ALEKSANDRA DOMANOVIC TALKS TO DEAN KISSICK

Born in Serbia and brought up in Slovenia, Aleksandra Domanovic now lives in Berlin, where she spends most of her time making art and showing it both on the internet and in galleries around the world. Her latest project, *19.30*, tracks the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe alongside the concurrent rise of electronic dance music, and manifests itself in an archive of TV news jingles, a collection of specially commissioned remixes, an online compilation and a series of parties. She talks to Dean Kissick about raves, football hooligans and the Robocop sculpture in Detroit.

DEAN KISSICK: Your sculpture *Grobari* is a sort of monument to the former Yugoslavia, and shows colourful plumes of smoke from flares lit by extremist football fans known as "ultras". In 1990 Yugoslavia reached the quarter-finals of the World Cup, but in 1992 it was disqualified from the European Championships because of international sanctions due to the ongoing war. So how do ultras relate to the history of Yugoslavia?

ALEKSANDRA DOMANOVIC: In Yugoslavia the football stadium was often seen as a kind of social seismograph, and I believe this is still the case today. The unofficial beginning of the war was the hooligan riot on May 13, 1990, in Zagreb, where a match between the Croatian and Serbian champions – Dynamo Zagreb and Red Star Belgrade – was supposed to be played. A small-scale war happened that day between the ultras of the opposing teams, and the violence escalated so quickly that the game couldn't even take place. What is interesting is that the Red Star "fans" had been mobilised in Serbia and brought to Zagreb by a known war criminal called Arkan, and many of these men were later involved in the war atrocities that took place over the next 10 years in the Balkans. Such violent fan groupings have been easily manipulated for various political causes in the Balkans, and the ultras are also known to switch sides frequently. For example, football hooligans played a decisive role in the October 5th revolution in Serbia, which brought down Slobodan Milošević. They were present in the first lines of protesters who fought the police and broke into the parliament. But the same people burnt Kosovan flags in the crowd during a recent match against Italy.

DK: Last weekend, a statue of Michael Jackson was unveiled by Mohamed Al-Fayed, the owner of Fulham FC, outside the club's stadium in west London. Your film *Turbo Sculpture* looks at the history of these sorts of celebrity monuments, and was inspired by a statue of Bruce Lee that was put up in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 2005. How did you become interested in this trend? Is it still carrying on?

AD: Well, there's a Facebook initiative to build a RoboCop statue in Detroit – the citizens managed to gather enough money and it's currently in construction. Of course, *RoboCop* was set in that city, and what interested me about the "turbo sculptures" in the former

Yugoslavia was precisely the lack of any apparent local connection to the figures honoured. The inhabitants of Zitiste, in northeastern Serbia, had no immediate link to Rocky Balboa or Sylvester Stallone or Philadelphia, but still they decided to build a monument to Rocky. They believed the character represented noble values which are universal, and also that it would bring media attention to a remote Serbian village, which it did. And the trend continues, although it seems to have become commercialised, whereas to

start with, it was not at all. So the planned Winnetou [a fictional hero invented by 19th-century German author Karl May] statue in Croatia is not a civil initiative but a corporate project, and will be built along with a Native American-themed amusement park.

DK: *Turbo Sculpture* also mentions a planned statue of Tupac in Belgrade. Was this ever built?

AD: I don't think so. There hasn't been any news about it for quite some time.

DK: It also lists a lot of famous Yugoslavians – from Milla Jovovich to Nikola Tesla to Slavoj Žižek – who would make more suitable subjects for public

PORTRAIT BY STEFAN HEINRICHS

sculptures. Have you ever thought of constructing some sort of monument to them yourself?

AD: Not really. I'm more interested in working with existing turbo sculptures by using their moulds, or relocating them, or exchanging them with non-turbo stand-ins, and vice versa. By the way, the term "turbo sculpture" did not actually exist before – I coined it for the video. But it was a logical continuation of postwar Eastern European genres such as turbo TV and turbo folk and turbo architecture, all of which are based on exaggerations and random amalgamations of the local and global.

DK: What inspired you to make *19.30?* Was there any one event or memory that triggered your decision to start collecting TV news jingles?

AD: The idea came after I ran across an old Serbian news ident online: the "world out of dots" used from 1978 to 1993. This jingle accompanied my life from birth to the break-up of Yugoslavia, and hearing it again after so many years had an immense impact on me. It not only brought back memories and captured the feeling of past times, it also sounded like electronic music – it just needed a beat to make it

danceable. And so I was inspired to make a techno version of it. As I researched further, I found a remix already online, which made me aware that my experience was not singular, and I changed my focus from producing something myself to facilitating a possibility for others to create their own versions. Since collaboration between the different national TV news studios in Yugoslavia was cut off in the early 1990s, there was no concise archive for the whole of the country, so I made my own. It's unique in that sense. My purpose is dual: on the one hand, *19:30* is an archive of theme songs; on the other, it's an attempt to explore their creative variation in a way that resonated with my personal experience of techno, as an art form based upon the infinite reinterpretation of other people's productions.

DK: Can you explain the process of collecting all these idents? I heard you toured the whole of the former Yugoslavia tracking them down.

AD: Yes, and travelling was the fun part, although I didn't always get everything I wanted. The hardest part of the project was actually obtaining the right contacts – that's what took the longest. It was a really tedious process of email and phone correspondence with many people. Most of the TV stations had archived the idents poorly, so I usually had to speak to the oldest person working at each station to find out which idents existed, and when they ran, and who made them, and where they were.

DK: And you're also hosting an event as part of the project?

AD: Yes, there will be a *19:30* techno party as part of the *Based in Berlin* show this June, and then a second one in Neuchâtel in July, as part of an exhibition at Centre d'Art Neuchâtel. The party is an evolving format, just like the remixes. I'm putting together a line-up of DJs and asking them to integrate some of the original idents or remixes into their sets, and each party will be filmed to provide material for a new video piece.

DK: You once said that for your generation, who were teenagers at the time of the break-up of Yugoslavia, "Techno became our transitional symbol." It's amazing how a sound that started in early 1980s Detroit has travelled around the world. What sort of social impact did dance music have in the region where you grew up?

AD: When I was young we would travel to Croatia or Serbia to attend raves, and young people from other ex-Yugoslav countries would come to party in Slovenia. Socially, the situation could be compared to Berlin right after the fall of the Wall, where techno played a significant role in re-establishing social relations between the East and West of the city. Culturally, techno also made a huge impact – for me it was the newest, weirdest thing I had ever heard – mind-boggling. I have not had a similar experience with music since.

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