

## Short Cuts...

Jasmina Čubrilo

Belgrade, July 2003

The traditional definition of an artwork contains an idea according to which work or art is a specific (aesthetic) object that enables art establish its shape, i.e. to become instantly present and visible. Kosuth's claim "art is the definition of art" redefined this tautological schematising by issuing its basic assumption that everything made in conventionally defined medium (painting, drawing, sculpture, graphics) is art. In other words, when art is defined by itself, a wide spectrum of possible artistic activities opens, which means that the list of "media" has enlarged - from the ephemeral ones such as concepts, "live art" (Guy Brett), site specific works of art, to the concrete ones such as photos, videos, installations and documents. On the other hand, defining art with the art itself is a very risky procedure, since it can easily cause art to begin reproducing itself from itself and to wear up, vanish or abolish itself in that monotonous perpetuum mobile rhythm.

History of art of the 20th century is based on a story of radical(ised) movements, which are based on quick, synchronised and successive changes. A big number of examples are based on desire to relate life and art. Regardless the way that connection was realised, the initial desire could not be separated from the intention to provoke limited and ossifying structures, that is, artistic institutions founded on hierarchic system of different artistic practices, upon national principles and economic power, on the principle of separating artist from viewer, upon the principle "watch, and don't touch", upon commercial art-market logic, upon privileging the products and not artistic processes, artistic work and art. Emphasis was on experimenting, on art as a method of reality research.

&

In his essay "Art in the Age of Biopolitics: From Artwork to Art documentation"<sup>01</sup> Boris Groys pointed out that in our age of biopolitics, when destiny/happiness/nature do not control our lives, but when our life becomes "time artificially produced and governed", documentation presents a basic source on which the production of (spare) time leans on. In other words, documentation as a collection of byrocratic and statistic facts produces life itself. If modern life can only be documented but not displayed, than we can expect that contemporary art will use documentation as medium when wishing to refer to life. R.Muttov's act of choosing object i.e. taking "a plain object from life" and placing it in a way "that its' useful meaning has vanished under the new name and a new point of observation" (Duchamp), through situational understanding of culture, has grown into an act of appropriating context of life itself and its' reality. Thus, exhibiting an usable industrially produced object, is broadened first by appropriation of reality through one's own physical, emotional and intellectual investments and then through documenting

experiences, situations, the real, as a more comprehensive act of description, interpretation, participation and dispute of reality.

The documentation could be approached as an act of relocation, which Boris Groys implicates when considering Benjamin's interpretation of difference between an original and a copy within a perspective of possibility not just making a copy out of original but also vice versa. In other words, if a difference between the original and the copy is interpreted only as topological and contextual, it means that the original has its' specific place through which it has been marked in history as a unique object and that the copy hasn't got a place like this, and it is in that sense virtual, and ahistorical. So, if it is possible to de-territorialize the original it is also possible to re-deterritorialize the copy, says Groys.<sup>02</sup>

Production and consummation of documentation presupposes that on the both sides there are people who have their personal biographies, experiences, knowledge and skills. In that sense, meanings are not closed or fixed. They should be an object of public communication, through which they should also be realised, which leads us to the concept of relational aesthetics, to the concept of realisation of the work of art through the process of dialog, exchange, active participation, defining personal positions, political processes and resistance strategies.

In its gist, documentation has imitating character. It is essentially realistic media, but not because it reflects reality but because it carries and constitutes dominant meaning of the reality. A document substitutes the reality but at the same time it creates it and this relation between document and reality represents skeleton of symbolic power, the power which, according to Lacan, gives meaning to the real and builds our everyday reality in which we can recognise our real, into which all of us invests meanings which are relevant to each of us. The artistic documentation also participates in this process of affirming and denying the reality. In fact, a relationship between bureaucratic and technological documentation towards artistic documentation is a relationship of shifting from affirmation towards denial, in other words from the notion of the symbolic real towards notion of symptom, of non-symbolised existence or something that yet needs to be symbolised.

Production of Zoran Todorović is quite heterogeneous but it has two elements, two forms, two media, two types of mediation, two "key words" which are interdependent and complement each other: the event and the document. Mostly for every work of art it is believed that it has its' specific "now" and "here", totally independent, whether it took place on some exhibition or as a private event (meaning that the authority of the artistic institution is in fact irrelevant for verifying that something actually happened in the field of art), and which is shaped in "there" and "then" via documentation.

&

"Agalma", 2003, actions: operation, recycling, bathing. A historic perspective that 'reconstructs' motive/topic of this work runs from the classicist patterns, nourished for

centuries, of representing ideal/perfect/disciplined human body, down to a "ready made" body in artistic practices through 20th century (futuristic and dada undisciplined, anarchistic body; body as "a main carrier of socio-political, existential and cosmological content"<sup>03</sup> in artistic practices of 50ies and 60ies; fragmentary postmodern and multicultural body, assemblage that substituted the stereotype of modern, unique body). It reached for technology and its time-excess production policy in relation to the one that is biologically predetermined, in order to avoid potential endangering body surplus created by undisciplined consummation of the life. A common operation ceases to be just a mere operation with intention to make undesirable, ugly, amorphous human mass which would conventionally provoke uneasiness and disgust, into traditionally nice, aesthetic object - such as minimalist sculpture in ephemeral, expandable material, multiple in limited edition of four copies. This object (x4), except its' a priori role to be nice, is also intended to be "sacrificed", to be consumed, melted, to vanish so that some other body could be clean and, of course, nice. A soap becomes an artistic object thanks to the fact that its' organic structure becomes social construction, that is, it can reproduce and produce social meanings. In other words "the body is the medium of the Real however multifarious that Real becomes and is manifest" says Kristine Stiles.<sup>04</sup>

Documentation has an ability to evoke uniqueness. In fact, it repeats selected fragments of certain "there" and "then" and with the help of them it reconstructs the reality of which was going on "there" and "then". So, we can say that the documentation is like a replicant, to whom a degree of similarity, in other words a degree of the development of referential relationship with the real world ensures life, duration and enables the reproduction of history. And, when the history is produced, one enters again the field of circulation of social meanings and within that field uniqueness is defined and the "copy" becomes the "original" and the documentation becomes artistic form.

<sup>01</sup> See Groys, B; Art in the Age of Biopolitics: From Artwork To Art Documentation, Documenta 11\_Platform 5:Exhibition, documenta und Museum Fridricianum, Kassel, 2002, p. 108-114;

<sup>02</sup> *ibid*, p. 112-113;

<sup>03</sup> Badovinac, Z.; Body and the East, pref.cat. Body and the East, Moderna galerija Ljubljana, Ljubljana, p.13;

<sup>04</sup> Stiles, K; Uncorrupted Joy: International Art Actions, in: Out of Actions, Between Performance And Object, 1949-1979, MOCA, Los Angeles/Thames and Hudson, 1998, p. 228;