

Was ist Multipleks?

A conversation by Marina Gržinić and Roni Layerson about time machines, the apocryphal art group Multipleks and other invisible dimensions of the (East) Art Map.

Layerson:

The notion of time and its manipulation plays a central role in many art works made on the territory of the former Yugoslavia – especially around the time of its breaking up. Of course I'm thinking of the NSK State in Time, but also about other positions like the Belgrade Malevich and Multipleks. Now procedures of time manipulation seem to be at the heart of post-Fordism – would you suggest re-considering and re-reading certain methods of Easthetics Aesthetics as today's resistance practices?

Gržinić:

I will answer to this and other questions by making more or less a consistent reference to projects by the group IRWIN from Ljubljana, and specifically referring to IRWIN re-enactments of works by the group OHO, the only conceptual group from Slovenia from the late 1960s, which was internationally known as well. IRWIN realized a series of art works/photographs titled IRWIN-OHO (beginning in 2004), in which they display the re-appropriation and re-enactment of OHO conceptual works from the 1960s–1970s. I can describe the results as procedures through which IRWIN displays and recontextualizes OHO through dialectical materialism. At least this is the way I see the project. Why am I explaining all this? Because this dialectical materialism is something I want to reapply to the ways of understanding the "utopian" processes of time.

So if we think about the NSK State in Time project by IRWIN and NSK (initiated in the 1990s) of a state that can live only in time, it was important to ask if this was not just a mockery of the (bloody) proliferation of new states in Balkans in the 1990s, or something that develops a new logic. I asked myself in the mid-1990s how we could label this *spiritual* element (time) of corporeality and this *corporeal* element (the state) of spirituality (as the NSK State in Time inaugurated embassies and consulates in real spaces – private apartments). I proposed that we define them as *specters* – not as something simply ghostly, but as material embodiments of processes of evacuation. I stated, re-elaborating Jacques Derrida's *The Spectres of Marx*, that the NSK State in Time is the specter of the state, and that NSK embassies are specters of embassies. The NSK State in Time is therefore a transposition, as much as it is also a spectralization of the evacuation of specific historical, social and political spaces of the former Eastern Europe, of its present non/existing condition.

Therefore, what is needed in reconsidering the potential of utopias in time is, using Alain Badiou's vocabulary, an opening of a passage to a truly difficult production of novelty, forcing the structure precisely where a lack was found, in order to make generically possible that which the state of the situation would rather confine to an absurd impossibility.

Layerson:

One important group in this context was clearly Multipleks, whose radical take on time and history has been highly influential on many other artists in their context. Virtually nothing precise is known about their practice, ... but in the book "East Art Map" you refer to Multipleks as being folded into many stages of what you call the Hegelian triad of Retro-avant garde.

Gržinić:

One untitled Multipleks project is closely connected to OHO's *Wheat and Rope* from the end

of the 1960s. The work by Multipleks is supposed to be a trace of a time machine; it is a two-dimensional projection cast by a 4-D object resembling a hypercube. There are no photos or other documentary evidence of the actual performance of the piece, but this is in line with many works of that time. The only trace of the time machine's existence is a sketch, which itself could be re-appropriated out of a popular comic magazine. We don't even know the date of its origin. The graphic style would suggest the end of the '60s up to the mid-'70s, but other references would hint even more to the second half of the 1980s, trying to re-make the '70s style and projecting it into the next decade.

Layerson:

Or maybe the other way round: I would see it as OHO's *Wheat and Rope* read through *Back to the Future*. The DeLorean sports car also leaves only fire tracks when it travels off into another time. Also, coming back to your idea of the specters: if we look back to the late 19th century, we find an obsession with the fourth dimension from both mathematicians and geometers AND the general public, which was crazy with spiritualism. People thought that ghosts and spiritual appearances were lower-dimensional cross-sections or projections of the fourth dimension.

Gržinić:

As with OHO, we have to see that many works were originally presented only on paper, not being able, or not wanting to be realized; others were realized conceptually, which means without any intention to be formally well performed. The question is, can a time machine be re-performed in formal and technological terms? Alain Badiou states it is important to use a measure of divisibility or *scission* when thinking about art and political figures. He says Hegel was divisible for Marx, it was possible to think about Hegel's idealism and materialism, and the same can be said about Lacan for Badiou. Lacan was caught in idealism before he switched to the theory of the real that represents his political materialism. I would like to similarly note this for OHO and to say that IRWIN precisely re-enacts OHO's period of materialism. The manifestation of OHO after 1971, which I would like to call idealism, is not important to me – or maybe I can say this for some or a lot of us! OHO's *Wheat and Rope* is definitely part of this materialism.

The question is, what defines this materialism? OHO's materialism can be defined as a topological obsession. I take this conceptual term from Bruno Bosteels, who, referring to Badiou, says that all topological obsessions of movement and progress depend on the primacy of the real. What this means is that these precise selected works by OHO, to be re-enacted by IRWIN (and now by you?) are all about topology. Topology begins with a consideration of the nature of space, investigating both its local and global structures. Topology builds on set theory, considering both sets of points and families of sets. Therefore IRWIN-OHO does not simply present relationships with nature, but antagonisms!

Layerson:

What about the role of disappearance? It seems Multipleks has been erased from almost any art historical reference – only leaving traces in the better-known works of others, casting shadows, like a four-dimensional object does on the field.

Gržinić:

Yes, you are right! But this disappearance is similar to the appearance of IRWIN-OHO works. We cannot think about IRWIN-OHO works in relation to any kind of objectivism that would result in the ultimate power of understanding OHO works objectively from the side of the science called art history. Works by OHO should not be understood as vanishing mediators

either, which now mark with their traces in the form of copies the disappearance of themselves, and of the historical Slovenian conceptual movement. On the contrary, precisely because these works are re-enacted and have a specific place within the IRWIN history of re-enactments, they cannot be seen in the classical Lacanian way as metonymical structures, as being, as I have already mentioned several times in other situations (for example, the symposium on conceptual art in the Central European context in Celje, Slovenia, in 2006), without a place, simply nowhere, and reappearing therefore now out of this nowhere. So to say, that what we see now is as if nothing is taking place, as solely this place itself. No way!

Layerson:

So would you say that IRWIN-OHO is secretly referring to the Multipleks time machine as well?

Gržinić:

Of course, but even more to your time machine. IRWIN-OHO works are destructions rather than continuity. Destruction means torsion. Such destruction only restates the rare possibility of over-determining the determination and of displacing the existing space of the once-assigned place. If this had not been the case, we would have gotten just a monotonous and repetitive perpetuation of OHO's old conceptual ideas. If IRWIN had taken into account and relied on the internal limits of the works from the 1960s-'70s, they would never have progressed. As Boostels writes, destruction means a torsion whereby a subject is neither chained to the automatism of repetition nor fascinated by the haphazard breaking in two of history.

We must emphasize a torsion or DESTRUCTION of the structure itself. Or to state with Badiou, every truth is essentially destruction, and furthermore, "History has worked all the better when its dustbins were better filled."

Gržinić:

The trace of the time-machine of course brings in a utopian moment. If we go back to OHO, I think the whole of their activity needs to be read from a perspective within the context of the so-called "concrete utopia", which can be defined as being neither an illusion nor wishful thinking, but rather as offering us a perspective and an orientation, as well as ideas about how to approach the future. We may draw nearer to utopia in reality, but we are also aware that we will never reach it.

Layerson:

Now this is interesting – seeing you as a strong proponent of materialism, talking about utopias. Fredric Jameson comes to my mind here. In his new book about science fiction and utopias, he writes: "Indeed, for those only too wary of the motives of its critics, yet no less conscious of Utopia's structural ambiguities, those mindful of the very real political function of the idea and the program of Utopia in our time, the slogan of anti-anti-Utopianism might well offer the best working strategy."

Gržinić:

Differently, with IRWIN, I can say that an excess of representation can only be decided retroactively by way of intervention. All historicity occurs at the point where a deadlock of structural determination is crossed by the eruption of a rare event that cannot be dissociated from this intervention. This intervention can be formulated as that which decides the undecidable, in a choice that at first glance seemed without a consistent concept.

Roni, is this not something that can be applied also to your work? When you wrote about 109 lines traveling through a space of post-Fordism, anti-globalization processes, capital, the copy and the museum, at first glance it seemed without a consistent concept; but now we know precisely, retroactively, by way of intervention, that what was signified by those terms does have a concept: "It only takes a little smoke and suddenly you see the hidden face of capitalist liberal democracies."

Layerson:

On the top of the comic picture, a small text says *umjetnik koji ne može putovati kroz vreme nije umjetnik*, which roughly translates as "an artist who cannot travel in time is no artist" and certainly rings a bell ...

Gržinić:

...back to "an artist who cannot speak English is no artist" – this was the art work written as a statement by Mladen Stilinović in 1992. I corrected this statement in 2006, stating "an artist who cannot speak English *well* is no artist". As I am terminally romantic, I will say it is true that "an artist who cannot travel in time is no artist", but the question is, who will you take with you for such a travel? In *Blade Runner*, set in Los Angeles, November 2019, the retired exterminator Deckard (Harrison Ford), is reactivated to shoot replicants, but he leaves at the end of the film with Rachael. They depart towards an uncertain future. Who is she? Rachael (Sean Young) is an experimental replicant who believes she is a human, but Deckard knows she is a replicant (her consciousness has been enhanced with implanted memories), and he knows that her life is programmed to come to an end. Therefore my question to you is, which memories, histories, politics, activism, theories and, last but not least, which "inhumans" do you take with you for such a travel?

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Dr. G. Roni Layerson has retired from game design and started over as a writer of pulp stories, a self-proclaimed "performative researcher" of extra-dimensional models, time machines and other post-Fordist science fiction. She graduated from Manoa Free University in 2002 with a thesis on shapeshifting in non-fiction and occasionally lectures at Croatoan College. Her texts have been published in international science fiction magazines. Her most recent work is the acclaimed novella *The War of the Time Machines*, once more featuring Raoul Meyer and Felipe Haut, which she refers to as "not so much fictitious literary characters as techniques of research".

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