

FEATURES





Jasmina Cibic (dir.),
The Gift, 2021. UK,
France, Austria and
Poland. Three channel
4K, 5 channel sound,
00:30:34, film still.
Co-commissioned
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Moving Image Network
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artist.

INTERVIEW

Interview with Jasmina Cibic by Chris Clarke

ABSTRACT

*Jasmina Cibic's artistic practice across film, performance and installation rigorously interrogates the aesthetics of politics. Her works are situated within grandiose architectural settings of national pride and power, from state assemblies to cultural monuments, while drawing on the historical events and individuals that determine shared conceptions of identity. In this interview, Cibic discusses ideas of soft power in relation to several recent projects, including the 2021 film *The Gift*, *State of Illusion* from 2018, and the *Nada* trilogy of 2016–17. In each of these projects, artistic production is examined in terms of its relationship to propaganda, ideology and identification, the ways in which culture is utilized and whom it is intended to serve.*

KEYWORDS

film
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Introduction

Jasmina Cibic (b. Ljubljana, 1979) works in film, performance and installation. She represented Slovenia at the *55th Venice Biennial* with her project 'For Our Economy and Culture.' Her recent exhibitions include solo shows at: Museum der Moderne Salzburg, macLyon, Museum Sztuki Łódź, Museum of Contemporary Art Ljubljana, CCA Glasgow, Phi Foundation Montreal, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art Gateshead, Ludwig Museum Budapest, Kunstmuseen Krefeld along with group exhibitions at MAXXI in Rome, Steirischer Herbst '19, MoMA in New York, MARTa Herford and Guangdong Museum of Art in China. Cibic's films have been screened at London Film Festival, Whitechapel Gallery, CCA Montreal, Pula Film Festival, HKW Berlin, Louvre Museum, Les Rencontres Internationales Paris, Aesthetica, Berwick Film and Media Arts Festival, Dokfest Kassel and Copenhagen International Documentary Festival. Cibic was the winner of the MAC International Ulster Bank and Charlottenborg Fonden awards (2016), the B3 Biennial of the Moving Image Award (2020) and the Jarman Award (2021).

In Jasmina Cibic's work, politics and culture are always inextricable. Her research-based practice has thoroughly explored the ways in which soft and

hard power inform one another, drawing on archival records, anecdotal accounts and speculative readings to interrogate their relationship. The resulting films and installations deftly convey the trappings of power and the uneasy compact established between state authorities and individual artists in the realization of public works.

Cibic's 2021 film *The Gift* encapsulates her approach. Over a series of choreographed and meticulously staged scenes, the film portrays a competition, between three representatives of artistic, political and scientific authority, to design a 'gift for the people'. The action shifts between sites of historical and cultural significance, gifted to their respective populaces – from the French Communist Party Headquarters to the Palace of Nations in Geneva to the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw – as each figure outlines their vision for the masses. From the diplomatic need to 'sway and seduce on a spiritual level', to the artist's desire 'to militate in progressive movements', to the engineer's plea for 'a poetic monument', their pitches outline the demands of a culture subjugated to political (as well as revolutionary) ends: as Marcel Mauss notes, the offering of a gift implies reception and reciprocity, an obligation to return the favour. The actors' proposals are weighed by a jury of four fundamental freedoms, allegorical adjudicators drawn from Franklin Roosevelt's address to Congress in 1941 advocating American entry into the Second World War. As Cibic describes the work, '*The Gift* is composed entirely from historical ready-mades that speak of culture's relationship with political power', and this tactic applies equally to its text: dialogue is constructed from speeches and declarations, by past and present statesmen, diplomats, artists and architects, testament to the ambiguous, immutable nature of political rhetoric.

These themes are developed across several other projects by Cibic, including the *Nada* trilogy of 2016–17, a series of interlinked films which offer different perspectives relating to Vjenceslav Richter's unrealized Yugoslav Pavilion for the 1958 expo in Brussels. A model of the structure is strung with wire and played as a musical instrument; a troupe of dancers perform the ballet of that same composition – Béla Bartók's *The Miraculous Mandarin* – across the corridors, walkways, stairwells and atriums of the Aarhus Town Hall; the allegorical figures of the artist, the curator and Germania discuss the preparation for and presumed reaction of a forthcoming exhibition, set within the Krefeld Villas designed by Mies van der Rohe. In the interview, Cibic untangles these disparate connections and historical affinities, the ways in which culture is (re-) contextualized to suit different ideological agendas and how such tactics are integrated in her own practice. The trilogy therefore offers not only numerous correlations from one film to another but across her entire body of work, including *State of Illusion*, 2018, with the theatrical 'disappearance' of Yugoslavia's last national pavilion from the 1967 Montreal Expo, to Cibic's own pavilion, her multidisciplinary installation *For Our Economy and Culture*, representing Slovenia at the 2013 Venice Biennale.

Throughout the interview, Cibic relates how these different projects stem from an ongoing interest in cultural production and its relationship to political power. From the historical soft power of Yugoslavia as an ideologically distinct model for other non-aligned nations to the United Kingdom's ever-shifting utilization of art as cultural industry, tourist attraction and distraction from political realities, Cibic notes how artistic practices have continually proven susceptible to the motivations and machinations of political actors. The artwork, despite the presumed best intentions of its creator, finds itself borrowed, manipulated, remade and replayed, depending on whom it is intended to serve.

Interview

Chris Clarke: Ideology and culture are abiding themes in your practice, particularly in relation to historic instances of soft power being deployed by political actors. So, in your 2021 work *The Gift*, you bring together a number of these interests. The film presents a sequence of three proposals for a cultural gift to the nation delivered by respectively, the engineer, the diplomat and the artist. And each individual represents a certain stance, whether it's the engineer proposing practicality as well as pleasure, the diplomat praising moral ascension or the artist's description of art as a weapon against the enemy. Why do you use archetypes of different professions and positions in expounding ideas in your films?

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Jasmina Cibic:

I began working in moving image as I found that my installation-based projects lacked a narrative when their performative elements ended. The style of working that I adopted and developed has a lot to do with the legacy of Slovene early modernist playwrights, quite famous for creating microcosms. They are perhaps also reminiscent of Beckett but have the additional accidentals that speak of small geopolitical contexts and European colonialism in situ. It is in these works that I began observing the methods of distillation of certain specifics into characters that effectively become archetypes and/or allegories and as such, obviously pave the way for a possibility of a greater universal relevance. But more importantly for our contemporary condition: they step away from becoming mere tokens of the geopolitical exotic pull, which all 'othered' territories and contexts get pushed towards. I began using this methodology of combining highly specific historical political materials but creating characters so universal and so recognizable, that they form a firm resistance to becoming colonized as representatives of a politically exotified context. As such they also connect with the audience on a completely different level.

CC:

You mentioned how you construct scripts from historical transcripts, records and statements. Do you think the archetype is useful in integrating these disparate sources, like a way of consolidating specific quotations or individuals into a single type of speech?

JC:

When contemporary artists use archives, a highly specific set of relations takes place. At worst it can become a form of abuse – especially when the outcomes are only interesting because of what they are referencing (via the archive). On the other side of the medal sit artistic practices asking questions never raised before – and as such they return with completely different answers from the archive. These are questions that many times help enact feminist, activist rewriting of set histories. With that come certain demands for enacted ethics of artistic research and the question of how artists ourselves label the works, under which category



do we see ourselves? Documentary, fiction, docu-fiction, experimental fiction? These questions are so much more important as we are speaking of the context of artist moving image which still so perversely slips through funding mechanisms, audiences and support networks. As hinted already – I am particularly interested in looking for universal archive writing strategies that are shared across time and space – decoding their patriarchal nature and reinscribing a new potentiality within them – by focusing on the erased, lacking, missing and redacted. By integrating all my diverse sources into distilled characters, I feel I am able to bring the attention back to the politics of archive making, writing and in effects – building of ideology through language of control. In my film *NADA Act III* for example, I merged transcripts of the discussions on what form of art should represent the German nation within three specific state formations: Weimar Germany, Nazi Germany and the post-Second World War Germany. Of course, you have different political actors, but the language is incredibly similar if not same. The only thing that properly changes is the type of the aesthetics and colour choice. Hence the solidification of these historical traces of instrumentalized culture into archetypes makes perfect sense. As we are ultimately speaking of (my consistent obsession) the relationship between culture and politics – we will always have the censor, the progressive, the conservative...

CC: It's interesting because their language is so slippery. So, you can see that language shifting between the different archetypal figures of the engineer, the diplomat and the artist in *The Gift*. There's something deliberately vague about it. So, through broadening political rhetoric to be more inclusive, it becomes less committal. You can bring people in through this deliberate vagueness. It speaks to everybody.

JC: The standard political drive is that everybody needs to see themselves in any speech that is made 'in the national interest'. This is why working with this material of political and diplomatic transcripts, letters etc. is extremely hard because it is very, very slippery. Additionally, we have the problem of translation as many times I am working with a multitude of languages. If we are looking at speeches made for inaugurations and similar ceremonial, protocol situations, we find them officially translated into other languages. But minutes or transcripts documenting tearing down or simply situations when things went wrong – will obviously never be officially translated except if we are speaking of multilateral contexts. As such, we enter a strange situation bearing different writing styles, different ways of expressing opinions, different directions. Decisions on how to treat this different material, how to translate things whilst keeping as much as possible of the linguistic finesse

– are hard. When we are looking at political language and speeches, they are of course heavily reliant on linguistic gimmicks and word games hence the question of language in my work is essential. To be honest, for certain pieces, if I could go back in time, I would make different choices. For example, for my show *For Our Economy and Culture* (2013)- the Slovenian Pavilion at the *Venice Biennial*, I made a film in English. This was a very conscious decision we took with my curator because of our attempted play with ‘universal monikers’ of history writing via cultural production. As the pavilion utilized only extreme local specifics and histories (from a Slovene beetle named after Hitler to the artworks hanging behind the backs of the politicians in office which we managed to borrow for the project) we made a choice that the language of the film in the show is to be English to aid with the ‘cancelling each-other out’ of the extreme local specifics and to somehow liberate the reading of the proposal to universal and contemporary time. Today I would make a completely different choice as I find it did give way to the art system’s own code of messaging.

CC: Yes, it puts you in that same position, doesn’t it? In the need to find a common audience, you remove a little bit of that specificity as a way of communicating. It’s interesting to see that same thing happening – and obviously this applies across your practice – but there’s that same necessity of using language to reach a wider audience that applies in both political and artistic contexts.

JC: We must admit, despite our great annoyance, that the territory of former Yugoslavia still has no art system, no art market and especially no proper support for artist film. And as I work so much with material from that cultural space – from locations, archives and histories from that context, it would be completely perverse if I would not be observing issues such as audience/context specificity. We have seen so many cultural producers use territorially and politically specific content for artworks and never bring the actual projects back to the context of provenience. We then see blockbuster shows that ‘demystify’ or give the art world that ‘exotic’ that it craves – this is of course not only a problem for former Yugoslavia, but for all regions on the margins of the art world and its colonial strategies which still persist stubbornly.

CC: I want to return to this in a minute but, still looking at the film *The Gift*, I have a couple of questions that are more specific to the content there. So, you have in this film these three male figures who are delivering their proposals to a female jury of four fundamental freedoms. The four fundamental freedoms of speech, worship, want and fear. What part do these freedoms play for you and why have you divided these roles along gender lines?

JC: I wanted to depict the three allegories of culture presented as art, architecture and music. As for my archetypes of the three gifts – I initially wanted them to be female leads. The problem here arose as I did not want to make the connection between the concept of the gift and the female body – hence the gifts had to be men – especially as the fundamental point was to attempt to decolonize the patriarchal discourse of nation building via soft power. Another point for them being men was to keep the focus on the narcissistic power verticals of the state – which always drive society into destruction. I continuously play with systems of control, whilst changing the point of subversion of the historical dominant within different projects. I usually keep the system's own code of messaging – which here included the cast – we have three White men that (as in historical reality) drive the society into collapse. But then the film brings in the attributes of the concepts the three men are apparently arguing for – and the attributes propose a new gendered and liberated space: the dancers, the musicians, the artworks. The judges – the four fundamental freedoms are drawn from the speech Franklin D. Roosevelt used to entice Americans to enter the Second World War – after many rewrites, the concept of Fundamental Freedoms comes in. The government employed artists to illustrate this concept – and perhaps most famous is the Norman Rockwell series of paintings of the *Four Freedoms*. This was historically the most lucrative piece of American art propaganda. for the state – as the images were used to sell bonds, posters, etc.

CC: The other thing about *The Gift* that I find quite fascinating is, and this goes across your practice of course, is the locations that you use, these kind of historically resonant, architecturally striking sites and buildings. And certainly, in thinking of *The Gift*, this historicism and architecture appears coded in the particular characters and their ideological positions. They structure the way in which narrative unfolds. So, for example, the centre stage of where the competition takes place is Oscar Niemeyer's Communist Party headquarters in Paris. The diplomat's presentation is quite dramatically transported to the Palais des Nations in Geneva. And the film concludes with a sweeping vista of the Memorial House of the Bulgarian Communist Party. What do these sites represent within the narrative? How do you think of those sites in relation to script or in relation to *mise en scène*? How do you figure them within the larger narrative of the film?

JC: I would say that all of my films start with architecture. More precisely – with buildings that were sites for national or supra-national scene setting which in the films become choreographers and cinematographers in their own right. It is absolutely fascinating to study them especially when their original client who commissioned them is lost. I am drawn to architectures that are 'liberated'



from their initial function or repurposed to serve another imposed authority. These are buildings that effectively act out and enact patriarchal control. Whether we are speaking of a dead nation state or a failed transnational organization or a political party.

We are – maybe just maybe – for the first time able to observe clearly their own behavioural patterns that they suggest and feel the traces of the potential performances of the political past within them. It is the immateriality of the archive through these traces, which is what I try to enhance, which is of course extremely abstract if not ludicrous.

CC: They have all the trappings of power, don't they? So, they seem to evoke a certain kind of political stance in their own right. You've mentioned this before, that your films have often been set in sites of soft power. This also includes your use of Aarhus Town Hall in *Nada II*. What kind of negotiation has this entailed on your part as an artist and as a director? And do you see this process of navigating the expectations of and demands of governmental institutions as part of your working process?

JC: My work with sites of power began during my student years as I was a part of a female collective staging performances onboard trains while they were passing national borders. The question of the interplay between an artist and the audience via a set form of relations (of a system) became seminal for my practice. Do we entice? Are we gatekeepers? Or are we providers of an experience? I quite soon delegated the performativity of my body to the actual systems of control – for example, with my projects within national airports where I worked with the state police and orchestras that welcome diplomatic and political government guests; re-choreographing their procedures and reprogrammed the airport's signalling system. Working with these spaces themselves has for me always been an activated exchange – they are never sole locations but spaces of interaction and re-inscriptions of relations.

CC: I'm very appreciative of the fact that you've been referencing some of your other films here because it's very much a body of work that has distilled and explored certain themes over many years. But I also wasn't familiar with the very early work that you were discussing, so it's great to hear where some of those ideas stem from. Looking at your *Nada* trilogy from 2016 to 2017, *Act III* seems to especially foreshadow certain aspects of *The Gift* in the way that they both employ archetypal characters and dialogue concerning the function of art. In the *Nada* trilogy, you explore ideas of national cultural representation through the example of Vjenceslav Richter's unrealized Yugoslav Pavilion of the 1958 expo in Brussels. These films and the trilogy seem to deliberately employ analogies to artistic disciplines that retain a certain

impermanence. In *Nada I*, there's an architectural model of the pavilion which incorporates tensed wires and which are tuned for a musical rendition of Bartók's composition *The Miraculous Mandarin*, and in *Nada II*, a performance of that same ballet, albeit edited and adapted, occupies the site of the Aarhus Town Hall. Even in the series' third act which focuses on the exhibition as a model of cultural representation, it seems to be more concerned with the acts of preparation, mediation and discussions about public display, than about any inherent finished artwork itself. Is there an analogy being made here with the unrealized or abandoned structure, with Richter's proposed vision and the temporality of these other more ephemeral modes of artistic expression? Are you wary of permanence?

JC: A gorgeous question.

CC: It sounds like it's a crazy question!

JC: I never really thought about this aspect of the work and I must say you lay out a very astute analysis. After studying any government's relation to culture – and at almost any point of time – one can draw conclusions that the final artwork or architecture is almost irrelevant. What is so insanely interesting is the procedure of selection, of mediation, of political curation, second-guessing and censorship. And the echo of these mechanisms within our contemporary situation is terrifying. You mention Vjenceslav Richter's design for the Yugoslav Pavilion for 1958 Brussels Expo – which I must admit I am a little bit obsessed by – as it was the first world exposition after the Second World War when countries and their politicians had proper time to raise money and political curatorship to clearly identify the scenography for their new re-inscription within the new set of world relations. The Yugoslav Pavilion ended up winning at the Grand Prix, but it was also heavily censored: namely the central pillar – which was the architect's core concept – was to be omitted. This was one of the very few examples of censorship in former Yugoslavia but a great example of the new awareness of the power of scenographic spectacle of art and architecture. This was a literal and metaphoric castration of the core artistic thought by one of the leading state ideologues. My trilogy *Nada* begins with this story, re-creates the architecture as it was envisioned – but as a musical instrument, which is being tuned according to the melodic score of Bela Bartók's *The Miraculous Mandarin* – a pantomime ballet which was also censored – but in 1927 when it premiered in Cologne, by the mayor Konrad Adenauer (without seeing it). These two censored works finally met at the Brussels Expo in 1958, when *The Miraculous Mandarin* became the main work presented by Yugoslavia. So this circular action is what I am drawn towards – and the re-inscription of artworks with a historical corrective,



Jasmina Cibic (dir.),
Nada: Act II, 2017.
Germany and UK. Single
channel HD video,
stereo, 00:13:01. Courtesy
of the artist.

where the focus falls on the process of their becoming and their navigation through the nets of political (and other) censorship.

CC: I think the Bartók reference is a really interesting one. I wasn't familiar with this, but what was particularly striking in *Nada II* is that you mentioned that the ballet has been altered and changed, but obviously there are clear glitches and edits within the film as well. And by adapting a work like this and then editing it in this way, there is a process of recontextualization which of course applies to the Bartók piece itself in the way it has had its original message censored and distorted. Like you said, music is that medium that can be made inoffensive. So its meaning is reapplied to other ends. And it felt to me like there was something about the deliberacy of the editing and the glitchiness of the film at certain points that spoke to this idea of another hand coming in and guiding a work's intent in a slightly different direction.

JC: That is beautiful. You bring me back to the notion of the trace and the fact that any archive is always heavily edited, we know that. But the trace could be something a bit more interesting perhaps. The trace for me is what is implied in an archive via the editor's hand. When you comb through the contents of all manner of folders, sometimes you find absurdist, poetic traces, scribbles, forgotten notes and all manner of strange encounters. When we were looking for the documentation pertaining to the Bartók ballet as performed in Brussels – we ended up finding only a few sheets of photographs from the rehearsal. The performance itself was created three months before Yugoslav television started and there is only one short video clip that exists, apart from these photographs. I invited Lea Anderson to the project because she worked in a very similar way in regard to reconstructing historical dance. The main objective for us was how to reconstruct a smooth movement from just a couple of images. I found the translation between how to retrace the path of a moving body to how to reconstruct an architecture without proper plans superbly interesting. With movement – if you have only two images taken some time apart, you will always experience a glitch, right? You can imagine the path of a part of the body, but you cannot be sure of it. Taking this idea of jittery movement and glitches in edit became a great format to imagine what other traces could be imagined or how we could rewrite an archive and its lacks, because of course the lacks are much more interesting than the actual recordings, right?

CC: It also reminds me a lot of *State of Illusion*, where you have these illusionistic, magical performances. There's an affinity between these works. When you're watching a film of a magic trick, there's always in the back of your mind this uncertainty as to whether you're watching something that's really magic or just a trick of the camera.



Jasmina Cibic (dir.),
State of Illusion, 2018,
single channel HD
video, stereo, 00:19:00.
Courtesy of the artist.

JC: Yes that was an interesting one, *State of Illusion*. For years I have been obsessing with the parallel between a nation state and an illusion – and how to translate it into film form. I was chiefly interested in the psychological tactics both concepts utilize – convincing the audience that they exist. I set out to construct the model of the last pavilion of former Yugoslavia at a World Exposition (Montreal 1967) as a series of illusionist boxes and created a choreography within which the illusionist (a woman) would – with the help of her henchmen – disappear, each time in a more violent manner. The problem arose precisely with the nature of the reality of the tricks – as I wanted them all to be actual and not use film trickery both for conceptual and formal reasons (the props were to be exhibited alongside the film where their mechanisms were to be disclosed). That meant we had some proper knives, spikes and fire involved, which made the choice of filming it in Serbia rather than the UK a godsend for all the health and safety issues. It's the same *modus operandi* to working with actual locations of power – and not recreating any of the architecture in the studio.

CC: It's obviously significant in your practice that you address the conditions of former Yugoslavia; its advocacy under Tito of a third way between western capitalism and Soviet communism, which included the promotion of culture as a form of political communication and the fallout from Yugoslavia's collapse in the 1990s. This tension between soft power and *realpolitik* is felt throughout your works and I wonder if you could elaborate on this. Do you feel there is a limit to culture where hard political power takes over? I'm just thinking here of the ways in which the Balkan conflict actually countered some of the ideological naïveté of the era. Even Joseph S. Nye talks now about smart power, soft cultural power backed up with military and economic authority, while Fukuyama's so-called end of history has been widely discredited by everyone, including Fukuyama. Are you interested in that point where soft power hits its limit? Is this tension between the rhetoric that accompanies cultural propaganda and the actual reality on the ground something that informs your work?

JC: Nobody believes in culture as soft power anymore, probably least the governments themselves. We don't live in a time of grand narratives of nation states anymore, as they are run by private lobbies and hedge funds. When culture was useful as a soft power vehicle was when we were still speaking of the need for national identity construction in the oldest sense of the word. There are such different monikers involved ever since turbo capitalism took over. This is where culture really loses out as the power brokers just somehow cannot refocus on it via different use value for society. Here I am of course purposefully ignoring the monetary value the private art sector guides. The other problem at hand is how

the state of diplomacy, even cultural diplomacy, is miles away from critically engaged art. You might have some countries that continue their cultural investment and support of contemporary art via their soft power extensions such as the British Council, Pro Helvetia and Mondrian Funds but many of their counterparts morphed into support by corporations and foundations. However at the end of the day, they all go hand in hand with a broader system of national growth and value creation as the works enter public and private collections. In a way we could say soft power just exchanged its set of players, but its essence remains, albeit a bit more in line with profits rather than status of individual nation states.

CC: Even when you hear of culture being used for a political agenda, it's usually distilled of any kind of obvious ideology. And so, I'm thinking here of the other forms of propaganda that get put out there, this kind of art that is fun, that is public and interactive, and the example I think of in this context, and where you're living at the moment, is something like the Unboxed Festival; spectacular events that make people feel warm and fuzzy. And the fact that this was the Festival of Brexit but was rebranded to strip the politics out of it. It promotes a soft culture that isn't a culture of criticality, but a culture that just has a warm vagueness. It almost seems like a next step in ideological indoctrination.

JC: I agree. The problem also lies with art institutions' choices because they know hard times are coming and many are changing their programming to suit the new economic and political landscape. The money is tight for them and they are starting to second-guess their funders as well as the audiences. After the pandemic crippling so many museums, galleries, theatres and their hard-won relationship with the public, the looming crisis seems even more brutal on that horizon. The problem now is how to create that act of resistance and solidarity as an institution or as any entity that's actually trying to produce critical content. We will need to find a different way of outputting with less finances. I am confident a new direction is possible, but it must be done with a clear mission statement which vocalizes the resistance and the persistence in supporting cultural workers and producers and not the financiers and private markets. I think that everybody is quite scared of screaming that the king is naked.

CC: It's funny, I mentioned Tito and Yugoslavia's Third Way politics but it also makes me think of Tony Blair and his own so-called third way. At the time, I remember a lot of criticism – and I would've also voiced some of this – about the instrumentalization of culture as the creative industries, of art as a way to get ahead in advertising or media. And the reaction to this was almost like, 'but what about art for art's sake?'. Yet now, when you see the other side of the coin,

it'd actually be alright to have a government that, even if it's tainted with a neo-liberal backdrop, still recognizes some value to culture, even if it's primarily economic value.

JC: I come from a context which never had an art market. All cultural production was effectively supported by the state, which worked well until we got a right-wing prime minister who in a single year changed eight directors of the leading cultural state institutions. We luckily elected a new government, but we came extremely close to the state of things in Poland and Hungary. We still feel the effects though of this short-lived stint as those directors maintained their positions for the next four years destroying all that their predecessors worked so hard to achieve – including a large amount of international collaborations. This is a great example of why public private partnerships today are needed – or supra-national funding bodies – as we never know which lunatic will get elected and how swiftly battles will be fought on the cultural front. To return to the *Venice Biennial* case study – if a country sends in an artist that falls out from the landscape of the current critical art discourse, it can take years for the audiences to return to consider that country as a valid member of the international art sphere. Well, Slovenia in the last edition sent to Venice a surrealist painting show and installed it in a broom cupboard with sand on the floor which was lifting and stinging the spectators' eyes as they were trying to view the works. Not much more needed to say about this as a metaphor...

CC: Is your work somewhat nostalgic for ideology? While your films certainly recognize the failures of ideology, there also seems to be a sense of loss, of political beliefs having succumbed to the 'no alternative' of neo-liberalism or the emotive populism of demagoguery. Is this something you recognize in your work?

JC: Since the entirety of the western art world began expecting either savage or nostalgic Balkan artists, I fiercely try to not give them any of the mentioned. As Lacan showed us so very well – for the desire to continue its persistence, it needs to stay unfulfilled. Rather I strive for the absurdist, the comical within the perverse cyclical narratives of power relations that draw from history and enter so very relevantly within our centre stage of contemporaneity. My works strive to elude any moral conclusions and didacticism, rather they intend to create platforms for discussion, where I invite writers, musicians, choreographers and other partners to dissect some of our shared concerns over the future of critical thought production. Together we play with audience expectations, exoticism, political correctness, questions of legitimacy, control, demagoguery and many other relations. I had a brilliant professor at Goldsmith, Suhail Malik, who gave us the best advice, which I always run past myself during the different phases of research

and production – namely to discern the difference between self-delusion and self-awareness – especially when it comes to communicating our practices to our audiences. I just wish this thought would travel from the art context into the spaces of political power, they could sure use it well.

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Chris Clarke is a critic and senior curator at the Glucksman, University College Cork, Ireland, where he has curated exhibitions including *Fashion Show: Clothing, Art and Activism*; *Data Streams*; *1,2,3,4: Dance in Contemporary Artists' Films*; and *OUTPOSTS: Global Borders and National Boundaries*, amongst others. He has also curated exhibitions including *Innsbruck International 2020*; *Under the Surface: Newfoundland & Labrador* at the 55th Venice Biennale and *The Second Act* at Arts Centre de Brakke Grond, Amsterdam.

He is a frequent contributor to art journals and magazines including *Art Monthly*, *Source*, *VAN* and *Photography & Culture*, and numerous exhibition catalogues and artist monographs, and he is currently a Ph.D. candidate at University College Cork, Ireland, writing on 'The curated encounter: Affect and experience in contemporary art exhibitions'.

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Note

1. For more information visit <http://jasminacibic.org/projects/for-our-economy-and-culture/>.