

“I thus lack a reverent stance toward other people and their thinking”



At home in Ljubljana (2004)

Taja Kramberger was born in Ljubljana on 11th September 1970. She spent her childhood in Koper. She studied history and archaeology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Ljubljana, became junior researcher at the Ljubljana Graduate School of the Humanities and later completed her postgraduate studies (PhD) in history and historical anthropology at the University of Primorska. To date (2004), she has published three poetry collections in Slovenian: Marcipan [Marzipan] (1997), Spregovori morje [The Sea Says] (1999), and Žametni indigo [Velure Indigo] (2004), as well as one in German: Gegenstrdtung/Protitok [Contra-Courant] (translated by Maja Haderlap). Her fourth, quadrilingual poetry collection, entitled Mobilizacije/Mobilizations/Mobilisations/Mobilitazioni, is due to be published shortly. In August 2002, she co-organised and led a poetry translation workshop in Koper.

Questions (Literatura): Tina Kozin, 2004
Photos DBR et al., 2004-2005

Literatura: *In a past conversation, you said that you already felt close to poetry and visual art during childhood, but that you began engaging with poetry more concretely “on a banal and jovial morning – on 23rd September 1995.” Can you say more about that? Did you write no lines of verse prior to that, no poem?*

Kramberger: I have no intention of creating a myth around my entry into poetry. In order to answer this question, I will have to be quite expansive (I do, however, reply to some later questions very succinctly). It is true that language, speech (in Saussurean terms of *langage* which refers to *langue* and *parole*), opened up to me suddenly and with great force when I was concluding my parallel courses of study (history and archaeology), and was able to catch my breath for a moment. Apparently, I needed to relax in order for other, perhaps more existential and essential things, to fall into place. Because I was sucked into poetry so wholly and intensely, I then abandoned the thought of completing my studies of archaeology along with history (I studied them independently and in parallel, so I thought one BA would be enough). Today, I think that a person only truly enters poetry at a later point, when the collective speech (*langage collectif*), which every individual is steeped in simply by virtue of living in a given environment, begins to fragment before their eyes (and simultaneously, also within that person, since that speech has been internalised). To put it more directly: a person can be a poet without experiencing this fragmentation of speech, as actually occurs in the majority of cases, but at least for me, that poet is uninteresting in an artistic/epistemic sense, since he or she fails to reach the most important domain of speech, where the transformative core of the collective imaginary and the transcendental dimension of poetry are

located. (However, that poet may be interesting from another perspective: as the object of anthropological analysis that studies the mentality of a given era, along with its agents.) Society proffers collective speech, that is to say, the circulation of discourses that are often nothing more than the repetition of certain empty patterns constituting a socially cohesive ritual composed of old mnemonic formulae, metaphors, and phrases, through the means of media, the education system, specific communication codes, and, if its selection is overseen by mediocre critics, even the literary canon.

Today, I see my first book of poetry as a strong current of speech, which on the one hand opened up a great many potential possibilities and directions for future continuation, while on the other, someone who reads closely can already spot which I will not choose, as they have, with this book, disappeared forever. My subsequent decisions about which streams of speech to follow, which are present in *Marcipan* as possibilities, are much clearer in my later books; then, I was able to see more clearly what is worth following and what has already died out, even though it may at first glance seem lively and dynamic.

Marcipan is a process, it is a direct decomposition of language that occurs before the reader's gaze in a very light-hearted manner (a great many of the book's readers told me that they were surprised by how light and unburdened the collection is, even though it contains an entire imaginary universe of images), but what is deconstructed so lightly in that book is in fact difficult and enduring, which I naturally felt after I had finished writing it. My first book is thus a very direct disassembly of clichés, it penetrates into expressive and linguistic

possibilities and feels around for the banks of speech, the riverbeds, the borders; in short, it is a purification of language overburdened with collective prejudices, which lasted for several months and was highly embodied. Pedantic removal of the dead aspects of speech occurs in an entirely physical way, and runs parallel with the removal of the dead parts of the body, as bizarre as that may sound. When a person survives such a process, he or she lives more fully and sensually, more physically and actively, but also more keenly and directly, more sensitively, and at the same time becomes more material and engaged. This person – a poet – is aware that strong artistic successes also require, along with knowledge and sensibility, an immense endurance (yet by itself, without knowledge and sensibility, this becomes merely brute force or discursive violence; and there are those poets, too). Sometimes it is necessary to maintain poetic tension at the same level for months or even years, which is why physical preparation is the first condition for work. Going through a metamorphosis of speech and the body simultaneously, which involves the removal of clichéd verses from speech, and of redundant and inert mass (which is part of the ideology of one's environment) from the body, is doubly difficult: awkward if socially codified speech, full of common places, and the correct, expected measure of neurosis, and the gesticulations associated with it (hysteria is expected of women, but recently I have witnessed at least three male hysterical attacks at the Slovenian Writers' Association), assure the individual's safety and comfort within society. At the same time, this sort of metamorphosis is extremely taxing for the body – no additional mystification or mysticism is necessary.

In Belgium



Only few people can truly endure such a forceful metamorphosis, which totally changes the direction of life and the perspective over it. The consequence of this is that the majority of poets' work from any given period remains stuck at the level of prejudice and common sense, since an urgent structural shift away from collective speech of that period either did not occur or was not permitted to occur. This very inertia, which is easily recognisable in (poetic) speech, guarantees that average poets, who frequently use their own mediocrity and its concurrent popularity in social circles as a yardstick for measuring other poets, or even as an "argument" with which they harass those who are more talented and nuanced than themselves, encounter popularity and a positive reception. This is due to the fact that agreement between them and the average reading public is maximised by the lack of any particular effort required for the creation of meanings or alternate meanings, either on the part of the poet or the reader, since they are all

already clear in advance. This is, in fact, the very form of populism: write what they expect of you and you have a guaranteed bestseller.

But the second, more difficult choice, which I discussed earlier and which triggers an irreversible process of realisation and a transformation of the self, is a terrible exertion. After my first collection, I was completely exhausted, I lost 8 kilograms, I had terrible insomnia and my blood pressure fluctuated so badly that I could barely keep my balance. And yet the process of transformation that I have mentioned, which is barely the beginning of a literary adventure that strives to be more than an anachronistic or ostentatious *mimesis*, is for the author irreversible. Once the torturous speech laden with prejudices has been recognised and excised, it no longer exerts either physical or mental pressure, all of a sudden large interior spaces begin to open up, spaces of peace, clarity and inner freedom, while the poetic speech of the individual becomes a tool that is simultaneously a carefully controlled probe and a tentative investigative instrument. Something that sings in one's hands, like, say, the violin in the hands of Menuhin or Heifetz.

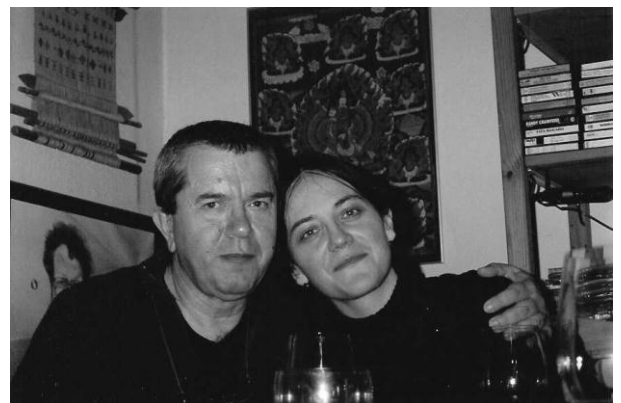
One very interesting effect of this exit from collective speech is that this very emergence of inner peace, and the liberation from the terror of collective mythologizing, frozen metaphors, and the re-arranging of stale phrases, leads in the outside world to a period of struggle for every corner of existential space. This was a very interesting shift that for me represented an extremely difficult experience. Of course, it first went wrong in the field where things continue to go wrong today: in the rigid gendered division within Slovenian society, where the structural space intended for women demands that they are quiet and obedient companions (accessories) of

men (this is the clerical, or rather local Catholic structure of the mental space, probably similar in all Central-European countries with a strong Counter-Reformation). Yet the Slovenian (and not only the Slovenian) patriarchal world is even a shade more pernicious than what I have just described, since its matrix does presuppose a space for the woman as exception. However, an exception in a very specific way. This exception – at once the exhibit and the isolate (called “the first lady of poetry” or “the first lady of prose”... not to make room for the second, third, fourth, etc., but always a singularity without any real power and socialisation) – is always in a subjugated relationship to men-signifiers, and is thus in a sense an extension of a man, we could say a *man-woman*, who shines like a saint in the pure world of saintly fraternities. In her concern for her own exceptional and ingenious status, which is purely an illusion, this man-woman *literata* does nothing to help other women access their voices and liberate themselves from the cruel, systematic, and institutionalised displacement of women from history. On the contrary, these exceptions, which are the confirmation, ornament-decorum, and extension of the patriarchal matrix, often inhabit their role in the patriarchal world so fully, and come to identify so strongly with the structural position which they occupy within this world, that they even help men exclude other talented women. After all, it is this very act of loyalty to the system by which they express and justify their status as exceptions within the patriarchal system, and thus ensure its internal coherency and seeming legitimacy.

Naturally, I quite soon (in 1999, with the publication of my second book) resisted being placed in this isolated structural space and did not relish becoming an exceptional man-woman in a literary world, which, I must add, was filled

with what I found extremely tactless, coarse, egoistical, and very deficiently educated men – poets and writers. They were simply not human beings, but some kind of literary social Darwinistic machinators; I was terribly disappointed by their social activities and stances. It didn’t even occur to me to abuse other women, or to proffer them, as a role model/criterion, my “chosen” position, achieved through the allegedly “naturally feminine” approach of licking the boots of boors and semi-intellectuals.

Fortunately, when the expulsion of my poetic speech, my name, and thus myself as a living being and woman, began to occur more systematically, I was more prepared for it than I had been when I started writing poetry. In the intervening period I met Braco Rotar, who had gone through a very similar experience of speech (he was a pot too, but soon decided not to follow that line) and had plenty of experience with various attempts at denigration and social exclusion. Things became much easier for me after our conversations and debates since I could see no one among the poets of the time with whom I could discuss this enormous personal shift and transformation.



With Braco in Denmark

After such an event you can no longer view your environment, or speech produced by others,

literati as well as scientists, the media, and politicians, in the same way. From then on you *see* language, you *sense* it physically: after several sentences, you see the actual extent of the writer's investment in speech, the writer's mimicry, tiny lapses, erotic loops in the discourse, the insistent game of appearances; you see the usually unseen connotative aspect of speech, traps set for readers, the ideological inserts that mobilise careless readers, but not genuine poets.

On the subject of whether I composed poetry earlier, let me say this: I did, but so do all children. On that level, versification is more of a linguistic exercise, closer to mnemonic training than to poetry. Even before primary school I created and bound my own picture books, drawings with stories and poems, for my mother. And in secondary school, I showed several poems I had written in a very short period of time (probably when I first fell in love) to my teacher at secondary school – Gimnazija Bežigrad. She was a little surprised and astonished, but nothing more came of it. At that time, they were printing several pamphlets of poetry a year, but the writing within them meant nothing to me. Back then I was deeply immersed in music, in the lyrics of Joni Mitchell, Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Grace Slick, Janis Joplin, Van Morrison, Neil Young, Billie Holliday, Bessie Smith, Mercedes Sosa, Violeta Parra and so on, in the music of Keith Jarrett, Miles Davis ... I bought LPs whenever I could (from Belgium via London flea markets and all the way to Sweden; everything, from pirate copies to official studio versions). It is also true that I had back then memorised a number of poems by Poe (*Alone* affected me deeply, and I still know many of them by heart today) and a lot of Prešeren. Today I wonder at the parallels between Dylan and Prešeren scribbled into the

margins of my exercise books; I'd forgotten about that. I went to concerts with my brother Boris, who was a member of the Pankrti, a much renowned punk band in Yugoslavia.

Later, at university, I abandoned my passionate LP collection and discovery of new music, there were other things that attracted me more. Yet this capital, which is also a pleasant, sweet memory of what was actively experienced and lived, which I invested in myself, played an important role in shaping my knowledge of English and my relationship to the world. From a processual and constitutive point of view, these were very important road-stops, even though they now appear as distant images with actors I barely recognise.

Literatura: *You have devoted your life to academia (social sciences) and literature. In your case, the latter is steeped in various references to the fields of philosophy and history, and is shaped into demanding, intellectual reading. What is the relationship between the social sciences and poetry as you experience it, are they separate fields or is there common ground between them, associations?*

Kramberger: As I have often emphasised, for me, academia (especially the social and humanistic sciences) and poetry form complementary fields, as both are fundamentally determined by (discursive) speech. Of course the orders of discourse differ across poetic and analytic functions, but this by no means implies that they do not draw from the same processes of knowledge and conceptualisation. They are separate horizons of perceiving and interpreting the world, but frequently they have a common connotative or cognitive field. Anyone who has come as far as to reach a certain level of cognitive conceptualisation knows this. For example, Einstein knows this when reading

poetry, Adrienne Rich speaks of it when she reads Marx, and it is evidenced in Foucault or Veyne's continuously inspiring readings of René Char, etc. Unfortunately, there is little knowledge in Slovenia of these analogous processes of cognitive conceptualisation and their reciprocal identification and stimulation.

There are multiple mystifications at work here: academics (and there are sometimes very sound academics), since they read decisively too little and too carelessly, and since they do not have enough motivation to read owing to the meagre and thematically incoherent selection of local poetic texts, are spontaneously caught in a pre-modern or romantic image of the poet. They have no conception of what *strong, contemporary, transformative poetry* is, nor of the differentiated linguistic levels on which it occurs, while, on the other hand, there is a string of rustic, pastoral and folklore poets who occasionally wrap their bucolics into seemingly urban furs, and appropriate a certain proximity to academia by means of a position on some pseudo-academic editorial board or by lobbying for some sort of academic recognition – without having any idea of how demanding it really is to work in the academic field and how much intellectual accumulation, pioneering analysis and elaboration is required in order to know how to write a solid and referential article in an academic and pertinent discourse, an article for solid and substantively demanding academics (and not for local academic leaders).



At home in Ljubljana

Due to this imbalance, which is established, maintained, and driven by the old non-reflective rivalry between science and art (which is a legacy of the 19th century), but also by a powerful and spontaneous climate of anti-intellectualism in Slovenia (which begins at the promotion or even imposition of simple and short sentences as a measure of linguistic quality, highly partial and misguided nonsense that does not lead to any greater sensitivity or greater differentiation of speech, but in fact prevents it while elevating dullness and inadequacy to a general criterion and thus enabling the perpetuation of a local “elite”), inherited from the Hapsburg monarchy, and so a reciprocally respectful stance of understanding, goodwill (most certainly not awe), and dignified relationship between these two great fields of human knowledge cannot be developed. This is a great inhibition from which a person can escape only by becoming involved in the relevant intellectual or literary groups and their discussions in other, less twisted environments.

Literatura: *How does the experience of art dictate your poetry (in your poetry, you frequently put into words “aesthetic experience”)?*

Kramberger: I doubt that I frequently put into words an “aesthetic experience”; this is a slightly unfortunate phrase, since the Greek *aisthanesthai* means sensation, *aisthetikos* means sensual perception, and *aisthetes* denotes the one who senses, so that “experience” is a redundant word when used in concert with sensual perception. I also think that a poem is an *act with aesthetic effects*, you cannot write down these effects and experiences later, they are placed in the poem and trigger themselves inside the reader, become complete through him or her. Certainly, my poetry is strongest at that point where the tension between sensual perception of reality and a poetically recognised content is highest. In other words, I am moved, astonished, or even feel the physical impact of poetry in which the poet approaches reality from the farthest possible mental position, and with intense force or with a strong (human but also intellectual) momentum, and creates from this extremely powerful creative and artistic tension between the distant and the real a realisation that feels as if it had occurred for the very first time (it is wonderful to be a part of this process, which is in all its entirety a *living* one, even as only a reader). These are unforgettable, almost corporeal encounters, which result lifelong favour and deep trust between a rare few individuals.

Literatura: *And how do you comprehend poetry in the context of other arts? What do they have in common, and what does poetry give you that you cannot find elsewhere?*

Kramberger: Poetry is speech with a particular, imaginary, that is to say, morphological and syntactic structure. Its images have their own dynamic power, they have a specific morphology which exists in relation to the structures of the imaginary space. This imaginary poetic space

has in every poet its specific logic and its own rules, which are interesting to compare with the logic of reality in the surrounding world and the collective in which poetry comes into being. Namely, it is here possible to determine whether there are any structural deviations, whether we are truly dealing with new connections between symbolic elements, which are important for invention in the poetic function, or whether we are seeing merely clichéd transpositions.

For me, a poetic image is considerably more than merely a momentary fulfilment of meaning, it has its own historical depth and characteristics that guide it, and which simultaneously mobilise any past meanings that a word may have had. Here lies the depth of the reality of speech, which brings much more than momentary propositions of signification; it brings age-old emotional correlations between signs, fragments of semantic metamorphoses, the aftershocks of the unknown and the forgotten, which perforate dreams, connect separate aspects of the imaginary, etc, even though we are not always aware of it. A lot of this can be found in visual speech, and a semiotic and historical-anthropological analysis of images via the visual signifier can reveal, in a similar way to an analysis of the poetic imaginary, how the mental space is shaped; it unveils the imaginary landscape, the constellation of meanings within it. These are, for me, intensely important and tremendously interesting things.

Poetry is comparative thinking, where the risk inherent in juxtaposing new figures has an important place. If there is no risk, then there can be no writing, no thought. And this means that, for me, lines do not become poetry simply because someone has strung them together and then named this resulting form a poem, instead, poetry begins only with the process of

autonomous thought, of risk. Even this risk is not a matter of a voluntary decision to “take a risk”; risk, if thought is truly put at stake, pulls along with it the person, and life, in their entirety.

Literatura: *What does, in your opinion, a good poem aim for? The established view holds that poetry is a “transcendental” space, that it tears us away from the automatism of everyday life and shows this life, and the world in general, in an entirely different light – one which excludes mere availability, banality – while returning to the world its wholeness and wonder... Do you believe in the “perfect poem”?*



In Topolo, Italy

Kramberger: Whenever a poem aims at something that we do not already know, but which lives within each and every one of us, and knows how to bring that into being, it is a good poem. A good poem is also many other things: it has, for example, the possibility of creating the kind of tension that shreds the constellations of accepted views, or that causes such strong and sudden mental dislocation that we find ourselves in a completely unknown imaginary space, which revives us, etc. I can't give any complete or final definition, since every definition is only a partial grouping of the attributes of a given process. And ultimately that is not my intention. It is true that a good poem tears us away from the “automatism of everyday life” and “shows the world in a different light”, but this should not

be the “established view”, since the “established view”, which is nothing other than a petrified generalised consciousness with fossilised collective representations to which living thought is foreign, blinds us with its omniscience, prevents the perception of reality that is before us. One of the core provisions of poetry is precisely the subversion of the “standard view”, the *doxa*, as Roland Barthes puts it, adding that this is a “wrong object because it is a dead repetition, because it comes from *no one's* body – except perhaps, indeed, from the body of the Dead”. The standard view, stereotype, *doxa* – all of this distances people, mystifies their access to actual thought and living speech.

The deconstruction, abolition, and subversion of “established views” and the other categories I have mentioned, all contribute to the transcendence (surplus) of poetry. Let me add: there is no general transcendence. When we are dealing with poetic transcendence, this is transcendence according to the individual poem, or the poetics of a given poet, and is always in relation to something which already exists. To put it differently: transcendence marks precisely the relationship between recognising and locating what is established (in space and time), and the inscription of invention (non-standardisation) in the new space of the imaginary.

It follows from the above that my answer to the previous question is: *no, I do not believe in the “perfect poem”*. (What is that, anyway? In relation to what is it supposed to be perfect? In what context? Surely not that of eternity? What sort of perfection are we dealing with?)

Whether the writer wishes it or not, the poem is always a part of the something (society, culture) in which it was created. On the other hand, it can

only rise above its time when the author is capable of a distanced view of the society in which he or she lives. And this is again only possible if he or she possesses sufficient symbolic capital, enough knowledge and sensibility, as well as the appropriate discursive talent to transform this knowledge and sensibility into quality poetic speech.

The “perfect poem” you mention seems to me more like an atemporal recipe, a prescription, a formalisation that is turning into petrification. I am interested in living thinking, thinking which is mobile, alive, which evades fossilisation, and which resists the intrusion of a general consciousness that would determine it completely.

I am also not a person of (religious) beliefs; I have an aversion to determined belief structures. I thus lack a reverent stance toward other people and their thinking. I think that a “perfect poem” is a relapse into total(itarian) belief, which demands the inclusion of everything (which everything?) and along with everything, perfection (without any criteria?) in every thought. For me, this is both an illusion and a terrible pretension.

I do not believe that acquisition, depletion, and colonisation of others’ thoughts are truly possible; and this most certainly has nothing to do – that’s at least what I think – with powerful literature. This pretension resembles an abuse of trust and cannot exist outside the case of one who is ignorant and knows nothing about himself, or who pretends not to be ignorant, an opinion held, among others, by Roberto Juarroz, the Argentinean poet who died several years ago, and who was one of the most original thinkers of the latter half of the twentieth century in his continent.



In Koper

I am interested in *strong, confident, transformative poetry* (poetry written from singular human experiences that has the power to exceed the threshold of general opinion, which has the potential to transform reality in an open and non-exclusive dimension), which can be completely everyday tuned and shaped from the imperfect daily debris of reality. Poetry that is a healing antidote to today’s widely accepted false holy relics, as Adorno once wrote about Proust’s discourse.

Literatura: *What role does childhood play here – many poets, including yourself in your first collection *Marcipan*, very frequently return to this period. Is this connected to a different comprehension of the world characteristic of childhood, is it a matter of each individual author (thus making literary creation a sort of “therapeutic method” that gives the writer an objective view of his or her own experience, and a better insight into it), or is it perhaps a combination of both?*

Kramberger: I don't know, it is definitely a combination, but not only of these aspects, also of many others. For example, a person's relation with time and space is to a considerable extent defined by the *spaces of memory* (*lieux de mémoire*) with which we establish specific relationships in childhood. This itinerary, this networked structure of temporal and spatial positions in the world and the relationships between them, stems from our experiences in childhood, and in life sometimes repeats or attempts to re-activate itself in very odd ways. But I can't give you a pat answer to this question, since the theme is too complex and we would certainly need to reflect more deeply. The objectivisation of one's own life – and thus experiences from childhood – can be carried out with the aid of various instruments that help the poet to establish distances when they are required, and to coincide with the view of another when circumstances demand it. The childhood gaze is merely one of those instruments.

Literatura: *Is a poet one of the chosen ones, or can practice, "drill", and craftsmanship also produce a good poem?*

Kramberger: A national poet, for example Jovan Vesel Koseski (1798–1884; a Slovenian populist poet within a national paradigm, who overshadowed other stronger poets of his time), is one of the chosen ones *because somebody chose him*. There are plenty of those around today, giving each other compliments and awards. True poets are not chosen by their contemporaries (who frequently join forces in lynching and persecuting them, elevating their own incomprehension to a generally applicable criterion), but rather impose themselves on their environment. The reasons for creating poetry are not a mission, apprenticeship, or "drill", but an

almost sensual realisation, which it is possible to communicate, formalise, and execute with the help of poetic speech. It is of course also possible to communicate it differently, but much less economically and precisely.



In England, Hay-on-Wye

Literatura: *Your poetry could be described as hermetic. It demands from the reader that he or she has a broad horizon, or rather, is well-read. What is the meaning of the reader? In your opinion, what does a competent reader look like, and how does negative and positive criticism of your work affect you?*

Kramberger: It surprises me greatly that we can, in the here and now, after decades of exposure, describe anything as hermetic. Hermetic poetry and literature were whatever was disliked by authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, but we would never be able to prove any connection with Hermes Trismegistes or with actual hermeticism. Perhaps there is some contamination here by hermetically sealed pickle jars? This ascription is equally surprising to those few readers who truly read my poetry (and

who do not partake in the defamation about my poetry and my person). The answer to your question lies elsewhere, in another question: Who benefits, and how, from labelling my poetry (or any other) with that descriptor? This kind of label is in fact always deployed with a particular motivation; it aims at a particular effect: those who use it attempt to discourage the public from reading different or “rival”, “overly difficult” poetry, claiming that it is incomprehensible or inaccessible only to especially chosen people (perhaps in order to direct this public to their own poetry, or to the poetry of their protégés, who would thus more easily and more surely achieve accolades and awards?).

As I have said, “hermeticism” was in Slovenia always a label which enabled the removal or attempted removal of poetry that was different from the established and repetitive poetry. I never thought that poetry was the domain of non-worldly and uncultivated people; in fact it never was, anywhere or at any time (except perhaps in Slovenia following the restoration, and in some other similarly provincial and secluded environments). At the end of the day I do not wish for, nor have I ever wished for, a multitude of readers, a few are enough for me, if only they are capable of overcoming the interpretative dictates of the purported culture of their surroundings.

Sometimes it really does seem as if I am living in a *mute burlesque* of Slovenian poetry and literature, or culture, even, which addresses those who are interested and those who are not *off the record*: “We invite all those who are uneducated, semi-literate, impregnated with alcohol, status-seeking and oppressive men, who have a minimum several-decade-long history of breathing exercises, or even better, an opus of

nonsense spewing packaged into book form, to gain overnight fame in Slovenia. Women invited only infrequently, with special conditions, which are at every moment adapted to meet the appropriate, momentary, and lasting frustrations of Slovenian men.”

Regarding the position and meaning of the reader: from the history of textual meaning, which has yet to be written in Slovenia (I myself dealt in some detail with the field of reception of the work of Vladimir Bartol and Josip Vidmar in the interwar period – the Thirties, and discovered some interesting things, several of which I published in the journal *Družboslovne razprave*), we can see that reading practices are at every historical moment very heterogeneous, but also, simultaneously, coercive and inventive. They are coercive because they always stem from already established social hierarchies and conventions, and inventive in those segments where readers dare to transcend these constraints, to creatively appropriate the substance of the book for their own creation of meaning (this category also includes those critics worthy of the name). These latter readings, which are no longer merely the reception but in themselves the production of meaning, interest me deeply, since I know that such readers do exist. At the same time, it is true that there are boundaries, restrictions on this free transgression, since even the articulation of original, unexpected, and subversive meaning always takes place within the “space of possibility” that must first be explored, known. In this sense, readers’ appropriations are not popular, which does not, however, make them any less free. The position of the reader is of course important, but of course a supplementation or upgrade of the writer’s text is dependent on the reader’s capability, the reading codes and conventions that dominate in a particular community, and which, as Roger

Chartier, says, having conducted a lot of work on reading and reading practices of the past, do not yield equivalent audiences in synchrony and diachrony. In this sense, the history of literature is a history of various appropriations and various modalities of the appropriations of texts. It would be dangerous and wrong to think that the social conditions of reading are universal regardless of space and time. This is an illusion that is widely held in Slovenia (it can be observed in the fact that many people hold the opinion, for example, that an established Slovenian poet can automatically be interesting to anyone outside the clique, and on the other hand, that someone who attracts no attention here – in Slovenia – is practically unquestionably uninteresting for other reading publics outside of Slovenia).

For me (I repeat, I do not speak in general) and for my poetics or poetry, a competent reader is one who manages, through their own reading, to constitute a human or an intellectual space through which it is possible to become embedded in the webs of meaning that stem from my own writing. The kind of reader who through his or her own competence (which I cannot define for the reader, though I do through my poetics set a threshold for entry, and its height, in very specific ways), that is to say, through an inventive reception of my work, becomes enmeshed in a series of complex and connected signifying determinations. These activations can of course be very different, and while I do have a certain notion of the entry point to my poetry, this may not necessarily – or not at all – equate to the reader's.

And with regard to poetic criticism, there is never a simple division between positive and negative criticism. (Even the terms, for my vocabulary, miss the point entirely, since they

are aimed at effects, at success or lack thereof, instead of the analysis of imaginary relationships that is crucial for understanding what happens to thinking in poetry).



In Belgium

It is sooner about asking from where, with what sensibility, with what elaborateness of speech, and with what symbolic capital someone measures my (or some other) poetry, and judges it. I am always ready to accept criticism, but it must be pertinent, it must have clearly visible criteria according to which my speech is judged. If one judges with a prejudice, or if, for example, communication begins with the phrase “personal grudge”, then we have nothing to talk about. This is not the level of dialogue, but the level of planted or prescriptive final judgements and exclusions.

Literatura: *What is your relationship to literary readings and other such events?*

Kramberger: I enjoy public readings. Oral communication, dissemination of meaning, is an interesting and exciting event based on the voice as the bearer of meaning (just as paper is the bearer of meaning with the written word), which I, at least, experience very physically. I always have a precise feeling for how much poetry I have managed to transfer to the audience; but of

course this is never wholly dependent on me, it also depends on the receptive ability of the audience and many other things that can intervene in the event. I have experienced several wonderful readings, the last one at the Hay-on-Wye festival in England where people came to me after the reading, very touched, and thanked me for the experience. After such emotionally condensed readings, a person needs some peace, even when what takes place is something beautiful, incredibly exciting, and kind, it is very exhausting, since it engages one's body to the fullest. I am not a crowd person; when meaning multiplies, I withdraw. I don't feel well when my speech deviates and changes into a tool for pressuring other poets. I also have no intention of controlling the circulation of meanings. Besides, with the dispersion of meaning, information about the author and knowledge of the author's cognitive horizons is lost. Which is also why, of course, I am more interested in the author's reading than the interpreter's. The latter is more of a receptive curiosity, while the former is an identification of the cognitive depth and fundamental authorial allegiance to speech.

Literatura: *How long do you hone a poem before you let it go? Do you return to your texts?*

Kramberger: I cannot answer with a single formula, since it varies a lot. Sometimes I write a poem that is utterly complete, as if an egg had been laid that one can't add anything to. If you aren't careful, you will merely crush the poem – like an egg. At other times, I only combine the thoughts I wrote down in my notebook at various moments (or on found sheets of paper, airplane tickets, sugar packages, etc) and which lead into a certain direction that I feel may end in a poem. Or third, I might be pushed into a new poem after reading an inspirational text (not

necessarily poetry, sometimes it is an academic text or the menu in a restaurant) or some fragment (gesture, constellation of elements, word, etc) of the everyday. Then I write this down, sometimes I return to the text, and sometimes I don't. If I do return, I tend to pay very careful attention to the balance of rhythm and meaning. The fourth option: I stand at a pedestrian crossing and suddenly think of four lines of verse, which I must then repeat in a very specifically mnemotechnic way so that they don't escape from my mind and bring them safely home where a pen awaits me. And I could keep going. This is an infinite list of very different, but above all very ordinary moments in life, which are intruded into by fragments of processual poetic thinking from which we occasionally catch a stream or drop and then call a poem. These intercepted thoughts and images, with the aid of which people feel about for the reliefs of our own internal imaginary spaces (which are always a combination of the individual and the collective), and with whose aid we move through real life, somehow help us to shape ourselves as people. And not merely those who write, but also readers. How we shape ourselves is another question. A poem is a form of pre-text, it strongly influences the person who writes it, transforms him or her.

Literatura: *In a past discussion, you said that the boundaries of social autonomies (for example, the autonomy of the literary field, or the sociological, historical) need to be understood, heeded and controlled. I wonder how you understand the notion of "autonomous poetry" – especially given that this frequently also sustains itself from other discourses?*

Kramberger: In life, a person moves through various, more or less autonomous spaces. Autonomy stems from the Greek word

autonomos, which means a person who acts according to their own rules, while the word *autonomia* denotes the right to act according to the rules you have set for yourself. Autonomy thus means only that different fields have their own rules and their own instruments with which they can carry out processes of realisation, but it does not mean that there is no connection between these fields. That poetry also sustains itself from other discourses is right – if only it did that more in Slovenia, although on a more challenging level and without the omission of citations – and by no means erodes the autonomy of the field of poetry. It is important that those who recognise themselves in this field know its instruments and its cognitive and objectifying processes. If, first of all, they do not even know that this, let us say literary field, is autonomous, and if, in second place, they know nothing of its tools and processes, then there is no wonder that it is ruled by disorientation and chaos, a state in which everyone can judge everything but doesn't really know anything about anything.

Literatura: *How do you understand the relationship between the poet and the narrator in a poem? Is poetry necessarily tied to its creator's experiences, or can it overcome them and thus approach fiction? More concretely – is an authentic poem possible, one which would put into words a viewpoint or an emotional experience that is not also the author's own?*

Kramberger: Poetry is a special form of reality (an imaginary one), which inscribes itself in the material agent (discourse) and through specific means integrates the actual, the material, and the imaginary reality of the writer. In this integrative function, the poet and the narrator are combined in the poem, intertwined. Where exactly these two functions separate, or intertwine again, is impossible to say in general terms, but only

through an analysis of an individual poem or text.

Every poem is always a revelation of the imaginary, of "fiction", if you like, but one which carries with it real effects. Experience and fiction are definitely not separate in any radical, and especially not in any simple way; just think of how someone puts into words their own experience, and you are already in the realm of the fictional.

But this bond is very complexly constructed, it certainly isn't simple. The means of an author's perception of this bond determines whether someone is, for example, a powerful poet (the order of the poetic and the cognitive) or a poet-mystifier (the order of the mythological and mythomantic). The poet and the narrator are effects of identificatory strategies, which are at the same time also discursive strategies. Poetry is of course closely connected to its creator's experience, whether this is everyday, artistic, intellectual, etc (they are all life experiences), as much in the case of an excellent poet capable of transgressing this experience as with the poet who merely simulates a given experience or smuggle its absence (even the absence of an experience is already inscribed into speech; with speech, one simply cannot cheat).



In Belgium

Slovenian poetry in recent times, since this appears to be cyclical, is too full of empty, simulated references to academia (science) that only contribute to discrediting its authors, since the perception of academia, as it is imported into the poetic field by these references, is frequently an expression of an anachronistic conception found in media and is as such an ideology *par excellence*, so that it becomes instantly possible to recognise the “pretentiousness” with which a poet attempts to force on the reader an image of his or her own “intellectual development”. I mean to say that it is not enough to bring “science” into a poem and think that the work is thus completed, and that you can henceforth be known as a “poet intellectual” (these are awful simplifications and swindles, which are possible only in intellectually backward environments), what is truly important is the binding of referential symbolic and poetic elements on the level of speech in the poem itself.

So, I think that the cognitive connection between the categories experience and creator is fundamental for the undisturbed and normal development of personality, and bring both to life and to poetry a freshness, fullness, and love. The separation of these categories is only a crippling of personality. As Roberto Juarroz says, “love which does not think deeply what it loves is a monstrosity. Thinking which does not love deeply what it thinks is not a sufficient thinking. More ever – here the poetry’s lot is casted – poetry doesn’t exist without that double bind.”

Most likely, the problems of “authenticity” (a word which may once have, for example in Walter Benjamin, counted as an important marker of artistic creation, is today, as far as I’m concerned, utterly inadequate for describing powerful poetry), “seeing”, and “emotional experience” are the domain of those who do not dare to live fully or write fully. I simply do not worry about such labels.

To clarify, I should perhaps emphasise what Roberto Juarroz has already said in his own way. He says – with which I agree: “More and more we’re getting tired of the half-done botcher’s poetry, that’s a poetry in which the author has not entirely submitted himself/herself to all aspects of creation. Half-done botcher’s poetry is the worst enemy of the authentic poetry – in a way as the half-done human being is the biggest adversary of human. It is very possible that the same is true for all that’s half-done in relation to that what it is or wants to be. Even the failure demands an integrity, especially in poetry.”



In Belgium, with Eric Brogniet and Tahar Bekri

Literatura: *Your poetry frequently moves along the boundary of rhythmic prose – particularly in your first collection. It is also very “narrated”. How do you understand the relationship between poetry and prose?*

Kramberger: The relationship is complex. It is difficult to characterise it in short. There may be a lot more space in prose for embellishment (e.g. descriptions of places and events, an outline of a character, etc), and more space for the reader’s interventions. In other words, a reader inhabits prose differently than he or she inhabits a poetic work. But the poem is more focused in terms of lexical choices, as a structure it is more economical and thus more intensive. It demands more attention from the reader, perhaps of a very different kind. We are also dealing with very different semiotic regimes; in prose and poetry, signs are first of all constituted differently, and second, arranged differently. But despite this, I think that the boundary between prose and poetry does not represent a particular division for someone who has an elaborate code of speech. For example, in poetry you can poke fun at fools, but in prose, you have room to show how fools poke fun at everything...

I personally know that I carry prose within me. I only need approximately decent conditions and

possibilities for writing, which, since I live in the kind of environment I have already briefly sketched out (which requests a constant struggle for elementary existential rights), I have yet to achieve.

Literatura: *What makes a poem a poem?*

Kramberger: The poetic order of discourse.

Literatura: *Why were you, as an artist, attracted to poetry?*

Kramberger: Bypassing all attempts at rationalisation (from psychoanalysis to an attempt to explain this to myself using anthropologically historical and sociological parameters of the space and time in which I live), in truth, I have no idea. But I can still try: I am attracted like a magnet to the speed of thought, to lightning twists, to humorous sparkling, to rapid jumps, unusual juxtapositions, not as hubris, of course, but as a direct cognitive response to a situation. If I sense all this, then the attention of all my sensors increases a hundredfold and goes into a state of alert. Such encounters are of course very rare, but they happen nevertheless and they attract me within a moment. I can also say, even though it may sound very immodest and contradict the gossip that circulates about me in nooks and crannies of this country (sometimes, undermining such structures is almost a pleasure), that I am in fact very patient and indulgent toward those people who deserve it. Because there are few such people in Slovenia, my engagement in this country is usually quite different: with my sharpness, consistency, and intransigence I try to hold open a space for affectionate and sensitive people, into which the crass and thuggish of all kinds keep intruding. This thankless job is a consequence, or rather a compulsion of my environment, not my personal tendency. Which

is why I frequently have to take a breather from Slovenian stupidities and insanities.

Literatura: *What is your stance toward the Slovenian literary tradition? Which poet has influenced you most? Do you agree that you “were a student of Tomaž Šalamun” (as an esteemed Slovenian critic put it) – you did dedicate a poem to Šalamun in your collection?*

Kramberger: First, there is no single tradition, not even in Slovenia. Very different things are processed into one tradition by various specialists for the forging of history and the homogenisation of the present. And then: ever since Peter Kolšek made some sort of far-fetched connection to Tomaž Šalamun, this has become a repetitive “critical” formula, just like a rosary or prayer wheel. My first collection was, for me, a powerful fluxus of speech and tired me out completely, but at the same time it purified my language to the point where a return to a herd-like discourse filled with phrases that had been chewed a hundred times, flowery language, and socially pleasing versifications was no longer possible; it is interesting that it did not meet with any particular resistance, if I leave aside (which is of course wrong) several paternalistic and ignorant criticisms. Such “criticisms” in the public reception of poetry in Slovenia are otherwise symptomatic of our cultural establishment’s abilities of comprehension, but they are also rife for another reason, since they create continuities, a simultaneous re-activation and awakening of prejudices in connection with *(trans)formative literature* (different from the generally accepted, repetitive kind), and especially with the powerful, loud voice of a woman.

Peter Kolšek, who is clearly of the opinion that even in poetry great things grow directly from small, and that poets are inevitably apprentices,

pupils, or acolytes of older poets (and perhaps this principle does hold true for the poets he holds in high regard, established behind a local fence, since after all, if you take a quick peek at how young poets are “recruited” in this country, and you are not completely – ideologically – blind, you will soon recognise initiation rituals characteristic of sacred fraternities and other exclusive groupings). Well, there is certainly no lack of such “esteemed” critics. Truly powerful and *transformative poetry*, as I call it (*transformative* because it is capable of moving the axis of the imagination, and to exclude imaginary deformations characteristic of the environment in which the poet comes into being), has nothing in common with such craft-like, scholastic, or acolytic conceptions of poetry. No, I was palpably not a student of Tomaž Šalamun, though even he might like to spread such a paternalistic and delusional nonsense.

But encounters between poetries and poets do take place, sometimes powerful and sometimes passing collisions, when something lights up for a moment and then you are on your own again. There can also be longer-lasting respect between people who write, but for this to occur, one requires considerably more staking of the self within poetic speech than is usual in these parts. In such a relationship, I find the interlocutor’s directness and criticism most valuable, rather than an avoidance of responsibility, empty idolatry, or even “branding” or a “marketplace”.



In Ljubljana, literary reading with Barbara Korun

My encounter with Tomaž Šalamun was not of the long-lasting kind, since neither my speech nor my relationship to the existing world and to the creatures that inhabit it have much in common with his conceptions. In addition, an adult and emotionally well-developed individual does not have a whole lot of time for staging an apprenticeship or lackeyism; if one senses speech, and sees and recognises the imaginary structure behind it, then he or she has a considerably more important task: to make visible what less talented or capable contemporaries cannot yet see. To engage in servility toward self-designated or officially pronounced gurus would be a waste of time and energy.

Since you've asked concretely how Šalamun appeared in my collection, let me also relate the following experience. In 1995, after several months of writing, I put several poems in a folder and took them to Tomaž Šalamun, who I then did not know personally. But I had been reading poetry for 20 hours per day, accumulating the greater part of Slovenian poetry of previous centuries, especially of the 20th century, and trying to understand what had happened to me. Today I see that this is not really possible through *opera poetica slovena*. Why, then, did I take them to him? Because I realized – today I could say that this realization

might even be an error^{*} –, through my reading, that his poetic speech had a sufficient accumulation of symbolic capital that he could perhaps understand my poetic speech, and because I realised, in reading his poems, that there was a kinship of the speed of thought, and sometimes even a similar dynamic of metaphors and metonyms, which I had not noticed with any other Slovenian poet, and of course also due to a certain economy of pleasure represented by a short-term common trajectory with Šalamun's poetics.

From today's perspective, I can only say that this companionship was very partial and short-lived, since, with the exception of several of his poems, this poetics, which either lost or missed the meaning of poetry when it replaced the arbitrary nature of figures with voluntarism, and turned itself into an egoistical relativism and a domineering means for the instrumentalisation of the poetics and libidinal evasions of other poets, no longer means to me what it did in that moment. In any case, I am interested neither in the spasmodic aestheticisation nor in the instrumentalisation of the libidinal economy (in my opinion they are a royal – or foolhardy – road into kitsch and a totalitarian discursive strategy). But of course I still think that Šalamun's imaginary world principally belongs to the domain of modern poetry, in comparison with other users and seeming appropriators of this world here today, and at least in that narrow segment where his poetics is inscribed with the perception and recognition of certain

^{*} When you read for example John Bradley's book entitled [War on Words: The John Bradley - Tomaz Salamon Confusement](#) by BlazeVOX Books in 2006, which enlightens many of Šalamun's "poetic" and not so poetic strategies for the Slovenian poet to be placed and noticeable in the world, some of which I've, alas, experienced even in a more drastic way, all this brutal political and cabal masquerade becomes very well visible – note added later by T. K.

relationships between art, artistic experience, and the written sign. His poetry, at least in its peaks, is quite complex and more than a binary and banal articulation of personal and collective frustrations, and in a strangely twisted and frequently deformed way, it is nevertheless inscribed with the experience of the contemporary world.

Whoever finds refuge in routine and lackeyism finds it difficult to become extricated from them: what may at first have been a tactical stance on the part of an underdeveloped poet candidate becomes his or her second skin, while the original skin, to the extent that it existed at all, disappears. Of course, this eternal pupils finds a balm for this social climbing in all but poetic means. The other, important question is why Tomaž Šalamun needed his padding, his own “cabbage patch”, the grateful and servile boys who spread his networks and his fame, but cannot come close to him with the force of their “own, eager” speech. What is the real reason for this networking and not another form of empowering his ostensible heirs, given that it was certainly not the criterion of powerful and transformative poetry?

Literatura: *How do you feel as a female poet in our literary arena, which is still dominated by your professional male colleagues (if you also take into account the smallness and specificity of our particular literary space – the provincialism of which you accuse it, the support for “untalented local geniuses”...)? Which female Slovenian poet were you most impressed by?*

Kramberger: I have at least partially answered this question in my reply to the previous one. It is probably already partly clear to the reader how I feel on this point. The Slovenian literary arena is tremendously robust and harsh, the speech of its literati is shockingly non-differentiated and

short of breath. Of course there are exceptions, which is very fortunate – without them I would certainly not be answering these questions – but as a rule, these exist in spaces from which it is difficult to intervene in the social structure. This is also a terribly exhausting act and not everyone can manage it. In the pulse of Oxford life in the year 1941, which Phillip Larkin describes – though in a relatively conservative manner – with great sensibility and intellectual perspicacity in his novel *Jill* (1946), the *lack of “douceur”* in a time of social hardship and lack was balanced out by a *lack of “bêtises”*. In Slovenia, where the social situation is becoming exacerbated (with recent events also in the literary field, when Iztok Osojnik was ousted as director of Vilenica International Literary Festival in order that another structural entity/literary business enterprise closer to Šalamun and co's imperium could be ensconced at the Slovene Writers' Association), there is no space at all for sensitivity and human relationship, while stupidity is positively on the march so that we can under no circumstances speak of its lack.

In any case, the “poetics” or “poetic speech” from the Slovenian literary canon, if we can even call it that, which I began to talk about earlier, continue with a perfectly defined anomaly in the local society, which is also a recognisable anomaly of Šalamun's poetry and of the Slovenian imaginary: *this is an extremely harsh and exclusionary stance toward women*, which was and remains within the Catholic clerical mental matrix and represents the foundational reason for the majority of imbalances in the mentality of those who take part in Slovenian culture. This cause is socially a very effective incentive, since it promises a dazzling career for indiscriminate repressors of women. Allow me an illustrative digression: it was quite amusing to

see how Aleš Debeljak, in one of the most recent issues of *Sodobnost* (vol. 68, no. 6, June 2004) demarcates himself from my apparently unnerving, and in his article frequently denied “influence”, without bringing himself to squeezing my name out of his pen; if he had done so, that would have meant the transgression of a powerful, half-internalised or instrumentalised taboo that concerns the intelligence of women and acts precisely through their namelessness and concurrent amnesia. That this bizarre evasion, and the four articles espousing Debeljak’s own influence (most likely commissioned), were triggered by just one of my texts, an editorial to one of last year’s issues of *Literatura*, is a kind of perverted acknowledgment of Debeljak’s fear that my “(non-)influence” is not quite what he thinks it should be. Of course I care very little for influence in the way it is imagined, claimed, and desired by Aleš Debeljak. But I do think that if someone wages war on my texts, and even quotes excerpts from them, I am entitled to my name and my surname (and don’t say that this is a “personal grudge”, since it is only about decency, about unfailing respect for the integrity of another person by means of their full name, and for the elementary adherence to the intellectual referential mechanism, which is the only guarantor of communication and dialogue, and which the writer, who prefers self-referential and monological discourse, was clearly not after). “Conservatism”, that is to say, the violent reactionaryism in the perception of women that is currently gaining strength (also with the publications of people from the local literary sector, such as Drago Bajt and Peter Kolšek in *Delo*), shows how little is necessary for the old prejudices to re-emerge in the forefront and for the utterly incredible and vile, but always obscurantist, persecution of women to become

naturalised or normalised. After all, the position of women in society is one of the measures of contemporary democracy (another such measure is the protection of minorities, which is also systematically overlooked).



In Ljubljana, literary evening with Iztok Osojnik, moderator Lidiya Dimkovska

At the end of the day, I have to say that the imaginary landscape of Tomaž Šalamun and his adoptees (modelling Slovenian exported literary canon and “elite”), insofar as they cannot step out of this string of transferences, is for me today a monotonous desert. It is not about me refusing to recognise the historical position of the “Slovenian literary tradition”, in other words, the homogenising construction of “local” literary experts and the literati in charge, which this does not speak to me either as a poet or as a sensitive person who resists any type of displacement and exclusion based on prejudice; I feel that what speaks to me more are the voices that this tradition left behind, did away with deliberately and covered their traces (the omission of a name must be seen as a deliberate strategy of this sort), or those contemporary poetic voices that are not merely a semblance, but which reach deep, and which in the furthest layers of speech, non-violently but with a keenness that cannot be overlooked, transform social self-perceptions

(Adrienne Rich, Pablo Neruda, Muriel Rukeyser, June Jordan, Tomas Tranströmer, Roberto Juarroz, etc).

In connection with female poets, I can say that all female Slovenian poets who ever spoke up publicly, and persisted in publication, have at least as much and usually more potential as men who have been incorporated into the infamous literary canon. And those who have a much greater and far-reaching poetic potential – by which I mean that they have in their poetics consciously discarded components of canonised, that is, herd speech, or who were about to do so – have accordingly been, and continue to be, thoroughly erased, for example: Tatjana Soldo, Nataša Velikonja, Maruša Krese, Barbara Korun, in some partial aspects also Meta Kušar. Stanka Chrobáková Repar, a poet and prose writer who in recent years writes in Slovenia, naturally represents an equal enrichment of elaborated speech that bears transformative power. But I have to say that transformative speech interests me regardless of the gender of its author, since it already bears the inscription of an awareness of a discriminatory social division according to gender; no particular technique of social compartmentalisation is thus necessary, but it is absolutely crucial to highlight any attempt at exclusion and to oppose it with all available might, all the while patiently discrediting erasures of women in the past and preventing them in the present.

Literatura: *Your mental home, in your own words, is Paris, a multi-million, cosmopolitan city, which once represented the poetic metropolis of the world. What draws you into the world?*

Kramberger: Nothing draws me into the world, I live in the world. The undercurrent of this “drawing into the world”, “windows into the

world”, and similar metaphors, which pops up continuously in the repetitive and ruminating cultural and “political” discourse, is Slovenia as a bunker, as a closed ghetto, outside of which there is a radically different world. And in a very particular meaning, there is. Despite that, Slovenia is also a part of the world, one that I happen to find in many aspects a less pleasant part. I can’t live a normal and relaxing life here, I cannot realise myself fully where a Peter Kolšek, for example (he is certainly not the only one, he is merely one of the actors of this genre and of this domineering mentality), who considers himself to be – and here it is even true (since everything is based on imposed self-representation and fabricated image) – a poet and literary critic, can write “difficult are these times of political and feminist correctness” (for him, simple or easy times are then those of incorrectness, which is for Peter Kolšek clearly the promised utopia), while he as a “competent” person participates in presenting the role of women’s literature in Slovenia (in the debate café at the 20th book fair). For me, this is like Eichmann having a competent voice at a round table about the *shoah*. These are not equal sides. Of course such personae exist elsewhere, but they are largely safely and contentedly stowed away in the places that they deserve according to their mental orientation, their actions, and their chauvinistic discourse, and are not underfoot where decisions are made about the transmission of mature and contemporary currents of thought and actions. This inversion – where people of the worst kind are in power – is terrible in Slovenia, for me it is as if the world’s greatest anomalies were extrapolated and made into a criterion for social life instead of us facing up to them, reflecting, and eliminating them, which would gradually even enable people to breathe normally, would give them back their decency,

their dignity, and their responsibility to themselves and others (the basis of human and civic self-awareness) – and perhaps allow several solidarities and sensibilities in the relationship to the other and to difference.

There are many things in Paris, but I have yet to come across such a mad inversion as I have found in the Slovenian academic and cultural environment. In addition, Paris lacks this sharp, existential, violent, and indiscreet exclusion, which consolidates itself through gossip in bars, dives, nooks, and corners, and which borders on the elimination of opponents or even those who simply fail to conform to the local standard. Instead there is a permanent direct confrontation and a refined intellectual keenness. Where I spend most of my time in Paris (largely in the area of EHESS and with several literati), the power of argument and symbolic capital, that is, knowledge coupled with an individual's subtlety, reign supreme. That hardly means anything here. Whenever I return from Paris I experience awful culture shock, when in Paris, a person momentarily forgets how uneducated and uncouth the elite Slovenian cultural workers, intellectuals, and academics actually are. But of course that makes those few subtle, studious, and noble people, such as Barbara Korun, Iztok Osojnik, Gašper Malej, Brane Mozetič, and perhaps several others on the Slovenian poetry scene all the more valuable. A critical stance toward coerced mental and literary patterns, on the part of people who have enough knowledge and enough sensitivity to resist ideology, brings them closer together in a very special way and forges respectful relationships regardless of any differences in opinion.

Literatura: *In Velure Indigo, in particular, we can trace in your poetry more or less obvious references to the current situation in the*

Slovenian literary and cultural space, an echo of several polemics which also unfolded in print media. Do you think that literature can be a filter for settling personal accounts, or rather: how can poetry that touches on this domain exceed the expiration date of a mayfly?

Kramberger: I think that echoes of the current situation in any given environment are in one way or another found in all literature, although the differences between these echoes are humongous: from the mad dash for novelty, and concerns for fashionably updated writing, to a commitment to viewpoints and reflection. Since the poems included in *Velure Indigo* were written several years ago (1999 – 2002), they do not reflect today's relationships and polemics (you can read more about this in the new issue of *Apokalipsa*, 2004, no. 84/85, pp. 139–182. [COBISS.SI-ID 223678952]) – it is only that relationships have changed little in that time. Regarding “settling personal accounts”, I can only reply with another question: do you know of any “impersonal accounts”? I don't actually know what to do with this hackneyed phrase. I am more interested in where, from what context, and what poetic sphere such a question can arise, who and why would someone want to “settle accounts” with me through such an imposition?

I do think that the impediment lies elsewhere: in the *hypocrisy* that is an integral part of the majority stream of Slovenian culture, and which enables the utter irresponsibility of those people who float and wander within it: the taboo around names. Historical events happen to have concrete actors with concrete names. We do not begrudge Prešeren his cobbler's shoes (he wrote ironic verses about a man who was his intellectual adversary in literature, named Cobbler – Kopitar), while the esteemed local literature specialists know only little about the

Renaissance “personal accounting” of, say, Aretin, Bembo, or Erasmus. This does not mean that in more cultured spaces, these texts are any more outdated than Athenian comedy, which is also a “settling of personal accounts” with the leading personae of public life in ancient Athens. The durability of quality of strong transformative literature does not particularly concern me. And I leave fretting about personal accounts to the mayflies.

Literatura: *How do you see the relationship poet-intellectual? What is the social role of the poet today?*

Kramberger: Above all, I don’t see a relationship. I doubt that anyone who is not an intellectual can really be a poet or prose writer.



In Canada

After all, the Slovenian literary everyday is proof of that. Of course, we must know what an intellectual is, and definitely not believe that anyone who graduates from FF [Faculty of Humanities] or FDV [Faculty of Social Sciences], or even the Faculty of Medicine in Ljubljana (or elsewhere) is automatically an intellectual. The social role of the poet, on the other hand, is as always double-sided: on the one hand, the poet conducts long-term interventions into the social imaginary and collective

mentality with his or her poetry; and on the other, as an intellectual, that is to say, a person and a citizen, reacts *par excellence* to events that occur in society, and intervenes in them (of course: not only seemingly, in protected environments, or without any action). However, such writers or poets are as few and far between as such scientists, even though societies, publishing houses, institutions, and academic establishments are overrun with people who hold these pretensions – but pretensions are merely pretension, even if the environment mistakes them for reality.

Literatura: *You organise and lead poetry translation workshops. Numerous poets, theoreticians, as well as translators are in doubt about the translatability of poetry and feel that it would be more appropriate to talk about the adaptation of original texts. What is your view of this and what guidelines have you followed in these translation workshops?*

Kramberger: For me, poetry translation workshops present an opportunity for many things connected with my poetic writing and investigations. Linguistic systems come face to face with specific “normalised” rhetorics (idioms, phrases, etc), and the conceptual worlds of authors, poets, and translators. Translators are in fact authors, although not of quite the same type as writers of texts. And not only because *traduttore* is always *traditore*, but because translators produce the intelligibility of texts too. Their work results in epistemic guarantees for the coherency of literary works, much more than newspaper reviews do; after all, translators had to deal with each word of the text. Adaptations or vernacularisations are also not a simple issue: on one hand they are unavoidable, since there is a transferral from one culture to another, and the translator (as well as the reader) inescapably

modifies the text with his or her intervention, translation (and reading). On the other hand, less educated or less aware translators tend toward degradation, they reduce the text or even do away with what is different from the local canon. In the encounters and comparisons that inevitably take place at such meetings, I can test my way of writing and my understanding of other people's texts. Contact with others, personal, official, short-term, long-lasting, is a category of its own. My co-editor Gašper Malej and I captured some of this lively atmosphere from the international poetry translation workshop in Koper (2002) in the collection *Različni jeziki/Linguaggi di-versi* [*Diverse Languages*], which showcases various examples of juxtaposed translations into different languages, and even different versions of translations into the same language carried out by different translators. In this sense, this is interesting material for further reflection.

Literatura: *Do you think that translating fiction is more difficult than translating non-fiction?*

Kramberger: Definitely not, but it is different. Careless translations of a non-fiction text can hinder the text's message, while distorting a literary work destroys both the cognitive and the aesthetic aspect of the text. The translating process is different: with a non-fiction or academic text, one must recognise expressions and terms that for the sake of legibility cannot be arbitrarily exchanged (in academia, there are no shortcuts and no clownish approaches). With literary texts, it is necessary to also comprehend the aesthetic aspects of rhythm, and message or content (cultural context), not merely *en bloc*, but in detail, from line to line and sentence to sentence. In addition, translation is always a deep reading of texts, be they fiction or non-fiction, it is a form of minute, almost surgical

work with words, phrases, and syntax, which says many very intimate things about the author of the text.



Forum Tomizza (photo Lado Jelen)

Literatura: *What is your opinion on translating from the original, in what cases are “second-hand” translations admissible? When the translation of the Chinese writer Gao Xingjian's *Buying a Fishing Rod for My Grandfather* was published, some people objected to the fact that the publishing company decided on a translation from another language, from the authorised French translation, even though the Faculty of Humanities has for many years hosted a department for Chinese studies...*

Kramberger: It is difficult to say anything about the meaning of translating from the original in such a limited space. Of course it is better to translate from the original. But this fact does not mean that a translation from the original is necessarily the most competent translation, since competency does not depend on the original but on the linguistic and intellectual capabilities and sensibilities of the translator. I am also much more interested in translations as a historical-anthropological objects, since I find what happens during translation more interesting than the translation itself (for artistic effects, I read originals, where possible): what do the

translator's interventions into the text look like, is the translator familiar with the broader context in which the text is positioned, does the translator know anything about the author. A little over a year ago (2003), I gave a lecture at the Collegium Budapest on how beautifully the mental structure, and with it, the broader mental field of the collective, emerge from semantic interruptions and the substitution of words if the translator is not adequately aware and does not reflect on his or her actions. This is definitely an issue populated by mystifications, which must not only be eradicated but also understood. "Second hand" translations are permissible in a number of situations, for example when the original has not been preserved (we know many Greek texts solely from translations into Arabic), when the translation has been authorised and is understood to be canonical, when it is not certain which language the original was written in, and of course also in other cases. In Gao Xingjian's case, it was a translation from a canonical version of the text which the author recognises as an original, and which is moreover written using clear associations with the new French novel (this, for instance, was not understood by the proof-reader, who "corrected" the text). It is also interesting that the Slovenian "intellectual clique" was more concerned by feuds, presented as a matter of departmental remit, and monopolies, rather than the proof-reader's crippling of the translation that went unnoticed by all of these "critics". This was definitely not motivated by a concern for the quality of the translation. But I would be very pleased if someone were to also translate Gao Xingjian from the Chinese (the book, after all, is slim, and it is very useful for the reading public to have more than one choice), and would gladly participate in reflecting on the translation carried out by Braco Rotar and myself in order to see

where adaptation has taken place, what sort of cultural transference occurred first between Chinese and French, and later between French and Slovenian. For me this would certainly be an exceedingly interesting project (in such a study it would naturally be necessary to consider all aspects, all interventions in the text: from the author's original interventions, where and why the author allows authorisation, via the translator's, what modifications are introduced and why, and through to the proof-reader's and editor's).

Literatura: *You speak six languages. What is the significance of knowing various languages for entry into the world of poetry?*

Kramberger: I don't speak all those languages equally well, but even so the knowledge that I have enables me to overcome barriers that are not merely lexical, but also cultural and mental. This ability and experience are important for writing any kind of text, as well as reading and translating. In fact, knowing languages allows me to fully understand the intellectual discipline required for every type of activity: for the writing of poetry as much as the writing of non-fiction or academic texts.

Literatura: *What do you make of the expressive power of the Slovenian language; which language do you most feel at home in?*

Kramberger: At its basis, Slovenian contains approximately the same expressive potential as other languages; there is nothing wrong with it, and it can even surprise us when we penetrate its logic to discover the finesses that are only rarely utilised by literature in this language (there are many possibilities in e.g. syntactic combinations or morphological variations that produce secondary semantic effects). The problem with Slovenian is that it has – even more so than

Chinese, even though its system of signs is considerably more complex – certain authorised owners who happen to treat it the way they do, and for whom it is largely a tool of separating from other cultures and languages. Despite this appropriation, I feel perfectly well in Slovenian – but I also feel well in some other languages.

Literatura: *“I have no problems with the beginnings of poems,” you wrote in one of your poems in Marcipan. How do your poems come into being – from momentary inspiration, or are they the result of longer periods of reflection?*

Kramberger: What answer do you expect to this question? Is a goal at a football match the result of momentary inspiration, or long-term training? Can you even have “momentary inspiration” without longer periods of reflection? I am not one of those people who swear by inspiration or mystify it (also, “inspiration” is a category that belongs to the aesthetic institution of romanticism, which may in fact still characterise the majority of Slovenian poetry today, but not mine). I am reminded of an interview that Paul Auster had with Edmond Jabès, where the latter says: “But I do not believe in inspiration, or anything like it. The book emerged from something that was already deeply inside me.” During certain favourable constellations, this simply wells up, and then the poet writes it down in order to try and decode the meaning of the process at a later date.



In Nida (Thomas Mann's house), Lithuania

Literatura: *“/.../; [Yet] the centre/is determined neither by the outer nor/the inner demarcation line;/neither is it determined by its proximity or distance/from an arbitrary point/of a given period –/the centre is! and/ it isn't arbitrary./ It is the only point/from which words can push off/words not many write...”, you wrote in Velure Indigo. Is the centre inside you, or have you found it outside yourself?*

Kramberger: The centre is, of course, inside myself, just as it is inside every individual. This is how culture works: it is inside every one of its bearers, and not on the street or the museum. This is a crucial observation, which may, for the more subtle readers, remove the undercurrent of my egocentrism or eccentricity raised by the question above, since I speak of what all members of a culture have in common. Locating the centre, which is paradoxically usually a lateral unit and goes unnoticed in time, enables a different view of culture. The truly abstract characteristics of the centre, that it is an immaterial entity around which sensual perceptions organise themselves, position this entity (centre), which lacks any substance and is merely an observational perspective, on the border of common-sense comprehension. And that is what makes it so fascinating. Think only

of Shakespeare's opus or the poetry of Emily Dickinson, whose elaborated speech and perceptive thought established the cultural gravitational centres of the British Elizabethan and modern American societies, while both were in their own time outside what society accepted as its own centre.

Dangerous

*I really was dangerous,
in the way that a shower
can be dangerous to someone who is dirty.*

*Too quickly and too steeply
my reputation grew among students,
among several cultivated people from Koper and
especially people not from Koper,
undermining the image of the crazy woman,
which had just about been successfully deployed
by the combined forces of exportable Slovenian literature.*

*Tomaž Šalamun had to arrive,
or somebody under his name,
and occupy the chessboard with his black pawns.
Abracadabra.*

*You had the opportunity, Koper,
to create something new, something people friendly.
You squandered it. It still shows that
the human contents planted here after the war
is not worthy of this beautiful Venetian city.*

*I am neither a Koper poet nor a Slovenian one,
I am merely a poet,
I describe human cataclysms, children's hands, and
heartrendering seagull cries.
I have no fear that I could not do this
anywhere in the world.*