

Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid: Radical Contemporaneity

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by Mika Maruyama

Kunstraum Lakeside in the state of Carinthia in southern Austria, near the border of Slovenia, provided a suitable setting to look back at the long-term collaboration between Slovenian artists Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid, who have also been active, respectively, as philosophers and researchers, art historians and writers. The region has a history of struggles by the Slovenian minority, especially in relation to the use of the Slovenian language in public. These politicized histories intersect with contemporary forms of discrimination in Europe, which Gržinić and Šmid have explored through their works in relation to gender, class, and race, within the geopolitical transition from a socialist regime to contemporary global necrocapitalism. "No War but Class War!" (2009), projected on a ceiling near the entrance, immediately offered a framework for the exhibition. Analyzing new forms of "coloniality" in Western Europe, to be distinguished from colonialism as the *internal* imposition of colonial logics, the video work elucidates their perspectives on the "neo-liberal capitalist machine, which is disgustingly tolerant of the social and political processes of discrimination, enslavement, exploitation."

While the exhibition space was filled with grids of images extracted from videos and monitors showing works selected from over forty video art projects emerging from thirty-five years of collaboration, it was far from being a mere retrospective. Conceptualized by Aneta Stojnić, the curator of the show and a theoretical collaborator with Gržinić, such as on the exhibition "Radical Contemporaneity," this show presents works that propose a rereading of the process of historicizing sociopolitical realities in relation to the present, by means of video editing that brings different contexts together. This is particularly prominent in recent works like "Naked Freedom" (2010) and "Seizure – Rewriting counter-histories" (2015). The former consists of four scenes, depicting a performance in a studio, a collective performance, an academic conference on capitalist and colonialist mechanisms, and the production process of an animation artist. The latter features face-to-face discussions with four film directors from different generations and the actual screenings of their films focused on political issues in diverse geographical contexts.

By assembling different frames of reference through the editing, the works address the interconnection between theory and the practices of art that are usually concealed behind the works of art. This juxtaposition allows the artists to reflect on a historical moment from different positions and perspectives, including their own, accentuating the relations between body, screen technology, labour, and capital under the new "digital mode of production," which reproduces the grammar of expropriation of the present system of financial capitalism.

From the outset in the 1980s, the duo's practices were inseparable from their theoretical texts incorporated into media technologies. The works, which were produced for what at the time was Television Ljubljana, such as "Labyrinth" (1993), also played a key role in the exhibition. In the 1980s and 1990s, the TV station supported their artistic production, first as a local TV station under the socialist regime and later as national public TV station, allowing for



Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid, Radical Contemporaneity. Installation at Kunstraum Lakeside, Klagenfurt, 2017. Photo: Johannes Puch.

works which reflected the experimental mode of production in former Yugoslavia, characterized by the subversion of normative Western visual ethics employing the visual code of porn, irony, thriller, and surrealism.

The promiscuity of theories and visual experiments in the exhibition allow the viewers to learn—rather than about the artistic biographies of Gržinić and Šmid—the different strategies for interacting with both the present and the histories under the contemporary conditions of neo-liberal politics that permeate every facet of life. This retrospective glance at their work urgently prompts us to reconsider our histories as an act of opening up new possible presents and futures.

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