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Teri Smit, [translated by Andrija Filipović], *Savremena umetnost i savremenost: zbirka eseja*, Beograd, Orion Art, 2014 (review)

Terry Smith is an Australian theoretician of art, art critic and an artist who currently works as a professor of History and Theory of Contemporary Art at the Pittsburg University on the Department for History of Art and Architecture. One of the latest publications, which contributes his more than years research work is *Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity*. After it has been published in Slovenia 2013, a Serbian issue was published in 2014. According to Smith, contemporary art appears to be a response to environment in which it is created, to contemporaneity which is fulfilled by multiplicity of possible, and mutually unadjusted, perspectives and “readings” of the world, as well as, simultaneous existence of “asynchronous temporality”. Therefore, Smith marks them as *antinomy*, namely contradictions that are mutually exclusive and which are, at the same time, equally valid/true.

In his first essay, “The Contemporaneity Question”, Smith pointed out the adequacy of the term contemporaneity with the aim of description of present situation in the world, in which, it seems, the whole history has disappeared and future is hardly imaginable, in which there are parallel, different, often opposite believes that form “condition of permanent-seeming aftermath” (p. 20). Although, it seems to him that we are involved in state where all art is contemporary, he thinks that is necessary to indicate the differences, by which contemporary artists will be singled out from those who are not. He raises a question by which we can recognize that the change has occurred and by which parameters this new state is different from previous periods. In order to find an answer he worked on discursive analysis of the terms “modern” and “post-modern”, he tried to detect the change in meaning of the terms “modern” and “contemporary”. He has concluded that we cannot make generalization and periodization, because the main characteristic is particularity. Therefore, he asks to “[...] an appeal for radical particularism to work with and against radical generalization, to treat all the elements in the mix as antinomies.” (p. 27)

The second essay, “The State of Art History: Contemporary Art”, is his try to historicize contemporary art and to give guidelines for a new approach for its study. Considering evident differences of the meaning of the word contemporary in the local art world and in the center, as well, it is clear that we cannot talk about one unique, but parallel specific histories of art. For that reason, a lot of differences, it is necessary to turn critic practice towards local, individual, artistic manifestations and connections that exist among them and other places (*Trans local*).

The terms like style, fashion and ideology we should change by following categories: *creation of the place, showing the world and connecting*. Methodology which was appropriate for modern art studies is not sustainable in the new context – new generations of the art historian use methodology of revisionist art history. However, Smith claims that it should be worked on overcoming those methodology limitations with the aim of perceiving all individual manifestations of contemporary art. He added that contemporary history of art should follow works of art with the awareness of forces that shape present time when these works are created. Related to, he introduced three currents/energies, as the most important tendencies in the contemporary context.

The third essay, “Contemporary Art of the World Today: Patterns in Transition”, is actually the author’s suggestion of possible vision of contemporary art in the near future. With the aim of clearer arguments, he introduced the eight stances: 1. Although there is no definition of contemporary art and its analysis postponement, it clearly indicates that the change in art has happened. Since the beginning, in 70s of the 20th century, it still has been happening, so it has to be accepted and its currents followed. 2. The number of antinomies has been rising in time, and, since no one is dominant, therefore it does not reach totality, so they are all in option. This creates radical uncertainty on all levels of society. Since the change from modern into contemporary art does not happen in the same way and in the same tame all-round the world (but *locally* /3./ and *regionally* /4./), neither the same speed (due to faster communication) it is possible to raise the awareness of differences and to make a *comparison* (5.). 6. As the change happens in different ways, plurality of each individual is impossible. 7. At contemporary art, there is a *pattern*, which explication the Smith gives the most of the time. He gives synchronic section of diachronic flows of three currencies, with their basic characteristics, complementary vision of contemporary art and different institutional formats.

- I The institutional and official *Contemporary art* is based on the aesthetic of globalization and modernization of art. From this perspective, contemporary art is late-modern art which continues with usage of reflective and avant-garde experimenting. It is present in big museums, commercial galleries, and significant collectors’ auctions.
- II *A Trans-national transition* is a current which originates from decolonization, from which a lot of created works of art is additionally shaped by local/national/anti-colonial values. From this perspective, contemporary art is revival and modernization of traditional set of images by styles which were contemporary in the West modern art. It is disseminated through biennales and traveling exhibitions.
- III The third current, in *contemporary art*, is made by generations of young artists who think about nature “[...] of time, place, media and mood today” (p. 77). No matter how organized they are (collectives, small groups, free societies, individuals), they are looking for sustainable flow of survival, cooperation and growth in contemporary complex circumstances. This current has no unifying answer to the question what the contemporary art is. The starting point for the artists is personal experiences of living in present and their disseminating points are alternative spaces, temporary exhibitions and the Internet. There is a presumption that the first current, although the most prominent at the moment, will be the first one to be extinguished. The second one takes primacy – which will continue some time, while the third one, still at the beginning, has a potential to make conditions in the future.

The last (8.) stance talks about contemporaneity, in which, despite of big instability, a pattern can be seen. According to Smith, it has been defined by adhesion among the three antinomies conditions of contemporaneity.

The last, the fourth essay, is related to art “(East of) Europe”. This Slovenian critic, Marina Gržinić’s formulation, has not just been taken for the title of the essay, but also points out question and inconsistency of the term *Eastern*, and a spirit that defines newer art in this area, as well. By sketching transition from modern to contemporary art in Russia, East and Middle Europe, Smith does not leave out the key ideas in art which preceded that change, but by which have also been defined, to the large extent (late and social-realism, parodies of the political scenes, performance art, post-communist art). The most dominant characteristic of this region art, according to the author, is “translating of the European ideal”. By using explanation of the French theoretic, Étienne Balibar, Smith sites that the artists of the region have become “interpreters of the world”. Translating/interpreting is seen as impassable media, but also as a media of possibilities and hope, for multi-language context. For that reason, the idea of translating like “alertness to multiplicity and difference” (p. 129) is in the focus of this region contemporary art.

In this essay book, the author covers some very important questions and areas – expresses a theoretical hypothesis regarding contemporary art, without ignoring wider political, economic and organizational characteristics of the contemporary context, perceives contemporary art by making constant connections with modernism and post-modernism and uses works of art and artists for case studies by which he proves his theory. Hence, the essay book *The Contemporary art and Contemporaneity* can be read not just like specific theory of contemporary art, but also as a contribution of the history of art, as art critics, and as map of the key contemporary works of art in the world and region, as well. Smith offered a unique organization which is less historical, but more geographical mapping, with a tendency to reach Serbian art theoreticians, critics and curators.