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The Art of a Networked World at the Beginning of the 21st Century – Maja Stanković, *Networked Image*, Beograd, FMK, 2022

The scholarly monograph *Networked Image* by Maja Stanković, published by the Faculty of Media and Communications in Belgrade, Serbia is based on the author's earlier research on the changing character of artistic work and the unsteady process of constituting its meaning and functioning. Overall, the author turns her attention to two aspects of contemporary art. The first is the “disappearance of clear differences between the artistic and non-artistic” as a continuation of radical ideas and challenging traditional views of art initiated in the context of avant-garde art movements in the early 20th century and new ways of technological reproduction. Stanković interpreted this in her previous book *Liquid Contexts* (FMK 2015) as the result of a shift in understanding and functioning of context, no longer seen as a set of circumstances and conditions under which an artwork originates but as an element integrated within the artwork that constitutes that difference. The second aspect is the process of “the moving and circulation of images in different registers” in which art also participates, which, according to Stanković, revealed the liquid context, and which now serves as a starting point for the theory of networked images as an interpretative tool or method for exploring contemporary art.

Over the last several decades, writing about contemporary art has become far more ambitious than previous attempts to provide a direct response to newly created artwork by presenting value judgments and establishing hierarchical distinctions between ‘real’ examples and those that do not satisfy the propositions of these ‘objective’ judgments, with the goal of promoting artists and the interests of the art market and collectors. That process occurred concurrently with and alongside artistic practices that challenged the conventions upon which the conceptual framework for comprehending the circumstance that led to an object becoming an artwork was based. Gradually, critical platforms based on organizational, documentary, and impersonal presentation of information about artistic practices and essayistic-theoretical interdisciplinary approaches evolved toward (new)historical-artistic mapping of asynchronous phenomena, tendencies, and theoretical concepts in the background of certain artistic practices, or toward a theoretically-based conceptualization of specific phenomena in contemporary art production. The potential historical importance of

contemporary art has made it a topic of critical analysis and interpretation based on existing or newly established methodological approaches. The book *Networked Images* is an example of introducing a new approach to studying art, including its theoretical explanation and ‘testing’ in the featured infographics as well as the analysis and interpretation of two contemporary examples: the new media project *24 Seconds* by Predrag Terzić and the YouTube project *Weather Report* by David Lynch.

The author articulates the phrase *networked images* as paradigmatic for art in the 21st century, referencing contemporary theoretical methods and critical conceptualizations of art both at the end of the 1960s and today. She employs the actor-network theory by Bruno Latour as a conceptual connection for ‘networking’ Jack Burnham’s (1968) systems aesthetics, a marginalized and forgotten concept from the realm of the critical conceptualization of the 1960s shift from the art object to artistic practice, with concepts such as network society by Manuel Castells, global art by Hans Belting, and metamorphic images by Jacques Rancière. Divided into three chapters and a conclusion, this book systematically introduces and explains the terms *image/representation*, *system*, and *network* as substantially important for the presented theory of networked images, which the author explains in two ways: as a paradigm of contemporary art in the digital environment, and as a methodological approach to studying contemporary art that uses the possibilities of digital technologies. In the first case, Stanković begins by stating that images are not only a part of reality, but also reality in and of themselves, that they produce meaning in science, everyday life, and art, that reality gains meaning through them and becomes more defined and thus more real, and that images to which different cultures ascribed an exclusive status, while West European civilization encompassed them under the term ‘art’ (painting, graphics, drawing, sculpture), are only one form of “visual experiences and thinking in the visual”. She points out that that contemporary art, building on the experiences of the avant-garde, neo-avant-garde, and post-avant-garde, blurred the distinctions between an artistic and non-artistic visual experience, and therefore, images were no longer limited to reproduction, representation, or media/object, but became – both conceptually and contextually – an ‘operation’, part of the process, variable, the place of relation production, or the effects produced by events. In other words, they are networked and the elements of that network include their artistic and non-artistic features, various social, economic, and political variables, and numerous existing, (re)produced, or changed meanings: “Networking refers to how the meaning of the artwork is articulated. The meaning is not in the work, or the image; it is unstable, fluid, and changeable, because it is the product of the same network” (*Networked Image*, 147).

Aside from the systematic, grounded, and precise explanation of the similarities between neo-avant-garde and post-avant-garde artistic practices of the 1960s and 1970s on the one hand, and contemporary art and the networked image on the other, the author identifies another historical parallel between, what she calls, the multidimensional and polyphonic method of Aby Warburg’s 1920s atlas of images *Mnemosyne* and the network analysis of digital art history as an introduction to her theory

of the networked image as a methodological approach. Warburg's tables, with their non-linear constellations of reproductions ('images'), suggested a broad interdisciplinary, diachronic way of studying images (art). The concept of networked images as an interpretative tool certainly bears a resemblance to Warburg's idea of using images as an investigative tool and metonymically creating the meaning of the work of art by tracing and examining connections between elements from different locations. The difference, however, is not solely in the new technological possibilities of software support for quick access, views, and interpretative linking of a large number of images (including moving ones) and information within offline and online research, but also in a more transdisciplinary character of exploration and interpretation of contemporary art in accordance with the reality and culture of a hyperlinked world and the theoretical discourses that explain it. The infographics featured in the scholarly monograph were created in collaboration with book designer Borut Vild, and they represent just a few of the many possible networks/acts that show how the meaning of an artwork is formed when it is the result of the crossing of a lot of more or less visible information relevant to the work's interpretation. They cannot provide the genuine experience of a networked image that is both an 'actor' and a component of the other network, as well as the subject of exploration and an interpretative tool, but considering that the book belongs to an analog universe, they are the closest illustration of how the theses presented in the book function in a digital environment.