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Queering Bratislava: On Borders, Otherness and Public Space

> Arriving at each new city, the traveller finds again a past of his (sic) that he did not know he had: the foreignness of what you no longer are or no longer possess lies in wait for you in foreign, unpossessed places.
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> Italo Calvino, *Invisible cities,* 1972

Arriving in Bratislava

This paper is the outcome of my 3-year scholarship at the Institute of Sociology in Bratislava that began in September 2015. I had never visited Bratislava before this fellowship, and admittedly my limited knowledge about the city derived from a small number of scholars that work in the field of post-socialist urban studies (Hirt 2012; Todorova and Gille 2010; Fejes and Balogh 2013). The research project – *Sociology of Crisis: Visualising Urban Austerity* – that brought me to Bratislava is an investigation into some of the core problems faced by sociological perspectives on crisis and austerity. Using methods from visual and urban sociology – social vignettes, photography workshops, walking interviews – it tackles the dual crisis of representation: both the political crisis of loss of faith in representative democracy as well as arguments about the partial, time-bound, subjective frame of photographic representations (Tsilimpounidi 2017).

The core focus of my project is the notion of crisis and how this shapes European societies and sensibilities. Having done extended research in the European South on the post-2008 financial crisis and especially in my home city of Athens; I have also witnessed the after-effects of the financial crisis in the UK where I lived for the last decade of my life before arriving in Bratislava. From 2012 onwards there was a plethora of symposia, conferences, journal articles, media reports, and documentaries trying to make sense of the unfolding realities of the European financial crisis. Almost all of them compared the European North to the European South and in some cases reproduced quite problematic stereotypes in order to explain one more failure of the capitalist system. A quite mainstream (conservative and racist) approach insisted

that the problem lies in the division between the effective, law abiding, and hardworking North and the tax evading, lazy and corrupt South (Douzinas 2013; Christopoulou 2014). There were discussions in the European parliament referring to the European PIGS (Portugal, Italy, Greece, Spain), an acronym that indicated countries in South Europe that were facing economic stagnation and their economies were hit hard by the post-2008 crisis. Certain nations were seen as responsible for the unbearable economic conditions in the EU; Greeks, in particular, were seen as the prodigal children of Europe that had to be 'kicked out' of the union (Zaroulia and Hager 2014).

Following this logic, it comes as no surprise that racist, xenophobic, and nationalist discourses were empowered all over Europe. The obvious explanation was that crisis brings unemployment, further marginalisation of certain strands of the population, and, poverty; therefore, crisis paves the way for the reawakening of xenophobic and racist ideologies in Europe. Well, even if this is partly true, we need to be suspicious of such cause-and-effect explanations when it comes to deep-rooted social phenomena such as racism and xenophobia. Moreover, what was striking in the European reportage on crisis was the absence of Central-Eastern European perspectives, from the usual comparison between the European North and South. Yet, in CEE the effects of the economic crisis were milder and, in some cases, like Bratislava, development ratios were improving in the midst of the European crisis. Yet, despite the financial improvement, xenophobia and racism were empowered in Slovakia as well. So, my intention was to include CEE in the comparison between the European North and South, in order to dismantle some of the prevailing stereotypes surrounding crisis discourse. For example, xenophobia and racism were not the outcomes of the post-2008 financial crisis in Europe, instead, these tendencies were always there, but in the moments of prosperity they were more easily masked. Europeans did not wake up suddenly in a xenophobic and racist Europe; this was the outcome of years of exclusions of unwanted others and internal dynamics from the beginning of the formation of the union.

So, I arrived in Bratislava with the intention to draw comparisons between perspectives from Southern and Northern Europe with Central European cases in order to dismantle some of the stereotypes surrounding the milieu of crisis. My project was mainly focused on the post-2008 financial crisis, yet I arrived in Bratislava in September 2015 just after 'the summer of migration' in Europe. In other words, my arrival coincided with a second crisis for the European project, what has been named 'the refugee crisis'. It was a moment of extreme polarities and tensions, but also a milieu open for engaged (and enraged) sociological research.

Interestingly enough there were many points of similarity between the two consecutive European crises – the financial and the refugee. Again, uncritically, the mainstream media reproduced a discourse that leaves no room for critical reflections on the true causes of the crisis. According to this mainstream narration the beginning of the refugee crisis coincides with the ap-

pearance of certain bodies on the European shores. Almost implying that the cause of the refugee crisis are those certain bodies, completely downplaying the violence of civil war, military interventions, and daily bombings of Syria for example. In other words, people fleeing war were portrayed as the cause of the problem and not the fact that France, the UK (together with the US and Russia) were continuing the distraction of Syria. War was not the problem, human suffering was not an issue; yet, the presence of certain bodies was the beginning of the European refugee crisis. Similarly, with the financial crisis, years of intensified inequalities between the 'rich' and the 'poor' strands of populations was not the problem, the ethics of turbo-capitalism and the fixation to profit-making was considered as 'business as usual', yet certain European countries were to blamed (especially Greece) and certain nations were to suffer the implementation of austerity policies.

Upon my arrival in Bratislava, Greece was portrayed as the epicentre of both crises: the lazy tax-evading nation of the South responsible for the financial crisis in Europe, but also the entrance gate of refugees to Europe and the 'hot-spot' of the continent (Carastathis, Spathopoulou and Tsilimpounidi 2018). I felt it was a particularly charged moment to 'be Greek' in Slovakia, not that I self-identify with any nation-state but since I was always perceived as anon-native in Slovakia one of the first questions posed to me was the whereabouts of my origins. The answer was not always received nicely, and I have witnessed many racist outbursts once my nationality was exposed. In what follows, I engage with this enraged sociological scholarship in an attempt to offer a short provocation on the bridges between post-socialist urban studies and queer theory through a series of 3 vignettes of Bratislava.

Queering Bratislava

Bratislava has undertaken multiple, rapid transitions in a compressed period of time. Being a threshold of passages, while struggling to establish a national urban identity, Bratislava exemplifies the vast transitions that exploded in Eastern Europe after 1989, but also the accelerated, accumulative capitalist realities that point towards the necessity for post-capitalist imaginaries both in theory and in practice. As a post-socialist city, it represents the transition from state socialism after 1989 to democracy and neoliberal capitalism. The fall of the iron curtain harnessed public aspirations for the unifying project of the European Union. Yet, even the use of the term post-socialist as descriptive of Bratislava should be contested, firstly because it presupposes the presence of a former 'socialist city' and secondly because in a way it distinguishes this urban environment from a capitalist city, which is not valid in the case of Bratislava.

While, twenty-five years later, some scholars have declared the end of the 'post-socialist' transition (Ferenčuhová 2011), others argue for the continued (or renewed) significance of the axis of differentiation between 'West' and 'East' in emerging geopolitical conditions. Matej Blazek and Pavel Šuš-

ka have proposed 'a dialogic approach to post-socialism […] characterised by a radical ontological openness in which no single solution takes primacy. It is constructed in a dialogue with various pasts, presents and (envisioned, anticipated, planned, and evolving) futures, and formed by a multiplicity of geographical connections that can never formulate a steady holistic identi- ty' (Blazek and Šuška 2017, 48). They suggest that a non-teleological model of post-socialist transition, which neither reduces East-West unification to a mimetic process, nor reproduces an essentialist discourse of cultural and po- litical difference can account for tensions along the East-West axis concerning issues such as the 'Refugee Crisis in 2015, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, LGBTQ rights, and intra-EU migration' (Blazek and Šuška 2017, 46).

This paper follows the multiple layers of an urban fabric that is stereo- typically characterised as 'post-socialist', yet in essence it is subject to ongo- ing transitions – much like the notion of being queer–in order to pose the question: What can we learn from queer theory in relation to post-socialist urban theory? The transition from socialism to capitalism is often represent- ed as an exodus to the promised land of economic prosperity and political freedom. Yet, within capitalism there have been multiple transitions, some- times signified through the now-hegemonic concept of 'crisis'. The symptoms of capitalist crisis conjure collective memories of austerity in the post-social- ist social imaginary; yet, they can coincide with accelerated destruction and development of the urban fabric through transnational investment and finan- cial speculation.

In other words, in a similar way that queer studies attempt to carve a space for thinking differently about the relations presumed to exist between binary models and systems–for example, between sex and gender; or gender and sexuality–we could attempt to scholarly queer Bratislava and disassoci- ate ourselves from the binary model of transitions between fixed categories, namely the post-social and the neoliberal, or the communist and the demo- cratic. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes in one of the earliest definitional at- tempts of the notion of queer theory:

> That's one of the things that 'queer' can refer to: the open mesh of possibili- ties, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excess of mean- ing when the constituent element of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality are not made (or cannot be made) to signify monolithically (Sedgwick 2013, 8).

In this light, queering Bratislava means to be open to the different speeds and dynamics of transitions, and at the same time embrace both theoretically and methodologically the complexity of categories that were previously thought as fixed and monolithic. Moreover, it points towards an intersectional model of analysis that does not separate the city's transitions from the lived experiences of its people and thus from other axes of power and social differences, such as race, ethnicity, class, and gender. For example, ethnic minorities such as Roma had a completely different experience of the 1989 transition than Slovak citizens; and even amongst Slovak citizens there was a huge division between urban and rural experiences of certain crucial

and historical moments. Thus, queering Bratislava also means to take a marginal standpoint in an effort to make the margins a space for academic (and activist) learning.

What could then be the methodological advancements that derive from such an approach? This paper will attempt to break the usually logocentric academic discourse and engage with the premises of visual sociology. As evident in the etymology of the Greek word *theoria,* theory is the establishment of a point of view; it involves the act of looking from a particular place, and from there making a leap into analysis of the wider interrelationships of events. If seeing comes before words (Berger 1977), then there is a fundamental connection between visualisation and our being in the world. However, our ways of seeing are dependent not only on our positionality but also on the available discursive framings. Using visual material from Bratislava focusing on urban inscriptions (street art, urban interventions) it opens up a discussion about the changes in the city and the struggles of different groups. What remains visible in the public space of a city? What should be concealed?

In what follows, the paper explores the visual economy of subversive 'signs' in order to re-claim public space and the visual as a territory of queer resistance. The three vignettes and the images that accompany them were chosen not as a way to define the city, but as a point of further evocation of the multiplicity of borders, identities, and performances of belonging that characterise Bratislava. Despite the apparent realism of photography as a medium, the visual materials are not designed to provide a uniquely authentic account of the city, but rather to offer a more in-depth understanding, from a visual perspective. As Chris Jenks has postulated, 'both seeing and social theory are acts of interpretation: selection, abstraction, and transformation. Both are socially constructed and culturally located' (Jenks 1995, 210). I thus acknowledge the subjectivity inherent in both taking the photographs and selecting them to accompany this paper.

Queer historicity: past/present/future

Time is inextricably bound up with notions of progress, growth and development. What are the changing notions of time and historicity and its socio-political effects in moments of crisis and rapid social change? After my initial engagement with lived realities, daily practices and informal discussions with friends and colleagues in Bratislava, I realised that the linear contract of time was broken in their narrations. Time was out of joint, historical moments seemed fragmented, and sometimes it seemed to me that there was no clear direction or outline for a future set of circumstances. The past was experienced through the wound of the communist regime; it was something that in many cases remained unspoken, unsaid, and therefore unquestioned. So, the present was trapped in this wound, the historical trauma was such that the present was simply the time to avoid by all means a return to the past. This notion of the haunting past was so prevailing that left almost no imag-

Article

ining possibilities for the future. Any notion of leftist politics or commoning practices was easily dismissed through the juxtaposition with the past. The linear contract of time was broken. The past. The present. The past. The past. Always the elimination of the past.

But the future was already here, looming large, setting in motion a different set of transitions: aggressive gentrification in the city-centre, demolition of buildings and monuments that were connecting the city with its past, Disneyland touristification, and the promise of a capitalist dream. There is a sense of loss, a lost future, a vacuum of history, a fragmented collection of Western-style era of really (really!) late capitalism that elsewhere in Europe was in crisis. Big corporations moving their offices and headquarters in Bratislava; I've seen this happening before in a different past of mine. Time is money! Time is progress. Are people in Bratislava experiencing now the reboot of history? Is history watching them now, or was it watching them only after 1989? Time is money and capitalism has its own rhythms. New high-rise buildings are taking the place of old houses; big corporations are buying local businesses; favourite underground venues are closing down due to expensive rents. There is a great future ahead! But most of the residents of Bratislava I spoke to, cannot afford living in the city-centre, they cannot find places to entertain themselves in the centre and feel alienated. Living costs are rising, but their salaries are not. Perhaps, as the artistic collective Depression Era[1] puts it 'they have a great future behind them'!

'Lost', Artist: AC-one, 2016;
reproduced with permission

The artwork is made by Ac-one[2], my favourite graffiti writer and street artist in Bratislava. He titled this artwork 'Lost' in order to signify how young people (his generation) feel about their identity, their belonging, and their future. The main character is a traditionally dressed Slovak woman holding the Slovak flag. She is lost and skeptical about where to go, she is looking behind her shoulder towards 'us'. In front of her a process of

[1] This slogan derives from a poster campaign that the collective launched in 2017 which can be found here https://depressionera.gr/tourists.

[2] For a full appreciation of Ac-one's work: https://www.ac-one.com.

extreme gentrification has started, a rapid speed metamorphosis of the urban landscape, and emblematic trademarks of this style of capitalism are visible: a Coca Cola bottle, a Tesco sign, Micky Mouse, etc. I cannot stop thinking of Walter Benjamin and his analysis of Paul Klee's painting the 'Angelus Novus'.

According to Benjamin's analysis, a Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the Angel of History. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees a single catastrophe which keeps pilling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close [...] This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress (Benjamin 1968, 257–258).

Ac-one has offered us a visualization of the Slovak angel of history in the era of capitalist transformations and fragmented time. In our discussion, I ask him why the central figure of his work is a woman. We talk about gender dynamics in the Slovak society and how he thinks that especially women are trapped in traditional roles and stereotypes. He and his collaborator are wondering whether there is any chance is modernising tradition or the only way forward is through the ruins of the past.[3] A few months after our discussion I spent Easter Monday in Slovakia and I witness first hand a folklore ritual of throwing cold water and whipping women on that day from 6 am in the morning. The men who are performing the task are congratulated with a shot of alcohol. Needless to say that the ritual is performed in order to offer more fertility to the women![4] I remember Ac-one's piece as I think of all the normalised violence that wears many guises on our everyday encounters. The woman in the picture seems lost, her traditional costume slightly destroyed, and when I observe the image closely it seems to me that she is also cold, wet, and in pain from the accumulation of many Easter Mondays on her body.

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[3] This is based on an interview and an informal discussion with Ac-one and his collaborator in 2016.

[4] Easter whip, a tradition of spanking or whipping, is carried out every year on Easter Monday. In the morning, men spank women with a special handmade whip called *korbáč*, which consists of twelve withies (willow rods) and is usually one meter long and decorated with coloured ribbons at the end. The spanking may be painful, but it's not intended to cause suffering. A legend says that women should be spanked with a whip in order to keep their health, beauty and fertility during the whole next year (Wikipedia entry on 'Easter whip').

Queer visibility: alienation

Fragmented time relates to fragmented identities. Many activists in Bratislava expressed their frustration over the alienation and the difficulty of sustaining meaningful and interventionist politics. They spoke about feelings of general apathy towards politics and political forms of organisation. We had many (usually) late night discussions about the difficulty of relating their politics to anything that could be associated with the past, whether that was a discourse of the commons or commoning practices of reclamation of urban space. A series of transitions and crises has a particular after-effect on social dynamics, I think of Naomi Klein here and her notion of the *Shock Doctrine* (2007). Klein argues that the implementation of neoliberal free market policies happens after a shock to the national consciousness. A shock can take many different forms – economic crisis, terrorist attack, national disaster, or let's say fear mongering after the 'refugee crisis'. This deliberate strategy used by the state in order to implement oppressive legislation utilises shocks and crises in order to push through controversial policies while the population feels fear, distraction, and disorientation.

'I write because nobody listens', artist: Garth, Bratislava 2017; author's image

Yet, even in these alienated and disoriented moments signs of resistance are evident in public space, demanding their own share of visibility. 'I write because nobody listens' is a tag by the street artist Garth made at the central bus station in Bratislava. Other graffiti writers and street artists explain that for them this is a tactic to open us a public dialogue (Tsilimpounidi 2015), a form of a visual diary on the wall that informs passers-by about an alterna-

tive history and narration that won't be broadcasted on the mainstream news (Bleeps 2014). If the question of space cannot be separated from the question of politics (Massey 2005), then it only follows that an engagement with urban interventions and street art has to take into consideration the politics behind these actions.

In other words, it is an expression of public consciousness that springs from lived experience, but which most often is seen as an illegal activity or vandalism. I argue that a close view on these kings of urban inscriptions in Bratislava (and elsewhere) is an opportunity to understand the political and social views of individuals and groups that would never otherwise be expressed in the mainstream culture or in the media. Furthermore, individual street artists take advantage of the urban environment to expose hidden stories to scrutiny and criticism and thereby enhance awareness in the wider community. Would anyone listen to Garth and engage in a meaningful dialogue? Can these acts of ephemeral reclamations of public space generate a more permanent and enduring politics of resistance? Of course, these are open-ended questions with no fixed and fatalistic answers, but being visible in public space, being able to be part of a city's aesthetics is already a small victory for whoever is out there and keeps an open ear for these messages.

As Nárcisz Fejes and Andrea Balogh explain in their edited volume *Queer Visibility in Post-socialist Cultures,* 'visibility is perhaps the only effective entry point for outsiders of the gay and lesbian community to break the vicious circle of heteronormativity and institutionalised homophobia in post-socialist Europe' (2013, 6). To put it differently, subversive queer visibility tactics in urban space hold the potential to destabilise hegemonic perceptions of space, gender, sexuality, and class. When I arrived in Bratislava I tried to find queer spaces in the city and my online search ended up in places with no address, – later on I realised these places did not exist anymore – facebook group profiles with no pictures, and fortunately a list of the two LGBTQI+ organisations. With effort and time, I met the people who then introduced me to the 'scene', but for the traveller or the passer-by Bratislava is a heteronormative space, very hostile to whatever is slightly different from what is perceived as the norm. This hostility explains the absence of queer performances and embodiments, yet this absence is coupled with extremely sexist and misogynistic attitudes, completely normalised and accepted in the public space of the city-centre. Of course, the one and only gay café is on the outskirts of the city-centre and to my enthusiasm has a big window to the street. If only those windows were not covered by (very stylish) blinds. It is in this context that I follow subversive signs, tags and street art pieces on the urban fabric with the hope that they would lead me to the urban fabric I want to discover.

Queer coalitions: anti-conclusion

Queering Bratislava? Why the need to queer a contested urban space? Perhaps it is my hubris to apply a Western concept in this urban space, am

I going down the East-West slope? Queer, this 'English-language slur, turned defiantly against a social and discursive system abetting violence towards sexual nonconformist, reflects a culturally and historically specific dynamic of abuse and response in the US and UK' (Hall and Jagose 2013, xviii). Can a queer studies perspective acknowledge the strong Euro-American metropolitan bias and engage in a process of meaningful translation in a particular context? Or, perhaps as one of the reviewers[5] of this paper correctly pointed out, can post-socialism be queered at all? And if so, is this version of 'queer' the correct way to 'queer' post-socialist contexts or does this strategy also imply a Western colonialism of various Eastern moments and politics of resistance?

There is continuous compromise and dialogue within any culture, or to use Homi Bhabha's words, by engaging in 'cultural translation' (1994) individuals deconstruct and reconstruct the way in which society is experienced and expressed. In his view cultures are dynamic products of translation between different systems of meaning. Bhabha describes this space of critical exchange as a 'third space' which holds the promise for an alternative society. For him, the collective site-building of such a third space would involve discursively and practically conceptualising an international culture which does not exoticise, nor uphold 'diversity', but prioritises hybridity. He calls for the recognition of 'the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the 'people'. And by exploring this Third Space we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as others of our selves (1994, 38).

It is in this context that I discovered the foreignness of what I no longer am or no longer possess, as the opening quote by Italo Calvino indicates. Always a stranger, a foreigner, an outsider to the hegemonic values that guide daily urban life in Bratislava. Not because I was not from that city, but mainly because I was not conforming to the value system recognised in this city and elsewhere. My urbanity is not 'from' a particular geographical place, I have been an urban nomad for my entire life, but it derives from this 'inter', this in-between space of queer solidarities and bridge building. From that place I write this paper, not as an expert in Bratislava or post-socialist urbanisms. It is to that place that I would like to return, or perhaps just like John Raban (1973) and the Situationists reminded us: there is always another city underneath the hegemonic urban realities. Avenues of hope parallel the big streets, alleys of desire next to the offices of corporations, and the beach is beneath the cement.

These vignettes offer glimpses of this space and this is an unapologetically subjective view of the city and my experiences as a *mestiza* researcher in Bratislava. To quote Gloria Anzaldúa:

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[5] I would like to thank the reviewers of this paper for their generous comments and feedback.

As a mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male- derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. Soy un amasamiento, I am an act of kneading, of uniting, and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings (1987, 102).

We live, work, and write in the difficult milieu of the European 'intersecting crises' (Carastathis, Spathopoulou and Tsilimpounidi 2018), a moment where the state reinforces national boundaries and suppresses radical politics, while at the same time xenophobic and racist coalitions win electoral votes and parliamentary representation all over Europe. In a similar way, social borders between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' are rigidly put around ethnicity, identity, race, and gender. Queer subjectivities are often one of the first targets of these conservative politics, while gender is once more considered a 'luxurious' category of analysis in the face of economic desperation, forced displacement, increasing death tolls in the EU/Turkey borders. To this might testify the absence of a Gender Studies department or centre in Slovakia. And perhaps, it is more imperatively and politically urgent now than ever to start the process of queering Bratislava, to add a critical and radical analysis of gender, sex and sexuality where it is missing or when present it is out of date. To start the process of 'making a certain set of ideas strange, to destabilize dominant understandings and underlying assumptions' (Daring et al. 2012, 14).

'Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic […] practice' (hooks 1990, 153). It is not a coincidence that most graffiti, political street art and urban intervention pieces can be found in borderlands – in spaces where boundaries blur and new forms of belonging emerge. The performance of making these artworks is a direct interaction between artist, social realities, and urban environment. In order to develop a visual response, artists become part of the place (if they were not already), they engage with the varied social tensions and struggles. Under these circumstances, this kind of political street art[6] becomes a visual manifestation of local social attitudes and behaviors.

As such, political street art (despite the criticism that it is a trend that attracts unimaginative creations) clearly points out that a public wall is a place for creative expression, social communication and protest. It alters the city's image and in turn the identity of the people in it, taking active participation in shaping a contemporary 'wall culture' and mutely shouting out that the

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[6] I refer here to political street art in order to differentiate this kind of work from tagging, commissioned street art pieces, murals, etc.

'The Kiss'; artist: Gordon;
Bratislava centre 2016; author's image

city is a living organism, bursting with energy and action in ways which cannot be bound by rules or restrictions. In this light, political street art is viewed as a barometer of freedom, as has been noted in studies of the juxtapositions between the freedom of the capitalist West and the totalitarian Eastern bloc which frequently made reference to the flowering of street art on the Western side of the Berlin Wall (Iverson 2010).

Political street art manages to create a mirror where we can recognise the features of our own concerns. What makes it remarkable is the personal and at the same time deeply collective voice that emerges from the pieces. Moreover, the voice transmits a common message, the words as living bridges between the street artists and the urban populace attempt to disrupt and disturb the hegemonic monopoly on truth (Tsilimpounidi 2013). This is precisely what Gordon's street art piece does; it points towards different possibilities, different desires and coalitions. And in these moments of rising nationalisms and fascisms we need a queer critique of the nation-state, the national symbols, and ethnic emblems.

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