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Culture Two Blog, Brian Droitcour

## Expiration Place

This was a while ago (2009 or 2010?) but Aleksandra Domanovic bought herself an international sampler of domain names: `aleksandradowanovic.sk`, `aleksandradowanovic.rs`, `aleksandradowanovic.si`, `aleksandradowanovic.eu`.

Buying a domain name with your given name in it is virtually a requirement for an artist or anyone else with aspirations to public significance, whose work may be searched for by curious (and potentially important) strangers. Public figures and would-be public figures need to stake a claim to their location on the web, and that means turning one's name into a domain. Aleksandra Domanovic (henceforth AD) already had `aleksandradowanovic.com` but she was claiming more; she was locating herself in the top-level domains governed by Slovakia, Serbia, Slovenia, and the European Union. This was superfluous—anyone who needs to find her can find her in `.com`—but it connected self-representation to political representation, web sites to geographic ones. `.sk` and `.si` are Slovakia and Serbia, little slivers of countries that splintered off from bigger, ethnically composite ones amid the fall of socialist governments in Eastern European and the accompanying upswing of nationalist feeling. `.sk` and `.si` are short for recent iterations of the modern nation-state—the assertion of a linguist and ethnic community under a parliamentary government that guarantees the representation of its individual citizens. `.eu` is the EU, the push in the opposite direction, the development of an extra-national governing body that protects the rights of nations and states as well as those of individual citizens and unites them all in currency and commerce. Then there's `.com`, the “unmarked” URL. It seems like a default but when lined up with `.sk`, `.si`, `.rs` and `.eu` it reveals itself as one choice of many, and like them this choice is associated with a particular geography. The forms of representation connected to `.com` have little or nothing to do with law, rights, nationhood, or nationality; it's still unclear what rights there *are* in `.com`, the domain of globalized networked commerce, and what governments are supposed to do with this domain when it enters their borders via underground and underwater cables.

Unless you're in China trying to use Facebook, or in Germany trying to watch YouTube videos that GEMA has blocked because of musical content, or in some other similar situation the web presents itself as borderless, “World Wide,” offering up any site that users can imagine with the help of a search engine. `.com` is comparable to the art world, another globalized network where national origin can be elided even though it's part of a complex and opaque system of control and representation. In a way AD's collection of domain names might be seen as an inversion/update of a work by Mladen Stilinovic, who made a banner with the inscription: “An Artist Who Cannot Speak English Is No Artist.” An artist has to have a web site and it has to be a `.com`, or she's no artist.

Stilinovic is a Croat, born in Serbia when it was part of Yugoslavia. AD was also born in Serbia, a few decades after Stilinovic was but still in Yugoslavia, and she grew up in Slovenia. Borders, their liquidity and permeability, the consequences of their disappearance, the role that the World Wide Web plays in ignoring or enforcing them—all these things matter to Domanovic. Her other projects address the same issues, in ways that are more tangible or visible than the purchase of a collection of domains. *Turbo Sculpture*, a video about monuments built in the former Yugoslavia to honor Rocky Balboa, Bruce Lee, Tupac Shakur and other icons of pop masculinity. Globalized culture is a ubiquitous nebula that congeals in local contexts with strange effects. *Turbo Sculpture* identifies the results of culture freed from the boundaries of the nation-state but bound again to the global market, and then manifested in ways that are remain particular to the cultural habits of the nation-state. Global heroes Tupac and Rocky—whose real

cultural forms attached to them, though its tone had an almost utopian optimism in contrast to the grim humor of *Turbo Sculpture*.

Here is part of a short text I wrote about *19:30* (the whole thing can be found at [nineteenthirty.net](http://nineteenthirty.net)):

“By a coincidence of history, widespread internet use came on the heels of socialism’s collapse in Eastern Europe. Routes of global commerce multiplied in parallel with the speed of information. From today’s standpoint, a world where capitalism and socialism coexisted is associated with rhythms of life defined by slower forms of media. Aleksandra Domanovic considers this condition through her own experience and the history of her native Yugoslavia in *19:30* (2010). The title comes from the time slot of the Yugoslav nightly news, when the whole country would take time to view the broadcast. Watching the news became even more important to the daily routine as ethnic tensions mounted in the late 1980s, but that routine, like many other unifying social norms, dissolved along with Yugoslavia itself amid open conflict. Around 1995, electronic dance music became popular in the former Yugoslavia (a bit later than it did in the rest of the world, due in part to the international isolation of the warring republics) and young people crossed the new borders to attend parties and dance to wordless, repetitive techno—a musical genre free of national associations. When information can be accessed at any time, the nightly news loses the power to create a simultaneous, shared experience for a multitude of people. But a live event like a rave, Domanovic points out, still holds that power.”

To rephrase: The World Wide Web arrived at the time of fragmenting social order, the disintegration of a socialist state and the promises and guarantees to its people. The rave is a public space, too: it has promises of its own, which include a kind of collectivity and brotherhood, but (unlike the nation-state, or the socialist republic) it is temporary, mobile, anonymous. A consideration of the rave can prompt an imagining of what kind of public space the internet is: how people come together, what borders have to do with it, what identity has to do with it, how long does it last, why do people go there.

Yugoslavia was dissolved in 1992. Its top-level domain, .yu, was registered in 1989, and it outlived the country it represented by seventeen years. ICANN let the Serbian administrators of .rs manage .yu until the domain was abolished in 2009. (Meanwhile, .su—the top-level domain for the Soviet Union, which was registered 1990, fourteen months before the Soviet Union collapsed—continues to exist, as domain-holders lobby ICANN to keep it alive.) Perhaps the news of the expiration of .yu prompted AD to buy up her name in .rs, .si, etc. Now she’s let this international collection of domains expire. Maybe the cost was too much? But the purchase of the domains can easily survive as a story like the one I’m telling: all you have to do is list the URLs—[aleksandrromanovic.sk](http://aleksandrromanovic.sk), [aleksandrromanovic.rs](http://aleksandrromanovic.rs), [aleksandrromanovic.si](http://aleksandrromanovic.si), [aleksandrromanovic.eu](http://aleksandrromanovic.eu)—and they mean something. When I go there I get a DNS error. So will .yu