

Maja Bajevic

To Be Continued

‘Uncertain, indeed, is the future, for who knows what will happen?
But uncertain, too, is the past, for who knows what has happened?’

Antonio Machado, *Juan de Mairena*, 1936

Introduction

Though made of iron, the Palacio de Cristal looks like a sleepy, somewhat spoiled princess in a lacelike dress who for decades has remained indifferent to her surroundings. Even night and day cross her body without impediment. One wonders whether she is still rooted on earth or floating in the heavens in innocent arrogance. And what would happen if the ‘prince’ who has to wake her was one of the common people? Who are the ‘people’?

Unlike the Sleeping Beauty, the people appear to be in continuous flux. The mass that speaks or is spoken to today might be different from, or even radically opposed to, the mass that speaks or is spoken to tomorrow. Is change the only stable factor in history?

The Project: Content / Questions

Political and economic slogans have probably become the most direct way of expressing opinions or transmitting messages to the masses. Around one hundred and fifty slogans from the last hundred years, from 1911 to 2011, are presented here.

They have been classified according to five distinct criteria: by date; by their political / economic nature; by content (for example, about work); using a children’s game; and at random, regardless of their impact or importance. From a neutral standpoint, putting them all on the same level gives rise to a reality distinguished by a sense of absurdity.

The quantity and the content of slogans from a certain period speak of the social temperature of that moment. In times of political turmoil there are more political slogans than in periods of relative calm. By contrast, in politically stable periods slogans tend to take on an economic cast. Some even lose their political connotations in favor of economic ones. Exploring this field of communication allows us to mirror events and fluctuations in society over the last hundred years. Noticeable shifts include: from the left to the right; from the political to the economic; from enthusiasm / idealism to resignation and back, as pinpointed, for example, by events in the Arab world today.

This gives rise to the next question: What were the five moments over the last hundred years when such radical shifts occurred? And how can we illustrate them? This question leads to form.

The Project: Form / Methods

Awakening the Sleeping Beauty / Putting Her into the Flux / Night and Day



Jedem das Seine
(To Each his Own), sign on the entrance to Buchenwald

Day

Taking these slogans and shifts as the starting point, a number of elements have been used to set them in motion.

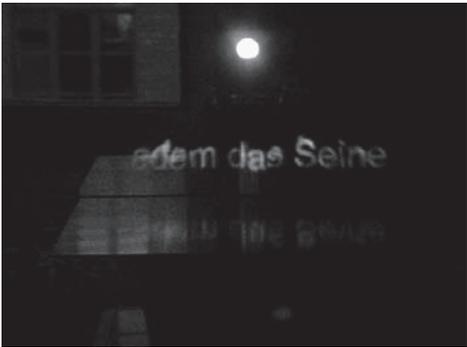
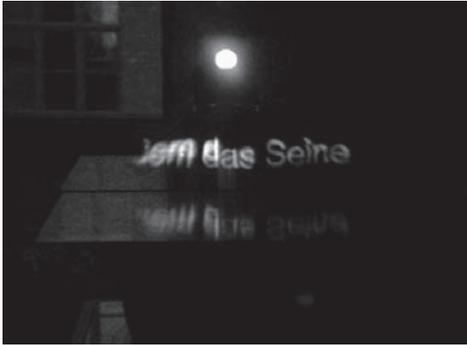
Sound Installation / Game Category

A composer and band leader, Nedim Zlatar, was entrusted with the task of composing an original melody for each of the slogans. He recorded them sung *a cappella* by individual singers, some of whom are musically qualified, others

not. In this case, the method for connecting them derives from a game children play: The last word of my sentence has to be the first word of your sentence. The sound installation is mixed with the singing of birds in the Palacio de Cristal to underline the nature / culture distinction.

Performance / Random Category

Scaffolding has been placed in one corner of the hall in order to allow access to the upper window levels. A group of five performers dusts these windows – putting dust on them rather than removing it. On



Maja Bajevic.
To Be Continued,
2011, installation.
Photograph:
Mixedmedia©Maja
Bajevic

the dusty windows they write slogans which are washed away before the process starts over again. History soils the precious lace dress of the Sleeping Beauty. A task as futile as Sisyphus', this element helps to underline the absurdity of the process.

The performance cycle lasts for five days, four hours per day. The scaffolding moves around the Palacio de Cristal during the process. Mounting and dismantling the scaffolding is part of the performance. At the end of the session the scaffolding and the scrawled slogans on the half-cleaned windows stay on as artifacts of the performance. The tools used by the workers also remain on display.

Archive / All Categories

In contrast to the ephemeral nature of these slogans' appearances, the archive offers a permanent register. It has a file for every slogan used in the exhibition. Each file includes a photograph of the slogan (in the broad sense of the term, including posters, etc.) in a public space and a text about it written by Bojana Pejić, Henriette Sölter, Mara Traumane, or myself.

The Monument

The Monument consists of a pedestal but no statue. In its base five plasma screens appear in a frieze-like

arrangement. At the top there is an empty podium: people who climb up the Monument become the missing sculpture. The piece is surrounded by scaffolding that situates it in an intermediate segment of time, in between being put up and taken down. On the back there is a slide.

The only way to descend from the top of the Monument is either by turning around and going back or by using the slide; both options are uncomfortable. During performance days a retired opera singer, clad in full regalia, reinterprets the slogans from the top of the Monument.

The five videos at the base of the Monument are titled *Wende* (meaning ‘turnaround’ or ‘twist’ in German), a term commonly used to describe events surrounding the fall of the Berlin Wall. It seems a very small word to describe the enormous change it brought about worldwide. Just a turn. Here the ‘turn’ is enacted literally. Five scenes of masses (groups of 300 people) describe in simple movements the five major turns that have taken place during the last hundred years.

Night

Steam Machines / Years / Meaning / Game

Social and political turmoil over the last hundred years is represented by slogans floating on clouds of steam. Walter Benjamin said: “The real image of the past moves on fleetingly.”¹ Slogans are projected on moving steam, underlining yet again the ephemeral within the project and the way it tends to speak about history. Everything comes and goes and turns around.²

The steam machines on display function only at night, after the closing of the Palacio. During the day a sign on them reads: “Night shift.”

In the former Yugoslavia there was an expression often used to describe politicians: ‘the ones who sell fog’ or ‘fog sellers,’ meaning those who tell a free interpretation of the facts, not necessarily false but not true either.

MAJA BAJEVIC

1 Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History” (1940), in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.

2 The entrance to Buchenwald carries a sign with the phrase *Jedem das Seine* (To Each his Own) in cast-iron letters. The camp was built on a hill, so that inmates looked at the inscription (which could only be read from the inside) from below. The Nazi barracks, on top of the hill, were visible through the inscription.

Biography

Maja Bajevic (Sarajevo, 1967) is an artist who takes a critical and witty approach to art in order to pinpoint dualities in human behavior, in particular those involving power. The power of history is opposed to the power of choice and interpretation; collective memory to collective amnesia, objective accounts to subjective storytelling and imagination – as a construction in progress, fluid and unstable (the presence of scaffolding in her work is not fortuitous), whose shifts and derivations react to contradictory stimuli.

Bajevic's work, performative in many ways, ranges from video, installation, performance and sound to text, crafts, machinery and photography. She combines her artistic work with teaching at the Università IUAV of Venice and at the Bauhaus Universität Weimar, among other institutions.

She has been invited to take part in some of the most important exhibitions of the 1990s and 2000s, including Manifesta (2000), Documenta (2007), and the Istanbul (2001) and Venice (2003) Biennials. She has had solo exhibitions at PSI, MoMA, New York (2004); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2005); and Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, Venice (2008).

Bibliography

Bajevic, Maja. ...*And Other Stories*. Zurich: Collegium Helveticum, ETH, 2002.

Bajevic, Maja. *Women at Work*. Sarajevo: National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Pro Helvetia, 2002.

Vettese, Angela (ed.). *Maja Bajevic*. Milan: Charta, 2008.

**Museo Nacional
Centro de Arte Reina Sofía**

Palacio de Cristal

Parque del Retiro, s/n
28009 Madrid

Opening Hours

From April to September:
Daily from 11:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.
From October to March
Daily from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.
Closed Tuesdays

The Palacio de Cristal will be closed
on rainy days

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27 May – 3 October 2011

**Activities
Performances**

27, 28 and 29 May, 5:00–9:00 p.m.
29, 30 September, 5:00–9:00 p.m.
1, 2 and 3 October, 5:00–9:00 p.m.

Screening hours

From 9:30 p.m. to 11:30 p.m.

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