributed to the fact that the performance took place precisely in Riga, where viewers had no experience with living sculpture or spontaneous street performances. That this performance took place at a time when artists were just beginning to directly approach and challenge their viewers and engage them in discussion with regard to art gave it an even more prominent position as a performance in the emerging avant-garde trends in post-Perestroika Latvia.

As previously mentioned, Polis did not consider himself to be part of the performance tradition in Latvia, nor does he consider himself a performance artist. Indeed this is ironic, considering the fact that he is perhaps best known in Latvia for the *Bronze Man* performances, and was certainly one of the first artists to create such widely known performances in the country. For Polis, "everything is performance,"¹⁷¹ meaning that he does not see a distinction between an artistic performance and what happens in everyday life. In fact, Polis dates his first performance to a childhood stunt, when he and a friend stood in the doorway of his apartment building and mooned the passersby, exposing their bottoms to them.¹⁷² In a recent interview, he mentioned the 1995 American film

¹⁷¹ "AB: Tas nozīmē, ka performance ir fantomu māksla, vai gleznotāji arī? MP: Viss. Viss ir performance." Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

¹⁷² "Nu, mana pirmā performance, es esmu intervijā jau to sniedzis, plika pakaļa, tāda... Un tu zini es redzēju Amerikāņu filmu par slaveno Skotu brīvības cīnītāju, kā viņu tagad pasniedz. Patiesību sakot, bandītu. To slaveno filmu ar to slaveno aktieri ar zilajām acīm [*Braveheart* – AB]. Es viņu redzēju... Bērnībā uz ielas, attaisījām durvis un abi divi ar puiku, es sarunāju mazāko draugu. Abi divi, es sarunāju kad kāds gāja garām, parādījām plikas pakaļas. Tā bija pirmā performance. Bet to darīja jau tūkstošiem gadu atpakaļ jau. Pasakas ir tas, kas pieraksta izrādi. Pasakas – tas ir mutvārdu daiļrade. Tur bija uzskaitīti kā paraugi, kas ir performance. Latvijā cara laikā bija performance."

Braveheart where he noticed a similar scene, asserting that this type of “performance” has existed for thousands of years, existed in the Tsarist times in Russia, and also in fairy tales. He considers his performances part of this tradition, as opposed to having derived from art historical traditions in Western Europe or America.

Polis also sees performance as something separate from art (*māksla*) and craft (*amats*), and considers his painting to be both of the latter (art and craft).¹⁷³ Nevertheless Polis credits himself with being the founder of what he calls “spontaneous theater” in Latvia, which could be defined, according to his description, as the recognition of the roles that we play in everyday life as we observe the people around us and they observe us, including how we act, and what we do. According to Polis, “spontaneous theater is what is always visible. It starts the moment we begin to notice the movements of the events happening around us.”¹⁷⁴ The artist described a situation where one person notices a woman on the street and starts to consider whether her earrings suit her or not. That person starts to think like a director, imagining what role she would play, what she would say. “In essence this is theater that is taking place,”¹⁷⁵ he states “...when we observe a

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

¹⁷³ At several times during my interview with Polis he distinguished between his performances and his art (*māksla*), meaning his paintings. At one point he stated that people were not interested in his “art,” only in his performances. Also, when speaking about his performances he said that they ‘had nothing to do with art,’ and they ‘were not art.’ “Neviens neinteresējas par manu mākslu, tādēļ es arī aizgāju.”

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

¹⁷⁴ “spontānais teātris ir acīmredzams. Viņš sākas tajā brīdī, kad...mēs skatāmies uz notikumu gaitu.”

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

¹⁷⁵ “Kad mēs skatāmies no malas uz situāciju, ko mēs domājam. Mēs domājam: “hmm, vai tai dāmai pietāv šis auskars, vai nē? Bet kas viņa varētu būt?” Un tad tu domā teātra kategorijās. Tu sāc domāt, kādai lomai viņa der jeb kādu lomu viņa spēlē. Vai, kā tu saki, nespēlē. ... Tu pēc būtības skaties jau kā režisors. Tagad tu saproti.... Jā, tad tu domā, teikt, ka viņai auskars nepiestāv tāds, viņai vajadzētu tādu. Vai neteikt. Tagad jau tu kā režisors domā par aktrisi. Un tad tu izdomā: “teikšu, bet tā delikāti.” Un tu jau izdomā tekstu kā tu to teiksi. Aplinkus. Viņa tev kaut ko atbild. Pēc būtības notiek teātris. Pie kam no šā teātra nevar izvairīties.”

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

situation from the side, and what we think about it.”¹⁷⁶ According to Polis’ theory, “performance,” for him, is simply that which occurs everyday in real life, in cafés, on the streets, in our nearest surroundings.

Poland

Performance art in Poland was more prominent than in neighboring Latvia and Russia. Poland has a strong tradition of alternative and experimental theater that dates back to the period of the Second Republic (1918-1939), during the inter-war period when Poland was still an independent nation. This tradition was briefly interrupted during World War II, but managed to continue, with varying degrees of experimentation, after the war, even once the communist government was in place – mostly through the work of Poland’s well-known artist and theater director, Tadeusz Kantor (1915-1990). In 1933 Józef Jarema founded the Cricot Theater¹⁷⁷ in Kraków, an avant-garde theater that produced a Kraków variety of Dada.¹⁷⁸ Jarema emigrated during World War II and remained abroad for the rest of his life, but his experiments in theater lived on through Kantor, who started the Cricot 2 theater at the *House of Visual Arts* (Dom Plastyków) in Kraków in 1955.¹⁷⁹

Kantor’s aims were both experimentation and the breaking down of various borders, such as those between the visual arts and theater, as well as those between art and life. In her study of 20th century Polish theater, Kathleen Cioffi described his performances as “something partway between a Kaprow-style happening and a theater

¹⁷⁶ “Kad mēs skatāmis no malas uz situāciju, ko mēs domājam.”

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

¹⁷⁷ The name itself is an anagram of “to cyrk,” which means “it’s the circus,” thus emphasizing the play, fun, and eccentric or alternative activity connected with the circus.

¹⁷⁸ Krzysztof M. Kłaczewski, *Encounters with Tadeusz Kantor* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 5-6.

¹⁷⁹ Kathleen M. Cioffi, *Alternative Theatre in Poland 1954-1989* (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1996), 42.

piece,”¹⁸⁰ mentioning his production of *The Water Hen* (*Kurka Wodna*, 1921) from 1967, where waiters served coffee and eggs to the audience throughout the performance, which took place among the audience with the house lights turned on and the actors interacting with the spectators. Furthermore, Kantor was interested in the reciprocal relationship between outside events (f.e. war, politics, social problems) and artistic production. In 1944 he directed an underground performance of Stanisław Wyspiański’s *The Return of Odysseus*, where the action takes place in Nazi-occupied Kraków, and the first performance of the Cricot 2 Theater, in 1955, was *The Cuttlefish* (*Mątwą*), a play about totalitarianism. The former referred to Poland’s situation during World War II, when it was also occupied by Nazi Germany;¹⁸¹ the latter, to Poland’s new-found position, after World War II, as a People’s Republic, under the jurisdiction of the Soviet Union.

Cricot 2, along with other similar theater groups formed in the 1950s, provided ties for Polish artists not only with the past – the avant-garde theater from the period of the Second Republic – but also correlated to what was going on in theater in the West, for example England and America. Cioffi stated that Cricot 2 provided “a link between certain theatrical developments of the interwar years and techniques which some later alternative theater groups in the sixties, seventies, and eighties would use.”¹⁸² Furthermore, she feels that there is “a kind of thread of experimental alternatives to mainstream theater which ran through Europe and North American in the early part of the twentieth-century. This thread was dropped for a while during World War II, but was

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 44.

¹⁸¹ In 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Poland and annexed much of the Eastern part of the country, ‘reclaiming’ lands that the Germany Empire had ceded to a reconstituted Poland at the end of World War I, with the Treaty of Versailles.

¹⁸² Cioffi, *Alternative Theatre in Poland 1954-1989*, 48.

taken up again after the war – perhaps by Poles a bit sooner than it was elsewhere.”¹⁸³

The reason for this was the relative liberal attitude toward the arts by the Polish government, as was described in Chapter One. To quote Anda Rottenberg again, “in retrospect, and compared with the cultural policy practiced in neighboring countries, Stalinism was nothing more than an episode in Polish art, lasting merely five years.”¹⁸⁴ Thus the new methods and approaches to theater that were begun in the 1920s and 30s were, to some degree, able to carry on throughout the communist period.

Experimental theater continued through the second half of the twentieth century, with varying levels of experimentation depending on the incumbent government and its policies toward the arts, meaning whether they were more or less strict with regard to enforcing the doctrine of Socialist Realism. Generally speaking, the Stalinist period, from the end of the war until 1956, was the strictest. What followed, immediately after the death of Poland’s Stalinist leader Bierut, in 1956, was a brief period of complete freedom, “a heady period of a relatively free press, lack of secret police terror and bold satire on the stage [that] lasted approximately one year.”¹⁸⁵ By 1957, restrictions were in place again, and although artists were still able to experiment freely, there was always a risk that a work that was considered too avant-garde would be censored. Still, there was no longer the fear of severe persecution for breaking the rules that there had been under Bierut’s administration. According to Cioffi, after 1956, “even though censorship was quickly reimposed on literature and theater after a short period of almost complete freedom, it was never again as strict as it had been during the Stalinist period. Moreover,

¹⁸³ Ibid, 48.

¹⁸⁴ Anda Rottenberg, “Polish Art in Search of Freedom,” in *Art from Poland 1945-1996*, ed. Anda Rottenberg, 13 (Warsaw: Galeria Sztuki Współczesnej Zachęta, 1997).

¹⁸⁵ Cioffi, *Alternative Theatre in Poland 1954-1989*, 54.

the authorities abandoned the doctrine of ‘socialist realism,’ so limiting to the Polish theatrical imagination, and avant-garde theater blossomed.”¹⁸⁶ This level of freedom enabled some artists to use the stage to express political views, albeit in an indirect manner so as to escape revision by the censors.

During the 1950s and 60s Polish theater remained relatively apolitical, focusing more on artistic concerns and formal development. It wasn’t until after the events of 1968,¹⁸⁷ in Poland and abroad, that Polish theater began to take on a decidedly political nature. Actors, writers and directors began to use their voices to express what everyday Poles were thinking and feeling, and also took into consideration the audience’s reaction to their performances, in order to create something that the public could truly respond to. The result was that a “feeling of community emerged, a feeling of mutual closeness of people gathered around the theater...a theater movement came into being which called forth performances that spoke straightforwardly for the first time in many years.”¹⁸⁸ Theaters began to see political commentary and engagement as a necessity, owing to the nature of the times. As Cioffi has stated, “they felt that they had the obligation to make theater which spoke about everyday reality in Poland. Since that reality was politicized, they had to make political theater.”¹⁸⁹ It was this type of enthusiasm for political engagement in the theater that paved the way for a more direct confrontation with audiences during the most volatile years in the history of communist Poland: the post-Martial Law years of the 1980s.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 56.

¹⁸⁷ In Poland this was the year that a state-sponsored campaign of anti-Semitism took place, as well as the banning of a performance of Adam Mickiewicz’s play *Grandfathers (Dziady)* in Warsaw, owing to the fact that it contained anti-Russian sentiment. These events sparked student and intellectual protests. This upheaval coincided with the “Prague Spring” in Czechoslovakia, as well as the student strikes in Paris.

¹⁸⁸ Aldona Jawłowska, *More than Theatre: Young Theatre as Social Movement* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1988), 142.

¹⁸⁹ Cioffi, *Alternative Theatre in Poland 1954-1989*, 106.

In contrast to artists in the theater, visual artists were less politically active during the communist period, as I argue in Chapter One. The situation in this field changed after 1968 as well, as visual artists began to confront the apparent contradictions between the promises made by government officials and the reality of their everyday lives. Artists such as Zofia Kulik (b. 1947), Przemysław Kwiek (b. 1945), Paweł Kwiek and Zygmunt Piotrowski began to create what was known as socialist-conceptual art, or *Soc Art*,¹⁹⁰ as they called it. Their aim was to create a new avant-garde political art that would critique the establishment from the inside, since all of the artists involved belonged to the Communist Party in Poland. Łukasz Ronduda, one of the curators of the exhibition *Polish Socialist Conceptualism of the 1970s*¹⁹¹ describes the artists associated with this type of art as follows:

They wanted to propose the new language of art as a language of conceptualism and minimalism. It was a very paradoxical idea they called “socialist conceptualism.” These progressive avant-garde artists belonged to the only party in Poland at that time, the Polish Communist Party, but at the same time they were very critical toward the state. So they were badly punished by the state on one hand and also by artistic society, which was anti-communist. They were doubly repressed and now completely forgotten because of this double repression.¹⁹²

The artists suffered this double punishment also because of the previously discussed aversion of artists to engage in political rhetoric (see Chapter One). Consequently these

¹⁹⁰ Polish *Soc Art* is quite different from Russian *Sots Art*, which was a Soviet equivalent of American Pop Art that used the visual iconography of Soviet Socialism instead of that of capitalism and consumerism. The term *Sots Art* was coined in 1972 in Russia by Vladimir Paperny, in order to underscore the analogy to Pop Art. Polish *Soc Art* was merely a conceptual art movement that attempted to critique the system using its language, but not necessarily by using a Pop Art style.

¹⁹¹ The Orchard Gallery, New York City, January 7-28, 2007.

¹⁹² Łukasz Ronduda, “Łukasz Ronduda, Curator of the Archive of Polish Experimental Film,” interview by Joanna Heatwole. *Afterimage* (Sept.-Oct. 2005): http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2479/is_2_33/ai_n15966511.

artists foregrounded their use of new methods in art-making, such as minimalism, conceptualism, happenings and process art, and made those methods the basis for making politically engaged art.¹⁹³

From 1971-1987 the artistic team Kwiekulik (Zofia Kulik and her partner Przemysław Kwiek) created and presented artistic performances under the rubric of their *Workshop of Action Art, Documentation and Diffusion (Pracowni Działań, Dokumentacji i Upowszechniania)*. These actions were performed for a small local audience, and the documentation of them was of great importance. One of their performances was based on the theme of passports, addressing the issue of Polish artists' inability to travel abroad, owing to governmental restrictions, as well as the general condition of artists in society in Poland.¹⁹⁴ Anda Rottenberg has described Kwiekulik's actions¹⁹⁵ created in connection with the *Workshop* as having two important stages: "first, they would create a performance for a very small group of viewers, which was very precisely documented, and next they would spread this documentation far and wide, in the form of hand-made postcards that would be sent to people in the art world."¹⁹⁶ The performance, in effect, had two audiences: those that were present for the initial performance and those that saw it in its documented form.

While performances in the 1970s may have addressed smaller and more private audiences, owing to fear of censorship and possible police action, such as arrest, in the

¹⁹³ See Łukasz Ronduda and Barbara Piwowarska's essay on the exhibition *Polish Socialist Conceptualism of the 1970s*, in *The Polish Cultural Institute of New York* website, http://www.polishculture-nyc.org/polish_socialist.htm.

¹⁹⁴ See Anda Rottenberg, *Sztuka w Polsce 1945-2005 (Art in Poland 1945-2005)* (Warsaw, Poland: Stentor, 2006), 239.

¹⁹⁵ Rottenberg uses the Polish word *akcje* (actions) to refer to Kwiekulik's performances.

¹⁹⁶ "Akcje, które uprawiali, miały zazwyczaj rytm dwuetapowy: najpierw odbywały się pokazy dla bardzo niewielkich grup widzów, bardzo dokładnie dokumentowane, następnie rozpowszechniano dokumentację w postaci ręcznie produkowanych kart pocztowych wysyłanych do ludzi sztuki." Rottenberg, *Sztuka w Polsce 1945-2005*, 239.

period after Solidarity and Martial Law artists became more vocal and more open about expressing their political opinion than ever before. Some pushed for freedom by taking their art into the streets, performing for a wider audience – the general public. A number of groups were formed in the 1980s that carried out Happenings, performances and actions on the streets of Warsaw, Wrocław, and other major cities in Poland: Orange Alternative (*Pomarańczowa Alternatywa*), Gruppa, and even a protest group called Freedom and Peace (*Wolność i Pokój*, or *WiP*).

Orange Alternative, perhaps the best known of these politically-motivated performance groups, was founded in 1981 in the university town of Wrocław, by Waldermar Maria Frydrych, who went by the name of ‘The Major.’¹⁹⁷ This leader had degrees in both history and art history, and led his followers first in publishing a student newspaper called *AA*, and later in performing what Cioffi refers to as “hybrid guerilla theater/conceptual art.”¹⁹⁸ According to The Major, their style of art making was his self-titled “Socialist Surrealism,” about which he published a manifesto in *AA*. He defined Socialist Surrealism as “the reality in which we live. That is, what surrounds us here, in this country, now.”¹⁹⁹ The reality that everyday Poles faced, not only in the 1980s, but throughout the communist period, can only be described as surreal. Orange Alternative’s actions addressed and underscored that fact, through the absurdity of their actions, performances and happenings, which they carried out on the streets of Wrocław.

¹⁹⁷ The Major describes the acquisition of this moniker as follows: “Running away from military service, I made my appearance at the psychiatric clinic. I explained to the doctor that I was raising the level of psychiatry in Poland. One day I was telling him that I had lovely officer’s boots, and another that I was a VIP, that various forces crave for my downfall and surround me. And one day, when I came shaven to the skin and in sunglasses, the psychiatrist started shouting at me, that I ought to take them off, and also that he was my superior. So I started to call him colonel, and I spoke of myself as major, and it stayed so.” The Major, as qtd. in “Who’s afraid of toilet paper?” *East European Reporter* 3:2 (1998): 41.

¹⁹⁸ Cioffi, *Alternative Theatre in Poland 1954-1989*, 175.

¹⁹⁹ The Major, as qtd. in “Who’s afraid of toilet paper?,” 40.

The Major was conscious of using the term “Happening,” which by the 1980s had become familiar among those knowledgeable about art history. When asked what the term meant to him, The Major replied that a Happening “is just what happens to happen. Its principle is to break certain norms. These can be behavioral norms, or norms of form in art. Fear is a certain norm. Happenings in Wrocław have been breaking norms set up by the state, among others.”²⁰⁰ When asked why he carried out these Happenings, whether he did them to expose the totalitarianism of the then current system in Poland, his response was simply: “I do them because I do them.”²⁰¹ And when asked whether he did them just for the sake of having a good time he replied: “well, no, not only. In order to scout out the reality in which we live.”²⁰²

Indeed, Orange Alternative used everyday reality as their material. They organized Happenings on Communist holidays, Polish holidays, as well as themed Happenings, based on actual social issues of the time, for example one called *Who’s afraid of the toilet paper?* (October 1, 1987). During the communist period, common items that are taken for granted in the West, such as toilet paper, soap, and most food items, were hard to come by, and often people had to wait in line for hours to obtain them when they were available. In his invitation to the Happening, The Major wrote that “in these times of Socialist Surrealism...toilet paper belongs to the realm of diplomacy – it is the White Paper of a White Elephant of Polish Hygiene....Socialism, with its extravagant distribution of goods, has put toilet paper in the forefront of people’s dreams.”²⁰³ He then invited anyone who was willing to come to Świdnicka Street, where most of the

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 40.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 40.

²⁰² Ibid, 40.

²⁰³ Ibid, 39.

Happenings took place, and bring toilet paper, shaving cream, and even sanitary napkins – all items that were extremely difficult to come by in those days – and share them by distributing them equally among all who were present – the random passersby, and those who had responded directly to the advertisement. Orange Alternative also reacted to other events taking place in society. For example, during Martial Law, all Solidarity graffiti was customarily whitewashed by the police. Orange Alternative would respond by painting an elf or the letter “A” with a flower on top of the whitewash.²⁰⁴ They had thus entered into a dialogue with the authorities, making their voice heard in an alternative space – the realm of art as opposed to the realm of politics – at a time when those in charge were trying to silence the public.

Most of the Happenings occurred as *Who’s afraid of the toilet paper?* did.

Members of Orange Alternative began by distributing leaflets to passersby on Świdnicka Street, the main shopping street in the city center. The event would then take place on or near that main street, and include The Major and his group of followers and those who showed up to participate, as well as random passersby who got caught up in the events, as well as the militia (the police). The Happening ended when the police started making arrests. Sometimes they arrested only The Major, but other times all who were considered to be a part of the event were taken into custody. Because the arrests were considered part of the event, the festivities usually continued at the police station, both inside and out, as those waiting outside were usually calling for the release of those held inside.²⁰⁵ During some performances the militia unwittingly became characters in the event, for example during the November 6, 1987 re-staging of *The Taking of the Winter Palace*. When the

²⁰⁴ See Cioffi, *Alternative Theatre in Poland 1954-1989*, 175.

²⁰⁵ For a summary of the Orange Alternative movement, see Cioffi, *Alternative Theatre in Poland 1954-1989*, 174-178.

police started arresting those who had come to take part, they found themselves playing the role of the palace guards, completely unaware. Since participants were asked to come wearing red, everyone wearing red was arrested, even if they were simply passersby that happened to be wearing that color.

Orange Alternative never asked for permission to stage these events, which is why they were stopped by the militia, and participants were arrested. According to Mirosław Pęczak, they felt that “the streets belong to us,”²⁰⁶ which shows an assertion of a right of the citizens to public spaces that simply did not exist under communist rule. Despite the fact that Poland was a “People’s Republic,” and everything was supposed to belong to *the people*, in reality virtually nothing did – everything belonged to the State. Orange Alternative’s actions held the government to their claims, and demanded that they recognize their right to public assembly by forcibly assembling, despite the consequences.

According to Mirosław Pęczak, the aim of Orange Alternative’s actions was “to induce the sort of creative street unrest which shatters common stereotypes held not only by the State and ‘average Poles’, but also by the Catholic Church and the opposition.”²⁰⁷ Indeed, the Orange Alternative performances turned everyday life upside-down, creating a carnival atmosphere for viewers and performers alike. By mocking the militia, the State and the Party, the group gave power and agency to audience members who otherwise were powerless to act against these governing bodies. Audiences became so involved that they began to participate in the entertainment themselves. Even the militia seemed to

²⁰⁶ Mirosław Pęczak, “The Orange Ones, The Street, and the Background,” *Performing Arts Journal* 13/2 (1991): 54.

²⁰⁷ Mirosław Pęczak, “Youth Culture,” in *Polish Realities: The Arts in Poland 1980-1989*, ed. Donald Pirie, Jekaterina Young and Christopher Carrell, 111 (Glasgow: Third Eye Center, 1990).

have been entertained. Upon their release from prison after the 1987 *Storming of the Winter Palace* happening, participants bid farewell to the police by shouting “all the best” and “thanks for a nice evening!” The Major reports that some of the security police shouted back “all the best” to the performers as well.²⁰⁸

The Orange Alternative performances and Happenings were similar to the Art Days festivals in Latvia not only for their celebratory atmosphere, but also because of the fact that, as art, they were removed from the everyday. Artists and citizens felt that they were able to act in ways that they otherwise could not, under normal circumstances. Furthermore, the performances served to make people aware of their position in the everyday “theater of the absurd” that was going on around them by underscoring that absurdity and making audiences even more aware of it than they already were. It also functioned as an equalizer, diminishing the differences between artist and audience member, and attempting to level the difference between everyday citizen and the authorities. On the other hand, the tradition of performance art was much stronger in Poland than it was in Riga or St. Petersburg, a fact that continues to be true to this day. It is quite surprising, then, that Kozyra’s performance was received as the most controversial by her audience, given the fact that the Polish public would have been used to shocking artistic performances.

Like her Latvian counterpart Polis, Kozyra doesn’t consider herself a performance artist; although she did study conceptualism under Kowalski, her training remains in sculpture. When asked whether she thinks of herself with regard to performance or video artist, she simply replied that “it’s actually the other way round, they [critics and art

²⁰⁸ The Major, as qtd. in “Who’s afraid of toilet paper?,” 39.

historians] speak of you in that way,”²⁰⁹ meaning that art historians and critics have labeled her as such. For Kozyra, all of her education came under the rubric of conceptualism, which to her meant more intellectualizing about art as opposed to creating anything called “conceptual art” *per se*. As she talked about her student days she recalled that:

...at that time it seemed to me that art was something weird, something snooty. It was more of a closed circle, well, because it had to be closed. As a result I really didn't know anything about that [performance – AB] and I had never really seen it and frankly wasn't interested in it. It simply wasn't accessible to me [on an intellectual level – AB]. It was all so different and only later did I find out about something like conceptual art. And Kowalski was pretty well-balanced in this regard. You could do absolutely nothing in his lessons, just sit there and tell him about something – he was always asking us to tell him about our projects. Everything in his workshops occurred on some intellectual level.²¹⁰

For Kozyra, her focus has always been on the practical aspect, the theory being applied afterward, by others – critics and art historians – which in many ways is counter to the ideas of conceptual art, where the idea arises first, and takes precedence over form. In her words, “I don't have any kind of theory. I mean maybe I do have some theory, but it's not like I have this theory and then I start to do something according to it. Maybe it's like that in American schools, where it's about preparing some theory for what they do, meaning

²⁰⁹ “AB: Jak mówisz o sobie jako o artystce, artystka performance czy artystka wideo? KK: Faktycznie jest tak, że to oni o tobie mówią...”

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

²¹⁰ “...wtedy to mi się wydawało, że ta sztuka to coś takiego dziwnego, takie zadzieranie nosa. Takie bardziej zamknięte koła, no bo musiały być zamknięte. Tak właściwie to nic na ten temat nie widziałam i właściwie nie wiedziałam kogo to tak naprawdę interesuje. Nie było w ogóle do tego dostępu. To wszystko jest takie inne dopiero później się dowiedziałam czegoś na temat sztuki konceptualnej. No ale wiesz Kowalski był w tym sensie dobrą równowagą. Można było u niego kompletnie nic nie robić tylko mu opowiadać, zawsze brał na dywanik i kazał omawiać jakieś projekty....To wszystko było gdzieś na jakimś takim intelektualnym poziomie.”

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

teaching students something in order for them to then be able to talk about what they are doing.”²¹¹

Kozyra herself was absent from Poland during much of the 1970s, when Orange Alternative was staging their performances in Wrocław. Although she admits to not having really understood what performance art was before she started her studies, she does wonder whether her time abroad in her early years had somehow influenced her to create the work that she did in the 1990s.²¹² While she is in good company, considering the great number of Polish performance artists to have emerged in the 1990s, Kozyra recounts that her student work *Pyramid of Animals* was the first such scandal of its kind, with a number of other controversial art scandals following on its footsteps throughout the 1990s. As she stated,

I think that there weren't any scandals at all connected with art before *Pyramid of Animals*. But people probably weren't really that interested, because they probably didn't really know that something [art – AB] like that existed [before the 1990s – AB] – as if that problem didn't exist. Contemporary art wasn't really a part of everyday life in general. So thanks to the fact that [the art work – AB] was played out on the level of scandal, despite everything, it got the attention of a wider audience. And then other artists started to create scandals.²¹³

²¹¹ “Nie mam jakiejś tam teorii. Znaczy się może miewam jakieś teorie, ale nie jest tak, że mam teorię i według niej zaczynam coś tam robić. Może to jest tak właśnie tak w tych amerykańskich szkołach, chodzi o to przygotowanie teorii do tego co się robi. Czyli uczenie ludzi do tego aby potem opowiadali o tym co zrobili.”

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

²¹² “Właściwie to się zawsze zastanawiam czy jak bym została za granicą czy bym zrobiła taką Piramidę Zwierząt czy taką Łaźnię Damską? Nie wiem może nie.”

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

²¹³ “Myślę, że nie było żadnego skandalu już związanego ze sztuką przed Piramidą Zwierząt. No ale ludzie też prawdopodobnie nie bardzo się interesowali, więc prawdopodobnie nie wiedzieli że coś takiego jest. Jakby ten problem zupełnie nie istniał. Sztuka współczesna nie była częścią życia w ogóle. Także przez to, że to się rozgrywało na poziomie skandali mimo wszystko to docierało do szerszej publiczności. A potem inni artyści zaczęli wywoływać skandale...”

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

The combined influence of time spent abroad as a young child, as well as the lessons learned in Kowalski's studio, gave Kozyra the tools to begin to create what would later be labeled as everything from feminist art to video and performance by critics and historians alike.

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the divergent traditions of performance art in Leningrad, Riga and Warsaw. While Polis and Afrika stand out as performance artists in their respective cities, which have only faint traditions of such work, Kozyra is part of a long-standing tradition of avant-garde performance and theater that has been going on in Poland since before World War II. Demanding a high level of attention and presence from the viewer, performance art was a genre that was well-suited to addressing the issues relevant to artists and citizens of nations where people were beginning to take control of their everyday lives by actively fighting to overthrow the Soviet regime. In the next chapter, I discuss the different topics that were of concern to inhabitants of Russia, Latvia and Poland at the time that Afrika, Polis and Kozyra were creating their performances, and how the artists distinctly deal with those respective issues in their performances.

Chapter Three: Common Issues and Arguments

The preceding chapters have explored the general conditions regarding art making under communism in Russia, Latvia and Poland, as well as the development of performance art and its interrelationship with the socio-political situation in each country. Here I will focus on the specific issues that each artist was dealing with in his or her work, by describing the background for the work itself, the audience the artist chose to address, the issues that influenced the audience reaction that it received, and the consequences of those reactions. All three of these artists were working under the shared cultural context of late-Soviet and early Post-Soviet socialism, yet in their performances used different strategies to address distinct issues that were relevant to their specific contexts and audiences. Although all of these artists continue avant-garde traditions in their work, they do so toward a different end, which is unique to the specific context in which they were working. In this chapter I highlight the diverse experiences and consequences of Soviet socialism in each of the countries in question, in order to demonstrate how these distinct situations came to shape not only the artists' concerns and strategies, but also the viewers' response to the manifestations of the art work.

Polis' *Bronze Man* performance was one of the first artistic performances that took place in public in Latvia, on the streets of the city center, for any and all passersby to see. As such it had a wide audience, and wide appeal. Those who didn't see the performance first-hand learned about it later through hearsay. Owing to its popular appeal *The Bronze Man* was developed and expanded for several years after the initial performance, as a result of suggestions by and collaboration with other artists, such as Jānis Borgs and Vilnis Zabers (1963-1994). The performances occurred at a time when

significant changes were occurring in the political sphere in Latvia. Citizens were beginning to organize themselves into active movements that would fight for the recognition of the Soviet Union's illegal occupation of Latvia in 1941, which many hoped would lead to the *de facto* restoration of Latvian independence. Polis' performances coincided with the time when these movements were just gaining strength, and were beginning to uncover the lies and deceptions that had been used to support the Soviet rule of Latvia. It was also just after Gorbachev had instituted Glasnost and Perestroika, which involved the relaxing of policies in all spheres of life, including the everyday and the artistic. By looking at the *Bronze Man* performances in the context of the socio-political changes that were occurring in Latvia at the time, I demonstrate how these artistic performances, which were unique for Latvia, were not just a product of Perestroika, but also worked in concert with the independence movements that were operating at the same time.

Afrika, like Polis, is unique in his role as a performance artist in St. Petersburg, a city where performance art was rare. While there are many Russian artists who appropriate elements of Soviet culture in their work (Ilya Kabakov, Komar and Melamid (b. 1943, 1945, respectively), Erik Bulatov (b. 1933), for example), Afrika is one of the few artists to appropriate those signs and symbols as elements of a language with relevance for the future. The artist also subjected himself to psychiatric evaluation and treatment, in an effort to deal with the identity loss that he thought all members of Russian society were experiencing at the time. Although he adopts the role of shaman, like many of his avant-garde predecessors, unlike them he does not claim to offer solutions or to heal society, only to make an effort toward that goal through searching.

Crimania encompassed both Afrika's first performance and first exhibition that were solely focused on the issue of language as it relates to identity. Although the artist had previously been interested in language and sign systems, it was not until the *Crimania* performance, when he was in the mental institution, that he witnessed first-hand the effects of the breakdown of a language system, by observing those who felt it most acutely. While the occurrence of Polis' performance was in some way a result of Perestroika (in that this phenomenon is what enabled a German director to travel to Latvia, propose it and carry it out), Afrika's took place as a direct result of the fall of the Soviet Union, as he stated that the reason for his stay in a mental institution was the result of the loss of his Soviet identity.²¹⁴ The art that he created during and immediately after the performance, which was exhibited at MAK, both grew out of and responded to the issues faced by average Russians in the early 1990s. By looking at Afrika's performance in light of the crises of identity and language that existed in the immediate post-independence period in Russia, I reveal how Afrika's work is both a symptom as well as a product of the post-Soviet condition.

Katarzyna Kozyra was the first of many controversial artists who were to appear on the art scene in Poland in the 1990s. Her 1993 MFA project, *Pyramid of Animals* was the art work that sparked the very first major scandal in Polish art, post-independence. Although she deals with universal themes in her work, these issues, and her treatment of them, had a distinctive resonance in Poland, owing to the fact that the country's cultural heritage of Roman Catholicism is deeply ingrained in society. While Kozyra was operating within the new democracy of the Third Republic of Poland, she also attempted

²¹⁴ Afrika actually claimed to be suffering from depression as a result of having lost his Soviet identity. Mikhail Ryklin, "The Artist in the Collection and the World," in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, ed. Peter Noever, 16 (Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995).

to develop that democracy and move it further along, by broadening the perspectives of her viewers and fellow compatriots. By examining the tenets and principles of the Catholic Church in Poland that form the foundation of Polish national identity and culture I demonstrate how Kozyra's work diverges from that established pattern of thinking. Furthermore, by focusing on the controversy surrounding her art, I show how Kozrya's work was at the same time a product of the new democratic freedom in Poland and a shaper of it. By taking on the issues of gender and beauty in her work, the artist challenges fixed beliefs in Polish society held in place by the Roman Catholic Church.

Polis' *Bronze Man* performance and the Latvian Independence Movements during the Soviet Period

It was around 1986 in Latvia that citizens began to actively form independence movements and push for the recognition of Latvian independence from the Soviet Union. No sooner had Gorbachev been elected General Secretary of the CPSU, and his liberalization policy of *perestroika* begun, than Latvians started to take advantage of these new freedoms by pressing for the recognition of Latvia as an independent state, as well as the recognition of the unlawful occupation and annexation of the country into the Soviet Union. Throughout the Soviet period, Latvian citizens were inundated with propaganda and information from the Soviet state that life in the Soviet Union was generally good, and the history books told the story of a Latvia that had willingly become a republic of the Soviet Union during World War II. Most citizens knew otherwise, but it wasn't until the late 1980s that they were allowed to address this publicly without fear of reprisal. It was then that activist groups such as Helsinki '86, the Latvian People's Front (*Latvijas Tautas Fronte*) and the Latvian National Independence Movement (*Latvijas*

Nacionālās Neatkarības Kustība, or LNNK)²¹⁵ began to form and started to expose the inconsistencies in between the Soviet version of reality and the lived one.

One of the first signs that times were changing occurred after the Chautauqua Conference that took place in Latvia's seaside resort, Jūrmala, in September 1986. While the US President's Senior Consultant Jack Matlock's speech was startling enough, given that he stated firmly that the US did not and would not recognize Latvia's incorporation into the Soviet Union, the fact that it was televised in Latvia was even more shocking. According to the authors of the recently published *History of Latvia: the Twentieth Century*, there was no possibility of such a speech being televised prior to Gorbachev coming to power and glasnost.²¹⁶ This outright statement declared Latvia's annexation into the USSR illegitimate and stimulated open and free discussion about the political situation in Latvia. Furthermore, the fact that this statement was televised, for all Latvians to see and hear, no doubt sent a signal that soon they would be able to do the same, themselves – to speak openly about their thoughts and opinions of the current regime.

To be sure, the consequences were soon to follow: just one month later an article appeared in the monthly journal *Literature and Art (Literatūra un Māksla)* written by a teacher, Dainis Īvāns, and a computer specialist, Artūrs Snips, protesting the planned construction of a hydroelectric power plant.²¹⁷ Their objections were not only environmental and economic, but also cultural. The Daugava River has a special

²¹⁵ *Helsinki '86* was a human rights watch group formed in Liepāja, Latvia in 1986 by workers from the port there. Their aim was to monitor how economic, cultural and individual rights of Latvians were respected. In June, 1988, the Latvian National Independence Movement was formed as the first national mass movement to demand the restoration of Latvia's independence. In October of that year the Latvian People's Front was established also to fight for the political and economic autonomy of Latvia.

²¹⁶ Daina Bleiere, Ilgvars Butulis, Inesis Feldmanis, Aivars Stranga and Antonijs Zunda, *History of Latvia: the Twentieth Century* (Latvia: Jumava, 2006), 431.

²¹⁷ See Daina Bleiere, Ilgvars Butulis, Inesis Feldmanis, Aivars Stranga and Antonijs Zunda, *History of Latvia: the Twentieth Century* (Latvia: Jumava, 2006), 431; and Artis Pabriks and Aldis Purs, *Latvia: The Challenges of Change* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 52.

significance to the Latvian people because it is written into much of their national folklore and mythology. For example, according to the legend, Riga was built when Kristaps the Great (*Lielais Kristaps*) carried people from one bank of the Daugava to the other, and began the settlement on the river's Right Bank that was to become the city of Riga. The response to the article in *Literature and Art* was immense – the journal received over 700 letters as well as 30,000 signatures of support.²¹⁸ Artis Pabriks and Aldis Purs, among others,²¹⁹ see this as “the first success story of Latvian collective action against Soviet authorities”²²⁰ because of the fact that by the following year, the USSR Council of Ministers passed a ruling to stop construction of the dam.

Latvians saw the construction of the dam as a personal as well as environmental threat that they were not willing to allow. But it was Gorbachev's reforms that enabled them to speak out on the matter, organize a collective action and actually impact governmental decision-making. Pabriks and Purs confirm the fact that “Gorbachev's leadership provided the people with the opportunity to express themselves with less fear of repression.”²²¹ The discussion about the dam that was initiated by the Īvāns and Snips article made its way into the mass media, including television and the press.²²² Once these debates started to enter into the public sphere, Latvians continued to push the boundaries of Perestroika even further to see just how far they would go. According to Juris Dreifelds, these protests were “a litmus test of Gorbachev's sincerity and seriousness in implementing liberalization.”²²³ In retrospect, we can see that once

²¹⁸ See Artis Pabriks and Aldis Purs, *Latvia: The Challenges of Change* (London: Routledge, 2002), 52.

²¹⁹ Juris Dreifelds also shares this opinion, see Juris Dreifelds, *Latvia in Transition* (England: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 55.

²²⁰ Pabriks and Purs, *Latvia: The Challenges of Change*, 52.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

²²² See Bleiere, Butulis, Feldmanis, Stranga and Zunda, *History of Latvia: the Twentieth Century*, 431.

²²³ Dreifelds, *Latvia in Transition*, 55.

Perestroika began, the freedoms that it allowed only increased as time went on, and as the people pushed the boundaries further and further, the wider they became.

It is not unusual that Ivans' and Snips' article appeared in the cultural journal *Literature and Art*. Artists and cultural groups were behind many of the protests and resistance movements in the late 1980s. In fact, according to Dreifelds, it was these groups that began the process of national awakening and rebirth in the 1980s. One of the first of such groups was Skandinieki, a folk-culture group that toured Latvia reviving local songs and traditions. The idea was to revitalize and bring back long-standing cultural traditions in order to support the argument that Latvia was an independent nation with an unique culture of its own,²²⁴ despite its illicit incorporation into the Soviet Union, against the people's will. There were also groups that formed in order to preserve and protect Latvia's indigenous architecture, through the repair of old churches and monuments. Even though these groups were operating in the cultural, not political, sphere, officials found them threatening enough. Helmi Stalts, one of the founders of Skandinieki, has attributed the authorities' fear to the fact that "beneath the song there lies something much more powerful."²²⁵ Indeed these cultural protection movements were at the very forefront of the national awakening that began in the mid-1980s with Perestroika, and only ended with the final declaration of Latvia's independence from the Soviet Union on May 4, 1991.

The writers of the recently published *History of Latvia: the Twentieth Century* have noted the important role that artists and intellectuals played in this period of Latvian

²²⁴ Incidentally, this is a strategy that has been used throughout history to make a claim for a culture's validity as an independent nation. The Brothers Grimm, for example, aimed to create a common German identity through their writing, with language being a unifying factor among all of the German federal states.

²²⁵ Helmi Stalts, as qtd in Dreifelds, *Latvia in Transition*, 54.

history. Published in 2006, this is the first comprehensive history of Latvia in the twentieth century published in Latvia since independence. The book was controversial when it first came out, because it was the first time that historical revisions of Latvia's incorporation into the Soviet Union had appeared in a formal history textbook that was published not only in Latvian and Russian, but also in English. Owing to the lack of any similar analytical texts published under the rubric of art history, I rely here on this text published in the genre of history that mentions the involvement of the cultural sphere in politics in Latvia.²²⁶

Not only did cultural figures attempt to prove the existence of a Latvian identity through the means of the arts, but they also stood in opposition to the regime. Artists are known for their characteristic refusal to conform in general; in the Soviet Union, this trait was considered to be a political statement, whether or not that was the intention. As the authors of *History of Latvia* have written:

First, culture was the expression of a small nation's collective resistance against efforts to dissolve its identity into the Soviet nation and culture. Second, resistance was also the confrontation of creative personalities and cultural icons with authority. Here, both the nonconformists' confrontation with power and the elite, which exists in any political regime, the resistance of the artistic community to efforts to turn them into obedient servants of Communist ideology, as well as protests against national enslavement were made manifest. The totalitarian regime perceived any free thought or creative independence as political opposition, thereby turning into political dissident occurrences that in another political regime would be looked upon as expressions of originality or creative nonconformity. This could cause various types of negative consequences, including political persecutions.²²⁷

²²⁶ See Mark Allan Svede's comment in "Many Easels Some Abandoned, Latvian art After Socialist Realism," in *Art of the Baltics*, where he states that although Latvia has reportedly one of the highest per capita concentrations of art historians in the world, it "lacks even a remotely comprehensive account of its artistic life as it developed in the second half of the twentieth century." (185)

²²⁷ Bleiere, Butulis, Feldmanis, Stranga and Zunda, *History of Latvia: the Twentieth Century*, 406.

Consequently culture, and protest from within the cultural community, could have as much and even greater weight than that which would come directly from the political sphere.

The Bulldozer exhibition of 1974, which made the front page of the *New York Times*, is an example of one occasion when a push from the cultural sector gained ground for civil liberties for the greater society. It was not so much that politics were *displaced* to culture per se, but that artists who fought the fight for freedom of expression and the right to exhibit their work were by default fighting for freedom of expression for their compatriots in all sectors of life. While those struggling to effect change on the political level risked more serious persecution, artists striving for similar policy changes were tolerated based on the assumption that they could effect concrete change.²²⁸ This is a feature shared by many of the countries of the former Soviet Union and its sphere of influence.

By the 1980s, artists began to recognize the significance of their position as intellectuals who could voice their opposition to the current regime, while remaining outside the more dangerous area of politics. As the writers of *History of Latvia* have stated: “the creative elite had the opportunity, within limits, to discuss or at least indicate the problems and issues of an ailing society by taking on the roles of philosopher, sociologist, cultural anthropologist, historian and so on.”²²⁹ Pabriks and Purs cite the

²²⁸ See Sirje Helme, “Nationalism and Dissent: Art and Politics in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania Under the Soviets,” in *Art of the Baltics*, ed. Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge, 6-16 (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Alfonsas Andriuškevičius, “The Phenomenon of Nonconformist Art,” in *Art of the Baltics*, ed. Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge, 25-29 (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002); and Elena Kornetchuk, “Soviet Art Under Government Control,” in *From Gulag to Glasnost: Nonconformist Art of the Soviet Union*, ed. Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge, 36-48 (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995).

²²⁹ Bleiere, Butulis, Feldmanis, Stranga and Zunda, *History of Latvia: the Twentieth Century*, 406.

activities of Latvia's creative unions as comprising the second phase²³⁰ of the Latvian pro-independence movement of the 1980s. Under the rubric of cultural institutions, intellectuals began to press for an open and honest discussion of Latvia's post-war history. Instead of the whitewashed official story presented by the Party, the people began to insist on the real account, or the truth behind the façade of what they had been told. As Pabriks and Purs have stated:

On June 1 and 2, 1988, Latvia's intellectuals met to discuss contemporary social and economic problems and demanded the public unveiling of the so-called "white spots" of history. In the 1980s, this term referred to everything that official Soviet propaganda avoided or pretended did not exist. Among these issues were the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states, the Soviet-Finnish war, and Soviet repression. During the conference, Mavriks Vulfsons, a journalist, political analyst and an old communist, stated openly that in 1940 Latvia was violently occupied by Soviet military forces. This could be considered the first *official challenge* of the legitimacy of Soviet power in Latvia.²³¹

Prior to this time the official line was that the Soviet Union had saved Latvia during World War II, and that Latvia had asked to be incorporated into and had willingly become a part of the Soviet Union. This is mainly owing to the fact that the Soviets had installed a puppet government in Latvia in June 1940. In order to give an appearance of legitimacy, a new "People's Parliament" was elected, although the conditions surrounding this election were questionable.²³² According to the writer of *History of*

²³⁰ They consider the period from 1986-1988 the first phase of the pro-independence movement, which included the ecological protests as well as the calendar demonstrations.

²³¹ Pabriks and Purs, *Latvia: The Challenges of Change*, 53.

²³² The Latvian constitution (*Satversme*) was violated on several counts: firstly, because the time period between the announcement of the elections and their occurrence was too short, secondly because the constitution stated that elections to the Parliament (*Saeima*) must take place in October, and finally, because of the fact that no other lists of candidates, other than those on the People's Labor Bloc, were permitted, thus guaranteeing victory for the latter. See Bleiere, Butulis, Feldmanis, Stranga and Zunda, *History of Latvia: the Twentieth Century*, 245.

Latvia, only one party was permitted on the ballots – the People’s Labour Party.²³³ Also, any slogans suggesting that Latvia was to be incorporated into the Soviet Union were banned, as “what mattered was not what the People’s Labour Bloc promised to do, but what it promised *not* to do.”²³⁴ Finally, we know that the results of the election were falsified,²³⁵ as the candidates were elected with nearly 100% of the votes, and in some cases exactly 100%. The newly elected Parliament subsequently requested that Latvia be admitted to the Soviet Union. The request was met, and Latvia was annexed as a Soviet Socialist Republic in summer 1940.²³⁶

The speeches from the June 1988 Writers’ Union Plenum were published in Latvian newspapers for all of the public to see. This was yet another instance, much like the Chatauqua Conference, when citizens were given a glimpse of the truth behind their recent history – a glimpse that had previously been denied to them by the policies that had to follow the official party line. For Dreifelds these speeches were “extremely blunt and crossed a threshold of political expression and openness not breached at an official gathering in Latvia for over half a century.”²³⁷ This was the beginning of the whittling away of the Soviet ideology, the façade that the Soviet government presented to the people, and the exposure of the truth behind that veneer. And in Latvia, artists and cultural figures were among those that began that whole process.

Once open discussion had begun to take place in the public domain, this opened up possibilities for other public manifestations. On June 14, 1987, the first “calendar demonstration” took place in Riga. On that day about 5,000 people gathered in front of

²³³ See Bleiere, Butulis, Feldmanis, Stranga and Zunda, *History of Latvia: the Twentieth Century*, 245.

²³⁴ Ibid, 246.

²³⁵ See Bleiere, Butulis, Feldmanis, Stranga and Zunda, *History of Latvia: the Twentieth Century*, 246.

²³⁶ Ibid, 243-249.

²³⁷ Dreifelds, *Latvia in Transition*, 57.

the Freedom Monument (*Brīvības Piemnieklis*) in order to commemorate the Soviet deportations of Latvian citizens in June 1941.²³⁸ Following that first protest, subsequent demonstrations took place on dates that marked other significant events in Latvian history, such as the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (August 23) and Latvian Independence Day (November 18). Unlike the previously discussed Writers' Union Plenum and cultural protection groups, the calendar demonstrations were not organized by the intelligentsia, but rather by Latvian working-class youth.²³⁹ The combined efforts of both the cultural leaders and average citizens eventually compelled the authorities to revisit the inconsistencies in Latvian history and reassess the party line. According to Dreifelds,

...by bringing about a sense of national rebirth among all sectors of society, the organization at the forefront of these demonstrations, Helsinki '86, eventually forced the Communist Party to reconsider its interpretation of Latvian history and its attitude to the demonstrations. By 1988, when demonstrations were repeated on the same three dates, some more progressive Party officials and prominent Party media commentators stood shoulder to shoulder with the demonstrators, even though they came from opposite ends of the political spectrum.²⁴⁰

Thus the calendar demonstrations not only brought opposition out into the open, what with people taking their views of dissent to the streets, but they also managed to incite changes on a governmental level, eventually leading the reestablishment of Latvia's independence in 1990.

Perhaps the culmination of these Calendar Demonstrations was an event that occurred on August 23, 1989 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the signing of the

²³⁸ See Pabriks and Purs, *Latvia: The Challenges of Change*, 52-53.

²³⁹ See Dreifelds, *Latvia in Transition*, 56.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 56.

Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact,²⁴¹ called *The Baltic Chain*. On this day approximately 2 million people created a 600 kilometer human chain across the three Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The purpose was to bring attention to the common historical fate that the three countries had suffered as a result of the signing of the agreement, leaving them in Soviet control after World War II. It was another instance of people ‘taking to the streets,’ but this time on a massive scale.

The events and actions of the late 1980s that were part of the pro-independence movement in Latvia had been organized by both cultural leaders and working-class citizens alike. Both groups sought to uncover the truth about the Soviet occupation of Latvia, which existed behind the shadow of official propaganda. They did so by bringing these repressed truths out into the public sphere through the use of mass media, and also via public demonstration. It was at this same time that Miervaldis Polis’ *Bronze Man* performance set out to do the very same thing – to underscore the dichotomy between the lived Soviet reality and the way it was presented in propaganda and the media, and to do so by provoking the questioning of this contradiction in front of an audience of everyday people.

The similarities between Polis’ appearance as *The Bronze Man*, with his bronze-colored suit, hat, and shoes and face, hands and extremities painted bronze, and the myriad of bronze statues that graced nearly every public square and civic building in cities across the Soviet Union were obvious and calculated. The entire project was

²⁴¹ The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, or officially the *Treaty of Non-aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*, was signed Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov and German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop in Moscow on August 24, 1939 (dated August 23). It included a secret protocol that divided Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania into spheres of Nazi and Soviet influence. It was as a result of this document that the Soviet Union felt fit to occupy Latvia and the Baltic States, and set up a communist government in Poland after World War II.

initially conceived by a filmmaker from West Germany who was, according to Polis, “filming Perestroika”²⁴² in Latvia. Polis himself has stated that the idea of a man covered in bronze paint was a direct reference to the various bronze statues that marked all Soviet cities, including Riga. Although some observers of Polis’ walk through the city thought that Polis was specifically referencing Lenin, the artist maintains that he wasn’t, rather his image pointed to bronze statues of historical figures in general, including those that date back to Ancient Greece and Rome,²⁴³ as well as the ubiquitous Soviet ones. In one of the appearances of *The Bronze Man* the artist was also photographed at the Victory Monument (*Uzvaras piemineklis*) in Riga (Fig. 3.1), a monument to the Soviet Union’s victory in World War II, which to this day still contains several monumental bronze statues.²⁴⁴

The comparison between Polis’ performance and the Soviet bronze statues goes even further than mere resemblance. Polis’ act of applying a layer of paint to his body and clothes also parallels the manner in which the production of bronze statues in the Soviet Union began. The implementation of these statues in the Soviet Union dated back to 1918 and Lenin’s plan for Monumental Propaganda, the purpose of which was, according to Anatoly Lunacharsky,²⁴⁵ “to set up monuments to outstanding persons in the field of revolutionary and social activity, philosophy, literature, science and art.”²⁴⁶ The

²⁴² “Viņi filmēja perestroiku”

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

²⁴³ “Nebija jau arī domāts Ļeņins.”

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

²⁴⁴ The origins and conception of *The Bronze Man* performance will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

²⁴⁵ Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875-1933), first Soviet People’s Commissar of Enlightenment, responsible for culture and education in the early years of the Soviet Union (1917-1929).

²⁴⁶ As qtd. in Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 53.

emphasis was on quantity, not quality, and as such many of these monuments were created in haste. As Christina Lodder tells us in her book on Russian Constructivism:

The monuments, to be set up ‘in suitable corners of the capital,’ were to ‘serve the aim of extensive propaganda, rather than the aim of immortalization.’ They were to be made of cheap temporary materials such as plaster and terracotta, although later it was hoped to replace them in more permanent materials. Primary consideration was to be given to ‘the quantity and expressive qualities of these monuments.’²⁴⁷

The statues, then, became a physical analogue to verbal gestures of the Soviet state, with a painted bronze surface that hid the cheap plaster underneath. While they were presented as one thing – solid, sturdy, even expensive, metal – a slight scratch at the surface would reveal the less stable reality underneath, in the same way that revealing the truth about Latvian history would quickly unravel the grand tales of the Soviet state as being Latvia’s savior in World War II and that brought prosperity and stability to the nation.

Polis was aware of the parallels between his painting himself bronze and the painting of the plaster statues. Although he states that with the *Bronze Man* performance he was mainly referencing the tradition, in Western society, of creating and erecting bronze statues to heroes, leaders and figureheads in general, he also mentions the fact that the Soviet Union had its own “perversion” of these bronze monuments. In his words,

The idea was about the putting up of monuments in general...It was the Greeks who created the greatest master works of the highest technological quality, in bronze. The power behind such a creation as the Athena statue [in the Parthenon – AB] – that was real power. But in the Soviet period they made these statues from

²⁴⁷ Ibid, 53.

plaster, and perverted them with horrible bronze paint of low quality, as if it were gold.²⁴⁸

Polis' historical reference was, then, multi-layered, as he was thinking on both a global as well a local level. While on the one hand he was creating his own version of a monument, he was also aware of the Soviet context in which he was operating, and the different connotation of a bronze statue among viewers in Latvia at the time. In this sense the performance could be read on two levels, addressing both Western and non-Western audiences.

Inconsistencies occurred everywhere in Latvian society during the Soviet period, not just in the form of plaster statues that were painted bronze. Astute viewers of Polis' performance could draw parallels between this discrepancy and others. Pabriks and Purs, for example, note how Soviet ideologists inflated statistics and exaggerated data in order to justify the Soviet occupation of Latvia, by showing how the Latvian economy had flourished after its incorporation. For example, Soviet figures in 1986 show production in Latvia having increased by 4,600 per cent, GNP by 1,150 per cent and social labor productivity by 1,009 per cent, all since 1940.²⁴⁹ Nevertheless, most Latvians were not happy with their living conditions under Soviet rule. In the 1930s Latvia had one of the strongest and fastest growing economies in Europe. Living standards since the country's incorporation into the Soviet Union, however, had significantly decreased. According to Pabriks and Purs, in the 1980s, "average Latvians felt increasingly deprived economically

²⁴⁸ "Domāts bija vispār. Par to, ka liek šos monumentus...Bet, kad likt monumentu, kas augstākās tehnoloģijas meistardarbs bija, grieķu laikā. Bronza. Vara, kas spēj tādu Atēnu Pallādu izliet, tā patiesi bija vara...Bet padomju laiks, uztaisīja no ģipša, nopervēja ar riebīgu un nekvalitatīvu bronzas krāsu, tā kā zelts."

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

²⁴⁹ See Pabriks and Purs, *Latvia: The Challenges of Change*, 49.

because it seemed to them that they did not receive an equitable share of what they annually delivered to the whole Union market.”²⁵⁰ Beginning in the 1960s, there were frequent food shortages that caused people to wonder why there was such a disparity between the high rate of production and the actual products available. For Pabriks and Purs, “economic difference between the Soviet center and Latvia was one of the rational sources of centrifugal force making many Latvians feel skeptical about the Soviet system and urging them to search for alternative perspectives.”²⁵¹ Audiences of Polis’ performance, recognizing an inconsistency in their everyday lives, could connect with and relate those that the artist was bringing up with his work. In this way the performance had relevance for the local audience at that time.

The other element of Polis’ action that bears resemblance to the Monumental Propaganda program is the element of performance itself. Because the Soviet statues were intended to have an official public unveiling, complete with speeches, ceremonies and festivities, together all of the actions surrounding their unveiling comprised the propagandistic message. According to Lodder,

These statues combined with plaques affixed to buildings, the ceremonial unveilings and festive musical accompaniments gave the impression that the Plan for Monumental Propaganda advocated and embodied an idea of a synthesis of the arts, of painting, architecture, sculpture and music, on the streets of the city. This concept of artistic synthesis and taking art out into the streets had already been present in the decorations and activities of the revolutionary festivals. The Plan for Monumental Propaganda gave it a more permanent character.²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 49.

²⁵¹ Ibid, 50.

²⁵² Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 54.

Similarly, Polis takes his own version of Monumental Propaganda out into the streets and to the people. But his contained a different message, reversing the effects of the original intended message of Lenin's original plan.

Instead of making a definitive statement one way or the other, Polis merely initiated a dialogue by appearing in public in provocative (for 1987 in Latvia) dress. And provocation is exactly what the artist claims to have intended. In an interview with Hardijs Lediņš in *Liesma (The Flame)*, he stated that he “was interested in how the viewers would react to it, first of all to me. It is a psychological test – to provoke the viewers.”²⁵³ In fact, the artist has made several statements to this effect, and this motivation behind his work will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four. Just as the calendar demonstrations were a public manifestation of the views and opinions of many Latvians who were opposed to the Soviet government at the time, so, too was Polis' performance, although his message was more ambiguous. Since it occurred within the realm of art and outside that of politics, it created a space for dialogue among a public that perhaps would not have otherwise engaged in such discussions, at least not in a public forum. Polis' performance allowed for the average citizen, walking through the streets of Riga on the day of his performance, to contemplate the issues that the performance raised, whether or not they were directly connected to politics. At the same time that it participated in the dialogues that were taking place on a political level, it was also separate and removed from them, given that it was an artistic performance that did not claim to be politically motivated.

Search for a Russian Identity: Sergei Bugaev's *Crimania*

²⁵³ Miervaldis Polis, “No karnevāla līdz izstādei,” interview by Hardijs Lediņš, *Liesma*, 87/4: 20-21.

Afrika's journey to Crimea, in 1993, was an attempt to discover a sense of national cultural identity, for which many Russians were searching at that time.²⁵⁴

Russian cultural identity has always been a problematical issue,²⁵⁵ and has been discussed to date in a number of texts and scholarly essays.²⁵⁶ The breakup of the Soviet Union only complicated those tensions, for reasons that will be discussed below. Firstly, the cultivation of a Russian national identity during the Soviet period was not of paramount importance, as the focus was on the creation of a Soviet one, at the expense of all other

²⁵⁴ For the purpose of this dissertation, the term "national identity" refers to national cultural identity, as opposed to ethnic or civic/statist identity. National cultural identity then, refers to, as Orlando Figes has stated, "a Russian temperament, a set of native customs and beliefs, something visceral, emotional, instinctive, passed on down the generations, which has helped to shape the personality and bind together the community. Orlando Figes, *Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002): xxx.

The question of ethnic versus civic identity is a separate issue also of concern to contemporary Russia, but will not be discussed in this text (see FN 42 below).

²⁵⁵ For the purposes of this dissertation I will be focusing on the identity question during and after the Soviet period, although the "Russian question" has also been an issue with regard to the Imperial (pre-Soviet) era and the construction of an Imperial, as opposed to ethnic, identity. See Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998); Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia and the Russians* (New York: Belknap Press, 2003); Robert Geraci *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), and Orlando Figes, *Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002). Hosking argues in *Russia: People and Empire 1552-1917* that Russian national/cultural identity had never been fully developed, and the collapse of the Empire in 1917 left Russians without a sense of any sort of Russian identity. In *Natasha's Dance: a Cultural History of Russia*, Figes argues that the lack of consensus as to what defined Russian national consciousness was in fact "enshrined in myth" (xxx) and the author explores the cultural movements that formed the foundation of these myths (the Slavophiles, the Westernizers, the Populists and the Scythians). Also, for cross-reference with post-colonial literature, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London: Verso, 2006).

²⁵⁶ See Ilya Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and leadership in Poland, Russia and Ukraine* (England: Cambridge University Press: 1998); Mark Sandle, "Search for a National Identity: Intellectual Debates in Post-Soviet Russia," in *Ethnicity and Nationalism in East Central Europe and the Balkans*, ed. Christopher Williams and Thanasis D. Sfikas, 64-85 (England: Ashgate Publishers, 1999); Antje Herrberg and Ulf Hedetoft, "Russia and the European Other: Searching for a Post-Soviet Identity," in *Which Identity for Which Europe?*, ed. Antje Herrberg, 85-108 (Denmark: Aalborg University, 1998); Simon Dixon, "The Russians and the Russian Question," in *The Nationalities Question in the Post-Soviet States*, ed. Graham Smith, 47-66 (New York: Longman, 1996); Graham Smith, Vivien Law, Andrew Wilson, Annette Bohr and Edward Allworth, *Nation Building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: The Politics of National Identities* (England: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Stephen K. Carter, "Russian Nationalism and Russian Politics in the 1990s," in *Ethnicity and Nationalism in East Central Europe and the Balkans*, ed. Christopher Williams and Thanasis D. Sfikas, 91-102 (England: Ashgate Publishers, 1999); Oksana Oracheva, "The Ideology of Russian Nationalism," in *Ethnicity and Nationalism in East Central Europe and the Balkans*, ed. Christopher Williams and Thanasis D. Sfikas, 47-63 (England: Ashgate Publishers, 1999); Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Pathways After Empire: National Identity and Foreign Economic Policy in the Post-Soviet World* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001).

individual nationalities. While other nations fought to save their individual cultural heritage from being subsumed by the Soviet Union, Russia, being the seat of the Soviet Union, did not allow for civic Russians²⁵⁷ to maintain their own individual Russian identities. The swift collapse of the Soviet Union, and the lack of any contingency plan to rebuild a national identity in the absence of the Soviet one left Russian citizens at a loss for dealing with the weak sense of national and cultural identity that was the legacy of the Soviet empire.

A nation's cultural identity is predominantly defined by the existence of a language (in this case, the Russian language) and a distinctive culture. In Russian culture, language has always played a distinct role. As Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis tell us:

Since the emergence of a Romantic philosophy of language at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the idea of a link between a nation's language and its self-consciousness and identity has been prominent in studies of cultural history. In Russian culture, the conflict between the two main approaches to the problem of 'language and identity' – they can loosely be called 'nominalist' and 'realist' – has played a significant role over the past two centuries. In the nominalist view, language is a tool whose shape and development are contingent on the changing intellectual and cultural needs which it is supposed to serve. In the realist view...the native language itself is the embodiment of the speakers' collective mentality and cultural tradition.²⁵⁸

While a nation's language comprises unique linguistic signifiers and syntax, its culture is made up of cultural markers unique to that group, including visual symbols. Afrika's subsequent exhibition following the *Crimania* performance was an exploration of the

²⁵⁷ Russians distinguish between ethnic Russians (*russkii*) and civic Russians (*rossiiskii*), or, inhabitants of the territory of Russia, the latter including people who live in Russia but are of various ethnicities, including Chechen, Tatar, etc. See Simon Dixon, "The Russians and the Russian Question" in *The Nationalities Question in the Post-Soviet States*, ed. Graham Smith, 47-8 (New York: Longman, 1996).

²⁵⁸ Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis, *National Identity in Russian Culture: An Introduction* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 132

very language, symbols and signs that had been used in forging a Soviet identity, including common and identifiable Soviet phrases (“Workers of the World, Unite!”), images such as the hammer and sickle, Lenin, and Socialist Realist imagery, as well as actual signs, such as banners (*znamya*), that were given as prizes during the Soviet period. In the installations in the MAK exhibition, Afrika appropriated all of these elements that he had salvaged from the Soviet Union and combined them with similar elements taken from the capitalist West (Donald Duck, the CNN logo), amalgamating linguistic and visual symbols from both sides of the Iron Curtain to produce new, Post-Soviet cultural symbols that could form the basis of a Post-Soviet identity for his fellow inhabitants of Russia.

Indeed, the search for a national cultural identity was one of the main issues that plagued Russian society and the Russian Federation in the Post-Soviet period. In 1999 Oksana Oracheva described it as “one of the most significant issues facing Russia today,”²⁵⁹ and Ilya Prizel has expressed the awesomeness of the issue as follows:

The complete disintegration of the USSR and the speed with which it happened were anticipated by very few in the Soviet Union or abroad. For many of the newly independent states the task would be to create a national identity after centuries of submission; for the Russians there awaited the no less daunting task of finding a post-imperial identity and destiny.²⁶⁰

Consequently when Afrika described his depression and despair at the loss of his Soviet identity in the early 1990s, it was not only a personal statement; the artist was speaking

²⁵⁹ Oksana Oracheva, “The Ideology of Russian Nationalism,” in Christopher Williams and Thanasis D. Sfikas, eds., 47 *Ethnicity and Nationalism in East Central Europe and the Balkans*. (England: Ashgate Publishers, 1999).

²⁶⁰ Ilya Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and leadership in Poland, Russia and Ukraine* (England: Cambridge University Press: 1998), 219-220.

for the nation as a whole. In the following sections I will outline the factors that have contributed to the complication of the identity issue in Post-Soviet Russia.

Despite the fact that Russia was the seat and center of the Soviet Union, nationalist rhetoric forged a Soviet identity, not a Russian one, during the three-quarters of a century of its existence. If anything, Prizel notes that “the Russian national identity that evolved during the Soviet period, on the elite level, especially after World War II, was organically linked to the imperial Soviet identity.”²⁶¹ When it appeared that the Soviet identity did not provide a stable enough foundation for a sense of national identity, an attempt was made to probe further into the Russian past. As Prizel has written, in the later Soviet period Brezhnev, “confronted with a deepening ideological atrophy, came to rely on Imperial Great Russian nationalism as a means to legitimize the regime, reverting to some of the verbiage of the period of high Stalinism.”²⁶² Lacking any consistent model of a national identity to rely on, Russian national cultural identity was experienced as a personal and collective crisis in the aftermath of the loss of the Soviet one. Since national identity had previously been associated with two defeated empires, the pre-Soviet Russian one and the Soviet one, Russians were now concerned above all with the creation of new terms of self-representation in the immediate post-Soviet period. To quote Prizel again, “as with all other former empires, the process of devising a new post-imperial paradigm is slow and fitful. Russia’s weak national identity compounded by its close association with an imperial identity makes the process of “nationalization” particularly protracted, and it will probably require a generational change within the Russian polity

²⁶¹ Ibid, 180-181.

²⁶² Ibid, 181.

before it is fully complete.”²⁶³ The lack of a stable foundation upon which to formulate a Russian national identity makes the task that much more challenging and requiring more time than in the case of other Post-Soviet nations, as will be discussed in greater detail below.²⁶⁴

The Russians’ role in the formation and maintenance of the Soviet Union was contradictory. Mark Sandle has described them as both “victims and executioners”²⁶⁵ because of the fact that while they were the ones responsible for creating a Soviet identity for themselves and others, this process actually prevented them from cultivating a separate Russian one.²⁶⁶ The process of Sovietization meant that individual nationalities and cultures were forcibly repressed in an attempt to create a unifying Soviet identity. Although the official language of the Soviet Union was Russian, and many had understood Soviet and Russian identity to be one in the same, Russian traditions were not, in fact, celebrated above all others. As Sandle explains:

The Russian people suffered as a result of the Soviet experience: their history, culture, traditions and social structure were all but destroyed by the Sovietisation policies of the CPSU. At the same time, the Russians were identified as the dominant and exploitative group who benefited from the USSR. The USSR was then an unusual empire. The dominant language was Russian, and yet the Russian

²⁶³ Ibid, 182. Geoffrey Hosking also addresses this issue in *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998) and *Russia and the Russians* (New York: Belknap Press, 2003).

²⁶⁴ Hosking also makes this point in the chapter “From Perestroika to Russian Federation” in his book *Russia and the Russians* (New York: Belknap Press, 2003), 569-614.

²⁶⁵ Mark Sandle, “Search for a National Identity: Intellectual Debates in Post-Soviet Russia,” in *Ethnicity and Nationalism in East Central Europe and the Balkans*, ed. Christopher Williams and Thanasis D. Sfikas, 68 (England: Ashgate Publishers, 1999).

²⁶⁶ This idea is supported by others, such as Simon Dixon, in “The Russians and the Russian Question,” in *The Nationalities Question in the Post-Soviet States*, ed. Graham Smith, 62 (New York: Longman, 1996), and by Antje Herrberg and Ulf Hedetoft, in “Russia and the European Other: Searching for a Post-Soviet Identity,” in *Which Identity for Which Europe?*, ed. Antje Herrberg, 86 (Denmark: Aalborg University, 1998).

people did not have the institutions and agencies accorded to other ethnic groups: an Academy of Sciences, KGB and a Communist Party,²⁶⁷

which is why he sees them as both victors and losers. The creation of an independent nation known as the Russia Federation presented a unique possibility finally to create a new Russian cultural and national identity. But even this historical opportunity brought with it its share of problems. In fact, according to Simon Dixon, “the creation of the Russian Federation, far from dispelling any anxiety about Russian national identity, has merely served to deepen it, and the ‘Russian question,’ rather than being definitely answered by the collapse of the Soviet Union, has instead been given a new lease on life.”²⁶⁸

The negative consequences for Russian national cultural identity that resulted from the breakup of the Soviet Union are frequently discussed among political scientists and sociologists. The Soviet Union dissolved rather rapidly, and the process of de-Sovietization was handled in such a way that it did not take into consideration the aspect of forging a new identity in the absence of an old one. Furthermore, there was no clear idea of Russian identity to revert back to, as there was in the case of other nations, such as Latvia (and Poland, as a Satellite nation), that had been subsumed into the Soviet Union.²⁶⁹ Prizel among others (such as Hosking and Figes²⁷⁰), for example, tells us that

²⁶⁷ Sandle, “Search for a National Identity: Intellectual Debates in Post-Soviet Russia,” *Ethnicity and Nationalism in East Central Europe and the Balkans*, 68.

²⁶⁸ Simon Dixon, “The Russians and the Russian Question,” in *The Nationalities Question in the Post-Soviet States*, ed. Graham Smith, 47 (New York: Longman, 1996).

²⁶⁹ National identity in Latvia, for example, was created in the late nineteenth century, and ultimately led to the establishment of Latvia as free and independent states in the immediate post-WWI years. A similar phenomenon occurred in Poland, although the idea of a national cultural identity had already been in place for several centuries and had helped Poland to retain its identity throughout the partitions. Poland and Latvia fell back on the ideas of national identity during those years when the countries were re-established yet again at the end of the Cold War.

“the swift collapse of the USSR did not permit the development of an extra-imperial Russian identity, let alone the internalization of a new post-imperial paradigm for Russia.”²⁷¹ He also adds that “Russia’s weak national identity compounded by its close association with an imperial identity made the process of “nationalization” particularly protracted.”²⁷² For Graham Smith, it was the way that the breakup was dealt with that inhibited the development of a new national identity. Comparing the breakup of the Soviet Union with the fall of the British Empire, he writes that:

Russian political elites have not brought to decolonization a clear awareness of the distinction between nation and empire, as did, for example, British elites following their empire’s eventual decolonization. As a consequence, the question of what and where is Russia, what is its sense of national self, remains highly ambiguous.²⁷³

In the aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet Union, there was no plan for the cultivation of a new Russian identity, which left many, including Afrika, struggling to find a way to define themselves.

Antje Herrberg and Ulf Hedetoft have also argued that Russia’s reliance on the “other” for self-definition has proved problematic for the development of a national cultural identity in the Post-Soviet period.²⁷⁴ Insofar as many of the former communist

²⁷⁰ Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917* and *Russia and the Russians*; Orlando Figes, *A People’s Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924* (London: Penguin, 1998).

²⁷¹ Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and leadership in Poland, Russia and Ukraine*, 181.

²⁷² *Ibid*, 182.

²⁷³ Graham Smith, Vivien Law, Andrew Wilson, Annette Bohr and Edward Allworth, *Nation Building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: The Politics of National Identities* (England: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9.

²⁷⁴ Herrberg and Hedetoft, “Russia and the European Other: Searching for a Post-Soviet Identity,” *Which Identity for Which Europe?*; C.S. Browning also discusses this issue of “othering” in “The Region-Building Approach Revisited: The Continued Othering of Russia in Discourses of Region-Building in the European North,” *Geopolitics* 8/1 (Spring 2003): 45-71.

and Soviet nations of Eastern Europe have gone on to join NATO and the European Union, this has further “othered” Russia. It is not only this definition by negation that is problematic for Russia in finding its own identity, but also the fact that a number of nations that were once a part of the Soviet Union had broken free and found their own identities in organizations that used to be the opposition to the USSR.²⁷⁵ Now the ‘other’ was greater, and stronger, and had come to include a number of former Soviet Republics and Warsaw Pact countries, including both Latvia and Poland.²⁷⁶ The impact of the accession of the Baltic States and other Eastern European countries, such as Poland, The Czech Republic, Hungary, and even Romania and Bulgaria, into the EU and NATO, cannot be underestimated. As Herrberg and Hedetoft tell us:

...it should not be forgotten that the Russian emergence as the heir, *de facto* and *de jure*, to the former Soviet Union appears to have given rise to expectations from the West which, in turn, also have a decisive impact on the self-identification of the new Russian state. Seen from the perspective of the Other (Europe and Western Europe at large), the formulation of Russia’s national identity has been measured against the success of reform and democratic transition in the east and central European states. Such expectations are problematic, because the Visegrad countries, with their aspirations for membership of the EU and NATO and their smaller and more manageable size, soon appeared to have an identity formation which defined itself closely in relation to the European Union, and where civic values were (successfully) developed from below, in parallel to the decay of the authoritarian Communist structures.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ NATO, for example, was founded in 1949 for the security of the founding nations against threats by the Soviet Union.

²⁷⁶ Stephen Carter has described Russia as having suffered a “triple defeat,” in that it lost both its outer and inner empire (Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the Republics), as well as suffering the defeat of Communism in the Cold War. See Stephen K. Carter, “Russian Nationalism and Russian Politics in the 1990s,” in *Ethnicity and Nationalism in East Central Europe and the Balkans*, ed. Christopher Williams and Thanasis D. Sfikas, 91 (England: Ashgate Publishers, 1999).

²⁷⁷ Herrberg and Hedetoft, “Russia and the European Other: Searching for a Post-Soviet Identity,” *Which Identity for Which Europe?*, 98.

The so-called ‘defection’ of former Soviet Republics to the EU and NATO, the Soviet Union’s former opponents, has left a much bigger and more powerful “other” for Russia to define itself against, in order to eke out its own identity.²⁷⁸

Afrika’s project was timely as well as topical, as it occurred around the time of a high point of political and social instability following the collapse of the USSR.²⁷⁹ Dixon cites the period between September 1993, the constitutional referendum, and elections in December of that year, up to summer 1994, as the “high point” of Russian political instability. He notes that 42% of Russians surveyed feared a complete loss of order and the country’s descent into anarchy. Afrika’s performance took place in 1993, and the exhibition in 1995, just on the heels of that period. Oracheva claimed that “many Russians are becoming increasingly depressed and frustrated by economic difficulties...the break-up of the Soviet state and lack of clear definition of a new political space coupled with the loss of an established national identity that in the past was mostly associated with the Soviet one is also making matters worse.”²⁸⁰ Furthermore Oracheva feels that a collective identity “can provide adequate psychological security,”²⁸¹ and is therefore a relevant and crucial issue facing Russians in the Post-Soviet period. Afrika’s project shares these concerns and, I will argue, attempts to resolve them.

While a sense of national cultural identity was what pushed the nations of the Soviet Republics to vie for their independence from the Soviet Union, in Russia it played no such role in the break-up. In fact, Sandle describes nationalist feeling as “a

²⁷⁸ Ibid, 87.

²⁷⁹ See Dixon, “The Russians and the Russian Question,” *The Nationalities Question in the Post-Soviet States*, 64.

²⁸⁰ Oracheva, “The Ideology of Russian Nationalism,” *Ethnicity and Nationalism in East Central Europe and the Balkans*, 47.

²⁸¹ Ibid, 47.

consequence rather than a cause of the collapse of communism in Russia,”²⁸² mainly because of the “low-levels of national consciousness and national self-awareness amongst the Russian people.”²⁸³ This was quite the opposite situation in Latvia. There, national identity was what led Latvians to fight for their independence, as inhabitants argued that an independent Latvian state had existed before World War II, and that its assimilation into the Soviet Union was therefore an aberration. Later, the Occupation served to bolster Latvians’ sense of national identity. According to Andrei Tsygankov, “the incorporation only exacerbated the Latvian sense of ‘non-Russianness’ or ‘non-Sovietness.’”²⁸⁴ Thus while Latvia emerged from the break-up with a strengthened and well-established national identity, Russia suffered from the opposite problem: the struggle not only to establish, but also finally to define an identity independent of the former Empire or the Soviet Union.

Scholars have argued that the Russian language was and remains a key gauge of Russian identity. Some refer to Russian culture as being *logocentric*, meaning that the word takes precedence over other cultural symbols or markers.²⁸⁵ Dean S. Worth considers language to be an even more important element to the concept of the Russian identity than it is to other national identities. In his chapter on language in *Modern Russian Culture*, he states that “among the Slavs, as among many other peoples, cultural identity tends to be defined by language: in a way that would be difficult for a Quebequois, a Mexican, or an American to understand, to be Russian is primarily to have

²⁸² Sandle, “Search for a National Identity: Intellectual Debates in Post-Soviet Russia,” *Ethnicity and Nationalism in East Central Europe and the Balkans*, 68.

²⁸³ Ibid, 68.

²⁸⁴ Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Pathways After Empire: National Identity and Foreign Economic Policy in the Post-Soviet World* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 47.

²⁸⁵ See Michael N. Epstein, *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism & Contemporary Russian Culture* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995).

Russian as one's mother tongue."²⁸⁶ Because Russian language and culture was absorbed by the Soviet variants, this important aspect of identity was not able to develop during the Soviet years. The symbolic, unifying, communicating power that the Soviet language obtained (as opposed to a participatory form of government) has consequently posed problems for the redevelopment of a Russian identity in the Post-Soviet years. According to Herrberg and Hedetoft,

Russian identity prior to 1989 was typified by the absence of official recognition and symbolic markers – and conceivably by the erosion of cultural-historical notions as well. Russia, the USSR, and the concept of fatherland merged, at least in official discourse, and arguably also for a sizeable proportion of the Russian population.

This presents contemporary Russia with a considerable task of identity reconstruction, resulting in political and ideological struggles about how, when and why to forge Russianness; who the central protagonists of this project are; and what the role of the outside world ought to be: friendly, gradualist mirror; contrastive enemy image; or exotic repository of cultural Europeanness. As a consequence, the 'declassed' Russian presently suffers from a lack of orientation...²⁸⁷

The crisis in language, therefore, points to the crisis in identity and can in fact be considered one of its sources.

While Billington states that within the Russian empire "there was neither ethnic nor linguistic unity,"²⁸⁸ there was indeed a unifying language in the Soviet Union: Russian. And while the lexicon and syntax employed in official discourse was indeed that of the Russian language, what it was used to communicate were *Soviet* ideas, concepts

²⁸⁶ Dean S. Worth, "Language," in *Modern Russian Culture*, ed. Nicholas Rzhevsky, 19 (England: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²⁸⁷ Herrberg and Hedetoft, "Russia and the European Other: Searching for a Post-Soviet Identity," *Which Identity for Which Europe?*, 91.

²⁸⁸ James H. Billington, *Russia in Search of Itself* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2004), 3.

and phenomena. Words, acronyms and phrases were used to identify Soviet institutions, leaders, events and places. Once the Soviet Union collapsed, much of the language fell apart along with it. There was an entire language in place to communicate concerns and values which no longer seemed relevant to many Soviet citizens. In other countries of the Soviet Union, people simply reverted back to the use of their native language for official communication. In Russia, the shift was quite different, in that it took place within the same language: the Russian words used to communicate Soviet ideas had to be exchanged for Russian words to express concepts relevant to the new Russian Federation. Afrika's choice, then, to examine language and symbols in connection with the Post-Soviet Russian identity crisis, is similarly driven by this process.

Theresa Sabonis-Chafee has used Richard Rorty's concept of "final vocabulary" to discuss the issues regarding symbols and languages in Post-Soviet Russia, citing the theory's usefulness in understanding the "profound crisis of vocabulary"²⁸⁹ faced by citizens of Post-communist states. Rorty claims that every person has a "final vocabulary," a set of words for which there is no further definition because they are the base words by which all others are defined.²⁹⁰ The fact that in the former USSR this "final vocabulary" had in fact been rendered useless meant that individuals lacked a base language that they could build on. For Afrika, working with language and cultural symbols seemed to hold the key to the development of a new Russian identity. If the artist could develop a new final vocabulary out of the rubble of the old signs and symbols of Soviet Russia, then the nation would have a basis on which it could build a new

²⁸⁹ Theresa Sabonis-Chafee, "Communism as Kitsch: Soviet Symbols in Post-Soviet Society," in *Consuming Russia*, ed. Adele Marie-Barker, 363 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

²⁹⁰ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 73.

language, and thus construct a new Russian identity.²⁹¹ Afrika's focus became this very quest for an identity, as it was one of the overriding problems Russians faced after the breakup of the Soviet Union. By honing in on this issue of singular importance for Russians of all classes and educational backgrounds, Afrika posits his own goals in terms that can have relevance for his entire nation.

Kozyra and Artistic Controversy in Poland

In the 1990s art and controversy went almost hand in hand in Poland. After a democratic government was reinstated, Polish artists began to exercise their right to free expression and create works of art that could be competitive with those seen in the West. Viewers had strong reactions to many of these art works, and a war was waged, mainly in the press and mass media, over the boundaries of contemporary art.²⁹² The fact that all of these events and upheavals occurred in the 1990s shows that, as Aneta Szyłak has stated, “this turbulent decade has demonstrated that visual art is playing an important role in the renegotiation of traditional and current paradigms.”²⁹³ Many of the artists in these “culture wars” suffered severe repercussions, such as being forced to withdraw from the Venice Biennale, or even being convicted in court.²⁹⁴ Katarzyna Kozyra managed to

²⁹¹ The notion of kitsch as a relevant cultural marker is also something that is being dealt with in many post-communist nations, especially in East Germany. See for example Charity Scribner, *Requiem for Communism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003).

²⁹² For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Aneta Szyłak, “Ten Years of Disturbance. Polish Art 1993-2003,” in *Contemporary Identities. Current Artistic Creation in Poland*, ed. Magdalena Lewoc, 8-27 (Poland: Zapol, 2005); Sebastian Cichocki, “Remarks About Critical Trends in Recent Polish Art,” in *Contemporary Identities. Current Artistic Creation in Poland*, ed. Magdalena Lewoc, 28-46 (Poland: Zapol, 2005); and Magdalena Ujma, “Critical Art and What Next?,” in *Contemporary Identities. Current Artistic Creation in Poland*, ed. Magdalena Lewoc, 47-60 (Poland: Zapol, 2005).

²⁹³ Aneta Szyłak, “Ten Years of Disturbance. Polish Art 1993-2003,” in *Contemporary Identities. Current Artistic Creation in Poland*, ed. Magdalena Lewoc, 8 (Poland: Zapol, 2005).

²⁹⁴ For example Zbigniew Libera (b. 1959), who was invited to participate in the 1997 Venice Biennale, just two years before Kozyra. He originally intended to exhibit his 1997 piece *Concentration Camp*, a boxed LEGO set that, when one puts it together, forms a grey concentration camp from World War II. When the curator of the Polish pavilion, a sculptor by the name of Jan Stanisław Wojciechowski, found out that Libera intended to exhibit the *Concentration Camp*, he presented the artist with an ultimatum – he was

escape such extreme consequences, but was a victim of severe scrutiny and criticism herself. This section will examine the causes behind the strong reactions of audiences, and why the two performances, *The Women's Bathhouse* and *The Men's Bathhouse* by Kozyra, were so significant for post-communist Poland.

Of the three performances discussed in this study, none was received with nearly as much controversy and fraught with such problems as the two bathhouse performances. The stark conservatism of audiences can be linked to the strong connection between the Catholic Church and Polish society that dates back to the time of the Partitions in the late 18th century, a connection which was only strengthened during the communist period. Indeed, the Church as an institution flagrantly maintained what could be called an anti-feminist stance even after independence in the 1990s. Consequently the fact that a woman artist created a work of art that violated a private space (*The Women's Bathhouse*) and then developed that idea even further – violating a private space intended for men, by disguising herself as a man (*The Men's Bathhouse*) – caused a great deal of consternation among Poles who were aware of the conditions surrounding the creation of the art work, as well as its final manifestation as it was exhibited.

Polish national identity is strongly linked with not only Christianity, but also with Roman Catholicism. This has to do with a number of factors connected with specific points in Polish history, namely the time of the partitions (1771-1795), World War II, the communist period (1952-1989), as well as the post-independence period in the 1990s.

still welcome to represent Poland at the Biennale, but he could not do it with the LEGO piece. Libera refused to compromise and withdrew from the Biennale. The subject matter may have been shocking, but the idea was not. Libera was asking his audience to question the discrepancy between the ideal world that is marketed to children in advertising and mass produced objects of entertainment, and the real one created by adults.

Also, see the section on Dorota Nieznalska below.

According to most statistics, since World War II Poland has been around 96-97% Roman Catholic.²⁹⁵ The strong links between Polish nationalism and Roman Catholicism, however, date back to a much earlier time, when the percentage was not even so great. In her outline of the development of Polish nationalism, Genevieve Zubrzycki traces the concept of Polish nationalism back to the time of the third partition of Poland (1785). After the country was finally eliminated from the map and no longer existed as an independent nation, the concept of Poland was expected to live on regardless of whether or not it had a physical mass of land behind the name.²⁹⁶ As Norman Davies reminds us, “the Partitions were widely described in religious metaphors and allegories: it was the period of ‘Babylonian Captivity,’ the ‘Descent into the Tomb,’ and ‘the Time on the Cross.’”²⁹⁷ According to Zubrzycki, Poland was “transformed into the Christ of nations”²⁹⁸ and the nation was therefore a martyr waiting for resurrection. She defines this period as the time when “the symbiosis between Catholicism and Polishness, and between the church and civil society, was achieved through a long process in which national identity was Catholicized and Catholicism was nationalized.”²⁹⁹ This foundation that was laid during the long years when Poland was partitioned (1795-1918) held fast for the rest of the 20th century, during both the years of independence as well as during communist rule.

²⁹⁵ See Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland* (England: Oxford University Press, 1986), 11; Marjorie Castle and Ray Taras, *Democracy in Poland* (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2002), 158-9.

²⁹⁶ Genevieve Zubrzycki, “Genealogy of Polish Nationalism,” in Genevieve Zubrzycki, *Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 43-44.

²⁹⁷ Norman Davies, *God’s Playground, a History of Poland, Volume 2* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 18.

²⁹⁸ Genevieve Zubrzycki, *Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland*, 46.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 49.

Once the Polish nation was reinstated in 1920, following the collapse of the empires that had divided it up among themselves in the 18th century, the task then became to reestablish a national and cultural identity where there had been none for over 100 years. According to statistics, the partitions had a definite effect on the ethnic composition of Poland, and ethnic Poles constituted only 64 percent of the population at the time of independence.³⁰⁰ One of the factors that could unify Poles was their religion. Consequently, according to Zubrzycki, “above all, Poles were increasingly encouraged, in political discourses and church sermons, to imagine their national identity in association with their Roman Catholicism.”³⁰¹ Roman Dmowski was perhaps best known for the promulgation of this idea, and the development of the concept of the “Polak-katolik,” or “Polish-Catholic,” which made these two concepts virtually inseparable. This close connection between Polishness and the church was only strengthened during World War II, as it was the church that fought a strong resistance against the Nazis. Timothy A. Burns reminds us that “Catholic bishops and priests were murdered in large numbers during the German occupation, and survivors like Stefan Wyszyński, chaplain to the Polish underground and future Primate of Poland, came to associate their church with armed resistance to Nazi rule, and with the widespread Polish nationalism the occupation reignited.”³⁰² Following the extermination of most of Poland’s Jewish and other minorities during World War II, Polish Catholics came to comprise 96% of the nation by

³⁰⁰ Ibid, 55.

³⁰¹ Ibid, 56.

³⁰² Timothy A. Byrnes, “The Catholic Church and Poland’s Return to Europe,” *East European Quarterly* 30 (Winter 1996): 434.

1946,³⁰³ thus further reinforcing the close identification of Polish nationalism with the Roman Catholic Church.

The idea of the Polak-katolik grew even stronger under communist rule (1952-1989).³⁰⁴ As during World War II, the church formed an opposition to the regime and gave citizens a safe space from which to resist. According to Zubrzycki, “the church provided an infrastructure for the resistance to the regime and drew support from the West...Religion and the church eventually became the site of moral and political resistance to the totalitarian regime, and served as an alternative legitimate system assuming symbolic and organizational functions.”³⁰⁵ The church was also a haven for artists during the communist period. A number of alternative art exhibitions were held in churches during the 1970s and 80s.³⁰⁶ Finally, it goes without saying that the Roman Catholic church is often cited as having played a significant role in bringing an end to communist rule not only in Poland, but in Eastern Europe as well. The election of Karol Wojtyła as Pope John Paul II in 1978, and his official Papal visit to Poland in 1979 provided strength to the Polish people to move forth with seeking independence from communist rule. Zubrzycki refers to these two events as “the midwife of the Solidarity movement,”³⁰⁷ because having a Pole as the leader of the Roman Catholic church inspired national self-confidence, and also because his visit could be seen as a symbolic act of support for the Polish nation in its struggle against an oppressive ruler. As he declared in his speech on the hallowed grounds of the monastery in Częstochowa, “here

³⁰³ Davies, *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland*, 11.

³⁰⁴ See Zubrzycki, *Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland*, 57.

³⁰⁵ Ibid, 63.

³⁰⁶ See Donald Pirie “Introduction,” in *Polish Realities: The Arts in Poland 1980-1989*, ed. Donald Pirie, Jekaterina Young and Christopher Carrell, 8-29 (Glasgow: Third Eye Center, 1990).

³⁰⁷ Zubrzycki, *Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland*, 66.

we have always been free,” referring to the fact that for Poland, religious space is closely connected with national sentiment.³⁰⁸ It was the church that eventually provided the inspiration and support for Poles to actively seek their freedom from communist rule, beginning with Solidarity, in order to follow their own national goals and pursuits.

Once communist rule had ended, the church continued to exercise its influence over society and insist on its position at the forefront of Polish politics. Evidence of this can be seen in the church’s role in the re-writing of the Polish constitution, the concordat between the Vatican and the Republic, signed in 1993 and ratified in 1998, as well as the passing of a Law on Radio and Television in 1992, which stated that all public radio and TV programs should respect the Christian value system. All of these events reflect a desire on the part of the church to impose traditional Christian values on a free, democratic society, as well as the fact that in many ways, the church has succeeded in reaching that goal. Although all of their requests were not accepted with regard to the new Polish Constitution, the document does refer specifically to “the Christian heritage of the nation” in the preamble, which was one of the points that the church had been arguing for. Furthermore, the constitution also declared that “relations between the Republic of Poland and the Roman Catholic Church shall be determined by international treaty concluded with the Holy See,”³⁰⁹ thus paving the way for the signing of the concordat between the two authorities. The fact that Christianity is written into the constitution only underscores the symbiosis of Poles with the Church, while the concordat guarantees the church’s authority within the state. The concordat was disputed for half a decade by politicians who feared that it would give the Church too much

³⁰⁸ Ibid, 65.

³⁰⁹ (Article 25, Para 4), As qtd. in Byrnes, “The Catholic Church and Poland’s Return to Europe,” 32.

power. Basically the fear, as Byrnes has written, was whether the document “merely *protects* the Church’s rights from encroachment by the state, or rather *imposes* the Church’s will on the state and Polish society.”³¹⁰ In many ways, the concordat simply makes official what is already understood to be true in Polish society – that the influence of the Church is great.

The passing of the Law on Radio and Television in 1992 demonstrates the scope of the Church’s influence. One of the cornerstones of a democracy is freedom of speech and freedom of the press. In Poland, however, one of the new democracies in Europe after the fall of communism, freedom of speech has been slightly curtailed by a law which requires broadcasters to “respect the religious feelings of their audience and especially to respect the Christian value system.”³¹¹ Although this law didn’t specifically limit artistic production, it sent a strong message to Polish society that, at least in state-run media, free speech was not completely free.

This law was in fact used to put limits on creative activity in 2002, when artist Dorota Nieznalska was taken to court by the League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*) for “insulting religious feelings” with her photograph *Passion*, which consisted of a photograph of male genitals within a frame that is shaped like a crucifix (Fig. 3.2). She was found guilty in 2003, sentenced to six months of community service for her ‘blasphemy,’ and forced to pay a fine of 2,000 PLN (\$500). She was the first artist in Poland ever to be convicted for creating and exhibiting a work of art. This event not only shows that Catholicism is deeply enmeshed in Polish society, but also just how deep that involvement has remained.

³¹⁰ Byrnes, “The Catholic Church and Poland’s Return to Europe,” 32.

³¹¹ As qtd. in Francis Millard, *Polish Politics and Society* (London: Routledge, 1999), 135.

The fact that the Roman Catholic Church has had, and continues to have, a strong influence in shaping Polish thought is clear. But just how does it wish to shape it? The Catholic Church is committed to reinforcing traditional values of the family, and the traditional gender roles that go along with it. In that vein, feminism and any kind of feminist values are seen as anathema to the church. Before 1989 the chief enemy of the Church was the communist government. After independence, however, the Church had to readjust to the the new reality. Without a clear opponent, the Church had to find something new to oppose, and thus it found a worthy candidate for opposition in liberals. According to Francis Millard, in the post-communist period, one can witness

...the Church's horror at many changes taking place in society, also seen as a direct consequence of liberal thinking, itself linked to capitalism. Often such changes touched the church's moral concerns. 'Pornography' and erotica in the media, sex-shop kiosks in the street markets, open discussion of sex education and contraception, *feminist ideas*, groups propounding the rights of homosexuals, varied manifestations of consumerism – were all anathema to church hierarchs.³¹² (italics mine)

The fact that feminism and women's rights have been grouped in with pornography and erotica shows the depths of the Church's intolerance toward modern thinking and ideals. Millard goes so far as to say that it was generally agreed that feminism was "a term of abuse"³¹³ and that Catholic groups provided "a strong countervailing force" to the few women's groups that were formed in the early 1990s. Consequently women in post-communist Poland were considered a potentially dangerous or damaging social group that required monitoring and even censorship; liberation from Communism did not guarantee them equal rights or leadership roles in society. In fact, according to Eva

³¹² Millard, *Polish Politics and Society*, 126.

³¹³ Ibid, 121.

Hauser, the ideological program of Catholic Nationalists is, in fact, “directed against women’s equality.”³¹⁴ The Church, as the moral voice and authority over society in Poland, was the force that took it upon itself to deal with these issues and reinforce the traditional roles of women.

Much like Poland’s Christianity, these traditional women’s roles are also deeply ingrained in Polish society and Polish national identity. While this dynamic exists in many other European countries, the consequences are significantly different in Poland, owing to the role of the Catholic Church. The myth of the Polish mother depicts women as homemakers and wives, sacrificing their individuality for the good of the family. Although she presents the image of a strong woman, she is nevertheless “expected to give up her personal aspirations and interests for the sake of the family and the nation.”³¹⁵ She is denied agency herself, and can only support the actions of her husbands or sons. If a woman does have agency then she must be genderless. This idea has been codified in the Polish national poet Adam Mickiewicz’s (1798-1855) *Death of a Colonel (Śmierć Pułkownika*, 1831), which depicts a female military hero, Emilia Plater. The hero/heroine is only able to achieve such feats on the battlefield because she is disguised as a man. As Ewa Hauser has noted, “in order for her to gain recognition as a public figure she had to

³¹⁴ Ewa Hauser, “Traditions of Patriotism, Questions of Gender,” *Genders* 22 (Postcommunism and the Body Politic) (1995): 81. It is also worth mentioning the abortion debate that took place during the 1990s in Poland. Abortion had been legal in Poland since 1956. It wasn’t until the late-1980s that the Church felt strong enough to launch a public anti-abortion campaign. Their efforts were finally rewarded in 1993, when a strict anti-abortion law was passed and has remained in place until this day. The passing of the law is a reflection not only of the Church’s strong influence on public policy, but also of the anti-feminist stance of the Church that legislators are more than willing to comply with. See Byrnes, “The Catholic Church and Poland’s Return to Europe,” 436-438, and the chapter “The Political Role of the Catholic Church” in Millard, *Polish Politics and Society*, 124-142.

³¹⁵ Urszula Nowakowska and Emilia Piwnik, “Women in the Family,” in *Polish Women in the 90s – The Report by the Women’s Rights Center*, ed. Urszula Nowakowska, 105 (Warsaw: Women’s Rights Center, 2000).

abandon her gender and become culturally male.”³¹⁶ In many ways this bears a striking similarity to Kozyra’s performance, where, in order to gain access to a man’s bathhouse, she had to take on the attributes of a male. The Mickiewicz poem is required fifth grade reading in the Polish curriculum today,³¹⁷ and this is one of the ways that traditional gender roles become accepted as the norm in everyday Polish society.

Another norm that is enforced in modern Polish society is that of woman as an object to be looked at and desired – a common trope in the history of Western imagery, and no less so for Poland. While the expected tendency of advertisements to show exclusively beautiful, young, attractive women is common in Polish advertising, there is also another trend, that of using eroticism and sexually suggestive messages, similar to those used in soft porn.³¹⁸ The Women’s Rights Center cites a number of advertisements for ice cream, potato chips and beer, where women are either shown in extreme states of ecstasy or placed in submissive and often humiliating situations. Eliza Olczyk and Anna Twardowska state that “women eating ice cream are always presented in the state of utmost excitement, as if they were very close to reaching an orgasm.”³¹⁹ Thus by “eroticizing a product, woman becomes a commodity.”³²⁰ Although the Church had made a clear stance against the influx of pornography and sex shops that occurred after 1989, it would seem that society finds these soft-porn images in commercials acceptable, as long as they are reinforcing acceptable gender roles. These commercials also in many ways

³¹⁶ Ewa Hauser, “Traditions of Patriotism, Questions of Gender,” 88. Eliza Olczyk and Anna Twardowska also note that in contemporary Polish politics, the “woman-official” is presented as sexless by the Polish mass-media. See Eliza Olczyk and Anna Twardowska, “Women in the Media,” in *Polish Women in the 90s – The Report by the Women’s Rights Center*, ed. Urszula Nowakowska, 262-3 (Warsaw: Women’s Rights Center, 2000).

³¹⁷ See Hauser, “Traditions of Patriotism, Questions of Gender,” 86.

³¹⁸ Olczyk and Twardowska, “Women in the Media,” 257.

³¹⁹ Ibid, 256.

³²⁰ Ibid, 257.

explain the strong reaction to Kozyra's *Women's Bathhouse*, in that Kozyra presents normal, average women as they are naturally, not offering themselves as objects of desire for the opposite sex. What with Polish society, much like other Western societies, being inundated with and used to eroticized images of women in television commercials and prints ads, it comes as no surprise that the general public would take issue with Kozyra's images. Furthermore, her performance in *The Men's Bathhouse*, which was accused of being "pornographic," would also be unacceptable to the general public, in that it does not present a woman in an accepted gender role, but rather one who has agency and uses that agency to enter a prohibited space, thus violating the private space of men.

The fact that Poles had such a strong reaction to *The Women's Bathhouse* and *The Men's Bathhouse* can also be explained by attitudes of the general population toward nudity and public bathing. Most of Poland, unlike Latvia and Russia, as well as Hungary, does not have a tradition of public saunas or baths. It is mainly for this reason that the performances took place in Budapest and not in Warsaw or Kraków, as such bathhouses are not common in Poland. The ones in Hungary are the result of thermal springs that flow up from a geological fault along the Danube River. The baths that are still in use today were built during the 16th and 17th century Turkish occupation, thus the country has a long-standing tradition of attending bathhouses. Latvia and Russia also have the custom of going to the sauna – *pirts* in Latvian, *banya* in Russian – which dates back to ancient times. Although there are some spa areas in Poland, mostly in the South, near the border with the Czech Republic, public bathing is not a tradition in Polish culture, and public nudity, even in these specified contexts, is also generally regarded as taboo.

Despite the church's strong anti-feminist stance, and the general public's indoctrination toward traditional gender roles, in the 1990s, contemporary Polish women made an attempt to create a new space, within the public arena, for the contemporary Polish woman. In her article, "Feminist Art and Democratic Culture," Elzbieta Matynia examines the phenomenon of women's art that emerged after the fall of communism, specifically the proliferation of installation art, and argues that it is this medium that provoked and created discussion not only about women's art specifically, but also about women's roles in society in general. Matynia's thesis is that:

...the very language of installations the artists use facilitates their entry into a direct debate with the public, the media, political and cultural organizations, and finally with the past. Polish women artists today have launched a major effort to rework a syndrome of Polish culture that has been dominant for two centuries, by moving away from a preoccupation with issues of national identity and sovereignty to an attention to active, post-national citizenship, the key agency in a democratic polity.³²¹

When Kozyra took on the attributes of a man to enter a men's bathhouse, it was not only the artist that changed gender, but also Polish art in general. Matynia notes how the actions of women artists in Poland in the 1990s, insofar as they took on an active role toward the shaping of a new democracy in Poland, bear a striking resemblance to the dissident activities that occurred during the communist period. For Matynia, both the dissident artists of the 1970s and 80s, and the women artists of the 1990s "exploited a grey area within the triangle of the preferred/permitted/forbidden, where in effect they could begin to function as a realm of dissent, emancipation and dialogue."³²² Kozyra is

³²¹ Elzbieta Matynia, "Feminist Art and Democratic Culture: Debates on the New Poland," *Polish Arts Journal* 79 (2005): 2.

³²² Ibid, 5.

part of this group of women artists in pushing boundaries of everyday norms; she and they are uniquely able to and do contribute to the shaping of a new democracy in post-communist Poland.

In this chapter I have presented an account of the varying socio-political issues that were of relevance to people living in Russia, Latvia and Poland in the post-Perestroika period in order to demonstrate not only the distinct problems that were plaguing those inhabitants, but also to show how they were individually dealt with by artists, and the contrasting audience response. The next three chapters will provide a more thorough examination of the performances by Afrika, Polis and Kozyra, not only in the socio-historical situation of the time, but also within the context of each artists' body of work. Whereas in Chapters One through Three I have presented the countries in question geographically, from center to periphery (Moscow – St. Petersburg – Riga – Warsaw), I will continue my discussion historically chronologically, dealing with Polis' 1987 *Bronze Man* performance in Chapter Four, Afrika's 1993 performance and 1995 exhibition *Crimania* in Chapter Five, and Kozyra's 1997 and 1999 *Bathhouse* performances in Chapter Six.

Chapter Four: Engaging the Public: Miervaldis Polis' *Bronze Man* Performances in late-Soviet Latvia

Miervaldis Polis has always been a painter. Trained in the monumental painting division of the Latvian Academy of Arts in the 1970s, the artist has worked in that capacity ever since. It was not until the 1980s that Polis introduced performance into his avant-garde repertoire. While the artist had created impromptu performances among friends as early as 1984, it was only later in that decade, after Perestroika had begun, that he introduced those performances to the public. His paintings from the 1970s and early 1980s contain elements of the performances that he would eventually create in real time and space – the strategy was the same, only the medium differed. By the 1987, Polis was finally able to create his first *Bronze Man* performance, after Perestroika and Glasnost had opened up greater possibilities for artists and citizens alike. From then on, Polis was able to use the medium of performance to address his public.

With performance Polis was able to address a wider audience than he did with his paintings, including an audience that might not necessarily be interested in art. Throughout his career Polis has used his art to engage in a dialogue not only with his viewers, but also with artists and art history itself. From his earlier paintings, which make use of such methods as hyperrealism and trompe l'œil, to his later appropriations of photographs and prints of paintings from Western art history, the artist uses his images to compel viewers to carefully consider the appearances they are presented with, and participate in the process of making meaning. He does by employing a variety of devices, for example, choosing to appropriate familiar images from Western art history, and using the painting technique of trompe l'œil to create a puzzle that the viewer must unravel

himself. In the late 1980s, Polis channelled the expressive means used in his paintings into a new medium (for him and for Latvia) of performance. By taking his art to the streets Polis was able to include the general population in that same dialogue that he did a more selected audience with his paintings.

Painting as Performance: Polis' Two-Dimensional Work

Collage and painting was Polis' primary medium when, during his student days, the artist began to undertake imaginary expeditions through space and time. In the series *Illusions on the Pages of a Book about Venice* the artist used trompe l'œil to insert his self-portrait into pictures from a guidebook about the city. Later, in the *Island of Colossi* series, he invented his own island, one similar to Easter Island, which was populated with giant ruins of colossi, modeled on the artist's own finger. Eventually the artist and his finger traveled to the cities of Dallas and Houston in Texas, when Polis painted himself and the giant finger into photographs of those cities, which he had cut out of Western art magazines. Polis has also painted his image into prints of paintings by Raphael, Caravaggio, and Jacques-Louis David. He used his skill at mimesis and illusionism, especially with regard to trompe l'œil, to attempt to convince us, at least momentarily, of the veracity of these images. At the same time that he tried to engage the viewer in a dialogue with the images themselves, by creating scenes that moved the viewer to question the juxtapositions within them, he also endeavored to engage in a dialogue with other (Western) artists and the canon of art history, by appropriating its images and making them his own through his insertions.

These concerns and strategies originated in works produced in 1973. While still a student at the Latvian Academy of Art (*Latvijas Mākslas Akadēmija*)³²³ in Riga, Polis created a series of images where he superimposed his self-portrait onto photographs of Venice that were found in the pages of a guidebook about the city (Fig. 4.1, 4.2, 4.3). At the time, travel into and out of the Soviet Union was severely restricted. Furthermore, the economic differences between a Soviet country and a Western European one such as Italy would have made such a journey prohibitively expensive. Indeed, the artist maintains that he was not able to travel to Italy in person at that time.³²⁴ Instead, he bought a guidebook of Venice from an antiquary shop, removed the pages from the book, and painted his image into the photographs of the city in a manner as if to suggest that he had been there himself and had his picture taken in front of all of the key tourist spots. For Polis, this was a way that he could create his own fictive journey to Italy, and he used the images to construct a kind of evidence that he had in fact been there.

In the cover to this book Polis used both image and text, as well as his careful technique, to alter the guidebook (Fig. 4.4). The top of the page reads: “Pompeo Molmenti un Polis Miervaldis/Venise et ses Lagunes/Texte mis a jour par l’auteur/Traduction de Paul-Henri Michel.” While most of the text is original, Polis added, in the same typeface and ink color, “un Polis Miervaldis,” (“and Miervaldis Polis”). Polis directed his work at a Latvian audience by adding his name to the title page in Latvian, using the Latvian conjunction “un,” instead of the French “et.” Indeed, at the time, the only potential viewers of the image would have been Latvian, as it only could have been (and was) exhibited in Latvia. Although the artist made painstaking efforts to

³²³ Polis completed his studies at the Latvian Academy of Art (*Latvijas Valsts Mākslas Akadēmija*), Monumental Painting Division, in 1975.

³²⁴ Miervaldis Polis, in conversation with the author, June 2004.

copy the typeface of the text on the cover, his use of language reveals his intended audience, one that would not be fooled by Polis' draughtsmanship into believing that the image was completely original.

Below the text Polis placed an image of himself, a backlit close-up of his profile, the only one that graces the cover. Beneath the picture he printed: "M. Polis/B. Arthaud/Éditeur a Grenoble," the latter being part of the original book, with "M. Polis/" added by the artist. An audience unfamiliar with Polis' countenance might not know whether the picture is that of Polis Miervaldis or Molmenti Pompeo, the apparent co-authors of the book, Paul-Henri Michel, the translator, or B. Arthaud, the editor. But audiences in Latvia familiar with his face would have known immediately the game that was being played and recognized the doctor of the image. Finally, the image was displayed mounted on fiberboard, out of the context of the book, and signed by the artist, who also titled the images *Illusions on the Pages of a Book About Venice* (emphasis mine). All of these techniques and strategies confirm the fact that Polis did not intend to deceive his audience, despite his effective use of *trompe l'œil*.

The images in *Illusions on the Pages of a Book About Venice* are a simulation of a document, much like the early propaganda posters of Gustav Klucis. Also Latvian-born, Klucis' photomontages of the 1920s were integral in creating the Cult of Personality surrounding both Lenin and Stalin. His technique of employing photographs in his posters added to their realism, making them more convincing. Exhibitions of Klucis' work took place in Latvia as early as 1959, with the display of works of Latvian "Red

Riflemen” exhibit at the State Museum of Latvian and Russian art.³²⁵ Klucis also had his first solo exhibition in Latvia in 1970. Polis confirmed that he was aware of Klucis’ work as a result of these exhibitions, but cited a different, more obvious source as an influence for his collage-like works.³²⁶ While still in primary school, one of the tasks that he and his fellow pupils were given involved cutting and pasting images from magazines or catalogues. In his professional work, Polis imitated this technique not by actually cutting and pasting, but by using different elements from different sources to create his collage-like works in a manner that resembles the cut-and-paste technique. Polis considers this childhood experience more of an inspiration for his later work than the photomontages of Klucis or other avant-garde collage artists.

Polis’ technique is slightly different than Klucis.’ Instead of using photographs to add reality to the poster images as Klucis did, Polis used the actual page from a book as the base of the image, and then painted his portrait over it in tempera. Still, the images function in a similar manner to that of Klucis’ photographs, because of the fact that Polis painted his additions onto the page in a photorealistic style. By doing this, Polis attempted to make the portrait blend with its surroundings, to give the impression that it is part of the original book. But because the grain of the photograph in the book contrasts with the smoothness of the brushstrokes, we can tell that his portrait is a later addition. Finally, the artist varnished over the entire image, attempting to seal in the different layers (original and painted) and create a single, seamless image. Polis’ practice of inserting his presence into a cityscape that he never visited is reminiscent of the practices

³²⁵ See Mark Allen Svede, “Nonconformist Art in Latvia,” in *From Gulag to Glasnost: Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union*, ed. Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge, 191 (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

³²⁶ Polis, in a phone conversation with the author, December 13, 2002.

of photomontage artists from the 1920s, who resurrected Lenin after his death and placed his photograph next to Stalin's. In this way Polis tries to claim a desired truth that both he and the audience know can only exist in fiction.

The artist's writings are also an attempt at claiming a desired truth for the artist. In the 1970s Polis, with his then-wife Līga Purmale (b. 1948), pioneered the painting style of photorealism in Latvia. Polis' 1983 essay "Some Hypotheses on the Correlation between Art, Science, and Technology,"³²⁷ is a treatise on photorealism that traces the phenomenon back to the invention of the camera obscura by Leonardo da Vinci³²⁸ and the use of the camera obscura as a drawing aid by Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675). "Yes, Vermeer from Delft is a Photorealist in the most immediate and truest sense of the word,"³²⁹ writes Polis. He wrote about the history of scientific discovery and artistic depiction as being inextricably intertwined, as "each new step of discovery of a scientific thought corresponded with a system of illustration."³³⁰ According to Polis, the camera obscura, along with the technique of one-point perspective, were tools employed by artists in order to attain "a greater precision of reproduction, to achieve a higher correspondence between illustration and the object being duplicated, in order to avoid optical and other subjective mistakes, and in order to be able to continually repeat the same results."³³¹ He wrote about the progression of artistic reproduction (which began

³²⁷ Miervaldis Polis, "Einige Hypothesen zur Wechselbeziehung zwischen Kunst, Wissenschaft und Technik," in *Lettische Avantgarde: Riga*, 23-8 (Berlin: Elefant Press, 1988).

³²⁸ Although the exact origin of the camera obscura is unclear, the idea having first appeared as early as in the writings of Aristotle (c. 300 BCE), and a number of permutations appearing thereafter in places such as Egypt, China, and Italy during the Renaissance, in his essay Polis cites Leonardo as its true inventor: "Traditionell wird Leonardo als Erfinder der camera obscura – der 'black box' – angesehen..." Polis, "Einige Hypothesen zur Wechselbeziehung zwischen Kunst, Wissenschaft und Technik," 25.

³²⁹ Polis, "Einige Hypothesen zur Wechselbeziehung zwischen Kunst, Wissenschaft und Technik," 26.

³³⁰ Ibid, 26.

³³¹ Ibid, 25.

with these Renaissance tools) as having reached its culmination in the twentieth century, with the advent of film, television, and eventually the holograph.³³²

In his essay Polis made clear the importance he places on precision in terms of artistic reproduction. In order to convincingly alter documents and create fantastical images that look, at first glance, real, the artist must be a technically adept draftsman. Much like the Renaissance artists strove to create illusionistic spaces that would persuade viewers that they are looking at a “window onto the world,” Polis used his technical skill to create the illusion of actual existing objects. He also attempted this with his Photorealistic paintings from the late 1970s, by painting ordinary scenes of the façade of a building at sunset, a forest, or a sleepy woman in a bathrobe as if they were in fact photographs (Fig. 4.5). By creating a simulation of a photograph for which there might not have been an original, Polis endeavored to make us believe in existence of these ersatz objects. With his technical abilities, he aims to declare a truth where there was none; with the use of his pen he also attempts to claim a place for himself within a history that is not directly his.

By writing the text, Polis created an art historical context for his work, linking it both with art historical tradition as well as recent trends, such as photorealism. For an artist identified as a photorealist in the 1970s, naming Vermeer as one of the first photorealists was a way for Polis to create an artistic heritage for himself, and connect himself to that heritage. Excluded from the canon of Western art, a Latvian had little chance of being recognized by the art world and market, which was based in the West.

³³² It is interesting to note that while Polis wrote this essay in the 1980s, David Hockney has recently published a book that similarly explores the use of the camera obscura by such masters as da Vinci, Vermeer, and Caravaggio: David Hockney, *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters* (New York: Viking Studio, 2001).

Not only were Latvian artists absent from the canon, but Latvia, itself, was often omitted from the history of Europe. Not only is the country small in size, but it had also only been an independent country for a relatively brief period between the two World Wars. The country gained its independence from the Russian Empire in 1918 only to be subsumed by the Soviet Union in 1940. Furthermore, the Soviet regime did its best to prevent its art from entering into the Western art market. For Polis, these historical references served as an attempt at self-affirmation. In the 1970s and 80s, the West did not and could not include him in the canon, so the artist provided access to it for himself. By painting as a photorealist, Polis was aligning himself with the great masters of Western art. From Leonardo and Vermeer through Turner and Degas³³³ and into the twentieth century, Polis saw himself as part of a tradition in art history of artistic creators who aimed at a more precise reproduction and production of reality with the aid of the camera. By writing about this history he sought to create support for his existence as an artist within that history by documenting its existence.

In choosing to employ the painting technique of *trompe l'œil* Polis attempted to more effectively engage the viewer, to question reality, and compel the viewer to become an active participant in the creation of meaning, by thinking about and interpreting the work himself. Polis used a variety of techniques common to the tradition of *trompe l'œil* painting in an effort to achieve this goal. First, he chose to depict objects that are relatively flat, such as pieces of paper or a photograph. Second, he added seemingly insignificant details to the objects so as to create the illusion that they are real, three-

³³³ Later in his essay Polis later discusses the work of David and Turner in relation not to the camera obscura, but to photography itself. He sees these masters, as well as the Impressionists, Surrealists, Dadaists, etc. as all continuing in the tradition, which had begun in the Renaissance with Leonardo, of attempting to achieve a more accurate depiction of the real world.

dimensional objects stuck to the background, and not simply representations of them. He therefore offers a *presentation* of reality, as opposed to simply a *representation* thereof. Susan L. Siegfried³³⁴ writes about these traditional motifs of trompe l'œil in her article on the French painter Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761-1845): “the iconography of *trompe l'œil* draws upon stock motifs, such as crucifixes, broken glass, ‘flat’ objects like bas-reliefs and engravings, and all manner of paper documents and banal objects.”³³⁵ Similarly, Celeste Brusati,³³⁶ a scholar of Northern Renaissance art, comments on one type of trompe l'œil painting that she calls “feigned paintings that *re-present* painted deceptions.”³³⁷ These pictures “simulate relatively flat objects ingeniously attached to simulated flat surfaces, such as cabinet doors, walls, and wood panels.”³³⁸ Paul Staiti³³⁹ even mentions one painting by the 19th century American trompe l'œil painter William Harnett (1848-1892), where the artist included “illusionistic fingerprints on a painted illusionistic wood fence, [which was] a clever way of establishing precedent – and also giving authorization – for touching the picture surface,”³⁴⁰ in order to determine whether or not the objects were real. These techniques make it easier to persuade the viewer, even momentarily, that they are looking at real objects, not a representation of them.

³³⁴ Susan L. Siegfried is a Professor of Art History at the University of Michigan, specializing in 18th and 19th century French painting. She has published widely on Boilly, Ingres and Watteau, including a book about Boilly: *Louis-Léopold Boilly: Modern Life in Napoleonic France* (1995).

³³⁵ Susan L. Siegfried, “Boilly and the Frame-up of *Trompe l'œil*,” *The Oxford Art Journal* 15:2 (1992): 27.

³³⁶ Celeste Brusati is a Professor of Art History at the University of Michigan where she specializes in theory of 16th and 17th century Dutch art. Among her publications on trompe l'œil and illusionism is her book *Artifice and Illusion: The Art and Writing of Samuel van Hoogstraten* (1995).

³³⁷ Celeste Brusati, “Capitalizing on the Counterfeit: Trompe L'œil Negotiations,” in *Still Life Paintings from the Netherlands 1550-1720*, ed. Alan Chong and Wouter Kloek, 60 (The Netherlands: The Rijksmuseum, 2000).

³³⁸ Ibid, 60.

³³⁹ Paul Staiti is a Professor of Fine Arts at Mount Holyoke College, where he specializes in 18th and 19th century American art.

³⁴⁰ Paul J. Staiti, “Illusionism, Trompe L'œil, and the Perils of Viewership,” in *William M. Harnett*, ed. Doreen Bolger, Marc Simpson, and John Wilmerding, 39-40 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992).

It is in fact by *presenting* these objects as something real, as opposed to simply *representing* them, that Polis aimed to call into question the appearances of reality in the world. In her article on the theory of trompe l'œil, "Presentation and Representation," Susan L. Feagin³⁴¹ draws a distinction between the functions of pictorial representation and trompe l'œil painting. In offering both a representation *and* a presentation of the subject matter, the latter, she maintains, "provides an opportunity for artists to use the ontological wobble set up by a painting's dual functions [representation *and* presentation – AB] to play with ideas about appearance and reality, percepts and concepts, spirituality and physicality, paradoxes of self-reference, visual puns, and the relation of the work in question to other works of art and the history of art."³⁴² Deception, she argues, although certainly figuring into the success of a trompe l'œil painting, cannot be the ultimate goal, since a perfectly undetectable trompe l'œil painting is impossible.³⁴³ On the contrary, she argues, it is human psychology that is central to this type of painting, as "what one knows to be true cannot always be made to penetrate the phenomenology of one's visual experience."³⁴⁴ Staiti also mentions this possibility in his article Harnett, stating that "Harnett's illusionism might be seen as part of the cultural poetics of an era that obsessively and seemingly everywhere called reality into question."³⁴⁵ Polis also utilized the technique of trompe l'œil to present his audience with a fictive reality and thereby provoke questioning of the world of appearances that surrounded them everyday.

³⁴¹ Susan L. Feagin is a research professor in the Department of Philosophy at Temple University; she publishes on aesthetics and philosophy of art. She is also editor of the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*.

³⁴² Susan L. Feagin, "Presentation and Representation," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53:6 (Summer 1998): 237.

³⁴³ Ibid, 237.

³⁴⁴ Ibid, 236.

³⁴⁵ Staiti, "Illusionism, Trompe L'œil, and the Perils of Viewership," 31-32.

The use of this illusionistic painting style to engage the audience is a common trope throughout the history of *trompe l'œil*, and has been discussed in numerous texts.³⁴⁶ In her essay on Boilly, Siegfried posits not only “that *trompe l'œil* is about representation *per se* but also that it emphasizes the act of interpretation on the part of the viewer who is being deceived by the ‘trick of the eye.’”³⁴⁷ Feagin maintains that *trompe l'œil* paintings, because of their dual function of presentation and representation, deliberately invite the viewer’s attention to the surface of the painting. As she states in her article: “painters may quite intentionally draw the spectator’s attention to the surface to show that *even they* have the painting skills to successfully maintain an illusion (emphasis hers).”³⁴⁸ Staiti also mentions the surface of the painting, putting forth the fact that at least with Harnett’s paintings, “viewers were impelled to abandon the etiquette of passive spectatorship by actively moving near the picture or even touching it in an effort to determine what it was they were seeing.”³⁴⁹ The fact that these paintings require closer inspection presuppose that the viewer is *physically* drawn nearer to the picture, implicitly releasing him from a passive stance and impelling him to actively look at and engage with the painting.

When the viewer becomes actively involved with the picture the result is a dialogue between not only the viewer and the painting, but also between viewer and artist, with the latter being absent from the scene. Staiti refers to this dialogue as a “partnership,” between pictures and viewers, with the artist orchestrating the entire negotiation from behind the scenes. With regard to the 19th century viewer of Harnett’s

³⁴⁶ Brusati, “Capitalizing on the Counterfeit: Trompe L’œil Negotiations”; Feagin, “Presentation and Representation”; Siegfried, “Boilly and the Frame-up of *Trompe l’œil*”; Staiti, “Illusionism, Trompe L’œil, and the Perils of Viewership,” to name a few.

³⁴⁷ Siegfried, “Boilly and the Frame-up of *Trompe l’œil*,” 27.

³⁴⁸ Feagin, “Presentation and Representation,” 237.

³⁴⁹ Staiti, “Illusionism, Trompe L’œil, and the Perils of Viewership,” 32.

paintings, he states that “the partners were never truly equal, for it was always Harnett, in absentia, who set the terms of the social and narrative negotiations, who threw representation and reality into question, at least provisionally...”³⁵⁰ Viewers of Harnett’s paintings, Staiti maintains, became actively occupied with the painting in order to determine exactly what it was that they saw before them – to ascertain what was real and what was fake, what was painted image and what was an actual object. Staiti describes viewers’ reactions to Harnett’s paintings as follows: “they were so illusionistic that spectators acted out a debate, either mentally or physically, over what it was they perceived. Their response, in other words, was about how to respond. Instead of pondering iconography, viewers thought about phenomenology.”³⁵¹ Although in the end it invariably turned out that all of the objects were indeed painted, nevertheless audiences tried to work out those distinctions between real and fake on their own.

Although the author of a *trompe l’œil* painting always maintains some control over the act of viewing and interpreting, the entire process actually empowers the viewer, not only enabling him, but also requiring him to take part in the process of interpretation. It goes without saying that a *trompe l’œil* painting is only successful insofar as it is viewed and taken, at least momentarily, to be more than simply a painting. As opposed to narrative painting, where the viewer is a passive recipient of information transmitted, with *trompe l’œil* the viewer becomes an active participant. Siegfried refers to this as a ‘game’ in which viewers participate in order to generate meaning. Narrative paintings, she states, tend to “situate the viewer as a passive recipient of the scene depicted,”³⁵² whereas *trompe l’œil* engenders a quest for meaning, it is a “guessing game [which]

³⁵⁰ Ibid, 32.

³⁵¹ Ibid, 34.

³⁵² Siegfried, “Boilly and the Frame-up of *Trompe l’œil*,” 28.

places the viewer in an active position of trying to supply meaning, to construct a narrative that will organize and create a whole.”³⁵³ This statement echoes Polis’ own with regard to meaning and the work of art: “the viewer, interpreting my work, doesn’t add or take away anything, but only deepens the content, revealing aspects unknown to me.”³⁵⁴ Polis has then chosen the painting style whose very character coincides with his aims as an artist.

Furthermore, with regard to *trompe l’œil*, the viewer has to actively make choices in this process, for example, whether to suspend disbelief or not, whether to choose to be taken in by the trick of the eye, once the trick is in fact realized. This freedom of choice provides the viewer with not only a sense of empowerment, but also enjoyment. As Staiti tells us, “it was a source of *pleasure* in experiencing a Harnett picture, for it placed in the foreground, as few pictures do, the viewer’s ability to “*choose which way of thinking to adhere to and which to disregard*””³⁵⁵ (italics his). Therefore a viewer would have the option of allowing his vision to fool him and believe that what he was seeing was actually a three-dimensional object, or overcome the illusion and see the painting as simply a flat surface. Similarly, Brusati argues that *trompe l’œil* paintings require more from the viewer than an average narrative painting in that they necessitate validation as paintings on the part of the viewer: “the artist’s virtuosity compels the knowing viewer to confirm that the painted objects are indeed painted.”³⁵⁶ The viewer thus takes on a necessary role in completing the painting and confirming that it is, in fact, simply a painting.

³⁵³ Ibid, 29.

³⁵⁴ “skatītājs, interpretējot manu darbu, neko nedz pieliek, nedz atņem, bet tikai padziļina tā ietilpību, atklāj to manis paša neapmanītā aspektā.”

Miervaldis Polis, “Miervaldis Intervē Poli,” *Māksla*, 1 (1988): 17.

³⁵⁵ Staiti, “Illusionism, Trompe L’œil, and the Perils of Viewership,” 41.

³⁵⁶ Brusati, “Capitalizing on the Counterfeit: Trompe L’œil Negotiations,” 60-61.

Staiti posits that Harnett's paintings may be part of a cultural zeitgeist of calling reality into question, which was connected with the phenomenological psychology put forth by American psychologist and philosopher William James (1842-1910) around the same time. Staiti maintains that although there is no proof that Harnett and his viewers followed James' theories, James did indeed capture "contemporary American doubt over what constituted reality and in so doing created philosophical space for an entire culture to wonder whether a piece of paper was depicted in a picture or glued to it."³⁵⁷ Staiti also mentions that the question central to James's philosophy is not, in fact, 'what is real?,' but rather "under what circumstances does one *think* something is real?"³⁵⁸ In this sense it values the viewer's perception and individual thought on the matter, as opposed to any single unequivocal truth. In the same way that Harnett's paintings were a fitting counterpart to the ideas of phenomenology that were in the air at the same time that they were produced, Polis' trompe l'œil paintings also appeared at a time when viewers, as citizens of Soviet Latvia, were beginning to actively and vocally question the truths surrounding them.³⁵⁹ While Staiti argues that Harnett, through his paintings "enfranchise[d] the middle class as vocal, participatory viewers,"³⁶⁰ I argue that Polis' paintings, along with his performances, served the same function within the rubric of Soviet Latvia. His trompe l'œil paintings called for viewers to think, and asked them for a genuine response, which they could not give otherwise in society. This request for active thought and participation actually paralleled events that were taking place in everyday

³⁵⁷ Staiti, "Illusionism, Trompe L'œil, and the Perils of Viewership," 41.

³⁵⁸ Ibid, 41.

³⁵⁹ See Chapter Three of this manuscript.

³⁶⁰ Staiti, "Illusionism, Trompe L'œil, and the Perils of Viewership," 43.

life, wherein citizens were called upon to take a participatory role in bringing an end to the Occupation and restrictive totalitarian regime.

Book by Vilis Plūdonis, from 1982, is an example of Polis' work in trompe l'œil (Fig. 4.6). Similar to the images of the Venice guidebook, Polis presents us with an aged and yellowing manuscript by the Latvian poet Vilis Plūdonis (1874-1940), only this time it is presented as a whole book open to a particular page. Here Polis followed the previously mentioned tradition of depicting a relatively flat object – the pages of the book – against a flat background, in order to achieve a convincing deception. Furthermore, the artist included such details as crinkling pages, creased edges, and shallow cast shadows, which strive to convince us that it is an actual three-dimensional book we are looking at. Although we don't know if such a book actually exists or ever existed, we can be convinced of the illusion due to Polis' skill as a painter. At the same time, the composition of the painting gives itself away as a painting, since the display of an open book hanging on a wall is highly unlikely, thus the viewer is compelled to enter into a debate as to what exactly he thinks is the reality. Polis used trompe l'œil techniques in an effort to draw the viewer closer to the image and get him to probe further into the nature of what he saw before him. Although this is not a political image *per se*, its implications become so when we consider the socio-political climate in Latvia in the 1980s. In the days before Helsinki-86 and other independence movements and activists groups, an image such as this could be quite potent as it not only persuaded the viewer to think for himself, but it presupposed that he would do so, in order to figure out the fact that its realism was a result of the artist's technical mastery.

Indeed Polis commented that those who attended his exhibitions were quite responsive to the works. In the 1970s and 80s, most of Polis' exhibitions took place at the Riga Polygrapher's Club. The artist commented that in general, art exhibitions would always be well attended, and crowded with visitors. "People would have to stand in lines [to get into the museums]...and the biggest lines were not only for those exhibitions that were [eventually] forbidden or shut down."³⁶¹ He said that at that time, the art-going public was always quite engaged with the work on exhibit, and carried on discussions at the openings about the works of art. Polis attributes this to the lack of other forms of entertainment during the Soviet period. Although attendance at exhibitions was high, the audience was still limited to those who would specifically seek out art. Once Polis began creating his performances however, he was able to address a wider audience, and one that perhaps would not attend a show where his paintings were on view.

Eventually Polis began to copy or appropriate the paintings of the great masters of art history, using the same technique of trompe l'œil. In *Reproduction of a Painting by Leonardo da Vinci* from 1982 (Fig. 4.7), Polis made an exact copy of Leonardo da Vinci's *Madonna Litta* (1490-91). Here Polis has created not only a reproduction, but one that looks like a photograph stuck to the canvas. Instead of simply copying the image, Polis has created a double illusion by painting a trompe l'œil frame around it that makes it resembles the edge around a photo. Again Polis carried on in the trompe l'œil tradition of depicting a flat object with convincing details such as wear and tear, and a shallow cast shadow. All of these small touches work to persuade us that this is an actual three-dimensional object we are looking at, and undertake to get us to consider the image more

³⁶¹ "Rindā stāvēja. Vai tu zini to, ka vislielākā rinda stāvēja ne jau uz to izstādi, ko aizliedza. Bet gan uz Kalniņu gleznām."

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

carefully, and make a decision regarding the appearance we see before us. Only one detail, however, works counter to the rest. At the bottom of the painting, Polis has included his fingerprint, next to his signature, on the canvas, which he created by covering his finger with the paint that he was using to color the Madonna's dress and pressing it to the canvas.

Polis sometimes included his fingerprint coupled with his signature in his paintings.³⁶² He said that he does this to suggest that he “only touch[es] reality.”³⁶³ But the fingerprint has another function, as it begs the viewer to question why there would be paint on the artist's hands if the image before him is really a photograph or actual object, as the trompe l'œil illusion would have us believe. Polis left this small clue for the viewer, to lead him to probe further and ultimately see that the image is indeed painted. The artist also admits that the fingerprint was meant to resemble one that a criminal might leave at a crime scene.³⁶⁴ While Harnett included fingerprints in his paintings to make the objects in them appear *more* real, Polis' fingerprint reminds us that these objects are not real, adding his own contribution to the tradition of trompe l'œil painting. Polis praised da Vinci for his achievements in naturalistic and precise replication of nature in his treatise; now he is able to take those achievements one step further and create an image so realistic that it is difficult to tell where the painting begins and the photograph ends. Polis presented the painting as a game – a puzzle to be worked through, thereby compelling the viewer to actively participate in the artwork and make sense of it through his interpretation.

³⁶² See for example the following paintings by Polis: *Photograph of Write Leonards Laciens*, 1983; *Leonardo da Vinci's "Portrait of a Musician" with a Palette*, 1992; *Photograph of Mother*, 1992.

³⁶³ Polis, in a phone conversation with the author (in English), December, 2004: “I only touch reality.”

³⁶⁴ “es lasīju, ka pirkstu nospiedums kā pierādījums.” Polis, in an interview with the author, September 9, 2007.

Polis was able to best da Vinci by creating an exact replica of his *Madonna Litta*; he did this using painterly skill, not modern technology. Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), in his well-known 1936 essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,”³⁶⁵ discusses the fact that mechanical reproduction has stripped the work of art of its “aura,” due to the fact that the presence of the original is no longer necessary to appreciate the art work and that one can see it without making the pilgrimage to view the original. Since Polis’ image is a painting of a photograph of a painting, Benjamin’s notion ‘the original’ is confounded. Polis’ treatment of the da Vinci compels us to take Benjamin’s idea one step further. What happens when the work or art is not *mechanically* reproduced, but physically, by a skilled painter? Furthermore, Polis’ imitation is not merely a copy, but also a deception, because of the fact that we are fooled on two levels: first into believing that we are actually seeing a “photograph” of the da Vinci, and second, that the da Vinci in the photograph is the original. Thus Polis’ treatment of the work by Leonardo infuses it with a new “aura.”

Another image where Polis uses similar devices is his *Leonardo da Vinci’s ‘Portrait of a Musician’ with a Palette* (Fig. 4.8), from 1992, which is an exact copy of da Vinci’s *Portrait of a Musician* from c. 1490. Again Polis has depicted the painting as a snapshot, but this time it is painted as if affixed to the canvas with a piece of cellophane tape. Once again Polis used this small detail to persuade us to believe that the photograph (and the tape) is real. To the side of the photograph is the palette that is mentioned in the title. The palette has the same function as the fingerprint in the *Madonna Litta*. Even though we are convinced by the trompe l’œil illusionism of the rest of the painting, the

³⁶⁵ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” reprinted in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter, 571-588 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989).

palette is a clue that it is all just a ruse. But by including a palette on the canvas, Polis presents a question to the audience regarding whose palette it actually is – his or da Vinci's. While we of course know that it is the former and not the latter, Polis has included it in order to start us in that line of questioning. Furthermore, we can be convinced that the painting is actually a photograph whether or not we know the original painting by da Vinci. *Photograph of Mother*, from 1992, works in the same way (Fig. 4.9). It is another trompe l'œil photograph “taped” to the canvas, and although we do not know if any such photograph ever existed, nor if the person – as a mother, or otherwise – exists, we still believe it to be real because of the technique employed by Polis as well as the details he included.

The addition of the palette has another function, according to Polis. Since the artist maintains that everything – in life and in art – is performance, he in fact sees no distinction between the act of painting, as performance, and the actual performances that he created on the streets of Riga. He therefore included the palette to show how the artist created the painting – an attempt to depict the *action* involved in making a painting, or the performative aspect of it. This is an idea that Polis will carry out further in his *Miervaldis Polis Memorial Room* exhibition in 1995, as will be discussed below. For the artist, the finished product is only part of the entire performance that includes the creation and exhibition of the work of art. Polis attempted to show the process by including the palette together with the finished product.

The quotation of Leonardo is not a unique phenomenon in Polis' œuvre. Throughout his career he has been in dialogue with the great masters from the Renaissance to the present, appropriating them, outright copying their work, or even

writing about them. In his essay on art and science he mentioned a number of canonical figures, and in his *Schema of European Culture* (Fig. 4.10) he depicted a wheel of artists whom he considers significant to the progression of art history. Although Polis did not include his own name in that diagram, his paintings convey a sense that he considers himself part of that history. Polis' solution to his exclusion, however, is not surprising, since he used a similar method when he was unable to travel to places such as Venice, Italy. Polis added himself to the history of Western images by including his own image in canonical works of art. In a series of works entitled "Polis and..." (*Polis and Caravaggio*, *Raphael and Polis*, for example) or "Self Portrait in a Painting by..." (*Self Portrait in a Painting by Vermeer*, for example (Fig. 4.11), the artist painted his own portrait onto a print of a canonical work of art by one of these artists, which he had removed from a coffee table book on Western art.³⁶⁶ In doing so, Polis made it appear that he had stepped into a virtual reality, and he created a space for himself in scenes that would only be possible through the manipulation of images. Once again, although we know these are doctored versions of the originals, they are nonetheless convincing due to the artist's skill as a draftsman and colorist.

In *Raphael and Polis* (Fig. 4.12), Polis used the title of the piece to inform us immediately that the subject is not the *Sistine Madonna* (1513), as in the original by Raphael Sanzio (1483-1520), but the two artists who are collectively responsible for the image. Polis painted his self-portrait directly onto a print of the Raphael image that he took from an art book, and varnished over it, in an attempt to make it look more convincing. Polis placed himself in the foreground of the picture, in front of the

³⁶⁶ The artist maintained that the images he chose were from the only available art books at the time with color prints in them.

Polis, in conversation with the author, August 2003.

Madonna, and painted himself taking his hat off to whoever happens to be viewing the image. He stated that the gesture was directed at both the viewer of the painting, as well as the original artist who was, in this case, Raphael. As he said in an interview:

Standing there behind those angels, I tipped my hat. That was a gesture to say that I respect those people who believe, but not those who force others to believe. I don't respect those people, I can't stand them. But those who believe without forcing others, I respect them. That's why I took my hat off [to them], even though I hate that power [of the Church]. I was thinking about those people [who believe]. I was also simply taking my hat off before a Raphael painting.³⁶⁷

By placing his image facing out from the canvas in that manner, he confronts the viewer directly, involving him in dialogue with himself as well as the painting. In some ways Polis has attempted to convince us that this scene is real, and in others he clearly revealed his deception. For example, although Polis painted his portrait to make it look as if it were part of the original painting, nevertheless he also painted himself in contemporary dress. By juxtaposing the disparate elements of a modern Latvian man in a sixteenth-century Italian Renaissance painting of an early Christian Biblical image, Polis aims to call into question the very nature of reality and the artist's role in the manipulation thereof, as well as asking his viewers to play a role in decoding the image.

In *Caravaggio & Polis* (Fig. 4.13), the latter painted his image into the background of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's (1571-1610) painting of *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (c. 1598). Here Polis used similar techniques as those used in the Raphael image. Polis has placed himself into the scene that is being depicted, but, unable

³⁶⁷ "Es tur, apakšā pie tiem eņģeļiņiem noņemu cepuri. Tas ir, es cienu cilvēkus, kuri tic, nevis cienu tos, kuri uzspiež ticību. Tos es necienu. Tos es neciešu, kuri uzspiež ticēt. Bet tos, kas tic bez piespiešanas, tos es cienu. Tādēļ es to cepuri tomēr noņemu. Lai gan man rieb j šī varza. Tādēļ, ka es domāju par tiem cilvēkiem. Vēl es noņemu Rafaēla gleznas priekšā."

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

to stop the event that was already occurring in the painting, his only option was to appear to comment on what was taking place by painting his face with an expression of astonishment and discontent, his hands raised in disapproval. In this way he, too, participates in the performance that happens in the painting. In a similarly titled image, *Polis and Caravaggio* (Fig. 4.14), from 1996, Polis once again made himself a commentator on the scene, this time Caravaggio's *Deposition* (c. 1602-1604). Here Polis has painted himself with an upward gaze, echoing the gesture of one of the figures in the background, who is looking up to God in heaven, in shock and disbelief at the scene. Polis has made himself both part of the scene and not part of it, his modern garb and the different materials that he used to render his image reveal him as someone who does not belong, added after the fact. In this image, unlike the previous two, Polis has painted himself standing in front of the painting, instead of in it; his exact location is ambiguous. This strategy then requires the viewer to consider whether Polis is part of the foreground of the painting, or if he is simply standing in front of it, as he stood in front of the Grand Canal twenty-three years prior. Once again Polis has presented us with a puzzle that we are to decipher for ourselves, and there is no one right answer or key to help us get it right.

The final group of paintings by Polis that I would like to discuss are those from the *Island of Colossi* series, which he created in 1975, while still a student at the Academy of Art. In this series Polis invented his own island and imbued it with its very own history. This series resembles the *Pages of the Book about Venice* series both formally and conceptually. But whereas in the Venice series Polis simply altered a travel book, in the *Island of Colossi* series he has altered the geography of the world. Polis

presented these images as if they were pages from a textbook. *Image Number 5* of the series is an illustrated page of that ‘book.’ Polis has placed a text in Latvian at the bottom of the page to illuminate the image for us (Fig. 4.15). He tells the viewer that the image we see is an 18th century miniature from the East, of an island landscape with a gigantic finger in the center and more colossi in the background.³⁶⁸ The artist has also superimposed a text in Hindi script over the image, in the lower right-hand corner. Polis employs this detail in order to persuade us not only that this page is a real document, but also that it documents a real place that actually exists.

In *Image Number 2* in the series Polis included a portrait of himself, appearing as an archaeologist visiting the site (Fig. 4.16). Again, he used a Latvian text below the image to illuminate it, which states that what we are looking at are gigantic light gray and pink sculptures, or rather sculptural ruins of the joints of fingers, and that the man in the foreground is the author.³⁶⁹ Polis provided physical evidence that such an island does exist, and that he had been there, by including himself in the image, posing as an archeologist. While the appearance of an island populated by ruins shaped like fingers may seem unusual and unique, in a telephone conversation with the artist, he claimed that the source for these images was quite straightforward: when looking for material, he often thought simply to use the things that he had around him, one of which was his finger.³⁷⁰ But it is not the subject matter that is of interest so much as the methods Polis used to influence us, to try to convince us that these places are real. Even when he is not using the technique of *trompe l’œil*, the artist employs other methods, such as the

³⁶⁸ The text reads: “XVII gs. austrumnieku miniatūra ar klin šainu salas ainavu. Centrā gigantisks pirksta atveids. Tālumā var saskatīt vēl dažus kolosus.”

³⁶⁹ The text reads: “Gaiši pelēkā un rožainā marmorā cirstas gigantiskas akmens skulptūras, vai drīzāk skulptūru drupas, kas attēlo pirksta locītavas daļu. Priekšplānā autors.”

³⁷⁰ Polis, in a phone conversation with the author, December 13, 2002.

inclusion of particular details, which engage us and compel us to consider the images and their relationship to the real and the fake.

Commenting on the exhibition of the *Island of Colossi* series, the artist says that the viewers were in fact momentarily fooled by his creation.³⁷¹ Recalling the opening of the exhibition at the Polygrapher's Club, Polis states that he overheard visitors commenting about the paintings, expressing their disbelief at the existence of such an island, and wondering why they had not yet heard of it themselves. Polis' deception, on a much smaller scale, echoes other deceptions and gaps in Latvian history that citizens had, at that time, not yet begun to question as vocally as they would in the 1980s. The questioning that Polis began, in relation to his fictitious island, was soon to be carried out one decade later in the political arena. As it remained safely within the bounds of art, this type of provocation was considered harmless by authorities, who in Latvia did not give small art exhibitions like Polis' much notice.

In the mid-1980s Polis transplanted his finger from a mysterious island to downtown Houston, and later to Dallas, Texas. In *The Colossus in Houston* (1985) he depicted a gigantic knuckle in the middle of a riverside city park, with the city skyline in the background, painting his own finger onto a photograph of Houston (Fig. 4.17). In this way, Polis, from Soviet Latvia, made himself (or part of himself) appear in an American skyline, without having been there, in the same way that he traveled to Venice ten years before. These images, of the colossus in the modern surroundings of Texas cities, are less convincing, since the ruins seem out of place in a contemporary setting. Nevertheless, Polis did his best to try to persuade us by using a hyperrealistic technique to paint the fingers. The decay of these digits becomes much more striking when they are juxtaposed

³⁷¹ Polis, in conversation with the author, June 2005.

with the pristine, contemporary architectural forms of the city. Polis has made the base of the finger in Houston appear to be crumbling and falling off, revealing the fact that the highly detailed and intricate skin is a mere façade. In this sense the statue echoes the message of Polis' work in general: appearances and surfaces can be deceiving, and in order to get closer to the truth one must investigate images carefully.

In the 1986 painting *Self-portrait in Dallas*, Polis recreated the aforementioned image with a number of significant changes: he added his self-portrait, and moved the setting to Dallas (Fig. 4.18). As in many of the images discussed Polis has again depicted himself facing outward in order to address the viewer. He paints his own finger, larger than he himself, looming in the background, outshadowing the buildings. Polis gave an architectonic form to the top of the finger, and made the geometry of its top edge echo that of the buildings surrounding it. The caption in the upper right-hand corner of the collage reads:

The skyline of Dallas in the light of the setting sun: Left, near the "Reunion" tower with its light-globe, the mirrored-front of the "Hyatt Regency" Hotel shimmers. In the far background the "First International Building" rises upwards³⁷²

Polis appropriated this page out of an America art magazine,³⁷³ and the text was part of the original page. When asked why he chose this particular image, he said that there weren't many color images or magazines available, and this foreign publication was one

³⁷² The original text in the image reads: "Die Skyline von Dallas im Licht der untergehenden Sonne; Links neben dem 'Reunion' Turm mit seiner Lichterkugel schimmert die Spiegelglas-Front des 'Hyatt Regency'-Hotels. Ganz im Hintergrund ragt das 'First International Building' empor." Translation mine.

³⁷³ "MP: Arī no Amerikas man žurnālus iedāvināja. No Hjustonas, Dallasas. Tur, kur nošāva Kenediju. AB: Bet tu nēmi gleznās no tās? MP: Divus gabalus. Divas tādas gleznas." Polis, in an interview with the author, September 9, 2007.

of the few that he could obtain.³⁷⁴ Given the specificity of the caption, when Polis inserted his finger in the background, he then made the finger, not the actual building, the “First International Building.” His careful insertion guaranteed that his finger would acquire the name “international” – an ironic gesture for an artist who had never left the Soviet Union at that point. But through the use of appropriation, collage, and the techniques of photorealistic painting, Polis himself was able to cross the globe; an armchair traveler making pictures along the way, as proof of his journey.

Born into a society saturated with its own perversions of the truth in the form of political ideology, Polis appropriated images of the West as well as techniques of the Soviet regime to produce his own pastiche of the world, as he liked to see it. Whether a fantastical image of a lost island filled with colossal knuckle sculptures, a perplexingly altered skyline of Dallas, or the unlikely probability of a twentieth century Latvian man in an Italian Renaissance painting, Polis uses his images to force us to take a closer look and to re-examine the quotidian knowledge that we normally take for granted. Creating these fictive images within the Soviet environment enabled the artist to stimulate questioning about the very nature of truth and perceived reality within the forum of art, outside of which discussion of the matter could not have taken place as easily. It is Polis’ approach to painting, especially his use of *trompe l’œil* and hyperrealism, which are painting techniques that presuppose the participation of the viewer methods and techniques, that make this provocation possible. Polis chose *trompe l’œil* as his technique because of the fact that it lends itself to this very game-playing with the viewer that he is interested in. The artist’s achievements in engaging his audience in dialogue were echoed in those dialogues taking place at the socio-political level in Soviet Latvia at the time.

³⁷⁴ Polis, in conversation with the author, June 2004.

The *Bronze Man* Performances

In the summer of 1987 Polis was approached by a television director from West Germany and asked to perform an action in Riga: to walk around the city painted bronze.³⁷⁵ What this director had in mind was just for Polis to make his face bronze, in the manner of a mime, but Polis himself decided to make the transformation more complete; he donned a bronze suit, hat and shoes, and – with the help of some of his friends – painted his face, hair and hands bronze (Figs. 4.19, 4.20). He took a bus to the city center from his flat in Āgenskalns, a region of Riga just outside the city center and across the river, and proceeded to walk around the city center (Figs. 4.21, 4.22, 4.23). He started on Tallinas Street (*Tallinas iela*), at the edge of the center, where he drank an apple juice that had been ordered for him by his friend (Fig. 4.24). He then proceeded toward the Old Town (*Vecrīga*), through Kirov Park (*Kirova Parka*),³⁷⁶ past the Opera (Fig. 4.25) and into the Cathedral Square (*Doma Laukums*) of the Old Town (Fig. 4.26). When he arrived at Philharmonic Square (*Filharmonijas Laukums*),³⁷⁷ the *Bronze Man* once again entered a café, had another apple juice, and smoked a (bronze) cigarette.

When he came out of the café he found a temporary resting place on an empty pedestal in

³⁷⁵ “Viņš bija televīzijas režisors. Viņš bija filmu, dokumentālo. Uz ātru roku es aizmirsu, viņa vārds protams fiksēts. Viņam bija poļu uzvārds. Katrā ziņā vesels teātris mums te bija iznācis. Nu, es jau biju izplāpājis Borgam vienkārši. Jānis Borgs. Un es tam Borgam biju teicis, ka es varētu pastaigāties...ka es nekad to nebūtu darījis, ka man slinkums. Kā, nu, nauda arī jātērē. Kam man tas vajadzīgs. Un tad es to ideju izstāstīju...Un viņš, Borgs, bija izstāstījis tam režisoram. Un režisors man klāt, un par katru cenu mani pierunā. Maksās un visu kaut ko. Bet viņš bija domājis, ka es tikai ģīmjiem nokrāsotu. Ka es tikai ģīmi nokrāsos. A viņam tas derēja priekš tā padomju. Bišķi tur to padomju panorāmu, nu, perestroiku. Bet es teicu: “nē, man tas viss ir liela klapata, es jau ne dēļ naudas taisu kautko. Ne jau nauda ir problēma. Bet man jāšuj apģērbs.” Kāds apģērbs? Es saku: “parastu jau nevarēšu nokrāsot. Bronzu jādabon. Nevar dabūt nekur. Kaut kur jānopērk.”...tagad saka tas ir ļoti sarežģīti. Kā, viņš saka, viss būs bronzā. “Nu jā,” es saku. “Nē,” viņš saka: “dari ko gribi, tūlīt aizsūtīšu operu pakaļ...Pērc konjaku.” Nu, kad es redzēju, ka cilvēkam tas tik ļoti liekas svarīgi. “Nu labi,” es saku. Naudas neprasu. Es saku: “nu bet atdāvinās to ko nobildēs...” Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

³⁷⁶ The park was originally known as Vērmanes Dārzs (The Vermanes Gardens), but acquired the name “Kirov Park” during the Soviet Period. Its original name was restored after independence, and it is now once again known as Vērmanes Dārzs.

³⁷⁷ The square has been renamed since independence. It is now called Līvu Laukums, or Livu Square.

front of the Small Guildhall (*Mazā Gilde*) and stood there briefly, immobile, like a living statue (Fig. 4.27). At times his arms remained at his side, and from time to time he adopted the pose of an imperial ruler. Eventually, he left his pedestal and ran down Wagner Street (*Vagnera iela*) in an attempt to dodge the crowd that had been following him, which by that time had become massive. From there, the *Bronze Man* caught the bus back to Polis' flat across the river.³⁷⁸

In one of his rare published pieces of writing, Polis described the *Bronze Man* as follows:

It's not known from where in Riga the 'Bronze Man,' who wandered around the streets and parks in the city center, appeared, as if looking for something. Mute and clumsy, he didn't linger for long in any one place, until, coming to a stone pedestal, he stood there stiffly as if in an 'eternal pose.'³⁷⁹

The "eternal pose" refers to his stance on the pedestal in the form of a historical leader. This aspect of the performance is significant because of the idea that Polis expressed with the gesture. According to Polis, "this work visualizes the inherent tendency of men to glorify and be glorified, the inclination for power, immortality, and fame. Of course, interpretations can be different."³⁸⁰ The performance took place at the same time that the

³⁷⁸ "No Tallinas ielas. Tur kafejnīca bija kādreiz, mākslinieciska, "Malvīne." Un es piezvanīju viņiem un teicu, ka es tur gribētu iedzert, šitādā izskatā, lai tad mani nemet ārā. Nedzen prom. Es tur iegāju iekšā. Izkāpu no tā autobusa, aizgāju līdz kafejnīcai, iegāju iekšā. Izdzēru kokteili, lēnā garā. Un no turienes es arī sāku iet. Pa to Brīvības ielu. Toreiz nebija Brīvības. Tad nogriezos uz Vērmanes dārzu... Tur viņi staigāja. Tur tie tūristi daudz, pārējie cilvēki strādāja...Nu, un tad tālāk pie operas, tur apmetu loku. Tur arī iznāca drusku kaut kādas sarunas. Es jau neko nerunāju. Izgāju līdz Līvu laukumam. Un tur bija āra kafejnīciņa, viena no pirmajām. Tur es apsēdos. Apsēdos un uzpīpēju, un izdzēru sulu, apelsīnu."

Polis, describing his route to the author in an interview, September 8, 2007.

³⁷⁹ "Nezin no kurienes Rīgā parādījies "Bronzas cilvēks," kas klīst pa centra ielām un parkiem, it kā kaut ko meklējot. Mēms un neveikls, viņš nekur ilgi neaizkavējas, līdz, nonācis pie kāda akmens paaugstinājuma, uz tā kā uz pjedestāla pamazām sastingst "mūžīgā pozā."

Miervaldis Polis, "Miervaldis Intervē Poli," *Māksla* 1 (1988): 20.

³⁸⁰ "Šajā darbā vizualizējas cilvēkam piemītošā tieksme glorificēt un tapt glorificētm, tieksme pēc slavas, pēc varas, pēc nemirstības, tieksme pašslavināties. Protams, ka interpretējumi var būt dažādi."

first independence movements were being formed and just after the first Calendar Demonstrations had been staged.³⁸¹ However, monuments to great communists still dotted the landscape of the country, and every city had its obligatory Lenin statue somewhere in the city center; Riga's was on Lenin Street (*Leņina iela*),³⁸² across from the Intourist Hotel.

Reactions to the *Bronze Man*, by the people who witnessed it in person, were varied. Although the entire performance was filmed by the German director,³⁸³ none of it was broadcast on television in Latvia; viewers were either there to witness it in person, or heard about it afterwards, through hearsay.³⁸⁴ Polis recalls that when he stood atop the pedestal in front of the Small Guildhall, some cried out "Lenin, Lenin!",³⁸⁵ thinking that the performance was an homage or reference to the communist revolutionary. Another journalist quoted Polis as recalling that when the *Bronze Man* boarded the bus to go home, some ladies there asked him: "Sweetie, tell us your address!"³⁸⁶ Polis also remembers that these women "fell in love with him – fell in love with him because of the

Polis, "Miervaldis Intervē Poli," 19.

³⁸¹ See Chapter Three of this manuscript.

³⁸² Since independence it has been known as Brīvības iela, or "Freedom Street."

³⁸³ Incidentally, there are no remaining copies of the film of this first *Bronze Man* performance. According to Polis, it was "stolen. I gave some fragments [of the video – AB] to the television. But they never gave them back. I also had a video, and they also stole that. That was around 1991."

"Nozaga. Es iedevu televīzijā fragmentus. Jā, un viņi neatdeva. Man bija arī video, arī to nozaga. Tas bija kādā deviņdesmit pirmajā jādā."

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

³⁸⁴ "Televīziju ļoti kontrolēja, lai nebūtu tā un tā. Bet neviens tur netaisījās ne rādīt, ne nerādīt. Tā bija vācu filma. Viņu nemaz nevarēja rādīt citur. Tās bija vācu autortiesības. Vācu ZDF."

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

³⁸⁵ As confirmed by the artist in a conversation with the author, August 2004, and also cited in Dasha Vishnevskaja, "Pohozhdenia bronzovogo cheloveka Polisa," *Sybbota* (September 20, 1997): 21. "V zavershenie progulki "Bronzovi chelovek" zalez na kapitel' u Filarmonii i zamer v podobaiushei pamiatniku poze. I tut vse pochemu-to zakrichali "Lenin, Lenin!"

³⁸⁶ "Darogoi, skazhi svoi adres, adres!"

Vishnevskaja, "Pohozhdenia bronzovogo cheloveka Polisa," 21.

bronze.”³⁸⁷ According to one account, a Russian in the crowd, upon seeing a man in Riga dressed all in gold, remarked, “Oh, look, the Americans have come!”³⁸⁸ For the artist, the reactions, no matter how varied, were most important in light of his view of the function of the performance. In a later interview, he mentioned one audience member whom he remembered from his walk around the city: “In the crowd that followed me, I allowed some little girl, who was staying close to me all the time, to attract attention. You could see how she really wanted to touch this strange man, but was afraid to.”³⁸⁹ It was the reaction that was most significant, and what he was most interested in as an artist creating the performance. About this particular response he stated: “I always wait for the viewers’ reactions like a psychological revelation, and this aspect of my work is quite similar to a test.”³⁹⁰ But for Polis it is not a test that one can pass or fail. The fact that each viewer walks away with a different observation about the piece is precisely the artist’s aim: “I think that the work of art is very meaningful. Each sees something different in it, and that is absolutely natural. The work is an independent object from me, which lives its own life.”³⁹¹ Performance and avant-garde art were relatively new to Latvia at the time of the *Bronze Man* performances, as was the idea of individual interpretation of a work of art – at least among the general (as opposed to art-viewing) public. Polis presented these

³⁸⁷ “Un tad divas krievietes, tādas dienvidnieciskas, tumšiem matiem bija tādas, tā kā no dienvidiem. Tās man sekoja uzmācīgi. Iemīlējās. Bet tai bronzā.”

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

³⁸⁸ Ilze Kārkluvāle, “Miervaldis Polis savā personalizstādē,” *Talsu Vēstis* (July 27, 2000): no page no.

³⁸⁹ “Ļaužu pūlī, kas sekoja, uzmanību piesaistīja kāda maza meitenīte, kas visu laiku turējās manā tuvumā. Varēja manīt, ka viņa ļoti vēlas aptaustīt savādo vīru, bet reizē baidās.”

Polis, “Miervaldis Intervē Poli,” 20.

³⁹⁰ “Es vienmēr gaidu skatītāja reakciju kā psiholoģisku atklāsmi, un šajā aspektā mani darbi patiesi līdzinās testiem.”

Polis, “Miervaldis Intervē Poli,” 20.

³⁹¹ “Es uzskatu, ka mākslas darbs ir daudznozīmīgs. Katrs tajā saskata kaut ko citu, un tas ir pilnīgi dabiski. Darbs ir no manis neatkarīgs objekts, kas dzīvo savu dzīvi.”

Miervaldis Polis, “No karnevāla līdz izstādei,” interview by Hardijs Lediņš, *Liesma*, 87/4: 21.

relatively new concepts to a population that was not used to such ways of thinking during communist rule by confronting them face to face with such ideas.

In the 1987 *Bronze Man* performance Polis made no explicit claims to being political. At first glance he could even be seen as simply a man in unusual dress wandering the streets of his home city. The *Bronze Man* reappeared several times over the course of the next four years, in various cities, and each time these appearances and actions took on increasingly political overtones. In 1989, together with five of his artist-compatriots, Polis staged a performance entitled *Bronze Peoples' Collective Begging* (*Bronzas cilvēku kolektīvā ubagošana*), or *Latvia's Gold* (*Latvijas Zelts*) in Market Square of Riga's sister city, Bremen, Germany (Figs. 4.28-4.31). The action was synchronized to take place at the exact same time that another group of "bronze men" were also "begging" in Cathedral Square in Riga. The men in Bremen were part of the LPSR³⁹²-Z Group, which consisted of Normunds Lācis, Vilnis Putrāms, Māris Subačs, Artis Rutks and Vilnis Zābers. The group had formed in the late 1980s and, like Polis, was involved in creating actions throughout the city during the Days of Art Festivals that took place during the summer. The group was in Bremen for an exhibition that they were taking part in there at that time, *Riga – Latvian Avant-Garde* (*Riga – Lettische Avantgarde*). The group in Riga was part of a group titled NSRD, or, Workshop for the Restoration of Unfelt Feelings (*Nebijušu sajūtu restaurēšanas darbnīca*). Although originally intended to take place at the same time as the Bremen begging, the Latvian counterpart to the action had to be postponed because of the fact that it would have taken

³⁹² In addition to being the letters of the surnames of each of the artists, the abbreviation is also that of Latvijas Padomju Sociālistiskā Republika, or, the Soviet Socialist Republic of Latvia.

place on a Latvian remembrance day.³⁹³ Those artists moved the performance to a later date out of respect for the occasion, yet the artists who were in Germany were not able to change the date of theirs.

The performance was interpreted by some Latvian art historians as an attempt to collect money for Latvia's future, but not yet realized, independence,³⁹⁴ although Polis did not intend the performance to have such symbolism. Instead, Polis said that "this was a symbolic action about the fact that all art and culture is begging. One shouldn't have to be ashamed of that."³⁹⁵ For Polis, this meant that creating art is not something practical or necessary for everyday survival. As he himself said, "you can't eat an artwork."³⁹⁶ Thus Polis made no distinction between "begging" by painting a picture in order to earn money to buy food, or literally standing on the street and begging for money for food, within the rubric of an artistic performance. Indeed the artists did use the money that they earned to purchase food, or rather, drinks. As the artist recalls, after the performance they took the money they had earned and spent it in a pub. He said that he and another artist collected around the equivalent of 60-80 US Dollars, but the others collected less.³⁹⁷ Although popular in Germany nowadays, at that time in Latvia, such street performances where artist dressed up in bronze, gold or silver to earn money simply did not exist. The artists

³⁹³ The date was June 17, a day that commemorates the occupation of Latvia by the Soviet Union in 1940.

³⁹⁴ See "Miervaldis Polis" in the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art's Statement on the exhibition "Trespassers: Contemporary Art of the 1980s" (published online): <http://www.lcca.lv/projects/trespassers/>; accessed October, 2007.

³⁹⁵ "Tā bija simboliska akcija par to, ka kultūra vienmēr ir ubags. Tev par to nav jākautrējas." Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

³⁹⁶ "Tāpēc, ka viņa nav tā, kas ražo maizi...No mākslas paēdis nebūsi" Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

³⁹⁷ "visvairāk savāca Hardijs pāri par 30 latiem, pie 40. Nē markām. Es savācu ap 30 latiem. Pārējie mazāk. Gājiens bija ļoti efektīgs. Sākumā stāvējām tik' ar cepurītēm. Es tak' nedomāju, ka kāds metīs iekšā." Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

took advantage of their situation of being in Western Europe, and were able to earn German Marks that they could use for their own entertainment purposes while abroad.

In 1990 Soviet Latvia's *Bronze Man* (Polis) met Finland's *White Man*, Roy Varan. The artist was invited to Finland by Varan to create the performance *The Bronze Man Meets the White Man* (Fig. 4.32). The meeting occurred on August 22-23, just a few weeks before the September 9th Helsinki Summit, when George Bush Senior met with Mikhail Gorbachev, which Polis described as another summit between a white man (Bush) and a bronze man (Gorbachev), although at the time Polis was not aware that the meeting was to take place.³⁹⁸ Polis and Varan called their meeting the "International Summit of Phantoms" and founded the concept of "Phantom Art" there. The term refers to Polis' understanding of art and reality. He stated that "this is the phantom age, the age of phantom art. All of these performances are phantom art."³⁹⁹ For Polis, this means that each person's perception of reality is different, and what each person sees is merely a reflection of his perception of the world. When he speaks about these ideas now, he draws parallels between his way of thinking and the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard's (1929-2007) theory of the simulacrum, popularized in his book *Simulacra and Simulation*,⁴⁰⁰ which was only just translated into Latvian in 2000. In Polis' words "this is the phantom age, the age of the simulacrum. I only read this [book] later, two or three years after it was translated into Latvian. Indeed all of the provocation of this age is

³⁹⁸ "Mēs nezinājām, ka būs samits starp bronzas cilvēku un balto cilvēku. Respektīvi starp Bušu vecāko un to, kas, nu, tur, Gorbačovu."

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

³⁹⁹ "Šis ir fantomu laikmets. Fantomu māksla, visa šī performance ir fantomu māksla."

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

⁴⁰⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

phantom art. They call it simulacrum.”⁴⁰¹ Polis’ own ideas on Phantom art, however, predate Beaudrillard’s writings on the simulacrum.

The so-called ‘summit’ between Polis and Varan began on August 22nd at 8PM in Helsinki University’s main hall, when the Bronze Man and the White Man had an official meeting with Finland’s Prime Minister Harri Holkeri (b. 1937) and his wife. Following the meeting, the artists officially opened the annual arts and cultural festival in Helsinki. The second day of the ‘summit’ consisted of official talks between the *Bronze Man*, who referred to himself as the official Egocentrs representative,⁴⁰² and the *White Man* (Varan). As a result of this meeting the two artists founded the “International Association of Phantoms.” Following the meeting the two walked around Helsinki’s city center together, much like the walk Polis took in the 1987 *Bronze Man* performance, this time visiting the Parliament building, the Cathedral, and having lunch at the restaurant *Kappeli*. They also had meetings with the press and embassy representatives.⁴⁰³

Polis was the first artist in Latvia to be received abroad as a cultural ambassador and meet with heads of state in this manner.⁴⁰⁴ For Polis, the meeting between a *bronze* man and a *white* man was significant more so because of his interpretation of the term “white man,” which, according to him, connotes a “free man.” For him the idea is connected to the times of slavery in the West, when white men were free and black men were not. Polis is not certain whether this interpretation would have been understood by

⁴⁰¹ “Jā, un šis ir fantoma laikmets, simulakrs. Es vēlāk, tikai, izlasīju. Kādi divi, trīs gadi pēc, Latviski tika iztulkots. Un tādā sakarā es tikai. Tiešām visas šīs laikmeta dusmas sauc par fantoma mākslu. Viņš to sauc par simulakru.”

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

⁴⁰² The Egocentrs organization, which Polis founded, will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁴⁰³ For a summary of the events see “Egoinfo Paziņojums,” *Literatūra un Māksla*, (September 8, 1990): 3.

⁴⁰⁴ As stated in “Egoinfo Paziņojums,” 3.

viewers in both Finland and Latvia at the time, but at least, he said, it made them think.⁴⁰⁵ The *Bronze Man*, both literally and symbolically, represented a person who was not free; as a Soviet citizen Polis did not share the same freedoms as his cohort Varan. He recreated himself as a bronze man because the bronze itself conjures up associations with the bronze statues of communist leaders erected in every Soviet city, a reminder of the Cult of Personality and the repressive regime that installed those statues. Polis saw the meeting between himself and Varan as a parallel between that of Gorbachev and Bush, when another man of bronze, from the Soviet Union, met with a white man, a representative from the free Western world.⁴⁰⁶

By summer of 1991 it was clear that Latvia's entry into the free market was inevitable. On May 3, 1990 members of the new Latvian Parliament, headed by Latvia's Popular Front, announced their intention to declare independence from the Soviet Union. The following year, on April 27, that party adopted a plan that would make autonomy actual by spring 1992. On August 8, 1991, just weeks before the politburo staged a coup against Gorbachev, Polis and his colleague Vilnis Zābers created a performance that anticipated the advent of a free market in Latvia. In the center of Riga, just on the edge of the Old Town, by the Laima Clock (*Laimas Pulkstenis*) – in the shadow of Riga's Freedom Monument (*Brīvības Piemnieklis*)⁴⁰⁷ – a popular meeting point, the two artists

⁴⁰⁵ “Es nevaru pateikt, piemēram, ka tie, kas gāja garām un redzēja, ka tajā brīdī pārkrāso, nē. Bet viņi par to domāja.”

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

⁴⁰⁶ Polis, in conversation with the author, June 2005.

⁴⁰⁷ The Freedom Monument (*Brīvības Piemnieklis*) was created by Kārlis Zāle and unveiled in 1935, during Latvia's brief period of independence between the two world wars. Renowned Russian sculptor Vera Mukhina took a liking to it and vied for it to remain in place even after the Soviet takeover, which it did. The monument consists of a female figure (meant to represent Latvia) holding up three stars, which represented the three regions of Latvia that existed at the time (today there are four regions). During the Occupation the Soviet government appropriated it as their own monument, stating that the statue represented Mother Russia holding up the three Baltic states.

stood selling sunflowers seeds from bags marked with the name of a new brand they had co-created: *Miervaldis Polis & Vilnis Zābers 08.08.91* (Figs. 4.33-4.34).

Polis appeared as the *Bronze Man*, in his usual costume. Zābers was clothed in everyday modern dress. The *Bronze Man*'s seeds were also painted bronze, and he sold them for one dollar per glass. Zābers' seeds were the standard dark Soviet kind, and consequently he sold them for rubles only. The *Bronze Man* was wearing what appeared to be military orders (Fig. 4.35), which he had appropriated for his own purposes, and which some in the crowd had misconstrued as Soviet orders. According to reports, one member of the crowd

...was filled with indignation about the fact that Miervaldis had the orders pinned to his lapel. The citizen doubted whether selling sunflower seeds honestly fulfilled the struggle for Soviet power. Miervaldis coolly...and quietly answered, that those were supposed to be his personal Egocentrs orders. Holding the orders in his hand, the aggressor became calmer – there were no Soviet symbols on the orders.⁴⁰⁸

Once again, Polis appropriated an older symbol for his own purposes. Although the pins did look like Soviet orders, the artist actually created the design himself, and had them cast for this purpose. When asked why he made and wore the orders, he stated that he didn't know of any person or official body that would honor him in such a way, so he honored himself with his own.⁴⁰⁹ According to the artist, the old Soviet seeds sold better

⁴⁰⁸ "bija sašutis par to, ka Miervaldim pie žaketes atloka piesprausti ordeņi. Pilsonis apšaubīja, vai saulespuķu tirgotājs tos nopelnījs godīgā cīņā par padomju varu. Miervaldis vēsā...mierā atbildēja, ka tie esot viņa personīgā Egocentra ordeņi. Paturējis bļembaku rokā, agresors kļuva rāmāks – uz ordeņa nebija nekādas "padomijas" simbolikas."

Miervaldis Polis, "Kā kļūt par miljonāru?," interview by Andris Bergmanis, *Sestdiena* (August 17, 1991): no page no.

⁴⁰⁹ "es tiešām esmu mēģinājis iztēloties, vai es varētu kādu cilvēku iedomāties, pasaulē, kas man varētu uzsist uz pleca un teikt "O!"...Ir viens. Tikai viens. Es. Tad es arī sev piešķiru ordeni. Tās ir manas tiesības. Nopietnākais, retākais ordenis pasaulē."

than the bronze ones that were meant to be from the capitalist system. Most likely this was because of both practicality and convenience: the old ones were still edible, cheaper, and were much easier to purchase using local currency.

The two artists attracted much attention on that very hot summer's day. While Zābers handled the incoming orders for seeds, Polis fielded questions from the passersby. When someone in the crowd inquired as to why he had painted himself bronze, he replied: "I can't wait for them to build me a bronze statue, so I am standing like a living statue."⁴¹⁰ In the same way that the artist didn't wait to be bestowed with orders, but bestowed himself with them, and in the same way that he didn't wait to be able to travel to the West, but placed himself in the West through his paintings, Polis took control of his own destiny and created the reality that he wanted for himself, whether it was possible or not. In doing this publicly, in an artistic performance or through paintings at an art exhibition, he suggests to his audience that they, too, could do the same. In fact this is precisely what those who took part in the Independence movements in the late 1980s in Latvia were doing, thus events played out on the political scene found echoes in the world of art, and specifically in Polis'.

A short interview with the artist appeared in *Sestdiena* (*Saturday*) a Saturday supplement found in the popular daily newspaper *Diena* (*The Day*). Polis jokingly told the reporter that he became involved in the sale of sunflower seeds because "all of the millionaires today started from something small. And sunflowers seeds are quite small."⁴¹¹ The possibility of becoming a millionaire only appeared in the early 1990s,

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

⁴¹⁰ "Nevaru sagaidīt, kad man uzcelš bronzas pieminekli, tāpēc stāvu te kā dzīvs pieminekļis."

Polis, "Kā kļūt par miljonāru?"

⁴¹¹ "Visi tagadējie miljonāri sākuši ar kaut ko mazu. Saulespuķu sēklas taču ir mazas..."

when the communist system in Latvia was coming to an end. Of course the reality wasn't as simple as it seemed. While in theory it was possible, within the framework of a free market, to become wealthy through private business and entrepreneurship, the Latvian economy, like many of the Post-Soviet and Post-Communist economies, suffered great hardships during the early years of independence, including rapid inflation as well as a massive rise in unemployment. Polis' action is certainly more symbolic than realistic, both for the fact that it would be nearly impossible in any circumstances to become a millionaire selling sunflower seeds, as well as that fact that it was just as difficult to become a millionaire through any kind of enterprise in the early days of independence in Latvia.

On August 23, 1991, on the second anniversary of the Baltic Chain,⁴¹² while citizens lit bonfires across Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to remember the event, Polis started his own symbolic fire in front of the Lenin statue in the center of Riga. He lit a remote-controlled toy Russian tank on fire and gave the controls to a young boy that happened to be standing there. The artist then disappeared into the crowd to observe the reactions of the onlookers. In a 1995 interview Polis described this as the most interesting event that had happened in his life:

Once, a few years ago, there was the action the "Baltic Chain." That night people all over the Baltics built bonfires. I found a green tank with remote control, and set out for the Freedom Monument.⁴¹³ Then I took turpentine, soaked the tank in

Polis, "Kā kļūt par miljonaŗu?"

⁴¹² See Chapter Three of this manuscript.

⁴¹³ Although Polis stated that he "set out for" the Freedom Monument, he told me in a recent interview that he actually set the tank on fire in front of the Lenin statue. He remembers that he initially planned to carry out the performance in front of the Freedom Monument, but later reconsidered, thinking that it would be too crowded with people there.

"No sākuma domāju pie Brīvības pieminekļa, pēc tam domāju: "velns, tur cilvēki tādi cemmīgi, nu ko tad es smirdināšu. Ies pie Ļeņina.""

it, and lit it on fire. I gave the controls to a little boy and disappeared into the crowd of people. The public was delighted, and no one noticed me. I like when people naturally join in like that. It's kind of like a performance – it's there one moment and then it is no longer.⁴¹⁴

This event occurred just two days after the Moscow coup⁴¹⁵ failed and the Latvian parliament voted for full independence from the Soviet Union and banned the communist party. Polis also recalls that this was the day that Alfreds Rubiks,⁴¹⁶ then First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party, was arrested for treason for his support of the Soviet crackdown against independence for the Soviet republics. He remember that people went to the building that is now the World Trade Center (*Pasaules Tirdzniecības Centrs*) in Riga, where Rubiks was arrested, to watch the flags change from the Soviet flag to the Latvian one.⁴¹⁷ This was also just a few weeks before international recognition (including by that of the Soviet Union, which occurred on September 7th) of Latvia's independence.

Again, Polis claims to have been more interested in the reaction and participation of the audience than with the political play he set in motion. It was for this reason that he

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

⁴¹⁴ "Toreiz bija pagājis gads kopš akcijas "Baltijas ceļš." Tajā vakarā visa Baltija kūra ugunsiskus. Es sameklēju vienu zaļu tanku, kas vadāms ar pulti, un devos pie Ļeņina pieminekļa. Līdzī paņēmu terpentīnu, ar ko aplēju tanku un aizdedzināju to, pulti atdevu kādam mazam zēnam un pats iespraucos cilvēku drūzmā. Publika bija sajūsmā, un mani neviens nepamanīja. Man patīk dabīga iekļaušanās. Tā ir tāda kā izrāde – vienu mirkli ir un tad vairs nav."

Miervalids Polis, "M. Polis: Mākslā nav svarīgi, vai tu dzen naglas vai glezno," interview by Solvita Viļuma, *Pašvaldības Ziņas* (Rīgas Kurzemes r.) 1 (January 9, 1995): 7.

⁴¹⁵ The 1991 Soviet coup d'état attempt. In August 1991 a group of hard-liners from the Soviet government briefly deposed President Gorbachev and attempted to take control of the country. They felt that his reforms had gone too far, especially in giving power to the Union's Republics (for example, Latvia).

⁴¹⁶ Alfreds Rubiks (b. 1935), First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party 1990-1991. After his arrest he served six years in prison, and was released in 1997.

⁴¹⁷ "Tā arī bija spontāna, viss sākās ar to, ka apcietināja Rubiku. Tur kur tagad ir vēstniecības un kaut kādas ārzemju firmas, ja tu zini to ēku, tāda liela. Iet pa Pulkveža Brieža ielu uz priekšu, tur kreisajā pusē viņa ir. Kronvalda parks. Milzīga padomju ēka, tāda. Tur bija daudzas vēstniecības, vēl tagad tur ir. Pasaules Tirdzniecības Centrs, tā viņu tagad sauc. Un tur bija Rubikam, respektīvi, Rīgas komunistu, varas tur, pats neatceros kā sauca. Tur Rubiku apcietināja. Visi gāja skatīties, kā tad nu tur, mainīja karogu. Es biju paņēmis tanku līdz."

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

vanished into the background, in order to observe the response to what he had started. Nevertheless, the two went hand in hand. The public was no doubt intrigued and possibly even delighted by the sight of an army tank, toy or otherwise, being set on fire. At that time, the Soviet Army was still stationed in Latvia, ready to take action if public manifestations became too disruptive to the everyday order. While an action as overt as this one would not have been tolerated just ten years before, by 1991 Latvians were exercising new freedoms nearly on a daily basis, in order to effect change in their government. Polis' action was part of that development, but in an artistic realm, which allowed him perhaps even more leeway and protection.

Before Polis lit the tank on fire, he simply steered it through the crowd with the remote control. Speaking about the performance, he recalled that two women from the crowd noticed him commandeering the tank and remarked, "surely that must be one of those artists doing that, no one else would be able to."⁴¹⁸ Polis' understanding of this was that if anyone else were able to do such a thing, then artists wouldn't be necessary in society.⁴¹⁹ Furthermore, he feels that this statement shows how greatly artists were respected during the Soviet times, and how it was specifically *visual* artists (as opposed to writers or musicians) who were allowed more freedom of creative expression.⁴²⁰ This statement by the woman also confirms the fact that everyday citizens still considered

⁴¹⁸ "Un tad es dzirdēju sakām. Ar to es lepojos, kāpēc nevar lepoties, ja tā ir patiesība. Tad kāds teica: "tas ir izcili," man ovācijas uzgavilēja. Un teica jā, es dzirdēju, Jā tas droši vien ir kāds no māksliniekiem, cits jau neko tādu nevarētu izdarīt. Iedomājies kādā cienā Padomju laikos bija mākslinieki."

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

⁴¹⁹ "to jau tikai mākslinieks var. To jebkurš varēja, tur nevajag mākslinieku. Tur nav nekā mākslinieciska, nekā, tici man."

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

⁴²⁰ "Viņi domāja, ka cits tas nevarēja būt, jo toreiz ļoti cienīja mākslniekus, dzejniekus, rakstniekus. Mākslinieks tādēļ, ka viņi nebija tik konservatīvi. Rakstnieki bija konservatīvi. Tā bija ideoloģija, vārds ir ideoloģija. A mākslinieki vienmēr varēja visu ko. Nu, mūzikā pavisam varēja. Bet mani izbrīnīja, ka padomju laikos tas varēja būt mākslinieks, man liekas, ka tur nekāda sakara nebija."

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

such public actions and gestures against the government (in this case its military presence in Latvia) as something that was really only possible within a different arena, for example, art. In this framework it was safe, and less subversive. In the political arena, it would have had to be carried out by only the truly daring, since such a public outcry could have been (and in fact was) punishable by arrest or detainment.⁴²¹ Polis, moving freely among the crowd with his toy tank, did so as an artist. Not making a specifically political statement, as an the artist he was able to make his own contribution to the discussion that was taking place on a political level, since he did so from within the context of a work of art.

In this sense it is clear that artists occupied a liminal position in Soviet society; in this case somewhere between the realm of the political/official and the everyday. Out on the street on the evening of August 23rd Polis was not simply an average private citizen observing the events that were happening around him. Polis himself was creating an event that happened parallel to official events, yet the burning of the tank remained nevertheless removed from that official realm. We have witnessed this at different points in time in Soviet history, from Khrushchev's "conversation" with Ernst Niezvestky at the Moscow Manèzh show, to the Bulldozer exhibition in 1974, artists had throughout the Soviet period managed to get away with and expand the limits of what art was supposed to and able to be during the Soviet period. Polis' actions, which occurred at the very end of the period of Soviet rule in Latvia, carried on this legacy and continued to act in concert with those who were working on an governmental level to achieve similar goals of greater liberty and independence for all citizens.

⁴²¹ In the late 1980s in Lavia, during the times of the Calendar demonstrations, citizens were often arrested or detained for such seemingly simple acts as laying flowers at the base of the Freedom Monument.

Finally, in 1992, after Latvia became an independent country once again, for a few moments the *Bronze Man* occupied the empty space where Riga's Lenin statue had previously stood, on the day after it was removed from its pedestal near the Intourist Hotel. Following that action, the *Bronze Man* made his final appearance and disappearance – in *The Bronze Man Becomes the White Man* performance (Figs. 4.36-4.37). Polis, as the *Bronze Man*, became the free *White Man* with the help of Vilnis Zābers. The original idea of the performance was that Zābers would paint Polis white in the middle of Cathedral Square in Riga, after he was already dressed as the *Bronze Man*. The performance was Polis' idea, who stated that the bronze man becoming a white man was symbolic of the transition from communism to free-market democracy. He said of the action, “before, we were communists, now, we are men. Before we were bronze men, now we are white.”⁴²² Polis recalls that when he came out of his friend's apartment, already dressed as the *Bronze Man*, he was approached by another artist, Jānis Borgs, who was with three employees of Swedish television that really wanted Polis to walk over to the pedestal from which Riga's Lenin statue had been removed and stand there as if he were the statue. At first Zābers didn't want to go, but the Swedes were insistent. Polis convinced Zābers by getting the Swedes to agree to buy them some beer afterward, for their trouble.⁴²³ Then the whole entourage followed *The Bronze Man* from the Old Town to the pedestal, which was just ten minutes away on foot.

⁴²² “Es teicu: “pa priekšu bija komunisti tagad kungi. Pa priekšu bija bronzas cilvēki, tagad baltie.”” Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

⁴²³ “Un tur es nokrāsojos bronzā, izeju ārā un Zābers mani krāsos. Nekas tur īpašs nav, bet piesējās Jānis Borgs, mūžīgais centrovīks ar trim zviedru televīzijas cilvēkiem. Un, ka viņi grib, ka es aizeju pie Ļeņina pieminekļa un tēloju Ļeņinu. Zābers saka: “kam mums tas vajadzīgs?” Mēs vēl nebijām sākuši krāsoties. Izgājām ārā, uzklājām palagu, lai ielu nenosmērē. Nē, nē, ļoti svarīgi. A, beigās saku, labs ir. Tad samaksājiet, lai mums iznāk krogs un miers. Es aiziešu.” Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

Polis also recalls that this action caused quite a stir. As he stood on the pedestal for the foreigners to photograph him, he heard cars and buses screech to a stop on the surrounding streets (the pedestal was located on a traffic island in the middle of a large boulevard). He noticed that there was a green light, yet the traffic remained still, and everyone in the cars and buses was staring at him as he stood there.⁴²⁴ Polis had once again succeeded, although this time unintentionally, in creating a deception for viewers of this work. Knowing that the statue had been removed quite recently, passersby must have wondered whether a new Lenin statue had appeared in place of the old one, or wondered if a new statue was being erected. He mentioned one man who came toward him saying “damn, some Russian has gone and put up a little statue in Lenin’s place.”⁴²⁵ It turned out that this man was an acquaintance of his, a neighbor from his childhood who had recently returned from his deportation to Siberia. The man happened to be carrying a shovel with him, which he had just purchased at the shop. Polis recounts the curiosity of seeing this man on one side of him, an ethnic Latvian who expressed his indignation at the thought of another Soviet bronze statue being erected in Lenin’s place (and whom Polis sincerely feared since he happened to be carrying a shovel!), and on the other side seeing a person

⁴²⁴ “Nu, un gāju uz turieni bronzā. Nogāju gar Brīvības pieminekli. Slāju tik tālāk. Cilvēki stāv un tā, nekas īpašs. Aizgāju uz to pieminekļa vietu, Ļeņina. Nostājos un pēkšņi dzirdu, bremzes kauc. Trolejbuss, mašīnas kaudze. Un es skatos zaļā gaisma rāda, a viņi nebrauc. Nu, neko, es stāvu.”

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

⁴²⁵ “viens jauns cilvēks, ne jauns, bet ne vecs, pienāk pie manis ar lāpstu. Nu būs. Bet es skatos, tas ir mans viens vecs bērnības draugs. Kaimiņpuika, jā. No Sibīrijas atgriezās, kā krievs arī bija palicis. Latvietis, bet, Sibīrijā dzīvodams, tu par krievu paliki. Arī sirsnīgs, protams, ka. Un viņš nopircis lāpstu. Un ieraudzīja, ka stāvu. Viņš saka, velns, kāds būtu uzlicis mazu pieminekli, Ļeņina vietā tie Krievi, viņš saka. Nācu skatīties. Ar lāpstu rokā. Un tad vienā pusē šis ar lāpstu ar mani runājas, otrā tas ar ordeņiem. Tas bija skats. Un es pa vidu bronzā. Vēl tur kādas sieviņas un vēl kādi. Tādi virsnieki to Ļeņinu neieredzēja. Mēs arī nezinājām savā laikā ka tā bija šusmīga... Visu jau pamazām uzzin. Bet tas bija forši, vienā pusē stāv ar ordeņiem un nāk man līdzi. Un otrā pusē ar lāpstu, kā kapracis. Tā mēs aizgājām līdz Vecrīgai. Iegāju pie Daces Lielās, kur es atkal iegāju dušā un...”

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

wearing Soviet orders, whom he felt was supportive of the former Soviet government and a new monument to that regime.

After Polis returned to Cathedral Square from his outing to the Lenin pedestal, Zābers covered the already-painted-bronze Polis with a layer of white paint, which symbolized the end of an era. Now that Latvia was an independent country and was no longer governed by foreign communist rule, the *Bronze Man* had become free. Polis even commented that once he painted himself white “there could never be another *Bronze Man*.”⁴²⁶ In the same way that most of the false idols, in the form of bronze statues, were taken down very quickly in all former communist countries, the *Bronze Man* was also displaced, by being painted white. In this sense the artist’s role had changed along with the times. While during the communist occupation he was a walking bronze statue, echoing those that could be seen on the streets around him, now the artists would have to find a new place to occupy in society. Since the roles of the official and the everyday citizen had changed, so, too, would the role of the artist.⁴²⁷ In fact Polis had an idea to create one final performance as *The Bronze Man*, wherein he would lie in a bronze coffin on the spot where the Lenin statue was. But he recounts that he and Zābers had a falling out following *The Bronze Man Becomes White* performance, and after that, they didn’t

⁴²⁶ “es pārkrāsojos un tajā dienā nekādi nevarēju būt”

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

⁴²⁷ Indeed the *Bronze Man* did make one more appearance in the world, although he never reappeared in Latvia. In 1999 the artist was invited to participate in a residency at Cleveland State University in Ohio. In conjunction with an exhibition of his work at the Cleveland State University Art Gallery, Polis recreated the *Bronze Man* performance. The artist had initially planned to travel to Ohio dressed as the *Bronze Man*, but decided that the logistics of it would be difficult, owing to the lengthy travel time between Latvia and the US.

“Atteicos arī braukt uz Ameriku, bronzā. Vajadzēja jau piekrist... Uz slaveno performanču festivālu. Mark Švēdes festivālu. Bronzā es būtu braucis. Toreiz bija ļoti sarežģīti, tikai caur Somiju, un tur ir liela stundu starpība starp vienu lidmašīnu un lidmašīnu uz Ameriku. Tā ka man būtu jāpavada kādas divdesmit stundas bronzā. Un es pieņēmu, ka man nelaistu. Toreiz vēl nebija terora. Varbūt ka laistu. Ja būtu straight, viss kārtībā. Ja būtu tiešais reiss. Un vienmēr var, man ir manas tiesības. Krāsoties. Obligāti, ar krāsu viss sākas. Kāpēc sievietes drīkst krāsoties, kāpēc mēs nedrīkstam. Discrimination, vīrietis tiek diskriminēts.”

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

meet anymore. According to Polis, Zābers was the one who concerned himself with the practical matters of the performances, not Polis. Furthermore, he was the impetus who helped encourage Polis to see his ideas through. In 1994 Zābers died, leaving Polis without the same motivation to continue as the *Bronze Man*.⁴²⁸

Artist's Philosophy

Polis' approaches to the art-making process spring directly from his artistic philosophy, which he has laid out in one of his treatises and in a number of interviews that were conducted in the 1990s, once the press had opened up and journalists began to write about his art. There are two overriding theories of Polis' work, the first being that art is a dialogue, with the art object only being half of the equation. By putting a work of art out into view, the artist invites the audience to participate in a dialogue not only with that work, but also with both himself (the viewer) and the artist as well. Only then can meaning be made, as part of a collaborative process between artist, viewer, and art work. The second idea, following directly from the first, is that art is merely a 'tool' that can be used to 'get to know oneself,' which is the motto for his Egocentrs organization. Through the dialogue that ensues with a work of art, both the viewer and the artist can make discoveries about themselves – their thoughts, ideas, perceptions, interpretations, and ways of thinking – which make them the people that they are. According to Polis, the understanding that one has of a work of art is simply a reflection of his perception of the

⁴²⁸ “Es pats būtu tajā brīdī, bet tad mēs ar Zāberu vairāk nesatikāmies, viņš man. Viņš praktiķis. Un man jau bija doma noslaktēt. Mani ieliktu zārkā. Bronzā. Un atstātu pie Ļeņina pieminēkļa. Zārku bronzas. Pārklātu ar bronzas pārsegu. Un ordeņiem. Un atstātu. Un es tur gulētu, kamēr mani savāķītu, nu jau jaunā policija. Bet zini kā, man pašam to nevajag. Tā kā Zābers bija uz mani par kaut ko apskaities, viņš domāja, ka es nozagu to zviedru naudu. Smieklīgi, protams. Bet viņš tādā...laikam dzīvoja, es jau tādā nedzīvoju. Manā laikā neviens otram neko neņema nost. Man pat tāda doma nevarētu būt. Bet es tagad saprotu, ka viņam taisnība, tagad jau tā publika mainās.”

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

world, it is his reality.⁴²⁹ In this sense Polis sees art and life as inextricably intertwined, without the possibility of separating one from the other. Polis feels that the viewing of an art object can aid in one's process of self-discovery. As he stated himself: "I don't separate my life from art; I wouldn't put one before the other. It's uninterrupted reason-consequence cooperation. Just as I paint, so I live. And the other way round. Human relations include the art process, creating an arabesque of a self-portrait."⁴³⁰ He also stated that he wants the viewer to "think and contemplate, meaning coexist"⁴³¹ with the work of art. The viewer is then an integral part of his work, and the relationships between artist, art work and viewer remains active, dynamic and reciprocal, as opposed to one-sided.

Although these ideas may have seemed natural to a Western audience by the 1980s, in Latvia this was a relatively new way of thinking with regard to the work of art. While some artists, who would be regarded as nonconformist artists in Russia (although as mentioned in Chapter One, in Latvia there wasn't such a distinction), were aware of artistic trends happening in the West, most of the general public were not. The overriding approach to art was that of Socialist Realism – that was what most artists officially practiced and what most audiences were generally familiar with. Even those artists in Latvia who were not painting overtly ideological work *per se* were also not creating paintings or performances that challenged the viewer to the extent that these works by Polis did. The philosophy of art making and art viewing in Latvia in the 1970s and 80s

⁴²⁹ Polis, in conversation with the author, June 2005.

⁴³⁰ "Es nenodalu savu dzīvi no mākslas, nestādu vienu pāri otrai. Tās atrodas nepārtrauktā cēloņu un seku mijiedarbībā. Kā es gleznoju, tā es dzīvoju. Un otrādi. Cilvēciskās attiecības iekļaujas mākslas procesā, veidojot savdabīgu arabesku."

Polis, "Miervaldis Intervē Poli," 18.

⁴³¹ "domāt. Apcerēt. Tas ir līdzdzīvot"

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

did not take into account the viewer's participation in the work of art, let alone in the creation of meaning. Russian art historian Gleb Prokhorov described the goal of Socialist Realism:

to focus on the object itself, rather than the inherent meaning of the image or gesture. The witchcraft of Socialist Realism consists precisely in shunning or ignoring the meaning. Its absurd 'spell' is similar to hypnosis: a person in a hypnotic trance is unaware of its suggestive mechanism. In other words, one is unable to be simultaneously in and not in, to see both the 'gesture' and the goal, the windowpane and the landscape behind it.⁴³²

In many ways this strategy bears similarities to those artists that we consider modernists, those who strove to create a seamless work of art whose 'meaning' or essence would be transparently communicated to the viewer. Russian philosopher and art theoretician Boris Groys has pointed out this similarity in his book *The Total Art of Stalinism*,⁴³³ where he argues that cultural program promoted by Stalin in the 1930s in fact grew out of the avant-garde culture of the nineteen-teens and twenties. Polis' artistic strategies, then, and his theories about art and its role with regard to the viewer, stand in bold contrast to that which was the artistic norm in Soviet Latvia at the time. He also presented his viewers with a considerable and difficult task in comparison to other artists at the time.

Polis' 1988 treatise, first published in the journal *Māksla (Art)*, and reprinted in countless other art journals in a number of languages (Russian, German, English, etc.), described in detail this attitude of the artist toward the function of the artist and art in society. The entire interview takes the form of a Socratic discussion between the artist

⁴³² Gleb Prokhorov, *Art Under Socialist Realism: Soviet Painting 1930-1950* (Australia: Craftsman House, 1995), 10.

⁴³³ Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

and himself, as the title, “Miervaldis Interviews Polis,” would suggest. With this text, then, Polis not only put forth his ideas, but also attempted to illustrate them, by presenting the treatise as a dialogue itself. The conversation that the artist had with himself is one that he hoped would be replicated by viewers of his art. It is only in this way that the meaning and interpretation of the work of art can be achieved. Polis needs the viewer because, as he says, “the viewer, interpreting my work, doesn’t add or take away anything, but only deepens the content, revealing aspects unknown to me. In other words, helps me to recognize myself, to share in that “recognition” or art process, which is one and the same.”⁴³⁴ The viewer’s response and interpretation not only contributes to the meaning of the art work, but adds to the multivalence of it, in the collaborative process of making meaning. As many as there are viewers of a work of art, so, too are there interpretations. While this concept was not a novel one in the West in the 1980s, it was when taken in the context of Soviet Latvia. This was one of the first published theories of art-viewing and interpretation that offered an alternative to the view that a work of art was unequivocal in carrying the party’s message. The interview, then, serves as a model of the process of this dialogue that viewers of his art could have with themselves, with others or with the artist as he or she communicates with the work.

For Polis, the entire creative process, from planning and creating the work of art, to putting it out among the public and observing their reactions, is a process of self-discovery. His life and his art are one and the same, which is how he described it in his interview:

⁴³⁴ “skatītājs, interpretējot manu darbu, neko nedz pieliek, nedz atņem, bet tikai padziļina tā ietilpību, atklāj to manis paša nepamanītā aspektā. Citiem vārdiem, palīdz man atpazīt sevi, piedalās šai “atpazīšanas” jeb mākslas procesā, kas ir viens un tas pats.” Polis, “Miervaldis Intervē Poli,” 17.

Polis: Stendal said: ‘Style – that is everything.’ This is quite the way I think. But what is this ‘everything’? The answers will be different and contradictory. I would say: ‘Style – that is me.’

Miervaldis: Well! But what is this ‘me’?

Polis: I don’t know. My art explains it. That is the basic idea.⁴³⁵

In a later passage “Miervaldis” went on to ask: “so for you your art is yourself, your “self”-identifying process, a process of creating consciousness?,”⁴³⁶ to which “Polis” responded in the affirmative. And the way Polis wrote this treatise reflects the way that the process occurs. Miervaldis questions Polis, and with each answer Polis gives, the artist, who is the voice behind both master and student, moves closer to both an articulation and understanding of his own ideas.

For Polis, people only understand themselves by understanding the things that surround them, this includes material things, such as art, as well as animate things, such as other people. As he explained in the interview:

From the point of view of psychology, a person ‘doesn’t see’ himself, doesn’t know himself; he realizes, gets to know himself and discovers himself only through other people, through the world. The world is like a mirror, which more or less precisely reflects what and how he is. And art is a form of contact with being, a mediator between the spirit and the material. Art forms consciousness and at the same time is a witness of it.⁴³⁷

⁴³⁵ “Polis: Stendāls teicis: “Stils – tas ir viss.” Gluži manas domas. Bet kas tad ir šis “viss”? Atbildes būs dažādas un pretrunīgas. Es saku: “Stils – tas esmu es.” Miervaldis: Lūk, kā! Bet kas tad ir šis “Es”? Polis: Nezinu... Mana māksla to skaidro. Tā ir tās pamatjēga.”

Polis, “Miervaldis Intervē Poli,” 17.

⁴³⁶ “Tātad tev māksla ir sevis, sava “Es” atpazīšanas process, apziņas veidošanas process?”

Polis, “Miervaldis Intervē Poli,” 18.

⁴³⁷ “No psiholoģijas viedokļa cilvēks sevi “neredz,” nepazīst, viņš konstatē, iepazīst un atklāj sevi tikai caur citiem cilvēkiem, caur pasauli. Pasauli kā spoguļi, kas vairāk vai mazāk precīzi atspoguļo, kas un kāds viņš ir. Un māksla ir šis kontaktēšanās veids ar esamību, starpniecība starp garu un matēriju. Māksla ir reizē apziņas veidotāja un tās lieciniece. Vienīgais gara eksistences veids un tā pierādījums.”

Polis, “Miervaldis Intervē Poli,” 19.

What this means is that for Polis, the art object is a mirror through which a person's self is reflected, because the way a person views an object, and what he sees in it, is a reflection of who he is in general. Furthermore, with the final sentence he emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between art and the self, in that it is both a separate object, and yet part of the self because the viewer's perception of it has to do with the viewer himself, and his consciousness. It follows, then, that viewing a work of art is akin to coming into contact with another person, either the artist, another person, or the viewer himself. He writes of art as a medium: "people can have contact with one another, but can also do so in a transcendental way through the mediator of art."⁴³⁸ In the same way that two people connect when they come face to face, a viewer faces the artist, or himself, by looking at a work of art.

Polis described this process by referring to his experience as a viewer of work by another artist, Leonardo da Vinci:

When I consider a Leonardo da Vinci painting (a work of art is this object of consideration), I 'have contact' with the author himself. In *Madonna Litta* I 'see' Leonardo, and I identify with him, that is, with his 'I,' I 'get to know' him. The painting, which depicts a woman with a child, for me, the viewer, is only a painting subject, a form, which works as a key to unlock the artist himself.⁴³⁹

In the same way that Polis can "get to know" Leonardo by looking at his work, so, too, can the viewer of a work by Polis undergo the same process of recognition of him, the

⁴³⁸ "Kontaktēties var tieši, cilvēks ar cilvēku, bet var arī transcendentālā nozīmē ar mākslas darba starpniecību."

Polis, "Miervaldis Intervē Poli," 19.

⁴³⁹ "Kad es apceru Leonardo da Vinči gleznu (mākslas darbs ir šīs apceres objekts), es "kontaktējos" ar pašu autoru. "Madonnā Litā" es "redzu" Leonardo, un, identificējoties ar viņu, tas ir, ar viņa "Es," es "atpazīstu" sevi. Pati glezna, kurā attēlota sieviete ar bērnu, man, skatītājam, ir tikai gleznas sižets, forma, kas darbojas kā šifra atslēga uz pašu autoru."

Polis, "Miervaldis Intervē Poli," 19.

artist. By understanding the artist's outlook and by examining the way the artist views the world from his perspective, the viewer can then come to better understand his own perceptions and view of the world, by understanding how they are similar or different. Self-recognition occurs through identification first with the work of art, then with the artist, and finally with the viewer himself.

The seeds of the dialogue that Polis created in the interview, can be found in the concept that Polis founded (with himself as its head and only follower) in 1986, "Egocenter" (*Egocentrs*). In the catalogue for a 1989 exhibition of Latvian painters in New York, Polis included information about Egocenter in his artist's statement, saying that his reason for founding it was "to research into the EGO and the problems connected with it."⁴⁴⁰ Polis used the Egocenter to give a name to his interest in the self and the process of self-recognition that he had already been carrying out through his art production. In that same artist's statement he outlined the main concept of Egocenter:

Natural ego-centrism is the basis of all creativity. Excessive ego-centrism is the basis of individual aggression. Excessive ego-centrism gives rise to world-wide aggression. The problem of egocenter is one of the most important problems of the world.⁴⁴¹

With this statement Polis underscored the centrality of self-discovery in his art work, and gave a verbal explanation for the general ideas pervading his art work, those that would later appear in "Miervaldis Interviews Polis." Art historian Elvita Ruka-Birzule also emphasizes that "painting is for [Polis] only a tool by which he identifies himself with the

⁴⁴⁰ Artist's statement as qtd. in Inessa Rinke, *Contemporary Soviet Painters from Riga, Latvia* (New York: Eduard Nakhamkin Fine Arts, 1989), 52.

⁴⁴¹ Artist's statement as qtd. in *Ibid*, 52.

surrounding world in all its varieties.”⁴⁴² After the inception of Egocenter, at times Polis used the organization’s logo (which he designed) coupled with his name to sign his work.⁴⁴³ He described the process of painting a portrait as one that could help in the identification process: “in order to be able to concentrate on something, you have to like some aspect of it, you can’t devour something that doesn’t taste good to you. The same is with people you paint – at that moment you identify with him and as if looking in the mirror you see yourself.”⁴⁴⁴ The Egocenter’s motto is “get to know yourself,”⁴⁴⁵ and Polis claims to have founded Egocenter in order to investigate the techniques of doing so. Clearly, however, he had already been making use of these methods in his art all along.

These ideas stand in stark contrast to that of collectivity, which was one of the overriding principles of Soviet life. In the Soviet Union, farms were collectivized, apartments were made communal, all in an effort to stamp out the individual and bring society together into one cooperative mass, to work toward the ultimate goal of communism.⁴⁴⁶ But Polis maintains that he was not consciously opposing those ideas. He based the ideas of egocentrism on his own personal theories of power and the individual. As he said in a recent interview, “minimal egocentrism is in every person. Creativity...is the basis of activity. This is normal egocentrism. But individual hypertrophied

⁴⁴² Elvita Ruka-Birzule, “Miervaldis Polis,” catalogue entry in *Personal Time: Art of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania 1945-1996*, ed. Iveta Boiko, Helēna Demakova and Joanna Ślodowska, 56 (Warsaw: Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, 1996).

⁴⁴³ This can be seen in *Raphael and Polis*, for example.

⁴⁴⁴ “Lai tu uz kaut ko varētu koncentrēties, tev šim kaut kam ir jāpatīk, tu nevari ieēst to, kas tev negaršo. Tāpat ir ar cilvēku, ko tu glezno – kaut uz to brīdi tu ar viņu identificējies un it kā spoguļi redzi sev.” Miervaldis Polis, “Cilvēks, kuram nekas dzīvnieciskais nav svešs,” interview by Arnis Jansons, *Laterna 9* (1997): no page no.

⁴⁴⁵ “iepazīsti pats sevi”

Polis, “Miervaldis Intervē Poli,” 17.

⁴⁴⁶ For more on Soviet collectivization and communal life see Robert Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror – Famine* (Alberta, Canada: University of Alberta Press, 1987); Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Life in the 1930s* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2000).

egocentrism is the basis of mass egocentrism. Hitler was a hypertrophied egocentrist. Stalin was a hypertrophied egocentrist....,”⁴⁴⁷ and he mentioned Napoleon as well. He was thinking not only about Soviet leaders, but about historical rulers in general. Furthermore, he stated that the Egocenter motto “get to know yourself” was an ancient Greek one, as this was the slogan that was said to have been written over the entrance of the Oracle at Delphi.⁴⁴⁸ In his understanding, this phrase meant “try to understand, discover who you are...I made this the founding principle of my life when I stumbled onto the idea thirty-five years ago, when I read that statement. I was into Greek philosophy then.”⁴⁴⁹ For Polis these ideas were more about universal principles of individualism, creativity and power, as opposed to simply contrasting the Soviet model.

Concurrent with the founding of Egocenter, in 1986, Polis created a veristic sculpture (in the manner of American artist Duane Hanson (1925-1996)) of himself, known simply as his *alter ego* (Fig. 4.38-4.40). Polis used this sculpture in his first *Alter Ego* performance in the Salon of Egovizors in Riga, during the Film Days (*Kino Dienas*). He placed the *alter ego* in a comfortable armchair facing a special television set, called “Egovizors” television, in which the regular screen had been replaced by a mirror.

⁴⁴⁷ “Minimāls egocentrisms ir katrā cilvēkā. Radošums, tas tāds padomju laiku vārds, teiksim tā, aktivitātes pamats. Normāls egocentrs...Bet hipertrofēts egocentrisms, es runāju par indivīdu, nevis masu. Masisms nav indivīds, tādēļ masismam šeit nav vietas. Es runāju par indivīdu, un indivīda hipertrofēts egocentrisms ir masu egocentrisma pamats. Hitlers bija hipertrofēts egocentriķis, Staļins bija hipertrofēts egocentriķis. Lai gan es ārkārtīgi cīnu un apbrīnoju Napoleonu, absolūts...bet arī viņš bija hipertrofēts egocentriķis. Es jau negribu noliegt cilvēku, kuru apbrīnoju, es arī negribu noliegt Staļinu. Hitleru man grūti apbrīnot, jo tik stulbas lietas Staļins tomēr nedarīja.”

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

⁴⁴⁸ The saying, in English, is “know yourself.” The phrase that is used in Latvian translates into “get to know yourself.”

⁴⁴⁹ “It kā ir rakstīts virs Delfu orākula Grieķijā. Sešsimtais gads pirms mūsu ēras, vēl pirms Kristus dzimšanas. Un tur bija rakstīts: “iepazīsti sevi!” Tas ir, mēģini saprast, atklāj sevi, kas tu esi. Tas ir ļoti sens, pierakstīts bija Tallesam, lai gan droši zināms, ka tas bija virs Delfu orākula...To es lieku par pamatu savai dzīvei, kopš es apjēdzu, gadus 35 atpakaļ, es izlasīju šo teicienu. Kādi 26 gadi man bija. Grieķu filozofiju toreiz.”

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

Egovizors television, of course, reflected the image of whomever watched it. In this installation it reflected the Polis *alter ego* statue. Polis placed a panel in the exhibition to explain the installation. It read: “There is an interesting broadcast on the television – you might not have seen it, but you appear in it – definitely watch it! And that’s why the “Egocenter” company recommends “Egovizors” as the best program for each person who watches it!”⁴⁵⁰ For Polis the sculpture represented the basic principles of self-recognition that he had outlined in both his writings on Egocenter and in “Miervaldis Interviews Polis.” He even stated that: “with my mannequin I have tried to summarize all of the characteristics of my work: the manipulations of that are more important than the figure itself.”⁴⁵¹ The installation can then be seen as a demonstration of the process of viewing as imagined by Polis, and more specifically, the process of viewing art, wherein an individual, in looking at something else, sees a reflection of himself, and thereby ‘gets to know himself.’

The Renewed Nobility

In the early 1990s, Polis replaced the Egocenter concept with another, the renewed nobility (*atjaunošana muižniecība*). He says that he came up with this idea in 1988, together with colleague Maija Krigene, at Krigene’s husband’s birthday party.⁴⁵² Since the 1990s, when he began talking about it in the press, he has often been referred to as the “first nobleman of the renewed nobility” in Latvia. He explains the concept as

⁴⁵⁰ “Televizorā interesants raidījums, - jūs varbūt to nenoskatīsit, bet, ja tajā rādīs jūs, - skatīties noteikti! Un tāpēc firma “Egocentrs” piedāvā jums “Egovizoru” ar labāko programmu katram, kas tajā skatās!”

Polis, “Miervaldis Intervē Poli,” 18.

⁴⁵¹ “Manā manekēnā esmu mēģinājis apkopot visas savas darbības iezīmes: manipulācijas ar to ir svarīgākas nekā pati figūra.”

Polis, “No karnevāla līdz izstādei,” 21.

⁴⁵² Polis, “Cilvēks kuram nekas dzīvniecisks nav svešs”; Details confirmed in an interview with the artist, September 9, 2007.

follows: “I am not a nobleman. I am a *renewed nobility* nobleman (italics mine). That is not the same thing.”⁴⁵³ There is no tradition of nobility – either hereditary or acquired – for ethnic Latvians. Before Latvia became an independent nation for the first time in 1918, all landowners were either German or Russian; the Latvians were farmers and peasants. But for Polis, the idea of the renewed nobility is mainly an ideal, a way of living based on enjoying life and being kind to others, as opposed to having any real connection with titles, status, or even land ownership.

Polis is aware of the development of the phenomenon of the nobility, as it occurred in Western Europe. As he mentioned in an interview: “The nobility took shape in the 17th century on the foundation of knights and took over that ideal [of knighthood]. Land belonged to the king, but the nobility were only managers and they took care of the farmers’ problems and duties.”⁴⁵⁴ Polis was not interested in the implications of the nobility as a land-owning class. Rather, what attracted him to this concept were the principles of the institution of the nobility. For him, the renewed nobility is about enjoying life, and about only doing the things that one was meant to do. In his words, “each person has their own job to do.”⁴⁵⁵ With regard to work and pleasure, he had this to say:

Noblemen do things insofar as it is within their power, they only listen to the calling of their heart, follow the passion of their soul...you can ask – how would a nobleman exist if he didn’t have money? Noblemen divided life into existence

⁴⁵³ “neesmu muižnieks. Esmu atjaunotās muižniecības muižnieks. Tas nav viens un tas pats.” Miervaldis Polis, “Otrā pusē minētais Miervaldis Polis,” interview by Pāvils Raudonis, *Vakara Ziņas* (February 25, 1995): 20.

⁴⁵⁴ “Muižniecība izveidojās XVII gadsimtā uz bruņniecības bāzes un pārņēma tās ideālus. Zeme piederēja karalim, bet muižnieki bija tikai pārvaldnieki, viņi uzņēmās rūpes par zemniekiem, uzņēmās pienākumus.” Polis, “Cilvēks, kuram nekas dzīvnieciskais nav svešs.”

⁴⁵⁵ “Katram ir savs darbs,” Polis, in an interview with him, September 9, 2007.

and enjoyment. Everything that is beyond existence is pleasure. Noblemen don't despise work. Not at all. It is against the hereditary nobleman's outlook that noblemen don't have to work. A nobleman, for example, won't struggle to earn money so that he can own a summer house in Jūrmala.⁴⁵⁶ A nobleman doesn't work for the sake of money, but because the things that he occupies himself with (*nodarbojas*) bring pleasure. Of course this pursuit (*nodarbošanas*) can also provide you with a means of living.⁴⁵⁷

Here Polis used the verb “nodarboties” meaning to occupy oneself with (something) or engage with. In Latvian this word carries a connotation of doing work but is different from verb “to work,” which is “strādāt.” He used this word to distinguish between ordinary work (*darbs*), which one simply must do in order to earn money, and *nodarbošanās*, which connotes more of an occupation than a job, but can also be translated as ‘pursuit’ or ‘pastime.’ Polis replaced the Egocenter concept with that of the renewed nobility, because the idea was that once a person had ‘discovered’ himself, he would understand what his ‘job’, or his purpose in life, was. If, according to Polis, each person has their own job to do, then once the person discovered it, he should pursue it and no other. This was the concept of the renewed nobility.

As there was no institution of noble classes in Latvia, or among ethnic Latvians, this idea of the renewed nobility is an imported one that can serve to connect Latvia to Western Europe through its traditions. But Polis is a citizen of “new Europe,” and, having been excluded from the traditions of old, he now uses this opportunity to improve upon antiquated traditions such as the nobility. In his opinion inherited nobility, which went

⁴⁵⁶ A seaside resort town just outside of Riga.

⁴⁵⁷ “Muižnieks kaut ko dara, pie tam tik, cik ir viņa spēkos, tikai paklausot savam sirds aicinājumam, sekojot savai dvēseles dziņai... Var uzdot jautājumu – kā tad muižnieki eksistē, ja viņiem nav naudas? Muižnieki nenicina darbu. Nekādu. Ta sir pretēji dzimtmuižniecības uzskatam, ka muižniekam nav jāstrādā. Muižnieks, piemēram, necenšas pelnīt naudu, lai viņam piederētu vasarnīca Jūrmalā. Muižnieks nestrādā naudas dēļ, bet gan tādēļ, ka darbošanās sagādā baudu. Protams, ka šī darbošanās var dot iztikas līdzekļus.”

Miervaldis Polis, “Tikai sekojot savai dziņai,” interview by Andris Bergmanis, *Sestdiena* (August 3, 1991): no page no.

hand in hand with land inheritance, was a foolish concept. His idea of the “renewed nobility” not only revived but also improved upon the model. As he has commented on the subject: “we connect nobility with property. The inheritance of a title and land is one great absurdity from human history – that is why the aristocracy has already degenerated.”⁴⁵⁸ He feels that what we think of today as the nobility is quite different from what it began as originally – a principle, according to him, and a model for human behavior. The renewed nobility is a chance for him to return the nobility to its former pure form. According to Polis, “in the 17th century, when the nobility was formed, it was an ideal. Later, the bourgeoisie started to develop hereditary nobility as a sort of property ownership.”⁴⁵⁹ Given that his revised form of nobility has more to do with a lifestyle than property ownership, he regards this as an improvement: “nobility is at the same time a form of thinking and of life. (Renewed) nobility isn’t a profession, and you can’t conflate it with hereditary nobility.”⁴⁶⁰ Thus Polis has made a place for himself, once again, on the landscape of Western history, making connections between his present day situation in Latvia and a tradition that dates back to medieval Western Europe.

Polis Puts His Life on Exhibit

In the 1990s, the artist who sees life and art as not separate began to put himself, and his life, on exhibit. The first of these manifestations came in April of 1992, when Polis, together with Vilnis Zābers, put on an *Exhibition without Work* in the Kolonna

⁴⁵⁸ “Bet muižniecība mums saistās ar īpašumiem. Titulu un zemes mantošana ir viens no lielākajiem absurdiem cilvēces vēsturē – tāpēc jau aristokrātija deģenerējās.”

Polis, “Otrā pusē minētais Miervaldis Polis,” 20.

⁴⁵⁹ “XVII gadsimtā, kad muižniecība izveidojās, tā bija ideāls. Vēlāk sāka veidoties tieši lauku buržuāzija – dzimtmuižniecība kā mantiska šķira.”

Polis, “Tikai sekojot savai dziņai.”

⁴⁶⁰ “Muižniecība ir domāšanas un dzīves veids reizē. Muižniecība (atjaunotā) nav arī profesija, un to nevajag jaukt ar dzimtmuižniecību.”

Polis, “Tikai sekojot savai dziņai.”

Gallery in Riga (Fig. 4.41). Visitors attending the opening of the exhibition saw only white walls, and the two artists decked out in their finest attire. A small blurb about the exhibition in *Sestdiena* (*Saturday*) mentioned that Polis had told journalists that “the exhibition without art work was organized so that no one would be disappointed. There is always someone who doesn’t like a certain artist’s work. So there won’t be anything that someone won’t like.”⁴⁶¹ Although no art objects were exhibited at the gallery, at least at the opening it appeared that it was the artists who were on exhibit, although not explicitly. This concept would be developed further in Polis’ *Memorial Room* at the Riga Gallery in 1995.

For two weeks at the end of February and beginning of March of 1995, Polis moved his entire studio into the Riga Gallery (*Rīgas Galerija*), just on the edge of the Old Town, for the exhibit *The Miervaldis Polis Memorial Room* (Figs. 4.42-4.43). For a few weeks Polis turned the gallery into an exact replica of his workplace, complete with furniture and all other accoutrements, including the artist himself. Every day, during the exhibition, Polis made himself part of the exhibit for a few hours in the afternoon, by sitting in the gallery. Mostly his friends would come to keep him company, but many others who were merely interested in meeting the artist came as well, to ask him questions and see how he lived. Public officials also came to view the exhibition, such as the Prime Minister of the Latvia at the time, Māris Gailis.⁴⁶²

In addition to the contents of his studio, he also exhibited a number of his paintings, documents such as his birth certificate, photographs from his life, and even his

⁴⁶¹ “izstāde bez mākslas darbiem rīkota tādēļ, lai nebūtu neapmierināto. Allaž rodas pa mākslas cienītājam, kuram kāds mākslinieka darbs nepatīk. Nu nebūšot, kam nepatīkt.”
Miervaldis Polis, as qtd. in “Izstāde bez darbiem,” *Sestdiena* (April 11, 1992): no page no.

⁴⁶² Māris Gailis (b. 1951) was Prime Minister of Latvia from 1994-95.

work pants, covered in paint splotches from wiping the excess off of his brush. Just as in *Leonardo da Vinci's "Portrait of a Musician" with a Palette* (1992), the artist believes that all of these extraneous elements – his paints, palette, studio, the easel that he works on, the couch in his studio – are part of the artistic performance that is involved in creating a painting. He stated that he put them on display in order to give the public a glimpse into the creation side of a painting. Although he had originally planned for the exhibition to take place in his actual studio, he decided that it was simply impractical. First of all the studio was located outside of the city center, and the artist felt that not many people would make the trip out there to see the exhibition. Secondly, the studio was a fifth floor apartment accessible only by stairs, which he also thought would be too inconvenient for his visitors.⁴⁶³ Consequently the artist decided to move his studio to a centrally located gallery on the ground floor in the Old Town, so that more people could attend.

Although in the West installations of this sort were nothing new by the 1990s, these two exhibitions were indeed the first of their kind in Latvia. Furthermore, it would have been difficult to carry out exhibitions such as these during the Soviet Period, as every exhibition had to be approved beforehand by the Artist's Union. These two exhibitions continue a tradition of art into life that had begun in Western Europe with Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) and continued through Yves Klein (1928-1962) and

⁴⁶³ “Lieta bija tāda, ka es gribēju uzlikt plāksni, ka šeit ir Miervalda Poļa memoriālais dzīvoklis. Bet tad es domāju, ka tie cilvēki jau nāks. Un viņi nāks rindā, ko tad es iesāksu. Āgenskalnā, 5. stāvā. Un tad es padomāju, kāpēc es nevaru pārstādīt svau dzīvoklīti Rīgas centrā, lai varētu apskatīt, kā izskatās. Cilvēkiem interesē, kā mākslinieks dzīvo, glezno. Mākslas nedēļas laikā māksliniekiem ir atvērtas darbnīcas. Pie viņiem var iet no tikiem līdz tikiem. Cilvēkiem ļoti patīk. Es pats arī gāju, kad vēl biju skolnieks, students, skatīties. Un tā es tur izliku. Albūmi bija, fotogrāfijas. Un pats uz vietas gleznoju. Nekas jau man nesanāca. Cilvēki nāca un jautāja. Bet tā man bija. Es tur biju no tikiem līdz tikiem, bet man nebija pieredzes. Un tā es tur cītīgi pavadīju laiku. Draugi ieradās kādi. Kāds ar pudeli, šnabi. Dīvēniņš bija. Tur ministru prezidents ir sēdējis. Nu, kad viņš vēl nebija ministru prezidents. Draugs Māris Gailis.”
Polis, in an interview with the author, September 9, 2007.

Arman (1928-2005). With the *Exhibition Without Work* we recall Yves Klein's *Le Vide* (1957), and with the *Miervaldis Polis Memorial Room* one may think of Arman's *Le Plein* (1960) or even Duchamp's *Boite en Valise* (1935-41). Although Polis' work bears superficial resemblance to these manifestations, the significance of these exhibitions is markedly different, given the context of their inception and installation. While Duchamp, Klein and Arman were reacting to an art world that had become increasingly commercialized and devoid of spirit, the art world in Latvia had never had the chance to become commercialized. Whatever commercialism had existed during the inter-war period of independence was brought abruptly to a halt with the first Soviet occupation in 1939. Klein stated that the aim of his exhibition at the Galerie Iris Clert was "to create, establish and present to a public a sensible pictorial state within the limits of an exhibition gallery for paintings. In other words, the creation of an ambience, of a real pictorial climate, which for that very reason is invisible."⁴⁶⁴ This is quite a different aim from Polis', who simply said that he wished to please everyone by not exhibiting anything at all, lest it be displeasing to some. For an artist like Polis, who trained and worked during the Soviet period, the opportunity to create an exhibition such as this had not existed previously, during the 1970s and 80s, when Western artists were developing ideas that were rooted in the work of Klein and others, and also moving beyond them. By the 1990s, ideas of exhibiting or producing "nothing," or exposing the artist's studio, had already become outdated and had already replaced by others. Perestroika and independence brought with them the opportunity to experiment, and Polis did so, simply without the same implications of a modernist critique that Klein's work contained.

⁴⁶⁴ Yves Klein, "The Specialization of Sensibility in the Raw Material State into Stabilized Pictorial Sensibility," reprinted in Yves Klein, Gilbert Perlein, Alain Buisine, Bruno Cora, Nicolas Bourriaud, *Yves Klein: Long Life the Immaterial* (New York: Delano Greedridge Editions, 2000), 182.

The same can be said for comparisons with Arman and Duchamp. Arman's *Le Plein* (conceived 1958, exhibited at Iris Clert 1960) was a direct response to Klein's *Le Vide*. It, too, is a statement on the consumer society, as well as on mass production and the disposable society. Polis' environment in the 1970s and 80s in Latvia, however, could not have been more different from Klein's and Arman's in Paris of the 1950s and 60s. Soviet Latvia was not a capitalist society, and furthermore there wasn't much to buy. Polis' two exhibitions, then, must be looked at from a completely different perspective than one would look at the French artists' – they must be considered in light of post-Soviet Latvia in the 1990s. Polis himself denies any awareness of these exhibitions at the time that he did both *The Exhibition without Work* and *Miervaldis Polis Memorial Room*.⁴⁶⁵ Even if he had been aware of them, however, the impetus for his work still remains informed by the context in which it was created. With *The Exhibition Without Work*, Polis was attempting to once again engage the viewer in a discussion, to enfranchise him and allow him to bring to the work his own thoughts and ideas. By providing him literally with a blank canvas – the white walls and empty gallery space – he allowed the viewer to add his own interpretation to the work of art. The exhibition was an example of democracy in action in a newly formed democracy.

⁴⁶⁵ As stated by Polis in conversation with the author, June 2005.

Polis' knowledge of Western European and American performance art, as revealed through several interviews and conversations with him, remains limited. At one point he claimed to have heard only of Alan Kaprow and Andy Warhol in the 70s and 80s, but not Joseph Beuys or Gilbert and George, for example. Later he stated that he later learned about Joseph Beuys, but when he mentioned him he said that he was aware that he had "painted himself white," an error that revealed his actual lack of knowledge of the artist.

"Es tik' zinu, ka viņš bija nosmērējies balts...Jā, viņš taisīja visādas, jā, tieši tā. Tipisks fantom mākslinieks. Man ir mākslas vēsture citā skatījumā. Es viņu lasīju tur, akadēmijā. Bet tā kā neviens tur nesaprata, es atmetu ar roku. Boizsu un Varhols, divas....To es uzzināju pirms...Es neinteresējos par visu to mākslu, man tas neinteresēja un...Es toreiz visas tās performances nezināju."

Polis, in an interview with the author, September 8, 2007.

In the *Miervaldis Polis Memorial Room* the artist put his entire life on view to the public, including himself. In this exhibition the artist who continually tried to engage in dialogue with his audience, through his paintings, was able to come face to face with that audience and conduct an actual dialogue with them directly, should they desire to participate. One could compare this work to Duchamp's *Boite en Valise*, an inventory of that artist's *œuvre* that bears superficial resemblance to Polis' exhibition. But Duchamp's piece, like that of Klein and Arman, was a comment on the commercialization and mass production of art, in the same way that Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* was a verbal critique of that phenomenon. Polis, unlike Duchamp, exhibited the originals of his work, those paintings that still remained in his possession. In Polis' world, art had not yet become commodified or corrupted in the same way that it had for the French artists nearly fifty years prior. Just as Polis made a "mechanical reproduction" of a da Vinci painting by hand, he also chose to exhibit all of his original art works, instead of making copies in the manner of Duchamp. Latvian art, having missed out on nearly fifty years of capitalism, also missed out on becoming commercialized. Polis used the exhibition of the actual art object, along with the tools with which it was created and the environment in which it was, to connect with his audience in a more direct way than he ever could with the paintings alone.

Polis and Performance

Just as Polis used the method of *trompe l'œil* in his paintings to engage his audience in dialogue, the artist also used the medium of performance art as a different means to the same end. Artists in the West began to develop conceptual and performance art in the 1950s and 60s as a response to and reaction against the commercialization of

art. This type of art seemed to provide the answer, since it was objectless – there was no object to sell. As Rose Lee Goldberg wrote about performance art in her anthology on the subject, “although visible, it was intangible, it left no traces and it could not be bought and sold.”⁴⁶⁶ In this regard, the focus was shifted to the message of the work of art, as opposed to the economic value. Goldberg sees it then as “an ideal means to materialize art concepts and as such was the practice corresponding to many [new art] theories.”⁴⁶⁷ Finally, performance art was able to level the distinction between artist and viewer because of the fact that both were participating in the performance together. For Goldberg, “performance art was seen as reducing the element of alienation between performer and viewer...since both audience and performer experienced the work simultaneously.”⁴⁶⁸ In many ways, this statement echoes Polis’ own idea about the roles of viewer and artist. As he stated in “Miervaldis Interviews Polis”: “I want to emphasize that when the art work is finished, it becomes independent, an object independent of the author; and the artist himself, even though he is the first, is only one of the possible viewers.”⁴⁶⁹ In this sense, the viewer’s presence is required to make meaning.

As Goldberg underscores, with the advent of performance art “above all, audiences were provoked into asking just what were the boundaries of art: where, for instance, did scientific or philosophical enquiry end and art begin, or what distinguished the fine line between art and life?”⁴⁷⁰ Polis even wrote that he preferred his viewers coming to the work of art with an open mind, ready to look at the work with a fresh pair

⁴⁶⁶ Rose Lee Goldeberg, *Performance Art from Futurism to the Present* (NY: Harry N. Abrams, 1988), 152.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid, 153.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid, 152.

⁴⁶⁹ “Gribu tikai uzsvērt, ka tad, kad darbs pabeigts, tas kļūst par pastāvīgu, no autora neatkarīgu objektu un mākslinieks pats, lai arī pirmais, ir tikai viens no iespējamajiem skatītājiem.”

Polis, “Miervaldis Interve Polis,” 19.

⁴⁷⁰ Goldeberg, *Performance Art from Futurism to the Present*, 153.

of eyes and add something new to it. In “Miervaldis Interviews Polis,” he wrote: “I really don’t like the designated “prepared viewer,” which means for me “the spoiled viewer.” That viewer’s perception is focused on something definite, and, if he doesn’t get what he expected then he feels disappointed. The perception has to be untouched like the soul of a child.”⁴⁷¹ In many ways his viewers were by default “untouched like the soul of a child,” because of the fact that performance art was still new for them.

In the late 1980s Polis and his fellow citizens were both involved in a similar pursuit, one to make people aware of the circumstances surrounding them, by reexamining them and looking more closely. Polis used specific art-making techniques, such as *trompe l’œil* and performance, in order to engage his audience and bring them into conversation both with himself and the art work. Performance art was not only well suited to Polis’ aims, but it also fit well within the transformations in the Soviet Union and Latvia in the late 1980s, because it allowed for a completely new way of looking at the world, and could therefore lead to new interpretations. As Hubert Clocker wrote in his essay “Gesture and the Object, Liberation as Action: A European Component of Performance Art”:

We know that the performative work of art, be it Happening, performance art, body art, or *Aktion*, is an ephemeral and participatory event. As such, it is primarily a direct experience and loses its immediacy upon being realized. Its presence can then only be conveyed by the media, or by means of representational objects. This does not necessarily imply a dissolution of the art object. It indicates rather a new, expansive, and free conception of the artwork and art itself, for eventually in the performative work, even thought achieves plasticity. It then becomes a gesture that in the conceptual and performative work can not only

⁴⁷¹ “Man vispār nepatīk apzīmējums “sagatavots skatītājs,” tas man nozīmē “sabojāts skatītājs.” Tāda skatītāja uztvere ir iecentrēta uz kaut ko noteiktu, un, ja viņš to nesagaida, tad jūtas vīlies. Uztverei jābūt neskartai kā bērna dvēselei.” Polis, “Miervaldis Interve Polis,” 16.

stand by itself, but can also lead one to a reevaluation of the art objects. This then provides the languages of art new contextual possibilities and conceptual variations.⁴⁷²

For Polis and his audience in Post-Perestroika Latvia, the artist's performances did lead to a reevaluation of the art object, in that by bringing this manifestation of art into the space of the everyday, it confronted viewers face to face. This new form of art opened up new possibilities for artists and viewers alike; it enabled performers to use different methods to engage their audiences, and allowed audience members to participate in the art process. It also enabled Polis to realize, in three- and four-dimensions, ideas about art and reception that he had begun earlier with his paintings. Polis' work is therefore both a product of as well as generator of the new freedoms experienced in Latvia during and after Perestroika.

While Polis used both painting and performance in an attempt to actively engage people that were just beginning to take action and control of their own destinies in the socio-political arena, his Russian counterpart Afrika (Sergei Bugaev) embarked on a different route, taking on the role of a shaman. While Afrika was also responding to the changes taking place around him, he used his performance in a much different way than Polis. Afrika's performance was an individual one, shared only with the inmates of a mental hospital. The artist hoped that the performance would eventually translate into some kind of resolution for his fellow countrymen. The next chapter will discuss Afrika's strategies in light of Post-Soviet Russia, and the implications of those particular strategies for his audience and viewers.

⁴⁷² Hubert Clocker, "Gesture and the Object, Liberation as Action: A European Component of Performance Art," in *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object 1949-1979*, ed. Paul Schimmel, 159 (Los Angeles: The Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998).

Chapter Five: The Search for a Russian Identity through Sign and Symbol: Afrika's *Crimania* in early Post-Soviet Russia

According to the catalogue for *Crimania*, after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, the St. Petersburg artist Afrika complained of depression resulting from his loss of identity as a Soviet citizen, and mentioned a desire to have his friend, the French psychotherapist Felix Guattari (1930-1992), psychoanalyze him to relieve his suffering.⁴⁷³ In February 1993, as part of an artistic performance, Afrika committed himself to a mental hospital in Simferopol in Crimea, where he remained for three weeks⁴⁷⁴ (Figs. 5.1, 5.2). He chose the hospital for a number of reasons, the first being that he had an invitation from the head doctor there, Professor Viktor Pavlovich Samokhvalov. Furthermore, Crimea held a special historical significance, with regard to both the Soviet Union and art historical tradition; it is the site of Joseph Beuys' narrative of creative origin: according to the artist, as a member of the Luftwaffe during World War II, his plane crashed on that same peninsula fifty years earlier, and his rescue by Tatars was the moment of his rebirth.⁴⁷⁵

Although Afrika defines his own experience as a "performance," his activities while living in a mental institution were witnessed only by the other patients and the staff of the hospital. The sole outside observer, Russian art critic and curator Viktor Mazin,

⁴⁷³ Mikhail Ryklin, "The Artist in the Collection and the World," in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazafaka*, ed. Peter Noever, 16 (Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995).

⁴⁷⁴ Alexander Pavlovich Liucii, a Senior Researcher at the Russian Institute of Culture Research recently published a book on the history of Crimea, and included Afrika's performance as one chapter of the book. See for reference Alexander Pavlovich Liucii, *Nasledie Krimea: geosofiia, tekstual'nost', identichnost'* (Moscow: Russkii impul's, 2007).

⁴⁷⁵ The plane crash is said to have occurred outside Sevastopol, which lays southwest of Simferopol, on the Crimean coast. Although many dispute the veracity of the story (such as Benjamin Buchloh in his 1980 article in *Artforum*, "The Twilight of an Idol – Preliminary Notes for a Critique"), Afrika nevertheless appears to engage with it as if it were true, as evinced by his choices in both the performance and exhibition.

acted as the patient's relative. Only five staff members knew that this was part of an artistic project. The second part of the *Crimania* project was Afrika's major solo exhibition that took place two years later at the Austrian Museum of Applied Arts (MAK) in Vienna, entitled *Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*. Much of the work that was exhibited there came directly from Afrika's stay in the mental institution in 1993, including art work that he produced there, work that his fellow patients produced with him, and the work that he did during the two years following the performance that was in effect shaped by his experiences in the hospital. The exhibition also consisted of installations and displays of Afrika's collections of Soviet memorabilia, such as busts of Lenin, flags, banners and medals (Fig. 5.3), and was accompanied by a catalogue that chronicled the observations of the performance by the doctor (Viktor Samokhvalov), the patient (Afrika) and the patient's "relative" (Viktor Mazin). The total installation was a retrospective of the artist's work to date, as well as an exploration of language and sign systems that was the result of Afrika's research in the mental institution.

Crimania was Afrika's attempt come to terms with the period of uncertainty after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which he labeled the time of "Great Aphasia,"⁴⁷⁶ or "pseudo-aphasia,"⁴⁷⁷ in recognition of the dissolution of shared tropes and values in Soviet official as well as public discourse. Technically, aphasia is a language disturbance; it is the loss of the ability to use words, an inability to connect signifier (the word) and signified (the concept). Afrika described aphasia as "the powerful vacation of language

⁴⁷⁶ Afrika, in Noever, 18. The reference is most likely either to Kandinsky's 1920 essay "On the Great Utopia" or to Josef Weber's 1950 text, "The Great Utopia."

⁴⁷⁷ Afrika, "Ethics and Ethology of the Artist," 64.

structures,”⁴⁷⁸ because of the afflicted person’s inability to communicate with those whose speech is unaffected. His work with language is indebted to the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson (1896-1982), who undertook a similar study of language fifty years earlier. Afrika’s fascination with the Russian linguist runs deep, and much of his study, in *Crimania*, owes a great debt to him. Jakobson is important to Afrika not only for his studies with language, but because for the artist, he is the figure who linked studies of language with literature, psychology, anthropology, and other disciplines.⁴⁷⁹

Jakobson was a scholar connected with the Moscow School of Linguistics and the Prague School at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴⁸⁰ One of his contributions to the study of linguistics is his revision of the work of French linguist Fernand de Saussure (1857-1913). Whereas Saussure conceived of language as a linear structure of signifiers and signifieds (signs and the objects or concepts that they represent), Jakobson proved that simultaneity existed in language, as evinced in, for example, the literary device of metaphor, where one word or phrase can have two meanings – the literal and the figurative. Jakobson’s contention led him to focus on the two rhetorical devices that he considered the most fundamental for communicating meaning – metaphor and metonymy.⁴⁸¹ This in turn led him to important discoveries about aphasia, a language disorder that impairs one’s ability to speak. Once he showed that human linguistic activity is founded on the two axes of selection and combination (also known as the metaphoric and metonymic axes, and the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes) he then

⁴⁷⁸ Sergei Bugaev Afrika and Viktor Mazin, “The Reflection of the Rebus and Stochastic Oscillations,” in Sergei Bugaev Afrika, *Sergei Bugaev Afrika – Rebus* (New York: Paul Judelson Arts, 1994), 19.

⁴⁷⁹ Afrika, in conversation with the author, July 2003.

⁴⁸⁰ Viktor Terras, *Handbook of Russian Literature* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990), 207-210.

⁴⁸¹ See Roman Jakobson, “The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles,” in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge, 56-59 (England: Pearson Education, Ltd., 2000).

applied that finding to the condition of aphasia, and concluded that aphasia either affected the axis of selection (meaning that those affected could not select the appropriate word to use) or combination (meaning that a person could not put his words together in a comprehensible sentence).⁴⁸²

While clinical aphasia is usually the result of an injury to the brain, aphasia can also appear in a symbolic sense, when a structure that keeps a sign system intact is disrupted. The catalyst for what Afrika referred to as the time of Great Aphasia was the dissolution of the Soviet Union. By December of 1991, after individual nations had one by one declared their independence, Gorbachev resigned as President of the USSR, having no other choice, as he had become a leader without a country. Citizens removed symbols that also ceased to have current meaning, such as the statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky (1877-1926), founder of the Cheka (precursor to the KGB⁴⁸³), which was taken from its pedestal in front of the KGB headquarters in Moscow. The hammer and sickle flag of the Soviet Union was lowered from the Kremlin; it had become a national flag without a nation. In time, the government was forced to change street names, and state agencies replaced their acronyms. For example KGB became FSB (Federal Security Service, or *Federalnaya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti*). Once the totalitarian structure had been dismantled, the sign systems that had made sense of it no longer had the same impact or effect; their socially determined meaning was no longer relevant to the current situation. They continued to communicate values that had existed in the past, but not the present. Throughout his career Afrika has been collecting these symbols of the former Soviet Union, including the banners that he exhibits in *Crimania*, as well as busts of Lenin and

⁴⁸² See Roman Jakobson, *Child Aphasia and Phonological Universals* (Paris: Mouton, 1968). This condition of aphasia and its relevance to Afrika and *Crimania* will be discussed in further detail in a later section.

⁴⁸³ Committee for State Security, or, *Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti*

Stalin, paintings, medals, and trophies. This aspect of his personality (collecting) is then examined during the performance by Viktor Mazin, while Afrika studies signs and semiotic systems with regard to the patients.

As part of the narrative that the participants created for this performance, Viktor Mazin argued that the stay in the mental hospital was necessary because of the condition with which he, along with his colleague, art historian Oleysa Turkina,⁴⁸⁴ and Afrika himself, had diagnosed Afrika: Obsessional Representational Syndrome, or ORS. As the observer in the performance, Mazin had his own set of goals and objectives with regard to his participation, and his narrative is also relevant to the performance insofar as he is one of the participants. In this sense he does not speak for the artist (in fact it happens that their views and estimations of the performance sometimes differ), yet contributes another layer to the picture of the performance.

Mazin stated that the condition of ORS resulted from Afrika's realization, at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, that he was, in fact, part of the art market.⁴⁸⁵ Afrika realized that the consequence of this situation was two-fold: one, that he had to constantly produce, and two, that he had to produce something recognizable, a "signature" by which gallerists and collectors might recognize the identity of the artist as well as his individuality.⁴⁸⁶ The obsessive neurosis, according to Mazin, results from an awareness of the need to constantly produce and reproduce work for the market. As he explained, an artist who successfully integrates himself into the art world becomes a compulsive creator, for in order to survive and make a living, "you have to copy yourself

⁴⁸⁴ Mazin, Turkina and Afrika have collaborated on several projects, including the publication of a journal of art theory and criticism called *Kabinet*, and the establishing of the Freud Dream Museum in St. Petersburg.

⁴⁸⁵ Mazin, in an interview with the author, September 16, 2007.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

all the time.”⁴⁸⁷ ORS was then also a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, or more so of Perestroika, which produced policies that allowed gallerists and art collectors to travel to Russia and purchase art from artists for Western collections. Mazin noted that this had begun in the late 1980s, and by the time of *Crimania*, Afrika was already a part of the market, with his own gallerist in New York, Paul Judelson.⁴⁸⁸

Afrika used the performance and the subsequent exhibition to explore the new circumstances that were re-shaping his and his contemporaries’ experiences of and relation to culture and politics during the period immediately following the break-up of the Soviet Union, by focusing on mental illness, language and symbols. Afrika also sought to discover whether his experiences during *Crimania* could have a universal relevance for his contemporaries or his viewers in general, in a post-modern, post-Soviet, global world. Although the performance itself was a very personal one, the artist was aware that any advances with regard to his development would be utilized in his future projects of alternative language systems, to reach a larger public. The performance offers a unique exploration of identity issues in post-Soviet Russia and is distinctive in its effort to resolve those issues by looking into language systems and different forms of communication. Afrika was also exceptional in targeting the connection between pathology and creativity. By making the setting of his performance a mental institution, a place where social changes were felt more keenly than anywhere else in the former Soviet Union, he was able to get closer to the essence of those issues. The performance is also fundamental as it lays the groundwork for Afrika’s work with signs and symbols that he continues throughout his career.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

This chapter will first outline the details regarding the performance, its participants, their goals and conclusions, and offer an analysis of the work presented in the *Crimania* exhibition. I will then assess the artist's strategies within the socio-political context of contemporary Russia and modernist and post-modernist art in general.

The Artist

As an artist, Sergei Bugaev takes on a role when he addresses his public, by appropriating the name of an entire continent as his artistic moniker. This initial change of name accompanied other significant changes in his life – the change of location, and the beginning of a career as an artist, when Bugaev moved to Leningrad in 1980 and became part of Timur Novikov's inner circle of bohemian artists. He acquired the nickname Afrika from one of his mentors, Boris Grebenshchikov (b. 1953), singer and songwriter of the Russia underground music group Aquarium (*Akvarium*) and a central figure of the Leningrad underground art scene. Bugaev developed an interest in reggae music and all things "African" as a result of Grebenshchikov's influence, and the musician eventually named one of his albums, "Radio Afrika" after Bugaev.⁴⁸⁹ In the late 80s Afrika also acquired another nickname that he is commonly known by to this day – Bananan, from his role as that character in *ASSA*.

By using the pseudonym "Afrika" as his artistic name, the artist has also created an aura of mystery around himself much like that exploited by Beuys with regard to his Crimean plane crash. The origins of the name "Afrika" are rarely explained in print, and when they are, they are often erroneous. For example, one supposition was that the nickname was given to him by his parents, who were Kenyan diplomats (they did not,

⁴⁸⁹ Afrika, in a phone conversation with the author, March 2005.

and were not).⁴⁹⁰ Others have considered the pseudonym a reference to Russian poet Aleksander Pushkin (1799-1837), whose great-grandfather was an African slave. The link, although incorrect, is opportune: Pushkin, hailed as Russia's "national poet," is considered to have shaped modern Russian literary language and is recognized by many as the most significant figure in Russian literature.⁴⁹¹ Afrika himself is obsessed with language and focuses, in his work, on creating a new and alternative types of language relevant to contemporary Russia. Regardless of the truth of the tales behind the nickname, the name Afrika conjures up a variety of associations, and perpetuates the many myths that surround the artist. Since the 1980s he has authored all of his works as Afrika, either with his given name following the nickname in parenthesis: Afrika (Sergei Bugaev), or with the nickname taking the place of his surname, as follows: Sergei Bugaev Afrika.

The Location

In February of 1993 Afrika traveled from St. Petersburg to Crimea, via Moscow and Kiev, documenting his route along the way as the beginning of the performance that was to take place in Simferopol. The train journey was complicated and difficult, as there were no direct routes between St. Petersburg and Simferopol. At the time, transportation between former Soviet republics was problematic, because border agreements had yet to be made, and communications between countries had yet to be established. For example, there were still no flights between Russia and Ukraine, which is why Afrika traveled by

⁴⁹⁰ Viktor Mazin, "Afrasia," in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, ed. Peter Noever, 36 (Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995).

⁴⁹¹ Even Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852) said about Pushkin that "in him, as if in a lexicon, have been included all of the wealth, strength, and flexibility of our language. More than all others, he has pushed back its boundaries and showed all of its spaciousness." ("Some Notes on Pushkin," 1834)

rail.⁴⁹² The trip was also symbolic for Afrika, because in some ways, he was returning home, as Novorossiysk, where he is originally from, is also on the Black Sea, close to Crimea. At the time the Russian and Ukrainian governments were still arguing over which country would maintain control of the Crimean peninsula, once an independent republic of the USSR (1921-1945) that had been ‘returned’ to Ukraine by Khrushchev in 1954.

Immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union, the transitions between currencies, passports and names created a situation that was confusing and unsettling. As Afrika noted with regard to Ukraine, “the people living there...were then unable to fully understand where they are situated, which currency system exists around them and what citizenship they have because, although the area was acknowledged to be part of the Ukraine, Soviet passports were still valid and were actually the only ones that existed.”⁴⁹³ Afrika recognized this uncertainty because he felt it himself, and identified with it. This is one of the reasons that Afrika chose to locate his performance in Simferopol: the quest of the local residents echoed his own – the search for a new identity out of the ashes of the old Soviet one. The artist also complained of “a feeling of uncertainty, confusion about ‘which country I live in,’”⁴⁹⁴ as he made the journey to a place where doubt and ambiguity were felt even more acutely. His own insecurity prompted him to examine these uncertainties up close; a deliberate strategy that will be discussed later in this

⁴⁹² Mazin, “Afrasia,” 21.

⁴⁹³ Sergei Bugaev Afrika, “Ethics and Ethology of the Artist,” in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, ed. Peter Noever, 62-63 (Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995).

⁴⁹⁴ Afrika, as qtd. in Viktor Pavlovich Samokhvalov, “The Conception of a Fundamentally New Symbol: The Artist as an Object of Science and Art,” in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, ed. Peter Noever, 55 (Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995).

chapter specifically with regard to the mental institution as the setting for the performance.

Today Crimea is an independent republic of Ukraine, although its history is deeply intertwined with that of Russia and the Soviet Union. In the 18th century it became part of the Russian empire, but in 1921 the Crimean Soviet Socialist Republic was created as part of the Russian SFSR (Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, *Sovetskaya Federativnaya Sotsialisticheskaya Respublika*).⁴⁹⁵ In 1945 it lost that autonomy and became a province (*oblast*) of the Russian SFSR, just one year after Stalin forcibly deported the entire population of Crimean Tartars to Central Asia as a punishment for their alleged collaboration with the Nazis.⁴⁹⁶ In 1954 the peninsula was transferred back to Ukraine by Nikita Khrushchev. He made the peninsula part of the Ukrainian SSR as a commemoration of the 300th anniversary of the Treaty of Pereyaslav, which was a peace treaty between Ukrainian Cossacks and Russia. When the Soviet Union collapsed, Crimea became part of the newly independent country of Ukraine. Because of the large Russian population there, the placement of Crimea under the jurisdiction of Ukraine caused tensions between Ukraine and Russia. Crimea's popularity as a resort and vacation destination during the Soviet period made this coveted territory for those who could lay claims to it. In 1992 Crimea proclaimed self-rule, but later agreed to remain part of Ukraine as an autonomous republic.

In 1945 Crimea was host to the Yalta Conference, a meeting which was to have a considerable influence on the makeup of the Soviet Union after World War II. It was here that Churchill and Roosevelt agreed to leave those countries liberated by the Red Army,

⁴⁹⁵ See for reference Alan W. Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars (Studies of Nationalities)* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1987) 130-149.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 150-179.

such as Poland and the Baltic States, in the hands of the Soviets, who had promised free elections after the war. Not surprisingly, these elections were rigged, and all of the countries remained under Moscow's control until the end of the Cold War.⁴⁹⁷ It was also in Crimea that Gorbachev was held under house arrest in 1991, during the August coup. The politburo attempted to remove him from power in order to prevent him from signing a new treaty that would make membership in the Union truly voluntary. In doing so, they hoped to keep the Soviet Union intact.⁴⁹⁸

Aside from the socio-political and historical significance of the peninsula, Afrika also chose this as the site for his performance because of the art historical tradition linked to the region. Crimea is also the locus of the events that came to comprise the well-known Joseph Beuys myth, which includes his 1944 plane crash and subsequent rescue by Tartars. It was here that Afrika's avant-garde precursor claims to have experienced his birth as an artist. While art historians have already discredited the facts of Beuys' story,⁴⁹⁹ by staging his performance in Crimea Afrika participates in the Beuys myth and perpetuates it. While Beuys constantly referred back to the plane crash as the source of his inspiration as an artist, and utilized materials such as fat and felt, which he claims the Tatars used to save his life and keep him warm, one can notice similar strategies that Afrika consciously follows in his work. The origins of his studies in language and sign systems can be traced back to the *Crimania* performance, and this performance signals

⁴⁹⁷ See for reference Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2000), 523-525; John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 21-24; Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, "Zhdanov of and Origins of the Eastern Bloc," in Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), 110-137.

⁴⁹⁸ David Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire* (New York: Random House: 1993) 453-466; *Russia at the Barricades*, ed. Victoria E. Bonnell, Ann Cooper and Gregory Freiden, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994).

⁴⁹⁹ See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol. Preliminary Notes for a Critique" *Artforum* 18/5 (January 1980): 35-43.

the beginnings of these explorations of the artist. Afrika also put his hospital pajamas on view in an exhibition that took place after *Crimania* in Pori, Finland, echoing Beuys' habitual display of his felt suit.

Afrika is conscious of his artistic predecessor and cultivates a similar myth surrounding his performance as Beuys did before him. Peter Noever, the curator of *Crimania* also refers to the German artist in the exhibition catalogue, stating that when he visited Afrika in Simferopol, he observed that inhabitants of Crimea still spoke of Beuys with reverence, even those not necessarily interested in art. They “‘breathed his spirit,’ regarded him as ‘their son,’ guarded his secret (‘only pathologically interested art historians would attempt to find the ‘truth’).”⁵⁰⁰ Afrika uses the location as an art historical reference point for his audience, yet this is merely a departure point for a project whose aims and strategies are completely divergent from that of his predecessor, as will be discussed below.

Afrika's ultimate destination was the Crimean Republican Psychiatric Hospital No. 1, in Simferopol, the capital of Crimea. He chose to stage the performance in a mental institution for very specific reasons, mainly because the hierarchical system that existed within the hospital accurately reflected the one maintained outside of it, in everyday life. As a patient there, he could observe a microcosm of that structure as it was contained in a restricted space. The artist described the psychiatric as a copy of the outside world, in the same way that

any microorganism is the copy of the larger system in which it is placed. The hospital is a mimetic system of the social structure within which it exists. The

⁵⁰⁰ Peter Noever, “Between Two Worlds: and Act of Self-Assertion,” in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, ed. Peter Noever, 5 (Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995).

difference between doctors and patients is just as big as the gap between the government of a state and its normal citizens, between the celebrant and a congregation in a church.⁵⁰¹

The patients in the hospital were all diagnosed with some form of mental illness; they were all suffering from an emotional trauma, a condition that was analogous to the mental suffering that Afrika was going through, and that he imagined his compatriots to be going through, after the breakup of the Soviet Union. By studying this condition in a mental institution the artist could observe how the dynamics of this trauma, and the healing of it, were played out in a smaller version of society – the hospital.

Furthermore Mazin claimed that the mental hospital was a crucial setting for the performance because the patients could feel the socio-political changes that were going on around them in a much more pronounced manner than did the relatively mentally healthy. Mazin feels that this is true of inhabitants of any mental institution, at any point and time. In his words, “the patients, they are not prophets, but still they are much more sensitive than so-called ‘regular’ people to the processes in society.”⁵⁰² He also stated that if, for example, “you want to understand what is going on now in society...the best thing would be precisely to go to the psychiatric hospital and talk to the patients to understand the most difficult and most sensitive questions about society in general.”⁵⁰³

As an example of how this might work in more concrete terms, he mentioned a system of exchange that had developed in the hospital at the time that he and Afrika were there. Mazin said that “in the hospital they were producing their own [paper] money,” for use within the walls of the hospital. He recalled that almost immediately after he and

⁵⁰¹ Afrika, “Ethics and Ethology of the Artist,” 62.

⁵⁰² Mazin, in an interview with the author, September 16, 2007.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

Afrika arrived there, one man asked if he could exchange this worthless paper hospital money for dollars, an action that mirrored events taking place outside the hospital, where average citizens were attempting to exchange a less stable currency (rubles) for the more stable one at the time (US dollars).⁵⁰⁴ While the patients may not have been aware of the details regarding the fall of the Soviet Union and the socio-political changes occurring as a result, he maintains that they could feel the effects of a major shift taking place, more acutely than those outside the wall of the hospital did.⁵⁰⁵

Although in Western society people with schizophrenia and other serious mental illnesses are often forced to remain in institutions, the former Soviet Union has a special relationship with mental hospitals and the diagnosis of schizophrenia. This was the diagnosis of choice for those who were suspected of being political dissidents or enemies of the state. A special classification of “sluggishly progressing schizophrenia” was created during the Brezhnev era, so that the government could confine these people to a sanatorium in order to silence them or curtail their rebellious activity.⁵⁰⁶ Mazin recalls being “surprised” at how quickly his close friend was diagnosed as schizophrenic.⁵⁰⁷ When asked whether now, nearly fifteen years later, he believes in the credibility of the diagnosis, he responded that he did not.⁵⁰⁸ Although he has great respect for Professor Samokhvalov, he realizes now that this diagnosis was most likely the result of the Soviet legacy and influence on psychiatry and mental health, and reflects the ease and frequency with which this label was applied to almost any case of mental ill-health.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Vera Rich, “Soviet Union Admits to Abuses of Psychiatry,” *New Scientist Magazine* 1795 (November 16, 1991): 13.

⁵⁰⁷ Mazin, in an interview with the author, September 16, 2007.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

A case in point is Afrika's previous stay in a mental institution, prior to his *Crimania* experience. In the early 1980s the artist was summoned for his mandatory military service. At the time, Russia was at war with Afghanistan and Afrika, being a pacifist, did not want to risk being sent off to fight, so he went to the conscription office with his mother and some of his paintings. His mother implored the officers to excuse him from his military service owing to his mental instability. After viewing the paintings, the officers agreed and had Afrika sent to a mental institution, where he was diagnosed with schizophrenia.⁵⁰⁹ Mazin mentioned that in the hospital, Afrika taught the other patients to eat flowers and do other crazy things. As a result, his case was considered the most severe in the hospital, but because of his antics, which disrupted the order and the peace of the other patients, he was forced to leave.⁵¹⁰ Mazin feels that this story exemplifies the contradictions in the system of mental health in the Soviet Union, where the most ill patient in the hospital is set free. As an underground artist himself, Afrika was not dissimilar from those dissidents who had previously been classified as schizophrenics. By committing himself to a mental institution after the end of the Soviet period, Afrika was able to explore another aspect of the legacy of the Soviet Union – that of mental illness and the approach to psychology and psychiatry.

The Goals

The project used scientific methods to seek answers about art and artistic expression, therefore the goals of what the participants had hoped to achieve were clearly outlined in the catalogue. The idea for the performance was conceived following a conference in Yalta in 1992, entitled "The Soul and the Human Image," in which Afrika

⁵⁰⁹ Afrika, in a phone conversation with the author, March 2006.

⁵¹⁰ Mazin, in an interview with the author, September 16, 2007.

and Mazin had participated upon invitation by Professor Samokhvalov, a professor of ethology, which is, according to him, “the science studying the biological origins and evolution of human and animal behavior under non-experimental, natural conditions.”⁵¹¹

Afrika described his conception of the performance as follows:

I started to contemplate the idea of hospitalizing a person in order to observe his behavior under clinical conditions, where, thanks to such symmetrical systems like the doctor-patient relationship, very powerful systems of information exchange would be developed under conditions which both differ greatly from normal life and have much in common with it.⁵¹²

The observation of the patient would have three aspects to it: the observation of the patient by the doctor; the self-observation of the patient, and the observation of the interaction between doctor and patient by a third party, in this case, a person acting as the patient’s relative during the performance. This tri-partite group was officially termed the *S. A. Bugaev Group*, which consisted of Afrika, the patient; Vitkor Mazin, Afrika’s friend who acted as his relative; and Professor Viktor Pavlovich Samokhvalov, the head doctor at the hospital.

Each of the participants stated their own personal goals of what they hoped to discover through the experiment. Although the goals roughly coincided with one another each participant had his own focus. Afrika, for example, was concerned with his own mental state as well as the development of visual images, including signs and symbols. This was especially important for him because at the time of the performance, he was starting to prepare his major solo exhibition at the MAK Gallery. Samokhvalov’s focus

⁵¹¹ Samokhvalov, “The Conception of a Fundamentally New Symbol: The Artist as an Object of Science and Art,” 48. The field of ethology, or the study of animal behavior, is quite different from ethnology, a study of culture and human behavior.

⁵¹² Afrika, “Ethics and Ethology of the Artist,” 63.

was on the manner in which art evolves and new symbols are created, and on a method of experiment known as endospection, or, examination from within, and Mazin's focus was on ORS.

Afrika's Goals

Afrika stated that for him, the *Crimania* performance was about the "obsession of creating an exhibition,"⁵¹³ a reference to what Mazin had previously mentioned about the sudden realization (as an artist) that Afrika was part of the art market, as well as the ensuing pressure for him to produce. More specifically, Afrika described his goal in the experiment as follows: "to describe, as completely and thoroughly as possible, the system of mood and behavior of the artist since this was relevant to the preparations for the exhibition at the MAK."⁵¹⁴ This echoes Mazin's statement about ORS, with regard to the artist being forced to produce, and to produce a signature style. The performance at the hospital was only the first part of his investigation, with the eventual exhibition being the end result or product of the performance. For the artist the timing of the performance was important, as it could only have occurred at that specific historical moment in order to be of any relevance. His hospitalization took place during a period of great socio-political change, after the great "empire" that was the Soviet Union had fallen, and new countries were being created (or re-created) in its place. He described this as "the dissociation of a remarkably powerful social structure [that created] circumstances of geopolitical changes comparable in size to the end of the Roman Empire."⁵¹⁵ One of the consequences of the changes for Afrika was his feeling of identity loss, and this feeling motivated him to

⁵¹³ Afrika, in a phone conversation with the author, March 2005, also Mazin, in an interview with the author, September 16, 2007.

⁵¹⁴ Afrika, "Ethics and Ethology of the Artist," 64.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid, 64.

study its effects not only on him as a person, but also on him as an artist and therefore on his art.

From there, Afrika sought to study the effects of these changes on culture, by examining a creator of culture: the artist. He therefore observed himself in the study, aiming to pinpoint the effects that the political changes had on his creative output. In other words, he planned to “observe the behavior not only of the essence of culture as such, but also of the cultural medium under these difficult circumstances when the strongest and most profound sign that appears in this area is the identification of the characteristics that distinguish a healthy from a sick organism...”⁵¹⁶ Beyond the scope of both the performance and the exhibition, his aim was to find a solution to the issue of the loss of a Soviet identity, by forging new symbols out of the old. These new symbols would then contribute to a new, alternative mode of expression, which can be described as one of Afrika’s ultimate goals as an artist.

Samokhvalov’s Goals

Professor Samokhvalov’s task, with regard to *Crimania*, was to examine the development of cultural symbols in society. His interest is summed up in the title to his catalogue entry, “The Conception of a Fundamentally New Symbol: The Artist as an Object of Science and Art.” For the doctor, the evolution of symbols could be investigated not by examining the *symbolic system*, but by looking at the source of the system, or, the artist. He justified this line of inquiry by stating that:

Behavior is that constituent of the “behavior – cultural objects – cultural texts” triangle which can be determined most objectively. Moreover, behavior is distinctly linked with our evolutionary deepest subconscious because the human

⁵¹⁶ Ibid, 64.

brain is basically a combination of reptile, mammal and primate brains. With the help of relatively simple methods it is possible to determine those elements of behavior in a person, especially in an Artist, which are linked with primeval adaptations and those which only go back to more recent periods of history. Behavior reflects a person's memory of his/her individual and generic past. Thus it is possible to understand a cultural text by looking at the behavior or one particular creator of culture.⁵¹⁷

In this case, the 'particular creator of culture' was Afrika. Samokhvalov's main goal, in observing Afrika, was to answer the question as to how new symbols emerge.⁵¹⁸ He sought to do this by observing the artist (a creator of sign systems) as an object of science, because, according to Samokhvalov, the way to discover the essence of cultural symbols was to look at the behavior of the creator of those symbols. As he stated in his essay, "in order to determine the laws governing the evolution of art it seems appropriate to choose the Artist, or rather, his behavior as the object of investigation instead of the symbolic system itself."⁵¹⁹ The scientist undertook the experiment in the hopes that the behavior of the artist in the performance could inform him about the nature of the cultural symbols he produced.

Afrika's and Samokhvalov's interest in the creation and evolution of new sign systems was relevant and topical owing to the changes in sign systems that were occurring around them in the former Soviet countries. Afrika's avant-garde predecessors from the revolutionary period had worked in similar conditions. Afrika revered artists such as Vladimir Mayakovskii (1893-1930), Kazimir Malevich (1878-1935) and El Lissitzky (1890-1941) for their experiments with language, words and symbols.

According to Afrika, it was Mayakovskii who was, "in some sense, the creator of the sign

⁵¹⁷ Samokhvalov, "The Conception of a Fundamentally New Symbol: The Artist as an Object of Science and Art," 47.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid, 47.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid, 47.

system on whose grandiose ruins we are currently standing.”⁵²⁰ During the second and third decades of the 20th century avant-garde artists in Russia, especially the Constructivists, were striving to create a new, alternative sign system, one that would be completely transparent, whose form would clearly and efficiently convey the ideals of the nascent communist state. For Afrika, it was Mayakovskii who managed to create the language of Soviet socialism. Now that Russia had undergone another great upheaval, contemporary society was in need of an artist or creator to produce an equivalent language for the new Russian Federation. Afrika, in his studies of sign systems, was also hoping to develop a new, alternative method of communication, relevant to the current socio-political circumstances.

Samokhvalov also used the performance to investigate the concept of endospection, or the “observation of phenomena, people and objects from the inside, from the point of view of the object itself.”⁵²¹ During the performance, Samokhvalov himself practiced exospection – observing the object (the artist) from without – while Afrika practiced endospection by observing the other patients in the hospital by living among them, as one of them. Samokhvalov speculated that endospection would offer a more thorough glimpse of the conditions of the mentally ill and their psychoses.

The problem with endospection, according to the doctor, is that the subject of the experiment could go too far in entering the world that he is examining.⁵²² A scientist investigating a disease could actually become ill; a person examining a group of people who are mentally ill may become too involved in their world. For that reason

⁵²⁰ Sergei Bugaev Afrika and Viktor Mazin, “Within the Spheres of Interimagery,” in Sergei Bugaev Afrika, *Sergei Bugaev Afrika – Rebus* (New York: Paul Judelson Arts, 1994), 9.

⁵²¹ Samokhvalov, “The Conception of a Fundamentally New Symbol: The Artist as an Object of Science and Art,” 47.

⁵²² Ibid, 51.

Samokhvalov conducted the experiment as he did – allowing Afrika to enter and become part of the world of the mentally insane, but at the same time observing and monitoring him as well. The doctor explained the need for the tri-partite observation during the performance when he stated that endospection could “be successful if the observer is observed himself.”⁵²³ Not only would Afrika make his observations while among the patients, but Samokhvalov would observe and maintain control over Afrika in the hospital environment as well.

Mazin’s Goals

The coordinator of the Group, Viktor Mazin, outlined *The Goals and tasks of the S.A. Bugaev Group*, which the three had agreed upon before the start of the performance. The primary task, according to the list, was to monitor Afrika’s behavior with regard to the socio-political situation at the time. More specifically, the aim was

...to examine, following the example of the artist Sergei Anatolevich Bugaev’s psychological development, the processes of disorientation (both collective and individual) resulting from the dissociation of our country, the world-wide loss of status for its remains, and the re-naming of all important areas and points of reference (the country, the city, many streets, etc.).⁵²⁴

In order to do this it was necessary to determine the connection between the artist’s emotional state and the objects that he collected, and to seek the cause for his desire to collect. They referred to these objects as “representation[s] of things which act as objects of power, i.e., which actually represent representation.”⁵²⁵ In the end they hoped to discover why Afrika collected these objects, and understand the impulse behind his desire

⁵²³ Ibid, 52.

⁵²⁴ Mazin, “Afrasia,” 41.

⁵²⁵ Ibid, 41.

to exhibit them, in other words, according to Mazin, “to determine those mechanisms which force the artist to a.) collect and b.) exhibit “totems,” i.e., sacred objects from the zenith of the Soviet Empire.”⁵²⁶

Afrika has collected a number of artifacts of Russian folklore, such as old wooden painted trunks; relics of the Soviet Empire, such as busts and statues of Lenin, banners, carpets, sport cups and medals; and vestiges of the first Russian avant-garde, in the form of rare editions of publications by Kazimir Malevich. A collection, as an entity, seeks to preserve a phenomenon or object as a piece of history, yet in doing so abstracts it from its original context, placing borders around it as something separate, yet unified. In this sense it identifies a particular thing as belonging to a group, having a common identity – a quality that Afrika expressed regret about losing when he lost his collective identity as a Soviet citizen. The fourth goal of the Group was, then, connected with the study of the collective versus the individual, or, “to determine the correlation between the fluctuations of collective and individual consciousness as regards the establishment of concepts of norm or of pathology maintained by society (by various institutions of society, especially by psychiatry).”⁵²⁷ By entering and living in the microcosm of a mental institution, where the patients have in common their collective identity as mentally ill, Afrika and the Group endeavored to better understand the dynamic between the collective and individual identities that occurred in the outside world, especially during the specific historical moment when that collective identity was undergoing a transformation.

In his observation of the performance, Mazin focused on the condition that he termed “Obsessive Representation Syndrome,” or ORS. He defined it as a condition with

⁵²⁶ Ibid, 41.

⁵²⁷ Ibid, 41.

symptoms similar to Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, but in this case the obsession was specifically with creating art objects. Mazin described ORS as a condition where

...the need to produce and display objects such as pictures, sculptures and installations imposes itself, although the individual is opposed to the idea, in this case the idea of representation. This idea both belongs to him (it was “born” and “exists” in “his head”) and does not belong to him (he is merely possessed by the idea which is not subject to him, but is aggressive, authoritarian and sadistic).⁵²⁸

Mazin and Olesya Turkina, co-founders (with Afrika) of the Russian art journal *Kabinet*, first linked ORS with Afrika. They thought that his fanatical collecting and exhibiting was a kind of pathology, related both to his concern over the changes happening in Russia and the (former) Soviet Union at the time, as well as to the recognition by the artist that he was part of an art market. This condition is quite specific to the post-Soviet condition, considering the fact that during the Soviet period all artists were employees of the state, which provided them with work and commissions. As there was no art market during the Soviet period, there was no competition among artists, especially among underground artists, who created their work for themselves and their friends, a small, closed circle of viewers, as opposed to collectors. Thus one of the goals was “to examine the so-called *obsessional representation syndrome* (ORS) which seems to result from an involuntary (obsessive) mechanism of artistic (self-) perception.”⁵²⁹

Since the performance was also an investigation into power structures and hierarchies in society, as they are modeled in the micro-structure of the hospital, another objective was to study the relationship between psychiatrist and artist/patient, as well as that between Afrika and the other patients in the hospital. As the artist was interested in

⁵²⁸ Ibid, 32.

⁵²⁹ Ibid, 41.

the creativity that resulted from various mental states, the purpose of his interaction with the patients was also a form of research, as he hoped to use the material that he gathered in future exhibitions.⁵³⁰ But this was not a purely selfish endeavor, because as a way of conducting his research the artist planned activities that the patients could participate in, thus they would also benefit from his being there. Afrika ultimately decided that a wall-newspaper would be an appropriate task that all of the patients could work on together, in the hope that it would encourage and motivate them. He said that he thought the newspaper “would provoke a type of behavior in the clinic that would inspire all those around to think that an especially important work would be done in the ward, namely the creation of works of art.”⁵³¹ The purpose of this was to transform the existing relationships in the hospital. Afrika felt that this collaborative effort “would change not only the relationship between doctors and patients and the relationships among the patients, but also the relationship between the outside world.”⁵³² Finally, he hoped that by working on the project with the patients, he would gain insight into the hierarchies that existed among them. In effect, that it would “produce fluctuations in the social structure of the ward, thus capturing the difficult and ambiguous situation that existed.”⁵³³ Afrika treated the hospital as a microcosm of the outside world, and became part of the hospital world as a patient. Insofar as he was also the artist and creator of the performance he was also free to manipulate that environment, to experiment with it in order to make discoveries regarding the nature of these hierarchical relationships.

⁵³⁰ Ibid, 41.

⁵³¹ Afrika, “Ethics and Ethology of the Artist,” 66.

⁵³² Ibid, 66.

⁵³³ Ibid, 66.

Finally, the Group listed a series of questions to which they sought answers to through the performance:

- 1.) Why does the ORS mentioned above result in this particular form of representation? Is it incurable? Is it a problem of mental health?
- 2.) Relating to these questions: Is there a difference between obsessional representation and “free” representation, if the latter is possible?
- 3.) Does obsessional representation have a substitutional character? Does it substitute the individual who is suffering from the syndrome through involuntary exhibitionism?
- 4.) Does the representation of Former Institutions of power in their metonymical manifestations constitute a representation of representation directed towards the healing of a socio-psychological trauma?⁵³⁴

In other words, is Afrika’s collecting and exhibiting a pathology, or a process of healing?

Walter Benjamin has already examined the phenomenon of collecting in two of his essays, “Unpacking my Library: A Talk about Book Collecting,”⁵³⁵ (1931) and “Eduard Fuchs: Collector and Historian”⁵³⁶ (1937). “Unpacking My Library” is a self-analysis of the theorist as a collector, an attempt to explain the man by way of his possessions, to explore the phenomenon of collecting as opposed to *the collection*. Benjamin deduces that it is the objects that make the man; they are, in effect, a summary of who he is, a record of his experiences and memories. He tells us that “the collector’s passion borders on the chaos of memories. More than that: the chance, the fate, that suffuse [*sic*] the past before my eyes are conspicuously present in the accustomed confusion of these books. For what else is this collection but a disorder to which habit has

⁵³⁴ Mazin, “Afrasia,” 41.

⁵³⁵ Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking my Library: A Talk About Collecting,” printed in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, 59-67 (England: Fontana Press, 1973).

⁵³⁶ Walter Benjamin, “Eduard Fuchs: Collector and Historian,” printed in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhard 225-253 (New York: Urizen Books, 1978).

accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order?”⁵³⁷ Furthermore, Benjamin emphasizes that because the collected item is an index of a memory, its function is of little or no value. Benjamin states that the owner has a relationship to the objects that “does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value – that is, their usefulness – but studies and loves them as the scene, the stage, of their fate.”⁵³⁸ The importance of the object is the history inscribed on it, what Benjamin describes as “a magic encyclopedia whose quintessence is the fate of his object.”⁵³⁹ The objects, then, are important to the collector for their symbolic content, more than their physical and material value.

In “Eduard Fuchs” Benjamin took these ideas one step further, describing how Fuchs (1870-1940), a Marxist theorist, most likely became a proponent of the theory of historical materialism because of the fact that he was a collector. He described this phenomenon as follows:

...because he was a pioneer, Fuchs became a collector. Fuchs is the pioneer of a materialist consideration of art. What made this materialist a collector, however, was the more or less clear feeling for the historical situation in which he saw himself. This was the situation of historical materialism itself.⁵⁴⁰

Historical materialism tells us that it is the things surrounding us, the objects, conditions and social circumstances that determine who we are, not the other way around. Thus Fuchs recognized the fact that the items that he collected – caricatures, erotic art and genre pictures, for example – had something to say about the time in which they were

⁵³⁷ Benjamin, “Unpacking my Library: A Talk About Collecting,” 60.

⁵³⁸ Ibid, 60.

⁵³⁹ Ibid, 60.

⁵⁴⁰ Benjamin, “Eduard Fuchs: Collector and Historian,” 225.

created, that they were indicators of the social and political conditions of their time. In the same way, Afrika realizes the fact that the objects that he collects in fact bear witness to specific moments in history. As such during the *Crimania* performance he hoped to understand how to use their potential as symbols of the past to create new symbols for the future of his ailing nation.

Insofar as Afrika is a contemporary artist, exhibiting his work in art museums across the world, *Crimania* remains an artistic performance, an art object. But to the extent that it involved a professor of ethology, a doctor, a man of science, it was also conducted as a scientific experiment, and treated as such. Consequently, according to Samokhvalov: “the project is an object of science insofar as any given text is an object of science. The project is an object of art in so far as any object of science is an object of art.”⁵⁴¹ It is for this reason that its goals were clearly stated, as were the results of the experiment following its conclusion. In that regard *Crimania* is unique among artistic performances, as its success or failure has already been evaluated as part of the performance itself. The participants posed a series of goals or questions, and consequently they were followed up with conclusive answers or explanations.

The Conclusions

While the aims of each of the participants of the performance were clearly stated, only Professor Samokhvalov, the scientist of the Group, offered definite conclusions. Aside from that, the other tangible results of Afrika’s stay in Simferopol were the wall newspaper and the two exhibits that the artist created. First, he and the other patients produced a wall-newspaper that was displayed in the psychiatric ward during Afrika’s

⁵⁴¹ Samkhvalov, “The Conception of a Fundamentally New Symbol: The Artist as an Object of Science and Art,” 54.

final week in the hospital. Then he produced an exhibition (*Heroes of the Soviet Union*) that occurred at the end of the three-week-long performance in the room for the chronically ill patients in the institution. Two years later, Afrika staged a second exhibition in a more conventional venue, the MAK Gallery in Vienna. The conclusions that he and Mazin arrived at, however, in answer to the questions they had set out to answer or goals they sought to research, were much less tangible.

Viktor Mazin kept a journal of each day that Afrika spent in the hospital. His comments ranged from the most banal – the weather outside, his own fever – to observations of Afrika’s health, mental state and activities in the ward, and discussions of issues such as ORS, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and rebuses. But as for offering conclusions with regard to new discoveries as a result of the performance, what was learned, what knowledge was gained, Mazin posed only questions, such as: “can we consider that answers have been found to any of these questions? Do the questions need to be answered? Is the answer not contained in the question, making the question superfluous? Is the question satisfactory once it has been translated into the illusion of an answer? Is there a teleological desire to receive an answer at all?”⁵⁴² His questions remind us of a Socratic dialogue, one like Polis’ from “Miervaldis Interviews Polis,” but without any answers. The questions, in fact, are the result of the performance for Mazin. This is as far as the performance could take us; it could explore questions and put them forth, but never answer them. In fact, while one can speak about the physical results of the performance (the wall newspaper, the *Heroes of the Soviet Union* exhibition, and the MAK exhibition), the metaphysical or epistemological ones are more difficult to pinpoint, according to Mazin. As he stated himself, “to my mind it’s much more difficult

⁵⁴² Mazin, “Afrasia,” 42.

to speak about the results in terms of the psyche, because on the one hand, of course it's a great experience, but on the other hand, you can't be cured by psychiatry, you can be even more damaged, so, we can't speak about the results in the sense of a cure."⁵⁴³ The emphasis was on the experience of the performance itself and the physical results, with the emotional or psychological ones remaining unclear.

For Mazin the questioning was precisely the point of the experiment, simultaneously the goal and the result. His statement with reference to the popular Russian cartoon characters Znaika and Neznaika ('Doono' and 'Dunno,' or knowledge and lack of knowledge),⁵⁴⁴ from a children's book by children's literature writer Nikolai Nosov (1908-1976), illuminate this point. "Znaika and Neznaika vie with each other and the competition is clearly not favorable for the former who *possesses* knowledge."⁵⁴⁵ The end result is not about *getting* a result per se, but about the pursuit of one. In fact, Mazin knows that any real of answers to such questions as those that were posed are, in fact, impossible. Only the scientist of the group, however, Samokhvalov, was able to draw definitive conclusions as to the results.

For Samokhvalov, the outcome of the performance was clear. From his observations of Afrika during *Crimania* he was able to firmly link the connection between the development of symbols and that of the artist's behavior, concluding that "art develops because the behavior (language) of its creators develops."⁵⁴⁶ Accordingly, he distinguished four ways that art evolves – the modifying way, the conservative way,

⁵⁴³ Mazin, in an interview with the author, September 16, 2007.

⁵⁴⁴ These characters also appear in Afrika's multi-media piece *Donalddestruction* (1991), which will be discussed below.

⁵⁴⁵ Mazin, "Afrasia," 42.

⁵⁴⁶ Samokhvalov, "The Conception of a Fundamentally New Symbol: The Artist as an Object of Science and Art," 60.

the regressive way, and the progressive way⁵⁴⁷ – all of which result in the emergence of new symbols:

This is the method of the New Artist, the postⁿ-modernist where n has an indefinite value, corresponding to the periods of time of the emergence of new forms of art. What is a new symbol? It is always the combination of a primeval (regressive) form and a contemporary symbol. The creation of a new symbol, therefore, is virtually impossible without the rearrangement of a pathological condition which is controlled, however, by conservative and modifying perception. If psychedelic drugs are refused then the only way to create new symbols is through endospection. In this sense, psychiatry and the psychiatric hospital are the only generators of concepts for the future.⁵⁴⁸

After observing Afrika during the *Crimania* performance Samokhvalov came to conclusions about the development of art. For him, a new symbol was simply the reworking of an old one, with new elements added. Afrika's work with signs, then, perfectly follows this recipe, as his banners and rebuses are precisely that. Samokhvalov also reasoned that the circumstances of an artist spending time interned in a mental institution, an artist who works with symbols of the past, was ripe for the generation of new ideas and signs. It follows, then, that Afrika was able to use his time in a mental institution as the basis for his creative output for the upcoming MAK exhibition.

When Samokhvalov stated that the creation of a new symbol is “virtually impossible without the rearrangement of a pathological condition,”⁵⁴⁹ he was referring to one of the tasks of the project, which was to try to figure out how to utilize ideas that came from the mentally ill, or, “to set up a scheme of how pathological ideas can be

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid, 60.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid, 60.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid, 60.

translated into new scientific and conceptual directions.”⁵⁵⁰ The doctor hypothesized that there were strong connections between pathologies and creativity, and that mental illness could help develop his creativity. As he stated:

The pathological condition is always positive as it is the source for new forms and feelings. The Artist enters into a pathological condition which leaves its marks on him. He converts these marks into symbols. Being the product of evolution himself, he realizes in the symbol all the periods and mechanisms of evolution. The pathological condition may be a catalyst of the individual’s endogenous creativity.⁵⁵¹

In *Crimania*, the artist was suffering from a pathological condition known as Obsessional Representation Syndrome. After the experiment, Samokhvalov concluded that this condition was relevant to his artistic production, in fact he stated that it formed “one stage in the formation of fundamentally New cognitive (symbolic) structures.”⁵⁵² In response to the question posed by Mazin, as to whether Afrika’s collecting was a sickness or method of healing, the doctor deduced that it was indeed the latter.

Samokhvalov realized that Afrika’s use of old Soviet symbols was a way for the artist to come up with new symbols for future needs. According to the doctor, Afrika’s

...representation of Former Institutions of Power is directed into the future because the contamination of different objects results in the emergence of new symbols with new semantics (context). Visualizing the individual (collective) subconscious myth, he uses objects of the past to create a personal (collective) future.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid, 52.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid, 54.

⁵⁵² Ibid, 47.

⁵⁵³ Ibid, 60.

Samokhvalov's findings demonstrate that the artist can play a significant role in the shaping of society, especially during a period of social upheaval, such as the one that Afrika was living through at the time – the change from one political structure to another. The conclusions of the doctor show that the confusion or chaos that ensued from these changes (The Time of Great Aphasia) could be alleviated by the artist, as he worked to manipulate the old symbols, to transform them to fit within a new context, to create new meaning for his audience. It does not necessarily mean that the artist will develop a new sign system, but his work with the existing systems can contribute to the development of new language and systems of signification. The exhibition that followed the performance also demonstrated the fact that once Afrika's personal experience was brought into contact with his audience, it was opened up to the possibility of further creation of meaning through that interaction.

The Wall Newspaper

The first task accomplished by the artist during the performance was the organization of an activity for all of the patients to work on together: a wall-newspaper, which was created during the time set aside for work therapy (Fig. 5.4). The usual work therapy project involved gluing a label that said "Set of Knives" onto a cardboard box. Initially the patients were quite enthusiastic about the project, and hoped that it would improve the situation in the hospital.⁵⁵⁴ Afrika started by making a large white poster with pieces of colored paper on it so that he and the other patients could write articles about the events in the hospital on it. Ultimately, however, the newspaper was a failure, because it produced too strong reactions in the patients. According to Afrika, the newspaper "caused an upsurge of conflicts among its readers, because it made them think

⁵⁵⁴ Afrika, "Ethics and Ethology of the Artist," 67.

about themselves somehow as inadequate individuals and their hospital stay to be a witness of that.”⁵⁵⁵ So Afrika dropped this collective work to focus on his individual project, an exhibition in the ward that would take place on February 23, which was both the date of Afrika’s release from the hospital, and Soviet Army and Navy Day, which was once an official holiday of the former Soviet Union. Although Army and Navy Day was no longer a state holiday, many citizens, especially those in the hospital, still regarded the day with fondness and acknowledged the day privately.

The “Heroes of the Soviet Union” Exhibition

The title of Afrika’s exhibition, “Heroes of the Soviet Union,” was taken from the book that Viktor Mazin had brought to the artist during the third week of the performance (Fig. 5.5). The artist prepared the materials for the exhibition on his own, during work therapy in the ward. In many ways his work was similar to the work realized by the patients, as it consisted of cutting out the pictures of the “heroes” of the former Soviet Union and gluing them to a cardboard background (Fig. 5.6). The exhibition of this work took place in what was referred to in the hospital as the “menagerie,” or the room for the chronically ill. Afrika placed one sheet of paper with photographs of the heroes on it above each bed. The exhibition was attended by Professor Samokhvalov, Irina Stroeenskaya (the nurse in charge of the ward), some assistants, Peter Noever, curator of the MAK, and his wife Ixy, as well as Afrika and Viktor Mazin.

In his notes about the performance, the artist tells us that this day was a holiday for all the men of the former Soviet Union, regardless of whether they had served in the

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid, 68.

army or not.⁵⁵⁶ Consequently all of the patients celebrated it. He wrote that the mood in the hospital was festive, and that a number of the patients reacted positively to the exhibition, and specifically to the holiday that Afrika had reminded them of. In his words:

...as a reaction to my explanations about the exhibition many patients immediately broke into joyful reminiscence, especially when we talked about the Heroes of the Soviet Union. For many it was hard to recognize the faces on the pictures, but no-one could exclude himself from what had happened during the time of the Soviet Union, including the Second World War and many other things.⁵⁵⁷

This exhibition of pictures of former Soviet figures was what Mazin was referring to when he spoke of Afrika's 'collecting and exhibiting icons of the former Soviet Union'. The reactions of the patients clearly demonstrate that these images had a meaning and significance to many who were at that time struggling to comprehend the new social and political conditions in which they found themselves. Even though the portraits were of people who were no longer 'heroes', and even though the viewers may not have known exactly who they were, they still signified something to the audience. They were a reminder of the past, of a relatively more stable time in their history, and furthermore they were something known and recognizable – images that were comforting during a time of uncertainty. They were icons that symbolized something in the past, but had little meaning with regard to the present, except in the memories of the patients. Afrika would carry the idea of exhibiting symbols from the former Soviet Union further in his next exhibition, which was still a continuation of the performance, the *Crimania* exhibition in Vienna.

⁵⁵⁶ In many Soviet countries, Soviet Army and Navy Day was unofficially considered "Men's Day," insofar as it preceded the more popularly celebrated International Women's Day, on March 8.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid, 69.

The Exhibit at MAK

In March 1995, just over two years after Afrika's performance in Simferopol, the artist mounted his first major solo exhibition, *Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka* at the Austrian Museum of Applied Arts (MAK) in Vienna. The main exhibition hall contained an installation entitled *Morphology of an Image (MZF 1)*⁵⁵⁸ with the *Stochastic Pendulum (Prigogine 1)*⁵⁵⁹ which also included the "reflecting rebuses" (Fig. 0.3). There was also the installation "Donal destruction" (Fig. 5.7) and a group of three small buildings, called "museums": "Histology," "Epileptoid Architecture," and "Aphasia" (Figs. 5.8-5.10). Finally, there were the banners from the series "Project Aphasia." As Afrika stated, the exhibition at MAK was the end result of the two-year long exploration of signs, sign systems, the evolution of images, and the artist's own personal psyche that he had begun in Simferopol in 1993.

It should be remembered that the original impetus behind Afrika's stay in the mental institution was the depression that he claimed to have felt when the Soviet Union fell apart. As has already been discussed in Chapter Three, the dissolution of the Soviet Union brought about a profound crisis in identity for citizens of Russia more than for any of the other former Soviet Republics. But Afrika was not only searching for some kind of national identity along with his compatriots. Afrika's own artistic identity had formed in the 1980s, during the Soviet period, as a non-conformist artist and member of the artistic underground. He was even christened – given his artistic name – by Grebenshikov, a prominent member of the underground. Now that the official institutions against which

⁵⁵⁸ "Mazafaka 1"

⁵⁵⁹ Ilya Prigogine (1917-2003) was a Belgian physicist and mathematician of Russian origin who was known for his work on dissipative structures (chaotic structures that are far from equilibrium). This work and his ideas inspired Afrika in his creation of the pendulum also based on chaos and disorder.

Afrika and his cohorts were rebelling against were no more, the artist would be forced to cultivate a new identity as an artist in a free, democratic state.

In connection with the depression that Afrika felt with regard to the collapse of the Soviet Union, Viktor Mazin has mentioned the guilt that he must have felt as a dissident artist who had, throughout the 1980s, essentially been working to bring an end to the system against which he was fighting.⁵⁶⁰ According to Mazin, “the first sign of the feeling of guilt is depression,”⁵⁶¹ and this depression or guilt was the result of not only the loss of an ideology, but also the feeling of responsibility at having played a role in eliminating it. In the *Crimania* catalogue Mazin recounts his and Afrika’s witnessing of the destruction of Soviet mosaics in the train station in Kiev, on their way to Crimea, and comments on the loss of these works of art which, although they represented the power and ideological program of the former Soviet Union, were also works of art in and of themselves. As he commented in an interview, the destruction of these mosaics “was really too much, because it was not just a memory of the Soviet Union but it’s also an aesthetic part of the surroundings. To destroy all of the monuments, it’s probably – well, it’s out of the question.”⁵⁶²

Mazin also added that the loss of these symbols amounted to a loss of Afrika’s sense of self, because of the fact that, like it or not, they (the symbols), and the ideology they represented, were also a part of him. He commented that when these symbols were “part of the totalitarian system [one] just wants to destroy it, but when you destroy it you start to understand that you are destroying yourself, because it’s all about identification

⁵⁶⁰ Mazin, in an interview with the author, September 16, 2007.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

with the system.”⁵⁶³ He described Afrika and his artistic cohorts as the “funny fighters against the Soviet Union”⁵⁶⁴ because of the fact that they were not outright dissidents, but rather members of the punk movement and alternative art and music scene that was relatively tolerated by the government in the 1980s, and it was as a result of their underground actions that Mazin feels that Afrika would have the aforementioned sense of guilt. Afrika, however, when questioned about Mazin’s comment, denied any such emotions, nor did he associate the feeling of guilt with the performance.⁵⁶⁵

Banners

During the Soviet period banners (*flag, znamya*) were both given as awards and displayed as emblems of patriotism and motivation during public gatherings and events. They were usually made of red satin or velvet, on which images were printed or embroidered. The standard imagery consisted of Soviet symbols, such as a bust of Lenin or Stalin, the hammer and sickle, a map of the Soviet Union, or grains of wheat. There was also usually a message inscribed, such as “Glory to the Party of Lenin” (*Slava Leninskoi Partii*), “Workers of the World, Unite!” (*Proletarii Vsekh Stran, Soediniiaites,*”) and “Forward, to the Victory of Communism” (*Vpered, k pobede kommunisma*). During the Soviet period these banners carried great ideological weight as representatives of the Soviet state and its ultimate aim of communism. As Turkina and Mazin have pointed out, one of the Russian words for banner, *znamya*, is etymologically related to the word for sign, *znak*.⁵⁶⁶ The banner is a sign in and of itself, in many ways having the function of a flag – a sign for the nation – so they were a stand-in for that

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ Afrika, in an interview with the author, September 16, 2007.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid, 24.

nation and all that it represented. Like most objects in the Soviet Union, however, they carried little monetary value. Turkina and Mazin have also noted that once the Soviet Union collapsed they became collector's items, and were able to exchange their original ideological value for a monetary one.⁵⁶⁷ The ideological value, however, did not completely disappear. The banners still carried that message in the form of nostalgia or memory. The original meaning of these banners is immediately clear to a viewer from a former Soviet country, but would need to be explained to a 'foreign' viewer, or someone for whom these images do not form a part of their collective memory.

After collecting the banners himself, Afrika attempted to recycle the images and adapt them to the new circumstances of the country, and use them to create a new cultural heritage. He did this by adding other signs to them, creating a layer of symbols. In effect, Afrika literalized Samokhvalov's conclusion that a new sign is a combination of old and new symbols. By introducing other imagery and mixing it with the old Soviet symbols, he altered the original meaning of the banners, thereby creating a new sign. But instead of combining an old symbol and a contemporary one, as Samokhvalov suggested, he placed symbols from different cultures and religions, from different periods and different parts of the world onto the surfaces of the banners. By recontextualizing the images, Afrika leveled the Soviet symbols, placing them side by side with other signs representing various periods and aspects of human culture. The effect was one of cataloguing, whereby the Soviet images on the banners were relegated to the annals of history, from which the added symbols had come themselves. Afrika deprived the flags of their old meaning, by corrupting them, but the new meaning is not exactly clear. With the

⁵⁶⁷ Olesya Turkina and Viktor Mazin, "Aphasia as Technique," in *Layers: Contemporary Collage from St. Petersburg, Russia*, ed. Alla Efimova, Viktor Mazin, Olesya Turkina, 24 (Maryland: University of Maryland Fine Arts Gallery, 1995).

reworked banners the artist has created a visual equivalent to the glossolalia, or nonsense language, of aphasia.

Flag Number 16 illustrates this point most clearly (Fig. 5.11). The original banner displayed a bust of Lenin resting above a garland of wheat, with a red ribbon intertwined, and a hammer and sickle at the center. The original text is in Ukrainian, and declares: “Proletariat of the world, unite! Under the banner of Marxism-Leninism, under the direction of the Communist Party, forward toward the victory of communism!” Afrika has left the original components of the banner intact, adding two figures to the composition: the Disney™ characters Daisy and Donald Duck. The characters hold poses that we are familiar with from their appearance in cartoons, yet they are still part of the arrangement in that each one is holding onto the garland that surrounds Lenin. Afrika juxtaposed Lenin, who looks eagerly yet sternly toward the future of communism, with Daisy, who looks away from Lenin and out toward the viewer with a coy look in her eyes. The contrast between the two figures is illuminating, as the Disney images are completely disparate from communist ones. Lenin is attempting to build the ideal socialist state while Daisy is flirting. In this sense Afrika has disengaged the Soviet meaning of the banner, shifting the tone from ceremonious to playful. The two sets of imagery both belong to a legacy of popular culture, each from its own side of the globe. By bringing them together in the banner, Afrika unites them physically, but no new message is sent forth from the banner. It still announces its expired message to the proletariat, the symbol for which seems even comical as it is displayed on a banner together with Donald Duck. The banner also sends a mixed message, or one of gibberish, to all audiences, Soviet and non-Soviet alike.

Flag 16 contrasts other icons of Western mass culture (Disney characters) with those of Soviet culture. But in the Banners series Afrika applies a variety of different figures to the Soviet canvas. Although the artist does not recall the exact provenance of all of these images, he states that he used “whatever sources were available”⁵⁶⁸ to him from any art historical, archeological and scientific texts he could find. In Flag 1 (Fig. 5.12), on either side of an image of the world with a hammer and sickle superimposed over it, the artist has placed two angels that resemble those that one would find in a fresco by Giotto di Bondone (c. 1267-1337), for example in his *Mourning of Christ* from the Scrovegni Chapel (1303-1310). The flag’s message is one of congratulations to a factory for first place in a contest in 1932-33.⁵⁶⁹ In Flag 3 (Fig. 5.13) he surrounded a double portrait of Lenin and Stalin with a pair of figures drawn in the flat, linear style that one would find in ancient Egyptian reliefs, for example the *Palette of Narmer* from Hierakonpolis (c. 3150-3125 BCE). Other flags have cartoon-like figures of Roman soldiers or cavemen. Afrika’s archaeology extends even further back into history – to the evolution of life before man. In flags 3 and 15, small protozoans crawl aimlessly across the surface, onward, toward the victory of communism, which would be sought after millions of years hence (Fig. 5.14). Afrika states that these are drawings of the earliest known living creatures on earth. He considers this to be an archeology of signs and semiology; a history and layering of visual images throughout time.⁵⁷⁰ This collection of visual imagery also conjures up an idea of evolution or historical progression, on which both Soviet and Western values have been based. But once again, by adding the figures

⁵⁶⁸ Afrika, in a phone interview with the author, December 24, 2007.

⁵⁶⁹ The text reads: “Proletariat of the world unite! From the party, professional and economic organizations, for the Bolshevik defense factory, and for first place in the competition 1932-33”

⁵⁷⁰ Afrika, in a phone interview with the author, December 24, 2007.

Afrika interferes with the original meaning, which has already been corrupted by the social upheaval that was the demise of the Soviet Union. But Afrika does not create a new message, or offer a new meaning with these banners. Instead, he creates a jumble, a mish-mash of symbols that don't carry one clear message, but rather several garbled and confused ones, a communication that perfectly echoes the state of aphasia that the former Soviet Republic of Russia was in at that time.

Jakobson concluded that aphasia usually involves one of two types of disturbances – either affecting the paradigmatic or the syntagmatic (metaphoric or metonymic, respectively) axis of speech. Linguistic communication occurs as a result of selection and combination – the selection of the appropriate word from the pool of all possible words (the paradigmatic axis) and the combination of those words into a sentence (the syntagmatic axis).⁵⁷¹ The aphasic who is affected by the former will have difficulty constructing sentences on his own. He is unable to access the collection of words in his vocabulary, but recognizes words when they are spoken to him. Thus an aphasic suffering from this type of disorder will only be able to react and respond in a conversation, but will be unable to start one himself. An aphasic who is affected along the syntagmatic axis will not be able to construct a sentence at all. Although he can select the appropriate words he cannot put them together in a logical syntax, thus his speech may resemble that of the nonsense language of a small child. Afrika's banners, with their layering of images that make sense when considered individually, yet do not seem to fit together in the context he provides, attempt to communicate in this language of aphasia.

⁵⁷¹ See Roman Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," in Roman Jakobson *On Language* (1956; repr. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 115-133, and Roman Jakobson, *Child Aphasia and Phonological Universals* (Paris: Mouton, 1968).

Banners with Text

In some of the banners Afrika has added figures to the composition, layering the visual symbols but leaving the original text intact. In others, Afrika has added words and phrases in addition to images. The additions are embroidered onto the banners in Russian, using a similar color thread and typeface, so that alterations may go unnoticed to the unobservant viewer, much as Polis did when blending his additions with the existing image. It is even easier for the non-Russian speaker to miss these additions, since to him the entire text appears simply as a collection of unintelligible symbols. Once again, the original message of the banner is now obsolete – the communist party it refers to is no longer in control, the central committee and unions have been disbanded, and the dream of the victory of communism has been abandoned. Although the significance of the banners themselves has undergone a transformation from dogmatic to commercial, the message contained within them has not acquired a new meaning. It continues to signify in the past, but not in the present. In this sense it is not a forward-striving message that we would come to expect from a modernist or avant-garde work of art. It refers to the past and makes sense in the past, and that is all that it can ever do. Afrika accepts the fact that the creation of a new ideology, out of the ashes of the old, is not yet possible. Instead, he remains focused on that indefinite state of instability and uncertainty that was prevalent in Russia at the time he was working.

In the banners with text added, Afrika directly invokes the spirit of Roman Jakobson and his insights into the condition of aphasia. Jakobson believed that one could learn about language by studying it at the point where it breaks down, as in the case of aphasia. Afrika adopted a similar position, hoping to understand the immediate Post-

Soviet condition by investigating its language at the point where it broke down. To this end he chose to study Soviet artifacts such as banners and medals. Their language no longer worked; their messages ceased to signify in present-day Russia, much like the words of an aphasic do not communicate anything meaningful. For the artist, the entire country – and all of the countries of the former Soviet Union, for that matter – were suffering from aphasia in a figurative sense, caused by the collapse of the system, or the structure, that supported its own lexis and syntax. The consequence of this in Russia was also the feeling of a loss of identity, since the Soviet identity that had supplanted the Russian one had suddenly become invalid, or dismantled.

Another epistemological theme that Afrika took up with the addition of his own text to the banners is that of semiotics, with a reference to the Belgian artist Rene Magritte (1898-1967) and his 1929 painting *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*. But instead of commenting on a pipe or other object, Afrika incorporated the statements “This is not Jakobson” (Fig. 5.15) “This is not Mazàfaka,” and “This is not Fazafaka.” (*Eto ne Jakobson, Eto ne Mazàfaka, Eto ne Fazafaka*) (Fig. 5.16) into his banners. In his 1968 essay on the Magritte painting, French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) concluded that: 1. the painting of the pipe is not an *actual* pipe, it is just paint on a canvas made to resemble a pipe; 2. the words written at the bottom of the painting (*ceci nest pas une pipe*) is not a pipe, but rather a group of words that point to the painting of the pipe above it; and 3. the entire canvas, consisting of a visual image and a string of words – those elements taken all together do not, in fact, constitute a real and actual pipe.⁵⁷²

Afrika was aware of both the Magritte painting and Foucault's essay when he created this banner. The banner then participates in the tradition of the exploration of signs begun by

⁵⁷² Michel Foucault, “Ceci n'est pas une pipe,” trans. Richard Howard, *October* 1 (Spring 1976): 7-21.

Magritte, and further developed by Foucault in his analysis of the painting. Foucault's explanation of the Magritte painting can help us to work through an understanding of the banners that Afrika had doctored, and to realize what sense they had as Post-Soviet images. Foucault demonstrated how the Magritte painting is about sign systems themselves and how they function. Afrika commandeers both Magritte and Foucault in order to point out how signs were functioning, or not, in Post-Soviet Russia.

None of the banners incorporate a visual image that directly represents either Jakobson or what is meant by Mazàfaka and Fazafaka. There is only an oblique relationship between what is happening in the banners and Jakobson. Jakobson was a linguist who *studied* language and aphasia. We can speak of glossolalia (nonsense language) in the banners because: 1. the acronyms and slogans from the original banner have lost their significance in post-Soviet Russian, and 2. Afrika has added images and words to the banners, thus jumbling the already obsolete original meaning. Nevertheless there is no definite connection with Jakobson. At best we could say that the puzzle would have interested the linguist. Therefore, applying a Foucauldian analysis, we can conclude that: 1. the image on the banner is not actually Roman Jakobson – firstly, they do not look like a person at all, and secondly, they are merely symbols that represent the aphasic-like language that Jakobson was interested in; 2. the group of written words “*eto ne Jakobson*” is also not the man Roman Jakobson, but just a group of words that point to him and his ideas; and 3. the banner taken as a whole, with word and image combined to create a linguistic problem that could have been of interest to the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson, do not constitute the real man himself. But in the same way that, at the end of the day, we can look at Magritte's painting of a pipe and exclaim “but it is, after all, a

pipe” in that it looks like an object that we call a pipe, and we can imagine picking it up and smoking it if it were three-dimensional, we can also reason that with this banner, and the problems posed by it, Afrika represents the very problems that Jakobson was concerned with in regard to linguistics, as will be demonstrated below.

Mazàfaka, Jakobson, and Signs

The terms “mazàfaka” and “fazafaka” that Afrika adds to the banners are transliterations of the English words mother-fucker and father-fucker, spelled according to Russian phonetics and pronunciation, written in the Latin alphabet. Thus the words have been transposed from English to Russian and back again, transformed almost beyond recognition:

mother-fucker → MA3AΦAKA → Mazàfaka

father-fucker → ΦA3AΦAKA → fazafaka

The two words, written with Latin letters, are not instantly recognizable to an English speaker, especially the term fazafaka. Although mother-fucker is well-known expletive in everyday parlance, meaning a generally detestable person, father-fucker is perhaps less commonly used, specifically as a term of condescension toward a male homosexual. Owing to the influx of American television and films in the late 1980s and early 1990s, English profanities such as these became popular not only in Russia, but all over the former communist countries in the region.

Mazàfaka is also used as part of the title of the exhibition held at the MAK – *Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*. If we dissect the title, “Crimania” refers to

initial performance that preceded the exhibition – located in *Crimea*, dealing with various *manias* or psychiatric disorders. Afrika displayed his “icons” and “monuments” of the former Soviet Empire in the exhibition. But the term “Mazàfaka” does not have a direct link to any of the objects in the show. What it refers to are the linguistic issues that are being dealt with by the artist.

All of these phrases (This is not Jakobson, This is not Mazàfaka, This is not Fazafaka) illustrate the functioning of the paradigmatic axis of language by using selection and substitution to change the meaning of the original sentence, “This is not a pipe.” The word “pipe” is substituted by the words “Jakobson,” “Mazàfaka,” and “Fazafaka,” respectively. When a person speaks, he selects words along the paradigmatic axis and combines them along the syntagmatic axis to form a sentence. Each word chosen, then, is one representative from a paradigm, or category of words, that enables us to understand the sentence. Thus in the example “The cat sat on the mat,” “cat” represents a four-legged animal, “sat” is a word for a type of posture, and “mat” is an example of a resting place. If we consider the original Magritte statement in this light, as Foucault did, then the word “pipe” becomes a stand-in for “a sign” (any sign), or a semiotic system of signifier and signified, which can easily be substituted with the words “Jakobson,” “Mazàfaka” or “Fazafaka,” which thereby represent such signifying systems. Consequently that would mean that no matter how one completed the sentence, that word would not be whatever sign or image it was supposed to represent. This becomes especially significant when looking at Afrika’s banners, considering the fact that they represent a government and system that no longer existed at the time they were exhibited.

If we look at a specific example of one of Afrika's doctored flags, we can see how this is played out in context. Flag no. 5 (Fig. 5.16) is a "Traveling red banner" (*Perekhodiashchaia krasnaia znamia*). Banners such as these were given this name because during the Soviet period they would move from one town, factory, school or group to the next, year by year, being passed to the next recipient of the award for which it was the prize. Afrika added two images to the banner, placing two aureoles next to the central portrait of Lenin. The emblems, which echo the shape of the Lenin portrait, are crocheted doilies, a common Russian handicraft. The text of the unaltered banner had read: "Traveling Red Banner" and was signed at the bottom: "Soviet Ministers [of the] RSFSR – VTsCPC."⁵⁷³ Among this text, Afrika then added the words, in Russian "this, not, fazafaka, neither" (*eto, ne, fazafaka, ni*) He has also signed the banner with the surname "Jakobson" in script in the lower right-hand corner, making the Russian linguist the author of the work.

The placement of the words demonstrates the breakdown of the syntagmatic axis of speech, as we are unsure how to read the message. Depending on the order in which we read the words we end up with a variety of different combinations. If we read it as one would normally read a text, from left to right, we need only insert a few commas to arrive at a logical sentence: "This is not Fazafaka[,] the Soviet Ministry of the RSFSR[,] nor the VTsCPC." Here, the same reading of "This is not Jakobson" can apply, if "Fazafaka" is taken as a paradigmatic substitution for "a sign." But if we consider the use of the metonymic device another possibility of meaning appears. Jakobson associated

⁵⁷³ The RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, or *Rossiiskaia Sovietskaiia Federativnaia Sotcialisticheskaia Respublika*) was the largest Republic in the former Soviet Union, and is now the Russian Federation, or what we know as modern-day Russia. The VTsCPC was the Professional Union of the former Soviet Union (*Vsiesoiuznii Tsentral'nii Soviet Professional'nix Soiuzov*).

metonymy with the syntagmatic axis, and identified it as a rhetorical device used not only in speech, but also in nonverbal communication, such as painting and film.⁵⁷⁴ A metonymy is a figure of speech where a part or attribute of a thing is used to mean the thing itself. In his essay, Jakobson mentions the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy's (1828-1910) use of the phrases "hair on the upper lip" and "bare shoulders" to represent the female characters who possess those features in his novel *War and Peace* (1865-1869).⁵⁷⁵ In the case of Afrika's banner, if we read "This is not the Soviet Ministry of the RSFSR nor the VTsCPC" as a metonymy, then these two institutions are verbal markers or stand-ins for the Soviet Union itself. Consequently *this* (meaning this banner and the ideology it presents) with its symbols of the Soviet regime, is not the Soviet Union itself – or perhaps, it is *no longer*. The banner then becomes a relic, a living testament to a country, government, regime, and goal that no longer existed at the time. Its language and symbols still existed, but could express nothing meaningful or relevant to the people at that place and time.

There are also other ways to read the banner's text. Moving from the top down, then left to right, then back diagonally to the left and straight across to the right, we come up with "This Soviet Ministry of the RSFSR is not Fazafaka nor the VTsCPC. Leaving out the "Soviet Ministers of the RSFSR," we can have "This is not Fazafaka nor the VTsCPC." But if we read left to right, and consider each line a separate sentence, we have one statement that makes sense and another that does not: "This is not Fazafaka. Soviet Ministry of the RSFSR nor VTsCPC." There are a number of combinations of words along the syntagmatic axis, but we have no idea which one is correct. In effect, it is

⁵⁷⁴ Jakobson, "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles," 56-59.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid, 57.

a word jumble, and each viewer can come away from it having chosen a different combination to read. The words do not function as a clear-cut, unambiguous sentence. Instead, they constitute a demonstration of nonsense language, echoing the everyday speech that existed in Russia at the time that Afrika recreated this banner.

As an example of what this gibberish entailed in Russia in the early 1990s, I present an extended quotation from Adele Marie Barker's essay "Rereading Russia," which is the introduction to her collection of essays on the rebuilding of Post-Soviet Russia. The quotation regards a taxi ride she took in 1993, and the difficulty of finding an address because street names had been changed. It echoes many such stories that I have heard in Russia, Latvia and Poland. As Barker recounts:

Sometime in the spring of 1993, I had occasion to spend more than an hour in a cab with a Moscow taxi driver hurling and honking his way through the streets in our mutual quest for an address that had been given to me. After an hour of precipitous stops – as the driver leaned out, hailed passersby, asked for directions, and engaged in protracted discussions over how to find the elusive address – we arrived at our destination, only to have the embarrassed driver confess that he knew all along where the address was and would have gotten us there sooner if only the “bastards” at the top hadn't changed the names of all the streets in Moscow.⁵⁷⁶

The author comments on the perplexing situation of being in a place where the names of everything around you were changing rapidly, and new words were being introduced daily – product names such as McDonald's and brand names for clothing such as jeans (*dzhinsy*). Barker states that the taxi ride is symptomatic of the “disorienting surface changes that abound in Post-Soviet society. Streets metamorphose, their ‘old’ familiar revolutionary names giving way to even older, less familiar names from the pre-

⁵⁷⁶ Adele Marie Barker, “Rereading Russia,” in *Consuming Russia*, ed. Adele Marie Barker, 3 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

Revolutionary past.”⁵⁷⁷ People not only had to deal with streets and cities changing names, but also shops and currencies. It was not uncommon for locals to be talking about the same exact place but using different proper names for it.

Afrika’s banners are memories of a country, ideology, and administration that no longer existed in 1995. By adding figures and words or phrases to them Afrika has made them representative of the present time – they are a collection of words and symbols that strive to have meaning in the present day. The artist’s use of *traveling* banners is significant because with his additions they do just that – travel between two times and places, between the past Soviet space that they used to occupy and the present Russian space. Because the signifiers in the banners remained the same while the signified in fact disappeared, the banners no longer referred to anything actual. So Afrika added new signifiers, to make the banners refer to something in the present – in this case the current aphasia of modern-day Russia. Afrika collected the banners, saving them from the same fate of what they represented. The final result is a mix of signifiers that produce no new meaning, except for the nonsense meaning, which in fact is their meaning.

The Rebuses

Afrika’s rebuses also present incomprehensible systems that can be examined, but not necessarily deciphered. A rebus is a puzzle, a representation of words in the form of pictures and symbols, including letters of the alphabet. The idea is that a word, phrase, or sometimes an entire poem, is conveyed by a conglomeration of letters and pictures that need to be translated or converted into words. The rebus is written in a language that is unique to that particular rebus, the translation of which is dependent solely on the reader’s ability to decipher the code at the moment of reading it. It is a self-contained

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid, 3.

system, the specific function of the pictures as words only operating as such within the frame of said rebus. In this way it is similar to language itself, where certain words, as well as acronyms and abbreviations, only make sense in the context of those who share a common context.

In order for a rebus to perform its function, it must be decoded – it must be *read*.

As Andrew Robinson explains the concept of the rebus, in *Story of Writing*,

...a purely pictographic system fails at the outset to express some elementary spoken concepts. However it can be transformed with an ingenious idea: the rebus. This pictographic symbol represents not the idea it depicts but the sound associated with that idea. With the rebus principle, sound could be made visible in a systematic way, and abstract concepts symbolized.⁵⁷⁸

Stephen D. Houston also described the rebus principle as “a logograph that stands for two objects, the first an iconically similar object, the second an unrelated object, whose spoken sign sounds like the first sign.”⁵⁷⁹ It is for this reason that the rebus appealed to Afrika. As he described it, the rebus “continues to suffer from an obsessive yearning to be read.”⁵⁸⁰ It therefore requires the viewer to become actively engaged with it. Much in the same way that Polis used the medium of performance because it required the viewer to participate, in order to create meaning, Afrika also selected a visual form that exacts the attention of his viewer. Furthermore, in using rebuses and banners that he has altered, he asks his local audience to re-read old messages, and come to new understandings of

⁵⁷⁸ Andrew Robinson, *The Story of Writing: Alphabets, Hieroglyphs and Pictograms* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 42.

⁵⁷⁹ Stephen D. Houston, *The First Writing: Script Invention as History and Process* (Cambridge, England: University of Cambridge Press, 2004), 23.

⁵⁸⁰ Sergei Bugaev and Viktor Mazin, “The Reflection of the Rebus and Stochastic Oscillations,” 17.

them. Foreign audiences can participate, as well, because of the fact that there is no set reading of the images he produces.

Afrika's rebuses, like the banners, are appropriations (Fig. 5.17-5.20). He has taken them from an album from the 1950s by an unknown artist, a book entitled *Literary Problems*, from 1947, and from a 1948 children's book.⁵⁸¹ All of the rebuses appear on the copper plates that would normally be used to make prints, but instead of printing the rebuses, he has left them in their "raw" state, simply displaying the plates themselves, not the engravings. In this way the rebuses are already half silent; just as they lay in wait of their eventual solution as puzzles, they also anticipate the realization of their full expression on paper. Rebuses are difficult to read to begin with – it is not always clear how to put together the sounds along the syntagmatic axis to produce words, and eventually form sentences or phrases. Afrika's rebuses, however, are impossible to read, owing to the artist's additions and deletions.⁵⁸² He has transferred *sections* of rebuses to the plates, and then added his own figures and letters to complicate the latent message. Consequently the process of reading the rebus is hindered before it has even begun.

Like Polis, Afrika used appropriation to create new images that refer to both East and West. While Polis appropriated images from the West in order to connect himself to that history, Afrika uses images from both sides of the communist divide. He is not the first Russian artist, however, to appropriate Soviet imagery. The artistic team Komar and Melamid⁵⁸³ have been appropriating the images and style of Socialist Realism for decades. Their *Nostalgic Realism* series (1981-1983) best demonstrates their purpose. It

⁵⁸¹ See Olyesa Turkina, "On the Border," in Sergei Bugaev Afrika, *Sergei Bugaev – Rebus*, 35 (New York: Paul Judelson Arts, 1994).

⁵⁸² This has been confirmed by asking several native Russian speakers who are well-practiced in decoding rebuses to try to decipher them. None of those asked could make sense of what was meant in the puzzles.

⁵⁸³ Vitaly Komar (b. 1943) and Aleksander Melamid (b. 1945)

is a series of images painted in a Socialist Realist style, some of which are self-portraits, for example *Double Self-Portrait as Young Soviet Pioneers*, which depicts Komar and Melamid as dwarf-sized figures wearing Pioneer uniforms (Fig. 5.21). Others contained images of Stalin, for example *The Origins of Socialist Realism*, which shows Stalin with the muse that is to have inspired him with the idea of Socialist Realism (Fig. 5.22). The images may be taken as ironic, but they are also, as the name implies, nostalgic. As Melamid has stated: “many critics have spoken about our historical paintings. For many people these were about Soviet power. It’s not that way with us. This style [Socialist Realism] is really part of us, it’s part of our heritage, our story.”⁵⁸⁴ Both Afrika and Komar and Melamid looked back at these images, signs and symbols wistfully, because regardless of exactly what they symbolized, they formed part of their collective memory.

Komar and Melamid’s attitude is the classic post-modern one, that one can never create anything new, because everything has already been invented. According to Komar, “there will never again be a truly new painting style because all possible styles have been tried by someone else,”⁵⁸⁵ which is why their work is always a combination of different images and styles. Peter Wollen also sees this as a way of trying to construct a new style of art, out an old that many had deemed worthless anyway. Wollen feels that their art is “not a symptom of the end of modernism, but a sign of their engagement with the massive task of creating a new art from the rubble left behind by Stalinism.”⁵⁸⁶ Just as the government was left with the task of rebuilding the nation, artists were by default the

⁵⁸⁴ Komar and Melamid, “Nobody’s Fools,” interview by Richard B. Woodward, *Art News* 86 (November 1987): 174.

⁵⁸⁵ Komar, as qtd. in Neil B. Rector, “Collecting American Dreams,” in *Komar & Melamid’s American Dreams*, 12 (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Art Alliance, 2001).

⁵⁸⁶ Peter Wollen, “Scenes from the Future: Komar & Melamid,” *New Left Review* I/185 (January/February 1991): 75.

ones responsible for creating a new style of art where there had only officially been Socialist Realism. But while artists like Komar and Melamid dealt with the art historical legacy of the Soviet Union and worked to develop a new, modernist style of their own, based on past and present influences, Afrika remained focused on language as a marker of identity, and the creation of a new identity, transforming signs and symbols from the past as a foundation for the language and cultural identity of the future.

The artist took over the rebus, like the banner, as a sign system that had could be looked at within the context of the condition of aphasia. He saw the rebus as representative of the current time in Russian history because of the fact that, in order to decode the rebus, one had to change words, rearrange phonemes, remove some letters, in effect, add and subtract from what was written on paper. As he described it himself, the rebus is “an illustration of another illustration of a process that takes place by erasing some elements of the image-sphere and coding other elements,”⁵⁸⁷ which, consequently, “is a distinctive feature of the time-moment which may proudly be called the time of Great Aphasia.” For example, in a rebus, the word “do” (in English) could be represented by a picture of a dog with “-g” after it, indicating that the reader must take the “g” off of the word “dog” in order to get the desired word “do.” It was during that time that Afrika was working that Russian society itself was undergoing a re-coding, with old acronyms being converted into new ones, parts of names being deleted and others added.

Afrika’s rebuses were a fitting testament to the post-Soviet period, because they were never ultimately resolved, but rather remained perpetually oriented toward a final goal of understanding, without the viewer actually getting there. The frustration of reading his rebuses was similar to the frustration of the taxi ride mentioned by Barker –

⁵⁸⁷ Afrika and Mazin, “The Reflection of the Rebus and Stochastic Oscillations,” 18.

the aggravation of potentially not being able to get where you need to go, because either you do not have the words to explain what you mean, or because others lack the language to understand you. Although the author did, in fact, reach her destination, and similarly many other transactions did take place successfully, the feeling of frustration that was so characteristic of Russia in the 1990s is what Afrika pinpointed in his rebuses. As he himself remarked, “the idea of the Great Aphasia is sufficiently illustrated by the contours of a rebus which is never understood to its conclusion although it demands rather complex manipulations of the system of coding or reading.”⁵⁸⁸ Perhaps one final language was never arrived at by citizens of Post-Soviet Russia in the 1990s, but the language had to constantly be manipulated and played with until some form of common language was reached.

Afrika is also aware of the problems resulting from confusion of different alphabets, such as when the rebuses are viewed by non-Russian speaking audiences. Since the rebuses were exhibited abroad, they were oriented toward both Russian speaking and non-Russian speaking audiences. As Dan Cameron has pointed out, the Cyrillic alphabet consists of a.) letters that look and sound the same as those in the Roman alphabet (Cyrillic M = Roman M), b.) letters that look the same as Roman letters but are pronounced differently (Cyrillic H = Roman N), and c.) letters which look nothing like Roman letters (Ж, И). As a result, some of the letters of the puzzle can be read, others misread, and still others can only appear as symbols to those who do not read Cyrillic.⁵⁸⁹ Thus a reading of the already illegible rebuses is further frustrated for foreign (non-Russian speaking) viewers. Ironically, these rebuses are literally transparent –

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid, 18.

⁵⁸⁹ Dan Cameron, “Making the Pieces Fit,” in Sergei Bugaev Afrika, *Sergei Bugaev – Rebus*, 44 (New York: Paul Judelson Arts, 1994).

printed on translucent paper, they can be seen from both inside and outside the *Museum Aphasia* building (Fig. 5.10). Unfortunately, however, this offers little in way of illumination. The rebuses can be sounded out, but never understood, much like a person with aphasia that affects the syntagmatic axis can utter recognizable words, but cannot put them together to form a logical sentence. The only solution is to try to find an alternative way to understand the meaning, or to make one's own meaning. With the rebuses, this is true for both Russian and non-Russian speakers, as the language is nonsense to both, simply in different ways.

It is with the “reflecting rebuses” that the viewer truly gets the chance to make his own meaning. The reflecting rebuses, or “light rebuses,” are large panels made up of blank copper plates joined together⁵⁹⁰ (Fig. 5.23). In *Crimania*, they are part of an installation called *Morphology of an Image (MZF 1) with the Stochastic Pendulum (Prigogine 1)* where they are situated on the walls around a statue of Lenin, who is mounted on a makeshift rocket, and also on the rocket itself (Fig. 5.24).

If the pictorial rebuses can never be solved to their “ultimate conclusion,”⁵⁹¹ according to Afrika, neither can the reflecting rebuses. The pictorial and reflecting rebuses represent the two extremes of what can be called a rebus. While the former contain a plethora of figures that demand to be sounded out and read, the latter are a blank canvas that absorbs all images that come across its path. These rebuses are similar to Polis' *Exhibition Without Art Work*, in that they invite the viewer to bring their own imagery and interpretation to the ‘blank canvas’ provided by the artist. Furthermore,

⁵⁹⁰ The reflecting rebuses were first exhibited in Pori, Finland in 1993. There they formed what looked like an iconostasis in the center of the room, with a stochastic pendulum displayed before it. The pictorial rebuses were hung around the sides of the room.

⁵⁹¹ Afrika and Mazin, “The Reflection of the Rebus and Stochastic Oscillations,” 18.

Afrika's choice of material is not arbitrary. Copper is light-sensitive, which means that it retains a trace of every shadow or reflection that comes into contact with it, meaning all of the visitors to the exhibition. Thus the reflecting rebus is a record of a variety of images, much like Afrika's banners are. Also like the banners they are a witness to history, as each viewer is somehow inscribed onto their surface. As the artist tells us:

It is essential to note the fact that copper sensitive plates of light rebuses constantly record all images that fall into its sphere of reflection. In time, these mirror-battered loci naturally become dark and will begin to represent a very complex photographic matrix reflectant of processes that occurred around it after it filled rebus plates with traces of images from past exhibitions.⁵⁹²

He mentions that even if the copper plates are cleaned, "absolute erasure is hardly possible."⁵⁹³ Each rebus bears an imprint of time that cannot be erased, much like the Soviet legacy is one that cannot be expunged, but instead must be incorporated into the future story of Russia, which the artist and his viewers alike will help to create. Like the banners, even the reflecting rebuses, which appear at first glance to be empty or blank, contain a layering or archaeology of images.

Stochastic Pendulum

The final element of Afrika's exhibition at MAK that I would like to discuss is the stochastic pendulum, which was located in the center of the main room of the exhibition, which Afrika strategically placed beneath a statue of Lenin whose body formed part of a rocket (Fig. 5.25). This pendulum, like the banners and rebuses, is indicative of the state of things in Russia at the time. A stochastic pendulum is based on regular chaotic movement, which means that while the movement of the drum that

⁵⁹² Ibid, 24.

⁵⁹³ Ibid, 24.

propels the pendulum is regular, the resultant behavior of the bob is irregular, but within certain parameters that can be relied upon.⁵⁹⁴ Applying this logic to the situation in the former Soviet Union, we can conclude that after the initial disturbance that sent shock waves through the language of Soviet socialism (the collapse of the USSR), the system then adjusted by incorporating the disturbance into its movement. In this sense, there was no possibility for escape from the chaos of everyday life.

The pendulum first appeared in Afrika's 1990 installation *Donal destruction* at the Lenin Museum in Leningrad (Fig. 5.26). This piece was also exhibited at MAK in 1995. It consisted of a background collage of black and white images from the Soviet period, including pictures of collective farm workers, laborers and even images from World War II, or, the Great Patriotic War. Across the bottom of the collection of images is an appropriation of portraits of famous 19th century scientists. In the center of the collage is a black rectangle that resembles a chalkboard, on which has been placed a map of the world, with a red line connecting Russia and the United States. On either side of the map are hand-written equations, two of which resemble the charting of the swing of a pendulum on an $x - y$ axis. Flanking this central panel are more collages. The right side is entitled "The East," and contains images from Russian and Soviet popular culture: Neznaika, the phrase "Not by bread alone" (*Ni khlebom edinim zhiv chelovek*), and the Lenin Mausoleum. The left side is "The West," and contains Donald Duck opposite Neznaika, images from McDonald's opposite "Not by bread alone" and a picture of the Taj Majal to complement the Lenin Mausoleum.

⁵⁹⁴ As confirmed by Afrika in a telephone conversation with the author, March 2006, as well as by Dr. Ron Rusay, Professor of Chemistry at Diablo Valley College in California and Visiting Scholar at University of Berkeley, California.

In front of the image is a common frictionless pendulum, which is known for its regular movement. The bob for the pendulum is a piece of sheet metal taken from the Vera Mukhina sculpture *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman* (1937). In 1990 Afrika, with the help of fellow artist Sergei Anufriev (b. 1964), stole the panel for the work (Fig. 5.27). The pendulum swings in an even, regular movement between East and West, between Soviet and American culture, between symbols of communism and capitalism. Afrika created this work just months before the ultimate break-up of the Soviet Union, when the binaries of East versus West, communism and capitalism, were still firmly in tact, though beginning to crumble. The regular movement of the pendulum reflected the relative order that still existed, at least for the artist, while the Soviet Union still existed. Afrika mentioned the fact that he began working with stochastic pendula only after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the times became more chaotic than they had been. He commented that “the creation of a stochastic pendulum coincided with the rise of a most unstable situation in our country which came out of the disintegration of the complex structure known as the USSR. This disintegration caused chaotic processes to occur in geographical, social, economic, political and aesthetic spheres of our territory.”⁵⁹⁵ The movement of this type of pendulum is an accurate depiction of the turmoil of these times.

The chaotic processes Afrika was referring to in his statement were the following: the breakdown of borders (geographical), which to this day, in some places of the former Soviet Union, have yet to be resolved.⁵⁹⁶ Then, the loss of Soviet identity that came with the end of the Soviet Union (social), the transformation from a socialist to capitalist market economy (economic), from a communism to democracy (political), and

⁵⁹⁵ Afrika and Mazin, “The Reflection of the Rebus and Stochastic Oscillations,” 23.

⁵⁹⁶ A border agreement between Russia and Latvia, for example, was only just signed in 2006, and the border between Estonia and Russia is still being disputed.

from a system where artistic expression was restricted to one style (Socialist Realism) to a free and open system (artistic). These changes did not happen overnight, nor were they smooth transitions. In many ways, most of the former Soviet countries are still in a state of transition, rebuilding the infrastructure along with the nation. In fact, both Mazin and Afrika have commented on the loss of democracy in current Russian society, as evinced in Vladimir Putin's (b. 1952) government.⁵⁹⁷ Thus the stochastic pendulum expounded the current state of affairs in Russia at the time (1995) that it was exhibited, yet the image that it conveys is still relevant today. It also spoke in a language that was more universal – the language of science. What could not be conveyed in words, with the rebuses, was perfectly illustrated by the regular irregularity of the movement of the stochastic pendulum.

Conclusions

The artists of the historical Russian avant-garde in the nineteen-teens and twenties found themselves in circumstances similar to that of Afrika in the 1990s, seeing it as their task to create a new, modern language for this socialist state, to replace the antiquated one of the Empire. As T.J. Clark has suggested in his essay, "God Is Not Cast Down,"⁵⁹⁸ this new language failed because of its impracticality during the time in which it was introduced. He uses the photograph of El Lissitzky's famous signboard from Vitebsk in 1920 to expound on the situation in the Soviet Union at the time and why these artists' modernist project failed (Fig. 5.28). He mentions the fact that the reality of life in 1920 was that the country was in a complete state of chaos. This was the period of war

⁵⁹⁷ Mazin, in an interview with the author, September 16, 2007, and Afrika, in an interview with the author, September 16, 2007.

⁵⁹⁸ T.J. Clark, "God is Not Cast Down," in T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, 225-297 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

communism – there was massive unemployment and supplies were low. People were focused on the concerns of everyday life and survival, and the idea of a sign that combined words, “the workbenches of the factories are waiting for you” (*Stanki depo fabrik zavodov zhduť vas*), and suprematist-style geometric abstraction, to form some kind of new utopian language, a “revolution of the sign,”⁵⁹⁹ in Clark’s words, was simply impractical. The semiotic message contained in this sign was in effect meaningless, as the benches of the factories were not actually waiting for anyone, owing to the lack of jobs and high unemployment. The sign failed to signify because its signifiers referred to a time and conditions that no longer existed, much like the banners that Afrika used in his exhibition.

Conditions in 1990s Post-Soviet Russia were similar in many ways. In the early 1990s there was rapid inflation, massive unemployment, and complete uncertainty about the future. Most citizens did not have time to contemplate the meaning of a rebus – neither reflecting nor pictorial – a banner, nor a pendulum. But Afrika is not, like his avant-garde predecessors, trying to create a new language for Post-Soviet Russia. His exploration of aphasia in the mental hospital, and his later work with signs in the rebuses and banners is an attempt to understand the existing language in order to give the artist insight into the current state of the Russian identity. It is for this reason that the artist presented the results of the performance at the exhibition at MAK, to a narrow audience of the visitors to the Applied Arts Museum in Vienna. For Afrika, the significance of the work was in the groundwork it laid with regard to his future creations with signs, symbols and language systems, more so than the size or breadth of the audience that saw it. Eventually, however, the results of all of these experiments would be brought to a much

⁵⁹⁹ Clark, “God is Not Cast Down,” 291.

wider audience, in his later work and exhibitions. As Afrika stated himself, when asked about the results of *Crimania* “in many ways the results can be understood from the next generation of my works.”⁶⁰⁰ The *Crimania* performance participated in the process of regeneration that was going on in Russia at the time. The artist’s personal development would contribute to the development of new signs, but they would not be forced on society from without, as the Constructivists before him had tried to. Rather, the language was to develop along with the creative medium.

Viktor Mazin has already noted the parallels between Afrika’s three week stay in a mental hospital and Joseph Beuys’ 1974 performance at the Rene Block Gallery, *I Like America and America Likes Me*, when Beuys spent two weeks coexisting with a wild coyote. According to Mazin, “both rituals involve placing oneself alongside the ‘inhuman’ and the ‘wild’ (animal/insane). The wildness of Beuys is homologous with the nature of Afrika who instantly establishes “hypnotic” contact with members of the animal kingdom.”⁶⁰¹ While some may take issue with the comparison between a wild coyote and the patients of a mental institution, nevertheless, in both cases the artist was attempting to find a common language with a being that communicated in another, by immersing himself in the life of that other. Whereas Beuys brought the animal to his world, Afrika entered the patients’ space as one of them.

There are other points of comparison that one could make between Afrika’s performance and those of Beuys. Noting a similarity between his work and that of his precursor, Afrika even exhibited his hospital pajamas, in the same manner that Beuys exhibited his felt suit, at an exhibition that followed the one at MAK, in 1996, entitled

⁶⁰⁰ Afrika, in an interview with the author, September 16, 2007.

⁶⁰¹ Mazin, “Afrasia,” 29.

Doctor and Patient: Memory and Amnesia, which took place in Pori, Finland, and was curated by Mazin and Turkina (Fig. 5.29). Afrika, like Beuys, had created his *Crimania* performance as a response to a trauma – in this case the trauma of the breakup of the Soviet Union. In the same way that Beuys attempted to use his art to heal Post-War German citizens and help them come to terms with the guilt of the Holocaust, Afrika undertook the *Crimania* project with the aim of dealing with the loss of identity that came with the loss of territory and status. Furthermore, both artists used old symbols – Beuys used fat, felt, straw; Afrika used Soviet banners and medals – in a new context, also as a way of working through the trauma. Finally, both artists meant to use their performances as a way of remaking themselves or refashioning a new identity, a natural result of the healing process. The difference, however, lays in the strategies as well as the ultimate goals of the two, which are indeed different.

Beuys believed in the social function of art, and the ability of art to bring about change. These ideas were present not only in his performances, which took the form of a ritual, aimed at healing, but also in his endeavors outside the scope of art, which included teaching and involvement in politics. Because he believed that his actions could heal society, he aimed to reach as much of that society as he could, making his art and ideas as public as possible. In his essay “Joseph Beuys: Between Showman and Shaman,”⁶⁰² Donald Kuspit responds to criticism by Buchloh and others that Beuys was a mere showman. He describes Beuys as presenting himself as a facilitator of “a redemptive, psycho-moral as well as physical change – a change from sickness to health, from near

⁶⁰² Donald Kuspit, “Joseph Beuys: Between Showman and Shaman,” in *Joseph Beuys: Diverging Critiques*, ed. David Thistlewood, 27-49 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press and Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1995).

death to vigorous life – in German society.”⁶⁰³ In another essay in that same manuscript, Kuspit compared Beuys’ relationship to his audience as one between a shepherd and his flock, stating that the “psychic drama of warmth and intimacy between artist and audience bespeaks the healing intention of Beuys’ art – its therapeutic mission.”⁶⁰⁴ Kuspit concludes that Beuys is able to heal others because of the processes he undergoes in order to heal himself. He states that those who see him only as a spectacle do not believe in that power of change that Beuys did; “they find it impossible to believe that one can change oneself without waiting for society to change itself, and that the change in oneself can cause significant social change.”⁶⁰⁵ Not only does Kuspit see Beuys as healing himself, but also the symbols that he engages with in his art – universal social symbols. As Kuspit stated, “he restores them to personal as well as social significance. He in effect heals them...”⁶⁰⁶ It is through all of Beuys’ acts and performances that the artist comes to heal himself, the symbols that speak to his society, and ultimately that society itself.

Unlike Beuys, Afrika was not trying to heal himself. The processes that Afrika went through in the hospital were all a part of the artist’s development that would invariably become incorporated into his later work. While Beuys addressed his work to the masses, Afrika’s does not come with a prognosis for a future healed society. Instead, it remains firmly planted in the time in which it was created. Unlike Malevich, Mayakovskii and El Lissitzky, Afrika does not offer a new language, but exposes the existing language system in Russia for what it is – a system that is ailing, although functioning. Like the muddled rebuses, whose logic is contained within their borders, and

⁶⁰³ Ibid, 37.

⁶⁰⁴ Donald Kuspit, “Joseph Beuys: The Body of the Artist,” in *Joseph Beuys: Diverging Critiques*, ed. David Thistlewood, 96 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press and Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1995).

⁶⁰⁵ Kuspit, “Joseph Beuys: Between Showman and Shaman,” 47.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid, 43.

the social order that exists only within the mental hospital, the Soviet language of socialism only functioned within that system. When the infrastructure that supported the system was destroyed, the language that it had created became, for the most part, a relic. In the same way, once the symbols of the system, such as the busts of Lenin, were removed and placed in a collection, their original meaning was displaced. Afrika has labeled the period just after their removal the “Time of Great Aphasia” both because of the fact that old symbols were awaiting new meanings, and because everyone was awaiting the development of new symbols. By saving these Soviet symbols and incorporating them into his art he makes them part of a new language that is still under development. At the same time, the assortment of signs that he creates are a witness to the atrophy of language that was occurring at the time. In this sense *Crimania* presents us not with the dystopia that we may expect; the conclusions of the participant, or lack thereof, keep us open to the possibility of the creation of new language, without yet presenting one in its completion.

Chapter 6: Art and Controversy: Katarzyna Kozyra's *The Men's Bathhouse* in Post-Communist Poland

Unlike her Russian counterpart, Polish artist Katarzyna Kozyra does not overtly address post-communist issues in her work. Like Afrika, she is concerned with identity issues, but not as they relate to the Post-Soviet condition. Rather, she deals with the subject using familiar subjects, focusing on the manner in which standards of beauty and gender- and sexual-identity are socially determined. The controversial reception of her work in Poland indicates that her work does, however, speak to issues relevant in the post-independence period, such as the influx of consumerist culture and the reshaping of a post-communist identity. Much of her work challenges the foundations of the rigid social order that had been upheld by the communist government and the Catholic Church during the previous fifty years. Although her performance-based art, and especially the video installations through which we get to see them, bears resemblance to feminist art from an earlier period in the West, her work is not feminist, and the *Bathhouse* performances do not share strategies with those American women artists whose work they may call to mind. Instead, these performances break free from gender-specificity and provide a message about identity formation in general. In this sense her work may be understood as broadly liberating the artist and her audiences from the strict notion of gender and hierarchy that sustain both Western and post-communist societies. Consequently Kozyra's work both participated in the new democracies that were being formed in Eastern Europe in the 1990s and helped shape them, by encouraging audiences to probe the most essential questions regarding the ontological status of contemporary art.

The controversies surrounding each of Kozyra's art works can be explained by two factors: the lack of education among the public that would help them to understand contemporary art practice in Poland – a legacy of the communist governmental control over the arts and art education – as well as the firmly held views about gender roles that had long been enforced by the Catholic Church and then tacitly reinforced by the Communist government. Kozyra's work challenges this status quo by first attacking the history of visual images that have been passed down through Western art history in *The Women's Bathhouse*, and then by violating a private space reserved only for the male sex in *The Men's Bathhouse*. In both projects she reveals how images of beauty and notions of gender are socially, rather than biologically, determined. Her choice of bathhouses was also socially determined; the artist used a bathhouse in Budapest as her setting because of the fact that there is no tradition of public bathhouses or saunas in Poland. Critics of these pieces, however, saw them as a violation of the privacy of the clients there. Those who were caught on film, however, did not, for the bathhouse, although a restricted space, is not considered private. Thus Kozyra further challenges the myth of private spaces that was cultivated during the communist period in Poland as a feature of Western, democratic cultures.

In many ways, each of Kozyra's works responds to her critics' disparagement of the previous one. This is explicitly the case with *Pyramid of Animals*, her MFA thesis project, and *Olympia*, which the artist admitted was an answer to criticism of *Pyramid*. The video performance *The Women's Bathhouse* was also an attempt to clarify the misunderstandings surrounding *Olympia*, as the artist used the installation to try to elucidate her tackling of the legacy of Western images of beauty. *The Men's Bathhouse*,

also a video performance, was her retort to that prior work. Furthermore, the artist used video to display the performances in the gallery space after they had been completed, which she considered a modern communication device whose language would be comprehensible to audiences weaned on television and Mtv. The fact that Kozyra strives to explain and illuminate each work with her subsequent one is evidence of the artist's concern to convey an idea to her audience, instead of simply challenging them with shock and foreign (Western) approaches to art and art-making. Nevertheless, owing to socio-historical circumstances, a large portion of her viewers were simply alienated and responded with condemnation.

This chapter will examine the strategies that Kozyra used to engage her audience and make them aware of various issues surrounding beauty and gender identity in post-communist Poland. It will then examine the reasons and sources for the controversy surrounding her art, focusing first on *The Women's Bathhouse* and then *The Men's Bathhouse*, which represented Poland at the 1999 Venice Biennale. Finally, I will examine and interpret the *Bathhouse* performances as works of art in their own right, as well as in comparison to Western feminist art practices.

The Men's Bathhouse and The Women's Bathhouse

In 1999 Kozyra represented Poland at the 48th International Biennale of Visual Art in Venice with a video installation entitled *The Men's Bathhouse* (Fig. 0.6). In order to realize the piece Kozyra (with the aid of two cameramen) surreptitiously filmed the visitors to a men's bathhouse in Budapest. The artist herself was also present in the film, disguised as a man. The installation of the work consisted of four simultaneous projections of eight minutes each onto four screens mounted within an octagonal

architectural structure, which suggested the interior of a bathhouse. The projections were visible from both sides of the screen. Accompanying these images was a short three-minute film documenting the artist's transformation into a man, which was shown on a monitor at the entrance to the gallery.⁶⁰⁷ The work received an Honorable Mention at the Biennale, and has since been exhibited in Kraków, Warsaw and Gdańsk, Poland, as well as in Providence (Rhode Island), Prague and Vilnius.⁶⁰⁸

The Men's Bathhouse was not Kozyra's first visit to a bathhouse, nor her first experience involving the filming of bathers using a hidden camera. In 1997 Kozyra completed *The Women's Bathhouse*, which involved the artist entering a woman's bathhouse, also in Budapest, and filming the visitors with a camera hidden in a plastic bag (Fig. 0.5). Although the artist was present in the bathhouse, she is not present in the video, since she was the one filming the scenes. This work was exhibited in 1997 at the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw. The installation consisted of a main screen showing a four-minute looped projection of scenes shot by Kozyra in the bathhouse, as well as five television monitors showing unedited films. Reproductions of well-known works of art have been edited into the main projection, for example Ingres'⁶⁰⁹ *The Turkish Bath* (1862) and Rembrandt's⁶¹⁰ *Susanna and the Elders* (1636).⁶¹¹

With regard to both works, the artist was reproached for violating the privacy and dignity of the visitors to the bathhouse, since she filmed them without their knowledge or permission. She also did not ask the subjects for their permission to exhibit the images

⁶⁰⁷ The details of this performance have been described in the exhibition catalogue *Katarzyna Kozyra: The Men's Bathhouse*. Warsaw: The Zachęta Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1999.

⁶⁰⁸ As listed in the exhibitions section of the artist's professional website: www.katarzynakozyra.pl

⁶⁰⁹ Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780-1867)

⁶¹⁰ Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606-1669)

⁶¹¹ The details of performance have been described in *Katarzyna Kozyra: The Men's Bathhouse*.

after she had filmed them. With *The Women's Bathhouse* Kozyra was also admonished for presenting women who were old, wrinkled, ill – seen as aging, and even dying – instead of showing bodies of idealized women that viewers were accustomed to seeing in advertisements, films and magazines. *The Men's Bathhouse* received even harsher criticism owing to the fact that it represented Poland at one of the most prestigious international art exhibitions, the Venice Biennale. Many could not accept the idea of a woman wearing a rubber penis in performance as a work of art. Furthermore, detractors were concerned with the fact that taxpayers' money had gone to making this rubber phallus. In stark contrast to this was the reception by art critics and historians in Poland (and abroad), who praised her for her deft questioning and overturning of cultural norms. The divided response is a reflection of the transitional period in Poland, the conservatism and traditionalism of the previous era giving way to newly democratic and global ways of thinking. In a country where citizens were just beginning to understand the meaning of (and be able to exercise) their new right to free speech, what they encountered was the familiar problem (in the West) of people with conflicting sets of interest arguing on opposite sides of that shared right.

Pyramid of Animals

Kozyra's very first exhibition, just as she was beginning her professional career, caused a great scandal that was played out in the popular press and on television.⁶¹² In fact this was one of the very first public controversies in Poland surrounding a work of art after independence. In 1993 Kozyra presented her diploma work *Pyramid of Animals* as

⁶¹² A selection of these debates have been reprinted in "Pyramid of Animals by Katarzyna Kozyra: Letters and Articles," in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, ed. Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospyszyl, 242-255 (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002).

part of her MFA show in Warsaw (Fig. 6.1). The object was a sculpture consisting of four taxidermied animals – a horse, dog, cat and cock – stacked one on top of the other, reminiscent of the same image from the Brothers’ Grimm Story *The Bremen Town Musicians* (*Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten*).⁶¹³ The statue was accompanied by a video that documented the slaughter and process of preserving the horse (Fig. 6.2). The attack on the artist started on a television program, *Animals*, which was broadcast in July of that same year. Her work was presented on the show and the artist was accused of cruelty to animals and immorality for having killed the animals to use in a sculpture. Xymena Zaniewska Chwedczuk, a well-known stage designer, wrote a letter to *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Poland’s leading daily newspaper, asking “whether the law allows us to kill animals for decorative purposes”⁶¹⁴ and further stated that she “protest[s] against killing for decoration and...will do everything [she] can to prevent such cases in the future.”⁶¹⁵ Other detractors questioned Kozyra’s morality and her mental state. One opponent of the work went so far as to name Kozyra “the true daughter of Doctor Mengela,”⁶¹⁶ and suggested that soon enough she would be making lampshades out of human skin.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹³ The story tells the tale of these four animals, all of whom are mistreated by their owners. They decide to escape to Bremen, where they think they will be free. Along the way they encounter a house that has been temporarily occupied by thieves. When the criminals leave, the animals take possession of the house. In the middle of the night the thieves return to the house, and the animals attack them, and force them to leave. The four animals live out the rest of their days happy and free in the little house, and never end up going to Bremen.

⁶¹⁴ Xymena Zaniewska-Chwedczuk, “A Sculptor or a Dogcatcher,” reprinted in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, ed. Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospyszyl, 251 (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002).

⁶¹⁵ Ibid, 251.

⁶¹⁶ “nieodrodna córka doktora Mengele”

Kozyra, “Coś mi siedzi z tyłu czaszki, rozmowa z Katarzyną Kozyrą, laureatką Paszportu “Polityki” w dziedzinie plastyki,” interview by Piotr Sarzyński, *Polityka* 5 (31.08.1998): 42-43.

⁶¹⁷ “sugerowali, że niedługo będę robiła abażury z ludzkiej skóry”

Kozyra, “Coś mi siedzi z tyłu czaszki, rozmowa z Katarzyną Kozyrą, laureatką Paszportu “Polityki” w dziedzinie plastyki,” 42-43.

Another stated that she was “mentally ill, a pathological personality who ought to be treated.”⁶¹⁸

The artist believes that part of reason for the sensation was the fact that the public had been misinformed. Most people had heard about the sculpture through the articles in the press and through hearsay and rumors, without even having seen the object for themselves. Consequently many believed that Kozyra had killed all of the animals herself,⁶¹⁹ a notion that they clearly would have known to be incorrect if they had seen the exhibition, as the facts about the origin of the animals had been explained in the artist’s statement and the documentary video. The horse and cock had already been slated for slaughter, she simply selected them, and she had gotten the dog and cat as corpses, already dead. According to Grzegorz Kowalski, Kozyra’s professor and chief defender, the reason that so many of the people who commented on the work objected to it was because of the fact that they distinguished between killing animals to eat or make handbags, which was acceptable, and killing them in the name of art, which was not.⁶²⁰

Pyramid of Animals is an exploration of death and killing in contemporary society. The animals are stacked on top of one another suggesting a food chain, one that human beings participate in every day of their lives, whether by killing an animal, insect or plant. According to the artist, people have become desensitized to this killing because

⁶¹⁸ Aleksandra Jakubowska, “Why the Heck is this Alive,” reprinted in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, ed. Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospyszyl, 251 (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002).

⁶¹⁹ Katarzyna Kozyra, “Artist’s Response,” reprinted in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, ed. Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospyszyl, 255 (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002).

⁶²⁰ Gregorz Kowalczyk, “Why the Heck is this Alive,” reprinted in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, ed. Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospyszyl, 253 (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002).

it takes place outside of our field of vision, so that we do not even notice it. Kozyra stated that she made the sculpture out of her need to ask the question:

Do we still feel the presence of death eating chops, using cosmetics, or using other animal-based products, or has that been effectively neutralized by the household representatives of animals, which receive our feelings on a day-to-day basis? *Pyramid of Animals* is a violation of norms in treating the death of animals as a phenomenon that has nothing to do with the consumer.⁶²¹

Kowalski also defended her work with a similar statement arguing that Kozyra presented and made explicit those unseemly elements of everyday life that we do not usually see. In his words, “the death of animals killed by industrial methods is invisible and sanctioned by utilitarian purposes so that it has been virtually eliminated from human consciousness. On the contrary, the death of a single animal, visualized in a work of art, is restored to the spectator’s consciousness.”⁶²² In this sense, the work is intended to be shocking, as Kozyra aimed to present to the viewer those facts of existence that most would prefer to remain unseen. But instead of receiving praise for her insight into these issues, the artist was censured by those who could not accept what the work was truly about.

Art historian and now curator at the Zachęta Gallery Hanna Wróblewska made a statement on Kozyra’s art that pinpoints the reason for the controversy surrounding *Pyramid of Animals*. According to her, Kozyra “forces us to re-think and verify the settled order of values by unveiling the facts of reality.”⁶²³ Kozyra’s recontextualization of the killing does not allow these acts to go unnoticed, which they often do in everyday life. Confronted with this work of art, the viewer is forced to consider the meaning and

⁶²¹ Kozyra, “Artist’s Response,” 255.

⁶²² Grzegorz Kowalski, “Why the Heck is this Alive?” 253.

⁶²³ Hanna Wróblewska, in an epigraph on Kozyra’s work, posted on the artist’s website: www.katarzynakozyra.pl.

impact of acts of brutality such as the killing of animals for food or shoes, chopping down trees for furniture, or extinguishing the life of an innocent flower for the decoration of our dinner table. The realization of hidden values through its visualization as art determined her subsequent choice of projects; it is also the consequence of her projects. With each new art work, Kozyra would rethink her approach, and attempt to explain the ideas that viewers had, in her mind, misunderstood or misinterpreted in previous works. In this way she constructed a dialogue with her critics; when their response indicated a misinterpretation of her message, the artist sought to bring out the elements that had been overlooked in attempt to make that message clear. In this sense the process of creation involves a reciprocity between artist and viewer, with the art work keeping the dialogue in tact.

Olympia

In 1996 Kozyra created *Olympia* as her response to the critics of *Pyramid of Animals*. While she was working on *Pyramid of Animals* the artist was diagnosed with Hodgkins disease, and one of the critics mentioned that in her review. Kozyra felt that if her illness was going to be exposed to the public by the press, then she would show them her illness full-force, by displaying it overtly in *Olympia*. In her words, “that chick who wrote an article about me and *Pyramid of Animals* dragged my sickness and all of my private affairs into it, and it was just completely tasteless. She presented my diploma work only from that perspective, as if I was simply some kind of sick person. And so *Olympia* was a sort of action of what I could show her now.”⁶²⁴ This was a photographic

⁶²⁴ “baba, która napisała artykuł o mnie, znaczy się to był reportaż o mnie i tej Piramidzie Zwierząt. Ona się uparła, że musi wyciągnąć wszystkie moje choroby i prywatne sprawy, że to zrobiła właśnie niesmacznie. Pokazywało to moją pracę dyplomową właśnie z tej perspektywy, że ja właśnie taka chora. No a ta Olimpia była taka akcją co my teraz pokażemy.”

series that consisted of three images with a video displayed next to them. In the first picture Kozyra reconstructed Manet's⁶²⁵ *Olympia* (1863) (Fig 6.3), where she played the central role herself. In this version, however, Kozyra replaced the smooth, svelte body of the courtesan with her thin and emaciated one, after she had undergone radiation therapy for Hodgkin's disease (Fig. 6.4). Her head is bald and her skin unhealthy. In the next image Kozyra presents herself in the same pose, but this time the location has changed to the hospital gurney where she received her radiation therapy, with the intravenous drip and nurse by her side (Figs. 6.5, 6.7). The final image is of an elderly woman – a patient at the hospital where Kozyra was staying. Kozyra also posed her as Olympia, with a black velvet band around her neck, but this time sitting up (Figs. 6.6, 6.7). The video display documents the slow process of Kozyra receiving her iv drip therapy. Instead of the young, healthy bodies ubiquitous in Polish advertising, this shows the infirm and elderly bodies of the artist and another woman.

Kozyra admits that this work is autobiographical, as a way to defend herself against the attacks that she had suffered three years prior for *The Pyramid of Animals*. In a statement about the work she said that:

This is a very personal work and completely conscious exhibitionism. It was a reaction to the scandal around the 'The Pyramid of Animals.' In reality I was incensed by the fact that I had to explain my work by becoming ill. I thought to myself: all right, if this is all so very interesting, if you publicize my privacy against my will and my convictions, then I can do the same. I can thrust forward my privacy not when someone wants to hear about it, but when I want to do so, not for the purpose of serving others, but for it to serve me, if that's what you want that's what you have, even if this is distasteful.⁶²⁶

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

⁶²⁵ Édouard Manet (1832-1883)

⁶²⁶ Katarzyna Kozyra, artist's statement on her personal website: www.katarzynakozyra.pl

For Kozyra, her illness brought the ideas that she was exploring, along with the emotions that she felt while creating *Pyramid* even closer to home. She said that it helped her reach “to another level of consciousness. I experienced a feeling of finality...It was these very circumstances...that awakened in me a sensitivity toward destruction.”⁶²⁷ While in *Pyramid of Animals* Kozyra commandeered her illness to explain the motivation behind the work, in *Olympia* she appropriated it and turned it into art. With the above statement, the artist reclaims her own agency; instead of appearing vulnerable and victimized, she presents her sick body as both subject and object of the Gaze,⁶²⁸ in the same way that Manet presented the woman in his *Olympia*. With both images we are taken aback because the figures are visibly connected to the odalisque as a vehicle for male scopophilia and subjectivity, yet at the same time, they do not allow themselves to be possessed by the Gaze.⁶²⁹

Just as Manet’s painted image was a shock to the audience at the 1865 Salon, so, too was Kozyra’s to her viewers, and both for similar reasons. T.J. Clark has told us, in his analysis of *Olympia*, that in 1865 the painting failed to signify, due in large part to its

⁶²⁷ Katarzyna Kozyra, “Carrying Buckets, Trotting Like Pigs,” interview by Artur Żmijewski, reprinted in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, ed. Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospyszyl, 245 (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002).

⁶²⁸ The term “Gaze” refers to the analysis, in visual culture, of who is viewing and who is being viewed. The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) grounded the concept of the Gaze in what he called the “Mirror Stage,” (1936) that is, the stage of development when the child first sees himself in the mirror and realizes that he is indeed a ‘self,’ independent of his mother; he is a unified whole that is at once himself and not himself. The realization is first that the subject is a split-subject and can never see himself the way others see him. There is also the realization that while the subject regards himself in the mirror, the image also stares back at him; he is as much seen as seeing. See Jacques Lacan, Miller, J.-A., ed., and Sheridan, A., trans. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988.

⁶²⁹ Film critic Laura Mulvey introduced the concept of ‘the male Gaze’ in her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975), where she postulated the fact that depending on the way a film, text or other work of art is presented, viewers, regardless of their gender, may be forced to see those objects through ‘male’ eyes. See Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16/3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18. Lacan’s conception of the Gaze, however, is not gendered. As human beings we are all in the field of the Gaze, all seeing and being seen, which by default levels distinctions of gender or sex as we are all powerless before the Gaze, and can never escape it. My analysis invokes Lacan’s, not Mulvey’s, concept of the Gaze.

recalcitrance at being pulled into any of the dominant discourses of the time.⁶³⁰ For Clark, *Olympia* is a 'limit case' of such recalcitrance. *Olympia* attempted a paradigm shift, as it "erodes the terms in which the normal recognitions are enacted but it leaves the structure itself intact."⁶³¹ Because of its disregard for the accepted iconography of beauty and women, *Olympia* did not dutifully take her place in the space of male fantasy. With such stubbornness, the viewer cannot invest the image with desire, rather, he or she is forced to reject it; the normal subject-object relation is thwarted. Although the painting appeared to be participating in both the "discourse on Woman in the 1860s" as well as the "discourse of aesthetic judgment in the Second Empire,"⁶³² Clark felt that *Olympia* "failed to occupy a place in the discourse on Woman, and specifically she was neither a nude, nor a prostitute."⁶³³ For Clark it was "the odd coexistence of decorum and disgrace... which was the difficulty of the picture in 1865."⁶³⁴ The painting was 'uncooperative'; it neither conformed to an established set of codes nor succeeded in effecting a complete revolution in signification. Thus, in 1865, it could occupy *no* position, much like Olympia herself. As a result, viewers did not know how to respond to it or connect with it, it simply floated between various signifying systems, and was rejected.

Kozyra's *Olympia*, from 1996, functions in a similar manner by returning the viewer to the original image by Manet. Using Clark's analysis of the latter, one can see how this plays out in terms of actual reception in a different context. While participating in similar discourses (the discourse of Woman and the discourse of aesthetic judgment in

⁶³⁰ T.J. Clark, "Preliminaries to a Possible Treatment of 'Olympia' in 1865," *Screen* 21/1 (Spring 1980): 22.

⁶³¹ Ibid, 39.

⁶³² Ibid, 23.

⁶³³ Ibid, 32.

⁶³⁴ Ibid, 32.

the 1990s), Kozyra's photographs, like Manet's *Olympia*, occupy a liminal position – “neither a nude, nor a prostitute.” Kozyra has mapped the discourse of the ill and the dying (the body becoming a corpse) onto these established discourses. She has ‘eroded the terms’ by replacing a healthy body with a sick one, but ‘kept the structure intact’ by appropriating Manet, Titian, Ingres, etc. – the legacy of the iconography of the female nude. This image is the epitome of the recalcitrance that Clark speaks of with regard to Manet's painting. Kozyra brings the viewer face to face with an image of a woman who does not conform to the ideals of beauty that are expected in art and mass media. Furthermore, she presents the viewer with images of women who are near-death, forcing him to confront this inevitable aspect of existence that one would rather ignore, disregard, or keep hidden. By presenting these unsightly figures in the pose of a woman that once represented the ideal of feminine beauty (as it did in Titian's⁶³⁵ *Venus of Urbino*, 1538) she conflates the two ideas (beauty and ugliness), and the viewer cannot help but reject that which has been presented in a deceptive package, in the same way that nineteenth-century viewers rejected Manet's *Olympia*.

Clark's theory has been challenged several times⁶³⁶ since his original publication, and once by Charles Harrison, Michael Baldwin, and Mel Ramsden, in “Manet's ‘Olympia’ and Contradiction.”⁶³⁷ The authors' contention is that it was not the painting itself that failed to signify, nor was it the artist's failure, but rather the social

⁶³⁵ Tiziano Vecelli (1485-1576)

⁶³⁶ See Peter Wollen, “Manet: Modernism and Avant-Garde,” *Screen* 21 (Summer 1980): 15-25; Charles Bernheimer, “Manet's *Olympia*: the Figuration of Scandal,” in Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth Century France* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 89-128; Mieke Bal, “His Master's Eye,” in David Michael Levin, ed., *Modernity and Hegemony of Vision* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1993), 379-404; Charles Harrison, Michael Baldwin, and Mel Ramsden, in “Manet's ‘Olympia’ and Contradiction” *Block* 5 (1981): 34-42.

⁶³⁷ Charles Harrison, Michael Baldwin, and Mel Ramsden, in “Manet's ‘Olympia’ and Contradiction” *Block* 5 (1981): 34-42.

circumstances were such that notions of feminine beauty were undergoing shifts, and the painting simply embodies the tensions among the discordant public. In their words, “if contradictions are not resolvable in social life then they are not resolved in art.”⁶³⁸ Indeed the same could be said for Kozyra’s *Olympia*, given that it was created and exhibited in Poland also during a time when traditional notions of femininity, beauty, and the role of women in society were being called into question and even beginning to shift, as a result of changes that were occurring on the political level. Kozyra’s work also embodies the tensions between those opposing views of feminine beauty from various social spheres, including the political and the religious.

The Women’s Bathhouse

From September – October 1997 Kozyra exhibited *The Women’s Bathhouse* at the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw (Fig. 6.8, 6.9). While she was in Budapest in January of that year, attending an exhibition with *Pyramid of Animals*, Kozyra visited a Turkish Bath and decided to create *The Bathhouse* (*Łaźnia*),⁶³⁹ which she did that July and August. She described how her feelings in the bathhouse inspired her to create the performance:

That place completely enraptured me. A gloomy and dark place with an uncanny atmosphere. Strange women moving around and acting in a way so different from the way we see them everyday. There was everything in it but eroticism. Always, when I observe my friends, I totally adore that moment when they stop controlling themselves, when they forget that they have to please others, that they have to sell themselves. And I saw that same thing in the bathhouse.

Then when the Zachęta proposed the possibility of an exhibition to me, I immediately thought of the possibility of doing *Łaźnia* [*The Bathhouse* – AB].⁶⁴⁰

⁶³⁸ Ibid, 39.

⁶³⁹ This later became known as *The Woman’s Bathhouse* (*Łaźnia Żenska*), in order to distinguish it from her later performance, *The Men’s Bathhouse* (*Łaźnia Męska*). For purposes of consistency henceforth it will be referred to as *The Women’s Bathhouse*, except where it is referred to as *The Bathhouse* by others in citations.

⁶⁴⁰ “Miejsce to zachwyciło mnie bez reszty. Ponure i ciemne miejsce z niesamowitą atmosferą. Przedziwne kobiety poruszające się i zachowujące w sposób całkowicie odmienny od tego, co przyzwyczajeni jesteśmy

Kozyra was also condemned for this work, for two reasons: first of all, critics resented the fact that again she showed ugly, corpulent, awkward, aged naked bodies. More than that, however, those who spoke out against her and the work took issue with the fact that Kozyra filmed and exhibited these women without their permission.

With regard to the criticism of this work, one aspect that has been overlooked is the lack of tradition of bath and sauna culture in Poland. Unlike its German, Slavic, Baltic and Finno-Ugric neighbors, Poland has no popular tradition of going to public baths or saunas. Kozyra herself has agreed that this may have been a source of the misunderstanding of the work by Polish viewers.⁶⁴¹ While in Russia a trip to the *banya* (baths) or sauna is a common social practice, as is the *pirts* (sauna) in Latvia, or the thermal baths in Germany, Hungary or the Czech Republic, in Poland this is not the case. Although there are thermal spas on the territory of Poland, they are fewer in number and concentration than in neighboring countries. Public bathing is simply not part of common cultural practice in Poland. It is for that reason that Kozyra had to use a bathhouse in Hungary in the first place. The lack of this tradition also corresponds to the fact that Poland is a Catholic country, which has strict ideas with regard to public nudity and purity. A tradition that required one to be naked in public would contradict the strong Roman Catholic tendency. While this act of attending a public bathhouse would seem

oglądać na co dzień. Było w nich wszystko z wyjątkiem erotyki. Zawsze, gdy obserwuję moje koleżanki, to szalenie podoba mi się moment, gdy przestają się kontrolować, gdy zapominają, że trzeba się podobać, że należy się sprzedać. I to samo dostrzegłam w tej łaźni.

Toteż gdy zaproponowano mi ekspozycję w Zachęcie, od razu wpadłam na pomysł, że mogłaby to być 'Łaźnia.'"

Kozyra, "Coś mi siedzi z tyłu czaszki, rozmowa z Katarzyną Kozyrą, laureatką Paszportu "Polityki" w dziedzinie plastyki," 42-43.

⁶⁴¹ As confirmed by Kozyra in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

completely normal to citizens of Hungary, for example, it would be relatively foreign to a Pole, given the lack of that common cultural heritage.

Kozyra defended herself by saying that she felt justified in filming the women in the bathhouse because she had also previously exposed herself to viewers: “I filmed myself in *Olympia*, I was laid bare with a bald head and shaved pubes. After that experience I felt that I had the right to show those women.”⁶⁴² The artist claimed that the piece was not malicious, and she meant no harm by displaying these women. For her, these women were beautiful because they were acting naturally, consequently there was no harm in presenting them in her work. As she said:

I did it in the name of what I thought was a good and right idea. I knew I wasn't really hurting anyone. I'm not poking fun at anyone; to me, there's no such thing as a defective body. Everybody is the way they are, while there's this pressure on the part of the media for people to live up to some kind of stereotype. I was interested in how the raw material looks, that is, what people are really like.⁶⁴³

Kozyra knew that the work would have been completely unsuccessful if she had asked for permission to film the women, or if the camera had been visible. “These women weren't playing, weren't pretending. They just were. In any other situation it would have been impossible, because always, when we know that someone is watching, we pretend,”⁶⁴⁴ the artist maintained. Anda Rottenberg, then director of the Zachęta Gallery,

⁶⁴² “Filmowałam samą siebie w “Olimpii,” obnażyłam się z łysą czaszką i łysym łonem. Po takim doświadczeniu uważałam, że mam prawo pokazać te kobiety.”

Katarzyna Kozyra, “Sztuka z flaków i cierpienia,” interview by Beata Maciejewska, *Marie Claire* 6 (June 1999): no page no.

⁶⁴³ Katarzyna Kozyra, “In a Men's Bathhouse — Men, Two Cameras, and One Woman,” interview by Christopher Blase, http://www.katarzynakozyra.com.pl/womens_bath_txt.html. Accessed October 29, 2007.

⁶⁴⁴ “Te kobiety nie grały, nie udawały. One po prostu były. W innej sytuacji byłoby to niemożliwe, bo zawsze, gdy wiemy, że ktoś na nas patrzy, udajemy.” Kozyra, “Sztuka z flaków i cierpienia,” no page no.

and curator of the Polish Pavilion at the 48th Venice Biennale, also defended Kozyra's choices, explaining that "the body, as long as we don't touch it, don't destroy it, don't cause it to be crippled, is the same artistic material as any other."⁶⁴⁵ In point of fact Kozyra views her actions as something similar to what one sees in documentary images. In her words, filming people in *The Men's Bathhouse*, "was more of an opportunity like National Geographic, one can observe guys in the same way that one would observe ants."⁶⁴⁶ Indeed, none of the individuals who were filmed in the bathhouse ever took her to court, nor did they threaten to, for her filming them without their permission.⁶⁴⁷

When asked what she would like viewers to understand when seeing *The Women's Bathhouse*, Kozyra responded that by showing women as they really are (not touched up), she hoped that other women would be able to identify with them, and appreciate their own beauty, because "all women are beautiful, regardless of their age, not only the young and beautiful ones,"⁶⁴⁸ she said. In fact, the artist mentioned that at the opening for the exhibition, several women came up to her and thanked her for the piece, for presenting a new or alternative view of women that isn't normally seen in art or visual

⁶⁴⁵ "Ciało, o ile go nie dotykamy, nie niszczymy, nie powodujemy kalectwa, jest taką samą materią artystyczną jak każda inna."

Anda Rottenberg, "Tabu jest po to aby jej łamac," interview by Jerzy Szerszunowicz, *Kurier poranny* (Białystok) (October 14, 1997): no page no.

⁶⁴⁶ "To raczej była okazja na taki National Geographic, wiesz jak podglądasz na przykład mrówki tak tu podglądasz chłopów."

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

⁶⁴⁷ There was one incident with regard to *The Men's Bathhouse*, where one of the directors of Hungarian television, who had been caught by her camera, was thinking of taking her to court for invasion of privacy. When clips from *The Men's Bathhouse* were shown on Hungarian television, it turned out that those where this man appeared were the ones that were shown. In the end, he decided not to sue her, as that would have resulted in even more unwanted exposure for himself.

"Jeśli chodzi o Łazienkę Męską to ja niechcący taką grubą szychę sfilmowałam, dyrektora węgierskiej telewizji czy coś. No i z tego mogło coś wynikać. No i właśnie potem tą jedyną rzecz jaką pokazali w węgierskiej telewizji to była ta szycha. Potem słyszałam, że on wystąpi do sądu czy coś, ale zrezygnował, bo wtedy on sam by za dużo sobie namieszał. Jeszcze więcej ludzi by się o tym dowiedziało."

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

⁶⁴⁸ "Tak naprawdę to kobiety są piękne w każdym wieku, nie tylko te młode i piękne."

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September, 2007.

images.⁶⁴⁹ In this sense her message was received by some of her viewers, the ones that were perhaps more used to post-modern visual expression. Indeed as we will see with all of her work it is the case that those used to understanding and interpreting artistic expression can and do appreciate her art for the message it sends, but for those who have not been trained in this visual language the message is invariably lost.

Blood Ties

Kozyra's 1995 photographic piece *Blood Ties* (*Więzy Krwi*), consists of four large-scale photographs of the artist and her sister, arranged in a square (Fig. 6.10). The piece was actually censored when two of the panels from it were exhibited on billboards in public spaces throughout Poland in 1999, owing to the content, which members of religious institutions and city authorities found objectionable (Fig 6.11). The work was initially conceived as protest piece against the war in the former Yugoslavia, specifically with regard to the victimization that women endured during the war. Later, when the piece was exhibited in 1999 in major cities across Poland in conjunction with *Galerie Zewnętrzna AMS* (*The Outdoor Gallery – by the Art Marketing Syndicate*),⁶⁵⁰ the images were understood as a reference to the war in Kosovo. In one of the photographs Kozyra herself is photographed lying naked on a red half-moon; in the other, her crippled sister⁶⁵¹ lies flat on a background of a red cross.

Kozyra was attacked first of all for using the copyrighted symbol of the red cross and the red half moon, which are the symbols of the humanitarian aid organizations that

⁶⁴⁹ “No i kobiety też były bardzo zadowolone, że to były prawdziwe kobiety a nie jakieś laski wiesz pod odpowiednim kątem sfotografowane. Taki był właściwie zamiar.”

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September, 2007.

⁶⁵⁰ AMS is a Poznan-based company that owns billboards. From 1998-2002 they created a project for public art on public billboards, which were displayed on billboards throughout a number of Polish cities.

⁶⁵¹ Kozyra's sister has one leg that is amputated; the cause of this is unknown.

brought relief to the people in Bosnia. She was also condemned for combining naked female bodies with a religious symbol (the cross). According to Aneta Szyłak, one right-wing politician from Gdańsk saw the image as Satanist, because Kozyra's sister is lying upside-down on the cross.⁶⁵² Critics of the images were also outraged by the fact that she showed her sister as a cripple, with her deformed leg exposed. When religious and municipal organizations got to know that these posters would be displayed on city streets, they began a campaign against them, through the media, for the reasons listed above.

Szyłak reported that one representative of the political party Electoral Action Solidarity (*Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność*), Joanna Fabisiak, collected 800 signatures from Warsaw inhabitants against the poster.⁶⁵³ Representatives of religious and government institutions, as well as citizens, sent letters to AMS demanding that the images be removed. Szyłak also stated that some members of the Polish Parliament attempted to gain support for their protest from members of the Islamic community in Warsaw, by contacting various embassies. According to her, however, the plan didn't work, because "those diplomats declared politely that actually they enjoyed the pictures."⁶⁵⁴ Still, owing to public pressure, AMS was forced to work out a compromise with the artist to cover the naked women⁶⁵⁵ (Fig. 6.12). As Kozyra remembers, this occurred just a few days before a

⁶⁵² Aneta Szyłak, "Have Billboards Changed the Meaning of Public Space in Poland?," *M/E/A/N/I/N/G Online* 1 (2002): <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/epc/meaning/01/anetaszylak.html>.

⁶⁵³ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁵ When asked why she agreed to the censoring of her work, she responded that she really had no choice. Either she agreed to the images being covered, or they wouldn't have been displayed at all. Kozyra stated that the works weren't covered immediately, so at least they were shown for a few days in their original form. The artist said that she was happy that her works were seen for at least a few days before being covered, and even after they were covered, she was content with the fact that she received some exposure, even despite the fact that the work was no longer being in its original form.

"No tak no co i oni się tak zabezpieczyli, że jak będzie jakaś afera czy coś to że oni będą mogli to zakleić. No i ja im powiedziałam, że mogą. To znaczy jak bym powiedziała, że nie mogą to oni by to całe zakleili a tak to tylko tą białą część. Nie miałam w sumie nic do gadania. No ale jeden dzień czy dwa to wisiało takie także było dobrze już nie pamiętam ile to wisiało. Więc gdybym na początku powiedziała „nie nie zgadzam

visit of Pope John Paul II⁶⁵⁶ to his homeland.⁶⁵⁷ Szyłak reported that there were even more serious consequences for the artist, since as a result of the scandal, funding for her project at the Polish Pavilion of the Venice Biennale was “radically cut.”⁶⁵⁸

With *The Men's Bathhouse*, which the artist worked on from January – April 1999 and displayed in June – November 1999, at the Venice Biennale, the artist reached the pinnacle of controversy surrounding her art in Poland, finding herself at the center of more debates in the popular press than ever. While the artist doesn't endeavor to cause such scandals with her work she does, however, hope that she will provoke audiences to think. She feels that “it's worse when art has no influence. If some thing [meaning anything she encounters in life – AB] has no affect on me, it's like it isn't real, it's unimportant, I can't enter into a dialogue with it.”⁶⁵⁹ In this regard Kozyra has accomplished her goal because she did start a public discussion about the definition and meaning of art, which would hopefully lead to the reconsideration of the generally held attitudes to beauty and gender as she addresses them in her work.

Controversy Surrounding *The Men's Bathhouse*

The debate surrounding *The Men's Bathhouse* (Figs. 0.6, 6.13, 6.14) took place through a series of articles, essays and letters to the editor in the Polish popular press. The

się żebyście mi to zaklejali” to prawdopodobnie oni by tego wcale nie plakatowali. A tak to wisiało trochę.”

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

⁶⁵⁶ Karol Józef Wojtyła, or Pope John Paul II (1920-2005), 264th Pope of the Roman Catholic Church and Sovereign of the State of the Vatican City, 1978-2005

⁶⁵⁷ “Ale to nie było tak że oni sami postanowili to ocenzurować, tylko jakieś grupki się zaczęły rzucać. Noi potem to ocenzurowali. To nie była wiesz jakaś sztuczna akcja, że najpierw to zawiesimy a potem ocenzurujemy, wiesz. Tylko to było jakiś dzień przed przyjazdem papieża czy coś. Po prostu tak wyszło nie wierzę, że to było zaplanowane.”

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

⁶⁵⁸ Aneta Szyłak, “Have Billboards Changed the Meaning of Public Space in Poland?,”

⁶⁵⁹ “Gorzej, kiedy wogóle nie ma oddziaływania. Jeśli na mnie jakaś rzecz nie wywrze wrażenia to jest nieistotna, nieważna, nie wchodzę z nią w dialog.”

Katarzyna Kozyra, “Was will das weib?” interview by Monika Adamczyk, *Machina* 7/28 (July 1998): 80-81.

main participants were educated citizens, professors in the humanities, although with admittedly no background in art, art history or art criticism. They were people who claimed to be speaking for the average Polish citizen. Another dialogue surrounding the work took place on a completely different plane by art historians, art critics and curators, both in Poland and abroad, who supported her work and recognized it in its own right for its investigation of gender roles and gender identity. The criticism of her work was centered on the following main issues: the representation of the male body in film and the artist's use of a fake penis, both of which (in the eyes of the critics) reduced the work to mere pornography; the use of the work to represent the Polish nation at the Venice Biennale; the question of taste and whether the work was even art at all; the use of tax money to fund the work; and the fairness of the competition to choose the Polish representative of the Biennale. The responsible critics, those in the field of art, feel that the work was perceived as controversial for the following reasons: lack of education, lack of explanation about the artwork, and the inherent conservatism of the Polish people in general. The dialogues and exchanges on these very issues will be represented below.

The most controversial item of Kozyra's performance was the element by which she gained access to the bathhouse, the rubber phallus. In an opinion piece in the conservative newspaper *Życia*, entitled "But what about good taste?" the current editor at that time, Łukasz Warzecha,⁶⁶⁰ described *The Men's Bathhouse* as nothing more than pornography. His tone is scornful and his description deprecating:

⁶⁶⁰ At the time of the controversy surrounding *The Men's Bathhouse*, Warzecha was a journalist for *Życia*, a conservative newspaper that had been established in 1996. He now writes as a political analyst for *Fakt* (*Fact*), a Polish tabloid-style daily newspaper modeled on the German magazine *Bild*, which was established in 2003.

A woman glues on a fake moustache and beard, fake chest hair, and a fake penis, and after that she goes into a men's bathhouse and observes the people bathing, filming them with a hidden camera. What the heck is that? Someone naïve could think that it is a porn film from a second-rate video shop. He would even show it in a way that had no connection with art, and this new face in contemporary Polish art would be foreign to him.⁶⁶¹

His final statement shows that he felt that the work did not, in fact, represent Polish art, given that "a naïve" viewer would not notice anything particularly Polish about the film. Later in the same article, in a similar statement, he said that "if the average person saw a piece of that film, he would think: oh, just another porno."⁶⁶² Zbigniew Górniak, a journalist for *Nowa Trybuna Opolska* (*The New Opole Tribune*, a daily for the region of Opole) and author of an opinion piece entitled "Success with a rubber" also made a comparison between *The Men's Bathhouse* and pornography, opining that "a more suitable name for the 'work' of the Polish artist would be something from the innumerable porn film festivals. [Kozyra's] little film, called a contemporary installation, could actually be placed in the category of 'peeping' and 'fetishism.'"⁶⁶³ He also commented on the use of the phallus, stating that "it is enough to go to a sex shop to be

⁶⁶¹ "Kobieta przykleja sobie sztuczne wąsy i brodę, sztuczne włosy na piersiach i sztucznego penisa z gumy, po czym wchodzi do męskiej łaźni i tam podgląda kąpiących się, filmując ich ukrytą kamerą. Co to takiego? Ktoś naiwny mógłby pomyśleć, że to film pornograficzny z jakiejś podrzędnej wypożyczalni. Pokazałby jednak w ten sposób, że nie ma żadnej łączności z artystycznym Parnasem i obce mu są nowe twarze współczesnej polskiej sztuki. Kobieta ze sztucznym penisem to artystka Katarzyna Kozyra, scena w łaźni to dzieło sztuki pt. "Łaźnia męska." I to dzieło nie byle jakie, bo wybrane do reprezentowania naszego kraju na Weneckim Biennale Sztuki."

Łukasz Warzecha, "A Dobry Smak?," *Życia* (June 1, 1999): 18.

⁶⁶² "Gdyby przeciętny człowiek zobaczył kadry z jej film, to pomyślałby sobie: jakiś kolejny pornos." Anda Rottenberg and Sławomir Ratajsky, "Teraz Kozyra?," interview by Łukasz Warzecha, *Życia* (June 1, 1999): 18.

⁶⁶³ "...bardziej stosownym adresem dla "dzieła" polskiej artystki byłby któryś z niezliczonych festiwali filmów porno. Jej filmik, zwany nowocześnie instalacją, mógłby startować w kategoriach "podgląctwo" i "fetyszyzm.""

Zbigniew Górniak, "Sukces z gumy," *Nowa Trybuna Opolska* (Opole) 146 (June 25, 1999): no page no.

convinced of the fact that a rubber dildo costs much, much less [than the performance did – AB].”⁶⁶⁴

Journalists focused on the element of the penis in their articles, writing witty quips and catchy titles of their articles to both poke fun at and debase the work. They also took issue with the fact that it was this penis, as opposed to the work of art of which it was a part, that was to represent Poland at an international art exhibition. In an interview, Warzecha asked the then Vice Minister of Culture, Sławomir Ratajsky directly: “how do you feel as a minister of the country which will be represented by Katarzyna Kozyra’s film with a glued-on penis?”⁶⁶⁵ In his article, Piotr Gadzinowski, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the satirical weekly *Nie (No)*, asked, “can the Republic of Poland be represented by a dick abroad? Be represented respectably? All the more that it is a dick of the *most subjective* sort, because it’s a female one. Additionally, it is a fake dick.”⁶⁶⁶ The fake penis, as the representative of a sex that the artist was not, was highly offensive to these critics not only because of the fact that Kozyra, as a woman, had no right to possess it, but also for the fact that she exhibited this stolen gender identifier as her own, at an international art exhibition.

⁶⁶⁴ “Wystarczy wejść do byle sex-shopu, aby przekonać się, że gumowy dildo kosztuje o wiele, wiele mniej.”

Górniak, “Sukces z gumy,” no page no.

⁶⁶⁵ “Jak się Pan czuje jako minister kraju, który będzie reprezentowany przez film z panią Katarzyną Kozyrą z doklejonym gumowym penisem?”

Rottenberg and Ratajsky, “Teraz Kozyra?,” 18.

⁶⁶⁶ “Czy Rzeczpospolitą Polską może reprezentować za granicą zwykły chuj? Reprezentować godnie? Tym bardziej iż jest to chuj najpodlejszego gatunku, bo damski. W dodatku chuj sztuczny.”

Piotr Gadzinowski, “Wólek i ochuczenie,” *Nie* (Warszawa) 23 (June 10, 1999): no page no.

Many questioned whether *The Men's Bathhouse* was, in fact, a work of art at all. Ryszard Legutko,⁶⁶⁷ a professor of philosophy who often published articles in such major journals as *Wprost*, *Rzeczpospolitej*, and *Życie*, wrote a Letter to the Editor of *Życie* stating that in his opinion *The Men's Bathhouse* was not art, but simply an attempt at scandal, and a failed one at that. He said that “yet one more time it turns out that “scandalous art” is a good way to make a career. I used quotation marks because in this situation there is neither art nor scandal...”⁶⁶⁸ Others echoed that sentiment, such as the anonymous authors in *Życie*, known simply by the initials A.H.A. and W.W.W., who scathingly remarked: “‘I provoke, I provoke, I provoke’ – it seems that Kozyra is screaming with her work.”⁶⁶⁹ These authors also posed the question as to whether “observing naked, fat, deformed bodies [is] even art, or is it maybe just a simple provocation?”⁶⁷⁰ Finally, Górniak also took up the ‘art’ issue, stating that “the most irritating thing is the fact that her works are called art.”⁶⁷¹ These writers were so shocked because of precisely the fact of what the work was about. By adopting the appearance, and genitals, of a man, and entering a male-only space, Kozyra demonstrated that gender, as opposed to sex, was a mere social construct. This revelation went in complete contradiction to the stability and order of things that forms the very foundation of a

⁶⁶⁷ Until 2005 Ryszard Legutko was the Chairman of the Center of Political Thought (*Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej*) in Poland, an institution involved in political analysis. Since 2004 Legutko has been a senator in the Polish Senate, and in 2007 received the nomination to become the National Minister of Education.

⁶⁶⁸ “Po raz kolejny stanowi nadal dobry sposób robienia kariery. Użyłem cudzysłowu, bo tak naprawdę nie mamy do czynienia ani ze sztuką, ani ze skandalem...”

Ryszard Legutko, “Dama z fallusem,” *Życie* 142 (June 21, 1999): no page no.

⁶⁶⁹ “Prowokuję, prowokuję, prowokuję – zdaje się krzyczeć Kozyra ze swoich prac.”

A.H.A., W.W.W., “Czy podglądanie jest sztuką?,” *Życie* 121 (May 26, 1999): no page no.

⁶⁷⁰ “...czy podglądanie nagich, otyłych, zdeformowanych ciał jest w ogóle sztuką, czy jest to może zwykła prostacka prowokacja?”

A.H.A., W.W.W., “Czy Podglądanie jest sztuką?”

⁶⁷¹ “Najbardziej irytujące jest to, że jej, Kozyry, dziełka nazywane są sztuką i po odpowiednim namaszczeniu – także finansowym – wysyłane na znaczące konkursy.”

Górniak “Sukces z gumy.”

society. By challenging that order, she challenged the stability of the world of these critics as well. As a consequence, they felt threatened, and, in a defensive move, accused her work of not being a work of art at all.

The issue of whether or not *The Men's Bathhouse* was art was also connected with what these critics considered to be art in general, and moreover what they thought of contemporary art techniques such as performance, video, and conceptual art. Legutko summed up the debate surrounding *The Men's Bathhouse* by stating that it reflected the state of affairs in the arts at that time. According to him, standards had been lowered by the employment of contemporary art methods, and the quality and validity of the visual arts, specifically, had suffered as a result. As he stated, what the controversy confirmed

...is that fact that the plastic arts community today is in chaos. The majority of us complain about the lowering of criteria in art, but in literature or music these criteria still stand, in spite of everything. You also can't escape fraudulence, but to create some kind of canon you have to have a certain sense of values. Currently a completely destructive aesthetic is dominating the plastic arts, which is allowed not only to appear in an unhygienically great number of various artistic trends, but also creates an establishment in the form of critics, gallery owners and bureaucrats, for whom this state of things is very convenient.⁶⁷²

Legutko is a professor of philosophy at Jagiellonian University, one of Poland's top universities. He was educated in Poland during the 1960s and 70s under the communist system, at a time when performance art was just beginning to develop in Poland, albeit in underground circles. Although he writes extensively on history and social issues, he

⁶⁷² "... to fakt, iż środowisko plastyczne jest dzisiaj w stanie chaosu. Większość z nas narzeka na upadek kryteriów w sztuce, ale w literaturze czy muzyce pewne kryteria nadal mimo wszystko obowiązują. Szalbierstwa nie da się tam również uniknąć, lecz ukształtowana hierarchia mniej więcej odpowiada rzeczywistym wartościom. W plastyce natomiast panuje kompletne zniżenie estetyczne, co pozwala nie tylko pojawiać się w niehygienicznie wielkich ilościach rozmaitym artystycznym naciągaczom, ale nadto tworzy establishment w postaci krytyków, marchandów, właścicieli galerii i biurokratów, dla których taki stan rzeczy jest niezwykle wygodny." Legutko, "Dama z fallusem," 142.

remains ignorant with regard to contemporary art practice. Later in his article he stated that the reason that Kozyra's was able to acquire the title of art was that "art" as an institution, no longer had any rules governing it. In his words, "in a situation where there is no criteria then any work can become art, and if it does become a work of art then there is nothing in this state that can deprive it of that title."⁶⁷³ As a professor of philosophy Legutko represents a member of the upper echelons of Polish society in terms of education and supposed cultural knowledge, yet he remains limited by this communist approach to the arts, with its narrow range of official techniques and standards. Nevertheless it is possible that his opinion was held in esteem by the public, owing to his background, which means that his articles could carry a significant weight to those that read them.

In an interview with Rottenberg, Warzecha questioned the curator in order to find out what the limits of art actually were. First he asked if it would be considered art if he staged a performance connected with the throwing of shit, to which Rottenberg replied that it had already been done.⁶⁷⁴ He then took the idea further, and asked if something connected with eating shit would be considered art. Rottenberg replied that it, too, had already been done, by Pasolini.⁶⁷⁵ An anonymous author in a Bydgoszcz newspaper, *The Illustrated Polish Courier* (*Ilustrowany kurier polski*), also made a sarcastic comment comparing Kozyra's work to a piece of shit, stating that "when it comes time to 'take care of business' it's worth knowing that we can do it in public, in the gallery, in front of

⁶⁷³ "W sytuacji braku kryteriów dowolne dzieło może stać się sztuką, a gdy już się nią stanie, nic nie jest w stanie go tego statusu pozbawić." Legutko, "Dama z fallusem," 142.

⁶⁷⁴ "Czyli gdybym ja zaplanował jakiś performance, coś na przykład z wydalaniem ekskrementów, to też mógłbym powiedzieć, że to sztuka i..."

Rottenberg and Ratajsky, "Teraz Kozyra?," 18.

⁶⁷⁵ Italian film director Pier Paolo Pasolini's (1922-1975) 1975 film *Salò* depicts characters eating excrement.

enraptured art critics, who will interpret our act as something beautiful.”⁶⁷⁶ In the Polish language, art and literature are called, respectively *sztuki piękne* and *literatura piękna*, literally “the beautiful arts” and “beautiful literature.” The term with regard to literature refers to the classics, to high literature, as opposed to pulp or popular fiction. With art it also takes on this connotation of something higher, greater than the everyday. The term implies that art must be something *beautiful*, which would involve a classical style of painting or sculpture. Thus there is also a standard of beauty maintained by art (in addition to the one created by advertising and mass-media), which Kozyra clearly flouts. Kozyra’s work does not fit into the rubric that requires art to be aesthetically pleasing according to traditional taste, even though Kozyra herself stated that it was in fact these natural bodies, not touched up or altered, that she found distinctly beautiful.

Stanisław Tabisz, Secretary of the Council of the Association of Polish Plastic Arts (*Związek Polskich Artystów Plastyków*) and a painter himself, also did not see any artistic value in Kozyra’s work, and his statement in “Nonsense on the highway of success” reflects his refusal to accept the explanation that had been given regarding the work. He agreed with others’ notions that it had been created purely for shock value, and that the artist had presented that shock in the guise of a work about identity. He also called the work ‘stupid’:

I don’t intend to analyze the worthless importance and paralyzing premise of the work of Kozyra here, because I consider it too hopelessly stupid, and in a certain sense pathological, because it is dependent on primitive and futile phallo-genital

⁶⁷⁶ “W każdym razie gdy przyjdzie nam załatwić potrzebę fizjologiczną, warto wiedzieć, że możemy to zrobić publicznie, w galerii, przy zachwycie krytyków sztuki, którzy nasz akt twórczy pięknie zinterpretują.”

“Zadek Papkina (i nie tylko) – czyli o sztuce wyzwolonej,” *Ilustrowany kurier polski* (Bydgoszcz) 122 (June 26-27, 1999): no page no.

shock. It is dependent on shock with naturalistic ‘special effects’ allegedly expressing the universal theme of ‘identity.’⁶⁷⁷

Tabisz (b. 1956) is a painter, trained in traditional studio art techniques at the Jan Matejko Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, whose painting motifs include fantastical scenes of landscapes or animals, and whose drawings are often of the female nude. Although trained as an artist he remains committed to the traditional techniques of art making. Because Kozyra’s work does not conform to the type of fine arts that he practices himself, he, too, finds it threatening, as it challenges his long-held notion as to what art should be, look like, and how it should function in the world.

“The Most Common Piece of Nonsense Paid for by Public Funds”⁶⁷⁸

One issue common to all discussions in the press of contemporary art was that of funding. Many of Kozyra’s critics were outraged by the fact that a work that they did not consider to be art, but rather pornography, that was lacking in taste and beauty, should be paid for by public tax money. In fact *The Men’s Bathhouse* was supported by both public and private funds. The Polish Ministry of Culture awarded the Polish representative of the Venice Biennale the sum of 200,000 Polish złoty (approximately \$65,000), which was not enough to complete the project. The remaining funding of 30,000 PLN (approximately \$9,700) came from a private source: a new fashion magazine called “Max.” Nevertheless, both parties were criticized for supporting Kozyra’s work

⁶⁷⁷ “Nie zamierzam w tym tekście analizować bezcennej doniosłości i porażającego przesłania dzieła Katarzyny Kozyry, ponieważ uważam je za beznadziejnie głupie, a nawet w pewnym sensie patologiczne, bo obliczone na prymitywny i jałowy, falloczno-genitalny szok. Polega on m.in. epatowaniu naturalistycznymi “efektami specjalnymi” rzekomo wyrażającymi uniwersalny problem “tożsamości.”” Stanisław Tabisz, “Bzdet na autostradzie sukcesu,” *Dziennik Polski* (Kraków) 150 (June 30, 1999): 14.

⁶⁷⁸ The title of this section is taken from Tabisz’s comment on *The Men’s Bathhouse*, stating that it was the most common piece of nonsense paid for by public funds.

“...najzwyklejszy bzdet za publiczne pieniądze”

Tabisz, “Bzdet na autostradzie sukcesu,” 14.

financially. Barbara Niemiec, a doctor of humanities and Professor Emeritus at the Jagiellonian University's Institute of Pedagogy in Kraków expressed her outrage at the use of public money to support *The Men's Bathhouse*: "Kozyra can do whatever she wants (I think that being involuntarily participants in her experimental work with freedom in their own name, is questionable) under certain conditions. Let her do it in her own name and with her own money. There is no reason to confuse her understanding of art with that of Poland's, nor with public money."⁶⁷⁹ Her statement also reflects the fact that Kozyra held a different notion than the rest of the Polish people as to what was art. Because her view did not conform to that of the rest, it followed, for Niemiec, that the work should not have represented the country at an international art exhibition.

In "Nonsense on the highway of success" Tabisz called *The Men's Bathhouse* "the most common piece of nonsense paid for by public money."⁶⁸⁰ He went on to inform readers that the 200,000 PLN that was awarded to Kozyra by the Polish Ministry of Culture was more than the entire Union of Polish Artists (which has about 10,000 members working in 22 different branches throughout Poland) received in one year. By comparison, their allotment from the Ministry of Culture is only 10,000 PLN (approximately 4,400 USD).⁶⁸¹ Górniak also stated that the most annoying fact about Kozyra is "that her works are called art, and after this specific anointing as art, have also

⁶⁷⁹ "Kozyrze wolno (chyba, że mimowolni uczestnicy jej twórczego eksperymentu wolność ową w imię własnej, zakwestionują) pod pewnym wszakże warunkami. Niech to czyni na własną odpowiedzialność i za własne pieniądze. Nie ma popędu mieszania do jej rozumienia sztuki imienia Polski ani pieniędzy publicznych."

Barbara Niemiec, "Łaźnia mózgów," *Tygodnik Solidarność* (Warszawa) 25 (June 18, 1999): no page no.

⁶⁸⁰ "...najzwyklejszy budżet za publiczne pieniądze"

Tabisz, "Bzdety na autostradzie sukcesu," 14.

⁶⁸¹ "Astronomiczne dofinansowanie dzieła jednego artysty (kwota 200 tys. zł) wydaje się grubo przesadzone, gdy dla porównania, całe środowisko Związku Polskich Artystów Plastyków (w liczbie ok. Tys. Profesjonalnych twórców) działające w 22 okręgach na terenie całej Polski, otrzymuje roczną dotację z MKiS poniżej tych 200 tys. zł."

Tabisz, "Bzdety na autostradzie sukcesu," 14.

been financed – and sent to meaningful competitions.”⁶⁸² From their comments, it is clear that these detractors feel that a monetary value can be placed on art, that one work of art is deserving of support and another is not, but they are evasive on the specific point of their rating system. Because of the fact that *they*, as Polish citizens acting as the voice of the people (insofar as they were educated in matters of culture and the humanities and writing for major newspaper publications) do not consider it art means that public funds should not be used to send this work to an art exhibition, much less one that represents the entire nation as a whole.

The final point which Kozyra’s opponents make clear is the fact that they do not believe in the fairness of the selection process for the Biennale. One went so far as to indict the institution of art in Poland as a whole, calling it an undemocratic structure akin to an old boys’ club where those who are favored by the ones in charge are selected and promoted. This was the opinion of Joanna Skoczyła, a well-known writer for *Sztuka Polska (Polish Art)* a monthly magazine devoted to the subject, the equivalent of *Art in America*. In her article “Art under the influence of narcotics,” she plainly gave her opinion that “of course in art there is no democracy,”⁶⁸³ meaning that those who were selected by juries and those who won competitions did so because of favoritism and connections, as opposed to their own merit. Although Skoczyła recognized Kozyra as a competent artist, her article was an indictment of the process whereby Kozyra was chosen, stating that too much surrounding her selection had been kept secret, from the

⁶⁸² “Najbardziej irytujące jest to, że jej, Kozyry, dziełka nazywane są sztuką i po odpowiednim namaszczeniu – także finansowym – wysyłane na znaczące konkursy.”

Górniak, “Sukces z gumy.”

⁶⁸³ “Oczywiście w sztuce nie ma demokracji. Ale dlaczego jedyna, naprawdę licząca się międzynarodowa szansa dla polskich artystów ma być ukryta pod korcem? Dlaczego odbiera się ją wielu utalentowanym, wybitnym?”

Joanna Skoczyła, “Sztuka pod narkozą,” *Trybuna* (Warsaw) 83 (April 9, 1999): no page no.

initial competition to the final work. According to her, none of the details regarding the competition, such as where and when it took place, which artists participated, and who was on the committee, were publicly known.

As maintained by the then-Vice Minister of Culture, an open competition was indeed held by the Polish Ministry of Culture, with a jury made up of “well-known representatives of the art world,”⁶⁸⁴ meaning art critics and art historians, among them Anda Rottenberg, the then-Director of the Zachęta National Gallery of Art.⁶⁸⁵ Although it had been announced that Kozyra had been chosen as the Polish representative, the specifics of the work to be exhibited were not revealed until the opening in Venice. Skoczyła made a comparison to the selection of the artist Robert Colescott (b. 1925) for the American pavilion at the Biennale the previous year, and praised the opacity of the American methods as an example of true democracy, stating that “every proposition was from the beginning publicly known, as were the members of the committee making the choice. Because democracy has its standards and procedures. No one can be surprised by the decision at the last moment.”⁶⁸⁶ She then went on to suggest that if the competition in Poland had truly been an open one, then more artists would have participated, stating that “it was known that (probably) a competition was taking place for a project for the Venice Biennale. I write ‘probably’ because if there really was a competition, meaning clear and

⁶⁸⁴ “Jury składa się z wybitnych przedstawicieli świata artystycznego...”

Rottenberg and Ratajsky, “Teraz Kozyra?” 18.

⁶⁸⁵ Indeed Rottenberg herself has also been the victim of the controversies in the arts in Poland in the 1990s. In 2000, she was fired as director of the Zachęta Gallery for her support of the Maurizio Cattelan installation, *The Ninth Hour*, which was a life-size plaster cast of Pope John Paul II lying on the ground after having been struck by a meteorite. The Members of Parliament who called for her resignation stated that “a civil servant of Jewish origin” should not be spending the Roman Catholic majority’s money on reprehensible works of art.

⁶⁸⁶ “wszystkie propozycje były oczywiście od początku publicznie znane, podobno jak skład komisji dokonującej wyboru. Bo demokracja ma swoje standardy, procedury. Nikt nikogo nie zaskakuje wyborem w ostatniej chwili.”

Skoczyła, “Sztuka pod narkozą.”

open to Polish artists (of whom there are some 10,000) there surely would have been more propositions presented [than were recorded – AB].”⁶⁸⁷ Finally, Skoczyła took issue with the fact that the work that Kozyra would present at the Biennale was being kept secret. In point of fact the task of the selection committee was to choose the *artist* to represent Poland at the Biennale; the artist was able to decide on the work. Skoczyła considered this a matter of public knowledge, especially given the fact that her work represented the Polish people: “why does the only one, truly the one on whom all of Poland is counting for international success, have to be kept hidden under a cork?”⁶⁸⁸ she asked.

In contrast to the above statements, Kozyra feels that the 1999 competition for the Polish representative of the Biennale

was the first open and free competition of its kind that everyone could take part in. Absolutely everyone could take part with whatever they wanted to, you simply had to have an idea and be able to present it... But you know it was so weird, because in spite of everything, despite the fact that it was free and open to all to participate, only three curators presented potential work. No one else. It was just Hanka [Hania Wróblewska – AB] with me, some other gallery director and someone else.⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁷ “...gdyby odbył się konkurs prawdziwy, czyli jawny i otwarty dla polskich twórców (których jest kilkanaście tysięcy) z pewnością byłoby więcej propozycji niż tyle, co kot napłakał.”
Skoczyła, “Sztuka pod narkozą.”

⁶⁸⁸ “Oczywiście w sztuce nie ma demokracji. Ale dlaczego jedyna, naprawdę licząca się międzynarodowa szansa dla polskich artystów ma być ukryta pod korcem? Dlaczego odbiera się ją wielu utalentowanym, wybitnym?”

Skoczyła, “Sztuka pod narkozą.”

⁶⁸⁹ “Zaczy się to był pierwszy taki wolny konkurs, w którym mógł uczestniczyć każdy. Wszyscy po prostu mogli uczestniczyć wszyscy, co chcieli tylko musieli mieć pomysł i musieli umieć go przedstawić.... No i wiesz to i tak dziwnie było, że mimo wszystko, że wszyscy mogli startować to wystartowało tylko trzech kuratorów. No po prostu już nikt inny, no właśnie to była Hanka [Wróblewska] ze mną, jakaś inna galeria miejska i ktoś tam.”

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

As she recalls, Wróblewska had discussed the project with Kozyra beforehand. The artist knew that she had wanted to do *The Men's Bathhouse*, but maintained that ever since a copy of her *Pyramid of Animals* was produced by Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan (b. 1960), she has been quite afraid of plagiarism⁶⁹⁰ (Fig. 6.15). Furthermore, there was the issue of funding, as once Kozyra had known that she had won the competition, she wasn't sure that there would be enough money to complete the project.

Explanation for and Reasons behind the Controversy

In the newly democratic Republic of Poland, Kozyra's work occupied a liminal position that responded neither to traditions of official or unofficial art, with their unified agendas of expressions of nationalism, albeit from opposite sides of the spectrum. This section will explore the reasons that Kozyra's art was, in fact, so subversive in Poland in the 1990s, owing to a cultural milieu that was much different from that of the West, as well as a lack of a context for the work within her own country.

Anda Rottenberg included the media as a guilty party, as well as the insufficiency of knowledge of contemporary art in Poland. Her opinion is that although superficial

⁶⁹⁰ In 1995 in what could be considered an act of outright plagiarism, Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan created a near-exact copy of *Pyramid of Animals*, entitled *Love Saves Life*. According to Kozyra, Cattelan claimed that he hadn't known about her work at the time that he created his. When asked why she didn't take him to court, she replied that she felt it would have been futile, as it would have been difficult to prove. This is especially the case because of the fact that the work didn't appear in any gallery or commercial venue, and it was from somewhere abroad in Poland, thus it would have been difficult for her to argue that Cattelan had seen the image. Furthermore, she felt that her status as an artist was much lower than his at the time, as she was known only in Poland, and he was more world-renowned. This also made her feel that it would be difficult to take him to task for the issue. When asked why she kept *The Men's Bathhouse* a secret she replied that it is difficult with good ideas, because one never knows who will take them from you.

"On twierdził, że go nie ukradł. Ale ja nie wiem... On powiedział, że nie. Co miałam mówić, że się cieszę? Nic by to nie dało przecież to byłoby po prostu śmieszne. Poza tym moje prace nie pojawiały się w żadnych galeriach, żadnego obiegu komercyjnego, a nie jak u niego w Polsce i za granicą. Ja byłam po prostu bezwartościowa w porównaniu do niego. Więc mnie nie zależało, co on tam robił. Bo inni na tym zarabiają i świetnie funkcjonują. Zarabiają na tym to w ogóle jakiś idiotyzm, bo oni robią to co chcą."

"strasznie trudno jest o dobry pomysł i ludzie nawet nie wiedzą, że ci go zabierają."

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

elements of Western society have been imported since 1989, the ideals and attitudes that go along with that way of life take much longer to shape. She feels that it is the media's job to help educate the people in matters of contemporary thought. According to her:

...knowledge of contemporary art is very weak in Poland – the gap between the average level of knowledge of art in Poland and in other countries is huge. It's easy to import hamburgers and video clips – significantly more difficult to create knowledge of the concept of aesthetics at the end of the 20th century, to shape a sensitivity to contemporary art. If the media is going to take up only the depressing incidents connected with the new language of art, then we will continue to have this situation, till the end of our days.⁶⁹¹

Aneta Prasał, a colleague of Rottenberg's and also a well-known art historian and curator at the Zachęta, also indicted the media for refusing to create a constructive dialogue about art. She writes that "aside from the media, film and television – which take as their greatest theme that of death in relation to life – are responsible for the brutalization of the language of art, extorting the intensification among its commissions."⁶⁹² Both Rottenberg and Prasał were expecting those working for the press to educate the public as to how to understand and appreciate contemporary art.

The problem, however, was that many of those who were writing for the popular press did not accept the techniques of contemporary art as a legitimate practice themselves. This very fact indicates a gap in the cultural education of Polish citizens, a

⁶⁹¹ "...znajomość sztuki nowoczesnej w Polsce jest bardzo słaba – rozróżnienie pomiędzy średnim poziomem wiedzy o sztuce w Polsce i w innych krajach, jest ogromny. Łatwo jest sprowadzić hamburgery i wideoklipy – znacznie trudniej zaszczerpieć znajomość pojęć estetycznych z końca XX wieku, kształtować wrażliwość na sztukę współczesną. Jeżeli media będą zajmować się tylko deprecjonowaniem zdarzeń związanych z nowym językiem sztuki, to będziemy w tym zaścianku do końca naszych dni."

Rottenberg, "Tabu jest po to aby jej łamać."

⁶⁹² "W pewnym sensie zresztą to media właśnie, zwłaszcza film i telewizja, której bodaj najbardziej pożądanym tematem jest śmierć relacjonowana na żywo, są odpowiedzialne za brutalizację języka sztuki, wymuszają wzmacnianie środków przekazu."

Aneta Prasał, "Sztuka prowokacji," *Wprost* (July 14, 1999): 112-113.

legacy of the PRL (*Polish People's Republic*, or *Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*), as well as a gap in the creative output in the plastic arts, that people like Kozyra and her colleagues were acting from within during the 1990s. It also points to an inherent conservatism and reluctance to accept avant-garde ideas which is a direct result of the Church's strong hold over individual thought in the nation, even after the end of communist rule.

For Barbara Niemiec, who in addition to being a professor at the Jagiellonian University was also one of the original organizers of the *Solidarity* movement at JU, Kozyra's piece did not speak from a clearly-defined position. She states this with regard to her expectations of contemporary art in the Culture section of a Warsaw newspaper called *Tygodnik Solidarność* (*Solidarity Weekly*). For her, the meaning of a work of art should be clear and transparent; the work should be able to stand for itself, and the viewer should not have to rely on any texts or explanations to understand the point of the work. As she wrote in her article:

I don't know Ms. Rottenberg, therefore I don't know if it is lack of experience, or the fact of having not the best memory that caused her to forget one important fact: a work of art, if it is a work of art, communicates directly with its audience! No professionals or translations or exegesis' are necessary.⁶⁹³

Niemiec's opinion reflects a pervasive attitude toward the understanding of art in Poland after the communist period, which can be traced back to the last great developments in Polish art, or the modern art from the inter-war period. Artists such as Katarzyna Kobro

⁶⁹³ "Nie znam pani Rottenberg, więc nie wiem, czy to brak doświadczenia, czy nie najlepsza pamięć spowodowała, że umknęło jej uwadze coś ważnego; dzieło sztuki, jeśli nim jest, komunikuje się z odbiorcą bezpośrednio! Żadnych fachowców, tłumaczy oraz egzegetów nie trzeba." Niemiec, "Łaźnia mózgów."

and Władysław Strzemiński, the Polish Constructivists, attempted to find a clear and transparent language in their abstract paintings, much like abstract artists from Western Europe or America working at the same time. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the communist government attempted to curtail the development of art, although many artists continued to work in abstraction. It was the development of conceptual and performance art that was slowed, in the mainstream, by the rules imposed by the authorities. Consequently the teaching of these trends in schools and universities did not take place to the extent that it did in the West. Experience with such techniques was limited, as evinced by the fact that Niemiec, a Doctor of Humanities, educated in the 1970s and 80s, would still promulgate a modernist approach toward the reception and interpretation of art.

Others agreed with Niemiec that the meaning of the work of art was not clear. Warzecha himself, in an opinion piece that followed his interview with Rottenberg, said that “unfortunately, this obviously important work of Kozyra’s is not clear and not understandable.”⁶⁹⁴ Legutko continued with that line of argument, putting forth his opinion that Kozyra and her supporters created a smokescreen that consisted of a convoluted explanation of the work of art, in order to hide the fact that the meaning is actually incomprehensible and that it is not, in fact, a good work of art. As he put it:

...the affair with Kozyra confirmed two well-known phenomena. First of all, when the lack of sense and value of a work of art is clear, the author and her supporters find a way to escape scrutiny by using complicated – in their opinion – intellectual formulas. Or, when the case is that they simply don’t have talent, the

⁶⁹⁴ “Niestety, to tak przecież oczywiste znaczenie dzieł pani Kozyry pozostaje nie dostrzeżone i nie zrozumiane.”
Warzecha, “A Dobry Smak?,” 18.

authors, with the help of verbal arguments, try to convince the stupefied public that what is shown contains something very clever.⁶⁹⁵

Kozyra, in fact, maintained that she was surprised by the reaction, because in her mind she always tries to find a way to express her ideas in a way that it would be most clear to her viewers. “For the purpose of justification, so that everything would be clear, I gave them Rembrandt and the *Turkish Bath* [by Ingres – AB], in order to show viewers that this, too, is art, and please give me a break with your ideas about everything! The same with *Olympia*, that’s also art.”⁶⁹⁶ Rottenberg’s and Prasał’s accusations of the media point to a greater problem in Polish society – the lack of a sufficient army of cultural promoters with the knowledge and education to address objects of contemporary art responsibly and intelligently. If writers such as Legutko and Warzecha, and artists such as Tabisz, still ascribe to the standards of art of a previous time, and the methods of interpretation that go along with it, then there is little that their contribution to the discussion can do to educate the public.

The influence of the Church can also explain the strong negative reactions to *The Men’s Bathhouse*. Indeed Halina Filipowicz has made this connection with regard to the state of Polish theater after 1989. According to her it is the Church’s hold on society that has produced this conservative atmosphere and approach toward the arts. In her essay “Shifting a Cultural Paradigm,” she cited the anti-abortion law as evidence of Poland’s

⁶⁹⁵ “Sprawa Kozyry potwierdziła dwa znane zjawiska. Po pierwsze, kiedy brak sensu i wartości dzieł jest oczywisty, autorzy i ich klakierzy uciekają nagminnie w skomplikowane – w ich mniemaniu – formuły intelektualne. Kiedy więc – mówiąc inaczej – nie staje talentu, autorzy przy pomocy słownych wywodów starają się przekonać osłupiałych wobec takiego tupetu widzów, że pokazane byle co zawiera niezwykle mądrość.”

Legutko, “Dama z fallusem.”

⁶⁹⁶ “dla usprawiedliwienia żeby już wszystko było jasne, dałam już wtedy tego Rembrandta i tą Turecką Łazienę, żeby pokazać, że to też jest sztuka, dajcie mi spokój na zasadzie takiego już pojęcia wszystkiego. Olympia w sumie też i sztuka”

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

acceptance of conventional attitudes, stating that “post-communist Poland has embraced predominantly nonliberal values, as evinced by the imposition of religious instruction in public schools and restrictions on divorce and women’s reproductive rights.”⁶⁹⁷ In her opinion it follows that “what emerged from the quiet revolution [the 1989 transition from communism to democracy, which was similarly known as the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia - AB] in Poland, then, is a very traditional culture rooted in religious fundamentalism, patriarchal mythology, and exclusivist ethno-nationalism.”⁶⁹⁸ Filipowska cites this as a clarification for traditional and conservative theater practices that one can notice in Poland in the post-communist period.

Kozyra’s remarks also echo this idea, when asked about the sway of the Catholic Church in the 1990s. In her words, “before [in the early 1990s] Catholicism wasn’t as dominant – it has only started to dominate recently. Now it’s really grown to almost a perversion. But then it was just after communism and it was only after that that the Church really started to grow.”⁶⁹⁹ She also indicts the Catholic Church for the lack of knowledge and what she considers a provincial approach to issues. She feels that Poles aren’t necessarily conservative, rather they are “rather parochial, they have a very low level of knowledge. Europeans have almost the same level of knowledge and style, but in Poland it has gotten really bad. And it’s because of all of these Catholics, who go to

⁶⁹⁷ Halina Filipowska, “Shifting a Cultural Paradigm: Between the Mystique and the Marketing of Polish Theater,” in *Over the Wall/After the Fall: Post-Communist Cultures Through an East-West Gaze*, ed. Sibelan Forrester, Magdalena J. Zaborowska, and Elena Gapova, 167 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

⁶⁹⁸ Filipowska, “Shifting a Cultural Paradigm: Between the Mystique and the Marketing of Polish Theater,” 167.

⁶⁹⁹ “Ale wtedy jeszcze katolicyzm się tak nie rozpanoszył on dopiero teraz się tak rozpanoszył. Teraz to już jest wręcz jakaś perwersja. Wtedy to było jeszcze za komuny to nie można było no i właśnie później ten kościół wiesz tak zaczął rosnąć.”

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

church and listen to this nonsense – of course it's not all nonsense...but they even try to manipulate people, for example, in the elections. They have too much power.”⁷⁰⁰

The influence of religion can even be seen in a concrete example in connection with Kozyra's work. On the day of the opening of the Polish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, at the exact time that her work was officially presented to the public, the private sponsors of *The Men's Bathhouse* (the fashion magazine *Max*) commissioned a mass to be said in Kozyra's honor in one of Warsaw's most prominent churches, Święta Katarzyny na Służewie (St. Catherine's). This church was chosen because it bears the same name as the artist, and the organizers hoped that a prayer to induce Kozyra's patron saint to bless her exhibition would bring her good luck. The very act of holding a mass reflects the pervasion of belief in religious salvation as well as superstition that is present in Polish society today. Even Kozyra's supporters believed that the power of prayer would help Kozyra's work of art gain recognition at the exhibition. Kozyra herself, however, was not entirely aware of the fact that the mass took place, although she mentioned that she recalled hearing about it.⁷⁰¹

Reception of *The Men's Bathhouse* in Venice

The Men's Bathhouse was met with praise in Venice, in complete contrast to its reception in Poland. Reporting from Venice, Dorota Jarecka, an art critic and reporter for *Gazeta Wyborcza*, commented on the fact that *The Men's Bathhouse* was received

⁷⁰⁰ “Oni nie są konserwatywni. Myślę, że Polacy są bardzo zaściankowi, taka jest jakaś niska świadomość. Europejczycy mają niby jakiś poziom stylu i świadomości, ale Polacy wypadają tutaj kiepsko. No bo to wszystko katolicy, chodzą do tego kościoła i słuchają tych bredni, znaczy się nie wszystko są brednie, ale idziesz i słuchasz tych bredni. Dlatego wiesz te chuję zaczęli tak manipulować wiesz tymi wyborami. Pozwalają sobie za dużo.”

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

⁷⁰¹ As confirmed by Kozyra in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

favorably in Venice, where it provoked a discussion about art and its boundaries, as opposed to causing a scandal because of its contents. As she wrote:

In Venice it wasn't a scandal. No one saw any kind of provocation in Kozrya's work. No one was offended. No one was shocked by the fact that there were naked men in the film. Instead they talked about the way the film was made (with a hidden camera) – not in the context of a scandal, but as a continuation of the long-time discussion about what is allowed and what is not allowed in a documentary film.⁷⁰²

In fact, Jarecka mentions the fact that two years prior to Kozyra's presentation in Venice, Russian artist Oleg Kulik (b. 1963) had appeared at the exhibition as a dog representing Russia in the Russian Pavilion,⁷⁰³ and the performance was accepted as a work of art without question. She also mentions other equally or more "shocking" works that could be seen at the 48th biennale, which Kozyra participated in. Kozyra, herself, was also pleased with the reaction of viewers in Venice, remarking that although viewers questioned her work, they took it seriously as a work of art; their questions were a result of engagement with the piece, as opposed to accusation. As she said, "I met some great people in Venice, and my "Men's Bathhouse" was very well received....Often people questioned me critically, with rhetorical questions, but they spoke seriously, without

⁷⁰² "W Wenecji jakoś nie było skandalu. Nikt nie zobaczył w wystawie Kozyry prowokacji. Nikt się nie obraził. Nikt nie był zbulwersowany tym, że na filmie widać kilku nagich mężczyzn. Mówiło się tutaj raczej na temat sposobu, w jaki praca powstała (ukryta kamera), ale nie w kategoriach skandalu, lecz przedłużenia toczącej się od dawna dyskusji o tym, co wolno, a czego nie wolno w filmie dokumentalnym."

Dorota Jarecka, "Otwartość," *Gazeta Wyborcza* 135 (June 14, 1999): 20.

⁷⁰³ Oleg Kulik (with Lyudmila Bredekhina), *It's a Better World*, Russian Pavilion, 47th annual Venice Biennale. The performance was a study of the animal as the alter-ego of man. It involved Kulik observing the visitors to the gallery space and filming them with a special camera that was attached to him, in order to capture their reactions. Other cameras were positioned in the gallery, also filming the events as Kulik, acting as a dog, played with, sniffed, and interacted with the visitors.

aggressiveness.”⁷⁰⁴ This reception was significant to the artist,⁷⁰⁵ as it accomplished what she had set out to do, to prompt questioning.

Not only was *The Men's Bathhouse* well-received in Venice by spectators, it was also honored with the prize of Honorable Mention by the judges there. According to them, it won because Kozyra “explores and examines the authoritarian predominance of the male territory and unites elements of performance and *mise en scène*.”⁷⁰⁶ Western audiences were able to evaluate Kozyra's work according to its merits, instead of responding with aggression regarding the method of presentation, because of the fact that the work corresponds with contemporary art practices that are familiar in the West (such as performance art) thus they had the necessary vocabulary with which to properly respond to the work of art. Furthermore, her work echoed and built upon the challenge of notions of gender and beauty that had already been undertaken by feminist and conceptual artists in the West in the 1960s and 70s, so it did not pose a threat to those viewers' generally held assumptions.

The Vice Minister of Culture in Poland tried to remind readers of *Życie*, when asked about the Ministry's opinion of Kozyra's work, that the Biennale presents the most modern and experimental works of art that a country has to offer. He said that “the Biennale is mainly a celebration of the avant-garde. We have to take that into consideration. And the work of Katarzyna Kozyra is characteristic because it is avant-

⁷⁰⁴ “Spotkałam w Wenecji świetnych ludzi i bardzo dobre przyjęcie mojej “Łaźni męskiej.”...pytano mnie o granice manipulacji i wolności. Często pytający mnie krytycy stawiali retoryczne pytania, ale rozmawiali poważnie, bez napastliwości.”

Katarzyna Kozyra, “Po nagrodzie na biennale w Wenecji, Strach był we mnie,” interview by Alina Kietrys, *Głos Wybrzeża* (Gdańsk) 116 (June 17, 1999): no page no.

⁷⁰⁵ “Akceptacja dla tego, co robię, była ważna.” “The acceptance for that which I did was important.” Kozyra, “Po nagrodzie na biennale w Wenecji, Strach był we mnie.”

⁷⁰⁶ As stated on the artist's personal website, <http://www.katarzynakozyra.com.pl/biografia.html>. Last accessed October 29, 2007.

garde, so you can't condemn it."⁷⁰⁷ What's more, he conceded to the fact that some could find this work controversial, as he said: "avant-garde art isn't accepted by a majority of society."⁷⁰⁸ The jury that chose Kozyra to represent Poland, however, was aware of that fact, they knew what constitutes a competitive work of art in terms of contemporary audiences, and also could have anticipated what the reaction of Polish audiences would be to that work. The divergent reaction between critics in Poland and those abroad points to a crucial difference between the functioning of these avant-garde techniques and strategies in the East and the West. While in the West artists had posed similar challenges to the status quo since the 1850s, in Poland, critical art had taken the form of protest against the government. Now that its art had different issues to fight against, the Polish public took issue, for reasons that will be discussed below.

The comment of the anonymous writers A.H.A., W.W.W. in *Życie* indicated a particular attitude toward the avant-garde and its tactics. They suggested that those who chose her work were more interested in its shock value than its merit as a work of art in general, wondering whether "...local [Polish – AB] curators of art count more on the effect of artistic provocation – with bad taste, in the opinion of many – than the actual value of an artistic work?"⁷⁰⁹ The statement reveals that these writers considered shock and the value of a work of art as two separate and mutually exclusive phenomena. Kozyra, however, was aware of the fact that shock could be used as a strategy, as evinced

⁷⁰⁷ "Biennale to jest głównie poświęcone awangardzie. Tego nie mogliśmy nie uwzględnić. A że akurat dzieło Katarzyny Kozyry jest charakterystyczne dla tego, co dziś jest zaliczane do awangardy, to nie ma osądzać."

Rottenberg and Ratajsky, "Teraz Kozyra?," 18.

⁷⁰⁸ "Sztuka awangardowa nie jest akceptowana przez większość społeczeństwa..."

Rottenberg and Ratajsky, "Teraz Kozyra?," 18.

⁷⁰⁹ "Czy rodzimi kuratorzy sztuki bardziej liczą na efekt artystycznej prowokacji – zdaniem wielu, w złym guście – niż rzeczywistą wartością artystyczną prac?"
A.H.A., W.W.W., "Czy podglądanie jest sztuką?"

by her response when asked about its function. As she said herself, “thanks to art, communication comes out of it [the provocation – AB] – a communication deeper than that which you can see materially.”⁷¹⁰ She recognized the fact that the issues that she dealt with in her art were difficult ones that people generally try to avoid. With her art, however, she asks her viewers to deal with and face them head on. Kozyra herself said that “people try to run away from things that are difficult or uncomfortable. That’s why I am not supposed to show them these things. In the end I didn’t do it [show them – AB] at their expense, but at my own. I terrorized them a bit.”⁷¹¹ Her statement indicates that she is aware of consequences of her strategies, and the fact that that in order to motivate her viewers to think she had to risk rejection by those very viewers, because of the difficult content of the work.

The debates surrounding Kozyra’s work are in fact evidence of the efficacy of the artist’s strategies. Magdalena Ujma, a Polish critic of contemporary art, curator, and author of several hundred articles on contemporary art, points out that at the same time that the tremendous amount of negativity surrounding her work was difficult for the artist to deal with, it is also precisely what she originally intended, and is proof of her success. In Ujma’s words:

The rows over each work of art discouraged Kozyra to the degree that she declared her repugnance at this Polish hell, but on the other hand she is ‘indebted’ to the publicity. At the same time she managed to overcome the sluggishness of the Polish public and awaken them to a discussion about contemporary art. That

⁷¹⁰ “Jaka jest funkcja szoku i prowokacji w sztuce? – Dzięki nim komunikat przechodzi – komunikat głębszy niż to, co jest materialne, widoczne.”

Katarzyna Kozyra, “Obcy w Łaźni,” interview by Iza Wodzińska, *Gazeta Pomorska* (July 21, 1999): 8.

⁷¹¹ “Ludzie uciekają od rzeczy trudnych czy niewygodnych. Dlaczego mimo to miałam im tego nie pokazać. W końcu zrobiłam to nie ich, tylko własnym kosztem. Trochę ich sterroryzowałam.”

“Scandal mimo woli,” *Dziennik Łódzki* 27 (February 2, 1998): no page no.

discussion is, after all, just like the spectacle of an artistic life. Its character is in great measure the result of unfamiliarity with contemporary art.⁷¹²

Kozyra is a victim of her critics precisely because of her aims and tactics. In challenging the everyday order of things of her viewers, she was inviting the strong reaction of them to her work. As mentioned in Chapter Two, according to her, *Pyramid of Animals* was the very first of many works of art that sparked a controversy in the media in Poland after independence.⁷¹³ While she admitted that all of the media frenzy took its toll on her, and was emotionally taxing to deal with, now that she has distance from it she can appreciate it for the positive effect that it had in bringing attention not only to her art, but also to the issues that she was dealing with in it.⁷¹⁴

One local art historian, however, lamented the quality of the actual discussion that Kozyra brought about with her work. Instead of genuine questioning, she saw the debates as more of a preaching of opinions. In *Wprost*, Aneta Prasał criticized the media for the refusal to take part in a productive dialogue, and their overlooking of the key issues. In her opinion,

...as much as the public reaction to the work of Kozyra, and other similarly radical artists, is completely natural and understandable, this astonishment and unrest make the media unwilling to engage in an actual discussion about art, but

⁷¹² “Awantury z okazji pracy zniechęciły Kozyrę do tego stopnia, że deklaruje odrazę do polskiego piekielka, ze drugiej strony właśnie jemu zawdzięcza swój rozgłos.

Tymczasem udało jej się pokonać niemrawość polskiej publiczności i pobudzić ją do dyskusji o sztuce współczesnej. Ta dyskusja jest zresztą jak całe życie artystyczne i jego widownia. Jej charakter w dużej mierze wynika z nieznaności sztuki współczesnej.”

Magdalena Ujma, “Nagość i nicość,” *Kresy* (Lublin) 38/39 (September 4, 1999): 254.

⁷¹³ “Myślę, że nie było żadnego skandalu już związanego ze sztuką przed Piramidą Zwierząt.”

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

⁷¹⁴ “Także przez to, że to się rozgrywało na poziomie skandali mimo wszystko to docierało do szerszej publiczności. A potem inni artyści zaczęli wywoływać skandale, ale to jest O.K. Chociaż wtedy to był obciach.”

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

they are willing to moralize, flatter popular taste and look for sensational themes. They move away from being informational and toward simplification, generalization and falsification.⁷¹⁵

None of the articles published about *The Men's Bathhouse* in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, for example, contained any serious probing of the issues that Kozyra's piece raised, nor even questioned the meaning of the work, beyond the discussion of its mechanics and circumstances. When asked why she thought that supporters of her work didn't make their interpretations more publicly known, the artist replied that they were too young at the time; Wróblewska, for example, was just starting out in her career. As a result these voices of support would have had less influence over the audience they were trying to reach. In Kozyra's words, Wróblewska "was very young then, she was only twenty-seven. At that time she still didn't have a real voice in the art world. Then she got one [a voice, meaning that she finished her education – AB] and even so she still didn't have a voice. No one really cares about what those young people have to say."⁷¹⁶ Although Kozyra did indeed have supporters inside Poland, they didn't yet have the influence over society that her detractors had, since they were established scholars and educators.

Indeed Prasał was not the only person to take the media to task in what was perceived as their irresponsible handling of art criticism. Contemporary artist Zbigniew Libera also sided with Prasał in his condemnation of the press, with regard to their reporting on the work of contemporary artists. According to him, writers for the Polish

⁷¹⁵ "O ile reakcje publiczności na prace Kozyry i innych równie radykalnych w swych poczynaniach artystów są całkowicie naturalne i zrozumiałe, o tyle dziwi i niepokoi postawa mediów niezdolnych do rzeczowej dyskusji o sztuce, lecz z lubością moralizujących, schlebających popularnym gustom i szukających sesacyjnych tematów."

Prasał, "Sztuka prowokacji," 113.

⁷¹⁶ "Znaczy wiesz ona była wtedy bardzo młoda ile ona miała 27 lat? Wtedy to ona jeszcze nie miała żadnego prawa głosu. Wtedy co ona to dostała to i tak było takie właściwie nic. Tymi młodymi to się w ogóle nie przejmowali."

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

mass media had not become involved in reflective, responsible discussions on art, and as a result, artists are left waiting for competent reviews to appear in the press. According to him “a mediocre personality, writing for a high circulation paper, is ruling our world of art, so even the so-called critical artists are afraid to call a spade a spade.”⁷¹⁷ He specifically criticized *Gazeta Wyborcza*, where most of the debates regarding Kozryra appeared. He felt that the newspaper catered to popular appeal, and did not take the duty of art criticism seriously enough. Therefore he “encouraged them to follow examples of more ambitious and not populist writing about art.”⁷¹⁸

Tired of waiting for real criticism to appear, Libera created his own newspaper, an exact copy of the *Gazeta Wyborcza Magazine* (*Magazyn Gazety Wyborczej*, the Saturday supplement to the newspaper), and filled it with what he considered to be proper criticism about art, that he himself wrote. This 1996 piece was entitled *Masters*, and in it the artist published articles about, and interviews with, Poland’s leading, and also most controversial, artists at the time. As he said, “I made a fake copy of the 1996 issues of the “Magazine” because I believe that it was the last time when one had an opportunity to publish in your magazine difficult, intellectually daring texts on art.”⁷¹⁹ Both Prasał’s comment and Libera’s piece point to one explanation for the reception of Kozryra’s work, and indicate the gap in knowledge among Polish society that makes her work less accessible to a local audience.

It is specifically Western *art* practices that cause a sensation in Poland, as opposed to other ideas and phenomena imported from the West, such as products,

⁷¹⁷ Zbigniew Libera, as qtd. in Kazimierz Piotrowski, “Libera: Art and Ruling Media,” *Exit: Nowa Sztuka w Polsce* 2/58 (2004): 3358.

⁷¹⁸ Libera, as qtd. in Piotrowski, “Libera: Art and Ruling Media,” 3360.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid*, 3358.

advertising, and mass media. Supporters of Kozyra's project have mentioned this as one of the paradoxes surrounding the harsh reaction to her work. In his interview, Ratajsky, the Vice-Minister of Culture, brought up the fact that people watch TV shows about murder every day, yet those did not cause a stir in the press as Kozyra's art work did.⁷²⁰

Ujma, in "Nakedness and Nothingness," mentioned an advertising campaign that appeared on billboards around the same time as Kozyra's *Blood Ties* did, featuring a girl sticking her bottom out from the top of her underwear elastic, which she considered "more provocative"⁷²¹ than Kozyra's work, yet there is no record of a public outcry of people claiming to have been offended by those ads. Similarly, Prasał compared the shocking nature of the daily news with Kozyra's art, posing the question: "why is the contemporary view with regard to the language of *Wiadomości* (*The News* [one of Poland's main evening news programs – AB]) or *Panorama* [another leading evening news show – AB] completely accepted by society, while the same truth told in the language of art scandalizes and shocks people? Informational television programs never speak in the name of provocation and no one sees them as a blow to European culture."⁷²² Indeed when presented in the language of news, film, advertisements or product packaging, Polish audiences accepted these techniques, imported from the West, but when presented as art, viewers were quick to take offense. In fact, Polish art in the 1990s

⁷²⁰ "Pan mówi o penisie, a ja mogę powiedzieć, że w telewizji codziennie wszyscy oglądamy filmy pokazujące moderstwa."

Rottenberg and Ratajsky, "Teraz Kozyra?," 18.

⁷²¹ "A przecież byle reklama, na której panienka wypina pupę w białych majtkach czy przeży się odziana jedynie w rajstopy, jest bardziej prowokująca."

Ujma, "Nagość i nicość," 256.

⁷²² "dlaczego wizja współczesności relacjonowana językiem "Wiadomości" czy "Panoramy" jest całkowicie społecznie akceptowana, podczas gdy te same prawdy opowiadane językiem sztuki gorszą i oburzają? Dlatego telewizyjnych programów informacyjnych nikt nie określa mianem prowokacji i nie widzi w nich zamachu na rudymenta europejskiej kultury."

Prasał, "Sztuka prowokacji," 113.

could be summarized as having been one controversy after another, as artists made an effort to educate audiences about not only “a concept of aesthetics at the end of the 20th century,” to use Rottenberg’s terms, but also about issues that they felt contemporary Poles needed to face.⁷²³ The reasons that Kozrya’s art, as well as that of other artists who used similar practices in the 1990s, was so particularly shocking for Polish viewers, receiving a considerable amount of media attention, will be discussed in the following section.

Cultural Norms of Beauty and Gender

Much like Kozrya’s *Olympia* (and the Manet painting before it) the *Bathhouse* video visualized the tensions and contradictions of a society where notions of beauty and femininity were conflicting and fragmented among the public. The women naturally adopted classical poses of women bathing, as we have come to know them throughout art history, from Ingres and Rembrandt to Cézanne⁷²⁴ and Degas.⁷²⁵ But the women are not idealized, as they have been throughout the history of Western art. They appear as they are in real life – fat, wrinkled, skinny, etc. According to the Polish feminist art historian Izabela Kowalczyk, “Kozrya showed women in *Bathhouse* as she herself saw them, as women see themselves, and not as they would want to be seen by men. They are caught on camera unaware of the view of the gaze.”⁷²⁶ She presents the viewer with a new

⁷²³ As mentioned, Kozrya was one of the first of a long wave of controversial artists that began working in Poland in the 90s, and the controversies surrounding their works have continued into the twenty-first century. One can mention a number of examples, for example Zbigniew Libera and Dorota Nieznalska, who were discussed in Chapter Three of this manuscript, and also others such as Alicja Żebrowska (b. 1956), Natalia LL (b. 1937), Grzegorz Klaman (b. 1959), and Robert Rumas (b. 1966), to name a few.

⁷²⁴ For example Paul Cézanne’s (1839-1906) *Les Grandes Baigneuses*, 1900-1905.

⁷²⁵ For example Edgar Degas’ (1834-1917) *La Toilette* (Woman Combing Her Hair), c. 1884–1886.

⁷²⁶ “Katarzyna Kozrya ukazała kobiety tak, jak ona widziała, jak kobiety widzą same siebie, a nie jak chcieliby je widzieć mężczyźni. Są one przyłapane przez kamerę jako nieświadome podglądającego spojrzenia.”

standard of beauty, based on authenticity, of women appearing and behaving as they are, and not as they are expected to be. For that reason they become shocking or controversial, because the viewer may not know what to do with these new images, or how to categorize them.

One can make comparisons with work by Western feminist artists from the 1960s and 70s, for example Carolee Schneeman (b. 1939), Hanna Wilke (1940-1993), and Eleanor Antin (b. 1935). The comparison, however, just as in the case of the comparison with Polis and Afrika with Western counterparts, would be a superficial one, as several art historians have already pointed out.⁷²⁷ Furthermore Kozyra has asserted that she was unaware of Western feminist art practice until the late 1990s, when she began to read books on the subject herself. Even in Kowalski's studio, students were not taught feminist theory. It was only later, around 1996, that the artist started reading Western feminist art theory, but denies that this was any influence on her art. As she recalls, "all of those specialist texts [about feminism –AB] that one is supposed to read, I started reading only in '96, '97, or '98. I had to adapt to it all so quickly that I wasn't completely sure what exactly it was all about."⁷²⁸ In fact, by that point she had already created *Olympia*. When asked whether she had been aware of Schneeman's and Robert Morris' 1964 recreation of the Manet original (entitled *Site*), she replied that at the time, she had

Izabela Kowalczyk, "Podglądanie jako strategia dekonstrukcji obrazu ciała," *Kresy* 38-39 (September 4, 1999): 252.

⁷²⁷ See Piotr Piotrowski, "Male Artists's Body: National Identity vs. Identity Politics," in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, ed. Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospyszyl, 226-234 (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002), and Izabela Kowalczyk, "Feminist Art in Poland Today," *N. Paradoxa* 11(1999): <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/n.paradoxa/kowal2.htm>.

⁷²⁸ "Wszystkie te książki takie specjalistyczne wiesz, które trzeba było przeczytać to ja zaczynałam czytać dopiero tak może w '96, '97 i '98 roku. No jak już to wszystko wtedy szybko przerobiłam to nie wiedziałam do końca tak naprawdę, co jest grane."

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

not been.⁷²⁹ According to the artist, her ideas are her own, and she does not cite any particular artist, feminist or otherwise, as an influence on her work.

The rise of feminist art in the West, specifically in North America, coincided with the Women's Rights Movements in America and Europe. Performance art was a preferred genre with feminist artists in the West, as it was already outside the mainstream, and performance artists themselves were involved in a rejection the consumerist culture that modernism had brought with it. Women performance artists also rejected that modernist tradition, as they saw it as a system of hierarchy and power that was predominantly masculine. As Carolee Schneeman has stated, "Western, masculist [*sic*] art history has been obsessed with the female nude...I realized there were only two roles offered for me to fulfill: either that of "pornographer" or that of emissary of Aphrodite,"⁷³⁰ a statement which in fact has echoes in the reception of Kozyra's art in Poland in the 1990s (which reduced her work to pornography), as well as the critique that the artist made of these expected roles. Consequently women performance artists sought to introduce the feminine self into artistic practice and press for greater representation in galleries, museums and at universities. Henry Sayre, in his article, "A New Person(a): Feminism and the Art of the Seventies," lists a number of oft-quoted statistics about the disproportionate number of women artists represented in galleries, museums, universities, and reviewed in art journals in the 1960s and 70s in America.⁷³¹ It was these numbers that feminist artists in 1970s America were trying to correct. Furthermore, by

⁷²⁹ "AB: Chciałam jeszcze zapytać o Olimpię? Czy wiedziałaś, że ten wzór już zrobiła inna osoba wcześniej? KK: "Nie właśnie nie wiedziałam. Ale jak już ją robiłam to właśnie mi się wydawało, że coś jest nie tak."

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

⁷³⁰ Carolee Schneeman, "The Obscene Body/Politic," *Art Journal* (Winter, 1991): 29.

⁷³¹ Henry M. Sayre, "A New Person(a): Feminism and the Art of the Seventies," in Henry M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance: American Avant-Garde Since 1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 86-88.

underscoring the active role of women as artists, as opposed to passive objects or models, women performance artists in America were critiquing these traditional ideas of subject/object within art, and reclaiming the female body from an object of male fantasy. As Amelia Jones has stated, “precisely *because* feminist body artists enact themselves in relations to the long-standing Western codes of female objectification, they unhinge the gendered opposition structuring conventional models of art production and interpretation (female/object versus male/acting subject).”⁷³² The woman artist as a moving, speaking subject thus challenged the patriarchal Gaze that had been present in visual imagery for centuries.

Kozyra, however, is critiquing not only that same tradition of Western imagery that feminist artists were, but she also poses a challenge to the social order in post-communist Poland that supports those traditions and holds them in place in society, as well as in art. In Poland, the notion of “woman” had been shaped by two main factors: socialism and the Church. Under communist rule women were considered to be equal to men, and should benefit from considerable equality of rights; while this was true in theory, the reality was much different, and in some cases, quite the opposite. As Piotrowski has noted, “all the Stalinist and post-Stalinist political regimes adopted definite anti-female policies, often under the guise of spectacular gestures: women could have their own organizations (which were, of course, official and fully controlled by the central committee of the Communist party), or “even” become high-ranking party and state officials.”⁷³³ Thus the government cultivated a myth of equality of women in its ideology. The guise of equality masked what was actually a traditional hierarchical and

⁷³² Amelia Jones, “The Rhetoric of the Pose: Hannah Wilke,” in Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 152.

⁷³³ Piotrowski, “Male Artists’ Body: National Identity vs. Identity Politics,” 231.

patriarchal structure, much like the one that women artists in the 1960s had been fighting against. As Piotrowski has characterized it, “any authoritarian system – or its extreme, totalitarianism – can function safely only with stable and hierarchical social structures whose foundation seems to be phallo-centrism.”⁷³⁴ The communist government supported a traditional social order that was cloaked in socialist rhetoric about equality between the sexes.

In Poland, this communist ideology was further complicated by the Catholic Church, whose sway over Polish society has already been discussed in Chapter Three. The Church cultivated the image of *Matka-Polska* (*Mother Poland*), a woman who was at the same time a domestic mother and also a mother to, and therefore protector of, the nation. Kowalczyk has described this woman as one who “looked after the Polish home and was a guardian of national values.”⁷³⁵ In her view “the Polish Church strengthened the model of a traditionally passive woman, who can realize herself only in her home and family.”⁷³⁶ After Independence the Church maintained its strong support by the people, as it was considered to have helped to bring an end to communism and was regarded as the savior of the Polish nation. It was these ideas, that of the false notion of equality under socialism and the notion of *Matka-Polska* that Polish artists were challenging with their work that resembled Western feminist art.

In addition to issues of nationalism and the Church, both female and male artists had to deal with the legacy of state control over the body and its consequent attitudes toward nudity, especially with regard to the male body. Thus the body as used in performance art in Poland by both men and women artists took on a political dimension.

⁷³⁴ Ibid, 231.

⁷³⁵ Kowalczyk, “Feminist Art in Poland Today,” <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/n.paradoxa/kowal2.htm>.

⁷³⁶ Ibid.

Just as women artists in the West used their bodies in performance to reclaim them from the male Gaze and patriarchal control, artists in the East used their bodies in performance as a way to “take back” the body from the state, and also to reclaim public spaces. Under communism, any public action was at risk of being caught by surveillance, which is why artists creating performances usually did so in private. Zdenka Badinovic’s analysis of work by a Serbian and a Romanian artist, both of which involved the male artists exposing themselves, can be useful in understanding the specific connotation of the body as it is used in performance art in Eastern Europe:

If we know the context in which these works were made, we also know that the very fact of the appearance of a naked artist in public had a political dimension. In the East, where the threat of police surveillance and censorship was omnipresent, people were very cautious about their public behavior and communication. It is true that the public exposure of what was private was (and still is) also limited in democratic environments, but this is ascribed primarily to public morals. One of the essential differences between East and West lies in the fact that similar gestures are read differently in different spaces.⁷³⁷

The artist’s use of the body in performance art, then, can be described as a reaction against ideology and state control over public space and expression, as opposed to the market and commodity culture as it was in the West.

Kowalczyk also confirms this in her analysis of Polish feminist art, stating that many Polish women artists refuse to accept the label of “feminist” artist, even though their work deals with issues of feminism. She makes clear the fact that male artists also deal with these issues in their work, therefore she feels that the term “critical” art, when

⁷³⁷ Zdenka Badinovic, “Body and the East,” in *Body and the East: From the 1960s to the Present*, ed. Zdenka Badinovic, 16 (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999).

referring to these trends, is more accurate. Again, she attributes this to a lack of a tradition of conceptual art in mainstream Poland. According to her:

In the 70s and even 80s the Polish socio-political background was not favorable to feminism. The feminist art that appeared was influenced by Western feminist tendencies, which unfortunately often resulted in simplified imitations that did not refer to issues rooted in Polish reality. Moreover Polish artists have not come up with feminist programs and theory related to their own unique position. Some of the most prominent women artists have denied having any connection with feminism. This trend however was connected with lack of a public art discourse in Poland, and a lack of critical tendencies. The situation started changing after the collapse of communism in 1989, when feminism started developing a more fully self-conscious program of artistic actions. Defining one's own identity, questions of body and lately analyzing ways of disciplining the body through consumer culture are the main questions of feminist and critical art in the 1990s. I should add that I prefer the notion of 'critical art' as it seems to me more precise.⁷³⁸

She goes on to mention male artists who also address the issue of women in society, most notably Zbigniew Libera, whose 1994 *Universal Penis Expander* is a critique of Western phallo-centric culture. Kowalczyk views this piece as an example of feminist/critical art, stating that "one can define [this] exactly as example of an emerging 'critical' feminist art."⁷³⁹ Both men and women artists were engaged in the critique of the social determination of gender and standards of beauty created by media imagery, therefore in Poland this art took the form of social critique as opposed to being limited to simply a feminist one.

Indeed, Kozyra feels that both men and women fall under the same amount of pressure to live up to a certain ideal in contemporary society. With her Bathhouse videos, Kozyra stated that she wanted "to show people how women really look, because there is

⁷³⁸ Kowalczyk, "Feminist Art in Poland Today," <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/n.paradoxa/kowal2.htm>.

⁷³⁹ Ibid.

always this ‘imagined’ woman [ideal woman – AB].”⁷⁴⁰ She wanted to share images like these with people “so that women wouldn’t feel pressured to be any certain thing [for example, live up to an imaginary ideal – AB]. For them it is a kind of pressure.”⁷⁴¹ She feels that a similar type of stress exists for men in modern society, and her *Men’s Bathhouse* attempts to provide liberation for them, as well. Not only do modern men have anxiety about looking good, but they also must provide for their families and be strong for them. There is also the demand to conform to the role of the heterosexual male. This is especially true in contemporary Polish society, where traditional values regarding gender roles and the family remain thoroughly engrained. As Kozyra stated with regard to *The Men’s Bathhouse*:

You know, the men didn’t look any better than the women, everyone looks the way they look...But there is something in our society that says that men have to look good, earn a good living. They have to in order to support their family. I mean, I don’t know if [in reality – AB] they have to or don’t have to, but that’s the way it is. They also have to be sexually ready. So they also have a certain role to play. The only thing is that men don’t really have anything to protect themselves with, because women have started to protect themselves with feminism...but I think that men should start to protect themselves [in the same way – AB] as well.⁷⁴²

⁷⁴⁰ “chciałam żeby ludzie zobaczyli jak wyglądają kobiety, bo to zawsze jest jakaś kobieta wyimaginowana.”

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

⁷⁴¹ “chciałam żeby kobiety nie czuły się zmuszane do czegośkolwiek. Ale to jest dla nich jakaś presja.” Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

⁷⁴² “No wiesz oni wcale lepiej nie wyglądają, każdy wygląda jak wygląda. Dokładnie. No ale jest coś takiego w naszym społeczeństwie, że mężczyzna nie musi dobrze wyglądać, ale musi zarabiać. Muszą niby utrzymywać te rodziny, znaczy się nie wiem czy muszą, czy nie muszą, ale tak jest. Muszą też być gotowi seksualnie. Więc też mają tutaj niezłą rolę. Tylko, że może mężczyźni się tak nie bronią, bo kobiety zaczęły się bronić wiesz te feministki i tak dalej. A myślę, że ci faceci mogliby zacząć się bronić.” Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

In this sense, Kozyra's work with the bathhouses was not simply about releasing women from their roles, wherein they have to be beautiful works of art, but about releasing individuals from their respective gender roles in society, regardless of their sex.

When Carolee Schneeman posed as *Olympia* in the *Site* performance with Robert Morris in 1964, the artists were invoking the tradition of the depiction of the female nude, in an attempt to reshape it in light of current feminist discourse. According to Henry Sayre, Schneeman participated in *Site* "in order to cause the discourse on sexuality which had been initiated by Manet's *Olympia* to move once again, to bring it into the present."⁷⁴³ Kozyra did something similar with her 1995 piece,⁷⁴⁴ but in addition to her critique of the subjectivization of women and the female body, she was calling for the inclusion of the aged, ill and dying in the discourse. In some ways her *Olympia* mirrors the posthumous project *Intra-Venus* (1994) by Hanna Wilke, which was a series of photographs taken by Wilke's partner, Donald Goddard, as she was undergoing chemotherapy treatment and dying of cancer. Within Wilke's *œuvre*, however, this piece was a complete departure from her earlier work, which involved her obsessively posing for the camera, celebrating her objecthood and femininity within the male patriarchal Gaze. For Amelia Jones, "Hanna Wilke explores body/self as always already not her own and enacts femininity as, by its very definition in patriarchy, inexorably performed, doubly alienated, removed from the lure of potential transcendence."⁷⁴⁵ Unlike Wilke's piece, Kozyra's *Olympia*, however, is a response to and continuation of the theme explored in her previous work, *Pyramid of Animals*, which is that of the invisibility of

⁷⁴³ Sayre, 75.

⁷⁴⁴ Kozyra mentioned that she was not aware of the Schneeman piece.

⁷⁴⁵ Jones, "The Rhetoric of the Pose: Hannah Wilke," 152.

death and dying, and our (Western) culture's reluctance or hesitation to see and acknowledge it.

One can also see similarities between Kozrya's critique of the notion of beauty and Elearnor Antin's 1972 photo-piece *Carving: a Traditional Sculpture*, where the artist also used her own body as material, being photographed during a period of three weeks while on a strict diet. While Antin subjected herself to a transformation in an attempt to conform to a feminine ideal, Kozrya did not. Antin's work demonstrates the impossibility of reaching that ideal; even though she lost weight, she still did not transform herself into a perfect model. As Sayre has noted, "what her work underscores is her *difference* from the ideal, even as she subscribes (with tongue in cheek) to its codes."⁷⁴⁶ Kozrya achieves a similar effect in *The Women's Bathhouse*, by placing canonical images from Western art history (by Ingres, Rembrant) next to the still images of the women bathing. These women, however, unlike Antin, do not attempt to conform to the standards of beauty that both Kozrya and Antin take to task in their work. Kozrya's models are celebrated for their intrinsic beauty, as the artist puts forth a new canon of beauty, based on these women, as well as their female counterparts throughout the Western world, and their natural beauty. Kozrya confirms this by maintaining that she did not intend to transform the world with this piece, she simply wanted to communicate to her viewers that women can set their own standards, instead of looking up to supermodels that they see in magazines and on television. "I wasn't thinking about changing anything...I never thought about that. I was only thinking about communicating something....Women should be models for themselves...even though women in the States try to look like

⁷⁴⁶ Sayre, 78.

superstars. But after all they all look the same...”⁷⁴⁷ Kozyra brings attention to this fact by presenting these women in her video. In doing so she exposes an already existing model that has long been hidden from view in both art history and mass media.

Another parallel between Antin and Kozyra can be seen in the change of gender that both underwent for the sake of performance.⁷⁴⁸ Whereas Kozyra simply adopted the guise of a man in order to execute one performance in *The Men's Bathhouse*, Antin adopted a whole persona known as *The King*, who appeared in a series of performances beginning in 1972.⁷⁴⁹ In some ways Antin's *The King* bears more resemblance to Polis' *Bronze Man*, in that it was an actual character that reappeared in a particular place (in Antin's case Solana Beach, in San Diego County, California) and interacted with her/his public. Like Polis' work, *The King* performances also took on a political dimension at times, for example in *The Battle of the Bluffs* (1975-1978), which was created in response to the potential destruction of some rare pine trees for the sake of real estate development.

Kozyra's performance does bear some superficial resemblance to Antin's. As Kozyra did in the exhibition, Antin included documentation of her transformation into a man, by the application of a fake beard, for one of her first performances in 1972. *The Battle of the Bluffs*, like *The Men's Bathhouse*, also represented the artist's country – at the 1976 Biennale. In both pieces, the artists demonstrate that gender is a social, as opposed to biological, construct, and that one can become male by adopting the behavior

⁷⁴⁷ “Nie, myślę, że nie. Kobiety są dla siebie własnym wzorem. Chociaż wiesz laski zwłaszcza w Stanach próbują się tak upodobnić do gwiazd. Ale przecież one wszystkie wyglądają tak samo. Nie ja nie myślałam żeby coś zmieniać. Nigdy tak nie myślałam. Myślę tylko żeby coś zakomunikować... Nie myślę, że nie. Kobiety są dla siebie własnym wzorem...”

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

⁷⁴⁸ One can also draw parallels between American lesbian writer and gay activist Rita Mae Brown's entering a gay male sauna, the Club Baths, in New York City in 1975. Although she did not wear a rubber phallus, she did use a fake mustache and codpiece to disguise herself.

⁷⁴⁹ See *Eleanor Antin*, ed. Howard Fox, 59-63 (California: Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999).

and appearance of a man. As Howard N. Fox wrote in his exhibition catalogue about Antin's work, "to become a man, she had not needed to change her sex but only her gender – that culturally codified matrix of behavioral traits and norms that define one as "male" or "female" – by adapting imaginatively to the behavior that suggested a man."⁷⁵⁰ But whereas Antin adopted the role of the archetypal male, one occupying a position on the pinnacle of power and agency, Kozrya's role did not give her any feeling of security or superiority, although it did give her the agency required to enter the private men's space of the bathhouse. "Sticking a cock on didn't make me feel like a guy! I have no idea what it feels like being a guy. Being a woman I felt terribly ashamed among men. Even though I was disguised, I felt totally naked."⁷⁵¹ While Kozrya's costume disguised her, at the same time it exposed her, underscoring the difference between actually being a man in society, and simply acting or appearing as one.

Kozrya commented on feeling afraid throughout the duration of the performance, afraid that she would not be allowed into the bathhouse, and also afraid that she would be caught once she was in there. When asked how often she feared that she would be discovered as a woman in a men's bathhouse Kozrya answered:

I don't know, ten, fifteen times maybe, every time someone would stare at me. But on the other hand it was a good experience, you just had to stare right back. That made you feel a lot surer. But first you had to overcome something to be able to give as good as you got. I wander in, look around and look like some art connoisseur admiring a beautiful bathhouse, while being looked at himself, then gape some more; give the order to start filming, is filmed, and observed at that."⁷⁵²

⁷⁵⁰ Fox, 61-62.

⁷⁵¹ Katarzyna Kozrya, "A Passport into the Male Sanctum," interview by Artur Żmijewski, http://www.katarzynakozrya.com.pl/mens_bath_txt.html.

⁷⁵² Kozrya, "In a Men's Bathhouse - Men, Two Cameras, and one Woman,"

In fact it was an act of defiance and reclaiming of agency that led Kozyra to create the piece in the first place. While critics blamed her for taking advantage of only women by filming them, Kozyra thought that she could also do the same for men, by showing them as they are acting naturally. She said that “everyone loves to show beautiful women, but with men it’s different. It’s not that just because I’m a woman I’m showing women, as a woman I can just as well show beautiful men. Because it has nothing to do with my gender.”⁷⁵³ Kozyra’s performance demonstrates the fact that she refused to be limited by her gender from making an art work that she wanted to make, simply because only men were allowed in the men’s bathhouse.

It was, as she mentioned, the context that made others believe that she was a man as well. As she expressed herself:

I was wearing a cap that made me invisible – how rewarding to make fools out of men. A woman ‘dresses up’ as a man. And it works, even though everybody there observes everybody else. Nobody can tell she’s a woman. You know what I think? It’s a sauna for guys. So even the towel fell off my tits, they’d never even think there was someone of the opposite sex there with them: that the dude with the tits was a broad. Their conviction that I was a guy cloaked me better than any disguise.⁷⁵⁴

This is also quite different from Antin’s *King*, who appeared in public spaces that are considered to be gender-neutral. Kozyra entered as space that was gendered as masculine, a place reserved only for men. This space, too was part of her costume or disguise, as it also enabled others to believe that she was a man.

⁷⁵³ “wszyscy lubią tak pokazywać te piękne kobiety, natomiast już z facetami jest inaczej. To nie jest tak, że ja sama kobieta będę pokazywać kobiety, taka samo ja kobieta mogę wyjść i pokazać pięknych facetów. Po pierwsze to jest tak, że jest to takie niezależne od mojej płci.”

Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

⁷⁵⁴ Kozyra, “A Passport into the Inner Sanctum.”

Whereas communist Poland enforced the ideology of the traditional woman as mother and subordinate, it only acquired the imagery of consumerist culture after independence, in the 1990s, when Western advertising began to be introduced to Polish society. The images of women presented in Western advertisements conformed perfectly with the attitudes and ideas regarding women that had carried over from the communist period, and from the history of Western art. Kowalczyk feels that these images of the body that we see everyday in the mass media are the very root of the discomfort that viewers felt toward the installations, or, more specifically, the source of the discord between those images and the ones Kozyra presents. “By feeling embarrassed at the film we can end up of revealing our own lie: that we possess a false image of the body, that we don’t know the truth about our own corporeality, that we would prefer fake pictures to reality.”⁷⁵⁵ Unlike the media images of women, “not everyone will be willing or want to consume these bodies, which is why they are seen as senseless”⁷⁵⁶ writes Ujma, speaking of *The Women’s Bathhouse*. In that sense, they don’t conform to the ideals of a consumerist society that was gradually taking over in Poland in the 1990s.

While feminist-critical art presented something relatively new to Polish art audiences in the 1990s, it also indicated a radical shift in critical art practices by artists in the country in general, which coincided with the regaining of independence in 1989. Insofar as in the 1980s most of the critical art that was produced was either nationalistic or anti-communist in nature, most supported the rebellious, anti-establishment content of

⁷⁵⁵ “Nasze zażenowanie filmem może więc wynikać z faktu odkrycia własnego fałszu: że posiadamy fałszywny obraz ciała, że nie znamy prawdy o naszej cielesności, że wolimy sztuczne obrazy niż rzeczywistość.”

Iza Kowalczyk, “Kozyra, czyli problem,” *Magazyn Sztuki* 22 (1999): 44.

⁷⁵⁶ “Tych ciał nie będzie chciał skosztować wzrokiem każdy kto zechce, dlatego wyrrywają one patrzenie z bezmyślności.”

Ujma, “Nagość i nicość,” 256.

the work, no matter how avant-garde it was. Indeed Elżbieta Matyna contended that Polish women artists in the 1990s attempted to use their art to shift the discourse from a focus on national identity to a post-communist one. In her words, “Polish women artists today have launched a major effort to rework a syndrome of Polish culture that has been dominant for two centuries, by moving away from a preoccupation with issues of national identity and sovereignty to an attention to active, post-national citizenship, the key agency in a democracy.”⁷⁵⁷ Ewa Hauser echoed that belief in her article “Traditions of Patriotism, Questions of Gender,” when she mentioned that at that time (in the 1990s) Poland was in the process of redefining itself according to its new freedoms. As she stated, “Poland is now busy re-defining the context of its national identity and restructuring the meaning of gender within it.”⁷⁵⁸ Kozyra’s work participates in this restructuring and redefining, by challenging commonly held notions in Poland. In this sense it resembles Afrika’s project, although unlike the Russian artist, Kozyra did not specifically identify the reshaping of identity as one of her goals.

In the 1990s, then, the status quo was actually the open, democratic, free-market, capitalist-consumerist society that the nation’s inhabitants had fought for throughout the communist period. Those who opposed the system or any of the features that came along with it, in the 1990s by default opposed the democracy that Poles had sought after for decades, and by default the Church, which was the leader in the fight for it. Whereas Rottenberg told us that during communism it was considered an obligation to defy the government, in word, mind or deed, in another essay she noted how that conviction had changed dramatically after independence:

⁷⁵⁷ Elżbieta Matyna, “Feminist Art and Democratic Culture,” *Polish Arts Journal* 79 (2005): 2.

⁷⁵⁸ Ewa Hauser, “Traditions of Patriotism, Questions of Gender,” in *Genders* (Postcommunism and the Body Politic) (1995): 78.

...the electoral victory of 1989 and the relatively free interplay of political forces within the new democracy deprived a number of martial law 'heroes' of their arguments. Once again, values had to be verified. The vivid and dynamic art scene which developed in opposition to communism gave way to the everyday toil of putting forward values more enduring than topical gestures.⁷⁵⁹

While the communist system brought with it its own set of problems to contend with for both artist and citizen alike, so, too, did the post-communist period. Artists were among the first to engage in a critique of the new capitalist society, which included an attack on mass media, advertising and consumerism. Kowalczyk has gone as far as to call these "threats for human freedom,"⁷⁶⁰ which only appeared after 1989. Instead of accepting the value system that the media promoted, critical artists in Poland suggested their own, alternative value system. This new system represented the much- and long-coveted freedom for Poles, and was also supported by the Church, insofar as it promoted similar views on women in society. Consequently, any attack on it was considered in fact *unpatriotic*, and unwelcome.

Insofar as Kozyra's work, according to Kowalczyk, attempts to upset that "universal order of things" and challenge the so-called "unchangeable ethical code,"⁷⁶¹ for her, this work is extremely important, because of the fact that it remains within the realm of art, and as such can work to change the notions of beauty put forth by the mass media. In her words, "it is precisely contemporary art that can break this canon, bringing female bodies into visibility which 'are different from the dominating norms and

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid, 22.

⁷⁶⁰ Kowalczyk, "Feminist Art in Poland Today," <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/n.paradoxa/kowal2.htm>.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid

expectations.’⁷⁶² In this way it puts forth questions about these very norms.”⁷⁶³ The fact that her work caused such controversy is evidence of the necessity of such a confrontation, in order to move the discourse on women, body image and gender construction in contemporary Polish society forward

One of the strongest objections viewers had to the bathhouse pieces was the fact that Kozyra filmed these people in a private space, without their permission. This discussion also has particular relevance for a post-communist society, as both public and private spaces were under constant scrutiny. The very construction of the communist apartment violated its inhabitants’ privacy, as flats were too small for the number of inhabitants they were intended to house, and clumsily designed. As David Crowley has written in his essay “Warsaw Interiors,” “Like sardines in a tin, families were raised in small, one- or two-bedroom apartments in which the living room often doubled up as a bedroom for more than one generation.”⁷⁶⁴ Furthermore, he tells us that “in the most prestigious Warsaw schemes, they were characterized by awkward spatial planning with high ceilings and parsimonious allocation of floor-space; rooms opening into one another without a corridor or hallway that might have afforded some kind of privacy to inhabitants.”⁷⁶⁵ Thus privacy was a coveted item in communist Poland, and looked upon as an item of luxury available in the free and democratic West.

⁷⁶² Linda Nead, *The Female Nude. Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, as qtd. in Kowalczyk, “Podglądanie jako strategia dekonstrukcji obrazu ciała,” 251.

⁷⁶³ “To właśnie sztuka współczesna może złamać te kanony wprowadzając w obręb widzialności ciała kobiece, które [są] inne od dominujących norm i oczekiwań. W ten sposób stawia się pytania właśnie o te normy.”

Kowalczyk, “Podglądanie jako strategia dekonstrukcji obrazu ciała,” 251.

⁷⁶⁴ David Crowley, “Warsaw Interiors,” in *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, ed. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, 183 (Oxford, England: Berg, 2002).

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid, 184.

While Schneeman's *Interior Scroll* piece (1975) sought to claim a space for women in the public (male-dominated) arena, Kozyra exposes privacy for the myth that it is, even in Western society. While those who grew up in communist Poland feared a different kind of surveillance, Western society is in no way free from the violation of its private space as well. Kowalczyk feels that the very idea of a bathhouse challenges the notion of a division into public and private, and that Kozyra highlights the superficiality of it and brings it to our attention:

They rejected Kozyra in that she violated privacy by filming women, but after all filming had a place in a public bathhouse. It caused us to reflect on the obligatory division, in general consciousness, of the spheres of public and private, on the sense of this division and the antonymity between the two. Already the institute of a municipal bathhouse is talking about the division between public and private. What is accomplished here is the function connected with caring for the cleanliness of the body, not allowing people who behave completely privately to stay in there. The whole time one is exposed to the gaze of others. Corporeality is publicized here.⁷⁶⁶

What Kozyra exposes, according to Kowalczyk, is that privacy, much like the images of women presented to us in magazines, is an illusion – it doesn't exist, although we would like to believe that it does. "In contemporary culture the image of privacy presented in the public sphere is always constructed, even if by style and mass media. That means that that 'privacy' is a fake product, a product for sale (in the form of gossip, intrigues). The public sphere produces private images according to the agreement of its awaiting

⁷⁶⁶ "Zarzucono artystce, że naruszyła prywatność sfilmowanych kobiet, a przecież filmowanie miało miejsce w łaźni publicznej. Każę to zastanowić się nad obowiązującymi w powszechnej świadomości podziałami na sfery prywatne i publiczne, nad sensem tego podziału i jego niejednoznacznością. Już instytucja łaźni miejskiej rozmywa podział na prywatne i publiczne. Wykonywane tutaj czynności, związane z dbaniem o czystość ciała, nie pozwalają przebywającej w niej osobie na zachowanie całkowitej prywatności. Cały czas jest ona narażona na spojrzenia innych osób. Cieleśność zostaje więc tutaj upubliczniona."

Kowalczyk, "Kozyra, czyli problem," 44.

audience, who dictate what you can say in the private sphere, what you can show, and what you have to hide.”⁷⁶⁷ Once again, Kozyra has smashed our hopes, interfered with our possibility of believing in the illusions that we are presented, not only by the mass media.

Both *The Women's Bathhouse* and *The Men's Bathhouse* were also essentially about viewing – Kozyra's viewing of the men and women in the bathhouse, the audience viewing those present at the bathhouse, as well as the artist herself, and also the visitors to the bathhouse viewing each other. Kozyra even called *The Women's Bathhouse* “a history of viewing,”⁷⁶⁸ and again, by juxtaposing an image such as Rembrandt's *Susanna and the Elders* with the stills of the women in the bathhouse, she underscored that fact. A spectator for both of these works, then, also takes part in the viewing. The viewer becomes a Peeping Tom, staring at men and women through a pinhole carved out in the wall of the bathhouse, a mobile pinhole that is actually the camera of the artist. He also views others viewing – both the artist and the other visitors to the bathhouse. In that case his participation is already inscribed into the work, it is echoed by the viewing that takes place in the film. As Ujma has remarked about the work, it “shows a slice of reality not meant for public viewing, it is therefore proof of the infringement, in which the viewers themselves take part as they connect to this observation.”⁷⁶⁹ The viewer knows that he is

⁷⁶⁷ “W kulturze współczesnej obraz prywatności prezentowany w sferze publicznej jest zawsze konstruowany, choćby przez modę i mass media. Oznacza to, że “prywatność” jest sztucznym produktem, towarem na sprzedaż (w postaci plotek, zwierzeń). Obszar publiczny wytwarza obrazy prywatności zgodne z oczekiwaniem odbiorców, dyktuje, co o sferze prywatnej można powiedzieć, co pokazać, a co należy ukryć.”

Kowalczyk, “Kozyra, czyli problem,” 46.

⁷⁶⁸ “historia podglądania”

Katarzyna Kozyra, “O twórczości Katarzyny Kozyry – Ciało obnażone i dusza,” interview by Marta Tyniec, *Życie* (Saturday-Sunday, September 20-21, 1997): 5.

⁷⁶⁹ “Praca ta pokazała wycinek rzeczywistości nie przeznaczony do oglądania, jest zatem dowodem wykroczenia, w którym sami widzowie biorą udział przyłączając się do obserwacji.”

witness to something that he isn't supposed to see. The people we see on camera are not posing, they are not the nudes one expects to see in art – they are not idealized, their bodies are not unattainable. Instead, the viewer can identify with the subjects, because they are *real*, in that they are average, everyday people, and not made-up. Her work therefore challenges the socially constructed concepts of gender, and suggests that the existing rubric may not, in fact, be representative of our reality.

Kozyra's techniques also reveal something about her goals. According to the artist, she attempted to reach her audience by using a language that they could understand, one that is current in contemporary society – video. "I only care about the fact that my work be readable, that my work would be understandable without any additional ideology. That's why we reach for new media, pictures, video. Those things, along with non-traditional painting and sculpture, dominate in contemporary culture and are understandable for audiences."⁷⁷⁰ In a recent interview she also agreed with the idea that because modern society is used to the video format, what with phenomena such as Mtv, using this medium in her work made it "easier to communicate [because] people are used to it."⁷⁷¹ Furthermore, the artist felt that video could perhaps offer the most "honest" or straightforward image of what she was trying to present. She said that she "once had this kind of theory, that documentary video doesn't lie, it has a one-to-one correspondence [with reality – AB]."⁷⁷² Nevertheless, instead of being immediately

Ujma, "Nagość i nicość," 257.

⁷⁷⁰ "Dlatego też sięgam po nowoczesne środki przekazu i zdjęcia, zapis na taśmie wideo. To one bowiem, a nie tradycyjne obrazy i rzeźby, dominują we współczesnej kulturze i są zrozumiałe dla odbiorcy."

Kozyra, "Coś mi siedzi z tyłu czaszki," 43.

⁷⁷¹ "AB: Ale to jest taki nowoczesny język mamy Mtv i tak dalej... Myślę, że to też pomogło komunikować się z ludźmi. KK: Tak, że to łatwiejszy komunikat... Ludzie są do tego przyzwyczajeni." Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

⁷⁷² "Miałam kiedyś taką teorię, że taka dokumentacja wideo nie zakłamuje, takie jeden do jednego." Kozyra, in an interview with the author, September 22, 2007.

accessible to audiences, it caused controversy and discord; the video did not communicate to its audiences in a way that, for example, Mtv could. This recalls Ujma's mention of the advertising billboard that failed to cause a stir because it used a far more universal language of tropes and conventions than that of contemporary art.

Video art in the United States grew out of Minimalism and Conceptual art. Margaret Lovejoy reminds us that its emergence also coincided with the expansion of broadcast television, which helped it to be much more easily received. In her words, "the pervasive influence of television strongly contributed to new cultural assumptions and attitudes which were gradually leading to the new Postmodern condition."⁷⁷³ Although artists began experimenting with video art in Poland around the same time (in the 1970s), once again, these were private experiments that would not normally have been seen in the conventional exhibition halls. This is another instance of a technique or approach to art that the public was not prepared for, as the traditional was not included in standard art historical education. Consequently Kozyra's use of film, instead of communicating directly to its audience, created a controversy over ethics and aesthetics, which for Kowalczyk, was regrettable. In her words, the focus on ethics and the method of creation "turns us away from the real problems that the work touches on."⁷⁷⁴ Kozyra was not, in fact, attempting to enter into a discourse on contemporary art practice and methods (as opposed to *ideas*), but because this discussion had not taken place previously in Poland,

The artist then went on to say that she later realized that video was also a manipulative art. This especially became clear to her as she was editing the videos for their final presentation, and she removed hundreds of minutes of tape, choosing only the ones she liked the most.

⁷⁷³ Margot Lovejoy, "Video: New Time Art," in Margot Lovejoy, *Post Modern Current: Art and Artists in the Age of Electronic Media* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1992), 195.

⁷⁷⁴ "Dyskusje, dotyczące etyki odwracają się od rzeczywistych problemów, które praca ta przekazuje." Kowalczyk, "Podglądanie jako strategia dekonstrukcji obrazu ciała," 249.

viewers used her work in order to take up the subject, and focused their discussion on the form of the work, as opposed to the content.

For Magdalena Ujma the strong reactions to the work only confirm the conservatism and traditional tenets of Polish society: “these reactions attest to the fresh reception of that which in other places stopped shocking a long time ago. It attests to a provincialism, which wouldn’t be so bad in and of itself, if it didn’t come from the steam of xenophobia.”⁷⁷⁵ These views are echoed by others, among them Maria Janion (b. 1926), a Polish scholar, theorist and feminist, who also feels that independence in Poland did not bring with it the freedom and liberalism that one might have expected. According to her: “the Polish cultural scene is fraught with complacency, obscuritism, and defensiveness, which make a free and open exchange of ideas difficult. Something really terrible is going on in Poland.”⁷⁷⁶ Her statement is an exact echo of those in opposition to Kozyra’s work, namely Maciej Iłowiecki’s statement in response to *Pyramid of Animals*, when he stated that “if academic teachers do not think it is immoral to kill animals for fun...indeed something very wrong must be going on in Poland.”⁷⁷⁷ The fact that such works can still produce shock and disbelief among viewers indicate the very need for such methods, as well as the want for such issues to be handled by artists and cultural figures alike, in order for audiences to work through them and confront them head on. In fact, Ujma’s mention of xenophobia echoes a statement made by Piotrowski, wherein he pinpointed both nationalism and globalism as two issues plaguing post-communist

⁷⁷⁵ “Reakcje te świadczą o świeżym odbiorze tego, co gdzie indziej dawno już przestało szokować. Świadczą o prowincjonalizmie, co samo w sobie nie byłoby złe, gdyby nie szło w parze z ksenofobią.” Ujma, “Nagość i nicość,” 254.

⁷⁷⁶ As qtd. in Filipowska, “Shifting a Cultural Paradigm: Between the Mystique and the Marketing of Polish Theater,” 164.

⁷⁷⁷ Maciej Iłowiecki, “Nothing Justifies Murdering Animals for Fun, Even if the Pretext is an Attempt to be an ‘Artist,’” reprinted in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s*, ed. Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospyszyl, 25 (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002).

Europe. For him the former is an effect of the latter, a defense mechanism in order to preserve the known identity – “a defense of the identity of margins.”⁷⁷⁸ He stated that “nationalisms can be more or less closed, more or less defensive, surrounded by the walls separating them from all the ‘others.’”⁷⁷⁹ In this sense the defensiveness of Polish viewers of Kozyra’s art can be seen as a mechanism used to preserve Polish society as it was defined at the time. Any major paradigm shift or change in ideology is in fact a disruption to the order of things, in light of this fact, this makes the strong reaction of Polish viewers understandable.

Unlike Polis’ and Afrika’s work, Kozyra’s is not explicitly political, yet it was nevertheless received as such by her detractors, who saw her work as an affront to the Polish status quo in the 1990s, with its strict standards of beauty and gender hierarchy. While Kozyra aimed to communicate effectively to her viewers, many of them did not have the tools to identify with contemporary art practices, and thus rejected the work categorically, stating that it was incomprehensible as art. Their denunciation of the work, however, is a clear indication of the efficacy of her critique of social norms in Poland at the time. While Polis’ *Bronze Man* performance made a statement against the system which his audience had opposed since World War II, Kozyra attacked the foundation of the society that Poles had been trying to build since that same time. Regardless of the criticism her performances received, they nevertheless sparked a discussion with regard to the limits of art and as such also stimulated viewers to consider the issues that she presented in her work with regard to images of women and gender identity. In this sense her viewers, even in receiving her work negatively, nevertheless still participated in the

⁷⁷⁸ Piotrowski, “Male Artists’ Body: National Identity vs. Identity Politics,” 232.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid, 232.

new democracy that was emerging in Poland in the 1990s. Kozyra's art work, then, went even further, as both her work and its public reception have helped to shape that democracy in the Republic of Poland and advance these new ideas in early years of its development.

Conclusion

The isolation of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc from the West during the Cold War was not only a political divide, but also a cultural and social one. Although these communist countries were not completely cut off from the rest of Europe and America, their development took a separate and distinct path from their Western counterparts. As such the sources and motivations of artists from the region were quite separate and distinct from the forces driving Western art. Consequently, it is crucial that the contemporary art from Eastern Europe and Russia be investigated from the perspective of the specific socio-political and cultural environment that shaped it. This is not only the case for art that was produced during the Soviet period (such as that of Polis) but also for post-Soviet art (as we see with Afrika and Kozyra). Since the manifestation of state socialism was different in each country, global statements with regard to artists of former Soviet countries would only result in generalizations and oversimplification.

As I have demonstrated in the first two chapters of this manuscript, although the official policies regarding artistic production, specifically that of Socialist Realism, were intended to be universally applied, they were in fact implemented differently in each country, as a result of both local governmental attitudes toward the policy, as well as the national traditions that influenced its reception, interpretation and application. In Russia it had been rather strictly put into practice since the 1930s, a phenomenon that by the later half of the twentieth century produced a significant backlash in the form of a movement of nonconformist artists who worked privately to develop art that was comparable to European and American contemporary practices. In St. Petersburg, this class of nonconformist artists began to emerge most strongly in the 1970s. In Latvia, however,

owing to both the fact that Socialist Realism had been introduced much later, in the 1950s, and also owing to the country's logistical and ideological distance from Moscow, the official style never really took hold. Similarly, in Poland, artists saw it as their duty to protest the enforcement of the style. Nevertheless, after the 1950s, in none of these places did Socialist Realism prove a serious threat to artistic practice.

While performance art was regarded with disdain by the ideologues who enforced Socialist Realism, the phenomenon also had varying relevance to the artistic practices in each country and city in question. Insofar as nonconformist activity in Leningrad mainly occurred within the realm of punk rock music and film, Afrika's contribution to the local art scene is quite unique, and also highly significant. The artist attempts to infuse the city with ideas and strategies for thinking of post-Soviet identity in artistic terms, while at the same time addressing a global audience with contemporary practices. Similarly, Polis is exceptional as a performance artist among his colleagues, and his message stands out and is delivered more effectively to a viewing public in Latvia that was eager for ideas outside of the everyday norm. Kozyra's work, however, is a continuation and development of a long-standing tradition of performance art that goes back to Tadeusz Kantor. Her use of contemporary art-making methods, however, places Polish contemporary art onto the global art scene.

It is clear that the three artists in this study chose to focus on different aspects of post-Perestroika and Post-Soviet life and society in their work. While for Afrika, forming a Post-Soviet identity was the key to mental health and survival in Post-Soviet Russia, in Latvia and Poland citizens were dealing with different issues. For Latvians, the revealing of the truth behind the appearances put forth and created by the Soviet Union was the key

to bringing an end to the Soviet Occupation. Polis contended with these problems in the realm of art while his fellow citizens worked to bring them into the more official arena of politics. In post-communist Poland, the transformation to a free and democratic society was played out amid a battle of conflicting ideas – traditional norms laid out by the Catholic Church, conventional Modernist ideas that are the foundation of Western society (which were also echoed in the Church’s beliefs), and Post-Modern ideas of the Western intellectual world. Afrika, Polis and Kozyra recognized the centrality of these issues to their potential audiences and chose to address them through the medium of performance, in order to more directly involve viewers and provide a space for them to think them through, with the art work as the medium.

Just as the concepts they chose to address were separate and distinct according to their intended audience, so, too, were the methods of engagement and the subsequent audience response. In Latvia, Polis addressed the Latvian “everyman,” or the man on the street. As these were people who were already beginning to consider the relevance of uncovering false idols, they responded favorably to *The Bronze Man* and most likely saw him as a mirror of the pursuits of active citizens on a political level. Afrika’s approach was quite the opposite. As his goal was a far-reaching one – the construction of a new and alternative language with which to help construct a new Russian identity – his initial audience was the people who felt the changes taking place in society most closely, the residents of a mental institution. He then took his work to a Western audience, in Vienna – the birthplace of modern psychology. Of all of these artists in the study, Kozyra is perhaps the one artist who aimed, in each of her subsequent works, to make each piece clear and understandable to her audience. Despite all of her efforts, however, her work

was received as the most controversial of the three performances discussed in this manuscript.

Many of these works bear resemblance, in various ways, to performance pieces by Western artists, such as Joseph Beuys or American feminist artists such as Eleanor Antin or Carolee Schneeman. While it is tempting to view these works of art through the lens of Western art history, it is important to remember that much of the region that these artists were working in remained *relatively* closed off from the Western art world during the Cold War. Although many artists in these communist countries were aware of developments taking place in the West, the manner in which they received this information was inconsistent and sporadic and one cannot assume that all artists in the East were aware of every artistic trend and development in the West, nor the order in which those developments occurred. Indeed, both Kozyra and Polis have denied any knowledge of the work by artists who those in the West may be tempted to say their work resembles. Of the three, only Afrika claims direct knowledge of, for example, Joseph Beuys, whom he consciously quoted with the exhibition of his hospital pajamas in the *Doctor and Patient* exhibition in Finland. If artists such as Maurizio Cattelan, whose 1995 *Love Saves Life: Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten I* appears to be practically a direct copy of Kozyra's *Pyramid of Animals*, can claim a lack of knowledge of the Polish artist's work, then it only follows that the same argument can be equally valid when made in reverse – that the Eastern artists were unaware of the work by feminist or conceptual artists that their work appears to be referring to.

Studying these artists from within the context of neighboring countries and nations with similar Soviet-influenced histories is perhaps more informative and useful,

not to mention necessary, than juxtaposing them with Western artists whose work more often than not had completely different concerns. This is certainly the strategy that has been taken since the end of the Cold War in the fields of sociology, political science, and cultural studies⁷⁸⁰; it only follows that the same approach might be similarly informative in the field of art history. In this way we can begin to understand the subtle differences between the diverse meanings of performance in Latvia, Russia and Poland, as well as the specific issues relevant or not relevant to the artists and their viewers. We will then also gain a more nuanced insight into both the Soviet and post-Soviet (communist and post-communist) socio-cultural and socio-political situations in each country. The performances discussed in this dissertation, therefore, are instructive both in terms of art and art practices in Eastern Europe and Russia in the late 20th century, as well as serving as an indication of the social climate in the period in question.

It is only after an investigation of the local environment in which the works were created that we can begin to assess the value of these artists' work on a global level, in terms of Modern and Postmodern art on an international scale. To do so, we must avoid the narrow focus and tendency to view the artistic production of these countries only in comparison to developments in the West. It is not simply a question of how these works resemble those produced in the West, but rather what the works mean in the context of when and where they were produced, and why the ideas they represent have manifested themselves in these particular forms. Furthermore, we must consider how the strategies of Modern, Post-Modern and Avant-Garde art arrived at a unique expression in the art of

⁷⁸⁰ See for example *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, ed. Susan E. Reid and David Crowley (Oxford, England: Berg, 2000); *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, ed. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (Oxford, England: Berg, 2002); and *Consuming Russia*, ed. Adele Marie Barker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

Eastern Europe and Russia. For example, examining why the artist chose a certain strategy, and how it was a result of the combined forces of art historical as well as socio-political legacy. The interpretation may then be enhanced by a consideration of the works in relation to similar works produced in the West only to point out that the completely different historical context has produced an art work that may look similar to one created in the West, but is a manifestation and expression of completely different ideas. From this comparison we will gain a refined and expanded definition of modernism and post-modernism in art history as we begin to consider European artists who have not, until recently, been included in the discourse.

In the absence of any significant written history, especially within former Soviet Union countries such as Russia and Latvia (in Poland there has simply been more published), careful research involving primary sources, namely the taking of oral histories from the artists in question, is essential to begin any significant evaluation of the art of these former communist countries. Local accounts of art history tend to be limited by their insularity. Accounts from the outside tend to consider the art work from a narrowly Western perspective. The ideal approach is to expand the scope and consider the artists and their work in all of these contexts – the local, the regional and the global, in order to arrive at a complete picture of the relevance and significance of the work in terms of Modern and Post-Modern art.

This study has adopted such a comparative approach, making extensive use of primary sources and oral histories. By examining the artists and the specific performances in question in terms of their significance in the country of origin, the region, and in terms of Western art history in general, I have demonstrated how each of

these distinct artistic strategies and art works have specific resonance in each of those areas. Kozyra's performance dealt with the naked body and standards of beauty in a way that had particular relevance for Polish audiences, and indeed the reaction of Polish viewers to the work of art also indicates its bearing on that society. The identity issues that Afrika and his compatriots were dealing with in Post-Soviet Russia were unique to that country, whereas in other Post-Soviet countries it was a strong sense of identity that had in fact helped citizens to regain their respective nations' independence. We see this expressly reflected in Polis' performance, which worked in concert with political activists struggling to tear down the façade hiding the truth behind the real history of the Latvian nation. Each of these three artists was maneuvering in the rapidly-changing socio-political environments of their localities; their work stands as a testament to that volatile and confusing period. The specific atmosphere in each of their working environments produced diverse responses to these pressures. Each project was both a reaction to, as well as a product of, the changing social times of which the artists were an integral part.

Images: Introduction



Figure 0.1. Miervaldis Polis, *The Bronze Man Performance*, 1987.
Reproduced in *Paintings: Witnesses of an Age – The 1960s, 1970s and 1980s*. Latvia:
The Artist's Union of Latvia, 2002.



Figure 0.2. From the *Crimania* performance, Simferopol, Crimea.
 From left to right: nurse at the psychiatric hospital, Professor Samokhvalov, Peter Noever, Sergei Bugaev (Afrika), Viktor Mazin.
 Sergei Bugaev Afrika, *Crimania* Performance, 1993, Simferopol, Ukraine.
 Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, edited by Peter Noever. Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995.



Figure 0.3. Sergei Bugaev (Afrika), Detail of installation from the exhibition *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna, Austria, 1995.

In the foreground: *Morphology of an Image (MZF 1)* with the *Stochastic Pendulum (Prigogine 1)*.

Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, edited by Peter Noever. Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995.



Figure 0.4. Katarzyna Kozyra, *Pyramid of Animals*, 1993. (multiple views)
Images courtesy of the artist.



Figure 0.5. Katarzyna Kozyra, *The Women's Bathhouse*, 1997. (various film stills)
Images courtesy of the artist.



Figure 0.6. Katarzyna Kozyra, *The Men's Bathhouse*, 1999. (various film stills)
Images courtesy of the artist.

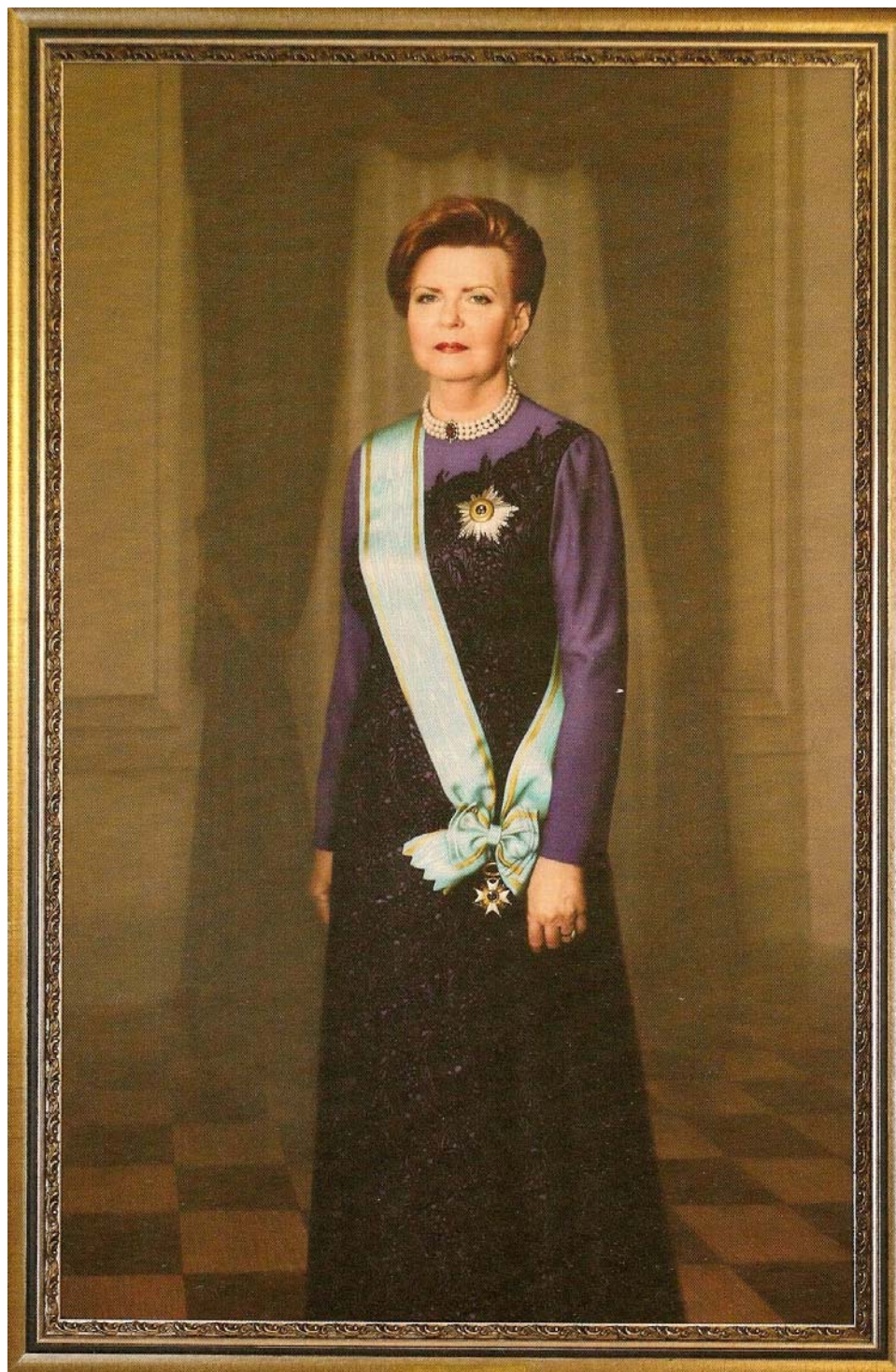


Figure 0.7. Miervaldis Polis, *Vaira Viķe-Freiberga Presidential Portrait*, 2007. Image reprinted in *Māksla* 4/2007.

Images: Chapter Three



Figure 3.1. Miervaldis Polis, *The Bronze Man* (c. 1987) in front of the Victory Monument (*Uzvaras Piemineklis*) in Riga.
Photograph courtesy of the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art



Figure 3.2. Dorota Nieznalska, *Passion*, 2001-2.

Images: Chapter Four

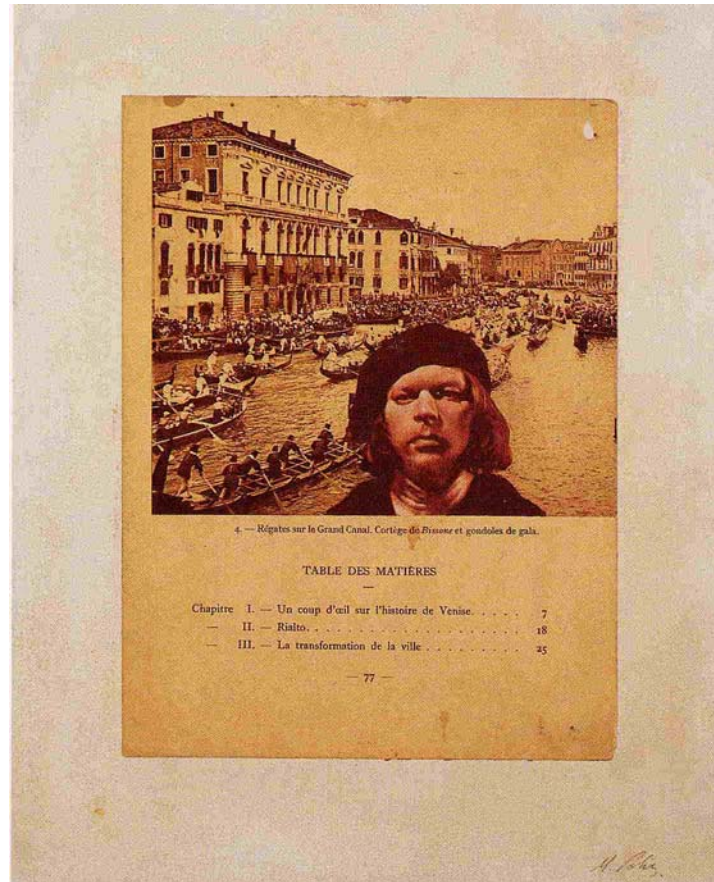


Figure 4.1. Miervaldis Polis, Page #4 from the Series *Illusions on the Pages of the Book About Venice*, 1973.

Tempera, reproduction, varnish on paper and cardboard, 37 x 30.

Image courtesy of the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Soviet Nonconformist Art, Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, New Jersey (USA).



Figure 4.2. Miervaldis Polis, Page #2 from the Series *Illusions on the Pages of the Book About Venice*, 1973.

Tempera, reproduction, varnish on paper and cardboard, 37 x 30.

Image courtesy of the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Soviet Nonconformist Art, Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, New Jersey (USA).



Figure 4.3. Miervaldis Polis, Page from the Series *Illusions on the Pages of the Book About Venice*, 1973.

Tempera, reproduction, varnish on paper and cardboard.

Image courtesy of the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.

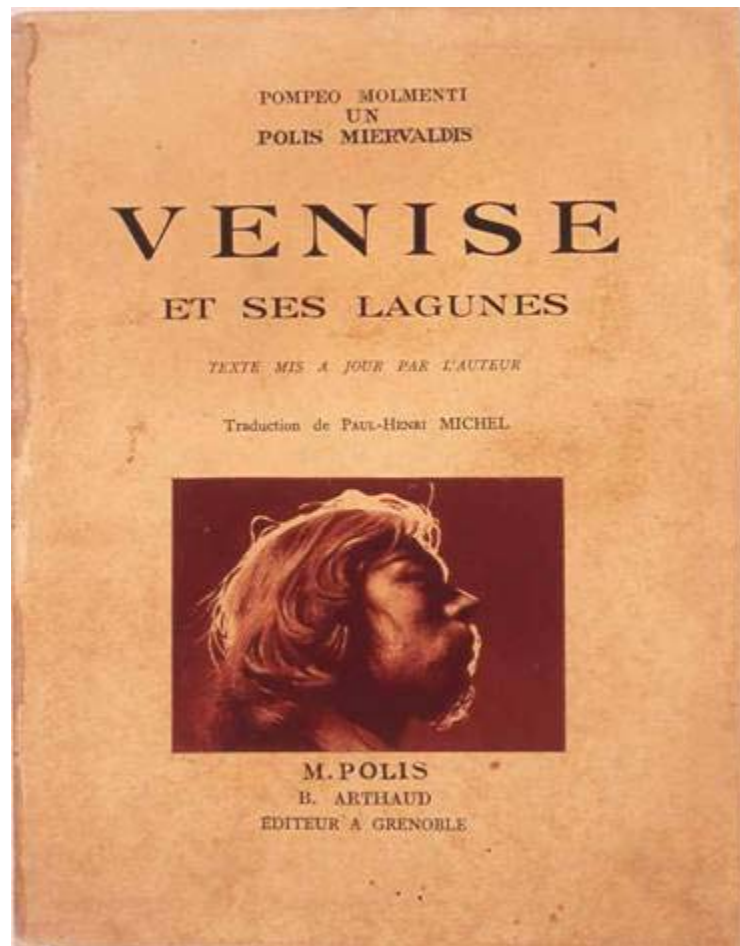


Figure 4.4. Miervaldis Polis, Title page from the Series *Illusions on the Pages of the Book About Venice*, 1973.

Tempera, reproduction, varnish on paper and cardboard, 37 x 30.

Image courtesy of the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Soviet Nonconformist Art, Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, New Jersey (USA).

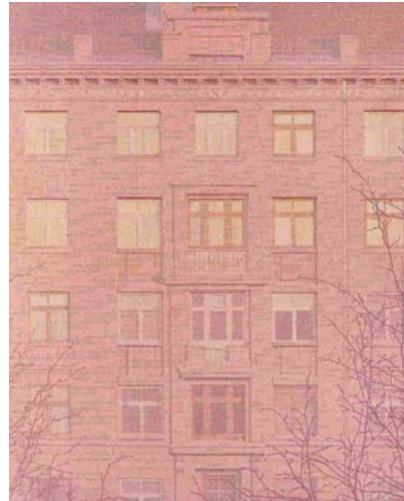


Figure 4.5. Miervaldis Polis, *Late Evening*, 1980 (left), *Sunset*, 1978 (right).

Acrylic on canvas.

Images courtesy of the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Soviet Nonconformist Art, Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, New Jersey (USA).



Figure 4.6. Miervaldis Polis, *Book by Vilis Plūdonis*, 1982.
 Pencil and varnish on cardboard, 100 x 130 cm.
 The Latvian National Museum of Art, Riga, Latvia.

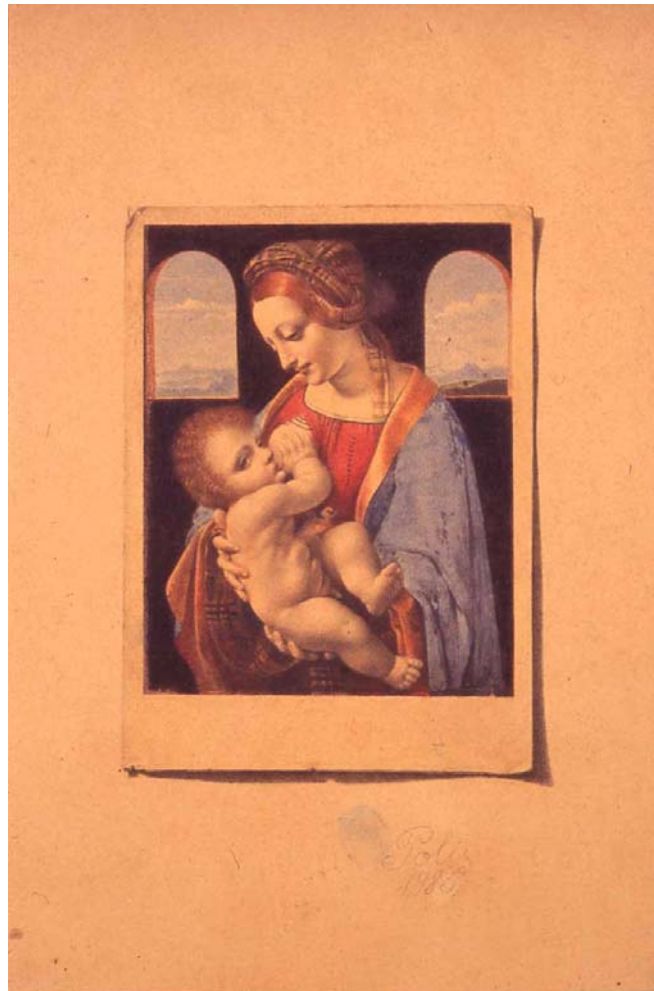


Figure 4.7. Miervaldis Polis, *Reproduction of a Painting by Leonardo da Vinci*, 1982.

Coloured pencil on paper on fiberboard.

Image courtesy of the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Soviet Nonconformist Art, Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, New Jersey (USA).



Figure 4.8. Miervaldis Polis, *Leonardo da Vinci's "Portrait of a Musician" with a Palette*, 1992.

Acrylic on canvas, 70 x 50.

Reproduced in *Personal Time: Art of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania 1945-1996*. Edited by Anda Rottenberg. Warsaw: Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, 1996.

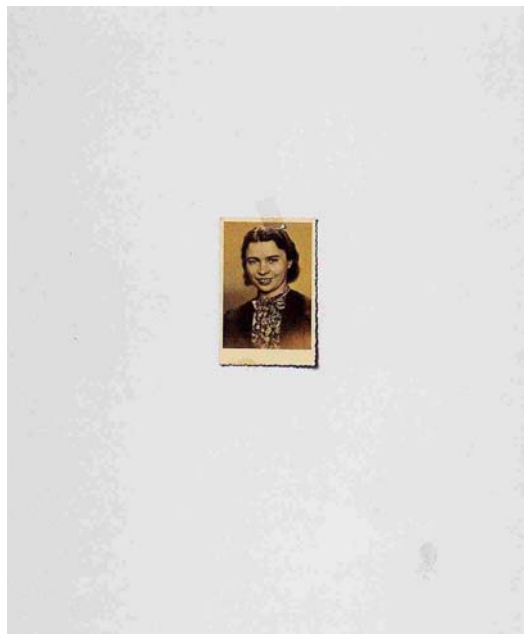


Figure 4.9. Miervaldis Polis, *Photograph of Mother*, 1992.

Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 50.

Reproduced in *Personal Time: Art of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania 1945-1996*. Edited by Anda Rottenberg. Warsaw: Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, 1996.

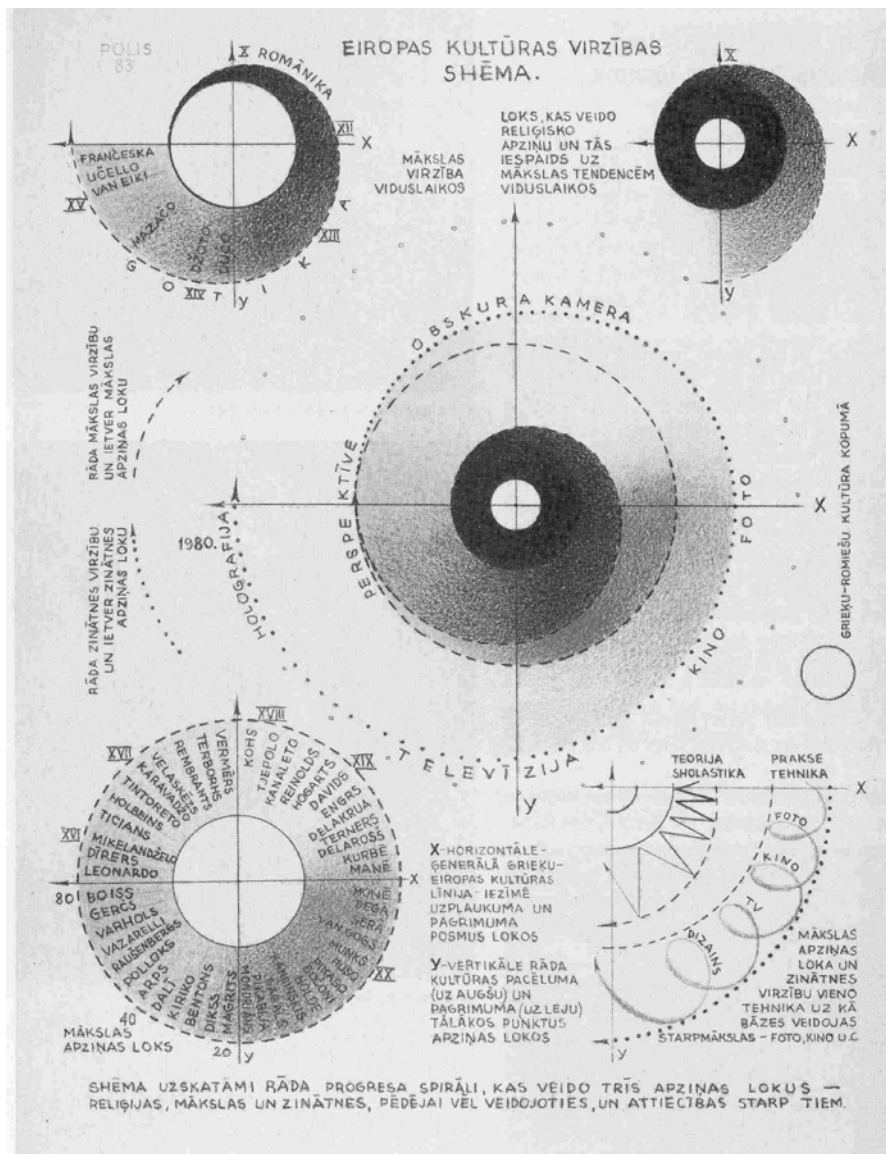


Figure 4.10. Miervaldis Polis, *Schema of the Development of European Culture*, 1983. Reproduced in *Lettische Avantgarde: Riga*. Berlin: Elefant Press, 1988.



Figure 4.11. Miervaldis Polis, *Self-Portrait in a Painting by Vermeer*, undated.
Acrylic, reproduction on cardboard.
Image courtesy of the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Soviet Nonconformist Art,
Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, New Jersey (USA).



Figure 4.12. Miervaldis Polis, *Raphael and Polis*, undated.

Acrylic, reproduction on cardboard, 29.3 x 21.6 cm.

Image courtesy of the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Soviet Nonconformist Art, Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, New Jersey (USA).



Figure 4.13. Miervaldis Polis, *Caravaggio & Polis*, 1986.

Acrylic, reproduction on cardboard.

Reproduced in *Contemporary Soviet Painters from Riga, Latvia*. Edited by Inesse Rinke. New York: Eduard Nakhamin Fine Arts, undated.



Figure 4.14. Miervaldis Polis, *Polis & Caravaggio*, 1996.

Acrylic on reproduction, 11 x 7.5 in.

Reproduced in *Dandies: Fashion and Finesse in Art and Culture* edited by Susan Fillin-Yeh. New York and London: New York University Press, 2001.

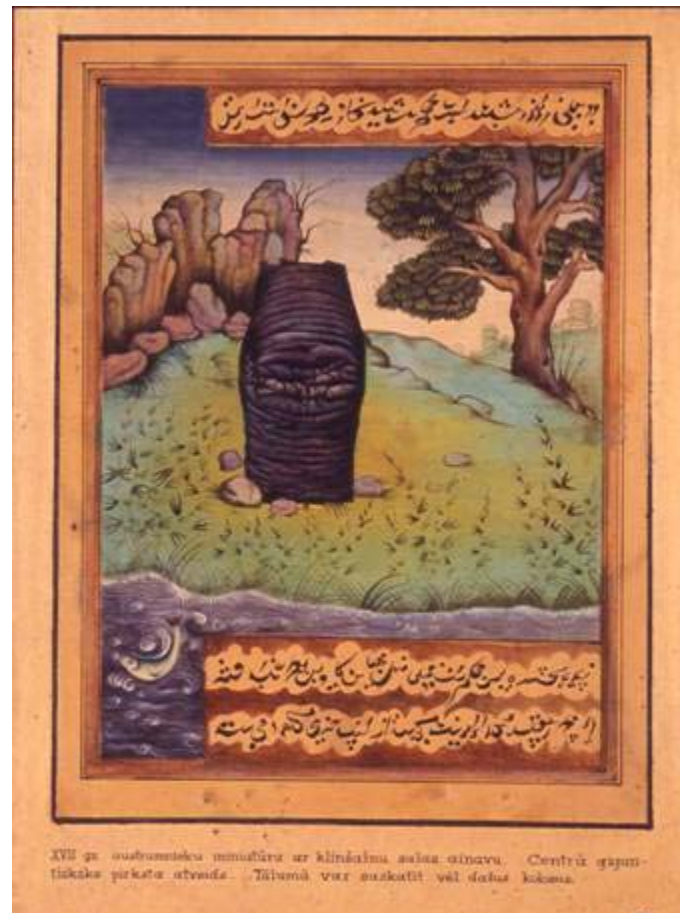


Figure 4.15. Miervaldis Polis, Image Number 5 from the series *Island of Colossi*, 1975. Acrylic on canvas. Image courtesy of the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Soviet Nonconformist Art, Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, New Jersey (USA).

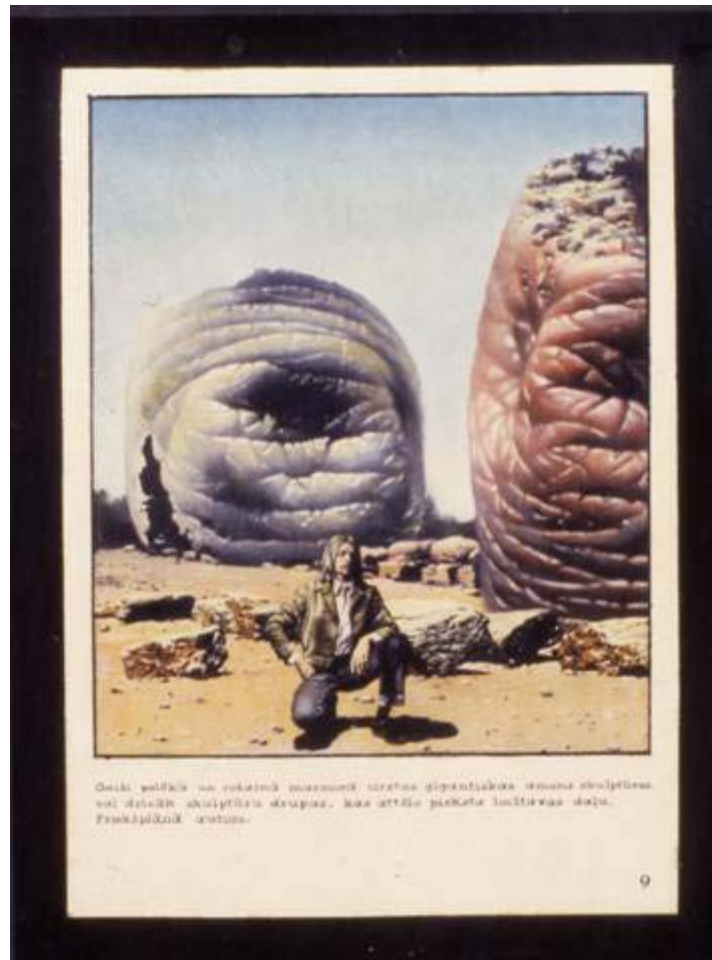


Figure 4.16. Miervaldis Polis, Image Number 2 from the series *Island of Colossi*, 1975.

Acrylic on canvas.

Image courtesy of the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Soviet Nonconformist Art, Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, New Jersey (USA).

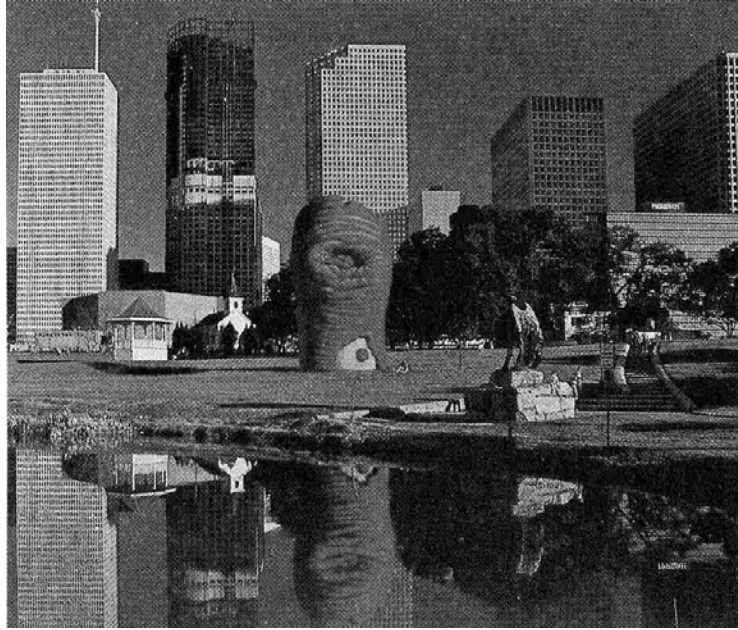


Figure 4.17. Miervaldis Polis, *The Colossus in Houston*, 1985.
Acrylic on reproduction.
Reproduced in *Lettische Avantgarde: Riga*. Berlin: Elefant Press, 1988.

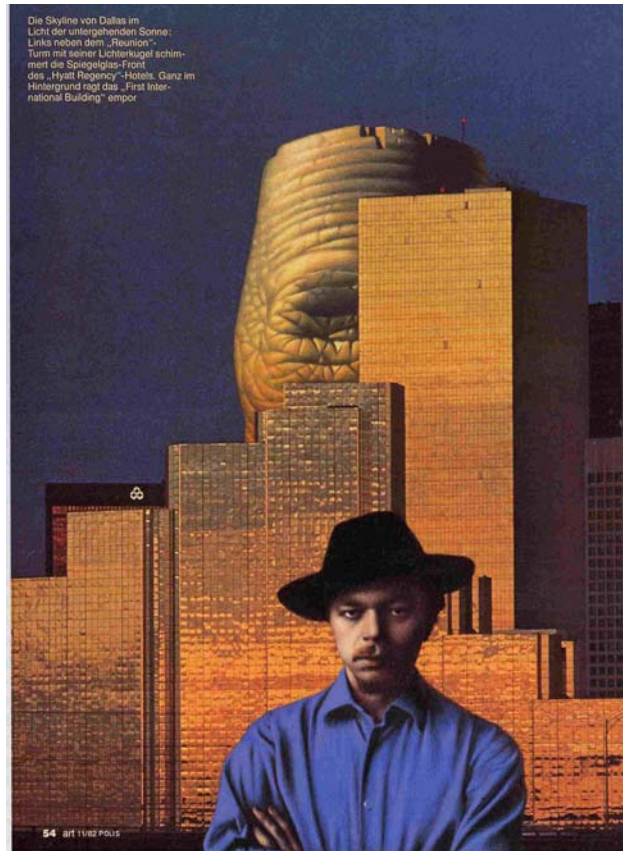


Figure 4.18. Miervaldis Polis, *Self-Portrait in Dallas*, 1986.

Acrylic on reproduction on fiberboard, 46 x 36.5 cm.

Image courtesy of the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Soviet Nonconformist Art,
Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, New Jersey (USA).



Figure 4.19. Miervaldis Polis, getting painted as *The Bronze Man* before *The Bronze Man* Performance, Riga, c. 1987.

Photographs courtesy of the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.



Figure 4.20. Miervaldis Polis, getting painted as *The Bronze Man* before *The Bronze Man* Performance, Riga, c. 1987.

Photographs courtesy of the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.

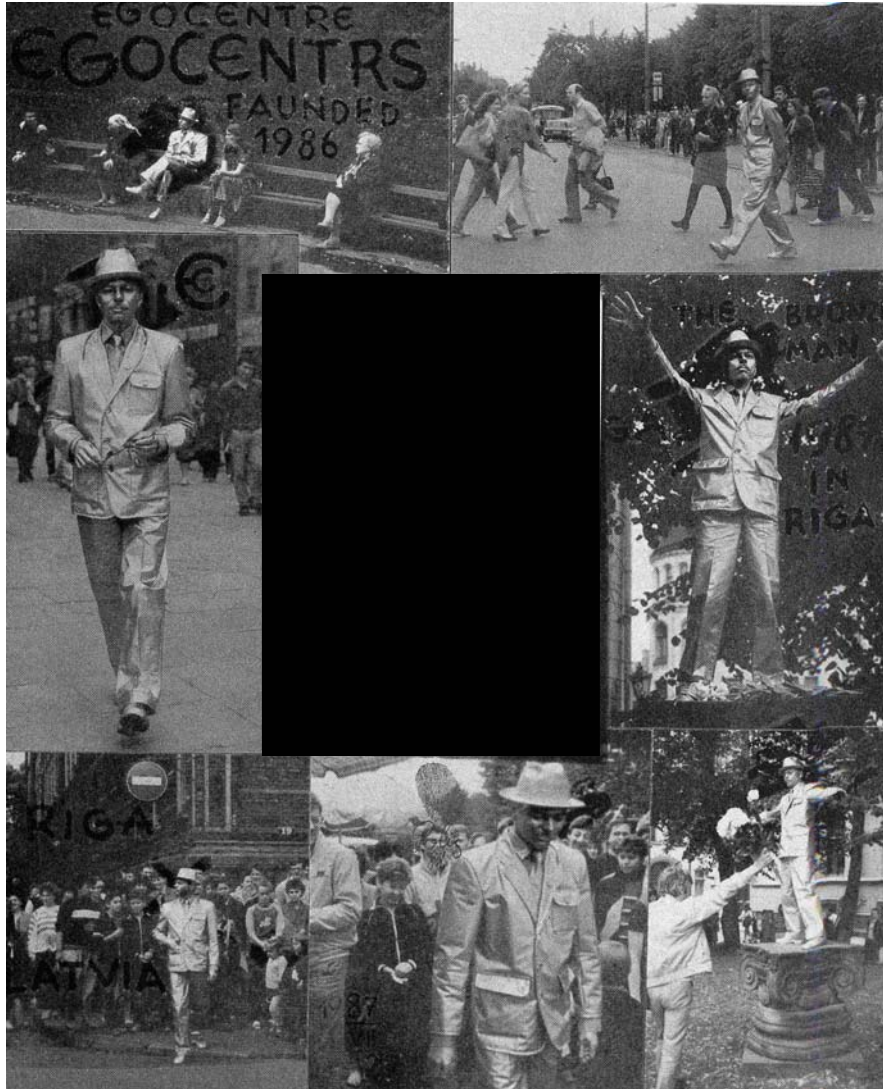


Figure 4.21. *The Bronze Man* on the streets of Riga, c. 1987.
 Reproduced in *Paintings: Witnesses of an Age – The 1960s, 1970s and 1980s*. Latvia:
 The Artist's Union of Latvia, 2002.



Figure 4.22. *The Bronze Man* walking through the streets of Riga during *The Bronze Man* Performance, Riga, c. 1987.
 Photographs courtesy of the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.



Figure 4.23. *The Bronze Man* walking through the streets of Riga during *The Bronze Man* Performance, Riga, c. 1987.
Photographs courtesy of the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.



Figure 4.24. *The Bronze Man* drinking a glass of apple juice during *The Bronze Man* Performance, Riga, c. 1987.
Photograph courtesy of the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.



Figure 4.25. *The Bronze Man* walking through the park in front of the Opera House during *The Bronze Man* Performance, Riga, c. 1987.
Photograph courtesy of the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.



Figure 4.26. *The Bronze Man* walking through the Old Town during *The Bronze Man* Performance, Riga, c. 1987.

Photographs courtesy of the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.



Figure 4.27. Miervaldis Polis, *Self Portrait in Bronze*, 1988. (painting after a performances by the artist)

Acrylic on canvas

Image courtesy of the Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection of Soviet Nonconformist Art, Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, New Jersey (USA).



Figure 4.28. Miervaldis Polis, *Bronze People's Collective Begging* (*Bronzas cilvēku kolektīvā ubagošana*) or *Latvia's Gold* (*Latvijas Zelts*), Bremen, Germany, 1989. Photographs courtesy of The Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.



Figure 4.29. Other artists participating in Miervaldis Polis' *Bronze People's Collective Begging* (*Bronzas cilvēku kolektīvā ubagošana*) or *Latvia's Gold* (*Latvijas Zelts*), Bremen, Germany, 1989.
Photographs courtesy of The Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.



Figure 4.30. Miervaldis Polis in *Bronze People's Collective Begging* (*Bronzas cilvēku kolektīvā ubagošana*) or *Latvia's Gold* (*Latvijas Zelts*), Bremen, Germany, 1989. Photographs courtesy of The Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.



Figure 4.31. Miervaldis Polis, *Bronze People's Collective Begging* (*Bronzas cilvēku kolektīvā ubagošana*) or *Latvia's Gold* (*Latvijas Zelts*), Bremen, Germany, 1989. Above: Poster from Bremen advertising the performance; Below: Viewers from Latvia with posters advertising the *Riga: Lettische Avantgarde* exhibition, Brene, Germany Photographs courtesy of The Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.

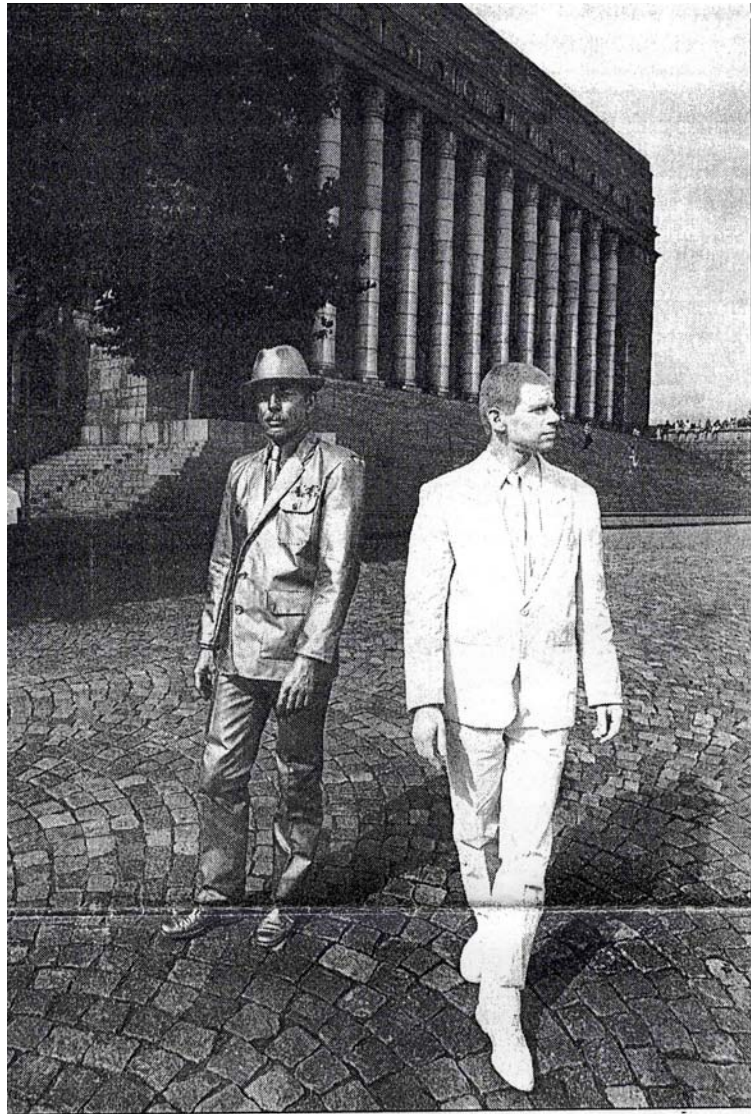


Figure 4.32. Miervaldis Polis and Roy Varan, *The Bronze Man Meets the White Man*, Helsinki, Finland, 1990.

Photograph published in *Vapaaia* (28 August 1990): 38. Courtesy of The Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.

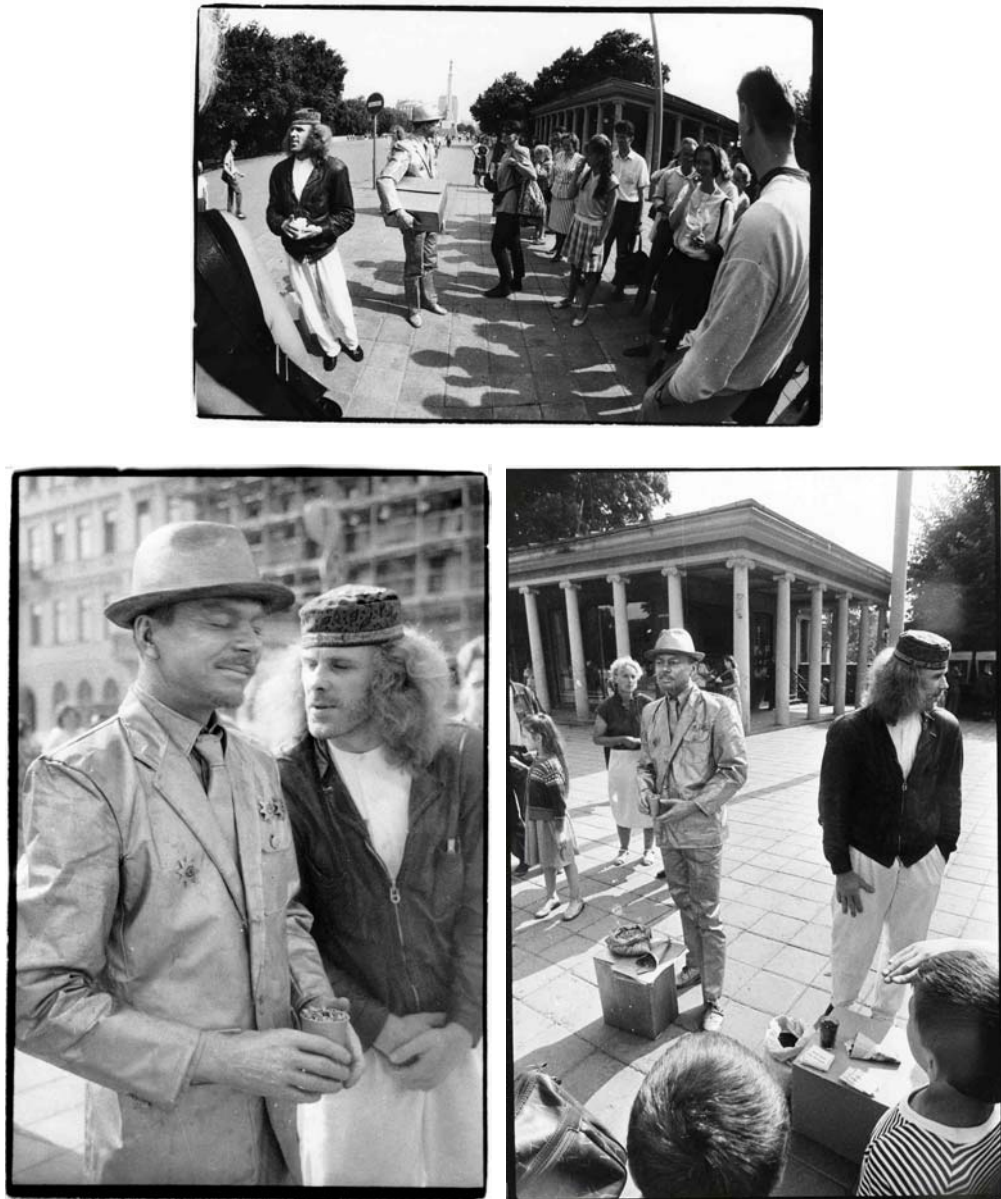


Figure 4.33. Miervaldis Polis and Vilnis Zabers, *Selling Sunflower Seeds*, Riga, Latvia, 1991.

Photograph courtesy of The Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.

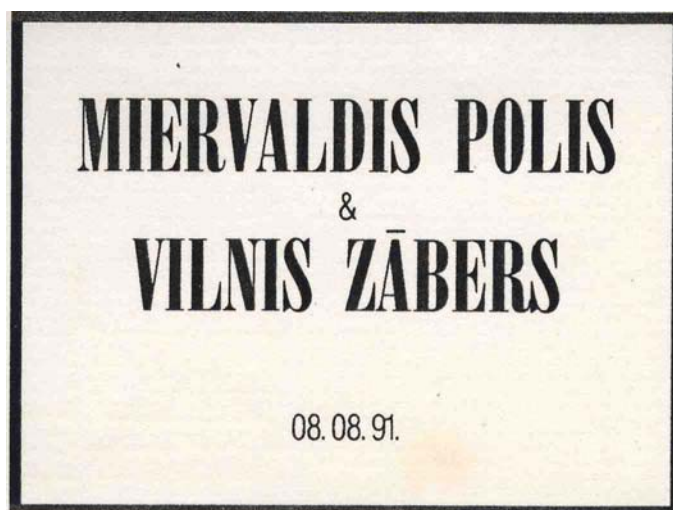


Figure 4.34. Miervaldis Polis and Vilnis Zabers, Label from the sunflower seeds package, *Selling Sunflower Seeds*, Riga, Latvia, 1991.
Scan of the label courtesy of The Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.



Figure 4.35. Miervaldis Polis wearing his *Egocentrs* orders.
Photograph courtesy of The Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.



Figure 4.36. Miervaldis Polis and Vilnis Zabers, *The Bronze Man Becomes the White Man*, Riga, Latvia, 1989.

Photograph courtesy of the Latvian Centre of Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.



Figure 4.37. Miervaldis Polis and Vilnis Zabers, *The Bronze Man Becomes the White Man*, Riga, Latvia, 1989.

Photographs courtesy of the Latvian Centre of Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.



Figure 4.38. Miervaldis Polis, *The Bronze Man* appears on a Riga street bench with Polis' *alter ego* sculpture, c. 1990. Reproduced in *Dandies: Fashion and Finesse in Art and Culture* edited by Susan Fillin-Yeh. New York and London: New York University Press, 2001.



Figure 4.39. Miervaldis Polis and the *alter ego* sculpture, c. 1990.
Photographs courtesy of the Latvian Centre of Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.



Figure 4.40. Miervaldis Polis, the *alter ego* sculpture with the *egovizors* television, c. 1990.

Photographs courtesy of the Latvian Centre of Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.



Figure 4.41. Vilnis Zabers (left) and Miervaldis Polis (right), *The Exhibition Without Work*, Kolonna Gallery, Riga, Latvia, 1992.
Photographs courtesy of the Latvian Centre of Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.

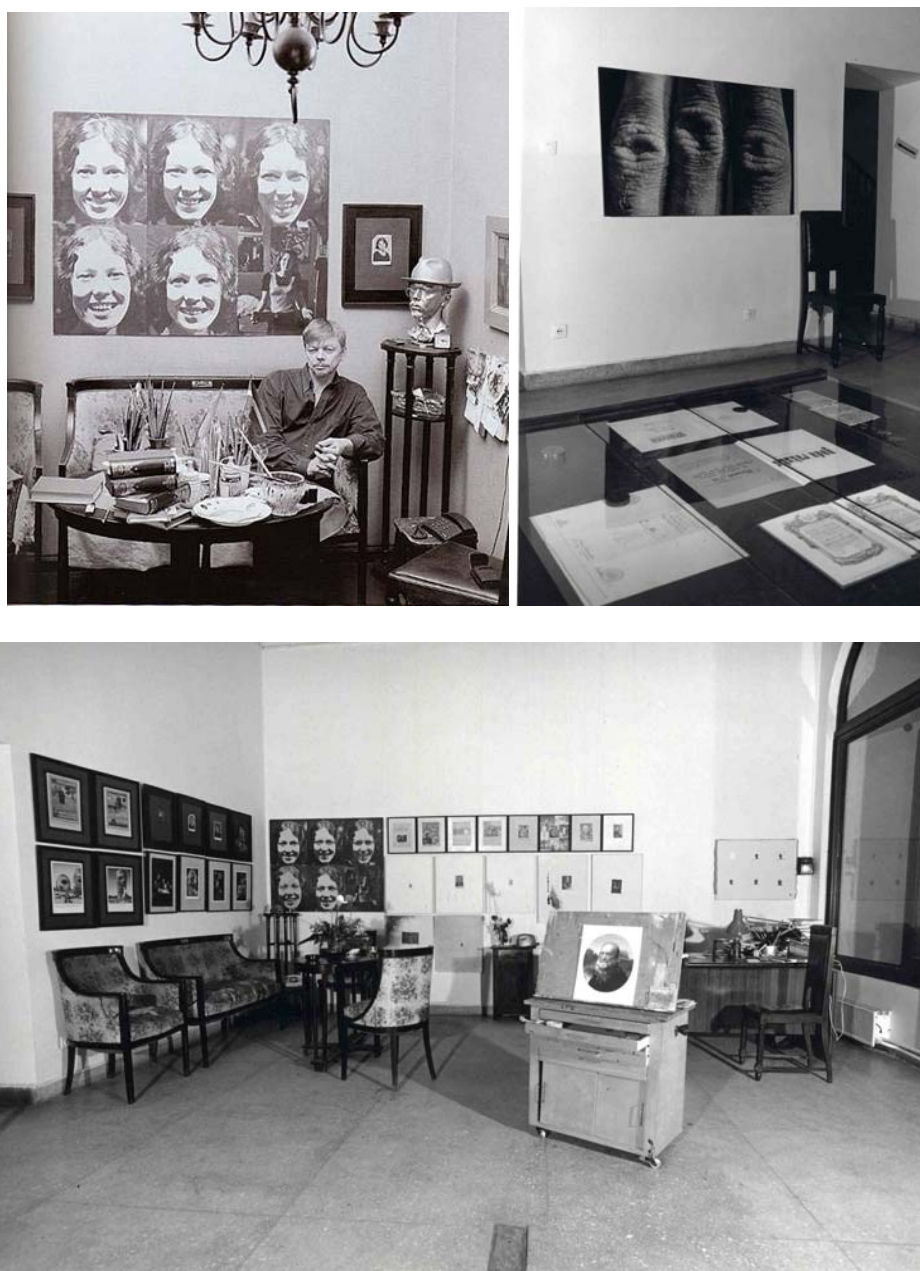


Figure 4.42. Miervaldis Polis Memorial Room, 1995.
Rīgas Galerija (Riga Gallery), Riga, Latvia.
Photographs courtesy of the Latvian Centre of Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.



Figure 4.43. Miervaldis Polis Memorial Room, 1995.
Rigas Galerija (Riga Gallery), Riga, Latvia.
Photographs courtesy of the Latvian Centre of Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia.

Images: Chapter Five



Figure 5.1. Republican Psychiatric Hospital No. 1, First Ward
Sergei Bugaev Afrika, *Crimania* Performance, 1993, Simferopol, Ukraine.
Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, edited by
Peter Noever. Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995.



Figure 5.2. Afrika's release from the hospital.
Sergei Bugaev Afrika, *Crimania* Performance, 1993, Simferopol, Ukraine.
Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, edited by
Peter Noever. Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995.



Figure 5.3. Sergei Bugaev Afrika, *Evolution of an Image, 1924-1988*, exhibited in *Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, 1993. Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, edited by Peter Noever. Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995.



Figure 5.5. Afrika, in front of the *Heroes of the Soviet Union* Exhibition, Republican Psychiatric Hospital No. 1, Simferopol, Ukraine, February 1993
 Sergei Bugaev Afrika, *Crimania* Performance, 1993, Simferopol, Ukraine.
 Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, edited by Peter Noever. Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995.

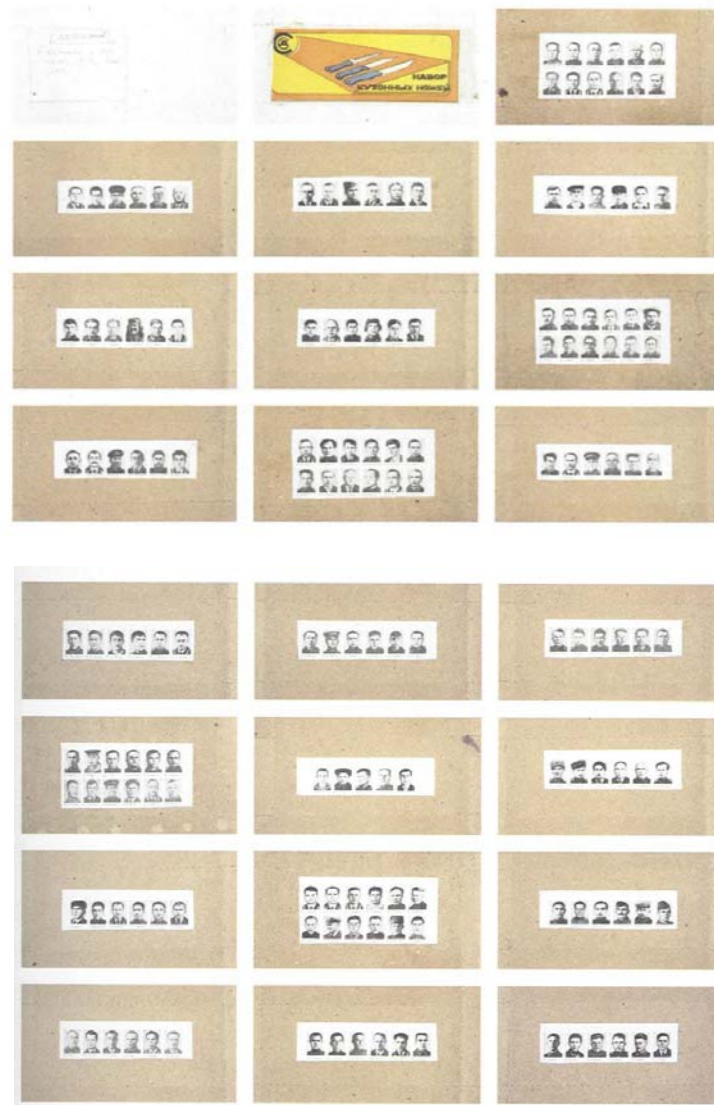


Figure 5.6. Sergei Bugaev *Afrika, Heroes of the Soviet Union*, 1993.
 Sergei Bugaev *Afrika, Crimania* Performance, 1993, Simferopol, Ukraine.
 Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazâfaka*, edited by
 Peter Noever. Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995.



Figure 5.7. Sergei Bugaev Afrika, *Donal destruction*, 1995.
Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, edited by Peter Noever. Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995.



Figure 5.8. Sergei Bugaev Afrika, Museum Buildings, front to back: *Museum of Histology*, *Museum of Epileptoid Architecture*, *Museum of Aphasia*, 1995. Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, edited by Peter Noever. Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995.

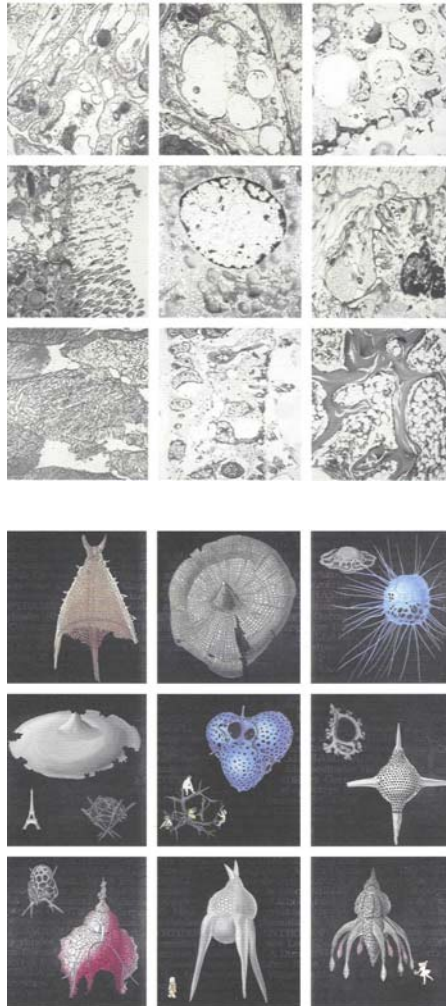


Figure 5.9. Sergei Bugaev Afrika, Details of the walls of Museum Buildings, Top: *Museum of Histology*, Bottom: *Museum of Epileptoid Architecture*, 1995. Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, edited by Peter Noever. Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995.



Figure 5.10. Sergei Bugaev Afrika, Top: Detail of the wall of *Museum of Aphasia*, Bottom: *Museum of Aphasia*, 1995. Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, edited by Peter Noever. Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995.



Figure 5.11. Sergei Bugaev Afrika, *Flag No. 16*, 1995.

Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, edited by Peter Noever. Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995.



Figure 5.12. Sergei Bugaev Afrika, *Flag No. 1*, 1995.
Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, edited by Peter Noever. Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995.



Figure 5.13. Sergei Bugaev Afrika, *Flag No. 3*, 1995.
 Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, edited by Peter Noever. Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995.



Figure 5.14. Sergei Bugaev *Afrika*, top: *Flag No. 3*, bottom: *Flag No. 15*, 1995. Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, edited by Peter Noever. Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995.



Figure 5.15. Sergei Bugaev Afrika, *Flag No.11*, 1995.
 Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, edited by Peter Noever. Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995.



Figure 5.16. Sergei Bugaev Afrika, *Flag No.5*, 1995.
 Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, edited by Peter Noever. Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995.



Figure 5.17. Sergei Bugaev Afrika, *Rebus I*, 1991.
 Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev (Afrika) – Rebus II: Works on Copper*. New York: I-20
 Gallery, 1997.



Figure 5.19. Sergei Bugaev Afrika, *Rebus 10*, 1993.
Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev (Afrika) – Rebus II: Works on Copper*. New York: I-20 Gallery, 1997.

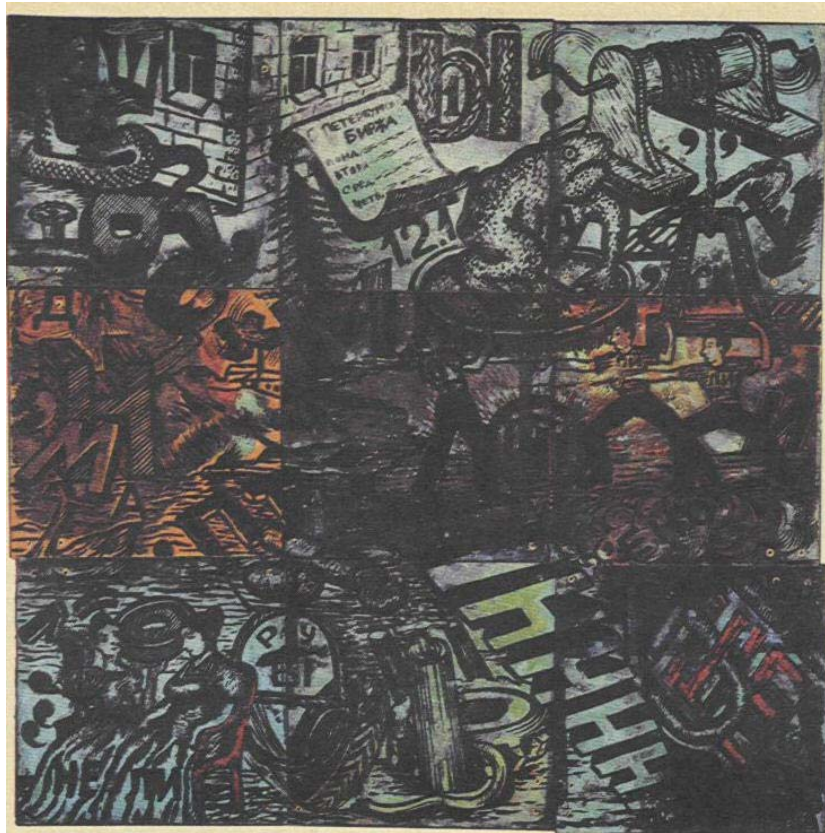


Figure 5.20. Sergei Bugaev *Afrika, Rebus 15*, 1993.
 Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev (Afrika) – Rebus II: Works on Copper*. New York: I-20
 Gallery, 1997.



Figure 5.21. Komar and Melamid, *Double Self-Portrait as Young Soviet Pioneers*, from the *Nostalgic Realism* Series, 1982-83.
Reproduced in Carter Ratcliff, *Komar & Melamid*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1988.

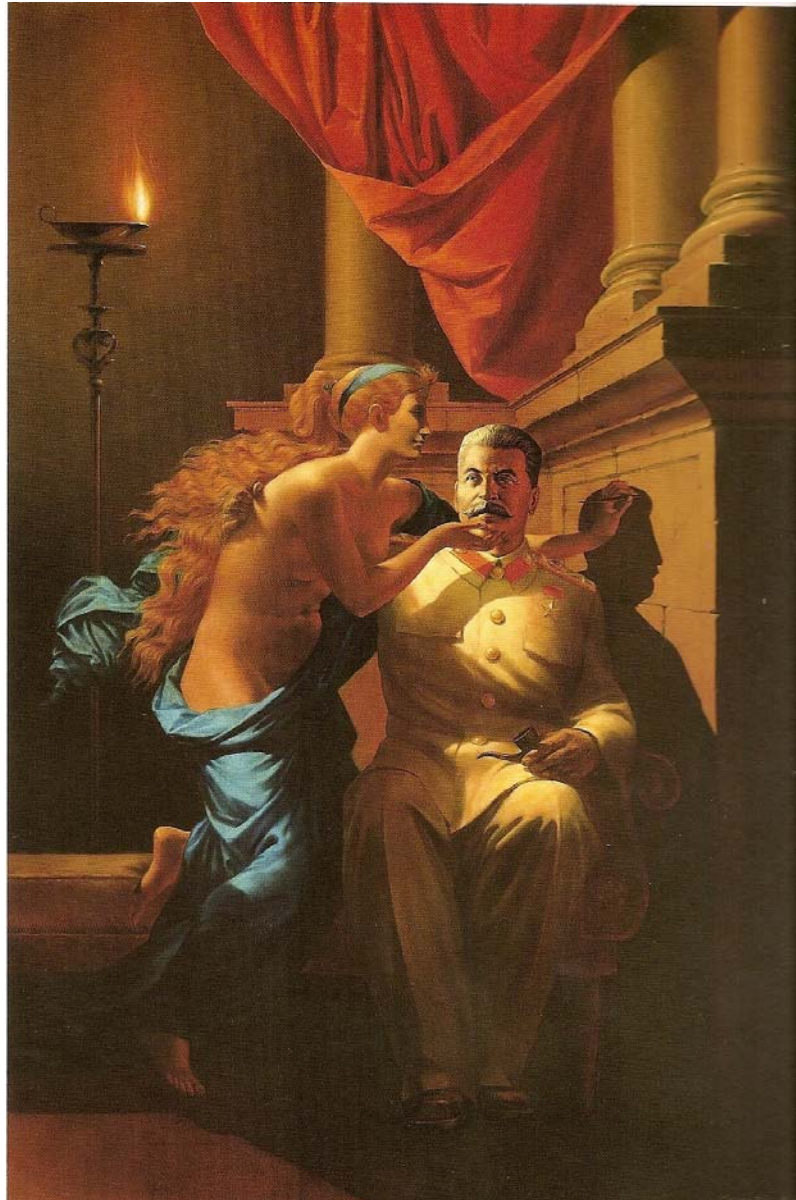


Figure 5.22. Komar and Melamid, *The Origin of Socialist Realism*, from the *Nostalgic Realism* Series, 1982-83.

Reproduced in Carter Ratcliff, *Komar & Melamid*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1988.



Figure 5.23. Sergei Bugaev Afrika, examples of *Reflecting Rebus*, 1997.
 Top: Installed at *Kabinet* exhibition, Amsterdam, 1997;
 Bottom: Installed at Port Art Museum, 1993.
 Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev (Afrika) – Rebus II: Works on Copper*. New York: I-20 Gallery, 1997.



Figure 5.24. Sergei Bugaev *Afrika, Morphology of an Image (MZF 1)* with the *Stochastic Pendulum (Prigogine I)*, 1995, MAK Gallery, Vienna, Austria, 1995. Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, edited by Peter Noever. Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995.



Figure 5.26. Sergei Bugaev Afrika, Top: *Donal destruction*, exhibited in 1991 at the Fisher Gallery, Los Angeles, California. Reproduced in *Afrika*. California: Fisher Gallery, 1992. Bottom: *Donal destruction*, 1995, exhibited at the MAK Gallery, Vienna, Austria. Reproduced in *Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Crimania: Icons, Monuments, Mazàfaka*, edited by Peter Noever. Germany: Cantz Verlag, 1995.



Figure 5.27. Afrika stealing a panel from Vera Mukhina's *Worker and Kolkhoz Farmer*, Moscow 1990.
Reproduced in *Afrika*. California: Fisher Gallery, 1992.

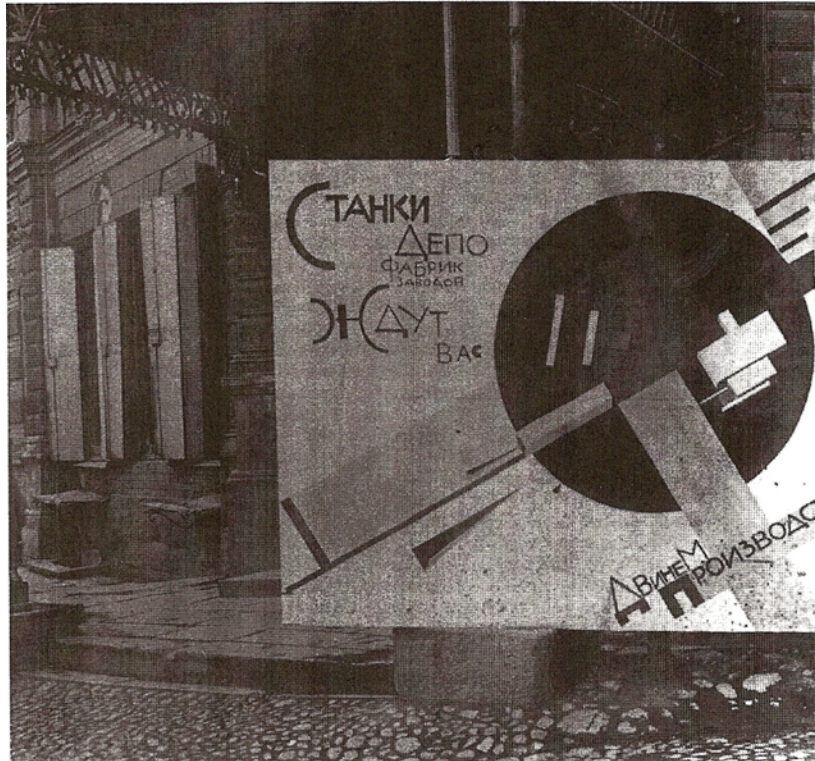


Figure 5.28. El Lissitzky signboard, Vitebsk, Belorussia, 1920.
 Reproduced in T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*.
 New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999.

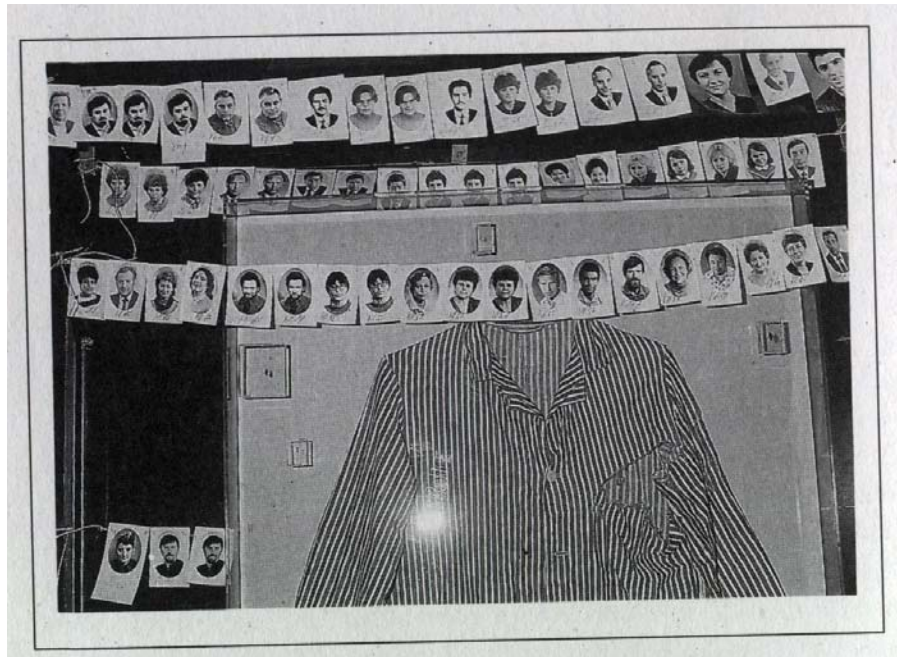


Figure 5.29. Afrika's hospital pajamas from the *Crimania* Performance, exhibited in 1996 in *Doctor and Patient: Memory and Amnesia*, Pori, Finland.

Images: Chapter Six



Figure 6.1. Katarzyna Kozyra, *Pyramid of Animals*, 1993. (multiple views)
Images courtesy of the artist.



Figure 6.2. Katarzyna Kozyra, film stills from *Pyramid of Animals*; documentation of the killing of the horse, 1993. Images courtesy of the artist.



Figure 6.3. Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, c. 1865.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris (France).



Figure 6.4. Katarzyna Kozyra, *Olympia*, 1996. Single image from the installation. Image courtesy of the artist.

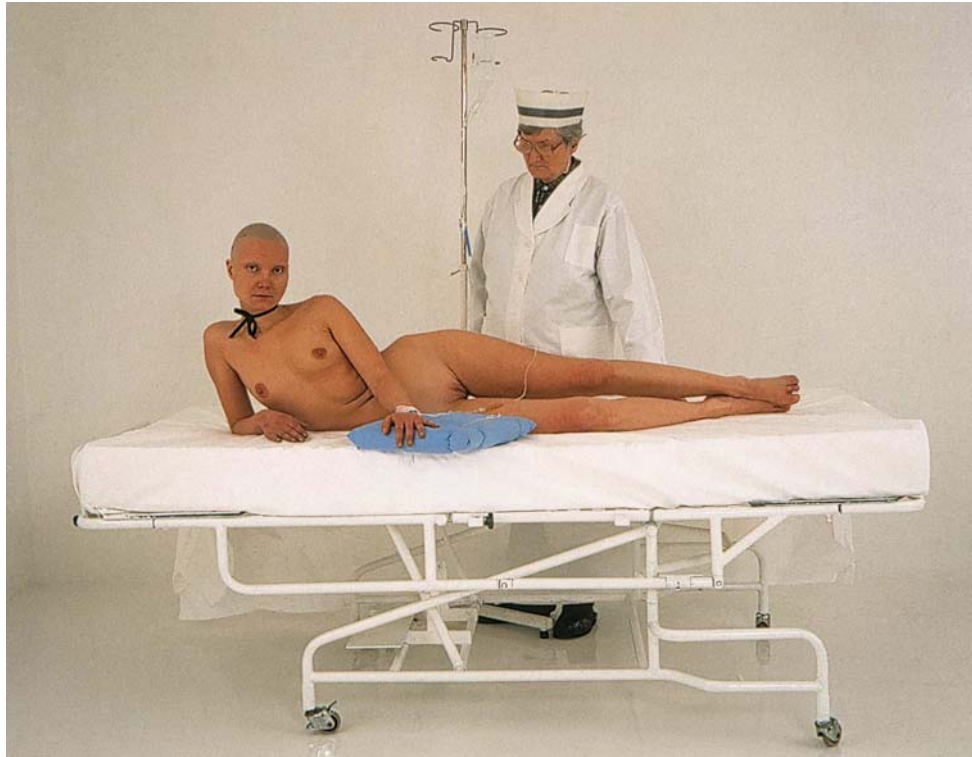


Figure 6.5. Kozyra, *Olympia*, 1996. Single image from the installation.
Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 6.6. Kozyra, *Olympia*, 1996. Single image from the installation.
Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 6.7. Katarzyna Kozyra, *Olympia*, partial view of the installation. The installation *Olympia* comprised three large-scale photographs and a 12-minute video. The video documents the artist being fed on a drip while undergoing her treatment for Hodgkin's disease. Above image courtesy of Katarzyna Kozyra's website: <http://www.katarzynakozyra.com.pl/>; lower image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 6.8. Katarzyna Kozyra, *The Women's Bathhouse*, 1997. Various film stills. Images courtesy of Katarzyna Kozyra's website: <http://www.katarzynakozyra.com.pl/>



Figure 6.9. Katarzyna Kozyra, *The Women's Bathhouse*, 1997. Partial view of the installation, Zachęta Gallery, Warsaw, Poland.
Image courtesy of Katarzyna Kozyra's website: <http://www.katarzynakozyra.com.pl/>

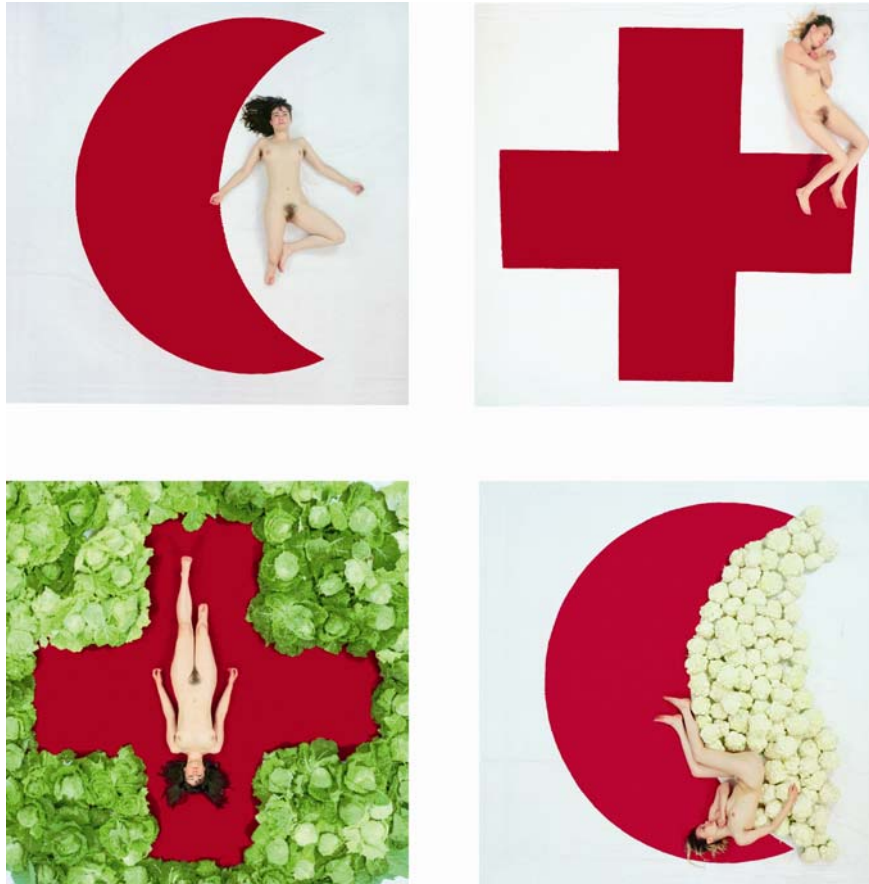


Figure 6.10. Katarzyna Kozyra, *Blood Ties*, *Galerie Zewnątrzra AMS (The Outdoor Gallery – the Art Marketing Syndicate)*, 1995.
Image courtesy of the artist.

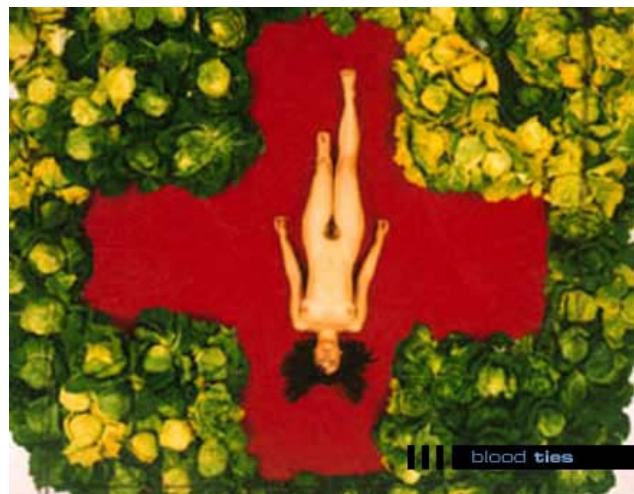


Figure 6.11. Katarzyna Kozyra, *Blood Ties*, Galerie Zewnętrzna AMS (*The Outdoor Gallery – the Art Marketing Syndicate*, 1995).
 Images courtesy of Katarzyna Kozyra's website: <http://www.katarzynakozyra.com.pl/>



Figure 6.12. Katarzyna Kozyra, *Blood Ties*, *Galerie Zewnętrzna AMS (The Outdoor Gallery – the Art Marketing Syndicate)*, installed in public spaces in Poland and censored, 1999.

Top image courtesy of the artist, lower image courtesy of Katarzyna Kozyra's website:
<http://www.katarzynakozyra.com.pl/>



Figure 6.13. Katarzyna Kozyra, disguised as a man in the bathhouse.
Image courtesy of the artist.

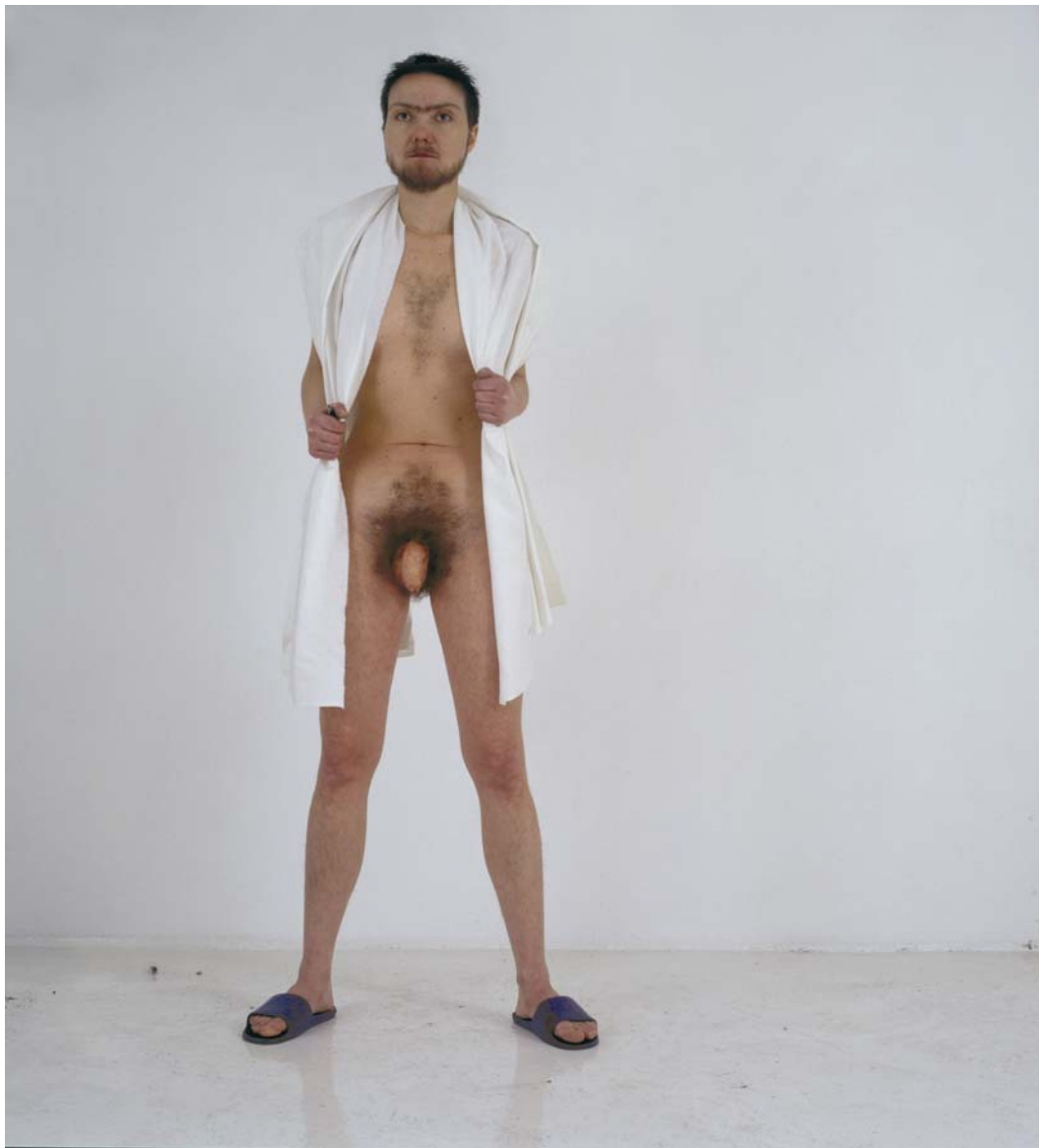


Figure 6.14. Katarzyna Kozyra, disguised as a man.
Image courtesy of the artist.



Figure 6.15. Maurizio Cattelan, *Love Saves Life*, 1995.
Reproduced in *Maurizio Cattelan*. Edited by Francesco Bonami, Nancy Spector and Barbara Vanderlinden. London: Phaidon, 2000.

Appendix 1

Interview: Amy Bryzgel and Miervaldis Polis

Original interview in Latvian transcribed by Juris Visockis and Edgars Vansovics,

Edited by Edgars Vansovics

Part 1 of 3, September 8, 2007

Transcribed by Juris Visockis

Amy Bryzgel: Tu kafejnīcā taisīji spontāno teātri, vai vari pastāstīt vēl kautko?

Miervaldis Polis: Viss kā joks sākās, kad es vienkārši sistematizēju vienu no performanču formām. Veidoja tās tāds leģendārs, asprātīgs, mākslinieks Razums Uldis, briesmīgi dzēra un briesmīgi pveda meitas, pie tam viņš bija ar izlūzušiem zobiem, sadauzītu brilli, nemazgājies un bez naudas, pārsvarā. Bet visas meitas lipa klāt, vienu vārdu sakot viņš meitām patika. Kāda leģendāra personība, ļoti asprātīgs cilvēks. Es tur vēl Robertu pazinu. Sēžam, kaut kādas meitenes... Tad es saku: „Ko tad mēs te sēžam, vismaz spēlēsim Šekspīru”. Uldis saka: „Nu jā, kāds tur ir smeķis, bet varbūt Čehovu”. „O,” es saku, „tad spēlēsim Šekspīru, „trīs māšas, trim brāļiem”. Nu trīs māšas: Dezdemonā, un trīs brāļi: Otello, Hamlets un... Nu, laikam šitas joks laikam visiem patika, un visi saka: „Sākam dalīt lomas!” Nu, piemēram, kurš gribētu būt Dezdemonā, un, kurš grib, lai viņu nožņaudz. Ā, visi jau grib... Un kas būs, teiksim, Otello... Un mēs visi gaidām, kad parādīsies... visi jau aizrāvušies, jau sāk dalīt lomas. Ja jums nav

gaumes, nu, tad jūs esat skatītāji, ja nepiedalāties. Gribat vai negribat jūs teātri vest... Mēs dalām lomas, tagad visu laiku, savstarpēji. Nu, bet... kādas, nu Ofēlija tur ir. Bet Ofēlija bija tumšmate, kāds vēl... sākam... Un gaidam kad nāks Jā,... Romeo tikai Razums. Un viss tikai. Bet tas Razums nenāk. Bet tā nu tas teātris turpinājās šādā garā gaidot Razumu... Un šitā te nosmējāties, un tad es šad tad tāds domāju, kas tas par joku, ko es te sastrādāju. Un pēkšņi sistematizēju fantomu teātri. Tad man japaskaidro kas ir „ietināmais teātris”. Redzi, lai saprastu, kas ir spontānais teātris, kura tēvs es esmu. Redzi, tā vienkārši krievu valodā ir „otec Russkogo teātra” [teātra tēvs – krievu val., EV]. Latviešiem ar no tā ir, teiksim ir Alunāna latviešu teātris. Nu, jā, tā es turpināju teātri...

Amy Bryzgel: Bet pirms cik gadiem tas bija?

Miervaldis Polis: 1984... vēlāk piefiksēju to datumu.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet es tikai zinu, Grīnbergs taisīja kādas performances septiņdesmitajos gados.

Miervaldis Polis: Jā, bet toreiz tās nesaucās performances, viņš tādas nezināja, es arī nezināju. Pasaulē nebija tāda vārda. Nekur nebija. Amerikā nebija. Amerikā ienāca modē ar zilajiem zēniem. Es vēl uztaisīju vienu performanci avīzē, kur man tikšanās ar zilo... Stop, stop, stop, a hapenings nav performance. Performance, nē, tas ir hapenings, tā viņš saucās. Izcel, starp citu, Atta Ieviņa fočenes [fotogrāfijas – JV]... Grīnberga hapeningu... Nu, es to filmu redzēju, toreiz vēl „čekas” laikā. Viņš aicināja, viņš mums labs draugs

bija. Mēs tur netālu dzīvojām. Mēs arī ar komandu... Bet Purmali arī es tur arī ietinu performancēs, mani arī... Es toreiz atkal Kreicbergus fotogrāfēju... Nē, nē, vēlāk...

Amy Bryzgel: Kā tu domā, kā tas ir citādi ko viņš izdarīja?

Miervaldis Polis: Te man jāsaka, ka viņam tieši ir tas, kas ir visīstākais, jo tas ir tas laiks. Es toreiz biju kārtīgs skolnieks, ne par tiem „bītliem” [grupa „The Beatles”, EV], kas man taisnību sakot lāga nepatika. Uzskatu par deģenerātiem, vēl tagad. Šitiem narkomāniem, tiešām. Bet tur tā, tas viss saistīts. Tu zini, kas Amerikā to visu ieviesa... Kāpēc? Visi šitie hipiji, bitņikiem sākās. Kāpēc? Tāpēc, ka komunisms. Totāli soļoja pāri Eiropai, un jau Amerikā. Meksikāņu mākslinieks Diego Rivera, Orozco... Un tad viņi vienkārši... Vjetnamas karā, atkal. Dabiski, nebija jau arī izejas. Nu, tā ir viena no versijām, tā nav mana. Iespējams, arī abstrakcionismu sāka popularizēt. Nav raksturīgs tas... Jo pateikt, ka kanjona ainava ar saules rietu, nu tā, nu, kā visiem cilvēkiem. Nu tā ir viena no teorijām, ka vienkārši viņi apspriedās, ieskaitot reliģijas pārstāvjus, ko iesākt, ka komunisms nāk virsū. Vai tā ir vai nav, es nezinu, bet katrā ziņā ar šitiem bitņikiem kā sabojājās valsts paaudze. Visa tā narkomānija, ko reklamē. Tagad arī Latvijā reklamē...

Lai saprastu spontāno teātri, man jāpaskaidro, ko nozīmē nezināmais teātris. To nodibināja apmēram es nepateikšu precīzi, 15 vai 18 gadus pēc tam, kad viņš darbojās Dienvidamerikas lielpilsētās un daudz kur. Astonpadsmit gadus, ja nemaldos. Tikai tad netīšām atklāja, ka visas šīs akcijas ir teātris. Ka to režisē. Viens režisors, 18 gadus nezināms. Jo visi uzskatīja, ka tas nav teātris. Tas, izrādās, ir teātris, visu laiku. Un viņi netīšām... viņam jautāja, tie korespondenti: „Ko jūs stāstat, bet tas gadījums taču bija,”

vienkārši tāds briesmīgs gadījums notika. „Nē,” viņš saka, „mēs to režisējām.” Nu un tad viņš visu to izstāstīja. Tāpēc, kur tad nu vairs spruksi. Nu beigu beigās, var jau arī kādreiz pateikt. Vienu vārdu sakot, nezināmais teātris ir tāds, vienu es konkrēti atceros, ko man atstāstīja no fakta. Tad bija trīsdesmitie gadi, ja nemaldos. Nē, meloju, piecdesmitie. Dienvidamerikas, tagad nepateikšu, atkal, kurā pilsētā. Bet viena no lielajām. Sanpaulu varbūt... Tur bija ārkārtīgi kontrasti, nu, laikam vēl tagad, cik man ir zināms. Nabadzība drausmīga, posts, tur mirst badā, kaudzes. Tai pašā pilsētā. Tur pat blakus šausmīga bagātība. Un tagad šī grupa nopērk šveicaru, visgreznākajā hoteļa restorānā. Ka viņš ielaidīs iekšā vienu ubagu. A tas ubags ir aktieris. A tai restorānā galdiņš. Pie galdiņa, pie diviem galdiņiem sēž aktieri. Pie viena – divi, pie viena – trīs cilvēki. Restorāns pilns, tur visi bagātnieki, snobi. Un visādi intelektuāļi bagāti arī, režisori arī un tā tālāk. Tāds ļoti slavens krogs. Neatceros, protams, nosaukumu... Jā, jā, jā. Tagad pie viena galdiņa sēž aktieri. Viņi nemaz neviens netika pie ratiem. Solīdi pusdieno. Pilns restorāns. Šeit ienāk tas ubags. A ubags ir tāds, neveselīgs, puņķi tek. Bet arī aktieris. Bet tā, nu iedodiet. Nu visu tā. Un paņem. Nu, kur ir, viena blāuj, kur ir metr d’otelis [maitre d’hotel – JV]. „Mest ārā!” Cits: „Kā jums nav kauna. Mēs esam bagāti. Dodiet tak’ viņam cilvēkam. Viņš tāpat cilvēks ir!” Nu, vārdu sakot, viena ir, kas jūt līdzī tam ubagam. Un otra atkal apsēžās. Un iet vaļā skandāls. Tūlīt arī aizspraucās tas viens aktieru galds. Pārējie atkal. Puse, protams, ir par to ubadziņu, otra puse – pret. Pa to laiku, ka, nu, jau iet vaļā, nu, jau dūres sit, un jau visi emocionāli. Skandāls. Pa to laiku, tas galdiņš kas iesāka, pazūd. Šitais arī pazudis. Bet skandāls iet vaļā. Tas ir nedēļas avīzē, raksta to... nu, kā var tā nabadziņu un vēl dzīt ārā. Tā vietā, lai iedotu viņam paēst... Izrādes viņas taisīja

astoņpadsmit gadus. Un neviens nezināja, ka tas viss ir teātris. Un pēc astoņpadsmit gadiem tas viss tika nosaukts par spontāno teātri.

Amy Bryzgel: Kā tu par to zināji?

Miervaldis Polis: Tur bija raksts. Man to izstāstīja Bilzēns... Nē, nē! Vācijā... Arī performances mākslinieks Bilzēns, Indulis... Sakarā ar maniem teātriem viņš te man šo izstāstīja. Nu, savs cilvēks. Par Šekspīru viņš jau zināja. Nu, tur bronzas cilvēks. Nu, lūk, tagad es tev izstāstīju, lai paskaidrotu. Tādēļ pa priekšu tas bija jāizdara, lai labi paskaidrotu manu teātra sistēmu, šo. Nu performanču teātris, tieši specifiski šādi. Spontānais teātris, ļoti pareizs apzīmējums. Man vajadzēja izstāstīt, lūk, šo nezināmo teātri. Tad, lūk, atšķirībā no nezināmā teātra, spontānais teātris ir acīmredzams. Viņš sākas tajā brīdī, kad [motions with his hand – AB] šādi, *in such a way*. Mēs skatāmies uz notikumu gaitu. Mums nav pat jārežisē ne Šekspīrs, ne... Es tikai izstāstīju piemēru. Tad, kad es pēkšņi skatos no malas... Tad jebkurš – tu vai es, vai vēl kāds. Kad mēs skatāmies no malas uz situāciju, ko mēs domājam? Mēs domājam: „hmm, vai tai dāmai pietāv šis auskars, vai nē?” Bet, kas viņa varētu būt. Un tad tu domā teātra kategorijās. Tu sāc domāt, kādai lomai viņa der jeb kādu lomu viņa spēlē. Vai, kā tu saki, nespēlē... Tu pēc būtības skaties jau kā režisors. Tagad tu saproti... Jā, tad tu domā, teikt, ka viņai auskars nepiestāv tāds, viņai vajadzētu tādu. Vai neteikt. Tagad jau tu kā režisors domā par aktrisi. Un tad tu izdomā, teikšu, bet tā delikāti. Un tu jau izdomā tekstu kā tu to teiksi. Aplinkus. Viņa tev kaut ko atbild. Pēc būtības notiek teātris. Pie kam no šā teātra nevar izvairīties. Interesanti, viņš grib vai negrib izvairīties... kā saruna, teiksim, kafejnīcā. Nu, kāpēc – var

būt arī bibliotēkā vai veikalā. Sākas saruna un spēle. Un kāds to sarunu... un piedalās. Un es pārdevējs.

Amy Bryzgel: Tu varēji taisīt performances veikalā vai ielās.

Miervaldis Polis: Un mēs taisījām padomju laikus... Tas ir, Brežņeva. Padomju laiki dalās trīs lielās daļās. Staļina, līdz piecdesmit ceturtajam gadam. Tas bija nacionālisma laiks. Absolūts nacionālisms. Visa tauta, ārkārtīgi skaisti nostādīta. Tikai nerunāsim par to citu pusi. Pēc tam bija Hruščova laiks. Amerikanizācija, kapitālisma laiks. Industrializācijas un kapitālisma. Tad arī tika izdomāts nosaukums – sociālisms. Ne Ļeņinam, ne Staļinam nebija nekāda sociālisma. Bija komunisms, ko būvēja. Sociālismu izdomāja Hruščova laikā. Bet tagad jau to nezin. Es te ar vienu jaunu advokātu runāju, puiku, ciemos atbraukušu... Es saku: „Sociālisms bija Vācijā, sociālisms bija Anglijā, Zviedrijā, Somijā. Un arī Padomju Savienībā.” Viņš saka: „kāpēc tikai tur?” Padomju Savienībā bija ārkārtīga savdabība. Bija pēc būtības valsts kapitālisms. Nebija īpaša sociālisma. Un tad viņi sociālisma programmu sāka īstenot... pamazām, paralēli konkurējot ar rietumu sociālismu. Jo tur viss bija sociālisms. Tieši tā. Kāds sociālisms, kapitālisms. Anglijā kurss bija valsts kapitālisms. Viņi speciāli uzturēja veikalus, kas sliktāk gan strādāja, bet toties bija lētāki, uzturēja cenas un konkurēja ar privāto. Šeit ir sistemātiski. Bija 95%, bagātākais dzelzs un citu rūpnīcu īpašnieks, maksāja 95% nodokļos. Tas bija, septiņdesmitie gadi. Fakts. Protams, ar atlikušajiem 6% viņš uzturēja vairākus lidlaukus, neskaitāmas lidmašīnas. Kā pirmais, kādēļ tad viņiem sociāli viss tik stabils tur bija, tāpēc, ka viņš ir nodokļi. Pat Amerikā bija progresīvais nodoklis. Tagad tā

varu pārņemt bandīti un kapitālu. Diemžēl. Tas nozīmē, ka tuvojas liela kataklizma. Ja vara un ienākumi koncentrējas slēptā, nelielā daļā, tad sākas karš. Pirmais jau ir Irākas karš, līča karš. Nu, un tagad viņš ir iestrēdzis. Tagad pa Afganistānu ņemas. Tad tur ņemas 100 gadus, tagad tur nekas nemainīsies. Tā vismaz ir, jau, vairāk kā 100 gadu pieredze, ka Afganistānu nekad nevar iekarot. Vairāk kā 100 gadu Afganistānā karo. Angļi, tad krievi, tad atkal angļi, tad krievi, un tad tagad amerikāņi. Un tagad visa Eiropa dodas. Nekas tur nebūs. Nekad. Nu jā, ko es gribēju teikt...

Amy Bryzgel: ...par to laiku...

Miervaldis Polis: Un tad bija Brežņevs, pēc Hruščova, nometa nost... Tad bija Brežņevs. Ar Brežņevu sākās rusifikācija. Aktīva. Visas tautības tika, jo uzskatīja Staļina nacionālo politiku par kļūdainu... Bet līdz ar to arī sākās zagšana. Totāla. Korupcija. Bet toties jautrs un brīvs laiks. Visi sāstīja anekdotes par Brežņevu uz ielas... Un tu zini, kas notika. Baznīca pieprasīja, lai slēdz [The Nature. Environment. Man. exhibition – AB]... Baznīca pieprasīja. Un tādēļ „čeka” aiztaisīja.

Amy Bryzgel: Es saprotu, bet tas nebija vienīgais eksemplārs...

Miervaldis Polis: To neaizliedza vara, bet gan baznīca.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet bija vai nē citas izstādes kas bija aizliegtas septiņdesmitajos gados?

Miervaldis Polis: Jā, tā ir tā pati, par ko tu runā. Viņu aiztaisīja pēc divām nedēļām. Tāpēc, ka cilvēki stāvēja, pāri simts, divi simti, rindā. Un pieprasīja to baznīca. Zini kāpēc. Tāpēc, ka tur bija altāra daļā, mani draugi bija sataisījuši... Bet kāpēc. Baznīcai jau nebija vara. Vara bija komunismam. Bet kāpēc tad komunisti pakļāvās baznīcai, šoreiz. Lūk, kāpēc. Tāpēc, ka starptautiski... baznīca. Lūk, kāpēc. Tur nekas nebija pret komunismu, tieši otrādi. Saproti, neuzticies tam, ko raksta par to... Tad tur vesela kaudze. Piemēram, Aija Zariņa, Zviedrijā. Kopš tā laika mums tur vairs nav kontaktu. Paziņoja, ka, ja nebūtu „perestroika”, mani būtu nošāvuši. Viņa melo. Viņa bija smaga šizofrēniķe. Viņai bija pasūtījumi no valsts. Neviens neko nekad viņai neaizliedza, bet vēl piemaksāja.

Amy Bryzgel: Vai Tu varēji iesaistīt to „Bronzas cilvēku” tur septiņdesmitajos gados?

Miervaldis Polis: Protams. Ko es tev gribu teikt. Man droši vien piebrauktu policija, nu milicija. Un teiktu, nu, zinies, ja cilvēki daudzi nāk pakaļ. Nāciet līdzi, sastādiet protokolu. Bet tad viņš nevarēja, pie ko piesieties. Es jau biju gatavs vienmēr teikt, sievieši drīkst krāsoties, un es nedrīkstu? Viņš nosmietos un nekas jau nebūtu. Reiz „čeka” pati šo teātri akceptēja. Protams, tika saukts uz čeku šoferis. Un prasīja, sakarā ar to, kas tur nebija tēlots. Es netēloju Ļeņinu. Es dažādas pozas ieņēmu. ... Bet, lūk krāsota bronza bija tikai padomju laikā. Tas nozīmēja kā pieminēklis. Tas no divdesmitajiem gadiem sākās kā ģipsis un krāsa...

Amy Bryzgel: Tu man kādreiz pastāstīji, ka bija režisors no Vācijas...

Miervaldis Polis: Viņi filmēja „perestroiku” [„pārbūvi”, no krievu val. – EV]... Un viņi atbrauca un uztaisīja saucamo „Aspekt”, viņiem ir tāds kultūras raidījums.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet viņš bija filmu režisors vai teātra?

Miervaldis Polis: Viņš bija televīzijas režisors. Viņš bija filmu, dokumentālo. Uz ātru roku es aizmirsu, viņa vārds, protams, fiksēts. Viņam bija poļu uzvārds. Katrā ziņā vesels teātris mums te bija iznācis. Nu, es jau biju izplāpājis Borgam vienkārši. Jānis Borgs. Un es tam Borgam biju teicis, ka es varētu pastaigāties... ka es nekad to nebūtu darījis, ka man slinkums. Kā, nu, nauda arī jātērē. Kam man tas vajadzīgs? Un tad es to ideju izstāstīju... Un viņš, Borgs, bija izstāstījis tam režisoram. Un režisors man klāt un par katru cenu mani pierunā. Maksās un visu kaut ko. Bet viņš bija domājis, ka es tikai ģīmjiem nokrāsotu. Ka es tikai ģīmi nokrāsos, a viņam tas derēja priekš tā padomju. Bišķi tur to padomju panorāmu, nu, „perestroiku”. Bet es teicu: „Nē, man tas viss ir liela klapata, es jau ne dēļ naudas taisu kautko. Ne jau nauda ir problēma. Bet man jāšuj apģērbs.” Kāds apģērbs? Es saku: „Parastu jau nevarēšu nokrāsot. Bronzu jādabon. Nevar dabūt nekur. Kaut kur jānopērk.”... tagad saka tas ir ļoti sarežģīti. Kā, viņš saka, viss būs bronzā. Nu jā, es saku. Nē, viņš saka, dari ko gribi, tūlīt aizsūtīšu operu pakaļ... Pērc konjaku. Nu, kad es redzēju, ka cilvēkam tas tik ļoti liekas svarīgi. Nu, labi, es saku. Naudas neprasu. Es saku, nu bet atdāvinās to, ko nobildēs...

Amy Bryzgel: Bet kāpēc viņš gribēja tikai seju?

Miervaldis Polis: Nebija iedomājies, ka kāds to darīs... Mazliet tur paspēlēšu. Kā parasti uz ielām kas stāv.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet kāpēc tu domāji, ka visu?

Miervaldis Polis: Tāpat kā es gleznoju, reāli, vai ne? Un tā viņš ir. Šņores arī, cigarete arī. Bronza... Es neesmu naturālists...

Amy Bryzgel: Bet vai viņš maksāja par visu?

Miervaldis Polis: Es atteicos. Viņš jau bija ar mieru. Viņš jau piesolīja man naudu. Es atteicos. Par naudu nestrādā. Tas nav mans darbs. Mans darbs ir gleznot. Tas prasa man laiku. Par to es prasu naudu.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet bija viegli dabūt to krāsu?

Miervaldis Polis: Pirmo reizi bija sarežģīti. Man palīdzēja Edīte Grīnberga. Mana Draudzene. Jauna māksliniece. Viņa tagad Berlīnē dzīvo un interesanti glezno. Un tad viņai mamma, abas divas. Mamma bija kino, kas šuj tērpus. Brigita Borga... Un viņš vīrs, bijušais, bija mans kursabiedrs akadēmijā. Andris Grīnbergs. Otrs Andris Grīnbergs. Man te mācīja tehnoloģiju gleznošanā. Un to es arī pielietoju. Šinī gadījumā želantīnu... Šite ģīmi un rokas želantīnā. Galertu. Tas ir augu līme. Viņu lieto galertam. Viņu lieto, kad

taisa to, saldaajā ēdienā. Viņš jau garšīgs. Nu, tad ar bronzu nokrāsoju. Matus tāpat. Un apgērbu savukārt tad, kad man steidzami vajadzēja, es pasūtīju, lai man pašuj no dermatīna. Zini tādu materiālu? Diezgan veclaicīgs materiāls. Viņam ir tā kā plastmasa tā virspuse. Mazliet apakšā plāna drāna, un virsū ir tā, kā plastmasa. Uz galdiem sedz. Tā viņu man uzšuva, šķībi, greizi, uz ātru roku. Dienas laikā, man vajadzēja. Es nopervēju, protams, ar nitro laku. Un, galvenais, jau ātri vajadzēja... Man, jau kādi 3 uzvalki bija, 4 bija man. Jā, jā, 4 uzvalki. Vēlāk, es vienkārši parastu uzvalku nokrāsoju. Tikai viņus nevar ar nitrolaku, kura ir ļoti cieta.

Amy Bryzgel: Viņš filmēja visu, kā pastaigā pa Rīgu?

Miervaldis Polis: Nozaga. Es iedevu televīzijā fragmentus. Jā, un viņi neatdeva. Man bija arī video, arī to nozaga. Tas bija kādā deviņdesmit pirmajā gadā.

Amy Bryzgel: Nebija rādīts televīzijā?

Miervaldis Polis: Televīziju ļoti kontrolēja, lai nebūtu tā un tā. Bet neviens tur netaisījās ne rādīt, ne nerādīt. Tā bija vācu filma. Viņu nemaz nevarēja rādīt citur. Tās bija vācu autortiesības. Vācu ZDF.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet vai viņiem nav kopija?

Miervaldis Polis: Viņi man atsūtīja visus materiālus. To man arī nozaga. Man ir palicis tikai skaņu celiņš. Ielas skaņas. Tad bija videofilma. Draudzība ar latviešiem ārzemēs. „Čekas” organizēta. Tā arī man autobusu iedeva. Bet es saku, ka čeka jau visu organizēja „perestroiku”. Tas nav latviešu. Tas ir čeka, un amerikāņu izlūkdienesti. Viņi jau amerikāņu dolārus miljonus, uzpirka cilvēkus, lai viņi demonstrē... Es tikai gribēju paskaidrot, ka tur nebija nekas...

Amy Bryzgel: Es arī lasīju, ka bija cilvēki, kas gāja pakaļ tevi – KGB. Es to lasīju.

Miervaldis Polis: Autobusa šoferi aicināja uz „čeku”. Man pēc tam pastāstīja viens no tiem organizatoriem... Šoferi aicinājuši un viss. Jautāja šoferis galvenais, bija Ļeņins vai nebija. A, bet šoferis tāds pats krieviņš. Kāds Ļeņins?! Mākslinieks bronzā nokrāsojies. Nebija jau arī domāts Ļeņins. Bet, ka cilvēku bars tad bija un tas bars brēca: „Ļeņin, Ļeņin!”... Tai padomju laikā jau bija ļoti šaura uztvere, ja bronzas un uzkāpj kā piemineklis, tad... Ļeņins bronzā krāsots.

Amy Bryzgel: Kā citādi tu atceries kā cilvēki reaģēja?

Miervaldis Polis: Es jau biju nobijies, ka man teica... „Jūs nebaidāties, ka būs agresija, no to cilvēku puses?” „Ā,” es teicu, „es nezinu.” Mums bija ļoti mierīga publika. Nav tā kā tagad – agresīva. Tā arī bija, viņš pēc tam sajūsmā teica: „Ak kungs, cik miermīlīga publika!”. Un tur bija pārsvarā krievi. Tāpēc, ka centrs viss strādā, vietējie. Bet tūristi no Krievijas daudz un Latvijas. Tie tūristi jau tie dīkdieņi ir. Un bērni

tur tak' veselēm bariem, bērni bija tur. Es dažiem mēģināju runāt, bet... Un tad divas krievietes, tādas dienvidnieciskas, tumšiem matiem bija tādas, tā kā no dienvidiem. Tās man sekoja uzmācīgi. Iemīlējās. Bet tai bronžā. Diezgan riebīgs viņš bija tāds. Lobās nost, nu, krīt nost. Drausmīgs paskats. Bet viņām patika. Un tad viņas mani daudzīja vēl pa to autobusu, kad es jau aizmuku no viņām. Un tad viņas atstāja adresītes man... Un tad bija tāds kadrs, pāri tiltiņam pie operas. Uz to tiltiņu gāju, lai ietu pāri. Viss tas bars aiz manis seko. Un tā vācu televīzija slepeni sēž, lai viņus nemana. Šite mūsu pašu video filmētājs, kas no tās čekas, režisors. Tas visu laiku maisījās pa priekšu kā tāds idiots. Bet tur pēkšņi pa to tiltiņu nāk. Tolaik nebija polietilēna maisiņi pārtikai, bet bija tādi, tā kā tīklos. Un pilns piepirkts – maizei, pudelēm un tamlīdzīgiem. Viņš iet pilnu krūti ar ordeņiem. Bet tāds maziņš, ar tādu resns, vecs. Un tad viņš apgāzās, ieraudzīja...

Amy Bryzgel: Kāpēc viņam bija ordeņi?

Miervaldis Polis: Russian hero! [krievu varonis – ang.val. – EV]

Amy Bryzgel: Cik ilgi tas bija?

Miervaldis Polis: No Tallinas ielas. Do you know where is the Tallinas street? [Vai tu zini, kur ir Tallinas iela? – ang.val. – EV] From Tallinas street, it is between Tallinas and Matīsa tirgus. [No Tallinas ielas, tas ir starp Tallinas ielu un Matīsa tirgu – ang.val., - EV] Tur kafejnīca bija kādreiz, mākslinieciska, Malvīne. Un es piezvanīju viņiem un teicu, ka es tur gribētu iedzert, šitādā izskatā, lai tad mani nemet ārā. Nedzen prom. Es tur

iegāju iekšā. Izkāpu no tā autobusa, aizgāju līdz kafejnīcai, iegāju iekšā. Izdzēru kokteili, lēnā garā. Un no turienes es arī sāku iet. Pa to Brīvības ielu. Toreiz nebija Brīvības. Tad nogriezos uz Vērmānes dārzu... Tur viņi staigāja. Tur tie tūristi daudz, pārējie cilvēki strādāja. Tagad jau tikai nestrādā. Tad tagad, kad es Berlīnē iebraucu, iedomājies, centrs pilns ar cilvēkiem, tikai neviena berlīnieša. Tūristi... Nu, un tad tālāk pie operas, tur apmetu loku. Tur arī iznāca drusku kaut kādas sarunas. Es jau neko nerunāju. Izgāju līdz Līvu laukumam. Un tur bija āra kafejnīciņa, viena no pirmajām. Tur es apsēdos. Apsēdos un uzpīpēju, un izdzēru sulu, apelsīnu.

Amy Bryzgel: Kā tu varēji pasūtīt sulu?

Miervaldis Polis: Edīte bija kafejnīcā. Viņai bija teikts, kur ko vajag.

Amy Bryzgel: Bronzas dzēriens!

Miervaldis Polis: Vēl tie kapeikas man bija bronzas. Tās es iedevu. Un tad es apmetu pa Vecrīgu riņķi. Un tad uzkāpu uz postamenta... Tagad sēta apkārt.

Part 2 of 3, September 8, 2007

Transcribed by Juris Visockis

Amy Bryzgel: Es gribētu zināt kad tās performances sākas.

Miervaldis Polis: Augustā, 1987. Vēlākās performances, Zābers Vilnis, nelaiķis. Tad viņš mani pierunāja. Un viņam bija ātri, ras, ko, teātris.

Amy Bryzgel: Kāpēc tu beigās piekriti?

Miervaldis Polis: Es pats redzēju, ka viņam liekas tik svarīgi tas kā tam nu (jābūt).

Pašam, es tā...

Amy Bryzgel: Kāpēc viņam tas bija tik svarīgi?

Miervaldis Polis: Nezinu, viņš bija sajūsmā, tas režisors. Nezinu... Pēc tam jau vēl iebrauca fotogrāfs no Vācijas. Vēlāk aizbrauca, baigi foršais džeks. Maiks Hedge? Baigi feins bija performanču mākslinieks. Arī Mihaels Lange laikam... Un tad viņš bija taisījies, es pat nokļuvu uz žurnāla vāka. Bronzas... Uzvaras pieminēklis, Pārdaugavā ir. Krievi liek tur [puķes – JV]. Un tur es parodēju to pieminēkli, bronzas. Man saglabājušies diapozitīvi daudz, ļoti labi. Viņus visus pēc tam man atsūtīja atpakaļ, kad žurnālam tas līguma termiņš beidzās.

Amy Bryzgel: Kad tika rādīts tas?

Miervaldis Polis: Tas bija 1989., ja nemaldos. Pa starpu vēl bija tas balto cilvēku, Rojs Varans [Roy Varan – AB], lielisks performanču mākslinieks, ļoti labs.

Amy Bryzgel: Un kam bija tā ideja?

Miervaldis Polis: Nē, te brauca tāds mākslas menedžeris, somu. Viņš rakstīja grāmatu, un tā, protams, mani viņš te bija saticis. Tas viņam tā ļoti atkal patika. Tad viņš teica, ka gribētu Somijā baltāku uztaisīt, baltos cilvēkus. Es saku, jā, bet tikai tad ja samits, baltā cilvēka ar bronzas. Ielūgumā ir jābūt tam visam. Tā arī bija. Mēs nezinājām, ka būs samits starp bronzas cilvēku un balto cilvēku. Respektīvi starp Bušu vecāko un to, kas nu tur, Gorbačovu. Mēs ar ministru prezidentu kopā atklājām festivālu slaveno, mūzikas un mākslas. Nu, tur jau slaveni bija. Pēc tam pusdienojām kopā ar deputātu kādu tur. Man tas neko daudz neizsaka. Tad gribēja tikties ar nelaiķa, šitā te, pirmā prezidenta sievu. Bet es teicu, man jau apnīka. Tas diezgan jau, nogurdinoši bronzā tādēļ, ka viņa oksidējās, tā ir inde. Zilskābe. Un viņa ir toksiska... Un viņš ēdiena garšas loģiski riebīgas, loģiski... dūms ir riebīgs, ēdiens... Un tā mana... jau bija līdz kaklam. Es aizgāju projām un es teicu... Mēs slavenajā krogā, kur visi tie politikāņi, studenti tur sēž, divkosīgi... Nu, tur mēs aizgājām pusdienot. Šis baltā, es bronzā. Tā mēs tur sēdējām pie galda.

Amy Bryzgel: Vai jūs runājat, tajā laikā?

Miervaldis Polis: Ko es tur daudz runāju, interviju noņēma un tamlīdzīgas lietas. Tad jau... To, vēl, grafiku satādījām. Tad arī dibinājām fantomu, atkal fantomu savienību.

Amy Bryzgel: Vai tu vari paskaidrot vairāk, jo es par to lasīju, bet neko nezinu.

Miervaldis Polis: Man te kaut kur mētājas, tikai neatceros, šeit kaut kur vai Rīgā, tepat ir, kur Rojs kaut kur zvana. Ā, laikam vēl Rīgā būs. Kur Rojs Varans atsūtīja man vēstules, tur arī fantoma zīmogs. Asociācijas. Viņam skice bija. Bet viss tas, protams, izjuka. Tā kā bija jābūt, fantomam, asociācijai... Nu, simulakrs tas ir latīniski. Simulakrs arī ir fantoms...

Amy Bryzgel: Bet fantoms angļiski arī nozīmē arī, ka tas ir? – *ghost*.

Miervaldis Polis: Jā, un šis ir fantoma laikmets, simulakrs. Es vēlāk tikai izlasīju. Kādi divi, trīs gadi pēc, latviski tika iztulkots. Un tādā sakarā es tikai. Tiešām visas šīs laikmeta dusmas sauc par fantoma mākslu. Viņš to sauc par simulakru. Tas nāk, ja nemaldos no latīņu jeb otrādi - no grieķu. Šis ir fantomu laikmets. Fantomu māksla, visa šī performance ir fantomu māksla. Nu, pirms viņai ar mākslu gandrīz nav nekāda sakara. Bet tas ar Varanu, tiešām ir mākslinieciskas performances. Dažas bija ļoti spēcīgas. Tad viņš Rīgā uzstājās. Bet tad jau nevajadzēja viņu... Te vispār ir provinciāli. Rīgā mākslas nav. Viss kas bija... un vairāk nav, ir jāzin. Amerikā, lai nu ko, lai es atkal tur amerikāņus vienmēr velku uz zoba un tamlīdzīgi... Bet, ā, Ņujorkā, viss kaut kas tur bija... Nē, nē, es jau nesaku, ka viss slikti, tikai dzirdēts nekad nav par mākslas.

Amy Bryzgel: Tu runā par postmodernismu, ka nevar uztaisīt kaut ko jaunu?

Miervaldis Polis: Man jau sen ir skaidrs, ka nekas jauns nevar būt. Tā vispār ir greiza, nepareiza parādība mums smadzenēs. Mākslā nevajag jauna, mākslā vajag redzējumu – kā tu redzi. Ka tu vari redzēt citādi, kā tev jau iemācīts skatīties. Tās ir mākslinieku... nevis kaut ko jaunu. Tas ir redzējums. Nāk no jaunu zemju atklāšanas. A tur zelts. Baigi izdevīgi. Kolumbs aizbrauca nezin uz kurieni, atklāja nezin ko un vēl pa valsts naudu... Nosauca par Indiju. Beigu beigās viņš nemaz Amerikā nebija izkāpis. Viņš bija izkāpis salā, Florida ne Florida, bet kaut kur tur salā. Tas forši tā. Tas bija tāds joks, žurnālā nopublicēts – Kolumbs, vot, tas ir vīrs. Aizbrauca nezin uz kurieni, atklāja pats nezin ko un vēl par valsts naudu. Viņam vēl piemaksāja. Tā arī ir fantomu māksla... fantommākslinieks, performanci uztaisīja.

Amy Bryzgel: Tas nozīmē, ka performance ir fantomu māksla vai gleznotāji arī?

Miervaldis Polis: Viss. Viss ir performance. Maija Tabaka uzved teātri, to sabildē vai kā citādi tur uzskicē un uzglezno pēc tam gleznu. Delle Biruta, šizofrēniķe, ļoti smaga. Ļoti skaista grāmata Dellei iznākusi. Ārkārtīgi skaista. Bet ne par to ir runa. Viņa taisīja lelles. Un Jūrmalā uzstādīja un tur gleznoja, skicēja. Ir arī tā kā Pēteris Sikars. Arī lielisks performanču meistars. Bet viņš saka, to nevar saistīt tādā aspektā kā ar amatu. Citam var būt, kāpēc nē. Es tikai saku. Un mums tas nav amats. Pēteris taista, viņš tagad pa Ķīnu braukā. Visādos konkursos. Viņš taista no stieplēm. Vai no viena materiāla pārveido citā,

vizuāli. Visādas performances. Jā, kad ierauj, tad. Kad es ierauju, tad es arī taisu performances. Tādas ka dažreiz visi cilvēki tikai noelšās un liela daļa pat apskaišās. Es tev izstāstīšu Latviešu tautas pasaku. Performances sākumu.

Amy Bryzgel: Amerikā gleznotāji, sāka taisīt izrādes, performance, kā teātri. Kā Alan Kaprow, Andy Warhol. Bet Latvijā nav, ir Grīnbergs, bet...

Miervaldis Polis: Jā, teātri bija, tāds Amerikāņu atdarinājums tieši bija *à la Jesus Christ* un tamlīdzīgi. Visi šie Māti, *Hair*, un tamlīdzīgi. Tasīja Tennysons. Man viņš nepatīk, viņš tāds šarlatānīgs, bet tā nav Tennysons... Viņš pie lietuviešiem. ... Lietuvā ir....

Amy Bryzgel: Arī Igaunijā.

Miervaldis Polis: Bet tieši apzināt kā mākslu. Bet teātris, tā pavisam cita lieta ir. Tas ir profesionalizēts un tā vispār ir, man liekas, galīgi greizi. Performance ir ļoti aizvēsturiska māksla, viena no senākajām. Mums lasīja kādreiz lekcijas un tad sagatavoja kādreiz par performanci materiālu... Tas viss ir pie manis, tai skaitā arī no kā viņš rodas. Redzi, kas par lietu, performance, sauc viņu kā gribi, var būt tikai tad kad ir šī fakta ieraksts. A, ja nav. Man, piemēram, ir daudz nauda. Līdz ar to kas notiek. Pirmais ieraksts ir starta punkts. Es arī negribēju, ka viņi... gribēja filmēt. Bet stāstam ir jābūt. Tas ir īstais, kad stāstu zini. Tā kā par spoku. Stāsti. A, kas būtu, ja spoku nofilmētu. Nu, viss. Reāli ir stāsti. No tā nāk tā ir mūžsena māksla. Nē, viņa kā oficiāli, tikai senos laikos mākslas jau nebija tādā aspektā. Piemēram ikona. Tā jau nav māksla. To tu zini, ka tā nav māksla.

Kāds sakars tur ar mākslu. Grieķiem nepastāvēja mākslas jēdziens. Viņiem to sauca par teh-meh [*sic* – techne – AB]. Tehnika. Sokrātam ir dialogs. Sokrātam tēvs bija akmeņkalis. Tāpēc viņš arī to lietu jēdz. Tad viņš ar vienu no slaveniem tēlniekiem runāja par šo lietu. Kas, attiecas uz renesanci. Piemēra pēc. Nedz Mikelandželo, nedz Čelini nebija mākslinieki. Viņi bija akmeņkaļi un zeltkaļi. Čelini bija zeltkalis. Jo nebija tāda cunftē. Māksla ir jaunlaiku jēdziens. Un nostabilizējās viņš dekadencē, deviņpadsmitā gadsimta beigās. Kad sākās māksla mākslā. Tā ir dekadence. Pikaso, klasisks dekadents. Un šī māksla latviešiem ir ļoti populāra, dekadence, arī savu laiku... Un es tam izurbos cauri un sapratu ka tā ir krāpšana. Acu apmāns, labākajā gadījumā. Sliktākajā vispār nekas. Vāja literatūra un vāja dzeja. Pārsvarā viņi ir garīgi slimi cilvēki kas to raksta. Dekadence ir tāda, kāda viņa ir. Mūsdienās, protams, ir otrais dekadentisma vilnis. Viss, kas ir slimīgs, viss, kas ir īpatnējs, par to maksā naudu... Nu, labs krēsls, to nevienam nevajag. Visiem vajag kaut kādu krēslu, kur nevar nosēdēt, kaut kādu īpatnēju, mākslu. Nu, tā es to redzu. Un tādā nozīmē performance ir viens no senākajiem mākslas veidiem. Te man būtu vesela lekcija jānolasa sakarā ar to. Tad man viņa jāsāk laikus.

Amy Bryzgel: Cik par citām performancēm tu uzzināji tajā laikā...Vācu mākslinieks

Džozefs Boizs [Joseph Beuys – AB], Gilbert and George...

Miervaldis Polis: Es tik zinu, ka viņš bija nosmērējies balts... Jā, viņš taisīja visādas, jā, tieši tā. Tipisks fantommākslinieks. Man ir mākslas vēsture citā skatījumā. Es viņu lasīju tur, akadēmijā. Bet tā kā neviens tur nesaprata, es atmetu ar roku. Boizsu un Vorhols,

divas... To es uzzināju pirms... Es neinteresējos par visu to mākslu, mani tas neinteresēja un... Es toreiz visas tās performances nezināju.

Amy Bryzgel: Kad es runāju par tavu mākslu, man jāprot viņiem atbildēt.

Miervaldis Polis: Nekad neesmu tādus zinājis, tagad, kad es šķirstu tos žurnālus un tur izlasu. Es nezināju nevienu tad. Nu, mana pirmā performance, es esmu intervijā jau to sniedzis, plika pakaļa, tāda. Un tu zini, es redzēju amerikāņu filmu par slaveno Skotu brīvības cīnītāju, kā viņu tagad pasniedz. Patiesību sakot, bandītu. To slaveno filmu ar to slaveno aktieri ar zilajām acīm.

Amy Bryzgel: Es nezinu kā saucas latviski, bet angļiski *Braveheart*....

Miervaldis Polis: Es viņu redzēju. Bērnībā, uz ielas, attaisījām durvis un abi divi ar puiku, es sarunāju mazāko draugu. Abi divi, es sarunāju, kad kāds gāja garām, parādījām plikas pakaļas. Tā bija pirmā performance. Bet to darīja jau tūkstošiem gadu atpakaļ, jau. Pasakas ir tas, kas pieraksta izrādi. Pasakas, tas ir mutvārdu daiļrade. Tur bija uzskaitīti kā paraugi, kas ir performance. Latvijā, cara laikā bija performance. Bija performāls dzejnieks Jānis Teiks. Latvijā. Tas ap divdesmito gadu. Divdesmitajos gados, tad arī nomira. Viņš performances taisīja tekstuālas un arī mutiskas... Un tur bija spontānais teātris... atnāca no Amerikas. Baltie cilvēki... Latvijā liels iespaids no Amerikas vienmēr ir bijis. Divdesmitajos gados. Mūsu pašu prezidents, izcilais Kārlis Ulmanis. Viņš, taču, studēja Amerikā.

Amy Bryzgel: Vai cilvēki tajā laikā, kad Doma laukumā tu taisīji Bronzas cilvēku, saprata, kas tas ir.

Miervaldis Polis: Es nevaru pateikt, piemēram, ka tie, kas gāja garām un redzēja, ka tajā brīdī pārkrāso, nē. Bet viņi par to domāja. Redzi, kas ir performance – spontānais teātris. Tur, piemēram, [kaut ko dara, skaņas – JV] [motions as if he is going to throw a bottle – AB]. Kādu brīdi tu domā, kāpēc viņš to darīja. Ko tas nozīmē un kas tas bija, ko viņš, ir tā. Lūk! Šī spontānā darbība, kas neatbilst situācijai. Nu, labi, es negribēju pudeli mest vai vēl kaut ko galīgi, bet es tikai saku. Un cilvēks domā, nu, kā viņš tā varēja. Kāpēc viņš to darīja. Tas ir slikti, ko. Cilvēks tiek... viņa apziņa tiek piemēslota. Netiek vaļā... Tāda man viņa vienmēr ir. Es atceros akadēmijā. Es uzzīmēju, gribēju apgūt grafiku. Es pieteicos grafikas nodaļā. Ārpus nodarbības, brīvajā laikā. Tur bija Upītis, profesors slavens. Tagad izstāsta kā to dara. Un tagad es uztaisu zīmējumu. Zīmējumā es uztaisu ābolu, nokostu. Bet tur, kur ir nokosts, tur viens zobs lien ārā. Tagad es iesniedzu to zīmējumu lai apstiprina, tā bija padomju laikā. Apstiprina, vai tad taisīs to litogrāfiju. Viņš tagad mani atsauc pēc trim dienām, tas profesors un saka, vai es esot komjaunietis, prasa. Es saku, ka neesmu komjaunietis. „Mhm,” viņš saka. „Es tik un tā domāju, ka to varētu arī komjaunietis darīt. Bet kāpēc jūs esat tādu zīmējumu uztaisījis. Kas tā par domāšanu padomju cilvēkam?” Nu, ābols kož pretī. Zini, kad nokož, tur paliek zobi [nospiedumi – JV]. Bet šinī gadījumā tur zobi uzzīmēti. Tā viņš man neatļāva to taisīt grafikā. Citu atļāva. Vijole debesīs. Tā man vēl ir saglabājusies. Kas notika? Tas viss bija spontāni. Es toreiz tā aizrāvos ka, mazliet sirreālu domu reālu uztaisīju, to ilūziju otrādi. Nu, tā man

ienāca prātā. Es neko apzināti, netaisījos kaitināt profesoru ar kaut ko tādu, ka viņš tur. Bet viņš saka, es trīs nakts par to domāju. Vai var padomju jauniešus, komjauniešus, bet es nebiju komjauniešus. Un ļoti smieklīgi tas tā.

Amy Bryzgel: Vai tu apzināti taisi tādas performances? Tu gribi, lai cilvēki piedalās tavās performansēs. Mākslinieks taisa tikai pus mākslu, bet cilvēks, kas to redz, viņš turpina.

Miervaldis Polis: Tas arī fantomus, kas izraisa. Fantomu efekts. Tā lieta, kas mani interesē, kā cilvēki reaģēs uz šādu situāciju. Nē, es nedomāju kā sliktā nozīmē reaģēs. Kā tas vācu režisors, kur tā vācu publika, varbūt, agresīvāka! Jo brīvāka zeme, jo agresīvāka publika. Mums padomju laikos bija ļoti daudz aizliegumu, tādēļ publika nebija agresīva. Visi vienkārši zina, ko drīkst un ko nedrīkst. Bet, ja nu tas ir, tad jau tas nav nekas slikts. Un šiem vienai, kā cilvēki to uztvers. Es mēģinu iztēloties, man pašam ar to pietiek. Ja nu kāds grib vēl ieinteresēt, arī interese bija vēl kādam. Šinī gadījumā tam režisoram. Saka, nu vispār jā, ja nu kādu vēl tas interesē, kāpēc lai es to neizdarītu. Aktieris. Bet kad tad... kādu tas satrauc. Protams, viss aizgāja uz Ļeņina pusi, bet tā tas nebija domāts. Domāts bija vispār. Par to, ka liek šos monumentus. Bet tur bija tā koncepcija. Es somiem izstāstīju. Avīzē viņi uzreiz bija sajūsmā, kad saprata. Jā, toreiz tikšanās bija, intervijas bija, protams. Jo tā ir doma par to, kas ir tas, ko mēs saucam par varu, par mūsu... Pati labi zini... Vienīgi jāatzīst godīgi, es nekad nebiju dzirdējis. Ja citur taisa ģipša eņģeļiņus. Nu, bet tā bija arhitektūras sastāvdaļa, tomēr, lai nu kā. Bet, kad likt monumentu, kas augstākās tehnoloģijas meistardarbs bija, grieķu laikā. Bronza. Vara, kas spēj tādu Atēnu Palādu izliet, tā patiesi bija vara. Vai tas, kas tur Asīrijā uztaisīja tos vārtus ar tiem

dzīvniekiem, spožajiem. Zini? Kā sauca tos vārtu?. Nu Berlīnē ir brīnišķīgs tas fragments. Metropolitenā tak' arī. Velns, man viss sajucis. Nu, jā, tas bija brīnums. Tā ir vara. Bet padomju laiks, uztaisīja no ģipša, nopervēja ar riebiņu un nekvalitatīvu bronzas krāsu, tā kā zelts. Un arī tie stulbie zemnieķeļi tur, nodzērušies, neizglītoti. Tāda bija tā Krievija. Padomju Krievija izglītoja savas tautas. Labi, latvieši bija samērā izglītoti, 75% prata lasīt un rakstīt. Cik Amerikā prata tad, nebūs 75 [procenti, EV]. Kā es tev saku. Latvieši bija ārkārtīgi izglītoti, tas Krievijas laikā. Bet tā nevar teikt par visu Krieviju. Dienvidu tautām. Un padomju laikos, patiešām izglītoja. Var jau mest visu vienā katlā. Bet jāsaka, ka padomju laikā bija ļoti daudz labas lietas... Tiešām bija ārkārtīgs svars uz izglītību. Ļoti nopietni. Amerikas radio, ko es klausījos, pati atzina, ka augstākā kāda viņiem ir zināma izglītības sistēma ir Padomju Savienībā. Amerikā ir ļoti slikta. To viņi paši atzina, tā ir. Ir runa par sistēmu... Viņi godīgi pateica, kas viņiem ir sliktā stāvoklī. Vācijā ir brīnišķīga izglītības sistēma.

Amy Bryzgel: Kā konstatēja, ka cilvēki redz to?

Miervaldis Polis: Viņi sajuta kaut kādu brīvības izpausmi.

Amy Bryzgel: Par mākslu padomju laikā cilvēki, pēc manām domām, nerunāja...

Miervaldis Polis: Akadēmijā tikai par mākslu runāja, par mākslu, par dzeju, par literatūru. Tagad vairs nav izglītības. Toreiz... bija vienalga, vienkāršs cilvēks. Jebkurš bija izglītots... visnormālākā līmenī. Ļoti labi teica Pēteris Plakids, izcils komponists, kas, lūk,

šeit viņa klājums, starp citu. Viņš šeit dzīvoja. Es no viņa nopirku šo māju. Izcilākais, kas pasaulē ir zināms, ir komponists... Tad viņš teica, ir trīs līmeņi mūzikā. To pirmo līmeni, to visi uztver. Tad par mūziku interesējies, pēti, pats mazliet ar' muzicē vai arī esi mūziķis, tad tu jau dzirdi arī otro līmeni. Bet, ja tu esi komponists, izcils, tad tu dzirdi to trešo līmeni. Bet tad viņš teica, ka tas visizcilākais komponists bauda tik un tā to pirmo līmeni. Ir neizglītoti cilvēki, tādā nozīmē kā ar sapostītām smadzenēm. Ka viņas no bērnības saposta. Viņš bija kalps vienkārši. Augstākas apbalvojums bija kalpa libreja, ko hercogs viņam piešķīra, kas bija tieša atzinība. Es biju tajā, kur viņš muzicēja, Berlīnē. Vāji atjaunojuši, tomēr var redzēt to telpu. ... Es tikai gribēju teikt, ja Bahs piedzimtu vienā Krievijas guberņā pirms Krievijas pilsoņu kara. Teiksim pasaules kara laikā. Nekāda Baha nebūtu. Viņš būtu sapostīts tajā murgā, kas tur darījās.

Amy Bryzgel: Tu domā, tā māksla ko tu taisīji astoņdesmitajos gados, tā lika cilvēkiem domāt?

Miervaldis Polis: Latvijā ir augstākais glezniecības līmenis mūsdienu pasaulē. Vairs nē, mirst nost visi. Nav adekvāti Enzelīnam... nav adekvāti pasaulē nekad bijuši.

Amy Bryzgel: Es runāju par cilvēkiem, kas gāja uz muzeju...

Miervaldis Polis: Rindā stāvēja. Vai tu zini to, ka vislielākā rinda stāvēja ne jau uz to izstādi ko aizliedza. Bet gan uz Kalniņu gleznām.

Amy Bryzgel: Vai cilvēki redzēja to, lai domātu par mākslu?

Miervaldis Polis: Nevar teikt – domāt. Apcerēt. Tas ir līdzdzīvot... Kas ir domāšana, tas ir stereotips, ar ko aizmāļēt nedomāšanu. Tukšs vārds. To mūsdienās lieto bez jēgas.

Piemēram, saka, mums ir tāda ēdienu gatavošanas filozofija, mums ir tāda biznesa filozofija. Tas viss ir tukši vārdi. Nav tādas filozofijas. Tā ir mūsdienu...

Amy Bryzgel: Kā cilvēki reaģēja pēc tavas performances?

Miervaldis Polis: Es tev varu pateikt, pavisam bēdīgi, par to kā. Līdz šim mani atceras, veci, nu, jau cilvēki, ka ir redzējuši. Vai atkal jaunāki bišķiņ, kuri bērnībā redzējuši...

Neviens neinteresējas par manu mākslu, tādēļ es arī aizgāju.

Amy Bryzgel: Es interesējos.

Miervaldis Polis: Tu arī interesējies par to pašu. Parādi pliku dibenu un visi par to runās. Bet parādi viņiem izcilu, izsmalcinātu lietu, viņi reaģēs...

Amy Bryzgel: Man ir daudz jautājumu par gleznām...

Miervaldis Polis: Cilvēki patiešām zin' par „Bronzas cilvēku”, bet par pārējo, neko tādu nezina.

Amy Bryzgel: Žēl, ka tavas gleznas nav daudz muzejos.

Miervaldis Polis: Brīnišķīgu darbu cikls ir Medicīnas muzejā.

Amy Bryzgel: Ir dažas Valsts [mākslas – EV] muzejā...

Miervaldis Polis: Ir ekspozīcija. Viņas nav muzejā, kur tad viņas var redzēt... Latvijā tagad cels fantomu muzeju. Muzeju, kurā nav kolekcijas, tādu mums cels. Bet to, kurā ir brīnišķīgākā kolekcija, kura ir zināma, tādu necels. Tūristi tur bariem ietu, tāpēc, ka interesanti. Jā, i Staļina laiku, i Hruščova laiku, i to Brežņeva laiku redzēt. I neatkarības laiku. Bet tam naudas nepietiek, tagad taisīs muzeju kuram nav kolekcijas. Manu darbu, redz, banka viena nopirka, bet es neko nesaprotu no tām muhļāžām tur. Bet tas [glezna – JV] piederēja maniem radiniekiem. Un tā kā viņiem naudu vajadzēja, es viņu arī pārdevu. Tādā nozīmē, lai viņiem ir arī nauda. Es viņiem nepārdotu, bet tā kā tas nebija man, tas tikai skaitās, ka es viņu pārdevu.

Amy Bryzgel: Pēc tam bija „Bronzas cilvēku ubagošana”.

Miervaldis Polis: Tā man bija feina ideja, bet Ņujorkā mēs jau gribējām, toreiz, kad mēs nonācām ar to izstādī. Divdesmit divi mākslinieki bija Ņujorkā, tad es jau gribēju šito. Redzēt, kad visi kolektīvi ubagos, bet ne bronzā, vienkārši. Kolektīvie ubagi, parasti... Naudas pelnīšana... Nu, lūk, bet Hārdijs šito kaut kā bija uztaustījis, vai arī viņš tāpat arī domāja, es vairs neatceros. Hārdijs, nu Hārdijs Lediņš.... Ja mēs bronzā, un mēs pa abiem

arī izstrādājām. Es arī uzrakstīju koncepciju un tā bija ļoti vienkārša. Kultūra vienmēr ir ubagojusi. Agrāk pie hercogiem, vēlāk pie valsts un tagad pie privātbagātniekiem. Un toreiz bija Gorbačova tikšanās paredzēta ar sievu, kad viņi iebruks Brēmenē. Jo tur bija Maskavas Kremļa zelts izstādīts, Brēmenes muzejā. Bet viņš neaizbrauca. Nu, mēs ar Hardiju tur bišķi arī pastrādājām. Piekārām banānu ar caurdurtu nazi, tā kā sirpi un āmuru pie sarkanā karoga. Ko Loganovskis, kurš vienmēr kaut ko vajag izdarīja, tas ir sarkano karogu pakāra mūsu izstādē. Nu, un tāpēc, ka bija vēl Padomju Savienība. Nu mēs, kā tad tā, sarkanais karogs un nav sirpis un āmurs... Tad mēs piekārām banānu, tad tas banāns izliecās ar to kātiņu tā kā rokturis. To lika noņemt. Stundu aizkavējās atklāšana, kad ieraudzīja šito te, pilsētas galva. Mums, šeit atļautu, Padomju Savienībā, a tur neatļāva. Kur bija lielāka brīvība. Jā, mums to neviens neaizliedza, Gorbačova laikā. Par to neviens nešaubījās. Mēs neko aizliegt nevarēja, kāpēc to būtu jādara? Tak' respektē likumus, kādi ir valsts ierēdņi. Vai tad tu nerespektēji, savus Amerikas valsts likumus? Vai tad tā nav, vai tad tu viņus pārkāp? Nu ja nu slepeni. Likumus tak' cilvēki respektē un mums viņi bija tādi, kādi viņi bija, un tos arī respektēja. Viņi nav pretrunā ar kādām cilvēktiesībām.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet, cik es zinu bija tāds likums, ka visas izrādes bija jāaskaņo.

Miervaldis Polis: ...kas pasūtīja. Jebkurā laikā un jebkurā. Vai jums Amerikā ir atļauts? Katrs žurnāls, katrs teātra direktors, komerciālais ir pašcenzors... Kā tu vari taisīt, ja tev nav naudas. Amerika nav Padomju Savienība, protams.

Amy Bryzgel: Cik es saprotu Mākslas savienība pateiks vai jā vai nē. Tad tu prasīji viņiem, lai taisītu to „Bronzas cilvēku”?

Miervaldis Polis: Jā, protams. Tas bija Mākslinieku savienībā. Tajā laikā jau varēja taisīt... Kuldīgā bez mākslas, bez atļaujas. Bet arī izstādes... mums atļāva taisīt. Bet vienmēr, ja bija pilsētā, tad pilsētai piederēja izstāžu zāle, vai tā izstāžu zāle piederēja kolhozam. Nu, vai, kādam taču viņa pieder. Nu, vai Ņujorkā nepieder kādam izstāžu zāle. Nu piemērs, nu, kam pieder piemēram Marboro [*sic* – Marlborough Gallery]? Un viņi arī skatās, vai viņi šo izstādīs vai nē. Vai, tā nav? Tieši tāpat bija Padomju Savienībā.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet tas ir mazliet citādi, jo Mākslinieku savienība bija atbildīga par visām izstādēm kas notika Latvijā.

Miervaldis Polis: Nebija! Štrunts par to, kas rakstīts. Populāra anekdote, Padomju laiku - rakstītam ticēt... Viss ir kārtībā, bet es tikai saku vai tad var visam, kas rakstīs ticēt. Mākslinieku savienība tāpat kā Makšķernieku savienība atbild par saviem biedriem, lai viņi nepārkāpj morāles robežas.

Amy Bryzgel: Vai visiem bija jābūt tajā biedrībā?

Miervaldis Polis: Nē, lielākā daļa nebija.

Amy Bryzgel: Krievijā bija...

Miervaldis Polis: Nevar runāt par visu pasauli un arī par visu Padomju Savienību, es nevaru runāt. Es paskaidroju kā bija Latvijā, kā bija Igaunijā. Ar Igauniju es pa daļai tomēr maz zinu, bet to es zinu, ka Igaunijā bija vēl brīvāk. Liela daļa nebija Igaunijas Mākslinieku savienībā. Tas nenozīmē, ka viņi nevarēja rīkot izstādes. Protams, viņi bija, nepopularizēja. Šeit, Latvijā vis kaut ko varēja izdarīt. Protams nepopularizēt. Jā, nu, bet, avīze tad piederēja kam? Valstij. A valsts nepopularizē to, ko pēc viņas domām... Cita lieta, ka tā pati sistēma bija ačgārna. Tad jau redz' drusku cita lieta. Amerikā, es nedomāju, ka ir ačgārna sistēma, bet Padomju Savienībā bija. Bet pat šīs sistēmas ietvaros bija liela brīvība un tiesības cilvēkiem... Katra jauna vara grib iepriekšējo noliegt, lai pati liktos labāka... Vai viņam kāds to aizliedza... Es tikai par piemēru, vesels štats, varbūt tu nezini, bet mums bija oficiāla publikācija avīzē, ka vesels štats Amerikā ir aizliedzis. Darvinu un plēš ārā no grāmatām lappuses, vai nēlaiž iekšā štatā grāmatas par darvinismu. Es tikai par piemēru. Tas labs vai slikts, es tikai saku, ka tādi likumi un cauri... Vai tagad tu vari staigāt plika pa Rīgas centru? Bet pa Ņujorkas centru, tur stagāt, tad tevi savāks policija... Nē, nē, nē, es vēlreiz saku. Amerikas sistēma ir smagās cīņās par cilvēka tiesībām, savstarpējām, izcīnījusi sev noteiktu sistēmu. Kura, nav ačgārna. Es tak' par to nerunāju, es tikai saku, ka plikam jau arī... Tikai, ja trāpītos policija, saņemtu, ka nemetās ciet. Kaut vai tā ir Amerika vai Padomju Savienība. Kāda starpība?

Amy Bryzgel: Es negribu salīdzināt, es tikai gribu zināt, kas bija atļauts vai nē...

Miervaldis Polis: Es tev atkal varu pateikt, ka „Amerikas Balss” [radio – EV], kura runāja par padomju likumdošanu, kura ir humānāka. Pat „Amerikas Balss”, pretī būtu jāsaka „Svoboda”, Krievu valodā raidstacija, no Amerikas, ka padomju likumi ir humānāki ja pieņem to raidījumu. Tā kā tā nav padomju propaganda. Bet viņiem bija viens liels likums. To varēja grozīt kā grib. Es neiegrimšu sīkumos, jo nebūt neesmu juridiski izglītots. Es tikai pats saku, ko es klausījos Amerikā. Un patiešām šī sistēma, lai nu kāda absurda viņa bija, sistēmas ietvaros bija ļoti likumīgi viss. Un tas, ka nedrīkstēja radīt situāciju, ka kādu var aizskart. Ja tu plīks ej, tad tu kādu aizskar, ja tu propagandē Jēzu Kristu, tad tu arī propagandē pravieti Muhamedu. Ļoti nekorekti ir, ja tu vienu reklamē, bet to otru niecini.

Amy Bryzgel: Es arī lasīju, tur bija raksts, ka cilvēki kas apģērbās kā hipiji un bitniki kas bija Doma laukumā, ka tika paņemti policijā.

Miervaldis Polis: Un kas tad bija?

Amy Bryzgel: Es nezinu vai tas bija aizliegts apģērbties kā hipijs.

Miervaldis Polis: Nē, bet... Amerikā notika gan. Astoņdesmito gadu beigās, es tev varu pateikt konkrēti. Faktu, paprasi Liānai Langai. Zini, dzejniece, Amerikā dzīvojusi, studējusi, strādājusi... Īstajā vārdā Bokše. Un ko viņa stāstīja. Mēs abi bijām kopā Ņujorkā, tāpēc viņa stāstīja, ka toreiz bija tas Ņujorkas mērs, tas mafiozņiks, kā viņu sauc. Tagad arī viņš uz prezidentu [prezidenta amatu – EV] cīerē. Tas Džuliani [Rudolfo

Džuljani – EV]. Viņa bija tad Ņujorkā, kad viņš iztīrīja Ņujorku, kad nošāva nevainīgu cilvēku policija, kad visi intelektuāļi protestēja pret to. Nekas tāds Padomju Savienībā nenotika. Vismaz Brežņeva laikā, nejauc laikus, nekas tāds nenotika.

Amy Bryzgel: Un viens ziņoja par Ļeņinu.

Miervaldis Polis: Un kas tad notika, nekas nenotika. Atbrauca no KGB, tie paskatījās, točna nav Ļeņins, kaut kāds ziņoja. Tas vēl no Staļina laikiem nāk, tā ziņošana. Kāds gribēja briesmīgi izkalpoties. Briesmīgi labs un bija piezvanījis, ka te, lūk, ņirgājās par valsts vadoni. Tas nebūtu pieklājīgi, es piekrītu. Nekad neņirgājos ne par Ļeņinu, ne par Staļinu... Par mirušiem cilvēkiem nevajadzētu ņirgāties. Varbūt būtu labāk viņus nīst.

Amy Bryzgel: Turpināsim ar kolektīvo ubagošanu...

Miervaldis Polis: Tā bija Hardija ideja. Viņš ir liela mēroga fantommākslinieks. Es tikai apstrādāju, kas mani tur interesēja, tai lietā. Tā ideja bija tāda, ka paralēli notiks Brēmenē un Rīgā. Un sazināsies, tur bija arī kino, Brēmenē, no Latvijas. Starp citu tika arī filmēts... man viņš arī piedāvāja. Man viņš nav, nezinu, kur viņš ir. Paralēli arī Rīgā, pie brīvības pieminekļa LPSRZ. Tas ir Zābers un Putrāms jaunais. Plātis bija... Tas viss notika četrpadsmitajā [jūnijā – EV]. Tā iznāca Brēmēnē pēc tās sistēmas. Mēs visi bijām Brēmenē, tur bija tā izstāde. Vienkārši iekrita tā, ka izsūtīto piemiņas dienā. Kad izsūtīja latviešus ārā no Latvijas uz Sibīriju. Septiņpadsmitajā jūnijā. Un tāpēc viņi attapās, nevar šito. Un tad bija citi laiki un nebija tas sinhronais. Un tur notika tā, mēs visi bronzējamies,

tēpus visi jau sašuvuši, dažam pa lielu bija, smieklīgi bija, kad tā sakrunkojās. Citi brilles uzlika, caurumiņus uztaisīja, kā nu kurš. Visi nobronzējās un tad soļojām viens aiz otra, visi seši. Soļojām no tās skolas, kur mums iedeva telpas, kur bonzējāties. Uz to centriņu. Tur kāds kilometrs bija. Tā mēs aizsoļojām, un tajā centrā bija kafejnīca. Kādu ceturtdaļu laukuma aizņēma kafejnīca. Un tad mēs stāvējām pa apli un ik pa brīdim mainījāties. Beigās es nosēdos malā, man jau apnika. Tērzēju ar vienu dāmu kaut ko tur. Man vēl fočenes mājās ir, es nobildēju. Un tad mēs gājām, tā bija Hardija ideja, viņš vienmēr visu savieno ar naudu, gājām gar tiem galdiņiem. Kā tu domā, visvairāk savāca Hardijs pāri par 30 latiem, pie 40. Nē markām. Es savācu ap 30 latiem. Pārējie mazāk. Gājiens bija ļoti efektīgs. Sākumā stāvējām tik ar cepurītēm. Es tak' nedomāju ka kāds metīs iekšā.

Amy Bryzgel: Es lasīju, ka tā bija ubagošana Latvijas nākotnei...

Miervaldis Polis: Katrs, ko grib to pieliek klāt. Tagad Latvijas lata devalvācija. Vai nav vienalga... Tā bija simboliska akcija par to, ka kultūra vienmēr ir ubags. Tev par to nav jākautrējas.

Amy Bryzgel: Kāpēc māksla vienmēr ir?

Miervaldis Polis: Tāpēc, ka viņa nav tā, kas ražo maizi. Kas audzē maizi, vai kas taisa krēslu... No mākslas paēdis nebūsi.

Amy Bryzgel: Jūs bijāt Brēmenē, bet, kas notika Rīgā?

Miervaldis Polis: Jāsaka vēl viens, Hardijs pārveda pāri kandžas aparātu. Tu zini kas ir kandža? Tas ir *self-made spirit* [*sic* – moonshine – AB]. Tas bija aizliegts. Kā Vācijā, tā arī Padomju Savienībā. Principā. Ievest obligāti bija aizliegts. Ar visu to, ka bija mākslas objekts. A tur uz vietas, izstādē viņš to iedarbināja un pilēja ārā šņabis. Katrs varēja atgriezt krānu un iedzert. Viš sāls paciņas pārdeva, padomju sāls.

Amy Bryzgel: Vai tur bija policija?

Miervaldis Polis: Viņi jau nesaprata. Pēc būtības pārkāpa divus likumus, padomju un vācu...

Amy Bryzgel: Kas bija noticis Rīgā, vai cilvēki deva naudu?

Miervaldis Polis: Viņi uzzinādami, ka nevar tai dienā, tad viņi kaut kur, laikam Doma laukumā bija. Bet citu dienu...Nezinu, tad tev būtu jāprasa tam pašam Subačam.

Amy Bryzgel: Vai tev bija grūti dabūt vīzu uz turieni?

Miervaldis Polis: Padomju laikos, protams, pēc tam jau arī. Padomju laikos grūti bija tādā nozīmē, tāpat kā visiem, rindās bija jāstāv. Neviens neaizliedza. Bija cita nelaime, lai tu lakā dabūtu to vīzu, arī biļete bija jāaskaņo tāpēc, ka tās arī nevarēja dabūt tāpēc, ka bija ļoti maz reisu. Tad gan bija problēma, tad padomju laikos bija sistēma, ko sauc par blatu.

Un mums māksliniekiem bija „blats”... un tad jau ārpus rindas. Tā arī bija, jo pēc būtības tā bija kultūras misija. Es esmu pirmais, kurš ticies ar augstākā ranga politiķi Somijā. Tā jau ir tā eļļa. Es taču ar Miterānu arī tikos. Francijas prezidentu. Satikos savukārt Latvijā. Tur vesela anekdote. Tas bija astoņdesmit devītajā, laikam, gadā. Tas ir, ko es runāju. deviņdesmit pirmajā gadā. Tikko neatkarība bija. Pirmie bija franči, iebrauca ar diviem karakuģiem. Un māksliniekus tad uzaicināja. Ak Dievs! Tas bija pa visiem, šitām vēstniecību balles. Ar Miterānu tur tiešām ir anekdote... Rīga ir pilna ar bandītiem... Viņi, vienkārši, ir kļuvuši par uzņēmējiem. Taksi firmas pieder bandītiem.

Amy Bryzgel: Spēļu zāles.

Miervaldis Polis: Tie nebija bandīti, es pats pazīstu viņus. Es divus pazīstu personīgi. Tie, kas faktiski bija bandīti, viņi pa priekšu laupīja taksīšus. Pēc tam par to naudu paši nodibināja taksīšu firmas. Un ir solīdi uzņēmēji. Tā tas Amerikā notiek, tā Anglijā notika, tā tas Francijā notika un tā arī Latvijā. Normāli bandīti nav tie sliktākie. Ja viņi ir slimi, tad viņi sēž ķurķī, agri vai vēlu... Bandīti sargāja uzņēmējus labāk par valsts policiju. Man liekas, uzņēmēji vēl tagad ar sirsnību satiek tos, kam maksāja. Viņi pasargāja viņus no citiem, tiešām stulbiem bandītiem. Par to jāmaksā, ka tevi apsargā. Rekets, tas jau bija normāli. Valsts nevarēja garantēt nekādu policijas drošību, jo pati jau bija briesmīgi sajukusi.

Amy Bryzgel: Pēc tam bija deviņdesmit pirmajā gadā ar Zāberu, kad jūs pārdevāt saulespuķu sēkliņas.

Miervaldis Polis: Tā bija Zābera ideja. Es tikai teicu, ka es tāpat nepārdošu, es esmu bronzā. Sākumā nē, bet pēc tam padomāja, nu labi. Tā bija viņa ideja, Zābera. Viņš pārdeva parastus, es nokrāsotus. Viņš par rubļiem, es sākumā... Jā, dolāri, man bija sākumā 3 dolāri. Un neviens nepirka. A viņam beigu beigās sanāca pāri 90 rubļi. Un tad es pacēlu cenu. Tas bija 5 dolāri. Dolārs bija aptuveni 120 rubļi. Varbūt kļūdods, bet kaut kas tāds. Varbūt 70. Arī mainījās tak' viss, tur. Tad pēkšņi atnāca, laikam bija no Saeimas, nē Saeima vēl nebija, bija Augstākā padome. Latvijas. Laikam mani pazina un bija kaut kādi ārzemnieki, un viņi nopirka vienu paciņu no manis par to 5 dolāri... Un tad bija teiciens – ko zvirbulis pa gadu to zirgs pa reizi. Atstāj aiz sevis... Es teicu Zāberam – es vinnēju. Aizgājām uz krogu un nodzērām.

Amy Bryzgel: Kāda bija tā ideja?

Miervaldis Polis: Nekāda. Zābers nekad neteoretizēja. Kāds pierakstīja to klāt, kādu pamatojumu, bet viņš pats nē. Tā kā tur nekā nedarīja. Vienkāršs fakts, jo Latvijā krieviņi ie brauca no Ukrainas un visurienes. Un viņi pārdeva tās saulespuķu sēkliņas. Visās malās, neoficiāli toreiz. Un viņiem precīzi tā arī bija, bija papīrīši saplēsti šādos kvadrātos, avīzes. Tad bija kastīte, atrasta iepakojuma kastīte. Un glāzīte bija. Un to glāzīti iebēra, tūtiņu uztaisīja. Tā tas bija precīzi. Man piesējās viens OMONšķiks... Tie bija tie, kas te šāva vēlāk. Tad vēl nebija šaušana. Viņš mani ieraudzīja, es pie pulksteņa, pie „Laimas”. Viņš mani ieraudzīja un man bija tas ordenis, manējie, personīgie. Tu ņirgājies. Es smejos par tiem. Es domāju, ka nē. Lai tas ir krievs, bet viņš ir karojis, īsts karavīrs. Vai krievs

vai vācietis. Kurš tad karavīru apceļ, nekad. Padomju laikos ordeņi bieži bija tieši tiem, kas nebija karavīri. Bet es neņirgājos arī tādā nozīmē, es piešķīru pats sev ordeni. Man neviens nebija, arī tagad nedod. Daudziem māksliniekiem ir ordeņi, man nav. Man nevajag. Es atteikšos. No Latvijas ordeņiem, obligāti.

Amy Bryzgel: No kurienes bija tas ordenis?

Miervaldis Polis: Es pats radīju, tas ir mans ordenis. Pats sev piešķīru pēc tam.

Amy Bryzgel: Viņi izskatās pēc Latvijas ordeņiem.

Miervaldis Polis: Nē, visi ordeņi ir tādi. Es sev taisīju dizainu, koncepciju. Bet praktiski, izaisīja Sīlis, ir tāds metālmākslinieks. Viņš man taisīja. Naudu es samaksāju. Viņam vēl ir matrica. Viņš man vēl nav atdevis, matrica ir mans īpašums. Tad man arī ir sudraba jeb toreiz nebija sudraba, bleķa. Tas atkal garš stāsts, tas arī bija viens performance ar fantommākslu.

Amy Bryzgel: Kāpēc tu gribēji to ordeni?

Miervaldis Polis: Es esmu teicis, ka es vienmēr runāju nopietni, bet cilvēks ne. Arī tagad es runāju nopietni. Tu neticēsi, un smiesies, bet es tiešām esmu mēģinājis iztēloties, vai es varētu kādu cilvēku iedomāties, pasaulē, kas man varētu uzsist uz pleca un teikt – ‘O!’ Ir viens. Tikai viens. Es. Tad es arī sev piešķīru ordeni. Tās ir manas tiesības. Nopietnākais,

retākais ordenis pasaulē. Ja tu zini ka bikšu lentes ordenis ir rets, Lāčplēša ordenis ir rets. Ordeņus pēc nāves nepiešķir. Tas ir Padomju teijaters [teātris – JV]. Kad pēc nāves piešķir. Padomju laikos tikai tā darīja. Nekad ordeni nepiešķir pēc nāves. Pēc nāves tu vari dot radiniekiem, ko tu gribi, zemes vai naudas, bet ne jau ordeni. Bet tā ir padomju specifika. Tie bija izcili ordeņi. Mans draugs, Laimonis Šulcs, Berlīnē, Latvijas emigrants. Viņam ir izcilākā ordeņu kolekcija, kādu es zinu. Viņam ir visi Krievijas ordeņi, visi Latvijas ordeņi, izņemot pirmās pakāpes Lāčplēša, izņemot pirmās pakāpes Ļeņina ordeni, kas ir ar briljantiem. Tas viņam nav. Viņš kaut kā aizrāvās un pa lēto visu to sapirka tad, kad tie krievi muka uz rietumiem, tad pārdeva. Vēl ir Lāčplēša ordenis, otrās pakāpes, Somijā saņemts. Interesanti, kā no Somijas atceļojis uz Berlīni. Somu virsnieks to bija saņēmis par brīvības cīņām. Bet viņš ar cieņu pret ordeņiem attiecās. Kā visur, tur ir klāt cilvēks, kas par to atdevis savu dzīvību jeb riskējis.

Amy Bryzgel: Vai tas ordenis ir taisīts kā egocentrs?

Miervaldis Polis: Ar egocentru ir jāsaprot ka, viņi jauc, parasti, ar egocentru parasti saprot, āā, egocentriķis, egoists. Nē, nē. Tur bija uzrakstīts vienkāršiem vārdiem, tad man būtu gari jāstāsta, īsi sakot ir tieši pretējais. Minimāls egocentrisms ir katrā cilvēkā. Radošums, tas tāds padomju laiku vārds, teiksim tā, aktivitātes pamats. Normāls egocentrs... Bet hipertrofēts egocentrisms, es runāju par indivīdu, nevis masu. Marksisms nav indivīds, tādēļ marksismam šeit nav vietas. Es runāju par indivīdu, un indivīda hipertrofēts egocentrisms ir masu egocentrisma pamats. Hitlers bija hipertrofēts egocentriķis, Staļins bija hipertrofēts egocentriķis. Lai gan es ārkārtīgi cienu un apbrīnoju

Napoleonu, absolūts... bet arī viņš bija hipertrofēts egocentriķis. Es jau negribu noliegt cilvēku, kuru apbrīnoju, es arī negribu noliegt Staļinu. Hitleru man grūti apbrīnot, jo tik stulbas lietas Staļins tomēr nedarīja.

Amy Bryzgel: Ir teiciens par egocentru, ‘iepazīsti sevi’...

Miervaldis Polis: Tas ir Talless. It kā ir rakstīts virs Delfu orākula Grieķijā. Sešsimtais gads pirms mūsu ēras, vēl pirms Kristus dzimšanas. Un tur bija rakstīts: „Iepazīsti sevi”. Tas ir, mēģini saprast, atklāj sevi, kas tu esi. Tas ir ļoti sens, pierakstīts bija Tallesam, lai gan droši zināms, ka tas bija virs Delfu orākula... To es lieku par pamatu savai dzīvei, kopš es apjēdzu, gadus 35 atpakaļ, es izlasīju šo teicienu. Kādi 26 gadi man bija. Grieķu filozofiju toreiz. Kopš tā laika es nolēmu tam veltīt savu dzīvi. Tas ir, savai tautai. Ar reālo tautas iepazīšanu man iet bēdīgi.

Amy Bryzgel: Kā tas darbojas? Tu teici, ka ar tavu mākslu cilvēki var iepazīt tevi....

Miervaldis Polis: Mākslā tam nav sakara. Mākslā ir tā. Vai tu esi dzirdējusi kā pavasarī dzied putni, starp citu, šodien viens šausmīgi interesanti brēkuļoja, putns. Ja tu prasītu putnam, putnu valodā, kāpēc tu dziedī, tāpēc, ka es nevaru nedziedāt. Viņš nevar nedziedāt. Manā mākslā ir tieši tas pats, mēs vienkārši to nevaram nedarīt. Cita lieta, ka es zinu, ka labākais, ko es varu darīt savai tautai, ir darīt to, ko es vislabāk varu. Cenšos. Ja es vislabāk prastu paukoties es...

Amy Bryzgel: Ja tu dari to, ko vislabāk proti darīt, tu vari atklāt sevi? Es nesaprotu kā darbojas egocentrs ar mākslu...

Miervaldis Polis: Es visu laiku domāju, kāpēc es gleznoju. Protams, ka tas, ko es tagad tev pateicu, to es nedomāju pirms divdesmit gadiem. Es pa priekšu gleznoju un pēc tam domāju. Viens no maniem formulējumiem, pretējs asprātībai. Un asprātība skan tā, ka sievietē pa priekšu dara un pēc tam domā. Vīrietis it kā otrādi, pa priekšu domā un tad dara. Un, ko es saku, es tā daru. Es pa priekšu daru un tad domāju. Tas ir domāšanas pamats. Un jebkuras loģiskas rīcības pamats ir pa priekšu spontāni rīkoties un tad domāt, ko tu esi izdarījis. Otrādi nemēdz būt. Sievietes latviešiem ir absolūta autoritāte. Latvijā ir patriarhāts... to tu zini. Man bija saruna Japānas vēstniecībā.

Amy Bryzgel: Es zinu, sievietē ir kakls un vīrietis ir galva.

Miervaldis Polis: Tās asprātības, pēc būtības pilnīgi nopietni, Latvijā valda sievietes. Jo kas to nesaprot, nekad šeit nekā nesapratīs. Tas nav noniecinājums vīrietim, tā ir cita rīcības sistēma.

Amy Bryzgel: Kāpēc tu domāji un dibināji to egocentru?

Miervaldis Polis: Kāpēc, to nepateikšu, tāpat kā putns, ir.

Amy Bryzgel: Dažreiz tu lieto kā parakstu gleznās to egocentru.

Miervaldis Polis: Jā. Tur, tajās reprodukcijās kur es iegleznoju sevi, vai kādreiz bez reprodukcijas, tur ir tieši ar to saistīts. Cilvēka tieksme ir būt klāt. Būt. Viņš grib būt. Atvainojiet, no spermata. Būt starp miljoniem vienīgais. No šejienes līdz kapam ir, būt. Otrs, ko šis indivīds, šis spermatozoīds grib, vienalga vai sieviete vai vīrietis. Tikai viņiem ir atsevišķi mērķi, sievietei cits mērķis, vīrietim cits. Vīrietim, mirt un atstāt pēcnācēju, sievietei – viņus augt. Tāpēc sievietes ir izturīgākas un vīrieši trauzlāki. Kas ir loģiski, jo viņiem vajag tikai radīt. Un, ja var aizstāvēt. Klasika, dzīvnieku pasaule ar cilvēkiem. Es tur redzu kā koki cīnās tieši tāpat kā cilvēki cīnās par savu sugu.

Amy Bryzgel: Es neredzu, kā tas ir saistīts ar tavu mākslu, tavām gleznām.

Miervaldis Polis: Un šajā, par to, kur ir Siksta Madonna [*sic* – Sistene Madonna – AB] un es, Rafaēla Siksta Madonna [Sistene Madonna – AB]. Redzēju viņu beidzot, ārkārtīgi skaista. Mikelandželo ir nožēlojams mākslinieks. Man viņu žēl, labāk būtu taisījis sērkociņus, kā viņš pats rakstīja. Augstākais, kas man ir zināms, ir Leonardo da Vinči. Absolūts meistars. Es tagad redzēju viņu visus to darbus. Tas ir neiedomājami. Es to saku kā tikai reprodukcijas agrāk jau biju redzējis. Protams, viens Mikelandželo arī izskatās labs, bet ne realitātē.

Amy Bryzgel: Kā egocentrs ir saistīts ar mākslu?

Miervaldis Polis: Lūk, es konkrēti saku, šo Siksta Madonu [Sistene Madonna – AB]. Es tur, apakšā pie tiem eņģeļiņiem noņemu cepuri. Tas ir, es cienu cilvēkus, kuri tic, nevis cienu tos, kuri izspiež ticību. Tos es necienu. Tos es neciešu, kuri uzspiež ticēt. Bet tos, kas tic bez piespiešanas, to es cienu. Tādēļ es to cepuri tomēr noņemu. Lai gan man riebjs šī varza. Tādēļ, ka es domāju par tiem cilvēkiem. Vēl es noņemu Rafaēla gleznas priekšā. Tad, lūk, šis egocentrs tur ir pielikts. Es parasti to nedaru. Bet kāpēc, tu neredzēji, ka Pāvests, šis zaglis. Dvēseļu zaglis, bandīts un blēdis ir nolīcis savu cepuri. Savu egocentra zīmi, varas zīmi. Kreisajā pusē, tad es labajā pusē savu. Tā ir parafrāze par Pāvestu. Baņģuga. Pāvests, ne jau konkrēti tagad vai kāds, bet vispār šī ir bandītu varas... Viņi jau toreiz ļoti labi zināja, ko viņi glezno. Viņš noņēma to cepuri nost un cepure ir varas simbols un cepures noņemšana ir varas noņemšana. Tāpēc es viņu paturu rokās.

Amy Bryzgel: Kāpēc cepure ir varas simbols?

Miervaldis Polis: Varbūt no bruņinieku laikiem. Kad tu atkailini sevi. Cepuri franču muižnieki noņem tikai karaļa priekšā un Pāvesta priekšā. Ja viņš katolis ir. Bet citādi tikai karaļa priekšā. Dāmas priekšā tikai paceļ cepuri, ko es arī daru. Atliek atpakaļ un nekad nenoņem cepuri. Kā tad kovbojiem, amerikāņu, tieši tā. Latviešiem ir ļoti interesanti, latvieši bija vergu tauta, tā bija, ģenētiski. Bet mēs izveidojām savu varas sistēmu. Un mēs uzskatām par liecinājumu, ja cilvēks ienāk no āra telpā, jebkura priekšā noņem cepuri. Ar to arī latvieši atšķiras. Latvieši paši to nezina. Latviešiem slikti, pat ļauni skaitās nenoņemt cepuri telpā.

Amy Bryzgel: Es dzirdēju, ka ir slikti ielikt cepuri somā pie galda.

Miervaldis Polis: Es domāju, ka tā nebija, jo grīda parasti bija netīra, īpaši ziemā. Kūst sniegs, dubļi. Tas būs jaunlaiku. Vecos laikos grīdu, arī Francijā kaisīja ar zāģa skaidām. Amerikā arī ar smilti... Bet cepuri nedrīkst paturēt galvā, franči sēž pie galda cepurēm galvā. Franču kultūra, dienvidi... Es nekad neesmu bijis, bet vienmēr esmu slavenā amerikāņu operdziedātāja, Amerikā nav slaveni operdziedātāju daudz, nu tas Mario Lance... Iespējams, mafija novāca, jo viņš atteicās dziedāt, viņš tiešām strauji nomira. Viņš no Jaunorleānas, no Ņūorleāna. Es saprotu, ka pēc tā ārprāta, tur ir... Bet es lasīju nupat, arī mans iemīļots amerikāņu rakstnieks Mains Rīds. Tu nezini Mainu Rīdu, palasi... Viņš raksta par Ņūorleānu, ka tur trīs kultūras bija kādreiz. *Spanish, French, and American*. [Spāņu, franču un amerikāņu – EV] Un viņi ļoti labi sadzīvoja visi, un vēlāk pārmāca prastums. Jankiji bija. Bet tā jau domāju, ka vajadzētu to Ņūorleānu kādreiz redzēt. No kurienes Karūzo nāca? Vai arī nebija no Ņūorleānas? Bet Mario Lanca no Ņūorleānas. Amerikāņiem ir tikai divi dziedātāji, Karūzo un Mario Lanca. Mario Lanca bija nabadzīgs itāļu zēns. Viņš dziedāja vairāk filmās, nekā bija uz operas. Un atteicās no mafijas ballītēm. Un ar to arī viss sākās. Itāļu mafija.

Amy Bryzgel: Vēl bija divas akcijas, mēs runājam par tanku kurš dega, vai tā bija tava ideja?

Miervaldis Polis: Tā arī bija spontāna, viss sākās ar to, ka apcietināja Rubiku. Tur, kur tagad ir vēstniecības un kaut kādas ārzemju firmas, ja tu zini to ēku, tāda liela. Iet pa

Pulkveža Briēža ielu uz priekšu, tur kreisajā pusē viņa ir. Kronvalda parks. Milzīga padomju ēka, tāda. Tur bija daudzas vēstniecības, vēl tagad tur ir. Pasaules Tirdzniecības centrs, tā viņu tagad sauc. Un tur bija Rubikam, respektīvi, Rīgas komunistu, varas tur, pats neatceros kā sauca. Tur Rubiku apcietināja. Visi gāja skatīties, kā tad nu tur, mainīja karogu. Es biju paņēmis tanku līdz... Tur ilgi tas notika. Fotografus satiku, kuri jau vienmēr, paziņas stāv, Bergmani dzejnieku, dzērāju. Izstāstīju viņam kā es ar Pugo tikos. Pugo ir pēdējais padomju valsts vadītājs.

Amy Bryzgel: Tas notika kur, pie Pasaules Tirdzniecības centra?

Miervaldis Polis: Nē, es tad vienkārši staigāju. Tad es attapos, kad ir tas uguns ceļš.

Pēctam aizgāju pie Daces Lielās, mākslinieces. Tad bija katalogs. Un palūdzu viņai, lai man asistē. Tāpēc, ka es negribēju lai man izjauc. Nevis tāpēc, ka man būtu bail.

Nevienam nekāda skāde nebūs, bet neiznākt var. Lai viņa paņem terpentīnu līdz, ar ko apliet to tanku, lai var aizdedzināt. Un viss, es domāju, ka tur milicija būs, un tā. Ālēsies tur cilvēki, tad jau milicija būs. Un tad man vienkārši atņems un neiznāks tā dedzināšana.

Un tā viņa gāja neatkarīgi no manis, lai nav kopā. Vakars, jau ir ap pus sešiem vai sešiem, neatceros vairs. Bet viss jau ir sācies, cilvēki plūst. Un es eju gar pareizticīgo katedrāli, pa kreiso pusi, alejai. No sākuma domāju pie Brīvības pieminekļa, pēc tam domāju, velns, tur cilvēki tādi cemmīgi, nu, ko tad es smirdināšu. Ies pie Ļeņina... Eju šajā virzienā un pretī plūst, pilna tā iela. Pa vidu ir aleja, no Brīvības pieminekļa līdz, tur, kur bija

Ļeņineklis [Ļeņina piemineklis, žargonā – EV]. Satiksme ir slēgta. Un nāk cilvēki. Pilna iela... Un es eju ar šito te, nāk pretī cilvēki, kalni. Un viņu arī vilku aiz muguras, un spiežu

šito, un viņš to stobru tā, brrr. Un tad es dzirdēju sakām. Ar to es lepojos, kāpēc nevar lepoties, ja tā ir patiesība. Tad kāds teica, tas ir izcili, man ovācijas uzgavilēja. Un teica, jā es dzirdēju. Jā tas droši vien ir kāds no māksliniekiem, cits jau neko tādu nevarētu izdarīt. Iedomājies kādā cieņā padomju laikos bija mākslinieki.

Amy Bryzgel: Ja es saprotu, tas nozīmē to, ka bija iespējams, ka tas ir tikai mākslinieks.

Miervaldis Polis: Tā viena teica otram, toreiz jau mani nezināja un neviens jau nezināja kā es izskatos. Nūū, izcili, to jau tikai mākslinieks var. To jebkurš varēja, tur nevajag mākslinieku. Tur nav nekā mākslinieciska, nekā, tici man.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet tas , ko nebija iespējams pateikt parastajā dzīvē, ja tas tiek saistīts ar mākslu.

Miervaldis Polis: Nebija saistīts, nekādā veidā. Tad bija sakars ar padomju bērnu rotaļlietu fabriku. Viņi domāja, ka cits tas nevarēja būt, jo toreiz ļoti cienīja mākslniekus, dzejniekus, rakstniekus. Mākslinieks, tādēļ, ka viņi nebija tik konservatīvi. Rakstnieki bija konservatīvi. Tā bija ideoloģija, vārds ir ideoloģija. A mākslinieki vienmēr varēja visu ko. Nu mūzikā pavisam varēja. Bet mani izbrīnīja, ka padomju laikos tas varēja būt mākslinieks, man liekas, ka tur nekāda sakara nebija.

Amy Bryzgel: Vai tu domā, ka tas varēja būt Tautas frontes cilvēks.

Miervaldis Polis: Es nebiju Tautas frontē, es neatzinu.

Amy Bryzgel: Ja cilvēks no Tautas frontes dedzinātu tanku, tā būtu politiska akcija, bet kā mākslinieks, tas bija mazliet cits.

Miervaldis Polis: Tā ideja, tai dāmai bija tā, ko es tagad stāstu. Kas to varētu tādu iztaisīt, tad tas laikam bija mākslinieks. Nevienam citam nebija brīvība to darīt... pagriezt tur. Tu zini kādas performances latvietis uztaisīja Vašingtonā? Nolika baltu palagu pretī Baltajam namam, pārgrieza vēnu, pa vidu iztecināja... Policija viņu pēc tam savāca. Nav jau par ko īpaši, lai noskaidro, kas par lietu tur... Griezt vēnas publiski nav atļauts, cilvēkam var nelabi palikt. Tālākais gan bija bišķi neatļauts. Bet tā kā toreiz visu atļāva, tad... nebija nozīmes. Es esmu nacionālists. Tikai nejauc ar to, ko tagad sauc par nacionālistu. Es neesmu nacionālists tādā aspektā, es esmu tas, kas mīl savu tautu.

Amy Bryzgel: Ja tas cilvēks būtu politiķis, kas taisītu to, ko tu taisīji tu, tas nozīmētu kautko citu.

Miervaldis Polis: Nē, to pašu. Tur jau ir tas kompliments, ka laikam jau tikai mākslinieks.

Amy Bryzgel: Es domāju, ka tas ir ļoti nozīmīgi.

Miervaldis Polis: Nē, zaļajā kustībā, tur bija... ko viņi izstrādāja. Zilus brīnumus. To es vairs neatceros, bet tur bija, es pats izlasīju. Ne par to ir runa. Te jau tā asprātība, par ko

es stāstu, ir tas, lai paskaidrotu kā cilvēki cienīja māksliniekus padomju laikā. Ne jau tāpēc, ka viņi bija labāki. Es tāpat zinu, ka viņi neviens nav ne labāki īpaši, ne sliktāki. Tie mākslinieki tādi savdabji, jocīgi. Kādas rindas stāvēja uz izstādēm pie Anmaņa, pie Tabakas, pie Kalniņa.

Amy Bryzgel: Kāpēc tu domā, ka tik daudz cilvēku cienīja māksliniekus.

Miervaldis Polis: Tāpēc, ka viņi savu tautu mīlēja. Un mākslinieki ir tie, dzejnieki ir tie, kas uztur to. Vienalga, kādas varas, kāda valsts būtu, vienalga.

Amy Bryzgel: Un vienalga kāda māksla, tā ir? Vai tas ir Kristaps Ģelzis vai Maija Tabaka?

Miervaldis Polis: Ārkārtīgi sirsnīgi viņi tajā mākslas zinātnē ir. Man vispār patīk. Nu, protams, uz Kristapu nestāv rinda. Nu, Maija Tabaka... tas ir ūnikums. Tauta neredz to kolorītu, bet viņi redz, ka tur ir. Kas tur ir grūti pateikt. Es vienmēr arī esmu par to domājis, kāpēc viens patīk. Kāpēc Goldbergs patīk. Es kā mākslinieks varu pateikt, ka viņš kā mākslinieks ir vārgs mākslinieks. Tāds ļoti nemākulīgs. Bet es jau viņu nenoliedzu. Es tikai apbrīnoju, kāpēc viņš veselam slānim, tautai nē, bet ārkārtīgi cienīts. Ne kā cilvēks. Kā cilvēks viņš ļoti, man vecs paziņa tak'. Es apbrīnoju, nezinu kāpēc, nezinu. Nu, zinu no Berlīnes laikiem. Tas bija pilnīgi apbrīnojami kā Berlīnē ar viņu aizrāvās. Tā it visur Latvijā. Nekā nesaprotu, jo viņš taisa blefu, viņš ir īsts fantommākslinieks. Nē, nē, tas nav nekādā sakarā ar cilvēku, Feldbergs ir brīnišķīgs

mākslinieks. Cilvēks lielisks. Ja runā par to, ko viņš taisa, tas viss ir lēts, un nekas tas nav. Kādreiz viņš tīšām ākstījās.

Amy Bryzgel: Es atceros, tu taisīji izstādi bez darbiem ar Zāberu, vai tu domā, ka tāda izstāde būtu atļauta 80jos gados?

Miervaldis Polis: Protams.

Amy Bryzgel: Es zinu, ka Krievijā nebūtu.

Miervaldis Polis: Krievijā arī cara laikos bija sliktāk nekā Latvijā. Un par padomju laikiem nerunāsim. Arī tad Latvijā bija labi. Krievijā kaut kāds liels posts ir. Es lasu tagad Vili Lāci. Izlasīju, es gribēju teikt, es nebiju lasījis. Ģeniāls rakstnieks. Kaut ko tādu, par to vēsturi, Sibīriju un visu. Cara laikos. Un tad tie komunisti sākās un sākās visas tās šaušanas un tā. Es tikai saku to, krievi ir brīnišķīgi cilvēki, cik es viņus zinu. Tas pats bandīts, tas kā cilvēka liktenis lēmis... Kurš tad, nu, grib būt bandīts. Neviens. Un ir tādi mazi reģioniņi Krievijā, kur cilvēki dzīvo kā cilvēki. Un te atkal kāds no ārpuses viņus okupē un iznīcina. A kāpēc tā notiek? Prasu. Nesaka neviens. Nu, es prasu krieviem. Man krievu valoda ir kā latviešu valoda. Ļeskovam, deviņpadsmitā gadsimta meistaram. Kad to lasu, tad mati ceļas stāvus. Kas tas ir. Viņš tā kā uzburtais tēls, delikāts, smalks cilvēks. Ko lai mēs zinām, vai tad var uz pasaules kāds var zināt, kāpēc mēs, cilvēki šitā vai tā rīkojamies. Tagad lasu islāma grāmatiņu, Korānu. Tā kā Talmudu, respektīvi, piecas prozas grāmatas es nopietni jau esmu lasījis, tad es tagad šo lasu. Pilnīgi cita lieta. Tur ir

ļoti maz atšķirību no kristiānisma vai no judaisma. Bet jāsaka, zināma agresivitāte tur ir. Kristiānisms ir mazāk agresīvs. Viņi ir ļoti līdzīgi. Man jāsaka, ar ārkārtīgu cieņu es lasu, lai tu mani nepārprastu. Pats es neesmu ticīgais un neatzīstu tādu lietu, bet es ļoti cienu ticīgus cilvēkus. Un mēģinu saprast, kas tas ir, kas viņus vieno. Man diemžēl tas nav saprotams. Tā es mēģinu saprast. Un nesaprotu, ko darīt... Jā, islāms ir diezgan kareivīgs. Ja ņem vērā, ka viņš ir visvēlākā reliģija. Tad kad kristieši bruka virsū, tad viņi izveidoja savu. Protams, kā protestu pret to. Tādēļ kristīgā ticība ir agresīva... Manis dēļ, lai viņi viens otru apsit, tikai lai liek mieru man šite... Nu, labi, es jau pajokoju.

Amy Bryzgel: Varbūt mēs varam atgriezties uz to sākumu.

Miervaldis Polis: Nobeigumu jau tu zini, es tak' biju stāstījis. Tad es nonācu tur. A tur izrādās vesela kaudze publikas jau stāvēja ap to Ļeņina pieminekli. Bija arī kādi pāris miliči. Tie visi pa gabalu, lai netraucē. Nu, tā, lai nav kādreiz kaut kādi tur. Un tad tur bija interesanti. Sāka krēslot. Tātad bija jau kādi astoņi pulkstenis. Augusta beigas, jā, tur krēslo. Un pēkšņi viens, es viņu pazinu, tāds bišķi ķerts. Ebrejs vai pus krievs, pus ebrejs, nezinu. Foršs puika, bet viņam bišķi šite. Nu es viņu sen zināju. A viņš bija uzgērbis krievu mundieri, virsnieku, cara laika. Un ar karogu laikam krievu armijas, krievu tagadējo – sarkans, balts, zils. Cara laiku karogu. To viņam tāds pīķis kā jau karogiem, to uz Ļeņinu tā [dūra – JV]. Tad miliči iejaucās un ar visu to karogu tā lēni izvadīja prom. Viņiem ir pavēle ne... Viss atkal nomierinājās. Cilvēki stāv un gaida, kas notiks. Jo baumas bija, ka novāks Ļeņina pieminekli. A, kad, neviens nezin. Nu, tad es piemiedzu ar aci, skatos, ka Dace Lielā skatās uz mani. Šī pienāk pie manis, iedod to pudelīti,

terpentīnu. Es nolieku, izeju priekšā pie Ļeņina pieminekļa. A tur tukšs. Nolieku to tanku, paspīdinu, apleju ar terpentīnu, piešķīlu sērkociņu. Ārprāts, plastmasa... Un es tik spiežu šito, tas tanks braukā un tikai pš, pš, pš. Un tad pēkšņi es redzu, mazs puisītis pienāk. Krēsla, tumšs jau. Nu ja uguns, tad pavisam visapkārt tumšs. Un tas puisītis, tu gribi paspīdināt, „tikai neej klāt,” es saku... Es saku: „Še, spied!” A viņš spiež, a es pazūdu pūlī. Nostājos un skatos. Zēns spiež. Tanks deg. Publika vispār. Un izrādās es netīšām nostājos aiz jauniem cilvēkiem kurie arī bērns mājās. Līdz nebija. Sieviete saka: „vai tad viņam nav žēl, tādu dārgu mantu dedzināt?” Viņi neredzēja, ka es to aizdedzināju. Cilvēki nāca, gāja, visu laiku mainās. Un tas tēvs teica: „Turi muti! Viņš sadedzinātu visu, pat savu māju, lai tiktu vaļā no šitā ārprāta.” A meitenīte...aizvērās. Un tanks šāva. Sadega tanks līdz beidzamam. Baigā tehnika bija. Ir, kas fiksēja to. Es redzēju pūlī fotogrāfu, latviešu. Bet viņš melnbaltu fotografēja. Tāpēc tur vienkārši fiksācija, nekā tur nav. Nu attēls vienkārši, fakts. Bet nav izskata nekāda. Tas ir Janaitis, es viņu vienkārši redzēju, viņš mani nē. Un viņš nobildēja. Pie Ļeņina pieminekļa, bet tā kā attēls nekāds labs neiznāk, nu tad, ko tad nu. Fotogrāfam neko nepateiksi. Nu tā arī ir. Viņam bija melnbalta tikai.

Amy Bryzgel: Vai tā arī bija performance, kad tas bērns sāka spēlēties?

Miervaldis Polis: Spontāni. Tas bērns pienāca. Skatos, un es atdevu viņam to. Jo tas ir tas, ko pārmantos. Vara būs pēc četrām paaudzēm Latvijā. Tas ir Bībelē teikts. Nevis septiņas... Bet tagad nekā nav, bēdīgi. Muļķi paliks nacionāli, kas ir tautiski. A tie gudrie būs Amerikā. Gudrie brauc prom. Un tā tam jābūt. Paliek tie kas paliek. Ne jau es, es

esmu vecs. Es jau saku, paliks, nekur nezudīs. Eiropa nekur nezudīs. Visa Amerika ir tikai Eiropa tur. Valsts ir stiprākā pasaulē, kāda ir zināma. Bet tā ir cita runa... Bet es tā atceros, kad es tur dzīvoju, tai Klīvlendā. Ohaijo galvaspilsēta. Tur bija japāniete trešā paaudze, sēdēja... Tad tur bija vāciete pirmā paaudze. Arī ēdām, nu viņa tā mazāk ēda. Tad tur bija, pie ieejas tas no... direktoru skolas. Nu, es teiktu, kāda laikam sestā paaudze, bet vienalga atceras, ka viņš ir īrs. Pirmais jautājums bija: „You stay in America?” „No,” I said. „I am only an artist here.”, [„Tu dzīvo Amerikā?” „Nē,” es teicu. „Es esmu vienkārši mākslinieks šeit.” – ang.val. – EV] A nē, brauks prom. Tūrists, bija nepareizi. Tourist it is not a people. [Tūrists, tas nav cilvēks – ang.val. – EV] Nē, nē, es nebiju tūrists, es biju tiešām projektu... bet ne tūrists. Nē, tūrists. Man bija, vispār tikai desmit kartiņas. Visā pilsētā un to pašu vienā vietā tikai varēja nopirkt.

Amy Bryzgel: Klīvlenda nav tūristu vieta Amerikā.

Miervaldis Polis: Tāpēc viņa ir izglītota. Es tev varu pastāstīt to vēsturi, īsi. Ja tu nezini. Klīvlendā sešdesmitajos gados dega upe. Ogļuraktuve, visa upe dega kilometriem. Pēc tam Klīvlendu pameta cilvēki. Viņa bija tukša pilsēta, badā mirstoša. Tas bija trīsdesmitajos gados. Trīsdesmitajos gados, es bišķi sajaucu. Bet dega pēdējo reizi sešdesmitajos gados. Tad pameta vēlreiz pilsētu. Posts šausmīgs, bads. Tad beidzot tur riktīgi vīri trāpījās un viņi lika uz izglītību. Tagad Klīvlenda, plūdu pilsēta. Bet tur arī nav vairs nēģeri, kā latvieši saka, tikai Amerikā tā nedrīkst teikt, tad viņi domā, ka tu esi slikts. Mums vienkārši saucas nēģeri. Tāpat, kā mums saucas žīdi nevis ebreji, bet var arī teikt ebreji. Krieviem tā negatīvi žīds ir. Tā kā mums daudzi no Krievijas ir, tad šausmas.

Tāpat kā Amerikas šitie melnie, kad viņi dzird nēģeris. Jeb tad kad latvieši ienāk Amerikas lielveikalā. Supermarketā un saka šitas un šitas, brīnišķīgs, brīnišķīgs. Tad saka: „Ja jums nepatīk, ejiet labāk ārā!”

Amy Bryzgel: Pēc tā ar „Bronzas cilvēka” ar Zāberu, kādreiz tu stāvēji, kur bija Ļeņina piemineklis.

Miervaldis Polis: Jā, paskaidrošu, kā tas notika. Nekāda sakara ar kādu domu. Pirmkārt, man riebja Ļeņina piemineklis un tikai sakarā ar to tanka dedzināšanu, tas, nu, vienkārši tā iznāca. Bet tad tas Ļeņina piemineklis bija novākts. Pirmā diena. Mēs ar Zāberu, tā bija šoreiz mana ideja. Zābers man asistēja. Es teicu, pa priekšu bija komunisti tagad kungi. Pa priekšu bija bronzas cilvēki, tagad baltie. Tagad manī nemaz nav ļaunuma, bet toreiz bišķi bija. Toreiz nezināju, tagad es daudz ko zinu un nebūt nav ļaunums uz to. Un taisam šito un viņš uzreiz piekrīt. Un viņš mani krāso. Es esmu bronzā, no Daces Lielās mājiņas atkal. Tas ir prezidenta meitu māja. Tu zini, kas ir meitu māja – mauku māja... Un Latviski meitu māja ir prostitūtu māja. Bet, kad es saku: „Prezidenta meitu māja,” tad tas ir burtiski. Prezidenta meitas tur dzīvoja. Viņu īpašums tas bija, kur Dacei Lielajai bija darbnīca ar vīru un bērniem. Gustava Zemgala un Čakstes. Tāpēc mēs smejamies, es dzīvoju prezidenta meitu mājā. Un tur es nokrāsojos bronzā, izeju ārā un Zābers mani krāsos. Nekas tur īpašs nav, bet piesējās Jānis Borgs. Mūžīgais centroviks [*sic* – EV] ar trim zviedru televīzijas cilvēkiem. Un, ka viņi grib, ka es aizeju pie Ļeņina pieminekļa un tēloju Ļeņinu. Zābers saka: „Kam mums tas vajadzīgs.” Mēs vēl nebijām sākuši krāsoties. Izgājām ārā, uzklājām palagu, lai ielu nenosmērē. Nē, nē, ļoti svarīgi. A, beigās saku:

„Labs ir!” Tad samaksājiet, lai mums iznāk krogs un miers. Es aiziešu. „Labs ir,” apsolīju, viņi gan bija skopi, kā zviedri. Zviedri ir visskopākā tauta pasaulē. Ne jau vācieši ir skopi, bet zviedri. Tas viņiem laimi nenes. Es tak’ smejos. Es nezinu, jums Amerikā stāsta anekdotes par tautām.

Amy Bryzgel: Jā.

Miervaldis Polis: Baigi labi. Par žīdiem, par latviešiem Amerikā maz būs, bet par žīdiem, krieviem, angļiem, Vāciešiem un tā tālāk. Nu, lūk, un tās jau arī ir tās anekdotes.

Amy Bryzgel: Tu daudz zini.

Miervaldis Polis: Baigi maz, mums iznāca katram pa divām. Vienu man izstāstīja Zābers. Bet tur bija baigais teātris, iznāca. Nu nekā nevar darīt. Labs ir, es viņiem apsolīju. Vajag izplatīt to – Latvijas vārdu, nu, ko tu darīsi. Nu un gāju uz turieni bronzā. Nogāju gar Brīvības pieminekli. Slāju tik tālāk. Cilvēki stāv un tā, nekas īpašs. Aizgāju uz to pieminekļa vietu, Ļeņina. Nostājos un pēkšņi dzirdu, bremzes kauc. Trolejbuss, mašīnas kaudze. Un es skatos zaļā gaisma rāda, a viņi nebrauc. Nu neko, es stāvu. Cik ilgi stāvēsi. Šie tur kaut ko filmē. Cik ilgi stāvēsi. Braucu mājās... Kā tu domā... They don't like... [Viņiem nepatīk – ang.val. – EV] All Russians... Old people... [Veci cilvēki – ang.val., - EV] I felt very curious... 49 years old, I know. But before, [Visi krievi... Veci cilvēki... Mani māca dziļā ziņkāre... Četrdesmit deviņi gadi, es zinu. Bet pirms tam, – ang.val. – EV] viens jauns cilvēks, ne jauns, bet ne vecs, pienāk pie manis ar lāpstu. Nu būs. Bet es

skatos, tas ir mans viens vecs bērnības draugs. Kaimiņpuika, jā. No Sibīrijas atgriezās, kā krievs arī bija palicis. Latvietis, bet Sibīrijā dzīvodams, tu par krievu paliki. Arī sirsnīgs, protams, ka. Un viņš nopircis lāpstu. Un ieraudzīja, ka stāvu. Viņš saka: „Vēl, kāds būtu uzlicis mazu pieminēklīti, Ļeņina vietā tie krievi,” viņš saka. Nācu skatīties. Ar lāpstu rokā. Un tad vienā pusē šis ar lāpstu ar mani runājas, otrā tas ar ordeņiem. Tas bija skats. Un es pa vidu bronzā. Vēl tur kādas sieviņas un vēl kādi. Tādi virsnieki to Ļeņinu neieredzēja. Mēs arī nezinājām savā laikā, ka tā bija šusmīga... Visu jau pamazām uzzin. Bet tas bija forši, vienā pusē stāv ar ordeņiem un nāk man līdzi. Un otrā pusē ar lāpstu, kā kapracis. Tā mēs aizgājām līdz Vecrīgai. Iegāju pie Daces Lielās, kur es atkal iegāju dušā un...

Amy Bryzgel: ...kad tu kļuvi par balto cilvēku?

Miervaldis Polis: Tas bija pēc tam.

Amy Bryzgel: Jo es domāju, ka baltais cilvēks bija tavējais, ka nav vajadzīgs bronzas.

Miervaldis Polis: Jā, jā es zinu, es pārkrāsojos un tajā dienā nekādi nevarēju būt. Pirms tam. Viņi mani noķēra. Ā, pareizi. Viņi mani noķēra pirms mēs vispār sākām. Borgs noķēra, jā, ar tiem. Beigās es piekritu, es Zāberam paskaidroju, ka būs, ko iedzert. Bet vispār viņi maz iedeva. Mums iznāca katram pa diviem aliņiem.

Amy Bryzgel: Kad tas bronzas cilvēks kļuva par balto?

Miervaldis Polis: Tas bija tieši, kad es atnācu atpakaļ. Tad es arī ar Zāberu, kurš gaidīja pie Daces. Jā, pie viņas, es atceros pareizi. Un tad mēs gājām turpat uz Doma laukumu... blakus Doma laukumam. Pirmā ieliņa. Otrā ieliņa no Doma laukuma.

Amy Bryzgel: Tad bija pēdējais bronzas cilvēks, izņemot to, kas bija Klīvlendā.

Miervaldis Polis: Jā, es tagad domāju, ka es neesmu vēl kaut ko sastrādājis. Atteicos arī braukt uz Ameriku, bronzā. Vajadzēja jau piekrist... Uz slaveno performanču festivālu. Mark Švēdes festivālu. Bronzā es būtu braucis. Toreiz bija ļoti sarežģīti, tikai caur Somiju un tur ir liela stundu starpība starp vienu lidmašīnu un lidmašīnu uz Ameriku. Tā, ka man būtu jāpavada kādas divdesmit stundas bronzā. Un es pieņēmu, ka mani nelaistu. Toreiz vēl nebija terora. Varbūt ka laistu. Ja būtu straight [*burtiski* pa tiešo – ang.val. – EV], viss kārtībā. Ja būtu tiešais reiss. Un vienmēr var, man ir manas tiesības. Krāsoties. Obligāti, ar krāsu viss sākas. Kāpēc sievietes drīkst krāsoties, kāpēc mēs nedrīkstam? Discrimination [diskriminācija – ang.val. – EV], vīrietis tiek diskriminēts. Kāpēc sieviete tikai, vīrietis jau tiek. Sešpadsmit punktos vīrietis tiek diskriminēts pēc padomju likumiem. Pret sievieti, tieši vīrietis. Kolbergs, rakstnieks, detektīvu rakstnieks, ļoti labs. Viņš to bija saskaitījis. Cik punktos padomju laika likumi diskriminēja vīrieti?!.

Amy Bryzgel: Cik punktos diskriminēja sievieti?

Miervaldis Polis: Kopsummā iznāk, ka vīrieti sešpadsmit punktus vairāk diskriminē. Tas viss ir nopietni. Skaitīju, skaitīju, man sanāca deviņi, viņš saskaitīja precīzāk. Viņš krimiķus raksta, nu to kriminālliteratūru. Tāpēc viņš varēja saskaitīt. Es vairāk par deviņiem nekādi nevarēju atrast. Jo deviņreiz vairāk vīrietis tika diskriminēts vairāk pēc padomju likumiem, nekā sieviete.

Amy Bryzgel: Vai „Bronzas cilvēks” bija nejaušs?

Miervaldis Polis: Es pats būtu tajā brīdī, bet tad mēs ar Zāberu vairāk nesatikāmies, viņš man. Viņš praktiķis. Un man jau bija doma noslaktēt. Mani ieliktu zārkā. Bronzā. Un atstātu pie Ļeņina pieminekļa. Zārku bronzas. Pārklātu ar bronzas pārsegu. Un ordeņiem. Un atstātu. Un es tur gulētu, kamēr mani savāķītu, nu jau jaunā policija. Bet zini kā, man pašam to nevajag. Tā kā Zābers bija uz mani par kaut ko apskaities, viņš domāja, ka es nozagu to zviedru naudu. Smieklīgi, protams. Bet viņš tādā ligzdā laikam dzīvoja, es jau tādā nedzīvoju. Manā laikā neviens otram neko neņēma nost. Man pat tāda doma nevarētu būt. Bet es tagad saprotu, ka viņam taisnība, tagad jau tā publika mainās. Tagad jau viens otram rauj kumosu no rīkles ārā. Tas ir latviešu dzejnieks, Veidenbaums. Ja tu lasītu Veidenbaumu, vienkārši skaidra latviešu valoda. 19. gadsimts. Fantastika. Most famous poet in the world [Pats zināmākais [latviešu] dzejnieks pasaulē – ang.val. – EV]. Viņš mira 27ņu gadu vecumā. Nē, 25. Tu tagad zini. French poet and writer [Franču dzejnieks un rakstnieks – ang.val. – EV]. Mīļais bērns, vajag lasīt. Divas lietas ir jādara, jādzer un jālasa.. Par to nav pieklājīgi runāt...

Part 3 of 3, September 9, 2007**Transcribed by Edgars Vansovics**

Amy Bryzgel: Es tev gribēju prasīt par Venēciju. Man ir trīs eksemplāri. Vai atceries, cik eksemplāri bija vispār?

Miervaldis Polis: Es tikai domāju, kā tev to vienkārši paskaidrot. Tas bija 73. gads. 72. gadā notika Venēcija. Es tagad biju tai Venēcijā, visas mājas izkrāsotas. Nav kā Latvijā. Nu tur ir forši. Bet ne priekš manis. Šur, tur ir īsts. Bet tas bija jautri, es vienmēr dzīvoju līdzī. Ja cilvēkam problēma, es gribēju aizbraukt un palīdzēt. Tad es biju jauns un spēcīgs. Un tad es antikvariātā nopirku grāmatu, 30-ajos gados izdotu. Un tad es uzzīmēju, it kā es būtu bijis tajā Venēcijā. Šīs bija četras lapas. Un vēl ir četras lapas, kas ir sadegušas. Bija šausmīgs ugunsgrēks. Divas stihijas. Un trešā – atkal četras. Bija plūdi. Aptecēja pamazām visas tās lapas ar ūdeni. Kopā divpadsmit. Un tad tas vācu režisors, mākslā izglītots. Nu tāds moderns bija. Un viņš man teica, kad skatījās šos darbus. To visu viņš par mani izdomāja. “Jā,” viņš teica: “Jūs nekur nevarējāt braukt. Tāpēc Jūs sevi realizējāt. Un tāpēc tā sala”. Un kad viņš “šito” pateica, jā...Un tā es pats esmu rakstījis, ka šādi es ceļoju. Un tādēļ man vairs neinteresēja šis te. Jo šādi es varu visur. Es varu blakus būt visiem notikumiem. Kā Madonna debesīs. Varbūt Karavadžo griež nost ienaidniekam to galvu.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet īstenībā, ja tu runā par Karavadžo...Vai tas ir nozīmīgi?

Miervaldis Polis: Nē. Pirmkārt, it tāds. Nu tu jau nezini, no kā tas nāk...Varbūt jūs arī tā savā skolā darījāt...Es nezinu, vai tagadējās avīzēs tā būs, bet vecākās bija tāds mīksts papīrs. Un šito [points to some images – AB], for example. Kolāža....Un otrs. Kāpēc viena ir tur un otra ir tur? Es nemainu gleznu, nedaru to. Es nelieku cita galvas vietā savu. Es skatos, Karavadžio kompozīcija – not ideal. Varbūt kolekcijas īpašnieks saka – no, no so much money. Šeit trūkst kompozicionāli. Nav ideāli. Es šo kompozīciju atrisinu. Es pareizi komponēju. Papildinu.

Amy Bryzgel: Tu domā, ka agrāk kompozīcija nebija laba, jo bija cita veida?

Miervaldis Polis: Jo te ir jābūt vēl kaut kam.

Amy Bryzgel: Nē, tas man netraucē. Jā, neko. Man nav visas. Tikai tās, kas bija mūsu muzejā.

Miervaldis Polis: Lai būtu. Šeit viss kārtībā kompozīcijā. Tad es sev centos iesplaut kā idejiski, tā ... papildinu. Es esmu klāt. Kāpēc tu skaties kino? Kovboji vai tur mīlas stāsts...Tu taču dzīvo līdzī, it kā tu tur būtu. Vai ne? Nu redzi. To arī es rādu.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet kad tu teici, ka tu esi klāt, vai tas ir ar to mākslinieku vai gleznu? Kur tu esi klāt?

Miervaldis Polis: Es gribu redzēt, kas bišķi notiek tai pasaulē. Reizēm arī ironizēju par šo īpatnību. Tāpēc es pats sev gleznoju, jo par sevi...Tā nedrīkst. Tāpēc es gleznoju sev, nevis citiem.

Amy Bryzgel: Es gribētu atgriezties pie Venēcijas. Mēs varētu par visu runāt. Es vēlos uzzināt, vai viņi bija izstādēs? Un kā cilvēki reaģēja, ja tu atceries?

Miervaldis Polis: Jaunatne bija sajūsmā. Es kļuvu slavenākais mākslinieks, uz brīdi vismaz. Es par to nedomāju tā. Vienkārši tā notika....Mākslinieki aizliedza māksliniekus, ne jau valdība. Tāpēc, ka mākslinieki ir konkurenti.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet kam piederēja tā izstāžu zāle?

Miervaldis Polis: Kā tas saucas?...Lāčplēša ielā, jā...Tur bija arodbiedrība kaut kāda....Tur uzstājās tautas ansambļi, un tur bija izstāžu zāle. Un tur bija arī fotogrāfiju izstāde. Foto klubs.

Amy Bryzgel: Tur bija pirmais foto reālisms. Tur, man liekas, jā....Es zinu, mēs runājām par to.

Miervaldis Polis: Bija vēl četras. Bija lapa krona jēla. To es uzdāvināju Ārgalim Marim. Un tad ir pannas.

Amy Bryzgel: Jā, es par to lasīju.

Miervaldis Polis: Tā gadus piecpadsmit stāv. Viņa Vācijā palika dzīvot. Viņa bija muzeja kurators. Vācu....

Amy Bryzgel: Bet es domāju, ka tas arī bija...

Miervaldis Polis: Deviņas panna.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet es domāju, ka tas arī bija diezgan unikāls tajā laikā Latvijā gleznot...

Miervaldis Polis: 75. gadā. Izstāde. Bet izstāde vērās vaļā no rīta. Vakarā mēs sakārām darbus, nu studenti. Studentiem jā, bet sveši cilvēki nedrīkstēja ienākt. Lai nemaitātu. Studentiem atļāva. Nu jā, vakarā mēs pakārām darbus visus. Un es izliku to pannu uz elektriskās plīts. Nāk apkopēja no rīta. Nu, kas slauka no rīta. Ko tad tie studenti dara – cep olas.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet interesanti, kas notika ar šo stilu. Vēsturē ir cilvēki, kas paskatījās uz gleznu un domāja, ka tas ir īsti un pēc tam...

Miervaldis Polis: Tā bija arī renesansē.

Amy Bryzgel: Jā, es zinu. Bet kā tu atnāci uz to stilu? Ne stilu, bet tehniku.

Miervaldis Polis: Es paskaidrošu. Es tāpat kā tu vai jebkurš normāls cilvēks no bērnības kājas... Nu es labi zīmēju, protams. Profesionālu skolu beidzu. Biju labākais zīmētājs. Lieliski gleznoju un kompozīcijas taisīju. Un dabūju divniekus. Un man bija pateikts, lai mani nepaņem akadēmijā. Es diezgan slikti uzvedos. Jā, jā, tā bija. Un man lika divniekus. Kā tas varēja būt? Nu jā, nu neko. Gāju kursus, lai saprastu, kā tad ir jāzīmē. Ļoti labi kursi bija. Mums bija tāds, par viņu bija raksts avīzē, Korņeckis. Ļoti labs skolotājs. Viņš redzēja latviešus tādā aspektā kā neatkarīgus. Bet izcils skolotājs. Ļoti izcils cilvēks. Man bija deviņi mēneši pie viņa. Bija vairāk nekā kursi, Rozentāls bija. Un tad bija armija.

Amy Bryzgel: Un kā tev tas patika?

Miervaldis Polis: Man bija 18 gadi. Tas bija 67. gads. Tad es aizbraucu uz armiju...Nu, lūk, atnācu atpakaļ. Viens mēnesis pēc eksāmeniem. A tur dokumenti jākārtu. Nu, protams, ka uzreiz tiku iekšā. Ar labām atzīmēm. Un akadēmijā es, protams, klausīju, ko saka skolotāji, lai saprastu kas un kā. Bet tad pēc otrā kursa. Trešajā kursā es sapratu, ka nedrīkst viņus klausīt. Viņi paši nesaprot. Tā bija. Tad es vairs neklausījos. Es sevi mācīju ārpus akadēmijas. Vakaros, patstāvīgi, mājās. Gleznot. Ļoti grūti bija. Zini, kā nogurst. Visu dienu jāglezno. Un vēl tur marksisms-ļeņinisms. Angļu valoda. Mums bija divi skolotāji no Oksfordas. Latvijas laika viņi Oksfordā bija mācījušies. Bet kāda Oksforda, ja tu pat nezini, kas ir sendviči? Es tikai stāstu, kādi man bija skolotāji un kā viņi izrunāja. Ļoti labi skolotāji, bet man negāja ar to valodu. Es ļoti cītīgi mācījos.

Redzi, un negāja. Bet ar to zīmēšanu biju cītīgs. Tāpēc, ka es daru to, ko es vislabāk protu. Ko cits var darīt, lai viņš to dara.

Amy Bryzgel: Es iedomājos, ka bija ļoti klasiska izglītība.

Miervaldis Polis: Zīmēšanā, jā.

Amy Bryzgel: Vai tu studēji tādu Trompe l'oeuil?

Miervaldis Polis: Nē, mums mācīja... Nevienam profesoram nepatīk padomi. Naturāla glezniecība. Gleznot visu pa jaunu. Tas nekur nederēja. Divās praksēs es dabūju...

Amy Bryzgel: Bet Pikaso bija iekļauts?

Miervaldis Polis: Padomju laikā bija grāmatas par modernismu. Krievu valodā. Rīgā man vēl ir. Ļoti labi uzrakstītas. Par visu – par ekspresionismu, par kubismu, par sirreālismu. Un to visu es arī darīju pats. Tad es sapratu, ka tas ir zem līmeņa māksla. Es tev saku, man darbus neieskaitīja. To, ka es tā gleznoju. Un tad es sapratu, ka tā nav mana... To, lai dara tie, kas neprot neko zīmēt. Tad viņi var taisīt to. Un tad bija tā. Es zīmēju... Nez, kur tās gleznas pazudušas? Bišķi it kā sirreāli, bet reāli tā. Grāmatu grāmatā. Uz grāmatas vāka. Ko tu šeit redzi? Grāmata, kurā var redzēt to pašu. Un tajā atkal pakārtota grāmata. Tādu es biju gleznu uzgleznojis. Tā kā man vēl īsti neiznāca tehniski un tā... Un tad viena sieviete, kas sēž, veca kundzīte, dāma. Viņa redzēja, ka es zīmēju. Viņa ticīga. Vai es

nevarēju uzgleznot Rozentāla altāra gleznu? Tā glezna kara laikā gāja bojā. Viņa teica – man ir tāda no avīzes, no Latvijas laika, kur tas Jēzus nāk. Vai es to varētu uzgleznot? Un viņa samaksāja. Es teicu – pamēģināšu. Es neticēju ne jaunībai, ne kam. Bet lieta tāda, ka cilvēkam tas ir vajadzīgs. Un es uztaisīju to mazo kopiju. Tu zini, ka lielu baudu sagādāja. Tas Rozentāls. Viņai patika, es uzgleznoju. Viņa samaksāja kādus 20 rubļus. Toreiz jau tā bija liela nauda. Tas tā kā tagad 200 lati. Apmēram. Un tad viņa man pasūtīja sunīti, ko es tagad pārdevu muzejam. Es uzgleznoju šito sunīti.

Amy Bryzgel: Es lasīju par to, ka cilvēks gribēja nopirkt.

Miervaldis Polis: Es teicu, nu man žēl. Ļoti labi iznāca. Bet vai tad nevar otru uzgleznot? Un pats taisīju kopiju. Un tad es sapratu, ka man ar sunīti bija idejas kaut kādas. Un tagad es izlasīju poļu žurnālā. Projekts bija. Un tur bija par visas pasaules moderno mākslu. Ļoti labi žurnāli bija tolaik. Un tur es izlasīju par hiperreālistu, amerikāņu. Tur bija arī viens vācietis - Francs Deka (?). Un izstāde Parīzē bija. 72. gadā, ja es nemaldos. Čaks Kols. Baigi interesanti...Tur aizbraucu ar kuģīti...

Amy Bryzgel: Kāpēc tevi aizrāva palielināt?

Miervaldis Polis: Man nekad nav bijis miera dzīvē. Gribēju saprast, kas ir tas, ko es redzu? Lai, protams, vēlāk apzināties. Tas, ko es redzu. Tas it kā ir un tas taču nav. Man tikai liekas, ka es redzu. Kas ir kas? Kas es pats, protams, esmu? Un kad tu uzglezno to gliemežvāciņu, tu doma par to, kas tas ir? Ko dara zinātnieks? Ar mikroskopu... Tā ir tā

pasaule, ka mēs varam palielināt. Padomju laikā nebija lielas fotogrāfijas. Pirmās es redzēju Berlīnē, kad es braucu. Pilnīgi jocīgi. Daudzas milzīgas redzēju. Es jau amerikāņu mākslu biju redzējis. Vēlāk es redzēju Francu... Viņš nebija gleznotājs. Viņš fotografēja. Bet kā viņš gleznoja. Francs Gerčš. Izcilākais hiperreālists. Viņš glezno transvestītus. Nu tematika tāda. Varbūt viņš pats arī transvestīts. Man grāmatu uzdāvināja pēc tam. Man atsūtīja. Viņš vispār vācietis. Vēlāk es viņu redzēju Berlīnē izstādē. Ļoti interesants. Viņš nav mācījies gleznot. Tu saproti? Fotogrāfs. Bet kā viņš glezno! Izcili. Kas arī ir izcilākais no amerikāņu hiperreālistiem. Francs Gerčš? Hanss Gerčš?

Amy Bryzgel: Varbūt es atceros to.

Miervaldis Polis: Tas bija nu jau pirms kādiem 12 gadiem. Hiperreālisti pirms tam tikai divus gadus bija. Tad es aizrāvos pa šo līniju, kaut vai tas pirms tam bija. Un tad es aizrāvos ar mazu bilžu gleznošanu.

Amy Bryzgel: Es zinu, ka ar pirkstiem salā...

Miervaldis Polis: Tas bija 73. gads.

Amy Bryzgel: Šī un tad Venēcija bija ļoti maza.

Miervaldis Polis: Jā, bet es turpināju citas. Mums bija maza istabiņa. 18 kvadrātmetri. Tur atradās mana radnieka mēbeles. Grāmatas, galds. Un mums bija... Es sēdēju uz

dīvāna un taisīju lielas bildes. Bet kāpēc man tādas? Ne jau lielas ir labas. Tad jau liels cilvēks ir labāks. Un tad es gleznoju maziņas. Sēdēju uz dīvānu. Citur kur nebija.

Amy Bryzgel: Un cik bija?

Miervaldis Polis: Vienpadsmit, laikam, grāmatas... Lapas, lapas. Man vēl pašam bija saglabājušās. Tekstu lapas.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet, piemēram, kā šiferteksts... Tas nozīmē, ka visos ir teksts?

Miervaldis Polis: Tituls. Titulpage.

Amy Bryzgel: Un vai visi bija izstādē kopā? Kā grāmata?

Miervaldis Polis: Jā.

Amy Bryzgel: Viņas bija pie sienas, vai ne? Bet vai ideja bija, ka cilvēki domā, ka tā ir īsta grāmata? Vai tā bija spēle?

Miervaldis Polis: Bija tāds teorētiķis. Man ar viņu biju ļoti labas attiecības. Skolotājs bija. Viņš šitā apjuka... Toreiz atklāja.

Amy Bryzgel: Lieldienās.

Miervaldis Polis: Atklāja vēl nezināmā grieķu kultūras pasākumā. Kaut kur tur Vidusjūrā. Ko viņi nezināja neviens. Nu tāda pilsēta bija. Zem ūdens... Tūr Hiendāls...Zinātnieks slavenais. Tu jau zini tikai par savu Ameriku, it kā nezinātu, ka vēl ir pasaule.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet es te esmu, studēju latviešu mākslu.

Miervaldis Polis: Nekā nav tajā latviešu mākslā. Ko tur iet studēt? Tur nekā nav. Ir franči, itāļi.

Amy Bryzgel: Es domāju, ka ir.

Miervaldis Polis: Ir citi izcilāki par mani, bet tie visi ir miruši.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet kas bija šī valoda?

Miervaldis Polis: Tā ir grāmatā, 17. gadsimta.

Amy Bryzgel: No kurienes?

Miervaldis Polis: Indijas teritorijas, bet tā nav indiešu. Tas ir viens ķēniņš, kalifs, par sevi un viņa dzīvi. Un mākslinieks uzzīmēja viņa dzīves ainas. Un es no tās grāmatas. Kā viņš

piedzērās, muļķības sastrādāja. Tur ir uzzīmēts. Un apakšā parakstīts. Ļoti skaista grāmata. Un no tās paņēmu. Es, protams, izmantoju šito te un no ta saliku... Bet es nezināju, ka viņiem viens šitais nozīmē pusi no vārda. Atbrauca man armēnis, armēņu rakstnieks. Tas skatās, saka – paklausies, tev tur viens vārds ir zivs. Bet es domāju... Sajaukts jau tur patiesībā nekas nav. Viņiem nozīmē kaut ko tas. Tas hieroglifs. Zivs, jā.

Amy Bryzgel: Un tu domāji, ka tas nekas nav?

Miervaldis Polis: Jā.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet vai šī ir lapa no grāmatas vai tu kopēji visur?

Miervaldis Polis: Nē, nē. To es pats uzgleznoju. Tajā laikā, šitie arābi, indiešu ceļotāji arī bija bijuši tajā salā. Bija arī renesanses zīmējumi. Itāļu renesanses. Uz nozeltīta papīra. Bet divas šitādas – arābu grāmata, viena bija no renesanses. Ir arī apstiprināts, ka bija divas grāmatas par salu. Bet tādas utopiskas.

Amy Bryzgel: Tu gribēji kaut ko par vēsturi pateikt?

Miervaldis Polis: Es gribēju taisīt... Bet man ir arī apraksti, kad es tur nonācu tajā salā. Kā es tur tiku un ko es tur redzēju. Ka tūristu apraksts. Un tad vēl es gribēju taisīt... To vēl tagad var patentēt. Nav pasaulē tādas rotu sistēmas. Bižutērija. Bet to es arī

nerealizēju. Es vairāk ar gleznošanu... Un tā kā es gleznoju, ļoti daudz cītīga darba. Un nav laika vispār... Tu jau, redzi, nevalkā nekādas rotas.

Amy Bryzgel: Man tikai dažas. Nav daudz.

Miervaldis Polis: Nav daudz.

Amy Bryzgel: Tu teici tas bija tipogrāfijas zālē. Un kādi cilvēki..?

Miervaldis Polis: Šitais nebija tur. Pēc tam es viņas kaut kur izstādīju. Pa kinostudijām. Nu darbi nebija pārāk populāri.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet kādi bija cilvēki atnākuši? Tie bija studenti, cilvēki, kam patīk māksla?

Miervaldis Polis: Tas bija ļoti izglītots cilvēku slānis. Tas, ko sauc par vidusslāni. Viņi jau nebija bagāti. Man liekas, ka arī nevajadzēja būt bagātam. Ļoti demokrātiska, starp citu, bija kultūra.... Tieši tad. Jā, ļoti izglītoti. Nāca veci cilvēki. Es daudz izstādes esmu taisījis. Rindā cilvēki stāvēja... Mākslinieki tik cītīgi gleznoja. Kad tu klausies Skenderu, tu domā – cik izcili cilvēki. Tā viņi domāja par mani. Tā es to neuztvēru. Man bija neērti vienmēr. Es jau par sevi esmu sliktās domās. Tu jau te dzīvo. Es to darīju savas tautas labā. Es to darīju savai tautai. To tu, lūk, nesapratīsi. Tāpēc es varēju piespieties. Es ne par sevi domāju, bet par savu tautu. Es nomiršu, bet mana tauta dzīvos. Viens cilvēks, tas nav nav nekas.

Amy Bryzgel: Mēs par to runājām. Bet bija arī visa tā māksla no ārzemēm.

Miervaldis Polis: Akadēmija bija ļoti prozaiska. Nu daudzas tehnikas viņiem nebija attīstītas, tajā skaitā, tā tipogrāfija. Līdz ar to latviešu reprodukciju bija maz, pirmkārt. Otrkārt, pārkrievošana notika. Tādēļ, man bija tikai no krieviem, no Maskavas Puškina muzeja grāmatas. Un tad kādreiz kāds no Vācijas atveda. Arī no Amerikas man žurnālus iedāvināja. No Hjūstonas, Dalasas. Tur, kur nošāva Kenediju.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet tu ņēmi gleznās no tās?

Miervaldis Polis: Divus gabalus. Divas tādas gleznas.

Amy Bryzgel: Divas. Kur ir otrā, jo es tikai šito redzu?

Miervaldis Polis: Varbūt vēl ar vienu ir gulbis. Bet viena ir Amerikā.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet vai tā ir litogrāfija vai īsta lapa no grāmatas?

Miervaldis Polis: Īsta lapa no grāmatas. Es vietas biju līdzī paņēmis krievu grāmatu vai vācu, laikam vai krievu un iegleznoju divas gleznas. To ar gulbi es arī uzdāvināju.

Amy Bryzgel: Un kad tu saki taisīt ar tām...

Miervaldis Polis: Ar Venēciju. Šis es domāju ir 75., 76. gads.

Amy Bryzgel: Man ir 86. gads. Bet tas bija mūsu muzejā rakstīts.

Miervaldis Polis: Tas bija 85., 86. Tikai divi gadi.

Amy Bryzgel: Šis 85., šeit nav datums. Kopā, komplekts.

Miervaldis Polis: Pat ne holandiešiem nav tramp l'oeuil.

Amy Bryzgel: Un kāpēc?

Miervaldis Polis: Man ir daudz to papīru, uz kuriem, tu saproti, visu laiku vajag to otiņu... Tur nevar tā. Man bija viens darbs, kur ir blakus paletes... Tas bija 77. gads. Un tad bija tās fotogrāfijas vienas pašas. Fons balts. Un priekš tam es tos papīrītus sakrāju... Diezgan daudz. Man ir bikses...

Amy Bryzgel: Jā, es redzēju kaut kur.

Miervaldis Polis: Es tāpat to fonu tukšu taisu... Baigi efektīvi. Man Vācijā ir 8 darbi kolekcijās.

Amy Bryzgel: Kādi? Ā, šitādi. Arī ir viens Radisonā.

Miervaldis Polis: Divi.

Amy Bryzgel: Jā, divi.

Miervaldis Polis: A to man pasūtīja. Dizaineris. No Amerikas.

Amy Bryzgel: Es aizmirsu, kā sauc...Un vēl, piemēram, par šito.

Miervaldis Polis: Tas ir galīgi neapzināti, kā es neko neredzu. Tu mani nesaproti. Caur to mākslu var labāk saprast. Es negribu iejaukties cilvēku dzīvē. Dzīvnieku dzīvē. Nezinu, koku dzīvē. Tie visi ir cilvēki, daba. Es tikai pieskaros. Protams, ka es arī neko nemainu.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet tas arī ir kā...es aizmirsu to vārdu – proof, evidence. Tas ir ka krimināls, ka redz, o, viņš bija tur.

Miervaldis Polis: Es atceros, es lasīju, ka pirkstu nospiedums kā pierādījums...

Amy Bryzgel: Jā, pierādījums. Tas ir pierādījums, ka tu to taisi.

Miervaldis Polis: Es izlasīju... Amērikā kaut kur... Es neatceros, tur bija par kaut kādiem... O, ka pierādījumu atstāja pirkstu nospiedumu.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet manuprāt, ir svarīgi kā Polaroids kā fotogrāfs... Kāpēc tas rāmī?

Miervaldis Polis: Tā ir fotogrāfija. Padomju laikā bija ļoti slikts krāsu foto. Ģīmis bija sarkans. Nu nebija tā... Nebija Kodaks. Bija Svema. Krievu. Es jau tikai ironizēju, tiko pats izdomāju.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet tas bija gleznā.

Miervaldis Polis: Atvaino, bet ir liela starpība. Šis ir zīmulis. Children's pencil. Bērnu zīmulītis. Es pat dabūju smalkos vācu. Bet tas bija vēlāk. Tajā laika man nebija, tikai krievu. Brūns zīmulītis.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet kāpēc tas Leonards Laciens? Es zinu, ka viņš ir rakstnieks.

Miervaldis Polis: Leonards Laciens? Ļoti labs rakstnieks. Arī dzejnieks. Bet pārliecināts komunisti. Un viņš neticēja Latvijas valstij. Buržuji... Līdz Ulmaņa laikam tiešām bija grūti. Un tie nabagi gandrīz mira badā. Tā bija. Viņš gribēja, lai visiem ir labi. Naivs, īsts komunisti. Un tad viņš emigrēja uz komunistu Krieviju. Tur arī viņu nošāva 37. gadā, kad bija genocīds. Visus latviešus apšāva. Ne tikai pret latviešiem bija genocīds, arī pret ebrejiem. Bet ebrejiem jau nepatīk, ka vēl pret kādu. Armēņus viņi negrib atzīt. Nu armēņiem bija ar turkiem. Bet vai mēs tagad nīdīsim turkus? Vēsture tāda. Tāpēc turki tagad jāsit nost? Tautas ilgi saglāba pāri darījuma atmiņas. Viens cilvēks var aizmirst, bet

tautai ir grūti. Vai žīdi var aizmirst, ka viņus šāva? Nu, protams, ne. Vai latvieši to darīja. Jā, bet nebija jau daudz. Mana māte glāba žīdus. Arī vācieši glāba. Latvieši glāba. Ja tu redzi ka cilvēkus slaktiņa, tu jau dari, ko vari. O jā, visi vācieši ir slepkavas? Nē. Vācietis manu māti izglāba, kad viņu gribēja izsūtīt. Viņu uz Vāciju gribēja sūtīt ar bērnu, brāli uz rociņas. Tāds jauns virsnieks, vācu, teica – laidiet viņus. Viņš jau zināja, ka neizdzīvos. Saka – latvieši slikti, žīdi slikti, vācieši, amerikāņi.

Amy Bryzgel: Cilvēki slikti.

Miervaldis Polis: Sliktu cilvēku nav.... Viņš jau gribēja ideālu, bet viņš bija slims.

Amy Bryzgel: Un Vilis Plūdonis arī grāmatā?

Miervaldis Polis: Es savas tautas varoņus zinu. Izcili rakstnieki... Mēs katrs iesim bojā. Bet tā māksla, ta kultūra būs. Mēs nedzīvojam pēc sevis. Mēs dzīvojam pēc tautas. Nevajag tā domāt, ka viss, kas ir nacionāls, ir slikti. Es atceros Dostojevski. Es viņu lasu kā latviski, tā krieviski. Viņam ir anekdote, kā tas puika... Nu, Napoleons Maskavā, viņš krieviem nodedzina to Maskavu. Viņš atrod to puiku un viņš ar viņu runājas...

Amy Bryzgel: Bet es par to bildi ar Dāvidu. Tas bija vēlāk... Tas varēja būt pēc bronzas cilvēka.

Miervaldis Polis: Es tur pozēju.

Amy Bryzgel: Tu teici, ka tu divus gadus ar to aizrāvieš. Kā sanāca, ka izlēmi ņemt lapas no grāmatas. Vai tas bija turpinājums darbam ar Venēciju?

Miervaldis Polis: Ir ļoti daudzas, kas ir Amerikā palikušas kaut kur. Arī Hjūstonā. Red finger.

Amy Bryzgel: Red. Sarkans? Es par to nedzirdēju.

Miervaldis Polis: Jā, tas Amerikā palika. Bija arī tā slavenā, kas bojā gāja. Skolotāja-kosmonaute. Tas bija ļoti sarežģīts darbs. Vissarežģītākais bija ar zīmuli. Vēl bija tas red finger. Un vēl bija. Es pats tagad neatceros, kas bija. Es vienkārši pie viņa atstāja. Es pie viņa dzīvoju. Man naudas nav. Ko es varu samaksāt? Nevienš jau neprasīja naudu. Bet man nekā cita nav kā bildītes. Man jau nav žēl atdot cilvēkiem bildes. Tagad, lai es pats varētu izdzīvot, man jāpārdod.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet seriāls ar paleti bija 90. gados, vai ne?

Miervaldis Polis: Varbūt no 89. gada bija. Pirmā bija Rafaela bildīte. No Ermitāžas. Maziņa, apaļa. Ja tu zini jaunības Rafaela glezna ir uz siļķu mucas dibena gleznata. Tehnoloģiskais izgudrojums. Tev te sāļjums siļķu. Piepūšas koks un tad koks nestaigā no mitruma. Tāpat gleznoja gregoriāņi 14., 15. gadsimtā. Viņi ņēma koku no kuģiem. Uz tā gleznoja. Kāpēc? Jūras ūdens, sāļš. Piepūtās tas koks. Vecai gleznai koks trausls paliek.

To var redzēt muzejos. Koks plīsa. Toreiz bija laba tehnoloģija. Un tā bija pirmā bildīte. Un to nopirka Šveices vēstnieks. Pirmais. Viņam bija no Etiopijas māksla. Kā jau diplomāts. Divus gadus viņš bija Etiopijā, divus gadus Dienvidamerikā. Un tad Latvijā. Un viņš no šīm tautām kolekcionēja mākslu. Un tā viņš šito no manis nopirka. Divus darbus laikam no manis nopirka. Pats vairs neatceros. Kaut kur 90. gados.

Amy Bryzgel: Tev bija daudzas izstādes ar darbiem, bet 92. gadā tev bija izstāde bez darbiem.

Miervaldis Polis: Zāberu es uzaicināju, tādēļ, ka viņš man ļoti patīk. Absolūti dzīvs mākslinieks, performants. Arī labi gleznoja un labi zīmēja. Man ir garš stāsts, kā viņš gāja bojā. Es tur esmu vainīgs. Ne jau tieši. Kā viss var sakrist? Bet bija jau labi. Viņš ļoti mocījās. Labi jau bija, ka viņš aizgāja. Slikti, ka to meiteni sakropļoja. Tas žēl bija. Vīrietim ir jāiet prom... Redzi, kas ir. Latviešu valoda. Tur ir neliela spēle ar valodu. Vārdu spēle. Latvieši rakstīja, arī padomju laikos, piemēram, Kalniņa izstāde vai Zābera izstāde. Tā es arī teicu – Miervalda Poļa izstāde. Ideja bija tāda. Parasti izstādes atklāšana – mākslinieki parasti pazīst viens otru. Nav par runāt. Un vienmēr mokās, par ko lai tur uzsāk. Kā tev māksliniekam pašam savi darbi vislabāk tur ir. Vienmēr problēmas, bet priekš kam apgrūtināt? Kāpēc man ir jāizstāda tā glezna? Ja jau Miervalda Poļa izstāde. Tad Miervaldis M.P. šeit ir.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet vai tas bija tikai atklāšanā vai tu biji visu laiku klāt tajā izstādē? Kas bija pēc tam, pēc tās atklāšanas? Tu tur stāvēji vai bija tukša zāle visu laiku?

Miervaldis Polis: Manuprāt, tā izstāde bija tikai vienu dienu. Es īsti neatceros.

Amy Bryzgel: Tas bija Kolonnas galerija? Tu atceries, kur tas bija?

Miervaldis Polis: Toreiz Kolonnas galerijas direktors, vai kā to sauc, bija Boiko. Viņu nosita pēc tam. Ja tu zini. Viņš gāja bojā. Viņu nosita vienkārši. Briesmīgi dzēra. Kaut kāds bandīts. Viņam brālis ir ļoti interesants. Man viņu žēl palika. Kam vajadzēja viņu nosist?

Amy Bryzgel: Bet tā ir privāta galerija?

Miervaldis Polis: Jā.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet laikam bija viena no pirmajām privātajām galerijām?

Miervaldis Polis: Tā it kā nebija privāta, bet Mākslas Akadēmijas. Tagad to ir privatizējuši. Toreiz pa daļām piederēja.

Amy Bryzgel: Un pēc tam 95. gadā bija memoriālā izstāde.

Miervaldis Polis: Lieta bija tāda, ka es gribēju uzlikt plāksni, ka šeit ir Miervalda Poļa memoriālais dzīvoklis. Bet tad es domāju, ka tie cilvēki jau nāks. Un viņi nāks rindā, ko

tad es iesākšu. Āgenskalnā, 5. stāvā. Un tad es padomāju, kāpēc es nevaru pārstādīt savu dzīvoklīti Rīgas centrā, lai varētu apskatīt, kā izskatās. Cilvēkiem interesē, kā mākslinieks dzīvo, glezno. Mākslas nedēļas laikā māksliniekiem ir atvērtas darbnīcas. Pie viņiem var iet no tikiem līdz tikiem. Cilvēkiem ļoti patīk. Es pats arī gāju, kad vēl biju skolnieks, students, skatīties. Un tā es tur izliku. Albūmi bija, fotogrāfijas. Un pats uz vietas gleznoju. Nekas jau man nesanāca. Cilvēki nāca un jautāja. Bet tā man bija. Es tur biju no tikiem līdz tikiem, bet man nebija pieredzes. Un tā es tur cītīgi pavadīju laiku. Draugi ieradās kādi. Kāds ar pudeli, šņabi. Dīvāniņš bija. Tur ministru prezidents ir sēdējis. Nu, kad viņš vēl nebija ministru prezidents. Draugs Māris Gailis. Razums tur ir gulējis. Nu jau tagad viss ir izmests ārā. Cilvēks tiešām interesē mākslinieki. Aktierus jau visu laiku redzi, kā viņi spēlē, bet mākslinieks jau kaut ko tur cītīgi glezno, bet viņu neredz.

Amy Bryzgel: Es par to runāju ar Inesi, un tā bija ļoti dīvaina saruna. Es gribēju viņai jautāt par tavu “Memoriāla” darbu. Es rakstu vienu rakstu par to, kā jūs abi bijāt kopā. Es rakstu par tavu darbu un viņas darbu. Inese ļoti apvainojās, kad es sāku rakstīt par to “Memoriāla” izstādi. Es teicu, ka tas bija tam laikam rets un unikāls notikums, jo tur bija gan performance, gan izstāde. Bet viņa teica, ka tā bija klasiska izstāde un nekas vairāk.

Miervaldis Polis: Tajā darbā ir viss – šeit ir instalācija, šeit ir performance, šeit ir gleznas. Šeit bija arī multimediji. Bija televīzija. Es pats uz vietas neatrados, es biju televīzijā, bet visi, kas nāca uz izstādi, mani varēja redzēt televizorā. Tas viss bija četru dienu garumā. Vienlaicīgi bija ziņas avīzē no izstādes. Bija kādas trīs publikācijas.

Amy Bryzgel: Tam laikam tas bija kaut kas jauns...

Miervaldis Polis: Es brīnos kā tad tā. Ko nozīmē klasisks? Nu, klasiska kāda glezna tur arī kaut kas bija.

Amy Bryzgel: Es brīnos par to, ka dažādi cilvēki var to interpretēt tik atšķirīgi. Es redzēju, ka tā nebija klasiska, bet Inese uzskatīja, ka tā bija klasiska.

Miervaldis Polis: Viņa bija grūti paciest šo izstādi, to es nenoliedzu. Tas bija fiziski smagi. Mums bija jābūt līdz sešiem, bet mēs katru vakaru nosēdējām līdz astoņiem. Katram cilvēkam attieksme pret darbu ir savādāka.

Amy Bryzgel: Tu teici, ka ziņas bija laikrakstos un ziņās. Bet vai arī kādas ziņas par “Bronzas cilvēku” parādījās avīzēs?

Miervaldis Polis: Par kuru “Bronzas cilvēku” tu tagad runā? Par to pirmo?

Amy Bryzgel: Par visiem. Gan par pirmo, gan arī par citiem, kas bija. Jo es daudz lasīju rakstus par “Memoriālo istabu”, bet par “Bronzas cilvēku” mazāk. Es tikai gribu saprast, jo tas bija padomju laikā, un viņi varbūt nevarēja par to rakstīt.

Miervaldis Polis: “Bronzas cilvēku” atspoguļoja tādi brīvāki žurnāli. Tāds bija, piemēram, “Skola un ģimene”. Nebija jau tā, ka bija aizliegts to publicēt. Vienkārši bija, nu... nebija pieņemtas tādas neparastas lietas. Bet to tak’ pati “čeka” organizēja. “Čeka” un sakaru komiteja. Sakaru komiteja ar tautiešiem ārzemēs. Bet viņi reizē arī popularizēja latviešus. Mūsu kultūru. Nav viss melns vai balts...

Amy Bryzgel: ...nu protams. Bet tu teici, ka tas parādījās ziņās ārzemēs. Un no tā Rojs Varans...

Miervaldis Polis: Tas bija vēlāk. Tas bija laikam 1989.gadā, kad es ar Somiju tikos. Tad vēl nebija neatkarīga Latvija. Nevienam jau pasaulē nepatika tā komunistu impērija. Somija jau bija pakļauta krieviem. Somu vēstniecības visas bija krievu spiegu [pilnas – EV].

Amy Bryzgel: Vēl bija tas “Alter-Ego.”

Miervaldis Polis: Jā, tas sākās ar 1986.gadu laikam. Tā ideja bija tieši fantoma mākslā. Ko nozīmē fantoms? Latviski tas ir spoks. Bet latviski ar spoku domā pārāk konkrēti. Bet vārds “fantoms” ir daudznozīmīgs. Piemēram, medicīnas studenti, ķirurgi un ne tikai mācās pie fantoma. Ja tu redzi spoku, tu viņam tici. Un ja viņam tici, viņš tevi iespaido, bet tu saproti, ka viņa nav. Tāpat ir ar dievu – ja tu tici Dieva, tā tad Dievs tevi iespaido, kaut viņa paša nav. Nu lūk, un egocentrs ir fantoms. Tas pats, kas tālāk iespaido mani,

mākslu. Tā arī ir. Vesela kaudze gleznas ir radušās fantoma iespaidā. Nekad es tā nebiju domājis, ka es gleznošu. Egocentrs kā fantoms rada manī idejas, nevis es.

Amy Bryzgel: Priekš kam ir nepieciešams tā koncepcija par egocentru un fantomu? Tas ir nepieciešams lai izprastu un veidotu jēgu tam, ko tu dari, vai tas ir nepieciešams tikai lai dotu vārdu?

Miervaldis Polis: Kā tu domā, kāpēc tas mākslinieks ir gleznojis velns zina ko tur? Viņš mēģinās izdomāt, ko lai apraksta. Kāpēc putns dzied? Jā, mēs esam cilvēki, mēs esam ļoti gudri, mēs par putniem zinām visu. Bet putns pats nē.

Amy Bryzgel: Vai tu zini, kā citi mākslinieki veido koncepcijas par savām idejām un saviem darbiem?

Miervaldis Polis: Jā, protams. Mani ir aicinājuši daudzi starptautiskās mākslinieku grupās. Bet mans darbs ir gleznot, mans darbs nav ceļot un kontaktēties. Es atteicos, jo es uzstatu, ka fantoma māksla nav māksla. Man bija iespēja kļūt slavenam, bet es atteicos. Mani neinteresē ne slava, ne nauda.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet tu jau slavens esi. Latvijā vismaz.

Miervaldis Polis: Nē, es neesmu slavens. Slavens ir [Stīvens – EV] Spīlbergs. Es esmu populārs tautā. Bet Spīlbergs ir slavens, viņam ir apbalvojumi starptautiski.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet es runāju par Latviju, ne par pasauli. Kāda starpība...

Miervaldis Polis:...kādreiz teiktu... Ir ļoti izcils grafiķis Sietiņš Gundars, tagad profesors akadēmijā. Viņš ir saņēmis pirmās prēmijas, zelta medaļas, nu, pa visu pasauli, pat Japānā. Mums bija saruna. Mēs iedzērām, viņš sēž. Viņš saka: “Paklausies, Poli! Tev nav nevienu apbalvojuma, nevienas izstādes. Bet tevi visi zina, bet mani nezina.” Lūk, slavens. Mani Latvijā zina, bet viņu nezina. Es esmu populārs, pazīstams. Iemīļots. Zini, ko teica viens no izcilākajiem franču impresionisma māksliniekiem de Gā? Viņš teica, ka “es gribu būt slavens, bet nezināms.” Es tieši tāpat – un es vēl piebilstu, ka es negribu būt arī slavens. Es gribu būt nezināms, bez slavas.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet es domāju, ka tad, ka tu plānoji “Bronzas cilvēku”, tev vajadzēja būt kādai nojausmai, ka tu kļūsi slavens...

Miervaldis Polis:...es neesmu centies dēļ slavas. Mani viņa [slava – EV] neinteresē. Es to daru tādēļ, ka es nevaru to nedarīt. Man ir sistematizēta domāšana. Viņa ir pierakstīta, es neesmu to publicējis un netaisos.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet tad, ka tu biji “Bronzas cilvēks,” tev taču tas patika, ka cilvēki uz tevi skatījās un tu biji uzmanības centrā...

Miervaldis Polis: Es “piespiedos,” tieši tāpēc jau es pats gandrīz nekad neko netaisu. Nu, ja es redzu, ka cilvēkiem patīk, tad es piespiežu sevi, īpaši ja mani kāds pierunā. Tak’ mani Zābergs uz to [“Bronzas cilvēku” – EV] pierunāja. Mani parasti pierunā uz tādām lietām. Es nekad neesmu bijis tā īsti starp cilvēkiem.

Amy Bryzgel: Tas “Alter Ego,” statuļa, pieminēklis parādījās pirms “Bronzas cilvēka”?

Miervaldis Polis:...kolāža, jā...

Amy Bryzgel: Es redzēju bildi, kad “Elter Ego” bija kopā ar tevi uz ielas. Nē?

Miervaldis Polis: Tas bija pirmo reizi Mākslas dienās. Es biju apsolījis, ka uztaisīšu uz Mākslas dienām. Toreiz Mākslas dienas organizēja Jānis Mitrēvics. Kā savam draugam es arī apsolīju, ka uztaisīšu. Bet vispār man tas [“Alter Ego” – EV] bija līdz kaklam. Es taisīju pirmo reizi mūžā, neviens neko tādu nebija taisījis. Un tad man bija viens draugs, nelaiķis jau tagad. Nomira. Zināms fotogrāfs Čaptereinoks. Traks bija uz mākslu. Pats neko no tā nesaprata, bet viņam ļoti patika. Tas vispār ārkārtīgi raksturīgi latviešiem, ka viņi paši no mākslas neko nesaprot, bet ārkārtīgi ciena. Normāli... es arī apbrīnoju mūziķus, kaut gan nekā nesaprotu no mūzikas. Un tad viņš man palīdzēja to figūru iztaisīt. Mums tas viss sagāja “sviestā”. Vienu nakti tur līdz rītam “monstruējām”. Nebija jau ne no kā [taisīt – EV], ne ar ko. Lai gan man nauda bija tajā laikā, es daudz strādāju. Ar enciklopēdijām. Nu kāds bija, tāds bija. Un izstādīja viņu mašīnā. Čaptereinoks sēdēja pie stūres, tā bija viņa mašīna, un blakus viņam šitas [“Alter Ego” – EV]. Kā tie cilvēki

reaģēja! Simtiem fotogrāfu. Tas bija pilnīgs murgs. Un tad sākumā biju malā, viņi jau mani nepazina, un es no malas skatījos. Un tad vienu brīdi es nosēdos blakus pie stūres it kā es gribētu braukt... Kā tie cilvēki klupa apkārt. Tā kā zooloģiskā dārzā. Tā gan bija šausmīga sajūta.

Amy Bryzgel: Kāpēc šausmīga?

Miervaldis Polis: Viņi tevi neuztver kā cilvēku. Kā zooloģiskā dārzā skatās uz to nabaga mērķaķīti. Nu cik tu vari blenzt uz mani? Cik var skatīties uz mani? Šausmīgi. Bija baigi jocīgi – viņi nesaprata, kurš ir reāls. Kurš? Abi sēž. Tagad tas nekas nebūtu. Viss jau ir pierasts.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet vai tas bija mērķis?

Miervaldis Polis: Mēģinājums. Vienkārši, redzi, es nodarbojos ar filozofiju. Es to nepopularizēju. Es tikai sāku tad to lietu. Es nopietni gadiem sistemātiski studēju, lai pats attīstītu savu domāšanu un tā, es to visu sistematizēju. Šis “Alter Ego”... tas esmu es. Es pat lekcijās viņu esmu lasījis Latvijas konferencē pirmā “perestroikā” mācītāji, filozofi, zinātnieki. Var uzskatīt to par zināmu šito [domāta gara slimība – EV], bet es tā nedomāju. Psiholoģijā, tu jau zini, ir “*I and my second I*.” Citi psihologi saka, ka ir pieci dažādi. Es domāju, ka tas nu gan ir šozofrēniķis. Bet tas, ko tu sauc par “alter ego” ir tikai tavs atspulgs apziņā. Mēs visu laiku... “hmm, vai es pareizi daru?” Tu domā it kā tu nebūtu tu, it kā no malas. Tas ir tas “alter ego”. Bet tā ir tikai ilūzija. Es tikai vizualizēju

šo... Tādā ziņā, lai varētu saprast. Māksla ir ceļš. Ceļš uz patiesību. Kas ir patiesība, es nezinu. Ceļa garumā es mēģinu saprast.

Amy Bryzgel: Es zinu, ka man kā amerikānietei ir cita saprašana par padomju laiku, bet mēs jau runājām, ka padomju laikā bija šī ideoloģijai, kurai neviens neticēja, bet tas bija parādīts kā taisnība. Bet vai tas padomju laikā nebija kaut kas rets; vai cilvēkiem nebija tā, ka viņi gribēja kaut ko, kas ir pretēji šai ideoloģijai? Mēs nezinām, vai mēs iesim uz šo patiesību, vai nē...

Miervaldis Polis: Jā! Tāpat uztvēra arī Anmanis Jānis. Tauta stāvēja simtiem cilvēku garās rindās uz viņa izstādēm. Mana mamma arī teica: “es arī gribu uz turieni tikt.” Kāpēc? Viņš nav “švaks” mākslinieks. Bet viņā bija šī godīgā attieksme. Tur viņš bija meitenīti ar zilām acīm uzgleznojis, tur puķīti... Nebija nekādas ideoloģijas. Lūk, kāpēc tauta kā izslāpusi gāja uz viņa izstādēm. Viņš nevienu nemānīja. Protams, mākslinieki teica: “mākslinieks, nu jā, kas viņš par mākslinieku?” Viņā ir kaut kas izcils, kas nav nevienā. Tāpat arī Maija Tabaka. Viņai ir mazlietiņ’ ideoloģija kādā bildē, bet pārsvarā jau nē. Viņa ir ļoti interesanta māksliniece... kolorīta. Tāpat Purmale. Ak, dievs, kāda Purmale Latvijā bija slavena! Tāpēc kā viņa kā neviens dabu mīlēja. Neviens to negleznoja. Viņa uzgleznoja. Šo Latvijas migu. To neviens pasaulē nebija redzējis, ne holandieši ne franči. Un uzgleznoja. Kā prata. Es jau arī kā protu. Vai tu domā, ka es briesmīgi protu? Nē! Bet mēs tiecamies pēc patiesā, nevis tādēļ lai būtu slaveni. Tādēļ, lai mēģinātu, cik vien labi var attēlot. Nu to arī attēlo. Kamēr tu neattēlo, tu neesi

pārliecināts, ka tas tā ir. Tas ir mākslinieka darbs. Protams, māksliniekam var būt dažādi darbi. Dekorēt istabas... tikai ne taisīt performanci. Tikai dēļ publikas... jā.

Amy Bryzgel: Es gribēju tev jautāt par performances saistību ar glezniecību. Vai tu domā, ka performance ir vieglākā, tuvākā veidā?

Miervaldis Polis: Performance ir pielipināta pie nosaukuma “māksla”. Tas nav pareizi. Te man būtu jārunā par valodu, vēsturiski un arī latviešu. Latviski ir ļoti pareizi ir “māka”, mācēt, “māksla”. Piemēram, latvietis saka: “kurpniek-amats,” arī: “kurpniek-māksla”. Viņš māc. Performance ir slikta performance, ja tur ir māka, tas nav īsts.

Amy Bryzgel: Māksla nozīmē, ka es māku, es protu?

Miervaldis Polis: Jā! “*You can!... You can make a table. Or maybe you can make a car.*” Kurpi vai apģērbi. Tā ir māka. Bet performance ir slikta, ja tur ir māka. Performance ir māksla.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet tu vienmēr runā par to spontāno teātri. Bet tad ir viss ieplānots īstenībā. Izņemot to Šekspīru kafejnīcā – pliku dibenu.

Miervaldis Polis: Pareizi. Performance ir – kaut kam ir jābūt. Performance ir teātra-māksla. Tā ir daļa no aktieriem. Es to skolniekiem stāstīju lekcijā. Redzi, lai tu būtu aktieris, ir jābūt mācai. Bet, lai aktieris tev ir jāvar ielekt lomā un kļūt Otello vienā

mirkli. Tu nevis mācies attēlot “Bronzas cilvēku”, bet tu kļūsti par “Bronzas cilvēku”. Tāpēc saka, ka tā nav māksla, bet ir aktier-māksla. To jebkurš cilvēks var. Bet tas jau visiem ir zināms. Tie cilvēki jau nav beiguši Mākslas akadēmiju, mācījušies zīmēt aktu, portretu un kluso dabu. Es nenoliedzu performanci, es pats viņu taisīju. Es viņu noliedzu kā mākslu. Tā nav māksla. Te nedrīkst mācēt. Es to studentiem stāstīju un viņi apvainojās. Es saku, ka, lai gleznotu kā Aija Zariņa, nevajag meistarību. “Kā Jūs tā drīkstat runāt?” Es teicu: “lai Miervaldis Polis staigātu bronzā, tur nevajag meistarību”. Tur nav mākas. Mani jau izkrāsoja divi sievišķi. Vēlāk gan es pats sevi krāsoju. Bet katra jauna meitenīte prot [krāsoties – EV] labāk par mani. Vai tad tā ir māka? Nē! “Nē, kā Jūs tā varat runāt par Aiju Zariņu?” Tad jau viņa nebūtu Aija Zariņa, ja viņai būtu meistarība gleznot. Tāpēc jau ir Aija Zariņa. Es nezinu, vai viņa pati to saprot, es domāju, ka nē. Māksliniekam pašam sevi nav jāsaprot. Tas ir mans dzīves ceļš saprast, ne tikai prasti gleznot, bet arī saprast, ko es gleznoju. Es cenšos, protams. Nu tie studenti, skolotāji viņiem bija klāt, apvainojās, ka esmu apvainojies Aiju Zariņu. Es viņu neapvainoju, es saku kā bija patiesībā. Tad es aizgāju no pasniedzēja [amata – EV]. Es neesmu vajadzīgs. Tāpēc es aizgāju no sabiedrības un nedodu intervijas, dažreiz viņi mani izmanto. Es redzu, ka es neesmu vajadzīgs. Daudzreiz mani rektors gribēja pierunāt akadēmijā, lai es pasniedzu zīmēšanu gleznošanu.

Amy Bryzgel: Varbūt viņi tevi tikai nesaprot.

Miervaldis Polis: Bet es taču neprasu, lai mani saprot...

Amy Bryzgel: Ko tu gribi?

Miervaldis Polis: Neko! Būt. Tīri cilvēciski dzīvot. Man tā ir nepieciešamība saprast, kāpēc es redzu zaļu, bet citi neredz.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet, ja tu lasītu lekcijas, ko tu gribētu no studentiem? Kādu tu gribētu viņu reakciju, ja viņi protestē, tas nebija labi...

Miervaldis Polis: Jēzus Kristus... Es esmu kristīgi audzināts, kā visi eiropieši. Es domāju, ka amerikāņi arī (smejas). Es vienmēr smejos, citādi tu visu laiku uztver, ka mēs esam citi un Amerika ir citi. Es to tā neuztveru. Es esmu kristīgi audzināts, tas nenozīmē, ka es ticu dievam, un vispār man riebjas kristīgā reliģija. Bet es esmu audzināts tajā kultūrā. Mēs visi gadu simtus un jūs visi esam auguši. Citi ir auguši islāma kultūrā, citi jūdaismā, citi kristīgajā... Vēl citi konfuciānismā, citi sintoismā, tas ir Japānā, hinduismā un tā tālāk. Mēs dzīvojam tajās kultūrās, kaut vai mēs paši ar prātu to neapzināmies. Es nekad neesmu noliedzis kristīgo kultūru. Un tur ir skaidri teikts: “kad lūdz maizīti un tev viņa ir, tad tu dod.” Ja es kaut ko zinu, pēc manām domām, un tas cilvēks grib to zināt. Nav svarīgi, vai tā ir patiesība, vai nav. Mēs nezinām, kas ir patiesība. Un ja kāds grib... Bet, ja es redzu, ka viņš negrib, kādas man tiesības viņam uzbāzties? Nekādas! Tā es esmu audzināts. Ir mentalitāte tautas, piemēram, krievu. Tu sēdi, piemēram, kafejnīcā un tev slikts garastāvoklis. Nu man, pieņemsim. Un tā krievietīte, kas apkalpo, viņa skatās uz mani, pienāk klāt, “nu kāpēc Jūs tik bēdīgs? Jūs tāds jauns cilvēks, kāpēc Jūs esat bēdīgs?” Es saku: “ir labi, es jau nemaz neesmu bēdīgs,” nu man vajag pasēdēt, a viņa

nesaprot. Nāk atkal “virsū”, viņa saka: “Nē, tā nedrīkst bēdāties!” Krievs ir sirsnīgs, viņš uzbāžas. Ar savu sirsnīgumu. Nu man nevajag to! Piemēram, es nekad nezvanu cilvēkam, ja viņš ir slimis un nesaku: “Vai kā es jūtu tev līdzī, ka tu esi slimis.” Bet, ja es zinu, ka tam cilvēkam vajag, lai es piezvanu, es piezvanu, protams. Bet es neciešu, ja man kāds uzbāžas. Ar savu līdzjūtību. Ja es esmu slimis, ja man slikti ir, tad es cenšos būt viens, parasti es neeju uz kafejnīcu. Es sēžu mājās. Un negribu, lai... Kad man ir gripa, es ciest nevaru, ka man kāds “vāai tu esot slimis” un tad man traucē, zvanīšot, lai nākot ciemos, lai dievs pasarg’. Es saku: “vai tu, lūdzu, nevarētu aizvākties – es tak’ esmu slimis.”

Netraucē mani! Krievam ir citādāk domāšana. Viņš uzskata to par ārkārtīgu nepieklājību. Viņam ir otrādi. Viņam vajag, lai visu laiku būtu kāds blakām. Ja tu būsi slimis, tad viņš tev būs apkārt un nu... tev visu dos. Bet tas latvietis otrādāk. Tāpēc nesaprot cilvēki, nevis tāpēc, ka viņi ir slikti. Abi ir kristīgi audzināti. Mēs varam būt muhamedāņi, vai... , bet mums ir dažādi, kā mēs saprotam...

Amy Bryzgel: ...bet es gribēju jautāt par studentiem...

Miervaldis Polis: Tur ir tas pats! Krievu skolotājs, kas uzskatītu, ka viņam kaut daļiņa no patiesības sapratnes, viņš uzskatītu par savu pienākumu to uzbāzt. Tās ir viņa tiesības. Es neko nesaku. Es nesaku, ka tā kā es daru, ir pareizi. Bet es nevaru, ja es redzu, ka es cilvēkam es neesmu vajadzīgs, mana izpratne, kāpēc man uzbāzties? Es neesmu augstprātīgs, kurš uzskata, ka atklājis patiesību! Ho! Ho! Ho! Tie ir muļķi, kas tā domā!

Vai šarlatāni.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet kāpēc tu domā, ka māksla ir balstīta uz attiecībām?

Miervaldis Polis: Tas ir atkal gari skaidrojams. Es varu paskaidrot vienu. Redzi, tas, ko es saku, izklausās pretrunīgi. Es saku, piemēram: “tas ir balts,” otrā brīdī es saku: “tas ir melns.” “Ko tu runā? Tu tikko teici, ka tas ir balts!” Redzi, man grūti ir atkal paskaidrot. Nu, mēģinu. Glezniecība, māksla, augstākā zinātne, apziņa. Tāda, kādu es gleznoju un citi glezno. Tā ir vissarežģītākā intelektuālā nodarbe. Ne jau fizika ir sarežģīta.

Gleznošana ir sarežģīta. Tā nav mana doma, tā ir Leonardo [doma – EV]. Viņš pamato to, bet ko es tagad atkal citēšu viņu. Bet, lūk, pats šis process... Viņš ir ārkārtīgi truls. To atkal ir grūti saprast. Nē, es saku, ka balts ir tajā pašā laikā arī melns. No vienas puses tā ir augstākā intelekta robeža. Bet tajā pašā laikā pats tas process ir pilnīgi stulbs. Tādēļ, ja tu tikai glezno, tad tu esi ārkārtīgi aprobežots. Tādēļ gleznotāji bieži vien liekas pastulbi. Tā īsti nav! Bet viņi neprot izteikties kā literāts jeb... žurnālists. Tādēļ ļoti reti gleznotāji raksta. Es arī. Es ļoti daudz rakstījis esmu, piemēram, atziņas. Ne jau domas... Tādēļ es zinu tikai vienu īstu domātāju, bez manis. Gleznotāju. Ar to es negribēju noniecināt citus. Leonardo! Viens no apbrīnojamākajiem, bet ārkārtīgs retums. Jo parasti gleznotājs nevar sistematizēti spriest, tādēļ, ka viņa darbs tāds ir. Un es mēģinu šo apvienot, kāpēc es to daru, es nezinu. Man vajag to. Bet, vai man tiesības to citam uzbāzt? Es neteiktu. Pati šī glezniecība man ir tikai līdzeklis. Tas nav mērķis. Ir māksliniekam mērķis uzgleznot, piemēram, labu gleznu. Tas ir ļoti normāli. Bet man nav tāda mērķa. Tas bija, kad es studēju, jā. Vai, cik gadus ir jāmacās... Un neiznāk un neiznāk. Ļoti sarežģīti, protams, ja nopietni pret to attiecas. Māksliniece ir Aija Zariņa, bet mākslinieks ir arī tas, kurš prot

ornamentus uzzīmēt skaisti. Tā arī ir liela māka. Skaties... – Luvra! Nu, es neesmu bijis Luvrā, bet kādi tur ornamentī, uh!

Amy Bryzgel: Bet kā jāsaprot uzskats, ka cilvēki patiesību un pasauli var labāk saprast caur mākslu? Kā tas “darbojas”?

Miervaldis Polis: Ļoti labi šeit ir Bruno Vasiļevska [uzskati – EV]. Viņš, neko nesaprazdams no japāņiem, ļoti aizrāvās ar japāņiem. Kultūru. Viņam ir tāds nosaukums, kurš viņam sagāja ar krievu kultūru kopā. “Сопереживание,” latviski es pats mēģinu tulkot kā līdz-dzīvošana. Piemēram, tu saki: “kā tā māksla kaut ko paveic?” Nekā! Bet tu dzīvo ar viņu. Saproti? Un to pieņem tās mākslas... Ja tu te dzīvotu, tad tu redzētu, ka tu dzīvotu ar to dabu. Amerikas tūrists iebrauc Kioto, kur ir akmens dārzs. Viņš baigo naudu samaksājis. Japāņi, protams... (ironiski smejas). Viņš staigā, divas stundas... “Ko te skatīties?” Smiltis... “Kas ir, pa ko... tik dārgi bija jāmaksā?” Viņš ir nesapratnē. Tas bija konkrēts fakts. Viņš bija to tūrisma firmu iesūdzējis tiesā, jo viņš uzskatīja, ka viņu krāpj. Mēs nevaram neko līdzēt šim cilvēkam. Viņš ir pieradis patērēt. Viņš: “nu, man vajag to, to, to! A, kāpēc tur nekā nav?” Nu redzi, latvieši tomēr saprastu, jo latvieši ir ļoti tuvi Japānas kultūrai. Varbūt tad tu latvieti labāk saprastu. Atkal tu teiksi: “aaa, latvieši... tā nav.” Tu uzreiz teiksi, ka tā nav, bet es tev stāstu, kā ir. Tas latvietis saprot to. Viņš saprot, ka ir jāapsēžas, vienkārši jābūt. Kāds putniņš tur iečivinās kaut kur... Tur neko nevajag, neko nedod. Tu vienkārši līdz-dzīvo.

Amy Bryzgel: Vai tu domā, ka latvieši, kas aplūko tavas gleznas, viņi arī līdz-dzīvo ar tām, vai nē?

Miervaldis Polis: Es pieņemu! Kāpēc tad to gleznu karina pie sienas? Varbūt gleznas daudz pie sienas nevar piekārt. Man jau ar' ir. Par Dāleni. Es domāju kārtējo reizi, ka vajag uz Dāleni aizbraukt. Man ārkārtīgi patīk Nīderlandiešu van der Vēdens. Bet, ko tad es skatīšos? Atkal to pašu, kas man ir galvā. Un pēkšņi es attopos, ka es taču nopirku kurpes jaunas, kas uzberza man tulznu. Tagad man būs jāmokās ar šito. Un ko tad es tur skatīšos? Atkal to pašu, ko es jau zinu, ar ko es dzīvoju. Es jau dzīvoju ar to gleznu. Atkal jāiet skatīties to pašu... Man nemaz nav jāiet. Nu, labi, labi, es jau bišķin pārspīlēju, bet jā... Es jau dzīvoju ar to. Es dzīvoju ar Poruku, dzejnieku un viņa darbiem. Tas nenožīmē, kas tagad lasu, un tikko beidzu lasīt, tā vairs Poruka dzejas nav. Rasas lāsīte okeānā. Tev nevajag braukt uz Lielo kanjonu, nē, nu var jau aizbraukt... Nav tik traki, kad neko neredz. Tas ir Laodzi, tas ir Japānā, tas ir Latvijā. Es nesaku, ka visi latvieši tā domā. Tā es domāju. Bet es esmu latvietis... Un tāpēc Leonardo ir latvietis un Laodzi ir latvietis... Jo tā kā es viņus saprotu, saprot tikai viens cilvēks, citi citādāk viņu saprot.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet tu vienā intervijā teici, ka var saprast Leonardo caur viņa darbiem, un cilvēki var saprast māksliniekus caur viņu gleznām un pēc tam saprast sevi.

Miervaldis Polis: Pareizi būs tas, ar ko tu nobeidzi. Tas, kāpēc es arī teicu, ka Leonardo ir latvietis. Redz, kas par lietu, tā kā es saprotu Leonardo, es tikai tā protu to uzrakstīt. Bet... Diez vai Leonardo tā būtu pats sevi uztvēris. Es saprotu Leonardo tā. Šā vai tā, tā

kā es saprotu Leonardo, pats Leonardo – diez vai. Viņš citādi sevi saprata. Tā kā es viņu saprotu – tad, kas tad tas ir? Leonardo? Nē, Miervaldis Polis. Tu vari mani saprast tikai kā sevi. Es arī domāju: “kā es saprotu Leonardo?” Bet tad es attapos. Nē... Es saprotu tikai sevi... Redzi, kad es skatos samērīgu galdu, krēslu, istabu... viņi ir nabadzīgi. Japāņu kultūra ir ārkārtīgi nabadzīgi. Tikai latviešu kultūrai vēl ir kaut kas līdzīgs. Tas atkal būtu gari jāstāsta. [gara pauze – EV] Tad, kad tu ar acīm seko kustībai, vai tu nejūti iekšēji? Tāpēc es nevaru deju skatīties, jo tā ir emocionāla. Baletu. Nu ja, nu ko es gribu teikt... Kad tu skaties gleznu, praktiski tu neko no tā negūsti. Nedz es, nedz kāds cits. Tādā nozīmē, ka – re’, ir, varam iebāzt kabatā un ir. Bet tu jau nemani, ka tu līdz ar viņu [kustās – EV]. Nu, es mēģinu pateikt... Kad tu klausies putnu balsis, ko tu gūsti? Kabaljē... nu, kā viņu sauc to dziedātāju, nu, nupat nomira tas... Pavaroti. Viņš nedzied labāk... Neviens nedzied labāk par izcilu lakstīgalu, varbūt tik pat labi, var teikt. Vai tu zini, ka viena lakstīgala no otras atšķiras tāpat kā, piemēram, es ar savu balsi no Pavaroti? To tu zini?! Nu, lūk... Bet tu jau neesi putns, putni nav cilvēki. Nē, putni ir cilvēki. Nu, kas tad ir putns, ja ne es pats? Jā, skatoties uz putnu, es jau redzu tikai sevi. Ir indiāņu cilts Amerikā. Zinātnieku aprakstīta... Divi zinātnieki amerikāņu pētīja primitīvas tautas. Nevajag domāt, ka viņi necina, ka saka primitīvas. Tas ir domāts ļoti vienkāršas tautas, kuras tūkstošiem gadu ir saglabājušās. Un viena no šādām tautām ir indiāņu cilts Amerikā, man liekas Ziemeļamerikā. Jā, uz Kanādas pusi. Un šādas cilts cilvēki tieši tāpat kā tu uzskati, ka tu esi sieviete, cilvēks un... kas tu vēl esi? Eimija? Tā viņi katrs uzskata, ka viņš ir reizē cilvēks un putns. Un tad viņš šad tad saka: “Nē, manis nav. Es aizlidoju!” Kaut gan viņš stāv tur... Viņi pētīja, kā tas var būt? Bet, ko es nupat tev teicu? Atkal tad viņš prasa: “bet kā tad tu vari vienlaicīgi būt sieviete, cilvēks, amerikāniete un

arī... Kā tas vienlaicīgi...?” Un tā indiāņu tauta, viņi vienlaicīgi ir putns un cilvēks. Nu vai nav jocīgi? Pie tam konkrēts putns. Ļoti jocīgi mums liekas. Nē, nemaz nav jocīgi... Redz, ko es ar to gribu teikt, kad es saku, ka putns, tas esmu es. Tā nav šizofrēnija! Tā ir vienkārša, loģiska spriestspēja. O! Mēs neredzam neko ārpus sevis. Bet viss tas, ko mēs redzam, ir... es. Ja šitādu es viņu neredzētu, nesataustītu, neizgaršotu...

Amy Bryzgel: Vai tāpēc tev bija tāda intervija “Miervaldis intervē Poli”? Un vai tāpēc tu runā tikai ar sevi, jo ar sevi var saprast tikai tādas idejas...

Miervaldis Polis: Tā ir forma. Jo iekšēji es vienmēr sarunājos ar sevi. Vai tad tu tā nedari?

Amy Bryzgel: Daru!

Miervaldis Polis: Tas ir mūsu loģisks monologs. Jebkurš monologs pēc būtības ir dialogs. Tu runā pats ar sevi...

Amy Bryzgel:...bet tas patiešām izskatās pēc... Sokrāta dialoga.

Miervaldis Polis: Jā, nu... es jau visus neesmu publicējis. Man jau vēl ir cits dialogs. Es neesmu publicējis, jo uzskatīju, ka... vāja forma. Jā, tur Sokrāts ir pamatā, bet tas pašam ar sevi... tas ir jāmācās.

Amy Bryzgel: Kāpēc tu šo publicēji?

Miervaldis Polis: Kā vienmēr – pierunāja mani.

Amy Bryzgel: Kas tevi pierunāja?

Miervaldis Polis: ... Grūti ir saprast. Bet es nesaku, ka tādi ir latvieši vai tādi ir eiropieši, vai tādi ir krievi, vai tādi ir... es tikai domāju – tāds es esmu. Bet tā kā es esmu latvietis un eiropietis, tad tāds nu ir arī eiropietis, viens vismaz (smejas). Es nemaz nedomāju, ka es esmu viens, vienkārši es ar to nodarbojos un mēģinu saprast. Vai visiem ir jāsēj rudzi un jāpļauj labība? Citam tā maize ir jācep, citam tā maize ir jāēd. Nu, jā, maize gan visiem jāēd, bet... Nu tā... un... Katrs dara savu darbu. Tā tika celts [Lielais – EV] Ķīnas mūris, Laodzi ir teicis... ļoti vienkārši. Katrs darīja savu darbu. Tas, kas prata rakt, raka. Kas prata mīcīt mālu, mīcīja mālu. Kas prata taisīt ķieģeļus, taisīja ķieģeļus. Kas prata stumt, stūma ratus. Kas prata mūrēt, tas mūrēja. Un, kas prata vadīt šo darbu, vadīja šo darbu. Katram ir savs darbs, ko darīt. Vienlīdz cienījams. Šofera darbs, vai kurpnieka darbs. Nu, ja, vienalga, nu jebkurš darbs ir cienījams. Ja prot, ja māc.

Amy Bryzgel: Līdzīgi arī par to “Ego-Vizoru”, vai tas ir tas pats...?

Miervaldis Polis: Tur jau tajā koncepcijā ir ļoti skaidri rakstīts. Par ko visi piekrīt un pasmaida, un tā... Tur ir rakstīts, ka “Ego-Vizors” ar labāko programmu katram, kas to skatās. Ja televīzijā rādīt, kāds raidījums būs, vai tu skatīsies? Nē! Bet, ja tajā raidījumā

tevi rādīs? Tad gan... aaaa. Nu tā tak' ir. Nu tad lūk, jums "Ego-Vizors". Ar vislabāko programmu katrā laikā, kad jūs skatāties.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet tas arī ir egocentrisms. Es nekritizēju, es saku, ka cilvēkiem vienmēr interesēs kaut kas par sevi.

Miervaldis Polis: Nu, bet, protams. Ko tad mātes sievietēm... nu tādas, kuras emocionālas..., sak': "vajag mīlēt sevi! Savu ķermeni vajag mīlēt." Tad tu arī citu varēsi mīlēt, ja tu sevi mīlēsi. Ko saka Jēzus Kristus? Viņš saka: "Mīli savu tuvāko kā sevi pašu." Rainis saka: "Augstākā mīla ir pašmīla." Nav augstākas. A, ko mums māca ar melniem paltrakiem baznīckungi no kancelēm baznīcā? Mīli... sevi nē, bet citu. Zini, kāda ir latviešu anekdote, bērnu? Droši vien ir starptautiska. Māte saka: "brālītīm vienmēr to labāko pusīti ābola atdod!" Lielāko pusi. "Brālītīm to lielāko!" Tad viņš saka: "labs ir, mammu, bet dod, lai brālītis dod!" Ja jau brālītīm lielāko, tad lai viņš dod. Nepareiza audzināšana. Pseudokristiānisms. Sev vajag ņemt labāko daļu. Nu, ja brālītis mazāks, tad tāpēc viņam dod lielāko daļu, bet nevis tāpēc, ka viņš ir lielāks.

Amy Bryzgel: Es gribēju jautāt par tavu domu par to, ka katram ir savs darbs. Un kāda tam ir saikne ar muižniecības atjaunošanu?

Miervaldis Polis: Man jāpaskaidro, ka... redzi. Tu neinteresējies par vēsturi, sak': "priekš kam tas vajadzīgs?" es nezinu, man tas ir vajadzīgs. Man tagad grūti paskaidrot. Tu jau nezini muižniecības vēsturi?

Amy Bryzgel: Mazliet es tā kā zinu...

Miervaldis Polis: Nu, labi. Bet tas viss ir nepareizi, jo to izplatīja aristokrātija.

Visnožēlojamākā varas sistēma ir aristokrātija. Tam nepiekritīs ļoti daudzi, noteikti.

Sakotēji muižniecība nebija dzimts īpašums. Muižniekam piederēja tikai viņa gods un zobens, ar ko viņš kalpoja karalim, kas viņa deva zemi un īpašumu. Vēlāk. Viņi sagrauba to un izdomāja, ka ir labāki cilvēki un sliktāki. Nez' kāpēc tie sliktākie bija vairāk, un tikai viņi izveidoja Francijā aristokrātiju. Izveidoja to, ko Amerika attīstīja par demokrātiju. Tagad mums demokrātija nav sliktāku cilvēku. Kā suga, kā dzimta. Vai tauta sliktāka. Bet, ir labākas tautas. (smejas) Ir dažādas, bet nav sliktāku. Bet ir sliktāki atsevišķi cilvēki, jā. Lab', lab', tas tā... Es tikai gribēju teikt, ka sakotēji muižniecība nenozīmēja dzimts. Piemēram, tu esi cēlusies no muižniekiem?

Amy Bryzgel: Es?

Miervaldis Polis: Jā! Tavi vecāki nebija, vecvecāki muižnieki?

Amy Bryzgel: Nē, laikam nē. Viņi bija no Polijas... Es šaubos, vai viņi bija...

Miervaldis Polis: Sākotnēji muižniecība bija apzīmējums godam. Fakts no Spānijas vēstures. Kur viens ciems nepadevās mauru iebrucējiem. Karalis viņus iecēla muižniekos,

visus līdz pēdējam nabagam. Tas ir gods! Īpašums nav gods. Lūk, šo tad es arī saucu par aplamo muižniecību.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet tas ir dzīvesveids?

Miervaldis Polis: Jā! Šis ciems nevarēja tika izaudzināts, iemācīts augstās skolās.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet, cik es saprotu, tad Latvijas vēsturē nebija muižniecības...

Miervaldis Polis: Tā bija tā neīstā muižniecība. Tie ir šie aristokrāti. Pseido... Šie bandīti, kas sagrāba varu. Slepkaņas! Paziņoja, ka viņi ir labāka suga. Un sliktākā saucās latvieši.

Amy Bryzgel: Tu domā, ka atjaunota muižniecība būtu pateicīgāka Latvijai?

Miervaldis Polis: Redzi, es saprotu, ka tu nelasi dzeju un nesaproti, kas ir dzeja. Dzejā tā nenotiek..., nu... dzeja nav matemātika. Tu man tagad saki: “vai tas būtu labāk”. Bet tu... esi amerikāniete. Merkantile, tu domā – labs tas, kas derīgs.

Amy Bryzgel: Jā, bet tu teici, ka slikti ir tas, ka vācieši pateica, ka viņi labāki un ka latvieši ir sliktāki...

Miervaldis Polis: ...tāpēc, ka viņi bija bandīti.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet tas arī ir... Bandīts nozīmē slikts?

Miervaldis Polis: Bandīts ir tēlains apzīmējums. Ir šis starptautiskais vārds “banditos”...

Amy Bryzgel: ...jā, jā, bet tad, ja cilvēks kādu sauc par bandītu, tas ir kaut kas negatīvs.

Miervaldis Polis: Protams. Viņš tas, kas atņem otram.

Amy Bryzgel: Varbūt es gribēju pateikt, nevis labāk Latvijai, bet pareizāk. Pareizāk!

Miervaldis Polis: Nē! Nav tur Latvijas, vai... nē, tam nav ar to saistības. Tam nav ar to saistības.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet tas ir svarīgi, ja mēs runājam par muižniecību un Latviju...

Miervaldis Polis: Nav tādas Latvijas! Tas ir abstrakts. Tev tas iegalvots kā realitāte – ka ir tāda Amerika, nav tādas Amerikas. Labi, lai būtu, ir amerikāņi. Bet amerikāņi ir arī indiāņi.

Amy Bryzgel: Jā, bet iepriekš tu runāji par gleznām un tu runāji par latviešiem...

Miervaldis Polis: Jā, ir latvieši, bet nav Amerikas.

Amy Bryzgel: Labi, tad pareizāk būtu teikt – latviešiem, nevis Latvijai, bet latviešiem.

Miervaldis Polis: Nē! Es nedomāju tādās kategorijās. Tā domā amerikāņi. Bet
interesanti... bet es tā nedomāju.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet varbūt es tagad patiešām nesaprotu, jo tu teici, ka tas, ko mēs saprotam
kā muižniecība, ir nepareizi.

Miervaldis Polis: Muižniecība ir visačgārnākā pasaules varas struktūra. Labi, ka viņa ir
sabrukusi. Tā ir ārkārtīgi nepareiza. Starp citu Amerikas likumi vienmēr tika izstrādāti,
lai ierobežotu kapitāla uzkrāšanu dažu rokās. Diemžēl, grūti pieņemt. Es klausījos atkal
to pašu Amerikas radio. Par to kā viņi vērsas pret monopola varu. Tur daudzus piemērus
minēja. Piemēram, to, ka teiksim, ar milzu nodokļiem tika aplikti mantojumi. Kāpēc?
Tieši, lai neveidotos šī pseidoaristokrātija. Tāpēc man patīk amerikāņu patriotiskas
filmas. “Karogs” saucas. Amerikāniete nezina vienu no amerikāņu ultrapatriotisma
filmām...

Amy Bryzgel: “Karogs”?

Miervaldis Polis: “Karogs”!

Amy Bryzgel: Nezinu...

Miervaldis Polis: Cietums. Bijušais Vjetnamas kara veterāns. Un tur it bandīti cietumā. Bieži gadās, ka ASV mazpilsētās cietumos ir bandītu vara, mafija. Terorisms. Viņš ar tiem cietumniekiem pasāk sacelšanos. Ā, nē, viņš bija iesūtīts, lai atmaskotu. Nu nav svarīgi, svarīgi ir tas, ka viņš bija beidzamais pie karoga. Un tur arī krīt dēļ to karogu. Un tā... redz', kas tas ir! Kas ir karogs? Lupata! Un tur tas teksts. Kas kuram ir karogs. Un tu domā: "vai Latvijai ir labāks?" Viņš tā nedomā! Viņš domā, ka tā ir jādara, kā ir. Un viņš apzinās. Nav svarīga nozīme. Viņi nekaro, lai... Viņi karo, lai izdzīvotu. Lai draugs izdzīvotu. Tu domā, lai ir labāk, kad tu ej uzbrukumā. Bet dzīve ir visu laiku cīņa. Ja kāds cilvēks nesaprot, ka dzīve ir cīņa, nu tad viņš neko nesaprot. Gandrīz. Protams, cīnīties var kā lauva ziemā... Augstākais cīņas princips ir nepretdarboties. Tas ir neuzvarams. Bokss! Tu zini, iekš kā pastāv bokss? Iekš nepretdarbošanās! Cīņas metode. Krievi pielietoja pret Napoleonu. Ko darīja krievs? Pēteris I šo metodi pielietoja. Tā ir sena krievu metode. Kāpēc Napoleons zaudēja? Tāpēc, ka krievs nepretdarbojās. Viņš atkāpās. Un tas Napoleons baigi priecīgs. Ja viņš būtu pretojies, Krievija būtu iekarota. Paši krievi būtu priecīgāki, protams. Nu, es gan nezinu, daļa jā, bet daļa nē. Bet viņš visu laiku atkāpās. Viņš pat pameta Maskavu. Galvaspilsētu! Līdz pēdējam vīram. Un vēl nodedzināja! Napoleons bija sabrucis. Laodzi šo formulēja 600 gadus pirms Kristus dzimšanas. Nepretdarbojies un tu esi neuzvarams.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet vai šī ideja attiecas uz muižniecību vai... dzīvesveidu vai...

Miervaldis Polis: Man ir aizmirsies, bet man ir intervija. Muižnieks nedala labos, sliktos cilvēkos. Viņi dala cilvēkus zemniekos un muižniekos. Bet viņi nesaka, ka zemnieks ir

slikts. Viņi apbrīno, un muižnieka pienākums ir dzīvot zemnieka labā. Bet zemnieka pienākums nav dzīvot muižnieku labā.

Amy Bryzgel: Es tikai gribu saprast, kā tas darbojas. Vai tas ir tavs dzīvesveids vai citiem...

Miervaldis Polis: Raiņa dzīvesveids. Jānis Rainis, bet tu jau...

Amy Bryzgel: ...es runāju par šodien cilvēkiem, kas var lasīt par to muižniecību.

Miervaldis Polis: Tur pat nevajag lasīt. Viņš dzīvo kā zemnieks, bet viņš ir muižnieks. Viņš par to nedomā.

Amy Bryzgel: Es lasīju daudz rakstus par muižniecības ideju. Es nezinu, vai tu gribēji par to runāt un publicēt to?

Miervaldis Polis: Es...

Amy Bryzgel: ... un kāpēc?

Miervaldis Polis: Tāpēc, ka biju naivs.

Amy Bryzgel: Ko tu gribēji, lai cilvēki gūst no tām idejām?

Miervaldis Polis: Nu, man tur bija tajā intervijā... Es teicu, ka es par to runāju, jo ļoti daudzi muižnieki dzīvoja kā zemnieki. Es to tagad stāstu, tādēļ, lai viņi saprastu. Katram tak' savs darbs. Es domāju. Es nesaku, ka visiem tas ir jādara viss. Vai visiem jābūvē mājas, vai visiem jāglezno. Cilvēki nesaprot, ka es nevaru vadīt mašīnu. Es saku: “man nevajag, priekš tam ir šoferis!” “Vai tad tu glezno?” – “Kā, bet automašīna!” Bet kāpēc man jāprot? Ja man kaut kur ir jāaizbrauc, priekš tam ir profesionāls autovadītājs.

Amy Bryzgel: Mans bijušais draugs domā tāpat, tas ir patiešām smieklīgi... (smejas).

Miervaldis Polis: Nu, kāpēc man būtu jāprot vadīt automašīna?! “Obligāti!” Cilvēki domā: “ja man vajag, tad visiem vajag.” Nu un paši tad nekur netiek – sēž tajās... “pik stundās” (nievājoši).

Amy Bryzgel: Bet ir viens raksts tev kopā ar Maiju Krīgeri par muižniecību.

Miervaldis Polis: Plakidim Pēterim, Maijas Krīgeres vīram bija dzimšanas diena. Tad tur bija dzimšanas diena, un mēs ar Purmali tu bijām, protams. Un tur bija jautri. Visi tie mūziķi un draugi tur. Saule lēca aiz loga. Mēs bijām – Krīgere bija, es biju, Plakidis bija vēl vai bija jau aizgājis. Krīgere kaut kā par šito ierunājās.

Amy Bryzgel: Es gribēju tev jautāt par to, vai nosaukums ir svarīgs, jo dažreiz, piemēram, “Polis un Karavadžo” vai “Karavadžo un Polis” – kurš ir pirmais?

Miervaldis Polis: Nē, nē pirmais ir “Karavadžo un Polis”, bet var jau būt, ka ir otrādi. Es to parasti arī lieku virsū uz reprodukcijas.

Amy Bryzgel: Vai vari pastāstīt par “Ego Sapni”.

Miervaldis Polis: Man bija sirsnīgs amizieris virsū. *I talk about myself, you – about yourself.* Jo, kurš tad nesaka, ka tu uz balta zirga. Nu tas ir tāds simbols no Napoleona. Vienmēr tiem karavadoņiem bija balti zirgi. Balts un visi aplaudē skaisti. Nu vismaz puikām jau nu ļoti [tas patīk – EV], nu meitenēm drusku savādāk, bet princips jau tāds pats. Meitene ne uz zirga tik ļoti, protams, bet nu...

Amy Bryzgel: Glezna bija nopirkta tirgū kaut kad?

Miervaldis Polis: Aha! Tas bija padomju laiks. No Krievijas te visādi nabadziņi iebrauca un viņi andelēja. Ja jau visi cilvēki darīs tikai to, kas atļauts, tad jau nekā nebūs. Tie bija ticīgie. Un tur bija arī visādi Kristiņi visādi. Man viens bija mājās. Un viņš pielika tādu gulbīti melnu. Tajā laikā jau nebija krāsainas fotogrāfijas. Tas ļoti sen nāk šitā forma. Un tad viņu izkrāso. Un tad viņu ieliek tādā mazā plastmasas... tā kā šļauciņa, pārgriež un apliek apkārt. Un aizmugurē ir tāda aukliņa, kur var pakārt. Tur bija Jēzus Kristus, Madonna un... gulbīši. Nu viss, kas ir vajadzīgs, protams. Viņi maksāja vienu latu. Un es nopirku trīs gabalus. Tur bija tāda sieviete japāniska. Nezinu, no kurienes viņi bija tādu pārfotografējuši. No kāda žurnāla, es nezinu.

Amy Bryzgel: Un tās pastkartes vienu no Krimas un otru no Venēcijas?

Miervaldis Polis: Marka laukums. Es tur biju, sēdēju, dzēru visu vakaru. Viena itāliete spēlēja džezu, es liku aiznest viņai piecdesmit eiro. Un tad viņi visu vakaru sajūsminājās.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet, kāpēc viens bija no Krimas un viens bija...

Miervaldis Polis:...no Krimas patiešām bija.

Amy Bryzgel: Bet Venēcijā tu nevarēji? Vai nē? Tai laikā...

Miervaldis Polis: Nē, dažiem laimējās. Tā nevar teikt. Dažiem māksliniekiem, ... bija tādi... Bija mākslinieku grupas, kam ļāva braukt. Piemēram, Purmale dabūja šādā grupā aizbraukt. Uz Itāliju, laikam bija sešas dienas, es vairs neatceros. Es jau arī īpaši nepūlējos. Pirmkārt, nebiju komjaunietis. [ilga pauze- EV]

Amy Bryzgel: Bet, kad tu beidzot biji Venēcijā? Kad tas bija?

Miervaldis Polis: Šajā pavasarī.

Amy Bryzgel: Jā?! Pavasarī!

Miervaldis Polis: Es tur pirkku tās krelles. Man visa nauda beidzās. Sapirku krelles, bet izrādījās, ka kredītkartē vairs nav naudas.

Amy Bryzgel: Un vēl es gribēju jautāt par pirksti Teksasā... Tas pirmais bija...

Miervaldis Polis: Es pat nezinu, kas tas par žurnālu bija. Tas bija ārkārtīgi labs, nu, ļoti izcilu fotogrāfu. Tas bija ārkārtīgi skaisti, kad gaisma krīt uz debesīm... tur bija dažādi. Ņujorka bija, Hjūstona, tur, kur debesskrāpji. Tas tā ironiski ar komunistu pirkstu [no debesīm – EV].

Amy Bryzgel: Bet tas neizskatās sarkans dzīvē. Varbūt es maldos, bet es domāju, ka tas ir bija rozā...

Miervaldis Polis: Es domāju, tu to neesi redzējusi. Tas ir tajā Hjūstonā. Pie ezera. Un aiz ezera parādās tikai tie debesskrāpji.

Amy Bryzgel: Šito? Man diemžēl ir tikai melnbalts.

Miervaldis Polis: Tās ir skulptūras. Modernās skulptūras. Es viņu vēlējos uzbūvēt Latvijā. Vajag daudz naudas un... Tagad jau varētu, bet es negribu. Kaut gan, kas teica, ka negribu. Es varētu arī uzbūvēt. Māli der, viņš tikai jāapdedzina, viņš nestāv.

Amy Bryzgel: Vai tas bija svarīgi, ka tas bija Amerikā?

Miervaldis Polis: Amerika mums bija sapņu zeme. Es ļoti daudz klausījos “Amerikas balsi”. Tur labi stāstīja. Par visu. Par zinātni, par mākslu, par kolekcijām. Bija ļoti izcils radio. Šitais bija katru dienu no rīta līdz vakaram. Nu, ceturtdienās bija par medicīnu. Stundu garš raidījums. Nopietni... materiāls izstudēts. Par mākslu bija, zinātni, par ko tik nebija. Katru dienu. Tās es ļoti daudz ko ieguvu jaunu. Citreiz es zinu par Ameriku to, ko pats amerikānis citreiz nezina.

Amy Bryzgel: Mans bijušais draugs to pateica (smejas). Es gribētu, lai tu viņam pateiktu, ka tu ļoti līdzīgi domā (smejas).

Miervaldis Polis: Jā, Amerika mums bija sapnis. Ne tikai mums, krieviem bija sapnis. Es nupat atbraucu no Rīgas. Viens latviešu slavens... no Amerikas. Viņš tagad ir slavens, viņam ir ierakstu studija. Viņa līdz šim brīdim darbojas. Viņš stāstīja interviju žurnālā, es jau toreiz viņu nepazinu. Viņam nepatīk, ka pa Ameriku sliktu runā. “Tā nav,” viņš saka, “tur nav tā!” Tu jau nesaproti, kā mēs runājam. Es runāju šitā (gari novelk). Es jau nedomāju, ka “nu tiešām viena zagļu valsts.” Vai tad es domāju, ka Latvijā visi ir zagļi? Nu, nē tak’.

Amy Bryzgel: Nu, protams, ka nē.

Miervaldis Polis: Redzi, nu vajag uzticēties, kad runāju. Nu es pārspīlēju, kad es saku: “ui, visi tie amerikāņi!” Es domāju to mistisko sindromu. Es viņu nezinu. Viņš tur velk uz

zoba. Kas tad tur ir? Nu kad atkal brūk virsū Irākai, ir briesmīgi. Simtiem tūkstoši... Man tas nepatīk. Nu irākiešiem noteikti nepatīk. Mums varbūt vienalga, bet tā nav. Amerikā kopā protestēja pret to.

Amy Bryzgel: Aha! Arī latvieši tur ir...

Miervaldis Polis: Es, protams, neprotestēju. Es uzskatu, ka es nevaru zināt, kas ir pareizi. Tādēļ es nepiedalos nekur. Pasaule nav bērnudārzs. Un es nevaru pateikt, vai tas ir pareizi darīts, vai nepareizi. Man prezidente jautāja, kā es domāju? Es teicu, ka es neesmu pacifists, un Latvijai ir jāpiedalās. Daudziem es esmu tā teicis. Par to jau nav, ko runāt. No tā, kā teikt, nekas nav atkarīgs. Vai es atzīstu, vai neatzīstu. Es, piemēram, atzīstu, ka kataloniešiem ir tiesības uz savu patstāvīgu valsti! Bet man nekādas tiesības no malas popularizēt šādu ideju. Paši katalonieši, ja uzskatīs... Tā ir viņu darīšana un spāņu. Es nedrīkstu iejaukties! Es nedrīkstu teikt, ka baski nedrīkst būt valsts. Es nevaru. Bet es nevaru proponēt, ka viņiem ir jābūt valstij. Es nevaru no malas. To ir jārisina. Baski dzīvo daļa Francijā, daļa Spānijā. Viņi tāda kalniešu tauta. Baski ir ļoti īpatnēji, un nav teroristi. To bieži vien provocē lielvaras. Biznesa nolūkos. Atkal nemāku teikt...

Appendix II

Interview: Amy Bryzgel and Sergei Bugaev (Afrika)

Original interview in English transcribed by Amy Bryzgel

September 16, 2007

Location: Afrika's studio, Fontanka, St. Petersburg, Russia

Amy Bryzgel: I was talking to Viktor Mazin earlier today and he mentioned that *Crimania* was not only about depression after the fall of the Soviet Union, but also about your possible guilt in having had a hand in that fall. I was wondering what your comment was on that?

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: I have no specific comment on this. No, if there's guilt, it's not actually guilt, and I don't think I will find the proper words in English to express what came much later, not during the performance. During the performance it was an everyday performance, it had nothing to do with guilt.

Amy Bryzgel: But it had to do with depression?

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Not only...

Amy Bryzgel: And preparing for the exhibition...

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Well, uniting what was called depression and what we try to describe in this performance as obsessive neurosis

Amy Bryzgel: Obsessive representational syndrome?

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Yes, this has to do with the need to illustrate something that is not possible to be illustrated. So, you can see it the way Viktor Mazin saw it if you like...

Amy Bryzgel: I'm just asking you because it surprised me...

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Well, it is more difficult to speak about this project today, with this practically twelve year period between us and it, and since then we have seen so many changes on every level of society, including the disappearance of democratic qualities and values...

Amy Bryzgel: So then if I understand correctly, this was also connected with the loss of identity, Soviet identity, is that true?

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Yes, I hope so.

[Pause in interview]

Amy Bryzgel: The only thing that wasn't clear to me were the results, not the physical results [the exhibitions, both in the Psychiatric Hospital and at MAK]...but I'm thinking

more about the psychological and metaphysical results, what was resolved in terms of identity, etc.?

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Well, the result in many ways can be understood through the next generation of works. And that next generation of works was concerning the condition of the individual in these types of situations, the idea of helping individuals...it's something that appears in a work that was produced together with Timur Novikov. It is one of the only illustrations I have that is visualized propaganda of how not to be destroyed by any external event, including collapse of the country, where in Russia you could say that we have experienced this practically every generation...some form of events related to form and organization of the society or the state. So even now we are facing a lot of dramatic changes, even one of my friends from Medical Hermeneutics, Pavel Pepperstein, couldn't stop himself from writing a letter to Esquire Magazine, telling them how much he hates the new construction of Moscow, and he wants to capital to be moved away to somewhere in Balagoya, one of the small towns, because it's so...paradoxically...human authority has its chance almost every second of our life to be ruined, destroyed, in an instant. So basically one of the most important forms of knowledge that I've acquired, or maybe from this period of transformation, is that maybe we should concentrate on those spaces – and that's probably why, since the project took place, a lot of my thoughts have been directed to the field of Buddhism, and these areas where the subjectivity of our behavior and its connections to society, even architecture, one can't – I might say that we have to be more active, but at the same time it's the exact opposite, so these are realistic battles taking place inside. This is the

practical result, we cannot stop ourselves from let's say reacting to external environment, whether it's architecture, or something else.

Amy Bryzgel: So it sounds to me that there's no solution ever, that people just have to continue to deal with these things.

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Pretty much, we don't have time to stop anymore. We don't have time to choose the form of our life anymore, you can be completely connected or you have to be totally disconnected. There are these two forms of organization and both are possible in modern society. One's speech is connected to Post-Soviet traumatic thinking, and its formation of the outside reality.

I just got back from Crimea, visiting Samokhvalov, and we were visiting the patients [in the hospital there]. But, you know, my whole life became somehow completely attached to psychiatric hospitals and patients. As soon as the plane landed, one of my friends who is a photographer from the Hermitage who takes care of this older artist, who will be one of the twelve artists representing Russia at the Miami-Basel exhibition, so I phoned this guy and he said that Gennadii was back in the hospital, he is a very interesting, famous artist. So here you have a couple different artists in their 70s, who went through this period of relating to psychiatric hospitals.

In any case the project that we speak about triggered my interest in contemporary art much deeper in the psychiatric hospital, where you can find interesting type of vibrations

between norm and pathology. Only looking to the world, we don't get an accurate picture of society, at least not in Russia, but I'm sure it's pretty much that way everywhere. In the last two years I've been going in many different directions – Asia, India, Cambodia, so my art has been changing.

Amy Bryzgel: If you can remember back to when you started the project, Samokhvalov wrote about you being a shaman, and *Crimania* being an endeavor that could heal the nation, but everything I read seems as if this was more of a personal journey...

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: It was definitely for me personal, because for other people...you know, fortunately, thanks to *ASSA* and my film background, I can express some ideas publicly, and projects, that are connected to formal art and I can get them [people/the public] personally involved. But generally our society is not ready to start dialoging with....society is pretty seriously damaged.

Amy Bryzgel: You mean specifically Russians?

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Specifically Russians....I am speaking now about these alternative languages, alternative forms of life. Unfortunately this is the biggest mistake that I've made – well, not a mistake – I haven't been planning this enough. There is not a single group of Russian leaders, not even one of the leading groups, that had any form of aesthetic support from the side of living artists, and so that means that really almost every bit of society is represented in state structures or in public society, but it didn't go over

the border that was basically drawn by the concept of realistic world. The world is what we see and the way we see is the way we have to understand it. And in this situation, in the Russian situation, people are becoming weaker, because people are using more didactic, more specific, more conceptualized, more serious languages, from the point of view of seriousness I mean scientifically related, because every form of subjectivity that we are experiencing, in art and culture, can be taken seriously from the point of view of physics or something. Is it clear – that the political society didn't look and didn't accept alternative languages of culture and art? So now we can see Russia as a country and society as a beautiful chocolate candy wrapped in a very nice plastic, global envelope, but at the same time it doesn't have the taste of some tasty product, because it is still an old fashioned product, I mean the culture – the leaders of our society are the most conservative artistically and the most uninteresting, I mean like Glazunov, people like Tseretelli, those kind of people, so they practically block the possibility for opening the gates for dialogue and communication. It means that, for example, if we can look back to European society around the time of Joseph Beuys, how much society learned from these strange manipulations, from these strange myths...and this happened with our group many times. So, for example, the famous TV program Lenin Mushroom – this was a very important, a very principle, public gesture from our group, this group united Popular Mechanics, Sergei Kurokhin, The New Artists, the Necrorealists and others. And once in 1989, I believe, 1990, we produced a TV program – it became very popular, very successful, filmed as an exception from this picture I just told you, where new products can be wrapped in the old language. So the project with Lenin Mushroom was discussed and debated so much over the years. Generally, it was some form of representation that

didn't have representation before... for example the guys in Moscow are now publishing a book on conceptual art. There was a really great tradition of conceptualism in Moscow, but, for example, in Petersburg, in Leningrad, there was Popular Mechanics, which was basically a very clear, conceptual...conceptual meaning part of modernism, some form of behavior that isn't linked to the practical part – and this TV show [Lenin Mushroom] was taken very seriously by society, and this was practically the only example, and people still see it as some kind of fun, some form of manifestation, but nobody sees it as an art form. And this is our most dramatic situation that every year, art is becoming weaker and weaker...

[Pause in interview]

Amy Bryzgel: I want to ask you about this alternative language, and the aphasia, rebuses and the banners – was this trying to create an alternative language, with a mix of Soviet symbols and different symbols?

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Smokhvalov mentioned in his writing about the development of new symbols...

Amy Bryzgel: Yes, he said that psychosis is necessary to create new images, and that new symbols come out of old symbols. So my understanding is that that's what you're doing with the rebuses and banners...

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: You mean can we find new universal symbols, but not Coca-Cola?

Amy Bryzgel: Yes, but you use not Coca-Cola, but Donald Duck and Western images.

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: It's very difficult for people to understand a lot of things about culture and art....

Amy Bryzgel: When you were talking about this Lenin Mushroom, you said that this reached a lot of people, as did *ASSA*, but the *Crimania* performance was very private. I'm interested in the fact that no one really saw this performance or exhibition...

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: And still it was very....if the information about this performance would be delivered to professionals, they would attempt to find information. But here in Russia, we don't have the right propaganda. I'm still proud of the performance, from the point of view of the obsessive part of... The obsession about where to do it, and showing the work was satisfied...to have some kind of event, not publicized by articles in *Art Forum*, but in the form of different...we can speak about some kind of integrated art. We need to find a new way of showing...so the idea was to have an exhibition in the department of the chronics, where there are no sheets on the beds....this was a very important result, because we are facing a very dramatic reshaping of the sphere that is avant-garde, and in this situation I have to defend not only my position, but I am also under the influence of John Cage. A lot of people blame him for being too

noisy in the last year of his life, he managed to create a space for this...all the time I see the face of my guru, who is one of the few exceptions in the moment when the art community was divided, you know, becoming part of the fashion industry. That's why this kind of heavy-weighted storm that can lift out of the bottom of the sea, in the form of the psychiatric population, psychiatric clinic, it's not far from the normal world, the fashion world, and magazines, one can really believe in this appearance in society...So I don't want to say that this is a very...but in general there is a large part of society coming out of that....the art industry...

Amy Bryzgel: How do you feel personally about the whole performance in the psychiatric hospital, do you feel that it changed you?

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Yes and no, because you have to understand a few things... but I don't think it changed my neural system...

Appendix III

Interview: Amy Bryzgel and Sergei Bugaev (Afrika)

Original interview in English transcribed by Amy Bryzgel

Telephone Interview

December 24, 2007

Amy Bryzgel: I wanted to ask you about some of the figures you include in the Banners from the *Crimania* exhibition, for example, Egyptian figures, Roman soldiers, angels. What were the origins of these symbols? Where did you take them from?

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: I would take them from every possible source I could find in books here, nothing special...I was just observing human evolution – not only the historical part of it, starting with Greeks, Scythians, Romans, but also the earliest drawings of bacteria. And going all the way down to the linguistic symbolization of the same things. The whole thing is dedicated to Jakobson. And one of them has a line that says sound, work, expression (viskazivanie), and at the end it said “Mazafaka” with a different type of pronunciation – instead of writing “mother” [with “th” – AB] it is spelled with a “z” [maza – AB]...so this is referring to this new state of language that is no more structured as some serious prototype that was once the driving force for human science, including people like Jakobson, Chomsky...so the latest stage, at this point, which is partly related to my analysis, is this state where Mazafaka is not written – it

sounds right, but it doesn't look good, it's not what it used to be...I somehow tried to cover the evolution of semiotics...counting not only images, languages and whatever we can illustrate....because one of the tasks of the exhibition *Crimania* is the impossibility to illustrate to an internal quality, whether it was probably a general source for art since Wassily Kandinsky....the spirituality and the possibility to fixate it and illustrate it and reach the power, steal the power from it, and all sorts of manifestations that we can observe.

Amy Bryzgel: So this is about the impossibility to represent the unrepresentable?

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: I was speaking about this in the *Crimania* project under the banner of Obsessive Representational Syndrome. So we can say that this opinion was accepted not only by people from the art world, who were not the main subject of my concentration for the *Crimania* project...so also for my work it will be important for you to point to the idea that this particular artist [Afrika – AB] is constantly searching for new forms of representation and new positions, new locations, and new forms of contacts – not only new forms of works of art but also new seers of representation. That is why we jump from the museum – which is today, in modern society, more of a fashion industry, fashionable attraction piece....whereas it used to be more related to the world of science and scientific discoveries and ideas....so in this situation the syndrome of Obsessive Representation that was in my case was connected to the so-called loss of the motherland and the impossibility of illustrating this form of obsession with any form of art

works....so the actual art work in *Crimania* definitely has to be described and analyzed. Someone has to take the responsibility to analyze it.

There is a guy I met in Moscow who wrote a book...the best article about my work unexpectedly appeared in a totally different sphere. He has nothing to do with contemporary art but he wrote a complete book on the history of Crimea. And one piece on modern Crimea was actually dedicated to this piece [Afrika's *Crimania* performance – AB]. And this guy had never met me and had no access to any books, and he actually got a lot of stuff, and I was really proud. It's really nice that he did this, and it just came out in 2007. It's by Aleksander Pavlovich Liucii, and the book is called *Na Sledie Krima*.

Amy Bryzgel: It's great that so many people are interested in this project!

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: No, no, no! Not many people are interested...I have to tell you that most of my work or work of St. Petersburg artists would not be integrated into a general mainstream history of modern Russian art because that history is being written in Moscow, by certain people like Ekaterina Dyogot...and their subject of concentration is mostly Moscow Conceptualism, and anything that interferes and is not in their control is not of interest to them, so this [the book by Liucii, and any interest in Afrika's work – AB] is an exception.

Amy Bryzgel: But you should know that everyone that I talk to about your project is quite interested in it...

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: I hope that this piece is still incomparable to most of what we are still facing in the last 25 years. I'm really proud that we found this interesting sphere. My only hope is art historians, because as you see I don't have a website, the catalogues are no longer available and I am not promoting this piece, so, it's only an internal situation for those who are really interested. Unfortunately right now the art market is dictating a lot of shifts and serious changes in modern art history. So I am standing on a lot of traditional positions because of my love for my teachers, love to all human beings, and art for all people, not only the rich.

Amy Bryzgel: Can you talk a bit more about how you got to meet these people (your teachers), people like John Cage, Jacques Derrida, etc.?

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: I have to say that this is not an official statement to say "yes, I was studying under this person" this is only...well I hope that we have the right to choose our own teachers just by observing people and seeing their behavior inside of the human community....all I can say is that unfortunately no one in modern civilization can be compared, in the art world at least, to someone like John Cage. I do hope that Joseph Beuys was kind of like this...maybe I am missing some people....you know, still in the art world we hope that we are not only dealing with daily practice but we are somehow interfering with the sphere of sacred opinions, and sacrality is something that is handed to the sphere of art by the people who really started it, I mean Wassily Kandinsky...I forgot this word *priemstvennost* [successiveness – AB]...and in the other worlds, the other

sphere, like for example, one of the greatest men I ever met – and this meeting was not about understanding or opinions...now I am able to read the works by Felix Guattari, who was a great psychologist and gave this huge angel for free to American art and European art, by Deleuze and Guattari, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, which was just published in Russian -perhaps too late, but maybe not. This book is the key guide to modern capitalism and its pathologies, and the area where we...[leaves to answer the door – AB]...what was I talking about? Oh, about Guattari, who came here once to Russia by the invitation of one of the ‘progressive’ journals...because *Flash Art* is now part of the global system of controlling the art market...but once they tried to be as progressive as many others, so they brought this – one of the greatest French philosophers to the Soviet Union....my language at that time, English or Russian, was limited....so I was only able to follow the gestures, the behavior, the eyes of the people....and this is a very important thing, this type of scanning is called ethology, and the leader of the school of ethology here is Professor Samokhvalov, who is also one of my greatest teachers, in this lifetime...not only a collaborator for the *Crimania* project but for many other things. And he is the one who opened my eyes to the language of human behavior, gesture, non-verbal forms of manifestations. Because we are not only speaking beings, we are also performing ones. So in this case our group that united, at one time, the club of Mayakovsky fans, Popular Mechanics, which heavily debated the importance of the receiving of energetic or symbolic sources from the generations who can be trusted...because we live in a human world and it’s very difficult here today where everything is painted hundreds of times and when we are facing hundreds of simulacra around us, we have to operate on some kind of basis and so in this case, the

Buddhist tradition of the enlightened teacher and the guru is for me in this case very principle...so I am very happy you are asking this question about Cage and other people. I hope I should mention everyone, including my teacher from [elementary – AB] school! Because just yesterday I was reading this book by one of the great Buddhist gurus, which started before China invaded Tibet and ends in today's world...so most of the book was about meeting people who are actually not who they are but who they are hundreds of years ago, and how they came here to this time, through these years...

Amy Bryzgel: Like reincarnation?

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Well, reincarnation is too spiritual, too esoteric. You know, we still have to say that our position in the world of art is heavily related to the academic world of semiology...Because we cannot take the position of Orthodox Christianity or the Buddhist community, because this is not our religious or political or ethnic search for some kind of Victory Over the Sun, but rather a poetic dance with a shadow...

Amy Bryzgel: You've mentioned a lot of people, like Mayakovsky, Beuys – and all of the your investigations into alternative language remind me of Mayakovsky, and some of the *Crimania* project reminds me of the things that Beuys was doing as a shaman,...and you even exhibited your pajamas like Beuys did. How do you see yourself in relation to these people? Are you continuing what they were doing, improving, or revising what they were doing?

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Well, I don't know if continuing is the right word, but I am definitely admiring their opinion in the face of civilization. Even the art world isn't sacred anymore, because you know the people you mention, they sacrificed themselves as well....in a way it is very tragic to see a united exhibition of two great artists – Matthew Barney and Joseph Beuys. Sad because their greatness is totally oppositional. I can understand some curators who would say that this is the result of our deep development of research about this opposition – how one was cleaning the street after the 1st of May demonstrations....the other is creating a beautiful carpet for the people wearing 100 Karat diamonds for a movie presentation and then stepping down to the art world for some symbolic reason and buying art work for their offices. I do believe that someone is bringing these two individuals together. Maybe I should read the catalogue better....but it's like building a church for Jesus Christ and Judah. Maybe it is worth doing, but you know I have never seen an icon of Judah.

Amy Bryzgel: You always talk about these alternative languages, and you've told me about this *Lenin Was a Mushroom* show, which you said was also about alternative forms of communication. I'm wondering what conclusions we have from *Crimania* about these alternative languages. It seems like all we ever end up with is aphasia. We have rebuses that we can't read. So, what do we get out of it? Where do we arrive?

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: It is very difficult to say where we arrive. All I can tell you is that sometimes we are....of course we are not only talking about our internal opinions...we are connecting and communicating to the observer, who is coming to see

the work of art and in this situation we are using different methods...because when I know who is coming to the exhibition, I am trying to understand this group of people...and deliver to them a message that actually I am often trying to include in the art work....most of the time there is a message. Sometimes no message is more than a message. For example in *Crimania*, at the end of the project was the *Heroes of the USSR* exhibition in the room for chronics. And they were the group who understood the message perfectly, and they are the ones who are not supposed to understand anything.

For example, once, in Los Angeles, at the exhibition of the Anti-Lissitzky series of works, at UCLA, one person came up to me and said “thank you so much for these three particular works which were painted using the isochromatic plates of Shilling for color-blindness, because I am color blind, and this is the only time in my life that I know that I see what is supposed to be seen in an exhibition – and more than that, I am the *only* one who can see only this.”

Amy Bryzgel: Are these the Lissitzkys that are painted pink?

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Well, they are painted with dots....I don't know if you've seen them. I don't know if they are published anywhere....so, anyway, concerning the new language and all these ideas...in most situations, no language is the newest language.

Amy Bryzgel: I write in my dissertation about how Malevich and Mayakovsky were trying to create these new languages for the Soviet Union, for the new Soviet State, this

utopian state...in my interpretation, I see what you are doing as similar, but instead of creating for the Soviet state you are creating for the new independent Russian state – creating a new language out of the old Soviet language...

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: My idea is not to give new guns to the state or to the government, but to the individual, to the single cell...I am more interested in the big scale that was once the illusion of Mayakovsky....we [Afrika and his fellow Leningrad underground artists – AB] once played an important role in Russian history, with the Club of Mayakovsky, *ASSA*, *Kino*....but it is not anymore the subject of my particular interest. Because now we are more in the state of genetic engineering for new forms of sign systems. And this is no more related to.... As I understand, the fundamental science is rather international and belongs to mankind in all lands....from what I understand Malevich was more or less general about his opinions, even inside of the Soviet Union. But he addressed his development to a much larger audience. That's why most of the global scientists are still interested in these works...even Mayakovsky too, who was not understood during the Soviet times because of his strong ties to Lenin and early Soviet mythology. That's why it somehow limited the amount of scientists who were able to look at cultural development or individual works of art....without any forms of distortion that come from practically every institutional side...so if you enter the world of nuclear physics with any kind of ideological background, you won't be able to succeed in the world of nuclear science....in the world of atoms and nucleons, you have to be human [laughs – AB].

Amy Bryzgel: Another question I have is about audiences. In *Crimania* you have first the patients in the ward for the chronics who saw the *Heroes* exhibition, and then you had the exhibition at MAK. But most average Russians – if you are thinking about language and something for Russia – most Russians wouldn’t get to see thatso, how does that idea of a new language fit in with the two audiences that you addressed in the two exhibitions....it’s interesting for me that the exhibition wasn’t in Russia or somewhere where most Russians could see it, or maybe that wasn’t your idea....

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: We are talking about two different groups of people. That’s why on these two panels - you saw one [at the Mimi Ferzt Gallery in New York] that said “Not by Bread Alone” – and this was one of the two triptychs that came out of it. I was really surprised to see that piece [alone in the gallery – AB], and it’s really strange that the guy who bought all six panels, two triptychs....that are from the installation *Donal destruction*, which was shown in Vienna as well, [has chosen to sell/exhibit them separately – AB], because somehow if I am combining installations using older and newer works, I still hope that they combine all together into some poetic piece that is completely understandable for those who can read poetry, so we are only talking about some people, a small editing of the human readableness....where we can imagine that if you can read language then you can read any other sign system...for example people can read the color plates [the traffic lights – AB], they know that when they cross the street they have to be green....so we are concerned with two groups of people. Vienna is the symbol of the great enlightenment that once visited the person who was Sigmund Freud, who delivered the greatest engine to human society for almost a century. Even now we

are using a lot of his theories to explain or interpret our behavior or our own internal energy potentials. So we are talking again talking about two groups: one group is the group of completely crazy people from the 'zoo' [the ward in the hospital with the chronic patients was referred to as 'the menagerie' – AB], the room where *Heroes*... was shown for the first time. And the other group is in the city that contains the spirit of the man who once inhabited it, Dr. Sigmund Freud, and its possible roots. And both of these venues I would say were successful in reaching the audience. Because when you see a completely destroyed group of people living inside one of the worst psychiatric clinics, and at the same time being totally divided by ethnic, social or any other type of classification, were united by the banner of craziness. But at the same time the group understood the message and the time-space combination in the project perfectly well. So, that's what I can call success, because you know from today's standards of art...no works of art were sold from the project, some of them were destroyed. So by today's standards when works of art are not sold the art project is not successful. So we have to divide two principle groups of art projects that we are talking about today, because of course there are great painters, very successful financially...there are great and important art dealers who are great and successfulbut also we still have alternatives...So all I can tell you is that we, as the Club of Mayakovsky, have initiated open public meetings here in Leningrad...regardless of whether our friends in Moscow, for example (I have to mention them because we come from the same background) established some kind of internal, esoteric club for only those who are members. Whether we started a completely public program...you know, performances, for example,....compared to the performances of Monastirsky, and Popular Mechanics...what are the differences? There are many

differences, of course. But the main difference is that one is for the public, and one is not for the public. It was private, and now it is for capitalists who can buy the actual work of art. So all I can say is that the idea of not selling art at that time is also linked to John Cage, who was unfortunately very heavily criticized by American art institutions in the '70s '80s and '90s for being very critical about how he sees the evolution of the American art institutions. And for us this is a very important subject because in the world of contemporary art the American institutions are the most important ones, they are not comparable to Russian ones, and in my opinion they cannot even be compared to British ones...so, when one generation is continuing something that the previous generation was doing, the previous generation gives them the flag or the banner to carry....priemstvennost [successiveness – AB]...the young generation is acquiring the qualities of the previous generation...

Amy Bryzgel: Can you tell me something about this *Lenin is a Mushroom* show? You said that this was also looking at alternative methods of communication...

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: I spoke a few weeks ago with the man who was in charge of that TV program. You know, this was the project of Sergei Kurokhin, who was one of the leaders of new free Russian art, and the word freedom is extremely important, and today even more important, because....we paid a very big price for that freedom. And Soviet Underground art was one of the strongest in the world, for communicating between the power structures and the public, and using alternative methods of delivering and acquiring this information. So, speaking of *Lenin is a Mushroom*, we have to say that

Kurokhin was one of the greatest conceptual artists who lived in the time when it was not necessary to leave any form of dust or any form of material proof of your activities. That is the one main opposition to existing forms of art around the world...to make a great work of art and not leave any substance or any form of material memory about it...That is why Kurokhin accepted John Cage as his greatest teacher, and the piece 4'33' was for most of us the greatest piece, because it wasn't based on material soil...it was completely spiritual. So, for that reason, to understand the appearance of this TV program, where the image of the leader of the great October Revolution, who was once called Vladimir Ilich Lenin, measured on a totally different scale and represented in a public TV program on prime-time in the former Soviet Union...nothing can be compared to the radicalism and the power of this work. So Kurokhin found and collaborated with one of the TV people here and proposed this to him. Because he was interested, just like John Cage...if you open an encyclopedia, you will find John Cage in two sections, in two forms of dimensions – one as a great American composer, and the other as a mycologist, an expert in mushrooms...because John Cage, all his life, was really interested in mushrooms. He would travel especially in season to Sweden to find a particular mushroom and to China to find mushrooms, and he would be so greatly happy...there are many stories about John Cage and mushrooms. For example, once he happened to be in Stockholm, at this exhibition of Robert Rauschenberg in the Moderna Museet, thanks to another one of my teachers Pontus Hulten, who was the first director of the museum of modern art in Stockholm...and he invited all the great American artists there before anyone else did, that's why Stockholm has the greatest collection of Pop Art. So, Rauschenberg and Cage were there at the same time, and so Cage said to "let's go to the forest and pick

mushrooms.” So John Cage was very upset when Rauschenberg – well, I don’t know if he was upset, but anyway – by accident, Rauschenberg, without knowing what he was doing, found a very rare mushroom that John had been looking for for twenty years, and he picked it up and gave it to John as a present. So in this situation, people who are that close to the biological substance...because they are not anymore...at the beginning of the twenty first century...people will call something merely a mushroom-looking thing/object/substance. So it is not anymore a mushroom, but it is something that comes in the form of a mushroom. So, in this case, this is one of the big public works of Kurokhin. Because most of his works were top secret and not open to the public, the same way it used to be in many of the spiritual traditions of the East, for example. Like in Tibet, for example, a lot of things are not spoken in public, for other reasons, but only spoken for hundreds of years from the mouth of the teacher to the student. So in that case the performances of Popular Mechanics was public, but at the same time it was unspeakable, because it was necessary not to mark repressive areas...where we know what could have happened if we would have said what we said in the language that was known and understood. So, in that situation I have heard met with a huge group of people over the years, public figures from the former Soviet Union and Russian, and heard absolutely unexpected opinions from these people that this particular TV show was extremely...well, first of all many articles came out the next morning in the Russian newspapers and magazines about this crazy program...the program that managed to produce this was called *Chihiy Dom* by Nova Ovshovikov....they produced only one of their programs on tape and DVD, and that was *Lenin is a Mushroom*. Included there is also a live interview with the top Russian pop singer Alla Pugachova, whom I was greatly

thanking one day for saying in public how greatly Kurokhin influenced her, so she gave a very beautiful picture of how her consciousness, after two hours of talking with Kurokhin...and it's not easy to move the very stable consciousness of a pop star in any direction, but it happened, and she was very happy when he did it, and she talked about it on TV, and she was very upset when our sweet friend died. And she was extremely happy to give me her opinion, and I was very proud....because she is the one who shares her voice, she is one of the soft dictators of Russian society, because when you have an individual whose songs are sung by millions of people, these have an exceptional position in our society society....whether it's, you know, Britney Spears or Alla Pugachova....[laughs – AB]

Amy Bryzgel: But you have that too, because of *ASSA*, and you have that power, too.

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: It can't be compared to someone who was the number one singer in the Soviet Union...because the Soviet Union was an exceptional society in the global situation, that's why it was called totalitarian, because it was a totally different field of information, probably many countries dream of establishing the kind of society like the Soviet Union was, in terms of delivering information, to the right people at the right time.

Amy Bryzgel: Can you give me some of the details about the *Lenin is a Mushroom*. Was it just one show?

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: It actually appeared around three times on television. There was an article the next morning, a serious article, that said “it is not possible for a human being to be a mushroom!” – they took it very seriously. Because some people on that program already said that mushrooms...because there were people on that program to make people believe what was told by many important scientists. There are some biological institutes here that deal with mushrooms, and there was this one guy who gave some image of a brutal warhead with mushrooms that can destroy civilization, or gave images of other forms of mushrooms. But here the metaphorical mushroom, the linguistic mushroom was much more powerful than the mushroom of radiation...because it goes much, much deeper into the consciousness, and consciousness is much, much deeper and more powerful than the flash...

Amy Bryzgel: And what was your role in the show?

Sergei Bugaev Afrika: Because my surname is Bugaev, one of Kurokhin’s projects was to present the idea that I am the reincarnation of Andrei Bely. Andrei Bely was one of not only the greatest Russian writers, but he was also a theoretician who actually influenced many people not because of the subject of his writing – for example his famous trilogy Petersburg, Moscow, before the revolution – but the way of language...so Kurokhin was forcing me to prove that I am a member of the Bely family, the Bugaev family, the Bely family, and that I am the person who inherited all of the powers, invisible powers...an extremely interesting man [Bely – AB]...I don’t know how much you know about Bely, but Bely was part of an organization that was more and more interesting, the progressive

part of art and art history....Rudolph Steiner, the father of anthroposophy. If you are in Germany you just push the button on anthroposophy or Steiner, and you will see hundreds of books, hundreds of things. So Andrei Bely was one of the...the only Russian follower of the time...who went to Switzerland and was working on the church that Rudolph Steiner was building in Germany....I forgot why I jumped to that....oh, so what was my position in the program...so on this program he [Kurokhin – AB] started the promotion of the campaign that I am a member of the Bugaev family, so he gave me a mark written under the image in the program as the great-grandson of Andrei Bely, whose stepfather was walking in the forest to pick mushrooms with Lenin, when Lenin was escaping the Tsar police in the forests of Finland. So for that reason we had a little piece, a little montage – and this whole thing is of course very montage-oriented...we took a little fragment of Lenin picking the mushrooms with one of the symbolic workers of Petrograd. And immediately after they said that I am the great-grandson of Andrei Bely.

Appendix IV

Interview: Viktor Mazin and Amy Bryzgel

Original interview in English transcribed by Amy Bryzgel

September 16, 2007

Location: Freud's Dream Museum, St Petersburg, Russia

Amy Bryzgel: I wanted to ask you about ORS [Obsessional Representation Syndrome]
Can you explain the background behind it?

Viktor Mazin: You mean how we came to the diagnosis?

Amy Bryzgel: Well it said in the catalogue that you and Oleysa [Turkina] came up with this diagnosis of ORS.

Viktor Mazin: So this is not about *Crimania* at all. This appeared in our conversations with Afrika, it doesn't belong to any one of us. I mean it's, you know, when you talk, all the time about some kinds of problems. It was probably the first time in Afrika's life that he understood that he was a part of the art market, and, being part of the art market you have to produce all the time, and you don't belong to yourself anymore. This is one thing – that you have to produce all the time. This is one moment. Another moment is even more serious, that people expect you to do something – like galleries and collectors –

they are getting used to some particular sort of production, so it's not just that you have to produce something (this is already quite an obsessional thing, meaning that you don't belong to yourself, you don't go to some places you want to go, but you have to stay in the studio and produce something), and the second thing is that you have to produce something that is recognizable by the collectors and galleries, as your particular product, your signature – your signature is not just your signature, but some kind of production. And it's also a way to be quoted and how you might be forged. Some time ago – a month ago – some of Afrika's work, one of his works, was sold at Sotheby's or, let's say, at one of the most important auctions. And when he saw the picture and the price in the catalogue he was amazed, because that work was not made by him. Somebody else produced it – by copying his collage style at that time. So it was not his production. This is part of this obsessional neurosis – copying yourself. You have to copy yourself all the time.

Amy Bryzgel: But that was early [when you diagnosed him with ORS], that was 1993, just after the art market had opened.

Viktor Mazin: Well it had already been open for five years. It was the end of the 1980s when the first huge trip of Soviet art to Stockholm occurred. That was at the end of the 1980s, it was in the Culture House in Stockholm, this was the first time the Soviet art, or, I would say *Leningrad* art was seriously exhibited. Also there was a concert of Popular Mechanics which was a part of the art of Leningrad, because Kurokhin was a composer, but he was also a close friend of Timur and Afrika. So there was a concert of Popular

Mechanics and the exhibition in the Culture House. And I think it was at that time when one of the biggest galleries and art dealers showed up, the biggest in Scandinavia, that is. But anyway, it was the first selling of their works, or, to be more precise it was the exchange of art works for cars. They paid them in cars – Timur and Afrika. So that was one contact, and then there was another contact. I don't remember the exact date but it was sometime at the end of the 1980s, when Popular Mechanics was again at the center of cultural activity and they went to Berlin, and they met some really big stars in the art market and famous gallerists. And they started selling this Soviet art. There were several stages of the art market, the first stage of the market was in the 1970s, but that was illegal, underground art. It was the pre-market market. And then at the end of the 1970s, they first went abroad, and there was already direct contact with the galleries, and it was already a real market. And so it was already in fashion, Soviet art, and it was already more serious, and yet more stupid at the same time. I still remember the bus that came with these Europeans and Americans and they were buying art like in a shop. Afrika was of course more serious, because he was known in the West at the end of the 1980s. I'm telling all of this to clarify that by the time of *Crimania*, Afrika was already part of the art market. He already had his gallerist, Paul Judelson. At that moment he was just Paul Judelson, the dealer, it was before he had his gallery. Now I'm trying to explain how *Crimania* happened. There are at least three different stories: one story is the art market and the neurosis of obsessional representation, because he was already part of the market, and he had to produce something. The second story is the collapse of the Soviet Union – it's the main ideological explanation of *Crimania*. And the third thing that is obvious but at the same time that something is obvious and clear it is also out of our sight – and this

third thing is that the whole project was part of the preparation for the exhibition in MAK.

Amy Bryzgel: I thought that in your notes it said that you wanted “to find the cause for his collecting and exhibiting relics of the USSR”?

Viktor Mazin: Of course. Because the thing that’s also very important, it’s very internal – the collapse of the Soviet Union. It seems like something that’s sort of out of the art life. You do your art, you don’t care much about the political system. But this is not true at all because of the – I would say, a feeling of guilt or sense of guilt. Because Afrika and all his friends were helping to destroy the Soviet Union, working for the diplomats, anyway, working against the Soviet system. When it collapsed, you understood that it was much more serious because the Soviet Union was not *outside* but inside. So by damaging the Soviet Union you were damaging yourself. And these psychological problematics brought him to the psychiatric hospital. He said many times – he was kidding, of course – but he was saying it was time to go to the KGB and to say “excuse us” for doing all of these terrible things.

And when he came to Kiev it was really horrible to see how the workers were destroying the mosaics at the railroad station. It was really too much because it was not just a memory of the Soviet Union but it’s also an aesthetic part of the surroundings. To destroy all of the monuments, it’s probably – well, it’s out of the question. When it’s part of the totalitarian system you just want to destroy it, but when you destroy it you start to

understand that you are destroying yourself, because it's all about identification with the system. Our main idea with Oleysa always had two parts: official art and unofficial art. And Timur and Afrika were people who come in between, trying to be in the middle, trying to join these inconsistent parts of art.

Amy Bryzgel: It's interesting that used the word 'guilt' because in all the things I have read, and what Afrika has written, it has always talked about loss of identity and depression, but never anything about guilt, so is that connected with that depression?

Viktor Mazin: That is completely right, because the first sign of the feeling of guilt is depression. And the reason is always the loss, so you've lost something. Especially in the West, where everything is very stable and you follow the evolution of society very slowly, and you have the feeling that you are losing something, you just have nostalgia. You feel that the best times are behind you, like when you were younger. In the West you just don't have this experience of a radical revolution, that you just lose a part of yourself. Normally when we speak about depression in the clinical sense, we mean that we lose some of our friends or relatives and then we feel guilty because we didn't do what we should have done for this person. So we don't understand depression in terms of losing some ideological or symbolic or abstract things, like the motherland. So this was also part of the explanation of his collecting things, trying to recuperate his depression and guilt by collecting things.

Also the important thing was that he was part of the “funny fighters” against the Soviet Union – funny because he was not a dissident, of course, but still by his behavior, by being punk. We don’t usually use this word when we talk about Afrika, but still at that time, in the Soviet times... The most important thing about the whole movie *ASSA* was that the movie represented life itself, so Sovolyev was not inventing things, he was just taking things from the surroundings and bringing them to the cinema, just like Afrika’s character Bananan in the film. The same is with the name, *ASSA*, which was coined by Kotelnikov, one of our friends from Leningrad.

Amy Bryzgel: So the movie, then, the way that it was made, parallels the way Afrika works?

Viktor Mazin: Yes. And that was 1988 [1987 – sic] probably, some years before *Crimania*.

Amy Bryzgel: I wanted to talk about the “results” or conclusions of *Crimania*. In the book, the goals are very clearly outlined, but then when it comes to what results or conclusions you came to, this is less clear. In fact, you ask a lot of questions, but don’t really give any answers. It seems more like the result was left open, as a big question mark. Maybe you could comment on what you think the results of the performance and the time in the mental institution were, and in general whether there was a solution to the identity crisis.

Viktor Mazin: Even now it is very difficult to say anything about the results, because I don't think he was planning to – by means of psychiatry – cope with guilt or master his problems. For him it was part of the, I would say even nervous breakdown, before the exhibition. I am even jumping over the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the ideological questions to the questions of representation and making an exhibition. Because of course he was very *very* nervous about what he would represent in MAK. Have you ever been to MAK?

Amy Bryzgel: No.

Viktor Mazin: Well, then, I can tell you that it is really enormous, and huge. So you have to find lots of stuff to fill it up and of course to make it a good exhibition. So he was really nervous, and this time in the psychiatric hospital was also a time for him to think how to do it, and what to do. Or probably just to not do anything at all and stay in the psychiatric hospital. I don't believe that he wanted to be cured or something – especially nowadays, as I understand now that psychiatry does not cure people at all. So, the principle thing, if we come back from the exhibition in MAK to the situation in the Soviet Union, the principle thing was to find out about the future of the country, let's say. I mean, the patients, they are not prophets, but still they are much more sensitive than so-called 'regular' people to the processes in society. I mean, I could explain it to you as a psychoanalyst. When we are so-called normal, or to be more precise, neurotics, we cover lots of things from ourselves, so we don't see really clearly the situation in society because it is like two organisms connected strictly and directly. The psychotics, the

people who are seriously damaged, they stop hiding something from themselves and that means from the people who are near. Meaning if you want to understand what is going on now in society....for example if I came from New Zealand to Russia and I want to understand what is going on in Russia, the best thing would be precisely to go to the psychiatric hospital and talk to the patients to understand the most difficult and most sensitive questions about society in general. So the basic idea, to my mind, and for Afrika – one idea, of course, was to prepare for the exhibition and get some ideas from the patients, and also to help the patients. But also another thing was, well, let's not say educational, but epistemological – to find out what was going on in society. So in this sense, I think this was a result, by means of communicating with people. I think the feeling of guilt was triggered, but not coped with. Because it was absolutely clear that instead – after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was not just regeneration and coming out, the new Russian democratic republic or something, but it was the immediate influence of the US first of all. Even in the psychiatric hospital it was not so much the KGB in patients' minds, but the CIA. So it was the replacing of one spying system with another. And it is also clear that the difference is really slight, so we understand it as “exchanging a needle for soap,” meaning exchanging nothing for nothing, or exchanging one piece of shit for another. So instead of KGB you have CIA. And that was absolutely clear in the psychiatric hospital, even in the very beginning. This is probably a good example to show how the patients are more sensitive to the changes than so-called normal people. And they felt this shift from one totalitarian ideology to another one, and it was more clear in the psychiatric hospital than anywhere else. Because society was still split, the society which was around the psychiatric hospital was split into the people who were

praising the new regime and the people who were nostalgic for the old regime. So there was the discussion as to who was better or worse, Stalin or Gorbachev, for example. But nobody really understood that the whole symbolic system was changing from Soviet into American. And it was also surprising that it was American, not really surprising but anyway, that it was American and why not European. Why wasn't the orientation from Soviet totalitarianism into Scandinavian socialism? Why was it absolutely oriented just to the US and to a commercial or capitalistic totalitarianism? So it was not about social problems, social security, but just commercialization, which is the most horrible thing working right now in 2007. So *Crimania* was predicting these things more than 10 years ago, it was predicting what would happen in the future. Because capitalism is also a totalitarian system, instead of ideological control, you have right now terrible commercial control. If something is not possible to commercialize then it's out of society completely. I don't want to speak about nowadays, but I just want to say that what we have nowadays in 2007 was clear in the psychiatric hospital even twelve years ago. In this sense we can talk about the results. That's one thing.

Another thing, which is mentioned in the book, is the collective work with the patients, especially the most damaged patients – damaged by society and damaged by psychiatry, to my mind, it's like double damage. And then, I want to jump back and tell you one more thing. In the psychiatric hospital the structure itself is very important, the social structure, which reflects the structure in 'free' society, which is still not free. So, one of the discoveries, which I still remember, which Afrika made in the very first day, is the social structure of the psychiatric hospital, meaning the hierarchy – there are criminals,

there are badly damaged people, there are people that are trying to escape from the army, from prison, and there are orderlies, who are waiting for the moment when the doctors are leaving the hospital for home, and then they are starting immediately to trade drugs for bread and eggs within the hospital, and so it is a real society with a drug and sex market. This was also very interesting, and it is also possible to call this a result, the witnessing of the social structure in the hospital and discovering how it works. Because they can't escape. So for example when I entered the hospital, one guy asked me immediately to exchange money, and of course this is already not the Soviet Union, because there was no currency in the Soviet Union anymore and it was impossible to make any sort of exchange. In the hospital they were producing their own money, and he asked me for dollars, which is also part of the story of what we are seeing now. He didn't want to change his paper money to rubles, but to dollars.

And, of course, I think this collective work with the patients was also a result, because afterward it was exhibited at the exhibition in MAK. Some of the wall newspaper was exhibited. One of the most incredible guys from the hospital – Peregud – lived his whole life in the hospital, he was producing poetry and making these repetitions of one and the same slogan, “all our forces toward the struggle for the betterment of the future of society,” for twenty years. And of course we exhibited some of these repetitions in MAK. And of course the work by Afrika, *Heroes of the Soviet Union*, from when I brought him that book. This was also a result, a material result. So we can divide the results into some material ones and some epistemological ones. Of course he had both of them. But to my mind it's much more difficult to speak about the results in terms of the psyche, because

on the one hand of course it's a great experience, but on the other hand, you can't be cured by psychiatry, you can be even more damaged, so, we can't speak about the results in the sense of a cure.

Amy Bryzgel: You had also written something about determining “the correlation between the collective and the individual consciousness”...

Viktor Mazin: It's weird for me to hear this, because I've changed so much in the last 15 years. The word “collective” sounds weird to me...

Amy Bryzgel: Samokhvalov had mentioned something about Afrika being a hero and a shaman, but now it seems like it was more an individual/personal thing, rather than healing the whole nation, so I was wondering about the collective/individual, and how you were thinking about that. Was it just about him as an individual or were you also thinking about the collective?

Viktor Mazin: Sincerely, I was much more worried about Afrika himself. He was much more worried about the ideological system in general, but I was much more concentrated on his experience there and for me it was necessary also to keep him in this hospital because, well...It's clear that he wanted to be there, and to be strong and to finish this experience, but also he was hesitating, and almost every day he was trying to escape the hospital, because it was a very hard experience. But I was trying to convince him not to leave before it was time. But also, for me it was weird there. For me maybe it was

important to focus on him and his experience, to help him and to understand him. But also I was interested not so much in society and the processes in society in general but in psychiatry. So for me it was really focused on psychiatry. You know that it was all planned and, for me it was a regular person (well, of course he's not regular, but for me someone close), and I never thought he could be diagnosed as schizophrenic. For me that was the biggest surprise, in the beginning – how easy it was to announce that someone is schizophrenic. But I'm not completely sure that there is such a thing in the textbook. I remember it very clearly, when we just came to Simferopol, and he was supposed to go straight to Samokhvalov, but instead he went to the cinema, to a restaurant, and I was saying “no, no, no, let's go to Samokhvalov.” And when I came the next morning it was really, for me, unpredictable, that this doctor would say, “well, your relative has typical regular schizophrenia, we will give him some drugs and he will be ok in a month.” So let's just say that my main interest was focused on Afrika and his experience and his condition in the psychiatric hospital, and what psychiatry means in general. And his focus was more broad, let's say, but at the same time much more narrow, and focused on himself, due to the art exhibition and in general the whole idea of the art exhibition, which was connected with the whole empire and the collapse of the empire. So his question – our questions – were in a different strata. Mine – psychiatry and a person being imprisoned by the psychiatry. Him – the empire and its collapse.

Well, you have to understand one more thing, which might be in the catalogue – the figure of the director of MAK, Peter Noever, this really great man who is an ‘emperor’ himself. So, Peter's interest was on the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Soviet Union

and what is happening with the symbols and the system in general. So, in a way, it is also part of the expectations from the head of one of the biggest museums in Europe, and you as an artist. It's terrible responsibility. We're speaking about two responsibilities – one, which we discussed before, this responsibility for destroying the Soviet Union, and another responsibility for creating an exhibition in such an enormous important place as MAK. And especially when somebody like Peter Noever is saying “I trust you, go ahead.”

Amy Bryzgel: What do you think of this diagnosis of schizophrenia, do you really trust it and believe it, especially when schizophrenia was one of the most popular diagnoses during the Soviet period?

Viktor Mazin: It's a real discrepancy in my head – not now; now it's much more clear, I know much better now what psychiatry in general means. I think it's a terribly repressive system. But I trusted our friends – I trusted Samokhvalov completely, for me he was a humanist, not a part of the repressive system, but a guy who was developing his own psychiatry called evolutionary psychiatry, a guy who was really loved by the patients – I saw it with my own eyes. The moment he entered the hospital everybody, all the patients, was happy to hear him and talk to him, etc. So, speaking about the diagnosis of schizophrenia, for me it was a real discrepancy, because I knew about Sizhnevsky, the professor who announced that everyone in the Soviet Union had schizophrenia, except for the high members [of the politburo], and all of a sudden, we're dealing with my friends, who are not part of this system. So I couldn't understand that at this time, that the

man who was not a part of this system....for me, Samokhvalov was a great man, and I couldn't understand the connection between him and psychiatry. Now it's much more clear, 100%, I have a completely different attitude. I still respect Samokhvalov, I love him as a man who drinks wine and talks about some weird theories, but I would never trust him as a psychiatrist – because he is a psychiatrist, and I don't trust them anyway. But at that moment it was particularly the idea about this psychiatrist and that psychiatrist, and everybody who was working with Afrika in the hospital, they belonged to the school of Samokhvalov, and that means that everybody was doing a really good job in the sense of psychiatry. So, for me, I couldn't understand at that time whether it was a mistake to claim that he was schizophrenic, or whether it was part of the old ideological institution of psychiatry, or what it was. I didn't understand at that time that it was about everybody – everybody who is not welcomed in society might be claimed to be psychotic. But I think the difference is clear. Twelve years ago I was thinking that it's because of his artistic nature and because of his great, weird ideas that he was schizophrenic, but not because he happened to be in the psychiatric system which is imprisoning people by labeling them with all of these things – paranoid, etc. My attitude nowadays is completely different, but at that moment I was almost shocked, when this doctor, who was a really nice young man, told me “your relative is a schizophrenic, but don't worry about that, we will fix him in one month.”

Amy Bryzgel: Do you think that in terms of psychiatry in general, that Afrika changed after the three weeks in the hospital?

Viktor Mazin: No, to my mind no. In this sense we can't speak about the result of the experience. Hopefully he didn't change. I think it's a very good result – having no result. First of all, you know that he was in a psychiatric hospital before, and he was the craziest guy in the psychiatric hospital in Leningrad at that time. They got rid of him. He put himself in the psychiatric hospital in order not to go into the army, so he tended to behave really wildly in the hospital, he started to teach other patients to eat flowers, to destroy the order, so in some time, they claimed – it's really weird – the psychiatrists said that he was the craziest patient there, but they let him leave freely. There was no place for him, the craziest person.

One thing is very clear for me, Afrika didn't change at all, and this is the best part, and the most amazing part of his life, and it is very easy for me to describe it. Normally people live in quite restricted circumstances. Since that time, I spent a lot of time with Afrika in all sorts of circumstances, but I have established one and the same thing. He is the rarest person on this planet, who feels more or less comfortable, who is ready to be – even in the psychiatric hospital – in the most horrible conditions, and then in a five star hotel. He spent the night of the 27th of February in the psychiatric hospital, then Peter Noever came with his daughter, we had dinner in a restaurant and then we moved to a luxury hotel, and had lots of fun there. And it is like that until now. And he is my teacher in this way, and I really respect him because of this. It was the same way in the psychiatric hospital. You can imagine the scene where on one side you have a seriously damaged patient and on the other, Peter Noever, one of the most powerful museum directors in the world [and Afrika can communicate with both of them – AB].

And that's Afrika, he didn't change at all, and I hope he will always be like this, in all sorts of social strata.

Amy Bryzgel: In that sense he was really the patients' equal, wouldn't you say? One of the criticisms of this performance is that he was exploiting the patients in the psychiatric institute.

Viktor Mazin: This is very stupid to say because he was doing this work himself, and this is typical psychiatric work, this book [*Hereos of the Soviet Union*], when he was cutting out the portraits. It's typical psychiatric work, cutting and pasting. And by means of doing this himself, he was provoking other people to do art work. And he was never using words such as "art therapy," for example. It was 100% *not* exploitation. So, exploitation would be if he came and said, you do this work and I will pay you in eggs and bread. That would be typical of exploitation.

Amy Bryzgel: But there are also the photographs that he exhibited of the other patients...

Viktor Mazin: Do you know about the exhibition *Doctor and Patient* in Pori, the next year? There he exhibited his psychiatric "costume" and also portraits of the doctors, portraits of the patients. I don't see any exploitation at all.

They have to understand that it's not the thing when one is violent to the other. There is no "ordering." Exploitation means that "I order you to do something," but that is not the

case here. It's a good idea to criticize people who exploit others, but this is not the idea here. And another thing which is important, which is also clear, it was not from the very first day. So, if he had a plan, then it would have started from the very first day, also because it might help him to get rid of some dark ideas about his circumstance in the psychiatric hospital..."so I give the work to these people in the hospital, and we start now, and then we will finish it by the end of the second week, and then I take all the art works and exhibit them"...it was only by the end of the second week [that he started working with the patients – AB]....so, he spent ten days or something just getting to know the others. Because he couldn't – he's not the type of person to plan anything at all, he's so spontaneous, and changes his mind so many times, really very creative, but very chaotic. But to make a plan, for example, "I need twenty works by the patients..." then it would even be possible to do it without even going to *Crimea*, just with a phone call to Samokhvalov: "I need twenty paintings, so many meters by so many meters, etc." So, I think you could explain to the audience that this is a different situation, and that was not the case.

Amy Bryzgel: I'm wondering if you think that this aphasia, glossolalia exist even today in Russia, for example this "KOFE XAOS" [a café-type chain, like Starbucks, which is very popular in Russia today], written in Cyrillic – do you think that this whole condition has really continued, because of all of the Americanization?

Viktor Mazin: Yes, I think that, as I mentioned already, it was not so much clear – during that time [of *Crimania*] it was clear to the patients, that the most important thing is:

dollars. And, nowadays, it's much more obvious...not necessarily to everybody...when it became a dominant ideology, the whole social structure...this country isn't going according to the European route, it's much closer, by construction, to Europe, to France, so this process is on its way. And the more powerful Putin is, the more he is copying George W. Bush. It's not about Putin himself, but about the structure and the social system.

Appendix V

Interview: Katarzyna Kozyra and Amy Bryzgel

Original interview in Polish transcribed by Piotr Karski

September 22, 2007

Location: Katarzyna Kozyra's Studio in Berlin, Germany

Amy Bryzgel: Chciałam zapytać o Twoje studia? Czego się uczyłaś? Czego ten Kowalski uczył Cię o sztuce konceptualnej i o feminizmie?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Za moich czasów w szkole w ogóle nie było czegoś takiego jak nauczanie o feminizmie. To dopiero jakieś kilka lat temu zostało wprowadzone. Osobiście ja na akademii to nic nie wiedziałam o tym. No ale ten Kowalski jednak coś nas uczył o konceptualizmie. Na pierwszym roku to były obowiązkowe zajęcia u Kowalskiego. Trzeba było robić akty z gliny. Wszyscy szliśmy wtedy do Kowalskiego. A potem można było sobie wybrać pracownię. Wybrałam sobie Kowalskiego, bo słyszałam, że jest to jedyny taki inteligentny facet. Jego postać była otoczona taką aurą, że wszyscy się bali tego Kowalskiego. No oczywiście ja też się bałam tego Kowalskiego. Z teorią ja jestem raczej tak na bakier, ja jestem raczej praktyka. Zawsze praktykuję, a nie teoretyzuję i zawsze tak było. Prawda jest taka, że u Kowalskiego można było robić to co się chce, a nie jakieś tam konceptualne tylko rzeczy. My nawet nie widzieliśmy co on robi, dopiero po studiach zaczął robić jakieś wystawy, jakieś katalogi zaczęły wychodzić.

To żeśmy się dopiero zorientowali co on robił. Wcześniej było tylko wiadomo, że był to intelektualista i konceptualista. Ale o co tam więcej chodziło to nie wiedzieliśmy.

Amy Bryzgel: A czy mówiliście coś więcej tym?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Nie, właściwie filozofia i historia sztuki kończyła się na latach 50-tych, czy tam 40-tych nawet. Dlatego wszystkie zajęcia teoretyczne wyglądały prawdopodobnie tak samo jak na Łotwie.

Amy Bryzgel: Czytałam, że w latach 70-tych było trochę więcej rzeczy eksperymentalnych, jakieś performance.

Katarzyna Kozyra: Oczywiście, że były. Byłam w takiej sytuacji, że wychowywałam się w Wiedniu i w Monachium, dopiero w wieku 17 lat dojechałam do Warszawy i tak naprawdę to ja się nie interesowałam sztuką. Poza tym wtedy to mi się wydawało, że ta sztuka to coś takiego dziwnego, takie zadzieranie nosa. Takie bardziej zamknięte koła, no bo musiały być zamknięte. Tak właściwie to nic na ten temat nie widziałam i właściwie nie wiedziałam kogo to tak naprawdę interesuje. Nie było w ogóle do tego dostępu. To wszystko jest takie inne dopiero później się dowiedziałam czegoś na temat sztuki konceptualnej. No ale wiesz Kowalski był w tym sensie dobrą równowagą. Można było u niego kompletnie nic nie robić tylko mu opowiadać, zawsze brał na dywanik i kazał omawiać jakieś projekty. No i wiadomo, że jego asystent też konceptualista. To wszystko było gdzieś na jakimś takim intelektualnym poziomie. W ogóle wszyscy ci, którzy poszli

do niego nie byli tacy przeintelektualizowani. Może tam jedynie Wiśniewski tak się intelektualizował trochę.

Amy Bryzgel: Myślę, że Twoja sztuka taka właśnie jest...

Katarzyna Kozyra: Niezupełnie tak jest. Nie mam jakiejś tam teorii. Znaczący się może miewam jakieś teorie, ale nie jest tak, że mam teorię i według niej zaczynam coś tam robić. Może to jest tak właśnie tak w tych amerykańskich szkołach, chodzi o to przygotowanie teorii do tego co się robi. Czyli uczenie ludzi do tego aby potem opowiadali o tym co zrobili. Wiesz nie wiem może Kowalski usiłował coś takiego wprowadzić, ale musiał się dostosować do ludzi, którzy do niego przyszli. To właśnie tak było na drugim roku, że tak mało było u niego wszyscy pracowni osób, bo wszyscy się tak wystraszyli tego teoretyzowania i intelektualizowania. On się musiał po prostu dostosować. Ale on dawał nam takie śmieszne zadania, bo on był właśnie taki podczas wspólnych narad. On patrzył zawsze na wspólne i własne. Dawał jakiś temat jakiś stół czy coś tam, i wtedy potem jakieś parę osób musiało w praktycznej formie się na ten temat wypowiadać. Uczył czegoś takiego i to było ciekawe bardzo. Niektórzy właśnie niszczyli prace innym, tak dla zabawy, u niego studia były o.k. Faktem jest też, że można było pogadać jak się chciało, że nie chodziło tylko o to żeby zrobić jakieś studium z natury. Dopuszczał też wszelkie inne sztuki, wiesz na przykład fotografie no wideo jeszcze wtedy nie było. Wszystko to było dopuszczane jakieś performance i tak dalej. Wszystko, co chciałaś zrobić mogłaś po prostu sobie zrobić. Nie mając oczywiście takiej bazy dydaktycznej na temat tego, co chciałaś robić.

Amy Bryzgel: No oczywiście czytałam dużo na twój temat o tym, co tworzyłaś na studiach, czy było coś podobnego do na przykład tej piramidy zwierząt czy performance?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Na studiach zawsze robiłam to, co on kazał robić, znaczy się kazał, każdy robił jakieś zadania a jeśli ktoś nie robił tego, co on mówił, to on się bardzo cieszył, że ktoś miał swoje pomysły. Nikt nie musiał robić tego, co on mówił, te jego zadania były jedynie taką konstrukcją takim kręgosłupem żeby ludzie jednak byli aktywni. No, ale jak ktoś nie miał swojego pomysłu to robił wtedy to, co on mówił. Większość ludzi jeszcze na studiach nie miała takich swoich pomysłów określonych. Tak naprawdę to ja robiłam to, co on chciał, ale robiłam też zdjęcia, pracowałam często w domu, a później przychodziłam do pracowni i już miałam gotowe. Co jeszcze? Aha! Jeszcze on nam kiedyś załatwił taką modelkę anorektyczkę, dziewczynę strasznie chudą i cienką, to wtedy właśnie się wyżywałam w takich małych modelach. No i tak naprawdę to się tak poruszałam trochę po omacku, nie wiedziałam za bardzo, co robić. Nie wiedziałam, do czego się odnieść. Ta Piramida to właściwie była pierwsza taka rzecz, kiedy do mnie dotarło, że właściwie tak naprawdę nie wiem, co ja chcę robić. No właśnie, że nie mam się do czego odnieść. Takie jakiś formalne rzeczy jakieś wyszukane to mnie w ogóle nie interesują. Miała też coś takiego dziwnego, że jak miałam jakiś pomysł to nie byłam go w stanie zrobić, bo mi się wydawało, że to wyjdzie w ogóle paskudnie. Ta piramida to była właściwie pierwsza moja taka ciekawa rzecz.

Amy Bryzgel: No bardzo ciekawa rzecz dla Polski.

Katarzyna Kozyra: Właśnie tą piramidę zwierząt miałam zrobić na dyplom, no to on w ogóle nie rozumiał na początku, że ja chcę tego konia zrobić. No i jeszcze zmuszał mnie do tego, że ja mam mu mały model tego przynieść. Oczywiście ja mu tłumaczyłam, że nie mogę tego zrobić. No to on zaczął mi grozić, że mnie nie dopuści do dyplomu. Dopiero wszystko było o.k. jak ja poprosiłam kolegę i kolega dopiero mi zrobił mały model ze szkielecików. Pewnego dnia ja do niego przyszłam, bo on prowadził pracownię fotografii, no i powiedziałam mu właśnie, że ja uśpiłam tego konia... Ale to właśnie, dlatego, że on jest konceptualista to coś mu nie pasowało, że ktoś może naprawdę tak po chamsku coś zrobić.

Amy Bryzgel: A pamiętasz tą książkę *Primary Documents*, kiedy byłeś w MOMA? Ktoś Cię pytał o to czy twoja sztuka się zmieniła po latach 80-tych? No bo mówiłaś, że nie. Mówiłaś, że wszystko było wolne na studiach i że nie czułaś żadnych ograniczeń na studiach. Czy wszystko mogłaś powiedzieć przez swoją sztukę?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Mój problem polegał prawdopodobnie na tym, że ja nie mam nic do powiedzenia.

Amy Bryzgel: Wspominałaś też coś o tym, że przeprowadziłaś się z Monachium do Warszawy?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Urodziłam się w Warszawie, ale jak miałam 3 lata to wyjechaliśmy na 5 lat do Austrii, potem przyjechaliśmy na 2 lata do Polski, a jeszcze potem na 6 lat do Monachium. Czyli właściwie dopiero jak miałam 17 lat to wróciłam do Polski.

Amy Bryzgel: A czy jak byłaś młodsza to interesowałaś się już sztuką? Czy chodziłaś na wystawy?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Oczywiście chodziliśmy z rodzicami do muzeum czy na jakieś wystawy. Także wiesz dosyć wcześnie już się interesowałam sztuką. Wiesz to wszystko było dla mnie ciekawe.

Amy Bryzgel: Ale jak to jest teraz, bo wspominałaś o feminizmie o konceptualizmie i tak dalej.

Katarzyna Kozyra: Wszystkie te książki takie specjalistyczne wiesz, które trzeba było przeczytać to ja zaczynałam czytać dopiero tak może w '96, '97 i '98 roku. No jak już to wszystko wtedy szybko przerobiłam to nie wiedziałam do końca tak naprawdę, co jest grane. (...)

Amy Bryzgel: Chciałam jeszcze zapytać o Olimpię? Czy wiedziałaś, że ten wzór już zrobiła inna osoba (n.p. Schneeman) wcześniej?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Nie właśnie nie wiedziałam. Ale jak już ją robiłam to właśnie mi się wydawało, że coś jest nie tak. Jak robiłam te dekory to właśnie myślałam bardziej jak facet. Chciałam zrobić coś żeby się nie utraciło. Więc ja wtedy przebywałam tylko z facetami, bo te wszystkie baby wtedy wydawały mi się głupie. Tak nie chciałam wiesz żeby mi to zginęło, naprawdę miałam problem, że mi to zginie. Ale tak do końca nie wiedziałam, o co mi z tym chodzi. To wszystko było takie bardziej intuicyjne tak jak ta Łaźnia czy Olimpia.

Amy Bryzgel: Właśnie czytałam trochę na ten temat jak doszłaś do tego z Łaźnią Damską, że byłaś na Węgrzech i chciałam zapytać jak potem doszłaś do tego w związku z tą Łaźnią Męską? W jaki sposób zdecydowałaś się iść dalej i ja potem do tego dotarłaś?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Znaczy się wiesz to było tak prawdopodobnie, że właśnie zawsze lubię albo zamącić albo robić tak na przekór, wszyscy lubią tak pokazywać te piękne kobiety, natomiast już z facetami jest inaczej. To nie jest tak, że ja sama kobieta będę pokazywać kobiety, taka samo ja kobieta mogę wyjść i pokazać pięknych facetów. Po pierwsze to jest tak, że jest to takie niezależne od mojej płci. Ale to też jest tak na przekór no i to jest tak na przekór tym wszystkim facetom.

Amy Bryzgel: Trudno jest być kobietą w Polsce w tych czasach co nie? Mówiąc o te Więzy Krwi, wiem że były cenzurowane plakaty. Wiem, że ludzie się gniewali na Ciebie.

Katarzyna Kozyra: No bo oni to jakoś idiotycznie jednoznacznie zaczęli odczytywać jako symbole religijne, tylko i wyłącznie.

Amy Bryzgel: Wiem, wiem ale nie o to mi chodzi. Chciałam się dowiedzieć na temat tego AMS w Poznaniu, jeśli dobrze to rozumiem, że to oni cię prosili żeby to cenzurować.

Katarzyna Kozyra: Oni się tak zabezpieczyli, że jak przyjdzie, co, do czego to oni się mnie spytali czy będą mogli to zaklejać.

Amy Bryzgel: Ale ty się zgodziłaś na to?

Katarzyna Kozyra: No tak no co i oni się tak zabezpieczyli, że jak będzie jakaś afery czy coś to że oni będą mogli to zakleić. No i ja im powiedziałam, że mogą. To znaczy jak bym powiedziała, że nie mogą to oni by to całe zakleili a tak to tylko tą białą część. Nie miałam w sumie nic do gadania. No ale jeden dzień czy dwa to wisiało takie także było dobrze już nie pamiętam ile to wisiało. Więc gdybym na początku powiedziała „nie nie zgadzam się żebyście mi to zaklejali” to prawdopodobnie oni by tego wcale nie plakatowali. A tak to wisiało trochę.

Amy Bryzgel: Zawsze tak jest, że jak coś jest cenzurowane to jest wtedy ciekawsze. Właśnie, dlatego, że jest cenzurowane.

Katarzyna Kozyra: Ale to nie było tak że oni sami postanowili to ocenzurować, tylko jakieś grupki się zaczęły rzucać. Noi potem to ocenzurowali. To nie była wiesz jakaś sztuczna akcja, że najpierw to zawiesimy a potem ocenzurujemy, wiesz. Tylko to było jakiś dzień przed przyjazdem papieża czy coś. Po prostu tak wyszło nie wierzę, że to było zaplanowane.

Amy Bryzgel: No dobrze to teraz porozmawiamy o Łażni Męskiej, jak to było z tym konkursem?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Znaczy się to był pierwszy taki wolny konkurs, w którym mógł uczestniczyć każdy. Wszyscy po prostu mogli uczestniczyć wszyscy, co chcieli tylko musieli mieć pomysł i musieli umieć go przedstawić. Noi wyobraź sobie, że wtedy taka Hanka Wróblewska mnie się wtedy spytała czy będzie taka sytuacja, co nie, czy ja jestem za tym. Czy będę coś przedstawiać? Czy ona mogłaby to zrobić ze mną? Powiedziałam że o.k. No ale Hanka mówiła że nie wie jeszcze czy będziemy przedstawiać coś nowego, że jeszcze nie wiadomo co będziemy przedstawiać. A ja powiedziałam Hance, że jak co to ja chcę właśnie tą Łażnię Męską zrobić. No i wiesz to i tak dziwnie było, że mimo wszystko, że wszyscy mogli startować to wystartowało tylko 3 kuratorów. No po prostu już nikt inny, no właśnie to była Hanka ze mną, jakaś inna galeria miejska i ktoś tam. Bo to pierwszy raz było tak jakoś nie od górnicy, że jest jakiś konkurs.

Amy Bryzgel: Czytałam, że oni wybrali nie tyle co sztukę ale artystę, że Ty byłaś wybrana. Ale czy oni wiedzieli, że to była Łażnia Męska?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Nie właśnie nie ja do ostatniej chwili nie mówiłam, co to jest.

Dopiero chyba tydzień przed biennale zrobiłam taką reklamę właśnie jakieś katalogi trochę takich rzeczy w prezencie. No i właśnie jak już siedzieliśmy w samolocie jak lecieliśmy do Wenecji to czytaliśmy takie artykuły, że Kozyra coś tam. Niektórzy się naśmiewali. Chcieliśmy uniknąć tego wiesz żeby tak było to źle zrozumiane. Już na 2 miesiące przed biennale zaczęło się coś mącić a to nie było pieniędzy, nie było sponsorów i w ogóle jakaś taka walka wiesz. Więc nawet bez tych brukowców gdyby tak nic nie pisali to byłoby jeszcze gorzej.

Amy Bryzgel: A kiedy rozmawiałaś z Hanką to już wiedziałaś, że to będzie Łąźnia Męska czy nie?

Katarzyna Kozyra: No ja od razu wiedziałam, że to ma być to. Ale ona się zastanawiała czy to ma być Łąźnia czy coś nowego. Ewentualnie czy to ma być pojedyncza wystawa, czy to będzie właśnie coś takiego. Ale ja i tak miałam to robić więc miałam już pewien pomysł. A ja jeszcze jeździłam do Budapesztu z kolegami filmować jakieś tam plenery i żeby to sprawdzić wszystko. A to wszystko jednak tylko nam to ułatwiło i przyspieszyło całą sprawę.

Amy Bryzgel: Nie mówiłaś też nic na temat tego problemu z Piramidą, że ten Cattelan ukradł twój pomysł.

Katarzyna Kozyra: W sumie to on był i nie był. On twierdził, że go nie ukradł. Ale ja nie wiem.

Amy Bryzgel: Rozmawiałaś z nim? I co on powiedział?

Katarzyna: On powiedział, że nie. Co miałam mówić, że się cieszę? Nic by to nie dało przecież to byłoby po prostu śmieszne. Poza tym moje prace nie pojawiały się w żadnych galeriach, żadnego obiegu komercyjnego, a nie jak u niego w Polsce i za granicą. Ja byłam po prostu bezwartościowa w porównaniu do niego. Więc mnie nie zależało, co on tam robił. Bo inni na tym zarabiają i świetnie funkcjonują. Zarabiają na tym to w ogóle jakiś idiotyzm, bo oni robią to co chcą.

Amy Bryzgel: Biedne kobiety...Ale nie powiedziałaś też nikomu o tej Łażni Męskiej?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Wiesz, bo strasznie trudno jest o dobry pomysł i ludzie nawet nie wiedzą, że ci go zabierają.

Amy Bryzgel: Ale szczerze mówiąc szukałam i nie mogłam znaleźć niczego takiego jak Łażnia Męska. Żadna kobieta ani facet, żaden artysta nie zrobił niczego takiego. Czytałam też o tym jak oni mówili o biednych kobietach w Łażni i że coś miało się znaleźć w sądzie?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Wiesz prawdopodobnie niektóre pisma były zainteresowane żeby coś zamieszać, jakieś zdjęcia zrobione po cichu w Zachęcie, które zaczęli potem publikować. Ale miałam nadzieję żeby im nic z tego nie wyszło. Ale jeśli chodzi o Łaźnię Męską to ja niechcący taką grubą szychę sfilmowałam, dyrektora węgierskiej telewizji czy coś. No i z tego mogło coś wyniknąć. No i właśnie potem tą jedyną rzecz jaką pokazali w węgierskiej telewizji to była ta szycha. Potem słyszałam, że on wystąpi do sądu czy coś, ale zrezygnował, bo wtedy on sam by za dużo sobie namieszał. Jeszcze więcej ludzi by się o tym dowiedziało.

Amy Bryzgel: Rozmawiamy o tym Żeńskim i Męskim. Interesuje mnie co widzi widz w Łaźni? Jakie są twoje idee, twój pomysł na ten temat?

Katarzyna Kozyra: No ja to przede wszystkim chciałam żeby ludzie zobaczyli jak wyglądają kobiety, bo to zawsze jest jakaś kobieta wyimaginowana. Ludzie tak jakby sobie nie zdają sprawy, że kobieta to jest normalny organizm. Jedna wygląda tak, druga inaczej, tak się porusza, tak właśnie robi to są prawdziwe kobiety, a nie jakieś wyimaginowane. Później widziałam, że nastolatki mieli problemy niesamowite, nastoletni chłopcy, że dziewczyny wiesz w takim skupieniu i tak poważnie wszystko oglądały i wszystko było o.k. A faceci właśnie ci młodzi nie wiedzieli jak się zachować, a to wybuchali śmiechem wiesz taki nerwowy śmiech, a to co innego. Chciałam żeby było tak sprawiedliwie, że kobiety mają tak a mężczyźni tak, wiesz. To są kobiety i koniec. No i kobiety też były bardzo zadowolone, że to były prawdziwe kobiety a nie jakieś laski wiesz pod odpowiednim kątem sfotografowane. Taki był właściwie zamiar.

Amy Bryzgel: A czy wyobrażasz sobie, że będzie jakiś nowy wzór kobiety, piękności?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Nie myślę, że nie. Kobiety są dla siebie własnym wzorem. Chociaż wiesz laski zwłaszcza w Stanach próbują się tak upodobnić do gwiazd. Ale przecież one wszystkie wyglądają tak samo, te nastoletnie promowane gwiazdeczki.

Amy Bryzgel: Myślę, że w Polsce też tak jest jak te wszystkie disco kobietki, zawsze gotowe żeby iść do dyskoteki.

Katarzyna Kozyra: Nie ja nie myślałam żeby coś zmieniać. Nigdy tak nie myślałam. Myślę tylko żeby coś zakomunikować. Ale ja nigdy nie miałam czegoś takiego, że ja chcę coś zmienić.

Amy Bryzgel: Szczególnie właśnie w mas mediach i telewizji oglądamy takie doskonałe kobiety, takie laski. Jaki był twój stosunek do tej tendencji, po roku '89? Bo wcześniej nie było dużo takich treści.

Katarzyna Kozyra: To się odnosi to historii sztuki, że jest malarz i jego modelka. No i temat też taki wiesz jakieś „body motion”. A to wcale nieprawda, że jak tutaj się tak tylko uśmiecha... To tak naprawdę nie jest tak. To był taki temat po prostu jak pokazać gołą babę najlepiej oczywiście w kąpielni pokazać nagie ciało. Tak to wtedy było widziane.

Amy Bryzgel: Można powiedzieć, że ten akt też jest taki symboliczny w Polsce, bo najpierw jest ten katolicyzm...

Katarzyna Kozyra: Ale wtedy jeszcze katolicyzm się tak nie rozpanoszył on dopiero teraz się tak rozpanoszył. Teraz to już jest wręcz jakaś perwersja. Wtedy to było jeszcze za komuny to nie można było no i właśnie później ten kościół wiesz tak zaczął rosnać.

Amy Bryzgel: Ale w sumie ten kościół pomógł skończyć z komunizmem... Ale wtedy też były pewne ograniczenia w sztuce w czasach PRL jeśli chodzi o akty...

Katarzyna Kozyra: Możliwe, ale ja tak dokładnie to nie wiem. Może były ograniczenia. No, ale na przykład Nowosielski też gołe kobiety malował. Ale tak naprawdę to nie mam pojęcia. A na przykład ta sztuka ciała co robili te performance, ta cała Natalia LL i tak dalej to one też raczej gołe te kobiety. To jeszcze w latach '60-tych robili na przykład jakaś tam goła pani naprzeciwko policjantki. Ale wtedy też ta sztuka nie była taka wszechobecna w świadomości wszystkich. Sztuka to sztuka, wiesz sztuka to jakieś głupie obrazki myślano wtedy.

Amy Bryzgel: Tutaj chciałam jeszcze nawiązać do tej tradycji kobiety w sztuce, tej piękności. Czy chciałaś złamać tę tradycyjną ideę kobiecej piękności?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Przede wszystkim to ja chciałam żeby kobiety nie czuły się zmuszane do czegośkolwiek. Ale to jest dla nich jakaś presja. Na przykład jak szukałam jakichś

starszych kobiet żeby z nimi popracować i porobić im jakieś zdjęcia, to było wręcz niemożliwe. „Nie bo to może ładniejsze sobie znajdziesz ja taka brzydka”. Tak naprawdę to kobiety są piękne w każdym wieku, nie tylko te młode i piękne. Trudno było im wytłumaczyć o co mi chodzi.

Amy Bryzgel: No właśnie wiem, że jest taka tendencja w Polsce „Nie ja jestem gorsza, nie fotografuj mnie...”

Katarzyna Kozyra: A przy Łażni Damskiej to nie musiałam się nikogo pytać, wzięłam kamerę, schowałam ją i poszłam. W ten oto sposób rozwiązałam problem.

Amy Bryzgel: Mówiłaś już, dlaczego zrobiłaś też Męską, że jak już zrobiłaś Łażnię Damską to i zrobisz Męską. Czy też myślałaś o ideale piękna w Łażni Męskiej?

Katarzyna Kozyra: No wiesz oni wcale lepiej nie wyglądają, każdy wygląda jak wygląda. Dokładnie. No ale jest coś takiego w naszym społeczeństwie, że mężczyzna nie musi dobrze wyglądać, ale musi zarabiać. Muszą niby utrzymywać te rodziny, znaczy się nie wiem czy muszą, czy nie muszą, ale tak jest. Muszą też być gotowi seksualnie. Więc też mają tutaj niezłą rolę. Tylko, że może mężczyźni się tak nie bronią, bo kobiety zaczęły się bronić wiesz te feministki i tak dalej. A myślę, że ci faceci mogliby zacząć się bronić.

Amy Bryzgel: A czy ta Łażnia Męska nie była też odbierana trochę przez gejów, że jest to miejsce spotkań dla nich?

Katarzyna Kozyra: To przypadkowo wszystko wyszło, po prostu stawiasz kamerę i nagrywasz to co jest, a to że jest tam aż tyle tych gejów no to jest. Nie wiedziałam że to zostanie w ten sposób odebrane. No ale wiesz jeden z tych facetów też gej opowiadał mi co się tam dzieje, że jeden drugiemu na przykład konia wali w tym basenie. Oczywiście geje się tam nie afiszują, bo chodzą tam też heteroseksualiści.

Amy Bryzgel: Czy myślałaś o tym, że jest to miejsce publiczne, ale które pokazuje prywatne strony życia?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Nie chyba nie. To nic takiego politycznego. To raczej była okazja na taki National Geographic, wiesz jak podglądasz na przykład mrówki tak tu podglądasz chłopów.

Amy Bryzgel: Używałaś video, bo jest to najnowsze?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Miałam kiedyś taką teorię, że taka dokumentacja video nie zakłamuje, takie jeden do jednego. Oczywiście wiadomo, że ja potem tym manipuluję, bo wywalam część nagrania. Wywalałam to wszystko, co było kompletnie nieciekawe. Kolorystycznie patrzyłam na określone ruchy jakieś... Więc wiadomo, że jak nic się nie działo to ja to wypieprzałam. Po co tego 20 godzin, kiedy wystarczy godzina. No, ale cały materiał mi się podobał, że jest to takie niby jeden do jednego z rzeczywistością.

Amy Bryzgel: Ale to jest taki nowoczesny język mamy Mtv i tak dalej...Myślę, że to też pomogło komunikować się z ludźmi.

Katarzyna Kozyra: Tak, że to łatwiejszy komunikat...Ludzie są do tego przyzwyczajeni.

Amy Bryzgel: Rozmawialiśmy już trochę o tym jak ludzie na to reagowali. Bo minęło trochę już czasu od tych skandali w twojej sztuce w Polsce przynajmniej. Co myślisz teraz o tamtych czasach o tych skandalach? Czy myślisz, że to pomagało ludziom myśleć o sztuce czy to tylko takie głupoty?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Myślę, że nie było żadnego skandalu już związanego ze sztuką przed Piramidą Zwierząt. No ale ludzie też prawdopodobnie nie bardzo się interesowali, więc prawdopodobnie nie wiedzieli że coś takiego jest. Jakby ten problem zupełnie nie istniał. Sztuka współczesna nie była częścią życia w ogóle. Także przez to, że to się rozgrywało na poziomie skandali mimo wszystko to docierało do szerszej publiczności. A potem inni artyści zaczęli wywoływać skandale, ale to jest O.K. Chociaż wtedy to był obciach.

Amy Bryzgel: Mówiłaś, że wcześniej nie było takiej sztuki...Myślę, że polski widz był bardzo konserwatywny.

Katarzyna Kozyra: Oni nie są konserwatywni. Myślę, że Polacy są bardzo zaściankowi, taka jest jakaś niska świadomość. Europejczycy mają niby jakiś poziom stylu i świadomości, ale Polacy wypadają tutaj kiepsko. No bo to wszystko katolicy, chodzą do

tego kościoła i słuchają tych bredni, znaczy się nie wszystko są brednie, ale idziesz i słuchasz tych bredni. Dlatego wiesz te chuje zaczęli tak manipulować wiesz tymi wyborami. Pozwalają sobie za dużo.

Katarzyna Kozyra: Byłam na ślubie w kościele i oni tam mówili o wyborach. Straszne. Dlatego jestem ciekawa, bo jesteś we Włoszech, jesteś tutaj w Berlinie, ale to jest dlatego, że miałaś dość?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Nie znaczy nie. Tutaj po prostu dostałam stypendium takie roczne w 2003. To było tak śmiesznie, bo ja chciałam uciec z tego zaścianka. To właśnie dzięki temu. Poza tym miałam już dość przypatrywania się temu, co ja robię przez ten pryzmat skandalizmu. Mogłam piękny nowy skandal zrobić, ale nie pokazałam tego, co trzeba i wiesz. Miałam po prostu dość.

Amy Bryzgel: Mogę sobie wyobrazić jak oni reagowali na to. Pamiętam już ten *In Art Dreams Come True*, ale to było to w Nowym Jorku. Jakie byłyby ich reakcje jak byłaś w tym geju klubie? Myślę, że oni tego nie zrozumieli. Myślę, że teraz jest gorzej przez tą paradę gejów.

Katarzyna Kozyra: Jest zupełny brak świadomości. Jeszcze do tego doszło to zakłamanie.

Amy Bryzgel: A czy chcesz teraz robić wystawy w Polsce? Czy planujesz jakieś projekty? Chcesz je robić gdziekolwiek?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Mogę robić wiesz nie ma problemu. Ale tego się nie planuje oni cię po prostu zapraszają albo i nie zapraszają a to w Warszawie albo gdzieś indziej.

Amy Bryzgel: Kiedy myślę o tobie jako o artystce polskiej czy jako o Europejskiej. Jak się tobie wydaje jaka jesteś?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Ja się chętnie przyznaję, że jestem z Polski szczególnie teraz, kiedy jest taki bum polskich artystów. A to, że jestem polską artystką ani mnie nie powiększa ani mi nie umniejsza. Nie wiem na przykład w stosunku do niemieckiego artysty czy do amerykańskiego.

Amy Bryzgel: A czy jak tworzysz swoje dzieło to myślisz o widzu czy to będzie Polak czy Amerykanin czy Niemiec?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Nie wiem w ogóle, ale chyba nie.

Amy Bryzgel: A chciałam jeszcze o coś zapytać. To nie była pierwsza szokująca sztuka w Polsce. Mówiłaś, że zrobiłaś Olimpię po to aby odpowiedzieć krytykom żeby obronić się przed nimi?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Nie. To znaczy nie, to było coś takiego, że baba, która napisała artykuł o mnie, znaczy się to był reportaż o mnie i tej Piramidzie Zwierząt. Ona się uparła, że musi wyciągnąć wszystkie moje choroby i prywatne sprawy, że to zrobiła właśnie niesmacznie. Pokazywało to moją pracę dyplomową właśnie z tej perspektywy, że ja właśnie taka chora. No a ta Olimpia była taka akcją co my teraz pokażemy?

Translation??? Check!

Amy Bryzgel: Jak to było z twoim pierwszym dziełem, o którym wszyscy wiedzieli? Czy te pierwsze wystawy kształtowały wszystko, co potem było dalej? Czy myślisz, że to jest oddzielone? Kiedy czytałam wywiady z tobą, że nie chciałaś być taka szokująca. Nie zamierzałaś być szokująca?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Znaczy z Piramidą Zwierząt na pewno nie zamierzałam. Nie myślałam, że będzie skandal. Mnie się wydawało, że robię coś, o czym wszyscy wiedzą, że tak po prostu jest. Ale jeśli chodzi o Łazienkę Męską to już byłam trochę złośliwa i się cieszyłam.

Amy Bryzgel: Ale chyba ten szok pomagał ludziom myśleć? Był czymś dobrym dla Ciebie. Zastanawiam się, że może ty chciałaś być tylko trochę szokująca, że chciałaś zmusić ludzi do myślenia.

Katarzyna Kozyra: Znaczy to miało być trochę szokujące, a oni zrobili z tego nie wiadomo co. Ale faktem jest, że jak pokazujesz mocne rzeczy to oni się bardziej patrzą,

więcej wrzeszczą, ale bliżej się patrzą. Nie pozostaje to obojętne. Ciekawą sprawę tu poruszyłeś. Zazwyczaj dociera to do zamkniętego kręgu grupy ludzi, tak zwanych znawców i tak to się kończy. A jak jest coś mocniejszego to ma szansę zobaczyć to większe grono ludzi. Oni nawet jakoś chcą patrzeć i lubią o tym gadać. Więc jest wtedy dobrze.

Amy Bryzgel: Do jakiego rodzaju widza kierujesz swoją sztukę? Do kogoś kto wie coś o sztuce?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Mnie się wydaje, że nie robię tylko dla zamkniętego kręgu swojej sztuki. W ogóle to byłoby nudne wtedy. Wydaje mi się, że mam takie tematy, które trafiają do prostych i normalnych ludzi. Tak, więc tworzę raczej dla normalnych ludzi.

Amy Bryzgel: No, ale niestety myślę, że normalni ludzie z zagranicy mogą zrozumieć taką Łażnię, ale w Polsce to chyba nie za bardzo.

Katarzyna Kozyra: Ale też trochę dziwne, bo to fachowe towarzystwo i środowisko, wtedy jak była taka nagonka na mnie, popieranie tych zwierząt i tak dalej, to oni jak gdyby nie poczuli się w ogóle żeby tutaj jakoś to skorygować z tej płaszczyzny tego skandalu, z punktu widzenia właśnie krytyków sztuki, jakby żeby to przedyskutować w ramach sztuki. Po prostu jacyś idioci.

Amy Bryzgel: Czytałam o tym, co powiedziałaś o Andra Rottenberg, że oni w mediach w ogóle nie rozmawiali o sztuce, nie pomagali w ogóle ludziom lepiej to zrozumieć.

Katarzyna Kozyra: Nie no właśnie nic po prostu jakaś banda debili, po co oni w ogóle są? Jeszcze była taka kwestia, że to co ja robię to nie jest sztuka w ogóle. Także na początku tych lat '90 to było trudno bo to wszystko było takie nieuksztaltowane. Znaczą tak zwani znawcy to też byli takie wypierdki wiesz.

Amy Bryzgel: Może nie wiesz tego, ale nie rozumiem, dlaczego ludzie ci krytycy, którzy was wspierali, dlaczego oni o tym nie pisali? O Wróblewskiej czy Rottenberg i innych?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Znaczą wiesz ona [Wróblewska] była wtedy bardzo młoda ile ona miała 27 lat? Wtedy to ona jeszcze nie miała żadnego prawa głosu. Wtedy co ona to dostało to i tak było takie właściwie nic. Tymi młodymi to się w ogóle nic nie przejmowali.

Amy Bryzgel: Czytałam w *Życiu Warszawy*, gdzie tam pisali ci profesorzy i ludzie wykształceni, ale brakowało im takich idei o sztuce i to niby profesor z Jagiellońskiego?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Katastrofa i to tak jest w dalszym ciągu, na przykład znani pisarze i ci cenieni poeci, i to co o nich piszą to takie kompletne bzdury po prostu przedszkole jeśli chodzi o sztukę. Gdzie indziej jest zupełnie inaczej. Jednak masz trochę tej ogłady a tu nic.

Amy Bryzgel: Dlaczego myślisz, że są tacy ludzie jak Wróblewska czy Rottenberg i są tacy o których piszą w gazetach? Skąd się bierze taka różnica? Szczególnie właśnie w latach '90-tych?

Katarzyna Kozyra: No właśnie nie wiem, czemu tak jest, bo i Rottenberg i Wróblewska miały dużo do powiedzenia, ale nie wiem.

Amy Bryzgel: Spędziłaś wiele lat za granicą w Austrii i w Niemczech w latach '80 i '70? Może właśnie dlatego myślisz inaczej niż Polacy?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Właściwie to się zawsze zastanawiam czy jak bym została za granicą czy bym zrobiła taką Piramidę Zwierząt czy taką Łazienkę Damską? Nie wiem może nie. Na przykład wiesz na zachodzie to ludzie są bardziej przeczuleni na tą prywatność. Także jak już spędziłam trochę lat w Polsce to mnie zmieniło, i to tabu które byłoby nie do ruszenia na zachodzie, tutaj po prostu wzięłam kamerę i poszłam filmować tak zupełnie bez zastanowienia.

Amy Bryzgel: Myślę, że w Polsce nie jest czas dla takiej Łazienki, nikt nie robi czegoś takiego a na Węgrzech to jest normalne. Gdzie te wszystkie nagrania są? Te twoje materiały? Czy one są w Zachęcie czy w twojej prywatnej kolekcji?

Katarzyna Kozyra: To wszystko istnieje w kilku kopiach. Łaźnia Damska w 3 kopiach, Łaźnia Męska w 3 kopiach. No to ta Łaźnia Damska to się rozeszła; jedna jest w Sztokholmie w muzeum, druga jest w prywatnej kolekcji w Polsce no i trzecia jest w Budapeszcie w muzeum. A Męska to jedna jest na Chorwacji a dwie to ja jeszcze mam właściwie. No i zawsze zostaje ta moja prywatna kopia, której ja nigdy nie sprzedaję, i wiesz ja mogę ją zawsze pokazywać nie pytając nikogo o zdanie. A Piramida jest w Zachęcie.

Amy Bryzgel: Jeżeli myślisz o wszystkich swoich dziełach, to jak ludzie reagowali na twoją sztukę? Albo jak opisywali cię w gazecie to byłeś trochę rozczarowana?

Katarzyna Kozyra: To jest tak, że jak ktoś chce koniecznie się przypieprzyć do ciebie to zawsze napisze jakieś kretyńskie rzeczy. Żenada taka po prostu. Potem to się już zaczęłam bać znaczy się nie tak bać się, ale tak dla usprawiedliwienia żeby już wszystko było jasne, dałam już wtedy tego Rembrandta i tą Turecką Łaźnię, żeby pokazać, że to też jest sztuka, dajcie mi spokój na zasadzie takiego już pojęcia wszystkiego. Olimpia w sumie też i sztuka.

Amy Bryzgel: Ale Olimpia jest w Paryżu...Oni tam nie byli. Teraz już wszystko rozumiem. Chciałam zapytać o tę mszę która była w Warszawie kiedy ty byłeś w Wenecji? Czytałam, że zrobili mszę w kościele Świętej Katarzyny, ale nie wiedziałas o tym, myślałam, że dzięki tego Ty nagrywali...Taki polski przesąd. (...)

Katarzyna Kozyra: Czy był? No, tak, pamiętam, że słyszałam coś o tym, ale nie wiedziałam, że był.

Amy Bryzgel: Jak mówisz o sobie jako o artystce, artystka performance czy artystka wideo?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Faktycznie jest tak, że to oni o tobie mówią...

Amy Bryzgel: No tak nie pomyślałam o tym, zawsze trzeba mieć kategorię...A co teraz robisz? Możesz mówić o tym, jakie masz teraz projekty?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Skończyłam ten „In art Dreams come true”, jestem teraz na etapie tego, że dostałam numer telefonu do tej agencji która wygrała na targach w Bazylei. Tak strasznie im się to podobało. Tylko nie mieli kasy żeby to kupić. Pewien kolekcjoner zgodził się dać nam 20,000 USD żebyśmy coś wybrały dla niego. Znalazłyśmy tego samego artystę, dwie różne rzeczy a byłyśmy w dwóch różnych galeriach, więc coś musi w tym być, ale nie chciałyśmy kupić jakiegoś szajsu. Ale żeby nie kupować nic za mniej niż 20,000. Mam się skontaktować tydzień galerią, bo przecież bez galerii to on nic nie zrobi. Za tydzień właśnie będę dzwoniła do niego. On zrobił taką rzeźbę, takiego kaczora i rzeźba kosztowała 60,000 więc wymyśliłyśmy, że za 20,000 mogłby mieć łapy tego kaczora. Ja chciałabym go namówić na ten Ogień, albo cokolwiek, ale nie wiem czy on zechce. Noi myślę żeby z kibicami piłkarskimi coś porobić. To ciekawe to jest takie w

czystej postaci tak właśnie żeby z nimi popracować. Noi myślę żeby może zacząć pisać scenariusz na film autobiograficzny, taki do kina.

Amy Bryzgel: Tak! No to super! Masz taki interesujący życiorys. Ale to będzie polski film?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Wiesz wszystko jedno. Muszę zbierać wszystkie fakty, które wydają mi się ciekawe. Pojedziemy do takiego producenta w Polsce i spytamy go się, co on właśnie będzie radził. Czy sama mam grać czy ktoś mnie będzie grał? To znaczy wiesz trzeba pomyśleć. Także wiesz nad tym teraz tak ślęczę. Poza tym wszędzie te biennale otwierają. W Istambule byliśmy, potem pojechaliśmy do Aten, noi jeszcze się zastanawiam, że było by śmiesznie zrobić Folk Music Biennale. W jakimś bardzo małym pomieszczeniu wybralibyśmy ze 30 nazw takie projekty w środku jakaś świnią wiesz coś takiego. Po prostu żeby zareagować na to, co się dzieje. A w ogóle nie traktuje się czegoś takiego zbyt poważnie. Ale z drugiej strony szkoda mi energii, bo to strasznie dużo zachodu. Może lepiej się skupić na scenariuszu, także nie wiem zobaczę. Chcę robić jeszcze jeden film z Karliczkami, czyli o Karzełkach.

Amy Bryzgel: Ale jest naprawdę ciekawe dla mnie, że ostatnio bardzo dużo twoich dzieł jest u ludzi, którzy są na granicy, nie są zszokowani twoją sztuką. To nie jest może poważne pytanie ale jestem bardzo ciekawa co się działo z tym paluchem czy go jeszcze masz?

Katarzyna Kozyra: Tym z Łaźni? Użyłam go jeszcze później, ale już nie do Łaźni. No ja później robiłam taki striptiz, identyczny jak Gloria, a na koniec okazało się, że jesteśmy tak identyczni, że nawet mam tego palucha.

Amy Bryzgel: To jest naprawdę ciekawe, Drag Queen, który naprawdę jest kobietą. Zakręcone.

Katarzyna Kozyra: Aha jeszcze go użyłam w tej Cheerleaderce

Amy Bryzgel: A tworzyłaś też waginę, jeszcze takie kwiatki, takie tulipanki z ciała? Super, że możesz to robić i powiedzieć tym ludziom, którzy tyle zapłacili, że ja go tyle używałam, nie był jednorazowy...No dobrze myślę, że zapytałam już o wszystko, z czego się przygotowałam. Nie chcę Ci tyle przeszkadzać.

Appendix VI

Photographs from a Visit to the First Republican Hospital of Crimea by the Author in March 2008

All Photographs by the Author



Entrance to the First Republican Psychiatric Hospital of Crimea



The admitting office on the grounds of the hospital



Ward Number 1 at the Hospital, where Afrika stayed



Courtyard of Ward Number 1



Ward Number 1



Side Entrance to Ward Number 1



Ward Number 1



Water tower on the grounds of the hospital, symbol of the hospital



Professor Samokhvalov's office building (above), and his office with art work by friends and patients (below).

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Work Experience

2006-2008	Freelance Journalist, Riga, Latvia
2006-2008	English Teacher, Riga Business School, Riga, Latvia
2004-2005	Fulbright Scholar, The Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia
2002-2004	Graduate Assistant, Assistant to the Curator of Russian Art, Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey
1998-2000	English Teacher, The Centre for European Languages, Częstochowa, Poland
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