

Life is the Institution: A Contingent View on Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Macedonian Art

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In a memorable conversation on the presence (or, rather, absence) of gender and sexuality in contemporary Macedonian arts between the theoretician and curator Slavčo Dimitrov and the art critic Nebojša Vilić, the latter goes on to contest the authenticity of a ‘gay perspective’ and the legitimacy of a non-universalist outlook inside arts. Both enthusiastic and exasperated, Vilić states:

... the entire campaign has been set up on the wrong grounds. Rather than dealing with speech (exalting the reality of these identities in/through/by the artistic act), the entire attention has focused on language... now that the ideological has been conquered, the political in these themes has remained for some artists a legitimate thematic corpus of interests. Therefore, I think that all these themes come into play as valid and legitimate themes of and within art, free of pomp, and precisely because of this I advocate a non-aggressive or aggression-free approach.¹

In his attempt to situate himself between generations, Vilić sought to incorporate both presence and absence in a perspective that is subtly rejectionist and politely inclusivist. But can both twists serve the same purpose?

Let us hold back for a while. Everyone – including every artist’s practice – is brimming with expressions of gender and sexuality. Everyone knows a lot about gender: they just do not know that they know it. And this is true for artists as well. Vilić admits as much by going all the way back to decoding gender and sexuality in Byzantine fresco painting and the patriarchs of Macedonian painting. When artists, curators and theoreticians are pressed to speak about such subject matters, it often means the artist’s interlocutor has assumed they have gone missing. But the refusal to engage with those matters – or, more importantly, their history – is not

¹ Slavčo Dimitrov and Nebojša Vilić, ‘Gender and Sexuality in Macedonian Art Practice and Theory: Interview with Nebojša Vilić’, translated from the Macedonian by Ognjen Čemerski, *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture*, vol 7, nos 1–2, Summer 2008–Winter 2009, p 162

necessarily undermining their importance.² Implicit knowledge is neither the medium, nor the message. Vilić's statement and worrisome engagement with what might be the prescriptive future of those subject matters in the then would-be Macedonian arts runs counter to the diagnosis he gives in the conversation. So before we ask what has changed in the almost fifteen years since that memorable interview, I would like to offer a contingent insight into what might have occurred before that.³

There is often an automated presumption that gender and sexuality are missing in the arts of Central and Eastern Europe, and North Macedonia is no exception.⁴ However, a phenomenon can be present where that does not have to mean it is the subject matter per se. Presence is not (automated) subjectivity. Therefore, in the ongoing canon of Macedonian arts, such problems as 'absence' are difficult to historicise and qualify. And when it comes to theory, the grandiose question is the power of anachronicity. Some historians of arts in Central and Eastern Europe carefully engage with explaining such 'delay narrative'.⁵ And as problematic as this may be, this is not necessarily a colonialist method of thinking and doing arts.

The delay narrative – the notion that a Western-bound concept has arrived belatedly in a non-Western artistic geography – could be valid up to a point, and by embracing it, it is possible to actually reject a localist cliché that a given problematic is missing. And the delay itself can be variously coded and silently implicit. A significant example from 1999 – perhaps the first curatorial project to deserve a focused analytical attention here – is Suzana Milevska's project 'The First Peep Show in the City', where seven artists commodify their art practices in a covert art project blurring life and art boundaries for the entertainment of the occasional viewer. The fact that the viewer is not explicitly informed that the peep show is an art project only enhances the precious added value of artistic and curatorial counter-voyeurism.

² Curators often have the upper hand in demystifying such artistic innocence. Suzana Milevska was perhaps one of the first to engage with the term 'curator', and, crucially, from a gendered point of view at that; see Suzana Milevska, 'With Special Thanks To: A Balkan Curator in First Person Feminine', *Open Space* (2013), <https://web.archive.org/web/20220320093820/http://www.openspace-zkp.org/2013/en/journal.php?j=3&t=9>. For a counter argument, which essentially defends the holy cow of artistic authenticity, see (in Macedonian) Vladimir Veličkovski, 'Diktatot na kuratorite i trikot na instant umetnitsite' ['The Dictatorship of Curators and the Trick of the Instant Artists'], *Dnevnik*, 29 July 1999, available in *ZaUm Archive*, https://arhiva.zaum.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/1999_07_29_Diktatot_na_kuratorite_i_trikot_na_instant_umetnicite.pdf.

³ By 'contingency' I do not mean to anoint subjectivism; one can respect the facts of life and/as art without dismantling theoretical self-respect

⁴ I tried to elicit this worry, especially with respect to performativity, in my review of Katarzina Kosmala's *Sexing the Border: Gender, Art, and New Media in Central and Eastern Europe*; see Stanimir Panayotov, 'Sexing the Border through the Body', *ART+MEDIA: Journal of Art and Media Studies*, Issue No 10, October 2016, pp 117–118

⁵ Such as, for example, Amy Bryzgel – most recently in her *Performance Art in Eastern Europe since 1960* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2017). Claire Bishop deserves a mention here, too, if only for her under-historicised efforts. The same is true for Piotr Piotrowski's rather controversial 'Why Were There No Great Pop Art Curatorial Projects in Eastern Europe in the 1960s?', *Baltic Worlds*, nos 3–4, 2015, pp 10–16, <http://balticworlds.com/why-were-there-no-great-pop-art-curatorial-projects-in-eastern-europe-in-the-1960s>, whose implicit dismissal of Eastern European traditions of poster art and murals is counterintuitive.



Dejan Spasović, *Would You, Please, Pass Me the Towel?*, 1999, performance with towels and radio, curated by Suzana Milevska, courtesy of the artist and CIX Gallery, Skopje, image courtesy of Branko Tasev

In these works (including those of Hristina Ivanoska, Slavica Janešlieva, Oliver Musović, Dubravko Naumov, Ana Stojković and Violeta Čapovska), hardly anyone is engaged with a gendered referential certainty. There is no ‘gay’, no ‘queer’; gender and sexuality operate in perhaps somewhat atavistic ways. Dejan Spasović’s durational performance *Would You, Please, Pass Me the Towel?* (1999) involved constant bath showering and occasional interaction with the audience, who could peep into the act of showering only if assisting the artist. Nudity, especially male nudity, and the self-objectification of the body are not immediately open to ‘reading’, because both the show and the performance do not involve a theory immediately interwoven – not to mention a ‘show’. But it takes less than ten years to be able to read Spasović’s work in an explicit manner: this is not because theory is of no use, but because it has to be socialised.⁶ The work of labelling could be hidden and/or postponed, or simply covered over. Just two years later, in Milevska’s 2001 ambitious project ‘Capital and Gender,’ the Macedonian scene arrives on the stage of a self-aware, self-referential labelling.⁷ As any activist knows,

⁶ On this point, consider, in juxtaposition, Igor Josifov’s 2008 performance *Purification Process*

⁷ While in this essay I do not want to dehistoricise any previous engagements with overt conceptualisations of gender and sexuality in the scene, Milevska’s ‘Capital and Gender’ needs to be recognised as the *prima facie* platform of gendered arts in North Macedonia. Sonja Abadjieva’s *Narcissisms*, a project from the 1990s, as well as her book (in Macedonian) *Deep Breathing: Aspects of the Woman’s Discourse in the 20th Century in Macedonian Art* (Skenpoint/Lourens Koster, Skopje, 2001), can be more properly described as influential for ‘female writing’ and the problematic of identity formation and identity as otherness, in a more or less balkanised lingo. While initially Milevska’s projects, as well as the work of Iskra Dimitrova and Sonja Abadjieva,

this type of referential visibility is important. It is not enough to imply and be implicit (however un/consciously). Empty talk about liberation does not redeem either the conceptual delay or its non-exposure. For this reason alone, when (conceptual and artistic) resistance is assigned a new regime of visibility, all retroactive work can be relabelled and rehistoricised. As much is true of Vilić's *Scandal* project, which was never realised.⁸ Even though today he can refer back to *Scandal* as a would-have-been gendered exhibition, the unrealised project still bears the mark of a vapid implication of retroactive committal.⁹

In the 1990s, much more gender, body and desire can be seen in works that go by the trope of identity, otherness and cultural difference (for example, Žaneta Vangeli's 1992/1994 *PORTA* videos and installation) which invite cross-cultural decoding. To re-read the 1990s of Macedonian arts is a risky business, because of the focus of the arts in that period on identity as life, decompromised and authenticated by the political torpedoing of post-socialism (and for a great deal of this line of work, and beyond, the Soros Centre for Contemporary Arts – Skopje should be acknowledged).

Thus, nothing short of the exposure of gender and sexuality in artistic work marks a historical momentum. I have no space here to reflect on how, for example, Milevska's 'Capital and Gender' would be impossible without socialist *as well as* capitalist consumer cultures, but I assume the logical entailment. In addition, I have seen and heard accounts of both artists and scholars discussing Macedonian art as one in extreme isolation.¹⁰ This is a narrative that, when embraced, aggravates the discussion of gender and sexuality in art even more deeply, for the delay narrative is complemented by an isolation narrative. And what if isolation is the truth of art here? As has been discussed by Amy Bryzgel in the case of the Baltic countries and Poland,¹¹ and by Jon Blackwood on North Macedonia,¹² the institutional life of art receives a momentum of relative independence within the NGO framework built in the beginning of the 1990s. This jolly period initiated a sense of artistic freedom *for some* of the artists. It is in this framework of NGO projects, summer schools (organised mainly in Skopje and Ohrid), workshops and curatorial projects that the introduction of gender and sexuality should be

can be framed as the 1990s avenue to making these subjects explicit, they are to a large extent framed as self-reflections on the intersection of femininity and art production, in both curatorial and artistic practices as they interweave. See Aleksandra Bubevska's 'Is Being a Woman Enough? Towards Sonja Abadzhieva, *Deep Breathing*', translated from the Macedonian by Tamara Bushtrevska, *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture*, vol 1, no 1, Summer 2001, pp 232–235.

⁸ See the project documentation in *ZaUm Archive* at: https://arhiva.zaum.mk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/1997_12_24_Skandal.pdf

⁹ And, to be completely honest, the list of applying artists who feature in the *Scandal* document is almost entirely male; this is no allegation, but a suggestion about the power of (curatorial) language, and that of the media (the billboard was supposed to be the dominating media for this project)

¹⁰ The most salient one being by Jon Blackwood in his *Critical Art in Contemporary Macedonia*, Mala Galerija, Skopje, 2016, p 34

¹¹ See Amy Bryzgel, *Performing the East: Performance Art in Russia, Latvia, and Poland since 1980*, IB Tauris, London, 2013, p 239, note 10

¹² See Jon Blackwood, *Critical Art in Contemporary Macedonia*, op cit, pp 28, 37

historicised.¹³ Even a sketchy essay as this one should operate carefully with the filters and containers of this NGO framework and programming, and not limit or reduce it only to a format for gathering. A project is not necessarily an NGO and vice versa – as in the case of the Press to Exit Project Space (2004–2009) by Hristina Ivanoska and Yane Calovski, or Cultural Center TOCKA (2002–2010) by Iskra Geshoska and Nikola Gelevski. An art group is not always a project and/or an NGO (cf MOMI, Dragana Zarevska and Jasna Dimitrovska's Ephemerki duo, the festival Prvo pa žensko). And a studio is not an NGO, etc... The importance of this infrastructure lies in carrying over important debates and projects relative to theorising and embodying artistically bodies and desires.¹⁴ The question as to how an institutional landscape contains an existential problematic is a separate one: in my opinion, it needs to start off with accounting for its own vulnerability and perishability. An artist's life against the landscape of artistic ecology.

The ongoing history I am trying to capture superficially here is generally no different than those of other countries in the region. There is no *necessity* to explain the correlation between NGOs, curation, artistic production in general, and gender and sexuality in particular. There should be a contingent approach, and contingency does not exclude either correlation or causation. But it does not demand them either. What I find particularly unsettling in Vilić's answers and *reaction* to the so-called 'gay perspective' is that another version of necessity is being woven as the non-heterosexual one is being debunked: that of undertheorising what has already taken place. How about constructing a contingent pattern that explains how the perishable institutional structures, their uneasy scaffolding, and the artistic languages on gender, desire and sexualities come together? I find it plausible that contingency can tell us more about Byzantine frescos and gender rather than necessary causations spread between history and methodological nationalism.

Armed with the power of contingency, it needs to be stated that for the gendered arts to live and be nurtured, NGOs were and are, from an artistic and curatorial perspective, as legitimate forms of life as, say, Wittgenstein's late works and Aristotle's notion of *zoe*. Since the 2000s, an accumulated knowledge and explicit action about gender could be witnessed, as rehearsed, for example, in the practices of the female duo Ephemerki, Hristina Ivanoska (particularly her *Naming the Bridge 'Rosa Plaveva and Nakie Bajram'*, 2004–2006), Velimir Žernovski, as well as in the organised actions, projects and exhibitions of the FRIK Festival, Coalition Margini and the feminist powerful festival-cum-community Prvo pa žensko. Doubtless, periodisation here is difficult for the simple reason that it relies on artists' memory and the scarce documentation and archiving practice of the floating groups and institutions. Additionally, it is not enough for a

¹³ Some artists and curators have been trained in the Euro-Balkan Institute's School of Gender and Politics, a medium of education that since the early to late 2000s has had a profound impact in Macedonian intellectual and cultural lives

¹⁴ Think of Iskra Dimitrova's installation *HISTORY OF ASEXUALITY* at Press to Exit Project Space, see www.presstoexit.org.mk/archive29/LectureAndPresentation/MoreLectureAndPresent/IskaDimitrova.html

writer to uncover only the relations between artists and/or curators. Relations are not parallels (and vice versa). An example: consider Žaneta Vangeli's *On the Ontological Failure of Fatalism* (2002), a photography with roots in an earlier project about religion and sacred space, where the author treats the photograph as a painting in the way it is framed and exposed while busting the authorial 'male gaze'. Is it socially committed art by dint of exposing a female nude? Does it matter if it is (not) the artist's body? Now ask the same questions about Alma Idrizi's *The Virgin* (2014), where the naked body is intentionally exposed as mystified by that male gaze. On their own, everything I could find about those works says there is no relation, and no parallel. Do I need a conceptual, institutional and theoretical infra-structure to parallel and read them? Only if I admit the contingency of such infrastructure. Generations have to be able to speak contingently, without relations, even – and especially – if that means without theoreticians.



Žaneta Vangeli, *On the Ontological Failure of Fatalism*, 2002, photography, courtesy of the artist



Alma Idrizi, *The Virgin*, 2014, photography, courtesy of the artist

Furthermore, the manifest exposure of the human body is far from a criterion. Were this the case, any history of national art would be all about gender and sexuality. Ironically, something of the kind was affirmed by Žernovski's 2013 billboard project *All Beauty Must Die!*, curated by Slavčo Dimitrov,¹⁵ although blown out of proportion, however – to the extent that contingency becomes the necessity of interpretation. Žernovski and Dimitrov's urban project at least made this clear: life is the institution par excellence. And given Vilić's unrealised *Scandal* project, which was meant to occupy thirty billboard locations across Skopje, it is a historical loss in the value of juxtaposition that it never happened.

¹⁵ I have written on this project in more detail (in Bulgarian); see Stanimir Panayotov, 'Makedoniya, ili kak natsiyata umira v rozovo' ['Macedonia, or, How the Nation Dies in Pink: On Velimir Žernovski's *All Beauty Must Die!*'], *Novi levi perspektivi*, 10 September 2013, <https://web.archive.org/web/20221001013530/https://novilevi.org/publications/publications/zernovski-beauty>



Velimir Žernovski, from the billboard series *All Beauty Must Die!*, 2013, billboards, various locations in Skopje, curated by Slavčo Dimitrov, courtesy of the artist

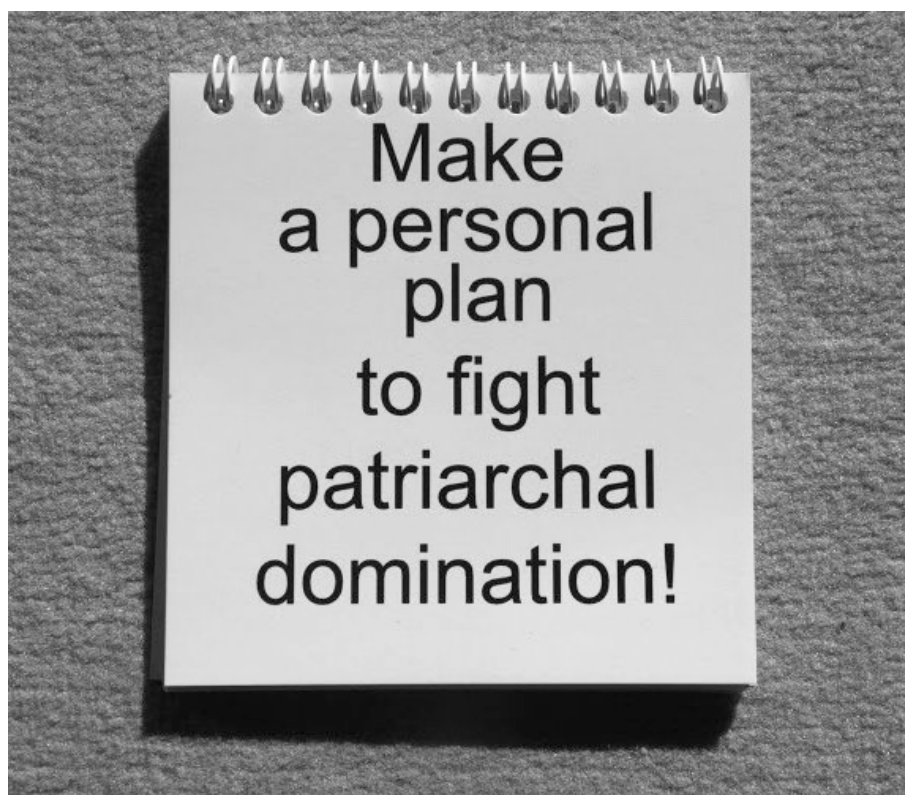
Whether the narrative is about delay, isolation, perishable infrastructure, or NGO-as-a-form-of-life, the seemingly chaotic spectrum of artistic signatures that Macedonian arts affirms that whatever the institutional space (the Mala Galerija or Mesto vs the Museum of Contemporary Art Skopje, for example), nothing can necessitate nor suppress an artist wanting to speak about desire in an explicit way. In this work of exposure, the most is said by artists floating around these different forms and structures, as individuals or organised around group identities. Zorica Zafirovska (an active member of the female group MOMI), who in her own words feels marginal among the marginalised,¹⁶ has distilled in her work both the quality of resistance in solitude and the solitude of group identity.

Zafirovska's work is both captivatingly alienating and discretely sardonic. Alienating, in that how many notes can she make to prepare herself to fight patriarchy? How much repetition and compulsion does it take to fight an institutional ghost? *Make a Personal Plan to Fight Patriarchal Domination!* (2014) is activist and simplistic in repeating a message which, in the hopes of repetition, becomes the truth of life and, thus, an institution (art object) of crumbling revolt, and it is sardonic in that her *Unspoken* series represents both domestic art objects and a performance. The artist stamps the embroidered messages and passes them out onto the streets of various cities as postcards, but the real object is still a corresponding mirror of the truth of art. With the *Rape* (2014) example presented here, Zafirovska has distilled the work of reproductive labour (the embroidery) with the deed of male violence in a menacing humoresque. And so, in relation

¹⁶ See the 'Interview with Zorica Zafirovska', in Jon Blackwood, *Critical Art in Contemporary Macedonia*, op cit, p 214



Zorica Zafirovska, from the *Unspoken* series, 2014, embroidery, installation/action, postcards, various locations, courtesy of the artist and the private collection of Slavčo Dimitrov, photo by Žarko Čulić



Zorica Zafirovska, *Make A Personal Plan to Fight Patriarchal Domination!*, 2014, installation, courtesy of the artist and SIA Gallery, Skopje, photo by Jana Sajkovska

to reproductive labour and the way it is intricately related to a productive one, have Filip Jovanovski and Ivana Vaseva done, who spearheaded the TEXTIL Cultural Center in Štip, an institutional critique type of space and one which should be mentioned here as one of the most important and gendered (due to the feminisation of textile work) spaces/projects outside of Skopje.

Have things changed since Vilić's 2009 musings over Dimitrov's questions? I do think so: they have changed to the extent to which the younger (now middle) generation of artists have discovered – and embraced – that (precarious) life itself is a less precarious institution than the art space. Despite the visible micro-histories, the only correlation (as causation) I can draw between the early 2000s and their impact on the later development of gender and sexuality in Macedonian art is between the precarity of the spaces different artistic groups and individuals inhabited and the exceptionality of the explicitness members utilised when it comes to gender and sexuality, to desire, and to (gender-)fucking. Some of those spaces were squatted by artists and were transitional spaces of art as justice, as in the case of Kocho Andonovski's 2009 project *Letters to an Unknown Friend* at Skopje Post Office. From Abadjieva to Milevska's writings and projects of the early 2000s, what was witnessed in the Macedonian artworld is the carving out of a space for the exposure of bodies and desires, not in the agony of institutional fissures and uncertainties but in the glorious transitoriness of life itself.¹⁷ The true testimony to that is the curatorial work of Slavčo Dimitrov (and the team behind Coalition Margini) – and Dimitrov received the 2018 Ladislav Barišić Award by AICA International Association of Art Critics North Macedonia – which has contributed to the nurturing of a more sustainable and direct and focused format, starting with the 2012 'Article One' exhibition at Chifte Amam, featuring real life objects granted by queer/ed people to create a living archive of desires. Since then, Dimitrov's work has been hosted in the platform of Skopje Pride Weekend, becoming more than a portmanteau for arts, offering queer art as, literally, a convivial way of life. Both the institutional recognition and the fact that Dimitrov has transformed Skopje in the past ten years as a European hot bed for queer arts *and* lives (with exhibitions from Skopje Pride Weekend such as 'Trans-Formations' in 2017, to 'Glittering Wounds' in 2019, etc) and has torpedoed North Macedonia's art scene into a gendered cosmos of a new quality and age. His work documents the fact that queer lives are abundantly precarious, grounding Skopje Pride Weekend around the factum of sheer survival as communal enjoyment.

Shifting between projects, NGOs, makeshift galleries, established institutions, vacillating and migrating curators, the Macedonian artist – wherever she, he or they are geographically – is not an anomaly but an epitome of making life work in praise of art and for the sake of art, and not vice versa. A good example is the trajectory of the performance artist Igor Josifov,

¹⁷ *This is not to say we need to glorify misery.* The political climate of the country has rarely not been exacerbating. One can wonder what are the effects of political proselytism, institutional nepotism, and the like, in artistic and cultural institutions, and I admit the necessity of giving an answer to that wonder, but the strategies of groups and individuals as artists cannot be reduced to sheer survivalism.

whose international career is still domiciled by his constantly being referred to as ‘Macedonian’. Josifov is a genuine member of that specific male queer canon of live and body art, intersecting as it does with the affects of agony and pain and the subjects of violence and endurance.



Igor Josifov, *2-Dimensional*, 2009, performance, courtesy of the artist and the Art Institute Chicago, photo by Ryan Noble

Yet, despite the apparent lack of referencing to gender and sexuality, Josifov’s work has invited various interpretations along such lines. In his own country alone, I have often heard him referred to as a queer artist. In 2016, Dominic Johnson delivered a lecture within the frames of Skopje Pride Weekend where he included Josifov’s *Face It (Manumission)* from 2009, a performance about religion, and paralleled him to the likes of Ron Athey and Franko B. The very fact that a performer such as Josifov carries certain visual reminiscences to body radicalism instantly connotes an automated gender radicalism. And while there is no apparent gender transgression in Josifov’s work, the self-objectification inherent in working with one’s own body is enough of a marker to maintain a historic parallel with traditions of performance. Performance is historically the most gender-heavy artistic genre there is, and I have never had the feeling that the likes of Josifov have escaped the parallelism. But beyond such genre determinism, the body as always-gendered-because-performed is not enough for an artistic gendered body of work. Genre and gender deserve a distinction. Josifov’s work is a good example of what could go explicit while barely implicit: or simply contingently complicit.



Igor Josifov, *Face It (Manumission)*, 2009, performance, courtesy of the artist and Toomey Tourell Gallery, San Francisco, photo by Lemiron Starling

Walking the space of both history and memory, in their own ways Jana Jakimovska and Hristina Ivanoska engage in *documenting* social and imagined reality. In 2018, Jakimovska's exhibition 'The Heroines of Our Time' (Museum of City of Skopje) featured portraits of politically engaged women active in various protest and social movements in the past ten years. Resting as it did on a no-nonsense, second-wave empowerment and consciousness raising trope, but focusing on women who could all fit in a fourth-wave feminism, Jakimovska's portraits were, in a sense, a return to the question of identity (as femininity) from the 1990s but with a specific and immediate historical luggage, which turns otherness into historical identity, and without a strong theoretical slant. The luggage of the genre of portraiture was crucial, as the abstract questions of femininity can, indeed, be finally replaced by facing the latter and making it concrete, historical and uncontingent. With Ivanoska's eleven portraits, 'tradition' was no

longer a vague historical ghost. In her 2016 work *Document Missing: Performance No. 4 (The Interrogation)*, Ivanoska continues her sustained practice on oral histories and gender, in an approach amalgamating her own artistic self and a historical figure through historical phantasy, ghosting the past with female identity. Her visual language is always elegantly simplistic and candidly figurative, and her works are also carefully stretched over time. The subject of imagination here – the revolutionary Rosa Plaveva, a vanguard figure of the ilk of Rosa Luxemburg – is both Plaveva herself (of the real 1917, of an imagined 1951) and Ivanoska. Creating ‘situations that “were and were not”’, Ivanoska’s approach is thus not simply a historical push for recognition of representation, but of coextensive creation and a continuation of erstwhile heroines as agents of change and immediacy. She also becomes a heroine in her art practice, in a *matryoshka*-like manner. The existence of an archive, for Ivanoska, has never been enough. Were this the case, would Jakimovska make all those portraits? The practices of both Jakimovska and Ivanoska showcase that history without women is a disfigured abstraction, and that this abstractly disgruntled archive can only be done away with by fusing the document of the self and the phantasmagoria of the history.

In this essay I deliberately have not tried to delimit what gender and sexuality would mean for a community that is sometimes questioned by its allegiance (or not) to that problematic, for the simple reason that the forms of life that constitute the Macedonian artistic communities are too vulnerable to the life of forms embodied in artistic practices therein. And for the simplest reason that *queer lives are often rejected a form*. Should human desires, genders and sexualities be plastered, painted, performed in some way to make art? Are not queer-gender artists already doing that by existing at the brink of forms and institutions? Are the institutional containers of those art specimens of desire making them art? Identifying with and exposing gender and sexuality in one’s own practice is an admission of one’s own untimeliness: and there can be no necessary form of artistic infrastructure that can dominate this sense of untimeliness. This is all the more true in a ‘delay narrative’, merging as it does with the contingencies of an art world.

Faced with the genre of life, questioned by the precarity of lifeforms, Macedonian artists have epitomised the practising of their desires as gendered and sexual beings across a surprisingly vast plethora of related subject matters. When the state of exception has become the rule, artistic anomie overrides art as exception of life, and life itself becomes the art institution to carry ahead the imaginary of the author. There is something conspicuously rich in this anomie in the Macedonian scenes to reject the gendered exceptionalism in place.

But again: this is no litany of misery. Misery is a fact of life, and not a lifeform.

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