
On Allomorphing: Anna Daucikova
15.5–22.9

Norra Sidan

Tensta konsthall

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15.5–22.9 2019
Video, 12 min, 2017

“My body is a building,” says the hoarse voiceover in Anna Daucikiva’s three-channel **On Allomorphing**, which tells the story of how, as a child, s/he thought that the body would remain frozen in the shape in which s/he fell asleep in the evening. On one screen, we see a person, gender indeterminate, clad in a rectilinearly patterned shirt, press their arm and chest against the glass through which this action is filmed. In **On Allomorphing**, the Lenin State Library also appears, together with three further libraries. These are indeed different from the Moscow library in that two of them feature Slavic books alongside English-language publications, one with a focus on postwar philosophy, the other leaning towards gender theory. The third library is mixed, although many of the publications are in Italian. All three libraries are apparently private. There are various strange editions to the collections however: a shelf of philosophy books is also adorned with women’s shoes, mostly large in size and high-heeled. A group of Italian-language tomes are adorned with pictures of political and cultural heroes like Jonathan Swift, Nikolai Gogol, Rosa Luxemburg, Vladimir Lenin, George Orwell and Philip K. Dick, all of whom are introduced in Italian by another voice, this time male-sounding.

On Allomorphing carries stories about the emergence of a subject and about psychological and physical malleability. It concerns the subject’s ability to learn and adapt, and therefore the way in which subjectivity is shaped, whether by a transvestite, a transsexual or someone whose profession does not allow them to ‘show face’ (politically speaking) in public, but whose private position leaves no doubt about their political stance. The work gives a taste of ‘transsexuality as a state of mind’, as Daučíková has phrased it: a constant

mental condition where normality, borders and definitions are not only questioned but literally transgressed. This is not foreign to Daucikova herself, whose biography includes being a glass blower, undercover lesbian and self-described ‘non-woman’, onetime member of the Soviet Artists’ Union, founder of queer feminist journal *Aspekt* and professor of art at the Prague academy.

A figure who is lurking around several works by Daucikova is artist Valery Lamakh, reminding us of her commitment to dissidence. As a forced labourer in Cologne during the war, he found some books by Arthur Schopenhauer in the ruins of a house and brought them back to Kiev, where they inspired his ‘schemata’ of simple diagrams exploring relationships. They profoundly shaped him. Apparently, he eventually smuggled some of them into the monumental figurative mosaics that he was commissioned to produce by the Soviet authorities. During the 1950s, Lamakh took the train from Kiev, to Moscow to study what at the time was most likely the only book on Piet Mondrian in the Soviet Union. He spent several weeks in the Lenin State Library, meticulously copying each picture on tracing paper and noting where the different colours went. This might seem extreme, but to travel long distances to see a film, visit an exhibition or buy food was not unusual in the vast Soviet Union. Back home, Lamakh then made his own copy of the Mondrian book, expanding his clandestine interest in geometric abstraction and spirituality.

In **On Allomorphing**, Lamakh’s widow Alina Lamakh is showing the Mondrian book being copied through tracing paper, a copying process which for Daucikova worked as an image for complying with something/somebody else’s subjectivity, and also widening the capability to shift from – to something. There is no difference in talking about the edifice, the architecture and one’s own body, in the continuous process of “building”.

Self-Presentation

Anna Daučíková, artist and teacher living and working in Prague. After her graduation at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bratislava in 1978 she emigrated to Moscow (then USSR) where she lived and worked until 1991. To this period relate her extensive painting practice and interest in photography triggered by her encounter with feminist thought. Returning to Bratislava in the 1990s her artistic practice went towards moving image and performance events, then widely organized in the Slovak art scene. In her video art the engagement of artist's body and bodily action became her main concern in presenting her queer statements. Alongside her artistic work she was a co-founder and activist in several women NGOs and she became a spokesperson for GLBT rights in Slovakia. Her academic career includes teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design Bratislava and since 2012 at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. She is the recipient of the Schering Stiftung Art Award 2018 with an upcoming exhibition in Berlin at the KW Institute for Contemporary Art commencing in summer 2019.

Since 1991 Daučíková has exhibited internationally: 2018: Galéria Medium Bratislava, Neubauer Collegium, Chicago; Gallery CarrerasMúgica, Bilbao; Sleeping with the Vengeance, Dreaming of the Life, Gallery Lítost Prague; 2017: documenta 14, Athens/Kassel; 2016, Gallery Futura, Prague; 2015: Kiyv Biennial/School of Kyiv; 2014: Manifesta 10, Eastern Window, St. Petersburg; 2013: "Good Girls", MNAC, Bucharest; 2010: "Gender Check – Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe", Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw and in MUMOK, Vienna; "Ars Homo Erotica" at the National Museum in Warsaw; 2009: "Kunst und Öffentlichkeit", 40 Jahre Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin, Documenta in Athens, 2017.

Artist presentation

Wednesday 15.5 kl 14:00

A conversation between Anna Daucikova and Maria Lind

Maria Lind: How would you describe your own artistic practice?

Anna Daucikova: I am artist trained at the art academy in 1970 in Czechoslovakia, in the period of a unofficial (hidden) appreciation of Western concept of modernity standing in opposition to doctrine of socialist realism. We were lucky to study with good teacher Vaclav Cigler who opened for us the understanding of art work as expression of „non-personal“ – however after the studies my practice turned out to be closely connected with personal, particular, privacy, search for authenticity in the realm of biographical.

So one line in my practice could be about the tension between modernity beliefs in universal, science and objectivity on one side and particular condition of a subject on the other. Looking back I can see how these two opposites were collapsing into or mixing with each other.

Another point could be the development of my practice from being a conventional “studio artist” (hidden from official scene and hoping for a dialogue with non-existent audiences in totalitarian isolation) to an artist-activist intertwining own art practice with political work for LGBT, women and other minorities, - after the collapse of regime in 1989. Important twist was me becoming feminist and later the spoke-person for sexual minorities and in art the sexuality began an issue in my art work - in performances, photography and video. In the mid-nineties the art making stopped for me being first of all a matter of self-cultivation, self – understanding. I learned from feminist history and reflection and my personal became political.

May be I could say that already during the 1980s in Moscow in that clandestine closure we have lived I sort of found myself a political person. It was

not unexpected that back in Europe in the nineties I found myself acting in public sphere, at first within feminist movement of women academics in Bratislava.

ML: At Tensta konsthall, you are showing *On Allomorphing*, in which several libraries appear. Libraries also feature in other works. Can you tell me about your thinking around libraries?

AD: I am not an intellectual. The library in the Soviet block life (in absence of freedom of speech) was a multifaceted neuralgic point. It was practically the only palpable evidence of a citizens´ mind-set. It was a treasure of knowledge, connected with a risk to be disclosed by KGB in case of home inspection as owner of forbidden literature and called for accountability. It wasn´t so rare - several of my closest friends in Moscow and Kiev had a KGB visit searching for so called anti-Soviet books and confiscating poetry published in foreign countries). Knowledge, passion, love and risk – there was certain “mystery” (I don´t find a better word) which placed library in the central position of home - storage of true valuables, and somehow a material presence of Pushkin next to Orwell, Oscar Wilde next to Tolstoy, Upanishadas to Symposion. This multi-personality of library is fascinating and the way the library is composed can become an image, sort of a group portrait. It is private and public at the same time. It is a biography of the owner as it is a biography of the world. There is a mixture of intimacy, fetishist need but for me it is first of all a fascinating collective image. As long as one lives it is an ever changing place. In *Allomorphing* I shot libraries of several friends, among them my friend Antonio Ilevolela, who by profession a judge could not practice a membership of Italian Communist party. His huge library is an encounter of all leftist and proto-leftist thinkers and writings, - a pantheon of his life-long allies. Is it a bubble? May be, but what an intensity.

ML: In your recent video works, physical and psychological malleability seems to be an important aspect. Can you elaborate on that?

AD: It became explicitly my topic in the last couple of years. On the one hand it is my personal setting, given by my transgender and transsexual mind set which I had lived explicitly from early childhood. Since then I went through periods of identifying myself in a range of labels put on me by the others and fighting or negotiating. Homosexuality as aberration, lesbianism, gay lifestyle, queer, transgender, non-binary, each of them never fully expressing my personality, working for me as a trap. I am trying to develop a desire for non-identitarian positioning. The identity is something a person inevitably keeps building, but when arriving to the accomplishment of the identification – the process doesn't end. What is at stake here is a never ending negotiation. It is a processing which has a quality of passion. A passionate work on making one self. A morphing. A chain of states of in-between-ness. That is why in my work I rather prefer the verbs and adjectives to nouns. In between-ness needs to be elaborated not just for the sake of transsexual and queering people but for the society as a whole.

ML: You voluntarily lived in the Soviet Union during the 1980s. How come and what was it like?

AD: My interest in Russian culture is of the old date, and back in 1970s I had often visited USSR with so-called student-friendship exchange trips. There, by a good chance I made some good friends, had found a circle of intellectuals. Later in 1980s I moved to Moscow due to a serious love relationship with a woman. There I found myself surrounded by open minded people, non-loyal with Soviet regime. But generally, the folks around in the vast Soviet urban areas, as if didn't care that much for the matters of non-normative sexualities.

In this respect my life there was less unpleasant than in conservative, petit bourgeoisie Bratislava. Definitely the feeling in Moscow was mondain, urban and less religious. The whole decade of 1980s with its perestroika the city was a boiling pot, and it was exciting. The time when new information about the true state of the things in the country were popping up was intensive and formatting. I started with intensive art making, namely discovered for myself medium of photography. I would say I developed into a political person there.

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