

EVA FOTIADI

From national mythologies to national mentalities and back

It is difficult to ignore in Greece national identity issues getting sensitive in recent years. Greece refuses to recognise the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, until it complies with certain conditions regarding the use of the name 'Macedonia'. Some years ago a huge country-wide issue arose when a little Albanian pupil, having the highest grades in school, had to therefore be given the Greek flag to hold ahead of the school's annual parade on a national commemoration day.

It is equally difficult to ignore moments of massive national pride. After the totally unexpected Greek football triumph in Euro 2004, anywhere you 'd turn your head, there were Greek flags – on cars, balconies, T-Shirts, pens, hair berets – over weeks and weeks. The success of the 2004 Olympiad despite international distrust translated to half-empty stadiums, filled the nation with unprecedented euphoric feelings.

The above moments are indicative of collective sentiments of national pride and collective codes of expressing them. These come down from national, long-standing conflicts against neighbouring states, and love-hate feelings towards the West. Yet they conceal an amount of collective oblivion or amnesia, regarding the treatment of the national past as the strongest referent and cultural asset of common Greek identity, and regarding collective practices expressing celebration or indignation.

In the film *Acropolis*, 2001, the film-maker Eva Stefani deconstructs the ideological use of the Parthenon by juxtaposing views of the monument to views of female bodies from super 8 pornographic footage. The juxtaposition evokes comparisons of feelings of desire and practices of commercialisation, with the monument remaining mute, like the women in the super 8. In the video *Untitled (Remake)*, 2001, by Stefanos Tsivopoulos, partly based on archive footage, one is reminded that national day parades, still a popular family outing, were established by the 1930s dictatorship. But also that the early days of television's expansion in Greece coincides with the 1967-74 dictatorship, thus typologies and clichés in television and political discourse have their roots there.

The collective amnesia and oblivion in these examples is not conscious, I would suggest, to the majority. Even the mix of nationalism's legacies (parades) and the 'anti-patriotic' extend of cultural heritage's commercialization (*Acropolis*) are totally 'normal' in everyday practices. Ideologies and practices are embedded and formative of mentalities.

SIOBHAN KATTAGO

Translocal Europe: Dream or Reality?

Intellectuals and artists can emphasize the cultural specificity of a nation or more universal themes of humanity and universalism. Images of the nation as a Golden Age are often nostalgic and mythical – a problem arises when a mythical people become xenophobic. A vision of translocal Europe can be more than a dream when

the shortcomings of provincialism and aggressive nationalism are acknowledged. While the politicization and uniqueness of the past emphasizes national differences, the Enlightenment heritage stresses common humanity and reason. The presentation shows how different narratives of World War II emphasize different traumas: the Holocaust, national suffering and the bravery of the Red Army. An argument is made for the recognition of both the Holocaust and crimes of Communism, without a hierarchy of which trauma was more painful. If one thinks of Europe as a Europe of regions, then the dream of moving the nation is gradually becoming true.

MARTIN KRENN
(Re)Writing Histories

Martin Krenn presents three of his recent projects, which all deal with the question of commemoration and the loss of the common past in the public space. *Monument for the Defeat* (completed in collaboration with Charlotte Martinez-Turek, Nora Sternfeld, and Luisa Ziaja, 2005) is an installation in front of the court building in Ostarrichi Park, Vienna, erected as a base empty of its monument, to recall the fact that Austria was never fully de-Nazified. Another work of Martin's, *Monument of the 'Aryanisation'* (2005/2006), was displayed as a poster campaign in public space, as well as a newspaper insert. The piece examines the story of the Big Wheel, one of the symbols of the city of Vienna, but also a monument to Nazi-period crimes. The attraction was "stolen" from its original Jewish owner Eduard Steiner, who died in Auschwitz. *Tirana Tours* (2007), a series of photos accompanied by an interview, starts with the communist tourist guide *Tirana*, a book that was published in 1990. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Albania was the last country in Europe with a communist system, which lasted until 1992. The project investigates the mechanism of ideological rhetoric and shows how neoliberal capitalism inscribed its economic and social processes into the physical landscape of the city.

KAMIL MALINOWSKI
Foreigners in their Homeland

The main plot of the screening program *Foreigners in their homeland* is the feeling of alienation in one's native country. Kamil Malinowski states that we sense discomfort about our national identity, since this identity is based on our nostalgic attachment to a mythologized past, rather than on a reworking of our real traumas.

The recurring plot of the presented videos deals with the juxtaposition of nostalgia/criticism, which corresponds to the individual and the social. The objective of the screening and the accompanying lecture is to investigate the absence or the aberration of identification with one's nation.

What does it mean to be a Pole, an Estonian, a Bulgarian or a German? Kamil suggests that it is not the language, blood, land or even history that determines whether one belongs to a certain nationality, but rather a sharing of collective imagery. It is rhetoric and visual codes that interpolate us, that we share and pass on. This phantasm-like, nostalgic position helps to solve the problem of

identification. Emigrants and immigrants put this issue in the limelight. Jews, gays and a variety of minorities inhabit the margins of democracy, whereas the 'majority' lead peaceful day-to-day lives and do not question or consider national identity. The majority is in the most difficult position, since they presume they know. But are we not all, majorities and minorities, trapped in the clichés of rhetoric and visual codes? Are we not all foreigners in our homelands?

The following video works will be presented: Yael Bartana, *Mary Koszmary* (2007, 12'); Wojciech Doroszuk, *Reisefieber – Sümela Restaurant* (2007, 6'25"); Anna Konik, *Transparency (Mija)* (2004, 9'30"); Tomek Kozak, *Inversus Monastery* (2003, 12'); Joanna Rajkowska, *Upwards!* (2006, 14'); Krystyna Piotrowska, *Yoga 1, Yoga 2* (2006, 3'46"); and Artur Żmijewski, *Lisa* (2003, 11').

KRISTINA NORMAN

Cosmic intervention. A case study

In her presentation, Kristina Norman shows her latest film *Monolith* (2007), where she unveils some mysterious circumstances surrounding a Red Army soldier monument – a monolith that arrived in Estonia from space, and stood for decades in the center of Tallinn. Kristina talks about the observations she made as a documentarian of a culture and patterns of collective behavior, at the core of which is the afore-mentioned statue. The Bronze Soldier – the unofficial name given to the Monument to the Liberators of Tallinn in the local media – has, since it was erected in 1947, become a symbol of occupation for Estonians. For Russians in Estonia, it is a symbol of victory in the Great Patriotic War, but also a central positive symbol of the collective national identity of Russians. The two nights of rioting that followed the removal of the monument from the heart of the city by the government are now considered the most traumatic event in the history of the young country. Kristina's other project, *After-War* (2009), which will be presented this year at the Venice Biennial, is an anthropological study of the case of the monument, conveyed by artistic means. Kristina Norman points out some working methods she used and the challenges she faced as an artist while dealing with this complicated issue.

ALEXEI PENZIN

Was There a "Golden Age" in Russia? Examining Conceptualizations of the Soviet Past

Alexei Penzin's interest in the framework of the seminar on the "golden age" focuses on the various theories and popular ideologies of the Soviet past and their relation to current nationalistic political discourses in post-Soviet Russia.

There is a heap of international scholarly literature on Soviet and post-Soviet conditions in the genres of cultural studies, anthropology, social history et cetera. Most of this research was produced in the context of the "Sovietology" shaped during the "cold war," and one part was written in the context of Slavic Studies departments, which were staffed mostly by liberal émigrés from the USSR, who were politically quite hostile to Soviet realities. So being normative and neutral from the point of view of academic standards, these studies contain a lot of hidden

ideological elements which are far from today's critical thinking on the Left. Liberal (or neo-liberal) ideological positions, which are dominant now in the post-Soviet academic field, represent the Soviet experience, generally, as totally negative and failed.

On the other hand, there are some new trends. For example, the internationally acclaimed theorist Boris Grois recently published a highly provocative and controversial book, *The Communist Postscript* (2007), in which he conceptualizes the Soviet epoch, especially Stalin's time, as a kind of paradigmatic event or even the only possible form of "really existing socialism," which represented a kind of true embodiment of Plato's dream of the ideal State ruled by wise philosophers.

In the mass media, Stalin's name still gains a lot of attention in Russia. For example, a recent public scandal was connected with the *Name of Russia* TV show. This is the project of a Russian TV channel which aims to name the most notable personality in Russian history by voting via the Internet, radio and television. In December 2008 the name of the winner was announced. In first place was Alexander Nevsky, second was Pyotr Stolypin and third was Joseph Stalin. However, some bloggers pointed out that the management of the project was prejudiced against certain candidates, namely Joseph Stalin and Vladimir Lenin. They demonstrated that votes for Stalin and Lenin were suppressed by the show's management, while other candidates received votes in a regular way.

So these symptoms provide a lot of occasions for theorizing on the politics of memory and construction of national "golden age" narratives in ex-Soviet Russia, which is the subject of Alexei's talk.

KATARZYNA RUCHEL-STOCKMANS Painting and counter-history

Histories are always written from within the present moment. Although this sounds contradictory at first, two competing histories can be constructed from the same set of facts. This is because they are always written *by* somebody and *for* a particular group of people. Especially when they are being told in a national context, they serve to strengthen and solidify the identity of a nation. This means that some aspects of past events are omitted or even actively suppressed because they do not fit into the heroic or martyrological version of the past. Art can respond to the past in other ways than erecting monuments or depicting crucial moments in the grand history and thus reinforcing the hegemonic image of the past. It can also offer a competition ground, where precisely these parts of the past which did not make it into history books come to light. Art practices that help reveal hidden or excluded versions of history contribute to a broadening of the debate around possible meanings of nationalism today.

In this presentation, Katarzyna focuses on several artistic projects in which painting is used as a form of critique of dominant forms of historical representation. This is quite striking, considering the fact that in the nineteenth century the genre of history painting was the key means of illustrating the heroic version of the past. Even more significantly, painting returned whenever more conservative or even regressive

cultural policies dominated the public discourse, as was the case during the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century. Yet, she argues that this old medium is currently successfully employed in order to undermine the apparently seamless image of the past. Precisely the experience of totalitarianisms seems to offer a springboard from which to question the limits of “visibility” in the dominant discourse. By referring to the artistic practices of Luc Tuymans, Wilhelm Sasnal and Dierk Schmidt, Katarzyna demonstrates how painting is used in order to destabilize strict regimes of historical representation, especially in reference to nationalist trends in the new Europe.