

WARREN NEIDICH

Acceptable Differences

Belgrade Cultural Center, Belgrade

Curated by Maja Ćirić

January 2011

Warren Neidich

“Acceptable Differences”

curated by Maja Ciric

published on occasion of the exhibition

Belgrade Cultural Center,

Belgrade

January 2011

Lazar Trifunovic considered art to be a complex phenomenon wherein a lot of other complex phenomena fit in, (1) but he pointed out that art, if it is to live with the times wherein it is created, must listen to its sounds, its problems and pains.(2)

If it is to be relevant in the 21st century, the gallery must simultaneously be an open network, a black box, a white cube, a temple, a laboratory and a situation. It must take on the form of a creative partnership between a curator and a producer, between an art object and the idea of art.(3)

In view of the fact that contemporary art is merely another niche within the framework of the overall intensive cultural production, especially within the surroundings of web 2.0, art criticism is addressed to a small number of insiders who, even when they really are interested in reading it, do not have too much time for doing so. If criticism has no market value and logic, its chances of finding its own space within the framework of cultural production lies in its being inscribed into curatorial practice.

If the purpose of practice is action itself, (4) the kind of action that characterises curatorial practice is aimed at creating a context wherein worlds meet and where continual negotiation between various regimes of knowledge, between art and its public, is stimulated. The policy that I am advocating is not necessarily directed towards finding final solutions but rather towards stimulating dialogues and understandings inside the times wherein we act in combination with historical precedents, theoretical reflections and concrete processes.

Paul O’Neill (5) speaks of the difference between a co-dependent and independent curator. According to him, it is not possible to be a curator without being dependent on institutions which one is in continual negotiation with. He stresses the dysfunctional aspect of this relationship, which is often unidirectional and emotionally destructive. Even though the majority of projects come into being through such cooperation, the independence of my being an agent is marked by my determination not to reproduce the system but to introduce a different perspective into institutional operations. An independent perspective is based on information and knowledge characteristic of transnational networks that I belong to, which specifically engage the methodology of curatorial practices. Pursuing this further, I try to ponder how the role of art is modifying the institutional socio-political paradigm.

Contemporary art, without utopian expectations, enables us to reread and reconsider the views of Lazar Trifunovic. My aim here was to stimulate the multiple ontologies of painting and conceptual art and to point out the outdatedness of an essentialist notion of art, reflected in the following view: art has never been so banal and so concrete as to make distinctions between certain political and economic systems – nor is it today. If social systems differ, do people differ as well? Are men/women different today merely because they live within the framework of different productive processes? Art has never counted on elements limited to the ‘national’, in the narrow sense of the term or upon specific socio-economic processes in the broader sense. Rather it has come into being as a product of the spirit, as a result of its conscience. Art has nothing in common with the outer, physical landscape and collective social relations. It only depends on the inner psychological landscape of the creator, on his/her personality. (6)

What we can conclude from these statements is that Trifunovic is arguing for essentialist things. As

such his entire argument calls for the emancipation of the individual from his surroundings and strives for the production of an apolitical art. For art and curatorial practice based on poststructuralism, the discourse of the surroundings is essential. They are both the result of discursive production. Today, through reconstructing the cultural landscape, different formations are created. Post-structuralism is also important for Warren Neidich’s culturally inflected Becoming Brain model whereupon ideas like feminism, post-colonialism and queer theory play as important roles as science in generating knowledge and in sculpting neural networks and its counterpart contemplation.

The exhibition of Neidich is an intellectual horizon that complements the public sphere by revitalising and reinterpreting art history, activating experimentation and theoretical reflections, evaluating process, dialogue and participation. His works exhibited here, Education of the Eye (2010) and Rainbow Brushes (2008) understand art as an existentialist investment, a set of ideas, and redefine the relationship between form and the conceptual gesture, with a view to critically setting the system in motion.

Neidich’s gesture counts on power as the modifier of the neurobiological architecture, coupled to the machinic assemblage of the socio political economic cultural system at large set in motion by its surroundings and context, and uses memories in order to create a plan for future decisions and action.(7) This approach enables him to shift away from a rigid and normative understanding of artistic practice, on the one hand, and from an essentialist one, on the other, and to review what Maurizio Lazzarato refers to as “noopolitics” (8), that the focus of power and the technology at its disposal is not the materiality of the body but its psychic life, especially its memory an attention.(9) The self-portrait of the artist with a palette, created by Vasa Pomoricac and dating from 1932, (10) as well as the overall context of the Lazar Trifunovic

Award, have been repositioned, through form and performance, within the framework of a collective process of self-orientated individuals whose interests were joined in order to discover what painting and criticism presuppose today and how they can be relevant. Historical heritage is an integral part of contemporary experience, and the participation of ten contemporary artists and five experts in an experiment created new possibilities of critical engagement. Neidich has staged his historical dialectic dramaturgy at the Belgrade Cultural Center to illustrate a paradigm shift from previously known biopolitics to noo- power – information power: objects no longer change brains, It is information that changes them. Through this project, contemporary art makes it possible for us to create an awareness of differences that are conditioned by various forms of power acting in geopolitical, ideological, economic and scientific contexts. While science is finding similarities and consistencies, art is about creating difference and unleashing the pluripotentiality. One artist and one art work has the potential to reset artistic parameters and change the history of art.

1 Attention, Criticism!, ed.. Radonja Leposavi! et al., Kulturni centar Beograda, Beograd 2009, p. 41.

2 Ibidem p. 42.

3 Iwona Blaswick, “Temple/White Cube/Labaratory”, 2007, p. 152, Rethinking Curating.

4 Beginning with Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics, Virno speaks of the difference between work, that is – poesis, and political action, that is – practice, in the sense that poesis produces the object that is left out of practice.

5 Beryl Graham, Sarah Cook, Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2010, 152.

6 Attention, Criticism!, ed.. Radonja Leposavic et al., Kulturni centar Beograda, Beograd 2009, p. 92

7 Elkhonon Goldberg, The Executive Brain, Frontal Lobes and the Civilized Mind (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 72.

In most real-life situations, we store and recall information not for the sake of recall itself, but as a prerequisite for solving a problem at hand. Here recall is a means to an end, not the end.

Furthermore, and this is particularly important, certain memories are accessed and retrieved not in response to an external command coming from someone else, but in response to an internally generated need. Instead of being told what to recall, I myself have to decide which information is useful to me in the context of my ongoing activities at that moment.

8 Maurizio Lazzarato, “The Concepts of Life and the Living in the Societies of Control”, in: Deleuze and the Social, eds. Martin Fuglsang and Bent Meier Sorensen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 186.

9 Ibid. Memory modulation would, therefore, be the most important function of noopolitics.

10 This work was lent to the Cultural Centre of Belgrade by the Matica srpska Gallery from Novi Sad, as a result of interinstitutional cooperation.