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Own Space

Irena Lagator's work is characterised by the variety of the methods of expression she uses. Drawing, photography, sculpture and video are just examples of the media in which she sets her works. Spatial installations and interventions in public urban spaces or landscapes serve to extend her field of media, in line with her objective of examining history, time, place, personal and collective memories and spaces according to their universal and also individually perceptible meaning.

The hardening of volatile material and the permeability of seemingly demarcated zones are as important in her work as the perception of one's own body and its aura, with the double meaning: something that demarcates and yet also radiates charisma; it focuses on the innermost self but also on how one extends consciousness towards infinity.

During her period as an artist-in-residence at the Neue Galerie, the artist developed a project designed tellingly as *site-specific* yet which at the same time appeared to eliminate spatial characteristics. The studio was painted a dazzling white, and a gently vibrating white floor was installed. This white room refers to the *white cube*; however it also deliberately contradicts an abstract spatial understanding by including such architectural features as soffits and vaults.

Irena Lagator has now created new spaces using cotton threads in every colour of the spectrum, hung from the ceiling and reaching to the ground. Cold colours create smaller square spaces, while warm colours create larger spaces.

The visitor enters a space lit either by daylight or by glistening neon light. One begins to interact with the work: crossing the room by moving through or between the hanging strings, one creates a dynamic. The individually distinct areas become recognisable only through movement and on approach; "own space" becomes perceptible only after temporal development.

So, on the one hand, we can locate ourselves at a particular point; on the other hand, we lose our sense of direction, we become aware of the universal while at the same time reflecting on our own self.

Thus, changes in reality, temporality and interactivity create the parameters that transform an apparently abstract spatial image into a field of action in which realities are rendered immaterial in the same way as the objectuality of the work.

By inviting the visitor to interact, Lagator is reacting, among other things, to various forms of theatre which also see themselves as political agitation. In this respect, one is reminded of Bertolt Brecht's *Epic Theatre*, whose analytical approach calls for distance from events in order to make drama distinguishable from real life. Stanislavsky's *method acting* stands in contrast: the actor identifies with his role as intensely as possible in order to produce maximum verisimilitude.

In *Epic Theatre*, the aim is to arouse the audience's activity from reflection, and so emulation is avoided. With regard to this, Brecht is following Karl Marx's premise that it is the social being that determines the consciousness. Thus, one should be aware of the illusory nature of theatre and not allow oneself to be carried away by the action as according to Aristotelian catharsis.

In post-dramatic theatre, as Hans-Thies Lehmann describes tendencies since the end of the 1960s, an aesthetic is developed in which a flexible relationship between actor and stage is forced. Reactions to spatial, visual and acoustic symbols are more important than remaining faithful to the text. Unlike Brecht, who still moves within a drama-based concept of theatre, here the aim is actually to create a communication process between the actor and the audience. An especially radical example of this is to be found in *Living Theatre*, whose improvised plays, in particular *Paradise Now*, have been staged since the 1940s.

In Irena Lagator's work, the theme may not be directly theatre or agitation. However, the visitor's involvement in her work is just as important as the real and virtual world. To put it another way: Lagator confronts the most private, most intimate space of one's own self with public life, with the social and political environment, and in this way provokes reflexive communication. The visitor can observe the work from outside, feel the effect of its aesthetic, he can engage directly as an individual with the interwoven space, thus perceiving a range of spatial experiences. Or he can – in the company of others – experience enhanced communication within a social structure.

As in all forms of art, what is investigated here is the theme of representation, an issue that has been under examination since the realisation in the 19th century that reality and image are not congruent.

The French philosopher Jacques Rancière focuses on an aesthetic that is gradually departing from and/or releasing itself from the representative model. Alongside his conviction that politics and aesthetics are mutually interfused, he is interested in who can take part in what function jointly and who remains invisible.

In Irena Lagator's installation, interfused within a high aesthetic are the issues of representation and interaction, participation within a frame, a cosmos in itself created by her that entails the nature of interlacing, silence and at the same time openness. Of equal importance, however, would seem to be her examination of the correlation between aesthetics and politics. Lagator belongs to the younger generation within the ex-Yugoslavian zone who do not express themselves loudly or as political agitators. They instead lead us to experience subtly aesthetic, and often physically situative, remotenesses. In the reduced installation of simple hanging threads, the spaces she generates assume a contemplative character that communicates both location and dislocation to the same degree, allowing interaction, automatically entailing changes – such as the connection of individual threads as one moves through.

Thus another approach that arises in Lagator's work is the interlacing of time-space parameters with regards to the issue of location specificity in the awareness of the global network within which we are positioned.

We know that dislocation begins with technical revolution, that the unity of time – space – body is overturned by telegraphy, moving machines or the telephone, but that there exist very old methods of site specificity. Peter Weibel comments:

*“The traditional techniques of displacement: The floating away in mysticism, the displacement in shamanism, the nonlocation in nirvana – they all served to free the body from its location. Since the 19th century new techniques to escape the prison of space have been invented.”*¹

The longing to escape the prison of space is examined here more closely and alongside the problem of new social orders interlinked with spatial and architectural models.

Referring back to Thomas More's ideal island which he named *Utopia*, generated from the terminology of the Greek *ou* (= not) and *topos* (= place), here the terms *Atopia*, *Dystopia* and ultimately *Heterotopia* are cited and addressed.

Atopia here is the non-place that lies nowhere and yet can be accessed by anyone in the context of our global networking. This is made possible by a society without territorial borders. Threads of different origins are randomly interwoven and remain in this respect changeable.

Dystopia deliberately addresses generated social systems whose faith in authority is high, but whose educational level is extremely diminished. The virtual space of the Internet can be seen – in the sense

¹ Peter Weibel, “Architecture from Location to Nonlocation”, in: Oosterhuis, Kaas and Feireiss, Lukas (eds.), *The Architecture Co-Laboratory: Game Set and Match. On Computer Games, Advanced Geometrics and Digital Technologies*. Rotterdam. 2006, p. 407.

of Michel Foucault as one of the most significant heterotopias. This is because it records all of social knowledge but is not perceptible as a real place.

This ultimately creates *heterarchitecture* “conceived as a hybrid, mixed-reality environment” that can be seen within political contexts.² Georg Flachbart comments: “*Democracy unrealized, even in the so-called liberal states, was the diagnosis made by organizers of the art show Documenta 11. The question is now: Is democracy realizable at all? At least for us, naive monsters, referring to Prometheus, the answer is quite simple: yes. But a further increment in the liberating dimension of technology, not ideology; or, in other words, by conceiving architecture as a quantum object, in which real and virtual space are coherently superposed, the impact of materiality could exponentially be reduced and investment of capital minimized. Architecture as an enabling platform – for all.*”³

In this regard, another key factor for Irena Lagator is the examination of space in consideration of the themes of presence and absence or the generation and disappearance of space, within which she investigates the external and internal to the same degree – again in a directly analogous and structural formal language. In this way, on the one hand she reflects our own body, and on the other she develops spatiality itself by retaining past traces yet at the same time inviting us to immerse ourselves again and open up the unstable woven structures. She makes that which is not present visible, creating an architecture of absence and focusing in this way on the problem of dislocation, of presence and of temporality.

On the one hand we remember Naum Gabo and his constructivist thread works, and on the other hand Marcel Duchamp, who calibrates the world with a universalist approach. In his 1942 work *One Mile of String*, when he stretched a tangle of threads across the entire exhibition hall at the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition in New York, Duchamp provided interaction with space through the stretching of threads and also addressed its perception and thematisation. Surmounting the two-dimensional interlacing of reality in the form of surrealist drawings, he created a structure that irritated and yet also demonstrated the permeability of real space and, also, imaginary space.

Further art-historical references can be seen in Gego’s work. In her fine yet vast structures or in Eva Hesse’s subtle thread installations, in particular her 1969 work, *Right After*. While Fred Sandback examines spaces from a minimalist perspective or pierces boards and walls in his productions with single threads, Karilee Fuglem’s work, *Imaginary Range*, focuses in its ephemeral form on the phenomenon of visibility and invisibility, the relationship between body and space and the presence and absence of the

² Georg Flachbart and Peter Weibel, Preface, p. 8 in: *Disappearing Architecture, From Real to Virtual to Quantum*. Basel. 2005.

³ Georg Flachbart, *Ibid.* p. 10.

visitor.

Based on this tradition, Irena Lagator creates a new, independent concept whose simplicity and reduction invites one to examine the scope of known and as yet unknown spheres, produced as *own space*.