

frieze

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SHAHRYAR NASHAT LAURE PROUVOST

BRUCE MCLEAN *Strike a Pose!*

The Artist as Anthropologist

Influences: IAIN FORSYTH and JANE POLLARD

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TRAVELLING COMMUNIQUÉ

Museum of Yugoslav History, Belgrade

The archive of the Photo Service of the President of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) contains thousands of photographs documenting Josip Broz Tito's public and private activities from 1948 to his death in 1980. Following Tito's death, the photographs were kept at his residence inside blue, satin-lined boxes, displayed behind glass as part of a permanent memorial. Hidden in plain sight, the collection became an untouchable memento, as though it had died with Tito. Access was further restricted when, in the 1990s, Slobodan Milošević took over the building during the wars that led to the collapse of the SFRY. The residence was eventually bombed by NATO, adding yet another dramatic twist to the mystique of Tito's archive.

It was only in 2002 that the collection was transferred to the Museum of Yugoslav History (MYH) and made available for scrutiny in situ and online. The MYH complex also houses the House of Flowers, the throbbing heart of the cult of Tito, where his body is buried. The museum's decision to invite a range of contemporary practitioners – from art, architecture, psychoanalysis and pedagogy – to 'activate' Tito's archive beyond its memorial and forensic value seems all the more momentous against this background. In 2012, the MYH curatorial staff initiated 'Travelling Communiqué', a cooperation with an initial project group comprising artists Armin Linke and Milica Tomić and curator Doreen Mende. More than a single event, 'Travelling Communiqué'

represents an ongoing collective project that opened this summer to the public with an exhibition, a summer school and a film programme. By that point, the complete project group included an impressive list of international participants.

Inside the museum, a copy of an internal memorandum by Mirko Lovrić, a member of Tito's Photo Service team and its first unofficial spokesman, led visitors to the first exhibition room, where the archive was partially reconstructed by the curators of the MYH. Lovrić's memo suggests that the blue boxes contain not memorabilia but 'images for the future' – a recommendation the curators took literally. A line of sparse working tables followed, covered with chronologically arranged photos showing decades of Tito performing the routines of 'political theatre' abroad. The selection highlighted the correspondence between photographic protocols and political practice, but also the chasms between the media and art. In a nearby corner, a row of monitors screened a series of groundbreaking interviews with witnesses and experts of the archive.

The scope of the Photo Service might have been open-ended from the outset, but the recent digitization of their archive has introduced a new freedom to reshuffle its contents by keyword ('official welcoming ceremony', 'gift exchange', etc.). This epitomizes a shift from autocratic order to user-generated content. A different perspective on the impact of digital technology was provided by Linke's installation *Staging and Servicing the Media*

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Paris, 1956,
photograph from the archive of the
Photo Service of the President
of the Socialist Federal Republic of
Yugoslavia

(2014). Presenting still images, transcribed extracts from interviews, conversations to be replayed on iPads, and photo books, it is a revealing exposé of the inner workings of the current German government's press entourage. A series of slick photographic albums (normally intended for internal use and never exhibited publicly) demonstrates that the codes of state photography live on, essentially unaltered.

'Travelling Communiqué' also investigated the unfulfilled legacy of a particular moment in the history of Tito's statesmanship, the first conference of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961. Held in Belgrade at the height of the Cold War, the conference saw 28 developing countries unite against the US and the USSR to advance a message of anti-colonialism and peace worldwide. Documentation of the event featured prominently in the exhibition, with the Otolith Group turning it into a wall-size 'anarchival' montage (*Gather Around Me, My Writers, Musicians, My Name is Nam*, 2014). This framed the entrance to a room where Jean-Luc Godard's *De l'origine du XXI^e siècle* (On the Origin of the 21st Century, 2000) played on repeat, next to a blank white screen with only subtitles transcribing an interview with Branimir Stojanović, in which the philosopher articulated a vital question for the message of the communiqué: what does peace mean today under the conditions of 'permanent war'?

The ethos of anti-colonialism was thoughtfully embedded in the structure of the programme. Artistic authorship was downplayed in favour of collaborative installations, as well as recorded and public conversations that foregrounded the question of what collective production might mean in a post-socialist, increasingly privatized economy. The exhibition touched on the most sensitive ethnic and territorial disputes, showing Godard's *Je Vous Salue, Sarajevo* (I Salute You, Sarajevo, 1993) and work by contributors from Kosovo (still not recognized by Serbia as an independent state), Palestine, Syria and Iraq. The possibility of trans-national 'political friendship' was proposed through long-term collaborations with students from the Dutch Art Institute and Netsa Arts Village in Addis Ababa. These resulted in some of the most imaginative interpretations of the archive, including Katia Barrett's mapping of an Asian-African network of mass choreographies and Mihret Kebede's collage of NAM photos.

The project's pedagogy was extended by way of a summer school run by art historians for recent graduates, with talks and reading groups on the topics of the archive, participatory art and the public domain. The school responded to a perceived lack of critical, inter-generational discussion in local universities and counteracted recent attempts at anti-SFRY revisionism. Nurturing public debate on the legacy of the region's socialist past seems particularly urgent now that pro-Western consensus is growing in Serbia and admission to a troubled EU is advocated as a remedy for all ills. Miroljub Miki Stojanović's fine programme of revolutionary Third World films proposed persuasive alternatives to the Western heritage, implying that the future imagined by 'Travelling Communiqué' certainly lies elsewhere.

GIULIA SMITH