

## Artemis Potamianou

### «Your history, it's not my story»

#### The cages

Since the early years of her postgraduate life, the work of Artemis Potamianou has been shaped around the idea of a systematic quest for the *reason* behind her artistic expression. The motive itself of expression is to Potamianou the object of expression, and that is a constituent element of her biography. It is an instructive pursuit—the 'pre-work' as the work—which could be defined as the quest for the *sufficient cause* of the artistic act, not in relation to the artist's current psychological motives, emotions or aesthetic expectations but in response to clear needs which are logically acknowledged as imperative.

This version of artistic life and creation does not relate solely to visual art: it extends into any responsible behaviour in a social context which would wish to ensure to be acting in a necessary way and in precise response to a specific question. In this way, what happens in artistic settings will be like the various decisions one has to make in social life depending on the specific circumstances: how can I be sure to have acted at any one time in the most suitable and necessary way so that no part of my intention remains unfulfilled? How can I be sure that my action has met the *sufficient cause* of this intention, so that my action's response to the intention will not be just a personal choice but a logical necessity for me as well as for all others? How does the artist know that each action was the most appropriate response to the necessities recognised by history? This is an ever-topical Cartesian view that lives on every time artists recognise an action as *sufficiently logical* so as not to belong to them, ultimately; so that it becomes by definition a logical necessity for all, an action that becomes itself the criterion by which the reliability of the intention is tested.

Yet this is the artist's condition, to believe at all times that they were complete in their action but also to recognise with hindsight that one piece was left undone: the piece from each *then* to each *now*. And adding from scratch the missing piece will be the cause of their next action, and then of the next after that. From

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the outset of her artistic life, Artemis was preoccupied with how *literal* her action was, i.e. how much this action was identical to what it intended, without any choices other than its own. And this leads to the other strange condition for artist, who want their work to be read as the work itself would like—but also that the work is not used by others as the work itself would like. This entails the artists' twofold dependence on their *Sisyphean* condition: they have to keep recharging a constantly emptied work, but the work has already served others as the pretext for their own, different work. Potamianou accepted from the outset this function of history as a distance from the work which, in practice, would not mean only this work or that work or that the work would be exclusively her own work, but that it would also be its correlation with other works.

Thus in much of her artistic life she has operated with the idea that the alternating links among things lay claim to the potential of being a work in themselves—of the links being the work—so that the distancing from a definition of the work in terms which are not of its own choice is what preserves its own self-definition. The idea of *connections*, and the shift from connections to connections and to complex sets of subsequent connections derived from the previous ones, makes up a major part of her art life, with projects pertaining to how they visually communicate through threads, and through different grids of *threads-connections*, historical art images or constructions: for instance, the way Man Ray is linked to Duchamp, to Kosuth or to contemporary modernism, and so on. The multiple grids of connections she made back then were not meant as a mere sampling of outcomes which could make up the image of the narrative of the artwork: they were her specific way of claiming her personal freedom to act herself as the continuous and ever-refreshed revelation of a new complexity of connections. These new connections would keep filling in the ever-renewed gap between the artist's intention of freedom and the realisation of this freedom: the freedom of the artist being constantly there, even if he or she seems to be constantly behind his or her intentions.

This is an unexpected affinity one finds between Potamianou and the *pragmatism* of William James (1842—New York, 1910), whose overall analytical oeuvre effectively constituted a network from which we choose to retrieve connections—some or other specific points in those connections. James was interested in functionality and in effectiveness; in the evident necessity so that the chosen decisions (links) would not be a random personal selection but one that addressed a necessity. And while the outcomes seem to be personal, the

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work is actually about how the outcomes are linked to one another and how they are reinterpreted on each occasion depending on the kind, the operation and the behaviour of their links: on the needs behind each connection.

This process of Potamianou already entailed—or at least envisaged—a less obvious statement which has now emerged and concerns the dominances that arise ever since from link to link and from the relationships among links. The idea in her work—in terms of the artistic, specific choice of network—had to do initially with the desire for equity, whereby no links prevail over others: the chosen links would be logically and equitably interchangeable, and any specific choice of certain links over others would reflect the history of logic and system theory at a given point in time and the systems recognised at that time as the most appropriate or sufficient—always through the expectation of a multiplicity of systems.

The differentiation in the work came when the artist shifted from the theoretically endless complexity potential of the connections (based on their constitutional principle of alluding to one another and thence to another) to their specific functioning in the context of specific social prerequisites of conditions such as authority—economic, political, national, cultural. The question of Potamianou was this: if a system operates in theory as the inexhaustible choices of links which identify—differently, each time—the kinds and behaviours of the relations among any entities, can it retain the same vastness when it is functionally applied in a context of social exercise? But then what would be the citizen's/artist's ability to feel free to claim their equality while knowing that in practice they is unable to exercise it? This is our experience from social powers. For it is one thing for the artist to feel certain of their personal freedom to organise their idea and his personal expression in the truest way to himself; it is another thing to know that the idea is already shaped to operate under pre-existing conditions whose origin, exercise and boundaries lie beyond their control. Their theoretical training reveals the boundaries of its own social exercise—and then the boundaries become the artist's object.

Thus Potamianou moved from the theoretical multiplicity of the links in her artistic quest to the field of socially applied multiplicity. It is the field where artists not only determine their object as to the certainty of their personal freedom but also determine the responsibility they assume in terms of the social power already exerted on their object; as if the critique itself becomes the artist's new object. With her reference to the use of a female portrait in relations of manifestation of male dominance (the application of this reference to one of

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many aspects of social life; it could be a reference to other forms of dominance), Potamianou set the boundaries of the prerequisites: a condition revealed through the personification of each prerequisite as a depiction of confinement—a *cage*, already charged historically from its use as dominance.

Initially, the passage in her work was from links to links. And when the links are applied to everyday, practical social life, they allude to their allusions and to their next new allusions. The project behaves as a constant shift from *cage* to *cage* in the process of liberating itself from its origins. It is a tough condition for the citizens or the artists (it's the same thing) to assert their choice while this choice is already a persisting boundary, and they need to explore this boundary in order to see it as the way out to the next one. The viewer of this series of shifts realises that to the citizen-artist the ability to explore the *cages*—from one *cage* to the next *cage* and thence to the next—is his freedom to seek a way out and that he has no other choice but to choose boundaries. It is all there: the circumstances of choice and the object of choice—the next exit. Potamianou means that we are forced to choose. And that this is the *cage* of freedom.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The allusion is to the famous phrase of J. P. Sartre: *Nous sommes condamnés à être libres*.