

● The major part of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the whole of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was devoted to in conquest of the space of freedom, both within society and in art. Needless to say, freedom, had to, indeed has to be, won. It does not come on its own. However, it seems to me that for some time now, time being measured in decades, we have been lodged in the desert of freedom. The fact is that the ideological, political, the wider social and therefore the artistic, position of freedom is being measured by external parameters. In other words, freedom is perceived as a space which does not restrict us in any way. But all this time our inner freedom, or rather the lack of it, has been neglected. In the atmosphere of the saying "Freedom is the cognizance of necessity," I would dare counterpoise the notion of responsibility with the idealized and ideologized concept of freedom.

Do we really understand one another?

Are we, as art critics aware of our position and our power? Are we aware of the "constitutional frameworks" within which we operate, and which we ourselves define? Do we realize that we necessarily act within an ideological field which is impossible to avoid? Or, to put it in a nut shell - are we being responsible in our activity - however much it may sometimes appear that the written word has no effect or bears no influence?

The Western, or rather the capitalistic model of ideology offers us democracy and individualism as the supreme ideals. Nowhere, however, does it mention *interest* as the driving force of the whole of society. And yet, it is the *interest* that is the force which is ready and able to be reshaped, changed, and, ultimately, subjected to itself, both democracy and individualism. *Interest suppresses* any responsibility but that which serves to attain the aim - which is *interest* itself. Ethics, moral, even aesthetics thus become ambiguous and elusive concepts which can be infinitely manipulated.

Can we conceptualize a book entitled *Ethics of multinational capital*? Such a book would contain but one single word: *profit* - as a very concrete substitute for the word *interest*. Consequently, it appears to me that time has come for the word *freedom* - created in the interests of what we today call *globalisation* - to be replaced by the word *responsibility*.

And please do not allow yourself to believe that our role in this process is negligible. Each one of us is a part of the overall mosaic, of the fractal picture which reflects the world. Our individual responsibility - first and foremost towards ourselves - for the word written, for an exhibition organized or for a message spoken, is an integral segment of the assumed responsibility of those who make, or will be making, decisions.

In these three days we shall be hearing diverse contributions dealing with our own presumed power. A power which has to be acutely aware of the freedom it has seized, and the responsibility which alone will imbue it with meaning and sense. ●



→ Berislav Valušek - art historian and critic, President of AICA - Croatia until 2003.