

Galerija Flora

HRVATSKO DRUŠTVO LIKOVNIH UMJETNIKA DUBROVNIK

Traversable heterotopia of difference

reflection accompanying Nina Kurtela's work "KHÔRA"

Gallery Flora, Dubrovnik

The visual and textual image of the neon sign 'Helsinki' in the gallery Flora is less an object and more an instigator of thinking. From the dynamics of this image, it becomes possible to rethink a space: the Mediterranean, Scandinavia, postmodernity, Europe, the contemporary world. It proposes an unsuspected sense of place and belonging that can no longer be presumed to be of a unique origin or singular explanation.

According to Derrida¹, 'Khora' reflects a difference (différence), while meaning and references pertain to the function of that difference, distance and space between traces. Through a very serious play of differences and traces, meaning is being slowly and cautiously built, arising from a network of codes and assumptions we always readily take part in. 'Khora' exists as a potential for irony that destabilizes supposedly firm concepts and opens up space for possibilities. Foucault's consideration of space² goes hand in hand with such deconstruction, which underlines how identity, playing on a principle of inclusion/exclusion, is created on the basis of definition of the Other. In this case, placing in relation the cold, prosperous North to the warm, traditionally transitional South prompts us to suspect, neutralize or invert the set of relations that these two places happen to designate, mirror or reflect.

¹ Derrida, Jacques (1995) *On the Name*, trans. David Wood, John P. Leavey, Jr., Ian McLeod. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

² Foucault, M. (1986). *Of other Spaces, Diacritics*, 16(1):22-29. Accessed at: <http://www.colorado.edu/envd/courses/envd4114-001/Fall09/Theory/FoucaultOther%20Spaces.pdf>

While Kaurismäki in Helsinki imagines Dubrovnik and Kurtela in Dubrovnik imagines Helsinki, they are both leaning on ideas that enter a direct or inverted analogy with their current place and society. These ideas are primarily utopian since they afford consolation although they have no real locality. Following their imaginaries, a form of reverse arrangement is created by placement of neon signs in a *lounge bar* in Helsinki and a gallery in Dubrovnik. Thus, the two artists establish heterotopias that juxtapose several sites which are in themselves incompatible. More specifically, while utopias are ‘fundamentally unreal spaces’ that present society in ‘a perfected form’, heterotopias are ‘real spaces’ and ‘counter-sites’ that remain absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about.

While the utopic promises an unrealizable consolation in the seemingly transparent emptiness of the present, the heterotopic promotes a disturbance, an interruption, sustained in the heterogeneity of times, rhythms and spaces, in the multiplications of modernity snapping the links in homogeneous understandings. There is no temporality or space – of modernity, of identity, of history – without other times and spaces, without the tempos and spaces of others.

Here the heterotopic is not only about the removal from life (*lounge bar*, gallery) but also about the deepening and extension of its possibilities (the journey, vulnerability, transdisciplinary and transnational knowledge). This cut or exit does not lead to an ‘outside’, but rather to another contemporaneity. It remains ‘within’ the materialization of planetary possibilities, proposing ‘lines of flight’ but also of resistance. In other words, ‘representation, contestation and reversal of real spaces’ in the *lounge bar* in Helsinki and gallery Flora in Dubrovnik contain a possibility of providing resistance and contestation to a normative set of relations. Space of Flora gallery marked by the sign «Helsinki» thereby becomes an instrument of resistance and social change: the doubleness and contradiction implicated in heterotopia has been linked with the postmodern valorisation of alterity, and thus inflects the gallery’s space with radical openness.

