MAIN TOPIC: Literary Images

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Editors' Note

Literary Images

While contemporary literary scholarship acknowledges the power of imagery to bridge language and perception, the in-depth study of literary images surprisingly remains a niche pursuit. Despite the potential to unlock deeper understandings of narratives, the intricate ways in which imagery shapes reader engagement and interpretation often receive less attention than other areas of literary analysis. This oversight is particularly striking given the potential of imagery to transcend the limitations of language and evoke profound emotional responses.

Focusing on imagery opens exciting avenues for interdisciplinary exploration, connecting literature with visual art, film, and psychology. By examining the interplay between literary and visual representations, we can uncover how literature constructs scenes, emotions, and entire worlds through the power of words alone. This approach not only highlights the influence of literary images on other art forms but also reveals how they reflect cultural values and perceptions.

Furthermore, analyzing literary images unveils the ethical and political dimensions of representation. By conjuring images that challenge or reinforce social norms, literature exposes hidden realities and amplifies marginalized voices. As contemporary scholarship grapples with issues of power and identity, a deeper understanding of literary images becomes crucial to understanding how narratives shape cultural discourse and influence readers' worldviews.

In this special issue of the *AM Journal of Art and Media Studies*, we explore the complex realm of imagery in literature, where words transform into visual representations within the reader's mind. This inquiry delves into the nature of literary images, their relationship to language, the cognitive and emotional mechanisms that shape their impact, and their ethical and political dimensions. Additionally, we examine how literary images interact with other art forms, including visual art, film, and music, and how they intersect with imagination, perception, and cultural context.

This issue embarks on a journey to address these questions and introduces a selection of scholarly papers that examine literary images from various perspectives. Ksenija Popadić explores the link between literary images and visual perception in meditative practices, while Vuksan Vuksanović builds on Foucault's analysis of Velázquez's *Las Meninas* to examine its self-referential nature through different epistemological and ontological lenses. Aleksandra Panić analyzes how Lidia Yuknavitch'sautofictional novel *The Small Backs of Children* invites readers to co-create meaning through imagery. Milan Radovanović investigates representation's role in

shaping political power, and Ana Došen examines Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police* to uncover the interplay between literary images, visual interpretations, and representations of totalitarian regimes.

Together, these papers offer a rich, multifaceted exploration of literary images, revealing their capacity to shape our understanding of reality and engage us both cognitively and emotionally. We hope the insights within this collection will inspire further scholarly inquiry into the power of imagery in literature and its lasting impact on readers.

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The Connection Between Literary Images and Visual Perception in Meditative Practice

Abstract: The study of practice based on visualization and the role of visualization in shaping the outcomes of contemplative practice is an overlooked research niche. The aim of this article is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the process that connects literary images and visual perception in relevant meditative practices. The key question is which elements contribute to forming this connection in contemplative practices like meditation. To gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics involved, the study employed a mix of primary and secondary data sources, along with analytical, descriptive, and phenomenological methods, drawing from an interdisciplinary approach that includes psychology, neuroscience, and literature.

The following meditation practices were selected: contemplative meditation, creative visualization, koan meditation, imaginative meditation, creative workshops with haiku poetry as an outcome, and meditative storytelling. The identified elements in the connection between literary depictions and visual perception include mental imagery and visualization, cognitive processes, sensory processes, and emotional processes. The importance of literary techniques is particularly highlighted – using descriptive language with metaphors, similes, allegories, and other stylistic figures that create strong visual images. This connection has a neurological basis – neuroscience studies show that reading/listening to texts describing visual experiences activates brain areas involved in actual visual perception. This overlap suggests that the brain processes literary descriptions similarly to how it processes real visual stimuli. The connection between literary depictions and visual perception significantly enhances the quality of meditative practice and promotes deeper understanding and emotional-volitional engagement with the text and personal development of the meditators. Both secondary and primary data sources were used in the paper.

Keywords: literary images; visual perception; meditation; mental processes; interdisciplinary approach.

Introduction

The American Psychological Association (APA) and the prominent psychologist, meditation researcher, and meditator, Dean Shapiro,[1] define meditation as a set of techniques whose common denominator is a conscious attempt to focus attention in a non-analytical manner and to remain neutral, meaning that the meditator does

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[1] Diane Shapiro, "Overview: Clinical and Physiological Comparison of Temporal Uncertainty and Filter Strategies," *Am J Psychiatry* 139, 3 (March 1982): 267–74.

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not engage in discursive thoughts or rumination.[2] Walsh and Shapiro[3] view meditation as part of a set of self-regulation practices designed to train attention and awareness, ultimately improving mental well-being and fostering a higher degree of voluntary control over mental processes. These practices also promote the development of specific abilities and states, including peace, clarity, and concentration.

Do-Hyung Kang[4] believes that meditation can be conceptualized as a family of complex practices for training the regulation of both attention and emotions; practices developed with various goals. According to Ornstein[5], meditation denotes a mental activity aimed at achieving a specific goal, such as attaining "emptiness" or "Nirvana", that is the "state of empty consciousness" – *Nicht-Geistes*.

Up to this point, the concept of meditation has not been precisely defined, and there is no consensus among those who practice or research meditation regarding its content. Milenko Vlajkov, a Serbian-German psychologist, researcher, and meditation master, emphasizes that definitions often omit one characteristic that is also a determinant of meditative practice, which every meditation master will point out: meditation is a "conscious perceptual-cognitive activity where the person fully focuses on and becomes one with the subject of focus."[6]

Scientific research on meditation has explored physiological and behavioral aspects, including its impact on creativity. There are two main research streams: one focuses on evaluating the effects and healing potentials of meditation, while the other examines the psychological and neuropsychological processes underlying meditation.[7] The majority of studies concentrate on the effects, with significantly less attention given to the processes.

Most scientific papers on meditative practices describe two processes: focused attention and open monitoring. Even the simplest forms of meditation training encompass both processes (Ibid.).

Although visualization has always been recognized as a powerful emotional incentive in contemplative practices, the dynamics of the visualization process in meditative practice are insufficiently researched. Visualization is a term that refers to the creation of mental images using visual or verbal stimuli, as well as through the senses of

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[2] There are multiple definitions of rumination, but what they have in common is the presence of recurring, intrusive, and negative cognitions. An individual with a deficit in the ability to direct attention can easily become stuck in repetitive ruminations that are always of the same content. If individuals become trapped in this vicious cycle, rumination becomes a habitual way of thinking, a mental habit that reduces the quality of thinking and lowers the level of constructive thinking.

[3] Roger Walsh, and Shauna L. Shapiro, "The Meeting of Meditative Disciplines and Western Psychology: A Mutually Enriching Dialogue," *American Psychologist* 61, 3 (April 2006): 227.

[4] Do-Hyung Kang, Hang Joon Jo, Wi Hoon Jung, Sun Hyung Kim, and Ye-Ha Jung, "The Effect of Meditation on Brain Structure: Cortical Thickness Mapping and Diffusion Tensor Imaging," *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 8, 1 (January 2013): 27–33.

[5] Stanley I. Ornstein, "The Advertising-Concentration Controversy," *Southern Economic Journal* 43, 1 (July 1976): 892–902.

[6] Milenko Vlajkov, *Na sopstvenom tragu: relaksacija i meditacija* (Bački Petrovac: Kultura, 1990), 170.

[7] Peter Malinowski, "Neural Mechanisms of Attentional Control in Mindfulness Meditation," *Frontiers in neuroscience* 7 (2013): 35772.

hearing, smell, taste, and touch. The senses are involved in creating mental images, but it has been confirmed that the focus is mainly on visualization,[8] except for people who are blind or have a high degree of visual impairment. The latest research on the phenomenon of mental images in cognitive psychology (Ibid.) confirms the important role of visualization in perception, cognition, and maintaining mental health. However, only a few meditation studies have explicitly dealt with practice based on visualization and the role of visualization in shaping the outcomes of contemplative practice.[9]

Literature on meditation[10] as a contemplative practice primarily focuses on describing various visualization techniques without delving into the dynamic's literary descriptions and visual perception – specifically how visualizations may serve as less intense forms of perception.[11] It also tends to focus on the effects of visualization in meditation. In this context, the purpose of this article is to promote the neglected research niche, and the aim is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the process that connects literary images and visual perception in relevant meditative practices. It is known that this connection arises from the descriptive language to convey mental images that simulate visual experiences, including processes similar to those involved in actual vision. This enhances both engagement with and understanding of the text. The question is, which elements participate in creating this connection in contemplative practice, such as meditation?

To offer a more comprehensive response to this question, a multidisciplinary approach was adopted, incorporating perspectives from neuroscience, psychology, and literature. This included the use of descriptive and analytical methods for analyzing secondary data, as well as phenomenological methods for engaging with primary data. The concepts of meditation, literary images, visual perception, and visualization were defined. Selected meditative practices that utilize the process of visualization were described, and the dynamics of the connection between literary images and visual perception were analyzed in both directions – from literary images to visualization and contemplation, as well as in the reverse direction, using the example of a creative workshop.

Literary images and visual perception

Literary images refer to the way in which readers or listeners visualize scenes, characters, objects, or events based on verbal descriptions in the text. The study of literary images in literature explores how words provoke the formation of images in

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[8] Joel Pearson et al., "Mental Imagery: Functional Mechanisms and Clinical Applications," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 19 (2015): 590–602.

[9] Michael Lifshitz, Joshua Brahinsky, and T. M. Luhrmann, "The Understudied Side of Contemplation: Words, Images, and Intentions in a Syncretic Spiritual Practice," *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* 68 (2020): 183–99.

[10] Chris Hatchell, "Buddhist Visual Worlds II: Practices of Visualization and Vision," *Religion Compass* 7 (2013): 349–60.

[11] Indrani Margolin, Joanna Pierce, and Aislinn Wiley, "Wellness through a Creative Lens: Mediation and Visualization," *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* 30 (2011): 234–52.

the reader's mind, including analyses of the use of figurative language and stylistic figures such as personification, comparisons, or metaphors.[12] Literary images represent a literary device that activates our senses and encourages them to react to what is presented in the literary text, enhancing the reader's power of perception by motivating their interest.[13]

Literary imagery can involve any of the five senses and is used to enhance the reader's connection with the text, which in meditation contributes to achieving the goals of meditation (Table 1).

Meditation has its neurological aspect, meaning that meditation directly stimulates the cerebral cortex. Cortex, from Latin cortex, is the Latin word for 'bark,' in this case referring to the cerebral cortex.[14] Depending on the meditative task, whether it involves visualization, repeating a mantra, or observing the contents of consciousness, different cortical areas are activated.

Visualization is a cognitive process that involves generating vivid mental images in the absence of external visual input, which then activates the prefrontal, parietal, and inferotemporal regions, as well as the retinotopically organized areas traditionally associated with visual perception. Visualization activates not only visual but also cognitive regions of the brain. The beneficial side effects of visual mental imagery on various cognitive processes, such as memory and problem-solving,[15] are well documented, confirming that visual mental imagery significantly impacts cognitive processes by engaging a network of brain regions responsible for various cognitive functions.

These findings underscore that the beneficial impact of mental imagery largely depends on its quality and vividness, which are associated with specific changes in the brain's functional connectivity. This has been particularly significant for patients with the Parkinson's disease, as the content of mental imagery has indicated a crucial impact on disease severity and brain function.[16] The vividness and strength of mental imagery can range from completely absent (aphantasia) to photographic-like (hyperphantasia). Individual differences in the ability to visualize and the vividness of mental imagery alter its impact on conscious perception and cognitive performance, emphasizing the variability in mental imagery capabilities among individuals.[17]

[12] Study Smarter, "Imagery," English Literature, Literary Devices, https://www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/english-literature/literary-devices/imagery/, acc. on September 5, 2024

[13] Homa Nath Sharma Paudyal, "The Use of Imagery and Its Significance in Literary Studies," *The Outlook: Journal of English Studies* 14 (2023): 114–27.

[14] Merriam – Webster Dictionary, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cortex , acc. on October 2, 2024.

[15] Joel Pearson, "The Human Imagination: The Cognitive Neuroscience of Visual Mental Imagery," *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 20, 10 (October 2019): 624–34.

[16] Jared Cherry, Serageldin Kamel, Mohamed Elfil, Aravala S. Sai, Ahmed Bayoumi, Amar Patel, Rajita Sinha, and Sule Tinaz, "Mental Imagery Content is Associated with Disease Severity and Specific Brain Functional Connectivity Changes in Patients with Parkinson's Disease," *Brain Imaging and Behavior* 17 (April 2023), 161–71.

[17] Nadine Dijkstra, Max Hinne, Sander Erik Bosch, and Marcel van Garven, "Between-Subject Variability in the Influence of Mental Imagery on Conscious Perception," *Scientific Reports*, 9 (October 2019): 15658.

Similarly to the previously described influence of mental imagery involving motor activities and visual representations, it has been demonstrated that the activation of other sensory cortical regions occurs following mental imagery (recollection) of specific sensory modalities such as taste, smell, sound, and touch.[18] Furthermore, it has been established that an interconnected system of cortical networks is active during the engagement of each sensory modality, irrespective of the task at hand. These findings bear significant implications for the investigation of mental imagery and theories of cognitive processes.

Contemplative meditations, creative visualizations, koan meditations, and imaginative meditations

Contemplative meditations, creative visualizations, koan meditations, and imaginative meditations are practices in which the visual cortex is particularly stimulated through meditative tasks.

In contemplative meditations, the practitioner focuses on mentally observing specific conceptual content, such as values (like justice and kindness), will, emotions (such as sadness and anger), and behaviors (including impulsivity and aggression). The meditator reflects on the given concept and neutrally observes the images that spontaneously emerge in the consciousness. During this process, they are actively present and fully awake. Contemplation leads to insights that can be applied to enhance the quality of everyday life. In Christian contemplative meditations, the focus is on the life and suffering of Jesus Christ. The meditator actively imagines individual scenes from Christ's life to experience them and identify with God, empathizing with Him. The ancient Greek philosopher Plotinus,[19] who had a keen interest in Eastern religions and mysticism, particularly the philosophies of the Persians and Indians, described in his Enneads contemplative meditations that lead to an ecstatic experience of awareness free from thoughts and duality, ultimately resulting in unity with the One. According to him, these mystical experiences the highest form of human knowledge that surpasses rational knowledge and conceptual thinking.

Creative visualizations are a meditative technique that involves focusing attention on engaging the imagination and actively creating images in our mind, with the only limitation being what one can envision. Visualization refers to the process of creating mental images through visual or verbal stimuli, as well as through the senses of hearing, smell, taste, and touch. The formation of mental imagery engages various sensory modalities. However, research has confirmed that the primary focus is on visualization,[20] except for blind or significantly visually impaired individuals. Recent

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[18] Chris McNorgan, "A Meta-Analytic Review of Multisensory Imagery Identifies the Neural Correlates of Modality-Specific and Modality-General Imagery," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 17 (October 2012): 285.

[19] At the age of 39, Plotinus joined the army of Emperor Gordian III when he set out on a campaign against the Persians. The reason was his desire to learn the wisdom of the *gymnosophists*, as the Greeks referred to Indian yogis

[20] Pearson, et al., "Mental Imagery".

studies on mental imagery phenomena in cognitive psychology[21] corroborate the critical role of visualization in perception, cognition, and the maintenance of mental health. To achieve a high degree of creativity, it is necessary to introduce stimulation based on visualization and imaginative processes, with simultaneous utilization of verbal and visual elements being crucial.

Here is a concrete visual meditation:

> Envision yourself on a snow-covered mountain path. In the distance ahead you perceive a trail ascending upwards. As you traverse this path for several kilometers, you arrive, utterly exhausted, at an illuminated log cabin. Night has fallen. Through the cabin windows, you observe a single large room with a fireplace at its center. Upon entering the cabin, you remove your coat and position yourself in front of the fireplace to warm up. A bearskin rug lies on the wooden floor in front of the fireplace. Overcome by fatigue and the warmth of the fire, you lie down on the soft fur. You close your eyes and allow your imagination wander. Images cascade through your mind like within a film...[22]

This example demonstrates the use of descriptive language that activates visual, tactile, and thermal sensory modalities. Through these literary descriptions, visual content is induced in the meditator, and attention is maintained through the emotionalization of the narrative, thereby enhancing the focus required for meditation.

In koan meditations, the student is presented with a question that has no logical answer. Koans can be sayings, stories, or statements that are paradoxical or confusing, urging the meditator to move beyond conventional modes of thinking and perception. For example: "If you come across someone on the street who has attained the truth, you cannot simply walk by in silence, nor can you speak to him directly. How will you approach him?" The student first repeats the question to themselves in order to fully concentrate on the literary image contained in the question. All their learned and logical answers are rejected in favor of directly and intuitively experiencing reality. At the moment of realizing reality, the meditator gains insight into its true nature, the essence of phenomena, and their interconnections. In dialogue with the meditation master, the quality of the response is assessed to determine whether it reflects genuine insight. The master confirms the student's experience of insight and guides them towards further mental development and liberation from all learned patterns.

The koan "Every morning is dawn. What is the meaning of the sun rising from the sea?" aims for the meditator to explore the cyclical nature of existence and renewal through the literary image of the sun rising from the sea. One of the most famous koans, *The Sound of One Hand*, where the teacher asks the meditator: "What is the sound of one hand clapping?", aims to move the meditator beyond dualistic thinking (sound/no sound) and explore deeper reality and in this case auditory perceptions.

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Ksenija Popadić, "Meditacija i kreativnost," *AM Časopis za studije umetnosti i medija* 11 (Novembar 2016): 131–40.

The next type of meditative practice that involves the connection between literary images and visual perception is visualization meditation. In this practice one actively imagines a specific story, object, symbol, or color fully immersing oneself in the visual and other sensory experiences that emerge during the process of imagination. Among visualization meditations, I highlight visual meditation in which the meditation teacher first tells a story, and then the meditator imagines that story: a storm at sea or walking on a snowy path to a cabin where a fire crackles, inhaling energy, light, and health that spread throughout the body while exhaling disease, toxins, even unhealthy feelings...

In Buddhism, there are compassion meditations in which one imagines receiving and giving compassion, kindness, affection, and understanding. These meditations sometimes include imagining of how these healthy feelings radiate from the heart and are directed toward oneself, others, and the world. Various symbols can be envisioned, such as the *yantra - a diagram*, represents the cosmos. The focus of imagination can be an image of the teacher or simply colors, with white, red, green, and black being the most commonly visualized in meditative traditions.

Visualization meditations activate visual zones in the cortex, but they also have a harmonizing effect, they relieve stress, and thus improve the healing process. They require concentration on the content being visualized, thereby they improve concentration. Mental engagement with images alleviates emotional reactions that may be associated with them. Focusing on images reduces amygdala activity.[23] In the case of surrendering to visual content that is spontaneously produced in consciousness, creativity is increased and when imagining a specific, usually burdensome feeling, it is accepted, experienced, and understood. The observed feeling fades over time and gradually disappears. This leads to emotional stabilization and better emotional control in everyday life.

Creative meditative workshops

The process in which literary images stimulate visualization and influence emotional processes is not one-sided; the reverse influence is also possible, whereby emotional processes stimulate visualizations that result in literary images. This effect has been noted in creative meditative workshops in which I have personally participated, utilizing the phenomenological method for their description. Such creative workshops were developed by Milenko Vlajkov[24] as a group activity that significantly improves the expressed creativity of the meditative students or general participants.

In Japanese culture, the haiku poetic expression has been cultivated for over 400 years. This poetic form captures external phenomena, without the mediation of ego, emerging from a focused attention on the external world – a moment of direct

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[23] The amygdala is part of the brain's limbic system. Along with the hippocampus, it regulates emotions and plays a crucial role in the development of fear and anxiety.

[24] Milenko Vlajkov, *Auf dem Weg zum Glänzenden Geist* (Berlin: ProBusiness medialis Offsetfruck GmbH, 2020).

experience of reality. Haiku serves as both a mental training exercise and an activation of the senses, particularly vision. Explicitness, logic, and rationality are less valued in Japanese aesthetics because they reflect a Zen-Buddhist appreciation for allusions, intuition, and ambiguity. In haiku poetry, words that typically evoke scenes of nature serves as triggers to stimulate emotions that are not expressed directly, encouraging the readers' intuition.[25]

The creative workshop begins with the assignment of a topic. When the group consists of meditators, the focus shifts to the meditative path of personal development. During a workshop I attended in June 2024, the topic was *controlled folly*.[26]

Initially, the workshop facilitator (or meditation master) familiarized participants with the concept's meaning. *Controlled folly* is a controlled surrender to intense experience, an experience of happiness limited within a certain period. One should not renounce pleasure in life but control it to avoid dependency. Conversely, most individuals are unable to terminate an experience of happiness or great pleasure at the moment of immersion.

In the next step, the group is tasked with describing the concept of *controlled folly* by collaboratively creating all group members agreed upon. My group agreed on a story from our adolescence, a time when we were all emotionally hypersensitive and struggled to cope. We sometimes walked for days while consuming only water or black tea, a practice that brought us sense of calm. We detailed this experience in a story that we felt we collectively shared.

In the subsequent step, we analyzed the story and distilled it into three fundamental, interconnected concepts: painful sensitivity, walking meditation, and clarity. These concepts lead to the final insight. In conclusion, we expressed each concept in a haiku verse following the 5-7–5 syllable formula.

Haiku	Concept
Hurts under the skin	Painful sensitivity
Click-clack through hours and the fast.	Walking meditation
Behold – cotton bridge!	Clarity

Each participant had the impression that it was their personal solution expressed as "We did this." The group became a single entity! The master could either accept our solution or reject it in which case he would provide guidance on how to proceed to reach an acceptable solution. In this instance, the master accepted the solution, and we all experienced cognitive and emotional insight!

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[25] Ana Došen, "Viscerocepcija: (japansko) telo koje misli i umetnost," *AM Časopis za studije umetnosti i medija* 11 (2016): 123–30.

[26] Idries Shah, an Afghan writer and Sufi teacher, wrote about controlled folly. The term is known in Sufi tradition and in the Teachings of Don Juan (Yaqui Indians from Mexico) described by Carlos Castaneda. It refers to conscious and deliberate behavior that is free from the ego and social expectations. This behavior appears mad and unconventional from the outside, but for the person performing it, it is completely intentional, purposeful, and an expression of complete freedom.

The creative workshop example demonstrates the dynamic interaction of memory, thinking, emotions, visualization, and creativity, resulting in the linguistic production of a formally demanding haiku verse and the group creation of literary images in the haiku's content. Primary data sources were used in describing the creative workshop.

Meditative stories

Since ancient times, there has been a tradition of telling and retelling meditative stories that contain a moral lesson and use descriptive language.

These stories guide us on the path of spiritual development and indicate ways to develop awareness, free the mind from all forms of attachment, and ultimately achieve self-realization. The stories have the ability to transform the mind and enable self-knowledge to find one's true identity.

From time immemorial the meditative stories were passed from master to student, from one who knows the path of liberation to one seeking that knowledge. Masters employed literary images, parables, analogies, metaphors, and narratives, because it is challenging to conceptually define and verbally articulate reality beyond intellectual understanding. These tools help access higher functions of the mind that are lucid, direct, and profound.[27] Meditative stories express the master's need to stimulate the student to transcend binary thinking (pairs of opposites) and perceive reality beyond everyday understanding and knowledge. These stories expand visual perception and cognition beyond prejudices and dogmas and allow different levels of reflection – from literary to intuitive.

Meditative stories require analysis and interpretation of symbols that develop abstract thinking. They can be interpreted in multiple ways, and different levels of understanding can be achieved based on the listeners. Meditative stories are often accompanied by emotions as well as compassion for oneself and others. They also point to true life values and demonstrate how one can live with the virtues of courage, patience, justice, moderation, compassion, wisdom, loyalty, responsibility, honesty, and generosity. The stories calm the mind, change consciousness, and lead to the maturation of personality; they inspire and activate the creative potential of the person exposed to the story.

Let's take the Story of the Four Monk as an example: Four monks decided to meditate silently without speaking for two weeks. By nightfall on the first day, the candle began to flicker and then went out. The first monk said, "Oh, no! The candle is out." The second monk said, "Aren't we supposed to abstain from speaking?" The third monk said, "Why must you two break the silence?" The fourth monk laughed and said, "Ha! I'm the only one who didn't speak."[28] This story is an allegory that leads to the insight that we all have a mind similar to that of a monkey jumping from branch

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[27] Ramiro Calle, *Cuentos de los grandes maestros espirituales* (Madrid: Oberon, 2005).

[28] Dhamma Tapasa, "Transform Your Thinking Transform Your Life – Mental Health and Positive Well-Being," https://4enlightenment.com/2019/10/07/the-four-monks/, acc. on June 30, 2024

to branch and always moving. In Buddhism, this is known as the Monkey Mind. The underlying meaning is that only by learning to listen and perceive neutrally - free from impulsive reactions, judgment, anger, or pride – we can truly understand the essence of silence. The structural elements of this story include symbolism and allegory used to convey deeper meaning and allow for multi-layered interpretations, as well as minimalist action focusing on the volitional and emotional mental processes of the characters.

Meditative stories are characterized by prominent use of descriptive language that features rich literary imagery, effectively engaging readers' mental processes and stimulating their cognitive faculties.

Conclusion

There are numerous definitions of meditation and various meditative practices. Here I highlight Milenko Vlajkov's insightful definition of meditation, which states that it is a conscious perceptual-cognitive activity where the person fully focuses on and becomes one with the subject of focus.

Drawing from a review of the literature and my own extensive meditative experience, I have identified several practices that effectively utilize the connection between literary descriptions and visual perception to achieve meditation goals. These include contemplative meditations, creative visualizations, koan meditations, visualization meditations, creative meditative workshops, and meditative stories.

The overview of relevant practices indicates that the connection between literary images and visual perception, i.e., visualization as an internal representation functioning as a weak form of visual perception, is a multifaceted interaction involving cognitive and sensory processes through which meditators interpret and visualize the initial text or, as in the case of creative workshops, create poetic haiku text as their final result. The interacting elements are mental images and visualization, with the mental images enabling meditators to 'see' scenes, characters, and actions described in the text. Cognitive processes are at play, as meditators rely on their existing knowledge and experiences to form a coherent visual representation of the narration and draw conclusions related to meditative goals, though not necessarily via conventional thinking. Sensory engagement encompasses literary descriptions that encourage the involvement of the senses to make scenes more vivid. Emotional processes also participate in the interaction. The way scenes are described evokes specific feelings and encourages certain moods. Literary techniques are also an element of connection using descriptive language with metaphors, similes, allegories, and other stylistic figures that create powerful visual images by comparing one thing to another in a way that emphasizes similarities and differences. Finally, the connection has a neurological basis as well. Neuroscientific studies show that reading or listening to text describing visual experiences activates brain areas involved in actual visual perception. This overlap suggests that the brain processes literary descriptions in a manner similar to how it processes real visual stimuli.

It can be concluded that the connection between literary images and visual perception in meditative practice encompasses a complex dynamic of mutual influence of cognitive processes, sensory engagement, literary techniques, and neurological activity. It strongly contributes to the quality of meditative practice and promotes deeper understanding and emotional-volitional engagement with the source text. It also promotes personal development and activates and enhances the creative potentials of meditators.

Table 1. Literary images and the senses they involve

Literary Imagery	Sense
The floor is wooden, and a bear fur rug is spread out on it.	Sight
Overwhelmed by fatigue and the heat from the fireplace, you lie down on the soft fur.	Touch
The thunder rumbled in the distance, a deep growl that shook the windows.	Hearing
The scent of roses was intoxicating, mingling with the earthy smell of the garden.	Smell
The sweet, juicy peach burst in her mouth, its nectar dripping down her chin.	Taste

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Foucault's Analysis and Interdisciplinary Perspective on Velázquez's Painting *Las Meninas*

Abstract: This paper examines Michel Foucault's interpretation of Diego Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas* (1656) which he uses to illustrate shifts in épistémès throughout history. After analyzing Foucault's interpretation, I extended his approach by employing an interdisciplinary perspective to relativize some of his concepts. The study incorporates various interdisciplinary methods, demonstrating that these approaches lead to a more profound understanding of the ontological, aesthetic, technical, psychological, and sociological dimensions of Velázquez's painting. This strategy demonstrates that artistic creations are dynamic and surpass simplistic dualistic frameworks, methodological relativism, and determinism. As a result, *Las Meninas* emerges as a self – referential artefact, continuously evolving in meaning through different epistemological and social frameworks.

Keywords: representation; Foucault; *Las Meninas*; épistémè; interdisciplinary analysis; self-referentiality.

Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656)

The painting *Las Meninas* by Diego Velázquez depicts a scene in the painter's studio at the Royal Alcázar of Madrid, in one of the rooms of the Spanish King Philip IV's palace. The central figure is the five-year old princess Margarita Teresa, surrounded by her ladies-in-wating, dwarfs, and a dog. To the right of the princess stand the maids of honour, María Agustina Sarmiento and Isabel de Velasco, while on the left are the dwarfs Mari Bárbola and Nicolás Pertusato with Nicolás gently nudging the dog with his foot as if trying to wake it up. Behind them are the housekeeper, Marcela de Ulloa, and a bodyguard. On the left, Velázquez is painting on a large canvas, holding his palette and looking at the viewer of the painting. In the background, the reflections of King Philip IV of Austria and Queen Marianne are reflected in a mirror, but their exact location in the scene remains unclear: although the mirror presents them, it does not directly depict them. Also, there are two large paintings on the back wall which are showing scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In the upper right corner,

an open door leads to a staircase where Don José Nieto Velázquez, the queen's chamberlainis standing. His presence adds an element of uncertainty – we are not sure whether he is entering or exiting the room.[1]

Foucault's Analysis of *Las Meninas*

Michel Foucault interprets Velázquez's *Las Meninas* as an example of "pure representation" illustrating the classical épistémè›s approach to visibility and boundaries in art.[2] He highlights Velázquez's detailed depiction of himself and his subjects including Infanta Margarita and her entourage, using traditional identifiers. The mirror plays a crucial role in revealing the unseen presence of King Philip IV and his wife Mariana; thus creating dual visibility that captures both the observed and the observers. Foucault notes, "The mirror allows for a metathesis of visibility that simultaneously affects the space represented in the picture and its character as a representation; It reveals aspects on the canvas that are invisible in the painting itself."[3]

In this Velázquez painting, there seems to be a representation of classical ideals and the definitions they reveal. The scene strives to capture every aspect – images, gazes, visible faces, and gestures that give it life. Yet, it is in this very dispersion, which the painting seeks to gather and present as a cohesive whole, that a profound emptiness emerges: the necessary absence of what this dispersion relies upon – the disappearance of the original subject, which it merely mirrors. Ultimately, liberated from this constraining relationship, the representation can exist as pure representation.[4]

According to Foucault, the subject (viewer or depicted) is excluded from this representation; although central to the process of viewing and depicting, the subject remains invisible within the complex web of relations within the painting. Ultimately, when freed from this constraint, the painting can become "pure representation" – a depiction without trying to fully portray reality.

This groundbreaking analysis is introduced at the beginning of *The Order of Things*, where Foucault emphasizes that the analysis is not aimed at describing knowledge in its pursuit of objectivity, but at exploring the "epistemological field" or "épistémè". He defines *épistémè* as "the totality of relationships that, in a given period, unite discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems."[5] Foucault undertakes the task of showing how different forms of empirical knowledge develop not as a result of increasing perfection but through

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[1] Las Meninas was completed in 1656 while Velázquez served at the court of Philip IV, a position he had held since 1623. For more details about the painting, see *Las Meninas*, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Las-meninas, acc. on May 29, 2024; "Las Meninas by Diego Velázquez – A Spanish Painter Art Study," *Art in Context*, https://www.artincontext.org/las-meninas, acc. on May 29, 2024.

[2] Michel Foucault, *Riječi i stvari. Arheologija humanističkih znanosti* [The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences] (Belgrade: Nolit, 1971), 109.

[3] Ibid., 77.

[4] Ibid., 83.

[5] Foucault, *Riječi i stvari*, 65–66.

the historical conditions of their possibility, which he calls "archaeology"[6].

"This archaeological survey revealed two significant discontinuities in the *épistémè* of Western culture: one that marks the onset of the classical era in the mid-17th century and another at the beginning of the 19th century, marking the threshold of our modern age. The order on which we base our thinking does not have the same mode of existence as the order of classicism."[7] Foucault emphasizes that these changes indicate fundamental shifts in the way society organizes and understands knowledge. "This does not mean that thought has progressed, but rather that the mode of being of things and the order by which they are arranged and offered to knowledge has undergone profound changes."[8] Changes in knowledge result from changes in the order and the way things are organized, suggesting a distinction between language and actual reality.

"However, it seems comforting and deeply reassuring to think that man is a recent discovery, a figure that is less than two centuries old, a mere crease in our knowledge, who will vanish as soon as this knowledge finds a different form."[9] This suggests that the concept of man is relatively new within the *épistémè*, supporting the idea that our definitions and concepts are tied to specific historical and epistemological frameworks, and can change as these frameworks change. Within these frameworks lie fields of knowledge and power that are inseparably linked and shape social actors.[10] Therefore, he rejects the belief that knowledge can be reduced to mere vocabulary and insists on the importance of historical structures and norms that shape discourse.[11] In doing so, he critiques the modern notion of power, opposing traditional hierarchical models that fail to detect its dynamic and pervasive nature.[12]

Expanding to a broader context, Foucault argues that our concepts of subject and identity are products of historical and social discourses, with *Las Meninas* reflecting on epistemological changes. He states: "The project of a general science of order, the theory of signs that analyzes representation, the arrangement of ordered tables of similarities and differences: thus, in classicism, the space of empiricism was constituted, which did not exist until the end of the Renaissance and would be condemned to disappear by the early19th century."[13] The classical "épistémè," he argues, relies on a specific organization of knowledge, where "the relationship between the signifier and the signified is situated in a space where no intermediary figure ensures their encounter: within the framework of knowledge, this relationship is merely a connection

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[6] Ibid, 66.

[7] Ibid., 66.

[8] Ibid., 67.

[9] Ibid., 67.

[10] Ibid., 92–95.

[11] Ibid., 63–67.

[12] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 98–101.

[13] Foucault, *Riječi i stvari*, 135.

between the idea of a thing and the idea of another thing."[14] This perspective highlights the absence of mediators between ideas, defining the classical structure of representation.

Foucault identifies a "precarious game of metamorphoses"[15] between the viewer of Velázquez's painting and the depicted model; he continues from an epistemological perspective, avoiding analysis of the painting's political context, or the aesthetic and interpersonal relationships within the royal court, as these are not his focus.

Expanding Foucault's approach to analysis

The aim is to continue from where Foucault left off and explore how interactions with works of art like *Las Meninas* continuously generate new interpretations and how the painting can evolve through different 'épistémè', discourses, and systems of power. In this context, representations illuminate the interaction between language and power, demonstrating how discourse shapes our understanding of the world and implying that individuals are shaped by external factors. Judith Butler's critique of Foucault suggests that identity formation involves more than external discourses; it is actively constituted through performative acts.[16] However, Velázquez's painting does not simply reflect reality; it participates in the construction of meaning as a metapicture.[17]

Perhaps, using Foucault's cautious tone, the "emptiness and disappearance of the subject" in the painting symbolize a creative space where meaning is continually generated and redefined through interaction with the viewer. Representation is a process of creating meaning and shapes our perception of reality, with the order of things always constructed by discourse. However, "thrownness into the world" (Geworfenheit)[18] and the body are the meeting points of the subjective and the objective, playing a fundamental role in shaping meaning and perception; the body is the primary place of world understanding, and our sensory experiences shape our understanding of reality.[19] This means that perception is not only a cognitive but also a bodily process. This idea, developed in the works of researchers George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, emphasizes that our understanding of the world is connected with physical interactions.[20] The painting *Las Meninas* transcends being merely an artistic entity serving also as a profound metaphor for the intricate interplay among the artist, the subjects,

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[14] Ibid., 131.

[15] Ibid., 73.

[16] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 73.

[17] See W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 35.

[18] See Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 135–37.

[19] This interpretation is informed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's discussions in *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1962), 112, 212.

[20] This concept is discussed in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

the viewer, the epistemological frameworks and the broader cultural context. The layers of meaning within this painting uncover connections that unmistakably illustrate how both the artwork and our perception of it are deeply embedded in an ontological network of relationships and specific strata. Art akin to perception is not static but inherently dynamic: enmeshed in ontological structures. This is equally true for the individual elements of the painting which possess epistemological, aesthetic and ontological dimensions thereby enriching our comprehensive understanding of the artwork. *Las Meninas* exemplifies how art can operate within a multifaceted ontological network where meaning is continually produced across different planes of interpretation. This leads us to an integrated approach to understanding and prompts us to ask a philosophical question: is there a clear distinction between epistemology and ontology? These two dimensions are often intertwined determining. Art makes us question these boundaries because epistemological elements (our knowledge and perception) inevitably shape our ontological reality (existence and reality) and vice versa. This relationship shows a paradox that Foucault might have overlooked; the distinction between epistemology and ontology is unclear. Trying to separate these areas may be misguided, as understanding one requires understanding the other. This calls for a metasystem that Foucault does not address, as his framework tends to reduce ontic and aesthetic aspects and focuses on networks of external power rather than on the layers and values of ontology. This paradox implies that the distinction between knowledge and existence might not be absolute; they are intertwined parts of a unique and interdependent web of meaning, serving as reflections of both meaning and existence.

The mirror in the painting serves as a crucial element in understanding the concept of representation, as it "allows for a metathesis of visibility and simultaneously encompasses the space depicted in the picture and its nature as a representation; it allows one to see on the canvas what is doubly invisible."[21] The mirror in the painting is an ontological element of the nature of reality and perception and on the other hand, a building block of art itself. In this case, the depiction of the royal couple in the mirror as the only representation of their presence in the painting can be understood as a self-referential imprint. This restructuring of the meaning of the painting and the mirror raises questions about the essence of perception, indicating that representation can be more powerful or "real" than reality itself. In this context, *Las Meninas* functions as an interactive artwork with the viewer becoming a part of the painting or the artwork, thus continuing the process of the artwork's self-realization in line with the ontological nature of art.

"At first glance, the position [of the painting] seems simple; it is a matter of pure reciprocity: we look at the painting in which the painter, in turn, looks at us."[22] This concept of meta representation and the complexity of the relationship between reality and reflection remains within the bounds of fiction that Foucault defines with the

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[21] Foucault, *Riječi i stvari*, 76.

[22] Ibid., 83.

term "pure representation". Foucault considers Descartes a key representative of the classical "épistémè" of representation[23] which differs from the Renaissance "épistémè" of similarity. He believes Descartes' universal mathematical method prioritizes order and measurement over the mathematics of nature. However, Descartes' mathematics is not a representation of a pre-existing ontological reality but a construction of the human intellect, or imagination, rather than a "pure" representation, which culminates in Foucault's concept of "void".

Foucault points out that the "void" in Las Meninas comes from the absence of a clear subject. Yet, every time we look at the painting, Velázquez, as both the creator and a part of the scene, adds to its meaning. This interaction shows that the meaning and significance of the artwork aren't static; they change with time and different viewers. When we experience the painting in its purest form, it touches on deeper, metaphorical levels that shape how we think, act, and perceive.[24]

A metaphor is a way to see one thing through another. Therefore, imagination plays a crucial role in the interpretation of art and texts, allowing us to see beyond literal meaning,[25] and opening up space to understand Foucault's representation as a symbol, perhaps with archetypal significance. Archetypes in their noumenal form are complex and multifaceted, existing beyond direct perception; they are the underlying patterns that manifest through representations.[26] Their phenomenal equivalents are symbols that give shape to these archetypes. To distinguish an archetype from an ordinary symbol, it needs to be individualized, starting with its *representation*. Symbols transform into representations when contextualized through specific environments, moods, and scenes, thereby becoming clearly defined. The founder of archetypal psychology, James Hillman, suggests that representation has a "body".[27]

"Pure representation" may contain a paradox: within the "void" lie layers of meaning that go beyond the superficial epistemological structure and can be linked with the imaginary elements of the mythical and metaphorical. Metaphors enable perception and a sense of existence and language providing a unique creative perspective. Representation is always a product of imagination; through it, it is impossible to see anything other than what is within the relationship with the imaginary. Imagination reveals and conceals meaning making representation an active participant in the formation of consciousness. Representation is a symbol, a catalyst for imagination, a window through which creativity and interpretation emerge.[28] This paradox holds

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[23] Ibid., 109.

[24] This idea is discussed in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 102.

[25] Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 171–73.

[26] James Hillman, *Re-Visioning Psychology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 82.

[27] Ibid., 62.

[28] This interpretation is informed by James Hillman's discussions in *The Dream and the Underworld* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 66. See also James Hillman, *Archetypal Psychology: A Brief Account* (Dallas, TX: Spring Publications, 1983), "Image and Soul: The Poetic Basis of Mind", 6, and "Archetypal Image", 11–16.

the key to understanding how symbols can both enrich and impoverish our perception of reality or lead to relativism. Therefore, understanding imagination within the framework of archetypal hermeneutics can offer an alternative that integrates subjective and collective aspects of meaning, surpassing purely linguistic constructions. Consequently, "pure representation" can be seen as part of an ongoing process of self – definition within the artwork, involving both internal and interactive meaning; in this context, representation is continuously renewed through interaction.

"On the contrary, the lines that run through the depth of the painting are incomplete; each one lacks a portion of its length. This absence is caused by the lack of the king – a trick played by the artist."[29] This trick reveals the play of presence and absence: the viewer is aware that the king constantly appears and disappears. This ontological uncertainty, or paradoxical dialectic, reveals how power discourses shape the perception of reality and identity in the artwork and create a network of meanings that invites the viewer to constantly reconsider their position and role in the interpretation process. Foucault emphasizes the irreducibility of language and image at several points, arguing that what is seen cannot be fully expressed in words and vice versa. He also highlights the role of proper names in transitioning from the space of speech to the space of seeing but suggests that maintaining an open relationship between language and the visible requires erasing proper names and using an anonymous language.[30]

However, Véronique M. Fóti analyzes Foucault's understanding of representation through Velázquez's *Las Meninas* and points out that, although Foucault claims that the painting "reveals and subverts the epistemological structure of classical representation", he often "neglects the materiality of painting in favor of its quasi-mathematical (perspective) comprehensibility."[31] A theory of representation informed solely by geometry does not give sufficient weight to the materiality of painting. Norman Bryson argues that the ideal system of perspective cannot allocate just an axis to the viewer but also a precise point of view. Foucault's analysis does not take this into account: the vanishing point in perspective becomes the "anchor of the system that embodies the viewer" and makes them visible "in a world of absolute visibility"[32]. This critique highlights the need for a more integrative approach. Such an approach requires necessary interdisciplinary methods and disciplines for a comprehensive interpretation of the painting.

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[29] Foucault, *Riječi i stvari*, 83.

[30] Ibid., 77.

[31] Véronique M Fóti, "Representation Represented: Foucault, Velázquez, Descartes," *Philosophy Today* 7, 1 (September 1996), https://www.pomoculture.org/2013/09/22/representation – represented – foucault – velazquez – descartes/, acc. on August 27, 2024

[32] Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 106.

Interdisciplinary interpretations of symbolism, power, and identity

Velázquez was not a member of the Order when he painted the work in 1656: the cross was added later, likely in 1659 after Velázquez was inducted into the Order, as a posthumous honor. The presence of Velázquez in the painting and the painted cross on his chest representing the Order of Santiago can be interpreted as a symbol of the sublimation of his unconscious desires for recognition and status within the court hierarchy. Sublimation is the process of redirecting repressed desires into socially acceptable activities and the painting becomes a space where the artist's unconscious conflicts are transformed.[33] Furthermore, the mirror can be viewed as a symbol of the artist's aspirations and desire for validation as well as narcissism where the artist seeks reflection of his own worth.[34]

The mirror on the wall delineates a boundary between reality and art. According to Lacan's mirror theory, the gaze serves as a tool of power and forms the basis for the development of identity through the relationship between the observer (subject) and the observed (object).[35] In other words, due to the mirror in the painting, everyone becomes both the observed and the observer; this creates a binding relationship between the subject and the object. This reflexive aspect allows the viewer to become part of the painting and form a new identity. However, the viewer's identity becomes fragment.

The illusion of wholeness is crucial in the formation of one's ego: according to Lacan, the ego is a fragile structure prone to fragmentation; narcissistic identification with the idealized self (an unreal reflection)[36] creates the ego through constant internal struggle, and identity fragmentation is inevitable – the mirror provides an image of a whole self, but that image (imago) conceals internal instability. [37] In *Las Meninas* the mirror in the background reflects the king and queen – they are physically outside the composition but through reflection they become its integral part; the viewer can identify with them, immersing herself/himself in the painting and feeling the tension between the reality and the reflected identity. The royal couple in the mirror can be interpreted as the "ideal I" (imago); the viewer recognizes the ideal image but realizes that it is a construct, not reality. Velázquez's presence in the composition further complicates the relationship – his self – reflection suggests that the painting becomes a place where identity changes both for the viewer and the artist.

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[33] This interpretation draws on Sigmund Freud's discussion in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) as found in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and Its Discontents, and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), vol. XXI, 97. Jacques Lacan's interpretation of sublimation, which may align more closely with the thesis presented here, can be found in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959–1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, 112, 119.

[34] This interpretation draws on Sigmund Freud's discussion in "On Narcissism: An Introduction", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIV, ed. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 73.

[35] This interpretation draws on concepts discussed in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 75–81.

[36] Ibid., 76.

[37] Ibid., 77.

Las Meninas poses the question of what we see and who we truly are using the "gaze"[38] as a driver of tension in the formation of that identity – by overlooking its illusory nature the viewer fails to recognize that all identities are illusory. According to Lacan, the gaze is not just what the eye misses: it is a fantasized object that fills that void and creates the illusion of a coherent identity while simultaneously provoking a sense of fascination and destabilization.[39]

Behind the painter, on the wall, are two copies of works by the Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens, depicting the myths of Minerva (Athena) and Arachne, and Apollo and Marsyas. In the first myth, Arachne challenges Minerva to a weaving contest and is turned into a spider as a punishment for her hubris. In the second myth, Marsyas challenges Apollo to a musical contest and is brutally punished, being flayed alive. These mythological depictions can symbolically reflect Velázquez's position at court, his relationship to art, and the artist's place in society serving as symbols of the transition between the seen and the unseen.[40] The theme of art emerges from these "nested images" and evolves at the level of "pictorial discourse"[41].

Analyzing gender roles in *Las Meninas* through the positions of the female figures enters the realm of performativity and identities.[42] The depiction of women in the painting reflects broader societal attitudes and the constraints placed on women at the time.[43] Additionally, the painting may also reflect colonial power and identity in 17th-century Spain illustrating how cultural identity is formed through historical transformations, hybridization, and the negotiation of new spaces of meaning. [44]

Light in Velázquez's painting filters through dark frames and falls on the painter's gaze, which can be interpreted as part of the complex ecological system of the painting.[45] In this context, all elements of the painting – people, objects, space, and light – mutually influence the viewer's perception. Digital humanities, using new methods for analyzing cultural artefacts can deepen the interpretation of Velázquez's painting by uncovering subtle cultural expressions beyond traditional boundaries.[46]

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[38] Ibid., 77.

[39] Ibid., 128.

[40] This reference draws on themes discussed in Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949).

[41] Victor Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 275.

[42] This reference is informed by the concepts of gender performativity as discussed in Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 24–25.

[43] This reference is informed by the arguments presented by Linda Nochlin in her essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 145.

[44] This reference is informed by Homi K. Bhabha's discussions on cultural identity and hybridization in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 123–39.

[45] This interpretation is influenced by concepts discussed in Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 28–29.

[46] For insights into the role of digital humanities in analyzing cultural artefacts, see Johanna Drucker, *Graphesis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 17–21, and Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 49–66, 80–99.

Cognitive art theory helps explain *Las Meninas* by linking artistic creativity and appreciation to the brain's neural structures, where perceptual processes and sensory interpretation form the basis of the artistic experience. [47]

Velázquez's work *Las Meninas* has become the subject of detailed analysis, particularly regarding composition, perspective, and representation. In her book *The Vexations of Art* (1995), American art historian Svetlana Alpers highlights how Velázquez uses light and space to organize the composition creating a "visual metaphor" for the distribution of power within the Spanish court, thus making *Las Meninas* a cultural artefact that reflects the social hierarchies of its time. [48]

In his book *Velázquez: Painter and Courtier* (1986) Jonathan Brown analyzes how *Las Meninas* reflects the political power dynamics, social hierarchies, and intimate aspects of life at the Spanish court under King Philip IV.[49] By combining art history, sociology, and political theory, Brown argues that *Las Meninas* affirms royal dominance and elevates painting as a noble art form, posing the question: what is Velázquez painting? Three hypotheses – a portrait of the king and queen, the Infanta with her entourage, or *Las Meninas* itself – create space for various interpretations, while the presence of the royal family reflected in the mirror underscores "the nobility of artistic expression"[50].

In his work *Las Meninas and the Paradoxes of Pictorial Representation,* American philosopher John R. Searle analyzes the painting through the lens of the paradox of self-referentiality: the paradox arises when Velázquez includes himself in the painting – the painting becomes a play of perspectives and reflections, where the artist and the viewer blend into a unified visual and conceptual whole. [51]

Romanian art historian Victor Stoichita wrote a book titled *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta – Painting* (1997) in which he argues that Velázquez's techniques create paradoxes: *Las Meninas* is interpreted as an example of meta-painting, where the work, as a self-aware object, reflects its process of creation through "intertextuality" – referencing other artistic works and traditions – and the technique of "mise en abyme", where the painting contains another painting within itself. [52] Stoichita suggests that "the artist presents himself as the creator in the first

[47] Cognitive art theory's application to *Las Meninas* is informed by the works of Semir Zeki, *Inner Vision: An Exploration of Art and the Brain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), and V. S. Ramachandran and William Hirstein, "The Science of Art: A Neurological Theory of Aesthetic Experience," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6, 6–7 (1999): 15–51.

[48] Svetlana Alpers, *The Vexations of Art: Velázquez and Others* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 145–46.

[49] Jonathan Brown, *Velázquez: Painter and Courtier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

[50] Jonathan Brown, *Images and Ideas in Seventeenth-Century Spanish Painting* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 109, 110.

[51] John R. Searle, "*Las Meninas* and the Paradoxes of Pictorial Representation," *Critical Inquiry* 6, 3 (1980): 477–88.

[52] Victor Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 103, 141, 183, 229, 291. For a more detailed exploration of these concepts, see especially chapters "Assemblage: How to Make a Painting from an Old Image", "The Intertextual Machine", and "Paintings, Maps, and Mirrors".

person: 'It is I, Velázquez, whom you see in the act of painting.'"[53] The role of the witness – observer can be understood as an act of "deconstruction": Velázquez separates the functions of the mirror and the door, using them as framing elements in the background of his painting. In the mirror, he places the "image", while in the doorway, he positions a figure to act as both "observer" and "author", though not entirely. [54]

This theme of paradox is further explored by Joel Snyder and Ted Cohen in their essay *Reflections on Las Meninas: Paradox Lost* (1981), where they analyze how Velázquez uses composition and perspective to create a layered depiction: although *Las Meninas* initially appears to uphold classical artistic rules, its true impact lies in the "destabilization of those very rules"[55].

In his work *Velázquez' Las Meninas* (1981) Leo Steinberg provides an exhaustive study of composition and perspective, exploring how Velázquez uses space and perspective to evoke specific reactions in the viewer: the arrangement of figures in the painting highlights the structures within the work as a complex narrative system, where perspective plays a central role, and the painting "remains a metaphor, a mirror of consciousness"[56]. While Steinberg's analysis of perspective and composition emphasizes traditional narrative structures, contemporary post-humanist theory may offer a new dimension in interpreting *Las Meninas*.

Post-humanist theory redefines the concept of the subject as a transversal entity immersed in a network of relationships with non-human entities – environmental, technological, and social.[57] In this context, *Las Meninas* can be interpreted through the lens of these relationships, where the reflection of the king and queen in the mirror, the arrangement and space between the figures, as well as the presence of non-anthropomorphic entities (such as dog, mirror, and light) function as relational elements. The mirror contributes to the painting's narrative and influences the viewer's perception; the arrangement of the figures defines their real and symbolic relationships, articulating the hierarchy of power, thereby creating a network of meanings within the composition and enhancing its performativity. Although the king and queen are physically absent from the scene, their essential presence is established through the mirror, positioning them at the center of the narrative. This duality – presence in absence – reveals how power in *Las Meninas* flows through a network of symbolic relationships, connecting humans, objects, and non-human entities within the painting, ultimately returning to the enigma of the scene.

In line with Braidotti's concept of *Zoe*, "Living matter – including the body – is intelligent and self-organizing, but precisely because it is not separate from the rest of organic life."[58] According to Braidotti's post-humanist ontology, matter is "affective

[53] Ibid., 276.

[54] Ibid., 280.

[55] Joel Snyder and Ted Cohen, "Reflections on 'Las Meninas': Paradox Lost," *Critical Inquiry* 7, 2 (Winter 1980): 429–47.

[56] Leo Steinberg, "Velázquez' 'Las Meninas,'" *October* 19 (Winter 1981): 54.

[57] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 49, 50.

[58] **Ibid.**, 60.

and autopoietic", evolving through continuous processes of becoming *Zoe*, permeating all forms of existence.[59] The materiality in *Las Meninas*, particularly through textures, colors, and fabrics, expresses *Zoe* by infusing vitality into the painting, allowing for its interpretation through a material – symbolic lens: the white and gold colors on the Infanta Mariana may represent *Zoe* – the central energy within the painting; white can symbolize purity while gold signifies wealth and power; the texture of the richly embroidered dresses symbolizes wealth and connects the material with the symbolic, providing a tangible sense of touch within the painting.

This material – symbolic transition is enhanced by the strategic use of light: the light falls on the central figures, especially the Infanta; highlighting the textures and colors of her attire, *breathing life* into the characters and reinforcing their vitality. Light also functions as a visual indicator of hierarchy – emphasizing the contrast between the illuminated and shadowed areas. The interplay of light and richly embroidered fabrics vividly exemplifies *Zoe* – the energy animating matter and conveying symbolic meaning throughout the painting.

In *Las Meninas*, light as a metaphor for *Zoe* reinforces the perceptual dynamics that structures its artistic representation. The evolution of post-humanist theory could offer new perspectives for analyzing *Las Meninas* through the lens of redefined elements and networked relationships.[60]

Velázquez's painting resonates today as a product of artistic imagination, directly linked to human perception: it articulates the social hierarchies of its time and establishes an ontological paradigm; it serves as an archetypal example of meta-reflection raising questions about representation, subjectivity, the boundaries between illusion and reality, and symbols of power and identity.

Conclusion

Foucault discovered significant epistemological changes and thoroughly described the structures of representation, the dynamics of power and knowledge discourse. However, his analysis does not fully encompass the way the viewer engages with the painting. By expanding Foucault's methodology with interdisciplinary perspectives, it is possible to reassess some of his conclusions and interpret Velázquez's painting as a self-referential artefact with a complex network of meanings. Integrating interdisciplinary approaches with Foucault's analysis allows us to broaden the interpretation and to see that epistemological changes can be viewed as manifestations of deeper ontological structures. Artistic works continuously change through interaction with the audience, context, epistemological processes and systems of power. However, they transcend binary positions of interpretation, methodological relativism, and determinism beyond ontology, moving towards integrative approaches sensitive to the multilayered nature of expression.

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[59] Ibid., 60.

[60] For an analysis of non-human actors and their impact on the creation of meaning, see Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), as well as Actor-Network Theory.

Velázquez's painting recontextualizes meaning serving as an interactive platform for understanding art, identity, power, and perception, while transcending spatial and temporal boundaries.

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Images as Invitations: Fostering Reader Engagement and Collaboration in Lidia Yuknavitch's *The Small Backs of Children*

Abstract: This paper analyzes how Lidia Yuknavitch, an American writer and creative writing teacher, employs vivid and evocative imagery to foster a participatory reading experience in her autofictional novel *The Small Backs of Children* (2015). Grounded in Ellen Joann Esrock's thesis from "Visual Imaging and Reader's Response", this analysis explores how Yuknavitch strategically invites readers to collaborate in the storytelling process. By doing so, Yuknavitch creates a dynamic interaction where meaning is co-created by the author and her audience.

Yuknavitch's narrative style blends the visceral with the conceptual using imagery that transcends mere description to evoke powerful emotional and intellectual responses. The imagery in *The Small Backs of Children* serves as a bridge between the text and the reader, transforming the act of reading into interactive practice. By blurring the lines between authorship and readership, Yuknavitch redefines traditional storytelling, positioning the reader as an active participant in the narrative. This paper demonstrates the diverse ways in which Yuknavitch's prose engages readers, transforming the act of reading into a collaborative process of creation of meaning and emotion.

Keywords: literary images; Lidia Yuknavitch; *The Small Backs of Children*; autofiction; visualization; participatory reading.

1. Introduction

Lidia Yuknavitch's imagery, recognizable by its dynamic interplay of violence and beauty, commands the reader's engagement. Her strategic use of imagery not only draws readers into the narrative but also blurs the lines between authorship and readership, fostering a collaborative space where the author's creative intentions and the reader's response merge. This paper aims to explore how Yuknavitch's visceral imagery prompts readers to immerse themselves in a dynamic literary experience and actively participate in the storytelling process.

The starting point for conducting this analysis was Ellen Joann Esrock's paper "Visual Imaging and Reader's Response"[1]. Esrock analyzed Julio Cortázar's story

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[1] Ellen Joann Esrock, "Visual Imaging and Reader Response," *CEA Critic* 51, 1 (1988): 30–38.

"Blown-up" to prove that visual images can have semiotic status and thus become integral to the meaning-making process in literature. These images function as signs that communicate specific messages, emotions, or themes to the reader. In her analysis, Esrock proposed that "the visual images formed by readers do not occur randomly but are guided by cues within text"[2]. Building on Esrock's thesis, I analyzed how Yuknavitch strategically prompts readers to collaborate in the storytelling process, where meaning is co-created by the author and the audience.

To provide context for this analysis, it is helpful to begin with definitions of an image in literature and the process of visualization. I will reference the well-known definition from 1913, attributed to Ezra Pound,[3] the founder of the Imagist movement. Pound defines image as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time"[4]. Although Pounds' definition has been challenged with questions such as "whether one image can encompass both intellectual and emotional parts" or "if the reference to time is accurate"[5], it remains a foundational concept.

According to the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*,[6] visualization is defined as the production of mental images in the process of reading. Renate Brosch suggests that "more vivid imaginings depend to a significant extent on textual triggers in the narrative"[7]. While neuroscientists have argued that textual triggers can be random, their research didn't include a wide variety of literary texts. Brosch further suggests that visualization is an elusive phenomenon that emerges from an interaction between a particular text and a reader in a particular situation and context.[8] This concept aligns with Louise Rosenblatt's[9] idea of literary work as a transaction between the reader and the text, where the reader "infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into verbal symbols", which in turn channels their thoughts and feelings.

This paper analyses *The Small Backs of Children* as a transactional and collaborative literary work, where the author employs various textual cues to engage readers in the processes of meaning-making and the continuous generation of images.

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[2] Ibid., 30.

[3] I part from Pound's definition because Yuknavitch opens the novel with a quote from H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), a renewed figure in the Imagist movement.

[4] Walter Sutton, "The Literary Image and the Reader: A Consideration of the Theory of Spatial Form," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 16, 1 (1957): 112–23.

[5] Ibid.

[6] David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (London: Routledge, 2005), 633.

[7] Renate Brosch, "What We 'See' When We Read: Visualization and Vividness in Reading Fictional Narratives," *Cortex* 105 (2018): 136.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Louise Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration* (New York: Noble and Noble, 1968), 25.

1.1 Lidia Yuknavitch and her work

Lidia Yuknavitch is a contemporary American writer and creative writing teacher, whose literary work defies easy categorization. Her writing spans genres from non-fiction and memoir to speculative fiction. Her prose oscillates between raw realism and poetic abstraction. Central themes in Yuknavitch's work include personal and collective trauma, the body, and the fluidity of identity. Her 2011 memoir, *The Chronology of Water*, established her reputation as an author who, through evocative and visceral imagery, captures the complexities of personal suffering. Yuknavitch's fiction, which includes novels *Dora: A Headcase* (2012), *The Small Backs of Children* (2015), *The Book of Joan* (2019), the short story collection *Verge* (2020), and her latest novel *Thrust* (2023), can be characterized as autofiction within a poststructuralist context. This is evident in her use of fictional characters with autobiographical origins, the erosion of boundaries between fact and fiction, and "the collapse of the concept of a homogenous, autonomous subject identity"[10]. The engagement with autofiction is particularly evident in *The Small Backs of Children*, which Yuknavitch wrote concurrently with her *The Chronology of Water* memoir.[11] The novel's featured character – the writer, shares autobiographical data with both the memoir's narrator and Yuknavitch herself. For Yuknavitch, autofiction is not a tool to fabulize real life, but to re-create it artistically. In *The Small Backs of Children*, the autofictional[12] narratives, though grounded in visceral experiences of pain and ecstasy, engage with broader existential questions.

In addition to her literary career, Yuknavitch is also engaged in teaching creative writing through innovative and transgressive methods. After earning her doctorate in English literature from the University of Oregon, she spent years teaching in academia. In 2015, however, she left the traditional academic path to establish "Corporeal Writing Center" in Portland, Oregon. This center serves as a hub for writers and artists of all kinds, fostering a space for collaborative creative exploration and discovery – an embodiment of Yuknavitch's unique vision for the writing practice. Yuknavitch's influence in contemporary literature is as much about her bold thematic choices and her stylistic innovations as her work as a writing teacher who tirelessly inspires a new generation of storytellers.

1.2 *The Small Backs of Children*

The Small Backs of Children is a hybrid novel that weaves prose, poetry, scripts, letters, and literary fragments into a complex narrative, creating a matrix of embedded

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[10] Herman, et al., 89.

[11] Alden Jones, "The Rumpus Interview with Lidia Yuknavitch," *The Rumpus* (July 13, 2015), https://therumpus.net/2015/07/13/the-rumpus-interview-with-lidia-yuknavitch-2/, acc. on April 19, 2024.

[12] Alexandra Effe and Hannie Lawlor propose the use of the adjective *autofictional* to describe a mode or a strategy an artist can use to extend the use of autofiction to other forms of art as well as to artistic reception and the audience's engagement with art. See in Alexandra, Effe, and Lawlor Hannie, *The Autofictional: Approaches, Affordances, Forms* (London: Palgrave McMillan, 2022), 1–18.

juxtapositions. The story unfolds in four parts, each set against the backdrop of a war in an unnamed Eastern European country, focusing on personal struggles of its characters. These characters are introduced by their creative vocations – the writer, the photographer, the filmmaker, the painter, the performance artist, and the playwright – rather than by their names. The novel also features the girl and the widow. The photograph introduced in the opening can be argued to function as a character itself, as it both catalyzes the plot and deeply engages readers. The photographer captures an image of a girl (suspended in midair by the force of an explosion that killed her entire family) and sends it to the writer. The writer becomes so consumed by the image of the girl that she falls ill and ends up in a grief-induced coma, which results in her hospitalization. In the second part of the novel, the writer's coma inspires a rescue mission by other characters, who plan to extract the girl from the war-torn country and bring her to the United States to recover and study art. The third part follows the girl's journey as she navigates her new life in America, while the final section explores various possible endings that echo the story's central question: is there a distinction between artmaking and life?

2. The analysis of Yuknavitch's use of imagery to foster reader's engagement and collaboration

2.1 The interplay of juxtapositions

Lidia Yuknavitch opens the first chapter of her novel entitled "The Girl" with an italicized paragraph that directly addresses the reader: *You must picture your image of Eastern Europe. In your mind's eye. Whatever that image is. However it came to you. Winter. That white…*[13] The imperative "must," immediately draws the reader into the narrative, implying that their imagination will play a crucial role in the unfolding of the story. Instead of offering a detailed description, Yuknavich presents a blank canvas as an invitation for the reader to fill in the gaps with her/his own mental images. The reader's participation in setting the tone and context of the story echoes Rosenblatt's theory of literature as a transactional experience – "the reader seeks to participate in another's vision to gain insight that will make his own life more comprehensible"[14]. The directive to "picture your image of Eastern Europe" allows for a wide range of interpretations, shaped by personal memories, media-fueled perceptions, or the abstract meanings of the words "winter," and "white…" The open-ended nature of this initial instruction enables each reader to construct a unique vison, informed by their own experiences and cultural references.[15]

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[13] Yuknavitch, *The Small Backs of Children*, 3.

[14] Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, 7.

[15] Ibid, 30. Rosenblatt explains that the reader always "brings into the literary work their personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mode of the moment and physical condition."

After inviting the reader to participate in setting the tone and context of the story, Yuknavitch takes over the narrative, opening the first scene with the fairy-tale-like phrase "One winter night when she is no longer a child […]."[16] The reader's gaze is now drawn towards a girl in the first scene – "her shoes against snow, her arms cradling a self […]"[17] – and is again invited to visualize her, filling in the gaps in description. The subsequent sentence "It is a year after the blast that has atomized her entire family in front of her eyes",[18] frames a profound moment of trauma. However, the author's deliberate lexical choice emphasizing the word "atomized"[19] creates an emotional remove that may prevent the reader from engaging in a more detailed visualization.

In the analysis of Julio Cortázar's story "Blown-up", Esrock[20] suggests that author's textual cues can either invite or discourage the reader's inclination to visualize, strategically shaping visual imagery for semiotic purposes. Yuknavitch seems to employ this principle right from the first chapter juxtaposing vivid, bodily imagery that prompt instant visualization with textual cues that create a narrative distance. For example, in the scene where the girl in the snow observes the trapped wolf chew its own leg to escape death, Yuknavitch directs the readers visualization process with an exquisitely sensual description: when the wolf limps away, the girl urinates over his blood, against the whiteness of the snow. In contrast, Yuknavitch layers the narrative with sentences that can serve as points of discouragement from visualization – or perhaps as moments of brief rest. We see more examples of this in the harrowing third chapter, where the narrator catalogues the brutalities of war. The juxtaposition is clear: explicit descriptions of violence against young bodies ("A soldier's cock entering the thin white flesh of a girl, into a small read cave of her…"[21]) are set against detached statements like "Women and children were raped repeatedly"[22] and "Children were bought and sold on the open market"[23]. This stylistic contrast magnifies the images of violence, particularly when the text revisits the blast, now described as "an anonymous explosion"[24] – the word anonymous contradicts the devastating personal impact of the event.

It's within this chapter when the photographer captures the girl's image: "In that moment, the girl's mouth opened wide as if to scream, but no scream emerged […]."[25] This image adds layers to the earlier description, prompting a more emotional

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[16] Yuknavitch, *The Small Backs of Children*, 3

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] The same word, along with other words from the first chapter like winter, white, nothingness… will echo throughout the narrative, reinforcing thematic continuity.

[20] Esrock, "Visual Imaging and Reader Response," 31.

[21] Ibid., 13.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 14.

response from the reader. According to Yuknavitch's writing philosophy, emotional responses are rooted in the body, because, as she explains – "the human body is an epistemological site, a physical place where meanings are endlessly generated and negated"[26]. This concept helps us understand the play of juxtapositions in the novel – a continuous process of drawing the reader in, then pulling back, which is the key to Yuknavitch's process of creating meaning. Graphic images of a character's body experiencing either violence or pleasure prompt a physical response in the reader (the stomach contracts, the jaw clenches, the breath arrests). In contrast, flat, detached descriptions provide the reader's body with moments of rest. This interplay of vivid and subdued imagery can be interpreted as a breath cycle – an innate bodily function. The vivid imagery that triggers a visceral reaction prompts an inhale, while the flat imagery offers a brief repose before the next response, hence facilitates an exhale.

2.2 The Autofictional Strategy

The autofictional thread of the novel is revealed as early as the end of the first chapter, when the narrative is abruptly interrupted by an authorial voice asking, "What is a girl but this? This obscene and beautiful *making* against the expanse of white."[27] This rhetorical question signals that the girl's story is mediated through an external viewpoint.

In the following chapter, the narratorial voice is demystified with the introduction of the character of the writer. The writer's self-introduction echoes details from Yuknavitch's life, aligning closely with her memoir *The Chronology of the Water*[28]. Shared experiences such as childhood abuse, sexual trauma, depression, and complex relationships with both men and women converge identities of the writer and Yuknavitch. The narrative becomes more intimate with the mention of a stillborn daughter, marriage to a filmmaker and raising a son. The motif of a merger of identities is here further revealed: "Inside everything I have ever written, there is a girl. Sometimes she is dead and haunts a story like a ghost. Sometimes she is an orphan of war […] Maybe the girl is a metaphor, or maybe she is me…"[29]

In the closing of the second chapter, Yuknavitch directly addresses the reader: "This, reader, is a mother-daughter story."[30] The narrative address is often used as a strategy to get the reader more emotionally involved.[31]

To further involve the reader, the third chapter introduces foreign words, *Menuo* and *Saule*, meaning moon and sun, respectively. Curious readers will discover that these

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[26] Cornelia Channing, "The Body Is a Place: An Interview with Lidia Yuknavitch," *The Paris Review* (February 4, 2020), https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2020/02/04/the-body-is-a-place-an-interview-with-lidia-yuknavitch/, acc. on April 25, 2024.

[27] Ibid., 6.

[28] Lidia Yuknavitch, *Chronology of the Water: A Memoir* (Portland, OR: Hawthorn Books, 2011).

[29] Yuknavitch, *The Small Backs of Children*, 8.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Herman, Jahn, and Ryan, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, 49.

words are Lithuanian, and were dropped as clues, hinting at Yuknavitch's own heritage. The linguistic clue anchors the initially abstract image of Eastern Europe to a specific personal reality, fostering a deeper (emotional) connection to the setting.

Chapter four juxtaposes the collective trauma of war with the personal agony of a mother facing stillbirth. The chapter opens with another direct address: "My daughter. Say it – hold it in your mouth, look at the words: *born dead*"[32]. This line, consistent with the narrative style, invites the reader to share the weight of the words, encouraging a collaborative storytelling approach. As Esrock suggests, "the text now foregrounds a merger"[33], potentially creating identification between the reader and the narrator. The paradoxical motif of *born dead* encapsulates the novel's tension between creation and destruction. The writer's reflection on her imagined lifeless child – "I expected her to be blue, and cold. I expected her to feel dead weighted"[34] – is contrasted with an image infused with life: "Her skin was flushed… her lips were in the hue and shape of a rosebud."[35] In this chapter, Yuknavitch's personal experience of a child loss is retold differently compared to the account from *The Chronology of Water*.[36] In this version, the writer takes agency by steeling the baby's body for a private burial, reclaiming control over her narrative, and engaging in a sacred communion with her loss on her own terms.

By using autofiction, Yuknavitch openly offers her life experience to readers, encouraging a transactional experience that engages reader's participation. As David Bleich[37] notes, people think about themselves most of the time and they think about the world in terms of themselves. We find a similar idea in Rosenblatt's definition of literature as "an objective presentation of our own problems"[38]. The strategies the writer employs evoke responses in the reader's mind. Rosenblatt[39] refers to this as an act of communication between the writer and the reader. While it may appear that the writer's strategy shapes the reader's response, Rosenblatt reminds us that this response is never a passive outcome but a result of active reader participation in the transaction.[40]

2.3 (Re)membering and (re)imagining

In the second part of the novel, the narrative shifts focus to the interconnected lives of the characters who gather around the hospitalized writer. Bound by concern and affection, these characters attempt to untangle the events that led to the

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[32] Yuknavitch, *The Small Backs of Children*, 19.

[33] Esrock, "Visual Imaging and Reader Response," 34.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid, 20.

[36] In *The Chronology of Water*, the burial of the newborn is featured in chapter titled "Ash". Yuknavitch, *The Chronology of Water*, 91–93.

[37] David Bleich, *Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism* (Indiana University: NSTE, 1975).

[38] Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, 41.

[39] Ibid., 34.

[40] Ibid.

writer's collapse, searching for a way to bring her back from a coma. Inside the writer's home, the poet is the first to see the framed image that pushed the writer into despair. Through the poet's eyes, the photograph is now reintroduced: "the orphaned girl, illuminated by the blast, seems to surge forward, emerging from the flames, a girl poised to transcend the confines of the image and time, to step into our very world."[41] This altered description of the catalyst image brings us back to Pound's definition of the image as "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time". However, at this different moment, the emotional and intellectual impact has evolved. The ongoing process of visualization generates new images and meanings, emphasizing Yuknavitch's focus on the importance of the continuous creation of meanings by both the writer and the reader.

As the third section unfolds, the girl is granted her own voice: "My name is Menas. This is my story. There was a bomb"[42]. The reader already knows the bomb she refers to. This statement is followed by a metaphor of resilience: "I am like a blast particle – a piece of matter that was not destroyed, a piece of something looking for form."[43] With the shift from third to first-person perspective, the narrative structure becomes more fluid, with prose stretching across the pages, and increased white space reflecting the unfolding of Menas's personal journey.

The sudden appearance of the white space in Menas's story circles back to the beginning and perhaps explains the recurring metaphor of snow, white, whiteness as a blank canvas of possibilities – a landscape where the reader can participate and draw their own story.

The final section reveals another author's invitation for readers – to envision how the story might end. Multiple endings are proposed, each underscored by the importance of artmaking – a recurring motif that serves as a source of both personal and collective narrative. As Yuknavitch explained in the interview with the Rumpus, "there is no such thing as an ending"[44].

At the conclusion of any work of art, just like at the conclusion of any experience, what we arrive at is a site of interpretation. Every reader commits a creative act at that site. Every reader creates a version of their own artwork within their act of reading. No author can ever succeed at holding a singular ending in place, stable, unwavering.[45]

This final act not only allows the characters' stories to converge but also offers a meditation on the very nature of the narrative creation – "I think art is the place where all our stories collect"[46], Yuknavitch writes.

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[41] Yuknavitch, *The Small Backs of Children*, 96.

[42] Ibid., 132.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Jones, "The Rumpus Interview with Lidia Yuknavitch."

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., 198.

3. Closing thoughts

As we have seen, Yuknavitch's novel *The Small Backs of Children* employs strategic cues that actively engage the reader in the narrative. From the opening directive to visualize Eastern Europe to the playful invitation to collaborate in imagining the story's ending, Yuknavitch uses a variety of prompts to solicit the reader's participation. These cues – ranging from invitations to create mental images to commands that align reader perspectives with character experiences – blur traditional narrative boundaries and foster a dynamic literary experience. This approach not only encourages readers to immerse themselves deeply in the narrative but also positions them as co-creators in the unfolding story. By doing so, Yuknavitch transcends conventional storytelling, transforming the act of reading into an interactive, collaborative process that invites readers to actively participate in creating the narrative landscape.

At its core, *The Small Backs of Children* is a meditation on the act of creation itself. As Yuknavitch describes, her characters are limited "to their bodies and their labor (the labor of making art, the labor of making love, the labor of being and thinking)."[47] Central to this narrative and to Yuknavitch's philosophy, when it comes to writing and teaching creative writing, is the celebration of community, the dialogue between artists, and the enduring connection with the audience. Every narrative technique that Yuknavitch skillfully weaves into the fabric of this story serves to draw the reader into a dynamic engagement, not just with the text, but with the very essence of her artistic philosophy. The reader becomes a co-creator, an integral part of a continuous act of art-making that Yuknavitch so vividly portrays.

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[47] David Naiman, "The Small Backs of Children by Lidia Yuknavitch," *Between Covers Podcast*, https://therumpus.net/2015/07/13/the-rumpus-interview-with-lidia-yuknavitch-2/, acc. on April 23, 2024.

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Political Power and Its Representation

Abstract: Understanding the concept of representation as a key factor involved in the process of meaning production in a society, can help us answer the following questions: what does the concept of representation mean in the context of constituting and producing political power, what does the process of representation entail, and how does it function? Our focus will be on the idea that political power is produced through regimes of verbal and visual representation that actively shape our perception of reality, including existing social norms and values. Representation is not only the result of certain social tendencies and changes, but also their instigator. The status of a ruler is determined not only based on their historical or social relevance, but also on how they are represented. In shaping the perception of a ruler as a legitimate holder of power, representation often plays a more dominant role than the subject itself. We will treat the concepts of power and representation as interdependent and interconnected variables. We will pay attention to how their reciprocal subordination produces two effects: the institution of power appropriates representation as something inherently its own, and representation is actually what transfers its power onto it.

Keywords: representation; language; power; ruler; portrait.

The construction of meaning in language and understanding between members of a social community is possible because language functions as a *representational system*. In language, we use signs such as words or images, which represent or convey our desires, needs, feelings, or thoughts to other people. This enables us to establish a relationship with the 'real' or 'imaginary' world of objects, people, and events: "Meaning depends on the relationship between things in the world – people, objects and events, real or fictional – and the conceptual system, which can operate as *their mental representations*."[1] In this way, we have a 'system' which connects all elements to concepts or mental representations in our minds. Without them, it would not be possible to interpret the world in a meaningful way. It involves different ways of organizing, combining, arranging, and classifying concepts, as well as establishing relations between them. However, to exchange meanings, we must have access to language, which is a system of representations that participates in the process of

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[1] Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practises* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2013), 4.

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meaning production. Our conceptual map must be translated into language so that we can correlate concepts with spoken, written, or visual content and express meanings in communication with other people. Every sound, word, image, or object that functions as a sign, organized with other signs in a system that conveys and expresses meanings, is used as 'language'. According to Stuart Hall, there are two systems of representation in the process of meaning production. The first enables us to give meaning to the world by constructing a chain of equivalences between things (people, objects, events, etc.) and our conceptual system, our conceptual maps. The second is based on a set of correspondences between our conceptual maps and a set of signs, arranged and organized into different languages that represent these concepts. The established relationship between 'things', concepts, and signs is a prerequisite for the production of meaning in language. The process that links these three elements is called 'representation': "Why do we refer to all these different ways of producing and communicating meaning as 'languages' or as 'working like languages'? How do languages work? The simple answer is that languages work *through representation*. They are 'systems of representation.'"[2] Representation is the production of meaning that occurs through language.

Theories of representation

Theories of representation can be classified into three basic categories: reflective, intentional, and constructionist. Each of them attempts to find an answer to the question: Where do meanings come from? The *reflective theory* believes that language simply reflects meanings that already exist in the world around us. Since Plato's time, the Greeks have used the concept of *mimesis* to explain how language, as well as art, reflects and imitates things and phenomena found in nature. The term mimesis is derived from the Greek noun *μίμησις*, which denotes *imitation* and is used to express the relation between a real object and its representation. The theory that language functions by reflecting or imitating a truth that already exists as fixed in the world is called 'mimetic'. Although it seems obvious according to this theory that, for example, visual representation bears some resemblance to the form of the object it represents, we will show that the connection between representation and the object it refers to is conventionally established. For example, if an artistic painting represents a king, we will never say that the king also represents that artistic painting, although we imply that there is an obvious similarity between them. The act of representation is not explained by the concept of similarity because similarity is a social construct and falls under processes of meaning production. For something to be a representation, it must stand for something else, and this is determined by social convention. According to the *intentional theory*, language expresses only what someone wants to say. Although people use language to try to convey their personal view of the world to others, one must bear in mind that language represents communication that cannot take place

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[2] Ibid., XX.

without linguistic conventions and codes accepted by all members of a social community. The *constructionist theory* emphasizes that meaning is constructed 'in' language and 'through' language. Things 'in themselves' do not have one fixed and unchanging meaning, but they acquire it based on how we represent them – what words we use for them, what images we create about them, what emotions we attach to them, how we classify them, how we conceptualize them, and how we value them. In other words, things acquire meaning based on how we use them in our everyday practices. Constructionists do not deny the existence of the material world, but they believe that the material world is not the bearer of meaning; rather, it is the linguistic system we use to represent our concepts: "Reality exists outside language, but it is constantly mediated by and through language: and what we can know and say has to be produced in and through discourse."[3] In this work, we will rely on the *constructivist* approach because this perspective helps us most to understand the relationship between representation and practices of meaning production. Saussure's linguistic theory has made a significant contribution to the development of the theory of representation. The implication of his thesis on the arbitrariness of the relationship between the signifier and the signified is that it results from systems of conventions that are specific to a society and culture at a particular historical moment, making the process of meaning production socially, culturally, and historically conditioned.[4]

Representation of political power

The relationship between political power and its representation will be explored through the historical example of the French king Louis XIV. In the 17th century in France, there was an intertwining of secular politics and religious discourse, resulting in the creation of a modern centralized state in which the portrait of the king in all its manifestations played crucial role in maintaining absolutism as the unlimited power of the monarch. Analyzing the role of the representation of political power in the constitution of the ruler's authority reveals the basic pattern by which every absolutist rule is structured. For the representation of the ruler to fulfill its function, it needs to be 'realistic' and as such entirely convincing. The convention of realism has been inherited from ancient art in which 'similarity' and 'recognizability' were culturally valued to ensure the 'presence' of a person who is currently or permanently absent: "When we use the word 'portrait' in modern language(s), there is a strong tendency to assume naturalism in the resulting representation – affected by photograph, by realism in painting, and by a long history of the genre in the West."[5] For Norman Bryson,

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[3] Stuart Hall, "Encoding/decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language*, ed. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis (London: Routledge, 2005), 121.

[4] "The bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. Since I mean by sign the whole that results from the associating of the signifier with the signified, I can simply say: *the linguistic sign is arbitrary*." Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York City: Columbia University Press, 2011), 67.

[5] Irene Winter, "What/When Is a Portrait? Royal Images of the Ancient Near East," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 153, 3 (September 2009): 254.

what we call 'reality' has no objective existence independent of different worldviews, which very actively participate in constructing our assumed experience: "It is clear that the term 'realism' cannot draw its validity from any absolute conception of 'the real', because that conception cannot account for the historical and changing character of 'the real' within differing cultures and periods."[6] Therefore, it is more accurate to say that 'reality' is the effect of recognition of representation that corresponds to what a society considers to be 'Reality'. The production of 'reality' involves a complex system of representations and social codes that regulate a person's relationship with their historical environment. For this reason, when we speak of a ruler's portrait, one should bear in mind that it is both in production, in the way it is produced, and in reception, in continuous interaction with existing social practices surrounding it. The realism of the portrait is based on the idea of convincingness that every society chooses as a means to express the existence of a subject in visual form. The historical and social determinism of the idea of convincingness must be concealed for the visual representation to be accepted as a reflection of a pre-existing reality:

> Certain codes may, of course, be so widely distributed in a specific language community or culture, and be learned at so early an age, that they appear not to be constructed – the effect of an articulation between sign and referent – but to be 'naturally' given. Simple visual signs appear to have achieved a 'nearuniversality' in this sense: though evidence remains that even apparently 'natural' visual codes are culture specific. However, this does not mean that no codes have intervened; rather, it means that these codes have been profoundly *naturalized*.[7]

In that sense, representation as a process of meaning production connects three orders of things: the world of reality – people, objects, or events from the external world; the world of concepts – ideas we have in our minds; and signs that constitute language through which we convey ideas in the process of communication.

The verb 'to represent' means to present something again (in the mode of time) or instead of something (in the mode of space). The prefix '*re-*' introduces the concept of substitution into our understanding. Louis Marin believes that the representation inherent in an artistic work is based on the systematic substitution of external referents by signs that represent them:

> An idea represents a thing (it is the thing in the mind), but that representation can only be achieved in relay fashion, by way of another thing that represents the first thing in turn of the second. Thus, if ideas are things in the mind, signs are ideas for the mind, ideas as thinkable and thought, that is, communicable and communicated. Representative repetition

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[6] Norman Bryson, *Word and Image – French painting of the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 8.

[7] Hall, "Encoding/decoding," 121.

is one side of an operation of which substitution is the other. There is repetition only in the case of substitution, and there is substitution only through repetition.[8]

In other words, something that was present, but is no longer, is now represented. Instead of something that is present elsewhere, representation is what is present here and now. In the place of representation stands the object or person that functions as a kind of double of the one who is absent in a particular time and space. To represent also means: to expose to view, to show, to intensify, to duplicate someone's presence. Thus, the prefix '*re-*' signifies not only substitution but also intensity and frequency. Representation intensifies identity through multiplication. In the process of considering our topic, it is important to emphasize that the basic function of representation is to make something present, but not in a way that is a simple imitation of presence, but rather through the repetition of the imagined present, producing the effect of presence itself: "The first characteristic of ideological authoritarian discourse is that it is definitive and all-encompassing and, in that way, reveals its autoreferentiality. It becomes the place where established principles are repeated and glorified."[9] The second effect of representation is that it forms a legitimate and authoritative subject of power in the form of institutional power:

> At the same time representation constitutes its subject. Such would be the second effect of representation in general, to constitute a subject through reflection of the representational framework: it is as if a subject were producing the representations, the ideas he has of things; it is as if there were neither world nor reality except for and through a subject, the center of that world.[10]

We can confidently assert that representation within discourse creates power because it is productive in itself.[11] Discourses are ways of constructing knowledge about a particular topic or practice, shaping social and institutional life in society. Discursive formations define acceptable and unacceptable elements in our social practices. 'Discursive' has become a general term used wherever meaning, representation, and culture are considered constitutive. While semiotics deals with how meanings are produced in language, the discursive approach focuses more on the effects and consequences of representation – its 'politics'. The aim of discourse analysis is not only how

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[8] Louis Marin, *On Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 23.

[9] Alain Goldschläger, "Towards a Semiotics of Authoritarian Discourse," *Poetics Today* 3, 1 (1982): 13.

[10] Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 5–6.

[11] "What makes power effective, what makes one obey it, is not simply that it is felt as a power that says no, but that in fact it produces things, it produces pleasure, it creates knowledge, produces discourse; it has to be seen as a productive network which runs through the social body, and is far more than just a negative instance whose function is to punish.", Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power: an interview with Michel Foucault," *Critique of Anthropology* 4 (13–14) (1979): 137.

language and representation produce meanings but also how knowledge is connected to power, how identities and subjectivities are constructed, and how certain things are represented, thought about, practiced, and studied. In the discursive approach, the emphasis is always on the historical specificity of representation; not on language as a general phenomenon, but on how the current practice of representation operates in a specific historical situation.

During the reign of Louis XIV, the legal and political model of power representation was borrowed from the discourse of Catholic theology, *Corpus mysticum*. We can observe numerous parallels between state rituals and the liturgical practice of the Church. From this perspective, it is possible to explore various domains of verbal and visual language[12] – historical narratives, exegeses and liturgical texts, or images – portraits and coins, as an expansion of the liturgical statement 'This is my body', which transforms the modalities of representation into signs of the state political sacrament and the ruler's 'real' presence. The Eucharistic formula of the Catholic Church applied to the ruler articulates two important statements in 17th century France: first, when Louis XIV uttered the words '*L'état, c'est moi*' ('The state, that is me') in Parliament in 1655; and second, recorded by the logicians of Port-Royal, *Le portrait de Cesar, c'est Cesar* [A portrait of Caesar is Caesar].[13] With the statement "The state, that is me", the ruler is represented as power in his singularity, and absolutism as power in its universality. When the ruler says, "The state, that is me", paradoxically, his body, which is present here and speaking now, is also a body present everywhere and always. The body that is present locally and translocally is precisely what the sacramental host realizes in the universal Catholic Church community. The Eucharistic model could function as a legal and political model because Jesus Christ's words 'This is my body' spoken in the liturgical formula produce a sacramental body visible as real presence on the altar, as a body present in reality in a symbolic manner in the form of bread and wine. It should be noted that the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ is the starting point of the commemoration of Jesus Christ's historical sacrifice as a constantly repeated narrative that constitutes the holy ritual. Therefore, the absent historical body of Jesus Christ is produced on the altar as representation. Also, this Eucharistic transformation serves to unite the faithful by constructing the ecclesial body as a symbolic community. The transfer of the structure of the liturgical act to the legal and political domain allowed the king's portrait to constitute a sacramental body, which, like the host in the church, is omnipresent in the kingdom and among the subjects. The primary aspect of all absolute powers is that they are dispersed and dissolved in an imaginary position, in an imaginary body,

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[12] "To make their pretences abundantly clear, as monarchs "by Divine Right" – the one through divinely-sanctioned birth, the other through divinely-inspired election – the men who ruled in Versailles and Rome fully exploited all aspects of visual propaganda. In doing so, they also elevated the political rhetoric of capitals to a new height.", Peter Rietbergen, "The Political Rhetoric of Capitals: Rome and Versailles in the Baroque Period, or the Power of Place", in *New Perspectives on Power and Political Representation from Ancient History to the Present Day*, ed. Harm Kaal and Danielle Slootjes (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2019), 74.

[13] Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, *Logic or the Art of Thinking* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 120.

which is sustained through preferred systems of representation.

The history of rulers, the story of their lives and achievements, is legitimized in narrative and operates in a similar manner to how absolute power controls its subjects. In other words, the history of rulers should not appear to recipients as a written transcript of their regular activities; instead, it should be re/presented as a direct and unmediated expression of the ruler's power. This means that the history of rulers should subject recipients to the same laws that an absolutist monarch enforces on his subjects:

> All forms of power create a pyramid structure to rule the social group. Every hierarchy implies a reduced summit of authority and a large obeying force at the base. Similarly, authoritarian discourse entails a pyramid structure of comprehension of its meaning. The true and complete meaning is available only to the very top; the bottom will receive only a pale reflection of the meaning and, thus, the masses have to be satisfied with what limited sign they receive.[14]

Historical narratives are thus no longer stories of historical facts but simulated productions of the effects of these histories. That's why words are not used alone and isolated. Despite the significant quantity and importance of verbal content, visual content is also necessary, i.e., images which appear in combination with written texts. The ruler's body is simultaneously visible in three ways: as a sacramental body, it is truly present in written and visual artifacts; as a historical body, it is visible as represented, absence becomes a renewed presence in the 'image'; as a political body, it is visible as a symbolic fiction marked in his name, law, and rule.[15] This way, the portrait of the ruler appears in all three dimensions: as presence, as imaginary representation, and as a symbolic name. Physical resemblance is not a necessary condition for a portrait; recognition based on socially accepted criteria of identification is sufficient. The likeness of the king 'in his royal dignity' belongs more to the semiotic than mimetic mode of representation. We can define a portrait of a ruler as a visual representation executed on a specific artifact. However, two aspects of representation should be distinguished: the object consisting of various materials and the visual text as a process of meaning production. In the image of the king, we see and recognize a subject represented not because some aspect of the likeness resembles him, but because the likeness belongs to a kind of representation that we are accustomed to 'read' in a certain way. The relationship between the likeness and the king is not direct and natural but arbitrary. Their similarity is not based on the coincidence of their visual properties but on the

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[14] Goldschläger, "Towards a Semiotics of Authoritarian Discourse," 13.

[15] That function was also held by the architecture of the Palace of Versailles as a representation of the king when he is absent: "Indeed, he also wanted to show himself and his power to all those who never would actually meet him in person, though they might visit Versailles, since the palace was in many ways an open place where tourists – 'avant la lettre' – were welcome, if properly accoutred. Moreover, he wanted to impress the world at large. Therefore, printed descriptions of the palace and its decorations were widely distributed […]." Rietbergen, "The Political Rhetoric of Capitals," 68.

visual practice characteristic of the existing society, in which observers are accustomed to certain forms of representation. Images should not be seen as isolated aesthetic objects because their production and interpretation depend on existing social practices. The following is how Bryson explains this thesis:

> My ability to recognize an image neither involves, *nor makes necessary inference towards*, the isolated perceptual field of the image's creator. It is, rather, an ability which presupposes competence within social, that is, socially constructed, codes of recognition. And the crucial difference between the term 'perception' and the term 'recognition' is that the latter is *social*.[16]

The fact that visual representations belong to social, rather than natural phenomena, means that they are not just reflections of given social circumstances but also produce effects that can maintain or change the existing social order. The portrayal of rulers as a practice can be examined from two basic theoretical positions: essentialist and relativist. The essentialist position is based on the belief that there is a certain degree of visual similarity between the image and the object it represents. In contrast, relativist theories argue that the idea of visual similarity is not sufficient to determine whether an image represents something; rather, a range of social and cultural factors that participate in the process of representation must be taken into account. Critiques of essentialist theory come from linguistics, where the concept of representation is defined as the production of meaning through language. In representation, we use signs organized into languages of various kinds (verbal or visual)[17] to communicate meaningfully with others. Languages can use signs that refer to objects, people, and events in the so-called 'real' world. However, they can also refer to imaginary things and worlds of fantasy or abstract ideas that are not part of the visible material world. There is no direct relationship, reflection, imitation, or unambiguous correspondence between language and the real world. The world is not accurately reflected in the mirror of language because language does not function as a mirror. The production of meaning depends on two different but connected systems of representation. In the first, concepts are formed as systems of mental representations that classify the world into meaningful categories. If we have a concept of something, we can say that we know its 'meaning'. However, we cannot convey this meaning in communication without another system of representation, which is language consisting of signs organized in different relationships. Signs can convey meaning only if we know the codes that enable us to translate our concepts into language. These codes are of crucial importance for the processes of meaning production and representation. They do not exist in nature but are the result of social conventions and form the basis of our culture – our

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[16] Norman Bryson, "Semiology and Visual Interpretation," in *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation*, ed. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 65.

[17] For more about the relationship between visual and verbal representation see: Arthur Danto, "Depiction and Description," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 43, 1 (September 1982): 1–19.

'maps of meaning' – which we learn and unconsciously adopt as we become part of the culture we belong to.[18]

When discussing the portrayal of rulers, one should not overlook the direct or indirect presence of various forms of verbal language. On the one hand, visual experience is a fundamental way of communicating with the world,[19] while on the other, verbal language shapes our perception of reality.[20] The practice of reading a visual text is determined by numerous intertextual relations between different textual modalities. Moreover, written text is simultaneously visual as it involves practices of looking and reading. Written texts are visually present; they are also 'images'. Verbal text is not isolated from visual phenomena because the process of reading it involves visualizing its 'content', which must not be ignored. Imagination, memories, dreams, fantasies, as well as literary images, belong to the domain of the visual. Without them, it would not be possible to create verbal texts, nor would it be possible to actualize them. Any attempt to draw a clear line between the verbal and visual domains would not be satisfactory because, on the one hand, we describe an image using verbal language, and on the other, words evoke mental images within us.[21] The portrait of a ruler as his sacramental body allows for the exchange between name and visual representation, word and image, narrative and law. The sacramental body of the ruler, the portrait of the king as an absolutist monarch, signifies the transition between names, where the body becomes a signifier, and narrative, through which the law turns into

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[18] "For an image, it can always be shown that it is a form of conventional order. This pictorial order expresses the viewpoint of the artist or their culture. Correspondences between the image and its references (objects depicted) are not simply given as a mirror reflection but are the result of public and implicit rules of symbolic arrangement of pictorial material. The radicalization of such a position leads to the view that an artwork never depicts an object, being, situation, or event in a literal manner but rather depicts how they are seen, experienced, understood, interpreted, and valued in the culture in which the work originated." Miško Šuvaković, *Pojmovnik moderne i postmoderne likovne umetnosti i teorije posle 1950. godine* (Beograd, Novi Sad: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, Prometej, 1999), 271.

[19] "Seeing comes before words. A child looks and recognizes before it can speak." John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 2008), 5. It's important to keep in mind that every written text is also visual. The history of literacy reminds us that initially we had simple pictorial language signs, which evolved over time into hieroglyphs and alphabets. Writing is a practice that has been based on its very beginning on the interplay between the visual and the verbal.

[20] "Language is *experienced* as a nomenclature because its existence precedes our 'understanding' of the world. Words seem to be symbols for things because things are inconceivable outside the system of differences which constitutes the language." Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London, New York: Routledge, 2005), 39.

[21] We already have this observation in Plato: "Σωκράτης: ἀποδέχου δὴ καὶ ἕτερον δημιουργὸν ἡμῶν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἐν τῷ τότε χρόνῳ γιγνόμενον. Πρώταρχος: τίνα; Σωκράτης: ζωγράφον, ὃς μετὰ τὸν γραμματιστὴν τῶν λεγομένων εἰκόνας ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ τούτων γράφει. Πρώταρχος: πῶς δὴ τοῦτον αὖ καὶ πότε λέγομεν; Σωκράτης: ὅταν ἀπ' ὄψεως ἤ τινος ἄλλης αἰσθήσεως τὰ τότε δοξαζόμενα καὶ λεγόμενα ἀπαγαγών τις τὰς τῶν δοξασθέντων καὶ λεχθέντων εἰκόνας ἐν αὑτῷ ὁρᾷ πως. ἢ τοῦτο οὐκ ἔστι γιγνόμενον παρ' ἡμῖν; Πρώταρχος; σφόδρα μὲν οὖν." (Socrates: I must bespeak your favour also for another artist, who is busy at the same time in the chambers of the soul. Protarchus: Who is he? Socrates: The painter, who, after the scribe has done his work, draws images in the soul of the things which he has described. Protarchus: But when and how does he do this? Socrates: When a man, besides receiving from sight or some other sense certain opinions or statements, sees in his mind the images of the subjects of them; is not this a very common mental phenomenon? Protarchus: Certainly) Plato, *The Statesman, Philebus, Ion*, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 300/39 b–c.

the body. In the representation of the ruler, three of his bodies are united: the physical-historical body, the juridical-political body, and the semiotic-sacramental body, which entirely enables the exchange between the historical and political body. It is evident that in creating a valid and legitimate history of the ruler, the narrator must present convincing facts to the subjects. For example, we can take the royal coin. What the subject perceives is not its written history but the inscribed power. The inscription on the coin is the representation of the absent monarch's symbolic presence. This way, instead of the king's imaginary absence in history, the subject perceives and sees his symbolic presence. The coin realizes its essential value not as a means of payment but in an aesthetic relationship established between the king and his subjects. The figure on the coin is transformed into text through the absorption of discourse.[22] Descriptive-narrative discourse enters the figure thanks to visual signs placed on the surface of the coin. The discourse that allows us to see the figure as a ruler, transposes it into a text that seems as if it is 'written' on the surface of the coin. On one hand, by reading, the figure is constituted as a meaningful object, and on the other, all these readings surpass the boundaries of the figure and point to other visual and verbal texts, as well as to the culture itself in which the figure is just one of the existing meaning systems. In her exploration study of the Assyrian kings' representations, Irene Winter emphasizes the importance of the text accompanying the image:

> In the representation, in addition to those signature elements marking the physiognomy, there would also have been signs external to the person: headgear, clothing, accoutrements. These markers would, to the ancients, have been so inseparable from identity that recognition of the office, if not the office holder, was immediate. And at that point, it is the textual inscription *on* the image that particularizes the holder of the office into a historical personage.[23]

From this perspective, it should be emphasized that the concept of 'portrait', belonging to the visual genre, is extremely polysemic. Everything that was characteristic of the ways of representing rulers of ancient times can be applied to rulers in other historical periods. For example, the portrait of Louis XIV has a triple structure: first, it depicts a specific historical person; second, it institutionalizes royal ruling power; and third, it reveals the sacred dimension of authority determined by ecclesiastical authority and divine blessing. In this way, the authority and personality of the ruler are realized in his image, in his representation.

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[22] More about the process itself: Louis Marin, *Sublime Poussin* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 45.

[23] Winter, "What/When Is a Portrait? Royal Images of the Ancient Near East," 266.

Conclusion

The distinction between a ruler who multiplies his manifestations and those who are involved in them, establishes a difference that separates the ruler from the subjects. As long as subjects show respect to the ruler by participating in existing social rituals, the continuity of social differences is sustainable. Power in society lies with those who know how to control ideology, where ideology encompasses not only the history and evolution of human ideas but also the state of idealism into which subjects introduce themselves through their everyday social practices. Therefore, power is much more based on controlling ideas than on obvious systems of physical repression such as police or military. In this sense, representation serves as an important and unavoidable means of establishing and maintaining political power. When the influence of ideology is recognized in iconology as an unquestionable set of values of a particular social community or historical epoch, the role of representation in constituting, maintaining, and spreading political power become clearer, as well as in retaining existing social relations and established identities. In the quest to answer the question, "How is political power represented?", we can say that power institutions produce their representations, and in return, representations transfer all their power to them. The process is reversible and serves the constitution of a legitimate subject, as the ruler contemplates representation until their own recognition and identification. Representation is a privileged instrument through which the power of a ruler is not only *de facto* but also *de jure* institutionalized and verified as a legitimate state. Various forms of representation are part of the ruling discourse and help the ruler discipline people without resorting to repression. This process, in which representations are actively involved, enables ruling structures to influence the attitudes and behaviors of their subjects, producing them as subjects susceptible to their authority and control. Therefore, the ruler's power is not a transcendent and immutable given, but a product of human activity that occurs within specific social circumstances shaped by discursive practices of meaning production through which representation creates the *effect* of the real presence of the subject, regardless of its objective existence as such.

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The Memory Police: Rehashing the Image of Totalitarianism or Intentionally Anachronistic Writing?

Abstract: Literary images, followed by their visual interpretation in diverse film adaptations have effective impact of reinforcing the "knowledge" about certain political ideologies. The cultural representation of fascism and totalitarianism seems to be reductively limited to its repetitive features of definite suppression of freedom and brutal control. Yoko Ogawa's dystopian novel *The Memory Police* (1994) depicts the state of affairs of a novelist on an unnamed island where inhabitants are subjugated to oppressive regime of the Memory Police enabling the total amnesia of all the objects disappearing from everyday life. My intention is to explore whether Ogawa's literary images challenge or underpin the previously established imagery of existing power structures. Further, I will discuss the notion of anachronism both as motif and (intended) literary approach. This novel is also analyzed through its allegory about the future perspective of the written word in the indifferent and oblivious world.

Keywords: *The Memory Police*; totalitarianism; Yoko Ogawa; dystopic fiction; anachronism.

> "I mean, things are disappearing more quickly than they
> are being created, right?"
> Yoko Ogawa, *The Memory Police*

Introduction

A leading Japanese critic of fascism during the third and fourth decade of the 20th century, Tsugimaro Imanaka suggests that "just as romanticism was the illusion of the nineteenth century, fascism is the illusion of our time"[1]. This comparison reveals Imanaka's standpoint on both movements as illusive and idealistic – romanticism envisioning the world led by people's emotion while its escapist realm ignores the industrial effect and changes of everyday life, and fascism enforcing the idea of national rebirth and (social) unity along with a suppression of individual freedoms and

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[1] Tsugimaro Imanaka, "Fuashizumu undō ron," in *Imanaka Tsugimaro seijigaku ronshū*, eds. Tanaka Hiroshi et al., (Tokyo: Ochanomizu Shobō, 1981), 78–79.

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production of fear. As responses to the crisis of their times, romanticism highly valued the nature, past and sublime in contrast to rapid urbanization and mechanization that generates dehumanization, and fascism provided an illusion of national purity and strength, supported by militarism and violence as solutions to social and economic problems. In parallel, these visions of reality, distinguishable in their respective periods, highlight that phantasms are indivisible of human understanding of the world.

On the other hand, literary depictions and their subsequent visual interpretations in various film adaptations play a powerful role in solidifying perceptions of specific political ideologies. However, the cultural portrayal of fascism and totalitarianism often appears overly simplistic, focusing primarily on transparent iconography of uniformed militants brutally enforcing repressive control. Yoko Ogawa's dystopian novel *The Memory Police* (1994) depicts the state of affairs of a novelist on an unnamed island where inhabitants are subjugated to oppressive regime of the Memory Police, enabling the total amnesia of all the objects disappearing from everyday life. This novel has been widely read for its exploration of themes such as memory, identity, survival, resistance and trauma. In Ogawa's narrative, Kumar and Singh note that silenced opponents of the authoritarian regime utilize memory as a weapon, while Foong and Chandran identify it as compliant, threatening and effective mechanism of resistance against the trauma imposed by repressive power structures. [2] Losing a memory is a traumatic experience that Prasol further relates to the loss of identity, which is also dissected by Tache in terms of preserving the integrity of the human in this peculiar space of disappearing objects.[3] In such thematic explorations of *The Memory Police,* scholars tend to favor the comparative analysis, drawing connections to the works of Ray Bradbury, Franz Kafka, George Orwell, Olga Tokarczuk and others.

Do these comparisons reveal certain imaginative restrictions, or more precisely, specific reiterations when dealing with dystopian reflections of totalitarianism? Does the writer consciously construct the realm which echoes the literary images of that many influential authors, or the very notion of oppression essentially defies heterogeneousness? In *American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army* (2016), Frederic Jameson recognizes the "overwhelming increase in all manner of conceivable dystopias, most of which look monotonously alike"[4]. This unvarying aspect of dystopian imaginary is read by Patricia McManus in relation to Jameson's own further impression that the lack of production of new utopias in recent decades is evident, suggesting that classic dystopias were also inspired by proliferation of utopias, and not solely by political conditions determined by mass movements of socialism and

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[2] Sunil Kumar and Ravinder Singh, "Suppression of Memory as Totalitarian Strategy: A Critique of Yoko Ogawa's The Memory Police," *Literary Voice* 2, 1 (January 2024): 111–19; Soon Seng Foong and Gheeta Chandran, "(Re)Imagining 'Dystopian Space': Memory and Trauma in Yoko Ogawa's The Memory Police," *Southeast Asian Review of English* 57, 1 (July 2020): 100–22.

[3] Eugenia Prasol, "Trauma Through Dystopian Distortions of Memory: Ogawa Yoko's *The Memory Police*," *Journal of East-West Thought* 14, 2 (2024): 47–60; Lavinia Tache, "Objects Reconfiguring the *Present* and the *Presence*. Routes of Displacement for Humans: Yoko Ogawa, Han Kang, Olga Tokarczuk," *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* 7, 1 (2021): 246–60.

[4] Frederic Jameson, *American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army* (London & New York: Verso, 2016), 1.

fascism.[5] Reflecting on present-day plethora of dystopias, McManus opposes Mark Bould's reasoning which equals monotony with "the totalization of the present" and interprets the world we exist in as "the worst of all possible", thus "there is no critique left that dystopias can effect".[6] The crucial aspect of reading today's dystopias embarks with McManus's question – "is the popularity of dystopian fiction part of a free-floating world of cultural production, geared towards commercial legibility, either indifferent to politics or committed to the reactionary fantasy that 'things could always be worse'"[7]? Is totalitarianism of dystopian or anti-utopian setting in contemporary fiction an empty signifier? Does contemporary dystopian fiction acknowledge and generate totalitarian manifestations in such a narrow framework that it can be only read as recognition of images previously established in the classics of the genre? Instead of dealing with the vast bibliography of dystopia in the last three decades, I intend to explore Yoko Ogawa's novel focusing on writer's vision of totalitarianism embodied by the Memory police. Special attention will be directed to the notion of anachronism, both as a theme and as a (deliberate) literary technique. Also, I will discuss the writer's perspective as the novel intersects the chapters of the protagonist's narration with the excerpts from the book she is writing.

Totalitarianism as anachronism

Ogawa leaves plenty of details unexplained about the Memory Police, but the reader is given a clear insight into the visual identity of its members. Their appearance does not stand out as distinctively unique – "there were five of them, dressed in dark green uniforms, with heavy belts and black boots. They wore leather gloves, and their guns were half hidden in holsters on their hips. The men were nearly identical, with only three badges on their collars to tell them apart"[8]. The typical military uniform with dark accessories descriptively does not reveal any authentic specificity of authoritarian power of the island. Noticeably, the same can be said for their demeanor which illustrates surveilling authority strictly disposed to control and violence, conducted with "remarkable efficacy"[9]. Ogawa's choice to create yet another prosaic representative of oppression can be unraveled in two contrasting perspectives.

Firstly, no original trait of the Memory Police could be read as intentional, as it provides a reader with a familiar epitome that could stand in place of any government or autocratic body. Depicting the Memory Police, Ogawa appoints the basic symbols of tyrannical dominion in order to deftly evoke common mental images of the coercive power. The readership is thus directed towards widely known dystopian tropes, left to their own vast interpretations of author's vague imaginings. Ogawa is

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[5] Patricia McManus, *Critical Theory and Dystopia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), 6.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., 7.

[8] Yoko Ogawa, *The Memory Police* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2019), 12.

[9] Ibid., 21.

purposely indefinite, designing the motif of the Memory Police nearly as a Rorschach test, to encourage each reader to not limit the possible number of interpretations. Today, thirty years after the novel was published, it entirely resonates with the current global climate in which neofascists, anti-antifascists, ur-fascists or even imaginary fascists seem to be frequently detected in both virtual and actual domains.

Conversely, a repetitive employment of the literary images deriving from classic dystopian fiction and the works of previously mentioned authors, already existing in both originals and their adaptations eventually becomes a cliché. In the case of Ogawa's novel, Orwellian and Bradburian motifs can be perceived as overused, tired models portraying a singular manifestation of political extremism. Insisting on well-known literary images, several decades after the original, essentially oversimplifies the faucets of certain ideology and risks to desensitize the readers in their ability to recognize totalitarianism within customary paradigms. In the era of immense popularity of dystopian fiction which offers little variation in its essence, the reader is pampered in the "safe mode" and ultimately deprived of the opportunity to identify the multifaceted manifestations of the oppressive ideology. José Ovejero's polemic critique on *ethics of violence* in literature and cinema points out that "when the ideology conveyed is left leaning or vaguely humanistic, the book functions both as a product and as a source of absolution: the readers feel solidarity with an idea, positioning themselves on the side of the good, without having to take any actual action"[10]. The subversive potential of the dystopian novel diminishes when various shapes of totalitarianism are neglected, without challenging the reader to go beyond lazy confirmation of his/her set of values and prefabricated truths. If we still assume that the state figures as a sole and supreme oppressor in current times, we are willingly blind to see both sophisticated and crude forms of cultural dictatorship. Therefore, the repetitiveness of such vision marks the work as anachronistic.

Drawing on etymology of the Greek word *anachronismos* (ἀναχρονισμός) (*ana*-(ἀνά) bearing a meaning "against" or "back", and *chronos* (χρόνος) for "time"), a such literary approach can be marked as the one that keeps the text "back in time". It integrates itself in the echelon of the classic works, only stripped of their originality, revolutionary perspective and significant cultural impact.

The issue of anachronism also emerges from *The Memory Police*'s narrative – the protagonist and her few acquaintances rebel against the order that enforces the disappearance of the objects and their meanings from the collective memory. If we take a suppression of memory as a totalitarian strategy, how should we regard the resistance to such action? Jacques Rancière proposes the following hypothesis – "anachronism is so called because what is at stake is not only a problem of succession. It is not a horizontal problem of the order of times but a vertical problem of the order of time in the hierarchy of beings. It is a problem of the division (*partage*) of time, in the sense of 'what one receives as one's share.'"[11] In the context of a novel, such *anachronistic* hierarchy is palpably set, as the one group actively denies the other their "share

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[10] José Ovejero, *L'éthique de la cruauté*, trans. Jean-Claude Villegas (Orbis Tertius, 2015), 19. – *my translation*

[11] Jacques Rancière, "The Concept of Anachronism and the Historian's Truth (English translation)," *In/Print* 3, 1 (June 2015): 23.

of time". With radical obliteration of recollection, the Memory Police destabilizes the (un)certainty of individual memory, as it forcefully negates the things in future time and their mental images. In this sense, the Memory Police's plan of action operates as a mechanism *against the time*.

> The island is stirred up after a disappearance. People gather in little groups out in the street to talk about their memories of the thing that's been lost. There are regrets and a certain sadness, and we try to comfort one another. If it's a physical object that has been disappeared, we gather the remnants up to burn, or bury, or toss into the river. But no one makes much of a fuss, and it's over in a few days. Soon enough, things are back to normal, as though nothing has happened, and no one can even recall what it was that disappeared.[12]

Described acceptance of evanescence seems to be the prevailing practice on the island, with the passivated inhabitants whose present is determined with affirmation of the future conditioned with perpetual diminishing of the objects. Nevertheless, the defiant effort of several islanders to preserve the remembrance on vanishing objects is the attempt to go *back in time*. Before being taken by the Memory Police, the protagonist's mother, a sculptor, concealed the forbidden objects within her art. Her sculptures preserved mundane things suggesting that they are inherent to the work of art, regardless of its sublime form and striking concept. All the efforts to protect the materiality of time that once are made by the very few. Thus, the undertaking of both counterparts, the oppressor being *against the time* and the minority maintaining the possibility to stay *back in time*, proves to be paradoxically anachronistic, in spite of their utterly divergent tactics.

Ogawa manages to achieve a striking "synchrony of anachronisms" in her work, where both thematic subject and its stylistic representation deem to be read as positively anachronistic.

Writing into oblivion

In this novel, Ogawa perceives the act of writing in a typical conventional manner, as a reflexive process, a creative interpretation of unsettling reality. The protagonist reveals the narratives of her published work which all directly reflect a persistent vanishing of the objects, while dwelling on the overall set of circumstances relating to the status of literature on the island:

> The first was about a piano tuner who wanders through music shops and concert halls searching for her lover, a pianist, who has vanished. She relies solely on the sound of his music that lingers in her ears. The second

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[12] Ogawa, *The Memory Police*, 4.

was about a ballerina who lost her right leg in an accident and lives in a greenhouse with her boyfriend, who is a botanist. And the third was about a young woman nursing her younger brother, who suffers from a disease that is destroying his chromosomes. Each one told the story of something that had been disappeared. Everyone likes that sort of thing. But here on the island, writing novels is one of the least impressive, most underappreciated occupations one can pursue. No one could claim that the island is overflowing with books. The library, a shabby single-floor wooden building next to the rose garden, has only a handful of patrons, no matter when one visits, and the books seem to cower on the shelves, fearful of crumbling to dust at the slightest touch. They will all, in the end, be tossed out without being cared for or rebound – which is why the collection never grows. But no one ever complains. The bookstores are much the same. Nearly deserted, and the managers appear almost surly behind their stacks of unsold books with yellowing covers. Few people here have any need for novels.[13]

This lamenting over the islanders' lack of interest for books does not affect the novelist's determination to finish the writing of her latest work about the woman who lost her voice and communicates with her lover (a typing instructor), using only the typewriter. The plot of the story she is writing clearly mirrors the events and anxieties of her own life. Her female protagonist is trapped in a clock tower of a church where her lover has a repair room for the typing machines, feeling "as though locked inside the typewriter"[14]. Helping her editor R, who is one of a few islanders with the ability to remember still intact, hide from the Memory Police, the novelist keeps him in a secretly constructed room. With having a supportive, non-amnesiac editor friend, concealed in *a room of her own*, Ogawa's novelist echoes Ovejero's premise of a *cruel author* who

> does not seek escape but rather the confinement of the reader with themselves. They block all exits so that the reader has no other solution but to confront themselves in a given situation. A cruel author feels at war against the sugar-coated versions of the world that conceal cruelty and are often used to legitimize a specific political and moral order, which in turn perpetuates other forms of cruelty. To escape softness and certainties, to move towards discomfort and uncertainty, to flee, yes, reality, but an anesthetized reality that gives us the sensation of living our lives as we could live another, with the same detachment, as if the world outside could be worse – it can always be worse – but hardly better, and thus that any effort is dangerous.[15]

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[13] Ibid., 15.

[14] Ibid., 92.

[15] Ovejero, *L'éthique de la cruauté*, 51.

For Ogawa's novelist "the world outside" is getting worse day by day – possibly, it was a difficult endeavor to face the idea that the Memory Police could only be a consequence and not the cause of prevailing unease. If the islanders display little interest in the books in the libraries, which are indispensable for preserving memory, then that the memory may prove to be fundamentally inconsequential and expendable. In that case, the oppressive agency would simply remove what it deems unnecessary. For a writer who chronicles life, even when its completely fabricated, navigating such a world becomes a daunting experience. *The Memory Police* is a book about the art of writing, recording all the worldly and unworldly things preoccupying one's mind and extensive concern of what will remain of literary manuscripts in the collective memory. Ogawa's work is an auto-reflexive novel, where the author is contemplating possible futility of all written work, including hers.

After the disappearances of roses, birds, photographs, calendars and fruits of all sorts, the novelist also has to endure the loss of books. Looking at the bonfire where the islanders burned the books, the narrator notices a woman dragged by the Memory Police screaming "No one can erase the stories"[16], epitomizing unrelenting persuasion or hopefulness that the texts would somehow keep their noteworthiness. On the island of vanishing things, body parts also become obsolete, but the all-remembering editor comforts the novelist, caressing her invisible, disappeared limbs. Ogawa's novelist managed to finish her writing before her body completely disappeared, only with her voice left to fade away, closed in the hidden room. But her finished work, like any other, does not end at that point. Aleida Assmann effectively argues:

> […], despite its completeness, the book is not a totalitarian metaphor. Opposite to the completeness and finality of the text stands the incompleteness and infinity of interpretations. Similarly, memory, especially human memory, does not have a final form. If the infinity of the text rests on the impossibility of a definitive reading, then the infinity of memory rests on its changeability and the impossibility of being fully controlled once and for all."[17]

Such perspective echoes to a certain extent the concept presented in Roland Barthes's seminal essay *The Death of the Author,* proclaiming that the individual reader's interpretation has ultimately more significance than the writer's original intention.[18] Regardless of the author's intention, all pre-existing (cultural) influences on the reader shape the interpretations of each individual, thus lies the *incompleteness* of the book. Yet, in *The Memory Police,* Barthes's reasoning gets upgraded by the allegorical fear that the death of the author is rendered irrelevant in the world where the reader is

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[16] Ogawa, *The Memory Police*, 180.

[17] Alaida Asman, "O metaforici sećanja". *Reč – Časopis za književnost i kulturu, i društvena pitanja*, 56, 2 (1999): 124. – *my translation*

[18] Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Fontana Press, 1977), 142–48.

totally indifferent to his/her reading and interpretation. The finality of the text, therefore, rests specifically in the realm of unconcerned and disinterested people.

Conclusion

Both literary and visual images of totalitarianism established in the years before and following the Second World War are so undeniably imprinted in the global collective memory that even half a century later, the authors are rarely trying to construct a new paradigm of it. Relying on these existing perimeters too strongly contributes solely to the preservation of memory of what has been, and not being alert to alarmingly evolving potential of the totalitarian thought. Apparently, in present time, the writer's position is a demanding one – he/she can only be inventive and imaginative as the longstanding literary past allows him/her to. Yoko Ogawa's portrayal of the Memory Police is being deliberately vague in order to possibly evoke a familiar image of authoritarian control as a universal symbol of oppression. This approach bears a risk that her work would be read as a cliché. Additionally, the repetitiveness of iconography established by classical authors may desensitize readers to the multifaceted nature of totalitarianism, limiting their understanding of diverse forms of oppression. Paradoxically, Ogawa's novel can be interpreted as both thematically and stylistically anachronistic but striking in its portrayal of the fight against forgetting. Furthermore, in *The Memory Police*, Ogawa explores writing as a reflective and creative process, but also the potential futility of such activity within the realm of oppressive control and prevailing indifference. Ultimately, the novel suggests that while texts may be forgotten or destroyed, memory of them and their interpretations are beyond anyone's firm control. In the vast landscape of a human mind, literary images allow their recipients to reshape them constantly, and thus evade the ever apparent, oppressive constraints of the *memory police*.

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BEYOND THE MAIN TOPIC

ART+MEDIA

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Night Landscapes of Autopsia

This study explores the underground artistic project Autopsia from Vojvodina, examining its visual, textual and musical works within the context of ex-Yugoslav avant-garde, neo-avant-garde and postmodern art. The focus will be on Autopsia's latest project *Steel Books*, which are unique art objects that incorporate diverse cultural questions. *Steel Books* recontextualize ancient motifs of night and death, resonating with similar themes found in Baroque art and literature. Autopsia combines the Baroque method of *discordia concors* with postmodern eclecticism, but rather than celebrating the neoliberal 'free market' of cultural artefacts, it offers a critical perspective.

Keywords: Yugoslavia; canon; politicized underground art under socialism and post-socialism; baroque; spectacle; Autopsia.

Introduction

This study will present the artistic project Autopsia in the context of Yugoslavia's system of self-management. Self-management can be discussed from different points of view: economic, political and cultural. Since it's not the main subject of the study, the cultural and political aspects of Yugoslav self-management will be briefly presented.

Autopsia is a multi-media art project that includes music, visual arts, performance and literature. The study will show Autopsia's artistic strategy by analyzing one of their latest projects, *Steel Books*. My hypothesis is that Yugoslav art, culture and politics continue to influence and inspire Autopsia's work. However, Autopsia transcends, being merely an exotic representation that holds little relevance beyond its cultural base. Its strategy is paradoxical: while it emerged from the alternative political and cultural model of Yugoslavia, this does not limit its interpretation to only that geopolitical context. *Steel Books* will also be presented in the context of Baroque and postmodern literature, artistic book objects and Guy Deboard's theory of spectacle.

Politics and Poetics of excess

Yugoslav art was characterized by a lack of homogeneity, both within its institutional frameworks and in its non-institutional contexts. Similarly, Yugoslav politics

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cannot be considered identical to the Stalinism of the Soviet Union. While the Soviet states were either rejecting Western art practices or adopting them only gradually (as seen with dissident art), Yugoslavia maintained a more open approach, albeit with its own forms of (self-)censorship. It is exactly for that reason that Yugoslav system cannot be interpreted as a totalitarian system (as opposed to states of the Soviet Union).[1] It was an ambivalent and contradictory system – insufficiently free, yet not entirely totalitarian. However, certain themes remained taboo, such as the People's Liberation Struggle and the cult of Tito. Similarly, we must differentiate between various periods of the Yugoslav system: politics before and after 1948 (after the split with Stalin, Yugoslavia underwent a significant transformation),[2] until Tito's death, and disintegration of Yugoslavia itself. After the split with Stalin, Yugoslavia established a self-management system of socialism. This specific path wasn't homogeneous; it evolved until the end of Yugoslavia and was often influenced by the specific state of affairs in different regions. Aleš Erjavec notes:

> In reality, social organization in the least-developed parts of Yugoslavia, where modern industrialization has not yet really taken hold, started to revert to the premodern state, while in the country as a whole, a complex system that was almost impossible to fathom caused decision making to become even more opaque and chaotic.[3]

We can conclude that Yugoslavia was contradictory, heterogeneous and sovereign in the context of the Cold War. It is undeniable that Yugoslavia differed both from the Soviet Union and the West, even though these entities were also heterogeneous. Márk Losoncz suggests that, within the framework of the Cold War, we can interpret Yugoslavia as a Lacanian excess: "Yugoslavia relates to what was something more in Eastern-European adventure, a utopian excess versus exhausted utopias, an alternative versus alternative hypermodernisations."[4]

By the end of the 1970s punk emerged in Yugoslavia as a subculture of industrial music and new experimental art, the cultural rebellion caused by dissatisfaction with existing institutions. This was a time when the domesticated rebels of Yugoslav generation '68 accepted cultural and political positions but were unable to change the system from within. The Yugoslav alternative culture of that period did not unconditionally embrace Western capitalism (which was the case in states of the Soviet Union, and one can sense that even today), it criticized both the Yugoslav regime and the Stalinism of the Eastern bloc. On one hand, it represented a leftist rebellion against

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[1] Alpár Losoncz, *A hatalom (nélküliség) horizontja. Hommage à Új Symposion* (Újvidék: Forum, 2018), 103–42.

[2] Gerson S. Sher, *Praxis. Marxist Criticism and Dissent in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Bloomington, London: Indiana University Press, 1977), 151–93.

[3] Aleš Erjavec, "Neue Slowenische Kunst – New Slovenian Art: Slovenia, Yugoslavia, Self-Management, and the 1980s," in *Postmodern and the Postsocialist Condition. Politicized Art under Late Socialism*, ed. Aleš Erjavec (Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2003), 138.

[4] If not otherwise stated, the quote is my translation. "Jugoszlávia arra vonatkozik, ami a kelet-európai kalandon belül valami több volt, utópikus többlet a kimerülőben levő utópiákhoz képest, alternatíva az alternatív hipermodernizációhoz képest." Márk Losoncz, Összefüggő viszonyok, teremtő kapcsolatok (Újvidék: Forum, 2022), 600.

false socialism, although in Yugoslav '68th there appeared smaller elements of ethnicism, nationalism (e. g. some of the demonstrators in Zagreb, who later in 1970/1971 became Croatian nationalists).[5] Thus, we cannot characterize the alternative culture of Yugoslavia as homogeneous in political and aesthetic terms; rather, it was infused with different ideological narratives. Erjavec notes that Yugoslav art depended on the socio-political circumstances of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s:

> Since the late 1960s, Yugoslav artists have been well informed about cultural and artistic events, whether these came from capitalist, socialist, or Third World countries. In the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the Yugoslav lifestyle started to change: a youth and underground culture developed in urban centers, and mass culture proliferated. […] A mixture of various genres, high and low, profane and elitist, characterized the 1980s. This was possible partly due to the autonomy that self-management offered to individual republics and their constituent parts.[6]

Of course, as we have already stated, Yugoslav alternative culture was not politically homogenous. Miško Šuvaković categorizes alternative art into two types: a conflict one and a non-conflict one. Both types share dissatisfaction with official art: "Alternative art is art rooted in critique, undermining, deconstructing and parodying the dominant art, culture and ideology of a given society"[7]. This is valid both for the criticism expressed in a direct, conflicting form (*NSK* and *Laibach*) and for a less direct, thus non-conflicting form (*invisible art* of Slobodan Tišma).

The Yugoslav pseudo-Gesamtkunstwerk group Autopsia emerged from both alternative strategies and their negation, the reworking of them. Autopsia's strategy is neither individualistic nor collective; it represents the strategy of the erased subject. According to Yugoslav conceptual artist Bálint Szombathy, Autopsia "does not promote the idea of provocation, but of ruse, not destructivity, but constructivity"[8]. The idea of a ruse is present in the game of deconstructing the representations of different ideologies. Autopsia's work can be interpreted as a montage, a construction, a composition of dismantled ideologies.

The alternative culture of punk rejects official cultural, artistic, political and economic models, embracing a "Do It Yourself" (DIY) ideology to create its own rebellious collages and montages. Yugoslavia was, in quotation marks, a DIY state; its system of "self-management" fostered a culture distinct from both the Warsaw Pact and the West. However, we have to understand it really with quotations marks, because that particular position was made possible by the Cold War, the rivalry between

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[5] Nebojša Popov, "Junski sukobi 1968," *Pitanja* 3–4 (Zagreb 1988): 129. Losoncz, Összefüggő viszonyok, 176.

[6] Erjavec, "Neue Slowenische Kunst," 140.

[7] Miško Šuvaković, *Pojmovnik moderne i postmoderne likovne umetnosti i teorije posle 1950* (Novi Sad: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, Prometej, 1999), 23.

[8] "Nem a provokatív, hanem a leleményes, nem a destruktív, hanem a konstruktív elveket vallja magáénak." Bálint Szombathy, "A halál láttamoztatói," in *Extázis és agónia. Független zenei (h)arcterek*, ed. Zoltán Virág (Szeged: Fosszília, JABE, 2006), 62.

the Western world and the Soviet bloc. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia became an unnecessary pawn in the game of globalized capitalism. Ultimately, it was former Yugoslavs who contributed to its destruction by abandoning the principle of non-alignment almost overnight to embrace chauvinism and nationalism and by effectively becoming useful idiots of neoliberal capitalism.

(De)contextualization of fatherland

In "the beginning" there was punk, and punk created Autopsia. The first works of Autopsia were fanzines *Bank Rot* and *Prose Selavy* (1980), where their first visual and textual works appear. The group's first exhibition did not occur in major cultural centers, such as Belgrade, Ljubljana, Zagreb or Sarajevo, but rather on the margin of the cultural map of Yugoslavia: in Ruma, a small town in Vojvodina (1985). Born in Ruma, artists Ratomir Kulić and Vladimir Mattioni developed their interdisciplinary project *Verbumprogram, which* was "more than an individual, less than a group".[9] Their theoretical concept had a significant impact on the creation of Autopsia. Despite these important references, the notion of 'fatherland' holds little relevance for Autopsia:

> *Autopsia* does not have a fatherland. It does not have any place or any system outside of itself. All social relations within which *Autopsia* operates might be anywhere in the world. *Autopsia*'s home is the world. The fatherland is a fictitious concept. *Autopsia* operates in reality, outside 'fatherlands'. It can produce a fatherland but cannot belong to it. The fatherland, the motherland – these are projects, abstract notions that have nothing to do with homelandness. It is only the homeland that is the place for the world of individuality, it is not an abstract product. The individual experience of the world cannot be shared with others.[10]

However, as one of the alternative Yugoslav art projects, Autopsia was and is possible exactly within the above-mentioned excess of Yugoslavia. Alexei Monroe notes that the cultural context of Autopsia is quite important:

> While Yugoslavia itself has never been the main subject of *Autopsia's* work, the numerous and unique Yugoslav influences and contradictions of the state it emerged in should be remembered, especially when we consider the sense of recent or imminent catastrophic loss and mourning that pervades so much of its work.[11]

The art of Autopsia is not only an implicit critique of the Yugoslav system and its ever more visible nationalistic feelers, nor is it an uncritical enthusiasm regarding Western

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[9] Avantgarde Museum. "Verbum Program," https://www.avantgarde-museum.com/en/museum/collection/authorsverbumprogram~pe4563/, acc. on September 14, 2024.

[10] Roland Orcsik, "*Nachtmusik* / Dijalog sa Autopsijom," *Tema* 3–4 (March–April 2008): 52.

[11] Alexei Monroe, *Thanatopolis* (London, Prague, Berlin: Divus, 2016), 19.

pop-culture. The alternative art of Autopsia is an excess. But this excess is not only political, but it is also ontological, as stated in one of the slogans of Autopsia: "Our goal is death". This statement can be interpreted also as an allusion or a reworking of Kafka's aphorism: "Unsere Rettung ist der Tod, aber nicht dieser"[12]. In this case the death can be interpreted also as a "death of the author" (Roland Barthes), the emptiness of the center, dismembering of the meaning. Autopsia has used Kafka's sentence more than once, in quite different contexts, released from the ideology of "meaning".

The art of Autopsia cannot be easily classified into the category of conflict/ non-conflict alternative art. It did not openly attack the Yugoslav system, but its aesthetics uses religious, as well as pop-cultural, or political symbols of Yugoslav culture, and deconstructs all of them. Dejan Sretenović is of the opinion *that Autopsia situates* itself outside 'high' and 'low' culture, outside 'mainstream' and 'alternative' culture.[13]

Visual, musical and textual works of Autopsia use symbols of industrialization of production, but in relation to official real socialism it is not only the attribute of 'the worker', but also the critique of capitalist consumerism. We can speak in the same way about the critique of the entertainment culture industry which plays a major role in consumerist societies. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, the Western liberal culture of capitalism is an entertainment industry. This industry creates controlled consumerism. The new, the progress, the repetition, these are key concepts of culture industry:

> The fact that its characteristic innovations are in all cases mere improvements to mass production is not extraneous to the system. […] Nevertheless, the culture industry remains the entertainment business. Its control of consumers is mediated by entertainment and its hold will not be broken by outright dictate but by the hostility inherent in the principle of entertainment to anything which is more than itself.[14]

The motives of tools, therefore of industrial production, in the works of Autopsia point exactly to this repetition of senselessness of entertainment (which according to Adorno and Horkheimer is a part of work, because the entertainment is only a preparation for work, for self-repetition of the production). The death of meaning, death of the author, death of the ideas: information, communication, aura or a cult of originality is an illusion of social spectacle. According to Guy Debord the spectacle represents itself as an instrument of unification; however, this produces a false consciousness, a false image of the world, because it is "nothing else but an official language of generalized separation"[15] The works of Autopsia do not attempt to rehabilitate the meta-

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[12] Franz Kafka, "Das vierte Oktavheft," https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/kafka/oktavhef/chap04.html, acc. on September 14, 2024.

[13] Dejan Sretenović, "Autopsia ili o smrti i izbavljenju," in *Autopsia. Ogledalo uništenja / Mirror of Destruction*, (Beograd: Salon Muzeja savremene umetnosti, 2010), 11, n. n.

[14] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 108.

[15] Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Radical Amerika and Black & Red, 1970), n. n.

physics of 'meaning' in a society where there is no such meaning. Its musical, visual and textual (bri)col(l)ages and montages bring to light breaks, fissures of ideological meta-narratives. Autopsia's artistic strategy is noise, eclecticism, absence of hierarchy between different contents, absence of a center. It's a critique of mainstream aesthetics, political ideologies and artistic strategies. In this sense, Autopsia's work is a mirror in which power is presented as a spectacle of centralization. Jacques Attali notes:

> The music of power no longer conveys information within a code. It is, like the ideology of the period, without meaning. The modern musician says nothing, signifies nothing if not the insignificance of his age, the impossibility of communication in repetition. [...] This ideology of non-sense is not without political ramifications. In fact, it heralds the ideology of repetitive society, the simulacrum of the decentralization of power, a caricature of self-management. All of music becomes organized around the simulacrum of non-power.[16]

Autopsia's works consciously position themselves outside both the margin and the center, serving as a critique of both ideological strategies. "Namely, what Autopsia deals with is the culture itself – it is the object of processing, and not the area to which the messages are directed."[17]

Nacht und Nebel

The motive of night is present in the works of Autopsia from the very beginning, as in following musical compositions:"Red Nights" (1984), "Kissing Jesus in the Dark" (1985), "Night of Annihilation" (1989), "Das Gesetz Des Tages Und Leidenschaft Zur Nacht" (1989), "Le chant de la nuit" (2005), "Radical Machines Night Landscapes" (2008), and so on. In many cases "the night" is a quotation, the title of the compilation "Le chant de la nuit" may point to Mahler's 7th Symphony or the 3rd Symphony by Karol Szymanowski. However,the primary context, original' conceptions are not of essential concern; instead the focus lies in the deconstruction performed by Autopsia.

In early poetic texts of Autopsia we often come across he motive of "night" and "darkness". But in the work of Autopsia the exact detection of the original source is not crucial, it is the method of collage, re-composition that is at stake:

> effect of the field
> darkness is without face
> triggering of bi-stabile multi-vibrator
> the abysses are rising

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[16] Jacques Atalli, *Noise. The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 114.

[17] Dragan Ambrozić, "Autopsia Autopsiae," *Delo*12 (December 1988): 175.

> mirrors are wondering
> limit values
> logical structures
> enormous night
> dead walk
> atomic structure of matter
> negative reaction
> I remove the mask
> the pain bleeds
> temperature of crystal
> total losses[18]

Sometimes 'the night" is replaced by the synonym "the darkness":

> sun battery
> factor of goodness
> forbidden zone
> factor of stability
> blind for differences, clairvoyant for similarities
> darkness is without face

In these works, "night" and "darkness" become a metaphor for disappearing of the visible: darkening of the spectacle, subject, author, center, God, light, logos, etc. This disappearance is explicitly thematized in another poem:

> what wants to light, must burn
> and we all must disappear.
> those that we do not name by name
> our heart will recognize,
> when we stand in light.
>
> many a darkness is on earth
> many a cruel, blind misfortune –
> should it all be more clear,
> only one command helps:
>
> we ourselves must burn
> and while shining silently disappear.
> those who thusly the light increase,
> always companions find,
> those who stand by them.

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[18] All poems are in manuscript, except where the first publication is noted.

While two earlier poems resemble a group of various quotations in different styles (technical, religious and poetic descriptions), this poem evokes a biblical-religious style ("light", "commandment").

A similar poem is "Apology of Death" (1980) which adds an apocalyptic atmosphere (judgement day, Armageddon) to everything:

> One who experiences the taste of blood
> Remembers it forever
> In the saddle must he sleep
> Spend the night by the fire
> With hate up to his throat
> With guard in the eye
> Death! You are the shield which gives shelter to us[19]

At first glance this part of the poem sounds perhaps as a terroristic prayer, but at the end the poem turns into an apocalyptic vision of an ominous war:

> Let the Heaven delight
> Let the Earth rejoice
> Let there be waves on the Sea
>
> (181)

The poem becomes a vision of world power, of the world darkness in which every light fades. However, the religious connotation is understood here as a quotation, as an element in Autopsia's machinery. The poem is not evidence of Autopsia's fidelity to any religion which advocates the idea of apocalypse. There is no salvation in Autopsia, no God, nothing saves the spectacular subject from the "mirror of destruction". According to Vladimir Mattioni: "The myth of Narcissus indicates that the subject is extinguished in the media of image. The image is, in a radical sense as it were, 'memorial' – evidence of death."[20] In Autopsia quotations are the means for the analysis of spectacle, we do not have their central sense, the meaning, there is no hierarchy. As Mattioni states:

> Autopsia is aware of diabolic symbioses, mythomaniac orchestrations, but its concept has nothing to do with mystical or occult nor with scientific-cognitive or political-pragmatic. Autopsia uses media containers as ciphers, and not as contents of entire cultural areas, reduced to media patterns.[21]

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[19] Autopsia, "Apologija smrti," *Delo*12 (December 1988), 181.

[20] Vladimir Mattioni, *Auto opsis*, ed. Dragomir Ugren, (Novi Sad: Muzej savremene umetnosti Vojvodine, 2012), 10.

[21] Ibid., 10.

The night and the darkness of Autosia is a scene of a death of the subject. The title of the exhibition of Autopsia in Museum of Contemporary Art of Vojvodina in Novi Sad was: *Specus Oblivionis* (2012), that is, "the cave of the oblivion". The oblivion relates to the escape of an individual from his/her mortality, in a desire of the subject to negate, forget his/her death. And the motive of cave can be interpreted as a Plato's cave where an individual is captivated and condemned to watch images of shadows on the wall. Only when an individual, with the help of philosophy, frees himself/herself, then he/she succeeds in differentiating shadow from reality. But, in *Autopsia* the reality is self-destruction: the night of the destruction of the subject, the world devoid of the Platonic metaphysical light, the world of ideas, the world of perfection.

Memento mori – remember that you are mortal, that you are singled out from the crowd, that you have your own unsharable death. One of Autopsia's recent musical products, *Apophenia* (2018), also thematizes the night in which the contours of the subject disappear: "Night is falling. A voice comes to one in the dark. A voice with neither meaning nor destination."[22] Apophenia is a disease of the subject in which the subject sees his/her reflection in everything: in a constructed image, in the meaning, in the sense.

By the very fact that Autopsia is not a group, that there is no author, i.e. that it uses authorship as a function (Foucault), as a mask, points to the core of its (non) existence. Miško Šuvaković notes:

> The group *Autopsia* has from the very beginning worked with a fictional structure of a group while transforming joint work into a *productive platform* which does not display its internal organs. Thus *Autopsia*, as an operative platform, was founded on two essential regimes of activity: (1) on the regime of the construction of analogues cultural myth about *Autopsia* as a function of an author, and not on the personalized authorial team, which uses real names, and (2) on the regime of impersonal work – the function of an author is a cultural mechanism, and not the representation of primary subjectivity. The noun *Autopsia*, therefore, is not a brand or a *false name* (pseudonym), but a construction of "the function of the platform", which takes over and fictionalizes individual-authorial functions in the field of art activities.[23]

We should also consider the idea of Gavril Stefanović Venclović, a unique Serbian writer and priest the Enlightenment era. His poetic fragment[24] "Death and life in

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[22] Bandcamp, "Autopsia," https://autopsia.bandcamp.com/album/apophenia-2, acc. on September 14, 2024.

[23] Miško Šuvaković, "Logika rekvijema," in *Instinktivne teorije* (Novi Sad: Zavod za kulturu Vojvodine, 2016), 169.

[24] It is debatable whether Venclović's poetic writings can be considered poems, because they are in fact parts of other scripts, and some are even translations and reworkings. That is why instead of "poem" here we use "poetic fragment". (On this topic see doctoral thesis: Milesa D. Stefanović-Banović, "Besede, slova i pouke na blagovesti u prevodu i preradi Gavrila Stefanovića Venclovića (PhD. Diss, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philology, 2015), 27–30. Petar Milošević states that Milorad Pavić constructed "free verses" from these poetic fragments,

language stand" thematizes the problem of language, death and evil way prior to post-modernity:

> Rescue my soul
> From unjust mouths
> And from strangers spare your servant
> So he could remain blameless;
> And a taleteller nearly lingual,
> Almost in evil falls
> And death and life in language stand![22]

This determinacy through language is dissolved with the idea about God's existence outside of language. In Venclović's poetic fragment "The Night"[25], we perceive the twilight of the world, an apocalypse in which all human activity – and the language that has shaped the subject – is invalid, worthless:

> Striving and trying, until the sun went down,
> Until the twilight came
> And doors of life are closed.
> Because during night nothing can be done,
> Trade is over, booths are closed.
> After that, you know too well
> That there's nothing to buy from anyone,
> Nor there's a reason for that …
>
> (109)

The text displays the downfall of human activity ("Trade is over, booths are closed"), after that there comes saturation, the feeling of emptiness.

Autopsia interprets the apocalyptic vision of Venclović in a following fashion:

> No matter how much the worldview of the Enlightenment endorsed the reason, the knowledge, the ethics and the aesthetics of the new era, opposing them to habits, customs and tradition, the foundations of the primordial link between divine love and human fear of the punishment because of the disobedience nevertheless remained intact.[26]

In the same text Autopsia presents the end of the world beginning in the Renaissance, when man positioned himself as the ultimate measure instead of God. But while the

"[…] but in original context these are paragraphs which belong to traditional genres of medieval literature (prayer, cry, letter, oration)." Petar Milošević, *Storija srpske književnosti* (Beograd, Budimpešta: Službeni glasnik, Radionica Venclović, 2010), 102.

[25] Gavril Stefanović Venclović, *Crni bivo u srcu. Legende, besede, pesme*, ed. Milorad Pavić (Beograd: Prosveta, 1966), 100.

[26] Autopsia, *Apocrypha* (Zagreb: UPI2M PLUS, 2013), 266.

biblical worldview, and thus Venclović, depict the world destruction through apocalyptic images, today's perspective focuses on the representation of that destruction in the media:

> There is no more a safe place for the retreat. The end of the world is imperceptible. Imperceptibility of the changes makes people indifferent, just like the group of Bengalimen at the banks of Brahmaputra is indifferent. Faith in salvation is unshaken and firm as ever.[27]

Is it exactly this faith in salvation that disables the subject to release himself/herself from his/her own false selfhood? Does destruction of the world depend on media representation? Is the representation of the destruction of the world identical to climate catastrophes? Is the apocalypse really the end, or just evidence of incapacity to create an alternative to catastrophic political and economic constructions? Mark Fisher states that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. What is capitalism? The destruction of all values: "Capitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics."[28]

Darkness of Steel

The thematic of darkness and night is also part of Autopsia's most recent projects, for example, in installations *Steel Books*, (from 2013 until today). Their dimensions are 43x35 cm, each "page" 8 mm thick, one book 80 kg of total weight. The first page contains cut out poems or aphorisms. The entire project evokes medieval theological and biblical books-objects, featuring illuminations, while also resonating the books-objects from the latter half of the 20th century. One of the first such books in modern art was created by American artist Edward Ruscha (*Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, 1963). The book-object is often the analysis of its own media, the critique of culture industry, of production, of fetishism of the product.

Miško Šuvaković states that we can discern books-objects, books-works, books-documents and books-theoretical objects. Avant-garde books-objects experiment with form, with visuality, and neo-avant-garde books-theoretical objects analyze the medium of book and its, language, while postmodern books-objects play with quotations, they "disturb the limits between the book of an artist, the monograph and a catalogue"[29]. The postmodern book sees the book-object in constant media transformation.

Autopsia's project for *Steel Books* is in some way all of this and something entirely different. The very material of steel is not just a mere play with a form, not just a result of the analysis of media representation, not just evidence of media transformation.

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[27] Ibid., 268.

[28] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009), 4.

[29] Šuvaković, "Logika rekvijema,"142.

The steel fits into Autopsia's visual works with tools of manual production. Here the 'manual' is of the essence, because such tool is not just a symbolic critique of production, but is also the emphasizing of the mastery, the skill of the worker. The artist is a worker-master, and not a spectacular star of media production of art and of the subject of an artists as a cult of consumption. This idea can be connected to the Hungarian constructivist Lajos Kassák's poem "The masters" (1918): "We are not scientists, nor pale, silver-tongued priests, / nor are we the heroes whom wild noise accompanies to the battle."[30] One of the early poems by Autopsia is "Masters on earth" (1983) in which the mastery is connected with apophatic theology, with the fire of negativity:

> Everything, which is flammable, in fire becomes fire
> And eternal light
> Masters on Earth guard the fire

The processing of matter, (work with matter, tools of masters), is also one of the goals of alchemy. Indeed, this goal is a transformation of matter into gold, and this gold can be spiritual as well. *Autopsia* also refers to Rudolph II who gathered various scientists of his era:

> Prague of that time was a huge research laboratory, which radiated the synergies of many arts. The similarity of pre-scientific systems of Rudolph's age with the principles of *Autopsia* is obvious. However, possibilities for any other similarities end here. For despite allusions and quotations *Autopsia* is concerned neither with alchemy nor with mysticism. It simply uses their iconographies in a rather special way. In hybrid conjunctions, it connects them with other components that have nothing in common with practices of Rudolphine age.[31]

Alchemy of *Autopsia* transforms the object, media, and art, into the death of the subject, representing, simultaneously, the artist's sacrifice:

> The artist is not the subjective agent of art. The artist is the sacrificial part of art. It' is also, finally, what disappears in art. […] if art is not something of the market, but is something against the force of universality of the market, the consequence is that the artist must disappear, and not to be someone who appears in the media.[32]

This thought is linked to the idea of Michel Foucault who sees the role of the author in the function of text: "As a result, the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence; he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing."[33]

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[30]"Mi nem vagyunk tudósok, se méla, aranyszájú papok / és hősök sem vagyunk, kiket vad csinadratta kísért a csatába." Lajos Kassák, "Mesteremberek," in *Kassák Lajos összes versei* (Budapest: Magvető, 1977), 55.

[31]Autopsia, *Apocrypha*, 240.

[32] The text is on Autopsia's serigraphy *Anonymia*, Umělec, 2 (London, Prague: 2010), 101.

[33] Michael Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *The Foucault Reader* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 102–103.

This game of disappearing is thematized also in poetic texts carved in *Steel Books*. Sometimes the motive of disappearing is evoked with Baroque thematic "life is a dream":

Treacherous mists ghostly circle around
Life becomes a dream
        (Autopsia, *Steel book*, 2013)

This Baroque topic in Serbian poetry is linked to works of Gavril Stefanović Venclović. Death, dream, fog, shadow, night, destruction of the world, are frequent motives of his rather unique poetry for those times. Venclović also used a Baroque poetics of *discordia concors*, the unification of opposite categories[34], and this is, as we shall see, close to Autopsia.

In the above displayed "steel" poem it is essential to point out to the negation of visibility, to the idea of illusion. The mist, the spectre, the dream – all this points to instability of knowledge, especially in the context of the iconic turn (Gottfried Boehm). The main characteristic of a subject representation is visibility, other senses have a smaller role in constructing their meaning. With its radical use of steel materials Autopsia, points out to tactility, i.e., to materiality which is also essential in alchemical (transformative)

[34] Jovan Deretić, *Istorija srpske književnosti* (Zrenjanin: Sezam BOOK d. o. o.,2007), 426. But let's add that, for example, Đorđe Trifunović negates Milorad Pavić's thesis that Venclović is an original Baroque writer, claiming that Venclović is rather and to a great extent a copyist and a translator.

perception of poetry. Steel as an element of the cosmos is of crucial importance: steel points to stellar essence of genesis and the existence of man and life on Earth. And the fact that human pre-existence is linked to stars, to cosmos, is an archaic idea.

In *Autopsia*'s poem "Masters on Earth" we encounter also the inevitability of a stellar origin of death:

> Star after star lights in eternal flame
> If you seek to escape that
> Your own foolishness deceived you
> Disappearing brings joy

Unlike Guy Debord who notes that the society of spectacle is captivated in the false culture of illusion, Autopsia states that darkness is essentially a true light:

> There is nothing visible at al
> Light became darkness
>
> Disappearing brings joy
>   (Autopsia, *Steel Book*, 2013)

Renunciation of the manipulative culture of spectacle brings poetic knowledge that light is darkness, and that disappearing of the subject brings 'joy in text' (to paraphrase Barthes). And that is also the negation of the representation as an illusion of the world.

The art and *Weltanschauung* of *Autopsia* is agnostic; an intellectual effort in the process of cognition relates to erasing one's own knowledge, one's own essentiality. In this process moral and ontological dualisms can no longer have a role on the stage of anti-spectacle. Every competition of the opposed categories, in politics-economy, the competition of market pseudo-values, is superfluous.

Truth and deceit no longer compete in representation
Because there is no representation anymore

We always see smoke as an image
(Autopsia, *Steel book*, 2013)

Smoke is a mobile, unstable, meaningless phenomenon, whose destiny is to only disappear. Smoke can be seen as an image, but we cannot catch it. This smoke can also be the smoke of sacrifice, the fire in which a false image or figure of subject burns:

It is the victims on whom the world stands

Horrifying agony of constant perceptibility
(Autopsia, *Steel book*, 2013)

In the digital world, especially in virtual social media, existence is declared through perceptibility. Identity is linked to visual scenography of lies. Release from symbolic capital of perceptibility is possible through conscious renunciation of visibility. The art of Autopsia is a ritual of sacrificing the authorship, the artist. The sentence, "it is victims on whom the world stands", at the same time is a self-quotation, Autopsia uses it in many works, and even in various languages. Self-quotation is therefore a reflection of its own work, but since it is an art without an artist, self-citation is a mirror of self-destruction. Autopsia is a priestly name of the religion of death.

Some steel texts can be interpreted also as prayers to the God of death:
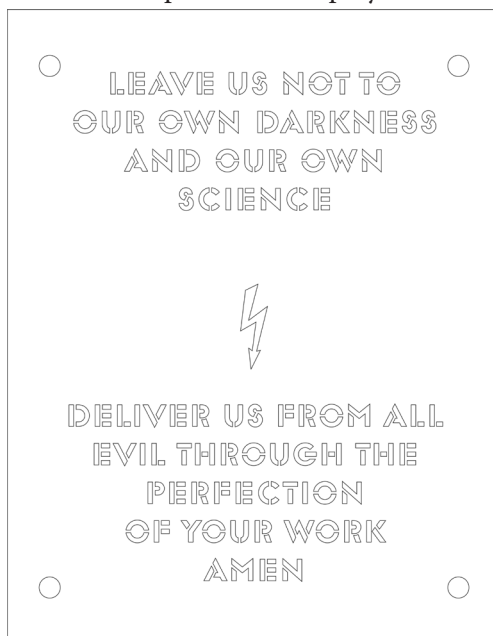
(Autopsia, *Steel Book*, drawing, 2013)

Thus, poetic writings of steel books can be interpreted as epitaphs, pastiche-prayers, and sometimes they are a postmodern play with quotation:
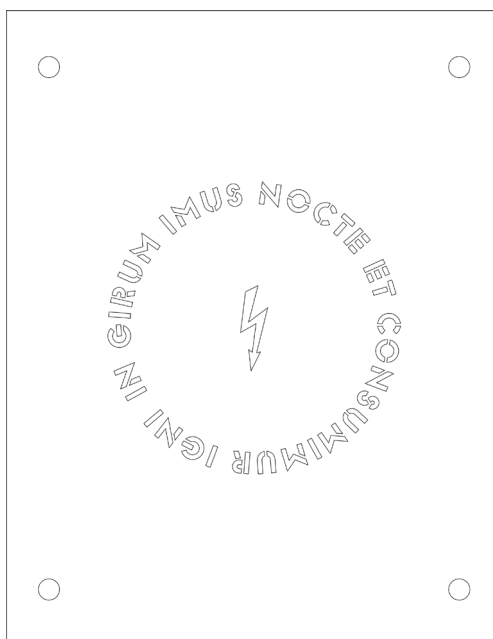
Latin quote is from Virgil's *Aeneid*, but at the same time it is also the title of Debord's collage film (1978). Therefore, this can be interpreted as double quotation. Virgil's verse contains those two basic motives which are essential also for *Autopsia*: night and death in fire. In the poem "Apology of death" we can find an allusion to Virgil's verse: "Death leads us on / Great peace have those who love its law [...] One who experiences the taste of blood remembers it forever / In the saddle must he sleep / Spend the night by the fire."[35]

In the work of Autopsia, however, Virgil's or Debord's authorship is not of relevance, because the quotation goes through media transformation. Hexameter turns into a visual poem, a circle with a symbol of lightning as a fire of death in the middle.

Lightning is a topos of Autopsia's works, we find it in many forms. There is a lightning in the middle of every steel book. Lightning is a visual (self-) quotation, it points out to a danger of an electric strike, in this regard it is a symbol close to *memento mori*, therefore it is an existential symbol of the mortality of an individual. lightning can also be the symbol of Tesla's research, in this regard it is more than the mortality of an individual, perhaps it is also the pointing out to ignorance regarding cosmic mysteries, and the fact that human knowledge is limited. Lightning is also an attribute of the Greek god Zeus, and also of similar deities in other ancient cultures. This archaic symbol is a cultural archetype and is always linked to vitality and strength, but also to divine punishment.

According to Alexei Monroe, lightning was used for the first time in punk culture by British industrial band Throbbing Gristle. After them many others used it when dealing with pagan, alchemical, apocalyptical and other esoteric themes, but it also points out to technological production, to systems of control.[36] Before Throbbing Gristle lightning was used by David Bowie who gave it numerous possible meanings. However, Autopsia does not relate to any meaning, but mobilizes this cultural archetype in the form of a question. What is lightning? If Foucault poses the question what is an Author, then Autopsia reshapes topic of lightning into a question: what is Death?

The joy of extinguishing the light

*Steel Books*are similar to other Autopsia-sworks: they are transnational, multilingual objects. They connect opposites via the Baroque method of *discordia concors*: religion with science, dream with life, disappearance with joy. All this becomes an apocalyptic anti-spectacle. While visual representation of apocalypse is often linked to spectacular displays of a possible catastrophe, Autopsia links the apocalypse to the connotation of the revelation, which is a lightning-like display of disappearance, but also of exhaustion of capitalism, the impossibility of return, the civilizational entropy. However, the disorder and aimlessness of this condition is not a catastrophe in itself, but the nature of things.

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[35] Autopsia, *Apocrypha*, 181.

[36] Monroe, *Thanatopolis*, 37.

Through the fusion of elements of cosmic origin and immaterial poetry, Autopsia's alchemy creates the gold of disappearance. Collage, montage, polytonal, repetitive, electronic, dark ambient works of Autopsia are the mirrors of destruction, prohibition of memory (*damnation memoriae*), entrance into the cave of oblivion.

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Experimental Art and the Body: Parangolé and the Collective Body

Abstract: The article deals with the changes in Brazilian art from the 1950s to the 1970s, from concrete art to experimentalism, taking into particular account the importance of the artistic production of Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica. It can be said that both artists contributed to a radical questioning of the concept of the work of art and its traditional supports, and also provided a new relationship between the work of art and the viewer in contemporary art. In fact, Brazilian experimentalism anticipated at least a decade ahead of similar questioning of contemporary art posed by European artists and institutions.

Keywords: Concrete art; Neoconcretism; experimental art; art and concept; Brazilian contemporary art; Helio Oiticica; Lygia Clark.

Introduction

Brazil's industrial modernization following the Second World War resulted in a appreciation for rationalist art, which was connected to the international constructive movement exemplified by Russian Constructivism, the Bauhaus and Neoplasticism. In São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, modern art museums were inaugurated, showcasing contemporary exhibitions mainly focused on abstraction, geometric and informal art, but also concrete art. Further to the existing cultural landscape, the São Paulo Art Biennial was launched in 1951. This was followed by the founding of modern art institutions and the mobilization of artists and art critics in favour of contemporary manifestations of art, a series of debates about their importance in forming a taste for modern art and the possibility of being informed about new contemporary trends in the visual arts. In this sense, conferences were organized by the institutions themselves, such as Romero Brest's six conferences on contemporary art at the São Paulo Art Museum (MASP)[1] and a series of proposals also emerged over the years regarding the true role of museums in shaping our artistic milieu.

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[1] Aracy Amaral, *Projeto construtivo brasileiro na arte (1950–1962)* (Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo: Funarte, Pinacoteca do Estado, 1977), 18–20.

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In fact, the minority left in Brazil that did not align itself with the Communist Party in the 1940s and 1950s was able to bet on modern art and its institutions without this meaning that Brazilian culture was subordinated to the impositions of modern art disseminated by the United States in the post-war period. Mário Pedrosa was a key figure in this left-wing alternative to the Communist Party in Brazil; he championed an alternative vision of art, far removed from the traditional modernism, viewing modern art as an integral part of a broader and more profound revolution i encompassing aesthetic transformation. Modern art museums in Brazil played the role of institutionalizing modern art in the country. The proposals and constitution of the new institutions were received with enthusiasm, due to the expectations of a greater dynamic of Brazilian artistic production. In the years that followed, Mário Pedrosa emphasized the importance of these institutions in the development local artistic circuit, showing, however, the contradictions of this expansion taking place in the 1970s. These modern museums would be true *pantheons of* the future, in Pedrosa's words, "already an expression of posterity"[2], where the idea of a museum would prevail less as a place where the official history of the arts would be deposited – a concept that was criticized by the avant-garde for its place in the affirmation of ethnocentric culture, valuing the meaning of art as the historical result of "economic and intellectualist progress"[3] – and more as a place where art could be seen as a historical result of "economic and intellectualist progress" – and even more as a living museum, committed to revealing new contemporary trends in art and to the "perceptual-aesthetic" re-education of man.[4]

Once the art circuit had been established, which would be initiated with the founding of the Biennale in 1951, contemporary art exhibitions began to pass through those capitals, eliminating, to a certain extent, the standards established by figuration in various different tones, contemplating versions of realism, thematization and referencing the image of the human – partly the result of the internalization of cultural interests due to the lack of international communication – rooted in the Week of Modern Art.[5] Among these exhibitions, Mário Pedrosa (1986) identified two as particularly significant for our artistic landscape: Among these exhibitions, Mário Pedrosa (1986) identified two as particularly important for our artistic *métier*, one in São Paulo and the other in Rio de Janeiro: Alexander Calder's exhibition at the Ministry of Culture Salon in 1948, initiated by Henrique Mindlin, and Max Bill's 1950 exhibition at the São Paulo Museum of Art, organized by Pietro Maria Bardi. In turn, each of the artists mentioned above informed the new generations about the trends in art being produced in the major international centers.[6]

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[2] Mário Pedrosa, *Acadêmicos e modernos*. (São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo), 1998, 305.

[3] Mário Pedrosa, *Homem, mundo, arte em crise*. (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1986), 281.

[4] Mário Pedrosa, *Política das artes* (São Paulo: Edusp, 1995), 298.

[5] The week of modern art took place in 1922 at the municipal theatre in the city of São Paulo. It was a cultural and artistic event that inaugurated the presentation of the ideas and works of modern art in Brazil. It was attended by poets, writers, sculptors, painters and enthusiastic supporters of modernism. For more information see: Elza Ajzenberg, "A Semana de Arte Moderna de 1922," *Revista Cultura e Extensão* 7 (2012): 25–29.

[6] Serge Guilbaut, *How New York stole the idea of the modern art – abstract expressionism, freedom, and the cold war* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985) 19–20.

Concretism in Brazil developed in the post-war period during the 1950s. Influenced by the Ulm School and Soviet experiments, several Brazilian artists experimented with the language of non-representational and geometric art. Geometric art gained strength in two locations in Brazil: Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. In the city of São Paulo, the concretist experiments were very close to industry due to the city's industrial vocation; in Rio de Janeiro, concretism was closer to free production and guided by uncompromising invention. Among the artists in the Rio de Janeiro group, Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica stood out for their strength of production. Over the years, the constructive experience opened up the opportunity for radical questioning of art supports, the relationship between work and public (for example, Mangueira samba school dancers inside the museum of modern art) and the conceptualization of the artistic experience. All this was called Brazilian experimentalism, Neoconcretism.

Faced with the progressive tendency in the 1950's to contradict the parameters established and in force for centuries, it was up to modern art to re-establish the motto of the dissolution of norms as its own identity. Over time and based on the contributions emerging from the artistic avant-garde at the beginning of modernism, the necessary conditions were created for radicalization of its proposals, leading art to completely dissolve the structural residues of its conceptions that were still in force.[7]

This elimination did not take place without protest by many who did not understand the new operationality that was being established. There was, so to speak, the closure and death of the Auratic character of the work of art, but at the same time the opening up of a new artistic practice that sought to extend the artistic experience from a visual to a sensory or conceptual field. Although the approach is not entirely true, the fracture of the usual parameters was felt in almost all areas of human material or intellectual production. In artistic activities more closely linked to mass production, the symbolic-representative nature of objects has been eliminated in exchange for the search for greater productive effectiveness combined with and transformed into personal customer satisfaction. The caveat regarding the approximation of various artistic-productive activities is due to the, so to speak, specific character that each of them has taken on, even though they participate in the same structural sphere. This is easy to see when we look at the link to the market that a fashion designer has in comparison to a painter, although this distance between the two has diminished and almost disappeared completely in recent years. For this reason, the tendency of art today (painting, sculpture, engraving and any other artistic manifestation that can be categorized or not) is to move closer to a total incorporation of its practice into usual practices of the market economy society.

The participation of artistic activity within the new rules of the market society can be effectively seen in the great value given to the cultural market, which generates dividends all over the world. Cultural markets are the new facet of neoliberal societies, the offspring of the transformation of culture and scientific knowledge into activities

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[7] Ronaldo Brito, *Neoconcretismo: vértice e ruptura do projeto construtivo brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, 1985).

that are uncritical of the status quo. Or rather, these activities have taken on the role of reproducers of today's society, where art has its performance embedded in managed cultural policies. Modern art, which had its space more or less guaranteed and inseparable from the freedom to invent and modify existing standards, now has its precise place in managed leisure. As such, the introduction of artistic endeavor into the sphere of producing "creative and renewable proposals" has led the plastic arts to take on the same meaning as *fashion weeks* do in society today, namely: emphasis on the artistic product as an innocuous activity in the transformation of society marked by serial production.[8]

This process began with the fate that was attributed to the renovating proposals of modernity that opposed both the oppressive system of the divine order of distinction between men and the bourgeois rationalism of the 19th century. In art, the dissolution of artistic parameters was erased in favor of its opposite. The dissolution or destruction of the foundations of academic art, in search of a living practice – an eminently modern activity as an act of building human freedom, lost ground to the dissolution of all activities in a monolithic social order. What had previously seemed to be a revolution without precedent in human history became a trivialized and dissolute practice, without any transformative effect – not independent – as was foreshadowed by North American *styling*, in which avant-garde art had generated its opposite, the retrogressive avant-garde of our day.[9]

The loss of the symbolic character of art, as has been said, was a response to criticism of the superhuman order of organization of society based on divine laws and also to art as a symbol of social distinction in the bourgeois world of the 19th century. In painting, the change from a representational character to a symbol or allegory of social values led to a reduction in the visual importance of painting, which was often conceived as a reflective simile of the image of the world. The invoice of painting changed due to the resignification of all its elements (colour, form, support).

This change also occurred in other fields of art. Leaving the court and the spheres of the emerging upper bourgeoisie at the end of the 19th century, the painter gained freedom because he was freed from social ties that held him and to which he owed obedience, as well as ties that bound him to a standard of taste determined by social customs of a particular milieu.

Modern art and rationality

At the turn of the 19th century, productive relations were dynamized by the development of technology. This process was experienced by the painter who, with the introduction of technical means – photography – for the production and reproduction of images, lost his role as a portrait painter and was left on the margins of society, with no defined social function. Art occupies new social places. The work of

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[8] Mário Pedrosa, *Política das artes*. (São Paulo: Edusp, 1995), pp. 322-326.

[9] Otília Beatriz Fernandez Arantes, *Mário Pedrosa: itinerário crítico* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2004), 27.

art and the symbolism of colors no longer have an explicit link to social position, but rather derive from the symbolic production of the capitalist system introjected by the artist. Painting has followed a separate path from modern social production, where the industrial means of production are monitored, unlike the trend towards clothing, which has not ceased to adapt to industrial modes of production. Like architecture, it responded to the needs of a real social demand, in an attempt to produce a new reality. In fact, like architecture – which was eminently social in nature – clothing was the first to adapt well to the new *modus operandi*.[10] In turn, less than architecture, with the exception of the constructivist production of Tatlin and other constructivists, the art of dressing was relegated to a subordinate position to the new relations of modern production and followed, in most of its experiments, the old 'well-dressed' scheme, when it didn't contribute to the aestheticism of life.

Apart from this, we find in sewing the same tendency to break down traditional dressing patterns as in modern art. The process of disintegration of traditional compositional values can lead to couture constructing its own values within the mode of production, freeing the couturier from his subordinate position in exchange for a free creative position. Both the discovery of gestalt psychology and the rationalizations implemented in urban spaces by architecture marked the plastic arts of the 1950s and 1960s, especially in Brazil. Brazilian artistic production largely followed this trend, something that had been abandoned by European and even American art since the time of Mondrian or the Bauhaus. In turn, international critics in the 1950s didn't understand the persistence of a geometric and abstract program in Brazil at the time Informalism dominated the art scene worldwide.

The persistence and dissemination in Brazil of an abstract-geometric art in its most radical manifestation, concretism, was spreading in the country with exemplary force due to the efforts of art critic Mário Pedrosa and the advent of the First Bienniale. But how could the insistence on affirming pure plastic values in Brazilian art be explained? Because of perseverance, Pedrosa's insistence and great vision of the fate and significance of modern art in our time. The roots of modernism in the arts were inextricably linked to the attempt to plan and rationalize social production for its own sake. This task was taken on by modern art throughout the century, from its first revolutionary experiments, drawing closer to the political identity from which the artistic manifestos imported from politics emerged, to the manifestations of constructive art aimed at the geometrization of architectural space and the experimental union between architecture and painting proposed above all by the Neoplasticists. There was, so to speak, a commitment on the part of modern art to be affiliated with the social struggles of its time.

Modern art undoubtedly suffered its first reactionary backlash with Nazi figurative art and then with socialist realism. These art forms tried to absorb the transformative content of art in order to use it to benefit the political-ideological struggle of totalitarian regimes. Their opposite line was Picasso's cubism, Malevitch's Russian

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[10] Brito, *Neoconcretismo*.

constructivism and Mondrian's neoplasticism, in which art still seemed to retain its independence (its autonomy) and its transformative potential. Emphasizing these two characteristics of modern art, Max Bill's concretism and Ulm's constructivism emerged. After Concretism and Neoconcretism, the modern project transformed the pictorial space into a rationalized space, which was therefore non-allusive and compatible with the garment and the body: Parangolé and the Collective Body new era, exerting particular pressure on art's commitment to building a new era. The modern trend promoted another role for the artist, namely his formal intervention in the social space, sensitizing people to a new, more collective type of society.

In turn, the defense of abstract-geometric art in Brazil served as a search for *ordo rationalis*, an intrinsic and predominant quality of the constructive trend in art. The transformative role of art is being questioned as criticism of modernism advances, particularly constructivism, whose ideals of reducing form to its minimum elements expressed in geometric relationships, its tendency towards planning and even the standardization of forms were instrumentalized and contributed much more to the market economy than to a significant improvement in the living conditions of the population. The shipwreck of the modern project was most evident in the architecture and urbanism of the world's great capitals, where the immeasurably large size of streets and the enormous concentration of people in small spaces transformed people's living spaces into increasingly restricted and inhumane ones. The metropolis, symbol of our time, has become, in its modern grandeur, synonymous with the failings of modernism itself with its inoperability, its cultivation of a productive rationality of repression and its development and growth without any planning of space without economic interests intervening in the first place. The new conditioning of art and even science in favor of economic interests sidelined the importance of man, subjected now more than ever to the market-god. In this new historical context that characterized the post-World War II period, the hope of Brazil actually entering the modern way of life through the developmentalism of Juscelino Kubistchek was transformed from a dream into a nightmare: the Military coup of 1964 brought the far right to power and began to implement the plan to subordinate Brazil's economy to the interests of the United States. All the contradictions that arose in the construction of Brasilia, the modern city par excellence, were valid for all the developments of the modern project which, over the years, was not accompanied by a social change in the structures of exploitation of man by man.

The limits of the Brazilian constructive experience

The introduction of concrete art in Brazil, although on the one hand it aimed for more than a simple artistic update and saw its hopes dashed, on the other hand it favored the unleashing and the real possibility of developing constructive artistic proposals to their end. Projects that relied on art's ability to transform collective living standards were abandoned in favor of previous programs to raise awareness among

individuals. The neoconcrete experience was the articulation of constructive language in all its consequences and limits. For its part, neoconcretism had been a response to the lack of consequence and impasse of concrete experience. In São Paulo, it had reached the structural impasse of painting, in other words, concrete painting – in which the example of the limit of experience becomes more evident – had reached the extreme of the material consideration of the work of art, conceived as a material support that enables optical experiences through the manipulation of color and form. Neoconcrete art will take this experience to its extreme degree through discontent with the reduction of the work to optical-mechanical aspects in search of a more complete aesthetic experience.[11]

The total work was the motivation for the new entry of the human aspect into perception and, above all, into creation; in other words, neoconcrete art wanted to give rise to existential experience. This existential experience became possible with the introduction of time into the work. Now the work of art was open to the viewer's sensory investigation, it was no longer a work of contemplation where time and space are fictitious, as they are representative of a scene, but rather time and space in the work. The neoconcrete experience reaches its ultimate consequences with the break-up of the previously stable categories of creation and the neoconcrete work becomes an artistic manifestation among poetry, painting and sculpture.

The cutting-edge art research, in the form of object art phase, that subsequently dominated the international art scene emerged from the neoconcrete experience of the 1960s' Brazil. Without being tied to the establishment of a new category of art, neoconcrete artists such as Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica continued their experiments in destroying the flatness of painting in search of a deeper understanding of the new field of artistic research that emerged with the advent of neoconcrete art. The new art was not constituted as a new artistic statute called by any 'ism', but proposed the experimental radicalization of art. This experimental radicalization led Hélio and Lygia to seek new means of artistic expression beyond conventional means of artistic representation. But what determined their search for new materials of expression? This question must be answered within the framework of what the artists understood as the dilation of the meaning of the artistic object and its new function. The search for new expressive materials was due in the first place to the new meaning attributed to art, in which the notion of expressiveness of form was not confined to a particular way of making art, but to various ways, because expressiveness was independent of the means of expression.

This was seen as broadening the meaning of what it means being artistic. On the other hand, the new art sought less to act in the aesthetic conformation of the social environment and more in the sensory expansion of an individual's reception and the change in his/her behavior within the technical-industrial society. The proposals put forward by artists Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark were aimed at recovering the dormant sensibility (*aesthesis*) of modern man immersed in a numbing, machinic

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[11] Ibid., 49.

and therefore alienating everyday life. It was, therefore, a matter of imprinting and believing in the possibility of changing the individual's existential meanings by seeking to reread everyday events in another sense; the aesthetic dimension capable of transforming the social dimension experienced by adding possibilities for each person to intervene in the world. Thus, it was not a question, at least as a program, of simple aestheticism, that is, giving a new form to a retrograde and reactionary content, but of opening up the possibility of an individual's aesthetic awareness. To do this, these artists used a variety of materials, usually from the discards of consumer society, as a way of recovering man's sensibility.

Among the various ways of sensitizing the spectator-participant are Hélio Oiticica's *Parangolés* and Lygia Clark's *Corpo Coletivo*. These experiences give us the key to understanding the disalienating value of art through the use of new means of artistic production. These experiences will serve as an attempt to explain a new way of conceiving the relationship between man and his social environment, the city.

Social deconditioning: Hélio Oiticica's experiments

Parangolé has an important significance in HO's art, as it marks the change from strictly optical art to environmental manifestation.[12] After the *Parangolé* experience, Oiticica entered the program of environmental propositions that sought to involve the former viewer in a set of sensations that were no longer just visual, but tactile, auditory and olfactory. These experiences followed a path of propositional coherence with continuous development in a very clear constructive sense. The constructive sense defined by HO will be the basis of the research into color and form in space in search of new notions of time and space. Now, form and color will be part of the sensory evolution of the former spectator – now participant. Evolution is linked not only to color and form, but to the expressiveness of the body as the particular rhythm of each participant, which becomes fundamental part of the work. Color and form do not exist per se but depend on participation in order to manifest themselves as dynamism, which is why form and color are the means of an artistic manifestation that involves the participant, their evolution and the dynamic effect of form and color in real space as a total work that can be experienced by other former spectators. All of them aimed to bring about a transformation without historical precedent and which constituted the Brazilian artistic experience as a singular one. HO's proposal will be to instill within the constructive developments of color and plan in the inventions, penetrables and bolides their overcoming in something new: the Parangolé, the sum of all previous experiences. This will bring to light the last significant consequences of the loss of conventional support, understood as a guarantee of a harmonious relationship between form and color. The Parangolé will be inscribed within artistic practices as a coherent development of the previously existing practices that takes the constructive sense to its telos, that is, the Parangolé will be an experience, no longer of construction

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[12] Celso Favaretto, *A invenção de Hélio Oiticica* (São Paulo: Edusp, 1992).

conceived as a dissociation of art and society, but as a de-aesthetization of the work of art, or rather, its insertion into the societal experiential practices, trying to give them a new meaning.[13]

The de-aesthetization of art proposed by HO inscribed artistic practice in its approximation to everyday practices and, at the same time, discredited social transformation as an aesthetic transformation of society, in a strict sense of the word. Aesthetics doesn't disappear in HO's latest artistic manifestations; it finds a new path: non-expressive action. According to what has been said above, we believe that the great change in HO's art was not really a break with the plastic developments prior to Parangolé; on the contrary, there was a continuity and, so to speak, a radicalization of his previous proposals: Invenções, Penetráveis and Bólides. These virtually contained the possibility of creating Parangolé. However, the path could have been different. HO opted not for a prescriptively determined artistic experience for the enjoyment of his work, but for the total opening up of the artistic experience to the viewer. This gesture means that his work will no longer be inscribed to a limit of creative conception of the work, but in the transmission or liberation of the sense of authorship, which Oiticica himself called a field of supra-open experience. If before the constructive experience aimed to give order and even to imprint a certain modification of man's behavior through his aesthetic sensitization to the world of rationalized forms in collective spaces, HO's experience now aims to establish the constructive project in its fullness (art and life), enabling the viewer to have an open experience, something that will manifest itself in full force in his Whitechapel experience in 1969.

The displacement proposed by HO, of the viewer as the creator of a rhythmic evolution of the Parangolé, aims to transform the last valuable place of art as it has been understood since the earliest traditions of artistic expression. The abandonment of creation or authorship was intended to be total freedom of the artistic experience and its new inscription as a practice in everyday life. The participant should be the limit of a new experience of the circulation of artistic values, which in turn no longer depended on an institution (museum) and a creator recognized by the art circuit (artist). HO's environmental art proposals were intended to be a link between art and everyday life in a vital sense whose consequence in extremes would be artistic creation as an everyday practice. The new utopia produced by Oiticica's work foresaw its end as an institutionalized practice and sought a creative space far from any form of incorporation that would restrict its freedom.

HO's great political endeavour was to try to establish artistic practice as a non-expressive practice. This explains HO's use of cheap materials: burlap sacks, plastic bags, plastic bathroom curtains, sisal, etc. If, on the one hand, these materials seek to broaden the visual and tactile experience for the viewer, on the other hand, they spell out the connection between HO and the yearnings for a 'popular culture' in the industrial age. HO did not share the political yearning of the time to search for the roots of Brazilian culture, but he understood artistic activity in its universal meaning

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[13] Ibid., 173.

and, therefore, common to all without any distinction of race, sex or economic situation, that is, as a practice common to man and which guaranteed him freedom from the great system of managed human relations or the symbolic appeals of the market.

HO's politics could be understood as a practice of subverting values within the space of freedom guaranteed to art. He himself conceived of his attitude as an ethical attitude, in other words, an attitude located outside the institutions of politics. HO was an outcast, just as Lygia Clark expressed the same yearning for unconditioned social transformation in her *Corpo Coletivo (Collective Body)*.

Social deconditioning: Lygia Clark's experiences

In 1970, Lygia Clark moved to Paris to live and work. She became professor at the Faculté d'Arts Plastiques Saint Charles at the Sorbonne. Her classes there are based on the proposal to transform the aesthetic experience of art into new forms of experience based on phenomenology. Artistic practice is understood as collective creation, in transition to body therapy. From the 1970s onwards, LC began to develop a series of research projects on the sensations of the human body. Like Oiticica's, her plastic research follows closely the elimination of traditional supports in art and the search for a new position for artistic creation in the face of managed society. Her research into the body was precisely a response to the sensory and situational conditioning of the body within our society. Lygia didn't just want to decondition human behavior, which has its statutory form (in schools, hospitals, banks, in other words, in all forms of contemporary social organizations), but she also sought other possible ways of manifesting one's living. If, on the one hand, her propositional research was as coherent as Oiticica's, on the other hand, she prefered; moving from the representational framework to the notion of spectator's participation in *Bicho*, the next step should be to emphasize the creative-free possibility of the participant. This situation, as in Oiticica, has as its background the very condition of the artist and his integrated position in the art circuit. All that remains is for the artist to deny his/her comfortable position and seek a new path of intervention in social practices.

LC's aim with *Corpo coletivo* was to alter the sensitive experience of the participants, making them experience new and unusual forms of manifestation, not just in the sense of playful practices, but in the sense of real manifestations of a new experiential possibility. LC's proposals aimed at interfering in the 'smooth running' of things, altering the individual's consciousness towards a new possibility of life beyond the narrow confines of existing everyday practices. Rather than a vision of a real possibility of unlimited transformation in the manifestation of life, LC's work is the beckoning of an utopia that could potentially be realized; rather: "from the absurd desire for everything to suddenly becoming exceptional [...] or for our usual condition to be transformed into the realm of the extraordinary' is at least the 'will to see one day – which can begin with the experience of the proposition – the ordinary itself ceases to be identified with failure".[14]

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[14] Ricardo Nascimento Fabrini, *O espaço de Lygia Clark* (São Paulo: Atlas, 1994), 162–63.

Among the developments in research into the forms of manifestation of the body in collective acts, LC's Collective Body explores relationships of human coexistence in open situations of current psycho-corporal bonds. The Collective Body was one of these pieces of research that was presented at the 1986 IX Salão Nacional de Artes Plásticas in Rio de Janeiro. It was a work of participation of up to fifty people wearing synthetic knitwear with zips in the back. The knitted garments looked like gym overalls and came in different colors (red, blue, orange, black and carmine). All the garments were tied together at different points by metal hooks. The hooks or elastic bands connected these garments in different places, i.e. the sleeve of one garment could be connected to the waist of another, which in turn was connected to the back of another garment. When the participants put on the knitwear, they found themselves strangely joined in with each other.

From this union, the movements of attraction and repulsion between the participants occurred in such a way as to alter the entire group of participants, constituting a collective act. The search for new references for space and behavior was intrinsically linked to the intentions of abandoning repressive psychic instances and the search for a concrete liberation of the body and sensuality understood in the relationship that was no longer established in a private environment, but in a space of collective interaction. It was, among other things, an attempt at a collective social liberation from the social standards of behavior that were demanded by the very conformation with an unforeseen circumstance and the therefore participants' collective involvement. A political act in metaphor, the collective Body points to new alternatives for the production of experiences and the emancipatory possibility for an individual in a collective action. LC's intention in her entire phase of Collective Body experiments (Túnel, Canibalismo, Baba antropofágica, Rede de elásticos, etc.) was to strengthen the link between art and politics.

Both LC's and HO's experimental work centered on questioning the meaning of modern art after its comfortable accommodation in the uncomfortable class division of capitalist society. The fact is that both LC and HO adhered to anti-art and with it aimed for a position as non-artists. They sought a new dimension of aesthetics that would escape the weariness of the experiences of modernism. On the one hand, HO turned to questioning elite art and introduced contact with popular art, especially samba, into his artistic solutions. On the other hand, LC began to produce sensory experiences linked to therapeutic mediation and a concern with psychic research. The experiences they produced attempted to break down the division between art and everyday life, art and life, in order to recompose human existence to a higher level of life.

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Documentary Practice as Praxis: A Direct Appeal to the Realization of the Social Act

Abstract: The essential preoccupation of this paper is *documentary practice* as (social) *praxis*, the voice of the photography as a direct mode of transmission and not only the discovery or mediation of reality. Allan Sekula's photographic discourse is taken as a case study, a practice that directly engages the subject – the position of *the worker* within *the working class*, critically representing the reality that is usually masked by spectacle. The hypotheses assume that the methodology of contextualization and discursivization of documentary photography (*Untitled Slide Sequence*, 1972) leads to a conscious perception of a historical and social reality. Using a cross-methodology of the author's theory and practice, referring to the author's critical point of view, Marxist and post-Marxist theories, this paper indicates that Sekula develops a specific *photo-graphology* concerned with the directness of expression, the literalness of meaning, and the unmasking of iconic signs captured by capitalist signifiers. The arguments underline that the use of documentary photography as a direct appeal can encourage the realization of a social act. The conclusion implies that the use of the author's voice in the direction of changing the movement of aesthetic production and reception leads to actualization, towards awakening of the passive component – confrontation with social stratification under capitalist order.

Keywords: documentary practice; social praxis; critical position; Allan Sekula; contextualization; discursivization; photo-graphology; realization of the social act.

Introduction

The approach to documentary photography as a *praxis* – a work in a specific social and historical context excludes the objective existence independent of the subject.[1] By building narratives around crisis situations and the discovery of marginal spaces, unemployment, and workplace struggle, Allan Sekula (1951–2013) applies a non-formalist approach to media – a critical art with an open indication of the social

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[1] For "praxis" see Christoph Menke, *Force: A Fundamental Concept of Aesthetic Anthropology*, trans. Gerrit Jackson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 13–29. Cf. Christian Lotz, "Representing Capital: Mimesis, Realism, and Contemporary Photography," in *The Social Ontology of Capitalism*, eds. Daniel Krier and Mark P. Worrell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 187.

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world.[2] Assuming that the purpose and effect of documentary practices is to reveal the truth, critical framework could raise certain questions.[3] And if art that aims at social transformation is treated as speech, then it could also point to something outside of art. Representation based on critical deconstruction and a rhetorical approach to the disposal of camera evidence, together with the affective character of documentary photography, could contribute to a more critical understanding of the social world.[4]

The hypotheses assume that the methodology of contextualization and discursivization of documentary photography (*Untitled Slide Sequence*, 1972) leads to a conscious perception of historical and social reality. The author's position takes an explicitly political stance within the ongoing debate about unemployment and the resistance that "cannot place itself in" as "an external relation to capitalism"[5]. Registering the "ubiquity in everyday social life", he posits meaning at the "beginning of the code", taking the "code of connotation" as "historical"[6]. Seen from a present distance, Sekula's photographs produced in 1972 are a "spatial (or temporal) continuum" of fragments of social reality; they "preserve the given" by converting it into a post-processual meaning "related to their true content"[7]. We can assume that the reading of a photographic context today could be understood as a continuous message, as an active maneuver (that lasts) in the discursive field, as an intervention in pointing (that needs to be decoded).[8]

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[2] Marie Muracciole and Benjamin J. Young, "Editors' Introduction: Allan Sekula and the Traffic in Photographs," *Grey Room* 55 (Spring 2014): 6–15; Allan Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)," in *Photography against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973–1983* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984), 56–70.

[3] Michael Renov, ed., "Toward a Poetics of Documentary," in *Theorizing Documentary* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 20.

[4] Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary," 53–57.

[5] Pascal Beausse, "Allan Sekula, Untitled Slide Sequence, 1972: Interview Vidéo De Pascal Beausse, Responsable De La Collection Photographie, Cnap," in *The Centre national des arts plastiques supports contemporary art since 1791*, acc. April 20, 2020, https://www.cnap.fr/allan-sekula-untitled-slide-sequence-1972; Allan Sekula, "Aerospace Folktales," in *Photography against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973–1983* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984), 105–64; Steve Edwards, "White-Collar Blues: Allan Sekula Casts an Eye Over the Professional-Managerial Class," *Nonsite.org*, 37, 2021; Nick Srnicek, "Capitalism and the Non-Philosophical Subject," in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, ed. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman (Melbourne: Re-Press, 2011), 175.

[6] Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977), 201.

[7] Siegfried Kracauer, "Photography," in *The Past's Threshold: Essays on Photography*, ed. Philippe Despoix and Maria Zinfert, trans. Conor Joyce (Zurich-Berlin: Diaphanes, 2014), 31.

[8] Ana Peraica, "Fotografija kao dokaz: Primjena tehnologijske definicije fotografije na raspravu u estetici i teoriji fotografije" (PhD diss., Zagreb: Multimedijalni institute, 2018), 118–23; Roland Barthes, *A Barthes Reader*, ed. and intr. Susan Sontag (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 196.

Positioning the critique

The artistic practice of Allan Sekula shows that he explored the freedom and possibility of photographic discourse, combining criticism, documentary genres, and conceptual art. Considered "one of the most critical artists of our time"[9], "an artist/critic"[10], he worked from an explicitly critical and Marxist standpoint.[11] Underlined by "critical realism", his practice attempts to make invisible capital visible.[12] Believing that critical art would justify its documentary position only if it exposed the "myth of photographic truth," he emphasized the "transparency" of the record and opposed the "alleged neutral objectivity," taking into account formal complexities of genre convergence.[13] His series of documentary photographs, *Untitled Slide Sequence* exemplifies the shift of discourse from the domain of the imaginative mastery of the camera to transcending the logic of commodity forms and the "abstraction of exchange" vis-à-vis the logic of the capitalist culture.[14]

Critic and artist coalesce in his authorial personality. By pointing out that a more encompassing *praxis* is needed, his writing deals with photography as *social practice*.[15] Considering that "the photographer is already a social actor, never a completely innocent or objective bystander", the act of "self-expression" should avoid the "megalomania of the signifier", he points out.[16] He develops a specific *photo-graphology*[17] concerned with the directness of expression, the literalness of meaning, and the unmasking of iconic signs captured by capitalist signifiers – precisely by pointing

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[9] Lotz, "Representing Capital: Mimesis, Realism, and Contemporary Photography," 176.

[10] Hilde Van Gelder, "A Matter of Cleaning up: Treating History in the Work of Allan Sekula and Jeff Wall," *History of Photography* 31, 1 (2007): 73.

[11] For an example of the use of the "universal equivalent" reference see Allan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," in *Photography against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973–1983* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984), 77–101; Karl Marx, *Capital: Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, intr. Ernest Mandel, trans. Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin and London: New Left Review, 1976; 1979; Penguin Classics, 1982), 181.

[12] Lotz, "Representing Capital: Mimesis, Realism, and Contemporary Photography," 192; Imre Szeman and Maria Whiteman, "Oil Imag(e)inaries: Critical Realism and the Oil Sands," *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies* 3, 2 (2012): 46–67; Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Allan Sekula: Photography Between Discourse and Document," in *Allan Sekula: Fish Story* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995), 191.

[13] Muracciole and Young, "Editors' Introduction: Allan Sekula and the Traffic in Photographs," 6–15.

[14] Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," 78–80.

[15] See for example his works: *Aerospace Folktales, Fish Story, This Ain't China, School Is a Factory, Sketch for a Geography Lesson.* Allan Sekula, "Introduction," to *Photography against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973–1983* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984), ix; Benjamin James Young, "Sympathetic Materialism: Allan Sekula's Photo-Works, 1971–2000" (Ph.D. diss., Berkeley: University of California, 2018), 4–10.

[16] Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary," 58–75. Cf. Sekula, "Introduction," to *Photography against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973–1983*, xi.

[17] The coinage of *photo-graphology* derives from Sekula's dialectical attitude of critical reflection on a theoretical and practical level as a methodology of interference that merges and moves from theory to practice and vice versa.

them out. Taking into account the already present, "pre-photographic" stage,[18] he constructs a direct relationship between the Althusserian concept of "alienation of man under capitalism", the reality of social class, and the Marxist-theoretical concept of "mode of production" (produktionsweise). Working on both a practical and a theoretical level, Sekula tries to move conceptual and documentary photography into the domain of social practices, to produce a "social effect" that does not correspond to the logic of the ideological system of representations.

Documentary practice *as* praxis (*Untitled Slide Sequence*, 1972)

Aware of the possible transformative pitfalls of photography as a work of art, Sekula highlights the possibility of photography being assimilated into the fine arts market, driven by romantic and post-romantic aspirations.[19] He does not insist on photography as art; on the contrary, he questions it becoming art through various developmental stages of institutionalization, production, aestheticization, and instrumentalization, trying to place documentary photography at the level of a *social gesture*.[20] His series of photographs, *Untitled Slide Sequence*[21] encourages an interactive reading not only of the extracted as recognizable potential meaning but also of the latent, that which cannot speak for itself. The act of direct call means re-discursivization of the voice of the worker, articulated through the author's utterance.[22]

The series of black-and-white photographs comprises successive sequences of a scene of workers leaving their workplace (context given: Convair aerospace factory[23]). The first twenty-one photographs are mostly shot from a static position; the last three photographs are shot from a slightly different position, since Sekula lowers his camera when warned by a guard. A stream of workers climbs up a set of stairs; some of them unexpectedly face the author's camera only for a moment (subsequently some of these workers get terminated). They are not caught in a work process, but in a moment

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[18] Victor Burgin, ed., "Photographic Practice and Art Theory," in *Thinking Photography* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 47.

[19] Allan Sekula, "Photography Between Labour and Capital," in *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures: A Selection from the Negative Archives of Shedden Studio, Glace Bay, Cape Breton, 1948–1968*, eds. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Robert Wilkie (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983), 199–200.

[20] Young, "Sympathetic Materialism: Allan Sekula's Photo-Works, 1971–2000," 1; Sekula, "Photography Between Labour and Capital," 200.

[21] A time-lapse slide show of three compositional sets of twenty-five black-and-white 35-mm transparencies, recently shown in the exhibition "The Uses of Photography: Art, Politics, and the Reinvention of a Medium," curated by Jill Dawsey, MCASD, 28 June–29 September 2017.

[22] Algirdas Julien Greimas, *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory* (Theory and History of Literature; v. 38), trans. Paul J. Perron and Frank H. Collins, forew. Frederic Jameson, intr. Paul J. Perron (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 71.

[23] Captioned: "End of Day Shift, General Dynamics Convair Aerospace Factory, San Diego, California, 17 February 1972." Convair was military-industrial complex, a General Dynamics company that worked for development of aeronautics during the Cold War. Young, "Sympathetic Materialism: Allan Sekula's Photo-Works, 1971–2000," 90–104.

that separates work from their free time and their repetitive everyday lives. But the everyday is not the main stage – capitalism, which inhibits the worker's inability to create practical resistance because he is conditioned and economically dependent – the everyday is the mise-en-scène of that main stage. Comparing clothing that these workers wear, we can conclude that they belong to different working strata within the working class.[24] Some are managers, some are plain workers, all hired by the employer for profit and market economy. The images are similar in an iconographic sense, but the individuals photographed are different; their lives are different, even though they all belong to the working class and perform the goals of the capitalist economy.

Sekula groups the photographs, using an "ensemble" method to incorporate a political dialogue characteristic of both theater and cinema.[25] Using "sequential montage" (Benjamin J. Young) and reworking the possibilities of portrait as a genre, he connects individual figures, presenting their aporetic dimension as a collective *of* separation. He used the analogy between space and time in each photographic frame and the distributed time of wage labor in conceptualizing slide projection, that is, the clicking of slides passing through the projector and the time of the factory clock.[26] The *mode of production* seems to be transposed into the *act of representation*, as a dialectical position that allows us *to see*. In that sense, the series of photographs projected in slide sequences,[27] do not just map the field of vision but also the time necessary for the viewer to confront each photograph individually, to think and focus on what is literally offered – the *reality*. These photographs are shot over a short period of time and projected as slides with an interval that allows the viewer to confront each of these sequences more directly. What lies beneath the surface of the visual is not a mere representation of reality, but a hidden ideology, that takes into account both the individual and collective ideologies of the working class.[28]

Sekula's work, according to Steve Edwards, could not be considered in its entirety if one does not take into account what is recognized as "PMC" (the Professional-Managerial Class). The condition that Sekula perceives, analyzes, and interprets occurs precisely in the working class and internal "antagonistic" fraction, with characteristics that diverge from ideas of social reform to technocratic allegiance to the capitalist system, separation of the working class into upper and lower strata, the impossibility of forming an anti-capitalist block, and, on the other hand, resistance to

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[24] For the diversity of the workforce and the fragmentation of social relations, referring to Marx's Theses on Feuerbach, "das Ensemble," see Young, "Sympathetic Materialism: Allan Sekula's Photo-Works, 1971–2000," 90–115.

[25] Sekula, "Introduction," to *Photography against the Grain*, x–xi.

[26] Young, "Sympathetic Materialism: Allan Sekula's Photo-Works, 1971–2000," 90–116.

[27] A slide projection of similar iconographic sequences gives the impression of a stopped-motion, unfolded film strip. In his art practice, Sekula combined texts, photography, and film expanding the boundaries of art-media.

[28] Young, "Sympathetic Materialism: Allan Sekula's Photo-Works, 1971–2000," 7–8. For reading the archives from below see Sekula, "Photography Between Labour and Capital," 202.

capitalist control.[29] As it is noted, Sekula expressed opposition to the Vietnam War, the supply of military resources produced by the working class, but also the mistrust of the New Left, which often drew personnel resources from the working class (those who belonged to the PMC).[30]

Sekula's series of photographs of Los Angeles industrial workers leaving a factory is a return to Louis Lumière's late 19th century documentary genre (1895) – Workers *Leaving The Lumière Factory in Lyon* (*La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon*).[31] They also evoke the discourse of August Sander and his photograph *Unemployed* (1928), a continuity of preoccupation that allows us to think about documentary photograph as a mark of its politics, or politics as a possibility for all languages.[32] Analyzing the photographs of Lewis Hine or Alfred Stieglitz ("a need for Hine or Stiegliz"[33]), a Marxist critique of "abstract objectivism", Sekula explores the need to consider photography differently. His photography speaks as "just one voice," appealing to the wider social agora as the arena of opposition and resistance, hoping that dialogue will "transcend current institutional boundaries"[34].

Contextualization, discursivization

Photographs are silent (in a phonetic sense) and immobile (in a kinetic sense). They do not have the characteristics of film, but this does not mean that they do not have a voice of their own[35] or that they do not speak something in a way determined by the author's *contextualization*. The author's voice in *Untitled Slide Sequence* conveys a social point of view, regarding the subject and according to the organization of the materials and its presentation.[36] Here, there is no voice as in documentaries, a means that directs the narrative suggestion (linear or non-linear), but the voice of the author is sensed, standing for the social class that itself has lost the ability to speak about its disadvantaged position in the given political contexts of rebellion, resistance, and autonomy, immersing itself in the so-called petty-bourgeois logic of the economy.

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[29] About PMC as a distinct class in monopolist capitalist society, see Edwards, "White-Collar Blues: Allan Sekula Casts an Eye Over the Professional-Managerial Class".

[30] Young, "Sympathetic Materialism: Allan Sekula's Photo-Works, 1971–2000," 7–8. And Sekula himself points out that the archive has to be read from a position of solidarity with those displaced, deformed, silenced, or made invisible by the machinery of profit and progress. Cf. Sekula, "Photography Between Labour and Capital," 202.

[31] Jorge Ribalta, *Universal Archive: The Condition of the Document and the Modern Photographic Utopia* (catalogue) (Barcelona: MACBA, 2008), 99.

[32] Walter Benn Michaels, *The Beauty of a Social Problem: Photography, Autonomy* and *Economy* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 40. Cf. Barthes, *A Barthes Reader*, 209.

[33] Sekula, "Introduction," to *Photography against the Grain*, xii.

[34] Ibid., x–xv.

[35] Bill Nichols, ed., "How Have Documentaries Addressed Social and Political Issues?" in *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010), 214.

[36] Bill Nichols, "The Voice of Documentary," *Film Quarterly* 36, 3 (1983): 17–30.

Believing that photography's potential can contribute to the awakening of class consciousness[37] and consequently influence general perception, Sekula redirects the purely aesthetic function into a more direct message, considering that there is always another side to its implications.[38] His essay from 1981, "The Traffic in Photographs", discusses forms of ideology; the legitimization of great political and economic powers; the authorization of institutional power; material and symbolic power; and the inseparable connection of language and power.[39] Sekula believed that a discourse situation was possible in which photographs would be enveloped by spoken language.[40]

The visual codes in *Untitled Slide Sequence* allow us to read aloud the failure of the revolutionary idea of Rousseau's "social contract" –people themselves as sovereign, people treated as social beings. Reality is represented not as spectacle,[41] the place of illusion and false consciousness, but in the direction of something that should be unveiled, or, as Walter Benn Michaels claims, the appeal of the literal is ongoing.[42] When Benjamin addressed the specificity of photography, he noted that it is impossible to say anything about the split second when a person starts walking.[43] From a technological-visual point of view when mimicking reality this may be so, but in social reality the workers included in *Untitled Slide Sequence* walk towards what Marx identifies as the "relative surplus population", towards unemployment, which is good for profit, good for capitalism itself, an useful inequality.[44]

Conclusion

Sekula theorized about "the photographer as monteur", applying a dialectical approach independent of the technique but making the technique operative.[45] If we underline Benjamin's hypothesis that the revolutionary nature of the political stance is based on a sense of solidarity in the attitudes, then the realization of the social act could be identified by the position of the author – *his* position in the process of production.[46] Resurfacing the question of authority; instead of prioritizing the image to

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[37] Elizabeth Borland, "Class Consciousness," in *Encyclopedia of Social Problems: 1&2*, ed. Vincent N. Parrillo (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2008), 134.

[38] Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (1986): 68.

[39] Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," 77–78.

[40] Allan Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," in *Photography against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973–1983* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984), 4.

[41] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995), 199.

[42] Michaels, *The Beauty of a Social Problem: Photography, Autonomy* and *Economy*, 15.

[43] Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," *Screen* 13, 1 (Spring 1972), 5–26.

[44] Michaels, *The Beauty of a Social Problem: Photography, Autonomy* and *Economy*, 38; Marx, *Capital: Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, 785–89.

[45] Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," 60. Cf. Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," in Benjamin, *Selected Writings, vol. 2, part 2, 1931–1934*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eliand, and Gary Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 770.

[46] Ibid., 773.

speak for itself, he is placing the right of the historical truth to be unveiled *with* the message itself, so that the link that connects the image and its exposed truth transposes into a *message*. The applied discursive procedures in *Untitled Slide Sequence* show that he uses "autobiographical" sources but keeps the "distance" by activating the point of view through the voice of the "third character" to establish the critical stance that he tries through the personal story to encompass a wider social field as an object of discursivization.[47] The use of direct images as a visualized author's speech, fractionated the prism of the storyteller – the narrator in the first or third person (overlapped or crossed) – memorizes the story, both personal and general – the story that couldn't be told by the ones who were silenced – the workers (the capitalist's most indispensable means of production[48]).[49]

Young notes that photographs such as *Untitled Slide Sequence* encourage what he calls "désoeuvrement," clarifying that it is not about "capitalist unemployment" but about the "aesthetic potential of unemployment."[50] What Sekula tries to extract from the photograph is its "dialogic social origin" by unraveling the "mute resistance to language" and its suppressed position. His source is everyday life – his own class and family background, situations already equipped with signs that he transforms into message.[51] Herein, the gesture of *discursivization* of documentary evidence[52] lies in the "context of utterance" as attached to the discourse,[53] the *contextualization* that supports and directs the meaning and the semantic destination intended to be read directly.[54] It is the photographic *utterance* that redirects one-s message from a general discourse of possible and limited meanings to a more precise connotation. It is *connotation* that constructs the orthogonals of perception by directing them to the center of projection, the constructed perspective, not to the illusion of reality, but to

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[47] Idem.

[48] Marx, *Capital: Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, 718.

[49] For what cannot be silenced, see Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, Howard Eiland, et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 276.

[50] Young, "Sympathetic Materialism: Allan Sekula's Photo-Works, 1971–2000," 114; 7. About unemployment, see Michaels, *The Beauty of a Social Problem: Photography, Autonomy and Economy*, 38–152.

[51] Sekula, "Introduction," to *Photography against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973–1983*, x–xi.

[52] Victor Burgin, ed., "Introduction," to *Thinking Photography* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 2. Jean-Luc Nancy proposes the concept of "coming-to-presence", referring to the term "evidence" as a possibility for the anticipation of some kind of meaning in the process of "cutting off" that reality from the world. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Evidence of Film: Abbas Kiarostami* (Brussels: Yves Gevaert, 2001), 42. For the interpretation of the term "evidence" and maintaining the connection with the original referent, see Algirdas Julien Greimas and Joseph Courtés, *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary*, trans. L. Crist, D. Patte, et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 110. We can draw an analogy with the poetic mode in documentaries that use the historical world for their raw material. Bill Nichols, "How Can We Differentiate among Documentaries? Categories, Models, and the Expository and Poetic Modes of Documentary Film," in *Introduction to Documentary*, Second Edition (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 162–64.

[53] Greimas and Courtés, *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary*, 81–85.

[54] Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," 4–8.

reality itself as a *social* condition. Taking into account that the photograph as an utterance carries, or is, a message in itself, the conditioning of its readability (treated as a *text* instead of an *icon*) is based on contextualization, i.e., culturally determined codes of perception, which are not purely universal. As Sekula points out, photography is a "way of *knowing*" and a "way of *feeling*", knowing the world "directly" from the inside and with all its contradictions.[55]

Sekula's pivotal (critical) point lays bare the non-resistance of the working class working in the Convair factory or anywhere else in the world in the service of war, technological superiority, and capitalism, forcing us not only to look but to *see* better, not only to listen to the *mute speech* of these photographs butto *hear* better.

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[55] Ibid., 85; Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," 95; Edwards, "White-Collar Blues: Allan Sekula Casts an Eye Over the Professional-Managerial Class".

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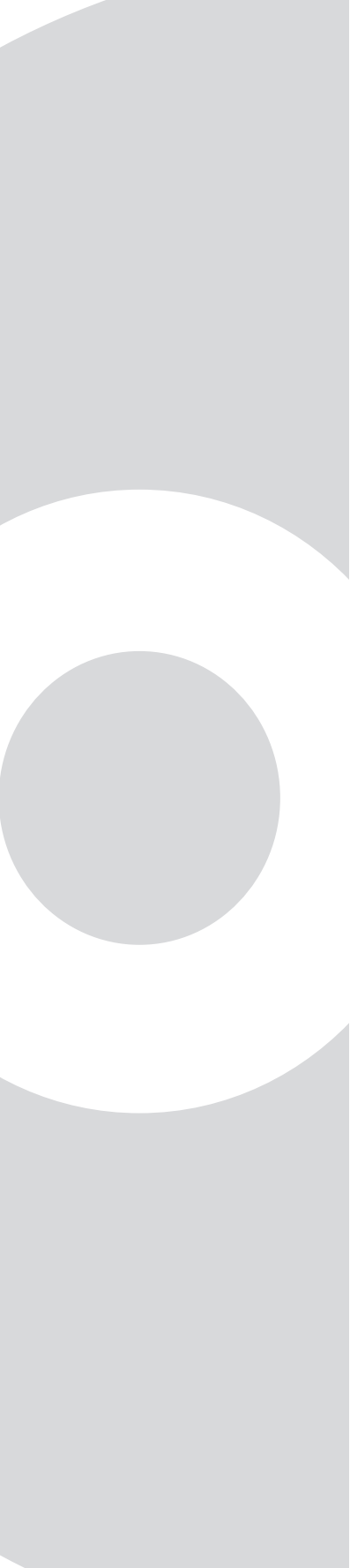
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The Position of Contemporary Hybrid Art Practices in Shaping Ethical Response to AI Vladan Joler and Kate Crawford – Case Study

Abstract: The thesis of this paper rests on the premise that the role of contemporary hybrid art practices, employing technology as a means of expression, has extended to active engagement in the complexities of societal conflicts and shaping philosophical dialogue, which is evident in its subversive endeavors, that have become the points of intersection between power dynamics, technology, and ethics. Namely, the position of art has become the pragmatic and utilitarian one, and art aims at confronting society with the antagonisms of the mechanisms of power and the consequences of high technology development. With a view to support the thesis of this essay, I will analyze Vladan Joler's and Kate Crawford's art project "Anatomy of an AI System". The aim of this essay is to show that the role of hybrid art is reflected in its contribution to the society, by helping it to anticipate and develop policies and systems of rules with a view to regulate behavior in borderline situations of advanced technology and ethics. Research methods applied in this paper are analysis, synthesis, observation, generalization, and comparative text analysis.

Keywords: ethics; artificial intelligence; hybrid art; "Anatomy of an AI System"; Vladan Joler and Kate Crawford.

Introduction

Various sections of society have been significantly affected by current tendencies in contemporary hybrid art practices, including transdisciplinary approaches to artistic production, which gained its impetus in scientific research and technology advancement. Instead of participating and engaging in conventional artistic practices, such as creating metaphors and imitating reality, contemporary artists are seeking to transcend their traditional roles, by means of criticizing, shaping and creating the world itself. Contemporary artists aspire to adopt transdisciplinary methodologies, encompassing not only the subversive application and utilization of technology, AI, and robotics, but also raising ethical questions. While some artists challenge and provoke the institutional role of science, others experiment on living organisms and critique the potential hazards of scientific exploration and application of technology.

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There have been multiple attempts to name recent contemporary art practices that include interdisciplinary approaches, where artists work at the intersection of art, science and technology. Some of these terms include information art, artscience and hybrid art. In the essay, the term *hybrid art* refers to artistic practices that emerge at the crossroads of science, technology, and art.

By *contemporary art,* I refer to artistic practices that are unfolding in the present moment. Contemporary art is the term used to denote current art, that is, the art happening at the moment it is being discussed and written about.[1] By the phrase *the role of art* I consider and refer to the status, function and position of contemporary hybrid art practices and also, various ways in which they are understood, organized and experienced, depending on the historical, social, political and ethical context. In this text, the term *artificial intelligence* will be used following Kate Crawford's perspective who is trying to "escape the notion that artificial intelligence is a purely technical domain".[2] As per Crawford:

> Artificial intelligence, then, is an idea, an infrastructure, an industry, a form of exercising power, and a way of seeing; it's also a manifestation of highly organized capital backed by vast systems of extraction and logistics, with supply chains that wrap around the entire planet. All these things are part of what artificial intelligence is – a two-word phrase onto which is mapped a complex set of expectations, ideologies, desires, and fears.[3]

To support the thesis of this essay, it is essential to provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of hybrid art on diverse sectors of society, as along with its contributions. First, hybrid art has reverted its objective to fulfilling pragmatic and utilitarian function and contributes to society by invoking dialogues. The dialogues invoked by hybrid art can be both intentional and unintentional outcomes of specific artistic practices. Rather than being defunctionalized, hybrid art retains a political character, avoiding a focus on aestheticization and visuality as its primary concerns.

Art that deals with societal issues has long been criticized for lacking pragmatic character and for its idealistic aspirations, that have no effect in real life. Hybrid art reverted its aim to confronting ethical ambiguities and serving a pragmatic and utilitarian purpose, while simultaneously, enriching ethical debates, that arise as intended and unintended consequences of art production. It is through the facilitation of meaningful debates, that art is serving its functional and practical aim. To fulfil its function, hybrid art needs to critically examine the ethical implications of robotics and AI deployment. The text will focus on the relation between AI ethics and hybrid art. The case study in this essay is the art project "Anatomy of an AI System", by Vladan Joler and Kate Crawford.

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[1] Miodrag Šuvaković, *Pojmovnik suvremene umjetnosti* (Zagreb: Horetzky, 2005), 604.

[2] Kate Crawford, *Atlas of AI, Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2021), 8.

[3] Ibid., 18–19.

The essay will additionally delve into the subject matter of AI and art as a framework for ethical reflection. Within the scope of political implications of technology, the essay examines AI impact on social control and analyzes the concepts from political philosophy such as freedom, equality, and power in the era of rapid technological advancement. The essay further discusses hybrid art, demonstrating the pragmatic role of art as it exposes the society to antagonisms, arising from power dynamics and the consequences of advanced development of technology.

"Anatomy of an AI System", Vladan Joler and Kate Crawford

"Anatomy of an AI System" is artistic research project by Vladan Joler, artist and founder of the Share Foundation, in collaboration with Kate Crawford, an AI researcher at New York University's AI Now Institute. The project includes both an infographic and an essay. This project highlights the infrastructure required to support the outcomes generated by users' interactions with smart devices. In other words, this project is uncovering the exploitative side of technology production in form of a map. The project investigates human labor, data, exploitation of resources and hardware infrastructure behind the Amazon Echo unit, a smart speaker that communicates with its users. Amazon Echo devices come equipped with a virtual assistant called Alexa. Alexa is cloud-based technology, meaning its computing processes take place on Amazon Web Services, rather than being executed locally, on the device. As Joler and Crawford put it: "Alexa is a disembodied voice that represents the human-AI interaction interface for an extraordinarily complex set of information processing layers.[4]"

The project is uncovering the exploitative side of technology production in form of a map, aiming at the recognition of the extent of the crisis we participate in, by making the hidden aspects of AI technology production, usage and distribution accessible to lay people.

"Anatomy of an AI System" is a work of art that consists of an essay and a map. The map is divided into three sections, which are production, usage and recycling. The production section has the Periodic Table of Elements, indicating rare Earth elements and other used elements for producing the Amazon Echo components and infrastructure. The diagram above the Periodic Table of Elements is concentrated on the exploitation of resources, the human labor, and the profit behind it, pointing at the issues and hazards of mines, smelters and rafiners, component manufacturers, assemblers, and distributors. This part also illustrates economic disparity among the participants in the process of production of an Amazon Echo dot, starting from users, miners, logistics workers, web developers and the CEO. The middle section of the map is dealing with the usage of the Amazon echo unit. This part makes the audience familiar with how Amazon Echo device is connected to Amazon Internet infrastructure, as its processing tasks are executed on Amazon services. In order to work properly, Alexa needs web servers and Internet, which implies the need for 900 000 km

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[4] Vladan Joler and Kate Crawford, "Anatomy of an AI System," https://anatomyof.ai/, acc. on September 3, 2024.

of submarine Internet cables. And lastly, the third part is centered on recycling and shows the process of reusing the components of the abandoned devices. The materials and chemicals used for recycling the abandoned devices pose a risk to human health as well as environmental hazards.

Joler's transdisciplinary approach is reflected in the fusion of various disciplines, neither aiming at creating the singularity, nor exploring distinct areas of knowledge in isolation. In other words, his artistic practice operates at the convergence of more disciplinary pieces of information. This media-nomadic convergence is directed towards the criticism of exploitative dynamics of techno-capitalism. Moravec explains that Joler: "[...] does away with critical theory and instead gathers existing scientific knowledge about AI's political economy and ecology, groups it coherently together, and thereby produces his own working aesthetics.[5]" Joler's and Crawford's work compels the audience to confront cognitive limitations, discursive antagonisms and political disparity associated with technology ethics.

Technology ethics and hybrid art. Political implications of AI

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is currently being implemented across multiple sectors, including corporation automation processes, education, medicine, finance, retail, security and defense, surveillance, and government services, etc. Speaking from a pragmatic standpoint, the debate pertaining to political aspects of AI and robotics, covers broad considerations, including algorithmic bias, autonomy, and freedom, as well as the impact on work. Artificial intelligence (AI) and other digital technologies evoke inquiries into concepts such as freedom, liberty, equality, justice, and democracy, which have been central to philosophical debates for centuries. It has become imperative to scrutinize ethical considerations, pertaining to the deployment of AI and robotics in political context.

Freedom is the concept that has had a very long history in Western philosophy. Positive and negative freedom are two distinct conceptualizations of the Western European notion of freedom, within the realm of political philosophy. As Robert Audi, the American philosopher, explains: "one is free in the positive sense to the extent that one has control over one's life, or rules oneself."[6] He also provides the following definition of the latter:

> One is free in the negative sense if one is not prevented from doing something by another person. One is prevented from doing something if another person makes it impossible for one to do something or uses coercion to prevent one from doing something."[7]

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[5] Lisa Moravec, "Training Humans Not Machines: Artificial Intelligence and the Performance Culture of Its Critique," *TDR: The Drama Review* 68, 1 (2024): 51–69.

[6] Robert Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, Second Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 723.

[7] Ibid., 723.

In terms of positive freedom, advancements in AI technology offer access to vast amount of information. This enables users to make more informed decisions that align with their preferences and values. In terms of negative freedom, advancements in AI affect privacy and civil liberties by enabling monitoring of the individuals without their consent. Croatian philosopher Vladimir Filipović, defines equality as follows:

> the social ideal of the equality of all people in duties and rights; that ideal, in particular, often stands out as the negation of class and class privilege and is therefore, contained in the French password revolutions: "Liberté, égalité, fraternité!"[8]

When it comes to the discussions regarding the interplay between the philosophical notion of dignity and artificial intelligence, the prevailing inquiries that arise chiefly focus on the respect for user autonomy, privacy, and labor. A key question is how the Digital Technological Mix, a hybridi of human and nonhuman emerging from AI and related technologies, can promote human dignity.[9] Persons are typically thought to have (1) "human dignity" (an intrinsic moral worth, a basic moral status, or both); and (2) a "sense of dignity" (an awareness of one's dignity inclining toward the expression of one's dignity and the avoidance of humiliation).[10]

In summary, the correlation between AI and human dignity is determined by the way these technologies are developed, deployed and regulated.

In a variety of approaches, artists represent, recontextualize, and sometimes deconstruct and critique the technological and sociopolitical aspects of AI.[11] The realms of contemporary hybrid art are inextricably entwined with AI research and its deployment in various sectors of human life. As a result, contemporary artistic production is profoundly influenced by discursive inconsistencies and ethical dilemmas present in the field of AI.

In the era of rapid advancement of technology, AI is becoming more and more integrated into diverse aspects of society, encompassing politics and governance. As new advancement in technology give rise to innovative theoretical questions, transdisciplinary topics are becoming inspirational fields of research for artists. The fusion of disciplines has become fertile ground for important questions, that that cannot be addressed within discipline-oriented approaches.

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[8] Vladimir Filipović, *Filozofijski riječnik* (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Matice hrvatske, 1989), 161 (translated by the author).

[9] Joachim von Braun et al., "AI, Robotics, and Humanity: Opportunities, Risks, and Implications for Ethics and Policy," in *Robotics, AI, and Humanity Science, Ethics, and Policy*, ed. Joachim von Braun, Margaret S. Archer, Gregory M. Reichberg, Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo (Cham: Springer, 2021), 10.

[10] Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, Second Edition*, 234–35.

[11] Dejan Grba, "The transparency of reason: ethical issues of AI art," in *Handbook of Crtitical Studies of Artificial Intelligence*, ed. Simon Lindgren (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023), 507.

Some of the domains where AI is applied include social robotics, machine learning, healthcare, military and defense, education, workplace automation, environmental robotics, etc.

The importance of ethical questions in AI deployment lies in its potential to initiate implementation of strategies that would certify that the advancements in these fields are developed responsibly. Criteria affecting successful deployment of these strategies concern the following areas:

1. the requirement that technology should contribute to human wellbeing, promote equity and respect of human rights,
2. the requirement that technology should contribute to environment wellbeing
3. the requirement that the technology should contribute to animal and all other non-human beings
4. safety and security,
5. respect for privacy,
6. adequate regulation

Apart from evaluating the functionality and regulation criteria, ethical questions extend to broader apprehensions about technology. In their book *An Introduction to Ethics in Robotics and AI*, Christoph Bartneck, et al. claim that:

> Much more importantly, ethical questions underpin the design of AI and robotic systems from defining the application to the details of their implementation. Ethics in AI is therefore much broader and concerns very basic design choices and considerations about which society we would like to live in.[12]

Ethical dilemmas and challenges stemming from AI deployment encompass different topics, such as political implications, anthropocentrism, policy and regulations, people`s attitude towards technology, etc. The discourse on anthropocentrism within academic discussions is further elaborated to include questions of environment, non-human agency, and the diminishment of human agency. One more challenge arising from the advancement in artificial intelligence is related to people`s attitude towards technology, delineating into discussions regarding narratives around AI and fear of autonomous machines being capable of making decisions on their own.

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[12] Christoph Bartneck, et al., *An Introduction to Ethics in Robotics and AI* (Cham: Springer, 2021), 103.

Hybrid art as a lens for ethical reflection: In what way does hybrid art extend its scope to active participation in ethical affairs?

The function of contemporary hybrid art, that involves advanced technology, has expanded its scope to active engagement into social matters, simultaneously affecting philosophical discourse. Innovative expressions of high technology art, serving as a critical reflection on societal matters, represent an approach in contemporary art practice that addresses technology ethics. Some of the points reinforcing this claim, are stemming from the interactivity and immersion of hybrid art that concerns advanced technology, from the tolerance towards artists experiments and excessive behavior, justified on the grounds of artistic freedom and freedom of expression, excessive and transgressive hybrid art practices raising awareness of potential risks and repercussions and initiating discussions about ethical standards and regulations, etc. Although it remains bound by the constraints of pragmatism, hybrid art is not defunctionalized, rather it is instrumentalized. An instance supporting this claim is the art project "Anatomy of an AI System", carried out by Vladan Joler and Kate Crawford. The data visualization presents Amazon Echo unit anatomical chart, consisting of production, usage, and recycling sections. This artwork in the form of an infographic, provides insight into the exploitative side of Amazon Echo production, including human labor, environmental implications, and consequences of exploiting planetary resources.

The way that technology is designed, deployed, and distributed is a significant factor in the manner that hybrid art is becoming capable of shaping the society. Interactivity, accessibility, and technical specifications are making it possible for hybrid art to considerably influence the discourses about and around the matters of immense importance, especially the emerging ones. French sociologist Jean Baudrillard pointed out that contemporary society is characterized by simulations that make the boundaries between reality and illusion unclear and blurred. Alienation resulting from 'separation from nature' leads to the creation of artificial nature through media culture. Baudrillard highlights the concepts of 'simulation' and 'simulacrums'.[13] By creating immersive experiences, hybrid art practices that incorporate advanced technology contribute to uncovering ethical ambiguities. In this context, issues on ethical implications engaging with simulated realities and traditional topics, such as representation are becoming the center of the debates in the field of hybrid and performative art practices. Crawford and Joler expose the infrastructure of an AI that end users are not familiar with. Their project is highlighting the disparities and antagonisms between the user-friendly gadgets and the exploitative side of hardware production. In other words, "Anatomy of an AI System" demonstrates the power of hybrid art to expose and problematize the illusion of human-friendly interfaces and the configuration of AI that creates immersive experience.

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[13] Miško Šuvaković, *Diskurzivna analiza, Prestupi i/ili pristupi 'diskurzivne analize' filozofiji, poetici, estetici, teoriji i studijama umetnosti i kulture* (Beograd: Univerzitet umetnosti u Beogradu, 2006), 491 (translated by the author).

Given that artistic experimentation and excessive behavior is in some scenarios legally tolerated, which is usually justified on the grounds of artistic freedom and freedom of expression, excessive and transgressive hybrid art practices are expanding their own boundaries in various fields, such as artificial intelligence, robotics, molecular biology, etc. Due to their unclearly defined boundaries, hybrid art practices acquire the potential to extend initial academic debates to real-world experience, by raising awareness of potential risks and repercussions and initiating discussions about ethical standards and regulations. This way, art is becoming a social practice which interweaves various interpretations, maps, and identifies the problems which are not easily discernible within disciplinary-focused research. In this respect, the project that Crawford and Joler have carried out, offers transdisciplinary and unconventional perspectives, demonstrating how art transcends to visual and textual narratives and along with AI, can be viewed as a form of social practice.

The role of art is pragmatic, exposing the society to antagonisms, arising from power dynamics and the consequences of advanced technological development. As such, art plays an active role in shaping society on both theoretical and practical levels. On the practical level, the implications of high-tech subversive art focus on achieving practical societal goals, such as anticipating and establishing policies and regulations at the intersection of technology and ethics. Theoretically, high-tech art production requires new theoretical reflections and appropriate terminology, sparking debates and the development of new terminology.

For the sake of its capacity to expand boundaries, reimagine agency, and engage critically with technological determinism, hybrid art can be interpreted as inherently emancipatory. When discussing emancipatory potential of art, the theoretical questions that emerge include its eventual capability of telling the truth, art as participatory practice, democratization of art and art as "material formalization of the possible"[14]. In his book *A Handbook of the Inaesthetics*, French philosopher Alain Badiou speaks of art as a generic truth procedure and explains that art truths belong only to the art register[15]: "[...] art, as a singular regime of thought is irreducible to philosophy. Immanence: Art is rigorously coextensive with the truths that it generates. Singularity: These truths are given nowhere else than in art".[16]

As defined by Claire Bishop, participatory art includes practices that engage the audience in the creation of artworks. In the spheres of new media and hybrid art, the democratization of art pertains to increasing accessibility and encouraging participation in artistic production. Digital tools and platforms are facilitating the participation and interaction, blurring the boundaries between traditional roles in the art world. Finally, in words by Giraud and Soulard, "material formalization of the

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[14] Fabien Giraud and Ida Soulard, "The Marfa Stratum: Contribution to a Theory of Sites," in *Art in the Anthropocene, Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, eds. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 179.

[15] I am pointing out at Badiou in this paragraph because I want to refer to the micro impact of contemporary art.

[16] Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 9.

possible" refers to what art should aspire to: "Art is not merely a conservation of what we were or a reaction to what we are, but a proper commitment to what we could be; it is the material formalization of the possible."[17] "Anatomy of an AI System" is an artwork that includes a map which depicts production, usage, and recycling processes of Amazon Echo by means of data visualization and an essay that offers investigation into resource extraction, exploitation of people and nature and data. By using visualization as an expressive tool, Crawford and Joler challenge both online audiences and gallery visitors to consider the underlying structures that sustain power mechanisms, thereby making a small but meaningful impact in addressing social injustice and damage inflicted on the planet.

Conclusion

In the essay, I aimed to demonstrate how hybrid art has evolved into an active initiator for transforming philosophical paradigms by highlighting ethical issues.

The first part of the essay is a brief introduction into the subject matter and its goals are announcing the topic and making readers familiar with the terminology used in the text. The following section is a brief description of the art project "Anatomy of an AI System", by Vladan Joler and Kate Crawford. The third section focuses on how artificial intelligence (AI) and other digital technologies raise questions about concepts such as freedom, liberty, equality, justice, and democracy, in a world where technology and art serve as fields for subversion and important frameworks for ethical contemplation. The final part seeks to address the question of how hybrid art extends its scope to active participation in ethical affairs.

The hypothesis rests on the premise that contemporary hybrid art practices play pragmatic role in navigating complex societal concerns by influencing philosophical discourse. As such, art is articulating the discourse beyond anthropocentrism. In the era of rapid technological development, hierarchical societal organization, and violence of human supremacy, it is the responsibility of art to identify and shed light on problematic societal phenomena. Not only does the task of hybrid art imply the type of criticism, restricted within institutional academic circles, but it can also broaden its horizons to initiating the anticipation and formulation of regulatory policies in ethically problematic situations.

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[17] Ibid.

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ARTIST PORTFOLIO

Neva Lukić
Writer, curator and art critic

From *The Abandoned to The Bird* – Sanja Latinović's Microworlds as Mirrors of the World's Condition

Sanja Latinović, the artist who has been present at the art scene since the beginning of 2000s is almost always engaged in performance art; however, the said medium is free-flowing, and it frequently grows into sculpture, video work, or photography. In her works – which we can also attribute to her sculptural vocation – the artist creates new (non)spaces, with the emphasis on the relationship between fullness and emptiness and the individual themselves, i.e., herself at the centre. Her work could indeed be described with several key words – *fullnes*s, *matter*, *decomposition*, *void.* These four elements are being realized in different combinations: *fullness* sometimes contains another fullness – object, installation or liquid contain a body (for example *Aquarium*, 2008) or a body contains organic substance like food (*The Abandoned*, 2019) and sometimes it stands on its own – as a body, or as a post-performance object/installation (*Do Not Cross*, 2016); *matter* balances between the object and the body, sometimes standing independently as a body, and as an object it is being realized only as a post-performance object/installation, never as a self-standing object within the exhibition space; *decomposition* is being manifested through matter such as food, sand or glass (*Movements: White*, 2012); and finally *void* which with its emptiness embodies all three material elements listed above, because the performances of Latinović problematize the emptiness from different perspectives – be it a shaped void engraved into different kinds of materials (*Do Not Cross*, *Obstacle or Threshold*, 2022); be it formless void, just a movement enacted by a body which gets a momentary shape by usage of different tools, such as pencils or belts (*Deflection*, 2009, *Until Death Do Us Apart*, 2021); or be it void which was once a visible matter but then by decomposition or digesting, it magically disappeared from the physical world, extending its missing half further into boundless space, merging with it without any boundaries (*Half of My Meal is an Artwork*, 2023).

By using different combinations of four key words, incorporating the performative body, objects/installations/props and various matter, Latinović entangles the questions of human isolation, incommunicability and that of the position of the artist in the (art)world. Even if in various performances the artist positions her (nude) body into danger and emotional or physical pain, as her fellow pioneer performance artists Marina Abramović or Valie Export do, she mostly relies on what she has – her own

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body, usually not tending to include the audience into her performance pieces. Her body is mostly the centre of the piece, and she approaches it in a universal way, so not as her own body, but as a representation of all our bodies through which she questions our physical and emotional possibilities and limits. Latinović is never explicit in her feminist or political views, by applying physical and psychological focus she delves into deep abysses of the human psyche which is actually more radical than political performances of various contemporary artists whose objectivity and dealing with specific, current political topics make such works superficial. Latinović's works can be approached by the audience for projections of their own emotional states, therefore it is natural and logical that they are minimalistic and achromatic in their execution. We could say that they are subjective in their objectivity, and vice versa – objective within their subjectivity.

The scene, which is of crucial importance for the artist, is usually distanced from the audience so the spectator observes the performance from an external position. Such is the case with the works containing the performing body/bodies, the space itself and/or installation. Here we can mention works such as *Aquarium* (2008), *Deflection* (2009), *Movements: White* (2012), *Do Not Cross* (2016), etc. On the other hand, what happens when the very face of the artist becomes the scene itself (?), as is the case with the video performance *The Abandoned* (2019), perhaps her most direct and one of the most intimidating performances. It is one of the two performances made specifically for the camera; all others were transformed into video works after they have been performed live. In this short video performance, only during the first thirty seconds, we can see parts of the artist's body, her hands pushing sugar cubes into her mouth. After the cubes have been jammed into the oral cavity, the camera shows intense close-up of the artist's face as she tries to shout the sentence "I am abandoned" ["Napuštena sam" in Serbian] through her mouth full of sugar. Sugar has the role of a Madeleine cookie bringing the artist back to the time of a traumatic event when as a girl she felt abandoned. The viewer is confronted with her face going through this agony, screaming or producing inarticulate noise when trying to utter "napuštena sam". The viewer has no place to escape, the only thing which one can do is to face the artist. The role of the viewer is twofold, he or she can identify with the artist, and he or she can also become the person whom the artist addresses, therefore the one who abandoned her that day. Even if during the video we only see the artist's face, so there are no other protagonists, the sentence "napuštena sam" still implicates that someone is present in the subtext, the one who abandoned Latinović. This can refer to the artist's parents, friends, brothers or sisters, or even more, to humanity as such.

The close-up, the correctly illuminated, directed and acted close-up of an actor is and remains the height of cinematography. There is nothing better. That incredibly strange and mysterious contact you can suddenly experience with another soul through an actor's gaze. A sudden thought, blood that drains away or blood that pumps into the face, the trembling nostrils, the suddenly shiny complexion or mute silence, that is to

me some of the most incredible and fascinating moments you will ever experience.[1] So Ingmar Bergman remarked and it is known that during actors' delivery the director fostered a tone of intimacy and vulnerability, which, one could say, made their performance close to performance art. Although in terms of the narrative and the medium itself they don't have much in common, *The Abandoned* is still disturbing in a similar way as, for example, Bergman's movie *Cries and Whispers* (1972). While watching Latinović, we don't want to face the cries that whisper trapped in our souls, the language which seems to deteriorate into an inarticulate scream, or with our weaknesses and fears which we daily avoid facing. Hence Bergman used the face close up because it is the best way to show the fragility of a human being. As Deleuze noted – *the expression of a face and the signification of this expression have no relation or connection with the space.*[2] When we watch the face of Latinović, unlike in her other performances, we do not perceive the space, so we enter into some kind of claustrophobia even feeling ashamed because the artist confronts us with her vulnerability, which can be ours as well, it is just that we are afraid that we may burst into tears or screams. If *The Abandoned* represents the *cries* then performance *The Bird* (2014) could recall *whispers* in Latinović's work, and that is the second performance created specifically for the camera. There is no scenery, the indoor space is completely empty and the only thing that disturbs the silence is a bird tied to the skin of the artist's arm by a thin chain. The only sound that the viewer can hear is the flapping of the bird's wings. Unlike in *The Abandoned,* here there is no voice or language, everything occurs within the silent dialogue between two performers – actually, when Latinović whispers something in another artist's ear. Discomfort again takes over the viewer, but this time discomfort is caused by the sound of flapping wings of a bird that cannot fly and impossibility to understand the ongoing communication process. Both in *The Abandoned* and *The Bird* a feeling of intimidation is triggered by using different variations of sound (flapping of wings, screams or cries), the silence (intervals of silence between flapping of wings) or by using the lack of sound (a whisper that the viewer cannot hear). Perhaps this is also the reason why they were filmed in an intimate atmosphere with no audience – a high level of emotional intensity could not have been achieved within a public setting.

The suspense caused by the feeling of abandonment (of the artist) or the imprisonment (of the bird) evokes vagueness and emptiness – that part of the whole which will inevitably be lost, be it part of the meal in *Half of My Meal Is an Artwork* or almost all of the sand in *Movements: White.*

The works of Sanja Latinović talk about that unattainability, the impossibility of achieving completeness. Just as matter slips, so do style and medium. Minimalism turns into surrealism, realism into symbolism, performance into sculpture, and sculpture into drawing on the white canvas.

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[1] www.bfi.org.uk/features/ingmar-bergman-faces-close-ups, acc. on September 1, 2024.

[2] Quote from: Henrique Cotado, and Fernandes Isabel Paz Sales Ximenes Carmo, "Face and death in *Cries and Whispers*, by Ingmar Bergman," *Contracampo* 36, 2 (2017): 9, http://dx.doi.org/10.22409/contracampo.v36i2.1026

Aquarium, 2008. Photo Credit: Ana Lucia

The Abandoned (2019). Video made during Master Class of Marina Abramović

Do Not Cross (2022). Photo Credit: Bojana Janjić

Movements: White (2022). Photo Credit: Bojana Janjić

Obstacle or Threshold (2022). Photo Credit: Bojana Janjić

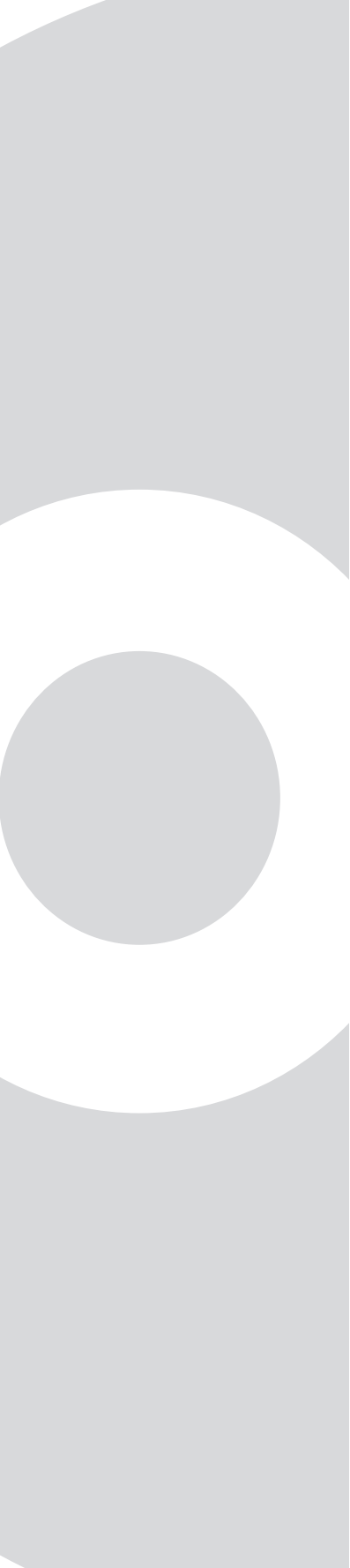

*Deflectio*n (2009). Photo Credit: Marko Milić

Half of My Meal is an Artwork (2023). Photo C

The Bird (2014). Photo Credit: Marina Lukić

BOOK REVIEW

Dubravka Đurić

Faculty of Media and Communication, Singidunum University, Belgrade, Serbia

American Poetry – Andrew Epstein, *The Cambridge Introduction to American Poetry Since 1945*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2023

Andrew Epstein is a professor of American Literature at Florida State University in Tallahassee. He writes about modern and contemporary American poetry and poetics, modernism and postmodernism, theories and practices of avant-garde, literature and culture of the Cold War era, etc. His previous books include *Beautifull Enemies: Friendship and Postwar American Poetry* (2006) and *Attention Equals Life: The Pursuit of the Everyday in Contemporary Poetry and Culture* (2016). In his book *The Cambridge Introduction to American Poetry Since 1945*, he examines American poetry, which is notably the most influential poetry culture on a transnational scale, particularly during the Cold War Era. Epstein maps the concepts, formations, and individual work of various poets, dividing his book in three parts, "American Poetry from 1945 to 1970", "American Poetry from 1970 to 2000" and "Into the New Millenium: American Poetry from 2000 to the Present".

The most distinguished characteristic of American Poetry from 1945 to 1970 is that it was able to generate two mutually opposing streams: the academic, more conservative stream (often referred to as the mainstream) and the antiacademic, known as The New American Poetry, highlighted in Donald Allen's groundbreaking anthology *The New American Poetry 1945–1960*, published in 1960. In his book, Epstein explores these two opposing streams and their changes over time.

In the first part, Epstein discusses influential poets-critics, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks, known as New Critics, who insisted on "well-crafted, allusive, and learned poetry" (p. 19), and insisted on their close reading as a "central pedagogical tool in literary studies". He then examines the emergence of New American Poetry in separate chapters focusing on the Black Mountain poets, the Beats, the San Francisco Renaissance, and the New York School. These schools based their poetry practice the in European and American avant-garde of the first part of 20th century and developed a distinct poetics in which poets discursively articulated their ideas about poetry and explored new ways of writing. Epsetein also wrote about confessional poetry, deep image poetry and African American Poetry.

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The second part of the book examines how New American Poetry changed mainstream poetics in the 1970s and 1980s. The period from 1970 to 2000 saw the appearance of experimental Language poetry, feminist mainstream and feminist experimental poetry. It was a time of diversification in American poetry largely due to the identity politics. In writing about African American, Latinx, Asian American, Native American and LGBTQ Poetry, Epstein traces the dramatic changes in this field in two ways.

American poetry, which until 1970 had been predominantly white, male and middle class, began to diversify along the lines of identity politics that I previously mentioned. At the same time, the significance of Language poetry is emphasized, as Language poets made experimentation an essential aspect of poetry. In the 1970s, Language poets positioned themselves against mainstream "anti-intellectual, neo-Romantic model of lyrical self-expression" (p. 146), establishing an anti-lyric paradigm. They adopted anti-foundationalist and anti-essentialist perspectives, decentering subjectivity and dismantling "the notion of coherent, essential selfhood" (p. 146). They were theoretically oriented, focusing their attention on language and the ways of meaning making. Epstein wrote:

> Language poetry, an avant-garde movement that started out on the margins of American poetry, gradually infiltrated and fundamentally changed 'official verse culture,' the name given to the mainstream poetry world by Charles Bernstein, one of its founders. While a number of leading Language poets, like Bernstein, Lyn Hejinian, Rae Armantrout, Susan Howe, and Ron Silliman, have been increasingly accepted and canonized, Language poetry has also more indirectly influenced the shape of a great deal of poetry being written today that has little in common with original movement. (p. 210).

In presenting the work of African American, Latinx, Asian American, Native American Poetries, Epstein, shows that poets in these formations started working in relation to the "political struggles for civil rights that reached a fever pitch during the 1960s. The dramatic social upheavals of this period ushered in an era of frenetic creativity, literary community-building by writers of color, and the successful push to establish ethnic studies programs in US universities", continuing to explain that American poetry was seen then "as a multicultural genre and perspectives that had long been marginalized or ignored burst into full view. In the 1960s and 1970s, this new poetry often aligned itself with social change and political activism; it focused on speaking collectively for communities of color, voicing political outrage and calling for racial pride and solidarity" (p. 174). At the same time, these poetries were not monolithic in style. Many poets of color experimented with forms, connecting the innovative poetry with questions of race.

Epstein wrote that "in post-2000 American poetry had been this rapid diversi-fication, in terms of gender, sexuality, sexual identity, ability, and race and ethnicity" (p. 208). He pointed to the three most significant changes in this period, which are:

> 1) the collapse of the old binary opposition between mainstream and experimental and the emergence of a new 'hybrid' mode; 2) a new open-ness to remix, sampling, and the use of found language and documentary materials in poetry, which can be seen, in part, as a response to the rise of the digital age and new questions about originality and appropriation it has ushered in, and 3) a resurgence of politically engaged, formally adventurous poetry, especially by poets of color, in the era of Obama and Trump (p. 210).

Despite the extensive translation and recognition of American poetry in socialist Yu-goslavia and after its decomposition (numerous anthologies of American published from 1952 to 2023, approximately 25), many aspects remain unexplored.

Epstein's book traces the various changes and divisions within this rich field, highlighting the lesser-known developments, especially those related to multicultur-alism and poetry associated with identity politics. Another often-overlooked aspect is the central role of experimental poetry, including Language poets and with femi-nist experimental poetry. Interestingly, in 1993 and 1994, three influential anthologies were published that established alternative cannons of American poetry, spanning from the era of New American Poetry to Language Poetry. They were edited by El-iot Weinberger (*American Poetry since 1950: Innovators and outsiders)*, Paul Hoover (*Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology*), and Douglas Messerli (*From the Other Side of the Century: A New American Poetry 1960–1990*). Epstein's book serves as an excellent introduction to the richness and diversity of American poetry.

BIOGRAPHIES

ART+MEDIA

Ana Došen

Dubravka Đurić

Kristina Janjić

Sanja Latinović

Neva Lukić

Marcelo Mari

Roland Orcsik

Aleksandra Panić

Ksenija Popadić

Milan Radovanović

Natali Rajchinovska-Pavleska

Vuksan Vuksanović

Ana Došen (1981), PhD., is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Media and Communications, Singidunum University (Belgrade, Serbia), where she teaches media theory, East Asian cinema, and Japanese art and culture. She holds a PhD in Arts and Media Theory from Singidunum University. She has published articles in the fields of literature, media, film and cultural studies.

Dubravka Đurić (Dubrovnik, 1961), graduated comparative literature and received PhD in American Studies. Poet, theoretician, translator and performer, works as Professor at Faculty for Media and Communication. Published seven (7) books of poetry, and five (5) books on American and Serbian poetry. With Biljana D. Obradović edited *Cat Painters: An Anthology of Serbian Poetry* (New Orleans 2016), with Miško Šuvaković edited book *Impossible Histories – Avant-Garde, Neo-Avant-Garde and Post-Avant-Garde in Yugoslavia 1918–1991* (MIT Press, 2003, 2006), with Vladimir Kopicl co-edited and translated an anthology of American poetry titled *New Poetry Order* (2001), edited *An Anthology of American Experimental Poetry* (2023). With a group of younger poets worked on co-editing an anthology *Discursive Body of Poetry: Poetry and Poetics of New Generation of Women Poets* (Belgrade 2004).

Kristina Janjić completed her undergraduate and master's studies at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Arts in Belgrade (school year 2016/2017). In 2010, she received a scholarship from the French Government and participated in a one-semester exchange program at the National Academy of Fine Arts in Paris (L'École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Paris). Kristina completed her doctoral studies in 2023 at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Arts in Belgrade. In addition to her studies at the Faculty of Fine Arts, she graduated from the Department of English Language, Literature, and Culture at the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade, in 2020. She is currently a third-year PhD student at the Faculty of Media and Communications in Belgrade, majoring in Transdisciplinary Studies of Contemporary Art and Media. She works for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Sanja Latinović (Serbia, 1983) graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade, Department of Sculpture. In 2016 she completed Master Studies in Performance Arts at HKB, Berne, Switzerland. Although a sculptor by vocation, Sanja focuses her work mainly on performance, video work and photography, choosing carefully those fields for her artistic research and expression in order to question the very medium of sculpture by exploring its transformative potential in the relations matter-space-form-idea. Sanja's thematic preoccupations are mainly about thematizing and problematizing the multilayered and complex functioning of an individual in today's world, our everyday confrontations with arious forms of social determinations, imperatives, and pressures. Dealing more with the emotionally psychological dimension of those relations, the artist proposes and articulates her own views

through unpretentious, simplified visual solutions/performances turning them into metaphors about syndromes, states and processes that characterize the tense global image of the society. Between 2009 and 2014 she took part in numerous joint actions and performances within the collective Third Belgrade (The Warm Place, Breakfast on the Grass, The Big Dream, We Like the Art of Others, etc.). Sanja is the winner of Politika's award for the best exhibition in 2022 and her works are in included in numerous collections (Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, Museum of Contemporary Art in Smederevo, Museum in Kraljevo, Nadežda Pertović art gallery)

Neva Lukić received her master's degrees in art history and archeology from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Zagreb and in the theory of modern and contemporary art from Leiden University in the Netherlands. She works as a writer, curator and art critic. She regularly publishes exhibition reviews and interviews with artists in newspapers and magazines. She has curated a number of solo exhibitions and has authored or co-authored thematically conceived group exhibitions. Having lived in various cities over the last eleven years, including Leiden, The Hague, Rijeka, Zagreb and Belgrade, she has developed a keen interest in cross-border interactions, identitites and intercultural exchange. By adopting an interdisciplinary approach to visual arts, literature, and exhibition organization, she tends to connect curatorial and writing practices. Her primary focus is the issue of 'the language' – its politicization, personification, mythologization, and (fictional) etymology.

Marcelo Mari is a professor of art history at the University of Brasília, Brazil. He recently published a book on the art critic Ferreira Gullar and a book on the designer Sergio Rodrigues. Mari has carried out research into Brazilian modernism.

Roland Orcsik was born in Becse (Serbia, Voivodina, ex-Yugoslavia) in 1975. He has been living in Szeged, Hungary since 1992. He works at the University of Szeged in the Institute of Slavonic Studies. Orcsik is one of the editors of literary monthly *Tiszatáj*. He writes poetry, prose, criticism, essays, studies and he translates several Ex-Yugoslav languages into Hungarian. His research focuses on Hungarian and Ex-Yugoslav literary contacts. So far, he has published five volumes of poetry (plus two selections in Serbian and one in Croatian and English). His first novel, titled *Phantomcommando*, was published in 2016 and has been translated into Romanian and Serbian. His works are translated in Arabic, Asami, Czech, English, French, Croatian, Greek, German, Odia, Romanian, Slovakian, Slovenian, Spanish, and Serbian languages.

Aleksandra Panić (1981) is a doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Media and Communication in Belgrade, Serbia, specializing in literary theory, feminist and gender studies, and post-colonial and memory studies. She is a Serbian American writer and an innovative, creative writing teacher who employs holistic, body-centered, and

trauma-informed methods of teaching creative writing. Aleksandra holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Goddard College, Vermont, and a master's degree in Italian language and literature from the University of Belgrade, Serbia. Her doctoral work explores memory culture and female authorship within post-Yugoslavian autofictional art. Her passion lies in studying and creating hybrid narratives that challenge and transcend disciplinary boundaries, genres, and forms. She currently lives in Belgrade with her family.

Ksenija Popadić was born in 1965 in Novi Sad where she received her Master's Degree in Psychology at the Faculty of Philosophy. In pursuit of her deepest desire to help people liberate themselves from inherited and learned patterns of thinking, feeling, and behavior that lead to illness, stagnation, unhappiness, and dissatisfaction, Ksenija dedicated herself to the study of psychotherapy. She specialized in two therapeutic orientations, earning certifications as a Transactional Analyst and Specialist, as well as an International Supervisor of Rational-Emotive and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy. Ksenija has been applying her knowledge and skills for over 30 years in Mexico, Germany, and Serbia. Additionally, she has a long-standing interest in Eastern philosophy and meditation. Currently, she is pursuing doctoral studies at the Faculty of Media and Communications in Belgrade.

Milan Radovanović. The doctoral dissertation *Semiotic Theories of Reading Visual Art Texts*, which he wrote under the mentorship of Prof. Dr. Miško Šuvaković, was defended within the scientific interdisciplinary studies of Art Theory and Media at the University of Arts in Belgrade. At the Academy of Arts in Belgrade, he teaches undergraduate courses in Art Theory and Media, Visual Literacy, Theories of Media Influence, and Aesthetics, while also teaching Methodology of Research Work at the master's level. Milan serves as the faculty's vice-dean for science. He is involved in creating new study programs and enhancing the teaching process at the faculty, which has been successfully accredited with top ratings and is recognized as one of the leading higher education institutions in Serbia. He is a reviewer for professional publications issued by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the University of Belgrade, the University of Novi Sad, the University of Niš, and others. As a theorist of art and media, he investigates the often-overlooked impact of Byzantine iconography's semiotics on contemporary art and popular culture.

Natali Rajchinovska-Pavleska (1982) holds a PhD in science – art and media and is assistant professor of art history and theory at the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. She is the author of monographs and art books, has curated exhibitions, and conducts research in contemporary art practices, art criticism and theory. Natali was a member of the curatorial team for the Macedonian project at the 15th Architecture Biennale in Venice (2016), served as a lecturer at the European seminar for curators, CreArt (2019), and was the curator for the Macedonian project

at Manifesta 14 in Prishtina (2022). She is a member of the Macedonian section of AICA and the Macedonian National Committee of the International Council of Museums lCOM. Her research experience, grounded in the humanities and philosophy, employs a transdisciplinary approach that integrates and intersects various theoretical currents. She explores and critically examines expanded and cross-media art in relation to social dynamics and institutional contexts.

Vuksan Vuksanović (Montenegro, 1978) currently resides in Podgorica. After earning his degree in philosophy from the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Montenegro, Milan worked as a high school philosophy teacher. He later continued his education and became a librarian. Currently, he is employed at the library of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics at the University of Montenegro. Additionally, he is a doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Media and Communications, Singidunum University in Belgrade, Serbia.

Guidelines for Authors

Authors must follow the instructions for authors strictly, failing which the manuscripts would be rejected without review.

The manuscript should be written in MS Word in .doc or .doc.x format, in Times New Roman font, font size 12 with 1.5 line-spaced texts.

Original scholarly papers should be between 3,000 and 5,000 words (section Main Topic and Beyond the Main Topic). Book review articles should be about 1,000 words. Artist Portfolio should contain 4 pages with illustrations and 1,500 words of text.

The manuscript (sections Main Topic and Beyond the Main Topic) should contain the title, keywords (5 to 8 words or phrases) and abstract (between 100 and 250 words) and list of references. Do not include citations in the abstract. Keywords should be relevant to the topic and content of the paper. An accurate list of keywords will ensure correct indexing of the paper in referential periodicals and databases.

All manuscripts should be also provided with: authors' names, affiliations (city and state of the workplace) and e-mail addresses of the corresponding author.

The authors should send their short biography (up to 150 words per author) with information about profession, carrier, workplace and year of birth.

Photos, drawings and other illustrations should be of good quality. Please, do not include photos, tables and other illustrations in the manuscript. They should be submitted as separate files. Visual examples must have permission from the author, photographer or owner of the rights. Visual examples must be technically prepared so as not to require additional interventions: format .jpg or .tiff; resolution higher than 300 dpi. Visual examples are additions to the main text and need to be clearly marked: example 1, etc. Please do not supply files that are too low in resolution as well files that are optimized for screen use (e.g., GIF, BMP, PICT, WPG), these typically have a low number of pixels and limited set of colors.

Footnotes and References

Use *The Chicago Manual of Style*, notes and bibliography documentation systems. Footnotes should be marked in the text at a point of punctuation, and listed at the bottom of each relevant page. References should be cited in the language in which they were published. The list of references (bibliography) shall only include works that are cited in the text. The references should be listed at the end of the article, in alphabetic order by the authors' surnames.

In footnotes:

Book:
Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 10–11.
Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, 23.

Book – two or more authors (for four or more authors, list only the first author, followed by et al.):
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Alperson, *What is Music?*, 83.

Editor, translator, or compiler in addition to the author:
Martin Heidegger, *Being and Truth*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 18.
Heidegger, *Being and Truth*, 25.

Chapter or another part of a book:
Richard Leppert, "Seeing Music," in *The Routledge Companion to Music and Visual Culture*, ed. Tim Shephard and Anne Leonard (New York, London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 5–12.
Leppert, "Seeing Music," 9.

Article in a print journal (after page numbers include a DOI if the article lists one):

Pauline Maclaran and Stephen Brown, "The Center Cannot Hold: Consuming the Utopian Marketplace," *Journal of Consumer Research* 32, 2 (September 2005): 320.

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Article in an online journal (after page numbers include a DOI if the article lists one):

Gueorgi Kossinets and Duncan J. Watts, "Origins of Homophily in an Evolving Social Network," *American Journal of Sociology* 115 (2009): 411, accessed February 28, 2010, doi: 10.1086/599247

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In References:

Book:

Bloch, Ernst. *The Spirit of Utopia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.

Book – two or more authors (for four or more authors, list all of the author):

Horkheimer, Max, and Teodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.

Editor, translator, or compiler instead of the author:

Alperson, Philip, ed. *What is Music? An Introduction to the Philosophy of Music*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010.

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Thesis and dissertation:

Choi, Mihwa. "Contesting *Imaginaires* in Death Rituals during the Northern Song Dynasty." PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2008.

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