



DIVERSIONS
ANCA OROVEANU

An art historian by training, Dr. Anca Oroveanu teaches at the Department of History and Theory of Art of the National University of Arts in Bucharest, where she holds a permanent position. She was recipient of a scholarship from the Getty Grant Program, Fellow of Collegium Budapest, visiting researcher of the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme and Associate Professor of the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art in Paris and Visiting Fellow of the Remarque Institute in New York. Her book on *Psychoanalysis and the European Theory of Art*, for which she received the prize of the Art Critics, was published in 2000 by Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest. A collection of her studies, *Recollection and Oblivion: Writings in the History of Art*, was published in 2004 by Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest. She has contributed studies, essays, articles and translations to specialised journals and art catalogues. In 1998 Anca Oroveanu was invited to join the staff of the New Europe College as scientific director. In this capacity she seconds the rector of the New Europe College in overseeing its academic programs; since 2000 she has been co-ordinator of the GE-NEC Program, a program in visual studies hosted by NEC, supported by funding from the Getty Foundation. – Address: New Europe College, Plantelor str. 21, 023971 Bucharest, Romania

I came to the Wissenschaftskolleg at the very beginning of October 2004 for what was to be a three-month stay here. This stay started, leisurely (since the first two weeks of October have a rather introductory nature, Fellows still gather, are shown around and explained

At the Wissenschaftskolleg, Anca Oroveanu was a Fellow of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

how the institution functions) and most promisingly, with a first Fellow lecture on “Manics and Hermeneutics” by Wolfram Högbe and with a delightful concert-talk by Stefan Litwin, only to come, for me, to a sudden end, due to a personal emergency.

I must thus begin by thanking the Wiko not just for the original invitation, but for being so accommodating about the unorthodox format of my stay: thanks to its generosity, I was able to come back for another two-month stay at the end of the academic year, in June and July. The disadvantages of this distribution of a stay, which is not over-long as it is, are obvious. I have been trying to also see its good sides, and in this I have been greatly helped both by the Fellows and the staff. As a result of this peculiarity, I could observe the College and its Fellows when they were still getting used to the place and to each other, and again towards the end, when habits of communication and close ties, in short, an atmosphere characteristic of the group as a whole, were already formed. I'm afraid I didn't manage to become a fully-fledged member of this community; but this is not to say that I wasn't received with friendliness and even warmth.

In coming here I was proposing to work on questions having to do with series in contemporary art; I was also invited to be part of a focus group on images, which became known here as the “Picture Boys” (given its all-male composition), but whose members were kind enough to include me even *in absentia*, re-baptising it “Anca and the Picture Boys”. Frustrating as it was for me to have missed many of their meetings, those in which I was able to take part were among the highlights of my stay here, and I hope that this common reflection on the present fate of images will continue, even if from a distance.

There is in circulation a definition of the ideal Wiko Fellow (attributed by some to Wolf Lepenies) stating that she is the one who fails to do what she had set out to do; if this is so, I qualify. Obviously, given the brevity of my stay, I wasn't proposing to complete my project here. Progress in reflecting on it could be described in mostly negative terms: I came to realise even better than I already knew how vast the territory is towards which it opens, and I mapped better small sections of it. One could also say that I let myself be slightly diverted from it, but from within it, as it were. In reading on and especially around my topic, I came back to a text by Kazimir Malevich, which had intrigued me for quite some time. It is a text on Lenin, written a short time after his death and discussing *post-mortem* images of Lenin and their status. It is, as most Malevich's texts are, in many ways an obscure text, but also, I think, a challenging one, as it confronts questions crucial to representation, replication (cloning, Tom Mitchell would perhaps say) and commemoration. I was fortunate to be able to consult here the first four volumes of the Russian edition in the

making of Malevich's writings, unavailable to me at home (the fifth volume of this edition has just appeared, too late, unfortunately, for me to be able to order it; as I write, I have on my desk a comment on it); once started on this track, my readings and ruminations continued in this direction, in ever wider circles. I am not yet certain what will come out of this, and how whatever may come out of this will relate to my "series" project. Beyond these more personal diversions, "diversion" is, I think, embedded in the very idea of such an institute. It would be a pity not to let oneself be diverted by such a diverse and interesting group of people and by the rich program of events the Kolleg offers.

Speaking of the opportunity to consult books, I touch upon what is, for a scholar coming from my part of the world, a sore subject. I may have intrigued some of my co-Fellows by the overuse of the copier; but access to literature in Romania is still very difficult and haphazard, and one of the great advantages of my stay here – profiting, as I hope, also my students – has been to be able to consult, read and copy portions of books unavailable at home. This too acted as a diversion, of course; but a diversion I couldn't and wouldn't deny myself. I am particularly grateful to Gesine Bottomley and to the library staff for the impeccable way the Wiko library functions; availing myself of its services has been of the essence to my stay here.

Involved as I am at home, besides my teaching and my personal work, with an institute for advanced study that was set up in Bucharest with significant support from the Wiko, my perception of this institution is perhaps in some ways different than that of other Fellows. Though the institute in Bucharest is of rather more modest proportions and ambitions, I know something about what making such an institute work well entails, and I can only wonder at the perfection achieved by the Wiko staff. It would be tedious to mention by name everyone at the Wiko who contributes to this perfection, and I wouldn't want to leave anybody out. May they all be individually and collectively praised and thanked.