

PHOTOGRAPHY AND ILLUSION IN THE WORKS OF IVAN PETROVIĆ

You put together two things that have not been put together before. And the world is changed. People may not notice it right away, but it does not matter. The world has changed anyway. – It is with these sentences that Julian Barnes begins his novel *Levels of Life*, which, in its first section, presents the fascinating history of the impassioned balloonist Félix Tournachon Nadar. In the fall of 1858, Nadar combined two things that no one had until then thought of putting together – photography and aeronautical engineering. The result was the first set of photographs taken from a flying balloon – the first documents of man's view from the air to the ground. The consequences of Nadar's experiment entirely altered man's way of observing the world: man's view was equalled with that of God.

However, man's conquest of space, from where it seemed possible to control the world around him, did not win for him the status of ruler of the environment he observed. On the contrary, the newly conquered freedom of gaze revealed an uncertainty at the core of the relationship between the eye and the image of the scene the eye is beholding. The photograph, which tends to prevail over the scene, therefore discloses to the gaze much more what eludes it than what is being photographed. According to David Campany, a photograph can be a fixed image, but in social terms, it does not stand still¹; its cultural function and historical potential encourage constant changes in the meaning and status of this complex medium. These changes are mainly related to interventions in the domain of reality and its image: the ways and procedures by which photography simultaneously constructs and undermines reality by imprinting its fragments. Walter Benjamin had already written about the contradictions inscribed in the photographic image, arguing that "A different nature presents itself to the camera than to the naked eye; different, primarily because a space unconsciously penetrated is substituted for a space consciously explored by man."² Nevertheless, the dialogue between the unstable character of the photograph and the volatile nature of the scene presented lies at the foundations of the visual culture of modernism, stimulating the fulfillment of aspirations to the achievement of continuity.

The questions of continuity and its sustainability in the social and historical sense, as opposed to the medium of photography, are the focal point of Ivan Petrović's artistic philosophy. More precisely, Petrović regards photography as a reproduction of social and historical processes that

¹ David Campany, "Thinking and Not Thinking Photography", *Engage 14: The Photographic*, London, 2004, p. 2, http://www.engage.org/downloads/152E25A7F_14.%20David%20Campany.pdf, accessed on 01/10/2016

² Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography", *On Photography and Art*, trans. J. Ácín, Belgrade, 2006, p. 16

are on the other side of representation, behind the space that presents itself to the camera (in fragments) and then becomes an image. As Petrović himself expresses it, “Photography materializes the discontinuity of the summarized flow of an often perplexing reality. From the discontinuity it produces, photography derives its fundamental right to elucidate the ‘broken’ flow. One of the main roles of photography is to foster a sustainable illusion.”³

How to understand the illusion photography encourages and its sustainability? Again, let us go back to the history of the medium. One of the important features of photography is its dual temporal character. This refers to the specific and time-dependent relationship between photography and photographically recorded scenes (which, in turn, are the result of indexicality and speed), as well as the historically specified moment at which photography emerged – the period associated with the development of modernity.⁴ Photography’s dealing with the photographed scene, i.e. with the illusion that photography maintains by translating the scene into an image, is inextricably linked to photography’s temporal character: by fixing a scene, photography gives it an archival value, transforming the moment into a document of the future past. The illusion that photography preserves lies in the archival logic of this medium, which, by acting as a participant in the process of the realization of modernity, turns out to be its artful destabilizing factor.

With the exhibition entitled *Unexpected Sustainability*, Ivan Petrović is exploring all the above-mentioned issues concerning the nature of photography, and at the same time treating it as a testing ground for the modern environment and its representations, but also as a space for auto-reflection, in terms of questioning the logic of this artistic medium. Photographically recording various situations, states and territories of city life, Petrović points to those historical and social processes which can be recognized in the scenes of the environment and the interaction between people and urban landscape. This photographic record, however, does not stick to the anthropological or sociological study; it becomes, above all, a means of understanding the ontology of the (photographic) image as a space for revealing the regimes that dictate everyday relations. With the presentation of his three photo projects, realized in Serbia after 2007 – *Exemplary Photographs* (2013), *Belgrade Portfolio* (2013-), and *And His Place Won’t Recognize Him Anymore* (2014-) – Petrović brings three problems of photography face to face. *Exemplary Photographs* examines the ways in which photography intervenes within the domain of social reality, by isolating, rearranging and recontextualizing its fragments through the continuously variable semantic relationships generated within the system for exhibiting this photo series. In contrast, *Belgrade Portfolio* examines photography’s potential, by creating imprints of urban topographical scenes, to act as an active historicizing factor in the production of the image of a

³ Ivan Petrović, notes, 2015

⁴ David Campany, “Preface: The Urban and the Everyday”, *Art and Photography*, London/New York, 2012, p. 27

city and its social contradictions. *And His Place Won't Recognize Him Anymore*, as the thematically most immediate reaction to political developments, comments on the status of photography in the context of its use in the media, underlining its significant role in the formation and imposition of the image of contemporaneity. The three operational formulae of photography mentioned here are based on photography's already discussed characteristic of promoting and maintaining an illusion. Is it on account of this that we do not 'trust' photography anymore, or are we learning from it to explore illusions?

Ana Bogdanović

FOTOGRAFIJA I PRIVID U RADOVIMA IVANA PETROVIĆA

Spojiš dve stvari koje nikada ranije niko nije spojio. I svet se promeni. Ljudi možda ne primete odmah, ali nema veze. Svet se svejedno promenio. – Ovim rečenicama Džulijan Barns započinje roman *Nivoi života* koji u prvom delu predstavlja zanimljiv život pasioniranog baloniste Feliksa Turnašona Nadara. U jesen 1858. godine Nadar je spojio dve stvari koje do tada niko nije doveo u vezu – fotografiju i aeronautiku. Rezultat su bile prve fotografije nastale iz letećeg balona – prvi dokumenti čovekovog pogleda iz vazduha na zemlju. Posledice Nadarovog eksperimenta temeljno su izmenile način posmatranja sveta; čovekov pogled izjednačio se sa pogledom boga.

Međutim, čovekovo osvajanje prostora iz koga se činilo da kontroliše svet koji ga okružuje nije mu osvojilo mesto sa koga može da vlada prizorom datog okruženja. Naprotiv, novoosvojena sloboda pogleda je otkrila neizvesnost kao srž odnosa između oka i slike onoga što oko posmatra. Fotografija, kojom se teži savladati prizor, tako otkriva pogledu ono što izmiče mnogo više od onoga što je fotografisano. Kako navodi David Company, fotografija može biti fiksirana slika, ali ona u društvenom smislu ne miruje,⁵ njena kulturološka funkcija i istorijski potencijal podstiču konstantne promene značenja i statusa ovog kompleksnog medija. Date se promene uglavnom tiču intervencija u domenu realnosti, odnosno njene slike: načina i procedura kojima fotografija istovremeno konstruiše i podriiva stvarnost putem otiskivanja njenih fragmenata. O protivrečnostima upisanim u fotografsku sliku pisao je još i Valter Benjamin, tvrdeći da je “priroda koja se obraća aparatu drugačija od one koja govori oku; drugačija najpre po tome što se na mestu prostora prožetog čovekovom svešću javlja nesvesno prožet prostor.”⁶ Pa ipak, dijalog između nestabilnog karaktera fotografije i nestalne prirode prizora nalazi se u temeljima vizuelne kulture modernizma, provocirajući mogućnosti ispunjenja težnje za ostvarenjem kontinuiteta.

Pitanja kontinuiteta i njegove održivosti u društvenom i istorijskom smislu spram medija fotografije nalazi se u fokusu razmišljanja umetnika Ivana Petrovića. Preciznije iskazano, Petrović fotografiju posmatra kao otisak koji otkriva društvene i istorijske procese koji se nalaze iza reprezentacije, iza prostora koji se (u fragmentima) ukazuje fotoaparatu i zatim postaje slika, o čemu i sam piše: “Fotografija od sažetog toka, često nejasne stvarnosti, materijalizuje

⁵ David Company, “Thinking and Not Thinking Photography”, *engage 14: The Photographic*, London 2004, 2, http://www.engage.org/downloads/152E25A7F_14.%20David%20Company.pdf, pristupljeno 01.10.2016.

⁶ Valter Benjamin, “Mala istorija fotografije”, *O fotografiji i umetnosti*, prev. J. Aćin, Beograd 2006, 16.

diskontinuitet. Iz diskontinuiteta koji proizvodi, fotografija crpi osnovno pravo da objavšnja 'pokidani' tok. Jedna od glavnih uloga fotografije jeste podsticanje privida i njegova održivost."⁷

Kako shvatiti privid koji fotografija podstiče i njegovu održivost? Vratimo se opet istoriji ovog medija. Jedna od važnih odlika fotografije jeste njen dvojak temporalni karakter: on se odnosi na specifičan, vremenski uslovljen odnos fotografije prema prizorima koje beleži (a koji je rezultat indeksikalnosti i brzine), kao i na istorijski određeni trenutak u kome se fotografija javlja – period razvoja modernosti.⁸ Odnos fotografije prema prizoru, odnosno prividu koji fotografija održava prevođenjem prizora u sliku, neraskidivo je vezan za njen temporalni karakter: fiksirajući prizor ona mu daje arhivsku vrednost, transformiše trenutak u dokument buduće prošlosti. Privid koji fotografija održava krije se u arhivskoj logici ovog medija koji se, delujući kao učesnik u procesu ostvarenja modernisti, ispostavlja njenim pronicljivim destabilizatorom.

U okviru izložbe *Neočekivana održivost* Ivan Petrović istražuje sva ovde pomenuta pitanja o prirodi fotografije, tretirajući je istovremeno kao polje za ispitivanje savremenog okruženja i njegovih reprezentacija, ali i prostor auto-refleksije u smislu propitivanja logike ovog umetničkog medija. Fotografski zapisujući različite situacije, stanja i teritorije iz života grada, Petrović ukazuje na istorijske i društvene procese koji se daju čitati iz prizora okruženja i interakcija između ljudi i urbanog pejzaža. Ovo fotografsko beleženje se, pak, ne zadržava na antropološkoj ili sociološkoj studiji; ono pre svega postaje sredstvo razumevanja ontologije (fotografske) slike kao prostora za oktrivanje režima koji organizuju odnose svakodnevice. Predstavljanjem tri serije fotografija nastale od 2007. godine u Srbiji: *Uzorne fotografije* (2013), *Portfolio Beograd* (2013-), *I mesto njegovo neće ga više poznati* (2014-) Petrović sučeljava tri problema delovanja fotografije. *Uzorne fotografije* ispituju načine na koje fotografija interveniše unutar domena društvene realnosti, izdvajajući, rearanžirajući i rekontekstualizujući njene fragmente kroz stalno promenljive značenjske odnose koji se generišu unutar sistema izlaganja ove serije fotografija. Naspram njih, *Portfolio Beograd* preispituje mogućnosti fotografije da, stvarajući otiske prizora urbane topografije, deluje kao aktivni istorizujući činilac u proizvodnji slike jednog grada i njegovih društvenih protivurečnosti. *I mesto njegovo neće ga više poznati*, kao tematski najneposrednija reakcija na političke aktuelnosti, komentariše status fotografije u kontekstu njene upotrebe u medijima, ističući njenu značajnu funkciju u formiranju i nametanju slike savremenosti. Tri ovde navedene procedure delovanja fotografije utemeljene su u njenoj, već pomenutoj osobini da podstiče i održava privid: da li joj zbog toga više verujemo ili od nje učimo da otkrijemo privid?

⁷ Ivan Petrović, beleške, 2015.

⁸ David Company, "Preface: The Urban and the Everyday", *Art and Photography*, London/New York 2012, 27.