

Bojana Burić

Note

Belgrade April 1998

Dear Sir,

I herewith inform you that your art project *A Tribute to Paul Thek* is included in the exhibition programme of the Faculty of Fine Arts Gallery in Belgrade. It is scheduled for May 1998.

I also feel free to use this formal acknowledgement to note that I am pleased that, by this occasion, the space of our gallery will be transformed into a labyrinth in which the visitors will search for the artist or for his face. This reminds me to Pascal Bonitzer and his book *Blind Field*, in which he wrote: 'Each labyrinth hides the unease, the mystery of a face. In the heart of Cretan labyrinth it is the bull-headed monster. In the heart of Egyptian labyrinth, in the pyramid, it is the mummy. What is the use of the mummy? To preserve the face. The key moment of the mummy is when we strip its ridiculous or disturbing bandage, or when the mummy alone removes it, in other words the moment when we are about to find out what is underneath...'

I believe that your self-portraying project will be intriguing enough to provoke the visitors to enter your intimate space labyrinth carefully. Will they distinguish the artist's discourse in both the first and the third person? Have you read Agatha Christie's novel *Murder of Roger Ackroyd*? In it, the narrator is simultaneously the murderer, the subject of narration and the object of investigation. Bonitzer reminds us that Proust in *La Recherche du Temps Perdu* also preserves the narrator's anonymity. I am sure that my discussion of literary examples will not influence the fact that your material is free of any description or narration. The abundance of photographed visual data from your own environment provides the map of your intimate programme. We can refer to them as some kind of diary notes. These 'dis-informations' are the results of your interaction with a material whose inertia you affect 'pushing it to a degree allowed by the material itself, while understanding of that degree requires corporal, biological experience of the environment.'

By the means of visual and technical representation you have saved the image of your environment and summarized the experiences of your interaction with it. Moreover, you applied the contemporary aesthetics of close-ups, variable scales, fine rendering of micro and macro structures, and innovative viewpoints to reinvent the objecthood of your artifacts or spatial fragments, thus creating new vistas and new iconography. Like staffage in this landscape we find your tribute to the American artist Paul Thek (1933-1988). I remember that you discovered this artist in an art magazine, and that his works fascinated you. Nevertheless, it seems that this artist's name is included in the title of your project not just to express your respect, but also to emphasize the very character of your concept that deals with issues of anonymity of an author, authenticity, ephemerality, evaluation of the work of art... It occurred to me that the alternative working title of this project could be *A Tribute to an Unknown Artist*.

Thek is also mentioned in dedications of Susan Sontag's books *Against Interpretation* and *Aids and its Metaphors*, which indicates that this extraordinary artist was well known in the intellectual circles of his time. Yet, he is hardly to be found in reviews of American art. It seems that his most comprehensive

exhibitions are organized now – a decade after his death. On the other hand, Sontag's name evokes the memories of her left radicalism, and some unpopular terms of Marxist provenance, like *alienation* or *disalienation*. Is it possible that the process of alienation resulted in the disappearance of the artist as a subject?

In reference to your notion that artists make questions, let me formulate one that occurred to me concerning your project. Do you find that authorial position you took for this occasion has something in common with the idea of mediaeval artist, in the context of authorship and anonymity? Is it a further manifestation of the spirit of Gothic culture, usually expressed in contemporary art through dark and violent aspects of human psyche? Is Paul Thek becoming actualised in this context too?

Yours truly,

Bojana Burić, Art Historian

Bojana Burić, *Note, A Tribute to Paul Thek* exhibition catalogue, FFA Gallery, Belgrade, 1998.