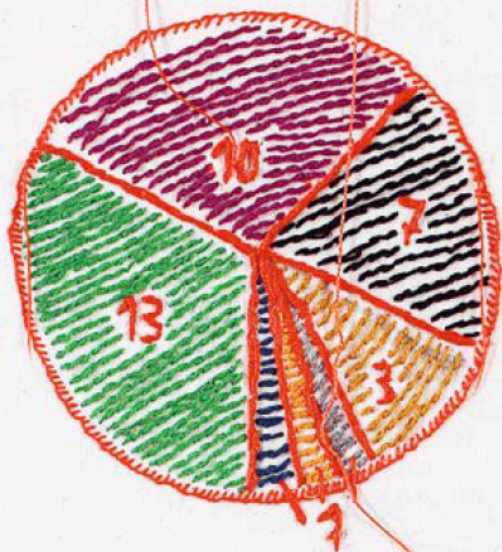


33 TANJE OSTOJIĆ

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Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić

Tanja Ostojić

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Tanja Ostojić

2018

Live Art Development Agency, London
Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Rijeka

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Introduction

Lois Keidan

Tanja Ostojić is an extraordinary and influential artist who, since 1994, has been creating research-led and performative projects that engage with issues of gender politics and feminism, of migration and displacement, and of labour. These are issues that have always held huge social and cultural significance, but that are increasingly urgent in the art, lives, and culture of a Europe that is fragmenting before our eyes – a Europe where womens’ rights are being rolled back, where questions of migration and displacement are causing unprecedented societal schisms and divisions, and where the exploitation of human labour results in unimagined miseries.

Much of Tanja’s work has involved projects that are rooted in ideas of mapping and searching, in invitations to participate, and in the creation of actions or tasks that give agency to others.

Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić brings these strands of her practice together in a multi-disciplinary, process-based, transnational project that includes the creation of a new community (in this instance, a network of women all called Tanja Ostojić), the facilitation of dialogues and workshops, the curation of a mixed media exhibition, and the publication of a book – *this* book.

The Live Art Development Agency (LADA) has been aware of, and admired, Tanja’s fearless practice and politics from a distance for many years, particularly projects like *Illegal Border Crossing* (2000), *Strategies of Success: Curator Series* (2001–03), *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* (2000–05), and *Naked Life* (2004–16). In 2016, we worked with her for the first time when – with our collaborator, the artist and researcher Elena Marchevska – we hosted an iteration of Tanja’s *Misplaced Women?*¹ workshop in London, in which 15 participants interrogated some of the realities of displacement, such as travelling, identity, illegality, security, and the private/public through the unpacking of a suitcase in resonant public places. The workshop profoundly influenced the practice of many of the participants, and still resonates across LADA’s work.

¹ The *Misplaced Women?* project has been ongoing since 2009. Please check out the contributions – texts, photographs, and videos – by participants of the London workshops, which Ostojić has edited and published on her project blog: <<https://misplacedwomen.wordpress.com/category/london/>>

LADA is committed to mapping and marking underrepresented performance histories, to legitimising unclassifiable practices, and, through our publishing work, to profiling some of the most radical and instrumental artists and projects of our times. For these, and many other reasons, LADA is delighted to be the co-publisher of *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić*.

Transformative Encounters

From the author’s perspective

Tanja Ostojić

On motivation¹

I am now in Venice, Italy, after two successful exhibitions and four workshops with participants in my name-sisters project (*Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić* [2011–17], renamed in July 2017 as *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić*²), and whilst trying to give structure to this concluding text of the book, it came to my mind that at the turn of the year between 2010 to 2011, I happened to be one of five people invited by a jury appointed by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia to propose an art project for the Serbian Pavilion at the Biennale di Venezia 2011. That was the very moment I started conceptualising and planning for the *Lexicon of Tanja(s) Ostojić* project for that very context and for the space in the Giardini, on the façade of which is still written ‘Yugoslavia’. All those topics that I have been deeply involved in for years in my projects (migration, gender politics, economy) could be addressed through this one, I thought, and I could already envision back then my name-sisters – women of different generations, nationalities, and professions, sharing a lot in common, starting from the historical facts of being born in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ), speaking the same language, etc. – giving the guided tours of our joint project in Venice.

¹ At some point in the 1990s, a friend of mine, Lidija Bošković, told me she would introduce me to her colleague Tanja Ostojić who worked at the National Library in Belgrade. As we had the same first name and family name, she thought we should meet each other. I have spoken already about this coincidence and some additional triggers and motivations to do this project in my conversation with Adèle Eisenstein, which is printed in this book.

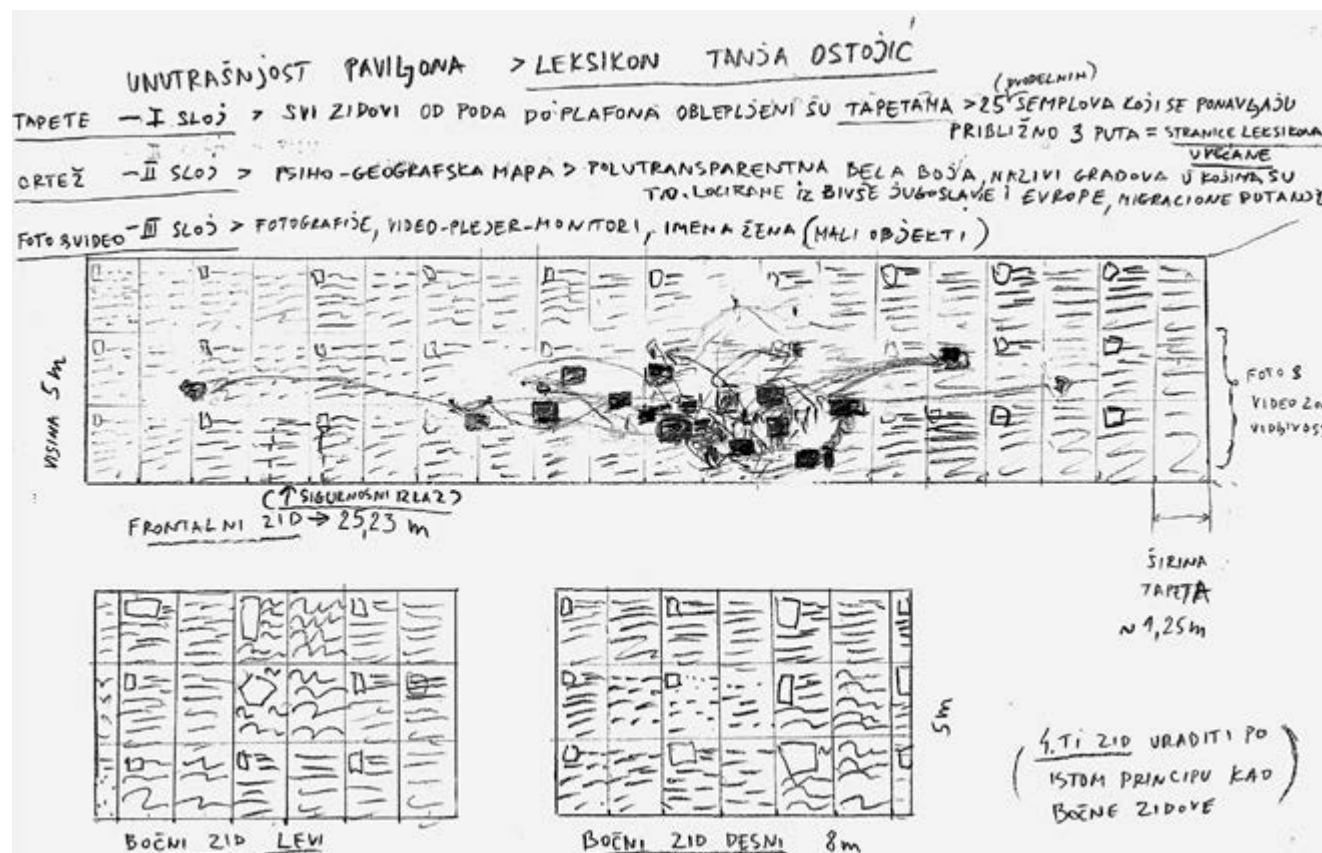
² For the remainder of this essay, and in the imprint of this book, the project name will be listed as *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić*, the equivalent of the Serbian version of it – *Leksikon Tānja Ostojić* / *Лексикон Тања Остојић* – as well as the title of this book and the title of the exhibitions and workshops in Rijeka. In the texts that were written before July 2017, namely, all other texts in this book, the old project name in English will remain as: *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić*. The importance of using the plural became particularly obvious throughout the project’s realisation, and particularly at the point that more and more Tanjas Ostojić were becoming involved.

Guided tour of permanent collection of the MSU, Zagreb, Croatia, for the *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić* project participants, April 2017. Photo: Tanja Ostojić (Berlin)





Proposal for the Serbian Pavilion at the 45th Biennale di Venezia. Mixed media drawings, 2010



In conversation with my cousins, neighbours, and friends, and following what was going on in society, I had the impression that the new national states, new religious identity, wars, transition, and poverty in the region were a huge step backwards for what were, in large part, emancipated Yugoslav women, and I was very curious to find out more about this through this research project. I wanted to explore, among other things, whether access to education and employment, and working conditions had changed after the workers' self-governance and Yugoslav Socialism vanished, and especially with migration, if and how this has influenced the position of women in families and in societies that have been transformed. Additionally, in the past several decades, there seems to have been a strong trend for erasing all traces of Yugoslavian tradition and history, including a proper interpretation of the anti-fascist struggle, the turn to the Non-Aligned Movement, and the tradition of workers' self-governance. This project has the modest intention of going against such mainstream discourse, and to engage with oral histories of some of the women from post-Yugoslav geographies.

Although my project was not chosen for realisation at the Serbian Pavilion, then or any other year, I was invited to perform my *Naked Life 2* in the *Call the Witness* exhibition in the Roma Pavilion that was hosted in the UNESCO Office in Venice in 2011. I won't go into detail about how the Serbian Pavilion was to be organised back then, or about what my opinions of the national Pavilion of Serbia in 2017 are, my views of Serbian cultural politics, or how complex the funding and the realisation of this project actually were, but you might get an idea of some of it, if you read between the lines...

About

Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić (2011-17) is a complex, long-term, interdisciplinary, participatory research art project, in which I used online social media networks, as well as collaborations with women sharing the same first name and family name. The name-sisters are of diverse nationalities, diverse ages, different levels of education, profession, social background, and life experience, but all of them are able to communicate in Serbo-Croatian, and they, or their parents are from the SFRY.

Through personalised sociological research, interviews based on a standardised list of questions, and direct social and creative exchange, I created a map that documents the ways in which over 33 name-sisters – the project participants – have migrated (as refugees for reasons of war and post-war resettlement, for education, marriage, or economic reasons). Specifically, I tried to look at various identity and gender issues with which they were concerned. One of the important threads of the

project, which is reflected in the ‘Women Talk’ chapter of this book and in the joint embroidery, are the labour conditions of the name-sisters, including women who are proud of their work, unemployed, underpaid, and/or exploited. Domestic work and domestic violence are also discussed in ‘Women Talk’ and the *Embroidered Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić*. Name anecdotes and changes of identity due to marriage are also featured.

Intention

Within this text, I would like to share some of my notes, and the notes of several participants, regarding the methodologies and ethics that were crucial to the processes of research and realisation. I will also share some of the findings and outcomes, and reflect upon how this project has enhanced the quality of the lives of the participating women via social interactions and transformative encounters. More precisely, the project offered an opportunity to discuss personal ideas and life situations with a diverse group of women with different life experiences, who were able to exchange ideas with people of a different social status and from different backgrounds. Self-analysis via interviews and the recognition that perhaps it’s time to change something in one’s life were also very important. The project also provided an introduction to participation in artistic life via pedagogical work, including joint museum and exhibition visits, guided tours, the production of tapestry, pottery, joint performances in public spaces, project presentations, a talk show, as you will have a chance to read about in the participants’ written comments about the new experiences in their lives. The co-authorship and co-ownership of a joint artwork, and the importance of this collaboration, could be discussed both in ethical and economical terms. Further work on the project could include analyses of certain topics and statistics that become apparent in the interviews and through art production, for example, a study of migration, including the key years in which the migration occurred, the countries and regions involved, and the key reasons for it. Furthermore, the crises and transition to a new economic system, and the pride that these women take in their work, their access to education, as well as the history of Yugoslavia, and related identities, should be noted. In particular though, the wishes, plans, hopes, and perspectives of the participants I recommend could be all observed directly via the diverse inputs in this book: in visual documentation, interviews, and texts.

Steps of the project’s realisation³

The steps involved in the realisation of the project included: academic and personal online and travel research in the period of 2011 to 2014, including one-to-one encounters and interviews, then creative workshops and documentary embroidery workshops (in 2013 and 2017); cultural-educational activities, including guided tours (2013 and 2017) and public events, including a talk show (2013), public presentations, a joint performance, and two exhibitions in 2017. I expect the steps will continue when this book launches at the beginning of 2018 in Belgrade, Rijeka, Berlin, and London. The work has been collaborative at most stages, and we, as participants and collaborators, were learning from each other all the time.

One-to-one Encounters and Interviews

The initial list of the *Lexicon* questions was created in collaboration with Tanja Ostojić, a mathematics teacher based in Lörrach, Germany. She was the first of the women that I had an opportunity to meet in person, and we spent an entire day together exchanging facts about our lives, talking about our kids, our plans, and wishes. We also talked about this project while visiting one of her favourite places – it was her garden in Germany, with a view of Switzerland and France, directions for her further migration plans that she had abandoned after some ten years in Hamburg and ten in Lörrach.

In response to the question ‘Is there a question that you might like to pose to your name-sisters if there was a chance to meet them?’ a number of other women that I asked later proposed some additional questions that I added to the standard *Lexicon* questions. And thus you can read here about the astrological signs, hobbies, and the favourite foods of the women who, in the same interviews, speak about their own history of family violence. I think it’s beautiful that many of those questions found their place into ‘Women Talk’, which, for me, represents the heart of this book.

All the interviews were conducted by myself, most of them live, between 27 October 2012 and 11 November 2013, during the first year of my research fellowship at the Graduate School, University of Arts Berlin (GS UdK), and occurred at the favourite places of my name-sisters. Only a few were conducted more recently and/or via telephone, Skype, Facebook chat, or via email. Some two-thirds of the interviews have been authorised, in part shortened, translated, and published in this book. Some of them were initially recorded during telephone conversations or conducted in writing, but once we met in person we were able to expand on a number of key questions in

³ A detailed list regarding the project’s realisation can be found at the end of this text (pp. 29-30). Here I would like to give just a short accumulative summary of it.

a profound way. The interviews were mainly audio-recorded, transcribed by Jelena Fuzinato,⁴ and then edited by Miroslava Malešević⁵ and myself. All later interviews I processed and edited alone, and have arranged all authorisations personally. Translations of the interviews from the original languages to English were done by Luna Đordjević from Belgrade, Marija Vujić from Banja Luka, and myself. I loved the diversity of ways the women expressed themselves, and it was often very difficult to maintain all those nuances in English, both in terms of dialects and attitudes. A series of double-portrait photos and the ‘Women Talk’ chapter (both in this book) have been mostly created in parallel.

Before this project, even though most of my art practice was research-based, I was used to working without a budget and could not afford any research trips. This project brought me my first research and travel grant, which gave me the opportunity for these precious encounters. I would like to acknowledge how inspiring this condition of travelling and the encounters with diverse and amazing women in remote villages and cities was, triggering abundant reflections, and offering new perspectives on common histories and memories.

Creative Workshops

As my GS UdK research grant in 2013 gave me the opportunity to visit some of my name-sisters and some of their favourite places, and to become familiar with their economic and living situations, I worked hard to make it possible for those women to travel as well, to become familiar with art, and to have an opportunity to meet each other.

In 2013, I shared one extended weekend of my residence in the international sculpture symposium at TERRA, Kikinda, Serbia, with Tanja Ostojić-Guteša, an engineer from Subotica, and her family. They were our guests and had an opportunity to see what six international artists (including me) had been working on there for a month. Together we visited the rich TERRA collection of large sculptures and the museum in Kikinda. Here I taught an introductory workshop where we made several small terracotta sculptures and ceramic pots. We took part in the local cultural and social life and had a wonderful time together.

During the realisation of the project in 2017, I was grateful that I was able to establish successful collaborations with a number of individuals and institutions in the region that gave me an opportunity to develop four creative workshops – lasting approximately three days each – with five to ten participants each time. My partner

⁴ Jelena Fuzinato is a very interesting Berlin-based artist from Bosnia, who was my project assistant in 2013. Please visit: <<http://jelenafuzinato.com>>

⁵ Miroslava Malešević is a very relevant Belgrade-based ethnographer (SASA), feminist activist (Women in Black), and a friend, who was my research assistant in 2013.

institutions were: Goethe-Institut Belgrad and four museums of contemporary art: Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrade (MoCAB), Serbia; Museum of Contemporary Art of Republic of Srpska in Banja Luka (MoCARS), Bosnia and Herzegovina; Museum of Contemporary Art (MSU), Zagreb; and Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMSU), Rijeka, Croatia.

For the first three of those workshops, I invited my old friend and respected colleague, Vahida Ramujkić⁶ to collaborate, and we co-moderated workshops in which we all together created a wonderful patchwork tapestry, in which key topics from the ‘Women Talk’ interviews were visualised, as well as our experiences of friendship and exchange.

Embroidered Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić

I also wanted to give Vahida Ramujkić – who said she didn’t have any trouble memorising the names of all the workshop participants – space in this book to write about her experience of our collaboration from her own perspective:

Documentary embroidery is a technique intended for the documentation of social reality, which I developed in 2008 with Aviv Kruglanski. As its name suggests, it is a documentary technique which is founded in the traditional technique of embroidery, employed in a new context. It has been practised in diverse geographic locations and social environments, and in terms of the representation of reality, it is more efficient than the latest digital photo and video technologies because it requires more time to produce less information (images).

A group of women of different ages, class, and social, economic, and geographical province, but all named Tanja Ostojić, were introduced to this technique through three sessions held in Belgrade, Banja Luka, and Zagreb during winter and spring 2017. In the extended leisure time of embroidering and chatting, they got to know each other better and explore their different viewpoints and experiences related to cardinal life topics, such as work, family, gender, knowledge, migration, and register them with a needle and thread into fabric, elaborating one large tapestry. For the sake of organising this diverse information within a particular kind of codification, it was set in using colours of a thread. For example, the colour red was related to intense affective relations, grey to normative or legislative issues and bureaucracy, green – knowledge, blue – work, ochre – family / friends / community / home, black – war, etc. In this way, individually produced embroideries put together could combine with each other and establish a dialogue, forming a unique piece of work composed from very diverse perspectives. Set in the wider context of the multidisciplinary project *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić*, the tapestry evolves a fine narration and reflects on the position of female identity and migration within a complex and nuanced representation of

⁶ Vahida Ramujkić is a Belgrade-based artist who practices art within a social context. Together with Laia Sadurni, from 2001 to 2008, they formed Rotor Collective and realised a series of long-term projects in Barcelona. In 2007, she initiated the *Disputed Histories* project, a history textbook library and a series of workshops that compare and analyse contradicting historic narratives, for which she won the 52nd October Salon award in Belgrade. *Documentary Embroidery* project blog: <http://bbva.irational.org/documentary_embroidery/>



Embroidered Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić, workshop, Goethe-Institut Belgrad, 2017. Photo: Marija Piroški

post-Yugoslavian geographies. Following the principles of documentary embroidery, the final tapestry is declared a common property of all its past and future contributors.

The project exhibitions

The project exhibition at the MoCAB Salon⁷ had a number of sections, including: a sociological research archive; collective and individual artworks produced in creative workshops, or even inspired by them and produced later; photo and video documentation from gatherings that took place, including sketches, drawings, double-photo portraits of the name-sisters, the documentary embroidery wall installation, small terracotta sculptures and pottery, 18 interviews and the favourite recipes of the name-sisters in text format (printed and nailed to the walls in the original languages and in English), video documentation from our activities in Zagreb (including a public presentation, workshop, guided museum tour, and an embroidery performance in the public space), and much more ephemera from the project archive was exhibited in several vitrines. A smaller version of the exhibition then moved on to Rijeka.⁸ A

⁷ *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić* exhibition: 6 June – 31 July 2017 at the MoCAB Salon, Belgrade.

⁸ *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić* exhibition: 11 August – 7 September 2017 at Kamov Studio, Rijeka, organised by MMSU, Rijeka, Croatia.

number of exhibition participants were present at the openings, guided tours, and press interviews, and for most of them, these were the first two exhibitions they took part in.

Cultural-educational activities

Besides a number of public events that took place during our workshops (such as project presentations and a performance), there were programmes organised with the goal of providing art education for the participants, including joint museum visits and guided tours by museum curators and artists, conducted (through the ongoing exhibitions and museum collections of our partner institutions) for the project participants who, during the project's development and realisation, began to discover and develop their artistic potential.

We tend to forget sometimes that access to art, culture, cultural institutions, and particularly to museums, is a privilege. The first guided tour where many women took part was in MoCARS in Banja Luka, and indeed two Tanjas Ostojić who are from the nearby villages, and who came daily to Banja Luka to school and to work had never before had the opportunity to enter the museum building.⁹ They particularly appreciated this opportunity to be inside the museum and to experience an excellent guided tour of Mladen Miljanović's solo exhibition, *In My Parents' Bedroom*, and to be in the audience at our project presentation, which some other participants took an active part in.

As I had envisioned initially for the Venice Pavilion (though unrealised), the guided tours led by the participating women would be a part of the project. Two of the participating women actually did give their own public guided tour, this time on their own initiative at our exhibition in MoCAB. Tanja Tatjana Ostojić guided the public on a tour, with the assistance of her name-sister, who she nicknamed 'Cimerka'¹⁰ (as the two of them became inseparable friends and shared a room on the occasion of the workshops in Banja Luka and Zagreb). And thus the best story from this experience:

3 July 2017, Belgrade – Tanja Tatjana Ostojić, marketing manager and journalist who took part in three workshops, two exhibitions, two presentations and five guided tours:

The possibility to meet people who are sharing your first and your family name, and are coming from different places in the region is extraordinary. When it is connected with the possibility to express yourself, probably for the first time, in a creative way, then it seems to be a realisation of one's dreams. And it was exactly like that. My participation in the *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić* project was a realisation of my long-term wish to meet some of my

⁹ On weekends, the museum rented its exhibition halls out for wedding ceremonies, so on our visit we had to wait for one wedding party to vacate the most popular spot for photos (on the top of stairs in front of the main entrance) in order to take a group shot of ourselves.

¹⁰ 'Cimerka' (which reads phonetically as 'Zimmerka') comes from the German term *Zimmer*, which means room, and so this nickname translates as 'Roomie'.



Guided tour at the *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić* exhibition, with Tatjana Tanja Ostojić and Tanja Ostojić-Guteša, in MoCAB Salon, Belgrade, 2017. Photo: Marija Konjušić

name-sisters, and a realisation of my dream to, together with a well-known artist such as Tanja Ostojić from Berlin, take part in an artistic project. Fantastic events and wonderful feelings!

They say all good things have been invented already, and that 'new' is just a different interpretation of the already existing... My first encounter with art was my personal impression of what artists wanted to say. The first live meeting with an artist who shared his feelings with us in person opened a completely new world for me (at the guided tour for the participants of the *Embroidered Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić* workshop, in MoCARS in Banja Luka, spring 2017). It was precisely this new world and a different perception that Tanja Ostojić-Guteša and I tried to share with the visitors during the course of our own guided tour of the *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić* exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrade Salon a few months later. And the reactions of the visitors were amazing! The moment when you share with them your intimacy touches them deeply and precisely in their hearts. And one could feel that during our guided tour, it was an extraordinarily powerful experience both for the visitors and for us, the project participants. Thanks again for all!

The ethical line of the sociological research and of the participatory art project

For me, the ethical line of the project development at all stages remained a crucial one. I tried to avoid some of the exploitative traps associated with participatory art, and particularly regarding the position of power of sociological/anthropological researchers that can be problematic. By investing a lot of time and trying to balance fairly what I asked of the participants, and what I had to offer, and staying uncompromising in those terms, were some of the guiding strategies during the project's development.

In order to be able to deal with ethical dilemmas of research conducted on living participants, at the earliest stage I defined an Ethical Code,¹¹ which related to the entire project. This was particularly relevant for the interviews, as it was very important to me that none of the participants ever feels anxious, or that they have a problem with what they said and what they did, and what was published in the frame of this project. For example, sensitive information was underlined with different colours, and the names of the companies they worked for usually remained a secret (or were deleted). In many cases, stories regarding harsh migration experiences, poverty, degradation, and humiliation were deleted in the cases where the women were ready to share them only with me personally.

The Ethical Code states that:

- Participants have the right to step out of the project at any time.
- Nothing will be published without their knowledge or consent.
- Participants have the right to take back certain information or censor parts that they do not wish to be accessible to the public.
- Participants can/will get all material produced in the project's frame for their own use.
- In the case of public events, participants could additionally decide whether they were willing to take part in it or not; which questions they might be ready to answer and which not; what facts can be disclosed about them and which should stay secret; if they want to be filmed, photographed, or not, etc.

¹¹ I'm grateful to Dr Suzana Milevska, who was my external project supervisor (2012-14), and I can still remember our Skype consultation when we discussed the Ethical Code of my interdisciplinary research. I am very pleased that she has contributed a fascinating theoretical essay about the project to this book.

The ethics of the position of the researcher came into question when I was about to write my analysis and comparison of the interviews that I had conducted, based on the same predefined questions. Here I began to consider what my initial plan would be in order to realise a methodological map. I felt it was not right to be in the position of the sociologist/anthropologist and having that perspective from above, looking at the circumstances of women's lives from an apparently objective perspective. Of course, I am also one of the Tanjas Ostojić, and so the most radical thing I could do was to subvert this position and to answer the same list of questions myself. This way, I could be in an equally fragile and exposed position as the others.

As already mentioned, in the research phase of the project only I had the opportunity to travel, given that I was in the privileged position of being a research fellow at the GS UdK Berlin. This changed during the project's further development, as I succeeded after a long period of fundraising, to find partner organisations who were able to help provide funds or infrastructure for numerous participants to travel to the events and workshops we organised, covering for each of them full travel, accommodation, meals, drinks, and material costs, including the expenses for the moderators of the creative workshops and guided museum tours. In this way, my feminist perspective of sharing and hosting the project sisterhood was realised.

At the next stage, I signed individual contracts with each of the *Embroidered Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić* workshop participants and with Vahida Ramujkić (who led those workshops together with me). It is about the shared authorship and the collective ownership of the artwork that we have created together. That means that each of us has the right to propose and request the joint artwork to be exhibited where they wish, and that in the case of sales, each of us will get a part of the income, depending on how many embroideries one has contributed and of what complexity.

Embracing methodology of chance

In the research-travel phase of the project, in parallel with the interviews, I started methodological development in a form of a diary (2013). At a basic informative level, there were facts (who I met, when, where, and for how long), but the biggest part of the text was the second level, where many poetic elements emerged and were combined, including personal memories, my thoughts, feelings, and self-reflective and political statements. Although the volume of this material became too large and un-processable, I would still like to give several examples of this writing and its genre. I reflected on

different notions of travelling, from being a stop-over passenger in a Vienna airport in the pre-Christmas shopping period, surrounded predominantly by business people, to having encounters with war refugees and economic migrants who are doing occasional short term manual work in Germany, with whom you have an opportunity to travel and exchange stories during long bus rides through the Republika Srpska in Bosnia, or having amazing encounters with all kinds of people, including locals and tourists that are, like you, stuck at a train station in Zagreb the entire day because of a snowstorm. This happened on the occasion that four Tanjas Ostojić were meant to meet in Ljubljana in November 2012, but we failed. (We were supposed to arrive from Trieste, Maribor, and Zagreb).

I also realised I could not publicise all the facts regarding the unfortunate economic situation of my interview partners, but I learned so much about the political and economic situation in the region from all the people I met by chance on the road at the time.

Example 1 from my research diary is about new labour conditions

22 May 2012. A conversation between two cleaning women in the ladies' room at the Belgrade Nikola Tesla Airport.

Today I witnessed a conversation between two cleaning women inside the ladies' toilets at Belgrade Airport. The first one was sitting inside the toilet cabin, she was smoking and complaining. The second one was listening to her carefully and commenting occasionally whilst standing and leaning over a mop. The second woman responded proudly that privately she is sewing T-shirts for a boutique at a women's home. The first one said: 'Bravo! Lucky you!'

'And God knows that I get tired, too', adds the second woman. 'Here I work 12 hours, eight hours I'm sewing, and I have a lot of work at home as well. But what shall I do? I need money.'

Then she said that she earns 1000 RSD for eight hours of sewing. I interrupted the conversation, asking if she was earning 1000 Dinar per hour, and she responded: 'No, for eight hours'. 'Terrible!' I said, shocked with the fact that this woman was earning just one Euro per hour. 'It is little', she responded to me, 'but I am satisfied since I need money... and I work here 12 hours a day too.'

What a shame and what injustice, I thought, while walking out of the toilet and turning around in my head all the clothes from boutiques that are produced by women like this (and perhaps desired by daughters of women like this) and the calculations of poor women, who are forced to do two jobs. And this apparently was becoming common in Belgrade. Yesterday my dear neighbour in Čanj in Montenegro, whom I also tried to interview, was telling me how her eldest daughter was lucky to work all winter in a fast food restaurant in Belgrade and to clean flats at the same time. In this way, she earned enough money to purchase all the hygienic articles she needed, the proud disabled mother of a young woman with a degree in defectology from the medical university told me. I was pleased to hear that the situation for them had gotten rapidly better in comparison with the year before, when her daughter had called the police. For the first time the Montenegrin special police force,

in charge of family violence prevention, was able to attend to protect them from the father of the family, who had for decades been violent towards the woman, her four children, and their animals. This story regarding her daughter’s temporary jobs might normally be disappointing, as one would hope for her to develop a medical career based on the diploma that she worked so hard to earn in such harsh conditions, but under such conditions I could understand the happiness of that mother, and of the cleaning woman who had an extra one-Euro-job for a boutique too...

These examples, like a number of examples in the interviews with Tanjas Ostojić (both published and unpublished), speak to my research questions about the huge step back for women in terms of their access to employment and working conditions after the wars in the 1990s and after Socialism, as well as the apparently common presence of violence within families. It’s very sad to think about how these conditions have been somewhat normalised.

Example 2 from my research diary, a rather poetic entry

Encounter with winter wind and sea... following an encounter with Tanja Ostojić in Split.

4 December 2012, Bačvice, Firule, Split

‘Puše jugo, duva bura’

The Bora northern wind is blowing. Rustling, crunching, the howling, spanking of a thousand yardarms in harmony with the wind in Marina Zenta. I’m doing my best so that the attacks of the wind don’t throw me off and waves don’t take me away. It’s 4:30 pm. It is already starting to get dark. I’m so happy that I was able to meet Tanja Ostojić today, when we spontaneously stopped by Porsche Auto house in Solin where she works, on the way from the airport to the city. And I am so grateful that she received me for 45 minutes on her lunch break, and openly told me her history.

I could add to the name anecdote that she said she is not on social media because her colleagues make fun of her, as there is another Tanja Ostojić who lives in Split and who is posting erotic pictures of herself on Facebook.

Spanking, rattle, rustling, the ringing of the wind. Kicks to the masts. I take out of my pocket a small branch of rosemary that I picked on my way and enjoy smelling it. Its gorgeous scent fills me with pleasure. The view of the sea, waves, and especially the impression of this strong wind fills me with a particular kind of energy that I am normally missing in my daily urban continental life. The flute-like sound of the wind and the melody of the rattle reminds me of the sounds of Peruvian instruments, even in Bossanova or African melodic rhythms of the tom-tom. Barba Željko, who has smiling eyes and something of the charm of the late Stevan Knežević, told me during a cup of tea that he invited me for, about local winds... Diocletian’s Palace... and promised to bring me in summer with his boat to the island of Brač to the stonemason workshop, to the olive tree woods of his sister and to visit the village of Ostojićs. Indeed, Tanja said there are three unrelated Ostojić families that live for many generations on the nearby island of Brač. Tomorrow I will phone Tanja Ostojić, who lives on Brač.

While it still made sense for me to relate to academic categories, I could say that I used qualitative methods of research applied to a complex and personal approach, conducting interviews, etc. It was also interesting to mention some facts based on a quantitative survey of the generation and origins of the participants. I contributed those embroidered statistics to our tapestry.

I felt somehow liberated from the political struggle and academic market behind the terms *praxis-based research* and *artistic research*, as I did not have an obligation to deliver something according to any particular academic standards, and did not receive a particular title for this project. This was liberating, as I could orientate myself particularly towards the ethics and the methodology of chance, enabling me to embrace the diversities that I met on my way.

Name anecdotes and identity crises

There were a lot of interesting topics one could follow as a thread via a number of personal and group encounters with the project participants and especially through the interviews. I would leave most of the threads playfully open for the reader to detect, to follow, and to connect with on their own. Still, one topic I would like to mention is the name anecdotes that speak about the deeply rooted social praxis of *violence of naming* and *renaming* that Suzana Milevska writes about in her essay for this book.

Tanja Ostojić, a mathematics teacher based in Lörrach, said to me that at the time when she lived in Hamburg (for ten years), often people would mishear her family name ‘Ostojić’ as ‘*Ostdeutsch*’ (which means East-German in English). And that was funny because it has actually happened to me, as well – one night in a loud bar in Berlin, someone misheard my family name as *Ostdeutsch*. I find this interesting, but also problematic, as the history of Yugoslavia seems to be very abstract to a lot of Germans, and they tend to equate it with East Germany – but this is completely wrong.

Tanja Ostojić, born in Novaković in Montenegro, now a lawyer based in Belgrade, had typical difficulties in getting used to a new family name after marriage, and whilst growing up in Montenegro, it was a problem since ‘Tanja’ was not considered a proper name but rather a nickname. The latter issue I believe speaks for the fact that the name Tanja has emancipated itself from Tatjana in Yugoslavia, slowly and over time, though on the Adriatic coast and in bigger cities earlier than in more patriarchal areas.

Tanja Guteša, born Ostojić, a mechanical engineer based in Subotica, was forced by her husband to take his family name, as they were employed in the same company at the time they got married. But she promised him back then that she would sooner or later change back to her original name. The fact that she actually never changed her

signature ‘Tanja Ostojić’ speaks for the fact that she remained very determined to keep her promise and her identity.

Tatjana Ostojić, born in Subotica, also graduated as a mechanical engineer, but is employed at a tourist office in Belgrade. She said that when she was born in 1965, the authorities refused to register her as ‘Tanja’, since this was not yet considered a proper name, but rather, a nickname. She also claims that all her life she did not respond to the name Tatjana, not even at university. Everyone had to address her as ‘Tanja’ if they wanted her to respond. The same woman was very stubborn in keeping her family name and refused to marry her long-term partner with whom she had a child, only because she was not ready to change her family name, and it was not possible to get around this. And so she stayed unmarried all her life (up to now).

Tanja Ostojić, an unemployed hairdresser based in Bratunac, still did not have the money to cover the replacement of all her identity documents after taking her husband’s name in marriage in 2008.

Jelena Dinić is an unemployed kindergarten teacher based in Belgrade, whom I met on the occasion of the performance art workshop, *Misplaced Women?* that I was running in Belgrade in 2015. I decided to invite her to be a special guest of our workshop in documentary embroidery in Belgrade (in January 2017), as she was recovering between two breast cancer operations at the time, and I thought that this reflective creative work would suit her condition well. In her embroidery, she precisely visualised the issue of renaming. She reflected on this in the following way:

My work speaks about my identity crisis when I changed my family name – in my case, this was a thoughtless step. I never thought of marriage as a way of affecting changes like that, but all of a sudden at the registry office, I spit out that I am accepting his family name... and then the administrative disaster came, as I had to change all my documents.

The second thing is an unwritten rule in Montenegro – when there are no longer any male inheritors in a family, then any woman remaining in that family is obliged to keep her family name when she marries. So my family were shocked with my ‘decision’ to change my name – and so was I. I was the last person bearing my family name, and this meant there was a cutting of our family tree. It also has happened to me that I would sit for hours at the medical clinic waiting for my name to be called for my appointment with the doctor – when I just did not register that they were calling ‘my name’ (that I took at marriage).

On the occasion of this creative workshop, for the first time I became conscious about many aspects of myself. My initial idea was to stitch the profile of my husband. But once it was finished, I was shocked to realise that it was actually a profile of my late father. In our family tree, he is rather unimportant, like a female inheritor, but from my subconscious he comes out in crimson red colour. (See related image on page 25.)

When I think about identity, I discover that neither my first nor my second name define me as who I am. I perfectly enjoyed being Tanja Ostojić for two days... If the situation becomes unbearable, I learned on this occasion, I could change my name more easily than men, who are essentially stuck within the patriarchal structure.

Now when I look at my embroidery, I notice that depending on how much space and the intensity that each of the elements occupy, it is precisely that much importance that they play in my life. The word ‘MISPLACED’ relates to the workshop *Misplaced Women?* in which I was encouraged to start reflecting and to express myself about painful and suppressed topics and memories. On the occasion of the *Embroidered Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić* workshop in Belgrade, I also received a tool and a technical skill, which I am profoundly grateful for.

Transformative Encounters: We learn from ourselves and from each other

At one moment I felt that one of the Tanjas Ostojić was deeply unhappy. – This information was marked as sensitive, and was marked with a special colour in my travel diary.

to be aware, to be careful...

empowerment on a micro-level and motivation... – This note was written just afterwards.

During our three-day-long creative workshops in Belgrade, Banja Luka, and Zagreb, and the related public presentations of the project, I noticed that the participating women spoke a lot about *transformational* or *transformative encounters* that they had experienced in the frame of the *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić* project. The examples and reasons for this were numerous.

First, with the interviews from the ‘Women Talk’ chapter of this book, many women felt that such a profound introspection that they were voluntarily exposed to – thanks to so many questions that they were asked to answer and discuss with me during the course of the interviews and during the process of translation to English – were putting them into a new situation, as they looked at their own lives, their heritage, traumatic experiences (which they decided in part not to allow to be published), their wishes, hopes, and plans from a new perspective. For some of them, as they said when we met four years later in Belgrade in 2017, those interviews represented a turning point in some aspects of their lives.

Two of the Tanjas Ostojić, for example, complained during the first interview about doing all the chores in their house, but by the time the interviews were authorised, this had changed and they had managed in the meantime to divide some of the domestic labour with their partners. There was something that was obviously bothering them for a while and that they wanted to change – the talk that we had had acted as a supportive trigger, encouraging them to improve their situation.

There were a number of women from different generations and based in different countries who complained about being literally exhausted, and in our conversations we thematised the feeling of being burned out, being in humiliating or exploitative conditions of work, having extended working hours, and the fact that their bosses or their working position would require them to respond to telephone calls, go to the office, or stay in the office late at night, even if they were on vacation or during maternity leave. This has positively changed in a number of cases. But even now, while I am putting together this text and organising the last of our workshops this year, I have arranged for the kind of ideal conditions for the women who are interested in participating. Besides covering travel costs, there is the possibility of staying for up to 12 days in one of two shared flats with other name-sisters in the beautiful town of Rijeka on the Croatian coast in August. Two of the women who would love to come unfortunately have absolutely no free days, as they work seven days a week and are not allowed time off, even during the weekend when our exhibition opening and the creative workshop will take place. In our hidden ‘Tanja Ostojić’ Facebook group, another Tanja Ostojić commented on this fact with the following: ‘how cruel capitalism is, while it sticks with the rule of no free days and low pay...’ And that is unfortunately also the reality of some of our name-sisters in Bosnia and Italy.

To return to the topic of *transformative encounters*, some of the Tanjas Ostojić expressed a wish to change their place of work or profession. Tanja Ostojić from Užice initiated communication with me when she was in the Czech Republic in 2012 and was looking for ‘any kind of work anywhere in Europe’, and at the time of the interview (2013) she was working for three months on shifts (as her visa allowed) in a restaurant in Slovenia. She was trying to earn enough money so that she could start a business of her own. A few years later, she has managed to open her own flower shop in her hometown that she is immensely proud of.

Tanja Ostojić from a Banja Luka suburb, who felt very frustrated at working for years for 300 Bosnian Marks, six days a week (that is about 150 Euros per month), managed to open her own hairdressing salon in another district, and she is now more able to contribute to her family economy. She also has an employee there, and as she is not yet experienced in that profession she is still working for minimum wage in a private store as a salesperson.

Tanja Ostojić, who is a freelance product designer based in Udine, Italy, also improved her working conditions and got married a few weeks ago, whilst slowly setting out the future of her professional plans.

Tanja Ostojić who lives in Bratunac is still an unemployed hairdresser, while Tatjana Tanja Ostojić from Belgrade has again temporarily lost her job. As the project goes on and time passes, our kids are growing up, progressing in school, and we are getting older. One of the women has improved her marriage and her attitude to



Jelena Dinić's contribution to the *Embroidered Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić*

marriage overall, while another is getting divorced. All those issues we discussed over many cups of coffee and during our workshops in documentary embroidery.

Tanja Ostojić from Pljevlja, whom I met in 2013 after her exam in Nikšić, has since graduated from pedagogical university and has been doing an internship in her profession now for nine months (starting in January 2017). Fully but not permanently employed, Tanja Ostojić based in Subotica has, in the meantime, finished her master's thesis in mechanical engineering, as it was one of her major educational plans to accomplish. Tanja Ostojić, who was an elementary schoolgirl in the village of Trn near Banja Luka, and whom I interviewed in 2013 in the presence of her mother, joined us as a teenager and secondary school student at the recent workshop in Banja Luka.

Handmade book

There is also a handmade lexicon book that circulated between the name-sisters, where many of them proposed and answered some of the questions regarding their lives, shared their favourite recipes (unfortunately not all translated to English and included in this book), and it has also served as an album for photos and comments from our travels, joint events, and meetings. We exhibited this handmade book in the MoCA

Belgrade Salon, locked inside a glass vitrine borrowed from the Museum of the History of Yugoslavia, where originally Josip Broz Tito's torches were stored. In our case, only the visitors who were able to prove their current or former identity as Tanja Ostojić had access to the inside of this book that is internally for the community.

Tanjas Ostojić had fun looking retrospectively at photos from our meetings, at each others' entries, and at entries of their own from several years earlier and commenting on them. One laughed, saying: 'Look, I wrote that I was planning to have a daughter', and the other one said: 'me too' (*smiling*). In the meantime, both of them gave up on this project (*smiling*).

Conclusion

I still owe you an insight into the migrations of the 33 Tanjas Ostojić. If one looks at the statistics as if on a pie chart of how many of them were born in Serbia, for example, and how many now live there, one might get the wrong impression of an almost stable constellation. According to my research, most of the Tanjas Ostojić that live in Serbia nowadays were born in Croatia or Bosnia or in Montenegro, and moved to escape the war or for educational reasons, but most of them stayed because of marriage. Most of the Tanjas Ostojić who were born in Serbia moved abroad, including myself (though some came back in the meantime), for economic reasons, for their studies, or even for marriage.

In 1991: one Tanja Ostojić escaped with her family from Zadar (Croatia) to Vojvodina (northern Serbia); the parents of Tanja Ostojić from Pljevlja escaped from Osijek (Croatia) to Montenegro where she was born two years later; the father of Tanja Ostojić ran away from Split (Croatia) to Montenegro and returned eight years later; and Tanja Ostojić from Požarevac (Serbia) moved with one suitcase to Hamburg (Germany) and stayed there for ten years, then moved to Lörrach.

In 1992, an eight-year-old Tanja Ostojić from Ramići, a village 14 km from Banja Luka (Republika Srpska, within BiH - Bosnia & Herzegovina),¹² lost her father and her uncle in the war, and in 2012 she married a refugee from Ključ (from the other Bosnian entity). Two Tanjas Ostojić, both born in 1976 in Goražde, escaped war in Bosnia the same year. One of them ran away alone from Sarajevo, where she was studying, and was living illegally at her brother's place in a student dormitory in Zemun (Serbia, just outside Belgrade) for several years. The other escaped the war in Bosnia

¹² Republika Srpska is one of two constitutional and legal entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the other being the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The entities are largely autonomous. The administrative centre of Republika Srpska is Banja Luka, which is the second largest city in BiH, after Sarajevo, the capital of the Federation.

with her entire family and they lived as refugees until 2005 on Zlatibor and in Užice (Serbia); later she moved on to Zemun.

In 1995, the family of Tanja Ostojić moved from the Croatian part of Istria (large peninsula in the northern Adriatic Sea) to Slovenia, and she moved later another six times around Croatia and Italy for her studies and work. The family of Tanja Ostojić from Krajina¹³ (who was born just one day before the Tanja from Ramići) remained there for the entire war and escaped in 1996 from Novi Travnik to Bijeljina, moving to Bratunac (all in BiH; Novi Travnik in the Federation, Bratunac and Bijeljina in Republika Srpska) only in 1998.

In 1997, Tanja Ostojić from Montenegro moved to Belgrade to study, and in 1999 she ran away from there temporarily because of the NATO bombing. In 1998, I moved from Belgrade to Nantes to study; in 1999 I came back shortly, and moved on to Paris and then to Ljubljana the same year. In 2001 I moved back to Belgrade for eight months, and in 2002 I married for my *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* art project and then moved to Düsseldorf (Germany).

In 2010, Tanja Ostojić who was born just 15 days before me in the same town of Užice, has moved to Prague (Czech Republic) because of her daughter's education, and in 2013 she moved to Maribor (Slovenia) for work. Last year she moved back to Užice and so she is again in the same 'piece of the statistics pie'. My conclusion might be that the statistics pie-chart seems to be too simple to reflect on the very complex migrations of Tanjas Ostojić.

Nowadays, as we are witnessing very difficult political and economic situations, it is obvious that the stories of displacement and migration are not finished. Tanjas Ostojić, who felt that they lost their homeland, and in particular, those who had to move due to the wars in Yugoslavia and the ones who left the region later for economic reasons or for their studies, are definitely experts in the subjects of emigration, re-integration, and new identities. In the last case, I include even the ones who were forced to change their identity due to marriage.

Closing comments of the project participants

Instead of writing the conclusion myself, I prefer to share with you, dear Reader, several closing comments from the project participants and one of the exhibition visitors. The comments come from some of the most active members of the Tanjas Ostojić

¹³ Krajina, meaning frontier territory, where a self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina (1991-95) was the site of fierce battles during the Croatian war. More concretely, the Oluja offensive / Operation Storm resulted in a forced exodus of the Serbian population from that part of Croatia. 200,000 Serbs were forced to leave Croatia within 84 hours. They literally walked into Bosnia and Serbia. It is still a matter of disputed history, as Oluja has been interpreted in Croatia as a heroic liberation event, even as war crimes were committed against civilians. I recommend the documentary, *The Fall of Krajina*, dir. by Filip Švarn (2007): <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtR4lp-aEQU&t=1049s>> [accessed 26 October 2017].

community, and the first one is around the awareness of personal creative and artistic growth of the participants, while the second two relate to the larger social enrichment aspect of one's life that is at stake. Finally, the exhibition visitor adds nuance to one of the key elements of perception of this very complex project, through which we learned a lot from each other and about ourselves.

10 July 2017. Subotica – Tanja Ostojić-Guteša, mechanical engineer, who took part in all five workshops, all three exhibitions¹⁴ and in most of the guided tours and presentations.

Several wonderfully organised creative workshops by our internationally established artist Tanja Ostojić are events that we will remember forever, events that have enriched our souls, and that brought us to our essential hidden need for creative expression.

Thank you, dear Tanja, for all you have done for us, for awakening our senses, for triggering our minds and souls to search for the surprising parts of ourselves. Thank you for showing us what freedom is, freedom of artistic expression and creativity, and for enriching our lives with each of the workshops more and more.

5 July 2017. Udine, Italy – Tanja Ostojić, designer of things for people with special needs, who participated in the Talk Show in HKW Berlin in 2013, in two creative workshops, two exhibitions, and one guided tour.

Each new experience enriches our lives. That is precisely how this project of our Tanja Ostojić enriched my own path in an unexpected way. To be a part of a project without knowing where it will lead exactly, and when and how it might develop or finish is awakening an interesting and beautiful feeling of curiosity.

To be a part of this Tanjas Ostojić group is joyful. We are so many! Each one different and each one full of energy, coming from different cultures, customs, different life experiences, but one feels very pleasant, almost like at home at wonderful creative workshops.

Thanks to all the Tanjas for the moments we've spent together. I hope there will be many more of them and that we will stay in touch even after the project ends.

23 June 2017. Zemun – Tanja Ostojić-Petrović, civil engineer who took part in four workshops, two exhibitions, and in most of the guided tours.

Our artist name-sister brought us together, and that unforgettable experience resulted in wonderful friendships. She brought to us the world of art in the best possible way. In the creative workshops that she organised in different sites of former Yugoslavia, in a relaxing atmosphere, with spontaneous and honest talks and with elements of fun, I got to know many name-sisters – indeed all wonderful women and girls. The crown of all was our first exhibition in Belgrade MoCA Salon that we are very proud of, and where we showed the results of our work. There, with our presence at the opening, we supported our artist name-sister. Can't wait until our workshop and joint summer holidays in Rijeka.

Letter by an exhibition visitor: 10 July 2017, in a village near Kraljevo (Central Serbia). Bojana Minović, shepherd woman and photographer.

¹⁴ Including the TERRA symposium exhibition at the Cultural Center in Kikinda in 2014.

Dear Tanja,

I had the opportunity to visit your *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić* exhibition. It is a very complex multilayered setting that I've spent over 40 minutes exploring. Luckily, the exhibition guard was discreet at his desk, where he was quietly talking on the phone, and did not pay attention to me, so when my emotions were overwhelming me, I had my freedom to smile, to contemplate, and to cry.

You might ask what made me feel sad. Memories, dislocation, and war, and mostly, I was overwhelmed by the discovery of the universality of these women's story. And with the unity between the women connected by the same first name and family name: they are such rudimentary points of identity; but in fact, there has been so much more that they have in common. Topics that are political and in this case have been reflected on at a personal level, and are related to (women's) work, women's health, existence during the period of transition, poverty, women's rights, education, maternity, and women's roles within family, but also the spaces of friendship, freedom, and autonomy have been analysed in an authentic, straightforward way, and is full of life.

At one moment, I felt a very strong identification (with all of you), as I recognised parts of my own story and the ones from my friends and relatives, starting from the historical reference of being born in the SFRJ, and the language and Socialist background in which I've grown up. And that touched me deeply, and was connected to beautiful and precious memories.

My favourite section was the one with embroidery. They are amazing. One of them has re-created a sheet of paper inside a school notebook with a grid, the contours of the map of Yugoslavia, and the related text seemed as if they were drawn and written inside... This lucid manoeuvre immediately activated my affective memories and new associations, which resulted in an abundant creativity. I felt inspired.

This is just a segment of my impressions regarding your very complex and profound narrative of historical continuity and political and social discontinuity, regarding braveness and awareness.

Thank you so much, and thanks to all Tanjas Ostojić.

Bojana Minović

List of events

Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić, talk show in Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW), Berlin, 10 April 2013 (Moderated by Dr Suzana Milevska, with the participation of Tanja Ostojić, designer from Pula/Milan and Tanja Ostojić, Berlin-based artist).

Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić, creative workshop in terracotta at TERRA, Kikinda (Serbia), July 2013 (three days long, with Tanja Ostojić-Guteša and her family; moderated by Tanja Ostojić artist).

Embroidered Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić, Goethe-Institut Belgrad (Serbia), 20–22 January 2017 (three-day closed workshop with ten participants; moderated by Vahida Ramujkić and Tanja Ostojić).

Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić, public presentation in Museum of Contemporary Art of Republic of Srpska (MoCARS) in Banja Luka (BiH), 31 March 2017 (moderated by Lana Pilipović, with the participation of Tanja Ostojić-Guteša, Tatjana Ostojić, Vahida Ramujkić, and Tanja Ostojić artist).

Embroidered Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić, MoCARS in Banja Luka, 31 March – 2 April 2017 (three-day closed workshop with six participants; moderated by Vahida Ramujkić and Tanja Ostojić).

Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić, public presentation at Museum of Contemporary Art (MSU), Zagreb (Croatia), 28 April 2017 (moderated by Tihomir Milovac curator of the project, with the participation of Tanja Ostojić artist, Tanja Ostojić-Guteša, Tanja Petrović Ostojić, Tatjana Tanja Ostojić, and Vahida Ramujkić).

Embroidered Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić, MSU, Zagreb, 29 April 29 – 1 May 2017 (three-day closed workshop with seven participants; moderated by Vahida Ramujkić and Tanja Ostojić).

Embroidered Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić, non-announced performance for incidental passers-by, Mala Kavana, Zagreb, 30 April 2017 (with six participants including special guest, artist Vlasta Delimar).

Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić, exhibition: Museum of Contemporary Art Belgrade Salon (MoCAB), 6 June – 31 July 2017. Exhibition author / artist Tanja Ostojić. With participation of: Jelena Dinić, Tanja Ostojić (Banja Luka), Tanja Ostojić (Berlin), Tanja Ostojić (Trn), Tanja Ostojić (Udine), Tanja Ostojić-Guteša, Tanja Ostojić-Petrović, Tanja Petar Ostojić, Tatjana Tanja Ostojić (Belgrade), Tatjana Ostojić Alabama, Sunčica Šido and Vahida Ramujkić. Curated by Zoran Erić.

Guided tour at the *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić* exhibition in MoCAB Salon: with the exhibition artist Tanja Ostojić and the curator, Zoran Erić, with participation of Tatjana Ostojić, 6 June 2017.

Guided tour at the *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić* exhibition: with Tatjana Tanja Ostojić from Belgrade and Tanja Ostojić-Guteša, 28 June 2017.

Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić, creative workshop at Kamov Studio, hosted by Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMSU), Rijeka (Croatia), 11–13 August 2017 (three-day long with six name-sisters; moderated by Tanja Ostojić).

Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić exhibition at Kamov Studio, organised by MMSU, Rijeka, 11 August – 7 September 2017 (exhibition author, artist Tanja Ostojić; with participation of: Jelena Dinić, Tanja Ostojić (Banja Luka), Tanja Ostojić (Berlin), Tanja Ostojić (Pljevlja), Tanja Ostojić (Trn), Tanja Ostojić (Udine), Tanja Ostojić-Guteša, Tanja Ostojić-Petrović, Tanja Petar Ostojić, Tatjana Tanja Ostojić (Belgrade), Tatjana Ostojić Alabama, Sunčica Šido, Vahida Ramujkić, and Leonard Rych; curated by Sabina Salamon and Tanja Ostojić).

Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić project participants visiting Artist on Vacation / Valamar, Poreč (Istria, Croatia), 12 August 2017.



Tanja Ostojić (Udine, Italy): *Coffee Connection* (2017). Handmade coffee set consisting of 46 elements, inspired by the *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić* meetings, glazed ceramic. Photo: Ana Opalić



Tanja Ostojić (Berlin): Large bowl, glazed terracotta, 26 x 9 cm. Photo: Milan Kralj



Tanja Ostojić-Guteša: *Milica*, terracotta 16 x 9.5 x 5 cm. Photo: Vladimir Sretenović

Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić at TERRA symposium, Kikinda, Serbia, 2013. Photo: Vladimir Sretenović

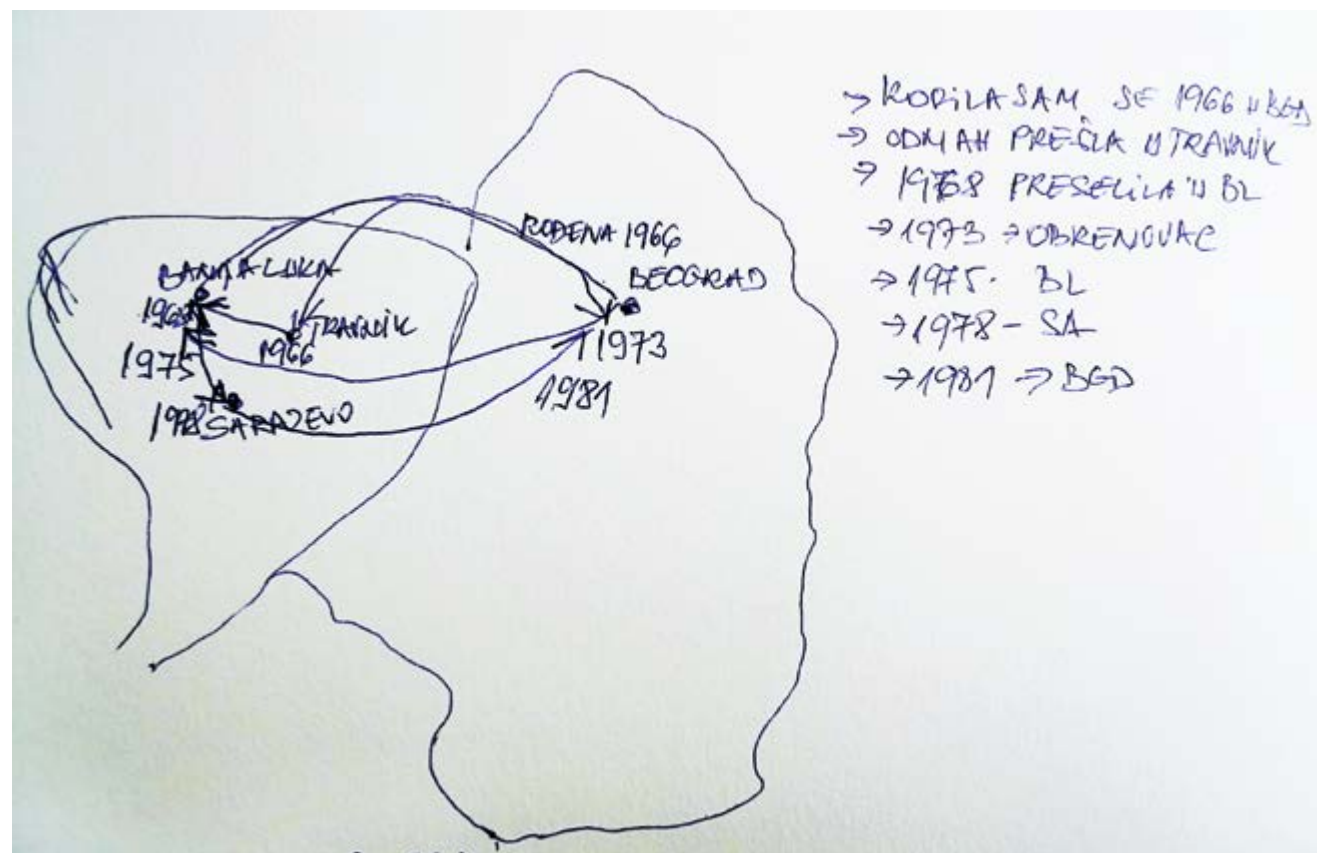


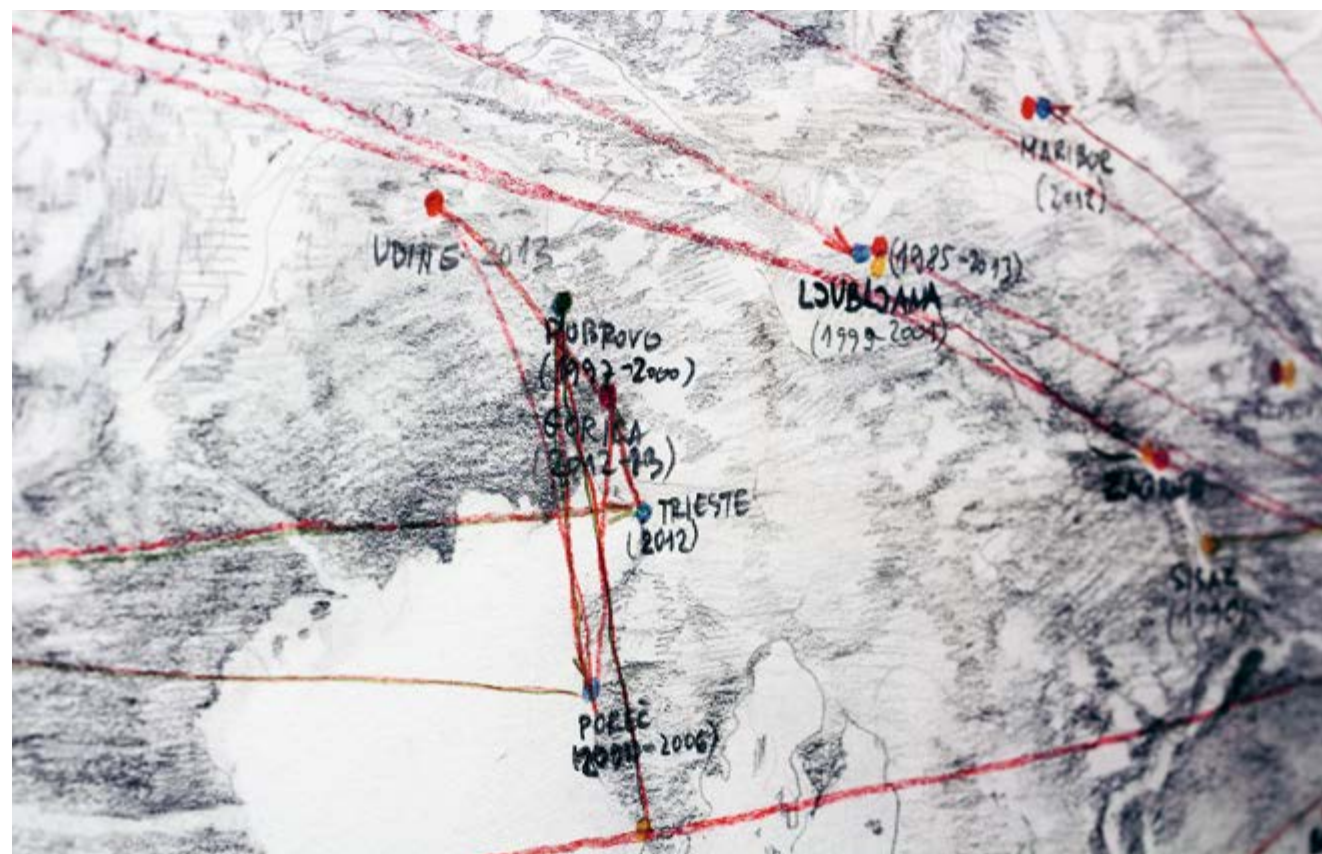
p. 34 above, p. 35 above, and pp. 36-37

Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić: Migration Map of 30 Tanja Ostojić (2013). Drawing in pencil on aquarelle paper, 254 x 138 cm. Author: Tanja Ostojić (Berlin). Artwork and detail photos: Nikola Radić-Lucati

pp. 34-35 below

From the Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić: Individual Migration Maps, from Tatjana Tanja Ostojić (Belgrade) and Tanja Ostojić (Berlin). Photos: Tanja Ostojić (Berlin)







Embroidered Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić, workshop, Goethe-Institut Belgrad, January 2017.
Photo: Marija Piroški

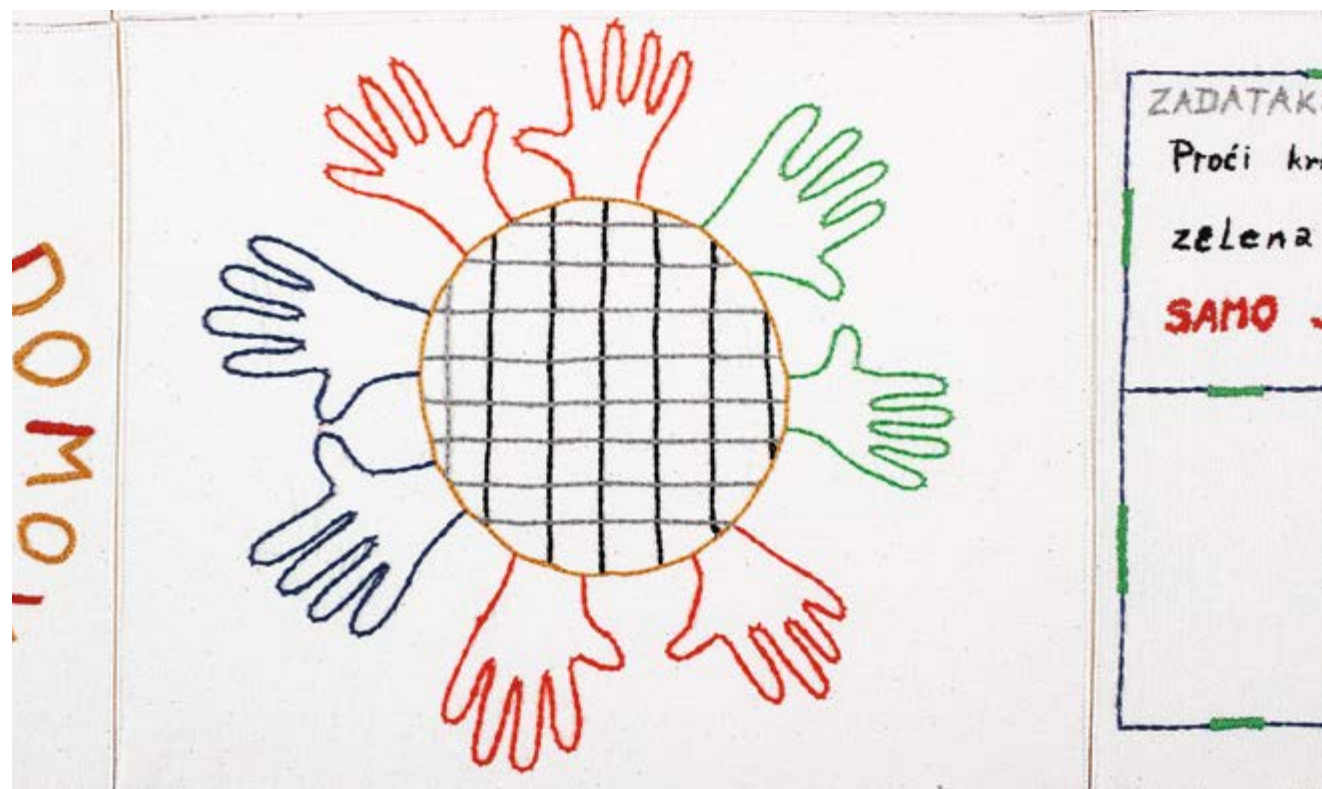


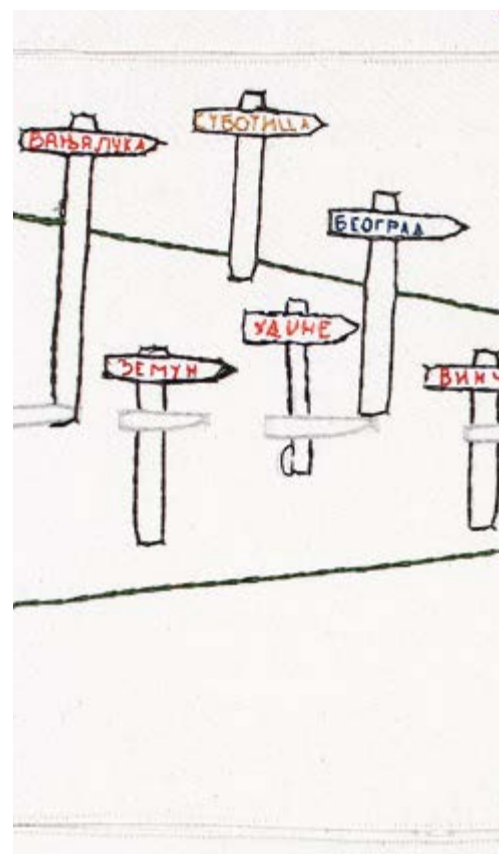
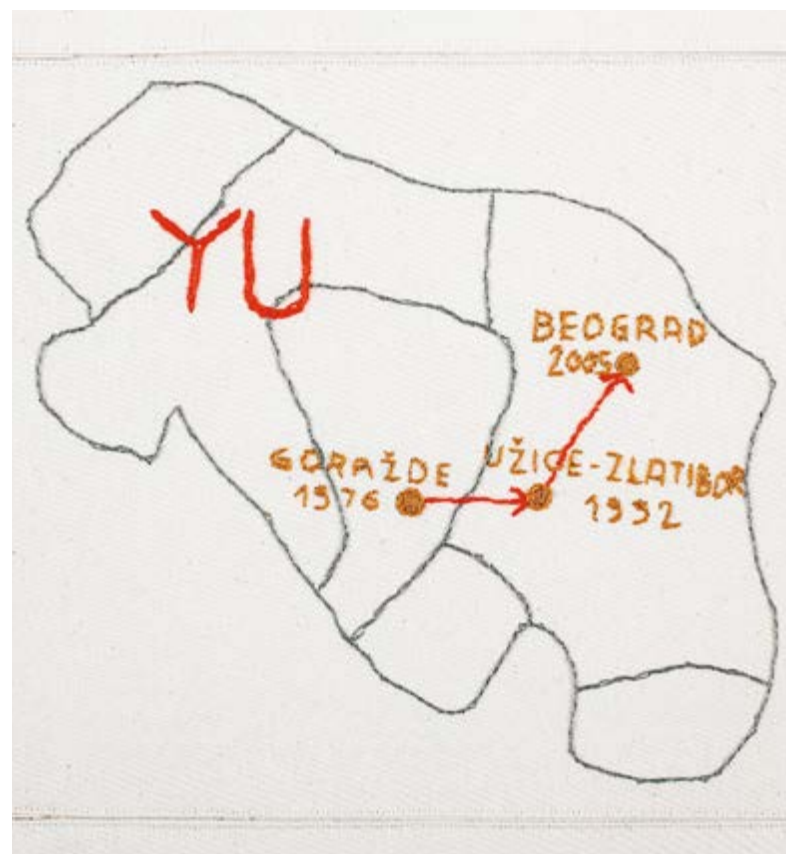
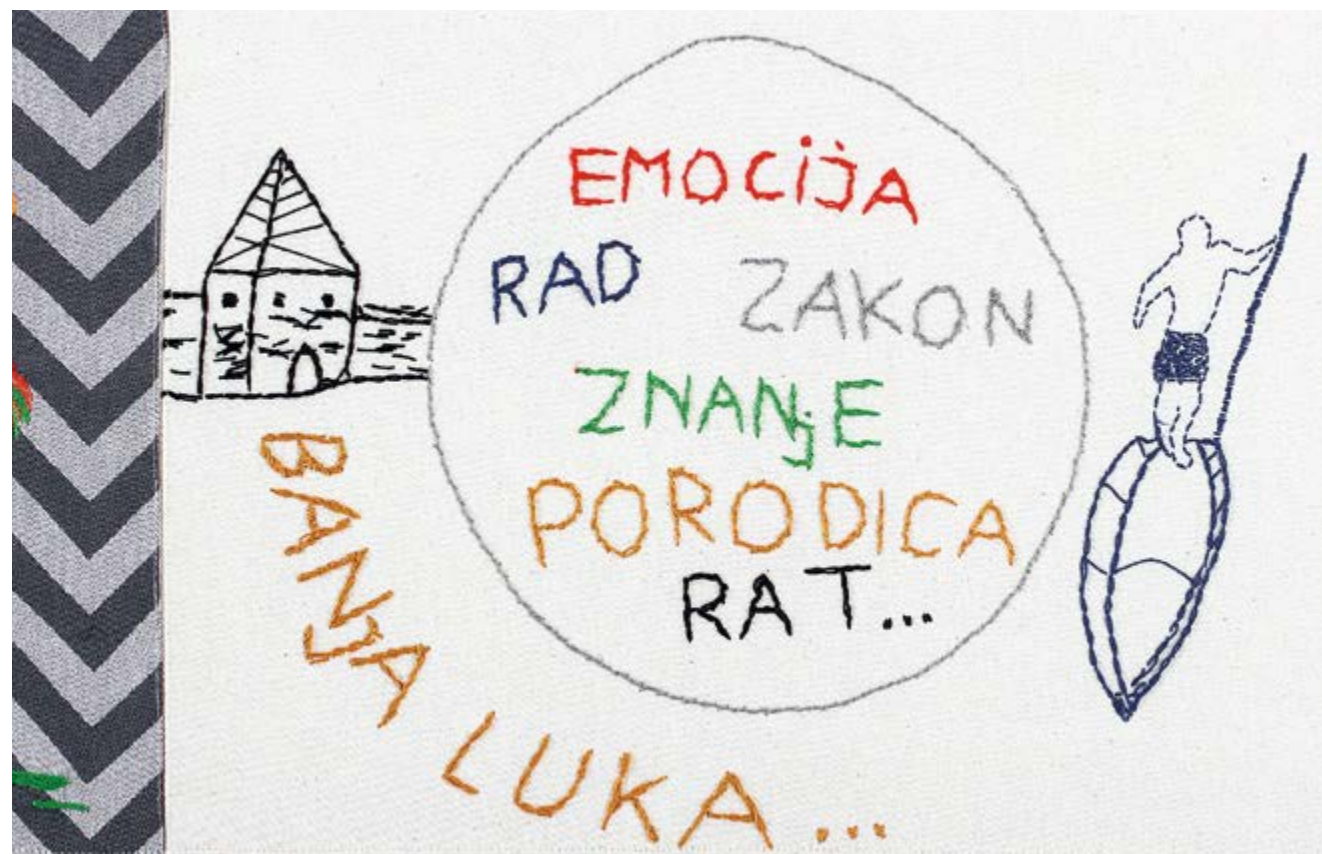
Embroidered Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić, workshop, MMSU, Rijeka, Croatia, August 2017. Photo: Tanja Ostojić (Berlin)

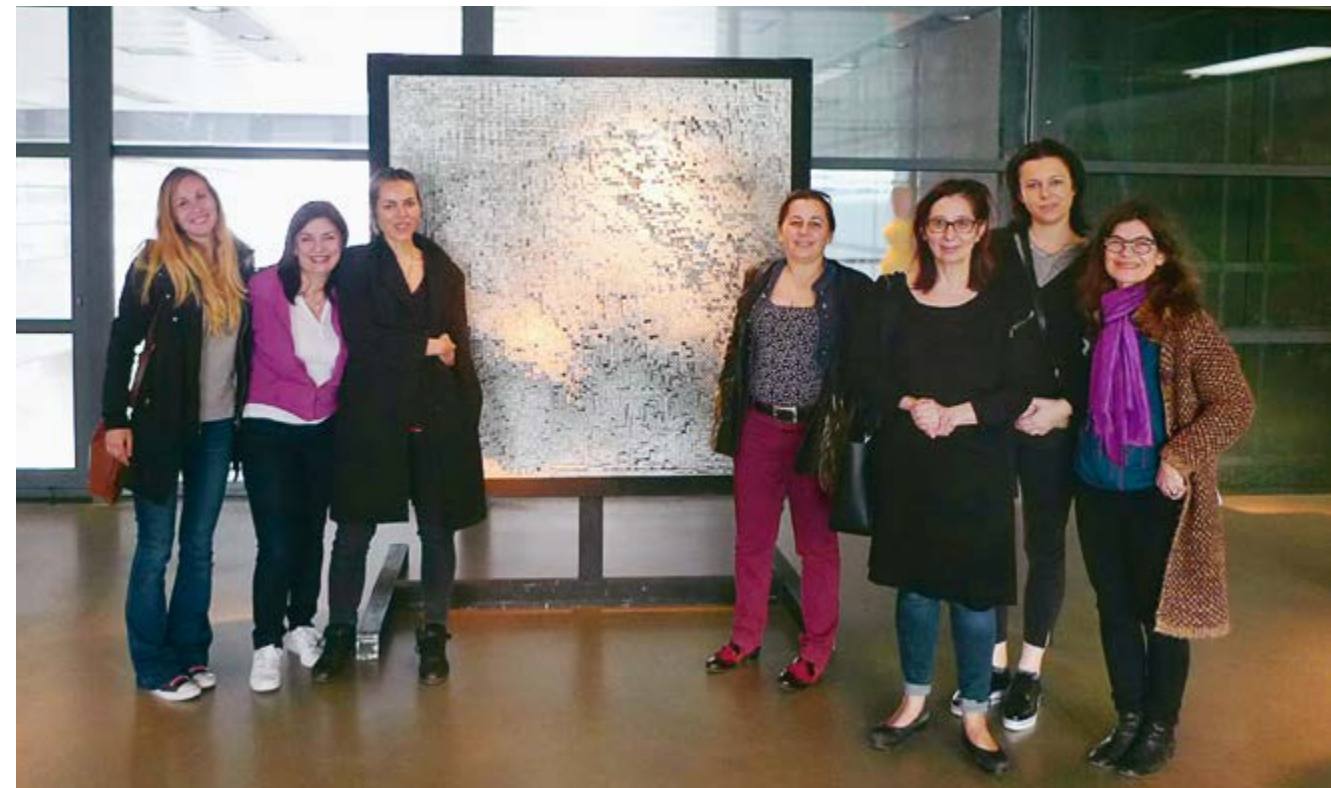
p. 40 above, and p. 41. Embroidered Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić, workshop, MSU, Zagreb, April – May 2017. Photos: Ana Opalić, Tanja Ostojić (Berlin)



Embroidered Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić, public performance / embroidery in the public space, Mala Kavana, main square in Zagreb, 30 April 2017. Photos: Ana Opalić, Tanja Ostojić (Berlin)







Guided tour of permanent collection of the MSU, Zagreb, for the project participants, 29 April 2017.
Curator on duty: Radmila Iva Janković. Photo: Andrea Krizmanić



From the *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić* project archive (2011-17): Four Tanjas Ostojić, joint flight to Banja Luka, March 2017. Photos: Vahida Ramujkić



Guided tour at the *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić* exhibition, with Tatjana Tanja Ostojić in MoCAB Salon, Belgrade, June 2017. Photo: Marija Konjušić



From the *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić project archive* (2011-17). Social time in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Rijeka.
Photos: Marija Piroški, Vahida Ramujkić, Jelena Dinić, Zenjo Šikora



From the *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić* project archive (2011–17). Group portraits: 7 *Tanjas Ostojić*, Belgrade, January 2017. Photos: Marija Piroški



Women Talk¹

**Tanja Ostojić, b. 1954
in Selce on the island
of Brač, Yugoslavia;
lives in Povlja, Brač,
Croatia**

What is your occupation? – I am a housewife.

Where did you go to school? – I completed elementary school on the island of Brač.

Are you employed? – I am involved in the family business. I take care of apartments that are named after me, Apartmani Tanja Ostojić, and my daughter sublets them.²

How satisfied are you with your work? – I am relatively satisfied. It's a small village, without a lot of entertainment, but it's peaceful and nice, and the season doesn't last more than three to four months.

What were the circumstances in which you grew up? – I grew up in a small village, Selce, on the Island of Brač.

Have you been living in the same place your entire life? – I never moved from Brač. I live now in a village called Povlja, where I moved when I got married, and which is near my home village.

Is the family name Ostojić your name by birth or by marriage? – I changed my maiden name, Trutanić, for my husband's last name, Ostojić, when I married him in 1974.

Did the war and the breakup of Yugoslavia affect your life? – The war affected my life, first of all financially. All my children were in school at the time, and we had no money.

Are you satisfied with your family situation now? With your children, housework, and your relationship with your partner? – I am married and I live with my husband. We have children and grandchildren. I am satisfied with all of that. I am a housewife, and nobody helps me around the house, but I help my husband with his job. Our daughter manages the apartments, and I clean them.

How satisfied are you with your sex life? – I am satisfied.

Have you experienced violence? – No.

¹ Most of the interviews have been audio-recorded live during one-to-one encounters in 2012 and 2013 in the favourite places of the name-sisters.

² See the homepage: <www.apartmanitanja.com>

What is your native language? – Croatian.

Do you speak any other language? – No, I just exchange a few foreign words with the tourists.

What is your citizenship/nationality – and your faith if you are religious? – Croat/Croatian/Catholic.

Are you satisfied with your life? – Yes, I am satisfied.

How do you spend your free time, if you have any? – I gather olives when they are in season.

**Tatjana Tanja Ostojić,
b. 12 May 1965
in Subotica, Serbia,
Yugoslavia; lives
in Belgrade, Serbia**

What is your occupation? – I am a mechanical engineer.

Where did you go to school? – After going to the high school for construction in Belgrade, I graduated from the faculty of mechanical engineering at the University of Belgrade.

Are you employed? – I work at a private travel agency in Belgrade.

How satisfied are you with your work (position, pay, relations with colleagues)? – I had never previously worked in this profession. I got a job very late. After I gave birth to my daughter I realised that I was not setting a good example for my child by sleeping until noon every day and doing nothing, since I'm not stupid or incapable. That made me find a job. And as it happens, the father of my daughter used to work with the owner of a travel agency. They needed someone to make the hotel room reservations. If I managed to graduate in mechanical engineering, I could also do this. I can learn any other job, except art, I thought. So, I began working there eight years ago. I work a lot, and I work overtime. I work from 9am to 5pm, but I rarely leave the office before six, and I often stay until 8pm. Sometimes I work at night or over the entire weekend. But the two of us can live an ordinary life, without any special luxuries, and save some money to go to the seaside.

Where do you live now? – In Belgrade, Tašmajdan, in my own flat.

If you moved, what were the reasons? – We moved to Belgrade from Subotica when I was a baby. As a little girl, I lived in France and Turkey, because my dad was there on business, so my mom and I lived there as well. That was before I started going to



Coffee, cigarettes, and endless talks... with Tanja Ostojić and poodle Ružica at the cafe Taš, Belgrade, June 2013. Photo: unknown author

school, and before my brother was born. Since then I haven't moved from Belgrade, just changed addresses.

Did the war and the breakup of Yugoslavia affect your life? – I can't say it did very much, since I remained stable. I didn't need to go abroad, although my ex-boyfriend and I did seriously think about going to Germany in 1994, but in the end we stayed here. He is an only child, and his parents are aged, so in the end he found a job that we could live normally from. Both he and I are lazy by nature, so we stayed here.

Is the family name Ostojić your name by birth or by marriage? – I was born Ostojić, and I am registered in my birth records as Tatjana, because the office didn't want to register me as Tanja. I only respond to the name Tanja. To be honest, I never explicitly wanted to get married, nor change my last name – which I would not do under any circumstances – so it became the reason to never get married. My boyfriend insisted that I should take his last name, I refused, and that's how it stayed. I always wanted to remain Ostojić, even though my origins aren't anything special for me to be particularly proud of my last name. I just knew that I definitely did not want to change my name.

What were the circumstances in which you grew up (childhood, ethnic and social background)? – I grew up in the city of Belgrade. I was born in Subotica only because my dad was in military service there at the time, and my mom was very young. So as not to be alone here in Belgrade, my mom gave birth in Subotica, where some of my grandparents also lived. So we were there for several months and then came to Belgrade, once dad finished serving in the army. My mother never worked, only my dad, and he travelled a lot and was out of the house. So it was normal that mom was there with me. I have a younger brother, born in 1972. I had already started school when he was born. I used to be pretty spoiled to a certain extent. Not spoiled rotten, but my mother was always the one who provided me with basic living needs. Dad earned well, so I never wanted for anything. I always had enough. In time, one relaxes and becomes lazy.

Did your parents also have access to education? – My dad finished a specialised school, and my mom finished high school.

Are you living with someone, or living alone? – I am a single mother now. I lived with the father of my daughter for 20 years, but we weren't married. And now we are no longer together.

How old is your daughter? – She is 13 years old.

Are you satisfied with your family situation? How do you manage the housework? – I feel burdened to the maximum, not physically but mentally, because I work a lot and also have to take care of my child, who goes to school. I wonder if everything is all right, if she got home well, if she had lunch or not, what she'll wear tomorrow, and all the other things moms think about. And I have no help from my ex, the father of my child, in any way – neither with raising her, or financially. My parents help me a lot. My mother cooks, so I don't have to think about going to the store every day; my mother will buy something. My mother comes every day to at least send my daughter off to school or meet her when she comes back from school, depending on the shift, and to give her lunch. It's at least some kind of control, since she's still young. I used to help my mom around the house, simply because I was responsible somehow, and conscientious, and I would help by cleaning my room and going to the supermarket. Nothing too significant, but I did help – compared to my daughter who doesn't help me at all. She's more relaxed, which might not be a bad thing for a girl.

How satisfied are you with your sex life? – I have no sex life at the moment because I have no time for it. I keep joking with everyone that I'll get married for the first time when I turn 50. Then I joke with my colleagues about giving me some free time so I can accomplish my three-year plan to get married at 50. My daughter becomes guarded at any thought of her mother getting married or finding someone, because she had a negative experience with her father...

Have you (or anyone in your family) experienced physical or verbal violence? – No.

What is your native language? – Serbian.

Do you speak any other language? – English.

What is your citizenship/nationality? – Serbian citizenship. My parents are Serbs from Subotica, where many nationalities and minorities live. Each ethnicity somehow took pride in their national identity, so to speak, not for nationalistic reasons, but to preserve a kind of tradition. For example, my parents got married in church in 1964, and I was baptised in church after I was born in 1965. Both were very unusual in Socialist times, but there it was a kind of tradition, and both Croats and Serbs did it. I also have a lot of Hungarians and Croats in my family.

What is your faith, if you are religious? And your political views, if you have them? – I don't practice any religion. I don't have political views, but I know what I am against and what I am for. It's impossible to be *for* anything here since one gets disappointed quickly. I participated in all the protests in the 1990s – 9 March, the walks. I was a participant, but not overly extreme. In the end, when the new alternative came to power, one could realise that they were the same as the previous party. I turned up to vote at the last elections, but I didn't circle anything. So now I am definitely not politically oriented. Sadly, I doubt I will vote again. I am not for anything anymore.

What is your astrological sign? – Taurus, with Aries ascendant.

Do you have any pets? Do you like sports? – We had an Irish setter, who lived for 14.5 years. Now we have a poodle called Ružica.

What is your favourite place? – I love this neighbourhood where I live – Tašmajdan – because there is always something happening. It's in the city centre, everything is nearby, and you have something intimately of your own. I grew up in Voždovac, and I also really love Voždovac.

How would you describe yourself as a person, in a few words? – Persistent, reliable, responsible, maybe a bit lazy.

What are your main values in life? – Security. When I separated from my ex-boyfriend, it was on my initiative, because I felt that something wasn't right, but I was in a position where I knew I could function alone with my child. That gave me security. I am now somehow trying to be both a mother and a father, but it doesn't work. A family is something I find to be the basis for a normal development of a person, but if there isn't one, then so be it. One somehow adjusts to it, and that's how we live. I have my daughter, my parents, and a younger brother, who has his own family. We are close to them. Family and close friends are what is the most important to me.

What is your life philosophy? – Honesty with oneself. To be one's own person and not give up on principles, because of parents, society, or what people say.

What are your greatest wishes? Your plans for the future? – My plan is to do everything I can so my child doesn't have to live here, in Belgrade. I don't think that this is a place to live. I think that wherever she might go, with her own work, she would be able to afford more for herself than she can here. True, regardless of what she is, wherever she goes she'll be a foreigner, and she'll never be truly at home – but there is still that satisfaction that you can live from your own work, or am I wrong?

I also love Thailand. I would like to travel to Asia again. The nature is fascinating there, the people are direct, pleasant, and there is so much to do. I learned that their sentences have no beginning or ending. They have enough food, and they simply developed so that they spend their whole lives just enjoying themselves. That's why there is Thai massage, and that's why they never needed to define their language with periods.

How satisfied are you with your life? – There is always room for improvement. I am not overly satisfied with my social life, but that's mainly my own fault. There is room for improvement both materially and socially, some kind of constant learning, but all of that requires time and effort, and I am lacking both right now. For a while, I had the idea to try and enrol in some other faculty, but I finally gave up on that.

What bothers you; what would you change in your life? – Generally, I don't have a negative approach to things but I am bothered by the fact that I can't live here the way I used to – carefree and easy, because that doesn't exist anymore. It does not exist anywhere; we had constructed such a lifestyle in the former Yugoslavia.

Can you name a negative trait of yours? – The fact that I'm lazy. That really bothers me.

How do you spend your free time, if you have it? – I wish I had more free time. I love to sleep, lie around, smoke, drink coffee, and travel. I don't have enough free time, sadly. A year ago I bought reading glasses, which completely horrified me because I realised that I am no longer that young. I didn't read a book for three years because I couldn't see, but I couldn't decide if I should take those glasses and begin to read again. Finally I took the glasses, but that laziness follows me through life.

Do you have a favourite culinary recipe? – I don't have one. I don't like to cook. I like to eat, but not to prepare. Anything that can be bought ready to eat, I will buy it. When I have friends over, I usually have one friend who likes to cook and cooks well, so I tell her that I'll buy everything she needs and ask her to cook. My daughter says: 'Mom, your instant soup is better than granny's instant soup!' to give me a compliment.

What aspect of yourself would you give to a mutant Tanja Ostojić? – I would give responsibility, reliability, and honesty. Friends can rely on me. I am someone who doesn't give away their friends' secrets.



Tatjana Tanja Ostojić, with her two daughters, after conducting her own guided tour at the *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić* exhibition, MoCAB, Belgrade, 28 June 2017. Photo: Marija Konjušić

Tatjana Tanja Ostojić, b. 4 September 1966 in Belgrade, Serbia, Yugoslavia; lives in Belgrade, Serbia

What is your occupation? – I am a law graduate.

Where did you go to school? How satisfied are you with your education? – I am satisfied with my qualifications, but not with the law school that I graduated from because, as it turned out, law was never something I wanted to do for a living. However, it is actually the knowledge and the way of thinking that I gained there that helps me in my work today. Unlike some of my colleagues from the university, I have never experienced a professor telling me that I should get married and have children instead of study, so obviously it has always been the matter of our attitude. I am not saying that there aren't any obvious differences between the sexes, and the job

positions that men and women are able to reach, though the fact that women are still paid less for the same positions as men is completely unacceptable.

Are you employed? – Yes, at the moment I work as advertising director at Attica Media.

How satisfied are you with your job? – Until recently I was very satisfied. For more than 20 years I have been in the media business. I worked as a journalist, editor, editor-in-chief, editorial director, advertising manager, advertising director, and director of a media house. My salary varied and it depended on the media house and the position. I wouldn't say that there have been any problems between different sexes, but maybe between the same ones. Relationships with colleagues also varied from one media house to another, as well as relationships with my bosses and my superiors. I am not sure if I still have any plans or career prospects left. It is hard to have them in this country.

Where do you live now? – I live in Belgrade, on Slavija Square.

Have you ever moved? What years were crucial for you? – I was born in Belgrade in 1966 and three months later I was taken to Travnik,³ where I lived until I was two-and-half years old. In 1969 we moved to Banja Luka.⁴ I survived the terrible earthquake that happened in Banja Luka that year. In 1973 we moved back to Serbia. At first we lived in Obrenovac for one year, and the year after in the countryside. In 1976, as I was in third grade of elementary school, we moved back to Banja Luka and in December 1978 we moved to Sarajevo. In August 1981 we moved to Belgrade. In Belgrade I moved many times from one end of the city to another. It wasn't easy to change between five elementary schools and three high schools. Each time you have to start over and prove yourself. It is something that still follows me at work. I often change jobs because I like challenges, but on the other side I always have to start learning from the beginning and prove myself. And the good side would be all those great people that I got to know. But still, I can't settle down. There is no place that feels like home. In elementary school, when they would tell us to write an essay on our hometown, I never had anything to say, since I really hadn't had one. I have never had a hometown or hometown quarter. All I had was my homeland, Yugoslavia, and they took that away from me. In Belgrade I moved many times after I got married because we were renting apartments, which I am still doing. And the fact that I never wanted to buy an apartment in Belgrade shows that I somehow haven't settled down here. All of these moves gave me many acquaintances, but weak roots.

Did the war and the breakup of Yugoslavia affect your life, and if so, in what way?

– I don't believe that there is any person on the territory of ex-Yugoslavia that

³ Travnik is a town in central Bosnia and Herzegovina.

⁴ Banja Luka is now part of the Republika Srpska entity and is the second largest city in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the capital Sarajevo.

wasn't affected by it. My family was partly isolated from all that. We didn't have any human casualties in the family nor did we lose our property, but we knew what happened to our friends and cousins from Croatia and Bosnia. I personally have lost my motherland.

Your family name by birth – is there any anecdote related to choosing a name for you at birth and changing your last name after marriage? – Ostojić is my last name by birth. One of the options for my name was Vanja, but the name Tatjana was very popular back then and that's why they decided to give me this name, and my godfather agreed. I added my husband's last name after getting married, which was really horrible for me. I didn't change my documents then and I was signing as T. O. when I started working as a journalist. As soon as I got divorced I eliminated his name from mine.

What kind of family did you grow up in (citizenship, nationality, social, ethnic, and political background, your parents' level of education)? – Even though my parents come from the countryside, they were relatively young when they came to live in a city, so I've grown up as a member of an urban family. My father is a retired officer now, and we moved a lot when I was a child because of his work. By the time I was 15, we had lived already in Bosnia (Travnik, Banja Luka, Sarajevo), even though my family comes from the village of Ratari near Obrenovac, today part of Belgrade's municipality. Even though both of my parents are of Serbian nationality, when Yugoslavia (as the country I was born in) existed, I considered myself a Yugoslav. But today I identify myself as Serb; my nationality and my citizenship are Serbian, but I am a cosmopolitan and I feel like a citizen of the world. My social background – middle class, ethnic – suggests that we come from Bosnia, and further from Herzegovina, and before that from Montenegro. My father was a member of the Communist party; he was completely open to Orthodox Christian customs and tradition but less open to religion. My father has a higher education degree while my mother has only an elementary school education.

What was the division of housework like in the family you grew up in and what is it like now? – My mother was a housewife so she did most of the housework. My sister and I helped, and as we grew older we had more responsibilities, but never too many, because our parents found our success in school more important. My father also helped around the house – it seems to me more and more as we were growing up, even though it was mainly my mom's job. While I was married there was some sort of division of housework, but I did most of it. My daughters had already started helping me back then, and after the divorce that division of housework was more distinguished between the three of us.

How satisfied are you with your family situation? – I am divorced and not in a relationship, which isn't really a good thing when your children grow up. I am not

happy with that. I have two amazing daughters though. Teodora is 23 and is about to graduate in Political Sciences and French at Grinnell College, USA, while the younger one, Isidora, is about to graduate from high school and is preparing to enrol in the Faculty of Organisational Sciences at the University of Belgrade.

How satisfied are you with your sex life? – My current sex life is a matter of my personal choice and I am very happy with that.

Have you or your mother/grandmother/daughters experienced domestic violence? – I know that my dad's mom experienced violence, but because my grandfather died very early, I console myself that she wasn't exposed to it for too long. My mom was sometimes exposed to psychological violence, and I got divorced because of mental violence. In that period and even after the divorce, my daughters and I were exposed to psychological violence from their father and my husband. I was always convinced that violence, even domestic violence, doesn't only happen to someone else who we don't know, but also to people around us, to those close to us, and unfortunately to ourselves too. Not knowing that I was pregnant, I started training for an SOS phoneline for the victims of violence. I completed my theoretical training and I met many victims of all sorts of violence during the process. Those were very difficult and disturbing stories. Once I realised I was pregnant, and that I was supposed to pass practical training that includes answering the phone and communicating with the victims of violence, I didn't have the strength for that. I felt like I wasn't capable of dealing with that, and that my unborn child could feel all the heaviness and horror of all that before even being born.

What languages do you speak? – I speak Serbo-Croatian language and English.

Religious affiliation, political views, astrological sign? – I am Orthodox Christian, apolitical. It is not correct to ask an Orthodox Christian about an astrological sign, but for your information I am Virgo, my ascendant is Aries, and I think I am born in the year of the Horse.

What do you like to do in your free time? Do you have any hobbies? – If I have free time – which is sometimes difficult – I love books and movies, and when the weather is nice, I like to go for a walk and I love bike riding. Riding a bike is definitely my hobby.

Your favourite place? – In Belgrade, Ada Ciganlija,⁵ and the seaside in general, especially Greece.

Do you have a flaw? – One? I am sure there are more of them. But the obvious one – I am a perfectionist. I try to do my best and I expect that from others too.

⁵ Ada Ciganlija is a river island that has artificially been turned into a peninsula, and is located in the course of the Sava River through central Belgrade. It is an immensely popular recreational zone, most notable for its beaches and sports facilities.

Your life philosophy? – It used to be: It doesn't matter if you fall, what matters is that you get up and keep going. Lately it has been more and more difficult for me to get up and it feels like I'm not moving forward.

What is it like to be Tanja Ostojić? – Usual, woman-like. I used to feel it was a rare combination, but then, 25 years ago, I was delighted to find out that there are five Tanjas or Tatjanas Ostojić and that we are all different from one another, and I would even say a bit different from the rest.

What aspect of yourself would you give to a mutant Tanja Ostojić if we were making one? – My hair. I always believed that my hair is the most beautiful part of me. When I was younger my mom always cut my hair short and it wasn't until high school that I earned the right to grow my hair. It was some kind of liberation. At its longest phase, my hair went below my waist. I had extremely thick black hair, of good quality. Today I dye my hair chocolate brown at the suggestion of one particular hairstylist who says that the colour matches my skin tone and my age. I agree with him and I take care of my hair so that it doesn't lose its quality. I simply love it.

I don't like.../it bothers me that... – Dishonesty, bad manners, tactlessness, lack of empathy.

If I had time... – I probably do have time, but I use excuses – I would go to a female monastery for a month to write in peace.

The important thing in my life... – The health and happiness of my children.

How satisfied am I with my life? – Well, I am not satisfied, but my children make it better [*smiles*].

What question would you ask the other Tanjas Ostojić?/Would you like to meet other name-sisters? – 'Do you ever feel different from other people?' Sometimes it feels as if one doesn't even come from this world, or that one comes from a parallel universe, right? (I am not sure if I explained this well). I would be extremely happy to meet my name-sisters on the following workshop in Banja Luka and I believe that we have a similar sense of humour (I would like that).

Did you like meeting other Tanjas Ostojić? Do you have any common activities or mutual photographs? – I think I will like them because in the picture on Tanja Ostojić's Facebook group they seem very joyful.

Your favourite recipe? – Spaghetti with peas.⁶ * It is my daughters' favourite dish that I prepare – even my ex-husband didn't complain, he always said he liked it a lot. And it's simple to prepare.

⁶ This recipe and all others marked with a * can be found in the 'Favourite Recipes of Tanjas Ostojić' chapter of this book.

**Tanja Ostojić,
b. 11 May 1968 in Split,
Croatia, Yugoslavia;
lives in Split, Croatia**

What is your occupation? – I am an economist.

What are your vocational qualifications? – I graduated as an economist from the University of Split.

Are you currently employed? – I work at InterAuto, an Austrian company that was bought last year by Volkswagen. Here in Split, we are one of 260 sub-agencies in Croatia, while the headquarters are in Zagreb. My position is managing clerk. In fact, I do the paperwork for everything related to the sales and clearance of the vehicles.

Are you satisfied with your job (position, pay, relations with your colleagues)? – It is okay; I cannot complain. The environment I work in is excellent. I have been working here for six and a half years, and I still go to work happily. Though when it comes to salary, no one would complain if it was a bit higher, but it is regular and I work in a relatively new and clean space. I am doing well, and my position is safe, which is the most important thing for now.

Have you been living in the same place since your birth? – I spent the first five years of my life in the village of Povlja, on the nearby island of Brač, where my grandmother used to watch me because my parents worked a lot. When I started pre-school and later elementary school, I moved with my parents to Split. My grandmother used to say, ‘Once I taught you how to go to the supermarket, they are taking you away from me.’ Those were the only migrations I had: Split-Brač-Split.

Which years were crucial for you? – I was born in Split in 1968. I lived in Povlja from the age of six months until I was five (1968–73). Then I moved back to Split. I lived without my father from 1991–99. From 1999 on, we were all together again, and we were happy.

Did the war and the breakup of Yugoslavia affect your life, and if so, in what way? – I had some turbulence in the 1990s. We went through some really bad periods during the war because my father was a military man, and that caused us problems because he had to leave Croatia for a period, but he came back after some eight to nine years. Before the war, I never knew who was who, nor did I care about who one was. The only thing that mattered to me was if someone was a good person. And I have to say that, despite everything that happened then, I am glad that my parents and I didn’t lose friendships with people who were our friends in that period. I was around 22 in the 1990s. My father didn’t consider asking us to move with him, because I was already in a relationship with my fiancé. My father was a lieutenant



During a coffee break at the workplace, in conversation with Tanja Ostojić, Solin near Split, Croatia, November 2012. Photo: unknown author

colonel, and so he found himself here in command. He was captured for almost a year and couldn’t escape. Then he went to Herceg Novi and retired the first chance he got.⁷ He never wanted to leave that place since he loved the sea so much. As soon as the circumstances permitted him to come back home safely, he did. I also went to visit him. But it was difficult to only hear from him, and not to see him sometimes for years. And during his absence, I graduated from college, got married, and gave birth to my first child. He didn’t experience any of that with me. That caused him pain. I always said that I would have two children, since I was an only child, because my mother had complications in her pregnancy and she could not have another child. So he asked me again and again when I was going to have another child, and I answered, ‘When you come back.’ As luck would have it, I remember it as if it was yesterday: this was exactly how it happened. My father came home in March 1999. That summer I got pregnant unexpectedly. He was on Brač, and one weekend I came to see him, and I told him that I had a gift for him: I gave him an ultrasound picture. That made him cry, and he said, ‘You kept your promise.’

⁷ Herceg Novi is a town on the coast in the bordering country of Montenegro.

Is the family name Ostojić your name by birth, or by marriage? – I was born Vučković. I got married in 1994 and took my husband's last name.

After changing your last name by marriage, did you get used to it easily? – Yes, because Ostojić was also my mother's maiden name. There are three unrelated Ostojić families in Povelja.

What were the circumstances in which you grew up? – I had a normal and happy childhood. I was an only child. Both of my parents worked in a hospital. I was taken care of by my grandmother in Povelja, and they came to see me whenever they could. My father was an officer in the army. He was originally from Kordun, from the Orthodox tradition. But he is an ethnic Croat, just like my mother, and at the same time, we are all atheists.

Do you live with someone? – I am married. I live with my husband and our two children.

How old are your children? – My kids are already grown. My daughter is 17, and my son is 13.

Are you satisfied with your family situation and with the division of housework?

– I am. I work from 8am to 4pm, I get home at about 5pm and I cook either in the evening, or I finish up cooking in the morning. The schedule simply doesn't allow us to gather for a midday meal until the weekend. My husband has his own company. He works all day long and comes home at 6 or 7pm. I do all the housework. The children would help if I told them to, but I manage it on my own. They go to school and have many responsibilities already, so I don't want to burden them further. My husband doesn't work in the house since he stays at work all day long, so I have taken it all upon myself. Although I do snap sometimes, when I cannot take anymore.

On the bright side, my flat is not that big, so it doesn't take too much time to finish everything. Sometimes my husband is willing to help, like when we are on vacation on Brač, he does the barbecuing. I don't meddle in that at all. He also does the work in the house, that includes making furniture, painting the walls, chiseling, everything. He is really good with all that. And he really isn't the kind of guy who sits in a bar instead of being at home. But when it comes to cleaning up, vacuuming, washing, that is somehow my thing. Raising children is something we do together; that was never only my responsibility. Also, as it happens, my parents live just two blocks from us, so when we need something... They helped us a lot when the children just started elementary school. Mother still calls me every now and then to let me know that she is there if I need anything. I try not to bother them, no matter that they are retired and have enough time. They should live their lives. Why should they have to live mine?

Are you satisfied with your sex life? – It's pretty good.

Have you (or anyone else in your family) ever experienced either physical or verbal violence? – Fortunately, no one has had those sorts of problems (except for those problems during the war, which are forgotten).

What is your native language? – Croatian.

Do you speak any other language? – English, and passively Italian.

What is your citizenship/nationality? – Croatian/Croatian.

What is your religious affiliation, if you are religious? Your political views, if you have them? – I am not religious. I am a Socialist, though I don't want to meddle in politics.

What is your astrological sign? – I am a Taurus, with ascendant in Capricorn, and Monkey in the Chinese zodiac.

Do you have any pets? What sports do you prefer? – I like handball and football, even though I am not the sporty type and I haven't ever trained in anything. I don't have any pets. A long time ago (before we were married) my husband gave me a beautiful parrot, Pippi. I loved her, and when she died I cried for two days, and later I never wanted another animal because it hurts too much to lose it.

What is your favourite place? – I like to stay home.

Art, movies, music – what do you enjoy? – I like to see a good movie: I am a really romantic person, and love stories always make me cry. I like all kinds of good music – everything except techno, folk, and heavy metal.

How would you briefly describe your personality? – I am joyous, communicative, optimistic, but sometimes very stubborn.

What are your main values in life? Your life philosophy? – For me, it is important that we are all healthy and together. After the rain, comes the sun.

What are your main plans and perspectives? – Now I only have plans for my children. I wish to see them finish school successfully and to set them on the right track.

What concerns you the most? – I am afraid of illness. I am not a hypochondriac, but I believe that health is the greatest treasure when you have it, and everything else will be resolved one way or another.

Are you satisfied with your life? – I am for now. I don't know about later on, but I have a good husband, lovely children, good friends, and a good job, so I cannot complain. Seeing how other people live, I can say I am fine. I must not complain. For now, I wouldn't change anything.

What bothers you? – I don't like seeing people being short-changed and humiliated because of their origins. I have felt that through my own skin during the war. Injustice bothers me a lot!

Can you name a negative trait of yours? – I am stubborn and sometimes I find it hard to admit that I am wrong. People say I am sometimes pushy and like to have everything under my control. I do it unconsciously, I guess.

How do you spend your free time, if you have it? – If I had free time, I don't know, I would probably find something more to do. To be honest, I don't have free time. In fact, in the past year, I discovered Zumba, something between fitness and dance, and I like doing that. I like long walks. In fact, I do everything on foot around town, and now and then I go with my husband to Marjan.⁸ He runs. I don't like running; I prefer to walk.

Do you have a favourite culinary recipe? – I don't have a problem with cooking, but it's hard to think of something to prepare every day. (Ice cubes,* cake).

What aspect of yourself would you give to a mutant Tanja Ostojić? – My eyes.

**Tanja Ostojić-Guteša,
b. 23 May 1970 in
Sremska Mitrovica,
Serbia, Yugoslavia;
lives in Subotica,
Serbia**

What is your occupation? – I graduated as a mechanical engineer.

Where did you study? What were the gender relations there? – At the Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad, where I also did my postgraduate studies. During my studies, my male classmates behaved correctly with the female students, but some of the professors let us know that they felt that technology was not for women. There were also many situations where we, in our opinion, got a lower grade for completely correct answers in oral exams. For example, we got extra questions, and even if the professor was assured that we had learned the subject with understanding, he would still be unsatisfied, and he would give us a lower grade compared to what he would give to a man. In the school year 1989-90, out of 700 students in the first year of studies there were only 50 women in total (such a big number of students is a consequence of the possibility to delay obligatory army service, so that two different generations of men met in their first year of studies).

Are you employed? – I am employed for an undefined period in the company ATB Sever Subotica, as an expert for auditing and certification, and project manager for

⁸ Marjan is a hill on the peninsula of the city of Split, the largest city of Croatia's Dalmatia region. It is covered in a dense Mediterranean pine forest and completely surrounded by the city and the sea, making it a unique sight. Originally used as a park by the citizens as early as the third century, it is a favourite weekend excursion destination and a recreational centre for the city.



First brief encounter at Tegel airport, Berlin with Tanja Ostojić-Guteša on a business trip in Germany, March 2013. Photo: Daniel Kojadinović

motors that are to be built in atomic reactors (in Russia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, etc.).

Are you satisfied with your job? – I am very happy with it at the moment.

Have you been living in the same place since you were born? – No, I haven't been living in the same place since I was born, and I had to move many times, mostly because of my job. I moved to Novi Sad in order to study; all the other moves were due to business engagements.

What were the most important places you moved to, and the crucial years? – Before my studies, I lived in Mačvanska Mitrovica. In 1989, I left for Novi Sad; 1996, Mačvanska Mitrovica; 1998, Sremska Mitrovica; 2000, Mačvanska Mitrovica; 2007, Subotica; 2008, Zemun, and in the same year, Subotica again – where I still live today.

Did war and the breakup of Yugoslavia affect your life, and if so, in what manner?

Not directly, since my family didn't have any human losses in the war, nor did we directly take part in the war. However, I lost my schoolmate, who was killed on the battlefield in Bogdanovci at the age of 22, while trying to help his wounded friend. His name was Saša Burmazević. His death shook me up very badly. After the war, in

1999, the bombarding that we experienced and my move from Mitrovica to Novi Sad were also hard to bear. As I saw that the bridges that I loved so much and that I passed so many times were destroyed, I felt some oppression in my chest. I took it very badly because I loved Novi Sad infinitely, the town that was ‘made for me’, and I couldn’t believe that it was really happening. All the photographs and TV recordings haven’t shaken me up as badly as my personal experience of the destroyed bridges that I will remember for the rest of my life.

Is the family name Ostojić your name by birth, or by marriage? – I was born Ostojić, and I changed my last name when I got married at the insistence of my husband, who didn’t allow me to keep my last name.

Since you have changed your last name by marriage, was it easy for you to get used to it? – My official signature has remained the same – Tanja Ostojić – and I think that speaks for itself when it comes to an ‘easy’ habit. In the past, when girls got married at the age of 18–20 it was probably easier for them to accept it; but today when you spend 35 years as one person, and then you have to change your last name and identity when you get married it becomes extremely difficult and burdensome. You spend almost more than half of your life with the last name that was given to you at your birth; you make numerous acquaintances who can hardly find or identify you on social networks; you change a great number of documents, and in the case of divorce or the desire to get back your original last name, you have to deal with changing a great number of documents again; very often you have to take with you your marriage certificate in order to prove to someone your identity, and all because you are a woman who got married. For me, the hardest thing is to get used to is the birth certificate, where they automatically change your last name after you get married, and they put your new last name into the document, which leads to the absurdity in which, in my case, the birth certificate says Tanja (Vladimir) Guteša, as if I was born Guteša, and not Ostojić. I wonder why the certificate is called a *birth* certificate, if the name on it is not the one you were born with. In my opinion, after the marriage there should be a note on the birth certificate that says the woman got married and took her husband’s last name, so that the document is amended instead of changed.

What were the circumstances in which you grew up? – I grew up in a modest and happy patriarchal family with my father, mother, and a brother who is two years younger than me. We lived in a house in Mačvanska Mitrovica. My father is originally from the village of Zasavica, and my mother is originally from the village of Ravnje.

What are your parents’ names and their occupations? – My father, Vladimir, and my mother, Verica, both finished elementary school. Because of their financial situations they couldn’t continue their education. My father worked in industrial valve production in Mitrovica, and my mother was a housewife.

Do you live with someone? – I am married. I live with my husband and our son. How old is your son? – My son was born in 2004, and is in school.

Are you satisfied with the situation in your family? – I am relatively satisfied. I always wanted to have a daughter too. The housework is mostly done by me. At my parents’ house we all helped each other, and now 90% of the work is on my shoulders. When it comes to gender equality in the household, I can say that that is a dead letter, based on my previous experiences. I believe that it is spoken about a lot but I assume that there has never been any equality, nor will there ever be. Talking to my female friends, I see that not many men today want to help their wives with the so-called ‘women’s work’, such as washing dishes, ironing, dusting, vacuuming... All those chores are still the burden of women who today also help men a lot. They are employed, they earn as much as men, maybe even more, and still, they do all the domestic work. Most of my girlfriends and I complain about fatigue, being overburdened, and a lack of support from our husbands.

Equality does not exist at the workplace either. For instance, on the occasion of choosing candidates for certain positions, a man will always have priority over a woman, based on the belief that the woman will give birth, have maternity leave, call in sick because of her children’s illnesses... So again, we are not equal, and again we don’t have the same starting position. In politics and generally in public life, women are in a tiny minority. We have fought for equality and still we don’t have it. Instead, we have ourselves a double-burden. The role of a mother, of a housewife, the pillar of the family remained, and we have an additional role of being a businesswoman on top of it all. Men admitted us equally, but for most of them nothing has changed since the period when we weren’t equal. There are some exceptions among them, but they are really rare.

Are you satisfied with your sex life? – I only talk about it with my partner, meaning my husband.

Have you (or anyone else in your family) ever experienced either physical or verbal violence? – I think that people, when asked about violence, think exclusively about physical violence. However, violence can be psychological, economic, sexual... and I don’t think that there is a single person who hasn’t experienced some sort of violence. Perhaps she or he did not recognise it, but I am sure that there are some sorts of violence in every family, in every marriage.

I cannot answer whether or not my mother or grandmother were exposed to violence, since they have never spoken about it. They never complained about physical violence, though this does not mean that they did not experience it. And I am sure that they were exposed to some sorts of verbal violence (criticism, insults, accusations). When it comes to physical violence in my marriage, I have made it clear to my husband that I would not allow it. I am financially independent, well-educated,

and theoretically familiar with various forms of domestic violence, the centres that support victims of domestic violence, safe houses, SOS numbers, and I also have my parents' support – if something in my marriage is not working, I can count on their help, and I think that under those circumstances I am not obliged to put up with any form of violence. However, people experience psychological violence on a daily basis at work, at home, in shops, in hospitals, but they either do not recognise it or they just are not ready to react to it. They tolerate it, because many generations grew up considering it 'normal'. That is, of course, my case too.

What is your native language? – Serbian.

Do you speak any other language? – I speak English and Russian actively. My spoken German is on a basic level, and my understanding of German is on an intermediate level.

What is your citizenship/nationality? – Serbian/Serbian by origin, from Mačva.⁹

What is your religious affiliation, if you are religious? Your political views, if you have them? – I am an Orthodox Christian. I am politically unaffiliated. In the 1990s I had to be politically active because of my job. I even got to relatively high positions.

What is your astrological sign? – Gemini, with ascendant in Pisces, born in the year of the Dog in the Chinese zodiac.

Do you have any pets? What is your favourite sport? – My favourite sport is tennis (I never played it, but as a 14-year-old I spent hours and hours in front of the TV watching the matches of Boba Živojinović, Bruno Orešar, Goran Ivanišević, and nowadays Novak Đoković), and I also used to play chess (I am a former member of a chess club called Srem from Sremska Mitrovica). I do not have pets because I believe that all animals should be free.

What is your favourite colour/favourite place? – I like to go to my parents' home. I always feel cosy and at home there. In my wardrobe, red, white, brown, black, and pastel colours dominate.

Art, movies, music – what do you enjoy? – I love music, but I dislike turbo-folk, heavy metal, and hard rock. I hardly follow rap, though I like some of the lyrics. I follow the work of the young Russian, Marina Devyatova, who is trying to save Russian folk music from being forgotten. I played the accordion before I started my studies. I rarely watch movies because of a lack of time and because I cry at every sad scene, but I was the most impressed by the movies *Kramer vs. Kramer*, *Dreams*, and *The Knife*.

How would you briefly describe your personality? – I am responsible, flexible, creative, devoted, joyful, friendly, communicative, and ambitious. I respect hard work and fairness, and I like to travel.

⁹ Mačva is a geographical and historical region situated in the northwest of Central Serbia. It is located in the fertile plain between the Sava and Drina rivers.

What are your main values in life? – The most important things for me are my son, the health of the people I love, and my own health.

What is your life philosophy? – When you are in trouble, refer to proverbs.

What are your plans and perspectives? – Perhaps doing a doctorate.

What concerns you the most? – All those things I don't feel right about and I am not in the position to do anything about.

Are you satisfied with your life? – I am very satisfied.

What bothers you? What would you change in your life? – I don't like to run, or to wash the dishes. I don't like violence, or fraud, not only in my own life, but in general. And if I had more free time, I would read more books, see more movies, play more music, and travel more.

Can you name a negative trait of yours? – I am sure I have many of them, but only the people who know me well can talk about it. In my opinion, perhaps it is too much persistence in proving to others that I am right, and sometimes it borders on stubbornness.

How do you spend your free time if you have it? – I read books, learn new things, and watch tennis. I like to play and spend time with children because of their honesty, immediacy, energy, and ideas. It relaxes me so much and recharges me, so the time spent with them is like an anti-stress therapy for me. When I was a child I used to collect paper napkins and I was very proud of my collection, but today that hobby cannot have the same charm because there are now stores where you can buy them, even piece by piece. My hobby nowadays is to learn to count up to ten in the native language of every country that I visit, and to learn a few phrases like 'good morning', 'good evening', 'hello'... Up to now, the only place I could not manage it was in Tunisian Arabic.

Do you have a favourite culinary recipe? – I don't have one (White chicken stew with extra rice*).

Which aspect of yourself would you give to a mutant Tanja Ostojić? – My warm Slavic soul and my will to help another person whenever I am able to.

**Tanja Ostojić,
b. 4 August 1972 in
Titovo Užice, Serbia,
Yugoslavia; lives in
Maribor, Slovenia**

What is your occupation? – I am trained as a schoolteacher, but I don't work in my profession.

Where did you go to school? – The University for Pedagogy in Užice.

Are you employed? – I don't have a permanent job; I work occasionally in a restaurant in Slovenia. My plan is to open a flower shop of my own in September; for that, I bought a new space two months ago. I have been working as a florist for ten years in Užice, where I had a flower shop.

Are you satisfied with your job? – So-so, not too much at the moment.

Where do you currently live? – I lived in Užice until 2012, and I have been registered in Maribor for one year (since 2013).

What were the reasons for moving? – In 2010 I moved to Prague because of my daughter's education, and I moved to Maribor in 2013 for my job.

Did the war and breakup of Yugoslavia affect your life and if so, in what manner? – Definitely, yes. One of my best friends got killed. Our youth and carefreeness were cut short.

Is the family name Ostojić your name by birth or by marriage? – I got the name Ostojić by marriage in 1992, and I kept it even after my divorce.

After changing your last name by marriage, did you get used to it easily? – Yes, I have.

What were the circumstances you grew up in? What are your parents' names and their vocations? – I lived with my dad and mom in the city of Užice. My dad, Spasoje, a mechanical technician, was a hardworking man. My mom was a teacher by calling, but she worked as an accountant in the local Car and Motor Association in Krčagovo.

Do you live with someone or alone? – I lived with my sister and her children in Užice. I am divorced, and my sister is a widow. Here in Slovenia, where I work temporarily, I live with my female colleagues on the restaurant premises.

Do you have any children? – I have a daughter who was born in 1996. She is in her first year of secondary school for interior design in Prague. She is 17 years old.

Are you happy with your family situation? – I am not happy with my family situation, but that's life. We arrange the housework really well among us. I share



A Skype video-conversation with Tanja Ostojić, April 2014. Screen-shot: Tanja Ostojić (Berlin)

the chores with my sister, who works in shifts in the *Prvi Partizan*.¹⁰ I also had a good organisation of house chores with my ex-husband, even though men are usually 'on the bench' when it comes to that.

Are you happy with your sex life? – I am very happy with it.

Have you or someone in your family ever experienced violence? – Yes, I have, and so have my mother and my sister. We experienced being slapped in the face on a daily basis. For Balkan Serbs, it is a normal thing. That was the reason for my divorce. It didn't happen every day, but occasionally. And verbal violence was a regular thing. And women being women, we keep quiet and back down. It is never you who is right, but always him. My Saša never drank, but he has a short fuse. That is just a part of life...

What is your native language? – Serbian.

Do you speak any other language? – A bit of Slovenian, under certain circumstances.

¹⁰ *Prvi Parizan* is a weapon production company based in Užice. Working conditions are very hard. People work in three shifts (day and night) in the factory underground. Most of those employed work for years via a student organisation, which means that they are only temporarily employed, receive half or minimum wage, and do not get any benefits – no employment or unemployment benefits, nor health insurance, etc.

What is your citizenship/nationality? – Yugoslavian/Serbian.

What is your religious affiliation, if you are religious? Your political stripes? – I am Orthodox Christian. And no political stripes.

What is your astrological sign? – Leo, and the Rat in the Chinese zodiac.

Do you have any pets/sports that you like? – Always: cats, dogs, and parrots. I used to practice yoga for a while, and I would like to start again. I don't like aggressive sports because I have asthma.

What is your favourite colour/favourite place? – Yellow, orange, and the colour of cyclamen. All of Užice.

What do you enjoy doing most? – I enjoy music, any kind of music that suits me. I listen to the radio, to cassettes, and I like to sing. I read many books.

How would you briefly describe yourself? – I am very interesting, I always laugh, I am very kind, positive, and very stubborn.

What keeps you going? What is your life philosophy? – Love. I believe in destiny, and that everything that happens is pre-destined.

What are your greatest wishes, plans, and perspectives? – To fall in love, and to have another daughter. And to open a flower shop, which is what I am currently working on.

What concerns you the most? – Illness, in general.

Are you satisfied with your life? – At the moment, about 90%, with another 10% to be achieved.

What bothers you; what would you change in your life? – I only need the right man beside me. Everything must come together, in space and time. I cannot have a shop now because there are other things to be done before that. Everything is developing well.

Can you name a negative trait of yours? – Stubbornness.

How do you spend your free time if you have it? – I read books, currently *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. I enjoy taking walks.

Do you have a favourite culinary recipe? – I have made and sold pies,* *baklava*, and *urmašice** in Užice. I like to cook and bake, and I have many favourite recipes (*orasnice**).

What aspect of yourself would you give to a mutant Tanja Ostojić? – Everything, my behind, my waist, my bosom, no problem [*laughter*].



A visit to the design studio *Vitra*, and one day in the company of Tanja Ostojić, a math teacher in Lörrach, Germany, October 2012. Photo: unknown author

Tanja Ostojić,¹¹ b. 19 August 1972 in Titovo Užice, Serbia, Yugoslavia; lives in Berlin, Germany

What is your occupation? – I am a freelance artist.

Where did you study? – I earned my BA and my MA at the University of Arts in Belgrade. I studied contemporary art on E.R.B.A.N. in Nantes, France, and I am currently a fellow in the Graduate Forum of the University of Arts in Berlin.

Are you employed? – I have been working as a freelance artist for 20 years now. I exhibit my artwork at international exhibitions around Europe and in the Americas. I participate in performance-, video-, and film-festivals, as well as at professional symposia, and hold lectures and workshops at art schools internationally. I am also involved in cultural activism.

¹¹ The author.

How satisfied are you with your job? – I do what I believe in, even though one never knows what is coming next. Working relationships in this field are not defined, and one always has to negotiate. I find it difficult that I am often expected to do my work without any compensation, or for extremely low compensation. It is also difficult, especially nowadays in the global economic crisis, to feed a family and to provide fair conditions for the realisation of artistic projects.

Where do you live now? – I have been living in Berlin since 2003. I have moved many times.

What were the reasons for moving? – In early childhood, the reason was the movement of my parents due to my father's work, and also my health reasons, then later education, and professional activities, art projects, and also marriage.

What were the important places you moved to and the crucial years? – 1972, from Titovo Užice to Titograd; 1974, to Belgrade; October 1998, Nantes, France; July 1999, Belgrade; August 1999, Paris; December 1999, Ljubljana; May 2001, Belgrade; March 2002, Düsseldorf; autumn 2003, Berlin, where I am still based today.

Did the war and the breakup of Yugoslavia affect your life? – They have affected traumatically my inner landscape, as well as my political and cultural identity.

Is the family name Ostojić your name by birth or by marriage? – I was born Ostojić, and I have not changed my last name by marriage or divorce.

What were the circumstances in which you grew up? – I grew up in a nice urban part of New Belgrade, in a modern Socialist family with one sibling. My brother, four years younger than me, was five times the champion of the Balkans in kickboxing, and vice-champion of the world. He is now a father of three, a football manager, and works for FIFA. I had a happy childhood; I spent a lot of time also at my grandparents' in Pranjani and on Zlatibor. I was the entire neighbourhood's sweetheart. But somehow the medical misdiagnosis that was given to me when I was two years old, the related stay in hospital, and certain family and social traumas, problematic stereotypes and problematic behaviour patterns imposed on me left a harsh mark, so to say. It took me ages to process this and to liberate myself from it, as an adolescent and as a young adult.

What are your parents' names and their occupations? – My father, Milan, who was a pilot – and a lieutenant colonel – is now retired. He graduated from the air force academies in Mostar and Pula, and he initially worked as a military pilot and flight instructor on Orao and MIG-21 planes. In the late 1980s he moved to the National Flight Control headquarters in Belgrade, where he flew a special airplane serving flight control needs. My mother, Milomirka-Mila Ostojić, née Djerić, who was a generous person, in her youth was a successful gymnast from a working family in Titovo Užice, where she taught gymnastics until she got married. For the first ten years of her marriage she did not work, but she took care of me and my brother,

and of the household. Since she finished textile school, she started working in Yugoexport, which was a very successful state-owned company for elite women's fashions, from about the time when I was nine years old, but she kept doing almost all the housework on her own. My mom also finished a part-time college programme for trade and commerce in the 1990s. Her company, which she identified with very much, was traumatically degraded by privatisation. She died very young, at the age of 55.

Do you live with someone or alone? – I live with my son.

How old is your child? – I have a son who is six years old now and who successfully finished first grade in public elementary school in Berlin-Mitte. He has a good heart and is a wonderful, talented, creative, intelligent, and eloquent being.

Are you satisfied with your family situation? – Sometimes I have had the impression that it is hard to come to terms with a child and with everyday life without a family infrastructure, especially when you are alone in a foreign country. Grandmothers, aunts, godmother, and neighbours on whom my mother could rely – we don't have any of that here. Most of my friends without children live in a different kind of reality. But I have to say that I am happy that my son's father feels increasingly confident in taking more care of him as the years go on, and that I don't have to worry when our son stays with him, so that I can devote time to my work, and finally have some time for myself, too. I try to raise my son to take on responsibilities in the household, which is not easy considering that he spends most of his time inside his own world of phantasy.

How satisfied are you with your sex life? – I feel more mature, and I know and love my body more since I turned 40. But I somehow find it difficult to meet people with whom I would match in sensibility, dedication, and perception.

Have you (or anyone else in your family) experienced physical or verbal violence?

– Unfortunately, yes. My late grandmother, Mira, my father's mother, was verbally and probably sometimes even physically molested by her husband, my late grandfather, Nedeljko, who was a notable man in the village, but he also liked to drink. I remember a scene from my childhood where my grandfather chased my grandmother around the dining-room table while she was feeding me a banana. Then we all ran in a circle like in some theatre show. I remember that my grandfather, whom I loved indefinitely until I reached puberty, also used to curse sometimes. My father was occasionally demanding and to create an atmosphere of pressure he sometimes gave orders or yelled. It was a sort of verbal violence in which I grew up, even though I never heard my parents fighting. It was hard for me to bear his excessive raising of his voice, and also the pressure to do something according to his military regime. Unlike my mother and my brother, I used to confront him. I remember my grandmother and mother telling me that I don't have to get married, and my grandma advised me to watch who I fell in love with, and watch what his

family is like, ‘because men are different before and after uniting in marriage’, she said. In one of my relationships – luckily a short one – I had to put up with someone who twisted my arguments and who didn’t have respect for my borders, which can also be defined as veiled violence.

What is your native language? – Serbian.

Do you speak any other language? – I am comfortable with English that I use daily, and I have started to gain more confidence in German. I also speak French and Slovenian, and a little bit of Italian, Spanish, and Russian.

What is your citizenship/nationality? – Serbian, with permanent residence in Germany.

What are your religious affiliation/political views? – I am a feminist with leftist, humanistic, and pacifist views. I support the ideas of people who do not have access to political rights, and I admire political engagement by anarcho-syndicalists and nature protectionists. I believe in love and solidarity, and I engage against all kinds of discrimination and racisms.

What is your astrological sign? – Leo, with ascendant in Virgo, and the Rat in the Chinese zodiac.

Do you have any pets? Any sports that you like? – During my studies, I had a Russian greyhound, Luna, to whom I was greatly attached. Her death was really hard to bear. That is why I passed on to plants. I grow many plants on my balcony, in my apartment and in my garden. That is very fulfilling. I like low-tech sports in the open and in nature, most of all swimming (in the sea, lakes, and rivers), hiking, and badminton. As a teenager I used to go scuba diving in the summer, skiing in winter, and always yoga. I use a bicycle for my daily transportation in the city, unless the distances are too long and the weather conditions too difficult. I started learning a bit of horse riding and tennis in the past two years with my kid, and also climbing trees, walls, and rocks. I used to practice Tai chi until I gave birth, and I would like to return to it again. I practice Zen yoga.

What is your favourite colour/favourite place? – In general, I like bright colours and different conditions of light. I like vibrations and energy reflected by some colours and colour combinations: Purple and orange, mustard yellow, shades of burnt sienna, the colour of cherries, burgundy, the colour of plums, antique rose, turquoise... There are many landscapes that I am in love with, and that I like to go back to: mountain peaks, sea and ocean coasts, river banks, the authentic narrow streets of Mediterranean cities, rooms with nourished energy and beautiful lighting in which I have spent some intimate time. Deep-red façades in the old town of Naples in the strong morning sun; La Calanque, the national park in Marseille in the South of France, which is my spiritual home, so to say; the birch-tree forest that belongs to my aunt Lela in the village of Buar, in the area of Užice; Oderbruch (an area near the German-Polish border), and my friend Ellen’s aunt’s house – with a beautiful

collection of blue decorated ceramics from Dresden; the estuary of the River Sava into the Danube; the soft landscapes of Zlatibor that remind me of my childhood; my balcony in Berlin overgrown with spices, herbs, and flowers...

Art, movies, music – what do you enjoy? – I enjoy dancing, in the kitchen, as well as to live music. I partly follow contemporary art, alternative theatre, and documentary film. I like authentic ethno, soul, and Romani music, amazing female voices, Marie Boine, Billie Holiday, free-jazz, Django Reinhardt, Jimi Hendrix, Šaban Bajramović... How would you briefly describe your personality? – My main virtues are: courage, self-confidence, engagement, empathy, responsibility, reliability, uncompromisingness. I love with all my heart. I am a mother, artist, feminist, intellectual, fighter for justice, always in process and development.

What are your main values in life? Your life philosophy? – Be true to one’s heart. Love and solidarity. Let us emancipate and decolonise ourselves and in that way improve the quality of our lives.

What are your greatest wishes, plans, and perspectives? – I admire the generosity of my six-year-old son who, whenever an opportunity arises to make one wish, wishes that everyone lives well all around the world, and that there is no war, rather than to wish for a new Lego set for himself. And if there is a chance for a second wish, he wishes that no animals get killed or tortured, but die of only natural causes. So, my wishes are also sometimes very ambitious, but sometimes very simple, whether they concern humankind, community, or my private life and work. In the next two years, I hope to finish this book, find a way to organise creative workshops for Tanjas Ostojić, and to improve my German. To begin a PhD, gain a stable teaching position or something similar, so that I can provide for my family’s existence. And if I get old and preserve my vitality, who knows, maybe some of my wishes will come true, and I will live by some water in a house with a garden, in exchange with an engaged community, sit next to a fire more often, learn Romani language, go horse riding now and then, learn tango and Romani dances, read revolutionary and feminist literature, learn to sew and weave, make my own clothes sometimes, have a chance to work in a pottery workshop once in a while, learn to play a string instrument, perhaps, etc. What worries you the most? – The unscrupulous corrupted political elite all over the world. Capitalist and religious discrimination and exploitation of children, women, men, animals, and natural resources worldwide. Consumerism, exploitation, and pollution that is destroying rare plants and animal species, human lives, the ozone layer, and our planet Earth.

Are you satisfied with your life? – I am very satisfied, and aware that my position is a privileged one in comparison with that of many other people. That is why being in solidarity with the ones who need it via artistic, political, or social engagement is very important to me. I also try to work on myself and on my relationships with those

who are close to me. Life is a process, and even if I have done a lot, and I am proud of many things, I feel I am only about halfway [smiles].

What would you change in your life? – The speed and the consumption. I also think that it is important to speak up about problems because in that way we create conditions to change what we don't like when it is time for a change.

Can you name a negative trait of yours? – It might happen that I get upset or stressed out sometimes, and I must admit that I even cry both for sad and happy fairytales and movies.

How do you spend your free time if you have it? – I spend a lot of time reading goodnight books to my son and talking to him. There is never enough time for all of my interests and the needs of my soul, for enjoyment in nature, social life, gardening, learning languages, reading feminist literature, activism, going to movies, theatre, dance...

What is your favourite culinary recipe? – I like to prepare healthy and tasty food and bread daily, and I have many favourite recipes, both modern and traditional ones. I adapt, combine, and make new recipes all by myself. Only on special occasions do I have time to prepare complicated and demanding recipes, like my mother's Black Torte, *Schwarzwald Kirsch Kuchen*, Slovenian walnut strudel, etc. (Watermelon Cocktail* and Gnocchi with Sage*).

What aspect of yourself would you give to a mutant Tanja Ostojić? – Perhaps my creativity and curiosity, and my heart chakra, including courage, sensitivity to injustice, empathy and love, but also my body, in which I feel confident.

**Tanja Ostojić,
b. 29 June 1976 in
Goražde, BiH (Bosnia
and Herzegovina),
Yugoslavia; lives in
Vinča, near Belgrade,
Serbia**

What is your occupation? – I am a therapist.

Where did you go to school? – I have a university degree: two-year post-secondary school of Medicine in Zemun.

Are you employed? – I work as a therapist in a prison hospital in Belgrade.



First encounter between two Tanjas Ostojić, both born 1976 in Goražde (BiH), who came to Serbia as refugees in the 1990s, in Belgrade, January 2017. Photo: Marija Piroški

Are you satisfied with your job? – I am satisfied with it. It is something I always wanted to do! The salary could be higher, but at least it's regular, and that is a huge success! My relationship with my colleagues is very good.

Have you always lived in the same place since you were born? – During my childhood and school years, I lived in Rudo until 1991, then in Sarajevo, where I went to secondary school (1991–92), and then in 1992, when the war in Bosnia started, I went to Zemun as a refugee. Now I live in Vinča, near Belgrade.

How did the war and the breakup of Yugoslavia affect your life? – Warrrrrrr, as people here say, may it never happen again... I lived as a refugee in a student home in Zemun, illegally at my brother's place. He weighed just 50kg and unloaded sacks that were as heavy as he was, so that we could buy coupons for meals in the student canteen. We didn't know what was happening to our parents and our sister in Bosnia for six months. It is over now, and may it never happen again.

Is the family name Ostojić your name by birth or by marriage? – I was born Tanja Cvijović and took the family name Ostojić by marriage in 1988.

Did you get used to your last name easily? – Yes, I love it.

What were the circumstances you grew up in? – I had a happy childhood in Rudo, where my parents and relatives still live today.

What are the names of your parents and their occupations? – My father, Tomislav, is a Serbian literature and language school teacher, and my mother, Nevenka, is a tailor and a housewife.

Do you live with someone or alone? – I am married.

Do you have any children? How old are they, and what do they do? – I have two sons, 14 and 12 years old, and now I am planning to have a daughter. My elder son has started attending high school for economics.

Are you satisfied with your family situation? With your children, housework, relationship with your partner? – I am happy with my family situation, with my children, husband, with everything. I don't know what to say about housework: I live with three men, so there is a lot to do in the household. But the boys are always around; I cannot complain: they sometimes help out, and they are really good. We are building a house, and the boys do a lot of outside work! We are doing great, thank God.

Are you satisfied with your sex life? – I am happy with my sex life, too.

Have you (or anyone else) in your family experienced violence? – Fortunately, I never experienced physical violence.

What is your native language? – Serbian.

Do you speak any other language? – Unfortunately, I do not speak any other language.

What is your citizenship/nationality? – Serbian citizenship, Serbian nationality.

Your religious affiliation? – Orthodox Christian.

What is your astrological sign? – Capricorn, ascendant in Capricorn, too.

Do you have any pets? Any sports that you prefer? – I have an American Staffordshire terrier, Cesar, my little sunshine; we all love him. I don't have a favourite sport at the moment, but my sons really like football and basketball, and so I follow those sports with them. Apart from that, I used to like volleyball and handball.

What is your favourite colour/favourite place? – My favourite colour is red, and my favourite place is Budva (in Montenegro).

Art, film, music – what do you enjoy? – I like to watch movies, and I like music, too.

How would you briefly describe your personality? – I would say that I am a joyful, kind, honest person, who would not get in the way if I could not help.

What is your life philosophy? – My life motto is: Have faith and look forward.

What are your greatest wishes? – I have modest wishes. I only wish for a normal life for my children, a job, and peace.

What concerns you the most? – The situation in this country.

Are you satisfied with your life? – My life is wonderful.

What bothers you? What would you change in your life? – I wouldn't change anything – except for higher salaries, of course.

Can you name a negative trait of yours? – Lack of self-confidence.

How do you spend your free time, if you have any? – I don't have much free time, but I like to go shopping with my children; that is very fulfilling. Or I go to my sister or to my brother for a visit.

Do you have a favourite culinary recipe? – At the moment I don't know any, although I cook all the time, because my boys eat like crazy. (Bird's Nest Cake).

What aspect of yourself would you give to a mutant Tanja Ostojić? – I would give my knees for Tanja Ostojić.

**Tanja Ostojić Petrović,
b. 7 September 1976
in Goražde, BiH,
Yugoslavia; lives in
Zemun, Serbia**

What is your occupation? – I am a construction engineer.

What are your vocational qualifications? Where did you go to school? – I have a university degree, from the two-year post-secondary school for construction in Užice.

Are you employed? – I work in my profession, in a small private construction-investment company in Belgrade.

Are you satisfied with your job? – The job itself is not bad, but the crisis took over, and one can feel tension at work. The work is not gruelling but everything is on my shoulders, and that bothers me a lot. Even when I am on vacation, the boss calls me to ask all kinds of questions. The feeling that I have to be at work all the time is already too much. The salary is not that satisfying, but I am happy with the interpersonal relationships and the company, and with what my job brings. We build buildings, so I go to the construction sites. I have a good relationship with the construction workers. I don't feel that I am above them, even if I am better educated than they are: instead, I try to learn something from them when I see that they know something. And as for the director: being director is above everything, so everything he says is to be respected, whether or not he is right. I have never had conflicts due to my gender, at least not in my company.

Where do you live? Have you been living in the same place your entire life? – I was born in Goražde in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the former Yugoslavia. When the

war began, I came with my family to the mountain Zlatibor as a refugee. Today I live in Zemun.

What were your reasons for moving? – The reason was the war. We left Goražde as refugees.

What were the places you moved to, and the crucial years? – In 1992, my family moved to Zlatibor (Partizanske Vode), and that was where I finished secondary school (I lived in a boarding school in Užice during the school week), and later from 1995 to 2005 I lived on Zlatibor, then since 2005 in Belgrade, and since 2008 in Zemun.

How did the war and the breakup of Yugoslavia affect your life? – We had to leave Goražde. My dad found a job at a security contractor's production in Užice, so that we could survive the period as refugees. Later my mom started working on Zlatibor. We didn't make any profit, but we managed to survive, since we could not go back to Goražde. Our parents were able to finance our studies. My brother graduated from university in mechanical engineering, and I graduated in civil engineering.

Is the family name Ostojić your name by birth, or by marriage? – I was born Ostojić, and I took the last name Petrović by marriage in the year 2007.

When you changed your last name by marriage, did you get used to it easily? – I felt sorry to lose my last name. But it was too long to add another name to it, so I decided to take my husband's last name, Petrović. Now I am used to it, and I don't think about it anymore.

What were the circumstances in which you grew up? – I grew up with my brother, mom, and dad in an ordinary, average family. Even though my father was a director we weren't that rich, but average. We had a house of our own. I think we were Communists, and Serbs by ethnicity.

Did your parents also have access to education? – My mom finished secondary school, and my father has a university degree.

Do you live alone or with someone? – I am married, and I live with my husband and children. I have a three-year-old daughter and five-year-old son.

Are you satisfied with your family situation? With your children, housework, your relationship with your partner? – I am. I have accomplished the role of mother: I have a family and two children. Sometimes it goes well, sometimes not so well, but it works out somehow. My husband is willing to help. He cooks, goes shopping, and we work equally depending on free time, situation, and mood. The grandmother also helps when it comes to watching the children, especially before they started kindergarten. I see that nowadays when everything is going very fast, and there isn't much time to slow down, there are more and more men who are willing to share in the housework so that they could have more time for nicer things together.



Fresh-squeezed fruit juices, a promenade along the Danube riverbank in Zemun, Serbia, and a talk with Tanja Ostojić-Petrović, June 2013. Photo: unknown author

Are you satisfied with your sex life? – Well, that is something I am the most satisfied with. In comparison to everything else that is missing, from materiality to spirituality, I can say that I am happy with my sex life.

Have you (or anyone else in your family) experienced physical or verbal violence? – No.

What is your native language? – Serbian.

Do you speak any other language? – English, on an intermediate level.

What is your citizenship/nationality? – I have dual nationality: Bosnian, and of the Republic of Serbia. I am Serbian.

What is your religious affiliation, if you are religious? Your political stripes? – I am Orthodox Christian. I am not that religious. I respect some traditions; we have a family patron saint's day once a year. I grew up under Communism, with the idea of fraternity and unity. Now everything is different. My political stripes? Always the opposition.

What is your astrological sign? – Virgo, with ascendant in Leo; Dragon in the Chinese zodiac.

Are there sports that you like? – I like all kinds of sports; I usually watch the finals for titles.

What is your favourite colour/favourite place? – From time to time, I change my favourite colour: now I am in transition from purple to red. I love water: it relaxes me, and it suits me. I am happy to go to the Zemun quay, or Ada, to walk by the river. I like to go to Greece: Halkidiki is my favourite destination, with a pure, turquoise sea. Art, movies, music – what do you enjoy? – I have no talent for art, but I like to see a good exhibition or to go to the theatre whenever there is an opportunity. I love sci-fi movies. I like all kinds of music, except for folk; lately, I enjoy pop-rock and chill-out music.

How would you briefly describe your personality? – I see myself as a positive person, mostly flexible, and a bit lazy.

What are your main values in life? What moves you? – My family is the most important thing; peace and health; and the functionality of society. I wish that the system of values wasn't so twisted, because we as individuals are not protected from everything that happens around us.

What are your greatest wishes? Your plans and perspectives? – I wish to travel around the world, to experience different nations, big cities, and also rural areas. When my working life is over, if the financial situation allows, that is what I would love to do: to travel everywhere.

What concerns you the most? – I am chronically tired: I have many things piled up, many responsibilities over the past five years. I don't have time for anything, and everything became difficult for me, and that makes me apathetic.

Are you satisfied with your life? – I am not satisfied yet. I feel I skipped some things in my life, often out of laziness I missed some chances, and now one might say I am paying for it. Maybe in the future, I will manage to fix it somehow, but now I am just not happy.

What bothers you? What would you change in your life? – My chronic fatigue and exhaustion bother me, and the fact that I don't have time and strength for some of the nicer things in life.

Can you name a negative trait of yours? – Laziness.

How do you spend your free time if you have it? – I don't have much free time.

I wish I could take a rest from everyday work. Otherwise, I spend time with my children, and I wish I could practice yoga, go swimming, and learn to rollerblade.

Do you have a favourite culinary recipe? – I love sweets and homemade cookies.*

What aspect of yourself would you give to a mutant Tanja Ostojić? – Even though I am not that happy with myself, there is one thing I would single out, and that would be my fingernails. They remained the same for so long, strong and beautiful. They don't need special care, just a classic manicure and a nice colour to look good.



A promenade in Košutnjak, and a conversation between two artistically inclined souls over a cup of tea, with Tanja Ostojić, animal rights activist and lawyer, Belgrade, January 2013. Photo: waiter

Tanja Ostojić,
b. 1 June 1979 in
Titograd, Montenegro,
Yugoslavia; lives in
Belgrade, Serbia

What is your occupation? – I am a lawyer.

Where did you study? – I graduated in law, at the Faculty of Law, University of Belgrade.

Are you employed? – I work as a lawyer in my own law firm. I also work as an animal rights activist. I founded my own NGO for the protection of animals.

How satisfied are you with your work? – Law is definitely a women's faculty: there are more women than men studying there. But it is hard to be a woman in this profession. Somehow, it is as if people have *a priori* more trust in men than in women lawyers. For a man, it is enough to put on a tie and wear a suit, carry a briefcase, and instantly he's Mister Lawyer, regardless of whether he knows his job or not. Clients

seem to be guarded towards women. No matter how well I dress. Of course, I always go to work dressed decently, the way I should. There is a bit of restraint, I can feel it. They always somehow trust men more. Men get jobs that are a bit better. But my job is not my identity. I would like to change my career. I passed the exam to be a public notary, and now I am waiting to find out the results of the competition. Working with people is very stressful for me. I can no longer listen to other people's problems. It is a big issue for me. I would like to sit, write out the legal documents, and go to trials. Since I work with my bridesmaid as a partner in my business, I ask her to take clients, because I just can't do it anymore. So we split the work, and now I'm looking to change. I am really under a lot of stress all the time and it's hard. I take it all very personally. Both the successes and the failures at work, and it eats me up. Have you been living in the same place your entire life? – I have lived in Belgrade since 1997. I came here from Podgorica,¹² my birthplace, first to study, and then I stayed for my work.

Did the war and the breakup of Yugoslavia affect your life? – I was pretty young when all that took place. My dad was not in the war; he was in Montenegro because of business, and my uncle was in the war, so I was stressed because of that, but thankfully he came back alive and well. So I didn't feel it all that much. But the NATO bombings in 1999 were more of a problem. I was here at the time, studying. I left on the second day, and I travelled to Montenegro for 24 hours by train. Bombs were falling around us while we were on the train. That was the last train that left. After that, they bombed the railway for two days. It was stressful, as stressful as it could be. We survived of course, got out and moved on. It was not something that left a mark. The only thing I remember was that during the bombings, we used to have a great time in the cafés in the evenings, like it was the last day of our lives. Never in my life was I at so many parties.

Did you get the last name Ostojić by birth, or by marriage? – I was born Novaković, and I became Ostojić by marriage in 2006. I took my husband's last name out of tradition.

Did you get used to your new family name easily? – It was strange and difficult for me to get used to my new last name for the first two years of marriage, because I had been Novaković my whole life. That was a really big problem for me, and it was hard for me to spit it out. Even my husband would say Tanja Novaković when giving someone my full name. I would say, 'didn't I take your last name?' He would bite his tongue. A couple of times he said: 'Dejan Ostojić, Tanja No...' Now I'm used to it and I don't have a problem with it.

What were the circumstances in which you grew up (childhood, ethnic and social background)? – I grew up in Podgorica, in a middle class family with my parents, my

¹² Podgorica is the current name of the former Titograd.

brother, and my grandmother on my father's side. My dad is from Montenegro, my mother from Kraljevo (Serbia). The division of labour in our house was traditional. The man does not do housework – that's out of the question. That's how it is: my grandmother raised him like that, and that's it. I used to say that I love my father and my brother, but I would never marry a Montenegrin, no way. My mother is a famous lawyer in Montenegro, people know her. She doesn't clean. They have a woman who cleans at home. There are a couple of restaurants nearby where they buy food and bring it home. My mom cooks well when she has time. She cooks when we come over and prepares a *slava*.¹³ She does all of that, but physically she cannot accomplish it usually because she works literally 12 hours a day sometimes.

What are your parents' names and what do they do for a living? – My mother is a lawyer, an attorney. She used to be a higher court judge for a long time, but after the 1990s, when the crisis began, she became a lawyer. She has no intention of retiring. She keeps complaining that she will, but she won't – I know her. Dad worked as a technician at the radio broadcasting centre. He worked a lot during the crises. He has a gift for fixing whatever he gets his hands on. The only question is if he wants to. He did mostly private work at that time, and that was how we supported ourselves. Now it is a very different time, and now my mom works much more. He quit, took his severance pay, and now he is waiting for his pension. My parents built a house of 200 square metres in Kolašin. My father did everything himself with workers.

Are you living with your husband? – Yes, I am married and live with my husband Dejan. We do not have any children yet.

Are you satisfied with your family situation? Housework, relationship with your partner? – I'm not satisfied with the fact that we don't have children. I have been working on that for five years, but it doesn't seem to be working. I'm not one of those women who suffer because they have to have a child at all costs. I would like to have one, and we will do everything we can, but it will not be some kind of tragedy in our lives if we don't manage.

My husband works at a power plant from 7am until 3pm. When it comes to the division of housework, whatever I ask him to do, he says he's working, he gets up at 5am, and he can't do it. On the other hand, I can go to work earlier or later, or leave for a few hours, which is why I do all the work around the house. Still, we have managed to make some kinds of arrangements lately, so I can say that we now split the housework evenly.

Have you (or anyone in your family) experienced physical or verbal violence? – No. My father is a Montenegrin, and he is difficult. I got slapped on the butt sometimes as a small child, but family violence in the sense of abuse, or fighting – no, really never.

¹³ Family patron saint's days, annual celebration.

My father and mother of course argue, just as my husband and I argue, but there was never any physical conflict.

How satisfied are you with your sex life? – Well, it’s all right, I’m satisfied. I can’t complain.

Native language? – Serbian.

Do you speak any other language? – English, Italian, and I understand Russian.

Citizenship/nationality? – I have dual citizenship of Montenegro and of Serbia. I am Montenegrin, and Serbian by nationality.

What is your faith, if you are religious? And what are your political views, if you have them? – I am an Orthodox Christian, but I am certain that faith is within us, and not in churches, with priests. Politically I am neutral, and I criticise every political party.

What is your astrological sign? – Gemini, with Leo ascendant, and the Ram in the Chinese zodiac.

Do you have pets? – I do have pets: they are my four-legged children: Čeda, Čupa, Ročko, Mališić, Danilo, and Milivoje. They are two dogs and four tomcats, all saved from certain death.

Is there a sport you like? – I watch tennis, swimming, and figure-skating.

What is your favourite colour? – I don’t have a favourite colour. I like calm tones.

Your favourite place? – Kolašin, a fairy-tale house, where I can hear myself and get a good night’s sleep.

Art, film, music – what do you enjoy? – I flirt with poetry and painting. I love movies: psychological thrillers, good comedies, but I don’t like drama or movies that remind me of reality. When I watch a movie, I want to have fun and relax, not to leave even more depressed. My husband plays music in his free time, so it is ever-present in our lives. I personally love classical and renaissance music. I listen to it all day.

How would you describe yourself as a person in a few words? – That’s complicated, because on the one hand I am very active, I have a lot of obligations, and I try to put all of that together inside me, but on the other, I love married life and my husband, who is completely different from me. He is not really up for walks and adventures. Sometimes I can’t hear myself to know who I am. I need a moment of rest. I am temperamental, different from my parents. When I come home they say, ‘when you come in, it’s like a tornado entered.’ And when I come, I ask, ‘did you have a fight or something?’ My mom is on the computer, my dad is doing something, and my brother is in his room with his headphones on, Skyping with his girlfriend. They don’t talk to each other for two or three hours. Of course, sometimes there is a period when I need to be home alone, when I don’t feel like going out. Then again, there are periods when I just can’t settle down, when I would just like to go somewhere. Especially since I have a lot of obligations with these animals, so I spend the entire afternoon outside. I wouldn’t be able to live if there was only peace and quiet.

What are your main values in life? Your life philosophy? – I am happy to listen to myself in the break of the everyday rush. It’s important for me to be in touch with my family, to receive and to give love. My life philosophy: love, forgiveness, helping, spiritual development toward a more humane society; empathy, empathy, empathy.

What are your greatest wishes? Your plans for the future? – I don’t like to plan: it almost never turns out that way. It is important for me to not stand in one place, but to keep going forward, to improve myself.

How satisfied are you with your life? – I am satisfied with my life, both when good and bad things happen. I see all troubles like children’s illnesses: it had to happen, and it will pass.

What bothers you? – I don’t like pettiness, folk music, or reality shows.

Can you name a negative trait of yours? – Laziness.

How do you spend your free time, if you have it? Do you have a hobby? – I write poetry, spend time with animals, and if there is time, I like to paint on canvas. If I had the time, I would live in my house at the end of a village, grow herbs and vegetables, take walks with my dogs, and travel a bit.

Do you have a favourite culinary recipe? – I am a semi-vegetarian (I still can’t give up fish), and I love cooking. (Mushroom Balls*).

What aspect of yourself would you give to a mutant Tanja Ostojić? – My curiosity, because I want to know everything about everything.

I enjoyed meeting you very much. It is interesting and something out of the ordinary. I would like to meet our other name-sisters, too.

**Tanja Ostojić,
b. 2 November 1983
in Novi Travnik, BiH,
Yugoslavia; lives in
Bratunac, Republika
Srpska, BiH**

What is your occupation? – I am a hair stylist.

Where did you go to school? – I went to elementary school in Travnik during the war, and finished school in Bijeljina part-time, after the war. And I finished school for hairstyling part-time, while I lived with my aunt in Sremska Mitrovica, which was what I wanted.

Are you employed? – I am unemployed. I work at home a bit: I cut my mother-in-law’s hair, my mother’s, and my sister-in-law’s hair, but I don’t earn anything. I used

to work while I was doing my apprenticeship, but after that, no. And I worked in Mitrovica in a hamburger place for a while. I haven't looked for a job for a while because my son was born, and then my daughter, so I had a lot of obligations with the children. And I don't have money to open my own business, because the equipment is too expensive. But hopefully, one day...

Where do you live now? Have you been living in the same place your entire life?

– In Bratunac. We moved here after the war.

What was the reason for moving? – We moved mostly because of the war-related conflicts.

Can you list the places you moved to and the defining years? – First we moved around 1996 from Novi Travnik to Bijeljina. Then my family was in Bijeljina, and I was at my aunt's place in Sremska Mitrovica. I lived with her until almost 2007; my family in the meantime moved here to Bratunac.

How did the war affect your life? – I remember very little. I was sorry that I had to leave my hometown, but I have now lived here longer than where I used to be. We were the only family of Serbian ethnicity who stayed until the end of the war, and we survived during the war thanks to the support from the Muslims who lived nearby. Since my dad owned a restaurant there for many years they protected him. Everyone else left much earlier, but we didn't. Then it happened all of a sudden. My brother had already started looking for a girlfriend and just like that, we packed one night and the next day we took a taxi early in the morning and arrived to Bijeljina. We didn't take anything except personal belongings. We stayed with my grandmother – they were refugees too – and lived in a refugee house.

Is the family name Ostojić your name by birth, or by marriage? – I was born Krstanović, and I took the last name Ostojić through marriage. I got married in 2008.

Did you get used to it easily? – I got used to it easily: it's simple and likeable.

What were the circumstances in which you grew up (childhood, city or country, ethnic and social background)? – I grew up with my mother, father, and two brothers in a village near Trvanik. We had our own house. I was the middle child. We got along well, surrounded by a lot of warmth and love. My mother took care of us, and my dad ran a restaurant. We used to help around the house as children, my brothers and I. Then the war came. It was not pleasant for a child to look at so many people without arms and legs.

What are your parents' names and what do they do for a living? – My dad, Ile, finished high school and was in the hospitality business. He had his own restaurant while we lived in Novi Travnik. There he was his own boss, and he paid for our schooling while we were there. Since coming here, everything changed. He is not registered or anything. He has worked illegally on the production of charcoal since



A conversation and a promenade with Tanja Ostojić, unemployed hairdresser, Olimp cafe, Bratunac (BiH), October 2013. Photo: waiter

we moved here. My mother, Zorana, is a housewife. She was never employed; she raised us, and that's how it stayed.

Do you live with your family? – I'm married, and my husband, Janko, is an electrician in the lead and zinc mine. We live with my in-laws in their house. They are from Bratunac, where my father-in-law's grandfather came from.

How old are your children? – I have two children: my son, Đordje, is five years old and my daughter, Milica, is three and a half. They don't go to kindergarten; they stay at home. My son is learning to read and watches TV, and my daughter is still not interested in any of that. They play with the neighbourhood children.

Are you satisfied with your family situation? Children, housework, relationship with your partner? – Yes. We live in a big household, but everyone has their own life and different mentalities. We divide the work: sometimes I cook, sometimes my mother-in-law does. I am happy with my marriage, but I would prefer that we lived alone, not depending on anyone, even if we only had one small room. But that isn't possible with only one salary. I wanted to have two children, and I have them, and I am satisfied.

How satisfied are you with your sex life? – **Very much. I think that's obvious, since I was married in 2008 and I already have two children.**

Have you (or anyone in your family) experienced physical or verbal violence? – **Well, no, no. When the war was over we had already left, and during the war we were lucky because we had support, so I didn't feel abused, nor were my parents beaten – none of that. We really didn't. A bit in school, but really nothing to speak of. Some children would call us Serbs, or *Vlasi* (Romanian minority from Eastern Serbia) – but nothing special. They didn't beat me or bully me. I didn't even go to their religion class, even though I was the only Serb, while my brother was in the other shift. And never at home. Dad was perfectly good to my mother and to us, and my husband is the same.**

What is your native language? – **Serbian.**

Do you speak any other language? – **No.**

What is your citizenship/nationality? – **Serbian nationality.**

What is your faith, if you are religious? And your political views, if you have them? – **I am Orthodox Christian, and we all go to church. We celebrate Saint John – that is the Ostojić patron saint. Only my father's father was not religious – he was a Communist. I don't have any political views.**

What is your astrological sign? – **Scorpio.**

What sports do you like? – **I don't ever watch sports; they never interested me.**

Art, film, music – what do you enjoy? – **I like songs from Krajina, because that's where I come from. I used to dance traditional dances in school. I like to dance and sing.**

What are your greatest wishes? Your plans for the future? – **I would like to find a job, no matter where, and have a place of my own, to school my children, of course, and everything that goes with it. First of all I would like to solve the issue of housing, to have something of my own.**

What worries you the most? – **Our difficult financial situation. We barely survive on 200 Euros a month.**

What bothers you, what would you change in your life? – **I would like us to be independent, to live on our own.**

How do you spend your free time, if you have it? Do you have a hobby? – **I don't have free time, but I like to go out for a coffee with girlfriends or my husband, or take the children for a walk, but this is very rare. My hobby is to cut hair, blow-dry, and colour. I enjoy it and it relaxes me. I also like cleaning and sorting things out in the household.**

Do you have a favourite culinary recipe? – **Cremissimo Cake.***

What aspect of yourself would you give to a mutant Tanja Ostojić? – **That is a good question. I would give myself completely, my soul and all. I think that is what I would give Tanja, as she is.**

**Tanja Ostojić,
b. 3 November 1983
in Banja Luka, BiH,
Yugoslavia; lives in
Banja Luka, Republika
Srpska, BiH**

What is your occupation? – **Hairdresser. But I am not in that profession anymore.**

What are your vocational qualifications? – **I finished school for hairdressers in Banja Luka.**

Are you employed? – **I work in a store, Azel Franz, a boutique chain held by a Muslim from France. I receive a minimal salary, as does everyone in our store. And I do hairdressing for free for my extended family and for some of my neighbours.**

Are you satisfied with your job? – **No, I am not, but I don't have any choice. I work seven hours a day for 300 KM a month.¹⁴ My husband and I don't have to pay electricity or accommodation: he works at a petrol station, and my in-laws help us, and still we struggle to make ends meet. We are all women at work, and our boss is the owner's spouse: it is their family business. My plan is to try to go back to my old profession, even though it is difficult to open a hairdressing salon. You must get a loan from the bank, and I don't know how I could pay it back with such a low salary.**

Where do you live now? Have you been living in the same place your entire life? – **Before I got married, I lived in Ramići, a village 14 kilometres from Banja Luka. Now we live in the Lauš quarter, in the outskirts of Banja Luka.**

Did you move, and what were the reasons? – **I never went anywhere outside Banja Luka, but I wanted to when I was younger. I don't like Banja Luka, but I never had any support to leave this town, to try somewhere else, at least to work during the summer. I myself was indecisive. I thought that I could do that later since I was young, and then came marriage and a baby. Now I don't think about it anymore. But if my children would ever want to leave, I would not stand in their way. I will support them.**

14 300 KM is approximately 150 Euros, and it represents a minimal and typical wage in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Is the family name Ostojić your name by birth, or by marriage? – Both at birth and by marriage: my husband's last name is also Ostojić. I added Ostojić to Ostojić, so now people say as a joke that I am Ostojić squared. My husband's family patron saint is Saint Nikola, while my family celebrates *Durđevdan* – Saint George's day.

What were the circumstances in which you grew up? – I grew up in a rural family: mom, dad, my brother, and I. My parents were farmers. Dad had a large pig farm, and we were one of the richer households in the village. We were doing very well until the war. Then my father was killed in 1992 and everything came to a halt. My mom struggled to raise and to educate us, to keep the household together. She is an incredibly strong woman; she did it all alone. She is my idol, and I wish I could be like her. Even now, my mother has a small garden and chickens, and she does all the work on her own.

Do you live with someone? – I have been married since 2012. I live in a family house on two floors in a household with my husband and son, and my father- and mother-in-law live under us. My husband is a refugee from Ključ.

How old is your child? – My son, Pavle Paja, is 14 months old. I would like to have more children, but under better financial circumstances.

Are you satisfied with your family situation and with the housework? I am. It's great. We all help each other, and we make a real family. I listen to some women complaining that they don't get along with their mother-in-law or sister-in-law. But we really help each other. I am the one who is working the most in the house: I cook and clean. But while I am at work, my husband watches the baby, and I watch the baby while he is working. My husband helps a bit. If nothing else, he collects toys. That's something.

Have you (or anyone else in your family) experienced physical or verbal violence? – The most terrifying violence was the death of my father in the same year in which my uncle was killed. Thank God we didn't experience any other kind of violence, not me or anyone else in my family. Unless someone has kept a secret.

Are you happy with your sex life? – It's good. I probably wouldn't be married if it was not so. That has something to do with my marriage.

What is your native language? – Serbian.

Do you speak any other language? – No.

What is your citizenship/nationality? – Bosnia and Herzegovina/Serbian.

What is your religious affiliation? Your political stripes? – Orthodox Christian. I have no political affiliation; I hate politics.

What is your astrological sign? – Double Scorpio.

Do you have any pets? – I like dogs.

What do you most enjoy doing? – I like to sleep when I have time.



Visiting Tanja Ostojić, who completed her hairdresser training and works in a boutique for minimum wage, and her family in the suburbs of Banja Luka (BiH), November 2013. Photo: Nikola Ostojić

How would you briefly describe your personality? – I am a nervous person. I like to solve things immediately; I don't like to wait. When I start doing something, I have to finish it. I like to take risks. For me, obstacles don't exist.

What are your main values in life? Your life philosophy? – Family, and only family, matter to me. What doesn't break me makes me stronger.

What are your greatest wishes? Your plans and perspectives? – My plan is to open my own hair salon. To have a few hundred marks just for myself. I cannot stand to work for someone else for such a low salary in unbearable conditions, like not being allowed to sit down sometimes while working. It is really humiliating. I want to try on my own so that one day, I won't have regrets.

What bothers you? What would you change in your life? – I wanted to travel; I always hoped I wouldn't live here. I hate Banja Luka. But after getting married, all my hopes for that faded away.

Can you name a negative trait of yours? – They say that my defect is that I always rush, I am always in a hurry, but it's stronger than me. My mom is also like that. We are both Scorpions; maybe that has something to do with it. I believe that one should

never leave things for tomorrow if they can be done today. If I slow down, I am bored, and if I rush things, it becomes gruelling. I can't find the middle way. How do you spend your free time, if you have it? – Oh, I wish I could get some sleep. That was my favourite activity before I got married. And now I wake up with the baby a few times during the night. Letting me sleep for two days would be the best gift ever.

Do you have a favourite culinary recipe? – Banana cake.*

What aspect of yourself would you give to a mutant Tanja Ostojić? – The invisible one. Probably no one has given that. You can draw a little heart, but it wouldn't be real.

**Tanja Ostojić,
b. 11 March 1985 in
Ljubljana, Slovenia,
Yugoslavia; lives in
Ljubljana, Slovenia**

What is your occupation? – I am an interior designer for cafés and bathrooms. I deal with ceramics.

What are your vocational qualifications? – I graduated from the School of Economics in Ljubljana, and I studied economics, but I did not finish university.

Are you employed? – My husband and I have a ceramic store, called Keramika za vse okuse. We import ceramics mostly from Spain, and I design rooms for customers that they want to furnish.

Are you satisfied with your job? – It is what I wanted to do. I am satisfied. At first, my husband sold ceramics while I was looking for a job. Then I got the idea to open the studio within our store. And I like it: the customers consult with me, I sketch, and make designs and then realise the installation. But the crisis took over here, and no one is building now; everything has stagnated, and that bothers me.

Have you been living in the same place your entire life? – I have lived in Ljubljana since I was born. I have never moved.

How did the war and the breakup of Yugoslavia affect your life? – I was too young. I never had any personal problems with people, and I didn't really feel it. In my school, there were mostly Slovenians, and it was shameful to say who you were. I was in show dance back then, and there were only Slovenians in my group. I never told them who I was. When one is older, one realises that you are who you are, and there



Visiting Tanja Ostojić at her workplace, *Keramika za vse okuse*, Ljubljana, November 2013.
Photo: Tanja Ostojić (Berlin)

is nothing to it. When I was in the 5th and 6th grade, I remember refugees coming from Bosnia, and they told us about the war there.

Is the family name Ostojić your name by birth, or by marriage? – I became Ostojić by marriage; I was born Obrenović.

Did you easily get used to the change in your last name? – I had difficulties with the last name Obrenović here in Slovenia. It was difficult to pronounce, and people always asked me to repeat it. Ostojić is short, fluid, easier to pronounce. Still I do identify more easily with the name Tanja, maybe because I have had my last name for only eight years, since I got married.

What were the circumstances in which you grew up? – I grew up in a working class family. My mother was originally from Bijeljina (Bosnia). I lived with my parents and my half-brother (from my mother), who is eight years older than me. My mom died in 1995, and my father took care of us. He cleaned and cooked: he was both mother and father to us. I was only ten years old when my mom died, and my attachment and love for my father are still very strong. He never re-married; he was completely devoted to us. Today, he still lives with me.

What are the names of your parents and their occupations? – My mom, Stoja, was a worker in seatbelt production. She finished secondary school. My dad, Branislav, who finished civil engineering school, worked in sanitary equipment production. Now our ceramic store co-operates with the company where my dad worked all his life until he retired.

With whom do you live? – I have been married since 2006. I live with my husband, our children, and with my father.

What age are your children? – I have two children, my son, Nikolaj, and daughter, Ivona. He is seven, and she is four years old.

Are you satisfied with your family situation? – I am satisfied. I grew up in a family where we didn't divide housework into male and female work, because dad did everything. Now and then my husband cooks, on weekends he brings me coffee in the morning. We didn't really determine who does what in the house. We both work a lot, so we don't divide housework according to gender. I do more cleaning, and I take more care of the children and their homework – that is my thing.

Have you (or anyone else in your family) experienced violence? – Not that I know, not me, nor anyone else from my surroundings has talked about such experiences.

What is your native language? – Since childhood, I have spoken Slovenian as my native language. I even speak Slovenian with my children, but at home I equally speak Serbian with the grandparents and my husband.

Do you speak any other language? – I can communicate in English and I wish to learn Spanish.

What is your citizenship/nationality? – I have Slovenian citizenship, while my original ethnicity is Serbian, but my parents declared themselves as Slovenians when they were in the process of getting Slovenian citizenship. Citizenship and nationality have been equalised in the documents here.

What is your religious affiliation/political views? – I am Orthodox Christian. I believe in God, I go to church, and I pray. My husband's family patron saint is Saint Nicholas, and we celebrate it at home. I am not interested in politics; we never talked about it. What is important is honest work.

What is your astrological sign? Pisces.

Art, movies, music – what do you enjoy? – I have danced jazz-ballet for half of my life, I danced show dance, and I miss it a lot.

How would you briefly describe your personality? – As a child, I was calm, peaceful, and shy. I lost my mother early, and that may be the reason why I am closed, a little insecure. I am afraid of being hurt, and I keep a distance.

What keeps you going? What is your life philosophy? – I always say, let's keep going. If the work doesn't go well, I won't make a fuss about it: we will close and keep going. I can quit forever, like I did with dance. It wasn't easy, but I keep searching;

I don't give up. Or when I feel I've done enough in some field, maybe I wasn't the best in it, but it was enough, and I keep searching for myself in something else. Life experience has taught me to think like that.

What are your greatest wishes and plans? – I wish to work less, and to devote myself to my children and home. One day, sooner or later, I will accomplish that.

Are you satisfied with your sex life? – I don't have the time to think about that.

I can't say that it is great, or ideal. Maybe when we are older, since we started so young. We had children so soon and we started working, and the work is still the main thing. We need to work a lot so that we could reach a point where we could relax a bit. This is the current phase we are in. I don't think of it as a kind of crisis or problem, but I need some time to arrange things in my head anyway. If only I was able to leave my work behind as I leave the store and close the door, relax and stop thinking about work. But not so far. My husband and I talk about it openly.

Can you name a negative trait of yours? – I am a closed person. I won't let anyone approach me because I don't want to get hurt. My childhood without my mother, in which I felt very lonesome, taught me that.

Do you have any hobbies? – I like to cook and to walk, even though I don't have very much time for walking. I walk in nature, but not in the hills: I like the lowlands. I was once a state and international dance champion. I was in a dance group for ten years and we travelled everywhere. Show dance was my hobby, but I don't have time for that now.

What is your favourite recipe? – 'Cat's eyes' cake.

Which aspect of yourself would you give to a mutant Tanja Ostojić? – The emotional one, because I am an emotional person, even if it doesn't show. Many people think I am a cold person, but that is just a wall that I built. I would love to meet other Tanjas, and to ask them if they love their lives.

**Tanja Ostojić,
b. 6 September 1987
in Pula, Croatia,
Yugoslavia; lives in
Udine, Italy**

What is your occupation? – I am an artist, a graphic designer, and designer of industrial products.

Where did you go to school? – The secondary school of applied arts and design in Pula (2002-06), with specialisation in product design at the *Accademia delle Belle Arti di Brera* in Milan.

Are you employed? – I am currently not permanently employed. I believe that nowadays we all live with the same problem, and that permanent job positions with companies simply do not exist anymore. Still, this dynamic and insecurity have their own ‘charm’. Ambitious people always go forward and find new contacts.

Are you happy with your job? – Well, there is definitely always room for improvement, but considering the fact that I am still young, I think it’s all good. Certainly, there are many more things that I have to learn, but, all in all, I am content.

Where do you live now? – In Udine, Italy, since 2013. I moved many times that year.

What were your reasons for moving during the course of your life? – First of all, education, and later because of work. My family also moved when I was small, and I moved with them.

What were the places where you moved, and the crucial years? – In 1995 we moved from Istria to Dobrovo in Slovenia, where I went to school. In 1998 we came back to Kastelir, Poreč, Istria, Croatia; 2002-06, I went to high school in Pula, Croatia; 2006-12, I was studying in Milan, Italy; then I moved for part-time work in Italy; 2012, Trieste; 2012-13, Gorizia; 2013, Udine.

Did the war and the break-up of Yugoslavia affect your life? – I think that as someone from the younger generation, I was not too affected by all of that. I don’t even know how it was; I have only heard stories.

Is the family name Ostojić your name by birth? – I got it by birth from my father, who is originally from Serbia.

What were the circumstances you grew up in? – I grew up in an ideal, liberal family. Mom, dad, sister, brother, and I. I am the youngest child. There weren’t any strict rules; we follow our own thoughts and dreams. I was never punished; I could do what I wanted. My parents always trusted me. When I was 14 years old I started



The first encounter between Tanja Ostojić Alabama and Tanja Ostojić (Udine, Italy), both designers by profession, and both born in 1987. Belgrade, January 2017. Photo: Marija Piroški

living alone, when I started high school. My parents got me an apartment so that I didn’t have to travel 60 kilometres every day.

What are your parents’ names and vocations? – My dad is a musician, a freelancer. My mom is currently a housewife, but for years she worked as a tailor in Croatia and she did it very well. She also sewed our dresses. I always wore her original creations.

Do you live together with someone? – With my boyfriend.

Do you have any children? – Not yet.

Are you happy with your family situation? – It’s great. Perfect. That’s what I can say for the situation in my parents’ house. There is no division of labour: everybody does everything. My mom is a housewife now so she mostly cooks, but dad cooks too. Everybody works, but somehow everybody individually. As much we are all bounded we are also still all individuals.

Are you happy with your sex life? – That’s even better. There aren’t any problems in that sphere.

Have you (or anyone else in your family) experienced violence? – There has never been violence; we never had big problems. My parents are still in love. When dad

comes home he always kisses mom, slaps her behind, and says, ‘Hello, my love’. I find it wonderful.

What is your native language? – Both Croatian and Slovenian are my native languages. I consider Italian my native language too.

Do you speak any other language? – English, and I also understand Czech because my mom and grandmother spoke it with each other.

What is your citizenship/nationality? – Croatian, and I belong to the Czech national minority in Croatia. My mother is Czech.

What is your religious affiliation/political stripes? – I am atheist and so are my parents. We are liberal and believe only in ourselves.

What is your astrological sign? – Virgo, with ascendant in Capricorn (perfectionist, very tidy).

Do you have any pets? What sports do you prefer? – I love animals. When I was little, I wanted to become a zoologist, but I gave up on that idea once I realised that I become too attached to those animals. I start to cry when I see an animal suffer. My pets are my joy: two dogs, a cat, bees, chicken, and there was a rabbit, a turtle, and so on. I used to play handball every day in secondary school.

What is your favourite colour/favourite place? – *Nančarasta*, that is orange. My parents’ house is where the whole family gathers.

Art, movies, music – what do you enjoy? – I enjoy daydreaming: then everything around me disappears, and I like to concentrate on what I love – music, or a good piece of art.

How would you briefly describe your personality? – I am a peaceful person, a pacifist.

What is your life philosophy? – Be yourself and love yourself, just the way you are.

What are your greatest wishes, plans, and perspectives? – There are many. I will slowly begin bringing them into realisation one by one, wish by wish: to try to open a gallery of my own, to do creative work with children with special needs, as I have already done before, to study for a Masters or for a Doctoral degree in new media or communications.

What concerns you the most? – I don’t have an answer to that.

Are you happy with your life? – I am happy, even though there are many things I still haven’t done yet: I have a pocket full of dreams. But step by step, everything in its own time. One just needs to have a strong will, to believe in oneself, and one should never break down! Everything that doesn’t break us makes us stronger [*laughter*].

What would you change in your life? – It may seem weird, but nothing actually. I believe that all good and bad things in life happen for a reason, especially the bad things that make us stronger if they don’t break us. You need to fall a few times in life so that you can learn to bounce back. Definitely, I wouldn’t change a thing.

Can you name a negative trait of yours? – Stubbornness.

How do you spend your free time if you have it? – Too little time! My job is my biggest hobby.

Do you have a favourite culinary recipe? – Everyone should taste my mother’s *Sarma* rolls!¹⁵ Unfortunately the recipe is a family culinary secret, and I still don’t have it.

What aspect of yourself would you give to a mutant Tanja Ostojić? – The sentimental part, definitely. It would be interesting to meet other name-sisters. One name, and so many various identities.

**Tanja Ostojić,
b. 2 November 1993
in Pljevlja, Serbia
and Montenegro,
Yugoslavia; lives in
Pljevlja and Nikšić,
Montenegro**

What is your occupation? – I am a full-time university student.

Where do you study? – I finished the second year of studying in the Pedagogical Faculty in Nikšić.

Do you work as well? – While I am at university my parents are supporting me. I don’t work now, and I don’t even hope to find a good job after I finish my studies, since the situation in my country is so bad and unemployment is high.

What were the circumstances in which you grew up (ethnic and social background)? – I grew up as the only child in a mixed family in a small town. My mother is from

15 *Sarma* means a wrapped thing in Turkish, from the verb *sarmak*, to wrap or to roll. In Serbia, *sarma* is cooked by using sauerkraut leaves, ground meat, rice, and seasonings. *Sarma* rolls are slowly simmered for a long time in large pots with lard and layers of smoked pork, seasoned with vegetable seasoning, bay leaves, and paprika. Some family recipes include finishing *sarma* by baking it in the oven, which gives it a distinctive flavour. *Sarma* is one of the staple meals for festive occasions like Christmas, New Year, Easter, birthdays, and family patron saint’s days (*slava*). There are also various Serbian recipes of *sarma* prepared in accordance with Orthodox Christian religious restrictions on using meat and animal fat during the period of Lent. Lenten *sarma* is usually stuffed with rice, shredded carrots, onions, seasonings, occasionally walnuts, or even chunks of smoked fish, and cooked in water and vegetable oil. Although it can be eaten with bread, it is usually served with *proja* (corn bread), preferably still hot.

In continental parts of Croatia, *sarma* is identical to the Bosnian type, and includes rice and minced meat, as well as dried smoked beef. However in Dalmatia, there is a special subtype known as *arambašići*, typical of the Dalmatian hinterland. The stuffing of *arambašići* does not include rice; the meat is diced and spices include lemon, cinnamon, cloves, and muscat nuts. Unlike that of predominantly Muslim regions, *sarma* in Croatia is cooked in a pot with dry pork, prosciutto bone, or sausages. It is traditionally served on New Year’s Eve and at weddings.

Croatia and my father from Bosnia. Because of the war, they ended up as refugees in Montenegro, where they got married and had me.

Where do you live now? Have you been living in the same place your entire life? If you moved, what were the reasons? – Now I live in Nikšić because of my studies, but I normally live in Pljevlja.

Is the family name Ostojić your name by birth, or by marriage? – I was born Ostojić. I am not married.

Did the war and the breakup of Yugoslavia affect your life? – It didn't affect my life too much since I was born afterwards, but it did affect my parents' lives a lot. They had to escape from Croatia and from Bosnia.

Did your parents also have access to education? – Yes, they both finished secondary school. My father was a football player and now he works in the local sports centre. My mom is unemployed.

Do you live with someone? – I live with my parents in Pljevlja on weekends and during school holidays, and I live in the student dormitory *Braća Vučinić* in Nikšić when there are lectures at the university.

Are you satisfied with your family situation? How do you manage the housework? – I am happy with my family. I am an only child, and I am very attached to my parents. I don't have my own family; I am still too young to have one. There isn't any specific division of labour in our family. We usually all help each other.

Have you or anyone in your family experienced physical or verbal violence? – Neither my mother nor my grandmother have ever experienced violence.

Are you satisfied with your sex life? – I'm still too young for that. I don't have a boyfriend.

What is your native language? – Montenegrin.

Do you speak any other language? – I speak English, French, and a little Spanish.

What is your citizenship/nationality? – Serbian nationality, Montenegrin citizenship.

What is your faith, if you are religious? – Orthodox Christian. We celebrate *Đurdevdan*, our family patron saint is Saint George.

What is your astrological sign? – Scorpio, with ascendant in Sagittarius.

Do you have any pets? Do you like sports? – I don't have a pet, but I adore animals. I never did sports myself, but volleyball and football are my favourites.

What is your favourite colour/favourite place? – I like all colours, especially black and red. My favourite place is Novi Sad.

Art, film, music – what do you enjoy? – I like sports, all kinds of arts and films, especially thrillers.

How would you describe yourself as a person, in a few words? – I would describe myself as a shy, stubborn, and determined person.



An encounter after an exam with Tanja Ostojić, student of Pedagogical Academy in Nikšić, Montenegro, June 2013. Photo: Milan Ostojić

What is your life philosophy? – I don't have any special life philosophy, except: Never give up!

What are your greatest wishes? Your plans for the future? – My plans for the future are to finish college and after that, if there are no job offers (which I suppose will be the case), I will start a new college, until I finish three colleges. Currently my greatest wish is to find a job after I graduate and to start a family of my own. Those are my plans for future.

What bothers you; what would you change in your life? – I dislike when people lie and talk behind one's back. I am not completely satisfied with my education. Diplomas are mostly obtained by paying someone or by being a member of a political party, at least here in Montenegro. Nobody cares about us ordinary citizens.

Can you name a negative trait of yours? – I am very lazy and stubborn.

Are you satisfied with your life? – I am satisfied. I have everything that I need.

How do you spend your free time? – As a child, I used to collect paper napkins with different patterns. I don't really have a hobby now, but I like to watch movies. I like to go for walks, to relax, to hang out with friends. I spend holidays in Pančevo, Novi Sad, and Belgrade.

Do you have a favourite culinary recipe? – **Chocolate rice pudding.***

What aspect of yourself would you give to a mutant Tanja Ostojić? – **I would give my blue eyes to a mutant Tanja Ostojić.**

How does it feel to be Tanja Ostojić? – **I feel that being Tanja Ostojić is a beautiful and special thing.**

What question would you ask other women and girls named Tanja Ostojić?

– **It was very interesting to meet you. I would like to meet at least some more of my name-sisters, if not all of them, and the question I would ask them would be: ‘Would you change anything in your life?’**

**Tanja Ostojić-Taca,
b. 8 May 2001 in
Banja Luka, Republika
Srpska, BiH; lives in
Trn, Republika Srpska,
BiH**

What is your occupation? – **I am a student.**

Where do you go to school? – **I attend the elementary school Desanka Maksimović in Banja Luka.**

How satisfied are you with your schooling? – **I go to school, I am satisfied, but it can always get better. Compared to other children, I think I am doing well, but I could still do better.**

What are the circumstances in which you grow up (ethnic and social background)?

– **I am growing up in the suburbs, of Serbian ethnic origins, in a working class family.**

Have you been living in the same place your entire life? – **Yes, I have been living here since I was born.**

Is the family name Ostojić your name by birth? – **Yes I was born as Tanja Ostojić.**

What are your parents’ occupations? – **My mom is a hairdresser, and she has her own salon in our house. My dad is a production manager in the company Cellex (where toilet paper, napkins, and tissues are manufactured).**

Who do you live with? – **I live with my parents, my grandmother, and my elder brother.**

Are you satisfied with the situation in your family? How do you contribute to the housework? – **I am satisfied. I help in the house a little by cleaning my room. Mom doesn’t ask me to do anything else.**

Have you or anyone in your family experienced physical or verbal violence? – **No.**



Coffee, cookies, and talk with Tanja Ostojić, pupil from Trn, and her mother, in the cake shop Pingvin in Trn, near Banja Luka (BiH), October 2013. Photo: Marija Vujić

What is your native language? – **Serbian**

Do you speak any other language? – **I learn German and English in school. And I would like to learn Italian, as well.**

What is your citizenship/nationality? – **Serbian nationality, citizenship of BiH.**

What is your faith, if you are religious? – **Orthodox Christian: we celebrate Saint Nikola.**

What is your astrological sign? – **Taurus.**

Do you have any pets? Do you like sports? – **We have a cat. I like volleyball.**

What is your favourite colour/favourite place? – **My favourite colour is blue, and my favourite country is Germany.**

Art, film, music – what do you enjoy? – **I like pop music. My favourite film is *Titanic*. I like to sing and to enjoy myself.**

What is important for you in your life? – **My accomplishments are important to me, as well as my health.**

What are your greatest wishes? Your plans for the future? – **I don’t know, I would like to be an archaeologist when I grow up, and I would like to study history as well, or to be a nurse. I haven’t decided yet.**

What bothers you? – I dislike it when people speak behind one another’s back.
Are you satisfied with your life? – I am satisfied with my life.
How do you spend your free time, if you have any? – I have free time after I finish all my obligations. I have been dancing in a folklore group for three years, with short breaks.
Do you have a favourite culinary recipe? – Biscuit-cake with chocolate frosting is my favourite!
What aspect of yourself would you give to one mutant Tanja Ostojić? – I would give my heart.
How does it feel to be Tanja Ostojić? – I feel very positive. I have the impression that it all centres on me. And so, I enjoy it while I can.
I enjoyed the meeting with you very much, and I would like to meet some other name-sisters, too.

Favourite Recipes of Tanjas Ostojić

Main Courses and Savoury Pies:

White Chicken Stew With rice/pilaf by Tanja from Subotica

- Ingredients:**
- 3 chicken fillets, diced
 - 2 carrots, sliced
 - 100g rice
 - 2T* sour cream
 - 1T mayonnaise
 - 1T mustard
 - crushed bay leaf
 - 12 black peppercorns
 - 1 onion, minced
 - bunch parsley, minced
 - salt

Clean the carrots, slice them, and place them in heated oil. When the carrots start to lose their colour, add the diced chicken fillet, and fry briefly. Add 1.5 litres of water, the peppercorns, bay leaf, and rice, and cook until the vegetables and meat soften. Add salt if needed and add the onion to a clean pan. Let it cook for about 10 minutes. Remove the onion. Remove from the heat and blend sour cream with mayonnaise and mustard. Garnish with minced parsley.

Note: If you use 200g of rice instead of 100g, you’ll get an exquisite pilaf. (This is how I created, by accident, the meal my son adores). I also don’t add all the water at once, but gradually while cooking. Instead of sour cream, I use double cream (extra fat), and instead of salt I use seasoned salt, so I don’t use parsley at the end.

* T = tablespoon / t = teaspoon

Mushroom Balls

Vegetarian meal by Tanja from Belgrade

Ingredients:

- 500g champignon (white) mushrooms and 500g oyster mushrooms (or shiitake or other types)
- 1 large onion, minced
- Parmesan (Parmigiana-Reggiano)
- breadcrumbs
- 1 egg
- glass of white wine (optional)
- salt and pepper to season

Chop mushrooms in blender. Braise the minced onion, and when it softens add mushrooms, then braise all together until the water from the mushrooms evaporates. Pour in some white wine (if you like), add salt and pepper to season. When all the fluids evaporate, let it cool down a bit and add an egg, breadcrumbs, and a lot of Parmesan so the mixture can thicken and the mushroom-balls can be shaped. Fry the mushroom-balls in boiling oil until they brown on both sides.

Potato Pie

Rich and economic traditional recipe by Tanja from Užice

All quantities are approximate. You need about 500g flour, a pinch of salt, then add a moderate quantity of warm water until the dough becomes firm. The secret is in good kneading. Knead for about 5 minutes, so the flour and water blend nicely. Make flatbreads of dough, spread oil on them and leave them for 5 minutes. Put the flatbreads on a tablecloth (covered in flour, so the dough won't stick on the tablecloth), flatten them with a rolling pin and then slowly stretch them with your hands from the middle to the sides. Grate 3 potatoes on each crust, sprinkle them with some oil, and add pepper (or seasoned salt). Roll each of the crusts and place them next to each other in a greased baking tray. Bake in pre-heated oven at 200°C for 20–30 minutes.



Photos: Tanja Ostojić (Berlin)

Gnocchi

**Quick summer recipe
by Tanja from Berlin**



Take 1 pack of freshly made gnocchi (approx. 150–200g per person), and pan-fry in butter for about 3 minutes. In a smaller pan, lightly fry in butter a handful of minced fresh sage, pine nuts or minced walnuts, and minced garlic, if desired. Serve the gnocchi with the sauce mixture over them, freshly grind mixed pepper, grate some Parmesan, and garnish with fresh leaves of home-grown (Thai) basil.

Spaghetti with peas

Caloric, quick, and delicious self-invented recipe
by Tanja from Belgrade

Ingredients:

- 300g thick bacon
- 450g peas (fresh or frozen)
- 200g sour cream (12% milk fat)
- a lot of fresh basil
- 1 raw egg
- 1 pack of spaghetti (0.5kg)
- salt and pepper

Fry 300g of thick bacon chopped into small pieces (without adding any oil, of course). Cook peas separately. Add as much as you like. We use all 450g (one pouch of frozen peas), which are supposed to be salted before cooking. Render fat from bacon (and put it in a jar in the refrigerator to use for something else), put in the peas and add pepper. Add the package of sour cream (200g) and a lot of fresh chopped basil. Mix it all together. Use Italian spaghetti – this always turns out better and not sticky. My family loves this meal so I cook around four fifths of a 0.5kg pack of spaghetti in a lot of water, to which I’ve added three teaspoons of salt and a half of teaspoon of oil. I cook the pasta until it begins to soften, but it should be *al dente* and not fall apart. Pour out the water from the spaghetti, whisk an egg in a big bowl, add some pepper and basil, and then the hot spaghetti. Mix it all quickly. Pour it in with the sauce made of bacon, peas, and sour cream. You mix it and *voilà!* It is excellent, very tasty, and preparation and cooking together take no more than 20–30 minutes.



Photo: Tanja Ostojić (Berlin)

Watermelon Cocktail

Refreshing summer drink by Tanja from Berlin

Blend pieces of cold ripe watermelon (rind and seeds removed) with a couple of ice cubes and a few leaves of fresh mint. Add a few drops of lime juice if you like. Pour into large (0.4 litre) glasses and add some more ice and (home-grown) mint on top if desired.

For an alcoholic version, you can mix in each cocktail glass separately ½ amount of champagne or sparkling wine with ½ amount of watermelon (prepared as above).

Pastries: Cakes and Homemade Cookies

Apple Cake

By Tanja from Lörrach

Ingredients:

- 1kg apples
- 2 eggs
- 150g sugar
- 1 pack vanilla sugar
- 100g butter
- 125g flour
- ½ pack baking powder
- juice of 1 lemon

Peel the apples, quarter them, then slice. Pour lemon juice on them. Whisk together two eggs, 150g sugar, 1 pack vanilla sugar, and 100g melted butter. Add 125g flour mixed with ½ package baking powder. Add apples to mixture. Bake in spring form at 200°C for 35-45 minutes.

You may also double the quantities, if you like!

Urmašice

Traditional recipe by Tanja from Užice

Dough

- 2 eggs
- 2dl oil
- 2dl yoghurt
- 2 packs vanilla sugar
- 2t baking soda
- 200g semolina
- 100g sugar
- c. 800g flour

Whisk all of the ingredients together and then blend with semolina and flour, so that the dough doesn't stick on your hands, but also so that it doesn't become stiff. Let it rest for 10 minutes. Form pellets the size of a large nut, and roll them. On the top,

make a decorative pattern using a grater (the side with smaller slots). Bake at 180°C in preheated oven until they turn golden.

Coating

- 1kg sugar
- 1.5 litre water
- 1 whole lemon, with peel, sliced

Stir sugar into water, and let it boil for about 5 minutes, then add a lemon (including peel), sliced into rings. While still hot, pour over the *urmašice* right after they are done.

Ice Cubes

By Tanja from Split

Biscuit

- 6 eggs
- 3T sugar
- 3T cocoa
- 3T oil
- 3T flour
- 1 pack baking powder

Mix all ingredients together well and put into deep tray. Bake at 175-180°C for approx. 20 minutes. Keep the baked biscuit in the tray and pour the hot sorbet (3dl water cooked with 300g sugar) over it carefully while still hot. The sorbet will stay on top at first, then will be slowly absorbed by the dough.

Cream

Beat 1 pack margarine with 6 packs of vanilla sugar. Boil 2.5dl milk, then add mixture of 2.5dl milk, 1 egg, 7T sugar, and 4T flour.

Frosting

- 100-150g hard chocolate
- 1T margarine
- 4-5T water

Melt chocolate together with margarine. On the cooled dough (previously topped with sorbet) – that is still in the deep tray – put the cooled cream, and on top of it melted chocolate, then put it all in the refrigerator. The cake should stay overnight in the fridge and be served the next day.



Orasnice

Crisp Serbian dessert by Tanja from Užice

- Ingredients:**
- 2 eggs
 - 200g sugar
 - 1 pack vanilla sugar
 - 500g walnuts (250g ground, 250g crumbled)

Whisk eggs and sugar together, and steam until the mixture starts to curdle. Take it off the heat, mix with ground walnuts, and leave it to cool. Spoon out the cooled mixture with a teaspoon. Make finger-shaped pieces with your palms, roll them in crumbled walnuts, form a horseshoe and arrange them on a paper-coated tray. Bake briefly at 120-150°C until crisp.

Banana Cake

Fast and economic recipe by Tanja from Banja Luka

Crumble 300g Plazma biscuits. Slice 1kg bananas into rings. Boil 3 packs pudding in 1 litre milk. Add 1 pack margarine (250g). Mix everything in a large bowl. When it cools down, put it in a flat pan, form, and coat with whipped cream.

Cremissimo Cake

By Tanja from Bratunac

Ingredients for each biscuit/cake layers (3 layers in total):

- 5 egg whites
- 5T sugar
- 1T vinegar

Whip well together and bake at 180°C for 30 minutes each.

Filling 1:

boil 15 egg yolks and 250g sugar, add 100g chocolate. When the filling cools, add 2 packs margarine (500g).

Filling 2:

- 200g whipped cream.

Cake arranging order:

1st biscuit/cake layer, filling 1, whipped cream, 2nd biscuit/cake layer, filling 1, whipped cream, 3rd biscuit/cake layer, whipped cream.
Icing and decoration as desired.

Chocolate Rice Pudding

By Tanja from Pljevlja

Ingredients:

- ½ litre milk
- 200g rice
- 2 slices butter
- 80g dark chocolate
- 60g sugar
- 1t cinnamon
- 4T sweet cream

Place the rice and the milk in the pot and let it boil on a low heat for about 20 minutes. Occasionally stir so that it does not become sticky and gradually add chocolate, sugar, and butter. Then remove from heat and add cinnamon and sweet cream. Let it cool down before serving, and serve in small portions.

Homemade Cookies

By Tanja from Zemun

Ingredients:

- 500g flour
- 250g margarine
- 250g sugar
- 2 packs vanilla sugar
- 3 egg yolks
- 1-2T milk
- 2t baking powder

Rub the flour into the margarine, then add other ingredients. Mix it all together. Using a mould or moulding machine, form thin cookies the size of 1.5 x 2.5cm. Arrange them in a pan and bake at 150-180°C for 20 minutes.

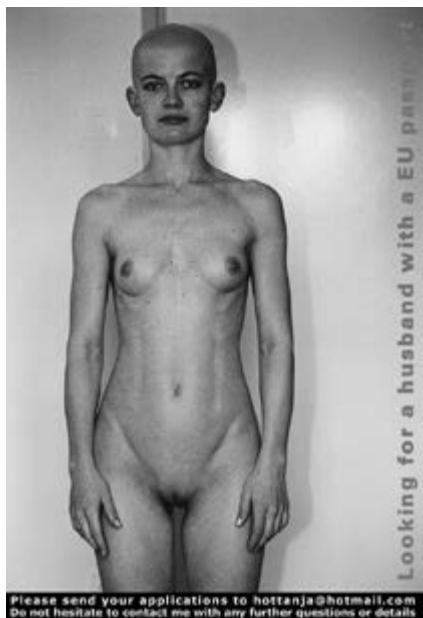
Tanja Ostojić in conversation with Adèle Eisenstein

On research, artwork, activism, solidarity, and agency¹

Adèle Eisenstein: What is different about how you work with migrant issues to the way human rights workers do? As an artist, what can you bring to the topic that would be different to what a human rights worker would bring?

Tanja Ostojić: Since 2000, I have been working on a number of research projects, in which I have used different approaches and developed different means of research that allow me to get deeper into the issues. At first, I started from my own experience and my own position of identity, and those first projects were in a way emancipatory for myself. I worked from my own identity, first as a Yugoslavian, then a Serbian passport holder, and also as someone with difficulties crossing borders. But I also reflect on the issues that affect other people, and not me directly, e.g. in *Illegal Border Crossing* (2000) I crossed, non-registered, the border between Austria and Slovenia twice – at the time it was the Schengen border and the border of the European Union; in *Waiting for a Visa* (2000) I performed a six-hour queuing action without results in front of the Austrian Consulate in Belgrade (2000); and in the five-year project *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* (2000-05) – I experienced for myself what it is like to be on the non-desired list, by applying the strategies that migrants have been forced to use for decades in order to cross borders. The difference, I think, is that I could speak from my own position. I also had this personal experience that can reach people in a way that they could identify with me and the troubles I went through,

¹ This conversation between Tanja Ostojić and Adèle Eisenstein was recorded, edited, and published in a shorter version as: 'On Artistic Research and Cultural Activism', in *Wahrnehmung, Erfahrung, Experiment, Wissen*, ed. by Susanne Stemmler (Zurich and Berlin: diaphanes, 2014), pp. 289-300.



Tanja Ostojić: *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* (2000–05). Participatory web project / combined media installation.
Photo: Borut Krajnc

in the mechanisms of exclusion that affect people's lives. On the other hand, coming from the European continent, I could not speak about how it is for people of colour or people from difficult social backgrounds, or how it is to cross the Mediterranean – and so, in the later projects, I interviewed people who had these kinds of experiences.

AE: Being an artist, and doing your projects within the art world – this is quite different. You are dealing with issues that occur within this world of development or advocacy, but are bringing this question into the art world. What value do you think that brings to the question of migration and refugees, or what does it bring to the art world?

TO: In the deportation jail in Berlin-Köpenick, I had to explain to the detainees who were interested in speaking about their cases on camera that the film I had been working on, *Sans Papiers* (2003–04), could probably not bring much to their individual cases, but rather to the greater issue. As for a definitive difference between NGO

work and my work, the effects of my work usually cannot be direct, but I work in the field of cultural activism. I am trying to add to the knowledge of the issue and sensitivity to it in the cultural sphere, and for the larger audience, while my work has also become relevant in the field of theory, so that theoreticians, sociologists, politicologists, who maybe do not react so often to socio-political issues in society, once they notice a continuous presence of such issues within artistic production, cannot ignore it, and start writing about it, or they at least often use my work as an example of such problems. I think it is only when the issues are dealt with in those three fields of theory, art, and activism, and when the experience from those different disciplines is being exchanged or referred to, that one can expect some progress with changes in actual politics, and hopefully positions for the people that are affected.

AE: Where do you feel there are differences or overlaps, or do you work together with groups like *Kein Mensch ist illegal* – which is something between being an advocacy group and part of the art world?

TO: I haven't had a chance to work with them so far, though we have communicated and attended each other's events. Since documenta in Kassel (1997), it seems like *Kein Mensch ist illegal* have a kind of programme to present immigrants in a positive light.

They have dedicated their cultural activist practice to changing the media picture of disaster and political refugees as victims, as well as the problematic picture of immigrants being a burden to society. It is an interesting combination of employing creativity, artistic expression, and activism under one umbrella. But what I am doing is to point to the kind of human rights atrocities, and the kind of wounds that exist regarding minorities and refugees, and the vulnerability of such positions.

AE: I am also working with the question of where the borderline is between artwork and activism work. Does this present a problem or dilemma?

TO: I think it is a personal touch of the artist, the aesthetic employed, and the artistic qualities of the work that decide if something is an artwork or an activist intervention. Another way to determine it could be if something is produced for the art context and if someone has continuity in artistic production. But one can sometimes see a high visual quality of activist work, and a visually poor quality of an artwork; nevertheless, I do not think it is absolutely necessary to define this.

For me as an artist, producing an artwork is something that is very important for my inner being, in terms of processing certain feelings or information. And even if it might look sometimes as if I am not using any aesthetics, this is actually an aesthetic of its own. The way I reduce my performances to performative gestures, still on the conceptual level, they are conceived as art pieces. My *Naked Life* (2004/2011/2013/2016) performances and video-performances, in performative terms, are very minimal, but it is a decision not to conceive an entertaining work, but to design it as a set of research-based minimal performances in which I show solidarity with Roma, who are systematically the subject of diverse kinds of racism Europe-wide. I am pleased when my material is used in the activist context, as I am pleased that it is shown in the artistic context.



Tanja Ostojić: *Naked Life 4* (2015). 90-minute lecture-performance about the 500 years of systematic discrimination of Roma and Sinti in Sweden, at Live Action 10, Gallery Rotor, Valand Academy, Gothenburg. Photo: Christian Berven

AE: There are also projects within the human rights world that go towards artwork as a new strategy. For example, there is a whole division of Amnesty International (who I work with) called Art for Amnesty, and it means that sometimes artists or non-artists will join the activist work by making art projects, or Occupy Wall Street

in New York, which quite a lot of important artists have joined. It works from both sides: you're going into human rights issues as an individual artist, but there are also NGOs or activist groups that artists end up joining and using their skills in a way to contribute to work on human rights and activism.

TO: Yes, those are very important platforms. I had a similar type of experience in the student and citizen protests in 1996-97 that I joined in Belgrade.

AE: Do you see how your practice maybe fits into or differs from something like that?

TO: I did collaborate on some projects with activist groups and with people from academia. For the *Sans Papiers* documentary, I found research materials about the conditions in the deportation jail and the media coverage that was collected by a doctoral student of theory of law in Leipzig, while his professor acted in part as my project advisor. *Initiative gegen Abschiebung* in Berlin helped me get the right contacts in the jail, specifically people who had more complex stories and who were able and willing to talk about them. In exchange, I brought some of the activists into the jail with me, since otherwise they would not have access to it. We have also made a special video edit that the *Initiative gegen Abschiebung* uses for their anti-racist educational programme. I think as a small collaboration it was quite a success. There was also an attempt to collaborate with the Migrants' Forum in Crete. I followed migrant workers' hunger strikes for two years, and they were my main contacts there. When I went to Greece they took me around with them, gave me information, and showed me very beautiful material – video statements – that were exchanged between hunger strikers in Athens and Thessaloniki (over 45 days in 2011, 300 people were on a hunger strike). And my wish was to go to Crete to edit the video together with them, so that they would also take part in the decision-making, creating a joint video work. It was also very interesting for me to meet by chance in Athens a sociologist from a university in England who did his own research, and we conducted one-day interviews together. We also talked about exchanging information and materials, but due to a lack of funding I did not manage to continue with the project. The political situation in Greece has also escalated badly in the meantime.

AE: How do the people you work with, the stakeholders as we call them in Amnesty language, how do they react to you coming and looking for them and speaking with them – what kind of reactions do you get if they know that you maybe cannot really help with their individual case?

TO: In the case of the 5th Park citizens' initiative in Belgrade, who were for over five years fighting for the right to keep the neighbourhood park, I think I did, in fact, help the issue very much. I produced a short TV programme about their struggle, which was screened twice on prime time television, and this helped raise media attention in the local context.² They participated gladly in it, and they got edited material from me that they could show around. Another time, I organised creative workshops in the same location with students I worked with at the time. A few years later, they won the legal process and started rebuilding the park. There was also the case of Peter Nolasco Oshiomegie, one of the main interview subjects in the *Sans Papiers* film in the deportation jail Köpenick, whose case became famous in Berlin, and whom later, in collaboration with David Rych, we followed for three years. We were able to promote his case and discuss the legal issues. Sometimes we can have some effect.

When one works for longer term with the community and has continuity, it makes a big difference. I organised some workshops with the neighbourhood and students, and also produced a TV programme about the Gazela settlement in New Belgrade, where my idea was to correct the media image of this community and to contribute to their dignity. Gazela has always been represented by media and politicians as illegal, 'dirty', problematic, and 'without history'. I tried to approach it from the aspect of alternative architecture, recycling, culture, communal issues, and to speak about its history and in positive terms, to give it a chance to be differently understood and interpreted in the media, creating a small TV programme about them.³ Ultimately, it did not make the city change their policy. We can do some things, but we cannot change patterns of discrimination, whether systemic or individual. Though this can be discouraging, one has to learn to deal with it and try to continue working. Even when artists dedicate their entire life to certain issues, they might only achieve very small changes.

AE: Since you mention the Gazela settlement, is this a Roma settlement?

TO: The Gazela settlement has a long history. Many people began moving from Central Serbia to Belgrade in the 1980s, when the economic conditions started to change. They lived in sheds built around the Gazela Bridge, located close to the Congress Centre Sava in New Belgrade, close to the river. There were a couple of brick houses there that were registered and had electricity and plumbing, then the newcomers cleaned the unofficial waste and built their sheds there. The settlement has grown incredibly – starting from 1991 with the refugees from Croatia, both Roma and non-Roma, and then even more in the late 1990s, when people were

² Tanja Ostojić, 'Open Studio of New Belgrade Chronicle', TV series, 2004.

³ Ibid.

deported, predominantly Roma, from Western and Northern Europe to Serbia. There was quite a large settlement. Most of these people did not have legal residence in Belgrade, but some were there for a long time, even from the 1980s. Then after 2000 it continued to grow, because after Đinđić became Prime Minister of Serbia the EU governments considered Serbia as the right place to send Roma back to. But still, the government did not do anything to help them acclimatise, and especially for some families who had lived for over ten years in Germany or Sweden, this was a big shock: children that were born abroad and went to school abroad suddenly ended up in this settlement without any basic communal infrastructure. And that was precisely the same in the neighbourhood where I had grown up – I was really connected to this neighbourhood. When I went to elementary school, there were kids from this settlement going to school with me. So every time I passed by there on the way to the River Sava, or went for a visit or to do some research for a project, I felt I had a right to be there. I had some contacts in the settlements, some families that I would visit. It was natural to pass by and talk to them about the issues.

In essence, I am really careful and respectful in the way I approach people. It is difficult for me to pull out my camera and put it in their face. I really take time and make sure that people feel comfortable in this situation, and I try to give as much in return as I can.

AE: Do you still have contact with any of those living in the settlement with whom you went to school?

TO: Unfortunately not, but my mum said ten years ago:⁴ ‘Oh, I saw the mother of Sejdo, that Roma boy, and talked to her’, things like that. It would be amazing if I could find someone I went to school with and see what has happened with them.

AE: Aside from the migrant questions, which are more directly connected with your own personal experience, how did you become so involved in Roma issues?

TO: It is because I have been sensitive to issues of injustice, inequality, and of those who are constantly excluded or put down just on the basis of being part of a certain ethnic group, living in poverty, and/or coming from a different cultural and/or social background. There is a large population of Roma in my former neighbourhood in Belgrade, and they are one of the largest minority populations of Europe, with a

⁴ TO: It was the year 2014 when I said to Adèle: ‘ten years ago’. My mother died in 2005, so it must have been before this that she met Sejdo’s mother. In August 2009 the Gazela settlement disappeared. The inhabitants were displaced against their will. All the houses were demolished and removed. The area has since been cleaned and fenced out.

really long history of discrimination and without much access to political rights, social rights, media, and decision-making. I have been voting for Roma parties for a long time in Belgrade, when I had the chance to vote, just out of a kind of solidarity. It is a culture I respect very much. During the Kosovo conflict, in political circles, in the media, they always talked about Albanians or Serbs, but very little about Roma – who were also greatly affected by the conflict. So for me it was important to follow the issues and to try to express my feelings and solidarity through my art praxis.

To research, to gather archives, to not ignore what is going on, even if no artwork comes out of it, just to keep my eyes open and witness what is going on. Most recently, I have been reading about the Swedish police keeping dossiers of all Swedish Roma born in Sweden from the 1920s until today, even if they have no criminal records at all. It is completely shocking and against the law, but still, because they are Roma, the authorities feel they can do that.

AE: How did the idea for the *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić* project first come to you?

TO: Years ago, I learned that there was another Tanja Ostojić working in the archive of the National Library in Belgrade, via a common friend, who said: ‘Oh, you should meet her!’, and I thought, ‘yes, that would be interesting’, but we never had the chance to meet. A few years ago, when I did a Google search, looking for certain information on a project of mine – I found a few other Tanjas Ostojić. I thought maybe there could be five or ten women that have the same first and second name as me, and it could be interesting to figure out who they are at some point. Out of curiosity, I started adding them as friends on Facebook in 2010. Then I got the idea that it might lead to an interesting art project because they all seemed to have very different histories. Once I was invited to submit my information as Tanja Ostojić, the artist, for the lexicon *Who is Who in Serbia*, I got an idea that it could be interesting to have entries also from other Tanjas Ostojić, who are maybe ordinary women, professionals in other fields, working women, unemployed, mothers, etc. And then I found out that there was a Tanja Ostojić in Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany, doing pedicures, and a Tanja Ostojić who was an insurance dealer in Chicago, USA, and a Tanja Ostojic renting summer apartments on the island of Brač in Croatia. I realised that the issues that have always interested me – migration, gender equality, labour conditions – could all be part of the same project, and if I found women who had the same first and last name as me, that could be a playful random choice of women with different generations and nationalities that I could engage with, and ask about their life stories. Also, when you do research on someone who is from the ‘same group’ as you, it is somehow easier to approach them – they might feel more comfortable being approached like this. That is how the project started.

AE: Where does the name Ostojić come from?

TO: Years ago, my aunt Milica Ostojić, who is a journalist based in Rome, had an interest in two particular books about Serbian families in medieval Herzegovina and did some research into the family name Ostojić. It originates from the male given name Ostoja, and it appeared in archives and in written documents from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries. There was, of course, no Tanja Ostojić to be found there. In the archives of the Dubrovnik Republic, e.g., the ‘Ostoich’ family name appears for the first time in 1373. There was only one woman, Ana, with the Ostojić family name who was mentioned in those historical sources – all other ‘Ostoich’ people that appeared were blue-blooded men or tradespeople. It was claimed in those two books that there were a couple of families originating from the medieval King Stephan Ostoja of Herzegovina, and several migration routes of Ostojićs provoked by the Ottoman invasion of Herzegovina in the second part of the fifteenth century, leading to the Dubrovnik Republic, along the Adriatic coast and to the islands, to the mountain areas in Bosnia and in Montenegro, as well as later to Serbia and Vojvodina.

But my research does not rely on those sources. Furthermore, it does not detect Tanjas Ostojić as Serbian Orthodox. On the contrary, the Tanjas Ostojić I got in touch with are all of Yugoslavian origin: Slovenian, Croatian, German, Czech minority in Croatia, Montenegrin, Serbian, American, Bosnian, Caribbean – so the name does not belong to one ethnicity or nationality. For me, it was also interesting to trace the contemporary migration routes and the migration related to the most recent wars in Yugoslavia. I drew a migration map of approximately 35 Tanjas Ostojić within Europe that is 240cm wide, and I tried to find out the year and the reason for each migration. There was a lot of migration at the beginning of the 1990s because of the war, but also after the war in Bosnia circa 1995–96, when there was post-war resettling. There was also a lot of migration at the beginning of the 2000s, for economic reasons and due to the transition. Still, many women have moved because of education, work, or marriage, though some have migrated in their own area, e.g., between Split and Brač. (On the island of Brač, similar to the area of Banja Luka in Bosnia, Bijeljina or Belgrade, there are numbers of different Ostojić families without family relations between themselves.) So through this microcosm of my name-sisters, one can follow a sort of personal geography, the migration between islands and coastal cities in Croatia, the movements of some of the war refugees within Bosnian entities, from Bosnia and Croatia to Serbia and Montenegro, and from Former Yugoslavia to Western Europe, and beyond.

AE: Where were you born, and where did you move to?

TO: I was born in Titovo Užice, today Užice, in Central Western Serbia. When I was three weeks old, we went to Titograd, today Podgorica in Montenegro, where my parents were based at the time. When I was at the age of two we moved to New Belgrade, where I lived my entire childhood and youth, until I finished my MA in 1998 (between 1995 and 1998, I lived at a number of different locations in Belgrade). Then I moved for another postgraduate studies programme, to Nantes, France. After almost a year, I moved back to Belgrade, then shortly after that to Paris for three months. From Paris I moved to Ljubljana, and then again, after Milošević was arrested and the political situation changed, I moved back to Belgrade in spring of 2001, and then about eight months later I moved to Düsseldorf, where I married in the frame of the *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* project. Then unofficially after one and a half years, I moved to Berlin, where I still live.

AE: What were your initial aims with the project, and what did you see as a kind of objective in the long run with it?

TO: I thought it would be interesting to meet some of the women and to socialise with them, be it over a coffee or meeting to go for a walk, cooking or eating together, or to visit their favourite place, visit an exhibition together, or exchange favourite recipes. I also wanted to conduct interviews on the issues that interested me for the anthropological and sociological aspects of my research, and gather information for my drawings and the book, *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić*, which is in preparation (and now in your hands, dear Reader). I have also conducted events with the participation of some of my name-sisters, e.g.: creative workshops (such as the creative workshop in clay in TERRA, Kikinda [Vojvodina, Serbia] in July 2013); live events (*Talk Show* at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, in April 2013); and in the future there will hopefully be book launches, ‘Conventions of Tanjas Ostojić’, and more creative workshops that could allow participating women to exchange, travel, and express their creativity. I have also started a closed Facebook group of Tanjas Ostojić: there are 28 in the group so far. There, I publish information and pictures related to the project’s development.

More specifically, questions of gender equality and access to education and employment among our generation interest me – and that of our mothers and our children. I try to initiate conversations about domestic work division, domestic violence, access to education, and differences in bringing up boys and girls, and I’m interested in finding out, as well, if these issues differ between the rural and the urban setting, in the Balkans, Europe, and the USA, before and after the fall of Yugoslavia. And also to look at how the name-sisters have experienced the war and the transition.

AE: You have been able to get in contact with all of these Tanjas – 30 or more – and hear their stories, but have any of the others met each other, or do they only meet you?

TO: I am reflective of my current privileged position that allows me to conduct travel and research, as opposed to the women who have small children and no income, and whom I've had a chance to meet. Nevertheless, many of the women have expressed interest in meeting others and have already friended each other on Facebook. Tanja Ostojić the mathematics teacher based in Lörrach, Germany, was the first name-sister I met (in November 2012), and we created a standard list of questions for the interviews. She even offered to travel and to conduct some interviews with a few other name-sisters instead of me. Creative workshops that I hope to organise in the future would have precisely this goal – to allow to the women to meet each other and to exchange. I have proposed such meetings already several times, but some of the women either had problems obtaining visas or finding time to meet – some others did not take my proposal seriously. Recently I brought together Tanja Ostojić from the surroundings of Banja Luka, who completed hairdressing school but had no chance to learn it practically, with another Tanja Ostojić, whose mother has a hairdressing salon at home, lives in a village near the same town, and is interested to share her experience with someone who would like to learn the job.

AE: You said that you have a kind of standard list of questions that you ask all of your name-sisters?

TO: Yes, when I met the first Tanja Ostojić in Lörrach, I got to the city by tram from Basel, she waited for me at the tram stop, and we crossed the border together on foot, then walked down to her flat – that was five minutes from the border between Switzerland and Germany. Then she took me to her garden, which was her favourite place. Why? From her garden in Germany, she has a view of both France and Switzerland. We spent the entire day together. It was a very intense and interesting meeting. She is a teacher of mathematics who moved out of Yugoslavia just before the war broke out, and her wish was to open her own school for additional mathematics classes for school children and senior citizens. By now, one year later, she has managed to open her own school. With her, we put the list of questions together. I had brought one beautiful, large empty book, and I thought: 'This will be the book where my name-sisters who I manage to meet in person will handwrite something about themselves if they like'. I will add a photo of our meetings inside, so that each subsequent woman who gets this book has a chance to read about the ones who contributed already. Two months later, I met another Tanja

Ostojić in Belgrade, who is a lawyer, originally from Montenegro, and an animal rights activist. She sent me many pictures of her cats and dogs, and wrote some of her own poetry in the book; many Tanjas wrote their favourite recipe inside. The first Tanja I met wrote a mathematical question for the other Tanjas. The idea is to have this book that I can carry around as a memory of certain meetings, not just for me, but also for the other Tanjas. I also ask each of my name-sisters that I interview: 'If you had the chance to meet other Tanjas Ostojić, what would you ask them? What would you like to know about them?' So I have included some of those questions, as well, into our standard list of questions. I think most of the questions are interesting also because they bring us to things we did not think of about our lives – about self-esteem and about how satisfied we are with our lives. Some of the interviews are very personal.

AE: You say that you send them a New Year's card, or a card for International Women's Day, or birthday greetings – but what about your nameday?

TO: Oh, we do not have such a nameday [*laughs*]. Maybe it would be a good idea to establish one. The name 'Tanja' comes originally from the Greek name 'Tatjana', which, with Orthodox Christianity spread to Russia and became very popular there. It probably came from Russia to Yugoslavia, but more recently the name Tanja has emancipated itself from Tatjana and become a name on its own.

AE: So on your birth certificate, it says 'Tanja'?

TO: Yes, all the women that I have interviewed so far – except one – have the name Tanja in their birth certificates. I had to be consistent on this point. For one woman the officials did not explicitly accept her registration as Tanja in Subotica in 1965 – they claimed it to be 'not a proper name but a nickname', but she has never identified herself with Tatjana, but with Tanja.

AE: How do you identify each other? When you talk with each other, do you just say 'hello Tanja', 'hello Tanja'?

TO: Sometimes we call each other *Imenjakinjo* (name-sister), or simply 'Tanja'. For the research and archiving, it was not easy to distinguish them at the beginning. So I try to locate them by where they live, or the birthplace, by year of birth, with their married name, middle name, or profession.

AE: If you somehow extended the question of Tanja Ostojić to every woman, maybe it would be an interesting case study in a way, to extrapolate information from the general population...

TO: Yes, I do ask for basic information in these terms, as well: if they're married, if they have children, what ages their children are, their level of education, their working position, etc. There are, e.g., several Tanjas Ostojić who have university degrees in technical science, but not many of them work in the field. It turns out that it is much harder for women to get work in that field in general.

AE: Since you started this project, have you realised that the name Tanja Ostojić is more common than you thought?

TO: Absolutely, yes. I have even encountered two Tanjas Ostojić who were born the same day as me, 19 August, but different years and different places. I thought, 'Okay, that's quite interesting!', but within the project I am more interested in our overlapping in terms of social issues, life paths, and family relations.

AE: Just before, you made a little slip, saying that you are interested in the 'solidarity', instead of similarities – I think this is an important slip that should be kept...

TO: Yes, the feeling of compassion and solidarity are important for me whenever I deal with people. Like when I asked one of my name-sisters when exactly she had moved from Zadar to Vojvodina, and she said, 'Well, in 1991, when all Serbs moved', all I could say was 'Oh, I'm sorry, it must have been a difficult experience' – but she didn't want to speak about it. Then there was another name-sister, who was just seven years old when she lost both her father and her uncle in the war... Of course, I feel solidarity with all of them. It is a beautiful experience for me, to try to remember what was going on in the political context at the time, what I was doing back then, and how life was affecting me, and others.

AE: It is interesting how important one's name is – when you said before that you found some Tanjas Ostojić on Facebook, and some of them said that they do not usually agree to be a friend with someone they do not really know well, but if they see someone has the same name, it is a different question. This really resonates with me because I have a relatively uncommon name, and it has happened to me several times, either through Facebook or through email, that someone called Eisenstein would contact me because they were curious to know if we had some kind of a family relation. I have the same reaction – I also do not usually agree to be friends

with people I do not know on Facebook, but when someone called Eisenstein contacts me, I think, 'well yes, that's interesting', and I want to see what this Eisenstein is doing and where they are. We actually attach so much significance to our name, so much so that we have a different reaction to a human being because they have the same name. In my case at least, I am interested to find out if we are actually related, and if I can find out some additional information about my own family, but I also want to know if there are others sharing my name who are also doing creative work, perhaps in the same field.

TO: Yes, that is interesting. Though I do not accept friendships from Ostojić people – not even from my family [*laughs*], not from the children in my family anyway, because I do not think children should be on Facebook at all. The name Ostojić is not uncommon: recently in the Croatian government, there were three people with the Ostojić name. In the case of my project, it is only the combination of the first name and the family name that interests me. While there is, of course, some significance in the naming, I remember some beautiful childhood stories from the autobiography of Marina Tsvetaeva. She wrote that her mum did not give her the name 'Tatjana' because it has such significance in the Russian culture, and as I understood, her mother was married for status reasons. The name 'Tatjana' is popular in Russian literature because of Evgeni Onegin, very much for this kind of destiny related to status marriages. So instead, her mother gave her the name 'Marina', so that she would follow her heart, and I thought this was quite nice. With the name 'Tanja' this is not the same, since the name has emancipated itself from Tatjana.

AE: Is there something that you have found that really joins all of you together, that you all have in common somehow?

TO: So far, all the women originate from a certain geographical region, whether they or their parents have been born in Yugoslavia, and we all speak some version of Serbian or Croatian language. So we have somehow a certain history in common, and we can communicate in languages where we do not need a translator in-between.

AE: Did you find any Roma Tanja Ostojić?

TO: There is one Tanja Ostojić on Facebook who has the Roma flag as her profile picture. And I wrote to her, 'Oh, you have a beautiful profile picture' – I wanted to know about her relation to that flag. But she has not replied to me so far. I hope she could be a Roma Tanja Ostojić. That would be really nice.

AE: Was there something new that came out of the talk show that you had in Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, with one of the Tanjas Ostojić in 2013?

TO: It was amazing to have another real Tanja Ostojić there, and without her it would not have made sense. Some people thought it was not as entertaining as they expected it to be, because I'm not bringing up weird information about other people and serving it in public to entertain others – I am really very careful about what I bring out in public about other people. I am interested in giving them visibility, but still, it always has to be in agreement with them, how much they want to be disclosed about them in public. In some cultures, people put only positive things out about themselves in public. I have to respect that as well. But I am not going to polish each of my name-sisters and then present her in public. In that case I would rather speak about some issues completely separate from the people. This talk show was a great experience for the guest Tanja. She claimed that it was very significant for her that she has this name. She's from the Czech minority in Croatia, while her father is Serbian, and her mother Czech. She decided to declare herself as a Czech minority, and there were some issues about nationalism against the family in a certain period, but she was too young at the time and not ready to talk about it. She has just finished her studies: she is a designer of products for people with special needs. She is a young person full of idealistic ideas.

AE: I am sure that there are some Tanjas Ostojić to whom you feel closer than others. Which of the Tanjas Ostojić do you feel personally closer to?

TO: It takes time to develop relationships. I feel close to a couple of them for different reasons. Some because they are open, some because they are idealists, some because they are sensitive, some because they are engaged with animal rights or social issues, some because they like nature. I feel close to someone not because of the similarities, but because I sympathise with their life experience, and also when it is very different from mine. One of the questions I ask my name-sisters is: 'If we were to make a mutant Tanja Ostojić, which part of yourself would you give to her?' I wonder what this mutant collage might look like. She might have a lot of energy, many hearts, a few pairs of eyes, a lot of smiles, and maybe no arms at all *[laughs]*.

AE: Now that you have been working on it for a while, do you start to see what kinds of final form the project will take?

TO: Some aspects of the project, or some possible collaborations, can develop only with time. There are some of the name-sisters I added as friends in 2010

and managed to start a conversation with only in 2013. It takes time to develop trust – even without touching each other or talking to each other. I cannot rush with this project. It is as simple as that. The book might even come early, after two years of working actively on the project. But that is also fine, because the book is a work on its own, and does not represent a closure or summary of the project. It is one of the phases of the project. The book could be an opening for the continuation of the project, not a closure of it. I can imagine in the future there may also be some archive exhibitions with drawings, photos, and artefacts from creative workshops.

Group portrait before the *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić* presentation, in front of MoCARS, Banja Luka (BiH), March 2017. Photo: Lana Pilipović

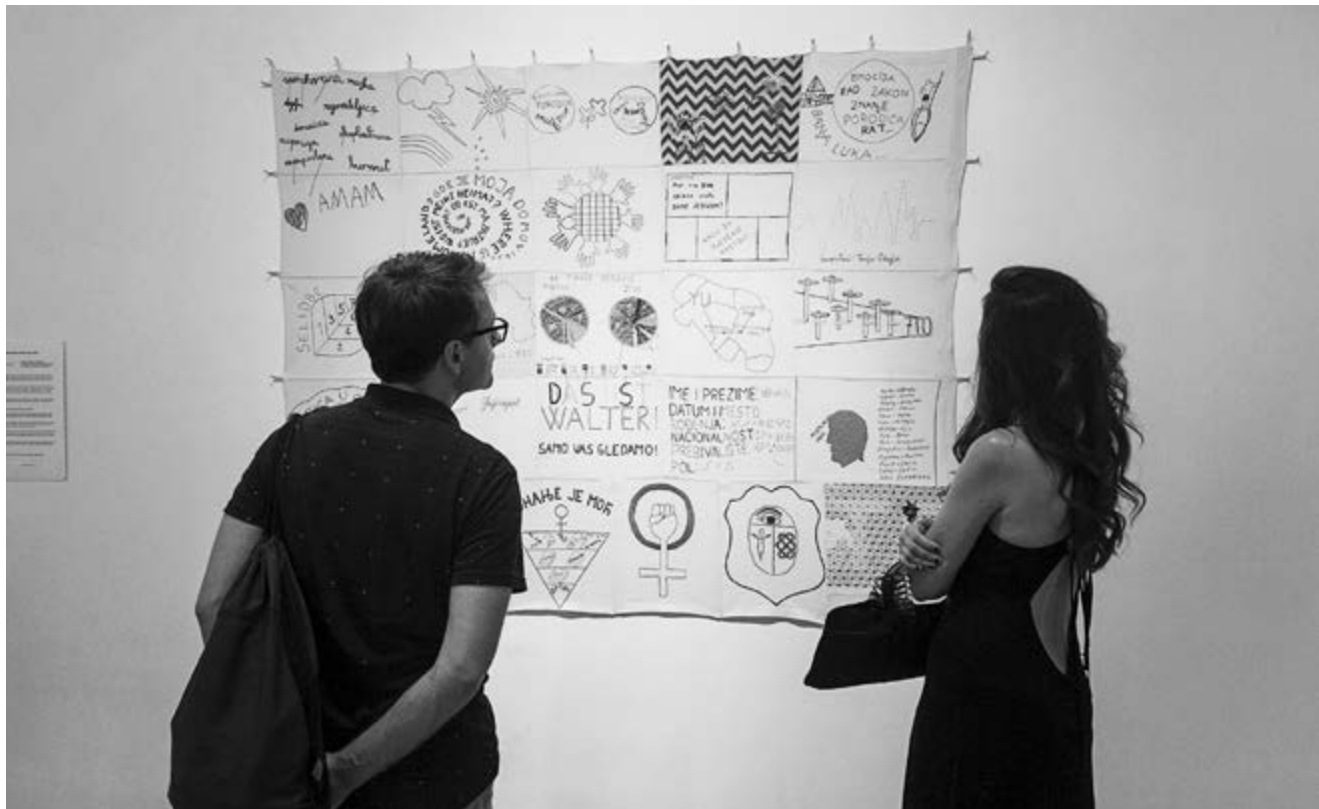




Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić, exhibition at MoCAB Salon, Belgrade, 2017. Installation view photos: Milan Kralj



7 Tanjas Ostojić, Group portrait on the occasion of the *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić*, exhibition opening, 6 June 2017, MoCAB Salon, Belgrade. Photo: unknown author



Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić, exhibition opening MoCAB Salon. Photo: Saša Reljić

The Potency and Potentiality of Transindividuality in the *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić**

Suzana Milevska

The project *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić* is the most recent artistic research project by the artist Tanja Ostojić, and it draws a complex psycho-geographical map of relations between proper name, identity, subjectivity, and belonging. The project comprised several parts: a long-term quest for others also bearing the name Tanja Ostojić; the artist's communication and encounters with the women she located in Bosnia, Slovenia, Serbia, Montenegro, Germany, and elsewhere; a Facebook group with 28 members named Tanja Ostojić from different countries; a handmade drawing of a map that traced the cross-border movements of Tanja's name-sisters; and several public events.¹

The current publication is also one of the outcomes of the project: a lexicon imagined as a compendium of different chapters encompassing the texts and images that are the result of the various trajectories and phases of the research, as well as of the lives and careers of the name-sisters.

Borders, Passports, Visas, Marriages

The project *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić* did not emerge overnight. It is the result of long and profound artistic research endeavours into issues and topics such as the body, gender, sex, politics, feminist struggle, class, belonging, transition, migration, displacement, and labour. It also bears relation to various earlier and parallel projects by the same artist, including: *Illegal Border Crossing* (2000); *Waiting for a Visa* (2000); *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* (2000–05); *Integration Project Office* (2005); *Untitled / After*

¹ The first event of the series was the talk show 'Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić', in Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW), Berlin, 10 April 2013. It was moderated by the author of this text; the participants were Tanja Ostojić, an artist from Berlin, and Tanja Ostojić, a designer, from Pula/Milan.



Tanja Ostojić: *Untitled / After Courbet (L'origine du monde)*, 46 x 55 cm, 2004). Colour photo, 46 x 55 cm. Photo: David Rych

Courbet (L'Origine du monde) (2004);² and most recently, the series of delegated performances, *Misplaced Women?* (ongoing since 2009), and *Misplaced Women? Marking the City* (2011).³

In 2000, when Tanja Ostojić crossed the border, non-registered, between Slovenia and Austria, she broke state rules in a direct and dangerous way as part of her performance, *Illegal Border Crossing*.⁴ The performance in fact mimics similar desperate actions undertaken by countless illegal immigrants who try to cross borders every day to reach the European Union; in a way, the *Illegal Border Crossing* performance actually precedes the *Lexicon* project.⁵

The Proper Name 'Tanja Ostojić' and its Geo-Politics

There is nothing unique or particularly amusing about the name 'Tanja Ostojić'. It is an arbitrary and common surname and given name. In this art project, artist Tanja Ostojić proposes a process of psycho-geographic research into the cultural biographies of a number of women, distinct personalities who coincidentally bear both the same first name and surname as her own, thus actually acknowledging its redundancy.

With some of the women she finds, Ostojić observes slight variations in the names, which have occurred because of various ethnicities, migrations, differences in the written versions of names, or change in marital status. Consequently, alongside the focus on the arbitrariness of proper names, even more importantly, Ostojić reflects on the specificities of common ethnic, cultural, and socio-political background, and

the historic and generational context of individuals with the same or similar names. She also focuses on the endless potential contingencies and unpredictable diversified biographies of these individuals, depending on the circumstances of their birth, places of upbringing, and displacements resulting from wars and conflicts and the split of the former Yugoslavia.

The artist's initial aim was to look at the various phenomena affecting women originating from the ex-Yugoslav republics, including migration, displacement, transition, and labour. Taking into account the ethnic, cultural, religious, gender, and sexual differences, the artistic research into the complex inner biographical and historical layers of the accidental 'homonymy' enabled Tanja Ostojić to draw a unique transindividual and psycho-geographic 'map', which traces the places of origin and various itineraries and movements of the women she contacted, all named Tanja Ostojić.

Similarly to a number of previous projects by Tanja Ostojić, this project is informed by and draws influences both from concrete social and political events, and from turbulent contemporary phenomena (voluntary or forced migrations, racism, gender inequality, sex work, arranged marriages). It aims to establish a sustainable network of women, who have not met before, but who benefit in various ways from establishing and maintaining these newly developed contacts and friendships – not only with the artist herself, but also among themselves.

Belonging / Not Belonging

The process of finding, collecting, indexing, and cross-comparing relevant information about the individual personalities who all go by the same name was meant to serve merely as a starting point for a project that gradually became a relational mapping – a kind of chart drawing various connections among the women.

Alongside an analysis of the various theoretical and artistic implications of this project, I also aim to establish links between this and several other earlier projects executed by Ostojić, which also dealt with patrilineality, kinship, and heteronormativity – phenomena that are often targeted by Ostojić's feminist critique. Primary questions that the artist posed throughout her project considered whether the arbitrariness of one's name affects our own subjectivities later in life, and how historical and biographical circumstances interweave and construct the formation of transindividuality and identity – because of, or in spite of the name.

During the first phase of the project, with the use of online research engines – including communication applications such as Skype, and the social network Facebook – as research and artistic media, the artist acknowledges the newly added layer to the identitarian issue – the virtual layer that cross-references already existing layers of subjectivity and identity. The challenge of the project lies in the uncertainty of the research results and should not be perceived as the quest for a common denominator

² Tanja Ostojić and Walter Mignolo, 'Crossing Borders / Development of Diverse Artistic Strategies', *Social Text* online, 15 July 2013 <http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/crossing-borders-development-of-diverse-artistic-strategies/#sthash.kkSETDb2.dpuf> [accessed 10 February 2014].

³ See: *Misplaced Women?* blog <<http://misplacedwomen.wordpress.com/>> [accessed 10 February 2014].

⁴ See: *Integration Impossible? The Politics of Migration in the Artwork of Tanja Ostojić*, ed. by Marina Grižinić and Tanja Ostojić (Berlin: Argobooks, 2009), pp. 34-37. According to Ostojić, she crossed the border non-registered twice, in both directions. At the time, it was the border of the European Union, where approximately eight to nine illegal immigrants were captured per day. Now that Slovenia is part of the European Union, such 'illegal border crossings' have 'shifted' towards the south, gradually between Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia. Equipped with detailed maps, the artist and her friends (also artists) passed the border, taking enormous risks of being captured and imprisoned.

⁵ As in the case of her 'arranged' marriage project, *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport*, Tanja Ostojić stretched the borders of the legal system and explored its efficacy and ability to recognise different languages. The art language she uses does not differ substantially from the language of 'arranged' marriages, or the 'real crossings' of borders. The difference, however, is the motivation (which, of course, is difficult to prove, if it comes to a legal trial).

in this heterogenic group, but rather as a confirmation of the inner polyglossia and multiple layered personalities. Ostojić questions the imposed heteronymy and invests in the potentialities of subjective agency as a kind of potency and potentiality for an individual answer to societal, cultural, and political conformities, of which proper names are the most common, but not the only ones.

Naming and Transindividuality

The violence of naming (Gilles Deleuze) and transindividuality (Gilbert Simondon) are tackled by the democracy of self-determination of each individual: you can be anybody you want; you can define your own personality, shaping it and re-shaping it, time and again, and all the time, still bearing the same name of Tanja Ostojić.

According to Jacques Derrida, *giving names* is, paradoxically, an act of both love and justice. In his book, *On the Name*, he writes that in everyday life, we give new names to people that we love as an ultimate gift, without expecting anything in return.⁶ In other words, we want to give something to our loved ones, even when it is not ours to give away – ‘heart’, ‘gold’, ‘queen’, ‘honey’, etc. – as proof of our total commitment. Nevertheless, it is worth recalling that, in the view of Gilles Deleuze, the first moment of giving/receiving a name is in itself ‘the highest point of de-personalisation’ because it is here that we acquire ‘the most intense discernibility in the instantaneous apprehension of the multiplicities’ belonging to us.⁷

One of the questions posed by the conceptualisation of naming is: what, if any, might be the positive implications of *naming*, in cultural and political terms, when this is executed by artistic means? Perhaps Deleuze’s warning could lead us to some answers through his understanding of our lives as the sum of little ‘becomings’ that inform and shape our identities, but that ultimately create idiosyncrasies that no longer fit within these identities. According to Gilbert Simondon, the process of *individuation is never concluded*, since the multiplicity of the pre-individual can never be fully translated into singularity; whereas the subject is a continuous interweaving of pre-individual elements and individuated characteristics.⁸

Multiplicity / Multitude, or Against the Biopolitics of Naming and Identity

Ultimately, biopolitics and the ‘society of control’ (in Deleuze’s terms) can be seen as reactions to the creative power of the multitude – the multitude which precedes naming

as an arbitrary identitarian politics that is one of the imposed societal mechanisms of control.⁹ The only way to defeat imposed identities that oppress us is to free our sub-individualities and combine them with others to form a multitude of possible and potential multiplicities.

Multiplicities thus formed will always be greater than the society of control, in that each of us is greater than any individual or collective label or name that might be assigned to us (‘man’, ‘woman’, ‘student’, ‘lesbian’, ‘white’, ‘Roma’), because we are, each of us, more than the names we are given. Thus, the multitude of Tanja Ostojić formed through this project is an intentionally created community that functions as a kind of arbitrary framework for various relations established very loosely for the duration of this project – and potentially beyond, in a similarly contingent way to which they were initially established, and beyond any controllable societal conditions and institutions.

The Paradigm of Belonging and Regional Identity

In embarking on writing about the potentiality that is embedded in the notion of the *regional belonging* of Tanja Ostojić, it is actually inevitable to attempt to bridge the ‘principle of hope’ and the utopian belief in complete belonging (either to a nation, or to the world in general), with the potential of *not belonging* that is necessarily attached to belonging.¹⁰ *Not belonging* is especially implied in the notion of regional belonging, where national meets cosmopolitan halfway, while the phantasm of *belonging* to a nation, and of belonging in general, is based on a positive and utopian hope: the very actuality of belonging. For example, belonging to a region is defined by the potential of *belonging without belonging*, or *belonging without having something in common*.¹¹

Of all the emphatic expectations and phantasms emerging among different peoples and nations in the new Europe, the very desire and projected hope to belong to the European Union (EU) has become the most urgent. The EU political superstructure has started to function as a kind of political re-definition and even replacement of European geography. The EU is neither a nation nor a region, but belonging to it functions as a kind of supra-belonging.

⁹ Will Large, ‘The Multitude’, *Dave Harris (& Colleagues): Essays, Papers, Courses* <<http://www.arasite.org/WLnew/empire/multi.html>> [accessed 5 July 2017].

¹⁰ I am using the negative concept *potential not to*, with reference to the philosophical notion of *aporia*, between potentiality and actuality, known already in the philosophy of Antiquity and of the Middle Ages. See: Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities*, ed. and trans. by Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery, Introduction by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 243-71.

¹¹ Suzana Milevska, ‘Phantasm of Belonging: Belonging without Having Something in Common’, in *Volksgarten: Politics of Belonging* (exh. cat.), ed. by Adam Budak, Peter Pakesch, and Katia Schurl (Cologne: Walther König, 2008), pp. 110-19.

Within such a political and cultural context, the notion of regional identity is one of the recently emerged political instruments of integration and belonging. Regional identity appears to be a kind of *aporia*, a specific form of *disjunctive* identity that, as a certain political compromise, a kind of ‘dangerous supplement’, overarches *belonging* to a nation with *belonging* to a European Union, which is comprised of different nations and identities.¹²

Ultimately, the concept of regional identity emerges as a kind of concession that contaminates the unconditional *belonging* with the potentiality of a partial *non-belonging* as the greatest nation-state danger: ‘Whatever singularity, which wants to appropriate belonging itself, its own being-in-language, and thus rejects all identity and every condition of belonging, is the principal enemy of the State’.¹³

What does it mean to assume a regional identity? Does one ever genuinely identify as Balkan, Mediterranean, Trentinian-Alto Adige/Südtirolian, or Northern Macedonian (in Greece)? Does this mean that national identification suffers a loss of patriotism because of the expansion of the strictly defined national identity into a more heterogeneous regional identity, or does this only help clarify one’s own identity? Or, is regionalism just a pragmatic tool used by smaller nations and ethnicities to boost their hopes of completeness, of belonging to the globalised world? Critical regionalism originally worked as a kind of cultural mediator between the codes of universal civilization and the specificity of place, and it offered the urgent and necessary hope of synthesis of, on the one hand, the architectural forms that were created within minor cultures and regional borders, and, on the other, universal cultural values that could be reached through a critically conceptualised regionalism.¹⁴

All these questions can be addressed indirectly, through culture and art, and this, in part, is what makes the research behind *Lexicon* so relevant, because it is there that regionalism is applied as a means of analysis of various minor differences in cultural codes and phenomena, starting from the everyday life of the name-sisters.

Solidarity and the Emancipatory Vicissitudes of Hope in “Lexicon”

Following Richard Rorty’s scepticism expressed in his 1996 essay ‘Globalization, the Politics of Identity and Social Hope’, about the relevance of the way in which

globalisation has affected identity politics, and having in mind his remark about the ‘loss of faith in cosmopolitanism and universalist notions’, I would argue that at present there are certain attempts to compensate for the lost social hopes of cosmopolitan values, and these are mainly based on newly provoked beliefs in the regional values of daily life.¹⁵

It is no accident, however, that today’s main contradictions and tensions are to be found not along the line of global-local, but in the pragmatic and calculative move between global-regional, wherein regional is seen as the democratic *potentiality* of the future, a concept that might supplement the local.

Hope as longing for something better, for supplementing life *as it is*, was the main subject of Ernst Bloch’s *The Principle of Hope*.¹⁶ According to Douglas Kellner, for Bloch, ‘individuals are unfinished, they are animated by “dreams of a better life”, and by utopian longings for fulfilment’.¹⁷ Furthermore, for Bloch, hope ‘permeates everyday consciousness and its articulation in cultural forms, ranging from the fairy tale to the great philosophical and political utopias’.¹⁸

What made Bloch’s understanding of ‘daydreams, fairy tales and myths, popular culture, literature, theatre, and all forms of art, political and social utopias, philosophy, and religion’ different from the other Marxist ideological critiques is his belief that all these forms ‘contain emancipatory moments which project visions of a better life’, and that they ‘put in question the organization and structure of life under capitalism (or state socialism)’.¹⁹

According to Kellner’s profoundly analytical reading of *The Principle of Hope*, in Bloch’s map of humanity, there are three dimensions of human temporality:

a dialectical analysis of the past which illuminates the present and can direct us to a better future. The past – what has been – contains both the sufferings, tragedies and failures of humanity – what to avoid and to redeem – and its unrealized hopes and potentials – which could have been and can yet be.²⁰

The *not-yet but realisable hopes* of the future, and a vision of a free future, are the most important part of Bloch’s projections and convictions about creativity. The *not-yet but awaited* manifests itself as future and futurity: as an event of a coming, or future *advent*, as it is understood in some more recent work of philosophy and literature.²¹

¹² I hereby refer to Jacques Derrida’s concept of ‘dangerous supplement’. See: Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 141-65.

¹³ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. by Michael Hardt (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1993), p. 87.

¹⁴ One example of the justification of regionalism came from architectural theory: the concept of ‘critical regionalism’, first offered by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre, and later developed by Kenneth Frampton. Kenneth Frampton, ‘Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance’, in *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), pp. 16-30.

¹⁵ Richard Rorty, ‘Globalization, the Politics of Identity and Social Hope’ in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), pp. 229-39 (p. 230).

¹⁶ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 3 Vols. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986).

¹⁷ Douglas Kellner, *Ernst Bloch, Utopia and Ideology Critique*, 19 April 2008 <<http://www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/kell1.htm>> [accessed 5 July 2017].

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Jean-Paul Martinon, *On Futurity: Malabou, Nancy and Derrida* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 152-53.

That is where the adventure of creativity is projected, since the hope's tense is always a future tense. In Kellner's opinion, Bloch encourages us to 'look for the progressive and emancipatory content of cultural artefacts' that are 'frequently denounced and dismissed as mere ideology'.²²

Following Kellner's analysis of Bloch's 'principle of hope', one could easily agree with his conclusion that Bloch provides us with a model of cultural theory and ideology critique that is unique, since it differs from other more dominant critical models. While Lenin, Althusser, and to a certain extent the Frankfurt School, presented 'ideology critique as the demolition of bourgeois culture and ideology, thus, in effect, conflating bourgeois culture and ideology',²³ according to Kellner, Bloch is 'more sophisticated than those who simply denounce all ideology as false consciousness' and interpret 'dominant ideology primarily as instruments of mystification, errors, and domination' of the 'ruling class' interest within ideological artefacts' because he rather 'sees emancipatory-utopian elements in all living ideologies, and deceptive and illusory qualities as well'.²⁴

Bloch suggested reading more attentively for any critical or emancipatory potential. Interestingly enough, at first sight, paradoxically, Bloch deemed ideology not only responsible for having a negative impact on society, but he also believed that ideology contained a certain emancipatory dimension. Discourses, images, and figures that produced utopian images of a better world, according to him, aided the reconciliation of subjects with the existing world. That is, of course, only if one believes and hopes that such reconciliation is possible.

Today, Ernst Bloch's assumption that art's mission, even when it is overburdened by ideological patterns, is to assist the subject's fulfilment and reification, somehow resonates with the Guattarian concept of art as a process of *becoming*. Even though he understands art as a kind of autonomous zone of production, it is still important for the 'innovative segments of the Socius', since, according to him, the future of contemporary subjectivity is no longer to 'live indefinitely under the regime of self-withdrawal'.²⁵ The artist's mission is to *recreate and reinvent the subject*:

The artist and, more generally, aesthetic perception, detach and deterritorialize a segment of the real in such a way as to make it play the role of a partial enunciator. Art confers a function of sense and alterity to a subset of the perceived world. [...] The work of art, for those who use it, is an activity of unframing, of rupturing sense, of baroque proliferation or extreme impoverishment, which leads to a recreation and a reinvention of the subject

²² Kellner, *Ernst Bloch*.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. by Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 132.

itself. A new existential support will oscillate on the work of art, based on a double register of reterritorialization (refrain function) and resingularization.²⁶

The hope and potentiality for such a reinvention of contemporary subjectivity is under new pressure, particularly the pressure of globalisation and the tensions between the nation-state and national identity politics versus new overarching political and universalist concepts. What the project *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić* offers to its participants is exactly this potentiality of artistic resingularisation.

In the context of the extrapolation of the intrinsic mechanisms of rapid globalisation, regionalism might seem an obsolete concept; yet, it has actually flourished in recent decades. The most important thing to state from the outset of a discussion of the regional paradigm is that regions are social and cultural constructs, and are established out of a belief in a common history and consideration of common interests.²⁷ It has become clear that a region cannot function as a relevant identity concept, due to the danger of essentialisation and the overburdening complexities and exclusions that prevent it being used as a common denominator.

The Deliberative Potentiality of Regional Belonging, Transversal Politics and Transindividuality

Not only are regional distinctions and definitions still in use; they are also much more highly valued today, and not only as metaphors. Regionalism is also seen as heralding a turn from identity politics toward what Nira Yuval-Davis so successfully dubbed 'transversal politics'.²⁸

As an alternative to universalistic assimilationist and exclusivist politics, as well as to identity politics, 'transversal politics' deals with:

people who identify themselves as belonging to the same collectivity or social category [that] can actually be positioned very differently in relation to a whole range of social locations (e.g., class, gender, ability, sexuality, stage in the life cycle, etc.). At the same time, people with similar positionings and/or identities, can have very different social and political values.²⁹

For some theorists, the only adequate political response to globalisation is the consolidation of democracy through the strengthening of national borders. For others, exactly the opposite is required, and indeed preferred, when national and other values are questioned from abroad. Many theorists of democracy would agree that democratic

²⁶ Ibid., p. 130.

²⁷ For a profound analysis of regionalism in relation to globalisation, see: *Regionalism in the Age of Globalism, Volume 1: Concepts of Regionalism*, ed. by Lothar Hönnighausen, Marc Frey, James Peacock, and Niklaus Steiner (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 2004).

²⁸ Nira Yuval-Davis, 'What is Transversal Politics', *Soundings – A Journal of Politics and Culture*, 12 (Summer 1999), 94.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 95.

government could be maintained only by extending its borders beyond the nation. The expansion and acceleration of cultural, political, and economic activities cutting across national and regional borders is not inherently incompatible with democracy.

Adam Lupel identified three different ways in which the politics of transnationalism could serve to broaden democratic legitimacy beyond the nation-state: '(i) cosmopolitan democracy, (ii) democratic regionalism, and (iii) democratic network governance'.³⁰ On the contrary, one could argue that precisely the intrinsically different experiences and common but troubled past throws into question 'the viability of political integration on the regional scale'.³¹

It is difficult to see, then, how a democratic consensus could be reached at a regional level between the conflicted parts, e.g., in troubled regions such as the Balkans, where the borders and identities continuously overlapped and changed in the past, and the battles that continue for the national appropriation of common historic events and historic figure. In such a context, Chantal Mouffe's agonistic model of democracy has very little chance of surviving due to the operation of much deeper confrontations than those needed for the 'privileged terrain of agonistic confrontation among adversaries'.

I agree with those who affirm that a pluralist democracy demands a certain amount of consensus and that it requires allegiance to the values which constitute its 'ethico-political principles'. But since those ethico-political principles can only exist through many different and conflicting interpretations, such a consensus is bound to be a 'conflictual consensus'. This is indeed the privileged terrain of agonistic confrontation among adversaries.³²

Even though the potential of *not* belonging to a homogenous national identity inscribed within the broadened concept of regional identity cannot be the ultimate answer to the problems of either limited political, cultural, and economic resources of nation-state, or the answer to a homogenised and globalised cultural identity, it could enable the democratisation of various societal patterns of behaviour and bring forward certain hopes for the future.

The Economy of Reverse Recuperation and *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić*

Finally, it becomes clearer that the questions of *belonging* and of participatory and deliberative democracy, particularly in the case of regional identity, are intertwined in a complex and reciprocal relation. Being dependent upon each other in this case means that this leaning on belonging to a certain community, and not to some other, provides the motivation for a demanding participatory democratic process.

³⁰ Adam Lupel, 'Tasks of a Global Civil Society: Held, Habermas and Democratic Legitimacy beyond the Nation-State', *Globalizations*, 2.1 (2005), 117-33.

³¹ Ibid., p. 124.

³² Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (New York: Verso, 2000), p. 103.

Economically, the project *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić* thus belongs to the realm of a certain staged 'ecological economical circle'.³³ A long-term interest in the relations between art and political economy was also the basis for her involvement in the long-term project and collective, Art&Economics Group (with David Rych and Dmytri Kleiner).³⁴

In the context of this project, such a circle is formed around the re-distribution of grants and the delegated role of an artist to the found/invited participants (the only condition to 'belong' to this voluntarily and deliberately formed multitude is to have the 'desired' name), who accept the invitation, not only to attend different events, but also gradually to produce content and design different formats. In this particular context, the artist enables a certain recuperation strategy – a knowledge platform that is unstable and open, with many loose and entangled ends that need to be connected or disentangled.

An inevitable question is how the recuperation is reversed and turned into 'small empowering acts' for each participant, rather than appropriated by the institutions that support the project (in contrast to the assumed systemic recuperation of institutions by Guy Debord). Recuperation here refers to the cultural appropriation of any subversive works or ideas by incorporating them and turning them into commodity.³⁵

Shifts in societal and artistic institutions make possible a societal agency as both artistic motivation and production. We see something similar with the *tontine*, the new form of credit association that is developing in the 'Third World': such grassroots communalism 'shapes a collective identity, it constitutes a counter-power in the home and the community, and opens a process of self-valorisation and self-determination from which there is much that we can learn'.³⁶

Ostojić, in particular, is concerned with new ways to conceive and produce art through *reverse recuperation*, i.e., through a solidarity that encourages and ignites various encounters, and through such new relations, she enables new rhizomatic relations to take form; through the new relations, indirectly, she opens up the potentiality of empowerment of the other name-sisters, or simply invites them to fully participate

³³ Anitra Nelson, 'Money Versus Socialism', in *Life without Money Building Fair and Sustainable Economies*, ed. by Anitra Nelson and Frans Timmerman (New York: Pluto Press, 2011), pp. 3-46 (p. 24).

³⁴ The Art&Economics Group was established in Berlin in 2007 by Tanja Ostojić, David Rych, and Dmytri Kleiner, in order to investigate the intersection of art and political economy.

³⁵ In Guy Debord's writing, the term 'recuperation' (from Latin, 'recuperāre': revive, recover, revive) designates the sociological process by which any radical ideas and images can be twisted, co-opted, and absorbed by mainstream and official culture and media in bourgeois society. *Internationale situationniste*, 8 (January 1963), 29-33; Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1967); Tom McDonough (ed.), *Guy Debord and the Situationist International* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

³⁶ Silvia Federici, 'Feminism and the Politics of the Commons', *The Commoner*, 24 January 2011 <<http://www.commoner.org.uk/?p=113>> [accessed 20 March 2013].

in various events and to enjoy the newly emerged friendships based on the arbitrary selection through this artistic project.

The common name ‘Tanja Ostojić’ as linked to a particular ethnic and cultural regional background, is only the starting point in establishing the loose structure that makes this project a unique artistic research experiment, and it is still open to many diverse developments. The art agency behind it relates also to the agency already entailed in all other Tanjas Ostojić who have or have not been contacted, and who, in a different way, on an everyday basis, overcome the determination of their own nation, gender, class, and generation, and encompass all these possible identities, making each of them so unique.

Note

* This essay was originally written by Dr Suzana Milevska in 2013 and has been previously published in German language only, in: *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić*, ed. by Tanja Ostojić (Berlin: Universität der Künste, 2014).

Talk show: *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić*, HKW, Berlin, 4 February 2013, with the participation of Tanja Ostojić (Trieste) and Tanja Ostojić (Berlin), moderated by Suzana Milevska, interpreter: Jelena Fuzinato.
Photo: Dario Fuzinato



Afterthoughts about the *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić*, to be continued... 03.05.2017

Suzana Milevska

Back in 2013, when I started writing the essay ‘The Potency and Potentiality of Transindividuality in *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić*’, the project was still in its research phase. Tanja Ostojić based her artistic research project on the outcomes of her long-term quest and communication with other women also bearing the name Tanja Ostojić. It was only a drafted proposition to look closer at various political, cultural, social, economic, and art phenomena such as: political and ethnic conflicts, belonging, national and cultural identity, economic transition, migration, immigration and exile, professional advancement and creativity, gender difference in relations at work and in family, and precarious labour, as reflected in the lives of the located name-sake women.

The artist had already located and/or established her communication with 28 women (whom she located in Bosnia, Slovenia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Germany, among other places) and several encounters and face-to-face conversations with some of the women had already taken place in various locations. A Facebook group was also created with 28 members bearing the same name – Tanja Ostojić – but at the time the group still didn’t have continuous traffic and activities. The handmade drawing of a map that traced the cross-border movements of Tanja’s name-sisters was still unfinished. In my text I also wrote that ‘several public events were planned’.

The motivation for this short *postscriptum* was exactly this humble announcement in anticipation of the process which later unravelled and disentangled various threads that were always supposed to be there (or were expected to take place) but were not yet visible and actualised. Despite ponderings and extrapolations that I based on various theoretical assumptions and arguments referring to, among others, Debord, Simondon, Virno, Agamben, Deleuze, Negri/Hardt, and Federici, I could not have anticipated, and neither could the artist herself, all the directions and the extent to which these

events would unleash the potentials entailed in the project's concept, and yet were not programmed and structured precisely in the initial draft.

The workshops planned for 2017 (in Belgrade, Banja Luka, Zagreb, and Rijeka) were yet to take place but now they are realised outcomes of the project in the form of interviews, discussions, and collaborations that have already taken place on social networks or in real places (e.g., in Split, Banja Luka, Bratunac, Nikšić, Ljubljana, Lörrach, Belgrade, and Zemun) among the artist-initiator and the other women bearing the same name, as well as with other artists and professionals in the field of art and culture. Not only did they all become participants, but they acted as active collaborators and became involved in different phases of the organisational process and creative production (e.g., during three documentary embroidery workshops in Belgrade, Banja Luka, and Zagreb which, in the framework of this project, were led by the artists Vahida Ramujkić and Tanja Ostojić together).

Perhaps it is still too early to evaluate and draw conclusions about the ways in which the project affected the individual life trajectories of all the women involved in these activities in theoretical and practical terms, regardless of whether their professional background is directly related to art and cultural production. Aspects of self-actualisation that have already been discussed – emancipation, self-reflection, empowerment, 'reverse recuperation', and concrete results such as individually or collectively produced objects – as well as the coining of the phrase 'transformative encounters', are only some of the steps which led participants to agree to engage in different collaborations and collective productions, and most probably will have further effects. The acknowledgment (on all sides) of the necessity to share copyright to the various outcomes (interviews, art objects, designs) is also an indicator that incited and justified the need for these short *a posteriori* reflections.

As this is the first attempt to summarise and interpret the ways in which the project moved from a concept to realisation, it is important to address the project's development in terms of artistic strategy, method of research, and how the artist dealt with the complex outcomes. It is most important to state clearly that the period in which the concrete activities of the project have been scheduled does not mark the end and therefore completion of the project's effects. It is exactly as it is in chaos theory – the initial conditions structured by the artist-initiator later allow many unexpected encounters and intersections, which rapidly develop in random, but profound relations, and are almost impossible to follow or provide an overview of their complexity and unpredictability.

Although the embroidered pieces visually representing the statistical data of the research results are remarkable objects of collaboration and collective labour, these and other produced artefacts and media were not the main aim of the project. However, their production was actually, in a way, imagined as only one means of transference

and a strategy for enabling the newly produced inter-subjective human relations that eventually developed in friendships and professional collaborations.

The communication and very intense exchange among the women of different generational, professional, and ethnic backgrounds, as well as geographic location – who initially gathered apparently arbitrarily on a voluntary basis, and only by coincidence of having the same first and last name as the artist – were possible only with continuous mutual respect for and genuine interest in each other. The time, scarce funding distributed to the involved participants and collaborators, and the artist's dedication was complemented by the institutional support that facilitated the process in which the women–otherwise–strangers located the points of rhizomatic intersections between their destinies, common interests, and different layers of subjectivity and multitude that emerged in the process.

Most importantly, although transindividuality was always already inscribed, its potentiality became visible and comprehensible only through the 'transformative encounters', the mutual introductions, and social exchanges during the one-to-one conversations, coproduction processes, discussions, and other public events. Thus a new sentiment of solidarity with the same (the name), but different (subjectivity and personality) has emerged. It can be read between the lines of this hypertext, the *Lexicon* with only one entry: Tanja Ostojić, but with so many 'homonyms' and a number of complex cross-references and interpretations that together create an ethnographic and psycho-geographic hypertext available for further research.



Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić, presentation, MoCARS, Banja Luka (BiH), 31 March 2017, with the participation of Tanja Ostojić (Berlin), Vahida Ramujkić, Tanja Ostojić-Guteša and Tatjana Tanja Ostojić, moderated by Lana Pilipović. Photo: MoCARS

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Suzana Milevska is a theorist and curator of visual art and culture from Macedonia. Currently she is Principal Investigator in the Horizon 2020 project TRACES at the Politecnico di Milano. She was the Endowed Professor for Central and South European Art Histories (2013–15) at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. She holds a PhD in Visual Culture from Goldsmith's, University of London, and in 2004 she was a Fulbright Senior Research Scholar. In 2010, Milevska published the book *Gender Difference in the Balkans* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2010), and edited *The Renaming Machine: The Book* (Ljubljana: P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E. Institute, 2010). In 2012, she won the Igor Zabel Award for Culture and Theory.

Tanja Ostojić is a Berlin-based performance and interdisciplinary artist and cultural activist who studied art in Serbia, France, and Germany. From 2012 to 2014 she was a fellow at the Graduate School of the University of the Arts Berlin. She uses diverse media in her performative and artistic research, thereby examining social configurations, power relationships, feminist issues, racisms, economy, and bio-politics between others. She works predominantly from the migrant woman's perspective, whilst political positioning and ethical participation define the approaches of her work.

Since 1994 she has presented her work in numerous solo and group exhibitions and festivals worldwide, including: *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić*, MoCAB Salon, Belgrade (2017); *Feminism is Politics!*, Pratt Manhattan Gallery, New York (2016); Busan Biennale, South Korea (2016); *HOMOSEXUALITY_IES*, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin (2015); Athens Biennale (2013); *Economy*, CCA, Glasgow (2013); *Tanja Ostojić: Body, Politics, Agency...*, Škuc Gallery, Ljubljana (2012); *Call the Witness*, Roma Pavilion, Venice Biennale (2011); Frederic Jameson Gallery, Duke University, Durham, NC (2011); *Integration Impossible? Politics of Migration in the Artwork of Tanja Ostojić 2000-07*, at Kunstpavillon Innsbruck, Austria (2008); *Global Feminisms*, Brooklyn Museum, New York (2006); and *Plato of Humankind*, Venice Biennale (2001).

Ostojić has performed at, among others: 7a*11d – International Festival of Performance Art, Toronto, Canada (2016); Volksbühne, Berlin (2016); KRASS Festival, Kampnagel, Hamburg (2010 and 2016); Live Action 10, Gothenburg, Sweden (2015); Préavis de Désordre Urbain, Marseille (2013); Spoken World Festival, Kaaitheater, Brussels (2010); Re.act.feminism, AdK, Berlin, and at Performa, New York (2009); ICA, London (1999); and Manifesta 2, Luxembourg (1998).

Ostojić's work maintains a high level of theoretical reference and has been acquired by a growing number of museum collections. She has given talks, lectures, workshops, and seminars at academic conferences and at art universities around Europe and in the Americas, including *Misplaced Women?*, a workshop hosted by the Live Art Development Agency, London (2016). She has published several books, including: *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić*, ed. by T. Ostojić (Berlin: UdK, 2014); *Integration Impossible? The Politics of Migration in the Artwork of Tanja Ostojić*, ed. by T. Ostojić and M. Gržinić (Berlin: argobooks, 2009); *Strategies of Success/Curators Series*, ed. by T. Ostojić (Bourges and Belgrade: La Box & SKC, 2004).

⟨<http://misplacedwomen.wordpress.com>⟩

⟨<http://www.van.at/see/tanja/>⟩

⟨<http://tanjaostojicshop.wordpress.com>⟩

**The *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić*
Project and Book**

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Embroidered Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić (2017)
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Workshop facilitators: Tanja Ostojić (Berlin) and Vahida Ramujkić
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Back cover inside, below, right and p. 53:
From the *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić* project archive (2011–17)
7 Tanjas Ostojić, Belgrade, January 2017
Photos: Marija Piroški

This publication is based upon *Lexicon of Tanjas Ostojić* (2011-17), an interdisciplinary participatory research art project by Tanja Ostojić that included academic and artistic research, five creative workshops, a number of public events, one group performance, and two exhibitions:

Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić / Лексикон Тања Остојић, MoCAB Salon, Belgrade, 6 June – 31 July 2017,

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Tanja Ostojić is an extraordinary and influential Berlin-based, Serbian artist who, since 1994, has created research-led, performative projects that engage with issues of gender politics and feminism, of migration and displacement, and of labour. *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić* brings these strands of her practice together in a multi-disciplinary, process-based, transnational project from a network of women around the world all named Tanja Ostojić.

Lois Keidan, Live Art Development Agency, London

Most importantly, although transindividuality was always inscribed, its potentiality became visible and comprehensible only through the 'transformative encounters', the mutual introductions, and social exchanges during the one-on-one conversations, co-production processes, and public events of the *Lexicon of Tanja Ostojić* project. Thus a new sentiment of solidarity with the same (the name), but different (subjectivity and personality) has emerged. It can be read between the lines of this hypertext, the Lexicon with only one entry: Tanja Ostojić, but with so many homonyms and a number of complex cross-references and interpretations that together create an ethnographic and psycho-geographic hypertext available for further research:

Dr Suzana Milevska, art theorist and curator, Skopje



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