

"Any objects that allows for aesthetic critique is thereby good"
(Menke 2010:25)

Before one of the seminar of *Contextual Studies* course in Kuvataideakatemia, I was asked to read Christoph Menke fragment of the: "The aesthetic critique of judgement". I did not do it firstly, as I thought I will avoid the session. Luckily enough, one of my fellow students convinced me to attend the course and I did. Moreover, I enjoyed it and have decided to wholly read the paper. Then, I have read it again and again. Finally, I have found many interesting issues there related to my artistic research - although the text is not from those effortless one to understand. Firstly, I have found three important questions: "How do we judge aesthetic objects? Why do we judge aesthetic objects? Or why do we judge at all?" (Menke 2010:09)

I will start from anecdote. When I was an adolescent I was a big admirer of one impressionist. Looking on a white snow of Alfred Sisley I was able to appreciate a natural precipitation outside my home. The snow was very bushy, brushy and had many layers of whiteness. I had appreciated snow before, but this particular one was different. It was beautiful or at least I was judging it as a beautiful, and that is because one of the impressionist showed it to me this way. Not in opposite manner.

I will come back to this anecdote a little bit later. Now however, let me introduce you some examples of works which I have made recently and which I consider as connected to my artistic research. I will start from one specific exhibition in Berlin. An exhibition relies on an experiment, which I will shortly describe. The exhibition consisted works placed within a white space of the gallery and a two A4 pages consisted questionnaire related to them.

I based my experiment on both: fragments of a Shannon and Weaver: "A mathematical theory of communication" and selected concepts of Stephen Kosslyn about ways of dealing with images. According to Stephen Kosslyn visual perception is a representation, which is created in 'online' situation during stimulation of visual system by physical stimuli (question 1). Visual mental imaginary in situation of lack physical stimuli in which we only create images through imagination or recalling something (question 2). According to Shannon and Weaver: "Noise is any factor in the process that works against the predictability of the outcome of the communication process." (Shannon&Weaver, 1949) (question 3). The questionnaire had -among other information - those three questions. Between them I left blank spaces intended to fill out the drawings of the viewers. Visitors were asked to take a pencil and answer on questions/tasks written in a paper.

The following questions have occurred:

(question 1): Please interpret in a form of very quick drawing your *first glance impression* about the work. Let me know your first hints, connotations, assumptions about the work.

(question 2): Please turn back to the work, close your eyes, hold them close for a while, open and draw an image of the work from your memory.

(question 3): Please try to define any kind of noise while interpretation, you can either draw them or write them or do both.

In first question I asked visitors to interpret in a form of drawing, very quickly their first glance impression about the work. However, I was also interested what they *see* while looking on image. In my understanding of the subject that time - interpreting while seeing was already there. I assumed it happens within the process. I came up from prerequisite that we are not able to see something without interpreting it. Moreover, an impression is already an interpretation - unclear and ambiguous. Following lessons after minimalists I thought that there is not such thing as: *you see what you see*. I have been convinced that there is only that, what you are able to see and what you want to see. We are projecting what we are seeing. And, I was interested what people are projecting when they are looking on my objects. Is it something different from what I see, are those differences big, how big and if big – why? Those were the questions that drilled my attention.

In first question I used a word *interpret*. However, looking back on a Menke's text I could say that I ask to *make a judgement about something aesthetic*. I was interested about people's connotations, assumptions, driven from a chosen work. I was curious about their impressions. However, spoken indirectly, conveyed as symbols - as drawings which will lead me to their thoughts.

Menke writes that when we are looking on objects we make a distinction if they are good or bad and in a consequence we accept or reject them. Through making judgements we make choices. "To judge means to draw a distinction, (...) a distinction of value", (Menke, 2010:11) "The point of judgement is self-government. By judgement we do not just live our lives, but also direct or lead them." "Judgements are not just reports that a subject gives of its attitude toward an object" (Menke 2010: 11)

Following lesson after Pierce according to whom signs stands for objects and the meaning of the sign is not contained within it, but arises in its interpretation, I wanted to build the situation in which I will not only let on interpretation, but I

will try to understand how its processes work. Here, I could say that I wanted to make – referring again to Menke's text - an *aesthetic critique*. According to Menke: "What we have come to call 'aesthetic' is the paradoxical practice of questioning judgement itself" (Menke 2010:12) While reading Menke' text, we observe that he is writing about aesthetic critique after modern regime. *AE* as a new way of understanding of a process of judging. *AE* as more about a question how such judgements are performed.

However, I was also intrigued to which things visitors will be referring to. From which things they will distinguish things. I was curious about Pierces's *semiosis*. The interaction between the *representamen*, the object and the *interpretant*. (Pierce 931 -5.484). According to Pierce "A sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. ... not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the *representamen*. (Peirce 1931 -58, 2.228)

I wanted aesthetic critique to occur during my exhibition. "Aesthetic critique does not just mean a judgement about something aesthetic. Aesthetic critique rather means a judgement that is aesthetically performed" (Menke 2010: 17) It is not about what you judge, but rather how you judge. Furthermore, "aesthetic judgement cannot be understand as a *telos* (purpose) of aesthetic critique" (Menke 2010:16) "Rather the idea of aesthetic critique refers to highly specific way in which the act of judging is understood" (Menke 2010:16)

In Menke text the definition brought from Hegel seems to be rather important to understand his further implications about aesthetic judging. According to Hegel "art does *not yet* contain in it the true and proper self" (Menke 2010:17) or as Adorno says it taking up definition from Hegel, art is about making about which we do not now yet. "Aesthetic doing eludes knowledge" (Menke 2010:18) It is a dark matter of not knowing. And, this has much more to do with a sentence from Borges that: "The imminence of a revelation that is not yet produced, is perhaps the aesthetic reality." (Menke 2010:17) The knowable, self – conscious, doing is not an aesthetic one . "Aesthetic critique is the judgement of aesthetic objects. However, if aesthetic objects are aesthetic processes (or performances) of representation that cannot be traced back to self-conscious subjectivity, but rather to unconscious forces, then no judgement of an aesthetic objects is possible without participating in those processes at the same time." (Menke 2010:20)

"Moreover the definition of art as the "not yet" is specifically aesthetic – as one of knowledge, of self concussions. Art is an act of making that escapes the subject because it is incapable of knowing and asserting itself. Art essentially eludes itself. Its act of making is not an object of is knowing or a content of its asserting (...) For deficiency of knowledge characteristic of art is not exterior to its doing, but rather, it defines the doing of art as an aesthetic one." (Menke 2010:18)

However, that was not the end of the experiment. The second task was about closing and opening eyes and drawing an image from a memory. I asked participants to not look any more on the object that they have been picked, but to draw what they have remembered. I wondered what remains after the experience in which there is an object anymore, but there are our previous impressions and often unclear concepts about something. Will we interpret something from our memory differently than something what we have seen - for example - when we have been standing in front of it? The second question seems still to be open.

The third task was even much more difficult. It was about finding and defining any kind of noise/problems which occurred while interpretation. In this case, I asked visitors about writing or drawing their problems or inconveniences. I have made an option more open and broader because I assumed that writing is often easier and I wanted to check which option will predominate.

|According to the dual coding theory proposed by Paivio verbal and non-verbal processing has equal weight. Paivio states: "Human cognition is unique in that it has become specialized for dealing simultaneously with language and with non-verbal objects and events. Moreover, the language system is peculiar in that it deals directly with linguistic input and output (in the form of speech or writing) while at the same time serving a symbolic function with respect to non-verbal objects, events, and behaviours. Any representational theory must accommodate this dual functionality." (Paivo: 1990:53)

In conclusion it could be still a lot of written what I have learned from Menke's text. However, returning to anecdote from which I have started and the fact of working with a questionnaire I would like to emphasise why exactly I brought them up. The answer could be to look closer on something that Dubois called an "aesthetic sensibility, whose judgments emerge suddenly without reflection and discussion – not guided by a reason, but as an expression of force." (Menke 2010:20). I assume that my goal was about to find an explanation for past and recent impressions.

