

N. Ilic, cat. Did She Fall Or Was She Pushed ?, *Falling into Circularity*, Zagreb, Extended media Gallery, Zagreb, Croatia, 2001

FALLING INTO CIRCULARITY

Circular space of the Gallery of Extended Media is filled by the blue light whose source is the neon sign with words written in French. It seems that the only source of light is the neon sign of elegant lettering that fakes handwriting, common as much as everyday, quotidian, is common. The blue light that fills and articulates the space by giving it a soft, tactile quality encompasses the whole space. The space virtually fills in the architectural shell transforming it so that it is no longer the articulation of walls that shapes the indifferent space, but the space itself expands the walls rising towards a dome. Energy of the blue space fills in the architecture. Blue is the color of orgon energy, primordial cosmic energy whose general presence might be proved visually, thermally, electroscopically and by a Geiger-Miller counter. In a living organism it is bio-energy, life energy discovered between 1936 and 1940 by Wilhelm Reich, as we learn in the glossary at the end of the only edition of "The Function of Orgasm" that circulates over here. Space equals energy. It makes the space intimate, transforming it into an aquarium, in a protected atmospheric dome, a station for intimate experiments.

The projection on the screen that hangs in the aerial inter-space is also blue – the sea, the sky, and a lonely female figure walking nervously, high on the diving board. The original perplexity whether to dive into water or not is expressed in different languages, which elevates it into a higher level.

Renata lives in France; however, in her native country migrations are mostly massive and brutal, and every experience of translocation/displacement is conceived as traumatic, disregarding the specific lifestyle that shapes it. There is a need to express the language trauma. The trivial outcome of narcissistic appearance endangered by the removal of make-up is deadly serious indeed. The dilemma is extremely important – "who am I and what do I want to be", as it is expressed by Lucy Lippard in connection to the use of autobiography in the feminist art of the 70s. There is make-up involved, a classical feminist prop. But the make-up is also about appearance, about style, chains of denotators participating in the construction of gender that is not originally and naturally given. Perplexity turns into a problem, a "thing" that stands in our way, something that stops us from dying, as deduced by Vilém Flusser. In modern anthropology it is implicitly stated that one of the men's highest capabilities is the ability to make decisions. The whole political discussion of modernity is about the question of freedom of decision-making.

The prescription of behavior, inexorability of forms given, has been questioned also in the early video *I, the Housewife!* The video shows the artists performing typical female household chores under water. The contradiction between socially given roles of woman and the role of female artist had been performed under water, underwater as a separate, protected environment that follows its own rules, and also a place that disables breathing. What is being expected of a female artist is an impossible task that equals the endeavor to learn to breathe underwater.

The descending and circular movement around the gallery lower floor terminates with the video projection that closes the movement above another set of stairs. The artist in a white dress slowly descends the stairs, and then falls down revealing her blue stocks and red shoes. There is a story developing. First there is neon sign with the French sentence *If only I can once say I'll follow you until the end of the world*, the sentence that might

be a movie or chanson title, fitting equally well in the *Cosmo* world and in any postmodern discourse on love. Then there is a video about the conditions of decision-making among necessarily scarce information that limits our ability to make decisions and disable the final knowledge whether we did a right choice or not. And there is a video on falling, on falling down the stairs, also on falling whose ultimate goal is to reveal fashion accessories, like in some stocks advertisement, but also on revealing what is hidden, what is under the skirt. That story about desire, about impossibility to decide because everything has already been decided upon, about falling-down-as-redemption, is actually quite simple, like a pop song – or as sophisticated as Laurie Anderson's *Bright Red. Did she fall or was she pushed?* The story nonchalantly shifts between advertisement, video clip, melodrama etc., equally persuasive in each instance. The neon sentence expresses desire. A desire acting as if knowing what it really wants, desire expressed in performative, establishing the subject constituted in the ambivalent *non-space of cultural collisions, in which the demand to resignify or repeat the very terms which constitute the "we" cannot be summarily refused, but neither can they be followed in strict obedience*, as expressed by Judith Butler. To jump-or-not-to-jump is the phrase that has been repeated over and over, forming a rhythm of the video. Rhythmic acoustic quality ceases to form a question and turns into a mantra-like, repetitive sequence whose sound cover the words' content, acquiring abstract aesthetic quality. In an earlier video, *Memories*, rhythmic repetition of sound and gesture of writing down the words *Tito* and *tata* ("dad" in English), turns the words into sound material for a pop song on which the artist is dancing. Again is the big subject of the authoritative father figure in the private and public, political sense, of social and personal amnesia, pushed into background, covered and erased by easy listening.

The possibility of choice has been realized as pressure that cannot be escaped. Even our innermost impetus (from sexual orientation to ethnic belonging) has been more and more experienced as something to be chosen on the basis of knowing the facts that makes the choice possible. But the facts are never sufficient enough. There is no frame in the *Jump* where we see how high is the diving board or how deep is the sea that is supposedly under the springboard. Too many answers dictated by the culture of manuals blurs the original dilemma, degenerated into an arbitrary dichotomy that paralyzes every true action, turning it into frenetic and meaningless movement.

There is an obvious ironic attitude present in Renata's works. Vilém Flusser explains how the shifting into irony is equal to the rising above the conditions, but engagement is falling back from irony to the conditions in order to change the conditions. This is exactly the line that shifts feminist traits in Renata's work into the realm of life-style, entering *a new epoch in which our lives will no longer be regulated by a firm set of symbolic prohibitions; individuals are more and more free to dedicate their lives to the pursuit of pleasures and to adopt only those social rules which ultimately serve their self-realization* (S. Žižek, *An Introduction to the 150th Anniversary Edition of the Communist Manifesto*, Arkzin, Zagreb, 1998). At the same time the retreat of traditional patriarchal authority (the symbolic Law) in the contemporary "permissive" society sets in motion the cruel imperatives of superego that command to enjoy doing what has to be done. Impossibility of enjoyment and articulation of desire, whose paradox lies in the cleft between desiring and wanting, locates feminist references into the realm of transformation into "post-political" regime that neutralizes and absorbs every

specific demand into a lifestyle. And that is something generational, something that addresses specific public whose cooperation it evokes and shapes, and in whose reception it has been realized.