

Of difficulty and easiness

Every thing is about to disappear, it's what it seeks.

- Jean Nouvel

A man was always seeking for a story. Whether drawn or in the written form, depended on the artist. In any case, an artist has his/her own way of telling his story, which consequently leads to the appearance of various drawings. Using the Volvo EC240 machine, Miroslav Stakić found his own way of telling us a story about art (drawing) and technology. As Dana Arnold put it: "The physical attributes of a work of art have a deep impact on how we understand them as objects." In Miroslav's case, we have a question of how to understand the usage of excavator's bucket as a tool for creating the work of art? The connotation of an excavator is more familiar to each of us in its natural surrounding, like the mining or construction site in our vicinity.

When we read the booklet about Volvo EC240¹, it becomes even clearer to us that its *natural* surrounding is on a mining or construction site. Isn't the *nature* of an excavator telling us that its *natural* place can only be seen as desolate and scarcely populated, like some post-apocalyptic landscape struck by atomic bomb? Miroslav Stakić is telling us that, when an excavator is mentioned, it's not about negation, but the fact that the machine can also be useful and have a positive connotation. The traditional definition of a machine, as Franz Reuleaux said,

¹ Advanced technology has brought Volvo excavators to the cutting edge of efficiency and productivity. No matter how tough the jobsite, Volvo excavators provide the highest performance and superior operator comfort. These machines are among the fastest and most powerful excavators in the world. Taken from:

<http://www.volvo.com/constructionequipment/corporate/en-gb/AboutUs/history/products/crawler+excavators/crawler+excavators+Volvo/Volvo+EC240.htm>

goes: “A machine is a combination of resistant objects connected in such a manner that with their help, the mechanical forces of nature can be used to do work using specific motions.” Lewis Mumford broadened Relo’s definition, since it doesn’t include the machines operated by men. Mumford continues to elaborate, saying that *machines emerged from the complex, inorganic agents for energy conversion, work, the increase for mechanical and sensing capacities of human body or reducing life processes to measurable order and regularity*². In other words, Mumford made a difference between a tool and machine; while a tool comprised handiwork, a machine leaned to the automated activity.

In Miroslav Stakić’s case, we have the presence of a machine-tool, the means which enables him to express himself in an artistic way appropriately. He is aware that an excavator is a machine which is more connected to demolishing, digging, leveling, cleaning and moving objects; in one word, deforming the natural surrounding, rather than providing some positive aspects of its impact. Metaphorically speaking, it leads to a piece of harsh winter appearing before our eyes. Anything related to digging, excavating or drilling has in itself the connotation of something different, that is, an idea that the world it leads us to is dark, colorless, tasteless, cold, harsh and depressive. If we take a look at the history of Western civilization in the past few centuries, we could see that there is a certain impact on the environment with the aim to progress further economically. This aim is achieved by changing the surroundings; forests are cut and devastated, river flows redirected, animal habitats destroyed. The examples of changing the environment can also be found in the mythology of northern peoples, connected to gnomes and dwarves who had something evil, twisting and defiled in themselves. A similar relationship could be seen in Greek and Hindu mythologies. While one side holds Prometheus as the greatest hero who stole the fire from the sky, the other considers Hephaestus to be handicapped and treat him with derision.

Art and technology are inseparable in today’s world. It is true that their relationship is very complex and calls for various questions and we are all aware of the existence of ambiguities and controversies. But we also have to admit that art and technology share a mutual basis, beginning with the ancient Greek word *tehne* and the latin word *ars*, where we have the same

² Mumford Lewis, *Technics and Civilization*, Mediterran Publishing, Novi Sad, 2009., str. 24.

connotation for craft and art. Of course, ancient Greeks had played with their heritage; in the harsh regulations of art they had managed to find new ways to enhance their works with naturalness and vividness, which had never been seen in earlier cultures. In one word, the technique represents dexterity, skill. In the time of ancient Greeks, craftsmen were also artists, who, inspired by materials, strived to heavens, when speaking of beauty, perfection and the quality of work, and which can also be seen in practical things which contained the meaning of art and the value of usefulness in themselves. When speaking of the root of relationship between art and technology, it should be pointed out that we also have the words *skill* and *art* which have the same origin. In other words, it is all but obvious that here we speak of something which has not just appeared in nature, but was created by a man. This is about a linear creation in progress: the mind (lat. intellectus)- create (the mental image)- skill (articulum- the dexterity)- the creation (work of art).

In order that something be created by a human hand, the aid of technology is required. When speaking of technology, we have two definitions; one refers to technology being the means of aim, while the other states that technique represents works of men. We could say that both definitions intertwine. Setting aims, seeking for means of achieving them and using those means has roots in the works of men. One of the fundamental texts of Modernity is Martin Heidegger's work "*The Question Concerning Technology*". Heidegger saw there a key twist which has taken place in Modernity. Technology is not just manufacturing but also discovering, that is, the ability to create form out of formless. As Heidegger put it: "*Bringing-forth brings something from concealment into unconcealment.*" In other words, technology is not just a method but is also discovering, which is the area of truth. Could we agree then with Jurgen Habermas' observation that technology is humans' destiny?

When Stakić creates using Volvo EC240, he simultaneously uncovers and clarifies things that, at first, seem invisible for us. On one side, we have a drawing, as the final product of the artist's work, while on the other there is a machine-tool, referring to a different social formation which operates in our space. Every model of society has its tool (technology) which it uses for the creation and improvement of its power. When speaking of the models of society, they are characterized not just by the way of behaving but also by the technology which the society

controls. The industrial societies were characterized by thermodynamic machines and computers typical for manipulating sovereignty. In today's world, we are witnesses of the attempt that entire planet be controlled and manipulated throughout the usage of technology. We have Edward Teller who claims that there is little strength to be found in technology: "It represents the opening of possibilities which could be used in a good way, but also in a bad one³." We also have Alain Badiou who does not agree that the technology should be treated as the *being* of our time, nor, as he said: "... the mind can have a useful relationship between the *planetary rule of technique and nihilism*⁴."

When speaking of technology, Badiou does not see it as something of vital importance for further advancement of today's civilization. On the contrary, he sees it as something which represents a grave problem which threatens the very *being* in ourselves. Thus, every advancement connected to technology is considered slow and burdensome, with each claim being under the assumption that *life is too slow* for what can/could happen, if the technology was would accelerate its growth. As Badiou put it: "Gentlemen technicians, you're just a single stroke away from achieving the supreme reign of technology."

In Stakić's case, we can clearly see the attempt to find a connection between the excavator bucket (which provides him with fair conditions for further impact in the system of social relationships) and a drawing, as one of the disciplines of art. Not only do the drawings he created contain the strokes of Volvo EC240 and human portraits, but also a segment of social engagement where an excavator is meant to be dislocated from its natural role as a machine and be introduced into the space of gallery. Stakić's aim is not introducing an excavator as another technique of art, since it has already been used in such purpose (remember Jackson Pollock and his usage of a similar machine to create his own works of art), but to place the robustness and the connotation of the machine in a visible place of power usage which seems masked in our time. The clear difference between the previous system of power and the new one, far more potent way of controlling, is still not visible. It is true that the industrial age is over, but the machines of

³ Taken from *Technology is not strength*, Edward Teller, editor C.V. Barloewen, *The Book of Knowledge*, Meander, Zagreb, 2010., pp. 500-512.

⁴ Alain Badiou, *The Manifest for Philosophy*, Jasenski and Turk, Zagreb, 2001., p. 33

power which, until yesterday, were the main protagonists of ruling circles have still not lost their value and significance.

A similar relationship could also be seen in the art of today. Today is not just sufficient to know the history of art and visual rules which are applied, but it is also necessary to possess the knowledge of science and technology which have a prominent role in the world of our time. New types of medium have appeared (video and visual performative art, video installations, Internet art, computer art, virtual art,...) and are slowly taking over the fields of classical types of expression (picture, sculpture, graphic art, drawing, photography) and a new type with the aim to dominate the field of spatial art is on its way. We are currently in the age which is not explained in a different way but as a space of informational act and coding, the time of remix and copy-paste culture.

That is why it is vital that Stakić's Volvo EC240 be understood in an appropriate way. Especially if we have in mind the impact of a social surrounding and the common inability to make a living just by 'doing' art. Volvo EC240 represents Stakić's response and a way to survive yet simultaneously create in a very special and unique way which is, as we must admit, rather emphatic, courageous and daring.

(translated by Vedran Cvijanovic)

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