

# Visual Literacy

issue editor

**KATARZYNA BOJARSKA**

**KRZYSZTOF PIJARSKI** "Realism,"

Embodied Subjects, Projection of Empathy

**MARTA LEŚNIAKOWSKA** Experiencing Cultural

Visualisations: the Anthropology of (re)Construction

**ADAM MAZUR** Negative Testimonials.

Photographic Representation of Holocaust Memory

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## *Visual Literacy*

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# Introduction

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Katarzyna Bojarska

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## Visual Literacy

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**T**wenty years ago, in 1996, American academic journal *October* published a survey entitled "Visual Culture Questionnaire."<sup>1</sup> Among the respondents were: Svetlana Alpers, Susan Buck-Morss, Jonathan Crary, Martin Jay, Stephen Melville and others. The questions posed tackled several topics including the shift from historical to anthropological thinking in the interdisciplinary model of visual culture studies; inspiration that visual culture scholars find in eccentric art historians such as Aby Warburg and Alois Riegl; criticism of visual culture for concentrating on the disembodied image and thus producing ideal subjects for globalized turbo-capital; and the claim that the shift in academia (from the historical study of images under the umbrella of art history towards visual culture) parallels the shift in the art world (in brief, from modernist autonomous art object to postmodernist art practices), while what follows would be the retreat of critics who tend to find it more challenging and productive to discuss cultural artefacts in a broader context rather than works of art per se.<sup>2</sup>

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1 *October*, 77 (Summer, 1996): 25-70.

2 *Ibid.*, 25.

Susan Buck-Morss provided an account of how an attempt to institutionalize visual culture studies failed at Cornell University where she worked at the time, and how it was impossible to grasp, frame and change something which was more of a process (an interdisciplinary network of exchanges and encounters) into something that would be an academic discipline. She introduced a crucial problem, namely: "what would be the *episteme* ... of such a field?"<sup>3</sup> And even though she went on to name the set of theoreticians included in the reading lists of visual culture courses (Barthes-Benjamin-Foucault-Lacan) and the set of problems addressed (reproduction of images, the society of the spectacle, scopic regimes, perceiving the Other, etc.), she concluded by saying that more than anything, images need to be read (sic!) "emblematically and symptomatically, in terms of the most fundamental questions of social life."<sup>4</sup> This for her means that visual culture is responsible for working out its own theories, ones that "themselves are visual, that show rather than argue."<sup>5</sup>

Jonathan Crary, on the other hand, saw in the emergence and success of visual culture studies a response to the "collapse of certain enduring assumptions about the status of a spectator."<sup>6</sup> According to him, vision remains closely attached to more general historical questions dealing with the "construction of subjectivity." Martin Jay on his part, seemed to have been convinced that visual art in the 20th century can no longer be separated (and as such studies in separation) from other images, from the conditions of their production, circulation and reception (an idea popular at least from the times of John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, from 1972).<sup>7</sup> We seem to owe this meaningful shift to the pressures coming both from within 20th century art as well as from without. However, this lack of a single method, the call for new (visual) theories as well as the "threat" of anthropology (the threat of ignoring the historical order of things and their historical specificities), together with an overdose of the inter- and multi-disciplinary have made many suspicious of the status of this new interpretative mode, this new approach to visuality and culture more generally.<sup>8</sup>

As Nicholas Mirzoeff has rightly pointed out,

like history visual culture is both the name of the academic field and that of its object of study. Visual culture involves the things that we see, the

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3 Ibid., 29.

4 Ibid., 30

5 Ibid., 30.

6 Ibid., 33.

7 Ibid., 44.

8 See *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*, eds. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey, (Hanover N.H.: University Press of New England, 1994).

mental model we all have of how to see, and what we can do as a result. That is why we call it visual culture: a culture of the visual.<sup>9</sup>

And it is precisely the proximity of history and the visual that proves crucial in thinking about Polish culture and the role images played in its transformation at the turn of 21st century. Why is it interesting and actually necessary to introduce this framework? Mostly because its inception can be dated to the very beginning of the 1990s and the birth of Polish democracy. At that time, people began to see themselves, their history and their current role in history differently (or at least many hoped that was the case). Moreover, in that cultural context, which was very strongly based on the word (especially the written word) and literature as records and expressions of collective sentiment and identity, the role of imagery (and visual arts alike) has for a long time been underestimated. And yet it seems that when it comes to the experience of Poland's political transformation and the outcome of the fall of the Iron Curtain, together with all the accompanying identity, political and economic consequences, it is the visual (rather than literary) culture that offers the big picture and one that is complicated. In the history of the 20th and 21st centuries, one finds numerous instances of both artist-as-(art)theorists and artists engaged in digging deep into matters of politics and aesthetics, or what Jacques Rancière would call the distribution of the sensible. Lack of proper education in reading the images and placing them in context is partly to blame for the mis-recognition and underestimation of the production in the Polish visual field.

It seems to be an interesting moment to turn back and look at how thinking and writing about images of all sorts – their production, circulation and reception – developed and whether we can talk in the case of visual culture about the formation of “its own theory.” The reason for this is also the fact stressed so accurately by the author of *How to See the World*:

Today there is a new world-view being produced by people making, watching and circulating images in quantities and ways that could never have been anticipated in 1990. Visual culture is now the study of how to understand change in a world too enormous to see but vital to imagine.<sup>10</sup>

This enormous world presents itself to us everywhere and always; the core of the difference is that back in the 90s, specific things could have been seen only at specific sites (such as art in museums), while nowadays we can see everything

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9 Nicholas Mirzoeff, *How to See the World* (London: Pelican, 2015), 11.

10 Ibid., 12.

everywhere, that is of course mostly on the internet. And this experience has yet another element: images have become even more equal than when John Berger claimed their equality as sights "recreated or reproduced" no matter whether by artists, machines, or ordinary people.

In Poland many events have shaped visual culture, among them iconoclastic acts against works of contemporary art which took place at the beginning of 2000s, the debates and conflicts over the so-called critical interventions in the field of visual arts, the emergence of visual studies, and the common use of new as well as social media. The dynamically developing image culture post-1989 and completely new (democratic but mostly capitalist) modes of image production and circulation as well as their political uses and abuses have radically transformed Poland's post-transformation society and its self-representation. In recent years, numerous seminal works in visual culture studies have been translated into Polish and there has been an ongoing debate on how to study images (and a competition of sorts) between the representatives of art history and of visual culture; numerous important debates have taken place.<sup>11</sup> More importantly perhaps, there seems to be a growing quantity of images and modes of image production and circulation; there is an abundance of visual evidence, documents, archives. It is not only the art historians nowadays who are obliged to study images, but also historians, literary scholars, sociologists, anthropologists, et. al. The question of interpretation, or visual literacy seems to be very significant. Is there still a need for sharp distinctions between image and text, and are we still tempted to read images? And if so, why? Or have we come up with a different, specific type of apprehension and are these types specific for every discipline?

Among many issues, one should also consider that of the agency of images and their political nature: the fact that they not only illustrate or document politics but also help create it (not only by catering images of politicians to voters). In order to be a conscious and critical citizen, one needs to be able to "read images" and read between the images (as between the lines), understand the nature of manipulation and the traps of the apparent neutrality of man-made image. The dissemination of images and their meanings has gotten out of control and more often than not we do not know what we are looking at and fail to see. Observing the world and self-observation (as well as recording) have become easily accessible (with access to the Internet and digital cameras – especially those built into cell phones); writing history and writing one's own history have increasingly become a visual task. So what do we do with these images and what do they do

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11 See among others, a discussion concerning Andrzej Leśniak's book *Ikonoŋilia. Francuska semiologia pikturalna i obrazy* [*Iconophilia. French pictorial semiology and the images*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Literackich PAN, 2013) in *Widok. Teorie i praktyki kultury wizualnej* <http://pismowidok.org/index.php/one/article/view/126/187> and other essays.

to us? What do we actually do when we decide to freeze a moment as a photo and store that photo or share it with others? Everyday life, ordinary history and world history have become permeated with banal or meaningful images which do not disappear easily but rather store themselves or are stored in the collective unconscious and transmitted in a haunting manner.

In her introduction to the course book devoted to the anthropology of visual culture, Iwona Kurz paraphrasing Claude Levi-Strauss writes that "some images are good (food) for thought."<sup>12</sup> What she means by that is that the theory of visual culture at its best reaches for cultural artefacts which formulate critical discourse in their own media and not merely provide illustrations for already existing theories. They are called, after Mieke Bal, theoretical objects, i.e. objects which render the structural complexity of the visual field. The visual perspective according to Kurz is not an element of culture in general, but rather a specific way of looking at culture and framing human activities.<sup>13</sup> It is in this framework that the phenomena from various domains such as design, architecture, art, photography, film, television, new media, etc. can be addressed and interpreted, as well as less obviously visual aspects of culture and – in the academic context – of the humanities. In the vast yet rather spectral field of such interdisciplinary study, the visual meets critical theory, history (including art history), comparative literature and literary theory.

What we propose in the present issue is not an account of visual culture studies in Polish academia, nor is it a survey of writings on images by professionals dealing with the visual, but rather different instances of how scholars representing various disciplines encounter and approach images or/and visuality as the subject of their analysis. *Teksty Drugie* journal has for many years concentrated on literature, its practice, theory and criticism. However, to see a growing interest on the part of its authors and editors in the visual field can also be perceived as a sign of our times and a certain tendency in academia.

The contents have been divided into four parts reflecting dominant issues, methodologies, or perspectives in the gathered articles. We begin with "Topographies" devoted to various aspects of and representations of sites, places, space and territories. Transgressing the figure of palimpsest and feeling an urge to go beyond its tradition, Roma Sendyka comes up with the figure of a prism in order to adequately describe and deconstruct what she calls the "non-sites of memory", i.e. sites of historical slaughter, destruction, gore such as former

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12 Iwona Kurz, „Wobec obrazu – wobec świata. Projekt antropologii kultury wizualnej,” in *Antropologia kultury wizualnej*, ed. Iwona Kurz et al. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego), 12. If not otherwise specified all translations of referenced works are provided by the translator of the respective article.

13 Ibid., 18.

concentration camps and anonymous mass graves. By introducing the concept of geological structure, the author offers a new look on a rather old problem and in her reading of the territory of the Płaszów concentration camp, she digs deep and reaches courageously for marginal themes and tropes in the reflection on Holocaust memory and oblivion. Focusing especially on the relationship between map and territory, Elżbieta Rybicka discusses the map as metaphor, practice and concept in contemporary theories. The author concentrates on three aspects of this relationship: maps seen as the simulation of territory; as a kind of experiment with territory and as an invention of territory (together with the production of a system of knowledge, identity and experience). She also devotes some time to the functioning of maps and cartography, more generally in the reading and study of literature. Marta Zielińska, for her part, offers an account of how, as a scholar of Polish Romanticism, she sketched the maps of the history of the romantic movement in Polish literature. As a literary scholar Zielińska, pursues her research with the use of visual materials and a visual practice of her own, and in turn describes all the problems as well as illuminations encountered along the way.

In the section entitled "Photo-graphy" two essays are devoted to the intricate relationship between photography, memory, trauma and representation of historical events – the case study of which is the Holocaust. Marianna Michałowska concentrates on Dariusz Jablonski's documentary film *Fotoamator*, devoted to the photographic documents of the Litzmannstadt Ghetto. The author reflects on the many aspects of the problematic nature of the creation and reception of visual documents. The question of what photography is actually able to capture, record and transmit as well as that of what can be made of it by artistic practice (Boltanski, Schefferski, Levinthal) stand at the core of this essay pointing in the direction of specific photographic hauntology. Looking at the work of several artists whose oeuvre has been shaped, even if not explicitly, by the historical experience of the Holocaust (Strzemiński, Richter, Boltanski, Mikhailov, Libera), Adam Mazur reflects upon the use of experimental and avant-garde strategies in the representation of a traumatic, violent and transgressive past. Two other essays undertake the question of the relationship between the visual (in this case, photographic) and the literary. Paweł Mościcki offers an analysis of numerous collaborative projects realized by photographers and writers at the times of the Great Depression in the United States, which can be treated from today's perspective as a testimony to specific moment in world history as well as in the history of visual and literary media. Inspired by studies on the iconography of Parisian clinic Salpêtrière and the feminist deconstruction of the history of the nude, Adrianna Alksnin writes on Jean-Marie Charcot's experiments with photography and his female patients. The author points to the problematic oscillation between the medical and erotic aspects of this collection.

In "Reading Art", several scholars with backgrounds in art history, philosophy (aesthetics) and literary studies offer an interesting mosaic of problems with the visual encountered by artists and their commentators. Agnieszka Rejniak-Majewska discusses Barnett Newman's challenge to the category of painterly abstraction and art theory in general. His radical anti-aestheticism and anti-formalism are contextualized by the author in a critically and historically informed way. She claims and highlights the influence of a specific historical experience and points to Newman's strategy of displacing it. Inspired by the studies of 19th century painters (Eakins, Menzel, Courbet) by the American scholar Michael Fried, Krzysztof Pijarski offers a reading of visual realism which he calls "embodied" or "empathic." Here, realism becomes a practice of resistance in the culture of spectacle, capitalism and inequality. The author moves on to discuss the work of a contemporary artist, Douglas Gordon, in order to put that theoretical framework in motion and show its validity in our times. Ewa Tonika, in an impressive dispute with the legend of 19th-century Polish painter Artur Grottger, proves that there is no such thing as a legend sanctioned by critical and scholarly narratives and that the powerful life and work of Grottger still remains a pivotal figure for identity politics both in the field of arts and academia. Adam Dziadek analyses a unique outcome of an encounter between Stefan Themerson and Kurt Schwitters, i.e. the book Themerson wrote together with his wife, Franciszka, on the work of the author of *Merzbau*. The author treats this work as an exemplary case of interference in the arts and genres. He offers a close-reading of this multi-layered and heterogenic book which includes various forms of textual and visual interventions thus becoming a challenge for the reader. Magdalena Popiel devotes her article to the critical reading of the history of an aesthetic genre of caprice (*capriccio*). The author stresses an impressive complexity of this form of representation: the uses of various stylistic modes, tropes and its numerous meanings.

In the last section entitled "Looking Awry", we have gathered several meta-reflections on certain methodological issues and discussions, articles, some of which at the time of their publication, raised critical issues for identifying particular disciplines, and initiated formative debates in Polish academia. Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska offers a comparative study of the science(s) of image, which have originated in different national and academic traditions. She juxtaposes the American version of visual culture studies with the German tradition of *Bildwissenschaft* with its stress on historical continuity and anthropological foundations. The author looks for a third way allowing for an approach to images in the most creative and productive way possible while avoiding the traps and limitations of either tradition. Luiza Nader, on her part, puts forth a project of affective art history in the framework of an ethical and affirmative humanities. The author asks how the study of visual arts can become a political and transformative project for an academic discipline and society more generally. Leszek Koczanowicz looks

closely at the intersection of the visual arts, politics and ethics in the public sphere in search for possible forms of emancipation and resistance both in an individual and collective context. Marta Leśniakowska reflects on the relationship between the visualisations of experience and the experiencing of images. She offers a case study of Aleksandra Polisieicz's *Wartopia*, a work of art referring to the Socialist urban planning and the projects for Warsaw. Last but not least, Grzegorz Grochowski addresses the intricate relationships and mutual influences of words and images within works of literature. The author focuses on what he calls "multiple semiotic games" which include various sign-based orders, forms of representation and conventions of communication. He attempts at naming and describing all possible functions images play as elements in the literary medium and their influence on the reading audience.

# Topo-graphies

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Roma Sendyka

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## Prism: Understanding Non-Sites of Memory<sup>1</sup>

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**T**he idyllic river landscape that opens Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* soon becomes scenes in which Szymon Srebrnik guides the filmmakers through the forest in order to finally stand before an empty clearing and say, "Es ist schwer zu erkennen, aber es war hier." [It is difficult to recognize, but it was here.]<sup>2</sup> "Here" is Chełmno/Kulmhof, one of the many sites of genocidal massacres perpetrated between Berlin and Moscow that now contain the remains of the victims.<sup>3</sup> Forest clearings, clumps of trees, grassy

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- 1 This paper is accompanied by eight diptychs, which can be found in the last 9 pages of the insert, prepared for the purposes of this publication by Jason Francisco, an artist, essayist, and photographer. Francisco's diptychs raise in visual language questions that the present article sets forward: the contemporary meaning of contested, forgotten memory sites, the usage of the sites, our presence within them, the habitable and the inhabitable, the ordinary and the inconceivable, the conflicts of past and present, life and death, the visible and the invisible.
  - 2 *Shoah*, Chapter 4, 00:07:05.
  - 3 Following the reasoning of Timothy Snyder in *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), I propose expanding the discussion of "non-places of memory" to refer not only to Holocaust sites but also to the sites of other genocides or of other forms of mass violence, and to sites related to these events (includ-

knolls—the residents of Central-Eastern Europe know these places, which on the surface are no different from their surroundings, though there does seem to be something disturbing in the air around them that sets them apart. My question is, what is it? Because it is not the driving force of symbols — of signs posted, or of tombstones — nor the language of ruins. Here nature covers over, transforms, and does not allow the visitor to view the past.

Lanzmann provocatively calls his work a “topographical, geographical” film,<sup>4</sup> maintaining that it is not possible to really think the problem of the Holocaust without visiting its sites and combining knowledge of events with a spatial experience that is meant to be extended in a sort of reenactment, “hallucinations,” attempts at imagining that “nothing has changed”: “I was witness to the change,” he says, “and yet, at the same time, I had to think that time had not actually completed its task.”<sup>5</sup> This plane of dual temporality distorts space-time: quiet bends in the river, clearings, mounds become “disfigured sites [*les lieux défigurés*]” located simultaneously in the “here and now” as well as in the “there and then.” Lanzmann defines such spaces as *les non-lieux de la mémoire* (non-sites of memory). Although the idea of “non-site”<sup>6</sup> (the image

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ing dilapidated areas of towns, abandoned houses, ruined cemeteries, etc.). A full inventory of these places would require further research.

- 4 Claude Lanzmann, “Le Lieu et la parole,” *Au sujet de Shoah: Le Film de Claude Lanzmann*, ed. Michel Deguy (Paris: Éditions Berlin, 1990), 294: “You have to learn and see. You have to see and learn. They’re inseparable. If you go to Auschwitz but know nothing about the place or the history of the camp, you don’t see anything, you don’t understand anything. By the same token, if you do know but haven’t been there, you don’t understand anything, either. They have to go together. That’s why the issue of places is such a fundamental one. I didn’t make an idealistic film full of grandiose musings on metaphysics and theology about what happened to the Jews and why they were killed. It’s a very grounded film, a film on topography, on geography.”
- 5 Lanzmann, “Le Lieu et la parole,” 290: “I call these deformed places non-sites of memory. At the same time, it’s essential that the traces endure. I have to give in to hallucinations and think that nothing has changed. I was witness to the change, and yet, at the same time, I had to think that time had not actually completed its task.”
- 6 Nora’s term is translated into English as “sites of memory”; its reverse would thus be in English “non-sites of memory.” The term “non-places,” meanwhile, translates Marc Augé, as in his “non-lieux de la surmodernité.” It is worth noting the etymology of the English words “site” and “place.” “Site” derives from the Latin *situs*, derived from the verb *sinere*, meaning ‘to set aside, to leave be, to permit,’ while *place* derives from the greek *plateia*, meaning ‘broad street’ or ‘open city space.’ This is to say that a site, in the original conception of the English language, is a position designated in the action of leaving it or for the sake of being able to leave it, presumably so that it can be found again, which is to say encoding as part of its very designation the possibility of putting it out of mind, leaving it to inactivity, and perhaps to neglect. Place, on the other hand, presumes an experiencing subject there to constitute it as such—an experiencing subject seeing expansively into a location, which becomes a locus of attachment

of the “voyage to nowhere,” to “the unknown”) crops up with some frequency in survivors’ narratives,<sup>7</sup> the term, used in the title of a 1986 interview<sup>8</sup>, is very clearly, according to Dominic LaCapra,<sup>9</sup> derived from Pierre Nora’s conception of “sites of memory.” Indeed, abandoned, unmarked sites of destruction do not serve either the local community or any other group as a memory anchor; there is no person whose “imagination would invest them with a symbolic aura,”<sup>10</sup> which essentially makes them the opposite of the places catalogued in *Les Lieux de memoire* (1984–92)/*Realms of Memory* (1996–98).

I propose here to return to these special places “in spite of everything [*malgré tout*]” — “in spite of the fact that there is nothing, but nothing, left to see” there. It was Georges Didi-Huberman who, in his essay *Lieux malgré tout* from the collection *Phasmes* (1995),<sup>11</sup> proposed replacing Lanzmann’s negative term “non-lieu” with “the site despite everything,” which possesses a positive valence. He then proceeded to pose the question that, to me, successfully isolates the central problem of these sites; namely, “Why are these sites of slaughter the sites in spite of everything, the sites par excellence, the essential sites?”<sup>12</sup>

What makes these sites essential? Why and how do we conceive of them as sites despite everything, despite the fact that “there is nothing . . . left”? What exactly distinguishes them from the topographical fabric into which they have been sewn — because despite initially appearing to blend in with the surrounding landscape, there is in fact a distancing, an isolation here. Srebrnik was able

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and activity. ‘Place,’ in other words, designates the fullness-in-experience of a ‘site’ when it is actually inhabited”; see: <http://jasonfrancisco.net/to-go-to-lviv> (Feb. 28, 2014).

7 Cf. Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 49.

8 François Gantheret, “L’Entretien de Claude Lanzmann, Les non-lieux de mémoire,” *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse* 33 (1986): 293–305.

9 “With implicit reference to a phrase of Pierre Nora, he also brings out how the sites that are so important in his film are ‘non-lieux de la mémoire’ in that they are traumatic sites that challenge or undermine the work of memory.” Dominic LaCapra, “Lanzmann’s ‘Shoah’: ‘Here There Is No Why,’” *Critical Inquiry* 2 (1997): 240; Lanzmann’s term is now less clear due to the use of “non-lieu” in Marc Augé, *Non-Lieux*, introduction à une anthropologie de la supermodernité; *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe, 2nd edition (London: Verso, 2009). (1992). A similar phrase also occurs in Giorgio Agamben’s *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Zone Books: New York, 1999), 52: *non-place* is a site occupied by a Muselmann, with its extreme limit called “selection.”

10 Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 19.

11 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Phasmes: essais sur l’apparition* (Paris: Minuit, 1995).

12 Georges Didi-Huberman, “The Site, Despite Everything,” trans. Stuart Liebman, in *Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah: Key Essays*, ed. Stuart Liebmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007), 115.

to point out his execution site because it somehow stood out from the rest of the forest: someone had kept nature from completely absorbing this space. “Non-sites of memory” are not—I suggest—permanently forgotten, as Lanzmann alleged:<sup>13</sup> there does exist a performatively articulated memory around them, which would make them distant relatives of anti-monuments,<sup>14</sup> were it not for the radically different origins of the actions performed upon and against them. These sites are actively present in the life of surrounding communities in such a way that they are bypassed, not named, not marked, not built up, unsown—as taboo places. The memory of them is not revealed at the level of material culture—markers are not placed there—but rather by way of negation, in turning away or turning a blind eye, and even through such radical gestures as littering and vandalizing: these acts appear to be related to ritual acts, magic, primal acts intended for cursed spaces, taboo places, which our culture has associated since Roman times (if not before) with death and catastrophe.<sup>15</sup>

The places I have in mind are numerous and diverse, and are the result of a variety of historical cataclysms, not only the Shoah. They are, in essence, burial places—mass graves or killing sites<sup>16</sup>—while also being sites of executions and of torture (like the terrains of former labor camps, concentration camps, and death camps) that have not been memorialized by being transformed into museums or monuments; and furthermore, places that remain connected to the events of genocide: demolished synagogues, vandalized cemeteries. These places may occur both in the city and in the countryside; they may be small, or even tiny, and they may also be extensive. They may stand out from the surrounding landscape in the sense that they are a kind of breach in its ordinary, familiar structure; they may not stand out at all, being mere clumps of grass or thickets. They share a certain affective aura that is difficult to rationalize—something in these spaces is perceptibly “off.”

To develop a working definition of these places, I hazard an indication of a quality they all share: they are a source of a certain discomfort among

13 Ulrich Baer writes about places where “historical knowledge has burned out,” see *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 72.

14 Cf. James E. Young, *Texture of Memory: Holocaust Monuments and Meanings* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

15 Cf. Eli Edward Burriss, *Taboo, Magic, Spirits: A Study of Primitive Elements in Roman Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 66–67. With regard to places, “taboo” referred not so much to prohibiting the disturbance of a site as it did to the behavior of individuals who found themselves on that site. Taboo places (e.g., places struck by lightning) were marked with (for example) stones that would prevent the passerby from accidentally wandering in.

16 See Patrick Desbois, *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest’s Journey to Uncover the Truth behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

the communities nearest them, for whom commemorating them is a greater threat for their collective identity than is neglecting to commemorate them, though this, too, puts them at risk of external critique. In other words, these places are not sites of memory in Pierre Nora's sense largely because the populations topographically ascribed to them do not need or even actively do not want to invest their memory in them. They want to forget these locales, to not-remember them. *Les lieux de la non-mémoire*. Or with the negative particle preceding the entire time, as Lanzmann has it: *Les non-lieux de la mémoire*.

To address their "fundamental significance," I will give a concrete example: the site of the former German concentration camp at Krakow-*Plaszów*, which owes its fame to Thomas Keneally's book *Schindler's Ark* (1982) and to Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List* (1993).<sup>17</sup> It is estimated<sup>18</sup> that 25,000 prisoners passed through this camp, and that the remains of 8,000–10,000 predominantly Jewish victims are still located on these premises. After the war, the area continued to be undeveloped, with abundant vegetation taking its revenge for the period of the almost total destruction of the land during the life of the camp. A monument "in honor of the martyrs killed in Hitler's genocide from 1943–1945"<sup>19</sup> stands at the eastern edge of the site. As a result of rapid urbanization after 1989, the site of the camp, which people had previously perceived as being on the outskirts of the city, suddenly became a part of the very center of the city. Satellite photos on Google Maps show a gaping hole in the fabric of the city here, around the same size as the Old Town of Krakow so very beloved by tourists. These two splotches relate to one another like the twin blots of a Rorschach test, embodying the urban conscious and the urban unconscious, the visible and the invisible, the revealed and the concealed, the familiar and the uncanny.

### Above

In his book *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*, Ulrich Baer reads the image corresponding to the typical "non-site of memory" based on the site

17 The camp began as a work camp in late 1942 and was officially transformed into a concentration camp in January 1943. After expansions, it ultimately occupied 67 hectares. Its liquidation lasted from August 1944 until mid-January 1945.

18 Cf. Ryszard Kotarba, *Niemiecki obóz w Plaszowie 1942–1945* (Warsaw–Krakow: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2009), 161–175.

19 Built in 1964 by architect Witold Cęckiewicz. In an interview I conducted with Cęckiewicz in October 2013, he told me that he did not recollect the source of funding or the originator of the memorialization.

of the former Zwangsarbeitslager in Ohrdruf (part of Michael Levin's *War Story* [1995]), asserting that in fact "we are made to see an unfathomable void that will not be dispelled."<sup>20</sup> The idea of "picturing nothing" also facilitates the ekphrasis of the black-and-white photograph called "Sobibór" from the cycle *Deathly Still: Pictures of Former Concentration Camps* by Dirk Reinartz (1995).<sup>21</sup> Applying Baer's ideas to pictures that clearly do *not* display emptiness in any empirical sense seems to suggest that the fundamental quality of "non-sites of memory" is their invisibility, their transparency, in the sense that they do not hold the gaze of the passerby. Difficult to recognize, they then surprise us with their lack of identifying markers; our awareness of these spaces' connections to instances of mass murder, meanwhile, heightens our sense of absence and abandonment – our sense of emptiness. A number of photographic projects dedicated to representing non-sites of memory would later opt for a similar poetics, including some of Alan Cohen's series *On European Ground* (2001), Susan Silas' *Helmbrechts Walk* (1993–2003), and even Wojciech Wilczyk's photographs from *There Is No Innocent Eye* (2009) [*Niewinne oko nie istnieje*], meticulously made devoid of any human presence.

Baer's interpretations are exemplars of a very typical practice in dealing with genocide sites. Their reception is generally formatted by a particular minimalist and monochromatic aesthetic consistent with the poetics of the artworks – like Levin's and like Reinhartz's. Lanzmann spoke similarly about the places he filmed in Poland in an interview for *Cahiers du Cinéma*: "there was nothing at all, sheer nothingness, and I had to make a film on the basis of this nothingness."<sup>22</sup> The expectations of the viewers inform the work to such an extent that it sometimes goes as far as to sacrifice authenticity – so vital to Holocaust history – to preserve its ascetic style.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, the stereotype of the monochrome is immediately undone, insofar as nature makes its way in the cognitive process from back- to foreground, where – compositionally – in the case of the representation of "non-sites of memory," it generally tends to be. The necessity of a reappraisal of over-exploited conventions of reception has been pointed out by Simon Shama, who writes that "we are

20 Baer, *Spectral Evidence*, 75.

21 Dirk Reinartz, *Deathly Still: Pictures of Former Concentration Camps* (New York: Scalo Publishers), 1995.

22 Stuart Liebman, *Claude Lanzmann's Shoah: Key Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 39.

23 One of the extras from *Schindler's List*, interviewed in the video project *Spielberg's List* (2003) by Omer Fast, mentions that Spielberg's set required the reconstruction of prisoners' barracks, with new boards being painted gray despite the fact that in 1943 they would have looked exactly like the ones freshly delivered in 1992: new and light-colored.

accustomed to think of the Holocaust as having no landscape – or at best one emptied of features and color, shrouded in night and fog, blanketed by perpetual winter, collapsed into shades of dun and grey [. . .]. It is shocking, then, to realize that Treblinka, too, belongs to a brilliantly vivid countryside.”<sup>24</sup> Putting the static poetics of reception to one side, we run into elements that are inconsistent with the Holocaust: colors, sunshine, and the vibrant filling in of the field of observation that is nature.

Recent contributions of the newly non-anthropocentric humanities now equip us to better consider the properties of “non-sites of memory,” beginning with the visible; that is, with the landscape: biotic and abiotic components of the local ecosystem. Nature, in the case of the spaces that interest me here, is the only immediate datum: if the site does still contain remnants of past tragedy, they are often hard to spot at first glance and may require some digging around in order to be discovered. Perceiving the intense, even lush layers of plant life demands the two steps just described: the deconstruction of the concept of “non-sites of memory” as places of voids, and the rejection of monochromatic poetics as the basic format of the imagination.

The question of whether biological material can provide insight into “non-sites of memory” leads in turn to more specific issues, such as the extent to which nature becomes representation, or even literally presentation in the sense of making the victims present. The two extremes in this debate are, on the one hand, the position that plant life is the worst enemy of remembering the victims, and on the other, the opposite: that nature is a faithful companion and suffering’s most intimate witness. One of these stances is held by Armando, the Dutch painter and writer.

Born in 1929, Armando spent the years of World War II (and of his childhood) in Amersfoort, a township in which the Nazis placed a concentration camp. His experience of the silence and passivity that occurred alongside those atrocities has returned time and time again in his works. The landscape onto which the guilt of all of the “by-standers” has been projected has turned into a *schuldig Landschap* (guilty landscape). Armando’s denouncement is a polyphonic soliloquy: “The edge of the forest, for example the trees towards the front, must have seen a thing or two. The trees in the back can hardly be blamed, they could never have seen anything. But the edge, the seam of the forest: that has seen it . . .”<sup>25</sup> Ernst van Alphen explains the position of the artist as follows: “The presence of the trees on that scene of violence, the continuity between the edge of the forest and the perpetrators of that violence,

24 Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 26.

25 Ernst van Alphen, *Armando: Shaping Memory* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2000), 10–11.

enables the trees to be blamed. The trees are witnesses, but they don't testify. Their refusal to testify, to serve as a trace of 'the war,' determines their guilt." The order of anthropomorphic nature is, then, radically distinguished from the order of the victims.

The reverse position is represented by Łukasz Surowiec, who presented a project entitled "Berlin–Birkenau" at the 2012 Berlin Biennale. A part of the work was the act of giving out birch seedlings from the site of the former Birkenau concentration camp. The artist explained his plan as follows: "I bring a live cemetery. The trees at Birkenau drink water from earth mixed with ashes and breathe the same air that bore the smoke from the burnt bodies. Those trees contain something of those people."<sup>26</sup>

Surowiec's bioart project is one of the works that initiate and foment the idea that plants, in absorbing the mineral remains of human beings as they grow, become something more than simply the representation of the victims' suffering by becoming witnesses at the cellular level—their presence metonymically restores the existence of those now absent. Anthropomorphizing trees, either planted or spontaneously arising on Holocaust sites, results in a next step, that of taking the metaphor literally: "if we actually think about the organic contents of the trees, we realize that they all contain within themselves the remains of the victims," writes Jacek Małczyński in his piece tellingly titled *Trees: Living Monuments at the Museum and Place of Memory in Bełżec*.<sup>27</sup> Trees are thus treated as transgenic objects—an extreme liberalization of a metaphor, since blending human with plant DNA is in fact an operation that must be carried out artificially in a lab.<sup>28</sup> It is an approach that renders habitat not as witness, but rather as a way of permitting the victims to endure.<sup>29</sup>

26 An interview conducted by Daniel Miller, accessed July 27, 2012, <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/7BerlinBiennale/SurowiecBerlinBirkenau/menuid-427.html>.

27 Jacek Małczyński, "Drzewa—Żywe pomniki w Muzeum-Miejscu Pamięci w Bełżcu," *Teksty Drugie* 1–2 (2009).

28 Jacek Małczyński writes about a "laboratory" art project by Gregore Tremmel and Shiho Fukuhara entitled "Biopresence," accessed July 27, 2012, <http://www.biopresence.com/description.html>. There are also similar commercial projects; cf. Ian Sample, "Firm Plans Human DNA Tree Memorial," *The Guardian* (April 30, 2004), accessed 28 July 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/science/2004/apr/30/genetics.highereducation>.

29 Between these two limit points there are a number of intermediary interpretations also possible, of which I will mention only one here: Oskar Hansen's project of a "road memorial," in which the artist, along with a group of others, proposed cutting across the terrain of the camp at Auschwitz with an asphalt road 65 meters across and conserving only those camp relics that could be found within the space of that road. The rest was to be consumed by nature. Jan Stanisław Wojciechowski cites an unpublished note written by Hansen: "The growing forest surrounding the "Road" is a kind of "watch" measuring the time that elapses since the tragic

## Below

Regardless of what position we take on what we find above ground, traces of the tragedy remain concealed below ground, and a full analysis of “non-sites of memory” would have to consider the space traditionally occupied by archaeology and geology. The difficulty of this research is crucially heightened by the fact that according to Judaic law, land containing the remains of victims of the Holocaust cannot be touched, being cemetery land.<sup>30</sup> An analysis of what is hidden beneath the plant layer appears to aim primarily at the discovery of relics – proofs of the existence of places of torture and of bodies or human ashes. I would argue that the materiality of these objects is more complicated than this.

In 2006, the Municipality of Krakow announced an architectural competition to develop the land of what was once the Płaszów camp. The team (Proxima) that won first place in the competition was asked to provide an inventory. The categories employed by the architects can enable us to imagine the “sub-plant” state of the “non-site of memory.” Proxima presented the results of their research in ten charts: a geological map of the present state of the place; a map of Austrian remains from the First World War; a map reconstructing the borderlines of the pre-war Jewish cemeteries; a map of the concentration camp buildings from the Second World War; a map of extant camp relics; a map of postwar developments (roads, paths); and a map of recent technical installations (water pipes, electricity cables, etc., that now run through the camp’s premises). The eighth map displays the ownership structure; the last-but-one pictures trees and shrubs; and the last map presents the proposed developments needed to complete the winning project.

These charts are a testament to how many discourses are at work within a single, topographically defined place: geographical, geodetic, geological,

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events of the camp, so it’s an expression of the triumph of life over death . . . Then when you keep going you emerge from the “Road” into the open space of a field . . . You return to life, able to fully appreciate its value.” Jan Stanisław Wojciechowski, “Oskara Hansena (i zespołu) projekt oświęcimskiego pomnika ‘Drogi’ w świetle jego teorii Formy Otwartej,” in *Pamięć Shoah: Kulturowe reprezentacje i praktyki upamiętniania*, ed. Tomasz Majewski and Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Officyna, 2011), 65.

- 30 Archeological investigations were conducted in preparation for the construction of the memorial site in Bełżec; cf. Małczyński, *Drzewa*, 211: “33 mass graves have been located. They take up a large part of the site. The minimally invasive method of drilling probes has been used.” Sobibór was similarly investigated, see Andrzej Kola, “Sprawozdanie z archeologicznych badań na terenie b. obozu Zagłady Żydów w Sobiborze,” *Przeszłość i Pamięć* 3 (2000). Non-invasive Holocaust archaeology is a recent development; cf. Caroline Sturdy Colls, “Holocaust Archaeology: Archeological Approaches to Landscapes of Nazi Genocide and Persecution” *Journal of Conflict Archaeology* 7 (2012).

historical, administrative and legal, technical (systems), biological, religious (the cemeteries existing on this land prior to the war), artistic (the development planned), as well as memory discourse (existing monuments). We can imagine maps charting the walking paths and pausing places for local residents (the discourse of “free time”), mapping the places specified by camp inmates in their private narratives (the discourse of idiosyncratic memory), and mapping the “phantasmatic” – local residents have their own tales and legends about the land from after the war. The camp land is also impinged upon by aggressive advertising by a nearby shopping mall that closes off the view and that also makes it possible to add to the above list, economic discourse (the discourse of consumption and trade).

The way that the Proxima Group has physically rationalized the confusion of orders on camp land brings to mind the notion of a palimpsest as a basic cognitive model allowing the increasing complexity of the site under consideration to be reckoned with. The figure of the palimpsest is built upon an idea of sedimentation (the buildup of successive planes) and provides a consistent synchronic model<sup>31</sup> in which individual categories are easy to separate, group, and read. (This is how the Proxima study is organized.)

As much as the quality of simultaneity certainly describes the state of the discourses interwoven in the fabric of the camp terrain in Płaszów, the project does not attain functional data storage or readability. Let us note, however, the way in which Proxima presented their study: the first map becomes lighter when the second map is placed on top of it, etc. Let us imagine, meanwhile, all the maps placed upon one another without any shading allowances: the chaos of the symbols would make any recognition of the properties of the site impossible. The researcher confronted not with the model, but rather with the object, standing in the middle of the terrain in question, is confronted with a cacophony of unstructured data (data that is in fact encoded and that requires training in order to be decoded, which impedes the activity of understanding still further.) The layeredness of the palimpsest, then, is merely an a priori cognitive construction allowing for the pictorial representation of the elements of the “non-site of memory” and is most certainly not its ontological characteristic.

Therefore, it might be more effective to refer to a “technical” description of a palimpsest. Greco-Roman etymology unites the words *palin* (“again”) and

31 “The structural concept of the palimpsest is based on the text’s ability to reveal explicitly its sources of precedent layers in order to make them totally visible and easily discernable,” see Michał P. Markowski, “Wiping Out: The Palimpsest, the Subject, and the Art of Forgetting,” edited by Bożena Shallcross and Ryszard Nycz (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), 121.

*psao* ("I scrape").<sup>32</sup> Some of the elements that make up the physical contours of the Płaszów grounds seem to support the "leveling" quality of the palimpsest: layers do not simply get added to one another, but are rather always erasing what came before, leaving only traces of the existence of the previous layer. As a new layer of soil and vegetation covered over and destroyed the remnants of the camp's buildings, so the construction of the camp itself razed the structures that had been built on that land in the era of the First World War, and so, too, the current construction of apartment buildings has erased all traces of the SS barracks.

But it strikes me that the figure of the palimpsest, whether the palimpsest that accentuates layeredness and lastingness or the palimpsest that refers more to the act of destruction, is unable to productively back up any analysis of the "non-site of memory," primarily because of one characteristic shared by both versions; namely, the basic concept of order, the succession of individual elements, the particular "syntactic logic" of both models based on the idea of sequence, on relationships of cause and effect, and on the assumption that the basic elements of the system are discrete, unconnected and discernable. Meanwhile the reality of physical objects on the grounds of the camps turns the idea of "layeredness" upside down—part of the installation is underground, part of it above; the ruins of the barracks are at once overgrown (as when vegetation covers extant structural elements of the camp) and also partly not (as when vegetation is nearby or underneath these elements); the human remains may be underneath but also above the earth's surface. In addition, some architectural projects (for example, the reinforcement of the Krakow fortress) functionally belong to several maps (several discourses): the trenches must simultaneously be included in the categories of ruins of the beginning of the twentieth century and mass graves from 1944. Furthermore, in treating layers as stable space, the metaphor of the palimpsest does not explain what happens *between* them:<sup>33</sup> it does not, then, serve the purpose of describing those "dynamic," "mixed," "diffuse" objects that are, without a doubt, the "living" grounds of "non-sites of memory."

### Prism

The contested sites of genocide and atrocity—I repeat—cannot be explained with the use of concepts based on the logic of a sentence. The particular

32 Cf. Justyna Beinek, "Inscribing, Engraving, Cutting: The Polish Romantic Album as Palimpsest," in *The Effect of Palimpsest: Culture, Literature, History*, 29.

33 Ryszard Nycz, "The Palimpsest and the Spiderweb: Two Dimensions of the Textualisation of Experience," in *The Effect of Palimpsest*, 23.

"mixed" character of "non-sites of memory" requires us to seek out metaphors from among terms suggesting disorder, and especially the type of disorder in which biological and non-biological elements are mixed, along with man-made items and natural elements, all of it in a state of constant agitation, of ongoing change. Elements disintegrate and are shuffled around, grow and die, are moved (e.g., by architects investigating the terrain, by visitors, by animals, by prisoners customarily sent in the spring to do light logging). Thus the metaphor I seek would need to include the idea of confusion and leftovers, of change and remaining, and perhaps the fullest reservoir of suitable ideas might be found in "rubbish theory."

What unites the "non-site of memory" with the "garbage heap" is not only the metaphor of the "rubbish dump of history," which we could no doubt use for places like Płaszów, not only the habit of littering in deserted places, but their shared state of "potentiality" and "indeterminacy." If Jonathan Culler is correct that "as the transient moves towards rubbish, it can either be torn down to make way for something new (this is the transient view, the view from the system of transients) or else salvaged as durable: rebuilt, reconstructed."<sup>34</sup> The material contents of the "non-site of memory" possess a similar dual dynamic: the camp's remains, as well as human remains, undergo a process of decomposition, becoming soil for the plants, though they might also be preserved if the locale is selected for conservation and turned into a "lieu d'histoire." Yet it is difficult to ignore the fact that some elements of rubbish theory preclude its usage for "non-sites of memory." Firstly, it echoes the rhetoric of the perpetrators who originally sent "human garbage" off to these camps in the first place. Secondly, in order for it to be "rubbish," the locale must become useless and "inferior" within the system of exchange.<sup>35</sup> The most important components of "non-sites of memory," human remains, simply cannot be evaluated in terms of an economic system, nor can there be any idea of referring to them as "trivial."

Metaphors with their provenance in the language of the natural sciences may be more productive, including the (also Adornian) term "detritus," with its connotation of an unordered accumulation of many elements and the movement of their interaction, as well as the effect of their acting: departure, destruction, forgetting.<sup>36</sup> In biology, detritus is any form of non-living organic material, be it the bodies or components of dead organisms or the matter

34 Jonathan Culler, "Junk and Rubbish: A Semiotic Approach," *Diacritics* 15 (Fall 1985): 9.

35 *Ibid.*, 5.

36 Zafar Reshi and Sumira Tyub, *Detritus and Decomposition in Ecosystems* (Delhi: New India Publisher 2007), 1.

discarded by living organisms, such as feces.<sup>37</sup> Adorno utilized the term in a context convergent with the topic of this article insofar as it was connected with the operation of memory disturbed by the “detritus of things.”<sup>38</sup> Detritus is synonymous in Adorno with the indiscriminate magma of stimuli brought to us by popular culture. Understood literally, “biologically,” it carries connotations that are useful in thinking about the problematic of the “non-site of memory”: the unordered accumulation of many elements, the movement of their interactions, as well as the effect of their activities: waste, ruin, homogenization. It emphasizes the influence on the surrounding community. (For biologists and ecologists, detritus has a major role in the proper functioning of the ecosystem.)

Detritus is thus the arena in which dead matter (the past) becomes transformed into fertile soil that is able to give rise to new life. In this sense, it serves to heal: in the case of “non-sites,” what has been forgotten may need to have been forgotten in order for the surrounding areas to continue to live. The metaphor of detritus would thus describe the positive component of the decomposition of memory occurring at “non-sites of memory” and the restorative significance of this process for the communities residing around these “non-sites.” On the other hand, the particularity of the “non-lieu de mémoire” is its conjunction of “detritus” with the opposite of this—not everything falls apart, and the very notion of visiting the places mentioned here is tied to the conviction that there is still evidence here incriminating the perpetrators—even if this evidence takes the form of a person capable of recalling the crime.

The material reality of “non-sites of memory” could also be described by means of an idea rejected by Giorgio Agamben in his *Remnants of Auschwitz*. “Hypostasis,” in its original Greek meaning, “is a substratum, deposit, or sediment left behind as a kind of background or foundation by historical processes of subjectification and desubjectification.”<sup>39</sup> I am particularly interested here in this definition’s mobilization of what I was pointing out in analyzing GP Proxima’s charts: the multitude of discourses clashing on the post-camp terrain of Płaszów. The short-circuiting, the collision, or even the less violent compounding of the space’s external qualities that produce its sedimentary, residual character as a “collection of traces” would direct our attention

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Tia DeNora, *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 77.

<sup>39</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 158.

to geology, which has lately become a participant in historical discourses.<sup>40</sup> The term “anthropocene” has arisen to define a period in which human activity has become defining in the shaping of the earth, so that the “eternal humanist distinction between the history of humanity and natural history”<sup>41</sup> has collapsed before our very eyes. “Non-sites of memory” may, then, serve as spheres in which one can actually observe this intermingling of the traditional human and natural orders. In some of them, one can literally watch the functioning of “man as new geological force” – especially in Płaszów, built near a quarry and also working during the war as a place that intervened in the land’s own structure. During the First World War, soldiers disrupted the limestone present here by digging trenches; later, camp prisoners were forced to dig out cellars, break down rock, and remove the ensuing rubble. On these “non-sites of memory,” natural history – the history of the rocks, trees, water—becomes an essential component of human history, making theoretically possible a discussion that would exceed the historical order.

Thus, the final metaphor I wish to propose here for the “non-site of memory” comes from the reservoir of geology. The term I have in mind is “prism.” In Polish, “pryzma” is used to designate compost; that is, the place for organic garbage. In this term, therefore, both rubbish theory and detritus come into play. The term also holds the energy of hypostasis; i.e., the sediment necessary for development, growth, and change. Geology, meanwhile, defines prism, above all, as the “accretionary prism.” This is an area of sedimentation produced by materials sloughed off by the force generated by friction between the largest tectonic plates, transferred and then left in the form of a wedge wherever it was that the tectonic movements ceased.

This definition of prism thus also incorporates a palimpsestic, continuous “scraping.” Rock and organic material (e.g., from the bottom of the sea) are combined in no order and expelled from their original location as the result of overwhelming force, geological “violence.” The prism is thus organic and non-organic, is “marred” and “illegible.” It is produced by the activity of external forces, which can be compared to the activity of external discourses: history, politics, economy, memory. “The wedge,” the physical presence of the object, does not allow itself to be dominated by these discourses, leaving the unsettling feeling that sweeps up the visitor, the feeling that there is still something there that threatens the organized order. The more common English meaning of the word prism,<sup>42</sup> i.e., an object that separates white light into a spectrum of

40 Cf. Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” *Critical Inquiry* 2 (2009).

41 Ibid., 201.

42 Until recently, this meaning also existed in Polish.

colors, also generates a particular kind of metaphorical strength: “non-sites of memory” are locations deconstructing all homogenizing imaginaries purporting to understand them. They refract and complicate superficially monological discourse – both the discourse around itself and perhaps also the existing discourse on genocide sites in general.

### A Question in Lieu of a Conclusion

That Lanzmann, in rejecting the notion of the “*lieu de mémoire*,” added a negating particle to the first rather than to the second component of Nora’s term ought to give us pause, for it could also be argued that in the locales he films, it is memory, not the site, that is deficient. Edward Relph was a precursor to Marc Augé and student of Martin Heidegger. His *Place and Placelessness* (1976) tied “placelessness” with a particular quality of topographical sites that strips the visitor of his or her sense of being an “existential participant” in a space of “givenness” for life. (I will bracket here for the moment the question of the modernity of the places described by Relph.) Baer, describing the effect of Levin’s photograph, writes that it shows the “landscape without us.”<sup>43</sup> “Non-sites of memory” are, then, not-for-life; they are always sentenced to death. The readily discernable other side of this phrasing is the critique of – even the indignation in the face of – the vacancy, the unmarkedness, the nondescriptness of these spaces. “Non-sites” ought instead to be cordoned off by some sort of “line” indicating their extent, allowing for the demarcation of the space of our symbolic engagement. Lanzmann’s thinking clearly subscribes to this desire for demarcation: in an interview with François Gantheret for *La Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, in which he utilized the term “non-lieux de mémoire,” he talked about arriving in Sobibór and meeting an old railway man. Lanzmann reconstructed the conversation as follows:

“Please show me. Please show me where the camp started.”

“Okay,” he said. “I’ll show you.” After taking a few steps he turned to me and said, “Okay, here there was a wood support, and then here was the next one.” And I see myself crossing that line and saying, “Here I’m inside the concentration camp.” I stepped back three meters. “And here I’m outside of the camp. On that side, you have death. On this side, life.”<sup>44</sup>

43 Baer, *Spectral Evidence*, 75.

44 Cited (in a different translation reversing the order of the last two sentences of this passage) in Richard Brody, “Claude Lanzmann on ‘Shoah,’” *The New Yorker* (December 10 2010), <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/movies/2010/12/claude-lanzmann-on-shoah.html>; cf. Au

It is hard for me to accept the dialectical nature of this “here you have death, there you have life.” If you look at the actual “non-sites of memory” from the perspective of Eastern Europe, the limiting “line” that Lanzmann requires was never so obvious. The line was, for the Eastern European population, permeable (although the degree of its permeability was, of course, different for different groups of people), far more permeable than to the citizens of countries in the West, due to radical differences in the forms of Nazi occupation. In any case, those limits that were wooden structures did not defend against death: at any moment, the whim of any of the perpetrators might cast anyone at all over onto the “side of death.” That is why, given the location of my point of view between Moscow and Berlin, it seems to me that it is necessary in the face of “non-sites of memory” – which perhaps ought to be given another name – to ask a different set of questions. Access to them, as they are not yet fully articulable, would consist of deconstructing the third principle of the conceptualization of places of genocide: dialectical separation. Standing with a camera in the forests of Sobibór, at the clearing in Ohrdruf, in the landscape of Plaszów, we are there, we are at the non-site, we enter onto that terrain, consciously or unconsciously invading a place of death with life. The “non-site of memory” turns out to be the “landscape with us.” In order to comprehend the “fundamental significance” of these sites, we need to try and understand how the forces of memory and forgetting together affect this space, how the vibrancy of these places coexists with their moribundity; hence, their “organic-nonorganic” character, inextricable.

Stepping out of the discursive frameworks set out above for a moment, I would like to ask a more basic question of those sites “of fundamental significance”: where do we actually stand in relation to them? If not on the outside and not on the inside – then where? Are we excluded from them, or sucked into their untamed life after/in trauma? What are we to do, here in this part of Europe, as we enter onto “non-sites of memory,” theoretically “unlivable,” but in practice so shamelessly alive?

*Translation: Jennifer Croft*

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*sujet de Shoah: Le film de Claude Lanzmann* (Paris: Éditions Belin, 1990), 281–282; and Claude Lanzmann, *Patagonian Hare: A Memoir*, trans. Frank Wynne (New York: FSG, 2013).

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Elżbieta Rybicka

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## Maps: From Metaphor to Critical Topography<sup>1</sup>

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### The Map, the Territory, and Deterritorialization

Contemporary discussions on the meaning and functions of cartography mostly revolve around the relationship between the map and the territory. In spite of appearances, explanations of the issue are neither unambiguous nor obvious, and the relationship itself is so complex that it provides a more comprehensive look at the historically determined bond between culture and reality. This state of affairs stems from the fact that the map is currently one of the primary epistemological and ontological metaphors in philosophical, postcolonial, historical, and literary studies discourses. This, in turn, allows us to use it to comprehend the mutating conceptualizations of the link between representation and the world. Nevertheless, the map is not only a metaphor but also practice, an instrument of administration and an instrument of state applied to space and territory. We need to add, however, that it is a practice taken up not only by expert cartographers, but also by artists, writers, and other non-professionals. Finally, the map itself is

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a nomadic concept, circulating between academia (geographic cartography, history, art history, psychology, sociology) and artistic practice. It is a fairly broad, non-specific term, especially taking into account phenomena like thought maps, mind maps, gene and genetic maps, the latter including other genetic maps of Europe, biomapping, and rhizomapping. The nomadic character of the map as metaphor and as practice predicates a questions about its usefulness as an instrument of organizing knowledge as well as about its liminal placement in a field wherein visual, linguistic (including literary), geographic, and historic studies intersect.

The most striking characteristic of contemporary examinations of the map is the problematization of its capability to objectively represent geographic space. I wanted to highlight this problematization rather than reject representation because I believe that at least a couple of solutions exists. As noted by Peta Mitchell,<sup>2</sup> the symbolic beginning of this problematization lies in Alfred Korzybski's famous premise that "a map is not the territory,"<sup>3</sup> formulated back in the 1930s. I'd like to introduce a preliminary structure into the relationship between the map and the territory by appealing to three model situations and positions: the map-as-experiment that collaborates with the territory, the map-as-simulation devoid of territory, and the map producing the territory. This first way of understanding the map can be traced back to the rhizome theory and nomadology of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari whose metaphoric thought model proposed a radical reformulation of the concept of the map. One of the principles of the rhizome (as an astructural, open model) is the principle of cartography which states that the map is not a tracing, but above all an area of experimentation:

Unlike the graphic arts, drawing, or photography, unlike tracings, the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed in such a way that it is detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits, as well as its own lines of escape.<sup>4</sup>

The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or

2 Peta Mitchell, *Cartographic Strategies of Postmodernity: the Figure of the Map in the Contemporary Theory and Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 2-3.

3 Alfred Korzybski, *Science And Sanity* (Lakeville: International Non-Aristotelian Library Pub. Co., 1958), 58.

4 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Continuum, 2004), 23.

social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as political action or as meditation.<sup>5</sup>

Contrary to conventional thinking, in Deleuze and Guattari's approach, the map does not fall within the scope of the optics of territory representation, but is rather considered experimental practice. In this case, it belongs to nomadic spatial logic, based on a sequence of transitions between deterritorialization and reterritorialization, on a state of openness wherein cartography is a process, and not an "image," a tracing or a visual reproduction. The original intention to problematize the map not as a creation – an object – but as a process, a mapping, corresponds to new directions in the theory of cartography. The map-as-experiment, however, does not break off its relationship with the territory as the primary principle of the rhizome is the principle of conjunction: as the rhizome acts in accord with the world, so does the map act in accord with the territory.

The second way of understanding the map is derived from the work of Jean Baudrillard, who opens one of his most famous texts with a reference to *On the Exactitude of Science*, a short story by Jose Louis Borges. The story then becomes a jumping-off point for his theory of simulation:

Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory – precession of simulacra – that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours.<sup>6</sup>

In Baudrillard's allegoric narration the territory disappears while the map-as-simulation remains. Eventually, however, the map-as-simulation vanishes as well, as the atrophy of the territory inescapably results in the atrophy of the map.

Insofar as Baudrillard emphasized the map as pure simulation in which the reference to reality is dissolved, the contemporary critical examination of the map highlights, above all, its relationship with territory, accentuating not its

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5 Ibid., 13.

6 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.

capability to represent space but its creative capacity, its power to transform and create.<sup>7</sup> This territorialism of the map stems from one fact that was suggestively emphasized by Karl Schlögel in his efforts to retrace the history of cartography:

Until it is measured and calculated, space is terrifying, wild, undisciplined, untamed, empty, and immeasurable. Only measured space becomes tame, explored, disciplined, sensible, it's forced to be practical. Only territorial space is capable of being ruled and ruling, it becomes the space of domination.<sup>8</sup>

This transmutation of space into territory intensified particularly in the Enlightenment era – that period saw the establishment of grand, long-term mapping projects looking to create detailed maps of France and England. The process of mapping the world coincided with the development of new tools and measuring instruments, the establishment of new institutions and ordinances standardizing systems of measurement. This dynamically developing “apparatus to measure the world” contributed, on one hand, to the creation of a modern, national, territorial state and the uniformity of territorial sovereignty in the spirit of Cartesian transparency; and on the other hand, entrenched the notion of the map as a cognitive instrument and metaphor for knowledge and cognitive processes.<sup>9</sup>

The relationship between the map and the territory manifests itself predominantly in the study of national identity and in postcolonial discourse. In this case, the map does not precede the territory, it produces it. In his *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson considers the map one of three institutions of power, the other two being the census and the museum, that colonial powers used for years to imagine (and develop) their domains.<sup>10</sup> The primary function of these institutions was to establish a totalizing classification grid that facilitated control and quantification. One classic example of such an effort was the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India – although that particular project also had economic motives.

7 For more insights on this see James Corner, “The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique, and Invention” in *Mappings*, ed. Denis E. Cosgrove (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 213–252.

8 Karl Schlögel, *W przestrzeni czas czytamy. O historii, cywilizacji i geopolityce*, trans. Izabela Drozdowska and Łukasz Musiał (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2009), 164.

9 *Ibid.*, 173.

10 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 167.

Anderson also points to two additional phenomena: firstly, the appearance of historical maps that legitimized antiquated delineations of territorial entities according to European notions of inheriting land. In other words, these maps established and legitimized borders not only in the present but also in the past. The other highly important issue was role of the “map-as-logo.” It stemmed from the fact that imperial powers often marked their colonies on maps using the same colors they employed to represent the metropole:

Dyed this way, each colony appeared like a detachable piece of a jigsaw puzzle. As this “jigsaw” effect became normal, each “piece” could be wholly detached from its geographic context. In its final form all explanatory glosses could be summarily removed: lines of longitude and latitude, place names, signs for rivers, seas, and mountains, neighbors. Pure sign, no longer compass to the world. In this shape, the map entered an infinitely reproducible series, available for transfer to posters, official seals, letterheads, magazine and textbook covers, tablecloths, and hotel walls. Instantly recognizable, everywhere visible, the logo-map penetrated deep into the popular imagination, forming a powerful emblem for the anticolonial nationalisms being born.<sup>11</sup>

Naturally, the process of creating imagined relationships using cartography was reinforced by universal education, geographical and historical atlases as well as wall maps at school. What seemed unimaginable and inaccessible from a local perspective – like the entirety of the state (or empire) – was now clearly visualized in these resources. In this particular case, special emphasis was put on the performative qualities of the map as an instrument of building nations construed as “imagined communities” which considered territorial autonomy essential.

Another important issue that shines additional light on the relationship between word, map, and territory is the question of geographical onomastics. Conquest of space by means of cartographical grid involves not only quantification but also toponymy, and this particular issue is especially important to postcolonial studies. The toponymy of the “New World” was based on repetition, reproduction and multiplication with an element of differentiation. New Orleans, New York, New England, Nova Scotia became an extension of Europe, a mark of geographic continuity, and simultaneously a form of linguistic usurpation of territory.<sup>12</sup>

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11 Ibid., 179.

12 Peter Jackson, *Maps Of Meaning* (London: Routledge, 1994), 167–169.

The relationship between map and territory is also an important part of the study of national culture and processes that shape nations, thus becoming a constituent element of ideological geography. In the works of Zygmunt Wasilewski and Jan Ludwik Popławski, Eugenia Prokop-Janiec noticed the process of drawing up national maps which “divide – and order – the national cultural space, identifying areas, spheres, strips, islands, points of familiarity and otherness, areas that are culturally older and younger, pure and hybrid, nested and annexed or newly colonized, central and peripheral.”<sup>13</sup>

The problems indicated here, related to the history of map as territory-creating instrument, are examined by critical cartography, a field developed in the early 1990s by Denis Wood and Brian Harley; recent contributions to the field were made by Jeremy Crampton and John Krygier. Recognizing that maps “make reality as much as they represent it”<sup>14</sup> is the basic premise of the field. Its primary objective is to draw attention to the close relationship of the map with Foucault’s power/knowledge and to the significance of historical and geographical contexts to the development of cartography as both science and practice. The field is developing both in its theoretical aspect, as critical map theory, and its practical aspect, as alternative or subversive mapping. Critical cartography seems to be especially significant due to its meta placement with regard to traditional, institutional cartography, thus making it possible to examine and verify its scientific, ideological, military, and economic bases. Additionally, critical cartography informs us that aside from the map as a subject of scientific cartography and the map as an instrument of European cartographic reasoning, there exist alternative maps: of local cultures, artistic experiments, the results of psychogeographic mapping efforts of the Situationists, of cultural “hacking.” Acknowledging the pluralism of maps shifts the distribution of cartographical knowledge: instead of being restricted to a small group of experts it is open to all. The import of critical cartography is linked with the recognition of the performative role of the map not only with regard to the transmutation of space into territory: “maps are active; they actively construct knowledge, they exercise power and they can be a powerful means of promoting social change.”<sup>15</sup> As far as further development of critical cartography is concerned, Crampton and Krygier offer five possible areas of additional exploration: art; everyday mapping involving

13 Eugenia Prokop-Janiec, “Przestrzeń, mapa, geografia kultury narodowej,” in *Nacjonalizm polski do 1939 roku. Wizje kultury polskiej i europejskiej*, ed. Krzysztof Stępnik and Monika Gabrys (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2011), 40.

14 Jeremy W. Crampton and John Krygier, “An Introduction to Critical Cartography,” *International E-Journal for Critical Cartographies* 4 (2005): 15.

15 Ibid.

performative, indigenous, affective, and experiential elements; maps as resistance based on counter-mapping; map hacking; and theoretical critique.

Another interesting issue, aside from the problem of representation, revolves around the fact that the map combines visual, linguistic, and geographic codes. Therefore, as noted by Igor Piotrowski:

[...] we are dealing with an equilibrium of not two but three elements: words, imagery, and territory depicted on the map. All three elements are requisite for the map to come into existence and their homeostasis decides the sense of that semiophore. However, we should take note that this particular situation is exceptional. Other depictions do not feature similar correlations between image and text, their mutual complementation. Photographs or drawings can be meaningful even when not accompanied by descriptions or even a title. Without a legend, a map often becomes indecipherable. The same applies to territory, that is the designation of the map. [...] in the case of the map, unfamiliarity with the territory or incapability of properly locating it has immense influence over its comprehensibility. In other words: disruption of the harmonious coexistence of the three aforementioned elements results in a drastic decrease of the functionality of the map as signifying object or its transposition into another class of objects (images, text).<sup>16</sup>

Such an understanding of the map opens numerous avenues of inquiry at the intersection of literary studies, visual studies, and geography. We should also take note here that historians and theorists of cartography themselves have already emphasized the rhetorical character of the map. In critical cartography's early stages, J.B. Harley considered maps to be both cultural and rhetorical text and indicated that the procedures of their creation are rhetorical in character and are based on selection, simplification, classification, the creation of hierarchies, and "symbolization."<sup>17</sup> Karl Schlögel also discussed cartographical narratives and the rhetoric of cartography. The relationship between maps, trajectories, and spatial stories was also emphasized by Michel de Certeau.<sup>18</sup>

16 Igor Piotrowski, "Słowo, obraz, terytorium. W stronę kulturowej analizy map," in *Słowo/obraz*, ed. Iwona Kurz and Agnieszka Karpowicz (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2010), 130-131.

17 John Brian Harley, "Deconstructing the Map," *Cartographica* 2 (1989): 11.

18 Michel de Certeau and Steven Rendall, *The Practice Of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 115.

Therefore, in contemporary discourse the map has a somewhat paradoxical status: on the one hand, it is critiqued as the instrument of knowledge/power, and on the other hand, it's appropriated by artistic, literary and other practices connected with the culture of resistance. It is also fairly easy to notice that nowadays the market for maps is booming, particularly due to the development of cybercartography. Peta Mitchell hypothesized that just as sun and light were primary metaphors for Enlightenment-era epistemes, and biological and mechanical tropes for the Modernist episteme, so the map is the key formative and performative metaphor for post-modernity.<sup>19</sup> It is especially intriguing, given that the library and the labyrinth, both derived from the works of Borges, were the definitive metaphors of the late 20th century. Is this transition, from the library and the labyrinth to the map, evidence of something aside from the obvious spatial turn? To attempt an answer to this question, I would like to first focus our attention on the matter of maps in literature.

### Literary Cartographies

Starting with the assumption that a map is a liminal and nomadic phenomenon, a link between geography and other discourses,<sup>20</sup> I would like to point out the functions it serves in literature and literary studies. And yes, firstly, it can be understood as metaphor or theme, sometimes as *topos*. Most often it is employed as a figuralization of the act of world creation (*The Issa Valley* by Czesław Miłosz is one example) or the exploration of unknown spaces (like in Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*), historical events, and processes (as in Stefan Chwin's *Białe kafelki, porcelana, nikiel*). Maps portrayed in literature, especially recent literature, are also metaphoric sites of memory, a sort of *mnemotopos* reminding us of a certain area's past – like in the works of Paweł Huelle, Krzysztof Fedorowicz, and Henryk Wańka.

The map metaphor, however, can be understood in a broader sense, when the act of writing and creating fictional worlds itself is considered “a form of mapping or a cartographic activity.”<sup>21</sup> The writer, like the mapmaker, designs the spatial organization of the territory through selection, the establishment of scale and the limits of the depicted area, and emphasizing the importance of selected topographical elements. Such a narrative map of Dublin was

19 Mitchell, *Strategies*, 39.

20 See Elżbieta Konończuk, “Mapa w interdyscyplinarnym dialogu geografii, historii i literatury,” *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2011): 255-264.

21 Robert T. Tally, *Spatiality* (London: Routledge, 2012), 45. see also Peter Turchi, *Maps Of The Imagination* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2004).

created by James Joyce in *Ulysses*, but Dante's *Divine Comedy* can also be read in this way – as an attempt to create an allegorical map.

Secondly, the map is often the subject of ekphrasis in the classic sense of the term – a linguistic representation of a visual representation. Naturally, ekphrasis introduces an additional layer of references as it evokes the problem of the relationship between word and visualization. Poem-maps, like Howard Howoritz's *Wordmaps: Manhattan* or *Oregon Coast*, are a separate issue arising at the intersection of literature, geography, and visual arts. This sort of visual poetry, as the author himself once noted, requires the reader to possess the knowledge of the geography and history of a given place, as it becomes entwined with the matter of the poetic text.<sup>22</sup> Geographical space exists inside them simultaneously as visualization in the form of a map and as text. Therefore, in this particular case, we can say that there exists an equilibrium between word, image, and territory.

The map itself can also serve as the nucleus of a story, its point of origin. The most famous example of that is naturally R.L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, which begins with a map a father drew for his son. In Polish literature, examples of narratives that begin with maps include *Kosmografia. Trzydzieści apokryfów tułaczyczych* [*Cosmography. Thirty Nomadic Apocrypha*], Jacek Dehnel's series of miniatures, created for the 2012 exhibition in the National Library entitled *The World of Ptolemy: Italian Renaissance Cartography in the Collections of the National Library*. However, Dehnel's *Apocrypha* are not an illustration, not an attempt at translating the language of the map into the language of storytelling, but a narrative in which imagination plays a much greater role than the territory.

The map can also play a supportive role in the interpretation of literary texts. Vladimir Nabokov's *Lectures on Literature* feature his hand-drawn maps of England on which he marked the location where *Mansfield Park* takes place and the wanderings of *Ulysses* characters across Dublin.<sup>23</sup> They are proof of the existence of a correlation between the creation of narrative maps and interpretative practice. Just as the creation of a fictional world can be compared to the mapping process – the creation of territories – the act of reading requires the readers to reconstruct or construct their own maps of the novel's territory.

The role of the map as an analytical instrument supporting the process of interpretation was emphasized especially by Franco Moretti. In his view, maps

22 Howard Horowitz, "Wordmaps" in *GeoHumanities: Art, History, Text at the Edge of Place*, ed. Michael Dear, Jim Ketchum, Sarah Luria, and Doug Richardson (New York: Routledge, 2011), 107–111.

23 Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov and Fredson Bowers, *Lectures On Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 10, 334.

can change the way a novel is read, accentuate specific geometries, boundaries, spatial taboos, and favorite routes.<sup>24</sup> In Polish literary studies, *Geografia Słowackiego* [*The Geography of Słowacki*], a volume edited by Dorota Siwicka and Marta Zielińska, is a great example of utilizing the spectrum of possibilities offered by the map.<sup>25</sup> Mikołaj Sokołowski examines the imagined geography and topographic inconsistencies of the poet, invoking medieval notions featured in ancient *mappae mundi*. Dorota Siwicka confronts the imaginary map of Słowacki's poems written in the early stages of the November Uprising with the real map of Europe. Monika Rudaś-Grodzka points out the importance of ancient maps to the geography of *King Ghost*. Michał Kuziak, in his interpretation of *Salome's Silver Dream* invokes maps drawn up by colonial powers. Marek Bieńczyk demonstrates the necessity of reflecting on the poet's biography in the analysis of the map depicting Słowacki's last voyage. Teresa Rączka uses hydrographic maps of the Black Sea watershed as a reference point for the poet's aquatic imagination. Given the nature of Słowacki's spatial imagination, freely combining imagination, phantasm, and real geographic locations, maps become a genuinely useful interpretative tool.

This methodology falls within the scope of literary cartography, a field which Barbara Piatti and Lorenzo Hurni, Swiss scholars involved with the Literary Atlas of Europe project, consider an auxiliary science or a subdiscipline of literary geography; its objective is to "translate" spatial elements of fiction into the language of cartographic symbols, thus facilitating new ways of reading and analyzing literature.<sup>26</sup> Most importantly, however, it is not about naive mapping that is unaware of methodologies or ignorant of differences. The metaphor of translation employed by the scholars introduces the essence of the issue fairly well, because it goes beyond the identity logic of the literary map and territory. The discrepancies and shifts between the narrative map and the real map seem to be the primary problem in this case. Just as the map is not the territory, the map of a fictional space is neither fiction nor territory, but to notice these differences one needs to confront both types of maps – real and fictional.

The Literary Atlas of Europe,<sup>27</sup> created by literary scholars in collaboration with geography experts, opens a new chapter in the history of literary

24 Franco Moretti, *Atlas Of The European Novel 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1998), 3-5.

25 *Geografia Słowackiego*, ed. Dorota Siwicka and Marta Zielińska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2012).

26 Barbara Piatti and Lorenzo Hurni, "Editorial. Cartographies of Fictional Worlds," *The Cartographic Journal* 48 (2011): 218.

27 "A Literary Atlas of Europe," accessed February 11, 2013. <http://www.literaturatlas.eu/?lang=en>

cartography, one directly related to the emergence and development of cybercartography and geographic information systems (GIS). For traditional literary geography, it is both a challenge and the subject of critique. Piatti and Hurni also indicate that literary scholars exhibit pronounced skepticism towards new methods of cartography that employ digital tools and instruments. First of all, there are fictional narratives that do not yield to mapping as they operate in universal spaces like “everywhere.” Vanished places, especially in ancient literature, are also a serious challenge and call for expertise.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, literary cartography, traditional as well as digital, has extensive cognitive benefits and advantages. Piatti and Hurni point out that, firstly, mapping can allow us to notice certain aspects of literature previously invisible; secondly, literary cartography allows us to fully grasp the cultural process of “the production of places,” their meaning, function, and symbolic values.<sup>29</sup> We should also note that the emergence of literary cybercartography is a part of a broader process related to the development of new media, especially geomedial. Their increasing role and growing influence on both theory and cultural practice, as mentioned by Anna Nacher, indicates a “return to the positioning and concrete nature of real locations.”<sup>30</sup> That does not necessarily mean a return to purely empirical approach, as she later adds, but instead indicates the acknowledgement of a double hybridization and penetration, of place as cyber-place and media as locative media.<sup>31</sup>

Regardless of the possibilities, briefly presented here, in which the map may function in literature and literary studies, I would also like to examine whether the three previously mentioned models of the relationship between the map and the territory may be utilized in research praxis. Secondly, I would like to explore the matter of critical literary cartography. The first issue revolves around the question whether maps can exist without territory in literary worlds, as pure simulacra. In an attempt to answer that question, I would to bring up an example from the fantasy genre, the map from Terry Pratchett’s *Discworld*, and thus a territory with a decidedly different ontology. My question is not intended to dissect the relationship between the map and the fictional territory, as the matter seems to be obvious and widely known, especially from J.R.R. Tolkien novels, and well covered by scholars. I am more interested in the relationship between the map of a fantasy world (as well as the narrative map of the depicted

28 Piatti and Hurni, “Editorial,” 220.

29 Ibid., 222.

30 Anna Nacher, “Geomedia-między mediami a lokalizacją,” accessed February 20, 2012. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/54125590/Geomedia-między-mediami-a-lokalizacją>

31 Ibid.

world) and the geographical space of the real world. Stephen Briggs, the man responsible for the creation of the map of the Discworld released in a separate book, has described his work on the map of a fantasy space in this way:

I thought this was going to be easy.

It was the word 'fantasy' that led me astray. Tolkien and his descendants apart, fantasy landscapes are not known for the precise cartography. East of the Sun and West of the Moon is not a point on a map. Over the Hills and Far Away is not a recommended AA holiday route. [...]

In fact it took a lot more time than that...

I showed draft # 1 to Terry, who looked at it for some time and said "Do you know what a rain shadow is?" This was new to me, who took Raffia instead of Geography. I was given a short lecture on mountain ranges and prevailing rain-bearing winds, which gently led up to the fact that I'd put the Great Nef, the driest place in the world, in what would have been a very large swamp.<sup>32</sup>

The procedure for creating fantasy maps is therefore bolstered by procedural elements for creating real-life maps. But that is not all. The same rules apply in the case of narrative maps of the depicted world. The world of Discworld is constructed out of elements rooted in the geographic spaces of the real world, as well as fairytale and imagined geographies. The reader of Pratchett's novels should, therefore, possess actual knowledge about current and historical geography, the latter pertaining to ancient and medieval concepts and notions. Both Pratchett and his readers live in a world defined by real-world geographical formulas and – we may even say – cartographic understanding which, obviously, does not preclude engaging in intertextual and parodistic games with these formulas.

Can narrative maps create territory? Put more forcefully, can they influence empirical spaces? History knows such incidents, with one of them being the change of the name of the French town Illiers, where Marcel Proust used to vacation as a child, to Illiers-Combray.<sup>33</sup> Another is Thomas Hardy's fictional area of Wessex, its names and places still in use by people living in southwestern England.<sup>34</sup> The latter example proves that narrative maps mold

32 Stephen Briggs, "Many Miles Across Tortuous Terrain," in Terry Pratchett and Stephen Briggs, *Discworld Mapp* (London: Corgi, 1995), 6.

33 See Donald Heiney, "Illiers And Combray: A Study In Literary Geography," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 1 (1955): 17-26.

34 Malcolm Bradbury, *Atlas literary* [*The Atlas of Literature*], trans. Anna Błasiak, Dorota Gostyńska, Magdalena Jędrzejak, Iwona Libucha (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2002), 135-138.

the mental maps of the readers themselves, shaping their idea of the territory. In consequence, neutral locations and spaces become important topographical sites, recognizable thanks to literature.

Another issue revolves around the question whether we can, and if so then in what way, apply inspirations evoked by critical cartography in literary or cultural studies. Let me bring up an example. Jon Heggland, a scholar of modernist literature, used the premise of critical cartography to design a research project on the rhetoric of cartography in James Joyce's *Ulysses*.<sup>35</sup> Heggland points out that the map Joyce used was created by the imperial administration, and thus the book touches on the subject of English-Irish relations. Nevertheless, Heggland adds that the spatial complexity of the novel cannot be simply reduced either to imperial domination or postcolonial nationalist resistance. In *Ulysses*, the static map is confronted with a dynamic narrative – order imposed administratively from above is confronted with local, grassroots transformations. In the words of Michel de Certeau, strategies are confronted with tactics.

Critical functions of literary maps can be discharged in a variety of ways. Firstly, literature can reveal the limitations of cartography and the map in a discursive way, by formulating and designing interpretations or putting new questions forward. One clear example of that approach can be found in the last poem of Wisława Szymborska, *Map*, which – in spite of appearances – is not ekphrasitic, but rather a discursive contemplation of the prototype map:

Everything here is small, near, accessible.  
I can press volcanoes with my fingertip,  
stroke the poles without thick mittens,  
I can with a single glance  
encompass every desert  
with the river lying just beside it.

A few trees stand for ancient forests,  
you couldn't lose your way among them.  
[...]  
Mass graves and sudden ruins  
are out of the picture.

Nations' borders are barely visible  
as if they wavered—to be or not.

35 Jon Heggland, "Ulysses and the Rhetoric of Cartography," *Twentieth Century Literature* 49, 2 (2003): 164–192.

I like maps, because they lie.  
 Because they give no access to the vicious truth.  
 Because great-heartedly, good-naturedly  
 they spread before me a world  
 not of this world.<sup>36</sup>

Literature may reveal problems related to the map in a way that is less literal and more graphic, metaphoric or allegoric. This approach is employed by Jacek Dehnel in his aforementioned volume. Tactics derived from the logic of the absurd can also be applied. As an example, I would like to juxtapose – in a sort of thought experiment – two passages. One is a quote from an 1899 article written by Jan Ludwik Popławski:

A map of the future Anglo-African state was released over a dozen years ago. It featured [...] borders, cities, railways that had yet to be built. With each passing year, the borders and the state of English possessions in Africa creep ever closer to that idealized outline drafted all those years ago.<sup>37</sup>

The second passage is a quote from *Alphabetical Africa*, an experimental novel by Walter Abish:

On the maps Tanzania is colored a bright orange. Neighboring Malawi is light blue. The maps are the key to our future prosperity. [...] Each day one hundred thousand Tanzanians carrying ladders, buckets of orange paint and brushes, are driven and also flown to different sections of the country. They paint everything in sight. [...] The Queen also proudly explains that Malawi has also decided to conform to international mapping standards, and since Tanzania had a technological headstart, she could export a light blue paint to Malawi.<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, colonial production of territory is more than just an imaginary practice or a product of contemporary theories, and in Abish's novel it becomes an exaggerated, cartoonish illustration of European "mapping standards."

36 Wisława Szymborska, "Map," trans. Clare Cavanagh, *New Yorker*, accessed 10 June 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/04/14/map>

37 Jan Ludwik Popławski, "Realizm polityczny i przyszła Polska," as quoted in Eugenia Prokop-Janiec, "Przestrzeń," 42.

38 Walter Abish, *Alphabetical Africa* (New York: New Directions Publ. Corp., 1974), 53.

The critical potential is eagerly activated especially in contexts linked with the politics of place, in areas where there is tension between the official map as the symbol of the authorities' power over the space and the local perspective. Such a local, slightly grotesque perspective was featured by Leon Bielas in the Silesian novel *Sławna jak Sarajewo* [*Famous Like Sarajevo*]:

A torn up map of Poland lay on the floor. Manek knew it well. The responsibilities of the student on duty included hanging the map up before geography classes. It had a flaw before: "Konewka" was nowhere to be found on the map, but Manek took care of that. The story was that the map was created far away from here and, naturally, by adults. And adults, as everyone knows so well, are absent-minded. So they forgot to put Konewka on the map. Manek called Selwik up to bring him some red ink and they drew the missing town onto the greenish sheet. They wrote the name in huge letters so that even the kids in the last row would see it, the lines straight like the bridge over the Przemsza, blocking out the Krakow-Katowice rail line.<sup>39</sup>

Lastly, we will examine the matter of the map-experiment but it deserves a separate inquiry.

### Map of the Niewiadomskiland

Andrzej Niewiadomski's *Mapa. Prolegomena* [*Map. Prolegomena*] requires two different readings: a visual reading, pertaining to the map, and a linguistic reading. The former is initiated by the map that simultaneously functions as the book's cover. It is a map of a very peculiar sort – it is basically devoid of proper names (aside from a couple of local microtoponyms and an abbreviation "S." located next to a town), road numbers, it lacks a legend, and has no signals that would allow us to associate it with a particular territory. At first glance, it is an indecipherable map without a territory, map of the space of the unknown, the Niewiadomskiland [the author's last name, "Niewiadomski," is a development of "niewiadomy," Polish for "unknown" — ed.] The starting point for the other, textual, linguistic reading of the book is its title and the opening lines. The distinction is obvious but I wanted to highlight it as the relationship between the title and the opening lines is built on tension. *Prolegomena* suggest a genre framework appropriate for non-fiction content, for scientific or philosophical discourse. The book opens with negative definitions that essentially do not question that framework: "The map is not

39 Leon Bielas, *Sławna jak Sarajewo* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Śląsk, 1973), 145.

an objective, not a myth, it is neither speculation nor game, it is neither of these terms exclusively, nor is it their sum."<sup>40</sup> It quickly launches into conditional mode and develops a couple of potential openings using pastiche-like stylizations:

If it were so, we could begin like this: "There it was, in my nearly forgotten childhood, on the desk, in a room whose walls rendered themselves far away, as far as the horizon and I, intoxicated, leafed through its pages, the sheets burning with vivid color, toying with the sweet promise of the summer haze." Or like this: "There were once two maps, great maps of continents and oceans, their incompetent imitation of similarity, the weathered sheet depicting a state that no longer exists, the names barely visible, a sheet over which the spectre of destruction has hung since time immemorial." Another opening: "In order to exist, a map only has to have the potential to exist, for example, no map is simultaneously a handrail, although there are maps that contradict that statement and claim otherwise, as well as maps looking quite like a handrail." And another one: "We can assert that in modern times writing about a map is basically impossible and then casually draft an amazing piece and pass ourselves off as the last essayist cartographers in the world."<sup>41</sup>

This opening suggests that we should pay equal attention to what Niewiadomski says about the map in a discursive manner as well as the language he uses and the way he uses it. The method which he uses to construct the text becomes a critical instrument with which to examine the definition and definability of maps. Secondly, the possibility category, revealed in the variety of openings and the introduction of a hypothetical mode, is also key in this instance. There is an additional third issue: genre instability or inconsistency. Further reading introduces additional complications, as autobiography mixes with fiction and literary criticism. I focused on the issue of the genology of Niewiadomski's book because it seems that finding the answer to the question of what genre are we ultimately dealing with should be absolutely fundamental. Naturally, the contemporary essay incorporates all of the above-mentioned genre conventions, thus destabilizing reading norms, but Niewiadomski's book refers to a very specific field of reference – the essayistic work of Robert Musil. The first chapter features characters whose names seem drawn

40 Andrzej Niewiadomski, *Mapa. Prolegomena* (Lublin: Ośrodek "Brama Grodzka-Teatr NN," 2012), 7.

41 *Ibid.*, 7-8.

from *The Man Without Qualities*: Bonadea, Diotima, Agathe. The narrator himself claims that back in school the children used to call him little Ulrich.<sup>42</sup> And lastly is the ostentatious conditional mode, a speculative formula signaling capacities introduced right from the start. Employing a broad understanding of essayism will be crucial here – an interpretation that considers it as a means of expression spanning scientific and literary discourse, and as an attitude aimed at assuming multiple perspectives, at indeterminateness and the sphere of potentiality; it is also an attempt to frame life itself or, finally, as going astray on an adventure.<sup>43</sup>

Potentiality as the key category of essayism is also related to the geography of the essay – maps produced and described by Niewiadomski. The book features numerous toponyms – authentic and recognizable, but also fake, codenamed, encrypted, displaced. Why does the author use the letter “H.,” an abbreviation of the pre-war German name of the town, instead of using “L.W.”? The latter may have been too obvious a trope, one that would lead too quickly to the rhetoric of locality and “small homelands,” and that rhetoric is a negative field of reference. In any case, toponymy becomes an experimental field which problematizes their localization function. Is this the “atopical topography” that John Hillis Miller writes about in his discussions of the poetry of Wallace Stevens?<sup>44</sup> In any case, experiments conducted on toponyms may signal something else. One recurring experiment seems to be especially characteristic – Niewiadomskiland. It is both a town in the pre-war Vilnius voivodeship, for which the book provides precise geographic coordinates: “55°17’ north and 27°15’ east. On the most precise of maps.”<sup>45</sup> It can be found on pre-war military maps. Nevertheless, Niewiadomskiland functions within the essay also as a polysemic neologism: the “land of the unknown [as per the explanation of the author’s name provided above —ed.]” and a somewhat biographic “land of Niewiadomski,” of poet, essayist, literary critic and historian, because “biography is part of the map.”<sup>46</sup> Finally, as these connotations should come to mind in this case, it is the land of language that, unlike Polish, remains impenetrable and unpredictable. Geography, cartography, biography, language, and imagination intersect in one single toponym to create

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42 Ibid., 12.

43 Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 1:273.

44 John Hillis Miller, *Topographies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 258.

45 Niewiadomski, *Mapa*, 89.

46 Andrzej Niewiadomski, “*Biografia jest częścią mapy*. Z Andrzejem Niewiadomskim rozmawia Michał Larek.” Interview by Michał Larek. *Studium 2* (2005): 44.

a toponomastic trope<sup>47</sup> founded on the rule of syllepsis.<sup>48</sup> Niewiadomski and – as a toponomastic trope – has to be read in two ways simultaneously, as the proper name of a real location (and its linguistic trace in the text) and as fiction, according to the precepts of literary *poiesis*. Syllepsis, therefore, leads us into an area comprising the nexus of the real and the imagined, which allows it to codename the primary rule of geopoetics – the span between two opposite notions, “geo” and *poiesis*. It is about maintaining equilibrium and preserving the tension between the subject (biography), reality (geography), and language (poetry, imagination) without dismissing any of the three elements of this dynamic configuration and simultaneously retaining the undeterminable potentiality that suspends the choice of only one option.

I would like to derive one general conclusion from this sylleptic toponomastic trope, a conclusion pertaining to the status of geographic space in the essay. It takes the form of a territory “without qualities” – a designation introduced by Andrzej Niewiadomski in his examination of the rules shaping Andrzej Sosnowski’s poetry.<sup>49</sup> It is a direct reference to *The Man Without Qualities* but, just like in Musil’s work, it does not denote territory lacking identity. Its primary characteristic is the suspension and blurring of boundaries:

It is about space being organized in a way that not so much abides by contradictions as “plays” them and obscures their boundaries, creating an alternative that is impossible to precisely define (or is defined differently each time) and one that exists outside of them. [...] As we face a world without a designation and a world filled with an overabundance of designations, we find ourselves at a loss to say anything certain about it.<sup>50</sup>

This method of producing space is also a reference to Musil’s Vienna, depicted as a space of potentiality suspended between a real and an indeterminate city.

47 See Janusz Hurnik, “Funkcje tropów toponomastycznych w liryce Tadeusza Różewicza,” in: *Onomastyka literacka*, ed. Maria Biolik (Olsztyn: Wydawnictwa WSP, 1993), 237–244.

48 For syllepsis see: Ryszard Nycz, “Tropy «ja». Koncepcje podmiotowości w literaturze polskiej ostatniego stulecia,” in: *Język modernizmu. Prolegomena historycznoliterackie*, ed. Ryszard Nycz (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Leopoldinum, 1997), 107–109.

49 Andrzej Niewiadomski, “Poezja niezrozumiała, czyli o nadzwyczaj trwałym nieporozumieniu krytycznym. Rekonesans badawczy,” *Teksty Drugie* 4 (2004): 141.

50 Ibid.

The rule of potentiality applies also to the case of map-as-cover. As I already mentioned, at first glance the map seems to lack territory but the last chapter of the essay features a depiction of the journey to S. which allows us to decipher both the place and the area. Therefore, the map which opens the book can function both as a map of the “unknown,” without references to a concrete, real territory, but also as a map-as-experiment in conjunction with the territory. Its experimental character stems from the fact that it was stripped of proper names and tampered with in other ways. It resembles the “incorrect” map of the world created by the Surrealists in 1929, one of the first examples of critical cartography, critiquing Eurocentrism and the cartographic logic of representation. Similar endeavors can be read as mismapping, but they are more than just a hoax: they are more of a misreading. Just as misreading precludes the possibility of proper interpretation, so does mismapping preclude the possibility of properly deciphering the map featured on the cover. The reader can conclude that the map is a representation of a territory and look for its real-life counterpart, as well as perceive it as a map outlining a journey, an encrypted map which, like in *The Hobbit*, requires insight into encoding procedures that were used. In a strategy that is equally promising, the reader can inquire into the purpose and significance of the mismapping and the absence of toponyms. In any case, once again the openness to potentiality and multiple possible readings seems to be crucial. Niewiadomski’s essay not only discusses cartographic and literary maps, it also experiments with them, problematizes the precept of directly referencing real-life locations without invalidating it. The map and the *Map* are suspended between representing real territory, producing new territory (“the Niewiadomskiland”) and experimental mismapping of territory. These “faults,” however, including all deviations, deformations, deficiencies, are impossible to notice if not confronted with the prototype map or the territory itself. The “incorrect” map, however, always invokes the “correct” original. In other words, it lays out the movement pattern between deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

Niewiadomski’s essay is an experimental attempt at formulating a theory and critique of the map, between scientific and literary discourse, as it confronts cartography as a branch of science with poetic cartographical imagination. We can say that it acts on the basis established by a cartography of the rhizome, a thought experiment, and the principle of conjunction. However, I would see the critical nature of Niewiadomski’s *Map* applied elsewhere—in the critique of the understanding of map as a representation of a geographical space and the simultaneous critique of the map as pure simulation, separate from reality. We are left with another solution – an experimental map as a non-definite potentiality, suspended between deterritorialization and reterritorialization, between “geo” and *poiesis*.

### On the Benefits of Maps

In essence, Borges's allegoric narrative tells us about the collapse of cartographic reason, failure of the effort to represent the world on a map scaled "mile to the mile." The issue was also discussed by Umberto Eco in his essay *On the Impossibility of Drawing a Map of the Empire on a Scale of 1 to 1*.<sup>51</sup> In spite of the logic of the absurd employed by Eco, this short text is an excellent critique of the utopia of cartographic representation. The contemporary justification for maps should probably be sought elsewhere. Chapter 83 of Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*, dealing with a variety of mistaken maps, opens with the aforementioned quote from Korzybski and concludes with the following dialogue:

"It was not to discover the 'true' form of the earth, but to reconstruct, among all the mistaken maps, the one right map, the one of use to him."  
 "Not bad, not bad at all," Diotallevi said. "To arrive at the truth through the painstaking reconstruction of a false text."<sup>52</sup>

Unfortunately, Korzybski's premise functions in mass consciousness in its abbreviated form, whereas the full quote is much more illuminating: "A map is not the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness." Borges, Korzybski, and Eco all emphasize the pragmatic nature of the map and its usefulness, and in such a situation the problem of map as representation essentially becomes secondary. From this perspective, even the "mistaken" fictional narrative maps can turn out to be useful, providing avenues of interpretation, revealing locations, imbuing them with specific sense, reevaluating their petrified meanings, evoking forgotten histories of specific areas, creating mental maps and countermaps, and providing orientation in space.

*Translation: Jan Szelagiewicz*

51 Umberto Eco, "On the Impossibility of Drawing a Map of the Empire on a Scale of 1 to 1," in *How to Travel with a Salmon and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt, 1994), 95.

52 Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2007), 446.

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Marta Zielińska

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## Romantics Plotted on Maps

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*Our essays are dedicated to Professor Alina Witkowska, a pre-eminent scholar and head of the Institute of Literary Research and the Romantics Bureau, who has led both institutions with word and deed for many years, on her 80th birthday.*

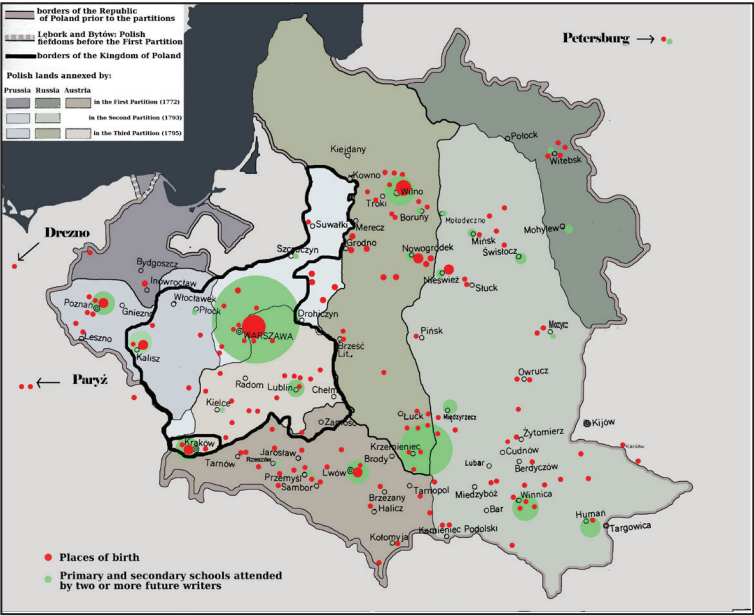
The first map I ever designed was supposed to plot the places of birth and death of Polish Romantics. I instinctively believed that this would allow me to portray the unnaturally long distances separating the starting and ending points of that literary movement. Initially, I assumed that the map would span the entire era and include the most important authors working in Poland (worked out with the help of *Obraz literatury*) and those who decided on emigration. The preliminary list did not include, save for a couple of exceptions, any essayists, historians, and philosophers, that is authors whose output did not include works of fiction. I quickly concluded that charting the fates of all the writers on a single map would only introduce unnecessary confusion in examining that emigration that occurred after the November Uprising, thus the decision to divide the single map into separate charts for each generation. Although it is generally as-

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sumed that three generations make up the Romantic movement, I decided to divide the era into only two generations: one comprising of authors born between 1795 and 1815, the other made up of authors born between 1816 and 1835. Thus, the first generation would encompass everyone that could have participated in the insurrection (with the younger ones obviously providing lesser numbers).

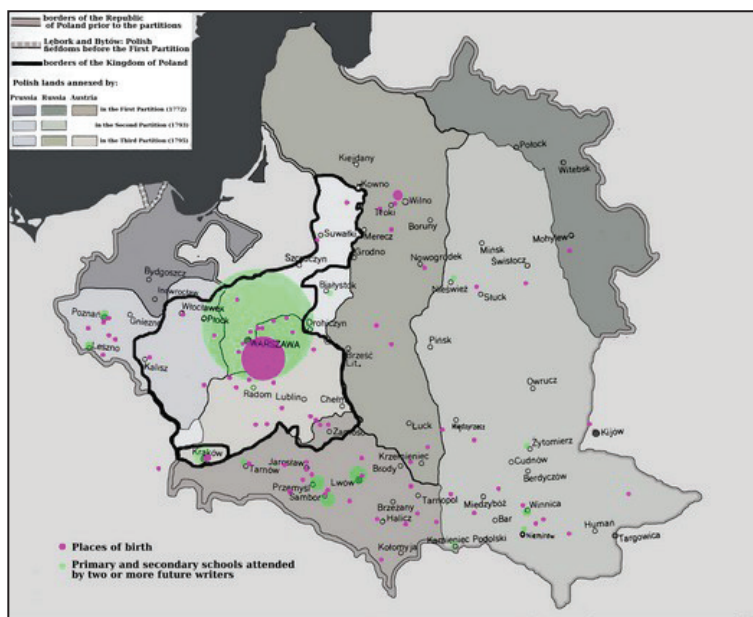
The selection of the background map proved to be another problem as borders across the lands of the former Republic of Poland changed repeatedly between 1795 and 1815. Ultimately, the map I went with was a depiction of pre-partition Poland, with post-partition borders and post-1815 Kingdom of Poland borders marked on it as well. This choice also forced me to mark the places of death, spread all over Europe and a couple of non-European countries, on separate maps; doing otherwise would have only confounded the overall picture I was trying to paint.



Map 1.



Map 3.



Map 2. Locations of deaths of writers from the first generation of Romantics.



Map 4.

Maps drawn up according to these criteria have revealed that, contrary to my intuition, the percentage of first generation writers who died beyond Polish borders is not all that high. Those who lived to old age often decided to return to their homeland, either under amnesty or by making Galicia their new home. Out of 119 writers, only 22% died abroad, 6% in Russia (3% in Saint Petersburg and the rest in exile).

As a result of this discovery, I decided to expand my preliminary list by including all the people who contributed to the intellectual climate of the Romantic period with their works on philosophy, literary criticism, history and their journals and essays. Thus, my register, based on the records of *Nowy Korbut*, grew to 171 names in the first generation (with 52 additional names) and 102 names in the second generation (with 11 additional names). The group comprised of philosophers, essayists, and critics of the first generation turned out to be particularly interesting. Out of that entire group, only 26 people died in Poland, 25 died abroad, one in Russia, and not a single person died in exile. This distribution clearly indicates how important the group was to the overall intellectual landscape of that generation. Out of the entire second generation (102 people), 20 people died abroad (19 in Western Europe and one in Saint Petersburg).

The fact that the second generation counts only half the number people of the first is fairly striking. To illustrate the reasons behind this state of affairs, I decided to mark primary and secondary schools that the future writers attended on the birthplace maps. I did not include any universities as not all

of the authors on my list were graduates, and besides, their ability to receive primary and secondary education decided whether a student would attend university. Therefore, I focused my attention on those earlier level schools. The maps only feature schools attended by two or more people from my lists. In cases where one person attended multiple schools, all school locations were marked on a draft version of the map. Incidentally, it is interesting that in the first generation nearly all of the men attended schools (with Fredro being the exception), whereas only one of the writing women (Paulina Wilkońska) had any formal education. In the second generation, the percentage of formally educated women was much higher.

In the end, I drew up four maps that comprise an image of the entire era. Two of them mark the locations where authors were born and schooled, the remaining two the locations of their death. The maps can be read in a multitude of different ways and I do not really think that my work has exhausted them.

If we compare the birthplaces of the two generations (Maps 1 and 2), we will quickly see that the number of writers, especially those hailing from Lithuania and Belarus, that is the lands belonging to the Russian Partition, significantly fell between generations. For the first generation these lands were practically the cradle of Romanticism, whereas the second generation associated them primarily with the most severe political persecution. We can also observe the growing importance of Warsaw for the second generation. The first map indicates that the first generation clustered around cities with prominent education facilities (Kremenets, Vilnius, Vinnytsia, Uman), whereas on the second map nearly all of these centers are in steep decline (except for Warsaw and Galicia). Daniel Beauvois was right in stating that the groundwork for Romanticism was laid by the ideals of Enlightenment embodied in the fruits of the Commission of National Education's labors. The subsequent demise of the schools is primarily a result of the changes in Russian policy and enactment of much harsher measures of population control, a process that started already in 1815 and that culminated in 1831 with the disbandment of a large number of schools (for example, the staff of the disbanded Kremenets secondary school was transferred to Kiev where they laid the groundwork for the local university).

Sociological analysis is just one use of the maps. They are an illustration of authentic space in which the writers developed. Our task, in this case, would be to demonstrate whether the proportions between imagined space incorporated into Romantic literature reflect this particular state of affairs or contain any other dominants, dependent on imagery imposed on them by the Great Bards. The maps also show that Ukraine was very important to both generations, whereas Lithuania and the Nowogródek Region play a prominent role only for the first wave.

Other reflections can be gleaned from the maps plotting the places where the Romantic writers died (Maps 3 and 4). Aside from emigration, which we have already discussed, we should take note of the fact that in the first generation, only seven people died beyond the borders of Europe.

Another noticeable tendency in both waves of writers is the role of cities as places of final settlement. The first generation map features numerous cities: Warsaw, Krakow, Paris, Lviv, Poznań and Rome; the second wave map is more scarce: there is just Warsaw, Krakow, Lviv and Paris.

All four maps also demonstrate the continuously rising significance of Warsaw as a birthplace and center of schooling and literary pursuits. The opposite tendency, however, can be observed for the countryside.

One other surprising fact on these maps is the relatively low number of people who died in exile. This is proof of the fact that the writers who were sentenced to exile by Czarist authorities either returned to their homeland after serving out their sentence or managed to emigrate. That, however, was not always the case, as evidenced by Wiktoria Śliwowska's *Słownik zesłańców* [*The Deportee Index*]. The fact that there were not that many writers among the total number of deported Poles who died in exile is significant. The same holds true for emigration. The writers simply were not the largest group among the deportees. Although they were highly visible and set the tone of the era, their biographies are not an adequate reflection of the fates suffered by the Polish community.

On the other hand, my maps still do not depict everything I would like them to. I should supplement them with at least another one that will depict emigration and settlement (voluntary or otherwise) of the Polish literary community in Russia.

*Translation: Jan Szelągiewicz*

# Photo-graphy

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Marianna Michałowska

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## The Art of the Document: Photography and Trauma<sup>1</sup>

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If we look at artistic representations on the subject of the Holocaust, we will see that contemporary artists, the generation born after the Shoah, are focused on discovering their own path to its remembrance. It also becomes clear that realizations are frequently based on memory as a source of images of a past which the artist has no direct experience of. Thus, the task of representing the Holocaust requires above all a definition of one's attitude to documents of the past. These are, on the one hand, narrations of survivors passed on to successive generations, and on the other, visual messages – photographs and films – preserved in the archives. Typically, facts from the past are authenticated in the popular consciousness by these technical images. Persuaded that a still or motion camera registers things objectively and without involvement,<sup>2</sup> we assume the resultant photographs to be the basis of reliable reports on reality. But can they re-

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1 Extended version of a text presented in Polish during „Memory of the Shoah – Contemporary Representations,” a conference that took place in Łódź in May 2003.

2 Susan Sontag says: “photography is actually an act of non-intervention,” cf. Susan Sontag, *O fotografii*, trans. Sławomir Magala (Warszawa: WAiF, 1986), 16.

ally be considered as reports, if they don't show "everything" – the complete background of events? The non-involvement of the photographer also turns out to be equivocal.

In the case of photographs which serve as a basis for knowledge about the Holocaust, we are faced with the incomparability of available sources. Who actually took the pictures? The oppressors or the victims? The latter are represented by scraps of testimony from before the Holocaust – mostly scenes of everyday life that were swept away by the establishment and eventual liquidation of the ghettos. By contrast, photographs that filled the archives of the Reich showed the days when the industry of death was in full swing. And there are also the archives of the Allies (e.g. the shocking photographic report by an American, Margaret Bourke-White). How are we to deal with these documents today?

### The Document – Empty Space

In the context defined above, Dariusz Jabłoński's *Fotoamator* (*Photoamateur*) is, in many respects, an intriguing case. A few hundred slides found in 1987 in a Vienna antiquarian shop gave rise to a documentary on the everyday life of the ghetto in Łódź.<sup>3</sup> In the film, the author juxtaposes black and white images of contemporary Łódź with colour slides taken from 1940–41 by Walter Genewein, an accountant at the ghetto in Łódź (Ghetto Litzmanstadt), and he confronts Genewein's story with that told by Arnold Mostowicz, a survivor from the ghetto. Both the ethical aspects of Genewein's work, who skillfully photographed the smoothly operating machine into which the Ghetto had been transformed (more specifically, in the years 1940–1941), and his comments accompanying the images have already been analysed repeatedly. Equally interesting as the ethical aspect is the written correspondence quoted in the film, between the photographer and AGFA, a company. Analyses of these communications emphasise the banality of evil. Even the director of the documentary himself stresses that he became interested in "the story of a man in an extreme situation," someone who agreed to be a cog in the machine. Engaged in work, says Jabłoński, we fail to notice what or whom we serve.<sup>4</sup>

In this article, I would like to focus on yet another aspect of Jabłoński's film. Upon closer inspection, we will recognize it as a film about two ways

3 It is not the first film in which Genewein's material has been used. According to some authors, Alan Adelson made a documentary entitled *Łódź Ghetto* in the 1990s.

Tadeusz Szyma, "Dokument skorygowany," *Kino*, 10 (1998): 7; Jan Strękowski, "Kilka Wątpliwości," <http://www.republika.pl/fotoamator>

4 „Rzecz o buchalterii zła,” Piotr Litka interviews Dariusz Jabłoński, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 33 (1998): 13.

of recording the past: a film documentary made about a photographic document. The issue put forward is that of the documentary nature of photography, that still and silent image. "The principal problem with the artistic processing of the Genewein's slides in the film," writes Tadeusz Szyma, expressing his doubts about the photographs used in *Fotoamator*, "was this correction of a highly specific document, falsified for all its realism, giving the effect not only of truth about the Holocaust, but also heightening, in term of both expression and drama, its impact on the viewer."<sup>5</sup> The use of photography in a film generates problems other than a formal one, and it is not just the issue of translating one medium into another. Except for the photochemical medium, photography and film have little in common. Hence, the issue is not just the fact that photographs can serve merely as "footage" for a film, but that the photographic image and its "falsifying" nature, to use Szyma's term, need to be corrected. What then should this correction involve?



A frame by Walter Genewein used in Dariusz Jabłoński's film *Fotoamator* [*Photoamateur*], database Filmpolski.pl, [http://www.filmpolski.pl/fp/index.php?galeria\\_filmu=459238](http://www.filmpolski.pl/fp/index.php?galeria_filmu=459238) (accessed 2016-10-06)

5 Szyma, "Dokument skorygowany," 7.

The point is that a colourful picture of the ghetto in no way resembles other archival images of the ghettos that we know. And the images of the Holocaust that appear in our minds are also in black and white, not in colour. The contemporary manner of filming feature movies about WWII in black and white confirms this mode of perception of images of the past (*Schindler's List*, to mention only one of the biggest film productions of recent years). While historical archives and popular films could suffice to explain this black-and-white perception of the past in people born after 1945, what should be taken to account for the shock Genewein's slides caused in people who survived those times?

At some point in the film, Mostowicz comments concerning the slides that "it's not what is in my memories." Indeed, colours tend to fade from the visual archives of individual memory, and on the other hand, it is impossible to render the memory of the Holocaust separate from an image of death. There is no death on Genewein's slides. What is depicted is the life of "a small Jewish town inside a city." Paradoxically, the shock caused by Genewein's colour slides does not result from the horror of the picture, but from its banality. The slides are realistic and strangely ordinary. Deprived of the usually contaminated black-and-white surface mediating the image, they look astonishingly contemporary. Evil and tragedy are hidden deep below the surface. We are aware of them only because we know what happened to the Ghetto. The photographs show nothing of the events to come.

Why are we not able to predict from the pictures what is soon to happen? Why can we not sense their hidden content? Let us refer to the semiotics of photography. In his *Rhetoric of the Image* Roland Barthes concludes that the meaning of photographic images goes beyond the denoted iconic message.<sup>6</sup> True, the photograph is "anchored" in connotation (determined by objective references undoubtedly), but the referential "anchorage" does not forejudge the image's meaning. "In order to read his last (or first) level of image, all that is needed is knowledge bound up with our perception."<sup>7</sup> Photography leads itself to interpretation only owing to this "almost anthropological knowledge."<sup>8</sup> Therefore, photographs intended to communicate a given meaning are accompanied by some kind of commentary. Even if the commentary is not spoken out loud, the photograph is still described in some way. But what happens, if we do not have such knowledge? We see objects, people, events, but we cannot say what they are essentially a part of.

6 Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete Islands Books, 1980), 270.

7 Ibid., 272.

8 Ibid.

Photography seems a strange medium, full of “empty spaces,” those peculiar cracks and discontinuities between particular images which do not form a coherent narrative. What is more, these “flaws” seem to exist in the photographs themselves. They account for this specific kind of falsification that is a characteristic feature of the medium rather than an intended falsehood. Perhaps it is because of this empty space that photography becomes so easily part of various ideological systems.

John Tagg goes one step further. For him photography cannot be freed from the institutional background in which it is immersed. In *The Burden of Representation*, Tagg refers to Michel Foucault’s concepts to demonstrate that the functioning of photography has been entangled in a complex of industry and ideology. The element of control is said to have appeared already in 19th century photography when a massive expansion of popular amateur photography took place, made possible by the mass production of cameras and photosensitive materials. Photography became easy and commonplace. As techniques of photographic representation developed, they were taken over by public institutions. Tagg notes that photographs were used as instruments of administrative and disciplinary authority.<sup>9</sup> Police, prison and hospital archives were filled with them. Simultaneously, photography came to be understood in the social consciousness as a testimonial to events. The prevalent conviction was that things happened exactly as shown in a photograph. Even propaganda manipulations disclosed every now and then cannot undermine the testimonial value of photography.

Let us now return to Jabłoński’s film. The communication between Genewein and the photo company quoted in the film builds the image of a medium used as a propaganda tool. In the *Fotoamator* documentary, the “correction” of the material from the Ghetto involved putting the photographs in specific context by adding Mostowicz’s commentary. In this way, the knowledge of events which was incomplete in view of the visual nature of the testimony became understandable. Photography here was used to some extent as a ‘double agent’: testifying to an event, but not prejudging its meaning. What use were Genewein’s slides for those who ordered them made? They proved presumably the efficiency of the system. What were they for the photographic company? Perhaps just another step in the testing process of a new technology. What are they for us today? The two previous points of view still count, but today, by proving the rationality of the extermination machinery, the slides testify against their authors.

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9 John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation. Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 20.

### Photography – in Place of the Empty Space

The example of Jabłoński's film shows the range of issues that are raised when artists undertake to reprocess documentary material. What is more, in many artistic realisations, documentary material juxtaposed with personal or shared memories is an opportunity to deal with a traumatic experience of the past. Commenting on his artistic work in a 1997 interview, Christian Boltanski said, "There is a kind of trauma at the beginning of every work."<sup>10</sup> These words take on a singular meaning when applied to photography. In fact, if we were to interpret the "traumatic nature" of photography, it would turn out that the medium is exceptionally suitable to expressing this kind of experience. Let us consider then how to understand "trauma."

In *The Return of the Real*, Hal Foster refers to Lacan's seminar in which trauma is defined as a missed encounter with the Real.<sup>11</sup> Although the process of losing the Real is irreversible, under special circumstances its return is possible. Foster emphasized that trauma even asks for representation. Here we also find a place for photography, the reproduction-based field of culture. In photography the past returns as a recollection, in the form of an image seemingly repeating what happened in the original experience, but in fact introducing significant changes to this image. Photography repeats, but it "repeats" differently than just imitating reality. Foster calls this process "traumatic realism." The operations involved in photographing – framing, choosing objects, freezing time – transform it irreversibly. In the example that Foster analyzes – Warhol's "reproductionist" works – a similar problem is encountered. Warhol uses photographs from the domain of journalistic or documentary information, retaining their formal attributes: print raster and black and white tones. But his interventions – the magnification and multiplication of the images – restore to the depicted events their original tragic character lost in a mass of similar press news (e.g. *Death in America* series).

Similar to traumatic experiences, photography is a repression of an event in the consciousness. Transferring an event to photographic paper and creating an archive absolves us from the responsibility of thinking about it. The photographed past disappears from our memory horizon. At the same time, it is saved somehow, even though it is not seen. Photography permits a strange kind of behavior: things we do not want to remember can be put aside "for later" – we can move them away from us. This does not mean, however, that

10 After Mette Sandbye, "Photographic Anamnesis: The Past in the Present," in *Symbolic Imprints: Essays on Photography and Visual Culture*, eds. Lars Kiel Bartelsen, Rune Gode and Mette Sandbye, (Aarhus University Press, 1999), 187.

11 Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 130-134.

they will not return. Thus, the point here seems to be the reinstatement of experience, discovering the truth about it.

The Real reveals itself “as if by chance.” “Lacan calls this traumatic point *touché*,” writes Hal Foster, and “in *Camera Lucida* (1980) Barthes calls it *punctum*.”<sup>12</sup> It is no coincidence that Foster refers to Barthes’ reflection. In *Camera Lucida*, the perception of photography is almost impossible without relevant individual experience. The social and historical context defines only a general frame for *studium*. It is *punctum* bursting through limitations which imbues the picture with meaning. Hit, pierce, wound. These words show that photography can benefit from elements of experience that cannot be expressed rationally. Therefore, it can be a suitable “language” for expressing trauma. Yet, how are we to reconcile this vision of photography with the one presented above, pointing to the institutional involvement of photography? According to Tagg, “neither experience nor reality can be separated from the languages, representations, psychological structures and practices in which they are articulated and which they disrupt.”<sup>13</sup> However, *punctum* rests upon just the properties that Tagg mentioned. Indeed, it is as Tagg would have it: *punctum* may not enrich the cognitive sphere, but the information obtained from *studium* seems dead as well. In fact, the two positions share the “double agent” function indicated earlier. Photography escapes attempts at unequivocal qualification. It is always suspect, not because what is shown did not happen, but because it can be taken as proof of facts.

Why is it photography that gives us a chance of opening the door leading to the Real? Let it be reiterated: the reality of photography is not about creating an image imitating reality. At least two properties of photography point to the Real: the first one is its indexical character (to use C. S. Pierce’s semiotic concept),<sup>14</sup> and the second is that it lets us see things that belong to the past. In other words, it has that special capability of “haunting” the present. What is characteristic about Peirce’s ideas is that none of the elements of the semiotic triangle prevails. Also, indexicality allowing for objective references realizes the link between image and symbol, creating an effective trope in the process of semiosis. Only the linking of the elements creates meanings. Photography, as Walter Benjamin would put it, breaks through the barriers of “optical unconsciousness.” “Thanks to it [photography] we became aware of

12 Ibid., 132.

13 Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 4.

14 Hanna Buczyńska-Garewicz, *Semiotyka Pierce’a* (Warszawa: Biblioteka Myśli Semiotycznej, Polskie Towarzystwo Semiotyczne, 1994); Marianna Michałowska, „Ślad – fotografia i semiotyka,” *Parergon*, 2 (2002/2003).

optical phenomena, which have been outside our consciousness, just like we come to sublimate subconscious drives through psychoanalysis.”<sup>15</sup> It may be said that it is only through photography that we become aware of what we see. Photography also serves this function in artistic realisations meant to restore a forgotten past. Let us now take a look at some examples.



Christian Boltanski, *Reserves: La Fête de Pourim*, 1989; in Christian Boltanski Inventar (Hamburger Kunsthalle 1991), 2.

In one version of *Purim Festival* (1990), Christian Boltanski sets up portraits of the dead on a rectangular prism of lead. He illuminates them with small lights attached to the frames. The installation alludes to the motif of the catacombs, as well as that of archives. What could be inside the neatly piled boxes? Human remains? Mementoes? Stories? The author seems to be asking

<sup>15</sup> Walter Benjamin, „The Work of Art. In the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” 1936, trans. into Polish by Janusz Sikorski, in *Anioł historii. Eseje, szkice, fragmenty*, comp. & trans. Hubert Orłowski (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1996). 231.

how, on the day of a festival celebrating the deliverance of the Jews, those who have already departed should be delivered. And by using photographs, he suggested that this can be done through reviving their memory. Boltanski's objects consist of elements taken from archives pieced together in an original way to enable systematic extermination. Once again the ambiguity of archives as an institution is revealed. Established to count, file away and remove the living, the archive now forces us to remember that they had indeed been alive. Despite the underlying intention of erasing a nation from history, the archive extends our memory of this nation. And it does not permit the crime to be forgotten. In Boltanski's huge catalogue, anonymous people do not lose their individuality. At first glance, the same faces seem to be featured in all his installations. But are they really the faces of the same man? The author's strategy is clearly apparent in *Gazes*. Parts of the faces, the eyes and the root of the nose are shown on successive screens. A comparison of the reproductions reveals minor differences, things that distinguish one reproduction from another, that single out the people in particular pictures. We come to understand the delicate nature of identity. Our illusion of our own individuality virtually disappears. Although facial expression, a smile here, a certain look there, differentiate these characters, it turns out in the end that they are not so different from us. In these portraits, the persons continue to look "as if alive."



Christian Boltanski, *Les Suisses morts*, 1990, Collection of Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, phot. Marianna Michałowska.

By means of photography, a medium created to take us into the land of absence, Boltanski exorcises death. If a photographic image is always and exclusively death (as Barthes claimed) and cannot represent anything but the world which no longer exists, then (in keeping with Derrida's perception) a photographic death does not occur only once.<sup>16</sup> It comes back in more than one form. By recalling strangers, Boltanski evokes at the same time another dimension, another time in our lives. We are filled with the desire to vanquish the ultimate condition; hence the need to restore what is irrevocably gone. We keep photographs to reverse the course of time: on the one hand, to *return* (*revenir*) to the past and on the other, to restore the past to the present.

"I got stuck. I cannot get out, I am helpless," wrote Jacques Derrida in *Aporias*.<sup>17</sup> An aporia is just the kind of trap a photograph is. Being in the place defined by a photograph, we are unable to decide about either of its sides. We could say the photograph is "this and that," but we could say just as well that it is "not-this and not-that." Derrida's "getting stuck" nicely describes the feeling one gets from looking at Boltanski's works. His creations escape rational evaluation. They are shocking to viewers, but it is difficult to explain exactly why: is it the form or rather the reference to the drastic content? The effect is the result of a collision of the two.

Boltanski draws our attention to the structure of the image, the print raster and the grains of emulsion making it difficult to recognize particular people. This emphasizes the documentary character of the image. The artist is thus referring to an interpretation of the photographic medium that is common to the French tradition. A photograph is close to *vera eikon*, the real image (it was André Bazin, among others, who wrote that "the Holy Shroud of Turin combines the features of relic and photograph alike"<sup>18</sup>). And if this is the case, then a photograph must have in itself a "mark" of reality, or to put it differently, an imprinted image of the real event. It is how the work of the French artist is interpreted as a rule.<sup>19</sup> The objects used in the structures he builds are relics, even though they do not belong to any specific religion. Boltanski refers to the most universal of cults, the cult of

16 Jacques Derrida, "The Deaths of Roland Barthes," in *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy since Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Hugh Silverman (New York: Routledge, 1998).

17 Jacques Derrida, *Aporias* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 13.

18 André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," trans. Hugh Gray, in *Classic Essays on Photography*, 244.

19 Günter Metken, "Was wir brauchen sind Reliquien," in *Christian Boltanski, Inventar, exhibition catalogues* (Hamburger Kunsthalle, 1991).

the dead. The photograph is at once a material object and a mediator with the world of the dead. It may be concluded that the function of photography in his works is to symbolise the ultimate aporia which is death. The events captured in the image are already dead and they come to us from the hereafter in this form.

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In the case of Boltanski's oeuvre, the essential thing was the use of images of the absent. It turns out, however, that there are images which we see in places where they no longer exist. This peculiar motif is put to interesting use by a Polish artist living in Berlin. The issue of Shoah representation is not in the mainstream of Roland Schefferski's art, but his works are extremely instructive in relation to the problems discussed here. I will refer here to two of his works: *Images Erased From Memory* and *Create for Yourself Your Own Image of Berlin*.

In both cases the artist does a strange thing: he creates pictures, but does not really show them. He cuts the centre out of archival photographs, leaving a kind of passe-partout around an empty space. Just like the fragment of a photograph that has been cut out from the whole, the image is forced out of our consciousness. Cutting out the image also symbolizes the annihilation of some visible part of the past, history which was "bleached." Does the fact, that we do not see the image, mean that it does not exist? Schefferski's work touches upon a very interesting issue – that of history which is full of "blank spots," which is often unwanted.<sup>20</sup> Historical meaning proves to be changeable and undefined, depending on the context of the times and the "interpreter." In one of his interviews, Peter Greenaway said "there is no history, only historians." This should not be understood as meaning that certain facts can be denied. There are no facts as undeniable as the Shoah. Nevertheless each of us forms a different history based on the same facts. The same happens in Schefferski's works. History is included only potentially for it does not appear until the "reader/viewer" of the picture comes. If we agree with this standpoint, we will see how the documentary force of photography can authenticate many, often contradictory, versions of the same events.

20 Like in the work entitled *Proletariat* from the 1998 exhibition *Fragmentaryczność pamięci* [*Fragmentariness of Memory*], in which the author cuts the heroes of the communist Poland out of hundred zloty notes withdrawn from circulation. This could be interpreted as the act of a participant in historical events who wants to forget.



Roland Schefferski, *Images Erased From Memory*, 1997, Berlin, Photography reprinted by the courtesy of the artist .

What actually is erasure? A deliberate removal of fragments deemed unwanted – like erasing a sentence written in pencil. Erasure does not happen by itself, like for instance a photographic image which fades under the influence of light. One must want to erase. Cutting out a fragment of a photograph is an equally drastic act. In both cases, however, there is always the chance that a piece will remain (the cut-out part of a photo lost under a cupboard or a letter incompletely obliterated) and become the basis for a reconstruction. Indeed, it is impossible to erase images from memory; all one can do is repress them deeply. Hence, the photograph exists outside its image – in people's memory.

A similar idea to the one employed in *Images Erased From Memory* gave rise to the *Create Yourself Your Own Image of Berlin* project. Billboards in Warsaw featured empty picture frames. The task of the viewer was to fill them in “mentally.” Paradoxically, however, if we are to fill in the empty space of the frame, we have to reach outside it, to search among other pictures, not the

ones that are identical to the original (since it has been removed) but among those that are similar. The effect is a peculiar replacement, a reconstruction of the missing image with fragments that have been seen and remembered. We have to remember them. To bring them back from the depths of non-memory.

Let us have a closer look at the cities Schefferski chose for his realisations. Both Gdańsk and Berlin have lost their past – Gdańsk, evacuated and resettled by new people, Berlin, shattered and then put together again. Both cities have been “wounded” by history. And in both places there are continuous attempts made to heal the wounds. The emptiness of the cities refers both to the empty city substance and to the emptiness of its citizens. It demands to be filled. And thus we return to trauma. After all, in Greek the word means a wound.

In the essay on Franz Hessel's *Walking in Berlin*, Walter Benjamin writes that “a city notebook written by a local person will always be something of a memoir. Not in vain did the author spend his childhood here.”<sup>21</sup> Can photography act as such a notebook (Benjamin dealt with description exclusively), and be more objective as an image than words? The point is that photography, as stated above, is the basis for a history that is constructed from sights. This is why every family album is different, even when the same city symbols appear in them (the Victory Column on a postcard dating from 1903, for example).<sup>22</sup> The horse carts featured in the foreground are also not to be found in a contemporary picture of Berlin. Paradoxically, a story is built owing to some missing elements.

Schefferski's empty picture frame is filled with images of the past. The pictures we are dealing with here are ones “taken” by the photographic camera of our mind. The picture stored in memory overlaps a second layer – the image of the city built from knowledge of its culture, a city of architectural signs. The proposal to create one's own image of a city is not merely a nostalgic attempt to return to a lost city from a different time; it is simultaneously a suggestion to build a new city from the broken pieces.

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Let us consider the source of images for reprocessing, if what is to be pictured are events in which the artist himself did not participate. In David Levinthal's work the past returns as a simulation. The artist employs miniature figures that are instinctively associated with a child's room. However, it seems more appropriate to see them as objects from an adult's collection. It would be just as difficult to call the depicted situations innocent games (as in the *Mein Kampf* for Hitler

21 Walter Benjamin, “Powrót flâneura,” trans. Andrzej Kopacki, *Literatura na Świecie*, 8-9 (2001): 234.

22 Ibid., 74.

*Goes East* series, for example). The pictures with a deliberately small depth of field depict scenes from World War II: silhouettes of concentration camp guard towers, people leaning over mass graves. Again, these are screens known from documentary or feature films, or from frequently published photographs. They are scenes which already belong to the "optical subconscious," scenes recognized at first glance. Levinthal's photographs are fictions about events that really happened. It is not only "traumatic realism," the desire to express a painful experience, but "traumatic illusionism," meaning the need to repeat what we have not experienced but know only from images. "Here illusionism is employed not to cover up the real with simulacra, but to uncover disquieting things in it."<sup>23</sup> In Levinthal's works there is nothing associated with childhood conceived of as a time of peace and security. Childhood is not the age of innocence, since children's games present materials which have not been subject to subsequent memory selection. Fiction and reality can be equally valid for children. It is a time of nightmare and fears. For Boltanski, his childhood is curiously pictured in much the same way. In his 1996 installation entitled *Shadows*, the shadows of angelic, diabolic and human characters suspended on lines wander across the walls with each blow of the wind.

Brought up in California, David Levinthal acts out the pictures of the Holocaust which reaches him through the media, mostly from pop culture. In *Mein Kampf*, he uses colour materials. In his meticulously staged projects, however, the reference is not so much to documents as to feature film productions (which is said to be "based on a true story"). Just as in films, we have sophisticated lighting, meticulous framing and depth of fields. The only "interference" in the composition is the subject. After all, his works continue to be a testimony of experience. Not a firsthand experience of the author this time, but one that registers with equal clarity the traces left in him by images of the events.

Let us go back to Benjamin. In his conception, Ryszard Rózanowski states that "fully conscious perception becomes an experience owing to the fact that the thing which forms the meaning is finally completed and can now be passed on to "memory administration."<sup>24</sup> In other words, owing to the functioning of consciousness, perception changes into an experience. But what determines experience? According to Benjamin the factor is "involuntary memory." Through "involuntary memory," unconscious meanings are revealed. While it should be remembered that Benjamin did not write about visual experience, it can be assumed that the kind of experience caused by

23 Foster, *The Return of the Real*, 52.

24 Ryszard Różański, „Walter Benjamin, Marcel Proust i estetyka wspomnienia,” *Parergon*, 2 (2002/2003), 96.

photography is close to a direct experience. It is a paradox of sorts that we consider a mediated image authentic. Levinthal's work is about transforming perception into an experience. Images remembered involuntarily (as one cannot escape them living in the world of pop culture) are reworked through staging and they change into a very personal experience of the Holocaust. The "traumatic illusionism" described above is then merely a tool and not the goal of artistic activity. The American's aim is to extract images from the abyss of "involuntary memory" and to subject them to consciousness. Actually, *anamnesis*, a special area of memory archaeology, works in the same way.

James E. Young writes of a certain attitude according to which there are scenes of the Holocaust that cannot be represented in keeping with ethical principles. "Because no one survived the gas chambers to describe the horror, their darkness has remained absolute."<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, many attempt such representations. Perhaps because it is an unimaginable reality. Representation of the Holocaust is in artistic practice an ambiguous issue because it seems impossible to be expressed. At the same time there should not be silence about the Shoah. In Levinthal's works, the replaying of child's games does not serve the purpose of taming a traumatic experience – trauma is not tamable. But the experience, as stated by Foster, calls for replaying and Levinthal submits himself to this internal call.

In the works of Boltanski, Schefferski and Levinthal, the focus is on juxtaposing the present and the past. The past haunts the present in the form of remembered scraps of history. It is impossible to reconstruct them absolutely, from documents and traces. But these documents and traces cannot be read unambiguously. They keep returning in new configurations. The nature of photographic documents makes us think of it in similar fashion. "As an image type, the photography is both banal and fraught with meaning but difficult to penetrate (like trauma)," writes Mette Sandbye.<sup>26</sup> The reason is that a photograph is situated between the strictly subjective (as a sign ready to be filled by the reader) and objective (since it has historical references in the past). This must be why John Tagg searched for the justification of photography outside the medium, in the commentary of ideologies, in the functioning of public institutions. It is why it is so easy to observe "falsification" in photography. At the same time, however, this duality lets artists exceed the limitations of the document and enables reality to appear between the grains of emulsion.

*Translation: Tomasz Niedźwiedź*

25 James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge. After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*, (Yale: Yale University Press 2000), 55.

26 Sandbye, "Photographic Anamnesis," 181.

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Adam Mazur

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## Negative Testimonials. Photographic Representation of Holocaust Memory

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The twentieth century has seen the decline of art based upon the classical ideals of beauty and the correspondence between form and subject. Beauty became an ambiguous category considered suspicious and kitschy. From the present perspective it becomes obvious that its devaluation within art was instigated not only by the avant-garde movement, but was considerably influenced by such modern experiences as the two world wars and the Holocaust. The avant-garde emerged in resistance to a culture founded upon the cult of beauty, as well as power and war. In this respect Hitler was correct in calling the (non-beautiful) avant-garde art “degenerate,” or simply “Jewish.” Art after the Holocaust is undergoing an identity crisis, although it is not the Holocaust itself that is at its center. However, Adorno’s influential and blatantly overused remark on the impossibility of poetry after Auschwitz turned out to be equally fallacious when applied to art. Simply put, the Holocaust is a problem of the group of artists who decide to take on the subject.

Art dealing with the Holocaust can be best described by referring to its two basic models: the one employing traditional means of representation, and the other shunning tradition to explore new possibilities of talking about Shoah. The first model is evidently inadequate for

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the task at hand. Naive realism, dripping with abominable metaphysics, leads straight to kitsch when used to depict the Holocaust. Of course the category of kitsch is not restricted to the art of the Holocaust, as it can be encountered in any of the movements in modern art. Holocaust and kitsch have until this day proved to be a fascinating but poorly researched subject. It is worth mentioning that kitsch in Holocaust art is not simply reserved to cheap mementos manufactured for the sake of tourists visiting the extermination camps.

The second model breaks with traditional art and references the avant-garde heritage. In this case a search for new forms has coincided with the taking up of a topic previously unknown to culture. Artists dealing with the Holocaust refer to the avant-garde experience of abstractionism (Mark Rothko, Anselm Kiefer, Roman Opalka, Jonasz Stern, Tadeusz Kantor, Mirosław Bałka), utilizing the potential of art that rejects narrativity. On the other hand, Holocaust art makes use of visual testimonials from the Shoah on an unprecedented scale; predominantly of photography (Gerhard Richter, Christian Boltanski, Borys Mikhailov, Zbigniew Libera). The avant-garde's use of photography is particularly interesting due to the emerging tensions that are not only of formal but also of ethical nature.

Władysław Strzemiński (1893-1952), a painter, theorist of Unism, founder of Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, is undoubtedly among the most inspiring artists who combine in their work abstraction and photography. It was during war-time, which he spent in Łódź in dire circumstances, that he created drawings referring to the experience of Unism that were – in their themes and titles – a reaction to the war and the Holocaust. The series *Deportations* [*Deportacje*, 1940], created in the course of the ongoing displacement of both Poles and, mostly, Jews from Łódź, and the following *Faces* [*Twarze*, 1942] and *Cheap as Mud* [*Tanie jak błoto*, 1944], became for Strzemiński the cornerstones of a profound cycle *To My Friends the Jews* [*Moim przyjaciółom Żydom*, 1945]. The cycle consists of ten collages constructed from photographs documenting the Holocaust and drawings that were faithful repetitions of works from the preceding war series. The cycle draws its power from Strzemiński's skillful conjoining of the avant-garde heritage of photomontage with Unist stylistics. The tension between the delicate and abstract suggestive of shape, between drawing and the documentary photographs, as well as showing the ghetto's liquidation, the extermination camps and the portraits of the Jews, all trigger a storm of associations, which, however, resist easy interpretation. Further difficulties arise from the lack of numbering of individual works within the set. The character of Strzemiński's work is well described by art historian Andrzej Turowski:

The technique of double collage, used by Strzemiński, that utilizes images from the press and the artist's own works compels us to view the

cycle *To My Friends the Jews* as an attempt to express the totality of the artist's wartime experience combined with the tragedy of the Holocaust. Furthermore, this procedure introduces the aspect of memory into the composition's structure, making memory itself a metaphorical axis of the narrative. The concepts of trace, emptiness, reflection and loss, well known to us from Strzemiński's wartime works, now become part of a new image, through which they gain a photographic representation together with a mnemonic dimension, wherein the Shoah must be reconsidered.<sup>1</sup>

The Holocaust has been apprehended by Strzemiński from a peculiar standpoint of a friend – a person accustomed to the daily hardships of the occupation and deeply touched by the Holocaust, but in a way remaining beyond the events taking place. This rupture is underscored in the works of Strzemiński by the use of two techniques – drawing and photography, where the drawing depicts the particular perspective of the (Polish) painter sketching a portrait or landscape, and the photographs depict the perspective of a (German) photographer documenting the ghetto's liquidation.

The poetic titles, which are a kind of auto-commentary accompanying the image, inscribed on the verso side of the collages are a completely separate matter: *With the Ruins of Demolished Eye Sockets. Paved with Stones like Heads; The Empty Shinbones of Crematoria; A Sticky Spot of Crime; Following the Existence of Feet Which Tread a Path; I Accuse the Crime of Cain and the Sin of Ham; Veins Strung Taut by Shinbones; Stretched by the Strings of Legs; Vow and Oath to the Memory of Hands (Existences which are not with us); and Father's Skull.*<sup>2</sup>

The Holocaust was also an important topic in the photography and painting of the German artist Gerhard Richter (b. 1932). Although for him the war was merely a distant childhood memory, it influenced his whole life. Raised and educated in the German Democratic Republic, the young painter decided to escape to the West, and after many years he received praise as one of the foremost contemporary artists. Besides the abstract paintings, in the early 1960s, Richter began creating the *Atlas* – a remarkable work composed of hundreds of sheets filled with thousands of press clippings, family photographs, drawings and sketches, many of which serve as source images for his photorealistic paintings that constitute the second branch of Richter's work.

1 Andrzej Turowski, *Budowniczość świata. Z dziejów radykalnego modernizmu w sztuce polskiej* (Kraków: Universitas, 2000), 228.

2 [translator's note] The English titles of works from the cycle *To my Friends the Jews* after: Władysław Strzemiński 1893-1952: *On the 100th Anniversary of His Birth* (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 1994), 196-197.

This personal rendition of Germany's post-war history, considered in light of the painter's biography, would not be credible if it omitted the Holocaust.

The Holocaust appears at the beginning of the *Atlas*, on sheets 16–20, directly following trivial newspaper and album photographs – images from extermination camps are presented alongside pornographic images. Both the camp and pornographic photographs have been altered by Richter, so that they seem out of focus and partly discolored. According to Helmut Friedel, a renowned critic of the *Atlas*, the unfocused pictures were supposed to ease the process of transposing the images onto canvas by obscuring the individual features of prisoners and models.<sup>3</sup> Despite this the effort to blunt the documentary edge of the photographs was futile and the Holocaust images have not been painted until this day, despite the fact that most of the photographs from the early *Atlas*, including the pornographic ones, have long ago attained their painted counterparts.

Although presenting album photography alongside images of the Holocaust is not unheard of in artistic practice, the pornographic wedge driven in between the other two groups of images remains troubling for critics even today (Friedel, rather unconvincingly, writes about the “relationship between violence and society: the everyday tragedy and the violence present in history”).<sup>4</sup> Accusing Richter of merely trying to cause a scandal is nonsensical, as for many years the *Atlas* remained a personal sketchbook and was not publicly exhibited. Contrasting themes from such divergent orders within a single narrative that is the *Atlas* can be viewed, like in the case of Strzemiński, as an attempt “to express the totality of the artist's experience combined with the tragedy of the Holocaust.” Also in the *Atlas* the artist “introduces the aspect of memory into the composition's structure, making memory itself a metaphorical axis of the narrative.” Andrzej Turowski's words can serve as an interpretative key that can open the meanings contained within Richter's work, in which, mirroring Strzemiński's example, “photographic representation simultaneously constitutes a mnemonic dimension, wherein the Shoah must be reconsidered.” It is noteworthy that for painters such as Richter and Strzemiński rethinking Shoah does not necessitate painting it. On the contrary, photography that has been artistically retouched (a technique that has only recently, that is in the 1980s and 1990s, become accepted as art) allows to introduce the theme of the Holocaust into art by a side entrance.

3 Helmut Friedel, *Reading Pictures: Possible Access to Gerhard Richter's Atlas* (Exh. cat., Mar. 31 – May 27, 2001; Sakura: Kawamura Memorial Museum of Art, 2001), 25–32. Compare: Gerhard Richter, *Atlas der Fotos, Collagen und Skizzen* (Exh. cat., Apr. 8 – June 21, 1998; Cologne, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus Und Kunstbau München, 1997).

4 Friedel, *Reading Pictures*, 27.

Gerhard Richter's aversion to painting the representations of the Holocaust from photographs might have many sources. The artist approached the problem once again in the mid 1990s, when he was working on a commission for the Reichstag's main hall (sheets from 635 to 656). Attempts to recreate the Shoah on a monumental scale within an official and highly symbolic space withered once more. Ultimately, in the images intended for the Reichstag, Richter settled for an abstraction coloristically corresponding to the unified Germany's national flag. This inability to directly (photographically) address the Holocaust can be elucidated by shifting attention to another of Richter's works. The photographic image titled *Uncle Rudi* [*Onkel Rudi*, 1965] is an oil on canvas portrait of a young smiling man dressed in a wartime Wehrmacht uniform.<sup>5</sup> Similar to Richter's other paintings that refer to keepsake photographs taken by ordinary Germans (possibly common German soldiers) before and during the war, also *Uncle Rudi* is an exercise in recalling and rethinking the suppressed past. The innocent family memento – the faded photograph of kinfolk kept inside a desk drawer – when recast in the context of art becomes a symbol of the guilt repressed in the memory of many Germans, both Eastern and Western. In Richter's case, as in Strzemiński's, we can ascertain an external point of view of the painter, who witnesses the Holocaust. Nevertheless it is not the compassionate perspective of a friend from *To My Friends the Jews*. In his pieces Richter contemplates the Shoah from the standpoint of a potential perpetrator. The very same photographs from the ghetto and extermination camps carry very different meanings for Richter and Strzemiński.

Documentary photography of the Holocaust constitutes the core of the Frenchman Christian Boltanski's (b.1944) art. His creative output has little to do with painting. In his artworks he uses – like Richter, only on a larger scale – commemorative photographs, often anonymous group portraits, to create on their basis quasi-religious spatial arrangements that share their aura with church altars and reliquaries. In addition to altars devoted to anonymous, unremarkable individuals, many of which are tributes to Shoah's victims, Boltanski creates spatial installations directly referring to the Holocaust, such as *Réserve, Canada* (a chamber filled with worn clothes, densely lining the walls). On the one hand, Boltanski strives to commemorate those deceased and murdered during the Holocaust, but on the other, exposes the fictitious aspect of Shoah's remembrance. It is not obvious whether the photographs are authentic or counterfeit, just like the biography of the artist who purposefully

5 Compare *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting* (Exh. cat., Feb. – May, 2002; New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 2002); *Gerhard Richter Survey* (Exh. cat.; Cologne, ifa-Galerie Stuttgart, 2001), 20–21.

deceives the critics and art historians attempting to study his life. In effect the altars, reconstructed within gallery and museum spaces, that memorialize the alleged victims turn out to be a practical ersatz of Holocaust memory, worth as much as the audience is willing to pay. The artist deliberately alludes to the associations between sanctity and the church, particularly the Catholic Church with its distinctive interior design, at the same time proclaiming his personal lack of faith and openly declaring the falsity of those facts that he himself provides. What is more, he compares the artist to a “false prophet” who solicits money in return for his services.<sup>6</sup>

All of Boltanski’s art, as he himself claims, concerns the Holocaust.<sup>7</sup> Many viewers take the artist’s words at their face value, and interpret his artwork in the context of Shoah. Although, when it turns out that among the sentimental photographs the portraits of the perpetrators cannot be discerned from the portraits of victims, the mystical aura slowly gives way to a reflection upon one’s own expectations of Holocaust art. The privileged connection with the murdered victims turns out to be equally impossible, even ridiculous, as would be kneeling before Boltanski’s altars inside a gallery. The naive faith in photography, as well as the artist’s sincerity, seems to be a lapse in judgment when facing someone who, like Boltanski, masterfully exploits the public’s demand for commemorating the Holocaust. Discreetly “memory preserved in photography” becomes a collective ritual, not in the least different from attending church, and the intermingled photographs, displaced from their historical context, of the victims and perpetrators are reduced to a remnant of an event that nobody – no matter what the effort – seems to truly remember. Not even the artist.

The “mnemonic dimension, wherein the Shoah must be reconsidered” (although viewed from two different perspectives, of Strzemiński and Richter) revealed through its photographic representations, turns out to be fictional in Boltanski’s art. The aesthetic fiction of photographic altars which incites remembrance can be comprehended in various ways (also “seriously”), akin to the essentially disparate experience that can be acquired from this art. However, it is certainly impossible to negate the fundamental truth of the conspicuous severing of ties with both the victims and the perpetrators of the Holocaust. The connection with the events belonging to the historical order, which the genocide of the Jewish people was, has ultimately become mediated

6 Tamar Garb, *Rozmowa z Christianem Boltanskim* [Interview with Christian Boltanski], press materials accompanying the exhibition *Christian Boltanski Revenir* in the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw, Sept. 15 – Nov. 11, 2001.

7 After Ernst van Alphen, „Zabawa w Holocaust,” trans. Katarzyna Bojarska, *Literatura na Świecie* 1-2 (2004): 217-243.

through culture, and therefore by art. The shift that has occurred is even more pointedly illustrated by a project titled *If I were a German* completed in 1994 by Ukrainian photographer Borys Mikhailov (b.1938). The series, which consists of approximately thirty photographs, is described by the curator of the artist's Warsaw exhibition as follows:

Together with his wife, Vita, and fellow-artists [...] Mikhailov has played and photographed scenes from the time of World War II. In these tableaux set in an idyllic Ukrainian landscape they pose in the nude or dressed in Nazi and Soviet uniforms. The pictures are mostly erotic, even perverse, and it is not always easy to distinguish the oppressors from their victims. In burlesque scenes Jewish women seduce and are seduced by German officers. The eroticism allows to question the historical relations, allowing for the roles to be reversed. The actors switch identities playing Germans, Jews and Russians; fate decides who is the victim and who is the oppressor.<sup>8</sup>

Mikhailov, himself of Jewish descent, shocks by incorporating the themes represented in Richter's *Atlas* into one short cycle. Nevertheless, the contrasting of album photography, pornography and the memory of the Holocaust in *If I were a German* takes place on a completely different level. In Richter's work we are dealing with transposed but ultimately still documentary objects, in Boltanski's art it is fiction disguised as document; Mikhailov does not even try to conceal the completely fictional character of the prearranged and photographed scenes. Unveiling the pretentiously pornographic side of the Shoah, he does not contradict, but expands the previously mentioned "mnemonic dimension, wherein the Shoah must be reconsidered." The arbitrariness of roles assigned by the photographer to particular models, and the openly erotic content subvert the official, monumental image of the Shoah, which turns out to be equally hollow when confronted with Mikhailov's "homespun" Holocaust. The process of demystifying the Holocaust, already noticeable in Boltanski (more in his words, than his works), becomes even more evident in Mikhailov. The *Testimony of the Negative* – the title of Boris Mikhailov's exhibition in the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw – turns out to be a hollow, ironic slogan: the negative does not attest to anything, maybe besides what the artist demands. In this sense Mikhailov's work would be better suited by the title *Negative Testimonial*.

8 Ewa Gorzdek, „Testimony of the Negative,” in *Testimony of the Negative*, trans. Kuba Weccsile (Exh. cat., Mar. 5 – Apr. 18, 2004, Warsaw: Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw, 2004).

Among the artists who are presently engaged with the issue of the Holocaust it is worth naming Poles Zbigniew Libera (b.1959) and Robert Kuśmirowski (b.1973). Libera gained notoriety for his work *Lego. Concentration Camp* (1996). His work was also showcased at the New York exhibition *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*, at the Jewish Museum. The artwork itself is a set of building blocks with which one can, as the title suggests, build an extermination camp. Aside from the three seven-box sets the artist prepared several photographs depicting various “moments” from the camp’s daily life. Juxtaposing the “innocent” toy blocks for children with the Shoah shocked and aroused the interest of both the critics and the general public. Libera’s controversial artwork was mentioned by Piotr Piotrowski in his book on Polish contemporary art, titled *Meanings of Modernism*:

Let us imagine an unsettling event, when a child plays with a Lego set prepared this way. Any person with at least a trace of sensibility will notice the inherent horror. For this reason many viewers contested the work [...]. The artist was even accused of designing toys that promote violence and abuse the memory of the victims of the Nazi terror. The only thing these accusations seem to prove is simple ignorance and a lack of understanding for the work that borders on malice. Such opinions invite dissent. Libera unmasks – by drastic means, no doubt – that it is mass culture, a part of which we all are, that manipulates the atrocity by commoditizing it.[...] Consumer culture confuses our ethical compass. We buy plastic replicas of guns for our children to play with, we watch thrillers, and finally somebody had the bright idea to build a supermarket right outside KL Auschwitz. Libera is not merciless, the human condition is.<sup>9</sup>

The artist’s critical attitude towards popular culture, especially to its visual aspect, is evident in the photographic series titled *Positives*, which was exhibited in 2004. Libera alters famous, iconic photographs of tragic historic events, so they contain a different, positive message, while still retaining the original’s formal features. There is a “positive” version of a well-known concentration camp photograph among the pictures. It depicts well-nourished prisoners dressed in pajamas, who smile at us from behind the barbed wire fence. A simple, but sacrilegious act of reversing the emotional force of the horrifying camp photographs points to new ways of thinking about the Holocaust. Libera’s photograph refers to the modern viewer’s fear of

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9 Piotr Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu. W stronę historii sztuki polskiej po 1945 roku* (Poznań: Rebis, 1999), 246.

the traumatic experience of fully recognizing the tragedy of the Holocaust, described by American writer and art critic Susan Sontag in her essay *In Plato's Cave*:

Nothing I have seen – in photographs or in real life – ever cut me as sharply, deeply, instantaneously. Indeed, it seems plausible to me to divide my life into two parts, before I saw those photographs (I was twelve) and after, though it was several years before I understood fully what they were about. What good was served by seeing them? They were only photographs-of an event I had scarcely heard of and could do nothing to affect, of suffering I could hardly imagine and could do nothing to relieve. When I looked at those photographs, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror; I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying.<sup>10</sup>

Sontag describes coming into direct contact with the nature of an atrocious event through photography, which seems impossible to repeat today. Not only due to the loss of credibility (“innocence”) by the photographic “document,” but also due to the inevitable passage into the realm of popular culture and the trivialization of the Holocaust, also in art. The condition of the contemporary museumgoer viewing the Holocaust is well illustrated by Robert Kuśmirowski’s work prepared for the catalog of the 2004 Fritz Bauer Institut exhibition<sup>11</sup> commemorating the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial. The photograph, printed on page 623 of the catalog, depicts the artist standing before a prison building and covering his face, as he tries to avoid the camera. After a close reading of the publication it turns out that the gesture is not random – it is a repetition of an evasive gesture that one of the accused Auschwitz SS-officers, at first glance an unassuming decent German, made forty years ago. Kuśmirowski, just like Libera, turns to archival photographs, although not to the iconic images of the twentieth century. The artist does not “substitute” emotions contained within the historical trifle-image. By reproducing the gesture and composition, while digitally aging the photograph, so that it resembles the original in the smallest of details, the artist gets “mistaken” by the viewer for the SS-officer, who was “apprehended” by the photographer. The misidentification of the artist as the

10 Susan Sontag, “In Plato’s Cave,” in *On photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001) 20.

11 *Auschwitz-Prozess 4 Ks 2/63. Frankfurt am Main*, ed. Irmtrud Wojak, (Exh. cat., Mar. 28 – May 23, 2004, Haus Gallus, Frankfurt am Main; Cologne: Snoeck, 2004).

accused perpetrator lasts only a brief moment, just like the gesture caught on the photograph. Kusmirowski's work does not reveal anything aside from a hollow gesture. As we cannot make out the face of the perpetrator, and we do not see the faces of the victims or the artist, it is not surprising that we also cannot see the Holocaust.

*Translation: Rafał Pawluk*

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Paweł Mościcki

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## Snapshots of Intimate Encounters<sup>1</sup>

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If it is true that as soon as philosophy declares itself to be reflection or coincidence it pre-judges what it will find, then once again it must recommence everything, reject the instruments reflection and intuition had provided themselves, and install itself in a locus where they have not yet been distinguished, in experiences that have not yet been “worked over,” that offer us all at once, pell-mell, both “subject” and “object,” both existence and essence, and hence give philosophy resources to redefine them. Seeing, speaking, even thinking (with certain reservations, for as soon as we distinguish thought from speaking absolutely we are already in the order of reflection), are experiences of this kind, both irrecusable and enigmatic.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty<sup>2</sup>

**T**here is no such thing as the relationship between text and image. There is no single, all-encompassing and permanently valid model of the mutual relationship

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1 Funding for this article was provided by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education as part of the 2012–2014 National Program for the Development of the Humanities.

2 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Claude Lefort, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 130.

between language and the visual, which is why all of the many theoretical attempts at formulating such a connection are forever doomed to failure, however impressive the conceptual constructs supporting such a relationship may appear. Thus there exists no such thing as a relationship or connection between text and image that would not at once be the source and effect of a specific historical moment, a moment that not only links the two media in a unitary configuration, but would also define a certain stage in their historical development, their reciprocal association, and the manner in which they are anchored in reality.

Therefore, what we are left with is a certain historical nexus between image and text, a specific moment in which their mutual relationship is redefined in a contingent and transient manner, one that may, on occasion, also be historically significant and influential. The relationship between photography and literature should also be regarded as a strand in the broad history of these intimate connections between the image and the word. Their development has also been fed by moments of particular intensification that sometimes open up new and unknown vistas for potential juxtapositions. Such moments of extraordinary intensity, in which speaking and looking become so consubstantial that they cast new light onto each other and crystallize into new configurations, may be called – to borrow a phrase from the classic essay by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing – “fruitful moments.” In his famous *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, Lessing writes that when attempting to portray in a painting or sculpture a strong expression of emotion, as in the case of the work of art referenced in the title, it is most important to choose the fitting fruitful moment:

Since the artist can use but a single moment of ever-changing nature, and the painter must further confine his study of this one moment to a single point of view, while their works are made not simply to be looked at, but to be contemplated long and often, evidently the most fruitful moment and the most fruitful aspect of that moment must be chosen. Now that only is fruitful which allows free play in the imagination. The more we see, the more we must be able to imagine; and the more we imagine, the more we must think we see. But no moment in the whole course of an action is so disadvantageous in this respect as that of its culmination. There is nothing beyond, and to present the uttermost to the eye is to bind the wings of Fancy, and compel her, since she cannot soar beyond the impression made on the senses, to employ herself with feebler images, shunning as her limit the visible fullness already expressed.<sup>3</sup>

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3 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Ellen Frothingham (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2005), 16.

What is key in Lessing's deliberations is not just the observation that one must capture or freeze the subject's expression at a specific moment, but his emphasis on the temporal precision required by the decision. The fruitful moment should thus be distinguished from the culminating moment of the action.<sup>4</sup> The latter intensifies the pathos of the experienced suffering or joy to such a degree that no room is left for the imagination: the depiction is frozen in its literal form. The fruitful moment, on the other hand, allows us to read into the corporal expression of the depicted figures with the simultaneous use of our sight and imagination, the fluid combination of which reveals to us the desired depiction of emotions. This, however, places us simultaneously in two points in time: the one in which the experienced affect is the strongest, and the one we actually see once it is limited, but which can thus refer to our imagination of what just happened. The right way of depicting emotion, the choice of the fruitful moment, thus relies on the true art of skillful delay, the capturing of the moment that unfolds immediately after the culmination, when its traces are still legible, but it is no longer directly present.

Another example illustrating the creative intensification of time is that of Henri Cartier-Bresson's "decisive moment." The term describes a certain convergence between the attention of the photographer, his compositional skills, and the complex situation in which he has found himself and which he is attempting to portray. The goal of the photojournalist, Cartier-Bresson says, is to capture on photographic film a situation and a configuration of figures that would convey the essence of the event without resorting to elaborate stories and creating a serial composition. This, however, requires the photographer to momentarily fuse with the world; not just with the rhythm of what is happening, but also with the deeper logic of the events:

To me, photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression. I believe that, through the act of living, the discovery of oneself is made concurrently with the discovery of the world around us, which can mold us, but which can also be affected by us. A balance must be established between these two worlds – the one inside us and the one outside us. As the result of a constant reciprocal process, both these worlds come to form a single one. And it is this world that we must communicate.<sup>5</sup>

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4 Ibid., 15.

5 Henry Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), 42.

While Lessing argues that capturing emotion in the fruitful moment requires a slight yet skillful delay, in Cartier-Bresson's view, to capture the essence of a situation, one must converge perfectly with reality.

One could say that the story of the relationship between photography and text is marked by the rhythm of repeated moments of particular intensification, real events that redefine their mutual connection. The category of the event – a concept important to the leading 20th century philosophers, including Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard and Alain Badiou – is, as Martin Jay writes, essentially a phenomenon “possessing a multiple time [...] preserving traces of an unfulfilled past or signaling the emergence or at least the promise of a radically new future.”<sup>6</sup> In the context of the relationship between different media, an event can mean two different yet not necessarily exclusive instances. First, it is a kind of breakthrough in the social, political or individual sense, that forces those attempting to react to it to conceive of a new type of connection between the photograph and the text, and thus it demonstrates to them that in their desire to remain “faithful to the event,”<sup>7</sup> they can no longer persist in the configuration that existed previously. Second, it is the shift in the model of visual and textual constellations that can itself become the event, as it commands us to think differently and establishes new structures of understanding and perception. In his criticism of the somewhat lofty vision of the event as a form of absolute difference that requires a radical conversion, Jacques Rancière states that this view imposes a “certain identification scheme; it creates something like a group of specialists, people capable of recognizing what is and isn't an event.”<sup>8</sup> He adds: “For me, the possibility that an action, a walk along the street, a glance through a window, the screening of a film, people going out onto a boulevard, or a performance will be become an event is not subject to axiomatization.”<sup>9</sup> This means that not only is the event contingent, but particular ways of speaking and looking (and their articulation) change as they are influenced by the event, and can even become events themselves.

These two visions of the event – something that is beyond capturing and something that emerges from its transformation – need not be mutually exclusive, which in turn means that each historical breakthrough, including

6 Martin Jay, “Photography and the Event,” in *Double Exposure. Memory and Photography*, ed. Olga Shevchenko (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2014), 100.

7 Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2012), 41.

8 Jacques Rancière, *La méthode de l'égalité* (Montrouge: Bayard), 117.

9 *Ibid.*, 117.

those pertaining to the relationship between the arts and different media, should be viewed as a veritable node of possibilities, breakthroughs, challenges and configurations. In his recent comments on Lessing's famous essay, Hubert Damisch admitted that its lasting validity entails the need to formulate a new theory of nodes (*noeuds*) which – in analyzing specific depictions and historical artifacts – would be preoccupied primarily with the codependencies between affect, the body and modules of representation, or, in his own words, “dispositives.”<sup>10</sup> It is only through the use of such a “node topology” that we can demonstrate, for instance, how individual affects, visual and textual sensibilities, and the history of photography and literature converge at a particular moment in history.

### The Dialectic of Photography

The discrepancy between Lessing and Cartier-Bresson's concept of the moment of intensified vision can be applied to the discussion on the ontological status of photography. On one side of the argument would be all of those who see the photograph as an extension of reality, a mere representation of its traces that in no way distorts what it depicts. As Roland Barthes writes, succinctly summing up this tradition of thought, the *noeme* of photography is “that-has-been.”<sup>11</sup> What this means is that “the photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here.”<sup>12</sup> This is why, to Barthes, the essence of the photograph “is to ratify what it represents.”<sup>13</sup>

But there exists another, equally strong tradition that sees photography, from its very inception, not as a perfect imprint of material reality, but as a kind of fundamental forgery of the human experience. To put it in more exact terms, it is the precision with which a photograph reproduces reality that makes it a tool for the mortification of that which, unavoidably, is not fully defined, literal and mechanical in our experience of the world. Among the supporters of this critical stance is Siegfried Kracauer, who argues that what every photograph essentially depicts is a past that was never there, i.e., one that cannot be recalled. It is a segment of a past reality that has been reproduced literally, but by doing so, it violates the rules of human memory.

10 See Hubert Damisch, *Ciné fil* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), 113–145.

11 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 77.

12 Ibid., 80.

13 Ibid., 85.

Memory, Kracauer writes, “encompasses neither the entire spatial appearance of a state of affairs nor its entire temporal course. Compared to photography, memory’s records are full of gaps.”<sup>14</sup> But this discontinuity is a product, rather than a symptom, of memory. Gaps in memory are necessary if we are to remember anything at all, if – as Kracauer believes, undoubtedly following in the footsteps of Bergson<sup>15</sup> – we always remember that which is currently relevant and useful to our own lives. Yet this also means that the fragmented tissue of our memory, like our own lives, is in a permanent state of motion, and is capable of dynamizing the past by repeatedly juxtaposing its recollections with our current situation. Photography, on the other hand, retains an accurate trace of a specific and random image of reality, thus blocking this motion and so, from the perspective of memory, it seems nothing more than an “assemblage of garbage.”<sup>16</sup>

The difference between these two positions – personified here by Barthes and Kracauer, but held by many others – may be regarded as an unsolvable aporia, an internal contradiction to which photography is condemned, but it can also be treated as a point of departure for an entirely new perspective on the medium. Or, rather, not on photography itself, in its generality, but on its historicity or even its eventfulness, which, nevertheless, cannot simply be placed in opposition to its theoretical generality, but is derived from it, becoming at once its confirmation and its abolition. When looking at a photograph and considering what it actually depicts, Barthes and Kracauer see completely different things. The former perceives in it a material trace of reality, while the latter sees a sign of something we have never actually experienced. An attempt to find the most basic common ground between these two points of view would reveal an interesting “altercation of seeing,” a certain kind of split vision which, at the very moment when it perceives something very real in a photograph, succumbs to an illusion and in fact gazes at a view that has been detached from the world by the photograph. We could therefore say that the same image installs a certain gap or pause in reality, and even places it precisely where we would expect it to adhere most closely to reality. It thus creates an artificial, excess moment in the time we experience – the fitting *fruitful moment*. In order to redirect this detached moment back into the stream of experience, to plug this gap in time, something other than the

14 Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 50.

15 See Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and William Scott Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1988).

16 Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, 51.

photograph is necessary: words, for example, that will name some of its elements, will identify views, recall faces, or, on the contrary, deny any similarity and question our memories. It is only the word that can, by reinstating the history and experience behind a photograph, name the gap that once deceived and disoriented our gaze. The moment of naming – by its distinctness from the mechanical reproduction of the photograph – introduces something fundamentally new that thereby makes possible a new configuration of meaning that is a superstructure built on top of the photograph while also transcending its directness.

A photograph never operates outside the confines of context, which also encompasses different points of view and ways of naming things that that are used outside the scope of the photograph itself. If this were not the case, we would indeed be condemned to a permanent aporia between Barthes and Kracauer's views, between a belief in the photograph's faithful rendition of reality and the suspicion that the image has tainted reality with pretense and forgery. Most of the discussions on the nature of photography as a medium revolve around this age-old conceptual opposition. Yet the photograph always appears in a world that is already populated with other images, words, sounds, etc., with which it comprises part of a shared node of experience. It is precisely this context that anchors the photograph in a reality that it never fully represents nor absolutely distorts, as is also true of other media. It nevertheless possesses a certain capacity for eventfulness as it retains a piece of reality in a literal image, tearing the continuity of time and demanding the participation of the other dimensions of our experience. The words that respond to this demand can also, in certain instances, be forced to say something in a completely new manner and to address the image in a different way than usual.

In other words, a photograph's potential eventful moment can be extracted precisely by the fact that the image is always accompanied by language, with which it constantly reckons and with which it shares a more or less intimate relationship. Thus the *noeme* of photography would not be "that-has-been," but a silent question that one must answer without the aid of a script. And while most answers will take the banal form articulated by Barthes, in no way does this invalidate the potentiality contained in that moment. It is simply an attempt to answer the question of what we experienced, how we want to remember it, and what rules will govern its recording in the log of our entire experience. The relationship between the photograph and language is thus never an exclusive relationship between two media, but a node of existential, ethical and political dilemmas. When a photograph touches upon something that is particularly resistant to being inscribed in this context through the use of the language at our disposal, there emerges an opportunity for a true event

that transforms our understanding of the world, precipitating a new way of explaining it in one, intense moment. If, as Thierry de Duve proposes, “with photography, we have indeed the paradox of an event that hangs on the wall”<sup>17</sup>, then this event binds the photograph with that which is external to it, thus reconfiguring the forms of our experience. This coexistence between language and the photograph was once aptly described by William Saroyan, who said: “One picture is worth a thousand words. Yes, but only if you look at the picture and say or think the thousand words.”<sup>18</sup>

These reflections on the photograph’s fruitful moment find a certain echo in an idea developed in recent years by Ariella Azoulay, who envisions photography as a space in which a kind of civil contract is entered into and renegotiated. In her writing, the Israeli scholar makes a distinction between “the event of photography” and “the photographed event.” While the latter is simply a fragment of reality captured on film, the former is a kind of configuration of different elements that constitute the very action of taking a picture. These two dimensions are never wholly separate from each other, obviously, though the discourse of photography has often omitted the event of photography and focused instead almost exclusively on the photographed events. But as Azoulay argues, “every photograph of others bears the traces of the meeting between the photographed persons and the photographer.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, every photograph depicts not just a certain fragment of reality, but also, indirectly, the very event of its creation: when, why, by whom and in what circumstances it was made.

The aforementioned civil contract is situated at the same level as the event of the photograph. What does it entail and who is responsible for compliance with this agreement? Azoulay often emphasizes that the contract she describes stems from the very nature of photography as well as from the historical and political determinants of its invention. Thus, on the one hand, the very existence of a photograph implies a certain tacit contract between those participating in the event surrounding its creation:

From the fact that in the photographic encounter itself there is no need for the formulation or signing of a concrete pact, we can assume there has been some kind of tacit prior pact or agreement between the sides that

17 Thierry de Duve, “Time Exposure and Snapshot: The Photograph as Paradox,” in *Photography Theory*, ed. James Elkins (New York, London: Routledge, 2007), 109.

18 Quoted in Jefferson Hunter, *Image and Word: The Interaction of Twentieth-Century Photographs and Texts* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1987), 6.

19 Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*, trans. Louise Bethlehem (London, New York: Verso, 2012), 21.

ensures the present encounter: not merely a contractual agreement or ad hoc understanding, but a civil contract.<sup>20</sup>

The collective captured in the image, along with the broader community that participates in the event of photography, is immortalized at the moment of their encounter as something unique that can never be reduced to the specific socio-political divisions that they may, incidentally, co-create or even support. This means that the photograph is a kind of space for alternative socialization, one that is always open to the possibility of transformation and negotiation. In other words, it provides an opportunity to participate in the process of political empowerment even to those who have been stripped of their rights in the social space. Thus it outlines the shape of a community that transcends the boundaries of any current government or system:

Anyone who addresses others through photographs or takes the position of a photograph's addressee, even if she is a stateless person who has lost her "right to have rights," as in Arendt's formulation, is nevertheless a citizen – a member in the citizenry of photography. The civil space of photography is open to her, as well. That space is configured by what I call the civil contract of photography.<sup>21</sup>

Yet Azoulay recognizes, and even emphasizes, the fragility of both the civil contract offered by a photograph and the citizenship that it can grant to the expropriated. Photographs depicting the pain of people who have been stripped of their rights and exposed to suffering can themselves become persecutors, while the act of taking a picture can certainly prolong and intensify the humiliation of those depicted in the image. The potentiality of the civil contract nevertheless persists, Azoulay says, despite photography's entanglement in the mechanisms of power and exploitation: "Even when this encounter occurs under the difficult conditions of distress or disaster, when a threat looms over or has already caused harm to the political space, as a space of plurality and action, the act of photography and the photographs it produces might, at least potentially, restore it."<sup>22</sup> And as long as the photograph exists, the groups and individuals depicted in it, even those who are excluded from or

20 Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, trans. Reli Mazali and Ruvik Danieli (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 101.

21 *Ibid.*, 81.

22 *Ibid.*, 89–90.

victims of the social hierarchy, can demand their rights and express their own suffering and aspirations. The fragility of the photograph's civil contract, its incessant oscillation between actual violence and potential solidarity, reflects, in Azoulay's view, the fragility of all social ties, and – we may add – that of the relationship between the image and the text, with all their historical implications. The photograph thus participates in history primarily by releasing the hidden potential of the present, which the image simultaneously binds to and misses. "The photograph," Azoulay writes, "always includes a supplement that makes it possible to show that what 'was there' wasn't there *necessarily* in that way."<sup>23</sup> Every act of photography renews the chance for a new configuration of the life of a community, a chance to remedy harm and to equalize opportunities. It assembles a certain constellation of people and things while preserving on the print the ever-real possibility of redefining their shared history and our perception of it through the photograph, inconsistent as this perception may be with the overt intentions of the image itself.<sup>24</sup>

In her writing, Azoulay frequently emphasizes another historical dimension of the photograph, namely that of its social impact not just as a technological novelty, but as a new social practice or even, one might say, a new way of practicing that which is social. The very process of its invention was an indication of the fact that there was no single inventor behind the technology, nor was it restricted by intellectual property rights; rather, it was a discovery that opened a space for the shared use of images of our world.<sup>25</sup> The ontology of photography, as Azoulay asserts, is thus necessarily a political ontology, or even – thanks to the impact photography has had on our communities by its very presence – an ontology of the political:

The ontology of photography that I seek to promote is, in fact, a political ontology – an ontology of the many, operating in public, in motion. It is an ontology bound to the manner in which human beings exist — look, talk, act — with one another and with objects. At the same time, these subjects appear as the referents of speech, of the gaze and of the actions

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>24</sup> In addition to her theoretical analysis of this situation, Azoulay continues to work on the archives documenting the Israeli occupation of Palestine, attempting simultaneously to find in them the dignity of the victims on the one hand and, on the other, the "right to not be an oppressor" on the part of those who enjoy full rights under an unjust political system. See Ariella Azoulay, *From Palestine to Israel: A Photographic Record of Destruction and State Formation, 1947–1950*, (London: Pluto Books, 2011), and *Potential History: Photographic Documents from Mandatory Palestine* (Wrocław: European Culture Congress, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Azoulay, *From Palestine to Israel*, 85–89.

of others. My intention here is not to lay out an ontology of the political per se. It is, rather, to delineate the political ontology of photography. By this I mean, an ontology of a certain form of human being-with-others in which the camera or the photograph are implicated.<sup>26</sup>

The very practice of photography, its broad availability and democratic nature have changed the conditions of this coexistence to such a degree that it has become very difficult to discern between the dynamic of the civil contract of photography and the political dynamic as such. Our lives, Azoulay admits, is littered with potential events that reference the photographic contract: "In the contemporary era, when the means of photography are in the reach of so many, photography always constitutes a potential event, even in cases where the camera is invisible or when it is not present at all."<sup>27</sup> In other words, we now live in a world in which anyone can find themselves in view of a lens at any moment, and being-in-a-picture has all but become the kind of existentiell or coexistentiell that being-in-the-world was to Heidegger.<sup>28</sup>

In the writings of Ariella Azoulay and in our own reflections above, an image of the photograph emerges as a nexus or node that links in itself diverse elements and distinct systems of experience. This image is not based on a simple referential relationship (successful or otherwise) between the picture and reality, but rather on a complex web of mutual connections and tensions between the photograph and the various dimensions of its exterior. Why then, instead of speaking of the print, the impression, the *vera icon* or, conversely, of the simulacrum and the shadow,<sup>29</sup> do we not speak about photography in terms of a kind of nexus or node which collects, in a non-linear and non-hierarchical manner, entirely disparate systems into one image and then returns them in a similar fashion? In his well-known essay on the state of photography in an increasingly mediated contemporary world, John Berger evokes an image of the photograph as radiation that is closely tied to the memory and the laws by which it is governed:

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26 Azoulay, *Civil Imagination*, 18.

27 Ibid., 22.

28 See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996). The category of the coexistentiell was introduced into the language of philosophy – based on a rereading of Heidegger – by Jean-Luc Nancy. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel* (Paris: Galilée, 1996).

29 See Bernd Stiegler, *Bilder der Photographie: Ein Album photographischer Metaphern* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2006).

Memory is not unilinear at all. Memory works radially, that is to say with an enormous number of associations all leading to the same event. [...] If we want to put a photograph back into the context of experience, social experience, social memory, we have to respect the laws of memory. We have to situate the printed photograph so that it acquires something of the surprising conclusiveness of that which was and is.<sup>30</sup>

To further develop this radial metaphor of the photograph, we could say that, in the most descriptive sense, the image works through a double movement. First, it collects within the frame and its associated situation a certain array of elements. One might describe this as the centripetal radial movement that captures, at a certain moment, the movement of the world in some more or less random configuration. This act has a certain kind of “decisiveness,” to borrow a term from Berger, in its coupling of diverse elements into one photographic nexus. This category could serve as an apt depiction of the conviction shared by proponents of many divergent theories of photography regarding the technique’s exceptional ties and particular adherence to reality. It could also help us transcend ossified oppositions such as inscription and reproduction, and reality and pretense that remain present in discussions of photography. The act of collection, in this case, refers both to the entirely material process of producing an image (using various techniques, digital or analog), as well as the various metaphors used to describe the act of photography, such as the civil contract discussed by Azoulay.

The other movement in the radial process of photography is one that we may describe as being centrifugal, as that which has been captured in the photograph is once again allowed to radiate outwards, freed from the moment that has been immortalized in the image. The photograph thus returns to the context from which it emerged, now saturated with meaning, subject to interpretation, processing, editing, etc. While the first step of the photographic act gathered diverse elements in order to capture them for a moment in a shared space, in the second, the finished photograph can once again transcend the limits of the frame and point to different parts of the world around it.

These two phases of the process by which a photograph is created and revealed constitute two inextricable elements of the same dialectic moment of a photograph’s radiation; they mark the pulsating rhythm of the image. This dialectic may correspond with the alternating movements of mortification and vivification, abstraction and realism, immobilization and dynamic movement, etc. Because of the dialectic nature of this nexus, not only can we not separate one moment from the other, but nor can one exist without the

30 John Berger, “Uses of Photography,” in *About looking* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 60–61.

other. The photograph can only bring something to life (itself included), for instance, thanks to the moment of capturing and “annihilation.” Meanwhile the photograph itself always gathers things that are already entangled in its own independent dynamic, which the image attempts to record and capture to an equal extent. This radial dialectic of the photograph, its pulsating rhythm, also determines its historicity by the very nature of its participation in the historical process and its *modus operandi* therein. Finally, the dynamic nexus of contractions and expansions, centripetal and centrifugal movements, and the tying and untying of the bundle of elements demonstrates how photographs are related to other areas of our experience and to other media. Thus if John Berger argues in his essay that “the aim must be to construct a context for a photograph,”<sup>31</sup> a context made up of words or other photographs, he does not articulate a task that could be the realization of some concrete movement for the improvement of photography as much as he names an ever-present dimension of the dialectic of the photograph: “Words, comparisons, signs need to create a context for a printed photograph in a comparable way; that is to say, they must mark and leave open diverse approaches. A radial system has to be constructed around the photograph so that it may be seen in terms which are simultaneously personal, political, economic, dramatic, everyday and historic.”<sup>32</sup> This radial system exists and is an inextricable part of how a photograph works, even if, as Berger rightly observes, it does not make itself apparent in particular historical moments.

### The Great Crisis of Experience

In his essay on art and the cultural contexts of narrative, Walter Benjamin formulated a famous thesis regarding the downfall of experience, which he linked to the transformations sparked in European societies by World War I:

With the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent – not richer, but poorer in communicable experience? What ten years later was poured out in the flood of war books was anything but experience that goes from mouth to mouth. And there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience

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31 Ibid., 64.

32 Ibid., 67.

by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.<sup>33</sup>

In his commentary on these words, Jefferson Hunter, author of a broad and insightful book on the interaction between images and texts in twentieth century literature, states that similar symptoms could also be observed in the United States, where they were caused by the Great Depression of the 1920s and '30s, rather than by war:

It showed a substantial population of Americans that they could not depend on laboring as their parents had labored, or trust the same institutions, or even, when the drought began, look for the same rain from the sky. Contradicting politicians and communal wisdom alike, the Depression made history incomprehensible and left behind, as its legacy, tiny, fragile human bodies set in a countryside where nothing remained unchanged but the clouds.<sup>34</sup>

The deep financial crisis of the 1930s affected not just the foundations of the lives of broad social groups in the United States, but it rattled the very framework of their world, casting doubt on the basic system of coordinates that allowed them to navigate that world. These circumstances required completely new forms of description, the establishment of new institutions and the re-definition of the social contract that lay at the foundations of the American state. Meanwhile in the aesthetic sphere, the Great Depression undoubtedly sparked the need, as Malcolm Cowley observes, for a “new art, one that has to be judged by different standards.”<sup>35</sup> This art was the documentary, a genre that experienced intense growth on both sides of the Atlantic precisely in the 1930s. In the words of Olivier Lugon, author of a book that explores the “documentary style” that enjoyed great popularity following World War I: “the documentary marked a return to reality, a kind of challenged posed by the street in response to the pressure of the political and social events that enlivened the era. [...] It was not about a shift from one aesthetic to another,

33 Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” trans. Harry Zohn, in *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000*, ed. Dorothy J. Hale (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

34 Hunter, *Image and Word*, 66.

35 Quoted in Hunter, *Image and Word*, 68.

but about rejecting all manner of formal exploration and focusing instead on testimony and political activism.”<sup>36</sup> The photograph thus became a tool that enabled one to depict society, with all its complexity and divisive conflicts, and to open up new perspectives on other forms of art.

The documentary movement in the United States won the support of an enormous patron in the field of photography: the Farm Security Administration, an official government institution created as part of Roosevelt’s New Deal. The agency, which operated from 1935 to 1944, was of course not tasked with promoting the art of photography. Its purpose was to save American agriculture by providing subsidies, supporting cooperatives that were hardest hit by the crisis, and starting new ones. The FSA was headed by the economist Rexford Tugwell, whose main goal was to lift part of the US economy from its knees and to protect farmers from the most dire effects of the Depression. Among the divisions that comprised the institution was the Historical Section, headed by Roy E. Stryker, whose tasks included promoting the agency through photography and, more importantly, documenting the sheer scale of the crisis and its social fallout for members of Congress and the general public. The section employed some of the country’s leading photographers, providing institutional and financial support to such famous figures as Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Ben Shahn and Arthur Rothstein.<sup>37</sup>

The photographers employed by the FSA were thus tasked with depicting the suffering and poverty of American society to those who did not want to see it, but also to legitimize the actions of the government, which was making an effort to remedy the tragic situation. Photographs thus became “powerful agents in the awakening of social conscience,”<sup>38</sup> while their style could be described using simple slogans: “to persuade and convince.”<sup>39</sup> The work conducted by the photographers, whose cameras documented the poverty of the farmers and their homes, the ongoing racial segregation, the social and class

36 Olivier Lugon, *Le style documentaire. D’August Sander à Walker Evans, 1920-1945* (Paris: Éditions Macula, 2011), 53.

37 See Lugon, *Le style documentaire*, 119. Regarding the work of the FSA, see Sidney Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); Cara A. Finnegan *Picturing Poverty: Print Culture and FSA Photographs* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2003). Regarding the nature and development of documentary photography in America, see William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

38 Helmut Gernsheim and Alison Gernsheim, *A Concise History of Photography* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), 257.

39 Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present Day*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1949), 19.

conflicts, etc., was a kind of “short voyage to the land of the people”<sup>40</sup> – one initiated and repeated by the government – in search of a new embodiment of the democratic subject that would emerge from the ruins of the old system. Their task was thus not to produce mere propaganda, but to include hitherto overlooked parts of society in the political community. The idea was to document how society’s “other half lives,” in the words of Jacob Riis, a pioneer of photojournalism who explored the world of New York’s lower classes in the 19th century, writing about them and documenting them with his camera. “Long ago it was said that ‘one half of the world does not know how the other half lives.’ That was true then. It did not know because it did not care. The half that was on top cared little for the struggles, and less for the fate of those who were underneath, so long as it was able to hold them there and keep its own seat”<sup>41</sup> he wrote. The work conducted by the FSA was intended to change that, to a certain extent, by forcing one half of society to look at images documenting the lives of the other half and, in result, to accept the New Deal, which laid out the rules of a new social contract.

The entire undertaking was of course based on the belief that photography had the capacity to alter people’s sensibilities, to directly influence not just their senses, but also their consciences. “Those who saw the suffering of others would immediately be compelled to help them out”<sup>42</sup>, Vicki Goldberg wrote. One might say, referring back to Ariella Azoulay’s observations, that the work of the FSA is an example of how official government institutions can, for better or worse, take control of the civil contract of photography and order the inclusion of new social groups and new areas of life in the sphere of representation. On the one hand, the institutions provide official endorsement of a fundamental shift in social sensibilities, on the other hand, they inscribe an unpredictable and potentially unlimited community of “citizens of photography” into institutional politics, thus making the community subordinate to the state apparatus. From this perspective, the difference between the persuasive and historical dimension of this undertaking is blurred, because by giving a community an image of its history – as did Matthew Brady during the Civil War, or Lewis Hine in his portraits of immigrants arriving in America – one also changes the community’s image of itself very significantly. It is at once an act of historical documentation and political activism.<sup>43</sup>

40 See Jacques Rancière, *Courts voyages aux pays du peuple* (Paris: Seuil, 1990).

41 Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (San Bernardino: ReadClassic.com, 2010).

42 Vicki Goldberg, *The Power of Photography: How Photographs Changed our Life* (New York: Abbeville Publishing Group, 1991), 113.

43 Lugon, *Le style documentaire*, 368.

Another aspect of the FSA's work was the presentation of its photographic documentation in the press, most frequently in the form of prepared stories that combined photojournalism with traditional reportage. This was also the agency's response to how the context of the use of photography was changing with the appearance of such widely-read illustrated magazines such as *Life* and *Look*<sup>44</sup>. This period marked the rise of another phenomenon that is of particular relevance to this discussion, namely that of books that combined photographs and literary texts as part of a single project. Such publications often used the archives of the FSA or photographers associated with the agency as a source of visual content. But as Hunter points out, this kind of connection between the text and the image greatly exceeded the limits of journalism and propaganda material:

In practice, the most ambitious writers and photographers were unsatisfied with the pairing of the caption and illustration, and instead combined their work into "photo-texts" – composite publications evoking a landscape or recording a history, celebrating a community or mourning a loss. The words and images in photo-texts co-create their meaning on equal footing; thus a new genre was defined.<sup>45</sup>

Though they were often linked to the work conducted by the FSA and made use of various content from its archives, these books generally went beyond the historical and persuasive goals of the agency, thus demonstrating that the new configuration of image and text had become more than just a matter of aesthetic creativity, but also a requirement of that moment in history, with all its ethical and political aspects. The best known books in the genre – among them *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion* by Paul Taylor and Dorothea Lange, *12 Million Black Voices* by Richard Wright, *Land of the Free* by Archibald Macleish, *You Have Seen Their Faces* by Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell, and *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* by James Agee and Walker Evans – are great tales about the human condition that are as sensitive to the historical intricacies of the collective experience as they are to the aesthetic

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44 See *ibid.*, 132.

45 Hunter, *Image and Word*, 1. Regarding collaborations between writers and photographers in the United States, see Carol Schloss, *In Visible Light: Photography and the American Writer, 1810–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Regarding the photo-text genre and, more generally, theoretical discussions on the relationship between the photograph and narrative, as well as on their practical applications in art in recent decades, see Marianna Michałowska, *Foto-teksty. Związki fotografii z narracją* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2012).

nexus of different systems of perception. Though they rarely challenge the assumptions of the FSA or the documentary style, these books exhibit a bit of what one might describe as activism within activism, a double loop that transforms this rather simple perspective in a compelling way. Each of these titles in its own way redefines the node in which photography and literature meet, simultaneously illustrating and co-creating the complexities of the historical moment that served as its context.

### **Gestures of Intensified Time**

One of the best known and most widely read books to come out of the efforts to combine photography and literary texts was the opus *You Have Seen Their Faces*, published in 1937 by the photographer Margaret Bourke-White and the writer Erskine Caldwell. Both were well known within their respective fields at the time: Bourke-White for her extensive photojournalism work in such famous magazines as *Fortune* and *Life*, and for her pictures illustrating the development of industry in the USSR; Caldwell for his novels depicting the problems affecting the American South, including *God's Little Acre* (1933) and *Journeyman* (1935). The popularity of their collaborative book provoked much criticism, directed particularly at the exaggerated ease with which they combine image and text. Even Hunter – whose opinion of the authors' work is generally highly favorable – points out the book's numerous simplifications and the editorial pitfalls the pair succumbed to: generalization, excessive persuasiveness, and resorting to cheap effects.<sup>46</sup> The objection against excessive attractiveness seems both unsophisticated and curious, particularly when leveled against books whose main purpose is not just to provide an argument or narrative, but also (perhaps more importantly) to produce a certain effect in the sensual as well as the intellectual and ethical sense. It appears that Hunter, in repeating the common criticisms of Bourke-White and Caldwell's work, assumes that the book ought to be discussed in terms of documentary honesty rather than artistic attractiveness, which cannot be clearly separated from the attractiveness of its individual components.

*You Have Seen Their Faces* deals primarily with the lives of the poorest Southerners, those making a living by growing cotton as sharecroppers. The idea is to juxtapose the historical and mythical dimensions of the South. On the one hand, the authors meticulously document the faces of their subjects, quote the stories they collected during their travels, and describe the social ties and economic problems in the region. On the other hand, they engage with the myth of the "Southern Extremity of America, the Empire of the Sun, the Cotton

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 70.

States," in which a particular spot on a map, constituting (like any other location) a cluster of diverse phenomena and situations, is treated exclusively as "the Deep South, Down South; it is The South."<sup>47</sup> Instead of making a clear division between these two levels, the authors play one against the other, thus building tensions that serve to illustrate a certain truth.

It is apparent that they also regard the South as a "worn-out agricultural empire," (p. 2) a region as real as it is symbolic. They behave not unlike anthropologists in distant lands, simultaneously fascinated by the curious nature of the natives and fully aware of their own roles and perspectives. In the very introduction to the book, Caldwell attempts a kind of critique of the colonial mindset manifested in the views of the South held by most Americans:

This is the place where anybody may come without an invitation and, before the day is over, be made to feel like one of the home-folks. Scientists with microscopes and theologians with Bibles come to the South to tell it what is wrong with it, and stay to buy a home and raise a family. [...] Mark against the South its failure to preserve its own culture and its refusal to accept the culture of the East and West. Mark against it the refusal to assimilate the blood of an alien race of another color or to tolerate its presence. Mark against it most of, if not all, the ills of a retarded and thwarted civilization. (p. 1)

These words are enough to reveal a certain ambivalent feature that is typical of Caldwell's writing, though no doubt remains as to his staunch views. Nevertheless, in his prose he mixes in equal measure his own criticism of Southerners (racism) with descriptions of the categories by which visitors from outside the region attempt to judge it. This minor vacillation in an otherwise expressive, and at times somewhat excessively agitational, text serves as a safety valve of sorts, a background that softens the focus a bit and prevents the main figures from appearing too sharp.

A similar point may be made regarding Bourke-White and Caldwell's treatment of the photo-text montage. It cannot be said that their book espouses one single method of combining photographs and text. The use of text, for instance, follows at least two different rules. On the one hand, the book presents a rather concise analysis, organized into chapters, of the economic, racial and political circumstances surrounding the crisis, and its effects on the daily lives and living conditions of the sharecroppers. On the other hand,

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47 Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White, *You have seen their faces* (Athens, London: Brown Thrasher Books, 1995), 1. Subsequent references will be provided in parenthesis.

the captions under Bourke-White's pictures, which often imitate the speech of those depicted in the images, form a fictitious internal monologue. Furthermore, an additional level of discourse, namely that of the actual quotes from stories collected by Caldwell during his travels throughout the South, accompanies his elaborate narrative, with which it is often juxtaposed and for which it sometimes serves as a painful illustration.

The prosopopoeia of sorts introduced by the authors in the captions accompanying the images, in lieu of a traditional journalistic format, demonstrate that their goal is not to feign objectivity. On the contrary: it is their intention to break with the anonymity of documentary photography by resorting to extreme personification. They simultaneously undermine any illusions of authenticity with regard to the statements made by the people depicted in the images: "The legends under the pictures are intended to express the authors' own conceptions of the sentiments of the individuals portrayed; they do not pretend to reproduce the actual sentiments of these persons" (p. X). Yet, if these words are in fact fictitious, it remains unclear whether we can believe the rest of the information supplied with the photographs, particularly the locations in which they were taken. Perhaps this is more of a reflection of the authors' fantasies about particular Southern states than of the actual conditions in the region. But what matters more than the authenticity of the captions and their correspondence to what is actually portrayed in the photographs is perhaps their general effect, which Hunter described thus: "[...] the images invite language. Furthermore, the style of the invited language corresponds with what is depicted."<sup>48</sup>

Bourke-White and Caldwell appear to follow the recommendations of Walter Benjamin and other interwar left-wing theoreticians of photography, such as those associated with the magazine *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf*, who encouraged photographers to caption their images with a legend, thereby adding context and avoiding obviousness. In his 1934 essay *The Author as Producer*, Benjamin wrote that the production apparatus, the context in which a photograph functions, must be thoroughly overhauled, which, above all else, involves

bringing down one of the barriers, surmounting one of the contradictions which inhibit the productive capacity of the intelligentsia. What we must demand from the photographer is the ability to put such a caption beneath his picture as will rescue it from the ravages of modishness and confer upon it a revolutionary use value. And we shall lend greater emphasis to this demand if we, as writers, start taking photographs

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48 Hunter, *Image and Word*, 73.

ourselves. Here again, therefore, technical progress is, for the author as producer, the basis of his political progress.<sup>49</sup>

Yet the authors of *You Have Seen Their Faces* seem unsatisfied with merely adding captions to the images, as the combination of photographs with the fictitious recollections of their subjects may readmit, through a back door, the impression of naturalness and fluidity that the legend, in Benjamin's view, would counteract. While Bourke-White did write a short epilogue for the book, she discusses in it mainly the technical aspects of her work, listing for instance the various lenses she used. She does not attempt to become a writer, just as Caldwell does not try his hand at photography, against the advice of Walter Benjamin – unless, that is, we count the terse descriptions intended to reveal, in a brief flash, some important aspect of the photographed scene. The natural quality of the photo-textual pairs is instead limited by Caldwell's main text – an extensive and cohesive study which, in contrast to the attractive photos and caption in the remaining parts of the book, demands attentive and careful reading.

The information and arguments thus provided require the reader to look at the caption and photo pairs in a different light. It is this double reading in the form of a single book that ostensibly enables us to follow the effects produced through quick editing while remembering the critical dimension of the whole project and assuming a serious, rational attitude toward its creators. On the other hand, the cohesive text itself is also made more concrete by its proximity to the photo-textual montage. Caldwell's text addresses three main aspects of the problems experienced by the inhabitants of the rural South. First, he states that their material and spiritual poverty was a result of changes in the economic system, as a result of which the entire burden was shifted onto the backs of the sharecroppers, while all the actual profits remained in the pockets of the landowners who cruelly leveraged their advantage over the farmers and relentlessly exploited their labor. In result, the sharecroppers worked on land they didn't own for humiliating wages and became entirely dependent on the landowners, while the lack of other options and the constant undervaluing of their work compelled them to be obedient even in times of hunger and extreme poverty. The sharecropping system developed in the South in the 1930s was "ruinous because the system itself is not a collective venture but one of personal profit" (p. 46). Furthermore, these profits were available to a select few whose enrichment came at the cost of the destruction

49 Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1998), 95. For a similar argument discussed in circles associated with *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf*, see Lugon, *Le style documentaire*, 133–134.

of entire social groups, who were deprived of the basic means of human existence.

The second important issue that emerges from Caldwell's analysis is that of the economic origins of the racism that was rampant in the South and with which the region was invariably associated by the rest of American society. In *You Have Seen Their Faces*, hostility toward Blacks is seen as a consequence and a symptom of a broad range of socio-political tensions, which of course does not erase the moral responsibility of white farmers for the numerous acts of violence and persecution perpetrated by them against their fellow citizens. Caldwell describes the reasoning of a typical farmer in order to demonstrate the mechanism by which racial hatred is born:

Somewhere in the span of life he became frustrated. He felt defeated. He felt the despair and dejection that comes with defeat. He was made aware of the limitation of life imposed upon those unfortunate enough to be made slaves of sharecropping. Out of his predicament grew desperation, out of desperation grew resentment. His bitterness was a taste his tongue would always know. In a land that has long been glorified in the supremacy of the white race, he directed his resentment against the black man. His normal instincts became perverted. He became wasteful and careless. He became bestial. He released his pent-up emotions by lynching the black man in order to witness the mental and physical suffering of another human being. (p. 19)

The economic frustration of white farmers is buttressed on one side by the age-old traditions of white prejudice, and on the other by the fact that under the exploitative system that white farmers were also subject to, Blacks occupied the lowest tier and were literally reduced to the status of slaves. Their extreme humiliation leads white farmers to feel "that Negro tenant farmers do not need anything more than a bare living" (p. 44).

Caldwell attributes a similar function – that of the symptom – to religion. For the Southern farmer

religion serve[s] as a release and escape. The sermons that are preached to him fulfill his desire for a vision of a different life. Once a week he can hear the minister promise him a new life in another world. It gives him something to look forward to during the other six days of hard labor when he and his family do not have enough to eat. (p. 39)

The futile repetition of the cycle of hard work and religious comfort creates a tension in the sharecroppers that can only be relieved in a spectacular

fashion. Thus Caldwell, like Bourke-White in some of her pictures, portrays religion in its theatrical dimension, drawing comparisons to burlesque and hysteria:

The failure of the Church to preach its own convictions in the sharecropper country has resulted in its becoming a burlesque of religion. For this reason it is not difficult to understand why many of its houses are now places where once a week men and women go to elevate themselves into a state of religious ecstasy that enables them to forget their troubles. Men and women who writhe on the floor, shout until they have no voices left, go through various forms of hysterical behavior, do not do so merely because they believe they are Christians. They intoxicate themselves with a primitive form of religious frenzy that has its closest counterpart in alcoholic drunkenness. (p. 40)

These descriptions correspond not only with photographs depicting the religious ecstasy of a congregation, but also with pictures in which Bourke-White portrays a preacher intoxicated by his own voice and gesturing like an epileptic or a hysterical woman at Salpêtrière hospital. The captions beneath the pictures read: "Hurry, folks, hurry! Getting religion is like putting money in the bank" and "We've got a first-class God." (p. 34) By accompanying Caldwell's critical analysis with pictures whose legends suggest that the religious ecstasy is also equivalent to the excitement of commercial trade (the captions clearly indicate that the slogans are advertisements), the authors allow us to treat the word "symptom" as an entirely serious symbol containing, in a condensed form, conflicting elements of experience, if only because, as Freud and others argued, it helps one suppress a desire while simultaneously evoking it.<sup>50</sup>

Freud attempted to define the nature of a hysterical attack thusly: "When one carries out the psycho-analysis of a hysterical woman patient whose complaint is manifested in attacks, one soon becomes convinced that these attacks are nothing else but phantasies translated into the motor sphere, projected on to motility and portrayed in pantomime."<sup>51</sup> These hysterical movements and the intensification of bodily gestures that attempt to express something that cannot be expressed would serve as a fitting description of

50 Sigmund Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, trans. Alix Strachey (New York: Norton, 1977).

51 Sigmund Freud, "Some General Remarks on Hysterical Attacks," trans. Alix Strachey, in Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. IX (1906-1908) (London: Vintage, 2001), 229.

the essence of Bourke-White and Caldwell's project, both in its socio-political or ethical dimension as well as the formal. Affects projected onto motility would correspond not only to specific, poignant poses by their subjects, but also to the radiation of photography and text, which are trying to produced a shared moment of intensity.

"The women waving hymn books were rushing up and down the floor in such a state of hysteria that several times I was nearly knocked over and the camera almost jarred out of my hands."<sup>52</sup> Bourke-White thus describes her encounter with the intensity of the symptom embodied by religious women in the South. These words aptly convey her approach to the portrayed phenomenon. She certainly does not behave like a disinterested researcher documenting, for the benefit of science, the symptoms of a disease while hiding her own dominance behind a shield of seriousness and the objectivity of academic processes.<sup>53</sup> After all, she holds in her hand a small camera that protects her from nothing, though it may enable her to capture the moment of intensity in its culmination. It is then that we discover the fact that the subjects of the book nevertheless "are still people, they are human beings" (p. 48), and the task of the authors is to extract a trace of that humanity, even if it is found in the bottom of a pit of squalor, mired in recurring symptoms of helplessness and escapism.

Bourke-White describes her work as a veritable hunt for moments in which suddenly, in a single gesture or nod, a spark of human dignity appears in her subjects and she will be ready to capture that moment immediately by firing her flash:

Flash bulbs provide the best means I know, under poor light conditions, of letting your subject talk away until just that expression which you wish to capture crosses his face. Sometimes I would set up the camera in a corner of the room, sit some distance away from it with a remote control in my hand, and watch our people while Mr. Caldwell talked with them. It might be an hour before their faces or gestures gave us what we were trying to express, but the instant it occurred the scene was imprisoned on a sheet of film before they knew what had happened.<sup>54</sup>

52 Margaret Bourke-White, "Notes on photographs," in Caldwell, Bourke-White *You Have Seen Their Faces*, 53.

53 This approach was, to a certain extent, shared by Charcot and his collaborators, who "documented" episodes of hysteria suffered by women at Salpêtrière hospital. See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention de l'hystérie: Charcot et l'iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (Paris: Macula, 1982), 9–82.

54 Bourke-White, "Notes on Photographs," 51.

A successful hunt sometimes resembles a kind of ruse used to steal the likeness of those whom one photographs. Bourke-White frankly admits that she owes most of her success in this field to the fact that the farmers in the South had never been photographed before and thus did not know how to challenge the artists about what they were doing.<sup>55</sup> The search for a spark of humanity is certainly not without a bit of violence on the part of the authors, but its source is not, in this case, their desire to objectively record the symptoms of a social illness, but rather to capture them in their own, unique dynamic.

The key to *You Have Seen Their Faces*, however, appears to be the search – in the photo-textual pairings and their relationship to the background provided by Caldwell's cohesive analysis – for certain types of moments of intensification that themselves operate similarly to the symptoms, mainly because they contain at once several dimensions of the situations captured in the brief moment when the shutter is released and the flash fired, as well as several temporal systems, thus making the opposition between the culmination of the decisive moment (Cartier-Bresson) and the retrospection of the fruitful moment (Lessing) parts of the same anachronistic moment. Moreover, it is a search, in the hysterical discharges of the frustrated bodies, for symptoms of an era incapable of resolving its own contradictions and diffusing social tensions. Furthermore, it is an attempt to capture – in that same fruitful moment of expression – the instant in which new subjects step into the photographic community which Ariella Azoulay wrote about. Finally, Bourke-White and Caldwell appear to be forcing us to discern something more in these pictures and in the helpless gestures they portray – namely, “spasmodic signs of an agricultural revolution” (p. 43), foreshadowing and simultaneously blocking the possibility of taking “collective action against the institution of sharecropping.” (p. 7) This overlapping of trends and time, the singularity of each gesture and the generality of its symptomatic reference can all happen precisely thanks to the invention of a specific temporal and spatial format for the coexistence of the image and text, in which not only do language and the photograph demand each other's presence, but so do disappointment and hope, criticism and empathy, the immediacy of a glance and the slowness of understanding incessantly refer to each other.

*Translation: Arthur Barys*

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 53.

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Adrianna Alksnin

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## Augustine: Charcot's Bunny

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I would like to return once again to the question of hysteria. An increasing number of works dedicated to figures of famous hysterical women, reception of hysteria in art, and numerous medical revisions, as well as psychoanalytical theories written in the spirit of feminism prove that there is an unrelenting interest in the Great Malingerer of the 19th Century.<sup>1</sup> Interest displayed by

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- 1 Bibliography on the subject of hysteria understood as a cultural figure of madness is currently extremely rich. I list only the most important titles, omitting works by Freud and other early theoreticians, because I would like to point out as many secondary analyses as possible: Lisa Appignanesi and John Forrester *Kobiety Freuda*, trans. Elżbieta Ablamowicz, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Santorski & Co, 1998) (Eng. ed.: *Freud's Women*, 1992.); Tomasz Majewski, "Produkcja wizualna i kryzys przedstawienia: ikonografia hysterii Charcota," *Przegląd Humanistyczny* [Humanities Review] 1 (2006): 86-99; Michał Paweł Markowski, "Krasiński: na scenie hysterii" in *Życie na miarę literatury*, (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Homini, 2009), 143-162; Elaine Showalter, "Przedstawiając Ofelię: kobiety, szaleństwo i zadania krytyki feministycznej," ["Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness and Tasks of Feminist Critique"], *Teksty Drugie*, 4 (1997), 188-205; Etienne Trillat, *Historia hysterii* [History of Hysteria], trans. Zofia Podgórska-Klawe, Elżbieta Jamrozik, Ossolineum, (Wrocław: 1993) (French edition: 1986); Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention de l'hysterie*, (Paris: Macula, 1982) (English edition: 2003); Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and*

anthropologists of literature and cultural studies scientists is only one of many signs of that phenomenon. What is more, the phenomenon itself is to a certain degree actually understandable. One could be surprised by sheer multiplication of representations of hysterical women in works of popular culture within just the last decade. We could mention, among others, two feature films about the famous female patient Augustine in the Parisian clinic at Salpêtrière. Jean Claude-Monode and Jean-Christophe Valtat directed the first feature film in 2003, and Alice Winocour directed the second in 2012. David Cronenberg's *A Dangerous Method* (2012) told a story of romance between Carl Gustav Jung and one of his patients, Sabina Spielrein, while Tanya Wexler's comedy *Hysteria* (2011) presents the phenomenon as a result of men's lack of skills in the bedroom. These examples thematize hysteria and the figure of the hysterical woman in accordance with the repertoire of historical facts. They refer to real people, places and events, and the biographies of particular individuals serve as inspiration.<sup>2</sup> The list of texts referencing fictional hysterical women would be much longer. How should we explain this unending presence of hysteria in texts of contemporary culture, or this unremitting interest in the different arts when it comes to spasms, or attacks which recall epilepsy? An answer to that question is, of course, extremely complex, and would require long and meticulous study. In this article I would like to present an answer provided by the surrealists who were fascinated by photographs from a particular collection. It was supposed to be an element of medical documentation, but became a document of the desiring gaze which, fearing the object of its desires, mustered its courage to look at it only through photographs. In other words, I would like to trace a connection between *Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière* produced under the auspices of Jean-Martin Charcot, the director of the clinic at that time, and a performative interpretation of the book produced by André Breton, who saw in the pictures of Augustine what Charcot was

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*the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, (London: Yale University Press, 1984); Dianne Hunter, "Hysteria, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism: the Case of Anna O," *Feminist Studies*, 9 (3) (1983): 465-486; Jean-Marie Rabaté "Loving Freud Madly: Surrealism between Hysterical and Paranoid Modernism," *Journal of Modern Literature*, 25 (3/4) (2002): 58-74; Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady. Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*, (London: Penguin Books, 1987); Elaine Showalter, *Hystories. Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture*, (London: Columbia University Press, 1998); Thomas S. Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness. Foundations of a theory of personal conduct*, (New York: 1974); Sander L. Gilman, et al., *Hysteria beyond Freud*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1993); Justin Vicari, *Mad Muses and the Early Surrealists*, (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2012).

- 2 For obvious reasons of convenience, I omit here the question of interpretative, quasi-fictional character of historical, biographical, or autobiographical narrations.

afraid to see. What is more, it will be shown that the field of medicine and art theory have a lot more in common than one might assume.

### Hysteria: Few Historical Remarks

The place of hysteria in the sphere of medical research is undeniable, although until the end of the 19th century, it was likened to other organic afflictions, than as one stemming from one's psyche. It was typically regarded as an exclusively female illness, while the term "hypochondria" remained reserved for men's equivalents, or – as it was also called in the 19th century – post-traumatic neurosis.<sup>3</sup> Regardless, trouble with respiration, paralysis, sensory issues, and convulsions intrigued medical and scientific communities from the very beginning.

According to Hippocrates, and the entire ancient tradition following his line of reasoning, hysteria was an affliction tied to movements of a dried uterus around a woman's body in order to moisten itself, while attacking neighboring organs, or even the brain. That is where we have the term "uterus dyspnea." What is interesting is that uterus was perceived as an autonomous organ living in a woman's body, possessing a vital force and an ability to move around freely, as well as to influence her behavior. It did not remain without influence on the perception of women by men who possessed logos:

A woman differs from a man in that she breeds an animal within her, which does not possess a soul. Close proximity to animality is caused also by the fact that a woman is not a man's equal. In contrast to man, she is not God's creation; she is merely a result of metempsychosis, a transformation of the most vile kind of man into the female species.<sup>4</sup>

The uterus was thought to be the reason behind woman's maternal urge to produce progeny; an instinct which was independent from her free will. As a remedy for the above-mentioned dyspnea, regular and frequent intercourse was recommended, among other solutions. That is how the connection between the illness that affected mostly widows and women in puberty, and the sphere of erotic experiences was established early on in the course of interest in hysteria.

The uterus theory continued to describe, in one way or another, the phenomenon of hysteria until its final disappearance from the medical diagnostic

3 In this subchapter, I will be referring primarily to *Historia hysterii* [*History of Hysteria*], trans. Zofia Podgórska-Klawe and Elżbieta Jamrozik (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1993).

4 Trillat, *Historia hysterii*, 14–15.

map in the second half of the 20th century. Even if hysteria were not to be connected directly to some form of illness of the reproductive organs (uterus contractions, ovarian tumors, fermentation of female sperm, animal spirit poisoning, vapors, etc.), it would remain perceived as a strictly female illness. Even though there were those who wanted to make hysteria gender-neutral, researchers who proclaimed such ideas were in the minority. It was more popular to label male patients as “hypochondriacs” while women suffered from hysteria. End of discussion.

At the end of the 17th century, after the era of bloody witch-hunts, when potential patients were taken care of not by a doctor, but by an inquisitor, hysterical women, along with their complex plethora of physical symptoms, again were placed under the protection of the medical community, which established new etiologies of hysterical symptoms. Among them, there would be theories of vapors (poisonous gases excreted by organs, like the uterus), which influence brain functions, and which were supposed to move around the body via arteries, or as it was thought later – nerve fibers. Alternatively, they could be trapped by the uterus and cause contractions. Correlating hysteria with brain dysfunctions did not automatically place it in the context of madness, but once again reduced establishing symptoms based on the patient’s sex. Trillat stated: “Hysteria is separated from sex to a point where it stops being assigned exclusively to women. Men could be hysterical too, and descriptions of cases of male hysteria began to appear slowly.”<sup>5</sup> One should note, however, that those cases have been tied to men with homosexual tendencies, generally described as feminine, which in turn allowed them to be treated more as hysterical women than men.

Thomas Sydenham was the first one to turn everybody’s attention to analogies between hysteria and simulation. He observed that hysteria does not produce its own symptoms, but rather borrows them from a variety of different illnesses, often imitating them. He also questioned the influence of the uterus on the creation of the symptoms, ascribing them to vapors and the irregular distribution of animal ghosts in one’s body which was caused by blood. The discovery of the circulatory system negated those theories and helped transfer the vapor theory onto the sphere of morals:

Vapors attack especially those who are idle, who do not tire themselves with manual labor, but think a lot and dream [...]. Many people assume that this illness attacks the mind, rather than the body, and that the evil lies in imagination. Indeed, we have to admit that the primary reason is boredom and wild passion, which through the disturbance of mental

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5 Ibid., 52.

powers, forces the body to participate: it could be the imagination, or reality, but the afflicted body suffers in a real manner.<sup>6</sup>

The 19th century, due to the socio-cultural evolution in the perception of women, as well as scientific progress, changed the perception of hysteria as well. On the one hand, medical descriptions found their inspiration in literature, which was increasingly interested in the nature of femininity, and fell into the trap of mythologizing it. On the other hand, however, hysteria underwent increasingly more scrupulous medical descriptions supported by empirical research. And so, propagators of the uterus theory (Villermay, Pinel) fell for the romantic image of a female, and copied her literary representation, while representatives of neurological theories were more inclined towards precise and concise formulations. What is more, ascribing hysterical symptoms to the female sex came to be questioned once again. The simulative character of hysteria returned in Paul Briquet's reflections. He assumed that the attacks were a reproduction of violent passions, which must have been experienced by the patient earlier, and under the influence of external stimulants. According to Briquet, it constituted a proof of the spiritual richness of women, and their extraordinary sensitivity which made them so vulnerable and susceptible to neurosis. He looked for sources in cases of neuroses in the cerebrum. Treating hysteria as a nervous illness allowed for including it into the family of mental illnesses: "By the capital distinction between sensibility and sensation, they enter into that domain of unreason which we have seen was characterized by the essential moment of error and dream, that is, of blindness. As long as vapors were convulsions or strange sympathetic communications through the body, even when they led to fainting and loss of consciousness, they were not madness. But once the mind becomes blind through the very excess of sensibility—then madness appears."<sup>7</sup>

### Charcot and Salpêtrière

The development of clinical neurology and medical practices in hospitals in the context of research on hysteria reached its apex in the work of doctor Charcot, conducted on the patients at Salpêtrière Hospital. Jean-Martin Charcot, born in Paris in 1825, who was talented in the visual arts, but also a very diligent and inquisitive student, began studies at the medical school when he was 19 years old. Already in 1856, he became a hospital doctor, and four

6 "Vapeurs," *Encyclopédie de Diderot et d'Alembert* (1722-1761), 65.

7 Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard, (New York: Vintage Books, 1988): 157-158.

years later he was a professor's assistant. He was also the private doctor of the French minister of finance, as well as many other prominent figures of Paris of that time. He specialized in treating many different illnesses, including multiple sclerosis, joint debilitation, rheumatism, and syphilis. He was also a founder of the neurology clinic for women at Salpêtrière. Charcot's encounter with hysterical women was a pure coincidence. One of the hospital's buildings – luck would have it to be a psychiatric and epileptic ward – desperately needed renovation due to its poor condition. As a result, patients had been moved to other buildings, and an opportunity arose to separate the epileptic patients from the rest as well. A new unit was formed – a Common Epilepsy Ward, with Charcot as its head. Ettiene Trillat cites one of the accounts from that transition:

Many women, some of whom had arrived at Salpêtrière years before, were placed there. They experienced frequent attacks, because they felt such repulsion to bromine that they preferred to suffer from their illness than to accept any form of treatment. Next to them, directly in contact, in the same bedrooms and dining rooms, in the same backyards, a number of young girls suffering from hysteria were placed. Their families, tired of those attacks and their peculiarities, committed them to Salpêtrière. Results of that mutual existence could not be ignored. Of course, the attacks of the epileptic patients remained unchanged; however patients with hysteria exhibited a shift in their patterns. Young, hysterical women, living among epileptic patients, were forced to hold them whenever they collapsed, and take care of them when sickness-struck. The impact of those experiences was so strong that – taking into consideration the mimetic tendencies of their neurosis – their attacks began to faithfully imitate attacks of pure epilepsy.<sup>8</sup>

It should not come as a surprise that Charcot named the affliction “hysterio-epilepsy.” These two groups of patients did not have general injuries and convulsion attacks in common. Hysterical patients, however, had, what Charcot diagnosed as an ovarian hyperesthesia – a pain in the area of the ovaries, which disappeared under applied pressure. It is worth remembering that by the 1870s, the uterus hysteria theory had been compromised, and Charcot's return to those concepts was a noticeable feat. Even though it was never expressed directly, hysteria once again entered into the realm of female sexuality.

8 Pierre Marie, “Discours à l'occasion du centenaire de Charcot,” *Revue Neurologique*, 1 (6) (1925): 731-745, after: Trillat, *Historia hysterii* [*History of Hysteria*], 115.

During those years, Charcot began his work of classifying the symptoms, which would be put in order and systematized later as a part of the "Great Attacks;" these attacks, often artificially invoked by hypnosis, or stimulated by amyl nitrate,<sup>9</sup> were presented in the hospital auditorium during the famous Tuesday presentations, which were often attended, apart from doctors, by Parisian elites, as well as random viewers:

A classic hysteria attack, devised in that manner, would develop through four stages in a clear, syntagmatic order: 1) during an epileptoid phase the body imitates, or "reproduces" a standard epileptic attack; 2) during the clown-like muscle contortions, other illogical movements occur; 3) during the "plastic pose" phase, also described as *attitudes passionelles* (passionate poses), the body assumes an expressive form, suggesting affection and physical desire, which concludes in 4) a painful phase of delirium, during which the hysterical patient "begins to speak again," which is when doctors attempt to stop the attack with all means available. This classification (more on this later), visualized in a series of photographs and synoptic, sketched tables, refers, as a figurative discourse, directly back to the artistic conventions of the 19th century: theater, narrative academic painting, and romantic themes.<sup>10</sup>

Exactly. And this was visualized in the form of photographs. When in 1875 Charcot became the director of the Salpêtrière hospital, he ordered for the arrangement of a photographic laboratory, as well as atelier, and a museum of plaster castings. Paul Regnard and Albert Londé became the photographers working with Charcot over the course of the following years. Their works have been published in albums entitled *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*, which were released in the following order: vol. I (1875), vol. II (1876-77), vol. III (1878), and vol. IV (1879-80).

Photographs from these volumes constitute the main subject of this essay, or more specifically: photographs of a particular model – Augustine – which appear in them the most often. She was admitted to Charcot's clinic in October of 1875, at the age of 15.

In figurative and taxonomic productions of Salpêtrière Hospital, Augustine was a "masterpiece." Charcot referred to her as a "very regular, and

9 Today known as "poppers" and used as an intoxicant, or a stimulating agent during sexual intercourse.

10 Tomasz Majewski, "Produkcja wizualna i kryzys przedstawienia. Ikonoграфия hysterii Charcota," *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, 1 (2006): 86-87.

classic case,” while Richter would go a step farther, claiming that she is “the one among our patients, whose plastic poses and *attitudes passionnelles* have the most regularity and plastic expression.” It was mostly Augustine’s face and body, which illustrate and summarize the hysterical type in Richter’s great comparative table.<sup>11</sup>

Soon after being admitted, Augustine, due to paralysis on the right side of her body, and after taking her first picture which portrayed her “normal state,” was diagnosed as a typical case of a hysteric; not because she displayed clear and unquestionable symptoms, but because “everything about her, in the end, pointed to future hysteria. The care with which she put on her make up [*sa toilette*]; the way she did her hair, the ribbons she loved putting in it. That desire to beautify oneself was so strong that during a hysterical attack, if there occurred a momentary break, she would spend the time pinning a ribbon to her dress; she was amused [*ceci la distrait*] by that, and it gave her pleasure [...]”<sup>12</sup> A forecast became a verdict for Augustine. Ulrich Baer recalls the above-quoted fragment to point to a dialectic aspect of that situation. On the one hand, Augustine is presented as a vain seducer, who hopes to earn men’s interest and protection through her attacks. On the other hand, however, Charcot himself is shown there as the one who wishes to be seduced by the hysterical performance. Although the care for details of her looks suggested strongly that the entire spectacle was meticulously directed and performed, Augustine was not officially recognized as a malingerer. The age of the patient made the entire affair even more exciting. It was duly noted that, even though she did not experience her first menstruation, physically she resembled a fully developed woman. *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* became an album, which recorded the physical maturation of Augustine, both in the physiological, as well as erotic sense. The regularity of her attacks was supposed to match the regularity of her cycle, which the careful doctors managed to attune perfectly.<sup>13</sup> What is important, however, is that Charcot – respectful of scientific discourse – attempted to remove from the narrative any references to sexuality, which could have emerged from photographs, and create medical documentation that was supposed to legitimate his thesis and recognize hysteria as an illness guided by its own rules, with its clinical

11 Ibid., 92.

12 *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*, 2, 167-168; after Ulrich Baer, “Fotografia i histeria: ku poetyce flesza” [“Photography and Hysteria: Towards Poetics of the Flash”], trans. Katarzyna Bojarska, *Teksty Drugie* [Second Texts], 4 (2013): 167.

13 See George Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria. Charcot and the Photographic Iconographie of the Salpêtrière*, trans. Alisa Hartz (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003), 117.

image as well as symptoms. In the case of hysteria – a condition, or sickness of a mimetic character, posing in for almost every other known condition – it was impossible up to that point. Photography was supposed to constitute an unmediated proof, and confirm the truth about the sickness. However, as Lynda Nead observed,<sup>14</sup> that confirmation of the scientific character of the work could be interpreted as a requirement of moral censorship. *Madame Bovary's* (1857) case could be recalled here – a work that got Gustav Flaubert accused of propagating demoralizing and obscene content. Even though, in the end, the accusations were revoked, and the novel was published due to its high artistic value, its example shows clearly how embarrassing and iconoclastic the theme of physical love, in particular outside of wedlock, was at that time. Even sociological publications, which referred to the problem of prostitution, brought about many controversies and backlash from parts of society:

And in this case as well, one had to persistently watch the boundary between the scientific and moral undertaking, and frivolous text, insinuation, or excitation. Requirements of objectivity and seriousness were supposed to be met by statistical charts and tables abundantly placed within the text, which also differentiated between a sociological study of immortality from immoral behavior itself. These texts, through an unending repetition of assurances of their social usefulness, as well as the calm stature of their authors, reminded readers of another, more frivolous reaction to presented materials.<sup>15</sup>

The postulate of the neutral scientific approach in speaking about matters concerning sex was a result of West European tendencies towards developing tools of discipline, including those concerned with sexuality. According to Michel Foucault,<sup>16</sup> contrary to some societies which have developed *artem eroticam* (Indian Kamasutra, for example), the culture of the West was going in a direction which brought the development of *scientiae sexualis*. Sexual behaviors were placed in two registers of knowledge: the biology of reproduction or the medicine of sex. Subduing the discourse on sexuality to the primacy of knowledge – a purified, neutral and (seemingly) objective point of view – was in reality a tactic of power, which was

14 Lynda Nead, *Akt kobiecy: sztuka, obscena i seksualność* [*The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*], trans. Ewa Franus (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Rebis, 1998).

15 *Ibid.*, 157.

16 Michel Foucault, *Historia seksualności* [*The History of Sexuality*], trans. Bogdan Banasiak, Tadeusz Komendant and Krzysztof Matuszewski (Gdańsk: słowo/ obraz terytoria, 2010).

supposed to subordinate sexual behaviors to norms useful from the perspective of social economy.

At least until the times of Freud, discourse on the subject of sex – discourse of scientists and theoreticians – was supposed to hide its actual questions. In all kinds of statements, scrupulous provisions, and detailed analyses, one could spot an attempt to avoid the unbearable, too dangerous, truth about sex. The very fact that there was an attempt to talk about it from a purified, and neutral point of view of science is telling. And the science itself was created as a result of unspoken facts, and the unwillingness, or lack of ability to speak about sex as such; it reached, primarily, for aberration, perversion, peculiar exceptions, pathological lackings, and clinical exaggerations. It was also a science fundamentally subordinated to imperatives of morality, the divisions of which it repeated in the form of medical norms.<sup>17</sup>

It should not be surprising that in such a context Charcot scrupulously attempted to hide any direct references to the sexual life of his patients. The fact of sexual abuse that Augustine experienced from her stepfather, as a young girl, and the rape she was a victim of as a teenager, which she seemed to recreate in her attacks of hysteria, were barely mentioned in her medical documentation. It was treated like an unimportant detail, and outside of that one remark it never resurfaces again, nor is it connected to any of Augustine's syndromes.<sup>18</sup> It does not escape Didi-Huberman, who calls her ironically a *p r i m a d o n n a* of Charcot's theater, that she holds the record for most attacks in a single day:

Augustine went through the ordeal of this theatrical distress on the day when, from among the spectators of the clinical lecture who had come to watch her reiteration and pantomime of an antiquated but always present rape, she recognized the rapist in person, who had come to eye something he might very well have considered, for a moment, to be his "own work." Augustine was utterly terrified, and had one hundred and fifty four attacks in a single day.<sup>19</sup>

That double game played between the desire for knowledge and fear of what it entails is partially reflected in the photographs themselves. On the one hand,

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17 Ibid., 43.

18 Ibid., 45; See also Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*.

19 Ibid., 256.

they constitute, according to Didi-Huberman, a testimony of desire for the "extreme visibility of this event of pain, the all too evident pain of hysteria,"<sup>20</sup> naked in its truth, which was supposed to reveal itself in a photograph. On the other hand, the very process of photographing is entangled in a relationship of power, which forbids the postulated truth, keeps hiding it, covers it up, because the truth hurts the accepted sense of morality.

### Hysteria on Canvas and in Photographs

Both the doctor and the photographer try to aestheticize the entire hysterical spectacle according to the 19th-century conventions of representing the female body in the visual arts. Some of the photographs, if we did not know the context of their origin, would be most likely placed somewhere between artistic and pin-up photography, that is if we were to keep to the classifications of female nudes proposed by Lynda Nead. She stated that the "female nude, literally, is a matter contained in form, because it simultaneously surrounds the female body, enclosed in shapes, and by that virtue, also in frames of artistic convention."<sup>21</sup> The most popular model for representations of female madness was, without a doubt, Shakespeare's Ophelia:

Tracing the iconography of Ophelia in English and French painting, photography, psychiatry, and literature, as well as in theatrical production, I will be showing first of all the representational bonds between female insanity and female sexuality. Secondly, I want to demonstrate the two-way transaction between psychiatric theory and cultural representation. As one medical historian has observed, we could provide a manual of female insanity by chronicling the illustrations of Ophelia; this is so because the illustrations of Ophelia have played a major role in the theoretical construction of female insanity.<sup>22</sup>

Have hysterical female patients been inspired in their gestures by theatrical productions and representations found in paintings, or was the process reversed – artists were first fascinated by hysterical attacks, which they then included in their art? It is difficult to answer such a question. Most likely,

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>21</sup> Nead, *Akt kobiecy*, 13.

<sup>22</sup> Elaine Showalter, "Przedstawiające Ofelię: kobiety, szaleństwo i zadania krytyki feministycznej" ["Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness and Tasks of Feminist Critique"], *Teksty Drukie*, 4 (1997): 192.

the mechanism of “hysterical stories”<sup>23</sup> was at work, as understood by Elaine Showalter, or maybe it was a mechanism of Baudrillard’s simulacrum – when the original disappears from the view, becomes impossible to identify, and all other copies continue to copy each other.

In the case of two paintings, however, there are no doubts. I am thinking about paintings painted slightly before the *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*. The first one, by André Brouilleta entitled *A Clinical Lesson with Doctor Charcot at the Salpêtrière*, shows a lecture hall, doctor Charcot, and a fainting Blanche Wittman – an English patient of the clinic, also known as the “Queen of Hysterical Patients.” The scene shows one of the Tuesday lectures, open to the public, which Charcot organized at the clinic. Blanche assumes a well-known pose, which can be found in photographs of monsieur Regnard. Her shoulders are naked, her shirt slips from under an undone corset, and the upper part of her dress is lowered. Looks of gathered men express scientific interest, some of them hastily sketch the scene. While few gazes reveal astonishment, there are ironic smirks, and doubtful smiles present as well. Few faces reveal traces of fascination, but it seems however, it has very little to do with the art of medicine. Brouillet captured the essence of Charcot’s lectures, as well as Regnard’s photography – of exposing a female body and its hysterical spasms to the judging and controlling gaze of men. The only difference being that in *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* that gaze is outside of the frame.

The second painting, entitled *Pinel at the Salpêtrière*, was authored by Tony Robert Fleury. The work refers to the famous undoing of the clinic’s chains, which had bound patients of the clinic up to that point. One can see a woman wearing a white, torn underskirt in the foreground; her corset is also loose, as if it constituted a symbol of madness, of “loose” morality. Her, seemingly random, body composition is supposed to reflect a pathological asymmetry of her posture. However, if one were to look closely at the placement of her feet, her bent knee, or the extended index finger of her left hand, and her bowed head – it would turn out that nothing about that composition is random. Venus could be presented in such a pose as well, or any other Greek goddess for that matter. Especially her slightly bent knees, and gently swaying body seem characteristic of representing female gestures in painting. Little farther in the background, there is another woman who seems to blend into the background at first sight. I am thinking about that figure on the ground, right behind the man undoing the chains which bound the figure in the foreground. From underneath her open shirt one can spot a naked breast, her body twisted, hands clutched, and her face reflecting erotic ecstasy. It is nothing else but a hysterical patient having an attack. Similar representations can be found outside of

23 Elaine Showalter, *Hystories. Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (London: Picador, 1997).

*Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*, as well as in 19th-century paintings. As examples, we can list *Ophelia* (1883) by Alexander Cabanel, *La jeune martyre* (1855) by Paul Delaroche, and *The Nightmare* (1781) and *Lady Macbeth* (1781-84) by Heinrich Füßli.

Connections between the clinic at Salpêtrière and history of art and literature are much broader still. As Tomasz Majewski aptly notices, "Knowledge of *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*, soon after its publication, moved beyond the world of medicine and spread normative ideas about physical symptoms of hysteria among the general public, and was often compared, during casual conversations, to *tableau vivants*, which were fashionable at that time, and seen as similar in its gesticulations to the conventions of historical painting"<sup>24</sup>. During the Tuesday lectures not only doctors, but people from the press and literary circles, as well as artists, attended these events. Emil Zola, Guy de Maupassant, Stéphane Mallarmé, August Rodin, Joris-Karl Huysmans, or Marcel Proust were mentioned to be among those present. Camille Lemonnier wrote a play in 1885, and gave it quite a telling title: *L'Hystérique*.<sup>25</sup>

One could search for other reasons for such "non-accidental similarities" in the artistic education system of the times, as well as in the common practices of academic painting. Lynda Nead recalls the following theory:

Marcia Pointon pointed out a connection between 19th-century medical examinations of the female body with artistic education. "Lecture halls," she writes, "were constructed in a similar fashion to the studio found in academies of fine arts, where models worked, and lectures on anatomy in front of art students were conducted just like it was practiced with students of medicine." Examining the female body from within and without, through medicine and art... took women into full custody. Defined by norms of health and sickness, the female body was subordinated to the rules and templates of what was considered appropriate.<sup>26</sup>

It should not come as a surprise that the "chief photographer" of Charcot's clinic, Paul Richer, was also a talented sculptor, as well as a professor of artistic anatomy at Paris' *École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts*. That would

24 Majewski, "Produkcja wizualna i kryzys przedstawienia," 89-90.

25 Olivier Walusinski, "Hysteria in fin de siècle French novels," in *Literary Medicine: Brain Disease and Doctors in Novels, Theater and Film*, ed. Julien Bogousslavsky, Sebastian Dieguez, (Karger, Basel: 2013), 35-43.

26 Nead, *Akt kobiecy*, 87.

explain, at least partially, the characteristic aestheticization of some of the representations of hysterical patients. It is worthwhile to notice that young, and potentially attractive, models underwent these aestheticizing processes. Photographs of older female patients, whose beauty had “degenerated” similarly to their morality, due to, for example, alcoholism, were not aestheticized, as if their ugliness were to be a lesson for everyone to follow the principles of morality. What is more, in albums spanning years from 1875 to 1880 there was not a single male portrait included in the publication. Until June of 1881, which was when an ambulatory clinic opened at Salpêtrière, men were not admitted to the hospital at all. First photographs of the hysterical male patients would appear in its 1888 edition.<sup>27</sup>

### Surrealism

The surrealist movement also received the phenomenon of hysteria with interest. Surrealists were fascinated by photographic representations of patients at Salpêtrière, most famous of which turned out to be the already mentioned Augustine. Agnieszka Taborska notes:

Charcot’s hysterical female patients combined everything that the male *ego* of *fin de siècle* dreamt about: untamed sensuality sacrificed at the altar of science, which was embodied by learned men wearing doctor’s smocks... That same appeal was found in those who were “mad” by surrealists fifty years later, proving once more how much they were bound to their Victorian predecessors.<sup>28</sup>

Surrealists would turn hysteria into a phenomenon received positively, the best example of which was the article by Louis Aragon and André Breton entitled “Le cinquantenaire de l’hystérie” (1878–1928) and published in *La Révolution surréaliste*, in which the authors observe similarities between madness and the surrealist method, recognizing hysteria as a poetic form of expression.

We, the surrealists, want to celebrate the fiftieth birthday of hysteria, the greatest poetic discovery of the end of the 19th century. We celebrate it at the moment when the dismemberment of the notion of hysteria seems to be irreversible. We love nothing as much as we do young hysterical women. Their perfect type is embodied by the lovely X.L. (Augustine),

27 Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria*, 80.

28 Agnieszka Taborska, *Spiskowcy wyobraźni. Surrealizm* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2007), 220–249.

who was admitted to Salpêtrière, under the care of doctor Charcot on 21st of October 1875, aged fifteen and a half. [...] Does Freud, who owes so much to doctor Charcot, recall the time when, according to the testimony of witnesses still alive today, the interns at Salpêtrière confused their professional duties with love preferences, when patients met them outside the hospital walls after dark, or welcomed them in their beds?<sup>29</sup>

Postulates recalled with the help of the quote above fit into a broader artistic concepts of Breton, both in terms of affirming madness and mentally disturbed imagination, which is compelled to question norms of social participation mentioned in surrealism's first manifesto from 1924, as well as in the concept of *convulsive beauty*, formulated in 1937. Madness (including hysteria) was an important point of reference in the surrealist program, mainly because of the contesting character of madness. Breton wrote about the mentally ill: "I am willing to admit that they are, to some degree, victims of their imagination, in that it induces them not to pay attention to certain rules – outside of which the species feels threatened – which we are all supposed to know and respect. But their profound indifference to the way in which we judge them, and even to the various punishments meted out to them, allows us to suppose that they derive a great deal of comfort and consolation from their imagination, that they enjoy their madness sufficiently to endure the thought that its validity does not extend beyond themselves."<sup>30</sup>

Breton's interest in psychiatric conditions is a direct result of his medical education. He began his medical education in the fall of 1913. Three years later he was practicing at the neuro-psychiatric ward, where he worked with front line war victims. One of his supervisors was Charcot's assistant. It was then that Breton took serious interest in psychiatry, and the psycho-analytical method. He was rumored to have tried it on the soldiers coming back from the front lines, although without too many positive results it would seem. A year later he became an assistant of yet another of the great theoreticians of hysteria – Józef Babiński.<sup>31</sup> It is not surprising then that questions of the psychiatric reality of madmen, dreams, free associations (psychic automatism), and the Unconscious occupy such a prominent place

29 Louis Aragon, and André Breton, "Pięćdziesięciolecie hysterii (1878-1928)" ["Hysteria's Fiftieth Anniversary (1878 – 1928)"], *Surrealizm. Teoria i praktyka literacka* [Surrealism. Theory and Literary Practice], trans. Adam Ważyk (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1973), 117.

30 André Breton, "Manifest surrealizmu" ["Surrealist Manifesto"], *Surrealizm*, 57. Source: [http://wikilivres.ca/wiki/Surrealist\\_Manifesto](http://wikilivres.ca/wiki/Surrealist_Manifesto)

31 Jean Michel Rabaté, "Loving Freud Madly: Surrealism Between Hysterical and Paranoid Modernism," *Journal of Modern Literature*, 25 (2002): 59.

in the surrealist concept of art. Breton always openly admitted that to be true as well.

So what exactly was surrealism supposed to be? Let us take a look at the definition:

**SURREALISM**, noun, Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express -- verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner -- the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by the thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.<sup>32</sup>

As we can see, it is not so much the artist's imagination that should be freed from aesthetic canons of representation, but rather his morality. It is the morality, which according to Breton, limits artistic expression. In "ruthless non-conformism" Breton looks for a possibility for rebellion against the prudery, against bourgeois and academic art, which is limited by morality – and a fake one for that matter. Hysteria in that context is presented more as a means to an end, rather than a goal, or effect as such. What for surrealists seems to be the most appealing in the figure of a hysterical woman, or more precisely in the photographic representations of Augustine from *Icographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*, is how the falseness of the discourse is revealed, which is made possible thanks to those photographs; a discourse, which initially was supposed to be a scientific one. Breton fetishizes photographs attached to the article, but does so openly. Charcot, and his collaborators fetishized them in the same way, but remained adamant in officially rejecting any erotic components of hysteria and its representations; not to mention the unquestionable pleasure they have derived from observing women exposed to their assessing gaze. The hysterical patient during an attack gives expression to tamed forces of sexual drive, which makes some of the stages of the attack turn into pure expressions of free sexuality. However, let us return to *Hysteria's Fiftieth Anniversary*:

In the year of 1928, we propose a new definition of hysteria. Hysteria is a state of mind more or less removable, characterized by the abolishment of relations between the subject and the moral world, from which an individual has freed him or herself practically, according to his or her belief, but outside of any illness system. That state of mind is based on the need for a double-sided enchantment which explains the wonders of hastily accepted medical suggestions (or counter-suggestions). Hysteria is not

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32 Breton, "Manifest surrealizmu," 77.

a pathological phenomenon and can be treated as the highest means of expression.<sup>33</sup>

"The highest means of expression" mentioned by Breton is not connected to the liberation of imagination, but of morality. The postulated "abolishment of relations between the subject and the moral world" is a condition of possibility for creating a new kind of art, free from the rules of mimetic reproduction. However, without that initial condition, art will always remain merely a catalogue registering artifacts of reality, which compose a long, fairly accurate, but boring list. In order to reach the underbelly of reality, the artist's imagination is forced to explore the deepest layers of the Unconscious, without fear, anxiety or censorship. Only then the poetics of the Uncanny à la Freud will be able to emerge.

The hysterical patient disregards rigors of moral censorship, and that is why she is so appealing. From a patient she is turned into a quite peculiar muse. It is not enough for the artist to simply be intoxicated with the hysterical aura, which shrouds the "madwoman" and places her on the pedestal. He needs direct, physical contact, and it has to be a sexual act: "The living poetry invented by the sick women and the doctors when sleeping together culminates in these "passionate attitudes" photographed by Charcot, in which one sees stunning half-undressed women in curious poses that express a convulsive but otherworldly ecstasy."<sup>34</sup> Only by liberating the repressed sexuality is hysteria capable of exploding in its entire glory, which hides behind the *grande attaque* and wealth of plastic poses, and what is more – it can become a form of expression.

The rejection of the primacy of reason and rationality for the sake of slipping into the sphere of dream, madness and free imagination expressed fascination with the "internal" life of hysterical patients. However, their external appearance was equally appealing to the surrealists. A proof of that seduction of artistic imagination can be found in a performance of Hélène Vanel, a dancer, during an International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris on the 17th January 1938. Taborska described the event as follows:

Her make-up and behavior were derived from *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*: a ragged night shirt, uncoordinated movements, mad laughter resounding in the darkness disrupted only by flashlights from the audience. Her midnight performance was composed of a witchcraft

33 Aragon and Breton, "Pięćdziesięciolecie hysterii," 119.

34 Rabaté, *Loving Freud*, 64.

ceremony by a furnace, which symbolized the brotherhood of surrealists, and a dance entitled *Mistaken Action*. [...] [The] performance ended with prances around an arranged pond, and a rage attack reenacted on a hysterical bed – the symbol of love. The artist kept going to sleep, and suddenly jumping out, and then jumping back in again, while whirling a live cock in the air and twisting her face in a terrifying grimace. A painting entitled *Ophelia's Death* by André Masson, which was hanging on the neighboring wall, constituted a grim allusion to the pond and an empty bed. References to the great madness, beloved by the 19th century painters, seemed to close the enchanted circle.<sup>35</sup>

Stylizing the dancer in accordance with *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*, and an association with Ophelia are not accidental, and constitute the result of dialectical relationship between hysteria and theater, which is often recalled in contemporary interpretations of that phenomenon. However, it was Joseph Bauer who, while working with Anna O., already described her symptoms as “personal theater.” Actresses playing Ophelia searched for inspiration in hospital patients, as well as in photographs, which were in turn stylized and staged after the theater and paintings. One should remember that in the case of daguerreotype and first cameras, the time of exposition had to be long, which required a model to remain still in any given position for a long time. That is how the future patients of Freud came into possession of rich sources for inspiration on the forms of constructing their own afflictions.

*Translation: Jan Pytalski*

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35 Taborska, *Spiskowcy wyobraźni*, 226.

# Reading Art

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Agnieszka Rejniak-Majewska

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## Image as a Situation: Tragedy, Subjectivity and Painting According to Barnett Newman

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The fetish and ornament – blind and mute, impress only those who cannot look at the terror of Self. The self, terrible and constant, is for me the subject matter of painting and sculpture.

B. Newman (1965)

There is a tendency to look at large pictures from a distance. The large pictures in this exhibition are intended to be seen from a short distance.

(Statement placed by Newman in Betty Parsons Gallery during his exhibition in 1951)

**A**lthough Barnett Newman's (1905 – 1970) painting belongs to the current of abstract expressionism, the wide, monochromatic fields of his canvases are clearly different from the gestular expression of Pollock, or de Kooning, who are commonly associated with that movement. Truly, as shown by Michael Leja, his contemporaries perceived his works as rather cool, intellectual and devoid of spontaneity.<sup>1</sup> In the 1960s there even have been an attempt to pair his paintings with geometrical

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1 Michael Leja, "Barnett Newman's Solo Tango," *Critical Inquiry*, 21 (1995): 568.

and minimalist art, which was growing popular. Newman, however, strongly opposed such labeling. In 1962 he rejected John Gordon's invitation to participate in an exhibition entitled "Geometric Abstraction" in Whitney Museum, and a year later he refused to show his works at the Gallery of Modern Art in Washington, at an exhibit entitled "Formalists." He justified his decisions by stating that such a context would "distort his work" and "confuse the issues."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, "formalism" was a perspective, which he vehemently opposed his entire life. He saw in it an attempt at reducing art to a level of sensual experiences and of trapping it within well-defined frameworks of description.<sup>3</sup>

His expressionistic attitude was in fact revealed in his aversion towards formalism, and rebellion against the idolatrous praise of "pure form." Many of Newman's texts express a belief that there exists a fundamental contradiction between a focus on the sensual beauty of forms, and art being a direct expression of an "idea" – an evocation of the radical and primary human experiences. Newman presented that opposition as an alternative between the need for expressing a "relationship to the Absolute," and the "absolutism of a perfect creation" – a plastic "fetish of quality."<sup>4</sup> In this way, with a single gesture, he separated himself from the entire aesthetic tradition of Western art, including the European avant-garde, which despite its rebellious nature in his view still remained "enclosed in the world of sensation," leaving behind a repertoire of innovative, but finite forms.<sup>5</sup> Following this argumentation, which displays a typical avant-garde attempt at ever-increasing radicalism, a step ahead was supposed to be a step back at the same time, towards the eternal source of all art, close to which the so-called primitive art. As Newman tried to convince us in his 1947 text, meaningfully titled *The First Man Was an Artist*, the metaphysical awe, and a need for its expression, constituted a primal human reaction, independent from utilitarian motives or communicational needs. Man's first expression – Newman wrote – was

2 Quted after: *Barnett Newman. Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O'Neill (New York: Knopf, 1990), 221.

3 Newman did not agree with the formalist interpretation of modern art proposed by Clive Bell and Roger Fry, along with their conservative claim about the continuity of artistic development and scholarly habit of making art more approachable. He definitely valued a subjective and opinionated, poetic and fragmentary critique of Baudelaire, Apollinaire, or Harold Rosenberg over the ordered discourse of formalistic critique. See "The Anglo-Saxon Tradition in Art Criticism" (1944-45), in *Barnett Newman*, 83-86 and "For Impassioned Criticism," (1968), in *Barnett Newman*, 130-136.

4 Barnett Newman, "The Sublime is Now," (1948), in *Barnett Newman*, 171.

5 *Ibid.*, 173.

“an outcry of awe and anger at his tragic state, at his own self-awareness and his own helplessness before the void.”<sup>6</sup>

That anthropological fantasy about the pure, entirely asocial and “non-utilitarian” expression, stemming from a metaphysical awe, shares certain kinship with a famous work by Wilhelm Worringer from 1908 entitled *Abstraktion un Einfühlung* [*Abstraction and Empathy*], which was well known to Newman. By referring to examples from the sphere of psychophysiology and primitive creations, Worringer attempted to prove that abstract art, despite seeming rational, grows from entirely irrational, psychological impulses. Whereas, according to Worringer, there was a “immense spiritual dread of space” at the foundation of that art – a sensation of powerlessness against the incomprehensibility and unpredictability of phenomena of the external world – Newman was eager to correct that attitude in one particular aspect: an “important truth,” he wrote, “which lies at the foundation of creation of form of art of any kind, and defines an artistic style, is not a relationship between a man and the world, but with himself.”<sup>7</sup>

That perspective, to a certain degree, fit into an intellectual milieu characteristic of the first generation of abstract expressionists. During the 1940s and 50s, questions of external and internal perils constituting the position of the modern subject were undertaken with a particular intensity, not only by philosophers, but also in popular psychological discourse in the press.<sup>8</sup> The positive American idea of an autonomous, internally integrated subject, who is conscious of his goals, was replaced by a vision the self that was divided, opaque and prone to unconscious, primitive drives – a concept which stemmed from psychoanalysis. Echoes of that concept within abstract expressionism overlapped with Marxism and existentialism, and derived statements about the reifying and dehumanizing influence that contemporary civilization has on an individual. In that pessimistic and intensely anxious, atmosphere, painting had to become an “arena in which to act” (according to Harold Rosenberg’s famous metaphor), and simultaneously a bastion of subjectivity. According to the accepted interpretation of this artistic movement established by painters and critics, painting was treated as a direct recording, or a metaphor, of a subjective ‘self’ – that complex, internal space full of tensions

6 Newman, “The First Man Was an Artist,” (1947), in *Barnett Newman*, 158

7 Newman, “Painting and Prose,” (1945), in *Barnett Newman*, 93.

8 Serge Guilbaut, *Jak Nowy Jork ukradł idee sztuki nowoczesnej. Ekspresjonizm abstrakcyjny, wolność i zimna wojna* [*How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*], (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), trans. Ewa Mikina (Warsaw: Hotel Sztuki, 1992), 292; Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism. Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s*, (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 1993).

and contradictions.<sup>9</sup> This very striving for authenticity and spontaneity of expression was identified with the defense of the individual's internal freedom, which was endangered by the soulless automatism of contemporary life.<sup>10</sup>

When Barnett Newman wrote that "The self, terrible and constant," is a particular "subject" of his painting and sculpture,<sup>11</sup> he seemed close to that kind of thinking and distant from it simultaneously. He was not interested so much in the psychological dynamic, vitality and fluidity of one's self, of which a painting could be a record, but rather in the primary awareness of one's own existence in front of the picture – that elevated, and terrifying at the same time, moment of realization of one's own subjective separateness and presence in face of the world. I will attempt at analyzing the characteristic of that subjective 'self' in Newman's texts, its dramatic aspect and the experience of the image that corresponds to it. What I would like to show here, among other things, is the tension between a conspicuous tendency towards universalization, apparent in his vision of art and the human condition, and its conditioning by concrete historical experiences. In the end, I would like to reference Lyotard's interpretation of Newman's painting, which by concentrating on the question of experience and the ontology of the image, simultaneously goes beyond the framework of his authorial interpretation.

### Tragedy and History

Newman stated on numerous occasions that the Second World War had been for him a period of "moral crisis" in painting. "During World War II it

9 Leja, "Barnett Newman's," 569.

10 As Robert Motherwell, one of the creators of the movement stated: "process of painting ... is conceived as an adventure, without preconceived ideas on the part of persons of intelligence, sensibility, or passion. Fidelity towards what occurs between oneself and the canvas, no matter how unexpected, becomes central... The major decisions in the process of painting are on the grounds of truth, not taste... no true artist ends with the style that he expected to have when he began... it is only by giving oneself up completely to the painting medium that one finds oneself and one's own style." (from an introduction to *The School of New York* exhibition catalogue, Perls Gallery, Beverly Hills, California, 1951, cited after: Irving Sandler, *The New York School. The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties* (New York: 1978), 46). This notion of "discovering one's self" in the process was often expressed by other artists as well; Ray Parker, an artist of a second generation of abstract expressionists stated: "The painting is both a thing and an event ... an 'aesthetic' object and behavior in the form of significant record. While the painter's subject is the painting, the painting's subject is the artist himself as his experience is consummated in the making." (R. Parker, "A Cahier Leaf. Direct Painting," *It is*, 1 (1985), cited after: Sandler, *The New York School*, 47).

11 Barnett Newman, "Statement," in *Exhibition of the United States of America* (São Paulo, 1965), in *Barnett Newman*, 186-7.

became nonsensical to get involved in painting men playing violins or cellos, or flowers.”<sup>12</sup> The tradition of abstract art also seemed like something closed and deprived of meaning at that time – there was no way of entering the “paradise of pure forms,” without having a sensation of emptiness and hollowness of such undertaking.<sup>13</sup> While before, without agreeing to reduce art to the role of illustrating political ideas, Newman supported modernism, and strongly separated himself from “regionalism,” as well as the social realism of the New Deal era, now he decided that nurturing aesthetic autonomy and understanding art in a purely formal way was not possible anymore. That moment of doubt marked itself in a direct way on Newman’s path as a painter: he stopped painting between 1940 and 1944, and in 1944 he destroyed all of his previous works. The first extant paintings and drawings, dating from 1944–46 are expressive bio-morphic abstractions, often painted in intense colors, whose titles refer to ancient myths (*Orpheus Song*, *Murder of Osiris*, *Gea*). Even though non-representational, they were, with their dramatic character and telling titles, an answer to a need for a “theme”; an answer to a basic question of that time: “what to paint?”<sup>14</sup>

Known at the time more as a critic, and a friend of artists, than as a painter, Newman paid particular attention to the kinship between works of American painters he was close with, and primitive art. Therefore, he supported the program included in earlier declarations by Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb, who talked about the internal, spiritual connections between their art and myth.<sup>15</sup> He himself was an organizer of two exhibitions of pre-Columbian art: *Precolumbian Stone Sculpture* in 1944, and *Northwest Coast Indian Painting* at Betty Parsons Gallery in 1946. Ancient objects presented at these exhibitions were taken out of their ethnographic context, and treated as fully legitimate works of art. In an introduction to the first show Newman wrote about the meaning the presented works should hold for contemporary artists:

While we transcend time and place to participate in the spiritual life of a forgotten people, their art by the same magic illuminates the work of our time, of our own sculptors. The sense of dignity, the high seriousness of purpose, the sublime plane of “moral state,” evident in this sculpture makes clearer to us why our modern sculptors were compelled to discard

12 “A Conversation. Barnett Newman and Thomas B. Hess,” in *Barnett Newman*, 274.

13 Newman, “Interview with Emile de Antonio,” in *Barnett Newman*, 302.

14 Ibid., 303.

15 See Guilbaut, *Jak Nowy Jork ukradł*, [*How New York Stole*], 116.

the mock heroic, the voluptuous, the superficial realism, and exercise of virtuosity that inhibited the medium for so many European centuries.<sup>16</sup>

In an introduction to the *Ideographic Picture* exhibition (1947), where he gathered works of several contemporary artists, Newman stated: "Here is a group of artists, who are not abstract painters, although working in what is known as the abstract style."<sup>17</sup> What is important in their works – he noted – is not a specific approach to space, formal composition and style, but "the idea-complex that makes contact with mystery – of life, of men, of nature, of the hard, black chaos that is death, or the greyer, softer chaos that is tragedy."<sup>18</sup> Similarly as for the Native American artist from the Kwakiutl tribe, painterly forms were supposed to be a direct embodiment of an idea. For such an artist, Newman wrote, "shape was a living thing, a vehicle for an abstract thought-complex, a carrier of the awesome feelings he felt before the terror of the unknowable. The abstract shape was, therefore, real rather than a formal 'abstraction' of a visual fact with its overtone of an already-known nature."<sup>19</sup>

Following that interpretation, analogies with "primitive" art did not include form, or iconography, but an attitude, and when used to describe works of a group of artists close to Newman, they granted them a mark of timelessness and significance. These analogies aimed to convince that their art is not merely an arbitrary, formal experiment, but an expression of fundamental experiences that move beyond personal, psychological states. "The new painter," stated Newman, "is in the position of the primitive artist, who since he was always face-to-face with the mystery of life, was always more concerned with presenting his wonder, his terror before it or the majesty of its powers, rather than with plastic qualities of surface, texture, etc."<sup>20</sup> Such an interpretation of primitive art as an individual gesture expressing metaphysical terror was a slightly anachronistic description, which did not match the conclusions of contemporary anthropologists, such as Franz Boas, or Margaret Mead, who paid more attention to the social functions of myth and ritual: the roles they played in organizing the tribal community, as well as their cognitive meaning as forms of explaining and ordering the world. Despite knowing their work,

16 Newman, "Pre-Columbian Stone Sculpture," (1944), in *Barnett Newman*, 65.

17 Newman, "Ideographic Picture," in *Barnett Newman*, 108.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Newman, "The Plasmic Image," (1945) in *Barnett Newman*, 145.

Newman preferred to stand by a romantic, expressive understanding of primal art, which was closer to Worringer and Nietzsche.<sup>21</sup> Thanks to such an approach, he was able to present it as a fundamental form of creativity, also available for contemporary artists. "The present painter," he wrote, "is concerned not with his own feelings or with the mystery of his own personality but with the penetration into the world-mystery. His imagination is therefore attempting to dig into metaphysical secrets. To that extent his art is connected with the sublime. It is a religious art which through symbols will catch the basic truth of life, which is its sense of tragedy."<sup>22</sup>

The notion of tragedy, interpreted here clearly from the perspective of Nietzsche's readings, refers to the primal sensation of life in the context of its pain and cruelty. It is tied to a state of Dionysian ecstasy, with abandonment of one's individual self, and direct insight into horrors of existence. On the other hand, aligning himself with existential thought, Newman connected the sense of tragedy with the deep contradiction which exists between one's separateness and individual freedom, and determinism associated with belonging to the entirety of existence. That was the way he described the "sense of tragedy of existence," in his comment on the works of Adolph Gottlieb:

Man is a tragic being, and the heart of this tragedy is the metaphysical problem of part and whole. That dichotomy of our nature, from which we can never escape and which because of its nature impels us helplessly to try to resolve it, motivates our struggle for perfection, and seals our doom. For man is one, he is single; and yet he belongs, he is part of another. This conflict is the greatest of our tragedies.<sup>23</sup>

The notion of tragedy understood that way and the identification with the primitive would seem to suggest a vast distance from contemporary reality. However, Newman stressed several times that they remain in close relationship with the current state of affairs. "The reason primitive art is so close to the modern mind," he wrote "is that we, living in times of the greatest terror the world has known, are in a position to appreciate the acute sensibility primitive man had of it."<sup>24</sup> A position of distance towards modern civilization came hand in hand with a conviction that art was supposed

21 See Leja, *Reframing*, 62-63.

22 Newman, "The Plasmic Image," in *Barnett Newman*, 140.

23 Newman, "The Painting of Tamayo and Gottlieb," in *Barnett Newman*, 76.

24 Newman, "Art of the South Seas," in *Barnett Newman*, 100.

to reflect the awareness of its own time.<sup>25</sup> However, in Newman's texts allusions and lapidary mentions of the experience of the Second World War were transferred onto a much more universal plain, and treated as an actualization of the unchanging laws of the human condition. One can observe in his writings a tendency, characteristic for that period, to universalize that experience; a way of explaining the war through the prism of the immanent, human propensity to evil and violence, or man's helplessness in his fight against irrational powers, instead of searching for more concrete historical and social explanation.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, one could state that the war and the Holocaust were according to Newman transformatory events – they marked an end of the “economy of beauty” that guided Western art, and demanded its inner transformation.

Newman expressed that view in his introduction to a catalogue, which accompanied an exhibition of Teresa Żarnower's works organized in Peggy Guggenheim's gallery in the spring of 1946. After a few words of introduction, in which he introduced the artist to the American audience – as a war émigré, an important representative of the constructivist movement in Poland, and a pioneer of functionalistic design – Newman pointed out the transformation visible in her latest works, created already after arriving in the United States. He wrote:

She now, in her first exhibition of work done here, feels that purist constructions in a world that she has seen collapse around her into shambles and personal tragedy are not enough, that an insistence on absolute purity might be total illusion. Art must say something. In this she is close to many American painters who have been no less sensitive to the tragedy of our times.<sup>27</sup>

Żarnower's example was supposed to confirm that “abstract language” should be replaced by “abstract thought,” and that, rather than “abstract discipline,” it is the “abstract subject matter” that is important.<sup>28</sup> Once again, Newman was employing his own differentiation between “abstract art” – concentrated on the plastic form, and the “art of the abstract,” being an expression

25 Leja, *Reframing*, 43.

26 Leja, “Barnett Newman's,” 569 and *Reframing*, 52–67. On the subject of Gottlieb's, Rothko's and Pollock's work in that context see also S. Zucker, “Confrontations with Radical Evil. The Ambiguity of Myth and the Inadequacy of Representation,” *Art History*, 24 (3) (2001).

27 Newman, “Teresa Zarnower,” (1946) in *Barnett Newman*, 105.

28 Ibid.

of an “abstract” idea, impossible to be enclosed by ready-made notions and representations.<sup>29</sup>

From the perspective of war, Newman looked also on the work of surrealists finding in it not so much a willingness to shock or escape from reality, but rather an unconscious forecast of future events. “It is natural that surrealism died with the advent of the war,” he wrote in an unpublished essay from 1945, titled *Surrealism and the War*. Photographs from the liberated death camps, which the world saw in the spring of that year, in Newman’s eyes constituted a final realization of a surreal terror, against which all attempts of imagination were exposed as flat and irrelevant:

We can now see much more: that the subject matter of surrealism was the most important of our time and definitely linked to our time. The surrealists’ work was in the nature of prophecy. For the horror they created, and the shock they built up were not merely the dreams of crazy men, they were prophetic tableaux of what the world was to see as reality. They showed us the horrors of war; and if people had not laughed at the surrealists, if they had understood them, the war might never have been. No painting exists [that is better surrealism] than the photographs of German atrocities. The heaps of skulls are the reality of Tchelichtev’s vision. The mass of bone piles are the reality of Picasso’s bone compositions, of his sculpture. The monstrous corpses are Ernst’s demons. The broken architecture, the rubble, the grotesque bodies are the surrealist reality. The sadism in those pictures, the horror and the pathos are around us.<sup>30</sup>

In his text from 1948, Newman returned to that theme once again, anchoring it in a broader reflection on tragedy. “Surreal art under its realistic and ideal surfaces contains all the weird subject matter of the primitive world of terror.”<sup>31</sup> Strictly speaking, there is no “tragedy” in it, because it would have to assume not only a sense of hopelessness against the impenetrable forces running life, but also a conscious confrontation with them. Surrealists, Newman claimed, “identified the tragic with terror” – similar to primitive art, they expressed a sensation of a powerful, external force alien to man.<sup>32</sup> However, contemporary history removed the accompanying aura of obscurity from that sensation:

29 Newman, “Memorial Letter for Howard Putzel,” (1945) in *Barnett Newman*, 98.

30 Newman, “Surrealism and the War,” (1945) in *Barnett Newman*, 95.

31 Newman, “The New Sense of Fate,” (1948) in *Barnett Newman*, 169.

32 Ibid.

The war the surrealists predicted has robbed us of our hidden terror, as terror can exist only if the forces of tragedy are unknown. We now know the terror to expect. Hiroshima showed it to us. We are no longer, then, in the face of a mystery. After all, wasn't it an American boy who did it? The terror has indeed become as real as life. What we have now is a tragic rather than a terrifying situation.<sup>33</sup>

"The new feeling of destiny" that is born of war seems closer, according to Newman, to the Greek notion of tragedy:

We have finally arrived at the tragic position of the Greeks, and we have achieved this Greek state of tragedy because we have at last ourselves invented a new sense of all-pervading fate, a fate that is for the first time for modern man as real and intimate as the Greeks' fate was for them. [...] Our tragedy is again a tragedy of action in the chaos that is society [...] and no matter how heroic, or innocent, or moral our individual lives may be, this new fate hangs over us.<sup>34</sup>

While in primitive awareness terror was induced by an impenetrable world of nature, "for modern man, the source of terror is himself."<sup>35</sup> "Our century," Newman concluded, "achieved the high point of stability and power over nature. We are at piece with the universe; we are not at peace with ourselves."<sup>36</sup>

If art is supposed to make sense, it has to confront us with that state of affairs – not as a tool of any given political, or social agenda, but on the far more primary level, which establishes its own, separate order of experience. Commenting on the title of his painting – *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (1950–51) – Newman said that "man can be, or is, sublime in his relation to his sense of being aware."<sup>37</sup> That kind of "feeling of one's own totality, of his own separateness, of his own individuality" was supposed to be awakened by his paintings.<sup>38</sup> These formulations could seem pathetic, but they gain another dimension, if one remembers their historical background. Direct references to war, and to the Holocaust, appeared rarely in Newman's texts, and were usually veiled, short

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33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Newman, "Art of the South Seas," 100.

36 Newman, "Painting and Prose," 92–93.

37 "Interview with David Sylvester," in *Barnett Newman*, 258.

38 Ibid., 257.

and full of generalizations. However, they have simultaneously – as I have attempted to show – made a lasting impression on his thinking about art. The closing remark in his text on Teresa Żarnower seems meaningful in this context. The choice of “abstract subject matter” instead of “abstract discipline,” he noted, “gives her work its strength and its dignity. The truth here is mutually inclusive, for the defense of human dignity is the ultimate subject matter of art. And it is only in its defense that any of us will ever find strength.”<sup>39</sup> If such subjective awareness and “dignity” became a central theme of his paintings as well, it should be noted that it was still something lacking firm support, merely a moment of autonomy, which appears only alongside the sense of its fragility.

### Form and Action

These paintings are not “abstractions,” nor do they depict some “pure” idea. They are specific and separate embodiments of feeling, to be experienced, each picture for itself. They contain no depictive allusions. Full of restrained passion, their poignancy is revealed in each concentrated image.

(Statement placed in Betty Parsons Gallery during Newman's first solo exhibition in 1950)

Like many artists of the abstract expressionist movement, Barnett Newman derived his work from surrealism and abstraction – however, he mentioned those currents mainly to highlight how outdated they were, and to stress the necessity to transgress the limitations which characterized them. He claimed that surrealism's achievement was to go beyond formal attitudes and cold abstraction, but the source of its weakness remained its illusionary style, taken as if from 19th century academism. Comparing surrealist painting with the “primitive” art of Oceania, an exhibition of which he was able to see at MoMA in 1946, Newman paid attention to their emotional kinship: in his view both expressed an analogous sensation of fear in the face of ungraspable forces impossible to understand, the sense of magic, and a similar way of experiencing space. Surrealists, who operated on a Renaissance understanding of space and body, however, in interpreting the meaning of magic “comprehended only its superficial aspects” – they “mixed the prevailing dream of the modern artist with the outworn dream of academism.”<sup>40</sup> What is more:

<sup>39</sup> Newman, “Teresa Żarnower,” in *Barnett Newman*, 104.

<sup>40</sup> Newman, “Art of the South Seas,” 101.

This realistic insistence, this attempt to make the unreal more real by an overemphasis on illusion, ultimately fails to penetrate beyond illusion; for having reached the point where we see through the illusion, we must come to the conclusion that it must have been illusion for the artists themselves, that they practiced illusion because they did not themselves feel the magic. For realism, even of the imaginative, is in the last analysis a deception. Realistic fantasy inevitably must become phantasmagoria, so that instead of creating a magical world, the surrealists succeeded only in illustrating it.<sup>41</sup>

This critique shows, from a negative side, in what direction Newman's expectations were headed: he was interested in the realness of experience and expression going beyond an established, artistic vision, or style, and working directly in an individual artistic form.

Newman found that kind of directness in the landscapes by the "American fauvist," Milton Avery, among others - landscapes which came close to abstraction. He did not agree with a popular opinion about the sensual beauty and decorative character of Avery's works. Instead, he characterized them in a way that seems to fit his own, later paintings. The meaning of Avery for American art, according to Newman, stemmed from the fact that he opened up a path

for the free exploration of the painting medium in order to discover its expressive powers, its possibilities for evoking emotion, and to make the medium function within itself [...] He has learned to get rid of personal sentiment, personal feeling, to arrive at a level of statement where his achievement is more universal. His work has an abandon, a nihilist explosiveness, a Dionysian orgy of freedom that is overwhelming. In front of an Avery canvas one no longer participates in a communion with the personal reaction of one human being toward nature. It is no longer a question of reaction; it is a question of participating in the moment of communion. To achieve it, Avery creates a world of his own.<sup>42</sup>

His paintings don't open a fictional, three-dimensional space in front of the viewer anymore, they no longer allow him to remain "outside," in a position of aesthetic distance:

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>42</sup> Newman, "Milton Avery," (1945), 79.

Avery's work is tragic in the Greek definition of tragedy, an orgiastic display of color and forms that express his love of freedom. Those who, looking at his work, can see only its charm and its sensuous display, missing its more deeply felt connotations, are like the early Christians who, looking on at the primitive expressions of tragic ceremonies typified in Western Europe by the bacchanale, saw in the bacchanale only an irreligious exercise of lust.<sup>43</sup>

Reducing works of art to their phenomenal, formal dimension, and identifying them with combinations of lines and colors, words, rhythms, images, or sounds, according to Newman, "manifests a nominalistic attitude toward art which makes of art an accidental, almost arbitrary phenomenon, void of significance. [...] The artist emphatically does not create a form. The artist expresses in a work of art an aesthetic idea which is innate and eternal."<sup>44</sup> The form of expression itself is impossible to differentiate from an "idea," which, in turn, cannot be communicated in any other way, or translated into any other language. This question was further extended in "The Plasmic Image" one of Newman's longest texts, written in 1945. Referring to the juxtaposition of the words *p l a s t i c* and *p l a s m i c*, he attempted to develop a notion of image which while freeing itself from objective references, would also go beyond the strictly formal definition that focuses on "plastic" shape. He thus attempted to sketch a proper theoretical perspective for contemporary painting (including his own), which would simultaneously align it with "primitive" art, which "is not concerned with geometric forms per se" but creates "forms that by their abstract nature carry some abstract intellectual content."<sup>45</sup> "Color, line, shape, space are the tools whereby his thought is made articulate"; "[it is not] the voluptuous quality in the tolls that is his goal, but what they do,"<sup>46</sup> he writes. Later on, he continues: "The intention is for the color, the stone to carry within itself that element of thought that will act purely on the onlooker's sensibility to penetrate to the innermost channels in his being."<sup>47</sup> Such an approach towards image excludes, according to Newman, any craftsmanship, or aesthetic focus on play between colors and shapes. "Shapes [created by the painter] must contain the plasmic entity that will carry his thought, the nucleus that

43 Ibid., 79-80.

44 Newman, "Concerning Objective Criticism," (1926), in *Barnett Newman*, 58.

45 Newman, "The Plasmic Image," in *Barnett Newman*, 139-140.

46 Ibid., 143.

47 Ibid., 144.

will give life to the abstract, even abstruse ideas he is projecting. [...] The effect of these new pictures is that the shapes and colors acts as symbols to [elicit] sympathetic participation on the part of the beholder in the artist's vision."<sup>48</sup>

Newman's juxtaposition of a finished, "plastic" form – an object of aesthetic delectation – and artistic expression experienced through direct participation, directs one to the opposition between Apollonian plastic art and Dionysian music as it was presented in *The Birth of Tragedy*.<sup>49</sup> Although Newman did not refer to Nietzsche directly at that point, his dependency on Nietzsche's philosophy, especially his notion of myth, tragedy and the Dionysian element can be observed in many of his texts, similar to the echoes of Nietzsche among his artist friends.<sup>50</sup> Analogous to Nietzsche, Newman stressed the internal duality of the Greek world as a home of classical beauty, as well as of archaic myths and rituals. He wrote: "Greece named both form and content: the ideal form – beauty, the ideal content – tragedy."<sup>51</sup> By categorically rejecting the "Greek form," and the nostalgia for it, which endured in Western art in a sentimental expression of tragedy meant as "depicting one's self-pity over the loss of the elegant column and the beautiful profile"<sup>52</sup> – Newman looked for inspiration in ancient drama. However, he had a different hypothesis concerning the genesis of Greek beauty. According to Newman, Greek works of art stemmed from the fascination with Egyptian forms – from an ambition to match their formal perfection. "The rigid figure in death, the absolute repose, the silence of the Egyptian all find their counterparts in the caryatids, the Apollos."<sup>53</sup> Yet, while Egyptian monuments have been an embodiment of metaphysical fear – symbols of necessity and the inevitability of fate, the Greek plastic arts find their matured, emotional elevation in the perfect form. That mimetic genesis of Greek beauty, and its particular

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48 Ibid., 141–142.

49 Frederick Nietzsche, *Narodziny tragedii, albo Grecy i pesymizm [The Birth of Tragedy]*, trans. and intro. Bogdan Baran (Kraków: Inter-Esse, 1994), 119.

50 Fragments of *The Birth of Tragedy* were quoted in the *Tiger's Eye* magazine, edited by the artists of the abstract expressionist movement (3 (1948)). It is possible that it was Newman, who decided about including them in the magazine. See Jackson Rushing, "The Impact of Nietzsche and Northwest Coast Indian Art on Barnett Newman's Idea of Redemption in the Abstract Sublime," *Art Journal*, Fall (1988), 189. Nietzschean concept of tragedy was particularly important for the work of Mark Rothko. However, contrary to Newman, Rothko avoided theoretical declarations and rarely spoke about his own art.

51 Newman, "The Object and the Image," (1948), in *Barnett Newman*, 170.

52 Ibid.

53 Newman, "The New Sense of Fate," 168.

“secondary character,” as a reflection of Egyptian art, seems to be partially in accordance with the Nietzschean characteristic of beauty as pure appearance, a veil which hides the tragic core of being. Newman, however, was far from the “pagan” affirmation of the “Greek dream,” that veil which misleads the senses. He rejected it with an iconoclastic violence, seeing it as an empty shell, a closed fetishistic form.

In Greece, along with the elevation of formal beauty and the transformation of art into a sphere of “ideal sensations,” the primary sense of tragedy were supposed to be replaced by aesthetic satisfaction, a sense of pride in one’s own civilization, and the following sense of mastery over the world. Newman projected a similar interpretative mechanism on modernist abstraction and geometric art, which he associated with a modern, scientific worldview and faith in the power of human mind. Works of Piet Mondrian, who also stressed his commitment to overcoming the tragic, which characterizes all existence, were perfect examples of that kind of art for Newman. He believed that, regardless of metaphysical theories that accompanied his painting, Mondrian managed to “raise the white plane and the right angle into a realm of sublimity, where the sublime paradoxically becomes an absolute of perfect sensations. The geometry (perfection) swallowed up his metaphysics (his exaltation).”<sup>54</sup>

Newman, who, despite everything else, highly valued Mondrian’s work, and – as historians all agree – was highly influenced by him in his own painting, disagreed with its rigor and “systematic theology.” A planned “search for that, which is elemental” lead, according to Newman, only to a theoretical dogmatism<sup>55</sup>. When he used red, yellow and blue – Mondrian’s basic colors – in his works, Newman stressed that his wish was to free them from paying mortgage to Neo-Plasticism, which by “turning them into ideas, destroyed them as colors.”<sup>56</sup> He wanted to make them expressive, not didactic – extract them from the “cage of geometry,” but without falling into subjectivism and expressive mannerism. As he claimed:

A new beginning cannot be found in the dead infinity of silence; nor in the painting performance, as if it were an instrument of pure energy full of hollow biologic rhetoric. Painting, like passion, is a living voice, which – when I hear it – I must let speak, unfettered.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Newman, “The Sublime is Now,” 173.

<sup>55</sup> *Interview with David Sylvester*, 256-257.

<sup>56</sup> Newman, “Statement. Who’s Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue,” (1969) in *Barnett Newman*, 192.

<sup>57</sup> Newman, “The New American Painting,” (1959) in *Barnett Newman*, 179.

In consequence, as he remarked, his own painting was “too abstract for the abstract expressionists and too expressionist for the abstract purists.”<sup>58</sup>

Beginning with his breakthrough *Onement I* from 1948, Newman separated from the bio-morphic expressions of his earlier paintings. In this relatively small painting – according to his own standards – on an almost homogenous, dark-red ochre plain, there appears for the very first time a vertical strip of intense, lighter red running across the middle of the painting, which was to become characteristic of Newman’s painting. Commentators interpreted that ascetic form as the fundamental equivalent of a primal act of creation, as an act of division: the separation of light and darkness,<sup>59</sup> or of a single, lone figure of man; Newman, however, rejected such symbolic interpretations. He would refer to narrow, typically vertical stripes separating his canvases, ironically, as zips. He stressed that it was not a line, but a separate lane of color, which was neither “behind,” or “ahead” of the primary color plain. It did not count as a separate part of composition, but as a factor of an indivisible whole. His reluctant, almost dismissive comments turned away from any formal, as well as iconographic interpretations by referring to painterly concreteness, a direct experience. Despite the rigorous limitation of resources, reduced to homogenous, monochromatic plains of color, and enlivening stripes, Newman’s paintings do not fall under any clear compositional schema. Rules of symmetry, present in some of them, become disturbed in others. The number of stripes, their location and character do not fall under any predictable set of rules. Sometimes they are distinguished by sharp edges, although far more often the visible traces of the brush, thinning in the paint’s coating or its thicker layer discretely contradict that strict, linear character of divisions. As a result, Newman’s works uphold a particular tension between regularity and irregularity; there is both a sense of primary discipline, an “internal law” of an image, and a tangible individualism of the voice. Independently from the repetitive character of formal techniques, separate paintings seem more like individual, singular situations than variations on a motif. To a certain extent, Newman manages to fulfill his own postulate about uniqueness and singularity in every painting, its complete separateness from the world of objects.<sup>60</sup> By distancing himself from a systematic approach and

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58 Ibid.

59 Leja, “Barnett Newman,” 576.

60 In one of the interviews Newman stressed that he is: “Not interested in adding to the objects that exist in the world. I want my painting to separate itself from every object and every art object that exists.” (“Interview with Lane Slate,” in *Barnett Newman*, 253).

plastic “dogmas,” Newman treated his work and the experience of it as an unpredictable, open situation. On the creation of his key painting – *Onement I* – he stated:

That painting made me realize that I was confronted for the first time with a thing that I did, whereas up until that moment I was able to remove myself from the act of painting, or from the painting itself. The painting was something that I was making, whereas somehow for the first time with this painting the painting itself had a life of its own.<sup>61</sup>

It was an extremely simple painting, but – as Newman recalled – you needed to be around it for a year to understand it.<sup>62</sup> Titles of the paintings typically appeared after the work was done, and instead of pointing to a “theme,” they constituted more of an evocation of certain emotional state, a clue about a painting’s meaning.<sup>63</sup> In case of *The Stations of the Cross: Lema Sabachthani* (1958–66), for example, the concept of the title appeared only during the work on the fourth canvas, when Newman realized that their content was about Christ’s Passion – understood not as a series of episodes of sacred history, but as an experience of agony. That was the genesis of the subtitle: an expression of a borderline, unspeakable moment of suffering. “This overwhelming question that does not complain, makes today’s talk about alienation, as if alienation were a modern invention, an embarrassment. This question that has no answer has been with us so long since Jesus – since Abraham – since Adam – the original question.”<sup>64</sup>

In respect to his cycle *The Stations of the Cross: Lema Sabachthani* Newman stressed: “I didn’t have a preconceived idea that I would execute and then give a title to. I wanted to hold the emotion, not waste it in picturesque ecstasies.

61 Interview with David Sylvester, 256. Richard Shiff elaborates on the primacy of experience over theory, and openness of the creative process in Newman’s work in his “Criticism at Odds with Its Art. Prophecy, Projection, Doubt, Paranoia,” *Common Knowledge*, 9 (3) (2003): 455–456. Shiff claims that this approach was analogous, or even more radical than Cézanne’s valuation of direct experience, described by Merleau-Ponty.

62 Jackson Rushing, “Decade of Decision,” *Art Journal*, 54 (1) (1995): 90.

63 See Interview with David Sylvester, 258. Short, symbolic titles, based on proper names such as *Adam*, *Eve*, *Jericho*, do not indicate any narrative content and it is difficult to see their illustration in the paintings themselves. Isolated from any context, similarly to paintings, they work like a calling. They do not encourage us to make associations, but rather force the viewer to stand upright in front of the painting.

64 From the exhibition catalogue “Barnett Newman. The Stations of the Cross, Lema Sabachthani,” (Solomon: R. Guggenheim Museum, 1966), in *Barnett Newman*, 188.

The cry, the unanswerable cry, is world without an end. But a painting has to hold it, world without end, in its limits.”<sup>65</sup>

That last sentence invites a reflection. If one were to refer at this point to the Nietzschean dialectic of the Dionysian and Apollonian once again – a dialectic which defines the essence of ancient tragedy – it seems to describe fairly well the mechanics of those abstract, seemingly orderly paintings according to how their author perceived them. If all limiting form – a form that confers its order and boundaries – is by definition Apollonian, then under the pressure of Dionysian forces, which are expressed through it, form becomes necessarily bend out of shape, negating its clear, Apollonian visibility, and revealing instead a presence of that which exceeds all concepts and images. That way, according to Nietzsche, “Dionysus speaks the language of Apollo, and vice versa.”<sup>66</sup>

When we try to describe the visual shape of Newman’s paintings, to a certain degree we separate things which according to him should remain entirely inseparable. These paintings themselves seem to be independent wholes, separated from the surrounding space, but their “self-sufficiency” is not based on a drama of forms taking place within the boundaries of abstract composition. Nothing suggests their “internal life” in the spirit of vitalist, or organicist theories, which often used to accompany modernist abstraction. The picture’s “life,” its expression, lies here in the way it addresses the viewer. The painting creates a sensation of a particular “now” – an awareness of a concrete, individual “place” that it establishes by itself.

### Sublime and the Avant-Garde – Newman and Lyotard

The love of space is there, and painting functions in space like everything else because it is a communal fact – it can be held in common. Only time can be felt in private. Space is common property. Only time is personal, a private experience [...]. The concern with space bores me. I insist on my experiences of sensations in time – not the *s e n s e* of time but the *physical s e n s a t i o n* of time.

Barnett Newman, *Ohio*, 1949

Gradually, Newman began to pay more attention in his comments to the perception of the viewer, the viewer’s awareness of his or her own presence in the face of a painting. He was not referring to the sensation of the tragic, despite

65 Newman, “The Fourteen Stations of the Cross,” (1958-1966) in *Barnett Newman*, 190.

66 Nietzsche, *Narodziny tragedii [The Birth of Tragedy]*, 157.

the fact that the term earlier epitomized his description of one's awareness of one's limits and individual separateness. Maybe it is a testament to a new, less pessimistic understanding of the human condition, not so conspicuously shaped under the pressure of the catastrophic developments of World War II. Instead of talking about the primal terror of man, who realizes his own presence against the powerful and incomprehensible forces of the outside world, Newman talked about an overwhelming epiphany of the 'self' in the face of infinite space.

He attempted to describe this experience, among other attempts, in an essay from 1949, entitled *Prologue for a New Aesthetics*, which was inspired by his impressions of earth mounds of the Native Americans he saw in southwestern Ohio. "Looking at the site you feel, Here I am, h e r e ... and out beyond there [beyond the limits of the site] there is chaos, nature, rivers, landscapes... But here you get a sense of your own presence... I became involved with the idea of making the viewer present: the idea that «Man is Present»."<sup>67</sup> Climbing the enormous mounds in the Ohio Valley, the visitor has a view of an endless space around him. It is not that, according to Newman, which decides the particular dimension of that experience: the space itself is not the issue, nor is it any other external, perceived form. What is truly important in that situation is "the sensation in time," the "physical s e n s a t i o n in time," which is an intense primary experience of oneself – of one's own presence in a singular moment. On a different occasion, while speaking on the subject of that experience, Newman recalled a Hebrew term – *Makom* – "the place of God,"<sup>68</sup> thinking exclusively about the e x p e r i e n c e d "sanctity of the place," regardless of its religious context. In that way, again – in accordance with his "plasmic" concept of painting – he stressed direct experiences and participation, as a counter to reifying interpretations based on formal categories and the homogenous, quantitative understanding of space. In a commentary to one of his exhibitions he wrote: "The freedom of space, the emotion of human scale, the sanctity of a place are what is moving – not size (I wish to overcome size), not colors (I wish to create color), not area (I wish to declare space), not absolutes (I wish to feel and to know at all risk)."<sup>69</sup>

Ultimately unfinished, *Prologue for a New Aesthetics*, left in the form of a short text under a much more humble title, could be treated as *counterpart* to the

67 Thomas Hess, *Barnett Newman*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1971), 73. Newman's commentary quoted in the introduction to the later edition of the text entitled "Ohio," *Barnett Newman*, 174.

68 Newman, "Response to Thomas F. Mathews," (1969) in *Barnett Newman*, 289.

69 Newman, from *Exhibition of the United States of America* (São Paulo, 1965) catalogue, in *Barnett*, 186.

much older *The Sublime Is Now* (1948), a text in which Newman questioned the aesthetics of beauty dominant in the Western tradition by confronting it with a competing search for sublimity. Greek art, dominated by a desire for beauty, “is an insistence that the sense of exaltation is to be found in perfect form, that exaltation is the same as ideal sensibility – in contrast, for example, with the Gothic or baroque, in which the sublime consists of a desire to destroy form, where form can be formless.”<sup>70</sup> Contemporary art appeared to Newman in that context, as a firm rebellion against the classic heritage of Antiquity and the Renaissance. According to him, its main impulse “was this desire to destroy beauty,” and its very effort of breaking free from the past and rejecting forms, which were already in place, had a sublime quality.<sup>71</sup> Sublimity, according to Newman, could not be based on calculated, aesthetic effects, which could include the sensation of vastness, physical power, or suggestions of something being impossible to represent. It required rejecting all “associations with old images, both sublime and beautiful.”<sup>72</sup> It does not stem from a sublime “theme,” as the ancient, mythical themes are dead already; one should focus rather on “ultimate emotions.” Newman claimed:

We do not need the obsolete props of an outmoded and antiquated legend... We are freeing ourselves of the impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend, myth, or what have you, that have been the devices of Western European painting. Instead of making cathedrals out of Christ, man, or “life,” we are making [them] out of ourselves, out of our own feelings. The image we produce is the self-evident one of revelation, real and concrete, that can be understood by anyone who will look at it without the nostalgic glasses of history.<sup>73</sup>

As a spokesman of new American painting, Newman attempted to differentiate between the negating movement he observed in his avant-garde predecessors, and the sublimity felt through the experience of a single work, a concrete painting, his own work being at stake, as well as that of his artist friends. The attempts of the European avant-garde – he argued – despite their elevated, revolutionary energy, lead to an aesthetic sublimity of simple, banal objects, or to a formal perfectionism of geometric art. Hence, they remained closed within the framework of the question of beauty – between an act of its

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<sup>70</sup> Newman, “The Sublime is Now,” in *Barnett Newman*, 171.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 173

negation, and an involuntary restitution. In the works of American painters, on the other hand, a gesture of commencing was shifted from the scene of history, to the single act of painting. "A naked, revolutionary moment," Newman wrote, is based on "beginning with a line, and painting as if the art of painting never existed before."<sup>74</sup>

It seems understandable that in a well-known text by Jean-Francois Lyotard, entitled *Sublime and the Avant-Garde*, Newman holds an important position. Not only is he the first one, even before the French philosopher, to reach for that slightly outdated category in order to associate it with aspirations of contemporary art, but also the first one to create its interpretation which in many respects could have been an example for the latter. In Lyotard's interpretation, the sublime of avant-garde works relates to their anti-formal attitude, the freeing movement of self-cleansing and beginning, or rejection of established norms of taste and exploring the unknown. In texts by both authors the stress falls not on complete, avant-garde programs, but on singular actions and experiences which do not count on *sensus communis*, and are contradictory to all communicative and utilitarian practice.<sup>75</sup> The sublime is not considered by them through its objective aspect, but primarily as a mode of experiencing temporality that exceeds causal order, and narrative continuity.

Lyotard, although well acquainted with Newman's work and with its existing interpretations, allowed himself to expand a partially independent, separate interpretation, one closer to his own philosophical interests. Therefore, he omitted the question of the tragic, present in the early works of Newman, and treated the recurring theme of subjective presence as an unfortunate expression of metaphysical fundamentalism. Newman's comments referring to the realization of one's own subjective "self" in the presence of a painting, according to Lyotard, do not deliver an accurate description of Newman's paintings. What struck and fascinated Lyotard in Newman's work was a particularly

74 Barnett Newman in "Jackson Pollock. An Artists' Symposium" (*ARTnews* debate, 1967), 192. Understanding of painterly act as a free, pure gesture, and unpredictable event associated with a popular in the 40s and the 50s existential philosophy used to be a kind of common good of abstract expressionism. The artist, when standing in front of the canvas, was supposed to free himself from any assumptions and calculations of effect. The most influential commentators of abstract impressionism, such as Harold Rosenberg and Robert Motherwell, stressed its authenticity, and spontaneity of painterly expression. One can spot a different distribution of accents in Newman's attitude: instead of talking about the immersion of an artist into the creative process, and direct experience of painterly matter, he stressed the primary sensation of one's separateness, and being alien to the world within the gesture of a painter – it was what he described as awareness of the tragic.

75 See Jean Francis Lyotard, "Wzniosłość i awangarda," ["The Sublime and the Avant-Garde"] trans. Marek Bieńczyk, *Teksty Drugie*, 2/3 (1996): 185.

epiphanic experience of a moment – an “event” which, as he stated, exceeds all meaning.<sup>76</sup> That “event,” according to Lyotard, is not something that the awareness establishes and confirms, but on the contrary – it is something which surprises and baffles.<sup>77</sup> That is why, as he tried to convince everyone, all formulations pointing to some totality, identity or personal presence in respect to canvases are mistaken, because they point to something that appears in one’s thoughts only *post factum*, and in no way legitimates their epiphanic character.<sup>78</sup> The notion of subjective presence inevitably directs Lyotard towards reflections about the search for some metaphysical basis, an ontological foundation, or a movement of establishing identity, which he himself juxtaposes with openness to events and the exploration of the unknown. Complete rejection, or omission, of that question by Lyotard is therefore based on a clear simplification in respect to the interpretation of a problem, which we have followed in the case of Newman.

In Lyotard’s rather “heretical” interpretation of the sublime, the particular experience, which is brought by the avant-garde work (including the work of Newman), is based on the feeling of powerlessness and the humiliation of our imagination as a power of forms. It is a sensation, which is not compensated by an awareness of the existence of some higher, beyond-the-senses dimension: God, or a transcendental order of ideas, but – at best – can be a momentary sensation that the “non-representational” exists, and “happens” contrary to any rational calculations and expectations. Sublimity is identified here with an ecstatic experience of an “event,” which contradicts the superior power of a subject. Paul Crowther, interpreting it in a contradictory way, while focusing on the question of the sublime in Newman’s work, attempts at proving that the painter remained faithful to Kant in the most basic outlines of his thinking.<sup>79</sup> Experience of a sublime work of art was supposed to be a moment of a subject becoming aware of his transcendental calling. Numerous comments made by the artist on the subject of one’s own self-awareness awakening in the process of confronting the painting, one’s separateness and the feeling of being alien to the world, of fear and terror, but also of dignity through confronting them, speak in favor of that interpretation. Crowther rightfully brings back and highlights a thread, disregarded by Lyotard, of a subjective self-awareness. Despite everything else, however, one should not forget that Newman,

76 Jean Francis Lyotard, “Newman. The Instant,” in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 247.

77 Lyotard, “Wzniosłość i awangarda” [“Sublime and the Avant-Garde”], 174.

78 Lyotard, *Newman*, 247–248.

79 Paul Crowther, “Barnett Newman and the Sublime,” *Oxford Art Journal*, 7 (2) (1984): 52–56.

when he mentioned “absolute emotions,” for example, did not employ Kant’s language systematically. Such comparison has its limitations, and bringing attention to an assumed transcendental, legislative dimension of human self-consciousness present in Newman’s texts does not have to explain in any definitive way the actual power of his paintings.

Which one of the philosophers is right here – which definition of the sublime is more adequate in case of Newman’s work? Crowther seems to be a more scrupulous reader of Newman’s theoretical manifestos than Lyotard, but vehemently attempts to liken the sense of Newman’s views to Kant’s concept of the sublime. Lyotard, on the other hand, takes out of Newman something with which he himself identifies, partially going astray from the painter’s interpretation, but also providing a great characterization of the paintings’ power. On the problematic question of the subjective “self” which – according to Newman’s words – was supposed to be located at the core of his painterly practice, one thing seems certain: subjectivity should not be imagined to be a transcendental, metaphysical base, an embodiment of the principle of unity and identity. According to such an understanding, it is not assumed as a condition for the emergence of a painting, nor of its reception. Newman himself spoke only of experience, in which the awareness of one’s individual self emerges, and any characteristics of that self refers only to its phenomenological dimension. As he said in a conversation with David Sylvester:

One of the nicest things that anybody ever said about my work is when you yourself said that standing in front of my paintings you had a sense of your own scale. [...] This is what I have tried to do: that the onlooker in front of my painting knows that he’s there. To me, the sense of place not only has a mystery, but has that sense of metaphysical fact. I have come to distrust the episodic, and I hope that my painting has the impact of giving someone, as it did me, the feeling of his own totality, of his own separateness, of his own individuality, and at the same time of his connection to others, who are also separate.<sup>80</sup>

The individual self, imagined by Newman, in its autonomy and secret tensions, the “self” standing for a firm decisiveness in his paintings ruling over their space, is – as many authors observed – an extremely “male” construct.<sup>81</sup> It does not have too much in common, however, with the Cartesian subject – a rational, bodiless transparency overcoming reality, or with the metaphysical

80 Interview with David Sylvester, 257–258.

81 Leja develops on that subject “Barnett Newman’s Solo Tango”.

principle of identity questioned by Lyotard. The “self,” spoken about by Newman, appears to itself in the moment of confronting the other, in a realization of a relationship with that which is different from it. Lyotard himself grasped it well by observing that, as a form of transferring messages, in their “pragmatic organization” Newman’s paintings are closer to ethics than aesthetics. It seems as if there is no rhetorical triad of speaker, addressee and object of reference in them. His paintings “don’t ‘say’ anything, they are not somebody’s message. It is not Newman who speaks to us, it is not him employing painting to tell us something. [...] The message itself takes the form of presentation. But presentation does not present, does not actualize, but rather is the presence itself.”<sup>82</sup> Newman “grants the color, line, or rhythm a bounding power of a face to face relationship.” It is a commitment formulated in the second person – not according to the model: “Look at that (there),” but: “Look at me,” or more precisely: “Listen to me.”<sup>83</sup> Newman would be happy with such description. Moving as far away as possible from thinking about a painting as a beautiful object, it simultaneously evokes a feeling of immersion in that painting – a consummate directness and establishing of distance. Lyotard’s words – an expression of a deep appreciation for Newman’s work – prove the existence of an analogous transition from a critique of Western metaphysics, meaning Greek ontology (and consequently, in case of Newman, Greek aesthetics), towards an ethical perspective that connects the position of the painter and philosopher. However, while for Newman the experience evoked by his paintings was supposed to ground the subject in his ethical foundations, Lyotard’s nomadic vision of subjectivity evades such “fundamentalism,” replacing for good “place,” in which the subject can appear, with “moment.”

*Translation: Jan Pytalski*

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<sup>82</sup> Lyotard, *Newman*, 244.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

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Krzysztof Pijarski

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## "Realism," Embodied Subjects, Projection of Empathy

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"The ultimate stakes of serious art – to attach  
us to reality."

Michael Fried, *Four Honest Outlaws*<sup>1</sup>

### The Question of Modernity

A question that is worth a moment of reflection: why does raising the issue of *realism* as a central problem in art (or literature) invariably require a certain gesture of withdrawal, for us to place it in brackets, or quotes? As if we were uncertain what we had in mind when writing this word, as if we did not know what it meant, or were opposing its standard, common-sense meaning. Therefore, when Hilde van Gelder and Jan Baetens open their 2006 anthology of texts devoted to *Critical Realism in Contemporary Art* with the words "20th-Century art [...] is at odds with realism, at least with the term," it is this final phrase that seems key. The authors' thesis is that after the adventures of modernism, the avant-garde and postmodernism, realism returned in contemporary artistic practices. It returned as a result of the exhaustion

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1 Michael Fried, *Four Honest Outlaws: Sala, Ray, Marioni, Gordon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 24.

of formalisms (from the end of the 1960s) and the dramatic increase in the “virtual disembodiment” of culture. Furthermore, during its return, the term “realism” acquired a new meaning:

Realism is no longer restricted to the implicit connotation of “photographic realism”: the 19th-Century model of detail realism as the production of a mechanical replica, no longer holds, either in literature, or in the visual arts. On the contrary, for those eager to maintain a realist stance in art today, realism is never simply reproductive (mimesis), but productive: it is the invention of new ways of representing the real, which always takes the risk of appearing utterly unrealistic, until these new styles become hegemonic, then stereotyped, and finally ... unrealistic once again.<sup>2</sup>

It seems to me that the time frame of this diagnosis is worth questioning. Is it not the case that “realism” was problematic from the outset, that it is a truly modern problem? The fact that it is historically a 19th-century phenomenon and that it appeared around the same time as photography is very telling. But what it tells us, and what conclusions can be drawn from this proximity, is by no means obvious. The negative reactions to photography, which from the very beginning had ambitions of joining the fray of fine arts, were of the same kind as the arguments against the “realists” (like many other definitions of movements or “styles” in art, realism too had negative connotations): creating a perfectly accurate picture of reality does not necessarily translate to understanding it (and might even make this impossible); it means that we remain on the surface of things. It was for this reason that Charles Baudelaire thought that Gustave Courbet (incidentally his friend) had “in favour of the immediate impact of external material nature”<sup>3</sup> declared war on the imagination, which the poet, as is well known, saw as the “queen of the faculties” and the precondition of art.<sup>4</sup> In *The Salon of 1859*, which contains perhaps the most famous 19th-century critique of photography, he says the following about realism:

The artist [...] who calls himself a realist, an ambiguous word whose meaning remains undetermined, and whom we shall call a positivist

2 *Critical Realism in Contemporary Art. Around Allan Sekula's Photography*, ed. Hilde van Gelder and Jan Baetens (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2006), 7–8.

3 Charles Baudelaire, “The Universal Exhibition of 1855,” in *Baudelaire. Selected Writings on Art & Artists*, trans. Pierre E. Charvet (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1972), 127.

4 *Ibid.*, 126.

to better characterize his error, declares "I wish to depict things as they would be, without me existing." *The universe without man*.<sup>5</sup>

The suggestion that is made here is clear: that the painter-realist is somebody who strives for a certain *automaticism*, as if he were himself a machine. In the same way, photography, as it is inhuman, can only record reality, but not interpret it. As a mechanical, *automatic thing* (and thus working on its own) it is a representative of the destructive forces of modernisation: progress and industry.<sup>6</sup> Baudelaire sees a gulf emerging between a "perfect" and "true" reproduction of reality, between the world recorded automatically (the world without humans) and that which permeates through the "filter" of imagination. And this is why I would suggest that the question of realism is a truly modern one: this gulf, or divide, is the point at which the place of humans in the modern world, their limits, and the conditions of understanding their constitution, become problematic. (There is no such thing as an objective record *per se*, even in photography). This is also why, in asking about realism, we must realise that problems are likely to ensue when answering the question of what this "reality" to be presented is. Or what remaining faithful to it in the gesture of representation should mean. Owing to this diagnosis, when tackling the question of realism we usually make it clear that what is at stake is not simply creating a faithful copy of reality.

In the light of this, it is hard even to state that there is such a thing as realism in general, and that if only we take a careful look at well selected examples we will be able to extract its secret. The question of the modern condition was examined in the context of realism not only in the 19th century, but also – and perhaps above all – in the 20th: on the one hand within the classical avant-garde movement in Europe, from the time of *facturalism* up to *productivism* and *factography* under the banner of Sergei Tretyakov and Alexander Rodchenko, and on the other as part of the "social realism" of Western Europe and the United States, German "new objectivity" [*Neue Sachlichkeit*] and the Mexican muralists.<sup>7</sup> All these phenomena are like prisms in which "realism" lights up in an extravaganza of various aspects, topics and localities.

5 Baudelaire, "The Salon of 1859," in *Baudelaire. Selected Writings*, 307. The spacing of the last sentence is mine (K. P.).

6 *Ibid.*, 297.

7 These issues are discussed very well by Benjamin Buchloh; see his "From Faktura to Factography," *October* 30 (1984, Autumn): 102-106; see also Sarah Wilson, "'La Beauté Révolutionnaire': Réalisme Socialiste and French Painting 1935-1954," *Oxford Art Journal* 3 (2) (2008): 61-69; and Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

They also suggest that it is to a large extent a phenomenon associated with a certain form of involvement in the shape of the social world around us, with some force of (practical) politicality. I shall be less interested in the immediate relationship between the image and the social reality in which it came about, and more in the philosophical aspect of realism as a problem of representation and as a certain politics of the image as such. What, then, are the stakes of “realism”?

### Courbet and Absorption

It will come as no surprise that I begin my argument from the aforementioned Gustave Courbet, who introduced the concept of realism to thinking about art once and for all. (Though he claimed that “the title of Realist was thrust upon me,”<sup>8</sup> this was the banner under which he held his rebellious individual exhibition at the World Exhibition in 1855). I shall base my analysis of Courbet’s gesture on Michael Fried’s interpretations. Fried, known above all as the arch-modernist 1960s art critic and historian on the art of modernity, is the author of three extensive studies of “realism,” whose subjects are, respectively, the American painter Thomas Eakins (regrettably little-known in Europe), Courbet, and perhaps the most important, the German painter of the second half of the 19th century, Adolf Menzel.<sup>9</sup> Fried too begins his reflections by distancing himself from the premise of the “mimeticity” of realism:

Indeed it’s hard not to feel that realist paintings such as Courbet’s or Eakins have been looked at less intensively than other kinds of pictures, precisely because their imagined casual dependence on reality – a sort of ontological illusionism – has made close scrutiny of what they offer to be seen to be beside the point.<sup>10</sup>

Fried describes his own approach as “strongly interpretive,” and in his reading of pictures endeavours to go beyond what is literally found in the scene of the representation. The French philosopher Jacques Rancière is very

8 Gustave Courbet, *Exhibition and Sale of Forty Paintings and Four Drawings by Gustave Courbet* (“The Realist Manifesto”), Paris 1855, quoted at <http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/courbet-dossier/courbet-speaks.html>, accessed August 30, 2015.

9 Michael Fried, *Realism. Writing, and Disfiguration. On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Fried, *Courbet’s Realism* (Chicago–London: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Fried, *Menzel’s Realism: Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century Berlin* (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 2002).

10 Fried, *Courbet’s Realism*, 3.

convincing in his criticism of the modernist equation of "realism" with representability (mimesis based on similarity) in literature. He tries to show that:

the so-called "realistic" novel was not the acme of "representational art" but the first break with it. By rejecting the representational hierarchy between high and low subjects, as well as the representational privilege of action over description and its forms of connection between the visible and the sayable, the realistic novel framed the forms of visibility that would make "abstract art" visible.<sup>11</sup>

The fact that Rancière concentrates on literature in this statement is useful, insofar as it allows me to establish a certain analogy between Courbet's project of painting and the writing strategy of his contemporary Gustave Flaubert. More on that in a moment. The above passage also points to a certain danger related to this "freeing" of realism from the restraints of similarity. This is illustrated extremely well by the interpretation of Courbet's canvases made by Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, who see the historical value of the creator of Realism<sup>12</sup> in the fact that he devalued the subject matter and "insisted on the painted surface as no one had ever done before."<sup>13</sup> They contrast his painting, which was indeed distinguished by thick impasti that sometimes form on the surface of the canvas – shapeless, tonally almost indistinct, and yet remarkably tactile surfaces<sup>14</sup> – with the illusory academic painting of Ernest Meissonier and Jean-Léon Gérôme. These artists treated the picture as a window (in the style of Alberti) and thus strove to make its surface as transparent as possible. For Rosen and Zerner, the fact that the content of the painting in Courbet's work is always subordinate to his way of applying the paint makes him a model representative of the "autonomy of art," which ultimately, in the

11 Jacques Rancière, "From Politics to Aesthetics?," *Paragraph* 28, 1 (2008): 20. There is no space here to bear out the comparison of Rancière with Fried, against whom – or more precisely against his reflection on contemporary artistic photography – the philosopher wrote on at least one occasion (see Rancière, "Notes on the Photographic Image," *Radical Philosophy* 156 (2009): 8–15).

12 Courbet insisted that "his" realism be spelt with a capital letter.

13 Charles Rosen, Henri Zerner, *Romanticism and Realism: The Mythology of Nineteenth-Century Art* (New York: Viking, 1984), 151.

14 For example, Timothy J. Clark notes how in *Burial at Ornans* Courbet "let the mass of congeal into a solid wall of black pigment, against which the face of the mayor's daughter and the handkerchief which covers his sister Zoë's face register as tenuous, almost tragic interruptions." Timothy J. Clark, *Image of the People. Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (Berkeley–Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 82.

20th century, led to the foundation of abstract painting.<sup>15</sup> In this sense, alongside Courbet, Manet and the impressionists also number among the realists.

Fried is decidedly opposed to this verdict, and although Rancière's statement appears analogous to that of Zerner and Rosen, he too would have to disagree with this interpretation. Above all, this is because they confuse the autonomy of aesthetic experience with the autonomy of art. In fact, their interpretation includes Courbet in the "canonical" teleology of Clement Greenberg's modernism, according to which "Manet's became the first Modernist pictures by virtue of the frankness with which they declared the flat surfaces on which they were painted,"<sup>16</sup> thus making Courbet de facto the first modernist. As we know from Greenberg, only a literal two-dimensionality is the "guarantee of painting's independence [i.e. autonomy] as an art."<sup>17</sup> For Rancière, this point of view is unacceptable, since the idea of the autonomy of aesthetic experience – unlike that of the autonomy of art – is not built on the premise that each art, searching solely for "the effects exclusive to itself," its "purity" as a medium, would "narrow its area of competence, but at the same time [...] make its possession of that area all the more certain."<sup>18</sup> The autonomy of aesthetic experience was not meant to introduce the now "homeless" art (alienated from religious and courtly ritual) to a field of new certainty, but was "taken as the principle of a new form of collective life, precisely because it was a place where the usual hierarchies which framed everyday life were withdrawn."<sup>19</sup> It is in this sense that "the idea of pure literature and the idea of literature as the expression of a determined social life are two sides of the same coin."<sup>20</sup>

Fried's take on all this is somewhat different, although it does not seem that his vision is irreconcilable with the above. He sees Courbet (together with Édouard Manet) as a figure who crowned the tradition, central to French painting, which he calls *antithetical*, a tradition stretching back to the mid-18th century and first theorised by Denis Diderot. It was Diderot, the author of *Jacques the Fatalist and his Master*, who framed the requirement for a picture to in some way "establish the metaphysical illusion that the beholder

15 Rosen, Zerner, *Romanticism and Realism*, 151.

16 Clement Greenberg, *Modernist Painting*, in Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 4. Modernism With a Vengeance - 1957-1969*, ed. John O'Brian (University of Chicago Press, 1993), 86.

17 Ibid., 88.

18 Ibid., 86.

19 Rancière, *From Politics to Aesthetics?*, 21.

20 Ibid., 20.

does not exist, that there is no one standing before the canvas."<sup>21</sup> From then on, the aim of the most important painters of this tradition – from Greuze, via David to Géricault – was "closing the representation to the beholder, above all by depicting figures wholly engrossed or absorbed in actions or states of mind and who therefore were felt to be unaware of being beheld (as though that apparent unawareness, that perfect absorption of the figures in the world of the representation, were experienced as curtaining off or walling off the representation from the beholder)."<sup>22</sup> Yet in the 1840s and 1850s, this strategy, which artists achieved using ever more dramatic methods,<sup>23</sup> ceased to be effective. Contemporary beholders became more and more aware that the figures on these canvases were in fact not absorbed in what they were doing, but merely wanted to be seen as such – that they were *a c t i n g* (Millet was one who encountered such reactions from audiences and critics). Courbet was the last painter who managed to achieve an absorptive effect, before Manet opened a whole series of "modernist adventures"<sup>24</sup> in a way that radically acknowledged<sup>25</sup> the fact that the image was exhibited to be viewed by an (anonymous) audience. The way that he accomplished this involved

the all-but-corporeal merger on the part of the painter-identified now as the painting's first beholder, or painter-beholder-with the painting before

21 Michael Fried, "Thoughts on Caravaggio," *Critical Inquiry* 24, (1997): 23.

22 Ibid.

23 The culmination of this is Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa*; see Fried, *Courbet's Realism*, 29–32.

24 I mention this only in passing, but in his book on Manet, Fried abandons the orthodox telology of the development of modernist art in favour of a series of "modernist adventures." Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism, or The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press), 410.

25 Fried shares the concept of acknowledging with Stanley Cavell; it forms the basis of their thinking about the tasks of art, as well as our obligations to others: "acknowledgment 'goes beyond' knowledge, not in the order, or as a feat, of cognition, but in the call upon me to express the knowledge at its core, to recognize what I know, to do something in the light of it, apart from which this knowledge remains without expression, hence perhaps without possession." (Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, (New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 428). And: "My harping on acknowledgment is meant to net what is valid in the notion of self-reference and in the facts of self-consciousness in modern art. The explicit form of an acknowledgement is 'I know I [promised; am withdrawn; let you down] ...' But that is not the only form it can take; and it is not clear why this form functions as it does. We should not assume that the point of the personal pronoun here is to refer to the self, for an acknowledgment is an act of the self [...]" (Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed. Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, (Cambridge, MA–London, 1979), 123).

him, the painting being realized under his brush. At least with respect to that beholder (the painter-beholder) the painting would ideally escape beholding completely; there would be no one before it looking on because the beholder who had been there was now incorporated or disseminated in the work itself.<sup>26</sup>

Courbet did this in various ways. For instance, in his self-portraits from the 1840s, the early period of his work, the presence of the artist on the canvas was guaranteed by the very subject, and further strengthened in various ways. These included a series of operations allegorising the process of painting these images (the returning motif of the arrangement of the hands, right and left respectively, as if they were holding the brush and palette), placing the figure close to the surface of the canvas so that it almost questioned the ontological separation of painted and real space, and finally the presentation of the figure in positions that minimised the sense of confrontation between the subject of the portrait and the beholder (which in this case was one and the same person, Courbet himself). The limits of representation are also placed in doubt by showing the figure from behind. On the one hand, this represents Courbet's situation as a painter-beholder, and on the other it makes the project of a quasi-corporeal union with the picture easier (creating the impression of looking over the figures' shoulders, as in the painting *After Dinner at Ornans*, 1848-1849). Allegories of painter's tools make their return as well – a shotgun, lance etc. as counterparts to the brush, other objects as counterparts to the palette and the positioning of the body corresponding to that of the painter during his work. The signatures are also significant. For example, the poses of the figures in *The Stone Breakers* (1849) not only allegorise the brush (hammer) and palette (basket filled with stones), but their arrangement also repeats the shape of the artists' initials and signature in the bottom-right corner of the picture. One might say that, irrespective of how "realistic" his paintings are, intuitively they always stick stubbornly to the fact that they are a painted reality. This is not quite the same as stating that Courbet's painting testifies to the autonomy of art. In other words, we can say that Courbet did not strive for the autonomy of the picture (or declare the irrelevance of the subject matter), but to evoke a certain "experience of corporeality, mobilized around the act of painting, that sought to undo the very distinction between embodied subject and 'objective' world."<sup>27</sup> In the central group in *The Painter's Studio* (1854-1855),

<sup>26</sup> Fried, "Thoughts on Caravaggio," 23-24.

<sup>27</sup> Fried, *Courbet's Realism*, 266.

one of his most important canvases, we see how the artist literally blends in with the picture emerging under his brush. The most radical manifestations of this strategy are attempts to identify with women (examples being *The Source* from 1869 and *Sleeping Spinner* from 1853) and with still lifes – stones and dead animals (*The Trout*, 1873).

In all this, we must discern an element of a certain rather fragile dialectic. The signature can be interpreted as an element both of uniting the painter-beholder with the picture and emphasizing the surface nature of representation (or its objectivity). And similarly, an aspect of painting that holds the viewer's gaze and at the same time may be interpreted as taking part in the project of the painter-beholder being united with the picture is the materiality of its surface. Although, as Fried admits, it is hard to pinpoint the exact relationship between the first beholder-painter and subsequent viewers – the audience – one thing remains certain: according to his interpretation, these image structures are a response to the fact of the existence of an audience in the modern sense – an anonymous group of recipients looking at paintings for their own pleasure. This dynamic is described well by Stanley Cavell, with whom Fried engaged in dialogue starting in the late 1960s:

If modernism's quest for presentness arises with the growing autonomy of art (from religious and political and class service; from altars and halls and walls), then that quest is set by the increasing nakedness of exhibition as the condition for viewing a work of art. The object itself must account for the viewer's presenting of himself to it and for the artist's authorization of his right to such attendance.<sup>28</sup>

In this sense, I would understand the Friedian antitheatrical tradition as the reverse of the "autonomy of aesthetic experience" as seen by Rancière, as its dialectical *pendant*. For the French philosopher, this autonomy involved a break from mimesis, which also meant that

there was no longer any principle of distinction between what belonged to art and what belonged to everyday life. [...] Correspondingly, any artistic production could become part of the framing of a new collective life.<sup>29</sup>

28 Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 121.

29 Rancière, *From Politics to Aesthetics?*, 21. The chapter on Cubism in Timothy James Clark's *Farewell to an Idea* examines this issue in unparalleled fashion. The author shows how Cubism as performed by Picasso and Braque in fact aspired to create a new kind of (egalitarian) commonality, and how it was ultimately forced to admit defeat. See Timothy James Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven—London: Yale University Press, 1999).

However, Rancière does not take account the fact that in the modern era, art also has other functions: it is *entertainment*, i.e. a good that can be possessed, objectified, *consumed*. This fact made art an extremely fragile thing, with the audience's desire, and its gaze, demanding a *spectacle*, proving a threat to it. And it is here that a space for thinking of Fried's project in political terms opens up. (This would be one of the ways that I understand the painter's "hyperbolic desire to abolish beholding altogether" in the *The Source*<sup>30</sup>). Fried himself looks at this question from two perspectives: Foucault's reflection on surveillance and modern visuality, and Marx's idea of non-alienated labour. In the former case, he has the following to say:

For example, the entire effort to defeat the theatrical that I have ascribed to the Diderotian tradition might be understood simultaneously as an attempt to imagine an escape from the coercive visuality of the disciplinary mechanisms whose origin Foucault traces back to the middle of the eighteenth century (*the figures in the painting must appear to be acting freely, as if in the absence of any beholder*) and as a product of those mechanisms and thus a source of coercion in its own right (the demand that the figures be seen in these terms virtually dictating the limits of representability, besides being finally impossible to satisfy).<sup>31</sup>

The issue of Courbet's construction of an effect of embodied subjectivity in his paintings is analogous. Fried interprets Courbet's ability to engage his own body in the production of his paintings to such an extent as an arch-example of the phenomenon that Foucault called practices of *resistance*. Courbet's strategy of quasi-corporeal unification also places in doubt, or forces us to reconsider, the dominant understanding of nature and reality as opposing humans, something from which we must keep our distance in order to acquire knowledge.

As for Marx, what Courbet was in a sense striving for in his paintings was that "the production and the consumption [...] exactly coincided"<sup>32</sup> (meaning that, by painting himself onto his canvases, he was not only their creator, but also their first beholder, and thus the consumer, excluding, or at least pushing further away, any others; he "aspired to *leave no world* outside the painting"<sup>33</sup>). This aspect of his work can be linked with the idea of the

30 Fried, *Courbet's Realism*, 271.

31 Ibid., 257.

32 Ibid., 258.

33 Ibid., 263.

perfect correspondence of production and consumption, in Marx designating nonalienated labour.<sup>34</sup> Of course, in the modern situation, nonalienated labour must remain a fantasy, and the idea of paying for "work being squandered," a representation of which T. J. Clark sees in *The Stone Cutters* ("men turned stiff and wooden by routine"<sup>35</sup>), becomes a utopia, rather like the attempt to paint oneself into a picture, to become the same as the representation, closing it to the world and thus making it immune to appropriation. Yet this does not at all mean that being condemned to defeat is a chance characteristic of Courbet's project. On the contrary, argues Fried: "it was precisely the impossibility of literal or corporeal merger that made that project conceivable, or rather pursuable."<sup>36</sup>

This radical instability of Courbet's position regarding his own work, suspended between absolute immanence and equally absolute externality, opens the possibility of looking at an analogy with the writing strategy of Flaubert, which I mentioned above. In Flaubert's letter to George Sand, we read:

I expressed myself badly when I said to you that "one should not write from the heart." I wanted to say: one should not put one's personality on stage. I believe that great art is scientific and impersonal. One should, by an effort of the spirit, transport oneself into the characters, not draw them to oneself. That is the method at least...<sup>37</sup>

34 In order to portray this idea, Fried cites an appropriate passage from *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: "Not only is production immediately consumption and consumption immediately production, not only is production a means of consumption and consumption the aim of production, i.e., each supplies the other with its object (production supplying the external object of consumption, consumption the conceived object of production); but also, each of them, apart from being immediately the other, and apart from mediating the other, in addition to this creates the other in completing itself, and creates itself as the other. Consumption accomplishes the act of production only in completing the product as a product by dissolving it, by devouring its autonomous thing like form, by raising the disposition developed in the first act of production, through the need for repetition, to a state of skilfulness; it is thus not only the concluding act in which the product becomes product, but also that in which the producer becomes producer. On the other side, production produces consumption by creating the specific manner of consumption, the ability to consume, as a need." (Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 93 [Translation slightly modified]. Quoted in: Fried, *Courbet's Realism*, 354, footnote 61.

35 Clark, *Image of the People*, 80.

36 Fried, *Courbet's Realism*, 269.

37 *Gustave Flaubert – George Sand Correspondence* (Paris: Flammarion, 1981), 110. Quoted in Fried, *Courbet's Realism*, 358, footnote 85.

Dominick LaCapra sees in this statement a fundamental tension in Flaubert's view of the ideal relationship between the producer and the work: between "objective impersonality and subjective identification," as if there existed a narrative strategy capable of abandoning the opposition between the objective and the subjective.<sup>38</sup> In this radical disconnection of the position – suspended between the impersonal distance of science and the immanence of total identification – it is not hard to perceive a strong analogy to what can be experienced in the paintings of Gustave Courbet. It is tempting, furthermore, to link this division to the aforementioned problem of representation in the time of photography, suspended between automatic recording of the world and the immersion embodied in it. Fried examines the question of the relationship of Courbet's painting with photography, and indeed notes that his works consistently tackle the subject of automatism (though he does not write how exactly, we can assume that he is referring to the ease with which Courbet uses paint to produce similarities and analogies), while at the same time placing in doubt the absolute differentiation between automatism and the act of will. (One might say that in Courbet's practice there is no such thing as "pure" recording).

Fried's "strongly interpretative" strategy therefore has nothing anti- or apolitical about it. Like Clark, he's not interested in interpreting political messages based on the "contents" of a painting (e.g. the non-hierarchical, inclusive composition in works such as *Burial at Ornans* as an expression of Courbet's democratism or egalitarianism), but in finding in works of art moments of "mediation." Clark writes:

I want to discover what concrete transactions are hidden behind the mechanical image of "reflection," to know *how* "background" becomes "foreground"; instead of analogy between form and content, to discover the network of real, complex relations between the two.<sup>39</sup>

This too is why Fried confesses that the degree to which his interpretation might seem convincing depends not on (establishing) a perfect correspondence between the picture and its artist, but on "an entire network of connections within Courbet's oeuvre," which link more seldomly the closer one gets to the edges.<sup>40</sup> One might say that this refers to the whole field of politicality,

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38 See Dominick LaCapra, *Madame Bovary on Trial* (Ithaca–London: Cornell University Press, 1982), 127.

39 Clark, *Image of the People*, 13.

40 Fried, *Courbet's Realism*, 288.

the paintings as his territory; to the various ways in which we make contact with the world and inhabit it.

### Menzel and the Vitality of Objects

In an extremely extensive and nuanced study of the work of Adolph Menzel, Fried examines the question of realism in a similar way to that used earlier in the case of Eakins and Courbet. Here too, a central aspect is Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of the embodied subject and "living perception" that accompanied Fried as a necessary tool of thinking about aesthetic experience ever since his time as a modernist critic. (In this sense he questions the widely held opinion of the pure viscosity of not only realism, but modernism as well.) As my reconstruction is no more than an outline, I will not be able to show the complexity of Fried's argument. Menzel is an extremely interesting and important figure particularly because of his singularity; one would struggle to find similar figures in the German-speaking world, and even more so to say that he was part of the anti-theatrical tradition traced by Fried. Yet it is Menzel who helps us to understand why Fried calls his selected "realists" "bodily painters,"<sup>41</sup> since the work of no other artist of the time was based to the same degree on "countless acts of imaginative projection of bodily experience."<sup>42</sup> Menzel did not feel the need to exclude his viewers from the painting, turning it into a separate, closed world; on the contrary, the beholder in the act of perceiving his works is forced to make analogous acts of projection. Innumerable drawings by the German artist (whose motto was "*nulla dies sine linea*" – "no day without a line") contain distinct indications of the changing position of the body and situation of perception while at work, e.g. the inscription of perceiving an object situated close by (almost from above, depicted in a sculpture-like manner) and a landscape (seen from a distance, rendered in a flat way) on one sheet in the drawing *The Schafgraben Flooded* (1842-1843); a mirror reversal of the image in *Partial Self-Portrait* from 1876, not to mention the artist's remarkable ability to convey the material and tactile nature of an object, as with the books in the drawing *Dr Puhlmann's Bookcase* (1844), or the planks in *Cemetery among the Trees, with an Open Grave* (1846-1847). He also frequently depicted the same object from various angles, almost as if he were turning it in his hands, as in the outstanding gouache *Moltke's Binoculars* (1871). We can also find examples of the changing perspective, pulling the viewer deep into the

<sup>41</sup> Fried, *Menzel's Realism*, 109.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

picture, in his larger oil works, portraying views from windows: *Garden of Prince Albert's Palace* (1846/1876) and *Rear Courtyard and House* (1844), which Fried sees as one of the masterpieces of 19th-century painting.

Owing to the tactile nature of Menzel's painting, and the mobility of his points of view, one might feel tempted to suggest that he did not paint views, but rather created images from within his own (bodily) immersion in the world<sup>43</sup> (which is also why his paintings invite us to look at them from up close). Fried tries to show that, in spite of his isolation, Menzel was not suspended in a vacuum; after all, it was during his lifetime that the aesthetic of empathy (*Einfühlung*) developed in Germany. According to Robert Vischer, Heinrich Wölfflin, August Schmarsow and others, empathy meant that our corporeality determines the forms of seeing the world; it is we that project our own image onto the reality that surrounds us; we are able to create and embody this image in inanimate matter, in still life. (This is an extremely abbreviated look at the matter, but so be it). The remarkable, smallish oil painting *The Artist's Foot* (1876) is probably the best example of this projection mechanism. This all leads to the conclusion that Menzel's art is essentially un- or even anti-photographic, since it does not seem that a photograph could produce such an effect of embodied reception<sup>44</sup>. It is worth adding that Fried himself would struggle to defend this statement, as in various photographs – especially the late landscapes of Stephen Shore<sup>45</sup> – he recognised such possibilities of reception. Also very important to mention are Thomas Struth's *Museum Photographs*.<sup>46</sup> Yet the effects have nothing to do with the "photographic" nature of these works, but rather with an appropriate construction of the picture and its scale attuned to the conditions of reception.

43 In fact one could say the same thing about Courbet, as demonstrated by two anecdotes: the first story took place in summer 1849 during Courbet's stay with Francis Wey and Camille Corot in Louveciennes. One day after lunch, the painters went into the forest to paint, and Corot took a long time finding the right point of view. Courbet, on the other hand, put his easel anywhere. "It doesn't matter where I set up," he said, "It's always good as long as I have a view of nature." The second incident took place in Switzerland, after Courbet had gone into exile. One day his assistant, Pata, drew his attention to a favourable point of view. Courbet retorted that Pata reminded him of Baudelaire, who one evening, while staying in Normandy, had led the artist to a picturesque rock overlooking the sea. "There is what I wanted to show you," Baudelaire said to me, 'there is the point of view.' Wasn't he bourgeois! What are points of view? Do points of view exist?" (quoted in Fried, *Courbet's Realism*, 281).

44 Fried, *Menzel's Realism*, 247–258.

45 See Michael Fried in *Conversation with Stephen Shore*, in *Stephen Shore* (London: Phaidon, 2007), 31, 34.

46 See Krzysztof Pijarski, *(Po)nowoczesne losy obrazów. Sekula / Struth* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo PWSFTviT, 2013).

Fried admits that there are certain kinds of photographs that can trigger a strongly empathetic effect: pornographic pictures for one, and those depicting bodily wounds and deformations, i.e. medical or war photographs; a similar result can be found in snapshots of people unaware of being photographed (as discussed by Susan Sontag). Yet these are all situations in which this effect is achieved automatically, and are therefore not of interest to Fried. According to him, the parallel development of the new invention of photography and Menzel's career means that they must be thought of in terms of a strong, but antithetical relationship. Both photography and Menzel's realism are based on the exchange or transfer of traces, yet in the former case this exchange is literal or causal, whereas with Menzel it is only – albeit with exceptional power – suggested and empathically interpreted by the beholder:

More broadly, I see Menzel and nineteenth-century photography as practicing two antithetical forms of extreme realism, the second predicated on a technology of detachment, according to which the operator is at least relatively speaking mechanically removed or abstracted from the actual production of the image, the first based [...] on empathic projection, which is to say on the heightened imaginative/corporeal involvement of the embodied artist in every aspect of the making of the oil painting, gouache, or drawing. It is tempting to think of the first as a kind of antidote or counterforce to the second, but it would probably be truer, certainly it would be more historical, to say that both the very extremeness and the chiasmus-like inner relation of the two realisms bind them irrevocably together and in the end make each one less than fully intelligible except in the light of the other.<sup>47</sup>

It is this juxtaposition and merging of the two modes of representation that interests me most. Does the way it is formulated not resound with that "fundamental tension" that we can find both in Flaubert and in Courbet? Fried maintains that "the effort of keying a drawn or a painted image to a body that is keyed to the world, neither relationship being one that can be taken for granted, is an exemplary modern effort."<sup>48</sup> An answer to the question about the exact meaning of this argument is given by the shift in Fried's narrative when he discusses Menzel's gouaches – from the aforementioned representation of the artist's foot, as well as two small images of his hand, one holding a container filled with paint and the other a book (?) from the 1860s, to the

47 Fried, *Menzel's Realism*, 252.

48 Ibid., 253.

series of remarkable depictions of suits of armour from the same period – making an uncanny analogy between them. The former evoke a sense of “inner vitality” in the viewer:

the closer we look, the more we become aware of an articulated interplay of bones, muscles, tendons, veins, the skin itself traversed by capillaries, as if the painter were seeking to make actual to the viewer – to render accessible as bodily feeling – not just the physical effort of holding the paint dish and the book (?) but also, going beyond ordinary sensation, the flow of blood and nerve impulses to and from the hands and fingers.<sup>49</sup>

The impression of looking at armour is equally uncanny (and overflowing with vitality):

the suits of armor (a kind of clothing, needless to say) are portrayed as at once inanimate and animate, empty yet instinct with life; more precisely, the artist wished to leave no doubt as to the absence within them of actual bodies [...] yet at the same time he has deployed and grouped the body-like suits, cuirasses, helmets, and so on in postures and arrangements that impose themselves on the viewer as incipiently alive and potentially menacing.<sup>50</sup>

I hope that the above comparison, which demonstrates the extent to which Menzel was able to bestow a certain peculiar vitality, autonomous power and almost bodily being to animate and inanimate things, shall make Fried's next reference to the writings of Marx distinctly legible, as well as his suggestion about the modern character of the desire to do something like that. He cites a passage from Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, which refers to alienation:

Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is ours only when we have it [...] Therefore all the physical and intellectual senses have been replaced by the simple estrangement of all these senses, the sense of having. So that it might give birth to its inner wealth, human nature had to be reduced to this absolute poverty.<sup>51</sup>

49 Ibid., 53–54.

50 Ibid., 56–57.

51 Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin Books, 1975), 351–352. Quoted after Fried, *Menzel's Realism*, 297, footnote 21.

And further on:

In everyday, material industry ... we find ourselves confronted with the objectified powers of the human essence, in the form of sensuous, alien, useful objects, in the form of estrangement.<sup>52</sup>

Interestingly, the former passage is used – twice – by Walter Benjamin in his *Arcades Project*. For him, there emerges from the text a “positive countertype to the collector – which also, insofar as it entails the liberation of things from the drudgery of being useful, represents the consummation of the collector.”<sup>53</sup> In the case of Menzel it is even more – he gives them almost their own, autonomous life. Fried suggests that Menzel’s pictorial practice produces just this counter-type of relations to things, not based on alienation, arguing that to an extent he realises Marx’s “vision of the everyday world of manufactured things as saturated with vital feeling, his assumption, in Elaine Scarry’s words, «that the made world is the human being’s body».”<sup>54</sup>

### Crary and Modern Subjectivity

The above attempts to define the realisms of Courbet and Menzel in categories of practices resistance may still seem unconvincing or unclear, as I am yet to provide the most important reasons for such considerations. I speak of the reconfiguration of understanding of modern subjectivity, the “emergence of models of subjective vision in a wide range of disciplines during the period 1810–1840,”<sup>55</sup> which Jonathan Crary described in his groundbreaking study *Techniques of the Observer* (and to whose further fortunes he devoted his book *Suspensions of Perception*). This topic permits us to see the tension present in realism – between a distant (“automatic”) record and identification, absorption – in a clearer light.

Crary calls this process the *autonomisation of sight*, which can be summed up in two points. The first aspect of the new understanding of subjectivity is, as Iwona Kurz writes,

52 Ibid., 354. Quoted after Fried, *Menzel's Realism*, 297, footnote 22.

53 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA–London: Belknap Press), 209 [The Collector; H3a, 1].

54 Fried, *Menzel's Realism*, 255.

55 Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 11.

the revival and embodiment of the subject, acknowledging sight as an active, dynamic practice, a process subject to human physiology, constituted in the “denseness and materiality” of the human body, yet also innate in its fragility and uncertainty, no longer able conform either to the sterile model in which images are formed like precise casts of reality, or to the objective scheme of the all-seeing Eye.<sup>56</sup>

Second, and more importantly in this context, this process also entails a separation of the senses, their gradual “purification.” In the case of sight, it is especially important to separate it from the sense of touch, which

had been an integral part of classical theories of vision in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The subsequent dissociation of touch from sight occurs within a pervasive “separation of the senses” and industrial remapping of the body in the nineteenth century. The loss of touch as a conceptual component of vision meant the unloosening of the eye from the network of referentiality incarnated in tactility and its subjective relation to perceived space. This autonomization of sight, occurring in many different domains, was a historical condition for the rebuilding of an observer fitted for the tasks of “spectacular” consumption.<sup>57</sup>

According to Crary, the discovery of the embodiment of the subject opened two paths. The first of these led to the affirmation of the sovereignty of sight in modernism, and the second to the standardisation and regulation of the observer, and thus forms of power dependent on the abstraction of seeing. According to this very critical understanding, the appearance of modernism, and with it the society of the spectacle, were linked to the suppressing of the embodied aspect of visual perception. It is not hard to gather that the role played by photography in this process was considerable.

In this context, realism as understood by Fried becomes one of the main tools of resistance to the autonomisation of the senses, one whose existence – if we deem Fried’s interpretation to be convincing – was not perceived by Crary. The latter put forward the alternative between the reduction of

56 Iwona Kurz, “Między szokiem a rozproszeniem. Przygody obserwatora w nowoczesnym świecie,” in *Zawieszenia percepcji* (afterword in the Polish edition of *Suspensions of Perception*; Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2009), 463–464.

57 Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century* (Cambridge, MA–London: MIT Press, 1990), 19.

experience in the universalist aspirations of modernism and its enslavement in the visual regime of the modern society of the spectacle.<sup>58</sup>

If we are to believe Fried, then, his examples seem to suggest that there are several ways in which this non-illusory "transgression" can take place. Firstly, thanks to a strategy based on a kind of visual violence that involves blinding, that is to say on showing something the sight of which seems painful, seems to threaten the gaze, and indirectly also the looking subject. (This is both the simplest and the most difficult strategy; the most difficult because a "productive" blinding seems to be no small feat). The second strategy entails engaging the viewer corporeally in the picture – in various ways, but never directly, and above all not exclusively through the sense of sight. The third would be the allegorical principle, i.e. when we make things that appear obvious form complex webs of connections and analogies.

For me, the most interesting "realistic" works are those which simply (though of course there is nothing simple to it) test sight as the privileged sense of access to the world – they seek to transgress the inevitable flatness and objectivity of representation, to create a "stage," where in the least theatrical and thus most "natural" way possible (whatever that might mean) its object can manifest itself in such a way, as if it became the object of our examination by itself. (We thus return to the idea of a world without humans).

### Gordon and Empathetic Projection

To conclude, please allow me a short diversion to open this analysis to the present day. In his book *Four Honest Outlaws*, Michael Fried examines four contemporary artists: the video artist and filmmaker Anri Sala, the sculptor Charles Ray, the painter Joseph Marioni and another creator of moving pictures, Douglas Gordon. According to Fried, at least three of Gordon's works – *Play Dead; Real Time* (2003), *B-Movie* (1995) and *10ms-1* (1994), and one of Sala's – *Time After Time* (2003) – raise the question of embodied experience as a contemporary one, albeit shifting the emphasis somewhat. *Play Dead* – a video installation composed of two screens suspended in the gallery space and one video monitor – is paradigmatic here. On the two screens we see a female elephant (named Minnie) who "plays dead" in an unspecific, vast, clean room, from time to time struggling up off the concrete floor. To do this, she has to go through a whole set of laborious tasks: getting her huge, lumbering

58 As we read further on, "The prehistory of the spectacle and the 'pure perception' of modernism are lodged in the newly discovered territory of a fully embodied viewer, but the eventual triumph of both depends on the denial of the body, its pulsings and phantasms, as the ground of vision" (Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 136).

body swinging, putting her front legs on the floor (as Fried rightly notes, from close up they look like a costume, as if the elephant were not real, but played by a person), before finally standing on all four legs. All this time, the camera moves at a slow, steady tempo around Minnie – on one screen clockwise, and on the other counterclockwise. (This relationship is reversed if we go to the other side of the screens). At the same time, the elephant is framed in such a way that we never see her in full – it is always a framed part of her body that we are watching. The monitor shows a series of close-ups of the animal's eye. The effect of the whole is such that the viewer empathetically projects her own “unavoidably anthropomorphising feelings” on (the moving image of) Minnie, or, in the case of *B-Movie*, on a fly lying on its back and defencelessly kicking its legs.<sup>59</sup> This arouses ambivalent feelings over the appropriateness of the elephant performing these laborious “exercises” for our “amusement” (the title of the work suggests an imperative, that Minnie is doing this all on command). On the one hand we have a monstrous and unshapely being in comparison with the human body, which, it would seem, makes it impossible to identify with the animal. On the other hand, though, the beast's awkwardness, the strange “artificiality” of her appearance, and especially the close-up of her eye, seeming to express some “subjectivity” after all, initiate a fundamental mental mechanism that Stanley Cavell called “empathic projection,” which according to him constitutes “the ultimate basis for knowing of your existence as a human being.”<sup>60</sup> Where, Cavell asks, does the assumption that a person must recognise someone else as a human being come from?

From some such fact as that my identification of you as a human being is not merely an identification of you but with you. This is something more than merely seeing you. Call it empathic projection.<sup>61</sup>

According to Fried, the works of Gordon and Sala, referring to the “absorptive tradition” stretching back to the work of Caravaggio – and thus to the tendency to create images of beings who are entirely absorbed in their activities, to the extent that they seem to exclude the presence of the beholder at the scene of the representation – lay bare<sup>62</sup>, and thus make problematic,

59 Fried, *Four Honest Outlaws: Sala, Ray, Marioni, Gordoni* (London: Yale University Press, New Haven–London 2011), 205.

60 Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 422.

61 Ibid., 421.

62 Another of Cavell's concepts: “To say that the modern ‘lays bare’ may suggest that there was something concealed in traditional art which hadn't, for some reason, been noticed, or that

the empathically projective mechanism on which this tradition was based.<sup>63</sup> It is this suggestion that the question of empathy (or rather of the viewer projecting his empathy) was from the very beginning key to the traditions of absorptive portrayal that is a measure of their importance as works of art.<sup>64</sup> Problematizing the issue of empathic projection brings with it the question of the limits of this empathy: what or whom found opposite us will we be able to call a "being," or even a "person"? What do we consider "natural," and what "artificial"? Where does "performance" end or begin? Is it at all possible for the object of (or in) a representation to appear to us a s s u c h?

What we have called realism here essentially describes an attempt to abandon – even for a moment, never more than for a moment – the status of representation as a screen separating us from the world, to project such a way of access to the image that will allow us to touch something more than just reality's dummy, to transgress the level of knowledge towards (corporeal) experience. To be sure, there is no metaphysics, no epiphany involved here – no ecstatic unification of the subject with the world, (Courbet knew better than anyone that this is impossible) but rather a certain way of harmonising with its matter, a sharper, more sensitive mode of an everyday form of attention. Can such an aspiration of an image be called a "politics of realism"?

*Translation: Benjamin Koschalka*

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what the modern throws over – tonality, perspective, narration, the absent fourth wall, etc. – was something inessential to music, painting, poetry, and theatre in earlier periods. These would be false suggestions. For it is not that now we finally know the true condition of art; it is only that someone who does not question that condition has nothing, or not the essential thing, to go on in addressing the art of our period. And far from implying that we now know, for example, that music does not require tonality, nor painting figuration nor theatre an audience of spectators, etc., exactly what I want to have accomplished is to make all such notions problematic [...]."

Stanley Cavell, "A Matter of Meaning It," in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 220.

63 Fried, *Four Honest Outlaws*, 209.

64 Ibid., 215.

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Ewa Toniak

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## Grottger and His Shadow<sup>1</sup>

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**A**rtur Grottger's famous series of paintings are a canon unto themselves, an ideal subject of research, fixed in place by an interpretative framework (i.e. the structure of the series, its sequence, elements appropriated from iconography, intentions of the artist, position of the audience) established already in the 19th century; but they are not defenseless and resist claims of "theoretical protectionism"<sup>2</sup> on account of their fragmentary nature, the looseness of the structure, and the technique fortifying them against "ultimate explanation" and being read "in a comprehensive manner." The persistence with which generations of researchers have colonized Grottger's oeuvre to plant their quickly fading victory banners on the still living body of art (long live chronology! long live contrast and antithesis! long live slivers of sense!) inspires suspicion that these "pockets of resistance" are only there to confuse the pursuit, so that people find the

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1 The title references Bożena Umińska's *Figure With a Shadow. Portraits of Jewesses in Polish Literature from the End of the 19th Century to 1939* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2001).

2 Cf. Anna Burzyńska, "Lekturografia. Filozofia czytania według Jacquesa Derridy," *Pamiętnik Literacki* 1 (2000).

grip of a saber where they were expecting to, but one placed there by a woman dressed up in masculine clothing.

Grottger's work and his biography were shrouded in legend even in his lifetime, whereas his epistolographic legacy came under the control of his fiancée, Wanda Młodnicka née Monné, who introduced far reaching changes to the manuscripts before they went to print. That is probably why Grottger, according to Mariusz Bryl—author of the most recent analysis of the painter's work—ticks all the typical boxes of a “model biographic legend of an artist.”<sup>3</sup> We can easily list them all in one breath: Grottger was a 19th century Polish painter who used his work to further the cause of Polish independence, the characters in his series supposedly reflect the sentiments of the painter himself, Grottger's life bears numerous marks of his deliberate self-stylization (artist-national leader), while his biography contains an easily identifiable watershed moment. The latter is obviously his work on the *Warsaw I* series which he began in 1861. Bryl writes that “even his appearance changed, his clothing and behavior became solemn. To show solidarity with his compatriots, he began wearing a black chimere.”<sup>4</sup> The biography-cum-legend remained incomplete for a very long time, gained new characters, recollections of past events and fragments of conversations. Bryl goes so far as to claim that even some authors writing about Grottger managed to “intertwine” themselves with the artist's legend. This role was played expertly by Wanda Monné, who remained the primary depository of the legend for the rest of her life, the legend she later continued to spin. The grandson of Wanda, Artur Młodnicki, remembers her thus:

Grandmother was at the very top of the family pyramid, she had the last word on all important family matters. [...] First and foremost, she loved the mythology [...] she believed herself the muse without whom Grottger would never amount to anything or would never have [...] painted the paintings he has under her influence. She believed that if it wasn't for her, we wouldn't have had Grottger the painter. [...] Naturally, everything she did was supposed to reinforce that myth. She even wore the black chimere herself.<sup>5</sup>

The appropriation of Grottger's biography was a cross-generational affair: after Wanda Młodnicka, who ordered the destruction of the entire unsold

3 Mariusz Bryl, *Cykle Artura Grottgera. Poetyka i recepcja* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1994), 326–348.

4 Ibid., 331.

5 Ibid.

print run of the catalogue for the 1906 monographic L'viv exhibition, came her descendants who limited their corrective influence to censoring Grottger's letters and notes before their publication in *Arthur i Wanda. Dzieje miłości Arthura Grottgera i Wandy Monné* [*Arthur and Wanda. On the Relationship of Arthur Grottger and Wanda Monné*].

The young Wanda's diary published therein is considered to this very day to be the most credible and most exhaustive source of insight – aside from his letters to Wanda and his notes – on Grottger's life and creative process. Wanda ended up annexing not only Grottger's legend but also his own voice. Grottger speaks – insofar as Wanda allows him to – on the journal's pages with Wanda's voice, while Wanda herself is a vehicle for the legend. In the soliloquy delivered by Wanda, whom – anticipating, to some extent, his post mortem biography – the artist affectionately called “the professor,” the legend often references Grottger's love of his Motherland: “love for his homeland ran in his blood. It was a gauge against which he measured deeds and people. When a Polish book lacked Polish inclinations, lacked a fondness for tradition and national customs then he considered it unworthy of his time.”<sup>6</sup> Sometimes, the legend tried to imitate Grottger himself: “O Child, if you only knew how this insurrection has lifted my spirit, how it woke me, pulled me from the depths of anguish! Reinvigorated me and inspired me to work!”<sup>7</sup> In an earlier passage, the legend compels Wanda to employ more melodramatic means of expression: “Oh, what passion burned in his voice when he spoke of his impressions and memories of 1863! He always regretted having only his pencils to fight with for Polish independence, oh, how he envied his brother's Siberian exile!”<sup>8</sup>

In the artist's deliberately constructed biography – were we to assume the perspective of Wanda/the professor, Wanda speaking with the voice of legend – there appears from time to time a tone that is slightly too emphatic, the overly sonorous tone of zealous assurance. One example of such a tone can be found in the passage describing how the love of his Motherland “ran in his blood.” Wanda, who was often told she was “more boy than girl,” met Grottger in 1865, at the Shooting Association ball in L'viv. “I looked up,” she noted, “and there was above me this tall figure wearing Polish attire.”<sup>9</sup>

6 Maryla Wolska and Michał Pawlikowski, *Arthur i Wanda. Dzieje miłości Arthura Grottgera i Wandy Monné. Listy—Pamiętniki* (Medyka–Lwów: Biblioteka Medycka, 1928) 1:150.

7 Ibid.

8 Antoni Potocki will later say that Grottger “used his art as weapon,” see Antoni Potocki, *Grottger* (Lwów: H. Altenberg, 1907), 210–211 as quoted in Bryl, *Cykle*, 327.

9 Ibid., 1:131.

On the 50th anniversary of the painter's death, Wojciech Kossak recounted his first meeting with Grottger and, according to Mariusz Bryl, the account is a typical example of others insinuating themselves into the legend (Janusz, Wojciech's father, taught young Artur to draw): "In either 1865 or 1866 [...] my father's workshop [...] was graced with the presence of a young insurrectionist. Slender, vivacious, his profile resembling a bird of prey but his eyes black and gentle, wearing a burka and an insurrectionist russet overcoat; there he was, an embodiment of sprightly and bellicose youth."<sup>10</sup>

Grottger's portraits and self-portraits – he liked to draw himself, even in a cartoonish manner – that employ "Polish attire" are widely known. Both passages mentioned earlier, the entry in young Wanda Monné's journal and Wojciech Kossak's account from 1917, indicate a sort of metamorphosis, a double disguise. Here, "Polish attire" functions as both an outfit/costume for a special occasion (the ball) as well as a sort of patriotic display. This metamorphosis 50 years after the painter's death reveals what was previously hidden (concealed) "under the veneer" of the ball: in Grottger entering his father's workshop, Kossak sees a "consummate masquerade," the image of an insurrectionist. In the monograph on Grottger released in 1886 in Kraków, Stanisław Tarnowski also recounts "those movements, that distinctive outfit."<sup>11</sup> Bołoz tries to persuade us that "we see him wearing only Polish attire in photographs taken between 1860 and 1866."<sup>12</sup> The "Polish attire" did not separate the public from the private.

Heart flutter, I entered the neighboring room [...] packed with easels and barely started paintings – recounts Władysław Fedorowicz – and Grottger stood there in front of an easel with a palette in one hand, a brush in the other [...] He was wearing typical Polish attire, i.e. tall boots, broad pants, and a chimere with braided ribbons.<sup>13</sup>

But let's get back to books. To Polish books, to be exact.

I don't know how Sacher Masoch's pamphlet on Radziwiłł found its way to our home – frowns Wanda, channeling the legend; "Have you read it?" he asked, agitated. "Not yet." – In one fluid motion, he chucked the books out the open window. "Then you won't. It's foul drivel, some cursed

10 As quoted in Bryl, *Cykle*, 337.

11 Stanisław Tarnowski, *Artur Grottger* (Kraków: S. Cichocki, 1886), 5.

12 Jan Bołoz-Antoniewicz, *Grottger* (Lwów: n.d., 1910), 220.

13 *Ibid.*, 221-222.

drifter decided to write about Polish customs of which he has not the faintest idea. Remember, child, if you ever come upon this author's works again, don't read them, it's a sin!<sup>14</sup>

Regardless of what the contents of Masoch's pamphlet were, we cannot rid our ears of that "drifter" (in Polish, the essay used the term "zawłoka," a pejorative term which, according to Karłowicz's dictionary of Polish dialects,<sup>15</sup> meant "vagrant," "nomad" – ed.), by definition a stranger, an other, someone worthless, and by implication someone who cannot have a grasp of Polish customs and whose books stray into Polish homes (the pamphlet "found its way") – as does the author himself. Even if that passage is more Wanda's fantasy than reality, why did imaginary Grottger have to react so fiercely and emotionally?

We know quite a lot about what Grottger was reading, his poetic and literary inspirations were studied by a number of scholars, the painter himself provided illustrations to many books published in his era. His illustrations for *The School of the Polish Nobility*<sup>16</sup> represent the Neo-Sarmatism school. The series comprised four watercolor paintings: *First Drills*, *Admonition*, *Excursion*, and *Last Warning*.<sup>17</sup> The reviewer for the Krakow-based periodical "Czas," Lucjan Siemieński, thus described the individual pieces:

One depicts a stripling practicing archery, the second painting portrays him as a strapping lad being reproached by his father after some sort of mischief; the third instalment features the two men on horseback, riding side by side, with the father delivering martial instructions to the son, whereas the fourth painting depicts the youngster as a man grown, kneeling, receiving his final blessings from his father dying on the battlefield.<sup>18</sup>

In his monograph on Grottger, Jan Bołoz-Antoniewicz comments on the series: "No woman either hastens or delays this normal progression of the

14 Wolska and Pawlikowski, *Arthur i Wanda*, 1:150.

15 Jan Karłowicz, *Słownik Gwar Polskich* (Kraków: PAU, 1911), 6:336.

16 The paintings were exhibited as an independent cycle at the 1858 Fine Arts Association Exhibition in Krakow.

17 In the catalogue of the National Museum in Wrocław, the paintings in the series were titled: *Archery*, *Reproach*, *Before the Battle*, and *Father's Blessing*, see: Waldemar Okoń, *Sztuka i narracja. O narracji wizualnej w malarstwie polskim drugiej połowy XIX wieku* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1988), 59.

18 Lucjan Siemieński, "Wystawa Towarzystwa Sztuk Pięknych w Krakowie," *Czas* 104 (1858): 1.

male life"<sup>19</sup> and later adds: "In 1894, after looking at the series every day for four months, I was reminded of the polonaise-like rhythm of *The Haunted Manor*: "No women in our abode / *Vivat semper* the bachelor life!"<sup>20</sup>

Scholars investigating the work of Grotter will quickly reach one of the "points of resistance," often called "cracks" or "inconsistencies" in the series. "The narrative continuity breaks between the second and third link, the structure of the series is divided into two antithetical pairs of paintings: the first-illustrating a carefree and safe childhood, while the other portrays tragic, heroic maturity," notes Irena Dżurkowska-Kossowska.<sup>21</sup> A similar interpretation of the series was posited a hundred years prior by Bołoz-Antoniewicz in his passages on transition "from the idyllic to the tragic, from the bright years of childhood to the first, grand sorrow of our lives, to the death of a parent on the field of battle."<sup>22</sup>

Let's take a closer look at the paintings. Admonition and instruction seem to be the common theme for all four pictures: the nobleman – first as child, then as adolescent – appears in a subordinate role, as a not necessarily bright or disciplined student. These scenes of overt humiliation can be treated as an illustration of the rite of passage that the 21-year-old Grotter relived within the confines of his own fantasy in 1858. In the third installment of the series, the young noble, still probably wet behind the ears and inexperienced in combat, has to listen to his father's interminable lectures. The tension of young flesh encased in armor is transferred onto the horse, which stiffens and digs its hooves into the muddy ground. The last warning of the dying father may sound like Kornel Ujejski's *A Father's Prayer at His Son's Christening*: "Let him not know happiness, nor sleep, nor peace, / 'Til he knows victory or in battle / learns the glory of martyrdom."<sup>23</sup> The goal of the rite, according to Michel Tournier, is to separate the boy from the environment he heretofore inhabited, an environment dominated by women, and integrate him with a new, masculine group. For the boy, the rite of passage is

19 Bołoz-Antoniewicz, *Grotter*, 184.

20 Ibid.

21 Irena Dżurkowska-Kossowska, "Koncepcja dzieła cyklicznego w twórczości Artura Grottera" in *Artur Grotter; Materiały z sesji zorganizowanej w 150 rocznicę urodzin i 120 rocznicę śmierci artysty*, ed. Piotr Łukasiewicz (Wrocław: Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, 1991), 42.

22 Bołoz-Antoniewicz, *Grotter*, 186.

23 Kornel Ujejski, *Poezje Kornela Ujejskiego* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1866), 1-2: 32, as quoted in Krystyna Poklewska, "Grotter a proza" in *Artur Grotter; Materiały z sesji zorganizowanej w 150 rocznicę urodzin i 120 rocznicę śmierci artysty*, 121.

supposed to revalidate his societal status.<sup>24</sup> In all four of the paintings, entry into the masculine world does not happen without friction: the armor does not yet fully cover the warrior. In the words of Maria Janion, “the enchantment with the paternal sphere”<sup>25</sup> is not fully consummated. The process of “revalidation of status” breaks down midway: the dying father sees not a man grown before him, but a sniffling child.

On January 13, 1858, Grottger wrote the following entry in his journal: “Today I feel like nothing, and why is that? Unfortunately, I can’t call myself a man of character, I can’t say to be developing qualities that would contribute to that character! I’m no more than a child!”<sup>26</sup> In the last scene from *The School of the Polish Nobility*, the protagonist does not behave like a noble but rather like a sniveling child or a woman, and bursts into tears.

Insofar as the “idyllic” interpretation of the childhood scenes from the beginning of the century tells us about the enduring rites of passage from boyhood to manhood in a patriarchal society, the emergence of the “joyful, safe childhood” *topos* in contemporary analyses seems to be rather a projection of modern child rearing theories that undermine the absolute, unyielding authority of the Father. Contemporary scholars may have fallen prey to the suggestive opinions of Wanda Monné (the Wanda channeling the Legend) who, as we know, shaped Grottger’s biography to make it fit the popular idea of the bard’s life. The “idyllic, bucolic” childhood theme can be found in her diaries:

When he worked, he often spoke to me about his early life. His “idyllic, bucolic” childhood was also the scene of an unrelenting struggle, his powerful spirit wrestling with his weak body, his physicality nearly giving up under the burden of his mind’s intellectual effort. When he was only 8 years old, he was already drawing for a couple of hours every single day [...], a labor encouraged by his beloved father. He took his lessons with a passion like no other, ambition spurring him ever onwards. He spoke of playing with his siblings, of ridings horses, the latter a pastime for which his father has been preparing him since infancy.—God forbid I would grimace after falling down. He harshly punished such displays of weakness,

24 Michel Tournier, *Coq de bruyère* (the passage was quoted in a lecture delivered by Katarzyna Kłosińska at the School of Social Sciences at the Polish Academy of Science’s Institute of Philosophy and Sociology in 2001).

25 Maria Janion, unpublished lecture delivered at a PhD seminar.

26 Arthur Grottger’s journals, entry from January 13, 1858 as quoted in Wolska and Pawlikowski, *Arthur i Wanda*, 1:114

saying, "Boys grow up to be knights. Giving someone a reason to call you a cry baby is tantamount to slapping you in the face."<sup>27</sup>

Pawlikowski describes the father-son relationship in a similar vein: "He was slender for his age, a frail stripling who did not really have the stomach for his father's disciplinarian bent and often fell ill."<sup>28</sup> Bołoz-Antoniewicz also notes that: "unfortunately, he was delicate and feeble since birth. Even back then he often suffered from a sore throat, eczema attacked his face, his arms swelled and itched, like in Vienna in 1855 and twelve years later in Paris, when he was working on *War*."<sup>29</sup> It is possible that after suffering yet another fall from a horse, the 9-year-old Artur painted his first watercolor, *The Execution of a Spy*, portraying the death of an evil father threatening castration.

Grottger was born on December 11, 1837 in Ottyniowice, a year after the nuptials of his parents: Krystyna née Blahao de Chodietow who, as noted by Pawlikowski, "was only sixteen" on the day of the wedding and Jan who was "nearing fifty,"<sup>30</sup> Jan Józef Grottger, protégé of Count Hilary Siemianowski, was a "patriot through and through, a reserve officer until his last breath, rider, hippophile, hunter, painter, a true man of the world;"<sup>31</sup> Jan was the illegitimate child of the Count and a French or Swiss governess named Grottger after whom he was named.<sup>32</sup> As noted by Felicja Boberska née Wasilewska, Hilary treated his only legitimate child, his daughter Laura, very harshly. "The daughter feared him even in infancy. He pushed away all displays of affection she had towards him and often warned her that he «despises sentiment and exaltation»." The convoluted genealogy of the artist forced Bołoz-Antoniewicz and other biographers to proffer numerous reassurances that in

27 Ibid., 1:147.

28 Michał Pawlikowski, "Prolog" in Wolska and Pawlikowski, *Arthur i Wanda*, 1:8.

29 Bołoz-Antoniewicz, *Grottger*, 35.

30 Pawlikowski, "Prolog" in: Wolska and Pawlikowski, *Arthur i Wanda*, 1:5.

31 Ibid.

32 Pawlikowski elucidated Grottger's provenance thusly: "When he was a young man, Count Hilary Siemianowski of the Grzymała coat of arms, heir to vast estates of then Galicia had a natural born son with Miss Grottger, a governess of French extraction who arrived at the estate of the Siemianowski family from Switzerland. The son, Hilary Grottger, given his father's Christian name and his mother's family name, and reared and educated at his father's expense," was Artur's grandfather. Pawlikowski later adds: "Sixty years prior, the elder Grottger's pedigree was something of a secret [...] but in Artur's times, his provenance was a matter of public knowledge." Wolska and Pawlikowski, *Arthur i Wanda*, Annex A, 474.

spite of a German-sounding name, Grottger's father Jan Józef (Pawlikowski will later describe him as an idealist, insurrectionist, and artist) was a "Pole down to his very core."

Another recurring theme in Grottger's biography is his eye-catching superficiality. As recounted by Bołoz, in 1860, when he was already an established artist in Vienna, Grottger was already making his way around the city "in a chimere, cocked hat with sheepskin trimming, swarthy like a Gypsy, slender and lithe like a reed, his eyes aglitter, swaggering through the streets with a huge greyhound at his side, thin and pointy like his master."<sup>33</sup> "From his mother he inherited the Hungarian swarthinness of his body, delicate of limb, with frail bones, shapely, oblong feet and hands, his head small and narrow with a razor-thin nose and skull as if made out of wood,"<sup>34</sup> Bołoz recounts tenderly, while his description of the 1858 watercolor *Fallen Knight* sounds somewhat like a homoerotic confession: "It's his own type, not plucked from history or experience, but borne of poetry and fantasy. How strange it is to look at this face, this handsome profile, the dapper mustache, the fancy goatee, his curly, silken hair. [...] That's no corpse!"<sup>35</sup> A similarly emphatic tone can be found in his description of the missing lithograph depicting the "heroic episode at Malegnano." "Grottger has been employing a specific type of protagonist ever since. His body slender, light, lithe, its movements quick, nimble, full of youthful energy. The artist will reveal its Greek beauty to his audience in the opening images of *Polonia*."<sup>36</sup> Horses drawn by the young Grottger are also slender, light, and lithe; Bołoz notes: "Grottger's horse is lean, long, nervous, anxious, the ultimate result of a long selection process, always smelling the air, trying to suss something out, [...] always ready to vault with the Cherkess into the abyss."<sup>37</sup> In these respects, it's quite different from Kossak's horse: "The horses in Kossak's paintings are of pure but cold blood, well fed, loose, somewhat playful and not too bright, yet still elegant, and something of a *bon vivant* – like its master."<sup>38</sup> Nervous and apprehensive, smelling something on the wind, permanently agitated (hysterical horse?) "ready at any given moment to vault [...] into the midst of savage battle" – that

33 Bołoz-Antoniewicz, *Grottger*, 220.

34 *Ibid.*, 32.

35 *Ibid.*, 189.

36 *Ibid.*, 291.

37 *Ibid.*, 49.

38 *Ibid.*

is Grotter. The concealed masculine/feminine binary (lean/well-fed; nervous/cold blooded) reveals itself in Grotter's work as two opposite psychic elements: heroism and sentimentality. In the words of Bolož, "as one of the ur-themes dominates the other, so does Grotter's work become either masculine or feminine. Both ur-themes are created and develop independently of themselves. They converge and intermingle here and there only briefly, each one develops into a separate filiation of themes and works." Both are melded in a "temporary union" in Grotter's *Polonia*.<sup>39</sup>

Grotter spent his childhood listening to the war stories of his father who fought in the November Uprising, stories which he "undoubtedly knew by heart," like the one recounted by Ludwik Jabłonowski, his father's comrade-in-arms, in his book *Złote czasy i wywczasy* [*The Good Old Days and Holidays*] (L'viv, 1920). Reportedly, in February of 1831, the elder Grotter "facing Warsaw, suddenly cried at the sight of a mysterious, blinding light,"<sup>40</sup> which later turned out to be nothing more than an illumination flare. In another, more dramatic story about the Battle of Wawer, Jabłonowski recounts: "Grotter cursed in French and slid off his horse with an injured thigh; a bugler was at his side as soon as he hit the ground and an ambulance was nearby as well, so in a couple of minutes they had him leaving for Warsaw in a carriage spattered with the blood of the gravely wounded."<sup>41</sup>

In the quoted passages, the elder Grotter inadvertently becomes a comic figure, a caricature of himself. His martial exploits are limited to cursing and exclamations that one may even consider unsoldierly. Jabłonowski juxtaposes his thigh injury with the blood of those who suffered much more serious wounds. The elder Grotter has not ritually concluded the "education of the young nobleman," a prerequisite of his initiation. The fall from his horse and his injury were a prefiguration of his death which in reality had nothing in common with the heroic archetype he lauded. Wanda remembers it thus:

His beloved father died a horrible death. His beloved mount was wounded by a rabid dog. The father cleaned out and cauterized the wound, but during the operation the horse threw itself at him and bit his hand, breaking bones. He struggled for nine months but ultimately succumbed to the illness. Artur was at school in Krakow when his father passed. The manner of his father's death was kept a secret from him for quite a long time.<sup>42</sup>

39 Ibid., 268.

40 As quoted in Pawlikowski, "Prolog" in Wolska and Pawlikowski, *Arthur i Wanda*, 1:9.

41 Ibid.

42 Wolska and Pawlikowski, *Arthur i Wanda*, 1:150.

We don't know when and in what circumstances he learned of his father's death; we can only assume that his stern "Mark my words" from his 1852 letter to Artur (when his son was 15 years old) and his unyielding, harsh tone were ringing in the painter's ears, as he barked out a series of commands: "You were at the Rzeszów market few times, you saw a lot of scenes, some may have stuck with you – try to make them into a couple of sketches;"<sup>43</sup> the same voice that during the holidays in 1855 ordered the young Grottger to draw scenes and take up themes that his friends and patrons of his father were interested in and enjoyed. During his stay with the Larysz-Niedzielski family, Grottger paints the *Sale of a Horse in Śledziejowice* (1855, National Museum in Krakow), a watercolor making extensive use of contrasts that Grottger so enjoyed. Bołoz denotes: "The antithesis of colors and physical types is a sort of prerequisite for Grottger, an eye-catching external symptom of the antitheses of characters, situations, and psychological states."<sup>44</sup>



In the album *Żydzi w Polsce: obraz i słowo [Jews in Poland. Images and Words]*, the reproduction of the watercolor was accompanied by extensive commentary:

43 Letter to Artur Grottger from his father, dated May 7, 1852 in Wolska and Pawlikowski, *Arthur i Wanda*, 1:11.

44 Bołoz-Antoniewicz, *Grottger*, 181.

In front of an inn in Wieliczka, a group of Jews is engaging Erazm Larysz-Niedzielski, the heir of the Śledziejowice estate, trying to sell him a horse that is visibly quite old, although its appearance suggests past beauty. The neatly saddled mount, coaxed by shouts, clapping, whip cracking, its head bowed, ears lowered – when they should be clipped – trots ridiculously under a Jew dressed head to toe like a hetman. The innkeeper lauds the horse's merits to persuade his critically inclined lord and his bailiff. Grottger witnessed the event when he was a guest in Śledziejowice and transformed it into a grotesque depiction of Polish-Jewish relations, a scene beautifully complemented by a plaque with the misspelled words: "VODKA BEER MEAD" hanging on the side of the inn. In the background we can see Śledziejowice.<sup>45</sup>

The commentary makes a joke out of what was most likely intended to be one, the "eye-catching external antithesis of characters," as the painting revolves around a dishonest transaction (the sale of an old, worn out horse; we can see what good quality mounts should look like in the background of the painting, where the heir's horses are quietly waiting). Not only is the intention of the merchants "contrastive" or "antithetical," especially in light of the horse's true value, but so are their movements, their theatrical gestures and their over-eagerness, their exaggerated appearance and clothing, their crooked legs resembling the emaciated limbs of the horse too old to be of any further use on a farm.<sup>46</sup>

The composition itself – the trot of the horse reflected in the rhythm of the peddlers' limbs – melds the two elements into a whole marred by a specific flaw: the shortcomings of the horse are compensated by the profusion of the Jews' gestures, an overabundance of sense which we have trouble dealing with, as evidenced by the ostensibly neutral work of Marek Rostworowski even to this very day. The Jews of Śledziejowice depicted in Grottger's watercolor do not "stand their ground" like the landowner and his bailiff, two phallic, rigid figures whose potency and power are reflected and magnified in the rhythm of the poplar trees, upright and unyielding stewards of the roadway; they bring

45 Marek Rostworowski, *Żydzi w Polsce: obraz i słowo*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Interpress, 1993), 181.

46 In *The Hunter's Rhapsody*, a droll poem he wrote for his fiancée in 1866, Grottger lampoons himself: "Here is Arthur the Brave/How crooked the legs of this knave/With misshapen legs and head/In rebels he inspires dread/Hiding in forest and cave." The poem was furnished with a caricature of Artur as a hunter, standing ramrod straight in high boots with his "misshapen legs." Artur Grottger, a letter to Wanda Monné dated March 13, 1866 as quoted in Wolska and Pawlikowski, *Arthur i Wanda*.

a measure of order into the chaos of the transaction: they belong—as does the left side of the scene—to the culture and tradition of order, the culture of the Polish country estate, of which the columns comprising the inn's arcade, weak and frail like the legs of the emaciated nag or the feverish Jews, are only a poor copy. But this game of reflection, repetition, and contrast has one more player, the shadows: tense and compact, the shadows cast by the prospective buyers are starkly different from those cast by the Jew astride the horse and his helpers, the latter spilling into an arabesque of two similar shapes: neither horse, nor camel. Like the Devil of von Chamisso, the shadows of the feverish peddlers are figures lacking “any distinguishing features.”<sup>47</sup> They are quivering and amorphous, like the shadow of the Wandering Jew penned by Paul Gavarni for Eugène Sue's 1844 novel under the same name. As Lavater teaches us, and what Stoichiță reconfirms in *A Short History of the Shadow*, is that “what the person conceals, the shadow reveals.”<sup>48</sup>

The landowner and his bailiff, “standing straight and tall”<sup>49</sup> witness a spectacle of the grotesque body. “The classical body is closed, static, and contains a person. The grotesque body is open, multifaceted, manifold, prone to mutation. Grotesque is related otherness, to a fascination with identity marred with repulsion. Grotesque indicates the feminine.”<sup>50</sup> It also indicates the Jew, another important figure of 19th century exclusionary discourse.<sup>51</sup>

The Śledziejowice watercolor can be considered a record of reasons dictating the inability of incorporating the Jews into spheres we consider our own: their attire, their horse riding in incorrect shoes<sup>52</sup> or other anatomical details, like their bandy legs and their distinct gait, different from the way with which members of Polish nobility carry themselves and revealing them as afflicted

47 Victor Ieronim Stoichiță, *A Short History of the Shadow*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 111.

48 Ibid., 159.

49 The list of figures standing “straight and tall” in 19th century iconography and literature is incredibly long; even the “ideal” described by Stanisław Tarnowski is “standing straight and tall with a slightly crooked leg.”

50 Anne-Marie Christine, “Rhétorique et typographie, la lettre et le sens,” *Revue d'esthétique*, 1-2 (1979): 297-322.

51 Following in Sander Gilman's footsteps, Bożena Umińska comments on the phenomenon: “The woman represented [...] an inclusive depiction of the Other, a portrayal that can be incorporated in spheres we consider our own, if only because women are essential to reproduction. Jews, on the other hand, were the very image of the Other, someone who can be excluded as they are not in any sense indispensable,” Umińska, *Figure*, 37.

52 Irena Turnau, “Ubiór żydowski w Polsce w XVI-XVIII w.,” *Przegląd Orientalistyczny* 3 (1987): 309.

with the so-called Jewish foot. As Gilman notes,<sup>53</sup> analysis of Jewish sexuality always leads to accentuating the otherness of the Jew, the object of menace. In the 19th Century, medical discourse monopolized the rhetoric of otherness in its treatment of the Jewish body. In late 18th century, the foot typical for “second-rate citizens” of the new nation states became the pathogenic organ to look out for. The Jewish foot stigmatizes all who suffer from it as infected with innate ineptitude and excludes them from society. In 1804, a sketch published by Joseph Roher, depicting the role of Jews in the Austrian Monarchy, clearly emphasized their frail physique, a trait quickly identifiable by their “crippled, deformed feet.” The leading accusation pertained to the Jews’ service in the army. In stateless Poland, this translated into exclusion from history grounded in a trinity almost Oedipal in nature: Fatherland, Knight, and horse.

Maria Janion dedicated an extensive study to the undesirable presence of Jewish heroes in Polish heroic discourse.

Heroic and martial bearing or behaviors were considered to be absent among Israelites; their “nature” was generally thought to be careful, cowardly, timid, “disposed” towards escape and hiding in the face of adversity, their dislike towards military service was to be “innate,” while their cosmopolitanism and egoism made it impossible for them to align themselves with a specific motherland and sacrifice for the good of a greater cause. By his nature, the Jew was predestined for the role of spy and traitor. “Jews in the military” or “Jewish formations” were a perennial punchline in a variety of jokes and caricatures.<sup>54</sup>

The elder Kossak’s *Jew on a Horse* was also a part of the repertoire of taunts and mockery. The Jew depicted in the painting (National Museum, Krakow) not only rides the horse bareback but also smokes a pipe. In Rostworowski’s album, the painting is presented with commentary that tries its best to alleviate the illustration’s openly anti-Semitic overtones:

This humorous portrayal evokes a nursery rhyme told to children playing “horsey” with their parents: *There rides a master, on his horsey faster, / There rides a hick, on his horsey quick, / There rides a Jew, on his horsey askew, / And after him Jewesses, making awful messes / Oy vey!* As they drew towards the final verse, the parents shook their knees with increasing force, resulting in the child

53 Sander L. Gilman, *L'autre et le moi: stéréotypes occidentaux de la race, de la sexualité et de la maladie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1996), 163-164.

54 Maria Janion, “Polscy Machabeusze,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, April 16-17, 2001, 18.

falling off. The general belief was that the Jews were poor horse riders who wobble in their saddles.<sup>55</sup>

How different equestrian portraiture was for representative figures we can see in the case of the 1861 post-mortem portrait of Berek Joselewicz, the legendary founder of the “Jewish cavalry regiment,” hero of the Battle of Kock of 1809, and “funereal character” in true Romantic fashion, painted by an unknown author after a likeness drawn up by Janusz Kossak. Maria Janion writes: “The inclusion of a Jew into this mythos required the suppression of entrenched stereotypes about the military, war, combat, and losing oneself in the struggle for freedom, until death if necessary.”<sup>56</sup>

The one thing that separates both equestrian portraits is death. Berek Joselewicz is accorded all the insignia of his status: the uniform of the 5th Mounted Rifles Regiment, the Legion of Honor on his chest and a cutlass in his hand, reflecting Kraszewski’s famous line about “acquiring civic rights through sacrifice,”<sup>57</sup> including the right to properly ride horses. Heroic death nullifies the difference – for a moment, Berek loses his Otherness. His stance and the beautiful mount are all part and parcel of a typical portrait of a valiant leader. His symbolic “enfranchisement” takes place somewhere between Grottger’s 1863 woodcut, *Death of Insurrectionist General Czachowski*, and Henryk Pillati’s 1867 oil painting *Death of Berek Joselewicz in the Battle of Kock* (National Museum, Warsaw), the latter patterned after the former.

Grottger himself modeled his scene after a woodcut by Hans Ulrich Frank from the *Thirty Years’ War* series. “He modified the original in order to, on one hand, imbue the death of the famous insurrectionist with a measure of nobility and highlight the savagery of his killers on the other.” He doubled the number of the general’s enemies and wiped any traces of terror from his face. As noted by Mariusz Bryl: “He knew full well that the act of heroizing a character is always spoiled by any indication that the character was involved in any sort of collaboration with the detested enemy.”<sup>58</sup> That is why the Polish hero had to be mortally wounded before falling off the horse and into enemy hands.

Pillati’s Berek Joselewicz finds himself confronted by three adversaries, with a fourth one, mounted on a horse, riding towards him from the background. The death of the Polish-Jewish champion is a superfluity of heroism, with his last blow looking somewhat like a public pledge: with

55 Rostworowski, *Żydzi w Polsce*

56 Janion, “Machabeusze,” 20.

57 “Sacrifice is the best method of acquiring civil rights,” as quoted in Janion, “Machabeusze,” 20.

58 Bryl, *Cykle*, 63.

his last breath, kneeling, he turns to the audience. His inclusion into the nation's collective history may happen only under specific conditions. In another Pillati painting, *The Funeral of the Five Killed at the February 27, 1861 Manifestation in Warsaw* (National Museum, Krakow), the historic "confederation of all faiths and classes" is seen spilling out of the Church of the Holy Cross in the equalizing rhythms of isocephaly; still, as noted by Kazimiera Szczuka,<sup>59</sup> a group of Jews, with mouldy faces and clothes, stands out from the crowd. The Jews, although participants in the mourning, have been visually singled out, a mute Other with four faces. Another painting from the same period, *The Funeral of Five Victims of the 1861 Warsaw Manifestation* (National Museum, Krakow), created by Aleksander Lesser in 1867, a painter born into a family of assimilated Jewry, transforms the communal prayer into a collective portrait: next to one another, immediately recognizable to contemporary audiences, stand Archbishop Fijałkowski and Rabbis Ber Miesels and Markus Jastrow.

Grottger also placed a group of *Warsaw Jews* on one of the panels making up *Warsaw I* (it is generally assumed that the scene on this particular panel refers to the funeral of Archbishop Fijałkowski that took place in 1861).

It's hard to agree with Mariusz Bryl that the portrait of Ber Meisels reflects the "historical veracity of the figure."<sup>60</sup> The rabbi looks more like the wrathful prophets of the Old Testament and seems to fit a type, reflecting depictions widespread among the general population. In the words of Tamar Garb: "The Jew functions as a sum of stereotypical cultural projections that describe him, put him on display, and incessantly reproduces him."<sup>61</sup> This hypothesis is supported at the very least by Stanisław Tarnowski's admiration of the "distinct typicality of these Eastern faces" and "Grottger's beautiful idea."<sup>62</sup>

For people trying to interpret it, *Warsaw I* is a series bearing a flaw – something about it chafes us, rubs us the wrong way. The assertion that it's "inconsistent and contains ideological and compositional defects" had been stubbornly repeated ever since Bołoz-Antoniewicz.<sup>63</sup> Only Mariusz Bryl managed

59 A notion articulated at the aforementioned seminar at the School of Social Sciences.

60 Bryl, *Cykle*, 56.

61 Tamar Garb, "Modernity, Identity, Textuality," in *The Jew In The Text. Modernity and the Construction of Identity*, ed. Linda Nochlin and Tamar Garb, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 28

62 Tarnowski, *Artur*, 14.

63 He writes: "The first half consists of four panels, while the other has three. The first images in each half gravitate towards the right side, the last ones towards the left," 347, and links this division to differences in contents of both halves of the series (religious-solidarity-related // martyrologic-heroic), see Dzurkowska-Kossowska, "Koncepcja," 46.

to pull them together into a consistent whole by organizing all the elements of the series into an apse-like arrangement, a sort of panorama enveloping the audience.<sup>64</sup> According to Bryl, focusing the gaze on the representatives of the peasants and nobles (Plate III, *A Peasant with Nobles*) indicates the historic “confederation of the classes”: “The peasant looks up at the standard he holds, while both nobles look «inwards», nothing attracts their gaze, their closed eyelids communicating their engrossment in the significance of the moment, a reflection that needs to be protracted *ad infinitum*.”<sup>65</sup>

From the perspective of “the significance of the moment,” the figures of the Jews seem to be doubly out of place. They do not “look inwards” and it’s hard to say that “nothing attracts their gaze.” The eyes of the last person in the rabbi’s entourage are clearly looking at the person looking at the painting, trying to engage them. The first can be seen talking to the rabbi. Bryl adds: “In the background, between the heads of the rabbi and the Jew on the right-hand side we can see the face of the fourth Jew casting an evidently anxious glance to his right, looking beyond the imagined space. Undoubtedly some danger, something unexpected and menacing is lurking therein. Thus prepared, the person viewing the painting is ready to experience the next scene, the meeting with “the first victim” (the fifth panel).”<sup>66</sup> The proverbial apprehension of the Jewish figures (similar in that regard to the nervous and apprehensive Grottger horse, “perpetually smelling something on the wind”) excludes them from experiencing the pathetic symbiosis of the Polish community. Speech results in the exclusion from a silent community.

Mariusz Bryl calls The chapter dedicated to exploring *Sanctuary*, the fifth panel of Grottger’s *Polonia* series, “Sanctuary: The Jew That Speaks.”<sup>67</sup> As the author writes, the title is a paraphrase of Wojciech Suchocki’s *A Horse That Speaks*. The anti-Semitic context of the title is further reinforced by the interchangeability of the Jew and the horse implied in Grottger’s Śledziejowice illustration.

Let’s take a closer look at the figure of the Jew in *Sanctuary*. The Jewish innkeeper runs up to the insurrectionists with his son, to warn them of approaching enemy troops. His face is twisted with terror, while his gestures and behavior emphasize the urgency of the matter. The reaction

64 Bryl, *Cykle*, 170.

65 Ibid., footnote no. 10, 161.

66 Ibid., 165.

67 Ibid., 30.

of the main insurrectionist character is what's most striking about it – he gazes intensely in the direction pointed out by the Jew but does not share in his emotional experience.



The woman standing next to the insurrectionist “looks apprehensively in the direction of the impending danger but she is not afraid for her own life like the Jew is. Instead she frets for the life of the insurrectionist.”<sup>68</sup> The Grotter scene was patterned after two paintings: Robert Smirke’s *The Earl of Sandwich Refusing to Abandon His Ship During the Battle of Solebay* (ca. 1800) and Josef Dannhauser’s *The Rich Spendthrift*, painted around 1836 (also known as *The Rich Man and Lazarus*).

Aside from analogies in composition, character arrangement, and similarities in the characters’ gestures, we can quickly identify differences in “speaking” characters between the pictures. In Smirke’s painting, the Earl speaks with a young soldier. In Danhauser’s painting, the old beggar, half-hidden behind the curtain, is asking the amused *bon vivants* for money. Surprised, Bryl

68 Ibid.

posits a question: “How did it happen that the handsome young man, a soldier no less, was transformed into an old Jew if Grottger was intent on remaining as faithful as possible to the original painting? Why, for example, was the soldier not replaced with a farm hand or even an insurrectionist, running up to his comrades to deliver grave news?”<sup>69</sup> The answer can be found in Danhauser’s painting: before becoming an old Jew, the young soldier also had to pass the stage of being a beggar (a vagrant?). Metamorphosis in the other direction was simply not possible.

In the *Polonia* series, the interchangeable pair of the Jew and horse is augmented with the woman – another interchangeable element. As noticed by Katarzyna Kłosińska,<sup>70</sup> in *Sanctuary*, both the woman and the Jew are bound together by the sheer terror enveloping them, bound by a terror which knows, and thus speaks, like one of the Jewish figures in the panels of *Warsaw I*.

From the perspective of dramatic narrative, scenes featuring Jews herald the culmination of events: *First Victim* in *Warsaw I* and *The Defense of the Manor* in *Polonia*. In the latter, as noticed by Monika Grodzka,<sup>71</sup> two separate chronologies can be said to coexist: the heroic chronology and the chronology of the Jew and the woman. The two latter figures are united by over-exaggerated gesticulation and expression: a community of gesture. The hunch of the Jew is reflected in the woman recoiling away: what he already knows, she begins to comprehend. The slant of their shoulders, the line of their bodies, and primarily their wide-legged stance – similar to the pose of the horse peddlers from Śledziejowice – are strikingly symmetrical, and unexpectedly so. The location of the woman is fairly unnatural, we cannot immediately see her foot, sticking out far beyond the hem of her skirts. The insurrectionist’s right leg nearly stomps on her foot, barring anyone from reaching out to her; his lowered rifle, aimed at the “others,” pushes the Jewish elder and his child away from the country estate. For them, sanctuary remains unreachable.

In 1886, Stanisław Tarnowski describes this scene in the context of exclusionary discourse: “Breathless and terrified, the Jew informs the soldiers that the Russians are close [...] but the haste and dread of the informant, yet the brilliant, proud, serene courage of the insurrectionist [...] an expression of persevering resolution, the

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69 Ibid.

70 A notion articulated at the aforementioned Maria Janion seminar.

71 Bryl, *Cykle*.

cold blood, and the hate that permeate his gaze as he fixes it on the enemy.”<sup>72</sup> Krystyna Kłosińska rightly noted that in Bryl’s book, the Jew finds himself at the lowest tier in the hierarchy of entities. Even the dog, “the loyal companion of the valiant insurrectionists,” as it’s called by the quoted author, looks at the approaching Russian menace “with fear but also with great obstinacy.”

Grottger often used characters defined by qualities such as doggedness, self-control, tranquility. They had beautiful bodies, their figures ramrod straight, their shapely calves clad in top boots (“Shiny lacquered boots wrap around the rounded calves of the young insurrectionists,” to quote Uniłowski<sup>73</sup> and pleats of leather arranged like wounds.) The idealization of the masculine body in Grottger’s work, his overinvestment in the masculine body, immobile and confined within the pathetic gestures against dramatic or tragic events, was commented upon and examined already in the 19th century.<sup>74</sup> The insurrectionists clumped together in *The Battle*, the fourth panel of *Polonia*, resemble, in a way that’s distant and somewhat masked by contemporary costume, the works of Jean-Louis David (Grottger’s father was a student of David in Vienna; the title card of the 1863 series *Polonia* also bears neoclassicist stylings). Similar, unnaturally twisted bodies, stripped of their symbolic costume

72 Tarnowski, *Artur*, 17.

73 Zbigniew Uniłowski, *Człowiek w oknie* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1957).

74 Grottger himself was fully aware of the physical perfection and the idealization of the male body in his work. He describes the main character of *The Draft Lottery* (1866–67), the third panel of *War*, in the following words: “The protagonist of my current painting [...] is so handsome, never before have I created anyone this beautiful. Apolline, calm, filled with male pride,” Artur Grottger, letter to Wanda Monné, dated October 16, 1886, as quoted in: Wolska and Pawlikowski, *Arthur i Wanda*, 1:411. Antoni Potocki said that Grottger’s protagonists are “beautiful with the hopeless and fatal allure of martyrdom.” cf. Potocki, *Grottger*, 118. The role of the “identification matrix” of Grottger’s characters is best seen in the political polarization of the 1920s. For the right wing, Grottger’s insurrectionists were the embodiment of the male national ideal: “Wonderful types, of supreme Polish stock: broad chests, unbending necks, wind-blown burkas, eagle eyes.” Cf. Eligjusz Niewiadomski, *Malarstwo polskie XIX i XX wieku* (Warszawa: Wydawn. M. Arcta, 1926), 95. One significant analogy for the composition of the scene was discovered by Stanisław Czekalski in a French engraving from the 19th century entitled *Woman Accused of Magic in the Middle Ages Braving Through Torture Without a Trace of Pain*: the place of the handsome recruit is here occupied by a woman. Cf. Stanisław Czekalski, “Grottger, czarownice i metoda. O *Losowaniu rekrutów*, intencji artystycznej i dialogu międzyobrazowym. Uwagi na marginesie książki Mariusza Bryla,” *Artium Quaestiones* 9 (1998): 203–228. Similar analogies will surely be abundant, for example in academic art; one only has to bring up Jean-Leon Gérôme’s *Phryne Before the Areopagus*, wherein a naked woman becomes the object of an erotic game of gazes played by men surrounding her in a semicircle. The French illustration brought up by Czekalski points to a secondary, concealed aspect of Grottger’s panel: torture and pain.



("Polish attire") can be found in the contemporary works of Zofia Kulik (*Archives of Gestures*, 1987-1990); her naked model – a Grottgierian *écorchée* – is forced to incessantly repeat heroic gestures: ridiculous meaningless gestures that reveals a masochistic streak in its 19th century archetype as well as in Polish culture, founded upon the mythology of sacrifice and martyrdom. The conclusions that Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, the author of a very insightful analysis of Kulik's oeuvre, arrived at can also be applied to the work of Grottgier: not only is the iconography of his series masochistic, but the psychosexual logic concealed by the formal qualities of his compositions also has a logic of masochism.<sup>75</sup> After analyzing Kulik's photomontages, the American scholar assumes the perspective laid out by Deleuze who treated masochism as a peculiar type of formalism (suspended motion, lack of narration, extensive

75 Cf. Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, "Old Histories: Zofia Kulik's Ironic Recollections," in *New Histories*, ed. Milena Kalinowska (Boston: The Institute, 1996). Many thanks to Dr. Izabela Kowalczyk for sharing the text with me.

stylizations), rather than erotic or moral economy (of pleasure/pain or guilt/punishment).

The “freezing of characters” (“cold blood”) within the confines of the imagined actions, like in *Sanctuary*, or immobilizing them and pushing them into a tight mass of combatants in *The Battle*, the lack of gestures, and the static nature of *Polonia*, these are all evidently Deleuzian tropes. We would also find them if we were to look for analogies between Grottger’s panels and David’s canvas.

The character of Romulus in David’s *The Intervention of the Sabine Women* (1799, Louvre, Paris) is very important in the context of the examined scenes; his body is smooth and polished, echoing Lajer-Burcharth,<sup>76</sup> who also thoroughly analyzed the output of the French painter. A patriarchal reconstruction of male identity destabilized after *la Terreur*, as well as an attempt at restoring the male subject, and David himself, as the privileged signifier, perform a similar role in the composition as the insurrectionist does in *Sanctuary*. We can consider him a visual, narcissistic representation of Grottger himself, the idealized bodies of his male characters compensating for his own flaws: his illegitimate genealogy, marred by the feminine, the very unheroic death of his father (a father who talked the talk but was no valiant soldier), his delicate feet and misshapen legs, or his own participation in the Uprising with “just his pencils.” Therefore, the hunched, “melancholic” figure of the Jew featured in *Sanctuary* can be considered to represent his repressed past, spoiling the heroic character of the scene with the touch of defeat.

There are many more surprising analogies between the works (and even biographies) of the two artists. I would like to highlight only those that can be considered the most significant for both scenes. Case in point: David’s *Intervention* and one of the panels of Grottger’s *Battle* feature a specific detail: a dead man laying at the feet of the combatants, his body half-concealed by their legs.<sup>77</sup> Both feature erect, taut characters standing straight and

76 Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines. The Art of Jacques-Louis David After the Terror* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). Subsection 8 of Chapter 3, *The Revolution «Glacée»* was especially inspiring for me,” 216–235. Ewa Lajer’s work suggests a hint that may be particularly important in interpreting the oeuvre of Grottger as a traumatic attempt at constructing one’s own identity. Stanisław Tarnowski compared Grottger to Słowacki. A vagrant, he called him, “a stranger in his own motherland.” Given Grottger’s posthumous Legend, the attempt turned out to be successful.

77 An additional, iconographic analogy that is important to my deliberations was identified by Mariusz Bryl. He writes: “Kaulbach’s illustration features an identical theme, but the valiant soldier is replaced by a terribly frightened girl, who hides from danger in a tight circle made up by her companions.” The quote discusses Wilhelm von Kaulbach’s *Faithful Eckart* (ca. 1800) from the *Goethe-Galerie* cycle. see: Bryl, *Cykle*, 28, footnote 18.

tall in the foreground (in the *Intervention* it's Romulus with his back to us, in *Battle* it's the insurrectionist with his lowered rifle. The bodies of those still alive straining for that final struggle is, according to Lajer-Burcharth, the corporeal ideal in a state of erection: immune to loss.

But the narrative of *Polonia* continues, culminating in the defeat depicted in *The Battlefield* (panel nine). The identity briefly made whole is shattered and fragmented; what is repressed returns as the "other," yields and collapses under the weight of the female, and arranges itself in another narrative, one that the male, heroic side (the side of Legends) simply cannot internalize.

*Translation: Jan Szelągiewicz*

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Adam Dziadek

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## Themerson and Schwitters

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### Milton, Themerson and Schwitters

To begin with, a quotation:

This neglect then of rime so little is to be taken for a defect, though it may seem so perhaps to vulgar readers, that it rather is to be esteemed an example set, the first in English, of ancient liberty recovered to heroic poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of riming.<sup>1</sup>

This passage comes from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but what could such a quotation have to do with Stefan Themerson and Kurt Schwitters? What could Milton, Schwitters and Themerson possibly have in common? "Common sense" would suggest that this is a fundamentally wrong juxtaposition. But this strange juxtaposition is only partly guided by chance, while "common sense" itself, as rightly noted by Roland Barthes in *Mythologies*, is a thoroughly bourgeois term, and therefore, I would suggest, unworthy of being stooped to or identified with in any way. We must therefore right away

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1 John Milton, *Paradise Lost: The Verse*, accessed August 20, 2015, <http://www.bartleby.com/4/400.html>.

reject “common sense” as a concept, just as Schwitters did in Hanover and Themerson in Plock.

What, then, might these three figures have in common? A great deal, in fact. For at the beginning of the strange relationship that formed between two remarkable artists at a remarkable historical time and in a remarkable place was John Milton, who, partly by coincidence, wove their fates together. The dates of this acquaintance – very importantly, in fact – were the years 1943 to 1948. The two artists met in remarkable circumstances, at a ceremonial sitting of the PEN Club in London held in 1943 to mark the 300th anniversary of the publication of Milton’s *Areopagitica*. As Themerson recalls:

Since I first met him, whenever I hear his name, [...] it is always closely followed in my mind by another name the name of another man, and if I tell you the other name now, you may say I am committing a heresy. [...] well, the name so heretically associated in my mind with the name of Kurt Schwitters, is: John Milton.<sup>2</sup>

The two men had been invited to this special PEN Club meeting and placed alongside one another. Schwitters had grown accustomed to collecting various strange objects that he found interesting, and this occasion proved no exception. On his way to the Institut Français, where the sitting was to take place, he passed a bombed-out building, and stopped to take a piece of wire from the rubble, which he proceeded to mould into a sculpture in the course of the session. The distinguished writers gathered for the ceremony thought that an electrician or plumber must have stumbled in off the street by mistake. Yet it was they who were wrong, and Schwitters’s work, titled *Air and Wire Sculpture*, ended up at Lord’s Gallery.

Milton’s *Areopagitica* is among the most famous texts written in defence of the word, the word rebelling against every act of censorial violence committed on works of art and literature. We began with a quotation from *Paradise Lost*, which also resists rhyming in poetry, against the limitations it imposes, making it a “vexation, hindrance and constraint” for poets, “the Invention of a barbarous Age, to set off wretched matter and lame Meter.”

Milton’s revolutionary gesture was reprised in unique fashion by Schwitters, and the freedom of expression chosen by the author of *Ursonate* forced him to leave Germany as it was at odds with the Nazi *Ordnung*. Recalling Schwitters’s fate, Themerson cites Kandinsky’s words: “Nothing defies

2 Stefan Themerson, *Kurt Schwitters in England: 1940-1948* (London: Gaberbocchus Press, 1958), 9.

barbarism with such force as a new art form.”<sup>3</sup> And indeed, one must admit that the originality and unconventional nature of the word “Merz” (coined, as we may recall, on the basis of a newspaper advertisement for *Kommerz und Privat Bank* by chopping off the first syllable of the first word), which was used to describe Schwitters’s writings, pictures and constructions, fundamentally clashed with the rules imposed on all areas of life by the System, usually hostile to art and all human artistic activity. In the case of Schwitters’s work, as with many other avant-garde artists (including Themerson), the anarchic element had a strong impact, striking with full force binary oppositions such as appropriate/inappropriate, norm/deviation, judicious/crazy, and my/your. Seeking to shake up these oppositions, it countered what 20th Century philosophy calls phallogocentrism unambiguously linked to diverse forms of power. As the author of *Professor Mmaa’s Lecture*, Themerson knew this very well (admittedly, he did not know, or ever use, the word “phallogocentrism,” but I assume that he would have readily accepted it).

For Themerson, the revolutionary nature of Schwitters’s work had a universal and timeless character. Themerson noticed that it retained its power from the 1920s, when it was written, through the ‘40s, when they met, and into the ‘60s, when he wrote a book about it. We can add that the power enshrouded in this extraordinary work remains active to this day, continuing to act in the same way. One of the most important questions undertaken by artists of the avant-garde concerns the human condition in the modern world (questions about identity, its internal and external limitations), the question of the condition of humankind, seeking to escape from, in Raoul Hausmann’s words, the *ch a o p l a s m* (a term from *simultangedicht*, published in *Merz* no. 4 from July 1923). The avant-gardistes were well ahead of their era, and asked questions that remain relevant today, in the postmodern age.

### Themerson and His Books about Schwitters

Themerson published several books on Schwitters, each of them a kind of homage from one artist to another. The first work on the author of *Merz* was *Kurt Schwitters in England*, published by Gaberbocchus Press in 1958 and based on a lecture given at the Gaberbocchus Common Room on 25 February 1958 (*Kurt Schwitters’ Last Notebook*). Several years later, on 17 February 1961, Themerson delivered a lecture at the Society of Arts in Cambridge which then formed the basis of the beautiful edition *Kurt Schwitters on a Time Chart*, published in issue 16 of the magazine *Typographica* (December 1967).

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3 Ibid., 14.

To these publications, we can also add the book *Kurt Schwitters, Raoul Hausmann and the Story of PIN*, published by Gaberbocchus Press in 1962.<sup>4</sup> This contains the story of the friendship between the two artists, which began in 1918, as well as their poems, passages from co-authored texts, photograms and photomontages of Hausmann and Schwitters's collages. It is also the history of the friendship and joint concept of two artists with a desire to tackle the innovative idea of poetry referred to by the acronym "PIN" (which can stand for several things: Poetry is Now, Présence Inter New, Poetry Intervenes New, Present Inter Noumenal) in the form of a magazine. Their idea was conceived in 1946 only came to fruition in 1963, when Themerson's publishing house issued *PIN*.

In writing *Kurt Schwitters in England* and discussing the fortunes of the German artist, Themerson was also writing partly about himself. This happened as if in this apparently alien identity he had found himself, and as if the fortunes of these two personal autarkies overlapped and merged – the similarities appear rather obvious. On the one hand, both men were avant-garde, versatile artists open to diverse means of artistic expression. Themerson created "semantic poetry," which was his own invention, with his pioneering work in the field receiving international recognition.<sup>5</sup> He also wrote novels and essays translated into many languages, and with his wife, Franciszka, was one of the most interesting makers of avant-garde film, as well as an original editor. On the other hand, both artists – albeit for different reasons – worked in a foreign country and language. Themerson left Poland for Paris with his wife in 1938, joined the Polish army with the outbreak of war and from 1942 settled in England, like many other Polish writers and artists (during and after the war London became one of the strongest centres of Polish political emigration). At this point we should make it clear that Themerson, for many reasons, did not identify with the Polish émigré communities; instead, he assumed the status of a Polish writer working in many languages abroad. Meanwhile, for Schwitters, as an avant-garde artist, there was no place in fascist Germany; it was forced emigration that led him first to Norway and then to Great Britain. And it may have been this chance affinity that inspired Themerson's peculiar fascination with Schwitters. Discussing the author of *An Anna Blume*, he spoke of the Dada movement, its historical, political and artistic background, but

4 *Kurt Schwitters, Raoul Hausmann and the story of PIN*, introduced by Jasia Reichardt, designed by Anna Lovell (London: Gaberbocchus Press, 1962).

5 In *La littérature définitionnelle*, a passage from the book *Oulipo, la littérature potentielle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973, 119) written by Raymond Queneau, Themerson, with his idea of semantic literature, was acknowledged as a precursor of the ideas of Georges Perec and Queneau himself.

it was the individual, Schwitters himself, whom he placed in the foreground, as a unique and imitable artist. In doing so, he was complying with Schwitters's will, as, when telling Themerson the story of how the word "Merz" had arisen, the former had made it clear that "the Dada people were friends. But Merz was independent. Merz was mine. Dada was everybody's."<sup>6</sup> Themerson also pointed to the unique situation of forced alienation in which the unknown German artist had found himself in England (during his time in the country, he managed only one exhibition, held in 1944 at Bilbo's Gallery by Herbert Read, and two "Merz recitals" at London Gallery in 1947). The reason for this alienation was not only that he was an unknown artist in England, but also that, as a German in England in wartime, he was burdened with anathema. In the minds of ordinary Britons, a German in England during the war could only be a camouflaged Nazi, just as a non-German Jew could only be a communist – these are obvious mental stereotypes that can develop especially strongly in wartime. The problem must have been all the more serious for Schwitters as he was one of those artists who find it very hard to understand classifications based on popular opinion and refuse to yield to simplified, system-based rules of thinking. Like Themerson, he was also well aware of the ideological complications of the 20th century and consistently tried to reject them, and it was at this time that the mental and spiritual affinities of the two artists became especially strongly visible.

This book is furnished with texts written in English, selected by Themerson from Schwitters's notebook. Here are some of them:

*When I am talking about the weather*  
 When I am talking about the weather,  
 I know what I am talking about.<sup>7</sup>

*I build my time*  
 I build my time  
 In gathering flowers  
 And throwing out the weeds.

I build my time  
 In gathering fruits  
 And throwing out all that is bad  
 And old and rotten.

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6 Stefan Themerson, "Kurt Schwitters on a Time Chart," *Typographica*, 16 (1967).

7 *Ibid.*, 47.



research.<sup>9</sup> It could, but I suspect that this would be an insufficient approach; moreover, one might go so far as to say that it would be very restrictive, and Themerson himself would be opposed to it. To determine how to read them, how they might be interpreted, we can refer to the works of Roland Barthes. He concluded, rightly, that traditional semiotics dealt with heteroclitite productions (pictures, myths, stories) and attempted to construct a Model, against which every artistic production could be defined in terms of deviation.<sup>10</sup> Adopting a semiotic mode of reading, in this case, we have to go beyond the traditional way of thinking in categories of Model, Norm, Code and Law, and instead use theological terms. The emphasis therefore needs to be placed not so much on the structure, as the structuring (the way in which it is done, how it functions), not so much on the Model as the work of the system. It is worth opting for the rejection of the hermeneutic idea of seeking the truth, some secret hidden in texts, and rather look for the actions through which these texts are structured. In this way, the work of reading can be identified with that of writing. The task of the reader of Themerson's books, which are without doubt an artistic product and at the same time an unquestionable and untypical testimony, therefore becomes writing a text on Kurt Schwitters.

Themerson also wrote many books on other outstanding artists published by Gaberbocchus Press. These include *Jankel Adler. An Artist Seen from One of Many Possible Angles*, which features Adler's text and drawings side by side, produced especially for the needs of this remarkable publication; a beautiful edition of *Apollinaire's Lyrical Ideograms*; as well as Themerson's own works *Semantic Divertissements* and *St Francis and the Wolf of Gubbio*.<sup>11</sup> Looking carefully at these typographic works, we can state categorically that they were never about "intersemiotic games," about something that could be called a simple exchange of signs taking place between systems (here I particularly emphasise the economic value of the word "exchange"). By saying "intersemiotic games," we immediately assume that systems of meaning are distinct, whereas in Themerson's books, the stress is on their coexistence. The pages

9 Cf. e.g. Artur Pruszyński, "O grach intersemiotycznych Stefana Themersona," in *Archiwum Themersonów w Polsce*, eds. Adam Dziadek and Dariusz Rott (Katowice, 2003), 33-74. See also: Artur Pruszyński, *Dobre maniery Stefana Themersona* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytorium, 2005).

10 Roland Barthes, "La peinture est-elle un langage?," in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3 (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 99.

11 Stefan Themerson, *Jankel Adler. An Artist Seen from One of Many Possible Angles. With Twelve Full Page Drawings by Jankel Adler* (London: Gaberbocchus Press, 1948); Stefan Themerson, *Apollinaire's Lyrical Ideograms* (London: Gaberbocchus Press, 1968); Stefan Themerson, *Semantic Divertissements* (London: Gaberbocchus Press, 1962); Stefan Themerson, *St Francis and the Wolf of Gubbio* (London and Amsterdam: De Harmonie, 1972).

of these books are *performative* so to speak, pages of writing and/or reading, a kind of drama of meaning in which the various scenes are played out simultaneously. In their untypical and remarkable nature and through the whole intratypographical and intertextual network, they form an open text that is hostile to the System and traditional reading based on and safeguarded by this same System. They assume an active participation of readers in the creation of this text, in a way forcing them to break the conventional predictability, as demonstrated, for example, by an instruction written by hand and reprinted in red that can be found in *Kurt Schwitters on a Time Chart*: "This space, reader, for you to fill with whatever you consider relevant."

In terms of form, the books on Schwitters resemble a collage. *Kurt Schwitters in England*, alongside Themerson's unconventional text, contains photographs (e.g. of the wall of the famous third Merz Barn found in Ambleside), reproductions of Schwitters's collages, sculptures, works written in England, copies of the pages of his last notebook written in English, and a photographic record of the shape of his mouth reciting the *Ursonate*. This recitation seems especially significant. Incidentally, Schwitters performs it in a remarkable way, using his voice to breathe life into this extraordinary text and making it into an authentic sonata of ambiguous sounds.<sup>12</sup> In one passage from the page, Themerson mentions that at one of the "Merz poetry recitals" organised by Mesens in London in 1947, two gentlemen from the BBC appeared with the intention of making a recording of the *Ursonate*. Schwitters began to read his work, and the men left the room halfway through his recitation. Themerson, in contrast, was certainly able to appreciate the significance of the recitation (or perhaps even execution) of this work, and, without any other way of rendering it in the text, he decided to include photographs depicting the shape of the artist's mouth at random moments.

As for *Kurt Schwitters on a Time Chart*, it is like a real patchwork, which forces the reader to stitch together and join disparate sentences, drawings, various types of font and typographically reproduced writing, diverse icons and red datelines arranged, meridian-like, on the page. The reader's memory and knowledge, with access to the signs scattered on the pages, become something of a *techné*, a machine almost, as well as a craft or practice of producing the text on Schwitters. The book opens with a diagrammatic and distorted image of the two hemispheres of Earth, with a red meridian line passing through one of them. On it is a red dot marking London on the map of the world, and beneath the picture is the caption: "I met him in 1943, in London," with photographs of Themerson and Schwitters alongside it. This book in

12 I found the recitation of Schwitters's work on the curious record *lunapark 0,10*, made by Marc Dachy for Sub Rosa publishers in 1999.

particular can be read as a patchwork, the loosely linked, dispersed elements of which have a unique power to generate additional meanings – on the basis of each of them one can construct an extensive narrative that ploughs deep into the intricacies of the history of the last century (the Victorian era evoked by a photography of the queen, the First and Second World Wars, pictures by Cézanne, Picasso, reproductions of Schwitters's works, a photo of the atom bomb, quotations from the works of Hugo Ball and Richard Huelsenbeck). This is both a collective and individual history, the latter being the point of departure. This patchwork construction gives the reader a multidimensional open text, and from it – owing to the extremely dynamic rhythm – emanates the tremendous force of interlinked meanings deriving from various semantic orders, and thus strongly diversified meanings as well.

What we see here is a unique case of the coexistence of words and images, shifting incessantly. The text composed of these words and images never actually ends (the last page of the book is a mesh of red vertical line-meridians, so the story told by Themerson seems to have no end) and is rearranged without end, with the words and pictures not so much expressing some encrypted code as rather exhibiting the coding work itself. This means that there is no ready, ordered system, as it is the act of generating the system itself which is foregrounded. The patchwork made by Themerson arranges itself into a text with no centre, in which no traditional linearity can be found and in some places it must be read in various directions (literally and metaphorically, as sometimes it is necessary to turn the book various ways to read a given passage), as well as returning to the previous pages, sometimes even making sure that one has read everything.

As much as possible, I have objectively referred to (how many traces here are passed over, invisible, with only partial access to them, or erased, sometimes completely unclear, so there is no access to them at all) the remarkable story of the acquaintance between two artists which inspired Themerson to create his remarkable books about Schwitters.

This story of a strange acquaintance is truly strange, as well as instructive, as it brings Themerson's own ways of reasoning, and his aesthetic choices, a little closer. It is the history of an artist and poet related by a fellow artist and poet, and let us especially emphasise that they were creators of ideas who, only after long years have passed, find their ideas developed by scholars dealing with the philosophy of language, ideas that allow contemporary society to better grasp the reality surrounding it, and they remain a rich source of inspiration for writers and artists all over the world.

*Translation: Benjamin Koschalka*

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Magdalena Popiel

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## The Aesthetics of Caprice: In the Circle of Visualization

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**W**hat is it to you?" Borrowing a line from the narrator of *Jacques the Fatalist*, the scholar of the caprice could respond, "What is it to you?" Such a riposte would be born not of the anti-essentialist stance of the scholar, but more of the frustration elicited by the subject itself. Caprice capable of speech would likely say the same thing as one of Marivaux's allegorical characters:

I am the *Je ne sais quoi* that pleases in architecture, in furnishings, in gardens, in everything that can be the object of taste. Do not search for me under a certain form; I have a thousand, and not one which is fixed; that's why one sees me without knowing me, without being able to seize me or define me. I am felt; one cannot lay one's hands on me.<sup>1</sup>

Observing the undefined and intangible in other areas than furnishings and gardens is the forte of both "liquid" postmodernity and "solid" modernity. At the dawn of modern art history, as well as the beginning of cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre de Marivaux, *Le Cabinet du philosophe*, quoted in Francis X.J. Coleman, *The Aesthetic Thought of the French Enlightenment* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971), 86.

studies, lies the oeuvre of Aby Warburg, and within its boundaries, his fascination with the figure of the “unbeen,” or the Nymph.<sup>2</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman’s book *Ninfa moderna*<sup>3</sup> opens with the ascertainment of the intriguing analogy between these interests of Warburg’s and the passion with which Sigmund Freud wrote about Gradiva.<sup>4</sup> More than just a collection of essays paying homage to the master, the book is also an application of methodology inspired by cultural anthropology. The Florentine Renaissance, with its grand finale in the Classicist-themed paintings of Botticelli, gave Warburg a field in which to explore the “animated life” (*bewegtes Leben*), and the “animated accessories” (*bewegtes Beiwerk*) of the figures of antiquity whom he recognized in the art of the Quattrocento. The windswept hair and flowing robes along with the fluid and lively movements of the body formed an instrumentarium of “forms evoking pathos” (*Pathosformeln*). Huberman continues this story: a beautiful, free goddess, suspended between fluidity and solidity, between rock and air, light as the wind, a Nymph, Gradiva, is subject to degradation in the modern era, like Benjamin’s aura; she falls figuratively and literally. Huberman attempts to show the images of the female body and dress as it changes “like the frames of a film” throughout art and literature up to the Parisian tramps and the tattered clothes dumped on the street, immortalized in photographs of the 20th urban landscape; these iconographic motifs intertwine with mental images.<sup>5</sup> Memory, desire and time assemble into a configuration of concepts into which this imaginarium is inscribed.<sup>6</sup>

The studies conducted by Warburg, and later Panofsky with his concept of pseudomorphosis, which dealt with interpenetration of the Classical motifs of antiquity with new meanings derived from the Christian cultural sphere, and finally Didi-Huberman’s writings on the image of the Nymph all assume a particular non-linear continuity between cultural phenomena. This continuity is possible across chronological and geographical boundaries, despite radical or even paradoxical changes in the “visual parameters” and aesthetic quality (for example, the stripping of pathos or the removal of form). Huberman emphasizes that we must open our eyes in order to see all that passes,

2 Among others, Aby Warburg, „La Nascita di Venere” e „La Primavera” di Sandro Botticelli (1893), *Ninfa fiorentina* (1900), Warburg Institute Archive, London III, 118, 1.

3 Freud’s study of Wilhelm Jensen’s novel *Gradiva* was published in 1907.

4 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ninfa Moderna. Essai sur le drapé tombé* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002).

5 Most of the images analyzed by Didi-Huberman are photographs of streets strewn with scraps of food and clothes; their authors include Nadar, Thibault, Marville, Atget, L. Moholy-Nagy’s Paris and Berlin series, G. Krull, A. Fleischer, D. Colomb and S. McQueen.

6 Didi-Huberman, *Ninfa Moderna*, 12–13.

and we must close our eyes to see all the relationships, correspondences and shifts. In this sense, the anthropology of art/images becomes poetic knowledge.

At some point this rendition of the story of the Nymph encounters the story of caprice; the watershed moment is the birth of modernity.

The Nymph in the Classical tradition could take the form of a Charis (Grace). In the aesthetic of the Renaissance, for example in the treatise *Libro della belta e grazia* (1590) by Benedetto Varchi, it is grace that begins to function as a category characterized by the famed *non so che*, different from the kind of beauty that is the domain of reason and norms.<sup>7</sup> 16th century courtliness and its carefree demeanor combined with *sprezzatura*, or “studied carelessness” introduce the caprice into the modern aestheticization of everyday life.

### A Few Reminders

“Caprice:” this word has retained the sonority of its Romance origin. According to Italian dictionaries of art, one might regard caprice as an aesthetic concept that is distinguished by its strong anthropological connotations.<sup>8</sup> Its large semantic capacity combined with the diversity of visualizations associated with the word make caprice an attractive neighbor for melancholy and grandeur, among others.

The exceptional breadth of meaning found in the word “caprice” can be illustrated by three examples of its diametrically different semantic values:

- in the slightly archaic discourse of love, caprice can appear in the passive or active aspect: to be capricious or to be the victim of someone else’s capriciousness;<sup>9</sup>
- caprice can be light or dark: sometimes it is cheerful, sophisticated and light, but it can also be paired with negative context, tinged with darkness, suffering and death; it is the space that divides Alfred de Musset’s *Un Caprice* and de Laclos’ *Les Liaisons dangereuses*;
- there is also the caprice in its weak and strong forms, that is the caprice of a child, a woman or an ill person, or the caprice of Fate or God. “A capricious God,” however, is an anthropomorphically marked term.

7 Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, vol. 3, trans. Chester A. Kisiel (The Hague: Mouton, 1974).

8 Among others, *Dizionario enciclopedico dell’arte*, ed. Flavio Caroli (Milan: Mondadori 2008); *Dizionario di estetica*, ed. Gianni Carchia, et al (Rome, Bari: GLF Editori, 2005); *Enciclopedia dell’Arte Zanichelli* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 2004).

9 See “Trésor de Langue Française Informatisé,” <http://atilf.atilf.fr>.

Is the caprice of God thus an anthropomorphization of the concept of Fate in teleological philosophy, or contrarily, is the caprice of a person the consequence of the human experience of the caprices of Fate, the fickleness and randomness of the outside world that becomes interiorized by the human?

In the artistic terminology used in the Polish tradition, caprice most commonly refers to a musical genre: a *capriccio* is a fantasia build on an imitative structure, a kind of scherzo, a masterly *étude* (the international master being Paganini, and Grażyna Bacewicz in Poland). In Italian and French culture, *capriccio* takes the foreground as a genre of painting as well as an extravagant or frivolous architectural form (such as the villa in Comillas designed by Antonio Gaudí).

### Figurative Depictions of Caprice

Caprice, like grace, was part of the visual domain. Władysław Tatarkiewicz referred to Lord Kames, or Henry Home, who argued that “grace is accessible only to the eye.”<sup>10</sup> An allegorical visualization of Caprice can be found in Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia*, which is both a summary of the earlier allegorical tradition and a model for the next two centuries. Caprice is presented alongside many other representations of feelings: Fear, Anger, Wonder. The emblematic representation of caprice clearly emphasizes such qualities as weirdness, variability and fantasy. The allegorical figure of caprice is a boy in colorful garb, wearing a hat adorned with feathers. Ripa thus explains the meaning of this garment: “His youth shows his inconstancy; his habit his fickleness. His cap shows that such variety of unaccountable actions are principally in the Fancy.”<sup>11</sup> The transfer of these qualities onto our knowledge of man leads to the following characterization: “A capricious person is he who follows ideas that differ from those commonly found among people, who indulge in different actions, only to jump from one to the other, even if they are of the same type.”<sup>12</sup> Along with the concepts of caprice in the allegorical tradition, there are also images of caprice created in the 16th century that emphasize the imagination and craftsmanship of the artist.<sup>13</sup>

10 Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas: An Essay in Aesthetics*, trans. Christopher Kasparek (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1980), 170.

11 Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia*, trans. Pierce Tempest (London: Benjamin Motte, 1709), 11.

12 Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Rome: Appresso Lepido Facij, 1593), 48.

13 One of the sources of Arcimboldo’s art was his interest in the weird creations of nature and humans. Their extraordinariness often stems from the fact of their being liminal forms, hy-

Caprice becomes an inalienable component of the Renaissance mannerism, one of the most intriguing fruits of which was the work of Arcimboldo and later Arcimboldian art. Allegorical portraits such as *The Librarian*, *The Lawyer* and *Rudolf II as Vertumnus* rely on a simple game of analogies based on the shapes and symbolism of objects, as well as the masterful craftsmanship of the artist. Reversible paintings such as *L'Ortolano* (*The Vegetable Gardener*) belong to an emerging art trend of employing optical illusions.<sup>14</sup> The permeation of material objects, plants, animals and human forms creates a capricious world of variable images and meanings. This phenomenon is also apparent in the anthropomorphic landscape that emerges in the latter half of the 16th century, leading to the development of the *trompe-l'œil*. Bizarre anthropomorphic forms found in nature then become the subject of visual creativity. It is no wonder that this form of fantasy caught the interest of 20th century surrealists (André Breton and Salvador Dalí); it emphasizes weirdness and peculiarity, wonderfulness tinged with wonder, menacing grotesque and magic – magic that comes from esoteric knowledge, as in the art of Arcimboldo, or the magic of the mystery of the subconscious discovered by Freud.

The connection between Mannerism and Surrealism was pointed out not only by the French founders of the avant-garde movement, but also by art historians and literary scholars. Jan Mukařovský observed that a similar montage technique was used by Arcimboldo and by Nezval in *The Absolute Gravedigger*.<sup>15</sup> In the treatise *Über Greco und den Manierismus*, Max Dvořák reveals premises analogous to the downfall of culture in Mannerism and in the 20th century interwar period. Recalling this interpretative correspondences, Josef Vojvodík links these body-incrustations or body/head-landscapes to the eradication of the boundary between the microcosm and the macrocosm, and nature and man in the paintings of Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst and René Magritte.<sup>16</sup>

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brids or monsters of the sort that can be found in the studies of grotesque figures by Bosch and Giambattista Della Porta's *Humana Physiognomia* (1586); they are, in a number of ways, an illustration of the 16th century human imagination's tendency to project metamorphoses.

14 See Roland Barthes, *Arcimboldo ou rhétoriqueur et magicien*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3, ed. Éric Marty (Paris: Seuil, 1995), 493–511.

15 Jan Mukařovský, "Sémantický rozbor básnického díla: Nezvalův *Absolutní hrobař*," in *Kapitoly z české poetiky*, vol. 2 (Prague: Svoboda, 1948). The author omits, however, the key link in this tradition, namely the 18th century images of various professions that depicted the composition of tools corresponding to particular trades.

16 Josef Vojvodík, "Świat strachu i strach przed światem w czeskim surrealizmie lat trzydziestych i czterdziestych," *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2007).

### Caprices and Vedute. Toward the Emancipation of Art

The term “caprice” first appeared in the writing of Vasari and, as is often the case with words that go down in the history of culture, its original meaning was negative, similar to “grotesque” (from *raccapriccio*: shock, terror). Vasari uses the word to describe ancient and modern artists who violate the rules of mimicking nature. The Counter-Reformation, during which artists who made capricious works of art were accused of ignorance and lies, entrenched the negative meaning of the word.

Capriciousness in painting, or, put briefly, a fantastic landscape, was born out of the veduta.<sup>17</sup> The veduta, or a picture of place painted in nature, was enormously popular in the visual arts in the unique circumstances that arose during Europe’s cultural opening and were tied to the increased mobility of its inhabitants. Creating a new custom known as the Grand Tour, the English, Scandinavians, Germans and the French set off on voyages to the South. It was for these educated travelers that the first guides and collections of vedute were written and painted. This genre of painting was thus born out of a specific social need, and its informative function – which stemmed from the requirement that the artist remain faithful to nature – appears dominant.

The peculiar aesthetic tension between vedute and caprices, or between the realism of depiction and attempts to disrupt it, perfectly illustrates certain paths followed by art. When looking at a painting, it is often difficult to discern whether it is a veduta or a fantastic landscape, particularly if it lacks any easily recognizable architectural forms. Sometimes it is only the title containing the term “caprice” that conveys to the viewer the fact that the artist has dispensed with the rules of simply mimicking nature. It is a sign of the stance of the artist, who wishes to exercise his right to free imagination on that specific canvas. An interesting 1766 painting by Belotto titled *Architectural Capriccio with a Self-Portrait* shows that the genre of the caprice was a type of manifesto of artistic freedom. The piece is a rather extraordinary combination of a self-portrait with a capriccio. In the background, on one of the walls of an odd building, the painter has placed part of a poem by Horace that praises the freedom of the artist.<sup>18</sup>

17 Early forms of capriccio are visible in the work of Baroque artists such as Salvatore Rosa, Giovanni Paolo Pannini and Marco Ricci, as well as Stefano della Bella, who is mentioned in Jacques Callot’s *Microcosmo della pittura* (1657).

18 Note that the fantastic space is completed by the usurping gesture of the artist, who depicts himself dressed in the fine garments of a Venetian nobleman. It is not only the space that has been shaped by the painter, but also the main character of the piece.

In the 18th century, artists became “depositories and sometimes prophets of the freedom disgraced on the battlefields.”<sup>19</sup> The importance of art that strives to escape the rigid confines of classical discipline increases significantly. No longer understood in terms of the language of power, it achieves a status equated with the increasingly independent language of the artist.

The departure from the faithful image of space occurred in various ways in the 18th century. Urban landscapes were of particular interest. The picture could depict a fantastic synthesis of actual urban architectural elements, or representations of real buildings combined with invented fragments. The former type of capriccio was a kind of museum collection that encompassed within the painting a set of characteristic architectural forms found mainly in Rome, Padua and Venice.<sup>20</sup> The space of capricious works is a chessboard in which the movement of realistically treated forms is the basic gesture of a player creating a new reality. The paintings conjured up by the artist remain within the boundaries of probability in the contemporary urban landscape.<sup>21</sup>

Capricious paintings use the framework of the landscape convention as an empty form that can often be filled with various elements using a technique similar to that of the collage. In the 18th century, the main current of this style of painting was headed in two directions. One emphasized the decorative value of art, using it as an ornamental motif in interiors and on furniture. An entire school of furniture-making emerges that specializes in imagined landscape-themed intarsia.<sup>22</sup> Other artists aimed to fill the space of the landscape with new semantics associated with the key motif of the ruin. Between the sentimental painterliness of the mainly Italian ruins and the freneticism discovered in them by German Romanticism, there is room for the aesthetic of

19 Jean Starobinski, *Wynalezienie wolności 1700-1789*, trans. Maryna Ochab (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2006), 15.

20 More common are capricci that combine realistic and fantastic elements; in a painting by Canaletto, for example, the background of the panorama of a fictitious city includes the Vicenza cathedral and the towers of Padua, while Francesco Guardi introduced Roman architecture into the background of a nondescript city. The artist's imagination would change the location of certain spatial elements, as in Canaletto's *Capriccio* (1743), in which the famous quadriga of St. Mark's Basilica is transferred to individual pedestals standing in front of the Doge's Palace.

21 See Roland Kanz, *Die Kunst des Capriccio. Kreativer Eigensinn in Renaissance und Barok* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2002); Colin Eisler "La Tempesta di Giorgione. Il primo „capriccio” della pittura veneziana," *Arte Veneta* 59 (2002): 85-97.

22 See, among others, "Scena e capriccio nelle tarsie del laboratorio di Ignazio e Ligi Ravelli ebanisti," *Studi Piemontesi* 26 (1997): 383-390.

caprice in the work of such painters as Alessandro Magnasco, Luca Carlevaris, Canaletto, Antonio and Francesco Guardi.

Ruins with elements typical of ancient and renaissance buildings, such as colonnades, terraces, galleries, porticoes and arcades are downright emblematic departures from the harmony and symmetry of classical beauty. The hegemony of order was to be replaced by an indistinct dynamic of lines forming the outline of an irregular shape. The rocks of a ruin gradually give way to vegetation, thus intensifying the sensation of ragged form. In *The Analysis of Beauty*, William Hogarth praises the line, capable of "lead[ing] the eye [into] a kind of chase." At times the peculiar landscape resembles the effect of an arabesque. The accumulation of architectural elements and plants within the space of the painting does not eliminate the semantic level; on the contrary, it often falls into grandiloquence. The most important sentence uttered in this capricious narrative pertains to the special marriage of culture and nature, permeating each other in constant metamorphosis. In its fully conscious artificiality, caprice is close to the theater; connections between this style of painting and set design were remarked upon by contemporary aesthetes. The capriccio is a form that affects the viewer with the oddity of its juxtapositions, sometimes its disproportions, and the ambiguity of its shapes and meanings.

The genre, which owes much to the extravagance of Mannerism, finds its extension in the works of Giovanni Battista Piranesi. In *Carceri d'Invenzione*, the architectural caprice achieves the level of a masterpiece and mystery. Georges Poulet devoted an extensive study to the influence of Piranesi's caprices on the imagination of French Romantic poets.<sup>23</sup> From De Quincey with his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, through Baudelaire, Alfred de Musset, Victor Hugo and Théophile Gautier, to Mallarmé as well as Kubin and Kafka after him, literature is full of visions of endless staircases and scaffoldings, a spiderweb of ruins and machines. Piranesi is likely the first painter to apply the form of capriccio to the exploration of the human psyche so evocatively and powerfully. The extension of this artistic current sees the appearance of one more work of art: Goya's *Caprichos*. The date of their publication, 1799, can be considered symbolic. The concept of the caprice is separated from the traditions associated with vedute, putting at the center of the meaning the artist's clear right to unbridled imagination; a fully individualized system of emotions combines with a moral sensibility and a sense of responsibility for the fate of the community. Caprice remains a gesture of emancipation for the artist, yet it is tinged with fear, suffering,

23 Georges Poulet, "Piranèse et les poètes romantiques français," *La Nouvelle Revue Française* 160 (1966), 660-671.

evil and death, not unlike the entire 18th century, which ends with cries of freedom and the clank of the guillotine.<sup>24</sup>

### The Caprice of the Eye

The history of caprice as it developed in the genre of painting depicts the entire diversity and fickleness of meanings ascribed to the term. A weirdly meandering aesthetic awareness compelled artists over several centuries to use the word to bind together paintings that reached into different parts of the imagination. Not only was the choice of figurative and landscape forms captured in the process of metamorphosis, fluid transition from one reality to another, interpreted by the notion of caprice, but so was the very process by which paintings were perceived and created.

In his concept of the image, Hans Belting assumes a special primariness of pictures in the lives of people: "We live with pictures and we understand the world through pictures."<sup>25</sup> Pictures that are indivisibly dual: the external and internal image remains both a product of our perception and the fruit of personal or collection symbolization.

This way of thinking about people through what Huberman calls an "epidemic of images" can be found in the work of Gaston Bachelard. His absolutization of the image applied to more than just the poetic imagination that evokes the four elements. Earlier, in 1933, Bachelard published a study titled

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24 In the late 18th century, in 1793, Friedrich Schiller published the essay "On Grace and Dignity," which examined the relationship between these two categories in a manner characteristic of the anthropological aesthetic of Romanticism. Schiller writes that "Grace, therefore, can only characterize willful movements, but also, among these, only those which express moral sentiments. (...) The beautiful soul has no other merit, than that it is. With such ease, as if mere instinct were acting out of it, it carries out the most painful duties of humanity, and the most heroic sacrifice which it exacts from natural impulse comes to view like a voluntary effect of just this impulse. Hence, the beautiful soul knows nothing of the beauty of its deeds" ("On Grace and Dignity," trans. George Gregory, in *Friedrich Schiller: Poet of Freedom* (Washington DC: Schiller Institute, 1992), 340, 368). Schiller analyzes the meaning of the belt of grace – an attribute of Venus which she, in her benevolence, can grant to other goddesses or mortals (recall the multiple meanings of the word "grace"). According to his interpretation, grace has five qualities: 1. it is a changeable beauty; 2. it is a fortuitous beauty; 3. it is the beauty of movement; 4. it operates magically; 5. it is compared to objects that are less beautiful or even those that are not beautiful. One cannot help but observe that Schiller's grace has much in common with Baudelaire's modern beauty. It appears in both instances as an opposing member to permanent, absolute beauty, which Schiller refers to as "architectonic beauty." In an interesting coincidence, in both cases the image of women's clothing serves as a point of departure for the imagination.

25 Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

*The World as Caprice and Miniature*.<sup>26</sup> This “philosopher of the moment and the unending,” as Błoński described him,<sup>27</sup> could only find his way, in the end, to the realm of caprice. “The psyche is hungry for images, and the world is the appetite of man,” said the author of *The Poetics of Reverie*. Reverie cannot be described without reference to the mechanism of desire; the image is a “mediation between ourselves and our wanting.”<sup>28</sup> The instrument that is the miniaturization of the world takes part in the creation of this image.

The fact that our sight is the interpretation of reality through the frame of a window has been known since the discovery of linear perspective in the Renaissance. This type of perspective, which Panofsky describes as a symbolic form,<sup>29</sup> constructs a space that is ordered and homogeneous. The reality that is subject to the rational rules of geometrization is a product of the “immobile eye.”

Bachelard, in describing his world as a caprice, refers back to a diametrically opposite tradition. The capricious gaze that shapes a flickering, moving, changing image stems from two sources: the direct rooting of visualization in the matter of the body and the sphere of desire. Caprice is a primary form of the subject’s intuition in its traumatic, miraculous and magical dimensions; it is the will to visualize objects in a way that miraculously suspends their inertia: “it is the commanding power that entertains itself by rotating the kaleidoscope of distant miniatures [...] Long before humans incarnated *Homo faber*, it was *Puer lusor* who possessed the world with his toy.”<sup>30</sup>

The notion of caprice in Bachelard’s concept has a variety of anthropological implications. The author contrasts caprice with the force of action, a voluntary activity that evaluates it in an ambiguous, ambivalent way. He emphasizes that it is the youthful energy of caprice, and not the power of activity, that shapes the self-awareness in its plurality and freedom. The fantasy of caprice allows us a chance to abandon the distant and indifferent world. The distance that forms in the immobile structure of the “view through the window” is eliminated, and we can once again experience individual objects and find ourselves inside the cosmos.

26 Gaston Bachelard “Le Monde comme caprice et miniature,” *Recherches Philosophiques* 3 (1933-1934), quoted in Bachelard, “Il mondo come capriccio e miniature,” ed. Flavia Conte (Milano: Claudio Gallone, 1997).

27 Jan Błoński *Introduction to Gaston Bachelard, Wyobraźnia poetycka. Wybór pism*, ed. Henryk Chudak, trans. Henryk Chudak and Anna Tatarkiewicz (Warszawa: PIW, 1975), 15.

28 Bachelard, *Wyobraźnia poetycka*.

29 Erwin Panofsky, “Die Perspektive als ‘symbolische Form’,” *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg*, vol. 4, (1924-1925), 258-330.

30 Bachelard, *Il mondo come capriccio e miniature*, 8.

### The World as Caprice – Georg Simmel's Aesthetic of Lightness

Traditional depictions of caprice are strongly linked to the image of a place that is sometimes regarded at once as the caprice of nature and civilization: Venice. In his description of Venice and the surrounding islands in *Iconologia*, Cesare Ripa used the term *capricci lagunari*. The ragged, irregular line that meanderingly and uncertainly marks the boundary between sea and land made the association with the caprice of nature unavoidable. This bizarre quirk of nature posed a challenge to the imagination, which, at the time, was preoccupied with solidifying images of the radical separation between land and water in the landscape of our planet.

In later narratives about Venice, caprice becomes a Cassirerian way of symbolically perceiving the city, an aspect of descriptions striving to uncover its mystery. Georg Simmel also searches for his own truth about Venice.<sup>31</sup> To him the city has the ambiguous beauty of adventure and rootlessness; a one-dimensional superficiality, a fickle and at once seemingly illusory variability at the defining features of capricious Venice. The unnoticeable overlapping of the seasons, "the green of its few gardens rooted somewhere in stone or in the air, or perhaps rootless, is not subject to change," "the city belongs neither to the land or the water;" its numerous bridges neither divide nor connect anything, and the "narrow Venetian streets slither over the countless bridges as if they were flat roads." All of this makes Venice an

"artificial city" where everyone moves as if on stage; preoccupied with vain dreams or endeavors that lead to nothing, they incessantly emerge from behind corners, only to immediately disappear around the next one, and they always have in them something of an actor who is nothing off stage, as it is only on stage that the game is played, with no cause in the reality of the previous moment and no effect in the reality of the next moment.<sup>32</sup>

Simmel's *capriccio*, describing an almost fantastic Venetian landscape, contains a crucial conclusion. Venice

has become a symbol of exceptional order about the forms of our understanding of the world: here is a surface that has abandoned the soil,

31 Georg Simmel, "Wenecja," in Simmel, *Most i drzwi. Wybór esejów*, trans. Małgorzata Łukasiewicz (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2006).

32 Ibid., 180.

a pretense in which there is no being, and yet it presents itself as something complete and substantial, as the contents of a life actually being lived.<sup>33</sup>

Simmel does not like Venice, but he is captivated by Florence, because “art is perfect, far from any artificiality only when it becomes something more than art” – such is Florence. And yet it is Venice that becomes the discovery of a new way of understanding the world. A surface that does not refer to any depth, but creates instead the autonomous and real content of life. Capricious Venice, Simmel’s *capriccio veneziano* becomes a prefiguration of the aesthetic of lightness and of the fluid postmodern world.

According to Georges Didi-Huberman, we must open our eyes to feel caprice. It is then that we will see how caprice builds the fantastic landscape of nature and architecture, how it assumes human forms, how it draws the map of the world. But we must then close our eyes so that it may give rise to what Milan Kundera called “a capricious cluster,” at once light and unbearable.

*Translation: Arthur Barys*

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33 Ibid., 182.

# Looking Awry

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Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska

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## **Visual Culture Studies or an Anthropologically Oriented Bildwissenschaft? On the Directions of the Iconic Turn in the Cultural Sciences**

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**N**ot too long ago, philosophers of science debated whether the history of the humanities could be described in a way analogous to the natural sciences. Those, who distinguished the developmental stages of the natural sciences (based on differing criteria), while representing methodological naturalism, invariably placed the humanities on a comparatively lower level of “advancement” – in relation to the theoretical knowledge of the natural sciences. This was the case even when they took into account the specificity of the humanities that came into focus with the rise of the antipositivist tendencies in science. Better times for the humanities came with Kuhn’s theory of scientific paradigms and Paul K. Feyerabend’s so-called epistemological anarchism, not to mention the postmodernist aura, which on the one hand has severely impaired thinking about the humanities in terms of the scientific method, but on the other hand, has “elevated” their standing in a certain way by exposing the culturally mediated and interpretative status of theories in the natural sciences. At the same time, attempts have been made at framing the dynamics of contemporary science from the pragmatic perspective of scientific investigations, a perspective determined by the complex character of tasks which are epistemological

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and practical in nature. The methodological-theoretical discourse has shifted from the heights of philosophical conceptualizations to more down-to-earth practices of contemporary research. Those practices in the natural sciences as well as in the humanities have, until recently, functioned mostly within the confines of disciplines and specializations (and for the most part they still do). The ambition of every discipline of knowledge, at the outset of its stabilization within the academic division of labour, has been to assert its autonomy through delineating its own investigatory field, differentiating its own specificity in relation to other disciplines, and pointing out the prospective uniqueness of its investigative methods. Immanuel Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties* is one of the early, but nonetheless vital, examples of this process. The relations between individual branches of knowledge, which at first mainly occurred at their peripheries, have been evolving under the aegis of interdisciplinarity (also in the form of comparative studies in the humanities). The distinguished German philosopher of science Jürgen Mittelstraß, in his book *Wissen und Grenzen* (2001), remarks that if in the late 1980s the congresses and symposiums of philosophers of science and representatives of other disciplines were still dominated by the rhetoric of interdisciplinarity, then today there is a noticeable dominance of the rhetoric of transdisciplinarity. Transdisciplinarity is, of course, much more than a meagre rhetorical strategy, as it becomes the primary notion upon which investigatory theory and practice are arranged. Consequently, we come to a much clearer realization that the divisions separating disciplines are essentially not of a theoretical but of a historical kind, and as such can be not only surpassed but also relocated, modified and transposed into thresholds that invite multidirectional movement. They not only can be, but – at a certain level of development – must be surpassed; as the changes in this matter are a direct outcome of the growing complexity of the problems set before contemporary scientific pursuits (e.g. the problem of sourcing energy, problems of healthcare and the environment, and in the area of broadly conceived humanities – the problem of images, which is of greatest interest to me, images whose proliferation in contemporary culture has become a serious challenge for educational strategies). If interdisciplinary investigations were characterized by their rather random character, then transdisciplinarity becomes a necessity in the second phase of modernity – a post-industrial modernity “at large” (to borrow Arjun Appadurai's phrase which explains the prevalence of the prefix “trans” in our language so well). There is no trace of an effort to eliminate disciplinarity as such here. On the contrary, it is its high level of development and evolved specializations that constitute the basic premise of transdisciplinarity. Nevertheless, excellent disciplinary competence is by itself not enough to resolve the tasks defined in terms of transdisciplinarity. Transdisciplinarity “guides

perception and problem-solving, but does not entrench itself in any permanent theoretical models – either professional or disciplinary, as well as any holistic frameworks,”<sup>1</sup> Mittelstraß sees this as an outcome of the previously mentioned weakening of the status of theory, not only in the humanities but also in the natural sciences. Thus, theories are perceived as (mere) interpretations, and the former dream of the unity of knowledge (upheld today by among others Edward O. Wilson or by Humberto Maturana) has transformed into a unity from the “bottom-up,” one that is practical and operational (defined by complex research tasks). In contrast with interdisciplinarity, which does not lead to a redefinition of the investigatory field of involved disciplines, transdisciplinarity – “active” in those cases where there are problems insolvable within the framework of singular disciplines – constitutes a novel investigatory field. The German philosopher illustrates his findings mostly with examples from the area of the natural and technical sciences being developed in new research centres that mainly operate beyond the settings of academic teaching institutions, which are organized according to disciplinary models. Depending on the character of problems being solved, sometimes the humanities are also involved (it is hard to imagine working out the problems of *Umwelt* or public health without them). To what extent they (still) belong to the tradition of interdisciplinary research and to what extent they cross into the sphere of transdisciplinarity – is a question, requiring detailed analysis, that will undoubtedly be asked by future historians of knowledge. Disciplinarity, interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity all have equally influenced the shape of contemporary humanities. In relation to the humanities of the last half-century, the correct assumption seems to state that the most inspiring insights are gained at the crossroads of diverse disciplines, subjects and methodological-theoretical perspectives; and that from previous research traditions we most readily adopt those which until now have existed on the margins due to their subversive nature, and in which disciplinary boundaries have undergone significant deconstruction. To make the titular *Bildwissenschaft* and its philosophical contexts relevant to this insight, it is enough to point out the contemporary popularity of Aby Warburg, whose research ideas were criticized or marginalized by the newly constituted, and proud of its academic standing, discipline of art history; or Walter Benjamin, who during his lifetime was not accepted in any of the German academic communities. Anticipating later considerations, with Mittelstraß’s roughly described concept in mind, I wish to add that the original undertaking of a group of humanists, the *Charter of Transdisciplinarity*, along with the founding of the International Center for

1 Jürgen Mittelstraß, *Wissen und Grenzen. Philosophische Studien* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001), 118.

Transdisciplinary Research and the *Transdisciplinarité* series, can easily be tied to the problematic inherent in the title of this text.<sup>2</sup>

When we try to put the history of the humanities of the second-half of the twentieth century in order, and at the same time want to embrace its inter- and trans-disciplinary efforts, we inevitably talk of “turns”: the linguistic-semiotic-textual, the performative, the visual; of which the genesis of the last two is two-fold: substantive – accounting for the state of contemporary culture (which on the one hand acquires performative attributes, while on the other, is filled, or rather flooded, with images derived from a multitude of sources) – and methodological – preoccupied with overcoming the limitations of the first turn. There are even some discussions about the emerging outlines of a new visual civilization, which can be considered – for a multitude of reasons – an exaggerated diagnosis that often entangles researchers of culture in renewed versions of an old religious and philosophical dispute between the iconoclasts and iconodulists (which frequently becomes much more heated than it needs to be).

We are aware of at least two – inherently different – formulations of the visual turn. One of them was proclaimed by William J. Thomas Mitchell, a Professor of English and Art History at the University of Chicago, while the other was introduced by a disciple of Max Imdahl and H. G. Gadamer, the art historian – Gottfried Boehm. The first is situated in the field of a new discipline (according to Mitchell’s preliminary investigative remarks), “Visual Studies” or “Visual Culture Studies,” which, while underscoring the undeniably growing importance of images (of various kinds and derived from different sources) in contemporary society, is tasked with investigating this state of affairs in a critical fashion and from multiple points of view. In

2 “As the prefix “trans” indicates, transdisciplinarity concerns that which is at once between the disciplines, across the different disciplines, and beyond all disciplines” wrote Basarab Nicolescu (one of the Center’s founders along with Edgar Morin), he added that “Its goal is the understanding of the present world” (Basarab Nicolescu, *Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity*, trans. Karen-Claire Voss (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 44.) Another theory I will refer to is that of René Berger, as it can elucidate the issue of the anthropology of images, just like the recent research that points out the elective affinities between the theories of Benjamin and Warburg – also in their relation to the ideas of Panofsky. Siegrid Weigel dissected this topic in the article *Bildwissenschaft aus dem “Geiste wahrer Philologie,”* in *Schrift Bilder Denken. Walter Benjamin und die Künste*, ed. D. Schöttker, (Frankfurt a/M 2004), 112–127. The way Weigel utilizes Freud’s theory to interpret Benjamin’s dialectic images in the spirit of “disfigured similitude” (in the book *Entstellte Ähnlichkeit. Walter Benjamins theoretische Schreibweise*, 1997) can be viewed as an undertaking in its intentions not unlike that laid out by Didi-Huberman in *Devant L’image* (which similarly refers to Freud’s concept of interpretation of dreams, and recounts its use for the critical correction of the conception of Renaissance art by Panofsky; see footnote no. 23).

the article-manifesto *The Pictorial Turn*, first published in *Artforum* in 1992, Mitchell, drawing from the work of Richard Rorty and Stanley Cavell, as well as the European tradition, formulated a project of a new research discipline that focuses on “the analysis and critique of visual phenomena.” Mitchell’s line of argument relied on the history of pictorial representation only to the extent required to discuss the work of Erwin Panofsky (read, in an interesting way, alongside Althusser), while postulating a new “critical iconology,” and referenced David Freedberg’s *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (a book considered to be as crucial for the development of the discipline as Belting’s *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*). Questioning the dominance of research strategies utilized within the framework of the linguistic turn, which he accused of a certain kind of iconoclasm, Mitchell defined the visual turn not as a return to naïve *mimesis*, copy or correspondence theories of representation, or a resurrection of the metaphysics of pictorial “presence,” but rather as “a postlinguistic, postsemitic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality.”<sup>3</sup> The critique of this and other theories that have rapidly become a part of academic cultural studies, which in turn intermittently attempted to incorporate the history of art into its domain (as well as media studies even though it preceded cultural studies), has taken on many forms. In the community of art historians, there was a growing sense of anxiety over the possible termination of their discipline, and over the trivialization of their workshop by utilizing it – against the intentions of its architects – for imagological practices (in the sense attributed to the term by Milan Kundera in *Immortality*), as well as for building theoretical resources that would enable the effective manipulation of people by means of images. In this context, Rosalind Krauss and others, in the journal *October* from the summer of 1996 devoted to Visual

3 William John Thomas Mitchell, “The Iconic Turn,” in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995,) 16. Mitchell explains the Genesis of the visual turn as an effect of the “paradox of the moment.” On the one hand, he says, it is noticeable that in the era of video, cybernetic technology and electronic reproduction there has been an unprecedented growth of new forms of illusion and visual stimulation. Nevertheless, on the other hand, there is a deep anxiety surrounding the image, a fear that the power of images will ultimately destroy its creators and controllers. The study of this subject led Willibald Sauerländer to notice that the contemporary staging of politics in the media clearly relates to pre-Enlightenment and pre-democratic models, thus they appeal to the “archaic remnants” of the public, which cease to be comprised of citizens (in “Iconic turn? Eine Bitte um Ikonoklasmus,” in *Iconic Turn. Die neue Macht der Bilder*, eds. Christa Maar, Hubert Burda (Köln: DuMont, 2005). In a similar way Ernst Cassirer described the Weimer Republic in the *Myth of the State* – a book “settling accounts” with modernity that is as important, but unfortunately not so well known, as Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Studies, fervently defended the heritage of the linguistic turn in the study of images, especially those created by the new mass media, which (according to Krauss) deprive the viewers of their objectivity and analytical skills, leading to a loss of a sense of reality. "Only the reading of image as text reveals the conventional nature of the image and thus neutralizes its power" – this is how Jan Verwoert summarizes Krauss's opinion, adding that from her point of view, "the visual face of the image is a lie. The truth of the image comes to light only when it is read as text" (for example in the spirit of the demythologizing strategies practiced by Roland Barthes or the ideas of Jacques Lacan).<sup>4</sup> The arguments presented by Krauss and other critics of Visual Studies call to mind the dialectic of myth and enlightenment outlined many years before by Adorno and Horkheimer, here transposed onto the (mythic) image and (enlightened) text; but apart from this, they express fears arising from the marginalisation or complete incorporation of art history into Visual Studies (a fear justified by the fact that in the American cultural tradition, references to autonomous artistic images have a much less solid grounding than in Europe, where the initiative to establish an analogue to Visual Studies came from art historians themselves, and it was not a proposition of creating a new discipline, but an endeavour designed to be transdisciplinary, even if not at first, then at least asserting such a future possibility). What adds to the confusion is that representatives of other disciplines within the humanities that deal with images in various ways and to various extent (such as archaeology) were not very active in the American debate concerning Visual Studies. Tom Holert proved to be a merciless critic of Mitchell's ideas when he examined the syllabus of the "Theories of Media" classes that accompanied Mitchell's "Visual Culture" seminar in the 2003/2004 academic year at the University of Chicago.

This course – we read – is devoted to basic problems in the interdisciplinary study of visual culture. What are the cultural (as well as natural) components of visual experience? What is vision? Who is a receiver? What is the difference between visual and verbal representation? In what way do visual media exercise control, arouse desire, how do they create pleasure and construct the boundary between individual and communal experiences within the private and public spheres? How is

4 Jan Verwoert "Double Viewing: Versuch über die Bedeutung des »Pictorial Turn« für einen ideologiekritischen Umgang mit visuellen Medien – im Medium Videokunst," in *Person/Schauplatz*, Hrsg. J. Huber (Wien: Springer, 2003), 227. Verwoert rightly underscores that the weakness of the opinions in question is their disregard for the results of research on the reception of media images.

the construction of visual semiosis affected by politics, gender, sexuality, ethnicity?

Holert leaves no proverbial stone unturned in his critique of the program's structure, pointing out the confusion of philosophical and psychological problems with political ones. Such ambitious aspirations within a single course of lectures can be realized, at best, in an amateurish way that "with the help of an eclectic mix of methods rather muddles the problems of visual culture instead of elucidating them."<sup>5</sup> For a later argument of mine, another thread is also important: in the syllabus, Visual Culture Studies is described as an "interdisciplinary study," and not – as in the primary account – a new discipline. Incidentally, Mitchell devoted a separate article to interdisciplinarity with "Interdisciplinarity and Visual Culture," published in the *Art Bulletin* in 1995. It is worth underscoring that the literature on the subject is filled with numerous attempts at characterizing the status of the study of visual culture. Nicolas Mirzoeff and Irit Rogoff view them rather as a perceptual-critical tactics independent from other disciplines, while on the other hand, the authors of one of the *Introductions to...* – John Walker and Sarah Chaplin, give such an extensive list of disciplinary and theoretical-methodological inspirations from which Visual Culture Studies draws that it is hard to imagine the possibility of their comprehensive (to some extent, at least) development and application.<sup>6</sup> Mitchell was attacked by numerous opponents and defended himself by reviewing the ten myths surrounding visual culture and the study of it that most of their detractors share. These myths about visual culture say that visual culture entails the liquidation of art ("as we have known it"); that it accepts without question the view that art is to be defined by its working exclusively through the optical faculties; that it transforms the history of art into a history of images; that it implies that the difference between a literary text and a painting is a non-problem as words and images dissolve into undifferentiated "representation"; that visual culture implies a predilection for the disembodied, dematerialized image; that we live in a predominantly visual era

5 Tom Holert, "Kulturwissenschaft/Visual Culture," in *Bildwissenschaft. Disziplinen, Themen, Methoden*, ed. Klaus Sachs-Hombach (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2005), 229.

6 In John A. Walker and Sarah Chaplin, *Visual Culture: An Introduction*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 3. Walker and Chaplin enumerate aesthetics, anthropology, archeology, architectural history/theory, art criticism, art history, black studies, critical theory, cultural studies, deconstruction, design history, feminism, film studies/theory, heritage studies, linguistics, literary criticism, Marxism, media studies, phenomenology, philosophy, photographic studies, political economy, post-colonial studies, post-structuralism, proxemics, psychoanalysis, psychology of perception, queer theory, reception theory, Russian formalism, semiotics, social history, sociology, structuralism.

as modernity entails the hegemony of vision and visual media; that there is a coherent class of things called “visual media;” that visual culture is fundamentally about the social construction of the visual field, and what we see, and the manner in which we come to see it, is not simply part of a natural ability; that it entails an anthropological, and therefore unhistorical, approach to vision; and finally, that it consists of “scopic regimes” and mystifying images to be overthrown by political critique.<sup>7</sup> Visual Studies or studies of the visual culture are, of course, not limited to Mitchell’s ideas, although he has always been mentioned in any kind of *Introduction to...* or anthologies which proliferated in the 1990s at a breath-taking pace – and the more of them appeared, the harder it was to find some reasonably sufficient set of beliefs that could be the foundation, at least heuristically, of a starting point for transdisciplinary research. Even such key notions as the notion of an image, visibility, visual act or visual culture are not semantically stable. In his analysis of basic textbooks, anthologies and collaborative works within the field of Visual Studies, Konrad Chmielecki, following in Mirzoeff’s footsteps, reconstructed their basic areas of interest: a) researching the visual phenomena created with the aid of visual means and technologies, b) researching the history of images based on the semiotic theory of representation, and c) constructing the social theory and history of visibility or the sociology of visual culture. This allowed him to point out that the idea of the image as a privileged element, or the medium of visual culture, did not receive a satisfactory explanation, one that is relatively stable, even in Mitchell’s and Aumont’s books devoted to this very concept (despite the widespread belief that the study of visual culture is in some way the outcome of the pictorial turn).<sup>8</sup>

The German research tradition displays much greater clarity in this respect. The transdisciplinary research of images was initiated there – not like in the United States – by philosophically-minded art historians and thinkers working in the field aesthetics, some of whom (starting with Warburg), have previously displayed an interest in various forms of non-artistic pictorial representation. There were, and there still are, various reasons behind this interest. Referring, as Mitchell did, to the idea of the linguistic turn (its possibilities as well as limitations) Gottfried Boehm, whom I mentioned earlier, searches for a distinctive “logic of images” different from the “logic of language,” but first he asks the question “What is an image?” calling attention

7 William John Thomas Mitchell “Showing Seeing. A Critique of Visual Culture,” in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London: Routledge, 2002), 86–101.

8 I refer to Konrad Chmielecki’s analysis from his book, which is being prepared for publishing, about the aesthetics of intermediality, based on his doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of Ryszard Kluszczyński.

to the exceptionally broad scope of connotations associated with the notion. In his introduction to a collaborative work, the title of which contains the preceding question, we read about the multiplicity of images “painted, conceived, dreamt up” from one perspective, about “paintings, metaphors, gestures” from another perspective, about “the mirror, echo, mimicry” from another still. Ultimately a problem evidently arises: “What do they all have in common, what can be inferred in each case? Which disciplines neighbour the phenomenon of the image? Are there any disciplines that do not?”<sup>9</sup> The way Boehm delineates the field of investigation for the *Bildwissenschaft* entails the transgression of disciplines that have traditionally displayed interest in images beyond their own framework and definitions, with the clear intention of bridging the gaps that separate them not only from psychology and psychoanalysis but from the natural sciences as well. In this case it is not simply about an interest in the role and form of images in the history of those latter disciplines (which Horst Bredekamp investigated – as a researcher who has long tried to open the history of art to non-artistic modes of pictorial representation), but about researching the forms, status and functions that images have in such disciplines as geography and law, as well as mathematics, logic, chemistry or medicine, all in close cooperation with their representatives – theorists and practitioners alike.

If archaeology and history of art relaunched their traditions precisely as historic *Bildwissenschaften*, if film theory places the visual aspect of film right next to narrativity, if philosophy celebrates the visual aspect of reflection, and literary theory analyses the bilateral relation between the written word and the image, if history expunged the odium associated with the illustrative aspect of visual documents, if the history of knowledge underscores its inherently visual aspect, and jurisprudence works on an iconology of law, if in the field of mathematics the Bourbaki group counters iconoclasm with the formula *seeing is believing*, if biology, beginning with Darwin, sees the criterion for natural selection in beauty, and if all areas of natural sciences rely upon computer visual analysis, then these are the signs that also within the field of research there occurs a substantial [...] shift that transpires in the whole culture.<sup>10</sup>

9 Gottfried Boehm, “Die Wiederkehr der Bilder,” in *Was ist ein Bild?*, ed. Gottfried Boehm, (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1994), 7.

10 Horst Bredekamp, “Drehmomente – Merkmale und Ansprüche des *iconic turn*,” in *Iconic Turn. Die neue Macht der Bilder*, 16–17. In Poland the issue of visualisation in contemporary science has been brought to the attention of researchers in the humanities probably only by Andrzej Gwóźdź. Although it was overlooked by Bredekamp, it is worth remembering about the influ-

This is what Bredekamp says in his article from a collaborative book under the telling title *The Iconic Turn: The New Power of Images*. Another recently published work titled *Bildwissenschaft. Disziplinen, Themen, Methoden*, which is an overview illustrating the extent of *Bildwissenschaft's* field of research, also spans from archaeology and prehistory all the way to the analysis of contemporary images. Tilman Lenssen-Enz, who represents the first two disciplines in that volume, points to the fact that, for example, Egyptology and classical archaeology of Greece and Rome have been examining images from the beginning and have developed the tools and frameworks suited for their interpretation. However, their history is primarily confronted with another, much less contextually developed, pictorial corpus – parietal art – also designated as “painting,” whose interpretations are and will remain far from unanimous (although, as we are all well aware, those interpretations fall somewhere between the magical and the aesthetic perspectives, the latter of which is especially agreeable to art historians and philosophers of art). Much has been achieved in this matter, as we well know, by Leroi-Gourham, who investigated not only parietal art, but also simple “mnemograms” and the so-called portable art; and a further impulse for archaeologists was provided by ethnological studies of indigenous groups in Australia, North America and Africa, which treated (as they do to this day) parietal art mostly as an identity-forming medium (for example as a way of marking previously possessed territory that was lost to the colonizers). This is how anthropology and ethnology have opened up a new interpretational dimension for research on European parietal art, and their continuous search for inspiration in (newer) aesthetics and the theory of artistic practices has led to, if not holistic, then at least “thick” (after Geertz) descriptions of cave paintings in terms of “figures,” “iconic scenes” and “compositions.” Lenssen-Enz convinces us that prehistory and archaeology have been, and still are, developed in close interrelations with other disciplines of knowledge about images (including modern ones), and thus, perforce, they exhibit transdisciplinary proclivities. Their search for sources of inspiration in the studies of contemporary culture is supported by the manifold analogies between the new-media images and the magical-religious images, made by researchers of the modern visual sphere, mostly with the purpose of discrediting it in mind (as in the case of the aforementioned account of Rosalind Krauss). A rare exception to this trend is found in the research, seemingly

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ence the pictorial turn has exerted over history. In the new series *Visuelle Geschichtskultur*, edited by Stefan Troebst, the first volume published was the highly interesting *Neue Staaten – neue Bilder? Visuelle Kultur im Dienst staatlicher Selbstdarstellung in Zentral- und Osteuropa seit 1918*, eds. Arnold Bartetzky, Marina Dmitrieva und Stefan Troebst (Köln: Böhlau Köln, 2005). This issue is investigated in detail by Magdalen Jabłkowska in her doctoral dissertation devoted to the imagery of selected cities in the context of memory theory.

unburdened by iconoclastic traits, of René Berger who, in his polemic against Lévi-Strauss's purely cognitivist account of the "mytho-logic," recalls Lévy-Bruhl's concept of "mystical participation" and compares it with the modes of influence exerted by the televised image.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, such analogies have already been made in the context of film. Joachim Paech points out that even Roland Barthes (a structuralist by all means) "turned his eyes towards the telly," and the "magic of cinema" was analysed by, for example, Edgar Morin.<sup>12</sup> It should be taken into account that if such analogies contain any useful insights, worthy of detailed analysis, then their areas of comparison should become better understood and articulated, at least to some extent, as an endeavour that requires a joint effort with the philosophy of culture, framed not as a mere "cornerstone" of the humanities, but rather as a theory of the civilizing process. I will attend to these matters shortly, but now I would like to take a closer look at the theories of the image that emerged from the German debates that took place at the height of the pictorial turn. I will start with the concept of Gottfried Boehm, who defines the image, akin to the linguistic metaphor, in terms of an "iconic difference." The contrast between the standard and non-standard use of language has its analogue within the iconic sphere in the visual contrast between the completely visible surface of the image and all that it contains; it is precisely this contrast that lies at the source of the fact that images not only "show" something, but that they frequently "tell" something as well, that they possess their own logic, irreducible to a merely discursive one. Although, as Boehm points out, it is hard to judge from the anthropological-historical point of view whether the propensity for depiction and the propensity for speech emerged at the same time in the history of our species, we are still able – by utilizing Hans Jonas's notion of *homo pictor* – to define the iconic difference as a property of man only, who has "[the] ability to reconfigure and embody into a limited and stable visual field [...] the volatile field of everyday perception with its blurry borderlines

11 In relation to this, Berger notices that „We differ much less from the primitive societies, than we might think. Although we have left traditional myths behind, the mythical dimension has survived within us. It is so vital that we do not even notice it. It seamlessly blends with reality, this is how myths work, when they cease being an object of study, and become a part of common practice.” „Restrukturyzacja mitu,” trans. Barbara Kita, in *Pejzaże audiowizualne. Telewizja, wideo, komputer*, ed. Andrzej Gwóźdź (Kraków: Universitas, 1997), 121. It is worth noting that the televisions „proteanism” described by Berger corresponds to some extent with the metamorphic quality of myth, described by Cassirer as a “law,” which together with the solidarity of life “rules” magical thinking.

12 Joachim Paech, „Telewizja jako forma symboliczna,” trans. Krystyna Krzemieniowa, in *Pejzaże audiowizualne*.

and free-flowing responsiveness to external stimuli.”<sup>13</sup> In this context, the problem of early forms of pictorial representation (in caves), which Meyer Schapiro for example considered incapable of achieving complete stabilization in the visual field, returns, alongside – on the other hand – the problem of contemporary new-media images, the perception of which is subjected to the rhythm of rapid, oftentimes fragmentary, everyday perception. Boehm attempts to mitigate this problem by stressing the gradual nature of the fundamental contrast constituting the image. He speaks of “powerful” images and the use of new techniques which amplify the image by means of building the iconic tension in a manner that is controlled and obvious to the viewer. “The powerful image draws its vitality from this twofold truth: show something, simulate something, and at the same time indicate the criteria and premises of that very experience.”<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, a “weak” image obscures all the differences implied by this fundamental contrast, remaining in accord with the description of contemporary culture in terms of total simulation and the “agony of the real,” to recall Baudrillard’s extreme diagnosis.

Boehm’s theory, modelled clearly upon the “powerful” image (autonomous, artistic), is inspired by both phenomenology and semiotics, placing them within the historically oriented philosophy of culture, whose reach overlaps with that of philosophical anthropology. It could be, as I see it, incorporated (with appropriate reservations and limitations) into Hans Belting’s project of the anthropology of the image. But before I take a closer look at this matter, let me briefly reiterate the theory laid out by Martin Seel in his *Thirteen Statements on the Picture*.<sup>15</sup> By pointing to the “material” image as the object of perception, which presents something on a defined (but not necessarily flat) surface, Seel concurs with Boehm not only in asserting the primacy of an artistic image, but also in their shared intention of overthrowing the opposition, exposed by Lambert Weising, between the semiotic and the phenomenological perspective. Only their integration – says Seel – gives justice to the image and, at the same time, allows one to distinguish it from phenomena of a similar kind. What kind of similar phenomena must be taken into account? Seel is adamant in pointing out that treating cyberspace as a pictorial phenomenon, although it certainly is a visual phenomenon, is a misunderstanding. Wherever space becomes a picture or a picture becomes space, we are no longer dealing with

13 Boehm, *Die Wiederkehr*, 31.

14 Gottfried Boehm, “Jenseits der Sprache? Anmerkungen zur Logik der Bilder,” in *Iconic Turn*, 34. Boehm, of course, addresses here these contemporary artistic practices, which uphold the iconic difference, diminishing in the mass-media.

15 Martin Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing*, trans. John Farrell, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 159–185.

pictoriality (as the iconic difference disappears), but with a visual phenomenon *sui generis*, accompanied by haptic and acoustic phenomena. Seel also disputes the view, introduced by Weising, on the historical evolution of images from the figurative panel painting, through video clips and computer-aided design, all the way to cyberspace. As Weising's proposals require a separate introduction and discussion, for the purposes of the current argument I will only reiterate the first introductory part of this author's latest work, where he lays out the main directions in contemporary philosophy of the image or rather – to be precise – the critical analysis of the anthropological viewpoint represented by Hans Jonas, Willém Flausser, early Sartre and – recently – by Belting. In its strong version, this analysis asserts that "...the pictorial imagery is not only a precondition of a defined human activity, namely the production of images, but this ability of producing images must be considered a precondition of the possibility of self-awareness and the specifically human way of being."<sup>16</sup> Ascribing the term "image" to both mental imagery and materialized images, and maybe even reducing the latter to the former, which is what Wiesing accuses Belting of, causes the anthropological perspective to become disconnected from the analysis of specific images actualized in material media. Another thing altogether is the fact – this also is a critique of Belting – that images are produced and utilized by people, in various ways and with various objectives in mind, which leads to an unjustifiable preference for distinctly anthropocentric images. Leaving the validity of this critique aside, I would like to underscore that the anthropological viewpoint of the philosophy of image should not be treated as a mere alternative to the semiotic and phenomenological perspectives, but rather as their "frame" that is inscribed into philosophy of culture, which shows a preference for perspectivism in its treatment of various forms of human expression and symbolization rather than for the one-sidedness exhibited by some proponents of the linguistic turn, who deny our forebears from pre-literate cultures the abilities of distancing themselves from their surroundings and the faculty of abstract thinking. The Palaeolithic hunter – Manfred Sommer points out – would then have to believe that he is killing the very same mammoth each and every time, and the gatherer would be convinced that the five slimes he just found are really the same single slime

16 Lambert Wiesing, *Artifizielle Praesenz. Studien zur Philosophie des Bildes* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2005), 22. In this book Weising refers to some of his previous concepts from the book: *Die Sichtbarkeit des Bildes. Geschichte und Perspektiven der formalin Ästhetik*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1997. There he introduced the logic of seeing, which encompasses both artistic (classical) and new-media images, referring to the formal aesthetics of Herbart, Zimmermann and Konrad Fiedler that inspired Viennese art history (Riegl and Wölfflin). He expanded the tradition of formal aesthetics by introducing selected elements from phenomenology and semiotics.

or – if he saw them as different from one another – he would not perceive the difference between them and, for example, the nuts he had just collected. “That the ability to utilize notions did not come alongside the rather tardily developed ability of speech – not to mention the even later literacy – but that it is inscribed into specific forms of bodily behaviour and that it can be inferred from them, is an idea that fell victim to the prohibitions on thinking, which we upheld for a long time in the name of the linguistic turn.”<sup>17</sup>

In a developed magical-mythical culture, “the force of the image of spirit manifests itself to us in all its richness, with its incalculable diversity and the fullness of its demonstrable expressions,” Ernst Cassirer writes, and adds that for the conscious mind these images possess at first a status analogous to any other object. “The image as such is not known or recognized as a free spiritual creation but is approached as an independent effectiveness; a daemonic compulsion radiates from it, which consciousness masters and then banishes.”<sup>18</sup> It sheds this property in the phase of entry into the religious domain, but only to the extent to which the prohibition of images is interpreted rigorously.

What differentiates the new monotheistic consciousness is that, for it, the animating spiritual force of images [*Bildes*] is, as it were, extinguished; all signification and meaningfulness withdraws into another purely spiritual sphere and, with this, leaves nothing from the being of images other than the empty material substrate. Before the force of heroic abstraction, which prophetic thought possesses and which also determines prophetic religious feeling, the images of myth “become pure nothingness.” And yet, they do not remain closed for long in this sphere of “nothingness” into which prophetic consciousness attempts to force them; rather, they always break out of it again, asserting themselves as an independent power.<sup>19</sup>

The emergence of autonomous artistic images, interpreted as second kind (besides the religious) of “disenchantment” of images (sanctioned through the motive of disinterest from Kantian aesthetics), changed the status of previous images both from our tradition as well as those from other cultures, which were incorporated by the institutional practice of museums

17 Manfred Sommer, *Zbieranie. Próba filozoficznego ujęcia*, tłum. Jarosław Merecki (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2003), 334.

18 Ernst Cassirer, *The Warburg Years (1919-1933). Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology*, trans. S.G. Lofts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 88-89.

19 *Ibid.*, 89.

and academic art history into the order of European artistic images. Nevertheless, it is worth remembering that, at least due to the limited scope of influence of the modern Institution of Art, the model of reception of images proposed within its boundaries has not expunged the preceding forms of their use. These problems have received an in-depth exploration in Joseph Kosuth's exhibition-installation titled *The Play of the Unmentionable* that was held in the New York Brooklyn Museum in 1990, and which corresponded with the process of deconstructing the idea of "the imaginary museum" being undertaken by art history, newly critical of its own tradition, in an attempt to distance itself from modernist myths. Hans Belting has substantially contributed to this "distancing" process.<sup>20</sup> But let us return to Cassirer's analysis. Describing the path that leads "from sensual impression to symbolic expression" (to acknowledge a passage from an essay by Habermas on the legacy of the author of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*), he conceives of mythical images – in the spirit of Usener, Warburg, and also Nietzsche from *The Birth of Tragedy* – as a form of expression of the primordial, ambivalent sensations; "extreme experiences of high importance, which draw the focus of the consciousness that differentiates them onto themselves, can augment into a mythical image, become semanticized and thus retained, inscribed into divine names, which by being invoked once and again allow to attain control over that experience."<sup>21</sup> It is not a coincidence that Cassirer was interested in physiognomy, which was so popular in nineteenth-century Europe. Nevertheless, he did not interpret it as a kind of "characterology," but rather in the context of the emergence of the early-magical bodily forms of expression – facial and gestural – whose perception (both from the perspective of "I" and "you") preceded the perception of things. "Symbols of expression are for Cassirer the building blocks of culture; their meaning comes down to the emotions which they express," says Krois, who points to the affinity between Cassirer's thought and not only that of Warburg, but also

20 I mention Belting's multidirectional subversion of the framework of contemporary art history in the final part of this article. Here I will only add that it is not by pure coincidence that David Freedberg commented (approbatively, of course) on Kosuth's exhibition-installation. The broad context of this exhibition (delineating the field of influence of the "second disenchantment" of images) is very instructively reconstructed by Agnieszka Rejniak-Majewska and Tomasz Majewski in the article "Gra przemieszczonego: „The Play of the Unmentionable” Josepha Kosutha," in *Muzeum sztuki. Od Luwru do Bilbao*, ed. Maria Popczyk (Katowice: Muzeum Śląskie w Katowicach, 2006), 172–18. It is worth mentioning that the scholars researching the status of images often refer to Kosuth's works in their discourse (one such scholar would be Martin Seel who does so in his book mentioned in footnote 15).

21 Jürgen Habermas, *Od wrażenia zmysłowego do symbolicznego wyrazu*, trans. Krystyna Krzemieniowa (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2004), 13.

that found in the post-metaphysical anthropology of Helmuth Plessner.<sup>22</sup> Cassirer's framing of the subject holds another insight valuable to contemporary anthropology of the image – the treatment of word and image as “branches of the same tree of symbolic formation,”<sup>23</sup> which frees us not only from the discussion about the primacy of symbolic forms, but also allows us to treat contemporary “turns” (linguistic and visual) as complementary framings of cultural expression. It is worth noting, with Manfred Sommer's aforementioned remarks in mind, that to the extent to which our forebears made use of protopicture-mnemoforms (Leroi-Gourhan's term) or ornaments, it is appropriate to talk about a certain practical distance toward the image which came to be fully realized only much later. For this reason also, a dual “limitation” seems to make sense: on the one hand keeping in check the views of Cassirer (who excessively emphasizes the expressive aspect of the earliest images, refusing their recipients *en bloc* the ability of any, even minimal, detachment), and on the other hand (utilizing Cassirer's thus

22 John Michael Krois, „Cassirer und die Politik der Physiognomik,” in *Der exzentrische Blick. Gespräch über Physiognomik*, ed. Claudia Schmölders (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1996), 223. Krois underscores that according to Cassirer what is important in physiognomy is not only the silent expression forming the Warburgian *Pathosformeln*, but also the vocal expression, from which language developed, and which to this day “defines the human condition” (p. 224). Upon both these forms of expression moral relationships are formed – of mutual acknowledgement and of mutual listening (and only subsequently – also argumentation).

23 In this meaning the latter „disenchanted” images lay somewhere between the spheres of *mythos* and *logos*. This placement was, as is well known, the subject of Warburg's interest, who according to Georges Didi-Huberman was “the greatest anthropologist amongst art historians.” In this context, the French historian of art (frequently mentioned by Belting) posits a thorough examination of the “the negative force within” the image, which “plays” with the world of logic. “There is a work of the negative in the image, a “dark” efficacy that, so to speak, eats away at the visible (the order of represented appearances) and murders the legible (the order of signifying configurations). From a certain point of view, moreover, this work or constraint can be envisaged as a regression, since it brings us, with ever-startling force, toward a this-side-of, toward something that the symbolic elaboration of artworks has covered over or remodelled. There is here a kind of *anadyomene* movement, a movement whereby something that has plunged into the water momentarily re-emerges, is born before quickly plunging in again: it is the *materia informis* when it shows through form, it is the presentation when it shows through representation, it is opacity when it shows through transparency, it is the visual when it shows through the visible.” It is a matter of – the author tells us – “knowing how to remain in the dilemma, between knowing and seeing,” and on the larger scale a matter of a critical reinterpretation of Panofsky's theory, and indirectly – also that of Cassirer. The author opens a possibility of such a reinterpretation by referring to the Freudian distinction between the symptom and the symbol. (Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images. Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, trans. John Goodman (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 142–143.)

“weakened” theory) limiting the “strong” (in the sense elucidated by Weising) anthropological concept of image and depiction.

In conclusion of this part of my examination, I will only add that the kind of collaboration between Cassirer and the scholars of religious studies, archaeologists, historians of different cultures, linguists and philologists from the Warburg Library circle (foremost with its very founder, who did not describe his own research on the forms of the pictorial presence of antiquity in European culture as history of art, but as the history of the image, and as such the field of his interest included postage stamps and newspaper photography) can not only be described as an early attempt at progressing from inter- to trans-disciplinary studies of culture, but also as an attempt at renegotiating the relation between philosophy and scientific knowledge on different terms from those used previously, which are no longer considered to be “royal.” Cassirer, Habermas says, “understood that philosophy can retain its influence only by sharing in the specialized knowledge of particular disciplines, and that through cooperation on equal terms, that influence can become substantial [...]. He distanced himself from transcendental philosophy, which attempts to provide ultimate answers, and from the conviction that it always predates any empirical knowledge. Cassirer distrusted the imperial key position that great philosophy asserted, which disregards knowledge of the world, and which digs deep on a very narrow field with unprecedented determination,”<sup>24</sup> but let us not forget that he did not limit his work to a mere reconstruction of scholarly endeavours or the procedures used in their course. Rather, he participated in the process that was recently described by Jerzy Kmita as a metamorphosis of the philosophical dilemmas into questions set before cultural studies, which can be reconciled with the aforementioned evaluation of Cassirer’s legacy made by Habermas.<sup>25</sup>

When Belting describes his own proposal as an anthropology of the image which integrates the theoretical and historical efforts of *Bildwissenschaft*, he rather intentionally does not choose between philosophical and cultural

24 Ibid. Roland Kany analyzed the relationship between Cassirer’s and Warburg’s theories and those of Usener in his book *Mnemosyne als Programm. Geschichte, Erinnerung und die Andacht zum Unbedeutenden im Werk von Usener. Warburg und Benjamin*, (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1987). The theme of memory stored within images and activated in memories became one of Belting’s foremost anthropological pursuits.

25 Jerzy Kmita, *Konieczne serio ironisty. O przekształcaniu się problemów filozoficznych w kulturoznawcze*, (Poznań: Wyd. Naukowe UAM, 2007). The aforementioned essay by Habermas can be used in the interpretation of Cassirer’s method as a transformation of philosophical problems for the discipline of cultural studies. Habermas, in an attempt to reveal certain shortcomings in Cassirer’s philosophical argumentation, proposed to read his works as a theory of the civilizing process. I addressed this issue in another article.

anthropology (in an introduction to the book *Bild-Anthropologie. Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft*, “anthropology” is used in the plural). According to Cassirer’s viewpoint, as I would like to see it, this distinction loses its *raison d’être*. That this viewpoint can be associated with Belting’s project is, in my opinion, beyond doubt despite the fact that references to Cassirer within the book are only sporadic and always polemical. An analysis of the merit of this dispute would require a dedicated argumentation, the direction of which I have outlined above, “weakening” Cassirer’s theory. Nevertheless, what puts the question to rest is Belting’s manner of characterizing the image as the “result of a personal or collective symbolization” which is always bodily mediated, although it does not always find a material representation. Anthropology is concerned with humanity which not only produces images, and lives by them, but also – he adds – lives within them. This final realization *de facto* limits (we must agree with Reiz and Weising on this matter) the symbolic dimension of images: “life in pictures” inevitably leads us to the questions of death and (potential) immortality, which are of interest to both philosophical and cultural anthropology. In the book *An Anthropology of Images*, Belting not only masterfully navigates the vast realms of ancient cultures, but also attempts to demonstrate that for each of them the experience of death is the fundamental source of images.

The dead exchange their bodies for an image that remains present. In order to give that image a presence, to make possible the re-presentation of the lost body, a medium becomes essential. We may speak of it as a medium between death and life. For such archetypal images, *p r e s e n c e* was far more important than *l i k e n e s s* to the person represented.<sup>26</sup>

Régis Debray’s account of his “journey to the heart of the image” was kindred in spirit. “The origins of the image are strongly linked to death. However, the archaic image appears on the tombs as a sign of protest, to refute the nothingness and to prolong life. Visual art is a domesticated terror,”<sup>27</sup> the French

26 Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, trans. Thomas Dunlap, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 19.

27 Régis Debray, “Narodziny przez śmierć,” trans. Maryna Ochab, in *Wymiary śmierci*, ed. Stanisław Rosiek (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2002), 243. Advancing his main idea, Debray goes on to write among other things: “The image sculpted at first, then painted, has at first played a part of a medium between the living and the dead, between humans and gods; it connected the community with the cosmos, the society of visible entities with the order of invisible powers, which rule over them. This image was not a goal in itself, but a means of foreseeing divine will, as well as a means of defense, spellcasting, healing and performing initiation rites. It conjoined the «city» with the natural order, the individual with the cosmic hierarchy,

intellectual tells us, in concord with the voices of Warburg and Cassirer. He introduces one more theme that links early images with death, the theme of transposing the pictures from cave walls onto bones, horns and animal hides – “materials that the human being obtains through killing.” Vladimir Toporov also refers to the prehistory of portraiture in his studies on the mythopoetic space and underscores, using just like Debray did as a point of reference the culture of ancient Egypt and the Etruscan-Roman tradition, that “the idea of ‘a portrait’ arises and/or actualizes in the face of death as a reifying force of forgetting (and herein lies the source of pre-portraits’ lasting association with the cult of the dead, burial rites and offerings – human sacrifice, initially).”<sup>28</sup>

Will the thesis about the historical primacy of the function of images as substitutions or representations of the absent dead stand up to the critique of prehistorians and archaeologists? Does it not seem necessary, in light of the current knowledge about the earliest images, to refrain from treating this thesis as the archetypal framework for all later experiences of the image? Is this experience not a part of the “manufactured presence” of proto-image and image entities, which not only do not represent but also do not substitute anyone or anything? In other words, is it not necessary to agree with Weising when he accuses Belting of a kind of anthropocentric reductionism in his treatment of the problematic of images? The questions that arise at this point do not compromise any of the other conclusions reached by Belting, who attempts (in accord with contemporary tendencies of philosophical, as well as cultural, anthropology) to restore the multifaceted bodily dimension to both the production and the perception of images. The significance that the bodily entanglement of images has for the German scholar is manifested

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the «spirit of the universe», «cosmic harmony». In short it truly was a means of prolonging life [...]. An image, an imagined thing – an instrument wielded by people without instruments – has for the longest time been an indispensable commodity” (ibid., 254).

- 28 Władimir Toporow, „Tezy do prehistorii „portretu” jako szczególnej klasy tekstów,” trans. Bogusław Żyłko, *Teksty Drugie* ½ (2004):178. From the point of view of prehistory of the portrait (the titular quotation mark indicates that Toporov’s research focus mostly on the mythical and literary portraits) the Russian scholar brings to light two particular traditions of imagery: Egyptian and Etruscan-Roman. The first, as is well known, developed the practice of mummification (according to Debray it was the first instance of treating bodies as artworks), alongside sculptural representations in burial ceremonies, paper and gypsum masks, the second has introduced the fundamental separation of the head (as the most important center of vital force) from the rest of the body. In Louis Marin’s terminology we can speak of the representation as the “regaining of presence,” see Paweł Mościcki, “Louis Marin: porządek przedstawienia i siła obrazu,” *Sztuka i Filozofia* 26 (2005).

in the formula that the human being, the body – to be precise – is (in more than one sense) a “space” of images.

A prerequisite for discussing the space of images is the assumption that our body is a space within the world, a space of production and cognition (as well as recognition) of preceding images, of whose origins and future fate we know nothing, images which we forget and recall, and which hold a personal meaning for us as they are inseparable from our life experiences. That is why they are as fleeting as we ourselves are, and in this respect are unlike the images established in the external world. Those internal images also retain and transfer elements of communal traditions. “The saying that an entire library burns down every time an old man in Africa dies – and one could just as well say an entire archive of images – makes clear that the body plays a crucial role as the locus of collective traditions, guarding them against the loss of vitality that can infect them, for various reasons, in the world outside the body” – says Belting.<sup>29</sup> He goes on to add that the transmission and reception of images are like two sides of the same coin. Transfer, as an intentional process concerned with the reorientation and stabilization of cultural patterns (this was the main focus of Panofsky’s research on the Renaissance), is accompanied by their adoption outside or (sometimes) against the main stream of the cultural current (a process of greatest interest – in Renaissance studies – to Warburg and, lately, Didi-Huberman). Both tendencies – contrary to Belting’s intentions – can be “rooted” in Cassirer’s theories, if only one takes into account his interest in physiognomy, and the part it plays not only at the stage of early formation of culture, but also in times when forms of symbolization become fully developed. A peculiar case of the bodily positioning of the image is represented by the painted body or a mask – interpreted here as a symbol of transformation of one’s body into an image. Framing the medium of pictorial representation as bodies or “hosts” for the images, opens up whole new fields of scholarly investigation for those interested in historical as well as contemporary images. Moreover, the problematics of individual and collective images of memory, primarily related to places which we “carry within ourselves” and recollect or sometimes simply endow with material form, harmonizes with broader tendencies of modernity “without borders” (similar to the postulate on the transcultural character of *Bildwissenschaft*), which, following Appadurai’s hypothesis, not only transforms those places that we remember, but also delocalizes and, at the same time, “shifts” the order of the cultural competences associated with them. What is more, it opens the possibility of rethinking the role that psychoanalysis plays within

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29 Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, 38.

the *Bildwissenschaft*, as previously seen in the case of research on the (im)possibility of visual representation of the Holocaust.

A broad (too broad according to Wiesing) notion of the image allows Belting to relatively easily solve the problem of new-media images, which he frames in terms of an adequately expanded notion of technology and new forms of perception that have for a long time been developed in the laboratories of avant-garde art. When it comes to the question of virtual reality that disconcerts other German scholars, Belting refutes it by pointing out that the specificity of modern times dictates the expansion of the sphere of images in relation to the sphere of everyday life, but also the encroachment of images into the Foucauldian “other spaces” – heterotopias which promise us liberation from references to reality. Nevertheless, they do not give access to some reality beyond images, they only expand the existing universe of images. It is possible to speak of images in a world of virtual reality, but not without recognizing that this world exists precisely (and only) in those images. Actually, participation in fictitious, imaginal worlds, manufactured with the means of new techniques and instruments, stimulates the imaginative faculties of the audience, thereby expanding the existing layers of “immanent image creation.” The conclusion of Belting’s considerations upon the imaginal worlds manufactured by new-media and the (old) longing for an embodiment in an image, which they exhibit, comes down to the realisation that even in the contemporary virtual world, the relationship between the image and the body is still present, and this allows us to uphold the outlines of the idea of a human being as a “space of images.” Belting also discusses the topic of intermediality, so important to research focused on contemporary culture, but for him it is of interest mostly from the point of view of visual media (he analyses, for example, the presence of the painted image within the film image, treating film as a separate, though strictly visual medium). He shares with other aforementioned German scholars the predilection for analysing the image in isolation from other aspects of sensory experience. Could this predilection be a remnant of traditional art history, which was mostly interested in images favoured by the bourgeois protagonist of Aragon’s *Les Voyageurs de l’Impériale* – “serene, controlled, on which nothing changes anymore,” in contrast to the volatile and noisy objects of perception in everyday big-city life? Such allegations cannot be made against American scholars, who concentrate mostly on modern images, whose impact is principally exerted through a multimedia context. In an anthology edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff – another towering figure (aside from Mitchell) of Visual Studies – we find an article by Irit Rogoff, in which we read that – as a matter of fact – these studies focus on the visual world, but it should not be forgotten that “opening up the field of vision as an arena in which cultural meanings get constituted, also simultaneously anchors to it

an entire range of analyses and interpretations of the audio, the spatial, and of the psychic dynamics of spectatorship. Thus visual culture opens up an entire world of intertextuality in which images, sounds and spatial delineations are read on to and through one another..."<sup>30</sup> The perspective developed by Belting on the one hand undoubtedly limits, but on the other expands the aspirations of modern history of art. Belting developed his theory gradually. In 1983, he posed a provocative question about the end of art history. He repeated this question a decade later in his book *Das Ende der Kunstgeschichte: eine Revision nach zehn Jahren*. Those ten years proved vital, not only due to the explosion of an aura that was postmodernist in character, putting into question almost every achievement of the first phase of modernity. New artistic practices, especially inter-media, which Belting attentively followed, as well as new exhibition trends, visibly expanded the framework of art history. The scholarly work on the topic of cult imagery published in 1990, *Bild und Kult: eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, expanded the field of research by introducing the context of how images are used. Modern art history, focused on researching autonomous artistic images, underestimated – as I have previously mentioned – this context in relation to images of the past. It showed a similar attitude towards images from other cultural backgrounds. While subjecting its "estheticism" and Eurocentrism to serious critique, Belting found a valuable ally in the person of David Freedberg. In the foreword to the French edition of *The Power of Images* (a book at first considered revolutionary for American art history, but welcomed by scholars from the field of Visual Studies as well) Freedberg – exhibiting solidarity with Belting – writes:

The main difference in the approach to very similar questions comes down to the fact that while Belting's book has a strictly defined chronological and historical range, my approach, although I refer to particular histories, is more comparative and anthropological in its nature. I do not share Belting's strong conviction about the loss of continuity between what he calls the era before art and the era of art, which came after the reformation. In short, where Belting is prone to see difference and the loss of continuity in the approach towards images between the two eras distinguished by him, I myself – taking the difference into account, of course – seek to find continuity and similarity.<sup>31</sup>

30 Irit Rogoff, "Studying Visual Culture," in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London, New York: Routledge, 1998), 14.

31 David Freedberg, *Potęga wizerunków. Studia z historii i teorii oddziaływania*, trans. Ewa Klekot (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2005), XXXI.

Later Belting not only upheld the statement that the scope of art history's theoretical achievement is limited to autonomous European artistic images, but at the same time – influenced by Freedberg? – opened the already constricted discipline not only to the return of the Warburgian tradition, but also to the anthropological problems of modernity, which were foreign to this tradition, and which *Bildwissenschaft* faces in many research practices. Its postulated transdisciplinary character – I will stress this once more – defines the complex objective of developing adequate educational strategies while facing the transformation of culture that is defined by a single designation label – the visual turn.

My aim has been to give a preliminary account of the outlines of a vast research area that is connected with the iconic turn and to define the focal points of problems contained therein, which require venturing beyond monodisciplinary competences. The title of this sketch contains a question, nonetheless. The course of my argument might suggest that I advocate choosing *Bildwissenschaft*, anchored in the anthropology of the image, over Visual/Culture Studies. Such a statement would be incorrect, along with the impression that my interest is limited to only those two research areas with disregard for the French, Russian or Polish contributions. With the formative process of the local version of transdisciplinary knowledge about the image in mind (and the symptoms of such a process are ever more visible, not to mention the initiatives undertaken by media theorists as well as anthropologists and sociologists of culture),<sup>32</sup> I have argued for the use of the German model in the preliminary stages, as one that is better “developed” philosophically and historically, and only later “inscribing” into it the proposals discussed by the

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32 The works of Mieczysław Wallis, Mieczysław Porębski, Jan Białostocki must undoubtedly be placed among the classics of Polish knowledge about the image. This subject was later expanded and developed by the scholars of new-media images. Andrzej Gwóźdź, without question, has done more than anyone for the understanding of their status and different configurations (both in his books and the well-planned – predominantly post-conference – collaborative works and anthologies of translations without which we could hardly imagine contemporary academic teaching of the cultural studies. The so-called anthropology and visual sociology (developed by Krzysztof Olechnicki or – lately – Piotr Sztompka) encompasses only a fraction of the problems opened up by the iconic turn – they analyze the role of images in the argumentation proper for their respective fields of knowledge. The latest volumes of “Konteksty” are visible proof of the opening of the field of anthropological interest in the world of images. Summing up I would only want to add that I have undertaken the first, preliminary, “attempt” at confronting the problematic of the iconic turn in a text published in the periodical *Dyskurs* 1 (2006). Although this text develops, improves and corrects the ideas contained therein it still bears, which is hard to ignore in face of the rapidly growing literature of the subject, a mark of a “sketch” or a “survey.” In its shorter form it was previously delivered during the proceedings of the conference organized by Jacek Sójka *Metody, paradygmaty, dyskursy. O swoistości badań kulturoznawczych*. (Poznań, 25-26 Apr. 2006).

representatives of Visual/Culture Studies (who have attained significant success in investigating the problematic of new-media imagery and their contexts). This proposed order comes from the conviction that although transdisciplinary endeavors neither assert nor lead to – as Mittelstraß underlined – a “top-down” unification of the theoretical-methodological perspective, the condition of their effectiveness is the stabilization, even if brief, of the basic semantics of notions and theoretical categories utilized and simultaneously developed for the numerous fields of research, diverse in their subject matter, and focused both on history and modernity. This kind of stabilization, to a much greater extent, I think, can be reached by analyzing the discussions and conclusions of the scholars involved in the creation of the *Bildwissenschaft* (who use – predominantly in an explanatory mode – the ideas from other research areas). In turn the reference to the “framework,” that in the case of the iconic turn is provided by the critical reconstruction of traditions of Cassirer and the Warburg Library circle (only briefly mentioned here in the main text, as well as in some of the footnotes), embeds its problematic very well within the broader context of cultural studies.

*Translation: Rafał Pawluk*

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 Luiza Nader
 

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## An Affective Art History

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The aim of this text is to present the project of affective history of modern art in Poland from the point of view of affirmative ethics and humanities. The field of my initial research is marked out by works that originated after the outbreak of the Second World War. In the first section of the article, which refers to the history of art's unique position in Poland, I ask the following research questions: what is affect? How can the concept of affect be adapted to studying works of art? Where can affect be placed? Which dimensions of knowledge concerning artistic work could be opened by an affective analysis and interpretation? What does affect bring to art history? In the next section of the article, owing to the limited format of the article I shall offer a few perspectives on post-war art in Poland from the point of view of a selected, specific affect – empathy, through which I would like to examine the history of art in Poland and restore its two critical events/experiences: the year 1968 and the Holocaust.<sup>1</sup> I shall also explore the critical potential of the affective analysis of art.

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1 This text is part of the book which I am working on, *Afekt Strzemińskiego. Moim przyjaciołom Żydom* ["Strzemiński's Affect. To My Friends the Jews"]. My sincere thanks to Professor Ewa Domańska, Dorota Jarecka, Professor Ryszard Nycz and Professor Piotr Piotrowski for their extremely valuable, critical remarks.

### Ethics and Affirmative Humanities

In her article *Affirmation, Pain and Empowerment*, Rosi Braidotti notes that in contemporary political and cultural discourse, negative critical categories dominate, meaning that our horizon of the potential future tends to be described by wars, violence and death.<sup>2</sup> This “traumatic realism” (Hal Foster) – concentration on wounds, suffering and pain – has become our schizoid cultural politics. As Braidotti writes, after September 11, 2001 in the United States (and I suspect that her observations could also be transferred to political, social and cultural life in Poland), there are a number of phenomena to which mourning is the response. Unquestionably, collective mourning and melancholy also have a major political and social significance, such as creating social solidarity, loyalty to people who are suffering, and maintaining social memory about critical events and experiences. As Braidotti continues, however, we must take note that universal melancholy and mourning have become such dominant narratives that they function as self-fulfilling prophecies, leaving little room for an alternative approach and different ways of looking at the social and cultural space – as well as, I would add, the historical one. The author proposes creating a new framework for developing ethical relations – an affirmative ethics – as one of the productive paths to establishing new forms of resistance. She writes that the ethical relationship does not belong to the moral essence of the subject, but is understood, after Michel Foucault, rather as a practice or technology of the “I.” The concepts that define affirmative ethics are: relations, resilience, change, process, radical immanence, and the concept of ethical stability. Braidotti understands the ethical good as the consolidation of the various forms of becoming a subject, and ethics as active and productive satisfaction of the desire to form supportive relations with others. A subject is perceived here as a process, developed by relations with others and affects, but it is also understood in a post-anthropocentric manner – as that which is human, non-human and post-human.

The starting point for affirmative ethics is pain and suffering. Pain, writes Braidotti, apart from other negative sensations, exposes the heart of subjectivity – affect and affectiveness, i.e. the disposition of influencing others and being open to influence. But the conceptualisation of pain which she is aiming for is one that will permit negativity to be neutralised. This is not so that we can pretend that the pain does not exist, but to transgress the resignation, torpor and passivity that result from profound hurt or loss. According to affirmative ethics, negative affects can transform as they contain a potential that allows them to be surpassed in favour of positivity. Subjects are not treated as

2 Rosi Braidotti, “Affirmation, Pain and Empowerment,” *Asian Journal of Women Studies* 3 (2008), 7–36.

individuals, but as participants in a certain dense network of exchange and relations. Braidotti therefore proposes going beyond the experience of pain, not by denying it, but by forming bonds, the effort of compassion, testifying, empathy, accepting responsibility, and collective formation of the horizons of hope.

The Polish researcher Ewa Domańska invoked Braidotti's concept in proposing the idea of affirmative humanities. The characteristics of this were to be

the peculiar post-secular and post-humanistic context of the project; going beyond postmodernist negativity and concentration of research on catastrophe, emptiness, apocalypse, trauma, mourning, melancholy, and passive victims; a turn from the egocentric human individual towards the community understood as a collective of human and non-human personas; positive reinforcement of the (individual and collective) subject; viewing the subject as an agent (application of the idea of non-anthropocentric, dispersed agency and non-intentional agency), vitalisation of the subject (the potential of mental and physical self-generation, the idea of neo-vitalism); a post-anthropocentric understanding of life as the dynamic force of becoming; use of relational epistemology (interest in the relationship between the human, non-human and post-human) and an emphasis on co-dependence and mutual conditioning.<sup>3</sup>

Domańska stresses, however, that

the proposal of an affirmative humanities is not about creating an infantile, naive and idyllic vision of humanities, which divorces itself from discussions concerning such things as vital socio-political issues, but about going beyond negativity and proposing a different set of research categories.<sup>4</sup>

Inspired by the proposals of both affirmative ethics and affirmative humanities, I would like to propose the concept of an affective history of art. Referring to the above remarks of Braidotti and Domańska, I shall treat as specific case studies the writing of modern art history as well as a certain general theoretical framework of artistic historiography in Poland after 1945.

3 Ewa Domańska, "Humanistyka afirmatywna: władza i płec po Butler i Foucault," in *Płec i władza w kontekstach historycznych i współczesnych*, ed. Filip Kubiacyk and Monika Owsianna (Poznań–Gniezno: Gnieźnieńskie Akta Humanistyczne, 2013).

4 Ibid.

## I. Negative Modernity

In Poland, the concept of modernity – and more broadly of post-war art – is based on decidedly negative categories.<sup>5</sup> It is explored in a dialectical relationship with the destructive experience of socialist realism, which in Polish art history is viewed as the fundamental disgrace, fall, break, non-art, or also, despite everything, the traumatic core of art after 1945. Scholars interpret modernity as being affected by the “October syndrome,”<sup>6</sup> becoming a kind of “mental compensation” for socialist realism, the quintessence of involvement in the mechanisms of power; this concept is based on the figure of a sudden break, invalidation, or amnesia jettisoning the experience of socialist realism; the dividing lines between socialist realism and modernity are blurred. The long departure from socialist realism is made mention of, or its dangerous proximity as well, and the negative similarity between it and modernity. In summary, in its rejection of figuration, realism and the conception of engaged art, modernity is regarded both as the negative legacy of socialist realism and the negative tradition of the present day. All these characteristics mean that works from after 1945 tend to be viewed

5 My main references in thinking about the negative image of modernity are the following publications: Wojciech Włodarczyk, “Nowoczesność i jej granice,” in *Sztuka polska po 1945 r. Materiały sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki, Warszawa listopad 1984* (Warszawa: PWN, 1987), 19–30, and *Socrealizm. Sztuka polska w latach 1950–1954* (Paryż: Libella, 1986); Waldemar Baraniewski, “Wobec socrealizmu,” in *Sztuka polska po 1945 r. Materiały sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki, Warszawa November 1984* (Warszawa: PWN, 1987), 173–188 and “Sztuka i mała stabilizacja,” in *Idee sztuki lat 60. Oraz inne sesje, seminaria i wystawy, Centrum Rzeźby Polskiej, Seminara orońskie*, vol. 2, ed. Jan Stanisław Wojciechowski (Orońsko: CRP, 1994), 33–42; Elżbieta Grabska “Puisque réalisme il y a, czyli o tym, co w sztuce powojennego dziesięciolecia nie mogło się dokonać,” in *Sztuka polska po 1945 r. Materiały sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki, Warszawa listopad 1984* (Warszawa: PWN, 1987), 375–384; Piotr Juszkiewicz, *Od rozkoszy historiozofii do „gry w nic.” Polska krytyka artystyczna czasu Odwilży* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2005); Anna Markowska, *Dwa Przełomy. Sztuka polska po 1955 i 1989 roku* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2012). Books that to some extent detach the specific nature of modernity in Poland from socialist realism, seeing a traumatic experience not only in socialist realism, but especially in the Second World War, are: Piotr Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu* (Poznań: Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, 1999, and Andrzej Turowski, *Budowniczość Świata. Z dziejów radykalnego modernizmu w sztuce polskiej* (Kraków: Universitas, 2000). Those that continue to be an exception in attempting a different perspective of critical experiences in art in Poland include Ewa Toniak, *Olbrzymki. Kobiety i socrealizm* (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2008) and Izabela Kowalczyk, *Podróż do przeszłości: interpretacje najnowszej historii w polskiej sztuce krytycznej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo SWPS Academica, 2010). Alongside the Second World War, Marcin Lachowski names as a traumatic experience, as well as a formative one for contemporary art, the Holocaust; see Marcin Lachowski, *Nowocześni po katastrofie. Sztuka w Polsce w latach 1945–1960* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2013).

6 “October syndrome” is connected to political events of October 1956 in Poland and the set of cultural processes related to “Thaw.”

as politically neutral, detached from reality, mute (and thus also to an extent deficient), and in this sense autonomous, hermetic, but at the same time conventional, squandering everything that might be seen as interesting in Polish 20th-century art. Modernity in this view becomes the space for a hegemonic game, and in fact itself becomes hegemonic. Considerations of this kind are accompanied by a certain lament over what might have happened in the history of Polish art and yet did not – a lack, if you will. What is not perceived here is the potentiality created by the decisive moments in history whose effects can be played out in spaces that are somewhat different from those expected. Therefore, the task of searching for another modernity/modernism whose experience is contemporary to us (and thus could be of use at the moment, not closed in the blocked space of non-experience, traumatic memory, fear, emptiness or dread) must not involve an inclusive operation – co-opting works that would create a critical idiom towards this negative vision of modernity – or even with regaining the excluded space. Rather, the task ought to involve a change in the perspective with which we look at post-war art in Poland, and assuming a different model of knowledge. Of course, I do not mean rejecting, but creatively using the categories and the works of scholars whose dedication to the Polish art history are indisputable.<sup>7</sup> I would also like to stress that the research of the authors I have mentioned are for me an extremely valuable source of knowledge and inspiration, and that I have the utmost respect for them.

My objective is to find the dimension of potentiality and positive categories within the critical events whose meanings and effects are never determined. I am also interested in finding other events previously not appreciated by the history of art in Poland (as they have not fitted in its paradigmatic framework), which could serve to stratify, transform and enrich the periodisation of art in Poland, as well as the concept of modernity, modernism and the avant-garde. To this end, rather than the template of trauma, I shall call upon a number of theories of affect and phenomena associated with affective experiences, of which I shall examine empathy in depth. I am putting forward the hypothesis that it is possible to construct a history of art in a more affirmative way, where it is affect, as a category, which organises the narrative. I should point out, however, that this endeavour does not mean the erasure

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7 I regard as one such attempt to escape the stalemate of negativity Piotr Piotrowski's *Awan-garda w cieniu Jałty* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Rebis, 2005), which analyses art in Poland from the point of view of a dynamic comparative analysis with artistic practices in diverse cultural spaces of Central Europe (searching for the strong subjectivity of this region), and as another *Agorafilia* (2009), including the remarkably effective concept of "love for the public space," used to ascribe and distinguish the meanings of autonomy and involvement before and after 1989.

of negative categories, but rather the exploration and transgression of the models of knowledge and theory based on negativity.

### Outline of the Issues in the Theory of Affect

In psychology today, affect is seen as a “momentary, positive or negative reaction of an organism (vegetative, muscular, experiential) to a change in the environment or in the subject itself.”<sup>8</sup> By affect we understand all short-term emotional states of low intensity, be they pleasant or unpleasant, which do not exceed the threshold of consciousness and are not processed by the subject’s cognitive powers, thus remaining a kind of proto-emotion. An affect is thus an unreflective, automatic, unconscious act, where the differentiation of the subject’s states concern basic judgements: like/dislike, aspire/avoid. It also spreads to the assessment of objects independent of it, affecting the subject’s judgements, as well as his/her relations with other subjects, orientation in the environment, cognitive process and memory.<sup>9</sup>

Many scholars, however, disagree with the separation of affect from emotion. Significant in this context is the discovery in the field of neurobiology made by Joseph LeDoux of the “low road,” a shortcut from the brain to the amygdala which permits an organism to react immediately to a threat. This path is responsible for the affective reaction (e.g. fear) that precedes a conscious perception, thus also proving that emotions too – like affects – can occur unconsciously.<sup>10</sup> Neurobiologists including LeDoux as well as Antonio Damasio argue that emotions are a precognitive system of bodily reactions to stimuli, which, although they occur unconsciously, are responsible for judgement processes, creating a kind of biological layer, or a core of consciousness.<sup>11</sup>

Paul Ekman, Richard J. Davidson, Jaak Panksepp and Nico H. Frijda do not differentiate between affects and emotions, and write about affective states, or even simply about the diversity of affect. Ekman argues that there are fundamental emotions, aroused automatically outside of the consciousness, having developed as a result of evolution owing to their adaptive values,

8 Alina Kolańczyk, “Procesy afektywne i orientacja w otoczeniu,” in *Serce w rozumie. Afektywne podstawy orientacji w otoczeniu* (Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, 2004), 16.

9 Ibid., 15–36.

10 Maria Jarmowicz, “Czy emocje mogą zmieścić się w polu świadomości?,” in *Nieświadomiony afekt*, ed. Rafał Krzysztof Ohme (Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, 2007), 19–21.

11 Constantina Papoulias, Felicity Callard, “Biology’s Gift: Interrogating the Turn to Affect,” *Body and Society* vol. 16, 29 (2010): 39–41.

and the emotions he refers to are the family of affective states.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, Rafał Krzysztof Ohme, working on unconscious affects, claims that at the basic level humans can distinguish more affects than only positive or negative ones: e.g. fear, anger, revulsion, joy.<sup>13</sup> Further elements in the controversy are the relationship between cognitive powers and affect, the question of the intentionality and autonomy of affect/affective states, the relationship between affect and socio-cultural constructions, as well as assigning to specific affects universal physiological reactions, e.g. a mimic or vocal signal.<sup>14</sup>

Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth note that the concept of affect entered the humanities lexicon for good in the mid-1990s thanks to the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Brian Massumi. The main foundations of their approach to affect were the research of Silvan Tomkins (in the former case) and the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and the ethics of Baruch Spinoza (in the latter case).<sup>15</sup> As in the biological, neurobiological and psychological sciences, the concept of affect is still lacking a satisfactory definition in the humanities, its meanings continuing to compete with each other and be shaped, criticised and contested. In the growing mountain of literature on the subject, it depends on the definition of affect (adopted from biology, neurobiology or psychology) whether cultural scholars treat affect as an affective state or emotion within the body that engages the cognitive powers and refers to a cultural system, or as pure social and cultural constructs, or as an unconscious intensity rooted in the body and physiology – a kind of genesis of the subject. The common point is the attempt to understand the subject beyond divisions into body and mind, nature and culture, and to ask questions about embodied experience and agency that cannot be reduced to social structures.<sup>16</sup>

In *What is Philosophy?*, Gilles Deleuze understood affect as a process of saturation, going beyond oneself, beyond sensual experiences and impressions, the excess of subjectivity, and at the same time the experience of indistinguishability, in which the division between the person, thing and animal, human and non-human, breaks. In *Proust and Signs*, meanwhile, he considers affect as semiological: as artistic or material signs, impressions forcing us to think

12 See *Natura emocji. Podstawowe zagadnienia*, ed. Paul Ekman and Richard J. Davidson (Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, 1999), 13-49.

13 Kolańczyk, *Procesy afektywne*, 20.

14 On the fundamental criticism of affect as used by the humanities see Ruth Leys's famous article "The Turn to Affect: a Critique," *Critical Inquiry* 37 (2011): 434-472.

15 Melissa Gregg, Gregory J. Seigworth "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham-London: Duke University Press, 2010), 5.

16 Cf. e.g. Lisa Blackman, Couze Venn, "Affect," *Body and Society* 16 (2010): 7-28.

and at the same time to search for the truth bundled up in signs. The sign encountered – more sensually felt than recognised by the reasoning powers – deals violence to conventional thought and leads to critical reflection. In this way, Deleuze sought to disarm the traditional divides between feeling, thinking and acting; affect, body and reason; art and philosophy.<sup>17</sup> Brian Massumi followed this path in his famous article *The Autonomy of Affect*, in which he interprets affect as intensity, the emotional state of suspension, but far removed from passivity, as it is filled with the potency of events, movement and vibration. Characteristic of affect is the fact that it is fixed inside the body, yet at the same time has the ability to transgress bodies and things. The body viewed in this way becomes both virtual and current: it is a potentiality in which the past joins with the present, as well as a place of vitality, sensual, synaesthetic sensations, interactions with the world opening the body to the unpredictable.<sup>18</sup>

Affect as a political and identity-based problem, rather than just a theoretical one, is particularly evident in the works of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who takes issue with cultural constructivism and the legacy of poststructuralism – the fear of the biological determinants of the body and essentialism.<sup>19</sup> Together with Adam Frank, Sedgwick published a collection of psychological works by the pioneer of psychological research on affect – Silvan Tomkins.<sup>20</sup> According to Tomkins, affect is an innate motivational system that is autonomous, independent of urges, but also connected with the intellect, endowing the human subject with freedom. Tomkins identifies seven pairs of fundamental affects (of low and high frequency), to which a specific mimic expression corresponds – interest-excitement, enjoyment-joy, surprise-startle, distress-anguish, anger-rage, fear-terror, and shame-humiliation – attributing the most important function in the formation of the subject to shame. Sedgwick uses his ideas in her texts, concentrating on the bodily aspect of affects, and the subjective difference and at the same time relationality that they introduce. Writing about shame, she extracts its performative and connecting nature, at the same time pointing to its power of subjective change

17 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) and Ernst van Alphen "Affective Operations of Art and Literature," *Res* 53/54 (2008, Spring/Autumn): 20–31.

18 Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," in *Parables for the Virtual. Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham–London: Duke University Press, 2002), 23–45.

19 Leys, *The Turn*, 440.

20 *Shame and Its Sisters. A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank (Durham–London: Duke University Press, 1995).

(monitoring subjectivity) and the cardinal role it plays in shaping both identity and queer politics.<sup>21</sup>

Cultural studies, anthropology, history and literary studies, especially in the United States, have begun to develop knowledge on the topic of affect in the context of social and political practices, of research on the everyday and the body, as well as animals, things, materiality, race, class, gender, capitalism and nationalism. Notions related to these approaches are trans-subjectivity, the unconscious, feelings, the concept of the body as a process, life, movement, collectivity, relationality, flow, environment, the body as more-than-human, individualisation, becoming, and embodiment.<sup>22</sup> There is no way to discuss here even a fraction of the research conducted and the broad spectrum of issues examined. I would therefore like to focus on just a few questions associated with the most recent applications of the concept of affect in the humanities. In his foreword to the important publication *The Affective Turn*, Michael Hardt uses the ontology of Spinoza to emphasise that the concept of affect detects the links between the disposition of a subject to think, his/her embodied actions and the body's susceptibility to influences, e.g. in the matter of so-called affective work.<sup>23</sup> Patricia Ticineto Clough notes that one is forced by the concept of affect to rephrase questions on the relations between the body and the mind, the dynamism of matter (except the logic of aspiring to *equilibrium*), and issues of causality.<sup>24</sup> The major political significances of affect are highlighted, among others, by Deborah Gould. In her article "Affect and Protest," she stresses that the idea of affectivity demonstrates important aspects of human motivation and behaviour that escapes cognitive and rationalistic attempts at understanding – it confronts us with the complexity and lack of determination of human thoughts and feelings. Affect also clarifies important sources of renewal concerning social aspects and interpersonal bonds, as well as pointing to the possibility of social change. According to Gould, affective states are what intensifies our attention, affiliations, identifications, reinforcing some convictions and weakening others. She goes on to observe that it is the perspective of the affective subject that makes us aware of the

21 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Shame, Theatricality and Queer Performativity. Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*," in *Touching Feeling. Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham–London: Duke University Press, 2003), 35–66.

22 Blackman, Venn, "Affect," 7–28.

23 Michael Hardt, "Foreword: What Affects are Good for," in *The Affective Turn. Theorizing the Social*, ed. Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley (Durham–London: Duke University Press, 2007), IX–XIII.

24 Patricia Ticineto "Clough. Introduction," in *The Affective Turn*, 1–33.

material effects that power has, but also, and perhaps above all, why it is never overwhelming.<sup>25</sup>

The notion of affect therefore radically alters the conception of the subject and the body, but also that of the social, cultural and political space, opening new perspectives in research on memory, history, culture and art, their function, causative power, and also the potential for change.

### Affect and Art

With the experience of the first avant-gardes of the 20th century, an encounter with a work of art ceased to be a question of experiencing beauty or sublimity. Yet at the most important, decisive moments it remained an occurrence of transitory intensity, an affective event. At the same time, though, feelings in the history of art are treated as not particularly serious and useless for research, and therefore seldom reflected upon. Yet the questions of what we feel and why, and whose affects and emotions works of art project on us, belong both to the sphere of intimate questions and to that of important political ones. Affect is diffusive in character, easily “spilling over” onto other subjects, unconsciously influencing our judgements, attention, and ability to remember and forget.<sup>26</sup> One of its fundamental characteristics is the ease of its intersubjective, intergenerational and transhistoric transfer through works, pieces of art and cultural objects, among others. Teresa Brennan notes that the fact of uncontrolled transmission of affect forces us to bid farewell to the concept of individualism. This is because we do not have full certainty of which affects are “ours,” and the easy delimitation between the subject and his/her environment disappears, the barrier of skin ceasing to protect subjects from something “in the air.”<sup>27</sup> However, it is important to emphasise what distinguishes affects from trauma: susceptibility to change in the process of their transmission and circulation, as well as the possibility (when they are subjected to conscious control) of an active influence on them. Thinking in terms of affective theories always assumes relationality, the possibility of transformation, agency and responsibility.

Mieke Bal and Jill Bennett are among the scholars who use affect for the analysis of artistic works. Their extremely inspiring works are to a great extent

25 Deborah Gould, “Affect and Protest,” in *Political Emotions* (Routledge: New York–London, 2010), 18–44.

26 Jarymowicz, *Czy emocje*, 23.

27 Teresa Brennan, “Introduction,” in *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca–London: Cornell University Press, 2004), 1–23.

based on the Deleuzian understanding of affect. Bennett deals with the splice of affect and cognition referring to artistic works on the issue of trauma, as well as highlighting the tension between the notion of affect and representation.<sup>28</sup> Bal, meanwhile, is especially interested in the relationship formed between an artistic work and its beholder, his/her affective reception, affect as a fundamental interaction with art and the resulting political aesthetic of the work.<sup>29</sup>

One of the most useful texts that, as it were, links the mentioned research positions, and facilitates consideration of the history of art using the concept of affect, is Ernst van Alphen's article *Affective Operations of Art and Literature*, in which the author conducts a review of the most important theories of affect and proposes looking at art from the titular point of view of "affective operations."<sup>30</sup> Van Alphen points out that in contemporary interpretations of art the dominant vocabularies have been those with their roots in theories of signification, and above all meaning has been privileged. He also stresses the important fact that the theories of affect give agency to works of art, ensuring that we perceive them outside of an anthropocentric framework – not as passive objects, but as active intermediaries. In doing so, he notes the transmission of affects by cultural objects and the diverse ways in which affects can be received. Affect in art, according to van Alphen, is a new form of contestation – its political influence is controlled by the powerful affective apparatus engaged by literature and art. He follows Deleuze in emphasising the proximity of affect and thought, perceiving impressions as catalysts of critical research. Van Alphen is interested in the ways in which affects are transmitted by art, and how works are active mediators in the world of culture.

I would like, on the basis of the proposals of the aforementioned scholars, to suggest a somewhat different approach and to indicate the fundamental differences between my perspective and that of van Alphen. Like the Dutch scholar, I aim not so much to apply theories of affect, as to consider the way in which the intensity, this life-giving transmission, and the rupture between the human and the non-human world – affect in its numerous conceptualisations – occurs, happens and acts through artistic works (in the broadest possible sense: paintings, sculptures, objects, happenings, performance art, spaces, environments, texts, and ultimately notions, conceptions and ideas). I do not

28 Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision. Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). Among other art historians using the concept of affect, see also Susan Best, "Mild Intoxication and Other Aesthetic Feelings. Psychoanalysis and Art Revisited," *Angelaki*, 10 (2005): 157-170.

29 Mieke Bal, "A gdyby tak? Język afektu," *Teksty Drugie*, 1/2 (2007): 165-188.

30 van Alphen, "Affective Operations," 23-29.

reject the intellectualist-formalistic perspective dominant in research on art, but I would like – by adding affect as one of the dimensions of experience connected to the visual arts – to expand it with an element that has to date been ignored, unjustly I feel. I am therefore interested both in the usefulness and the possibility of applying theories of affect to studying works of art – the “affective operations” of a work of art – and in the question of what new things artistic works can tell us about affect. What aspects of historical experience do theories of affect reveal with reference to contemporary art in Poland?

Ernst van Alphen points to the fact that affect is played out in the relationship between the viewer (with their base of culturally, historically and socially shaped sensitivity) and the artistic work; the formal characteristics of the work act affectively, while the reading of it should display literalness.<sup>31</sup> I would like to expand this idea. In my proposal of the affective history of art, affect is the dynamic relationship subject to continual transformation not of a dyad (as in van Alphen), but a triad:<sup>32</sup> between the subjective position of the artist, the material and textural (as well as, following van Alphen, formal) levels of the work and the beholder, who becomes the place of transmission and retransmission of the affect. In writing about the subjective position of the artist and the viewer I do not mean the artist's intention, although I see the subjective feelings of the beholder (e.g. fear, boredom, tiredness, rapture) as important for analysis and interpretation: they bring knowledge on the cultural models of binding affects with specific objects. I would simply like to show that in studying affect, we must focus in detail on important political challenges, the cultural, historical and existential stakes at play both “now” and “then,” which steadily frame the work.

In affective history of art, I am interested in the way in which affects are formed (as biological phenomena) in their historical framework, how they are problematised and conceptualised by artists, how and with which material media they are transmitted and changed, and what their ethical grounding is. I am keen to see how an affective reading of a work looks like, when, as van Alphen notes, it requires engagement, and at the same time production of a new language. The significant difference between my proposal of an affective history of art and the application of affect to the study of art made by Bal, Bennett and van Alphen is within the framework of the humanities and affirmative ethics. I am interested in the following questions: in what ways can the affects transmitted by works serve to transgress the negativity perceived

31 Ibid., 26.

32 I owe the idea of moving from a dyad to a triad to Barbara Engelking's book *Zagłada i pamięć: doświadczenie Holocaustu i jego konsekwencje opisane na podstawie relacji autobiograficznych* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFIS PAN, 1994), 16.

by Rosi Braidotti and Ewa Domańska (the concept of crisis, agony, emptiness, fracture, oppressive power, exclusion, repression etc.)? How through art bonds and networks of exchange could be established? How can the tactics of influencing the world and processes of opening oneself to the influence of others develop?

However, my proposal of an affective history of art is not a project that assumes unconditional optimism. In fact, I am particularly attached to the conclusions made in Grzegorz Niziołek's impressive book, as yet the only critical attempt to rewrite post-war history of Polish culture using affective categories:

The post-war history of Polish theatre is usually told from the perspective of a symbolic order, as works of symbolic reinterpretations of great texts and collective myths, accorded great importance and permanence. My question is: can these works be studied from the point of view of affects? Can the theatre be recognised as a place of production of these affects, as a place of defence from them and as a place where this defence is broken? My proposal involves an attempt to disclose the fact that another stage exists – not that of the theatre of symbolic reconfigurations, but of affective flows and blockages. The history of the other stage of Polish theatre might be perceptible by studying mistakes and omissions, for instance. Yet I do not treat mistakes and omissions as a historian of the theatre, who explains misunderstandings, corrects facts, and determines the final version of events. These mistakes and omissions in fact themselves belong to the final versions of events, and are already an irremovable part of this history.<sup>33</sup>

Like the author of *Polish Theatre of the Holocaust*, I too would like to recognise the field of the visual arts as a place of production and reproduction of affects (in the case of the affective history of art both negative and positive), the accompanying mechanisms of displacement and the moments at which they break – but also as a place in which resistance emerges against the affective power, an opposition to the dominant cultural models, and in which a leap of the imagination is made. In this sense I feel that, in spite of the obvious differences, Niziołek's ideas do not clash with the affirmative nature of my project: with the search for events and artistic works that touch upon the fractures of history, pain and death, producing spaces of potentiality and life, positivity and bonds, support, reinforcement, care, and life-giving power. Even in the concept of trauma, one may discern a space for constructing positive categories

33 Grzegorz Niziołek, *Polski teatr Zagłady* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2013), 220. My thanks to Katarzyna Bojarska for pointing me in the direction of the above quotation.

such as care, forming relations, testimony, and the coping process. I therefore treat transgression of negativity as throwing off stupor, torpor, compulsive repetition, and pointing to the agency and potency of subjects placed before critical situations – rather than as a rejection of the historical and cultural experiences associated with suffering, or more metaphorically, with states of a split in the I – which, to repeat, are for me the backdrop to the whole project.

## II. Empathy – Attempts at an Affective Interpretation

In 2006, when the *Obieg* journal held a discussion on Piotr Piotrowski's *Awan-garda w cieniu Jalty* [*The Avant-garde in the Shadow of Yalta*], published a year earlier, perhaps all the participants in the meeting (including myself) expressed their surprise at the artistic practices of Hungary, circa 1968. This book contained information on activities the nature of which exceeded my imagination and analytical capabilities at the time. I wondered for a long time over what had such a profound effect on me using the example of the reproduction of Tamás Szentjóby's *Czechoslovak Radio 1968*.

Szentjóby's work was produced in 1969. It is a brick covered with a layer of sulphur on the four narrower sides and placed vertically on one of them, functioning as a multiple. The radio-brick hybrid refers to objects (bricks wrapped in newspapers) that appeared on the streets of Prague as an expression of protest against the invasion of Warsaw Pact forces (20 August 1968) and the military decree forbidding listening to the radio, which continued, unfettered, to transmit information on the developing political situation in Czechoslovakia. The artist interpreted this work as a portable monument contesting every war, and simultaneously expressing his enthusiasm for human invention in situations of brutal oppression.<sup>34</sup> The sulphur that partly covers the brick is used as an ingredient in gunpowder, but also has medicinal purposes, thus making the surface of the object both explosive and therapeutic. Sulphur is a metonym for shooting, violence and fire, but it also brings with it the promise of reparation and healing. The object can be treated as a literal tool of active resistance in the tactics of the powerless when faced with the outbreak of violence. At the same time, *Czechoslovak Radio 1968* is a receiver, although it does not receive electromagnetic waves itself. It works on two levels. The first is that of observers, i.e. us the listeners – those subjected to violence. The second level is that of the sufferers. The radio-brick transmits a message from them to us: a communication of the pain and suffering of the other. Simultaneously, though, this is a message for suffering humanity: somebody

34 Cf. Tamás St. Auby's statement in conversation with Reuben and Maja Fowkes, <http://www.translocal.org/revolutioniloveyou/stauby.html> (accessed October 17, 2013).

is listening to your suffering, somebody is on the other side and is united with you. Admitting pain and listening to this confession is not the end, but the beginning of an event, as Veena Das notes.<sup>35</sup> In this sense, *Czechoslovak Radio 1968* can be seen as a dual receiver: in its mute, paradoxical transmission of pain, but also, through such transmission confirming its reception, it designates the moment of the encounter with the other and the beginning of the human relationship. Yet we cannot ignore the fact that *Czechoslovak Radio 1968* looks like a relic of the past, a kind of “radioactive fossil.”<sup>36</sup> Another’s suffering becomes a point of reference for thinking about our own pain (in this case the silence of Hungarian artists associated with the events of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution), not to remain there, but to transgress the pain in order to establish relationality: the effort of understanding and supporting. Szentjóbý’s work implies questions concerning not so much trauma itself as the viewers’ relationship with it, with the suffering of another. His portable monument does not so much refer to the ways of showing opposition, as itself being a work of resistance – in the endeavour of paying homage to others who are subjected to brutal oppression. It is characterised by a set of affective, corporeal, sensual, memory-related, and also intellectual processes, which Jill Bennett described by citing Nikos Papastergiadis’s description of empathy as a movement “of going closer to be able to see, but also never forgetting where you are coming from”<sup>37</sup> – for me, this is empathy’s paradigmatic work.

Anna Łebkowska, the author of a book on the connections between empathy and literature, notes that there are two opposing viewpoints that dominate in reflection on this affect. The first is that of identification, where it is a significant threat to impute one’s own experiences and cultural position on another, taking for oneself a privileged and moralising position. The second is understanding and feeling for somebody, which involves orienting oneself self-critically towards getting to know the states of the other, seeing something in that person, recognizing “transitions between people,” being aware of mediation, and at the same time acknowledging the ethical responsibility for the other.<sup>38</sup> In view of the kind of empathy adopted here, I reject the former meaning in favour of the latter broader approach, which

35 Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 48.

36 Anri Sala’s phrase referring to the traumatic dimension of the archive, see Anri Sala. Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, “Obraz jest pozbawiony podmiotowości nie dlatego, że jest znaleziony,” *Tytuł roboczy Archiwum*, no. 1, 42.

37 Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 10.

38 Anna Łebkowska, *Empatia. O literackich narracjach przełomu XX i XXI wieku* (Kraków: Universitas, 2008), 20–33.

entails [...] a continual tension between otherness and striving for closeness, [where] what come into play [...] are relations usually based on the paradox of empathising and being alongside, consciously muting one's own expression and at the same time refraining from excessive interfering in the autonomy of others.<sup>39</sup>

Jeremy Rifkin, author of the book *The Empathic Civilization*, uses the accomplishments of contemporary neurobiology (the discovery of mirror neurons) to back up the claim that empathy is a predisposition of human (and not only human) biology. It is connected to the development of the "I," of self-awareness, also of social life and, more broadly, advanced civilisation. Without going into the complicated history of this concept and the often contradictory definitions, I would like to follow Rifkin in making use of Martin L. Hoffman's definition of empathy, which calls it the engagement of mental processes causing the feelings of a given person to be more honed to the situation of others than to one's own. Empathy understood in this way is a kind of response to somebody's suffering or a crisis situation with which a cognitive and affective judgement is linked: the engaged desire to bring help and relief in suffering. Rifkin stresses that empathy is not associated exclusively with pain, but also with positive experiences: one can empathise with somebody's joy and success. Empathy therefore gives a sense of belonging – in pain, but also in joy. It is also a predisposition which makes us aware of the human need for belonging that builds relationships with others. Through empathy we become part of someone's life and share an experience. It seems extremely important that empathy, as seen by Rifkin, is perceived as a biologically affective predisposition that needs to be developed and cultivated by education – as well as, I would add, by cultural practices, including creating, making available and distributing works of art. Rifkin writes of the need to determine a new model for describing humans, to change the way we regard economics, society, politics and history. This new model is *homo empathicus* – raised to empathise and feel a responsibility for the suffering and pain of others, a model fulfilled not in the egoistic drive for desire, but in relations with others.<sup>40</sup>

I would like to harmonise the work by Szentjóby, a transmitter of suffering and distributor of compassion – a work of empathy considered by Anna Łebkowska as a "relationship of empathising and being alongside," or

39 Ibid., 33.

40 Jeremy Rifkin, *The Empathic Civilization. The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis* (Cambridge: J.P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2009), 5–43.

“co-participating in the strong awareness of alienation”<sup>41</sup> – with other voices and cultural spaces. My aim is to consider how empathy with other societies of Central Europe could turn into a question of modernity, modernism and the avant-garde in Poland at that time, as well as how it might become an ethical message for art historians.

### 1968 in Poland from an Empathy Perspective

For me, one such work is Jurry Zieliński's *Hot* from September 1968. *Hot* (oil on canvas, 149 x 199.5 cm), as noted by my student Aryna Astashova, is not “burning,” connoting rather a state than a process. On a smooth blue background, explosive, blood-red forms arrange themselves into the outline of a human face, which is burning and showing no signs of letting up. The red and blue contrast with each other sharply – the lively, growing, intensive forms of the red conflicting with the smooth calm of the background. The painting probably came about a few days after the self-immolation of Ryszard Siwiec at the harvest festival in the 10th-Anniversary Stadium in Warsaw on 8 September 1968.<sup>42</sup> Siwiec's act was a protest against the Warsaw Pact forces' invasion of Czechoslovakia. Information about the event and the picture of the burning body were carefully guarded by the authorities, and apparently had no way of entering social consciousness, although it had taken place in front of around 100,000 spectators. Jurry Zieliński created the picture of a burning body, thus showing solidarity with both the pain and the resistance exhibited by Ryszard Siwiec and the Buddhist monk who on 11 June 1963 had committed an act of self-immolation to protest against the dictatorship in South Vietnam. Malcolm Brown's photograph of this event had gone round the world. Zieliński gave an image of events which he had not seen and which at the same time exceeded all phantasms, violating the horizon of our imagination. It is an oneiric image, but also one that jolts viewers from their slumber. Zieliński's *Hot* does not so much kill as rather symbolically give life, as the space of the fire, the fever becomes the genesis of a new subject. The subject is continually becoming, and at the same time, so to speak, infects with fire, the fever. The experience of pain is recorded by Zieliński, finding a space to be heard,

41 Łebkowska, *Empatia*, 34.

42 This coincidence demands a thorough analysis. Among those to identify the link between Jurry Zieliński's painting and the self-immolation of Ryszard Siwiec is Jolanta Kruczek, *Metaforyczne malarstwo Jerzego Ryszarda Zielińskiego: „Jurry malarzski poeta,”* master's dissertation, KUL, Lublin 2009, 107–108, and following her the authors of a calendar, see *Kalendarium życia i twórczości, in Jurry. Powrót artysty. Jerzy Ryszard „Jurry” Zieliński (1943–1980)*, ed. Marta Tarabuta (Kraków: Galeria Zderzak, 2010), 474.

and also a space for the transgression of suffering – in the web of relationality woven around the dramatic existential gestures, while also regarding the political events of violence to which Ryszard Siwiec and the Buddhist monk reacted with self-destruction. This image-account becomes a place of forming bonds with those who suffer, and at the same time is supposed to infect viewers with the fever of empathy. As Jan Michalski writes:

Zieliński's life mission was to defend the community from moral lethargy. [...] According to his wife's testimony he called this a modest vigil. On a painting that goes by the title *Modest Vigil*, he painted his soul in the form of a live bird with a glowing eye.<sup>43</sup>

I should stress that I do not think that *Hot* is a straightforward image of Ryszard Siwiec or a Buddhist monk with whom viewers are to identify, which would assume introducing an ambivalent meaning of empathy as identification. I perceive Zieliński's painting rather as an expression of a "modest vigil," which in this case I interpret as a glowing, hot gift of empathy, leaning towards another, seeing something in him or her that goes beyond our own experience.<sup>44</sup> I therefore understand *Hot* as an image-account, a representation of empathy calling for a response and responsibility.

Such works as Barbara Zbrożyna's *Sarcophagus in Memory of Jan Palach* (c. 1969) and Jarosław Kozłowski's *Presence* (Galeria Pod Moną Lisą, Wrocław, 1968) can, I suspect, be considered in similar terms. They demand from us a detailed analysis at the level of the material aspect of objects as well as the level of their political and social framing.

In their relational nature and references to the suffering of others, these works appear in 1968, which to date has not been a particular reference point for the periodisation of art in Poland, confined to 1944, 1945, 1948, 1949, 1955 and 1956, and then 1980, 1981 and finally 1989. This fragile (and, it seems, rare in the field of the visual arts) phenomenon of empathy at the same time triggers its reverse – indifference, and ethical torpor. The year 1968 in Poland is surrounded by silence in the art history narrative, and also seems empty from the perspective of artistic production. In spite of the dramatic events in politics and society of the time – above all the strident anti-Semitic witch-hunt, the forced emigration of Polish citizens with Jewish roots, and student

43 Jan Michalski, "Jury – partyzant," in *Jury. Powrót artysty*, 62. Michalski also relates *Hot* to the self-immolation of Ryszard Siwiec, as well as mentioning Maciej Bieniasz's series of *Burning* paintings, in which the artist refers to the similar acts of Buddhist monks.

44 Cf. the examination of the concept of "empathy" in the writings of Edith Stein, Anna Łebkowska, *Emocje*, 25, footnote 56.

protests – in the visual arts circa 1968 it was as if nothing was happening. With the few exceptions of individual artists, daily activities on the national art scene went on uninterrupted; at the same time, art in Poland seemed strangely numb and indifferent. Carolyn Dean, writing about the phenomenon of indifference in culture, writes that “most of us won’t disrupt our daily routines for the sake of others near or far without a real or imaginary causal connection to sufferers.”<sup>45</sup>

In spite of this silence, to me 1968 seems decisive in thinking about the periodisation of art in Poland: it was at that time that the worldview of avant-garde art, which assumed the universalism of values and universality of experience, imperceptibly succumbed to destruction. Indifference entirely destroys a community of experience, as well as the myth of universalistic values and of art as a community experience. If by their lack of reaction artists made it clear that they were watching over timeless values, then the period in which they did not react showed these values to be past, empty, and useless. This, I feel, makes the few voices that one can discern in this silence all the more valuable. However, for this we need a change in the theoretical framework. Individual gestures such as self-reflectiveness, (self-) criticism of institutions, analysis of the medium, critique of pictorialism, recalling socialist realism and the disenchantment with realism and figuration seem to me rather specific problems of Polish art. Instead of them, I am inclined to look for relational gestures: empathy and community – looking for links and connections with a true other that can proceed using various media, forms and materials and which change the concept of autonomy of form in the direction of subjective sovereignty, an existential concept of autonomy, perhaps: speaking to others in one’s name and seeking relations with another in order to copy oneself anew.

### The Art Historian as Homo Empathicus

Empathy as a gesture of critical courage, response and responsibility recalled and initiated in artistic practice by Szentjóby, Jurry Zieliński and Władysław Strzemiński (*To My Friends the Jews*, c. 1945) leads to a redefinition of the concept of criticism in the art of the time. From this point of view, critical artistic practice is the kind that forms a sense of empathy and a position of *homo empathicus* among artists in spectators as well as in the wider perspective: it is art that does not feel for itself, but co-creates itself through an empathetic relationship with another. In what way, though, could we relate the question

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45 Carolyn J. Dean, *The Fragility of Empathy after the Holocaust* (Ithaca–London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 5.

of empathy, affect and experience of critical artistic practice mentioned above to writing art history in Poland?

I would like to point to the fact that the history of art in Poland has never considered the Holocaust sufficiently thoroughly to change art history's structures, paradigms, hierarchies of values and periodisations, which from a geopolitical perspective appears to be a particular task for it. I do not mean either a simple operation of adding Jewish artists to the apparatus of art history in Poland, or the absorption of the Holocaust by the *episteme* of the discipline in its local version. Izabela Kowalczyk points emphatically to this "break" in art history in Poland with reference to Jewish identity.<sup>46</sup> What I have in mind is rather the aforementioned change in framework, the radical rewriting of art history in Poland, taking as a starting point (not a culmination point!) the suffering and pain of the other, the Holocaust and Polish society's involvement in it, as well as war and postwar bursts and symptoms of antisemitism. I am thinking of the transgression of identity in art history towards radical otherness, so that, rather than being consolidated, it is exposed to change, ultimately understanding the Shoah as, to quote Zygmunt Bauman,

born and executed in our modern rational society, at the high stage of our civilization and at the peak of human cultural achievement, and for this reason it is a problem of that society, civilization and culture.<sup>47</sup>

Grzegorz Niziołek relates Bauman's conclusions to the post-war history of theatre in Poland in the phenomenal book mentioned above, *Polish Holocaust Theatre*. I would like to repeat Bauman's and Niziołek's proposal to refer to my own discipline. This is not about the history of art relegating the Holocaust to the space of specialist studies, but rather about shifting it from the margins to the centre of thinking and writing about history and art of the last seventy or so years in Poland.<sup>48</sup> And it is from this perspective – the Holocaust treated not as a specific problem, but as the heart of art history in Poland – that I propose searching for the traces of this event (as well as those of 1968) and the experience of Polish-Jewish relations that joins it, in the work both of the

46 Izabela Kowalczyk, "Zwichnięta historia sztuki? – o pominięciach problematyki żydowskiej w badaniach sztuki polskiej po 1945 roku," *Opposite, Rocznik Instytutu Historii Sztuki Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego*, Wrocław 2011, [http://opposite.uni.wroc.pl/opposite\\_nr1/izabela\\_kowalczyk.htm](http://opposite.uni.wroc.pl/opposite_nr1/izabela_kowalczyk.htm) (accessed October 19, 2013).

47 Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), x.

48 Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*. I regard Marcin Lachowski's book *Nowocześni po katastrofie. Sztuka w Polsce w latach 1945-1960* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2013) as the first step in the rewriting of the history of art in Poland in this direction.

artists who remained in Poland and of those who in Polish history and art, forced to leave the country in a literal and symbolic way, “emigrated” in the 1940s, ‘50s and ‘60s (and later). The ways that might lead art historians to such a paradigmatic change include searching for founding events that are radically different from those previously adopted for post-war art history, and with them being open to other experiences, values, categories and judgements.

What would happen if, for example, instead of Tadeusz Kantor’s *The Return of Odysseus* (1944), the *First Exhibitions of Modern Art* (1948) or the exhibitions in the Warsaw Arsenal (1955), we were to take, as an “event”-scale work, an otherwise unknown album from the heart of darkness – the Łódź ghetto circa 1943?

This piece is an 18-page album with an unknown title. It was produced in the Łódź ghetto, as indicated by Agata Pietroń, probably in the autumn or early winter of 1943.<sup>49</sup> The plastic cover was made by Arie Ben Menachem, and the majority of the photographs, integrated as a collage, were taken by Mendel Grosman. The original album was lost, leaving black-and-white photographic copies in its stead. According to Pietroń’s excellent master’s thesis, Arie Ben Menachem had no artistic training, but Mendel Grosman was a photographer who was recognised in the artistic community before the war. Pietroń writes that in the ghetto he worked in the department producing straw shoes, and probably met Mendel Grosman through the latter’s sister, Ruzka Grosman. In 1942 he helped him photograph the victims of the General Curfew of September 1942.<sup>50</sup> The album of interest to me was produced from blue pages manufactured in the ghetto paper-making department. On each sheet a black-and-white photograph or photographs were affixed, accompanied by a caption in Polish or Yiddish, or drawings in watercolours and gouache and patches cut out from coloured paper. Most of the photos used by Ben Menachem were taken for official purposes for the Statistical Office, while some were private and taken in secret (from 1941 there was a ban on photography for private use).<sup>51</sup> Their montage, the contrasting juxtaposition of images, and the use of text that demystifies or reinforces the visual information or poses questions and sets problems completing the space of the elliptical official discourse, allows Ben Menachem to construct an accusation levelled at those in power, as well as taking a position towards the

49 Agata Pietroń, *Fotomontaż jako sposób opisu Zagłady. Analiza albumów fotograficznych z łódzkiego getta*, master’s dissertation written under the supervision of dr hab. Jacek Leociak, University of Warsaw Institute of Polish Culture, April 2007, 54. Thanks to Agata Pietroń for allowing me to read her excellent thesis and for providing valuable information.

50 Ibid., 42–43.

51 My description is based on the catalogue *Getto. Terra incognita. Sztuka walcząca Ariego Ben Menachema i Mendla Grosmana*, eds. Xenia Modrzejewska-Mrozowska and Andrzej Różycki, Marek Szukalak (Łódź: Oficyna Bibliofilów, 2009).

official albums in the ghetto made by ghetto workers for German and ghetto dignitaries.<sup>52</sup> He exposes their crimes and concealments and traces their promises, decisions, choices and their consequences. Yet in this space of dark knowledge marked by suffering, death, destruction, but also self-accusation, hope appears. The first 16 pages are devoted to hunger, death, humiliations, deportations to the extermination camps, uncertainty, loss, despair, and tragic events in the history of the ghetto such as the General Curfew of September 1942. But the two final pages bear the comment "But despite everything..." "We will endure." The first of the pages depicts in photographs young people dancing, learning, and spending time together. On the second page we see an almost archetypal couple: a woman and man gazing into the distance, beyond the horizon of the representation, pointing to the future. The last two pages, depicting groups and pairs, underline the community, relations, and solidarity of people in the face of suffering. One might say that the album was constructed for the future, for viewers to come. For me, this album from the ghetto as a material object (for whose production the authors could have faced a harsh punishment), and also as a process of creation (involving a network of collaborators bearing an existential risk), constitutes a work (in the verb and the noun sense) of resistance *par excellence*. With it came the belief in the fragility of human life, but also faith in the power of testimony. Ben Menachem and Mendel Grosman represented the experience of pain and suffering, but also their own, extremely subjective sovereignty. They portrayed the phenomena of utter social subordination, but also of the community and collective. The disillusionment that Ben Menachem and Mendel Grosman's series exhibited in its focus on death, sickness and suffering, led to action, throwing off the structure of passive waiting. Although it depicts the darkest experience of death and loss, in its power and expression it is life-giving, as it calls for resistance, protest, and feeling. The album's 18 pages are an assemblage of extraordinary constructions of intensity, endeavouring to surpass the state of immobilisation, anticipation and petrification, moving from despair to anger and hope. This is a hope that, as Victor Crapanzano writes, is linked to the future tense – the promise not only of individual salvation and endurance, but also of a broader one, that of society. A hope that becomes a promise, has a therapeutic aspect, and moves away the horizon of death. It calls upon us to join in feeling the injustice and suffering, to salvage the space of intensity and waiting, to establish the space of the future in ourselves.<sup>53</sup>

52 On Ben Menachem's album and those in the ghetto see Agata Pietroni's master's dissertation *Fotomontaż*.

53 My observations on hope come from Vincent Crapanzano's article "Reflections on Hope as a Category of Social and Psychological Analysis," *Cultural Anthropology*, 1 (2003): 3–32.

I would like to make this work a symbolic foundation of affective art history in Poland and the historian perceived as *homo empathicus*. It obliges art history in Poland to form a sense of empathy proposed in historical research by Dominick LaCapra:

the historian puts him- or herself in the other's position without taking the other's place or becoming a substitute or surrogate for the other who is authorized to speak in the other's voice. Empathy involves affective response to the other [my emphasis] [...] It implies what I am terming empathic unsettlement in the secondary witness, including the historian in one of his or her roles or subjective positions. This unsettlement should, I think, have nonformulaic stylistic effects in representation, for example, in placing in jeopardy harmonizing or fetishistic accounts that bring unearned spiritual uplift or meaning [...].<sup>54</sup>

From the point of view of the affective history of art, I would like to propose the historian of art as a *homo empathicus*, who sees the founding event of art history in Poland not in socialist realism and disgrace, war and trauma, but in the Holocaust, the suffering of the other, but also in the hope of the other, that are so strongly enshrined in Arie Ben Menachem and Mendel Grosman's joint, and only, work.<sup>55</sup>

### Conclusion: What is Affective History of Art?

Although the effects of critical events are not always traumatising, introducing negativity through such terms as fear, disgrace, rupture, emptiness, non-experience or trauma in art studies can rob subjects of their agency, frequently blurring the boundaries between the victim, the witness and the aggressor and (self-) victimising individuals and entire social groups. This in turn often leads to the experience of the actual victims being obscured and particularly uncomfortable historical facts being repressed, such as that of Polish society's partial responsibility for the Holocaust. Theories of affect not only restore to subjects the power of influencing the world, but also equip them with the possibility of existential transformation and political change. As I mentioned, affect does not occur either in the body or in the mind, but joins the intellect

54 Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit. Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), 65.

55 This work does not exist in studies of the history of art in Poland, although it was mentioned during the exhibition *Pole, Jew, Artist. Identity and Avant-garde*, curators: Joanna Ritt and Jarosław Suchan, Łódź Museum of Art, 15 November 2009 – 21 January 2010.

and cognitive powers with the senses, instinct and the biological level of human functioning like a Möbius strip. At the same time, though, affect is the biological core of subjectivity; in an affective experience (thus wrote Deleuze, and I suspect that the representatives of contemporary psychology and neurobiology would not disagree) there is a rupture in the boundary between the human and the non-human – affect is the space in which humans, animals, space and things meet.

The aforementioned artistic works made me aware that hegemony is never quite overwhelming.<sup>56</sup> The mysterious point x at which its effect vanishes concerns consenting and being open to relationality that is reinforcing and life-giving in an existential and social sense. Although in the above analyses I concentrated on empathy, I should stress that the affective art history can of course not be reduced to this, which is just one very specific form of affective art. Whole chapters therefore wait to be written involving such affects, or collections of affects such as guilt and shame, hatred, anger, sadness, anxiety and fear, as well as love, pleasure, affection and longing. In the history of art edited in this way, particular attention must be given to the transitive relationship of the scholar.

Ewa Domańska describes the challenge of putting together a “practical methodology” combining diligently conducted empirical research with the ability to construct a theory. She writes:

This would therefore mean not finding methodological directives to study history from already existing theories [...] but turning towards the description and analysis of the research material with the aim of searching for concepts and building generalisations, which as a consequence leads to the construction of (small- and medium-scope) theories.<sup>57</sup>

This approach makes existing theories the starting point, the framework for the initial assumptions and research questions, but not the ending point.

In writing about the significance of the subject matter of a work in an affective analysis, I would like to use the above proposal of practical methodology to underline the need to construct the affective history of art in a “bottom-up” fashion, as it were, employing detailed analytical methods focused on the surface of the work: its form, but also its texture, material and physical nature, as well as the artistic procedures undergone (e.g. chopping and cutting, or the reverse: joining, fastening, copying and reproducing). In this way, the affective

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<sup>56</sup> Gould, *Affect and Protest*.

<sup>57</sup> Ewa Domańska, *Historia egzystencjalna* (Warszawa: PWN, 2012), 171–172.

art history would constitute a challenge not so much for the application of terms garnered from other disciplines, as for using a dense description of the piece and an analysis to produce new research categories that are almost inscribed in the matter of artistic work.

Affective art history is not only concerned with the affects problematised by artistic practices. Above all, it examines the artists, objects, processual works, institutions, beholders and environment (in a material, historical and cultural sense) as a certain assemblage of active intermediaries of affects: points of transmission, reception, and finally transformation of the affects connected with each other by the web of relationality. As Ernst van Alphen writes, affective reading is an act of engagement – the act of exposing the reader to change. I would add that in an affective reading of art works we concentrate on the material and formal location of the affect in the work and attempt at recognising its forms of transmission, its ethical authority, and relations with memory. But what seems particularly interesting is the way in which this affect operates: what works, how and thanks to what, as well as what we as viewers perceive, what we can do with it as active agents, how we can respond to it and what our responsibility is.

Again, though, I would like to stress very strongly that my project is not about rejecting critical events and experiences, but rather about exiting the impasse of using the “traumatic subject” as a research perspective, whose conceptual outline is, too readily applied not so much to the experiences of actual victims as to the observers of trauma. As Grzegorz Niziołek claims in *Polish Theatre of the Holocaust*, “the bystander society dreams of salvation through trauma. But what about resentment, stupidity, lack of imagination? [...] my research on historical theatrical facts falling into a broad time frame between 1946 and 2009 teaches mistrust towards such overused concepts as trauma and mourning.”<sup>58</sup> I would like to bring a little of this mistrust into the history of art in Poland too. The goal of my broader project, of which this article comprises an introduction, is to try to recognise the key moments of a certain dimension (visual arts) of the history of culture in Poland from an ethical perspective that assumes the possibility (but not necessity) of agency and responsibility, especially of those who are exposed to the view of others’ suffering (particularly the subjective position of artist-observer). So I do not want to reject the negative experiences of the cultural field’s past in Poland, only analysing the positive ones. On the contrary, I would describe my objective as undertaking a critical study of the critical moments in art based on the key events and historical experiences, as well as to change the perspective from a traumatic to an affective one. The task this brings with it is to listen

58 Niziołek, *Polski teatr Zagłady*, 35.

carefully to silence and quiet, to pain and death, to indifference, anger and hatred, the challenge of continually opening oneself to guilt and shame, but also the search for the desire for life, relations, care, friendship, and solidarity in and through art. In the history of art conceived and articulated in this affective fashion, I am not interested in moral judgement, but in expanding the space of understanding.

As noted by Braidotti in the article I quoted at the beginning, affirmative ethics does not entail rejection of pain or suffering, but changing the framework in which they are conceived: empathetic co-existence with the other, in a relationship that is a potential place: of movement and change, growth and interaction.<sup>59</sup> I would set similar goals for the affective art history in Poland, for example. I propose leaving behind self-victimisation in order to see the suffering of others, as well as oneself in relation to others. The affective history of art would serve to redefine our own cultural and artistic experience – to recognise ourselves as a subject influencing others and open to the influences of others: human and non-human. It would, as Braidotti puts it, make us see not individuals, but mutually dependent, connected networks of positive and negative flows of reality. Affect in the writing of history can be treated as a “rescue category,”<sup>60</sup> giving us an escape from a situation of an insoluble conflict that makes agreement impossible. The goal of the affective history of art would be to “move the heart” and, connected with this, “shock to thought,” in order for conflict and crisis to be not just described and analysed, but above all transgressed.<sup>61</sup>

*Translation: Benjamin Koschalka*

<sup>59</sup> Braidotti, *Affirmation*.

<sup>60</sup> The rescue category is conceived here in reference to Ewa Domańska's idea of “rescue history.”

<sup>61</sup> “Shock to thought” is a description of affect used by Brian Massumi, cf. *A Shock to Thought. Expression after Deleuze and Guattari*, ed. Brian Massumi (London–New York: Routledge, 2002). I thank Łukasz Mojsak for the concept of “moving the heart.”

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Leszek Koczanowicz

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## The Magical Power of Art: Subject, Public Sphere, Emancipation

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**F**or the subject of his Nobel lecture, Joseph Brodsky chose an issue of key importance to an artist, namely, the meaning of art for people, individuals and society. He opened with a strong statement on the completely private character of the work of art.

If art teaches anything (to the artist, in the first place), it is the privateness of the human condition. Being the most ancient as well as the most literal form of private enterprise, it fosters in a man, knowingly or unwittingly, a sense of his uniqueness, of individuality, of separateness – thus turning him from a social animal into an autonomous “I.” Lots of things can be shared: a bed, a piece of bread, convictions, a mistress, but not a poem by, say, Rainer Maria Rilke. A work of art, of literature especially, and a poem in particular, addresses a man *tête-à-tête*, entering with him into direct – free of any go-betweens – relations.<sup>1</sup>

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1 This and further quotations from Brodsky are based on the script of his lecture available on the webpage of the Committee: [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1987/brodsky-lecture.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1987/brodsky-lecture.html)

Departing from this axiological statement, the great Russian poet arrives at a paradoxical conclusion. Art, private by its very nature, a refuge for privacy even, fulfills an extraordinary social role, not despite but precisely because of this characteristic. Art has an advantage over politics, over the sphere of power, since:

Language and, presumably, literature are things that are more ancient and inevitable, more durable than any form of social organization. The revulsion, irony, or indifference often expressed by literature towards the state is essentially a reaction of the permanent – better yet, the infinite – against the temporary, against the finite. To say the least, as long as the state permits itself to interfere with the affairs of literature, literature has the right to interfere with the affairs of the state. A political system, a form of social organization, as any system in general, is by definition a form of the past tense that aspires to impose itself upon the present (and often on the future as well); and a man whose profession is language is the last one who can afford to forget this. The real danger for a writer is not so much the possibility (and often the certainty) of persecution on the part of the state, as it is the possibility of finding oneself mesmerized by the state's features, which, whether monstrous or undergoing changes for the better, are always temporary.

Brodsky believes that in this relation of infinite art and temporary politics, a highly important role is played by the private aesthetic experience which at the same time is an ethical experience.

On the whole, every new aesthetic reality makes man's ethical reality more precise. For aesthetics is the mother of ethics. The categories of "good" and "bad" are, first and foremost, aesthetic ones, at least etymologically preceding the categories of "good" and "evil." If in ethics not "all is permitted," it is precisely because not "all is permitted" in aesthetics, because the number of colors in the spectrum is limited. The tender babe who cries and rejects the stranger or who, on the contrary, reaches out to him, does so instinctively, making an aesthetic choice, not a moral one.

The connection between art and politics, aesthetics and ethics, is not only obvious but also special and intimate precisely because art allows for the preservation and cultivation of privacy. In fact, Brodsky adds that "The more substantial an individual's aesthetic experience is, the sounder his taste, the sharper his moral focus, the freer – though not necessarily the happier – he is" and continues: "It is precisely in this applied, rather than Platonic, sense that

we should understand Dostoevsky's remark that beauty will save the world, or Matthew Arnold's belief that we shall be saved by poetry."

As a consequence, art in a society is a condition *sine qua non* of its human dimension and ethical well-being. Brodsky outlines a kind of political utopia:

In any event, the condition of society in which art in general, and literature in particular, are the property or prerogative of a minority appears to me unhealthy and dangerous. I am not appealing for the replacement of the state with a library, although this thought has visited me frequently; but there is no doubt in my mind that, had we been choosing our leaders on the basis of their reading experience and not their political programs, there would be much less grief on earth. It seems to me that a potential master of our fates should be asked, first of all, not about how he imagines the course of his foreign policy, but about his attitude toward Stendhal, Dickens, Dostoevsky. If only because the lock and stock of literature is indeed human diversity and perversity, it turns out to be a reliable antidote for any attempt – whether familiar or yet to be invented – toward a total mass solution to the problems of human existence. As a form of moral insurance, at least, literature is much more dependable than a system of beliefs or a philosophical doctrine.

Brodsky's lecture was undoubtedly intentionally provocative: an apotheosis of art which, while remaining free of limitation, is capable of countering all kinds of pressures, and more to the point, depriving them of their political power. When the dictator's words are revealed as empty rhetoric, its power of enslavement dissipates despite all of its more or less refined tools of violence. Art is also an apotheosis of freedom, although the poet prefers to speak of privacy, probably in order not to overuse big words. The autonomous "I" opposes the social animal, a product of "mass solutions to the problems of human existence." Such positioning of the private versus the public entails the positioning of good versus evil, beauty versus ugliness, in which the victory of beauty and good results not only from the work of an artist but also from the reader's. For Brodsky, a "novel or a poem is not a monologue, but the conversation of a writer with a reader, a conversation, I repeat, that is very private, excluding all others – if you will, mutually misanthropic." Consequently, the power of art lies for Brodsky in its influence upon the audience – the reader. Nothing from what had been lived or read disappears, all persists and continues to impact the very center of the "autonomous I." And so, the Russian poet adds "I believe – not empirically, alas, but only theoretically – that, for someone who has read a lot of Dickens, to shoot his like in the name of some idea is more problematic than for someone who has read no Dickens."

It would be easy to critique the views presented in the cited lecture. Even if they reflect the extraordinary, almost mythical, moral of Joseph Brodsky's life, they also present him evoking the pathos of the Romantic idea of art and artist as a creative force transforming and shaping the society. Modernity seems to have undermined this interpretation of the mission of art, assigning to it a far humbler role and weakening the faith in its power. The relationship of aesthetics and ethics appears, sadly, to be broken. It has been pointed out in the context of Brodsky's lecture that one could imagine a pretty decent volume of poetry written by Stalin, Mao-Tse-Tung and Ho-Chi-Minh, illustrated with Hitler's watercolors. Brodsky is obviously aware of this and differentiates between those who are well read and true readers, but such differentiation can really be conducted only *a posteriori*, which of course means that the validity of the very distinction can be easily undermined. Finally, one could level what I consider the most significant charge against Brodsky, namely that he presents an elitist, aristocratic model of art while trying to democratize it. Brodsky believed that Russian totalitarianism could have come to existence only because art was limited to the circles of the chosen, to the Russian intelligentsia, leaving entire human masses outside its domain.

If one were to systematize and summarize Brodsky's poetic intuitions, a rather clear distinction would emerge between the corrupt public sphere and the private one, where the autonomy of the individual and its ability to reject mass slogans can – or must – be preserved if humanity is to survive. True art, and the poet clearly uses a very limited definition here, should thus avoid engagement, as it is bound to be a false one. Art cannot be entangled in social or political arguments or it will inevitably become entangled in “bad” language which in turn will subordinate art to tyranny. The only meaning of art, to restate once more, is its intimate impact on the “autonomous I” through a misanthropic conversation. The originality of Brodsky's idea, however, lies in its introduction of the private sphere directly into politics. The concept of culture as an improvement of *Bildung*, found in numerous definitions of culture in the 19th century but distant from all political connotations, becomes for the poet a political tool. This way, he performs an extraordinary politicization of the private sphere, prefiguring or predicting that which has become, as I will attempt to show, the central issue of the first decade of the 21st Century.

One can fully appreciate Brodsky's intuitions only by looking back at the beginnings of the 19th century when the modern public sphere began to take shape. In order to define it, we must refer to the seminal work of Jürgen Habermas who writes:

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public

sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor.<sup>2</sup>

Commenting on this definition, Habermas stresses the dialectic of the public sphere's emergence from the already existing private sphere which itself inevitably undergoes a transformation as a result of the emergence of the modern, complex commodity exchange and the related division of labor. The private is not destroyed as a result of the public sphere constituting itself – on the contrary, it is given an additional dimension which had previously been nonexistent or barely present.

The line between state and society, fundamental in our context, divided the public sphere from the private realm. The public sphere was coextensive with public authority [...]. Included in the private realm was the authentic "public sphere," for it was a public sphere constituted by private people. Within the realm that was the preserve of private people we therefore distinguish again between private and public spheres. The private sphere comprised civil society in the narrower sense, that is to say, the realm of commodity exchange and of social labor; imbedded in it was the family with its interior domain (*Intimsphäre*). The public sphere in the political realm evolved from the public sphere in the world of letters; through the vehicle of public opinion it put the state in touch with the needs of society.<sup>3</sup>

Habermas's definition of the public sphere was, as we know, broadly discussed and contested. There is no need here to repeat those often very dramatic arguments but it may be worthwhile to outline at least the main dividing lines of the debate. Firstly, it concerns the degree to which the public sphere is autonomous from the state, or in general, from the political sphere. Apart from liberal tradition represented by the German philosopher, there emerges a parallel one, tying together the public sphere, society and the state. The connection of the public sphere and the state almost automatically introduces the second line of division, namely, the question of separating the public sphere from the private one, in other words, of separating private values and the good life from civic and political values. Following the clearest divisional

2 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, transl. Thomas Burger with assistance of Fredrick Lawrence, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991), 27.

3 Ibid., 30–31.

lines, we are presented with two almost symmetrical visions of society. On the one hand, there is a definite separation of its internal spheres with their completely different values, on the other, a fusion of those spheres through uniform value systems that constitute the social life. Obviously, intermediate variants are possible as well – from dissident thinkers of the 70s and 80s, there emerges a vision of a civic society as a space of ethical values, differentiating between the later and the corrupt political sphere of the totalitarian state. In such a version of the public sphere, values organize the society against the state which in its ideological dimensions becomes an empty shell continuing to exist only thanks to its apparatus of violence. Importantly, each of these concepts is true in a way – inasmuch as they reflect a certain idea of the functioning of modern society. In other words, the concepts of the public sphere and of the public space emerging within the public sphere are largely instruments of symbolic power.<sup>4</sup> Thus, an analysis of the public sphere and its transformations has two aspects. On the one hand, there is the emergence of the public sphere itself as a self-standing and separate space in social life; on the other hand, the appropriation of this sphere by politics and ideology.<sup>5</sup>

Art obviously had to accompany the transformations of the public sphere, and to find its place in an era where it was no longer viewed as an emanation and transmission of absolute values; it began to be recognized as a phenomenon historically and culturally limited by the horizon of temporality. In this new situation, art had to find again a niche allowing it to reconstruct the sense of its existence. And considering various interpretations of art's role in modernity, one may say without the risk of exaggeration that it fulfilled its role very well, maybe even "too well." It took the effort to fill the gap that emerged when the modern "disenchantment of the world" brought about the breaking of culture's continuity both within a certain moment of the present, and between the past and the present of a given culture. And if art proved capable of playing this role, it was possible due to its magical power allowing it to conquer the seemingly unconquerable horizon of temporality.

A testimony to this power can be found in the famous remark by Karl Marx who, although moved by the phenomenon, seems to remain helpless in the face of it. In the remaining manuscript and fragmentary passages of the *Grundrisse* he looks at the relations between forms of consciousness and the

4 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

5 Ideologies attempting to appropriate the public sphere can be classified, following Zeev Sternhell, into two major currents: the Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment - viewed not as a simple reaction to the former but as an autonomous intellectual movement. See: Zeev Sternhell, *Les anti-Lumières. Une tradition du XVIIIe siècle à la guerre froide* (Paris: Fayard, 2006). I discussed this in "Oświecenie i nowoczesność (część I)," *Przegląd Polityczny* 81 (2007): 61-66.

processes of production, and in this context struggles with an odd property of art that manages to overcome its temporary limitation. Marx notes that: “certain periods of the highest development of art stand in no direct connection to the general development of society, or to the material basis and skeleton structure of its organization.”<sup>6</sup> He then adds: “is Achilles possible side by side with powder and lead? Or is the *Iliad* at all compatible with the printing press and even printing machines? Do not singing and reciting and the muses necessarily go out of existence with the appearance of the printer’s bar, and do not, therefore, prerequisites of epic poetry disappear?”<sup>7</sup> But what the author of *Das Kapital* finds truly difficult to comprehend is how it is possible for us to remain amazed by Greek art when our society differs so much from the one that produced it, “but the difficulty is not in grasping the idea that Greek art and epos are bound up with certain forms of social development. It lies rather in understanding why they still constitute for us a source of aesthetic enjoyment and in certain respects prevail as the standard model beyond attainment.”<sup>8</sup> Marx’s answer to this question was very enigmatic and has remained so despite numerous commentaries in the following years. He says:

A man cannot become a child again unless he becomes childish. But does he not take pleasure in the naiveté of the child, and must he not strive to reproduce its truth on a higher plane? Is it not the character of every epoch revived in its original truth in the child’s nature? Why should not the childhood of mankind exert an eternal charm in the unique historic age where it obtained its most beautiful development? [...] The Greeks were normal children. The charm of their art has for us does not conflict with the immature stage of the society in which it had its roots. That charm is rather the product of the latter. It is inseparable from the fact that the immature social conditions under which that art arose can never return.<sup>9</sup>

Marx’s remarks have been interpreted with the goal of finding those features of art that decide about its universal character. But when we look at them today, this does not seem to be of key importance. What is important is the fact that because of its dualist, protean nature, art may fulfill in the public sphere, and in culture, the role of being a keystone of values.

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6 Karl Marx, “Introduction to the *Grundrisse*” in *Karl Marx: A Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 19.

7 Ibid., 20.

8 Ibid., 20.

9 Ibid., 20.

Writing about Walter Benjamin's famous propositions from *On the Concept of History*, Giorgio Agamben emphasizes that two important tropes in the works of the German philosopher, "quotation" and "collector," are an answer to a cultural situation where the chain of connections allowing for a continuous transmission of the past has been broken: "In a traditional society neither the quotation nor the collection is conceivable, since it is not possible to break at any point the links of the chain by which the transmission of the past takes place."<sup>10</sup> According to Agamben, Benjamin did not fully consider the consequences of his ideas, especially the concept of "aura" which is central concept in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Agamben believes, contrary to Benjamin, that the disappearance of aura does not result in liberation of the work of art from its cultural sheath but quite the opposite – endows it with new artistic value:

This is to say: the work of art loses the authority and guarantees it derived from belonging to a tradition for which it built the places and objects that incessantly weld past and present together. However, far from giving up its authenticity in order to become reproducible (thus fulfilling Hölderlin's wish that poetry might again become something that one could calculate and teach), the work of art instead becomes the locus of the most ineffable of mysteries, the epiphany of aesthetic beauty.<sup>11</sup>

According to the Italian philosopher, beauty must appear to fill the empty space remaining after the fall of the traditional, mimetic culture where the processes of movement from the past to the present and the object of transmission were identical. Art performs exactly the same tasks as those once fulfilled by tradition: it resolves the conflict between the old and new, whose resolution is necessary for man to function. Aesthetics is capable of reclaiming this space between the past and the future, space where human actions and human knowledge are situated. However, Agamben notes that:

This space is the aesthetic space, but what is transmitted in it is precisely the impossibility of transmission, and its truth is the negation of the truth of its contents. A culture that in losing its transmissibility has lost the sole guarantee of its truth and become threatened by the incessant accumulation of its nonsense now relies on art for its guarantee; art is thus forced

<sup>10</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, transl. Georgia Albert, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 105.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

to guarantee something that can only be guaranteed if art itself loses its guarantees in turn.<sup>12</sup>

Here, art plays a particularly important role, perhaps the key role, not even in constituting society but in saving the human condition faced with what has become known as modernity. But the role assigned to art is too demanding because its atemporal horizon is no longer defended by tradition. Such universalist vision can be found in numerous analyses of art's function in modernity, analyses which interestingly have been formulated recently. As this is not the place for a thorough discussion of these approaches, I will only briefly mention some of them.

For instance, Alain Badiou's concept of art assumes it to be one of the spheres where truth-generating procedures emerge.

We shall thus posit that there are four conditions of philosophy, and the lack of a single one gives rise to its dissipation, just as the emergence of all four conditioned its apparition. These conditions are: the *matheme*, the *poeme*, political invention and love. We shall call the set of these conditions generic procedures [...] The four types of generic procedures specify and class all the procedures determined thus far which may produce truths (there are but scientific, artistic, political and amorous truths).<sup>13</sup>

Badiou's ethics centers upon the category of "event." The event is also an element of a "normal" situation. From the ontological perspective, the event is a naming of the emptiness that existed at the very center of the previous situation. As an example, Badiou mentions the appearance of the classical style associated with Haydn's name in music: "at the heart of the baroque style at its virtuoso saturation lay the absence (as decisive as it was unnoticed) of a genuine conception of musical architectonics. The Haydn-event occurs as a kind of musical 'naming' of this absence."<sup>14</sup> The event is a carrier of truth and Badiou strongly opposes the tendency in contemporary philosophy that relativizes truth. There is always one truth, although it has to be referred to one of the four spheres of human activity: science, art, politics and love. The event determines the truth for each of these spheres. In art, an event may

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>13</sup> Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, translated, edited and with an introduction by Norman Madarasz, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 35.

<sup>14</sup> Alain Badiou, *Ethics. An Essay on Understanding Evil*, transl. Peter Hallward (London and New York: Verso, 2001), 68.

be constituted by the creation of a new style, in science by the emergence of a new theory, in politics – a revolution, and in love by the meeting of lovers. In each case, however, the truth revealed in the event surpasses the already existing knowledge and becomes a source of new knowledge.

Badiou sees in modernity a domination of art that towered above other truth-generating spheres and moved to the foreground, replacing philosophy. He refers to this period as the “age of poets” to emphasize the remarkably significant role of art for constituting truth which nonetheless also resulted in a confusion of roles of art and philosophy:

The moderns, even more so, the postmoderns, have willingly exposed the wound which would be inflicted upon philosophy by the unique mode in which poetry, literature, art in general, bears witness to our modernity. There will always have been a challenge laid down by art to the concept, and it is on the basis of this challenge, this wound, that it is necessary to interpret the Platonic gesture which can only establish the royalty of the philosopher by banishing the poets.<sup>15</sup>

Of course for Badiou this is an illegitimate replacement of philosophy by art, doubly illegitimate in fact, as art not only ventured outside its territory, but also changed the very essence of philosophy which is the formal condition of the emergence of truth, although it itself generates no truths. The “age of poets” emerged as a reaction to the weakness of contemporary philosophical thought but was also a testimony to the significant role of art, one that almost exceeded its power.

Jacques Rancière’s idea of aesthetic meta-politics resonates with the two above-mentioned concepts. In Rancière, art meets politics not in the area of “engagement” or “resistance,” but rather through a shared striving to reconfigure the space of perception, to transform the common social space. Rancière discusses the political character of art in an interview with Gabriel Rockhill:

It means that aesthetics has its own meta-politics. [...] There are politics of aesthetics, forms of community laid out by the very regime of identification in which we perceive art (hence pure art as well as committed art).<sup>16</sup>

The autonomy of art and its participation in the project of aesthetic meta-politics do not exclude but complement each other. Rancière defines

<sup>15</sup> Alain Badiou, “Philosophy and Art,” in *Infinite Thought* (London: Continuum, 2005), 76.

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of the Aesthetics* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), 50.

meta-politics as “thinking which aims to overcome political dissensus by switching scene.”<sup>17</sup> The aesthetic project is inscribed in this meta-politics inasmuch as they both share a common desire to transform the political field which is also the field of perception. This is why both concepts of art, shaped in modernity and continued in postmodernity, encounter what Rancière calls an original contradiction. Whether it is a concept of art that transforms into life, or a concept of art that resists life and through this becomes a source of emancipatory thought, in the end

these two ‘politics’ are in effect implicated in the same forms by which we identify art as the object of specific experience. [...] There is no art without a specific distribution of the sensible tying it to a certain form of politics. Aesthetics is such a distribution. The tension between these two politics threatens the aesthetic regime of art. But it is also what makes it function.<sup>18</sup>

I have briefly presented these three important concepts of art in order to highlight a certain feature that they share or, perhaps, a certain brand - one that I would not dare to call a similarity. The brand that they share is a conviction that art's entrance into the public sphere does not imply it becoming an expression of external, historically determined social and cultural conditions. Art transcends these, which does not mean that we must return to the concept of art as an expression of eternal and absolute values. And if this last concept of art opposes the modernist ones, especially those associated with the name of Walter Benjamin, the resistance also assumes a continuation. This emerging concept is not only critical of modernism but turns against postmodernism as well. Following Terry Eagleton, one may see how postmodernism resolved the contradictions inherent in the modernist formulations of arts. All artistic disciplines

find themselves accorded to a momentous social significance which they are really too fragile and delicate to sustain, crumbling from the inside as they are forced to stand in for God or happiness or political justice. [...] It is postmodernism which seeks to relieve the arts of this oppressive burden of anxiety, urging them to forget all such portentous dreams of depth, and thus liberating them into a fairly trifling sort of freedom.<sup>19</sup>

17 Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 33.

18 Ibid., 44.

19 Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 16.

I would prefer to refrain from passing judgment on the actual validity of this evaluation. Postmodernity is, as modernity was, difficult to conceptualize in clear terms. Jean-François Lyotard, a thinker as important for postmodernism as Walter Benjamin was for modernism, relates the concept of the end of grand narratives to the idea of art's freedom and its boundless potential for experimentation, but at the same time, applying his interpretation of the Kantian sublime to modernist art, he emphasizes the special role of artistic creation. The notion that art realizes social values obviously is not a modernist idea; it nonetheless assigns to art specific challenges and tasks.

Regardless of the details of the debate concerning the status of art within postmodernism, the end of this particular formation is now becoming increasingly clear. And it is this sense of postmodernity's end rather than its internal problems that lead to questions concerning the role of art, although – as it is common in such cases – those questions must be formulated within the broader context of the organization of the public sphere. It seems we are now only able to define features of this breakthrough from a negative perspective. I believe that among the axial symptoms of the end of postmodernity there are the return of grand narratives, the reclaiming of human subjectivity and the fading of the public sphere. Those processes result in the reemergence of the idea of universality as an answer to the besetting questions of post-postmodernity.

Each of these reactions to postmodernity would require a thorough analysis, but for the purpose of this essay, I would like to describe only what these tendencies mean to me. When Lyotard wrote about the end of the meta-narrative, the statement itself carried an aftertaste of a story with a didactically optimistic character. It turned out that after many dramatic, horrifying experiences of history, humanity finally managed to rid itself of the desire to be a universal subject, to speak with a single voice and strive toward a single goal. The failures of emancipatory metanarratives are at the same time a proof of a maturity that leaves behind the temptations of totalitarianism, even the one masked as representative democracy. Sadly, the fiasco of the concept becomes noticeable on several analytical levels. To mention only the most spectacular examples, there are narratives of such shocking simplicity as the victory of the forces of good over the "axis of evil," as well as reanimated eschatological stories of different religions and their varieties, from radical Islam to Christian fundamentalism. On the other hand, optimism radiates from several varieties of globalization, from the dreams of realizing cosmopolitical projects by the stoics or Kant, to the post-communist concept of the rise and fall of empire. Emancipatory illusions seem to regain their force and the voice of the skeptical philosopher can only warn that they are always of limited and faulty character. Maybe, however, Giorgio Agamben is right constructing a suggestive

counter-narrative of post-post-modernity, stressing that extreme political and technological domination focuses on "bio-power," resulting in the reduction of human existence to "bare life."<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, the return of the grand narratives entails the destruction of the public sphere which is not to be equated with the shrinking of public space. Quite to the contrary - as the means of communication (among them, the Internet) develop, the public space becomes monstrously big, but its growth remains in an inversely proportional relation to the size of the public sphere. The very possibility of separating the public sphere and space is in itself a sign of the times. The public sphere described by Habermas is constitutively conditioned upon going out, finding oneself in a space demarcated by the meeting places of clubs and organizations, but also by the circulation of press and political pamphlets. A shrinking or even disappearing public sphere takes place through the shrinking of public space. Prohibition of free assembly, closing down clubs, censorship or suppression of the press and banning the meetings of independent organizations - actions typical of totalitarian regimes - take place precisely in the public space although they are aimed at suppressing the public sphere. However, it turns out that the connection of the public sphere and public space is not indispensable.

The public sphere may be colonized from two directions. On the one hand, it is being increasingly subordinated to grand and lesser narratives of governments. The mechanisms of this domination are revealed by several contemporary philosophers, from Michel Foucault and his micro-physics of power, through Pierre Bourdieu and symbolic power, to perhaps the most radical among them, Giorgio Agamben, who in the concentration camp sees the modern *nomos* leaving little hope for the exchange of thoughts that could reach a consensus on politics. It becomes clear, however, that this colonization of notions and means of discourse does not have to entail a dismantling of the public space which may retain a living quality, filled with voices and passion, but devoid of the power to create its own response to this process of colonization.

The public sphere is also increasingly penetrated by the private area of subjectivity. In a book recalled earlier in this essay, Habermas stresses the impossibility of clearing this sphere of subjectivity which cannot be shed completely when we go outside. Nonetheless, the very decision to enter the space of discussion and the act of searching for a consensus mean that subjectivity is somewhat suspended and the rational discourse of the social subjects comes to the foreground. Many features of modernity and postmodernity could be

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20 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, transl. Daniel Hellen-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

explained through the peculiarities of the process separating subjectivity from the public sphere and space. This concerns, of course, also the role of art that first becomes divided into art for art's sake and art that enters the public sphere, often as a medium of communication or even expression of social values. Although this division has been repeatedly questioned and contested, it continues to remain a point of departure for such revisionary deliberations.

Subjectivity's conquest of the public sphere is on the one hand a process complementary to its colonization by the meta-narrative but, on the other hand, also contradictory to it. It is complementary in the sense that the majority of those narratives include an ideal subjectivity the corresponds to all the grand political narratives. It seems, however, that from the very beginning the process is destined to fail when confronted with resistance from real human subjectivity. This is where I trace the rebirth of the concept of subjectivity in contemporary humanist reflection. Naturally, one cannot go back to the illusory notion of the subject as an integrated whole capable, as construed by classical German philosophy, of grasping the entire available reality through intellectual effort. The subject that is reborn in the post-postmodern thought is a broken one, lost in internal contradictions. It is nonetheless the only force that can oppose the growing domination of dehumanizing meta-narratives making their return.

Using the idiom of psychoanalysis, Julia Kristeva perhaps presents the most distinctive concept of rebellion in the contemporary humanities, a revolt understood as an intimate transformation instead of a movement or social rebellion. This is how she formulates the concept in one of the interviews:

In contemporary society the world revolt means very schematically political revolution. People tend to think of extreme left movements linked to the Communist revolution or to its leftist developments. I would like to strip the word revolt of its purely political sense. In all Western traditions, revolt is a very deep movement of discontent, anxiety and anguish. In this sense, to say that revolt is only politics is a betrayal of this vast movement.<sup>21</sup>

Revolt, in opposition to revolution, confirms what is most crucial in psychic life, or – in the psychoanalytical language of the author – the return to the Self, to the “I.” This return, however, is always unstable and temporary, as it is in the conflict that we find pleasure and *jouissance*. Let me quote one more passage from the above mentioned interview, in order to further clarify Kristeva's thought:

21 Julia Kristeva, *Revolt, She Said* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2002), 99.

I think that in the automated modern world the depth of psychic life, the liberation of psychic life, the search for truth in the interrogation and the questioning are all aspects that are overlooked. We are expected to be performing entities. At best, we are asked to work well and to buy as much as possible. This whole problematic of interrogation, of the return to the self, the questioning and the conflicts that are sources of human freedom have become obliterated, rejected or even destroyed parameters. The culture that arises from this situation is a culture of entertainment rather than one of interrogation and revolt. I would say it is an essential kind of resistance in a technocratic society to rehabilitate memory along with the questioning and to allow the conflicts of the individual to take place.<sup>22</sup>

The sphere of imagination or the imaginary sphere (to use Jacques Lacan's category) is of key importance for the development of freedom as postulated by Kristeva. This is because imagination allows for stopping the attacks on our internal psychic life, and it is capable of transforming them, sublimating them and, as such, allows us to live and be free. Art is, naturally, crucial for the development of the imaginary sphere, because it allows to "translate" our mental states to ourselves.<sup>23</sup> Admittedly, Kristeva writes mainly about writers, since her analyses concern mostly literature, but one can easily apply her notions to other types of art that, using their own means, perform the same work. Joseph Brodsky would be definitely critical about the entire psychoanalytical assemblage of the concept of rebellion as presented by the French philosopher, but certain similarities between these two voices are difficult to deny. Both see the mission of art in revealing and strengthening the internal world of the viewer or reader. Art is first and foremost a way to encourage introspection, a search and questioning of that which the mind may see as obvious. It is equally clear for the poet born in totalitarian Russia and the psychoanalytical philosopher born in totalitarian Bulgaria that the political meaning of art lies in its distance from politics. Neither a connection to politics or any other ideology, nor its support for a political alternative decide the terms of engagement for art, which after all is determined by its ability for a "misanthropic conversation" or for questioning the seeming coherence of the psyche. The core of art's influence lies in pleasure, *jouissance* of negation, a discovery of internal conflicts. Imagination is inevitably inscribed in it, and indispensable to all internal, intimate revolts.

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22 Ibid., 100 – 101.

23 Julia Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt. The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis*, transl. Jeanine Herman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 254.

Such political reading of art assumes, of course, a transformation of the very notion of the political. The political is different from politics (in the French tradition, respectively, *le politique* and *la politique*), it is a way of life or of viewing social reality, and it meets art at its deepest level. Art as a project of meta-political aesthetics or as a space between the past and the present must eventually refer to the internal conflicts and tensions emerging in the internal lives of individuals. It seems, however, that such an autonomization of individuals leads in turn to the restitution of public space identical with the public sphere. Entering the public space but at the same time going beyond it, art remains in the condition of allowing this space to exist and be transformed. I would emphasize especially the latter as it is impossible to find an unchangeable public sphere or public space distinguishable from the private sphere. This is because the distinction itself always results from a certain political, or – to be precise – meta-political political project (as in Rancière) and its contents largely determine what is imaginable and what cannot take place in current politics. Art situated within this distinction is at the same time one of the conditions for its existence and is the reason why it is so difficult to see its manifestations in the public sphere which are not merely symptomatic or fleeting. Universalism in the aesthetic political project reveals itself only through subjectivity, in the defense of the individual and the unique world of the individual's internal conflicts.

*Translation: Anna Warso*

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Marta Leśniakowska

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## Experiencing Cultural Visualisations: the Anthropology of (re-)Construction<sup>1</sup>

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It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double [...] simulation threatens the difference between the “true” and the “false,” the “real” and the “imaginary.”

Jean Baudrillard, *The Precession of Simulacra*<sup>2</sup>

These are the forms the city could have taken if, for one reason or another, it had not become what we see today.

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*<sup>3</sup>

Matters of art often start where matters of life end. Life begins with birth; artwork may

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- 1 The presented text is an extended version of the paper presented at the 36th Conference on Literary Theory *Cultural Visualisations of Experience*, organised by the Department of Historical Poetics and Art of Interpretation of the Silesian University and the Department of Historical Poetics in the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Złoty Potok, September 18–21, 2008.
  - 2 Jean Baudrillard, *The Precession of Simulacra*, trans. Sheila Farla Glaser, accessed September 15, 2015, <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jean-baudrillard/articles/simulacra-and-simulations-i-the-precession-of-simulacra/>.
  - 3 Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1974), 32.

be born among the destruction: under the rule of ashes, in escape into mourning, due to absence.

Georges Didi-Huberman, *Génie du non-lieu*<sup>4</sup>

The proposed analysis of modernity from the perspective of critical post-modernist art history is aimed at showing how this perspective changes the relationship with images. What happens when the problem of image as a cultural visualisation of experience, that is as speakable language, is turned into a question of experiencing the image itself? The field of observation will be the analysis of experiencing a certain (specific) image of a city as a "record of social participation" (as Bourdieu would say) in which memory is observed, becoming visible as a performative category. The category of media spectacle as presentation – not representation – will emerge, while the titular anthropology of (re-)construction is concerned with the analysis of an aesthetic experience which leads to the generation of memory as a cultural experience and to the rehabilitation of the notion of emotion in perceiving/experiencing art. Consequently, following Gernot Böhme's aesthetic theory of emotional states [*Befindlichkeit*] or mood, the sentimental involvement will be put into focus. This will allow for the depiction of sensual/corporeal presence *against and within* image, which eventually will reveal the role of image as part of an aestheticized reality – the reality in which the creator consciously generates mood, implementing the politics of mood together with its hidden impact.<sup>5</sup>

In his book *Imagining the Modern City* (1999), a radical critic of culture James Donald treats the city as an "imagined environment." Not losing sight of the fact that "of course real cities exist," he asks:

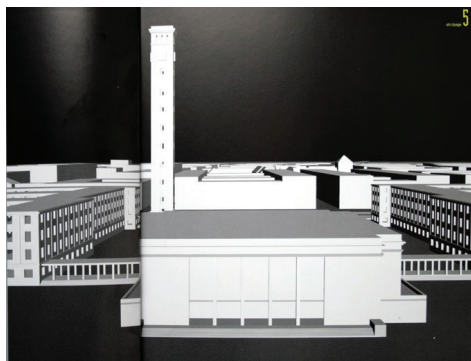
But why reduce the reality of cities to their thinginess, or their thinginess to a question of bricks and mortar? States of mind have material consequences. They make things happen. Starting from there, what particularly interests me is the power of the city as a category of thought. The city is an abstraction, which claims to identify what, if anything,

4 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Génie du non-lieu. Air, poussière, empreinte* (Paris: Hantise, 2001), 9. [translation M. Skotnicka]

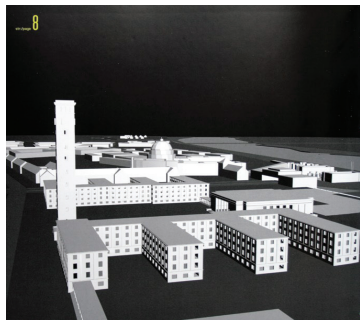
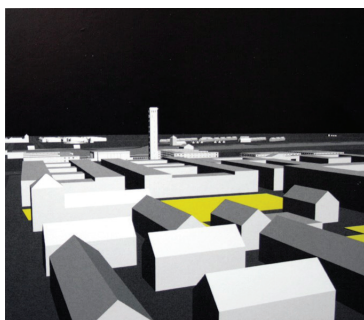
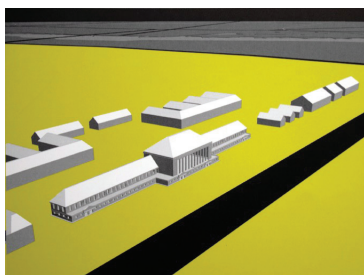
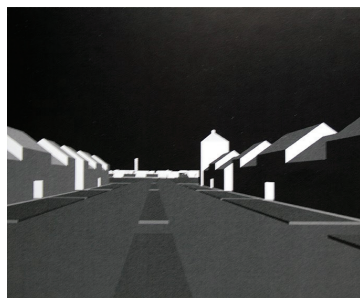
5 Cf. Gernot Böhme, *Filozofia i estetyka przyrody w dobie kryzysu środowiska naturalnego*, trans. Jarosław Merecki (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza, 2002); "Współczesna rehabilitacja estetyki przyrody. Na marginesie projektu Gernota Böhme. Dyskusja redakcyjna," *Sztuka i Filozofia* (2004): 5-54; Stanisław Czerniak, "Pomiędzy Szkołą Frankfurcką a postmodernizmem. Antropologia filozoficzna Gernota Böhme na tle klasycznych stanowisk antropologii filozoficznej XX wieku," foreword to: Gernot Böhme, *Antropologia filozoficzna. Ujęcie pragmatyczne* [wykłady z Darmstadt], trans. Piotr Domański, foreword and editing of the translation Stanisław Czerniak (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 1998), VII-XLVII.

is common to all cities. [...] The city we do experience – the city as state of mind – is always already symbolised and metaphorised.<sup>6</sup>

The artist Aleksandra Polisiewicz's project entitled *Wartopia* (2005) is precisely about the "imagined city," a simulacrum, a city as a state of mind. At first glance, it is read as a typical computer rendering of virtual urban planning. Reception of the work radically changes once the viewers learn about the genesis of the project which places them in a disturbingly ambiguous situation [illustration 1-11].



6 James Donald, *Imagining the Modern City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 8, 17, quoted after Janet Wolff, "Kobiety i nowoczesne miasto. Refleksje na temat flaneuse," in *Co to jest architektura? Antologia tekstów*, ed. Adam Budak (Kraków: Manggha. Muzeum Sztuki i Techniki Japońskiej, 2002), 260.



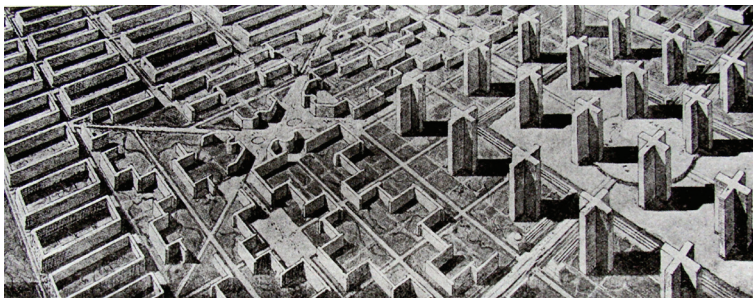
1-11. Aleksandra Polisieicz, Wartopia, 2005

The starting point of *Wartopia* are urban concepts of Nazi city planners developed during World War II which necessitated the complete destruction of Warsaw and replacing it with a newly built German city (*Die Neue Deutsche Stadt Warschau*) reduced to around 40 000 inhabitants and dedicated to Germans only [illustration 12].



12. Cityscape of Warsaw, watercolor by Ernst Vollbehrl, from the exhibition "Expedition to Poland in Pictures and Photographs," Berlin 1940.

The radical character of these plans – by no means dystopian, as they genetically originated equally from urban planning fantasies of 18th and 19th century visionaries and the utopias of 20th century's first avant-gardes [illustration 13-15]



13. Le Corbusier, Diorama of the Contemporary City for Three Million Inhabitants, Paris Salon d'Automne of 1922.



14. „Urban surgery” according to Le Corbusier: Le Corbusier points out the high-rises on the diorama of the „Voisin” plan for Paris (1922-1925), still frame from a 1925 film. The Pavilion of the Esprit Nouveau, Paris 1925.



15. Bruno Taut, Die Stadtkrone, a project of an ideal city, 1917.

filtered through Germanic myths of cultural colonisation – assumed creating an entirely new space meant to take the place of the city erased from the map. Such an initiative – supported by the dream of *tabula rasa* and Le Corbusier’s

concept of “urban surgery”<sup>7</sup> – enabled the realisation of the old founding myth of the New Beginning, “from the founding of the city” identified with the New History written for the New Man who “changes his environment and himself with it”<sup>8</sup> [illustration 16].



16. Adolf Hitler and architect Albert Speer standing next to the model of the German pavilion for the 1939 World's Fair in New York.

Out of the three time dimensions – past, present and future – the first was already deemed obsolete. Since the 1920s, influential German architects and art historians of the Weimar Republic such as Hans Hildebrandt and Cornelius Gurlitt, and institutions such as Freie Deutsche Akademie des Staedtebaus (Free German Academy of Urban Design) and the Construction Committee in Hamburg, scrutinised Le Corbusier's modernist ideas based on the concept of *tabula rasa*, regarding them as confirmation of the thesis that “the city of today, and certainly the city of tomorrow, has little in common with the city of the past.”<sup>9</sup> Theories of new urbanism, embedded in the

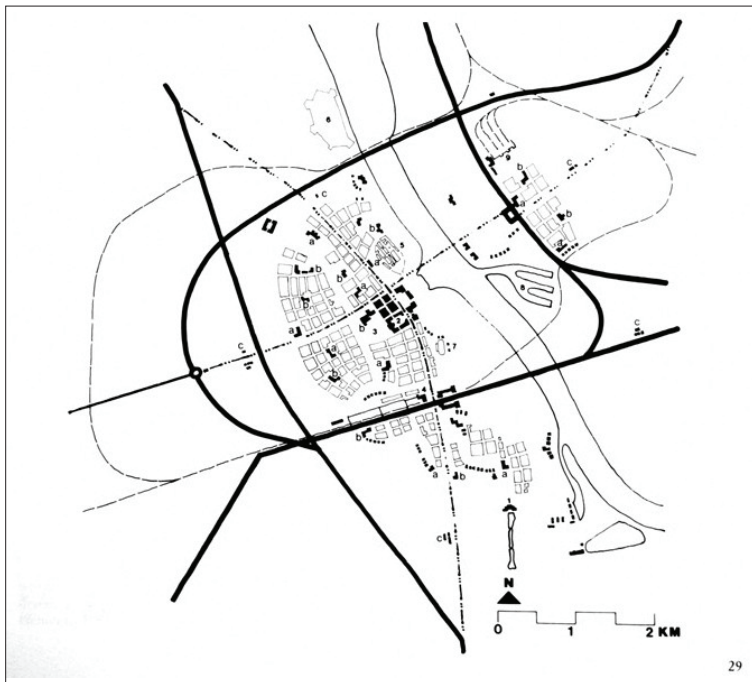
7 According to Le Corbusier, the vision of New Paris, “Plan Voisin” from 1923–1925, based on the “surgical” removal of the old town, “liberates” the city and introduces geometry to the nature or to the chaos of traditional urban agglomerations (Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme*, 1925).

8 Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme*, 1925, quoted after: Niels Gutschow, Barbara Klein, *Zagłada i Utopia. Urbanistyka Warszawy w latach 1939–1945* (Warszawa: Muzeum Historyczne m.st. Warszawy, 1995), 15.

9 Hans Hildebrandt in the introduction to the German edition of Le Corbusier's *Urbanisme Staedtebau* (Berlin–Leipzig, 1929) after Niels Gutschow, Barbara Klein, *Zagłada i utopia*, 15.

national-socialist (and analogically – communist) programme became the foundation of the new order in the 20th century.

The Nazi plans for Warsaw prepared in the years 1939-1943 by Hubert Gross, Oskar Dengel, Hans Hubert Leufgen, Friedrich Gollert (author of the book *Warsaw Under the German Rule*, 1942) and Friedrich Pabst within the framework of Hitler's "Germanisation of the East" and cultural colonisation, are well known to art historians [illustration 17].



17. Die Neue Deutsche Stadt Warschau, city plan, 1939/40.

Mistakenly called the "Pabst Plan," they were carefully analysed in the 1990s by two Polish and German scholars who, in their interpretations, deliberately adopted the perspective of "perpetrators" instead of victims. However, the cultural situation after the Holocaust brought to light by Adorno could not be omitted or ignored in these analyses. Niels Gutschow, an architect representing the post-war generation and the son of an architect who supported the national-socialist programme during the war, asks, "Is urbanism possible after the experience of Auschwitz?" And he answers:

Most probably this question has never been posed because architects and urban planners, both in Germany and Poland, were not afraid of *tabula rasa*. On the contrary, as representatives of a professional group feeling the vocation to design cities of the future in any circumstances, they were expecting it. The simultaneity of destruction and utopia will appear incomprehensible and astonishing only to the next generation.<sup>10</sup>

Aleksandra Polisiewicz, young Polish artist, uses the archives to read the Nazi urban plans of Warsaw anew. Hiding her female identity, she takes on an attitude of ostensible objectivism and distance typical of the contemporary post-colonial situation. It enables her to obtain her goal: to perform a Freudian disclosure, i.e. bring out what was and/or was supposed to be concealed in order to re/write the history. The artistic tactics of Aleksandra Polisiewicz oscillates between modern art strategies which relate to the problem of (re) construction of history and, by referring to psychoanalytical practices aimed at liberating the images of representation, problematises the issues of mediating memory. Such a visualization situates *Wartopia* in the area of critical art of post-memory.<sup>11</sup>

At first glance, Aleksandra Polisiewicz “only” makes computer reconstructions of history which update the Nazi visions with the use of 3D techniques and movement. She creates images specific to the aesthetics of computer graphics: flat and colourless, with a narrow palette and “bare,” stereometric, roughly moulded solids exposed by sharp, contrasting lighting coming from an “extraterrestrial” source, impossible to locate. These synthetic images straightforwardly demonstrate the intention of overwhelming the viewer: their visual attractiveness makes the Nazi architecture turn into a “fascinating fascism” – as Susan Sontag described Nazi aesthetics<sup>12</sup> – which introduces the viewer to the “re-enchantment of the world” and “reactivation of mythical powers,” acknowledged by Benjamin and Adorno.<sup>13</sup> For we do not observe here a computer image treated as an allegedly objective, transparent medium helping deliver a reconstruction/model identical with its primary source. Animations and complementary static images-frames shown on the screen seem to be staged,

10 Hildebrandt, 10–11.

11 Cf. Bartosz Korzeniecki, “Medializacja i mediatyzacja pamięci – nośniki pamięci i ich rola w kształtowaniu pamięci przeszłości,” *Kultura współczesna* 4 (2007), 5–23.

12 Susan Sontag, “Fascynujący faszyzm,” *Magazyn Sztuki* 12 (1996), 123–136.

13 Walter Benjamin, *Anioł historii. Eseje, szkice, fragmenty*, ed. Hubert Orłowski (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1996); Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialektyka Oświecenia. Fragmenty filozoficzne*, trans. Małgorzata Łukasiewicz (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1994).

resembling a performed landscape, an architectonic spectacle of “pure form” of the solids’ geometry, suspended in an abstract, endless landscape. Aleksandra Polisiewicz’s cybercity shapes an ambivalent image of the fictional world – like in a computer game – founded on a monumental, modernised classicism, stereotypical of fascist architecture associated with Hitler’s architect Albert Speer. The cultural cliché of so-called Nazi architecture, therefore, dug out from the “memory system” as “a ready image” that undergoes appropriate processing, equally concerns the problem of falsity/utopia of modernist “truth” as cultural hypostasis and fantasy (the problem of the falsity of “reconstruction”) as well as the emotions and obsessions which are present in the collective imagination determining social life. Taking up the problem of mythologisation of totalitarian systems and memory ruins, Polisiewicz deliberately employs the image of “bare” architecture: deprived of *decorum*, extremely synthetic solids are the figures of architectural bare bodies in their essentialism, bonding architecture and body within a single system of power.<sup>14</sup>

*Wartopia*’s 3D urban visions deploy animation. Thus they have all the features of a fictional film projection. It is the gist of what the theory of film – occupied with perception of image – defines as the “dynamic screen” (Lev Manovich): the relation between the moving image and the motionless body of the viewer who experiences the moving world in the image through the eye connected with the camera transmitting him into virtual space. In this relation “between the body and image,” states Hans Belting, the representation of image remains linked with the screen, whereas the synthetic image with users and their graphic desires inspired by haptic sensual experiences, mystical metaphor and hyperreal space. This is why the perceiving Polisiewicz’s cyberimages seems to require evoking the synthetic image’s novel features discovered by Belting when he points to the viewers and their receptive behaviour. Especially in view of what Bernard Stiegler calls “the discreet image,” since “the image does not exist at all” and is only the “remnant,” the “trace and inscription” of images mediated by the current media. This perspective allows us to interpret the current experience of the image anthropologically. Belting also reminds us that the deconstruction of the mimetic truth of images which takes place in digital imaging, did not begin concurrently with the emergence of digital technology – this topic has been the focus of all avant-gardes of the 20th century which undermined the traditional “trust towards image” and replaced it with “the fascination with the media spectacle,” which exposes its effects and generates its own graphic reality.<sup>15</sup> According to the

14 Cf. Jo Anna Isaak, “Representation and its (Dis)contents,” *Art History* 3 (1989): 362–366.

15 Hans Belting, *Antropologia obrazu. Szkice do nauki o obrazie* (Kraków: Universitas, 2007), 54.

anthropological perspective, says Belting, technical images are thus analysed from the point of view of their function in the media dialogue with the viewer. Simulation and animation play key roles here – they are the two achievements of fantasy, pushing the borders of the imagination which had already been present in Renaissance paintings, considered to be constructs of the precisely measured visual field. By showing “what happens between images today,” the motion image of new media (e.g. computer animation) cannot avoid being studied against the psychology of perception and Deleuze’s film theory introducing the sensorimotor situation, including dream-images and memories.<sup>16</sup> *Wartopia* may be situated in this perspective as well: as a dream-image in Deleuze’s understanding.

The artist used two kinds of images – animation and motionless renderings – to compose a hybrid out of two different media: film and photography. Independently of the medium, however, it is always about the image. In *Wartopia*, it is the “found” image: retrieved from the archive is the unrealised vision of Warsaw, designed by the Nazi architects and ideologists at the beginning of World War II in order to transform the historical capital of Poland into a garrison town for the “herrenmensch” of New Germany. We could thus quote after Belting that *Wartopia* is both the image of memory and the image of representation.<sup>17</sup> In computer animation, we experience the cyberspace linked with the image of the city that is hypothetical, but still possible to realise.

What is more important here, however, is the dystopian quality of *Wartopia* understood as an instrument of interpreting the world. We might assume (after Andrzej Turowski via Foucault) that Hubert Gross and Friedrich Pabst’s urban plans are pseudoheterotopias. In his interpretation of *Wartopia*, Turowski recalled the discrepancy between utopia and dystopia; the former emerges on the ruins of reality, the latter on the ruins of utopia. Utopias and dystopias are places deprived of real space but this only seemingly allows for considering the Nazi designs – and particularly *Wartopia* – as belonging to any of the two categories. It appears closer to pseudotopia and pseudoheterotopia – urban hybrids having no specific location because such geographic indication would in fact only simulate the knowledge of “where Warsaw once was.”

Heterotopias parasitising utopias try to locate them in space by which the space is embedded in the mythical or political order linking it with time and people. [It is a kind of] effectively performed utopia in which

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16 Ibid., 52–59.

17 Ibid., 103, 113.

all other real places that can be found within culture are simultaneously represented, contested and reversed.<sup>18</sup>

Foucault's perspective – defining heterotopias as places which are antithetic or alternative to the ones we live in – helps diagnose the current process of ousting heterotopias by the virtual reality of images, “virtual space outside of the world space,” as Belting puts it, i.e. as an image of a certain place, for instance a city, which is reflected in its counter-image. And “everywhere we use our eyes to search for places our bodies cannot access, we come across the tangle of references between places and images of places which is almost impossible to be resolved.”<sup>19</sup> The same situation can be encountered in *Wartopia*. As a VR (virtual reality) project, it introduces the viewer to a different reality whose aesthetically modelled artificiality<sup>20</sup> is felt so intensely that we are able to immerse in it deeper than in the film image – one of the reasons being the lack of distance characteristic to film and television. In VR, the distance is abolished which enables the viewer to experience the state of immersion in the image to such a degree that VR attains the status of a natural environment, functioning similar to eroticism.<sup>21</sup> The latter evokes an “ontological shift”: this world does not exist but its effects do.<sup>22</sup> This is because virtual reality, continuing the tradition of simulation, introduces one

18 Andrzej Turowski, “Ekran miasta,” in Aleksandra Polisiewicz *Wartopia*, Berlin – 518, Moskwa – 1122, Exhibition Catalogue (Warszawa: Galeria Le Guerr, 2006–2007), 63–63; Michel Foucault, *Inne przestrzenie*, trans. Agnieszka Rejniak-Majewska, *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2005), 120.

19 Hans Belting, *Antropologia obrazu...*, 82–83.

20 Wolfgang Welsch, “Procesy estetyzacji – zjawiska, rozróżnienia, perspektywy,” in id. *Estetyka poza estetyką*, trans. Katarzyna Guczalska, ed. Krystyna Wilkoszewska (Kraków: Universitas, 2005), 51.

21 See Joanna Walewska, “Wirtualność jako przyszłość mediów. Spojrzenie estetyczno-filozoficzne,” *Półrocznik. Pismo Instytutu Sztuk Audiowizualnych UJ* (2006): 18–23. “Suspended in computer space, the cyborg leaves the prison of the body and emerges in a world of digital sensation,” Michael Heim, *The Erotic Ontology of Cyberspace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), accessed September 10, 2015, <http://yin.arts.uci.edu/~studio/readings/heim.txt> <http://yin.arts.uci.edu/~studio/readings/heim.txt> <http://yin.arts.uci.edu/~studio/readings/heim.txt>

Heim mentions seven features of VR: simulation, interaction, artificiality, immersion, telepresence, full-body immersion, networked communication.

22 Tadeusz Miczka, *O zmianie zachowań komunikacyjnych. Konsumenci w nowych sytuacjach audiowizualnych* (Katowice: Księgarnia św. Jacka, 2002), 107. “Reality cannot be both real and unreal and since it is unreal and its agentive effects are real, it’s hard to clearly determine its ontological status,” Monika Miczka-Pajestka, *Podmiot i jego cyfrowa egzystencja in Estetyka wirtualności*, ed. Michał Ostrowicki (Kraków: Universitas, 2005), 421.

fundamental difference: it is no longer a fake space developed from a “normal” space, but it is space in which physical reality is disregarded, dismissed or abandoned.<sup>23</sup>

According to Belting, between images and places, there are connections which have not yet found their commentators: “Just as we may speak about the body as the place of images, we may also speak about geographical sites which only gained popularity due to artworks located in these places.”<sup>24</sup> It is a good starting point to observe how *Wartopia* sublimates the notion of place, being only an image of place which solely exists in the form of an image. This situation is accounted for by the anthropology of image, which indicates that visiting a place existing only as an image causes a shift in an image-place relation: the image becomes “the place of the unplaced” with no correspondence to real places and exists only as a metaphor. The graphic presence of absent places is of course an old anthropological experiment where the relationship between imaginary places and the real ones alters.<sup>25</sup> In Belting’s view, this process can be explained with the help of “ethnology of one’s own environment” (M. Augé) which finds its equivalent “in the gaze of those who suddenly re-discover the images of their own culture in museums and archives, and where history of images requires explanation, similarly to the images of other cultures – open to hermeneutic interpretation.”<sup>26</sup> The problem which is analysed here concerns the relationship between image-memories and the collective memory of culture whose technical body remains in the institutionalised memory of archives, which gets activated (animated) through collective imagination by both forgetting and recalling, granting the past a visible place in the present.

This context also embraces the issue of “reconstruction” bearing resemblance to the museum as a reservoir of memory-images. There are no doubts about Foucault’s thesis that, due to their relation with time caesuras, museums are “alternative places or heterotopias produced by modernity.”<sup>27</sup> the

23 Lev Manovich, *An Archeology of a Computer Screen*, accessed September 18, 2015, [http://manovich.net/content/04-projects/011-archeology-of-a-computer-screen/09\\_article\\_1995.pdf](http://manovich.net/content/04-projects/011-archeology-of-a-computer-screen/09_article_1995.pdf), 27-28: “Previously, the simulation depicted a fake space which was continuous with and extended from the normal space. [...] In VR, either there is no connection between the two spaces (for instance, I am in a physical room while the virtual space is one of an underwater landscape) or, on the contrary, the two completely coincide [...]. In either case, the actual physical reality is disregarded, dismissed, abandoned.”

24 Belting, *Antropologia obrazu*, 76.

25 Ibid., 77, 80-81.

26 Ibid., 83-84 and further.

27 Foucault, quote after: Belting, *Antropologia obrazu*, 86.

heterotopicality of the museum makes it belong to another time than its own collection, while its role lays in creating a place beyond the time when these items took part in the life process. Belting specifies that the museum, excluded from the flow of time, is dedicated to images representing another time which makes them symbols of memory, carrying certain understandings of the past:

In the museum, we replace the world we live in with the place we understand as the image of place of yet another kind. We perceive artworks we see in the museum as images painted for another time which nevertheless belong now to the museum only. It seems that world cultures are moving away from books and museums where they are archived, but not animated any more.<sup>28</sup>

In this pessimist view of the imaginary place, place exists only as an image inscribed in the modern (individual or collective) experience. *Wartopia* as a “reconstruction” of memory/place straightforwardly appeals to this concept. An imaginary place is what Benjamin describes as “seizing hold of a memory:”<sup>29</sup> it resembles images produced in a dream, inaccessible in reality but perceived solely as image. This gives *Wartopia* the quality of a movie screen.

The scenario of *Wartopia* is constructed by means of comparing two complementary types of images: computer animation and motionless images repeating shots from animation. This simple idea refers to two types of time and perception: active and passive. The state close to hallucination and dream (described by film theoreticians Marc Augé and Christian Metz), which the viewer falls into during the film, is particularly apparent in such computer animations which draw the viewer inside the image. Consequently, the moving visualisation of architecture, which only creates a suggestion of the real experience, is closer to the state we are in while dreaming. The radical application of time upon an image, mentioned by Belting,<sup>30</sup> is typical of films where the viewer identifies himself with the imaginary situation, while mental images entertained by the viewer can be identified with images of technical fiction. This is almost perfectly exemplified by *Wartopia* which reveals its ambiguity by mixing the real with the fictional. The plans – existing in reality, although

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>29</sup> “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’ (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger,” Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 255.

<sup>30</sup> Belting, *Antropologia obrazu*, 96–97.

never put to life – lead to technofiction, a cyberutopia which, as Belting claims, “promises, with technological pathos, liberation from references to the real world.”<sup>31</sup>

*Wartopia*, therefore, is pure Virtual Reality (VR) endowed with the new, technological authority of fiction which appears to be real. Aleksandra Polisiewicz’s project may be perceived as a direct reference to the situation diagnosed by Belting who had observed how modern art was becoming increasingly technological and used technology to create mental images and images of memories which are then offered to our graphic memory as quotations.

The artist’s project enters into a polemic with 20th century art as we know it from institutional discourses and spaces. “Reconstruction” (I’m using the quotes here on purpose) tells an unrealised story; its assessment performed by official Polish historiography is unequivocally negative in view of the idea of *tabula rasa* put to life within Germany’s colonisation policy. Computer images of *Wartopia*, however, also reveal what stands behind and beyond this politically functionalized assessment: they turn into a critical art history aimed at something more than only exposing the ambiguity of the official interpretation. The Nazi plans retrieved from the archives considered to be the reservoir of history, are typical *objet trouvé* which tell a new history. Subject to purely aesthetic processing, the cyber-vedutes use their painting-like quality to show what has been deliberately omitted and/or ruled out from earlier interpretations of the Nazi plans: not only, or not exclusively, the menace of the totalitarian city but also the dangerously tempting beauty of “fascinating fascism” symbolised by the monumental and modernised neoclassicism. Buildings suspended in black, cosmic emptiness of the endless landscape, clinically pure and deprived of people, tempt, hypnotise and fascinate. The cybercity loses its identity and its bond with reality as a geographical site and becomes an abstract space of pure fiction but also a “new mirror” reflecting architecture as an image-metaphor of the world. The question about “the truth of reconstruction” is not legitimate any more, since the analysed German projects have been complemented by the artist with components that the originals had been missing, such as elements borrowed from the model residential district (Wilcze Gardło) built in Gliwice (the artist’s hometown) for SA and SS members who inhabited it between 1937 and 1941.

In the virtual model of *Wartopia* as a “simulated city,” the stereotypical image of so called fascist architecture is designed to evoke the recipient’s psycho-emotional reactions. What gets displayed is the mechanism of falsifying history artistically represented by “reconstructions.” Not incidentally, the latter

31 Ibid., 102, 105.

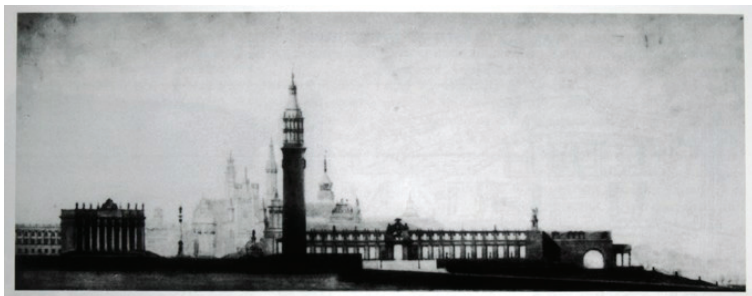
keep all the qualities of a “beautiful vedute” – ideal topographical images. The new medium unveils its hidden trait, but by no means does it eliminate the old conflict of pictorialism and documentalism. It only dismisses the documentalist claims in favour of the computer-made spectacle (presentation) where the main role is played by the old category of beauty, getting in through the back door.

Aleksandra Polisiewicz's project is a narration which reveals all the rules of the psychological influence of architecture. According to the artist's intentions, the second part of *Wartopia* is supposed to be the sarcastic “continuation” of her critical history of totalitarian systems in this part of Europe. Although the Nazi plans remained on paper, the idea of *tabula rasa* which had governed them was implemented within the second totalitarian regime. The latter part of *Wartopia* is meant to describe the “reconstruction” of socialist Warsaw prepared by architect Edmund Goldzamt, a graduate of the Moscow Architectural Institute and the main ideologist of Polish social realism. Almost at the same time when Hubert Gross was drawing the “Abbau der Polenstadt” (“Liquidation of the Polish City”) plans with the national-socialist Gauforum tower in its centre and Friedrich Pabst was sketching the Volkshalle in place of the Royal Castle, Goldzamt was designing the new Socialist Warsaw, with

the Liberation tower-monument next to the Pantheon of Revolutionaries [illustration 18-19] in the spirit of *tabula rasa*. Simultaneously, leftist architects associated with Helena and Szymon Syrkus and their Architecture and Urban Design Studio in Żoliborz (Warsaw) consistently developed the vision of functionalistic “Warszawski Zespół Miejski” (1940-1945) by introducing – after Le Corbusier (just like the Nazis) – the “geometry into the chaos” of the historical structure of the city. Some of these ideas



18. Socialist Warsaw, project, illustration by Edmund Goldzamt, Moscow 1945.



19. Cityscape of Socialist Warsaw, project, illustration by Edmund Goldzamt, Moscow 1945.

were implemented during the post-war “restoration” as figures of the new order.

The two totalitarian visions: fascist and communist which affected one European city within a short period of time are more than signatures of the dystopian dimension of the 20th century. By means of the digital medium used by Aleksandra Polisieicz, they turn into the critical discourse concerning the crisis of presentation and representation, trapped between the problem of the modernist truth, postmodernist representation and postmodernist experience as a spectacle.<sup>32</sup>

*Translation: Marta Skotnicka*

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Frank Ankersmit, *Narracja, reprezentacja, doświadczenie. Studia z teorii historiografii*, ed. Ewa Domańska (Kraków: Universitas, 2004).

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Grzegorz Grochowski

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## Where Codes Meet: On the Literary Uses of Iconic Signs

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### 1.

Despite its solid grounding in the field of semiotically oriented poetics and its recent surge in popularity thanks to cognitive linguistics, the category of iconicity is not a homogeneous one and, in the literature on literature, encompasses a variety of incommensurable areas of problems.<sup>1</sup> In the most traditional and perhaps somewhat old-fashioned view, iconicity is equated with imagery and with the capacity that words have to form illustrative images that stimulate the sensibility of the receiver.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 Examples of the growing interest in the phenomenon of iconicity, and a testimony to the variety of ways in which this category is understood, can be found in the book series *Iconicity in Language and Literature* (eds. Olga Fischer and Max Nänny, *Form Miming Meaning* (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: Benjamins, 1999); *The Motivated Sign*, eds. Olga Fischer and Max Nänny, (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: Benjamins, 2001); *From Sign to Singing*, eds. Wolfgang Müller and Olga Fisher (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: Benjamins, 2003). For a discussion of various interpretations of the same term and a study of its corresponding phenomena by a Polish author, see Zofia Mitosek, e.g., "Ikoniczność" and "Słowo ikoniczne?," in *Mimesis. Zjawisko i problem* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1997).
  - 2 See, for example, Zdzisława Kopczyńska, "Malowanie słowami," in *Język a poezja* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1976); ed. Agnieszka Morawińska *Słowo i obraz* (Warszawa, 1982); Barbara

Meanwhile, academics subscribing to the ideas of structuralism (among them Roman Jakobson, to name but one) emphasised the problem of motivation in the poetic sign, analysing the artistic operations and strategies that lead to the transformation of arbitrary symbols into recognizable counterparts to extra-textual phenomena.<sup>3</sup> In the study of literary communication, it is iconicity as mimetic formalism, understood as the “quotationality” of statements, that achieved the most privileged position.<sup>4</sup> In this case, the subject of study was the relationship of likeness shared by given segments of a literary narrative and the textual models of certain utilitarian texts which they imitated. Finally, an issue that enjoys great interest, chiefly due to the influence of cognitivism, is the diagrammaticity of statements, analyzed in their myriad aspects and different textual levels.<sup>5</sup> It is this final matter, admittedly, that offers the most promising perspectives, as it applies to both utilitarian and artistic texts, is manifested at the local and global levels (i.e. the syntax of a sentence and the overall composition of the text), and encourages studies on empirical linguistic data as well as reflections on the perception of the receiver, and on the mechanisms by which one picks up various analogies and parallels.

While I appreciate the significance of the above perspectives and wish to state my particular sympathy to the final viewpoint, I would also like to point out another issue and examine one more possible approach to the phenomenon of iconicity in literature. I am referring not to the “iconic word,”<sup>6</sup> in its various senses, but to the use of strictly iconic signs in linguistic messages: in other words, the topic of iconicity in literature, rather the iconicity of literature itself. The scope of this article will thus exclude

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Sienkiewicz, “Literackie ‘teorie widzenia’” (Poznań, 1992); Seweryna Wysłouch, “O malarskości literatury,” in *Literatura i semiotyka* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2001).

- 3 Examples include the observations on the symbolism of sounds and the multi-leveled motivation of poetic signs formulated in the seminal work by Roman Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” in *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory*, ed. Ken Newton (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1997).
- 4 See, for example, Maria Renata Mayenowa, “Pojęcie wyrażenia cudzoślowowego a sytuacja komunikacyjna literatury,” in *Poetyka teoretyczna* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1974); Janusz Lalewicz, “Mimetyzm formalny i problem naśladowania w komunikacji literackiej,” in *Tekst i fabuła*, eds. Czesław Niedoziński and Janusz Sławiński (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1979); Michał Głowiński, “Mimesis językowa w wypowiedzi literackiej,” *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (1980).
- 5 See, for example, *Iconicity in Syntax*, ed. John Haiman (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: Benjamins, 1985); Anna Duszak, “Tekst naturalny,” in *Tekst, dyskurs, komunikacja międzykulturowa* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1998); *Kognitywne podstawy języka i językoznawstwa*, ed. Elżbieta Tabakowska (Kraków: Universitas, 2001).
- 6 I borrow this term from the above-mentioned study by Mitosek, “Słowo ikoniczne?”

such crucial aspects of the relationship between the verbal and the visual as description, ekphrasis, intersemiotic translation, the aestheticisation of the linguistic sign (as represented by *carmina figurata* and calligrams, for example), and the textual equivalisation of the image. I will not analyze situations in which a piece of literature refers to a certain work of visual art as a theme, be it alluded to or explicitly named. I would like to focus this study on units that might be described, to use a concept from the field of art history, as “semantic enclaves” appearing in contemporary artistic texts. Mieczysław Wallis, from whom I have borrowed this term, uses it to describe “such a part of a work of art that is composed of signs of a different type, or belonging to a different system, than the work as a whole,”<sup>7</sup> and thus comprises a certain relatively independent, complete constituent that follows its own rules and presents its own semantic potential. As an example of such a phenomenon, Wallis mentions *verba visibilia*, or writing placed in paintings, from the banderoles bearing dialog or sententiae featured on Medieval canvases, to the inscriptions pasted by Pablo Picasso and Max Ernst onto their avant-garde collages. The analysis and comparison of many diverse examples demonstrates the dynamic nature of the relationship between the image and word in different eras, cultural formations, and artistic styles. Depending on the time and place in which a particular work was created, we observe a change in the form of “quoting,” or the combining of incommensurable signs, the hierarchies governing the relationships between codes, the ideological and aesthetic justifications for the use of inscriptions, and the functions ascribed to such semantic interjections.

I am, however, interested in the opposite situation, one that nevertheless refers to the relationship between the word and the image: namely, such works in which images — not in the sense of poetic visions, rhetorical figures, or realist descriptions, but as literal drawings, maps, or diagrams — are introduced into the literary text. The presence of such visual elements in a book has traditionally been associated with the category of illustration, which serves to facilitate the understanding of messages conveyed through the use of language; it is an ornament intended to increase the aesthetic attractiveness of a given volume. In a similar understanding, the image is associated mainly with popular publications, didactic or utilitarian literature (including, for example, cookbooks and travel guides), as well as children’s books. It is safe to say that the phenomenon of illustration has rarely captured the interest of scholars in the fields of textual linguistics, literary theory, or even semiotics, likely owing to the optional nature of the relationship between the

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7 Mieczysław Wallis, “Napisy w obrazach,” in *Sztuki i znaki. Pisma semiotyczne* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1983), 191.

verbal and the visual in such arrangements.<sup>8</sup> The matter becomes somewhat more complicated when we approach the subject of illustrations created by the very author of the book. This raises the rather obvious question of the degree to which we are to treat them as an irremovable part of the work, as a “testimony to the author’s interpretation.”<sup>9</sup> Yet, even in situations such as the above, the answer is frequently in the negative, as evident in the common editorial practice of excluding such drawings from the canonical version of a given text.<sup>10</sup>

In contemporary literature, however, and particularly in prose, there are instances of such works in which the function of the image is not limited to illustrating the antecedent, autonomous linguistic message. We may thus posit that the semiotic status of visual signs in literary communication is changing before our eyes. The image is ceasing to be an aesthetic addition that serves merely to illustrate the contents of the verbal layer, and is becoming an integral part of the narrative or lyrical monologue, taking its place in the specific relationship of communication and becoming another part of the various tensions involved in the creation of meaning. The phenomenon I intend to examine should thus be considered a special case — perhaps a somewhat peculiar yet significant and informative one — within the broader problematics described in terms of the correspondences, relatedness, influence, transpositions, and interferences in art.<sup>11</sup> It should also be noted that the last category seems most appropriate in the given context, as we are concerned not with the relationships that emerge from the comparison of the inherent qualities of individual disciplines, but rather with the consequences of an incidental juxtaposition, one that leads

8 An interesting attempt to describe such ties can be found in the study by František Daneš, “Text a jeho ilustrace,” *Slovo a slovesnost* 56 (2009): 174–189. See also Wysłouch, “Tekst i ilustracja,” in *Literatura a sztuki wizualne* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1994). It is likely apparent that we are now approaching the matters that constitute the subject of our attention.

9 Wysłouch, “Ilustracja autorska – casus Brunona Schulza,” *Teksty Drugie* 5 (1992): 120.

10 For an examination of this topic, see, for example, Wysłouch, “Tekst i ilustracja”; Jerzy Szyłak, *Poetyka komiksu. Warstwa ikoniczna i językowa* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2000), 154–157.

11 See, for example, Oskar Walzel, “Wzajemne naświetlanie się sztuk,” in *Teoria badań literackich za granicą*, ed. Stefania Skwarczyńska, vol. 2, part 1 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1974); Teresa Cieślukowska, Janusz Sławiński, eds., *Pogranicza i korespondencje sztuk* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1980); Mieczysław Porębski, *Obrazy i znaki* (Kraków: 1986); Mary Anne Caws, *The Art of Interference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Maryla Hopfinger, *W laboratorium sztuki XX wieku. O roli słowa i obrazu* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1993); Adam Dziadek, *Obrazy i wiersze. Z zagadnień interferencji sztuk w polskiej poezji współczesnej* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo UŚ, 2004).

to the overlapping of two different systems of signs within the space of a single text.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, the phenomenon in question is not an entirely new one, nor some great revolution in how statements are formed, but rather a growing trend. Measures of this sort remained rare for several decades and may have appeared to be an isolated form of extravagance or a one-off experiment that failed to become a widespread or recognizable trend. Among the examples that achieved the privileged status of an isolated endeavor motivated by the particular poetics and theme of the work were, in the 1940s, the use of original illustrations in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, and, somewhat later, in the 1970s, the visual depictions inserted into the narrative of Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*. A separate (and rather small) group comprised artists who were professional drawers, caricaturists, and illustrators such as Roland Topor and Edward Gorey, who attempted to use their experience in the visual arts to create experimental and humorous narrative texts (Gorey even went as far as to make triviality one of the main premises of his aesthetic, known as "Goreyography").<sup>13</sup> Noteworthy examples of the use of such strategies in Polish literature can be observed in the achievements of writers belonging to the milieu known as "young prose," though individual instances can also be found in poetry, even in the output of authors who are not part of the younger generation (these include Witold Wirpsza, author of *Komentarz do fotografii* [*A Commentary on Photographs*], which binds, into a single whole, poems, photographs and inscriptions, forming a peculiar paraphrase of the old form of the emblem, and Jacek Durski, whose book *Uderza Ziemia* [*Earth Strikes*] can actually be classified as either a poetry book or an album of illustrations). Of course, considering the actual state of affairs, it must be admitted that books of this type remain a minority, paling in comparison — both in terms of their number and popularity — to homogeneous linguistic messages, that is, literature based solely on the written word. Despite the popular conviction about the dominance of the image in contemporary culture, it would be difficult to find an abundance of works displaying such multimedia poetics. This

12 On the subject of the category of interference in art, cf. Dziadek, *Obrazy i wiersze*, 14–16.

13 Among the younger generation of Polish artists, the one most closely associated with this group would likely be Maciej Sieńczyk, the author of charming *Hydriola* (Warszawa: Lampa i Iskra Boża, 2005), in which the exaggerated style of both the verbal narrative and the visual layer serve to evoke a grotesque reality that borders on a hallucinatory play of associations, a surreal, macabre story, and a pastiche on old-fashioned popular literature. However, the autonomy of the image is so far-reaching that one doubts whether the work in question can still be considered a literary text.

is not necessarily a refutation of general, sociological, or anthropological diagnoses regarding the condition of modern civilization. One may assume, for instance, that the dominance of the visual is manifested in the waning social prestige of literature and the concurrent rise of other media, rather than in transformations occurring within literary discourse itself. On the other hand, our general and academic awareness appears to ascribe significant relevance to various multi-coded messages; even among the numerous projects devoted to literary theory, there are vocal opinions critical of the “verbocentrism” of poetics, as well as calls for the creation of a multimedia literary genology or stylistics.<sup>14</sup> Though works that employ iconic signs remain scarcer than novels or short story collections based exclusively in the medium of the word, even these individual, isolated texts are places in which crucial tensions that dynamise contemporary literature, and even the entire space of social communication, are manifested. There have not yet been any in-depth and thorough theoretical studies devoted to the issue of such intratextual interaction between various signs (despite plenty of notable examinations of certain parts and aspects), nor any attempts to verify general theses through specific analyses, which is why this analysis, which I will attempt to base on specific examples as often as possible, can only be considered a superficial reconnaissance.<sup>15</sup>

## 2.

Let us begin by identifying the textual phenomena that are to be interpreted as icons, and by determining the initial semantic potential of such units. As we remember, the iconic sign, according to the definition by Charles S. Peirce, is an element that replaces an object for a certain receiver through its resemblance to the object itself, due to certain features shared with that which it signifies (as in the relationship between the drawing of a horse and

14 See, for example, Wyśłouch, “Werbocentryzm – uzurpacje i ograniczenia,” in *Literatura i semiotyka*; Edward Balcerzan, “W stronę genologii multimedialnej,” in *Genologia dzisiaj*, eds. Włodzimierz Bolecki and Ireneusz Opacki (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2000); Ewa Szczęsna, “Opowiadanie i media,” *Pamiętnik Literacki* 2 (2002).

15 There have been many more studies devoted to the various ways of imparting one group of signs with features characteristic of other classes of phenomena, as is the case with the previously-mentioned aestheticization of the word, visible in *carmina figurata*, for instance, and particularly in concrete poetry (see, for example, Piotr Rypson, *Obraz słowa. Historia poezji wizualnej* (Warszawa: Akademia Ruchu, 1989); Tadeusz Sławek, *Między literami. Szkice o poezji konkretnej* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1989); Wyśłouch, “Od słowa do ornamentu. Semiotyczne problemy poezji konkretnej,” in *Literatura i semiotyka*).

the signified horse, to use one of the most frequent and trivial examples).<sup>16</sup> It is thus sometimes referred to as a representative sign (as its main quality is its capacity to represent through imitation, its ability to actualize selected qualities of the denoted object) or a motivated sign, in contrast to the arbitrary, conventional symbol (which include units of a verbal code, among others).<sup>17</sup> Such is the role in which drawings are usually included in the text, be they drawn by the author or selected by him (it should be mentioned that not all images can be interpreted as iconic signs, which, by their very nature, often represent abstract meanings, as is the case with the classic example of the “peace dove”). The next group comprises icons that I would tentatively describe as “utilitarian illustrations,” or various technical or anatomical cross sections, maps, and plans as well as manuals in which the visual element represents a certain action and illustrates a recommended method of operation. And, finally, though somewhat hesitantly, I would include photographs in this list of visual inserts. One should, of course, keep in mind that the semiotic status of the photograph remains a contentious issue and that even Peirce himself did not treat the photograph as an icon. He believed that the picture, as a product of the optical process of reproduction, retained a direct, physical relationship with its object, and thus, despite the visible likeness, became an indexical mark or situational index.<sup>18</sup> There are, however, argu-

16 A detailed discussion of Peirce's theses can be found in Hanna Buczyńska-Garewicz, *Wartość i fakt. Rozważania o pragmatyzmie* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1970) and *Znak – znaczenie – wartość. Szkice o filozofii amerykańskiej* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1975). The epistemological aspects of the concept have been explored in Max Bense, *Vermittlung der Realitäten: Semiotische Erkenntnistheorie* (Baden-Baden: Agis-Verlag, 1969). For a critical discussion of the category of likeness as the basis for signification, see Włodzimierz Ławniczak, “Uwagi o pojęciu znaku ikoniznego,” *Studia Semiotyczne* 2 (1971).

17 One should naturally be aware of the various arguments raised against the premises behind isolating such a category, and particularly of the criticism expressed by Umberto Eco, who regarded the concept of natural likeness as a relic of naïve magical consciousness and attempted to prove that the perception of a visual analogy is conditioned upon the mastery of perceptive conventions. Images — according to the quoted line of argument — thus do not constitute a separate class of motivated representations contrasted with arbitrary linguistic signs, but form, together with symbols, a cohesive repertoire of conventionalized signs. However, this does not necessarily entail a rejection of the concept itself: Eco, for example, proposes its reinterpretation, recognizing that the iconic sign refers not to the thing itself, but to its perceptual schema. (Umberto Eco, *Nieobecna struktura*, trans. Adam Weinsberg, Paweł Bravo (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo KR, 1996), 136). See also Wyslouch, “Znak ikonizny w koncepcji Umberto Eco — nowatorstwo i niekonsekwencje,” in *Literatura i semiotyka*.

18 Charles Sanders Peirce, “What Is a Sign?,” in *The Essential Peirce. Selected Philosophical Writings. Volume 2 (1893-1913)*, Peirce Edition Project, ed. S. Pierce (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 5-6.

ments that allow us to lessen the strictness of this ruling to a certain degree. It is worth noting, for example, that the father of pragmatism focused primarily on photographs created with the snap of the shutter, pictures that automatically recorded what happened to appear before the lens, while later artworks often revealed intentional processing, many forms of original interference into the process of automatic exposure, as well as various levels of semiotic transformation of the photographic image, consequently weakening the direct, indexical relationship with the object.<sup>19</sup> Even if we conclude that such an image is a mechanical copy, a replica of the appearance of an object, rather than its visual representation and a unit of semiosis, it can surely change its semiotic nature when affected by a particular context, used in a certain statement, equipped with communicative intent, and ascribed to a given subjective instance. When integrated into the statement, photographs undoubtedly begin to acquire semantic associations and encourage interpretative activity on the part of the reader, while also indicating the potential object of the reference thanks precisely to this relationship of likeness, accentuating the iconic potential of the images.<sup>20</sup> Such a broadening of the scope of the term seems in line with the main current of Peirce's semiotics, which links meaning to the pragmatic purpose of the sign and to a dynamic performance, to processual semiosis and the effect of the interpretant, rather than a stable arrangement of systemic relationships.<sup>21</sup>

The issue of the semantic capacity of visual signs has, on multiple occasions, been the object of semantic analysis in the field of literary theory. It has been observed, for example, that of the different varieties of meaning, iconic messages overwhelmingly employ the referential function, or a reference

19 See, for example, Hopfinger, *O roli słowa i obrazu*, 69.

20 This classification has been accepted by some scholars. Mieczysław Wallis, mentioned above, acknowledges that "iconic signs are likenesses in the broadest sense: sculptures, paintings, drawings, illustrations, photographs, and films" (Wallis, "O znakach szczególnych," in *Sztuki i znaki*, 35; emphasis added). See also, for example, Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977); Krzysztof Olechnicki, *Antropologia obrazu. Fotografia jako metoda, przedmiot i medium nauk społecznych* (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2003); Sławomir Sikora, *Fotografia: między dokumentem a symbolem* (Izabelin: Świat Literacki, 2004).

21 Peirce, for instance, admitted that "one and the same sign may be at once a likeness and an indication" ("What Is a Sign?," 8), thus practically paving the way for an understanding of iconicity, indexicality, and symbolism as aspects of the sign that are actualized through reception, rather than using them as separate categories of classification applying to the substantial form of the message. In result, it becomes a feasible and attractive proposal to associate iconicity with the mode of reading and to replace the objective nature of the sign with a question about the decisions made by the subject, as a result of which a given element becomes an icon.

to the denoted object. For this reason, it may even be assumed that the iconic sign occupies a space somewhere between signifying and representation: while a symbolic sign profiles the indicated object through its name and includes it in a web of recognizable classifications, the iconic sign reproduces the ambivalence of the object, in a sense, not always resolving its actualized categorical membership. It is characterized by a certain suspension between the poles of improvisation and codification. On the one hand, we know that visual messages do not have an unambiguously defined dictionary or grammar, nor do they refer us to a complete repertoire of discrete units or employ a codified set of rules governing selection and combination. Due to their integrity, neither drawings nor photographs can be subjected to rigorous morphological analysis.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, it is impossible to make an image mean whatever we want it to (as long as we do not arbitrarily impose on it an entirely external and foreign meaning with the use of an inscription, for instance). Iconic messages, as a number of studies in the field of semiotics have shown, rely on general perceptual codes (though these are not subject to such strict grammaticalization as the linguistic system and rather take the form of nebulous connotative repertoires) that select certain qualities of an object as relevant and crucial to the manner in which its identity is captured. It is precisely this reference to imaginative stereotypes that enables a certain enrichment of the visual signs with more detailed content, while the reduction or elimination of some qualities and the emphasizing of others makes it possible, to a certain degree, to modify the nature of the references by portraying an object in one way or another. Another means through which different shades of meaning can be introduced is the style and composition of the depiction: the use of formulaic imagery, for example, usually leads to the universalization of the reference; by diminishing the features considered to be determinants of negative or positive connotations, one can degrade or elevate an object; meanwhile, in the realm of suprasegmental features, certain visual solutions may carry connotations of precision and accuracy of reproduction or a hurried execution and sketchy portrayal; and, finally, at the compositional level, the placement of an object on either the left or right side of a field suggests either familiarity or newness.<sup>23</sup> All of these mechanisms, however, rely

22 For more on this subject, see, for example Lalewicz, "Przedstawianie i znaczenie. Próba analizy semilogicznej rysunku (1–2)," *Sztuka* 4–5 (1979).

23 See, for example, Rudolf Arnheim, *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Gunther R. Kress, Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (London: Routledge, 1996). Though it does not deal specifically with semantic categories, one should also mention the seminal work by Ernst Hans Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960). The works of Roland

on optional qualities of images and remain rather in the realm of cognitive inclinations or preferences, never achieving the position of obligatory rules and only barely approaching the status of a possible grammar of perception. In result, the icon — according to Umberto Eco — “though recognizable, is always burdened by a certain ambiguity and more readily denotes general things than it does detailed ones.”<sup>24</sup>

The above-mentioned privileging of references has occasionally led to the questioning of the efficacy with which iconic signs fulfill other communicative purposes. Maria Renata Mayenowa claimed, for example, that a “purely iconic message is incapable of conveying metalinguistic information,” which, in her view, was the cause of the “fundamental non-metaphorality of iconic signs.”<sup>25</sup> This assertion might be true if we were to narrow our perspective to encompass only the primary meanings evoked by isolated iconic signs stripped of any communicative context. The question I find most interesting, however, is that of the artistic reinterpretation of visual elements: determining the functions ascribed to them in literary discourse and demonstrating the way in which they are incorporated into the semantic structure of the statement. Undoubtedly the simplest and most basic meaning-forming operation is the recontextualization of the icon, i.e., the placement of the visual sign in an unconventional communicative context, juxtaposing it with a system of expectations geared towards extracting specific messages.<sup>26</sup> Treated in this manner, even the simplest and most literal picture can absorb figurative, allegorical, and metaphorical meanings. Our perceptual apparatus, when appropriately directed beforehand, demonstrates a great eagerness to find such features of the received message that may turn out to be relevant in a given situation. Of course, in the case of a work of literary art, the role of this regu-

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Barthes also occupy an important place in the development of the field (for example “Rhetoric of the Image,” trans. Stephen Heath, in *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977; *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981)).

24 Eco, *Nieobecna struktura*, 135.

25 Maria Renata Mayenowa, “Porównanie niektórych możliwości tekstów słownych i wizualnych ikonicznych,” in *Studia i rozprawy*, eds. Anna Axer and Teresa Dobrzyńska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 1993), 176. See also Michał Porębski, “Czy metaforę można zobaczyć?,” *Teksty* 6 (1980).

26 It is worth mentioning here that there exists a general tendency in semiotics to tie the semiotic status of the image to its use in communication. Izydora Dąmbska, for example, claims that “objects that are images of other objects are not *eo ipso* those objects’ signs. [...] Even the images that most closely resemble the objects depicted in them only become signs of those objects when equipped with the ability to indicate, signify, or symbolize them.” (Izydora Dąmbska, “O konwencjach semiotycznych,” *Studia semiotyczne* 4 (1973): 38–39.

latory context is played by the linguistic tissue of the statement, comprising both the propositional meanings of each subsequent verbal sequence as well as the stylistic or genre conventions being actualized in a given work. For this reason, icons used in literary discourse should be treated as non-autonomous signs, regardless of the “communicative elevation of the image.”<sup>27</sup> Once brought to life, they may in certain cases become the active side, reinterpreting or even compromising the message conveyed by the verbal channel, but, in the broader perspective, are subject to strong pressure from the verbal layer of the statement. It is mainly the verbal material that unleashes the semantic potential of the image, gives direction to the processes that create meaning, and remains the superior level of communication, the one that determines the overall character and identity of the message. This structure of dominance was already observed by Peirce, who emphasized that the image, aside from its ability to reference an object, has very few capabilities with regard to the conveyance of information. Thus every act of semiosis must combine iconic, indexical, and verbal signs, but “the complex whole may be called a symbol; for its symbolic, living character is the prevailing one.”<sup>28</sup>

### 3.

This pattern appears to find confirmation even when applied to such radical proposals as the recently published title *Produkt polski* [*Made in Poland*] by Sławomir Shuty.<sup>29</sup> This book, which is one big collage comprising an extensive selection of brief manifests, newspaper clippings, bits of comic strips, questionnaires, drawings, and photographs, nearly straddles the boundary between literary and visual artwork and features surreal humor, often sprinkled with a pinch of dark comedy. The author rarely (if ever) speaks directly, *expressis verbis*; he employs irony, creates parodies and pastiches, desemanticises words, and autonomises the iconic layer, but even in this case the verbal layer gives some degree of direction to our reading, both in the broader and narrower scope. Above all else, such elements as the title, the genre clas-

27 Hopfinger, *O roli słowa i obrazu*, 57.

28 Peirce, “What Is a Sign?,” 10. It is telling that in the case of texts in which the image is substantially dominant, it is often the word that dominates the image in terms of function. For example Zbigniew Kłoch (“Słowa i obrazy. Kilka uwag o związkach i zależnościach,” *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (1990)), in his analysis of “visual texts” (the painting and collage) assumes that “the meanings of these texts cannot be interpreted without referring to verbal codes and the information conveyed through them” (p. 191) and that to do so requires that “the messages be included in a web of intertextual relations” (p. 193).

29 Sławomir Shuty, *Produkt Polski* (Kraków: Ha!Art, 2005). Pages not numbered.

sification (“recycling”) verbally hinted at by the author, and his opening remarks in “Wstęp do konsumpcjonizmu” [“Introduction to Consumerism”] constitute a peculiar set of coherent instructions that describe the contents of the tome as a grotesque collection of imaginative clichés symptomatic of the mentality displayed by contemporary Polish society. This is repeated at the level of specific phenomena, where the presence of the verbal label frequently leads to the functional transformation of the icon. This is not to say that any of the inscriptions serve merely to ground, tautologically repeat, or literally explain the meaning of the image. Rather, the verbal sequence plays the role of a catalyst that provokes the reader to formulate semantic hypotheses and triggers a series of associations without achieving the status of authoritative commentary that would unambiguously determine the meaning of a given configuration of signs. The meanings evoked in this manner can diverge significantly from the literal sense of the iconic code, postulated by Mayenowa, which often vacillates towards a quotational message. It seems that the matter of such meanings can be found primarily in a set of connotations embedded in culture and ascribed to the visual conventions in question. There are certain ways of making drawings, illustrations, and diagrams that tend to stabilize within a social practice, as a result of which they often become perceived as synecdoches of their corresponding realms of communication. Selected visual signs thus acquire a resonance that exceeds the relationship of likeness, enabling the emergence of an iconographic order. Such an order, in turn, leads to another reevaluation of the references in the image, because, as Eco observes, “in an iconographic code built upon the iconic, the meanings of the basic code become the signifiers,”<sup>30</sup> which connote certain complex, “culturally localised”<sup>31</sup> configurations of a conventional or even symbolic nature (when treated as an iconogram, the image becomes a sort of heraldic attribute of certain phenomena). Thus, in this case, individual iconic signs are reproduced, quoted, and subjected to re-contextualisation in such a manner that they lose their referential dimension, acquiring instead a metatextual quality and operating not so much as icons representing objects, but as emblematic quotes from particular poetics, styles, and registers of discourse (individual pictures evoke associations with the visual style of ad leaflets, technical schematics, illustrated magazines, and kitschy religious pamphlets).

As these theses may sound somewhat abstract, let us attempt to illustrate them with the help of specific passages. At one point in the book, for example,

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<sup>30</sup> Eco, *Nieobecna struktura*, 155.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

we encounter an anachronistic map covering the territory of Poland and its neighboring countries (including part of the collapsing USSR). The arrows drawn through individual areas give the map a strategic air, making it resemble the sorts of illustrations seen in historical atlases, ones depicting the courses of famous historical battles. Only by reading the title and legend do we discover that we are looking at a chart depicting the *Flooding [of the region] with cheap clothing from the People's Republic of China and the former USSR, with main outdoor markets* as the locations of the landmark battles. It is therefore the linguistic text that determines the reference of the arrangement, while the iconic part — via cultural connotations — adds a humorous, mock-heroic interpretation of the denoted object. Meanwhile, in the miniature *Polish Karate*,<sup>32</sup> a series of illustrations depicting a person sitting or standing in various positions, one can find in the plane of denotation a representation of a number of rather simple physical exercises, evoking in the sphere of connotations associations with popular instructions and booklets on health, fitness, and hygiene<sup>33</sup>:



32 Ibid.

33 Shuty, *Produkt Polski*.

It is only the series of captions that point to an interpretation of the pictographs as illustrations of the suffering experienced by a typical Pole as a result of alcohol overconsumption, allowing us to treat the whole as an ironic and satirical take on stereotypes regarding social mores. Just as I proposed above, we would not find in the presented series of illustrations any subtext associated with Polish customs were it not for the textual complement: the verbal commentary imposes this connection onto the formulaic drawings, compelling us to perceive them in a new context. At the same time, these images are not an inert, malleable body that succumbs to linguistic instructions. It is precisely the connotative potential of the iconic layer that implies the standard, normative nature of the depicted behavior. The analytical disassembling of the simple, trivial — perhaps even embarrassing — action into a series of visual emblems becomes one source of comedy in the statement, compounded further by the contrast between the anticipated dynamism (karate) and the static nature of the depiction. At the same time, the programmatic, instructional nature of publications that use a similar iconographic convention creates the illusion of scientific restraint, making room for an ironic sense of detachment. As a whole, the visual elements serve primarily as characteristic *exempla* of what we might call individual iconographic subcodes, as prefabricated clichés and connotative media for ingrained social mythologies.

#### 4.

Shuty's text is incoherent by design and, as such, is paradoxically easy to reduce by grasping the rules behind the collection of clichés, paraphrases, and quotes that govern the entire work. It is, however, possible to integrate more tightly the iconic enclaves with the main stream of the statement by granting them a prominent place in the overall organization of meaning. Such a solution appears to be particularly interesting, as it leads us beyond the borders of the individual sign and enables the observer to reconstruct the meaning-creating strategies inscribed into the text.<sup>34</sup> I would like to illustrate this possibility by examining Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*, mentioned above. The book's drawings are woven into the plot and tightly integrated into the linguistic layer (not as a parallel series, but through hypotactic hierarchisation) and are preceded each time by a indexical gesture by the author,

34 Due to limited space, I will merely mention the possibility of the existence of intermediate states, such as when a separate illustrated insert is included in a digressive narrative text. In the novel *Podręcznik do Ludzi* (Warszawa: W.A.B., 1996), the narrative is interspersed with illustrations depicting tarot cards and reproductions of several paintings, and is preceded by a short series of humorous drawings by the author.

for example: "It was daytime outside, and there was a clock in the tower. The clock looked like this:



The professor was stripped down to his candy-striped underwear shorts and his socks and garters and his mortar-board..."<sup>35</sup>

In each of these cases we encounter an obvious duplication of the signification using two codes to represent the same parts of the depicted world. Two things immediately draw our attention: first, the peculiar tautological nature of such an arrangement, one that does not result in a more detailed reference, but is instead limited to an intersemiotic translation of the references; and second, the incidental nature of this measure, or the lack of clearly perceptible criteria according to which the objects subjected to double signification were selected. We cannot say that there is any particular category of phenomena that forced the author to employ visual elements, nor can we indicate any repeatable, typified context that would provoke him to use semiotic pairs.

The ostentatious disruption of the rules of textual autonomy through the complication of the message without providing any tangible increase in information, thus violating Grice's maxim of quantity, prompts us to search for a motivation for this arrangement in the area of implied meanings (not unlike in previous examples, grasping the sense of the configuration requires ingenuity and interpretative activity on the part of the reader). If one seeks such implicit justifications, one should also note the disillusioning effect of such iconic enclaves, in which the clash of codes exposes the conventionality of the story and the materiality of the text (as an arrangement of signifying graphemes), disorganizing the flow of meanings and making room for alternative approaches to the subject. Such parabases, as Paul de Man might say, introduce elements of an ambiguous, ambivalent visual code into the

<sup>35</sup> Kurt Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions* (New York: RosettaBooks, 2010), 52.

coherent linguistic statement, in a sense exposing the gap between the word and the thing, documenting the resistance of factuality against semiosis. The addition of iconic supplements suggests that language, as a narrative tool, is incapable of actually and definitively corresponding to its object, as there remain expanses of malleability and incompleteness stretching out at the margins of the message.<sup>36</sup> In other words, the arbitrary series of iconic signs in the text of the novel encourages us to suspend our belief in the validity of the categories upon which the narrative is founded and provides a sense of ironic detachment vis-à-vis existing structures, indicating the cognitive limitations of the story. By employing such awkward drawings, Vonnegut in a sense “peels” objects of their meanings, thus distancing himself from culturally-sanctioned signs, which are incapable of conveying critical messages. This is not about the invalidation or destruction of meaning, but rather ironic ambivalence: for a statement to exist, it must confirm and assimilate the model of the world that is ingrained in language, but, at the same, it expresses a critical awareness while retaining a certain margin of leeway indicated by the unpredictable changes in the semiotic register.<sup>37</sup> From this perspective, the above-mentioned irregularity and incidentalness of the illustrative interjections, which form no series, are justified as a specific form of macrosign, one that repeats, within the arrangement of the text, the haphazardness of being, which eludes the control of the symbolic order. One could say that the subject retains a skeptical distrust of the authority of the discourse, yet fails to provide any opposing order; it is based merely on its inability to fit in, a result of the incidentalness and individuality of this specific being.

And one brief, final comment on this matter: in this instance, it is worth mentioning certain additional circumstances that could serve as meaningful clues to support the proposed interpretation. First, I would like to point out that ironic reduction is generally one of the main defining mechanisms of the rhetorical strategy employed in the novel. There are passages that play a similar role to that of the visual representations by, for example, referring the reader to the perspective of a naïve observer through a reduction of the language to a behavioristic description of physical data, which, as in the case

36 Some critics (see, for example, Charles Russell, “The Vault of Language: Self-Reflective Artifice in Contemporary American Fiction,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 20 (1974)) were willing to consider the “distance between words and phenomena” (*ibid.*, 351) as one of the main determinants of the artistic formation represented by the likes of Vonnegut.

37 Compare this passage with the interpretation of Vonnegut’s novels as examples of a particular affirmative parodical practice that explores the limits of “forms of meaningful action” in the study by Harriet and Irving Deer, “Satire as Rhetorical Play,” *Boundary 5* (1977): 711–722.

of the visual depiction, cleans the object of any perceptive traces and meanings added through the process of social semiosis.<sup>38</sup> The revolver, for instance, is torn from the realm of moralistic rhetoric and persuasive aestheticization through both an iconic recoding and the use of a naïve definition: “This was a tool whose only purpose was to make holes in human beings.”<sup>39</sup> Second, the supposition regarding the demythologizing quality of the image is also encouraged by the infantile visual style of the author’s drawings. The destabilization of the narrative code is thus accomplished with the support of the potential within the code itself, while the questioning of existing stereotypes occurs by exploiting the stereotype that grants the childlike gaze the ability to discover that the emperor has no clothes. Nevertheless, iconic signs seem particularly predestined to semiotic sabotage, as they belong to the category of “weak” codes (maintaining, some would claim, the status of a semiotic hypothesis) and do not result in an alternative categorization of phenomena, but rather — by relying on likeness (even if it is conventionalized) rather than classification — merely indicate semiotic potentiality, encouraging many competing perspectives on the object.

The image is thus highly privileged as a sign that remains closer to reality, more neutral than the word, and, by the same token, less susceptible to symbolic abuse and falsification. This characterization of different types of signs, however, is conditioned upon the narrative strategy, which is associated with a specific axiological perspective. Vonnegut’s novel clearly elevates the realm of the somatic experiences of the common man, who — to borrow a term from a Morris Dickstein essay — “knows in his gut that all ideals”<sup>40</sup> are worthless and treats them as abstract hypostases.<sup>41</sup> In this prose, the lofty ideas and accomplishments of “high” culture are predominantly depicted in burlesque tones, while the perception of the direct, everyday experience is treated as the

38 This quality has been observed by critics and recognised as one of the most important features of the writer’s style. See, for example, Morris Dickstein’s remarks on the “flat and factual” tone of Vonnegut’s novels, which serves to paint an image of a (sometimes irritating, by the critic’s own admission) “wise simpleton” (“Black Humor and History: Fiction in the Sixties,” *Partisan Review* 43.2 (1976): 197).

39 Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions*, 47.

40 Dickstein, “Black Humor and History,” 191.

41 One might safely include Vonnegut among the circle of writers that value the areas of the “material bodily lower stratum” (a term I borrow from Bakhtin) and explore a quasi-carnavalesque inversion of hierarchies. This assumption finds support in the first of the bi-codal interjections, one that contains a manifest of sorts: “To give an idea of the maturity of my illustrations for this book, here is my picture of an asshole” (Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions*, 13).

only relatively effective shield against the destructive effects of social mythologies and cultural alienation.

A completely different relationship can be observed between the word and the image in the case of a literary work that refers to a somewhat different world view. The particular use of drawings in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*<sup>42</sup> essentially results in the questioning of iconicity as a mode of representation.<sup>43</sup> The imposition of a particular reference onto arbitrary pictographs tears the relationship of likeness from its objective anchors and essentially makes the reference conditional on subjective perceptions and the unrestrained choices of the subject. Thus the analogous nature of the image, which stabilizes the phenomenon in its given form, gives way to provisional associations and dynamic symbolic relationships. On the other hand, the individual sign, while retaining its uniform substantive form, can become a space in which alternative interpretations collide, appearing, for example, as either a snake or a hat<sup>44</sup> (incidentally, the author employs the same mechanism of aspectual perception and gradable iconicity demonstrated by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his famous duck–rabbit drawing). It is worth noting that, in this case, the image operates similarly to symbolic *signata*, as it is subject to a certain homonymy that conditions its semantic fulfillment on the action of the verbal context and communicative environment.

Yet the questioning of signification through likeness in *The Little Prince* goes even further. In the famous passage involving the drawing of a sheep, subsequent illustrations of the supposed animal are rejected — in the course of negotiations between the narrator and the character — as failed, unsuccessful representations that obscure the individual nature of the original and artificially force its unique qualities into the mold of well-worn perceptual clichés.<sup>45</sup> When a depiction is finally accepted, it is one that does not involve obvious analogies, and merely alludes to the very existence of its model. Considering the parabolic nature of the work, we may look for more general premises behind such a decision and understand the semiotic game described above as a pretext for sketching a certain anthropological design. The narrative of the book derives its dynamics from the tension between the desire to semiotically represent the Other (the sheep, in this case) and the fear of alienating appropriation. Actual representation thus turns out to be possible

42 Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1995).

43 In this passage I make use of the inspiring remarks of Prof. Teresa Dobrzyńska and Prof. Albena Chranova.

44 de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, 10.

45 Ibid., 14.

only when we abandon the creation of images of the Other and the reification of its qualities through a specific visual characterization, and merely outline the space in which this Other could spontaneously present itself, unbridled by our expectations and perceptions. In result, the visual code is harnessed by the narrative commentary into performing an iconoclastic function and, paradoxically, is turned against itself. The iconic elements dispersed throughout the book form an arrangement of negated signs that are summoned, in a sense, as examples and criticised as blunt objects associated with the oppressive power of the gaze.

## 5.

It could thus be assumed that *Breakfast of Champions* and *The Little Prince* each represent radically opposite narrative strategies: from the privileging of the image as a substitute for experience, to the critique of iconic likenesses as a specific form of reification. Between these two clearly polarized perspectives there can also be found certain intermediate solutions involving a more ambivalent approach to visual representation. One example of such an ambiguous stance is the latest (and, according to the subtitle, “illustrated”) novel by Umberto Eco, *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*,<sup>46</sup> which problematizes the very opposition between iconic and symbolic signs. The author (quoted above as an expert in the field in question, and now appearing as the object of our analysis) tells the story of the antiquarian book seller Yambo who suffers partial memory loss as the result of an accident, retaining only his encyclopedic knowledge while losing all ties with personal memories. In an attempt to recover his lost identity, he spends his days poring over the books of his childhood, searching for any familiar signals that could reify his past experiences. Because visual messages comprise a majority of the texts read by the author, and are included as reproductions in the novel itself, the narrative eventually turns into an elaborate essay on the multiple meanings of the cited images. This discursive section of the book is so expansive that the images used within — among them encyclopedia illustrations, postage stamps, posters, postcards, comics, the covers of adventure novels, propaganda leaflets, etc. — focuses the majority of the reader’s attention for an extended period of time and nearly rises to the rank of the main protagonist of the story (this expansive commentary was in fact the reason for the book’s lukewarm reception among some of the critics, who complained about the less-than-coherent connection between the analysis and the plot, the privileged position of semiotics

46 Umberto Eco, *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana: An Illustrated Novel*, trans. Geoffrey Brock (London: Secker & Warburg, 2005).

at the expense of the narrative, and the rather unsuccessful disguising of the implicit autobiographical dimension of the investigations).

In subsequent chapters, Eco presents his readers with more illustrations, clippings, and reproductions that make up the home archive of the main character (and, at the same time, the narrator, and probably that of the author's own spokesman), while also displaying the cultural determinants of the image and the myriad ways in which it is entangled in the realm of social discourses and notions. The meaning of individual visual representations cannot be deduced on the basis of purely optical similarities, but rather, as it turns out in almost every instance, based on their dependence on various codes, customs, stereotypes, ideologies, and, finally, the circumstances of their reception.<sup>47</sup> The semiotic reinterpretation of similar signs begins with the very first illustration, in which the main character attempts to depict Napoleon, at the request of a doctor.<sup>48</sup>



As it turns out, the likeness of the famous emperor bears more resemblance to a pictograph of sorts rather than a faithful portrait, as it refers not to a “natural likeness,” to the visual qualities of the object, but rather to the

47 The peculiar “discursivisation” of the images appears to be aided by the fact that in Eco’s work all visual interjections are narratively motivated by the conditions in which the text is read and, by the same token, are in a sense subordinated by the speech of the narrator who decodes their meaning (in contrast to Vonnegut’s novels, in which images are introduced based on the author’s arbitrary decisions and where representation is conditioned upon the modulations of the communication channel).

48 Eco, *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*, 23.

attributes that stem from our knowledge of the subject, attributes ingrained in our semantic memory. Thus, this is a typical example illustrating Eco's theoretical thesis, which states that:

if an iconic sign shares attributes with something, it is not with the object itself, but with the model that governs our perception of the object; it is constructable and recognizable through the same thought processes that we undertake to construct a given concept, regardless of the substance in which the mutual relationship materialises.<sup>49</sup>

Here the author assists the reader in this task by having one of the characters explain the significance of the event: "You drew your mental scheme of Napoleon — the tricorne, the hand in the vest."<sup>50</sup>

Elsewhere, the change in the context of the reading produces a significant shift in its connotation: for example, a visually-motivated likeness is called into question in the case of a postage stamp collection. The images reproduced in this passage could essentially be regarded as iconic representations of various exotic places or landscapes ("the houses of Baghdad," "a Guatemalan landscape," "a map of the Fiji islands"<sup>51</sup>), as nearly ideal realizations of visual signs. Yet the narrator clearly emphasizes that for him, they make up a phantasmatic imaginarium, a "receptacle of oneiric images" rooted in his personal obsessions. Not representing any objects familiar to him through his own experience, the signs signified primarily through associations with the books of his youth, with the world depicted in adventure novels, and by belonging to the reality of the character's youthful dreams and notions. The pictures on the stamps thus refer to written texts, to popular stories and stereotypes of exoticism, and also to private associations and imagined representations. Multiple references are cited, yet none form any stable, motivated relationship, none achieve the status of an objective model. This contextual approach to the meanings of an image makes is articulated most evidently when the narrative focuses on propaganda messages dating back to the period in which the dominant ideology was that of fascism. The writer demonstrates, for example, how postcards bearing caricatures of Jews and Blacks reinforced racist prejudices by exploiting popular notions about the natural motivation behind the image.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Eco, *Nieobecna struktura*, 136.

<sup>50</sup> Eco, *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*, 22.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 254, 256.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.



Only when confronted with specific wartime experiences and the circumstances following the war do the characters in the novel verify their previous notions, perceiving the inadequacy of well-known images and discovering the striking dissimilarity between the sign and the apparent model. The recognizability of the image turns out to be not so much a derivative of the simple, spontaneous perception of visual stimuli as it is a function of certain beliefs that shape reality in a specific manner.<sup>53</sup> One can easily notice that, despite their variety, in all of these cases the attention of the writer is rarely directed towards individual iconic signs (nevertheless treated as “semata” belonging to different perceptual codes that do not refer to any supposed natural likeness), focusing instead on iconograms, or codified arrangements of signifiers that connote certain webs of notions and convictions. Their decipherment occurs through a peculiar form of “deiconisation” of the images while reading, which in turn reveals their conventionalized, quasi-symbolic semantic status.

53 This naturally raises the question of the interventional role of a narrative strategy that is apparently intended to be an implementation of the “semiotic guerrilla warfare” proposed by Eco: “to change the circumstances influencing the readers’ choice of the code governing their reception.” (*Nieobecna struktura*, 406–407). Such an interpretation allows us to treat *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* as a novelistic illustration of the author’s theoretical postulates. This, however, does not exhaust the issue, as the cited representations are additionally tied up in the dialects of truth and pretense, decadence and vitality, representation and ineffability. I will not explore this subject further, due to a lack of space.

## 6.

In the last three novels mentioned above, we witness the near removal or, to use a more careful term, the neutralisation of the icon's primary meanings, the marginalization of the referential association, which becomes pretextual and incidental. However, the series of visual representations is used in such a way that, without changing its denotation, it becomes a medium for new meanings that emerge from the overall structure of the message. It can thus be assumed that it is not the iconic sign itself, but the manner in which it is used in a given context, that co-creates the meaning of the message. A similar pattern can nevertheless be observed, though likely to a lesser extent, in all of the other literary works mentioned. Practically none of the examples discussed above emphasize the purely artistic qualities of the icon, which does not serve a pictorial purpose in the traditional sense, nor does it affect us with its visual qualities, but instead enters an abstract game of concepts, thus becoming a medium for categorical qualifications and stereotypical cultural characterisation. Only superficially do the cited images resemble traditional illustrations: the former differ from the latter in that they do not serve any autonomous aesthetic or representative function, and are thus by definition essentially devoid of any particular artistic value. They do not explain their purpose in the mimetic plane of representation nor in the context of the pictorial conventions that govern contemporary art, and elude description in terms of art criticism or history. They do, however, belong to a greater semantic complex in which objective references are dominated by metatextual and pragmatic meanings. Rather, the direction of such semanticisation is determined mainly by the manner in which the drawings are combined with the verbal layer, through the use of explicitly expressed content, stylistic devices, and compositional choices. It is this linguistic context of the iconic interjections — their “verbal interpretant”<sup>54</sup> — that enables us to guess which of the connotations of the likeness in question will be relevant and useful within the frame of a given message. The word also allows us to specify the communicative status of content connoted in this manner, as well as its hierarchical position and modal characteristics (which determine, for example, whether given signs should be treated as the authoritative media of narration, traces of the author's own presence, or quotes from the popular iconosphere that have been subjected to critical reflection). Once processed in this manner, the image ceases to be a mere likeness, a simple “view of a thing,”<sup>55</sup> and becomes a medium for diverse information, a textual phenomenon of sorts.

54 Maria Poprzęcka, *Czas wyobrażony. O sposobach opowiadania w polskim malarstwie XIX wieku* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1986), 67.

55 I borrow this apt phrase from Szyłak, *Poetyka komiksu*, 23.

In his excellent study on intertextuality, Laurent Jenny treats iconic enclaves as just such an example of associations between statements, and simply considers the signs used therein as counterparts to purely linguistic elements. He posits that:

images, even when they exist within the body of the text — among sequences of lines — assume an ideographic character that brings them closer to verblality; they become directly translatable substitutes of a word. [...] The image can be likened to typography and the manner in which it is interpreted. It is deficient not only in visual terms, but also in that it has been pushed into a sentence that removes all of its value save for the symbolic, and incorporates it into its syntax.<sup>56</sup>

Despite its identification of the dominant role of verbal context and the ideographic status of visual signs, this perspective seems overly simplified and reductionistic. Though the claims regarding the necessary inclusion of the icon in the syntagma of the statement and the reduction of the textual gap separating the semiotic statuses of the image and the word seem convincing, I do not believe this is a matter of literal, straightforward translatability (in most cases, at least). The dissimilarity of the signifying substances and semantic functions calls for a more elaborate conclusion. There are undoubtedly certain obstacles associated with the interpretation of iconic signs which do not fit into the repertoire of standard devices used to build connections in discourse: they lack certain propositional content, they do not quantify events, they essentially do not support the contiguity of coreferential associations, nor do they automatically become part of the thematic and rhematic order of the message. Thus, when such a combination of words and images appears in a literary work, the normal process of reading is interrupted and we as the receivers encounter a certain resistance which cannot be overcome through the use of our standard readerly competence. Our understanding of the encountered arrangement is conditioned upon finding its motivation, the discovery of the premises justifying the choice of such a mode of presentation, and the formulation of the lines of reasoning that lead to a hypothesis that reconciles incommensurable systems of meanings (this plane of the image's action can be described as the enthymematic level of the reception of visual messages, to borrow a phrase from Eco).<sup>57</sup> This combination of codes is thus

56 Laurent Jenny, "Strategia formy," trans. Krystyna Falicka and Jerzy Falicki, *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 1 (1988): 283.

57 Eco, *Nieobecna struktura*, 183. The term, of course, is based on the (not entirely precise) concept of enthymemes as "logical syllogisms" (*ibid.*, 101).

not merely a simple sum of the visual references and informational content in the judgment (as in the case of a rebus, for example), but is formed by the layering of two orders and encompasses the content suggested by such an unusual fusion. As there exist no routine rules governing the decipherment of similar arrangements, the process of reception must each time undergo a temporary communication crisis phase that results from the collision of incommensurable planes of meaning and different methods of reading. An image that operates within the space of paradigmatic relations must find its place in the syntagmatic structure of the text and determine its position in the linear flow of subsequent passages.<sup>58</sup> The reader should therefore step outside the confines of the parallel bonds of likeness and consider what the very act of recognizing the existence of such relations can contribute to the gradually expanding story. What is more, the visual sign, as is often emphasized, refers to a concrete thing and the past, mainly utilizing the resources of our past experiences, while the symbolic code relies on the anticipation of possible states and entails a rationalization of thought. An important step involved in the semantic interpretation of visual enclaves within a work of literature can thus be the translation of iconic elements into symbolic linguistic signs; a translation that is not limited to the isolated name of the object, but one that takes the form of a discursive explication of the depictions (i.e. a judgment, a more elaborate explanation, or a line of reasoning).<sup>59</sup>

The above study should be expanded to include at least an outline of the typology of specialized semantic functions served by the visual elements considered to be components of a literary work. At this point, however, it would likely be difficult to compile such a catalog, due to the extensive contextualization of the semantics of individual arrangements and their strong ties to the peculiarities of a given author's strategy. Perhaps, with time, as the popularity of heterogeneous visual-linguistic messages grows, there will emerge certain recognizable varieties of such intercodal semantic relations, but at present the reconstruction of the meanings of given icons cannot occur without a consideration of the nature of individual idiolects, and ought to indicate the diverse existing series, which are often divergent, autonomous, or intersecting. One

58 Peirce also emphasized that the image can signify, but is not in itself capable of conveying specific information (Peirce, *What Is a Sign?*, 7), and that every signifying element can only acquire a communicative function once it has been included in the syntagma of a statement, once it has been combined with a predicate, forming with it a judgment that contains some propositional content (Peirce, "The Nature of Meaning," in *The Essential Peirce*, 220).

59 See, for example, Jakobson, "W poszukiwaniu istoty języka," in *W poszukiwaniu istoty języka*, trans., ed. Maria Renata Mayenowa, vol. 1, (Warszawa: 1989), 133; Mayenowa, *Porównanie niektórych możliwości tekstów słownych i wizualnych ikonicznych*, 177; Mitosek, "Słowo ikoniczne?," 45.

may observe, however, that the visual insertions described above primarily function as model representations of culturally-marked subcodes equipped with certain personal, social, axiological, ideological, and historical characteristics. In result, the referential values stemming from the iconic structure of the sign are overshadowed by the content typically associated with symbolic signs, along with the meanings implied by the collision of incommensurable semantic fields. The interpretation of multicodal messages is thus synonymous with the integration of the disrupted coherence of the text, requiring the receiver to examine the unstated motivations of similar juxtapositions and to propose some hypothesis to explain the overall meaning of the statement. Meaning-creating processes involving pictorial signs therefore rarely occur on the level of purely iconic references, but rather — though initiated by references to such elements and relations — expand beyond the narrow range of objective recognition and are determined on the iconographic, tropological, and enthymemetic planes, or the areas in which the visual and linguistic layers co-operate.

*Translation: Arthur Barys*



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