

#1 RE-ENACTMENT AS ARTISTIC STRATEGY



SPRING

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AUTUMN

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TICA AIR LAB

This publication appears as a response to the first two editions of TICA's artist-in-residence program TICA AIR LAB launched in April 2012, followed by a second session in September 2012. TICA AIR LAB is a three-year program, encompassing two thematic residencies in Tirana each year. Perhaps, to begin means to repeat — thus, giving rise to TICA AIR LAB's first thematic focus on RE-ENACTMENT AS ARTISTIC STRATEGY.

TICA AIR LAB RE-ENACTMENT AS ARTISTIC STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

The strategy of re-enactment is an artistic approach one encounters often in contemporary art. The idea of re-enactment one can say, permeates to a certain extent the artistic operation all along the history of art, but a shift in perspective occurs in contemporary art: past events are re-enacted not for the mere sake of commemoration, but due to their relevance to the current situation. Furthermore, one can encounter not only re-enactments of historical events, but also of artworks and actions done by other artists in the past, or even artists re-enacting their own works or actions. Thus, it could be said that by reaching back to historical events that have left a trace, or, to historical circumstances that have inspired the creation of certain artworks, artistic re-enactment is a way to question our present times through the direct engagement of not only the artist, but often of the audience as well.

Even though artistic re-enactments do not consist of mere repetition of events or actions, the element of repetition is present and plays an important role. It does so from a standpoint of a “theatrical” idea of history, as elaborated by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*, in which he considers repetition to form “a condition of movement under which something effectively new is produced in history.”

It is precisely this idea of re-enactment — this repetition with a difference that produces something new through time — that constituted the focus of TICA AIR LAB for the year 2012. The residency program hosted artists working along these lines of re-enactment as an artistic strategy and that were willing to experiment with a context overlap, using the Albanian situation as an active background for the translation of their works.

Edi Muka, Tirana/Göteborg

cover:

NEVER
Armando Lulaj
Film still
2012

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TICA AIR LAB RE-ENACTMENT AS ARTISTIC STRATEGY

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REPETITION AS INSISTENCE

STRATEGIES OF RE-ENACTMENT IN CONTEMPORARY (MEDIA) ART AND PERFORMANCE

*Is there repetition or is there insistence.
I am inclined to believe there is no such
thing as repetition.. And really how can there be.*

Gertrude Stein, "Portraits and Repetition",
Lectures in America, pp. 166–169

This essay is based on Inke Arns: "History Will Repeat Itself. Strategies of re-enactment in contemporary (media) art and performance" in: History Will Repeat Itself. Strategies of re-enactment in contemporary (media) art and performance. Ed. Inke Arns and Gaby Horn for Hardware MedienKunstVerein and KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Frankfurt am Main: Revolver – Archiv für aktuelle Kunst, 2007, pp. 37–63

¹ This definition is taken from German Wikipedia, <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reenactment>, 11 January 2007

² *ibid.*

³ http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Experimentelle_Archäologie, 30 March 2007

⁴ http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Living_History, 11 January 2007

⁵ <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liverollenspiel>, 11 January 2007

⁶ War simulations also belong in this category. These can be computer simulations, but also, for example, simulations of the US-led war in Iraq with German actors in the Bavarian woods; see "Sie lernen zu töten", interview by Jan Pfaff with the director Teresina Moscatiello, in: *Die Zeit*, 22 February 2007, p. 66. The Austrian artist Oliver Ressler treats a similar subject in his video *The Fittest Survive*, 2006, 23'

⁷ Staged by members of re-enactment groups from Poland and coordinated by Maciej Mielecki, *The Battle of Berlin* (2012), organised in the context of the 7th Berlin Biennale, aimed to "relive the defeat of the Third Reich through two re-enactments based on the final battles of the World War II in April and May 1945." The author is wondering whether this was not a (failed) attempt to take popular reenactment as a ready-made and to implant it into a contemporary art context. Oh well.

⁸ This does not mean that communicating history has never utilised media: the decisive difference today, however, is the total and permanent availability of images, where any image at any given time can become its own simulacrum.

Historical Re-enactment as a Practice of Popular Culture (folklore)

In general, a so-called re-enactment is a historically correct re-creation of socially relevant events, such as battles (for example, the Battle of Hastings or the Battle of Gettysburg).¹ It is the "best possible, detailed repetition of how an event occurred, historical or modern; where possible, it is staged at the location where the original event took place, and under the same conditions as when it occurred."² Criminology, for example, uses re-enactments to reconstruct a crime. Re-enactments are often part of experimental archaeology³ when testing working techniques of the past through experiments (for example, Thor Heyerdahl's *Kon-Tiki* expedition in 1947). In numerous countries, many very different re-enactment groups exist in which there are people who do it for a hobby, but also professionals who devote themselves to specific subjects, epochs, or events.

For our particular enquiry here, both the parallels and the differences to similar practices are of interest. For example, re-enactments are very different to pop-cultural practices such as 'living history' and 'live action role-playing'. Living history,⁴ for example, does not take a concrete, historical event, but rather seeks to re-create the life style and realities of life in past epochs (for example, the late Middle Ages, the late fifteenth century, the Napoleonic Wars, or the American Civil War). And live action role-playing⁵ is role-playing games in which the actors also physically play their character. In contrast to re-enactments and living history, which both refer to historical events, live action role-playing is entirely *fictional*.⁶ What all three forms — re-enactment, living history, and live action role-playing — have in common, is that they allow access to history, or histories, through immersion, personification, and empathy in a way that history books cannot.

Re-enactment as an Artistic Strategy (art)

In recent years, the strategy of re-enactment is increasingly found in contemporary art, especially media art and performance. Historical re-enactments, such as the ones mentioned above, are about imagining oneself away into another time and have nothing (or little) to do with the present, such as playing a totally different role that has nothing (or little) to do with our own reality (for example, as a Viking or a daughter of a medieval lord of a castle). Artistic re-enactments, however, do exactly the opposite. The difference to pop-cultural re-enactments such as the re-creation of historic battles, for example, is that artistic re-enactments are not performative re-staging of historic situations and events that occurred a long time ago; events (often traumatic ones) are re-enacted that are viewed as very important for the present. Here the reference to the past is not history for history's sake; *it is about the relevance of what happened in the past for the here and now*. Thus one can say that artistic re-enactments are not an affirmative confirmation of the past, rather, they are *questionings of the present* through reaching back to historical events that have etched themselves indelibly into the collective memory.⁷

In contemporary (media) art of recent years there are an increasing number of artistic re-enactments, that is, the re-staging of historical situations and events. One reason for this rather uncanny desire for performative repetition seems to reside in the fact that experience of the world, whether historical or contemporary, is based less and less on direct observation and today operates almost exclusively via media; that is, through images or other kinds of recordings of (historical) events.⁸ History appears to be present at all times and in all places; at the same time, however, this permanent availability of media representation renders all forms of authenticity increasingly remote. In the current situation of intensified spectacles, there is a growing feeling of insecurity about what the images actually mean. In this situation artistic re-enactments do not ask the naïve question about what really happened outside of the history represented in the media — the 'authenticity' beyond the images — instead, they ask what the images we see might mean concretely to us, if we were to experience these situations personally. In this way the artistic

re-enactment confronts the general feeling of insecurity about the meaning of images by using a paradoxical approach: through erasing distance to the images and at the same time distancing itself from the images.

Drama, Audience, and Witnesses

In 2002, the *Milgram Re-enactment* was shown for the first time at the CCA in Glasgow. It is a re-enactment of one of the twentieth century's most controversial experiments in social psychology.

In 1961, Stanley Milgram, a 27-year-old assistant professor at Yale University, conducted the so-called Milgram Experiment, which aimed to analyse the crimes of National Socialism from a social-psychological perspective. The experiment tested the obedience of individuals towards people in authority and also the willingness of ordinary people to follow orders, even when the orders contradict their conscience. The *Milgram Re-enactment* (2002) by the British artist Rod Dickinson, is an exact reconstruction of parts of the original experiment. In detailed reconstructions of the original rooms, actors played the protocols of the experiments as though they were a stage play. The audience watched the four-hour performance through one-way glass windows, which were set into the walls. In this way the spectators became actual witnesses of a (repeated) historical event.

The *Milgram Re-enactment* is "a reconstruction," as the introduction has it, "of one part of Stanley Milgram's Obedience to Authority experiment, first conducted at Yale University in Connecticut in 1960. During the original experiment subjects were asked to give seemingly real electric shocks to another individual. The experiment was designed to test the limit to which subjects were prepared to follow the orders of a scientist. It aimed to establish to what degree an individual would be prepared to hurt a fellow human because they were ordered to do so. In the original experiment the three protagonists are the Learner, the Teacher and the Scientist. The Learner and the Scientist were actors and the Teacher was an unwitting subject who had answered an advertisement calling for participants for a learning experiment in a study of memory. The Teacher thought that they were part of a research project that aimed to establish whether punishment could help people to learn. The Teacher was instructed to give increasingly severe electric shocks to the Learner if he failed to remember a sequence of words that had been read to him at the beginning of the experiment. In reality

no shocks were administered. The *true* purpose of the experiment was to establish the degree to which the Teacher was willing to obey the authority of the scientist. Despite the Learner's cries of pain (and despite his declaration that he no longer wanted to be part of the experiment), in the majority of cases the Teacher continued to follow the instructions of the Scientist."⁹ According to Rod Dickinson and Steven Rushton, the original experiment, which can be called a World War II re-enactment, was inspired by the Eichmann Trial and Hannah Arendt. It was "intended as an abstracted repetition of the Holocaust, at least in as far as the experiment's designer, Stanley Milgram, was seeking to test the Nazi defence at Nümburg of 'only following orders'."¹⁰

Although the *Milgram Re-enactment* (2002) was just a dramatic performance, how it would run was predetermined, and the result was known to most of the audience, its effect was nevertheless special: the spectators' position as 'observers' made an experience possible for them that differed greatly from what is experienced when looking at photographs or reading the write-up of the experiment. By becoming witnesses of an (obviously mediated because repeated) event, which is normally only accessible as an event communicated by media, the observers were able to ask themselves: "How far would I have gone, how many shocks would I have administered? You then question the degree to which you resist authority in your daily life. Should you feel reassured that, in the original experiment, 60% of the people were prepared to kill their subject if instructed to do so? (...) are you sure you would resist authority?"¹¹

Witnessing as Participation

Like Rod Dickinson, Jeremy Deller returns in his sole (but very famous) re-enactment project *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001) to the place of the trauma. By making people who had actually been there observers who replay their personal memories, this project goes much further than Dickinson's aim in the *Milgram Re-enactment* to make the past into a 'stage-play'.¹² The recollections of the participants, which are replayed out in *The Battle of Orgreave*, are significantly different to what was reported in the mass media about the original event.

Supported by Artangel, a London-based agency for art in public spaces, in 2001 Jeremy Deller staged a re-enactment of an episode that took place during the British miners' strike of 1984–1985,¹³ and by so doing so "created a poignant perspective between personal and political histories."¹⁴ The event, which Deller selected for the re-enactment, was a "violent and largely misconstrued clash between mounted police officers and striking miners. Significant to this re-enactment", Robert Blackson continues, "is the fact that Deller, in large, relied on memories from both miners and police officers to recreate the battle scene rather than the copious quantities of biased and misinformed newspaper articles that initially reported the story. By allowing personal memory to direct the course of the re-enactment rather than the evidence provided by historical newspaper accounts, Deller's work *The Battle of Orgreave* and the Mike Figgis film that documented the performance were effectively righting old wrongs."¹⁵

Therefore, specific to this project is the *emancipatory* role that Deller's re-enactment played in the village communities involved. On this, another quotation from Robert Blackson: "The end of the miners' strike was typified by a vilification of the miners by the media. The miners and their unions were blamed not only for disorderly conduct towards the police force (...) but also for crippling the economy of Britain by refusing to work. (...) The English author George Orwell wrote in his novel *1984* that those who control the present control the past and those who control the past control the future. By allowing the miners' memories to control the course of the re-enactment, the performance provided languishing mining communities

9 Introduction, *The Milgram Re-enactment*, ed. by Steve Rushton, Maastricht 2003, p. 5

10 Rod Dickinson, 8 December 2005, *Crumb* mailinglist

11 Vivienne Gaskin, Subjects in Search of an Author, in: *The Milgram Re-enactment*, ed. Steve Rushton, Maastricht 2003, p. 13

12 Adam E. Mendelsohn, Be Here Now, in: *Art Monthly* 300, October 2006, p. 13

13 See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_orgreave, 27 May 2013

14 Robert Blackson: Once more ... with feeling: Re-enactment in contemporary art and culture, in: *Art Journal* New York: College Art Association, April 2007

15 Robert Blackson, op. cit.

16 *ibid.*

17 Adam E. Mendelsohn, *op. cit.*, p. 15. This also describes how the film *La Commune* (1999) by the British director Peter Watkins functions.

18 "Some of the work made in recent years may (...) be seen as an attenuation of the anxiety displayed by historical re-enactment groups — the desire to feed the hunger for some connection with the past and to provide an embodied continuity with the people of the past, and the belief, in an increasingly mediated world, that this is objectively possible." Steve Rushton, *op. cit.*, p. 7

19 Steve Rushton, *op. cit.*, p. 10

20 Rod Dickinson, 8 December 2005, *Cramb* mailinglist

21 In *The Uncanny* Freud does not equate the uncanny with the unfamiliar (Sigmund Freud: *Das Unheimliche*. In: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 12, pp. 229–268, here p. 231) but asks under what conditions the familiar, the well known, can become uncanny and frightening (p. 231). In Freud's view this is when something of great similarity is repeated (p. 249), the unintended (p. 249) and insistent return (p. 250), and the element of unintended repetition that renders what is otherwise harmless uncanny (p. 250); "... for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (p. 254) and which now returns. English citation: <http://people.emich.edu/acoykenda/uncanny2.htm>

22 Solo show, Artur Zmijewski at the Kunsthalle Basel, 2005

23 Walter Benjamin, *Kleine Geschichte der Photographie*, in: W. Benjamin: *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*. Frankfurt am Main 1977, p. 50

Inke Arns is a curator and artistic director of Hartware MedienKunstVerein in Dortmund, Germany, since 2005. She has worked internationally as an independent curator, writer and theorist specializing in media art, net cultures, and Eastern Europe since 1993. Exhibitions include IRWIN: Retroprinciple 1983–2003 (2003–2004), What is Modern Art? (Group Show) (2006), The Wonderful World of irrational.org (2006, 2007, 2008, 2012), History Will Repeat Itself (2007–2008), Anna Kournikova ... Art in the Age of Intellectual Property (2008), "Awake are only the Spirits" – On Ghosts and their Media (2009), Arctic Perspective (2010), The Oil Show (2011–2012), Sounds Like Silence (John Cage – 4'33" – Silence today / 1912 – 1952 – 2012) (2012–2013), His Master's Voice: On Voice and Language (2013). She has been teaching at universities and art academies in Berlin, Leipzig, Zurich, and Rotterdam, and has lectured and published internationally. Books include Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) – eine Analyse ihrer künstlerischen Strategien im Kontext der 1980er Jahre in Jugoslawien (2002), Netkulturen (2002), Objects in the mirror may be closer than they appear! Die Avantgarde im Rückspiegel (2004).

with a way for their actions to act outside of the historical script that was determined for them by the government and the media. Thus the artwork '... became a part of (the strike's) own history, an epilogue to the experience.' (Tom Morton)."¹⁶ Adam Mendelsohn describes *The Battle of Orgreave* as "cathartic, interactive theatre", "in which the participants were given a deeper insight into what took place through their participation in the re-enactment."¹⁷

From Representation to Embodiment

Let us return to the paradox of the re-enactment: erasure and simultaneous creation of distance are two key mechanisms in the contemporary practice of artistic re-enactments, which often co-exist in one and the same artwork. Initially it is about the elimination of safe distance. The viewers or the readers become immediate witnesses of a (repeated historical) event, which unfolds in front of their eyes, or they become participants in an action, in which they actively participate.¹⁸ Re-enactments eliminate the distance, construed as safe, between the historical event represented by the media and the present, between performers and audience. The re-enactment transforms representation into embodiment, distanced indirect involvement into — sometimes unpleasant — direct involvement, and through this turns the passive reader or observer into an active witness or participant. The witnesses or participants replace their existing collective knowledge of the past with direct and often also physical (living, in person) experience of history. Artworks that utilise strategies of re-enactments attempt to (re-)create a connection with history, which is increasingly based on media images. The short-circuiting of the present with the past makes it possible to experience the past in the present — actually, an impossible view of history. This is an attempt to feel sympathy for the subjects of bygone events by imagining oneself in their position. By eliminating the safe distance between abstract knowledge and personal experience, between then and now, between the others and oneself, re-enactments make personal experience of abstract history possible.

Creating Distance: Re-enactment as the Uncanny of the Spectacle

Artistic re-enactments, however, do not stop at the elimination of distance, at the partial or total identification with the historical subjects (like many pop-cultural re-enactments). The second, not less important step is the creation of distance. In re-enactments one finds, as Steve Rushton puts it, a "complex and in-depth reflection of the *mediation of memory* — which can be even described as *the core subject of re-enactment as an art form*. This tendency asks how memory is an entity which is continuously being restructured — not only by filmmakers and re-enactors but also by us personally, as mediating and mediated subjects."¹⁹ Rod Dickinson said about the role of re-enactment in his works: "I have very consciously focused on events that were heavily mediated in their original form. My hope with these pieces is that the audience's direct experience of the live performance is constantly undercut by their knowledge of the layers of mediation that are at play in both the original historical event and my double of it. I hope with pieces such as these that rather than making 'history' 'real' (often the declared aim of re-enactments found in other cultural spaces, such as TV or hobbyist recreations) history is actually experienced by the audience as deferred and displaced, but through the apparently immediate and direct lens of live performance."²⁰

Sigmund Freud defined the uncanny²¹ as something that is actually known but has been repressed, from whence it returns. This definition maps surprisingly well onto the practice of the re-enactment. *If it happened only once it's as if it never happened*²² — re-enactments repeat moments of history, whose importance has not been fully understood. Similar to the mechanical recording techniques (slow motion in film, enlargements in photography) described by Walter Benjamin, re-enactments make the Optical Unconscious visible.²³ Re-enactments are artistic interrogations of media images, which insist on the reality of the images but at the same time draw attention to how much the collective memory relies on media. As Gertrude Stein remarked in 1934 in the quotation that introduces this text: Even repetition is not about repetition per se, but about insistence.

SPRING

WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION ZONE

Astrit Ismaili

What was your initial interest when working on re-enactment in Tirana?

I think that the best way to understand the past is to bring it back somehow, maybe by materializing, performing, or wearing it. That's the easiest way to feel it.

The fact that I could meet people who experienced Socialism in Albania was something that made me excited from the beginning. I wanted to touch the clothes that were worn during the time, look through personal photographs, without any specific intention. I wanted to get inspired from the place and the people, to somehow find myself in a time during which I didn't exist.

Where did you go from there?

Being aware of the fact that the Socialist regime in Albania was pretty rough, I had to be careful not to do something stupid. During my research I got to know about Socialist Realism in painting and fell in love with a painting by Rafael Dembo titled *Shkojme në Punë* (Engl. *Going to Work*). In this painting you can see a group of nine people holding picks and pallets on their way to work. The only thing that distinguishes the men from the women in this painting is the hairstyle, their body structures and clothes are almost the same. I was standing in front of this painting when I first caught sight of the idea. I decided to organize an action.

By merging the image of labor and women, Rafael Dembo's painting provides a prominent allegory of the journey towards Socialism itself. Not only in Albania, this composition was widely used. Was this part of your consideration?

Actions during Socialism had this sense of "togetherness" where different people were doing something for their community. I wanted to create an action that was more abstract in terms of staging it, or lifting it up to the level of performance art.

In the performance that followed, I selected seven girls whom I asked to wear men's clothes and gave seven picks, one to each to work on the concrete. While they were hitting on the concrete, I told them to think of something they would really like to brake. So in this performance, I was keen to introduce a sense of "ritual", with each of the participants having their own personal experience. At the same time, and similar to Dembo, my intention was (by means of video and costumes) to recreate this generalization of women's labor during Socialism, not limited to a specific event that happened for real.



Women in Construction Zone
Astrit Ismaili
Video stills
2012

Women in Construction Zone
Astrit Ismaili
Production still
2012



In your film, you move from the original agricultural setting onto rough city concrete. What made you choose this un-placement?

My current work explores “construction zones” or, activates abandoned areas through performance art. The way I see it, this rebuilding and construction are attempts to re-envision the past. In a way, they create new meanings and realities built from recent history. This space of destruction and re-construction from personal, public and political viewpoints provides me with an “ideal” space to create performances and interact directly with the public. In the piece *Women in Construction Zone*, the concrete is a metaphor of the limits, the barriers, and the walls that we should all smash.

Yet, *Women in Construction Zone* also seems to push the performers to a point of total exhaustion. At one point, the mere “semiotic body” is nowhere to be seen.

Two hours of repetition of certain movements by the girls and the sounds of exhaustion they made lead them into moments of sensual trance. I admit that this performance ended up to be a very erotic work.

Is there a hidden beauty in Socialism?

I personally hate any kind of dictatorship, not only the one imposed during Socialism. On the other hand, I really like these forms of acting in unison, as people did during street festivals, massive marches or morning gymnastics, also the pioneers and the feeling of equality without going into the content. I am also fine with Atheism, but the way it was imposed knocks out the nostalgia.

Astrit Ismaili (born in Prishtinë, Kosova), is an artist resident in Prishtinë. His work is body-oriented and performance-based, expressed through photography, video, installation, fashion, contemporary theater and poetry. For Ismaili art is a subject and an object at the same time. He utilizes the male body to develop his own self-knowledge by playing with gender, infamous superstars, clothing and mise-en-scène as to recreate moments or situations that happened in real life. The body is always treated like a commodity ready to be used and consumed, or like an icon to be adored from a safe distance, often placed within familiar and ordinary settings, somewhere on the verge of the viewer's experience. Ismaili attempts to present the body as a symbol of receptivity: a site of encounter between the self and the rest of the world, a communicative model in which information on the artist's own experience are both disclosed and projected upon.

Shkojme në Punë
Rafael Dembo
Oil on canvas
ca. 1965



NEVER

Armando Lulaj

With your work *NEVER*, you suggest a conflicting re-dedication. Based on a monumental engraving of Enver Hoxha's first name on a mountain range commissioned back in the 1960s, you carved out again its remains, however, with an important deviation: ENVER becomes NEVER. How did this project begin?

First of all, I'm very interested in the archive. A while back when I was doing some research regarding the protests of 1997 — the last time the members of Kinostudio¹ shot on 35mm — I accidentally discovered a beautiful documentary about aeronautics made in 1974. After watching the first five minutes I realized that I had seen this film several times during my childhood. In the film you see a squadron of pilots in preparation, their glidings and of course their happiness in getting together one precise point — above the Shpiragu Mountain², which at the time was adorned with Enver Hoxha's first name: ENVER.

The mountain got back into my mind when I was preparing for an exhibition in Milan entitled *No Mercy*, for which I was working on a neon showing the well-known phrase *Arbeit Macht Frei* in reverse, thus, in the way the inmates of Auschwitz-Birkenau would have read it. I decided to do further research, which was very hard, and at times impossible. I also went to the mountain to see if there were still traces, but there were no signs of the name.

1. "Kinostudio" was born out of the "Albanian Film Institute" founded in 1945 by the first Communist government. Based in Tirana, Kinostudio operated from 1952 to 1990 as a national conglomerate of writers, actors and filmmakers, and continues its work up until now under alternate structures and official titles, whilst "Kinostudio" remains its most common name

2. a mountain range nearby the Albanian city of Berat

NEVER is a re-enactment on many levels: there is the re-writing of the name, the whole production process, which recalls a certain history repeating; as well as the way you replace one ideology with the next. What other forms of re-enactment did you come across, thinking of those which are not evident in the final film, and that are hidden in the process?

Trying to do a big work like this, using the mountain, one needs permissions of all kinds. You probably know that for everything you decide to do in Albania politics come first. This nonsense that happens when explaining to people that I wanted to do an artwork hit me every time. The politicians, administrators and so on kept talking about their political benefits, and at times they took it as if it was a "tender". And of course, the "tender" here in Albania always comes with big amounts of money, that in association with corrupted politics always finds the right pockets to fill.

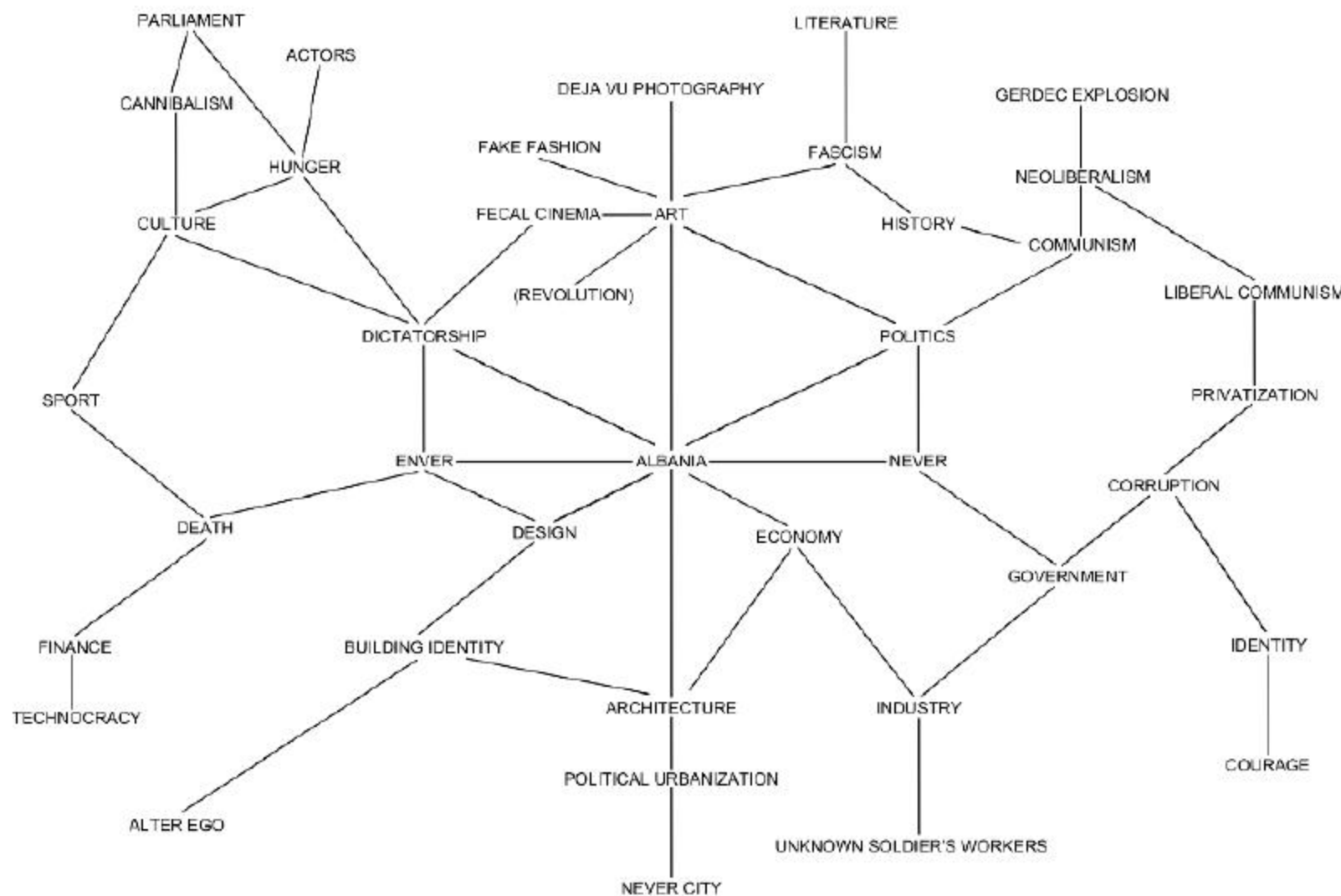
In the middle of those people, I was trying to explain my motivations regarding the conceptual framework of the work. I documented all these discussions that occurred in the preparatory phase, which actually became part of a concept-map that accompanies the work. It is strange to see that still these two different political periods of now and then have the same tradition. Only the suit has changed.

Certainly, there were different people that were trying to help because they believed in it. After a while, I decided to avoid these round tables and odd meetings, and to work onsite. The project was near to a dead point, when I went to the villagers and tried to con-

vince them. The mountain is very important for them not only as a dwelling place. It is the carrier of a particular herb used in medication, too — and of course there were the letters of which the villagers knew exactly where they had been during the time. The first two letters E and N belonged to a small village that is linked to the next one, which owned the rest. So, the villagers of the first two letters can collect and sell the herb only from the mountain slopes of E and N. The same goes for the other village. Besides, no foreigner can go there to collect the herb. In a way, the slopes belong to the villagers. I had different meetings with them to win their approval and to finally get to the point. The discussions were very hard but also constructive. Eventually, they even helped me and invited me into their homes. For one month, my crew and I became part of the village.

Regarding the strategy of re-enactment, during my research I found some notes of Enver Hoxha, pages of his diary, as well as some orders he used to write down. I am considering using his handwriting to design the titles and the captions of the film, so that it will become as if he, himself, wrote the titles of this film. In a way, it is a sort of painful repetition, touching on the plague again and again...

NEVER
Amando Lulaj
Chart
2012



What role does activism play in your work?

My work has been always linked to concepts of activism, although activism is probably a new word in the Albanian community. Unfortunately, those who call themselves activists are often rather strange people with a strange past and a strange role in society. Activism here is a way to get paid. Of course, there are also different people who do not support this political logic and attitude and who can help an actual activist practice to evolve. Internet, blogs and instant messages are becoming interesting. However, they are only shared by the young generation, but what about the older ones? Nobody seems to care about them. This is one of the reasons why I don't see how to overcome the fecal politics of today.

In your film, the camera seems to return to one man in particular. What made you emphasize his role in the process of re-writing?

This main character in the film is very important for different reasons. First of all, he had been the protagonist in a number of situations and incidents related to the letters.

In the first part of the film, we see him working with a group of people, but later he remains alone with a young guy who helps him carrying the barrels of white color and his pump — the same Chinese pump that he used in his farm already during the regime. Back in 1968 while a young man, he was one of the villagers who worked on the construction of the letters, helping the soldiers carry the barrel of white color. The work was carried out under the supervision of the army, but with extensive help of the people, man like him, as well as students and pupils in the area. All together, there were more than 500 people involved in carrying stones, cutting bushes and later, painting the 36.000 m² surface of the letters. He was also there in 1994 — the year when the Democratic Party ordered to destroy the name of the despot. They used dynamite — two soldiers got burned and one of them died. In 1997 during the army protests, he was there once again, when the Communist Party decided to paint with white color over the remains of the name. Communism was still fresh and the people of the area didn't want to witness any longer to a name that recalled the killing of more than 2000 people.

While 60 years old today, his life is closely connected to the letters, not only due to his constant work on them. During the regime, he got married to his first wife and they had a son together. She died in 1991 by illness and a few years later, also his son in a car accident in Greece, to where he had emigrated. He married again and had another son, but recognizes only one love in his life — the one for his first family. He is a contradictory person perhaps. A love in the Communist past, a very ideological one, and a death in this new era, which he hates and wants to love at the same time.

NEVER
Armando Lulaj
Film still
2012





NEVER
Armando Lulaj
Film stills
2012

The irresolute relationship between the present and the past is also mirrored in the public reactions your work has caused. Some voices were raised that deemed the new spelling of NEVER to be an accident rather than a voluntary act.

Yes, some people do think that. Some still read it as “Enver”. Other read it like it is. I’m still searching for a good photo of the mountain that shows the original inscription. A photo between 1968 and 1990. I have sent announcements in some papers and private local TVs in order to find family photographs of the mountain and had different calls from people, but they sent me photos taken from the internet. They do not archive. The same goes for the professional photographers. Some of them told me that after the end of Communism they were afraid of the new ruling order so they threw their photo archives into the river. Others who kept their images of the time had their archives destroyed and burned later, by the army protests of 1997. At the ATSH (the Albanian State Archives), documentations of ENVER are also missing. Eventually, a very well-known photographer called and told me he had the photo, a beautiful one. I went to his studio full of powerful historical photos from the 1990s events and he presented me with an amazing photograph of the mountain Shpiragu with the ENVER sign. For a moment, I remained breathless. I recognized the letters. My letters are different from the original ones, they are not so precise. In his photograph, *my* letters were saying “Enver” and not “Never”. He had made a very beautiful photoshop work in order to get paid.

This is pure like an economical interpretation. I think in their mind, a lot of people still read “Enver”, it will take some time. It is like something that you learn from childhood or tradition. For these people, it will take time to take the information in because they are still lied to by the leaders and bureaucrats who offer them prosperity and a future, in which they do not believe in. For those, the real future, perhaps, is somewhere hidden in the past.

Clearly, *NEVER* is more than a shift in letters. It's a "not-at-any-time", but also acts as both attestation and negation of the past and present. By transferring Hoxha's name into an English speaking context, the boundaries between an ideological and economical reading become blurred. But the story doesn't end here. You placed *NEVER* in a way that it will remain visible over many years, developing an afterlife in its own right and receptive towards more events to come.

In the footage that I'm using in my film you see five young pilots preparing for the flight that leads them to the site of ENVER. Enver as a name has oriental origins meaning "brightness". It has this beautiful meaning but this way of reading it is devoid of content. Holy hell is full of light, too, and the present economic situation is near that point. There are two main layers in this work. One has to do with the shifting of the two letters and the other with the shifting of two different times.

When I was in the mountain taking some shots of the work, two American filmmakers of distant Albanian origin joined me to do an interview regarding *NEVER*. They were very interested in the Communist past and what the representation of the future means to me and the young generation, in reference to *NEVER*. Afterwards, they told me about their father, who had visited Albania during Hoxha's regime and had died in America soon after, expressing the wish to be buried in Albania. As the conversation went on, one of the filmmakers asked me if it was possible to do something, and something very meaningful and touching happened. I talked to the people of the village and we all gathered under an olive tree, exactly beneath the first two letters N and E — that at the time were E and N — as he spread a part of their father's ashes into the air.



NEVER
Armando Lulaj
Film stills
2012

Armando Lulaj (born in Tirana, Albania), lives and works in Tirana. A writer of plays, texts on risk territory, film author, and producer of conflict images, Lulaj is a lucid and disrespectful analyst of the dispositives and mechanisms of power. He has no desire to subject to the context of local belonging — rather, he is orientated toward accentuating the border between economical power, fictional democracy and social disparity in a global context. In 2003 he founded *Debatikcenter* that also acts as a centre for film productions run by the artist and his sister Anola Titani. Recent exhibitions include the *Prague Biennial* (2003; 2007), *Tirana Biennial* (2005), the Albanian Pavilion at the *52nd Venice Biennial* (2007), *4th Goltzenburg Biennale* (2007), *5th Baltic Biennial of Contemporary Art*, Szczecin, Poland (2009), and the *6th Berlin Biennial* (2010).

NOTES FROM ALBANIA

Vahida Ramujkić

You have not explicitly worked with re-enactments before, but rather with “re-writings”, with parallel and alternate histories, and how to weave them together in the form of a collage or embroidery. In which way did you choose to work the theme of re-enactment, what were your first concerns regarding the given subject and its context?

I have been working for some time with different official historic narratives around the same historic events and the way they were presented in the text books of the states descending from former Yugoslavia (see: the *Disputed History* project). Coming to Albania was a great opportunity for me to deepen my very scarce knowledge about the other side of the Kosovo-Serbian conflict, bearing in mind that Kosovo's and Albania's history is inextricably linked. On the other hand, I was eager to move away from my earlier focus on graphic material to more expressive formats such as theatre and drama.

For the residency in Tirana, my initial idea was to organize a workshop where a historic event would be staged according to the different narrations existing in the regional history text-books (of Albania, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro or Greece). The real situation on site however confronted me with certain difficulties. I found it hard to find text-books, translations, people

interested to talk and work on the topic. Besides the main obstacle was that many seemed unwilling to present their opinions in public, which made me change path quite a bit.

I spent a lot of time reading and observing until I decided to start making embroideries about my findings — a technique that I usually use as a means to make annotations that have to be accurately resumed in an almost codified way (see: the *Documentary Embroidery* project). On the other hand, I started working with historical texts. One of the books I had brought with me from Belgrade was about the Yugoslav-Albanian relations from 1941 to 1948, written by Tito's personal historiographer Vladimir Dedijer. The book was edited in Zagreb in 1949, a couple of months after the breaking of the Yugoslav-Albanian bilateral relations and the closing of the Albanian border. It was explaining in details the crucial role the Yugoslav Communist Party and its delegates Dusan Mugosa and Miladin Popović had in forming the Communist Party of Albania during WWII. It spoke of an “unseen friendship between two states”, for which Yugoslavia had been “unselfishly helping the less developed Albania to build its way to Communism”. The book was full of factographic details, letters and transcripts of notes, that — with visible indignation — sought to testify “the great sacrifice Yugoslavia had made, and the lit-

tle it received in exchange from its fellow neighbor Albania”. This was all very strange to me, as I had not heard of this “great friendship that took place in the past” in this way before. Furthermore, it was not very clear why Yugoslavia had been helping Albania so much.

For a while, I have been interested in the Yugoslav Federation as a creative political process at the time, building a new society and a multi-ethnic state based on antifascist, communist, and anti-imperialist ideas, still I sensed that these things were much more complex during and after WWII, and that, from today's perspective, we tend to oversimplify them. While I was talking to people of different ages I eventually discovered another book supposedly written by Enver Hoxha himself in 1984 titled *TITOITES* which was explaining exactly the same events and speaking of the same protagonists, but shown in a completely different light. Even the dialogues and quotes differed. I started to take out parts of the texts from both books and began to recombine them in the format of a dramatized text.

In one of your works the words “history” and “hysteria” get strangely mixed up. One could easily misread them, hardly noticing the difference. Could you speak more about the proximity between the two terms you bring into play?

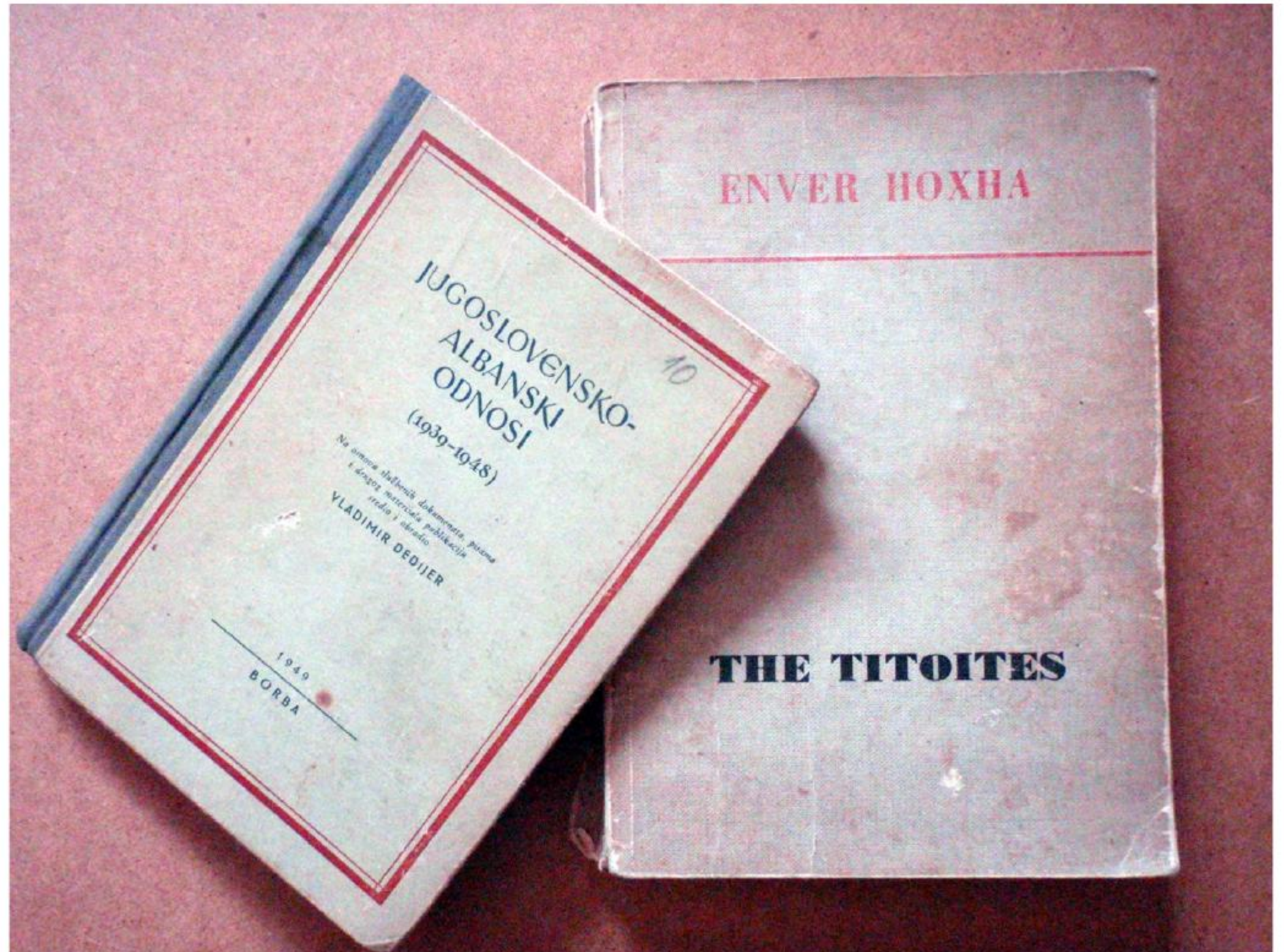
This was the title of the fanzine completed on the first workshop I did with the *Disputed Histories Library*. Actually, it came from a joke one of the participants made, and I decided to use it as a title. The topic of the workshop was to examine how the last five decades were explained throughout the history text-books for elementary schools in Croatia, the Bosnian Federation, the Republic of Srpska, and Serbia. Especially in the new history curriculums that appeared in the 1990s — just after the proclamation of the new states — the historical descriptions went very far off track, and were later censored for being chauvinistic and incorrect.

There was a certain fever of rewriting the histories from the national perspective of each state, all of it of course was put in service to restore the new/old national identities. After 2000, these texts have been largely corrected and edited down. That’s where the comparison with “hysteria” comes from. Actually, in many languages like Bosnian and Croatian, the difference between the words “history” and “hysteria”, (“historija” and “histerija”) consists of only one letter. This was really valuable to our collage techniques, but even more telling in regard to how close, not only by phonetic resemblance, the two fields are situated.



How does this story go?
Vahida Ramujkić
Embroidery
2012

Two books
Valida Ramujkić
(research material)



At the end, during your time at the TICA AIR LAB, you chose to continue your work with embroideries. In regard to your research into the mechanisms of “history writing”, embroideries seem to bring into play gender and the different roles attributed to men and women when it comes to history making/writing.

I found myself working with women very often, but I never really considered myself a feminist activist or artist per se. This attribution somehow always came from the outside. I have also worked a lot of times with men, while appreciating their feminine qualities. The different tendencies of the male and female division of labor are maybe best explained by David Graeber:

“One way to state the matter is this: men tend to monopolize the sorts of work framed in terms of an implicit dramatic structure. Men, one might say, tend to get the sorts of work one can tell stories about afterward, women, the sort one tells stories during, to pass the time (...). What such a division of labor does, one might say, is to attribute to men the sorts of activity defined as memorable, narratable action; to define men as actors, and woman as non-actors (...). The pattern is not limited to gender. It continues, to a lesser or greater extent, through every social hierarchy: the more exalted a group or status, the more their typical activities will tend to take dramatic form, one which lends itself to being told as stories afterward. The political domain is usually the most dramatic one of all.”

Perhaps, it is exactly this more playful and non-heroic feminine quality that I intuitively follow without explicitly making a statement of it.

Does this division of labor, the idea of “actors” and “non-actors” then also produces different conditions or, results when it comes to strategies of re-enactment? Here, also the recent “re.act.feminism” research project comes to my mind, as it alludes to a conflicting proximity between feminism and re-enactment while at the same time energetically overcoming it.

For me, it is interesting to view the technique of embroidery itself in the light of re-enactment, as a continuous balance between repetition and variation. Traditionally practiced by the repetitive actions of stitch after stitch, or endlessly, tracing and repeating the same folkloric patterns throughout centuries, the practice of embroidery might be seen as a quite oppressive activity — oppressive towards the women who usually practiced it. The mechanic repetition of stitches and patterns results in oppressiveness because it prevents the performers of any creativity and originality. But repetition also brings in new qualities that can result in creativity or liberty by means of an error, a missed or imperfect stitch, a variation.

This process expresses in a way my understanding of re-enactment. The repetition of the “same” gesture or action will be anyhow different from the original one, and the understanding of this difference could disclose another valuable knowledge.

Vahida Ramujkić (born in Yugoslavia), lives and works in Belgrade. During her stay in Barcelona, together with Lina Sadurní, Ramujkić founded *Rotor Collective* (2001–2006), which initiated a series of explorations of the public space. Balancing on the border between art, activism, and social studies, *Rotor Collective* sought to devise its own methods and strategies for learning through experience and creative practice. Traveling the former Yugoslav Republics in 2006, she launched the *Disputed Histories Library* — a long-term research project based on a growing collection of history text-books issued in different time periods in those regions. The project is marked by an ongoing series of workshops organized by the artist, comparing and analyzing opposed historic narratives. In 2008, she joined Aviv Kruglanski for a collaboration, which resulted in *Documentary Embroidery* — a work-in-progress using embroidery as a technique for documenting reality. Their collaboration extends to other ongoing projects including *Microcultures* — a work (collaboration) with micro-organisms that experiments with the process of fermentation in a culinary, social and economic sense.

AUTUMN

YET TO BE TITLED

Lana Čmajčanin

What was your point of departure when working in the context of Tirana?

The cultural legacy of previous systems, Socialistic Realism, and societies in transition.

When I first arrived to Tirana I couldn't avoid the perhaps most powerful image in the city. *The Albanians* — a colorful mosaic located on the facade of the National History Museum at Tirana's main square Sheshi Skënderbeu. I guess this happens to many, if not, to all visitors, and not just because of the impressive size of the mosaic itself. There is also the composition and the aesthetics of Socialist Realism, which I found close, attractive and quite effective.

Did the initial impact of the mosaic informed the way you addressed the theme of RE-ENACTMENT AS ARTISTIC STRATEGY?

I had never worked with the idea or the form of re-enactment before, therefore it was very interesting for me to get my head around this methodology. In fact, it is the complete opposite of the methodology that would usually describe my practice.

Certainly, at first glance, the mosaic wasn't hard for me to "read", especially because it employs the same visual practice and heritage that was also treasured in the former Socialist countries of my origin (Yugoslavia) although the mosaic *The Albanians* dates back to the time when Albania was under the Communist dictatorship of Enver Hoxha only. Made in the manner of Socialist Realism, the mosaic captures the spirit of victory and progress, depicting the evolution of the Albanian history from the ancient Illyrians to the partisans, who still seem to be carried on the wings and the idea of progress even 36 years after the end of WWII — that is 1981 when the mosaic was completed and the museum opened.

The mosaic's composition of 13 figures presents a "realistic genre scene" of a historical event that in a way never occurred. This I found was an intriguing point of departure for working in the context of the re-enactment.

Was the video installation *Yet to be titled* what you had in mind from the beginning?

The initial idea was to make a very large-scale print of the re-enacted composition with the 13 protagonists, at a scale 1:1 with the dimensions of the original mosaic. It was thought to be installed on the very same spot at the National History Museum, literally covering the mosaic, followed by a panel discussion about the obvious and less obvious questions this would have arose, with all stated doubts. It didn't happen that way, but it might be useful to know as an undercurrent of the more simplified version of the work that followed.



Yet to be titled
Lana Čmajčanin
Video still
2012

Drawing on such a famous landmark of Tirana, *Yet to be titled* seems like quite an unusual title for an artistic re-enactment.

This first layer of the mosaic *The Albanians* and its general visual narrative about the rising of the Albanian nation wasn't enough for me. I became more interested in the details and individual figures in the composition, and wondered who those figures were and what they would represent or mean to Albanians nowadays. In other words, I was interested in cultural statements about national representations of identity.

During my stay I had several discussions with young people that made me notice a striking level of ignorance as well as indifference regarding the recent past and cultural legacy. More precisely, hardly anyone had a personal view on the mosaic or, an idea of what the mosaic represents nowadays. They were passing by the National Museum of History several times a day without paying any attention or even thinking about it. As some of them stated in the interviews I conducted: "It was there since I was born", or, "It's simply there."

I was thinking of possible analogies or continuities. Who would be the representational figures of Albania nowadays, and where would they be heading to? Is it possible to head to the future without knowing of or, apprehending the past? And in which way does the (un)perceiving of the past affects the way one perceives of the future? It was at this point that I decided to recreate the composition of the mosaic working with the same young people I had interviewed previously, by simply switching positions.

Lana Čmajčanin (born in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina) lives and works as a visual artist in Sarajevo. She graduated in sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo and is a founding member of the Association for Culture and Art CRVENA, as well as a member of the Artists Association of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Čmajčanin works independently as well as collaboratively. Her artistic practice encapsulates mixed media, video, video performance and object art. Not afraid to be engaged with the most personal and traumatic issues of the place she is coming from, her work presents an unbribable political agenda, giving voice to the most marginalized subjects — the victims of sexualized war violence. Her work has been included at the *Secondary Witness*, ISCP, New York (2012); *Spaceship Yugoslavia – The Suspension of Time*, NGBK Berlin (2011), *I will never talk about the war again (psychosis: part 1)*, and *Färgfabriken*, Stockholm (2011).

The indifference towards the mosaic is also mirrored in the interviews you filmed, clashing with the original gestures of *The Albanians* that you re-staged in your work. The shift from your original plan of organizing a public roundtable to a more slow-paced, informal chat seems to generate another kind of conflict, or, gap that your work discretely measures.

The starting point of the idea was to do a re-enactment of a historical event 'that never happened'. In this sense, the re-enactment had no actual reference point. In a strange anachronism, the only reference point, perhaps, is what happened during the discussions about the mosaic itself, about cultural legacy and the social realities we live in — between at least the 17 participants that our team counted.

Meanwhile, the mosaic has undergone turbulent times. Two years ago, there was a government order to remove it from the museum's facade. After some resistance by city intellectuals, a few interventions followed, such as, the removal of the red star on the flag and its temporal disappearance under the banner of a huge Vodafone campaign (to fundraise for the poor budget of the museum, but the money seems to have taken another route). Despite all this, the mosaic proudly thrones on Tirana's main square, delivering its message about the brave, glorious and progressive past of Albania. If culture is the mirror of society, this raises a lot of questions.



Yet to be titled
Lana Čmajčanin
Video stills
2012

ALWAYS READY

Neda Firfova

For the residency, you choose the mass games (Spartakiads) as a point of departure. How does this reflect your initial concerns regarding the theme of re-enactment, as well as your practice as an artist?

In my practice there is a recurring tendency of preserving, documenting and reproducing design and grid-like ideas that belong only indirectly to modernism. So perhaps this in itself represented a larger entering point in the subject-matter. Being raised during the dissolution of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia meant witnessing the crumbling of Socialist propaganda imagery and aesthetics, which were replaced with capitalist advertising aesthetics automatically assumed to be “better” and “more advanced”. The systematic and programmed Socialist ideas about design vanished as soon as the transition started, and no one attempted to retrieve or salvage this knowledge.

In the case of the Spartakiads, I was not so much focused on the final event or the final image produced by the mass choreographies. Much more pragmatically perhaps, I was interested in the actual objects that made the visual effect possible: the “books” produced for the mass games, which must have comprised a number of unicolored sheets. Due to my interest in the printed medium, as well as through the lenses of re-enactment, the mass games books began to really fascinate me. Fittingly — given the enforced cultural amnesia that took place in Albania after Enver Hoxha’s death — there is not a single copy of the mass games books at the National Library or at any of the other archives in Tirana. It remains unanswered why and

how they had been destroyed. Besides, I was wondering why they were considered to be “traumatic” in the first place.

This erasure of memory was perhaps the second point of entrance into the subject matter. The mass game re-enactment *Always ready* was a solo performance, essentially because I wanted to stress the singular as opposed to “the masses.” I especially intended the performance and its documentation to simultaneously deconstruct the memory of authoritarian ideology while at the same time translating it into a set of minimalist abstractions. In this sense, the singular becomes a site of memory, of remembrance, which easily resists intelligibility.

Always ready
Neda Firfova
Book object
2012



As you mentioned earlier, there was no original edition or documentation of the book to begin with. How did you then proceed with your research?

For a short period of time, after the initial decision to deal with the mass games book object as a subject to study, I assumed it would be impossible to find some of the mass games participants to talk to. Then I thought, even if I did, would they feel comfortable talking to me about the mass games? Do they remember? Did they wish to forget? But I was very wrong. Of course! It was the mass games, there were masses of people attending and the last one was held in 1989, thus, very recently. Almost everyone I met in Tirana who was born in the early 1970s or before, had at least been once in their lives at the mass games. This was a wonderful discovery. In the context of so-called “mass amnesia”, personal memories become archives. It was an experience shared by many, and undoubtedly, everyone remembered it with a certain subjectivity.

The stories I collected throughout the many conversations with former participants created an interesting learning environment for me, as truth was being recreated through them: truth was undetermined. Documentation in the archives was limited and to find a sample of the book proofed to be impossible. Therefore, one can conclude that the book object I constructed relied on the recollections and the directions given to me by the mass games participants, as well as on available video and photography documentation. This was interesting to me, as the encounter with the real book object was constantly being extended and became even more desired — an amplified mystery. But that object was what I was really after, the stories were a temporary process deviation.

All along, it was difficult for me to imagine how these books are being designed and produced for contemporary mass games (like for example for the North Ko-

rean Arirang) but it was even more difficult to imagine how they were produced back then, in the context of pre-computer and pre-printer modes of production. The materials used here in Tirana remains unknown, as well as the actual production techniques. Were they originally made of cardboard or vinyl? Were they printed or painted? How were they bound and who produced them? How long did they last?

My idea was to reverse the mass-produced processes and to work with the concept of singularity in production. Something that especially challenged me was the existing possibility that these books were actually made one by one. The book I produced was hand-made and hand-bound. In a sense, the laborious production of hand-making and hand-binding such a massive book object can be considered a re-enactment in itself, however, only a coincidental one.



Postcard
Artist unknown
2012



Spartakiada
Roland Tasho
Photographic series
1989



Always ready
Neda Fufova
Documentation of the performance
2012

Neda Firfova (born in Skopje, Macedonia) graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Skopje in 2005 and pursued her MFA in the Graphic Design Department at Tama Art University in Tokyo. From 2009 to 2011 she held a research position at the Jan Van Eyck Academie in Maastricht. As both a visual artist and a graphic designer, Firfova's work operates on the blurred border between art and design. Her current practice aims at questioning the printed medium as a symbol of established truth in the Digital Age, and the modernist invention of the grid as a basic tool for democratic distribution of printed information. Her work is often articulated in the printed medium, but at times extends itself towards conceptual acts, ready-mades and performative events. Suggesting more open approaches towards the distribution of information, her work invites the integration of interventions by collaborators and the audience, and supports reverse editorial processes. These experiments contribute to the questioning of the authority that graphic designers are educated to deliver exclusively on paper, and by means of multiplication.

At first sight, the book you produced reveals little of its original function and historical usage. There is a strong visual beauty to it, too. What do you think is generated in the act of dissecting a once purpose-built object from its original (mass) context, but also by bringing it back into the play, as you did with the solo performance?

Generally, my practice questions the printed medium and the book as symbols of established truth in the digital age, and I am especially interested in critiquing the modernist invention of the grid as a basic tool for the democratic distribution of printed information. In this sense, I got interested in the large-format mass games book object because it is, given its size, essentially unreadable, while at the same time it is also the basis for a grid that is authoritarian, functional, and perfect. These book objects also dictated the actions of the subjects who hold them in front of their bodies and “turned their pages”, in order to reveal — when viewed from a distance, or, in the setting of the stadium — a number of ideological images (a flag, proletarian workers, factories, a fist). Hence, as objects, they produce subjectivity both on a singular and on a mass (or multiple) level, and in doing so, they embody the totalizing logic of mass games in paper format.

When producing this book as a prop for a solo performance, I was contemplating on the power of the object, its power to control and to hide the body, or, to hide itself inside the image. Singling it out and detaching it from the collective backdrop of the mass games makes it visible, mysterious — thus, a beautiful object.

ARCHITECTURE OF SADNESS

Ermela Teli

The suggestion to develop a new work through the lenses of RE-ENACTMENT AS ARTISTIC STRATEGY is manifold. Re-enactment — a term that is not restrained to the arts, but rather adopted by it — can be grasped and negotiated in many different ways. What was your personal take on it?

In the work I developed during the course of the residency, I was eager to work on the relation between man and architecture in the very context of Albania. As always, my point of interest is the human being, as well as the impact of psychology on society. This led me to what I called an “architecture of sadness”. When it comes to the interpretation of society, a lot can be retrieved from the architectural surfaces of this country — starting with the Rozafa myth, in which a woman serves as the “human brick” on the walls of a castle. Then, we have the Albanian bunkers, which in my work also generate a relation between architecture and the body through the lenses of a suppressed and clandestine sexuality. And at last, there is the industrial architectonic regression that can be perceived since the early 1990s and which by now has reached yet another level of fatality.

In regards to the theme of re-enactment, there are several points of reference, not so much in terms of an “artistic strategy”, but more on the level of the narration. The physical and the architectonic elements keep clashing throughout the trilogy, as if caught in some doomed loop.

Thinking of your practice as a filmmaker, was the idea of re-enactment in some way or another already inherent to your practice beforehand? Do you see relations or analogies to your previous works, or conversely, where do they differ?

As a director and screenwriter I naturally work according to certain principles and personal parameters. Every work of mine involves a different subject-matter. With this said, I don't search for a specific depiction of what love, or happiness, or death is — these topics that movies are usually built on. For me, the real value of all this is to work on something which in the end discloses a truth in its own right. With this in my mind, I depart in all sorts of different artistic relations and film practices.

How did you go about your research? Where did it lead you to and which strands did you choose to abandon?

History leads me to search multiple paths. For the residency I chose to work on something I was sensitive to for a long time. I did not have to abandon a path or subject-matter, although I quite literally had to abandon a place where I wanted to shoot. In Albania, one abandons a place because the bureaucratic language can be too “complex” for a director at times. While this might be an interesting subject to study in itself, it is also the reason why the scene I was planning to shoot is left unrealized.

For *Architecture of Sadness*, many elements are carefully choreographed and I followed a strict plan of work. But, more importantly, and as I have learned from my experience a lot of times the power of a scene is based on new ideas and people that appear randomly. This is true for all my works, and I think it can also bring something more meaningful to the fore when it comes to re-enactment.



Architecture of Sadness
Ermela Teli
Film stills
2012

As you mentioned earlier, in *Architecture of Sadness* you open the field with the myth of Rozafa. In doing so, something interesting happens: you are treating a historic event that was, and that wasn't at the same time, a poetic narrative in the first place, beyond the logics of reason or history. Which significance do you give to factuality, where do you see its limits?

From a psychological point of view, the Rozafa castle in Shkodra is usually related to the legend of the sacrifice of Rozafa — a woman who became the “human material” in the course of the castle's erection. A legend that also encompasses subject-matters such as family, faith, betrayal, and love.

This myth, in which a woman's body is reduced into an “object” of sacrifice, was my point of departure in the poetic narrative of *Architecture of Sadness*. Divided into three chapters, I was keen to show a somewhat mental-social experience that can be found in the Rozafa myth as much as it is related to the dictatorship period, where the sacrifice is exerted upon the entire society. At the end — the last chapter of the trilogy — the state of transition introduces yet another form of alienation of the body and the mind that can be seen in the crowds of people still deprived of what I consider to be human and social. In my film, I deliberately merge “mythology” and historical events, as they inhere to me a common somber logic. I do not intend to re-narrate historical factuality, but rather seek a different, more poetic form to give sense to this persisting psychological bend between man and architecture.

Again I was not so much concerned with the “limits of factuality” as a working method, but I do see the “limits of significance” where the body is left without the mind in the most severe ways in the last chapter of the film.

Architecture of Sadness
Ermela Teli
Film still
2012



One of your previous films is called *Farewell*. Similarly, in *Architecture of Sadness* a notion of farewell — a last filmic depiction of something that is just about to disappear — seems to reverberate through the film. Is re-enactment also a means of saying goodbye, a repetition in order to conclude or, to foreclose on something?

More than a notion of farewell, I would say that with *Architecture of Sadness* I was choosing another direction. Once, I remember, a Bektashi said to me that “our mission lasts until our bones dissolve, and after, there are still things to be done!” Thus, to me there is no form of closure or farewell, but rather another, different path.

“History repeats itself.” How would you comment on this when thinking of your trilogy?

History repeats itself when its descendants make the same mistakes.



Architecture of Sadness
Ermela Teli
Film stills
2012

Ermela Teli (born in Tirana, Albania) graduated in 2004 from the Academy of Fine Arts in Tirana and has since worked as an actress at the National Theatre in Tirana. She started her artistic career in 1999 as the protagonist in the film *Tirana – Année Zéro*, directed by Fatmir Koçi, featured at the 55th Venice International Film Festival. Parallel to her theatre practice, Teli has continuously pursued her interest in film and theater directing as well as script-writing. Her film *Love in Stone* (2003) was awarded the first prize in the category of screenplay at the Skopje International Script Festival. In 2009, she directed and produced the short film *Farewell*, presented at the *Regards sur le Cinéma Du Monde Festival* in Rouen; followed by *Hommage* (2010), shown at the 2012 ZEBRA Poetry Film Festival in Berlin, which is described by the author as poetic cinema.

WORKERS MONUMENTS | IDEAL STATE

Anna Witt

In your work, you have touched upon re-enactment many times. How did your interest in this develop?

In one of my first works, I re-enacted my own birth with my mother. I crawled under her nightdress and stayed on her belly for nine minutes. It occurred a grotesque situation. As a grown up woman I had a hard time fitting under the nightdress of my mother and obviously created too big of a belly. The re-enactment was not realistic. It rather showed the impossibility of this attempt.

At that time I was interested in the idea of revolution, not only as a political term but also in its meaning for an individual life. I had read in a book by the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, that beside death, birth is the biggest revolution in a human's life. This in fact is also a moment, which none of us can remember, it is not an active process or a self-made decision. That was my starting point in the case of the work *Birth (Die Geburt, 2003)*.

What made you move from the personal to the public context?

With *Birth*, "re-enactment as an artistic strategy", or existing genre, was not part of my consideration. Re-enactment as a form of experience, felt to me as a logical approach to question existing structures. Since then, I have used re-enactment in different forms throughout my work. For example in *Kontakte (2005)* and *Push (2006)*, for which I re-played situations connected to state control, such as body-searching or the physical act of arrest of strangers in the public space. In these works, the most important aspect to me was the switch of positions and power.

The strategy of re-enactment, or re-enacting, gives the opportunity to discuss certain questions in both a playful way and through physical experience. The involved persons act according to a given "script", but the interesting part is defined by the space left for individual reactions and interpretations. Acting becomes a form of physical communication. In the examples I mentioned, my work focuses not so much on a specific historical event, but on certain social routines within society.

What was your personal hook when working in the specific context of Tirana? Did it effect or alter your working methods used previously?

For my project in Tirana, I decided to work on the theme of RE-ENACTMENT AS ARTISTIC STRATEGY by referencing a re-enactment of an artistic concept that I had developed elsewhere some time ago. However, in the context of Tirana, the initial concept expanded to also deal with the reclaiming of a historical meaning in itself.

Workers Monuments was first developed in Bindermichl and Spallerhof, which are working class neighborhoods in Linz. Most of the people living there are employed at the Voestalpine AG, the biggest steel company in Austria. Starting from a political-historical aspect, I wanted to examine the term "worker" and discovered that it is only slightly shaped by role. The political "meaninglessness" of the term was the starting point of the project. I invited the residents to bring in their ideas for a workers monument and asked them for proposals on which person or, aspect of work should the monument be devoted to. Each request was accompanied by a video in which the residents showed to me how such a monument could look like, by posing themselves as models. Since the posing took place mostly in public spaces and the resident-models had to

stand still for a while, the performers became sculptures themselves.

The political meaning and history of the “worker” is a topic that interests me. In Tirana, I wanted to examine the results of the same concept, but in a different local and historical context.

Ideal State
Anna Witt
Documentation of the performance
2012



Ideal State
Anna Witt
Documentation of the performance
2012



Workers Monuments
(Monument for the Veterinary)
 Anna Witt
 Documentation of the performance
 2012

Anna Witt (born in Wasserburg am Inn, Germany) is a Vienna based artist with a focus on performative intervention and video installation. Upon completing her studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, she attended the masterclass of Magdalena Jetelova at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, where she graduated with Honours in 2008 in performative sculpture — a program supervised by Monica Bonvicini. Witt's practice is strongly informed by the construction of cultural stereotypes and individual positionings within social systems. Digging the space between fictional re-enactment and staged documentary, her work calls for an investigation into the problematics of subject-formation in relation to identity politics, collectivity and citizenships rights.

The term of the worker always links to a certain schizophrenia. In Albania, most radically employed until the 1990s, at first there was the gap between the real conditions of work and the stylized depiction of the worker as a fulfilled, striving being. At the same time, the idealization of the worker also stood as a reminder of the actual contingency — the hidden potential that is always already contained within the system. In *Ideal State* you show this by the simple means of a mirror situation, that makes the slightly overweight police men shrink back to a more “ideal” physical condition. In this work, illusion and disillusion come very close. How did you go about it in the case of the *Workers Monuments*?

In the Communist ideology the worker was an idealized symbol. For my project in Tirana, I asked people how they would imagine a monument dedicated to a profession or an aspect of work that was important to them personally, or, representative for the current situation. I was interested in if and how the ideas would be influenced by the past and what image they would create about the present. Would the idea of making a workers monument be seen as self-evident, or would there be some skepticism towards its intertwining with the past. The ideas for the monuments varied from dedications to: particular individuals, contemporary professions like software programmer or fashion model, and personal action-heroes like Superman and Falco. But there were also ideas to use the format of the monument as a critique towards certain topics, for example in the proposals of:

Would you consider your project emancipating in some way from the idea of re-enactment and history repeating?

The chosen concept was not a classical re-enactment. It dealt with the transformation of a “historic form” into the present situation.

“Monument for the Corrupt Professors”

“Memorial for the Victims of Modern Slave Trade”

“Monument for the Highly Skilled Young Albanians Who Do Not Leave the Country”.

LIST OF WORKS

YET TO BE TITLED

Lana Čmajčanin

Two-channel video installation
Format: DV NTSC, color, sound
Duration: 19'39" and 5'38"
Language: English, Albanian
Subtitles: English
Year of production: 2012

Directed by: Lana Čmajčanin
Camera, editing: Lana Čmajčanin, Olsi Hoxha
Sound editing: Lana Čmajčanin, Olsi Hoxha
Translation assistance: Belina Jano
Special thanks to: Jona Hysa, Gjergj Mos

WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION ZONE

Astrit Ismaili

Video / Performance
Format: HD (16:9), color, sound
Duration: 10'
Year of production: 2012

Directed by: Astrit Ismaili
Camera, sound: Black Box Creative
Performers: Lura Elezi, Blerta Ismaili, Jona Mersuli,
Vahida Ramujkić, Brisejda Reka, Lola Sylaj, Vilma Vi

ALWAYS READY

Neda Firfova

Book object
Edition of one, hand-made and hand-bound
Dimensions: 45cm x 70cm x 7cm

Photo documentation / Performance
Digital photographs
Photographer: Shogo Matsushiro
Location: Qemal Stafa Stadium, Tirana

NEVER

Armando Lulaj

Intervention / Film
Format: Full HD, color, sound
Duration: 20'
Language: English, Albanian
Subtitles: English
Year of production: 2012

Directed by: Armando Lulaj
Camera, sound: DC Films
Production Company: DEBATIKCENTER Production-Distribution. Sh.P.K.,
Paolo Maria Deanesi Gallery in collaboration with
T.I.C.A. Tirana Institute of Contemporary Art

NEVER - presentation during TICA AIR LAB Spring 2012:

Intervention / Installation
Chart / T-shirts

NOTES FROM ALBANIA

Vahida Ramujkić

Embroideries
Dimensions: 50cm x 38cm

- 1 – Besa what is this?
 - 2 – Balkan staff
 - 3 – Yu-Albanian relations
 - 4 – How does this story go?
 - 5 – Wild plant tinncan
-

ARCHITECTURE OF SADNESS

Ermela Teli

Video
Format: Full HD, color, sound
Duration: 16'
Year of production: 2012

Written and directed by: Ermela Teli
Camera: Nicola Avanzinelli
Sound, post-production: Nicola Verhaeghe
Music: Mardit Lleshi
Performers: Elidjon Grembi, Klodiana Keco, Maren-
glen Lutaj, Gledis Mema, Nigela Rukaj, Renato Shati,
Sidrit Tafai, Taulant Zharri

WORKERS MONUMENTS | IDEAL STATE

Anna Witt

Series of Performances

Workers Monuments (selection)
1 – Monument for the Veterinary
2 – Monument for the Corrupt Professors
3 – Monument for the Highly Skilled Young Albanians
Who Do Not Leave the Country

Ideal State
Police officers, mirrors

IMPRESSUM

TICA AIR LAB
RE-ENACTMENT AS ARTISTIC STRATEGY

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