

Leonida Kovač

POLYRHYTHMICS AND MIGRATING VOICES

In 2010 Croatian artist Nicole Hewitt, experimental filmmaker, performer and lecturer at the Academy of Fine Arts at the University of Zagreb, began her intermedia project which takes as its subject the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague. As a work in progress, the project has more than one working title, among which are *Jasna. Transcripts* and *Polyrhythmics and Migrating Voices*. It consists of film, slide projections, audio installations and a set of live performances, some of which are in the form of performative lectures. The project does not thematize any particular war crime, nor does it concentrate on the culprits or their victims. Instead, it focuses on the ‘peripheralities’ of the trials and is concerned with all that participates in the technology of trial and its media transmission. It could be said that the real subject of Hewitt’s interest is the gap between the impossibility of the mediation of trauma and the obvious medialization – and the spectacularization of traumatic events. In that gap I identify the reason why her work manifests itself as an interminable process of translation.

Walter Benjamin argued that translation is a mode, and the translator's task is to find the intention toward the language into which the work is to be translated, on the basis of which an echo of the original can be awakened in it.¹ But into what language is trauma to be translated? And what mode is appropriate to awaken the echo of the original trauma? Fully aware of this problem Hewitt refuses to visualize the subject

¹ Walter Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator’, trans. by Harry Zohn, in Lawrence Venuti, ed., *The Translation Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 16-20.

matter of the Hague trials and instead undertakes the task of reconstruction. But here arises the question of what is to be reconstructed. Her reconstruction does not employ representation at all because in order to be represented something must exist within language and Hewitt's main concern is to point to the presence of that which is not perceptible and intelligible because it exists beyond language. Hence, from the very beginning it was necessary to deconstruct the media images of the trials - literally, to interrupt the smooth flow of the media transmission. As trauma cannot be depicted, Hewitt's artistic procedure takes the form of a forensic investigation focused on the alleged ephemerality that the media image allows to be seen: it is at the same time a live performance in the course of which the flow of estranged non-representational images projected on the film screen and syncopated by vocal pulsation detects conditions within which a discourse on crime occurs. Hewitt wrote:

The polyrhythmic is the simultaneous performance of conflicting rhythms, an entanglement of rhythmic fields where each trajectory proceeds in parallel with the other, they divulge, undulate and converge – meeting on occasion for a single beat. I place the notion of polyrhythmics along that of the syncope – a suspension of the dominant beat, producing a faltering absence – a gap in time.²

In that gap in time, in a faltering absence, the speechless trauma resides.

² Nicole Hewitt, *Polyrhythmics and Migrating Voices* (unpublished manuscript, courtesy of the artist, 2012).

It seems that war and the 'revolution of poetic language', to use Julia Kristeva's expression, somehow have something in common. In the late 1930s Gertrude Stein wrote:

[...] no war is ever ended, of course not, it only has the appearance of stopping. [...] It is an extraordinary thing but it is true, wars are only a means of publicizing the things already accomplished, a change, a complete change has come about, people no longer think as they were thinking but no one knows it except the creators. [...] The spirit of everybody is changed, of a whole people is changed, but mostly nobody knows it and war forces them to recognize it because during a war the appearance of everything changes very much quicker, but really the entire change has been accomplished and the war is only something which forces everybody to recognize it. [...] A creator is not in advance of his generation but he is the first of his contemporaries to be conscious of what is happening to his generation. A creator who creates, who is not an academician, who is not some who studies in a school where the rules are already known, and of course being known they no longer exist, a creator then who creates is necessarily of his generation.³

A war implies the war crimes that are often equated with crimes against humanity. The Statute of the International Criminal Court, the permanent tribunal based in The Hague, specifies crimes against humanity as particularly odious offenses in that they

³ Gertrude Stein, *Picasso by Gertrude Stein* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1984), pp. 29-31.

constitute a serious attack on human dignity or grave humiliation or a degradation of human beings.⁴ Unlike the Nuremberg Trials, the series of military tribunals conducted by the Allied Forces after World War II, the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991 (ICTY) is a body of the United Nations established in 1993 by Resolution 827 of the United Nations Security Council.⁵ The wars waged in the former Yugoslavia during the last decade of twentieth century were the first wars in Europe since World War II. The dissolution of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia that existed as a geographical and political entity from the end of World War II until 1991 occurred after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 that symbolically marked the end of the Cold War and the initial impulse towards the unification of so-called eastern and western Europe. What collapsed with the Berlin Wall was socialism, the last obstacle to the realization of the idea of a global free market, which included the labour market. In the former Yugoslavia which consisted of six federal republics, the transition from socialism, i.e. a single (communist) party political system to the multi-party system characteristic of western liberal democracies, was accompanied by the rise of nationalist rage that led to the wars which began with the attacks by the Yugoslav army and Serbian paramilitary forces on the territories of Slovenia and Croatia in 1991 and continued the following year in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ethnic cleansing and other horrific crimes were committed in the

⁴ *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*, article 7, (The Hague: International Criminal Court, 2011), pp. 3-5

⁵ United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 827* (1993), [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/827\(1993\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/827(1993)) [accessed 14 June 2014]

name of the nation (and religion). The still-ongoing trials for those crimes began in The Hague in 1996.

Shoshana Felman reads two so-called ‘trials of the century’ – Adolf Eichmann’s and O. J. Simpson’s, in the context of the phenomenon of collective trauma. Her reading is mediated via the life’s work of Walter Benjamin, who for Felman ‘represents and incorporates, concretely and personally, the physiognomy of the 20th century’ and is ‘the most profound witness of a culture that had to fall silent’. Falling silent, she writes, is not a state but an event.⁶ For history consists of a series of traumatic interruptions rather than a sequence of rational causalities. And the traumatised, who are the subjects of history, are deprived of a language in which to speak of their victimisation. Felman argues that the relationship between history and trauma is speechless and that the traditional theories of history are apt to ignore the speechlessness of trauma, meaning that the speechlessness is what remains unrecorded.⁷ In the chapter *Forms of judicial blindness, or the evidence of what cannot be seen*, where she claims that beating is a quintessential figure of the abuse of power and has the impact of the political act par excellence, she writes that seeing, which is the essence of cognitive activity and the basis of consciousness and memory, is not simply a physiological act; it can also be an inherent and unintended political act:

Trauma is precisely what cannot be seen: it is something that inherently, politically and psychoanalytically defeats sight, even when it comes into contact with the rules of evidence and with the trial’s legal search for

⁶ Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the 20th century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 24.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 33.

visibility. The political is thus essentially tied up with the structure of trauma. It is to the structure of the trauma, therefore (and not simply to a different ideology), that our ‘eyes’ should be precisely educated.⁸

As trauma cannot be seen and is speechless, Hewitt shifts the parameters of vision through the polyrhythmics of migrating voices that recite depictions of that what in the courtroom exists as irrelevant marginalia. In doing so her work in progress aims to ‘educate our eyes for the structure of trauma’ that lies beyond the visible. In her concept of the film *Jasna. Transcripts* which is one segment of the project, she wrote:

From the position of the future we see The Hague as a purgatory where a reality that is undepictable and unspeakable becomes spoken, a historical document for a society that wants to believe that the crime has stopped there. Translated, edited, selected, summarized ... color coordinated fonts and logos, voices transcribed - all activated in an attempt to represent the unthinkable. Archives, data banks, registry numbers, transcripts, appeals, verdicts. Mechanisms for processing the unutterable. Written, transcribed, translated, registered, stapled. The crime is disinfected in The Hague. When we convert the passive form of the verb into the active we get the actors – someone wrote a summary, someone translated, someone wrote an abstract, someone decided which of the statements deserves to be presented on the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) web site. The actors: script writers, suppliers, caterers, typists, upholsters, cleaners, electricians, architects, camera operators, editors, directors, tailors, clerks,

⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

guards, drivers, judges, cooks, foreign language teachers, priests, dentists.⁹

Hewitt's project is based on comprehensive interdisciplinary research that includes watching live streams of the Hague's courtrooms and reading the many of court files. She also attends some of the trials and sits in the courtroom, making eye contact with the accused, for example Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić who were responsible for the Srebrenica genocide. In our digital age, all the trials are broadcast live and are available on the ICTY web site. It is worth asking how many invisible and anonymous workers are needed to make these broadcasts possible? And who are the people who turn the undepictable trauma into a global spectacle? Only fifty years ago Leo Hurwitz became famous because he was commissioned to film Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem and to find the most dramatic footage for broadcasting on American television. The names of the cameramen, directors and editors who daily produce the images of the Hague trials for crimes against humanity and broadcast them immediately all over the world, are unknown. No one is required either find dramatic footage or to comment. In Hewitt's words, the crime is disinfected in The Hague. If I were to term her work as a critical art practice, or more precisely, a politically engaged deed, I would consider it in the context of Irit Rogoff's understanding of the notion of criticality:

Criticality implies that it is not possible to stand outside of the problematic and objectify it as a disinterested mode of learning. Criticality is furthermore a recognition that we may be fully armed with theoretical knowledge, we may be capable of the most sophisticated modes of analysis

⁹ Nicole Hewitt, *Jasna. Transcripts* (unpublished manuscript, courtesy of the artist, 2012).

but we nevertheless are also living out the very conditions we are trying to analyse and come to terms with. Therefore, criticality is a state of duality in which one is at one and the same time, both empowered and disempowered, knowing and unknowing, it is a state from which one cannot exit or gain a critical distance.¹⁰

That state of duality is clearly articulated in Hewitt's artistic procedure in which she positions herself in the interspace of personal and official history. Being fully aware that seeing as the essence of cognitive activity is an unintended political act, Hewitt concentrates on that which is overlooked and that the overlooked lies in the foundations of media images that build official history. From this situation stems the need to dissect the media image of the trial: to abstract it in producing diagrams based on the pixilation of the digital image, to pronounce a choreography of movements of anyone caught on camera in the courtroom, to translate the figures of the accused, witnesses, prosecutors, defenders and judges visible on the screen into the contours that are reminiscent of those that remain after a corpse is removed from a crime scene, to versify the instructions given by tribunal authorities and to render everything into the yet non-existing language capable of awakening the echo of the original trauma. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that all the elements of corruption and exploitation are imposed on us by the linguistic and communicative regimes of production: destroying them in words is as urgent as doing so in deeds.¹¹ Hence Hewitt undermines the spectacular images of the

¹⁰ Irit Rogoff, *"Smuggling" - An Embodied Criticality*,

<http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en> [accessed 15 April 2012]

¹¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 404.

trials by breaking their grammar and syntax and approaches the concept of war crime tangentially. The tangent originates from personal memory and is materialized by the voices of people involved in the Hague trials, people who are rendered invisible by imaging technology. Personal in Hewitt's work does not mean singular by any means. Her work is concerned with the concept of the multitude, or more precisely with the relationship of labor and the multitude of migrants.

While watching the livestreams of the Hague's trials, the artist listens to the voice of the official court interpreter who is speaking the words of victims, perpetrators, prosecutors and defenders in the first person singular. Posing the question of how many voices the voice of the translator consists of, what happens in the process of translation, and finally who or what is the translator, Hewitt's work shifts the meaning of the notion of the translator from the concept of the individual towards the concept of a multitude of migrating voices. In this process the mere concepts of identity, memory and reality are challenged.

Like Gertrude Stein more than seventy years ago, Nicole Hewitt knows that no war ever ends but only has the appearance of stopping. This is a reason why Hewitt's work in progress, in all of its shapes, insists on the form of performance, and takes her own generation as a subject of reconstruction. It is the matter of the performative search for an identity that is anything but coherent and clear.

When the war broke out in Croatia in 1991, a group of her friends – artists, musicians, students - dispersed throughout Europe. Many found ways of getting to Amsterdam by initially working *sans papiers* in various temporary jobs, settling in squats aided by the squatters' community in Amsterdam, negotiating their immigration status and finding temporary jobs before getting employment at the ICTY. Thus, the now official participants of the ICTY were once the semi-legitimate underbelly of a

dominant order. They now work for Chambers, Office of the Prosecutor and in Witness Support Sections. Therefore, the art project produces its stories from within lived experience - from an *a priori* position of inhabitation.

This performative project reveals that the prewar 'delinked' histories of punk bands, experimental and improvised music formed a dense cultural backdrop to the dissolution of former Yugoslavia. Paraphrasing Stein's words, the wars in former Yugoslavia were only a means of publicising things already accomplished. Knowing that, Hewitt focuses precisely on the structure of that cultural backdrop. On the polyrhythmic as 'the simultaneous performance of conflicting rhythms, an entanglement of rhythmic fields where each trajectory proceeds in parallel with the other'.

In July 2013 Nicole Hewitt announced that her public performative lecture entitled *This woman is called Jasna* at the Multimedia Centre in Zagreb, was a 'draft for a historical novel in cinematic form – a work in progress'. Such a witty categorization of the event points not only to the problematic relationship between the concept of history and the agency of historiography and to the discrepancy between material facts and factography - often indistinguishable from fiction but above all to the notion of genealogy. Namely, it was the nineteenth century that invented the fictional genre of the historical novel as well as the reproducible media of photography and film, both capable of producing a given reality. The same century gave rise to the idea of the modern nation-state: the war crimes in the former Yugoslavia were committed in the name of the borders of the nation-state. In the late 1970s Barthes concluded that the same century had invented history and photography. Photography, moreover: 'began, historically as an art of the Person: of identity, of civil status, of what we may call, in all senses of the term, the body's *formality*'.¹² The idea of the body's formality also implies the border

¹² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 2000), p.79.

that divides a single bodily territory from its exteriority. That is perhaps the reason why Hewitt, in the 'opening paragraph' of her performance specified as 'historical novel in cinematic form' focuses on the relationship between the formalist meta-language of photography and the idea of identity inseparable from corporeality.

Sitting at a speaker's table placed within the stage of a dark auditorium, with an open laptop in front of her and a screen behind, she starts to read into the microphone:

In 1990 Jasna was 23 years old. She was studying Comparative Literature at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University in Zagreb. In earlier years she had often appeared on the covers of youth journals. Sometimes she had a long hair, sometimes short, sometimes curly. [...] The photographers always made sure that they left the full format of the photograph untouched, that the black edge was clearly visible and that the composition was dynamic. Sometimes she was shown cut off from the head, sometimes from the waist. She was interested in the black edge of the photograph. It seemed to her that it formed a constitutive part of the photograph which, along with her, provided a constant of sorts. Many years later, she read that this edge served as a sign and as evidence of an untouched format, that the photographer had framed the photograph in the moment of its taking and had not later reframed it. She was comforted by the fact that the graphic editor respected that evidence. She felt as if she were offering him psychosocial support and simultaneously proofing the materiality of the photograph. She often listened to Galeta's talks at the MM Centre. Galeta also talked about the edge of the frame and about the space beyond the frame, about reality, that is, the materiality of film. It seemed to her that that very edge was the

material reality of the film and she wondered if she too had an edge, or whether the edge referred only to the frame. Much later, at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s while she was working as a database administrator in the documentation and video-documentation unit for the Office of the Prosecutor in The Hague, she was troubled by the disappearance of the edge in digital photography.

Delivering this text in the calm voice of a storyteller and producing, in the process, the position of the narrator, whose grammatical personality constantly slides across the fluid territory where *she* and *me* merge, Hewitt addresses time. But does time allow itself to be addressed? How can time, or more precisely the gap in time which is a faltering absence where the speechless trauma resides, be uttered? To do this, it was necessary to induce the sense of the corporeality of time, to reproduce it in its materiality, to find the material evidence of the time in question, forensic evidence which would enable the reconsideration of the concept of cultural history.

It is not by chance that Hewitt performed her 'draft for a historical novel' in the Multimedia Center (MM) in Zagreb. That space, an institution which, paradoxically, has not been institutionalized, was a cult venue during the late 1970s and 1980s, a space where a specific non-academic knowledge was disseminated through screenings of experimental films and early videos authored by the less visible twentieth century artists whose pioneering works generated the tools that were later employed by a wide range of critical and politically engaged contemporary art practices. The black edge of the photographic frame also denotes the counter-cultural movement in the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia during the 1980s, which gained its visibility through the youth publications *Polet* and *Studentski list* which were periodically banned for their

overt criticism of the socialist bureaucratic system and its pertaining repression of freedom of speech. The umbrella term “*Polet* photography”, that later entered into the critical meta-language on Croatian photography, refers to the photographic practices of several, now famous photographers, who insisted on the black edge of the negative when printed on photographic paper and who began their careers by publishing photographs in the Croatian youth journals of the 1980s – the decade after Josip Broz Tito’s death, during which the process of disintegration of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia began. It was the time of the first workers’ strikes in a country where declaratively the working class was the ruling class, and *Polet* published images of those events framed with its characteristic black edge that ‘proved their material reality’. Despite its criticality towards the totalitarian political system *Polet*, as well as virtually the entire counter-cultural ‘alternative’ scene, was blind to the violence of sexist discourse which often produced the ‘material realities’ of the photographed bodies framed by the authorial and authoritarian ‘black edge’. Among the favorite photographic objects were ‘beautiful girls’ shot in eroticized poses. One of them was ‘the hero’ of Nicole Hewitt’s 21st century ‘historical novel in cinematic form’ - a young woman who, ten years later, when the war broke out, became an immigrant working different jobs *sans papiers* in The Netherlands, and who finally, when the trials for the war crimes began, became a legal employee of the ICTY, working as a file administrator in the Visual Documentation Unit in the Witness Support Service.

Many of the crimes against humanity committed during the wars waged in the former Yugoslavia were sexual crimes, including systematic mass rapes of women in concentration camps. The mass rape of the ‘enemy’s women’ was part of the war strategy. The migrating narrator’s voice in Hewitt’s performative lecture which addresses the ‘material reality’ of media image, bridges the gap in the interrupted space-

time continuity by linking the black frame of the 1980s photographs which depict young female bodies, with the notion of the speechless trauma of the witnessing victim of the crime against humanity at the Tribunal. This is the voice that speaks for the narrated subject who feels as if she were simultaneously offering psychosocial support to the graphic editor who once respected the evidence of the black edge proofing the materiality of the photograph. While Hewitt reads her 'draft for the historical novel in cinematic form', a slide projection takes place on the screen behind her. The projected images are digitally processed analogue photographs from 1980s youth journals where, instead of the figures of young women framed in a black edge, a huge black hole cut along the contours of the missing body dominates the photographic frame. Its spatiality connotes the process of interiorization where the transfigured black edge of the photographic frame becomes the expanding blot, or in Hewitt's words – the 'faltering absence' that suspending the 'dominant beat' blows up the idea of a coherent identity.

Speaking in Croatian, when she says that Jasna, while working as a file administrator at the documentation and video-documentation unit of the prosecutor's office in The Hague, became troubled by the disappearance of the edge in digital photography, Nicole Hewitt's voice shifts in rhythm, speed and intonation and the images vanish from the screen. In complete darkness the speaking body of the performer begins to erupt an accelerated flood of delinked English spelled characters and words like: 'mm slash yyyy to mm slash yyyy slash from o four slash two zero zero zero ten slash two zero zero zero type of bussines UN position held data entry clerk dash language assistant and document slash video information unit office of the prosecutor UN ICTY Churchillplein one two five one seven j w Den Haag. Description of your duties. I was assigned to various projects of the Document and Language Team. Bulletpoint...', etc.

This shift of language from Croatian into English, the change of intonation and change in discursive modality, the transition from the calm, coherent mode of the storyteller into the mechanized universal bureaucratic language of a digital, post-industrial age characterized by the disappearance of traditional social classes and the emergence of a new global class of precarious workers forced to ceaselessly fulfill standardized applications for jobs, functions as a syncope. The moment of this auditory suspension of the dominant beat that ‘produces a faltering absence’ through the temporality of the images shown on the screen a few seconds before and the images of the black hole that usurp the position of the human figure in the photographic image, brings to mind Freud’s concept of *Nachträglichkeit* – deferred action¹³. Freud used this term in connection with his view of psychical temporality and causality: experiences, impressions and memory-traces may be revised at a later date to fit in with fresh experiences or with the attainment of a new stage of development. They may in that event be endowed not only with a new meaning but also with psychical effectiveness. In his letter to Fliess in 1896 Freud wrote:

I am working on the assumption that our psychical mechanism has come into being by a process of stratification: the material present in the form of memory-traces being subjected from time to time to a *re-arrangement* in

¹³ The term *Nachträglichkeit*, that signifies 'afterwardness' or 'deferred action', appeared in Freud's writings during the 1890s. Explanation of this psychoanalytical concept is given in J. Laplanche and J.- B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1973).

accordance with fresh circumstances—to a *re-transcription*.¹⁴

Laplanche and Pontalis consider Freud's conception 'not as lived experience in general that undergoes a deferred revision but, specifically, whatever it has been impossible in the first instance to incorporate fully into a meaningful context. The traumatic event is the epitome of such unassimilated experience'.¹⁵

During her performative lecture, 'from the position of the future', Hewitt ceaselessly re-transcribes media images, written words and graphic signs as well as the content of someone's memory which gain materiality in the course of translation, where the various strata of verbal and pictorial signifiers become voices. Hewitt, speaking in the third person singular, tells us about a group of photographs from the United Nation Security Council archives, showing a smiling man standing in front of various military vehicles and before different lenses. While simultaneously projecting the photographs on the screen, she poses questions surrounding the circumstances of taking photographs.

She wondered who was behind the lens and whether, apart from respecting the frame, they had taken into account the light and the weather conditions. She had always been interested in Peter Gidal who said that the images and sounds that we see and which position us with regard to the meaning, i.e. the truth, are precisely those images and sounds which are material in the literal sense - light, grain, volume, duration, etc., but also in the dialectical sense of

¹⁴ Letter to Wilhelm Fliess is quoted according to J. Laplanche and J.- B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*.

¹⁵ J. Laplanche and J.- B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*.

the socially material. Such images are social, she thought, as they simultaneously consist of light, grain and form, but also form an attempt of representation.

During the course of her performance Hewitt exemplifies the intertwinement of the 'literal' and 'social' materiality of the image. She achieves this in the form of a poem recited in the Croatian language. In so doing she even redefines the idea of concrete poetry, as the content of her poem is a kind of ekphrasis, the minute description of that which the precarious worker sees on entering her office:

I came to work

at 09:17

Today

And first I saw

The grey office in the dark

And first I touched

The schedule

The keyboard

In the Computer

The Gray Computer

I believe it

On the table the printed schedule.

In the first minute I

sat

saw

stood up

Left and left and

right

diagonally and straight and

right

up left up

left

up left into the corridor

right

a door

again up

right left then

a door

right

I am smiling to the smiling faces

it is gray and

I look at the door

No sounds

Everything is colorless

The carpet has no color

The wall has no color

There is

no

floor

no

ceiling

no

people

no

stairs

Only

A door

transparent

fluid

un-real

a door and behind them

This poem is followed by another shift of language, intonation, rhythm and type of discourse. The modulation from 'poetic' mode into bureaucratic denotes the issue of labour as a referent of the recited poem. The performativity of such modulation in Hewitt's verbal performance (that undoubtedly alludes to musical performance) manifests itself in the acknowledgment of the apparatus, both in a sense of the optical and bureaucratic, that is, the administrative device. It is quite obvious that the sequence of words in the poem signify the trajectory of someone's gaze, but at the same time the glaring abruptions between their utterance connote something robotic, as if the voice doesn't belong to the living body, but to

the technical device. What we hear during the performance is the translation of the directions of camera movements into the words that describe a certain ‘un-real’, ‘colorless’ space. The notion of a trajectory that is signified by the disembodied gaze objectified by the specific interrupted rhythm of the poem, also connotes another kind of trajectory: that of the missile.

The concept of a trajectory that is produced at the auditory level in the course of Nicole Hewitt’s performative lecture is precisely that which links the act of looking with witnessing, and furthermore poses the question about the conditions under which material evidence becomes intelligible. The witness whose statement is ‘transcribed’ and re-enacted through Hewitt’s voice is a ballistic expert who was in the courtroom faced with certain photographs and asked to explain the meaning of the term azimuth. In this case the question of azimuth is related to the photograph of a war landscape, and the very notion of landscape rhizomatically leads to the procedures of representation of landscape in visual arts. While the audience in the Multimedia Centre watches the sequence of monochrome fields extracted from the electronic images of the Hague trials and projected on the screen behind the performers back, her calm voice narrates:

While working on the digital archive of the Tribunal she tried to find a way to feel the space between materiality and the permanent grid of pixels. When she enlarged the pixels, a kind of colour spill occurred which reminded her of some Croatian painter, she was not sure if it was Oton Gliha or someone else. She wondered if the spillage came from the photons or from thermal energy, given that the effect occurred only with the dark colors, especially with the blue curtain behind the judges; she asked herself if this was due to a short wave frequency or the absorption of red, as, for

example, with the enlarged pixels of the skin the spillage was considerably less pronounced.

This paragraph of Hewitt's 'draft for the historical novel in cinematic form' is particularly significant because the word *skin* functions here as a shifter that translates (and equates) the literal materiality of the media image into its social materiality. The word 'skin' connotes the sense of touch and metonymically, the unmediated experience that introduces the irreducible difference between official and personal history. 'To sense something on one's own skin' is also an expression in the Croatian language which refers to direct, unpleasant personal experience. By the end of Hewitt's performative lecture, the term *skin* functioning as a shifter, turn us back to the beginning: to the topics of the black (photographic) frame and to the issue of figuration and abstraction as pertaining to the discourse of art. The notion of abstraction stressed by the embedded 'story of azimuth' in which lines, points, triangles and circles matter, is transliterated by the sentences spoken by the performer-artist in the third person singular: 'She was interested in modern art. She had spent a certain amount of time in London where she had participated in consciousness raising and peace promoting actions with a group of twenty people recently arrived from Croatia'. These sentences in Croatian are followed by sentences pronounced in English that describe the same situation but in the language imposed by job application forms – such as the applicant's curriculum vitae. This artistic biography is followed by another also found in the job application form of a woman who once, as a semi-legal immigrant worked in a rubber clothing design studio producing S&M masks, hoods and corsets. After this job description is uttered in English, the voice shift occurs again. The calm voice of the performer narrates in Croatian:

Making rubber products required skill and accuracy, it is very important that these objects are not only beautiful, but carefully shaped to fit anatomically and form a perfect contour. It seemed to her that with this contour she herself had a sharper edge and was more clearly delineated from her environment, even though she had read somewhere that the relationship between the interior and the exterior in rubber clothing brings into question the possibility of distinguishing one's own body from the body of the other. She liked the inner anatomy activated by the rubber layer, although she was aware of theories of the body as a surface on which the social is inscribed, she liked to imagine the space between the rubber and her skin. Many years later, the relation between the soft tissue on the inner side and the taut membrane on the outer had changed, but the space between the first and the second skin still formed an elastic membrane that was very practical, especially during the winter months in The Netherlands, and at the same time she was comforted by the black edge.

But what is inscribed in the elastic membrane that lies in the space between the rubber and the skin, in that space which has become the favored object of imagination? Maybe the knowledge that no war is ever ended but only has the appearance of stopping. Or, perhaps the question pronounced in the course of the performative lecture which is a draft for a historical novel in a cinematic form: 'Can art practice raise consciousness, and what is its relation with labor, that is, with the socially material?'

Bibliography:

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 2000).

Benjamin, Walter. 'The Task of the Translator', trans. by Harry Zohn, in Lawrence Venuti, ed., *The Translation Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000).

Felman, Shoshana. *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the 20th century*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio. *Empire*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

Laplanche, J. and Pontalis, J.- B. *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1973).

Rogoff, Irit. 'Smuggling' - *An Embodied Criticality*,

<http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en> [accessed 15 April 2012]

Stein, Gertrude. *Picasso by Gertrude Stein* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1984).