

Olga Kopyonkina

ALBARUSSIA: LOGIC OF THE NOMOS

The main criterion to identify the Republic of Belarus among other East-European cultural zones is related to the quality of its borders. The development of culture within the territories of the former state of *Rzeczpospolita* (Belarusian lands used to constitute one of its parts) was determined by the permanent migration, transparency and looseness of borders between the internal ethnic territories. It was only clear that Ger-

and a Russian woman having children, who are obviously Ukrainians or Lithuanians, illustrates the continuity of ethnic composition, which was the main factor determining culture in the frontier zone. Perhaps that is why Belarus is not still recognised at international art scene, and it continues to attach itself to some "supolnost" (e.g. community) existing in our historical memory.

Presently the artistic situation in Belarus is determined by two generations. One was formed in the 70s and 80s and is based upon the ideas and aesthetics of underground. The other one, which had not revealed itself till few years ago, is that of the 90s, its main characters stake on their own biography, not binding themselves to any traditions, successions or identities. It is paradoxical that when appearing on the international scene both generations avoid or are scared of public presentations and therefore subscribe to joint projects (uniting artists from different countries who vary by their level and quality), which serves to the restoration of the West-Russian brotherhood, which once existed in *Rzeczpospolita*, and to the legitimising of their choice to be with somebody (and with whom exactly) or to remain with themselves.

However the features of the Belarusian artistic consciousness are best seen in the international projects and abroad. One of such project was a joint German-Belarusian exhibition project called *Texts*, organised by the Goethe-Institut and shown in Minsk and several German cities. The art matter of the Belarusian part of the exhibition consisted of the text fragments, image symbols, which most likely appear in the moment of removing the language from its experience and not from the desire of its textualisation. A Belarusian artist at an international *rendez-vous* is seemingly breaking the rules by not bringing in any clear statement, neither discarding nor approving of anything. The artist subconsciously opposes any form of determination, breaking the links within symbols and codes, ruining the symbol, which has not yet emerged, and registering these ruins. Something of this kind is demonstrated in the work of Ihar Kashkurevich (at *Texts*). It is a text in German written on a vertical panel and accompanied by arrows pointing at several bins, which seem to be detached from the Soviet urban context. We are as if living within the circle of permanent reminiscence of discourses, which have never started, of unpronounced statements and unclear meanings. Hence the verbal shortage and the impossibility of putting together a Belarusian artist and language matter and presenting this artist as a consumer or a source of information.

Within the self-determination of the contemporary Belarusian topos one discovers the former communist



Ludmila Rusova, performance

many lies to the West, while Russia is in the East. The frontier zone was involved in a continuous process of "values migration" that withdrew all issues related to the cultural identification with an ethnic factor and shaped almost tactile perception of the Other and his determination in oneself. The joke about a Polish man

province's experience with its predestination of an empty ideological zone intended for the implementation of some political project.

If the Belarusian post-communist experience has brought anything at all, it is the feeling of the legitimisation of its borders — a factor, which induced a neurosis of isolation (or the end of this connection with the Other) and distance, perceived by the local artistic circles rather as a loss than as an acquisition. This experience is compensated by art projects connected with the feeling of a threshold, zero space, stop point, from which a new communicative movement can start and create the required field of interpretation in order to help constructing new forms of relationships with the West. From this point of view, understanding of the solidity any precise character of the borders corresponds to the statement by the Russian writer Daniil Kharms about one unit to register the world. "We are our most comfortable shape. Now when we have become totally independent, let us clean our facets to clarify where our presence ends" (Daniil Kharms).

At the present the main image for the Belarusian art consciousness is the image of an absolute periphery, when the whole world, Moscow and the West, turn into something external compare to Belarus. The centre seems to be elsewhere. We feel as if having a house on the North Pole, in which all windows face South; at the same time we feel at a safe distance from contemporary world. In his *Treatise of Nomadology* G. Deleuze set off a nomad against a migrant in relation to the space: the continuously perceived "space of individual events" of a nomad, which changes its structure reacting to the frontier's migration; and the space of a migrant — closed, exhaustive, centred. The image of a nomad, described by Deleuze, is close to the identity of a partisan, existing in the Belarusian art consciousness. Contemporary Belarusian art is trying to develop a psychology of a nomad-partisan and a migrant (as defined by Deleuze) simultaneously, e.g. to apply self-determination strategy through the context and to separate from it. In 1994-1997 everybody's attention was drawn by two exhibitions held in Minsk and Vitebsk, which were engendered by the context and turned the real available being into their own material. The most interesting was the *Partisan Galleries* project by Ihar Tishin, in which the exposition, consisting of various items, pictures and photos seemed absolutely naturally raised from the environment. The being was chosen in the shape of a private house transformed into a storage of partisan folklore. The disposition of things was interesting. Things were dissipated in the space, they conquered the space, appearing in one or another place. The house as a *nomos*, the intermittent space, expressed the essence of the artistic experience of the Belarusian territory, based on the partisan movement strategy. Tishin suggests this strategy as the only way of "territorialisation and deterritorialisation" (as defined by Deleuze), preventing the enemy from reading and acquiring the area. Tishin's projects define the role of an artist as a liaison officer between his own territory and the external evident world. He moves his territory's frontiers, expands the spring-board changes the location of centres and totally annihilates them, rejecting the *polis* and approving of the *nomos*. The reason why contemporary art institutions with serious

programs have not yet appeared in Minsk, might be that local artistic environment prefers pure strategy without rear or concrete battlefields. It is dissipated like sand in a desert, and realises itself through personal actions. In order to get acquainted with this strategy one has to study the territory. That is sometimes called partisan nomadism, which is the main feature of the Belarusian art situation. In the Western structured and dismembered universe, where a Belarusian artist appears to be a migrant and where traditional and new, technological and hand-made coexist without conflicts, where everything seems legitimised, partisan paraphernalia are becoming a communicative code, which helps an artist to establish him- or herself in the external international world. Everything, which used to be the depth, becomes the width and the surface, where all events are seen as if through a looking glass. That is an explanation of the exhibition called *The Kingdom of Belarus*, presently touring Poland, where the republic is presented as some East Slavic dissident zone (in contradiction to the empty ideological zone status). Here we find that the coarse material objects and installations with an unclear metaphorical meaning really depict the territory's psychology more precisely than any picture with some Belarusian landscape on it. The meaning appears where the event "leaves the premises," appears at the surface. It is important not to slide down from this surface back into the depth: into the false depth of the underground and discussions of national, territorial and other types of identity.

However the lack of symbols, the visual indecipherability of the Belarusian territory has become one of the main experiences of the local artistic circles. Photo projects presented by Igor Savchenko, small, with inexpressive spatial motives, intended for the most banal exhibiting, reflected the character of the area, impossible to be defined by its surface. The lack of a symbol, which could be used for the area identification is the main feature of the border territory, which can determine cultural and territorial identity.

For any outer world representative such projects match the "in-between" category: between stable meanings, concepts and myths. Once the border criterion still exists, the communicative space can appear only between the territories bearing the experience of being distanced. It is like recently, when artists from Eastern Europe created images of mobile periphery within European cultural space.

It seems that Belarusian art can use the Western desire to expand its cultural horizon, and to establish itself in the Western consciousness as some metaphysical frontier zone, involving some additional, but necessary articulation of the contemporary world picture.

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Olga Kopyonkina — graduated from Slavonic philology faculty of the Belarusian State University, deals with history and critique of contemporary art. In 1990s, worked as a curator in "The Sixth Line" Gallery and a lecturer of history of contemporary art at the European Humanistic University in Minsk. In 1998 emigrated to The U.S.A., in 2001 graduated from curators' studies at the Bard College in New York.