



Tractatus Post Historicus (1976)

Braco Dimitrijević

Edited by Aaron Levy

Produced with the 2008-2009 Seminar in Contemporary Culture, University of Pennsylvania

Commentary by Nicolas Bourriaud, Dan Cameron, Nena Dimitrijević, Lóránd Hegyi, Želimir Košević, Cornelia Lauf, Jean-Hubert Martin, Catherine Millet, Achille Bonito Oliva, Klaus-D. Pohl, Osvaldo Romberg, and Clara Weyergraf-Serra

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Braco Dimitrijević

TRACTATUS POST HISTORICUS

1976

Braco Dimitrijević

TRACTATUS POST HISTORICUS

Edicion Dacić
Tübingen

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NATURE
Horn Hill



CULTURE
Silbury Hill

Introduction

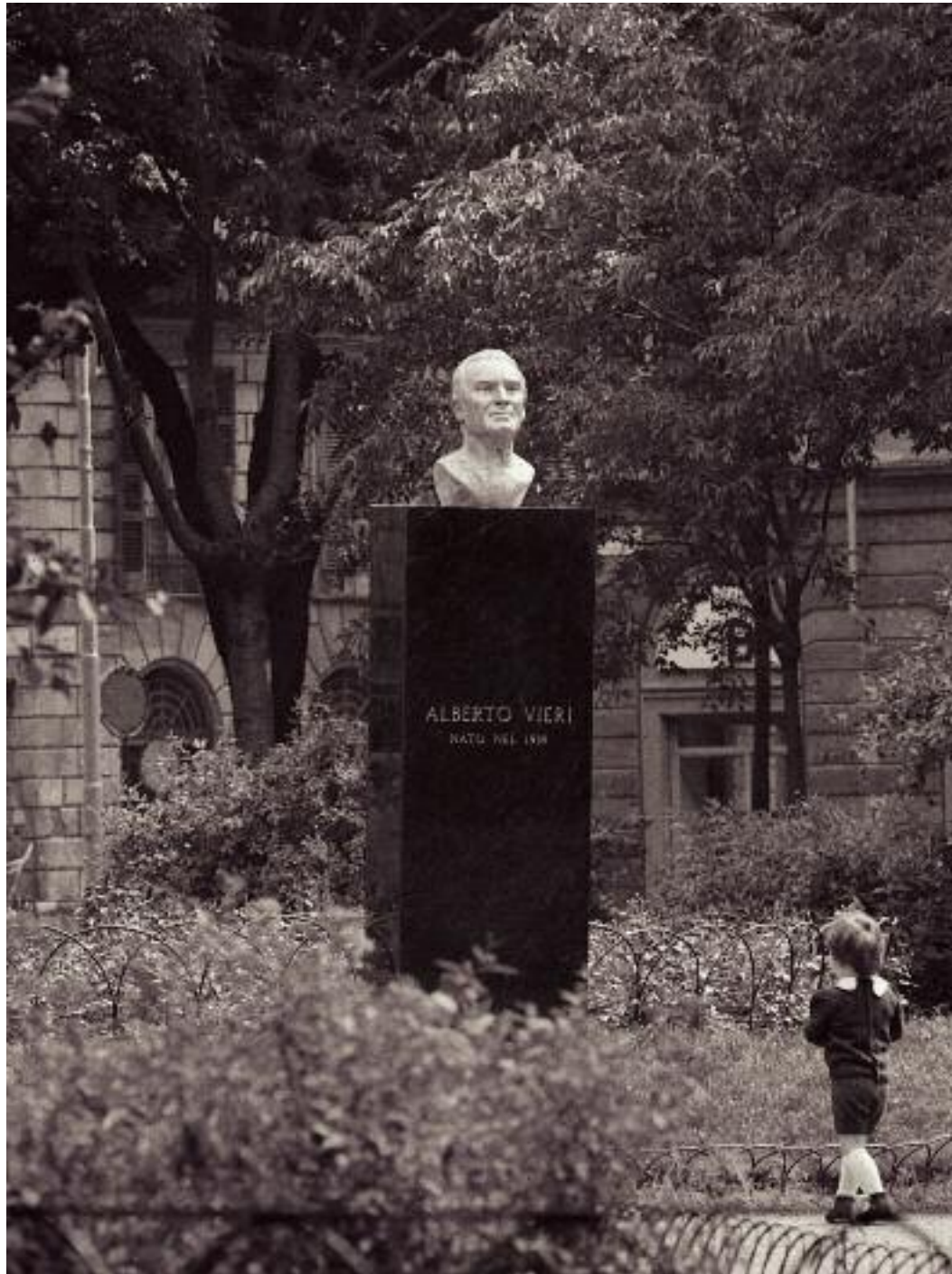
While I was working on this book I happened to go to Wiltshire to see Silbury Hill again. The hill is man-made and possibly it was never an art work, however it seems so to us. It is one of those rare cultural products which by appearance and material imitates a form that already exists in nature. Its purpose is not known but it is certain that its builders meant it to have another function than the many larger and smaller natural hills in the surrounding countryside. (According to some archeologists it took 700 people 10 years to build Silbury Hill.) Its builders used a form existing in *their environment* to make a product with a different function; works published in this book imitate forms already existing in our *environments*, in order to question them and use them in new semantic structures. It must be said that I consider “environment” not to be a physical space, but a cultural heritage.

B.D. Avebury, England, October 1976

Einleitung

Während ich an diesem Buch arbeitete, kam ich zufällig nach Wiltshire und sah Silbury Hill wieder. Dieser Hügel ist von Menschen angelegt. Obwohl er uns heute so erscheint, war er wahrscheinlich nie ein Kunstwerk. Er ist eins dieser raren Kulturellen Produkte, die in Erscheinung und Material eine Form imitieren, die als solche in der Natur bereits existiert. Sein Zweck ist unbekannt, aber es ist sicher, daß diejenigen, die ihn angelegt haben, ihm eine andere Funktion zumaßen als den vielen großen und kleineren Hügeln in der Landschaft ringsumher (einigen Archäologen zufolge brauchten 700 Leute zehn Jahre, um Silbury Hill aufzubauen). Seine Erbauer bedienten sich einer Form, die in *ihrer Umgebung* bereits existierte, um ein Produkt zu machen, das eine Funktion innehatte, die von der des natürlichen Vorbilds entscheidend abwich. Die Arbeiten, die in diesem Buch veröffentlicht sind, imitieren Formen, die in *unserer Umgebung* bereits existieren, um sie zu hinterfragen und sie innerhalb neuer semantischer Strukturen zu verwerten. Es muß klargestellt werden. Daß ich „Umgebung“ nicht als physischen Raum meine, sondern damit das kulturelle Erbe bezeichne.

I
THE ETHICS OF FORM OR ESTHETICS OF LOGIC
DIE ETHIK DER FORM ODER DIE ÄSTHETIK DER LOGIK



ALBERTO VIERI – THE CASUAL PASSER-BY I MET AT 4.15 PM, TURIN 1973
 ALBERTO VIERI – PASSANT, DEN ICH ZUFÄLLIG UM 16.15 UHR TRAF, TURIN 1973



THIS COULD BE A WORK OF BRACO DIMITRIJEVIĆ
 DIES KÖNNTE EIN WERK VON BRACO DIMITREJEVIĆ SEIN



THE CASUAL PASSER-BY I MET AT 11.28 AM, LONDON 1972
 PASSANT, DEN ICH ZUFÄLLIG UM 11.28 UHR TRAF, LONDON 1972



THIS COULD BE A WORK OF B. D.
 DIES KÖNNTE EIN WERK VON B. D. SEIN



MARIA BRACHETTO – THE CASUAL PASSER-BY I MET AT 6.41 PM, TURIN 1975
 MARIA BRACHETTO – PASSANT, DEN ICH ZUFÄLLIG UM 18.41 UHR TRAF, TURIN 1975



THIS COULD BE A WORK OF B. D.
 DIES KÖNNTE EIN WERK VON B. D. SEIN



From left to right:

Von links nach rechts: DEM DEMO, DANIEL BUREN, BRACO DIMITRIJEVIĆ

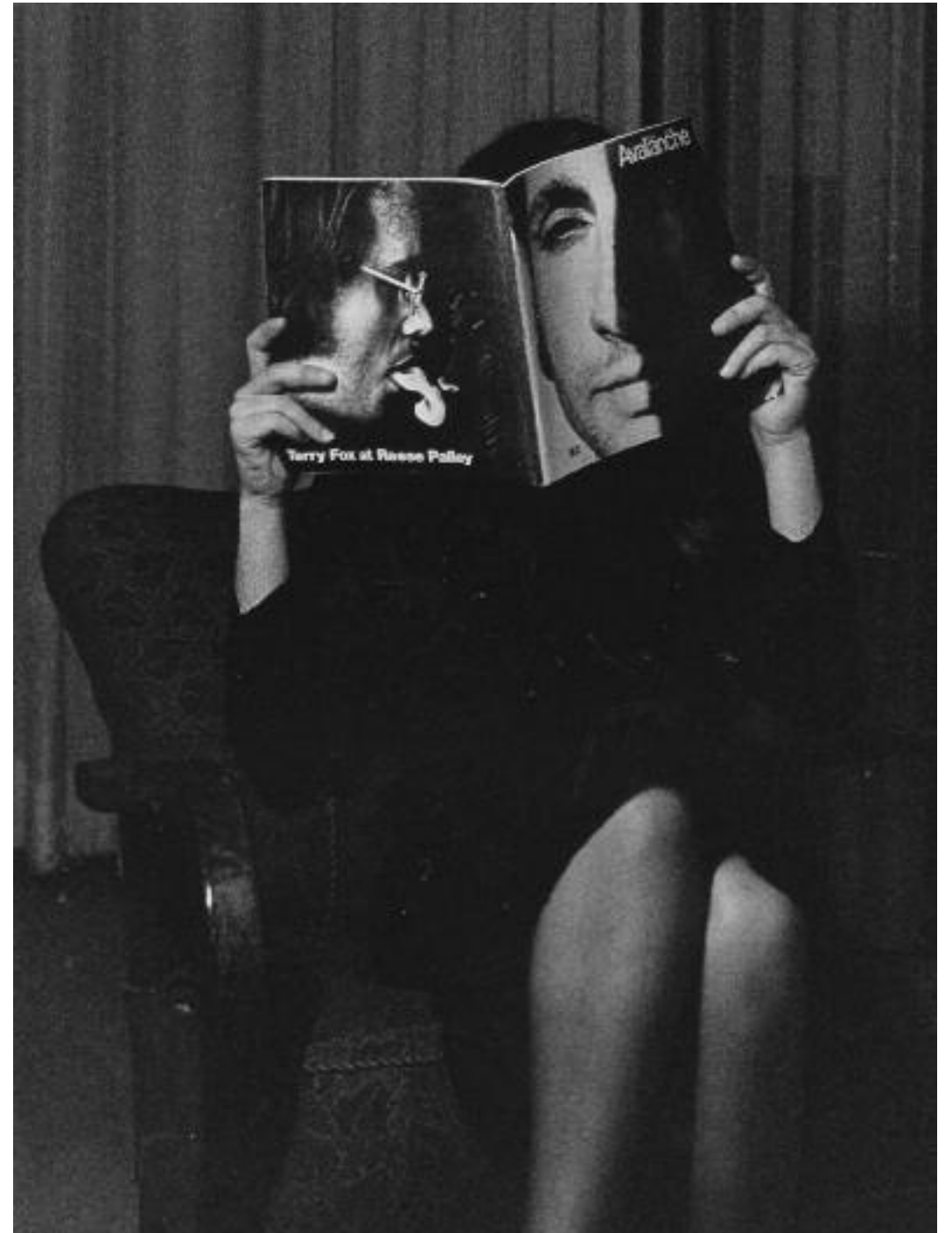
DEM DEMO – THE CASUAL PASSER-BY I MET AT 11.45 PM, BELGRADE 1972
 DEM DEMO – PASSANT, DEN ICH ZUFÄLLIG UM 11.45 UHR TRAF, BELGRAD 1972



THIS COULD BE A WORK OF B. D.
 DIES KÖNNTE EIN WERK VON B. D. SEIN



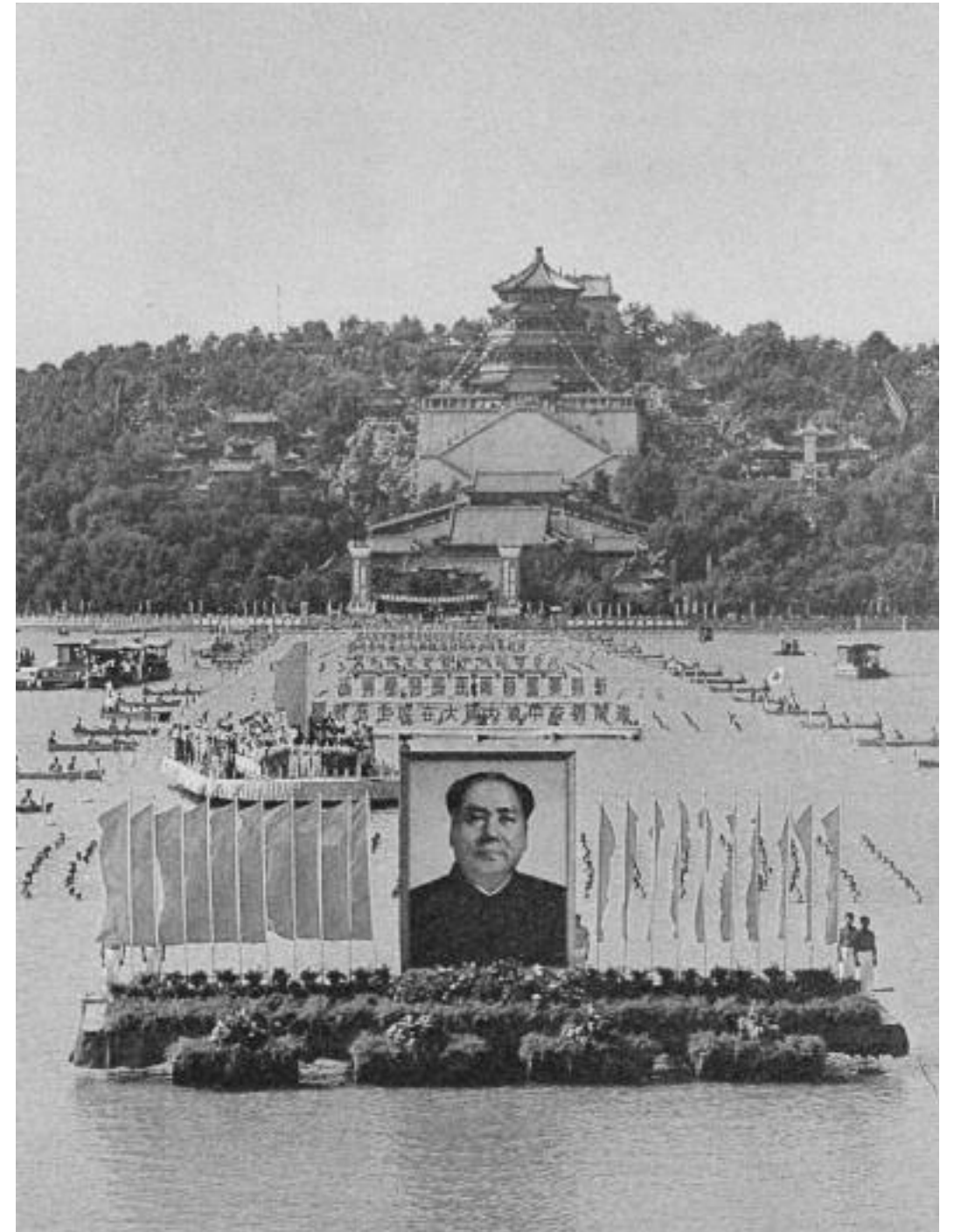
THE CASUAL PASSER-BY I MET AT 2.55 PM, ZAGREB 1974
 PASSANT, DEN ICH ZUFÄLLIG UM 14.55 UHR TRAF, ZAGREB 1974



THIS COULD BE A WORK OF B. D.
 DIES KÖNNTE EIN WERK VON B. D. SEIN



THE CASUAL PASSER-BY I MET AT 1.49 PM, VENICE 1976
 PASSANT, DEN ICH ZUFÄLLIG UM 13.49 UHR TRAF, VENEDIG 1976



THIS COULD BE A WORK OF B. D.
 DIES KÖNNTE EIN WERK VON B. D. SEIN



THE CASUAL PASSER-BY I MET AT 2.04 PM, MUNICH 1970
 PASSANT, DEN ICH ZUFÄLLIG UM 14.04 UHR TRAF, MÜNCHEN 1970



THIS COULD BE A WORK OF B. D.
 DIES KÖNNTE EIN WERK VON B. D. SEIN



GIANFRANCO MARTINA – THE CASUAL PASSER-BY I MET AT 3.28 PM, SAN SICARIO 1975
 GIANFRANCO MARTINA – PASSANT, DEN ICH ZUFÄLLIG UM 15.28 UHR TRAF, SAN SICARIO 1975



THIS COULD BE A WORK OF B. D.
 DIES KÖNNTE EIN WERK VON B. D. SEIN



THE CASUAL PASSER-BY I MET AT 4.30 PM, BERLIN 1976
 PASSANT, DEN ICH ZUFÄLLIG UM 16.30 UHR TRAF, BERLIN 1976



THIS COULD BE A WORK OF B. D.
 DIES KÖNNTE EIN WERK VON B. D. SEIN

THE ETHICS OF FORM OR ESTHETICS OF LOGIC

Art History as the History of Formal Evolution

Art as it is shown through the history of arts exists as a succession of styles. It is presented as a series of pure and uniform formal units in which the later one is always better than the previous one. According to this theory art is presented as ever bettering itself. This concept of art history is based on the following idealistic presumption: 1) idea of continuous amelioration of forms, change of one art form for another supposedly better one, presupposing the Hegelian idea that there exists a certain model into which the whole process leads. In other words, if Baroque is more perfect than Renaissance, or Color Field than Abstract Expressionism, then there is supposed to exist one absolute ideal style to which creators of style who independently of the socio-historical circumstances in which they live, infuse their masterpieces with divine inspirations. It is easy to see that the concept of art history as amelioration results in oppressive consequences. Primarily it justifies, even implies, the existence of exclusive criteria within each epoch which eliminate everything that differs from the dominant style: this idea justifies the existence of “totalitarian taste.” After the geniuses establish the domination of a certain style there is no longer any need for creative and independent individuals, only for an army of mannerists who have to confirm the dominant style by using the newest art technology and creating a multiplicity of variations of the same stylistic nature.

The idea of art history as consequent and linear evolution is only possible if all cases which don't fit in line with dominating style cliché are overlooked and eliminated. (For instance I'm sure that in Rococo there was at least one artist applying esthetic principles close to minimal art, but he remained unknown because the collective taste and sensibility weren't ready to accept his ideas.) This model of art history is only a reflection of general history because it reflects the ideas of Western man about his own history as a series of changes which through conflicts and struggles nevertheless result in so called “progress.”

Style as a Form of Racism in Art

Style is made from numerous variations of the same conceptual formula. Style is the accumulation of the signs with different signifiers and same signifieds. If according to Barthes, language consists of the Plane of Expression and the Plane of Content then we can say that in the language of art, numerous variations of the Plane of Expression correspond to the same Plane of Content. In other words, there is a great discrepancy between the production of new forms and new substances. If art is a cognitive process realized through the creation of new logical relationships, then the period in which style proliferates is a period of cognitive stagnation because the same conceptual formula is filled with numerous different, but generically identical elements. For instance, when the principle of monochrome (the surface of the painting is entirely covered with one homogenous color) is once defined, then all later variations (use of different colors, change of format) are without any cognitive value. Art activity which occupies itself with formal variations of the same conceptual formula is analogous to the work of “cosmetic” industrial designers who invent every season new

forms for technically unchanged products. The purpose of both activities is to stimulate the consumer's appetite. The surplus of monochromatic paintings on the contemporary art market could be compared with production of the newest models of electric blender which is always basically the same, but it comes out every year with a new look and more speeds. Art works of this kind have a two-fold function: 1) they satisfy an increasing demand from the art market. (The resistance to which the pioneering works of the same kind were confronted at the beginning in the meantime has given way to increasing acceptance.) 2) In the periods of cognitive stagnation in art production they give the illusion of change. Variations of the same principle are presented with the help of the art support systems under the guise of progress in the process of evolution. Giving an illusion of freedom of expression this practice leaves only the possibility of formal change while eliminating almost any change for consideration of new signifying systems. In this way the purity of style is assured. Style in fact is illustrative of the oppressive mentality of an epoch, i.e. it is a kind of aggression against the plurality of art concepts in a given moment.

Myth is the Best Investment¹ –

Formal Innovation. Macro and Micro Style.

The theory of formal evolution based on the chronological homogeneity of styles imposes formal innovation as the supreme critical criterion while disregarding the essential concern of art—its role and place within the given socio-historical structure. According to the demands of the production of new forms particular art works are evaluated on the basis of identifying the artist's personal handwriting. Within the value system of art that we have today, stylistic uniqueness is the accepted trademark of a top quality product. The form of this trademark has evolved through the course of art history, from artist to artist, but its significance in our value system has remained unchanged since the Renaissance. The fact that the criteria of visual recognition of an artist's handwriting, i.e. criterion of formal novelty, survived numerous changes of esthetics and art technologies which happened in the last 500 years shows that in that period the social interpretation of art has not basically changed.

The idea of art as a series of formal innovation encourages esthetic excess. But the esthetic excess or the divergence from established style is not as early or revolutionary an act as we used to think: it only feeds the myth of the evolution of art, leaving untouched all essential questions about the position and function of art. This claim is best proved by the rapid integration of recent avant-garde movements in cultural establishment. For instance, the recurring mistake of the 20th Century avant-gardes was that, although they proclaimed to be anti-esthetic in their manifestos, it became clear later they were in fact only introducing new visual statements. That attempt to free themselves of the esthetic failed because the new criterion of beauty was quickly adapted and that which was not thought to be retinal became a new model for art production, an optical measure of an art epoch. This shows that these anti-esthetic attempts carried within themselves antitheses that could later be easily manipulated for commodity purposes. They remain only as a symptom of a situation which was mature enough to take this problem into consideration, but fell short of successfully solving it.

The process of assimilation of a new art occurs more or less always in the same way: the conceptual contents of it are often forgotten and formal/decorative aspects are emphasized instead. The

examples known to us from previous art movements are only the vestiges of their philosophical standpoints. That which is recorded and glorified as art of the past is not more than a remnant of past ideologies. The conceptual content of an art work is reduced or completely ignored by the meta-language of art (art history and art criticism); only decorative and formal components of the work are considered.

This is actually a process of eliminating the revolutional potential of art in favor of its peripheral and easily manipulated characteristics—decorativeness. The tendency to present art history as a formal evolution alienates art from its potential for ideological clarity and turns it into a means for ideological manipulation. The critical / analytical potential of art producers is weakened and made ineffective by irrelevant criteria, namely by insistence on personal handwriting. When an artist is identified with a particular visual formula, he is expected to adhere to it. Such an adherence to a particular expression might be said to produce a micro, or personal, constriction that reflects a larger cultural oppression through style. The myth of formal evolution is structured on a series of easily recognizable signs and the artist is expected to confine his production to this clear image. On the other hand, the critical and selective capacity of the recipients of art messages (consumers of art) is disturbed by their assumptions: 1) that art is sacred activity and 2) that the art object is a precious thing in itself. The support system and meta-language of art in its present form has the exclusive role of promoting the art object as fetish, i.e., to insure its magical status. Viewed this way the art object is justified solely as an end in itself, whereas it could be thought of as a means of transferring new models of consciousness through its catalytic power.²

Two Logical Spaces

The following analysis refers to analogies and the differences between 1) the language of this work – E₁R₁C₁ and 2) the language which is used by the power structure for communicating messages of special significance – ERC. By using examples of analogous signs from ERC and E₁R₁C₁ systems, the mechnism of this work will be shown.

Sign A (from ERC system):	Monument to Alfred Nobel
Signifier A	– Bust cast in bronze on a marble pedestal
Signified A	– A person of special social importance
Sign A ₁ (from E ₁ R ₁ C ₁ system):	Monument to Alberto Vieri
Signifier A ₁	– Bust cast in bronze on a marble pedestal
Signified A ₁	– Casual passer-by

ERC is a language of primarily repressive nature because it attempts to impose and perpetuate a particular system of values. E₁R₁C₁ is the language of this work which attempts to “defunctionalize” the signs from the ERC system.

ERC System

Two groups of signs can be distinguished here:

- 1) Signs which promote contemporary subjects because their signifieds are present day personalities/ideas.
- 2) Signs which verify history because their signifieds are certain selected individuals from the past.

The function of the signs from groups is repressive with regard to the recipient of the message who is expected to accept it in a certain way, not questioning its credibility and source, i.e. the motives of the groups that are sending it. Starting from the premise that individual creativity is directly limited by the amount of data available, the reduction of data by a selective mechanism of both history and the power structure in turn restricts the creative development of the individual. Criteria are passed on by means of the educational system, which does not give the individual the opportunity and freedom to make his own judgments. The whole concept of education and culture is based on the obedience to authority and hierarchy of values. One of the liabilities of that cultural concept is that it says that the evolution of art took place through the divine attributes and contributions of certain geniuses and epoch heroes. This linear and reductive version of the history of culture is built on personal mythologies which are fostered by isolating elements from the artists’ private lives. Monuments, memorial plaques, (“lived here,” “worked here,” etc.) are only the means by which the status of genius is created and their function is to instill a passive awe in the masses. The result is that the consciousness of those for whom the message is intended is dulled into passive acceptance of the cultural authorities of the past. All figures presented via the historical media are accepted a priori as genuinely relevant. “In fact, what allows the reader to consume myth innocently is that he does not see it as a semiological system but as an inductive one. Where there is only equivalence, he sees a kind of casual process: the signifier and signified have, in his eyes, a natural relationship. This confusion can be expressed otherwise: any semiological system is a system of facts: myth is read as factual system, whereas it is but a semiological system.”³ The complete dulling of the individual’s critical judgment is achieved by an entire system of repressive signs: monument and memorial plaques are not innocent reminders of cultural values of the past, but a carefully constructed mythical system which conceals the chaotic reality of the past. Its function is to do away with the contradiction between this reality and the ordered image of the past; the differences, conflicts and contradictions which characterize a period are disregarded in this system, in which only clear, pure signs are presented, which constitute a harmonious record of the past.

The repressiveness of the signs from group (2) is indirect compared with the effect of the signs from group (1): whereas in the case of contemporary persuasive messages, the recipient offers resistance, in the case of historical means of persuasion, not even the minimum of critical reserve remains due to the complete lack of interest and access on the part of the victim.

For instance, there are few people who would understand that the memorial plaque on Berlioz’s house is an attack on free thought and judgment, while most of us would be skeptical towards overly commercial or political messages. However, this in no way means that signs from the second group are less repressive. Take for instance, the already mentioned example of the marble plaque on Berlioz’s house on which the sentence “Berlioz lived here” is written. The basic system is linguistic but substituting the linguistic code for the message of its presentation gives us the

statement “Genius lived here.” It means that the implied message of all places without a memorial plaque is “A genius never lived here.”

E₁R₁C₁ System

Method

A person chosen by chance, because of an accidental meeting on the street, becomes the subject / content of the following stereotyped models of presentation which are in our civilization recognized as the transmitters of especially significant messages.

- Large photoportrait hung in a public place
- Monument erected in a public place
- Poster displayed on a billboard
- Banner carried on the street
- Memorial plaque on a façade
- A cocktail party in honour of Mr. X
- A dinner party in honour of Mr. Y
- Poster on the bus
- Street sign
- Historical group photograph

Chance

Chance is taken as the basic principle of choice, as an alternative to the selective mechanism of the power structure. The intention of the work is not to make the accidentally chosen people famous; the causal passer-by only embodies the principle of chance, one choice from a broad spectrum of possibilities. This is not a pseudo-humanistic story about the glorification of the “little man” (the notion “little man” is already discriminating and comes from class alienated consciousness), but the casually chosen subjects of these works represent undefined possibilities. This method in its opposition to so-called historical ways of imparting value is used to provoke doubt in existing criteria. Chance as a characteristic of disorder can shake the image of the established order of things.

Formal Non-originality

Principle of Ready Esthetics

In a formal sense, this work is completely non-original. There is not one element on the basis of which the artist’s personal handwriting could be identified. This work does not wish to contribute, in any sense, to the formal evolution of art. It takes already existing forms *from* and *outside* the context of art and gives them new content.

This is in no way the principle of the ready-made, which is based on the change of context. (For instance, a portrait cast in bronze existed for centuries as an art form and as a means of glorification.) This means that the technological spectrum of this work is several thousand years broad, from a bust in bronze to photography on canvas and therefore cannot be identified with particular media/technology. Contrary to the art in an era of technological boom (from the beginning of the 20th Century up to now) which based its originality on introducing new materials/technologies in art, this work uses already existing art materials and forms. This principle could be defined as a juxtaposition of ready esthetics. This work does not exist as a formal novelty, but exclusively as a new semantic structure, and consequently is not noticeable. Furthermore, it is almost invisible at first glance. Since it faithfully imitates the real forms of historical glorification, it can’t be noticed without additional information. All this demonstrates that the work deals exclusively with problems not connected with formal novelty and visual appearance. This reduction of the formal is not to narrow the spectrum of creativity, but rather to call attention to the polysemic nature of the image.

Artificial Myth or Esthetic of Logic

As it has been shown, the signifiers of the signs in the system ERC and E₁R₁C₁ are analogous: the signifieds are essentially different. And it is precisely on the similarity of forms that this work functions. When the person is confronted with the signs from the system E₁R₁C₁ he would react in the same way because he’s used to passively and automatically accepting the messages of the similar signs from the system ERC. It is just this conditioned reflex, this passive acceptance, that forms one of the basic elements of the work, i.e. the first phase. The next phase is correction of this intentionally provoked incorrect conclusion which is achieved through additional information provided by galleries, museums, press, etc. The effect is that every subsequent encounter with the signs from the system ERC results in a questioning of their signifieds. When the conventional relation of the signifier and signified is once shaken, the sign ceases to function “normally.” The actual purpose of the work is to defunctionalize the sign from the system ERC by means of their mistaken replicas from system E₁R₁C₁. In this way suspicion regarding the intentions of the myth is cast by means of the myth itself, and the one-way communication on which it is based (from myth-makers to consumers) is exchanged for a reversible, two-way communication. Instead of only one way of reading the signs from system ERC, this work intends to provoke doubt regarding the value system they are based on. Instead of passive acceptance of uniform values offered by tradition and history, the work aims to create a new situation: the establishment of very open and flexible individual criteria which could permit the coexistence of different and often contradictory values.

This text is written in collaboration with Nena Dimitrijević
B.D. Zaton Mali, Dubrovnik, Summer 1976

1 B.D. Lecture held at University College, Slade School of Art, London, November 1974
2 B.D. “Just as piano is not music, a painting is not art,” Catalogue. Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb, February 1973
3 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Hill and Wang, New York 1972, p. 131

DIE ETHIK DER FORM ODER DIE ÄSTHETIK DER LOGIK

Kunstgeschichte als die Geschichte formaler Entwicklung

Kunst – so wie sie durch die Kunstgeschichte dargestellt wird – existiert als Abfolge von Stilen. Sie wird dargestellt als eine Reihe von reinen und in sich einheitlichen formalen Einheiten, wobei die nächste immer besser ist als die vorhergehende. Dieser Theorie entsprechend steigert die Kunst sich fortwährend in ihrer Qualität. Ein solches Konzept von Kunstgeschichte basiert auf folgenden idealistischen Prämissen: 1) Der Idee der kontinuierlichen Verbesserung der Formen; d. h. des Wechsels einer Kunstform zu einer – vermutlich – nächstbesseren. Dem liegt die hegelianische Idee zugrunde, daß ein gewisses Vorbild existiert, auf das hin der gesamte Prozeß sich entwickelt. In anderen Worten: ist der Barock besser als die Renaissance oder die Color Field Malerei besser als der abstrakte Expressionismus? Es wird ein absoluter, idealer Stil vorausgesetzt, auf dessen Erreichung der gesamte Perfektionsprozeß abzielt. 2) Der gesamte Prozeß verdankt sich dem Genius, dem Stilschöpfer, der unabhängig von den sozialhistorischen Bedingungen, in denen er lebt; seinen Meisterwerken göttliche inspiration einflößt. Es fällt nicht schwer zu begreifen, dass ein Kunstgeschichtskonzept, das von einer kontinuierlichen Verbesserung der Kunst ausgeht, Unterdrückung zur Konsequenz hat. In erster Linie rechtfertigt, ja impliziert es sogar die Existenz exklusiver Kriterien in jeder Epoche, Kriterien, vermittels derer alles eliminiert wird, was vom dominierenden Stil abweicht: Diese Vorstellung rechtfertigt die Existenz eines „totalitären Geschmacks.“ Nachdem die Genies die Herrschaft eines bestimmten Stils etabliert haben, ist kein Bedarf mehr für Kreation und unabhängige Individuen, sondern nur noch für eine Armee von Manieristen, die den herrschenden Stil zu bestätigen haben, indem sie sich der neuesten künstlerischen Techniken bedienen und vielfältigste Variationen derselben stilistischen Natur schaffen. Die Vorstellung von Kunstgeschichte als einer konsequenten und linearen Entwicklung kann nur aufrechterhalten werden, wenn alle Fälle, die dem dominierenden Stilklichee nicht zu subsumieren sind, übersehen bzw. eliminiert werden (ich bin beispielsweise sicher, daß es im Rokoko mindestens einen Künstler gab, der ästhetische Prinzipien anwandte, die denjenigen der Minimal Art ähnlich waren, aber er blieb unbekannt, weil der kollektive Geschmack und die kollektive Sensibilität nicht bereit waren, diese Idee zu akzeptieren). Ein solches Kunstgeschichtsmodell ist nur eine Widerspiegelung der allgemeinen Geschichte, insofern es die Vorstellungen der Menschen in der westlichen Welt über ihre eigene Geschichte wiederholt; Vorstellungen, die Geschichte als eine Serie von Veränderungen begreifen. Trotz Konflikten und Kämpfen läuft alles auf einen sogenannten „Fortschritt“ hinaus.

Stil als Form von Rassismus in der Kunst

Stil entsteht aus den zahlreichen Variationen ein und derselben konzeptuellen Formel. Stil ist die Akkumulation von unterschiedlichen „Signifies“ (von Bedeutetem) und denselben „Signifiants“ (von Bedutendem): Wenn man Roland Barthes folgend der Sprache eine Ausdrucksebene und eine Bedeutungsebene zumisst, dann kann man übertragen auf die Kunstsprache sagen, daß zahlreiche Variationen der Ausdrucksebene derselben Bedeutungsebene korrespondieren. In anderen Worten,

es besteht eine große Diskrepanz zwischen der Produktion neuer Formen und der Produktion neuer Inhalte. Wenn Kunst ein kognitiver Prozeß ist, der sich durch die Schaffung neuer logischer Beziehungen realisiert, dann ist die Periode, in der sich ein Stil ausbildet, eine Periode kognitiver Stagnation, weil dieselbe konzeptuelle Formel mit zahlreichen, unterschiedlichen aber prinzipiell identischen Elementen gefüllt wird. Wenn beispielsweise das Prinzip der Monochromie (die Oberfläche des Bildes wird vollständig mit einer homogenen Farbe bedeckt) einmal definiert ist, dann sind alle späteren Varianten (der Gebrauch anderer Farben, Veränderungen des Formats usw.) ohne kognitiven Wert. Kunstaktivitäten, die sich mit formalen Variationen derselben konzeptuellen Formel beschäftigen, sind vergleichbar der „kosmetischen“ Arbeit von Industrial Designers, die in jeder Saison neue Formen für technisch unveränderte Produkte erfinden. Die Absicht dieser Aktivitäten besteht jeweils darin, den Appetit des Konsumenten zu stimulieren. Der Überschuß an monochromatischen Bildern auf dem zeitgenössischen Kunstmarkt könnte verglichen werden mit der Produktion immer neuer Modelle von elektrischen Mixern, die sich zwar nicht grundsätzlich verändern, aber jedes Jahr mit neuem Aussehen und mehr Gängen herauskommen. Kunstwerke dieser Art haben eine zweifache Funktion: 1. befriedigen sie eine zunehmende Nachfrage von Seiten des Marktes (der Widerstand, dem die Pionierarbeiten anfangs konfrontiert werden, ist mittlerweile wachsender Anerkennung gewichen). 2. Vermitteln sie in einer Phase kognitiver Stagnation der Kunstproduktion die Illusion von Veränderung. Variationen ein und desselben Prinzips werden mit Hilfe der Kunstunterstützungssysteme als Fortschritt im Entwicklungsprozeß präsentiert. Obwohl die Illusion von Ausdrucksfreiheit vermittelt wird, erlaubt die Praxis tatsächlich nur Veränderungen im Bereich der Form. Sie eliminiert fast jede Chance, neue Bedeutungssysteme zu berücksichtigen. Nur auf diese Weise ist Stilreinheit gewährleistet. Stil repräsentiert in der Tat den gewaltsamen Charakter der Mentalität einer Epoche. Stil ist eine Art von Aggression, ist geistige Impotenz, die Unterschiede eliminiert. Stil ist Mangel an Toleranz, Aggression gegen einen Pluralismus von Kunstkonzepten.

Der Mythos ist die beste Investition¹ –

Formale Innovation. Makro- und Mikrostil

Die Theorie von formaler Evolution, die auf der chronologischen Homogenität des Stilwandels basiert, impliziert formale Innovation als übergeordnetes kritisches Kriterium, während sie das essentielle Interesse von Kunst außer Acht, nämlich Rolle und Ort der Kunst innerhalb eines gegebenen soziohistorischen Kontextes. Entsprechend der Nachfrage nach immer neuer Formenproduktion werden viele Kunstwerke allein anhand der Identifikation der Künstlersignatur bewertet, die persönliche Handschrift eines Künstlers wird absolut überbetont. Innerhalb des Wertsystems der Kunst, das wir heute haben, ist formale oder stilistische Einzigartigkeit das einzig akzeptierte Markenzeichen für Spitzenprodukte. Dieses Markenzeichen hat sich im Verlauf der Kunstgeschichte ausgeprägt, von Künstler zu Künstler sich weiter präzisiert. Seine Bedeutung ist in unserem Wertsystem seit der Renaissance unverändert. Die Tatsache, daß das Kriterium des Weitererkennens der Handschrift eines Künstlers (=Kriterium für formale Innovation) zahlreiche Wechsel der Ästhetiken und Kunsttechnologien, die in den letzten 500 Jahren stattfanden,

überlebte, zeigt, daß in dieser Periode die soziale Integration der Kunst sich nicht prinzipiell verändert hat. Die Vorstellung von Kunst als einer Serie formaler Innovationen ermutigt ästhetische Exzesse. Aber der ästhetische Exzeß oder die Abweichung vom etablierten Stil ist nicht annähernd ein so revolutionärer Akt, wie wir zu unterschätzen gewöhnt sind: genährt wird lediglich der Mythos von der Entwicklung der Kunst, während alle essentiellen Fragen über Position und Funktion der Kunst unberührt bleiben. Diese Behauptung ist am besten bewiesen durch die rasche Integration neuer Avantgarde-Bewegungen in das kulturelle Establishment. Der sich ständig wiederholende klassische Fehler der Avantgarde des 20. Jahrhunderts ist beispielsweise der, daß sie – obwohl sie in ihren Manifesten behauptet, antiästhetisch zu sein – nur wie sich dann später herausstellt, neue visuelle Statements einführt. Die Versuche, sich von ästhetischen Normen zu befreien, schlugen notwendig fehl, weil die neuen Schönheitskriterien schnell vereinnahmt waren und das, was als nicht-retinal gedacht war, zum Modell für eine neue Kunstproduktion, zum optischen Maßstab einer Epoche wurde. All dies zeigt, daß diese antiästhetischen Unternehmungen Widersprüche in sich enthielten, die es ermöglichten, die antiästhetisch intendierten Produkte im Sinne der Warencharaktere von Kunst zu manipulieren. Sie behalten begrenzte Gültigkeit lediglich als Symptom für eine Situation, die reif genug war, dieses Problem in Betracht zu sehen, der es jedoch nicht gelang, es auch erfolgreich zu lösen. Der Assimilationsprozeß, dem neue Kunst unterworfen ist, vollzieht sich immer auf etwa die gleiche Art: Der konzeptuelle Inhalt der Kunst wird oft vergessen, und stattdessen werden formal-dekorative Aspekte akzentuiert. Die Beispiele, die uns durch historische Kunstbewegungen bekannt sind, überdauern nur als schwache Spur ihre ursprünglichen kunstphilosophischen Standpunkte. Das, was heute als Künstler Vergangenheit überliefert und glorifiziert wird, ist nichts weiter als Relikt vergangener Kunstideologien. Der konzeptuelle Inhalt eines Kunstwerks wird durch die Metasprache der Kunst (Kunstgeschichte und Kunstkritik) reduziert oder total ignoriert: Nur dekorative und formale Komponenten finden Berücksichtigung. Es handelt sich hier tatsächlich um einen Prozeß der Eliminierung der revolutionären Potenz der Kunst zugunsten ihrer peripheren und leicht manipulierbaren Oberflächendekorativeität. Die Tendenz, Kunstgeschichte als einen Prozeß formaler Evolutionen darzustellen, entfremdet die Kunst ihrer ideologischen Klarheit und verkehrt sie zu einem Mittel ideologischer Manipulation. Die kritisch-analytische Fähigkeit, mit der die Kunstprodukte bewertet werden, siehe Überbewertung der persönlichen Handschrift eines Künstlers. Ist ein Künstler erst einmal mit einer besonderen visuellen Formel identifiziert, so wird erwartet, daß er an dieser festhält. Eine solche Beschränkung auf eine Ausdrucksform kann eine persönliche Beschränkung produzieren, die Mikrospiegelung des Eliminierungsprozesses, der auf der Makroebene durch den Stil vollendet wird. Der Mythos von formaler Evolution begründet sich auf eine Reihe leicht erkennbarer Zeichen. Vom Künstler erwartet man nun, daß er seine Produktion so beschneidet, daß sie dieses klare Bild nicht zerstört. Die kritische und selektive Fähigkeit der Kunstrezipienten (Kunstkonsumenten) ist von vornherein durch bestimmte präexistente Meinungen über Kunst in Frage gestellt. Diese Meinungen lauten: 1. Kunst ist eine geheiligte Tätigkeit, 2. Ein Kunstobjekt ist eine Kostbarkeit. Das System, das Kunst unterstützt, wie auch die Metasprache der Kunst in ihrer gegenwärtigen Form spielen zur Zeit die exklusive Rolle, das Kunstobjekt als Fetisch zu propagieren, d. h. seinen magischen Status zu akzentuieren. Unter solchen Bedingungen kann Kunst sich nur als Selbstzweck, als Zweck an sich rechtfertigen. Es wäre aber denkbar, daß das Kunstobjekt als Mittel eingesetzt würde, das durch seine katalytische Kraft neue Bewusstseinsmodelle „bermittelt.“²

Zwei Bereiche von Logik

Die folgende Analyse beschäftigt sich mit Analogien und Differenzen zwischen 1. die Sprache dieser Arbeit — E₁R₁C₁ — und 2. der Sprache — ERC, deren sich die offizielle Struktur, die Machtstruktur, bedient, um bestimmte Botschaften von spezieller Bedeutung mitzuteilen. Indem Beispiele analoger Zeichen aus dem System ERC und dem System E₁R₁C₁ gegenübergestellt werden, kann der Mechanismus dieser Arbeit demonstriert werden.

Zeichen A (aus dem ERC System): Denkmal für Alfred Nobel
Bedeutendes A — Bronzestatue auf einem Marmorsockel
Bedeutetes A — eine Person von besonderer gesellschaftlicher Wichtigkeit

Zeichen A₁ (aus E₁R₁C₁ System): Denkmal für Alberto Vieri
Bedeutendes A₁ — Bronzestatue auf einem Marmorsockel
Bedeutetes A₁ — jemand, der zufällig vorbeigeht

ERC ist eine Sprache repressiver Natur, weil sie zu imponieren sucht und ein spezielles Wertsystem erhält. E₁R₁C₁ ist die Sprache dieser Arbeit, die versucht, die Zeichen des ERC Systems zu „entfunktionalisieren“.

ERC System

Zwei Gruppen von Zeichen können unterschieden werden:

- 1. Zeichen, die zeitgenössische Sujets propagieren, ihr Bedeutetes sind wichtige aktuelle Persönlichkeiten oder Ideen.
- 2. Zeichen, die sich affirmativ zur Geschichte verhalten. Ihr Bedeutetes sind bestimmte ausgewählte Individuen der Vergangenheit.

Die Funktion der Zeichen beider Gruppen ist repressiv in Bezug auf den Empfänger der Botschaft, von dem erwartet wird, daß er sie aufnimmt, ohne sie auf ihre Glaubwürdigkeit und Herkunft hin zu hinterfragen, d. h. letztlich ohne die Motive der Gruppen zu hinterfragen, die die Botschaft senden. Geht man von der Prämisse aus, daß individuelle Kreativität unmittelbar durch die Menge der zur Verfügung stehenden Daten begrenzt wird, so schränkt die Reduzierung der Daten — bewirkt durch den selektiven Mechanismus von Geschichte und Machtstruktur — also die kreative Entwicklung des Individuums ein. Durch das Erziehungssystem werden Kriterien vermittelt, die dem Individuum die Chance und die Freiheit nehmen, eigene Urteile zu fällen. Das gesamte Erziehungskonzept, wie das gesamte kulturelle Konzept überhaupt, basieren auf Autoritätsgläubigkeit und Werthierarchie. Dies kulturelle konzept trägt auch die Verantwortung dafür, daß die Evolution der Kunst und die göttlichen Attribute, die der Kunst zugewiesen werden, als Leistung einiger Genies, einiger Heroen einer Epoche gelten. Die lineare und reduzierende Version von Kulturgeschichte baut auf personenfixierten Mythologien auf. Nahrung erhalten diese Mythologien, indem man aus dem Privatleben der Künstler bestimmte Elemente isoliert: Denkmäler, Gedächtnistafeln („hat hier gelebt“, „hat heir gearbeitet“, usw.) sind nur Mittel, durch

die der Genie-Status geschaffen und akzentuiert wird. Ihre Funktion besteht darin, den Massen eine passive Ehrfurcht einzuflößen. Das Resultat ist schließlich, daß das Bewusstsein derjenigen, für die die Botschaft bestimmt ist, abestumpft ist bis zur passiven, unkritischen Annahme der kulturellen Autoritäten der Vergangenheit. Alle Figuren, die via Geschichte präsentiert werden, werden von vorneherein als relevant akzeptiert. „Was dem Leser ermöglicht, den Mythos unschuldig zu konsumieren, ist, daß er in ihm kein semiologisches, sondern ein induktives System sieht. Dort, wo nur eine Äquivalenz besteht, sieht er einen kausalen Vorgang. Das Bedeutende und das Bedeutete haben in seinen Augen Naturbeziehungen. Man kann diese Verwirrung auch anders ausdrücken: jedes semiologische System ist ein System von Werten. Der Verbraucher des Mythos fasst die Bedeutung als ein System von Fakten ab. Der Mythos wird als ein Faktensystem gelesen, während er doch nur ein semiologisches System darstellt.“³

Die vollständige Abstumpfung der kritischen Urteilsfähigkeit eines Individuums wird erzielt durch ein ganzes System repressiver Zeichen: Denkmäler und Gedächtnistafeln sind nicht lediglich unschuldige Mahnmale für kulturelle Werte der Vergangenheit, sondern sie gehören zu einem sorgfältig konstruierten mythischen System, das die chaotische Realität der Vergangenheit entzerrt und dadurch verzerrt. Ihre Funktion besteht darin, den Widerspruch zwischen einer chaotischen Realität und einem Ordnung illusionierenden Bild der Vergangenheit auszuräumen: Die Differenzen, Konflikte und Widersprüche, die eine Periode charakterisieren, werden in diesem System negiert. Nur klare, unzweideutige Zeichen, die eine völlig widerspruchslöse, einheitliche Aufzeichnung der Vergangenheit erlauben, werden zugelassen.

Die Repressivität der Zeichen von Gruppe 2) ist indirekt ins Verhältnis zu setzen mit der Wirkung der Zeichen von Gruppe 1): Während der Empfänger in Bezug auf die zeitgenössische Botschaft, die überzeugen will, Widerstände aufbaut, baut er in Bezug auf die hisorischen Mittel der Überzeugung nicht ein Minimum an kritischer Reserve auf. Letzteres ist bedingt in einem vollständigen Mangel an interessierter Aufmerksamkeit auf Seiten des Empfängers, sprich des Opfers. Es gibt beispielsweise wenig Leute, die verstehen würden, dass die Gedächtnistafeln am Haus von Berlioz ein Angriff auf die Freiheit des Denkens und der Urteilsbildung ist, währenddessen die meisten von uns offenen kommerziellen oder politischen Botschaften gegenüber skeptisch bleiben. Das bedeutet jedoch keineswegs, daß Zeichen der zweiten Gruppe weniger repressiv wirken. Nehmen wir als Beispeil die bereits erwähnte Marmorplatte, die am Haus von Berlioz angebracht ist. Auf dieser Marmorplatte steht der Satz „Berlioz lebte hier.“ Das dieser Botschat zugrunde liegende System ist ein linguistisches. Selzen wir jedoch an die Stelle des linguistischen Codes die Botschaft, die aus der besonderen Präsentationsform sich ergibt, so erhalten wir die Äußerung „Hier lebte ein Genie.“ Das abgeleitet wird „Hier lebte niemals ein Genie.“

E₁R₁C₁ System

Methode

Eine durch Zufall ausgewählte Person – beispielweise ein Fremder, dem man auf der Straße begegnet – wird zum Sujet/Inhalt der folgenden stereotypierten Präsentationsmodelle, die innerhalb unserer Zivilisation als Übermittler besonders bedeutsamer Botschaften anerkannt sind.

- Übergroßes Porträitfoto, das auf einem öffentlichen Platz aufgehängt ist
- Denkmal, das auf einem öffentlichen Platz errichtet ist
- Plakate auf Anschlagtafeln
- Fahne, die durch die Straßen getragen wird
- Gedenktafel an einer Fassade
- eine Cocktailparty zu Ehren von Mr. X
- ein Essen zu Ehren von Mr. X
- Plakate auf einem Bus
- Straßenzeichen
- historisches Gruppenfoto

Zufall

Zufall ist das dieser Arbeit zugrunde gelegte Auswahlprinzip und zwar Zufall als Alternative zu den selektiven Mechanismen der Machtstruktur. Die Intention der Arbeit liegt dabei nicht darin, bis dato unbekannte, zufällig ausgewählte Personen berühmt zu machen: Der zufällig begegnende Straßenpassant verkörpert lediglich das Zufallsprinzip, d. h. eine Wahl, die aus einem breiten Spektrum von Möglichkeiten getroffen wird. Es handelt sich nicht um eine pseudohumane Geschichte über die Glorifikation des „kleinen Mannes“ (das Wort „kleiner Mann“ enthält bereits eine Diskriminierung und hat viel mit Klassenbewusstsein zutun). Die zufällig gewählten Sujets dieser Arbeiten stehen als solche ein für bestimmte Möglichkeiten. Diese Methode, die sich aus dem gewollten Gegensatz zu historischen Arten der Auswahl und Festsetzung von Werten erklärt, wird eingesetzt, um Zweifel an bestehenden Kriterien zu provozieren. Zufall als Charakteristikum für Unordnung kann das Bild der etablierten Ordnung der Dinge erschüttern.

Formale Un-Originalität
Prinzip der „Fertig“-Ästhetik

Unter formalen Aspekten ist diese Arbeit absolut un-originell. Es gibt kein einziges Element, das eine persönliche Handschrift des Künstlers erkennen lässt. Diese Arbeit will in keiner Weise zur formalen Entwicklung der Kunst beitragen. Sie bedient sich existierender Formen, die *inner-* und *außerhalb* des Kontextes von Kunst bereits vorgegeben sind, und gibt diesen Formen einen neuen Inhalt.

Dieses Prinzip ist nicht zu vergleichen mit dem Prinzip des ready made, das auf der Veränderung des Kontextes basiert (Portraitbüsten aus Bronze existieren bereits seit Jahrhunderten als Kunstform und als Mittel der Glorifikation). Das bedeutet, daß das rein technologische Spektrum dieser Arbeit einige tausend Jahre umfasst, von Bronzebüsten bis hin zur Fotografie. Deshalb besteht kein Zusammenhang zu einer Medien-spezifischen Technologie. Im Gegensatz zu einer Kunst, die sich in einer Phase technologischen Aufschwungs ausbildet (etwa vom Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts bis heute) und die ihre Originalität dadurch erhält, daß sie neue Materialtechnologien in die Kunst einführt, bedient sich diese Arbeit bereits existierender Kunstmaterialien und –formen. Man könnte ein solches Prinzip als Juxtaposition der „Fertig“-Ästhetik definieren. Diese Arbeit existiert und legitimiert sich nicht als formale Innovation, sondern ausschließlich als eine neue semantische Struktur, folglich ist sie unter formalen Aspekten nicht weiter bemerkenswert. Darüber

hinaus bleibt diese Arbeit in ihrer Besonderheit auf den ersten Blick tatsächlich unsichtbar. Sofern sie die wirklichen Formen historischer Glorifikation getreu imitiert, kann sie ohne zusätzliche Information nicht wahrgenommen werden. All dies zeigt, daß sich die Arbeit ausschließlich mit Problemen befasst, die nichts mit formaler Innovation und optischer Erscheinung zu tun haben. Das Formale wird nicht reduziert, und die Kreativität einzuengen, sondern vielmehr um die Aufmerksamkeit auf die Vieldeutigkeit des Abbilds zu lenken.

Künstlicher Mythos oder die Ästhetik der Logik

Es ist demonstriert worden, daß die Bedeutungsträger der Zeichen in dem System ERC und dem System $E_1R_1C_1$ analog waren, wobei das Bedeutete jedoch jeweils grundsätzlich verschieden war. Diese Arbeit funktioniert aufgrund der Ähnlichkeit der äußeren Form. Wird jemand mit den Zeichen des Systems $E_1R_1C_1$ konfrontiert, so wird er zunächst genauso reagieren wie auf Zeichen des ERC Systems, denn er ist daran gewöhnt, die Botschaft des ERC Systems passiv und automatisch zu akzeptieren.

Dieser beängstigte Reflex, diese passive Annahme ist eines der grundlegenden Elemente der Arbeit, d. h. ihrer ersten Wirkungsphase. Die nächste Phase besteht in der Korrektur der intentional provozierten unkorrekten Folgerung. Diese Korrektur wird durch zusätzliche Information geleistet, die von Galerien, Museen, der Presse usw. bereitgestellt wird. Die Wirkung besteht darin, daß jedes erneute Zusammentreffen mit Zeichen des ERC Systems zu einer Hinterfragung des von ihm Bedeuteten führt. Ist die konventionelle Beziehung zwischen dem Bedeutenden und dem Bedeuteten einmal erschüttert, so hört das Zeichen auf, „normal“ zu funktionieren. Der tatsächliche Zweck der Arbeit besteht darin, die Zeichen aus dem dem EC System zu entfunktionalisieren, indem sie im $E_1R_1C_1$ System „falsch“ nachgebildet werden. Auf diese Art wird Argwohn in Bezug auf die Absichten des Mythos erzeugt, und zwar durch Mittel, die dem Mythos selbst immanent sind. Die Ein-Weg-Kommunikation, auf der er basiert (vom Mythenhersteller zum Konsumenten), wird ins Umgekehrte, in eine Zwei-Weg-Kommunikation umgeändert. Statt nur eine Lasart der Zeichen des ERS Systems zuzulassen, will diese Arbeit Zweifel an dem Wertsystem produzieren, auf dem die Zeichen des ERC Systems basieren. Statt einer passiven Annahme vereinheitlichter Werte, wie sie durch Tradition und Geschichte angeboten werden, zielt die Arbeit darauf, eine neue Situation zu schaffen: Die Etablierung sehr offener und flexibler individueller Kriterien, die die Koexistenz verschiedener und widersprüchlicher Werte zulassen.

Dieser Text wurde in Zusammenarbeit mit Nena Dimitrijević geschrieben

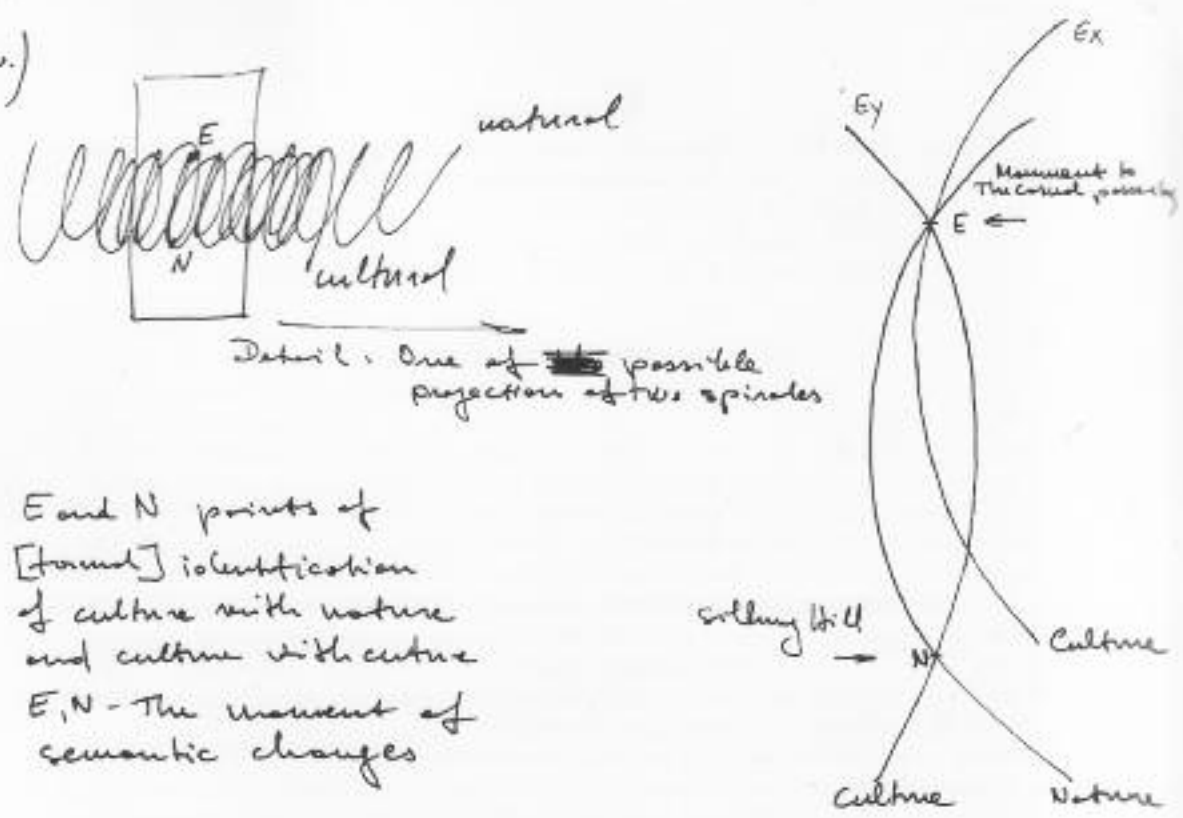
B.D. Zaton Mali, Dubrovnik, Sommer 1976

Übersetzung: Clara Weyergraf, Bochum

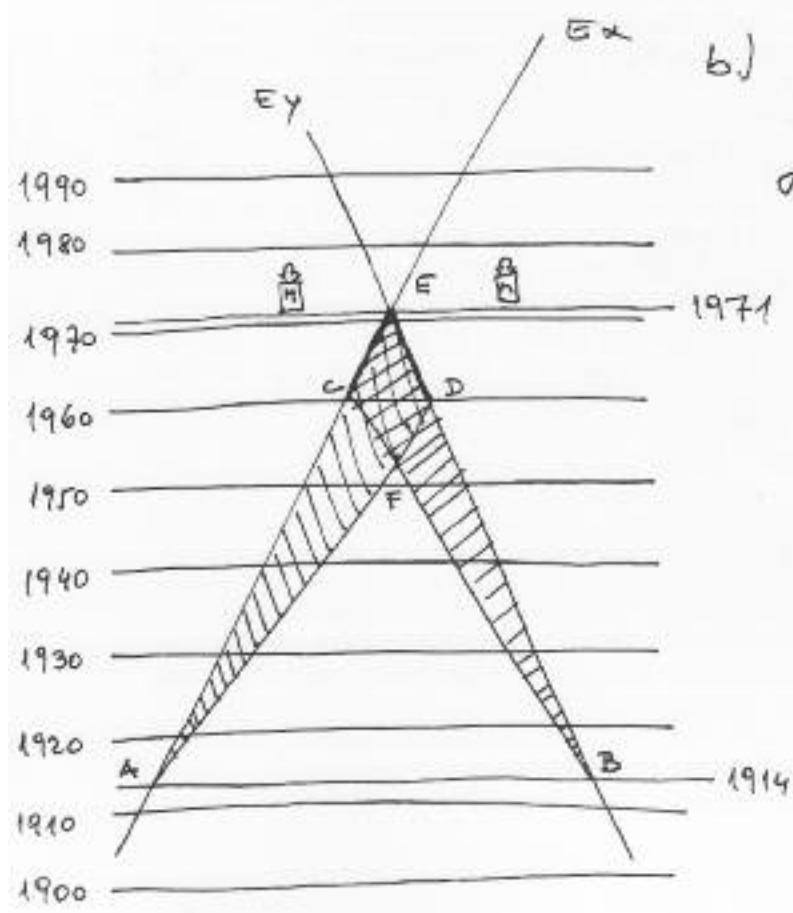
Anmerkungen

- 1 B.D., Vorlesung, gehalten am University College, Slade School of Art, London, November 1974
- 2 B.D., „Ebenso wie ein Klavier keine Musik ist, ist ein Bild noch keine Kunst,“ Katalog des Museums Zeitgenössischer Kunst, Zagreb, Februar 1973
- 3 Roland Barthes, *Mythen des Alltags*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt 1974, S. 115

a.)



E and N points of
[formal] identification
of culture with nature
and culture with culture
E, N - The moment of
semantic changes



b.)

Diagram of the
formal evolution of art

- A. Suprematism
Malevich
- B. Ready Made
Duchamp
- C. Beginning of Fluxus
movement
- D. Beginning of
Minimal Art
- E. Monument to the
casual passer-by
- F. Some anticipators
of C and D
- EExEy The field of
Art after formal
evolution

Diagram of the formal evolution of art

- A - Suprematism: Malevich
- B - Ready Made: Duchamp
- C - The beginning of the Fluxus movement
- D - The beginning of Minimal Art
- E - Monuments to the casual passer-by
- F - Some anticipators of C and D
- CDEF - Overlapping BCE (the spirit of Conceptualism) with ADE (cold minimalist presentation) we get the field of so-called Conceptual Art
- CE - Development of Conceptual Art
- DE - Development of Minimal Art
- ABF - Movements of relative importance for Conceptual Art. Left from AEEy, and right from BEEy: activity which imitates art
- EExEy - The field of art after formal evolution

Diagram der formalen Entwicklung der Kunst

- A - Suprematismus, Malewitsch
- B - ready made: Duchamp
- C - Anfang der Fluxus-Bewegung
- D - Anfang der Minimal Art
- E - Denkmal für den Straßenpassanten, der zufällig vor"bergeht
- F - Einige Vorformen von C und D
- CEDF - Formen, die BCE übergreifen (Geist des Konzeptualismus); mit ADE (kalte minimalistische Präsentation) erhalten wir das Feld der sogenannten Konzeptkunst
- CE - Entwicklung der Conceptual Art
- DE - Entwicklung der Minimal Art
- ABF - Bewegungen von relativer Bedeutung für die Konzeptkunst. Links von AEEy und rechts von BEEy: Aktivität, die Kunst imitiert
- EExEy - das Gebiet der Kunst nach der formalen Evolution

II
STATUS HISTORICUS

EINMAL, VOR LANGER ZEIT, DA LEBTEN WEIT WEG VON STÄDTEN UND STÄDTCHEN ZWEI MALER. EINES TAGES VERLOR DER KÖNIG, DER IN DER NÄHE AUF DER JAGD WAR, SEINEN HUND. ER FAND IHN IM GARTEN EINES DER BEIDEN MALER WIEDER. ER SAH DIE WERKE DIESES MALERS UND NAHM IHN MIT AUFS SCHLOSS.
DER NAME DES MALERS WAR LEONARDO DA VINCI. DER NAME DES ANDEREN VERSCHWAND FÜR IMMER AUS DEM MENSCHLICHEN GEDÄCHTNIS.

DIE GESCHICHTE VON ZWEI MALERN, 1969

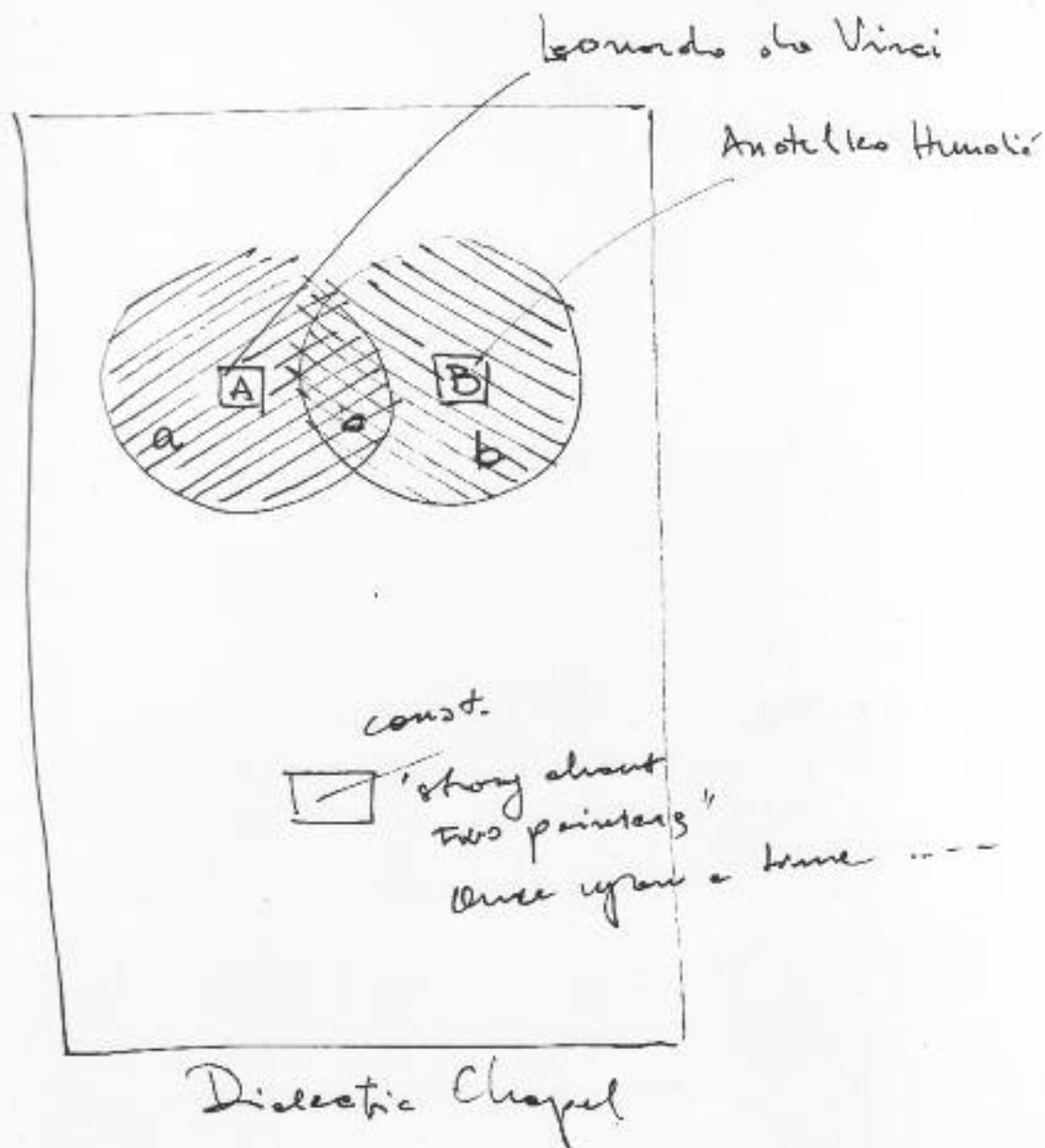


STORY ABOUT TWO ARTISTS, 1969

III
STATUS POST HISTORICUS



ABOUT TWO ARTISTS, DIALECTIC CHAPEL, VENICE BIENNALE 1976
 ÜBER ZWEI MALER, DIALEKTISCHE KAPELLE, BIENNALE VENEZIG 1976



- A - Painter - Scientist - Genius
- B - The Casual passer-by I met
- A - Selected according Historical criteria
- B - Selected according non-historical method of selection
- a - field of meaning produced by A
- b - field of meaning produced by B
- c - field of meaning produced by composing A and B

The Dialectic Chapel

- A - Leonardo da Vinci
Painter, Scientist, Genius
- B - Anatolko Hundić
The casual passer-by I met
- Constant - Story about two artists
- A - Selected according to historical criteria
- B - Selected according to non-historical method
- a - field of meaning produced by A
- b - field of meaning produced by B
- c - field of meaning produced by composing A and B

Die Dialektische Kapelle

- A - Leonardo da Vinci
Maler, Wissenschaftler, Genie
- B - Anatolko Hundić
Passant, den ich zufällig auf der Straße traf
- Konstante - die Geschichte von zwei Malern
- A - ausgewählt aufgrund historischer Auswahlkriterien
- B - ausgewählt aufgrund einer nicht historischen Auswahlmethode
- a - Bedeutungsfeld, produziert durch A
- b - Bedeutungsfeld, produziert durch B
- c - Bedeutungsfeld, das durch das Zusammenwirken von A und B bestimmt wird.

The "Dialectic chapel" is a situation in which "important" and "unimportant" are equally presented. This is a model for a post-historical society. History was always created by the power structure which selected only certain data (convenient to itself) to be recorded. By "post-historical" I mean a situation which makes possible the coexistence of different qualities.

Die „Dialektische Kapelle“ ist eine Situation, in der „Bedeutendes“ und „Unbedeutendes“ nebeneinander präsentiert werden. Sie ist ein Modell für eine posthistorische Gesellschaft. Geschichte wurde immer durch die jeweilige Machtstruktur bestimmt, die nur die Daten auswählte, die ihr genehm waren, und auch nur deren Überlieferung zuließ. Wenn ich von posthistorisch rede, so meine ich damit eine Situation, die es ermöglicht, daß verschiedene Qualitäten nebeneinander existieren.

IV
THREE MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS
DREI MUSEUMS AUSSTELLUNGEN



Part One

PALAIS DES BEUX-ARTS, BRUXELLES, JANUARY 1975

Gerda Bollen – The casual passer-by I met at 1.38 PM
 Gerda Bollen – Passant, den ich zufällig um 13.38 Uhr traf



Part Two

MUSEUM OF TEMPORARY ART, ALBIOLO, MARCH 1975

MUSEUM TEMPORÄRER KUNST, ALBIOLO, MÄRZ 1975



Part Three

STÄDTISCHES MUSEUM MÖNCHENGLADBACH, MARCH/APRIL, 1975

Erich Hoefler – The casual passer-by I met at 6.16 PM
 Erich Hoefler – Passant, den ich zufällig um 18.16 Uhr traf

THREE MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS¹

The museum is an institution for collecting and preserving art works. It is in this form that the museum is present in the minds of most professionals and laymen. The organization and very existence of the museum as an institution is based on the premise that an art work has a certain inherent value which is constant and not subject to sociological influences. Understanding an art work as a timeless esthetic entity is an application of an idealistic thought pattern to the field of art. It has its roots in a cultish attitude towards art.

This fallacy about the timelessness of an art work is in part nourished by the fact that most art objects are executed in fairly permanent materials: bronze, oil on canvas, marble all successfully resist the onslaught of time, and consequently the corpses of the art which they constitute last much longer than the ideas they embodied.

In my opinion the value of an art work is primarily defined by the divergence of the ideational level of the work from the state of collective consciousness.²

$$V = \frac{i - i_1}{d}$$

V = value of an art work

i = Constant = ideational substance of the work

i₁ = level of collective consciousness

d = decorative, anecdotal, formal component of an art work

All significant art works are always ahead of their time because they diverge from existing modes of thought. However, “i₁” is a variable which changes in time as the level of knowledge increases. When “i” becomes equal to “i₁” the art work is both consumed and exhausted: the object which remains after this process is no longer an art work, but a corpse, or more romantically put—“an art souvenir of the past.” All art works are subject, without exception, to this process and there is no point in deceiving ourselves that Braque was more successful in escaping this than Titian, for example. Consequently there are many fewer art works in museums than we tend to believe: a more fitting expression for the objects we find there might be “vestiges of the art of the past.”

The role of the museum in distributing art ideology is not a small one. Galleries and museums have a similar way of presenting works; gallery exhibitions lasting only a few weeks, while museum collections and installations can last unchanged for several years. The obvious difference in the duration of exhibition can have a two-fold effect. The frequent change of exhibitions in galleries suggests an apparent dynamism and variety in art production, in contrast to the museum’s longer-term installations which, in being seen by more people, lead to more rapid consumption. The slowness with which museums react to the complexity of creative acts which are happening every day results later in the establishment of particular units of style. Objects in collections are classified according to the chronological linear method which coincides with stylistic classifications. This method of presentation suggests order and clarity in art production. Whether or not the public frequents museums, it is still influenced by other media which express the same criteria used in

selecting art are inherited from a 19th Century concept of culture, and the function of museums is limited to cultivating the esthetic-possessive attitudes of the privileged class, instead of educating according to dialectical principles.

Because of the changeable and transient nature of art work, it seems to me that a more fitting name for a museum might be “Museum of Temporary Art,” which is what I call the model-collection I made on the farm in Albiolo. This name actually synthesizes the idea about the philosophical temporality of the art work.

Decentralization of Art

I chose a place far from any art center for the location of the Museum of Temporary Art. Identifying art with the art scene results in the idea that art flourishes only in certain places. On the map of the world, there are only a few places where art thrives and from where it is exported. All other works that originate elsewhere are considered ecletic satellites of phenomena launched from the center. This led to a “geographical criterion,” i.e. evaluating the art on the basis of its place of origin and place of presentation. A geographical criterion equates the quality of art production with the power of the support system concentrated in a certain place.

Works exhibited in the “Museum of Temporary Art” in Albiolo are taken out of the art scene. At the same time the same sort of works are shown in the Städtisches Museum in Mönchenladbach and in the Palais des Baux Arts in Brussels, two institutions of unquestionable cultural prestige. In this case, the works of the same sort act as a means of comparing three museums: if we are freed from a geographical criterion, the only point of comparison that remains is the quality of the exhibited works. Thus, this work puts elements of different importance within the conventional cultural system on the same cultural level. A barrack achieves the same cultural importance as a palatial museum. Obedience to an institutional authority and to the myth of cultural centers is annulled which makes independent evaluation of the exhibited works possible.

1 This text was first published in the catalogue of Galerija Nova, Zagreb, October 1975.

2 “Why I Paint Like Pollock, or the Value of a Work of Art,” *Bitef* 6, Belgrade 1972.

DREI MUSEUMS-AUSSTELLUNGEN¹

Das Museum ist eine Institution, die dazu dient, Kunstwerke zu sammeln und zu erhalten. Dies ist jedenfalls die Vorstellung der meisten Professionellen und Laien über das Museum. Organisation und Existenz des Museums als Institution basieren auf der Prämisse, dass das Kunstwerk einen bestimmten inhärenten Wert besitzt, der konstant bleibt und unabhängig von gesellschaftlichen Einflüssen entsteht. Das Verständnis des Kunstwerks als einer zeitlosen ästhetischen Entität geht von der Anwendung idealistischer Denkmodelle auf den Bereich der Kunst aus. Die Wurzeln für ein solches Verständnis liegen in einer kultischen Haltung der Kunst gegenüber.

Der Trugschluß über die Zeitlosigkeit eines Kunstwerks wird teilweise durch die Tatsache genährt, dass die meisten Kunstwerke in sehr beständigen Materialien ausgeführt sind: Bronze, Öl auf Leinwand, Marmor, all diese Materialien widerstehen erfolgreich den Angriffen der Zeit. Folglich überdauern die Leichname der Kunst viel länger als die Ideen, die sie verkörperten.

Meiner Meinung nach wird der Wert eines Kunstwerks primär durch die Divergenz zwischen dem intentionierten Anspruch des Werkes und dem Stand des allgemeinen Bewusstseins definiert²:

$$V = \frac{i - i_1}{d}$$

V = Wert eines Kunstwerks

i = Konstante = intentionierte Substanz eines Werks

i₁ = Stand des allgemeinen Bewusstseins

d = dekorative, anekdotische, formale Komponente eines Kunstwerks

Alle wesentlichen Kunstwerke sind immer ihrer Zeit voraus, weil sie von den bestehenden Denkweisen abweichen. „i₁“ ist jedoch eine Variable, die sich in der Zeit ändert, und zwar in dem Maße, wie der Wissensstand sich erhöht. Wenn „i“ sich „i₁“ angenähert hat, wird das Kunstwerk einerseits konsumiert, zum anderen sinnentleert: Das Objekt, das nach diesem Prozeß übrig bleibt, ist nicht länger mehr ein Kunstwerk, es ist ein Leichnam, oder romantischer ausgedrückt, ein „Kunstsouvenir der Vergangenheit.“ Alle Kunstwerke ohne Ausnahme unterliegen diesem Prozeß, und es gibt keinen Anlaß, uns selbst zu glauben geneigt sind: Man könnte die Objekte, die wir dort finden, passender als „Spuren der Vergangenheit“ bezeichnen.

Das Museum spielt als Verteiler von Kunstideologie keine kleine Rolle. Galerien und Museen präsentieren Kunstwerke auf ähnliche Art. Galerieausstellungen dauern allerdings nur einige Wochen, während Museumssammlungen und Aufbauten für einige Jahre unverändert bleiben können. Der offensichtliche Unterschied in der Ausstellungsdauer wirkt sich zweifach aus: Der häufige Ausstellungswechsel in Galerien suggeriert eine scheinbare Dynamik und Vielfalt der Kunstproduktion. Im Gegensatz hierzu führen die auf längere Dauer angelegten Kunstpräsentationen in Museen, die auch von weitaus mehr Leuten gesehen werden, dazu, dass Kunst schneller konsumiert wird. Die Langsamkeit, mit der Museen auf die Komplexität der kreativen Akte, die jeden Tag geschehen, reagieren, resultiert später in der Etablierung partikulärer Stileinheiten. Objekte in Sammlungen werden nach einer chronologischen linearen Methode

klassifiziert, die mit einer stilistischen Klassifizierung übereinstimmt. Die Präsentationsmethode suggeriert Ordnung und Klarheit der Kunstproduktion. Ob das Publikum das Museum besucht oder nicht, es ist in jedem Fall durch andere Medien beeinflusst, die dieselben Kriterien der Kunst gegenüber vertreten, dieselbe Haltung ihr gegenüber einnehmen wie das Museum. In den meisten Fällen sind die zur Kunstselektion angewandten Kriterien durch ein Kulturkonzept, das sich im 19. Jahrhundert ausgebildet, vererbt, und die Function des Musuems bleibt darauf beschränkt, die ästhetisch-besitzergreifende Haltung der privilegierten Klassen zu kultivieren, stat auf der Grundlage dialektischer Prinzipien erscheint es mir passender, ein Museum „Museum temporärer Kunst“ repräsentiert die Idee von der philosophischen Zeitlichkeit des Kunstwerks.

Dezentralisierung der Kunst

Für das „Museum temporärer Kunst“ habe ich einen Platz weit entfernt von jedem Kunstzentrum ausgewählt. Identifiziert man Kunst mit der Kunstszene, so resultiert daraus notwendig die Vorstellung, daß es nur einige Orte gibt, an denen Kunst entstehen kann: Auf der Weltkarte sind in der Tat nur wenige Orte verzeichnet, wo Kunst gedeiht und von denen aus sie exportiert wird. Alle Arbeiten, die nicht an diesen Orten entstehen, werden als eklektizistische Satelliten der Phänomene eingeschätzt, die von den Kunstzentren her lanciert werden. Das bedingt die Einführung „geographischer Kriterien,“ d. h. Kunst wird auf der Grundlage ihres Entstehungs- und Präsentationsortes bewertet. „Geographischer Kriterien“ setzen die Qualität der Kunstproduktion gleich mit der Macht der die Kunst unterstützenden Systeme, wobei diese sich eben in einem Ort konzentrieren.

Die Werke, die im „Museum temporärer Kunst“ in Albiolo ausgestellt waren, sind aus der Kunstszene herausgenommen. Zur selben Zeit wie in Albiolo wird dieselbe Art von Arbeiten im Städtischen Museum Mönchengladbach und im Palais des Beaux Arts in Brüssel gezeigt, zwei Institutionen von untragbar hohem kulturellem Prestige. So fungieren Arbeiten derselben Art als Vergleichsmittel für drei Museen: Werden wir von geographischen Kriterien befreit, so verbleibt als einziger Vergleichsaspekt die Qualität der ausgestellten Werke. Auf diese Weise bringt diese Arbeit Elemente von verschiedener Bedeutung in das konventionelle kulturelle System ein, ohne das aktuelle kulturelle Niveau zu ignorieren. Eine Kaserne erhält dieselbe kulturelle Bedeutsamkeit wie ein palastartiges Museum. Der Gehorsam gegenüber einer institutionalisierten Autorität wie auch der Gehorsam gegenüber dem Mythos vom Kulturzentrum werden annulliert, und eine unabhängige Bewertung der ausgestellten Werke wird ermöglicht.

1 Dieser Text wurde zum erstenmal im Katalog der Galerie Nova, Zagreb, Oktober 1975, veröffentlicht.
2 „Warum malte ich wie Pollock oder Über den Wert eines Kunstwerks,“ *Bitef* 6, Belgrad September 1972.

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The casual passer-by I met at 11.28 AM, 1972, Robert Self Gallery, London
The casual passer-by I met at 6.41 PM, 1975, Galleria Sperone, Turin
The casual passer-by I met at 11.45 AM, 1972, Sperone Gallery, New York
The casual passer-by I met at 2.55 PM, 1974, Flash Art, Milan
The casual passer-by I met at 1.49 PM, 1976, Collection Nena Dimitrijević, Zagreb
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History should be composed of an infinite number of interpretations of events, so that the difference between legend – the sum of individual interpretations, often irrational, in which everything is possible – and history – as we know it today with its limitation of „proven“ facts – would disappear.

Geschichte sollte aus einer unendlichen Zahl von persönlichen Deutungen von Ereignissen zusammengesetzt werden, dann heben sich die Unterschiede auf zwischen Legenden als einer Summe von individuellen und oft auch irrationalen Interpretationen, in denen sogar Unwahrscheinlichkeit wahr werden kann, und Geschichte, die mit „nachprüfaren“ Tatsachen operiert.



Braco Dimitrijević with his first drip paintings in the style of Jackson Pollock, Dubrovnik (1972)

Why I Paint Like Pollock, or the Value of a Work of Art, 1972

Braco Dimitrijević

The following text and these paintings were produced in summer 1972, just after Documenta 5. They were a reaction to the conceptual academism which started to become evident in the preceding two years and was definitely confirmed in Documenta 5 where most of the works exhibited were in the conceptual manner. In the same exhibition I also exhibited photographic works, all framed in aluminum except one large photograph outside. Feeling myself in danger of being identified with such new media, I tried to analyze problems of context, value judgments and arbitrary criteria, (which were always main concerns of my work) by using paintings, in those days almost heretical media amongst avant garde.

I chose Pollock because within the historical circle of formal repetition his creative contribution is still too near the present day to serve as the basis for a new aesthetic unit, i.e. a formally innovative act. The other motivation is that Pollock was one of the first to subordinate all the elements of a painting to the principle governing its making. These two reasons governed my selection and adoption of his principles in realization of my work entitled, "Some of the Most Recent Paintings by B.D." The context of galleries and museums (in which both Pollock's works and these works of mine are exhibited) makes possible an automatic identification of my paintings with Pollock's. It intentionally leads to an incorrect conclusion. Knowing the origin of my paintings corrects that mistake, and such rectification may stimulate a more critical attitude towards the collection in which this work is included.

The other problem that this work considers is deliberate unoriginality: the effort is contrary to the desire for originality which accompanies every creative attempt. I assume that if a logical space exists in which art is exclusively based on the principle of formal originality, there must also be a space in which unoriginality is the dominant component of the creative act. For some people intentional unoriginality would not be a good enough argument for making a piece of art and they would designate these paintings as copies, fakes, or simply as mistakes.¹ Understood in this way, these paintings in the context of their setting may cause the reevaluation of all other works and may initiate meditative reflection. The function of the painting becomes subversion instead of decoration.



One of the Most Recent Works by Braco Dimitrijević, 1972
130 x 170cm, Acrylic on canvas
Price: 601,000 Dollars

Installation view at Sperone Gallery, Turin, 1973

The value of an art work

Why these paintings are so expensive

The prices of these paintings are a constituent part of the work and serve to emphasize the concept behind them. It has always bothered me that conceptually eroded works of art are sold for sums immensely higher than when they were created, the time when they actually had the strongest philosophical potency. A new work of art at the time of its origin has the greatest seminal value because it is widely separated from the existing level of awareness.² In my opinion the value of an art work is primarily defined by the divergence of the ideational level of the work from the state of collective consciousness.

$$V = \frac{i - i_1}{d}$$

V = value of an art work

i = Constant = ideational substance of the work

i₁ = level of collective consciousness

d = decorative, anecdotal, formal component of an art work

Significant art works are always ahead of their time because they diverge from existing modes of thought. However “i₁” is a variable, which changes in time as the level of knowledge increases. When “i” becomes equal to “i₁” the art work is both consumed and exhausted: the object which remains after this process is no longer an art work but a corpse, or more romantically put, “a souvenir of the art of the past.” All art works are subject without exception to this process and there is no point in deceiving ourselves that Pollock was more successful in escaping this than, for example, Leonardo.

Oddly, the newly created art work has the least market value because it is still unrecognized by those who establish the economic system of art. Each oeuvre has its own life span, from its origin to the moment when the object of communication stops being effective because all the concepts it contains have been spread and accepted. The journey of the *Mona Lisa* from Leonardo’s painting to the label on a chocolate bar illustrates this process of consumption. At the end of that journey the original has exactly the same philosophical value as each reproduction, whilst the actual market values are extremely different. From a non-formal view point the omission of elements such as format, difference in reproduction material, author’s signature, frame, etc.

Should someone claim that the colors or size of my paintings are not the same as Pollock’s, I would argue that the value of those paintings is found in the employment of his method and not in their almost identical appearance. For example, when the wheel was invented, the principle of reduced friction had the same value wherever it was used. Just as the value of the wheel’s function does not depend upon its radius, so the significances of certain ideas behind art lie not in the selection of format, color or technique.

“Some of the Most Recent Paintings by B.D.” have nearly the same price as Pollock’s works because I am also using the dripping technique, the main component of his creative whole. In fact they are more expensive: for example, if Pollock’s painting costs \$600,000, my painting’s price is \$601,000. Pollock died in 1956, and his experience of art ended with action painting. Because I am living and working twenty years later I have assimilated and built upon aesthetic ideologies which arose after Pollock’s death. The dripping technique applied with an awareness of art in the period between Pollock death and the emergences of my work cannot be identical but only more valuable than that of Pollock, inasmuch as the character of the painting-object is subordinate to the value of experience and artistic principle.

The price of “Some of the Most Recent Works by B.D.” decreases proportionality to their ideational potency.³ This tendency is contrary to the art market’s and at a certain moment the commercial value of these paintings will reach zero.

***On the Pollock Paintings by Braco Dimitrijević*¹**

Nena Dimitrijević

In 1972 after participating in Documenta 5, Dimitrijević sensed the danger of conceptual art becoming the new mainstream style. Harald Szemann was the first to include conceptual art in such a prestigious international venue as Documenta and thus ensure that it gained broad recognition. The initial definition of conceptual art as a linguistic system, which in its most radical form puts an end to the emphasis on individual expression in art and claimed that the art work is merely a means of transferring mental processes, had in the meantime been replaced by identification with new styles and media—photography, text, film and video. The art’s system requirement for effacing labeling of every new product ensured that every work executed in one of the new techniques immediately received the trademark of “avant-garde.” Dimitrijević called this the “new academy of aluminum framing” or “Do-not-lean-out-of-the-window aesthetic,” referring to the panorama photographs decorating the train compartments. After coming back from Documenta in order to demonstrate that a conceptual work could be in any media, including the most traditional one—painting—and yet still retain its critical edge, Dimitrijević painted a series of drip paintings, accompanied by his theoretical text “Why do I paint like Pollock or, the value of a work of art.”

Sue Cramer writes: “Dimitrijević was one of the first to make paintings, which in the terms of Postmodernism ‘appropriate’ a particular style. In 1972 he made his first drip paintings in the manner of Jackson Pollock, as a rebellious action against the ‘styles’ that he felt had become dominant within conceptual art at that time.”² These works entitled “The most recent paintings by Braco Dimitrijević” were exhibited in a group show at the Galleria Gin Enzo Sperone in Turin in 1973 and in solo shows at 212 Gallery Belgrade in 1972; at the Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb; and at Situation Gallery-Robert Self London in 1973. These paintings were also exhibited in the group shows “New Tendencies” in Zagreb and at the Sperone Gallery in Turin, both in 1973.

Notes

This text was first published in *Bitef* 6, Belgrade, 1972.

1. It will soon become clear that to make copies of Pollock’s work is impossible because of the nature of his working method, which involved movement, gravity, and chance.
2. A work of art is not thought of here as belonging to the category of Fine Art, but as a means of establishing a new relationship between someone and that person’s as yet undefined reality.
3. By the time this article is published the painting will have reached the price of \$595,000.

Notes

1. Nena Dimitrijević in “Braco Dimitrijević—Against Historic Sense of Gravity,” exhibition catalogue Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, 1995.
2. Sue Cramer in “Braco Dimitrijević—Post-historical dimension,” exhibition catalogue Institute of Modern Aert and Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 1989.



Accidental Sculpture (1968)

Man-Creator / Perception / Creation / Art Work, 1969

Braco Dimitrijević

Man will become creator when he possesses all the links in the chain of creativity that he is missing now. The artist enables man to see fragments of his environment that are at present invisible to him; he presents to the viewer untransformed fragments of everyday reality. We can therefore say that the artist influences and transforms the old perception apparatus of the viewer. At the moment when the simple fragment of everyday life becomes of interest to the viewer, he will find himself in the position of becoming a creator. Can we foresee, in that case, a creative reaction from an until-now passive recipient? If we aim to direct the audience towards this kind of attitude, the role of the artist as such will become superfluous.

Since we are not yet at the stage in which artist and non-artist become one, I made an attempt to show to the viewer that the situations from his everyday surroundings are worth aesthetic consideration. The task of the artist is to indicate to the spectator that the objects he passes by every day have an aesthetic quality equal to the objects presented within the art structure.

The next step towards this end involves the creative behavior of everyone. Whereas art creation is similar to any other form of creativity, these experiments were conducted in the domain of art.

The artist only arranges the initial situation; its development depends on chance, and the understanding and approval of other persons. When entering a gallery, a visitor is prepared to see works of art. In my work, the people are chosen at random, without my knowing whether they have a feeling for art, and are transformed from spectators into persons who cooperate with 'the arranger' (ex-artist), i.e., create.

They have thus been included in the act of creating, and the dividing line that formerly existed between artist and non-artist has been removed.

First published in 1969 to accompany the artist's solo exhibition at Gallery SC Zagreb.

Statements — Thoughts, 1966-2008

Braco Dimitrijević

THERE ARE NO MISTAKES IN HISTORY. THE WHOLE OF HISTORY IS A MISTAKE.

LOUVRE IS MY STUDIO, STREET IS MY MUSEUM.

I AM A PHILOSOPHER WHO CHOOSES TO EXPRESS HIMSELF THROUGH THE VISUAL ARTS, IN ORDER TO COMMUNICATE AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT.

THE WHOLE OF HISTORY IS NOT SO RICH AS 1 SECOND OF POST-HISTORICAL TIME.

POST HISTORY IS A TIME OF COEXISTENCE OF DIFFERENT VALUES, OF MULTI-ANGULAR VIEWING, SPACE WITHOUT FINAL TRUTH.

I AM NOT A MAKER OF OBJECTS, BUT A CREATOR OF VISION.

CHANCE IS A LOGIC BEYOND REASON.

DARWINISM WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE IF IT WOULD BE IN REVERSE ORDER.

I AM NOT INTERESTED IN SMALL FORMAL SHIFTS, IN INVENTING USELESS OBJECTS, IN ADDING MORE WORDS TO A VOCABULARY OF NONSENSE.

EVERY CASUAL PASSER-BY IS MY ALTER EGO, A SUPPLEMENT TO MY IGNORANCE.

IF ONE LOOKS DOWN AT THE EARTH FROM THE MOON, THERE IS VIRTUALLY NO DISTANCE BETWEEN THE LOUVRE AND THE ZOO.

I MAKE WORKS WITH ANIMALS IN ORDER TO LEARN ABOUT MAN.

LASCAUX WAS AT THE SAME TIME THE LOUVRE AND THE ZOO.

WHAT WAS MADE FOR 1 SECOND IS MADE FOR ETERNITY.

AT THE EDGE OF THE VOLCANO ONE REMEMBERS THAT THE EARTH WAS ONCE A STAR.

WHERE WOULD I BE IF I WAS FOLLOWING THE TRENDS? DEFINITELY NOT IN THE POSITION TO MAKE THEM.

FASHION IS WHAT REMAINS UNDER THE NAIL WHEN YOU SCRATCH THE STYLE.

JUST AS PIANO IS NOT MUSIC, PAINTING IS NOT ART.

REAL REVOLUTION DOES NOT HAPPEN WHEN PEOPLE EXPRESS THEIR ANGER BY THROWING TOMATOES AT PAINTINGS, BUT WHEN A FRUIT IS GENTLY PLACED NEXT TO A PAINTING.

JUST AS PAINTINGS HAVE THEIR STORIES, SO TOO DO SHOVELS AND VIOLINS.

IN THE COSMOS, THERE IS NO ABOVE AND BELOW.

WITH VISUAL MISERY, IT IS DIFFICULT TO HELP THE MISERY OF THE WORLD.

FAME HAS TO DO WITH POLITICS, TALENT WITH NATURE.

IN OUR CULTURE, GENIUS IS SOMEONE WHO MAKES SOMETHING DIFFERENT FROM NATURE. IN OTHER CULTURES, IT IS SOMEONE WHO IS IN TUNE WITH NATURE.

AN ARTIST IS SOMEONE WHO IS EXILED IN TIME.

THE ARTIST'S ETERNAL TASK IS TO SEARCH TRUTH; WHEN HE FINDS IT HE REALIZES THAT THERE IS NOT JUST ONE TRUTH, BUT MANY.

MEDIOCRITY FACILITATES UNDERSTANDING.

IN POST HISTORY 1 SECOND EQUALS ETERNITY.

REAL ART HAS NO SIZE.

APPLE IS MORE SIGNIFICANT TO ME THAN RED IS TO TITIAN.

ANY SOCIAL THEORY IS NOTHING BUT BORING POETRY.

ONLY THOSE WHO ARE DISOBEDIENT TO HISTORY CAN GIVE SOMETHING TO HUMANITY.

IN THE COSMOS ETERNITY DOES NOT EXIST.

INTUITION IS NOTHING ELSE BUT ANTICIPATION OF AN IDEA FROZEN IN ANOTHER TIME.

HUMANITY MAKES PROGRESS THANKS TO MISTAKES.

CHANCE IS AN UNPREDICTABLE EVENT THAT PROVES TO BE SUPERIOR LAW.

EVERYTHING HAS A MEANING, EVEN THE MEANINGLESS.

IN THE *TRIPTYCHOS POST HISTORICUS* THERE IS NO FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD. EVERYTHING IS FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD AT THE SAME TIME.

I WILL BE BACK EVERY HUNDRED YEARS.

ART WITHOUT SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL REFERENCES IS LIKE POTTERY. THE ONLY DIFFERENCE IS THAT YOU CANNOT DRINK FROM IT.

I AM JUST LIKE AN ORDINARY PAINTER, EXCEPT THAT ON MY PALLET THERE ARE BICYCLES, SHOVELS, APPLES, MATISSES, REMBRANDTS, LIONS, AND SNAKES.

THERE ARE NO RUPTURES OF CREATION, ONLY RUPTURES OF PERCEPTION.

MY ART IS SLOW AS LIGHT AND FAST AS THOUGHT.

MY LOCAL TIME IS FROM LASCAUX TO NOW.

THE THOUGHT FROM 2000 YEARS AGO AND ONE TO COME IN 2000 YEARS ARE MEETING IN THE SAME INSTANT IN THE POST-HISTORICAL DIMENSION.

EVERYTHING HAS BEEN DONE, BUT NOT EVERYTHING HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO A MUSEUM.

THE PEDESTAL IS THE MOST IMPORTANT SCULPTURE EVER INVENTED AND YET ITS AUTHOR REMAINS ANONYMOUS.

TO MOVE OR TO STAND STILL IS THE SAME IN THE POST-HISTORICAL DIMENSION.

JUST AS WRITERS ARE USING WORDS TO CONSTRUCT THEIR SENTENCES, I USE BLOCKS OF MEANINGS TO CREATE MY WORKS.

ART IS AXIOMATIC.

WHEN ONE TALKS ABOUT MONEY IN THE ART MILIEU, IT IS THE MISERY OF SPIRIT THAT EXPRESSES ITSELF.

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN ARTISTS WHO INFLUENCED OTHERS ARE LIKE COMETS. YOU DON'T SEE THE HEAD, YOU JUST SEE THE TAIL WITH LITTLE SPARKS.

HISTORIC MAN WAS THE MAN OF FRAGMENTED VISION; THE POST-HISTORIC MAN HAS A VISION OF SYNTHESIS.

BEAUTY EQUALS POWER.

WHAT SEPARATES KNOWN FROM UNKNOWN IS A THIN LINE OF CONVENTION.

THERE IS NO BEAUTY WITHOUT INTELLECTUAL PROVOCATION.

PICTURE EQUALS ENERGY.

ART IS ALWAYS BEHIND THE BACK OF THE MASSES.

ONE WHO IS NOT AN ENGAGED THINKER, CAN EASILY BE A GOOD PAINTER.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN PAINTING AND SCULPTURE IS THAT SCULPTURE ATTRACTS MORE DUST.

BEING UNIQUE EXCLUDES A SENSE OF COMPETITION.

WITH GLOBALIZATION, TWO *DEMI-MONDES* ARE UNITED TO MAKE THE WORLD COMPLETE.

REAL ARTISTS HAVE NO SENSE OF HIERARCHY.

IT IS TERRIBLE WHEN AN ARTIST KNOWS MORE ABOUT HIS WORK THAN THE OTHERS DO; IT IS EVEN WORSE WHEN OTHER PEOPLE KNOW MORE ABOUT HIS WORK THAN THE ARTIST HIMSELF.

I DID NOT INVENT THE APPLE, AND I DID NOT INVENT PAINTING, BUT I DID INVENT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEM.

IN NATURE YOU CANNOT HIDE VOLCANO, BUT IN CULTURE YOU CAN.

WHEN YOU ARE WALKING DOWN THE STREET, YOU ARE DOING MY STUDIO VISIT.

TODAY THE CENTRE OF ART IS ON THE PERIPHERY OF THE WORLD.

ABOUT SECOND-GENERATION ARTISTS: I DON'T UNDERSTAND PEOPLE THAT DRINK MUDDY WATER INSTEAD OF GOING TO THE SOURCE.

ABOUT CONCEPTUALISM: WOULD YOU RATHER MAKE LOVE TO A CLEVER WOMAN, OR TO ONE THAT IS BOTH CLEVER AND BEAUTIFUL?

IN MOST CASES, MOST DISOBEDIENT WORKS OF ART ARE THE BEST MONUMENTS TO THEIR TIME.

OLDER IS THE CIVILIZATION, DEEPER IS THE SOUND.

IT IS A VERY COMFORTABLE FEELING IF YOU KNOW THAT YOU BELONG TO YOUR TIME. AN EVEN MORE COMFORTABLE FEELING IS IF YOU KNOW THAT YOU MADE YOUR TIME.

IN A TIME OF CRISIS, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT ART OF ONE GENERATION IS BASED ON THE IGNORANCE OF THE PREVIOUS ONES.

EVERYTHING, MATTER INCLUDED, HAS MEMORY AND INTELLIGENCE.

AT THE SAME TIME THAT THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO UNDERSTAND ART IS GETTING SMALLER, THE QUEUES IN FRONT OF THE MUSEUMS ARE GETTING LONGER.

EVERYTHING CHANGES EXCEPT THE CHANCE.

AN INTELLECTUAL IS SOMEONE WHO CANNOT RATIONALIZE THE POWER.

ART WILL COME BACK TO OUR LIVES WHEN SHELLS REPLACE DOLLARS.

TODAY ARTISTS ARE BRANDS WITH NO PRODUCTS.

EVERYTHING THAT IS USELESS IS NOT ART.

THERE ARE ART WORKS THAT LOOK TOTALLY MEANINGLESS; ONLY YEARS LATER IT WAS UNDERSTOOD THAT THEY WERE HEADING TOWARDS THEIR STRUCTURE.

SNOBBERY IS THE LACK OF INTEREST IN REAL LIFE.

FOR HUMANISTS, IN MOST CASES GOOD LIFE IS RESERVED AFTER THEIR DEATH.

THOSE WHO ARE ETERNAL HAVE A LITTLE BIT MORE TIME THAN THE OTHERS.

EVERYTHING IS INSCRIBED IN TIME.

NO THEORY IS ETERNAL.

MY ART RESUMES EVERY OTHER FORM OF ART, EVERY HANDWRITING THAT EXISTS IN THE UNIVERSE.

HISTORY IS REPRESENTED BY KITSCH, POST HISTORY BY ART.

THE ORDINARY IS THE GREATEST MONUMENT TO THE EXTRAORDINARY.

HOW MANY PAINTINGS DO YOU WALK BY WITHOUT REALIZING THAT THEY HIDE SAFES? DECISION-MAKING AND GAPS BETWEEN PAINTINGS ARE THE POETRY OF CURATORS.

I NEVER UNDERSTOOD CURATORS WHO WERE LONGING FOR THE COMPANY OF THE DEAD.

THE WORLD WILL BE SHAKEN BY THE RESURRECTION OF THE NEO-NEOLITHIC.

COSMIC REASON IS SUM TOTAL OF ALL THE REASONS THAT WERE AND THOSE TO COME.

INTUITION IS WORTH MORE THAN KNOWLEDGE.

ABOUT THE PENETRATION OF IDEAS INTO THE MASSES: STUPID IDEAS ARE MORE AERODYNAMIC THAN CLEVER THOUGHTS.

THE ART OF CONSENSUS GENERATES SUSPICION.

ON THE EARTH, GOD INVESTED TOO MUCH IN BEAUTY AND TOO LITTLE IN INTELLIGENCE.

IT SOUNDS PARADOXICAL THAT I AM TRYING TO MAKE ART GOVERNED BY THE RULES OF NATURE.

IN THE NEOLITHIC ERA, EDUCATION WAS FREE OF CHARGE.

ALL GENIUSES ARE SELF-TAUGHT.

ARTISTS WHO DON'T LIKE OTHER ARTISTS ARE NOT ARTISTS.

TODAY A HIDDEN CONFLICT IS TAKING PLACE: BETWEEN ART WHICH IS VISIBLE RIGHT NOW AND ART WHICH WILL BE VISIBLE IN A HUNDRED YEARS' TIME.

ONLY CONTENT-LESS PHOTOGRAPHY CAN BE TOTALLY IN FOCUS.

THE WORLD IN WHICH ONLY THE PRESENT COUNTS HAS NO FUTURE.

THE RICHNESS OF A COUNTRY CAN BE MEASURED BY QUANTITY OF ITS USELESS KNOWLEDGE.

ONLY THE LIBERAL ECONOMY CAN TURN SOMETHING USELESS AS ART INTO SOMETHING VERY USEFUL.

EVERYBODY CAN BE FAMOUS, BUT NOT EVERYBODY CAN BE GIFTED.

TO MOVE OR TO STAND STILL IS THE SAME IN THE POST-HISTORICAL DIMENSION.

POST HISTORY IS PREHISTORIC HARMONY IN A LITERATE WORLD.

Critical Commentary

Foreword: The Subject Matters

Osvaldo Romberg

History should be composed of an infinite number of interpretations of events, so that the difference between legend—the sum of individual interpretations, often irrational, in which everything is possible—and history—as we know it today with its limitation of "proven" facts—would disappear.

Braco Dimitrijević, 1969

Braco Dimitrijević is an artist whose work questions the validity of history’s “proven” facts, promoting instead a history composed of what he calls “an infinite number of interpretations of events.” In his claim that “there are no mistakes in history—rather that all of history is a mistake,” Braco Dimitrijević does not attempt to erase the written mistake of history, but instead, through what Peter Weibel has referred to as a re-writing of history, seeks to re-write it altogether, adding new subjects to its discourse. In his “Casual Passer-by” series where he photographs a common person on the street and displays a monumentally large banner of this portrait in a public sphere, in the manner of and in the environs of a place typically reserved for the elite, Braco begs of history itself the question of subject matter, that is: who matters in history as it unfolds? Who is important enough to be remembered?

Instead of a history that remembers, Braco aspires to a re-remembered history where his goal is not simply to include, but also to critique the very process by which one is excluded. We see that the question of subject (who) matters is dependent not only upon a constant flux of variable casual passers-by who are depicted, but also on the context (i.e., geographical, socio-political and cultural) of when and where such iconographic imagery is displayed.

I believe that when Braco produces works of art he poses his questions of history rhetorically, hoping for shifting answers and infinitely possible interpretations of history. It is this act itself which produces the paradox I see in Braco’s work—as an artist, he condemns art history, but in so doing, actually becomes a part of its narrative. This, of course, is a paradox with which Braco seems comfortable. He is an artist who loves to contradict himself. For instance, in his video work entitled

“Interview/Interview,” he gives completely different answers to the very same questions posed by critics in separate times and places. This is to say that Braco is deeply concerned with time and place—the materials which compose history and draw its coordinates. Moreover, he does not just make random monuments to the unknowns of society, but also has created a series of works under the general title of “This May be a Place of Historical Importance” in which he installs plaques in specific sites of supposed non-importance.

In so doing, once non-descript places garner a sense of discrete importance. His monuments, therefore, construct anew the monumental, while at the very same time his words somehow proclaim its end. Confronted with this seeming contradiction, perhaps we can conclude that Braco Dimitrijević cannot be categorized as wanting to simply dismantle history, or to add new subjects to its discourse. Rather, his work shows an interest in constructing for history a new narrative, a rationally defined history that shares a close relation to a limitless legend. For this reason, I would call Braco’s work Deleuzian in the sense that his “art creates a finite that restores the infinite.”¹

Like a Trojan Horse, he enters his enemy’s territory. But, in my opinion, Braco is not looking to divide but rather to build bridges; with his work, he continues to brilliantly write a new and conceptually-oriented history of the avant-garde. Braco entered conceptual art in the beginning of the sixties, not at its center but from the periphery; he shares with other conceptual artists from countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Poland, and Russia a conceptual art practice based in iconography which diverges from other pioneers in the movement whose practices were typically and exclusively linguistic, such as Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, Art and Language, Mel Bockner, etc. In contrast with this group, Braco introduces a historical sensibility into the movement, incorporating into his discourse questions about who is important and who is not—theoretically interesting but also profoundly dangerous questions to ask in what were then communist countries. His defiance of political repression is historically relevant and important to note as that period increasingly recedes from memory.

It seems to me that Braco will never accept the idea that received history should simply be trusted; in point of fact, the works of Braco always teach us to be suspicious of truth and to be suspicious of history. But this history extends beyond social politics and into the social sciences as well. In Braco’s series *Triptychos Post Historicus*, he begins to question the viewer’s interaction with art history, such as when he places a lion with a painting by Malevich. Such works beg anthropological questions and even create a sort of sociological disturbance in exploring the line between viewer and subject. Is the viewer the human or the beast? What is the distance between the museum and the zoo? What is the distance between human and animal? Braco questions the

truth of history to a point where even history itself has no record, and must rely instead on the progress of science and its research. He will always prompt the question of who is the subject to the point of irritating the very conscience of the viewer. The missing subject here is the viewer herself, the human observer who brings content to an art work, a self-reflexive subject who holds as predicate her own observance. When the viewer becomes the subject of her own observance, what then can the observer claim as the detached and rational point from which to record history in the first place? Post-historical art is in fact historical, not because it delimits, but rather because it bridges what happened in the past from what will come to be in the future. But even this bridge solidifies in time, and comes to belong to history again. What history teaches (whatever biases and interpretative stances a particular historian may introduce) is that time passes by invariably, mythologizing everything in its wake.

The work of Braco deals all the time with subjects who matter, in contrast to the work of Modernist artists for whom the code became the content, or artists more simply Postmodern who foreground fragmented micro-narrative(s) that resist cohesion and epistemological clarity. Braco begins to write a critical epistemology that is comprised of the plural but produces the singular—for it is the singular that has the power to hold the infinite. The works of Braco Dimitrijević deal with macro-matters, surpassing the small political games of small groups so as to deal with existential questions concerning the function of the aesthetic today. In this way, Braco’s work is at once historically relevant to artistic practices over the past half century, while also relevant to contemporary debates about what the new subject matters of art should come to be.

Notes

1. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, *What Is Philosophy?* p.197 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).



Casual Passer-by I met at 3:01 PM, Philadelphia, 2007
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

Editor's Introduction

Aaron Levy

Culture means more than just preservation or presentation; it means the exchange of ideas, the creation of concepts. At Slought Foundation we facilitate this exchange by working with artists such as Braco Dimitrijević in intimate and participatory ways, exploring new forms of practice and belonging with the cultural communities that each artist's work engages. We highlight inventive and interdisciplinary practices and encourage sociability and activism through public programs that are purposely collaborative and provocative. Many of the artists we present emphasize research as a fundamental component of their work, and they challenge us to reconsider the politics of exhibition display and prevailing curatorial approaches by evading clear distinctions between artist, critic, and curator. As a grass-roots organization, we especially value agility and the experimental disposition. This agility has enabled us to present hundreds of programs in our first seven years and operate at the forefront of curatorial innovation in North America.

Slought Foundation has been committed to the work of Braco Dimitrijević since our inception as an organization. Osvaldo Romberg, a senior curator at the foundation, first introduced his work to us when he included him in *The Other Epistemology* (2004), an exhibition that surveyed European artists from the 1960s and 1970s whose work explored epistemological issues. The following year, Dimitrijević exhibited at Slought Foundation as part of the exhibition *CONFLICT: Perspectives, Positions, Realities in Central European Art* (2005), which was curated by Lorand Hegyi of Le Musée d'art moderne de Saint-Etienne. Shortly thereafter, in 2007 and 2008, he participated in *Slought for Export*, an archival exploration into the activities of Slought Foundation in Philadelphia at Galerie Heike Curtze in Berlin, the ZONE: Chelsea Center for the Arts in New York, and at la maison rouge—fondation antoine de galbert in Paris.

Meanwhile, students in the 2007-2008 RBSL Bergman Foundation Curatorial Seminar in the Departments of History of Art and English at the University of Pennsylvania collaboratively engaged in research spanning disciplines such as literature, art history, and visual culture. The course, which I was honored to lead, provided students with the opportunity to gain practical knowledge about

curating at an organization such as the Slought Foundation. One such curatorial endeavor was *The Casual Passer-by I Met at 3.01 pm, Philadelphia, 2007*, a public installation by Dimitrijević on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania, which is adjacent to Slought Foundation. The students in the seminar and I collectively curated the installation, which accompanied *The Ways to Post History*, a retrospective of the artist's work in the galleries, curated by Osvaldo Romberg.

In conjunction with the installation, the students moderated a series of site-specific public conversations with the individuals involved in the realization of the project. These included the artist, students, community members, as well as, notably, the casual passers-by featured in the works themselves. In keeping with our curatorial view that the innumerable inter-organizational negotiations and processes which gave rise to the public installation were also part of the work, we invited the architects and others who were involved in the physical installation of the banners to participate. These informal conversations, each of which took place in different outdoor sites from which the work could be seen, were recorded, and the documentation made available online for download (slought.org). The students sought to broadly construct an audio archive of these live conversations, in keeping with the artist's interest in temporality.

As we prepared for the installation, the students were intrigued by Dimitrijević's *Casual Passer-by* installation on the Boulevard Saint-Germain des Prés in 1971. Dimitrijević has remarked that five million passers-by had statistically encountered the work each day, but maybe only five understood what it was about. "The ambiguity that lies between the five and the five million is interesting," Dimitrijević explained. "Five million people minus five were perturbed by the fact that there was a portrait there." Were five million people in fact perturbed by this work, we wondered? What would it have been like to come across this work back then? What would it have been like be one of those five million for whom this work was a potential "rupture of perception"? We also wondered how the work might register with the public in Philadelphia. We debated how to define "the public," and how this public's response might be qualitatively quantified. These questions were of continuing interest the following year to students in my Seminar in Contemporary Culture at the University of Pennsylvania (2008-2009). In collaboration with this seminar, Dimitrijević agreed to the republication of the *Tractatus Post-Historicus* (1976), a philosophical essay he authored in 1976 in which he concretizes the underlining principles to his work. With an initial run of only 500 copies, the *Tractatus* had been long out of print.

The students participated in all aspects of the publication process, from the solicitation of essays and the collection of artist documentation to the very design and layout of this publication. The publication begins with a series of early writings by the artist, including the *Tractatus Post*

Historicus (1976), *Why I Paint Like Pollock* (1972), *Man-Creator/Perception/Creation/Art Work* (1969), as well as collected statements by the artist since 1968. These writings are accompanied by accessible commentary by some of the leading critics and curators of our generation, including Nicolas Bourriaud, Dan Cameron, Lóránd Hegyi, Jean-Hubert Martin, Catherine Millet, and Achille Bonito Oliva.

We hope to provide with this publication a comprehensive archive of material about the work of Braco Dimitrijevic. The artist's reception in America has been irregular, marked by infrequent exhibitions and a general lack of publications (although a large number of publications in the English language have been published elsewhere). This is the case for many artists that have exhibited at Slought Foundation, but the international visibility of Dimitrijević's work renders this paucity all the more problematic. With this publication, therefore, we hope to remedy this imbalance, engaging not just specialized audiences already familiar with the artist's work, but also those generally unfamiliar with his practice.

The the 2007 installation of Braco Dimitrijevic's "Casual passer-by" at the University of Pennsylvania was made possible through the financial support of the RBSL Bergman Foundation Curatorial Seminar at the University of Pennsylvania, the Society of Friends of the Slought Foundation, the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, and the University City District. I also wish to express my gratitude to the University of Pennsylvania, without whom this project would not have been possible; in particular, the Departments of English and the History of Art in the School of Arts and Sciences, the Facilities Planning and Operations Division in the School of Arts and Sciences, and the University of Pennsylvania Art Committee. Last but not least, I acknowledge here the following individuals for their tireless advice and counsel: David Brownlee, Katherine Carl, Jim English, Eduardo Glandt, Claudia Gould, Laura Heffernan, David Hollenberg, Michael Howard, Suvir Kaul, Mark Kocent, Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss.

*Students in the RBSL Bergman Foundation Curatorial Seminar, University of Pennsylvania (2007-2008):
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Grace Ambrose, Johann Diedrick, Colin Foley, Kathryn Lipman, Kaegan Sparks, Liza St James*



Monument to David Harper, the Casual Passer-by I met at 11:28 AM, London, 1972; Collection: Sylvain Perlstein, Paris

How did the known get to be known anyway?

Clara Weyergraf-Serra

“A DADAIST IS PREPARED TO INITIATE JOYFUL EXPERIMENTS EVEN IN THOSE DOMAINS WHERE CHANGE AND EXPERIMENTATION SEEM TO BE OUT OF THE QUESTION.” (ONE REASON TO CALL ONESELF DADAIST RATHER THAN ANARCHIST)

Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method, Outline of an anarchistic theory of knowledge.*

Who is it that actually decides what is to be considered art in the USA, West Germany, England, the Benelux Countries, in short, in the so-called capitalistic West?

1. Decisions are made by the art market through international manipulations of both private collectors and public museums.
2. Decisions are made by those art critics who are primarily interested in their own fame, those who play with power in choosing to write or not to write (review or not review), those who categorize and label to spare themselves and others further reflections: (pigeonholing: New Image, post-minimal, post-modern, post...)
3. Decisions are made by museums in adopting predetermined and digested values. The art market and the art critics feed the hallowed halls with values which by inclusion become eternal.
4. The decisions are not made by the artist. He cannot influence the definition of his creative effort, whether or not the products of his labor will be considered or purchased as art.

Those which survive must have a kind of psychic constitution enabling them to withstand the march through this institutional quagmire. The survivors must confront the possibility of co-option as they participate in the corrupt value system which has been fostered by correlating art with market value.

Fame eludes artists by circumstance: Luck or being at the right place at the right time pays off.

Fame eludes those whose obstinate behavior and work threatens, confronts or attacks bourgeois taste. (Fame does not elude reformists).

Those who are eluded by fame can only hope for the archeologist of later days, but more than likely they will be forgotten.

ONCE UPON A TIME, FAR FROM CITIES AND TOWNS, THERE LIVED TWO PAINTERS. ONE DAY THE KING, HUNTING NEARBY, LOST HIS DOG, HE FOUND HIM IN THE GARDEN OF ONE OF THE TWO PAINTERS. HE SAW THE WORKS OF THAT PAINTER AND TOOK HIM TO THE CASTLE. THE NAME OF THAT PAINTER WAS LEONARDO DA VINCI. THE NAME OF THE OTHER DISAPPEARED FOREVER FROM HUMAN MEMORY.

Braco Dimitrijević, *Story about two artists*, 1969

King equals today's versions: Art market, daily newspaper, granting institutions, museums, critics, curators, art magazines, private collectors, television, fashion, and so on, and so on, ...

Democracy has multiplied the kings. The principle of selection is identical: CHANCE

“LOUVRE”: J.M. W. TURNER – EDWARD RAMPTON – REMBRANDT VAN RIJN – FRANS VAN DOREN – LEONARDO DA VINCI – GERHARD HECHT – ALBRECHT DÜRER – DIETER KOCH

or: “IN ADVANCE OF BROKEN EVOLUTION OF ART,” 1975/79

8 marble pedestals with 8 bronze casts; the names on the pedestals are engraved in golden letters: 8 monuments.

Moment of confusion: Who is Gerhard Hecht, who Frans van Doren, Edward Rampton, Dieter Koch? How have their heads come to be on a pedestal? Those who are deigned to be monumentalized have the right to be on a pedestal. Why don't I know their names? Maybe I have forgotten, maybe I have never known? NO—I am sure. Art history has not proposed Dieter Koch, Gerhard Hecht, and Edward Rampton to be eternalized. Their names are not included in the annals of history. Are these then monuments for the “unknown artist”? That would be too simple. It's all a fiction. Someone is playing with the monument and its context, its location: LOUVRE, the mother-museum. Those that are being eternalized are fully climatized and conserved here. Back to the 8 heads. The 4 unknown on their pedestals create mistrust. Why doesn't the fact that Turner, Rembrandt, Leonardo, Dürer are being presented in the same marble and style create mistrust? Because they are expected to be monumentalized, eternalized by being placed on pedestals. This place is conferred upon them by history, and we believe in the objectivity of that history. Who would have the courage to doubt it? Possibly the person who created this special collection of heads. This is a heretic's work. The dogma of history is being questioned, confusion arises. Disorder is introduced into our well-ordered world of facts. WHY? Ignorance is bliss. Facts are facts.

Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method*:

“...a little brainwashing will go a long way in making the history of science duller, simpler, more uniform, more ‘objective’ and more easily accessible to treatment by strict and unchangeable rules.

Scientific education as we know it today has precisely this aim. It simplifies science by simplifying its participants... Their imagination is restrained and even their language ceases to be their own. This is again reflected in the nature of scientific ‘facts’ which are experienced as being independent of opinion, belief, and cultural background.

It is thus possible to create a tradition that is held together by strict rules, and that is also successful to some extent. But is that desirable to support such a tradition to the exclusion of everything else?”

Braco Dimitrijević, *Tractatus Post Historicus*:

“History should be composed of an infinite number of interpretations of events, so that the difference between legend—the sum of individual interpretations, often irrational, in which everything is possible—and history—as we know it today with its limitation of ‘proven’ facts—would disappear.”

Tristan Tzara, *Manifest des Herrn Antipyrine*:

“There is no final truth.”

It is a war against final truth, proven facts, a tradition that is held together by strict rules (and nothing else). The weapons used to attack the apodictic claim of art history defining eternal values are marble, bronze, gold-leaf, the materials of which monuments are made.

Braco Dimitrijević does not lack respect for the artist. He disrespects those who create the canonization of the artist to a role-designation of genius: PEDESTALIZATION. Traditions of eternal values are constructed by exclusion. Braco Dimitrijević upsets the constructed linearity of art history by interposing fictitious historical personages. He finds the “unknown” names by chance. How did the known get to be known anyway?

Is our belief vacillating, slipping? We feel trapped. The mouse realizes it has been trapped after it has taken the bait. We are not mice without pride, we have something other than insatiable appetite, the willingness of belief. Our willingness of belief triggers the lynchpin. We are enticed by a collection of monuments, which prompts us to think. We are deceived. Not by Braco Dimitrijević. That would be harmless. We feel deceived by those who install monuments and impose their values on us. Do we really want to deal with this insight? Is there a possible escape? The door to the next room. There is a Picasso.

June 1979

Meta translation from German to English: Richard Serra and Clara Weyergraf-Serra

The Posthistorical Dimension

Nena Dimitrijević

Early Works: Chance is a Logic Beyond Reason

Where and how is an artistic vision born? There are a lot of theoretical answers to this question, but essentially they can be reduced to John Ruskin's dilemma from the end of 19th Century: is an artist the product of his social environment or is his existence determined by genetic inheritance, so that the artist influences rather than being influenced by his surroundings? However in the case of Braco Dimitrijević, the artistic family background, the fact that he belonged to the third generation of artists in the recent family line, certainly played its part. Dimitrijević was born in Sarajevo in 1948, the second child and only son of the well-known painter Vojo and his wife, an architect, Jelena.

The first years of Dimitrijević's life coincided with the first period of post-war Yugoslavia. In European political history the year of his birth, 1948, is remembered as the year in which Tito said his historic "No" to Stalin and thus made the first chip in the monolith of the Communist Bloc. This act of dissent made Yugoslavia a special political case, a country between two worlds, divided by the Cold War: an island which did not completely belong to either West or East, capitalism or communism, but which at the same time had strong ties of dependence with each of these systems. Although having a single party, and under the rule of one leader, it nevertheless had a higher standard of living, and more civil liberties than any other country of Eastern Europe—thanks to the generous Western support given to this disobedient member of the Communist family. Personal rights, including, from 1965, the freedom to travel abroad, were incomparably greater than in any other country practicing "Real Socialism."

Dimitrijević's childhood was marked by these complex social and cultural circumstances as much as by his family environment. His parents' home and father's studio were hospitable meeting places, where he came into contact with a wide span of personalities, ranging from Vojo's artist and writer friends—people such as Ivo Andrić, winner of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1961, and his

Paris acquaintance, Jean-Paul Sartre, to his acquaintances from the resistance, who in the meantime, had made politics their profession or had become dissidents.

This atmosphere made a sensitive child, as Braco was, suspicious of authority and skeptical towards appearances. Seen from close-up, famous artists, war heroes, and men in power were only people with weaknesses and failings, and their grand ideals often only a cover for personal gain and successful careers. As he was brought up surrounded by art in his father's studio, seeing the paintings from both front and back from a very early age, so also, from the most innocent age, Braco began to look at social myths from both sides. For this very reason, when he came of age, the impulse towards relativism became the most characteristic feature of his personality. This complex cultural climate and his upbringing in a liberal intellectual family influenced his formative years and it would not be wrong to say that Dimitrijević's critical attitude towards authority and individual myths was formed at this early age. A humanist alternative to every dogma, humor as a weapon against hypocrisy, a human response to both fame and power were attitudes that young Dimitrijević took from his parents' home as an inseparable part of his own *Weltanschauung*.

From very early on, Braco Dimitrijević showed a talent for painting. He had an advantage over other children in that he was able to try out his gift with real, professional materials—in oils, and on large size canvases from his father's studio. A family anecdote from this time says that, long before he could read, Dimitrijević was able to distinguish the monograph on Matisse from the one on Cezanne, and would bring whichever one was asked for from his father's library. Considered a child prodigy, Dimitrijević gave his first newspaper interview at the age of five and had his first one-man show of fifty oil paintings at the age of ten. The considerable publicity attracted by the exhibition stirred a doubt in the child's mind, that all this interest in his painting was only because of his father's reputation. This doubt would make him give up painting altogether and enroll in the skiing club. This change of social environment, the contrast between the cultured and protected ambience of a middle class family, and the tough atmosphere of a skiing club, consisting mainly of simple mountain boys, was an important influence on Dimitrijević's formative years.

Later, he would often say that it was the sporting spirit and the courage needed in skiing competitions that helped him make some of his audacious moves in art. "Downhill skiing at 100 km/h is very close to both creating and understanding a work of art, because it requires courage, fast decision making and absolute mastery of space and time." ¹ Dimitrijević became a good skier, and a member of the national team, and in his teenage years often traveled for competitions, both in his own country and abroad to Austria, Bulgaria and France. Often later, when confronted with the art system's practice of creating successful careers and personal myths for untalented artists,

he would regret that there was no stopwatch to provide a more objective measurement of the quality on the art slopes.

After this protected and happy childhood, which paradoxically produced a doubtful and questioning intellect, Dimitrijević decided to leave Sarajevo in search of his own identity, away from the family's name and position. After two years trying to forget his artistic vocation studying electronics, physics and mathematics, Dimitrijević went to London and Paris for several months in the autumn of 1967 and the spring of 1968. In London he paid daily visits to the Tate Gallery and the National Gallery, studying Paolo Uccello, Carlo Crivelli, Hans Holbein and Titian. He was already searching for his spiritual ancestors, looking in the museums for the Dadaist works of Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia, but to his disappointment neither in London nor later in Paris could he find them on display. It was a few years too early for art historians and museum curators to recognise the importance of the historic avant-gardes. This had to wait for the artists of Dimitrijević's age and state of mind to make their revolution, i.e. it was not until the conceptual art generation came of age that the museums discovered Dadaism in their collections.

During this journey Dimitrijević made a decision to study art. After an initial rejection he scraped into the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb in the autumn of 1968. It was a traditional art school, which like most of the European academies was based on the Renaissance model; long hours of life drawing were followed by studies of composition, color and volumes. Despite a strict school rule that the students shouldn't exhibit publicly before graduating, Dimitrijević began showing independently even during his first year. His participation in the first students' exhibition consisted of signing a dust mark left on the wall by the painting of the preceding exhibition by the teachers. He entitled it *Dust trace of the painting of F.K.* and exhibited it as his own work. The other work he exhibited was a found piece of wire armature with the remains of plaster entitled *Triptych*. Already Dimitrijević was demonstrating his taste for ephemeral non-art materials; the emphasis is on the perceiving and selecting rather than on sculpting or modeling, and on the attribution of aesthetic quality to trivial everyday situations.

At the time of Dimitrijević's studies Zagreb was the most advanced city in ex-Yugoslavia for the visual arts. A number of artists and architects had founded the group EXAT-51, looking to the Constructivist tradition for an alternative to the official Social Realism. From 1961 onwards, Zagreb was also the city of the biennial international exhibition *New Tendencies* which included Piero Manzoni, Yves Klein, Group Zero and other experimental art of the time. However, by the end of the sixties, the exhibition lost its vitality and became identified with Kinetic and Op Art. As a young artist Dimitrijević defined himself in opposition to these schools, setting conceptual art's emphasis



Painting by Krešimir Klika, Zagreb, 1969

on the idea/concept against the retinal dogmatism of Kinetic Art, and nihilism and poetic anarchy against the *New Tendencies'* constructivist-derived project of improving the quality of life by aesthetically ameliorating the urban environment. His interventions in the urban environment were of another nature and were intended to involve the participation of people on the street. Thus the artist installed a heap of plaster of Paris on the road, waiting with a camera. When a car passed by the cloud produced was photographed and entitled *Accidental Sculpture* (1968). Dimitrijević insisted that, despite its short life which lasted until the cloud fell or dispersed, this work had all the traits of sculpture—it was made from the most common sculptural material and had perceptible volume. Here we encounter for the first time Dimitrijević's idiosyncratic approach to the categories of time, which makes the duration of an event less important than the fact that it has actually taken place in real life.

Painting by Krešimir Klika (1969) is a key work from this period. Dimitrijević installed a milk carton on the street, waiting for a car to run it over. He stopped the driver who, until that moment was an involuntary participant of the event, and asked his judgment of the milk splash. If the latter assessed the white stain as art, he would be asked to sign it directly on the pavement. This work implies a fundamental change in the notions of authenticity and authorship. At the very moment when the driver agreed to sign the milk splash, the authorship shifted from Dimitrijević, who set up the situation, to Klika, who accomplished the action; what actually finalizes the process and brings the art work to life is his conscious acceptance of authorship. Ontologically the work is realized only through the gnoseological process of its cognition and recognition. It does not exist as an autonomous entity beyond the judgment of its maker, who is at the same time its audience. The meaning of the work of art resides not in its origin but in its destination. "The birth of the reader must be accomplished at the cost of the death of the author."² Simultaneously to Barthes' essay on "The Death of the Author," we witness the birth of Krešimir Klika, the artist and the spectator in one. Dimitrijević developed a wide variety of artistic means to bridge the gap between artist and viewer, thereby addressing the implicitly hierarchical separation that Barthes identified.³ *Painting by K.K.* already includes many elements of Dimitrijević's later works in public spaces: the element of chance, the manipulation of the gaze of the observer in order to provoke a critical reflection, the stimulation of the observer/participant to produce a value judgment.

In 1969, in the hall of a building in the centre of Zagreb, Braco Dimitrijević waited behind the door, holding a plate of wet clay, pressed against the back of the door. The first person who tried to enter the building would create the imprint of the door-handle and the edge of the door on the clay. The involuntary author of this sculpture agreed to put his signature in the clay; Tihomir Simčić was his name. Dimitrijević decided to form a fictitious art group and named it after Simčić, instead of using



Accidental drawing, 1968

some illustrious name from the past, say, Leonardo da Vinci. And yet everything he knows about Simčić can be put into two sentences: born in 1910, retired in 1960. The ideas behind Dimitrijević's first street works were presented in the text referring to the fictitious *Group Tihomir Simčić*, published in 1969 in the catalogue of his exhibition at the Students' Centre Gallery in Zagreb. Dimitrijević explains the ideas behind these works:

"In this series of works the artist only arranges the initial situation, the development of which depends on chance, understanding and approval of the other persons. When entering a gallery a visitor is prepared to see works of art. I have tried to choose people at random, without knowing whether they have an affinity for art, and make them not only the spectators, but persons who cooperate with the 'arranger,' i.e. create. They have thus been included in the act of creating, and the dividing line that formerly existed between artist and non-artist has been removed."⁴ The notion of the artist craftsman was replaced by the notion of the artist as catalyst of the action, who only sets up the initial situation in which anyone can produce the work. The work of art as an open structure undermines the traditional myths of the making of art—the myth of virtuosity, of the artist's personal handwriting and the myth of the artist as a genius. Dimitrijević claims that the members of the group are all those who consciously or unconsciously make some visual changes, suggesting first that the notion of art is enlarged to include everyday events and secondly, that the role of the artist shifts from making objects into recognizing, selecting and claiming certain situations from the multitude of things and events as art. From this moment Dimitrijević started his project of promoting Simčić's name, i.e., inserting the name of this pensioner from Zagreb into art history. He would mention Simčić's name in newspapers or art magazines whenever the occasion arose so as to make it known in the art world. "After all," Catherine Millet would write later, "this voluntary self-cancellation of the artist is a fitting strategy for making obvious the necessity of his action in a society that no longer knows what place to allot the artist. In the eighties, during which this place, unlike the seventies, was so well defined that it was made banal, we saw a certain number of artists going back to this model of disappearance and hiding behind pseudonyms, initials, or enigmatic company names."⁵ Also from this period are the Super 8 mm films shot by passers-by to whom Braco Dimitrijević gave a loaded camera with the instructions to film whatever and however they wanted. The artist explains that he is "more interested in what is happening behind the camera than in front of it."

On the occasion of the *Belgrade International Theatre Festival* in 1970, Dimitrijević realized his first "appropriation" piece. With the author's permission, he distributed red glasses to the spectators of a theatre production directed by Ingmar Bergman, together with leaflets explaining that they could put them on at any moment they chose and thus voluntarily change the chromatic value of the performance.

After a solo exhibition at the Students' Centre Gallery in 1969, Dimitrijević realized that the regular exhibition rhythm of one show a year at best was far too slow for everything he had to say. Determined to act independently of galleries and true to the spirit of his street works, he found an alternative exhibition space. With the tenants' permission, an ordinary entrance hall of an apartment building in the centre of Zagreb became an exhibition venue. The space, named after the street and building number, *Frankopanska 2a*, housed several one-day exhibitions; *Three sets of objects* gathered miscellaneous objects classified according to a somewhat Borgesian taxonomy: a) round objects, b) red objects and c) sharp objects. *Frankopanska 2a* preceded by several years the appearance of alternative art spaces in New York and elsewhere, as well as the later curatorial fashion for organizing exhibitions in various non-art sites.

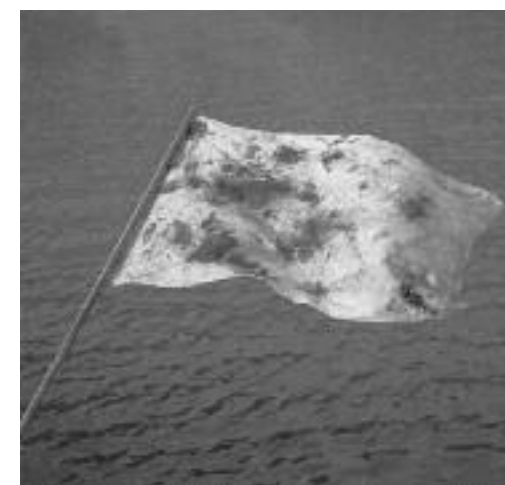
In the same space in 1971, Dimitrijević and I organized an international exhibition of conceptual art, *At the Moment*. It is interesting to mention how the decision to make an exhibition of the kind came about. In 1970 Dimitrijević was invited to exhibit in *Aktionsraum 1* in Munich, one of the first international venues for the Wiener Aktionismus as well as the emerging Conceptual and Arte Povera generation of artists. The show in Munich was accompanied with Dimitrijević's street action of carrying a banner with the casual passer-by's face on it, around the city. The long-haired young man readily explained to anyone who stopped him that the photograph showed an anonymous person selected at random.

After Munich we decided to spend the money intended for our honeymoon on traveling around Europe and we went on a month-long trip to Turin, Düsseldorf, Amsterdam, Paris and London. In each of these cities we met conceptual artists and critics and from these contacts was born the idea of an exhibition of conceptual art in Zagreb. Because of the anecdote that the journey was originally intended as a honeymoon, our wedding photograph was published on the exhibition poster. *At the Moment* was one of the first group exhibitions of the emerging art movement, and included the following artists: Giovanni Anselmo, Robert Barry, Joseph Beuys, Stanley Brouwn, Daniel Buren, Victor Burgin, Jan Dibbets, Braco Dimitrijević, Barry Flanagan, Douglas Huebler, Alain Kirili, Jannis Kounellis, David Lamelas, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Lawrence Weiner and Ian Wilson amongst the others.

Although the show was held in an alternative space, and lasted only three hours, it was extremely well attended by both art professionals and the general public who were drawn by the crowd in the doorway. It was announced in the daily press and on the radio and two 16mm documentaries were made by a Zagreb underground filmmaker. The visitors were encouraged to participate in the wall-drawing project by Sol LeWitt, to watch Barry Flanagan's Super 8 movie, to read and reflect on



Flag of the World I, 1963
First outdoor work in which the official flag was replaced with a cloth for cleaning brushes



Flag of the World II, 1963

Lawrence Weiner's proposition, or to leaf through Stanley Brouwn's artist's books. To limit the duration of the exhibition to only three hours was Dimitrijević's idea, and it reflects his views on the relativity of time. What matters is the act of introducing an event or an action into real life, even for a short particle of time, because, as the artist claims, "eternity is composed of seconds." The short duration and alternative space of the exhibition were a way of questioning both the institution of the gallery and that of the exhibition, in the best critical spirit of the conceptual art presented. "The purpose was to exhibit in a 'non-institutional space' and to make of it 'a centre of interest and information'—but not to establish it." ⁶

In the mid-fifties, when still a boy, Dimitrijević had painted a series of six canvases entitled *Houses of Beliefs*; they represent the façades of the buildings he could see from his window—cathedral, synagogue, Orthodox church, mosque, politburo and museum. In the late sixties, Dimitrijević chose the city as the place and framework of his artistic activity in contrast to Land and Earth artists, who search in nature the alternative to the institutional limits of the museum and gallery. Unlike natural landscape, the cityscape is loaded with historical and ideological meanings, which are inextricably woven into its fabric. Throughout history, the city has been the central arena for the spectacle of power. Public space is a coded structure which produces, accommodates and reflects the myths of ideology: a public building, a triumphal arch, a war memorial or a monument are not only the architectural and aesthetic vocabulary of the *urbs*, they are also signs of the dominant ideology and are charged with its connotations and values. In a totalitarian society, the rhetoric of power in the urban setting is amplified; military parades mark important dates, flags and banners are hung during the state holidays, as are gigantic portraits of political leaders. Confronted from his earliest childhood with the iconography of the personality cult, Dimitrijević chose as a young artist to intervene in urban areas normally reserved for the display of authoritarian symbols. A symbolic act from his adolescence can serve as an introduction to the later developed phase of his artistic strategy. At the age of fifteen he replaced the national flag on his sailing boat with a cloth used for cleaning brushes and called it *Flag of the World*. This is often seen as the artist's earliest attempt to defunctionalize an official sign by replacing it with a private, human-scale alternative.

In May 1971, Zagreb's annual Salon organized a competition for artistic interventions in the urban space. Dimitrijević submitted two projects; the first, for which he had already tried for several years without success to get permission, proposed to install on the city's main square the portraits of unknown people, of passers-by, whom he would select randomly on the street. The second was to hang the Japanese flag all over the city, without any obvious reason and without providing an explanation. The jury, which included Želimir Košević, the director of the Students' Centre Gallery, selected the first proposition. Before dawn, three portraits, of a middle-aged man, a blonde girl,

and an elderly lady with a hat appeared on a façade of Republic Square where posters of prominent politicians usually hung on state holidays. Puzzled early morning commuters, queuing for the tram, asked themselves if there had been a sudden change of government. However the look of the three ordinary faces did not seem to corroborate this hypothesis of a new political triumvirate. Simultaneously, in two other city squares, one of which bore President Tito's name, three more portraits were hung. Among other issues, the work wittily addressed the taboo subject of the time, the personality cult. Although Dimitrijević displayed these images without any accompanying information, they differed just enough from the usual rhetoric of political propaganda or advertising messages to arouse curiosity and uneasiness. The use of misinformation, intentionally leading the viewer to a false conclusion, was a structural part of the work. "The object which contains my work can be seen, but the work is not understood unless internally perceived. It is almost invisible at first glance. Since it faithfully imitates the real forms of historical glorification, it can't be noticed without additional information."⁷ The space for the artist's proposition opens up in the observer's act of mistaking the images for representations of politicians or media celebrities. The face on the poster confused the observer because the mechanism of association had been disturbed, or rather the complete code for integration of this information into the existing semantic field was missing. This manipulation of the gaze serves to shake the passive unquestioning attitudes towards the mass media, history and tradition. The artist hoped to change the passive uncritical acceptance of the city's persuasive language and to stimulate social consciousness through art displayed in public spaces.

"My work's intention is to establish a new qualitative relationship, firstly between man and specific information, and secondly between man and his exterior reality. It is important to change that with which, as a result of acquired and inherited experience, we have a definitive and established a priori relationship. I refer primarily to our automatic acceptance of particular forms of information, while disregarding its real content, and to the passive and negative attitude which is passed from one generation to the next through education. We accept the messages transmitted through these channels automatically and unconsciously as important historical and social facts. As we discover new content within old forms of presentation, it is possible that in the future we may begin to distrust the truthfulness of one-way information."⁸

The success of the process lay in its faithful mimicry of the 'original', i.e. the authentic pieces of political propaganda, because only then could the observer be led to believe that the passer-by was a person of social importance. When through the gallery or mass media information the viewer learns about the identity of the subject of the large photographs, he may in the future start to question the content conveyed through similar modes of representation. The artist claims that he



Clockwise from top left:

Casual Passer-by I met at 1:15 PM, Zagreb, 1971
Collection: Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna

Casual Passer-by I met at 4:23 PM, Zagreb, 1971
Collection: Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna

Trg Bana Jelacica, former Republic Square, Zagreb, 1971

Casual Passer-by I met at 6:11 PM, Zagreb, 1971
Collection: Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna

did not intend to introduce any formal innovation but to intervene in the semantic structure of existing forms. “I have tried to find a kind of activity that will enable me to overcome the framework of formal evolution and attempt to fundamentally change our passive relationship to the environment. Given that the environment plays an active role in shaping the mind, I have attempted to change our customary relationships and reactions in our encounter with everyday reality.”⁹

In September 1971, Dimitrijević participated in the Paris Biennale, then a prestigious international exhibition of artists under 35. This seventh Biennale, which included a conceptual section curated by Catherine Millet, was later to be recognized as one of the first international exhibitions of conceptual art. Dimitrijević exhibited a large portrait of a casual passer-by on the façade of Boulevard St. Germain, one of the busiest spots of the capital, frequented daily by some 2 million people. After two weeks the piece, which was seen by a great number of Parisians and tourists, was removed by the police and the fire brigade. Still under the influence of May ‘68, the echoes of which remained very much alive in the occasional street confrontations between students and police, the work of art was removed and confiscated with the laconic explanation that “It disturbs Paris.” About this work, bought in 1978 by the newly opened Musée National d’Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Dimitrijević would say that it made the journey from the local police station to the national museum. (A few years later, Dimitrijević had another large photograph removed during the Venice Biennale from the façade of the Ca’ Guistinian Palace on Canal Grande. The destiny of the work is symptomatic of the attitude of the art bureaucracy towards art that activates genuine interest outside the cultural milieu. Because of the considerable interest aroused by the work, accompanied by numerous phone calls to the Biennale office by the public passing by in *vaporettos* and wanting to find out who the person in the photograph was, the Biennale decided to take it down and reinstalled it in the security of the art reservation of the Giardini.)

After seeing his work in Paris, the Naples art dealer Lucio Amelio invited the young artist to do an exhibition in his gallery. He arranged Dimitrijević’s opening evening to coincide with that of Beuys’ first solo show in Italy, which took place on the first floor of the same gallery. By mistake Dimitrijević’s name was printed on the back of Beuys’ invitation card and vice versa: this mistake was corrected but a few examples of these cards signed by both artists and given away remain as a souvenir. The episode symbolically marked the beginning of a friendship between the older artist and the 23-year-old Dimitrijević, which lasted until Beuys’ death in 1986. The opening night of the two exhibitions was a major cultural event, attended by artists, curators and dealers from all over Italy and Germany. The group dinner usual during this kind of gathering was an occasion for Dimitrijević to make a piece. He stopped a casual passer-by in the uniform of a customs officer and asked him to join the group, which included Jannis Kounellis, Joseph Beuys, Achille Bonito Oliva,



Casual Passer-by I met at 11:09 AM, Paris, 1971
Collection: Musée National d'Art Moderne,
Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris



Boulevard St. Germain, Paris

Germano Celant, Mario and Marisa Merz, who were just about to pose for the photographer in front of the restaurant. A few seconds later the camera recorded the scene for posterity, together with the Italian customs agent, Francesco Abatiello. "This work is my answer to the usual omissions of history. When in art history books we see a group photograph, the title usually goes like this: Duchamp, unknown, Katherine Dreyer, Picabia, unknown. I was always interested in the fate of these unknowns, because I believe if the author of the publication had really tried, he could have found out who these people were. They were not without names at the time when they were photographed, but through selective mechanisms of history, they became one generic 'Unknown'. We can speculate that their ideas were too far behind or too much ahead of their time. The historic group photograph is just another instrument of the selective promotion of the art system. My idea was to manipulate so-called 'documentary' photography, by inserting casual, non-belonging content, and thus deconstruct its functioning."¹⁰

In Lucio Amelio's gallery Dimitrijević exhibited photographic pieces, referring to outdoor works, while the billboards around the city were pasted with the poster of a casual passer-by. In the *Casual Passer-by* series, the work is situated in a public space, while the role of the gallery is limited to distributing secondary information. A photographic piece shown in the gallery would consist of a portrait of a casual passer-by, of a shot of the outdoor situation in which the work was installed, and a certificate that stated the exact time of the meeting, but not the date. Here again we encounter Dimitrijević's special relationship to time. It seems absurd to note with precision the hour and the minute of the meeting and to omit the day and month, but it is consistent with Dimitrijević's system, which places the subjective experience of time above the scientific exactitude of historical time. Indicating the time and the place simulates historical precision, whilst the omission of the date immediately calls this exactitude into question. In this system, the casual meeting, an event from the sphere of the personal and random, is antithetical to the supposed determinism of history. Caroline Tisdall defines the intention behind this strategy: "In his work as an artist, he also seeks to comment on the process of history. In so doing, he hopes to call into question the criteria by which we accept the accidents of history that raise people to fame. He feels that many stay in the world memory for no particularly good reason, and that the rest of us accept their eminence passively, unthinkingly and unconsciously. By implication, this reflects as much on the promoting processes of the mass media as on the structuring of history."¹¹

In the autumn of 1971, Dimitrijević left for London to continue his studies at St. Martin's School of Art. At the time, the school's high reputation was based on the success of the New Generation sculptors, many of whom were both alumni and teachers. The coincidence that in the second half of the sixties the St. Martin's sculpture course was attended by Barry Flanagan, Richard Long,



From left to right:
Marinella Pirelli, Germano Celant, Mimma Pisani, Joseph Beuys, Lucio Amelio, Diana Alfano, Natalia Fesser, Pasquale Trisorio, Lutz Shimer, Folker Skulima, Louisa Schubert, Francesco Abatiello, Braco Dimitrijević, Carlo Alfano, Marisa Merz, Vettor Pisani, Achille Bonito Oliva, Jannis Kounellis



Casual Passer-by I met at 2 PM, Naples, 1971

Hamish Fulton, Gilbert and George, Jan Dibbets and Bruce McLean among others, had to do with the impression that sculpture was less of a constraint on artists who rebelled against traditional art forms. To the generation adhering to Duchamp's artistic philosophy it might have seemed easier to escape the fate of being "stupid as a painter" by attending this sculpture orientated-school. In fact, by the end of the sixties, St. Martin's legendary advanced sculpture course had become no more than formalist exercises in painted metal sculpture. For the conceptual generation, who had already started their artistic revolution, the school was but a starting point for a rebellion against the referential art model espoused by the previous generation. On the other hand, there were strong ties to sculpture in their work. Richard Long defines his promenades in nature as *Walking Sculpture*, as does Hamish Fulton; Gilbert and George call themselves *Living Sculptures*; McLean makes performances that mock the formalism of certain New Generation idiosyncrasies, whilst Barry Flanagan opposes the rigidity and artificiality of painted metal sculpture by enlarging the notion of sculpture to embrace soft materials like hessian, rope and cloth.

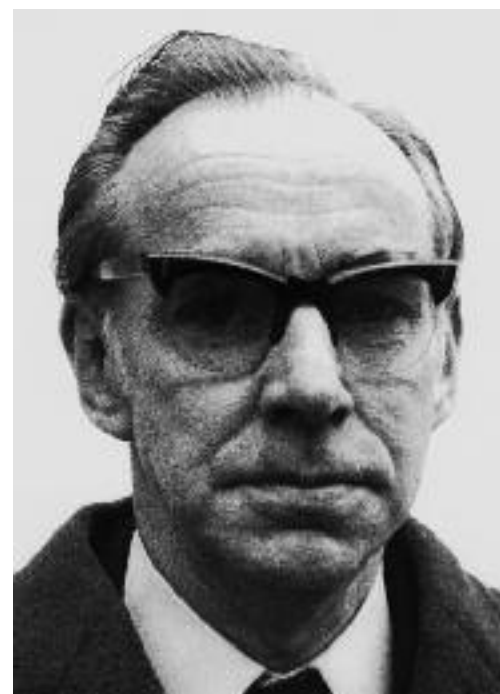
When Dimitrijević arrived at St. Martin's he already had several one-man exhibitions behind him, and had a defined personal artistic position. To his disappointment he soon found out that the school was not a forum for the most advanced views on art of the time, but the place where Anthony Caro, Philip King and others fostered the formal aspects of sculpture. However, Dimitrijević continued his project of inscribing alternative semiotic messages in the city, but now in altogether different political and cultural urban surroundings. The cityscape of London differed from that of Zagreb; instead of the direct, loud rhetoric of the political propaganda, more subtle forms of persuasion were employed to transmit societal values and beliefs. Instead of huge photographs to herald and celebrate state-sanctioned politicians, equestrian statues of military leaders and monuments to glorious men of the past inhabit public squares and gardens as an expression of the rhetoric of conquest and rule. Instead of slogans, discreet blue enamel plaques decorate the buildings where eminent persons once lived. After his arrival in London, Dimitrijević's work developed according to the internal logic of his intellectual discourse, i.e. following the need to find an appropriate strategy which would counteract the ideological intention of his new surroundings. The work applied the logic of mimicry to these stereotypical models of representation which in every culture serves as the transmitter of significant messages. Guy Brett wrote in *The Times*: "Each country has its own way of monumentalizing famous people. Dimitrijević has made humorous use of those customary in each country he has visited, the forms people implicitly accept as carrying an important message."¹²

In the studio at St. Martin's, Dimitrijević produced memorial plaques inscribed with the names of people living in the neighborhood. Continuing his strategy of context-specific interventions, he

installed the plaques with the inscription *John Foster lived here* or *Sarah Knipe worked here* on their respective buildings in SoHo. The linguistic message of the sentence was factually correct; Sarah Knipe did work in that building, but the observer is misled by the language of its presentation to believe that she was somebody of social importance. A couple of years later, the artist gave the following analysis of the intention of commemorative messages:

“Personal mythologies are fostered by isolating elements from artist’s private lives. Monuments, memorial plaques are only the means by which the status of genius is created and their function is to instill a passive awe in the masses. Few of us would be prepared to consider the memorial plaque on Berlioz’s house as an attack on free thought and judgment, but most of us would be skeptical towards overly commercial or political messages. Take for instance the marble plaque on which the sentence *Berlioz lived here* is written. The basic system is linguistic but substituting the linguistic code for the message of its presentation gives us the statement *Genius lived here*. It means that the implied message of all places without a memorial plaque is *A genius never lived here...* The complete dulling of the individual’s critical judgment is achieved by an entire system of repressive signs: monuments and memorial plaques are not innocent reminders of the cultural values of the past, but a carefully constructed mythical system which conceals the chaotic reality of that past. The function of this system is to do away with the contradiction between this reality and the ordered image of the past; the differences, conflicts and contradictions which characterize a period are disregarded in this system, in which only clear, pure signs are presented, which constitute a harmonious record of the past.¹³

In the studio at St. Martin’s, Dimitrijević spent several months modeling a realistic, larger than life-size portrait head. Considered either as an eccentric or as an irreparable case of Social Realism within the St. Martin’s Pantheon of Abstract Sculpture, Dimitrijević got into an aesthetic dispute with Caro and found himself without tutorial supervision. No one realized that he was working on the project for his exhibition with the Situation Gallery, scheduled for the spring 1972, and that the portrait was the head of David Harper, the casual passer-by whom he had met at 1.10 pm on a London street. A few months later, the monument to David Harper was installed without the permission of the city authorities in Berkeley Square. At the same time a photo piece of Harper was exhibited in the gallery along with other works from the *Casual Passer-by* series. Rather than publish a typical exhibition review, Richard Cork, the art critic of the *Evening Standard*, decided to participate in Dimitrijević’s project by informing the paper’s 7 million readers in an article headlined “This Man is Art,” that the monument in Berkeley Square was erected in honor of their fellow citizen and contemporary, David Harper. The private view party started in the park square, where drinks were served before going on to the gallery. After a couple of drinks, a museum curator who had



Clockwise from top left:
Casual Passer-by I met at 10:05 PM, London, 1972. “John Foster lived here Oct. 1961 – Feb. 1968.”
Casual Passer-by I met at 2:42 PM, London, 1971. “Sarah Knipe stayed here in 1971.”
 City bus, Line 14 - Direction Kings Cross, London, 1972
Casual Passer-by I met at 11:28 AM, London, 1972
 Collection: Tate Gallery, London

been invited to the gathering asked why they were meeting there. When shown Harper's monument, he remarked, to the artist's amusement, that the statue had been there for as long as he could remember. Around this time the gallery obtained permission from London Transport to have the posters of a casual passer-by displayed on number 14 buses. The serious face with glasses, staring from the back window of a double-decker could easily have been mistaken for a new party candidate in some electoral campaign, but in fact it simply belonged to a man who happened to be walking down Charring Cross Road at 11.28 AM. (In 2005 the same work was revived in the occasion of a group exhibition "Open Systems: Rethinking Art c.1970," a historic survey of Conceptual art at the Tate Modern. Approached by the Tate Modern and Sadler's Wells with a request to sponsor the renewed version of the piece, the London Transport, after finding in its archive the original correspondence with the Situation Gallery from 33 years ago, agreed to sponsor the project and provided free publicity space on buses, underground platforms and billboards.)

The artist always used the same procedure when choosing a subject for a large photograph or a monument. When he decided to make a work he went out on the street and stopped the first person who happened to pass by, explaining to him or her what he intended to do with the help of either a catalogue or a photograph of an earlier work. If the person agreed to participate he went on to the next phase of the work. If the person refused he approached the next passer-by. The artist did not usually stay in touch with people who took part in the work except on a few occasions. There is an anecdote about one such passer-by whose large photograph was exhibited on the façade of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven during Dimitrijević's exhibition there. Two years after the exhibition, the man wrote to the artist explaining that he intended to cross the ocean on a raft and asked whether he would give him his photo-portrait on linen to use as a sail. Another anecdote dates from 1989 when Dimitrijević was preparing his work for the *Les Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition in Paris. He stopped a passer-by on Boulevard Beaumarchais and explained to him what he intended to do. After listening attentively to the artist's proposal, the passer-by, a young man in his twenties, answered almost angrily: "What you are doing is not very original. Dimitrijević did it twenty years ago" and walked away before either the artist or photographer had the time to explain. Dimitrijević's intention was not to make these people famous, but to call attention to the omissions of history. "It is interesting to observe the mechanism which creates art history, the methods of selection, its influence on information systems, on the creation of concepts and names. Using the same forms of presentation I have deliberately emphasized the element of chance in selecting subjects for my monuments, memorial plaques, photographs etc. The purpose of this activity is not to make some people famous, but rather to point out the relativity of the criteria whereby some individuals/ideas are promoted while others are not."¹⁴

Caroline Tisdall writes: "He was trying to find a way of expressing in an art form his misgivings about the way history is made, the feeling that for every Leonardo we honor there was another long-forgotten."¹⁵

To prove his point the artist often cites the example of El Greco: "Casual passer-by stands for unrecognized creative potential or the creative person whose ideas were overlooked because they were too advanced. For instance, El Greco painted all these wonderful paintings between 1560 and 1600 and then he was forgotten for three centuries and rediscovered around 1900. If he had only been rediscovered five hundred years after his death, we wouldn't know about El Greco today; this suggests that even today we might be missing out on some El Grecos. The reason for this is that part of human nature which would simply call lack of tolerance. This lack of tolerance prevents us from seeing certain things."¹⁶

After the reviews of the exhibition in the leading national papers, Dimitrijević realized that his St. Martin's peers were more aware of their avant-garde offspring than they had seemed at the first glance. He was invited for tea at the office of the head of the sculpture department and shown neatly filed clippings of his reviews, as well as those of his conceptual colleagues, Barry Flanagan, Gilbert and George, Richard Long and others. Later in his essay in *British Sculpture in the Twentieth Century*, Stuart Morgan remarked that "parallel to Richard Long's interventions in the natural landscape, Dimitrijević sets his monuments as a perfect mimicry in the urban setting."¹⁷

In the autumn of 1972, Dimitrijević prepared an exhibition at the Galerie Konrad Fischer in Düsseldorf. Since neither the gallery nor the artist had the means to pay for the production of the large photograph, Joseph Beuys generously offered to do so. He offered Dimitrijević his studio for the preparation and introduced him to his former students Imi Knoebel, Blinky Palermo, and Ulrike Rosenbach, all of whom proved extremely helpful in taking photographs and generally helping with production. In those days, long before inkjet procedure was invented, producing large photographs of this size was not only artistic but also a technical challenge. In the early years Dimitrijević used to make the portraits on photographic paper and glue the fragments on a large canvas. To sew a canvas strong enough to resist windy weather, the artist had to use all his past experience of repairing the sails on his boat. The Düsseldorf piece was installed on the façade of the old Landesbibliothek on the Grabbeplatz. The same work was exhibited a few months later in *Documenta V*, on the building opposite the Neue Galerie in Kassel. In Harald Szeemann's *Documenta*, the anthological exhibition of Conceptual Art, Land Art and Arte Povera, the 24-year-old Dimitrijević was one of the youngest participants.

The artist's first retrospective, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb in 1973, included all his previously realized works from the *Casual Passer-by* series. Dimitrijević makes conscious use of certain groups of signs with their predetermined meanings and fields of association: the poster, the oversized photographic portrait, the memorial plaque, the monument, the portrait bust. He creates two sorts of simulacra, one which paraphrases modern and mass media forms of promotion, and the other which mimics historical forms of glorification. In both cases, he induces transformation of the sign, i.e. restructures its meaning. The introduction of the casual passer-by into these codes of representation acts as a means of defunctionalizing them. For his one-man show at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels in 1975, Dimitrijević put the name of a casual passer-by in large typeface on the front of the invitation card, while his own name appeared on the back in smaller characters. Dimitrijević worked constantly to subvert the production of artistic myths, which are made of the same fiber as historical ones. The recurrent practice of art magazines of putting the portrait of an established or up-and-coming star on their cover, was counteracted by Dimitrijević's putting a casual passer-by on the cover of *Flash Art* magazine and of several other publications.

Another form of official recognition and social behavior which Dimitrijević parodied are the cocktail parties and dinners given for VIPs. The artist organized such events in honor of casual passers-by, with an obligatory printed invitation in the conventional formal wording. One example was a cocktail party given for Mr. Simurdic during the *April Festival* in Belgrade in 1974. On the photograph, which constitutes the piece, we see Simurdic surrounded by a group of people, which includes Beuys, toasting him. On another occasion, Dimitrijević printed the card, announcing that he and John S. Herman had made an official visit to Italy from November 28 to December 5 1973. Herman was a hitch-hiker to whom he had given a lift to Milan.

The second group of works mimics historical forms of glorification and includes the monument, street sign, memorial plaque and portrait bust. On several occasions, Dimitrijević named a street after an anonymous person. The street sign he installed appears to be a perfect copy of a real one, except that below the name of the person there is only the year of birth whilst the year of death is missing. In 1975, while visiting Gian Enzo Sperone and Michelangelo Pistoletto in the skiing resort of San Sicario, he named a street after Gian Franco Martina. The latter was a skier who happened to cross paths with the artist at 3.28 PM. The portrait of Dimitrijević by Pistoletto also dates from this period. It shows the long-haired artist with skis on his shoulder bending to fix his shoe, an image which enacts a humorous paraphrase of the religious iconography of *Carrying the Cross*.

It is a significant aspect of Dimitrijević's work is that it never stays on the level of the idea/concept,



Top:
Documenta 5, Kassel 1972
Museum Fridericianum

Bottom:
Milan Simurdic, *Casual passer-by I met at 12:16 PM*, Belgrade 1974

as is usually the case in the era of conceptual art; his were actual interventions in the public space, events inserted into the real world. The passage from the project to its realization is usually a painstaking procedure which reveals absurd bureaucratic regulations and the Kafkaesque functioning of municipal administrations. When, in 1972, Gian Enzo Sperone asked permission from Turin city council to install a monument to Alberto Vieri, he did not realize that this was the beginning of an endless procedure. In the correspondence between the Sperone Gallery and the authorities one finds that the arguments against granting such permission include: “Monuments can be erected only to dead persons, or to persons whose importance is acknowledged by the city council.” After a year the artist and the dealer decided to install the monument without permission in the public garden on Piazza Maria Teresa.

When staying as a guest of DAAD program in Berlin in 1976, Dimitrijević started another project with very little prospect of ever being realized. Berlin in those years was still full of ruins, vivid remnants of the war, and its geopolitically defined urban coordinates made it a unique monument to fictions of history. Braco Dimitrijević wanted to add yet another monument, that is to build an obelisk in the garden of Schloss Charlottenburg. After couple of years of fund raising, the obelisk was erected with joint funds of the city, German Lottery, DAAD and the Verwaltung der Staatlichen Schlosser und Garten. At the bottom of the baroque garden of the Charlottenburg Castle, Dimitrijević’s obelisk was constructed as it should be—in noble and eternal white Carrara marble, built in traditional manner with five stone blocks held together by the sheer force of gravity, without any cement, positioned on 24-foot deep concrete foundations. The deceptive formal perfection is disturbed only by a sentence engraved in an ancient classical script in four languages on each side of the obelisk “11th of March” and in the smaller characters “This Could be a Day of Historical Importance” in English, French, German and Croat. The inability to identify 11th March by leafing through a history book, together with the use of conditional tense, sets off an alarm: this obelisk seems to be neither a memento of a maybe forgotten but nevertheless respectable historic date, nor an innocent decorative accent in the landscape. Indeed it is neither. 11th of March was chosen by Peter Malwitz, a casual passer-by, whom the artist met in Berlin, because it was his birthday. The monument in honor of Malwitz’s birthday stands at the end of a historical axes, situated within a system of coordinates framed by Prussian memorials and busts of Roman emperors, pavilions and royal graves—that is between the signs of power and aesthetic concerns for the landscape. This is the most monumental piece of conceptual art ever made, an ironic homage to chance or as Thomas Deecke put it, “a memorial as a fiction.” The obelisk was inaugurated with speeches and toasts in the hall of mirrors of the Schloss Charlottenburg, the very same room in which were held most of Berlin’s important official receptions, including one given for John Kennedy. Thomas Deecke concludes his essay in the artist’s book *An obelisk beyond history* with the following

reflection: “Enclosed by historical memorial and forming *point de vue* of the Baroque garden, Braco Dimitrijević’s imitation obelisk clarifies the mechanism and context of meaning of its function as a memorial through its reflection upon and its interaction with history: this could be an event of cognitive importance.”¹⁸

Tractatus Post Historicus: The Principle of Ready Aesthetics

In 1976 Dimitrijević published *Tractatus Post Historicus*, providing a coherent theoretical foundation for his artistic practice. In the *Tractatus* we find the critique of the paradigm of art history as a doctrine of the evolution of styles: “Art as it is shown through the history of art exists as a succession of styles. It is presented as a series of pure and uniform units in which the later one is always better than the previous one. According to this theory art is always presented as ever bettering itself. This concept of art history is based on the following idealistic assumptions: 1) the idea of continuous amelioration of forms, the change of one art form for another supposedly better one, presupposing the Hegelian idea that there exists a certain model into which the whole process leads. In other words, if Baroque is more perfect than Renaissance, or Color Field than Abstract Expressionism, then there is supposed to exist one absolute ideal style to which the whole process of perfection aims. The idea of art history as a consequent and linear evolution is only possible if all cases which don’t fit in with the dominating style cliché are overlooked and eliminated. (For instance I’m sure that in Rococo there was at least one artist applying aesthetic principles close to Minimalism, but he remained unknown because the collective taste and sensibility weren’t ready to accept his ideas.) This model of art history is only a reflection of general history because it reflects the ideas of Western man about his own history as a series of changes which through conflicts and struggles nevertheless result in so-called “progress”...

The theory of formal evolution based on the chronological homogeneity of styles imposes formal innovation as the supreme critical criterion while disregarding the essential concern of art—its role and place within a given socio-historical structure. In keeping with the demand for the production of new art forms, particular works of art are valued on the basis of the fact that you can identify the artist’s personal handwriting. Within the value system of art that we have today, stylistic uniqueness is the accepted trademark of a top quality product. The form of this trademark has evolved over the course of history, from artist to artist, but its significance in our value system has remained unchanged since the Renaissance. The fact that the criterion of the visual distinctness of an artist’s handwriting—the criterion of formal novelty—has survived the many aesthetic and technical changes which have occurred in art over the last 500 years shows that the social interpretation of

art has remained basically the same for all that time. The idea of art as a series of formal innovations encourages aesthetic excess. But aesthetic excess or divergence from established styles is not nearly as revolutionary an act as we used to think: it only feeds the myth of the evolution of art, leaving untouched all the essential questions about the position and function of art. This claim is best proved by the rapid assimilation of recent avant-garde movements by the cultural establishment.”¹⁹

The concept of art history as a continuous progression of styles relies on the mythification of the artistic personality: “The whole process occurs by sheer force of genius. Creators of style act independently of the socio-historical circumstances in which they live, infusing their masterpieces with divine inspiration. The whole concept of education and culture is based on obedience to authority and the hierarchy of values. One of the liabilities of this cultural concept is that it says that the evolution of art took place through the divine attributes and contributions of certain geniuses and epochal heroes.”²⁰

Dimitrijević’s answer to dictum of formal innovation is deliberate used of plurality of forms: alongside with employing modern technologies such as photography on photosensitive linen, silkscreen, or offset printing, he used traditional materials and techniques such as marble, bronze, or gilded lettering. The choice of technique resulted from the inner logic of the artistic discourse; it was the intention to subvert the dominant ideological system that dictated the form and technique of the work. In order to avoid the trap of formal novelty, Dimitrijević defined intentional unoriginality as the central principle of his work.

“In a formal sense this work is completely non-original. There is not one element on the basis of which the artist’s personal handwriting could be identified. This work does not wish to contribute in any sense to the formal evolution of art. It takes existing forms from and outside the context of art and gives them new content. This is in no way the principle of the readymade which is based on the change of context. (For instance, a portrait cast in bronze existed for centuries as an art form and as a means of glorification.) This means that the technological spectrum of this work is several thousand years wide, from a bronze portrait bust to photography on canvas, and therefore cannot be identified with particular media/technology. Contrary to the art of the era of technological progress (since the beginning of the 20th Century, which based its originality on introducing new materials/technologies into art), this work uses existent art materials and forms. This principle could be defined as a juxtaposition of ready-aesthetics. This work does not exist as a formal novelty, but exclusively as a new semantic structure”²¹

Dimitrijević’s concept of formal non-originality and ready aesthetics prefigured some later claims of Postmodernism. His practice is an artistic - that is, poetic and intuitive - expression of the ideological transgression inherent in the writings of the French Post-Structuralist school. The insertion of alternative content into found forms of social representation can be interpreted as what Barthes calls a “strategy of counteracting myth by creating an artificial myth.”²² This is how the artist defines his strategy in the chapter of *Tractatus Post Historicus* entitled *Two Logical Spaces*:

“The following analysis refers to analogies and the difference between 1) the language of this work – $E_1R_1C_1$ and 2) the language which is used by the power structure for communicating messages of special significance - ERC. By using examples of analogous signs from ERC and $E_1R_1C_1$ systems, the mechanism of this work will be shown.

Sign A (from ERC system): Monument to Alfred Nobel
Signifier A - Bust cast in bronze on a marble pedestal
Signified A - A person of special social importance

Sign A_1 (from $E_1R_1C_1$ system): Monument to Alberto Vieri
Signifier A_1 - Bust cast in bronze on a marble pedestal
Signified A_1 - Casual passer-by

[...] The actual purpose of the work is to defunctionalize the signs from the system ERC by means of their ‘mistaken’ replicas from system $E_1R_1C_1$. In this way suspicion regarding the intentions of the myth is cast by means of the myth itself, and the one-way communication on which it is based (from myth-makers to consumers) is exchanged for a reversible, two-way communication. Instead of the only one-way of reading the signs from system ERC, this work intends to provoke doubt regarding the value system they are based on. Instead of passive acceptance of the uniform values offered by tradition and history, the work aims to create a new situation: the establishment of very open and flexible individual criteria capable of permitting the coexistence of different and often contradictory values.” ²³

By choosing a casual passer-by as a subject for his ironic monumentalizations Dimitrijević uses a foreign element to break down a cliché. He appropriates myth in order to repress it. Specific subjectivity replaces the official apparatus of repression. The casual passer-by is a metaphor, a hint of poetic disturbance in the ossified order of things; in Dimitrijević’s vocabulary, he also stands for an open possibility, for undiscovered or unrecognized creativity. “Every time when I stop a casual passer-by in the street, I believe that I might be meeting Leonardo. And if he proved to be Leonardo, I would not lose hope of meeting Leonardo and Einstein together in the next person.”²⁴

Tractatus Post Historicus is the theoretical expression of Dimitrijević’s critique of History and the way in which historical and cultural meanings and values are constructed. Far from its claimed objectivity and scientific exactitude, History, believes the artist, is an arbitrary interpretation of the past, which serves the interests of the group who writes it. By introducing alternative content into

media reserved for the historically important, the artist proposes an alternative vision of the past and present. “History should be composed of an infinitive number of interpretations of events, so that the difference between the legend—the sum of individual interpretations, often irrational, in which everything is possible—and history—as we know it today with its limitation of ‘proven facts’—would disappear.”²⁵

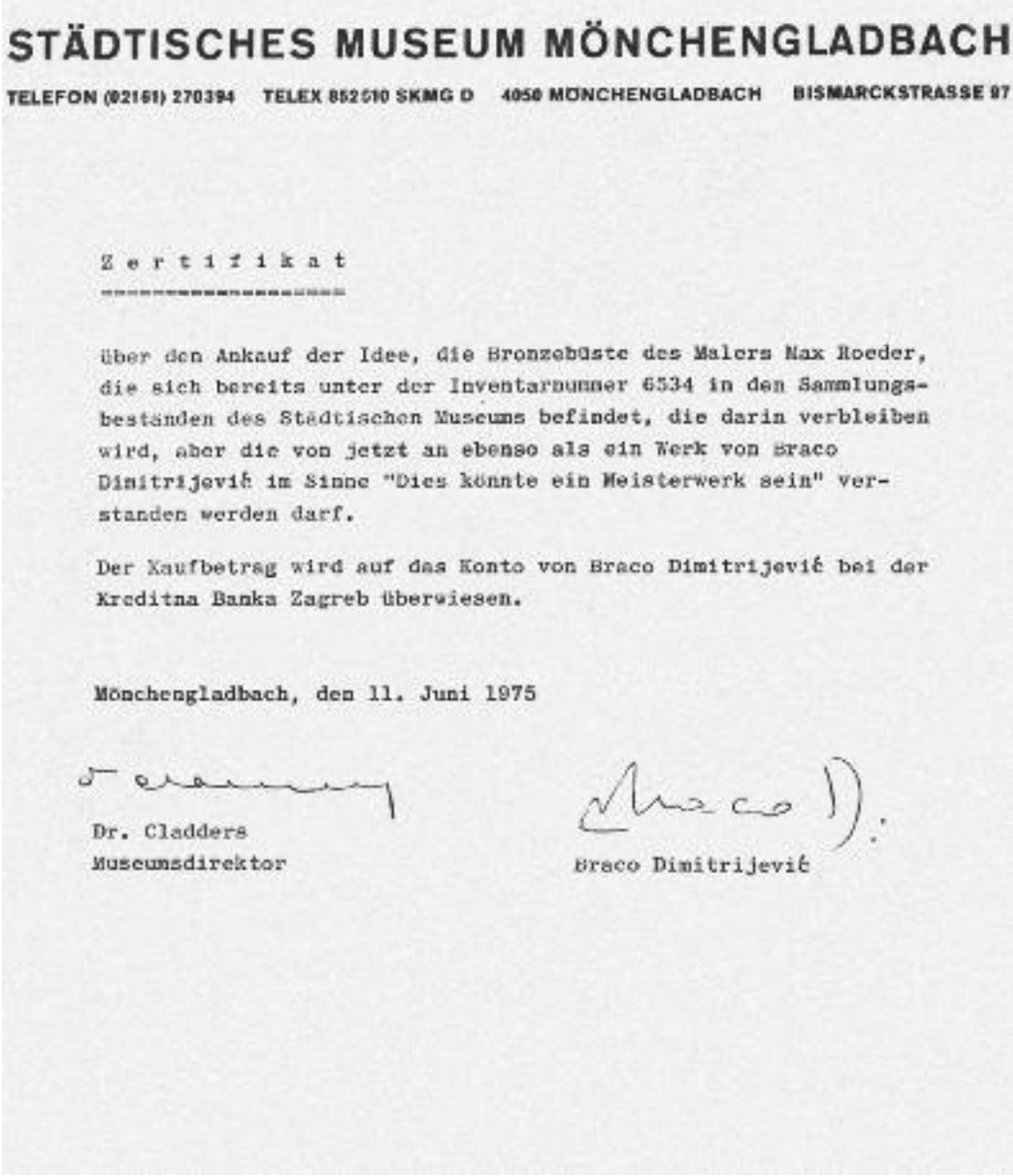
Tractatus Post Historicus is a combined textual/photographic essay that questions established values in order to affirm the power of personal judgment and individual poetics. Dimitrijević often emphasizes that his work is about perception. We see only that which we are conditioned to see. “There are no ruptures in creation, only in perception.”²⁶ If this causal relationship between the form of representation and its content is broken, individual perception can be freed from the domain of the controlled and opened up to independent judgment.

In the Cosmos There is No Above and Below: Masterwork as Readymade

During his one-man exhibition at the Stadtisches Museum Monchengladbach in 1975, Dimitrijević exhibited a series of works titled *This Could be a Masterpiece*. A group of heterogeneous objects was displayed on the white museum pedestals each with a brass plaque inscribed with the artist’s name and the conditional sentence quoted above. Among these exhibits was a bronze bust of 1920s German painter Max Roeder. The notion of *objet trouvé* was thus enlarged to include a work of art. The completed work, a sculpture already classified in one art historical drawer, changes its meaning to become an active element of a new semantic structure. The reality of the gesture of appropriation was confirmed by Johannes Cladders, the museum director, who decided to acquire Max Roeder’s bust as a work by Braco Dimitrijević. On 11 June 1975, the artist and the curator together signed a “Contract of Purchase of an Idea.”

The contract confirmed not only that a veritable purchase of an idea has taken place, given that the object in question had already belonged to the museum collection, but it asserted the plurality of truth by acknowledging the dual authorship of the same sculpture by two artists who lived fifty years apart.

This idea, inherent to the logic of Dimitrijević’s artistic discourse of mimicking/appropriating existing art forms, has found its most radical expression in the next phase of his work, the installations under the generic title of *Triptychos Post Historicus*. In 1976, after six months of negotiations with the Berlin Nationalgalerie, he was allowed to make series of installations using



Certificate for purchase of an idea, 1975

“The bronze bust of a painter Max Roeder is stored under stock number 6534 in the collection of Stadtisches Museum where it will stay. From now on it can also be regarded as a work of ‘Braco Dimitrijević, “This Could be a Masterpiece.” The purchase amount will be transferred to the artist’s account.”

master paintings from the museum collection. One day when the museum was closed to the public, the artist arrived for the working session, equipped with an array of everyday objects and a crate full of fruit and vegetables. The complexity of issues implied by the *Triptychos Post Historicus* installations is already manifest in this first series. The very first triptych, with a Kandinsky painting balanced against a piece of wood, and an apple underneath, represents precarious physical and metaphorical balance, between one object which unquestionably belongs to history and another object, which is undeniably outside it, the balance held above an apple which epitomizes processes of nature indifferent to human conventions. (Many times later I had occasion to witness Dimitrijević working on *Triptychos Post Historicus* in numerous museums all over the world, including Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, Tate Gallery in London, Guggenheim Museum in New York, Musée d'Orsay, the State Russian Museum and the Louvre. Many of those later triptychs were more elaborate and more spectacular than these first simple and severe installations at the Nationalgalerie, but the sensation I felt then had the power of a completely new experience. It was at the same time unreal and magically poetic: when I saw for the first time a stepladder, an orange, a clock, a watermelon alongside masterworks by Kandinsky, Mondrian, Monet, for which, as most art historian, I had idolatrous respect, I knew I was witnessing a new departure not only in Dimitrijević's work, but in contemporary art in general. Because it was no longer a question of quoting the art of the past, a usual practice throughout art history, but of incorporating a master painting as an integral part of the newly created work.)

Triptychos Post Historicus is an elaborate combination of works of art from within the long Western pictorial tradition, anonymous utilitarian objects from everyday life and organic, living elements. According to the artist's theory the highly estimated masterpieces in the museums are subject to a specific historical evaluation that, frequently independent of their inner meaning, has become a part of the system of our tradition and culture. Dimitrijević intends to overcome this pattern; he views a work of art as the point of emanation for impulses that encourage newly created 'post-historical' art events.

In the *Triptychos Post Historicus* the disparate and incongruous find new semantic relationships. In these still life installations, the painting represents high art, the object everyday life and the fruit and vegetable stand for nature. "I want to abolish the classification which divides these three realms—art, everyday and nature," says the artist. The three objects all belong to different sign systems in our culture. Placed on the same platform, complex symbolic relationships start to develop between them. The semantic structure of *Triptychos Post Historicus* is analogous to Dimitrijević's other work—the *Dialectic Chapel*, in which a head of Leonardo stands alongside the portrait of Hundic. In a *Triptychos Post Historicus* a painting by Mondrian is juxtaposed with a bicycle belonging to Joop



Installing *Triptychos Post Historicus* with Kandinsky at the Nationalgalerie, Berlin, 1976

Sanders, whose name is stated in the title of the triptych. In this way the object is pulled out of anonymity and becomes personal, that is, a sign of the same order as a painting. What is disputed is not the painting itself but the blind respect we have for the art works in museums: proposed instead is a critical and creative reading of the art of the past and that of the present. Today Walter Benjamin's prophecy—that in an era of mechanical reproduction art will lose its cult value—has come through only as far as the image is concerned. Thanks to its reproducibility, the image has lost its aura and has been subjected to various recycling processes; but the fetish status of the painting as an object is stronger than ever, due to its ever-growing exchange value. Dimitrijević acts on the aura of the art work, breaching the taboo of the untouchability of art.

The *Triptychos Post Historicus* shakes the accepted hierarchy, according to which the painting would be always at the top, the object in the middle and the organic element at the bottom of the value scale. "In the *Triptychos* there is no first, second and third. Everything is at the same time first, second and third."²⁷ Once exposed on the same platform, which acts as a magical stage, each one of the three parts reveals its hidden identity: the painting its physical properties, such as a stretcher, back of a canvas, the labels from the museums it has traveled through. The object demonstrates a new evocative power. In the set up of *Triptychos* something of a painting aura reflects on the object. Instead of looking at them with the usual indifference we start deciphering their meanings, and the layers of their unknown past—the fates of their producers and one-time owners. "Just as paintings have their stories, so too do shovels and violins."²⁸ The fruit in the triptych is no longer just daily food, but becomes a metaphor for the eternal cycle of nature, birth, reproduction and death. It embodies the principle of dialectic: its obvious perishability stands in antithesis to the supposed immortality of artworks. The evident decay of this organic part of the *Triptychos* functions as a kind of *memento mori*. Its limited lifespan becomes a reminder that all our values, aesthetic ones included, are temporal, of a conventional nature and historically conditioned. These installations can also be interpreted as *vanitas*: we are reminded by the artist that paintings once praised by our ancestors, exhibited in salons and paid for dearly, can be found in the flea markets or in antiques shops for next to nothing; than less than 100 years ago El Greco was ignored, and that in a book on abstract art published in 1953, there was no mention of Malevich.

It is important to recall the contemporary art context in and against which Dimitrijević made his first *Triptychos Post Historicus*. The mid-seventies was a time when Conceptual art had already made its way into the mainstream, and was entering a decadent phase, becoming a style, identified no longer on the basis of its proposition but on the basis of its formal appearance. The desired look for an avant-garde work at the time was a Minimalist-derived, austere black and white presentation, and the media in vogue were photography and text. Although Conceptual art of the time rejected

Greenberg's formalism, it adhered to the evolutionist paradigm of art history and even more, it saw itself as the very goal, the ideal at which the whole progress of art aimed. Contrary to this Dimitrijević's artistic intuition led him to address art of the past in an era in which any such interest was condemned as both retrograde and heretical. Dimitrijević's choice is fully conscious as demonstrated in the chapter of *Tractatus Post Historicus* entitled "Style as a Form of Racism in Art":

"Style in fact is illustrative of the repressive mentality of an epoch, i.e., it is a kind of aggression which eliminates differences. Style is a lack of tolerance, aggression against the plurality of art concepts at a given moment."²⁹

When Dimitrijević saw that the use of the outdoor context had become common currency among the new generation of artists, he retreated to the museum. "When I realized that the idea of intervention in the street had become popular among other artists, I decided to move to the most elitist studio I could have - the museum. It was a gold mine for my type of activity, which is combination of sculpting, archaeology and anthropology."³⁰

The statement "The Louvre is my studio, the street is my museum" emphasizes the equal importance he attributes to these two places of work, in both of which he breaks the conventional rules. "The Louvre, the ideal museum, the archetype of the museum, is a mirror of the man of history, which reflects his need to freeze the spiritual through material vestiges which he classifies according to geographical and chronological order. The man of history is a man of fragmented vision, it could be said that he is a great painter of details. The time of history is the time of division and classifications of knowledge into separate compartments, of creating specialized institutions, one of which is the museum. Post History means abolishing the divisions in favor of a harmonious vision of the world. Posthistorical man seeks to unite the fragments into a new harmony. *Triptychos Post Historicus* is an expression of this synthetic vision and demonstrates the belief in the possibility of harmonious co-existence because our world is made neither of paintings, nor bicycles nor apples but of all these things together."³¹

After his first pioneering break into the treasures of the museum, Dimitrijević's chances of persuading another curator to join the adventure of *Triptychos Post Historicus* increased considerably. It is no exaggeration to say that a map showing the sites of the first *Triptychos* would also be a guide to the most creative and audacious museum curators of the time, because thirty years ago it took lot of courage and open-mindedness to let a young artist take the most precious works of the national collections off the walls and use them as a part of sculptural installations. It should be borne in mind that all later exhibitions playing around similar ideas happened 20 years

after Dimitrijević's pioneering *intrusion* in the museum collection and at the time when public opinion was already more receptive to similar kind of ideas.

During 1979 Dimitrijević exhibited *Triptychos Post Historicus* installations during his solo exhibitions at the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, Institute of Contemporary Arts in London and Badischer Kunstverein in Karlsruhe. The first group exhibitions to include triptychs was *Museum des Geldes* at the Kunsthalle Dusseldorf in 1978 and then *Art in Europe After '68*, held at the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst in Ghent in 1980. In 1984 he held two retrospectives, one at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne and subsequently another at the Bern Kunsthalle, both featuring an extensive number of installations using paintings borrowed from the Museum Ludwig and Kunstmuseum Bern.

The art work, object and fruit in the *Triptychos* become elements in a complex symbolic system, the meaning of which should be deciphered as the artist's reflection on the formal and philosophical aspects of the oeuvre of the painter in question, but also as a series of obsessional returns to the principal themes of his own artistic discourse. Lorand Hegyi remarks, "This simple combination of objects becomes a means of sensibilisation of history or a stimulus to overcome history as no longer applicable concept of the development of mankind. On the black bicycle the Post-historic artist enters straight into history mixing the temporal contexts of historical existence and blending different systems of references of visual art experience. They no longer function as authentic and exclusive structures, because we no longer believe in monolithic system of logical causality."³²

Dimitrijević's one-man exhibition at the Tate Gallery in 1985 included triptychs incorporating paintings from the British and the Modern collection—Stubbs, Turner, Sisley, Modigliani and Cezanne, among others. The triptych *Entrance to the Palace of Light* was the portrait of an epoch. Turner's *St. Benedetto, looking toward Fusina*, a masterpiece of proto-impressionism, is a painterly exploration of light. In the 19th Century both scientists and artists were fascinated by the question of light. Poets like Goethe, painters like Turner and Caspar David Friedrich, approached light as an aesthetic issue, anticipating the empirical and practical examination of the problem well before a physicist named Goebel invented the prototype of the light bulb. At the Tate Dimitrijević superimposed physical and pictorial light, by installing a light bulb in front of Turner's view of Venice, that is he *illuminated* a work by the master of painted light. The work juxtaposed science and art, which Dimitrijević sees as inseparable forms of human creativity. This "portrait" of the 19th-century was completed by two pineapples, set like capitals on two pedestals which stood as a gateway at the entrance to the 'palace of light'. The fruit referred to the period when Queen Victoria



Triptychos Post Historicus
Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 1978
I: *Composition XIV*, Piet Mondrian, 1913
II: Hans Biezen's guiar
III: Bananas

became Empress of India and the power of the Empire was reinforced through intensive commerce with the overseas colonies. A strong smell of a pineapple was sensed even in the rooms on the other side of the Tate and could serve as a guide to visitors to the exhibition.

Another triptych, *Repeated Secret*, exhibited for the first time during Dimitrijević's show at Tate and reconstructed two years later on the occasion of a group exhibition, became a subject of the agitated polemics—proof that the triptych procedure hits the very nerve of our preconceived idea about art, jeopardizing the fetish status conferred on painting in our cultural system. In the summer of 1987 this uproar reached the front page of *The Times* newspaper. Dimitrijević's harmonious still-life which connected the subject matter of Modigliani's *Little Peasant* with a period wardrobe and an agricultural product—a pumpkin—provoked a hostile reaction from one among the thousands of visitors to the Tate. In his letter to *The Times* he objected to the fact that “one of Modigliani's finest paintings has been used to wedge open at knee level the door of a clothes cupboard, the sort one might have come upon fifty year ago in a third-rate lodging house... Such treatment of a priceless treasure passed belief.”³³ The editorial reaction to the letter appeared on the front page of *The Times* under the headline “2.5 Modigliani props open a cupboard.” The letter showed that the reader's reaction was principally provoked by Dimitrijević's concept which gave equal consideration to a painting worth 2.5 million pounds and an object bought at the flea market. The artist comments that that the criticism “just made evident how some people approach art. They take it into consideration only if it's worth a few millions. They never consider under what circumstances it was made. Maybe in its original situation, this painting, in the first years of its existence (i.e. in Modigliani's studio) was placed in a similar situation, i.e. ‘third rate lodging house’. Modigliani was starving and living in poverty and possibly this very painting was leaning against a similar wardrobe near the cooker where he cooked his soup. For every person who knows a little about Modigliani's life it would be easy to imagine that it was more than just a possibility.”³⁴

“Anyway, how is it possible that Modigliani or Van Gogh died penniless if each of their paintings is worth millions?” asks the artist, referring again to the paradoxes inherent in ways of accepting, praising and evaluating art.

The body of *Triptychos Post Historicus* works is a philosophical system constructed by employing existing artworks, simple objects and fruits. “Together they form, as it were, a still-life, simple in that it consists of only few components, but complex in their interrelationships, and the questions they suggest,” wrote David Brown.³⁵

Additional to the generic title the *Triptychos* often have a second title. Fluent in five languages the

artist often makes puns in the titles of his works which combine several languages. The title not only indicates the meaning of a particular work, but often in the concise style of a verse, evokes the principal themes of Dimitrijević's artistic preoccupations.

In order to emphasize its transient nature the artist considers that a *Triptychos Post Historicus* is not an installation, but a constellation, because its elements are not in static relationships and united once forever. “They gravitate freely, everyone in its own galaxy, they met at an instant of Post-historic time in order to form a triptych and then go off in their own directions”³⁶ According to Dimitrijević's concept, these works are of a cyclic nature: they are assembled and disassemble, they come into being and disappear, but they can always be recreated. In the time between two installations the painting hangs in its usual room in the appropriate department, and only from time to time does “it come into the same orbit with objects and fruits.” The only remaining form is a photographic work issued from the *Triptychos* installation.

Although Dimitrijević is a conceptual artist par excellence, the visual aspect of his work is never neglected. None of the analysts of the triptychs have omitted to mention their aesthetic quality: their sculptural aspect, the chromatic harmony between the colors in the painting and the selected objects and fruits, the thoughtful relationship between the shape of the objects and the forms in the painting, the dynamism of the composition. Duan Sabo remarks on the union of conceptual and aesthetic achievement in the *Triptychos Post Historicus*. “Dimitrijević arranges the elements of his *Triptychos* not unlike the medieval painter, who decides in front of his drawing how to compose the elements into his three-part altarpiece. By the nature of his technique the artist is much closer to the medieval masters than it may first appear.”³⁷ For his part Lorand Hegyi writes: “In his work a radical confrontation between different cultural and sociological levels and processes of aesthetic perception link, however paradoxical it may sound, aesthetic arbitrariness, which can be almost as brutal and unconstrained as those of Occidental avant-gardes like Dadaism, Futurism and the Fluxus, with an almost transcendental and traditionalist cult of the image, which has its roots in the medieval tradition of worshipping icons. The aesthetic quality is what distinguishes Braco Dimitrijević's oeuvre from that of his contemporaries, who are more directly orientated either towards Duchampian intellectual tradition or towards the Futurist, Dadaist and activist tradition of the avant-garde world reformers.”³⁸

New Installations

At the beginning of the 1990s, Dimitrijević started a new cycle of work which successfully unites

the fundamental preoccupations of his earlier phases. A portrait—not, now, of an anonymous person, but of a well-known writer, painter, musician or scientist—becomes part of an installation with everyday objects and fruits. As in the rest of Dimitrijević's oeuvre there is a paradoxical twist: given the fact that the faces of the illustrious men of the past are much less known than their achievements, their portraits are nearly as anonymous as those of passers-by. Starting from these elements Dimitrijević develops an authentic artistic vocabulary for transmitting metaphorical meanings.

The installations with portraits of people who are today commonly recognized as geniuses, but were ignored during their lifetime, issue from Dimitrijević's critique of the social automatism of rejecting new ideas at the time of their appearance. He coined the term Geniuscide in order to point out the constraints placed on the spirit: unlike genocide, atrocities against entire people, Geniuscide is a silent peacetime crime against creative individuals. This is more than a simple lamentation on the tragic destiny of genius; in Dimitrijević's artistic system it primarily refers to the limits of perception, a certain myopia caused by blind respect for the values imposed by tradition and education. Why were Malevich, Kafka and Modigliani all isolated, known only to a small circle of initiates during their lifetimes, then discovered and glorified years after their deaths? Dimitrijević made a work dealing with this theme, entitled *Between Eternity and Geniuscide*, at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Four photo portraits of those three artists plus the scientist Nikola Tesla were stuck in a big pile of red beans, filling the corner of the room. Tesla, the man who according to some biographers, "invented the 20th century" and who, despite some 1,300 inventions registered at the USA Patent Bureau (including the one of AC-DC current), is still, at the beginning of the 21st century, almost completely unknown, is a paradigmatic example of Geniuscide. In front of each portrait was a burning remembrance candle, in reminder of all the geniuses rejected because of inertia and the constrictions of the human spirit, and equally of those whose ideas may wait for centuries to pass through the filters of acceptability or to be rediscovered.

The work *Thin Edge of History* (2005) consists of series of photographic portraits of the Russian Constructivists—Rodchenko, Tatlin, Larionov, Popova, and the poet Mayakovski—hung two feet above floor level. Against each portrait leans a broken pane of glass resting on a pair of old shoes, suggesting departure and absence. Between the top of the glass pane and the wall is inserted an egg, giving the whole composition an appearance of extreme fragility, precariousness and imminent danger. The work is a reflection on the relationship between the political and artistic avant-gardes at the time of the October Revolution: their passionate reunion at the beginning, and their dramatic split at the end. Dimitrijević points to the "thin edge" which divided the artists' initial euphoric participation in the Great Social Utopia, from the later reluctance to identify with political

pragmatism, which led to their personal and artistic calamities in the "purges of consciousness." As in the *Triptychos Post Historicus*, so in these new installations, by establishing and restructuring the symbolic relationships between the three families of objects, the artist founds another strategy for readdressing central concerns of his work—history and the history of art, moral issues connected with forging the myths of art, methods of selection of values for posterity and the rejection of new ideas at the time of their appearance.

Culturescapes: Savage Harmony

Under the headline "Peacocks in Cork Street," *The Times* announced an event at the Waddington Gallery in London, in September 1981. The event was the opening of Dimitrijević's one-man show at the gallery, for which a *tableau* was set up. In the middle of the gallery, surrounded by Picasso, Monet and Matisse paintings, a pair of living peacocks, their tails opened wide, paraded amongst gilded stones. Evelyn Weiss described the situation: "The birds wandered about in their surroundings, utterly oblivious to the masterpieces, yet because of the form and color of their feathered dress, they harmonized strikingly with the paintings. The similarity and the contrast between art and nature were shown in a strange and disconcerting manner. Art in nature is programmatically confronted with nature in art. Art in the background, the traditional mythology resonates too: the peacocks, associated with the goddess Juno, are also symbols of pride, beauty, and of a clear and good vision. Nonetheless, the two peacocks were apparently blind to their surrounding; as living creatures they stalked about without seeing or understanding the gold under their feet or the art above their heads."³⁹

This work, entitled *Dust of Louvre and Mist of Amazon*, was the first of Dimitrijević's *tableaux* to confront living animals with artworks and artifacts, signs of culture. The numerous complex symbolic meanings of animals in more or less distant mythologies, legends and religions, the experience of which is deposited deep in our collective unconscious, become an active element in these installations. At the end of 1970s the term *Culturescape* was coined by Dimitrijević to denote "art which seeks its inspiration in the field of existing art and culture; establishes new structures out of previously known elements; explores the meanings and relationships of different cultural data; escapes from traditional value judgments."⁴⁰

In 1983, the artist made a series of animal installations in the zoological garden of his hometown. Subsequently a series of photographic pieces was produced as well as video entitled *Four Culturescapes*. One of the works shows a majestic couple of lions who seem to be jealously

guarding the artist-as-child represented in two portraits: a portrait of the artist at the age of five, painted by his father Vojo, and a portrait bust modeled by the sculptress Iva Despic. In this surreal archetypal family scene, the wet walls of the concrete cage appear as a primeval dwelling—the cave. The title *Memories of Childhood*, may be less related to the artist's past, than to the childhood of mankind, the time of prehistory, which is another recurrent metaphor in Dimitrijević's work. "I make the work with the animals to try to learn about men."⁴¹ Like fables these works have a power to reveal human falsehood through the qualities that we attribute to animals. The artist was frequently asked whether lions or leopards ever attacked a painting or cello. With characteristic wit, Dimitrijević answered that the question was typical of human logic because what could possibly motivate a lion to attack a cello or a painting, that is a piece of wood and canvas that he can't eat. He adds that this kind of question demonstrates nothing but man's mental impotence manifested in aggression towards art and ideas in general which he does not accept or is unable to understand.

In 1998 Dimitrijević undertook an adventurous enterprise—he made another one-man exhibition in an unusual place—the Menagerie du Jardin des Plantes in Paris. In this, the oldest zoo in the world, founded in 1794 and preserved in its original state, the artist presented 20 installations in the cages of jaguars, panthers, lions and crocodiles, bringing face to face wild animals with works of art and artifacts. The exhibition, aimed equally at the general public as well as the contemporary art public, lasted 5 months and attracted 1 million visitors. It was reviewed by the international press of some 30 countries and received repeated CNN Television coverage.

With a gesture, both humble and grand, the artist offers his works to the gaze of the animals. The elegance and dignity of animals is enhanced by the presence of art works, associated in our consciousness with notions of beauty and spirituality.

On the one of the Ménagerie's lawns five bronze cast cellos were planted into the earth, next to four busts of Erik Satie on marble pedestals. The flock of pink flamingos got on with its life in the midst of a work of art, whose scale was thoughtfully adapted to the size of these delicate, long legged creatures. Every day visitors witnessed the strange ballet of the birds' elegant movements amongst the symbols of musical harmony.

In another installation, in the presence of a black leopard, a Gaboesque head evoked the origin of Cubist sculpture in African art. These works juxtaposed culture with nature, but on another level they can be interpreted as the confrontation of two cultural models: the Western, represented by the paintings or artifacts, with the model of non-Western cultures, which live in much greater

harmony with nature. In these works the animals become a means of relativizing the absolute superiority of our model of science, philosophy and art and act as metaphors of Otherness; they serve to mirror our value system, and condemn our Eurocentric and anthropocentric arrogance.

In his statement "If one looks down at Earth from the Moon, there is virtually no distance between the Louvre and the zoo," the artist proposes a cosmic perspective, a view from the moon, because if we get far enough away from rigid scientific taxonomies and the unreserved belief in the classifiability of all things and beings, we may discover a new, as yet unknown dimension of reality.

The Ethics of Form or Aesthetics of Logic

When we look at Dimitrijević's apparently heterogeneous oeuvre, an authentic and consistent artistic philosophy takes shape before our eyes and mind, an interlaced web of philosophic, aesthetic and thematic preoccupations, the expression of the most profound strata of the artist's psyche and spirit, to which, in some kind of spiral cyclical movement, he keeps returning. These preoccupations are a mistrust of history, a reflection of the social factors determining fame and anonymity, and on society's general intolerance towards new ideas, its rejection and excommunication of visionary thinkers, in short, a whole series of moral and philosophical issues which surround and condition the field of creativity. On another level, his work also deals with metaphysical questions of chance, perception, the understanding of nature and culture and, ultimately, like every significant artistic or philosophical system, with cognition of the world.

In the first phase of his work at the end of the sixties, out of the need to revolutionize both the methodology and the place of the production and exhibition of art, Dimitrijević situated his artistic practice in the city, at the very heart of the dominant ideology's value system. For the artist the street, i.e. the city, is not just an alternative to the gallery and museum context; his outdoor interventions differ from the various Situationist practices of the early 1960s, including Fluxus, as well as from the Land and Earth Art interventions in landscape. Instead of a romantic escape into the idealized world of nature he chooses the city as the privileged arena of ideological meanings. From 1969 onwards, his work sets up an extensive alternative semiological system in order to undermine the dominant sign system.

Dimitrijević's practice of inserting alternative meanings in the cityscape was not only at least a decade and a half ahead of similar attempts in the eighties, but it has the witty edge of poetic anarchy and efficiency of message which are often lacking from the works of his followers, mostly

reduced to the didactic, 'have your heart in the right place' exercises. New York curator and writer Diego Cortez wrote on the impact of Dimitrijević's work on the next generation of artists: "Dimitrijević, besides being a seminal artist from the international art movement known as Conceptual art, was also a seminal founder of what we now accept as a vital part of today's artistic expression - public art. Artists today, such as Americans Jenny Holzer, Keith Haring and Barbara Kruger, have strongly evolved this attempt to move art into the streets to the public, and out of the safety of the gallery and museum system. Dimitrijević's early photographic works or photographs-on-photosensitive linen works are of the utmost importance to this art-historical development. These works possess the democratic reference to chance, as the casual passers-by have all been selected at random from the streets of Zagreb, Venice, Berlin and New York."⁴²

Lorand Hegyi defines Dimitrijević's position in relation to the following period in art: "Although he gained an international reputation as a conceptual artist in the seventies, his paradigmatic individual position became clear several years later and he directly influenced numerous artists of the next decade. There are a few 1980s artists who expressed a conscious skepticism about history, as Braco Dimitrijević had already done in the seventies, formulating his ideas with unprecedented force and radicalism in the book *Tractatus Post Historicus* which appeared as early as 1976... Dimitrijević's "ars poetica" not only heralds the acceptance of pluralism and the co-existence of contradictory concepts and aesthetic strategies, but it requires the artist to become an active and integral part of the Post-historic era. The direct confrontation in art of various levels of experience becomes a metaphor for the experiences of the multicultural media society of the '80s and '90s, in which unequivocal, closed homogenous information structures no longer exist."⁴³

In many respects Dimitrijević's polemical essay from 1976 foreshadowed a number of ideas relating to History, progress, originality and style that have become dominant within the theories and practices of Postmodernism. *Tractatus Post Historicus* was published four years before Charles Jencks coined the term "Postmodernism" in architectural theory (which would later be overtaken by art theory). Not only was Dimitrijević's practice some 15 years ahead of the various deconstruction and decontextualization strategies of the eighties, but there was also a fundamental difference between Dimitrijević's model of Post History and Postmodernism. The wide span of styles that Dimitrijević employs results from the very nature of his artistic discourse, from a need to mimic various modern and traditional forms of symbolizing social importance. This variety of materials, techniques and forms employed, was in sharp contrast to the austere Conceptual black and white aesthetics of the time. The simultaneous use of marble and modern technologies, anticipates the pluralism of media employed in Postmodernism and Neo-Conceptual art.

Another important aspect of Dimitrijević's work is his redefinition of the notion of authenticity or originality. When he speaks about the "juxtaposition of ready aesthetics," of using already existing art materials and forms, he heralds a whole set of issues discussed later by the artists of appropriation tendencies. His freedom of operation within various aesthetic paradigms announced the deliverance from the dictates of stylistic purity in art, and heralded the Postmodernist interest in the forms and styles of the past. In his treatise, the artist qualifies the adherence to one style as a form of "racism in art, intolerance which eliminates the differences." The concept of Post History results from Dimitrijević's belief that art shouldn't be restricted by boundaries of style, material or technique, but should use all the media at its disposal. But here all similarity ends. Whilst the concept of Post History is an ethical model, a hypothetical era, in which the hierarchy of values ceases to exist, the eclectic deployment of the empty shells of past styles characteristic of Postmodernism results from the disillusioned state of mind at the end of the millennium. Postmodernist theory in art appeared in an era of deep economic and moral crisis, as a theoretical alibi for a conformist and from the beginning a corrupted artistic generation. Dimitrijević formulates the distinction in the following way: "Postmodernism is a formalistic movement, the product of a cynical state of mind, and without ethical foundation. Post History means a principle of another ethic; it presupposes a dynamic vision, another view of our legacy, and this view is synoptical and results in the model of annihilation of all hierarchies and classifications. I'm talking simply about the ethics of form and the aesthetics of logic. Postmodernism is the form without the concept; Post History, on the contrary is a diversity of forms which originate from the need to communicate a concept."⁴⁴ Later the artist would add, referring to the model of art history as formal evolution: "I am not interested in small formal shifts, in inventing useless objects, in adding more words to the vocabulary of nonsense."⁴⁵

Post History is primarily a philosophico-ethical proposition calling for disobedience towards the authority of History and establishing a polemical relationship with the inherited values in art and culture. Dimitrijević's oeuvre attacks our concept of linear history, our Monument-History and the rationalist ideal of progress. The method of attack is the introduction of chance, the unpredictable and unexpected. Chance has a power of revealing historical time to be dead time, a time of marble and bronze, fixed forever in its silence of anaesthetized meaning. Post History introduces a poetic disorder, chance, and the unprecedented into the linear, directional time of history. It includes both the known and unknown, because according to the artist "the unknown is the richest field of all."

"Dimitrijević's art speaks of openness rather than closure and the endless if chaotic, possibility for new contingencies. There is a willingness to admit into one's assessment of things, values and ideas which exist outside the mainstream, the fixed or the given. Dimitrijević juxtaposes order (that

of art history and of the art museum) with a kind of disorder, fluidity or flux which inevitably results from an engagement with a living culture and all of the variety, complexity, plurality and anomaly that the word 'living' implies. The artist's analysis of the past becomes an optimistic metaphor for the future. The seeds of speculation are scattered brightly in the night sky.”⁴⁶

Triptychos Post Historicus marks a new phase in the definition of the Posthistorical dimension. The decision to integrate an existing work of art into a newly created work is without precedent, and its transgressional power can be compared to Duchamp's introduction of the ready-made in art. Dimitrijević's artistic discourse produced two schools of followers: artists who intervene in the ideological intention of the city by inscribing alternative messages, and artists who employ various appropriation strategies in addressing past art styles.

“Unlike a number of current appropriation artists who recycle and recontextualize different styles from art history in their painting, Dimitrijević is not and never has been a simulation artist. The creation of situations that are present, concrete and temporal, is seminal to his strategy as a radical interventionist, an artist intent upon revealing other ways of viewing the world. An unusual ability for creative, lateral thinking is at work in the art of Braco Dimitrijević. His is a capacity for intuitive and inventive vision closely allied to the processes of speculation and a passion for discovering new or different meanings within older familiar formulae. Dimitrijević's body of work proposes the artist as amateur historian, philosopher, scientist, storyteller and strategist whose investigative spirit reaches beyond the confines of any medium or style. He brings to light fresh insights, drawing connections between things previously thought to be disparate; viewing things, as it were, from the moon. He is the artist as traveler in space and time. And all of this at a time in world history when a lateral, heuristic vision may be just what is needed.”⁴⁷

One of Dimitrijević's poetic strategies for dissolving history is his authentic concept of Time. In an interview the artist said, “The whole of history is not as rich as one second of Post-historic time.”⁴⁸

To historical time, with its division into frozen fragments, the artist opposes a paradox of Time as a subjective category. The time of this work is either infinitesimally condensed, or endlessly expanded. The international exhibition *At the Moment* lasted only three hours; *Accidental Sculpture* had a lifespan of only a few seconds; the *Casual Passer-by* works specify the hour and the minute of the meeting but not the day; the obelisk in Charlottenburg paradoxically celebrates a date, while omitting the year. Measured by existing conventions, the three-hour duration of an exhibition may seem improper, the few seconds of the sculpture's lifespan may have been insufficient, but then, as the artist seems to be asking, what is any duration of human time compared with the life of the

universe? What is this infinitesimally small particle of time, the instant which represents a length of human life, or even whole periods of history measured by the age of the universe? Dimitrijević introduces subjective time, the time of an ephemeral art work; the meeting with an unknown person becomes as important as any thousand year dynasty, or any “eternal” monument, because any case “In the cosmos eternity does not exist.”⁴⁹ Public figures come and leave the stage of politics and life; some war ends and another begins; all that remains from this universal history of dishonor are subjectively and casually chosen road signs which sometimes pass for history. To the diachronic time of history the artist opposes a synchronic, poetic model, a hypothetical moment of Post History in which things and beings exist simultaneously: past and present, anonymous passer-by and artist painting and object, meet in another dimension, a dimension contemporaneous to the present. It would not be wrong to say that this work exists in oriental, rather than in western temporality. Western time is linear, defined by accumulation, acceleration and finality. Oriental time is cyclical, defined by slackness and repetition. Borges quotes a certain Arabian writer from the 11th Century, by the name of Alberuni who said “Hindus care little about the order of historical facts, or the succession of kings. If asked about it they will invent no matter what as an answer.”⁵⁰ The truth, however blasphemous it may sound, is that to him the ideas are more important than the dates and names. “For Hindus who study philosophy, different doctrines are perfectly contemporaneous,” comments Borges.⁵¹ Is not a similar idea reflected in Dimitrijević's statement that “The thought from two thousand years ago and one to come in two thousand years from now are meeting in the same instant in the post-historical dimension?”⁵²

Dimitrijević's artistic philosophy is close to Eastern thought in yet another respect. He succeeds in introducing moral categories into philosophical and abstract notions such as history, time, universe, and form. *Triptychos Post Historicus* represents Dimitrijević's characteristic opposition of irreducibly different temporalities. There is the time of history, contained in works of art, together with men's projections of eternity; there is the time of man, daily life represented by ordinary tools or objects, and there is the time of nature, contained in the life of fruit. The fruit, apparently perishable, is in fact the only eternal element in this triad because of its capacity for self-reproduction.

In accordance with his artistico-philosophical system, the artist argues that prehistory belongs to the Posthistorical Dimension. If Post History proposes a harmonious vision of the world, prehistory in Dimitrijević's interpretation is some sort of lost paradise, an era before the fragmentation of knowledge and creativity into various disciplines. He names prehistory “the time of primary needs,” because in that period everyone did what he was most capable of: prehistory is a state of society free of the fakes of history and the manipulation of the modern mass-media. The importance of this

idea in Dimitrijević's work confirms a project of connecting the prehistoric cave and the museum with a symbolic gesture. The first act of this piece dates from 1970, when as a young artist, he obtained permission to sleep for a few hours in a museum, "surrounded by art like caveman," as a part of his project of domesticating art. The second act was one-man exhibition he held in the prehistoric cave of Lascaux in the presence of a very limited number of visitors. The artist exhibited seven chalk drawings on canvas with the motif of the bison's head combined with his recurrent references, the names of Kafka, Tesla, Ben Akiba, or Einstein's formula, that is, references to both scientific and artistic creativity. Lascaux is a very important metaphor in Dimitrijević's work. "For me it represents the time when man's talent and skill had to be used to their full extent to enable him to survive. In those days, as now is only sometimes is the case, art was a cognitive process, it was art, philosophy and science at the same time. So, the wall of Lascaux was at once painting, notebook, scientist's blackboard, the book of writer and reader, and the cave was all in one—home, studio, gallery, library and museum."⁵³

The artist sees Lascaux as an expression of undivided creativity, in opposition to today's civilization of the infinite division and classification of knowledge, a process which deprives us of comprehension of the world in its totality. It is the expression of total creativity, that is, the intuitive faculty of the spirit to comprehend the essence of the world.

Dimitrijević's discourse amounts to a coherent critique of Eurocentrism. His attack on historical determinism refers to the crises of Cartesian logic, which is at the foundation of Western philosophy and epistemology. In his work, the animals as untamed nature stand as a metaphor for the savage mind, as an antinomy to the supremacy of western thought.

Johannes Cladders, legendary director of the Städtisches Museum Monchengladbach and one of the curators of Documenta 5, came to the conclusion that Dimitrijević's work is to be recognized only by the artist's characteristic pattern of thought, or by his individual artistic philosophy. "His style, that is the thing that is always present in his oeuvre, by which it can be identified as his, is of a conceptually formal rather than *gestalt-formal* nature."⁵⁴ This philosophy finds its expression not only in the visual arts, but also in music and literature.⁵⁵

Dimitrijević has written fiction and poetry throughout his adult life. In 1995, a collection of some hundred stories was published in Paris under the title *Histoires de Prix Nobel*.⁵⁶ It is a literary expression of his preoccupation with art history, the destinies of artists and the paradoxes inherent in accepting, judging and interpreting art. If history and art history are a fiction, then the artist responds to this situation by making his own creative fictions. For this new genre, he coined the

term, "fiction-criticism," because it blends from the artist's specific point of view historical personalities with anonymous names or invented characters, known facts with fictive events, determinism with indeterminism. It would be wrong to consider Leonardo, Tintoretto, Picabia or Duchamp as the main protagonists of these parables, even if they do figure in them, just as do a cheese-maker, a bank-clerk or the railway worker who composed a symphony by installing railway tracks in a particular rhythm. However, the key figure of these stories is Chance, that is, the relativism which introduces doubt into historical facts, upsets established hierarchies, and proposes a fresh and polemical view of the past and present of creation. One should not be deceived by the humorous tone of Dimitrijević's narrative. Its apparent lightness and paradoxical turns conceal serious moral issues: like the rest of Dimitrijević's oeuvre, they defend individual creativity, talent and independent thought against the constraints of power, conformism and the authority of History.

Braco Dimitrijević's intention is to shake our belief in certainties—those of history, of art, and ultimately of our entire monocentric view of the world. The aim of this prolific, heterogeneous and multifaceted activity is to point to the diversity and richness of possibilities that open up before our eyes once we break the narrow cells of the edifice of history. Once freed from rigid preconceptions, we can start looking around with an open and altruistic mind, can start to consider new ideas when they appear, and to accept different concepts of art, life and philosophy. As the clocks are ticking ever faster, the need for it has become ever more evident at the present time, the time of the twilight of history. Perhaps then we will get a little closer to "the space with no history, no fixed beliefs, no final truth, to the time of multi-angular viewing and the coexistence of different values," that is, to the spiritual coordinates of the Posthistorical Dimension.

Notes

1. Unattributed quotations are from the author's interviews with Braco Dimitrijević.
2. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, New York, 1971, p. 148.
3. "...the text requires that one try to abolish (or at the very least to diminish) the distance between writing and reading, in no way by intensifying the projection of the reader into the work but by joining them in a single signifying practice. The distance separating reading from writing is historical." (Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *Image-Music-Text*, New York, 1977, p. 162).
4. Braco Dimitrijević in the catalogue of one-man show at the Galerija SC, Zagreb, quoted in the Tate Gallery, *Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions 1982-84*, London, 1986, p. 145.
5. Catherine Millet, "The Part of Risk," *Braco Dimitrijević*, exhibition catalogue Museum Moderner Kunst, Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna, 1994, p. 56.
6. Nena Dimitrijević quoted in "Another Moment," *Studio International*, London, vol. 183, no. 941, p.74.
7. Braco Dimitrijević, *Tractatus Post Historicus*, Edition Dacic Tubingen 1976.
8. Braco Dimitrijević, "Towards a New Way of Behaviour," *Studio International*, London, February 1974, vol. 187, no. 963.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Braco Dimitrijević, "The Ethics of Forms and Aesthetics of Logic," *Tractatus*, *op. cit.*
11. Caroline Tisdall, "Notes for a friend," in Braco Dimitrijević, exhibition catalogue Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, 1973.
12. Guy Brett, "Private Faces in Public Places," *The Times*, 18.4, London, 1972.
13. Braco Dimitrijević, ERC System, in *Tractatus*, *op. cit.*
14. Braco Dimitrijević, "Towards a New Way of Behaviour," *Studio International*, *op. cit.*
15. Caroline Tisdall, "The man, the myth and the artist," *The Guardian*, London 25.4.1972.
16. Braco Dimitrijević interviewed by Bruce Ferguson, ex. cat. *Rhetorical Image*, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1990. p. 42.
17. Stuart Morgan, "A Rhetoric of Silence," *British Sculpture in the Twentieth Century*, published by Nicholas Serota, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 1981, p. 172.
18. Thomas Deecke, "An Obelisk for 11th March" in *Braco Dimitrijević: An Obelisk Beyond History*, DAAD, Berlin, 1979.
19. Braco Dimitrijević, "Myth is the Best Investment—Formal Innovation. Macro and Micro Style," *Tractatus*, *op. cit.*
20. Braco Dimitrijević, "ERC System," *Tractatus*, *op.cit.*
21. Braco Dimitrijević, "Formal Non-Originality: Principle of Ready Aesthetics," *Tractatus*, *op.cit.*
22. Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," *Mythologies*, New York, 1972, p. 121.
23. Braco Dimitrijević, "Two Logical Spaces, Artificial Myth or Aesthetic of Logic," *Tractatus*, *op.cit.*
24. Interview by Judith Aminoff with Braco Dimitrijević, in "10 Years of Post History: Tractatus Post Historicus Revisited," exhibition catalogue Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Ludwigshafen, 1987, p. 70.
25. Braco Dimitrijević in *Tractatus*, *op. cit.*
26. Braco Dimitrijević in ex. cat., *Dimension Dimitrijević: Rooms and Thoughts*, Municipal Galleries Piran, 1991.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. Braco Dimitrijević in "Style as a Form of Racism in Art" in *Tractatus*
30. Frank Perrin & Olivier Zahm. "Beyond Dualism: Interview with Braco Dimitrijević," *Dimension Dimitrijević: Rooms and Thoughts*, *op. cit.*
31. Braco Dimitrijević, "Louvre is my studio, street is my museum," *The Post-historic Times*, Paris-London-New York, 1993.
32. Lorand Hegyi, "Braco Dimitrijević: an artist of the Post-Historic era," ex. cat., *B. D.*, Museum Moderner Kunst, Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna 1994, p. 25.
33. Letter to the editor, *The Times*, 15.7, London, 1987.

34. Zelimir Koscevic, "Interview with Braco Dimitrijević," *NIKE—New Art in Europe*, no. 28, May-June 1989, p. 27.
35. David Brown, ex. cat., *Braco Dimitrijević*, Tate Gallery, London, 1985.
36. Braco Dimitrijević, "Louvre Is My Studio, Street Is My Museum," *The Post-historic Times*, Paris-London-New York, 1993.
37. Duan Sabo, "Braco Dimitrijević," *Flash Art*, no. 132, Summer 1985, p. 69.
38. Lorand Hegyi, *op. cit.*, p. 45-46.
39. Evelyn Weiss, "Chance: History-Evolution:Freedom," ex. cat., *Braco Dimitrijević: Culturescapes, 1976-1984*, Kunsthalle Bern/ Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 1984, p.19.
40. Braco Dimitrijević quoted by Adrian Morris in ex. cat., *Braco Dimitrijević: Culturescapes, 1976-1984*, Kunsthalle Bern/ Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 1984, p.132.
41. Braco Dimitrijević in interview with Jean Hubert-Martin, ex. cat., *Braco Dimitrijević - The Man of Lascaux*, Museum of Modern Art Ljubljana, 1996.
42. Diego Cortez in "The Bulletin of Braco Dimitrijević's show at Fundacion San German," San German, Puerto Rico, USA, September 1991, P. 2.
43. Lorand Hegyi, *op. cit.*
44. Zelimir Koscevic, "Interview with Braco Dimitrijević," *op. cit.*
45. Braco Dimitrijević, *Dimension Dimitrijević: Rooms and Thoughts*, *op. cit.*
46. Sue Cramer, ex. cat., *Braco Dimitrijević*, Institute of Modern Art and Queensland Art Gallery Brisbane, 1989.
47. Sue Cramer, *op. cit.*
48. Frank Perrin & Olivier Zahm, "Beyond Dualism: Interview with Braco Dimitrijević," *Dimension Dimitrijević*, *op. cit.*
49. Braco Dimitrijević, *Dimension Dimitrijević Rooms and Thoughts*, *op. cit.*
50. Jorge Luis Borges, "Qu'est-ce que le Bouddhisme?," Paris: Gallimard, 1979, p. 25.
51. *Ibid.*
52. Braco Dimitrijević, "Rooms and Thoughts," *op. cit.*
53. Braco Dimitrijević in The Tate Gallery, *Illustrated Catalogue...*, p. 149.
54. Johannes Cladders, "Braco Dimitrijević," in cat. *Braco Dimitrijević, Dan Graham, On Kawara, Roman Opalka*, DAAD/Galerie Rene Block, Berlin, 1977.
55. As a young artist Dimitrijević composed concrete music based on chance. In the mid-1960s he composed music as everything between two silences. His participation in the Music Biennale in Zagreb in 1970, consisted of all the mistakes and the sounds produced by chance in the recitals during the Biennale performances. In 1993, he composed three pieces of music; *Tokyo Bauer*, *Kassel-Wimbledon*, and *Pythagora*. They were composed, as the artist puts it, in a "Free Bach style," and written for organs, strings, a French horn and one vocalist. As a visiting professor at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1993, Dimitrijević realized with students the opera *Leonardo-Simčić*, consisting of some 35 voices pronouncing alternately the names of famous artists and unknown persons. He directed it by indicating to the performers how many voices (the number being chosen beforehand by chance) should pronounce each name.
56. Braco Dimitrijević, *Histoires de Prix Nobel*, Paris: Editions de la Tempete, 1995.



Triptychos Post Historicus or Hopes and Ways to Identify
Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 1990
I: *Le beaux ténébreux*, René Magritte, 1950
II: Coats from Mea She'arim, hats gift of David Redberg
III: Apples
Collection: Israel Museum, Jerusalem

Braco Dimitrijević: An Artist of the Post-Historic Era Lóránd Hegyi

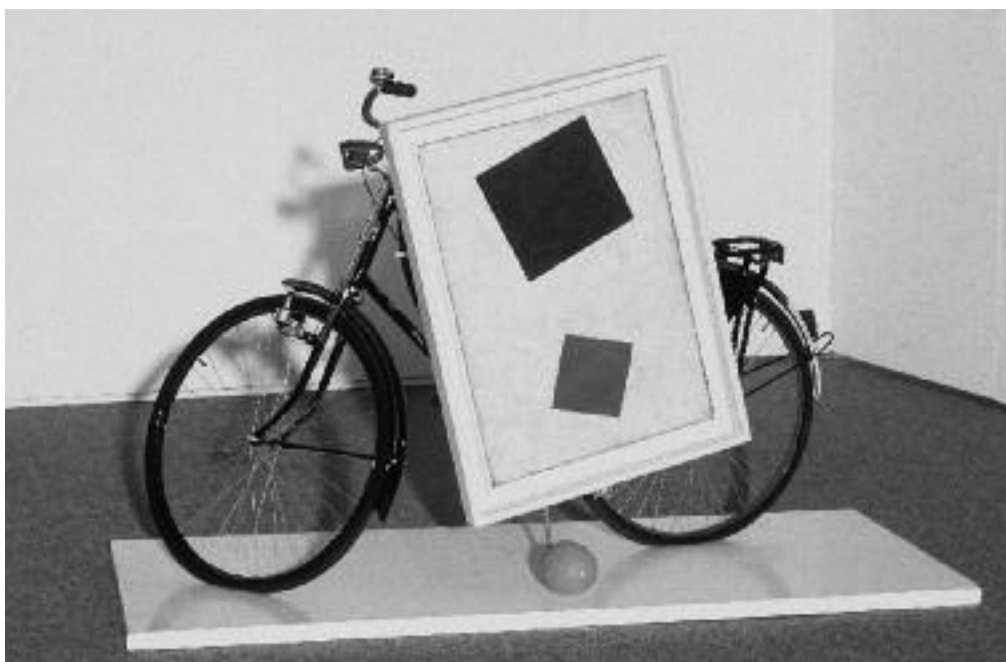
The work, as much as personality of Braco Dimitrijević, is a concise and clear expression of an artistic attitude which incarnates, from a radically subjective point of view, all the problematic of this century coming to its close. “Radically subjective” refers not only to the artist’s personal life, his peregrinations which have led him from Sarajevo to London, and later to New York and finally to Paris, or the multiculturalism of his family and friends, but also his artistic position which made him overcome the antagonism maintained and mystified by history and politics, between art of the West and art of the East, between freedom and oppression, between progressive avant-garde and regressive official state art. Although he gained an international reputation as a conceptual artist in the seventies, his paradigmatic individual position became clear several years later and he directly influenced numerous artists of the next decade. There are a few eighties artists who expressed the conscious scepticism about history, as Braco Dimitrijević had already done in the seventies, formulating with unprecedented force and radicalism, his ideas in the book *Tractatus Post Historicus* which appeared as early as 1976.

In his work a radical confrontation between different cultural and sociological levels and processes of aesthetic perception link, however paradoxical it may sound, aesthetic arbitrariness, which can be almost as brutal and unconstrained, as those of the occidental avant-gardes like Dadaism, Fututurism and the Fluxus movement, with an almost transcendental and traditionalist cult of image, which has its roots in the orthodox tradition of the worshipping icons. This aesthetic quality is what distinguishes Braco Dimitrijević’s oeuvre from that of his contemporaries, who are more directly orientated either towards the Duchampian intellectual tradition or towards Futurist, Dadaist and activist tradition of the avant-garde world reformers.

In an interview with Frank Perrin and Olivier Zahm (“Beyond Dualism,” 1991) Braco Dimitrijević said “The whole of history is not so rich as 1 second of Post-historical time” referring to the unlimited numbers of possibilities available to the artist of Post-historic era, in which there is neither any longer lineal historic development nor the necessary logical structures—fatalist and mechanical—



Triptychos Post Historicus or At the Start of the Milky Way
Museum Moderner Kunst, Palais Liechtenstein, Vienna, 1994
I: Portraits of the Tarzia Family, Venetian Masters of the 15th–17th century
II: Yamaha motorbikes
III: Melons



Triptychos Post Historicus
Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Ludwigshafen, 1985
I: *Black and Red Square*, Kazimir Malevich, 1915
II: Bernhard Holeczek's bicycle
III: Melon
Collection: Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Ludwigshafen

to determine the “direction” and “goal” of history; history itself is radically put into question and the juxtaposition of various semantic systems and levels of references become perfectly legitimate. Dimitrijević’s “ars poetica” not only heralded the acceptance of pluralism and coexistence of contradictory concepts and aesthetic strategies, but it requires that the artist himself/herself becomes active and integral part of the Post-historic era. Dimitrijević’s radical interventions into history do not mean acceptance of the earlier stylistic formulae, not the harmonisation between past and present, and even less changing the aesthetic roles—which would allow some poetic licence for emphatic strategies—but quite the opposite, calling history per se into question. The direct confrontation in art of various levels of experience becomes a metaphor for the experiences of the multi-cultural media society of the 80s and 90s, in which unequivocal, closed, homogenous, information structures no longer exist.

Characteristically, Braco Dimitrijević transfers certain meanings from the area of culture to the fields outside of it and conversely, makes an aesthetic apology and even an over-evaluation of different non-cultural phenomena, which are thus “elevated” into the realm of culture. This deliberate confusion of different levels of references and the mixing of art signs and symbols with non-artistic languages, produces an evident eclecticism which does not refer as much to art, as to the experience of the crisis of history and historical consciousness.

When Braco Dimitrijević presents a painting by Kazimir Malevich together with a black bicycle and a yellow melon, he at a first level mixes the processes of aesthetic perception and on a second creates a completely new, radically eclectic structure, which does not exclude a poetic reconstruction of a historically possible situation. The first level allows a formal and phenomenological reading: at the same time Malevich’s black and red square and the circular shape of the bicycle wheel blend into one geometric formal structure, while the yellow Catseye on the rear wheel and a yellow melon seem like a complementary forms. Thus the non-objective world of Suprematism loses its transcendency and image becomes a part of the world of objects. On the other hand, ordinary objects from everyday life (the bicycle and the melon) are taken out of their functional, practical and utilitarian context and integrated into an universal, non-objective formal structure. However, the essence of this aesthetic restructuring is not fully grasped until we start to explore the second level of meaning: the black bicycle carries Malevich’s painting as if it was a parcel, like a postman delivering his letters. The autonomous aesthetic universe of Malevich’s non-objective suprematism becomes a portable object, a concrete physical thing which contains a hidden message, just as a sealed envelop contains a letter. It recalls in our memory certain images from cultural history, for instance the “agit-prop” trains of the October Revolution in Russia or geometric and abstract forms painted on the wooden panels for the big mass demonstrations; this

simple combination of objects becomes a means of sensibilisation of history or stimulus to overcome history as a no longer applicable concept of the development of the mankind. On the black bicycle the Post-historic artist enters straight into history mixing the temporal contexts of historical existence and blending different systems of references of visual art experience. They no longer function as authentic and exclusive structures, because we no longer believe in monolithic systems of logical causality.

For both West and East, the art historical significance of Braco Dimitrijević's oeuvre lies in its ability to make us aware of our relationship to history, that is to the different possibilities for the activity of artists and intellectuals. He is the first artist from the former Eastern Europe and the radical representative of the new artistic consciousness who does not accept the heroic and missionary role of avant-garde prophet who brings current Western trends to the East, neither does he accept the role of the emigrant to the West, who serves as an ambassador for little-known Eastern European avant-gardes. To Braco Dimitrijević, East and West are of as little relevance as old and new tradition and avant-garde, for the very reason that, to him, history no longer appears to be an applicable formula and the confrontation of new strategies of aesthetic consciousness with the obsolete conventional strategies—as formulated by the activist avant-gardes—has lost its meaning.

Beyond the historical structures, logical and causal, beyond the banal and simplistic political clichés, such as East and West, free and oppressed, creative and conformist, Braco Dimitrijević attempts to free the cultural consciousness from the fatalist and mechanical concept of history and instead to sensibilise the spectator, that is to focus his perception on the infinite multitude of sign structures and cultural systems which exist alongside each other. This radical sovereignty creates an extremely powerful poetic expression which seems to be sufficiently effective to unify over and over again the fragments of the Post-historic era into new coherent structures.



Triptychos Post Historicus or Entrance to the Palace of Light
Tate Gallery, London, 1982
I: *St. Benedict, Looking Toward Fusina*, J. M. W. Turner, 1843
II: Lightbulb installed by Peter Lockwood
III: Pineapple
Collection: Tate Gallery London

The Part of Risk

Catherine Millet

If I knew nothing about contemporary art and met by chance on the street Braco Dimitrijević, who asked me to pose for a photograph, would I accept? Would I agree to be that anonymous passer-by whose face would soon after appear on a wall in the city, coming to the attention of all other passers by. From the position of my anonymity would I be able to bear that my face, full of my identity, all my good and bad features, disproportionately blown-up, were exposed, in the double sense of the word? And even art critic as I am, aware of the work of Braco Dimitrijević would I be ready in the situation where the artist controls the rules of the game to overcome all the inhibitions which one naturally feels, imagining one's face launched into public space? To tell the truth, I am not so sure. I would ask at least time to think it over. The power of this action and the force which is also contained in the photographs that show these portraits installed outdoors in the city, comes also a great deal from the attitude which we judge as open, free, audacious of the persons who accepted, fully aware of the consequences, to pose in front of Dimitrijević's camera.

To be stopped on the street by Braco Dimitrijević is quite an adventure. But to confront the works which he exhibits in museums is not necessarily any safer. One can even say that one of the major preoccupations of this ex-pioneer of the rebellious seventies is to maintain the risk in an art world which is today all too bureaucratized.

Since the late sixties, he has created to this end a radical method by formulating the notion of Post History. He defines it in the textual discourse in 1976 in his book *Tractatus Post Historicus*. Post-historicism allows one to view history not like a logical succession of facts, to which at the end we will tie ourselves, but as an unlimited field of the possible, where for our consciousness opens an abyss of forgotten knowledge and where, in place of the facts which official history has condensed into one unified meaning, intricate paths of interpretations, multiple and contradictory, present themselves. This concept is summed up best by the parable which Dimitrijević invented: "Once upon a time far from cities and towns, there lived two painters. One day the king, hunting nearby, lost his dog. He found him in the garden of one of the two painters. He saw the works of that



Casual Passer-by I met at 4:30 PM, Berlin, 1976; Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York



*Clockwise from top:
Casual Passer-by I met at 3:47 PM, Paris, 1999
Casual Passerby I met at 3:41 PM, Paris, 1999
Champs-Élysées, Paris, 1999*

painter and took him to the castle. The name of that painter was Leonardo da Vinci, the name of the other disappeared forever from human memory.” This concept multiplies vertiginously the possibilities of our present and even of our future. If, as Dimitrijević claims all styles were always possible in all periods, they are equally present today, as they will be tomorrow—this concept also puts them in doubt because if, as he reminds us we needed three hundred years to rediscover the art of El Greco, that which we believe to have built so solidly today, may equally sink into long ‘absences’ from history. In April 1971, Nena and Braco Dimitrijević organized, in the entrance hall of an apartment building in Zagreb, the international exhibition of conceptual art “At the Moment,” which acquired, despite its short duration of only three hours, a great importance. However, with a sense of humour, they put in the introduction of the catalogue three photographs: the first taken the day before the exhibition shows no more than ten people passing by the closed entrance door of the building, in the second taken on the day of the exhibition, one sees a bigger group of people in front of the open doors, and in the third, taken the day after, only a few people are indifferently passing the again-closed door.

So while some of his fellow conceptual artists rest on well-defined concepts of history, sharpened like a spearhead, Dimitrijević slips under their feet, and under the feet of all of us, a concept of history which is a minefield. We put our feet in it in order to insert our points of reference, to anchor it with dates, and the ground explodes from all its virtuality. In 1969 when Richard Serra, for instance, made his lead splashes, Kresimir Klika signed a work which consisted of a milk splash left on the pavement by a car driving over the milk-carton. The driver Kresimir Klika drove by chance over the milk-carton, put there by Dimitrijević. When Dimitrijević explained to him the meaning of the action, he accepted, while others might have refused the artistic responsibility for the milk splash, and signed it directly on the pavement. Today the written history of the avant-garde values the name of Richard Serra more than that of Kresimir Klika. But can't we imagine that one day, if other criteria enter the game, the absolute generosity, the marvelous readiness with which Klika accepted responsibility for his gesture may be equally appreciated, even more than the intentionality behind other works, and that some recognition will be given to this artist of a few minutes, recognition at least equal to that of career artists? Don't we accept already, at the heart of our art history, artists who have arrived to us only through one single painting and whose intentions remain mysterious to us?

When Braco Dimitrijević uses the façades of buildings in the busy centres of European towns to hang his gigantic portraits of unknown people, knowing that he comes from Yugoslavia, one recalls immediately the pictures of communist heroes under which the masses marched past in Eastern Europe. All of a sudden, the face of a casual passer-by takes on the same importance as that of



Casual Passer-by I met at 3:59 PM, Paris, 1989; Courtesy of the artist and Collection: Eric Fabre, Paris
Magiciens de la Terre exhibition, 1989; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

Tito or Mao. It is not unimportant, precisely regarding the artist's concept of history, to mention how the network of analogies in which this oeuvre is entangled has evolved. The net through which we perceive reality, our criteria, has changed in 25 years. Today, don't we first think of the portraits of the disappeared brothers and husbands, carried by the women of Argentina, or even of those posters showing the faces of ordinary unemployed behind which demonstrators were walking recently in France? Perhaps Post History, which makes apparent the obscure background of the abyss of history, could have been invented only by somebody who lived in the society in which censorship of memory was applied with a scientific methodology. However, all societies practice to a bigger or a lesser extent such a censorship. Braco Dimitrijević by carrying one day in 1970 in the streets of Munich a placard with the face of a passer-by who he met by chance at 2.04 PM, or in Belgrade in 1972 placing in front of the camera for posterity a group in which Dzem Dzemo poses between Daniel Buren and Giuseppe Chiari, or engraving a street sign in San Sicario in 1975 with the name of Gianfranco Martina, was a predecessor of these movements in which groups of individuals engage by all their power to keep on the surface of the world, in the reservoir of recordable and memorisable images, the identity of other individuals, which all kind of repressive regimes engage to wipe off or to at least humiliate.

In commenting on the anti-humanism of Baudelaire (who embodies the image of the dandy and who is a key figure in understanding the depersonalization of the artistic act, characteristic of modernism), Giorgio Agamben writes: The novelty of modern poetry, *vis à vis* a world which, the more it glorifies man, the more it reduces him to an object, consists in unmasking humanist ideology in taking literally a witty remark which Balzac attributes to Georges Brummell: "Nothing looks less like man than man himself."ⁱⁱ

Nothing looks less like an artist than an artist. This is the principle that Braco Dimitrijević understood from very early on. Very early, he knew that the wreath of post history, whose method is to bring to the light that which was in shadow, was that the one who dedicated himself to this task, accepts in his turn to be partly recovered by shadow. Thus his actions, mentioned above, which are not signed with his name, thus his participation in the Biennale de Paris in 1971, under three different identities, Braco Dimitrijević, Slobodan D. and Tihomir Simčić (name of a pensioner he met by chance in Zagreb in 1969), thus the big banners bearing the names of Gerda Bollen and Eric Hoefer, respectively on the façades of the museums in Brussels and Monchengladbach where Dimitrijević was invited to show in 1975 (whilst Dimitrijević's name appears on a house of a friend somewhere in the countryside). After all, this voluntary self-abolition of the artist is an adequate strategy to make obvious the necessity of this action in a society which does not know any longer which place to give to the artist. (In the eighties, during which this place, unlike the seventies was

so well defined that it was banalized, we saw a certain number of artists retaking the model of disappearance and hiding behind pseudonyms, initials, or enigmatic names of companies. As far as the personality of artists is concerned, who always finish by inscribing themselves in a style, Dimitrijević has found since 1976 a means to keep it to the maximum through *Triptychos Post Historicus*. All works from this series consist of three elements—natural objects (fruits, vegetables), one or few manufactured objects, which belong to somebody else other than the artist (the name of the owner is given in the title of the work), and an old or modern painting, always bearing another signature (often famous) than that of Dimitrijević.

The effectiveness of the triptychs comes a great deal, of course, from the fact that these are real paintings which are exhibited and not, as one would expect in the post-modern era, their reproductions. Beyond the play of formal and symbolic relationships which they invoke and which mean that every element acquires critical quality in relation to the other, these works have two major effects. They seem to put precious paintings in a precarious and risky situation. They put works of art closer to us in both a literary and metaphoric sense of the word. (One is tempted to touch the works taken down from the wall, from where they usually dominate, and to push them or put them upright again.) Material risk is emphasized by symbolic risk. Works of art which we believe to be eternal can be revealed as more ephemeral than an apple, which may take a long time to dry and rot. At the same time, the way in which some objects, especially those which are close to the body—tools, clothing—touch the paintings, is not sensed without certain unease. It is as if a ghost body appropriates for itself only, this masterwork which belongs to all (this feeling leaves us at the very moment when we see the work accessible to our hands). A certain audience was not mistaken about this, the one which expressed in the press its indignation that museums, in this case the Tate Gallery, accept that cultural heritage is treated in this way.

As a child, being a son of well-known artist and himself already a painter, Braco Dimitrijević lived in a daily and familiar relationship with art. He spent a lot of time in his father's studio where the paintings were simply ordinary objects casually leaning against the wall and exposed to all kinds of danger from a jar of paint which could be overturned to the more irredeemable danger of the artist who judging his own work can, unsatisfied, decide to destroy it. In a painter's studio the works still have the status of ordinary objects, liable to be thrown away, because they are still in the process of being created. They are still alive and thus able to die. They are not yet mummies protected and inert, as turned into by the museum.

It is not only that Dimitrijević uses the real art work and not its reproduction, but that paradoxically those he chooses, in being combined with ordinary objects, cease to be reproductions of

themselves, as they have become under the weak light of museology, and under our disinterested gaze. We should take literally Dimitrijević's claim that the Louvre is his studio. Masterpieces for the artist are raw material; he arranges them not even as others would arrange apples and lemons as a model for a still-life, but rather as they would mix the medium and the pigment. The encounters which happen in front of our eyes, the dangerous encounters (the yellow of real lemons catches the eyes, before lemons painted by Matisse), struggles for identity (the harmonious ochre of a painting by Géricault emerging out of an enormous pile of coconuts), rivalries (what remains of David's *The Death of Marat*, when Dimitrijević puts it in a bathtub and raises the installation on a monumental pedestal?), are all opportunities for these paintings, aroused instantly from the sleep of history, to regain their status, to prove their supremacy, to confront again reality. Often Dimitrijević improvises and does not decide until a few days before the opening which works he will borrow from the collection, which objects he will use to provide hints for interpretation. In this way these works are not only placed in a new cultural context, but are also launched into the orbit of another philosophy.

In *Art after Philosophy* Joseph Kosuth wrote: "If certain artists from the past are revived, it is because certain aspects of their work became usable for living artists." Braco Dimitrijević gives a completely new turn to this rule, audacious and radical, not being satisfied to merely quote the work of his predecessors, but integrating them literally into his work, with all their properties—spiritual as well as material, aesthetic, philosophical and even their market value. One series of his works consists of putting next to various objects a plaque bearing the inscription "This Could be a Master Piece." During his exhibition at the Städtisches Museum Mönchengladbach in 1975, he attributes this sentence to the portrait bust of Max Roeder belonging to the museum collection. The museum acquired the work of Braco Dimitrijević. Thus the same bronze object was, from this moment, classified under two different inventory numbers. Is not this act of appropriation the very symbol of a creation, the red-hot instant of actualisation/abolition of history?

If it happens that Post-historic artist Braco Dimitrijević reverses some historical process, it also happens that he accelerates others. His work entitled *Culturescapes* confronts, as his *Triptychos* do, nature and culture, except that here nature is represented by living animals. Peacocks in front of paintings by Picasso, Matisse, Léger, a painting and a palette in a cage where the couple of lions are pacing. Escaping from the control to which it is subjected today, art finds again its natural environment. But Dimitrijević questions the evolution which leads us from Lascaux to sophisticated displays such as the Grand Louvre. He believes the only difference is that at the time of Lascaux, man was trying to domesticate animals, whilst today we have succeeded in domesticating art! What progress, from the painted caves to the cellars in museums!

In order to describe this accelerated process, I will quote again Agamben explaining that the "transformation (by Baudelaire) of the work of art into absolute commodity is also the most radical abolition of commodity." And he adds, referring to the experience of "shock" which the poet places "at the heart of his art work": "The 'shock' is the potential alienation of the object when in order to hide behind the mask of commodity, it loses the authority which its use value gives to it and which traditionally guaranteed its reading. Baudelaire understood that in order to secure the survival of art in the industrial civilization, the artist has to try to reproduce in his work this destruction of use-value and of the traditional reading which gave a place to the experience of 'shock'..." We are no longer in the times of Baudelaire. The "shocks" that we experience are very rare in a society where art as "absolute" is so well integrated that it finds a kind of use value, as a product to be consumed exclusively for leisure, whilst its exchange value, openly advertised, exploited, managed, pulls it down to the level of ordinary commodity. However to answer this new situation Dimitrijević adopts a strategy which follows the logic of Baudelaire: he takes to its limits the social model. And the "shock" is born out of ephemeral encounters of some products which are to be consumed in the literal sense of the word, of some commodities whose exchange value is sometimes very small because they are worn out, and one object which is not much more than a rectangle of smeared canvas framed in wood. The "shock" springs no longer from the exceptional value that we attribute to art, but from the risk art runs of not knowing whether to acquire or to lose this value.

Notes

1. Braco Dimitrijević has always chosen unknown people met in the street as subjects of large photographic portraits, chance being the main regulator of his work.
2. Giorgio Agamben, *Stanze*, French translation Editions Payot & Rivages.

Braco Dimitrijević and New York in the 1980s: Influences and Coincidences

Cornelia Lauf

Let's dispense with the kind of language one would normally expect to find in an artist's monograph. The reason that I am writing about Braco Dimitrijević has little to do with our respective roles as art historian and artist. We will use model "B" in the kind of conversations Braco himself has suggested would be a real way to conduct a dialogue. Model "A" is official talk. Model "B" is the truth.¹ Let's apply the logic of Braco's way of making art to the discipline of art history. Let's reject theoretical verbiage and philosophical posturing, and try to say something that Mr. Tihomir Simčić or my grandmother would understand. Anyway, if you want the Real History, No Mistakes about Braco Dimitrijević, you could do no better than to go to the least and, at the same time, most objective source, the words of his wife, Nena. In the 1995 exhibition catalogue, a monograph on the artist, Nena writes one of the most perceptive and gracious articles I have read about a living artist.

If you would like to find out more about Braco Dimitrijević, in vivid historic detail, you might look at the two catalogues I consulted, the red one, from the Museum of Modern Art, Vienna (1994), or the black one, from the Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt (1995). Either one will give you a good idea of how smart Braco was as a young boy, and show that Braco recycles his early history as an art work, like Joseph Beuys, that he greatly loved his father, and that he has managed to work with a lot of establishment places while remaining skillfully outside of the institution.

The reason this essay has come about is because I ran into Braco in Bologna and we reminisced about old times (coming in a minute), and decided that the entire art world is based on good feelings. I had discussed this with art historian Gabriele Guercio a couple of weeks ago. Gabriele calls it "resonances." Well, you either have them or you don't. When I met Braco in the late 1980s, I was fully married to a conceptual artist named Joseph Kosuth. But this did not mean that I was naturally friendly with all conceptually-oriented artists. On the contrary. There was a kind of *Feinschmecker* cult of which artists to include and Mel Bochner and Bernar (no "d") Venet were definitely not on that list. Braco was. Braco had two shows with Nicole Klagsbrun, who always



Early Works, 1968-1976; Pat Hearn Gallery, New York, 1990



*Casual Passer-by I met at 3:41 PM, New York, 1988; Private Collection, New York
Broadway, New York, 1988*



seemed very scattered and unfocussed but had really good gallery sense, and when she was in partnership with the mad but gifted Clarissa Dalrymple, whose name alone is cinematic, the two of them ran one of the best art galleries downtown. At that time, the center of the universe. The reason why the gallery was so good, besides the fact it was run by Klagsbrun and Dalrymple, was the artists. Clegg & Guttmann, Philippe Thomas. I think those women showed many of the best artists from the mid-80s. Parallel to the show at Nicole Klagsbrun, Braco had an exhibition at the Pat Hearn Gallery entitled “Early Works 1968 -1976,” which was part of the gallery’s series of retrospectives, along with those of Dan Flavin and Chuck Close. Braco was an integral part of that very interesting melting pot, where Koons, so early in his career, was already being critiqued for being part of the very system he mocked. I am sure that Braco’s portraiture was seen by Thomas Ruff and the big-face photography movement, because Ruff showed with 303 Gallery, which was also located downtown, East Village, until its transfer to SoHo (and then Chelsea). Oliviero Toscani would not have produced the Benetton Face had it not been for the vision of those Casual Passers-by, on façades of buildings and museums from Zagreb to Paris to Rome. Braco has had an influence on many artists who became significant. Perhaps the most important thing that he did was show that the notion of medium is irrelevant, and that even marble could become conceptual. He influenced Sherrie Levine, for example. And Louise Lawler, who frequented Sperone and Weber, in the time when Dimitrijević did a show with Daniel Buren at Sperone in 1975. Haim Steinbach has spoken about the importance of Dimitrijević. Interestingly, unlike the influence of someone such as Picasso, whose work gave rise to legions of imitators, Dimitrijević’s work has been internalized by artists, and spawned parallel rather than second-rate careers.

In his book *Braco Dimitrijević: Transmemorials*, Michel Gautier has written that Duchamp made “*quelque chose*” important in art, while Braco made “*quelqu’un*” important in art. Perhaps he was even more successful than Joseph Beuys (“everyone is an artist”) in democratizing art and finding mechanisms to absorb real life into the artistic process.

Braco was one of the first consciously “post-modern” artists, or more precisely the first post-historical artist. His theoretical book *Tractatus Post Historicus* from 1976 in which he coined the term and gave the definition of Post History, predated academic usage by some ten years. Its first appearance in the United States occurred in the use of architectural citations, posed by critics such as Charles Jencks, and evident in the work of Michael Graves, Robert Stem, Memphis, or Leon Krier. Much later, at end of 1980, Arthur Danto started employing the notion of Post History in his writings. Bucking this model, Dimitrijević came from Eastern Europe, and yet was equally at home in London, Paris, or New York. Stylistically, he started in the late 1960s as an archetypal conceptual artist using photography, certificates, text, but very early he sensed a trap of conceptual

academism. By the early 1970s, without changing his artistic discourse and without abandoning photography, he started making monuments, bronze busts and memorial plaques. In other words, he started ironically using Beaux-Arts heaviness and skills in conceptual art, whenever he judged a context to be appropriate for it. With this aesthetic pluralism—that is, a simultaneous use of various art and non-art techniques—he emphasized even more the importance of the concept in his art.

Braco Dimitrijević's most significant area of influence may have been art-historical. His analysis of art world systems, and relentless probing of the limits of institutions led to the idea of “institutional critique” and the anthropological interest that surfaced in the writings of many art historians (and artists) since the 1980s. There were clearly precedents in the 1960s. But by using masterpiece artworks, and taking the questioning of art taxonomies from the sphere of language to the sphere of the art object itself, Dimitrijević worked in the context and “field” in a way that many of the language-based conceptual artists alluded to only through words. Dimitrijević forced institutions or municipalities to change the very nature of their thinking about art. I myself was captivated by the idea that one could re-hang a masterpiece. This was different from choosing an industrially produced ready made, and isolating it from its supermarket context. Dimitrijević's gesture involved entering the curatorial world, working with curators and museum directors, and treating the whole academic or institutional apparatus as a theater.

In 1988, I mounted an exhibition called *Natura Naturata*, which dealt with the theme of the still life, and for which I asked a large number of artists, including Claes Oldenburg, Roy Lichtenstein, Haim Steinbach, Clegg & Guttmann, Sarah Charlesworth, Braco Dimitrijević, to make or lend works. My idea was to choose artists who used ready-mades and then install these works in my own composition—a salon setting in which fine pieces of Rococo furniture and even a flower arrangement by New York's best florist were supposed to function on an equal footing with the artworks. Basically, I was trying to take the lessons of someone like Dimitrijević or Broodthaers, and apply them to their own work. I wanted to make a Dimitrijević too! This certainly colored my intellectual participation in shows such as Joseph Kosuth's *Wittgenstein, Play of the Unsayable* (Palais des Beaux-Arts), or *Play of the Unmentionable* at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. No doubt, Broodthaers' *Département des Aigles* was also important. But the delicate whimsy in Dimitrijević and his decision to produce shifts of meaning, rather than physical residue, are unmatched. On March 11, 1990, Lithuania gained its independence. On March 11, 2004, bombs exploded in Madrid, killing hundreds and hundreds of people. Braco Dimitrijević had made a work almost thirty years earlier, in which the 11th of March, an arbitrary date, was turned into an anti-monumental monument. Many political commentators today seem surprised at the anonymity of current



Triptychos Post Historicus
 Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1988
 I. *Green Violinist*, Marc Chagall, 1923-1924
 II. Cello played by Anne Skolnick
 III. Squash

terrorism, and by the homespun simplicity of its weapons. They note with alarm the burgeoning trend of microterrorism, against which traditional armies are ineffective. They realize that 21st-century information networks, whether telephone, Internet or radio-based, are the weapons that must be disabled first. A brief glance at art networks, and artistic communication since the 1960s, might have predicted the state of the world today. Networks via the mail, and worldwide lists were being established almost forty years ago by artists. Rather than investing in heavy metals (bronze, for example), artists increasingly turned to simple materials: instructions, certificates, and inexpensive fabrication as art work. The trend was toward anonymity. Art could take the form of magazines, telephone calls, stamps, assemblages, musical scores, writing, record albums, or conversations. It could show up in a solitary walk by Richard Long, in a score by George Brecht, in a certificate by Gordon-Matta Clark. In billboards, radio presentations, environmental modulation, and even the manipulation of light. Since the nineteenth century, art has been separate from political life. This is not to say that artists are not political. Or that their works do not have a political content. But politicians use art as a decorative element, ultimately, or to express their own power over culture. They do not craft the entire imagery of politics—as Jacques-Louis David or Gian Lorenzo Bernini or Peter Paul Rubens might have done—with the use of art. If instead, there was the recognition that “art speaks with the speed of light,” as Dimitrijević has said, one could utilize its power to much greater advantage. According to Dimitrijević, an artist is primarily someone who acts in public space. An important innovation of his work is total awareness of the public context and establishing a new type of relation to both the street and the museum.

Dimitrijević has always played brilliantly with photography and its limitations. Even today, his works have lost none of their radicalism. Take the recent exhibition in Rome, where he displayed the enormous pictures of some “casual passers-by” on the façade. The organizers of the Roman photo festival quickly hung up two big signs next-door advertising the festival, and making it clear that Braco’s work was art. Or at least photography. In his brilliant series of lectures in 1963 entitled “Art and Anarchy,” Edgar Wind delineated how art moved from the center to the margins of society. “Art has been displaced from the center of our life not just by applied science, but above all by its own centrifugal force. For most of a century most of Western art has been produced and enjoyed on the assumption that the experience of art will be more intense if it pulls the spectator away from his ordinary habits and preoccupations.” He notes that the more artists are removed from society, the more they seem haunted by “a desire to mimic scientific procedures; often they seem to act in their studios as if they were in a laboratory, performing a series of controlled experiments.” With the worldwide proliferation of “institutes” of contemporary art, it is clear that Wind’s diagnosis continues to apply. The work of Braco Dimitrijević poetically exchanges genius for the

commonplace. And vice versa. Unfettered by pedantry, and resistant to the very bureaucracies he has worked with for thirty years, Dimitrijević’s work goes a long way towards reestablishing art in its rightful political, social, and cultural context. The museum has been Dimitrijević’s medium, the frame of art his subject, and the real world, his studio.

Notes

1. This is a reference to Braco Dimitrijević’s work *Interview-Interview*, 1974.

Ghosts of the Future

Dan Cameron

One of the more frustrating discoveries of late modernism, particularly for those who had based much of their practice on the premise that avant-garde art had a utopian mandate to fulfill, came with the slow realization that it didn't matter how frantically diverse the various schools of 20th century artistic practice may have been—the process of innovation was locked into a system of linguistic tropes and rhetoric with rules and hierarchies that were as rigid as any academic formula. As art then entered the period of uncertainty marked by the collective understanding that Conceptual art was the last possible permutation in a reductive series of models of art history, the need to hinge one's belief structure on some fixed set of ideas led to a splintering of styles across the international spectrum, leading to the development of a post-stylistic method of simultaneous innovation across several stylistic fronts at once, the sorting-through of which has provided the dominant critical methodology in the last 35 years since Braco Dimitrijević's emergence as a young artist coincided with this unstable moment in art history, which was also marked by considerable upheaval in the social and political realm. Society as a whole was questioning itself on many levels, and with the explosion of popular culture through music, film and experimental video, the entire practice of “art” had become for a large number of people an anachronism. As a young artist in Sarajevo, Dimitrijević created a work in 1969 that seems to foretell much of his development for the next decades. It is *Story About Two Artists*, which consists of nothing more than a narrative inscription on a marble plaque. The story is of a chance meeting between the king and an unknown artist, who through this well-timed encounter became known to us today as Leonardo da Vinci. The other artist mentioned in the title, who did not meet the king, “disappeared forever from human memory.” In light of Sarajevo's tragic history, the harshness of those particular words today reaches far past the typical young artist's desire for immortality, revealing instead the cruel indifference with which history treats those who most crave its attention. Certainly, immortality is no less capricious than death itself—a grim but realistic point of departure to which Dimitrijević has returned many times in his career—but it seems he is also commenting upon the error of those who place art and its values above all other systems of exchange, even at the price of ignoring the stark reality all around them.

Dimitrijević's most characteristic work of the 1970s, which he repeats with innumerable variations in form and locale, takes the anonymity imposed by historical processes as its starting-point. "The Casual Passer-By I Met At..." places the idea of randomness at the core of the formation of meaning, but gives it an extra push towards affirmation by allowing us to celebrate the mere fact that a fellow citizen is honored for the sake of having been alive at a particular time and place in history. However, our interest in these works does not depend on the fact that the story turns out all right in the end, but rather that the artist has made us acutely aware of our own participation in it. By continuing to observe the social practice of naming streets, buildings, bridges, museums, and even towns themselves after those individuals who made our predecessors take notice of them during their lifetime, we implicitly reward not the ones among us who desire to turn the historical spotlight on themselves, but only the ones who succeed. Therefore, in rejecting the artist's role within this trajectory as one who merely designates the visual form that the commemoration will take, Dimitrijević imposes a new set of criteria on the process, criteria which serve to heighten our appreciation of both the contrast between the fragility of the individual life compared with the momentum of history, and the necessity to replace these receptacles of dead men's power with something more relevant to our daily lives.

The various manifestations of "The Casual Passer-By I Met..."—banners hung from buildings, advertisements on public transport, sculptural busts, plaques, monumental obelisks, and even a dinner that the artist held in honor of a complete stranger in Belgrade in 1976—seem to highlight Dimitrijević's underlying subject, which is the fleetingness of lived time compared with the "stopped" time that art is expected to represent. To gain his immortality, the traditional artist makes an implicit pact with society to exchange a social value (prestige) for a private one (exposing one's name or likeness to the public). But in commemorating the lives of those who are said to have influenced our own lives, the artist can also be said to be putting his identity into competition with that of his subject. This is the point where the autonomy of the art system's history and that of society at large come into obvious conflict: there are portraits by great artists of men and women whom we do not need to know, and portraits of great men and women by artists whom we do not care to know. While seeming to operate from within this intricate system of exchange, Dimitrijević is in fact offering us a surprising view into its inner mechanisms while proposing an alternative form of immortality based on the role of the artist as self-appointed arbiter of who will be recorded by posterity, and who not. It is as if Warhol's dictum about everyone being famous for fifteen minutes had been supplemented by the apparently similar (but quite distinct) notion that those who don't use their allotted moment of fame still have as much a reason to be commemorated as those who have used more than their fair share.



Triptychos Post Historicus, 1990
 I: *The Son of Man*, René Magritte, 1964
 II: Bowler hat
 III: Apple
 Collection: Harry Torczyner, New York



*Triptychos Post Historicus or
 The Late Years Bananas on the Line Again*
 Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1981
 I: *Premonitory Portrait of Apollinaire*, Giorgio de Chirico, 1914
 II: Jean-Hubert Martin's telephone
 III: Bananas

It doesn't require careful scrutiny of the 1969 *Tale of Two Artists* to realize that lurking behind the anonymous passer-by series is the nagging issue of the artist's own identity. A key to understanding this problem of self-representation can be found in the manner in which Dimitrijević documented these activities: not just with himself photographed alongside his subjects as a form of witness, but often with one other, more well-known artist (Richard Hamilton, Douglas Huebler) in the picture as well. In other words, Dimitrijević's image tends to function within these photos as a kind of mediating persona between the figure of the historically legitimized artist and that of the man (or woman) in the street—a place which he, as an emerging artist, might be said to have occupied at the time. However, as his reputation in Europe grew through the 1970s and early 80s, Dimitrijević became increasingly aware that his work, despite its claims to being outside the art system, was in fact operating from a real insider position. Furthermore, the works themselves in their final state became subject to the same rules of critical analysis that applied to all art production at that time, regardless of whether it was conceptually-based or not. For that reason, the next step in his development as an artist, while far from inevitable, had a strong connection to these previous works which is not always brought to the fore.

It would also be tempting to analyze his concept of "Post History" as analogous to certain more recent manifestations of Postmodernism, since the goal of recasting one's relationship to history remains the primary objective in both cases. Still, it is just as crucial to stress that the fundamental strategies of Postmodernism—appropriation, (mis-) quotation and recycling—are noticeably absent or underemphasized in the *Triptychos Post Historicus* work, which has been Dimitrijević's main area of concentration from the mid-70s on (the two lines of his work have more or less continued in a parallel relationship to one another since that time).

One of the most intriguing features of the *Triptychos Post Historicus* series is that it is entirely conditional, in the sense that it depends on borrowing an existing work from the cooperating museum in order to occupy the center of the tableau which Dimitrijević then creates for it. Seen in comparison to the use, by other artists, of reproductions of artworks that act as a reference to previous art without actually trying to replicate its presence, this body of work by Dimitrijević can be seen as a bracing affirmation of the fluid system of negotiated values that surrounds the original work, but in a way that keeps our attention fixed on the social as well as the artistic values conveyed by that system. Like his casual passer-by work, the "Post Historicus" series derives its peculiar tension from the half-concealed meditation on time, which is summarized by the contrast between an exaggerated symbol of temporality (a piece of fruit) with an equally loaded symbol of timelessness (an important work of art).



Installation at Documenta IX
Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, 1992



Triptychos Post Historicus or the Arch of Reason
Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, 1992
I: *The Mad Assassin*, Theodore Gericault, 1821
II: Hats supplied by Nathalie Duriat
III: Apples
Collection: SMAK, Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent

Most importantly, perhaps, the *Triptychos Post Historicus* series acts as a direct, if somewhat extenuated, affirmation of the museum itself. This factor is crucial, if for no other reason than because Dimitrijević began his practice by developing a methodology that circumvented the museum as the primary site of cultural activities, and replaced it with the street. Eventually, however, it became increasingly clear to him that, in the same way that the earliest photos documenting the passer-by series entailed the presence of art-world “witnesses” to make them more verifiable, so the larger-scale variations on this theme required the site of the museum in order to distinguish them from the efforts of the sort of marketing or political campaign whose stylistic tropes (scale, simplicity) they intentionally mimic. Perhaps in comparison with his earlier work, Dimitrijević’s *Post Historicus* interventions even seem to embrace the languages and structure of the museum with an enthusiasm that contains much less of a critical impetus than before. But this supposition does not hold up under engaged scrutiny of the work itself, which in many individual examples succeeds in tilting the values of the institution in the same way that the works themselves are literally tilted to one side or another, as if reinforcing the narrative impression of the artist’s having had his way with them. In fact, these are hardly episodic works at all, but rather diagrams of the fault lines that lie between the museum’s often conflicting responsibilities toward modern art on the one hand, and contemporary art on the other. There can be no doubt that the success of Dimitrijević’s intervention depends upon his convincing the museum director that one of the works which have been entrusted to the protection of the institution and its trustees should in turn be placed in the hands of an avant-garde artist whose interest in the object is obviously more inspired by its meaning as a transmitter of cultural values than by its historical value for connoisseurs of painting.

But Dimitrijević goes much further than the creation of a spectacle from the temporary suspension of the museum’s authority in favor of its purported liberalism. On the contrary, by recontextualizing a canvas by Matisse or Malevich as part of an expression within contemporary art discourse, he makes a strong case for integrating the art of the first half of the century with that of the present, at least insofar as the continuity established determines the painting to be something more than an artifact to be studied or a masterpiece to be admired. Our reality, Dimitrijević seems to be saying, demands that we construct new relationships for ourselves in relation to all inherited social forms—that is, if we don’t want to see the forms themselves slip away into a state of crystallized irrelevance. At the top of that list is the very practice of art itself, which increasingly gives the impression of wanting to entwine itself with the multitude of new languages and media that form the currency of everyday life. Curiously, however, it is only when we start showing art becoming redefined in direct relationship to this quotidian structure that we begin to understand how our artistic values have the potential to become as free-floating as the functional objects that find their way into Dimitrijević’s installations. In fact, art which accepts anything less than a complete overhaul in our way of assessing our relationship to it suddenly seems tame by comparison.



Triptychos Post Historicus
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1988
I: *Woman with Vase*, Fernand Léger, 1937
II: Baritone trombone played by Tchepo Kaleb
III: Apple

Interview

Želimir Košević and Braco Dimitrijević

It is now many years after Dimitrijević's first exhibition in Zagreb. Has he become history after all, which is—according to Dimitrijević—a mistake, or is he still a provocative accident of history, i.e. a post-historical alternative, which is according to him, the real history? The idea of Post History is based upon the sum-total of individual equal interpretations as the opposition to the officially-known history, and in the middle I see Braco Dimitrijević, who since his beginning, has been looking for the synthesis between these two confronted concepts of understanding the human universe. After his own history, he still exists as a casual passer-by who upsets the ordinary communal and museological system with his artistic reality, which is basically different from that one known in our frequentings of museums or walking about the town.

The whole idea of Postmodernism partially indicates that history and its system deserve changes. But Postmodernism has always been too concentrated on modernism, and the final result is that Postmodernism has indeed failed. With Post History, which is a neologism as well as is Postmodernism, we are entering the vast area of uncertainty (remember Heisenberg!), where events, order and ideas are dominated by mere random. At the moment, this is just an alternative, and really hardly acceptable. It is an artistic idea, and when art is in question, who cares about reality! When Dimitrijević speaks about pre-history (sometimes with some nostalgic overtone), he speaks about the reality of mutual relations, and Post History is just a claim for that. Triptychos Post-Historicus was an excellent example of that claim.

The interview was conducted in Zagreb, in early January 1989. Having in mind that Dimitrijević began his activity in this town in 1969, I decided to ask him about his pre-history.

Želimir Košević: Here I have a page of classified ads in Zagreb's Daily *Vecernji list* of Feb. 13, 1971. In the section *Art & Antiquity* there is an advertisement: "Works and the ideas of conceptual art on sale. B. S. Dimitrijević, Pantovcak 104 c, or offers to box No. 6623-1-19." In that time of your proto-history you were living in Zagreb. Tell me, did you have any response to your advertisement, and did you sell anything?

Braco Dimitrijević: How did you find this? You know, this was a very funny story. Yes, I made this announcement, but I forgot it immediately. These classified ads were published on Saturday, and on Sunday morning came a chap and said: I'm coming about your announcement. I took him into the kitchen where my studio was and told him: So, here you have some casual passers-by, some proofs in the clay, there is an idea for an underwater bridge from Dubrovnik to Bari, then I have some other ideas, and so on... He was listening and then he asked: Very well then, have you maybe an antique wooden chest? But this is a private anecdote...

ZK: It's not so widely known that you did the first gigantic photographs of casual passers-by in Zagreb. As I remember, one morning in May of 1971 three monumental photographs appeared in the main square in Zagreb.

BD: Generally, people considered that these photos represented new leaders. At that time we had a rather dynamic political situation. Yes, the faces on the photographs lead to some confusion; there was a girl, a middle aged man and an old lady with a funny little hat.

ZK: After that, you continued to install your casual passers-by in the streets and squares of Düsseldorf, Turin, Paris, London, New York, and the idea was put into the urban environment a certain unexpected motive, a mistake, in order to—as you used to say—disfunctionalize the urban sign.

BD: My basic intention was to lead the people on. People are accustomed, so to say, conditioned, that places like main squares, front sides of monumental buildings are places for the faces of VIPs—politicians, movie stars, heroes and so on. When they learn later from the newspapers, magazines, or TV that these photographs are my art work, and that the faces on photographs are just equally unknown as they are themselves, this can change their perception, to cause some doubt in the inviolability of authorities from today and from the past.

ZK: How do you consider history? You stated once: There are no mistakes in history. The whole of history is a mistake. Long ago in 1973 Caroline Tisdall described you as an optimist, adding that by being an artist you extend this into the field of art. In other words, do you believe in change?

BD: History interested me endlessly, but one thing I know for sure: the eurocentric perspective of history gives us only one version of history, and I think that this mono-vision we must change. Take as an example my obelisk in the park Schloss Charlottenburg in Berlin, which I made in 1979. The obelisk is a stereotype appropriated from our historical inventory. But there is also a carved



Front page of the Times with
Triptychos Post Historicus, July 15, 1987



Triptychos Post Historicus or Repeated Secret
Tate Gallery, London, 1978-1985
I: *The Little Peasant*, Amedeo Modigliani, 1919
II: Wardrobe painted by Sarah Moore
III: Pumpkin
Collection: Tate Gallery, London



Solo exhibition, Tate Gallery, London 1985
Solo exhibition at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 1996

inscription on it with the date of birth of a man whom I met in Berlin, and the text “This Could be a Day of Historical Importance.” This is alternative history. The date carved on the obelisk is true, this is the birthday of that man, but what makes this obelisk different from others is that it is erected for the person who is not historically verified. As I see, history should be composed of an infinite number of interpretations of events, so that difference between legend and history would disappear.

ZK: In this post-modern time you stubbornly insist on Post History. From that aspect, what is the space of your history?

BD: Postmodernism is a formalistic movement, the product of a cynical state of the spirit, and without ethical foundation. For me Post History means a principle of another ethic. Post History presupposes a dynamic vision, another view of our legacy, and this view is synoptical which results in the model of annihilation of all hierarchy and all these boring classifications. I’m talking simply about the ethics of form and the aesthetics of logic. Postmodernism is the form without the concept; Post History, on the contrary, is diversity of form which originates from the need to communicate a concept. For instance, a long time ago I started to use very different materials and forms like bronze portraits, marble plates, photographs and so on, knowing that conceptual art does not mean a reduction to photograph and text, but, in contrast, the free use of all artistic materials and techniques in the process of the materialization of my idea, my concept. I did not want to create new forms, nor to introduce new materials in art, but I have been taking existing forms like monuments, enlarged photographs, posters on billboards or obelisks to reexamine their genuine function, to give them a new content, a new meaning. Post History—you know—is connected with my *Triptychos* from 1976. This was in some way my answer to the conceptual orthodoxy. It was a meditation about horizontal and vertical selection in history.

ZK: Most of these ideas have been formulated in your *Tractatus Post-Historicus*, edited by Dacić in Tübingen in 1976.

BD: In *Tractatus* I was trying to make a textual definition of my practice, although “The Story About Two Artists” was a similar attempt. This story is parabola of history, and the point is one of chance. In *Tractatus* the idea is different, I know that it is utopian, but I was trying to imagine the coexistence between various centres of power without hierarchy and sclerotic classifications. After all, in Cosmos there is no above or below.

ZK: ... and *Triptychos Post Historicus* ...

BD: This is questioning the existing historical order by a diagonal ...

ZK: Is it some kind of intellectual essay about the painting in the centre of the *Triptychos*?

BD: Yes and no. The triadic essence of *Triptychos* compromises plastic, sociological and philosophical attitudes. The painting of a famous master as a part of *Triptychos* is treated as material indeed, but this material has some specifics: it is very valuable, it has precisely-defined aesthetical, historical and economic dimensions. Simply, the painting is a fetish. I could tell you many stories about human prejudice, ...for instance, a chap wrote a letter to *The Times* expressing his disgust at seeing in The Tate Modigliani incorporated in my *Triptychos* together with an old wardrobe and pumpkins. The Modigliani estimated at 2,500.000 £! I wrote an answer pointing out that the Modigliani was starving and living in poverty and that possibly that very painting was leaning against a similar wardrobe near the oven where he cooked his soup. By showing in such a way that things are relative, I am pointing to the other side of history. After all, sometimes it is more difficult to purchase pumpkins than a painting. The Modigliani has already been in The Tate, and as the pumpkin season was over, the curators had to order them from Jamaica...

ZK: Would you want to say that your *Triptychos* is seasonal?

BD: Yes, cosmically seasonal.

ZK: Just to finish, do you contemplate a retrospective?

BD: I have already had some in Museum Ludwig, Bern's Kunsthalle, in Eindhoven. Last June in London and New York I did Outdoor retrospective 1968-1988. As I always exhibit simultaneously in the museums and on the streets, I don't see any reason to abandon this practice. I'm interested in using the street as the most open studio and the museum as the most elitist one. In both cases you have problems of how to show, how to present your work, you see, in both situations you have a challenge. The museum is a splendid studio, but the street!... The Sperone Gallery in Turin spent almost two years in correspondence with the city-administration asking for the permission to erect the monument to Alberto Vieri, casual passer-by. In Paris 1971 my photographs of casual passers-by were taken down by the joint action of police and firemen with the explanation that photographs upset Parisians. All this represents the life of work, because I am not interested in the work as the concept, but as the real life...

And about the retrospective... last November in cooperation with Nicole Klagsbrun I put on a casual passer-by at Broadway, but on the other hand the relation between artist and museum I have always considered as essential. Yes, fruit may cause serious problems. After all, if one looks down at Earth from the Moon, there is virtually no distance between the Louvre and the zoo.

Notes

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Interview

Klaus-D. Pohl and Braco Dimitrijević

Klaus-D. Pohl: Since 1976, your work has been dominated by your installations entitled *Triptychos Post-Historicus*, in which you combine a painting, an everyday object, and a fruit. You and others have often explained this concept, but nevertheless can you please give—as an introduction for this interview—a short definition of your theory of Post History.

Braco Dimitrijević: To answer this question I have to make a little detour. Once, after many years in Paris, Marc Chagall was asked to explain the ideas, inspiration and motifs of his works. His answer was that he had never scraped the mud of his native country from his shoes, probably meaning that all his ideas are rooted in his childhood. I also could never remove the mud from my shoes for the simple reason that I never had any mud on them. For generations we lived on city pavement and what I had instead was a lot of dust. The dust of History.

On many occasions, ever since I was young, I realized that the descriptions of events in the books were very different to, or did not correspond at all to that I happened to have heard. I started reflecting on it very early, and I developed a certain kind of skepticism towards history. More precisely towards its mono-optical dimension. I showed my discontent with history in 1969, when I came to the conclusion that there are no mistakes in history, but that the whole of history is a mistake. Needless to say, history as a science had to provide an objective picture of the past, one that influenced our behaviour, reflections or reactions, in short, conditioning our future. In my works at that time I started creating a kind of alternative history, presupposing a logical space that would provide a synoptic view of reality. Later all of this crystallized in the idea of Post History.

History has always been created by a power structure which selected only certain data convenient to itself, to be recorded; it is typical science, born in the civilization that lives from recycling its mistakes. Made by man, for man, as if it were abstracted from at least half of his bio-psychological being. In this way history could not offer anything else but a mutilated image of the past.

Post History is the time after history, the time of multi-angled perspectives, a situation with open and flexible individual criteria, a time of coexistence of different and often contradictory values, a space where novelty will manifest itself in the domain of meta-material. It is a multilogical field without one final truth. There is one very important work done in 1975 before the actual *Triptychos* were realized in the Nationalgalerie in Berlin. During the solo exhibition at the Städtisches Museum Monchengladbach I took the bronze bust that had belonged to the museum collection for fifty years, and I exhibited this work with other objects chosen to be presented on different pedestals. This was the first time that I used an art work that belonged to a museum collection. The whole intervention consisted of changing the title and meaning of this art work by adding my name, the sentence “This could be a masterpiece,” and dating it. Furthermore this work was later purchased by the museum. And so from 1975 this work started to have a double life; it could have been exhibited as a bust of Max Roeder, an artist from the twenties, and also as a work of mine. It was a purely conceptual-semantic operation, because the work had existed in the museum for a long time, but the new meaning was added to the existing art object and form. After the act of purchase was signed by the museum director and myself, the two works of art started to manifest themselves through one object only. It was through an official institution that for the first time the plurality of truth was confirmed. The two truths which do not annihilate each other and are some half-century apart.

There were some other works from childhood which precede my reflection that our environment is not a physical space, but a cultural heritage. When I was five or six years old I made some paintings, like still lifes; I would paint some toys in the middle and then in the background a white monochrome surface with some paintings painted on it. There is even a series of paintings in which I made a kind of self-reference, that is, as a background I would use a painting which I myself had previously painted. So there was a kind of tautological element, where the motif for painting was not looked for in the outside world, but in the sphere of art. Some time later, it struck me that I painted the whole painting just because of that background. Already, here, we find the roots of the *Culturescapes*.

In 1976 I was finally given the opportunity to realize a triptych with a painting of Kandinsky. The second element was the walking stick of someone called Johannes Hutten, whom I met by chance in Berlin and who lent me this object, and the third element was an avocado. The first triptych expresses the need for the existentially important balance between life and art. The basic concept is, to bring an artistic activity into the state of composing new reality from the existing elements. I think that this world has too many things anyway, it has too many similar concepts based on formal novelty, it has too many of the same philosophies, and my idea was to restructure these existing

elements and to position them in a conceptually convenient form to me. To establish a kind of co-existence between elements which in real life, more precisely in our culture would be seen as far apart. I made *Triptychos Post Historicus* mostly because I understood, loved and respected art, but profoundly despised the conventions imposed on it, which deprive an art object of its prime function and its spiritual performance.

KDP: If I look at your *Triptychos Post Historicus* installations from 1976 until today, it seems to me that nothing has really changed concerning their effects and the way we perceive them. That means: the installations of 1995 have the same fascination and provoke the same perplexity as the works of 1976. What do you think is the reason for the topicality of your concept?

BD: I think there is something universal about it, because every human being must be concerned with at least one of the elements of the triptych. Another important issue is that it is not a work of a formalist nature. I do not deny that I compose the *Triptychos* in the most classical way, but here the similarity of traditional art-making ends. It is important that I do not relate to any specific period of art or to any specific artist, but I have tried to incorporate all the artistic experiences from Cave Time to the present.

I also realize that every social theory is nothing else but boring poetry. I don't believe in the development or formal evolution of art, nor do I approve of the unnecessary accumulation of art objects. But I have a strong notion of the passage of time, therefore I acknowledge the accumulation of experience. So there is no one particular period of art that especially influences me. I allow myself to play with colors, or with composition. Obviously in the early days of conceptual art all of us, who were the first protagonists, used to deny that side of art, by making black and white documentary pieces.

There is another aspect of the *Triptychos* which is the component of time. This becomes evident when the fruits started rotting next to the paintings which are meant to be eternal. I think that may be the reason—I thank you for this compliment—of the universality of the triptychs. It probably makes them as interesting now as in twenty years. There are even *Triptychos* of northern or southern hemispheres, depending where the fruit comes from. Fruit evokes the eternal cycle of life, from insemination to harvest, different seasons—inclinations and declinations of our planet in relation to the sun. They can recycle themselves, many things which happen independently from human logic.

KDP: The *Triptychos Post Historicus* are defined as an anti-art historical and anti-historical

concept. It is your theory that all styles are possible at any time. It is only a question of perception, of power [influence] or even accident [chance]. Therefore you avoid a personal style, you combine only materials already existing. The values of these different elements cancel themselves in an endless plurality of things. Nevertheless you are making new images with new semantic and new iconographic structures and a certain composition of colors and images never seen before. Your installations are born out of the traditional structures in art. In this sense you are part of art history...

BD: History is also a very small part of Post History. It may be only a question of language or terminology. The *Triptychos* have another goal. They are not considered as aesthetic exercises, but they combine the intent of each element and its prefabricated meaning. These blocks of meaning and their interrelation determine a final meaning. Since this is a metaphysical operation there are many things that we cannot always rationalize. I mentioned earlier a flux of time; one component of the *Triptychos* is the decay or change in the fruits, a recycling of these elements. I do not even call them installations, I call them constellations. It is like a constellation of certain stars like the Great Bear, Andromeda, Orion, Little Lion, Hercules or Dog. These are constellations that man has known from the beginning of humankind, and yet everything is relative. When I was sailing in Australia, or elsewhere in the southern hemisphere, my notion about the stars, everything that I had been looking at ever since I was born, points of orientation disputed by no one, were just gone, and been replaced by the constellations of the southern sky.

Back to the *Triptychos*: after showing them, the painting goes back on the wall, the chair goes back to the office and the apple is eaten or rots. And then—one year later—all these elements gravitate towards each other if there is a need for an exhibition. And then again they separate. It is like all elements in the universe which come together in order to create one constellation, disperse, and then gravitate to each other again.

In your question you said that the *Triptychos* are anti-art historical and anti-historical. They are definitely anti-historical because I do not believe in history as evolution: it is a fiction just like the evolution of man. What I mean by that is that, whatever man has done, since he began to exist, the psychology of man has not changed. Whether he lives in a cave or a citadel, or in a modern house, the psychology of man is the main constant of every event that man has created. In that way I am an anti-evolutionist: man solves the problems of his existence, in the early days of hunting, now by buying meat—and only the formal procedures have been changed. Another fundamental credo of Post History is that there are no ruptures of creation, but ruptures of perception. In the totality of things everything exists already. In the 2nd century AD in Judea there was a philosopher with the name of Akiba ben Joseph, also known as Ben Akiba, who taught that there was nothing new

under the sun. He was hung by the Romans for this innocent thought. So it seems that the idea of progress or illusion of progress has a long history and it's been appreciated for quite a long time. I don't think that insisting on a personal style is essential or very important for art, because it is common knowledge that the signature of every man is different; if you gave one hundred canvases to every man on this planet, they would all make inevitably different identifiable products. For me to produce a work of a formally recognizable style is not what counts. It is more the patterns of thinking that individuals have, their specific energy, the specific frequency that they receive and transmit. I wanted to make something that would be very different within the structure of its very concept.

KDP: I think, when one is confronted with your theory of Post History and your denial of personal style, or with your emphasis on the role of chance, all these theories provoke a real fear, because our conception of history comprehends evolution, a progress. Your installations seem to be like three dimensional still-lives. Like the old Dutch still-lives, that evoke the idea of vanitas. The provocation however is, that the vanitas in your installations also includes the "eternal value" of the individual art work. That is our secret fear. Where do you think that it comes from?

BD: It might sound like a paradox, but there is no specific area where I find my inspiration. For me, the inspiration comes from the field of the known and the unknown. I think the unknown is the richest field of all. On the other hand, one of the main motivations for my work and my inspiration is human stupidity. Intelligence is limited, stupidity is limitless. Because whatever has been done by the geniuses of mankind, such as Leonardo da Vinci, El Greco, Franz Kafka or Nicola Tesla, I take it as normal. But what I am opposed to are certain conventions which prevent us from seeing the world in its complexity. So all my work is addressing and struggling against these conventions, which do not correspond to the reality of this world, and prevent people from having a more universal *Weltanschauung*. I say that for instance in the cosmos there is no above and below, meaning that there are certain hierarchies in our civilization, but if you go a little bit outside, if you distance yourself from the conventions, then you see that these hierarchies are not applicable in a more universal sense, man is somehow neither culture nor nature. He is a very contradictory being, because, on one hand, he corresponds to the laws of nature, on the other hand he belongs to culture. From these limitations and contradictions are born these conventions. If stupidity ceased to exist, I would no longer see any reason to continue my work.

One of these contradictions is the idea of eternity. We believe that art works are eternal. And then when in the triptychs you see one element which is perishable, like fruits or vegetables, which are decaying in front of your eyes, it may shake your belief in the eternity of the other elements. It is

the same with human life in our western culture. In prehistoric time, man lived thirty or forty years and in the Middle Ages if somebody was fifty he was very old. Now people often live to ages of eighty or ninety, and in the next century people may well live for a hundred and twenty years. Here, we are struggling against a natural law to achieve eternity. This idea of eternity imposed on art, is a projection of our desire to live forever. But it is not achievable and it is not compatible with universal rules.

If in a historic sense culture is transformed nature, or in a certain way antithetical to nature, Post History tends to be in tune with nature. To return to the theme of chance disharmony or disorder if you think in cosmic terms, disorder is also incorporated into cosmic harmony. For instance, if two planets collide, it is integrated into the sequences of universal events. To impose certain hierarchies within our culture was justifiable to a point, because at a certain moment of human history the classification helped man to understand the world and to survive. Now it has become an obstacle. Now we have a different notion, since technology is bringing us close to the possibility of realising the Post-historical idea of a more global and cosmic vision, of the variety of co-existing concepts, without one dominating the others. Now we have the chance to proceed with different methods.

KDP: Your criticism of the idea of eternity includes the utopian dimension, in the sense of putting everything together, regardless of its actual or conventional value: everyday objects on an equal footing with art? The relativity of art or the awe or hidden everyday life? A democratic view or a view of the totality of life without distances? How should we perceive art? Which position does art occupy today?

BD: The position of art is exactly the same as ever: meaning that art started as a cognitive process, meaning that man, in order to learn about the world, had to express himself. I think it's very much the same today, the essence of art has not changed. For instance I had an exhibition in the cave at Lascaux which was a very important event for me. It took me thirteen years to get permission to get into the real Lascaux and do some paintings there. It was actually an event which lasted only about two hours. I have done some similar events, or even an international group show, which lasted only a couple of hours, because what is important is that the event lives on in people's memory. In the work with the *Casual Passer-by*, it's stated that I met a passer-by at, for instance, 3.54pm in 1972, but there is no date; there is only a time and a year. I omit the date, because memory works in such a way that you can remember something that happened seventeen years ago, about that time in the afternoon, but you would not know if it was the 7th or the 14th of February. You can recall the season, you can recall the time of day, you can recall the year, but not the actual date. Post History tries to introduce the notion of subjective time rather than obeying the

pseudo-scientific exactitude of history. The meaning of art has not changed, and I don't think it ever will change. I have always seen the artist not as a maker of objects, but as a creator of visions, and the same goes for the artist of Lascaux. Artists in prehistory did not make unnecessary objects, paintings on canvas, but just created a kind of referential image of existential importance, an aspiration for integration with the universe.

You remarked that these installations have a utopian dimension: in the short term, yes, in the long term, no, because they respect universal law, not the law that is established or invented by man. That is a very important issue because we must admit that these so-called "three different worlds," that is, these three different elements of the triptychs, belonging to different spheres, make this world in its totality. Whatever the interaction between them or measurement of each element in relation to the other would be. If you apply the logic of a painting, a logic of art to both the everyday object and to the apple, you would think that somehow the everyday object is becoming art, and the apple starts relating to painting, to its form and its colors. If you apply the logic of an everyday object, then obviously the usual hierarchy within this trinity would fall because the painting would be equal to either a shovel or a bicycle. From the perspective of nature, everything starts to be as perishable as fruit. But this is not really the idea of the *Triptychos*. The idea of the *Triptychos* is not to annihilate multiple meanings of its components or to make simple equations, but, on the contrary, to emphasize and induce a maximum of meaning in each element within its structure. By that, I mean that it activates and stimulates the optimal reading of each constituent, confirming this co-existence.

In your question you refer to the democratic aspect of the work or the view of the totality of life without distance. I would say that in the conventional sense of that word, it is democratic. But, however much I can and have, as a normal citizen, to respect the laws that are imposed on us, as an artist, I respect the laws of the universe, as I see them and as I can read them. The artist is the sole witness of what has been long forgotten, but also the crucial witness of the future, the only being able to live in two mutually distant eras.

KDP: You combine paintings and everyday objects with a certain kind of nature: fruits, vegetables or even living animals. Natural forms and colors and the "history of species" of nature are placed next to the forms and colors of art history, that is of the paintings. How would you define the connection between these two sections of our life and history?

BD: For me it is very important to incorporate the experiences of all the artists that have lived since the beginning of civilization. I abandoned the concept of originality, of personal handwriting for very

obvious reasons, that is, if you look at the history of painting, you notice that only the form changes and that there are no fundamentally new concepts. The true work of art must acquire a new structure and content. The works of art that used a different language are still of interest to us, but they are rare and the storerooms of museums are full of paintings which do not have any meaning today. In the procedure of making a triptych I am trying to find corresponding forms, corresponding shapes, but first of all corresponding meaning. For instance, there is one triptych I did in Beaubourg in 1981, in which you see a telephone in front of a De Chirico painting and a bunch of bananas. The bananas are something that could be iconographically associated with De Chirico, but in this particular one, *Portrait premonitoire d'Apollinaire*, there are no bananas. The life of the triptych that includes the bananas is different from the triptych with an apple or a coconut. They are all products of nature, but the time of decay of this fruit is very different. For instance if I exhibit a triptych with a banana for two months, the the triptych will have five, eight or even twelve week cycles, depending on the temperature of the room. The curators will have to change the banana simply because they are rotting fast. If it is an apple, the length [sic] of the show may coincide with the duration of an apple. If it is a coconut or any other nut or grain then obviously the piece could last forever.

KDP: That means the duration of an art work simply depends on the duration of this apple, on its natural lifetime, and not on the time that human beings imagine?

BD: Exactly. Talking about the cycles and different lives of triptychs brings us back to the triptychs' fourth dimension, the question of time. We suppose that endless time is eternity. Again, I am trying to suggest that there is no point in pretending that eternity exists, because in the cosmos eternity does not exist. In Post History 1 second = Eternity. 1 second = Eternity, depending which direction you come from. Different rhythms of triptychs show how man is trying to fight the problem of time, which is completely pointless. This desire is futile and belongs to the part of man that is more culture than nature. But it varies from culture to culture: Australian aborigines [sic] have a different notion of time and manifest their thoughts in a different way. Somehow they do not tend to materialize them in the same way as we do. Not only do we tend to materialize our thoughts, we also want to make them last forever.

KDP: The connection of art and nature has a long history in art. It was a history of perception and especially since the Romantics—a history of feeling. Basically it was always an expression of the relationship [or the conflict] between human beings and nature. When I saw your installations for the first time, I felt there could be a harmony between nature and art, but also a deep rivalry. The nature looks good, the fruits smell fine, taste good. It is never problematic or complicated to enjoy them—in contrast to art... Is Post History a risk for art?

BD: Maybe in historic terms, but not in prehistoric or Post-historic terms. I tend to believe that throughout history the cognitive in art has been replaced by the decorative, and I am trying to take art back to its origins. I think that this is the only possible way for art to continue. We have never had more movements happening at such a speed as in the last decade. Every six months or every year there was a new movement. As far as I am concerned there have been only two spiritual revolutions in this century; one around the '20s and one in the mid to late '60s. To produce a movement, which requires a few people who sense the "Zeitgeist" and express it in a similar way, is possible in our culture only once or twice in the century. With individual geniuses it is different.

You ask if Post History is a risk for art. I would say it is the only possibility for the continuation of art. It's taking art back to its original intentions. Post History does not insist on producing new objects, but has nothing against creating new images. For instance the triptych has a new meaning, but I did not make any of the three components. We have enough elements to play with in this world. For instance, if the traditional painters had blue, red, and other colors to make their paintings, on my palette I have Titian, Piero della Francesca, Luis Cranach, Georg Wilhelm Hegel, apples, melons, elephants, obelisks and lions, chairs and bicycles. The casual passers-by are a replacement for my ignorance, a divine supplement to my experience. The operation that I am doing is, like taking existing concepts and philosophies, and instead of keeping them apart, I play with these concepts to make something new. As opposed to quoting just one sentence, or quoting two words, I am putting whole blocks of meaning together. At best, what the Post-historic artist has in common with the historic one is possible curiosity and the sense of composition.

Going back to the idea that art is a cognitive process: in the beginning of human existence the cave man had to deal with the domestication of animals, it was one of his primary tasks. He probably drew these animals to understand them, on the wall of the cave, to have the theme constantly in front of his eyes. At the same time he invented the hammer, but did not need the nail to hang his painting. This is another paradox explaining the passive schizophrenia of the human being. The idea that he introduces the nail into art some 25,000 years after the invention of the hammer explains the shift of the cognitive to the decorative, from active to passive, from reflection to mere observation. So now when I use something from our heritage, from our culture, I am trying to understand what has happened in our environment, to relate to the artifacts that have remained. In short, if the problem of prehistoric man was the domestication of animals, the problem of Post History is the domestication of art. Art has moved far away from its original intentions, has become object making. It is a kind of visual pollution. We have a sufficient number of things, and I just try to structure them in the way I like to see them.



Granite slab built into the pavement in front of Cologne cathedral, 1980
Public comission, City of Cologne

KDP: The kind of nature you use in your installations is not “wild” nature, except for the animals. Fruits and vegetables are, at first glance domesticated nature, as their function as banal food, and in a certain sense also democratic: cheap fruit and vegetables, and it’s obvious in your *Triptychos* you often use the same fruit, for example, apples, coconuts or oranges. Do they have a certain iconographic meaning?

BD: They definitely do. No element in the *Triptychos* is ever chosen by chance. Have you ever seen a sketch by a prehistoric master? They left only “masterpieces.” Do you think that next to Lascaux they did their drawing exercises? Obviously not. Instead they had been thinking for years, drawing probably for decades in their minds, before they did it on the wall. Have you ever thought that the medieval masters did something which was separate from reflection? Sometimes the *Triptychos* is the product of immediate inspiration, sometimes after several months or even years of work. Just to give you an example with the fruit: there are books written about the symbolic meanings of fruit. This symbolism developed in antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages, but there are a few things which have not been said in the books. If I use for instance, an apple, the apple has its biblical meaning of temptation and sin, the gesture between hesitation or decision, and it is well known. But when we speak about the apple we do not realise that an apple contains invariably only six or eight seeds inside. For me it is essential that this element of the triptych can reproduce itself, being in contact with nature without human presence, and that is a very important fact. That is why fruits vegetables and living animals are part of the *Triptychos*. For instance, when I made an installation in Lenbachhaus with Franz Marc’s *Blue House*, I used yellow melons. Obviously one would say, ok the yellow of the melon can be associated with Expressionist yellow: it is true, but the fact is the melon has hundreds of seeds, whereas the apple has only six or eight. The whole movement, the *Blaue Reiter*, was made after this painting so the large number of seeds there is a reference to the fertility and the possibility of the multiple reproduction of the Expressionist concept. Fruit in a triptych is always more than just a color, it is more than a shape. Our reading depends on its position (high, low, left, right), its own iconographic and symbolic meaning, plus the one that I induce.

KDP: You also confront paintings or sculpture-portraits with living animals. In our exhibition you confront art works with a snake. Compared to the fruits in this case the contrast between the values seems to be stronger. Nevertheless the question is, do the animals have a feeling for art, and if yes, how does it affect our ideas about art or about the animals?

BD: Well, the main reason for confronting the art works with the animals is that it means that I am also confronting the artist with the animal. That’s another analogy with the Lascaux artist who had animals around him. I intend to insert animals into my artistic vocabulary. As for animals’ feelings

for art, I'll give you an example. I started working with animals out of pure intuition, but later I learnt more about them. An interesting thing occurred when I did the first work at the Waddington Gallery in 1981 with living peacocks. I was making an installation with a Cézanne, a Monet, and a Picasso. As the gallery storage was near to where I was taking these shots, I suddenly saw a Roy Lichtenstein painting. I asked an assistant to bring this painting and to remove all the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist ones. A very interesting thing happened: the peacocks started fighting. At first I thought it was a coincidence, and I asked that this painting be removed and the Monet brought back. The peacocks became quiet and in order to be certain that this was not a coincidence we bought the Lichtenstein back and the peacocks fought again. On a very basic level on the animal psychology, the event was determined by shapes and colors. When the Cézanne painting with more earthly pigments, the same ones that the cavemen used, was brought in, the birds became quieter. I believe that this answers your question.

But it answers another essential question: if animals can react to art, it means that art concerns every being and it means that art really is about cognition, perception, and reception. We know that some animals create certain shapes and forms, like termites: there are also birds in South America which have something like a nest competition, and the male bird that makes the best, most attractive and elaborate nest is the one who attracts the female. They do not call it art, but it has to do with modeling, the modeling which determines their reproduction, conditions their existence. Lofton says animals are the last witness to another logic, fine connoisseurs of the cosmic law. Take for instance the snake or other reptiles that I used either as signs in some paintings, or live in the installations. They can sense an earthquake many hours before it happens. Apart from other symbolic or mythological meanings they have, like fertility for instance, they are a perfect metaphor for the anticipation or intuition that some artists have when they make the works that precede movements or collective experience.

I learned a great deal from animals. Once I made a work with a giant lizard. Just after lunch I fed him and realized that the next time that I would have to do it would be in seven days. Several hours later at the dinner table I realized that the sun would rise seven times before the lizard ate again. What was for me the time between lunch and dinner for him was 7-9 days; this provoked a reflection about metabolism and the relativity of time.

KDP: Nature is time. Art seems to be eternal, at least it is a habit in our present human culture to preserve all kinds of art for eternity. But art has only existed since the Lascaux man painted the first cave walls and it will end with the disappearance of time. Nature is always changing, evolving, but finally it will be eternal. If you include nature in your concept, is this a part of Post History's



March 11 – This Could be a Day of Historical Importance, Obelisk, 1979
White Carrara marble
Collection: Museum and Garden, Schloss Charlottenburg, Berlin

attack on art history? At the end the winner of the competition will be the apple.

BD: Sometimes I say that what red was to Titian, an apple is to me. If despite various code-symbols that it has, we reduce an apple to a red color only, obviously in the present state of things any painter or painting has no chance in competing with the apple in terms of preserving the freshness of the red. But luckily in the cosmos there is no winner, and in the cosmos eternity does not exist. At some point man will have to get to this point. Lets take another example: some time ago man ran 100m in 15 seconds, but the world record today is only 10 or 9 sec. So eventually it will be 5 or 4 seconds for 100m, and then it will come down to 0 seconds. It will be an action with no physical manifestation, similar to the work with the bust I did in Mönchengladbach. That's why I say eternity = 1 sec. It brings us also to the question of speed. What is good about art is that you can communicate a very large number of messages extremely fast. That's why I like to consider the Post-historic artist as *Philosophe à l'image* who expresses himself at the speed of light.

In a certain way it is an attack on history, or it is an addition to or it is a correction, because Post History is trying to propose this universal view. History and culture act against nature. Post History tries to be in tune with nature, that's one of the basic distinctions between the two.

KDP: You have worked in so many different museums around the world. What kind of challenge is it to work in this kind of museum, which conserves until today the idea of the Cabinet of Curiosities (*Wunderkammer*)?

BD: It is probably more stimulating than a museum in its present state, because in a Wunderkammer you find different objects that would not definitely be man-made. There is everything that is "strange," that would provoke reflection. From a long time ago, my idea was that if you look from the moon there is practically no difference between the Louvre and the zoo. Obviously in a museum of art that is at the same time a natural history museum, I have more chance of doing that than in an art museum. (Therefore this exhibition is conceived as both the Louvre and the zoo.)

KDP: It is obvious that collections and exhibitions in natural history departments are visited by more people than the art history departments. Nature seems to be more fascinating than art. For example, it is always astonishing to learn that many people believe that prehistoric animals like the dinosaur of Loch Ness still exist today. That means, it seems easier to imagine parallel existence of different natural historical phenomena, than that of different artistic styles.

BD: I think that natural history is a contradiction in terms, because nature has no history. Nature is a process. It is a very complex process. I mentioned earlier that even chaos is incorporated into the general harmony of nature. We say that the beginning of history is the discovery of writing, of those who will come after you. Before that it was prehistory. That's the time man when communicated with images, a time of confrontation between event and witness. Also, being a direct witness meant something of existential importance. That's why the image-witness differs from the text-witness. The image can substantiate the legend, whilst the text, i.e. secondary witnessing, can create the myth which decreases the individual's existential ability.

What man does not understand or does not approve of, he does not tend to write about. History pretends to be the science which explains the past, but since in the universe or in the complexity of nature, there are so many things that cannot be explained, history as a science cannot be applicable to nature. However, we can recognize a certain chronology of things, something that happened seven million years ago and that something else only two million years ago. I want, under the very roof of this institution, to question the concept of history while showing natural phenomena, to discuss the problem of Post History.

It is very interesting that there are more visitors to the department of national history than the art department. It means that man is still more interested in nature than in culture. This statistic is a clear demonstration of man's animal nature. I don't blame those who go to the national history department, perhaps it could be explained. Take, for instance, a little wild thing which lives in the forest outside Darmstadt; it lives its natural life in its natural surrounding. On the other hand, think how many kilometers we had to travel in order to make our existence. When I counted the number of kilometers I have driven, I realized I had been to the moon twice just driving, in order to make my existence. The Darwinian idea of evolution, that we are more perfect than a mouse, is not true. A mouse can live here in a museum, and can eat these pieces of wood. We have to travel thousands of miles to make our living. It is a very simple conclusion with a terrible implication, because these facts help us to understand the faults of Darwinian theory.

Apart from his cerebral memory, man has also a genetic memory. Sometimes we can probably feel with the skin or see with the skin. I realized that when I made the work with the lions, when I installed the paintings in the lion cage. The lion retreated when the television crew started filming, because he was afraid of the cameraman, and when he was five centimeters away from the painting, he stopped. He sensed it, not with his eyes, but felt it with his skin. I think we still have this capacity, but we are not aware of it, maybe we have lost it. A newborn baby can swim, but a child of three cannot. A child has to learn how to swim again. This is very interesting phenomena connected to genetic memory.

For some very strange reason we are more interested in what happened a hundred years ago than in what happened yesterday. This is another question I ask myself: why is it that we spend more time exploring the Middle Ages than the present or recent past? Another interesting phenomenon is that the artist has always been—although it does not seem to be the case for Dada—interested in the everyday ephemera. For instance, he would take an ashtray full of cigarette butts, and try and make something interesting, rather than to think about Gilgamesh, or the tower of Babylon. But it is human nature to look back as much as to look forwards. That's why I say that ideas from millions of years apart meet in the same instant in the Post-historical dimension.

If we keep going back in our attempts to understand, it will bring us to the nucleus of the universe. If you go back, then you will come to the point where man did not exist, where animals did not exist, where the planet did not exist in its present form, and this interest, this intuition and this instinct will lead you to the essence of the universe. That is my explanation of the human interest in the past time. I don't claim to express this scientifically. It is just my artistic intuition which suggests that.

KDP: In a certain sense, a museum like the Hessisches Landesmuseum seems to be the ideal and real Post-Historical museum: art, history of civilization and nature under one roof. Often there is a kind of rivalry between the departments, as well as a will to find an interdisciplinary harmony. What is your advice for us art and natural historians?

BD: Let's remove the word "historians" from natural historians and replace it with "observers of nature." A museum must always take into account its origins and act in tune with its origins in order to justify its existence. Let's say that man initiated the idea of the museum in order to learn about the world, to observe the objects he had accumulated so far. It started with the idea of the *Wunderkammer*, collecting odd bits of different kinds, but soon after specialists came into the game, certain categorizations and classifications were introduced. That served the cognitive processes, but due to an unnecessary accumulation of objects, objects that did not add any more meaning, this categorization started to act against the primary intentions of the museum. That's why I say that I don't want to make any more objects, to add more words to the vocabulary of nonsense.

I am very happy to be able to do a piece with a living animal in a museum. Finally we are reaching a position where we can observe the world more like universal beings, with this marriage between museum and zoo. Historic man was a very good painter of details; he would focus himself on something and then do it. The role of the Post-historic artist is to consider the general harmony of the world and to try to forget about the categorical boundaries characteristic of historic time.



With Joseph Beuys in front of a *Triptychos Post Historicus* at the Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf, 1978



Preparing work for Konrad Fischer's gallery in Beuys' studio in Düsseldorf

This exhibition deals with several problems that we raised in this conversation; I will mention just one work, *Slow as light, fast as thought*, the third version, with the additional title, *Broken by chance*. It incorporates elements like lemons, together with a terracotta head from the Neolithic collection from 5000 BC. In this work I will have a horsemen from the Bronze Age and pieces from Ancient Egypt and Rome, a work by Holbein from 1515, and then, a jump into the 20th century. These elements will be set in random fragments of glass taken from a shattered panel measuring approximately 220 cm x 100 cm, and placed along the same axis. Each element will be titled a few degrees from its vertical position, creating the effect of an anticlockwise rotation, that is the same sense of rotation as the solar system.

Although making art can look like a very archaic activity, it is the only activity in which you can express yourself with the speed of light. For instance there is the speed of music, the speed of sound, the speed of cinema, the speed of writing (I am mentioning this in order of decreasing speed). It is no coincidence that the visual arts are one of the most important arts, because you can express extremely complex messages within an extremely short time, which develops a special kind of responsibility.

KDP: One more question for the end of this conversation. I know you were friends with Beuys. Since our museum has the most important collection of his works, can you tell me something about your relationship with him?

BD: I am not surprised you mention Beuys here. What Luxor is to Ramses, Darmstadt is to Beuys. He was a great man, a great artist and I loved him very much. I used to travel a lot by car in those days and I used to see him very often. After we had both shown in Lucio Amelio, opening on the same day, we become really close friends and we had endless discussions about everything. He was very generous and simple. I would phone him at any time of day or night and we would meet a half an hour later. It was his generosity and insistence that enabled me to do that large photograph of a passer-by in Düsseldorf. I can also recall an occasion on a day before the opening of the *Museum de Geldes* exhibition at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf. It was the first public showing of one of my *Triptychos*. Beuys was installing in the neighboring room and came to see what I had done. He stood there in front of the work for a long time and then, in spite of all the people around, asked that we go for lunch alone. Just Beuys, Nena, and myself. We went to *Goldenes Einhorn* in Altstadt and started talking as usual. But at a certain moment, obviously moved by the work he just saw, he asked how I could be so quiet while doing such a radical work.

I laughed and asked him what he wanted me to do, if he wanted to demonstrate or create a new



Triptychos Post Historicus
Musée du Louvre, Paris, 1996
I: *Portrait of a Young Man*, Sandro Botticelli, ca. 1470-1475
II: Candle lit by Braco Dimitrijević
III: Apple



Against Historic Sense of Gravity, 1995
Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt

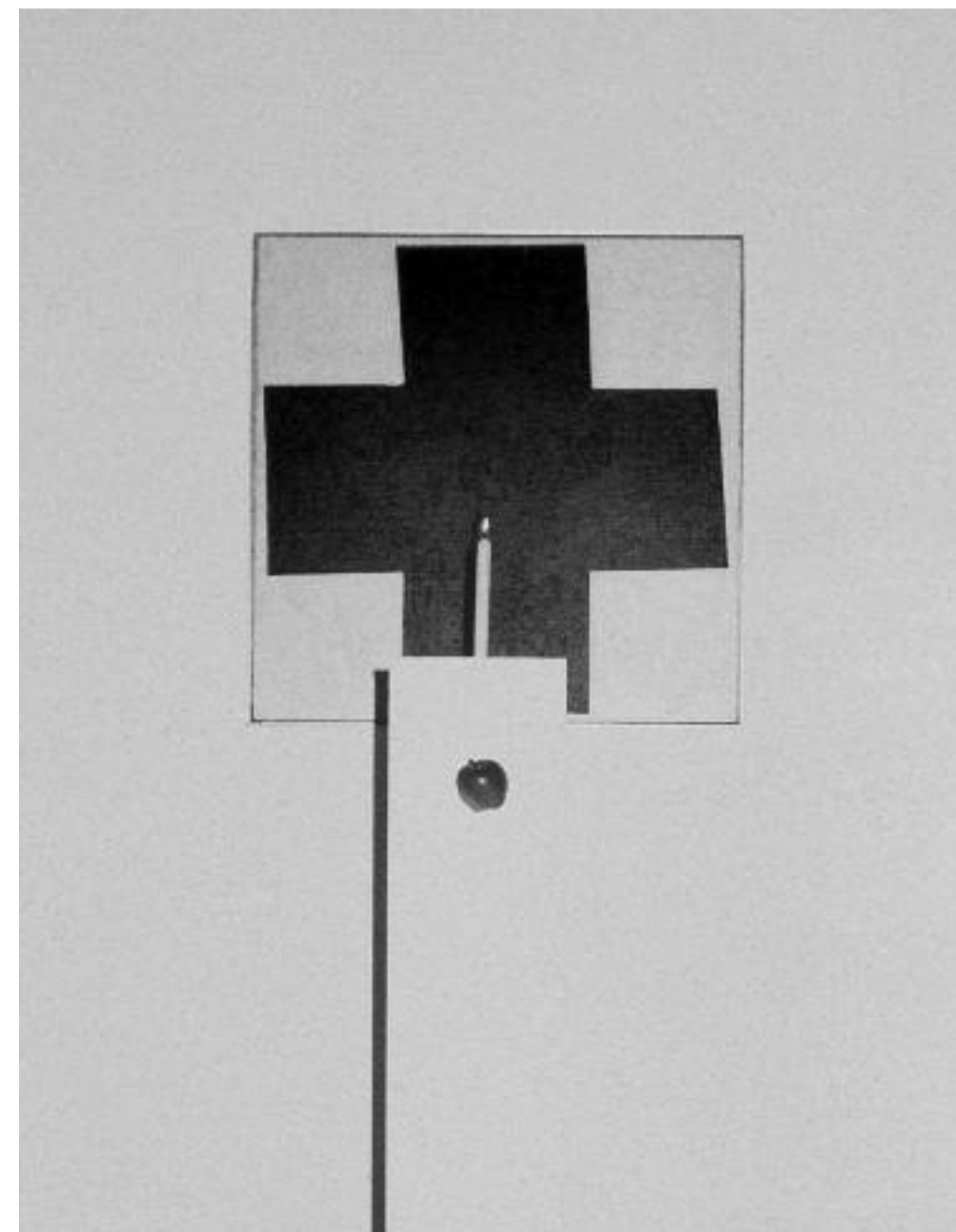
party. He laughed and said that it was fantastic, but that that was his invention and it was perfect that he was the only one doing it. I explained that my big photographs were seen by millions of people, only half of whom would realize something strange was going on, but that I was happy about it, because my goal is to provoke reflection, and that is enough. Out of several million spectators only a small percentage know that it was I who did it. I explained that as a child I was given a lot of media coverage, I had the status of a superstar kid. When I was a professional skier it was quite common in downhill competitions to have thousands of people cheering me on. Later I was not so interested in that aspect, because fame is, in most cases unjustified and faults of historic reasoning. He seemed to accept this.

Apart from numerous memories and other things about this exceptional artist that we preserved, there are two works that stay as souvenirs of our friendship: a portrait I did of him in the Ludwig Museum, the *Triptychos Artists' hats are high above the rainbow* with his hat flying above a Malevich landscape, and the portrait he has done of me with my coat. I miss him a lot now. I would say that a certain imbalance in the art world was caused by his death. It is almost symbolic that he died in the eighties.

He was extremely anti-hierarchical in his behavior, very witty and despite the age difference I felt him to be almost like someone from the same generation. I say almost, because the mentality of the works is different. Although I felt Beuys to be extremely close as a friend and an exceptional human being, he was from a completely different artistic generation. His work however was based on modeling and elements of personal mythology; he introduced new artistic materials and new forms. He was the last myth worth constructing, the last myth worth believing in.

In contrast my work is based on the deconstruction of myth and introduced an idea based on non-originality. So the modeling or composing in my work does not come from shaping new materials linked with personal mythology but from creating new semantic structures referring to the myths, and contradictions, of our world. In that sense he is the last historic artist and I am the first Post-historic one.

I have introduced nothing new, I have just changed the distance between a few existing things, created new constellations, confirming the universe by creating my own. What makes me think that I am an artist is that I create images, but in fact I am a thinker who has chosen to create images in order to be able to communicate at the speed of light.



Triptychos Post Historicus

Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1981

I. *Black Cross*, Kazimir Malevich, 1915

II. Candle lit by Tchepo Kaleb on October 19, 1981

III: Apple

Interview

Jean-Hubert Martin and Braco Dimitrijević

Jean-Hubert Martin: I would like you to redefine the idea of Post History as stated in your 1976 book *Tractatus Post Historicus*.

Braco Dimitrijević: I initiated this discourse at the beginning of my work in 1969 with the statement: “There are no mistakes in history, the whole of history is a mistake.” This marked a revolt against history which I have always considered as being a false science and which I would call the only impressionistic science. There really is no such thing as the facts. The true power of history does not lie in the physical facts. It manifests itself through the psychological effects brought about by the event. People write their impressions, claiming them to be scientific because real history is made of many possibilities, pluralities and impressions. Let us call it a quantity of subjectivities. What we call History is nothing more than one subjectivity which is imposed on the whole world as objective opinion. This is the reasoning behind my critique of history and my formulation of the notion of Post History which, for me, means the time of a multitude of co-existing truths rather than any one ultimate truth. It is therefore also a plurality of concepts that exist simultaneously.

I have always maintained that in Baroque times, it is possible that at least one artist was making monochrome paintings. Such boldness would have been in direct opposition with the richness of the Baroque, a sort of statement that says, “Now I’m going to make some black monochromes!” The possibility of this being the case has always been swept aside because our civilization is based on exclusion. I would also say that style is just one simple manifestation of the racism in art. If black monochromes constitute the prevalent style, then whoever paints yellow flowers is destined to be excluded. This is all due to the fact that we have a linear history of art, which is to say a succession of styles. Often, for instance, I will pick up the book on abstract art published by Skira in 1953 that features Kandinsky, Mondrian, and Van Doesburg but where there is no mention of Malevich. Few people at the time knew he even existed.

JHM: Forty years later, however, and thanks to the diffusion made possible by your generation, Malevich is considered one of the great artists of our century. From this perspective, how do you see your own position as an artist?

BD: Given the fact that I express myself with images, I consider myself a philosopher who communicates at the speed of light. This is the greatest speed that exists in relation to the speed of sound, the speed of writing and reading or the speed of a spectacle. This is how I came up with the title of my show *Slow as Light, Fast as Thought* at the Museum Moderner Kunst in Vienna. Since I was a champion skier, I consider it possible to compare the creation of a work of art with a 100 km/h descent. Both require courage and speed in making decisions, as well as the absolute mastery of space and time.

JHM: Coming back to the definition of Post History you have just given, does this mean that the interpretations regarding any given moment in history are significant, including those that are of apparently minor significance at the time? And if we apply such a notion to your work as an artist, does this not mean that you would need to use a multitude of means and techniques in order to create art? Wouldn't this involve you using a huge variety of methods, materials, and styles in order to say everything you wanted to say?

BD: To create a portrait of the planet, all means are permissible. If traditional painters had blue, red and other colors to make their paintings, on my palette I have Titian, Cézanne, elephants, apples, obelisks, cellos, lions or bicycles. Nothing is excluded.

JHM: Since you admit that all interpretations are possible and valid, and that those which appear completely insipid and negligible can prove, with time, to be the most important, do you set out to break away from the prevailing thought of an era?

BD: In my opinion, there is no such thing as rupture in creation, but there are ruptures of perception. I am opposed to all stereotypes in thinking and behavior. For instance, the large-scale *Casual Passers-by* were obviously a resistance to the cult of the personality as well as a critique of certain automatisms conditioned by the media. What I wanted to do was to create a reversal in meaning, and sometimes this has been successful. One woman who went to Beijing in 1975 told me, "When I saw the portrait of Mao, I thought he was just some anonymous passer-by." Later, when I started exhibiting in museums, I reacted against the fetishistic treatment given to the work of art. Since my father was a painter and I had my first one man show at the age of ten, I started very early to ask myself questions about the function of an art work and its presentation in the

museum, I tried to play with it, and give back some significance to the work of art as an object complete with all its inherent spiritual values, as something that has originated from the mind of an artist. It is no longer a sacred object, an icon that cannot be touched or taken down. It is easier to penetrate all the layers of meaning of a painting in a *Triptychos Post Historicus*, than to recognize the values of the same work when it is simply hanging on the wall.

JHM: I actually think that one of the great qualities of your triptychs is that they allow for this sort of freshness of contemplation, because we are so used to seeing the work of art the way it has to be, vertically on the wall. In this way, it becomes a decorative element and its meaning evaporates.

BD: I am concerned with a certain idea of harmony. How can harmony be expressed in this world? For someone looking at a *Triptychos Post Historicus* from the outside, the Franz Marc painting has a different value to the pitchfork or the melon. On the other hand, this microcosm, the triptych, would not exist without the melon or the canvas. The *Triptychos* is by no means an equation between these elements; its role is rather to amplify their significance. The three elements alongside each other on the same plane sum up the universe.

Only a small amount of my work is inspired by "cultural heritage," or by strokes of genius from the past, because I find ideas of genius such as those of Da Vinci or Michelangelo completely normal. What have inspired me, on the other hand, are human idiocy and the idiocy of human conventions. Since urban space is so saturated with messages of culture and dominant ideologies, what I set out to do was to create another space. I have always said, "Louvre is my studio, street is my museum." The idea was to create a parallel world, something of a utopia, perhaps. What I intended to create was a counter-model and propose a counter-stance to the existing, dominant thought. I recall, for instance, that *Casual Passer-by* on the Boulevard Saint-Germain des Prés in 1971 was, statistically, seen by five million people a day as they walked by. About five of them understood what it was all about. The ambiguity that lies between the five and the five million is interesting. Five million people minus five were perturbed by the fact that there was a portrait there.

JHM: Your concept of Post History has also led you to ponder the origins of art.

BD: After fourteen years of persistent attempts, I finally got to enter Lascaux where I made seven canvases. I feel particularly close to Lascaux man because I feel that prehistoric man was no small painter of detail like historic man. For me the Lascaux era represents the time when man's talents and skills had to be used to their full extent to enable him to survive. In those days, as now is only sometimes the case, art was a cognitive process, it was art, philosophy and science at the same

time. So, the wall of Lascaux was at once painting, notebook, scientist's blackboard, the book of writer and reader, as the cave was all in one—home, studio, gallery, library and museum. The themes dealt with by man throughout history are very restricted. Even the emergence of museums with their painting galleries, sculpture galleries, rooms of Chinese vases, Greek vases, Roman glass and so on is an idea of fragmentation of the world. Nowadays, we should be breaking away from this idea of the fragmentation of the world which was appropriate in the Renaissance or Age of Reason. This is why, at a certain point, I decided to hold some exhibitions at the zoo. There are cages at the zoo just as there are at the Louvre.

JHM: Lascaux seems to be an important metaphor in your work.

BD: Yes, because prehistoric man lived, slept and created in the cave in which he guarded everything he had discovered, including fire. Lascaux represents for me “the time of primary needs.” If somebody was a good hunter, he would go to hunt; if somebody felt a need to paint, he would get up in the deep dark of the cave, while the others were sleeping, and would draw by torchlight, trying to comprehend and explain the world to himself and to the others. An untalented hunter would soon be unmasked, because the survival of the community depended on the catch everyone brought. Today, in the modern world, we encounter everyday painters who hunt and hunters who paint, people who are far from being both at the same time.

JHM: I think this is the abiding preoccupation of some of the most important artists of today as they try to regain that concept of globality and totality and break away from the idea of fragmentation which, up until not so long ago, was dominant and which is effectively a hallmark of the museum.

BD: I consider Post History as being very close to prehistory for various reasons. First of all, the level of technology we have reached means we are back on the borderline of existence because this world could quite easily be heading for collapse. This is not some apocalyptic notion, but if there were ten Chernobyls all in one go... We have to be vigilant just as the Lascaux dwellers were vigilant in their times. There were always guardians of fire, so they were vigilant people and I think man has survived because there were artists. Moreover, Lascaux was, at one and the same time, both Louvre and zoo. The animals and paintings occupied the same cave. Thousands of years later, and we could finally break through into a situation of harmony. Nowadays, however, it is a struggle to reestablish the harmony that existed so long ago at Lascaux. If historic man was a man of fragmented vision, then post-historical man has a vision of synthesis. It is the world in which one becomes aware of the relation between paintings and birds, objects, fruits, blacksmiths, and stars.



Memories of Childhood, 1983
Collection Kunstmuseum Bern



Braco Dimitrijević, solo exhibition in the cave of Lascaux, France, 1993

Come to think of it, I have done practically nothing; all I have done is to bring things closer together. I actually do not see myself as the producer of objects but as the creator of a vision.

JHM: On the subject of Lascaux, which is considered as a beginning of the history of art, do you think that there is any progress in art, or that there is an evolution in art, or neither?

BD: Art is just a perception of the world or formulating something which exists but of which we as yet have no knowledge. Obviously, today's art is different from yesterday's but that's just because there are more things around. Art is still a cognitive process, now as in the past. It will always involve comprehension of the world, whatever the product may be. I don't really believe in art as an evolutionary process. That kind of interpretation is only possible if you exclude all phenomena which don't fit into your scheme of things. Recently, when setting up a *Triptychos Post Historicus*, I used an original painting. But it was only 98.2% original because one corner had been restored which means that 1.8% of the painting was painted by the restorers. A lot of art history is retouched in this way, just like history in general whatever doesn't fit in is excluded or whatever is apparently irrational has to bide its time to be accepted. Picasso, for instance, was 300 years late in being inspired by African tribal art. The proper time for that would have been Columbus's century because this was the era of Europe's first contacts with distant cultures. If there had been an artist on board Columbus's ship he could have been inspired by Indian art.

But it took us 300 years to appreciate native art and even then, it was through the interpretation of an artist. It took roughly the same amount of time for the world to come to appreciate El Greco, and if it had taken 500 instead of 300 years, we would still be ignorant of him today. I made a piece referring to that problem entitled *Two, four, or eight hundred years*. El Greco, dealing with the fact that perception is conditioned by the historical and social setup. Nowadays there are plenty of ideas, but if in future somebody summarizes developments in 20th-century art, he may omit what he doesn't understand.

JHM: Is that what led you to make a piece about Darwin?

BD: Yes. It was really to emphasize my disbelief in linear development. As a student in 1968, I drew diagrams of Darwinist evolution and showed it as being disrupted by various forces or creatures or inexplicable events because I somehow never believed in this linear theory.

JHM: You also made pieces with live animals; you confronted the live animals with classical works of art and actual objects.

BD: In a way, the animals fulfill the same function as the fruits in the *Triptychos*. My early works dealt with chance or potential creativity. Animals represent the irrational, unknown, unpredictable element because their logic is different from ours and often beyond our comprehension. I made a piece about that entitled *Last Witnesses of Another Logic*. For instance, when people see these works, they often ask whether the lion tried to destroy the cello or the painting. That's typical of human logic. Why would a lion want to do either? However, it is impossible to predict what form the work will ultimately take because one never knows where the leopard will move or in which direction the bird will fly. For instance, in the piece with peacocks, the birds walked calmly around or stood in front of the Picasso, Matisse and Monet. But as soon as a Pop Art painting was brought into the room, they became very agitated—maybe it had something to do with color psychology. However, all these elements and many more are included in the work. For example, in Persian mythology, the peacock symbolizes pride and immortality, but also stupidity, so it could be a metaphor for human vices and superficiality—preening one's metaphorical feathers.

JHM: If you wanted to confront nature with art why didn't you use photomontage or today's Photoshop?

BD: An important aspect of all my work is that I never use photomontage. In the early pieces with passers-by it would have been easy to take a photo of a square and glue a picture of somebody's face on it. But for me, it was always essential to have the work executed in real life. It is also vital to invest a lot of energy in executing it, doing the impossible, combining incompatible things. Usually I require a lot of time and energy to make a work happen. People ask me, "Why don't you put a Cézanne reproduction next to the violin?—it would be just the same as using the original." But it's not the same because it's not merely an image by Cézanne or Picasso which is part of the *Triptychos* but painting with all its material, sociological and cultural significance: its heavy frame, its cult status, its market value. All these factors play a role in the *Triptychos*. In our civilization, original paintings have a different status from reproductions so it is essential to persuade museum curators to let me use something which is sacred to our culture. For me, it is important to bring these model situations to life, even if it's only for five minutes.

JHM: When you used elephants to make a work, was it just to create an effect or was there something more behind it?

BD: I brought elephants out into the open field, and perhaps for the first time since Hannibal, elephants were walking around freely in Europe. In principle, the work is not different from the early casual passers-by pieces in which I eliminate the barrier between the known and unknown, the

recognized and unrecognized potential. The elephants' free walk symbolizes the breaking down of barriers between different cultures, the flow of ideas between continents and the promotion of harmony in the world. So I see these works—the *Triptychos* and *Culturescapes*—as a portrait of our planet, because after all, if one looks down at Earth from the Moon, there is virtually no distance between the Louvre and the zoo.

JHM: We were both witness of 1968.

BD: Probably more than that.

JHM: OK, but what I want to say is that it was remarkable time, and in fact what followed it was probably more important. There was one whole generation whose minds and ideas were shaped in relationship to the experience of a preceding generation, that is our parents, who spoke about war, resistance, and holocaust. Naturally we wanted to escape the experience and values of our parents and to create our own. For me internationalism was an essential value, because it also bore fruit in art. How do you see yourself in all that and especially in recent years with regard to the revived interest in Conceptual Art and the appearance of Neo-Conceptualism?

BD: It is true that we wanted to position ourselves, not only in relation to our parents' generation, but also in relation of everything else that existed before. Those who considered themselves artists started to question art. As for myself, I started seeking the answers to the question of the artist's role, and that is visible in my work of that time. In 1968 and 1969 I made works like *Accidental Sculpture* and *Accidental Painting* where chance played an important role. I always considered that chance is logic beyond the reason, but in that context one can ask what reason is. Is it in the domain of individual, collective or part of something even wider than that? Those works questioned the notion of the author, of the recipient and also the context in which art is created. Although not every artist of that generation was aware of art's social context, in some cases attitudes overlapped. There was a common desire to leave the galleries and museums in order to create and show our works somewhere else. That goes for Land Art people as well as for me, but I think the similarity would end there. My comprehension of the space was quite different. I had a very strong notion of urban or social space and the main difference was that I started to understand space as history, as an environment that shapes our behavior. In this stage of civilization our environment is no longer physical space but cultural heritage. The logical consequence of that understanding was also the analysis of the way in which certain messages were conveyed. After using exclusively photography for *Casual Passer-by* works, I became aware of the importance of the medium in which these messages were transmitted throughout history. That is how the idea of using bronze



When Elephants Were Rehearsing Nordic Disciplines in my Home Town, 1983



Dust of Louvre and Mist of Amazon
Waddington Galleries, London 1981

cast came to mind. Since I have never had a dogmatic mind, it was natural that in the most orthodox period of Conceptual Art, I should start using, alongside with photography, a totally different medium—marble and bronze.

JHM: Your memorial plaques, the Berlin obelisk or monuments to casual passers-by are in appearance completely outside of the Zeitgeist. But can one escape the Zeitgeist? At the same time there were other kinds of urban interventions, like Gordon Matta Clark splitting houses or Joseph Beuys sweeping the street after a demonstration.

BD: I am glad that you mentioned them. Both were close friends and great artists. I became friends with Gordon in 1975 during my first exhibition in New York at the Sperone Gallery. We considered each other as counterparts in our respective milieus. We were both sons of painters, but apart from that there was something else we had in common. Each of us reacted strongly to the traditions of the countries and continents on which we were born. American art is concerned with space and Gordon responded to it in the most radical way. For my part, my reaction concerned a typical European problem, that is many layers of time or simply too much history. By coincidence, in 1979, after Gordon's death, a curator of the Badischer Kunstverein in Karlsruhe put on simultaneous one-man shows of our respective work, without knowing that we were friends.

Speaking of Beuys: at the time I liked his idea that everyone is an artist, but now I would add that everyone is maybe not a good artist. Good artists are like good conductors. They are the first to tell you about laws or logic that exist in the space/zones that yet do not belong to us.

Anyhow, if my monuments and memorial plaques were not part of the *zeitgeist* thirty years ago they are very much now, because the artists of today use a much greater variety of media, free from the dogma of early Conceptual Art. It was my individual contribution to that very rigorous movement that was shaped by our generation. We invented a language and I am glad that this kind of language is in use again by the Neo-Conceptual generation. The interesting artists amongst them will find ways to talk about their own problems.

JHM: Always when I talk to you what strikes me the most is your absolute fascination with the question of creation, your almost obsessive desire to understand creation. I don't know many artists who reflect so much on the process of creativity or where the core of creativity actually lies. To some point it is understandable given your family background, but you are quite a special phenomena because of your insistence on philosophical questions of creation and perception. All your texts, all the stories you have written, your *Passer-by* works as well as *Triptychos Post*



Cas d'évolution, Jardin des Plantes, Paris 1998
Collection FNAC, Paris

Historicus turn on these issues.

BD: In fact all my work probably revolves around one key problem: perception. It sounds simple, but it is at the same time a philosophical, anthropological, aesthetic and psychological issue. The importance that is attributed to art I see as a crucial existential question. What we can see and what we cannot see at a given moment. What I am interested in doing is understanding that fluid, that is the mechanisms that govern the acceptance of certain ideas. It sounds odd that in nature you can't hide a volcano, but in culture you can.

JHM: When I hang paintings in museums I often think about what you said back in the late 1960s: "Just as a piano is not music, painting is not art." As a curator does when hanging the collection or making an exhibition, I feel responsible for creating that music.

BD: This was a shortcut way of explaining the nature of art, that art is immaterial and that it depends as much on the recipient as on the artist. If art is a metaphysical process then the identification of art with an object is meaningless. One of the issues often discussed in the 1970s was the dematerialization of art. All the answers consisted in presenting something physically invisible, exhibiting an empty gallery or a space filled with light or invisible gas. Strictly speaking, I would consider all that as still fitting into the scheme of an evolutionist idea of art, relying on the invention of new forms or materials, that would be added to an endless chain of formalist innovations. My answer was a work I realized at the Städtisches Museum Monchengladbach in 1975, where I attributed a new title and new meaning to the bronze bust from the museum collection. The actual object had been there for decades, I just selected it and renamed it. A certificate of purchase was delivered and, through an institution, officially, the existence of Post History was confirmed thanks to the plurality of truths. What was really being played upon was the multitude of meanings contained within one work under different perceptions. I believed that this would stop the formalist approach to art, and that was my contribution to the question of the dematerialization of art. Since then, with no material transfer, there was one more art work in the museum without anything being actually added to the collection. That was the time when I started writing *Tractatus Post Historicus*.

JHM: Your most recent works are installations with portraits of well-known writers, musicians, artists and scientists. How do you relate these works to your previous cycles of works, i.e. the *Casual Passer-by* and *Triptychos Post Historicus*?



The one that can sense the earthquake, Philadelphia, Slought Foundation, 2007

BD: In some way the new installations represent the synthesis of my previous work, in terms both of vocabulary and composition. The portraits representing personalities of wider social significance have historical connotations. In that way these portraits have a similar role to that of the master paintings in *Triptychos Post Historicus*. The people chosen, the complexity of their oeuvre and destiny, can provide multitudes of readings in the context of the constellation of surrounding objects and natural elements. Also, they represent people that contributed a lot to culture and yet their faces are not so well known. In that sense they are similar to the *Casual Passer-by*, as a representation of unknown creativity or genius. After all, most people whose portraits I use were stored in the twilight of collective ignorance, before being accepted. What separates known from unknown is a thin line of convention.



Between Collective and Individual
Imperial College of China, Confucius Temple, Beijing, 2006

The Justice of Art

Achille Bonito Oliva

I still remember the 1971 Paris Biennale, where I participated in the organization of the Italian Pavilion, and Braco Dimitrijević showed his *The Casual passer-by I met* in the section devoted to Conceptual Art. It is a photographic monument to an anonymous passer-by, a hymn to potential and unknown creativity, to the non-recognition of the artist-poet who is erased by history.

Already then Braco Dimitrijević introduced a typically European ideological component into the analytic neutrality of Conceptual Art that generally tended towards self-contemplation and preferred the theoretical “workshop.” In the following decades, he consistently conquered the conformist indifference of a bureaucracy which, as I still recall, ordered the police to remove the giant photograph of the unknown passer-by since it visually disturbed the public image of Paris.

Braco Dimitrijević with Cartesian rigor and Slavic irony immediately pinpointed the problem of a mass culture that was increasingly subjected to the metastasis of an unstoppable kitsch that turns every historical complexity into schematic facts and every city into a picture postcard. Hence the conformist revolt of the authorities against the well-aimed incursion of the conceptual artist Dimitrijević.

He has consistently been inspired by the material culture of the countries in which he has made his works. For example, when working in Latin America, coffee has been both a material and a color that he has adopted to create mainly installation images that are the fruit of a blend of nature and culture, photographs and elemental objects. Dimitrijević’s conceptual art has always avoided the pragmatic neutrality of Anglo-Saxon art, giving precedence to the partiality of a gaze that is never solely visual but investigative and judgmental.

While kitsch is a virus malignantly attacking the collective imagination of mass society, on the other hand the icon, the image of the popular myth, is definitely the visible flipside of all this.



Balkan Walzer, 2004
7 B/W photographs, 7 pick axes, Red chili peppers
Courtesy of Galeria Pino Casagrande, Rome



Balkan Walzer, 2004 (Johann Strauss, left; Joseph Strauss, right)
B/W photograph, pick axe, red chili pepper
Collection: Lorenzo Bini Smaghi, Rome



Taking this as his premise, Braco Dimitrijević began to demolish the false myths of cultural history and international politics. Or, as in one of his more recent works, he stigmatizes and punishes the musical kitsch of operetta. Here we see Émile Blanchet, Oskar Strauss, Johann Strauss, Victor Herbert and Victor Massé, photographed and framed in a casual arrangement gazing at us from the wall. They each have a pickaxe outrageously breaking the icon's protective glass of authority, accompanied by rivulets of red blood, red chili peppers reminiscent of coagulated blood. Here Dimitrijević brings the circle of the discourse begun in 1971 to a close and shows the other side of the coin. While the unknown passer-by is celebrated and rendered monumental on public buildings and at the entrance to the exhibition, and is thus turned into an involuntary icon, now by contrast, Dimitrijević punishes and demolishes, by executing the historic icons of musical kitsch. Now he glaringly and poetically executes the creators of a light music that floated blissfully unaware over *finis Austriae*, stealing space and recognition from a culture that was instead investigating the crisis not only in the Austro-Hungarian Empire but the whole of Western society in general.

The explicit violence of the pickaxe that shatters and offends the respectability of the personalities is Dimitrijević's attempt to remove Conceptual Art from the analytical limbo of pure ideological research and make it a political and emotional incursion into history. Thus the weapon of a crime ceases to be an instrument of murderous destruction, but is paradoxically the tool of creative and constructive work conferring a different identity in art. An art, as Pablo Picasso said, that focuses on the world.

On other occasions the work unites other elements not always related to ideas of violence and death. At the São Paulo Biennale in 1996 Dimitrijević presented the work *Against Historic Sense of Gravity*, a sequence of photo portraits including the painters Malevich and Modigliani, the inventor of psychoanalysis, Freud, the scientist Nikola Tesla and the writer Kafka. Attached directly to the wall was a quantity of coconuts, which naturally evoked the tropical Brazilian context and whose display formed an astral image of the Great Bear. In this already stellar space in which are displayed these great representatives of culture, five cellos were planted in the wall like spears.

With the help of the musical instruments every kind of violence was transformed into spirituality, which arms all artistic creativity and engages the mind.

If the law of gravity brings everything down, then art overcomes this force and spins the icons of artists and thinkers towards the constellation of the Great Bear, which in this case smelt erotically of the tropical fruit.



Against Historic Sense of Gravity II
Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume Paris, 1996
5 B/W photographs, 6 full-size cellos, coconuts



Ultimo Camino al paraíso (Last Road to Paradise)
Havana Biennial, Centro Wilfredo Lam, Havana, 1997
3 B/W photographs, carts, sugarcane

Dimitrijević develops his own poetic, conceptual investigation by contextualizing the work in the geographic, historic and cultural space in which he makes the work. At the 1997 Havana biennial he made the work *Last Road to Paradise*, another shortcut between nature and culture, presenting three carts with three tons of sugarcane on which he placed big photographic portraits of Proust, Kafka and Dostoevsky. The creators of individual utopias furthered the ferment of history, just as the sugar cane was fermenting in the carts. In any case utopias and sugarcane both end up in a *cul de sac*: the exhibition. The whole of European culture, from the Urals to the Mediterranean, precipitates itself into the Caribbean space, in the wagon of a collision, which represents relation and not domination, dialogue and not colonization. Braco Dimitrijević's work always pushes the notion of value to extremes, implying a coexistence of differences, sometimes celebrated through linguistic conflict between the objects from diverse origins, art and the everyday, related to each other as *objet trouve*.

At the 1990 Venice Biennale Dimitrijević presented another constellation work in the exhibition *Ubi Fluxus Ibi Motus*, this time a comet of apples on the floor serving as a pedestal to a bicycle to which was attached a work by Duchamp.

Once more Dimitrijević was playing a creative game which implies different linguistic options but only one compositional strategy: to make a universe out of fragments, by creating a system of harmonious relationships between high and low, full and empty, history and nature, figurative and abstract, matter and form.

He created a great work at the Jardin des Plantes zoo, Paris, in 1998, with the motto "If one looks to the Earth from the Moon, there is virtually no distance between the Louvre and the zoo," demonstrating the artist's ability to create an itinerary for the spectator, to absorb him in the place where in different cages cohabit the animal world and the world of culture—lions with paintings belonging to art history. The zoo became a space of regeneration, an Indian reservation in the best sense of the world, in which energies gathered from different universes, created an iconographic and formal miracle. The zoo was taken out of the ghetto of Nature and transformed into a place in which cages looked like minimalist structures, the paintings threw off their cultural rhetoric and animals became gentle creatures able to host a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. In this way the artist transferred language from a purely metaphoric plane onto a completely metonymic one.

The planet Earth is a theater of conventions which have come to be called history. It is itself the fruit of a linear development which tries to give a meaning to everything under the name of progress. In his 1976 book *Tractatus Post Historicus*, Braco Dimitrijević develops a reading of that

meaning in order to introduce a notion of Post History capable of defeating logocentrism, that completely occidental, completely rational idea of historic progress playing on the categories and distances between different realities that in fact surround each other.

From this vantage point, outside of the purely evolutionary order subordinated to the ideology of Darwinism, Dimitrijević proposes prophetic works, accompanied by his theoretical text. Dimitrijević's art has developed to a level of great maturity and at the end of the 1970s his artistic poetry escaped the ideological heaviness of the purely evolutionist linguistic Darwinism that had an almost superstitious manner power over most of the avant-garde art of those years.

He elaborates art that is concentrated on art itself, combining a Situationist manner with Fluxus-like freedom as he puts together the high reality of art with the low reality of life, images derived from various moments in art history and elements belonging to nature. In the space of Dimitrijević's Post History all distances become relative, temporal—between different periods of art (Renaissance, Baroque, Modernism) as well as spatial, between fruits of earth united with a market cart and old paintings in museum frames.

The installation *Van Gogh Goes to Paradise* (2005), made and exhibited at the Musée d'Orsay, consisted of a market cart filled with oranges and lemons, in which was placed Van Gogh's self-portrait from 1889. Hanging on the wall next to this was another Van Gogh's self-portrait from 1887. This is surrounded by oranges and lemons that are fixed to the wall, forming the shape of a comet.

Here Dimitrijević poetically assumes an astral perspective, a distant view that allows him not to make a distinction between the fruits of the earth and those of the imagination: oranges and lemons and the self-portrait of the great Dutch artist. In that way an interaction between art and life is established, rigorously resolved on the level of language. He jumps over the hierarchical order that substantially governs our everyday life and introduces the vitality of an encounter between the objects of different nature, united by their common belonging to the Post History of our planet.

Braco Dimitrijević uses the concept of the found object in order to construct a new typology of the readymade, able not only to strike metaphysically our way of seeing, but to produce a shortcut between realities which are foreign to each other. Furthermore, he expands the limits of the conceptual art game, dislocating it from "dematerialization" and bringing it into contact with the matter of life, because, in the words of the artist, from a great distance there is no difference between the Louvre and the zoo. The mythical French museum becomes the artist's studio and a confined space within which is cultivated a love of art and a disciplined contemplation of the art



Triptychos Post Historicus or Van Gogh Goes to Paradise
Musée d'Orsay, Paris, 2005
I: *Self-portrait*, Vincent Van Gogh, 1889
II: Cart found by Anna Martinez
III: Lemons and oranges

work, which at the same time pushes it towards the myth of untouchability. But since for Dimitrijević "the street is my museum," at the Musée d'Orsay the artist chose the paintings of Van Gogh and placed them in contact with the fruits of the earth. Van Gogh was given back his human dignity, that of a peasant, in tune with the natural landscapes of his pulsating painting.

From Kandinsky to Van Gogh, numerous artists have been taken as love hostages by Dimitrijević and linked to the natural reality of fruit, which in the closed space of museum announces not the immobile time of immortality but the very minutes of our everyday life.

Dimitrijević has again confronted, both in his aesthetic and anthropological solutions, the totality of cosmic time (which contains present, past and future) and the particularities of everyday life (which contains also death and desperation). In a site-specific work he has mixed the cultural heritage embodied by great masters, physical space and pulsating life. Matter and concept, idea and form, find their place in work which succeeds in affirming the relationship between art and life as a contradiction; the hell of life and the paradise of art. In the case of this work, we inhabit a condition in which time and space interlace in a relationship which is simultaneously concrete and symbolic.

In the course of time, the source of desperation represented by the self-portraits of Van Gogh has grown to be valued. The century that did justice to the great Vincent also took him from his wanderings in the French countryside and brought him to the center of museographic attention in Paris. The market cart becomes an element which is strongly representative of matter, matter which is represented also by fruit. The art work accomplishes this through the system of art, which can change any existential destiny. Certainly not that of the art work, whose qualitative evaluation depends on the other subjects of that very system.

Now Van Gogh's self-portraits are not only dispersed in the most important world museums, but are fortunately also made available to another artist, Braco Dimitrijević, for him to establish a dialogue, to eliminate the distance between different personalities and to allow, even if only temporarily, the realization of a special duet.

In the Musée d'Orsay the air was filled not only with the emanations of the historic master paintings, but also with the near loss of gravitational weight of fruits of the earth since they were now displayed on the museum wall. Dimitrijević seems to have introduced in this sacred space the freedom of a vacuum, which makes every thing levitate, and permits connections between things of different natures, organic and artificial, to be seen from the viewpoint of cosmic time which does not distinguish between centuries and months, between real oranges and lemons and the painted products of the earth. Braco Dimitrijević happily confirms the contradiction of art, the possibility of a vision capable of breaking the limits of historic reality of good common sense in favor of a positive vacuum, the ritual of an art work that is able to affirm the hell of life and the paradise of art.



Self-portrait with *Triptychos Post Historicus* or *Van Gogh Goes to Paradise*, 2005

Letter to Braco Dimitrijević about Post History

Nicolas Bourriaud

Dear Braco Dimitrijević,

In many African communities, the role of the “griot” (travelling black African poet and musician) consists of telling the history of the tribe that gathers together traditionally under the branches of the “tree of endless discussions.” Endless discussions because that story is always a subject to be treated with caution and always a controversial one: never does the “griot” tell the same version of that immensely flexible history. In the Jewish tradition of the Talmud, these discussions are referred to as “pilpul,” which are all the more delightful since the truth is never discovered, which is, by the way, far from being their aim: the commentary itself needs to be commented since objective truth is a result of negotiations. That is quite far from Hegel and his vision of History as “the realization of an idea,” far from the Christian and Marxist-Leninist teleologies, and far from the progressive dogma influencing Western modernism.

In the Middle Ages, theology was considered as an integral science: it is history, the “fake science,” as you call it, that took its place at the level of illusions coagulated into Truths. In both cases, the belief in the absolute sense of the collective narrative crushes the multitude of versions and hypotheses. The world has a meaning, and this meaning is the only one. Conspiracy theories, so fashionable nowadays, reinforce this idea while they claim to oppose it. When you write for the first time, in 1969 that “There are no mistakes in History,” but that “the whole of History is a mistake,” a thesis appearing in your book entitled *Tractatus Post Historicus* published in 1976, you take a step beyond the dogma of the Avant-garde of the time who perpetuated a banal messianism based on a strict historization of artistic “gestures.”

In your work, since at least the beginning of the 1970s, you have sought to replace this monolithical narrative by the idea of coexisting truths and confuse the tracks that lead to that single line by which the West has imposed its colonial power upon the entire world. Thus, for a long time, humanity lived as if watching only one television channel: you were either within History or totally

without it in that ahistorical zone generally allocated to “the savages,” in other words, without any particular importance. Your idea of Post History compares to the invention of channel-hopping: we are talking about switching between different sources of broadcasting, each of which portrays a version of History.

In 1912, an international conference confirmed the notion of “universal time” divided into time zones. A century later, the idea of global economy running twenty-four hours a day validates a conception of the universal that does not dare to identify itself any more, promoting, on the contrary, “differences” and multiculturalism (the vernacular or national culture having become fictional) in order to better mask the genuine uniformization implemented by it. What is linked to these two dates is the fiction of a linear history of mankind, a modernist history whose postmodern hypocrisy today consists in arranging the scenery. For the ideology of the “end of history,” inseparable from postmodernism, represents most of all the will to freeze the image in order to neutralize all vague political attempts to transform the world and fix its course on a “new economic order” that would be the final one. In your words, “What we call History is nothing more than one subjectivity imposed on the whole world as objective opinion.”¹

But when you talk about a “post” state of History, it has nothing to do with its end. Quite on the contrary, your works and your writings incite an outburst of creativity, a multitude of histories, their versions and their hybridization. Regarding History, Louis Althusser talked about a “process without a subject” in the 1960s: an audacious idea going against the ideologies of the era that could think of no other subject of History than the people or the fighting proletariat. However, Post History has no subject, either. And especially not the Earth itself, Gaia, the maternal idol transformed into a monotheistic ersatz by radical ecologists and New Age groups. The fact that there is no subject for Post History liberates a multitude of subjects, that is, us; as Serge Daney put it, “have we failed to such an extent in replacing God, the father by mankind, the brother that the terrible matriarchy of our mother, the Earth should return?”²

The Casual passer-by, the central theme of your work, this individual that becomes a subject only when encountering the device of inscription implemented by you, is the true inhabitant of Post History. In a way, he appears as the tenant of glory, in this respect, he is a contemporary of Warhol’s injunction of “becoming famous for fifteen minutes.”

An animal or some fruit, an ordinary object, a piece of art. In your “post-historical triptychs,” you show that Cézanne or Picasso, whose works we comprehend and evaluate in their relation to a narrative event, in other words, as signals emitted by history, can also be perceived as natural



Triptychos Post Historicus
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, 2005
I: *Vanka*, Kazimir Malevich, 1928-1929
II: Vassily Baranov's axes
III: Apple

phenomena or tools. A picture by Kazimir Malevich, hatchets placed at an angle, associated to apples put on stands: this arrangement, created in St. Petersburg in 2005, imitates the array of colors of the painter whose composition (*Vanka*, 1928-1929) presents a human figure seen from behind in the first place in post-Suprematist style, but heading to a much more realistic farm situated in the background of the picture. You have placed your stands in such a way so as to recall the wake of that walking man, and having hung up the painting in one of the corners of the room, you have evoked the first suprematist exhibition in Petrograd in 1915 in which the *Black square on white* by the same Malevich was displayed in a similar position: at the top of the wall and in the corner. And in the most well-known photo of that “historic” exhibition, a chair can be found amongst the works.

Your Post-historical arrangements evoke the status of the icon, a generic image which assembles three elements that you summon: in *Between eternity and geniuscide* (1994) it is, by the way, made explicit since you place candles in front of photographic portraits of Kafka and Modigliani, perched on a sea of red beans. This votive dimension constituting the icon assembles in a stable unit, that of the arrangement, the organic, artistic and functional elements that compose the *Triptychos*. Post History as you see it reveals itself spontaneously in the form of an absolute timelessness of which the icon constitutes the privileged visual framework. Nevertheless, in your work, the timeless is only a precondition to Post History and not its last say. The “zeitlos,” the Eternal, the atemporal, the long historical duration are but some motives, among others, of a vision of time stripped of all imposed figures. In other words, the icon is only a moment of the image: more precisely, the moment of its crossing from historical time to the ambiguity of the timeless.

So which age does that Casual passer-by belong to that you met in London at eleven twenty-eight on an October morning in 1972? In any case, not to the ordinary one: the day is the only element missing. He belongs to the history of art to the extent that this encounter resulted in a piece of art that eternalizes him; to your personal history for it is your wandering and the fact that you were in London that day that allow him to exist for us. But he also belongs to that chaotic time without chronology in which Malevich encounters an apple and a hatchet to the liking of the chromatic harmonies. André Malraux wrote in *L'Intemporel* that “the Events of a life converge rather than follow each other.” Art is a nave which this convergence may be organized around and which may create coherence that the chronological ideology just cannot perceive. Our memory is achronological itself: it wanders in recent times, then in the faraway irrespective of dates. Chronology is nothing more than an idealist version of time that materialism, that of signs and colors, has destroyed in your “post-historical” compositions.

You claim that “There are no ruptures in creation, but only ruptures of perception.” Along the same lines, Paul Valéry thought that you could write a literary history without using the authors’ names, narrating only the modifications that took place in the ways of reading. But time will not necessarily flow from the past towards the future: when writing about Franz Kafka, Jorge Luis Borges considers his work as a historic shock that transforms the past thoroughly; an entire branch of literature emerges as the “forerunner of Kafka.” Similarly, in the 1960s, Georges Perec and Oulipo invented the notion of “plagiarist by anticipating,” which points out the reversible and multidirectional time of culture. With the progress of globalization (that, in harmony with the Hegelian tradition, some perceive only as the “end of history”), we are heading towards a civilization exploded into countless fragments. According to that conception of history, the opposite of the idea of universal progress, history is no one-way street; instead, there are local crises, micro-narratives, briefly, a whole of temporal distortions that one needs to learn to read together. To this future archipelago of the world, brought about by globalization, corresponds a new conception of time comprising all the historical narratives, all of the chronologies, the sum of accelerations and slowdowns: in a word, heterochrony. It is a temporality in which time flows from the future towards the past, and from global present towards all the particular times.

In 1967, Robert Smithson elaborated the notion of “ruins in reverse” in relation to his piece entitled “The Monuments of Passaic.” Exploring the uncultivated countryside of the State of New Jersey, Smithson qualifies all recent and future constructions as “ruins in reverse.” Earlier, romantic ruins (the ones that Hubert Robert presented in his paintings) symbolized the flight of time and incited to a nostalgic meditation over the past; the vaguely modernist constructions designed by Smithson, however, are programmed to become ruins even before their existence, the ruins of a modernist ideology in which future and linear scenarios were much more real than the present or the past. Naturally, entropy, that generic notion around which Smithson articulates his work is a slowdown. However, paradoxically, this loss of speed results in the acceleration of the future obsolescence of these “ruins in reverse.” As Claudio Magris puts it, “There is no one flow of time going at a constant speed into one specific direction; sometimes we pass another train coming from the other direction, from the past and for a moment, we have this past near us, next to us, in our present.” Your post-historic arrangements work like these Smithsonian “ruins in reverse”: they go from the future towards the past, their point of departure being modern art and their destination the Lascaux caves.

The portrait of the Casual passer-by that you hang up like official posters on the front walls of buildings, designate the possibility of a junction in History: when one is front of them, one is always under the impression of entering a parallel reality or having overslept and inexplicably missed a

moment of official History, for this institutional narrative is made up of forgotten things, more or less voluntary omissions, subtle hierarchies and implicit codes. The “casual passers-by” remind us that History is created by all of us and that the essence of mankind, as stated by Karl Marx, is no other than the result of what we do together. As a means and as a territory, your work is a zone of junctions: a space in which history turns back, goes off the rails, makes a false step.

In a way, history ceases to be “universal” when it spatializes, when it demands its own territory: contemporary reality is an open book in which, by turning its pages, artists may simultaneously explore the strata of the past and the traces of the times to come. For modernism, the past represented tradition that the new supplanted. For postmodernism, it was a kind of catalogue or repertoire. Nowadays, it simply constitutes a new area of which the artists are the privileged archaeologists and geographers since they glance through it by going from form to form far from the strictness that the discursive linearity imposes upon thinkers and ideologists. In your work, I admire that obstinacy that is shaped around a strong and premonitory vision. Were you not an artist, you would be a kind of preacher or a travelling monk, the one that knocks in, further and further, a painful, but salutary nail.

Notes

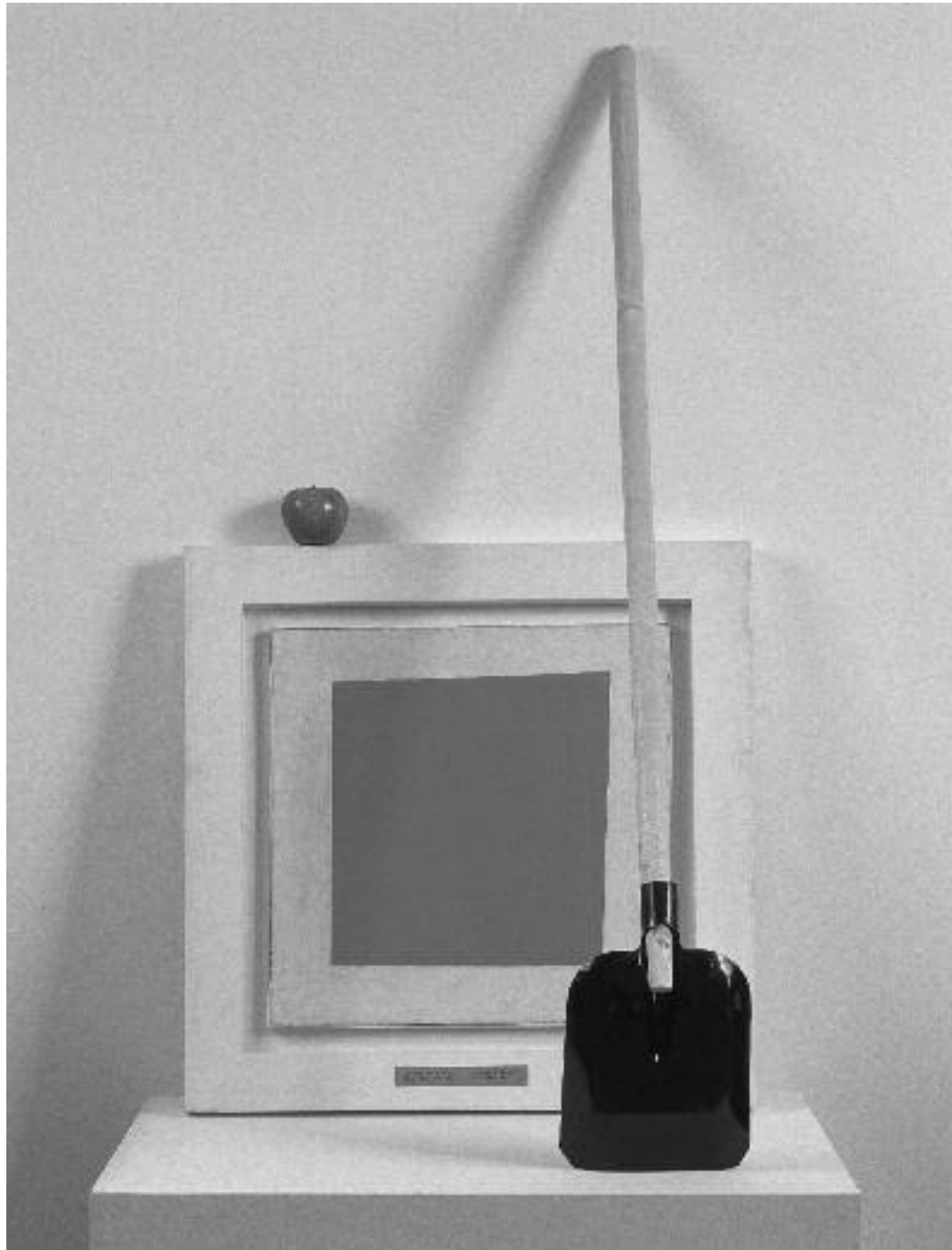
1. In the monograph *Braco Dimitrijević*, Edizione Charta, 2006, like all the subsequent quotations.
2. Serge Daney, “L'exercice a été profitable, monsieur,” Éditions POL, pg 341.



Between Eternity and Geniuscide II
Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 1994
4 B/W photographs, candles, beans
Collection: Israel Museum, Jerusalem



Installation view, Retrospective exhibition at Ludwig Museum, Budapest, 2008



Triptychos Post Historicus
 The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, 2005
 I: *Red Square*, Kazimir Malevich, 1915
 II: Shovel used by Mihail Vilich
 III: Apple

On the Edge of the Archive Aaron Levy

"If one looks at the Earth from the Moon, there is virtually no distance between the Louvre and the zoo."
 - Braco Dimitrijević, 1969

In 1975, at the Städtisches Museum in Monchengladbach, artist Braco Dimitrijević exhibited a series of works entitled *This Could be a Masterpiece*. The objects he placed on display included a bronze bust of 1920s German painter Max Roeder, which was accompanied by a brass plaque inscribed with the artist's name and the aforementioned title by Braco Dimitrijević. This gesture of appropriation (wherein Max Roeder's work was presented as Braco Dimitrijević's), was institutionalized by museum director Johannes Cladders, who on June 11, 1975 acquired Max Roeder's bust as a work by Braco Dimitrijević when they together signed a "Contract of Purchase of an Idea." Through the veritable purchase of an idea, Dimitrijević added work to the archive without necessarily adding an artifact, proving that a given artifact can simultaneously come to have more than one meaning. Here, Dimitrijević suggests that an archive is more than just a series of artifacts, and that artifacts and objects are more than just lines of attribution or appropriation in a register.

In her essay *The Posthistorical Dimension*, Nena Dimitrijević explains how in this work, a sculpture already classified in one art historical drawer simultaneously became an active element in another semantic structure, asserting a plurality of truths by "acknowledging the dual authorship of the same sculpture by two artists who lived fifty years apart."¹ We are living in "a time of a multitude of co-existing truths," Braco Dimitrijević similarly remarked in an interview with curator Jean-Hubert Martin in 2005, such that we can no longer believe in "one ultimate truth" either.² The artist in fact addressed this theme as early as 1976 with the publication of his *Tractatus Post Historicus*, a philosophical manifesto where he introduced the concept of "Post History." With this term, he meant to convey the sea change in our understanding of objectivity and our grasp of facts that had already taken hold in the humanities by the early 1970s.

"For too long, objects have been wrongly portrayed as matters-of-fact," the sociologist Bruno

Latour likewise remarks in *Making things public: Atmospheres of Democracy*.³ To say that a fact or an object is self-evident and obvious “is unfair to them,” Latour declares, “unfair to science, unfair to objectivity, unfair to experience. They are much more interesting, variegated, uncertain, complicated, far reaching, heterogeneous, risky, historical, local, material and networked than the pathetic version offered for too long.”⁴ For Latour, objects are facts, but they are also more than that, and a lot of other things besides. They are also sites of interpretative contestation marked by perpetual struggle. That is to say, the meaning of a rock is just as opaque as an artwork; both equally give rise to conflicting interpretations that are neither transparent nor easily reconciled.

This is what Dimitrijević laments when he says that one contingent subjectivity is mistakenly being imposed on the world as if it were objective opinion. The interpretation of an artwork lies somewhat immaterially in the traces and perturbations it leaves behind in the viewing public, whether in the museum or in the street. The meaning of an artifact takes form through the layers of interpretation that we bring to bear upon it. Dimitrijević’s work is in effect derived from these cumulative perceptions. An artwork “does not lie in the physical facts” because it is more than its material substrate.

In Dimitrijević’s *Painting by Kresimir Klika* of 1969, for example, the driver of a car has unknowingly driven over a milk carton placed in the road by the artist, producing a splatter painting on the pavement. The driver is then stopped and asked to share authorship of the work with Dimitrijević through the co-signing of a photograph and certificate. Here the aesthetic object is not the milk carton but rather the chance procedure and the documentary traces it leaves behind. Unable to return to the initial accident, the interpretation of the work is left open to the contingencies of time and speculation.

As we fight over the meanings of objects and residual traces such as these in the archives all around us, the one thing that can be said with certainty is that these objects bring us together only to divide us, and it is this unending struggle to agree, this unfolding process of disagreement, that links the contingent object to larger political processes and forms of assembly. “Objects,” Latour similarly concludes, “bind all of us in ways that map out a public space.”⁵ However, the public sphere, like the objects from which it is derived, is always expected to deliver “something it cannot possibly deliver—its limitations are what we are prepared not to accept.” What frightens us in the public sphere or in spaces of political assembly is the disunity and disagreement that eludes and exceeds our grasp. “A demon haunts politics,” Latour memorably concludes, “but it might not be so much the demon of division—this is what is so devilish about it—but the demon of unity, totality, transparency, and immediacy.”⁶ What we have perhaps lost hold of in this unfolding process is our

ability to understand what public space *is* when it has been exploded in this way, its contradictions and tensions always exceeding our grasp.

In 1971, Braco Dimitrijević presented publicness itself as a sort of exploded artwork when he photographed and displayed to the public the images of three passers-by. In the process, he turned a street in Zagreb into a sort of museum of lived experience, an archive of the arbitrary pedestrian. The artwork was part of the series *The Casual Passer-by I met...*, and featured the faces of strangers whom he confronted on the street, explained the project to, and then, assuming they agreed to share the rights to their image for purposes of public display, photographed against a white background. He has since repeated this process in cities worldwide utilizing the facades of public buildings or cultural institutions, but also occasionally employing advertising media such as billboards, banners and public transit vehicles. The vagaries of chance, the whims of history, and the fickleness of celebrity are all suggested by these anonymous yet iconic portraits. These works comprise a veritable archive of urban life, charting the perpetual transformations of city space.

By working furtively in an urban space saturated with “messages of culture and dominant ideologies,” Dimitrijević hoped “to create another space, a counter-model [...] to the existing, dominant thought” that might “create a reversal in meaning” and expectation. By creating “ruptures of perception” in the sense of displaying an image in public without a clearly labeled purpose or function, he wanted “to non-violently change their customary relationship and reaction to everyday reality.”⁷ He was trying to transform and restructure the meaning of a public image, to inhabit existing codes of representation so as to “defunctionalize” them, as Nena Dimitrijević argues in *The Posthistorical Dimension*.⁸ If in Central Europe in the 1970s his work resisted the cult of personality and the saturation of urban space with messages of political ideology, today, especially in the United States, the work critiques certain automatisms conditioned by advertising and the cultural industry.

Here, the “medium” of the outdoor exhibition is less an opportunity to show or display and instead an opportunity to test new publics, new assemblages, and re-codifications. Dimitrijevic is among the very few artists to have generated a practice around communicative processes and sociological relationships to others, and in this sense could be said to resist the “aura” of the unique art object by addressing and involving a public directly. His work stands for a sort of prototypical “social network” in which cross-overs between art, artist and society are manifested, transforming the physical structures where his work is placed into a forum for social exchange.

“Anyone who wants to transform the conditions of publicness, or through publicness transform possible orientations to life,” Michael Warner similarly remarks in *Publics and Counterpublics*, must

also desire to transform the possible contexts of speech.⁹ In an otherwise hostile environment Warner argues that one must seek out new forms of rhetorical address by acting “in a manner designed to be a placeholder for a future public.”¹⁰ Warner refers to a “future public” because a public is not simply a given assemblage of existing persons publicly engaging in a culture of rational discussion. A public is much more than an impersonal definition of temporally and spatially associated strangers.¹¹ It is more imaginary and more fleeting, and is the consequence of a performative address as varied as its addressee. To say that a public has not yet come to be, however, is not the same thing as saying it is inconsequential. For publicness wholly depends on the imaginary function of a public.¹² Or to quote Dimitrijević himself: “our environment is not a physical space but a cultural heritage.”

Where, then, is one’s public?¹³ For whom does one write or speak? Is one’s public to be found in the museum, or in the street? For Dimitrijević, these questions can never be answered in advance, because they are addressed to a public that is comprised of strangers conditioned by the media to think in ways the work is designed to upend. Instead of the pure representation of an art object, with a pure and simple objective or outcome, Dimitrijevic instigates temporal fluctuations in the field of art and in social formations. Accordingly, one encounters titles such as “The Casual passer-by I met...,” where the artist highlights the random encounter with a stranger without which the work would not have been made, or grammatical constructions such as “This could be a work of historical importance,” in the future conditional tense, where the artist describes a hypothetical moment that has not yet come to be.

“What is for me, the present moment?” the philosopher Henri Bergson remarked, a question that could surely be asked of Dimitrijevic’s approach as well. “The essence of time is that it goes by,” Bergson argued. “Time already gone by is the past, and we can call the present the instant in which it goes by. But there can be no question here of a mathematical instant.”¹⁴ For Bergson, time is less a calculable moment than a sort of extended duration. The present cannot be clearly archived or neatly inventoried except as a sort of duration between past, present, and future. Similarly, in the archive, which customarily preserves information accumulated over time, we cannot help but “burn with a passion” to understand the future as we interminably search the stacks for some clues to its past; all the while, the clarity of the present continues to slip away. Our inability to fully conceptualize our “archivable present,” as Jacques Derrida suggests in *Archive Fever*, perhaps points to our reluctance to fully understand the concept of temporality in the archive.

In *Archive Fever*, Derrida remarks, much like Bergson, that the archive is predicated on a series of temporalities, a complex set of nested presents: the past present, the present present, and the future present.¹⁵ An archive is supposed to receive and record events, but in reality these events can never simply be confined to the past. According to a Freudian trajectory, these events instead leave all sorts of traces that disrupt, disturb and entangle forever the reassuring distinction between past and future. It is perhaps for this reason that Derrida clearly states at one point that “the question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past.” Something that has been inscribed once never fully disappears—or as Dimitrijević has formulated it: “in the Post Historical Dimension, what exists for 1 second, exists for eternity.” The contents of any file will invariably be retrieved, or mixed up with another file retrieved in the meanwhile.

Another way of saying this is that the “archivable present” is always caught up in the concept of the future. It is *the* “question of the future itself,” Derrida emphatically wagers at one point in *Archive Fever*, “the archive as an irreducible experience of the future.”¹⁶ The archive represents “the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow.” Derrida is perhaps suggesting that data, before it has even been deposited in the archive, has already been conceived and compiled with this destination in mind. Lived experience, the “present present,” is already embedded within a larger, ongoing process of archivization. The archive does not safeguard the past because it in fact produces the events it records. When Derrida argues that “archivable meaning is also and in advance codetermined by the structure that archives,”¹⁷ he is suggesting that its structure conditions the way we produce knowledge and therefore how we understand the present. If one were to archive these artifacts in a different way, one would therefore experience the present differently. It is in this respect that, in the archive, one could be said to have a fundamental responsibility not just for the present or the past, but also for tomorrow.

“Nothing is more troubled and more troubling today than the concept archived in this word ‘archive,’” Derrida repeatedly warns. “We are *en mal d’archive*: in need of archives.”¹⁸ What, exactly, is this persistent *trouble de l’archive* of which Derrida speaks? Why are the conceptual underpinnings of the archive so problematic? For Derrida the paradigmatic case study involves Josef Hayim Yerushalmi, the noted historian who aspires to uncover in the Freud archives an answer to the unanswerable question of whether for Freud psychoanalysis was, in fact, a “Jewish science.”¹⁹ Yerushalmi hopes to end the incompleteness of this particular archive and return to it a certain sort of legibility and repetition. With this single stroke, however, Yerushalmi suspends the historiographic rules and critical distance that has always been, Derrida notes, “the very condition for the history he intends to write.”²⁰ Yerushalmi is burning with the desire to control the radical openness to the future, and hopes to channel Freud’s ghost in the material records (“I want only to

know whether *you* ultimately came to believe it to be so,” Yerushalmi remarks at one point.²¹ Yerushalmi is so caught up in this engagement with a “dead person” that he is interested not so much in the content of what Freud would say, but rather the fact that he should say something at all, with the authority that only the spoken word can carry. Yerushalmi’s desire to put an end to the indeterminacy of the archive is for Derrida a paradigmatic if inevitable flaw that is characteristic of our archival disposition in general.

Yerushalmi is, of course, not the first to become feverish before the archive, fantasizing about its totalizing embrace. For the protagonists in Flaubert’s unfinished satire *Bouvard and Pécuchet* (1881), for example, everything has to be copied and collected because the slightest omission of artifact can cause the encyclopedic underpinnings of the project to collapse.²² Bouvard and Pécuchet cannot begin to judge or act with impartiality until they first have “read all the histories, all the memoirs, all the journals, and all the manuscript documents, for the slightest omission may cause an error which will lead to others *ad infinitum*.” Nothing can be discarded because nothing can be left out. As the scope of archive grows in scale the interpretative possibilities predicated upon its completion are deferred as well. Faced with this impossible task, Bouvard and Pécuchet rarely persevere throughout the course of the novel in exploring any subject beyond their initial disappointments, and their intellectual task is perpetually unfinished. Sven Speiker argues in his book *The Big Archive: art from bureaucracy*, that in Flaubert’s novel literature and the realist genre become subsumed under the weight of the desire to include everything. “By the late nineteenth century,” he continues, the number of recorded facts was so great that “their totalizing representation within one archive seemed increasingly impossible.” Accordingly, the conundrum is that there is no longer a position to be had outside of the archive because “everything that can be known is already archival.”²³ By the close of the novel, the protagonists, unable to archive anything and disgusted with the world in general, ultimately decide to “return to copying as before.”

Meditations on the totalizing archive, and, conversely, the archive in disarray, have historically excited the cultural avant-garde as well. In their First Futurist Manifesto of 1909, F.T. Marinetti and the Italian Futurists loudly proclaimed the beauty of ruinous and incendiary violence (“There is no masterpiece that has not an aggressive character”) and glorified war and struggle.²⁴ The complete destruction of the archives and libraries of their time, as well as the artworks housed within, was the central aim stated in their manifestos; such institutions were overly academic and moralistic, and as such, cemeteries of wasted energy and ambition. Sven Speiker has similarly argued that Surrealist artists “critically revised the revolutionary traditions of the nineteenth century with their assumption that a revolutionary’s primary task was the wholesale destruction of the archives

[...].”²⁵ Likewise, Boris Groys has argued that the historical avant-garde has traditionally seen itself as “the embodiment of the pure negativity, as the medium of destruction and annulment.”²⁶ Kazimir Malevich, he continues, “sought a new society by means of an iconoclastic destruction of the old conventions, methods and habits.”

El Lissitzky’s project for the Hannover Provinzialmuseum (1924) thus represents a more affirmative model of archival engagement, eschewing the more violent forms of cultural protest espoused by the historical avant-garde. Here, Lissitzky reworks the archival interface of the historical museum by advocating not for the endless accumulation of cultural artifact but rather for a more dynamic form of encounter with those artifacts. As Sven Speiker has suggested, Lissitzky felt preceding perceptual regimes had turned museums of historical art into what he pejoratively referred to as a static “archive” of the past.²⁷ Lissitzky therefore painted large black and white bands in the gallery and fitted wall-sized frames of steel bands. What today may look largely decorative was, in its time, a sort of curatorial gesture intended to turn “the wall from a static optical support into an active part of the optical environment.”²⁸ In these experimental installations, artworks were displayed from continually shifting positions to question the centrality of any particular viewpoint. Lissitzky challenged the conventional display of cultural artifact where there is one wall with one image and one singular point of view. Instead he constructed an environment predicated on “cumulative perceptions” and bodies in motion. In this project and his subsequent Demonstration Rooms, the artist resisted the aesthetic disposition; as Sven Speiker argues, he “refused to add up to the abstraction of an object before experience.”²⁹ Instead of simply displaying a cultural object on the wall, Lissitzky presents the viewer with an embodied experience.

I would like to contrast the incendiary rhetoric of Marinetti with the affirmative disposition of El Lissitzky, whose approach, I would argue, laid the groundwork for conceptual artists of the second half of the 1960s such as Dimitrijević. Much like Lissitzky, Dimitrijević has continually evaded and playfully experimented with the idea of the totalizing archive, treating the museum as a laboratory for the experimental disposition. Dimitrijević is also profoundly ambivalent about the ability of the archive to communicate the heterogeneity of everyday life, and has for nearly forty years argued for an expanded definition of the archive that can account for temporality and the role of contingency. His work demands a form of cultural literacy attentive to this fact, and bears profound consequences for the curatorial field. Insofar as Dimitrijević is interested in how artifacts shelter “a multitude of co-existing truths,” and how archives permit a multiplicity of encounters, his work could be thought of as “additive.”

In works such as the *Triptychos Post Historicus*, Dimitrijević juxtaposes disparate art works and objects, inviting us to rethink archival structures and classifications. He gestures towards alternative taxonomies that may one day emerge or come to be. These works also invite the audience into the installation, accentuating the role of the viewer's perception in the constitution and activation of the work. Here Dimitrijević treats museum masterpieces as ready-mades, as inductors of new semantic blocks. As Ursula Frohne has argued in relation to Peter Weibel, perhaps Dimitrijevic is less an "exhibiting" artist in this regard, intent on communicating a clear outcome or objective to the viewer, and instead as an artist of the "exposition," who is interested in a sort of performative address that calls attention to the conditions of its own staging. The word exposition implies "the process of making public, of showing to the public, of the public presentation of opinions and judgments."³⁰ As Mieke Bal has argued, Dimitrijevic's work, with its emphasis on process, has a sort of "showing" function that entails a discursive dimension that takes place in and through the very staging of the work.³¹ In this sense the work could be thought of as transformative in positioning the audience in an open-ended relationship to the work and the questions it raises.

A similar semantic structure to the *Triptychos Post Historicus* can be found in the artist's works involving living animals, which he began staging as early as 1981. Here, the zoo becomes the artist's studio, in which objects charged with cultural meanings are offered to the impartial presence of animals. There is a sort of casual confrontation taking place in these works between wild animals and art works, which is to say, between two different museological approaches to history: the natural and the cultural.

In 1969, Dimitrijević remarked that "If one looks at the Earth from the Moon, there is virtually no distance between the Louvre and the zoo." In these works the artist is proposing a veritable view "from the Moon," i.e., a synoptic perspective which would bridge the modern divide between the natural and cultural museum. If only we could get away from rigid taxonomies, Dimitrijević suggests, we might discover new, as yet unknown dimensions of reality. On the occasion of his solo show at the Waddington Galleries in London, for instance, a pair of living peacocks wandered amongst the paintings of Picasso, Monet and Matisse. In 1983, he made a series of installation with wild cats and elephants. And in 1998, Dimitrijević realized an exhibition at the Paris Zoo, Menagerie du Jardin des Plantes, where he organized 20 installations in the cages of the jaguars, the camels, the crocodiles, the bison and other wild animals. The exhibition was seen by one million people, receiving international coverage in over 40 countries, including on CNN.

To what extent can interventions such as these be properly subsumed under the role of the artist, and to what degree might they equally belong to the role of the curator? Dimitrijevic is seeking not a new politics of art but rather a form of practice that goes beyond visuality, one that is not visual in any exclusive sense. In this respect Dimitrijević's practice continues the example set by Lissitzky, who similarly traversed the boundary between the artistic and the curatorial when he conceived of the exhibition space itself as an artwork. Moreover, the role of the artist is recast here as a producer of art, not in the sense of the classical definition of the artist as one who expresses himself through the canvas, but rather in the sense of the modern curator who mixes together media, publics, and the most diverse forms of thinking experiments, so as to create a space of contemplation somewhere between the practical and the possible.

"An exhibition cannot do much," sociologist Bruno Latour cautions us in *Making Things Public*, "but it can explore new possibilities with a much greater degree of freedom because it is so good at thought-experiments."³² For Latour, exhibitions permit the public to compare and act upon the different possibilities the future affords, and gesture to the different forms of representation that may one day come to be. Over the past forty years, Dimitrijević has similarly explored new modes of publicness through transient and provisional gestures that transform spectators into "persons who cooperate with 'the arranger' (ex-artist), i.e. create." In his essay *Man-Creator/Perception*, Dimitrijevic evidence a participatory and cooperative approach predicated on chance and contingency, and attempt to remove "the dividing line" that "formerly existed between artist and non-artist" in the institutional arena.³³ If, as Boris Groys argues, artists no longer feel "free,"³⁴ it is in large part because of the pioneering maneuvers of artists such as Dimitrijević, who, following Duchamp, finally freed the beholder to become an equal participant in the construction of the work. If the artist was potentially at the center of attention, the spectator and audience now clearly move into focus. It is clear that for Dimitrijevic the role of the artist is to occupy a sort of interstitial zone that problematizes authorship as well as institutionality, wherever that may be.

I have argued above that Dimitrijević's works question traditional approaches to cultural preservation and display, advocating for a more contingent and experimental mode of engagement. However, works such as the *Triptychos* series are nevertheless dependent on the archive as the site of perpetual intervention. Dimitrijević produces these works in the very institution whose archival disposition he seeks to interrogate. His work therefore represents a complicated gesture of institutional critique, which at its most subversive moment produces a critical analysis. It cannot be said, however, to enable a politics of emancipation that might simply liberate us from our archival and institutional dispositions. The power of institutions, after all, always seems to reproduce itself in the artistic practices, intentions, and methods espoused within.

Dimitrijević’s work seeks out edge conditions, liminal spaces where boundary negotiations about the nature of institutional complicity and creativity take place. In the *Triptychos* series his art is defined by acts of institutional complicity, staged within the museum walls; *Painting by Kresimir Klika*, however, demarcates his desire to radically modify institutionally-defined authorship as such, and takes place outside the museum in the urban environment. We can understand these dueling positions to mean that Dimitrijević’s work is to be located neither exclusively inside nor outside the museum. Instead, it is predicated on a perpetual reversal of roles and expectations that questions the traditional dependence of the artist on the institution as site of display, but also on the studio as site of production. It is no accident, after all, that Dimitrijević’s “Casual passer-by...” series is often literally mounted on the façade of cultural institutions. By turning the outer wall of institutions into privileged sites of display, Dimitrijević is not merely advertising his work or calling attention to the exhibition located directly inside. Rather, he is highlighting the very structure of the museum, and the role of the museological frame in defining the meaning of the objects housed within.

After nearly four decades of staging such works, Dimitrijević has created an art derived from the archive. One could say that Dimitrijević has in fact created a veritable museum of museums, a museum of façades.

Notes

1. Nena Dimitrijević, “The Posthistorical Dimension,” in *Tractatus post historicus (1976): Braco Dimitrijević* (Philadelphia: Slought Books, 2009), pg. 122.

2. Jean-Hubert Martin, “Interview with Braco Dimitrijević,” in *Tractatus post historicus (1976): Braco Dimitrijević* (Philadelphia: Slought Books, 2009), pg. 207.

3. Bruno Latour, “From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public,” in *Making things public: atmospheres of democracy* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005), pg. 19.

4. Ibid, pg. 19-21.

5. Ibid, pg. 15.

6. Ibid, pg. 24-26. In this passage, Bruno Latour explores the etymology of the word democracy, arguing that it is derived from *Demon* and *Demos*, which both share the same Indo-European root *da-*, to divide. Previously, Latour uncovered in the etymology of the word for *Thing* the designation of certain type of archaic public assembly, which Heidegger similarly explores in *What is a thing?* See page 23.

7. Mark Godfrey, “From box to street and back again: an inadequate descriptive system for the seventies,” in *Open Systems:*

Art in the World c. 1970 (London: Tate Publications, 2005), pg. 39.

8. Nena Dimitrijević, “The Posthistorical Dimension,” in *Tractatus post historicus (1976): Braco Dimitrijević* (Philadelphia: Slought Books, 2009), pg. 104 and 121.

9. Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 128.

10. Ibid, 130.

11. Ibid, 144.

12. Ibid, 128.

13. Ibid, 128.

14. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), pg. 138.

15. Ibid, pg 80.

16. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pg 36 and 68.

17. Ibid, pg 18.

18. Ibid, pg 91.

19. Ibid, pg 46 and 51.

20. Ibid, pg 52. Regarding Yerushalmi’s desire to communicate directly with Freud, Derrida further notes: “Engaging a dead person, it would no longer be subject to the strategic calculations, to the denials of the living Freud, and to the retractions of the founder of a psychoanalysis exposed to all the anti-Semitic violences.”

21. Ibid, 51.

22. Sven Spieker, *The big archive: art from bureaucracy. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008)*, pg 33.

23. Ibid, 32.

24. *Manifesto: A Century of isms*, Caws, Mary Ann (Ed.) (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001). Pg. 185-190.

25. Spieker, 97.

26. Boris Groys, “Images of Thinking,” in *Peter Weibel: The open work, 1964-1979*, Buol-Wischenau, Karin and Christa Steinle (Eds.) (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006), pgs. 984-5.

27. Spieker, 111.

28. Spieker, 110.

29. Spieker, 111.

30. Ursula Frohne, “Detournement as ‘Poetry Made Real,’ in *Peter Weibel: The open work, 1964-1979*, Buol-Wischenau, Karin and Christa Steinle (Eds.) (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006), pg. 972.

31. Mieke Bal, quoted in Frohne, 972.

32. Bruno Latour, “From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public,” in *Making things public: atmospheres of democracy* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005), pg. 31.

33. Braco Dimitrijević, “Man-Creator / Perception / Creation / Art Work (1969),” in *Tractatus post historicus (1976): Braco Dimitrijević* (Philadelphia: Slought Books, 2009), pg. 122.

34. Groys, 982.

Why Now?

**Braco Dimitrijević in conversation with the
2008-2009 Seminar in Contemporary Culture, University of Pennsylvania**

Taking Braco Dimitrijevic's work as a point of departure, our seminar of six undergraduate students explored contemporary notions of Post History from a number of theoretical directions. We were especially concerned with the relationship between Dimitrijevic's writings and his artistic practice. As we republish the Tractatus Post Historicus over thirty years after it was first written, this interview reconsiders his work from a different historical framework—that of the 21st century.

Seminar: In your *Casual Passer-by* works, you specify time and year while excluding the month and date of the photograph. Why? How does a date communicate a different sense of temporality than a time or year?

Braco Dimitrijević: According to my own subjective experience, I can remember the time of a day of a specific year without remembering the day or month. So that's why on the certificate, when it is stated where and when I met *Casual Passer-by*, I simply omit the day and month.

S: But why are there different temporalities built into the documentation, into the certificate? For instance, two different years in a way...

BD: Oh, I see. There is a fixed year, which is '69, when I met the first *Casual Passer-by*. It was a concept that I knew I was going to elaborate on over the years, so I emphasize the year when the decision was made in printed form. The time and year of a meeting with a new passer-by is written in my handwriting on the same sheet of paper.

S: Do you see your work aligning with the tenets of conceptual art in this way, where the genesis of the idea marks the birth of the work, even before it is executed?

BD: In a manner that is different from many conceptual artists, I always believed in realizing the work in real life and was not satisfied with mere concept, which is obviously the starting point. For me it is essential to create these model situations in a public context for whatever period of time. I used to say that in the Post-historical dimension, one second is equal to eternity or what existed for one second exists for eternity.

Although this may seem utopian or illusory, for me a real situation counts a lot more than a photomontage or sheets of paper exhibited in a gallery. Confronting a public with the work initiates various processes of poetic interferences that I cannot always predict. For instance, when a viewer learns that my large portraits and monuments are of passers-by, the static relationship between him and his historic environment is put out of balance.

S: You wrote the *Tractatus Post Historicus* as very young man and some aspects show hallmarks of youth—a type of rebellious exuberance. What do you think about the work of younger artists today like Thomas Hirschhorn, who arguably also use the street as their museum, “imitating,” as you write in the *Tractatus*, “forms already existing in our environments, in order to question them and use them in new semantic structures”?

BD: It just confirms that I was right [*laughs*]. I became aware very early that in the city, architecture and monuments of different kinds have hidden meanings and radiate energy that conditions our mind and behavior. Many good artists later joined in the practice of using public space and started taking into account historical and ideological aspects of the city.

S: In the *Tractatus*, you condemn style. You rebuke the individual “handwriting” of particular artists consistent to a prescriptive style that makes them predictable. Can a cognitive/intellectual style be similarly problematic?

BD: Not really because it is not reduced to objects that exist per se. To illustrate this we can compare Picasso, the typical example of a painter with distinguished handwriting, to Duchamp or Malevich, two examples of strong conceptual artists. Picasso’s influence is totally insignificant on today’s art, as he never had followers of any significance. The other two are still very much alive.

So for instance, if my name becomes a synonym for a particular pattern of thinking, it is a shortcut to indicate a whole universe of ideas. If you say Kafkaesque, for instance, it gives you a picture of the artist’s whole universe or his approach to life—his philosophy.

I became aware quite early that conceptual art has become a style. I came to that conclusion during Documenta 5 in 1972 and I named this style “Do Not Lean Out of The Window” aesthetics, because the presentation of conceptual art pieces reminded me of the display of information in train compartments at that time—namely, black and white photographs or short written instructions to travelers displayed in aluminum framing (for instance, those enabling passengers to open the window or pull a brake in case of emergency).

In reaction to that, I came to the idea to use painting as the most traditional medium. I chose the procedure of drip paintings in order to show that I could convey my ideas through very different means—photography, bronze, and even painting. Through appropriation of this Pollock-like drip technique, I tried to say something beyond painterly preoccupations.

This appropriation of Pollock’s principle is not so different from my monuments to passers-by because, through an already known form, they convey different kinds of messages than the monuments which existed for centuries. In short, I wanted to play with this kind of appropriated language and already existing forms in order to end art’s identification with artist’s personal-formal handwriting.

I remember once having a discussion in the second half of the seventies with Lucy Lippard who wrote a book called *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*. I claimed that the dematerialization of an art object didn’t happen with conceptual art or galleries showing text and photographs, which in relation to painting and sculpture had less physical presence or were less visible.

In contrast, my idea was to change the attitude of identifying art with art materials, and automatically identifying new media or new art materials with the avant-garde. For me the creative act is primarily a cognitive process and has nothing to do with medium employed.

In that sense the real dematerialization occurs when the same object can produce different meanings depending on context. The defetishization of an art work permits the total freedom of metaphysical emanation.

In 1975 I borrowed an original art work that was already in a museum collection for 50 years in order to make my work. I showed this sculpture on a pedestal with the inscription *This Could be a Masterpiece*. After the show, Dr. Johannes Cladders, the director of the museum in Monchengladbach (who co-curated Documenta 5 with Harald Szeemann), decided to purchase

that work as a work of mine.

The physical object, that is, the museum item, which was already part of the museum collection for a half century, became from that moment on an object that had parallel existence, expressing the multitude of concepts and plurality of truths. Part time it was exhibited as the bust of Max Roeder and part time as my “This could be a masterpiece.” A new work of art was produced without bringing any objects or materials to the museum.

S: Can a conceptual approach amount to a style?

BD: These are two dialectically opposed notions. Style is an aesthetic sphere of accumulation of similar forms and is based on the exclusion of differences. In the *Tractatus*, I give an example of somebody in the Baroque period who painted minimalist canvasses. The artist would not have the chance to be recognized because he wouldn’t pass filters of acceptability. Taste or criteria are never pluralistic, because people lack tolerance even in aesthetic matters. Therefore, excluding this minimalist artist during a Baroque period of ornamental redundancy is like excluding somebody just because he has a different skin color.

In contrast, a conceptual approach or art based on an individual philosophy is a process with an unpredictable number of manifestations, often existing in different forms.

S: Your work appropriates existing forms—general modes of public recognition, advertising images, or monuments. When you do this repeatedly, can that form in the end become indelibly associated with your art?

BD: Only if I were to outnumber the totality of “real” monuments and memorial plaques in the world would people start saying “Look, this is...” In a way, I suggest this in the chapter of *Tractatus* in the form of a photo essay. There, one finds caption “This could be a work of Braco Dimitrijević” under photographs of existing monuments and memorial plaques—but these are only hypotheses and I doubt that they will happen in the near future.

S: The *Tractatus* speaks of our desensitization towards certain historical masterworks (those “vestiges of the art of the past”), their reduction over time to formal landmarks or archetypes of art history. What role do theoretical approaches and academic criticism play in this process? How does a work become a vestige of the art of the past?

BD: There are some works that are predestined to become part of common knowledge. I think that this happens when all strata of a given work are absorbed by the public. This total consumption of ideas inherent in an art work is part of the transition of a work into a “vestige of the art of the past.”

When you see a living snail, for instance, however slow it goes, you are aware that one day it will only be a shell.

When I was offered the possibility to use any painting of the Louvre for my *Triptychos Post Historicus* installations, I did not choose the *Mona Lisa* (instead, I used Leonardo da Vinci’s *The Virgin and Child with St Anne*), because somehow it was completely insignificant to me and void of meaning. Even subconsciously, I was unable to find possible strata to reveal its hidden meaning, for instance by putting an object such as a fruit or vegetable next to it.

S: Does your art require the conceptual explication that the *Tractatus* represents? What is the relationship between your art work and its philosophical underpinnings?

BD: Well, I think that my work does not rely on theoretical explanations. There are artists who are capable of explaining their work but the work remains autonomous. Making an art work and creating a text are two different activities, two different gifts.

Malevich’s writing does not change the quality of his art but it gives hints to someone who wants to know more. The essays may also be like a mirror to an artist’s work.

On the other hand, there are so many theoretical essays written by the artists themselves or by critics that cannot help the art works to which they refer.

They usually serve those who want to continue or study a particular phenomena.

S: So who did you write the *Tractatus* for?

BD: It was written for myself and for at least one more person who would happen to read it. Artists always do things out of inner necessity and cannot predict who will be their audience. Insofar as Kafka never published anything during his lifetime, it is obvious that he wrote for himself. I felt a need to express my intentions in the form of an essay to mimic the semiotics of the city.

Repeated coincidences amount to a system, and if that system exists, why not explain it?

S: If you were a curator at an establishment like the Louvre, would you preserve paintings or allow them to reveal their age?

BD: That's a tough one. We must recognize that there are different approaches to the opposition temporality-eternity. One is Western, namely ours, and then there are other cultures with different notions of time. In contrast to people of other cultures, for instance Australian aboriginals, we tend to preserve things forever—the only problem is that “forever” is of very limited duration.

Even on a very practical level, museum conservation departments follow two different approaches. One is that a painting should show its age; the second is that it should look “original,” that is, as if it just came out of the artist's studio. Some people have a problem seeing something five centuries old that looks so new and consider it overly restored.

At flea markets, paintings once worth thousands or hundreds of thousands of dollars in today's money now cost only one hundred dollars. You quickly realize that there are no fixed or eternal values. This example from a Sunday street corner proves that everyday life is a model for the more “universal” time of history. One day, when our civilization reaches another type of dialog with its environment, and our idea of “eternity” changes, what are considered masterpieces today may be grouped in different ghettos.

Even when I use paintings in *Triptychos Post Historicus* installations in unusual ways, there is a deep respect for these paintings. That respect is inherent in all of my installations. I just want these precious objects to tell us more.

As a curator, I would preserve paintings but I would give them more freedom than is presently the case.

S: What does that mean?

BD: That means examining the reasons for its creation, its role, and its existence on a daily basis, without doing physical harm or damage to the painting. Works of art, as they are perceived now, have unquestionable value and status. I would allow other creative people to intervene around them.

A long time ago, before I published the *Tractatus*, I published an article entitled “Just as piano is not music, painting is not art.” That was to indicate that painting for me is an instrument that

produces art, a box from which music emerges.

As was the case with the *Triptychos*, placing an apple or everyday object in an installation provided a different reading of the painting, in a way enriched it by rendering its noble character of “useful uselessness.”

S: Doesn't every generation have a different relationship to the temporal? Would you say that your work is itself indicative of its age or generation?

BD: Somebody like me could have been born in any time. The language I employ obviously belongs to its time. But there is one constant inspiration for my work which is not dependent on any particular time: human intelligence, or more precisely, its opposite, stupidity. What is being done by geniuses of mankind I find normal, but what I find problematic is the way it is perceived, or rather not perceived—in fact, rejected by others.

S: What do you think about another artist executing a *Casual Passer-by* and entitling it “This could be a work of Braco Dimitrijević”?

BD: That would be perfectly alright.

S: What would an elementary school textbook by Braco Dimitrijević about world history be like?

BD: This textbook would be monumental. It would have a page corresponding to each individual who ever lived on this planet. And it would have an appendix too: of all texts that have been written since writing exists.

Pre-history was the time of harmonious coexistence of people with different gifts. We distinguish pre-history from history by the discovery of writing. Post History, in short, is pre-historic harmony but in the time of literacy.

S: What would a textbook about the history of art look like?

BD: If I were working from the existing record of art, this textbook would probably be a lot thinner than today's history books.

Every century would have no more than ten artists because it would include only major

breakthroughs, that is, the artists who introduced new concepts. Throughout human existence, there have been a great variety of concepts which were not recorded. There might be a concept conceived 5,000 years ago that is still valid, while another might be 10,000 years ahead of its time. The book wouldn't be respecting the chronological order to which we are accustomed in art history. Thoughts from 10,000 years ago and those to come in 10,000 years meet in the same instant in the Post-historical dimension.

The whole of history is not so rich as one second of Post-historical time.

S: If you were an art historian, how would you write about art?

BD: Instead of describing brushstrokes, I would refer to the artist's need to relate to the complexity of his environment.

S: Isn't that a problem with a lot of art history, that it often reduces gesture to a historical moment?

BD: Artworks are not created in a vacuum; they are not meant to be presented in a vacuum. I wouldn't disassociate art from its social context. That would probably induct another approach to art history that would focus more heavily on existential issues. And those issues are always changing, because our environment changes constantly.

If art history continues to exist, I would expect it to be more pluralistic in attitude.

S: It seems that some of your works are displayed for shorter and longer periods of time than others, for instance your work in front of the Cologne cathedral and your *Casual Passerby* series. Is this due to logistical considerations, or is there a conceptual motivation for these disparities? Your work seems to be predicated on an element of temporality that questions habitual ways of reading...

BD: Both of these examples are in tune with the media employed. In reality, large promotional photographs of that kind are temporarily displayed, whilst stone plaques are of a more permanent nature. My work just follows that logic.

S: Would you want them to be permanent?

BD: If I had the chance, I would pave the globe with memorial plaques, so that we get rid of this

kind of historical selection that distinguishes important events, places, and people from unimportant ones.

My most comprehensive retrospective will happen when stupidity ceases to exist on the earth. It would be a kind of ready-made retrospective. I always say what Leonardo, Malevich or Kafka did is perfectly normal to me, but what provokes me to react is invariably the same thing: the stupidity of conventions. My work is infinitely inspired by the things that I find illogical.

S: So, do you hope to completely supplant the semiotic structures that you subvert in your work—wouldn't getting "rid of this sort of historical thinking" necessarily entail an end to your art?

BD: I think it would not be a great loss in comparison what humanity would get in exchange. My idea of creation expressed in the *Tractatus* is that I am trying to naturalize art. It sounds paradoxical, but I am trying to make art within the laws of nature.

S: Can you elaborate on your comment that from the perspective of outer space, there is no distance between the Louvre and the zoo? Should this idea inform the way we understand things other than art history?

BD: In this universe things are inseparable.

This reflection relates to our perception of things. Man is a single-channel thinker. He can't cope with the multitude of concepts coexisting in the same space and time. I don't object to Renaissance paintings being hung in museums in different rooms than Baroque paintings, that is, displayed according to chronological order, or if animals of different families are put in their separate cages. But this always comes from our need to simplify and classify things. In the history of mankind, there was a phase when this classificatory methodology was necessary to acquire new knowledge—a sort of Darwinist idea of evolution and development. But today there are different models offering different modes of perception and each permitting different kinds of knowledge.

What I am trying to say is that perception in our world is linked to repetition, that is, in order for the public to perceive new ideas, they have to be repeated over and over again. In art, for instance, I believe that the first version of a new idea is a stroke of genius. The second version of the same thing is a misunderstanding in time, while the third version is kitsch. In our society, we are forced to repeatedly go through all these three phases, inevitably leading to problems of accumulation and classification.

S: How many copies were printed of the *Tractatus* in 1976? How did it circulate upon its first printing?

BD: I think five hundred. To be quite honest I was surprised that it was selling well in bookstores like Printed Matter in New York and similar venues in London, Paris or Berlin. Nowadays, we have just a few archival copies left. It sold out very quickly. I remember, for example, Jenny Holzer visiting us in London in 1979 and saying that the book was of importance to her and was influential on her circle of friends.

S: We are republishing the *Tractatus* in 2009 exactly as it was published in 1976. Given the opportunity to update your “semantic structure” upon its republication in this volume, why not do so?

BD: I think that this book is more relevant than ever because contradictions that inspired my writing are more present than ever.

Take, for instance, the chapter of the *Tractatus* entitled “Myth is the Best Investment.” At the time, this sentence referred mainly to art, while today it is evident in almost every aspect of both art and life: the excessive prices of recently created artworks, the role of mass media, marketing strategies for the most banal or sophisticated intellectual products or our virtual economy. The consequence of this development is evident in the generation of neo-conceptual artists, who intervene in public space out of necessity for critical action and employ similar artistic strategies when referring to historical and social issues.

Earlier, we spoke about the idea expressed in the *Tractatus* that art should not identify with any particular media or language, but should use any expression at hand. My idea of “stealing the language in order to subvert it,” or as I called it then, “ready-aesthetics,” seems very applicable to the attitude of artists today who appropriate any media or style to address a certain issue.

S: In the *Tractatus*, you state that your work “does not exist as a formal novelty, but exclusively as a new semantic structure, and consequently it is not noticeable, and furthermore it is almost invisible at first glance.” What is the role of a treatise like the *Tractatus* if you are interested in a discourse of invisibility?

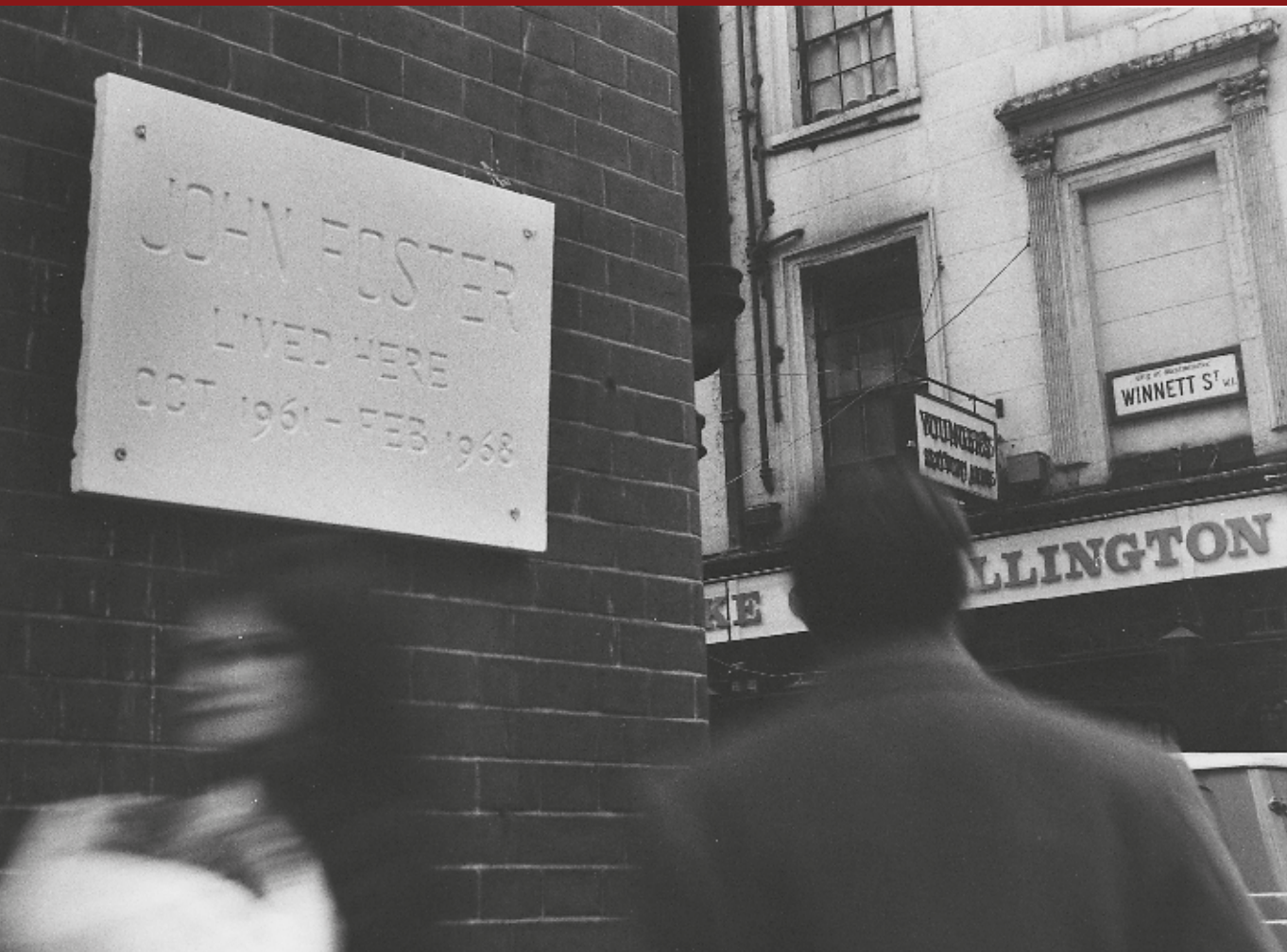
BD: The idea of my work is to deceive the observer, to lead him to automatic and inevitably wrong conclusions. But the work is completed only if the viewer becomes aware of the work’s real

content. Only in that case could the automatic acceptance of persuasive messages be put into question and lead to independent reasoning and judgments.

Invisibility is a very vast space that I am interested in. There are always people who see a little bit more than others, so my work is addressed to those who want to see beyond the lines of shadow. It is already paradoxical to be in visual arts knowing that the world is full of “blind” people.

The book was written for those who have this gift of distinguishing two formally identical things—to give them an opportunity to perceive even more.

Interview conducted by: Grace Ambrose, Johann Diedrick, Colin Foley, Kathryn Lipman, Kaegan Sparks, Liza St James



There are few people who would understand that the memorial plaque on Berlioz's house is an attack on free thought and judgement, while most of us would be sceptical towards overly commercial or political messages.

However, this in no way means that signs from the second group are less repressive. Take for instance, the already mentioned example of the marble plaque on Berlioz's house on which the sentence "Berlioz lived here" is written. The basic system is linguistic but substituting the linguistic code for the message of its presentation gives us the statement "Genius lived here." It means that the implied message of all places without a memorial plaque is "A genius never lived here."

Braco Dimitrijević



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Front: *Casual Passer-by I met at 4:57pm*, Edinburgh, 1975. Collection of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.
Back: *Casual Passer-by I met at 10:05pm*, London, 1972. "John Foster lived here Oct. 1961 - Feb. 1968."

