

ENTICING DIFFERENCES
LA SEDUZIONE DELLA DIFFERENZA
ARTE FIERA 1994

After the 45th Biennale of Venice, the issue occupying the forums of the contemporary art should be redefined.

We were very optimistic and enthusiastic about our participation at the Venice Biennale; even the very inconvenient space in the Italian Pavillon could not demoralise us.

Serhat Kiraz and Erdağ Aksel produced works, which had references to the Venetian culture and to the traditional links between Venice and the Ottoman Empire. We also presented a work entitled "Inbetween", produced by Adem Yılmaz and Jarg Geismar comprising works of 45 artists from 45 countries; all names were kept anonymous. Now a catalogue will be published in Germany announcing the names of the artists and countries. This was a work radically questioning the international exhibitions defending national identities.

It sounds very naive to say, that we were dissatisfied. As usual the "differences" were emphasized with the names of the nations and famous artists and not with the names of cultures.

As usual, the art critics and journalists, who covered the Biennale remarked only on the famous names and on the names who have recently surfaced. We know that it was an exhaustive exhibition. But if it was important to recognize the lesser-known aspect of the contemporary art-as it was stated in the concept, the critics should have ventured to the obscure corners of the exhibitions. "Inbetween" exhibition has challenged the art world to put in practice the theory of communicating between the differences and evaluate its relationship with the borderline artists and curators.

There is an interesting definition of the "difference" by Homi Bhabha (1993 Whitney Biennale catalogue) "Difference is not so much a reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the tablets of fixed traditions as it is a complex, ongoing negotiation among minorities, against assimilation"

I would like to add, that "difference" is not black and white or orient and occident or primitive and progressive, it is more than that! Difference is everywhere, within the existing traditional homogenous entities and concepts, within the most homogenous societies. Let me give you an example from my country:

In my country there are still some people like scientist, artists, writers, intellectuals who seek for truth, for reality, for authenticity, for essence, for genuinity etc. This must be the main difference that distances us from the rest of the people. This is what I feel lately in my country, where a texture of various identities emerged one after the other in the past decade. In this texture we are a small minority, or a group in the minority.

What we seek for is not any more the traditional truth and authenticity. After all what has happened in our lifetime, I mean my generation, it cannot be the same anymore. Therefore we are also differing from the seekers of truth, reality etc. before us. This new or different search does not include the seduction of discovery or exploration; on the contrary it has the grave atmosphere of a loss. In fact we are seeking for a truth, reality or authenticity which we hope to replace the true truth, the real reality and authentic authenticity.

Somehow, as this search has lost its idealism or utopia in the old sense, it has also lost its misgivings and anxiety. Idealism and romanticism are transformed into short-term achievements and pleasure, revelation and compassion. Even with these positions and emotions, which are also partly attributed to the consuming society, we are miles away from the rest of the society.

The texture of identities in Turkey is based on two main transformations during the period from the foundation of the republic to today: the decline and fall of the leftist utopia and the occupation of the dream of the masses by the consumer economy.

Between 1960-1980 there was a strong opposition of the left to the state, to the tradition and to the capitalistic half-feudalism, which in fact was divided some opponent groups in itself. The left for a time became an upper-identity for opposite identities like islamic-laik, shiite-sunni, men-women, religious-atheist etc. This leftist upper-identity was an utopia for the people comprising the merits and qualities like: honesty, frankness, outspokenness, social behaviour, to support the oppressed, humanity, solidarity, political attitudes like respectation of the people's values and democratic decisions, priority of regional and local identities. But, all these elements of this utopia was worn out towards the end of the 70's.

About 60 years long the liberalist block promised merits like a leisure society and a contemporary civilisation under the upper-title: "A Little America" to their voters. But the gap between the first world and the third world countries never closed; on the contrary the gap opened.

The loss of utopia on both blocks created violence and terrorism!

1980 was another date of turning to fascism.

The leftovers of the leftist utopia was cleaned of by the military intervention.

The void of the liberalist utopia was filled with a new dream which defined a world based on money economy. The new dream said: "If we seek the meaning of the world, this must be found in computer technology and multinational economy. To taste and experience wealth and richness is the right of everybody, therefore, money-currency-property must be obtained in any case!" This dream still occupies the brains of the masses; but our dreams are different!

In the meantime the media took its place in our homes. Another decade passed with this "money-currency-property" media-heterotopia which created money sovereignty, corruption, loss of all identity, depoliticisation etc.

Now the leftovers of the leftist intellectuals are discussing: "How to create a clean democracy?" The rightist block are in reconciliation with radical Islam, moreover there is a tendency of the Islamisation of the society. The majority in Turkey is Islamic, but as there are Shiite and Sunni differences, there are differences within the differences.

80's produced many significant and good things for the artists, but also produced greed excess, superficial strategies and banality; obviously in accordance with the above mentioned situation. Publicity was more important than art. The ignorant public was somehow fascinated, the collectors poured money to the paintings of the "new dream" and they bought wholesale! After the Gulf War the international market dictators organised a contemporary art auction in Istanbul. The Turkish high-society bought paintings with exorbitant prices and after that forgot about buying art! This was a shameless interference of the multinationals into the organic growth of the market. The artists are still suffering from the negative aftermath. On the other hand the crisis in the art market caused a new mode of reflection; the interpretive function of art and the content of art was put on the agenda. The differences between the market-artists and non-market artists is very obvious.

I would like to quote Edward Said: "...that I grew up in the Middle East knowing more about Britain than I did about the country in which I was growing up; knew more about its history and so on, and even knew its language better."

This is the case with the art world in my country. We used to know more about the art of Europe and America, than about the region we live in. We lived our difference within the definition of the difference, as was dictated by Europe and America. The artists who could overcome this situation and who could have a new confidence are different.

Also paradoxically the questioning of center&periphery, of cultural differences, of nomadism are handled and guided in the centers and not in the peripheral countries, where the problem has its roots. In fact the main subject of discussion is not the problematic situations in the periphery but the problems of the center surrounded by the periphery or the problems of the peripheral minorities in the centers.

Venice Biennale showed us again that the theory and practice are not corresponding. The correspondance is only possible, when the partners can understand the language of each-other. If the languages are not known, translators should interfere. If the "difference" must be practiced within the "demography of the new internationalism" and within "a radical revision in the concept of human community itself" (Homi Bhabha, *ibid.*), if a radical change in the concept of humanity and nature is wanted, the time has come to translate the differences in the international arena.

As a frontline curator, Lucrezia de Domizio Durini takes a crucial function in the art-world of our region. She is acting like a translator between cultures and differences. She is putting the theory into practice.

Again Homi Bhabha (*ibid.*) gives her an answer: "The act of translation between cultures is effected through the exacerbation of what culturally incommensurable or strange, which then allows an understanding of the other to emerge from elision, an uncanny alienation, of one's own cultural priority".

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