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## CREATING ETERNITIES OR THE SHAPE OF ART TO COME

The *Ars Aevi* contemporary art collection in Sarajevo, located for the time being in the city's Centar Skenderija, harbors parts of a photographic artwork which defies some of the concepts conventionally used to theorize art in the post-communist "zone of transition"<sup>1</sup> of the Central and Eastern European Countries: three black-and-white photographs from the Hungarian artist Orshi Drozdik's *Dystopium Infinite* series (1983-1996), arranged as a triptych in the size of 9 x 100 x 200 cm (illustration 1).

One of these concepts is "retro-utopia"<sup>2</sup> or retro-utopianism, a concept which Boris Buden in his *Zone des Übergangs* ('zone of transition') critically takes up from the German curator Inke Arns. Arns uses it to describe the "paradigm change of the artistic reception of the avantgarde in ex-Yugoslavia and Russia from the 1980s until today"<sup>3</sup>. While in the 1980s the "so-called Soviet postutopianism (Il'ja Kabakov, Erik Bulatov, Oleg Vasil'ev, Komar&Melamid, *Kollektive Aktionen*) and [...] the Yugoslav retro-avantgarde (NSK, Mladen Stilinović, Malevič from Belgrade etc.)" would seek for "potentially totalitarian elements of the avant-garde", driven according to Arns by a "discourse-archaeological' interest", "this point of view changes fundamentally during the 1990s in a younger generation of artists (neoutopianism and retroutopianism). Retroutopianism (Marko Peljhan, Vadim Fishkin) no longer primarily equates the utopianism of the avant-garde with totalitarian tendencies [...]." Instead, Arns claims, the utopianism of the avant-garde would now be "reexamined with regard to its media technological projections and designs, [...]." The paradigm shift diagnosed by Arns would therefore consist in a shift from a discourse-archaeological criticism to a "media-archaeological' fascination for the avant-garde's early utopian fantasies of technology". As a consequence of this shift, "utopian thinking per se separates from its unambiguously negative, political-totalitarian aftertaste [...] and takes on a new positive political connotation. It is now understood as an emancipatory or visionary-spectral potentiality [...]."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Buden, Boris: *Zone des Übergangs. Vom Ende des Postkommunismus*, Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2009

<sup>2</sup> Buden: *Zone*, p. 171

<sup>3</sup> Arns, Inke: *Objects in the mirror may be closer than they appear! Die Avantgarde im Rückspiegel*, Dissertation 2003, <http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/dissertationen/arns-inke-2004-02-20/PDF/Arns.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> See the "Abstract" in Arns: *Objects*.

*Ars Aevi* zbirka savremene umjetnosti u Sarajevu, koja se privremeno nalazi u gradskom Centru Skenderija, čuva dijelove fotografskog djela koje se opire nekim od pojmove koji su se uobičajeno koristili pri teorijskoj analizi umjetnosti u postkomunističkoj „zoni prelaska“<sup>1</sup> u zemljama Centralne i Istočne Evrope: tri crno-bijele fotografije iz serije *Dystopium Infinite* (1983.-1996.), mađarske umjetnice Orshi Drozdik, postavljene kao triptih u veličini 9 x 100 x 200 cm (ilustracija 1).

Jedan od tih pojmove je "retroutopija"<sup>2</sup> ili retroutopianizam, koncept koji Boris Buden u svojoj *Zone des Übergangs* (*Zona prelaska - o kraju postkomunizma*) kritički preuzima od njemačke kustosice Inke Arns. Arns ga koristi da opiše "promjene paradigme o umjetničkoj recepciji avangarde u bivšoj Jugoslaviji i Rusiji od 1980-ih do danas"<sup>3</sup>. Dok su tokom '80-ih "tzv. sovjetski postutopianizam (Il'ja Kabakov, Erik Bulatov, Oleg Vasil'ev, Komar i Melamid, *Kollektive Aktionen*) i [...] jugoslavenska retroavangarda (NSK, Mladen Stilinović, Malevič iz Beograda, itd.)" istraživali "potencijalno totalitarne elemente avangarde", potaknuti, prema Arnssovom, "diskursno-arheološkim" interesom", "ova tačka gledišta se iz temelja mijenja tokom '90-ih kod mlade generacije umjetnika (neoutopianizam i retroutopianizam). Retroutopianizam (Marko Peljhan, Vadim Fiškin) više primarno ne izjednačava utopianizam avangarde sa totalitarnim tendencijama [...]." Umjesto toga, Arns tvrdi, utopianizam avangarde se sada "preispituje s obzirom na njegove medijsko-tehnološke projekcije i dizajn, [...]." Promjena paradigme koju je Arns dijagnosticirala se, dakle, sastoji u promjeni od diskursno-arheološke kritike ka "medijsko-arheološkoj" fascinaciji za rane utopijske tehnološke fantazije avangarde". Kao posljedica tog pomaka, "utopijsko mišljenje *per se* odvaja od svog nedvosmisleno negativnog, politički-totalitarnog prizvuka [...] i poprima novu pozitivnu političku konotaciju. Sada se doživljava kao emancipatorski ili vizionarsko-spektralni potencijal [...]."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Buden, Boris: *Zone des Übergangs. Vom Ende des Postkommunismus*, Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2009. (*Zona prelaska – o kraju postkomunizma*, Beograd: Fabrika knjiga, 2012. – op. prev.)

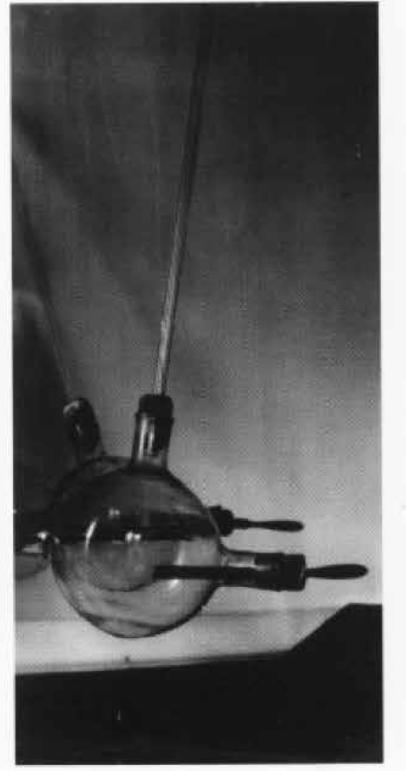
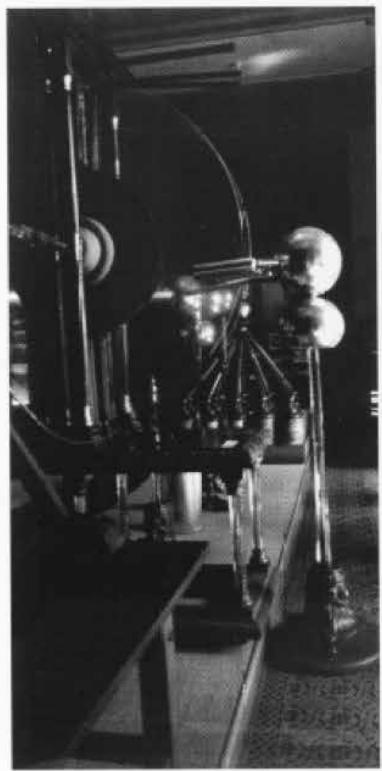
<sup>2</sup> Buden: *Zone*, str. 171

<sup>3</sup> Arns, Inke: *Objects in the mirror may be closer than they appear! Die Avantgarde im Rückspiegel*, disertacija 2003., <http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/dissertationen/arns-inke-2004-02-20/PDF/Arns.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Vidi "Abstract" u Arns: *Objects*.

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## STVARANJE VJEĆNOSTI ILI OBRIS UMJETNOSTI KOJA DOLAZI



**Dystopium Infinite 1983-1996**, Orshi Drozdik, black-and-white photographs, (9 x) 100 x 200 cm, ARS AEVI collection Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina

Referring to Arns, Buden's *Zone des Übergangs* criticizes precisely this retro-utopian attempt to recover and restage the techno-utopian dimension of modernism. Instead of opening up emancipatory and visionary potentials, retro-utopianism would turn out to be anachronistic and ideological. Anachronistic it is indeed because it undertakes to recover modernity's utopian 'past future' by way of a 'retro-prospective-ly' projected identification with it.<sup>5</sup> As this identification seems to take place with little or no reflection on the historical distance separating modernism and post-modernism, retro-utopianism gambles away the emancipatory potential it might have. As a result, it becomes krypto-ideological, a kind of artistic historicism unaware of its own position in time and place. As such, it blends with a cultural field which praises itself to be post-utopian and post-totalitarian yet which, as to Buden, turns out to be de-politicized and restrictively "post-social".<sup>6</sup> Hence, instead of opening

<sup>5</sup> "Retrospectively prospectively", in Arns: *Objects*, p. 18. - Buden: *Zone*, p. 181

<sup>6</sup> Buden: *Zone*, p. 181

up critically transcending views on society, which it could and should do, retro-utopian art would forcibly frame contemporary society, precluding it from self-reflexive viewpoints.

To Buden's critique one could object with Arns that for example works like Marko Peljhan's<sup>7</sup> *makrolab*, following up on the techno-utopian visions of Velimir Chlebnikov and Nikola Tesla, might indeed also provide a basis for a "corrective of present developments"<sup>8</sup> in media technologies, for instance for a critique of today's disciplinary surveillance technologies. As it happens, for Buden it is precisely the however refined reaffirmation of technology which is problematic here. As Habermas already in 1968 pointed out, technology (and science) may as such function as ideology.<sup>9</sup> In such an ideology-critical perspective, Buden's analysis of retro-utopianism - and of the post-social ideology lining it - seems quite to the point:

*It may sound paradoxical, but the artistic retro-utopia of the 90s reverts to the techno-utopias of the past in order to compensate for the loss of reality attributed to media technology. Without utopia no reality! What is more, it is only through its utopian extension (albeit in retrospective) that mankind may reappropriate the alienated media technology. But only the single human being, not society. In contradistinction to the historical avant-garde, the artistic retro-utopia does not dream of transforming society according to its own utopian ideas. What satisfies her is a (media-technological) future without society.<sup>10</sup>*

Buden rightly denounces the self-limitation, the "arbitrarily set horizon"<sup>11</sup> of a society in which artists who understand themselves as progressive once again fall into the techno-utopian trap of an engineering of mankind. Theirs is a society which no longer struggles to determine its political fate by collective action. Instead, they fancy themselves as single individuals who, through the retro-utopian staging of counter-technologies, would artistically subvert the new technological forms of political control.

<sup>7</sup> Arns: *Objects*, str. 321ff

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.: str. 359

<sup>9</sup> Habermas, Jürgen: "Technology and Science as 'Ideology'", in *Toward a rational society; student protest, science, and politics*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1970

<sup>10</sup> Buden: *Zone*, p. 184. Translation W.B.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.: p. 182

ga, umjesto da otvori kritički transcendirajuće poglеде na društvo, što je mogla i trebala činiti, retroutopiska umjetnost bi nasilno uokvirila savremeno društvo, lišavajući ga autorefleksivnih stavova.

Budenovoj kritici može se usprotiviti tvrdnjom Arnsove da bi, na primjer, radovi poput *makrolab* Marka Peljhana<sup>7</sup>, nadovezujući se na tehnoutopiske vizije Velimira Hlebnikova i Nikole Tesle, mogli pružiti osnovu za "korektiv aktuelnih zbivanja"<sup>8</sup> u medijskim tehnologijama, na primjer za kritiku današnjih tehnologija za disciplinski nadzor. Zapravo, za Budena je ovdje problematična upravo reaffirmacija tehnologije, ma kako sofisticirana ona bila. Kako je Habermas istakao još 1968. godine, tehnologija (i nauka) kao takve mogu funkcionirati kao ideologija.<sup>9</sup> U takvoj ideološko-kritičkoj perspektivi, Budenova analiza retroutopije - i postsocijalne ideologije koja stoji u istom redu - čini se sasvim na mjestu:

*Možda zvuči paradoksalno, ali umjetnička retroutopija '90-ih godina okreće se tehnoutopijama prošlosti, kako bi nadoknadila gubitak realnosti pripisan medijskoj tehnologiji. Bez utopije nema realnosti! Štaviše, samo kroz svoj utopiski produžetak (iako u retrospektivi) čovječanstvo može izvršiti reappropriaciju otuđene medijske tehnologije. No, samo kao pojedinac, a ne društvo. U kontradistinkciji prema istorijskoj avant-garde, umjetnička retroutopija ne sačaja o promjeni društva u skladu sa vlastitim utopiskim idejama. Ono što je zadovoljava je (medijsko-tehnološka) budućnost bez društva.<sup>10</sup>*

Buden s pravom osuđuje samoogranjenje, "proizvoljno postavljen horizont"<sup>11</sup> društva u kojem umjetnici koji sebe doživljavaju kao progresivne još jednom upadaju u tehnoutopisku stupicu inženjeringu čovječanstva. Njihovo se društvo više ne trudi odrediti svoju političku sudbinu kroz kolektivno djelovanje. Umjesto toga, oni sebe zamišljaju kao pojedince koji, kroz retroutopijsko postavljanje kontratehnologija, umjetnički podrivate nove tehnološke forme političke kontrole.

<sup>7</sup> Arns: *Objects*, str. 321ff

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.: str. 359

<sup>9</sup> Habermas, Jürgen: "Technology and Science as 'Ideology'", in *Toward a rational society; student protest, science, and politics*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1970.

<sup>10</sup> Buden: *Zone*, str. 184. (prevedeno sa engleskog prijevoda kojeg je uradio W.B. – op. prev.)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.: str. 182

While Buden's criticism is right in theory, in practice one finds retro-utopianism already thwarted and belied, namely by the above mentioned photographs of Drozdik's *Dystopium Infinite* series from the late 1980s and early 1990s which form part of the *Ars Aevi* collection (see illustration 1 above). Against a society which, as to Buden, has become its own invisible and "insuperable limit"<sup>12</sup>, a society which retro-prospectively closes off its own political future, Drozdik's photographic triptych conjures the dystopian reverse of retro-utopianism's artistic phantasies of self-mastery through technology.

### The fragility of presence

The dystopian apparatuses from Drozdik's photographs set the stage for a human being who looks as if he or she had been taken directly from Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*: an isolated fetus or homunculus in a glass tube container, possibly a liquid incubator. Dwelling weightlessly, softly and silently, like a fly in amber, it seems caught in an eternal moment beyond time. It seems to harbour the potential of a future human life, made possible and transparent by an imagined anthropo-technological environment. However, as spectators we are not looking into the future, we are not glimpsing into a utopian *Vorschein* (Ernst Bloch's 'pre-appearance'). Nor are we looking into a retro-prospectively techno-utopian 'past future', rather into a future whose techno-utopianism was already dated before it began. Hence, instead of emerging from utopian technology, human life appears as still-born. The fetus may seem to harbour a whole human future, yet at the same time he or she already appears to be dead. Like a corpse laid out in formalin solution, he or she is visibly incapable of ever re-appropriating his or her environment.

It is this 'at-the-same-time' of life and death which Drozdik's photographs expose, not as a past future containing the seeds of a techno-utopian future-to-come, but as a void contemporaneity. Despite or rather because of its technological setting, the photographs show human life and death in an unmediated form. Facing the photographs, we are experiencing an unreal yet somehow eternal moment, not a 'past future' which shows what would or should have been (from a reflected past viewpoint), nor even a 'future

Iako je Budenova kritika teorijski tačna, u praksi je retroutopija već osuđena i osporena spomenutim fotografijama koje čine seriju *Dystopium Infinite* Drozdikove, nastalu kasnih '80-ih i ranih '90-ih, a koje su dio zbirke *Ars Aevi* (vidi ilustraciju 1). Protiv društva koje je, prema Budenu, postalo sopstvena nevidljiva i "nepremostiva granica"<sup>12</sup>, društva koje retroprospektivno zatvara vlastitu političku budućnost, fotografski triptih Drozdikove priziva distopijsko naličje retro-utopijskih umjetničkih fantazija samokontrole kroz tehnologiju.

### Krhkost prisutnosti

Distopijske naprave sa Drozdikinim fotografijama postavile su scenu za čovjeka koji izgleda kao da je neki junak kojeg je preuzeo direktno iz knjige *Vrlji novi svijet* Aldousa Huxleya: izolirani fetus ili homunkul u staklenoj posudi, možda tečnom inkubatoru. Dok boravi tu, bez težine, lagano i tiho, poput muhe u cibaru, ono djeluje uhvaćeno u vječnom trenutku izvan vremena. Ono kao da čuva potencijal budućeg ljudskog života, kojeg je učinilo mogućim zamisljeno antropo-tehnološko okruženje. Međutim, kao posmatrači, mi ne gledamo u budućnost, ne bacamo pogled u utopijski *Vorschein* ("pred-viđenje" Ernsta Blocha), niti gledamo u retroprospektivnu tehnoutopijsku 'prošlu budućnost', već u budućnost čija tehnoutopija je zastarjela i prije nego je započela. Dakle, umjesto da nastaje iz utopijske tehnologije, ljudski život se pojavljuje kao mrtvorođenje. Fetus možda čuva kompletну budućnost ljudskog roda, ali, u isto vrijeme, on ili ona čini se mrtvim. Poput leša koji je izložen u rastvoru formalina, on ili ona je očito nesposoban/a da ikada reappropriira svoje okruženje.

To je upravo 'baš-u-istom-trenutku' života i smrti koje Drozdik izlaže na svojim fotografijama, ne kao prošlu budućnost koja sadrži sjeme tehnoutopijske budućnosti-koja-dolazi, već kao praznu savremenost. Unatoč ili baš zbog svoje tehnološke postavke, fotografije pokazuju život i smrt u neposredovanom obliku. Gledajući fotografije, mi doživljavamo jedan nestvarni ali ipak vječni trenutak, a ne 'prošlu budućnost' koja pokazuje šta je trebalo ili moralo biti (sa stajališta odražene prošlosti), niti čak 'buduću prošlost' koja predviđa ono šta će biti (sa stajališta odražene budućnosti). Umjesto toga, odgadajući opoziciju smrti i života, prošlosti

past' which anticipates what will have been (from a reflected future viewpoint). Rather, suspending the opposition of death and life, of past and future, they show the fragility of presence. Nativity and mortality are strangely disjointed, transfigured into an uncanny sublimity. The meaningful presence of human life, its historicality, constituted through the dialectical integration of past and future, of death and life, seems to be at a standstill.

As a consequence, the spectator's time-consciousness cracks and decomposes. With this crack, the photographs open up the dystopian abyss implicit in the illusionary idea of a technological making of mankind, an idea which at times may take an utterly delusional shape. In lieu of such a making, an 'infinitely dystopian' instant takes place. Human subjectivity reveals its abyssal condition, its atopy, never to be restored or mastered by any technology. Only a dialectical art, springing from the Socratic *dialektikē technē*, could possibly account for it. Drozdik's *Dystopium infinite* triptych conjures precisely this instant of human atopy, an instant which here, in the static, two-dimensional medium of photography, serves as the temporal placeholder for a genuinely anaesthetic placelessness. In doing so, the instant of atopy marks less an existential than an 'in-sistential' moment, a moment which, though contingent upon a particular point in historical time, keeps on insisting in human life, indestructible like unconscious wishes are according to Freud. Moreover, this moment reverberates the peculiar temporality suggested by the Latin noun *aevum* which forms part of the name of the photographs' art collection: *ARS AEVI*. In 13<sup>th</sup> century Scholasticism, which coined the term, *aevum* names neither the increase eternity of the transcendent divine nor the immanent transitoriness of worldly creatures but - in between the two - a "created eternity"<sup>13</sup> (latin *aeternitas creata*), the duration of created yet imperishable things, for instance of intelligent essences or of angels.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See the entry "aevum" in Ritter, Joachim et al. (eds.): *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Basel: Schwabe, 1971.

<sup>14</sup> It is true that one could also want to interpret Drozdik's fetus or homunculus in a retro-utopian sense. For example, one could want to see the fetus as one of the post-historical angels from the song *Engel* ('angel', 1997) of the German band RAMMSTEIN, interpreting RAMMSTEIN thus from a similar prospective from which Slavoj Žižek interprets the Slovenian band LAIBACH, for instance in his latest movie *The pervert's guide to ideology* (UK 2012). As RAMMSTEIN's angels sing: "We are frightened and are alone" the lead singer answers: "God knows I don't want to be an angel". Thus they reveal a cynically retro-utopian attitude. The line dismisses, it is true, traditional Christian notions of life in heaven

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

i budućnosti, oni pokazuju krhkost prisutnosti. Rođenje i smrt su neočekivano iščašeni, preobraženi u neku jezovitu uzvišenost. Suvislo prisustvo ljudskog života, njegova historičnost, ustanovljena kroz dijalektičku integraciju prošlosti i budućnost, smrti i života, kao da je na mrtvoj tački.

Kao posljedica toga, posmatračeva svijest o vremenu puca i raspada se. A sa tom pukotinom fotografije otvaraju distopijski ponor implicitan u varljivoj ideji tehnološkog nastanka čovječanstva, ideji koja ponekad može dobiti potpuno nerealan oblik. Umjesto takvog nastanka, dešava se 'beskrajno distopijski' trenutak. Ljudska subjektivnost otkriva svoje nesagledivo stanje, svoju atopiju, koju nikakva tehnologija ne može obnoviti ili savladati. Samo bi dijalikička umjetnost, nastala iz sokratovske *dialektikē technē*, mogla to razjasniti. Drozdikin triptih *Dystopium Infinite* priziva upravo taj trenutak ljudske atopije, trenutak koji ovde, u statičkom, dvodimenzionalnom mediju fotografije, privremeno čuva mjesto za stvarnu anestetsku nemjesnost. Pri tome, trenutak atopije manje označava egzistencijalni nego 'in-sistencijalni' trenutak, trenutak koji, iako kontingenatan nakon određene tačke u historijskom vremenu, nastavlja inzistirati u ljudskom životu, neuništiv jednako kao što su to, prema Freudu, nesvesne želje. Štaviše, ovaj trenutak odražava neobičnu temporalnost koju sugerira latinska imenica *aevum* koja je sastavni dio imena zbirke u kojoj se nalaze fotografije: *ARS AEVI*. U skolastici 13. vijeka, koja je skovala termin, *aevum* ne označava nestvorenu vječnost transcendentalnog božanskog niti immanentnu prolaznost zemaljskih bića već - nešto između tog dvo-ga - "stvorenju vječnost"<sup>13</sup> (latinski *aeternitas creata*), trajanje stvorenih ali neprolaznih stvari, primjerice inteligentne esencije ili andela.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Pogledati natuknicu "aevum" u Ritter, Joachim et al. (ur.): *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Basel: Schwabe, 1971.

<sup>14</sup> Tačno je da bi neko poželio tumačiti Drozdikin fetus ili homunkul u retroutopijskom smislu. Na primjer, neko bi mogao poželjeti vidjeti fetus kao jednog od postistorijskih andela iz pjesme Engel ('andeo', 1997.) njemačkog benda RAMMSTEIN, tumačeći tako RAMMSTEIN iz slične perspektive iz koje Slavoj Žižek tumači slovenski bend LAIBACH, na primjer u svom najnovijem filmu *Perverznjakov vodič kroz ideologiju* (UK, 2012.). Kad RAMMSTEINOV andeli pjevaju: "Mi smo uplašeni i sami" pjevač odgovara: "Bog zna da ja ne želim biti andeo". Tako oni otkrivaju cinično retroutopijski stav. Stih odbacuje, to je istina, tradicionalna kršćanska shvaćanja života na nebuh (andeli pate od straha i osamljenosti, a kantovsko 'željno sudjelovanje' u poslovima ljudi koje im se tradicionalno prisupuje postaje nezamislivo), ali *u isto vrijeme* to cinično potvrđuje perspektivu transcendentnog Drugog koji bi trebalo da zna da su oblici postojanja nebeskih tijela koje je on stvorio nepoželjni iz ljudske tačke gledišta. Kao što je Lacan znao, cinični perverznjak

Accordingly, the void contemporaneity of Drozdik's photographs, its created yet seemingly eternal instant of human atopy, stands in critical contrast to the anachronistic past future of retro-utopianism - this past future being what is most problematic in the post-social return to the techno-utopian dreams of modernism. For retro-utopianism's promise must be to conquer human life's ultimate horizon, to reconcile life and death, preferably through anthropo-technological engineering. Ultimately, this means to resolve space in time and to overcome historical time itself through a mastering even of physical space-time. As a matter of fact, retro-utopianism can only give this promise if it veils not just the tempo-spatial coordinates of its own socio-historical and intellectual origins (which lie in early 20<sup>th</sup> century modernism and the occidental utopian tradition), but also the atopy constitutive of human subjectivity as such. Now this veiling is exactly achieved through the presumable timelessness ('past future') of its techno-utopian phantasies, through a temporality, by the way, which the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan analyzed as the imaginary past tense (the "prospective imperfect")<sup>15</sup> of unconsciously fuelled phantasy.

So, upon reflection, the timelessness of retro-utopianism's past future reveals itself to be quite mythical. Unlike the void contemporaneity staged in Drozdik's triptych, it does not juxtapose the two conflicting temporalities of life and death, future and past. Rather, it fuses them. As if it were beyond the timeline, the past future of retro-utopianism has always already happened yet *at the same time* it will never have come. Thus *at the same time*, depending on the logical aspect, its unrealized presence either recedes into an immemorial past (like the paradise in the Genesis narration of Judaism) or it proceeds into an infinitely deferred future (like the Kingdom of God in the Christian New Testament). So, quasi-eternally, it is both already gone and yet still to come. Consequently, it never really is. Reality and presence it may therefore only achieve

(angels suffer from fear and loneliness, a Kantian 'wishes participation' in human affairs traditionally imputed on them becomes unthinkable), yet *at the same time* it cynically reaffirms the perspective of a transcendent Other who is supposed to know that the forms of existence of the heavenly bodies he created are undesirable from the human viewpoint. As Lacan knew, the cynical pervert is "a unique helper of God" (Lacan, Jacques: *Le séminaire livre XVI: D'un autre à l'Autre* (1968-69), Bregenz: Lacan-Archive, Seminar from May 26, 1969, p. 210).

<sup>15</sup> Lacan, Jacques: *Le Séminaire livre XV: L'acte psychanalytique* (1967-68), Bregenz: Lacan-Archive. Seminar from January 10, 1968, p. 81; see also Lacan, Jacques: *Écrits*, Paris: Seuil, 1966, p. 678

U skladu s tim, prazna savremenost Drozdkinih fotografija, njen stvoreni ali ipak naizgled vječni trenutak ljudske atopije, stoji u kritičkom kontrastu anahrone prošle budućnosti retroutopije - ova prošla budućnost je najproblematičnija tačka postsocijalnog povratka na tehnoutopijske snove modernizma. Jer retro-utopijsko obećanje je osvajanje konačnog horizonta ljudskog života - pomiriti život i smrt, po mogućnosti kroz antropo-tehnološki inženjering. U konačnici, to znači razriješiti prostor u vremenu i prevazići samo istorijsko vrijeme kroz ovladavanje čak i fizičkog prostora-vremena. Zapravo, retroutopija može dati ovo obećanje jedino ako prikrije ne samo temporalno-prostorne koordinate sopstvenog socio-istorijskog i intelektualnog porijekla (koje leži u modernizmu ranog 20. vijeka i zapadnoj utopijskoj tradiciji), već i atopiju koja je konstitutivni dio ljudske subjektivnosti kao takve. To prikrivanje je upravo postignuto kroz pretpostavljenu bezvremenost ('prošla budućnost') svojih tehnoutopijskih fantazija, kroz temporalnost, koju je, usput budi rečeno, psihoanalitičar Jacques Lacan analizirao kao imaginarno prošlo vrijeme ("prospektivni imperfekt")<sup>15</sup> fantazije koju pokreće nesvjesno.

Dakle, kad se dobro razmisli, bezvremenost retroutopijske prošle budućnosti pokazuje se kao prilično mitska. Za razliku od prazne savremenosti uprizorene u Drozdkinom triptihu, ona ne upoređuje dvije suprotstavljene temporalnosti života i smrti, prošlosti i budućnosti. Umjesto toga, ona ih spaja. Kao da je izvan vremenske skale, prošla budućnost retroutopije oduvijek se već dogodila, pa ipak, *u isto vrijeme* ona nikada neće doći. Stoga, *u isto vrijeme*, ovisno o logičkom aspektu, njeni nerealizirani prisutnosti ili se povlači u pradavnu prošlost (kao raj u judaističkoj Knjizi postanka) ili prelazi u beskonačno odgođenu budućnost (kao Kraljevstvo Božje u kršćanskom Novom zavjetu). Dakle, ona je kvazi-vječna - već prošla i tek treba da se desi. Iz toga slijedi da nikada zaista nije. Stoga se stvarnost i prisutnost mogu postići samo kroz estetsku mimikriju, danas ponajprije u eklektičkoj maski postmodernističke tehnoutopijske umjetnosti.

je "jedinstveni pomagač Božji" (Lacan, Jacques: *Le séminaire livre XVI: D'un autre à l'autre* (1968-1969), Bregenz: Lacan-Archive, Seminar održan 26.05.1969., str. 210).

<sup>15</sup> Lacan, Jacques: *Le Séminaire livre XV: L'acte psychanalytique* (1967-68.), Bregenz: Lacan-Archive, Seminar održan 10.01.1968., str. 81; pogledati takođe Lacan, Jacques: *Écrits*, Paris: Seuil, 1966., str. 678

through aesthetic mimicry, today preferably in the eclectic fancy dress of post-modernist techno-utopian art.

As is known, pre-modern utopian narratives would locate utopias either in different places or at different times. This is evident if one compares the pre-modern spatial utopias of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, e.g. Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) or Tommaso Campanella's *Civitas solis* (1602/23) with the modern temporal utopias and dystopias, e.g. Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *The year 2440* (1770ff.), H. G. Wells' *The time machine* (1895) or his *The shape of things to come* (1933), Jewgenij Samjatin's *We* (1920) or Aldous Huxley's *Brave new world* (1932). In these narratives, differences in place or time open up a critical distance, exposing subjectivity's atopy, hence the genre name *u-topia*, non-place. By contrast, retro-utopianism's post-modern identification with a past future tends to suppress and disavow temporal difference and consequently human atopy. Its past future has no place in time except for the illusionary non-place where both extremes of the timeline, past and future, would converge. Its utopianism thus forms, as it were, an imaginary circle. It sutures the atopy of human subjectivity, pretending to project its ultimate cause and goal.

### The art of creating (and deconstructing) eternities

Against this background, one can argue that the past future of retro-utopianism epitomizes the illusion or even delusion which already Immanuel Kant detected and denounced in utopian thinking: the tempting but inconsistent delusion of human self-creation. In a famous passage from the *Contest of Faculties* (1798), Kant gets back at his writings on the philosophy of history and undertakes, as the title of the passage states, "a renewed attempt to answer the question: 'Is the human race continually improving?'"<sup>16</sup>. There, in a footnote, Kant asserts with respect to political utopias like More's *Utopia*: "It is the same with these political creations [e.g. More's *Utopia*] as with the creation of the world: no-one was present at it, nor could anyone have been present, or else he would have been his own creator"<sup>17</sup>. If Kant in this passing remark is right, if utopianism *per se* implies a founding phantasy of

<sup>16</sup> Kant, Immanuel/Reiss, Hans (ur.): *Kant's political writings*, prijevod H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970., str. 177

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.: str. 188 Fn \*

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.: str. 188

Kao što je poznato, predmoderni utopijski narativi lociraju utopije ili u drugim prostorima ili u drugom vremenu. To je očito ako se usporedi predmoderne prostorne utopije 16. i 17. vijeka, npr. *Utopija* (1516.) Thomasa Morea ili *Grad sunca* (1602.-1623.) Tommasa Campanelle sa savremenim temporalnim utopijama i distopijama, npr. *Godina 2440.* (1770.) Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Vremenski stroj* (1895.) H.G. Wellsa ili njegovo djelo *Obrisi budućnosti* (1933.), *Mi* (1920.) Jevgenija Zamjatina ili *Vrli novi svijet* (1932.) Aldouisa Huxleya. U ovim narativima, razlike u vremenu ili mjestu otvaraju kritičku distancu, razotkrivajući atopiju subjektivnosti, odakle dolazi i ime žanra *u-topia*, ne-mjesto. Za razliku od toga, postmoderna identifikacija sa prošlom budućnošću retroutopije teži potisnuti i poreći temporalnu razliku, a time i ljudsku atopiju. Njena prošla budućnost nema mjesto u vremenu osim iluzornom ne-mjestu gdje obje krajnosti vremenske skale, prošlost i budućnost, konvergiraju. Njena utopija, stoga, stvara, takoreći, jedan imaginarni krug. On spaja atopiju ljudske subjektivnosti, pretvarajući se da projicira svoj konačni uzrok i cilj.

### Umjetnost stvaranja (i dekonstrukcije) vječnosti

Ako se stvari promatraju u ovom kontekstu, može se zastupati mišljenje da prošla budućnost retroutopije utjelovljuje iluziju ili zabludu koju je uočio i osudio već Immanuel Kant u svom utopijskom razmišljanju: primamljiva, ali nedosljedna zabluda o ljudskom samostvaranju. U poznatom odlomku iz *Sukob fakulteta* (1798.), Kant se vraća na svoje spise o filozofiji istorije i poduzima, kao što naslov odlomka kaže, "obnovljeni pokušaj da se odgovori na pitanje: 'Da li se ljudska rasa stalno poboljšava?'"<sup>16</sup>. Tu, u fusnoti, u vezi sa političkim utopijama Moreove *Utopije* Kant kaže: "Isto je sa ovim političkim tvorevinama [npr. Moreova *Utopija*] kao i sa stvaranjem svijeta: niko nije bio prisutan tada, niti je mogao biti prisutan, jer bi inače on bio svoj sopstveni tvorac"<sup>17</sup>. Ako je ova Kantova usputna napomena tačna, ako utopizam *per se* implicira postojanje početne fantazije samostvaranja, iluzorne fantazije koja se nikada ne može u potpunosti ostvariti, onda predviđeni kraj istorije prema Kantu, "kozmopolitsko društvo"<sup>18</sup>, može uspjeti tek kada čovječanstvo ostavi

self-creation, an illusionary phantasy which can never fully be realized, then the envisaged end of history according to Kant, the “cosmopolitan society”<sup>18</sup>, can only be brought about once mankind has left this phantasy behind and has deconstructed its circularly sutured topology.

For Kant, another world is possible, but not through a utopian or retro-utopian chase after a delusional immanence qua self-creation. No utopian master plan can realize the future of “civilization”<sup>19</sup>, only an enlightened and self-reflexive “history of future times, i.e. a predictive history” can do so, like his own philosophical sketches of world history. In contrast to utopianisms of any kind, such a history of a future past builds on two essential insights: first, on an insight essential to the classical era of enlightenment, namely that there is no foretelling the future of a given society unless “the prophet himself occasions and produces the events he predicts”<sup>20</sup>. Polemically, this insight serves Kant to denounce the negative examples for this art of self-fulfilling one’s own prophecies: “[P]riests”<sup>21</sup> through their “moral terrorism”<sup>22</sup> and “politicians”<sup>23</sup> through their “treacherous designs”<sup>24</sup> act as “architects of [...] fate”<sup>25</sup>, be they evil or just ignorant. In Kant’s time like in ours, it is through their very own predictions that they induce in the first place the desolate realities which in turn serve to justify their ideologies. Today, we should only add to these the experts of capitalist consumer good marketing who through their manipulative strategies pretend to serve their customers’ allegedly given preferences, preferences which of course are all but given but which they themselves more or less cunningly devise and exploit.

Fortunately, there is an enlightened variant to this art, and this is where artists committed to the public are called for, namely as emotionally concerned spectators who through their wishful participation promote a desirable course of political events. Like Kant’s enthusiastic spectators of the revolutionary events

fantaziju za sobom i dekonstruira njegovu kružno spomenu topologiju.

Za Kanta, drugi svijet je moguć ali ne kroz utopijsku ili retroutopijsku trku za nerealnom immanentnosti u svojstvu samostvaranja. Ne postoji utopijski *master plan* koji može realizirati budućnost “civilizacije”<sup>19</sup>, samo je prosvjetljena i autorefleksivna “istorija budućeg vremena, tj. predvidljiva istorija” u stanju to uraditi, poput njegovih filozofskih skica svjetske istorije. Za razliku od utopizama bilo koje vrste, takva istorija buduće prošlosti nastaje na dvije bitne spoznaje: prvo, na uvidu bitnom za klasično doba prosvjetiteljstva da nema proricanja budućnosti određenog društva, osim ako “sam prorok ne stvara prigode i događanja koje on predviđa”<sup>20</sup>. U polemičkom duhu pomenuti uvid služi Kantu da upozori na negativne primjere (ovog) umijeća samoispunjena vlastitih proročanstava: “[S]većenici”<sup>21</sup> kroz svoj “moralni terorizam”<sup>22</sup> i “političari”<sup>23</sup> kroz svoje “podmukle planove”<sup>24</sup> djeluju kao “arhitekti [...] sudbine”<sup>25</sup>, bilo da su zli ili samo neznalice. U Kantovo vrijeme, baš kao i u naše, oni koriste sopstvena predviđanja da njima na prvom mjestu izazovu opustošenu stvarnost, kojom se zatim služe da bi opravdali svoje ideologije. Danas bismo njima samo trebali dodati eksperte za kapitalistički marketing robe široke potrošnje, koji se kroz svoje manipulativne strategije pretvaraju da služe tobožnjim željama svojih kućaca, željama koje su, naravno, sve samo ne date, ali koje su oni više ili manje lukavo osmisili i iskoristili.

Nasreću, postoji prosvjetljena varijanta ovog umijeća, i to je mjesto gdje su potrebni umjetnici posvećeni javnosti, koji kao emocionalno angažirani posmatrači promoviraju poželjni tok političkih događaja kroz svoje željno sudjelovanje. Kao Kantovi oduševljeni gledatelji u revolucionarnim događajima u Francuskoj 1789. godine, oni osjećaju i shvataju, kroz željno sudjelovanje, kroz “Theilnehmung dem Wunsche nach”<sup>26</sup> kako je to Kant nazvao, skrivene motive koji djeluju unutar društva u određenom trenutku, prvenstveno strasne

in France in 1789, they would sense and appreciate through their wishful participation, through a “*Theilnehmung dem Wunsche nach*”<sup>26</sup> as Kant termed it, the hidden motives operative within a society at a particular point in time, primarily the passionate attachments, that is the unconscious identifications pivotal for collective and single subjectivities. Through such wishful participation, they may attain a position from which to share the emotional “experience”<sup>27</sup> of those events which, because of their historical import, “can never be forgotten”<sup>28</sup>. These are experiences then which are not utopian in the sense of a short-circuited self-creation, but a-topian in the sense of a historically contingent eternity - in scholastic terms: created yet imperishable. Thence they appear as created eternities. However, today, in a historical time which has gone through the dialectic of enlightenment and which continues to suffer from it, the optimism and all-inclusiveness of Kant’s idea of a progress of “the whole of humanity”<sup>29</sup> may itself appear to be mythical, above all in that it posits something like an absolute memorability through which contingent historical events like the French Revolution would become quasi-eternal experiences.

Nevertheless, in the contemporary post-enlightenment era affected by the massive counter-enlightenment propaganda of terroristic priests, treacherous politicians and clever marketers, enlightenment is needed just as it was in the times of Kant. It is up to philosophers and artists then, acting dialectically in and on the public, that is acting on behalf of society’s atopy, to sense, articulate or actually create such quasi-eternal experiences - knowing, however, that their seeming eternity is to be deconstructed, that their practical impact is fragile and that they always run risk of being appropriated by counter-enlightenment forces.<sup>30</sup> It is in this way only that vantage points for

<sup>26</sup> Kant, Immanuel: *Der Streit der Fakultäten* (1794), Akademieausgabe VII, p. 85, line 26

<sup>27</sup> Kant, *Kant’s political writings*, p. 181

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.: p. 184

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.: p. 177

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Boris Buden’s critique of the appropriation of the democratic revolution of 1989-90: “You want a better world, but the better world are we’ was the answer of the Western spectators to the democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe. In this sense, they are completely different from those who in 1789 so enthusiastically welcomed the news from Paris. While the latter caught sight of their own dream in the revolutionary reality of others, the former recognized in the revolutionary dream of the other nothing but their own reality.” (Buden, Boris: “Children of postcommunism”, in *Radical Philosophy* 159, Jan/Feb 2010)

veze, to jest nesvesne identifikacije koje su od centralnog značaja za kolektivne i pojedinačne subjektivite. Preko takvog željnog sudjelovanja, oni mogu ostvariti poziciju sa koje su u prilici podijeliti svoje emocionalno “iskustvo”<sup>27</sup> tih događaja koji se, zbog svog istorijskog značaja, “nikada ne mogu zaboraviti”<sup>28</sup>. To su iskustva koja nisu utopijska u smislu osuđenog samostvaranja, već atopijska u smislu istorijski kontingenčne vječnosti - u skolastičkim kategorijama rečeno: stvoreno ali neuništivo. Dakle, pojavljuju se kao stvoreni entiteti. Danas, međutim, u istorijskom vremenu koje je prošlo kroz dijalektiku prosvjetljennosti i koje nastavlja da trpi zbog toga, optimizam i sveobuhvatnost Kantove ideje napretka “cijelog čovjekanstva”<sup>29</sup> može djelovati mitski, ponajviše zato što prepostavlja nešto poput apsolutne memorabilnosti kroz koju kontingenčni istorijski događaji poput Francuske revolucije postaju kvazi-vječna iskustva.

Ipak, u suvremenom, post-prosvjetiteljskom dobu na koje djeluje masovna protuprosvjetiteljska propaganda terorističkih svećenika, nepouzdanih političara i pametnih trgovaca, prosvjetljenost je potrebna upravo onoliko koliko i u vrijeme Kanta. Znači, sada je do filozofa i umjetnika da, djelujući dijalektički na i u javnosti, to jest djelujući u ime atopije društva, osjete, artikuliraju ili zaista stvore takva kvazi-vječna iskustva - znajući, međutim, da će njihova prividna vječnost biti dekonstruirana, da je njihov praktični učinak krhak i da uvijek postoji rizik da ih prisvoje protuprosvjetiteljske snage.<sup>30</sup> Jedino se na ovaj način otvaraju polazišta za kritičko promišljanje željnog mišljenja, bilo da je utopijsko, prosvjetljeno ili konzervativno.

Mora da je sa nekog takvog postprosvjetiteljskog, atopijskog polazišta, Iva Kirova u instalaciji *Glagolica* projicirala drevni (proto)slavenski označitelj za ‘misao’ na napuštene ostatke onog što je nekada bio javni prostor za obrazovanje kako željnog tako i kritičkog mišljenja - Univerzitetska biblioteka u Mostaru (vidi

<sup>27</sup> Kant, *Kant’s political writings*, p. 181

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.: str. 184

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.: str. 177

<sup>30</sup> Usp. Budenovu kritiku prisvajanja demokratske revolucije 1989.-90. god: “Hoćete bolji svijet, ali bolji svijet - to smo mi’ bio je odgovor zapadnih posmatrača istočnoevropskih demokratskih revolucija. U tom smislu, oni su potpuno drugaćiji od onih koji su 1789. godine tako oduševljeno pozdravili vijesti iz Pariza. Dok su potonji u revolucionarnoj stvarnosti drugih vidjeli svoje snove, prvi su u revolucionarnim snovima drugih prepoznali tek vlastitu stvarnost” (Buden, Boris: “Children of postcommunism” (“Djeca postkomunizma”), u *Radical Philosophy* 159, januar/februar 2010.)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.: p. 188

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.: p. 177

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.: p. 178

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.: p. 177



*Glagolica*, Iva Kirova, installation at a former University library in Mostar, Bosnia & Herzegovina, 2013

for the critical reflection of wishful thinking, be it utopian, enlightened or conservative, are opened up.

It must have been from such a post-enlightened, atopian vantage point that in her installation *Glagolica* Iva Kirova projected an ancient (proto-) Slavic signifier for ‘thought’ onto the derelict remains of what used to be a public place for the education of both wishful and critical thinking, the University library in Mostar (see illustration 2). Kirova’s artistic installation marks the ruin of this place, as if it was dialectically echoing, from a long historical distance, Kant’s notion of the “historical sign”<sup>31</sup>, namely of a secular ‘sign of the times’ which, as to Kant, should assure humanity of its continuing progress. On the one hand, it thus prompts the deconstruction of the wishful thinking operative in both utopian thought and enlightenment idealism. Yet at the same time, as an intervention into the void contemporaneity of a ruined public place, it re-opens the space for wishful or active participation in public matters.

<sup>31</sup> Kant: *Kant’s political writings*, p. 181

*Glagolica*, Iva Kirova, instalacija u bivšoj Univerzitetskoj biblioteci u Mostaru, Bosna i Hercegovina, 2013.

ilustraciju 2). Umjetnička instalacija Kirove označava propast ovog mjesta, kao da je dijalektički reflektirala, sa duge istorijske distance, Kantovu ideju “povijesnog znaka”<sup>31</sup>, odnosno sekularnog ‘znaka vremena’ koji bi, kao i za Kanta, trebao uvjeriti čovječanstvo u njegov stalni napredak. Na taj način ona potiče dekonstrukciju željnog razmišljanja značajnog kako u utopijskoj misli tako i u prosvjetiteljskom idealizmu. Ipak, u isto vrijeme, kao intervencija u praznu savremenost propalog javnog mesta, ona ponovo otvara prostor za željno ili aktivno sudjelovanje u pitanjima od javnog interesa.

## Images:

### Illustration 1:

Ars Aevi production: ARS AEVI COLLECTION 1992-2006, Catalogue, Sarajevo: Ideologija, 2006, p. 198

### Illustration 2:

Anke Hannemann

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## Ilustracije:

### Ilustracija 1:

Producija Ars Aevi: ARS AEVI ZBIRKA 1992.-2006., Katalog, Sarajevo: Ideologija, 2006., str. 198

### Ilustracija 2:

Anke Hannemann

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<sup>31</sup> Kant, *Kant’s political writings*, str. 181