

THE INDIVIDUAL MYTHOLOGY OF TOMISLAV GOTOVAC

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THE NECESSARY CONTEXTS

In order to be able properly to perceive, to recognise, feel, understand (and yes, why not, to learn to love) and, finally, to analyse and evaluate, at the pertinent level of art criticism and history everything that Tomislav Gotovac is doing, and everything he has done during several decades of work, right at the beginning one has to state and identify the problem area contexts into which his many productions in various media - his actions, appearances, deeds, gestures, his very figure and outward appearance, what he says in public (in interviews none of which mince words) or privately (in tales that while you are with him seem to have no end) have to be located or installed, because however much everything that Gotovac does might seem at first glance just a vast conglomeration of larger or smaller accidentally revealed fragments, there actually is in his work a very coherent and even highly systematic authorial strategy, which absolutely requires that it be considered and observed within the coordinates of certain large and already clearly historically established spiritual and artistic concepts in the culture of the twentieth century. For there would be a number of grave disagreements between Gotovac's works and the surroundings. The surroundings, that is, would frequently have had too little knowledge or understanding to be able to realise that his work had to be seen in the light of traditions parts of which make up chapters in the historical avant-gardes (especially of Dadaism and Surrealism), as well as numerous chapters from the history of film (silent and talky, feature and experimental film), and in more recent times, just before or during Gotovac's own work, covered by phenomena such as Informel, New Realism, neo-Dada, happenings, Fluxus, the dematerialisation of the art object, the artist's first-person speech, performance, behaviour art, body art, actionism, art outside gallery premises (in urban and natural settings), the art of static and moving mechanically/electronically produced pictures (photographs, film, video), art (as conceived by Beuys) in the extended field of the relations between art/politics and the question of the politicisation of art, the identification of art and life, art as extension of the artist's existence, the transfer of the focus of the problem from the general concept of *art* to the

singular and personal case of the *artist*, perhaps, put most briefly, in the light of *the arts of individual mythologies*, which concept assumes the absolute uniqueness and non-assimilability of the artist's person. If, that is, there is no recognition of all these practices and concepts of the nature of art and artistic ideologies, or at least some of them, as being the adequate contexts for the art of Gotovac (and he has consciously cultivated them as such, or has simply taken them for granted), then there will be misunderstandings at the outset. There will be no real contexts with his work later on, and vice versa, if these contexts are known and appreciated, and if Gotovac's work is fitted in to them at precisely determined points, it will be possible, completely naturally and even relatively easily, to discern and to find the particular and recognisable place for Gotovac's works within, or at least in the vicinity of, the historical or recent universal problem areas of art just mentioned.

IT'S ALL A MOVIE

Gotovac's overall oeuvre, everything that he has in general achieved in art and life is an inseparable unit, which only for external and technical reasons can be tacked in (though not strictly divided into) separate areas such as constituted by the film medium and practices derived from the disciplines and legacies of the fine arts. Gotovac's film work will be dealt with by people thoroughly versed in this part of his work, but those who keep an eye on what might be called the artist's dealings in the area of fine art are also completely aware that film is crucial for Gotovac's work as a whole, that he was, as an artist in the extended sense of the concept, primarily brought up and formed on film, that film is not only a basic thread but leading thread, the very being, even of those works of his that are not practically manifested in the film medium. Even more than this, film in its endless diversity (with a very strict quality selection) has in the whole history of the medium become a genuine fascination and obsession in Gotovac's life from his earliest days, when as a boy he got an irresistible electric shock from the magic of moving pictures on the screen of the darkened cinema auditorium. In many interviews Gotovac has stated various very intimate reasons why he fell permanently and insatiably in love with film, revealed everything that then made up part of his youthful knowledge of film and what, later being combined with new understandings, was retained in him for good, not only where film is concerned, but also when, setting off from that into other areas of expression, it became crucial for his entire conception of art, irrespective of the media in which the need for art was put into reality in practice. Hence the statement that *It's all a movie*, made on one occasion ostensibly a mere piece of passing wit, is actually the crucial motto of the whole of Gotovac's philosophy in art and life. And not philosophy alone (for in the case of Gotovac the concept sounds somehow too deliberate and scientific) but one could say, of the whole of his unpredictable life's activity, tiny, which like some film not yet shot goes on from day to day practically as a combination (or a conflict) or fiction.

reality, just as film itself is most often a fiction that talks of some possible reality, or vice versa, it is a new reality in the form of an imagined and invented story.

HOW PHOTOGRAPHY TAKES THE PLACE OF FILM

In the seventies, as part of the then *new art practice* of the time, there was a very widespread phenomenon known as *photography as the medium of the artist*, that is, photography for the purpose of conceptual art and the art of behaviour, in terms of its extra-aesthetic characteristics quite the opposite of the aesthetics of the *photography of the photographer*. For those keeping an eye on radical events in art, there was surprise, and even shock, in the discovery that for a whole decade and more already (1960) Gotovac had taken a whole series of photographs (*Heads*) totally in line with the characteristics of the *photography of the artist*, although, of course, he had done it starting off from different ideas and different experiences. Not being able, that is, in the conditions that then reigned in the Cine Club Zagreb, to be able to shoot his own film, making up for this missed and yet ardently longed-for chance, Gotovac decided, in the role of director, with the help of Vladimir Petek as cameraman, to make a series of five pictures of his own figure in close-up, in various poses, situations and moods. Directed within the photographic medium, the shots in the *Heads* series were in essence based on the foundations of the language of film: they were conceived, in effect, as individual frames of a possible sequence not pulled together by a given action but rather by a common basic motif, in this case the motif of the artist's figure, which means that we are dealing here with a kind of photographic (potentially filmic) self-portrait. The author of the series himself was to say that at the basis of the work there was a reflection on the nature and significance of the frame in the film that was for him of cult importance, Robert Bresson's *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé*. This shows that even then Gotovac was completely consciously thinking in categories of the analysis of the linguistic factors of filmic and photographic depiction, particularly in relation to those directors whom he particularly liked and valued. But apart from this analytical component, the shots from this series also contain a clear psychological mood derived from his personal states of mind at the time that *Heads* was shot. Because these are self-portraits here (examples of the author's *first person speech*), in the figure and face of the person photographed, states of depression, alienation, the consciousness of the absurdity of existence are suggested and discernible. This derives from the feigned scenes of the judicial examination, torture in jail, fear of possible explosion of a grenade in a soldier's hand and so on. In connection with this shot, it is telling that the *Heads* series was created immediately before Gotovac had to go off to do his compulsory military service. From this series, one can recognise signs pointing to the sources and models of Gotovac's general and filmic culture deriving from intensive reading of the existential writings current in the fifties, and his almost obsessive all-day watching everything that was being shown at the time, as well as the classics of the film, in the hall of Zagreb's *Kinoteka*

(Gotovac himself in one interview gives the concrete references: Soviet revolutionary films, the French *film noire*, the American war film, *Soldier's Tale*, *The Cranes are Flying*, *Shchors* by Dovzhenko, Pudovkin and so on).

FIRST PRESENTATION OF HIS OWN BODY

The next photographic work by Gotovac, *Showing the Elle*, 1962, was actually his first presentation of his own body, the use of his own body for the purpose of personal expression, as an action that was later to dominate the whole of his artistic oeuvre. Soon after doing his military service, where he had lived surrounded almost entirely by other men, and got rid of many of the inhibitions of a reserved and shy young man, Gotovac decided on a pleasant trip up Mt Medvednica, Zagreb's mountain, in the company of friends, in spite of the cold, to strip off; still, he did not do so, because there were women present. Nevertheless, he did strip to the waist, and then took in his hand and started to leaf through the fashion magazine *Elle*. The event was shot, according to Gotovac's direction, by the photographer Ivica Hričko, and this is how this photographic series was created. What Gotovac did on this occasion on Medvednica could be called a forerunner of the performance, perhaps a performance manqué only the name. Not even Gotovac was aware that he was using an artistic procedure that was later actually to be called performance, but he certainly knew that he was doing something extremely unusual and uncommon. And hence ultimately art as well, however, at that time, quite different from and outside the bounds of every known and accepted conception of art. And since this act was registered by the camera, according to the directions of the creator of the idea, the camera being the means for the creation of the photographs and the film, one has to conclude that this was quite intentionally an artistic action, and an undoubtedly artistic work. If we recall that all this happened in distant 1962, while there were no actions at all similar to this in the art of this country, both actions - the stripping and the shooting - were very advanced for the conception of art at that time, hence *Showing the Elle* is a work that in many ways anticipates conceptual and media trends. This is the first of Gotovac's works with his own (semi)nude body, his first (provisionally so termed) performance in a public place, one of the first (not only of his, but in the whole of Zagreb, Croatia and Yugoslavia of the time) works documented and accomplished in the technical and linguistic characteristics of the photographic medium. Here, the photography is Gotovac's substitute for film. This series of shots is one possible photographic mini-direction, in the absence (the blockage, the impossibility) of the maxi-direction of film that was inaccessible and unachievable to him.

DIRECTION AS OPERATIVE CONSTANT

Direction as an operative procedure deriving from the film medium became, then, at the earliest stage of Gotovac's work, the basis for his manner of artistic thinking. Awareness that handling artistic media, irrespective of the characteristics of

the media, is always in fact a kind of direction, that it consists of the planned and organised adjustment of all the factors that, subordinated to the author's conscious leading idea, take part in some artistic operation, was to go through the whole of his work, irrespective of changes in the means of expression used. This awareness derived first of all from his education in film, but since it was never able to be realised in an actual (feature, short even documentary) film, direction in Gotovac's procedure was adapted to the medium that was closest to film, and that was photography, also involving shooting, using frames and sequencing, having an actor as figure in an arranged scene. After the *Showing the Elle* sequence in 1961, the next sequences of directed photographs were created in Belgrade in 1964. *Posing, Hands, Trio, Case* are in general related to some of the artist's filmic models and affinities, but also communicated as independent works in the medium of photography, almost all with some pronouncedly provocative psychological and sociological subtext and effect, in essence of autobiographical content and character.

COLLAGES AS PAGES OF AN INTIMATE DIARY

As well as direction, *regie*, an operative procedure characteristic of the art of film, *montage* is another fundamental heritage of film, one that Gotovac, as an artist in essence brought up on this art, frequently used in his pictorial work. In the fine arts it is the principle of the collage that is akin or analogous to the principle of montage; collage is a work of montage, a work that consists of numerous fragments of heterogeneous origin simply juxtaposed (not combined in the organic unity of the classical work of art). In other words, collage is manifested in the effect of unexpected encounters and conflicts, clashes, shocks even, as a consequence of the duress by which elements torn and pulled from their natural and original surroundings are forced to coexist. There is a long and well known history of collage and collage procedures in the history of modern art (Cubist and Futurist, via Constructivist, Dadaist and Surrealist, and then the post-war neo-Dadaist and neo-Realist); yet what is in common to all these applications and changes in the procedure of collage is that every single work derives from some avant-garde or neo-avant-garde worldview, with all the connotations that are implied in this concept. Gotovac, who had the heritage of avant-garde film and fine arts work at the very foundations of his intellectual upbringing, did not need much for a sudden impulse to persuade him to try collage creations himself. He recalls that the sight of two collages of Kurt Schwitters at the exhibition of the Urvater Collection in the Modern Gallery in Zagreb in May 1959 stimulated him, a few years later, to get into the making of collages himself. At that time, however, and for a long period afterwards, he did not exhibit these works. He showed them for the first time in the Student Centre Gallery in Belgrade in 1976. That the collages were not shown at the time they were made is another confirmation of the isolation of Gotovac at the time, his *aparthood* from the regular artistic circles, his marginality, self-exclu-

sion from the local world of art. But even in such a situation, Gotovac needed to keep busy at his work, even totally in the shade, because his collages were a kind of intimate diary. Everything that was put into these collages were in origin and significance parts of the artist's everyday life (crumpled paper, discarded newspapers, tickets from films seen, bus tickets, match boxes, cigarette butts, plasters that had covered wounds and scratches). Since it had all previously gone through his hands, it represented, for him, something close and intimate, it was a part of his existence, an existence, however difficult and gloomy it might be, was the only one he had, and it was only his, and in works he recorded it meticulously, preserved, remembered it, considered it at least for himself particularly precious and irreplaceable. In a chronological, linguistic and technical sense, Gotovac's collages from the mid-sixties and later are post-Dadaist, post-Merzian, coinciding with incidences of American post-Dadaism and European New Realism on the international art scene, and are, with their characteristics, extremely rare, probably the only examples of local art with such typological parallels. But for Gotovac himself, such parallels are unimportant. What is concerned here is a series of personal confessions that he wrote down in loneliness, incapable of speaking out in a different way. When, that is, he had no other possibilities of expressing himself, when he could not only not shoot a film but also had no opportunities to take photographs, he could express himself at least with the refuse of his own anyway scanty lifestyle. He never consented, that is, to total silence, although his artist's voice, completely outside the art world of this country at that time, was never heard, nor did anyone even know that such a voice was speaking somewhere in the profound shadows.

BODY THE FIRST TIME IN ACTION

But this energy, held back so long and trammelled up, had to break free some time, there had to be a flare up when there was a chance; this chance came to Gotovac in the now legendary first Zagreb happening (*Happ naš*, 1967), in which Gotovac was one of the artists, participants, actors (the other two were Hrvoje Šercar and Ivo Lukas). What actually did happen that evening of 10 April 1967 in the *Podrum Scene* theatre in Ilica 12 cannot subsequently be visually reconstructed (although a year later there was a remake of the action in the Ante Peterlić film *An Accidental Life*, from which one scene was later built into the film *Plastic Jesus* by Lazar Stojanović. But there is a fairly detailed verbal destruction of the action in Gotovac's interview with Goran Trbuljak and Hrvoje Turković in the magazine *Film*, 10-11, 1978, which needs neither retelling nor repeating here. What basically needs to be said is that in this happening there was the first explosion in action of the still clothed (black middle class suit, required by the scenario) and not naked body, as was frequently to be the case with Gotovac later on. It is essential that the body is not shown in some other medium (as in the preceding photo sequences) but is used immediately, used as the motive energy of a planned and hemmed

drastically enough performed act of destruction, as compared with the originally conceived action of the happening or, more precisely put, the actionist ritual performance (in which hens, at first alive and then slaughtered, were supposed to appear, though this did not actually happen). But in this deed the body was nevertheless set free to an extent way beyond what was considered normal in that time and milieu. For the first time it was shown that some action deemed artistic could be put on outside the context of the static and completed art-object. Everything occurred as a result of this action in progress, this deed with a limited period of duration. This first experience of the body in action was later to be built with far-reaching consequences into all of Gotovac's public and direct corporeal appearances.

FORERUNNER AND REPRESENTATIVE OF THE NEW ARTISTIC PRACTICE

At the end of the sixties, directly or indirectly linked with the great no-saying of '68, the manner of artistic expression, the behaviour of artists and the status of the work of art, that is, in fact, the entire world of art, changed drastically, and there was obviously a radically different spiritual and artistic climate coming on. The same thing, of course within the constraints and characteristics of the milieu, was occurring on the local art scene as well: a phenomenon was being born that in later historical treatments was to be referred to as *the new artistic practice* and *the innovations in the art of the seventies*. This then led to the creation of a historical framework and problem area within which Gotovac's previous works (from his first photographs up to 1960, to the happening of 1967) could legitimately be seen as heralds of the new artistic sensibility, and, what is more, as pioneering works completely in the spirit of this altered artistic language and the ideology characteristic of it. He had a concrete confirmation that this was how things really were, that Gotovac had been one of the precursors and leaders of the new art of the end of the sixties and during the seventies - which came down to a well-deserved reevaluation that resulted in his definitely being included in the context of the new art, through the solo show held in the Belgrade Student Cultural Centre Gallery in 1976, and then in the same year through his participation in the show *The New Artistic Practice 1966-1978* in the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Zagreb. From that time on, there was no longer any doubt about the typology and characteristics of Gotovac's work: for he, in his beginnings in the sixties, had instinctively and intuitively nurtured phenomena that were later to be called the new art, and then, from the seventies on, he was a very striking, highly radical and completely aware leader and representative of it.

In the same year there was a reevaluation of his early works, as anticipation of the new artistic practice, 1976 that is, in Belgrade Gotovac took a series of photos that fitted in with the work *Here, in this place*, in which he marked his subsequent inclusion into the mainstream of events of innovative art of the seventies. This work consisted of a series of shots

of memorial plaques on the façades of buildings, the inscriptions marking individual important historical dates from the political and cultural life of the milieu, as well as some common everyday things. In his choice of motif, Gotovac applied the procedure of *registration without intervention*, implying an operational principle in which the camera became a means of impersonal looking and statistical registration according to a principle that Hrvoje Turković called *reduction and repetition in variations*, the aim being to *find system in accidental phenomena*. This is, in fact, the principle according to which a constant accumulation of identical or very similar data starts to take on the features of a highly personalised point of view, which Andy Warhol commonly used and developed to the level of an entire system as operational procedure in film and in silk-screen prints.

Talking of his experience, Gotovac mentions the example of Warhol's *dry film*, but apart from that model, also admitted to being influenced by the Howard Hawks manner of framing, in which the characteristic procedure was to register a scene from the normal angle of vision without looking for any special angle (low or high). By drawing attention to such basic filmic foundations in his proceedings in this series of photos, Gotovac admits that he used the medium as an area of reflection about the immanent structure of the frame as a basic building block of both photographic and film language. And thus he confirmed that his involvement with photography as a medium for artistic practice was in essence the consequence of a metalinguistic approach to the constitutive elements of the medium that he made use of in his work.

For this kind of approach has built into it the author's awareness of the nonmetaphorical and anti-narrative character of contemporary artistic language, and this is an awareness that Gotovac owes to his training on very selective specimens from the history of film, ranging from the classics to the underground, primarily on sources and models to do with which Turković was to conclude: "Gotovac bares the constituent tradition of the film to those mechanisms that are most in harmony with the primary endeavour to register that is the nature of the medium, eliminating all the while anything that might possibly conceal the mechanism." As forerunner and then leading representative of the domestic new art of the seventies, Gotovac put two kinds of characteristics into this art: he was the first, long before this art really made an appearance, to use static and moveable technically produced pictures (photographs, film), and then he went in for a very stringent structuring of the expressive potentials of the new mechanical or electronic media in the light, not only of their expressive and documentary, but also, and primarily, for their metalinguistic and metamedia nature.

FIRST PERSON SPEECH

In the context of the first wave of the new artistic practice of the early seventies, made up of representatives of the younger generation of the time - OHO from Slovenia, the conceptual groups Kod and Bosch+Bosch in Vojvodina, Dimitrijević,

Trbuljak, Bućan, Martinis and Iveković in Zagreb, and Abramović, Todosijević, Popović, Paripović, Milivojević and Urkum in Belgrade, most of them born in the later forties - Gotovac, alongside Radomir Damnjan (1936) was the only slightly older artist involved in the circle of the artistic sixties-eighties. Coming from the area of the experimental, unconventional, underground film (terms he likes better than amateur film-maker), Gotovac brought some very particular characteristics into this circle. Firstly, there was the decision to put his own figure (face and body) into the centre of most of his actions of that time, and particularly of a later time; then, in line with this, came the use of media based on recording procedures, with him becoming increasingly interested in photography alongside film, because of both the ability to document actions that had been carried out, and also because of the autonomy accorded by this expressive discipline. Ten years after the first *Heads* series, Gotovac shot a second series in Belgrade, one with the same series, which means that it is once again characterised by the choice of his own figure as the one and only motif; in addition to this thematic characteristic, it has the additional reflection about the nature of the filmic and photographic frame, as the basic structural unit of the language and medium he is using. This then is about the theme of self-portrait, and this theme by definition marks the need of the artist to speak in the first person, and the way he does it, with this theme and language being filled with some special expressiveness and suggestiveness from the person presented; this led to the second version of *Heads* at once giving an impression of being sophisticated speculation about the characteristics of the medium employed and also of making a direct and sometimes vehement and drastic statement about existence.

But, while in the first *Heads* series he arranged the shooting scene, getting a different set every time and different attributes for his own transformed personality, in the second series Gotovac concentrated entirely on his own figure and personality, as on a direct and factual item of information, putting his face and back of the head always in a static and documentary plane. He worked them out in three sequences, the successiveness of which was achieved with the actions of haircutting and shaving, procedures in which he emphasised the difference in the temporal sequence of the actions performed. And the choice of his own figure as the only motif of the shooting is conditioned by the aim of having the documentary character of the photo, which in its bald and stark close-up recalls the exact function of the police dossier photographs, supplemented by the self-ironical impression that lends this series of *Heads* the direct qualities of provocation. But still, the expressive and provocative dimension is only additional, and not the fundamental element of Gotovac's exploit in the medium of photography.

For Gotovac himself will confirm that the typology of shots in the second *Heads* series is actually founded on a reflection about a close-up impelled by a fascination, subsequently an analysis, of the structure of the framing in the film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* by Carl Theodore Dreyer. The idea to shave

his head came to him when he saw a scene with the actress Marie Falconetti from this film, while the procedure of rotating the figure shot came from a reflection about the circular pan often used in some of Hitchcock's films - *Rebecca*, *The Paradine Case*, *Notorious*, *Vertigo*), as well as in the specific treatment of the same camera movement previously used in Gotovac's major experimental film called *Circle* (1964). Done in photography, the second version of *Heads* is actually a visual essay about the language and structure of film necessarily replaced by photography, simply because the artist was unable to do this in film. Whatever he does, whatever he uses, for Gotovac everything is film, everything is direction, even when the final phase of the work is accomplished in some other medium, in this case in photography, and it is this forced, coerced, replacement of film by photography that is a constant in Gotovac's operative procedure. It also contains his specific authorial position and strategy in the complex of the new art of the seventies.

HIS OWN BODY AS A READY-MADE

Not long after the shooting of the second version of *Heads*, in 1971, Gotovac was mixed up in the famed and controversial case of the film *Plastic Jesus* (more about this elsewhere). What is important for Gotovac's future artistic work is one of the scenes from the film in which, completely naked, he runs around the streets of Belgrade in the very centre of the town. For the first time it happened (although for the sake of another medium and in the work of another artist) that Gotovac, without any shrinking, exhibited and showed to the gazes of the multitude - the way it is - his own naked body. Whether this was a completely self-aware performance in the medium of a film by a different artist, or whether he was just an actor in the film, is a question that can be answered from the viewpoint of Gotovac's overall artistic strategy. Of course: the first of these two. This was a Gotovac performance, everything else, in the context of the film, is just the circumstances surrounding the only way he could possibly find to make his intent become reality. One very convincing proof that this is the case will come much later, at the end of the seventies, beginning of the eighties, when in just a few years, in a real explosion of urges for individual self-expression, Gotovac was to have a series of crucial public appearances and bodily actions, the peak and focus of his entire work in art. These are, in order, the following events (quoted literally from Gotovac's work biography): the performance *100*, to mark the opening of the 10th Music Biennial in Zagreb on May 12 at noon (a mass scene on Trg Republike with a hundred young people); the performance *Artist Begging*, performed on 26 December 1980 at 12 noon in front of the Church of the Wounded Jesus; the performance *Haircutting and Shaving in Public*, July 6 1981 at 12 noon; the performance *Lying Naked on the Asphalt. Kissing the Asphalt* (better known as *Zagreb I love you*) on Trg Republike as it then was, on Friday 13 November, 1981 at 12 noon. A few years later this was to be followed by the action of vending the paper *Polet* on Trg Republike, done in 1984-1985, involving a death mask and the Cyrillic

BUY POLET, getting disguised as a mummy, a chimney sweep, a street sweeper, a worker with hammer and sickle, Santa Claus and Superman.

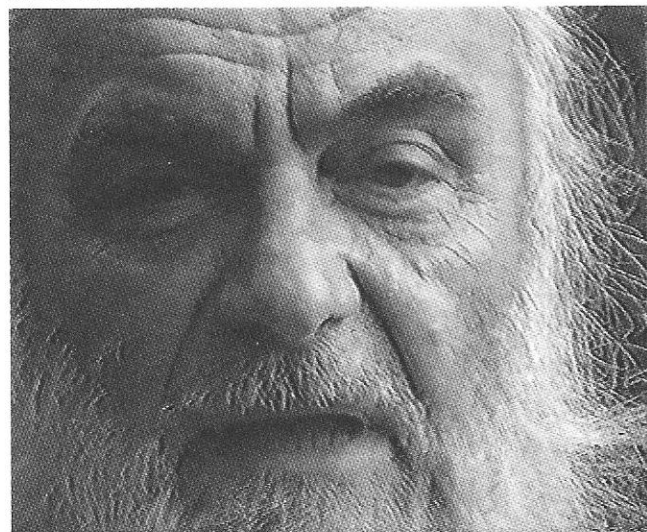
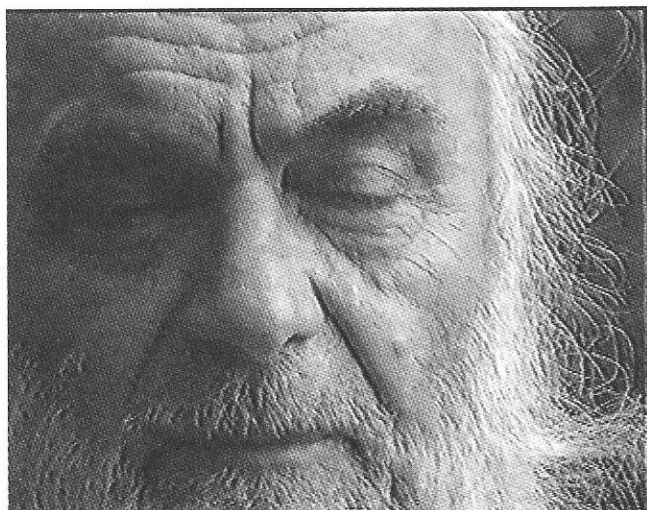
In these actions, Gotovac's basic expressive strategy reached its peak. He definitely and radically (dressed and undressed), invested his own appearance, his figure, his exceptionally large build, and striking face, with long hair and beard (which he was ready to cut and shave for the purpose of his performances). His own body, as a kind of ready-made - this might, briefly, be the basic definition of the language and procedure of Gotovac's art. Gotovac had already made use of the principle of the ready-made in his film work, putting certain fragments of frames or music from other people's films into his own, but in the actions he did it by taking this operational principle to its culmination, treating his own body, that is, as both subject and object of the artistic event. No aids or intermediaries are necessary to him any more; he is sufficient unto himself, as he is, the way nature created him; he really did have the guts, without any hang-ups or beating about the bush to accept his own appearance and body as an inescapable fact of existence and hence decided to make this the material and basic substance of his own art.

The ready-made procedure, as radical innovative strategy in the avant-garde art of the twentieth century is owed, according to the generally accepted belief, to Marcel Duchamp and his ideas from *Bottle-rack* (1914) to *Fountain* (1917); after being applied in many different ways, in the post-war neo- and post-avant-gardes, always with the idea of inoculating the virus of some existing (found, ready made or slightly adapted) object into a context foreign to it to create an effect of surprise, of making-strange, as the Russian Formalists would put it, even to the extent of a pronounced shock.

This then puts the passive, routine perception of the observer into some sudden testing situation, some unease, creating a reaction of resistance, perhaps the outright anger of those who are unused to, unready for such unusual challenges. Of course, as an expert in film history and the arts of the twentieth century, Gotovac is very well aware of this strategy; however he also knows that the application of the principles and procedures of the ready-made can be completely empty and otiose if some personal note is not put into it. Aware of the dangers of going down blind alleys but also of the opportunities in the employment of this strategy, he decided to put a pronounced individual trait into it: his own figure and appearance, as direct means of expression. It is here that the originality, unrepeatability, exceptionality of Gotovac's feat lies: for, while most of the users of the ready-made strategy take material things and objects, Gotovac takes himself as the object of his own art, and bringing his own body into various actions, situations and events, almost always in a public place, has a very provocative effect, which is, after all, his primary purpose.

Since they are put on in a public place, in the centre of town and in the surroundings of a mass of casual passers-by, most of them unfamiliar with artistic events of this kind, and al-

most always at the time when the squares and streets are full of people (always beginning at 12 noon), Gotovac's actions have acted as a deliberated agitation of the public. And they to a considerable extent they really were, especially in those cases when he runs or walks naked, or lies down kissing the Zagreb thoroughfare. Gotovac, of course, counts on his unusually large body and his very striking exterior being extremely provocative in these actions, also expecting that the guardians of morality will be ready to intervene and hence enhance the effect of provocation (which actually happened during the begging action on 26 December 1980, when he was arrested and had his illegally obtained income of 233.85 dinars confiscated, after which he was imprisoned for ten days). Explaining these actions, Gotovac does not hide the fact that the "naked body in the public space, in my town, is a blasphemy, an insult to the petit-bourgeois", and that he does all this so that, literally baring himself, he should be able, intermediately, to bare all those who in their own everyday lives resist and are afraid of the risks of any kind of change. Exposing his own naked body in a public place is for Gotovac a direct gesture, and a symbolic deed of freedom of behaviour; he allows himself a large measure of free-



IDENTITY NUMBER, 2001

dom, it is true, calling upon other people, in a way appropriate to themselves, and of course in a different way, to fight for the right to their personal freedom, irrespective in which area of human existence this freedom of action needs to be won. Artistic action in a public place, in a word, art, serves Gotovac as a cover, an alibi, as auspices for his ultimately anarchic political deed, for his exemplary, even, ethical instance. Everything happens the way he himself understands the share of the political and the share of the ethical within his own artistic actions and, ultimately, in his own overall conception of art.

But for Gotovac, as well as public provocation, in these actions there are some other, very personal and intimate reasons. Most of the actions have, in their sub-title, a dedication to individual cineastes (Howard Hawks and *Hatari!* in the performance *Zagreb I love you*; Carl Theodor Dreyer in the performance *Haircutting and Shaving in a Public Place*). Dedicating these actions to famed film directors, Gotovac confirms that for him, everything that he does is linked, directly or indirectly, with film, that for him, everything is a film of a kind, in a different medium.

Film remains his basic obsession, even when there is no trace of film as medium, directly, in his performances (completely in the spirit of his basic motto in art and life - *It's all a movie*). Hence it is true of Gotovac's actions in public places and his performances as a whole that they are equally vehement corporeal and existential statements and very sophisticated reflections about his favourite film authors, references set up on the basis of some motif typical of the author, if hidden at first glance, the meaning of which only those very well versed in the terminology of film language can make out and understand. The physically and mentally rough expression of the physical battle, and also the refined erudition of the mind, sensory and conceptual, corporal and intellectual, all in the same deed and work - these are equally essential underpinnings of most of Gotovac's public actions, actually, of the majority of his artistic exploits.

URBAN INDIVIDUAL AS COLLECTIVE DEVOTEE OF NATURE

That such a pronounced individualist as Gotovac, who openly states that "art is at root exhibitionist" is both ready and willing to make art in very close cooperation with others, become a member of a small three-member team, agree, then, to the suppression of his own ego for the sake of the harmony of a not very large collective entity, is proved by his participation in the project *Weekend Art: Hallelujah the Hill 1996-2000*, together with Aleksandar Battista Ilić (author of the project), only half his age, and Ivana Keser.

But actually this was no surprise for those who know Gotovac's nature as a human being, because for him, in life and in art, communication and socialising with people are very important, as against the alleged hardcore solipsism that might seem to be the case at first glance. Although as an artistic project this undoubtedly belongs to Ilić, Gotovac is certainly something more than an extra, the actor of an enigmatic

older man intriguingly disposed vis-à-vis a young pair of people in love, to which many of the scenes of the story, via the agency of automatically taken colour shots, would seem to point. The dedication of the project to Adolfas Mekas (brother of Gotovac's favourite author Jonas Mekas) and his film *Hallelujah the Hills* of 1963 recalls Gotovac's already mentioned *homage* to film directors, just as the technique in which the project is realised is essentially the simulation of a film or, in a sense, a film that, for shortage of money, could not be put on a reel, only on the much cheaper medium of photography. This then, because of the key role of direction in what are only apparently documentary shots, is what has been accurately said to be a film project done in slides. The action of the film goes on in a soft and gentle version of nature (actually on Mt Medvednica); nature here is not some neutral setting, but is, not less than the three actors, a full protagonist of the story in the pictures or the performance recorded from it, which goes on during the walk of three city people during the weekend rest, in pauses to eat, to look at natural beauties or do some unexpected casual actions, winter or summer, during the day or at dawn. The exaltation of nature, as an extra-temporal and universal value available to anyone who knows how to enjoy it, nature as setting that helps in the palliation of the anxieties of everyday life in a given social surrounds - that, in essence, is the philosophical and ethical credo of this artistic undertaking, one of the most marked works of Croatian artists in the international art scene during the nineties. Taking part in it, Gotovac kept up and reinforced his presence in the art of the last decade.

PARODY OF THAT OBSCURE OBJECT OF DESIRE

Just as he had once, at the beginning of and in the middle of the sixties, working outside any artistic context, by force of circumstances become a forerunner of the new art of the seventies, so Gotovac even after the beginning of the third millennium found himself without an appropriate artistic setting, but still, following up his previous undertakings, works as a freelancer in the domestic world of art, culture and even politics. And in fact, the time of today, as far as art is concerned, is not only characterised by the post-modern and the post-post-modern, but is a time after every conceivable avant-garde, which does not mean that it is a time in which there are definitely no more causes and reasons for hitting hard at the prejudices of public taste, whether aesthetic, artistic, or simply of decent middle-class behaviour.

That there are still plenty of energy, ideas, courage, even the brazen willingness to shock the public left in Gotovac is shown by his latest project, *Mister Foxy 2000*, neither shown at any exhibition, nor presented at any festival, but partially and in adequate detail revealed in the weekly *Nacional*, no. 325, 5 February 2002. The weekly as a medium for the presentation of artistic work, more adequate, effective, penetrating and accessible than classical and modern channels of art - that is (thanks to journalistic savvy and gumption) the effect of the publication of an interview with Gotovac, with a mass of accompanying illustrative material, in this popular Zagreb

publication. In the photographs the basic idea of the work can be seen very clearly. Gotovac imitates, with his own massive, naked, aged (and, as he himself says, rusty) sixty-five year old body, the poses of the naked lovelies from the porno mag *Foxy Lady*.

The body of a fat older guy, with a sense of mockery that hits at many taboos, has taken the place of the erotically provocative young female body in the role of sex object. The additional connotations that arise from this are very numerous - ranging from the demystification of the world's porn industry to the desire to *épater les bourgeois*, local artistic and general public opinion. And it is essential that Gotovac once again, as so many times before, has made use of his own body as a kind of ready-made. He has also used the technique of directed photographs, and this also means for him the indirect use of the film medium, in line with his already mentioned motto that all is but a film, actually, all is direction, the immanent operational procedure of film. Gotovac's artistic oeuvre to date (at the beginning of 2002) has come to a conclusion with a performance dedicated to Trotsky and put on at the multimedia *Broadcasting Project*, in honour of Nikola Tesla, a work that goes on in the same line and like many of the preceding works stands on the line of expressive radicalism, in a media and still more in a thematic and substantive point of view filling out his total work, which is according to many of its characteristics without peer in contemporary Croatian art, and very likely extremely rare in the art of much wider geographical and cultural ranges.

UNRESTRAINED DEMONSTRATION OF AN INDIVIDUAL PERSON

Just as the whole of every worthwhile piece of art consists of many problem chapters (formative conditions, change of language and procedure, key works and their meaning), so Gotovac's total work is composed of a number of fragments, among which it is hard, in this case almost impossible, to seek for any completely coherent thematic, medium and stylistic unity - the more so since Gotovac expresses himself in several areas, from photography to performance, among them film (film thinking, the thinking of film, thinking about film) is at the centre of his conception of the nature of art. But in Gotovac's case there is still a place for the gathering of the various lines of force, even some focal point at which his ostensibly scattered endeavours come together. And this is the fact that everything he does bears the very power mark of his person, both physical (his appearance, face and body), and spiritual (his experience and understanding of art, his total worldview).

For a superficial view of the phenomenon of Gotovac in the foreground there is precisely the external, physical quality of his figure, in which it is easy to see a pronounced eccentricity, provocativeness, egocentricity of conduct. All this is accompanied with frank and gamey statements in his many interviews, in which he cannot be accused of dithering, of buttering anyone up in his sincerely stated claims, however uncomfortable they might be to some. Of course, everything

that can be noticed in his public communication is indeed the real Gotovac, but it would be inadequate and completely wrong in the understanding of his artistic character to halt just at these external manifestations. Because way above and beyond them, Gotovac is a serious artist, one who has a greater knowledge of characteristics of the form and operations, and the history, of all the media he uses; actually, it is from such deeply accepted cultural assumptions that the structural foundation of the work of this complex and - however much it might seem, on the surface, to be at odds with his behaviour - intellectually and conceptually very systematic artist.

For he knows very well that a firm and stringent articulation of the language of expression is the basic condition for every successful artistic formulation, and carries this out consistently and systematically in practice in all his undertakings, irrespective of the medium he is using. In consequence of his many years of watching the same films, from his earliest youth (tens of times, some of his particular favourites), Gotovac, neglecting narration, becomes particularly adept at delving into the smallest details of the operations of directors, cameramen, editors, actors and all other kinds of film operations, and hence puts the same degree of attention to the smallest operational details into his own work. He counts, in addition, on the inevitability and attraction of the case that gives new life to some formal structure foreseen in advance, making it lively and exciting. Gotovac's performances are thought up and carried out as flexible and variable sets of basic propositions set by the author himself, but also of reactions to them, from the unpredictable circumstances affected by external factors, especially if the performance is carried out in well-frequented public places. The reciprocal relation of firm structure and unexpected accident at the base of Gotovac's works derives from his conviction that the mind and thinking exist and act only in connection with physical activity, and that the body is in every action ruled by instinctive and conscious decisions of the responsible subject.

For this reason, then, Gotovac's art, apart from being firmly structurally founded in terms of language, is always extremely vital, experiential, real, physical, literally corporeal, and because of such characteristics his art is primarily a reinvestigation of the conditions, a testing of limits and an aspiration to step over the conditions and the limits of human freedom. And since for true human existence there is nothing more important than the achievement and enjoyment of full freedom, in all his actions, actually, Gotovac deals with nothing else than the unquenched need, with almost desperate effort, to push from him everything that would make him faceless, tame and limit him. And in return, the only thing that he asks is what is for him the normal, natural, unrestrained un(self)censored, in brief, free behaviour. He believes that if he can win the right to behave in this way, for himself, as artist, then perhaps it will be an example to others of how they should fight for their own measure of liberty.

However complex it may be, scattered around various media areas, making its statements equally in film, photography, collages, various objects, bodily performances, street actions,

interviews and reports in the dailies and weeklies, it would seem that the whole of Gotovac's decades-long activity, and the whole of his work, are in essence focused on a single basic aspiration, addressed at one purpose that for him is worth something. And this is the insatiable aspiration for the achievement and manifestation of undisputed individual freedom. For there is indeed no greater spiritual pain than when someone is deprived of his personal freedom, or has it curtailed, no greater longing than for a person to feel proud in his own freedom and to act in his life as a dignified and free creature.

Gotovac, with a frankness that crosses the borders of the most intimate confession, does not conceal that in his early and somewhat later youth he experienced a tremendous sense of being thwarted in his personal behaviour, that he went through a painful, chafing repression of, limitation of, his rights to his own individual identity, in his immediate family and setting, among peers, and then in inevitable integration into society and its institutions. The example of Gotovac, actually, is just the case, laid totally bare, of a persistent individual struggle in a society that theoretically accepts and encourages the right to freedom but in the reality of a hyper-organised society at almost every step denies this right with the hypocrisy of education, the conventions of the petit-bourgeois mentality, the standardising effects of institutions and finally by the repressive ideological postulates of the political system of all the years in the past in this part of the world. Gotovac first of all sensed a way out of this intolerable situation, and then definitely grasped it, under the auspices of the fictional world of art. First of all in his impressed watching of films, then in the desire to express himself in the making of a few modest, short, amateur film creations of his own, and when, because of the failure of this to come to anything satisfactory, because of various barriers, he went over to the exhibition of himself in art, and addressed the indispensable possibilities of the artistic *first person speech*.

Distantly perceiving, then, only in art any chance for his own redemption, Gotovac gradually sought and found ways of self-expression, strengthened the awareness and self-awareness of his own position, finally revealed himself the way he is, physically, emotionally and intellectually. He gave the whole of himself to everything he did, showing himself without any masks, just the way we know him as person and as artist, to some a dear and close figure just because he is like that, to others repulsive and distant, again, because of the way he is. He has behind him today a work that, in its approaches and achievements, is involved in both the lateral currents and in the mainstream of the domestic art scene, and the art scene much wider afield. He is at once one of the living legends of the Zagreb, Croatian and one-time Yugoslav alternative culture, but he is also - however much this might offend someone - one of the elite landmarks (in the sense used by Radoslav Putar) in the new art history of the milieu. But he has also managed, investing himself without any reserves, managed to prove himself to himself, with himself, in himself, whatever anyone else thinks about him, good or evil.