

## **The Archive as Project - Lucia Nimcova & Ewa Klekot**

"Čechov often expressed his thought not in speeches," wrote Stanislavski, "but in pauses or between the lines or in replies consisting of a single word... the characters often feel and think things not expressed in the lines they speak."

**Ewa Klekot**

**What do you think about cross-titling of your projects? To me, *UNOFFICIAL* is much more what Marian Kusik was doing because he documented the unofficial, private sphere of people's life; while *LEFTOVERS* would be to me the images of Juraj Kammer: the place they are being kept now in the Regional Centre for Culture in Humenne, as you told me, somewhere in a cupboard next to the loo; and also the message your work on them transmits to me is very much about the "leftovers" of the old, Soviet system still there, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Slovakia...**

***Lucia Nimcova***

*Both projects are UNOFFICIAL and LEFTOVERS at the same time. In UNOFFICIAL I was working with material officially paid by state, but archiving also unofficial images, critically documenting the opposite they were commissioned for. When I was finishing UNOFFICIAL I did not know I will be continuing with other archival project and of course I did not know that it will be called LEFTOVERS. In general, I am interested by any kind of leftovers.*

**EK**

**I find a meaningful difference in your approach to the both photographers' personalities. The way we get to know Kusik is more personal and intimate. You give him the voice, with his own words and his life story, while we do not get the chance to know Kammer, why?**

**LN**

*Kammer was official photographer, obliged to do certain job he was paid for. He was supposed to be professional, let's say without an opinion - neutrally documenting for the future what was happening in official life of the district. By making selection from his archive I had a chance to illustrate not only the era, but also his personality visually. I do not think he was showing his opinion openly, but within twenty years of taking images of the same places and same people over and over again, I had enough space to select hidden side of his*

*personality, through the images itself. I like the idea, that there is much bigger voice behind, pushing people to do, what they did, while being photographed by Kammer. They would not do the same just because of him. They did it for the system and sometimes they are caught doing it wrongly, or they are not looking heroic for many reasons.*

*With Kusik it is different. He was coming to people's homes, making portraits of their little children. I think it is necessary to know the stranger personally, before you decide to do so. I wanted people to look at his images through his life experience and knowing why he was doing, what he was doing in his free time for free. At the same time, his pictures are very intimate, it is almost like all photographed kids became for little while his own kids, so it makes sense to know a bit from his personal life too.*

**EK**

**When you find an archive, the first thing you do is to select some images that seem more appealing; or in your case also more suitable to your projects. What was the clue to your selection? What did you find attractive in the first place? How did they suggest your interpretation?**

**LN**

*Projects do not have the same form...each of them is individual, even there is some continuation. I do not have concept, which I would use for all the material, rather each material is asking for different interpretation.*

*...and book is usually different from installation in the exhibition... installation you can develop in the time and context of each exhibition. Book is usually statement in the moment, when you are on the upper wave of your mind? Your mood is changing after finishing the work. You become different person. I would have not been able to make UNOFFICIAL project today. I am not that angry anymore.*

**EK**

**But was there any clue to your selection?**

**LN**

*For the selection in the archive I was using different concepts. One was more rational, later more intuitive. One was working with the topic of representation of the women, another was showing bad compositions, formal mistakes and so, on. I was curious, what will stand out from different selections and why? The result in the book is some kind of essence. It is very interesting for me to know, what I consider important even after watching it every day for the period of two years. I can rationally explain selection in every image, but I did not use one strong concept structure for all of them. I was trying to change relationship to the past, because I wanted to change my future. Nowadays I am looking forward to the future being aware of the things I could not change at all, but it does not mean I am not aware of them.*

**EK**

**I feel that you are using photography for detecting similarities of the form... but also for creating them, the similarities, I mean...? To me it's not only finding a form – understood as a gesture, or bodily behaviour, or position – but also creating it and questioning. Have you considered what could be beneath this form? Because I do not really believe that this form is empty...**

**LN**

*Zekon, Chemlon, Chemes, the hospital & Mekom made around 700 people redundant in a space of half a year. Most of them were managers in high positions. That's quite a lot for a town with 35 thousand inhabitants, baring in mind that half of them went abroad anyway.*

*"Friday he met up with a business partner in Paris and on Monday a redundancy notice was awaiting him on his desk. An engineer highly specialised in chemical fibres. He had orders booked for half a year in advance. 58 years old. He's finished."*

*Masseur at the swimming pool says to me: "You know what? Nowadays afraid are even those who have never been afraid."*

*"Hey, you know what?" my mate stated, "I have a feeling that people are terribly afraid in this town of Humenné. I feel it's even worse than it was in communism. The other day I was talking to a man on the street. First he looked around and then whispered something quite normal."*

*"My colleagues don't greet me on the street because they are afraid that the boss might see them. They would become disfavoured. I am the only one who stood up to him and am now being punished for it." Says another woman.*

*Anonymous informing is at large. People mostly phone in.*

*"Morale and law in complete breakdown. Harass them. Morass."*

**EK**

**After the transformation one can often have the feeling – as you seem to have in UNOFFICIAL – that nothing has changed, as the form seems to stay the same; but actually there are changes that are going underneath, this is at least experience I have from Poland.**

**LN**

*At Vihorlat library the discussions with the members of Green Stone have been cancelled. According to the new manager, discussions about consumerism, protection of the forests, economic crisis, animal abuse and democracy are not for the category of people they are aiming for. The Nights with Andersen for children are to finish too. Nineteen employees of the library are supposed to focus on pensioners instead. The staff are signing in the attendance book. 7 o'clock is the red line. Who comes late will receive a warning and, occasionally one may get dismissed. Depends on how often he or she opens his mouth. They don't need people that inconvenience them. Why spoil the last few years leading up to pension? Somehow they have to last those 8-9 years...*

*"Once back in communist days I drew all the lines in the attendance book red, just for fun. The director laughed at it. Today I wouldn't dare draw those red lines."*

*When a discussion is being organised at the library, (approximately 5 times a year) refreshments are strictly prohibited. No tea, nor coffee. Not even if people bring their own because the kettle would use electricity and the cups would have to be washed. No exceptions. Don't send anyone to my office, no discussion.*

**EK**

**What is relationship of the photographed with their archival aliases? Did you ask people involved in the project?**

**LN**

*In the past, while working on the project Instant Women 2002-2006 I believed, that I could show reality. Even following people for years, I could not show all aspects of their lives. There was always something missing. More I was trying to talk with their own voices through my images, I had a feeling I was not succeeding. In the end I came with the best compromise possible, understandable for the wide public in the Eastern Europe. Anyway, what was clear for people from the East was double coded in the West. I realized, that the best way is, simply to have my own view on what is going on. In UNOFFICIAL project I made my own vision and worked with people more as objects, not subjects. And if subjects, than from my own perspective. Therefore, it is my own reality.*

**EK**

**When you watch the video, it is true, they are enjoying themselves. You do not feel that there is strong power relation going on, but there are some power relations. First, because your protagonists are supposed to perform to your script – it's you that is putting them into their roles; and which is more, what you are trying to do, in my opinion, it's to find out and sort of reveal hidden bodily disciplines they are following. Discipline is obviously an expression of power relations too. Did you investigate this power relations while working on UNOFFICIAL project?**

**LN**

*Many of the images I made, I would say 90% are documentations from the official events in the town, continuing from the past, they would just change the titles of the events. Usually you would see same people present there with some of the new ones. I went there as many other photographers from local newspapers did and documented what I felt is continuation*

*of the past. Of course there is many new things happening at the same time, but I was curious about those from the past, being alive. Few images are staged, they came out from my imagination. Video Exercise is my own concept. I asked people older than 50 to exercise for me, without telling them what to exercise and without saying for how long. I was curious what would happen.*

**EK**

**In a totalitarian system what is meaningful is the private, what is hollow is the public sphere; so the Everyman gets more meaning than the Hero. This is kind of revenge of the individual on the totalitarian regime. What I find in your projects it is a clear, critical comment on the public sphere, but there is no such a strong comment on “the Kusik side of reality”, the private. We know that Kusik quitted making pictures – why didn’t you feel compelled to comment his photographs it with your own pictures? To show the present of the private sphere, as you have done with the public?**

**LN**

*In the book LEFTOVERS, you can read under each picture a little story, usually as one sentence. A sentence is not explanation of the image, it is individual observation, which I call for myself „written photography“. That means, that I decided to use written images, instead of photographing them. I like that idea, because anybody who would read those texts could imagine their own image. That means at the same time, that book is open, not finished for viewer.*

**EK**

**Do you think that people involved in your projects share the vision of their reality that you are trying to transmit?**

**LN**

*This is very difficult question for me to answer. Depends which kind of people you have in your mind? If you think about people from my hometown Humenne, I have to say, that they gave me a prize of the town for promoting Humenne abroad. Official ceremony was like a best scenario for my UNOFFICIAL project. I was very disappointed, that my work was definitely useless at that moment.*

**EK**

**The system is inscribed in our bodies, but is it inscribed in our minds?**

**LN**

*People of my age use to say, that we need other generation to come and than all will change. I have to say, that many officials of my age are even worse, than generation before them. Of course, it is not so bad everywhere. We do not have so many stable rules as it is in the western societies, so if somebody really wants to change things, it is usually very hard, but not impossible.*

**EK**

**What was going in their minds?**

**LN**

*In minds of the older generation there is an opinion, that their life was much better during communism. It means, that something has really changed.*

**EK**

**What are the ordinary stories of today?**

**LN**

*I believe, that all my work is about ordinary stories of today. Anyway, I keep trying...*

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