



Dobro jutro, kao uvek.
Dobro sam i zadovoljan.

PO-700124

What the Market Bares

Dara Greenwald and Sarah Kanouse

“What the Market Bares” is a video installation investigating the relational impacts of labor migration in one town in eastern Serbia. In 2007, we were invited to participate in “The Return of the Gastarbeiteers,” a one-month arts residency sponsored by ArtLink Belgrade. The program brought Serbian and international artists together to learn about and creatively respond to social and economic tensions between residents who work abroad and those who remain in the isolated and economically precarious town of Kučevo. The residency began with a two-week workshop orienting artists to the town and the history and politics of the “gastarbeiteer” phenomenon. Artists were then given two weeks to create work that either reflected aesthetically on or sought to intervene in local discourse about migration.

“The foreigners have come home.”

Starting in the 1960s, Serbian workers began migrating to Western Europe for employment. In 1969, the West German government formalized a system for these “gastarbeiteers,” or guest workers, and the word has become part of the Serbian lexicon to refer to anyone working abroad. Today, the government estimates the Serbian diaspora at 3.5 million, with remittances reaching \$2.4 billion—12% of the GDP—in 2004. Very large expatriate communities can be found in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Canada, and the United States.

Most gastarbeiteers intend to return to Serbia, and every August—when Western Europe closes for the summer holidays—they do. But the homecoming is never what it is imagined: tensions between those who remained and those who left exist for economic, cultural, and interpersonal reasons, and much larger structural forces shape the terrain in which these financial and personal relationships are negotiated.

“What the Market Bares” explores labor migration through the material experiences of residents and gastarbeiteers from Kučevo, a town that lost 10% of its population in the last ten years and where half of all ballots are cast by absentee voters. Throughout the workshop, we had been struck by how polarized the two groups were; year-round residents tended to see gastarbeiteers as tasteless, money-grubbing opportunists whose status as ‘real’ Serbians was in doubt, while gastarbeiteers sometimes referred to their former neighbors as lazy, greedy, ignorant hicks. Residents bitterly complained about the large, ornate homes that gastarbeiteers often built in their family villages—ones with marble statuary in the yard but with unfinished interiors because they would

never be lived in; gastarbeiters pointed out that these palaces provided construction jobs. Even during the annual August return, it was clear that the two groups had very little contact with each other as equals. We were also aware of how little we really knew about the place, and we wanted to design a project that would probe at the stories circulating about these two groups while placing them in dialogue with each other.

We set up and operated a free, open-air photo booth in the daily farmer's market. We offered to take digital portraits of anyone who wished, and over the course of three days, we photographed the equivalent of ten percent of the town's permanent population. In addition to retaining the digital images to use in our

video, we printed the portraits and mailed them back to participants once we returned to the United States, as photo-finishing options in Kučevo were extremely limited. Along with the portraits, residents were asked to describe one thing they receive from abroad and gastarbeiters to tell us one thing they bring back from abroad. We hoped these unseen objects would suggest how the people are variously positioned within and linked to the global economy. Some responses reinforced existing stereotypes about the two groups—many town residents reported receiving nothing from the gastarbeiters, and one teenage who grew up abroad proudly announced that he comes to spend money. Others reveal a poignant, mutual attachment to the town and to one another.



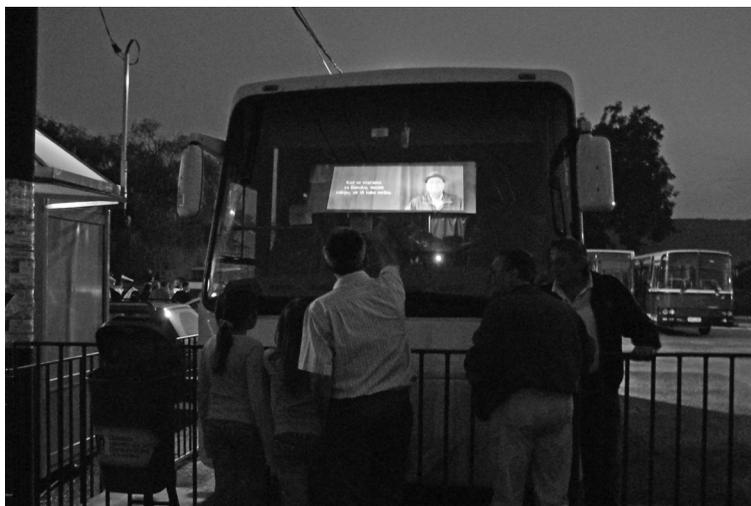
Above: Dara Greenwald takes a portrait for “What the Market Bares” in the Kučevo farmers’ market. August 3, 2007. Photo by Sarah Kanouse. Right: Kučevo farmers’ market. Women from surrounding villages sell homemade cheeses every Saturday. Photo by Sarah Kanouse.



We selected the farmer's market because it was the social hub of the town and the only place where both year-round residents and gastarbeiters could be found in great numbers. It also represented the sort of traditional, local, agrarian economy that the gastarbeiters left behind but that their remittances may be partly responsible for sustaining today. It was therefore the location where Kucevo's global-local nexus was most evident. The farmer's market also provided the inspiration for the title. A play on the notion that, within capitalism, prices for goods and services reflect "whatever the market will bear," our title literally refers to what was bared or revealed in the local farmer's market, while implying that much larger neoliberal, financialized, and globalized world markets impact individual social relations.

For the video installation, the digital portraits and texts were compiled into an animation that was reversed-projected on the front windshield of a bus

to be visible from the street. The people in the video are not explicitly identified as residents or gastarbeiters; differences in language—using "I bring" rather than "I receive," for instance—subtly identify which group the individual represents. Installed in the town bus station at dusk, the piece enjoyed a large audience that included both people attending the residency exhibition opening and scores of gastarbeiters boarding chartered buses back to their jobs in places like Austria, Germany, and Sweden. The bus station became much like the farmer's market—a place where permanent residents and gastarbeiters came together—but the video installation prompted animated and spontaneous discussion about the town's condition that explicitly acknowledged the presence of both groups. Ephemeral art projects like "What the Market Bares" are certainly not solutions to the complex and specific challenges posed by widespread labor migration. However, as artists we hope to subtly reshape the contours of the debate.



"What the Market Bares" installation shot. Image courtesy the artists.



Ne dobijam ništa
iz inostranstva.

I receive nothing from abroad.



Donosim novac za trošenje.

I bring money to spend.



Moja porodica dobija kafu.

My family receives coffee.

Video stills, "What the Market Bares." Alternating resident and gastarbeiter responses.



Donosim iskustvo i ljubav
prema svojoj zemlji.

I bring experience and love for my country.



Donose dokaz da tamo
negde život ipak postoji.

They bring evidence that somewhere
over there, there is life after all.



Ništa..kad se vratimo,
idemo da radimo, nema
se vremena za kupovinu.

Nothing...when I go back, I go to work.
There is no time for buying things.

Dara Greenwald is a media artist, organizer, curator, and writer. She edited (with Josh MacPhee) the publication Signs of Change: Social Movement Cultures 1960's to Now (Ak Press/Exit Art, 2010) which came out of an exhibit of the same name. Other collaborative projects include Spectres of Liberty (www.spectresofliberty.com), United Victorian Workers, Pink Bloque, and the Interference Archive. Her videos have screened widely including at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts/SF, the Liverpool Biennale/UK, Eyebeam/NY, Videolisboa/Portugal, & the Aurora Picture Show/Houston. Her writing has appeared in Proximity, the Brooklyn Rail, the Journal of Aesthetics and Protest, Affinities, and Realizing the Impossible (AK Press, 2007). Documentation and more info at www.daragreenwald.com

Sarah Kanouse's written and visual work examines how physical and political landscapes are socially produced in order to create alternate, oppositional experiences of them. She looks into the spatial practices—visible and invisible—that have produced a certain place over time and influence how politics are lived there. Sarah's artwork has appeared in exhibitions, screenings, and events mounted by Concordia University (Montreal); the University of Michigan; the Smart Museum (Chicago); Artlink (Belgrade, Serbia); University of California Berkeley; Columbia College (Chicago); Indiana University; University of Wisconsin Madison; and the Centro Cultural Rosa Luxemburg (Buenos Aires, Argentina), and many other festivals and artist-run spaces. Sarah's writings have been published in the Journal of Aesthetics and Protest, Leonardo, Acme, The Democratic Communiqué, Critical Planning and Art Journal. An Assistant Professor of Art at the University of Iowa, she teaches specialized classes in video/time-based media and art and ecology. Documentation and more information available online at www.readysubjects.org.

Lead Photograph

Dara Greenwald and Sarah Kanouse, "What the Market Bares," 2007.

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