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Biopolitical Art in Central-Eastern Europe.

Participatory art in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland since 1960s up to today

The methodological approach of my PhD thesis is an extensive survey of literature produced regarding the social engaged and participatory art of the 21st century, along with the literature on neo-avant-garde art actions and happenings from the 20th century. As an art historical methodology, I employ social critical theory to analyse the art projects produced in the 2000s. In addition, my thesis is based on several gallery archives, artists' studios and exhibitions. This thesis also uses a qualitative anthropological method of interview (of artists and curators) with aim to gain first hand data about the state of contemporary socially engaged art practices in the region.

Analytically, this thesis aims to provide an understanding of genealogies and current developments of socially engaged art projects in the Czech Republic Slovakia and Poland. The 'social turn' in art history is generally accepted by many art theorists to have occurred circa 1989 – the moment when the fall of the Berlin Wall led subsequently to a collapse of the collectivist vision of society and to the rise of global capitalism.¹ However, I aim to argue that when examining the situation from an 'Eastern European' perspective, the political, social, economic and cultural conditions had a slightly different development. I place a clear emphasis on the emergence of truly socially and politically committed art projects occurring later than the early 1990s. I argue that it was in the 2000s that the rise of socially engaged art and, consequently, *Biopolitical art* emerged in the region. *Biopolitical art* projects, which I will discuss in this thesis, demonstrate the contemporary biopolitical global condition of the individual's life, while also generating critical thinking on issues linked to biopolitics. These *Biopolitical art* projects demonstrate the shift from the *artist's body* (performance) to the *artist's life* (biopolitical art)². What I want to add to this equation is the aspect of collaboration in *Biopolitical art* practices. I propose that *Biopolitical art* is created from the following three components – real life (BIO); collaboration or public dialogue (POLITICAL);

¹ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 2012. Kester, Grant, *Conversation Pieces*, 2004, 130, or Angela Dimitrikaki and Kirsten Lloyd, *ECONOMY*, 2015, 1; Nato Thompson, *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011* (New York; Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2012), 29.

² Angela Dimitrikaki suggested this here Angela Dimitrakaki, *Labour, Ethics, Sex and Capital On Biopolitical Production in Contemporary Art*, n.paradoxa Vol.28

documentation (ART). I argue that in *Biopolitical art* projects, which I understand as collaborative in nature, it is not only the “*life of the artist*” but even the “*lives of the participants*” which constitutes the art. However, this is not to say that the entirety of the life of a participant is to be experienced in a *Biopolitical art* project, but rather the section documented by the art project.

Some of the main questions I aim to address are:

1. Does participation in art really come from the historical context of the Western avant-garde, or does it rather find its local theoretical and practical sources of reference in the region of Central-Eastern Europe?
2. In contrast to the notion of community being historically identified with communism as a nation and a homogeneous entity, it was observed that the unofficial art communities were formed in small enclosed circles of trusted friends. What collaborative art projects did these unofficial art communities produce in the 1960s and 1970s? And what are the similarities and differences between participation in unofficial art communities and current *Biopolitical art* projects?
3. What can *Biopolitical art* projects tell us about the contemporary biopolitical global condition of the individual's life? What main themes do these art projects demonstrate?
4. Can the work of *Biopolitical artists* be seen as a constant effort to subvert and refuse the current governmental precarization and the effects of biopolitics on the individual?