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Sofija Grandakovska, researcher and a poet, actively engages in interdisciplinary studies in the area of comparative literature and visual semiotics. She is the author of the academic paper *The Speech of Prayer* (2008) and of the two books of poetry *The Eight Day* (2005) and *Burning Sun* (2008). In 2006 she was awarded with the prize *Best Young Scientist of the Year* and she is still the only awardee of the accolade *Vita Pop-Jordanova* by MANU in the field of literary science for 2005, awarded in accordance with international classification. She has also received several other important accolades in the field of science and creation: a plaque as a sign of recognition for the affirmation of the University Sts. Cyril and Methodius – Skopje (2006), the National Recognition regarding her receiving the accolade for the best young scientist of the year (2006) and the Special Recognition for her academic and scientific project *The Female Monasticism in Macedonia*, awarded by Ford Grant and the Museum of the City of Skopje (2004), as well as other recognitions.

Based on her internationally published and recognized academic and creative work, Sofija was nominated by *press to exit space* for international intellectual exchange supported by one of the most prestigious cultural and artistic spaces in the heart of the New York City - Apexart, founded in 1994 by the artist and its current director, Mr Steven Rand.

Currently Grandakovska is a candidate for a Ph.D. at the University of Sts. Cyril and Methodius and is working on her essays *New York and I*, which are a result of her New York experience, and which relate to the theoretical aspects of the difference in the universal socio-cultural and artistic discourse. Sofija is presenting a part of them in this issue of the E1 magazine.

New York: Big bag, small place

In the current time of strong geostrategic and cultural ferment in the Balkans and in Europe, and in a time when the recession is a global phenomenon, at the turn of winter into spring I was honored to stay in the most cosmopolitan city in the world - New York, in the heart of Manhattan. Hence I became one of the “participants” of the daily and academic life of the city. New York is a city that cannot be retold. Yet, New York is an unbelievable city – it simply tells you that it loves you. You cannot resist but return the love and you cannot be indifferent and not conquered by it. It is big. A big bag. New York is big in everything. Just like the metaphor for the sea, which is always big, always deep and hence always high; and most of all – always *free*.

Any sort of contextualization of my academic experience and my intimate feelings for this city is just a relative standing before such an attempt, as New York is always ahead with its vividness and its unbelievably open discourse toward the opulent possibilities. Through the metaphor for the endless width of the sea freedom (big bag) and the inevitable human choice

(small bag) for the limited position on such a “map”, in order to be able to sail and to arrive to one’s own place and in order to be able to retell the story later, this city simply escapes from the possibility to be put in a solid frame. Its content stimulates the feeling of freedom, but exactly this feeling reveals one’s own facing the city’s cruelty if he/she doesn’t find a way to contextualize such freedom. Hence, you are faced to make a choice in the name of that: to limit the freedom that the city gives you, in which you either swim as a dolphin in the New York aquarium or you remain standing on a dry surface.

In a certain respect, it is as if you would constantly think of J. P. Sartre in New York, and as if you would constantly live every moment of difference, the socio-cultural influences and the symbiosis of the critical thought in the center of art. In New York. It is a city in which you are absolutely freed from the subject of the national feeling, and in return you get the dynamics of the thought and the discussions on modernity. It is a city in which it is easy to socialize with what is now and here, before the entire energetic downpour of cultural events. The opportunity to equally think, create and act together with someone from Ethiopia, Greece, Bogotá, Scotland, or..., maybe exists only as a powerful wish in the imaginary concept in all of us. But in New York such a utopia disappears before the possibility your concept, which is different, new, but honest, to be heard and seen. Maybe that’s why this city has been successfully thriving as a center of different cultures, languages and peoples. Such a cosmopolitan concept of the city constitutes its creative discourse which in turn motivates the person to be honored to express his/her thoughts. That’s why I think this is a city in which you can never become arrogant.

There is always an AFTER, and going toward it, it is completely clear to you that you have preserved your innocence toward the new challenge. They say people are the same everywhere. And that’s true. But there is something that exists in between lines in this “absolute” truth; maybe it is naive for this cruel world, but on the level of a question: *how are the people same everywhere* - it gives the healthy logic of the New York creative content. The city does not make the people, but it makes their disposition, connection and way of acting toward possibilities, which are always open for everyone and they are dialogically the same. Therefore, in the phrase of Apexart: *Big bag - small place*, I can see an excellent creative and metaphorical designation of New York, in which there is a possibility for everyone without the annoying Balkan nepotism and the European paroles of the “embracings of the Great Mother”.

As a small example of such a historical discourse, I point to the extensive collections at MoMa and the Metropolitan Museum (and not less in the Morgan Museum and Library), where the world has been united at one place from its prehistory until today. In this story nobody is interested about the greatness of Kazimir Malevich because he is a Russian Jew, and not even the originality of Frida Kalo is measured due to her Mexican origin. The world is interested in results, not in individuals! And here the story should end. But New York shows that not only the story of the world heritage has been excellently curated, but also how that story has been dynamically inspiring the modern, current artist and researcher who chooses to curate in a non-linear manner and to create and define a critical stance in order to contribute toward the contemporary issues and dilemmas. All that said the person is not marked politically, ethnically, religiously or by gender, because that’s simply a human right. Talking with my colleagues in

New York, we couldn't but remain unanimous in the stance that the New York cosmopolitanism is not only a rare attraction for every creator as its openness is not only a right to individual, intellectual, academic and artistic possibility, but before all and most of all - it is a platform of a human right. In this context, New York mostly becomes a synonym for freedom (big place), and being part of the freedom (small place) does not mean becoming its captive. That is because at the same time you have the right to keep your anonymity in New York as a part of the way in which you practice your choices for your personal freedoms. Your freedom, your stance, your map, your solitude, your New York!

The way in which New York can tame you is unbelievable. Although never in my life have I seen at any other place millions of people walking along the endless Broadway from dusk till dawn, I was yet enraptured by their determination to arrive to their place (small place), and not to the place of the other. I am not talking with this romanticized zest about New York as about a "poetic quest for the lost heaven", but most of all I am talking about the message for the concept of one's own place. I was convinced that the concept for the *big place-small place* in this city functions perfectly as a rule that refers to the result of one's work and the interest toward the results, and not as an exception due to someone's name or surname. I mean to say that the world is interested in results, and not in individuals! That exactly legitimizes my thought that New York does not recognize arrogance, because at the moment you allow it, and you can, you are left without your small place, and the large space continues without you. I liked the feeling of the constant multiplication of the small place, of the possibilities of the small place as a dynamic discourse which always means openness, exchange, learning, critical thought, energetic avalanche - all forms of the big place. Hence, I think that New York has an unbelievable charm to tame you, showing you its greatness that can never be yours, but yet it never takes the possibility away from you to participate in it.

The last day, when I was just a few hours away from my departure to the JFK airport, there was a constant and heavy rain in New York. I was left speechless, but I didn't want to just leave standing still. I selected the best in my i-pod – Zbigniew Preisner and his music for the *Double Life of Veronica*. At the same time at *Union Square* I was approached by a journalist and a photographer of the daily *Metro*. Apart from the other questions they posed me, one of them was: How are you going to describe New York in Macedonia?

I arrived home with what I took with me from New York: Big bag, small place. I never had a chance to read how I had briefly described the city in the New York *Metro*. Yet, for telling a story there is time, inter alia - right here.

Sofija Grandakovska