

In: Irena Lagator Pejović: *Image Think*. Montenegrin Pavilion at the 55<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. Curated by Nataša Nikčević.

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## Bazon Brock's answers to Irena Lagator Pejović

### Hand and Mind. Image and Thought

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Social strategy could be described as an intervention by means of art. Intervening in a society involves encouraging people, convincing people, making them believe in what you think would be effective intervention, and the most effective intervention is problematization. This is because, usually, people, as social beings, just rely on what they think is quite evident.

But artists and scientists know that you cannot rely on evidence, because you have had experiences of being misguided by evidence. This means in consequence that you have to problematize evidence. Problematizing evidence means criticizing the belief in evidence. But the most important aspect in the process of developing the European way of handling unsolvable problems – as opposed to the Chinese way, the Indian way or the African way – was that in the 14<sup>th</sup> century Europeans discovered that criticism of evidence, the problematization of evidence, must itself be made evident– this was the beginning of art and science, which in turn means, for instance, that scientists do not trust their eyes, because they have the experience of being deceived by impressions if they trust their sense of vision. Therefore, they criticize the evidence of what they see with their eyes; they use numbers and indicators to show that evidence is not pure, as something unproblematized, but that evidence itself is a problem. So criticism of evidence has to be made evident, and the solution for the criticism of evidence, which has to be made evident, is art. Strategies of art were thus developed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Before that, the phenomena of art – in the Greek, Italian and of course Chinese culture, as well as others – were mentioned only by the use of terms like “*Gestaltung*” or “preparing” things, or building, and so on – not by the use of the terms “art” or “science”. Not even the Greeks used the term “science”, because they were just developing something similar to a scientific community. Plato’s academy was a remarkable result of human interference in nature and society, but it cannot be claimed to be either art or science.

Art as a concept has developed out of the differentiation of criticism. This means that after having criticized evidence, you must make it evident. This dialectical method also works for the principle of affirmation as a state of recognition that sprang from criticism: you see something that’s offered to your eyes, or get the impression of

something evident (position), then you criticize it by negation (positive negation) and the result of the negation, the criticism of it, is once again affirmation (negation of negation = affirmation).

A strategy of intervention by means of art in society means problematizing evidence through criticism and giving evidence for the criticized positions. Art is a strategy of problematization, which leads to a new form of affirmation, which means to a new starting point.

Interference in social affairs involves shaping social bodies by designing the surroundings in which one lives, such as our cities, streets, squares, and so on. So art as a social strategy involves designing the social behavior of people, not by just convincing them, or by overwhelming them with some ideas, but by leading them. Leading means being aware of your steps: “mind your steps”, “mind your behavior”. So the interference of artists as a social strategy implies being aware, keeping in mind, because you have to problematize it, and then you have to go on with the problematization of evidence by criticism until you can accept the given situation as criticism of the problematized one. Exactly the same attitude should be developed regarding the results of artificial and scientific work: it is not something which is given, like, for instance, painting a wall, but it’s the art on the wall as interference with a viewer’s or visitor’s perception that enables him to accept criticism of evidence, as well as its results. So it starts with art, and it comes out as education, as developing the ability to handle knowledge, to be aware of the problems we are confronted with as a society and even as a single person. Each single person must problematize him or herself, because everybody knows that a lone human being cannot survive. Men are society-related beings, and therefore the criticism of individualism is that no individual can survive alone. Every individual has to keep in mind the idea that they are individuals, not because they represent their individual identity, but because every single person represents the totality of society and of mankind. That, of course, has an impact on how human beings express their attitudes – attitudes of feeling, thinking, imaging, etc.

The basis for this kind of social strategy, of art as social strategy, is therefore the ability to anticipate. It is not enough only to criticize something *after* it has been given as an evident situation or evident object. *Before* you realize the evidence, you already have to accept, which by anticipation you can imagine a given state and imagine the ability to criticize, and then imagine what is going to result from the negation of a position (positive negation, negation of negation). What comes of criticizing the evidence is itself evidence.

Anticipation is a form of imagination because it’s virtual. If people are sitting somewhere and they have to make sure that by hunting – which they are forced to do because they have to eat – they would not put themselves in great danger, in order to escape this dangerous situation of hunting, they have to train themselves through imagination, which means by anticipation. You have to anticipate every possible danger that you could be confronted with; then you are able communicate this imagination, this anticipation to your followers, to colleagues in the group. Afterwards, you will be able

to train others to react to such horrible situations in which you are confronted with injury or even death.

The main aspect of anticipation is the ability to avoid danger, to avoid hunger, to avoid poverty or conflicts such as war between gangs, clans or tribes. So the first step is to avoid what you wish to avoid. (Of course there are some people who'd say, "I don't mind whether I live or die", but normally we have the wish to survive). In this sense, anticipation is a form of imagination. It's impossible to reproduce anticipated situations just by the use of abstract terms, by the use of words. The danger caused by a snake, a waterfall, a landslide, or something else we have to be aware of, already evokes an image. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ferdinand de Saussure said: "When we rely on reality, by giving, by calling names, we rely on images we have in theories of ourselves of these objects". So, if I say "snake", it's not the real snake, but the image of a snake I carry with me, as well as the behavior of a snake as a situation. Understanding this principle makes anticipation much more reasonable, because by calling up an image, it will take only a few seconds until I am mentally faced with the anticipated situation.

Through imagination language is practically useful to avoid danger. It is a more effective way of avoiding something than expression by words.

Art as a social strategy is the starting point. The image is the beginning of the development of consequences (after being aware of the danger, and having had the impulse to avoid the danger, you start with the imagination, with anticipating images, to react adequately to the situation). So the image provokes exactly the type of reaction you'll need to avoid danger in that particular situation.

The art of anticipation (including a wide range of anticipated situations) is of great importance to you and your family, your clan, your nation, etc. It means developing adequate (re-)actions out of the names, out of the (interior) images. More than that, adequacy is another form of responsibility – if you lead a tribe of 25 young men on a hunt, you are responsible for them because you are the leader; otherwise, they would not follow you.

Responsibility implies the need to be a leader. It's a declaration of the power of anticipation: "I will be responsible for the way I lead your anticipation towards any source of danger that we will be confronted with in the next hour, the next ten hours, etc.". And this means: "I am responsible for the adequacy of the reactions you have towards the situation".

So unlimited responsibility means principally that there is a form of most adequate reaction to avoid a situation of danger, while unlimited in this case means: "There are no other ways of anticipating a dangerous situation than by being informed." "Oh, a tiger" means you do not see it, but you can utter the term "tiger", even if your companions hear the word "tiger" as something that is transferred by voice to them over a long distance (precisely in such a situation they imagine the tiger and the behavior of a tiger).

Limited responsibility means that I can take on responsibility only in special situations in which I am trained to do something adequate, that is, in situations of everyday life

that are repetitious and routine. In routines you take on limited responsibility for this kind of reaction. In a factory where you transform metal into cars, you have a very special range of reactions: a lamp is glowing and then you have to take your right hand to this position and that position, and you have to do this and then that. So it is a very routine way of reacting to a situation being called up by commands or attention-getting or even evident signals.

Unlimited responsibility is the responsibility of a leader. Limited responsibility is the ability of a functionary within a very narrow range of responsibilities. This kind of anthropology and social strategy results in social design in the sense of shaping the social behavior of people by organizing the material facilities of the living room, of the square where crowds are to demonstrate, etc.

Another ability we have developed to define situations has come through evolution. While human beings (or primates such as the great apes) were able to parallelize intervention and recognition in synthesis with cognition, they also had to synchronize the parallel actions of the hand and the brain in a very different way. There are very precise German terms for this synchronization (“*Angreifen*” and “*Begreifen*”), which can be summed up by saying “you can grasp or touch the world with your hands (*Angreifen*), as well as with your brain” – in the sense of understanding (*Begreifen*). Perceiving your surroundings by touching with your hand and even by tasting with your mouth, smelling, and so on, leads to an instruction to your brain, to identify what it is, and of course then to anticipate what could result from such a confrontation. In the German language “*Angreifen*”, with the hand, is connected inseparably to “*Begreifen*”, with the brain. So by forming it, shaping it, the material substance is always parallelized by a neuro-cognitive action of your brain: knowing it, identifying it, analyzing it, and so on. And of course the evolutionary strategy of developing the cooperation between hand and brain means that there really are unlimited ways in which hand and brain do cooperate (for instance, if you touch something with your hand that’s unknown to you, you perceive it in an unlimited sense because there are no limitations imposed by knowledge). If you happen to encounter something you have no word for – you don’t know what it might be – your brain is forced to start a new form of cognition: “let’s see, this is something unknown, perhaps it’s even dangerous – then keep your hands off it!”. This is an example of unlimited responsibility, because it’s endless (you do not know whether something you can touch with your hand is helpful for you, or whether it’s dangerous or poisonous).

In the case of limited responsibility, it is just the opposite. If your brain tells you: “Do not touch this or that!”, then this is an example of limited responsibility. It means you avoid the experience, whereas unlimited responsibility means forcing yourself to deal with unknown objects or situations, even if the outcome is unpredictable.

The cooperation of hand and brain, of “*Angreifen*” and “*Begreifen*”, of designing with the hand, as well as the cognitive process of analyzing what the hand is doing at the same time, has astonishing implications and very important consequences. Handling something means being able to react adequately without understanding – we drive cars, we operate electronic equipment with our hands, without however understanding these

processes. So the hand leads us in adequate, but somewhat unconscious, operations as a function of the object's conditions. And even if you can think of, or imagine things that cannot be controlled by adequate design that is operated by the hand, the work of the hand can guide you adequately to and through a situation that you have no chance to understand, ever. And this is the importance of modern developments, for instance, with art, or with objects: a car or a computer has to be designed by the producers so that someone who does not understand anything can operate it. So design is asked to develop instrumentalization without understanding. And, as in our everyday life we are dealing with a lot of objects and instruments we don't understand, it becomes more and more important that we can handle them without understanding. Thorough management of working with your hands in the world, designing it, involves doing so without any need to understand what you are doing.

But how can you be responsible if you are able to do something you do not understand? This is a very important question. This is where art comes into play. Design, as I have just said, is about simply designing. But art is just the opposite: it involves thinking, cognitively developing something, understanding something heuristically, which could never be adequately transferred into handiwork.

Art is the supreme expression of thinking in opposition to making, and this means that thinking is much more important than imaging, especially considering the fact that you can manage instruments just by imaging them (like the images provided by the producers of technical devices showing you how to use a certain app or how to use a computer without any understanding). In the field of art you have to rely on the ability to anticipate, to think, to marshal cognitive activities, which could never be adequately transferred, one to one, to any designed object in the world. This is the relation, as well as the distinction, between design and art.

The term design became so important during the third industrial revolution, after the 1870s (the first one was the steam engine, the second one was fertilization for the growing of crops, the third one was electricity). And since this third industrial revolution with the development of electricity, we are experiencing this confrontation between art and science. Since then we have had to rely more and more on design instead of art, because what we have to do in everyday life is to use instruments we do not know. So design is leading us.

Understanding what is behind the lack of design strategies, as well as the insight that we can never design the world in such a way that it runs completely fruitfully, peacefully, healthfully for nearly everybody, means accepting the need to think about the difference between what's going on in using things and in understanding things. Using things is completely different from understanding things, and understanding, of course, from using. The implicit danger of relying on design and acting without understanding (the implicit danger) is that all these actions of leading by design without understanding can develop a kind of superpower, which has normally been called "evil", as opposed to God, healthful ideas of saving the world, and so on (so you always have to accept that someone is going to understand the functions of the Internet, not just to use it, but also to use its structure to develop an understanding of how to destroy the abilities we have

in using the Internet; an evil character, or an evil will to do bad things; therefore you always have to be aware of such situations). You have to keep on thinking: “What is going to happen if people, simply out of the ability to use things without understanding, use them in a way that is inadequate – to achieve bad consequences, accidents, criminal activities in banking houses, etc.?” And, therefore, artists and scientists are necessarily organizing a kind of control of handling this world without understanding, and they stick to the idea that we'll always have to anticipate, in terms of thinking (often unconsciously), more than we realize. Because such is the excess that can result from control (over evil). So we have control over evil and we can always think of more than what there is that can be done by using things. And this means that it's not only criticism in terms of evidence, which is the character of art and science, but it's the idea of philosophers, of arts and science that you have to take into account, that there is something you cannot enforce – either by handling without understanding, or by understanding. And this is called reality.

This means art and science are coping with reality as the sphere of what is around us, which is independent of us, which cannot be forced under our will. On the contrary, designing means using everything without understanding, because we can manage to instrumentalize it. And responsibility is thus the only way to control the overwhelming power of cognition, of will, of designing, to control it with the idea that there is a borderline, that is, an ultimate limit to how we can manage the world without understanding. Unlimited responsibility in this regard means that there will always be a sphere of reality which could never be overcome by your will or by your abilities. Sigmund Freud said: “An adult, mature character is one who always knows that there are limits to his will, to his power, to his handling of possibilities”. This is what is lacking nowadays: so many investment bankers, so many politicians, so many artists believe that there is no limit to their imagination, their power of anticipation, to their realizations, or to the ability to manage the world without understanding. We can say that there is a difference between unlimited responsibility, for which there is principally a sphere of reality that is more powerful than we are, so we have to respect it, and limited responsibility, which represents a very small sector in which I just work and can in certain given situations say that I must face reality as something I am confronted with without being overwhelmed, which is forcing me, without my having any idea that I just may be the one defining the situation, so I have to simply react to situations. Principally, we are free to define it, but that's not the main situation. Nowadays we know that we must develop unlimited responsibility, because, in general, rationality is defined as accepting limits. Only those who know their limits, who know their abilities, are acting rationally.

And of course, that's then followed by the third idea of this kind of parallelism: as enlightenment in Europe taught us, “if you rely on rationality and you define rational behavior as that which is taking boundaries and limitations into account, you will develop the idea of metaphysics, beyond the borders of the rational, which is the irrational”. So if you want to stay rational, you have to keep in mind that by acting rationally you prompt an inclination to the irrational (as in theology, by insisting on doing something good, on good thinking, you lead people to bad thinking, to the bad

world, to evil). The relation of rational and irrational implements the idea of complementarity: rational and irrational are complements. To rely on facts (artifacts are nothing but facts) means that you intend to focus on the counterfactual. It's exactly the same with social strategies and rational behavior: you always have to calculate risks, for instance, when you tell somebody "be rational in building your social relationships".

Anticipation, which is a quality given to humans by nature, and without which we could not have survived – even dogs are able to anticipate, even apes, all developed animals, as social beings, are dependent on the ability to anticipate – involves control of the relation between hand (manipulation – from *manus*, Latin for hand) and cognition, as well as the quality of feeling. This means that when we start to anticipate something, we have control by remembering situations most like the one we're experiencing right now. So if a leader says, "Now be aware of snakes, of waterfalls, of animals, and start to coordinate your actions!", this anticipated command is qualified by feelings, and these feelings are a reaction to experiences we have had before. So we have experienced such situations many times and therefore know whether it felt adequate or inadequate. But to develop new strategies you must overcome the feeling of adequacy.

While a name, as a product of thinking (of cognition), evokes interior images, feelings are a kind of positive reinforcement between cognition and imaging in delicate or new situations. It's always a kind of triple movement: cognition evokes imagination, imagination evokes feelings; feelings qualify the imagination and the qualified imagination is relaunched through cognition. This is a kind of trinity of adequate reactions. Usually feelings are viewed as in opposition to cognition and imagination, as a third position that is disapproved of by neurologists – while on the contrary it's not just a qualification, but the cooperation of knowledge and imagination. And of course then, it's the brain that is managing the hands and manipulating the world.

### **On the exhibition *Image Think***

The idea of the exhibition is to pass a golden room at first, then to enter a black box, and after that to be confronted with a situation in a third, white room, that enables the visitor to realize that there is black and white cognition based on valuation. A black box signifies that we accept the principle of doing something without understanding. The function of a black box instrument is to measure the input and the output (and from the difference you say: "I have got a result, but I do not know what happened inside the black box; I accept that something happened without understanding it"). This is design. So the black box incorporates the method of working without understanding, and develops the idea of manipulation without understanding. The white box is somewhat like the opposite: there's a situation in which everything is clearly defined – you can see it, touch it, etc. – but you do not know what it's related to. The black box relates to the difference between input and output. The white box relates to the very moment, but because it doesn't force you into a decision whether to go on or to stop, it is just as well eternity.

So as I said, the black box is defined by the difference between input and output without being able to know what happened in between, because it is all black – this is the sense of the black box. We know that something happened because we know the difference between input and output, but we are unable to know what happened, because it is a black box – it is unperceivable, unrecognizable, and so on. Regarding the white box, you know input and output. It's eternity in the moment – like when you are lying on the sand, looking at the sun; the weather is perfect; it's the white box of the sand or the hills, and you may stay there forever. The white box is the definition of the moment of eternity. It's called white mystery. Robert Musil developed this idea according to Carnap and other scientists, as well as from mysticism. For him, white mystery is the opposite of black mystery. Black mystery is the crude ability to do something which is not very clear or that's half-criminal, but white mystery is the mysterious idea of a situation which could go on like it is forever, without having to fear that something may change.

The first room is the room defining the strategies for making something important, make it valuable, to develop the ability to preserve it as something special, as holy, as eternal, as memorable, unforgettable, etc. In medieval painting, gold is an indication of paradise. It indicates something that is beyond itself. And in medieval times, making things important was done by arranging them in a very special way; in modern terms that is called tactics. Moreover, it was a structure of symbolizing, allegorizing and indicating something superior, something absent. Let me just recall the theory of Charlemagne, Charles the Great and his monastery, the theory of the four senses of images or the four layers in which images work (German: *der vierfache Schriftsinn*). The first is the way in which it indicates itself (e.g., gold is a very expensive metal, therefore you keep it); then of course, it is the symbol of luxury, and then it is an allegorical expression of the valuable, of something that has value in and of itself, not only as a means, but in the abstract sense; and the fourth sense is the anagoge (*ana* means to lead across, which means to transform something from this state to another state). So there's the allegory sense, the material sense, the symbolic sense and then it's an anagoge, which means it points towards a paradise. So in your first room, you remind people of general strategies to indicate that we value something, that we rank something on a very high level – give an idea of a material object, etc. (The strategy of making something more valuable is the opposite of the vandalism we see in the main cities of nowadays; so the first room is a manifesto against vandalism.) This intends to say in what sense and in what ways we develop the idea of something as valuable that has to be protected, that has to be taken care of, and reassures us that we are always oriented to a metaphysical idea, an anagoge, something which takes us from here, from the short life on earth, into eternal life in paradise. So the first room is showing the strategies of valuing – like, for example, by gilding something, turning it into gold, or the golden memories of the aged (in the sense of nostalgic remembrance). Valuing is also a form of imagination: can you imagine how this situation in which we are now is preparing us to develop something that is of the greatest value into something even greater, say, worldwide, or even on the level of the existence of nature itself, like transforming it into a paradise? That's the gold of socialism, communism and other utopian ideas.

So if the first room (the golden room) presents strategies for making things important (for valuing things, indicating that something means something that is to come, that will come, or is expected to come, etc.), then this proves that the black box (the second room) is one of the major strategies for measuring the difference between input and output. And the third room, as the white box, envisions something that will not happen in the future, but which is both in the future and in every moment. The white box is eternity in this very moment, not eternity in the paradise of the next ten thousand years. It's the difference between in and out, or the insistence on the very moment, which could be the attainment of all our desires (feelings, ideas, love, searches, and so on). The golden room reminds everyone that gilding is the strategy for making something important, valuable, (for example, the application of gold-leaf backgrounds, especially "ciel d'oro", meaning "golden sky", in medieval painting indicates paradise).

The black box is our normal strategy in a world where we cannot understand what's really going on, but in which we still manage to do (we are always in the dark, which means we can only manage the difference), whereas the next room tells us: "Don't rely on the future, but start to do it now; stay here and you will find eternity, you are always already there". And the next intervention is the space that we ourselves create. This is the moment, and it's more than only imagination, it's meditation. Meditation is the way to turn a moment into eternity. But it's not virtual, it's real. Your body shows it's real, it's not only your brain, but your blood pressure, all the reactions of your body can be measured through this strategy.

Making things valuable, fruitful, meaningful, performing the normal strategy of measuring input-output differences, this is all we can know. We have to accept that we are able to manage the difference even though we don't understand it. Meditation – if we are not thinking of imagination as imagination of the future, or as the impressions of some virtual realities – is insisting that all this is already realized, or could be achieved at the very moment. So it's the perfect exhibition!