

FOREWORD: A THEATRE OF VOICES

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The stories behind failed political systems and states provide the source and setting for Jasmina Cibic's larger artistic project. Hers is a practice that addresses the ways in which visual language, art, architecture and rhetoric are deployed and instrumentalised by political regimes, before investigating what happens to these fragments when the ideologies they endorse collapse.

Gathering together these symbols and iconographies, Cibic's projects present a synthesis of gesture, stagecraft and re-enactment. Realised in films and installations, her ongoing performative practice is an 'enacted' exercise in the dissection of statecraft. Her multilayered approach draws together primary sources and falsified narratives. This wilful overwriting creates shifting meanings and highlights historical uncertainties and untruths, especially in the gendering of the past. Cibic plays a double-game, at once decoding mechanisms of power whilst building her own allegorical structures. Tracing lines through history, she undertakes detailed research of official state archives and hidden repositories of authority. The conventions, apologues and narratives she turns her forensic gaze upon are drawn from various players involved in the contrivances of power, working in concert to forge common visions of the nation.

At the centre of *Spielraum* Cibic sites an investigation into the art and architecture deployed by the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as a framework for its own visual presentation in the aftermath of the Second World War. Specifically, the design of its capital and government buildings, which were to host the inaugural conference of the international Non-Aligned Movement, a grouping of states that Josip Broz Tito was instrumental in. In the act of distancing itself from the Socialist Realism of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia looked to the West for

aesthetic influences, developing a hybrid visual identity that served to distinguish it from the binary extremes that typified the Cold War.

In the trilogy of films and exhibitions that comprise *Spielraum*, Cibic addresses a series of historical moments tied intrinsically to the association of architecture with modernism, and the compelling belief systems that informed its utopian aspirations. It serves as a detailed look into the visual languages that were to endorse and give power to various ideological attempts at nation-building across Europe in the last century. Each chapter of *Spielraum* addresses a stage in the life of an imagined, ideologically charged building or monument, from its genesis in *The Nation Loves It*, to its use and life in *Give Expression to Common Desires*, and its death in *Tear Down and Rebuild*. Each chapter was staged in a different international art institution as an immersive installation in its own right.

The title *Spielraum* is taken from the writing of Karl Kraus, one of Europe's early modern satirical writers, specifically his eponymous essay of 1912, in which he protests in the strongest terms against the use of decoration in both language and architecture. It is an ambiguous word, slippery in translation. It means a place for play, but also room for manoeuvre; it means scope, but also margin. These layers of seemingly disparate yet associative meanings allow for the title to mobilise various devices across times and locations. It is a strangely disruptive unifier that binds these multiplatform projects.

With deft ambition Cibic asks the questions at the heart of unlocking layered aggregations of authority, culture, representation and identity. How is power made manifest? How does it come to be enacted? Who has the authority to frame and to speak? What kinds of coercion and complicity are required? Several of the contributors to this publication

allude to the operation of 'soft power' in the formation of the state, which is to say the persuasion of citizens that the norms or aspirations endorsed by the structure of power are to be desired. In contrast to the system of threat and reward exercised by hard power, soft power emphasises less tangible factors, such as the popularity of a state's values and institutions. Joseph Nye succinctly defined it as the ability to get what you want through attraction, rather than coercion.¹ Seduction always wins out in the end.

This publication is intended to further an understanding of Cibic's practice and methodologies, unravelling with archaeological precision in a number of directions at once. It is proposed as a reader, with incisive essays by critics, architects, theorists and curators. Whilst the historical root of *Spielraum* lies in the Non-Aligned Movement, the ambition of this book, as with the project, is far ranging. The essays here represent a considered feminist critique of the whole enterprise of nation-building, and of soft power and its modes of operation. These are consistent themes for the artist and can be traced back to her 2013 Venice Biennale project *For Our Economy and Culture*, which sought to interrogate the ways in which artists and architects have been put to work in the service of the state.²

Underpinning each of Cibic's ambitious projects is an intense period of personal research, and collaborative interactions with performers, actors and curators. Time and again, her practice raises a lens to focus on rhetorical methods of presentation. In the act of dismantling these facades, her work invites

critical engagement in the methodologies of social shifts and structural strategies. At a time of great uncertainty for Europe, in which its collective identity is once more thrown into doubt, Cibic's work serves as an invaluable reminder of the relentlessly cyclical nature of history, and a warning against complacency.

1

Nye, Joseph S, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York: Public Affairs, 2004.

2

For Our Economy and Culture, exhibition catalogue, Pavilion of Slovenia at 55th Venice Biennale, Tevž Logar and Vladimir Vidmar eds, Ljubljana: Museum and Galleries of Ljubljana, 2013.