

FROM

CONSIDERATION

TO COMMITMENT



ART IN CRITICAL CONFRONTATION TO SOCIETY

**FROM**  
**CONSIDERATION**  
**TO COMMITMENT**

**ART IN CRITICAL**  
**CONFRONTATION**  
**TO SOCIETY**

BELGRADE, LJUBLJANA,  
SKOPJE, ZAGREB  
/ 1990-2010 /

# CONTENT

---

*\*click on the links below*

INTRODUCTION

→

EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED / Jasna Jakšić /

→

TOWARDS CHANGE / Interview with Darko Šimičić /

→

IN POCKETS OF RESISTANCE / Interview with Sanja Iveković /

→

BUILDING BRIDGES / Interview with Andreja Kulunčić /

→

RESPONSIBILITY IN EVERYTHING WE DO / Interview with Igor Grubić /

→

CLOSED CIRCLE / Vesna Milosavljević, Vesna Tašić, Miroljub Marjanović /

→

PROBLEMATIC ISSUES OF THE CONTEXT / Interview with Stevan Vuković /

→

ALLEGORIAN / Interview with Živko Grozdanić Gera /

→

POLITICAL ART / Interview with Milica Tomić /

→

FLOATING POSITION OF ARTISTS / Interview with Danilo Prnjat /

→

SAME PLACE – DIFFERENT TIME / Miha Colner, Nika Grabar / →

---

PLEASURE IN DISCIPLINE / Neven Korda / →

---

PARK OF CULTURE / Marko Peljhan / →

---

CRITICISM BEYOND MORALISING AND LITERAL MEANING / Marija Mojca Pungerčar / →

---

TECHNOLOGY IS THE MESSAGE / Maja Smrekar / →

---

POSSIBILITIES FOR CRITIQUE ART / Nebojša Vilić / →

---

INTERVIEWS WITH BOJAN IVANOV, ZORAN POPOSKI, MIRA GAĆINA AND ŽANETA VANGELI →

---



Igor Grubić, **Sooty-Faced Angels**, Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade, 2006. Photo: Jasenko Rasol



INTERVIEW WITH IGOR GRUBIĆ

---

# RESPONSIBILITY IN EVERYTHING WE DO

---

---

by: Maja Gujinović, Jasna Jakšić and Srđan Laterza

**You received a lot of attention for *Black Peristyle*, an illegal intervention performed in Split in 1998 as an *hommage* to a 1968 action by a group of artists that would later become 'Red Peristyle', but also as a reflection of the current situation in Croatia. Your biography says that you started making art in 1996. What preceded *Black Peristyle* in your work and how were you determined by that intervention?**

In the mid-eighties, when I was in high school, I started doing photography. At the beginning of the nineties I photographed artists and their art for exhibition catalogues and in the mid-nineties I did conceptual photography, land art interventions, site specific performances and collages. The horrors of war and the extremely nationalist atmosphere in Croatia made me wonder what my responsibility in all of that was. Since I had been drifting about our little art scene for quite some time, I realized that people in it never changed. I thought about how art could break out of gallery spaces to reach





Igor Grubić, ***Black Peristyle***, Split, 1998. Photo: Feđa Klarić.

people who didn't go to galleries, to influence the public in the sense of making an actual change, even on a micro level, to encourage others to speak up and start doing something... I wanted to do the *Black Peristyle* in 1997, but I believed it would have a stronger effect on the thirtieth anniversary in 1998, so I decided to wait patiently. Also, in 1997 I was writing something akin to a manifesto of my artistic activity and I would go on to base my work upon those principles, which are, primarily: stepping out into the public space, attempting to benefit the community I live in by starting discussions, pointing out or offering solutions for certain problems and including others in the creative process. When I realized what a splash *Black Peristyle* and *Book and Society – 22%* made in the public and what their actual influence was, it was a definite affirmation of the future course of my artistic work.

**That same year, in collaboration with ATTACK! – Autonomous Culture Factory, you organized *Book and Society-22%*, an action in which you criticized putting VAT on books.**



Igor Grubić, ***Remembering the Book, Book and Society - 22%***, Zagreb, 1998. Photo: Marko Ercegović.

During the post-war economic crisis, when all the statistics showed a great decline in book sales (it was clear to me that an ordinary person with a low pay could not afford to buy books), my intention was to work out an event that would initiate a public discussion on the problem of putting VAT on books. Although I organized the entire action on my own, it was important for me to involve ATTACK!, as they were the only representatives of the alternative youth culture at the time. They helped by arranging for me to subsequently (a couple of months later) get funding for the organization and catalogue printing expenses from the American Embassy through their organization. I also invited the most prominent artists of all generations, in whose work I recognized social engagement, to participate. The protest against VAT on books was a strong and united statement made by the independent art scene, and it was in that sense unprecedented. By speaking the language of art, we managed to attract great media attention. I think it made us all aware that there was power in such collective, creative outward interventions, and that such strategic actions could even lead to a serious change in society. In this case, with publishers and authors also reacting swiftly, VAT on books was levied under mounting pressure.





Igor Grubić, **Scarves and Monuments, 366 Liberation Rituals**, Miroslav Kraljević Gallery, Zagreb, 2008

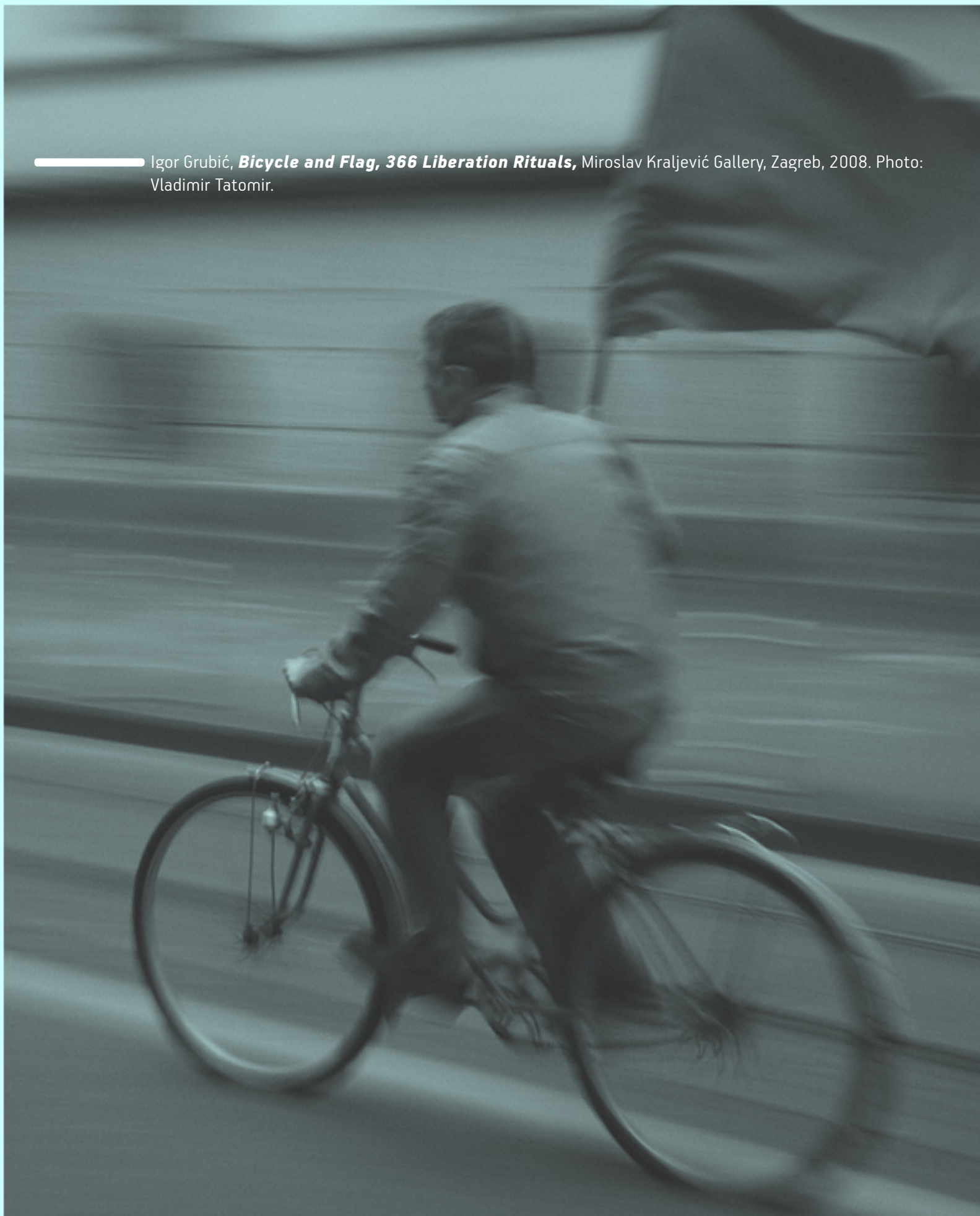
## **IN BOTH ACTIONS I USED GUERILLA STRATEGIES OF COORDINATED INFORMATION BOMBARDMENT. *NO KI TE KA* WAS AN INTERVENTION I STARTED AT THE END OF 1997 AND CONTINUED FOR THE NEXT SIX MONTHS, PASSING OUT LEAFLETS AT THE OPENINGS OF EXHIBITIONS AND AT OTHER CULTURAL EVENTS**

**With *NO KI TE KA* (1997/98) you pointed out the flaws in institutionalized culture, while *Appeal for the removal of the Student Centre management* tried to call for action among the student population through a questionnaire. These interventions directly referred to the disappearance or pacification of what used to be the hearts of culture, like Kinoteka and Galerija SC, but indirectly touched on the problems of the return of nationalized property to public institutions or their misuse for the acquisition of party or personal wealth. What were the reactions to that?**

In both actions I used guerilla strategies of coordinated information bombardment. *NO KI TE KA* was an intervention I started at the end of 1997 and continued for the next six months, passing out leaflets at the openings of exhibitions and at other cultural events. I copied them and carried them in my pocket, handing them out to everyone; I gave them to journalists and sent them to news desks. That sparked interest and several newspapers and a film magazine wrote articles on the problem of Kinoteka, and even parts of the leaflet were published. When I did *Appeal for the removal of the Student Centre management*, at the very opening of the exhibition members of the Student Centre (SC) management got upset that I was passing out leaflets calling for their removal. I was pointing out that it was unacceptable for students not to be able to shape the cultural policy of a Centre that was supposed to cater to them. At the end of the leaflet, there was a questionnaire addressing the recipient-student, questioning his/her own responsibility for the state of SC. The following day the management removed all the leaflets that were at the exhibition and that I had put up on the walls of the Centre. I used that to contact the media, calling attention to censorship in SC and vandalism of art (honestly, I didn't care whether it was art or not at the time, but I thought that was a good way to stir up a scandal). When the media started writing about what had



Igor Grubić, ***Bicycle and Flag, 366 Liberation Rituals***, Miroslav Kraljević Gallery, Zagreb, 2008. Photo: Vladimir Tatomir.



**TUDMAN WOULD**

---

**CALL OUT EVERYONE**

---

**WHO DARED TO**

---

**THINK DIFFERENTLY**

---

**AND CRITICIZE THE**

---

**GOVERNMENT IN THOSE**

---

**DIFFICULT TIMES**

---

happened, the management got even more upset. Students organized a number of public discussions on the problem. At the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences the leaflets were xeroxed and handed out, and Pokret studentskih inicijativa (PSI, student initiative) launched a petition demanding that the management should quit that was signed by 5000 people. When the politicians saw how great the number of the students was and realized they were potential voters, they decided to support them. Nine months later the managing director was removed from office and the SC policies started to change.

## **IN THE NINETIES THERE WAS SMALL NUMBER OF YOUTH INITIATIVES, FINANCED MAINLY BY SOROS AND A COUPLE OF FOREIGN FOUNDATIONS AND EMBASSIES. THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND CITY OF ZAGREB MOSTLY FINANCED VARIOUS FOLKLORE EVENTS, IN ORDER TO RAISE NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS**

**Around ten years later you supported the students of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and performed an intervention on the statue of Silvije Strahimir Kranjčević with them. Could you compare the student populations at the end of the nineties and at the end of this century's first decade?**

You should take into account that the end of the nineties was marked both by the ravages of war and the tyranny of Tuđman and his party, and the urban population was completely apathetic. Not only were the students lost in search of their own identities, but a large number of intellectuals remained passive. Tuđman would call out everyone who dared to think differently and criticize the government in those difficult times, and he labeled them “Soros's mercenaries”, “traitors of patriotism” or “red, yellow and green devils”... In that period after the war, when we know there were purges in certain positions, when there was an economic crisis, maybe it is no wonder most intellectuals decided to be quiet (or at least not rebel) out of fear for their jobs and their families' survival, and in such a climate young people had no role models or support. In the nineties there was a small number of youth initiatives, financed mainly by Soros and a couple of foreign foundations and embassies. The Ministry of Culture





Igor Grubić, ***Christmas Trees, 366 Liberation Rituals***, Miroslav Kraljević Gallery, Zagreb, 2008

and City of Zagreb mostly financed various folklore events, in order to raise national consciousness. The beginning of 2000 brought a change at the elections and the NGO scene bloomed, young people organized and initiated various art events and festivals in all fields of creativity. All these things in the past ten years were prerequisites for creating a collective consciousness that led generations to realize young people could influence the social actualities.

**For a number of years you worked for the production studio Fade In. That job wasn't miles away from activism: the TV documentary series *Direct*, as well as documentary films, directly engaged with social reality. What was it like to work in the television medium and did you feel you (and your colleagues) were being heard by a wide audience?**

The experience of working in Fade In and in the film medium was definitely of great significance for the future course of my artistic work, but even more important was the experience of being part of a collective that is trying to act together and live and work according to shared ideals and principles for a number of years. For a long time, Fade

It was the only socially engaged studio in Eastern Europe. During that time I produced less art. In Fade In I worked as a producer and journalist. We made documentary films and reportages that followed the independent art scene and NGOs, and these were broadcast in *Dobro jutro Hrvatska* (*Good Morning, Croatia*), a show with one of the highest viewer ratings at the time.

We were interested in citizens who actively participated in society and who were concerned with the problems of other people. We followed the work of such individuals and groups and tried to share their example with the wider population. These were the beginnings of the civil society's presence in our media. We believed it was important to give people these examples and encourage them to get organized and act. There were no such shows at the time on HTV and other televisions, so Fade In had a direct influence. Also, back then, the journalism on Croatian television was old-fashioned and the camera was slow, while we used hand-held camera and fast, dynamic montage. Interviews are more expressive when there is no voice over, so we based our TV segments on that. With time, HTV's approach to shooting and montage also began to change. The atmosphere in our collective was stimulating, our outlooks on the world were very similar and all the decisions about the studio's policies were reached together. I believe that such an experience of a collective is almost impossible in the art scene, unlike in the film world where moviemakers rely more on each other and on team work, due to the nature of their business.

**In 2008, on the fortieth anniversary of the tumultuous 1968, you decided to spend the year doing little, everyday rituals, which encompassed artistic rebellion, emotional reactions, nostalgic reminiscence and adolescent revolt. In the explanation you made a funny remark about it being your withdrawal from the social perception of the forties, which you had just entered, as the period of a preferably serious, financially secure life. The personal and the public are intertwined and interchangeable in this series of performances. How much of the political was there in your personal, intimate rituals of liberation, and how much of the personal in those most political? What was humor's role in all of this?**

For me, forties coincided with some personal tragedies, all of it giving rise to introspection and recapitulation of my life up to that point. I decided to leave the safety of the job of producer and completely commit myself to art. As a form of revolt against the false safety and conformity that had had me dozing off for a while, I decided to

---

## **I DECIDED TO LEAVE THE SAFETY OF THE JOB OF PRODUCER AND COMPLETELY COMMIT MYSELF TO ART. AS A FORM OF REVOLT AGAINST THE FALSE SAFETY AND CONFORMITY THAT HAD HAD ME DOZING OFF FOR A WHILE, I DECIDED TO EMBRACE UNCERTAINTY AND DO INTERVENTIONS IN THE PUBLIC SPACE EVERY DAY**

---

embrace uncertainty and do interventions in the public space every day. I was guided by some basic questions: what is it that I am preaching and do I practice what I preach? My starting point was that it wasn't possible to influence others unless we turned to ourselves first.

Although some of the rituals are more personal and some more political, it's logical that the two are constantly intertwined. The political in the personal is the awareness that our every act and every word leave a deep mark on reality. There should be responsibility in everything we do. The personal in the political is the awareness of one's right of expression and consistency of personal opinion, which is potentially endangered by the majority that thinks differently. From time to time I try to interlace the interventions with humor because these little gestures relieve art of its seriousness, gravity and monumentality, but at the same time have depth.

**In one of the 366 Rituals you did *Read Martek* with two younger artists, performers Božidar Katić and Marko Marković. You dedicated a couple of actions to Martek and you often single him out as your mentor. In what way has his artistic work influenced you and who else would you point out as your role model? Also, what drove you to collaborate with Katić and Marković, and was it the continuation of the intergenerational dialogue? In which of the younger artists do you recognize an approach to art similar to yours?**

Sanja Iveković, Vlado Martek and Mladen Stilinović are the artists that in the eighties left a permanent mark on my approach to art. I was interested in them because of the

ways their works reacted to social actualities, because of their direct approach to reality, the consistency of their work, but also, very importantly, the width of their creativity and the ethics present in their lives and works. Even back in Yugoslavia, Zagreb's conceptual scene was strong and specific, precisely because of this critical social engagement. A certain local heritage is present in our works, you can see the connection to the avant-garde of these areas. We don't focus on abstract or universal ideas, we refer critically to the social issues around us. You could probably detect influences of the Zagreb School of Animated Film, Gorgona and the philosophers gathered around Praxis. Branimir Štulić echoed the spirit of that heritage in his songs, and there is also Novi Kvadrat (the New Square) and Mirko Ilić.

Although I agree it's possible for the art work alone to move us, I don't believe in its autonomy. I'm interested in who's behind the art work, in whether he/she practices what he/she preaches and whether his/her thoughts are aligned with his/her work, because talent is not the only thing that matters, virtue matters as well. A man's greatness is not in his intellect, but his character. What always strikes me about Martek is his focus on others and I often talk to him about spirituality and working on oneself. His poetics is close to the ideas of the avant-garde, its cheekiness and faith that art can enrich and culturally elevate the people. When creating *Read Martek* I had all of this in mind, and that's why I involved Marković and Katić: they have similar poetics and charge. I recognized my boyish energy in them. This action was, among other things, a symbolic demonstration of handing on the torch of the activist spirit from one generation to another.

Speaking of artists who are not yet thirty, I would also like to mention Iva Kovač, Tonka Maleković and curator Vlado Tatomir, who launched the *Museum of Neighbourhood* project.

***East Side Story*, your project recently bought by the London Tate Modern and Zagreb and Belgrade museums of contemporary art, deals with the violence against the people who dared to publicly express their sexual orientations at gay pride parades in Zagreb and Belgrade and the people who supported them. The shocking documentary footage of aggression is juxtaposed with the healing dance performance from one of the scenes of violence, Zagreb's Zrinjevac Park. How much are the themes of violence against those who are different universally recognized and understandable in today's art production? What have been the reactions of Zagreb and Belgrade as well as international audiences to the piece?**





Igor Grubić, **East Side Story**, Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade, 2008



The Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade invited me to create the piece and I was guided by the idea of reacting to the context I was in. I created a piece that speaks about the problem of this region, about the existing prejudice and hostility toward those who are different. At first I had planned to do interviews with hooligans and human rights activists, who were on the opposite sides at the parade, but going through documentary footage I realized my disbelief at people's brutality and cruelty was accompanied by a strong physical reaction; I was nauseous every time, so I decided to work with the body: with dancers. I realized that enough had been said on the subject, so I chose to communicate the bare emotion without using words, since the spectator is quickest to identify with emotionally charged scenes and to ponder on them, reflecting on his responsibility in society. I believe empathy is very important in artistic work because it pushes us to act. Wherever this video is shown, I receive reactions from people who were shocked and moved to tears. In the end, it turned out that I had actually created a piece that communicates in a language understandable to all: the universal language of emotion.

**If we tried to make a formalist joke, we'd say that the colors most present in your work are red and, in a lesser degree, black. Both have strong ideological meanings and together they make the anarchist flag. However, the symbolic meanings of these colors go way beyond the political arena of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. How do you perceive them in relation to ideology, but also beyond ideology?**

I'm glad there's an association with anarchism. I mostly used black and red in *366 Liberation Rituals* and *Black Peristyle*. I mostly worked with these colors when doing interventions because they seem to be the most suggestive. Colors play an important role in the public sphere, as proved by marketing research, and I too look for a way to reach the audience I'm addressing. I always think about how to present an idea to a wide audience as simply as possible, so everyone can understand it. Sending a message becomes something like a minimalist agitprop campaign that I try to design well. I create something simple and clear, like an ideogram, because you don't have a lot of time for explanation in the public space. People are chasing after their own goals and you need to grab their attention, stop them so they can receive the message. In the twentieth century, the strongest messages, in the sense of their creative solution, were those created in the period of Russian Constructivism. Russian Constructivists honestly believed that art could cultivate the people. Propaganda and emotion are strongly present on their posters. So at the same time, art made its way through advertising,



Igor Grubić, ***Velvet Underground***, 2002. Photo: Mare Milin.

while politics used art to spread revolutionary ideas. The two basic colors dominating their designs are red and black. In interventions that were part of *366 Liberation Rituals*, I would use red to spark off a nostalgic ideological association with the past socialist system, but in many of the interventions red had other symbolic meanings, like blood, life energy, youth, revolt and passion. Black suggested criticism, negation, the necessity of destruction that will be followed by creation. The black circle on the Peristyle symbolized the stain on the soul of every individual who could actively contribute to changing our society's reality, yet doesn't do so, remaining passive instead.