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Art and its Machines of Pain / Laughter

Or of Horror / Enjoyment

AAA: arbitrariness, alienation, absorption

Zoran Todorovi* (b. 1965) established a complex and controversial art practice of exploring, deriving and carrying out critical (liminal, transformational, provocative) relations of art, science and micropolitics regarding human body, that is, the human body in contemporary culture of arbitrariness, alienation and absorption.

Arbitrariness: because he works with regulation of motivation and demotivation of the relationship with the body (anatomy/figure, physiology/system, system/behaviorality), and not with causal and mimetic systems of the relationship of “human being” and “nature”. Todorovi* takes on the role of the subject of motivation and demotivation of a singled-out existential sample. Thus he shows that today there rules no order of “natural” (Darwin’s) or “social” (Marx’s) laws in the culture, but an order of constructing cultural algorithms and their socially situated performances. A situation, or an event, that are performed, or carried out, are not the expressions of his state of mind (body/mind), but are the construction of a separated, located and indexed event which is the symptom of danger, insecurity, transformation, the possibility of creating the micro-culture, etc. ...

Alienation: because he works with decentering of human reason (of deeper, meta-meaning) and with pointing to a literal event or situation, or relation that have no justification in a great humanistic metalanguage. On the contrary, Todorovi* provokes, and tests, great metalanguages of humanism (science, technique/technology, religion, politics, sexuality, everyday life, culture, art) through creation of “small” and “localized” excesses (construction of a machine that produces sound waves of dangerous frequency; an offering of the food made of human skin and flesh; exposure of body to insects; using of serum that changes certain sensory features of the body). His world is not the world of the integration of human principle, but the world of disassembling of the ideality and, certainly, of “necessary lie” of great humanistic constructions of reality. Todorovi* brings us face-to-face with insecure literality, for example, of pain, and the certainty of cultural articulation of every unpronounceable and not-knowable confrontation with the pain or the danger, into a system of values of one society, culture, or even civilization. There is no pain itself or the danger itself, but the pain or the danger are polysemantic “currencies” of investing into the construction or deconstruction of social reality (truth, norm, everyday life).

Absorption: he entangles the human body into a complex system of production of the possible world which semantically, behaviorally and indeed existentially takes over and puts the “human being” into the play of transformation (technology of transformation or at least the technology of provoking its stability) from “being” into the symptom. That is why Todorovi*’s work does not belong to those art practices that are named, during 1990ies, as “strategies” or “tactics” of the art in an age of culture. He does not work with science and art in the manner of the scientist or an

artist, but he explores in the manner of a “culture worker”, and this means as author-producer of situations in which science and art are provisory – but always powerful – frames for testing the individual. This testing has the features of biopolitics, if “biopolitics” is, according to Foucault, designated as “practice of governing” or “practice of ruling” over the body. For us, today, governing and ruling can be neutral testing as well as ecstatic consumption and uncontrolled exchange of bodies (effects of bodies) in specific channels of communication of experience in Western civilization after the fall of Berlin Wall, and in an epoch of establishing social globalization.

Dynamic definition

Todorovic’s “work in art, the work as the construction of micro-culture”, is explorative, some kind of a research, because he goes through phases of initiation, conceptualization, contextualization, articulation and carrying out of processes (situations, events, works) that cannot be predicted in advance. He deals with critical, dangerous (injurious, lethal) symptoms of ordering, or structuring, of individual and social field of existence and behaviorality. Open symptoms are at stake here because they involve possibilities of unpredictability. This unpredictability that occurs in an illusive predictability of respecting the scientific and technical procedures is the fundamental effect of launching the mechanisms of the “dangerous” (the horrifying) as the provocation of what is socially acceptable, normal, or “natural”. In an illusory certainty of scientific *steps* he promises an insecurity of existential confrontation of concrete body with encompassing and invisible system. He offers to us the possibility of acquiring the experience of fear, insecurity, and of course, of horror. Dangerous “artworks as symptoms” are at stake here, because the participants of the exploration are exposed to potential, real or fictional danger (injury, transformation of the body or to transformation of corporeal capabilities, violation of usual norms of social realization, or actualization of the body, etc.). Art is for Todorovi* an “exceptional polygon” of exploration, or research, and positioning of different objects, situations or events in a transparent form of expectations of decentered experience (as the knowledge of the experience of danger, pain, corporeal change, or exposure to the governing over the body), but not of aesthetic experience. His work is post-aesthetic. For example, when he puts the micro-camera into the vagina of a stripteaser, he annihilates the »idea« of the striptease, which consists in offering the ideal-phallus body as an object of visual and even haptic enjoyment in the body of the object-woman, and offers a translation from the aesthetic-erotic to the pornographic-organic. This is the place of discontent. Now, the pornographic is not to be understood in the sense of moral categorization, but in the sense of an intention to center one »detail« of the body to its obscene presence which does not have the legitimacy of »the place for the enjoyment of the gaze«, but of the »organ« which provokes the gaze and disables the gaze to slip into an »innocent« bourgeoisie enjoyment in an idealized erotic body-as-object of desire. He moves the gaze from the object of vision to the gaze which is viewed from the »organ«.

For Todorovic, science and technology are complex multitude of historical, actual or futuristic procedures, contexts, institutions, effects and, certainly, of knowledges that can be transferred from their basic frame (of positive scientific purpose and meaning) into an area of an uncertain work and actualization of both positive and negative possibilities of production of micro-realities and physiological, anatomic, subject-related and social reactions to them. His work has the

features of »micropolitics« because it is political, and this means, performative (performed) in relation to social constructions of identities, norms and modi of _expression/representation, or behaviour. This »micro«-political, in fact, means that Todorovic does not work with great metapolitics of classes (social classes as situating instruments of great-real-politics, national ideology or systemic conception of society and civilization), but with the politics of »micro-climates«, singled-out and presented in the world of art as the segment of the world of culture. All this happens in a specific epoch – at stake here is an actual turn of 20th and 21st century, when firm borderlines between art, culture and micropolitics are lost, so at stake here is an »art« which is outside of modernistic autonomy and thus the one which becomes the means of realization or derealization of the interest and the power in the culture. In such situation his work is transgressive because it provokes, inverts and makes the utility of public discourses (expectations from culture and about culture) vague (spectral). Today, it is not the work that obviously violates some essential or not essential social *law* (system of rules of behaviour and political correctness /PC/) that is transgressive, but the work which demonstrates, in its on effects, that »social law« is the genuine and only place of transgression. That is why Todorovic's allegedly cold and rational works confront the viewer or the viewer-participant with fundamental insecurity, even anxiety in front of what s/he found herself/himself and in front of what expects herself/himself. He makes us insecure and unsafe in the world around us and he makes the world itself insecure. For Todorovic, the expressive outcome of an artwork is not the _expression of artists's internal states, but an effect of the system of rationality and utility which shows its imperfections, roughness, resistance, deficiency, hollow, emptiness, hidings, idealizations and censorships.

Todorovic's artworks are not quite privileged »inocent« art and aesthetically centered works in relation to safe and privileged, most often disinterested viewer as the one who enjoys the work (a peace, installation, situation or event). Todorovic, on one hand, uses the privilege of the world of art in order to realize a »problematic«, »exotic« or »dangerous«, that is, »unpleasant« work – such work could not be carried out without the legitimacy of contemporary world of art, and this means »the world of art« as a polygon of non-utilitarian and provocative or excessive or dangerous experiments. All participants (curators, critics, audience) know that it is the matter of a dangerous artistic event and this means the event that has no »normal« or »usual« artistic-aesthetic characteristics, but that it is an exploration, or an experiment, within the »phenomenon« of culture, science and biopolitics, which is placed in the space of art, which is understood, after Duchamp, and after conceptual art, as a realm of political, cultural, scientific, religious, sexual, etc. ... experiments, that have no determined position in non-utilitarian social disciplines. On the other hand, when a viewer enters into the »space« or the »parainstitution« of Todorovic's work, s/he is no longer *the viewer*, aesthetically privileged and placed into the realm of »disinterested« or »conceptual« reception of an artwork (as a work to be watched, or experienced, as something artistic, for example, in modernism), but is introduced into a situation which in some way is unpleasant, risky, dangerous or, at least, problematic for her/him as an organism (effecting her/his body, organs, physiology) and for her/him as social individual (effecting her/his psyche, ethical, political, religious attitudes) and for her/him as the subject (s/he is not only a subject who watches, touches, or listens an artwork, but is the subject who resemanticizes herself/himself in the work itself as a collaborator, participant, or an object). In a letter Todorovic writes: »*element of danger*, unpleasantness, etc., carries out an entirely concrete matter, let me say – mediatic, it leads the viewer into the image, that is, makes her/him an actor of the event, puts her/him in some relation to it, and precisely that is what enables the work to 'fall out' of the field of the aesthetic,

because, to put it simple, there disappears this privileged position of the viewer. Therefore, it is one functional device«. And this is one of essential determinations of Todorovic's concept of the artwork; the artwork for him is not a »phenomenon / concept« for contemplation, but an instrument for reactualization of chosen samples of existential or experimental (real or fictional) reality for human being (body, organism, mind).

Concept of performativity and status of the performance

Todorovic's work is performative, and this means grounded on the performance, or carrying out of an act, an operation or an instrumentalization, that establishes meanings. Meanings of his works are effects of the process of individual carrying out of procedures of one context (for example, of science, or of the world of perverted behaviour) in another context (of the art), whereas the resistance of this other context opens and shows itself as »instantaneous« artefact of culture (knowledge, enjoyment, consummation, transformation). But the point is in the act of carrying out, or the act of performance.

Todorovic's work is constructed to be performed, though he does not realize the work of the *performance art*, most often he does not perform the event in front of the audience and for the audience – he produces and performs-(the)-production of the situation or the event that leads to a perversion of objectivity and utility of institutional scientific experiment or social normativity as existential horizon of contemporary cultures. His works are carried out as installations (system of plates with sparklers – »Material or Energy«, 1994), machines (dangerous sound – »Infrasound Gun«. 1997/98), situations or events (preparation and serving of the food made of parts of human body obtained from the »litter« during plastic surgery, »**Asimilation**«, 1997, are not *event* or *happening*, but a tactical action of uncovering the rationality of scientific exploration in spectral divergencies and metastases of »science« outside discourses of its ideologizations. This indeed is a complex process. In it the artist is some kind of a producer and organizer who carries out the work-experiment only through the project (how the work is performed), the program (why the work is performed) and concept (how to present intentions and effects in their concords and contradictions). The artist is outside, or beyond, the work. He regulates and deregulates »the work« (installation, machine, situation or event) through productional and organizational modi of carrying out, although mentally, behaviourally and existentially he confronts himself with unexpected, dramatic and spectral consequences of his own »idea«. In a lucid, occasionally cynical way, Todorovic demonstrates that there is no art without consequences. His experiments bring him into a situations that he had not foreseen and that are the effect of complex responses (interactions) that different social micro or macro systems offer to his »samples« or »symptoms«.

Micropolitics and biopolitics

Activation of different micropolitics is a fundamental question of contemporary political theory, but also a fundamental question of the »art«, stated as cultural experiment. For an artist, as Zoran Todorovi* is, it is not essential to offer a work as a work, or a work as an excess within the culture, but to show, by mediation of the work (instalation, machine, situation or event, or a complex institutional or parainstitutional strategies or tactics) how lower or dominant paradigms within contemporary societies are activated, and to enable concrete bodies to confront themselves with the effects of these activities or their redirections. In one of the works Todorovic makes the food out of human flesh, but he is not a cannibal, as surrealists of late 1920ies or 1930ies, or Vienna actionists of 1960ies and 1970ies »acted« or »simulated«; in his work, an institutional origin of the »flesh that is there to eat«, is inscribed in it, namely, that it is a litter of a medical industry of plastic surgery. He does not work with phenomenon of the flesh itself, or with the phenomenology of consummation of human flesh, but with a phenomenon and a phenomenology that involve complex institutional »micropolitical« traces, values, relations, promises or censorship. In an other work he carries out a situation in which naked females are hanged in the gallery, holding with their own teeth to a some kind of a holder; all this enables them to »hover« above the floor. At first sight, it seems that it is the work which exhibits the effort of the body to hold itself above the ground by the strength of jaws. But, besides this allegedly absurd and exhibitionistic play: »body-effort-hovering-endurance«, there are also characteristic micropolitical plays, or manoeuvres:

- artist uses female body as an object
- it is not just any female body, but the body of a prostitute
- but it is not just a body of a prostitute, it is a 'rented' body of a prostitute taken from »alternative system« of prostitutional exchange of »commodities« (body signified by the system of prostitutional institutions), and
- it is not just any body of a prostitute rented from the system of prostitution, it is a body of easturopean prostitutes (a body for sale in an era of post-socialism).

All of these micropolitical denotations/connotations prove that Todorovic, indeed, works with biopolitical mechanisms of governing: how the body, on existential and phenomenological level, endures strategies and tactics of governing. Thus, Todorovi* conducts an essential »artistic operation«; by carrying out scientific (utilitarian) and political (instrumental) situations, in the context of art, he shows, in fact, that they are non-utilitarian and non-instrumental – that is, they do not lead, as society is concerned, towards any certain goal. He offers them in their bare absurdity and groundlessness. There is no other goal but to expose the body to a danger (potential or real alteration) for the sake of the danger itself. These works look frighteningly amoral, cynical and destructive, but they are offered also in the sense of the common sense: this is it. They prove that the system of science and politics is a system of the »perversion« itself – what is, for science and politics of everyday life, full of meaning, for Todorovic is an empty place or an objectness of enjoyment whose function is to be without function ... His misuse and his manipulation of science (and technology also) and politics (above all, micropolitics) is a deconstruction of the »norm« according to which function determines the meaning – that society in the name of a higher goal can legitimately do anything, any time and anywhere. Todorovi*'s »perversity« confronts us with the perversion of social machines that can justify anything, exactly everything,

in the name of an idea, metaphysics, moral, metalanguage, political goal ... His work is, therefore, a production of inversions of science and politics in the field of art as the symptom of culture. His work is biopolitical, because all of these operations (strategies and tactics) have consequences and act upon the body itself ... his work is the body with consequences or, perhaps, with traces of complex systems of contemporaneity . Biopolitical body is the body with consequences. HERE and NOW.

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