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Book Review: Miško Šuvaković, *3E. Estetika, epistemologija, etika spekulativnih i De Re medija* (“3E. Aesthetics, Epistemology, and Ethics of Speculative and De Re Media”, Belgrade: Faculty of Media and Communication, Singidunum University, 2020, ISBN: 978-86-81042-78-6

3E is a highly topical and relevant book, a transdisciplinary theoretical study that frames its author’s impressive oeuvre as a testimony (experience) of the present time, the time of its writing, including the reception of a range of top reference sources from the domain of 20th- and 21st-century art and media art theory. Also, the book constitutes a fresh achievement (contribution) in conceptualising a 3D image of the (personal, collective, and factual) state of the world, within the networking processes of aesthetics, ethics, epistemology, and speculative and especially *De Re* media today. From page 1, the reader is placed inside this (spatiotemporal) web as a participant/contemporary of these “years of lead”, while the reader’s free fall to the very bottom of the crisis is cushioned by the book’s potent and authentic humanity of communication.

3E is a book written at a time when the state of emergency has become the *normal* situation across the planet! (82)¹ In the author’s words, it concerns “...the aesthetics, epistemology, and ethics of the *media dispositive* on the margins of practice”. The dispositive (like in Foucault) is treated as a strategic function in the system of inter-human relations and, in the context of media, it is further interpreted as “the complex, heterogeneous, hybrid collection of a multitude of clusters or swarms in/around the media machine: from the machine via the physical to the social and, ultimately, the natural as the non-human world”; the author is not interested in the (media) machine itself, but “the human, social, cultural, and artistic dispositive hosting the machine”, that is, “the active, intervening, material environment where a complex media practice takes place in and with the material world” (109).

¹ The numbers in the brackets indicate page numbers in the cited edition of the book.

The notion of *De Re* media, as an event and situation of communication (in the real world) is intimately related to the media dispositive. This is because *De Re* media constitute a “complex objective world” of communication messages, affective impacts and self-involvement with others in a community of “negotiating parties”. (65) Finally, *De Re* media generate a dialectical tension with speculative media, transforming communication into participation, which results in an event (coupling) among those involved or a processing of the world. (diagram, 526)

3E is a book written “in the domain of ‘aesthetic theory’, wherefrom or to which it derives reflexive indexical lines of interpretation, directed at epistemology [...] and ethics [...] within contemporary art, culture, society, and *nature*”. (110) As a whole, the book then develops from “writing in first person” (Chapter 1) to raising ethical (critical) questions about a traumatic present where media, having converted their (practical) ethics into (a propositional) morality, have generated the need to confront the consequences “to the last breath” (the concluding Chapter 11).



The demand that the author sets before aesthetics as “the most complex, orderly, as well chaotic assemblage of theoretical, philosophical, and other discourses on art and culture” is a demand to turn it wholesale into an all-encompassing “theory about theories of art”. (68) The reason for such a (re)positioning of aesthetics is “the radical conditions” of our present time, when art theory, from an independent form of art history, aesthetics, and criticism, has turned into a comprehensive theory of culture. (174) Such a transformation of aesthetics also implicates an “epistemological turn”, that is, switch from the regime of theorising into an utterly different regime, the regime of theoretical work. Therefore, it includes an essential shift in the type and mode of acquiring knowledge. (177)

In that context, ethics develops as “the discourse about the discourse of the character, correctness, or value of individual or collective human action/effect on oneself, close or remote others, acceptable and unacceptable others, society and/or universal identity...”, therefore, as “a universal right”. (74/5) The author is interested in bringing aesthetics and ethics closer together as a strategy for bringing together “every or any representation, function, and its effect in relation to human sensuality, sensibility, intelligence, and imagination [...] as an analytical or reflexive or critical approximation between *evil* and *good* by way of artistic or cultural media production within the ethical and political networks of articulating everyday life...” (75).

Therefore, bringing ethics and aesthetics closer together ultimately actualises the concept of “political aesthetics”, “...which leads from *the aesthetic itself* to the aesthetic in specific social *situations*, social dispositives, processes, or systems of existence, acting, or even enduring with one’s body and giving for the body. The aesthetic is thereby trans-individualised, by relocating from a singular body to the community...” (184)



The underlying methodological matrix of Šuvaković’s book is identical to the title of its fourth chapter: *Diagram Aesthesis*. In the author’s view, its function is to implement “interventional knowledge” and knowledge *qua* event, where the form/model of a diagram is interpreted as a “new reality” and *Aesthesis* as primary perception and bodily experience. This “tactical epistemology” is offered as a “related derivation of the sensory and the conceptual”, with the intent of constructing an aesthetic and epistemological theory. As “skeletons of knowledge”, diagrams concretise and visualise interventional knowledge, already mentioned above, organising the new reality of a characteristic material order. For, “the potentiality of knowledge that may be observed and read at once is diagrammatic knowledge”. Furthermore, in the author’s view, as a species of *mixed media*, a diagram constitutes a processual, epistemological

body – assemblage – of the visual and the linguistic, whereby it moves from knowledge *qua* form to knowledge *qua* event. Thus the ultimate aim of knowledge becomes its visibility and concretisation, which finally establishes the farthest reaching link between aesthetics and epistemology. (207–242)

The “baroque” Spinoza (rationalist philosopher, monist), a socially excommunicated scientist (read: philosopher at loggerheads with the regime), a man who grinded optical lenses for a living, is positioned, certainly not by accident, in the conclusion of this book as a thematic ally of the discussion. His historical tracks combine aesthetic perceptibility, epistemological speculativity, and ethical interactivity to defend the “sure value” of freedom. (596) In addition, another link is established with Švabković’s diagrams as a contribution to understanding the “required geometry”, for the sake of “reason corresponding with nature” (600).

And while today’s “university technocrats are offering experience *in lieu* of theory: *skill education!*”, predicated on the belief that “experienced professionals telling stories can replace theory and enable direct and uncontested adopting – downloading – of real professional experience, which is not interrogated but only perfected”, this valuable book, by contrast, returns us to the original meaning of the “abandoned humanities”. Pursued from the renaissance, “via the study of classical ancient literature as part of general education/upbringing and the study of grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy”, the humanities should bring us “to a contemporary critical epistemology of human practices, achievements, and emancipatory projects” (500). In our present circumstances, anything else would only corroborate Švabković’s note on page 28 in the book, where the data “Google mythology”, deprived of theory, becomes “soft ground” for yet another big Narrative Intrigue.