

Extract from the exhibition opening speech *Jan de Weryha – Refinement Revisited* by Dr Rafael de Weryha-Wysoczański at the exhibition *Jan de Weryha – Objects* in the Galerie Kunst im Licht, Hamburg 1998

[...] The first group of his works consists of wood blocks. These blocks can stand on its own in groups on one another or next to each other. Or, they stand in a distance from one another and are part of a chequered pattern. The surface of the wooden blocks is always handmade. In the bigger pieces their skin is covered with principally horizontal power saw cuts and gouge traces. The smaller blocks carry primarily axe traces. The surface appears lively in all these works, complex and no spot on the block resembles the other, but bears its unique and constantly varying structure.

Therefore, the surface varies not only on one particular block. Standing next to each other, the surface differs also from block to block. But not only the surface is in the process of constant change. When we look at one single block, its form is seemingly strictly geometrical. In fact, no block wall is really even and no wall surface has the same dimensions, as the opposing one. In case the blocks stand united and, moreover, within a symmetrical pattern, like in *Opus 76*, the large installation [...], then the idea of variation within the form of a block is developed further. Each and every block differs in its height, its size and its cuboid form from the other.

In the previous examples of the blocks importance was placed on the differentiation of the surface and of the form. A stress on these elements is also to be found in the second large group of works. We deal here with small wood elements, which fill a given area on the floor, [...] or which are assembled in the area of a rectangle. Like in the case of *Opus 68* the elements which were left over during the production of the previously described wooden blocks stand densely packed next to each other. Every surface of each part features on two sides the traces of the saw cut and on the third side the surface, on which the gouge was applied. So not only the surface texture varies, but according to cut and gouge application, thus, also the form of the pieces.

Consequently, in these works like in the blocks, the differentiation of the surface and of the form play an important role. Both elements stand next to each other on equal terms, contribute through their symbiosis to the unity of the work. Through this general tendency of the equality of the parameters of surface and form and the simultaneous giving voice to both elements Weryha differs fundamentally from advocates of the Minimal Art, like Donald Judd and Carl Andre. Many works by Carl Andre consist also of block like elements of wood, fire-brick or metal. But each element there is machine made, equal and replaceable. In Carl Andre's *Equivalent VIII* bricks are positioned over two levels so that they form a cuboid. The machine made surface of the bricks

causes that the surface of the formed cuboid stays neutral. As a result the three-dimensional cuboid form is emphasised and the object enters in a direct relationship with the space and therefore with the beholder. And here we have the main difference to Weryha. Carl Andre, with his flat and sterile kept surface, wants to achieve that it fades into the background in order to give priority to the form of the work. The measure of the deindividualisation of the surface, which contributes to the physical approach between work and beholder is denied by Weryha. Admittedly, Weryha draws also on a supply of means of expression, which are reduced to a minimum. But he uses the minimalisation only to accentuate the individualisation of several elements, like the form and surface. Hence, every of these elements adds to the refinement of the work in its entity. The form as well as the surface experience a syntactic meaning in the work. The works are, therefore, rather coherent in their statement and do not any longer merely thematise the relationship between beholder and work. Weryha develops, on the contrary, a highly differentiated language.

One can name another example for a deindividualisation like with Andre, this time in music. The composer Philip Glass pursues like Andre also the strategy of a dedifferentiation. In his Minimalist composition style, especially from the last 20 years, he resorts to simple chord sequences, which are repeated in various forms. The apparently minimal change and accentuation decays into popular decoration.

Besides this second example for a dedifferentiation tendency, there are, however, also in music examples for tendencies affiliated with Minimalism, which develop a sophisticated language. It is indeed La Monte Young, who is the father of Minimal Music. Additionally, he combines it with the highly complex serial tradition of the 50s. But contrary to Philip Glass his Minimalist strategies were nowhere near to popular traditions. Young, actually, is seeking a more subtle way. In his piece *The Melodic Version of The First Dream of China*, which had its world première in Hamburg two years ago, we can find the basic features of his composition style. In this piece he operates with overtones, which are extreme lengthened. The tones sound within a given system determined by rules. Additionally, light effects come into play and the strings frame the audience. Young seeks, therefore, not only for the highest possible differentiation through specific musical means, but extends them to several parameters and media.

Thus, La Monte Young's musical approach seems to be related to that of Weryha. Despite a minimal supply of musical and artistic means, both are pursuing a maximum refinement in their works. In doing so, both put emphasis on extending their refinement strategies preferably to different parameters. Weryha follows this strategy calling for the simultaneity of form and surface. We can ask ourselves, which strategy, the one of deindividualisation and dedifferentiation, as with

Glass and Andre, or the one of refinement, as with Young and Weryha, is worth striving for today? Naturally, we should know since the 19th century, that several art movements can exist side by side. But after all, I want to opt at this point for the strategy of refinement. To my mind, we cannot go on like this, after a century like the 20th, in which the artistic development is at breakneck speed. The Postmodern eclecticism of the last decades is the best example for the stagnation of the development. Do not let me be misunderstood, I am not against new ideas of the art development, on the contrary. The achievements of Modernism provide us with many possibilities for a future art. But I would like to hold on to certain values, which define a high art. I therefore propose, after the radical revolutions of the art, to choose a path of refinement, perfection, like the one of Weryha or Young. At least this is an option to build an art with future, this time based on subtle values. A future which does not end in popular monotony.

(Translation from German to English by Rafael de Weryha-Wysoczański)