

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.

Irena Lagator Pejović

## Art as Social Strategy

### Answer to Bazon Brock from Venice

16 March 2013

Dear Bazon,

Allow me first to express my gratitude to you for your willingness to engage in an endless continuation of a question-and-answer session begun with your writing for the occasion of the publication of *The Society of Unlimited Responsibility, Art as Social Strategy*<sup>1</sup>. As you ended by asking me for an answer, I am driven by a sense of responsibility to both reply to you and provide a more in-depth analysis of art as social strategy. For this construct, which during our conversation in Munich last year we agreed adequately describes my work, I have chosen to reply to you from Venice, with the content of works that I'm currently finalizing for "Encyclopedic Palace", the 55<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition, *La Biennale di Venezia*.

Art as social strategy<sup>2</sup> aims to discover the potentials of unlimited responsibility. It deals with a range of human feelings, seeking to invoke perceptual and cognitive awareness. *Image Think* is the title of my project for the Montenegro pavilion. The willingness to be unlimitedly responsible and its relations to the issues of image, knowledge and the functions of the imagination, which are the subjects of this *Biennale* edition, impel us not to neglect the category of space-time in and of itself. Referring to the concept underlying Orwellian Newspeak, the title *Image Think*, with the infinitive form of the verb "to think", is an attempt to demonstrate how the power of imagination and mental images can survive the degeneracies of language (or any kind of totalitarian regime). As the Latin word *infinitus* stands for something limitless or endless, something which is impossible to measure, I was therefore wondering if my using the infinitive form of the verb "think" can conjure up the idea of unlimited responsibility in thinking relating to the question of *image*. If such a choice is able to sustain our thinking to continue indefinitely, then it should also be able to extend our responsibilities in thinking to the non-finite.

If we think by images, we can allow ourselves to estimate beforehand the value of the matters we are thinking about. If we think by images, our personal and collective responsibilities become multiplied. If we think by images, we transform absence into presence, a process in which images cannot be controlled, nor can thought.

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<sup>1</sup> Irena Lagator Pejović: *The Society of Unlimited Responsibility. Art as Social Strategy. 2001-2011*. Edited by Christa Steinle, Karin Buol-Wischenau, Neue Galerie Graz am Universalmuseum Joanneum. Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Köln, 2012. For Bazon Brock's essay entitled: Bazon Brock, *In the String Forest. Irena Lagator in Conversation with Her Rock Face Bazon Brock*, see pages 12, 172 and 230. The essay is also published on the Websites: <http://irenalagator.net/texts/bazon%20brock.pdf> and <http://www.bazonbrock.de/werke/detail/?id=2757&sectid=2440>

<sup>2</sup> Margarethe Jochimsen, *Kunst als soziale Strategie: Ausstellung von 4 projekten*, Bonner Kunstverein, 8.12.1977-15.1.1978

In the title and work *Ecce Mundi*, humanity and the ‘homo’ are not dominated by destructive powers, but by their very opposites. People in such a society identify with a sense of responsibility. Though connected to each other, they are nonetheless isolated. In sharing their knowledge, their Nietzschean evolution is not yet complete, but an ongoing process. They think in relation to a humanity lacking any clear center. In the Sloterdijkian sense, the fascination of man with other men is ongoing in such a society<sup>3</sup>. These worlds, hand-drawn, and connected via the visual means of a three-dimensional space, are exposed to the judgments of visitors, who can walk over the canvases and are hence caught up in the spatial situation of encountering a kind of society that we can construct, rather than deconstruct. But it is the dramaturgy of presence, which is revealed by the act of walking over the canvases, which in turn reveals *how we become what we are*.<sup>4</sup>

Can the power of thinking equal the power of imagination? Can the power of word equal the power of *image*? It seems that the answer you asked me for turns into a snowballing field of questions, instead of remaining well-defined in the form of an answer expressible in words.

Therefore, art as social strategy seeks to activate our perceptual and thinking awareness of the limitlessness of our responsibility to respond in an endlessly open manner, in such a way that our responses have the capacity to engender further questions.

I believe that a work of art is only one step in the processes of acting, thinking or creating. Therefore, a work of art is not enough, but merely a primary element, an indispensable step towards furthering the ever-extending reach of human capacities. It is only the initiation or the beginning of the cognitive and sensory processes humans are equipped with. It is part of the process of creation. Isn't society thus becoming a medium – the bearer of *images*?

As the golden tetrahedrons in the work *Further than Beyond* exist in relation to light and the visitor's movement in space, they disappear visually when the visitor chooses to receive the light directed towards his eyes. The visitor as a living medium is thus meant to perceive himself as a primary constituent of the space, so that the process of *art as social strategy* continues in his mind and sensorial spectrum. This is why the artwork alone is not enough: the visitor must step in, participate,

for in reality, it is not the medium, but the spectator who engenders the image within his or her self.<sup>5</sup>

Art as social strategy relies on synthesis with the observer. It operates according to the dichotomies of material and immaterial, personal and collective responsibility, constructed reality and its poetic reconstruction. As only one of the many elements in the process of thought-sense development, it starts as a mental and sensory construct, but it consists of actions that generate new acts of introspection, of being within a world, of being constantly present and attentive, and becoming aware.

Art as social strategy (AASS) aims to generate concepts for our mutual co-existence, to promote being-with or being together, rather than just being, in and of itself. AASS reaches audiences through visual means that work with lightness and levity, with spatial

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *Spheres, Volume I: Bubbles, Microspherology*, Semiotext(e) foreign agents series, Los Angeles, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images. Picture, Medium, Body*. Princeton University press. 2011.

matters that anchor us in the “where and what we are”, to enable us to question ourselves, or demand from ourselves an explanation regarding how *we become what we are not* (Bazon Brock). AASS is a responsibility apparatus for revealing human possibilities. In such an apparatus (medium) the *image* depends on space-time, that is, on the position and movement of the beholder. *Image* thus depends on the eye and the mind. Therefore, the *image* transmitted by the work changes, just as our *image* of the world and reality changes over time. The work is thus charged with as many *images* as the visitor decides to induce, evoke or activate. Images are therefore individual, just as an individual is an *image*.

Nietzsche insists that aesthetic experience should be one in which we “see at the same time”, while we “also [long] to transcend all seeing”.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, the thesis of the pavilion *Image Think* tries to demonstrate that thinking anticipates imaging and that, vice versa, the purpose of *image* is to give rise to thought, rather than representation.

Art as social strategy is based on the concept of unlimited responsibility, intended as the need to respond endlessly, to limit the condition of limited responsibilities through poetic transformation of the world, to answer the challenges of *constructed reality*. But when we come to the issue of responding, we must also address the issue of beginning, as such, in which it is possible to conceive of the core of unconditionally rooted responsibility. Because I recognize in your work such fulfillment of a never-ending obligation to respond, Bazon, I am keen to ask you:

What is responsibility?

Can art be considered knowledge?

Does thinking also imply feeling?

What is art the beginning of?

Is the society of unlimited responsibility achievable?

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *Thinker on Stage: Nietzsche's Materialism*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1989.