

AUTOPSIA Interview 2008

Questions Roland Orcsik

1. Autopsia exists in Prague nowadays. In the town where Kafka, Rilke, Mucha and other icons of Monarchy and modernism lived. We might say: Prague is one of the thresholds of modernism. How does Autopsia experience the Prague of modernism?

Autopsia experiences modernism as historicism. Autopsia started as a postmodern project based on standpoints which were radical deflections from modernism. Everything that is modernism Autopsia is not. But Autopsia makes use of modernism in order to show that it belongs to the history and that it gathers meanings from history which cannot be labeled in terms of historical periods. At the time when Autopsia emerged the phenomena which marked the distance between modernism and postmodernism hardly were able to be anticipated. Postmodernism of Autopsia is founded on the very turn towards oneself, towards one's own experiences, opposite to lessons learned. One's own values and one's own criteria certainly were in confrontation with the paradigm of modernity on which leading authorities relied. Autopsia started with doubt in authorities and came across an entirely open realm which was perceived as a time "after modernity". That is why Prague became such an important site for situating Autopsia – a place which revealed its forgotten faces alongside with the projects of Autopsia. At that time projects of Autopsia were a hundred percent reality which enabled hybrid conjunctions of different epochs, and thus the modernism as well.

2. "... Mein Bruder suchet Kronen, ich den Stein der Weisen" – this sentence was ascribed to Rudolph II. During his time in Prague, more precisely in Rudolph's palace, mystics and alchemists of the Renaissance period were gathering. In the work of Autopsia one can often find allusions to and quotations from alchemical tradition; the atmosphere of mystery is also present. Did Autopsia had in mind Prague mysticism, when it had chosen Prague as a "center" of its activity?

Autopsia proclaimed Prague to be the spiritual capital of the world. To this spirit and centrality certainly belongs the spirit of Rudolph II, as well as the history he created. Not only Rudolph II, for Autopsia Charles IV is perhaps even more important and interesting, also Czech baroque – especially baroque music. Rudolph II didn't create the history of states and peoples, but new European spirit of cosmopolitanism. His spirit gathered knowledge, from antiquity to contemporary times, thus making of Prague a place of new epoch, a new center of knowledge. Prague of that time was a huge research laboratory, which radiated the synergies of many arts. Similarity of pre-scientific systems of Rudolph's age with

principles of Autopsia is obvious. However, possibilities for all other similarities end here. Despite allusions and quotations Autopsia is concerned neither with alchemy nor mysticism. It simply uses their iconographies in a rather special way. In hybrid conjunctions it connects them with other components which have nothing in common with practices of Rudolphine age. “*Geistzentrale der Welt*” is supposed to be understood as a code for a place in which the identity of the work is built.

3. Does Autopsia have a fatherland?

Autopsia does not have a fatherland. It does not have any place nor the system outside of itself. All social relations in which Autopsia operates might be anywhere in the world. Home of Autopsia is the world. Fatherland is a fictitious concept, Autopsia operates in reality, outside “fatherlands”. It can produce a fatherland but cannot belong to it. Fatherland, motherland – these are projects, abstract notions which have nothing to do with homelandness. It is only a homeland which is the place for the world of individuality, it is not an abstract product. Individual experience of the world cannot be shared with the others. Homeland guarantees the certainty of the world prior to awareness of one own’s person. Homeland has the meaning for individuality, and fatherland, or motherland, for collectivity. Autopsia does not have neither the homeland nor the place. It is a pure thought about a mortality of the being. What a person can do within understanding of it’s own mortality is detachment, separateness from the ruling ideas about the world; meaning – it has to be detached from the collectivity. Only with collectivity death becomes an idea which turns into the weapon of self-destruction. Only individuality is mortal. Experience of one’s own mortality cannot be shared with others.

4. Autopsia originated in one country, Yugoslavia, which – like the Monarchy and the utopia of modernism – fell apart, and today it does not exist. What the ex-Yugoslav cultural space meant for Autopsia? How does Autopsia look at this part of Europe?

/if Katalin Ladik, Balint Szombati, Boris Kovac, art groups KÔD, OHO, NSK, etc., meant something for Autopsia, not in terms of direct influence, but for the sake of presenting one cultural space, I would like these artists to be mentioned – me or maybe some other readers would be glad to do so/.

It would be wrong to think that Autopsia “originated in one country”, or a state. One might say that beginnings of Autopsia had a cartography which included several countries, it’s better to say, several cities. From the very beginning Autopsia didn’t belong to any state system. It’s history is a nomadic one. Artists that you mention, with exception of NSK, might be considered as last remnants of the avantgarde. Autopsia begins where avantguardes end. “Avantgarde” is today a historical relic with which Autopsia deals in a kind of laboratory manner, but never “belonged” to it. It cannot be said that Autopsia operated within the frameworks of any

kind of cultural spaces as historical categories. Autopsia passed through different cultural spaces as one passes through images of unexplored regions. If Autopsia came across some hidden “preciousnesses” during this journey, then those things have become impulses for creation of new projects. Autopsia is constantly moving through cultural spaces, thus places of residence are irrelevant. Autopsia has no “viewpoint” about political parts of Europe, there are no prejudices concerning where and when it will come across the impulses which will start the interests in new projects.

5. “Scars of Europa”, track on one of early CDs of Autopsia (*Death is the Mother of Beauty*, '88-89) can be interpreted as a premonition about the death of Europe. Does this mean that we live today in post-Europe?

Autopsia does not deal with predictions. It deals with reality, which means – the Death. “Scars of Europa” narrates about the new spirit of Europe which is filled with scars of the history. Such historical component also belongs to the new spirit of Europe. *Death is the Mother of Beauty* is presage of the world in becoming, or of the world to come. After domination of an all-encompassing simplified modernism, the world that could have been different was presaged, the world which, throughout the channels of its networks, will not reproduce the same. It could have been only the world aware of its history, the world of an individual which was known to such a history. Unfortunately, this didn't happen. Entire project of the new spirit slipped into a globalized network of technological modernism, while the only things that remained after particular histories were only images, appearances and illusions that were poured on us by media in order to cover the real condition – flow of money. It turned out almost immediately that there was no project of the new spirit at all. Such a thing is not possible anymore. Man finally gave up to think of himself/herself as of an individual, as of a unique, unrepeatable selfhood. His/her mind became a container of messages. But, there the death again has something to say, because the death is not a mere event in the epoch – terror or the genocide, conflict and destruction – at stake here is the epoch itself, death as time, the age of its reign, death from the perspective of the faith grounded in metaphysics, which encompasses the totality of being. Project *Death is the Mother of Beauty* can be translated into the domain of the political or the cultural, but it is not directed towards the presentation of something real, but towards an understanding of the homelandlessness (‘not-being-at-home; not-being-in-homeland’), which occurs in the catastrophic age of groundless faith. Since the messages cannot be checked anymore, one can only believe in them. The truth has lost its meaning, only belief remained, pure faith without religions and ideologies.

6. It is obvious that one of the cultural metaphors of Autopsia is: death. Is it possible that discourse about death can replace its individual experience? Is it not that the discourse, that is, any artistic act or ritual

about death, becomes an unsatisfied wish, or even desire, to overcome death, to gain power over death?

It is not a matter of death being dealt with as an object of consciousness. To speak about death in the manner of Autopsia means to speak from the closeness, the proximity of death as mortality, from the closeness of the Being itself. Among all other beings, only humans have consciousness about mortality, because they have the ability to comprehend the time itself. Time is what tells us that we are mortal. We can do our best trying to gain power over death, we can even work on its oblivion – and that's what we most often do – but we cannot go out of time, beyond time, we cannot be outside of changes, permanent and timeless, as an image of God. And yet, within this dualism of changes and duration it is as if something is hidden which keeps them together so that thinking can endure such a fate at all. What puts them together is certainly something that lasts and which is eternal. Although hidden, we somehow participate in the image of God, as its inseparable part. After all, we consider ourselves godly creatures.

Autopsia does not speak about death from the standpoint of individual experiences of death, nor its motives are directed towards some substitute. There are substitute concepts only if you think about death as an object. Death is not something that is represented, nor it is representable. We are mortal beings, mortality cannot be put in front of us and be observed. Our own mortality cannot be shared with anyone else. This feeling cannot be “communicated”. It can only be poetically expressed – it can be spoken of indirectly, by means of a specific language. And this is what Autopsia, in fact, does.

8 What kind of means music represents for Autopsia? Is it an instrument of the manifesto about the mortality of beings?

Music is not a means for Autopsia. Music is neither an instrument nor a programmatic platform. Music is art, Autopsia does not stand for anything outside art. To be in art means to dwell in poetic discourse. There are no manifestos; iconographic messages of Autopsia should not be read directly. Autopsia operates with images as with a vocabulary of recycled cultural products. These images refer to the ways of musical composing, but are not their illustration, the sound and the image are linked only on the level of methodologies but not of meanings.

10. In your works one can find various quotations: textual, musical, quotations from fine arts, from film, etc., ranging from high culture to popular one. Within this collage of quotations, by way of frequent repetitions, quotations become self-quotations. There occurs a processing of cultural waste into a hybridism of signs, which leads to an “original” palimpsest. Does Autopsia accept postmodern ideology of

quotationalism, that is, the blasphemy of the authority of the original work? There is no hierarchy in Autopsia, isn't it?

Correct, there is no hierarchy, no authority. In "Mirrors of Destruction" it is said that our world is founded on the idea of the center, which has the attributes of the source, the beginning, the truth, the ideal form, the essence, the god – the presence which guarantees meanings. Everything which is different from these notions, it is excluded. What interests Autopsia is exactly that which is "excluded".

Autopsia uses the language and its forms just as it uses musical phrases. To operate with representations means to use metaphorical features of language – like in poetry. Autopsia uses the image in so far as it is the meeting point of those characteristics which can easily turn out to be the forms of mass-media. In its visual products it carries out the procedure of montage of the trivial and the marginal. Autopsia creates images by means of which it nourishes what it destroys. Thus the doubled process is carried out – on one hand, through thematic and subject matter realm a relation towards the work is shown, and on the other, through manipulation of the image, of its essence, a testimony of death is displayed, which is nothing else but the image itself. Autopsia uses mediatic contents as containers of entire cultural realms, reduced to media patterns.

14. It seems that Autopsia's musical experiment consists of baroque, minimalist, electronic, avantgarde, ambiental, pop and other music. In one of your answers you've mentioned that baroque is particularly important for you. Baroque, which is founded in the ideology of harmony. What attracts Autopsia in the art of baroque?

The list you have just made is inexhaustible, it is limited with nothing else but the creative interest. There is no focusing on just one sector of music, or on choosing one set of musical idioms. Autopsia is not interested in musical forms, but in their spiritual foundations. In baroque music for the first time there appears the work as a project. By this, one is supposed to conceive the complex structure of the work which is based on the idea of the spectacle, and which will acquire its standard form in opera. Thus the baroque work is a total authorial project which originates in the symbiosis of music and other scenic forms – a project of total spectacularization. In different styles and different cultures the harmony is a matter of convention; harmony of one style and culture is a disharmony in the other culture or style. Trivial opinion that the avantgarde is disharmonious is just a trivial opinion and nothing else.

16. Autopsia's work is not only music, but textual and visual art as well. Could we consider the works of Autopsia a verbo-voco-visual meditative

objects?

No, works of Autopsia are not verbo-voco-visual projects. Verbo-voco-visual is a notion derived from the arsenal of late avantgardes. It designates the hybrid of conceptual amalgams within the invention of art practices which at one time had the sign of “new”. The use of verbal statements, musical compositions, and visual representations is quite conventional for Autopsia. There is no intention to create any kind of synthesis which would be directed towards one particular hybrid product. All of these three ways of expression are quite autonomous, what links them is a common spiritual ground. Autopsia deals with music and is concerned with complete control over its own production.

19. Latest album of Autopsia “The Berlin Requiem” is rather interesting. This project evokes Berthold Brecht’s “Berliner Requiem”, and the inside cover refers perhaps to Himalaya, that is, the endeavour of human being to overcome his/her limits, to reach the peak of his/her existence, which in the context of Autopsia means – death. Is Autopsia attracted by Brecht’s poetics of quotationalism, the so called *Verfremdungseffekt*?

In the context of “The Berlin Requiem”, Brecht’s “Berliner Requiem” might be seen as a quotation in its entirety. In the initial ground of Brecht’s poetics there is a concord with the poetics of Autopsia, otherwise “The Berlin Requiem” wouldn’t have happened at all. However, every similarity ends with this initial ground. Everything that can be heard in the requiem is not a quotation. The use of verbal statements and the creation of compositions do not match. One does not illustrate the other. They are in the relationship of the foreboding, of the potentiality, of some kind of inclination of one toward the other, on which the possibilities of “expanded” meanings rest. Sound images, photography and the text come from different areas, but in some special way they support each other and make the entire product more complex. Climbing up the mountain peak is not the strive to reach one’s own peak of existence in the figure of death. Although Autopsia was using the slogan “Our Goal Is Death”, it is not about the representation of death, it is a declaration phrase the object of which is substituted. Climbing up to the top points to the effort which man makes in order to explore the unknown. However, this strenuous walk does not lead to some determined goal, and thus neither to death. Rather, it tells about the courage to endure the solitude in the world.

21. Recently Autopsia issued a small project in which Pasolini and Freud were put together, entitled “Silently The Wolves Are Watching / Porcile”. Is this work an intro into the conception of new works, which are, at the

moment, in the phase of becoming? What are we to expect in these new projects?

First title comes from psychoanalysis, and the second one is the title of Pasolini's film. The speech at the beginning of the track is from that movie. At www.autopsia.net both titles have direct links to the sources of the inspiration. But it is no accident that they are on two sides of the vinyl. There is a connection between "Lacanian gaze" and parallel narratives about cannibalism and capitalism. It is a matter of a paradoxical conjunction of completely individual experience, irreplaceable one – outside of communication, and social order which is replaceable. It's permissivity can be displayed by any other form of social construction. When we speak about capitalism, we speak about one of the known forms of totalitarianism. However, at stake here is not the fate of the individual in the society, nor is it the criticism of society, which is the usual opinion, but at stake is unrealizable desire to appropriate the other, that is, to eat oneself. Selfhood is substituted with the reflection of the other. This desire is projected into social relations and becomes a driving force of permissivity. How much such a scenario corresponds to reality, and how much to the interpretation, still remains the open question. Referring to "Lacanian gaze" perhaps helps to understand numerous fields in which the very way how we gaze at something, the gazing itself, becomes the enigma of the visible. Project of this single record is independent, it is not an introduction to some other product, nor is it a preview of what shall happen in the future.

In fact, Autopsia goes through a period of an interest which is reflected in exploration of the legacy of the last century. All projects from that period are connected in a certain way, but at the same time are completed entities. It has never been that one work opened the other. The method of repetition and extension of the material was used, but always within a framework of a single thematic totality. Projects of Autopsia were not conceived as series.