

2ND TIRANA BIENNALE – A FERRY TALE

Sat. 06.09.03 We start our journey to Albania. We deliberately chose the long way: a train to Brussels, a flight to Rome, then another one to Bari (south-east Italy) then a 9- hours ferry ride across the Adriatic sea to Durres, on the Albanian coast. We thought it would be quite a romantic journey, suited to the somewhat romantic destination. Albania, how exotic! We decided to follow our preconceptions and the scent of adventure.

At 20:00 we land in Bari, looking forward to some rest and a nice, very necessary shower (Amir had to work in the bakery that morning and a small cloud of yeast, raisins, sweat and aeroplane's refreshener odors was surrounding him), but our modest dreams are shattered as we find out our luggage didn't make it, but was lost on the way. The 'lost and found' clerk is not being very helpful and although she's not the one to blame, we find it hard to stay calm as she tells us in a flat tone that our luggage might arrive tonight or tomorrow and if not then it usually takes 3 to 5 days. Usually?! Yes, she says, it happens every day. That's a useful piece of information, if only we had known! We try our best to make the whole airport crew feel guilty. Effi even threatens to spend the night on the baggage conveyor belt. But they're not really impressed.

We get really worried. Apart from our money (yes we know- we shouldn't have put it there in the first place) all the props we prepared for our work are in the luggage, and we can't go on without them. After a short conversation with the chief policeman we are allowed to spend the night at the airport. The terminal is locked for the night. For dinner we have a few Crostini snacks from the automatic machine. We sleep on the bare floor. Only one lovely little catholic chapel to comfort us.



Sun 07.09.03 We wake up at 05:00, all determined and ready to attack the RIGHT PERSON.

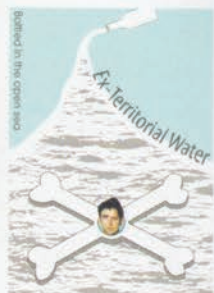
But there is no right person; no one seems to take responsibility, we're in the hands of God, or of an arbitrary airport worker. So, off we go to the port, where we have reserved tickets for a ferry leaving at noon. "Oh, you lost your luggage in Rome!" says the lady at the desk. "I know how it feels, it happened to me too." At least we get some sympathy. "No problem, your tickets are paid for, you can take the boat whenever you like". That was easy! Now we're doomed to spend a day in Bari. A forced vacation and we quite enjoy it. At 21:00 we are back at the terminal. The airport crew greet us like old friends. Only the man at the 'Lost and Found' booth is red with fury. Our luggage arrived an hour ago and he's been phoning all the ferry-companies like crazy, trying to locate us. We don't even bother to argue (well, maybe just a little bit, it's our national sport, and besides- they did have our mobile number, we are the ones who are supposed to be angry!). But now, since we have our stuff back we are as soft as putty and our minds are focused on the future.

Mon. 08.09.03 10:00. We're at the port. There's a different lady at the desk, we have to repeat our story, right to the happy ending, which means: us, here, with our stuff ready to board. "But there's no ferry leaving at noon, only on weekends. But you can take the one that leaves at 23:00." Now, this is too much! We can't take a night ferry! We need to film on board, we want to see where we are, we want to talk to people! We tell her we must leave NOW. There's another ferry, from a different company that leaves in 20 minutes, and gets there in 3 hours. A little too short for our plans, but we assume it's better than going in the dark. Now we are running between the two desks, our tickets are not refundable and the return tickets have to be issued here, because they don't have this facility in Durres. Now, this requires 3 phone calls to Greece, while we are running to the other company to buy the tickets and to make sure they don't leave without us. The ladies on both desks seem to enjoy this little bit of unusual action.

We are finally on board. It's a tiny ferry, and immediately we understand we won't be able to do very much. We can't even go outside, it's like a little aquarium. Despite being slightly depressed we start thinking of our plan B (that is, shooting on the beach, pretending we are on sea). But within a few seconds we think no more. We are out in the open sea, and the sea is damn high. It's incredibly stormy and the waves literally

toss the little boat into the air. The sailors are busy running around handing out yellow plastic bags and removing the used ones. Everybody's vomiting. No question of looking through a viewfinder. Actually we don't care about anything anymore, when our head is not dipped in the stinking bag we fix our pleading gaze on the clock. We know that 3 hours can take very long, 90 minutes have passed. And suddenly something happens. The boat is going into low gear, which is kind of nice for the stomach but also quite suspicious. Then the speaker goes: "Siniori e Sinoras... a Bari", and in English - we cannot proceed any further, we are returning to Bari. At this point we seriously start doubting we'll ever get across the Adriatic to see Albania. We wanted to take the hard way, but, hey, we didn't really MEAN it.

Tue. 09.09.03 It's past midnight so it's Tuesday already. We are two days late but finally, exhausted on the big and slow ferry boat, we are heading eastwards. We took a cabin, a tiny symmetrical box that smells of gasoline and has a window to the sea. We have to think a little bit about our work and, yes, to finally get something done. We have a general idea. The biennale's theme is *U-Topus*, referring to the end of big utopias and their replacement by local, personal ones. A theme which we can easily relate to with our continuing absurd efforts to declare ourselves an autonomous, self-contained unit. For this project we have the following gripping points: the journey on sea towards an unknown place (Albanian refugees used to take the opposite route); us as Western travelers about to discover and conquer a land (which is innocent? savage? magical? dangerous?) - a scenario that was traditionally imposed on the *Orient*, where we come from. And also - us as pirates, a metaphor for an independent structure, with no territory and no state rules, an autonomous criminal traveling unit. And finally the exciting and abstract experience of passing through Non Territorial Water. Being nowhere, literally.



Wed. 10.09.03 We've been already introduced to the space and the people who are sharing it with us. We have quite a limited portion of it, and very limited time to do anything about it. Yesterday afternoon we did some additional shooting in Tirana itself for the video and now it's time to edit. It was arranged in advance that we'd get editing facilities. At noon our editing suite arrives, in the form of Arian, an Albanian young artist, extremely kind and generous, with his Personal Computer. We're going to edit in the middle of the national gallery space, surrounded by beautiful medieval icons, dust, and the sounds of drilling, shouts and staple guns, because in Arian's place, as everywhere else, electricity is cut off for a few hours during the day, whereas in the gallery, lucky us, electricity is a constant feature. Constant, but not stable. Each time we try to open a file the computer simply shuts itself down in protest. It takes us till 20:00 to get half a minute done, and with each hour that passes our plans shrink. But gradually we get better. We learn how to trick the computer and not to irritate the sensitive electricity. Things go faster, but our nerves are quite worn out. At 2:00 we declare the work done; it's a 4 minute video with no sound, plenty of dropped frames during playback, but we are quite happy with it.



Thur. 11.09.03 This is the day to handle the space. We use some objects we brought with us: a cheerful chain with little flags depicting us as a doubled headed figure, a paraphrase on the Albanian flag. Like the eagle, we too have wings but our posture suggests we are holding pistols and are about to shoot. As you know, Albania has a reputation of being violent, (but so has Israel) and in the image we created, the double-headed creature (us) is going on a suicidal dual. We also collect many empty bottles for the healing, but also snobbish, ex-territorial water. >



Friday 12.09.03 From now on, the fun days begin. Work was short and intensive, and apart from some cleaning up/final touches it's all done now. At noon-time is the opening for the press, and we can dedicate the rest of the day to exploring Tirana. In the early evening we go for a walk along the promenade above *Lake Tirana*. The sunset is beautiful and the promenade is crowded. From down the hill we hear the sound of Kareeki coming from inside a big circus-like marquee. But on the promenade there's entertainment too. Apart from the grilled corn one can also amuse oneself with shooting a hunting rifle. The improvised shooting stand is operated by a very tough looking 13-year-old kid, who demonstrates absolute control of his totally inaccurate rifle. No matter how badly we shoot - he doesn't smile.



Saturday In the evening there's the official opening. The place is surprisingly busy and there's also a show going on: a gypsy band and 4 very young girls doing some very serious belly-dancing. As non-politically correct as can be. Then two 14-year-olds replace the Gypsy band with a breakdance-debka hybrid dance. Later on,



there's a party in the same marquee where we heard the Kareeki the other day. The party is great fun, but the fact that it's also an election-campaign-party makes the whole thing a bit strange. Edi Rama, the present mayor of Tirana, is a painter and the director of the biennale, and throughout the election month he throws a party for the Tirana youngsters every night. Almost all the artists were discussing the dictatorial tendencies of this democratic leader. Still, (coming from another pretentious democracy, one may say) we can only wish our political leaders would produce international art-events as their preferable electoral gimmick. After all, that's what art was all about in the first place, wasn't it?

