LOST IN TRANSMISSION
NOTES ON COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS BY EMANUEL DANESCH AND DAVID RYCH

As much as Homi Bhabhas quote might sound quite accurate today, it actually dates back to 1989 - a year that may be seen as a crucial redefinition of national configurations, territorial conflicts and forms of migration, since it is commonly remembered as a date of re-opened borders. As the following transitional period went through various stages, a devaluation of previous conditions raised new questions about old identities. Along with transformation came a re-emergence of nationalist thought in many of the former socialist countries, while like in the rest of Europe one could observe an intensified fortification of external borders. A general prevalence of xenophobic policies found legitimacy in the wake of 9/11, when throughout Europe essentializing discourses out dated liberal multiculturalist principles of previous years and at times surfaced publicly in reactionary antagonisms. Integration rapidly became a keyword to distinguish in society, especially in mainstream media terminology, when basically everything started to be negotiated on the bases of cultural belonging, whereas it remains political frontiers, economic inequity and ideological concepts that divide people on all scales.


In the beginning of the new millennium, we started with early research in the Middle East and South-East Europe for Utopia Travel, a project openly inquisitive about constructs of identity in the face of historical transformation. The main endeavour was a compilation of a pre-selected video library, produced by artists and filmmakers originating from and in most cases living along a connecting line of following countries: Egypt, Israel and the Palestinian territories, Lebanon, Turkey, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria.

The itinerary hinted to the traditional route between Occident and Orient, still most of all, this course encompassed a multiplicity of political and cultural contexts. Large parts of the referred geographies have been divided by conflict - as historic experience proved violently, up to most recent times - and repeatedly defamiliarized through cultural, religious or ethnic diversity. Our research in these specific regions, examined political borders as potential communication barriers, not reduced to language alone, but concerning the usage of specific symbols for interpretations of history and reality, ostensibly shared by all national subjects. As David Morley and Kevin Robbins point out, the questions of identity, memory and nostalgia are intricately interlinked with patterns and flows of communication: "How are we to understand the national" and what the role of media institutions is in the construction of national identities? The role of the state is crucial in this respect, in so far as government policies have often determined the parameters and possibilities of various national cinemas, in the context of recognition of the potential ideological power of cinema...as an institution with a "nationalising" function" (Higson 1989:5).

From this angle, the Utopia Travel collection was intended to bring together film and video, chosen under consideration of notions of cultural, social and political reality found in the fragment of the particular society of origin of the authors - presupposing that national and cultural limitations, given by geographical boundaries and the assumption of different habitat environment with certain historical influences, produce noticeable diversities in the coding of visual information. The relevant questions were, how much the practice of art and filmmaking would keep or emancipate from the concept of national identity and how far these vernaculars of cultural production could be read and decoded in other territories. One remarkable affinity in a number of these travelled areas at that time was, that the cultural scenes would primarily get familiar with neighbouring scenes via their exposure in central Europe, from where information was transmitted back as a mirror of a "peripheral" culture promoting - the mirror is the metaphor applied by Bulgarian artist Ventislav Zankov in his essay on Understanding the Balkans, in which he utilizes Lacan's "mirror stage" to figure out the socialisation processes in South-East Europe.

On the other hand one may critically reflect the assumption of an emerging transnational culture - where the sensation of participating in a system of common values is certain, no matter what geographical origin the participant may be from. A sense of cultural translation, Boris Budun identified as being a "normative counterpart to nationalism", but also challenges its political practice - by constructing a radically hybrid space, in which every claim to a pure, essential identity principally becomes impossible." As we see it, curatorial methods in a cross-cultural context revolve around crucial complications: it would have been practically unachievable to avoid problems of stigmatisation and stereotyping. We discussed alternatives to the notion of a Europeanistic perspective. We asked local curators, filmmakers, artists and advisors in educational institutions to select an individual...
Vaisākas no filmām skara ļoti sugas polītiskās un sociālas problēmas un pašu oficijālajā patiesībā priėjai ar to tās būtiski atšķirīga monētā. Dažos gudijumos tas nozīmē, ka videokasetes bija jāpārveido rohekti sloopas, tās noteļļojot vai izmantotājai diplomātisku pasti, tātad tās varēja izraisīt problēmas vai betiska aizkavējumus uz robežas. Tā kā filmas izraisīja daudzumu realitāju, netiek tās ierakstītas celos laikā. ar filmu veidotajām, politiskajām aktivitētēm, žurnālistēm un kurzorietem.

MINORITY LOGBOOK (2006)


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A following project, that yet again engaged with the transport of video works, was produced for the exhibition project Kubas Journey Against. The Current, commissioned by Thyssen-Bornemīta Art Contemporary, which travelled along the river Danube from the Black Sea towards Austria.

Minority Logbook is a direct continuation of the mobile library idea - set as a sort of micro cinema space inside a caravan, that was equipped with a monitor and a digital jukebox, holding an archive containing mainly

compilation of video works, which in their view was a contribution to the theme of "cultural identity". Moreover there was our wish to overtake the selection of the Austrian part. During that time the political coalition of Christian Social Party and Jörg Haider's party into government. Thus a number of the chosen videos are critical or politically engaged works, directly referring to the problematic Austrian situation. In total the archive included a broad variety of 123 videos. Succeeding almost twenty years of preparation phase, the actual travel took place from March to July 2002, in a taxi limousine equipped with monitors, serving as a mobile unit for the video library, on a more or less precise route through the cities Cairo, Beirut, Istanbul, Sofia, Belgrade, Sarajevo, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Graz and Vienna. In 2004 an additional presentation of the project took place in Holon, since neither Israel, nor the Palestinian territories could be passed through during the first trip. The presentations took place in public space to the largest extent, with the objective, to work under versatile conditions in a very flexible setting, whilst connecting to different institutions for art and culture for official screenings.

During the spaces of presentation, including the taxi and alternative structures, gave an opportunity to take part in open discussions on issues considering the complexity of societal structures as well as the construct of political territories. In that sense we understood the project as a temporary non-institutional platform dealing with matters of translation and transnational mobility of locatable codes. Some of the films in particular touch on very sensitive political and social issues, with opposed official truths and several angles of interpretation. This also meant that in a few cases the tapes had to be smuggled across border, by either hiding them or passing control as diplomatic cargo, knowing their contents could have caused problems or strong delays at the checkpoints. As the films evoke various responses, they often happened to be the starting point for the conversations and interviews recorded during the travel with locally active film makers, political activists, journalists and curators.
embodies a minority over generations, to the most contemporary citizens of Europe, who are expelled with an expelled status. Depending on location there may also exist official definitions of who is considered a minority. While others struggle for recognition and even consideration, clearly there are communities that may not even wish to be classified as minorities for various reasons - meet groups are not homogeneous - as some members face further marginalization due to age, class, disability, gender or other factors. Whereas few marginalized communities found accurate representation from within, they have frequently been the focus of investigation and patronisation - like the Romany people, who have been repeatedly depicted by others. Considering this viewpoint it was important for us to distinguish between a representing and a self-representing author.

Visual documents that give an insight into particular communities are even more valid, once they originate from within these groups - especially if it entails a politically disempowered position an active participation in the memorial memory work - being present and not represented. In an attempt to show a multitude of works on and by marginalized population groups, the mobile library included a wide range of national as well as transnational minorities - this included also gender-related works, as for example videos by the Budapest Lesbian Film Collective - to contrast a variety of views, representations and translations. We were hoping that the audience might take different angles on the dominant society and its mechanisms of exclusion, but also get aware about stigmatization among and within marginalized groups.

OUTLINES OF A HOMELAND (2007)

The last work in reference at this point relates once more to the initial question of essentialist identity and national projection. In 2005 Austria celebrated a multiple anniversary - 10 years since joining the European Union, 50 years of its constitution and 60 years of the second republic, after the end of World War 2. The patriotic jubilation blinded out an essential part of history before 1945, which has been wrapped in long-nurtured notions of victimhood. To touch on this issue in an implicit approach, we became curious to explore communities of Austrians, living in hermetic cultural enclaves in foreign countries long before the troubled period of the Third Reich. The objective was to figure out how much of the historical implications have been transmitted abroad and if it had an impact on their community. We set off to the Brazilian highlands, searching for the Colônia Tirol, whose inhabitants were presumably untouched by that historical burden. The outcome is a documentary, shot in an observational manner of visual anthropology, set against a background of a historic Austrian settlement, which remained as a consequence of the transatlantic migration stream from the year 1857. When Brazil was internationally pressured to resign on the import of African slaves from 1850 onwards, duchess Leopoldina of Brazil, daughter of emperor Franz 1 of Austria and first empress of Brazil, encouraged the immigration and settlement of her compatriots. It was also her, who determined the colours of the new Brazilian flag taking into consideration the imperial "black-yellow" of Austria. Green should symbolizer the jungle, which was to be defeated, and the expectation of fertility. In 1917 Brazil first declared war against Germany and...
the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. In the second following World War Brazil faced European fascism with armed forces, whilst as a consequence it came to the internal suppression of numerous immigrants of German and Italian origin in Brazil, which were fully recognized as settlers since decades.

Because of the subsequent isolation, and also due to a continuous economic crisis after initial wealth through coffee production, the Tyroleans colony had outlasted almost 150 years since its establishment in an hermetically isolated form in the highlands close to Leopoldina in the Brazilian Federal State Espírito Santo - remote from politically relevant tensions and transformations in Europe and in particular the significant role of Austria in the following history, from the end of monarchy over a period of national socialism. In the mid 1960's the Colônia Tyrol suddenly gained increased attention due to the writings of Austrian ethnologist Karl Ilg. In his publications, carrying titles like The German in Latin America, Karl Ilg established precise topographies of the remaining families of the former colonists. His principal interest above all, however, was the preservation of German culture and the German language in those regions.

As Professor Ilg gained influence in the most rural communities he went to explore, at some point scientific research and socio-cultural experiment collapsed. To sustain a fading culture, he appointed German-speaking teachers and took care that, among other things, the Colônia Tyrol was supplied with German books. All activities were carried out in a manner of development aid, which included sending folkloristic objects, such as traditional dirndls. Since Karl Ilg started a German-inclined appropriation almost 40 years ago, the influence of a nationalistic and nostalgic projection towards the Colônia Tyrol continues till the present times. These "tropical Tyroleans" apply officially as Brazilian citizens, yet the "old Austrian homeland" maintains and promotes their affiliation. Currently their culture appears as a hybrid, as something new, linguistically and historically - one can certainly abolish the thought, that a pure culture was preserved, as some Austrian voices try to make us believe. Of course there are single forms of mimetic complicity - a