

PRAISE OF DIVERSITY

„Beyond Mediations“ exhibition – as the title itself suggests – is a critical continuation of a previously developed concept, which underlies the Biennale in Poznan. While still overlapping with the Biennale’s domain of mediation issues, it simultaneously introduces new problem and structural themes, extending and complicating this domain, and providing reflective reference to the very idea of mediation.

1.

The strategy which has been assumed as a basis for the exhibition, engenders a viewpoint on the concept of mediation, in which, on the one hand, mediation should not be perceived as communication between independent, integrity-oriented wholes or cultural systems. Therefore, it should not strive for multiculturalist vision of autonomic, simultaneously functioning arrangements, which are systematically reproduced in its invariably sustainable dissimilarity and singularity. On the other hand, however, it must be acknowledged that mediation does not lead and should not lead to such combination of mediatized phenomena, which would result in the blurring of differences existing among them, in the emergence of forms which constitute an integral amalgamation of originally diverse or even opposite phenomena into a non-conflicting shape. Such vision of unified global culture could probably be envisaged as desirable only from the perspective of commercial systems (although even in this case it is not a ubiquitous and unquestionably accepted vision). In

all other approaches to cultural products of globalisation, a vision of uniform, homogenous culture in force across the globe, is, more often than not, rejected, supplanted by the image of mutually connected hybrid systems. This is also the attitude towards mediations that "Beyond Mediations" chooses to employ.

I consider hybridity to be one of the most important values of contemporary world. At present, it determines not only cultures and civilizational systems seen as a whole, but also its individual constituent elements, individual personalities, and individual identities. It is caused, above all, by the ever-intensifying intercultural communication, fostered by the dynamic development of technologies in global communication. The multilaterally infiltrating process of transformation of the contemporary symbolic systems, which moulds them into rhizomatic networks, manages to include all cultural planes: from all-entailing, planetary projects to the smallest of local cultures. What is more, they all are fused into a system of mutual references and operative influences. Arjun Appadurai, for instance, when analysing the structure of the order of locality, proposes not to perceive it as a product of indigenous tradition, but a product of local, current work. Such a work does not resort exclusively to the local resources, but also to the global tradition – to the contents of archives built from ingredients of all cultures, which participate in the global interaction. In Appadurai's project, the role of a particularly significant subject of cross-domain activities thus construed is given to art; naturally, in that variety of art which functions outside the principles of commercial systems, as well as beyond the impact range of national narrations. The global tradition, by becoming a resource base for all artistic creativity, and, which is particularly important, for the artistic production of every locality, helps to overthrow the tyranny of local tradition, as well as relieve the pressure of transnational corporate order. Thus, it allows to go beyond

the constraints imposed on the existence of individuals and communities by system founded on the opposition of nationalised and commodified time, towards the hybrid present, which is continually forged and processed anew.

The hybrid culture project reflects the diversity that is characteristic for each reality, which evolves without limitations. The multitude of contributing constituents, factors, events and processes, when not subject to the coercion of the homogenizing system and enforced conditions, develops in multiple directions, thereby constructing a multidimensional, multiform reality, which remains within the network of numerous and diversified relations. Among the processes associated with cultural hybridisation, besides the phenomena which by definition reveal their irrevocable heterogeneity, one also finds those which intend to blur (or conceal) the hybrid nature of works in the making. In fact, they do not build a hybrid world, but give rise to a tendency, which in a singular fashion supports opposing aims which lead to cultural standardization, to which I have referred above. Here, however, they are not taken into consideration.

The context and the content of “Beyond Mediations” exhibition comprises only those domains of artistic practice, which register the presence of tendencies emphasizing and manifesting the hybrid dimension of its products, their heterogeneous complexity. Their active presence in the world of art testifies to the attitudes which are alive there, and which endeavour to give support to (or to make evident) primarily those processes, whose objective it is to return the world (and its image) to the shape of hybrid diversity. Seen from this perspective, the history of avant-garde art of the postmodern era assembles into the stories of

hybridisation. This is the source from which numerous works amassed at the exhibition emerge, or of which they speak.

2.

Apart from the reflection, in its generic shape, on the very notion of mediation, which reveals the latter's complexity and ambiguity, the exhibition expands the scope of addressed issues, introducing many threads and complicating its structure. The anticipated effect of the expansion in terms of structure and substance is the widening of the spectrum and intensification of mediative tensions which typify the exhibition.

First and foremost, "Beyond Mediations" project establishes a space for the co-presence and mutual influence of traditional artistic techniques and genres existing in contemporary art (painting, sculpture, drawing etc.) and the digital art of new media. Consequently, the project abolishes their radical separation, which has existed persistently since the dawn of creative application of digital technology, and remains valid today. The art of the new media is usually presented during specialised undertakings which confine their scope to new media exclusively, and which are organised by dedicated institutions (Centrum Ars Electronica in Linz, Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie in Karlsruhe, or the Intercommunication Center in Tokyo), while the classical artistic forms are shown to the public in numerous, traditional institutions of art of the museum-gallery type. The division endures unchanged, in spite of the progressing digitalisation of the contemporary world, which embraces all its domains, art in its classical guise included. Even festivals or biennials of art, which have been spreading worldwide in recent years, despite being characterised by greater freedom in the design of their programmes, chiefly present works typical for the gallery system (although it is worth

noticing that that the part taken up by video art continually increases, the genre having become in the meantime an integral element of the contemporary art system). “Beyond Mediations“, on the other hand, combines within its space numerous forms and genres of art which feature on the landscape of contemporary work, also those which make extensive use of new media technologies – the art of new media.

By juxtaposing paintings and interactive installations, one achieves the sharp and clear outline of dissimilarities found currently in the world of art, a manifestation of the diversity predominating there. On the other hand, this expedient allows to uncover those attributes of the current arrangements in art which emerge due to the co-presence of both of these orders: the traditional and the new media one. Art of the traditional genres and the art of new media cast light upon each other, contributing to the exhibition’s substance those qualities which distinguish the arts from one another, those that they jointly create between themselves, but also those that constitute their mutual links. The selection of works presented at the exhibition also reveals the shared dimensions of the world of art, regardless of the employed media and genre markers. Among other things, it proves, for instance, that neither genre purity nor the cultivation and exploration of features, which are typical of the utilised media does not determine the works created nowadays. The manifold aspects of domain crossing: hybridity, inter- or multimediality, transculturality become now the dominant attributes of contemporaneity.

In “Beyond Mediations” exhibition, the direct effect of this media-genre coexistence is also the parallel presence of various kinds of experience that art is capable of providing today. Apart from artworks which engender experience engaging one in a profound, contemplative penetration of autonomous worlds that these works call to life, there are also interactive

realisations inviting the audience to co-create the experienced form, artworks which offer experiences which possess the structure of a network connecting various aspects of reality, which invite to enter a social and political discourse (as well as actions), which encourage to perceive art as a tool with which to analyze the present and even as a means of its transformation. The works of artists invited to the exhibition reveal that contemporary art is ready to abandon the autonomy it had had until recently, that it enters into elemental relationships not only with media technology but also with the worlds of science and many other social discourses, creating new, multidimensional languages of expression, which are adapted to the hybridity of the contemporary reality, to the complexity and multiformity of the world in which we live.

Presently, the experience of contemporary art becomes ever more often, and to an ever-greater extent a communion with heterogeneous structures, diversified internally at the level of structure and material (not to mention the semiotic plane). Transmediality sets the pace for contemporary artistic practice, lending expression both to individual works as well as entire art systems.

The artworks presented at the exhibition, and the experiences they provoke, display transitive, multidimensional, often hybrid character. Thus they remind that the processes of crossing boundaries, also those, which are instituted in order to develop the desired relationships with the Others, the processes that shape the spaces of mediations, situate us in transitional worlds, worlds "in between". With each transgression, with each boundary crossed, new challenges appear. The "beyond" transforms into "in-between". The internal and the external opposition turn out to be a play on perspectives, not a real contradiction. The exhibited works also remind that the very notion of mediation entails a fundamental separation,

a tension between separate states and forms, and an inner desired conflict. They also remind that this state of separation, this conflict, presents a challenge not only with regard to the actions, which aim to overcome it, but also those that strive to legitimize it. That mediation consists in analyzing, civilising and valorising differences. That it could be (should be, in my opinion) the task of discourses concerning hybridity and hybridization of the contemporary world to manifest diversity and difference, to cultivate it and use creatively – not to overcome and abolish.

3.

The works assembled within the space of “Beyond Mediations” exhibition are situated in diverse dimensions of the issues discussed here. All these dimensions and their resultant structural and problem threads, around which the exhibition is devised, appear chiefly in the form of binary oppositions, in which various paradigms of art, various systems, qualities or values, stand contradicted. Yet, in this unadulterated, binary form, they may be isolated only through theoretical reflection. In specific instances however, when analysing individual works, one most often discovers several such oppositions and associated threads, which co-exist and overlap within that single work. In this way, they bring to life yet another dimension, or rather, a meta-dimension of hybridity of the presented works and the whole exhibition.

So far, I have remarked upon only one of the threads, which I deem fundamental for the exhibition’s concept, where the traditional order of artistic genres, which jointly constitute the paradigm denoted habitually as contemporary art, is contrasted with the paradigm of the new media art. Accordingly, the works presented at the exhibition belong either to one or the other paradigm. On the one hand, we have Małgorzata Borek, Kamil Kuskowski, Hidetoshi Nagasawa, Jean-Christophe Norman, Anna

Orlikowska, Yukina Sakai, Chiharu Shiota, Konrad Smoleński or Kijuro Yahagi, on the other, Keith Armstrong, Luc Courchesne, Ken Feingold, Paula Gaetano Adi, Jakub Jasiukiewicz, Bart Koppe, George Legrady, Mateusz Pęk, and Geoffrey Alan Rhodes. This thread/opposition renders particular status to works, which, like the projects of Masato Kobayashi, Daniel Koniusz, Dominik Lejman, Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau, and Masaki Fujihata's installation *Private Room/TV* combine both paradigms in their structure. These works (just as the entire exhibition, but these are particularly poignant) provide unequivocal evidence that the concept of contemporary art, stripped of the part, which is created by means of digital media, is absurd.

The juxtaposition of art and science is the foundation of another significant thread. The contemporary reflection of artistic creativity draws particular attention to the current change in the views on the functions performed by artistic endeavour. The parallel transformation of ideas concerning science, the evolution of its theory, from Ernest Nagel and Karl Popper to Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend, the resulting contextualization and gelatinisation of the value of research results, all these processes legitimise the conclusion that science should no longer be considered as the sole domain of social practices which produces knowledge. In effect, art assumes a new role, abandons the traditional division into objective science and subjective art, aspiring to become a research environment, a source of substantial knowledge. Today, very many works of art, most frequently from the new media area, undertake the tasks which are situated between creative work and science/research-oriented activities. On the one hand, these works reinstate the alternative epistemological tradition in science, rejected during the Enlightenment, while on the other, they relocate making art to scientific laboratories. This migration gave rise to such currents as bio-art, robotic art, transgenic or nano-art. The

works, which originated within these branches, by virtue of combining attributes of art and science, constitute a new, significant quality in both disciplines. In “Beyond Mediations” these new tendencies are evinced in the installations and objects by Paula Gaetano Adi, Ken Feingold, Eduardo Kac, Wade Marynowsky, Zbigniew Oksiuta and Paul Vanouse.

The artists whose works participate in the discourses conducted in the domains indicated above, as well as those who do not take part (although frequently present in those discourses in a limited or mediated form, while their works prioritise different issues instead) find their place also in other structural threads of the exhibition, which are no less aporetic, dialogic and hybrid in nature.

Some artists penetrate the realms stretching between the present and the past, between individual and social dimensions of memory (Inga Fonar Cocos, Jonas Dahlberg, Masaki Fujihata, Sanja Iveković, Julien Maire, Apichatpong Weerasethakul), or between the aesthetic and the ethical dimension of experience (Sanja Iveković, Anna Orlikowska, Konrad Smoleński, Piotr Wyrzykowski). Others construct intermedia and multimedia relations, combining numerous, often remote creative disciplines (Takashi Ishida, Marie-Jo Lafontaine, Yukina Sakai, Calum Stirling, Piotr Wyrzykowski). Still others take up the reflection which concerns the multidimensional, often conflicting complexity of individual identity, at times engaging in a play with the world of art (Konrad Kuzyszyn, Józef Robakowski, Magnus Wallin, and, to a certain extent, Yuiko Matsuyama). In many similar cases, the deliberation on individual identity is continued in the discourses, which expose the complicated structure of social relations, intercultural references and their representations, frequently entering the sphere of political issues (Smadar Dreyfus and Lennaart van Oldenborgh, Kimsooja, Adrian Paci, Michelle Teran, Ultra-

Red, Paul Vanouse). On other occasions, the reflection takes on the shape of emergent, multidimensional, technologically expanded realities (Dorota Chilińska/Andrzej Wasilewski, Luc Courchesne, Masaki Fujihata, Bart Koppe, Mateusz Pęk, Marc Tobias Winterhagen).

All the threads I have discussed, as well as those, whose description could not be accommodated in this short introduction, together combine into a complex, multidimensional and hybrid construction of the exhibition. Its tremendous diversity, the multitude of its inherent issues, themes and discourses, as well as the extensive spectrum of form with which they are expressed might appear chaotic. But this is how it should be! The world is chaos, once unleashed from the corset of order-imposing ideologies. And art only can restore the ability and joy of experiencing the world in its untidy state, in its creative disarray. Art as part of the world and as its representation.

“Beyond Mediations” exhibition is a praise of diversity. And as such it also possesses another, I think valuable, quality. It allows to experience each work displayed in its singularity, in its immediate (whatever it might happen to mean nowadays) presence. Only later does it open the possibility of making references to other works featuring at the exhibition, of seeking a temporary order, formulated individually in its disarray. Obviously, only when one unexpectedly feels the need to do so.

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