

MONITORISH

XIX/2 • 2017
CENA 6,30 EVRA



- Art and Aesthetics
in Post-Transition

MONITORISH

XIX/2 • 2017

Revija za humanistične in družbene vede

Journal for the Humanities and Social Sciences

IZDAJA:

Alma Mater Europaea - Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis, Fakulteta za podiplomski humanistični študij, Ljubljana

PUBLISHED BY:

Alma Mater Europaea - Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis, Ljubljana Graduate School of the Humanities

Monitor ISH

Revija za humanistične in družbene vede / *Journal for the Humanities and Social Sciences*
ISSN 1580-688X, e-ISSN 1580-7118, številka vpisa v razvid medijev: 272

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Revija je vključena v bazo dLib.si - Digitalna knjižnica Slovenije.

Revija je vključena v mednarodni bazi / *Abstracting and indexing*

ANTHROPOLOGY PLUS, IBZ - INTERNATIONALE BIBLIOGRAPHIE DER ZEITSCHRIFTENLITERATUR

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Nonparel d.o.o., Medvode

Naslov uredništva / *Editorial Office Address*

MONITOR ISH, Kardeljeva ploščad 1, 1000 Ljubljana, Tel.: + 386 5 933 30 70

Založnik / *Publisher*

Alma Mater Europaea - Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis, Fakulteta za podiplomski humanistični študij, Ljubljana / *Alma Mater Europaea - Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis, Ljubljana Graduate School of the Humanities*

Za založbo / *For publisher*

LUDVIK TOPLAK

Korespondenco, rokopise in recenzentske izvode knjig pošiljajte na naslov uredništva. / *Editorial correspondence, enquiries and books for review should be addressed to Editorial Office.*

Revija izhaja dvakrat letno. / *The journal is published twice annually.*

Naročanje / *Ordering*

AMEU-ISH, Kardeljeva ploščad 1, 1000 Ljubljana, tel. 059333070

E-naslov / *E-mail*: maja.suncic@gmail.com

Cena posamezne številke / *Single issue price*: 6,30 EUR

Letna naročnina / *Annual Subscription*: 12,50 EUR

Naklada / *Print run*: 100

http://www.ish.si/?page_id=3610

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Revija je izšla s finančno pomočjo Javne agencije za raziskovalno dejavnost RS.

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ART AND
AESTHETICS
IN POST-
TRANSITION

MIŠKO ŠUVAKOVIĆ¹

The Implications of Post-Transition for Art and Aesthetics

Abstract: In contemporary anthropology, art history and aesthetics, the concept of transition is meant to signify and explain the hybrid set of changes that occurred in society, culture and the arts following the fall of the Berlin Wall or, more accurately, after the end of the Cold War. The assumption is that there is a relation of contingency between art, culture and society, which may produce the impression of a relation of causality.

Keywords: art, aesthetics, transition, post-transition

UDK 7:111.852:316.323.6

Potranzijske implikacije za umetnost in estetiko

Izvelek: V sodobni antropologiji, umetnostni zgodovini in estetiki naj bi koncept tranzicije označeval in pojasnjeval hibridni komplet sprememb, ki so se po padcu Berlinskega zidu ali, natančneje, po koncu hladne vojne zgodile v družbi, kulturi in umetnosti. Tukaj je predstavljena predpostavka, da obstaja odnos kontingence med umetnostjo, kulturo in družbo, ki lahko naredi vtis, da gre za odnos vzročnosti.

Ključne besede: umetnost, estetika, tranzicija, potranzicija



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state of emergency
is
my normal mode
of
life

In contemporary anthropology, art history and aesthetics, the concept of transition is meant to signify and explain the hybrid set of changes that occurred in society, culture and the arts following the fall of the Berlin Wall or, more accurately, after the end of the Cold War. The assumption is that there is a relation of contingency between art, culture and society, which may produce the impression of a relation of causality.

Today, “transition” typically signifies *moving* away – either gradual, as in a crisis, or accelerated, as in a break – from Cold War, real-socialist, state-socialist and self-managed society, culture and art toward a reconstructed and, in certain cases, even restored bourgeois society, that is, toward introducing and implementing liberal, typically also national, capitalism.²

Beyond the context of Europe, the concept of “transition” serves to signify political changes from the colonial to the postcolonial condition of Third World societies and states.³ The postcolonial condition is viewed as a process of transition that enabled ethnic/national and state-building liberation from colonisation and resulted in the emergence of independent or partly independent Third World states, whether liberal or real-socialist. With the conclusion of the Cold War, the world entered yet another transition leading from real-socialist postcolonial societies toward liberal or post-secular soci-

² Todorova, 2010; Piotrowski, 2012.

³ Godiwala, 2007.

eties/states, whereby both liberal and post-secular societies have faced re-colonisation by multinational corporations and ethnic, national, or religious antagonisms of decolonisation. By itself, the concept of “decolonisation” contains another meaning as well: the critical-theoretical subversion of the postcolonial as a postmodern-recolonising notion, in other words, confronting the economic, political and cultural limits of contemporary global biopolitics and necropolitics⁴ applied to the transitional Third World.

One must carefully identify and differentiate between the concepts of “reconstructed” and “restored”, because the differences between them are almost unnoticeable. To reconstruct means to construct something anew, something that had been constructed before and was then destroyed; furthermore, reconstruction proceeds with an insecure and uncertain vision of the future. Reconstruction is defined by a desire for a new future that might exceed that which is re-constructed. By contrast, restoration denotes the renewal of something that had “organically grown” and was then destroyed. When something is restored, it is renewed and consolidated with a vision of an imaginary past, which is meant to be affirmed at every subsequent moment in the future.

In more detail: In everyday speech, the word “transition” denotes the transformation of socialist or *communist* societies into liberal, capitalist societies with parliamentary democracy, i.e. into *democratic societies*. In terms of government, “transition” is the transformation of *people’s democracies* led by the one-party “avant-garde of the working class” to multi-party parliamentary democracies with separate – legislative, executive and judiciary – branches of power. In terms of economy, transition denotes the transformation of economies based on social or state ownership into economies based

⁴ Mbembe, 2003.

on or dominated by private ownership. In geopolitical terms, “transition” signifies – paradoxically – the emergence of national states (on the localising level) participating in the global economy and information system (the globalising level). In symbolic terms, transition begins by introducing a multi-party political system and ends by implementing a total or near-total privatisation of state and social property. In terms of the aesthetic, transition is the “pluralisation of sensory regimes” ranging from media to spectacle production in mass and global, market- and software-determined culture. In terms of art, transition is a retreat from “artistic practices that are characteristic of closed societies” into a global artistic practice with sustainable local references. On its way from real socialism to contemporary global capitalism, transitional art switches between various orientations, with specific narratives and relations with the public organisation of contemporary forms of life:

- artistic practices featuring the deconstruction of socialist-realist, socialist-modernist and socialist-postmodernist artistic practices;⁵
- art of the *politics of difference*,⁶ characteristic of postmodernity – for instance, feminist, gender and queer art, postcolonial art, racial art, artistic practices in the liminal zones of popular and high culture, etc.;
- technocratisation of contemporary artistic practices by linking up with “creative industries”, “corporate art”, “therapeutic artistic practices”,⁷ etc.;
- critical, subversive and activist artistic practices,⁸ as a reaction to “post-politics”, i.e. to the liberal-postmodern transition from pol-

⁵ Erjavec, 2003; Irwin, 2006.

⁶ Foster, 1999, 140–141.

⁷ Chiu, Genocchio, 2010.

⁸ Klanten *et al.*, 2011.

itics as a social practice to managerial policy-making in culture and society;

- artistic practices at the time of the “return of the political”,⁹ i.e. in the conditions of the global economic crisis, the domination of political, media and cultural pluralism and establishment of local autocracies.

To be sure, one may also depoliticise the concept of transition and thereby point to “immanent artistic transitions”, for instance, from functional bourgeois or real-socialist art to non-functional, i.e. autonomous art.¹⁰ One may also apply the concept of transition to changes in art in relation to the type of artistic or cultural¹¹ creative/productive work – from manual via mechanical to electro-mechanical, analogue and digital work, i.e. mediation through media in relation to social or cultural formats, etc.

Perhaps one could argue that transition was anticipated by the concept of ending the “struggle for workers’ rights”¹² – following the collapse of the miners’ strike in Great Britain – during the stabilisation of neoliberalism under Margaret Thatcher as prime minister. One should not forget Thatcher’s famous slogan: “There is no alternative!” One could interpret her assertion in two ways: either there is no political or economic alternative to the contemporary rise of neoliberalism or every future alternative practice will be appropriated by the dominant neoliberal order and thereby transformed into a social market-economic artefact.

Historically, one could argue that transition began with the 1980s “singing” or “coloured revolutions” in the Soviet Bloc, which

⁹ Mouffe, 2005, 1; Rancière, 2004.

¹⁰ Šuvaković, 2009.

¹¹ Lovink, 2002.

¹² Hall, 1988.

culminated with the fall of the Berlin Wall, coming to an end at different moments of implementing privatisation from the early 1990s to the mid 2010s. As a process of transition, post-socialism began in post-communist Europe with numerous reform and revolutionary events, which led to the end of the Cold War. The very beginning of that process was the crisis of the Polish state, provoked by the activities of the anticommunist and pro-national-democratic workers' movement *Solidarity* (*Solidarność*), founded at Gdansk Shipyard on 31 August 1980. The collaboration between the unions and the Catholic Church triggered the Polish national revolution, which ended with the Solidarity's victory in the parliamentary elections of 1990. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's project called "Perestroika" (*Перестройка*) marked the beginning of democratic reforms, which led to the transition from socialist to capitalist society and the end of Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe. Gorbachev's cabinet adopted the so-called Sinatra Doctrine,¹³ whereby the Soviet Union stopped meddling in its allies' internal affairs. This doctrine opened the way for the collapse of communism in a number of Warsaw Pact member states and for the revolutions of 1989. The Baltic States, which had been integrated into the USSR immediately after the Second World War, saw the beginning of non-violent revolutionary movements called "the singing revolution" between 1987 and 1991. The first mass manifestations of national feelings occurred at the Tartu Pop Music Festival on 14 May 1988. The term "singing revolution" was then introduced by Estonian activist and artist Heinz Valk between 10 and 11 June 1988. He gave that name to the nightly demonstrations with singing organised at the Tallinn Song Festival Grounds. These were mass demonstrations involving around 300,000 Estonians, who gathered every night to sing na-

¹³ Kushlis, 2009.

tional songs and anthems that were forbidden during the Soviet era. Demands for independence were openly made at a music festival held in Tallinn on 11 September 1988. The so-called “Baltic Way” or “Baltic Chain” was a non-violent political event involving around two million people forming a human chain by holding hands across Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania on 23 August 1989. The chain was around 400 miles long. It marked the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact signed in 1939 by the USSR and the Third Reich, when the Baltic States fell under Soviet control. Estonia’s declaration of sovereignty was announced at a festival held on 16 November that year. When the Soviet army attempted to put an end to the independence movement, which had been running for four years by that time, Estonia announced the restoration of its independence. Following the announcement of Lithuania’s independence restoration act on 11 and 13 January 1991, the Soviet army intervened, killing 14 civilians and arresting over a thousand people. The action of erecting “Barricades” was a political action that took place between 13 and 27 January 1991, as an act meant to stop a potential Soviet intervention. Czechoslovakia’s pro-Soviet regime was toppled in the “Velvet Revolution”, which saw revolutionary turmoil and protests between 16 November and 29 December 1989. The Romanian armed uprising, turning into a violent revolution, occurred between 16 and 22 December 1989. China witnessed large and violently suppressed protests between 15 April and 4 June 1989. Tiananmen, Beijing’s central square, was occupied by students demanding the democratisation of China’s society. Etc.

One should also distinguish between the terms “transition” and “revolution”,¹⁴ since the former involves a pragmatic and rational implementation of controlled and gradual changes that have the char-

¹⁴ Egbert, 1970.

acter of a consensual harmonisation of two distinct systems or material practices according to established and mediated external criteria.

Whereas revolution denotes a sudden break producing radical, which means essential and complete, changes of a given state of affairs, transition signifies a gradual approximation of one system or practice to another system or practice. The initial system or practice is thereby abandoned and transformed into another system or practice – integrated into a differently ordered set of relations between that which *is* on the one hand and local and global *public opinion* on the other. By contrast, revolution refers to the destruction of the structural order of a system or practice. According to Antonio Negri, however, revolution is a creative transformation that emerges from resistance to the “dark and terrorist being of the state”. The factors of revolution – revolt, resistance and constitutive power – are presented as a temporal event, an event in and with time. As a temporal event, revolution shows that “revolt”, “resistance” and “constitution” are related to time. Rather than a “space”, time is a “phenomenon” connected to revolution: space is something one occupies, whereas time happens – just as a revolution happens. A revolution is at once an event of insurrection and resistance happening at a certain point in time that is necessarily “contemporary” – a literal performance of that NOW. Revolution constitutes a demonstration of the character of that contemporaneity – how contemporaneity acquires its meaning. Negri’s phrase “time for revolution”¹⁵ may be understood not only in terms of a point in time when a revolution should occur, but also in terms of constituting revolutionary time.

Transition also effects a relocation and reorganisation – reintegration – of one system and practice into another. In public opinion,

¹⁵ Negri, 2003.

transition is presented as “gradual and justified progress” and not in terms of explosive destruction giving rise to a new order. Transition is therefore an ideologically mediated order of events that hide their real intentions. Due to the fetishisation of “progress”, transition cannot be identified with restoration. Then, however, the following question arises: does the concept of progress also involve the concept or effects of emancipation as an important indicator? A revolution occurs when there is a dominant feeling that there is no time left and that everything must be settled now, whatever the price. By contrast, restoration occurs when in public opinion there emerges or is realised the feeling that we have gone too far in our pursuit of the new and now find ourselves in unfamiliar territory, that we must go back and seek safety in a domain of living and acting bound by tradition. Transition emerges as a situation where we are in control of time and are aware that things are solved gradually – slowly – by proceeding by the smallest steps that will, by means of accumulating life, economy and politics, eventually yield results. In any case, it is always an ideology that names and represents “change” in a pragmatically instructive way!

However, the transition from real and self-managed socialism to bourgeois, liberal society based on private property brought an established order to an end and enabled the introduction of a new order and reintegration in such a way that both orders found themselves in the situation of the “end of an order” – real-socialist and liberal society alike. This concerns the tactics of “echo” (in romanticist terms) or feedback (in pragmatic terms). In other words, the transition involved not only the “political East”, but also the “political West”. The end of an order appeared as an essential and total change – where total means global, while essential means a wholesale change of system and practices from one set of forms of life to an entirely different set. In the wake of the socialist and liberal order

there emerged the hybridised order of global and mass economic-representative populism. Which means that, paradoxically, the mechanisms of transition appear as instruments that simulate revolutionary expectations and effects in a global sense.

In this context, post-transitional society denotes a “normalised” or “harmonised” society that has completed its transition from “socialism” to “capitalism”, which means the establishment of

- a parliamentary democratic order,
- the domination of private ownership over state and social ownership,
- the implementation of globalisation in terms of market economy and media and communication.

Post-transition, hypothetically speaking, is not a stage of *change*, but of reaching *stabilisation* by societies seeking to join the global order; accordingly, for instance, Europe should no longer be divided into Western and Eastern Europe in political-economic terms, which also means cultural, i.e. artistic terms. One then arrives at an entirely harmonised or regulated *world image* that brings together the local and global public, at least at the level of an individual consumer, that is, a distant accomplice or, frequently, subcontractor, in a complex process of production, exchange and consumption.

The preceding opening paragraphs have defined/redefined the concepts of “transition” and “post-transition” in the usual sense of the contemporary usage of those concepts. For instance, Cuba today stands at the beginning of its transition, Serbia is at the end, while, for example, Slovenia, Poland, Hungary and Russia are in post-transitional stages. Some transitional societies in post-transition adopt the conditions and circumstances of the global state of affairs, i.e. the global *view of the world* as a public *view of the world*. We must now return to re-examining the concept and phenomenon

of “transition”. One may indicate the concept and phenomenon of transition by means of four theoretical *indicators* and a fifth meta-indicator:

phenomenology of TRANSITION			
change	flow	transformation	transfer/transferring
effect of revolution			
<i>(qua accumulation of changes, flow, transformation and transfer/transferring toward a radical break)</i>			

“Change” signifies a set of social activities whereby a condition or stage of society undergoes a radical, sometimes even revolutionary change and comes to occupy a situation of redefining the local and global *world image*, which also includes the relations between local and global public and private *forms of life*. Change is redefined as a social process – a sort of subversive practice with consequences.

“Flow” signifies the uncertainty and irresolubility of permanent change in the course of our lives. No stable situation can be indicated. We cannot say that we have come from Condition A to Condition B and that the flow, i.e. transition, is complete. The flow signifies the permanence of changes, transformations and transfers. From a pre-transitional condition or situation via a transitional one, we have come to a post-transitional condition or situation that is now a new situation, for instance, marked by the global economic crisis¹⁶ and thereby initiated as a new flow of changes. At the same time, having attained the ideal or non-ideal paradigms of parliamentary democracy, we are facing a crisis of parliamentary democracy in the West itself and the transformation of the platforms of

¹⁶ Lazzarato, 2009.

global neoliberalism¹⁷ into those of expansive populism, etc. The flow does not stop.

“Transformation” typically signifies a gradual event whereby one *form of life* becomes another *form of life*, that is, an event whereby one *world image* becomes a different *world image*. At the same time, there is an analogy between becoming and organic growth, that is, the growing up of a living being. The transformation of society is conceived as an allegorical image of the transformation of living organisms.

Transition is a sort of “transfer” of a situation from one context into another context. A transfer is initiated by an impulse that causes the transfer of a situation. Transferring causes changes not only in the situation that is being transferred, but also in the context from or into which it is being transferred – in addition, the aim is to show that there also occurs a counter-change in the “impulse” that initiated the transfer by the very event of the transfer. One therefore speaks of transfer and counter-transfer. A transfer is the relocation of an X from one context into another. A counter-transfer is the counter-impact of relocating an X from one context into another that has consequences on the initiator, i.e. the impulse that initiated or caused the transfer. In other words, a *form of life* or *world image* in “transfer” is an event with double consequences, which occur in systems with *feedback loops*. By analogy with psychoanalytic thought,¹⁸ transfer initiates the patient’s unconscious through the activity of the analyst, and the patient’s unconscious initiates the analyst’s unconscious as an effect-reaction. In other words, initiating transitional processes in the East by the West has the counter-effect of initiating transitional processes in the West by the East.

¹⁷ Harvey, 2006.

¹⁸ Lacan, 1981.

In relation to social flows, one may say that the accumulation of changes, the flow, transformation and transfer/transferring toward a radical break appears as an “effect of revolution”: a complete and essential end of an order and modality of its existence with counter-impacts on the social, political, economic and cultural potentials of the initiator/ideologue and surveillance of transition. A form of life is depleted and discarded. Its place is taken over by other forms of life emerging in the process of transition. In ideological-political terms, transition appears not as a revolution, but as its opposite; by virtue of the fundamental global change it effects, it has the phenomenological – phenomenal – character of a revolution.

Therefore, my claim in this discussion is that the “transfer”, i.e. *moving* from Cold War, real-socialist, state-socialist and self-managed society, culture and art toward civil society, that is, toward introducing and implementing liberal, typically also national, capitalism, takes place not only in terms of the contents transferred (real-socialist, state-socialist and self-managed society, culture and art), but also in terms of making a counter-effect on the dominant world of the liberal West, which initiated these processes. The transition of Eastern Europe caused a counter-transfer in the society, culture and art of the original initiator of the “transfer”, which was Western liberal capitalism. The global economic crisis is an indicator of that counter-transfer and its “painful” realisation.

From that first claim follows the second: that the transition of the political East to the economic-political West is not complete, because the very goal of that transition – i.e. the West’s liberal democratic order – has undergone transitional changes that violate the propositions of liberalism and democratic order. The conception of transition as a controlled and regulated transitory interval of transfer from one *world image* into another is thereby brought into ques-

tion. The idea of “permanent transition”¹⁹ emerges as an attractive model that one could trace, though not without irony, from the dialectics of Heraclitus to that of Marx, or connect to Leon Trotsky’s idea of “permanent revolution”.²⁰ It may be traced all the way to neoliberal economy with its base in a constant inflation of surplus value and uncontrolled changes in the distribution of social income both locally and globally.

Having posited the indicators of operative concepts and having indicated a “hypothetical metaphysics of transfer and counter-transfer”, one may argue that contemporary aesthetics as a theoretical practice and contemporary art as a practical theory participate in the fictionalisation or de-fictionalisation of the “transitional human condition”.

That is meant to show that contemporary transition is a totalising process with all its transfers and counter-transfers, encompassing humankind in relation to its geographical locations, global/networked relations and phase-dislocated historical identifications in contemporaneity. Thus we see that transition, as permanent processing, *resonates* with politics, economics, social dynamic structures, ethics, art, distributions of sensuality. Thus all of human *reality* is inscribed into a broad constellation of signifiers, i.e. a map of dynamic *vectors* and vector consequences (economic effects and human affects) whereby transition unfolds in the direction of transfers and counter-transfers.

¹⁹ Enwezor, 2008.

²⁰ Trotsky, 2010.

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Manipulating Memory and Mourning in Post-socialist Art

Abstract: When it comes to global contemporary art practice, the present-day humanitarian discourse abounds in a variety of self-explanatory notions and imperatives such as: political art, community-based art, post-studio practices, participatory art, contextual art, socially engaged art, collaborative art, interactive art. It long ago became apparent that artistic practice can no longer revolve around producing objects for consumption by a passive audience, but must take an active part in interfacing with social reality. In perceiving the modality of a work of art and artistic practice, such a change goes hand in hand with the post-Fordist economic changes and the immaterial and flexible labour imperatives. Claire Bishop has already extensively depicted such artistic phenomena in several of her publications.

Since the early 90s, after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, we have been informed that we ought to be involved with the humanist struggle for the ‘politics of human rights’, and for ‘Art against terrorism’, or engaged with social groups and minorities with the aim of integrating them into a ‘legal sphere’ of life. The humanitarian/humanist imperative, present in everyday political discourse, art and culture, presupposes an opposition between good and evil, where art as a human, humanist and humanitarian activity, is supposed to assume a ‘responsible’ role. In the view of such rhetoric, Art must be ‘political’, ‘socially engaged’ and ‘participatory’, to the extent that it

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indicates the sharp distinction between the places of violence and those of justice. However, as Marx indicated so many times, the division between those who have the right to be seen (the 'polis', or public sphere) and those who do not have a right to a voice (private sphere), assents to social division as such, as well as a rather contingent ethical contraposition between good and evil. Humanitarianism/Humanism in art only affirms the existing democratic phraseology. The humanitarian/humanist regime of art validates a separation between civil society and the abstract society of political equality. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to trace the conceptual distinction between the humanitarian ideology of the current time in the post-socialist context of art and culture, and the thinking and practical application of the concept of the dehumanisation of art.

The manuscript consists of three parts: In the first part, I will recall Adorno's thesis regarding the 'after-Auschwitz' ethic of representation; in the second part, I will discuss the controversy and the implementation of this thesis following 9/11 as related to culture; and finally, in the third part, I will address the issue of how this thesis, as the main current ideological weapon, conditions the contemporary state of affairs in the post-socialist spaces of art and culture, by indicating several key symptoms in artistic production.

Keywords: humanitarianism, humanism, dehumanisation of art, post-socialism, emancipation, 9/11

UDK 7:316.323.6

Manipulacija s spominom in žalovanjem v postsocialistični umetnosti

Izvleček: Ko govorimo o sodobni globalni umetniški praksi, je današnji humanitarni diskurz poln široke palete samo po sebi razumljivih pojmov in imperativov, kot so: politična umetnost, skupnostno pogojena umetnost, post-studijske prakse, participativna umetnost,

kontekstualna umetnost, družbeno angažirana umetnost, kolaboracionistična umetnost, interaktivna umetnost. Že dolgo nazaj je postalo očitno, da se umetniška praksa ne more več vrteti okoli produciranja predmetov za potrošnjo s strani pasivne publike, ampak mora zavzeti aktivno vlogo pri povezavi z družbeno realnostjo. Pri dojetju modalitete umetniškega dela in umetniške prakse gre takšna sprememba z roko v roki s post-Fordovskimi gospodarskimi spremembami in nematerialnimi ter fleksibilnimi delavskimi imperativi. Claire Bishop je ta umetniški fenomen izčrpno prikazala že v svojih številnih objavah.

Že vse od zgodnjih 90. let prejšnjega stoletja, po padcu železne zavese leta 1989, smo obveščeni, da bi morali biti vključeni v humanistični boj za 'politiko človekovih pravic' in v 'Umetnost proti terorizmu', ali pa angažirani v družbenih skupinah in manjšinah s ciljem integrirati jih v 'pravno sfero' življenja. Humanitarni/humanistični imperativ, prisoten v vsakodnevem političnem diskurzu, umetnosti in kulturi, predvideva opozicijo dobrega in slabega, kjer naj bi umetnost kot človeška, humanistična in humanitarna dejavnost prevzela 'odgovorno' vlogo. S takšno retoriko v mislih mora biti Umetnost 'politična', 'družbeno angažirana' in 'participativna', vse do te mere, da nakazuje strogo razliko med prostori nasilja in tistimi pravice. Vendar pa, kot je tolikokrat nakazal Marx, razlika med tistimi, ki imajo pravico biti videni ('polis' ali javna sfera), in tistimi, ki nimajo pravice do glasu (zasebna sfera), pristaja na družbeno delitev kot takšno, pa tudi na dokaj odvisno etično nasprotje med dobrim in zlim. Humanitarizem/humanizem v umetnosti zgolj potrjuje obstoječo demokratično frazeologijo. Humanitarni/humanistični režim umetnosti potrjuje ločevanje med civilno družbo in abstraktno družbo politične enakosti. Tako je cilj tega prispevka slediti konceptualni razliki med humanitarno ideologijo trenutnega časa v post-socialističnem kontekstu umet-

nosti in kulture, pa tudi miselna in praktična aplikacija koncepta dehumanizacije umetnosti.

Članek sestavljajo trije deli: v prvem delu se avtorica spomni Adornove teze o 'post-Auschwitz' etiki zastopanja; v drugem delu bo govora o kontroverznosti in implementaciji te teze po 11. septembru v povezavi s kulturo; na koncu pa v tretjem delu naslavlja problematiko kako ta teza, kot trenutno glavno ideološko orožje, pogojuje sedanje stanje v post-socialističnih prostorih umetnosti in kulture s tem, da bo nakazala več ključnih simptomov v umetniški produkciji. **Ključne besede:** humanitarizen, humanizem, dehumanizacija umetnosti, postsocializem, emancipacija, 11. september



Introduction

It has been twenty-seven years since the Fall of the Iron Curtain and the promise of a new global post-political, post-ideological and post-historical democratic era. Immediately after this historical moment, politics, art and culture in the Yugoslav context entered the final stage of their disintegration, and instead of the former social-democratic ideals of equality, fraternity and unity, there emerged various nationalist imperatives and programmes under the umbrella of 'Western liberal democracy'.

During the 90s, it seemed that avant-gardes in the (post-)socialist Yugoslav spaces of art and culture were not dead: there appeared various alternative, activist, dissident cultural movements (although most of them were financed by cultural initiatives such as the Soros Foundation)², which strived to overcome the artistic,

² Šuvaković, 2002.

traditional, modernist, projective and utopian avant-garde's endeavours. As a matter of fact, scrutiny of the modernist avant-garde legitimacy commenced long before Yugoslavia collapsed into its political and territorial disintegration: Between the early 70s and the 90s, some artistic practices such as Slovenian *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (NSK) and *Laibachkunst* announced the deconstruction of state socialism and its transition into post-socialism on the ground of the avant-garde legacy.³ Net.art also marked the two-fold property of access to technology such as (a)politicality of the internet, making political statements and gestures whose goals were to attack norms of the (traditional) art establishment.⁴ With the postmodernist turn and the collapse of the Eastern bloc, many artists in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe addressed political issues regarding otherness from the feminist, queer and postcolonial identity platforms.

What is most striking when it comes to 'political' or the so-called 'socially engaged art practises' in the last fifteen years, that I find extremely symptomatic in the post-socialist spaces of art and culture, and which, in my opinion, have contributed to the neoliberal globalising cultural industry—is an increasing focus on humanist/humanitarian imperative of memory production and reception. It may seem that many preoccupations of artists who work with memory, nostalgia, Holocaust and specifically with Yugo-nostalgia, were to be carried forward to the critique of the fascist logic that has been survived and has been always (more or less) alive in the contemporary consumer capitalist societies. However, what this kind of art produces is something quite opposite. In the majority of the artistic works of memory, trauma, nostalgia and reconciliation, an accent

³ Erjavec, 2005, 7.

⁴ Greene, 2004, 52.

has been placed on the ‘data(base) aesthetics’⁵ and archival artistic procedures from the moralising standpoint(s) that suffers from the lack of serious research background and query.

On the one hand, the opening towards new technologies (ITC), and, on the other hand bloody wars and political conflicts from the early 90s, enabled the artistic context of South-Eastern Europe to become exquisitely the place of the postcolonial exoticisation, in which the art of memory, trauma and nostalgia with the help of ‘memory studies’ as its main theoretical point of departure and advocacy, have played a significant role. As Norman Finkelstein noted, ‘The Holocaust has become “an indispensable ideological weapon”⁶ in contemporary politics, art, and culture at large, that justifies and acknowledges a doxa according to which ‘there is no alternative’, and (what is most formidable) the procedure of victimisation of specific, minor group of people (in the USA particularly) – by which certain privileging social relations and forces of production, as well as their political pretensions – gain immunity to criticism. In the wake of Novicks’s research, Finkelstein aimed his analysis at the properties and inflections of the so-called ‘Holocaust-industry’ claiming that, currently all the rage in the ivory tower, ‘memory’ is surely the most impoverished concept to come down the academic pike in a long time (...) Today, all that remains is the bland, depoliticised language of ‘concerns’ and ‘memory’.⁷

This cultural, political and economic phenomenon may be tracked in the case of ‘after-Auschwitz’ cultural claim and its gradual ideological distortion that became more perceptible after 9/11. In other words, what I am trying to state is that the art of memory, remembrance,

⁵ Cf. Bulajić, 2007, 3–22. Wilson, 2006.

⁶ Finkelstein, 2001, 10.

⁷ Ibid.

trauma and nostalgia represents one of the most powerful contemporary political means for protecting and advocating certain class interests on the global level of the all-more social segregation.

A few notes on the ‘after-Auschwitz’ dictum

I would like to begin this analysis with some of Adorno’s statements regarding the ethic of the impossibility of art after Auschwitz:

1. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.⁸
2. I do not want to soften my statement that after Auschwitz it is barbaric to go on writing poetry; it expresses, negatively, the impulse that animates committed literature. (...) The excess of real suffering permits no forgetting.⁹
3. It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist.¹⁰
4. The more the emancipation of the subject demolished every idea of a pre-established order conferring meaning, the more dubious the concept of meaning became as the refuge of a fading theology. Even prior to Auschwitz it was an affirmative lie, given historical experience, to ascribe any positive meaning to existence.¹¹
5. In silence alone is the name of the catastrophe to be spoken . . . But laments and complaints [*Klage*] about this must reflect—in spirit—the fact that laments and complaints themselves are no longer possible. No weeping melts the armour; the only face left is the one whose tears have dried up. This lies at the basis of an

⁸ Adorno, “Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft”; Adorno, 1981, 34.

⁹ Ray, 2005, cit. 65.

¹⁰ Adorno, 2013, 1.

¹¹ Ibid. 208.

artistic method that is denounced as inhuman by those whose humanity has already become an advertisement for inhumanity, even if they are not aware of it.¹²

6. Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as one who is tortured has to scream; thus it may have been wrong [to have claimed] that after Auschwitz no more poems [*kein Gedicht*] may be written.¹³

One could say that the common denominator of all these statements rests upon the standpoint according to which Auschwitz was the inexplicable betrayal of a culture's traditional claim to ennoble and improve humanity. In the light of this argument, Adorno advocated the 'double bind' dimension of art towards artistic autonomy, rather than an engaged art which accepts art's instrumentalisation which presupposes both autonomy and the *fait social*. The concept of the autonomy of art or of the negative representation of Auschwitz in Adorno's position implies, simply speaking, blocking the extraction of any aesthetic pleasure or redemptive meaning. Adorno's ethics of representation – "the case of Auschwitz" – rests upon a resolution of the issue of how we may proceed to live under the existing conditions of social barbarism in which the Enlightenment cultural programme has failed. It would be barbarism after Auschwitz to reach back to these traditional moralistic forms of art, on the one hand, and on the other, to subject artistic practices to the moralistic rhetoric of every-day politics.¹⁴

In the light of this argument, it is worth mentioning one of Adorno's crucial examples: Schönberg's *The Survivors of Warsaw*, in relation to which he elucidates the issue on politicality and the

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Adorno, 1966; Adorno, 1995, 355/369.

¹⁴ Ray, 2005, 64.

ethical claims of art after Auschwitz. As an aporia of historical suffering has been aesthetically transformed into a representation, the victims are to be turned into a work of art. With this procedure, the unthinkable becomes thinkable, thereby opening up the possibility of a redeeming transfiguration.¹⁵

What it seems that Adorno tries to uphold is the thesis according to which committed art approaches the social aporia too directly, producing positive – I would say, humanist/humanitarian and moral – significations.

The ‘After-Auschwitz’ ethical claim and its implications in contemporary art after 9/11

Today one may witness the presence of the ‘after-Auschwitz’ ethic’s claim on contemporary political art in a rather controversial manner, especially to the extent it coincides with the recent historical crisis following the demolition of the Iron Curtain, such as the September 11 attacks in 2001 (9/11). In the early 90s, it became apparent that the ‘after-Auschwitz’ ethic had come to dominance and was being gradually conventionalised. As a matter of fact, it seems that the ‘after-Auschwitz’ ethic of representation has been misinterpreted as a consequence of the transitional historical conjunctures and of the conditions of justification for the current democratic phraseology. Deviation of the ‘after-Auschwitz’ standpoint goes hand in hand with the weakening of the utopian social movements in major Western countries and replacing the social struggles for real democracy with the rules of the State of the Right. The result of such procedure became obvious in the light of an argument which Rancière has already provided: the political has been withdrawn from the public sphere in such manner that it has become indistinguishable from

¹⁵ Ibid.

the (international) Law.¹⁶ At the core of the consensual harmony of 'humanitarian discourse (of art)' is the procedure of blurring the boundaries between the factual dispositive (status quo) of the given society and its normative and legislative underpinning. Subsequently, this procedure produces a 'reminder'—a multitude of individuals that fall outside of "this happy circle of fact and law".¹⁷

The result is obvious: Each otherness deserves to be politically seen and heard. Every minority should have the merit of being included into the social regime of the visible – into the sphere of the 'right to existence'. The manifestness of bodies and their desiring and machinic life ought to be tracked and performed. Artists "cannot write poetry", because, after 9/11, "writing poetry is barbaric". The 'barbaric communism' of Cold War rhetoric has now been replaced with 'Islamic terrorism', justifying the humanitarian right to intervention. 'We' should all 'enunciate', 'declare', 'verbalise', 'speak', 'break silence'... about the Holocaust/Shoah, for such a Thing 'will never happen again' as long as the contemptuously paternalistic military intervention against the disobedient easterners proceeds.

One is not faced here only with the established conventions of so-called 'Holocaust Art', but with the ideological nucleus that pertains to the contemporary demand for art's political, moral commitment and its humanitarian and humanist discourse. Gene Ray well noted that:

...although the limits Adorno imposed were a critical response to new historical conditions after 1945, the rigidification of those limits into a set of blindly followed formulas obscures their own historical specificity and makes it more difficult to test them against the shifting realities of new contemporary conditions.¹⁸

¹⁶ Rancière, 2010, 101.

¹⁷ Ibid. 102.

¹⁸ Ray, 2005, 68.

The 'after-Auschwitz' ethic of representation has, in the process of its reception, undergone ideological transformation when compared to its original formulation. The fear of the 'concentration camp' has proven to be one of the most efficient ideological weapons of contemporaneity. The survival of the fascist logic in consumer capitalism is to be found in the current representational taboos, moralistic imagery and humanitarian and humanist visual rhetoric. The dominance of the 'after-Auschwitz' dictum goes hand in hand with the US-led "War on Terror" and the reinforcement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict just after 9/11—after 'We' were all informed that we should be struggling against Islamic terrorism. The word 'terrorist' has gradually become an inherently propagandistic term in the everyday political speech that pertains to traditional Enlightenment moralist formalism.

By establishing the place of the so-called 'Terror', the proponents of the current democratic phraseology lay claim to a humanitarian/humanist and moralist discourse of culture, which reflects itself in the soft totalitarianism of the mass consumer democratic societies and the global government of capital. The humanitarian/humanist logic of art justifies the current positive idea of humanity, that is to say, of 'human rights', which stands in accord with the Law that regulates judgements and opinions concerning the Evil that happens in some variable elsewhere. As Badiou maintained:

Ethics is thus part of what prohibits any idea, any coherent project of thought, settling instead for overlaying unthought and anonymous situations with mere humanitarian prattle (...)¹⁹

The current humanitarian/humanist ethical consensus, for which 'after-Auschwitz' rhetoric stands, has been founded on the *a*

¹⁹ Badiou, 2001, 32.

priori recognition and determination of the Evil, and aims at the mobilisation of people, opinion and cultural practices around a positive idea of the Good. The “after-Auschwitz” ethical claim in the much changed circumstances after 9/11 reduces ethical issues to the self-evident principles of human rights and humanitarian actions. Such transformation and misinterpretation of Adorno’s ‘after-Auschwitz’ dictum leads to the definition of (wo)man as victim. Respectively, in the contemporary global cultural circumstances, the artistic ideological principle is reflected in the imperatives of representation of the absolute victim of infinite Evil, which obliges infinite retribution. Ethics, thus, has become a means to identify and conceive of infinite Evil, laying claim to the constitution of an absolute, extra-judicial right to the victim. Two main nucleuses around which this dispositive knits the contemporary ideological marvellous web are 1) The ideal of Good which eliminates political dispute by blurring the boundaries between right and fact (of ways of being and values); 2) Absolute Evil that requires the imperative of representing a (wo)man as a victim.

The case of the post-socialist art world

In the post-socialist spaces of art and culture, such an ethic can be recognised, especially to the extent that the historical promise of socialism in the last two decades of the 20th century proved to be a failure. Although the term ‘postsocialism’ in art, generally speaking, refers to the common conditions of late socialism or postsocialism which shaped artistic practices from the early 70s, early or late 80s and early 90s²⁰, I use this term more broadly, which is to say, in order to mark the political, social and economic circumstances of the global neoliberal restoration of the class system and traditional

²⁰ Erjavec, 2003, 337.

values of the former socialist countries that influenced the shaping of artistic production.²¹ The term ‘post-socialist’ in my own nomenclature also refers to the process of specific contextualisation, fetishisation and political exoticising of the cultural production in the “barbaric” and “traumatised” political geographies of the former socialist and communist countries. It functions as a convenient label for the “specific” contemporary artistic practices, that have been recognised by the rules and regulations of the contemporary global market economy as something “naturally” inherent to the presupposed political geography.

The ‘after Auschwitz’ ethical consensus in the post-socialist spaces of art and culture is rooted in the sophistry according to which every revolutionary project necessarily turns into a totalitarian nightmare. ‘We’ have been convinced over the last fifteen years that every attempt to inscribe an idea of justice and equality turns into Evil. The ethical demand is clear: ‘communicate’, ‘politicise’, ‘make visible’, ‘verbalise’, ‘participate’... —the sharp distinction between the places of violence and those of justice must be verified. From the early 90s, “we” were all to break silence about the crimes in the Balkans and make otherness visible—which, under this supposition, had not been granted the right to any kind of an existence under the previous totalitarian regime. According to such a claim, all true emancipatory art must be “politically” and “ethically” engaged.

The moral, humanitarian nexus of the majority of such practices is based on the afore-mentioned ethical humanitarian dictum at the

²¹ I would like to stress that I do not consider the Yugoslav ‘socialist space of art and culture’ as an innocent area of that what was or should be the righteous and justifiable opponent to the Western capitalist consumerism in any mean possible. When it comes to Yugoslavia, the ideals of the self-management market system failed, and the result was a consolidation of the so-called ‘economic statism’.

intersection with the local narrative of the given political geography. As I have pointed out elsewhere²², in the contemporary post-socialist constellation of art, which nevertheless assigns to itself the attribute of political emancipation, one can recognise mutually related, key moments:

Fetishisation of art of memory, trauma and nostalgia

The concept of the art of memory, trauma and of nostalgia inclines to that which is today, in a most popular manner, termed the ‘culture of remembrance’. This specific artistic activity mostly takes the form of recycling the existing texts and data from the field of broader culture in the manner of postmodern pastiche. Collecting, appropriating, getting, retrieving, finding of data, information, and cultural texts in the broader sense of the term, appears to be a self-sufficient play with historical illusions. Practices of this kind are structured around certain historical, cultural and aesthetical patterns, myths and stereotypes linked to the past, that stipulate the postcolonial exoticising of the (post-)socialist spaces of art and culture.

The issue of nostalgia was problematised even twenty-five years earlier in the context of the cultural production conditioned by ‘late capitalism’. Fredric Jameson, an emblematic figure on the Marxist theoretical polygon, provided an elusive account on this matter. Jameson made his critique of the postmodernist logic, especially when discussing nostalgia film (*la mode rétro*), claiming that the imperative of nostalgia in the postmodernist cultural production

²² Matejić, 2014, 42–56. In this manuscript, I introduced the broader typology of artistic practices in the post-socialist spaces of art and culture that contribute to the reproduction of the existing power relations. The focus of my attention here is only a *memory discourse of art and culture* and its humanitarian/humanist logic.

implies “a depersonalised visual curiosity”²³ in which “intertextuality” is applied as

a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect and as the operator of a new connotation of “pastness” and pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces “real” history.²⁴

A memory, as a set of imagery constructions of the past or historical ruptures/traumas, and nostalgia in the postmodern logic of the cultural production, whose logical deviations are still present today, colonises the “present”, by which historicism appears as a substitute for “real” history.

Notwithstanding, Linda Hutcheon elaborated a different account on the politics of postmodernism as related to nostalgia / remembering, addressing the issue of the constant critique of the postmodernist ahistoricism. She stated that most of these critiques of the postmodernist nostalgia were focused on the postmodernist “naive” and “nostalgic” recycling of history. In Hutcheon’s perspective, what appears to be naive is the unquestionable belief that any recall of the past must, by definition, be sentimental nostalgia. Postmodernist usage of the past, says Hutcheon, does not include the mechanisms of quotation of history with the aim of the transcendental utopian projecting it into future. According to such claim, it might be said that the traces of the postmodernist nostalgia in the contemporary post-socialist spaces of art and culture do not imply a search for transcendent timeless meaning, yet rather an evocation of “a dialogue with the past in the light of the present”.²⁵

²³ Jameson, 1991, xvi.

²⁴ Ibid., 19.

²⁵ Hutcheon, 2003, 19.

What I am trying to indicate here by juxtaposing two opposing discourses on postmodernist logic is that ‘postmodernist art’, in such explanation—that I share with Hutcheon to some extent—wields its subversive dimension in its specific historical and geopolitical constellation(s). However, most of the postmodernist tactics are to be soon appropriated by the contemporary global power relations becoming a mainstream. What is most exploited today from the postmodernist strategies are artistic formal procedures such as appropriation, citation, nostalgia (howbeit, here “bad” nostalgia) and memory.

Taking into account this difference, by the memory discourse of the post-socialist art and culture I do not presuppose the postmodernist post-avant-garde / retro-avant-garde, or the post-Soviet anachronic painting etc. which problematise and deconstruct the great historical metanarratives in accordance with the postmodernist logic and cease to announce the political riots and conflicts immediately around the Fall of the Iron Curtain. By the memory discourse of the post-socialist art and culture, I imply the relatively recent symptomatic phenomenon that appeared in the work of the (predominantly) younger generation of artist and art theorists of addressing topics such as the communist and socialist past, the repercussions of the wars in the Balkans, partisan legacy, transformation of urban life in the changed political and economic circumstances after 1989 from the moralising, humanist and memory discourse’s standpoints.

Let me dwell more on this problematic. The memory discourse includes a broad corpus of texts and things—from the (contemporary) museum procedures and regulations of collecting, archiving, managing, allocating, representing and distributing of knowledge (as the ‘legal’ battle over repressed memory) to the market for cultural production, artistic works, academic books and articles that

refer to memory as key word—that all together create and participate in the so-called ‘memory industry’.²⁶ The academic interest and fascination with the memory discourse is a quite new phenomenon. The concept of ‘collective memory’ appeared as an object of scholarly enquiry in the early twentieth century with the first serious ‘crisis of historicism’.

The term “collective memory” in the ‘culture of remembrance’ nomenclature was first used by Hugo Hofmannsthal, while Maurice Halbwachs regards memory, contrary to H. Bergson and S. Freud, as a specifically social phenomenon in his book *The Social Framework of Memory* (1925). However, what is most striking is that the academic and cultural interest in memory studies has grown with the postmodernist dominance in the 80s, especially with the emergence of two books: Yosef Yerushalmi’s *Zakohor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982) and Pierre Nora’s “Between Memory and History” the introduction to an anthology *Lieux de mémoire* (1984). In these manuscripts, memory is regarded as a “primitive or sacred form of accessing the past that is opposed to modern historical consciousness”. For Yerushalmi, the Jews were the archetypal people of memory who had adopted history only recently and then only in part, for ‘modern Jewish historiography can never replace an eroded group memory’. For Nora, memory was an archaic mode of being that had been devastated by rationalisation: ‘We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left’.²⁷

The logical justification of the indispensable conceptualisation of memory, in the wake of postmodernism —as something that, under the supposition, confronts (‘Western’) aspiring to metaphysics and historical grand metanarratives—rests upon humanist

²⁶ Kerwin, 2000, 127.

²⁷ Ibid.

/ human and moralising belief that the process of ‘memorising’ will necessarily prevent from the (radical) Evil / Holocaust (to ever happen again). All the more, some proponents believe that the ‘memory discourse’ has a political dimension to the extent it takes a critical stance towards the fascist consumer logic of (contemporary) capitalism. Unfortunately, to recall briefly Hannah Arendt’s seminal manuscript, a (radical) Evil has nothing to do with the exception of sadism, perversity, totalitarianism, community, brotherhood, solidarity, unity, socialism, communism, partisans, capitalism, history, metaphysics (whatever word or label used), yet with the humanist, moralising “terrifying normality” as such.²⁸ Right here, one may remark all the fine curtains of the humanitarian/humanist ideological anamorphosis of the ‘after-Auschwitz’ ethical dictum.

During the 90s in the post-Yugoslav spaces of art and culture—socialism, communism, socialist modernism, self-management, partisan legacy etc. appeared to be indecent words. Only after the beginning of new century, the memory discourse—which includes artistic imagery reinvention of the traces of either the “barbaric” and/or “golden era” of the communist/socialist past, as well as the implications of the process of vanishing of the socialist/communist culture under the changed socio-political and economic circumstances—was enabled to be brought into light. As it was assured that (state) communism/socialism (both in political life and culture) would not survive, that it was completely defunct and that it no longer represented a threat to the neoliberal democratic ideals, the memory discourse of the post-Yugoslav / post-socialist (or of the recuperations of the war) cultural production was finally “allowed” to exist, only if it is to be exploited by the new imperial regimes of power.

²⁸ Arendt, 1963/2006, 276.

Consider some of the examples of the (particularly) younger generations of artists: Relying on some visual patterns of (post-)conceptual art, Vladimir Milanović—the author of the exhibition *Invisible violence* (2014) at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, declaratively addresses the issues of the post-war trauma of the former Yugoslav societies, as well as the questions of how the media and the institutions in the post-Yugoslav societies “create public sphere” and “collective memory”.²⁹ This project, to some extent, stems from the broader project “Četiri lica Omarske” initiated by artist Milica Tomić. The exhibition launches an avalanche of serious questions: from the visual aspects and methodology of the work as related to its conceptual principles and the framework to the moralising standpoint typical for the humanitarian/humanist discourse. Among many, one imperative is imposed: We are all obliged to speak, enunciate, declare, make visible, face etc. “our/Serbian/German... guilt” for the Terror. Take another “young” example—Benjocki’s sound installation made of recordings and archival material of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) titled *Soundtrack (Statements of Guilt)* exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts in the Hague in 2011. The author produced a piece of music from the previously archived, recorded, transcribed and translated voices and statements of guilt. The work addresses the “reciprocal alienation of voice and body from words and their context, and their complex relationship with to how the trauma experienced in the countries of the former Yugoslavia and the Netherlands is articulated.”³⁰ These works of art rather exemplify that of what Benjamin called *a(n)aestheticisation of politics*³¹ of the existing humanitarian

²⁹ Cf. <http://vladimirmiladinovic.blogspot.rs/>.

³⁰ Cf. <http://www.kristinabenjocki.com/soundtrack-statements-guilt>.

³¹ Benjamin, 2008, 41. Cf. Martin, 1992, 21.

democratic materialism³² / ‘after-Auschwitz’ ethical demand. The aesthetical conception of memorising, remembrance and personal enunciation here stand for the process of “normalising” of something which can never be symbolised—something which is at the core of the “normality” per se.

An artistic act of mourning

The second symptom that I find dominant in the last fifteen years in the work of a younger generation of artist / theorist is an artistic act of mourning.

The concept of an artistic act of mourning implies artistic practices that address the exotic mourning of the vanishing of the socialist and communist aesthetic and historical legacies, such as partisan history and the collapse and/or lost utopia (dystopia). More precisely, the act of mourning in art privileges lost object of desire which had implied some social values in the former socialist and communist countries. What it seems here is the major focus of the issue, is, actually, the act of mourning for the loss of the emancipatory projective object of the great modernist utopias—which testified to even before Auschwitz.³³ Yet, that of what is missing is nothing other than the “memory of deep memory”.

What is enacted is nostalgia for nostalgia, for the grand older extinct questions of origin and telos, of deep time and the Freudian Unconscious (...) for the dialectic also, as well as all the monumental forms left high and dry by the ebb tide of the modern moment, forms whose Absolutes are no longer audible to us, illegible hieroglyphs of the demiurgic within the technocratic world.³⁴

³² Badiou, 2016.

³³ Horkheimer, Adorno, 2006.

³⁴ Jameson, 1991, 155.

One should take into consideration, as Domenic Boyer stated, that the nostalgia production is never neutral or innocent when considering the system and categories of valuation. Similar to history construction, it is a narrative which is selected however legitimised, since it comes “from above” (personal/social vs. history/state). Furthermore, one should not neglect a discrepancy between the ‘industry of nostalgia’ and the ‘culture of nostalgia’ as remarks Mitja Velikonja, since the former implies the exploitation of the culture whose main resources are sentiments and emotions.³⁵

Let me take an example: Tanja Deman’s and Vesna Jovanović’s collaborative project *Deserted Utopia* (artist book, 2010) reflects on examples in architecture and urban planning whose utopian “goal” was emancipation of the modern Yugoslav society in the light of aspiring to social values of ‘unity’, community etc., as that which today represents a sign of a vanishing (either “golden” or “shameful”) socialist past. Similar Yugo-nostalgic reflections and outcomes are suggested in Marta Popivoda’s film *How Ideology Moved Our Collective Body*—a work in which the author seeks to make (media) information, often lost or displaced, physically present, using the methodology of archival samplings, juxtaposing the media constructions of the life form(s) in the socialist past and the 90s, that marked the collapse of Yugoslavia. Ivan Fijolić cites the visual stereotypes and constructions of the socialist realism in the work *NEO N.O.B - The (Un-)popular Culture of Remembrance* in the manner of the postmodernist pastiche and transfigures the visual narrative by incorporation of the elements of pop culture. In the installation *Here Come the Women* (2015) Adela Jusić in collaboration with Andreja Dugandžić produces monumental collages as the citation of the evident visual markers and traces from the media con-

³⁵ Popović, Belić, 2014, 94, 25.

structions of the woman's social life under the Yugoslav socialist regime. The installation problematises that of what could/might socialism and/or equality claim mean for the "average" woman. Similar topics and issues are initiated in the work *Born without a Reason: The Internal Soliloquy in Personal Encounter with Heroines* (2011) by Milica Rakič etc.

Most of these artistic practices, more or less, tend to use 'Yugonostalgia' as the artistic act of mourning aspiring to political and critical reflections on the current crisis of democracy and neoliberalism. Among other aims, they tend to reflect on the object that could/might be realised, but in the end failed. However, what is overseen in this relatively new cultural phenomenon is that they push the contemporary neoliberal commodification of the 'post-socialist context of art' to the extreme, by preserving the position of the object for victimisation, exotification and humanitarian ideological anamorphosis.

Conclusion

At the end, I must stress that the aim of this manuscript was not to render the listed artistic works as politically insignificant in the current state of the post-socialist art and culture—or worse to claim that such artistic practices should not exist—yet to open a dispute for the identification and critical reflection of the new, quite fashionable tendency of the (younger generation) artist/theorist who comes (geographically) from the post-Yugoslav context. The reasons for this situation should be found in the institutional dispositive (art schools and master programmes) in (Western) Europe that create and shape this global demand on the one hand, and on the other—the global market economy which rests upon the procedures of categorisation, separation and recognition, specifically inherent in the given culture/geopolitics.

Distortion of the ‘after-Auschwitz’ ethical dictum especially after 9/11 became one of the most powerful imperative as regards arts and culture in which memory discourse plays the most significant role. The art of memory, trauma and nostalgia contributes to the recent restoration of the classical liberal bourgeois society values (equality, civil rights, free speech, open media, humanitarianism, etc.) resting upon the production of the “degraded repository of images and simulacra”³⁶, in such a way that they substitute and reify the stereotypical constructions for filling the gap between reality and the past itself.

Therefore, today inasmuch as, Hanno Rauterberg³⁷ says, contemporary art is finally “free” from the categories of the form, technic and visual, perceptible aspects of the modernist achievements, the issue of its function, its forms of political, economic and social “value” / agency, its modes of shaping one’s/social life, become more important. In the present dominant humanist/humanitarian circumstances, one should try to think and practically indicate the possibilities of the process of the *dehumanisation of art*—of the moments of refusal that exceed the current culture’s affirmative social functions. As the humanitarian imperative of a/Art calls for obedience to some supposed Good against Evil, for which it is assumed cultural workers must strive, an art that aspires to emancipation might start by recognising the dominant images and spectacularisations of democratic phraseology critically demonstrating this very process of recognition. All these moments of post-socialist artistic practices that I have just identified, more or less acknowledge, fortify and consolidate the current ‘fear of Terror’ and ideological anamorphosis of the ‘after-Auschwitz’ ethic of representation.

³⁶ Jameson, 123.

³⁷ Rauterberg, 2016, 8.

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NIKOLA DEDIĆ¹

The Neoliberal Stamp on Post-socialist Art²

Abstract: The main objective of this paper is to provide an outline for a future theorisation of the following question: what is it that specifically determines the art of our time, that is, how do the conditions in which this art is created differ from the conditions in which art was created a decade or even twenty years ago? In order to carry out this analysis, it is necessary to take into account several factors: (a) the specificity of the social order within which the art of our time is created, that is, the evolution of a neoliberal “transition” state and its ideological apparatus; (b) the problem of material work forms, which has to do with economic production models that both contemporary neoliberal state and art are based upon; (c) the issue of value (for want of a better word let us call it “aesthetic”) which is implied or entailed by the work in the field of art.

Keywords: art, transition, post-socialism, society

UDK: 7:316.323.6

Neoliberalni pečat postsocialistične umetnosti

Izvleček: Glavni cilj tega prispevka je ponuditi osnovo za prihodnje teoretiziranje o naslednjem vprašanju: kaj je tisto, kar specifično določa umetnost našega časa, torej kako se pogoji, v katerih ta umet-

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² An early version of this paper, titled “Art in Peripheral Capitalism”, is published in the exhibition catalogue of the 17th Biennale of Arts in Pančevo, *See Art Gates* (2016), Kulturni centar, Pančevo, 63–85.

nost nastaja, razlikujejo od pogojev, v katerih je nastajala umetnost pred desetletjem ali celo dvema? Če želimo izvesti to analizo, je nujno vračunati več dejavnikov: (a) specifičnost družbenega reda, znotraj katerega nastaja umetnost našega časa, torej evolucijo neoliberalnega stanja “tranzicije” in njenega ideološkega aparata; (b) problem oblik materialnega dela, ki je povezano z ekonomskimi proizvodnimi modeli, na katerih sta osnovana tako sodobno neoliberalno stanje kot umetnost; (c) vprašanje vrednosti (v iskanju primernejšega izraza mu za zdaj recimo “estetske”), ki se implicira ali narekuje z delom na področju umetnosti.

Ključne besede: umetnost, tranzicija, postsocializem, družba



The dominant ideological meta-narrative within which post-socialist societies developed after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the communist project was one of a “democratic transition” and a new state of liberal democracy. A constituent of this narrative is the story of “totalitarianism”: former communist societies should overcome their totalitarian legacy and enter a society of liberal freedom, human rights, democratic distribution of power and, of course, free market. Thus the EU becomes the ultimate goal of historical development, and the European integration process becomes the path to be followed by former totalitarian societies in order to transform, gain an education, and mature, with a view to turning from *non-European* dictatorships into *European* democracies. However, as the historian János Kornai shows on the example of his homeland Hungary, the idea of liberal democracy, especially in the aftermath of the great economic crisis in 2008, has reached its definitive debacle, even ceasing to play the role of

an ideological meta-narrative.³ Kornai analyses institutional, legislative and ideological changes brought on by Orbán's regime: one of the founding principles of liberal democracy, the separation of executive and legislative powers (a separation that has probably never been achieved in Eastern European countries but has at least functioned as an attainable "ideal"), was suspended with a series of legislative changes. These included changes to the constitution, electoral laws, media laws, election of state prosecutors, etc., which culminated in the passing of the so-called 32 "cardinal laws", whose further potential change can be implemented only with a two-thirds majority in the parliament. In terms of economy, Orbán's Hungary abandons the market model and heads for state protectionism; this does not mean turning back to the socialist model but to a new form of neoliberal economy. The latter replaces a nominally free market with a clientelist system where economy develops under the fundamental influence of political elites close to the Prime Minister. Finally, there is strict control of the "cultural sphere", which started with a radical "purge" of the media and which leads to the institutionally shaped negation of any ideological "pluralism". Kornai's thesis is that these changes are structural, that is to say, they do not constitute a deviation, degeneration, or dysfunction of a liberal system, but build a *new* system that cannot even theoretically be called liberal.

Nor can this new system be called a "dictatorship" in the traditional sense of the word. In fact, it is a sort of hybrid between "liberal democracy" and "dictatorship", which, for want of a better word, Kornai refers to as *autocracy*. This transformation from democracy (at least in principle) towards autocracy is, owing to a series of legislative and institutional changes, practically *irreversible*:

³ Kornai, 2015, 2-24.

Fidesz is prepared for the unlikely but not impossible event of its failing to win a parliamentary majority in the next elections. The 32 cardinal laws can only be modified by a two thirds parliamentary majority, and even in the case of Fidesz' electoral defeat no such majority would be possible without their participation. The mandates of many key positions, most importantly those of the chief prosecutor, president of the republic, head of the central bank, of the audit office, and of the judicial office, extend beyond the current parliamentary cycle; they can sit tight, even if the opposition wins. The fiscal council, a body appointed by the present government, but which would remain in office even in case of an election defeat, has not only an advisory role but also the right of veto over the budget submitted by a new government. If that veto is used, the president of the republic may dissolve the parliament and call for new elections. In other words, a few hand-picked men loyal to the present government would be able to overturn the next government. All of this leads to the logical conclusion that it would probably be extremely difficult to effectively dismiss the government at parliamentary elections. In this sense, the situation that has emerged is nearly irreversible. Historical experience shows that an autocracy can only be brought down by an "earthquake" that rocks the very foundations of the system.⁴

Although he writes about Hungary, Kornai's thesis is gaining confirmation in other countries as well, both in the former socialist bloc and the countries of the so-called peripheral capitalism. The paradigmatic place is actually Putin's Russia, but states such as Erdogan's Turkey, Poland, and former Yugoslav countries are going

⁴ Ibid.

through substantially similar processes. This does not necessarily mean that “Putinism” is the model, or a role-model for the processes of a new neoliberal autocracy constitution – all these countries experience the erosion of liberal democracy meta-narratives in specific local circumstances and traditions, and within different networks of international economic and political relations. However, what still links them to each other is a strong neoliberal economic policy, which is necessarily clientelist. On the one hand it implies strong social and class stratification, and on the other the strengthening of conservative elements in the ideological sphere domain, which is in some cases (as is the case with the latest Croatian government or the process of rehabilitation of the Second World War collaborators in Serbia and elsewhere) openly neo-fascist. A more detailed research into the extent to which these processes have become *irreversible* in post-Yugoslav countries is beyond the scope of this text: direct parallels between Serbia and Hungary still cannot be drawn because Serbia has not yet implemented the structural constitutional and legislative transformations of the political system that would be reflected in an even more rigid constitution and change of electoral laws, although there have been sporadic announcements of the sort. The revision of private property still has not been carried out, nor its “amendments” through a state centralised economy. On the other hand, similarities are obvious – the concentration of power in one political personality, clientelism, suspension of power distribution, elimination of a functional opposition, changes in labour legislation, and perhaps most notably full control of the media, that is, “ideological apparatus”. Kornai’s thesis points out precisely the fact that the process marked as “democratic transition” has finally been rounded off, which means that former socialist countries have entered a new “post-transition” phase of their development. The question that arises is how this gradual formation of an autocratic

neoliberal country of peripheral capitalism is reflected in the field of art and artistic production.

The socialist system viewed art in a broader context of modernism as a universal meta-narrative. In this regard, communist systems, including the Yugoslav system, saw art as the key place of political self-legitimation: socialism “with a human face” is only possible as part of the global emancipatory meta-narrative. Thus a communist state treats art within a kind of Hegelian teleology: the totality (the universal) is achieved by the interaction of a multitude of opposing subtotalities (local modernisms), not annulling but integrating them into this “higher” form of totality (the universal concept of “great” modernism). Disintegration of the teleological art narrative happened parallel with the disintegration of the socialist project: after the fall of the Berlin Wall (if not even earlier) it was hardly possible to speak of a universal project of modern art. From the state of modernity, art has come to the state of contemporaneity, that is to say, it has become a series of synchronic micronarratives, none of which reaches the level of the Hegelian totality. Yet it would be wrong to assume that the “transitional” state rejects all forms of artistic teleology: the logic of liberal transition is basically teleological. Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić once said: “Our generation is a generation that has a huge responsibility. Of course, with responsibility comes great honour. We have been chosen, we have a mission to complete.” This mission, of course, is the European Union. Within such logic, history is seen as a teleological narrative that leads to the ultimate self-fulfilment: the order of liberal Europe is a kind of “homecoming”, the end of history, which can be reached only through rejection and complete erasure of the Yugoslav socialist legacy. Art resumes its place within this liberal-capitalist teleology: the concept of “Eastern European art” is the construct included in the project of cultivation, “civilisation”, of

local pre-modern societies into the community of European democratic nations. As Miklavž Komelj states, “Eastern” art is those post-conceptual practices that reflect on avant-garde heritage (perestroika art, soc-art, Yugoslav retro-avant-garde). The constitutive element of this art is a myth of the socialist “totalitarianism”, underlined by the broader historical process of restoring capitalism, and therefore the global art market as well. In Komelj’s words:

The rhetoric of “Eastern art” refers to the otherness of the “East” and the subversion of that otherness in the global art system – which we could understand exactly as fighting against the ideological disqualification of the “East” performed by the “West” through the use of the term “totalitarianism” [...]. This thesis, however, is nothing more than a way to incorporate the “East” as such in the space of the “West”, that is, a globalised art market now. Thus, of course, the “East” becomes harmless; something that until recently represented a real threat to the “West” becomes a potential cultural wealth that can fill the globalised art system with new vitality. It is about how to convert social issues into issues of art and launch them as such onto the globalised art market.⁵

This process of capitalist culturalisation of the “East” meant at the same time the construction of an entire institutional infrastructure of “Eastern” art production: the paradigmatic place is the launching of the Soros Centers for Contemporary Art network (SCCA), and then large biennial exhibitions such as *Manifesta*. The real break-up of this artistic teleology occurred only with the completion of the transition: only a neoliberal “post-transition” state does not truly need contemporary art as a source of self-legitima-

⁵ Komelj, 2011, 32–33, 185–201.

tion. The dominant narrative of the “post-transition” cultural logic is no longer that of a more democratic integration but one of pure market, which is supplemented by the ideological rhetoric of “austerity” and by phasing out a large part of what we once perceived as the “public sector”. Parallel to this, there occurred a disintegration of cultural infrastructure, both the infrastructure that was built in socialism and the one that was made up of “independent” cultural and activist organisations (NGOs), such as the aforementioned Soros network of Centers for Contemporary Art. That is why the protagonists on the contemporary art scene in countries like Serbia feel as para-institutional workers. This feeling is followed by a disorientation in both conceptual and, even more so, institutional sense, as well as by the feeling that a post-transition state recognises only “occasional” culture (e.g. popular music festivals and similar commercially viable “entertainment” events) but not the supposedly “serious” culture, such as contemporary art. In other words, “post-transition” art is art which does occur within the neoliberal framework, but is devoid of the “transitional” teleology of reaching liberal democracy.

Working in the arts also reflects well the transformation of work caused by integration into the neoliberal market, which can be described by the standard term of precarisation. The precarisation of art is the result of both external factors (global transition from Fordist to post-Fordist production model) and the development inherent in art as such. The art historian and curator Jelena Vesić advances a thesis according to which the concept of contemporaneity was introduced in art and aesthetic debates precisely through the construct of post-socialist transition (and thus “Eastern European” art as well), which brought with it the “managerial” model in terms of institutional infrastructure for the production art: the basic premise was that the culture of Eastern countries was “contaminated”

with “totalitarian” ideology and state control (concern), and that the main task of today’s historians, curators, or artists was the “opening” of contemporaneity, which was to be achieved through a “renovation”, “reconstruction” and “new management” of history. Hence, SCCA offices have become the new meeting places of artists, but now these places are run by hired managers (usually local art historians and critics). While in the socialist system the development of art was decided upon by the state, the development of contemporary art depends on the decisions of a few expert councils (modelled on company management in the West). In this regard, “post-socialist art exhibitions in most cases are not judged, but curated – they are now curated either by a ‘council’ or, in later stages, by an *invited curator*”.⁶ Moreover, while modernist authors focused on the *métier* (artistic skills), creating tangible artefacts/works in their studios, the author in post-Fordist neoliberal economy conditions spends most of his time in offices “engaging in post-studio practices, dealing with communication, documentation, creating projects for his/her future works, researching, planning and so on”.⁷ It is about constructing a new type of artist-entrepreneur who no longer requires art institutions as institutions of social care but works on the curator-manager model, or as Vesić points out, as a self-governing individual who solves “his/her existential issues either on the art market (still linked to objects) or in the context of the project market”.⁸ This (neoliberal) paradigm, first established within the SCCA network, remains a model to this day.

“Post-transition” art is thus created in conditions of the complete dismantling and disintegration of institutional frameworks that were

⁶ Vesić, 2015, 68.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

initially formed in the socialist era, but it is left without even “alternative” institutional frameworks, which were once provided by the ideology of “liberal” integration of post-socialist societies and its inherent concept of “Eastern European art”. The precarious market model is the dominant framework of today’s art. However, at this point there emerges a paradox which is also characteristic of global frameworks: although it offers work in precarious conditions, often unpaid work, social insecurity, etc., the number of art students is not declining. The last decade saw the introduction of private higher education in Serbia, and one of the trends is an increase (not decrease, as might have been expected) in the number of art academies, departments of new media, digital art, art theory, curatorial practice, design and so on. This is one of the paradoxes that point to the fact that work in the field of art, even in precarious neoliberal conditions, carries a specific type of symbolic value, a kind of “symbolic capital”. The question remains how to consider this kind of cultural value which is implied by the work in the field of art. It seems that in the local circumstances at least three dominant discourses can be identified: (a) traditional; (b) market (or entrepreneurial); and (c) the discourse of contemporary art in a strict sense (this is, of course, only an approximate and intuitive typology).

The traditional model refers to mostly common-sense guidelines within which a work of art is treated as an autonomous “beautiful” object in an indifferent and non-utilitarian sense. An autonomous work is an “outstanding” object, rarely a situation or event, which essentially means masterfully made, authentic or unique.⁹ This kind of “common-sense” definition of art occurs in different contexts, and is often an argument within the institutional realignment on the local art scene – a good example is the change

⁹ Šuvaković, 2010, 408–411.

of the Management Board and program of the October Salon, where objections to the current concept, mainly articulated within official art associations, rested on the argument that the Salon had stopped dealing with “beautiful” art, authentic aesthetic values and visual arts, that “waste” was exhibited instead of genuinely valuable works (according to one of the critics of the “conceptual” approach to contemporary art), and that international artists had been privileged at the expense of local, national authors. On the other hand, the traditional approach is also characteristic of a phenomenon typical of the new millennium since its beginning: the emergence of private collectors who are mainly governed by the logic rooted deeply in the “object market”, preferring art based on the idea of “artistic” and aesthetically valuable art objects. Nevertheless, this “traditional” value model often spreads beyond the scope of guild artistic circles into the broader field of political debates and realignments: from conservative and right-wing advocacy for an “authentic” national culture to, for example, debates on reality television programs, where the mass media aesthetics of “kitsch” are supposedly countered by “authentic” high culture and art. An example is last year’s protest by a student organisation, “Sistem vrednosti”, which supported a petition against reality programs by playing classical music concerts in the central city square; as the mainstream media reported, “they say that they want museums and theatres, rather than ‘Farms’, ‘Couples’ or ‘Big Brother’, and as they stated, they showed that they appreciated real Serbian and European culture, and were against the promotion of immorality and stupidity, which abound in TV programs”.

Another model that we have singled out is the “market” or “entrepreneurial” model. It is a context gradually built by creative industries: in circumstances where the state withdraws from everything that was once understood as “public goods”, including artistic pro-

duction, a market environment is supposed to emerge that will enable economic “self-sustainable” cultural policies. One of the ways that should allegedly make this possible is through the so-called public-private partnerships. The basis of this is the affirmation of private enterprise, which is based on the combination of art, social activism, marketing, and collaboration between people working in the field of art and private companies. One of the implicit arguments of this view is that there is still no “real” market in our country and that our cultural scene is branded by bad habits from the socialist era, rooted in the state’s patronising attitude towards culture, as well as by the lack of a “global trends” knowledge, successful management, and ideas. The naivety of these views aside, if the market did not solve any of the transition society problems, why should we expect it to resolve cultural production issues? It is of much more importance to realise that the “free market” concept is one of the constituent ideological constructs of transition countries: as indicated by Kornai in the abovementioned text, peripheral capitalism rests on a centralised, clientelist system in which the state functions as the prime regulator of the market. The curator Vida Knežević has written most strikingly on this issue, analysing the work of an event based on the concept of “public-private partnership”, noting that creative industry work actually means state controlled and patronised business modelled by local private companies, “whose business is largely non-transparent, and rests on privatisation of social property, social infrastructure and resources built during the period after the Second World War”.¹⁰ In her opinion, it is a complex mechanism of institutional collusion between private business, political elites in power and the new managerial class, which actually masks the structural conflict between work and capital.

¹⁰ Knežević, 2016.

Finally, the third model is the contemporary art discourse in the narrow sense of the word. It suggests diverse post-post-avant-garde and postconceptual practices, which have generally rejected dealing with traditional art objects. What they start from is art as a form of political practice rather than its aesthetic “content”. The institutional framework of this art is based on the networking of local practices with international art “worlds”, where the underlying form is the concept of international biennials and the increasingly frequent art fairs. These practices are often positioned as critical, even subversive in relation to the local ideological, political, aesthetic and economic models. With reference to this, as indicated by the French sociologist Nathalie Heinich, the main axiological determinant, a kind of pre-condition for the integration of such a work into the globalised contemporary art system, is transgression.¹¹ In the modernist model, mediation between the work and the recipient tended to be direct and unmediated (and where the artist’s main task was expression, the rendition of his private world). Today, by contrast, in order to enter the art system, a work of art has to question and even go beyond the borders of what is rationally considered a work of art. Artists create ambivalent, “transgressive” works and the mechanism of their “socialisation” is achieved through a curator and theory respectively. This is what Heinich calls the “permissive paradox” of the contemporary art system:

We cannot understand how contemporary art functions unless we understand that, while artists are trying to push the boundaries, mediators (intermediaries) simultaneously keep extending the borders so that artists can get in – while at the same time the incompetent keep crying “but it is not art”. This is what I

¹¹ Special thanks for the comments on the transgression thesis and referral to Nathalie Heinich’s text are due to Dr. Rade Pantić.

have called in the conclusion of my book the “permissive paradox”, which refers to the fact that by accepting and integrating transgressive proposals, contemporary art institutions are acting in a way contrary to what artists they supposedly support are doing because they pre-accept everything that is created as opposed to their power.¹²

This is precisely the mechanism by which “Eastern art” was created: authors create an ideologically and politically ambivalent, that is, provocative and subversive work, and the mediation process is carried out by specialised experts – critics, theorists, curators. A typical example of this is the famous *Irwin* group and the NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst) movement intervention, remembered in the history of art as the “poster scandal”, which rested on an ambivalent attitude to the thesis of “totalitarianism”; *Irwin*’s international success lies in the impossibility of any “straight-line” reading of their work either as a glorification of totalitarian ideology or as its criticism and deconstruction. Local contemporary art scenes in former socialist countries are marked by the influence of such a “mediation” mechanism, which is the basis of the global art system: local art is often marked by internal tensions – “short circuits”. These mainly revolve around the question which artistic gesture is “authentically” political and which reflects “backward”, “bourgeois”, “nationalist”, “conservative” ideologies, etc. It is indirectly expected that “progressiveness” will ensure a work’s integration into the globalised art system. Another typical example of this kind was a major debate about the work *Gipsies and Dogs* by the artist Zoran Todorović in 2009–2010. Due to its ambivalent character, that is, its resistance to being straightforwardly read either as a critical documentation of racial exploita-

¹² Heinich, 2007.

tion or as its racist reproduction, the work caused a stir and an institutional and ideological realignment of the scene.

We have already pointed out that a common argument in the local art circles is the lack of a “real” market. It is argued that the formation of a functional art market would solve some of the structural problems of contemporary art production and reception. However, we hope that it is clear from the above why this faith in the market is at least ideologically naive: the point is exactly that the art created in post-socialist countries is *already* part of the capitalist market, that it has already been co-opted by neoliberal logic, no matter whether it is circulating within traditional or contemporary models; the point is that this market is of a peripheral type. This does not mean that it is structurally not integrated into the mechanisms of the global capitalist system, be it the “object market”, where private collectors are replacing former public institutions, the market of precarious work, which is taken up by increasingly clientelist-oriented creative industries, or the “project market”, where survival in the world of art means integration into a global network of art biennials, residences, etc. Until concrete political answers are articulated, answers which will use a new mass political movement to question the very foundations of the current capitalist system, we can hardly expect art to escape co-optation into the neoliberal order.

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POLONA TRATNIK¹

Maja Smrekar's Biopolitical Manifesto from a Philosophical Perspective

Abstract: With her series *K-9_topology*, Maja Smrekar is challenging anthropocentrism by linking biology and culture, in particular addressing interaction between human and animal species. The artist builds upon the recent scientific findings that it is not only the dog species that has been domesticated; the domestication that took place during evolution is to be considered mutual. Not only has the dog been mastered by the human, but dogs have had an active role in “using” the human species for a more comfortable survival as well. Both species coexist. In the project *Ecce Canis* Maja Smrekar built upon the sense of smell as an interface used to trigger the emotional connection between the species.

Hybrid Family is another project in the *K-9_topology* series. In this performance Smrekar nurtured a puppy. By submitting herself to two and a half months of physiological training, she achieved milk production in her breasts. The artist refers to this process as to the process of becoming, of becoming-animal, becoming-woman and becoming m(Other). She is deeply rooted in her own experience at the beginning of the 3rd millennium, when “liberal capitalism finally struck hard into the newborn Slovenian economy”, as she writes in her blog: her parents lost their business, house, cars, forests, meadows and vineyards, and her father committed suicide. She finds her own way of resisting, which is in submitting herself

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to a “dog-human kinship relationship as a radical intimate action of ‘returning home’”.

In the present paper, the process of becoming mother is analysed in relation to the process of becoming animal. Furthermore, the process of becoming (m)Other is particularly examined with reference to the mother-and-child unity, applying the *Umwelt* notion and a Hegelian, existentialist feminist and post-structuralist discussion of identity and difference. The process of becoming (m)Other is finally examined as a biopolitical statement or intervention with the investment of the artist’s body. Its purpose is to re-gain the position of power, i.e. to perform an act of resistance to bio-power on and through bodies.

Keywords: biopolitics, Other, bio art, Maja Smrekar, bio-power, performance art, *K-9_topology*, *Hybrid Family*

UDK 7:606

Biopolitični manifest Maje Smrekar s filozofske perspektive

Izveček: S svojo serijo *K-9_topologija*, Maja Smrekar izziva antropocentrizem s povezovanjem biologije in kulture, še posebej pa naslavlja interakcijo med človeškimi in živalskimi vrstami. Umetnica gradi na najnovejših znanstvenih dognanjih, da ni samo pasja vrsta tista, ki je bila udomačena; udomačitev, ki se je odvijala med evolucijo, se mora smatrati za obojestransko. Niso samo psom zagospodarili ljudje, ampak so tudi psi imeli aktivno vlogo pri “uporabi” človeške vrste za svoje bolj udobno preživetje. Obe vrsti sobivata. Pri projektu *Ecce Canis* je Maja Smrekar gradila na čutu za voh kot vmesniku, ki se uporablja kot sprožilec za emocionalno povezavo med vrstama.

Hibridna družina je še en izmed projektov v seriji *K-9_topologije*. V tem performansu je Smrekarjeva vzgajala kužka. Z dva in pol meseca trajajočim fiziološkim treningom je dosegla, da se je v nje-

nih prsih začelo proizvajati mleko. Umetnica o tem procesu govori kot o procesu postajanja, postajanja žival, postajanja ženska in postajanja (druga) mati. Globoko je zasidrana v svoje izkustvo na začetku 3. tisočletja, ko je, kot je zapisala v svojem blogu, “liberalni kapitalizem končno globoko zarezal v novorojeno slovensko gospodarstvo”: njena starša sta izgubila podjetje, hišo, avtomobile, gozdove, travnike in vinograde, njen oče pa je naredil samomor. Sama je našla svoj način upora, ki se izraža v tem, da se podvrže “odnosu pasje-človeškega sorodstva kot radikalnemu intimnemu dejanju ‘vrnitve domov’”.

V pričujočem prispevku je proces postajanja mati analiziran v povezavi s procesom postajanja žival. Še več, proces postajanja (druga) mati je še posebno pod drobnogledom glede na enotnost mati-in-otrok, z uporabo pojma *Umwelt* in heglovske, eksistencialistične feministične in post-strukturalistične diskusije identitete in razlikovanja. Proces postajanja (druga) mati je na koncu preučen še kot biopolitična izjava ali intervencija z investicijo umetničnega telesa. Njegov namen je ponovno pridobiti pozicijo moči, torej izvesti dejanje upora bio-moči – vaja moči na telesu in skozenj.

Ključne besede: biopolitika, drugo, Maja Smrekar, bio-moč, uprizaritvena umetnost, *K-9_topologija*, *Hibridna družina*



With the series *K-9_topology*, Maja Smrekar is challenging anthropocentrism by linking biology and culture, in particular addressing interaction between human and animal species. The artist builds upon the recent scientific findings that it is not only the dog species that has been domesticated; the domestication that took place during evolution is to be considered mutual. Not only has the dog been

mastered by the human, but dogs have had an active role in “using” the human species for a more comfortable survival as well. Both species coexist. In the project *Ecce Canis* Maja Smrekar built upon the sense of smell as an interface used to trigger the emotional connection between the species.

Hybrid Family is another project in the *K-9_topology* series. In this performance Smrekar nurtured a puppy. By submitting herself to two and a half months of physiological training, she achieved milk production in her breasts. The artist refers to this process as to the process of becoming, of becoming-animal, becoming-woman and becoming m(Other). The project is deeply rooted in her own experience, as she writes in her blog. At the beginning of the 3rd millennium, “liberal capitalism finally struck hard into the newborn Slovenian economy”,² so her parents lost their business, house, cars, forests, meadows and vineyards, and her father committed suicide. In this regard *Hybrid Family* is her way of resisting the neoliberal power over the bodies and lives of people.

Becoming mother

Maja Smrekar bought a young puppy, which had been taken away from its primary dog-mother, and adopted the role of its new parent. In addition to ensuring a new home for the puppy, as any ordinary dog keeper would, this new parent ensured its nurture in the most literal sense possible, by breast-feeding it. Let us consider the significance of this act more carefully.

With breast-feeding the puppy and the artist connect biologically, if biologically means through and with investing their own bodies. The artist “hunts nature”. She has not only become a sort of social parent to the puppy, ensuring care and protection. Becom-

² <http://majasmrekar.org/post-no-1-history-of-tears>.

ing the breast-feeding “parent” to the puppy puts this human dog keeper in a corporeal relationship with the dog.

“Naturally” milk is produced within *the exchange process* between mother and child; the production is realised by the mother but evoked by the child. The mother’s capacity to produce milk is enabled only by the child’s evocation. The production of milk by the woman’s body is thus a process that originates from the tight *connection* between the mother and the child, or *the unity* mother-child.

Breast-feeding is a process significant for the mother-child formation, in which the two are mingled together. Julia Kristeva ascertains that in this phase the child does not yet have a narcissist attitude, which only develops after the intervention of the third, who becomes the object of the mother’s desire. The third breaks apart the dyad. According to psychoanalysis, this moment signifies the beginning of the process of autonomisation or the formation of the self.³ In our case we are not paying attention to the moment at which the formation of the self begins, but to the moment which is originally performed here, that is, the moment at which the mother-child formation is established. The project thus establishes the situation before the moment of quitting the breast-feeding, in which the boy is protected against regret that he is no longer a breast-feeding baby or a girl, as ascertained by Simone de Beauvoir, since from then on he will embody his transcendence and his arrogant sovereignty in his sex.⁴ If this moment signifies the becoming of the first or the second sex, to paraphrase de Beauvoir, the project performs a “reverse” process of becoming: of becoming the breast-feeding mother for the artist and of becoming the human breast-fed baby for the dog.

³ Kristeva, 1987.

⁴ Beauvoir, 2010.

Mother and child are in this formation of breast-feeding mingled to such a degree that they exist as an entity. Rather than *the other* of the child's self, the mother is a part of the child's own subjectivity, of the child's own self.

This moment of unity could also be examined with a reference to the notion of *the Umwelt*, introduced by Jakob von Uexküll.⁵ The early 20th century zoologist and one of the founders of ecology, Jakob von Uexküll, examines the notion of the environment that is bound to an animal. For Uexküll animals don't experience the same world and time. The bee, the tick and the fly that we observe don't move in the same world or share the same world with us, the observers. Each *Umwelt* is a closed unity within itself.

For Uexküll there exists also *die Umgebung*, a rather objective environment which, however, changes according to one's perspective, since there is no objective space per se: there is only a forest-for-a-woodcutter, a forest-for-a-botanic, a forest-for-a-wanderer, etc. Uexküll does not find much interest in the notion of *die Umgebung*, but offers a very interesting examination of the structure of *die Umwelt*, in which the world and the animal are intrinsically or existentially linked.

Uexküll takes into consideration the case of a tick. The fundamental aspects of the structure of *die Umwelt*, the environments that are valid for all animals, can be derived from the example of the tick. Out of the egg crawls a not yet fully developed little animal, but even in this state it can already ambush cold-blooded animals such as lizards, for which it lies in wait. Once the female has copulated, the eyeless and deaf creature finds its way to a warm-blooded animal, from which it pumps a stream of warm blood. Uexküll ascertains that the tick uses the sense of smell and has no sense of

⁵ Uexküll, Kriszat, 1934.

taste. It takes in any liquid, so long as it has the right temperature. For the tick it is existentially relevant to get the meal: after getting it, it will fall to the ground, lay its eggs and die. The tick gets into a “functional cycle as a subject and the mammal as its object”.⁶

In *die Umwelt* there are carriers of characteristics or significance; in semiology these would be marks [*Merkmalträger*], which are also carriers of meaning [*Bedeutungsträger*]. These carriers are all that interests an animal. An animal has receptive organs that are designed to perceive the mark [*Merkorgan*] and to react to it [*Wirkorgan*].

Uexküll believes that his explanation of the subject – object interconnectedness in *die Umwelt* has finally connected biology to Kant's philosophy by emphasising the decisive role of the subject, because there can be no time and no space without a living subject.⁷

By analogy with Uexküll we can postulate that in the case of the child and the mother, the child undertakes a role similar to the tick's. The functional cycle of breast-feeding makes the mother the object of the child in the sense that she is required for the child to survive, she is the child's host, the nourisher, the food, the existential expansion of the parasite child. Together they form this significant environment, *die Umwelt*, which is a closed unity within itself. We, not being part of it, don't share their world. And there is one significant conclusion that we have to formulate at this moment: there is no mother per se, there is no objective mother, the mother is the mother-for-the-child. The fact that the artist voluntarily undertakes the “objectification” of herself for the puppy by becoming mother-for-the-puppy through breast-feeding, as well as through becoming the puppy's social parent, opens up a new dimension of the project.

⁶ Uexküll, 2010, 50.

⁷ Ibid., 52.

One should not forget that the dog keeper is legally responsible for ensuring proper care for the animal. The role of the caretaker is somehow similar to the role of the parent. However, the dog is considered the dog keeper's property, an object with an ability to suffer, which is why suffering may not be caused. Yet the punishment for the violation of a child's or a puppy's rights tells the most about the hierarchical difference between human and animal, as agreed upon in a given society. The difference between the two species has been recognised within historical materialism, as ascertained by de Beauvoir, which ensured a relevant recognition that "[h]umanity is not an animal species; it is a historical reality".⁸ If Maja Smrekar is becoming mother-for-the-puppy, this makes up a significant dimension of the process of becoming, in which she is simultaneously becoming an animal-mother. With objectifying herself for the dog, she is resisting the policy by which domestic animals are considered proprietorial objects of humans. The hierarchical differentiation of human and animal species is here subverted.

Becoming animal, becoming other

Saying that one is becoming an animal seems senseless since man *is* an animal, a speaking animal, if we agree with Jacques Derrida.⁹

For Martin Heidegger, however, there exists a difference between animal and human and stone; it lies in the relation of each of them to the world: "the stone is worldless [*weltlos*]; the animal is poor in the world [*weltarm*]; man is world-forming [*weltbildend*]." The origin of Heidegger's consideration of the relation between the being and the world is to be found in Uexküll: what Uexküll defined as marks or carriers of meaning, Heidegger calls disinhibitors, and

⁸ Beauvoir, 87.

⁹ Derrida, 2008.

what Uexküll defined as *die Umwelt*, Heidegger calls the disinhibiting ring. Heidegger examines the relationship of the animal to its disinhibiting ring further in order to define what he called the “poverty in the world” characteristic of animals. Heidegger differentiates between animal existence in the world and the mode of the human world. The mode of existence proper to an animal is signified in its relation with the disinhibitor – it is in a state of *captivation*. As an example of captivation Heidegger presents the case of a bee described already by Uexküll. A bee, placed in front of a cup full of honey, begins to suck it, then its abdomen is cut away, yet the bee happily continues to suck while the honey visibly streams out of its open abdomen. The animal is captivated, stunned, but also taken away, blocked [*benommen*], as well as taken in, absorbed [*eingegenommen*]. The animal is essentially captivated and wholly absorbed in its own disinhibitor. It cannot truly *act in relation to it*, it can only behave.¹⁰

The animal is being-alongside-itself: the animal does not recognise the situation, the bee does not recognise the presence of too much honey neither the absence of its abdomen. It is *taken by* [*hingenommen*] the food. “This being taken is only possible where there is an instinctive ‘towards ...’ [*treibhaftes Hin-zu*]. Yet this being taken in such a drivenness also excludes the possibility of any recognition of any being-present-at-hand [*Vorhandensein*]. It is precisely being taken by its food that prevents the animal from taking up a position over and against [*sich gegenüberzustellen*] this food.”¹¹

The baby is *taken by* the mother’s milk. When the animal comes in contact with its disinhibitor, it gets taken by [*hingenommen*] the

¹⁰ Agamben, 2004, 52.

¹¹ Heidegger, 1995, 263; original in Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vols. 29–30, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik. Welt-Endlichkeit-Einsamkeit*, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1983, p. 383.

food, it is captivated, because the “very possibility of apprehending something as something is *withheld* [*genommen*] from the animal, and it is withheld from it not merely here and now, but withheld in the sense that it is ‘not given at all’”.¹² We can draw an analogy with the captivation of the animal and the breast-feeding child. The breast-feeding baby gets into a disinhibiting ring. The baby is driven toward the breast. It gets into instinctive drivenness “toward”. Being taken by the milk prevents the child from taking up a position over the milk or apprehending something as something. In this case, however, the subject experiencing the “poverty in the world” is not the animal as in the case discussed by Heidegger, but the child, which is a pre-state of human being.

The captivated subject, the breast-feeding child, does not, according to Heidegger’s theory, fulfil the criteria for a human being. The difference between man and animal lies in the human capability to act in relation to the world or to act against it, according to Heidegger. It would not be correct to say that this child is becoming human through the process of breast-feeding or this performance. Recalling Derrida saying that man is a speaking animal, let us reflect upon the *communication aspect*. Uexküll refers to the decisive role of the subject expounded by Kant when conceptualising the notion of *die Umwelt* to show how space and time depend on the subject, the animal in our case. Kant introduces the notion of existence of things *for* the subject. So how does the baby exist for itself? The environment, time and space are formed according to the subject, they exist *for* the subject. But as a being in the state of captivation, the child is not capable of apprehending something as something. Accordingly, it is not capable of apprehending itself. The same holds true for the animal. There is a certain difference

¹² Ibid., 253; original, 269.

between the baby and the grown-up. If man is a speaking animal and other animals are not speaking, the baby is a non-speaking animal, an animal as all other non-speaking animals. The mother, on the contrary, is a speaking animal.

One might say that the mother is capable of reaching the state of being-for-herself. She is thus a conscious being, and it is consciousness that makes the difference between human and animal. On the other hand, Jean-Luc Nancy disagrees that consciousness is the criterion and claims there is no difference between man and animal. There is no consciousness, but there is *exchange*.¹³

Let us consider the breast-feeding performance as a *communication event*. Jean-Luc Nancy recalls Edmund Husserl's reflection upon the silent voice of the self, talking to itself, listening to itself. The self communicates with the self. One aims to be present to oneself. Yet to see oneself can only happen if there is a difference between presence one and presence two. There is an "Augenblick", a moment, it takes a while. The self starts to go to the self, but the self will never find itself. There is a *différance* at work. With this term Jacques Derrida refers to the double meaning implied in its root: the French verb *différer* means *to be different from* or *to delay something*. The delay of the *différance* is an infinite delay. To be becomes suspended. It is a continuous, never ending process of *becoming*.

If the baby has no capability to apprehend itself as itself, to be present to itself, it does not even start to go to the self. The mother, by contrast, has the ability to aim to be present to herself as the mother. Yet this to be, the identity, is suspended. The mother enters the continuous process of becoming mother.

¹³ Jean-Luc Nancy in a Ph.D. seminar for the Humanities program, Alma Mater Europaea – Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis in collaboration with the Global Center for Advanced Studies, 30th August 2016.

Considering the existence of an identity, Hegel introduced the notion of an *other*. The relationship between the two, the mother and the baby, is essential for the establishment of their identities. It is the baby that makes the mother the mother. According to Hegel, something is existence, determined by its relationship to others: “[s]omething is a determinate existence, this something is in relationship to *others*, and also to a perceiver among these others.”¹⁴

Identity is being established not essentially, but through a differentiation process in relation to that which something is not, i.e. through negative relational defining. Something is defined through relations and differentiations, negations (and confirmations).

Furthermore, for Hegel, something is also *becoming*. The two moments are not those of abstract being and nothing, but an existence, something, and another existence, which is the negative of something. “The other moment is equally an existent, but determined as the negative of something – an *other*. As becoming, something is a transition, the moments of which are themselves something, and for that reason it is an *alteration* – a becoming that has already become *concrete*.”¹⁵

With breast-feeding the puppy, the artist positions herself in a kinship relationship with the dog. She enters a process of differentiation and of becoming the negative of herself as a speaking animal, that is, as a non-speaking animal. At the same time the puppy enters a process of becoming human. Humanity enters its differentiating identity, the identity of a non-speaking animal, which has the speaking animal as its other. This equalisation of the two processes of becoming is significant for the artist. Agamben’s finding that “[t]he total humanization of the animal coin-

¹⁴ Hegel, 2010, 64.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

cides with a total animalization of man”¹⁶ is a relevant reference in the *K-9_topology*.¹⁷

In short, we will focus upon the political implications of this equalisation. But first we need to shed light on the artist's struggle for de-hierarchisation, since the two species do not enjoy political equality. The original positioning of the artist lies in making herself a disinhibitor for the puppy. In this disinhibiting ring she does not take over the “higher” state of being as regards the relation to the world, but a “lower” one, as far as one can gather a hierarchical positioning of the human, animal and stone in Heidegger. She enters a transsubstantiation process of becoming a “defined” being, an animal, as Heidegger comprehended the animal. At the same time the animal becomes “privileged” with its transition to the human.

Becoming a non-speaking animal is, however, at work also in the mother-child formation through breastfeeding, if we infer from Heidegger that the baby is a “defined” being as well as other animals. It is the state and the relation to the disinhibitor that defines the being as “defined” or “non-defined”. The “defined” being is not in a state in which the subject would be able to apprehend something as something or itself as itself, or in which it would aim to reach a comprehension of itself. In this state the subject surrenders to the instinctive drivenness “toward”, *it is the state of captivation*. With putting herself in this state, Maja Smrekar can discard the “privilege” of the human to be a “non-defined” being. As this project demonstrates, the mother is not a mere host that harbours the parasite, the breast-feeder: rather, she is captivated in her own turn by the breast-feeder in this functional cycle. The one who gives suck is dependent on sucking, as the whole process of breast-feeding is

¹⁶ Agamben, 77.

¹⁷ <http://majasmrekar.org/k-9_topology> 1. 11. 2016

dependent on the breast-feeder. The existence of this breast-feeding *Umwelt* is established on breast-feeding, since without sucking there is no milk. Therefore, it is relevant to conceive the *Umwelt* of the breast-feeding mother and the child, as well as the *Umwelt* of the artist and the puppy, as an *exchange circuit*.

For Maja Smrekar this physiological captivation is of extreme importance. It becomes her means of resistance: “Becoming (- animal) is a molecular process: in my case the molecular process of my pituitary glands being so much triggered by systematic breast-pumping, they would get connected with hormone prolactin to accumulate milk in my body. As a side effect of that triggering, hormone oxytocine increases, which evokes empathy.”¹⁸

Biopolitical resistance: becoming bare life

“I hunt nature and culture hunts me,”¹⁹ says the artist in the title of another *K-9_topology* performance. Aiming at becoming “nature” is aiming at escaping culture. Maja Smrekar aims at becoming “zoē”, bare life, the domain once reserved only for animals. But what can we say today of the distinction between zoē and bios? According to Giorgio Agamben, the anthropological machine produced *humanitas* by de-ciding every time between man and animal. There is a “total management” of biological life at work today, that is, of the very animality of man. Humanity “has taken upon itself the mandate of the total management of its own animality”.²⁰

Maja Smrekar responds to the situation in which bio-power is being exercised on and through the bodies, as ascertained by Michel Foucault. “As an artist I feel I need to use my own body (and bodies

¹⁸ <<http://majasmrekar.org/post-no-2-involution-of-m-mother>> 19. 10. 2016.

¹⁹ The title of another Maja Smrekar’s performance with wolves.

²⁰ Agamben, 77.

of my dogs) to re-gain the position of power. To re-gain my body. Our bodies.”²¹ The project of becoming (m)Other is to be comprehended as a biopolitical statement or intervention with the investment of artist's body for the purpose of re-gaining the position of power and her own animality, i.e. as an act of resistance to bio-power.

Her artistic gesture is additionally to be read as a response to neoliberal capitalism: “The global economy threatens to homogenize people by means of the lowest common denominator – the ability to consume.” The artist feels the urge to resist by using her own economy of emotions: “Therefore I am submitting myself to the dog-human kinship relationship as a radical intimate action of ‘returning home’.”²²

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CURTIS L. CARTER¹

Globalization and Cultural Identity of Art Works

Abstract: Works of art are properly characterized as cultural objects, as opposed to being merely physical or perceptual objects. As cultural objects, works of art can be embodied in physical objects, but they require properties that physical objects do not necessarily possess, such as being intentionally composed in some artistic medium in a particular historic context informed by ideas, values, and technical skills and means offered by the culture. Works of art retain their identity in important respects, but may also undergo change when transferred from one culture to another. The identity of a work may be enriched and expanded to incorporate features acquired as a result of its being interpreted in a new cultural setting. An expanded and clarified account of culture is required to give a fuller characterization of the cultural properties that comprise works of art and to support the view that cultural identity in some sense transcends a culture of origin. Culture is a multi-phased concept involving at least three related elements. First, there are the particular *art cultures* consisting of art-making and their attending strategies of interpretation found in the art worlds of various societies. Secondly, the *culture of a people* consists of the broader societal, political, economic, religious, ideological, and other practices that define a culture. An additional element is *world or global culture* consisting of the features of art that enable people from diverse cultures to interpret and appreciate art from other cultures. Within

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these frameworks, the identity of art works is open and cumulative, with the result that they continuously acquire new properties over the duration of their existence.

Keywords: art, globalization, cultural identity

UDK 7:005.44

Globalizacija in kulturna identiteta umetniških del

Izvleček: V nasprotju s tem, da bi bila zgolj fizični ali perceptivni predmet, so umetniška dela primerno okarakterizirana kot kulturni objekti. Kot takšna so lahko umetniška dela utelešena v fizičnih predmetih, a zahtevajo lastnosti, ki jih fizični predmeti nimajo nujno, na primer da so namerno sestavljena v nekem umetniškem mediju v določenem zgodovinskem kontekstu, ki se napaja z idejami, vrednotami in tehničnimi znanji ter sredstvi, ki jih kultura ponuja. Umetniška dela v pomembnih pogledih ohranjajo svojo identiteto, a se lahko, ko se prenašajo iz ene kulture v drugo, tudi spreminjajo. Identiteta dela se lahko obogati in razširi, da vključuje lastnosti, ki so pridobljene kot rezultat interpretacije v novem kulturnem okolju. Potrebno je razširjeno in razjasnjeno mnenje o kulturi, da se lahko poda popolnejša karakterizacija kulturnih lastnosti, ki sestavljajo umetniška dela, in se podpre mnenje, da kulturna identiteta v nekem smislu presega izvorno kulturo. Kultura je večfazni koncept, ki vključuje vsaj tri povezane elemente. Najprej so tukaj določene *umetniške kulture*, sestavljene iz umetnostnega oblikovanja, in njim pripadajoče strategije interpretacije, ki jih je moč najti v umetniških svetovih različnih družb. Drugo je *kultura ljudstva*, ki sestoji iz širših družbenih, političnih, gospodarskih, verskih, ideoloških in drugih praks, ki določajo neko kulturo. Dodatni element je *svetovna* ali *globalna kultura*, sestavljena iz lastnosti umetnosti, ki omogočajo ljudem iz različnih kultur, da interpretirajo in cenijo umetnost iz drugih kultur. Znotraj teh okvirjev je identiteta

umetniških del odprta in kumulativna, rezultat pa je, da skozi trajanje svojega obstoja kontinuirano pridobivajo nove lastnosti.

Ključne besede: umetnost, globalizacija, kulturna identiteta



Underlying the question of artistic understanding between the cultures of East and West in the era of globalization is the problem of the identity of works in art in relation to culture. With respect to art and aesthetic values, the problem of cultural identity addresses the question: In what sense might a work of art created in a western culture such as ancient Greece be understood and appreciated in contemporary China? Or in what is the basis for appreciating Andy Warhol's image of a Campbell Soup can created in the United States in the 1960s when it appears in a Chinese cultural setting? This problem is not simply a matter of developments in the twentieth or twenty-first centuries. For example, in the early nineteenth century the Parthenon Marbles of ancient Greece were welcomed in London in 1800 as the Elgin Marbles when the British Lord Elgin removed them from Athens. The Elgin Marbles were created as part of the Parthenon in fifth century Athens. Since their transfer in 1800 they have resided in the British Museum in London. The question for consideration here is, do the works located in their original settings, respectively in Athens (the Elgin Marbles) and New York (the Campbell Soup Can pictures), have the same cultural identity when viewed in London or in Beijing as the art works had in their original settings? The answer depends in part upon our understanding of cultural identity and our view on how to accommodate the changes resulting from a work transferred to a culture other than its culture of origin and also sustain the identity of the art work.

I propose to accept in principle the thesis offered by Joseph Margolis and others that works of art are properly characterized as cultural objects, as opposed to being merely physical or perceptual objects. As cultural objects, works of art can be embodied in physical objects, but they require properties that physical objects do not necessarily possess, such as being intentionally composed in some artistic medium in a particular historic context informed by ideas, values, and technical skills and means offered by the culture. Further, it is my intention to argue here for the position that works of art retain their identity in important respects, but may also undergo change when transferred from one culture to another. This means that the identity of a work may be enriched and expanded to incorporate features acquired as a result of its being interpreted in a new cultural setting.

An expanded and clarified account of culture is required to give a fuller characterization of the cultural properties that comprise works of art and to support the view that cultural identity in some sense transcends a culture of origin. My proposal is to think of culture as a multi-phased concept involving at least three related elements. First, there are the particular *art cultures* consisting of art-making and their attending strategies of interpretation found in the art worlds of various societies. Secondly, the *culture of a people* consists of the broader societal, political, economic, religious, ideological, and other practices that define a culture. An additional element is *world or global culture* consisting of the features of art that enable people from diverse cultures to interpret and appreciate art from other cultures. Within these frameworks, the identity of art works is open and cumulative, with the result that they continuously acquire new properties over the duration of their existence.

The plan for developing the remainder of the paper is as follows. I will first undertake a critical review of the notion of culture as it

appears explicitly or implicitly in the writings of the authors referred to above, and will propose modifications necessary to clarify the cultural nature of works of art. Thirdly, I will consider the question of criteria for judging whether a work retains its identity when it is relocated in another culture, again relating the issue to the cultural factors surrounding the identity of a work of art. The Elgin Marbles and Warhol's Campbell Soup Can paintings will serve as examples to facilitate the discussion. The essay terminates with brief comments on the implications of the discussion here for communication of East-West aesthetic values.

I. The Elgin Marbles

Before taking up the broader issues outlined here, it will be useful to consider for a few moments some aspects of the cultural and historical information surrounding the Elgin Marbles. This information will establish the Marbles as works of art and will also provide a concrete reference for the theoretical points that are being considered here.

Nearly 200 years ago in 1800, Lord Elgin sailed to Constantinople to assume the role of ambassador of Great Britain to the Turkish Empire, which then included Athens as well as all of Greece. High on the list of his priorities was the intent to take back to England artists' drawings and casts of the magnificent sculptures and reliefs which had been installed in the Parthenon. Lord Elgin's primary aim was to elevate the standards of artistic practice and taste in England by introducing these works to his countrymen.

The Parthenon had been built on the Acropolis in Athens between 447 and 431 BCE under the direction of the architect, *Ictinos*, during the administration of Pericles the Athenian ruler and was intended to serve as the Temple of Athena, the patron goddess of Athens. It was part of a program of public works intended to sym-

bolize the glories of Athens as the center of Greek culture and of political power. The temple itself was built of the finest-grained white marble in the Doric order of Greek architecture, and with extraordinary precision of workmanship, resulting in a perfection of artistic form. The building was adorned by sculptured figures created by or under the direction of the sculptor Phidias. These consisted of groupings of figures carved in the round, representing such mythical events as the birth of Athena and also a legendary contest between Athena and Poseidon. On the outside of the temple, the panels or metopes were carved in high relief with scenes of mythological gods, giants, Lapiths, and centaurs at war. Around the inside was a frieze in low relief of the Panathenaic procession, a major religious ceremony which occurred every four years in the Parthenon. The centerpiece of the Parthenon was the statue called *Athena Parthenos*.² The figure, designed by Phidias, stood approximately 12 meters high and was adorned with ivory and gold.³

By the end of the eighteenth century, the Parthenon was under the reign of the Turkish Empire, and had undergone substantial physical changes in its 2300 year history. The center of the building had been destroyed in 1687, for example, during a siege by the Venetians, and remnants of many parts of the temple were all that remained. During its lifetime, the building had also undergone a variety of uses: including a pagan temple, a Christian Church and a Turkish Mosque.

When Lord Elgin's agents arrived in 1800, the Parthenon was serving various purposes for the Turks occupying the Acropolis. St. Clair details the state of things in his biography of Lord Elgin in these terms:

² St. Clair, 1967, 52. See also Smith, 1916, 180.

³ Brommer, 1979, 60.

The Turks living on the Acropolis built their houses, vegetable gardens, and fortifications round about the ruins, or made use of them as it suited their purpose. Inside the Parthenon was a small Mosque, and the spaces between the pillars of the Propylaea were half bricked up to provide a kind of castellation for the guns. Everywhere it was obvious that for years the ruins had been a main source of building materials.⁴

Although Lord Elgin seemed to have had no prior plan to do anything more than to make drawings and casts and, perhaps, to collect a few fragments, the deteriorating condition of the monument, together with the urging of his agents, led to an agreement with Turkish authorities, which resulted in the actual removal of a substantial portion of the principal remaining sculptures to England. At the urging of Elgin's secretary, Reverend Phillip Hunt, Elgin agreed to the drafting of a firman, or official letter of permission. The document was sufficiently vague that it served the English to guarantee the following permissions and protections from the Turkish government:

- (1) to enter freely within the walls of the citadel, and to draw and model with plaster the ancient temples there;
- (2) to erect scaffolding and to dig where they might wish to discover the ancient foundations;
- (3) to take away any sculptures or inscriptions which did not interfere with the works or walls of the citadel.⁵ It is doubtful that the Turks intended to grant permission to actually remove the sculptures, given the fact that Turkish policy had heretofore forbidden the removal of such, particularly from the Parthenon.

⁴ St. Clair, 51.

⁵ Smith, 190.

But Hunt and his colleagues persuaded the chief Turkish officials to the contrary.

The removal of the Marbles was, at the same time, a controversial event from the beginning. However, the objections and doubts appear to have come from the British, rather than from the Greeks, who were in a state of subjection and decline, or from the Turkish officials, whose actions indicated that their primary interest was in using the Marbles for political or economic benefit.⁶ Lord Byron, who was traveling in Greece at the time the Marbles were transferred to England, denounced Lord Elgin in his satirical poem “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” as well as in other poems and prose. In “The Curse of Minerva” Byron refers to Elgin as a plunderer who basely stole the treasures of the Parthenon.⁷

II. Culture, Cultural Objects, and Art

The interest of philosophers in works of art as cultural objects is not new; rather, it is implicit in the philosophical treatment of art by many philosophers including Plato and Hegel, who both recognized that a work of art is shaped by the state of ideas and artistic practice at the time it is produced. It is unlikely, however, that either of these philosophers would have supposed that all or the most important properties of art could be exhaustively supplied by a particular culture without incorporating an element of the form of beauty or absolute spirit. The incorporation of form or absolute spirit would have been their way of recognizing that the art can be of interest beyond its immediate community.

⁶ St. Clair, chapters 6, 9.

⁷ Lord Byron, 43. See also St. Clair, 187–201.

Over the past two decades, philosophers such as Joseph Margolis, Andrew Harrison, and Arthur Danto have advanced the study of art works as cultural objects. Margolis is a proponent of the notion that works of art are culturally emergent entities embodied in physical objects and that the embodiment of cultural properties is a function of the culture of origin.⁸ Harrison also affirms that culture is the primary factor in bringing works of art into being and establishing their identity. In practice this means that to identify a work of art is to lay down what material events or particulars are to count as instantiating it.⁹ Danto addresses this issue by locating the identity of art works in a matrix which consists of art history and theory operating within the art world at a particular time.¹⁰ Others who approach cultural identity primarily within the context of interpretation theory include Michael Krausz and Richard Shusterman. Krausz argues that art works are socially constituted entities whose identity is determined by their place within a given practice, sustained by their own aims, rules, and procedures, and sustained by interpretations of informed practitioners.¹¹ Shusterman, following Rorty, locates the identity of a work of art in the pragmatically identified propositions, which are provided by the customary ways of talking about such works.¹² The work of these authors offers a point of departure for examining the effects of a change of culture on the identity of works of art, and I will refer to them from time to time as the discussion proceeds.

Among the philosophers who offer an account of art works as cultural objects, Margolis has developed his views more fully than

⁸ Margolis, 1980, 41.

⁹ Harrison, 1967–68, 125, 127.

¹⁰ Danto, 1980, 111. See Margolis' critique of Danto's views, in Margolis, 1995, 256–266.

¹¹ Krausz, 1993, 38, 39.

¹² Shusterman, 1988, 408.

most. In his book *Art and Philosophy* (1980), he contends that works of art are artifacts that can be identified only in reference to the artistic and appreciative traditions of a given culture.¹³ They share with other cultural objects the condition of being in some sense (nondeductively and nonreductively) linked with physical entities of some sort. Their existence depends upon the culturally informed work of persons who intentionally produce the art works within a specific cultural practice.

According to Margolis, “cultural’ signifies the property of any system in virtue of which certain entities emerge and exist, a system in which both persons and what they may produce—a *fortiori* works of art—exist or once existed. Such a system is at once rule-governed, in that what is typically produced is intelligible only in terms of rule-like regularities (traditions, customs, practices, institutions). ...”¹⁴ It follows that works of art consist of culturally emergent properties intentionally embodied in a physical object according to the rules, customs, and practices of an artistic medium such as sculpture. Among the properties that might be assigned within various practices are representational, expressive, abstract, conceptual, or other stylistic features. The works embody features that would enable an informed audience to grasp their meaning and locate them within a recognizable artistic tradition.

More recently, in his book *Interpretation Radical but not Unruly* (1995) Margolis emphasizes that emergent properties, in this case aesthetic values, consist of intentional properties which are “social or societal or collective or historical” rather than individual mental or neurological states.¹⁵ A corollary of this expanded version of cul-

¹³ Margolis, 1995, 41.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁵ Margolis, 1995, 52.

tural identity is found in Margolis' notion of unicity, a concept that he employs to argue that the identity of a work of art embraces its cumulative history of interpretation over time, in lieu of a fixed nature established at its origin and intended to serve as a referent for all future interpretation.¹⁶

Margolis' views will serve as a starting point in the development of the three-tiered structure (*art culture, culture of a people, and world or global culture*) necessary to provide an account of cultural identity for works of art that extends beyond the culture of origin and addresses the continuing issue of identity for works of art originating in one culture and subsequently being relocated in another. The account of cultural identity given in *Art and Philosophy*, emphasizing a tradition of art production and interpretation, fits the notion of an *art culture*, which provides the rules of a practice necessary to account for the cultural identity of art. Art culture represents the world of the practitioners and includes artists, critics, and institutions responsible for training, interpreting, and maintaining the traditions and developing new practices as the culture evolves. It consists of a specialized culture focusing on the aesthetic, stylistic and technological aspects of production. Art cultures do not exist independently of the wider culture of which they are a part. In many instances, a plurality of art cultures may exist as part of a whole culture, each with its own important links to the larger culture. In modern societies it is now common for fine art, folk, and popular art cultures to exist simultaneously. Similarly a plurality of fine art, folk, or popular art cultures may exist within a single larger culture.

Applying this concept to the Elgin Marbles, one might say that the Parthenon Marbles were the product of a particular artistic practice under the direction of Phidias and his artist collaborators in

¹⁶ Ibid., 33-35, 46.

Athens of the fifth century BCE, which embodied them with the figurative, naturalistic concepts of a style of representational art.

There is merit in considering this aspect of the identity of art works. It is favored by certain approaches to art history because it lends understanding to the origins of the work and the practices surrounding its production. In claiming that cultural properties are to be understood as rule governed regularities of a particular tradition of artistic production and interpretation, Margolis also favors a narrower rather than a broader context in which to discuss the “rules” governing the identity of works of art, such as is provided by an art culture.¹⁷ However challenging it might be to come up with a coherent set of rules governing an art practice for a particular art culture, it would be even more difficult to do so for the culture of a people.

Nevertheless, there are serious problems with limiting our discussion of cultural identity to a particular art culture. Such a limited view would isolate what is occurring in the larger community (culture of a people). Moreover, a history of art which deals only with the art culture surrounding the origins of a work of art in an art culture would necessarily exclude a significant portion of the life of the art work which follows from its interpretations and uses in history. Hence the specialized art culture in which a work of art is produced does not account for all of the cultural properties that are important, namely those which derive from the larger culture of which the art culture may be a part. Most importantly, ‘art culture’ does not adequately explain how a work of art sustains a continuous identity when it is removed from its culture of origin and relocated within another culture.

Hence it is necessary to introduce at this time the notion of the *culture of a people* to broaden the context for considering the cultural

¹⁷ Margolis, 1980, 47-49.

identity of art. This sense of culture might include myth, language, philosophy, recreation, and technology, as well as the institutions of politics, economics, law, and education. A culture in this sense covers formal and informal ways of behavior, including the thinking, feeling, and doing expressed through day to day involvement in the various practices and institutions. Art practices of particular cultures function within, and interactively, with these other aspects of the culture of a people. Therefore it is necessary to take account of the interactive influences from the larger culture on the practices of art when contemplating the cultural identity of works of art.

In traditional tribal societies works of art are closely linked with community life, where they incorporate the values of the community and also participate in the processes of social integration. Sculptures are used in certain African communities, for instance, to symbolize harmony among the members of the community and to invoke ancestor presence as a means of establishing continuity between past and present members of the community. Mythical images incorporated symbolically into tribal art may also relate to the cycle of life and death.¹⁸

With respect to the Parthenon Marbles, the primary reason for their coming into being lies beyond the particular art culture that produced them. As we have seen earlier, it was the desire of Pericles and his fellow citizens to produce a monument that would embody the achievements of Athens and symbolize for all the world its superior political, material, and spiritual achievements. This aim led Pericles and his followers to appropriate their own treasures, often coupled with the treasures of their unwilling allies to create a culture with unsurpassed art and architecture at its very center. Even

¹⁸ Botombele, 1976, 22-23. See also Bahoken, 1976, 14. *World Conference on Cultural Policies: Problems and Prospects*, 1982, 31.

the ruins of Ancient Athens still command the awe of Greeks and generations world wide, and have generated unending debate among critics and historians particularly over the significance of the Parthenon Marbles. This debate and the attending historical events have extended their significance far beyond the particular art culture of their origin. As Melinda Mercuri's impassioned remarks imply, the cultural identity of works of art is integrally linked to the culture of a people:

"We are talking about the unity of a unique moment which is part of the culture and democracy of Greece. The Marbles are part of a monument to Greek identity ... our roots, our continuity, our soul."¹⁹

The extension of cultural identity of art works to include the culture of a people would appear to go beyond Margolis' initial formulation of cultural identity in *Art and Philosophy*, which was essentially linked to the art culture of origin. However, Margolis' more recent version of cultural identity found in *Interpretation Radical But Not Unruly*, with an emphasis on the societal, historical, open-ended sense of cultural identity, appears to be, in principle, consistent with recognition of the broader culture of a people as a necessary component of the identity of art works. There, Margolis notes that the intentional, which is the agent of embodying cultural properties in physical forms, has already internalized "... the *Lebensformen* of a particular society."²⁰

The purpose of drawing attention to the larger scope of culture found in the *culture of a people* is to point out that at least some of the important cultural properties embodied in works of art are a re-

¹⁹ Touhy, *Milwaukee Journal*, June 27, 1983.

²⁰ Margolis, 1995, 52.

sult of arts connections to the religious, mythical, political, economic and other values and activities that are important to the general culture of a people. This notion expands our basis for understanding the cultural identity of works operating within a particular local culture. Yet it does not account for the identity of works in a new culture, such as the case of the transfer of the Parthenon Marbles to England.

The relocation of the Marbles (now referred to as the Elgin Marbles, after Lord Elgin who arranged for the entry of the Marbles into England) offers insight into the process by which a work of art from one local culture enters into another local culture, and the implications of such changes for the cultural identity of the work. The first of the Marbles arrived in England in 1806. The critical and interpretive responses of the British art world and the public at the time of their arrival are well documented. Their arrival generated substantial enthusiasm among England's artists and critics and the public. The responses of the British art culture were immediate and intense. Critics debated the specific properties of the Marbles in a context of ideas about classical art based on their familiarity with such work as the "Apollo Belvedere", located in the Vatican collection in Rome, and the "Venus de Milo", housed at the Louvre in Paris. The British art world was startled by the contrast between the vital, life-like properties embodied in the Marbles and the more academic, ethereal properties of the Apollo and the Venus. At that time, the critics were unaware that these works were Roman copies or Hellenistic statues rather than classic works of the fifth century.

Leading English artists of the time, such as Benjamin West, Thomas Lawrence, and J. M. W. Turner, immediately acclaimed the significance of the Marbles, and may have been influenced by their imagery. "There is in them," said Lawrence, "an union of fine composition and very grand form, with a more true and natural expression of the effect of action upon the human frame than there is in

the Apollo or any of the other most celebrated statues.”²¹ On the other hand, critics such as William Hazlitt brought to the Marbles a new set of interpretive properties by presenting them in the light of their own interpretive theories. Hazlitt applied a variant of British Romanticism to the Marbles in these brief excerpts:

This is the great excellence of the Elgin Marbles, that they do not seem to be the outer surface of a hard and immovable block of Marble, but to be actualized by an internal machinery, and composed of the same soft and flexible materials as the human body.²²

Their “amazing vitality and “life-like appearances” led Hazlitt to extend further his attribution of the qualities of nature to the Marbles.

Nothing remains of them but their style; but that is everything, for it is the style of nature. Art is the imitation of nature; and the Elgin Marbles are in their essence and their perfection casts from nature—from fine nature it is true, but from real, living, moving nature, from objects in nature, answering to an idea in the artist’s mind. ...²³

Ennio Quirino Visconti, director of the Capitoline Museum at Rome and later director of the Louvre in Paris, and Antonio Canova, a leading European sculptor and critic, visited the Elgin collection in London and responded with high enthusiasm concerning the authenticity and artistic importance of the Marbles. Their views brought international confirmation of the favorable responses to the marbles from the English art world.

²¹ Report from the Select Committee of the House on the Earl of Elgin’s Collection of Sculptured Marbles. Also cited in St. Clair, 254.

²² Hazlitt, 1822, 154.

²³ Hazlitt, 1934, 100.

There were also less favorable critical interpretations applied to the Marbles. Richard Paine Knight, a leading English critic, was steadfastly unenthusiastic about the significance of the Elgin Marbles. He maintained that they were in fact from the later period of Hadrian, and in such poor condition that they were of relatively secondary interest. His cryptic remarks convey his sentiments: “You have lost your labor, my Lord Elgin; your Marbles are overrated—they are not Greek, they are Roman, of the time of Hadrian, when he restored the Parthenon ...”.²⁴ But Knight’s interpretation failed to carry the day and did not significantly affect critical or popular understanding of the Marbles in England.

The responses to the Marbles within the British public were substantial. Debates in Parliament over the purchase of the Marbles, as well as questions about their artistic merit and ownership had brought the matter of their role in English culture to wide public attention. Additional interest and awareness had followed public exhibitions of the Marbles beginning soon after their arrival in England. The result of the processes of incorporating the Marbles into the art culture and the culture of the British people was to firmly establish a place and a meaning for the Marbles in their new cultural home. The principal change from the Greek understanding of the Marbles was the substitution of British for Greek cultural interests. The British interpreted the Marbles in reference to their own national interests, viewing them as “proud trophies” of British prestige.²⁵ With respect to their artistic status, the Marbles were widely admired as works of fine art which the British found no difficulty placing in their most prestigious showcase at the British Museum. Parenthetically, it is interesting to note that the issues of national

²⁴ Messman, 1973, 71.

²⁵ Smith, 1916, 35.

honor and their significance as works of art were important factors in the deliberations of the select committee and in parliamentary debates over the legitimacy of their official acquisition by the British nation.

In summary, the strong reception of the Marbles in England as works of art suggests that they did retain their cultural identity as works of art through the change of cultures. The closing words of an editorial exchange in 1941, between the editors of the *Burlington* and the *Connoisseur* art journals over the return of the Marbles to Greece, attests to the extent to which the Marbles have been assimilated into British culture: "What we have we will hold."²⁶

Having shown by example that such cultural transfers do exist and that the works continue to have meaning outside their cultures of origin, it remains to account for this phenomenon. First, it is necessary to look further into the question of identity for the transplanted Marbles. Let us begin by inquiring into the relationship of the "Elgin Marbles" located in the British Museum to the "Parthenon Marbles" that formerly resided at the Parthenon in Athens. Here it is necessary to ask, do the two terms refer to the same work of art? Throughout this discussion, the Marbles have been represented as composite objects; consisting of a set of physical objects (pieces of marble) embodied with intentional properties (their form given by the artist operating within various levels of culture), as well as interpretive properties acquired throughout their life.

Suppose we limit the discussion for a moment to the culturally embodied physical object. Among the accepted criteria for the identity of culturally embodied physical objects is identity of parts and spatio-temporal continuity. If we mean, do the terms 'Elgin Marbles' and 'Parthenon Marbles' refer to the same configuration of natural

²⁶ Granville Fell, 1941, 220.

marble and technical and stylistic markings, the answer would be a qualified yes. The qualification derives from the fact that the Elgin Marbles were initially attached to the temple on the Parthenon as part of a larger work, and from possible physical alterations resulting from faulty cleaning, or aging over time. Nevertheless, the major parts of the Marbles have remained continuous throughout their history, and their form is intact. For all technical and formal purposes, they retain the same numerical identity.

On another level, the situation here recalls Frege's classical formulation of the problem of identity of meanings. Gottlieb Frege argued that identity is to be interpreted as a relation between the names of objects rather than as relations between objects themselves. I take this to mean that for identical objects the descriptions that apply to one will apply to the other. Applying this notion to the Elgin Marbles, it follows that the cognitive sense of Elgin Marbles will vary in some respects from the "sense" of Parthenon Marbles, even though they refer to the same numerical entity. The difference follows from the fact that "Parthenon Marbles" refers to the Marbles as seen from the Greek perspective, whereas "Elgin Marbles" encompasses the British perspective at a given moment in their respective histories.

Thus far, our analysis suggests that the cultural identity of the Marbles incorporates the interpretive properties derived from an historical understanding of their culture of origin and, additionally, those properties which derive from its life in the new culture. One way to view the matter, as I do, is to adopt the view that the cultural identity of a work of art encompasses its entire history of production and interpretation. From my perspective, all of the interpretive properties that have been associated with the Marbles, including their Greek and English cultural histories, and even the interpretations brought by visitors from other cultures, become a part of their evolving identity. The cultural identity of the work is necessarily

open ended in the sense that it includes past, present, and future properties. Changes that occur in the properties of a work can be additive as when the work is interpreted in a fresh light, or selective when taking on the interests of particular interpreters. The British may at a particular time choose to add to, ignore, or suppress the special interpretive properties which the Greeks may have invested in the Marbles, or *vice versa*, but this action does not alter the fact that the respective properties are a part of any complete account of the identity of the Marbles. It would not be necessary, however, that any one person contemplating the Marbles should have in mind all of the possible interpretive properties, only a sufficiently rich sampling grounded in first hand experience and augmented by critical discussions as required by the viewer's purposes. An art historical comprehension or a critical assessment of the works would obviously call for perusal of a greater range of interpretive properties than would be sufficient for a casual tourist's needs.

This requires the acknowledgment that some of the properties contributing to the cultural identity of works of art may originate outside their culture of origin, a view contrary to Margolis' initial view. This would imply also that the understanding of art works extends beyond particular cultural boundaries, and calls for an account of their appreciation and understanding when viewed outside a particular culture of origin. As far as I can determine, Margolis' view of cultural identity does not explain how a work can be understood outside its culture of origin, although he does not deny that works of art can have meaning beyond their cultures of origin. Without some common ground among the interpreters extending beyond a particular local culture, an historical understanding of cultural identity that embraces, in principle, the entire range of activities surrounding the work is insufficient to explain how a work can have meaning outside its culture of origin.

To remedy this deficiency, I would introduce the notion of *world culture* or *global culture* as providing a level of understanding that extends beyond the scope of particular local cultures or *culture of a people*. The problem remains how to explain that the cultural identity of a work produced in one of these cultures transfers to another and retains a continuous identity sufficient to provide meaningful interpretation and understanding. There are two possible answers. First, the possibility that the works are embodied with expressive, formal, or other *world cultural* properties that contribute to their being understood at some level by persons, irrespective of variations in the rules and means governing local cultural practices. Secondly, this would require of persons that they possess, or are able to acquire through learning, the necessary attitudes and aptitudes for transcending particular cultural languages, including those of the arts. Cases like the successful relocation of the Elgin Marbles in England demonstrate that art works do successfully transfer, and the entire world system of museums is predicated on the premise that such cross cultural understanding is possible.

Many philosophers have alluded to the necessity of some broader frame for human understanding which would extend beyond local cultures. An ancient philosopher such as Plato or Aristotle might have centered the discussion of global properties in terms like beauty, truth, and goodness. But for us these terms do not say as much. With the possible exception of beauty, they have lost their richness and are afloat in a quest for clarity and specificity through philosophical analysis.

Hegel, perhaps, understood better than most the importance of world culture when he linked art to the realm of spirit.²⁷ Hegel wisely did not provide any strict rules for producing or identifying

²⁷ Hegel, 1979, 413-414. Also, Hegel, 1975, 56-58. See Carter, 1986, 239-256.

the properties of art that might be used to sustain universal interest from one culture to another, a task far more demanding than giving rules to a particular art culture, or to the art of a people. Instead, he relied on a typological outline marking the particular stages in the world historical development of art as an important manifestation of the disclosure of world spirit or absolute spirit. In his scheme, there is no break between developments in particular historical epochs and the world spirit. Individuals, civilizations, and the absolute all participate in a common milieu, which at least in principle might accommodate communication between cultures and allow for transcultural understanding.

Karl Popper alludes to a possible structure for locating the foundations for transcultural understanding of art works in his discussion of objective musical work, in conjunction with his “world 3,” which he characterized as consisting of objective contents of thought, derived from actions in worlds 1 and 2; or the physical and the subjective respectively.²⁸ Such objective entities would represent the results of solutions to problems that arise in particular historical conditions, but transcend the limits of local cultures, thus suggesting another possibility for transcending the bounds of local cultures.

Gadamer’s hermeneutic approach to the understanding of cultural works relies on a “fusion of the horizons” that melds an understanding of the historic past with our own comprehension of it. This process includes a universal or classical perspective to facilitate communication across the boundaries of particular historical cultures. Perhaps this universal element of human communication could be useful for the purpose of deciphering the meaning of an art work from another culture. He also holds the view that “the very

²⁸ Popper, 1976, 60–68. Cited also in Krausz, 1993, 35, 36.

fact of human communication signifies the universality of human nature.”²⁹

I do not point out these views here for critical examination or commendation. Rather, it is to note that an appeal to transcultural conditions of human communication, as a means of accounting for crosscultural understanding, is not without its serious proponents.

Among recent work on this problem of cultural identity, Margolis’ account of “radical history,” based on a critical synthesis of analytic, hermeneutic, and poststructural developments in twentieth century philosophy, offers an alternative to traditional views. Margolis eschews all claims to changeless universals or invariantly structured cultural identities for art works, proposing instead to replace these with narrative devices or socially shared histories of interpretation.³⁰ The historical, in this instance, incorporates the actual events as historicized over time, and most importantly, the experience of the interpreter at a given moment in time. Applying this notion to the problem of cultural identity for art works means that identity would be established at any given moment by consulting an informed societal consensus “grounded in the habits of life” of the community. This tactic might well be suited for identity questions within a particular local culture, but it remains unclear how Margolis’ latest proposal would account for the cultural identity of art works outside the particular society or on a global basis.

There is one possible answer. That would be to adopt a global understanding of community, in which the boundaries of all local communities are dissolved into one world community. This is in some sense what Hegel has in mind as an ultimate strategy, and

²⁹ Gadamer, 1975, 337. See also Gadamer, 1976. Margolis offers an extensive critique of Gadamer throughout *Interpretation Radical But Not Unruly*. See especially 48–52; 76–81.

³⁰ Margolis, 1995, 52.

perhaps Popper and Gadamer in their respective ways as well. I am not at all certain that this is what Margolis has in mind, but otherwise his insistence on restricting the exploration of cultural identity to the limits of local cultures could not adequately address the larger issues of cultural identity, that is, how to account for cultural identity beyond local cultures.

Clearly the struggle between local cultures and global culture has become one of the major issues of the late twentieth century. We cannot hope to resolve all of the issues of political and economic dominance that this struggle entails. But it is possible that one small step toward global understanding is to continue exploring ways to make the art works of a particular culture accessible to the people of other cultures.

In this analysis, I have attempted to identify three aspects of culture that enter into the cultural identity of works of art. First, *art culture*, which supplies the technical and formal elements of art production. Secondly, the *culture of a people*, which links the art work to the various other components that form a particular community. The third is the idea of a *world culture*, which addresses the fact that the interest in art works is not necessarily limited to the particular culture in which they emerge. Each of these levels of culture respectively contributes to cultural identity.

The use of the Elgin Marbles as a case study has, perhaps, been helpful in making clear some of the issues that are involved in questions concerning cultural identity. With respect to the historic situation surrounding the Marbles, I have shown that the Elgin Marbles share an identity with the Parthenon Marbles, an identity which was reconstituted in England during the early nineteenth century, and which is reconstituted from time to time as a focus of the debates over their artistic significance and the question whether they rightly belong in England or in Greece. Their identity must be

viewed as consisting of their on-going cumulative history, which begins with their production in fifth century Athens and embraces their new life in England. Like all truly great works of art, the Marbles do not belong to a particular people, but are to be shared in a broader world culture. Great art speaks from the viewpoint of an encompassed humanity, albeit produced through the seemingly abridged elements found in our various local cultures.³¹

Bringing the focus of the discussion closer to our time, aesthetic values have undergone radical changes as western art has undergone substantial changes from modern art to pop art, leading to the emergence of a highly pluralistic art culture. The changes have been so radical that it is difficult for many people to comprehend, let alone appreciate some of the new developments. The radical changes in pictorial composition introduced by Picasso's cubism, the pop art paintings of Warhol in the 1960s, and the post-modern aesthetics of late twentieth century media arts are but a few markers of changes in the arts and aesthetic values. Who would have thought that any one could think of selecting a commercial commodity, such as a soup can, as a subject for art? And yet Warhol catapulted to world wide fame by introducing into his work symbolism

³¹ As for the present dispute between Greece and England, there is no support in this analysis of the identity of the Marbles for the nationalistic claims of either country. There is no question that the role of England in preserving these works has been immensely important in their past preservation. From this it does not, however, follow automatically that their claim is forever. The issue must be decided on other grounds: that is, in the best interest of preservation and the proper display of the works for the world's appreciation and understanding. The decision is best left to the responsible members of the world arts community who are, one hopes, able to distinguish national interest from more fundamental issues of art conservation and the interpretation of these important works for the world community.

drawn from the everyday experiences that caught the spirit of mid-twentieth century America. In this work he followed the imagery of mass advertising, focusing on everyday objects that were understandable to the masses, and also caught the attention of the art world. At first Warhol's art might seem the very antithesis of what has been traditional in art, the images that are removed from everyday life and focused on more high minded matters. What, we may ask, would happen to this art in China today? Would it garner understanding and appreciation? What values does it carry? How would it be changed by being placed in the culture of contemporary China? Given that there is already in place a Chinese pop art movement, with its own culturally specific symbols and aesthetic values, it might come to be appreciated. If the thesis offered here is viable, the Soup Can painting would retain its original aesthetic values to be shared with a different culture, but Chinese interpretations would expand upon the meaning as the work became acclimated to a new cultural setting.

In order to bring the topic of the cultural identity of art works closer to home, it is useful to consider how the dominance of globalization in contemporary world cultures has affected our understanding of cultural identity. There is no time here to develop this issue, but perhaps an example will serve to point in a direction for further research. As a closing reference, I will briefly consider cultural identity as it applies to contemporary artists practicing in China and elsewhere today. Chinese contemporary artists in particular must struggle with the question of how their work relates to a near 5000 year tradition of aesthetics and art practices, as they experiment with and modify Chinese art and culture of the past. The central problem Chinese contemporary artists face is how to build upon their Chinese cultural heritage and also connect to new developments of contemporary life in China and throughout the

world. It is on the mind of every serious contemporary Chinese artist how to remain connected to their Chinese roots while creating art that would be appreciated in a changing world, where East and West are drawn ever closer. Addressing these changes is not a question of Chinese art versus western art. Rather, the practice of art in a global context has become a matter of enabling individual artists to create by using the ideas and visual forms irrespective of their particular cultural origin, while establishing relevance to contemporary Chinese culture. This means that there is at the artist's disposal an evolving universal vocabulary of artistic means, contributed over time from the practices of artists working in many cultures throughout the world. Creating art today thus requires considering exactly such a universal visual language. The solution does not lie in creating a new "International Style" reminiscent of the Euro centered International Style, grounded in formalism and proposed as the norm for western architecture of the modernist era. Rather, the situation invites artists to continue to develop new ideas for art, incorporating their cultural histories and those of others.

Conclusions

What can be learned from this analysis about the question of communication of aesthetic values between the respective cultures of the East and the West? First, this analysis provides a framework for understanding culture in terms of its multiple dimensions. These dimensions include the idea of a culture based on the aesthetic values associated with a particular art practice (for example classical representational sculpture or modern pop art painting), national cultures such as ancient Greece or contemporary China, and global world culture in which all persons participate by virtue of their common humanity. In this multiple framework, art has the possibility of serving as an important means for communicating and understand-

ing cultural values. Understanding the art of another culture is thus one means of establishing communication among the different cultures world wide. Art, apart from its culturally specific means, is also grounded in common human capacities, such as the ability to recognize and value creative expressions of ideas and feelings.

Secondly, the analysis offered here recognizes that the identity of works of art is not static or fixed. As a work of art enters into another culture, its meaning may change as it is seen in a different cultural framework, allowing for new interpretations with reference to the values of a new environment. Hence a sculpture from ancient Greece, when seen in London or Beijing, or a Warhol Campbell Soup painting in a cultural setting in Asia, may bring an opportunity for communication of values. Finally, as artists from China increasingly attempt to incorporate elements drawn from the visual cultures of both East and West, discussions concerning the cultural identity of works of art will have to expand to take these changes into account.

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DRUGI
ČLANKI

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***Eyes on the Ground and Eyes in the Sky.* Satellite and Participatory Surveillance: Photography in Sudan**

Abstract: The paper analyses the project of participatory surveillance (*Ears and Eyes of God*, 2009–ongoing) and on the satellite surveillance project (*The Satellite Sentinel Project*, 2010–2015) in the border area between South and North Sudan. Both projects try to raise awareness of atrocities being committed in this region by various belligerent parties fighting for control over the region and both advocate for the benefit of the civilian communities affected. The paper addresses and analyses the power of photography to deter, advocate, and provide evidence. It analyses the difference between explicit, first-hand visualisation and implied, indicative visualisation of the two projects. It argues that understanding the role of photography in contemporaneity in general (and in these two cases in particular) the investigation should turn away from the questions of re-presentation and focus more closely on the logic of the photographing itself (the act of photography) and its possibility of structuring the reality.

Keywords: satellite surveillance photography, participatory photography, documentary photography, photography of atrocities, Sudan

UDK: 77.044(624)

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Gledati od blizu in od daleč: satelitska in participatorna fotografija v Sudanu

Izvleček: Članek analizira projekt participatornega nadzora (*Oči in ušesa Boga*, 2009– še traja) in projekt satelitskega nadzora (*The Satellite Sentinel Project*, 2010–2015) na območju meje med Severnim in Južnim Sudanom. Oba projekta se trudita ozaveščati o grozodejstvih, posledicah boja med različnimi frakcijami za prevlado v regiji in oba se zavzemata za skupnosti civilistov, ki jih ta boj najbolj prizadeva. Članek se posveča in analizira moč fotografije za pridobivanje dokazov, zavzemanje za druge in odvrčanje od nasilja. Analizira tudi razliko med eksplicitno vizualizacijo iz prve roke in implicitno, indikativno vizualizacijo kot razvidna iz teh dveh projektov. Članek zagovarja tezo, da je za razumevanje vloge fotografije v sodobnosti nasploh (in v teh dveh primerih še posebej) potrebno usmeriti pozornost stran od vprašanj reprezentacije in se posvetiti bolj logiki samega fotografiranja (fotografskega dejanja) in njegove zmožnosti strukturiranja realnosti.

Ključne besede: satelitsko nadzorna fotografija, participatorna fotografija, dokumentarna fotografija, fotografija grozot, Sudan

* * *

Forensic Paradigm

In *The Crime Scene Photographer* by Gail B. Stewart one of the photographers is quoted as saying: “You don’t know why you photograph everything – but the detail is the key to crime scene photography.”² The point being that the detail mentioned by the photographer is not the detail that interests the photographer but

² Von Brauchitsch, 2012, 71.

rather the detail that can be revealed, found later on in the investigation process. The imperative is to photograph everything not just the objects of interest but also the empty space – which is “an equivalent motif, a pictorial subject that should be acknowledged as such”.³ To put it figuratively: to deplete the reality of the scene and transform it into pictorial representation as a whole in view of turning “a temporary scene into a permanent record”.⁴ The only way to achieve such an objective ideal of complete record is to act in the manner of the camera, the machine – a crime scene photographer is required to “to switch of thinking and document thoroughly”⁵, to be both emotionally and rationally disinterested in their subject matter. To see the world, the object as the ideal omniscient eye of the camera sees it – in its totality, as a complete pictorial entirety from every possible angle.

An example of crime scene photography will be used as a point of reference to discuss notions such as disinterestedness, distance, proximity, involvement and transparency and power in relation to photography’s revealing potential. We will more specifically address two projects in Sudan: participatory photography (*The Eyes and Ears of God*) and satellite surveillance photography (*Satellite Sentinel Project*). We will analyse these projects through concepts of objective representation and active engagement taken as specific modes of structuring the reality and the events. We will focus on the documentary ideology of visually structuring the world to make possible the emergence of the truth – the incriminating detail.

It is imperative for the crime scene photographer to write down detailed impressions of each photograph (what is *to be seen* in them

³ Ibid., 73.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 71.

what the *photographer* sees and lastly even what *should be seen* in them) – all the information which might or might not reveal something later on in the investigative process.

“The crime scene evidence must be accurately documented at the scene by sketch, measurement, photography, and notes for a reconstruction to be attempted. A misallocated item may lead to a wrong interpretation.”⁶

Thus creating a multi-layered, multi-sensorial, interdisciplinary “reconstructive image” of the crime scene. A similar process of struggle against photography’s reductivism potential was a subject of Geoffrey Batchen’s insightful book *Forget me not: Photography and Remembrance* where he deals with the relationship between memory and the image on the vernacular photo-memorabilia object. He observes “the efforts of ordinary people to overcome – or at least reduce – the power of photography to replace living, emotive memories with static and historical images.”⁷ These efforts are based on “enriching” the photographs with ornaments – creating memorabilia objects (photographs combined with locks of hair, objects belonging to loved ones, inscriptions, quotations and of course, the titles with the date and location). All this as if in an attempt to “anchor” the photography in words, tactile objects – thus creating complex linguistic-visual-haptic photo-collages or complex “photo-objects” as Batchen terms them. Complex objects that would function as emotive memory triggers – as opposed to pure photographs that provide just factual data or rather more to the point – static, historical, barren, formal facts. Isn’t every forensic reconstruction surprisingly similar to such a complex photo-object? Evoking the truth, reconstructing it from past – as is it would a long-

⁶ Mozayani, Noziglia, 2011, 121.

⁷ Batchen, 2004, 94.

lost memory that only contiguity and similarity would resurrect from oblivion. Another way to describe this would be to resort to Roland Barthes and see this as an attempt to tame the “semiotic” madness of photography. In a similar way memorabilia photo-objects are structured with desire to facilitate future memory (future recollection of persons, events) the forensic imagery is based on a model of structuring the visual so as to make possible the “future” emergence of the truth – the incriminating detail – for future incrimination (future use of the images as evidence in the court of law). The truth of the forensic mode is deeply tied to incrimination. And as such it must be transparent – it is imperative to know how it was made, who made it, where, in what context, and how it was perceived by the photographer. This entire context in accordance with the complex production procedures functions as a basis for knowledge – or rather as a model for particular knowledge – for the supposed forensic truth of the event.

In *The Burden of Representation* John Tagg’s view is that what is omitted (i.e. not seen) from this forensic realistic representative system is the process of production itself.

“In realism, the process of production of a signified through the action of a signifying chain is not seen. It is the product that is stressed, and production that is repressed.”⁸

But forensic realism does not rest solely on the simplified belief of “eternal, consciousness-independent reality” which is “out there”. It rather lies precisely in the belief in the de-subjectification process itself. In the belief that procedures, instruction, careful following of forensic methodology will at the end reveal the reality precisely through the transparency of its procedures. Tagg stresses that in forensic photography there is “an unshaken belief in the photo-

⁸ Tagg, 1993, 99.

graph as a direct transcription of the real.”⁹ But this realism does not lie in the pictorial aspect of photography but rather in its wider social institutional apparatus – in the filing cabinet. There are strict rules that qualify one or the other photograph as being a “direct transcription” of the real – as being a piece of evidence in forensics. There is a difference between the time of “mechanical objectivism” of the middle of the nineteenth century where the burden of representation lay on the image and today where the burden of representation lies in highly evolved interpretive apparatus.¹⁰

But even in the early days of photography it was never taken for granted because of its likeness to the reality; it was taken for granted because the process was perceived to be completely natural: chemical, optical, and mechanical. Similarity is more or less a cultural “side effect” of a particular era and its particular pictorial conventions. One just needs to take into account non-western traditions of photography to come to the conclusion that photography’s naturalism is not to be confused with particular western realism.¹¹ To perceive something as being “a copy of” cannot be reduced on perceiving something as “being similar to” in pictorial realistic terms. Photography verism is a specific cultural construct. There is no better example of this notion than the writing of French realism film critic André Bazin in *The Ontology of the Photographic Image*. Photography “shares, by the virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it is the model.”¹² This is usually termed an indexical nature of photography (that rests on the belief in mechanical reproduction that excludes human agency). What is usually forgotten while quoting

⁹ Ibid., 98.

¹⁰ See for example: Daston, Galison, 2007.

¹¹ See for example: Pinney, 2011; Pinney, Peterson, 2003.

¹² Bazin, [1948] 2010, 51.

Bazin's "photography as a death mask" syntagm is precisely the social nature of the death mask – the power of which lies in the magic of contact (contagious magic) and is deeply connected to the particular social, cultural uses. One needs to question – when and where does this "law of contact" come into effect – what are the rituals that enforce it? The rituals of the death in the case of that mask. The death mask performs a certain "need" in the ritual of the death. In modern day forensics, the power of photography is measured against its constitutive ritual – the legal system that structures the legally specific "photography realism".

The regime of forensic photography itself it is nothing less than a purely visual regime of exclusion – exclusion of the human factor – the photographer from the picture (in a figurative sense) as an attempt at complete delineation of a photographer's influence (artistry) from the process in such a way that the reality, the event, the crime will "shine through" the process unimpeded. And by that John Tagg's notion of the unshaken belief in the realism of photography reaches its proper meaning. It is not a simplified, naïve belief in photography realism but rather deeply structured (scientific) relation to reality – for the purpose of this article, we are terming it "a forensic paradigm of reality".

The "forensic real" itself as presented in this paradigm is something infinitely reproducible. Walter Benjamin in his *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* states while reflecting on emerging techniques of mass reproduction (photography and film) that there is a strange new "desire of the present-day masses to 'get closer' to things, and their equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing's uniqueness [Oberwindung des Einmaligen jeder Gegebenheit] by assimilating it as a reproduction."¹³ Or to re-

¹³ Benjamin, 2005, 105.

peat from the beginning of our elaboration: to deplete the reality of the scene and transform it into pictorial representation as a whole in view of turning “a temporary scene into a permanent record”. But as such forensic realism is far removed from photographic naturalism – the forensic photographer actually works “against” the very nature of photography or at least “nature” as perceived in the tradition of western thought on photography. It tries to minimise its “openness”, its strange time-meaning rapture, the effect of what Walter Benjamin termed optical unconsciousness and Roland Barthes, although on slightly different grounds – *punctum*.

In the book *Photographic Evidence: The Preparation and Use of Photography in Civil and Criminal Cases* it states:

“[T]here are instances in which counsel must use photographs of amateurish appearance simply because they are the best, or the only, pictures available. Furthermore counsel should avoid obtaining photographs that appear to slickly made or too expensive, lest the jurors come to believe that the presentation is being overdone. Legal photographs should be rich in information but not expansive in appearance”¹⁴

Amateur photography is admissible in a court of law – it is actually even preferable for the forensic imagery itself to look similar to amateur, vernacular non-artistic images. The forensic paradigm rests on the notion of excluding the modernistic “artistic” authorship of the image, emphasising the realistic artistry of the image making. In addition, realistic artistry encompasses both – the objectified, scientific forensic photography and vernacular, subjective photography. It goes almost without saying that both can be used in a legal model only insofar as the intentions of the photographer

¹⁴ Ehrlich in Tagg, 1993, 98.

- the author - can be delineated clearly and what remains is deemed a pure document of the reality.

The intentions of the forensic photographer can be rather easily deciphered (since it is based on and strives for uniform, repeatable procedures) whereas it might seem that the intentions of a vernacular photographer are not that easily decipherable. But of course, sometimes the vernacular images are “the only pictures available” and furthermore their mode of production is supposedly quite clear and transparent since the vernacular author is perceived as being basically a naive, quotidian snap-shooter. In his *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* Vilém Flusser said much the same about a snap-shooter. He merely functions - he is just a functionary in the representative regime. There is a beautiful metaphorical description that Flusser gives us describing the vernacular, quotidian photographer: “Viewing the motion of a man with his camera (or a camera with its man), we are looking at the movements of hunting.”¹⁵ The camera of a vernacular photographer is not the extension of the photographer - but rather the opposite holds true - the photographer is an extension of the camera apparatus. What unites the two practices of amateur and forensic would be the syntagm: “Photographing without thinking.”

Through the forensic paradigm, the photographer as an operator and the operational side of the images that is revealed - and as such a photography is, in the words of John Tagg “no longer a monument for future memory, but a document for possible use”.¹⁶ The operational aspect of this type of documentary photography needs to be emphasised - in contrast to the misconception of a document as being a factual description (or inscription) of the real, of being a

¹⁵ Flusser, 2010, 37.

¹⁶ Tagg, 1993, 90.

transformation of reality to discursive (written or visual) form, being a mere objective “snapshot” out of an event, process or a state of things – a document has its meaning only in relation to certain use – to certain operation that is to be performed. Therefore, documentary images are operational, performative from the very beginning. Eugene Atget described his works as “documents” in the following context that Molly Nesbit so poignantly explains:

“ [...] the photograph was a good document because it could be applied to art as well as to science, providing a ‘document vu’ to accompany the ‘document écrit.’ It would tell the truth about, say, a leaf, a doorway, an animal in motion, an earlobe, or an hysteric. So an architectural photograph would be called a document, as would a chronophotograph, a police i.d., or an X ray. They had one thing in common: all of them were *pictures that went to work.*” (our italics)¹⁷

Eyes and Ears of God

The project *Ears and Eyes of God* (*EEG* in short) was instigated and started by Slovenian documentary filmmaker, human rights activist, and journalist Tomo Križnar in 2009 in the border region between North and South Sudan where the ongoing conflict between the various belligerent parties and the central Khartoum regime is taking a heavy toll on civilian population. The conflict can be most aptly described as a pre-planned and organised genocide by the Khartoum government against the indigenous communities living in the regions of South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur. In 2009, through the humanitarian foundation H.O.P.E., Tomo Križnar started disseminating small cameras to the affected communities and teaching the volunteers to use the cameras and to upload the

¹⁷ Nesbit in Hutchings, 1997, 237–238.

images to the world wide web via a satellite connection. The idea behind the project is threefold. The presence of the cameras should function as a deterrent to the perpetrators, the images (created on a large scale by the victims themselves) could be used later on as evidence, and importantly – the online availability of the images themselves should stir the worldwide community into action.

Such an ambitious grass-roots surveillance project is made possible only by advancements in technology and then by the system that enables quick and easy dissemination of images as well as quick production of them. What we are observing is the development of a new kind of “engaged” photography approach – grass roots documentary or its even more engaged, “militant” variant – activist participatory photography. Let us observe closely the logic of the project – and how images and the production of imagery are embedded in it. The knowledge of the production of photographs and the means to produce them is passed on to the “participants” of the project. To a lesser extent even the means and knowledge of dissemination (access to distribution channels) is passed on. The emphasis on the role of an author – the photographer, so prevalent in the tradition of documentary, is missing. Importantly, the participants are at the same time the authors of the images and the targeted, selected unprivileged group in focus – in need of help. They produce the images that aim to empower them. This approach is nothing new in the tradition of documentary photography although it was largely repressed by its more canonical, photojournalistic, and art-oriented tradition. Such grass roots, self-representation tradition of documentary can most notably be traced back to the Worker’s Film and Photo Leagues of the twenties and thirties of the last century and community photography movement in the seventies. It is a belief that the only real representation of the other is the one that is made by the other – thus enabling self-representation of

the other – as the only proper way of empowering the unprivileged. But in the *EEG* project, of course, the purpose is more focused, the images more operational.

It seems that aesthetical mode is absent from the project. How could one even think about the mode of representation, the manner in which the images were made under such horrendous conditions, by the ones exposed to the harshness and atrocities? Nevertheless it is there – it is a mode of vernacular, amateur, snapshot photography. One can hardly imagine aesthetically pleasing, formally perfect imagery to pass as a point-of-fact, down-to-earth reality, presented to us (the global public) through the eyes of real people living through atrocities as they are happening right now. It seems that the aesthetics of press imagery is actually less powerful; the style of press photography (that is readably recognized globally as having a uniform pictorial structure) carries nowadays a strong burden of scepticism. Poignantly – in contemporaneity the objectiveness (the perception of authenticity, realism) can be most effectively achieved through imagery that is distinctly de-subjectified from the point of view of the production – it is almost necessary for the images to be made in such a way as to be recognised as being able to have been made by anybody in order for their indexical value (i.e. representative ambition over the real) to take effect. As an observer one can relate to images if one perceives him or herself as being a possible author of the images. Interestingly there is some new “vernacular realism” at play here – we perceive things to be real only insofar we perceive ourselves as being in the position of an author – and at the same time recognising that it is so precisely because this position is inherently interchangeable – everybody could be an author. The partial aim of the *EEG* project is to influence (structure) the events themselves by the mere presence of the cameras. The deterrent effect through the perceived om-

nipresence of the cameras seems to work (at least so it seems for now) even without the sanctions. It is reported by the *EEG* project that since the presence of the cameras in Darfur sexual assaults on women in the region have gone dramatically down.¹⁸

The *EEG* project is all about making the reality visible by providing for incessant photographing and that in turn means completely depleting the reality and transforming it (or should we say) – dissolving it into an image. Making the “ground zero” of horrific events completely transparent. In this we can clearly sense the “forensic” logic of transforming the reality in a pictorial plane – so that the truth, “the incriminating” detail might appear. But there is one important difference – whereas the forensic, crime scene photography structures the closed, secluded, controlled space in a pictorial representation where the truth of the event might appear, the *EEG* project structures the ongoing actuality, the event itself, for the “pictorial” truth to appear – in order for the truth of the event to disappear. The logic closely follows the logic of a classic, liberal documentary (although as we have seen the *EEG* project enriches it with the participatory dimension). By making the truth (the horrors, the genocide) visible, thus pictured, the truth should disappear from reality (through a global campaign and by addressing policy makers).

However, *EEG* tries to structure the reality itself, not just through the process of participatory image making but also through the mere presence of the cameras. The observing subject is missing from this logic; the photography has become instrumentalised. There is almost no need for the visual representation, no need for an observer, for a subjective eye that sees the images. The photography has the ability to structure the reality by its mere

¹⁸ Eyes and Ears of God. Available at: <http://www.tomokriznar.com/ang/index.php?li=novice> [11.9.2013].

presence – by its very logic, which is deeply imbedded in our conception of reality.

The aim of *EEG* images is to function as an objective record, a valid testimony; the goal of this project is the future incrimination and at the same time real time deterrence against atrocities. We have seen how the logic of real time deterrence works – but we have neglected the future incrimination aspect. Since most of the images are done by volunteers whose names and identities are not disclosed for obvious reasons, sometimes images lack the interpretative context (the how, who, where, for what purpose ...) which would in a manner quite similar to the forensic one be able to function in the court of law. It is precisely that which gives credibility to these images – the “vernacular realism”, the logic of author-lessness of images that could prove problematic in the court of law.

Satellite Sentinel Project

The *Satellite Sentinel Project* (*SSP* in short) was launched on 29 of December as a private and NGO-run satellite surveillance over the border region of South and North Sudan. John Prendergast (co-founder of the Enough Project) and actor George Clooney instigated it. It is hiring DigitalGlobe’s satellites to take satellite imagery of the region, provide expert analysis of the images (discerning from the images the threats to civilians, traces of military activities, traces of bombings, grave dig outs etc.), get as much confirmation as possible from the ground and then alert the media, policy makers, the public, and publish the findings. On the first page of their web page, there is a telling description of the project:

“From 300 miles in the sky, the imagery seems indecipherable. But up close, the Satellite Sentinel Project, or *SSP*, is looking for clues. Researchers on the ground ask questions to try to get

closer. *SSP* finds out the facts, and monitors what's really going on in Sudan. Satellite imagery uncovers evidence of alleged atrocities. Stories that alleged war criminals don't want told. Then *SSP* sounds the alarm. The world is watching because you are watching."¹⁹

The images taken from afar by satellite are intended to function as an objective record of events taking place on the ground – war zones. Similar to *Eyes and Ears of God*, the Satellite Sentinel Project has several objectives:

“What do you get when you combine cutting edge imagery and data analysis? You get a game-changing project that uses technological innovations to document, deter, and seek accountability for war criminals and mass atrocities.”²⁰

To document, deter, and seek accountability – to paraphrase: to record, to structure the reality on the ground, and to incriminate. Because of the use of the satellite still imagery one has an idea that every image is a crime scene image waiting to be deciphered, explained, clarified – to discern the truth of event from the picture, the event that has already taken place. But there is another side to the project – a pre-emptive side, which is lacking in the *EEG* project. The aim of the *SSP* project is also to warn about atrocities before they actually happen – much in the manner of war reconnaissance images – through the assumption of future actions from the tell-tell signs of military activities (building roads, fortification, building artillery positions, moving convoys etc.)

¹⁹ The Satellite Sentinel Project. Available at: <http://www.satsentinel.org/> [11.9.2013].

²⁰ Ibid.

“SSP seeks to hold perpetrators of alleged mass atrocities accountable by documenting human rights crimes as they develop and unfold.”²¹

The role of the author in this project is ultimately reduced to that of the operator of the “machine”. The production is perceived as done by the machine – the satellite camera (and an image-making program); images are made from a distance. The truth claim of SSP would be that objectivity is achieved by removing the subjective, human factor from the production – as if the images were produced by themselves. The aesthetics factor is perceived as a burden for the reality of the representation. The indexical value of photography is preserved or valued through distance objectification. The logic of this project falls neatly into the forensic model – or rather into the forensic paradigm.

The truth of the images is hidden in the small granular pixels, in strange pictorial structures in shapes and contours that to the nonprofessional’s eye tell nothing. The truth must be revealed through the pointers, diagrams, graphs, cursors, drawn areas, detailed descriptions (a tank, burned house, recently dug out defensive trenches etc ...) even time-lapse imagery (comparison between before and after). It is through the mathematical schemata, through the aesthetics of the objective, the scientific that these images talk to the nonprofessional observer. Not surprisingly, the images lack any emphatic potential, any identification markers with the victims. Between the satellite images and the final recipient there is an interpretative corpus, represented by an expert, one who knows how to interpret the images, one that possess the knowledge of satellite image production – as the general public is perceived as lacking the ability to discern the reality from these images.

²¹ Ibid.

The images of *SSP* are intended to function as an objective record, a valid testimony; they will “perform” in a court of law in the future – where events will finally be reconstructed in legal, veristic, objective way. Of course – one of the most important goals of *SSP* is precisely the future incrimination and a real time deterrent effect against atrocities only second. *SSP* addresses foremost and even specifically the policy makers (as opposed to the *EEG* project; they have presented their findings to selected senators of the USA Congress). *SSP* exposes the war machinery, the “invisible” structure of the war happening right now and the war that is about to happen.

Up Close and From Afar

Even though both projects still rely on the classic, liberal documentary paradigm, they are in contrast with the tradition of classical documentary photography, more or less unorthodox. They both foster a certain reluctance towards the function of the author in a classical sense. Authorship is deemed more or less a burden for the correct representation. In these two projects the author functions more as a facilitator for the production of the images made by the others – in the *EEG* the participants themselves, in *SSP* the camera machine – the “Cyclops eye” of the satellite. *EEG* wants to explore every possible viewpoint from every possible angle by as many as possible participants photographers in the field itself – relying on the impact of reality style vernacular photographs taken from close-up in the utmost proximity – in the ground zero of atrocities. The *EEG* includes a multitude of subjective cameras – achieving objectiveness through the numbers. The *SSP* relies on the exclusion of the author through distance – through the logic of “viewing from afar”, through objective, automated, programmed production of the images.

But there are further developments to the projects. At some level both projects tend to gravitate slowly towards the other in terms of

their representative regimes. The *SSP* uses a combination of satellite images and images taken on the ground in a collage manner. And some of the images are actually taken by the participants of *EEG* project. On the other hand the *EEG* project has recently started an action of another kind of surveillance – aerial drone reconnaissance – aimed to capture events while they are taking place, from above. Capturing the horrific reality at the very moment of its unfolding, not just recording the aftermath of events, which takes the old photographic logic of “getting closer” to the event to the extreme. Only if we can capture the unfolding of reality at its utmost presence will the international community finally “really see” (as Tomo Križnar so convincingly and emphatically says in the fundraising video for the purchase of drones) and the perpetrators be exposed.

The images that are the result of these two projects cannot be further apart from each other – on the one hand, we have highly technical, to the naked eye completely vague satellite imagery, on the other vernacular snapshots of bomb holes, injured civilians, and dead, burnt bodies. Whereas the first can be believed only through trust in the interpretive apparatus (pointers, diagrams, close-ups, before-after images of the changing landscape), the second can be believed on the grounds of their vernacular aesthetics. Similar to the way we have discovered in forensic photography, both approaches follow the representational paradigm of what can constitute “a document” in contemporary legal ideology.

The impact of these two projects is still, after so many years, under question. The international community has been stirred to action, but to limited effect, since there is no political will to seriously act upon the results from these two projects – there are no immediate sanctions against the Khartoum regime (being blocked mostly by China and Russia, but silently also by the EU and USA).

Even more, the culprit is not only North Sudan – it seems that even the South Sudanese political elites are profiting from the conflicts. It is of no surprise that from 2015 onwards the SSP ceased its activities. Its “founding fathers” created a new NGO – *The Sentry*:

“The Sentry is a team of policy analysts, regional experts, and financial forensic investigators that follows the money in order to create consequences for those funding and profiting from genocide or other mass atrocities in Africa, and to build leverage for peace.”

Following the money, *The Sentry* found culpability on five continents of the earth: Europe, North America, Africa, Asia, and Australia. At the end, it must be admitted that the representational strategies employed in these two projects and their efforts to combat the atrocities in Sudan are simply no match for the political and corporate power unleashed on people in 21st century. Consequently, it seems that representational strategies in general (art and documentary) and their theoretical analysis are even less a match for the global powers. And it is only on the grounds of such an insight that any socially engaged theory and practice can staggeringly move forward, especially so if the aim is not a grand global change but small-scale local one. It is then that the power of the camera to structure reality by its mere presence could be harnessed to its full (yet still limited) potential. It is on this power of photography (photographic) – to directly engage and change the events accruing – that maybe we should theoretically, if not even more practically, focus a bit more attention. On the photographic act, on the process of photographing itself.

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Evropocentrična nadvlada “Zahoda nad Vzhodom”

Izveček: V prispevku je predstavljen pregled izbranih zgodovinskih dogodkov, ki so pripeljali do trenutnega razmerja moči med obema diametralnima poloma – torej Zahodom in Vzhodom ter posledično prispevali k negativnemu vrednotenju muslimanov ter stereotipiziranja le-teh kot drugih. Evropocentrična miselnost je postala še bolj izrazita v času sodobnih migracij, pri čemer mislimo predvsem na prihod beguncev in migrantov, do katerega je prišlo v zadnjih letih predvsem z Bližnjega vzhoda in severne Afrike. Prispevek opozori na izjemen pomen zgodovinskih dogodkov, ki so pripeljali do tega, da so tako muslimani, živeči na Zahodu, kot begunci in migranti, ki so v zadnjih letih prišli z Bližnjega vzhoda in severne Afrike, na Zahodu dojeti kot drugi, izrazito negativno ovrednoteni ter se srečujejo s porastom sovražnega govora, islamofobije ter oteženo integracijo v družbo.

Ključne besede: evropocentrizem, Zahod, Vzhod, muslimani, porazdelitev moči, superiornost, križarske vojne, kolonializem, imperializem, neokolonializem

UDK: 316.7:327:28(4)

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Europocentric Dominance of the West over the East

Abstract: This paper presents an overview of the chosen historical events that led to the current distribution of the power between the two diametric poles - the West and the East, and consequently contributed to a negative evaluation of the Muslims and stereotyping them as others. Eurocentric mentality became even more evident during the time of the modern migrations, by which we primarily have in mind the influx of the refugees and migrants mainly from the Middle East and North Africa, which occurred in the recent years. The contribution highlights the exceptional importance of the historical events that led up to the fact that the Muslims, who live in the West, as well as refugees and migrants, which came from the Middle East and North Africa in recent years, are perceived as others in the West, are strongly negatively evaluated and are faced with the rise of the hate speech, Islamophobia and difficulties in order to integrate into society.

Key words: Eurocentrism, West, East, Muslims, distribution of power, superiority, Crusades, Colonialism, Imperialism, Neo-Colonialism



Uvod

Tematika nadvlade moči Zahoda nad Vzhodom oziroma v našem primeru zahodnega sveta nad muslimani kot delom vzhodnega sveta krepko presega okvire tega kratkega prispevka, zato bomo skušali podati vsaj grob oris dogodkov, ki so pripeljali do trenutnega razmerja moči med obema prej navedenima poloma. Muslimane zahodni svet postavlja v podrejen (inferioren) položaj – ali kot sestavni del nerazvitega Vzhoda ali kot nazadnjaške “barbare”

z navadami, pogledi in verskim fanatizmom, ki nikakor niso in ne morejo biti združljivi z modernim, naprednim, bogatim ter sekulariziranim Zahodom, ali pa kot osebe, ki hočejo na silo stopiti na tla Zahoda z namenom izvajanja terorističnih napadov, odvzema služb avtohtonim prebivalcem in še marsikatero argumente lahko slišimo oziroma preberemo, ko tema naleti na muslimane, ki prihajajo iz vzhodnih dežel. Negativna porazdelitev razmerja moči v smislu nadvlade Zahoda nad Vzhodom in posledično muslimani je navzoča že vrsto stoletij in se skozi stoletja le še pogloblja. Na podlagi študija literature in raziskovanja za potrebe izdelave znanstvene monografije³ lahko trdimo, da je eden izmed pomembnih vzrokov problemov, s katerimi se sedaj srečujejo muslimani na Zahodu (denimo manj uspešna integracija, nestrpnost do muslimanov, ki vodi v sovražni govor in včasih celo v sovražna dejanja pripadnikov zahodnih družb), izrazita (okcidentalistična) polarizacija med Zahodom in Vzhodom.

Odnos Evropejcev do drugih kulturnih prostorov je bil skozi zgodovino poln nasprotij in tako je bil za Evropejce od 16. do 18. stoletja neevropski svet hkrati prostor za plenjenje, pobijanje in uničevanje ter prostor romantičnega iskanja lastnih korenin, nedolžnosti in naravnosti⁴. Reprezentacija drugega pomeni nekrščanskega drugega, ki v renesansi postane nerazsvetljeni drugi in pozneje 'drugi tretjega sveta', ki je brezbrizen, neizobražen in neracionalen – je manj kot evropski človek, in prav ta stališča so spodbujala, upravičevala in reproducirala evropsko eksploatacijo od 18. do 20. stoletja.⁵ Taka stališča temeljijo na evropocentričnih stališčih, "ki soočena z neznanim svetom drugačnih religijskih, estetskih, moralnih in družbenih oblik

³ Pucelj, 2016.

⁴ Lužar, 2010, 138.

⁵ Lužar, 2010, 138.

nanje reagirajo odbijajoče in ksenofobično”.⁶ Izrazita evropocentrična miselnost pa, poleg negativnega vrednotenja muslimanov in stereotipiziranja le-teh kot (negativnih) drugih, vpliva tudi na sodobne migracije, pri čemer imamo v mislih (nedavne) migracije beguncev in migrantov z Bližnjega vzhoda in severne Afrike. Omenjeno družbeno skupino (torej begunce in migrante z Bližnjega vzhoda in severne Afrike) se velikokrat predsodkovno enači z religijsko pripadnostjo islamu, ki naj bi bil edini ali (pa vsaj) najpomembnejši način identifikacije, s čimer se potem (hote) poudarja njihova kulturna in verska “neenakost/drugačnost”, “nekompatibilnost” z evropskimi (sekularnimi) vrednotami, kot tudi njihove (domnevne) značilnosti v smislu stereotipnega dojemanja le-teh – kot so denimo “nepoštenje, nečistost, kriminalnost, nevarnost”. Takšna retorika posledično ponižuje, razžaljuje ali razčlovečuje ter spodbuja sovraštvo ali celo nasilno obnašanje nad njim. Zelo podoben (slabšalni odnos) ima Zahod tudi do muslimanov, ki v miselnosti pripadnikov zahodnih družb predstavljajo del Vzhoda in jih zahodne družbe od križarskih vojn naprej dojemajo pretežno kot “druge” in so le-ti zato v zahodnih, pretežno krščanskih državah, zaradi svoje veroizpovedi, tako kot begunci in migranti z Bližnjega vzhoda in severne Afrike, velikokrat deležni diskriminatorne obravnave, sovražnega govora in celo sovražnih dejanj.

Vzpostavitev superiornosti Zahoda nad Vzhodom oz. muslimani

Postaviti ključni moment, kdaj je Zahod pričel dojemati muslimane in Vzhod kot inferiorne,⁷ je zelo težko, saj je momentov več, občutek

⁶ Lužar, 2010, 138; Šterk, 1998, 29.

⁷ V tem prispevku se bomo osredotočili na tematiziranje evropocentričnega pogleda na večvrednost Zahoda (zahodnih miselnih paradigem) nad Vzhodom (vzhodnimi miselnimi paradigami), s poudarkom na muslimanski paradigmi.

superiornosti pa Zahod kultivira in nadgrajuje že mnogo let oziroma stoletij. Muslimanski odnos do Zahoda pa je bil, kljub skupnim teološkim koreninam in stoletja dolgi interakciji, pogosto zaznamovan z medsebojno ignoranco, stereotipiziranjem, odporom in konfliktom.⁸

Teoretično bi lahko govorili o mitičnem začetku oziroma genealogiji predsodkovnega občutenja, usmerjenega proti muslimanom, v okviru naslednjih zgodovinskih manifestacij:

- 1) z rojstvom preroka Mohameda okoli 570. leta (glede na to, da je Mohamed vzpostavil islam kot veroizpoved in s tem tudi izpostavil razlog za ločevanje med zahodnim krščanstvom, ki predstavlja pravoverstvo v očeh zahodnih narodov in vzhodnim islamom, ki v teh istih očeh predstavlja krivoverstvo);
- 2) v času širitve islama skozi dinastije Omajadov in Abasidov, ko je zanos, ki ga je vzbujala nova vera, pripravil Arabce k temu, da so se, še preden je minilo pol stoletja, spustili v osvajanje sveta, ki se je razmahnilo v eno najmočnejših dogajanj v zgodovini človeštva;⁹
- 3) v času obdobja rekonkviste, ki je predstavljala skorajda osem stoletij (od 8. do 15. stoletja) trajajoče obdobje osvajanja ozemlja s strani muslimanov na območju Iberskega polotoka in predstavlja prvo srečanje Evrope z islamom. Rekonkvista se je v 15. stoletju končala s padcem Granade in umikom muslimanov z Iberskega polotoka¹⁰;

V tem kontekstu lahko govorimo o treh večjih konceptualnih zgodovinskih vzrokih, ki so vplivali na percepcijo Zahoda do mu-

⁸ Esposito, 1992, 24.

⁹ Potočnik, 2006, 41.

¹⁰ Pucelj, 2016, 25.

slimanov, ki so enačeni z Vzhodom kot inferiornim drugim. To so križarske vojne, kolonializem in imperializem.¹¹

1. Križarske vojne

Mirovno gibanje v enajstem stoletju je:

*“načelno prepovedalo prelivanje krščanske krvi in poenotilo zahodno krščansko družbo v miru. Dopolnilo se je v sveti vojni. Da bi sveta vojna lahko bila, so bili muslimani skonstruirani v Sovražnika krščanstva in poenotene družbe zahodnih kristjanov, kristjanstva. Nasilje je bilo, načelno, preusmerjeno proti temu Sovražniku. Vendar ni šlo preprosto za to, da bi bila vojna proti “nevernikom” cena, ki jo je bilo treba plačati za mir med kristjani. Mir je postal pogoj, sredstvo za vojno proti muslimanom. Vojskovanje proti “sovražnikom vere” je bilo norma in sveta vojna dejavno načelo zahodne enotnosti. Zahodnjaške predstave o muslimanih so zato igrale ključno vlogo pri oblikovanju – in preoblikovanju – oblastnih struktur na Zahod in še posebej pri urejanju odnosov med temi oblastnimi strukturami pri ustvarjanju zahodne enotnosti”.*¹²

S križarskimi vojnami so se začeli oblikovati stereotipi o Vzhodu in Zahodu, saj od križarskih vojn naprej velja Zahod za progresističnega, Vzhod pa vidi sebe kot žrtev travmatičnega srečanja s tujo kulturo ter dodaja, da je ta barbarski vdor v srce muslimanskega sveta začetek dolgega obdobja dekadence in

¹¹ Čeprav muslimani živijo tudi na Zahodu, pa so v očeh zahodne kulture še vedno dojeti kot “drugi”, kot del vzhodnega nerazvitega sveta in zato posledično inferiorni v primerjavi z nemuslimanskimi prebivalci zahodnih držav. Zato bova v tem delu privzeli to percepcijo muslimanov kot dela nerazvitega Vzhoda. O tem vprašanju piše tudi Anja Zalta (2006).

¹² Mastnak, 1996, 8.

obskurantizma, ki ga v islamskih deželah še danes občutijo "kakor posilstvo".¹³ Izraz "križarske vojne" označuje serijo osmih vojaških pohodov od 11. do 13. stoletja, s katerimi je krščanski (zahodni) svet - vsaj deklarativno - poskušal tajno zavzeti ozemlja v osrednjem delu muslimanskega sveta.¹⁴ Eden izmed vzrokov za križarske vojne je bil želja po nadzoru s strani Evrope (torej zahodnega sveta) nad takrat najbolj dragoceno surovino - azijskimi začimbami.¹⁵ Torej, če pogledamo na enega izmed vzrokov te travmatične izkušnje, ki je pustila neizbrisljiv pečat v odnosih med obema poloma, lahko vidimo, da so že zgodnji spori med njima imeli korenine v želji Zahoda, da bi dosegel ekonomsko submisivnost Vzhoda. Vendar pa so bili ti prvi boji krščanske Evrope z islamom seveda predstavljeni drugače, in sicer kot spopad krščanskega sveta proti nevernikom, poganom oziroma sovražnikom.¹⁶ "Dojemanje islama kot sovražnika pa se je še poglobilo ob koncu 11. stoletja, ko se začne ogrožanje krščanske cerkve in papežev, saj jih začnejo muslimani z osvajanjem južne Italije in približevanjem Rimu počasi ogrožati. Takrat postane islam glavni sovražnik, ki je pozneje v križarskih vojnah poenotil novo, krščansko Evropo".¹⁷ Julija leta 1099, ko je s strani križarjev v Jeruzalemu prišlo do boja 30.000 muslimanov in Judov, se je s strani Zahoda pričelo dojemanje muslimanov kot "drugih" in to je prvi dogodek, ki je botroval stoletja trajajoči sovražnosti med obema poloma.

¹³ Mastnak v: Maalouf, 2008.

¹⁴ Šterbenc, 2011, 128-129.

¹⁵ Engdahl, 2012, 11, 12.

¹⁶ Mastnak, 1998, 25-40.

¹⁷ Pucelj, 2016, 26.

2. Kolonializem¹⁸

Od kolonializma dalje lahko govorimo o začetku in rasti občutka superiornosti Zahoda tako proti muslimanom kot delu Vzhoda kot proti Vzhodu kot nerazvitemu delu sveta. V obdobju kolonializma so nastajali prvi zametki hierarhij v odnosih med državami, saj so evropske države kot države kolonialne dominacije predstavljale razvite, napredne, vodilne države, v nasprotju s kolonijami, ki so veljale za nerazvita kolonizirana ozemlja, ki so brez pravic in temeljev za ustrezen, nadaljnji razvoj. Nesorazmerje gospodarske, politične, vojaške in še kakšne druge moči, je instrument kolonialne dominacije.¹⁹ V nasprotju s tem Ferguson²⁰ izraža občudovanje do obdobja kolonializma ter predstavi le eno (zahodnjaško) perspektivo tega obdobja, ne predstavi pa negativnih posledic tega obdobja. Navaja, da so zahodnoevropske države, ki so intelektualno sledile orientalski matematiki, astronomiji in tehnologiji, v poznem 15. stoletju ustvarile civilizacijo, ki je bila sposobna zavzeti velike orientalske imperije in si podrediti Afriko, obe Ameriki in Avstralazijo ter dodaja, da ni nobena predhodna civilizacija nikoli dosegla takšne dominacije, kot jo je Zahod nad preostankom sveta. Vendar pa se je treba zavedati, da je “obdobje kolonializma muslimanskim deželam/nekdanjim muslimanskim kolonijam otežilo ekonomsko in politično napredovanje, kar je/in še vedno vzbuja negativne občutke pri muslimanih po svetu”.²¹ Esposito dodaja, da je bilo v odnosu med muslimanskim svetom in Zahodom zgolj malo dogodkov

¹⁸ V Slovarju slovenskega knjižnega jezika (<http://bos.zrc-sazu.si/sskj.html> (dostop 15. 4. 2017)) je kolonializem opredeljen kot (i) v kapitalizmu politika gospodarsko močnejših držav, ki temelji na osvajanju, gospodarskem izkoriščanju in političnem zatiranju drugih dežel.

¹⁹ Južnič, 1980, 15–16.

²⁰ Ferguson, 2014.

²¹ Pucelj, 2016, 28.

bolj daljnosežnih in vplivnih, kot je bila izkušnja evropskega kolonializma.²²

Imperializem²³

Imperializem, ki ga lahko razumemo tudi kot najvišji stadij kapitalizma²⁴, je pojem, ki se ga v svoji konceptualni zgodovinski osnovi povezuje z evropsko nadvlado, ki se je pričela krepiti po letu 1500 in v zadnjem času z nadvlado Združenih držav Amerike (v nadaljevanju: ZDA). Pred letom 1500 je bila porazdelitev moči na strani naslednjih imperijev: indijskega/Mogulskega imperija, perzijskega/Safavidskega imperija, turškega/Otomanskega imperija in Kitajske, medtem ko je bila Evropa po zatonu rimskega imperija le obrobje Evrazije in kot takšna nepomembna. Po letu 1500 pa se je razmerje moči pričelo preusmerjati proti zahodu, predvsem evropskemu delu Zahoda. Leta 1500 so bodoče imperialne evropske sile zasedale okoli deset odstotkov zemeljskega površja in največ 16 odstotkov svetovnega prebivalstva, medtem ko je leta 1913 enajst zahodnih imperijev nadzorovalo skoraj tri petine vsega ozemlja in prebivalstva ter več kot tri četrtine (kar 79) odstotkov svetovnega ekonomskega proizvoda.²⁵ Do prevlade Zahoda je prišlo zaradi napredka v znanosti in tehnologiji.²⁶ Od srede 19. do srede 20. stoletja je Zahod vladal preostanku sveta.²⁷ To ni bila samo doba imperijev,

²² Esposito 1992, 47.

²³ V Slovarju slovenskega knjižnega jezika (2000) je imperializem opredeljen kot 1. nav. ekspr. težnja po obvladanju tujih ozemelj; nastopiti proti imperializmu; ravnati v duhu imperializma / politični imperializem; 2. polit. razvojna stopnja kapitalizma, na kateri je ta usmerjen k novi ekonomski in politični delitvi sveta.

²⁴ Brumen in Jeffs, 2001

²⁵ Ferguson, 2014.

²⁶ Ali, 2002, 280.

²⁷ Ferguson, 2014.

temveč tudi imperializma in teorije prekomorske ekspanzije, ki je upravičevala formalno ter neformalno dominacijo nad nezahodnimi narodi iz koristoljubnosti, pa tudi altruističnih vzgibov.²⁸ Ravno to obdobje je tisto, v katerem je Evropa najbolj opazno posegala v neevropski svet – to obdobje je v marsičem opredelilo družbeno-gospodarski svet koloniziranega sveta.²⁹ Analiza tega obdobja je izhodišče za razumevanje nastanka sodobne mednarodne skupnosti in posledično razdeljenosti sveta na razvite in nerazvite³⁰.

V sklopu govora o imperializmu je treba poudariti tudi (še vedno trajajoči) ameriški imperializem, ki je navzoč tudi sedaj in nedvomno zelo vpliva na odnose med ZDA in Vzhodom oziroma muslimani v negativnem kontekstu. Ideološka prevlada Združenih držav, ki jo podpira njen vojaški vzpon, je “postala tako izrazita, da celo številni od tistih, ki so bili nekoč kritični do tega, kako so svojo moč uporabljale, samo še prizanesljivo predejo in banalno hvalijo”.³¹ ZDA, ki po koncu II. svetovne vojne izgubijo samozadostnost pri osnovnih surovinah, pričnejo politično intervenirati v obliki državnih udarov, lokalnih vojn, pri ustanavljanju ameriških oporišč ...

“Trmasto vztrajanje pri oligarhiji v Venezueli, generalih v Braziliji in Čilu ter pri klanu Al Saud v Saudovi Arabiji, to so bili najpreprostejši načini za boj proti komunističnemu sovražniku in za zaščito ameriške ekonomije”.³² – Pri tem lahko potegnemo črto vzporednice tudi na dogajanje in nasilno poseganje na Bližnji vzhod (torej ekonomski interesi po nadvladi nafte), kar potrjuje Ali³³ tudi v nadaljevanju, ko obravnava Huntingtonovo teorijo in pravi, da

²⁸ Ferguson, 2014.

²⁹ Južnič, 1980, 33.

³⁰ Južnič, 1980, 33.

³¹ Ali, 2002, 259.

³² Ali, 2002, 268–269.

³³ Ali, 2002, 277.

“mora biti Zahod (v resnici Združene države) pripravljen na obračun z vojaškimi grožnjami drugih civilizacij. Jasno je, da sta najbolj preteča islam in konfucijanstvo (nafta in kitajski izvoz), in če bi se ta dva kdaj povezala, bi to predstavljalo grožnjo za obstoj bistva civilizacije”.

Dodatni spori, ki škodljivo vplivajo na razumevanje med Zahodom in muslimani

Poleg omenjenih treh zgodovinskih sporov je (v prejšnjem in tem stoletju) prišlo do dodatnih dogodkov, ki kvarno vplivajo na odnos med Zahodom in muslimani, saj izkazujejo željo Zahoda po izkazovanju svoje superiornosti nad Vzhodom oziroma muslimani.

Izraelsko-palestinski spor

Kot pravi Mandelc (Arabska vstaja), se ne zmotimo veliko, če izraelsko-palestinski konflikt označimo za “mater vseh konfliktov” na Bližnjem vzhodu. Pomembnost tega spora za odnos med obema poloma lahko razberemo tudi iz naslednjega stavka: “Udarec je islam doživel tudi z ustanovitvijo judovske države leta 1948, ki je sprožila več vojn med Judi in Palestinci, kar je posredno pomenilo tudi spopad med ZDA in islamom.”³⁴ V muslimanski percepciji je nastanek države Izrael neločljivo povezan z obdobjem evropskega kolonializma-imperializma.³⁵ Ustanovitev Izraela leta 1948 je bila dojeta kot najbolj drzen primer dvoličnosti evropskega kolonializma in njegove želje, da bi Arabce ohranil ločene in šibke.³⁶ Izrael je obravnavan kot evropsko-ameriška (zahodna) kolonija sredi arabskega sveta, kot orodje zahodnega imperializma, ali kot mostišče za pro-

³⁴ Potočnik, 2007, 59.

³⁵ Šterbenc, 2011: 137.

³⁶ Esposito, 2012, 73.

jiciranje zahodnega vpliva, penetracije in dominacije v arabskem svetu.³⁷ Po drugi strani pa ima Palestina izjemno pomembno in celo edinstveno mesto v zavesti vsakega muslimana, saj izraelsko-palestinski (arabski) spor, ki traja že vsaj od leta 1948, zbuja izjemno pozornost vseh svetovnih muslimanov.³⁸

*“Palestina je v percepciji muslimanov otipljiva posledica kolonializma, ki je še vedno zelo pod drobnogledom muslimanov po svetu. Po mojem mnenju se izraelsko-palestinski spor ne bo rešil še lep čas, menim pa, da je že sorazmerno prepozno za ugodno rešitev za obe strani, kar se bo nedvomno reflektiralo tudi na odnosu muslimanov proti Zahodu in posledično tudi na želji po integraciji muslimanov, ki bodo prihajali na Zahod. Kakšen bo ta vpliv, pa je zaradi še vedno trajajočega spora v Palestini, na tej časovni točki zelo težko ustrezno ovrednotiti oziroma oceniti.”*³⁹

Neokolonializem

Današnji neokolonializem predstavlja imperializem v svoji končni in morda svoji najbolj nevarni fazi.⁴⁰ Neokolonializem je dojet kot prilagojena oblika kolonializma, ki izkoristi slabosti novo dekolonializirane države, da doseže gospodarske, politične in kulturne prednosti,⁴¹ predvsem preko opuščanja politične moči naklonjenih

³⁷ Šterbenc, 2011, 137.

³⁸ Šterbenc, 2011, 137.

³⁹ Pucelj, 2016, 38.

⁴⁰ https://www.prisoncensorship.info/archive/books/Economics/Neo-Colonialism_KwameNkrumah.pdf (dostop 19. 4. 2017)

⁴¹ Ardent, 1965; http://icip.gencat.cat/web/.content/continguts/publicacions/workingpapers/2011/arxiu/wp_2011-6_ing.pdf (dostop 10. 4. 2017).

⁴² Martin, 1985; http://icip.gencat.cat/web/.content/continguts/publicacions/workingpapers/2011/arxiu/wp_2011-6_ing.pdf (dostop 10. 4. 2017).

elit.⁴² Cilj je enak kot v kolonializmu – obdržati prejšnje kolonije v samostojnem položaju, ki dopušča gospodarsko izkoriščanje.⁴³ Splošna percepcija muslimanov je, da vodi Zahod v odnosu do muslimanskega sveta neokolonialno hegemonsko politiko, katere cilj je ohranjanje podrejenosti svetovnih muslimanov.⁴⁴

*“Neokolonializem je dejansko nekakšna “nova oblika kolonializma” v moderni dobi. Gre za politiko, ki jo Zahod vodi proti Bližnjemu vzhodu in ki jo muslimani dojemajo kot vzrok sovraštva do Zahodu, saj se zdi, da Zahod s to politiko želi podrediti tako Bližnji vzhod kot celotno muslimansko populacijo na Zahodu. Nasilno poseganje na Bližnji vzhod tako vzbuja odpor pri celotni muslimanski populaciji, ne glede na to, kje ta živi in posledično na Zahodu pripomore k temu, da se muslimani težje uspešno vključijo, saj ima takšno ravnanje nedvomno vpliv na slabšo psihološko integracijo muslimanov”.*⁴⁵

Nasilno poseganje Zahoda na Bližnji vzhod

Skozi zadnja leta se je na območju Bližnjega vzhoda zgodilo več dogodkov, ki botrujejo še dodatnemu poslabšanju odnosov med muslimani in Zahodom. Kot prvega lahko nedvomno izpostavimo napad na Irak leta 1991 in leta 2003. Kot ugotavlja Šterbenc, je imel vojaški poseg ameriško vodene koalicije proti Iraku leta 1991, ko so milijoni muslimanov po vsem svetu Sadama Huseina obravnavali kot islamskega heroja,⁴⁶ izjemno negativen učinek, ameriški napad na Irak leta 2003 pa je bil odločilna prelomna točka, saj je odprl Pan-

⁴³ Kabunda Badi, 1991; Ardent, 1965; http://icip.gencat.cat/web/.content/continguts/publicacions/workingpapers/2011/arxiu/wp_2011-6_ing.pdf (dostop 10. 4. 2017).

⁴⁴ Šterbenc, 2011, 136.

⁴⁵ Pucelj, 2016, 50.

⁴⁶ Šterbenc, 2011, 142.

dorino skrinjico konflikta in grozodejstev.⁴⁷ Ameriški napad na Irak je sprožil bistvena procesa, ki sta privedla k nastanku Islamske države, že prej pa do njene predhodnice, Al Kaide v Iraku.⁴⁸

“Iraško ozemlje je zaradi različnih razlogov zelo pomembno za sunitske in šiitske muslimane. Irak je kot današnja država umetna tvorba, ki so jo vzpostavili Britanci avgusta 1921. V zgodovini muslimanskega sveta je Irak obstajal predvsem kot geografski pojem, ki je označeval območje južne Mezopotamije. Za sunita ima območje Iraka ogromen pomen, ker je bil v Bagdadu med letoma 762 in 1258 sedež bagdadskega abasidskega kalifata, v času katerega je islamska civilizacija doživela svoj največji gospodarski, kulturni in znanstveni razcvet. Bagdad in Irak sta simbola nekdanje moči islama, napad ZDA pa je imel pričakovano velik negativen simbolni odmev.”⁴⁹

Napad na Irak so muslimani po svetu razumeli kot napad na njihov “simbol moči” in “kot željo Zahoda, da bi muslimane ponižal na simbolni ravni, saj so napadli njihov “ponos”, torej Irak. Kot odziv na ta napad, je v Evropi prišlo do različnih terorističnih napadov (največja sta se zgodila v Madridu in v Londonu), kot odziv na nasilno poseganje Zahoda na Bližnji vzhod”.⁵⁰ Zaradi križarske retorike – in dejanj – ameriške administracije je vojna proti terorizmu radikalizirala del muslimanskega prebivalstva od Mavretanije do Indonezije in je kot učinek bumeranga s terorističnimi napadi Ma-

⁴⁷ <http://www.rtvsllo.si/svet/radikalizacija-muslimanov-nerazumljiva-novost-fikcija-ali-nadaljevanje-vecdesetletnega-trenda/345626> (dostop 29. 4. 2017).

⁴⁸ <http://www.rtvsllo.si/svet/radikalizacija-muslimanov-nerazumljiva-novost-fikcija-ali-nadaljevanje-vecdesetletnega-trenda/345626> (dostop 29. 4. 2017).

⁴⁹ <http://www.rtvsllo.si/svet/radikalizacija-muslimanov-nerazumljiva-novost-fikcija-ali-nadaljevanje-vecdesetletnega-trenda/345626> (dostop 29. 4. 2017).

⁵⁰ Pucelj, 2016, 42.

drida in Londona obiskala Evropo.⁵¹ Če ostanemo še pri "simbolu moči" za muslimane, torej Iraku, pa le-tega ni prizadel le fizični napad, temveč tudi ekonomski embargo s strani Združenih narodov, ki so ga v Beli hiši zmagovito razglasili za "najstrožji in najboljšežnejši embargo v zgodovini".⁵² Sankcije proti Iraku, ki so bile uvedene leta 1990 zaradi napada na Kuvajt, so bile primer splošnih oziroma celostnih sankcij, saj so ukrepi med drugim obsegali prepoved vsakršne trgovine z Irakom, prepoved izvoza orožja, prekinitve mednarodnih letalskih povezav, prepoved vseh finančnih transakcij in zamrznitev iraškega premoženja v tujini.⁵³ Ekonomski embargo

"je za sabo potegnil ogromno negativnih posledic, od podhranjenosti ljudi, do visoke stopnje umrljivosti novorojenčkov, razmah so doživele tako telesne kot duševne bolezni in tako dalje, zaradi česar ni presenetljivo, da tudi ta dogodek ostaja v muslimanski percepciji po svetu kot izredno negativno obdobje nasilnega poseganja Zahoda v muslimanski svet".⁵⁴

Nasilno poseganje Zahoda na Bližnji vzhod pod t. i. Vojno proti terorizmu, ki jo imenuje Videmšek⁵⁵ kar največji geostrateški dogodek po padcu berlinskega zidu in za katero so odgovorne ZDA, se je po terorističnem napadu na WTC 11. septembra 2001 iz "strahu" pred porastom terorizma opazno razširilo. Takrat so namreč ZDA pričele (tako preventivno kot represivno) izvajati različne ukrepe, med njimi so bili tudi različni napadi na Bližnji vzhod. Po tem tero-

⁵¹ Videmšek, 2011, 15.

⁵² <http://www.dlib.si/details/URN:NBN:SI:DOC-1I8TSH1P> (dostop 16. 4. 2017).

⁵³ Al-Samarrai, 1995: 133.

⁵⁴ Pucelj, 2016, 43.

⁵⁵ Videmšek, 2011, 15.

rističnem napadu so ZDA skupaj z zavezniki začele vojno proti talibanskemu režimu v Afganistanu, saj talibani Američanom niso hoteli predati Osame bin Ladna, po mnenju Bele hiše vodilnega arhitekta terorističnega napada na New York in Washington.⁵⁶ V sklopu "vojne proti terorizmu" je prišlo do več napadov držav na Bližnjem vzhodu s strani ZDA, in sicer do:

1) napada na Afganistan leta 2001, ki se je leta 2010 razširil tudi v Pakistan, saj sta se Pentagon in Bela hiša leta 2010 "odločila afganistansko vojno tudi uradno razširiti čez Durandovo črto v Pakistan, epicenter vseh afganistanskih potresov"⁵⁷;

2) že prej omenjeni napad na Irak leta 2003 je bil "ključni dogodek sodobne zgodovine, ki je nepovratno premešal geostrateške karte";⁵⁸ ZDA so zaradi vojne, ki je temeljila na laži o iraški posesti orožja za množično uničevanje, sprožile razpad države, ki je pripeljal do krvave državljanske vojne in popolne razgradnje nekoč najbolj trdne države na Bližnjem vzhodu;⁵⁹

3) izpostavimo lahko še kar nekaj napadov, ki so se zgodili kot posledica "vojne proti terorizmu", vendar se v pojasnjevanje ozadja in posledic le-teh zaradi kratkega obsega pričujočega dela, ne bomo detajlno spuščali, in sicer:

a) napadi na Demokratično republiko Kongo - najbolj krvav konflikt po drugi svetovni vojni⁶⁰;

b) na Somalijo - eden najbolj krutih konfliktov našega časa⁶¹
ter

⁵⁶ Videmšek, 2011, 12.

⁵⁷ Videmšek, 2011, 21.

⁵⁸ Videmšek, 2011, 103.

⁵⁹ Videmšek, 2011, 103.

⁶⁰ Videmšek, 2011, 204.

⁶¹ Videmšek, 2011, 231.

c) na Sudan – "prvo bojišče tretje svetovne vojne, vojne za energetske vire in vodo".⁶²

V kontekstu vojn in napadov s strani Zahoda na vzhodni/muslimanski svet pa je nujno potrebno omeniti, da Zahod svoje suverenosti ne kaže le z napadi in z izvedbo nasilnih dejanj, temveč tudi z opustitvijo dolžnega ravnanja, ki ga muslimani pričakujejo od Zahoda, do česar je denimo prišlo v času vojne v Bosni in Hercegovini med letoma 1992–1995. V tej vojni je nasilje srbskih in hrvaških sil proti bosanskim Muslimanom (Bošnjakom) doseglo razsežnosti genocida, zahodne sile pa so večji del vojne to tragedijo bolj ali manj pasivno opazovale, pri čemer še dodaja, da je nepripravljenost zahodnih sil, da bi na krilih svoje množične intervencije za izgon iraških sil iz Kuvajta ustavile bosanski genocid, vodila v otipljiv bes ne zgolj militantnežev, kot je Osama Bin Laden, temveč tudi več sto milijonov navadnih muslimanov po svetu.⁶³

Zaključek

Pri vseh vojnah in sporih med Zahodom in Vzhodom oziroma muslimani, ki smo jih navedli, lahko najdemo skupni imenovalec, in sicer željo Zahoda, da ekonomsko izkoristi Vzhod in si ga podredi, kar nesporno pri muslimanih zbuja odpor. Ta tendenca je bila navzoča že v času križarskih vojn zaradi želje po nadzoru nad svilno potjo. Trenutna težnja pa je navzoča zaradi želje po nadzoru nad naftnimi bogastvi. Vzhodne dežele, ki so bogate s surovinami, so zaradi te v osnovi pozitivne izhodiščne točke, torej naravnega bogastva svojih območij, "nemočen plen" Zahoda, kar v muslimanih po svetu vzbuja odpor in sovražnost, usmerjeno

⁶² Videmšek, 2011, 256.

⁶³ Šterbenc, 2011, 144.

proti Zahodu.⁶⁴ Zgoraj navedeni napadi in superiorna medijska manipulacija zahodnih medijev s strani Zahoda so usodno vplivali na porast islamofobije in protiislamskih občutkov po svetu, ki se v zadnjih letih še stopnjujejo. Če pogledamo podatke v ZDA, je v zadnjih desetih letih prišlo do opaznega porasta neugodnega dojemanja muslimanov, saj je med letoma 2006 in 2016 v določenih raziskavah odstotek nemuslimanov, ki so izrazili neugodno dojemanje muslimanov, porastel z 21 odstotkov (v letu 2006) na kar 63 odstotkov (v letu 2016).⁶⁵ V letu 2015 in 2016 je prišlo do opaznega porasta islamofobije, ki jo vzpodbuja tudi retorika v predsedniških volitvah (predvsem s strani Donalda Trumpa).⁶⁶ Medtem ko je na drugi strani, torej na strani muslimanov oz. Vzhoda “Vojna proti terorizmu” privedla k nastanku Al Kaide in Islamske države.

Superiornost Zahoda proti Vzhodu oziroma muslimanom se kaže praktično na vsakem koraku – ali če pogledamo поближе poročanje medijev ob terorističnem napadu, se kaže v takojšnjem prevpraševanju in iskanju vzročno-posledične povezave z islamom oziroma muslimani. Osredotočimo se lahko tudi na družbena spletna omrežja, kot je denimo Facebook, ki so (in še vedno) po prihodu muslimanskih beguncev in migrantov z Bližnjega vzhoda

⁶⁴ Muslimani na Zahodu čutijo povezanost z muslimani z Bližnjega vzhoda iz dveh razlogov: 1) v Koranu je opredeljeno, da so vsi muslimani bratje in sestre, 2) Bližnji vzhod je v percepciji muslimanov dežela, od koder prihaja večina muslimanov, živečih na Zahodu in kamor odhajajo na romanje v islamsko svetišče (v Meko v Saudovi Arabiji in predstavlja kraj rojstva preroka Mohameda), zaradi česar ni težko razumeti solidarnosti muslimanov po svetu z muslimani, ki živijo na Bližnjem vzhodu.

⁶⁵ <http://www.irdproject.com/> (zadnji dostop 19. 4. 2017)

⁶⁶ <http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2016/02/10/3748058/chapel-hill-anniversary/> (dostop 18. 4. 2017); <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/12/9/us-muslims-experience-surge-in-islamophobic-attacks.html> (dostop 14. 5. 2017).

polni sovražnega govora, ki se posledično usmerja tudi na muslimane, že živeče na Zahodu zaradi miselne povezave muslimanov kot enotnega naroda v percepciji zahodnjakov/nemuslimanov. Seveda ob tem ne smemo pozabiti na že prej omenjena nasilna poseganja Zahoda na Bližnji vzhod. Omenjena dejanja (vsaj kratkoročno) vplivajo na povečano število terorističnih dejanj na Zahodu, na "slabšo" psihološko integracijo muslimanov, povečano diskriminacijo in islamofobijo ter sovražni govor, usmerjen proti muslimanom in s tega stališča na oteženo integracijo muslimanov na Zahod. Če vsemu temu dodamo še ugotovitev, do katere smo prišli v znanstveni monografiji,⁶⁷ in sicer, da je v desetih obravnavanih državah področje diskriminacije muslimanov urejeno bolj neuspešno, nam postane jasno, da superiornost Zahoda postavlja neizbrisljive meje med Zahodom in muslimani, ki onemogočajo kakovosten dialog med obema stranema, kakor tudi dajejo temelje uspešni integraciji muslimanov, ki že živijo na Zahodu.

Zahod bi lahko imel v podzavesti zavedanje, da so skozi zgodovino velike civilizacije in imperiji nastajali in tudi propadali in si posledično tudi izmenjevali razmerja moči, s tem mislimo na grško in rimsko civilizacijo, indijski/Mogulski, perzijski/Safavidski, turški/Otomanski imperij in Kitajsko, od leta 1500 pa se je razmerje moči preusmerilo proti Zahodu – najprej proti evropskemu delu Zahoda, v zadnjih približno dveh stoletjih pa v smeri ZDA. Enaka usoda lahko doleti tudi Zahod, ki bo lahko čez čas ponovno v podrejenem položaju in se mu bo trenutno vedenje lahko zelo maščevalo v enakem (poniževalnem) odnosu s strani nove superiorne sile, ki bo prevzela trenutno mesto Zahoda in bodo tako sami na mestu Vzhoda oziroma muslimanov.

⁶⁷ Pucelj, 2016, 367.

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Repositioning Biotech Arts in Mexico

Abstract: This paper examines the role played by biotech art in Mexico and the way in which it has been inscribed in the local issues. Specifically, it focuses on the first biotech art exhibition in Mexico and on the production of the installations at the National University. It emphasises the epistemological and aesthetic problems encountered during the production of the artworks and the setting up of the exhibition.

Key words: bioart, transgenic crops, biotech, corn, aesthetics

UDK 7:111.852:606

Repozicioniranje biotehnoške umetnosti v Mehiki

Izveček: Ta članek preučuje vlogo, ki jo biotehnoška umetnost igra v Mehiki, in način, na katerega se je vtisnila v lokalna vprašanja. Natančneje se osredotoča na prvo biotehnoško umetniško razstavo v Mehiki in na proizvodnjo instalacij na Narodni univerzi. Poudarja epistemološke in estetske probleme, na katere so naleteli med izdelavo umetnin in postavljanjem razstave.

Ključne besede: biotehnoška umetnost, transgenetične rastline, koruza, estetika



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What follows is an attempt to describe the process through which the pieces of BIOS Ex machinA (the first art collective in Mexico producing transgenic and biotechnological art²) were generated, in order to reflect about the exhibition that took place in 2012-2013, “Sin origen/Sin semilla”³ (Without origin/Seedless) at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Describing this process will be an occasion to put forward the limits and possibilities of biotech arts, for example the challenges confronting artists, the response of museums, the possibilities of working with lab conditions in the art world, the range of topics that biotech arts can address, and how collective work is accomplished at a university which has, as an advantage, active group works in the fields of arts, technology, sciences and humanities. At the same time, the whole project represents an effort to confront the alterations of the Mexican landscape in the recent decades, reflecting the transition from traditional agriculture to industrial agriculture. We focused on the topic of maize because it has a symbolic significance for the Mexican culture, being deeply rooted in the national imagery, in the ancient myths, and in the food. Moreover, it can be thought of as an axis of a way of being, of dwelling and transforming nature and culture.

It has been a challenge for Mexico to adopt the practices of late capitalism, to change the agricultural landscape in order to cope with the competition of the USA and the Californian crops, to adopt the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and slowly to develop an agricultural industry which does not consider the traditional crops and farming, but sees the land as something instrumental that

² BIOS Ex machinA was conformed in 2012 by: Marcela Armas, Axel Barceló, Arcángel Constantini, Deborah Dorotinsky, María Antonia González Valerio, Marco Antonio Lara, Jorge Enrique Linares, Sebastián Lomelí, Juan Carlos Martínez, Rosaura Martínez, Lena Ortega y Luisa Valender.

³ For further information about the exhibition, see González Valerio, 2016..

can be exploited for economic gain and growth. Although the issue might seem two-sided, an opposition between traditional crops and a capitalist agriculture that follows the neoliberalist rules of the market, it is of course more complex than that. It involves the recent history of Mexico and the outcome of the Mexican Revolution regarding the land and the city (specifically Mexico City) as the two options for economic growth in the second half of the twentieth century.

The Mexican land was severely impoverished after the Mexican Revolution (1910–1921), and the whole country was in an economic and political crisis. The centre of economic development was Mexico City, which grew enormously in the next decades, representing the possibility of a new life, after the land was more or less abandoned and the reforms on agricultural laws ended up many times leaving people with land ownership but with no means to cultivate it.

The Green Revolution changed things dramatically, starting in the north of Mexico in the 1940s with the introduction of improved wheat, beans, potatoes and maize by Norman Borlaug, who later won the Nobel Peace Prize for introducing many of the improved seeds in Mexico to Asia and helping reduce famine there.

The biodiversity of Mexico and its varied climate conditions made it a perfect spot to experiment with new projects of agriculture and to create a seed bank, which goes back to the 40s and nowadays contains the largest maize seed collection in the world. The project was sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation and was later established as the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT-Centro Internacional de Mejoramiento de Maíz y Trigo⁴). They realised very soon the importance of seeds as a biotech product, as an epistemic artefact and as a way of controlling knowledge and agricultural development.

⁴ See <http://www.cimmyt.org/>.

The very existence of seed banks and the research on improved seeds of maize and wheat, among others, in Mexico even before the end of the Second World War make us consider to what extent biopolitics are involved in the construction of our contemporary world as a crossroads of science, technology, neoliberalism, late capitalism, territory, fast transformations of the environment, and our relation to the land. The fact that the South of Mexico, where many indigenous people preserve their traditional crops, still resists the introduction of agroindustry prompts us to start thinking about all that is at stake in the transformation of agricultural practices.

The CIMMYT is likewise investigating the production of transgenic seeds. In collaboration with Monsanto, they launched transgenic maize (maize Bt) in Kenya in 2016. Although transgenic maize is still forbidden in Mexico because of the many protests and movements by activists, scientists and artists, Monsanto continues to try and introduce GMO's with the support of the Mexican Federal Government.

Recently the CIMMYT has received financial support from Bill Gates and Carlos Slim, two of the richest people in the world, who are well aware of the importance of the seeds for the near future.

From this scenario, how to produce art in the intersection of biotechnology? How to deal with some of the broad issues that are involved in the era of technoscience? With these questions in mind, the collective BIOS Ex machinA started its quest in order to produce the first exhibition in Mexico of transgenic and biotechnological art.

The primary question that we had to answer before becoming BIOS Ex machinA was how to invent a collective that would reunite artists, scholars and scientists to produce biotech arts.

At the very beginning we got together planning to produce biotech art. We needed to call on those who could be interested

in our intention and ideas. And then we knocked on some doors. But how does one knock on doors with the intent of producing “biotech art”, to intervene and manipulate living organisms? How is this to be done?

We formed an initial group and a seminar, assembled a library of basic texts, and began studying. Ideas came up during the seminar: we discussed them and kept reading. We dove into some pretty confusing depths. But there was a lot going on and we were in well over our heads. Luckily, our enthusiasm was overwhelming as well. A good part of the collective group was made up of scholars from UNAM, and because of this, most of the theoretical and research work with and on the texts proceeded quite naturally. The enthusiasm to turn and redirect or, more accurately, to invent new research lines was equally buoyant.

We had a lot of questions. Above all, we studied biology texts on transgenic modifications in maize, for example. We added these readings to reflections on aesthetics and biotechnological arts. Discussion points were never scarce. We were slowly beginning to understand the discourses that had come into being surrounding these topics. Perhaps the most important case was maize, and our growing involvement with themes that had at first seemed foreign to us, for our focus in the discussions was of a more ontological order, permeated with very abstract concepts. Another important point that determined what we were going to produce was politics and the political commitment of art. Bio-politics could not be translated into a mere slogan or manifesto.

The issue of maize had been previously addressed in Mexico with a very strong political charge by visual and plastic artists who repudiated transgenic maize and mobilised all over our Republic to denounce the practices of transnational corporations and political parties.

Our immersion into the topic was marked by scepticism and radical doubt about transgenic maize and its condemnation. We held a position of uncertainty. We were studying texts which were in its favour and texts which were against it,⁵ until we took our stand, which depended in good measure on the people we encountered on our way.

One of the first doors we knocked on happened to be Elena Álvarez-Buylla's at the Ecology Institute of UNAM. One thing led to another, and all of a sudden we were in the molecular genetic lab trying to uphold the importance of biotech art and to convince her to collaborate with us.

The Laboratory for Plant Molecular Genetics, Development and Evolution was studying the model organism *Arabidopsis thaliana*, and Elena's team was dedicating part of its work to this. She took us to the greenhouses where rows of genetically modified *Arabidopsis* were growing, and explained what her experiments consisted of. There we asked her if we could work with *Arabidopsis* and create a genetically modified plant expressly for our project. To our surprise she agreed. We sealed the deal.

Naturally, what followed was a thorough investigation of what this minute plant called *Arabidopsis thaliana* was, and how the

⁵ Paradigmatic texts in its favour include: Carlos Blanco 2008. Here we find a profusion of data on the positive impact of transgenic modifications; indeed, Blanco even affirms that "It is desirable for developing countries, especially Latin American ones, to adopt strategies that allow them to take advantage of the benefits of transgenic crops so as to reduce their food dependence on bigger economies", 46. Conversely, texts like *Haciendo milpa* (México, UNAM, 2011), coordinated by Elena Álvarez-Buylla, and *Origen y diversificación del maíz* (México, UNAM, 2009), coordinated by T.A. Kato et al., stress the importance of biodiversity, of the recognition and conservation of traditional knowledge of maize, in order to preserve the varieties that have developed in Mexico.

website that gathered all the information obtained from labs around the world worked.⁶ I signed up on the website, requested information, and they sent me genetic sequences with the warning that their distribution was strictly forbidden. It was evident that I could not understand anything and did not know what to do with these sequences. But I was surprised by how easy it was to gain access to this kind of information, to databases and the software.

My academic credentials were sufficient for me to register on these websites. Indeed, I even registered as a laboratory in an attempt to buy a part of the international stock of modified *Arabidopsis* seeds and pay for them with my credit card. Fortunately, before doing so, I asked some colleagues from the Faculty of Sciences if it was feasible to receive such material. They warned me that Mexican customs officers were so corrupt that they had let biological material die or decompose on many previous occasions, and thus it was pointless to buy anything: the customs officers would keep everything, even animals, they insisted.

Access to information without the proper tools to interpret it is completely worthless. The obtained genetic sequences are undecipherable and useless if you do not know what to do with them. We were very far from knowing what to do. Anything that involved transferring this genetic information into another realm, be it sound or illumination, seemed to us completely ridiculous.

We had the project of an immersive installation to build with *Arabidopsis*. We chose the mutant *Arabidopsis agamous* with a reporting GUS gene because it produced a blue super flower, and that allowed us to play with the classical canon of beauty (a super flower

⁶ Results of genetic interventions are published on this website. The study of the genome of this plant turned into an epistemic artefact is the result of a collective international effort in which even Monsanto is involved. www.arabidopsis.org.

would be maximally beautiful). To this we added blue dye, water, dystopian imaginaries produced by biotechnology, the production of a dislocated space ... and the piece *Accumulated transparency. Arabidopsis AG:GUS* (*Yes, it is blue! It has to be blue! A coagulated blue in the offing*) began to take shape in our minds. Moreover, we had the idea of a 3D printer mounted on a tractor that would print seeds out of a biopolymer PLA moving in a radial space: this would become *Polymer "milpa"*. We decided to build an installation that would allow a live experience of detecting transgenic maize contamination on the basis of its resistance to glyphosate, a wide-spectrum herbicide. The installation had the name: *They will be ashes, but will make sense (Slightly toxic)*. And the project of a documentary film about transgenic maize: *Cross-pollination*.

When we finally worked out the projects for four pieces, we only needed to bring them about and find a way of doing so, for we were starting on a road never trodden before. The most important part was to have complete and multidisciplinary teams that could create these pieces. This was no easy task.

For *Polymer "milpa"*, not only did we have to get our hands on a 3D printer, but we also had to find engineers and designers that would help with the programming and assembly. To build this robot was not easy at all, and only minutes before opening the doors of the museum did it finally work! The arm spun around moving the tractor, which left its tracks in the soil contained in the circular ring that marked the radial space, and the printer produced little 3D modelled seeds, based on the samples we had collected for another piece. In a slow, seemingly fragile movement the injectors pushed PLA out in seed shapes, which fell on the soil. The biopolymer cartridge was spinning and through the four giant speakers one could hear the audio from Monsanto's stock exchange that had been recorded for three months. People were going around taking the

seeds – some unnoticed, some not. This continued throughout the two months that the exhibition lasted. The seeds became plastic monuments to recall the acting power of biotechnology.

The documentary film that would give place to *Cross-Pollination* was a research on maize, biotechnology and transgenic modifications: the parties involved in the debate, the political and economic positions, and the artists who had taken a stance. The film had two screenings, one at Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC) and the other at Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Artes (MUCA Roma). The videos were edited in a different manner for each setting. The documentary became an actual testimony to the power of words to speak truth and lies.

When *Accumulated transporence* began to take shape in our minds, we had no idea how incredibly complicated it was going to be to create that piece, or the number of people who would have to be involved in the process, or the amount of money we were going to spend. We thought of water, of blue dye, of the transgenic plant, of the immersive installation, and of an aesthetic experience that would surpass the “classical” limits of the effect on the spectator. We thought of creating a hybrid in which the limits of art, science, and philosophy would be broken through, leading to a dislocated space.

The first practical and technical challenge was to build a pool inside MUCA Roma, for the museum is located inside a Porfirian house⁷ that crumbles a little more with each earthquake. The next step was the visualising device. To try to decide between acrylics, crystals, mirrors, metals, in order to build that visualisation device, the box in which we would have to reproduce the laboratory condi-

⁷ A house built during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz at the turn of the 20th century in French Baroque style.

tions for plants to survive and in which we would have to create a game of mirrors, visions, reflections, objects, plants, breaths.

The task of the artist as producer consisted only of deciding. We were not involved in the manufacturing, the forging of the metals, or the polishing of the mirrors. We didn't even know the names of the hammers and silicone that were shaping the materials. Who is the creator/producer here? Is there in fact a "who"? How to continue with this questioning if the very act of creating is dissolved into things, people, processes, instructions? There is no solitary artist masterfully crafting the wood with his hands or sculpting the stone. There is no solitude. There is – indeed, without a doubt and with unparalleled strength – a community of voices in which it is useless to ask who is speaking or who this discourse can be attributed to. Moreover, one would have to enter these voices, intercept them, throw some of them back, and witness how all of this was coming to be, letting oneself be driven by this whole process with a joyful smile. A primary self-surrender and then yielding to forces without trying to direct, without turning multiplicities into a course directed towards a previously defined and fixed goal.

What needed to be built now was a visualisation device with web cameras that would be inside Elena's laboratory, streaming the growth of these plants live. In the museum we would showcase the mutant *agamous*. The transmission of the image in real time was yet another complication of this piece – another nut to crack, as we may say. The next nut was the piece's audio track. The audio was finally set up when everything was full of water, and it began sounding through all the hidden speakers behind the black background that served as the room ceiling. Enwrapping anguish. The last nut was the actresses. They had to act as scientists, with white lab coats and blue glasses, to direct the public and create a biohazard environment. An arsenal of mouth covers, gloves, blue surgeon slippers

and lab coats had to protect the spectators, who would face, probably for the first time in their lives, genetically modified organisms, biological mutants created inside a laboratory.

Actresses played their part convincingly. In fact the piece had absolutely no biohazard risk. The intention was to play with the dystopian imaginaries that biotechnology produces, to create a crossroads between science fiction and the questioning of the sometimes invisible borders between “nature” and “artificiality”. Many people thought and acted as if they were truly submitting themselves to a space controlled for security reasons and labelled with the international symbol of “biohazard”. Then it became real (some even ran away from the waiting room or asked for protection for the children). As the weeks went by, the *Arabidopsis* girls, as we called them, amplified their discourse. The presence of these actresses allowed, in such a way, to transmit the information that people would hope to obtain from a scientific experiment. That was, however, no scientific experiment. Nor was it something that could be contemplated aesthetically. Its elusive character was manifested as such, moving the territories of the expectations of meaning.

They will be ashes changed our previous conceptions of maize, the debate on transgenics and its cultural significance. As I had mentioned, we were unwilling either to create ideological art or to position ourselves for or against the issue. Knocking on more random doors, I found Margarita Tadeo, an agronomer at FES-Cuautitlán, a campus of UNAM, with a long and important work career on maize.

We had a large stock of seed samples, which had been collected by the team here and there. I planted them so that they would keep growing until it was time to begin their annihilation process. The life-death bond proper to this whole piece was beginning to emerge tensely. After having taken care of the seeds and then the plants for weeks, I had to kill them. I prepared a solution of glyphosate-water,

covered myself up as much as possible, took these plants to the roof and sprinkled them (with the camera in one hand and the sprinkler in the other). A week later I sprinkled them again. With the passing of days, all but one began to die. In a few weeks all plants were withered except one, which insisted on living. It came from a warehouse in the state of Guanajuato that sold foraging maize. We ran some Elisa tests on the maize to confirm that it was transgenic. I left the plant at home so that it would slowly wither, and then we exhibited it in the museum.

For the installation at MUAC, we repeated the experiment that I had already carried out at home. The seed samples were again our own, expanded in the following months with an enormous stock from Guerrero and Veracruz, kindly given to us by Margarita Tadeo.

We had a performance every week at the museum, sprinkling the seeds with glyphosate. The installation was aesthetically successful. We had been working to design the furniture containing the plant pots, striving towards an aesthetic that was not exactly laboratory-like, but also not completely like a garden or a greenhouse. One could actually go plowing about through the piece as if it were a “milpa”, and in order to go through the entrance one had to cross a sign on the floor where one could read “slightly toxic”, the letters drawn with the ashes of the burnt plants.

For the time being, our experience was the successful detection of transgenic maize in Guanajuato and the experience of trying to conduct an experiment in museum conditions rather than laboratory conditions.

BIOS Ex machinA was basically about reducing the quest for the “who” and witnessing the frenetic movements. It was about bringing the living into being from a producing (desiring) machine (device) and executing an immanent thought that searched for what was there (beyond matter, and before transcendence). The machine

produced everything, from the very name of the collective group to the last comma of the texts. That was the experience: to be many and to produce the multiple in a realm of indefiniteness, indecision (what is it that is there, what is it that is?). This experience prompted some necessary questions: What does it mean to create, to produce? What does it mean to think?

BIOS Ex machinA is a machinery that still needs some fine tuning and will probably always be in the process of tuning (itself). This was its first presentation: the course of its development was set by chance, uncertainty and drift. Instead of chance, we should say forces.

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DIAFANIJE

VID SNOJ¹ IN JOŽEF MUHOVIČ²

Vincent van Gogh, *Zvezdna noč*, in Anne Sexton, *Zvezdna noč*



Zvezdna noč

1889, olje na platnu, 74 x 92 cm, New York, The Museum of Modern Art

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The Starry Night

That does not keep me from having a terrible need of – shall I say the word – religion. Then I go out at night to paint the stars.

Vincent Van Gogh in a letter to his brother

The town does not exist
except where one black-haired tree slips
up like a drowned woman into the hot sky.
The town is silent. The night boils with eleven stars.
Oh starry night! This is how
I want to die.

It moves. They are all alive.
Even the moon bulges in its orange irons
to push children, like a god, from its eye.
The old unseen serpent swallows up the stars.
Oh starry starry night! This is how
I want to die:

into that rushing beast of the night,
sucked up by that great dragon, to split
from my life with no flag,
no belly,
no cry.

Zvezdna noč

To me ne odvrtača od strašne potrebe po – naj izrečem to besedo – religiji.
Tedaj grem ponoči ven slikat zvezde.

Vincent van Gogh v pismu bratu

Mesta ni,
razen kjer neko črnolaso drevo drsi
navzgor kot utopljenka v vroče nebo.
Mesto je tiho. Noč od enajstih zvezd povreva.
O zvezdna noč! Tako
si umreti želim.

Giblje se. Vse so žive.
Še mesec v svojem oranžnem okovju nabreka,
da iz svojega očesa otroke potisne kot bog.
Nevidna stara kača golta zvezde.
O zvezdna, zvezdna noč! Tako
si umreti želim:

v to hitečo žival noči,
da me ta veliki zmaj vsesa in se ločim
od življenja brez prapora,
brez trebuha,
brez krika.

Prevedel Vid Snoj po Anne Sexton, *The Complete Poems*, Boston:
Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999, str. 53

VID SNOJ: *Zvezdna noč* je ena najslovitejših van Goghovih slik, če ne morda celo najslovitejša. Vzemiva, Jožef, za izhodišče sodbo Meyerja Schapira, ki jo je označil za “vizionarno sliko”.³

Schapira v tej zvezi na začetku ne omenjam po naključju. Za študente na newyorški univerzi Columbia, kot je bil v poznih štiridesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja na primer poznejši beatniški pesnik Allen Ginsberg, je bil nič manj kot guru umetnostne zgodovine. Tam je študiral, doktoriral in nazadnje postal zaslužni profesor, predaval in pisal je o zgodnjekrščanski in srednjeveški umetnosti, poleg tega pa je bil tudi promotor modernosti v slikarstvu. V zgodnjih petdesetih letih je izdal knjigi o van Goghu in Cézannu. K van Goghovim slikam, razstavljenim v MoMI,⁴ je napisal kratka enostranska besedila; med njimi je tudi *Zvezdna noč*.

V čem je ta “vizionarna slika” že na prvi pogled posebna v primerjavi z drugimi van Goghovimi slikami?

JOŽEF MUHOVIČ: Če želiva odstreti semantične horizonte *Zvezdne noči* in nastaviti ogledalo njenim interpretacijam, tudi Schapirovi, nikakor ne moreva mimo vsaj skicozne osvetlitve življenja ter značajskega in ustvarjalskega profila njenega avtorja.

Vincent van Gogh se je rodil 30. marca 1853 v mestecu Groot-Zundert v južnonizozemski provinci Severni Brabant. Bil je drugi otrok v družini protestantskega pastorja. Ko je leta 1934 izšel biografski *best-seller* Irvinga Stona o njegovem življenju in delu, je v hipu za več desetletij postal slikarski zvezdnik, prototip nekonformističnega umetnika, ki zunaj dosega vrednostnih radarjev svojega časa in v najtrših socialnih okoliščinah, v popolni osami in z na vse načine preizkušano vero v umetniško poslanstvo ustvarja umetnine, ki daleč presegajo sočasno kulturo, njen okus in umetniške standarde.

³ Schapiro, 1950, 100.

⁴ MoMA je kratica za The Museum of Modern Art v New Yorku.

Van Gogh je bil kot otrok introvertiran in občutljiv ter je težko prenašal formalno izobraževanje, pa tudi pozneje je bil nenehno v napetem razmerju z avtoritetami. Poklic je iskal dolgo in z mnogimi preobrati. Po srednji šoli v Tilburgu, ki je ni končal, se je leta 1869 zaposlil kot vajenec v haaški podružnici trgovine z umetninami in umetnoobrotnimi izdelki Goupil & Cie, katere solastnik je bil njegov stric Cent. Po začetnem seznanjanju z etablirano umetnostjo in uva-
janju v cenilske spretnosti je od leta 1873 do 1875 delal v njeni lon-
donski podružnici. Potem je bil zaradi osebnih razlogov premeščen
v pariško filialo. Ker mu je bila tuja hinavščina in je bil brez občutka
za prodajalsko "diplomacijo", je imel v Parizu razmeroma malo
trgovskega uspeha. Zapiral se je vase ter se čedalje bolj prepuščal
prebiranju Biblije in dejavni religioznosti. Ker je za veliko noč 1875
samovoljno zapustil delovno mesto in odpotoval na obisk k star-
šem, je dobil odpoved.

V naslednjih treh letih in pol se je neuspešno preizkušal v razli-
čnih poklicih. Bil je pomožni učitelj, pomožni pastor, prodajalec
knjig, nesojeni študent teologije in nazadnje pomožni laiški pridigar
v belgijskem rudarskem mestu Borinage, kjer so ljudje živeli v po-
sebnost težkih razmerah. Z njimi se je solidariziral in delil najhujšo
revščino, kar ni bilo pogodu njegovim predstojnikom, ki mu zato
leta 1879 niso hoteli podaljšati delovne pogodbe. Zaradi te zavrnitve
se je v naslednjih letih povsem odvrnil od institucionaliziranega
krščanstva, ne pa tudi od osebne vere in močne potrebe po presež-
nem. O tem piše v mnogokrat citiranem odlomku iz pisma bratu
Theu z dne 29. septembra 1888, in sicer da si v svoji umetnosti pri-
zadeva upodobiti "težke prizore iz življenja", da pa mu to nikakor
ne odjemlje "strašne potrebe po religiji".⁵

⁵ Vsa van Goghova korespondenca je v angleškem prevodu in opremljena
z opombami dostopna na spletni strani <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/>, ki
jo vzdržuje Van Gogh Museum v Amsterdamu.

Po prekinitvi pogodbe je van Gogh še leto dni ostal v Borinageu. Veliko je risal in mislil samo na to, da bi postal slikar, za kar se je dokončno odločil jeseni 1879 pri sedemindvajsetih letih. Da bi prišel v stik z umetnostjo in umetniki, se je oktobra 1880 preselil v Bruselj in se lotil samostojnega študija risanja. Ni dokazano, da bi kdaj zares obiskoval bruseljsko umetniško akademijo, čeprav je bil vpisan nanjo. Po nekaj poskusih z zasebnimi učitelji je novembra 1885 odšel v Antwerpen, kjer je skromno živel z bratovo podporo in se kot avtodidakt izobraževal po muzejih. Že naslednje leto se je zaradi finančnih težav preselil k Theu v Pariz, epicenter takratne svetovne umetnosti. Tam je ostal dve leti. Obiskoval je tečaje v zasebni slikarski šoli Fernanda Cormona, v kateri je spoznal številne slikarske kolege, ki so pozneje postali znani, Henrija de Toulouse-Lautreca, Paula Signaca in Paula Gauguina. Posebno prijateljstvo je sklenil z Émilom Bernardom, s katerim sta še dolgo ostala v pisnih stikih.

V Parizu je van Gogh spoznal takrat aktualni slog, impresionizem, pod vplivom katerega je njegova paleta postala svetlejša in barvitejša. Navdušili so ga japonski lesorezi, njihova oblikovna prečiščenost in barvitost, ki sta mu odpirali nove smernice za delo. Čeprav ni imel skorajda nikakršne formalne likovne izobrazbe, njegove refleksije v številnih pismih Theu kažejo, da se je vztrajno oblikoval v – to lahko mirno rečem – prvovrstnega likovnega intelektualca svojega časa, čigar konceptualni in oblikotvorni horizonti so presegali horizonte večine njegovih formalno šolanih sodobnikov.

V. S.: Dovolj, da te prekinem: v kakšnih okoliščinah pa je nastala *Zvezdna noč*?

J. M.: Naslikana je bila sredi junija 1889, komaj kaj več kot leto dni pred van Goghovo smrtjo, in je imela nadvse razburkano predzgodovino. Van Gogh se je leta 1888 preselil v južnofrancosko mesto Arles, ker je upal, da se bo v blagem mediteranskem okolju izognil severnjaški zimi, si povrnil zdravje, načeto zaradi nezmernosti pri

delu in pitju alkohola, ter našel svetlejšo, toplejšo in jasnejšo paletto. Arles je imel sprva v mislih kot vmesno postajo do Marseilla, vendar prvotnega načrta ni nikoli uresničil. Nastanil se je v hotelu Carrel, ki je odprt še zdaj, ker pa so bili stroški preveliki, je aprila najel "rumeno hišo", si v njej uredil atelje in od septembra tam tudi bival. Uresničiti je hotel svoje dolgoletne sanje – atelje, v katerem bi umetniki skupaj živeli in ustvarjali.

Za "projekt skupnega bivanja in ustvarjanja" se je po dolgem omahovanju, šele potem, ko mu je Theo plačal prevozne stroške in obljubil mesečno podporo, odločil Paul Gauguin. Van Gogh ga je pričakoval z veseljem, pa tudi z napetostjo. Da bi ga navdušil, je v kratkem času naslikal veliko slik, med njimi znamenite *Sončnice*, in z njimi opremil zanj pripravljeno sobo.

Gauguin je v Arles prispel 23. oktobra in atmosfera med težkima in impulzivnima značajema je zaradi vsakdanjih in strokovnih sporov kmalu postala napeta. Skupno življenje se je končalo natanko dva meseca pozneje zaradi nekega nikoli docela pojasnjene dogodka: van Gogh si je po enem od številnih sporov z Gauguinom odrezal velik del levega ušesa. Naslednje jutro so ga našli brez zavesti in oslabiljenega zaradi velike izgube krvi, ker si je prerezal zadajšnjo avrikularno arterijo.⁶ Gauguin je o tem obvestil Thea in se po policijskem zaslišanju odpravil nazaj v Pariz.

Opisani dogodek velja dandanes za prvo manifestacijo van Goghove duševne bolezni, ki so jo tedaj zmotno označili za epilepsijo. Po njegovih lastnih navedbah so take napade spremljale blodnje, more in globoke depresije, ki so lahko trajale dneve in celo tedne, v vmesnih obdobjih pa je bil bister in zmožen za delo.

Februarja 1889 se je napad, ki je trajal nekaj dni, ponovil, zato je bil van Gogh hospitaliziran. Potem ko so ga odpustili iz bolnišnice,

⁶ Prim. Kaufmann in Wildegans, 2008, 305.

so arlški meščani zaradi njegovega "čudnega" vedênja podpisali peticijo, na podlagi katere so ga v bolnišnico internirali, in sicer do aprila, ko je bil ukrep v zvezi njegovim prisilnim bivanjem v njej uradno odpravljen. Ker ni bil prepričan, da je zmožen živeti samostojno, se je odločil, da zaprosi za sprejem v psihiatrično kliniko Saint-Paul-de-Mausole, stacionirano v nekdanjem samostanu iz 12. stoletja v bližini mesteca Saint-Rémy-de-Provence. Terapij za paciente tam pravzaprav ni bilo, le njemu je bilo zaradi terapevtskih razlogov dovoljeno slikanje.

Slikati je začel že prve dni po prihodu. Najprej je slikal to, kar je bilo mogoče videti na bolnišničnem vrtu in skozi okno njegove bolniške sobe, pozneje pa tudi motive iz okolice Saint-Rémyja. V takih okoliščinah je nastala *Zvezdna noč*. Naslikana je v oljni tehniki s poudarjenimi pastoznimi nanosi in značilno vangoghovsko fakturo. Gledano z likovnega stališča je na njej veliko ritma in ekspresije, kot da bi se slikar z njo neposredno iztezal v protoekspresionizem. Kmalu po nastanku jo je poslal Theu v Pariz za razstavo. Po Theovi smrti jo je podedovala njegova vdova, ki jo je leta 1900 prodala in pozneje spet odkupila. Potem ko je slika zamenjala še nekaj zasebnih in institucionalnih lastnikov, je leta 1941 pristala v MoMI, kjer je še zdaj.

Ker je van Gogh tedaj, ko je nastala *Zvezdna noč*, živel v psihiatrični bolnišnici, ki jo je smel zapuščati samo podnevi v spremstvu, ponoči pa sploh ne, je več kot verjetno, da je ni naslikal na podlagi neposrednega opazovanja, ampak po spominu ali vsaj v kombinaciji opazovanja in imaginacije.

V. S.: *Zvezdna noč* je bržkone posebna po tem, da jo je van Gogh naslikal nekoliko drugače kot veliko večino drugih slik. Naredil jo je kot "abstrakcijo" v pomenu, ki ga je tej besedi dal Gauguin.

Povedal si že, da je Gauguin z van Goghom v Arlesu preživel nekaj tednov jeseni 1888. Leto pozneje, novembra 1889, je van Gogh

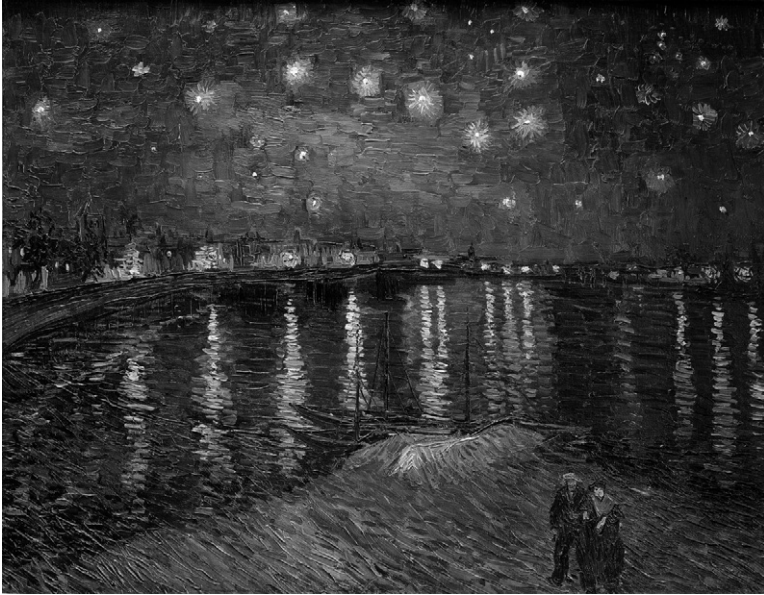
pisal drugemu slikarskemu kolegu, Bernardu, da se je, ko sta z Gauguinom slikala skupaj, enkrat ali dvakrat pustil zapeljati njegovemu načinu slikanja. Abstrakcija po Gauguinovo seveda ni to, kar ta izraz na področju slikarstva pomeni dandanes. Ne nanaša se na nemimetično ali nepredmetno slikarstvo, v katerem ne prepoznavamo oblik stvari, kot jih vidimo v svetu, ampak meri na slikanje po spominu ob pomoči domišljije, ki oživlja bledico zapomnjenega, za razloček od slikanja po naravi, pri katerem ima slikar svoj model ves čas neposredno pred očmi.

Van Gogh je Theu kmalu potem, ko je naslikal *Zvezdna noč*, napisal pismo, v katerem to sliko imenuje "nočna študija". Uvrstil jo je med slike, ki jih je Theu poslal v Pariz, da bi bile tam razstavljene. V istem pismu omenja tudi tiste slike, ki so se mu posrečile, vendar med njimi – presenetljivo – ni *Zvezdne noči*. Zakaj ne?

Rekel si, da se *Zvezdna noč* bliža ekspresionizmu. Z drugimi besedami: ni naslikana po naravi. Na njej je več "nerealističnih" prvov: mestece, cipresa, vrtinci na nebu. Van Gogh je na tej sliki upodobil pogled skoz okno s svoje bolniške sobe, toda od tam menda tedaj ni bilo videti cipres,⁷ kaj šele mesteca. Ciprese in mesteca ni niti na nekaterih pripravljalnih študijah za *Zvezdna noč*, pri tretji "nerealistični" prvini pa ne gre za to, da od tam sploh ne bi bila vidna, ampak za način, kako so naslikane sicer ponoči vidne zvezde – kot vrtinci. Van Gogh je pogled skoz okno svoje bolniške sobe naslikal večkrat, vendar je nočnega upodobil enkrat samkrat, kje drugje seveda kot na sliki *Zvezdna noč* z vzvrtinčenim nebom.

Še nekaj. Ko van Gogh v že omenjenem pismu Bernardu govori o tem, da se je Gauguinu pustil zapeljati v abstrakcijo, dodaja, da se mu je to zgodilo še enkrat, že potem, ko je Gauguin odšel iz Arlesa. Ta še enkrat tudi izrecno imenuje "spodrseljaj" oziroma "korak nazaj",

⁷ Prim. Pikvance, 1986, 103.



Vincent van Gogh, *Zvezdna noč nad Rono*, 1888

in ker v isti sapi omenja prevelike zvezde, je upravičeno sklepati, da je imel v mislih prav *Zvezdno noč*. Če si pred oči priključeva drugo sliko, recimo zgodnejšo *Zvezdno noč nad Rono*, ki je nastala septembra 1888 in prav tako upodablja nočno nebo, na njem ne bova našla velikanskih zvezdnih vrtincev. Ne morem si kaj, da ob zvezdah, kot so naslikane na tej sliki, ne bi pomislil na Strniševo podobo iz zbirke *Zvezde* – “čiste krone zvezd”.

Van Gogh je torej o *Zvezdni noči* sodil kritično, najverjetneje zato, ker je ob njej občutil nekaj takega kot nezvestobo samemu sebi, namreč da je prišel v nasprotje s svojo slikarsko poetiko, s svojim siceršnjim slikanjem po naravi. Pa vendar je ta slika dosegla veliko slavo. Ni pritegnila samo pozornosti umetnostnih zgodovinarjev in občudovalcev umetnosti po vsem svetu, ampak tudi pesnikov. Ob Anne Sexton, katere pesem bova obravnavala v nadaljevanju pogovora, jo je v pesmi *Vincent Van Gogh naj mi blago odpusti* imel pred

očmi na primer tudi Arsenij Tarkovski,⁸ oče slavnejšega sina, filmskega režiserja Andreja Tarkovskega.

J. M.: Dal si kar nekaj iztočnic za razpravo. Ena od njih je vsekakor povezanost van Goghovega in Gauguinovnega slikarskega dela z abstrakcijo. Če izhajam iz etimologije, tj. iz latinske besede *abstrahere*, ki pomeni “odtrgati”, “odcepiti”, “izločiti” in “odmisliti”, izraza “abstrahiranje” in “abstrakcija” v likovni umetnosti označujeta slikarski ali kiparski postopek odmišljanja nebistvenega pri kakem motivu ter luščenje in poudarjanje tistega, kar je bistveno. Vsaka abstrakcija ima torej za izhodišče motivno predlogo, ki obstaja zunaj slike in slikarjevega uma. Izhajajoč iz predloge likovni ustvarjalec selekcioniira, prečiščuje in po potrebi intenzivira oblikovne in barvne podatke, ki jih je perceptivno dobil iz nje. Po tej plati so vse van Goghove slike “abstraktne”. Res pa je, da pri slikarjih velikokrat nalletimo na mnenje, po katerem je poudarjanje in potenciranje bistvenega pri motivu nekaj “realističnega”, nekaj, kar potencira njegovo “resničnost”. Zato svojih slik ne imenujejo abstraktne in imajo tako poimenovanje lahko celo za pejorativno, čeprav je odmik od oblik in lokalnih barv motiva na njih, tako kot pri van Goghu, izrazito “ne-realističen”, kot bi rekel povprečen gledalec. Razlog za to kratko malo je, da je umetnik motivu pogledal pod kožo, če se tako izrazim, in slikarsko intenziviral njegovo doživetje.

V. S.: Tu mi prihaja na pamet misel Paula Kleeja: *Kunst gibt nicht das Sichtbare wieder, sondern macht sichtbar*, “Umetnost ne podaja vidnega, ampak dela vidno”.⁹ Torej: umetnost ne daje videti vidnega naknadno, in sicer tako, kot je videti tudi sicer, že pred njo, ne reprezentira, ne ponavzočuje tega, kar vidimo ne glede nanjo, ampak *v vidnost privaja tisto, česar sicer ne vidimo*, kar je bilo za nas prej nevidno.

⁸ Pesem je v slovenščino prevedel Drago Bajt; gl. *Antologijo ruske poezije 20. stoletja*, 1990, 293.

⁹ Klee, 1920, 28.

J. M.: Kleejeva misel je tu več kot dobrodošla. Z njo bo namreč načeto témo laže sistematično pojasniti.

Na splošno ima likovna umetnost, če jo opazujemo vzdolž osi časa, tri generalne artikulacijske možnosti. Prva od njih, ki je znana že iz paleolitika, je približevanje videzu vidne stvarnosti. To približevanje je lahko elementarno, tako kot v umetnosti arhajskih ljudstev ali v otroškem likovnem izražanju, ali pa sofisticirano, kot se kaže v delih realizma ali sodobnega fotorealizma. S tako artikulacijo sva imela opraviti pri Vermeerjevi sliki *Ženska v modrem, ki bere pismo*. Njena strategija se sicer dandanes, v času mobitelske fotohistorije in razrasta čedalje bolj sofisticiranih fotoreproduktivnih tehnologij, utegne zdeti trivialna, a je na slikarsko prepričljiv način ni prav nič lahko doseči.

Druga generalna možnost likovne artikulacije je odmik od videza vidne stvarnosti in spust v razkrivanje njene globinske strukture, se pravi metoda abstrahiranja. Abstraktni slikar vangoghovskega in gauguinovskega tipa "dela", kot pravi Klee, pri motivu vidno tisto, kar je za navadno gledanje nevidno. Ko odstira videz in lušči bistvo vidnega, razširja ter zase in za druge pogloblja horizonte percepcije. To je nekaj velikega, saj širše in globlje zaznavati pomeni širše in globlje doživeti – tudi povsem navadne stvari v povsem navadnem življenju. Zato abstraktni umetnik praviloma ne potrebuje ekstravagantnih ali izjemnih motivov, saj nenavadnost, izjemnost in izrazitost najde takoj, ko pogleda v zakulisje stvari, ki so na zunaj videti povsem navadne. Na primer v zakulisje cvetočega vrta, krajine s cipreso, oljčnega nasada, žitnega polja, šopka irisov ali sončnic.

Tretja generalna možnost likovne artikulacije, na katero morda predvsem meri znameniti Kleejev stavek, pa je proizvajanje še nevidenih videzov, se pravi videzov oziroma oblik, ki jih ni ustvarila "narava" sama, a jih je mogoče proizvesti na podlagi spoznanja njenih prostorskih in vizualnih zakonitosti. To možnost dandanes ime-

nujemo “nepredmetna umetnost”. Umetnik, ki ustvarja v njenem okviru, ne izhaja iz nobene inicialne vidnosti, iz nobenega motiva, ampak poskuša, kot pove Klee, tisto v umetnikovem umu, kar sploh še nima vidne in prostorske oblike, narediti vidno tako, da to z likovnimi izraznimi sredstvi “uprizori” v dvodimenzionalnem ali tridimenzionalnem prostoru. Prototip takega umetnika je na primer Piet Mondrian s kompozicijami iz svojega poznega, neoplasticiističnega obdobja.

S stališča opisane artikulacijske trinitete je van Gogh abstraktni slikar *par excellence*. Njegova ustvarjalnost se v celoti giblje v obsežnem območju oblikotvornih možnosti med posnemanjem videza na eni strani in ustvarjanjem avtonomnih videzov nepredmetne umetnosti na drugi.

Druga iztočnica, ki si jo dal, je dejstvo, da van Gogh *Zvezdne noči* v pismu Theu ni navedel v skupini del, ki jih je sam imel za uspela, pa vendar je ta slika pozneje dosegla svetovno slavo. Tu se razpirata dve vprašanji. Prvič, zakaj *Zvezdne noči* “ni znal ceniti”, in drugič, zaradi česa je pozneje dosegla tolikšno slavo.

Odgovor na prvo vprašanje ni preveč težak. Slikarjem, ki se jim kaka slika posreči, se pogosto zgodi – še zlasti če se morajo za uspeh truditi v težkih okoliščinah in z visoko stopnjo koncentracije –, da take slike zaradi ustvarjalne “izpraznitve” ne znajo takoj ustrezno ovrednotiti. Po navadi so do nje hiperkritični in jo lahko celo podcenjujejo. To se je zgodilo tudi van Goghu, ki v pismu Theu septembra 1889 pravi, da je zelo nezadovoljen s kompozicijo *Zvezdne noči* in s pretiravanji oziroma deformacijami oblik na njej ter da mu je pogodu le barva nočnega neba. Ni pa mogoče takoj odgovoriti na vprašanje, katere kvalitete te slike in katere okoliščine so bila vzrok za njen dvig na firmament svetovne slikarske slave. To ostaja enigmatično, odprto, se pravi najina “naloga”, še zlasti če se spomniva na Ludwiga Wittgensteina, ki v *Logično-filozofskem traktatu*

pravi, da dejstva – in van Goghova *Zvezdna noč* je sistem vizualno-prostorskih dejstev –, spadajo v nalogo, ne v rešitev.

Za katera dejstva gre v zvezi z *Zvezdno nočjo*? Začniva z najbolj zunanji. Kot že rečeno, je več kot verjetno, da van Gogh te slike zaradi bolnišničnega režima ni naslikal neposredno na podlagi opazovanja, ampak, kot si že prej nakazal z “nerealističnimi” prvinami na njej, po spominu, *de tête*, “iz glave”. Van Goghova bolniška soba v sanatoriju je bila v prvem nadstropju. V njej ni smel slikati, lahko pa je risal in skiciral. Za slikanje je imel na razpolago atelje v pritličju. *Zvezdno noč* je torej zelo verjetno naslikal podnevi v ateljeju. Pogled, ki se ujema s krajinsko mizansceno *Zvezdne noči*, pa je bil prepoznan kot pogled skozi vzhodno okno njegove bolniške sobe. Obstaja kar nekaj risb in slik, navdihnjenih s prizorom, ki se mu je ponujal od tam.

V. S.: Menda ga je risarsko in slikarsko upodobil kar enaindvajsetkrat ...

J. M.: ... recimo na slikah *Pšenično polje pri Saint-Rémyju*, *Zeleno polje*, *Ograjeno pšenično polje po nevihti*, *Hribovita pokrajina za Saint-Rémyjem* ali *Pokrajina s cipresami*. O tem inspirativnem pogledu Van Gogh v pismu Theu z dne 23. maja 1889 piše tole: “Skozi zarešetkano okno lahko razločim ograjen kvadrat pšenice [...], nad njim pa zjutraj vzhod sonca v vsej njegovi gloriiji.” Malo pozneje, v pismu z dne 18. junija, dodaja: “Končno imam krajino z oljkami, pa tudi novo študijo zvezdnega neba.” Vendar ne vemo povsem natanko, kje je napravil to študijo in kako, saj je vmes slikal tudi na prostem.¹⁰

V. S.: Ko ugotavlja dejstva, ki spadajo v najino nalogo, ne smeva spregledati tistega, ki si ga delno že omenil oziroma celo citiral – van Goghovega pričevanja o njegovi “strašni potrebi po religiji”. V pismu Theu, napisanem ob koncu septembra 1889, nekaj dni po ti-

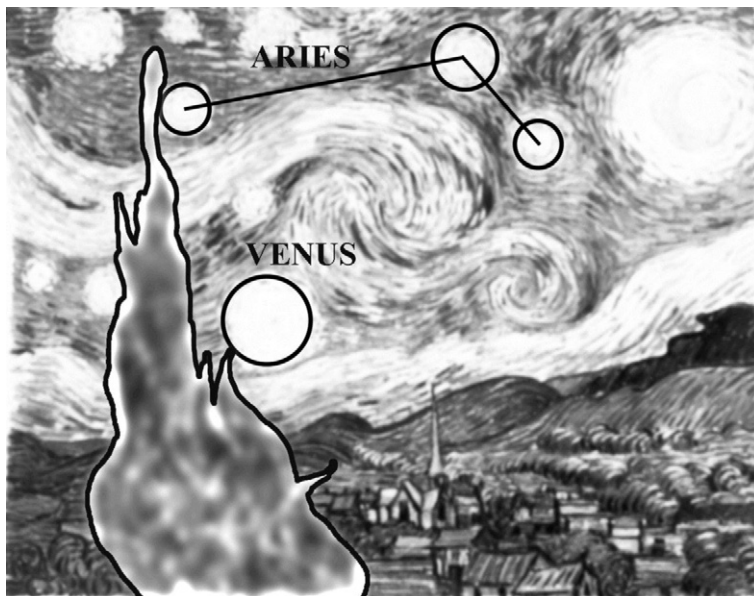
¹⁰ Prim. Hulsker, 1986, 394.

stem, v katerem *Zvezdno noč* imenuje “nočna študija”, pravi: “To me ne odvraca od strašne potrebe po – naj izrečem to besedo – religiji. Tedaj grem ponoči ven slikat zvezde ...”

To izjavo, “grem ponoči ven”, bi zdaj lahko nalahko vzela za potrditev, da van Gogh *Zvezdne noči* ni naslikal na kraju samem, z okna svoje bolniške sobe. Vendar se prej kot nanjo nanaša na tiste van Goghove slike z zvezdnim nočnim nebom, ki so res nastale zunaj, na planem, ob razsvetljavi plinske svetilke, recimo na prej omenjeno *Zvezdno noč nad Rono*, kot je mogoče sklepati iz njegovega pisma Theu, napisanega septembra 1888, še v Arlesu. Nasprotno *Zvezdna noč* prikazuje pogled, kot se odpira prav skozi okno njegove bolniške sobe, ne od koderkoli že na planem, in vanj za nameček postavlja drevo in mestece, ki ju v tistem, kar se je ponujalo pogledu od tam, kratko malo ni oziroma ni bilo.

Toda pustiva ta zaplet, ki ga poraja van Goghova “abstrakcija”, ob strani. Van Gogh v navedenih besedah vsekakor povezuje svojo religioznost s slikanjem zvezdnega nočnega neba. To stoji. In Anne Sexton je te van Goghove besede postavila za moto svoji pesmi na njegovo sliko.

J. M.: Van Gogh je bil plenerist, se pravi slikar, ki dela na prostem, neposredno pred motivom in po njem. Romaneskne in filmske upodobitve ga eksemplarično prikazujejo, kako z zločljivim slikarskim stojalom na hrbtu in z za ta namen ne prav majhnimi formati napetih platen koraka skozi pokrajino ter se zvečer s še svežimi platni utrujen vrača domov. Tudi kadar je zaradi slabega vremena ali kake druge nadloge slikal v ateljeju, je to večinoma počel po skicah in študijah, ki jih je napravil v naravi, ali pa je naravo oziroma realnost – stol, čevlje, tihožitje – poiskal kar v ateljeju. “Zvestoba naravi”, tj. zvestoba najbolj “naravnemu”, neizumetničenemu v naravi, je bila sploh njegova slikarska deviza. V skladu z njo je tudi *Zvezdna noč*, čeprav se je zaradi že omenjenih okoliščin ni mogel lotiti pleneristično.

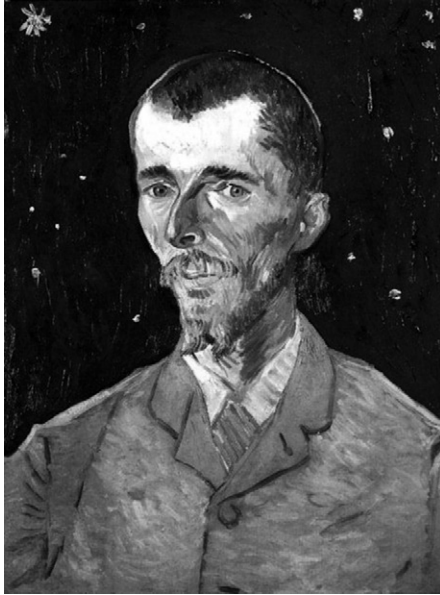


Shematičen prikaz *Zvezdne noči* z Venero in Ovnom

Ta slika je edini *nokturno* v beru van Goghovih saintrémyjskih slik. Zgodaj junija je pisal Theu: “To jutro sem s svojega okna dolgo gledal pokrajino pred sončnim vzhodom z ničimer drugim kot z jutranjico, ki je bila videti zelo velika.” Pozneje so astronomi potrdili, da je bilo jutranjico oziroma Venero junija 1889 v Provansi dejansko mogoče videti v skorajda največji mogoči velikosti. Venera naj bi bila na sliki *Zvezdna noč* najsvetlejša zvezda desno od ciprese,¹¹ in na “predsvitnem pogledu” morda temelji tudi nebesna konstelacijska mizanscena, poglobitni ikonografski moment te slike.

To pomeni, da je naslikani prizor glede na motiv pravzaprav nekakšen kompozitum. Nekateri interpreti so mnenja, da je nebo na sliki provansalsko, kar potrjuje tudi astronomska rekonstrukcija Venerinega položaja junija 1889, mestece pod njim, o katerem si že po-

¹¹ Prim. Boime, 1984, 86.



Vincent van Gogh, *Portret Eugèna Bocha (Pesnik)*, 1888

vedal, da ga skozi okno van Goghove bolniške sobe ni videti, pa je bolj nizozemsko.

V. S.: Pravzaprav obstajata dve razlagi, prva, po kateri je gruča hiš na van Goghovi sliki mestece iz njegove rodne Nizozemske, naslikano po spominu, in druga, ki pravi, da je to mestece Saint-Rémy, kot je videti z bližnjega hriba - in torej tudi naslikano po spominu, ne tako zelo oddaljenem, ampak bližnjem.

J. M.: Čeprav se je van Gogh sprva jezil nad Gauguinom, češ da ga je zapeljeval v "abstraktno" slikanje, tj. slikanje "iz glave" oziroma po spominu, je - tako se zdi - to "tehniko" dela delno zaradi svojih slikarskih spoznanj, delno pa zaradi delovnih okoliščin čedalje bolj ponotranjal. To je mogoče jasno razbrati iz pisma Theu z dne 18. avgusta 1888, v katerem opisuje, kako bo naslikal portret prijatelja umetnika, v katerega bi rad vnesel "svoje spoštovanje, svojo ljubezen do njega".

Najprej, pravi van Gogh, ga bom naslikal takega, kakršen je, kolikor le mogoče zvesto. A slika s tem še zdaleč ne bo končana. Da bi jo dokončal, nadaljuje, bom postal *samovoljen* kolorist. Namesto navadne stene zanikrnega stanovanja bom za njegovo glavo naslikal "neskončnost". Zmešal bom najintenzivnejšo in najžlahtnejšo modro, ki jo bom lahko dobil. Pretirano bom poudarjal plavost njegovih las, tako da bom prišel do oranžnih odtenkov, do poltonov blede citronaste barve, in tako bo svetla plavolasa glava na žlahtnem modrem ozadju proizvedla skrivnosten vtis zvezde na temni modrini nočnega neba, podoben učinku, s katerim moj prijatelj umetnik sveti na nebu naših življenj.

Tipologija te slikarske strategije, ki je samo na videz naivna, je po mojem mnenju vgrajena tudi v *Zvezdno noč*. Ta slika namreč ni nastala zgolj z abstrahiranjem in potenciranjem motivne predloge, ampak "samovoljno", s kombiniranjem elementov različnih motivnih predlog v popolnoma novo, transmotivno celoto. Videti je, kot da bi se zunanja *motivika* nočnega neba in notranja *motivacija* "sle po neskončnosti" na sliki medsebojno preželi in bi slikar "gorivo" za artikulacijo kratko malo črpal iz obeh interferirajočih virov. O tem dobesedno govori tudi že citirana van Goghova izjava, češ, ko začutim silovito potrebo po neskončnem, po religiji, grem slikat zvezde.

Prisilni situacijski odmik od slikanja po motivu bi bilo v tej zvezi mogoče imeti za eno od spodbud, ki so peljale k interakciji med zunanjim motivom in notranjo motivacijo, kar van Goghovemu delu daje še silovitejši semantični "potisk". Zunanji motiv, nočno nebo z zvezdno konstelacijo, s cipreso in spečim mestecem ...

V. S.: K vsemu temu se bova še vrnila, čas pa je, da preideva k umetnostnozgodovinskemu razlaganju *Zvezdne noči*, ki je pomembno tudi za pesem Anne Sexton nanjo. Avtor najodmevnejše umetnostnozgodovinske razlage je nemara Schapiro, čeprav se najvplivnejši

del njegove razlage nanaša samo na to, kar se dogaja v zgornjem delu van Goghove slike, na nebu.

Schapiro je van Goghovo upodobitev dogajanja na nebu povezal z dvanajstim poglavjem zadnje biblične knjige, *Razodetja*. V njem je govor o prvem izmed sedmih znamenj poslednjih časov, o ženi, ki je ogrnjena v sonce in ima pod nogami mesec, na glavi pa venec ali krono iz dvanajstih zvezd. Žena je noseča, vpije od porodnih bolečin, in pred njo se, potem ko je z repom pometel z neba tretjino zvezd, ustopi zmaj, da bi požrl otroka, ko bi ga porodila. Žena v razlagalskem izročilu zahodne in vzhodne krščanske Cerkve velja za Božjo porodnico Marijo, o zmaju pa že pisec *Razodetja* sam pove, da je "stara kača, ki se imenuje Hudič in Satan" (Raz 12,9). Marija, iz katere se je rodil Božji Sin, v tem izročilu simbolizira Božje ljudstvo, ki je po eni razlagi Izrael, prvotno izvoljeno ljudstvo – od tod dvanajst zvezd v kroni na njeni glavi, ki ponazarjajo dvanajst Jakobovih sinov oziroma prav toliko judovskih rodov. Po drugi razlagi je Cerkev, novi Izrael namesto starega, ki je Kristusa zavrgel, čeprav je ta kot človek izšel iz njega, in dvanajst zvezd je dvanajst apostolov. Videnje žene in zmaja se končuje s tem, da ko se otrok, se pravi Kristus, rodi, ga zmaj ne pogoltne, ampak je odnesen k Bogu. Na nebu izbruhne vojna med nadangelom Mihaelom in zmajem ter njunima angelskima vojskama – in zmaj je nazadnje skupaj s svojimi angeli vržen na zemljo.

O čem na van Goghovi sliki bi bilo mogoče reči, da ustreza videnju pisca *Razodetja*? To bi bilo bržkone mogoče reči o vrtincih na nebu, torej o zvezdah, o mesecu kot največjem izmed njih in o progi, ki se vijuga po sredi neba, z vrtinci zgoraj in spodaj, ter spominja na veliko repato kačo. Toda na nebu, kot ga prikazuje *Zvezdna noč*, ni človeške figure niti ničesar, kar bi napotovalo na ženo v porodnih bolečinah, ki je osrednja figura videnja v *Razodetju*.

J. M.: Kratek medklic: morda pa taka figura na sliki vendarle obstaja, čeprav v kriptoobliki. Kontura hribov mi namreč zbuja aso-

ciacijo na ležečo figuro, ki bi jo lahko označil za porodnico. Gre za nekaj podobnega kot pri “Mrtvem menihu” v Zgornji Savinjski dolini, ki je od daleč videti kot ležeča postava z obrazom, meniško kuto in na prsih prekrižanimi rokami, tvorijo pa ga konture Velikega Rogatca, Lepenatke in Črnivca. Toliko za *intermezzo*. A vrniva se k umetnostnozgodovinskim razlagam.

V. S.: Tudi jaz sem slišal za to hribovsko konfiguracijo, pa ne za “Mrtvega meniha”, ampak za “Mrtvega škofa”. Nekatere je njen podolgovati iztek očitno spominjal na meniško kapuco, druge na škofovsko kapo.

Kakorkoli že, zelo kmalu, že ob koncu petdesetih let, se je pojavila druga razlaga nebesnega dogajanja na van Goghovi sliki. Spet na podlagi Biblije, tako kot že Schapiro, jo je zasnoval Šved Sven Loevgren. Vendar *Zvezdna noč* po Loevgrenu ne prikazuje van Goghove različice apokaliptične vizije, kot je menil Schapiro, ampak je izraz “religiozno naravnane hrepenenja po onstranstvu”,¹² še več, upodobitev njegove lastne končne potopitve v kozmos.

J. M.: Na eni strani torej *apokaliptični motiv* iz Biblije, na drugi avtorjev *notranji hrepenenjski elan* – nekaj podobnega temu, kar je pokazala tudi formalna analiza. Kje pa je Loevgren našel oprijemališče za svojo “personalistično” hipotezo?

V. S.: Loevgren je bil prepričan, da je van Goghu za predlogo pri slikanju neba rabil neki drug biblični odlomek, s katerim je mogoče pojasniti pomenljiv detajl. V zgodbi o Jožefu in njegovih bratih, natančneje, o njegovih sanjah iz *Geneze* se namreč pojavi natanko toliko zvezd, kot jih je tudi na van Goghovi sliki – *enajst*.

Dvanajst je bilo število Jakobovih sinov, med katerimi je po tem, da je bil deležen posebne očetove ljubezni, izstopal Jožef – mimo grede rečeno, tvoj soimenjak, Jožef, oziroma sploh prvi, ki je nosil

¹² Loevgren, 1971, 183.

Risba za *Zvezdno noč*

to ime. Kot mladenič je imel sanje, v katerih je skupaj z brati na polju vezal snope in se je njegov snop postavil pokonci, snopi bratov pa so se razpostavili okrog njega in se mu začeli priklanяти. In imel je še druge sanje: “Spet se mi je nekaj sanjalo,” je rekel bratom, “sonce, mesec in enajst zvezd se mi je priklanjali” (1 Mz 37,9). “Sonce, mesec in enajst zvezd”, se pravi: oče, mati in enajst bratov. Enajst zvezd za enajst bratov.

Znano je, da je van Gogh *Zvezdno noč* naslikal *alla prima*, brez poprejšnje risbe na platnu, vendar je naredil nekaj pripravljalnih študij oziroma risb zanjo. Na eni izmed njih lahko vidimo, da se cipresa s svojim vrhom, ki molí v nebo, dotika njenega roba. Nasprotno je van Gogh cipresin vrh na končani sliki toliko skrajšal, da je rahlo desno od njega lahko doslikal še eno zvezdo. Enajsto.

Zdi se, da geneza *Zvezdne noči* govori v prid Loevgrenovi izbiri odlomka iz *Geneze* kot predloge za to sliko. Pa vendar njegova ra-

zlaga pojasnjuje samo število zvezd na njej, ne pa tudi njihove konstelacije. Ta konstelacija nima središča, zvezde, okrog katere bi plešale druge zvezde, kot bi to zahtevala krožna razporeditev priklanjajočih se snopov in zvezd iz Jožefovih sanj. Po tej plati je Loevgrenova razlaga v resnici šibkejša od Schapirove, ki s pojasnjevanjem dinamike dogajanja na nebu brez dvoma deluje prepričljiveje. Kdo tretji bi sicer lahko rekel, češ, van Gogh je imel pred očmi oba biblična odlomka in je, kot je dovoljeno umetnikom, nekaj vzeti iz enega, nekaj iz drugega. Na koncu bi tako imeli opravka z nekakšno *conflatio* bibličnih virov, vendar upravičevanje razlage z umetniško svobodo po mojem razlagi ni v prid.

J. M.: Preden bi bilo o neustreznosti interpretacij, ki si ju predstavil, mogoče reči kaj bolj določnega, afirmativnega ali kritičnega, je po mojem treba narediti kratek ekskurz v splošno hermenevtiko likovnih in sploh umetniških del. Umetniška dela so fenomeni v prostoru in času. To verjetno ni sporno. Ti fenomeni so dejstva – in dejstva po Wittgensteinu spadajo v nalogo, ne v rešitev. Umetniški fenomen je torej sistem dejstev, ki so del naloge, načini, kako to nalogo rešujemo, ko smo soočeni z dejstveno matrico umetniškega dela, pa so, če to povzamem po Franklovi “dimenzionalni ontologiji”,¹³ *interpretativne projekcije*.

Umetniški fenomen si lahko figurativno predstavljamo kot tridimenzionalni objekt v prostoru projektivne geometrije, čeprav ima lahko v realnosti tudi več dimenzij in se zato pojavlja v večdimenzionalnem hermenevtičnem prostoru. Skratka: umetniški fenomeni venomer omogočajo različne projekcije. Najbolj elementarna med njimi je projekcija na recipientovo doživljajsko projekcijsko ravnino. Mogoče so tudi projekcije na projekcijsko ravnino recipientovega svetovnega nazora, prevladujoče družbene ideologije, te ali one iko-

¹³ Prim. Frankl, 2005, 12-17.

nografije, te ali one teorije ipd. Vse te projekcije – in teh je lahko veliko – pa so nižjedimenzionalne od fenomena, ki ga interpretirajo.

Če umetniški fenomen iz njegove večdimenzionalnosti projiciramo na različne dimenzije, ki so nižje od njegovih lastnih, se odlikava tako, da si odslikave med sabo nasprotujejo. Če na primer kozarec, ki je, geometrijsko gledano, valj, iz tridimenzionalnega prostora projiciram na dvodimenzionalno ravnino tlorisa in stranskega risa, v prvem primeru dobim krog, v drugem pravokotnik. Iz obeh projekcij izhaja tudi protislovje, saj gre obakrat za sklenjen lik, kozarec pa je odprta posoda. Poleg tega se različne stvari, ki jih iz njihove dimenzije projiciramo na eno in isto projekcijsko ravnino, odlikavajo tako, da si odslikave med sabo nujno ne nasprotujejo, ampak so večpomenske. Ko valj, kroglo in stožec projiciram na tlorisno ravnino, vselej dobim krog. In če vem, da gre pri tem za sence, ki jih mečejo valj, krogla in stožec, uvidim, da so te sence večpomenske, saj po njih, ker so si enake, ni mogoče sklepati, ali jih meče valj, krogla ali stožec.

S stališča umetnostne hermenevtike se mi zdi, da čas, v katerem živimo, o umetniških delih kopiči neznanske množine nižjedimenzionalnih projekcij, težave pa se pojavijo, ko bi morali iz projekcij sklepati nazaj na večdimenzionalnost umetniškega fenomena. Projekcije tega fenomena na nižjedimenzionalne projekcijske ravnine so v načelu enakovredne, niso pa vse enako pomembne zanj. Postavlja se torej odločilno hermenevtično vprašanje, kako med mogočimi projekcijami identificirati tiste, ki so bistvene za umetniški fenomen, in kako te projekcije reflektirano navezati nazaj na umetnino. Mislim, da interpretativne projekcije, na primer omenjeni biblični v zvezi z *Zvezdno nočjo*, dajejo dobrodošlo podlago za to, da se lahko približujemo bistvenemu na sliki, čeprav dvomim, da je van Gogh pri slikanju te slike resno pomislil na katero od obeh bibličnih projekcijskih možnosti.

V. S.: To bi pomenilo, da ni slikal stvari samih, ampak je z njimi upodabljal biblične like. Vendar ne verjamem, da je na nebu želel naslikati nekaj takega kot biblično alegorijo.

Ampak preidiva počasi k pesmi Anne Sexton, saj se bova ob njej tako ali tako nenehno vračala k van Goghovi sliki, pa ne samo k njej, ampak tudi k njeni umetnostnozgodovinski razlagi. Pesničina *Zvezdna noč* to razlago namreč očitno predpostavlja, ob Schapirovi, kot se bo jasno pokazalo, tudi Loevgrenovo. Pesem je izšla leta 1962 v zbirki *Vsi moji lepi (All My Pretty Ones)*, Loevgrenova knjiga pa tri leta prej, sicer v Stockholmu, vendar v angleščini.

Naj najprej povem besedo, dve o pesničinem življenju. Anne Sexton je večino svojih otroških in mladostniških let preživela v Bostonu. Še pred dvajsetim letom je pobegnila od doma in se poročila. Pri šestindvajsetih, leta 1954, leto po rojstvu prve hčere, je bila prvič hospitalizirana v psihiatrični bolnišnici. Njena diagnoza je bila manična depresija oziroma, kot se temu reče dandanes, bipolarna motnja. Leto pozneje, nekaj mesecev po rojstvu druge hčerke, se je spet znašla v psihiatrični bolnišnici in tedaj ji psihiater kot terapijo svetoval pisanje poezije.

Poezija Anne Sexton se uvršča v tako imenovani konfesionalizem, ki se je s Sylvio Plath, Robertom Lowellom, Johnom Berrymanom in drugimi v petdesetih in šestdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja razmahnil v ZDA. Vendar je njeno pisanje daleč od sentimentalistične izpovedi. Pisala je o menstruaciji, splavu, masturbaciji, prešuštvu, incestu, odvisnosti od mamil. Njena pesniška kolegica Maxine Kumin je zapisala, da "noben drug ameriški pesnik našega časa ni na glas izgovoril toliko zasebnih nadrobnosti".¹⁴ Bila je najbolj spotikljiva izmed vseh konfesionalistov in je razdvojevala bralce. Odziv bralstva je bil tako rekoč bipolaren: del jo je sprejemal in se, zvečine ženske, istovetil

¹⁴ Kumin, 1999, xix.

z njo, drugi del pa jo je ostro zavračal. Kljub temu je leta 1967 prejela prestižno Pulitzerjevo nagrado za pesniško knjigo *Živi ali umri*.

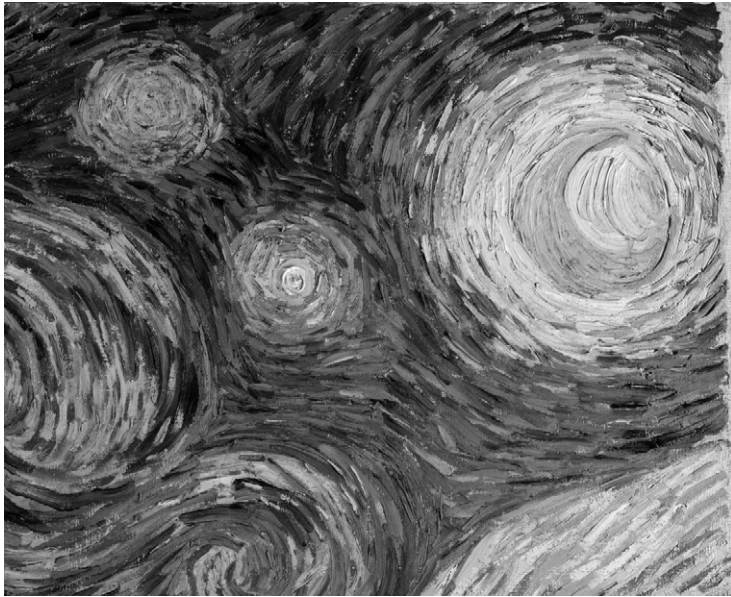
Življenje Anne Sexton je nekoliko podobno van Goghovemu: bilo je življenje z duševno stisko, ki se je končalo s samomorom.

J. M.: Zelo pomenljivo. Morda bi van Goghovo "epilepsijo" dandanes prav tako diagnosticirali kot bipolarno motnjo. Z bližino usode, da tako rečem, je verjetno zaznamovano tudi pesnično branje van Goghove slike.

V. S.: Brez dvoma. A kot rečeno, Anne Sexton gleda oziroma bere *Zvezdno noč* ob pomoči njene umetnostnozgodovinske razlage, ki pred sliko samo postavlja biblično predlogo. Reči pa je treba, da njeno likovno konfiguracijo, kar zadeva dogajanje na nebu, po tej predlogi razbira natančneje od obeh umetnostnih zgodovinarjev. Čeprav je njena pesem že bila prevedena v slovenščino,¹⁵ sem jo prevedel na novo, ker se stari prevod pretirano odmika od izvirnika in bi popravljajno pojasnjevanje prevodnih odmikov jemalo preveč časa.

Anne Sexton iz van Goghove podobe nočnega neba, ki ujame silovito dinamiko dogajanja na njem, razvije prizor. Razvije ga na podlagi bibličnega scenarija iz dvanajstega poglavja *Razodetja*, čeprav je očitno, da pozna tudi Loevgrenovo razlago, saj izrecno imenuje število zvezd na van Goghovi sliki: "Noč od enajstih zvezd povreva." To je ta prizor: mesec, največji izmed vrtincev skrajno desno zgoraj na sliki, potiska "iz svojega očesa otroke", se pravi, da kot svoje otroke poraja zvezde. Ženo, ki je na tem, da porodi, torej kot porajalec zamenja mesec, zvezde pa golta "nevidna stara kača" – nevidna, ker na sliki, tako kot ni jasno in razločno izrisane ženske figure, tudi ni do potankosti sfiguriranega zmaja, *a vendarle vidna*, vidna namreč v obliki vijugaste proge sredi med zvezdami.

¹⁵ Prevedel jo je Mart Ogen; gl. *Antologijo ameriške poezije 20. stoletja*, 1986, 371.



Izrez desnega zgornjega dela *Zvezdne noči*

Ko Anne Sexton opisuje porajanje zvezd, pravi, da mesec nabreka *in its orange irons*, "v svojem oranžnem okovju". Besedna zveza *in irons* izhaja iz časa, ko so Angleži začeli v svoje kolonije na ladjah prevažati kaznjence, okovane v železo, in odtlej v pomorščaki angleščini zaznamuje položaj, v katerem se znajde ladja, ko, obrnjena proti vetru, ostane brez hitrosti in se ne more premakniti, zaviti ne desno ne levo, skratka, njen *impasse*. V pesmi Anne Sexton pa se, kot kaže pridevnik *orange*, nanaša na tale krajec, bi lahko rekla, na ...

J. M.: ... tole objemko ...

V. S.: ... ja, lahko bi rekla tudi na objemko, oranžno objemko, ki z ene strani, z leve, oklepa okrogolino znotraj največjega vrtinca na van Goghovi sliki, tisto, kar se od tega krajca ali objemke naprej z ukripljenimi potezami čopiča obli navznoter, najnotranjši del vrtinca, ki ga pesnica morda imenuje "oko", organ mesečevega porajanja.

Vsekakor sva zdaj v zadregi: če je ta vrtinec mesec in ima oranžnina znotraj njega obliko mesečevega krajca, ki delno objema njegovo notrino, imava pred sabo podobo meseca, mladega meseca v mesecu ali meseca, ki poraja samega sebe. Kot da bi se mesec v podobi Anne Sexton čudno podvojil. Vendar se ta podoba prav prek idioma *in irons* hkrati preliva v semantično polje plovbe. “Po nebu plava mesec” – to metaforo rabimo tako pogosto, da smo na to, namreč da je metafora, malone pozabili, Anne Sexton pa z *in irons* v podobi meseca sugerira ustavitev, zastoj v njegovi plovbi po nebu, še več, njegovo ujetost, nemoč. Mesec poraja zvezde, toda proti temu, da jih golta “stara kača” ali “žival noči”, “véliki zmaj”, kot se ta kača imenuje v zadnji kitici pesmi, ne more ničesar.

Anne Sexton torej van Goghovo podobo nočnega neba razgiblje z glagolsko dinamiko (mesec nabreka in poraja zvezde, zvezde golta kača) v prizor, narejen po bibličnem scenariju. Kljub temu pa van Goghovo videnje v tem prizoru navsezadnje dobi občutno drugačno podobo od videnja v *Razodetju*, v katerem novorojenca ne pogoltne zmaj. Van Goghova “apokalipsa” v njem postane popolnoma brezizhodna.

J. M.: Čutna dinamika van Goghove slike, ki jo pesnica lovi z “glagolsko dinamiko”, ima podlago v dveh likovnih izraznih sredstvih: barvi in fakturi.

Zvezdno noč bi tudi laiki označili za barvito. Vendar barvitost na njej, če natančno pogledava, ni stvar množice intenzivnih barvnih tonov, ampak odnosov med njihovimi perceptivnimi in semantičnimi dinamikami. Naslikana je – presenetljivo – le z malo barvami: z modro (kobaltom, ultramarinom in pariško modro), s kromovo in kadmijevo rumeno, z neznatnimi količinami rdeče, iz katere izhajajo majhni rdečeoranžni poudarki in rjavine, ter z belo, ki mestoma svetli izhodiščne barvne tone. Tu so torej le štirje barvni toni, iz katerih so izpeljani odtenki. Modri in zeleni barvni odtenki, ki prevladujejo,

ustvarjajo svežo barvno mizansceno prizora, topli, tj. rumeni in rdeči, pa s kontrasti točkastih oblik vodijo gledalčev pogled po kompoziciji. Veliki kontrasti so v zgornjem delu slike, manjši v spodnjem, krajinskem. Modra, zlasti svetla, ima v simbolnem smislu ekstravertno semantično intenco, v njej "tiči" želja po neskončnosti, čistosti in nadnaravnem. Zelena kot mešanica perceptivno aktivne rumene in kontemplativne modre poudarja ravnovesje, v katerem lahko človek pride na sled slutnji ponotranjenega življenja in novega upanja. In rumena spontano zbuja asociacije s svetlobo, soncem, zvezdami, mesecem in odsevi, kar je témi pisano na kožo.

S kolorističnega gledišča ima slika torej dve dinamiki: odnosi med ekstravertnimi in introvertnimi barvnimi toni gledalca nago-varjajo k iskanju ravnovesja med akcijo in kontemplacijo, nervozo in umirjenostjo, kar se še kako dobro veže na takratno van Goghovo psihično stanje, odnosi med toplimi in hladnimi barvami pa podpirajo perceptivni vitalizem slike, tj. načrtno vodenje pogleda od akcenta k akcentu, in se s tem neposredno povezujejo s fakturo.

"Faktura" – od latinskega *facere*, "narediti", "storiti", "opraviti", "ustvariti" – je v likovni teoriji izraz za umetnikovo rokopišno uni-katnost, ki ostaja vpisana v zanj značilno vodenje orodja – svinč-nika, čopiča, dleta – po likovnem prostoru. V fakturi je, podobno kot v ročnem podpisu, s katerim podpisujemo pogodbe in ki ga over-jamo pri notarju, zaobsežen enkratni, neponovljiv pečat umetni-kove osebnosti, še zlasti če umetnik, tako kot denimo van Gogh, svojo fakturo načrtno razvija, kultivira in podreja formalni disciplini slike. Poudarjanje fakture v likovni artikulaciji je znamenje potrebe po osebni pečatu, po osebni, tudi telesni ekspresiji, ki je v mo-dernem času eksplicitno prišla do izraza v ekspresionizmu, klimaks pa je doživela v *action painting*, "akcijskem slikarstvu".

V. S.: Pri Jacksonu Pollocku, Willemu de Kooningu, Franzu Klinu

...

J. M.: Pri njih, ja. Vendar je treba reči, da ima to, kar slika van Gogh, večina gledalcev za “emocionalno ekspresijo”, čeprav je mogoče pokazati, da je takšna ekspresija veliko bolj navzoča v učinku kakor v vzroku njegovega dela. Če pogledamo van Goghove risbe in perorisbe iz tistega časa in še od prej, zlahka ugotovimo, kako sistematično in disciplinirano vleče poteze po papirju, ne da bi te zaradi sistematike in discipline izgubile kanček svojega ekspresivnega naboja. V likovni teoriji tako gradnjo imenujemo “aditivna gradnja”, se pravi gradnja iz elementarističnih izhodišč. Elementi so poteze s peresom ali čopičem, celota pa je motivna artikulacija, ki jo poteze vzpostavljajo. To pomeni, da mora umetnik ob vsaki potezi imeti jasno predstavo celote, saj brez nje ne bi mogel smiselno povleči nobene. Skratka: pri taki gradnji risbe ali slike je sistemsko mišljenje primarnejšee kot akcijska ekspresija, ki bi poteze s svojo impulzivnostjo in furioznostjo znala pomešavati in jih celo izigravati drugo proti drugi.

Res pa je, da slikar z akcijsko ekspresijo v izvedbi potez doseže interno dinamiko svojega dela, ki bolj kot iz zunanjega motiva izvira iz njegove notranje psihične motivacije.

V. S.: Glede na to, kar si pravkar povedal, se mi zdi temeljno vprašanje, ali je *Zvezdna noč* ekspresija, torej ali izraža van Goghovo občutenje stvari, ki so upodobljene na tej sliki, ali pa prikazuje stvari same. S tem se vračava še dlje nazaj, k razločku, ki si ga razprl med abstraktnim in nepredmetnim slikarstvom: med abstrakcijo, ki odvzema, vendar od stvari, ki so zunaj nas, jemlje stran, kar je nebistvena, in nepredmetnim slikarstvom, v katerem slikar na platno iz samega sebe projicira prej še neoblikovano, kar sploh ni neposredno vezano na karkoli zunanjega.

J. M.: Mislim, da gre tu za presečno množico obojega in da je prav interakcija med abstraktnim in nepredmetnim v poznem van Goghovem delu tudi njegova poglobljena presežna ali “dodana vrednost”, kot v ekonomističnem žargonu pravimo dandanes. Če bi si

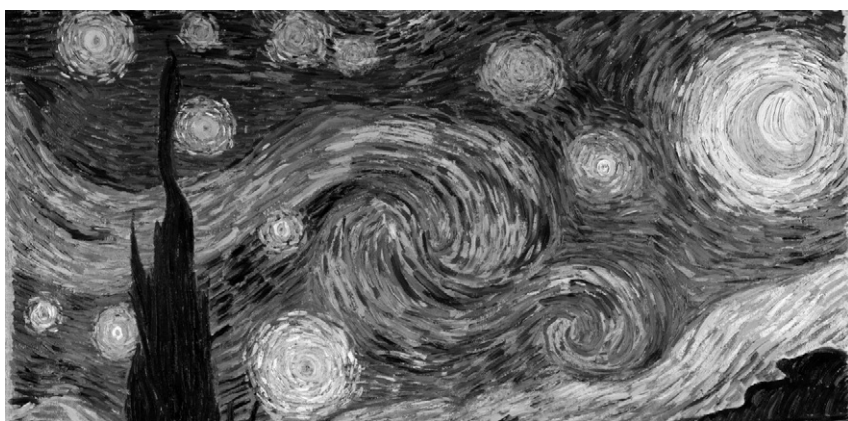
ogledala realni motiv nočnega neba z zvezdami, denimo kje na podeželju ali v puščavi, kjer ni svetlobnega onesnaženja, ki zakriva in pači prezenco, bi z lahkoto ugotovila, da je optična slika zvezdnega neba močno drugačna od zvezdnega neba na sliki *Zvezdna noč*. Osrednja razlika je v tem, da optična slika nočnega neba v ospredje gledalčeve pozornosti potiska svetlostno izpostavljene dražljaje, zvezde, gibanja nočnega neba pa se ne vidi nikjer. Običajen pogled v nočno nebo je vgrajen v optični spominski repertoar vsakega gledalca in vsakega likovnega ustvarjalca.

Vendar se zadeva zaplete, kadar likovni ustvarjalec v nočnem nebu vidi izziv za “zdravilo duše”, za “religijo” in “kozmično odpiranje”, ki ga optična slika ne vsebuje in ne daje. Če pogledava zgornji del van Goghove slike, vidiva odprti kader nekega brezbrežnega kozmičnega gibanja, vrvenja in razprostranjanja planetarnih mas, njihovih interakcij in sil, ki jim le stežka sledimo. Na sliki te sile v obliki linearnih ritmov izvirajo iz slikarjevega občutenja, najprej iz njegovega telesnega gibanja, iz telesne ekspresije in rokopisne unikatnosti, nato pa tudi iz notranje psihične motivacije, da bi se dinamika človeške psihe uskladila z ritmi presežne kozmične dinamike, z ritmi kozmične “neskončnosti”.

V. S.: Skratka, občutenje, ki ga slikar v tem primeru s svojo roko prevaja na platno, predpostavlja kozmično vrvenje. To občutenje ni nikakršna avtoafekcija.

Prej sem govoril preveč shematično, naj se popravim: “stvari zunaj” so vselej že znotraj nas. Ni stvari zunaj, *vsaj ne za nas*. Tudi če so bile pred nami, so nam zmeraj (pred)dane v naši notranjosti. Zmeraj imajo barvo, ton naše izkušnje ali pa drsijo skoz nas, ne da bi jih izkusili – in slika (ali pesem) je tedaj prazna izkušnje.

J. M.: Vsekakor. Telesne in duhovne energije, ki kibernetizirajo likovno ustvarjanje, so nedvomno naravne ali, če želiš, kozmične sile. Vendar se te energetske inherence in interakcije med osebno in koz-

Izrez spodnjega dela *Zvezdne noči*Izrez zgornjega dela *Zvezdne noči*

mično ravno dogajanja navadno ne zavedamo, dokler se ne pokažeta na čutnonazorni ravni, na primer v konkretnem slikarjevem duktusu, ritmu in kompoziciji.

V. S.: Dajva, ozriva se še malo na konkretni duktus, ta na sliki *Zvezdna noč*, na njeno likovno fakturo. Če sliko približno razdeliva na pol, lahko opaziva veliko razliko med potezami čopiča v njeni zgornji polovici in tistimi v spodnji. Mestece v spodnji polovici, hiše, njihove strehe so vse naslikane z ravnimi črtami, v zgornji polovici pa so poteze čopiča ukrivljene oziroma zaobljene. Spodnja, zemeljska polovica je po tej nasprotnopoteznosti popolnoma statična, zgornja, nebesna z vrtinci, silovito dinamična.

Toda "statično" in "dinamično" sta samo tehnična izraza ... Prej si omenil kozmično vrvenje. Kadar začutim potrebo po religiji, grem ponoči ven slikat zvezde, je dejal van Gogh. Sam pa bi rad rekel, da se po mojem v zaobljenih potezah njegovega čopiča upodablja neka sicer brezpodobstvena sila. To ni fizikalna sila, ki je nevidna, a jo je mogoče meriti, ampak Božja sila, ki stopa *en érgo*, "v delo" – Božja *enérgeia*. Ta sila si nebo udeleuje v prizorišče svojega prikazanja. Od nje, ki je sila življenja, ki je življenje samo, se suka in kopa v vrtincih vse nebo. In s takšnimi potezami, vzgibana od takšne energije, je na mnogih drugih van Goghovih krajinah naslikana tudi narava podnevi.

J. M.: Na primer na sliki *Pšenično polje s cipreso*.

V. S.: Recimo, ja, to je dober primer. Ta slika je *Zvezdni noči* med drugim blizu tudi po času nastanka – nastala je julija 1889 –, pa ne samo po tem.

J. M.: Mislim, da zdaj razumem, kaj hočeš reči. Duktus spodnjega dela slike razvidno vodi diktat motiva, njegove prostorske organizacije in geometrije, duktus zgornjega dela pa v optični sliki motiva, se pravi zvezdnega neba, pravzaprav nima nobenega morfološkega oprijemališča, nobene oblikotvorne podlage, če seveda odštejeva astronomske rekonstrukcije in prikaze kozmičnih dogajanj, na primer zvezdnih konstelacij, gibanja kometov, razvoja galaksij itn.

Umetnostni zgodovinar Albert Boime je objavil obsežno študijo, v kateri dokazuje ujemanje van Goghove upodobitve z realno zvezdno topografijo provansalskega neba poleti 1889 oziroma skladnost oblik naslikanih zvezd in njihovih sijev s sočasnimi reprezentacijami astronomskih pojavov v ilustriranih publikacijah astronoma Camilla Flammariona, ki naj bi jih van Gogh poznal posredno, prek prebiranja Victorja Hugoja in Julesa Verna.¹⁶ Po Boimu so edini nerealistični momenti na sliki *Zvezdna noč* mestece in vrtinci na

¹⁶ Prim. Boime, 1984, 88–89.

nebu, ki naj bi izvirali iz van Goghovega razumevanja kozmosa kot “živega, dinamičnega prostora”.¹⁷

Glede na to, da van Goghovo slikanje, kolikor mi je znano, ni nikoli temeljilo na študiju znanstvenih dejstev in teorij, Boimu kljub njegovi veliki študiozni prizadevnosti ne morem pritrditi. Zato se mi tvoje vprašanje, od kod v oblikovnem smislu izvira dinamika zgornjega, “kozmičnega” dela *Zvezdne noči*, zdi relevantno. Če prav razumem, se sam nagibaš k odgovoru, da je duktus na njem spodbujen s “silo”, ki v sliko stopa kot (Božja) *enérgeia* v starogrškem pomenu, torej kot “življenje” oziroma bivanjska vitalnost, in si jo jemlje za prizorišče svojega prikazovanja. Slika v zgornjem delu, kot rečeno, ni ritmična odslikava vidnega, ampak nevidnega energetskega toka slikarjevega življenjskega vitalizma, ki se aktualizira prek likovnih izraznih sredstev in se s tem kaže tudi za druge. Če je van Gogh, ko je portretiral prijatelja umetnika, za ozadje naslikal “modro neskončnost”, da bi portretirančeva glava na njej simbolno svetila kot zvezda na nočnem nebu, je na *Zvezdni noči* poskušal “portretirati” interakcijo osebne in motivne dinamike z dinamiko kozmične energetike, da tako rečem.

V. S.: Ne, nisem mislil povsem tako. Moram te popraviti, kot sem prej popravil sebe, in se o tem morda jasneje izreči. *Enérgeia* je v teologiji vzhodne krščanske Cerkve izraz za delovanje, v katerem se nam izkazuje Bog, za razloček od njegove *ousíe*, “bitnosti”, ki je za nas popolnoma nespoznavna. Z njo nisem meril na tok življenjske sile v slikarju, na van Goghov “življenjski vitalizem”, na njegov *élan vital* ali kaj podobnega, ampak na Božje življenje, ki ga je občutil in ga v hrepenenjskem iztezanju k njemu prevajal na platno.

J. M.: Prav, recimo, da si s tem opozoril na finalni ontični izvor “bivanjske vitalnosti”, ki sem jo imel v mislih. Ta izvor je nekaterim

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

blizu, za druge pa je tendenciozen in nesprejemljiv, čeprav se sklada s pisno izpričanimi van Goghovimi življenjskimi nazori.

V tej zvezi je pomembno še nekaj, česar doslej nisva tematizirala z usmerjeno pozornostjo, namreč temna plamenasta cipresa. Ta je po eni strani, gledano iz kolorističnega zornega kota, nekakšen barvni "povzetek" oziroma izravnava v nekromatičnem, saj se v njej zbirajo in v njeni plemeniti temni kvaliteti izravnava vsi najznačilnejši barvni toni slike, modri, zeleni, rumeni, rdeči in rjavi. Po drugi strani pa je to temno, elegantno, lepo proporcionirano in razviharjeno drevo od nekaj znamenje posebne, skrivnostne vitalnosti.

V. S.: Cipresa v sredozemskih deželah raste na pokopališčih, kjer drži stražo mrtvim in s tem, da ima obliko sveče oziroma plamena, simbolizira goreče upanje obojih, živih in mrtvih, ki ležijo v zemlji, v življenje. Vendar njen položaj na sliki *Zvezdna noč*, levo od mesta v njeni spodnji polovici, predvsem napeljuje na to, da to mesto ne spi svojega mirnega nočnega spanca, ampak je mrtvo, mesto mrtvih. Kontrast med zgornjo in spodnjo polovico slike, med oblasto vzvrtinčenim nebom in ravno zemljo, je kontrast med živostjo in mrtvostjo.

J. M.: Če sledim temu, kar si pravkar razvil, bi morda lahko rekla, da je spodnji del slike nekakšen simbol nekropolskega "večnega počitka", nad katerim se je razdivjal cunami kozmične "večne dinamike", nekakšna akropola "nebeškega Jeruzalema", če uporabim žargon *Apokalipse*. Vez med obojim je cipresa, ki je, kot rečeno, pod oknom van Goghove saintrémijske spalnice ni bilo. Vendar je van Gogh to mediteransko drevo v južni pokrajini pogosto srečeval in je tudi intenzivno pritegovalo njegovo pozornost. O slikarskih aspektih cipres piše Theu v pismu z dne 25. junija 1889: "S cipresami si še zmeraj dajem opravka in rad bi z njimi naredil nekaj podobnega, kot so platna s sončnicami, saj me osuplja, da jih doslej še nihče ni naredil tako, kakor jih sam vidim. Po obrisih in proporcijah

je cipresa enako lepa kot egiptovski obelisk. In njena zelenina je po kakovosti tako izjemna. Je temen madež v pokrajini, preplavljeni s soncem, eden najbolj zanimivih temnih tonov, ki ga je od vseh, kar si jih lahko zamislim, najteže zadeti." Simbolne vidike cipres tematizira v pismu z dne 1. februarja 1890: "Ko sem naredil tiste sončnice, sem iskal nekaj nasprotnega, pa vendar enakovrednega – in sem rekel: to je cipresa."

Ni torej dvoma, da se je van Gogh zavedal ne le likovne, ampak tudi simbolne vrednosti cipres. Tako kot je s sočnicami obdelal simboliko življenja, je s cipresami poskušal priti na sled ekvivalentnemu simbolu smrti. Jessica Caldarone, ki je napisala razpravo s pomenljivim naslovom "Ciprese v 'Zvezdni noči': simbolni avtoportret Vincenta van Gogha",¹⁸ pravi, da ga je ukvarjanje s simboliko cipres čedalje bolj nagibalo v "obsedenost" s smrtjo in posmrtnim življenjem. Kot bi se v cipresah, v njihovi barvni izravnavi v nekromatičnem, ki je simbol zatona in odsotnosti energije, ter v njihovi obeliskni formi, ki je simbol svetlobe, stremljenja kvišku in hrepenjenja po presežnem, lahko povezovalo in simbolno sobivalo oboje. **V. S.:** Cipreso na sliki *Zvezdna noč* je vsekakor mogoče razlagati kot figuro med zemljo in nebom, ki tu stoji za človeka. Na možnost takšne razlage spet napotuje van Goghova korespondenca.

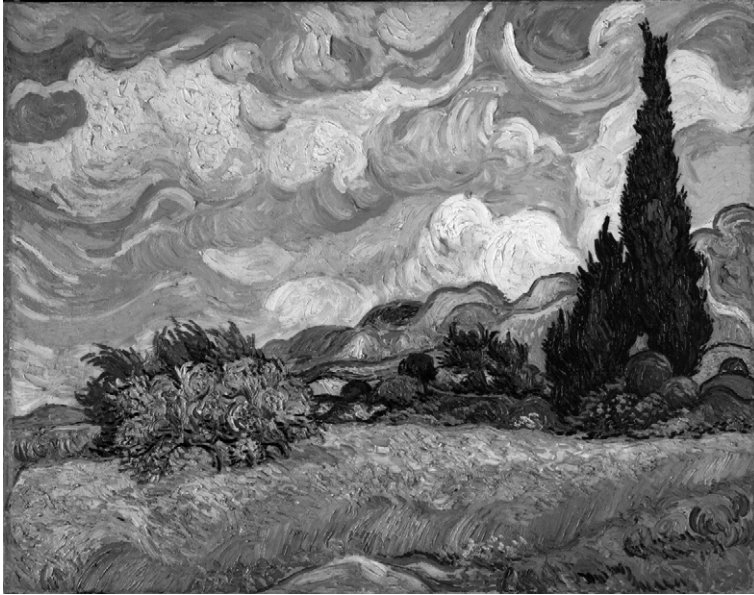
Cipresa v levi spodnji polovici slike, pomaknjena naprej glede na mestece v ozadju, je Loevgrena spomnila na Kristusa v vrtu Getsemani, na samotnega, tesnobnega, v smrtni boj zapletenega človeka pred bližajočim se trpljenjem in smrtjo na križu, in mestece na speče apostole (prim. npr. Mt 26,36–46). Res je sicer, da je van Gogh leta 1888 v Arlesu dvakrat poskušal naslikati ta motiv, vendar je oba poskusa zavrgel, in ko je izvedel, da sta se Kristusa v Getsemaniju kmalu potem lotila Bernard in Gauguin, je Bernardu, ki mu je poslal

¹⁸ Prim. Caldarone, 2011.

fotografije svojih novih slik na novozavezne motive, o njegovem Getsemaniju odpisal, češ, očitno je, da slikar ne ve, kako je oljka videti v resnici, in da bi bilo bolje, ko bi namesto Kristusa v oljčnem vrtu naslikal resničen oljčni vrt. Slikanje po bibličnem ali kateremkoli drugem literarnem motivu namesto po naravi van Goghu ni šlo in mu je tudi pri slikarskih sodobnikih zbuvalo nelagodje. Da bi biblični motiv naslikal po ovinku prek stvari iz narave, kar je Loevgrenova (in v temelju tudi Schapirova) ozadnja misel, in povrh naredil dve biblični alegoriji, eno na nebu, drugo na zemlji, se mi nikakor ne zdi verjetno.

Kljub temu pa bi na sliki *Zvezdna noč* izmed vseh stvari iz narave prav drevo lahko stalo za človeka. Van Gogh je Theu že leta 1882 pisal, da vidi "v vsej naravi, predvsem v drevesih, izraz in dušo kot tako". Okleščene vrbe, je dodal, ga včasih spomnijo na berače, mlado žito na spečega otroka, pomendrana trava ob cesti na prebivalce revne mestne četrti in zmrznjene zeljne glave pred kratkim, ker je snežilo, na starke v tankih krilih in starih rutah, ko so zjutraj šle po vročo vodo in premog.

To, da za človeka na sliki *Zvezdna noč* lahko stoji drevo, ameriška literarna zgodovinarica Jean Schwind utemeljuje z van Goghovim branjem Whitmanovih *Travnih bilk*. Na Walta Whitmana kot enega izmed virov za to sliko je sicer opozoril že Loevgren. Whitman je v izdajo *Travnih bilk* iz leta 1881, pesniške zbirke, ki jo je od njenega izida leta 1855 kar naprej popravljaj in dopolnjeval ter je do njegove smrti doživela devet izdaj, vključil razdelek z enaindvajsetimi pesmimi in s skupnim naslovom "From Noon to Starry Night", "Od poldneva do zvezdne noči". Van Gogh, ki je Whitmana isto leto, ko je nastala *Zvezdna noč*, priporočil v branje tudi svoji sestri, naj bi naslov za sliko vzel iz naslova tega razdelka. Jean Schwind pa je iz van Goghovega navodila bratu, kam naj bi obesili njegovo *Zvezdno noč* na pariški razstavi, razbrala, da bi morala, čeprav je



Vincent van Gogh, *Pšenično polje s cipreso*, 1889

bila navsezadnje izločena izmed izbranih slik, “viseti ob svoji dnevni ustreznici, njegovem ‘Pšeničnem polju s cipreso’”.¹⁹ Cipresa pod zvezdnim nebom *ponoči* ob cipresi zraven žitnega polja *sredi dneva*.

Jean Schwind je v Whitmanove *Travne bilke* kot vir za *Zvezdno noč* kopala še globlje in v njih med drugim naletela na verz o mestih, ki so “bolj polna mrtvih kakor živih”²⁰ – tako kot je v nasprotju z živim nebom mrtvo z ravnimi črtami izrisano mestece na van Goghovi sliki. Pa ne le to. V pesnitvi *Popotovanje v Indijo* je našla verz, v katerem Whitman postavlja človeka v nasprotje z drevesom: “Mar nismo dovolj dolgo stali tu v tleh kakor drevesa?”²¹ (Ne stali *na* tleh – razsodno, stvarno, s čutom za resničnost –, ampak v tleh, *in the ground*, pravi

¹⁹ Schwind, 1985, 7.

²⁰ Whitman, 1977, 459.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 437.

Whitman, zakoreninjeni v tla in nepremični, kot so drevesa.) Toda kaj ima to opraviti z van Goghom, ki je zlasti v drevesu videl “izraz” in “dušo”, nekaj, kar, naj še enkrat ponovim, lahko stoji za človeka?

V Whitmanovi pesnitvi, ki je tako kot nekatere druge pesmi ali pesnitve v *Travnih bilkah* posvečena Krištofu Kolumbu, je ta, ki je stal zakoreninjen v tla kakor drevo, stari človek. Kolumb, odkritelj Amerike, je za Whitmana, barda Amerike, prerok novega človeka, njega, ki si je drznil podati se na plovbo proti zahodu, pustiti stari svet za sabo in iti v novega, na Manhattan in naprej na zahod v pre-rijo. Stari človek je *mrtev*. Živi novi Adam.

In več kot speče, mrtvo, mrtvo kot pokopališče je tudi mestece na van Goghovi sliki, ob katerem navzgor v nebo poganja cipresa. Jean Schwind, ki *Zvezdno noč* razlaga v paru s *Pšeničnim poljem s cipreso*, v spremenjenem položaju ciprese, ki je na prvi sliki naslikana na levi strani in na drugi na desni, razbira “ne le gibanje proti levi, ampak plovbo proti zahodu”,²² in tako v cipresi prepozna simbol za človeka, ki si je s tem, da se je izruval iz starega sveta in se podal na zahod, odprl možnost postati novi Adam, ter navsezadnje celo simbol za pesnika *Travnih bilk* samega. Vendar gre v teh prepoznanjih predaleč. Je van Gogha res tako zelo navdušila ameriška različica novega človeka ali njen bard, da bi naslikal modernizirano, vendar v temelju še zmeraj na Biblijo, na Pavlovo razločevanje med starim in novim človekom (prim. Rim 5-6) oprto alegorijo?

Poglejva sliko: cipresa na njej ne poganja iz tal, ampak je spodaj odrezana z okvirom. Slika je kadrirana tako, da se vrh ciprese tako rekoč zapikuje v nebo, tla, v katera bi morala biti zakoreninjena, pa ostajajo zunaj slikovnega prostora. To drevo, s spodnjim, širšim delom krošnje pri nevidnih tleh, je breztalno. Nima korenin na zemlji. Lebdi ali plava, plava med zemljo in nebom, plava proti vzvrtin-

²² Schwind, 1985, 7.

čenemu nebu. To, da plava, je po svoje videla tudi Anne Sexton, ki na začetku pesmi pravi: " ... neko črnolaso drevo drsi / navzgor kot utopljenka v vroče nebo." Lahko da je torej cipresa na sliki *Zvezdna noč* nosilka hrepenenja, van Goghovega lastnega hrepenenja ven iz tujega in mrtvega človeškega sveta h kipečemu življenju na nebu.

J. M.: Lahko da. Vendar menim, da je pri interpretativnih projekcijah tega tipa dobro biti zadržan, še zlasti če se gibljemo zunaj prvoo-sebnega oziroma pesniškega doživetja. Prvič zato, ker je dejstvo, da so likovne artikulacije "nosilke" avtorjevih doživetij in pojmovanj, tako rekoč aksiomatično in velja na splošno. In drugič zato, ker so take semantične projekcije teoretsko tako rekoč nedokazljive, čeprav so v osebem doživljanju ne le mogoče, ampak tudi verjetne, pogoste in smiselne. Vsekakor pa priznam, da so ciprese v van Goghovi slikarski izdaji vselej unikati, tako rekoč portretirane.

V. S.: Zanimiva beseda, "portretirane" – kot bi šlo za ljudi.

J. M.: Vsekakor ne gre za tipske objekte, ampak za "subjekte artikulacije". Slikarji prejšnjih dob so imeli radi postopek, ki mu pravimo "antropomorfizem" oziroma "personifikacija". Z njim so nevidne, netelesne ali težko predstavljljive fenomene, na primer veter, boga, ljubezen, glasbo ali pravico, prek podobotvorne imaginacije pretvorili v simbolne – večinoma človeške – figure, ki jih je bilo mogoče upodobiti. Za zgled je tu lahko, denimo, Gauguinova slika *Mesec in zemlja* iz leta 1893, na kateri je planet zemlja predstavljen z ženskim aktom s hrbta, njen satelit mesec pa z moškim poprsjem desno zgoraj, ali Picassova *Guernica* z bikom kot simbolom agresije, "nosilko luči" kot simbolom upanja, "žensko, ki pada", kot simbolom moderne breztemeljnosti itn.

Van Gogh je pri svojem delu ubiral ravno nasprotno pot, metodo, ki bi jo pogojno lahko imenoval "personalizacija" oziroma poosebljenje. Z njo je tudi v neživih stvareh, drevesih, oblakih, nebu in zvezdah, prepoznaval in likovno poudarjal neki njim lasten

energetski vitalizem in neko njim lastno (p)osebnost. Če je bila temelj antropomorfizma *podobotvorna* imaginacija, torej tvorjenje podob za reprezentacijo pojavov, ki nimajo vidne in prostorske podobe, je temelj personalizacije *oblikotvorna* imaginacija, se pravi tvorjenje oblikovnih karakteristik, ki pri motivu niso vidne, a so nujne, da ikonografski elementi na sliki intenzivneje semantično zaživijo. Zgledi za to so, denimo, ritmično gibanje neba na sliki *Zvezdna noč*, ki ga pri motivu ni, “samovoljni kolorizem” na portretu prijatelja umetnika, ki ga pri motivu tudi ni, “portretne značilnosti” tipskih objektov, kot so ciprese, sončnice ali čevlji, in “poroka dveh komplementarnih barv”, o kateri van Gogh govori v pismu Theu z dne 3. septembra 1888 in ki s svojimi nasprotji in mešanjem lahko ponazarja kompleksno dinamiko “ljubezni med zaljubljenca”.

Skratka: van Gogh iz objektov, ki so motivno “vrženi predenj”, dela subjekte, ki “ležijo spodaj” – iz latinskega *sub*, “pod”, “spodaj”, in *iectum*, “to, kar je vrženo (pod)” in torej leži spodaj, “temelj” – ter s tem ekspresivno utemeljujejo objektnost presegajočo semantiko naslikanih stvari. To omogoča, da cipresa na sliki ni zgolj cipresino drevo, ampak lahko glede na svojo oblikovanost simbolizira različne vsebine, na primer smrt, kadar v njeni obliki ugašajo in se nevtralizirajo barve, hrepenenje, ko se njena oblika kot ognjeni zubelj v drzno vihrovem ritmu poganja kvišku, eleganco in dostojanstvo, ko se kot vitek obelisk dviga nad pokrajino in jo osredinja, ipd. Te na oblikotvornosti zasnovane simbolne iztočnice pa lahko v osebni doživetju in osebni interpretaciji vsekakor zaživijo natanko tako, kot si nakazal prej, ko si govoril o “van Goghovem lastnem hrepenenju ven iz tujega in mrtvega človeškega sveta h kipečemu življenju na nebu”, ali kot predlaga Jessica Caldarone s svojo “avtoportretno cipresno sugestijo”.

Novost, ki jo odpira van Gogh, je, da o fenomenih lahko govori

na način, ki z njihovo običajno ikonografijo in predstavnostjo nima nobene zveze. O smrti lahko na primer govori brez lobanje, smrtne postelje ali pogrebnega sprevoda, o strasti brez mimike in gestike in celo brez človeške figure, o religioznem občutju brez sakralnega prizora in o neskončnosti na omejenem prostoru.

V. S.: Strinjam se s tem *lahko* in pritrjujem hermenevtični prevedivosti, na katero opozarja. “Lahko” razlage mora venomer imeti zagotovljeno podlago v umetniškem delu samem, drugače je izraz poljubne subjektivne eisegeze.

A naj se nazadnje dotaknem še razmerja med van Goghovo sliko in pesmijo Anne Sexton. Pesnica to sliko bere na podlagi *Razodetja*, ob predpostavki, ki jo je vzpostavila umetnostnozgodovinska razlaga. Van Gogh pa je na nebu naslikal predvsem življenje in v tem se zasnavlja temeljna razlika med njegovo in *Zvezdno nočjo* Anne Sexton.

To, kar v pesmi zbode v oči, je drugačnost pesničine želje. Anne Sexton bi se gotovo podpisala pod besede, ki jih je van Gogh zapisal v pismu Theu julija 1888: “Kakor vzamemo vlak, da pridemo v Tarascon ali Rouen, tako vzamemo smrt, da pridemo do zvezde.” Želja, hrepenenje obeh je naravnano od tod k zvezdnemu nočnemu nebu. Toda za van Gogha je smrt kakor vlak do zvezde, do zvezdnega neba, kjer je obet življenja, za Anne Sexton pa je na zvezdnem nebu smrt.

Ko se pesnica v pesmi na van Goghovo sliko, medtem ko opisuje dogajanje na nebu, oglasi s svojim glasom, pravi: “Tako / si umreti želim.” In še enkrat, potem ko je opisala mesečevo nabrekanje in porajanje ter kačino goltanje zvezd:

Tako

si umreti želim:

v to hitečo žival noči,
da me ta véliki zmaj vsesa in se ločim

od življenja brez prapora,
brez trebuha,
brez krika.

Pesničina želja po smrti, po tem, da jo, enako kot zvezde, vase vsesa "žival noči", je želja po ločitvi od življenja. "Brez prapora" – se pravi: brez *triumph of life*, če si sposodim Shelleyjevi besedi, brez "zmagoslavja življenja". Vojska je premagana, ko nihče več ne drži prapora kvišku in ta pade oziroma ga osvoji sovražna vojska. Ostati brez prapora je pretrpeti poraz, vendar pesnice ni strah, da bo življenje poraženo. Nasprotno, želi si ga pustiti za sabo. Njena želja govori: naj bo zmagovalka smrt. Umreti "brez trebuha" in "brez krika", kar po nabrekanju in porajanju meseca spet priklicuje nosečnost in porod, pomeni: ne da bi porodila življenje ali ne da bi se sama skoz smrt porodila v življenje.

Poanta pesmi je v nadvse ostrem nasprotju s citatom iz van Goghovega pisma, ki ji rabi za moto. Van Goghova slika je globoko religiozna slika brez tradicionalnega sakralnega motiva, pesem Anne Sexton njen *counterstatement*. Slika je kljub *tremendumu* vzvrtinčenega neba zame svetla, pesem temna.

J. M.: To občutenje povsem delim s tabo. Tudi to, da je van Goghova slika "globoko religiozna", čeprav je brez "tradicionalnega sakralnega motiva", se kar najbolj sklada z že omenjeno metodo "personalizacije". Vendar je zanimivo še nekaj drugega. Van Gogh v času, ko je naslikal *Zvezdna noč*, ni bil v dobri telesni niti duhovni kondiciji. Bil je v sinusoidi, obrnjeni navzdol, dobesedno k smrti, ki je prišla dobro leto pozneje. Presenetljivo pa je, kako se je njegov poslavljajoči se življenjski elan intenzivno odpiral v tisto, kar bi lahko brez slabega namena in brez apriorne postmoderne zadržanosti do takega poimenovanja imenovala "transcendenca", kratko malo zato, ker se *Zvezdna noč* v odprtem kadru razpira v neke

druge, brezbrežno pulzirajoče, neulovljive, presežne svetove. In zanimivo je, da *enérgeia* telesa to transcendentno odpiranje in razpiranje še zmore.

V. S.: Ali pa *Zvezdna noč* odstira Božjo *enérgeio* v tem svetu, jo v tem svetu “dela vidno”, če spet uporabim Kleejevi besedi, vendar v zvezi z resničnostjo, ki je sam bržkone ni imel v mislih. Dela nevidno vidno. To.

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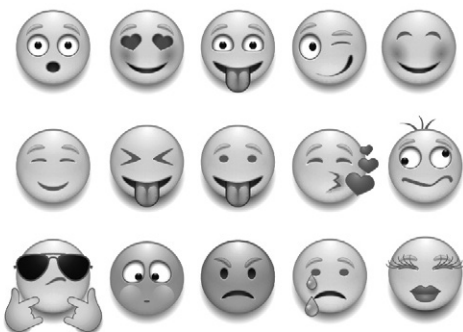
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DIALOG Z ANTIKO

Tit Makij Plavt

PERZIJEK KAZINA



Prevod, opombe in spremna beseda: *Nada Grošelj*

Tit Makij Plavt,
Perzijec, Kazina,
prevod, opombe
in spremna beseda
Nada Grošelj,
Ljubljana 2017,
AMEU-ISH,
zbirka Dialog z antiko,
212 strani, 17,90 €

Tit Makij Plavt, *Perzijec, Kazina,* prevod, opombe in spremna beseda Nada Grošelj, AMEU-ISH, zbirka Dialog z antiko, Ljubljana 2017, 212 strani, 17,90 €

Eden najpomembnejših rimskih komediografov, Tit Makij Plavt (3.–2. stol. pr. Kr.), se je navdihoval pri starogrški »novi komediji«, ki je sledila prepoznavnemu vzorcu: prikazovala je stereotipne melodramatične zgodbe in v njihovem okviru paleta človeških tipov, kakršni so sitni in stiskaški oče, zaljubljeni mladenič, pretkani suženj. Svojim predelavam grške komedije pa je Plavt vtisnil še lastni pečat z vnašanjem prvin iz italske uprizoritvene umetnosti, ki sta jo zaznamovali burkaštvo in zajedljiv humor. Ta knjiga prinaša njegovi doslej neprevedeni burki *Perzijec (Persa)* in *Kazina (Casina)*. V *Perzijcu* se Plavt poigrava s konvencijami grške nove komedije, tako da lahko v njej vidimo kar »komedijo o komediji«, medtem ko v *Kazini* spremljamo motiv, dobro poznan iz številnih del evropske književnosti, ne nazadnje iz Linhartove veseloigre *Matiček se ženi*: gospodar zasleduje služabnico, a se na koncu osmeši. Rdeča nit, ki povezuje Plavtovi igri, je prevratniški saturnalijski duh, v katerem osebe z avtoriteto – starci, očetje, gospodarji – potegnejo krajši konec.



**Evripid,
Prošnjice,
Heraklovi otroci,
prevod, opombe
in spremna beseda
Jera Ivanc,
Ljubljana 2016,
AMEU-ISH,
zbirka Dialog z antiko,
172 strani, 18,99 €**

Knjiga prinaša prva prevoda dveh Evripidovih manj znanih tragedij, *Prošnjice* in *Heraklovi otroci*, ki pa sta zaradi tematike, ki jo obravnavata, danes prav gotovo bolj aktualni kot katera koli druga tragedija, ki se nam je ohranila iz antike. *Prošnjice* sodijo v tebenski cikel in uprizarjajo, vzporedno z *Antigono*, sklepno dejanje tega mita, le da se v *Antigoni* pravica do pokopa obravnava na ravni posameznika, v *Prošnjicah* na ravni kolektiva – za vrnitev trupel in pokop prosijo matere padlih Polinejkovih soborcev. V *Heraklovih otrocih* spremljamo usodo junakovih otrok po njegovi apoteozi: pred gotovo smrtjo zbežijo od doma in, od povsod pregnani, končno dobijo azil v Atenah.

V obeh dramah se mesto Atene kot zaščitnik šibkih in preganjanih, kot nosilec novih, demokratičnih in civilizacijskih vrednot, postavi na stran občečloveških pravic celo za ceno vojne; v bran pravic, brez katerih si tudi danes ne bi smeli predstavljati civilizirane družbe – sprejem beguncev in pokop mrtvih, ne glede na to, ali so padli na strani poraženega agresorja ali zmagovalnega branitelja. Vendar ob nepokopanih žrtvah druge svetovne vojne in kilometrih rezilne žice, ki naj ustavi begunce, ni povsem jasno, ali se je v dva tisoč petsto letih spremenila definicija civilizirane družbe ali pa družba, v kateri živimo, ni civilizirana.

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Prispevke in drugo korespondenco pošiljajte na naslov uredništva. Uredništvo ne sprejema prispevkov, ki so bili že objavljeni ali so istočasno poslani v objavo drugam. Nenaročenih rokopisov ne vračamo.

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