

Milan Samardžić

Visual artist, Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Critical Potential and Subversiveness of Young Emerging Artists Working Alongside Art Institutions: Milena Ivić *What are we supposed to do with all this freedom* [Šta da radimo sa svom ovom slobodom]

Abstract: This study concerns the concept of freedom, radically questioning the autonomy of contemporary art and institutions. The issue of freedom of expression, freedom of speech and artistic freedom will be considered through a particular artistic event that serves as a case study. This event happened in October of 2020 in Banja Luka, BiH (Bosnia and Herzegovina). It was a solo exhibition by contemporary artist Milena Ivić from Banja Luka, organized and curated by the Museum of Contemporary Art of the Republic of Srpska (MSURS) entitled *What are we supposed to do with all this freedom* [Šta da radimo sa svom ovom slobodom]. It successfully opened one evening, and by the following day it had to be withdrawn and closed to the public. The text in the first part presents an insight into the context of the mentioned exhibition and the structure of the MSURS as the main art institution in this part of BiH. The second part of the text offers a look at certain patterns within the paradigm of contemporary art, with a look at the feminist framework of the artist. The third and final part points out the paradoxical principles of the autonomy of art and shows how the institution transforms subversiveness and obstructs progressiveness by perpetuating the status quo.

Keywords: institutional critique; contemporary art; transgression; mainstream feminism; anti-art; autonomy of art.

Introduction

What are we supposed to do with all this freedom? sounds familiar. As if we've heard this question somewhere before. Maybe we asked it ourselves, maybe not, but it is there, provocative and comical. What kind of freedom we are talking about and what seems to be comical about it is hinted at by the very question. It points to 'freedom' as an already established empirical category, and its disposition is called into question as if freedom is spilling over the edges, and we just don't know what to do with that surplus. The question is, of course, rhetorical and stands for the title of an exhibition that took place in October 2020 in the city of Banja Luka. The construction *What are we supposed to do with all this freedom?* can be interpreted in many ways, but

*Author contact information: contact@milansamardzic.me

in this case, attention will be focused on its context, where it comes from, and what potentially marks as a phenomenon in the local contemporary art production. The Museum of Contemporary Art of the Republic of Srpska (MSURS), with a tendency to support the local art scene, created a prize for the best artwork in the scope of the collective exhibition for final year students of the Academy of Arts at the University of Banja Luka. The prize itself is a tradition with many years of history and for 2020, the prize went to young student Milena Ivić. As for the reward and regulations from the year of 2018, the museum provided the exhibition space with a dedicated curator and general support from the institution. The prize is conceived as an opportunity for ‘young artists’ to get familiar with the practice of gallery exhibition within a large institution, which is treated as a mentorial collaboration for one year. The artist is obliged to prepare portfolio material and present it to the audience with an independent project. To introduce the ‘young artist’ to the artworld in a proper way, a whole team of professionals participates in this process. This system starts on the one side with the museum as an institution, which organizes exhibiting projects, through the curator consulting the ‘young artist’, to the academy from the other side which is producing the ‘young artist’. Such relations already showed great success having in mind that some of the well-established professors from today’s academy were also honored as ‘young artists’ with the same prize, and some even had the opportunity to represent the country at major art events like the Venice Biennale.

The exhibition, which was in preparation for a year, took place on October 16, 2020, inside the *Gallery Plus* – a separate gallery space of the museum, mainly focused on sale and shows. Little information was available about the work of the honored artist at the time, however, some sort of official announcement appeared in a Facebook post that read:

The expert jury selected the work of Milena Ivić which covers socially current topics some of which are gender relations and feminism, as a very successful realization of this year. Knowledge of conceptual art makes her works eclectic, and at the same time authentic with an individual stamp according to the degree she attends. The expert jury made its decision, among other things, based on the way Milena Ivić explains her work, in which a noticeable commitment to the concept, awareness of current social issues and an exceptional gift for narration by which the honored student expresses her thoughts in the best possible way. The prize of the Museum of Contemporary Art of the Republic of Srpska, in addition to the monetary prize, also includes an exhibition of the honored student, which will be realized in the *Gallery Plus* – exhibition and sales space of the Museum.¹

¹<https://www.facebook.com/muzejsurs/posts/osamnaestu-godinu-zaredom-muzej-savremene-umjetnosti-republike-srpske-nagrado-j/1757699860999443/>, acc. on February 10, 2022.

In addition, there was some media coverage before the opening noting the thematic framework the artist deals with saying: “The young artist’s interest is focused on feminist art and re-examining women’s gender role in contemporary society, but also towards re-examining the position of artists on the art scene, their attitude towards their own work and the attitude of cultural institutions towards authors in general.”²

Considering all this, one could arguably conclude that the conceptual starting point for the artist is feminist theory and socially current topics like feminism and gender relations. However, the secondary field that is taking place here, the part where artist points out institutional attitudes towards artists and re-examining the status of an artist, is lacking in the museum’s statement.

The *Gallery Plus* is located in a busy pedestrian zone in the city center, and as such has an attractive market and sale position with a big glass shop window at the entrance. The author’s choice to place her work exclusively in that specific area and to leave the rest of the space unused or empty, was very effective regarding the exposure it gave. Also, one of the reasons for placing the work only in a shop window could be interpreted as a kind of insulator for people against physical proximity to avoid the spread of the COVID 19 virus which was then on the verge of a second wave. Nevertheless, the question remained: was that really the case?

Contemporary Art Institutions in the System of Art Production

The situation that could be found at the opening of the exhibition on that issue was somewhat different. It was never explicitly stated that the author, due to the potentially large number of people gathered, wanted to avoid the spread of the virus infection, and thus limited visitors to observe only from the outside. Such a narrative would make sense, if that evening the gallery itself remained closed for the public, on the contrary, that evening sparkling wine was served for all visitors inside the gallery’s relatively small space. The paradox of this situation can be stated more by mentioning the same opening the year before, when this whole conventionality took place outside, in front of the gallery itself, where you could enjoy your sparkling wine with equal respect. The glass shop window of the *Gallery Plus* is placed along sidewalk area containing the entrance door which divides it to two parts. The right part had the white background plate which held many papers containing different writings and symbols. Besides paper writings, there were also photographs and readymade objects obviously transformed from their real-life utility like mattresses and bedsheets. On the left part, the space occupied two highly aestheticized installations with a strong emphasis on their physical appearance, carefully hanging from the ceiling on a thin silk line, almost giving a sense that they levitate. However, on the contrary, the right side gave an impression of totally random placement. The entrance door at the middle would at some point suck you inside from pure curiosity, just to see the absurdity of

²<https://www.nezavisne.com/kultura/vizuelna-umjetnost/Izlozba-Milene-Ivic-Sta-da-radimo-sa-svom-ovom-slobodom-u-Galeriji-Plus/626737>, acc. on February 10, 2022.

the empty gallery space, but the inside was not empty, it was filled with paintings and objects that were on sale regularly. Nevertheless, even though these two parts of the shop display looked utterly different, they correspond to each other with the same narrative and concept through written inscriptions or artist's statements. The actual inscriptions were not part of the available documentation, and further analysis will refer to the curator's text from the catalog. As part of organizing such an exhibition, in respect to the full procedure, the museum hired one of its curators to assist the 'young artist' with curatorial work and selection. Maša Čavić is a curator who worked with Ivić on this project, therefore her text in the exhibition catalog was conceived as an introduction to the exhibition with partial descriptions of the individual artworks. The first part of her text is giving explication of feminism in a broad sense, which in a way remarks slightly conservative enclosure in regard to feminist practices. Having in mind this specific local cultural environment with a strong traditional and patriarchal influence, this act could be marked as benevolent where Čavić emphasized the general principles of feminist theory: "Before describing the works in more detail, it is important to note that feminism is not a phenomenon that takes place independently of everyday life and is of interest only to a selected minority (activists, theorists). As a global movement, especially in the last few decades, feminism has left its mark in all cultures, in different regimes and environments characterized by different traditions."³

This need to emphasize a broad context of feminism is commonplace, explaining to observers that feminism is something very common around the world could be interpreted as a less critical act from the position of the curator (woman) with the task to present a work in a feminist framework that nevertheless strives for a significantly more progressive approach. The other part offers a description of the four conceptual units and morphology for each artwork with corresponding titles. The left side of the window contained installations entitled *Criminal mileu* [*Kriminalni milje*] and *She fell into a deep sleep* [*Usnila je dubok sanak*]. The right part consisted of works with titles *Female castrator* [*Kastratorka*] and *Untitled* [*Bez imena*] which, for some reason was not mentioned in the catalog. However, it turns out that this work could be marked as most controversial among others. Feminist theory historically, together with activism, has tendentiously broken many dogmatic norms such as the existential, political, professional, and social equality of women, thus embracing this legacy to our times. If we say that feminist practice in art is an extended field of feminist struggle, following that pattern they also evoke the transformation and transgression of conservative ideas in the field of female gender and work. The idea of *transgression* in this sense signifies such a tendency to overcome the status quo, more specifically the dominance of patriarchy, and redefinition of a given hierarchy structure. Furthermore, this could be observed parallelly with the status of contemporary art, which is determined by this very concept. According to the theorist and art historian Nikola Dedić, *transgressiveness* in artistic creation is a procedure that represents an idiosyncrasy of thinking in art. For instance, he advocates the notion that the concept of contemporary art thus becomes

³ Maša Čavić, "Šta da radimo sa svom ovom slobodom," exhibition catalog (Banja Luka: MSURS, 2020).

one of the genres in the history of art that as such has its own structure, system, beginning, and I would add *the end*⁴ as well. This system is characterized by the following:

The institution of contemporary art rests on constantly fluid and flexible (topological) boundaries between the world of specialists (curators, critics, artists) and non-specialists. Contemporary art is thus, as a rule, paradoxical for non-specialists: the author creates an ambivalent, transgressive work, while the curator, through the intervention of theory, redefines the boundaries of artistic and non-artistic and integrates an object, gesture or act into the artworld. Transgression thus becomes the central axiological determinant, that is, the norm in the full sense of the word of contemporary art.⁵

Leaning on Groys' concept of the author's project,⁶ Dedić briefly presents the importance of the role of the curator, in understanding of the phenomenon of contemporary art:

Contemporary art, constituting itself on the failure of the avant-garde to abolish the autonomy of art. The historical form of this new 'style' is the curatorial exhibition. The curatorial exhibition, in the form in which it exists today, could hardly have appeared before the second half of the 20th century – until the end of the 1960s, the function of curator was mainly connected with the institutions of large museums. In its traditional form, museums are perceived as a place of archiving, storage, scientific research, that is, as places that manage the processes of educating the population, the *audience*. The basic formats of this were either professional, studio exhibitions (e.g., art epochs, schools, phenomena, etc.) or monographic, so-called. retrospective exhibitions – in both cases the curator is perceived as a specialist within the museum institution between a narrow-minded researcher within one field or as an administrator between museum collections and the public. Only with the transformation of large biennial exhibitions, such as “documenta”, a new kind of profession appears – independent curator, and the exhibition becomes a form of curatorial not more administrative but in the true sense of the author's project.⁷

⁴ In the sense of Danto's proclamation of the end of art history, the idea of the end of contemporary art arises in the understanding of the logic of genre and genre frameworks. With its establishment, the genre systematically becomes the subject of historical paradigmatic observation, and as such remains at the moment of its emergence in the time-space dimension of a historiography.

⁵ Nikola Dedić, “Doba savremene umetnosti,” in *Nova povezivanja: od scene do mreže*, Miško Šuvaković, Jovan Čekić (Beograd: FMK Singidunum University, 2017), 51.

⁶ Boris Groys, “Multiple Authorship,” in *The Manifesta Decade. Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe*, ed. by Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipović (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 93.

⁷ Dedić, “Doba savremene umetnosti,” 51.

In other words, something that Terry Smith would call *First stream – contemporary art*.

To emphasize the importance of the notion of the status of contemporary art, Smith constitutes three levels or streams of contemporary art: 1. Contemporary art; 2. Transnational transitions; 3. In contemporaneity: “The first stream – official, institutionalized contemporary art – comes down to the aesthetics of globalization, serving it through tireless re-modernization and sporadic modernization of art. It has two or three tendencies, each of which may be style; in the traditional sense, important changes in the continuous practice of art in a significant place, which occurs, takes the form that attracts others to work under his conditions and to develop them, prevails over time and comes to an end.”⁸ To the first stream Smith adds also tendency to attach new art to old modernist impulses with imperatives, to sort of renew them. He claims that works of Richard Serra, Gerhard Richter and Jeff Wall are examples of different versions of this tendency that he calls “re-modernization”.

The second stream – transnational transition – arises from the process of decolonization in what the Third, Fourth and Second Worlds were, including its influences on what the First World was. It has not solidified into a comprehensive art movement, nor in two or three movements. Rather, the transnational turn has created a multitude of artistic works that are shaped by local, national, anti-colonial, independent values (diversity, identity, critique). [...] The third stream – as an art, it usually takes the form of personal, smaller, and more modest offerings in opposition to the common expression and monumentality that largely marked re-modernizing, retro-sensationalist and spectacular art, and conflicting testimony that remains much of the art after the transnational turn. Younger artists certainly benefit from elements of the first two tendencies, but with less respect for the declining power of structures, and styles of struggle with more interest in the interactive potentialities.⁹

Based on this one could claim that the curator as a messenger of the artworld is someone who constitutes the validity of the artwork, whether it been feminist or not. Thus, this situation gets more complicated as actual work has suffered sabotage from the institution and audience as well just for being feminist, not for being not-art, which happens to be central point of discussion in this study.

⁸ Teri Smit, *Savremena umetnost i savremenost* (Beograd: Orion Art, 2015), 73–74.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 77–78.

Transgressive Act and its Limits as a Strategy

Milena's work in this exhibition highlights the female body in such an autobiographical manner, which is characteristic of early feminist artistic practices, problematizing the political position of the female subject.¹⁰ The female body as a central motif but also a problem in terms of the struggle for freedom, (female sexuality, the right to abortion, the identity of the mother), the body as an identifier of subordination Milena leads to a borderline position with works *She fell into a deep sleep* and *Female castrator*. The work *Criminal milieu* is, on the other hand, a serious analysis of the omnipresence of female symbols (female manufactory, female decor) in the context of criminalization, stigmatization, and a general second-class existence.

The work, *Untitled*, points to the legacy of psychoanalysis and structuralism with elements of autobiographical writing and photography, that lead us to postmodern practices of referring to the intimate and the personal. In similar manner, glued to the wooden panels of the shop window, were paper cutouts originally from the bedroom space in which these records appear as documents of spontaneous thinking of an intelligent young woman, revealing personal intimacy and her own unconscious. This is further indicated by the mattress and bedsheets that were laying on the bottom, in style of Tracey Emin's *My Bed*. Similarly, to the metalanguage experiments of conceptual poetry,¹¹ these writings did not reveal a coherent narrative structure, but rather a series of free associations. Among others, writings such as: *Misogyny = family heritage* [*Mizoginija = porodično nasljeđe*] could be found there; *Current topics* [*Aktuelne teme*]; *Women are not allowed in* [*Zabranjen ulaz ženama*]; *Class body* [*Klasno tijelo*]; *Salon for beautifying subordination and taming* [*Salon za uljepšavanje podređenosti i kroćenja*], forms such as diagrams and longer texts were also present. In one part, a segment with a red cloth cut in the shape of a cross stood out, on which was the written *Boobs* – horizontally above; *Pussy* – vertically below. This segment was a part of the fabric from the installation (dress) at the shop window next to it, called *She fell into a deep sleep* that was missing in that area (body area of female sexuality). Through the vocabulary of everyday speech, these words are referring to those parts of the female body that determine radical *other* in the domain of sexuality more than biological sex. In the context of the historical oppression of female sexuality, such depiction of femininity emerges from a subordinate position to the place of the divine archetype (crucifixion), thus being extremely subversive and intrusive. I find this expression one of the most powerful semantically, while it corresponds to the problem of fetishization of the female body yet pointing the dominant conservative traditional

¹⁰ Miško Šuvaković, *Pojmovnik suvremene umjetnosti* (Zagreb: Horetzky, 2005), 201.

¹¹ Conceptual poetry is a poetic practice that explores the nature of language and opinions about poetry, literature, and literature in an inter-or-polygenre text, poem, or theoretical text. Conceptual poetry is a metalanguage practice as it speaks to the language of literature and art.

narratives who use fetishism¹² as a methodology.¹³ As such, it provokes with the fictitiousness of vulgar expression and performs a sort of parody of understanding the personal sexual bodyness, thus closing the circle of the autobiographical¹⁴ artistic act. This confrontation of the sacred and profane motives is the explicit moment of transgression according to Bataille:

human society is not only a world of work. Simultaneously or successively, it is made up of the profane and the sacred, its two complementary forms. The profane world is the world of taboos. The sacred world depends on limited acts of transgression. It is the world of celebrations, sovereign rulers, and God. Taboo and transgression reflect these two contradictory urges. The taboo would forbid the transgression, but the fascination compels it.¹⁵

Although subversive in the domain of perception of the female body, the space for progressiveness is reduced as much as this represents a commonplace. The issue of female sexuality was a battlefield of the second half of 20th century, also known as first-wave feminism. As a difference between the feminism of the 1960s (first wave) and something we have after or even today (postfeminism), we should consider more complex forms of obstruction of women's path to freedom.

Postfeminism raises theoretical problems that enter the field of psychoanalysis, social work, aesthetic, political and philosophical reflection on the status of the subject (subjectivity and rationality) of women. Female sexuality is considered in terms of difference and otherness, ie from the point of view of women's writing, the female portrayal of the male and female body, emotions, desire, enjoyment, obedience, drama, repression and rationality. Postfeminist art (film, literature, positivity, visual arts) originated in a changed social and artistic climate: 1. Unlike feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, revolutionary leftist ideas and utopian emancipation were abandoned; 2. Provocation and excess are replaced by deconstruction and polygenre reinterpretation of the mechanisms of the portrayal of sexuality in advertising, media, economics, art.¹⁶

¹² Fetishism exists as enjoyment for the sake of enjoyment because enjoyment serves no purpose. In modern and postmodern culture, sexual fetishism is brought to the aesthetic and artistic, analogous to magic. This shows how in modern and postmodern culture art becomes a communication channel that forms a combination of the obscene and the normal. Through artistic aestheticization, it is perversely transformed into a cultural code, which means that it is translated into a symbolic area of exchange of aesthetic value and consumption of the illusion of freedom.

¹³ Šuvaković, *Pojmovnik suvremene umjetnosti*, 201.

¹⁴ Postmodern autobiographical works bring us back to the very act of writing, public self-display (exhibitionism) or documentary reconstruction of fragments of our own lives, without focus on stories, data, facts, or fantasy but on the language of writing, self-presentation or documentary reconstruction.

¹⁵ Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* (New York: Walker, 1962), 67–68.

¹⁶ Šuvaković, *Pojmovnik suvremene umjetnosti*, 201.

On the other hand, the aspect of open communication (provocation) with the audience (the public, residents) generates this absurd situation where the idea of *education of the population* is seriously taken into question. By erasing the border between non-specialists and specialists in the artworld, ordinary passers-by receive the treatment of a legitimate artistic audience and thus with the triad: *artist – work – audience*, constitutes the act of production in the system of contemporary art. This ambivalence that has been established marks this exhibition of Ivić's as an anti-art act¹⁷ because it violates the autonomy of the institution of *contemporary art* and the whole concept the audience¹⁸ as such, the role of the institution becomes redundant, and artwork reduced to one-dimensional mass reception.¹⁹

Since the exhibition's opening was held in the evening, it is assumed that the shop window in the gallery attracted much attention of people walking by that evening, taking in account that the museum received several threats from individuals the next day with messages that the gallery could be demolished in protest. Numerous announcements appeared on social networks, calling out the museum's incompetence and calling for lynching in the comments. Only 16 hours after the opening, the exhibition was closed and withdrawn from the street sight. An announcement on the museum's Facebook page, calling for artistic freedom and epidemiological responsibility, was again given as an official public statement of the institution. Thus, putting in the foreground the free choice of the author to set up the exhibition as the concept instructed, so allegedly the same concept demanded the paradoxical decision of the author to withdraw the exhibition herself.

Museum director Sarita Vujković offered a kind of common-sense argument²⁰ and an effort to avoid conflict, emphasizing that the museum is always open for discussion, mentioning that the young curator, Maša Čavic, is in her seventh month of pregnancy and thus unable to cope with this kind of situation. A few days after, appeared statements of Čavic and Milena Ivić, stating their denial of responsibility and participation in the act of canceling the exhibition. They experienced resistance from the top of the institution, receiving phone calls from the museum director herself, who managed to obtain their consent to withdraw with her alleged skills of moral rhetoric regarding reputation of the institutions and potential material damage.²¹

¹⁷ Anti-art can be determined as a tendency that negates the autonomy of art, such as neo-dada, fluxus, and happening. They believed that their work takes place outside the traditional framework of art, in the space of cultural, political, moral and existential provocation. They use life situations as material for artistic work, moving from aesthetic creation to political action. *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁸ Walter Benjamin noted this phenomenon of how individual reactions are predetermined by the mass audience response especially in the film because of mass reception and shared experience. That way he points how it becomes less critical in comparison to the painting where one could have personal experience and reception.

¹⁹ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 14.

²⁰<https://banjaluka.net/negativne-konotacije-gradjana-msu-dan-nakon-otvaranja-povukao-izlozbu-milene-ivic/>, acc. on February 10, 2022.

²¹ <https://banjaluka.net/masa-cavic-kustos-msu-rs-kako-je-povucena-izlozba-milene-ivic-iz-galerije-plus/>, acc. on February 10, 2022.

However, it is questionable and not that convincing that a young woman engaged in feminist art who show greater concern for the material value of the glass window than for the intangible value of the subordinate existence of the female subject. It should be noted that in addition to everything there is also a political touch point to this story. Namely, there were allegations in Ivić's text²² where she discussed the censorship of one part of her work which mentioned the name of the current President of Republika Srpska, Željka Cvijanović. Allegedly, only a few hours before the opening, a decision that came from the Museum's upper management was that the one piece should not be shown as part of *Female castrator* work. Also, information of some lateral relevance may be that the pre-election campaign for the mayor of Banja Luka was active at the time, and that the current mayor belonged to the same political party as the president.

Can transgressive strategies be seen as liberating ones? Perhaps it can bring more of the avant-garde reminiscence to its practice, but they can most certainly emphasize the area of the limit and border, or as Foucault would put it the "narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses."²³ The actual limit constitutes transgression and part of its short life is determined by crossing of this line which by its nature doesn't go much beyond, because its primarily strategic purpose is to cross the line. The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely un-crossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows. Foucault also points out "this curious intersection of beings that have no other life beyond this moment where they totally exchange their beings, is it not also everything which overflows from it on all sides?"²⁴ Which can be taken in place of freedom for our case, *what are we supposed to do with all this freedom?* This directly correlates to the notion of transgressing limits of freedom and its overflow as a consequence. This question always arises after the transgressive act, the nature of its strategy lacks the idea of the future, just like the fugitive from the Siberian gulag doesn't know what to do after crossing the boundary of the prison camp. Foucault at this moment will describe transgression as a glorification of the nature it excludes: "the limit opens violently onto the limitless, finds itself suddenly carried away by the content it had rejected and fulfilled by this alien plenitude which invades it to the core of its being."²⁵ Or as Bataille puts it: "It opens the door into what lies beyond the limits usually observed, but it maintains these limits just the same. Transgression is complementary to the profane world, exceeding its limits but not destroying it."²⁶

²² <https://bonamag.ba/2020/10/28/otvoreno-pismo-milene-ivic/>, acc. on February 10, 2022.

²³ Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. by James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998), 73.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, 67.

Autonomy of Art as a Dominant Discourse

It is important to note the concept of the autonomy of art in relation to the institution from the case study. “The autonomy of art according to Hinz (Berthold Hinz) arose due to the fact that artists were excluded from the division of labor, that their production, unlike mechanized, serial, continued to be craftsmanship, in other words there was no alienation, separation of worker and production object, and Winckler (Lutz Winckler) interprets autonomy as the result of the artist’s alienation from those who commission the work of art.”²⁷ Peter Bürger introduces a dualistic historical overview of the category of autonomy, partly autonomous and partly socially integrated. “Category of autonomy is created as a result of centuries long process of taking apart the art from the social reality. At first the art was part of the sacred and served as an object of a cult. Art at castles was a part of life practice, but it contained the untying ties with sacred, which is the first step towards emancipation of art.”²⁸ Thus making emphasis on this isolation of art, that is serving purpose of being representative of the social and civil aesthetics. Bürger also claims that if the art loose distance from the social reality, consequentially it loses critical potentiality. He also points out that avant-garde had this attempt to transform the autonomy of art towards social reality, as a kind of new social reality based on the art, which he saw as antinomies of the avant-garde. Example of this notion is given through Duchamp’s ready-mades, as a provocation and critique of the autonomy of art. “In order to deny the category of individual production and to belittle the cult of the great genius artist, Duchamp did just the opposite: by placing a signature under a mass-produced object, he showed that only the actions of that signature affirm the position of the ‘great creator’ against whom criticism is directed.”²⁹ This was the genuine attempt, but symptom of the failure at the same time of the avant-garde art movement, turning over the autonomy of art towards the social reality. What happened only was, as he puts it “restauration of the category of the artwork,”³⁰ which contributed to the autonomy of art and appropriation of this transgressive tendency. This is also why Bürger criticized the neo-avant-garde movements as being historical reminiscence and imitation inside institutional realms.³¹ Statements like this could be found a day or two after the exhibition closed, which speaks to how much this scandal has attracted media attention. The sensitivity of the topic and the controversy caused by the notion of the female body and the names of its parts in free speech speaks more about the cultural environment in which such a thought experiment took place, than about feminism itself or its progressive aspects which the theory refers. Therefore, it can be said that this kind of artistic

²⁷ Nina Mihaljinac, “Peter Birger,” in *Savremena marksistička umetnost*, ed. by Nikola Dedić, Rade Pantić, and Sanela Nikolić (Belgrade: Orion Art, 2015): 462.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 464.

³¹ Ibid., 464–65.

experiment could be called a form of feminist spectacle or provocation, while on the other hand, we are missing potentially a more progressive moving and transgression in the domain of institutional critique that remains unnoticed. Here we detect a connection with mainstream feminism, certain ideological tendency to perpetuate the status quo sustaining some common progressive legacy (e.g., Women's suffrage) to maintain calling itself *feminist*, but essentially overlooking other inconsistencies in social, labor, and even daily political equality, to which the intersectional feminism or Marxist feminism refers. What institutionalized production of knowledge puts as the norm, society follows according to it. Foucault described this as the *mechanism of power*, and names it *the governmentality*³² – the mentality that is influenced by the government.³³ In other words, it has come to the point that women are now emancipated and know their place, hence they strive to stay that way.

Conclusion

Criticizing the mechanism of creating knowledge through dominant discourses, that is, creating power through knowledge according to Foucault, we must criticize institutions as such and those who cooperate with them. Because the place of dominant discourses is the key to understanding systems that manage the drive of an individual, thus if the drive tends to power (will to power), the one who determines what power is, in this case, the knowledge,³⁴ can actually control the individual. Such practices exist because they generate a new vocabulary of power (cognitive capital) of the mainstream in culture and thus enter the space of exploitation and manipulation, being in that sense counter-revolutionary on both fields. Also, the inevitable amateurism among the staff of this institution is hardly acceptable, especially when it comes to taking responsibility. Allowing a 'young artists' to experience such inconveniences does not leave much optimism for other artists to continue the same path, but on the contrary, I think it's much more necessary to identify practices that affect this structure or at least take it critically. To conclude on this notion, I would agree with Terry Smith which points out the strategy of the undermining integrated contemporary practices in his classification of the contemporary art of third stream: "Unlike the

³² The governmentality refers to the collective and individual mentality which, as Foucault explains in *Discipline and Punish*, compares the mechanisms of discipline in the state of sovereign power from the 18th century, where the threat of death by the army and police indicates the power of the state over the individual. Foreign liberal mechanisms in the 20th century are institutionalized through education systems, psychiatric institutions and military structures that create a mentality that unconsciously acts on the principle of exemplary citizen with use of force as little as possible, thus generates the normalization of society.

³³ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population, lectures at the Collège de France*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 19.

³⁴ Michel Foucault considered knowledge to be power. And not just any knowledge, but knowledge that corresponds to the dominant values or codes of political systems at different levels in society. To that extent, knowledge as a concept is relativized against various neoliberal politics, which as such can be called mainstream politics or status quo politics.

passive postmodernists, most of these artists despise the superficiality of the spectacle, although they acknowledge that it has permeated the totality of our lives. They start with their experiences of life in the present, so the question for them becomes less what contemporary art is, and more what kinds of art can be created today – less *for* themselves and more *with* others at their fingertips.”³⁵

References

- Bataille, Georges. *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*. New York: Walker, 1962.
- Benjamin, Walter. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, 217–51. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- Dedić, Nikola. “Doba savremene umetnosti.” In *Nova povezivanja: od scene do mreže*, Miško Šuvaković, Jovan Čekić. Beograd: FMK Singidunum University, 2017.
- Foucault, Michel. *Security, Territory, Population, lectures at the Collège de France*, translated by Graham Burchell. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Foucault, Michel. “A Preface to Transgression.” In *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, edited by James D. Faubion, 103–22. New York: The New Press, 1998.
- Groys, Boris. “Multiple Authorship.” In *The Manifesta Decade. Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe*, edited by Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipović, 93–102. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005.
- Mihaljinac Nina. “Peter Birger.” In *Savremena marksistička umetnost*, edited by Nikola Dedić, Rade Pantić, and Sanela Nikolić, 457–72. Beograd: Orion Art, 2015.
- Smit, Teri. *Savremena umetnost i savremenost*. Beograd: Orion Art, 2015.
- Šuvaković, Miško. *Pojmovnik savremene umjetnosti*. Zagreb: Horetzky, 2005.

Article received: December 24, 2021

Article accepted: February 1, 2022

Review article

³⁵ Smit, *Savremena umetnost i savremenost*, 78.