



Inke Arns

Statement on the occasion of the panel discussion:

"Tactical Media Concepts in Post-Socialist States"

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Tactical Media Concepts in Post-Socialist States

I would like to briefly focus on the notion of the "tactical" (as opposed to "strategic"), and on the notion of "tactical media" before talking about "tactical media concepts in post-Socialist states", the topic of our panel.

Tactics vs. Strategies

In his famous book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau makes a very clear distinction between strategies and tactics. He confronts the notion of passive consumption with the notion of active *usage* or *practice*. This "different production" is almost invisible because it articulates itself "not through its own products, but precisely in the way the products that are imposed by the ruling order are *used* or *practised*."¹ The movements of this "different production" entirely happen "inside the enemy's field of vision", in a space entirely controlled by the enemy. That is why de Certeau calls this "different production" tactics, as opposed to strategies. Tactical practices create blurry vectors which consist entirely of the vocabulary of known languages and are subject to a pre-existing syntax – which is why at times it is quite risky to use them, as they might be difficult to recognise. However, despite their using the same linguistic or social material, tactics manage "to stay heterogeneous (or alien) to the systems they invade", and, once inside these systems, they "wittily manage to deploy and formulate different interests and wishes."²

If we are to stick with Vaclav Havel's distinction between "power" and the "powerless,"³ then strategies belong on the side of "power," and tactics on the side of the "powerless". Hegemonic power acts from its own place and space, and thus can produce strategies that it can force upon space. Tactics, on the other side, are developed by the so-called "powerless" that do not have their own space. Therefore,

¹ Michel de Certeau, *Kunst des Handelns*, Berlin 1988, p. 13

² de Certeau, *ibid.*, p. 85

³ Vaclav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless*, 1985

tactics happen "inside the enemy's field of vision", in a space entirely controlled by power. Tactics, which unfold in *time* rather than in space, can therefore make use of, or manipulate the practices developed from a strategic place.

Tactical Media

"Tactical media are what happens when the cheap ,do it yourself media, made possible by the revolution in consumer electronics and expanded forms of distribution (from public access cable to the Internet) are exploited by groups and individuals who feel aggrieved by or excluded from the wider culture. Tactical media do not just report events, as they are never impartial, they always participate and it is this that more than anything separates them from mainstream media."⁴

The notion of tactical media as developed by David Garcia and Geert Lovink was first introduced by the conference Next 5 Minutes 2 on "Tactical Media" in Amsterdam in 1996. It makes direct reference to Hans Magnus Enzensberger's 1970s text "Baukasten zu einer Theorie der Medien" ("Construction Kit for a Theory of the Media") on the emancipatory use of media as well as Bertolt Brecht's famous Radio Theory from the 1930s in which he demanded to transform the radio as a centralized distribution apparatus into a genuine communication device.

Post-Socialism: Contexts and Strategies

So much for tactics/strategies and the notion of tactical media; now let's focus on the second part of this panel's title: "Tactical Media Concepts *in post-Socialist States*" (and I would have to add "in Eastern Europe"). If we talk about "post-Socialism" then we have to immediately state that as there was not one Socialism, there is no single or unified post-Socialism. Under Socialism there were always a lot of different red flags (meaning that the grade of political repression varied from country to country), and the same holds true for that which came after Socialism. In Russia we are today confronted with what the Chto delat collective calls a "state of emergency" (a notion, mind you, made famous by Carl Schmitt). In the context of the global "war on terror" a variety of repressive measures have been introduced like travel restrictions, media censorship, and the persecution of political opponents. Chto delat are suggesting in the latest issue of their newspaper that "Russia and other post-Soviet countries are undergoing processes of global neo-liberal 'development' that are, in fact, taking place almost everywhere" and they conclude that "the 'state of emergency', commonly associated with fascism, is inherent to this global order (Agamben)".

In Kosovo we are faced with an entirely different (geo-)political situation: Since 1999, Kosovo, which until then was part of Yugoslavia, is under the administration of an interim government installed by the United Nations – the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). The interim government and the UN forces (KFOR) were installed in Kosovo after the activities of the Serbian military and paramilitary led to massive deportations of the Kosovo-Albanian population in 1999 to neighbouring

⁴ David Garcia, Geert Lovink, „The ABC of Tactical Media“, in: *Nettime*, 16 May 1997

countries such as Albania, Macedonia, and Montenegro.⁵ Until today the future political status of Kosovo – which officially is still a part of Serbia and Montenegro – remains undecided upon. Most of the Serbian population have left the region.

So, we might ask: What could new strategies of disobedience look like in these contexts? This is by no means an easy-to-answer question. We could ask: Are there any at all? If so, what do they consist of? Are publications – newspapers, website – enough? Does it possibly make sense to look into the Socialist past for inspiration concerning the development of new contemporary strategies (or, to be more precise: tactics)? I am not talking about the long history of "dissident" activities or "anti-politics" here, but rather about very intriguing artistic/political strategies that have been developed in the respective Socialist/post-Socialist contexts since the early 1980s and that use the strategy of "subversive affirmation" and of "over-identification".

⁵ The 1999 Kosovo crisis is only the latest in a long-term development. Settling in the myth-laden Kosovo polje where the Serb nation suffered defeat by the Ottomans in 1389, especially Kosovo-Albanians have been suffering political repressions since at least the 1970s from the Serbian authorities increasingly informed by Serbian-nationalist rhetoric. This culminated in the development of an entire Albanian "underground" (non-official) social system including underground universities, hospitals, schools, etc. in order to avoid Serbian-dominated institutions.