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Hide-and-seek:  
Absence, Invisibility, and Contemporary  
Art Practices

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## **Hide-and-seek. Absence, Invisibility, and Contemporary Art Practices**

The 13<sup>th</sup> issue of the Journal of the Faculty of Art at the Pedagogical University of Krakow, "Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia de Arte et Educatione," addresses invisibility and absence in contemporary art practices in widely understood public sphere, where the latter concerns both urban and rural space, the Internet, as well as museums and galleries, public collections of contemporary art, art festivals and other events. Authors featured in this volume investigate those artistic and institutional practices that seek to achieve social efficacy and presence, yet their less conspicuous existence is not considered a failure.

In this issue, we are interested in those approaches as well as individual and collective efforts that question the omnipresent quest for visibility. This attitude may be manifested in negating the market and the conception of artwork as commodity, or in a dismissal of galleries and museums. Yet, it may also be expressed in the artist's approach – his or her state of mind – of being authentically exhausted with and distanced towards fame and recognition despite being a successful player in the world of high-budget commissions and festivals of art in public space. We are interested both in the intentionally orchestrated gestures of disappearance, as well as in the "dark matter" of art – this group of countless and anonymous "dogs-bodies" of culture.

In recent decades, calls for invisibility, absence or withdrawal have been also voiced by institutions involved in exhibiting art. We are interested in initiatives undertaken in this sphere, as well as attempts to withdraw from it, as exemplified by the recent Biennale de Paris, which presented an alternative to the "cyclical" festivals of art. Another important issue is the presence of works of ephemeral and dematerialised nature in public art collections. In this context, we would like to investigate institutional mechanisms that allow them to include such projects in permanent collections. We wish to highlight the commonly unnoticed work of curators and completely invisible conservation practices.

In this issue, we wish to consider whether all those practices are able to provide merely a substitute for a "real," institutionalised and commodified culture? Or, on the contrary, in the media-dominated world, where everyone is truly visible and Andy Warhol's 15 minutes of fame is so much more than just a phrase, can efforts to be visible and retain material permanence be seen as largely anachronistic, while the most valuable qualities are anonymity and transience? Or, perhaps, this is merely another game and another strategy to – just like Banksy – enter the art-world through the back door, through the gift shop?

*Lukasz Białkowski, Karolina Kolenda*



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## Invisible Violence: Drone Warfare and Landscape after 9/11

### Introduction: the art of commemoration and the poetics of absence

Reactions to the terrorist attack of 9/11 have resonated through all forms of cultural production, from film, through literature dealing with the memory and post-memory of the event, graphic novels and iconotexts, to the visual arts. Visual records of the attack, which have immediately filled the iconosphere, from the continuously aired video footage of airplanes hitting the World Trade Centre, which left the public increasingly incredulous rather than contributed to deeper understanding of what happened, to the photographic records of “the falling man,” welcomed predictions about the “game-changing” significance of 9/11 as an event that would mark the closing of an era and the beginning of new types of practice. W.J.T. Mitchell referred to its aftermath as a period of a new type of warfare: “the war of images,” thus highlighting the unprecedented importance of the image in initiating, justifying, and conducting military conflicts (Mitchell, 2011).

However, the last two decades have shown that the practices and artworks with which the visual arts responded to 9/11, in many ways, make it impossible to support the claim that “9/11 changed everything” and invite us to question the initial belief that “nothing would be the same.” This is because many direct artistic responses to the event, as well as the discussions that arose around the ways several different groups proposed to commemorate the victims and the sites of attack, seem to continue earlier debates on representation of the “unrepresentable,” as well as about the “appropriate” medium and form used to express suffering and pain. First, there were two different perspectives on how Ground Zero should be treated, where ambitions to “preserve” clashed with ambitions to “rebuild.” Advocate to the first cause, New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, in his farewell address, declared that Ground Zero should become a memorial to the fallen and not site for economic development (Cannavó, 2007: 137). The Port Authority and developer Silverstein have sought to restore the lost 10 million square feet of office space (Cannavó, 2007: 139). The final project is a result of these clashing views. However, it is also a result of highly relevant discussion about contemporary forms of commemoration, with a distinct position taken by the counter-monumental movement

that gained currency primarily in Europe, within the debate of how to adequately honour victims of the Holocaust. Significantly, with its negative form, *Reflecting Absence*, the 9/11 Memorial by Michael Arad, echoes those earlier counter-monuments, particularly Horst Hoheisel's *Aschrott Fountain* from 1985 and Micha Ullman's *Bibliothek* from 1995. With its minimalist negative form, it is also reminiscent of Rachel Whiteread's *Holocaust Memorial* in Vienna (1995–2000).

The same can be said about two landscape design works, one realised at the Pentagon, where Flight 77 struck, another at the site in Pennsylvania, where Flight 93, presumably intended for the Capitol, crashed, killing passengers and the crew. The Pentagon Memorial, by Julie Beckman and Keith Kaseman, is a landscape design, where the site of the crash is covered by gravel and punctuated by 184 benches. Each of them is raised over a small, illuminated pool of water. The design is made complete with maple trees and memorial units with engraved names of victims, which are organised in reference to their ages (Rogers, 2011: 113)<sup>1</sup>. The Flight 93 Memorial, by Paul Murdoch Architects, is – on conceptual level – displaying affinities with several projects made after the Second World War. Its integration with the wetland landscape and decision to leave the surrounding meadow uncultivated, expresses the wish to commemorate, but also to heal: “The memorial marks this land as a place of violence and a place of healing and renewal. A wildflower meadow sweeping up the slopes above the Memorial Plaza at the crash site brings colour and life to a once scarred landscape” (Flight 93). This, in my view, resonates with the postwar concept of Open Form, as conceived by Oskar Hansen. Notably, in September 2018, the Flight 93 Memorial will gain a new element in the form of a Tower of Voices, a wind organ commemorating the victims' voices. Despite being an interesting addition, the Tower is hardly an introduction of a commemorating form like no other. Although formally very different, on conceptual level, it bears certain resemblance to Władysław Hasiór's 1966 *Wind Organ*, a memorial to the Communist victims of the postwar civil war, commissioned by the authorities of Podhale region in southern Poland.

This is, of course, not to say that none of these works is an artistically, conceptually, or historically valuable contribution; many of them are. What this brief discussion was meant to show is that a lot of art made after 9/11, particularly in direct response to these events, often invalidates the claim that “9/11 changed everything.” If it did, then perhaps we should look elsewhere. For instance, a lot has been written about how the media changed the way the public takes part, since the invention of television broadcasts, in given events, rendering us all, viewers in front of television screens, into willing or unwilling witnesses. Furthermore, what seems to completely transform the status of the visual media (primarily photography) after 9/11 was brought not so much by the terrorist attack itself, but by the way the visual image was made to serve the interest of the war on terror.

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<sup>1</sup> More about the project in: W. Rogers (2011). *The Professional Practice of Landscape Architecture*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, p. 113.

As Nicholas Mirzoeff highlighted, however, the “war of images,” whose beginning Mitchell links with 9/11, starts exactly with the advent of a young, urban, networked global society (Mirzoeff, 2015). This way, the visual scholar clearly suggests that technological development, globalisation, and increased access of the global public to images and techniques of their distribution, were of perhaps paramount importance in the transformation of the role of the image in contemporary reality.

Regardless of its immediate causes, this role did, indeed, transform radically, as manifested by the singular focus put on the photographic and video image as incentives to engage in military conflict. Famously, photographs of alleged chemical weapons served as “evidence” used to justify the US campaign in Iraq. When in 2003 Colin Powell presented to the UN the US reasons to invade Iraq, he supported his claims with photographs of alleged evidence that Iraq produced chemical weapons and made efforts to hide them. Two pictures illustrating the process of “hiding” were put together in a PowerPoint presentation and explained with an attendant commentary. As Mirzoeff contends, this marked perhaps the first political use of this computer programme, whereby Powell detached the everyday “seeing” from the specialised visualisation, telling the UN delegates that the pictures were difficult to interpret for a common viewer, even for himself. The US claims were based on an analysis conducted by experts with years of experience (Mirzoeff, 2015). Significantly, these photographs did not represent the chemical weapons deposited in the bunker but rather the absence thereof; absence which, understandably, could not have been captured on camera. The subsequently published claims by the UN inspectors that the pictures were misinterpreted and the situation misrepresented had little bearing on the subsequent events of 2003.

Another important aspect emerged during the next stage of the war on terror during Obama administration, which can be described as a visual rather than physical engagement of military personnel involved in the drone warfare. The unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), together with other systems of computerised supervision, transformed earlier, clearly defined battlefields, into spatially unlimited areas that stretch far beyond immediate conflict zones or national territories. Another important turning point came with President Barack Obama’s decision to prevent any pictures of the assassination of Osama bin Laden being shown in the media. This marked the ending of the “war of images,” whose major weapon was increasingly obscene and horrifying visual content, and the beginning of a new type of warfare, based on secrecy and distinctly asymmetrical distribution of the power to see, where the “unblinking eye” of drones offers continuous surveillance, without its operators and supervisors suffering almost any consequences of this act of seeing, such as immediate physical danger or direct emotional impact<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The issue of stress and trauma experienced by drone operators is a highly controversial topic. Recently, more and more information is being revealed about cases of PTSD among involved personnel. Detailed accounts of the training programme, the operations

What interests me in this paper is not so much these art practices that would validate the claim about the game-changing status of 9/11 as an event after which “nothing is the same,” either formally or conceptually. My primary goal is to investigate these examples of visual arts which, coming after the event, have sought to examine how the new type of military conflict, which was brought to life with the war on terror and made possible by the advancement of technology in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, introduces a new kind of dynamic of visual engagement of its actors. For this reason, I focus on selected art projects that highlight the changes in how armed conflict has been played out after 9/11 by investigating visual representations of violence. Works I discuss are primarily concerned with unpacking the relationship between violence and landscape, as transformed by the new type of combat techniques, made possible by advancement in military technology. To do so, they converse with the tradition of landscape representation in an effort to explain how new forms of human engagement with the environment, developed in the aftermath of 9/11 and as a result of the war on terror, render the traditional roles of the viewer (or viewing subject) and the observed object both invalid as well as, paradoxically, more clear-cut than ever before. More importantly, however, they emphasise the transformative role of technology in the emergence of new geographies, whose bearing on the way we see and represent landscape cannot be overestimated.

### **Hide-and-seek: drone warfare and the politics of invisibility**

Works that I discuss display a type of engagement with landscape (often aesthetically pleasing or idyllic landscape), which highlights its problematic status after 9/11. What discussed artists manifest in their practice, is that, in post 9/11 landscape, violence is both present and absent, both located in and detached from its immediate environment, experienced first-hand as a new kind of reality, yet mediated through technology to the point where it can no longer be seen, assessed, or opposed.

In her curatorial commentary to the exhibition *To See Without Being Seen: Contemporary Art and Drone Warfare*, organised in 2016 at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum in St. Louis, Svea Bräunert writes about drones that “They are suspiciously absent from public discussion and visual renditions, so that their absence partially manifests itself as invisibility” (Bräunert, 2016: 13). In her exhibition, organised with Meredith Malone, Bräunert brought together a group of artists whose practice in recent years has been focusing on making drones objects

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themselves, and their ethical implications, have been given by sensor operator Brandon Bryant, for instance. Many sources emphasise, on the other hand, that operating a drone is much like playing a computer game. See: B. Bryant (2017). *Letter from a Sensor Operator*. In: Parks L., Kaplan C. (eds.). *Life in the Age of Drone Warfare*. Durham: Duke University Press. See also: G. Chamayou (2015). *A Theory of the Drone*. Trans. Janet Lloyd. New York, London: The New Press, especially the chapter: *Psychopathologies of the Drone*, pp. 106–113.



of public scrutiny. In so doing, artists address both purely political concerns (the secrecy and deniability of the government's actions, the ethically dubious practice of "targeted killing," etc.), as well as a wide array of problems that arose when remotely controlled machines were tasked with viewing, selecting, and destroying human targets. These problems stem from two major aspects of machine-mediated warfare: one concerns the way image rendered by cameras and sensors supplanted human vision; another refers to the asymmetrical division of the power to observe.

The first aspect has been aptly described by Paul Virilio in his reflections on "the vision machine." Although originally published in 1988, a time before the advent of drones and mass automated surveillance, Virilio's reflections about photography are now even more relevant than they were at the closing of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Curiously, equally pertinent in their assessment of the threats posed to human experience of objects by the mechanised vision are comments made by Auguste Rodin one century earlier, with which Virilio begins his book: "If the eye's mobility is transformed into fixity 'by artificial lenses or bad habits, the sensory apparatus undergoes distortion and vision degenerates. [...] In his greedy anxiety to achieve this end, which is to do the greatest possible amount of good seeing in the shortest possible time, the starrer neglects the only means whereby this end can be achieved'" (Gsell, Rodin, 1911, see: Virilio, 1994: 2). In his book, Virilio expresses an intuition about the future of automated vision that finds its exact confirmation in how computed image works today as the fundamental organising aspect of our lives. He speculates on the future development of "visionics," a science developed to achieve "sightless vision," a process "whereby the video camera would be controlled by a computer," and "the computer would be responsible for the machine's – rather than the televiewer's – capacity to analyse the ambient environment and automatically interpret the meaning of events" (Virilio, 1994: 59). This automated perception, indeed, a purely artificial vision, would delegate "the analysis of objective reality to a machine." While this "formation of optical imagery with no apparent base, no permanency beyond that of mental or instrumental visual memory" is, in many ways, our not-so-futuristic reality, it requires a deeper examination in terms of its immediate repercussions. Virilio identified several areas where ethical and aesthetic concerns were bound to emerge, such as "the philosophical question of the *splitting of viewpoint*, the sharing of perception of the environment between the animate (the living subject) and the inanimate" (Virilio, 1994: 59).

Following in Virilio's footsteps and developing his points, Trevor Paglen, an artist, writer, and experimental geographer, proposes to reconfigure and expand the definition of photography so that it accounted for its increasing autonomy in production, interpretation, and storage of images. In his text on "seeing machines," Paglen emphasises the need to investigate the way machines operate by scrutinising what he calls their "scripts," that is "the basic and obvious function of an imagining system," "the immediate relationship (between seer and seen, for example) it produces, and the obvious ways in which a seeing machine sculpts the world" (Paglen, 2016: 52). Although apparently merely an assistant in human endeavour

to make our vision of the world incredibly expanded and accurate, technology, in fact, completely transforms the relationship between the observing subject and the space under its scrutiny. This transformation takes place through the spatial distribution of personnel involved in computerised surveillance. Paglen notes that “The aircraft might be flying a combat mission in Yemen by a pilot based in Nevada, overseen by a manager in Virginia, and supported by intelligence officers in Tampa” (Paglen, 2016: 55)<sup>3</sup>. While the drone operating personnel is spatially dispersed, making the decision-making process and thereby also acute sense of responsibility somewhat divided, indeed, in some cases almost impossible to deduce<sup>4</sup>, the image of space produced by the drone is at once unified to an unprecedented degree as well as patchy and uneven. This inherently conflicted condition has numerous consequences. First, as Paglen emphasises, the drone produces “its own relative geographies, folding several noncontiguous spaces around the globe into a single, distributed ‘battlefield’” (Paglen, 2016: 55). He compares this process to what Karl Marx described as “the annihilation of space with time” suggesting that seeing machines “are increasingly playing a role creating new relative temporal geographies, perhaps something akin to an annihilation of time with space” (56). On the other hand, the image produced by drone sensors and cameras is unclear and requires “interpretation by experts,” the numerous military personnel involved in a drone strike. It is because the sensors and cameras installed on board a UAV offer focused image of a selected area, which is often difficult or impossible to comprehend in reference to a larger area. Indeed, as Andrew Cockburn argues, this vision was described as a “soda-straw” view of events, “with a visual acuity of 20/200. As it so happens, this is the legal definition of blindness for drivers in the United States” (Cockburn, 2016: 126). Yet, this blind belief in technology, which Cockburn dates back to the US campaign in Vietnam and its largely unsuccessfully and very costly operations in the Vietnamese jungle orchestrated by the Alpha Task Force, makes the operatives and commanding officers involved trust its accuracy to the point of dismissing contradicting information provided by on-site observers. Cockburn’s comments on one of such instances suggest that “The technological architecture in which the assorted participants operated was a tribute to the notion that if it was possible to see everything, it is possible to know everything and

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<sup>3</sup> Paglen refers here to what after Derek Gregory he calls “drone geographies,” that is a spatially distributed organisation of drone warfare by locating multiple and often insufficiently connected personnel responsible for drone missions in various military facilities in the US. See: D. Gregory (2014). “Drone Geographies.” *Radical Philosophy*. No. 183 (January–February), pp. 7–20.

<sup>4</sup> Numerous investigations conducted after mistakenly identified targets were bombed often found it difficult to establish the source of “error” and suggested, instead, multiple errors occurring on various stages of the operation, from target identification based on inaccurately tracked SIM card, through image interpretation, to technological malfunctions; the so-called “signature strikes” are known for even higher level of inaccuracy. More on this in: Cockburn, 2016: 7–15, 28.

therefore automate the process of empirical deduction” (Cockburn, 2016: 15). As a result, a fuzzy image requires “informed interpretation.” Quite predictably, such interpretation follows a predetermined pattern, ignoring any signs that would question technology’s reliability. This way, what Virilio referred to as “the splitting of viewpoint” between animate and inanimate objects leads to the situation when humans, or human operators in this case, tend to rely on coordinates, computed patterns, tracking signals, and heat signatures, thereby consciously giving up the previously privileged position of their human visions. Admittedly, interpretation of computer-made images still requires a human subject, but this intentional resignation from the use of the biological apparatus of human vision suggests increasingly greater trust we have in “seeing machines.”

This conscious partial “blindness” of human operators is made use by some potential targets on the ground who develop techniques of becoming “invisible” to the “unblinking eye” of drone cameras<sup>5</sup>. Strategies of visual deception of UAV sensors are also engaged in works by contemporary artists. In her 2013 video work, *HOW NOT TO BE SEEN: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*, Hito Steyerl provides an ironic commentary on how sensors can be “fooled” and playfully instructs her viewers how to master the art of obfuscation, emphasising that invisibility can be attained if the nature of technology is used to our advantage: “Resolution determines visibility. It calibrates the world as a picture. [...] To become invisible one has to be smaller or equal to the size of a pixel.” The same premise informs Adam Harvey’s 2013 series *CV Dazzle*, where photographed models wear non-standard hairstyles and make ups that look rather original and certainly make their owners stand out in the crowd, but are designed in such a way that they confuse facial recognition software and render them “invisible” to the “seeing machine.”

The second aspect of automated warfare, which I mentioned above, is the asymmetrical division of the power to observe. Whereas surveillance technologies, such as satellites, GPS system, and CCTV cameras seem to work to our, citizens’, advantage and have become our everyday reality, weaponised drones are not something commonly encountered, either in real life or even as a subject of media’s scrutiny. This lack of visibility and lack of transparency is astounding if we consider the possibilities offered to us by contemporary technology, software such as GoogleEarth, etc. Tomas van Houtryve has aptly noted that “there is no visual narrative in the public mind’s-eye to go along with this war” (Houtryve, 2014, see: Bräunert, 2016: 17). For this reason, some artists interested in documenting the drone warfare choose to connect its visual records with images that are familiar as examples of cultural representation of military conflict. In the context of this essay, particularly relevant are those that also refer to the tradition of landscape representation, and seek to account for the ways drone warfare engages space by investigating its impact upon landscape and its perception.

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<sup>5</sup> These techniques involve wearing reflective shields and cooling down body temperature to avoid being detected by heat sensors.

In his *Limit Telephotography* series (2007–ongoing), Trevor Paglen records military complexes located in the US, removed from the public eye so insistently that their sighting requires the photographer to engage a telescopic camera, which enables him to take a picture from a distance at times as remote as 30 miles. On their aesthetic level, Paglen’s photographs refer to the American tradition of landscape photography. Their purpose, however, is more than merely aesthetic, as their objective is to “emphasise the visual distance of their own making” so that the war is made visible and yet clearly shown in its manifest secrecy. As Peter Geimer claims, this way, photographing the previously invisible can result in the “production of visibility, the generation of an image where there was none or a different one before” (Geimer, 2010: 263, see: Bräunert, 2016: 17). These works pose important questions about the striking contrast between what the state knows about its citizens, and what we know about its operations. More important, however, in the context of this paper, is how they challenge the tradition of landscape representation in a number of different ways, starting with the privileged position of the viewing subject. Military facilities are hidden from the viewer through the natural limitations of the human eye. They simply refuse to be seen. They also challenge the typically romantic traveller’s wish to see and record what has not been seen before, to appreciate the magnitude of nature in complete solitude. Paglen describes how during his work he was accompanied only by drones, whose shadow – in a different landscape and in different circumstances – would probably be the last thing he would see. Normally, seeing is reserved for the drone only. And rather than merely seeing, drone is potentially also targeting. As Grégoire Chamayou writes, “vision is a sighting: it serves not to represent objects but to act upon them, to target them. The function of the eye is that of a weapon” (Chamayou, 2015: 114, see: Bräunert, 2016: 21).

While the targets of drone operators become exposed to the all-seeing eyes of cameras and sensors, operators themselves are safely removed from danger, remote from the arena of war by way of physical distance that separates them from the areas where drones make their flights, as well as through the distance afforded by the intermediary of the interface. This aspect is aptly represented in Rune Peitersen’s video work from 2017, *The Operators and the Targets*. In the film, the visual asymmetry of the war – the shocking inequality in the distribution of the right to see – is poignantly juxtaposed with the emotional impact of warfare on both sides: on targets, operators, and their respective families.

### **The military sublime: from absence to invisibility**

Particularly significant for the shaping of the modern image of the war was the Romantic notion of the sublime. However, although the sublime, as an experience of awe in the face of a phenomenon of colossal nature, whose magnitude produces in the viewing subject a strong emotional reaction that reason then turns into

contemplation of infinity and grandeur, seems to accurately define how our culture has pictured military conflicts in modernity, mixing fascination with terror; in fact, war does not easily fit into the frameworks of the sublime, as outlined by the classic definition of the term.

Notably, in his *Analytic of the Sublime*, included in *Critique of Judgement*, Immanuel Kant fails to accommodate war within the realm of the sublime (2007: 85–93)<sup>6</sup>. Patricia Anne Simpson suggests that, despite his efforts, the German philosopher is unable to explain war in terms of the sublime due to the “state of joy” that ensues when reason introduces controlled appreciation of perceived magnitude in place of earlier powerfully emotional experience. “Pleasure,” Simpson argues, “is the crucial component of the sublime experience, provided in part by the security of the subject from any danger” (2006: 40). Due to the fact that war fails to offer such security and therefore provide a source of “pleasure,” it refuses to conform to Kant’s system, even that idealised type of war “conducted with order and a sacred respect for the rights of civilians,” which he saw as a power able to inspire commendable behaviour (2007: 93). In his *Critique of Judgement*, Alex Houen claims, Kant, in fact, “outlines his own cognitive war against terror: terrifying nature must be converted into personal rational security, just as suffering (the faculties’ initial discord) is converted into hard-won ‘pleasure’” (Houen, 2007: 254). The wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with their immediate impact on civilian populations and the tactic of provoking panic and chaos, would find no entry into this ordered system.

In his postmodern reading of Kantian aesthetics, Jean-François Lyotard developed the notion of the sublime in terms of an unresolvable conflict between perception and comprehension: “We can conceive the infinitely great, the infinitely powerful, but every presentation of an object destined to ‘make visible’ this absolute greatness or power appears to us painfully inadequate” (1984: 78). For the French thinker, this quality of indefiniteness, particularly in the context of abstract painting, was welcomed as a portent of openness. However, when referred to other images, such as footage of the 9/11 attacks or the visually elusive nature of the war on terror, it takes on an entirely different aspect. Edmund Burke, in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, expressed reservations about the “security” of sublime experience when an individual’s reason is not strong enough to endure terrifying objects (1889: 101)<sup>7</sup>. Writing about the sublime in the reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and its globalised, networked society, Houen links Burke’s arguments with Fredric Jameson’s claims about technology,

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<sup>6</sup> Kant writes: “War itself, provided it is conducted with order and a sacred respect for the rights of civilians, has something sublime about it, and gives nations that carry it on in such a manner a stamp of mind only the more sublime the more numerous the dangers to which they are exposed, and which they are able to meet with fortitude” (2007: 93).

<sup>7</sup> According to Burke, “pain and terror” need to be modified so that they are not “actually noxious” (1889: 101). Alex Houen emphasises that if “the force of the sublime is too strong, it can produce an obsessive derangement in individuals” (2007: 254).

that it can only be theorised through the category of the sublime (Jameson, 1991: 38), and argues that, at present, “Unable to seek refuge in one’s own super-sensible realm, individuals have to look outside themselves for such security and power. Technologised networks are one possibility in contemporary culture, aimed as they are at ordering things, events and experience into supposedly rational systems” (2007: 254)<sup>8</sup>. However, ironically enough, these networks are increasingly complex so that “individuals are incapable of comprehending the ways in which they are caught up in them” (2007: 254). This way, the initial terror can never be transformed into pleasure; fear never turns into the sublime, while the sublime itself “remains rooted in trauma” (2007: 254).

Visual records of 9/11 and its aftermath offer a powerful confirmation of the contemporary shift of the sublime towards the traumatic, which is effected by the *immensity* and truly ungraspable size of the war on terror, indeed, an impossibility to imagine its parameters, such as geographical scope, legal ramifications, or actual number of casualties. The facts of this war are, in many ways, so obscure that it is difficult to pinpoint an object or image that triggers the sense of terror; rather, it comes from the absence thereof, while its impact is, nevertheless, deeply felt. In contemporary art, attempts to create visual testimonies to this problematic nature of warfare come in many different guises, with some artists channelling the traditional aesthetics of the sublime in an effort to highlight the ensuing discrepancies in what the image shows and what it actually depicts.

Photographs by Simon Norfolk, for instance, who uses old-fashioned wood and brass field camera, play with the tradition of war photography both in their technique and in their aesthetics<sup>9</sup>. In the series *Afghanistan: Chronotopia*, Norfolk records ruins of warfare, which, in his rendition, refer the viewer to the European landscape tradition<sup>10</sup>. Here, as Norfolk claims, “the landscape of Afghanistan is also ‘awesome’ (in the original sense of this word), but the feelings of dread and insignificance are not related to the power of God but to the power of modern weaponry” (Norfolk). In an interview, the photographer describes his efforts as trying to show war not so much as the agent of ruination; he sees it as something that is even beyond human agency. As Tim Connor suggests, “Looking at

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<sup>8</sup> Jameson wrote about technology that is represents “that enormous properly human and anti-natural power of dead human labour stored up in our machinery – an alienated power [...] which turns back on and against us in unrecognisable forms and seems to constitute the massive dystopian horizon of our collective as well as our individual praxis” (1991: 35).

<sup>9</sup> More on Norfolk’s technique in: A. Danchev (2009). *On Art and War and Terror*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> The title of the series, “chronotopia” comes from Mikhail Bakhtin’s description of places where space and time seem to mingle, places that manifestly display the “layeredness” of time. In Afghanistan, because of prolonged conflict, ruins of bombed buildings, left-over military equipment, and stretches of land swept by landmine removing squads, suggest exact dates of particular remains: the 1980s, 90s, and recently.

them [ruins – K.K.] – as *aftermath* – goes beyond the catharsis of human identification with war's futility and loss. Outside time, the photos suggest something even darker – that war is larger than human concerns. It may even be beyond human control" (2007). In this context, Norfolk's interest in the sublime and in representation of ruins is an expression of his trying to make sense of the nature of contemporary warfare: entire countries as battlefields, entire countries as ruins. He says of his engagement: "It ends up being like a relationship with the sublime – a military sublime [...]. Because these objects are beyond: they're inscrutable, uncontrollable, beyond democracy" (Norfolk, 2007, see: Connor, 2007). In Norfolk's pictures, the violence of war, even though so recent, is observed *after* it had occurred and therefore experienced (by the artist) already as long absent, since ruins, which modern warfare produces so swiftly and effectively, are culturally embedded as chronologically remote from us<sup>11</sup>.

Although the effects of war, the ruins it leaves behind, permanently transform the landscape and the lives of people who inhabit them, being poignant reminders of its presence, the violence itself, for a viewer overseas, is virtually invisible. This is not to say that it is immaterial. But the fact is that the use of drones, which can be heard rather than seen, makes the violent act they perform partly intangible (the more so that the act itself is not *really* performed by either the drone or by a single person behind the drone, but dispersed between pilot, sensor operator, and several other actors involved in a strike). Trevor Paglen renders this elusive presence into visually compelling pictures in his series *Untitled (Drones)* from 2010. Paglen is interested in how increasingly covert operations of the military during the war on terror translate into growing difficulty of recording them on camera. Hence, the series presents visually attractive pictures of the sky with only the subtlest traces of drones visible. In a very telling comment, Paglen said: "For me, seeing the drone in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a little bit like Turner seeing the train in the 19<sup>th</sup> century" (Paglen, 2017, see: Adams, 2017). This is, then, of no coincidence that his photographs channel the aesthetics of the sublime. Colourful shots of the sky make clear references to the dramatic renditions of the sky painted by the great Romantic artist. Turner's famous painting, *Rain, Steam and Speed – The Great Western Railway* (1844), dating not long after the aesthetics of the sublime embraced developing technology and gave rise to what is termed the technological sublime<sup>12</sup>, was inspired by the artist's journey on the train, when he famously put his head outside the window, but remained in the safety of the carriage. The terrifying effect of the train rushing through the rain was then transformed, in the artist's studio, into a "pleasurable" image. Although Turner's experience did contain elements

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<sup>11</sup> Significantly, Norfolk's photographs do not feature human figures, which evokes a postapocalyptic atmosphere of pictured places as always-already ruined and depopulated. More on Norfolk's reasons for avoiding human subjects in his representations of war in: Biernoff, 2017: 38–39 and Roberts, 2014: 109–110.

<sup>12</sup> More about the technological sublime in: Nye, 1994.

of apprehension about the rapid development of technology and its immediate threats, which made the sublime in his painting verge towards its modern, conflicted form, still the relative safety of the viewing subject (the painter) works to secure it in the confines of an aesthetic experience. Paglen's photographs of drones, in contrast, refuse to admit such possibility; in them, danger is both invisible and oppressively present, while the terror of this situation evades representation.

## Conclusion

Works I discussed in this paper are merely several examples of a great variety of cultural production that seeks to examine the ways our perception of reality and, indeed, our reality as such, have changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As indicated in the beginning, the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent war on terror are seen either as causes of this change (primarily on geopolitical level), as well as results thereof (particularly in areas such as military technology and warfare strategy). Artworks that attempt to investigate this new reality, and which make landscape their major focus, reveal important aspects of this change. One is that the image of landscape, which, historically speaking, has always been made for reasons to a great extent linked with military power, conquest of new lands, and their subsequent control, is increasingly often produced, perceived, and analysed by machines, without ever reaching the eyes of a human viewer. Once maps were being made for political leaders and merchants to favour their interests, making an impact on how space was imagined in art; the invention of aerial photography marked the first step towards machine-mediated vision of landscape, yet still the human viewer was central for its production; with the development of "seeing machines" looking at landscape (primarily for scientific and military purposes) is delegated to "other eyes," while effects of their "seeing" are often never reported back to the human viewer in forms other than numerical data. Another important aspect of discussed change is the shift of perspective from horizontal to vertical. Admittedly, photographs taken from airplanes and satellites "lifted" our vision to heights previously unknown, yet the ultimate goal of that was still to map and imagine how elements of our material environment were distributed *on* the Earth's surface rather than above it. 21<sup>st</sup>-century mapping technology, including drones, Google Maps, etc., privilege vertical vision: looking from a more or less defined "above". As Hito Steyerl writes, this "view from above" carries a double threat, being both "a proxy perspective that projects delusions of stability, safety, and extreme mastery onto a backdrop of expanded 3-D sovereignty," at the same time recreating "societies as free-falling urban abysses and splintered terrains of occupation" (Steyerl, 2016: 79). In discussed works, technological and military underpinnings of contemporary perception of landscape is confronted with historically sanctioned ways of seeing. The way artists draw on the aesthetic notion of the sublime shows that an artistic juxtaposition of "cold" mechanical mapping



with emotional-turned-aesthetic experience of landscape is able to reveal the vital aspects of technologically-transformed perception of space, one of them being its gradual disappearance effected, paradoxically, by its increasing visibility.

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## Invisible Violence: Drone Warfare and Landscape after 9/11

### Abstract

The paper investigates representations of landscape in selected examples of contemporary artworks that were produced in the aftermath of and in direct response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent war on terror. Focused on the work of Hito Steyerl, Trevor Paglen, and Simon Norfolk, the paper seeks to examine how the development in military technology, primarily the increasing reliance on computerised vision, as manifested by the use of drones, has generated new ways in which landscape is perceived and represented, experienced and mediated. In the text, discussed artworks are shown to confront the mechanised vision of landscape with aesthetic concepts such as the sublime in order to account for the changes in human experience of space in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Keywords:** invisibility, drone warfare, landscape, art after 9/11

**Słowa kluczowe:** niewidzialność, drony, krajobraz, sztuka po 9/11

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TRAFo Trafostacja Sztuki w Szczecinie Gallery for Contemporary Art

## **Art, Memory and *Angel* by Czesław Dźwigaj**

In this paper, I am interested in urban public space as an area of interplay of symbols of memory. In my discussion of “invisible” and “visible” objects of contemporary art on the squares and streets of Szczecin, I focus on a specific case – the implementation of the idea of commemorating the victims of December ‘70 (i.e. the victims who died in protests against the authorities of the PRL in 1970 in Szczecin) in today’s Solidarity Square. The disputes, discussions, decisions and their changes, which took place in Szczecin over the course of one and a half decade after 1989, and which concerned the symbolic marking of public space, are symptomatic in a dual dimension: firstly, they reflect the problem with the presence of contemporary art in public space and, secondly, they highlight the issues of the intended purpose and audience for commemorative sculpture.

As far as the former issue is concerned, one should take into account the unsteady status of the Szczecin agora: after 1989, as in other Polish cities and other countries of Eastern and Central Europe, this is the space of political transformation. The democratic and capitalist breakthrough meant free contestation of previously cherished monuments that had political and ideological functions. If considered from the perspective of its media representations, the period of political transition of 1989–1990 was pictured as much through the images of scenes related to the sudden access to the Western consumer goods as it was through scenes associated with demolition and destruction of monuments of hated communist leaders or symbolic buildings, with the Berlin Wall at the forefront. In Szczecin, such a symbolic, visually significant and remembered gesture was the removal of the Soviet star from the top of the column that worked as a monument of gratitude to the Red Army’s military deed, which, according to the Polish communist interpretation, liberated Polish Szczecin from the hands of the German fascists. Incidentally, the rest of the monument, a devastated column standing in Szczecin for the next quarter of a century, was left undisturbed, and was eventually dismantled in 2017, which did not raise significant emotions among the residents of Szczecin. They did not feel an emotional connection with it, which was received with some surprise by our closest neighbours, Eastern Germans.

After 1945, public space in Poland was saturated with unambiguous and politically one-dimensional symbolism. For decades, people have been forced to recognise and accept that public rather than private space was the domain of power and the space of its expression. In contrast to the invisible power analysed by Michel Foucault on the example of a panoptic prison, communist rulers wanted visual manifestations of their domination. As we know, they guarded this monopoly very closely. It was not only about monuments, murals, mock-ups, propaganda posters, but also about giving patrons to schools, workplaces, scientific institutions, and above all squares and streets. One of the most distinct processes was the change in naming of public spaces. This process continues in Poland uninterrupted, but today, it seems, it only caricaturally repeats spontaneous gestures, releasing communism shortly after its fall. Today, this is done for the purpose of strengthening the domination of the right-wing national discourse.

As Piotr Piotrowski wrote in his book *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, in post-communist spaces, “certain events were wilfully forgotten, while others were wilfully remembered. As a matter of fact, every city is saturated with the discourse of power and its ideology, which undergoes change according to the political system in effect; the buildings in general do not disappear, streets [...] remain the same [...]” (Piotrowski, 2012: 66). Practice shows that the democratically elected authorities, in place of symbols thrown into the trash, usually insert their own, new, but equally unambiguous ideological ones.

In fact, one of the manifestations of the post-communist condition is a tacitly accepted assumption that the symbolism of functioning in public space should be socially integrating, clear, uplifting consent, while political power should work as the guarantor, guardian and a provider of fixative consensus and order. The illusion, and perhaps even naivety of artists in Poland and other post-communist countries was the conviction that democratic freedoms would guarantee the independence of creative expression in public space from orders of current politics, or more strictly – the right to show or inspire dispute in public space. This antagonism applies in general to the function that shared space should play for society. Is it to be an arena of agreement or confrontation in a democracy? In the context of the duties of contemporary artists, this dilemma was solved programmatically by Piotr Piotrowski (2010: 63):

On the one hand, in the light of “deliberating democracy” (Jürgen Habermas) public space is subject to consensus, on the other hand, according to critics of liberalism and advocates of radical democracy, or “agonistic” (Chantal Mouffe), public space is above all a place of and permanent and endless dispute. It guarantees democracy; its constant maintenance is a condition for eliminating exclusions from the agora space. Rosalyn Deutsche [...] even believes that constant problematization of public space is a condition of democracy. [...] democracy in post-communist countries encounters many problems. Therefore, it is even more important to participate in the debate about public space of artists who, with their often provocative projects, are able to create conflicts without which democracy wilt. The dispute, the competition of views in the

space of the agora – and not the consensus, which by definition eliminates radical voices from the public space, excludes them – is an indispensable condition of a democratic society.

Many artists, especially those who wanted to make artworks commemorating historical events (tragic in the case of Szczecin, which I will describe), while giving them a universal dimension, were deeply surprised that their actions were perceived in political terms and became involved in the political dispute. However, as Chantal Mouffe (2013: 51) writes in the text *Critical Artistic Practises as Counter-hegemonic Interventions*, there is no other option:

[...] I do not see the conflict between art and politics as a conflict between two separate fields – art on the one hand, politics on the other – between which there is no relationship. Politics have an aesthetic aspect, just as art has a political aspect. From the point of view of hegemony theory, artistic practices play a role in creating and maintaining (or questioning) a certain symbolic order, and hence their political aspect. The political is about the symbolic ordering of social relations, and this is what its aesthetic aspect is all about. Therefore, I think that the division into political and non-political art is useless.

Among other post-communist Polish cities Szczecin is additionally distinguished by its “short duration” complex, which makes it impossible for it to reach for older Polish traditions other than the communist past. Its local identity, connecting the place with a sense of belonging to larger social groups, headed by the national group, has been under construction since 1945. Reflection on the space of post-German Szczecin led to the interpretation of the city as a palimpsest or Atlantis. We owe this view mainly to the literary creativity of the writer of Szczecin, Artur D. Liskowacki, in whose books his hometown appears as a multi-layered text, where older entries in a foreign language can be seen under new records, or as a land shrouded by the sudden disappearance of its old inhabitants, and settled by unrelated newcomers.

This particular condition of Szczecin after 1989, where there is nothing that could be restored in public space that would be “ours” (Polish) and non-communist, opens up a field for action for contemporary artists. Their work, apart from being often used as an instrument of responding to the needs of social inclusion, of revitalisation and gentrification, is primarily perceived as a tool for the production of identity, “marking the terrain” for the use of us, citizens, by inserting politically handy objects with clear meaning. The longing for an aesthetically and socially synthesising object, however, falls apart, and often painfully collides, with the practices and projects of contemporary art. Currently produced artifacts, operating in a subversive language, created with the intention of introducing semantic tremors, ambiguities and metaphors, perversely revealing uncomfortable truths and paradoxes of transparent discourses, are subject to political repression and social rejection. Sometimes, as little as a proposal for a monument can trigger a media scandal and

launch an intense, emotional reaction and resentment-driven political dispute. In this sense, Szczecin can be analysed as an arena of repetitive social processes related to contemporary art.

The second area of consideration is the analysis of the relationship between the commemorative function (desired by the founders) and the potential and impact of contemporary art, seen in reference to the theory of cultural forms of memory. Polish Szczecin, looking for specific identity anchors in the past, could not find them, as I mentioned above, either in the German past or in the communist narrative. The solution was to turn towards dissident and oppositional cards in history. An expression of this is the creation of a new pavilion of the National Museum – the Dialogue Center “Upheavals,” with a permanent narrative exhibition documenting the fate of the city of rebellions and political solstices. Among several crucial events that took place in Szczecin in the years 1945–1990, it is December 70 – January 71 that is particularly extensively covered by local historiography and addressed through symbolic practices of commemoration. It is not my intention here to report the course of the tragic December and political January in Szczecin. Suffice it to say that the Szczecin workers, in protest against the communist rule, rising prices and anti-democratic practices, took to the streets, burned the party committee building, and then gathered in the square in front of the militia, who opened fire, killing sixteen people. In January 1971, Edward Gierek, a new leader of the Polish People’s Republic met with the workers, which was a sensation.

It took fifteen years for the concept and ultimately the created sculptural form of the monument to finally emerge, commemorating the events of the December ‘70 in Szczecin, on the very square where people died. The monument revealed universal dilemmas, functioning in a place where an individual artistic concept meets collective memory<sup>1</sup>, which looks for a suitable cultural form. How can art comply with the commemorative role without losing its unique character? And, on the other hand, to what extent are those who demand the creation of a symbol expressing their collective memory able to universalise what is their individual and historical experience?

The case of the Szczecin monument proves that not only the relationship between authors and their art and the holders of collective memory is a source of potential tension, but the conflict is already on the level of authorities or political power, who, by using a visual symbol, want to find expression for the importance of a historical event. The conflict would stretch between the will to commemorate in a unique (artistically) groundbreaking moment, giving it a timeless importance, and the desire to meet the common expectation of the creation of a SINGLE symbol, giving justice to the commemorated.

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<sup>1</sup> Using the terms of collective, cultural, as well as individual and communicative memory, I refer to the theoretical writings of Jan and Alaida Assman. In Poland, they were published in the volume: M. Saryusz-Wolska (ed.), (2009), *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa. Współczesna perspektywa niemiecka*, Kraków: Universitas.

This urban game of visibility (art and memory) was played out around three sculptures: two awarded but unrealised designs, and the final work by Czesław Dźwigaj. Those are:

1. *Phantoms (Fantomy)* by Jerzy Lipczyński from 1998/1999;
2. *Paths (Ścieżki)* by E. Maksymiuk, N. Białek, T. Maksymiuk and J. Szparadowski from 2002;
3. *Angel of Freedom (Anioł Wolności)* by Czesław Dźwigaj from 2005.

The first two concepts displayed significant artistic values. The one selected as the final winner of the competition, although it did not arouse aesthetic enthusiasm, but rather criticism and protest in professional art circles, was selected as a design that best expressed the wishes of those who represented the victims.

I will start chronologically with the first one. Jerzy Lipczyński's *Phantoms* was created in response to a competition announced in 1998 by the Social Building Committee of the "Social Protest of December 70" Memorial, established by the city of Szczecin. The jury chaired by prof. Konrad Kuczy-Kuczyński, architect, selected a concept by a Szczecin sculptor and his team from the Szczecin University of Technology. The monument was conceived as a horizontal structure consisting of about 110 elements in the form of silhouettes, resembling shadows rather than human figures. Made of rough metal and inclined at the same angle, the figures were to measure from 1.8 m to 4 m. The passage between them was supposed to create an illusion of participation in the protest (Klim, 1998).

Jerzy Lipczyński recalls his design as follows (2006: 17):

The idea of the monument was based on authentic photos from events taking place on the streets of Szczecin in December 1970. The authors of the design, under my guidance, in the most concise form tried to reflect the atmosphere resulting from social dissatisfaction. The results of this dissatisfaction were demonstrations, marches, and often riots. By showing the other side of the Polish system, i.e. protests, through objects resembling unorganised crowd-phantoms, the authors clearly defined their point of view about the past system.

According to the press, the work provoked controversy from the very beginning<sup>2</sup>. The chairman of the jury commented as follows (hal, 1998): "This is certainly not a classic solution. We are not dealing with a monument, but with a spatial composition."

Initially, the chairman of the social committee, Marian Jurczyk, who reluctantly referred to the proposed design (at the time when the contest was resolved also by the President of Szczecin), two years later became its main critic. What was earlier an advantage in the eyes of the Jury, now became aggravating. To justify his shift of

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<sup>2</sup> After the results were announced, no criticism was raised of the awarded project. The other participants of the competition accused it of lacking details, copying the design of the monument prepared earlier for Gniezno and not taking into account the symbol of the cross. A. Klim, *Ibidem*.

opinion Marian Jurczyk (2001), the leader of Solidarity protests in Szczecin, wrote, among others:

We believe that it is a great misunderstanding to express our feelings for those events in such a terrible way. The design of the monument, in its incomprehensible form, seems to be the epitome of the overstepping of artistic ambitions over common sense. God will be sorry comparing the Gdańsk crosses, so monumental in their expression and evocation of pathos, to the lack of ambition and misery of our Szczecin spirit.

This statement, signed by the legendary leader of the Szczecin strikes, the future first president of Szczecin, chosen directly by the citizens, in practice, determined the fate of the monument. In their comments, right-wing politicians focused primarily on one aspect, namely that the families of the protesters did not accept the proposed monument on the grounds of its failure to form a consistent relationship with the memory of the participants.

It is worth stopping at this point the report about the fate of the monument, sealed as a result of quarrels of politicians, and focus on the arguments of both sides regarding the specificity of the work.

An apt diagnosis made by right-wing politicians about the anti-communist past concerned the memorial's lack of monumentality, patience and values symbolised by the Christian cross. Lech Karwowski, director of the National Museum in Szczecin and art critic, answered questions posed by the members of the social committee, explaining that: "The vertical form of the monument belongs to the rhetoric of power, while horizontally organised form better reflects the collective hero." Analyses evaluating the design, presented by professional critics, using the language of academic aesthetics, were not compatible with the competences of the communities representing the victims. It seems that the voices of professionals were addressed rather to politicians (city councils, presidents), legally responsible for decisions about public space. Meanwhile, Marian Jurczyk's statement proves that the collective memory of the participants of the December protests expected to be expressed with forms suggestive of a heroic act. Contrarily, sculptor Jerzy Lipczyński was looking for a different meaning. He wanted to show the strength of the community, the alternative and the threat posed to the political power by people who were grouping around a libertarian idea, indeed, something in the spirit of Elias Canetti's deliberations in the essay *Crowds and Power* (1960). The local event was supposed to be universal in the spirit of timeless relations between the power elite and a group of citizens, while maintaining the existential perspective – despite more than one hundred phantoms, they kept their distinctiveness.

However, the disponents of individual memory located its adequate expression in a different type of symbolism, conveyed through an expected, solemn dimension. This symbolism can be considered martyrological-religious, combined with the desire to gain visibility by dominating the surroundings with a vertical monument. The religious and martyrological codes were well known and



understood among the participants of the events. The first, religious, is associated with the peasant origins of the working-class society in Szczecin, the second was consistently inculcated as an identity narrative after the period of partitions from the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, mainly in schools and public events. In post-German and post-Protestant Szczecin, a cross, or a vertical monument containing a cross, clearly denotes the belonging of space, its imperious subordination. People expected the monument to clearly express the nature of their participation in the past, not a reflective or critical work. The dispute surrounding the monument of December '70 victims only superficially seemed to be concerned with aesthetic preferences. In essence, it was about interpreting the past and giving it the desired status.

On the one hand, there were artists, critics, and people of culture who used aesthetic and substantive arguments. On the other hand, there were emotionally driven people who, in large part, would be difficult to define as material beneficiaries of the transition period of 1989. Therefore, the conflict of these two groups produced an impression that a martyrological and religious monument worked for the latter group as a kind of symbolic compensation, or at least a way to confirm the conviction that their sacrifice had a deeper meaning, fitting in with the Polish martyrological tradition.

A confirmation of these theses can be found in the subsequent fate of the December '70 victims' monument. The *Phantoms (Fantomy)* design was rejected by the local government, and a new competition was announced, resolved in October 2003. A design by four architects: Elżbieta Maksymiuk, Norbert Białek, Tomasz Maksymiuk and Jerzy Szparadowski was selected. It bore the title *Paths (Ścieżki)* and was a kind of wide belt separating the square, made up of smaller iron bands. Sixteen of them, each of different length, stop abruptly with a distinct break. They symbolise the victims of December '70. The co-author of the work, Tomasz Maksymiuk, explained the concept as follows: "The victims of the events were not some heroes, but ordinary people. Hence our aversion to great pathos. We simply show the paths of life: some break off, while others roll on" (after Rembas, 2003).

It is worth noting the convergence of these two, awarded designs, with the concept of Oskar Hansen's team, which was submitted to an international competition for a monument commemorating the victims of Auschwitz. As Filip Springer (2013: 24) writes in his book *Zaczyn (Leaven)*:

The assumptions of the winning work are shocking. The authors do not offer anything more than crossing the whole area of the camp with a sixty-metre-wide and a kilometre-long asphalt belt. In it, barracks, wires, watchtowers and remains of crematoria are to be sunk. [...] The road – a closed wound from the beginning to the end, elevated just above the camp area, so as not to touch the cursed ground with the feet. One could only look, be silent and hope that all this nightmare will soon fall into dust. Only black asphalt will remain, after which we will be able to go further. A road that will allow us to go, but will not let us forget.

Jerzy Lipczyński, author of *Phantoms (Fantomy)*, admits to drawing his inspiration from the work and person of Oskar Hansen. In this design by four architects, the belt of *Paths (Ścieżki)*, a correspondence with Hansen's idea for the Auschwitz memorial is clearly visible. The belt was to "cross out" the square horizontally, showing, at the same time, the tragedy of death and the continuity of life, a path towards freedom. Playing with space and the universal meanings of unnatural forms was common to both Hansen's design and the Szczecin memorial concepts.

There is, of course, yet another common element – the story of their fate. The three designs were selected by respective competition juries, aroused admiration of professional critics and were rejected by the participants of the events or their discursive representatives. Ultimately, the authorities, under the pressure of individual memory managers, decided to give up the winning concept and implement a compromise.

The *Paths (Ścieżki)* design proposal met with a similar reaction as *Phantoms (Fantomy)*. Finally, on January 10, 2005, the Szczecin City Council resolved the issue of the monument between the four concepts: the two concepts mentioned above and the two submitted by Marian Jurczyk, the mayor of Szczecin. One of them was the so-called working class *pieta* by a Szczecin-based sculptor Ronin Walknowski, which was rejected from the outset (the work was ridiculed as a bastard of socialist realism, an image of drunks returning from an event, and even as a figure of homosexual relationship); another was the *Angel of Freedom (Anioł Wolności)* by Czesław Dźwigaj.

Eventually, the *Angel* won, which was considered an unsatisfactory, but necessary, compromise. The *Angel of Freedom (Anioł Wolności)* was unveiled on August 28, 2005. At first, it was exposed in the central part of the square, which focused on it. It is a figure with a transparent, uncomplicated symbolism. Unsurprisingly, the monument met with crushing criticism of professionals, artists, and architects. It was accused of being derivative, ridiculous (compared to Chopin carrying a cake), and gaudy (a candle was to burn in the inscription December '70, but I have never seen it).

The visibility of the monument changed after the construction of the new building of the Szczecin Philharmonic, in particular the Dialogue Center "Upheavals" (DCU) – the new Pavilion of the National Museum. The monument by Czesław Dźwigaj was moved from the central position closer to the eastern side of the square. Due to the correspondence of modern forms of the DCU and the philharmonic hall, the monument disappears, it is not perceived. It is treated as a phenomenon, but not as a focusing object. Contemplation and reproduction (which preserve memory and knowledge) are determined by the shape of buildings and the content of a permanent exhibition inside the DCU, which narrates in a political manner the breakthroughs in Szczecin's history after 1945.

Unrealised designs for the December '70 memorial have joined the collections of the National Museum in Szczecin. They are still of interest as proposals that universalise tragic historical events, conveyed in a valuable aesthetic form. Although

hidden, they are still visible. The monument, made under the pressure of memory managers, enjoys the spotlight only during the celebrations of official anniversaries. On other days, it fails to fulfill the function of the memory medium. Its message escapes in the banality of the figure, which resembles a scaled-up serial funeral production rather than an artistic achievement.

The members of Szczecin's local government and its elites were involved in this "game" of showing and hiding contemporary art, ultimately deciding not to let forms of contemporary art with a commemorative function to exist in public space. They chose a traditional solution, which fails to inspire deep reflection or further searching. 13 years after this decision was made, we can see that a wrong choice has been made. The will and taste of those who remembered were honored, forgetting that monuments are created primarily for the future. With the help of an artistic symbol, they are supposed to arouse vivid emotions in the next generations, allowing them to touch the tragedy of history.

As a post-scriptum, I would like to add a comment about the authors of unrealised designs. Jerzy Lipczyński withdrew from active participation in the artistic life of Szczecin and focused on academic work. Four architects successfully implement commercial designs as part of a jointly created office. In conversations with them, I sensed the resentment of the lost opportunity for contemporary visual art with commemorative function in Szczecin and, at the same time, the satisfaction that their works are still remembered and described. Their works live in historical and critical discourse, although they do not exist as visible objects.

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## Art, Memory and *Angel* by Czesław Dźwigaj

### Abstract

The article analyses the process of implementing the idea of commemorating the victims of December 70 in Szczecin. Disputes, discussions and decisions accompanying this monument are doubly symptomatic: they reveal a problem with the presence of contemporary art in public space, and the question of who and what should be the main purpose of commemorative sculpture. After 1989, the Szczecin agora reflected the political transition of the state, additionally characterised by the "short duration" complex (existence as a "Polish city" only after 1945). Art plays a role in ordering (and subordination) of public sphere, and, as such a tool (building politically handy identity symbols), it is perceived by the authorities. Its specificity, however, allows it to escape social and political control. The second area of consideration is the analysis of the relationship between commemorative function (desired by the founders) and the operation of contemporary art, in reference to the theory of cultural forms of memory. The three-dimensional urban game of visibility was played out in Szczecin around three public sculptures: two unrealised designs, and the final work by Czesław Dźwigaj.

**Keywords:** contemporary art in public space, art after communism, commemorative sculpture

**Słowa kluczowe:** sztuka współczesna w przestrzeni publicznej, sztuka po komunizmie, rzeźba pomnikowa

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## **Artiste Anonyme / Anonymous Conceptual Artist / Umjetnik u krizi: Goran Trbuljak's Names and Namelessness<sup>1</sup>**

*Sly as a fox and twice as quick: there are countless ways  
of 'making do.'*

Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984: 29)

“From time to time I stuck my finger through a hole in the door of the Modern Art Gallery without the management's knowledge” (Trbuljak, 1973: n.p). This short text, printed alternately in Croatian, English, or parallel translations, captions a photograph of a double wooden door decorated with geometric carvings [fig. 1]<sup>2</sup>. Deep shadow dominates the left side of the composition, indicating that the photo was taken outdoors. To the right of the shadow protrudes the curved sliver of artist Goran Trbuljak's finger. Dated 1969, the combination of text and image forms one of Trbuljak's first known works, made when the artist was twenty-one and a student in the graphics department at the Akademija likovnih umjetnosti in Zagreb, then part of the Yugoslav Socijalistička Republika Hrvatska (Croatia)<sup>3</sup>. Trbuljak

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is an excerpt from my in-progress dissertation “*Umjetnik radi: Stilinović and Trbuljak on Art, Work and Life.*” I would like to thank the organizers of the *Hide-and-Seek* conference; my fellow panelists Lada Nakonechna, Ralf Sander, and Barbara Tiberi; and Stephen Wright for his question regarding political stakes versus games of hide-and-see for their assistance in the development of this paper. Thank you also to my advisor Ann Reynolds, and to my writing group colleagues Jessi DiTillio and Francesca Balboni, for comments on earlier drafts of this text. Finally, thank you to Goran Trbuljak, as always, for your generosity and curiosity.

<sup>2</sup> I have opted here to refer to this language as “Croatian,” but it might be properly referred to as “Serbo-Croatian” as that is how it was known at the time of the text's printing in 1973. Then, Serbo-Croatian or *Srpsko-hrvatski* was one of three official languages of Yugoslavia (along with Macedonian and Slovenian). Today, these languages are generally understood as pluricentric, but are referred to by national variations.

<sup>3</sup> While in my dissertation I refer more frequently to the socio-political context and history of Yugoslavia in relation to the artists and artworks under discussion, these connections are not made as explicit in this article. Such references will mostly occur, where relevant, in the footnotes. It is important to note at the outset, however, a few details about



Fig. 1. Goran Trbuljak, *Kroz rupu na vratima...* (1969). Street action documentation  
Image courtesy Galerija Gregor Podnar

the particularities of Yugoslav socialism. In 1948, due to a perception of dictator Josip Broz Tito's insubordinate aspirations for power and autonomy in the Balkan region, Stalin kicked Yugoslavia out of the Cominform, isolating the fledgling country from the Soviet Bloc's financial assistance, and also from Soviet doctrine. In the years following 1948, Yugoslavia shifted from an emulation of Stalinist models like five-year planning and forced collectivization toward a system that strived for innovation, liberalism and independence for its citizens. In 1950 the first law establishing a self-management system was introduced. Self-management was based on a principle of social ownership of the means of production, and a hybridization of collectivist and cooperative styles in which worker councils were theoretically given autonomy to control state-owned operations and set wages and other policies independently and cooperatively. In practice, councils remained hierarchized and the system did not ensure true equity. Yugoslavia experienced economic success and stability by the 1960s and the quality of life in Yugoslav cities increased dramatically. Notably, Yugoslav citizens had passports and could travel freely. The perception of Yugoslavia as a hopeful alternative path within socialism was not entirely false, but did mask the country's problems. Poverty and illiteracy remained widespread in rural and less developed areas and republics. Thousands left Yugoslavia to find jobs as *Gastarbeiter* in Germany and elsewhere. Criticism of the

had noticed the hole in the door at some point in his walks through the city and, finding amusement and excitement in the idea of people passing by on busy Zrinjevac street noticing his gesture while they remained invisible to him (and he only slightly visible to them), later returned with photographer Nada Orel to document the action (Trbuljak, 2018)<sup>4</sup>.

Humorous and compact, the work typifies Trbuljak's practice, and foretold a career-long interest in breaching boundaries and poking fun. Today, it can also aptly symbolize a condition in the literature on the artist. While this work, and Trbuljak more generally, have often been understood primarily in relation to a critique of art institutions, both actually manifest an appeal to the street and the spontaneously constituted public of strangers that forms there<sup>5</sup>. The turn to the street as a site for art is perhaps a repudiation of the studio, gallery, and museum, but to understand the move solely as such does not allow adequately for the street's particular allure. Moreover, in this and other projects, Trbuljak exists in the gallery and on the street at once.

The course of Trbuljak's life as an artist has been marked by such a tendency to reject occupying a single position. Instead, he wanders – often vacillating between modes of behavior and styles of self-positioning. One of the primary swings manifested through Trbuljak's work has been between an ethic of self-effacement or self-concealment, and a fixation on his own name and signature<sup>6</sup>. Given this back and forth, Trbuljak demonstrates simultaneously the ways that certain forms of anonymity or namelessness can be a temporary liberation from the pressures of authorship and individuality, and the hazards of making a name for oneself as

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Yugoslav system, expressions of republican nationalism and other forms of dissent could be punished by losing one's job or imprisonment. From the beginning, art held an important place in socialist Yugoslavia. Soon after the Tito-Stalin split, socialist realism was no longer enforced. Resultantly, in Yugoslavia, there were no clear distinctions between official and unofficial art practice. Diverse forms of art were tolerated and granted government support, which did not mean that all artists were treated equally. In Yugoslavia, self-censorship, and more direct acts of suppression by the government both existed.

<sup>4</sup> The door is not the main entrance to the Moderna galerija, but the one to the Kabinet grafike on the side of the building. The same door is still in use today (absent the hole).

<sup>5</sup> For example, in the eighth chapter of Piotr Piotrowski's book *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989* the author uses Trbuljak as the primary example of Yugoslav conceptualism, and highlights works by Trbuljak that took the form of slogans about exhibitions, calling them the summation of Trbuljak's artistic contribution. Describing Trbuljak's project *O galerijama* (to be discussed later in this text), Piotrowski calls it a "radical critique, produced in the language of conceptual art," which posed epistemological questions about "the entire system of art." See P. Piotrowski (2009). *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*. A. Brzyski (transl.). London: Reaktion Books, p. 330.

<sup>6</sup> Lada Dražin has pointed out the centrality of the use of Trbuljak's name as a material in his art. See L. Dražin (1994). Goran Trbuljak – Anonymous Conceptual Artist. In: B. Stipančić (ed.). *Riječi i slike*. Zagreb: Soros Center for Contemporary Arts, pp. 86–87.

an artist<sup>7</sup>. For in addition to the voluntary, and playful, forms of obfuscation that can be linked to the artist, there are involuntary ones. First, there is the canonical obscurity that follows from being born in a small, former socialist country in the Balkans and, secondly, as alluded to above, the artist has been masked by an association with the limiting art-critical paradigms of both institutional critique and conceptual art.<sup>8</sup>

In this text, the benefits and pitfalls of Trbuljak's particular forms of invisibility are explored through a discussion of works made from the late 1960s through the early 1970s. Throughout, the writing of Michel de Certeau offers a theoretical framework for interpreting Trbuljak's approach in art that, beyond art world critique, affords insight into the artist's engagement with the street, the body, and his insistent liminality. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau describes forms of practice he calls tactical. A tactic is a way in which generally powerless subjects, through fleeting seizures and everyday gestures, regain time, pleasure and agency from an otherwise controlled and hostile environment. These gestures, however, like Trbuljak's in his art, lack place and permanence. As de Certeau writes of a tactic, "Whatever it wins it does not keep" (1984: xix). Trbuljak's art, including his frequent plays on anonymity and self-concealment, is tactical in nature. It is how he has "made do" within urban, political and art world systems. Reading Trbuljak's work alongside de Certeau's notion of tactical practice creates space for an art

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<sup>7</sup> Izabel Galliera has similarly argued for the importance of anonymity in the street practice of Hungarian artist Gábor Tóth. Drawing on the artist's own comments on the subject of projects such as *Food Vending Machine* from 1980 in which the artist bought items from a vending machine and then bartered with passers-by to exchange the food for personal items, Galliera writes, "Tóth saw in the concept of anonymity a powerful way to undermine the institutionalized canon of art history, particularly its Modernist myth, which values the Artist as the sole creator of an Artwork." See I. Galliera (2017). *Socially Engaged Art After Socialism: Art and Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe*. London: I.B. Tauris, p. 51.

<sup>8</sup> These two impediments to visibility are actually linked, as artists from former socialist (Central and Eastern European, Balkan, etc.) countries are often pigeonholed into a singular relationship to art via dominant political narratives. This happens often through a tendency for survey texts and exhibitions aimed at forming and promoting a region-specific canon of artists at the expense of breadth of examples and depth of analysis. A related tendency is for artworks by artists living under socialist regimes to be examined only through a lens of authoritarian oppression or protest, while the nuances of, for example, formal choices are overlooked. As Ruth Noack has written of the lack of aesthetic consideration in the discourse on the performance work *Trokut* (1979) by Trbuljak's colleague in Zagreb Sanja Iveković, "...isn't it rather obvious that the existence of aesthetic discourse or lack thereof must be attributed to something other than the inherent features of an artwork? There certainly are contexts in which references to the formal aspects of a work does not discredit its political character, whereas in others there does not even seem to be a language with which to start. Isn't it the case that hegemonic art contexts have less trouble discussing aesthetics with politics and politics with aesthetics than communities that are marginalised?" See R. Noack (2013). *Triangle*. London: Afterall, p. 18. In the case of Trbuljak, institutional critique becomes a kind of political critique by proxy, as the entire art world of former Yugoslavia was run by the state.



history that values the small, the self-effacing, the anonymous, the unsure, and the impermanent, as much as the bold and the radical.

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*To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper.*

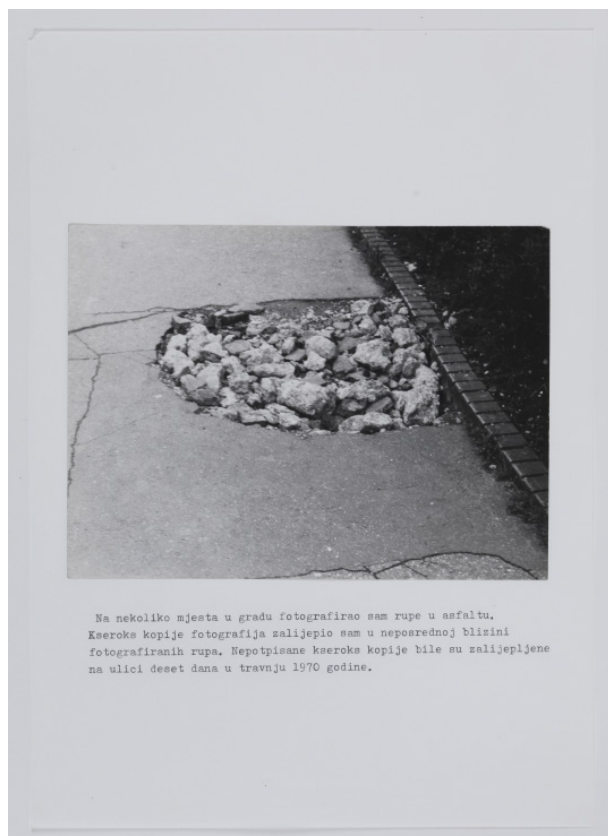
Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984:103)

In Trbuljak's early work he used the streets of Zagreb as a space to explore and experiment<sup>9</sup>. These projects chronicle his frequent travels through the city by foot and by tram and reveal both the point of view of a young artist beginning to establish a practice, and the intimate texture of small moments enjoyed in the city. In one, from April 1970, Trbuljak photographed holes and loose patches of asphalt in the street in several places around Zagreb, then produced photocopies of these images and placed the reproductions on the street near to where the original images were taken, leaving the photocopies on the street for ten days [fig. 2]. Pointing, twice, to the textures in the asphalt by juxtaposing them with their photographic representation, Trbuljak attempted to wake the attention of passersby (Trbuljak, 2016). It is striking the amount of care Trbuljak took in producing this ephemeral, and entirely anonymous, intervention. Walking by the places in the street, returning to photograph them, producing the prints, returning to place them on the street: his actions dilated the experience of a momentary observation into an undertaking that likely spanned multiple days.

In comparison to his Yugoslav contemporaries who also occupied the street as a space of artistic activity – such as Croatian performance artist Tomislav Gotovac

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<sup>9</sup> The atmosphere of Zagreb in the late 1960s and early 1970s at the time when Trbuljak began doing his street projects was a time of transformation in the city, both in terms of government-led city-planning, and citizen- and artist-led protest and intervention. Zagreb was steadily expanding in size and population as citizens from villages moved to the city for work and education. Newspaper headlines frequently and enthusiastically announced the arrival of taller, and more modern buildings to the skyline. At this time, Zagreb experienced both left-wing and student protests and protests associated with the Croatian Spring, a movement demanding greater representation and autonomy for Croatia, and Croatian language and literature, within the Yugoslav federation. It was this mood of constant change and negotiation between citizens and the state that made Trbuljak, and many other artists and peers, feel free and inclined to act in the space of the city. Performances, happenings and less categorizable art actions on the street are a through line of alternative and avant-garde practice with a deep history in Zagreb. Maja Fowkes and Ivana Bago have made claims for the influence of contemporary protest culture, as well as dissatisfaction with atomized, characterless socialist urbanism, in these projects. See I. Bago (2017). *The City as a Space of Plastic Happening: From Grand Proposals to Exceptional Gestures in the Art of the 1970s in Zagreb*. *Journal of Urban History*. No. 44:1, pp. 26–53; M. Fowkes (2015). *The Green Bloc: Neo-avant-garde Art and Ecology under Socialism*. Budapest: Central European University Press.



**Fig. 2.** Goran Trbuljak, *Na nekoliko mjesta u gradu...* (1970). Street action documentation  
Image courtesy Galerija Gregor Podnar

in his 1971 streaking action in Belgrade or in the Slovenian group OHO's 1968 work *Triglav*, in which the artist's presence in public space (naked, humorous, surprising, etc.) essentially constituted the art – Trbuljak avoided drawing attention to himself<sup>10</sup>. The documentation of his projects lacks any observable trace of the

<sup>10</sup> In her book on the history of performance art in Eastern Europe from the 1960s to the present, Amy Bryzgel discusses both Gotovac's and OHO's projects in terms of the political and national discursive possibilities of the artist presenting their body in public. She refers to Gotovac's naked sprint through Belgrade, filmed as part of the production of Lazar Strojanić's film *Plastični Isus*, as what was probably the first streaking action in the region. Bryzgel argues that while the phenomenon of the streak had emerged in the context of the sexual revolution, for example, in the United States, to perform one in Yugoslavia where there had been no such revolution was a truly shocking act. In the case of the OHO project, which took place in Ljubljana's Zvezda park, the name of the work refers to the mountain Triglav, the highest peak in Slovenia, and a symbol of the nation, which is today pictured on Slovenia's flag. Triglav can be translated into English as "three head" (referring to its three peaks). In the performance, Milenko Matanović, David Nez, Drago Dellabernardina exposed their three heads in public, arranged into a loose triangle formation, with their

artist, as he was the one who typically took the photographs<sup>11</sup>. While choosing the public visibility of the street as the location of his actions, Trbuljak simultaneously assumed the invisibility of anonymity as a position of identity. Made for the enjoyment of strangers, who were not intentionally seeking an art experience, a name became associated with many of Trbuljak's street works only when their documentation was published in the catalogue of his 1973 solo exhibition at the Galerija suvremene umjetnosti.

Trbuljak's projects on the street can also be differentiated from other artists using public space as a site of artmaking due to their unassuming intentions. In contrast to, for example, the revolutionary aims of Situationist urban practices like the *dérive*, Trbuljak's animus in his early projects was to share his observations with others, and hope that they might delight in the smallest details of urban experience as he did (Trbuljak, 2016)<sup>12</sup>. Trbuljak's street practice might in this way, in its slightness and subtlety, initially feel apolitical<sup>13</sup>. However, de Certeau's theory of tactical everyday practice opens up different interpretive possibilities.

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bodies covered in black fabric—thus impersonating the mountain in a humorous public performance, spoofing this significant national monument. See A. Bryzgel (2017). *Performance Art in Eastern Europe since 1960*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 34–35, and 126–127.

<sup>11</sup> The project referenced at the beginning of this text is a notable exception, along with his project *Referendum* from 1972, photographed by Petar Dabac.

<sup>12</sup> The connections between Trbuljak's art on the street and Situationist practice are numerous, including the artist's interest in walking, his sense of play, and the arrangement of scenarios for strangers on the street to encounter. However, Guy Debord described the Situationist movement in 1963 as manifesting "simultaneously as an artistic avant-garde, as an experimental investigation of the free construction of daily life, and finally as a contribution to the theoretical and practical articulation of a new revolutionary contestation" (1989: 148). It is in this final component, a crucial one, that Trbuljak's art differs. Trbuljak has never articulated a totalizing or goal-oriented theory of politics or art in the way of Debord, and his art does not seem to invite one (see note 13). For this translation see G. Debord (1989). *The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics or Art*. In: E. Sussman (Ed.), *On the Passage of a Few People through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: The Situationist International 1957–1972*. T. Levin (transl.) Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 148–153.

<sup>13</sup> The question of the political character of street practice, performance and happenings in the context of socialist Europe has been a central question in recent literature. Klara Kemp-Welch's *Antipolitics: Reticence as Dissidence under Post-Totalitarian Rule 1965–1989* has been a key source in this discourse. Through case studies of six artists in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, Kemp-Welch traces how attitudes toward politics and political engagement shifted from the 50s through the 80s, and especially how certain artists' forms of refusal of political content articulated a mode of complex political critique. Most relevant to the discussion of Trbuljak is Kemp-Welch's chapter on Jiří Kovanda's "reticent" street practice in Prague. Similarly to Trbuljak, Kovanda created art in public spaces, but with a diffident relationship to interaction with his public audience. In *I Hide* (1977) Kovanda attempted to hide himself in various public places in Prague. In 'Contact' 3 September 1977, he walked down the street intentionally rubbing his body into passers-by while being documented. Kemp-Welch refers to these projects a "litmus test of the openness of the Czechoslovak public sphere" (2014: 198) as well as a means for Kovanda to communicate his desire

De Certeau defines a tactic's relationship to the vaguely outlined "order of things" as lacking "any illusion that it will change any time soon" (1984: 26). Rather, this order is temporarily occupied by alternative social and moral values through the invisible, ephemeral actions of ordinary people. Therefore, walking in the city, for example, has a kind of political value even when absent a political motive. As a speaker appropriates language in the creation of unique utterances, interpretations and improvisations, as the reader temporarily inhabits a text (like a rented room), the walker finds their body's pathway in the city.

Another of Trbuljak's projects points precisely to such momentary hijackings of order. The work consists of a photograph of a staircase, accompanied by a text that in English reads, "A bang on this pipe produces a sound different from the sounds of the neighboring pipes" (Trbuljak, 1973: n.p.). Again, Trbuljak is not pictured, and in this case he is not made the subject of the statement, as in other projects when he writes, "I stuck my finger..." etc. His presence in the artwork is irrelevant by design, except insofar as it tracks that when he walked past this staircase, probably a number of times, he used its handrail for an unintended purpose, striking it in different places with his hand or another object, taking note of the sounds produced, and deciding that these observations were worthy of sharing (Trbuljak, 2016). These kinds of idle, exploratory gestures, not unique to Trbuljak, and not in any way revolutionary, are also not insignificant. They represent moments of playful, active embodiment accessible not only to the artist, but anyone able to walk down the street. Trbuljak's stance of anonymity, although ultimately temporary, emphasizes this accessibility.

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*Called Everyman (a name that betrays the absence of a name),  
this anti-hero is thus also Nobody...*

Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984: 2)

The self-effacing proclivities present in Trbuljak's street practice manifested concurrently through projects in which he employed pseudonyms Trbuljak, for example, made two submissions to Klaus Groh's 1971 compendium of alternative art from Central and Eastern Europe, *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa*. The first, published under his own name, was a collection of three works representing objects in successive states of change through photography and drawing: a series of four

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for contact with the public, since "Being an unofficial artist in Prague was in many respects equivalent to being in hiding..." (2014: 207). Trbuljak's self-effacing tendencies must be differentiated from Kovanda's in this regard. Since official and unofficial distinctions did not exist in Yugoslavia (at least not as clearly as elsewhere in socialist Europe) Trbuljak did not necessarily need to hide his activities. He was able to exhibit, received government prizes, and was a member of the Udruženje likovnih umjetnika Hrvatske (the Croatian republican artist's union).

self-portraits of the artist pouting and squinting into the camera, taken once per year from 1968 to 1971; a collection of six drawings of circles representing an apple, first alone, then pierced by wire, then wrapped in wire; and four photographs of gentle waves breaking onto a stony beach, each taken at the same time of day four days in a row in July of 1969. Trbuljak's second contribution, submitted under the pseudonym Grgur Kulijaš, consisted of three handwritten project proposals. Each was a conditional statement, beginning, "If any of my three projects is published in Klaus Groh's book..." followed by one of three outcomes: "I will be the happiest man in the world," "I will enter into history," "I will no longer have to do conceptual art" (Groh, 1971: n.p.)<sup>14</sup>. These two projects manifest a push and pull between concealing and revealing. In one, Trbuljak presents himself by name and by image. In the other, he performs what he has referred to as an act of fraud (1973).

In November of the same year, Trbuljak had his first solo exhibition (at the Galerija Studentskog centra), and performed yet another act of simultaneous concealing and revealing. Art historian Branka Stipančić has written that when moving from the anonymity of the street to the visibility of the gallery, Trbuljak was forced to negotiate his values as an artist by acquiring a name (1994). Indeed, this negotiation – to have a name or not, when and where, which name (already present in *Aktuelle Kunst*) – has continued for much of the rest of Trbuljak's career. His solution in the case of the exhibition was to display a single copy of a poster as the sole content of the show. The poster featured a smug, black-and-white photo of the artist and bore the slogan, "Ne želim pokazati ništa novo i originalno" ("I do not want to show anything new or original"). While today this poster is one of Trbuljak's best known and most-discussed works, the critical response in Zagreb at the time was lukewarm<sup>15</sup>. By presenting his name and face along with this statement in the context of a public exhibition, Trbuljak had exposed himself to critique.

The reviews Trbuljak received reflected the attitudes of some critics at that time towards an artform becoming increasingly popular among the younger generation of artists across Yugoslavia. These artists produced texts, proposals, performances and installations as art. Their work was initially called conceptual art and

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<sup>14</sup> Translation by author.

<sup>15</sup> This poster and its slogan have been referenced frequently in surveys of Croatian, Yugoslav and Eastern European art. In addition to the above reference from Piotrowski (note 5) see, for example, B. Stipančić and S. Cramer (1993). *The Horse Who Sings: Radical Art from Croatia*. Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, p. 5; S. Uzelac (2002). *Art as the Trace of Culture*. In: T. Milovac (Ed.). *The Misfits: Conceptualist Strategies in Croatian Contemporary Art*. Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary Art, pp. 24-25; L. Kovač (2003). *Impossible Photographs*. In: D. Djurić D. and M. Šuvaković (Eds.). *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991*. Cambridge: MIT Press, p. 288; and I. Bago (2014). *Dematerialization and Politicization of the Exhibition: Curation as Institutional Critique in Yugoslavia during the 1960s and 1970s*. In: *Museum and Curatorial Studies Review*. No. 2, p. 21.

later became associated with the regionally-specific and theoretically-expansive term *Nova umjetnička praksa* (New Art Practice)<sup>16</sup>. As the reviews showed, while there was a general consensus that conceptual art had something to do with the primacy of mental activity, there were differing judgments about such activity's worthiness as art. Critic Tonko Maroević wrote of Trbuljak's gesture, that it had sparked neither approval, nor protests, nor any particular excitement, owing to the fact that it had been somewhat expected (1971). He explained that Trbuljak's association with conceptual art, defined by Maroević as specious efforts at purity and mental abstraction that paled in comparison to the achievements of avant-garde artists like Malevich, had set this expectation.

In contrast to Maroević's condescending disapproval, Belgrade-based critic and curator Ješa Denegri commended Trbuljak's work and quickly became a champion of the young artist. In his writing on Trbuljak, Denegri defined conceptual art as both "pure mental activity" (1971: 22) and "a medium of direct critique of the system of art" (1977: 22) in which the artist could not rely on the innovations of the past<sup>17</sup>. In a series of essays and exhibitions featuring Trbuljak, Denegri praised the artist's "search for radical conclusions" and his abandonment of "all possible codes of aesthetic value" (1971: 22)<sup>18</sup>. He also established a list of works by the artist, and a way of interpreting them, that today remains orthodoxy. This list includes the artist's commentaries on the perceived pressures and vacuities of exhibitions that he presented on posters in art shows in the 70s, along with other works that most resemble forms of art world critique<sup>19</sup>.

While Trbuljak himself referenced conceptual art by name in a few projects, his submission to *Aktuelle Kunst* as Kulijaš might suggest that he did not brandish the association as a badge of honor, so much as present it tentatively, and experimentally, like a fake ID. Other projects and statements by the artist later in the decade confirm this possible skepticism. Between 1971 and 1973 Trbuljak sent

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<sup>16</sup> See M. Susovski (Ed.). (1978). *Nova umjetnička praksa*. Zagreb: Galerija suvremene umjetnosti.

<sup>17</sup> Translation by author.

<sup>18</sup> Translation by author. It is clear not only from Denegri's writing on Trbuljak, but on the entire movement of *Nova umjetnička praksa* that this group of artists and their critique of the art system was particularly important and inspiring to him. Although he wrote on a multitude of artistic phenomena, he returned time and again to these figures. In his essay from the *Nova umjetnička praksa* catalogue, Denegri writes triumphantly of the young generation of artists that they had been motivated "by the need of the subject for self-expression and self-affirmation in an active and contradictory spiritual reality which is always full of tension." See J. Denegri (1978). Art in the Past Decade. In: M. Susovski (Ed.). *Nova umjetnička praksa*. Zagreb: Galerija suvremene umjetnosti, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> These slogan works include "Ne želim pokazati ništa novo i originalno" (1971), "Činjenica da je nekom dana mogućnost da napravi izložbu važnija je od onoga što će na toj izložbi biti pokazano" (The fact that someone has been given the possibility to make an exhibition is more important than what will be shown) and "Ovom izložbom održavam kontinuitet u svom radu" (By this exhibition I maintain continuity in my work).

out postcards with the words “Anonymous Conceptual Artist” printed across the front. This moniker can be read in two ways. Firstly, that Trbuljak did not yet have a name in international conceptualism. Secondly, perhaps, that Trbuljak felt there was a certain anonymity associated with this term. In a 1979 interview, Trbuljak referenced a *ladica* (drawer) system in art criticism (Sinković, 1979). Once his works were linked with a category, he felt as though they had been filed away in a drawer, invisible behind a label. Although the genre title of conceptual art was useful in making sense of a current zeitgeist for Moroević and Denegri, it has grown increasingly ineffectual over time. While initially associated with mental and linguistic activity and the “dematerialization” of the art object (Lippard, Chandler, 1968), the term has subsequently been stretched at times to encompass nearly all types of non-traditional artworks and expanded in regards to political, international, affective, and spiritual associations<sup>20</sup>. Given the unfixed nature of the term, especially in the case of an artist like Trbuljak, already subject to the multiple forms of anonymity outlined above, references to conceptualism become a substitute for, rather than a tool of, interpretive engagement, something that obscures rather than elucidates<sup>21</sup>. Attending more closely to the specificities of his artworks and considering alternative pathways to interpretation are necessary.

Take the example Trbuljak’s *O galerijama*, in which the artist first used the French pseudonym *Artiste Anonyme*. In 1972, Trbuljak temporarily relocated from Zagreb to Paris, where he had been accepted to study painting at the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts on a prize from the Yugoslav government. Once in Paris, he did not spend his days behind a canvas, or even attending classes. Instead, he visited the Louvre, went often to the cinema and, as he had done in Zagreb, wandered the

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<sup>20</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, the term “conceptualism” has been stretched to the point of being often incoherent. Borrowing from Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper’s arguments about the word “identity,” I claim that conceptualism has been strained simultaneously by its “strong” uses (those evoking a specific form of philosophically-engaged practice involving text, numbers, grids, and connections to the cities of New York and London and so on) and “weak” ones (those that attempt to expand “conceptualism” using various qualifiers, while ultimately remaining beholden to the “strong” definition). See D. Smith (2016). *Death as Catalysis: Adrian Piper’s What Will Become of Me. KAPSULA*. No. 3, pp. 6–15. Texts offering expansions and reconsiderations of conceptualism include L. Camnitzer, J. Farver, R. Weiss and L. Beke (Eds.). (1999). *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*. New York: Queens Museum of Art; A. Alberro (2003). *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*. Cambridge: MIT Press; P. Eleey (2009). *The Quick and the Dead*. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center; and E. Meltzer (2013). *Systems We Have Loved: Conceptual Art, Affect, and the Antihumanist Turn*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. My intention is not to cast judgments on the worthiness and relevance of these texts, but rather on the feasibility of continuing to use the terms *conceptual art* and *conceptualism* in regards to Trbuljak.

<sup>21</sup> Most references to the artist in articles, books, catalogues and newspapers use this term, typically as part of an extended title boasting Trbuljak as the most significant Croatian conceptual artist. See, for example the review: Izložba Gorana Trbuljaka u Galeriji Rigo. April 26, 2016. Culturenet.hr, <http://www.culturenet.hr/default.aspx?id=70183>, Last accessed June 30, 2018.

city (Trbuljak, 2016). Time and again, Trbuljak never quite takes up the role he seems meant to fill, defying expectations of traditional artistic activity and of alternative art activity, as well.

Given that Trbuljak was in Paris on a government scholarship, ostensibly studying painting, his actions take on the flavor of something de Certeau calls *la perruque* (1984: 25). De Certeau defines *la perruque* as small acts of time theft or diversions of company resources towards a worker's desires. When the worker borrows their boss' tools to create something of their own design, or writes a love letter on the clock, they introduce new values into dominant economic and social frameworks. Trbuljak took this opportunity in Paris to grapple with what it meant to occupy a new city, in a new region and a new socio-political system<sup>22</sup>. In Paris, Trbuljak encountered new contexts of art exhibition and sale, contending for the first time with independent, commercial galleries<sup>23</sup>. He also contended, once again, with anonymity. Although he had toyed with anonymous interventions and pseudonyms in Zagreb, Trbuljak had subsequently made a name for himself in Yugoslavia as a provocative young artist, while in Paris he enjoyed no such currency.

Between October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1972 and January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1973 Trbuljak visited nine Paris galleries and museums and repeated a set of prescribed actions<sup>24</sup>. He walked in the door, and without introducing himself or stating his purpose, requested to speak to the director. He then handed over a typewritten sheet of paper with a small photograph of the façade of the gallery pasted onto it. Below the photograph, uneven, typewritten text bore the date, the name of the gallery, and closed with a question, "Voulez-vous exposer ce travail dans votre galerie?" (Would you like to show this work in your gallery?) At the bottom of the page the director was prompted to respond with one of three options: "OUI," "NON," or "PEUT ETRE" (yes, no, or maybe). The bottom right corner of each page was signed ARTISTE

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<sup>22</sup> In an interview published in the catalogue *Living Art on the Edge of Europe* Trbuljak is quoted on this matter, "I was aware of my position as a foreigner, totally anonymous. I had nothing to show because what I did in another context could not function in Paris. My work probably meant nothing to Western Europeans." See G. Trbuljak (2006). Goran Trbuljak talked to Branka Stipančić. In: N. Zonneberg and E. van Straaten (Eds). *Living Art on the Edge of Europe*. Otterlo: Kröller-Müller Museum, p. 56.

<sup>23</sup> There existed a system and hierarchy of sale in Yugoslavia, but it took very different forms than in a city like Paris. Artworks were purchased by the state out of exhibitions organized by artist unions, and there were also *prodajni* (sales) exhibitions and galleries, including the Prodajna galerija founded in Belgrade in 1963, and the exhibition that Želimir Košćević organized in summer 1966 with the intention of selling artworks to tourists and visitors to Croatia.

<sup>24</sup> I am intentionally excluding from my count of galleries, and below the count of affirmative responses, the sheet addressed to Galerie des Locataires, or Tenant's gallery, which Trbuljak collaborated in running with Ida Biard (another transplant from Zagreb to Paris). Ivana Bago has used this particular sheet as a way to discuss the paradigm of hospitality in the operation of Biard's nomadic, strongly anti-capitalist, curatorial project. See I. Bago (2012). A Window and a Basement: Negotiating Hospitality at La Galerie Des Locataires and Podroom – The Working Community of Artists. In: *ARTMargins*, No. 1:2–3, pp. 116–146.



ANONYME. On some days Trbuljak only approached one gallery, and on others he visited at least five. Overall, he received two affirmations of interest, five rejections, one maybe, and one no response.

Denegri wrote in 1977 that Trbuljak's work highlighted that galleries serve, "to stabilize and neutralize certain orientations of art" while maintaining a status quo (1977: 22)<sup>25</sup>. Resultantly, the anonymous artist "stays outside the system of cultural circulation" (Denegri, 1977: 22)<sup>26</sup>. Denegri actually exaggerated the outcome of the survey in his essay to further these claims, writing that it resulted in an entirely negative response. Denegri's statements on the conservatism of the gallery system as a whole may be uncontroversial, but, truly, how were the gallerists supposed to respond to Trbuljak's questionnaire? Who was this young man refusing to introduce himself while requesting a signed response to a survey of uncertain origin and motive? What was the "work" referred to on the survey? Given the circumstances, any ambivalence on the part of the people working in the galleries seems justified, and the fact that he received any affirmations of interest might evidence a relative lack of conservatism.

Such ambiguities in the persistent presentation of Trbuljak's project as "radical critique" (Piotrowski, 2009: 330) do not undermine its value, but rather generate opportunities to reconsider the implications of *O galerijama*. In contrast to the notion of "pure mental activity" (Denegri, 1971: 22), how might Trbuljak's art's connection to the body, so clearly demonstrated in his street practice, be brought into sharper focus?<sup>27</sup> From the work of taking the initial photographs of the galleries, to moving between them after what were probably brief encounters, the project mostly consisted of walking on the street, and not confronting the gallery.

*O galerijama* also opens up broader contextual considerations, among them Trbuljak's own position as a recent transplant to the city. In the project, anonymity undeniably protected the artist's body by masking Trbuljak's foreignness. Put in this light, Trbuljak's travels through Paris bear resemblance to the works of émigré artists made during the same period. In 1970, the Mexican-born artist Felipe Ehrenberg, who lived in London from 1968 through 1974, produced *Tube-O-Nauts' Travels*, a project in which he and a collaborator explored the London underground for nearly 18 consecutive hours, transferring 26 times, traveling on every line of the subway during the course of one day, and stopping just short of their goal of exiting through the same station they originally entered due to physical exhaustion (Mayor, 1972)<sup>28</sup>. Ehrenberg documented *Tube-O-Nauts* through photography, audio recordings, maps, and lists of notable headlines and advertisements encountered. Trbuljak's and Ehrenberg's projects share a nomadic, furtive, and anonymous quality. While each simultaneously fits within a critical discourse of conceptualism

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<sup>25</sup> Translation by author.

<sup>26</sup> Translation by author.

<sup>27</sup> Translation by author.

<sup>28</sup> Ehrenberg's collaborator was Rodolfo Alcaraz, identified as "Laus."

by using text, systems and data, the projects also call to mind displacement and isolation, play and exploration. They are both tactical approaches to “making do” in situations of artmaking, urban space, and relocation.

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In 2004, Trbuljak was featured in an exhibition titled *Kurze Karrieren (Short Careers)* at the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig in Vienna, featuring eleven artists and one artist collective who all “withdrew from the official art world, each in their own way” (Neuburger, Saxenhuber, 2004: 11). The catalogue entry on Trbuljak begins with a description of *Artiste en Crise 1981*, the name of a photographic poster work, exhibition, and arguably Trbuljak’s last pseudonym, from 1981, in which his outstretched hands (captured with a Xerox machine) appear posed in a gesture of supplication or surrender, also referred to by the Croatian title *Umjetnik u krizi*. The author of the entry frames the work as a turning point for the artist: the beginning of his work as a cameraman after the art world turned away from conceptualism, leaving the artist disillusioned.

While the text in the *Kurze Karrieren* catalogue implies that Trbuljak essentially went into hiding starting in the 1980s, the artist’s declaration of artistic crisis was not so sudden or total a retreat, but rather something more performative. The late 1970s and early 1980s saw Trbuljak moving professionally towards graphic design and cinematography, though by the end of the decade he was already participating in gallery shows in addition to these occupations, and has continued to produce photographs, posters and other artworks into the present. Trbuljak’s reasons for pursuing cinematography and graphic design were initially practical, he was seeking a means of employment after, as he put it in 1979, “It became clear to me that I couldn’t live off of amusing only myself and no one else” (Sinković, 1979: 12)<sup>29</sup>. Cinematography was chosen over directing or other aspects of film since Trbuljak wanted, at first, to make a clear separation between what he saw as a craft and a day job and his artistic practice (Trbuljak, 2018)<sup>30</sup>. As a cinematographer, Trbuljak’s concerns were entirely visual, oriented primarily toward the framing of light and space. He also chose a role that, while essential, is often peripheral, and nameless, in comparison to that of the director and actors. In this way, Trbuljak’s crisis was not entirely a break with his sensibilities. As an artist, Trbuljak seems to have always moved through the world keenly observant, with an attraction for small details that he shares with others, while, as a rule, maintaining a distance, often through a tendency to conceal himself through anonymity or pseudonyms.

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<sup>29</sup> Translation by author.

<sup>30</sup> Trbuljak’s personal and artistic crisis, not coincidentally, corresponded with a national and economic crisis in Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was unable to begin paying back foreign loans taken out primarily during the 70s. Inflation rose dramatically, while the standard of living steadily declined in the final years of the 70s and early years of the 80s.

Trbuljak's recent work has been particularly marked by a self-deprecating tone. In a poster work from 2006–2008, Trbuljak reflected on the continuation of his anonymous status with variations on the text: "Old and depressive anonymous is looking for a permanent display place in some nice new art museum space" [fig. 3]. However, he has actually always held a place, if slightly outside, occupying a zone whose consolation is that a kind of freedom might exist there in equal proportion to the frustrations of anonymity.



Fig. 3. Goran Trbuljak, *Untitled* (2006–2008). Silk prints mounted on canvas, each panel 71 x 51.5 cm. Image courtesy Galerija Gregor Podnar

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## **Artiste Anonyme / Anonymous Conceptual Artist / Umjetnik u krizi: Goran Trbuljak's Names and Namelessness**

### **Abstract**

Goran Trbuljak (b. 1948) is recognized as one of the central figures of Yugoslav *Nova umjetnička praksa* (New Art Practice), primarily for his early works that engaged in a questioning of the status of the figure of the artist and the institution of the exhibition. This article focuses on the centrality of various forms of self-concealment, primarily anonymity and the use of pseudonyms, in Trbuljak's art. I also discuss what I refer to as the involuntary obfuscation that has come through Trbuljak's association with conceptual art and institutional critique, labels that have tended to block rather than advance the discussion of his practice. I urge new paths to interpretation through considerations of Trbuljak's interest in the street, walking, the body, and his insistence on a position liminality, never quite committing himself to one particular role, ideology or space. I refer to Michel de Certeau's notions of the *tactic* and *la perruque* from *The Practice of Everyday Life* as a way to understand the political dimensions of Trbuljak's tendencies.

**Keywords:** Goran Trbuljak, performance, walking art

**Słowa kluczowe:** Goran Trbuljak, performans, sztuka chodzenia

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## The Private Hidden Art of Janusz Kaczorowski

*Janusz Kaczorowski says his bike always stops five metres before the finish line*

Julian Kornhauser (1973: 48)

Janusz Kaczorowski (1941–1987), a Krakow artist and poet, survived in the memory of members of the local artistic community as an extraordinary figure. In his concept of hidden art, expressed in the so-called *The Private Manifesto of Hidden Art (Manifest prywatny sztuki ukrytej)*, which he embodied in his life and art practice, Kaczorowski proclaimed the need to abandon art presentation practices altogether. He claimed that the need for presentation stems from the sense of weakness of the work and artist who are seeking legitimation. In this way, he undermined the institutional structure of the art world, and the format of exhibition. His gestures of withdrawal gained additional power of expression. The concept was created in the 1970s, in the times of the Polish People's Republic. Dominated by the images and symbols of totalitarian rule, the public sphere inspired him, and Lenin became a peculiar leitmotiv of Kaczorowski's work. He used it in graphics and spatial objects, including the unpreserved work entitled *Mausoleum*. These images are saturated with non-propaganda content and can be read as a subversive allegory of everyday life in Poland at that time. Kaczorowski's artistic achievements and theoretical thought, preserved to this day only in several existing works and written fragments, display affinities with conceptual art from the mature period, when artists researched messages generated by mass media. Janusz Kaczorowski, transforming the language of the surrounding pop culture, developed the idea of absent and hidden art, which is nevertheless important in the life of a person and society.

**Krakow *szopka* maker, dental technician, circus performer, assistant**

The collection of photographs of the Historical Museum of the City of Krakow contains a black and white photograph of a Krakow *szopka* [nativity scene] bearing

the reference number 2580 / F / IX<sup>1</sup>. Based on the photograph, it is difficult to determine the dimensions of the cardboard structure [fig. 1]. Most probably, it was not large – as for a Krakow *szopka*, of course. Five towers inspired by those of St. Mary's Church at the Main Square, shiny domes on drums, inspired by the Sigismund Chapel. The whole is dotted with ornaments, flags, and balconies, with staffage in addition: figures of small people dressed in Krakow traditional style. In a word, everything that a Krakow *szopka* should be and what a conditioned avant-garde artist despises as a standard. The photo documents the *szopka*, which received the second prize at the 25<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Krakow Szopka Competition, which took place on December 8, 1967. The author is Janusz Kaczorowski, 26, a student of ASP [Academy of Fine Arts].



**Fig. 1.** The 25<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Nativity Scene Competition, 6 December 1967, szopka no. 79, 2<sup>nd</sup> prize, author: Kaczorowski Janusz, 26, Academy of Arts student. Collection of the Historical Museum of the City of Krakow

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<sup>1</sup> Photo by Józef Korzeniowski, the collections of the Historical Museum of the City of Kraków, sign. 2580/F/IX.

I am looking for solid reasons to treat this work by Kaczorowski as something more than a curious hobby that enriches the life story of a conceptual artist. On the basis of the reconstruction of his life and work, I assume that he was searching reality – also its non-artistic part – for creative actions that have not yet been incorporated into the art reserve. John Roberts' reflections might shed some light on this attitude. Roberts, author of a study on the concept of *de-skilling*, investigated the history of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century avant-garde from the perspective of the development of the artist's workshop as well as adaptation of new, sometimes mechanical technologies into the artistic and sometimes the amateur, and followed the definition of authorship from the time of the *ready-made* to the *outsourcing* of the production of artistic objects, and concluded that even examples of non-materialised art, or art functioning on the basis of innovative forms of production, did not give up the traditional artistic sensibility, whose formulas are still developing along with the sensibility of viewers (Roberts, 2007). According to this fairly universal statement, Kaczorowski reached for media related to everyday life exploration, such as flag and band – associated with manifestations, rallies or police bullying. There is no doubt that the construction of a traditional nativity scene requires craft skills, but they are not typical for artists and the final object was as alien to the art field in the 1960s as it is today. The *szopka* creates additional methodological problems, which are defined by several negative facts: it does not exist – only photographic documentation has survived, it is also unknown in the artworld – there are no known comments from the period about it, and it is unknown whether it was intended as a work of art. The *szopka* is and is not there. The *szopka* is in the field of art and beyond. *Unknown* and *not preserved* are the most common adjectives defining the history of Kaczorowski, an artist who made an attempt to play with the artworld, with strategies of mass media and propaganda, to finally *give up* artistic work altogether.

At the turn of the 1960s and '70s Kaczorowski was an active poet and ideological communist. His involvement in the students' strike in 1968 ended with a few days in detention. In 1976, he returned his PZPR [Polish United Workers' Party] identification card on the wave of indignation with the brutal suppression of the workers' strike in Radom. On his initiative, a poetic group 848 was formed, the name of which referred to the year of publication of the Manifesto of the Communist Party (1848) (Kaczorowski et al., 1970). He was a graduate of the Faculty of Graphic Arts of the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts. For one academic year, 1973/1974, he was an assistant at the Department of Woodcut, headed by prof. Franciszek Bunsch. At the Academy, he dominated the department group intellectually. He taught critical deliberation and spread doubts.

Kaczorowski was known as a talented designer and constructor. During his studies he participated in international exchange in Hungary, and for reasons difficult to explain today, instead of an analogous art academy, he studied there at a circus school. He supposedly treated this fact as a sign of good fortune. Before his artistic studies, he had graduated from a dental prosthetics study, where he acquired, as the family had desired, a profession to earn a living.



The life and work of Kaczorowski (1941–1987) remains largely a mystery, and what emerges in the course of guessing may cause astonishment due to his originality and the way he functioned in the field of art. In his life, in his undertakings, and in his intentionally intimate practice, he redefined the artist's work. He rejected the conditions set by the environment, the academy, and society, and left behind a memory of the life of a radical artist who erased his own traces. In 1987, he committed suicide by jumping out of the window of the studio at the Widok estate in Krakow's Bronowice district. Apparently, he was fascinated by the work of Yves Klein, particularly by his well-known photomontage depicting the artist jumping out of a window (*Jump into a Void*, 1960). Only a few of Kaczorowski's works survived: random graphics and posters in the library of the Academy of Fine Arts, *Flags (Sztandary)* and *The Tie (Krawat)* in the Stu Theatre, several graphics, diaries and books kept by his friends, to whom he donated elements of his small estate and the memory of a rebel. He is remembered as a well read, magnetising personality, an erudite, and a good friend.

### **Subversive translations of official propaganda messages, or *For a Bolshevik, Nothing Is Impossible***

Kaczorowski created graphic compositions of logotypes (16 small linocuts, 1969) – abstract, elegant, and legible. Equipped with poetic titles (*In Something Hard, Black Ponds, Over the City, Bialka Roars [W czymś twardym, Czarne stawy, Nad miastem, Białka huczy]*), together they create beautiful works of visual literature. Similar forms, sometimes colourful ones, bear titles from yet a different reality, such as *The Electoral Card of Millions of Illiterates* from the *Lenin* cycle (*Karta wyborcza milionów analfabetów z cyklu Lenin*, 1970). The artist used visual motifs found in propaganda messages and mass media, such as star, clenched fist or images of political leaders. A similar attitude is evident in the works of artists of the mature phase of the development of conceptual art, which results from the need to polemicize with the image of the world created by the media and mass media (Dziamski, 2010: 170). A print preserved in the collection of the Library of the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow presents a profile of a leader against the background of a colourful, a bit New Age style composition of floral motifs. The title of this work – *He Lived for the Working Class (Żył dla klasy robotniczej)*, 1970) – was as if borrowed from a newspeak dictionary, it could be a real slogan or motto of the PRL. The visual structure of the work from today's perspective seems to explore the clash between two public codes: projects of official propaganda and a colourful substance straight from the other political bloc.

The phenomenon of Lenin's image in Kaczorowski's work arose from cultural and political circumstances. Clearly, his presence results from experienced excess of his imagery and subsequent defensive reaction (Zosschchenko, 1984). *The Mausoleum (Mauzoleum)*, not preserved and uncertainly dating to the beginning of

the 1970s, Kaczorowski's masterpiece, is an object consisting of blocks, papered with linocut prints and fancy images of Lenin. Images of fictitious situations are juxtapositions of Lenin's well-known physiognomy with subsequent anecdotes. Other cubes depict Lenin as Ho Chi Minh on the bridge, Lenin as a Chinese revolutionary with a red book, Lenin as an aviator, Lenin as a king from the Piast dynasty, Lenin as an Indian on an elephant, Lenin as a boxer – Black Panther fighter, Lenin as a cosmonaut, Superlenin, Lenin as Saint Christopher, etc. This work was inspired by comic books and the ethos of opposing blocs: the West and the East, etc. The system of visual forms and signs used here does not refer to traditionally assigned meanings or ideologies, but is subversive, mocking, and critical towards them. These are early examples of the use of visual language, whose content has been replaced (Ronduda, 2006). They are also examples of a sophisticated visual persiflage – a playful reference to other styles. The criticism contained in this work concerns the bizarre and permanent use of the image on a daily basis. I think that it is also a mockery of the mass of gig graphic designers, propaganda organs whose "works" flooded the Polish iconosphere.

Kaczorowski – a committed leftist, proclaiming the avant-garde methods of expressing content in poetry and visual arts – proposed in his work a kind of model of a commemorative burial structure dedicated to the commander of the Revolution, his own model of private real allegory. Referring to images of historical nature, he also referred to the figure of the superhero and ridiculed the ubiquitous subservient attitudes. The above-mentioned allegories can be interpreted along the lines proposed by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh. According to his view, an artistic use of borrowed image, assemblage, and collage are ways of speaking in public, but with hidden meanings. Such an allegory, as a method of artistic expression, uses the language of "ideology of everyday life" (Buchloh, 1982).

Janusz Kaczorowski's allegory of the everyday in the Polish People's Republic requires further clarification. The method of choosing the languages of expression is accompanied by a pragmatic need to arouse consternation. The insertion of the image of Lenin in various and bizarre circumstances is objectifying. Stories in which it occurs are treated non-chronologically, non-historically, and non-logically. With its narrative timeframe, *The Mausoleum* of the mythical substance of Lenin's body creates a tangled structure, in which many myths generated by mankind from the beginning of time have found their fulfilment.

However, *The Mausoleum* by Kaczorowski is not so strange if we look at it in the perspective of the history and function of the real Mausoleum for the lives and collective imagination of the Soviet people. According to Boris Groys (1992), the Lenin Mausoleum in the Red Square, in which the body of the leader and the main ideologist was laid, is not an ordinary commemorative building. Throughout history, from antiquity to the modern times, monumental tombs enclosed the dead inside their structures and protected them from being seen. Lenin is exposed to the public as a work of art, and before the entrance to the mausoleum, there is a crowd of people waiting in the same way as outside a museum. Lenin was simultaneously

buried and exposed, his body, in contrast to standard mummies, such as bandaged Egyptian ones, is preserved and reconstructed. This way, Lenin instantly became more important than Leninism, and his relics inspired the Soviet citizens to heroic deeds. Vladimir Mayakovsky was to say that “There’s no one more alive than Lenin in the world” (Mayakovsky, 1967).

The expressive means of Kaczorowski’s work are strengthened by paradoxes, messages that do not match one another, internally contradictory theses, disturbances in the space-time order. Lenin is omnipotent in life and after death, because “for a Bolshevik nothing is impossible,” as professed by one of the popular slogans of those times. Being paradoxical in a paradoxical world is a union with the present. This is also an act of identification with the subject of critique. In Marshall Berman’s perspective, it is about living a life full of contradictions and staying in the authorities of large organisations that have a permanent impact on the community. It is also a desire to face these forces. To be modern is to be open to adventure and its inherent threats. In the end, to be modern is to be a contradictory human creation that is both a conservative and a revolutionary (Berman, 1988).

Examples of forgotten creativity are symptoms of broadening of the *avant-garde* idiom and shifting the interests of artists towards reflection on the surrounding reality, its visibility and intrusiveness, and the search for a method that manipulates this reality, its history and representation. Eventually, the commemorative building by Janusz Kaczorowski was lost, but I hope that it survived somewhere, waiting to be discovered.

### ***The Private Manifesto of Hidden Art***

Kaczorowski rarely participated in exhibitions. In 1972, three of his works (*Gloves* [Rękawice], *The Tie*, *The Mausoleum*) have qualified for the main exhibition of the International Print Biennale in the BWA [Bureau of Artistic Exhibitions] Pavilion IV (exhibition catalogue, 1972). He never presented his prints at this festival, even though he was associated with it from the very beginning, when as a student he helped organise its first editions. He also inspired a group of regular Biennale participants. As time went by, this peculiar vanity fair started to tire him, and it was still in times when the Biennale could boast of a high quality of artistic and theoretical reflection that was difficult to undermine. Kaczorowski expressed his views in the following statement: “the biennale found itself on a side-track. Captured and explored by individuals who disrespect the drama of art and notoriously avoid discussing it” (Janusz Kaczorowski, 1988).

The expressiveness of Kaczorowski’s reflection is emphasised by an extraordinary and enigmatic documentary that explains many other events in his life as well. *The Private Manifesto of Hidden Art* was not published before the author’s death. It was created in the early 1970s, but an exact date remains unknown. It was known to the closest circle of friends and artists. It was published for the first time in the

catalogue of Kaczorowski's posthumous exhibition, organised in 1988 (*Janusz Kaczorowski*, *ibid.*). There it seems to be incomplete, as if somewhat sloppily written down. It never had any wider impact, but, in my view, it remains the best known key to discover the artist's intimate journey to oblivion.

According to Kaczorowski, "hidden art is the most radical form of breaking with everything that was accompanied by art except for itself" (*Janusz Kaczorowski*, *ibid.*). It holds a special and important place in the spiritual development of a person who is aware of this activity and the benefits resulting from it. Art reveals itself from the need for authentication, and this has its basis in overestimating its social role or impact. This revealing is a result of vanity and a desire for profit. Hidden art has no aesthetics. Nor is it ephemeral, "as the artistic attitude inherent in it is constant and disciplined" (*Janusz Kaczorowski*, *ibid.*). The artist refers here to examples of Western art, (although he does not mention them), which take place outside the artistic field; this way, he admits and proclaims a strictly non-institutional art circuit of friends and colleagues.

*The Manifesto* ends with a series of revolutionary expectations concerning the reduction of virtually every form of functioning of art sanctioned by the system. The author dreams of increasing its autonomy, eliminating its linguistic character, giving up exhibitions as forms of art presentation, and he counts on the disappearance of artistic life and criticism. This, in the eyes of the author, would help derive the knowledge from the experience of art where it manifests itself, not from the source. In institutionally-sanctioned environment, he claims, critics have access only to fragments of the artist's work rather than to the work itself. The goal of hidden art is to "deepen this crisis until the fall of criticism and the birth of the philosophy of art are effected" (exhibition catalogue: 1988) An open question can be asked: is the kitschy *szopka*, whose representation is hidden in the museum's archives, a contributing factor to such a crisis? In my opinion, definitely!

I think that *The Manifesto* is a declaration of faith in the good that happens to a person who creates art; Kaczorowski's consistent following of the path he projected in this text effectively condemned the artist to oblivion and did not allow his work to have any impact. Kaczorowski's *modus vivendi* and *operandi* are simply the implementation of the statements found in *The Manifesto*. They are characterised by limited participation, withdrawal, yet not resignation, passivity in some art fields like the formula of the exhibition or festival. Kaczorowski did not believe in the power of the social impact of art, which he expressed in his text. It seems that he focused on individual, intimate examples of his work, friendships, discussions and his work as a teacher, first at the Academy, and then at a theatre in the museum in Zubrzyca Górna, which he used to run in the 1980s. There is no record of any works produced by Kaczorowski after mid-70s.

Kaczorowski, as can be seen in his ironic statements and reluctantly revealed works, did not seem to have lost his faith in art. His doubts concerned exclusively the processes of its distribution: the need for presentation, participation in the life of institutions and organisations, competition and criticism. Kaczorowski's

anarchism is not a literal game with art that defined the attitudes of Marcel Duchamp or Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz. The artist consistently reduced the form of his art, then its presentation, and finally withdrew from the life of the artistic *milieu* and ultimately dissipated his works and his assets. It is tempting to compare this attitude with other, much better researched examples of artists who consciously, in a significant gesture, made an act of abandoning art. The works of Bas Jan Ader, Lee Lozano and Charlotte Posenenske are various forms of artistic dissidence, which sought to expose the structure of the field of art and criticise its *status quo* (Koch, 2011).

Translated by Agnieszka Tyman



**Fig. 2.** Janusz Kaczorowski, *Pajac* [Clown], Collection of Woodcutting Studio, Faculty of Graphic Arts, Academy of Fine Arts, Krakow, photo: Kuba Pierzchała

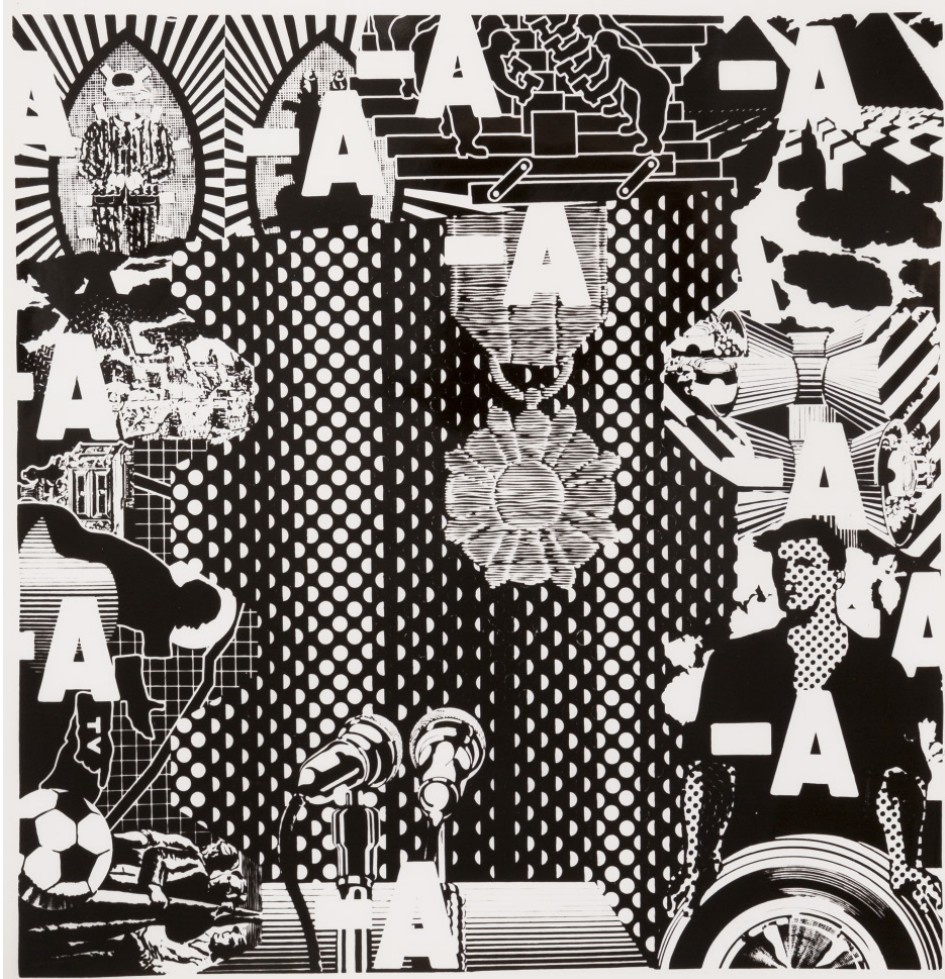


Fig. 3. Janusz Kaczorowski, *List do Zjednoczonej Polskiej Partii Robotniczej* [Letter to the United Polish Workers' Party], 1971, Collection of Woodcutting Studio, Faculty of Graphic Arts, Academy of Fine Arts, Krakow, photo: Kuba Pierzchała

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## The Private Hidden Art of Janusz Kaczorowski

### Abstract

Artistic practice of Janusz Kaczorowski, of which only a few traces remain in the collections of institutions and in private hands, is characterised by surprisingly high quality of intellectual reflection. With his attitude and works, the artist affected several young artists and he is still remembered as an extraordinary personality. He created an original hidden art concept that avoids public presentation. I submit the idea expressed in *The Private Manifesto of Hidden Art* in a detailed analysis in the second part of the text. I locate the source of this idea in the examples of the artist's reflection and works dedicated to the permanent presence of images and symbols of a totalitarian state in the iconosphere, which display the characteristics of a subversive artistic approach. Kaczorowski, a leftist and a socially engaged person, consistently embodied artistic ideas in life, and the several works that he left behind should be seen in terms of the power that generates acts of cessation, concealment and withdrawal.

**Keywords:** Janusz Kaczorowski, hidden art, subversive art, neo-avant-garde

**Słowa kluczowe:** Janusz Kaczorowski, sztuka ukryta, sztuka subwersywna, neoawangarda

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## Disappearing Objects in Georges Didi-Huberman's Curatorial Practices

Moving across art history as a discipline, Georges Didi-Huberman questions traditional historiography of art, emphasising the necessity of undermining its distinctiveness. He fuses art history with archaeology, anthropology, and philosophy, draws on Freudian psychoanalysis, and re-examines the key figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Walter Benjamin and Aby Warburg. His investigation spans art from prehistory to contemporaneity, overpassing the trajectory of chronological research. He brings out the limits of dominant discourses, proposing in return his own revalorised formulas in art history, concentrating mostly on peripheral narratives. Still, he does not confine himself to theoretical work only, but expands his interests also into the curatorial field, having worked as an active curator since 1997.

In my essay, I undertake an analysis of the first exhibition curated by Didi-Huberman and Didier Semin as the co-curator, *L'Empreinte (Imprint)*, which took place in Centre Pompidou in 1997. The exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue with essays, released in 2008 as a separate publication, *La ressemblance par contact. Archéologie, anachronisme et modernité de l'empreinte*. In this project, the French philosopher intentionally bypassed the usual products of artmaking, instead choosing to focus on what is left alongside this process. The project in Centre Pompidou transferred the technique of imprinting into the context of art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, investigating the tactile transmission of form from one surface to another. To begin, I will characterise the imprint in Didi-Huberman's methodology and summarise the selection of artworks on a display. Then, I will discuss how this attempt was influenced by the notion of *survivance* of forms and may be referred to Aby Warburg's approach. Finally, I will investigate the contemporary context of the project, and the original/copy issue.

In Didi-Huberman's interpretation, "an imprint is a technological gesture, and this technique is a thing of space and time" (Didi-Huberman, 1997: 11). In *L'Empreinte* catalogue, he writes:



The imprints used by artists aren't particularly "archetypal" or particularly "postmodern." One must understand how, overpassing the usual concept of style and spontaneous chronological divisions, establishing a fundamental anachronism that forces us to recognize the traditional limits of historical models using to discuss artistic issues<sup>1</sup> (Didi-Huberman, 1997: 11).

"These small anachronous objects" are the signs of memory's effort (org. *le travail de la mémoire*), says Didi-Huberman in relation to the works featured in the exhibition. With his treatment of the *imprint* as an *imprint of memory*, a new kind of quality of writing about history emerges, where one can diverge from the chronological approach. This results in the need to redefine the commonly and unreflectively accepted understanding of the concept of time (org. *modèles du temps*) used in art history (Didi-Huberman, 1997: 11). In order to be able to describe an imprint, one must find the *imprint's circumstance* (org. *circonstances d'empreinte*), such that enables it to become unique, or allows it to be viewed as a regular pattern. By accepting the *anachronistic point of view* (org. *un point de vue anachronique*), an imprint becomes the *paradigm*, a *procedure*. *Anachronistic point of view* is based on the rejection of the traditional alternative that contemporary art history often offers us (Didi-Huberman, 1997:16).

The structure of the exhibition served to manifest this specific point of view; it is, indeed, a translation of Didi-Huberman's philosophy into the language of a visual essay. Simultaneously, it is the long history of imprints and their lasting position on the margins of history. *L'Empreinte* was presented in Galerie Sud in Centre Pompidou from February 19<sup>th</sup> till May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1997. On a display were 300 works of 110 artists, placed on a 1400 m<sup>2</sup> area.

In the introduction to the main part of the exhibition, the so-called *emblematic objects* were presented. This selection contained archaeological remains, fossils, primitive ritual masks, i.e. objects usually examined by palaeontology. The exhibition itself was divided into three separate paths leading the visitor, depending on the type of *contact*: *Contacts de la matière* (*Contact with materiality*), *Contacts de la chair* (*Contact with the body*) and *Contacts de la disparition* (*Contact with disappearance*), and they, in turn, were divided into even smaller parts, depending on the characteristics of the specific imprinted item. The first part was dedicated to the technology of the imprinting process, especially in order to accentuate the existence of a printing matrix, which acts as an initial impulse for the whole process that follows. Various techniques and materials used by 20<sup>th</sup>-century artists

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<sup>1</sup> Org. 'Les empreintes produites par les artistes contemporains ne sont ni particulièrement «archétypiques», ni particulièrement «postmodernes». Il nous faut tenter de comprendre de quelle façon, tout en déjouant la notion usuelle de style, et les découpages chronologiques spontanés, elles forment un anachronisme fondamental qui impose de reconnaître la limite des modèles historiques généralement en usage pour parler des choses artistiques.'

were presented to the visitors (like *moulage*, *frottage*, *pliage*, *décalcomanie*, *photogramme* etc.).

The underlying idea was that each form has an implicit anti-form and each print – its archetype. Perhaps the most representative in terms of illustrating Didi-Huberman's curatorial intention was *Female Fig Leaf (Feuille de vigne femelle)* (1950–1951) by Marcel Duchamp. This work was exhibited beside its own mould, which served as its archetype. What is symptomatic, the mould of *Female Fig Leaf* (1950) forms a part of Centre Pompidou's permanent collection, as its legitimate part. These two pieces were accompanied by Duchamp's small-scale *erotic-objects*, like *Dart Object (Objet Dart)* (1950) and *Not a Shoe* (1950) with its antagonist form *Wedge of Chastity (Coin de chasteté)* (1954), as well as *Please Touch (Prière de Toucher)* (1947), a collage made out of rubber foam in the shape of woman's breast, known from the cover of the catalogue of the *Le Surréalisme en 1947* exhibition in Galerie Maeght in Paris. A bit further, the display presented the famous moulding of the sink-stopper, *Le Bouche-évier* (1964). Duchamp's works might serve as a visual link helping us to understand the ideas that stood behind the project. As the founder of modernity, contesting the traditional notion of work of art as well as the originality of the object, he initiated the way of thinking about art that Didi-Huberman draws on. The following part showcased works such as *The Hunter* by Tony Cragg (1991), a composition of 23 structures made out of gypsum and rubber foam, Jasper John's *Bread* (1969) or Bruce Nauman's *Device for a Left Armpit* (1967), a realised version of three sketches from Nauman's *Shoulder Sketches* (1967). Further on, the display contained imprinted shape-like structures, such as Arman's *Hommage à la Gorgone* (1964), with combs dipped into the paint and pressed on the canvas, Jasper John's *The Critic Smiles* (1959), where the lead and gold made toothbrush hair was replaced with four teeth, or *Achrome* (1957) by Piero Manzoni. Another interesting example is the *Moulanges en plâtre de deux savons usés (destinés à l'agrandissement)* by Joan Miró, two moulds of used soap that later served as the inspiration for his full-scale sculptures, such as *Personage* (1978) or *Monument* (1970). Pablo Picasso's *Profil d'homme* (1932), one of his Erwinographies was also on the display, next to the photogrammes by Man Ray. They were followed by works in the form of seals and tools used for their production, such as Arman's *Cachets* (1959), *Tampons* by Louis Cane (1967), *Poem* by Maurizio Nannucci (1967), or *Conspiracy* (1992) by Abigail Lane. In-between was a reprint of Kurt Schwitters' famous poem *Anna Blume* (1922) from the collection of the Dada nonsense poems.

The next section contained artworks characterised by *sensible structures (surfaces sensibles)*, such as Pierre Alechinsky's *Bouclier Urbain* (1984), decalcomanies by Oscar Dominguez (*Lyon's Bicyclette*, 1937) and Jean Dubuffet (*Le Chien du Hasard* and *Empreints* from 1957). Simon Hantai's *Folding method (Le Pliage)* was represented with three paintings from 1968, 1971 and 1973, next to one of Piero Manzoni's *Anachromes* (1959). The second path referred to the depiction of the body, and the relation between the physical aspects of the individual and

his surroundings. First, moulds of hands, such as Wassily Kandinsky's *Imprint of the Artist's Hands* (1926), Claude Viallat's *Untitled (Imprint of the Hands)* (1972), Giuseppe Penone's *Maldoror's Hands* (1987), as well as fingers, e.g. Gina Pane's (*Identity Painting*, 1968) or Jean-Jacques Lebel's fingerprints of the audience taken during the happening *120 Minutes Dedicated to Devine Marquis*, a tribute to Marquis de Sade (1966) or Piero Manzoni's egg with an imprint, *Uovo con Impronta* (1960). They were followed by hand imprints, for instance Pablo Picasso's *Main de Picasso* (1937), Pascal Convert's *Unattributed Sculpture (Hand's imprint)* (1994), and Giuseppe Penone's *Hand is a tree (Mano e Albero)* (1973), and finally by face imprints, e.g. César's *Mask* (1968) and *Head in Pain (La Tête en Pain)* (1973), Marcel Duchamp's *With My Tongue in My Cheek* (1959), and an ear mould in Camille Bryen's *Morphologie du désir, objet a fonctionnement* (1934–1937). The aspect of an inside and outside of the body was also brought up, as in Louise Bourgeois' *Rabbit* (1970). The last part of the exhibition referred to the process of vanishing, debris of dematerialisation, ephemeral actions, and capturing the invisible. On a display were artworks such as Yves Klein's *Pink Cosmogony with Traces of Wind (Cosmogonie Rose-Vent)* (1961), Marcel Broodthaers' *5 Magic Slates (5 Ardoises Magiques)* (1972), and Lucio Fontana's *Spacial Concept* (1957). Also, objects somehow wounded (org. *blessés*), like Camille Bryen's *Automatisme (Fumée)* (1935), and imprints of objects seemingly impossible to duplicate, including Picasso's pieces on Brassai's photographs, a piece of corrugated plaster [*Sculpture de Picasso (Morceau de plâtre cannelé)*, 1944], or crumpled paper [*Sculpture de Picasso (Empreinte de Papier Froisse)*, 1944]. Finally, there was the famous *Soffio (Breath)* by Giuseppe Penone (1978). Some items depicted the destruction as a result of the passage of time, such as Charles Rosses' *Solar Burn, 5/10/1970* (1970), Luciano Fabro's, *Sisifo* (1994), Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray's *Dust Breeding* (1920) or Robert Morris' *14 minutes* (1962). Lastly, the loss of space was depicted in such works as Rachel Whiteread's *Untitled (Airbed)* (1993) and *Untitled, Wax Floor* (1992). These three paths of the exhibition formed a coherent structure, a narrative that included the genealogy of the imprint and its evolution throughout contemporaneity. They also revealed two leading problems. On the one hand, the matter of time and *survivance*, the duration (org. *la durée*) of images, that leads to the distortion of the conventional trajectory of art history and the linear vision of time, a necessity to fully understand what an imprint is for Didi-Huberman. On the other, there is the original/copy issue that emerges from the status of artworks on display – admitted as rightful artworks, but also objects with a copy: a printing matrix that preceded them.

In order to fully understand this project, we must go back to Didi-Huberman's theoretical background and its key figures. His anachronous methodology implies this kind of understanding of time that was formulated by Walter Benjamin in his concept of *constellations*, i.e. *the dialectic configuration of heterogenic times* (Didi-Huberman, 1997: 17). Following Didi-Huberman's writings, we can also be certain that the key to his methodology lies in Aby Warburg's *nameless science*. In

*L'image survivante. Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg*, published in 2002, he delivers a unique reinterpretation of concepts conceived by the German historian, especially his idea of *survivance*. Warburg's concept of *Nachleben*, his survival figure, describes the life and after-life of certain forms, and their ability to endure (Bałus, 2010: 37). Examination of Warburg's study, his ideas about the *impurities of time* and the life of images, worked as a starting point for Didi-Huberman's concept of anachronous history of art. The *survivance* of forms discredits the existence of the linear concept of time by replacing it with endless duration, which includes disappearance and resurrection of forms. Warburg was also investigating the necessity of direct contact with historical means of artistic expression in order to revive them, which might serve as a crucial point of reference for Didi-Huberman's attempt. As a result of his deliberations, Warburg created the *Mnemosyne Atlas*.

It is Didi-Huberman's leading premise that a historian does not work with History itself, since there cannot be any direct access to it. All we are left with are testimonies, traces, and remains (Leśniak, 2010: 124). Therefore, to study history is to research merely the evidence or its traces. Anachronous art history also deals with facts of memory, items whose being cannot be precisely located on the timeline. In *Devant le temps*, the French philosopher writes about the *archaeology of anachronous* and the *epistemology of anachronous*, and that they are strictly related to the functioning of memory, examination of traces and imprints (Vojvodik, 2009: 12).

For Didi-Huberman, an imprint, understood as an imprint of memory, is a certain kind of utility that allows us to adopt an *anachronistic point of view*. In this point, we can interpret the *L'Empreinte* exhibition as the manifestation of Warburgian *survivance* figure, in a way it is seen by Didi-Huberman.

It is difficult to evaluate the collection gathered by Didi-Huberman in this exhibition. It contains the classics of 20<sup>th</sup>-century's art but also works created shortly before the exhibition, in 1997. Some of the artifacts, except for the key names such as Duchamp, could have easily been replaced. This aspect was brought up by Richard Shiff, who, in his exhibition review in *Artforum*, asked a relevant question: "From room to room, I thought repeatedly, why include this object?" (Shiff, 1997: 132). He also emphasised one more aspect that emerged when Didi-Huberman's philosophy was translated into the visual language of the exhibition, namely he asked about the fate of imperfect imprints: "Didi-Huberman's theory of the imprint deals only with the most normative instances; he is imprinting without deviation, distortion, or failure, without degradation or entropy." (Shiff, 1977: 133) He mentions an example – Marie Pierre Thiebaut's *Medius Digitus – Taxinomie 1 et 2* from 1994. He writes:

On a smooth sheet of cardboard Marie Pierre Thiebaut laid out a grid of his fingerprints using wet clay instead of ink or paint to make the impressions. Such marks thoroughly blur or fail to register the finger's pattern of papillary ridges, which identify the

mark as a functional fingerprint. Here the imprint is entirely indexical, yet isn't at all what our culture tells us a fingerprint should look like (Shiff, 1997: 133).

So there are some ambiguities we are left with. The narration of the exhibition is consistent, although, the choice is subjective and apparently there is no definite key. We are confronted more with representations of some symptoms, rather than with the objects as such.

As to the original/copy issue, *L'Empreinte* investigated the dilemma of whether the process of imprinting is rather a case of copying the original item, or, on the contrary, losing the essence of the original. Does the process of reproduction make authenticity and uniqueness widely available or rather is this uniqueness being dispersed among many objects? This way, we are obliged to rethink the notion of the origin (*org. repenser la notion d'origine*).

In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin, mentioned on numerous occasions in *La ressemblance par contact*, linked the seriality of photography and possibility to easily multiply the images with the loss of aura. Years later, Rosalind Krauss, in her *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*, discussed originality in the context of Rodin's *The Gates of Hell* that she saw in the National Gallery in Washington in 1978. She undermined the work's authenticity – this is not a lifetime cast, moreover, we do not know whether the final set of the composition's elements coincided with Rodin's vision. However, the answer to the question of whether we are dealing with a copy or an original is not clear-cut. This binary opposition, a contradistinction between original and copy, real and fake, common for the modernist narrative, was overpassed with the emergence of postmodernism.

In his essay, *Parody and Appropriation in Francis Picabia, Pop and Sigmar Polke*, Benjamin Buchloh wrote:

When Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol introduced mechanically produced, "found" imaginary into the high art discourse of painting (by technological procedures of reproduction, such as the dye transfer process and silkscreen printing), gestural identity and originality of expression were repudiated. The very procedures that had concretized notions of creative invention and individual productivity in the preceding decade were now negated in the mechanical construction of the painting (Buchloh, 2000: 350).

The emergence of the neo-avant-garde was a subsequent step to break down the isolation of high art. The increasing impact of mass culture on artistic production and its mechanisation entirely rejected the modernist *aura*. In 1998, Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* was published, and four years later his *Postproduction*, where he argues that the change that took place in the 1990s, when artists were using already existing works for reproduction or recreation, placing artworks in a new context, was much like the process of sampling, when already existing music

is being mixed and blended. For Bourriaud, *postproduction* is the consecutive stage of *appropriation* (Bourriaud, 2002: 25).

So, why in 1997 still discuss the issue of originality of an artwork? The original/copy dilemma had already been fairly obsolete a short time after Rosalind Krauss speculated about *The Gates of Hell*. So why go so far back in 1997? Wasn't the starting point for the exhibition anachronous itself? Displaying copies or non-artistic objects that emerged with Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades has a long history in modern art narrative since the birth of the avant-garde; one may even mention André Malraux's *Museum without Walls* from 1947. However, *L'Empreinte*, aside from the initial part with "emblematic objects", gathered original, fully-fledged artworks, "original copies." The works presented by the philosopher have always existed only in the *negative* form, so they were items of the exhibition with full rights. Alongside presenting his reflection on Warburgian methodology, Didi-Huberman aimed to overpass both the avant-garde dualistic strategy and the postmodern unification. With their binary status, the artworks shown on display were suspended between those two models. These copies, which are at once originals, create a paradox, a lapse in the dominant art history narrative and the concepts of time it is using. Their characterisation leads us to the *anachronistic point of view*. The artworks on display are not originals in the modernist understanding of the term, because they have been multiplied; neither are they postmodern copies in spite of being multiplied.

When it comes to exhibition making, Didi-Huberman's curatorial approach definitely remains postmodern. The acceleration of life and the emergence of the new model of society conjured a new type of ahistorical exhibition that overcame the approach that was in force since the 1960s. In *Museum in the Post-Industrial Mass Society* from 1996, Peter Weibel analyses the changes that have occurred in the exhibition models during the 1980s and 90s. Weibel writes that: "In some way, the lack of criteria of present-day curators guarantees their omnipotence because without criteria their individual dictatorship disguised as «intuition», becomes legitimate. An apparent pluralism shrouds the tyranny of subjective choice" (Weibel, 2017: 381). He describes a new type of exhibition, defined as "show-like" display: "correspondences, constellations, affinities, interference and resonance are produced purely subjectively, intuitively. They replace the historical categories of genealogy, of development, of chronology" (Weibel, 2017: 385).

Ultimately, one must remember that *L'Empreinte* was on display in Centre Pompidou, an emblematic space for postmodernism, where twelve years earlier Jean-François Lyotard's *Les Immatériaux* was exhibited. One might also mention here two projects that somehow corresponded to *L'Empreinte*. In the introduction to the exhibition's catalogue, Didi-Huberman writes about *Impronte del corpo e della mente* (*Imprints of the body and mind*), a show organised by Adalgise Lugli in 1995, for the Venice Biennale, where the imprint was also analysed from the historical perspective underlining its anachronous aspect. However, Didi-Huberman noticed many differences, including the lack of interest in the process of imprinting

itself in Lugli's proposition (Didi-Huberman, 1997: 11). On the other hand, Richard Shiff recalls the exhibition *L'informe: mode d'emploi (Formlessness: User's Guide)*, organised in Centre Pompidou one year earlier, in 1996, by Rosalind Krauss and Ive-Alain Bois, whose narrative was based on *formlessness*, as conceptualised by Georges Bataille. Didi-Huberman was also critical here, accusing Krauss and Blois of misunderstanding the formless as an absolute opposition to that which is formed (Shiff, 1997: 133). *L'Empreinte* was followed by many other exhibitions curated by Georges Didi-Huberman, including a project referring directly to Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*. The latter, titled *Atlas. How to Carry the World on One's Back?*, was presented in 2010 in Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid. It was a specific three-dimensional atlas, which also resigned from the traditional distinction between artistic and non-artistic, and consisted of Warburg's *Mnemosyne* panels, as well as works of art, including Goya's sketches, works by avant-garde artists (Kurt Schwitters, László Moholy-Nagy) and surrealists (Man Ray), various representations of the atlas (Marcel Broodthaers), and pieces not commonly associated with their authors, such as Paul Klee's herbarium, photos of pre-Columbian architecture by Josef Albers, photos of random objects by Robert Rauschenberg, photos of New York graffiti by Sol LeWitt, atlas sheets cut by Rimbaud, and Benjamin's notes to *Arcades Project*. In 2010, the exhibition travelled in an unchanged shape to the ZKM in Karlsruhe and later, in 2011, to Stiftung Falkenberg in Hamburg. Didi-Huberman engaged French photographer, Arno Gisinger, and entrusted him to create the documentation of the whole project, beginning from the process of installation to the dismantling of the exhibition, as well as the exhibition itself. The project was subsequently shown in other venues, such as le Fresnoy (*Histoires de fantômes pour grandes personnes*), and Palais de Tokyo (*Nouvelles histoires de fantômes*), in a new form, as a video projection on the walls of the interior. In Beirut Art Centre (*Afteratlas*), printed photographs were hung on the wall. For a change, in Rio Art Museum (*Atlas, suite*), photographs were placed on the floor and leaned against the wall. If *L'Empreinte* was dealing with the objects of memory through the sense of touch, it is important to mention also the digital version of the exhibition, since this marked the moment when the artworks were replaced by their dematerialised virtual copies, or by *poor images*, as Hito Steyerl calls them. Is it still *survivance*? With what kind of memory are we dealing when the physical medium is removed?

To summarise, it is difficult to overlook the question of topicality of those translated ideas. Didi-Huberman asks about originality, and, using Benjamin's category of aura, he moves on to reflections about the process of reproduction, filtering them through the postmodernist screen. However, this anachronism remains intentional and it serves to manifest the *anachronistic point of view* adopted from the examination of Aby Warburg's methodology and *survivance* figure. It is convincing, but in 1997, the golden era of net-art, it could strike one as a bit obsolete. The complete isolation of the artefacts from their original context and their use as building blocks for a new composition, in an effort to make them work as evidence

supporting a specific theoretical model, is an area where one should always remain careful. From the present perspective *L'Empreinte* certainly remains very distant. Nowadays, we live in the age of digital reproduction, when the image has never been so distant from its prototype, or even never had a physical prototype. However, the rapidity of changes and persisting circulation of forms made the problem of their survival come back with a vengeance, but from a different angle, responding to the postmedia condition.

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## Disappearing Objects in Georges Didi-Huberman's Curatorial Practices

### Abstract

In this essay, I undertake an analysis of the first exhibition curated by Didi-Huberman, *L'Empreinte (Imprint)*, which took place in Centre Pompidou in 1997. In this project, the French philosopher and art historian intentionally bypassed the usual products of artmaking, instead choosing to focus on what is left alongside this process. The project in Centre Pompidou transferred the technique of imprinting into the context of art of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, investigating the tactile transmission of form from one surface to another. I will examine how Didi-Huberman's attempt was influenced by the notion of *survivance* of forms, formulated by Aby Warburg, and how it offers an alternative to traditional approaches to original/copy issue.



**Keywords:** Georges Didi-Huberman, imprint, originality, curating, Centre Georges Pompidou, anachronism, Aby Warburg

**Słowa kluczowe:** Georges Didi-Huberman, odcisk, oryginalność, kuratorstwo, Centre Georges Pompidou, anachronizm, Aby Warburg

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## ***Coincidentia oppositorum*: The Works of Giovanni Anselmo between the Visible and the Invisible**

*I wanted to create an invisible work. However, if I want to verify the invisible, it is possible only through the visible. If I want to materialise the invisible, this becomes immediately visible. The invisible is the visible that cannot be seen.*

Giovanni Anselmo (1989)

The work to which Giovanni Anselmo is referring with these words is *Invisibile*, 1971 [fig. 1], a work consisting of a projector that focuses a slide saying VISIBILE not on a screen designed to accommodate it, but in a point in space where no object is placed. It will be the viewer to complete the work and make the projection visible, while passing at the right distance or moving in order to get the image in focus, once he or she understood the mechanism of operation of the device.

Projectors are an instrument of modernity that breaks into the economy of the artwork according to the specificity of its language: they are used, depending on the circumstances of the exhibition, not in focus or in focus, or with the focus on infinity, or on a precise point. Such elements will allow (or not allow) for a clear vision of the projected word. To act as a counterbalance to this mechanical presence is the body of the viewer, which inevitably becomes the projection screen. Germano Celant (1967: 85) states in the text for the catalogue of his seminal exhibition *Arte povera – Im Spazio*, held in Genoa at the Galleria La Bertesca during the autumn of 1967, that, in this way, “the body is ennobled as a ritual altar. [...] The physical presence, the behaviour, in their being and existing, are art.”

The installation *Invisibile* was shown on numerous occasions over the decades. In the photographs taken to document its effect, we often find that the body of the artist becomes the projection screen: Giovanni Anselmo turns himself into a means that illustrates the methods of unveiling the vision. This aesthetic approach, a relational behaviour common among many contemporary artists from Marcel Duchamp onwards, perfectly embodies what Friedrich W. Nietzsche (1872: 29) stated in his seminal book *The Birth of Tragedy*: “Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art.”

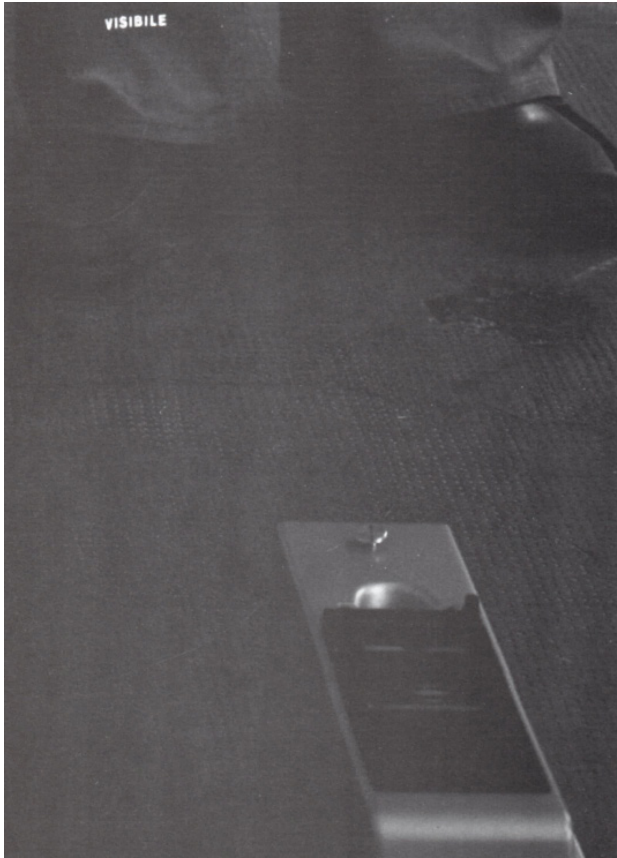


Fig. 1. Giovanni Anselmo, *Invisibile*, 1971

The works of Giovanni Anselmo generally bring into play a tension between forces and weights, while in the works I refer to the same tension embraces the contradiction between the visible and the invisible, involving a material *facies* only to the extent that the latter is indispensable for making visible what otherwise would not be. The intangible element of the light beam is made visible only through the projection. It is always the projection of something immaterial on something material, of something that is seen on something else that is not seen; we could, therefore, say of an entity that participates in the dimension of the non-being that it is projected into the world of the being. This hypothetical material makes, then, the imperceptible turn into the perceptible, it allows it to exist; the matter puts the light beam into being; otherwise, it would not be seen, it would not exist in the end; otherwise, the finished would be lost in the infinite.

This contradiction is clearly defined by the French professor Jean Marc Poincot (1982: 40–41), in an article titled *Anselmo infini* (Eng. Infinite Anselmo), published in the periodical *Art Press*, where he points out: “Every attempt to perceive the invisible is then liquidated through the apparition of the visible.” The

non-being can only begin to be if it finds in front of itself a screen that prevents the light rays from continuing beyond their journey and getting lost in the infinite. In the course of the years Giovanni Anselmo has created works that function in a similar way and that, in different aspects, deal with “abstract and general concepts (infinity, invisibility...), seen as categories existing in ideas, but not in empirical experience, a situation the artist attempts to remedy through the work,” as stated by the Italian art critic Giorgio Verzotti (2000: 297).

For example, Anselmo worked on thematic cycles such as the one entitled *Particolare (Detail)*, a project started in 1972 [fig. 2], consisting of slides saying the word PARTICOLARE (Eng. DETAIL) projected into different exhibition spaces. Sometimes it runs into a wall, almost dignifying in this way the portion of the wall in question, as if it was an important work of art from which a relevant detail has been selected, just as it happens in the monographs of the great authors of the past. In his other pieces, however, the mechanism is the same as the one employed in the work described above, *Invisibile (Invisible)*, in which the focus of the slide is not immediately perceptible, but the viewer needs to physically stand in front of the light beam to become a screen and be able to read the word PARTICOLARE.



Fig. 2. Giovanni Anselmo, *Particolare*, 1975

Referring to Anselmo's decision to show a fragment of surrounding reality as a detail of his artwork, Beatrice Merz (1989:13), daughter of two Arte Povera artists, Marisa and Mario Merz, in her text *Entrare nell'opera* (Eng. Enter the artwork), speaks in verse about this cycle of works by the artist:

Detail of everything.

Finite of infinity.

Visible of the invisible.

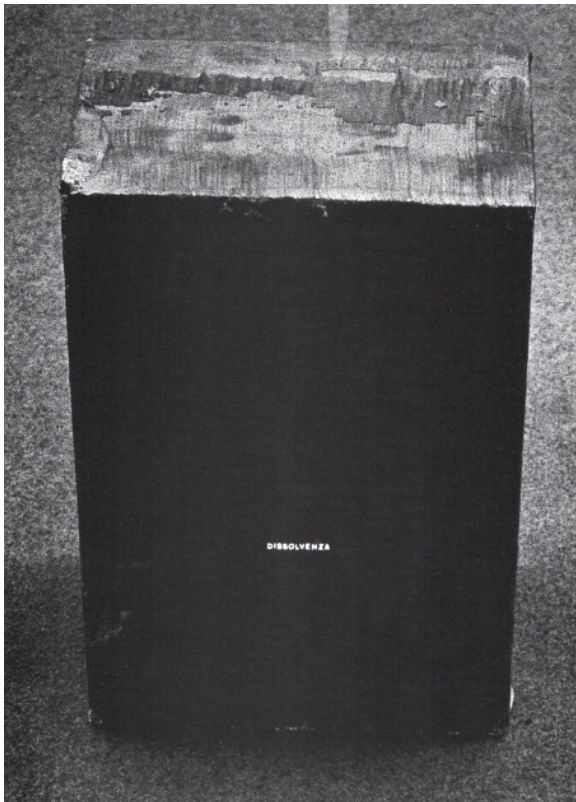
Detail of infinity.

[...] A detail of a room is a detail;

a room is a detail of time;

We, the objects and everything on which the projector points, we are details of time, we are also other details in a future time and we were other, different details in a past time.

I am now going to address Giovanni Anselmo's relationship with time. In his art, it appears to be declined with complex modalities in numerous works and it finds an appropriate manifestation in *Dissolvenza* (Eng. *Fade-out*), a work first created in 1970 [fig. 3]. A projector focuses the writing DISSOLVENZA on an iron



**Fig. 3.** Giovanni Anselmo, *Dissolvenza*, 1970

parallelepiped, which clearly undergoes a process of continuous oxidation over time. Differently from what happens with the work *Per un'incisione di indefinite migliaia di anni* (Eng. *For an engraving of indefinite thousand of years*), 1969, here the protagonist of the artwork is no longer the trace left by the state of transformation of the iron, but the immediate denomination of the same state of transformation. Anselmo does not use the material to show an iron parallelepiped, but to emphasise a factor that is at the base of the iron material and that transforms it as time passes by. Beyond its nature of rusty material, however, iron, in this case, plays the role of a strong substructure, fundamental to the very existence of the work. It is a hard material support without which each of the "opposing pairs" (Foster, Krauss, 2006) mentioned above would fall into its negative, that is, in the term more closely related to immateriality, to the non-being, and would be lost in nothingness.

As we have seen, there is a diaphragmatic element that interposes itself between the source of the light beam and its dissolution into infinity. It alternately configures itself as a hard, rough, industrial, almost minimalistic material (although the yield is quite different here compared to the rigorous American interventions) in the case of the iron parallelepiped, or as an organic element, such as the palm of a hand, or otherwise related to the field of the human body, as well explained by the example of the photos where the writing is projected on a leg. These projections, writings, and words restore the dignity of the objects they are projected on or of the man-artist when he projects them on himself. In cases when anthropic elements come into play, such as a wall or a parallelepiped, they are turned into man's creations capable of welcoming the impalpable projection of human ideas.

There are some works by Giovanni Anselmo where the indistinct, a beam of light, is projected on a distinct wall; we must not forget that the latter is configured as the parcelling element *par excellence*, a division that creates limits and categories to be respected in the definition of space, which also means the social definition of roles and hierarchies. The wall is *par excellence* something that occludes the sight, as is the hedge in the famous poem by Giacomo Leopardi, *Infinito* (*Infinite*); in this case, however, it expands the possibilities of the visible precisely because it is configured as a barrier. All the objects we have presented are barriers, or they can become barriers: a raised hand, a leg placed sideways to block the passage, a metal parallelepiped, at least for the impression of heaviness and strength that communicates the material itself, whatever form it takes. In the opposition between an open space and a filter, even though it is made up of only one hand, the latter could be read as a hedge, as found in Leopardi's work, which, instead of excluding the gaze, gives it the possibility of expressing its own function, which means to be able to see. This overturning is the vital principle of the works of Giovanni Anselmo.

Being able to watch means being able to know. It is not a mystery that among the forms of the Greek verb ὀράω (I see) we find the perfect οἶδα (I know

because I saw), which is the reason why the connection between the two fields is even more evident from their etymological origin, as underlined by Achille Bonito Oliva (1980) in one of his texts.

With the refraction of the light rays on the support placed in front of them, it seems that this indistinct chaos that runs towards the infinite is somehow physically constrained and overcome by the order that this diaphragmatic element represents. The matter is more complex than what appears, since in many works by Giovanni Anselmo there is no constant physical presence of this material filter, but it is only hypothesised as possible. The possibility of relapse in the indistinct is always imminent. The support is then configured as an instrument of the Apollonian *principium individuationis*, which orders the Dionysian chaos of the world; but this order cannot be truthful: just take your hand off or move the iron parallelepiped to no longer enjoy that taxonomically ordered world, with a name for everything that Apollo had presented to us. We just plunge back into infinite chaos. With regard to the opposition between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, see, again, Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872).

The role that the artist saves for himself appears to be to fight against this risk or at least provide the possibility of avoiding a sudden relapse into the indistinct. This evocation seems to have to do with the divine creation of chaos; it is important to point out that the association of the artist with the creative divinity is widespread. In this regard it is interesting to remember a work by Italian artist Gino De Dominicis, *D'IO*, 1971, titled after a wordplay with the words Dio (God) and Io (Me). It is a strong and prolonged laugh that echoes in an empty gallery: it is also an invisible work that plays on the infinite possibilities of estrangement provided by a pungent use of language. It is superfluous to note how huge is the debt of those artists to Marcel Duchamp. They often employed such, sometimes bizarre, possibilities.

In the work *Tutto* (Eng. *Everything*) [fig. 4], which Anselmo has put on display since 1971, two projectors project the letters TUT and TO onto two different objects, or on their parts. It is undisputed that by indicating everything nothing is indicated, that is to say, equivalence becomes omnipresent. In the works of Anselmo, the possibilities of language are continually challenged because the words we see written could disappear from one moment to the next, but at the same time, they are strengthened precisely by their always possible and imminent negation. As stated by Michel Foucault, in *Les mots et les choses* (1966: 275), the language "defines objects not hitherto apparent" and that could return to their previous latent condition an instant after we have experienced them. Language is reduced to the minimum, but it still has the ability to evoke, to indicate, as pointed out by Rosalind Krauss, in her articles *Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America* (1977).

With regard to the essential use of language, it is interesting to read what Germano Celant (1967) wrote about the artists representing the Arte Povera movement:

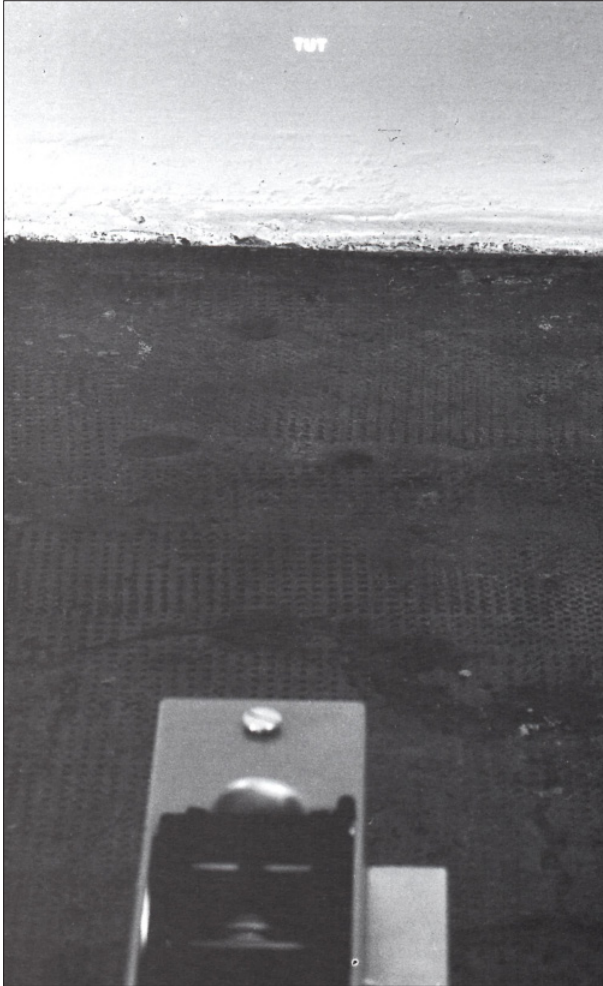


Fig. 4. Giovanni Anselmo, *Tutto*, 1971

The linguistic process consists of removing, eliminating, reducing to the minimum terms, in impoverishing the signs, reducing them to their archetypes. We are in a de-cultured period. Iconographic conventions fall and the symbolic and conventional languages crumble. Thus, in visual arts, the visual and plastic reality is seen in its occurrence and in its being. It is reduced to its accessories and discovers its linguistic artifices. It refuses the visual *complicatio*, not connected to the essence of the object, the language is alienated and reduced to a purely visual element, stripped from every historical-symbolic superfluity.

The works by Giovanni Anselmo I have examined here provide for the evocation of isolated words, according to the dictates of poetic mechanism. The epiphanic appearance of these elements provides the key to understanding the ephemeral nature of the surface of things, which presents us with a truth that is not as stable



and certain as we believe: it can move or be moved from one moment to another. Each entity can fall into its opposite: a wall that closes becomes a device capable of revealing a (possible) truth that otherwise would remain hidden and would be lost. As the Italian art historian Massimo Carboni (2002: 85) states, the epiphany of language, “while taking preliminary action of the irreducibility of the visual to the verbal, attempts to recover and to elect an element that is in some way common to the two registers as the very component of the overall critical-cognitive approach.”

We are facing a poetic reduced to the essential, where the essential is transformed into the maximum of strength. The climax of the antinomy, in which the word is so powerful that it can even disappear, is the series of works entitled *Infinito* of 1971. Among these works, we find a photograph that depicts a blue space. Anselmo focuses the lens on infinity and then takes a picture of the blue sky. In the same year, he inserts a slide with the word INFINITO into a projector [fig. 5]. After setting the focus back to infinity, the result is clearly a blurred, white

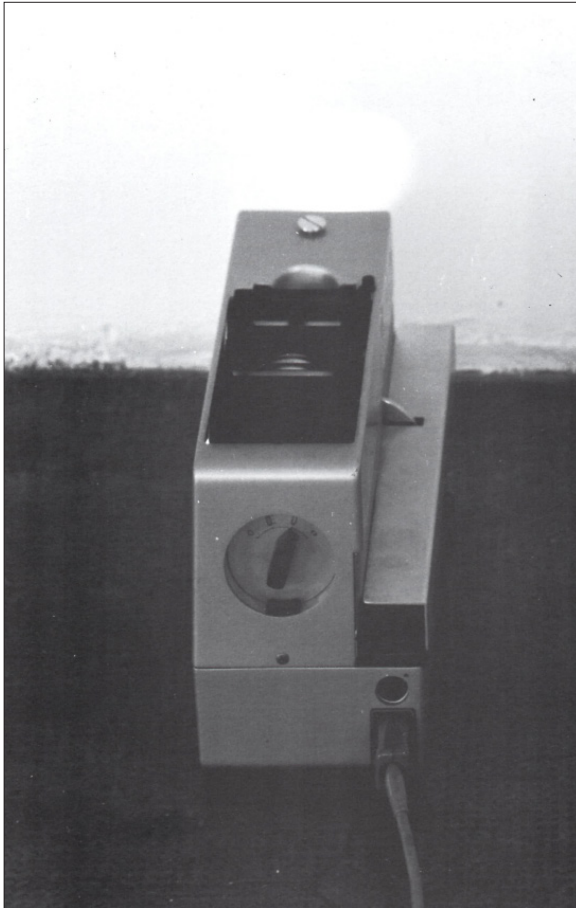


Fig. 5. Giovanni Anselmo, *Infinito*, 1971

image that appears on the wall in front of the projector. Once again, the artist tries to make manifest what is configured as unknowable by its nature. On the wall, we should read the word INFINITO, but it is lost, it is dissolved in the entropic space of the infinite itself. A vain attempt to cling to the last grain of certainty, which has already vanished from our sight and we will no longer be able to reach it because the coveted writing has disappeared in the interstitial spaces between what we can say and what we cannot say. It hides from our sight, so it is also hidden from our own understanding.

From the beginning we knew the risk of such dissolution, it was intrinsic to the premises of the very first works we have dealt with. Now all that remains is to accept it. Jean-François Lyotard (1979: XXV) explains to us, citizens of the postmodern era, the reason why we must learn to deal with the risk of fading into the infinite: "Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable."

\*All English translations from Italian and French texts are by the author of this article (when an official translation was not available).

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## **Coincidentia oppositorum: The Works of Giovanni Anselmo between the Visible and the Invisible**

### **Abstract**

The Italian artist Giovanni Anselmo (b. Borgofranco d'Ivrea, 1934) was a member of Arte Povera group, which was put together by Germano Celant back in 1967. Anselmo has addressed the invisible in art since the beginning of his activity, mainly with projections of

words that play with the idea of the visible and the invisible, with the true (or multiple) meanings of language, and with the very nature of art. He refers to universal and eternal concepts and opposite pairs, such as the visible and the invisible, the finite and the infinite, the close and the open, the clear and the blurred, the being and the non-being. In the works discussed in the paper, the intangible element of the light beam is made visible only through the projection. It is always the projection of something immaterial on something material, an entity that participates in the dimension of non-being that is projected onto the world of being.

**Keywords:** Giovanni Anselmo, Arte Povera, Germano Celant, Italian Art, Contemporary Art, Infinite, projection, visible, invisible, light, Art Press, Beatrice Merz, Jean-François Lyotard, Friedrich W. Nietzsche, Achille Bonito Oliva, Massimo Carboni, Michel Foucault

**Słowa kluczowe:** Giovanni Anselmo, Arte Povera, Germano Celant, sztuka włoska, sztuka współczesna, nieskończoność, projekcja, widzialne, niewidzialne, światło, Art Press, Beatrice Merz, Jean-François Lyotard, Friedrich W. Nietzsche, Achille Bonito Oliva, Massimo Carboni, Michel Foucault

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**Perfoactivism: from *Three Weeks in May*  
to *The Museum of Arte Útil***

“The phenomenon of art activism is central to our time because it is a new phenomenon – quite different from the phenomenon of critical art that became familiar to us during recent decades” – wrote Boris Groys in his article “On Art Activism” (2014). Even if we do not go as far back as Gregory Sholette, who, in his polemic article “Merciless Aesthetic: Activist Art as the Return of Institutional Critique. A Response to Boris Groys” (2016), lists 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century examples of art activists, such as Jacques-Louis David and Gustave Courbet, it is hard to agree with this statement. In my essay, I will focus on the relationship between art activism and performance art, as this genre, since its birth, has been tightly associated with counterculture and social movements – feminist, anti-war, anti-racist, LGBTQ and others.

Lucy Lippard (2015: 76) indicated that art activism and organizations such as AWC, Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, Women Artists in Revolution did not come “from the raised fists and red stars of the ‘revolutionary’ left as from the less consciously subversive reactions against the status quo that took place in the mainstream – primarily in minimalism and conceptual art.” The critic then pointed out that they were blunt and blatantly noncommunicative. This statement comes in accordance with how Polish performance artists, active in the 1970s and ‘80s, described this period. Kwiekulik wrote that, in the reality of the communist regime, it was impossible to create conceptual art, hence the success of contextualism formulated by Jan Świdziński (Załoski, 2012: 79–88). Zofia Kulik said: “We, however, could not be pure conceptualists, because we would have cheated ourselves – that we are fine, there are no institutional or existential problems, there are no potboilers etc. How could one make conceptual art in Poland? Until now I can’t comprehend that” (Załoski: 79). Likewise, in the entire world – the war in Vietnam, the birth of the second wave of feminism, student strikes and events of 1968, the assassination of Martin Luther King and the anti-racist movement and the emergence of AIDS and HIV problem had to induce a reaction from artists.

Naturally, groups excluded from art institutions, such as women and artists of colour, were more likely to take up performance art as their form of expression, as this was a genre that did not depend on them. One could perform in independent venues or even on the street. In the world dominated by art critics, gallery owners, and curators, artists postulated to be present in the work of art, not merely to be re-represented by it. If we were to summarise (and simplify) the development of performance art practice, the '70s was a time when the presence of the artist in their work of art was crucial. In the '80s performance artists started to be involved in institutional critique, and in the '90s the role of audience started to be discussed. This is when the first "delegated performances" started to emerge. In the 2000s some performances were included in the context of the *Arte Útil* concept.

Ephemerality of performance art has been the main way to avoid capitalist commodification and art market, as well as institutions – understood in a colloquial way. Grant Kester also underlines the fact that, in case of performance art, dematerialisation of art object "must be understood not simply as a defensive tactic to forestall commodification but also as a positive or creative moment, marked by an increasing emphasis on art as a process of collaborative interaction. This interactive orientation implies, in turn, an art experience that extends over time" (2013: 53). The form of presentation of performance art – symbolic and manifestation-like – has been favoured as a means to take a stance in the heated debates taking place internationally at the turn of the 1960s and '70s. Judy Chicago said that "[p]erformance can be fuelled by rage in a way that painting and sculpture cannot." (Roth, 1980: 466) Nevertheless, Philip Auslander (1994: 31) observed, in his *Presence and Resistance*, that the transition from resistance to engagement produces the necessity of balancing between co-operation and critique.

For the purpose of this paper it is very important to try to define the term "performance art." An interesting point of view was presented by Stephen Melville, who wrote that: "Performance is not [yet] art in itself, but a way in which various arts may find themselves outside themselves. It is not clear to me what it would take for performance to establish itself as art – what, that is, its 'proper' medium is" (Kester, 2013: 59). A similar view was independently developed by Władysław Kaźmierczak, who claims (2011) that performance art is not a medium in art but an "undefined zone of art" and that "every performance is a definition of performance art." Performance challenges the division between where art ends and the rest of the world begins. From constructivism, through situationism and minimalism – this boundary remains ambiguous. And in performance art, the audience, the milieu, the environment, etc. play their role. Philipp Kleinmichel, in his discussion of whether certain forms of activism are art or politics (2015: 16), draws attention to the problem of intention – and therefore employs Donald Judd's definition "if someone says his work is art, it's art" (After: de Duve, 1990: 272). In this understanding, performance art activism, which I abbreviate as perfo-activism, I see as a visual art performance presented in public space, whose idea is to initiate social change, yet that change does not need to be defined or achieved like in political

activism. It employs performance art strategies to manifest its stance and engage the public. In this paper, I focus on this kind of performances as artworks of alternative visibility in the artworld.

One of the most interesting cases of early examples of performance activism was certainly *Three Weeks in May* – a series of workshops, lectures and manifestations against sexual violence in Los Angeles – organised by Suzanne Lacy in 1977<sup>1</sup>. Over the course of three weeks, Suzanne Lacy received police reports about sexual violence and, using a red stamp, on the map of LA placed in a shopping centre, marked spots where women were raped or abused. Next to it, there was a map with stamps in places where women can seek help. Various workshops, therapeutic sessions and performances were organised as part of this project. What was characteristic was that it was not about one particular performance art action for the audience. Art-activism of this sort is process-oriented. Sometimes actions that last a couple of weeks require a year of work (like in case of Suzanne Lacy) – as they include workshops, filmmaking, documenting, etc. Gregory Sholette, asked if he considered his activist work in terms of art (2015), gave the following answer: “After all, what substantial difference is there between the production of a work of art, researching and writing an essay, teaching or organizing collective actions? When all is said and done for me ‘art’ is simply how I think my thoughts in a more tangible, plastic form that reside alongside, rather than above or below, writing, teaching and organizing.” Suzanne Lacy kept working in the same manner, seemingly influenced by Allan Kaprow with whom she studied at Cal Arts in Los Angeles. Jeff Kelley wrote (1995: 226): “What Lacy learned from Kaprow was that performance could take place outside the dramatic boundaries of theatre and even avant-garde performance art, and that the body, heretofore a medium of acting, or at least acting out, could be extended through the participation of others into a social setting without dissipating its physicality and, ultimately, its capacity for emphatic connection.” In case of Lacy’s *Three Weeks in May* – an artwork emerged in the context of everyday life and its main purpose was not so much to give visibility to performances that took place, but rather to drag attention to rape as a social problem. A later example of her work is *The Roof is on Fire* (1993–1994), completed with Annice Jacoby and Chris Johnson as part of the *Oakland Projects*, in which she gathered teenagers of Colour and placed them in cars on a roof top garage in Oakland. They were given topics to discuss with one another, while ca. 1000 White community members were there only to listen (Kester, 2013: 4–5 and Thompson 2017: 178–179).

Another non-visible performance was Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s *Touch Sanitation*, which she performed for almost a year (1979–1980). Ukeles shook hands with 8500 workers of the NY City Department of Sanitation saying: “thank you for keeping NYC alive.” The performance lasted for 11 months and occurred between the sanitation workers and the artist. The action, now known as *Handshake Ritual*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.suzannelacy.com/three-weeks-in-may/>

(Phillips: 180–185) was documented, but the artwork itself remained hidden from the artworld. Some unknown but important actions took place in the Woman's Building (founded in 1973), such as performances by three groups: The Waitresses (1977–1985), who organised guerrilla actions in restaurants<sup>2</sup>, the Mother Art (1973–1986) who performed in laundromats<sup>3</sup>, and the Sisters of Survival (1981–1985), whose work oscillated around the topic of the Cold War, incited by Reagan administration, and attempted to uncover its absurdities. They performed in public places, in front of public buildings and monuments. After a few actions in the US they started a European tour during which they joined female activists in the UK, for instance, who were camping for nine years in protest against a missile base in the Stonehenge area<sup>4</sup>.

In the 1980s, we had performers such as Anna Halprin, who travelled around the US and performed her choreographic pieces with people with AIDS (such as *Circle the Earth [Dancing with Life on the Line]*, 1989, 1991<sup>5</sup>). Adrian Piper organised her *Funk Lessons* (1983–1985) teaching white people in her semi-academic, semi-colloquial lectures how to dance funk – a “typically black” dance<sup>6</sup>. In 1985, John Malpede founded LAPD – the acronym was an allusion to the Los Angeles Police Department, but it actually meant: LA Poverty Department. Between 1988 and 1990 Malpede's group did a series of performances, *LAPD Inspects America*, in which they first did a series of workshops with local homeless people or those who got out of homelessness to have a final show with them after a few weeks (Kimball, 2014). In 1985 Guerrilla Girls initiated their group. Their activity is an example of an alternative visibility in the art world. As Elizabeth Hess wrote: “[...] the Girls are much more interested in their own *real*, careers as artists, than pushing the group in the direction of the art world. In their view their mission is purely political and far from accomplished, which is why they have been attempting to ‘institutionalize’ and survive” (Hess 1995: 329). In her performances *The Others*, Rachel Rosenthal asked owners of various pet animals – from dogs to cows and snakes – to participate in a show with them on stage<sup>7</sup>. Another classic example of perfo-activism is, of course, the well-known activity of the Yes Men or Yomango – a Spanish group who, for instance, stole a dress from a Bershka store and later organized a guerrilla fashion show of it. Then the dress was returned to a Zara store (Anderson and Herr 2007: 1502).

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<sup>2</sup> [https://ospace.otis.edu/jerriallyn/The\\_Waitresses](https://ospace.otis.edu/jerriallyn/The_Waitresses)

<sup>3</sup> <https://motherart.org/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://thesistersofsurvival.wordpress.com/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.annahalprin.org/performances>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.artforum.com/film/lauren-o-neill-butler-on-adrian-piper-s-funk-lessons-24753>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-rachel-rosenthal-13200#transcript>



Boris Groys wrote (2014):

A certain intellectual tradition rooted in the writings of Walter Benjamin and Guy Debord states that the aestheticization and spectacularization of politics, including political protest, are bad things because they divert attention away from the practical goals of political protest and towards its aesthetic form. And this means that art cannot be used as a medium of a genuine political protest – because the use of art for political action necessarily aestheticizes this action, turns this action into a spectacle and, thus, neutralizes the practical effect of this action.

But the question is – is it always a spectacle? Examples discussed here did not focus on visibility; neither did they make it to the mainstream of art. Stephen Wright, in his famous *Toward a Lexicon of Usership* (2013), suggests that participation and usership are a remedy for spectacularisation. This, in turn, raises a question of how art activism can be useful. Boris Groys's criticism follows the logic: if you want to change the world, you should become a politician not an artist and further (with which I would actually agree) – that art activism is useless when it is later to be shown and sold in galleries and museums. He wrote (2014): "Art activists do want to be useful, to change the world, to make the world a better place, but at the same time, they do not want to cease being artists. And this is the point where theoretical, political, and even purely practical problems arise." In some cases, however, artists can influence political decisions. In 2011, Cecylia Malik and Modraszek Kolektyw (the Alcon Blue Collective) mobilised hundreds of people who, dressed in blue butterfly wings, protested against developers who intended to build another estate in the last green enclave of Krakow, where a rare butterfly (the Alcon blue) resides. The protests were successful<sup>8</sup>.

But we should not only measure the usefulness of art with political impact meant as influencing the decisions of those in power. As Lucy Lippard wrote (2015: 72): "art may not be the best didactic tool available, but it can be a powerful partner to the didactic statement, speaking its own language (and, incidentally, sneaking subversively into interstices where didacticism and rhetoric can't pass)." The Center for Artistic Activism has published a folder, *Assessing the Impact of Artistic Activism* (2018), in which various aspects of it were analysed and measured taking into account various concepts of the role of art and artists in society as well as the definition of social change. More recent examples of such works – which can be defined as performance art and art activism can be listed. In 2000, C.U.K.T group travelled around Polish clubs and alternative spaces with a presidential campaign for a virtual candidate Victoria Cukt, whose main slogan was "politicians are redundant." The public were asked to enrol into the political party Victoria CUKT, to sign a petition to the Parliament to make her become an official candidate (in Poland one needs to collect 100 000 signatures in order to register) and to write down their postulates, which would then automatically become a part of her

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<sup>8</sup> <https://culture.pl/en/artist/cecylia-malik>

political programme<sup>9</sup>. Nowadays, which is 18 years later, the scandal of Cambridge Analytica proved that real politicians do use Victoria's method. In 2011, Paweł Hajncel joined a Corpus Christi procession as a "Butterfly Man" for the first time to comment on the appropriation of public space by the Catholic Church in Poland, for which act he was later prosecuted. He has repeated the action every year in various costumes since 2011 and was arrested last time on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2018<sup>10</sup>. Another interesting case of alternative visibility includes Milan Kohout – a Czech-American artist who was expelled from Czechoslovakia as a Charter '77 signatory – and Yasmin Mjalli – a Palestinian artist and activist. Milan Kohout never "performs" in a classical understanding of the word at performance art festivals. One of his actions took place in the City Hall of Ostrava, where he went during the session of the City Council to ask the Mayor to privatise his body. On another occasion, he went to a bank in Ostrava with an intention to deposit a bucket of coal, as it is called the "Ostravian gold." Documentation of his work is usually shown during festivals that he attends (like the above mentioned at the Malamut Festival in Ostrava), but the performances themselves do not happen in the art context. Just recently (2017), a Palestinian performance artist Yasmin Mjalli made a series of street performances *I'm not your habibti* [I'm not your sweetheart] in which she typewrote stories of women molested in Palestine. The only trace after the performance is low quality documentation and the stories of women.

The issue of visibility in case of art activism also raises a question of authorship. Claire Bishop, in her *Artificial Hells* (2012: 8–9), underlines the need for a clearly defined authorship, stating that projects created by micro-societies are often a cover for exploitation and privatisation. Further on, she argues that activists often take over the tasks that should be the responsibility of the state and that "[t]hrough the discourse of creativity, the elitist activity of art is democratised, although today this leads to business rather than to Beuys"<sup>11</sup> – she writes (2012: 16). She sees the role of participation art in creating relational antagonisms (2004: 51–79) – hence she values artists such as Artur Żmijewski. Grant H. Kester – on the other hand – in both of his *The One and the Many* (2011) and *Conversational Pieces* (2013: 130–131) values "dialogical art," i.e. art created together with local societies. He does not trust the conformist "EU artists" – whose social sensitivity ends together with evaluation of another EU-sponsored project. He criticises the attachment to the idea of authorship and art autonomy, since capitalism as a whole is based on individualism – he argues.

Performance art and art activism became so popular that the largest art institutions try to embrace them. One of the best known art activists and performance artists is Tania Bruguera – who, in her practice, implements the idea of "Arte Útil"<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.peterstyle.eu/wiktoria-cukt.html>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.artysci-lodzkie.pl/en/artist/h/pawel-hajncel/>

<sup>11</sup> Here she means Joseph Beuys's idea that everyone can be an artist.

<sup>12</sup> The term was coined by artist Pino Poggi in his "Manifesto" from 1965.

The project functions as a website that collects initiatives which follow specific guidelines:

1. Propose new uses for art within society
2. Challenge the field within which it operates (civic, legislative, pedagogical, scientific, economic, etc.), responding to current urgencies
4. Can be implemented and function in real situations
5. Replace authors with initiators and spectators with users
6. Have practical, beneficial outcomes for its users
7. Pursue sustainability whilst adapting to changing conditions
8. Re-establish aesthetics as a system of transformation<sup>13</sup>.

In 2013, in the Old Building of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Museum of Arte Útil was organised – it was divided into ten rooms (Live Projects, Room for Controversies, Room for Propaganda etc.), in which artists acted as initiators of a social dialogue rather than exhibited their works. This way the project evaded one very important problem. A display of relics of art activism seems to work in the same way as it does for performance art in general – it merely fetishises the object and replaces its ephemeral aspect with an icon-generating documentation. In its attempt to use the most standard means of visibility, the project did not, however, evade musealisation of art activism. Kleinmichel (2015: 17) wrote:

As with anything else that is musealized, be it an image, an object, or a stuffed animal, the musealization of any given object allows us to approach it from a distance, to reflect on its appearance and meaning, without being immediately affected. The dinosaurs, the Apollonian statues, the portraits of sacred martyrs have lost not only their function, but also their immediate power over us the moment they were musealized and the same holds true for the musealization of political activism. The musealization of political activism allows us to understand its methods, strategies, and historical contexts.

*The Museum of Arte Útil* certainly filled that need. But there is also another important problem – showing art activism in art institutions, which are often guilty of discrimination and doubtful employment policy, is simply immoral. An exhibition of art activism, *An Incomplete History of Protest: Selections from the Whitney's Collection, 1940–2017*, has been recently organised in the Whitney Museum which is pretty ironic taking into account that the Whitney Biennale is notorious for the under-representation of women and artists of color. Tania Bruguera completed her *Francis Effect* performance in 2014 at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. Standing in front of the building for fifteen weeks, she collected signatures under a petition to the Pope Francis which requested the Vatican City citizenship for all undocumented immigrants. Earlier that year, the Guggenheim Museum was criticised for its employment policy at the construction of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. From this point of view, anti-institutionalism and alternative visibility seem to be the only option for activists.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://museumarteutil.net/about/>

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<http://museumartutil.net/about/>

## Perfoactivism: from *Three Weeks in May* to *The Museum of Arte Útil*

### Abstract

From the very beginning, performance art has been anti-institutional and counter-cultural. Because of that performance artists tended to look for other channels to achieve visibility, often intentionally avoiding it. Since the late 1960s performance art has been exhibited in independent art spaces, at festivals organised by other artists, as well as in public space as *guerrilla actions*. This paper discusses a subjective selection of the most interesting socially or politically-engaged performances, which at present have taken the form of perfoactivism, functioning outside the art market and popularly understood art institutions. This article is also a review of criticism around activism, focused on writers such as Gregory Sholette, Boris Groys, Grant Kester, and Claire Bishop.

**Keywords:** performance art, art activism

**Słowa kluczowe:** sztuka performance, aktywizm artystyczny

**Małgorzata Kaźmierczak** – an independent curator of art projects in Poland and USA, especially performance art events (i.e. International Performance Art Meetings “Keshet” – 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008 in Krakow and New York, *Ephemeral fixed* at the Wschodnia Gallery in Lodz, Poland – 2012, *Manuel Vason. RE: Performance* – an exhibition at the BWA

“Sokół” Gallery in Nowy Sacz, Poland, *Performance Month* at the City Art Gallery of Kalisz, Poland – 2014, *Imagine* during the Triennale of Drawing at the National Museum in Wrocław, 2015). Author of many essays and reviews. Editor and translator of <http://livinggallery.info>; 2006–2012 – president of the Foundation for the Promotion of Performance Art “Keshet”, a member of the Art Documentation Association and AICA; 2012–2014 – managing editor of the *Art and Documentation* journal; 2014–2016 – director of the City Art Gallery of Kalisz. Between 2016–2017 a director of a Library at the Art Academy of Szczecin, an editor-in-chief of the Publishing House and an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Painting and New Media of the Art Academy of Szczecin. Currently an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Art of the Pedagogical University of Krakow.

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## Guerrilla Girls: Invisible Sex in the Field of Art

Guerrilla Girls is an anonymous collective of female artists, who declared a war against sexism and racism in the world of art and social life. The group came to life in 1985 in New York. It was created by seven women protesting against the exhibition *An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture*, curated by Kynaston McShine in the Museum of Modern Art. The exhibition, conceived as a review and a summary of current international art, presented the works of 165 artists, among which only 13 were women; even smaller amount had a skin colour other than white. As a sign of protest, the collective put up posters in the Soho district bearing the names of institutions that presented less than 10% of works by women, as well as of critics who wrote about female artists in less than 20% of their reviews. Bringing to light this inequality became the group's major goal.

The identity of Guerrilla Girls is unknown<sup>1</sup>; they hide their faces behind gorilla masks, and they use pseudonyms – names of deceased female artists. During the 40 years in which they took action, over 55 women became members. According to a “founding myth” of this collective, the gorilla mask occurred as a result of a mistake. The name of the group – “guerrilla” – connected directly with the partisan-like way of taking action, was incorrectly spelled by one of the artists. This brought up the word “gorilla,” which automatically was seen as a perfect symbol for the collective (as it turned out – not for everyone).

Of central position among the tools used by Guerrilla Girls in their feminist fight have been statistical data and facts, compiled with visual materials. The quoted numbers were a result of research, mostly cited as the source of information. This was the reason why it was so difficult to undermine the credibility of the statistics, which depicted – among others – wages, participation in exhibitions, being represented in collections. These visual and textual collages became a basis for posters, stickers, books, T-shirts and gadgets; sometimes they were interpreted

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<sup>1</sup> The issue of the collective's members' anonymity is described later on in the article.

in performance forms. The key element was the ironic humour. As Guerrilla Girls said in one of the interviews – it was a consciously chosen strategy, which was supposed to attract a new generation of women, disappointed with the previous methods of feminist actions. They chose humour as a tool, because: “if you can laugh about something that is the most brilliant [ploy] because a laugh makes everybody feel a part of the inside joke” (Chave, 2011: 104). A classic example, illustrating the GG’s sarcastic sense of humour is the poster *The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist* (1988), which mentions (among other titular benefits): “Working without the pressure of success,” as well as “Knowing your career might pick up after you’re eighty.”

In her description of the collective’s actions, Anne Teresa Demo diagnoses that they employ the strategy of mimicry and are largely founded upon the practices of historical revision and strategic juxtaposition. Mimicry can be found in Guerrilla Girls’ representation of womanhood and girlhood, drawing on its depiction by both the art world and pop culture, such as their association with the colour pink. As a strategy, mimicry is successful as a means of “exposing the harms of norms without being reduced to them” (Demo, 2000: 146). Another strategy point – historical revision – consists in the quest for rewriting art history and incorporating within its frames women who were never given their rightful spot in the canon. To reach this goal, artists published a book, *The Guerrilla Girls’ Guide Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art* (1998), as well as have used the names of deceased female artists. Strategic juxtapositions are revealed in the act of clashing quotations from institutions with verified facts about them, as well as contrasting popular symbols with the collective’s aesthetics.

The goal of the collective’s activities is to undermine the mainstream narrative by underlining its undertones and invisible aspects, or rather the aspects that are unnoticed – such as the issue of inequality. The works of Guerrilla Girls took on topics from outside the art field, although rarely. They were connected with women rights, social and political issues (for example, works made against George Bush and his ideas for education reforms or his military campaigns), as well as the movie business. The art world has still remained their primary field of interest. The Guerrilla Girls’ iconic work was their first colourful poster, made in 1989, after diagnosing that women’s art accounted for less than 5% of Metropolitan Museum of Art’s collection, while almost 85% nudes in the possession of the Museum presented women. The poster posed an ironic question: “Do women have to be naked to Get into the Met Museum?”, which accompanied a nude by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, titled *La Grande Odalisque*, in which the face of a woman was replaced by a gorilla’s head. Anna Chave wrote the actions of the collective into the frames of “institutional criticism” (Chave, 2011: 105), giving examples of works, where Guerrilla Girls uncover the connections between the art world and the business world, as well as *Guerrilla Girls’ Code of Ethics for Art Museums* (1990), in which one of the rules states: “Thou shalt not be a Museum Trustee and also the Chief Stockholder of a Major Auction House.”



Primarily, the posters and leaflets were meant to be seen in the urban area, however later on the collective found its place in the institutional space, carrying out projects for museums and galleries in several countries, among others in Mexico, Istanbul, London, Bilbao, during the Venice Biennale and in Krakow, during Artboom Festival in 2012. They were honoured with monographic exhibitions in Bilbao and Madrid, *Guerrilla Girls 1985–2015*, and a travelling exhibition: *Guerrilla Girls: Not Ready to Make Nice*.

The main goal of Guerrilla Girls was to make the scale and effects of inequality evident. However, the group also became the object of critical analysis.

### **The things that are less visible**

The collective was rooted in the second wave of feminism, which evolved in the 1960s and '70s; the main demand at that time was to bring equal rights for men and women. The movement postulated (among others) tearing down sex discrimination, legalising abortion, making contraceptives available, and recognising domestic violence as a public, not a private issue. Many things can be mentioned in terms of what we owe to the movement's activists. However, since the beginning of the 1980s, second-wave feminism became a target of serious charges, especially ones concerning its essentialist definition of women's experience, and its characterisation from a white middle class and woman's perspective, coming from Western society and culture. As a response to such criticism, starting from the 1980s, a new, third-wave feminism started to evolve, sometimes referred to as post-feminism. It speaks on behalf of women previously omitted; it includes diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, religion, and so forth. How do Guerrilla Girls fit into this new perspective? It seems as if their practice has not been affected by the developments within feminism. The collective's members are being accused of essentialism – i.e. of being convinced that womanhood is a set of fixed qualities, shared between every member of this sex. This approach can be seen, for example, in the work that promotes an oestrogen bomb, which the world needs (*Estrogen Bomb*, 2003). This way, the work levels being a woman with having oestrogen, therefore omitting issues of gender, queer or transsexuality.

The charges concern also the group's structure, specifically its lack of diversity. It seems like the collective repeats and reflects the mistakes that they themselves previously attacked. It is difficult to verify whether these accusations are justified or not, due to the members' anonymity. It is evident, however, that the founders and initiators of Guerrilla Girls were white. Some of the group's members of different skin colour or who defined themselves as non-heteronormative admitted in an interview with Judith Richards, that they diagnosed their presence in the collective as a sign of tokenism (Hurstun, Martin, 2008). They felt their membership was a façade, which served only the purpose of proving that there was no discrimination in the group. The voices of each member were not equal. There appears to

be no room here for the musings of bell hooks, a pioneer of black feminism, who said that a fundamental matter for the evolution of feminism is the acknowledgment that there is a difference between individual experiences. She juxtaposed the oppression on the grounds of sex with other forms of submission, based on racist prejudice and class division. This is why the issue of equal rights should not be generalised into women's/men's experiences, because there are no common female/male interests. To strengthen the feminist fight against a dominating and oppressive order, hooks offers the category of "sisterhood," meant as a common movement created by people of different experiences, needs and limitations. Any presence of the idea of "sisterhood" among Guerrilla Girls is questionable.

The issue of the masks used by the members of the collective is also worth mentioning. The inspiration behind them comes from the figure of King Kong, a symbol of masculine power that objectifies a woman. It is hard to belittle the racist connotations that a gorilla mask brings. Suffice it to recall the historical context of the film's first version, which had its opening night in 1933. In the USA, it was a time of an active, although declining activity of the Ku Klux Klan, as well as a time of racial segregation. The character of King Kong was a picture of how the racists saw black people, treating them as crude, wild and threatening to white women. The inappropriate nature of the form that the collective's emblem holds is obvious, for example in the eyes of one of its members, an Afro-American woman who goes by the pseudonym Alma Thomas.

The main guideline for the group's actions appears to be the feminism of equality. GG aim to level the female-male proportions in both the institutional space – by presenting and collecting the works by female artists – and the space of art criticism and art history. They point out the galleries that omit to show art made by women (*These Galleries Show No More than 10% Women Artists or None at All*, 1985), as well as critics that stay silent about the topic of female art (*These Critics Don't Write Enough about Women Artists*, 1985). They try to revise the art canon and uncover the heritage of women's art. In an interview by Suzi Gablik in 1994, two members of the collective, who introduced themselves as Romaine Brooks and Guerrilla Girl 1, admitted that their goal is not to demolish or remodel the entire system. They called themselves pragmatics and explained that the institutional circulation of art does not seem to have an alternative (Gablik, 1994: 45). This resignation in terms of seeking a counterproposal for a system with patriarchal foundations, which was partially responsible for the fact that "there were no great female artists" (Nochlin, 1971), seems to be Guerrilla Girls' biggest weakness. In my opinion, a group that limits itself to a contestation of the lack of women in art canon and modern art only contributes to the legitimisation of the dominant order. By simply asking for change, it does not undermine the rules that lead to those oppressive exclusions.

Equally significant is the issue of the collective's members' anonymity, which – as they themselves confessed – allowed them to stay safe in the art world and provided them with a chance to continue their careers. If they were to uncover their

identities in the first years of their actions, they would likely be ostracised. The situation changed significantly in the 1990s, when – due to the collective’s popularity – revealing their identity could have helped their individual careers. Also, anonymity of the members was partially a fiction, especially in situations when they cooperated with institutions, which required them to disclose their identities (for example for the purpose of buying plane tickets). The groups’ subsequent actions were also a topic of discussion within the collective (Bowles, Thomas, 2018). Still, the artists use pseudonyms and declare that they want to focus on larger problems and not on the work by individual members (Gablik, 1994: 46). This leads to them working simultaneously as separate artists, acting under their own name and functioning within the current system. On the other hand, they criticise the foundations of this system. Suzi Gablik notices this inner conflict. She appreciates the collective aspects of the group and the fact that they represent non-individual demands. However, she also diagnoses that this communal dimension fades during the periods when the members are focused on individual careers, subsiding under the ideology of independent art.

The works of GG, such as posters, masks, books, catalogues and gadgets can be bought online; they mostly cost less than 30\$, but some of them became part of institutional collections, for example in Tate Modern. In response to accusations concerning their cooperation with institutions, Käthe Kollwitz – a member of the group – explained that it is dictated by the wish to reach a larger audience. She also explains that institutions are interested in their practices, because they want to change; it is a need coming from within museums and galleries, where employees “saw [GG] as a way to jump-start this” (Kollwitz, 2017).

It seems that accusations against Guerrilla Girls uncover a specific quality of the group’s actions. By that I mean bipolarity, which can be seen in many aspects. These aspects do not involve the differences within every collective, which is analysed in the context of social interactions and therefore cannot be seen as a “homogenous, unified body in which singularities are irrevocably drawn into an anonymous mass” (Block, Nollert, 2005:14). GG actually expresses this issue, sometimes accentuating inner tensions, different opinions on staying anonymous, or discussing whether their actions are art or activism. By bipolarity I mean the frameworks of the group’s strategy. Here are some examples. The collective uses devices typical for the third-wave feminism, which is “colourful (mostly pink) and self-mocking” (Graff, 2005). It uses specific resistance strategies, basing on aesthetics that draw attention; it works beyond the individual and creates a limitless work of art – constantly renewed and refilled. On the other hand, it is accused of embracing essentialism as a way of formulating definitions of the experience of being a woman in the art world – the biggest accusation against the second wave of the movement. The diversity among the group’s members was often questioned, or rather the intentions and methods of providing this diversity. GG fights against the art system, but only until it allows other women to become a part of it. They respond positively to invitations from museums and galleries, even though there is

a risk of their interventions being used in an instrumental way. It is worth noticing that the presence of Guerrilla Girls in an institutional program may as well be used as a way of proclaiming self-criticism and reformative efforts. As a result, GG reinforce the system and feel gratitude when it cares, even just a little bit. They legitimise it, performing within its space.

## Revision

For almost 40 years Guerrilla Girls have been fighting an uneven battle against discrimination. After such a long time, questions concerning the effectiveness of their actions occur automatically. However, the questions are not about the group itself or the relevance of their work, but about the art field. It seems that the answer is an oxymoron: it is better, but still the same. This concern was expressed in one of GG's posters, saying: "Have many women had one-person exhibitions at NYC museum last year?" In 1985, the collective published relevant numbers: Guggenheim, Metropolitan and Whitney – zero, Modern – one; in the year 2015: Guggenheim, Metropolitan and Whitney – one, Modern – two.

*It's Even Worse in Europe* – claims the title of a poster from 1986, which was revised in response to a request from Whitechapel Gallery in London, which organised an exhibition of the collective's work in 2016/2017. Guerrilla Girls sent out a questionnaire to 383 European institutions, in order to diagnose the situation. They asked them about the gender of artists in collections and exhibitions, and about exhibiting works by artists from outside of Europe and North America. Only 1/4 of the institutions answered, which is already a sign of their attitude towards the issue. The results of the questionnaire showed that in the case of a 100 museums, only two had a collection that consisted of over 40% of women's work and that artists from outside of the European cultural circle are rarely shown.

If we listen to women from the very core of the art world, the voices are not comforting either. Laurence des Cars, the director of Musée d'Orsay and Musée de l'Orangerie, one of the few women in a very masculine world of people supervising art-related institutions, responded to the question about the lack of women in higher positions by saying: "It's a consequence of official institutions not reaching out to women enough, or not giving them enough confidence. We're talking about cultural habits that are deeply ingrained in our societies" (des Cars, 2018). Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, who is the director of Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art and GAM in Turin, Italy, presents a declining picture of the situation: "A disturbing fact is that in the past few months, most of the people being sacked or asked to resign from museums are women – Olga Viso from the Walker, Laura Raikovich at Queens, Beatrix Ruff from the Stedelijk, Maria Inés Rodríguez at CAPC Bordeaux and Helen Molesworth at LA MOCA" (Christov-Bakargiev, 2018).

Guerrilla Girls try to change the shape of those strong and grounded structures, while still remaining a part thereof. Any occurring changes are

time-consuming and barely noticeable. For example, the Museum of Metropolitan Art in New York, which has been the object of many critical actions by Guerrilla Girls, provides a series of meetings/walking tours of their collection, called *Badass Bitches*, organised by the group Museum Hack! The guides tell the history of Palaeozoic art, which was created by women, as well as of the significant influence that Camille Claudel had on Rodin's sculptures. Still, aside from the loud slogans and educational actions, only 6% of the art collection at the MET was made by female artists.

One of the most emphasised contributions of Guerrilla Girls is expanding the common knowledge on discrimination in the art world. However, I would like to stress the problematic areas of the theoretically positive effects of GG over their 30 years of activism. Due to significant negligence, the picture of inequality they tried to expose is not just incomplete, it is completely distorted. It becomes a cover for the true character of discrimination.

My main complain is triggered by the group's superficial way of handling exclusion processes, not noticing qualities like ethnicity, sexual orientation, education, religion, age, etc., which may influence the experience of alienation. There is no place for the idea of intersectionality, which is useful when researching how social categories intertwine and influence women's situation. The theory of intersectionality, brought to the scientific discourse by Kimberle W. Crenshaw in the 1970s (Crenshaw, 1989), teaches for example how the experiences of a white, middle class woman differ from the life of a black lesbian, not well situated and non-educated. While some of Guerrilla Girls' works take note of ethnicity-based discrimination, it is not enough. When discussing the group's actions, one cannot forget the criticism coming from within – the aforementioned confessions of black members, Hurston and Martin, who considered their own presence in the collective as a faux-membership. It is also hard not to notice the oppressive character of the gorilla-faced masks that obscured the activists' faces, which appears to be offensive only to people influenced by its negative connotation. Both facts show that while Guerrilla Girls declare to act on behalf of a wide array of women from the art field, they only speak from a narrow and privileged perspective of whiteness (Eddo-Lodge, 2018: 174–221).

The activists proclaim the idea of increasing women's visibility. While it is a highly admirable postulate, turning it into the only proposal of fixing the art system is a simplified vision. It levels the problem of discrimination with the issue of under-representation. However, the problem of alienation is so much more complicated and connected with structural ties and determinates of social life, such as race or class. To make a clear point: a postulate to divide the cake evenly does not change the fact that the recipe was bad. All things considered, I think that conducting any changes in the art system and fighting against discrimination within this structure requires including new movements and strategies.

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## Guerrilla Girls: Invisible Sex in the Field of Art

### Abstract

The article focuses on an artist and activist collective Guerrilla Girls, created in 1985 in order to fight discrimination in the art field. It presents the group's strategies, using selected actions as examples. The article is also a critical analysis of the collective's achievements in the context of feminist theories, especially one concerning the relations between feminism and issues of race and ethnicity. The author is also interested in the connections between members of the group and the art system, as well as questions on sexism in the contemporary art field, after 30 years of Guerrilla Girls' existence.

**Keywords:** Guerrilla Girls, art activism, feminism theory, intersectional feminism, sex discrimination

**Słowa kluczowe:** Guerilla Girls, aktywizm artystyczny, teoria feministyczna, dyskryminacja

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## Instructive Invisibility: Paradoxical Sub-Pedagogy of Janusz Orbitowski

### Teaching when being unseen

Janusz Orbitowski was a geometric abstract painter working in Krakow at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. He ran a drawing studio at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow since 1981 and he was the head of the Chair of Drawing since 1993. As a supervisor, he was valued as very well organised and disciplined. However, in the artistic *milieu*, he was perceived ambiguously.

“He was withdrawn, silent and secretive” – said his former co-worker Zbigniew Sałaj (Sałaj, 2018). Another assistant, Grzegorz Sztwiertnia, added that the former head of the chair was defensive and averse to risk-taking (Sztwiertnia, 2018). He was silent during official academic events or faculty meetings, he did not get involved, he was transparent, unseen...

Maybe it was because of Adam Marczyński, whom Janusz Orbitowski perceived as the model of academic attitude. The older professor was a widely respected authority, who was considered restrained, distanced, sometimes at most ironic (Oramus, 2015: 15). Janusz Orbitowski was his graduate and long-time assistant, and later also his close friend and neighbour. He had to learn distance, moderation and seriousness. Perhaps the reason was also that the geometrical abstraction Orbitowski cultivated was neglected at the academy? And perhaps also that the three-dimensional structures which he created using cardboard or wooden boards earned him a contemptuous nickname of “carpenter,” which he shared with Marczyński? The reason could also be that Orbitowski was never given to run a painting studio, although it was usually received after the supervision of the drawing studio. Or maybe the work at the academy was simply a disliked necessity for the artist, held just because of the benefits that came with fixed salary and insurance? This possibility finds confirmation in the words of the artist’s son, Łukasz Orbitowski, who clearly stated that work at the academy was a “real cross to bear” for his father (Orbitowski Ł., 2018). Anyway, in his workplace, numerous colleagues perceived the artist as silent and invisible. Paradoxically, there were some who found metaphysics in this unobtrusive silence (Sałaj, 2018). As if the



inconspicuous artist, avoiding loud and violent reactions and ignoring the need for immediate answers, created this way a place to be filled with that which is not loud and vividly visible.

The paradox was the greater that outside the academy Janusz Orbitowski was the life of the party, a man full of humour and anecdotes. Openness and warm energy were strongly present in his relations with other artists from the geometric artists *milieu*, the art-dealer Andrzej Starmach, and his friends from the legal and medical circles in Krakow (Wiktor, 2004: 100; Starmach 2018; Orbitowska 2018). On the one hand, the richly instilled artistic and social meetings simply allowed Orbitowski to present his real attitudes and emotions. On the other, his colleagues from the *plein-air* painting workshops remember him not only as always desirable, “brilliant and witty,” but also as an “extremely spiritual character – up to the state of levitation” (Wiktor, 2004: 100). There are grounds, therefore, to see Janusz Orbitowski as a person who opened up metaphysical experience just by his very presence. This experience was evoked both by his silent and invisible presence, as well as by his visible, “strong” activity, clearly shaping social relations. Perhaps the paradox of such a dual personality can be treated as an unintentional “hint” (though not an answer) at the meaning revealed just by the paradox itself.

The paradox was also hidden in Janusz Orbitowski in the relationship between his art and his teaching of drawing at the academy. As a drawing teacher, Orbitowski taught a traditional study of the nude (*Katedra rysunku*, 1996: M16). It required the teaching of mimetic imitation, representation, resemblance and the preservation of the traditional principles of harmonious composition. He expected his students not to spoil the appearance of the body, or its limbs. Finally, accuracy and conscientious work were required. The professor criticised simple mistakes. Orbitowski’s pupil and his later assistant, Bogusław Bachorzcyk, remembers simple words, such as “here you ‘shifted’ the leg,” delivered by the professor during the correction (Bachorzcyk, 2018). Admittedly, the refinement of details was appreciated, but the teacher emphasised above all that a student should use a traditional study to arrange the plane and develop an individual language expressing his own vision. This was possible also during the work on a simple nude composition (*Katedra rysunku*, 1996: M16).

### **Art seemingly absent**

As an artist, Janusz Orbitowski himself perfectly arranged the plane and developed his own language of painting and drawing. This was evident in experiments with the coloristic geometry through perceptual op-art and minimalist forms. Even so, his own art did not appear at all during the classes he was teaching. This art was as if invisible to students. Meanwhile, Orbitowski’s works included many elements that could work as a starting point for important reflections on the theory of art (not only abstract) and its various contexts. His original artistic approach may be

observed already in his early works such as *Ciemny czerwony* [Dark Red], painted in acrylic in 1968 (size 100 × 65 cm). There are three red glowing spots with irregular edges, arranged diagonally inside black and white rhombuses. The higher one, in the upper left corner, is more suppressed by a black shadow surrounding it. The lower one, on the right, more distinctly red, resembles a cross-shaped reflex, surrounded by a smaller grey stain. The shadows merge together. The dark field grows with another red incandescence inside, on their connection. The viewer approaching and changing the direction of his gaze notices that the composition of rhomboids is made up of small close adjacent rectangles. They form the internal rhythm of the entire image, which ultimately imposes on the viewer.

The painting seems to realise in abstract art the concentration on the experience of the viewer, as postulated by Władysław Strzemiński in *The Theory of Vision* (Strzemiński, 1958). It exposes the role of eye-catching stimuli, shows the importance of visual changes that identify rhombuses and rectangles, almost synthesises the ways of creating a grey and blurred “peripheral field,” and finally underlines the role of natural rhythm. A challenge to join “the rhythm of the world,” taken in the pulsating and vibrating lattice of the painting, is an example of the relationship with nature that Orbitowski would later always maintain by accepting “organic” traces in his works (Orbitowski J. in Szczepaniak, 2005: 7). However, in this specific work, the trace is not in the similarity to natural objects but rather in the presence of the pulsating “rhythm of the world.”

Orbitowski’s concentration on the viewer’s experience and its inclusion into the vibrating energy of the environment corresponds with op-art and *The Responsive Eye* exhibition. The multiplicity of events on the retina which experiences a rhythmic and alternately pulsating play of colours, a combination of red that defies the “nothingness” of black hue (and at the same time emphasises its intensity), achromatic contrast of white and black (tonally, subtly mediated by grey) are the features typical for “optical paintings” (Seitz, 1965: 18–19). On the other hand, the rhythmic movement of repeated rectangles, which could indicate the “unistic” repetitions of the painting frames (Strzemiński, 1977: 449–450), is broken by the dominant rhombuses with angled lines, repeated and varied by size. Such an experience suspends reception. Temporary suspension forces the viewer to reflect on one’s vision and its boundaries. Then, “the optical unconscious” demands the logic of “transparency, simultaneity, and the containment of a frame” to ask the question about “the higher orders of the intellect” (Krauss, 1996: 19, 12) Perhaps the stopping moment of the rhythm and angled lines become the symptom of “the inner Gaze” expressed in an abstract painting?

The use of Strzemiński’s ideas, juxtaposed with the reflection on perception open to various aspects of experience, leads finally to metaphysics. It seems that this early picture is just a “spontaneous” and “pre-discursive” experience of a metaphysical “fundamental reality” present in the “strangeness” of the world. Such an experience is possible especially in painting, as it was suggested by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, 1996; Migasiński, 1993: 58). It is possible, therefore, to

discover in the art of Janusz Orbitowski, already at its early stage, a mutual interpenetration of Strzemiński's ideas, perceptualism, optical unconsciousness and the phenomenology of perception open to metaphysics.

A later example well shows the evolution of style and the search for the artist's own proper artistic solutions. Work titled *21/91* (the twenty-first work painted in 1991, size 140 × 100 cm) was painted in acrylic on canvas in white. Its specificity, however, is the result of a linear structure of delicate and thin cords attached to the white canvas (forming initially unrecognisable ridges and grooves). The cords construct four planes covered with tightly arranged delicate darker lines that run in parallel and rhythmic constancy, but in four different directions. The planes collide in the upper part of the work to build an "arrogant" triangle. It looks as if it is "slicing" between two basic planes. Such a suggested movement can give this figure an apparent spatiality. However, another lower plane moves upwards with a definite calm force. It makes the impression as if it wants to cover the triangular illusion of space. The impression of movement prompts the spectator to trace the directions of planes and lines. As a result, it turns out that in fact the upper triangle and the sliding plate from below are one plane. The side forms were simply overlapped on it. The cognitive paradox is hidden in the initially imposed dramatic illusion of movement.

The contrast and ambiguity of white plane and darker cords, flat canvas and spatiality of ridges and grooves, the permanence of rhythmic order and the movement of a created form could be associated with the *Black and White* trend, singled out at *The Responsive Eye* exhibition (Seitz, 1965: 30–31), and represented, for example, by Bridget Riley, Josef Albers, François Morellet, Francis Celentano, and Henryk Berlewi. The more so that in special lighting the cords may seem black. Such an association is sustained and extended in "the stimulation of experience" by the textural tremor and vibration of parallel lines (or ridges) made of cords. The impression grows especially when a spectator, after approaching the painting and looking at it from various perspectives, identifies the non-illusory space in the grooves between the lines.

Then the rhythmically trembling texture provokes to expand the experience "synaesthetically" (Merleau-Ponty, 2001: 249–250). It is as if the painting "asks" to touch and cross the grooves with a finger or a hard tool to induce a whirr to experience the order and rhythm acoustically. Such an illusory sense of sound causes not only visual participation in the physiological and natural rhythm, as it might be called in the context of Strzemiński's concept of perception (Strzemiński, 2016). Neither does the picture simply "bombard" the retina with an energy, which was emphasised by William Seitz. It is rather the immersive perception caused by the painting, because it induces "engaged reception in which the work approaches and overwhelms the viewer, interacting fully with his cognitive power" (Ostrowicki, 2006: 204).

Finally, the last paradox is revealed. It turns out that one of the grooves runs strongly and "definitely" from top to bottom of the painting, as if even the frame

could not stop it. Its course is categorical like the yellow line in *The Command* by Barnett Newman. Or perhaps it is Worringer's "symbol of necessity," excavated from subconscious memory (Sztabiński, 2004: 12)? Or a trace of an infinite Absolute Being to be experienced in a sensual reception (Merleau-Ponty, 1996; Migasiński: 53, 55)? The more so that the scale of the painting maintains an impression of minimalistic monumental sublimity.

There are, finally, works smoothly covered uniformly with white paint, made after 2001. This is one of the last recurrences of "whiteness" characteristic of Orbitowski (the first white relief appeared as early as 1967, white works were created e.g. in 1973, 1978; Kowalska, 2006: 102). White uniformity, however, is violated and changed by the relief included into paintings. In one of the works (*Relief 7/02*, acrylic, fibreboard, cardboard; size 1 × 1 m), the rows of vertically oriented, adjacent, several-centimetre-long rectangles form diagonally inclined columns. Rectangles rise above a flat surface, cast a shadow, offering an impression of stairs or panels ascending within staircases. Black rectangular contours in the left part of the rows and the white ones in the right resemble sequences of illuminated or darkened windows. The relief "animates the white space of the ground" (Kowalska, 2015). It is geometry, however, that organises the space. There is still an overwhelming order in the painting. Even if some of the rectangles seem pushed far to the back of the plane. Geometry that violated the quiet sublimity of white colour simultaneously restores this sublimity despite the dynamic interplay of light and shadow and the introduction of the third dimension. The dramatic paradox shows the stability of overwhelming and immersive sublimity.

Only that this is not the end of the experience offered by this work. It is a double-sided relief (one of a series of eleven reliefs made in 2001). Its reverse is also intended for viewing. Narrow strips are visibly made of cardboard, a light-brown colour is exposed as a raw material of geometric and refined structures, while the interiors of the ascending stairs turn out to be stairs leading down to dark unknown depth. Or is it a symbolic way to reveal the Mystery just by constructing space?

This is an essential challenge to experience the simultaneity of both ascending upward "pyramidal" stairs in the gradual growth of form and downward recesses in one work and, moreover, in the same place and in the same structure. However, it requires the viewer to change the perspective. The viewer looks at the obverse and then turns the picture to see the reverse. During such an activity time passes and "simultaneity" cannot be observed. The essence of the work is impossible to experience, paradoxically enough. This paradox itself shows the limitations of cognitive powers within the categories of time and space. It suggests that, guided by the space-time order, so expressive in Janusz Orbitowski's works, we ultimately stand in the weakness of the senses facing the Mystery. Nevertheless, it is the poetics of paradox to suggest that metaphysical inaccessibility and inferiority reveals itself the most just in the experience of the paradox. The more so because in this work the paradox also appears through the complementarity of opposites

(*coincidentia oppositorum*). What is ascending is at the same time descending, the obverse has the same meaningful reverse, the white outline of the planes has dark equivalents (in the rows of “windows”). The paradox transcends human expectations, habits, knowledge and understanding. Consequently, it reveals that there is another, unknown order. An order of the Absolute Existence, unlimited by the categories of time, space, vision, understanding...

## Paradoxical cognition

The duality of Janusz Orbitowski’s approach, described earlier, is present in a certain way also in the artist’s works. Often, it is the first impression of an abstract form, maybe a bit too ornamental, not interpretable, not challenging. And yet, the concentration on the work and its reception reveals a richness of experience it offers. There is a lot going on in the paintings and they could be the subject and a foremost inspiration for a reflection on important artistic issues. Among them is the role and construction of space, the function of both order and rhythm, the role of changing the viewpoint, the stimulation of experience, perceptualism, phenomenology of perception, Strzemiński’s ideas, metaphysics, and so forth. What’s more, the multiplicity of events occurs in an image or results only from it. Analyses can therefore be implemented in accordance with the most categorical abstractionists and conceptualists, as “analytical judgments” (Kosuth, 1969: 134–137).

Why, then, did Orbitowski decide not to use his own works in any way in his teaching? Why were his own paintings and drawings “invisible” for students during the education process in his studio? Was the artist unwilling to raise demanding subjects? Erudition combined with diligence and discipline, which characterised Janusz Orbitowski, do not justify such an opinion. Or maybe he was embarrassed to talk about his own art? He was indeed restrained at the academy but among other geometric abstractionists and his friends he discussed art a lot. The artist’s wife, Teresa Orbitowska, mentions that “he talked with Marczyński about art for hours” (Orbitowska, 2018).

Or maybe Janusz Orbitowski did not appreciate his students? On the contrary, the students who displayed required diligence were allowed to make experiments. The teacher did not bother them or try to stand in an individual way of a student. Such selected young artists were accompanied by a calm and patient observation. This was “sub-pedagogy” of sorts, as education in Orbitowski’s studio was called by his student, Piotr Bujak (Bujak, 2018). A film, made by Bogna Podbielska and Grzegorz Sztwiertnia during a picnic organised in the garden of Orbitowski’s favourite summerhouse in Tenczynek, shows sympathy for students (Piknik, 2003). Janusz Orbitowski simply liked them. But, nevertheless, the master was still staying out of sight at the academy, distant perhaps also in the drawing studio, as if he was hidden in the shade. Although he was perceptibly present, he was becoming invisible in his own way.

Even Orbitowski's son identified the cause of this approach as the usual dislike of the academy. However, maybe, in his own way, Janusz Orbitowski taught drawing not only because of financial necessity (as his son stated above). Perhaps the artist used his ambiguous situation to make use of the paradox to reveal what his art was ultimately discovering and what constituted the foundation of the artist's personal identity and his understanding of art. The same son writes that "the need for silence, some harmony between the soul and the world" was important for his father above all (Orbitowski Ł., 2018).

Indeed, on the one hand, he was teaching in a very traditional way. On the other, during such teaching he was still present, as well as he was patiently waiting. There was, in the quiet waiting, an opening of space for a response. The teacher expected the students to see the essence of art themselves, during the process of learning their ordinary artistic craft. Instead of unambiguous answers, he offered space and silence for the students to find and resound their own answer. His "unseenness" served this purpose. In this way, the silent invisibility was instructive. The "unseen" Janusz Orbitowski taught to be invisible and patient to give a place to see and hear what is happening in the silent simplicity where one can find their own identity and cognise the universal sense of existence. The metaphysics of presence, observed by friends, resonated with the metaphysics of expectation appearing in relations with students. Perhaps, in this way, Orbitowski taught not so much art but rather metaphysical cognition (Krapiec, 2006)?

Lastly, the mentioned paradox of the dual attitude to artistic *milieu* and dissonance between teaching and art appeared to be an element of a demanding game. Participation in such a game made participants aware of the causes and the role of the silent invisibility. It taught the ways of looking to find meaning. Participation in the game includes the necessary entry into the relationship and inclusion into the community of participants. The community of the game discovers the value of a shared view and mutual learning. This way the community itself appears to be the cognised value, too. Such a value is discovered and cognised, paradoxically (again), because the initial impression was an alienated and silent invisibility.

Such a paradoxical invisibility, however, served metaphysical cognition, too. It was the cognition of the identity, complementarity of opposites, existential necessities, universal sense of being, Absolute Existence. And it was the essence of Janusz Orbitowski's sub-pedagogy of art expressed in an apparent silence and invisibility. Such an essence was present on various levels of personal presence, art making, and art teaching. The paradox of both silence "distended" with sublime meanings and the dramatic multiplicity of "the unseen" transcended the activities of Janusz Orbitowski. Finally, the presence of transcendence ultimately indicated a paradox as the way to experience the invisible Mystery. As well as the way to discover such an experience as the essential task of art, teaching and human existence.

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## Instructive Invisibility: Paradoxical Sub-Pedagogy of Janusz Orbitowski

### Abstract

The text focuses on Janusz Orbitowski, a Krakow-based painter of geometric abstraction, and on his teaching methods at the Academy of Fine Arts. This discussion is combined with interpretation of his works. Orbitowski's distance to the academic *milieu* and his quiet teaching of traditional nude drawing are presented as a contrast to his openness and "energetic" lifestyle among friends, as well as to the distinct expressiveness found in his works. The text suggests that the paradoxical duality of silent invisibility, concealed by expression, could lead the artist and his students as well as the viewers of his art to a variety of cognitive experiences, including metaphysical cognition.

**Keywords:** Janusz Orbitowski, teaching art, Academy of Fine Arts, geometric abstraction, op-art

**Słowa kluczowe:** Janusz Orbitowski, nauczanie sztuki, ASP, abstrakcja geometryczna, op art

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**Artistic Education and the Artist's Work:  
the Way out of Producing Objects**

The artist's refusal to define him-/herself as a producer of unique objects grew alongside the extension of the market's influence on all areas of life. The artist's path, from producing objects to conducting sensory experiences, from producing representations of reality to taking an active part in the construction of reality, was reflected in the process of educational transformation.

Usually, fine art academies adjust to the new ideas rather slowly and accept the change of educational programs and methods rather reluctantly. For this reason, the critique of artistic education is always focused on the ideological basis of academies as places that uphold traditional types of art practice and keep standards and hierarchies. The attack on academic principles of teaching art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was implemented through reformist and anarchist approaches. Alternative pedagogical frameworks led to a radical change, and teaching artists often embodied avant-garde ideas inside existing institutions. Requirements for an educational system in the art field were formulated by artists-theoreticians in accordance with their understanding of the role of art and its agents in the society.

Founded in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, art academies sought to protect artists' autonomy and to prevent them from being controlled and patronised by trade guilds and craftsmen associations. Being distinguished from crafts, art was able to enter the system of academic education. Making art was perceived as a separate type of practical work, while academic education guaranteed its continuity. It was believed that it was possible to teach how to become a painter or a sculptor, although they were considered special professions, linked with the notion of talent. It seemed that art was not conflated with crafts anymore (as it was achieved by the Renaissance), however professional success required mastering. Thus, skill improvement in making art objects was seen as the artist's main objective, but the talent shown that way could only be developed through the conventions enacted by following tradition.

As an avant-garde theoretician, Osip Brik wrote in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century that the experience of an easel painter was a specific case and individual

painting work, not a general artist experience (1924). Artists representing productivist art offered a new awareness of the artistic work as a work not separated from material production (Arvatov, 1926). At the same time, they manifested objectlessness and pointed that left art could not be reduced to the production of material culture elements. The aim of the artist's move into production was not to create applied things – it was about creating objects of a new function, consequently, these objects were aimed not just to improve welfare, as to change people's sensual habits (Chubarov, 2014).

The ideas of productivist art were embodied in educational and experimental fields – inside the GINKhUK/ГИИХУК, *Gosudarstvennyiy Institut Khudozhestvennoy Kulturyi* [State Institute of Artistic Culture] and Vkhutemas/ВХУТЕМАС, *Vysshiyе Khudozhestvenno-Tekhnicheskiye Masterskiye* [Higher Art and Technical Workshops], actively functioning institutions in the USSR in the early 1920s. Members of GINKhUK stopped making easel paintings and focused their critique on representational and figurative art. They demanded from artists to become engineers, technicians, inventors. They saw the difference between a craftsman and an artist particularly in the mastery, which, according to them, was inherent to an artist, as a creative, and therefore unalienated process of making a piece.

Along with the reorientation of academic education for artists so that it was able to take part in the organisation of production, a process of another kind – a search for approaches to objectify educational methods – was taking place. For instance, on a scientific basis, Vkhutemas professors were developing an “objective teaching method,” unified for all types of creative work in order to bring them together (Han-Magomedov, 1995). Experimental and analytical search of left artists served as a basis of methodology of learning the primary means of artistic expression, principles of composition, correlation between form and material. These artists were establishing completely new laws of form-making (Han-Magomedov, 1995). Similar analytic and objective approaches were introduced in *Kyivskiy Khudozhnii Instytut* [the Kyiv Art Institute] from 1924 to 1930, in the teaching of formal and technical disciplines (*Фортех/Fortech* course)<sup>1</sup>.

At the same time, in Bauhaus Manifesto, Walter Gropius stated that art could not be grasped by educational systems and therefore there was no sense in separating it from crafts (1919). To him, the artist was an exalted craftsman and the difference between artist and craftsman, which should be overcome, was initially the class one. Gropius came back to the pre-academic type of education in workshops and to the notion of mastery. He put improving the technical skill and agility above acquiring the practice of representational drawing in an isolated studio. At the same time, he found it important to separate art from technique, since, according

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<sup>1</sup> Apart from some articles on pedagogical programs of the Fortech course written in Ukrainian by O. Kashuba-Vol'vach (Кашуба-Вольвач, 2008) and recently published sessions of the drawing section of the Kyiv Art Institute, where the course was discussed (Filevska, 2017), there are no in-depth studies of this course.

to him, it was possible to become a qualified craftsman or an independent creative artist owing to individual capacities. Gropius regarded art in the unity of disciplines: there were basic principles taught and researched in Bauhaus, the same for architecture, sculpture, and painting, which served as a foundation for all creative activities within the visual arts.

In the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, due to their proximity to industrial production (in accordance with the shift from pre-industrial crafts to commercial design), art schools introduced a new understanding of an artist's figure and goals of artistic education. Producing objects gained a new meaning, where no longer a unique object became the final result of an artist's work, but an efficient, economical, temporary one, one that took part in shaping a new human sensuality and had direct relations with nature.

The idea of work and art integration in the avant-garde was linked with the aim of shaping a new society, while the idea of art moving to manufacture was intended to show the social nature of creativity. Intended, and therefore free, creation process had to negate the worker's alienation throughout the manufacturing process, since the process of making a product involved skills and developed new means of setting up the material in interaction between different kinds of work and creation.

In his pedagogical practice, through the tasks that did not require a clear solution, as well as evaluation, Josef Albers, a Bauhaus teacher, effectively encouraged the development of creative force and independence. Instead of focusing on traditional methods of learning craftsmanship and gaining technical skills, which limit creative freedom and inventiveness, the primary course program *Vorkurs* (Foundation Course) developed by Albers provoked thinking and playing with the material free from specific goals. The problem-oriented teaching approach designed by him required usage of qualities of materials and interaction between formal elements, it stimulated students to create new forms and to use self-invented methods. Therefore, the process of learning resulted from students' individual finds.

After leaving Bauhaus, Albers was teaching in North Carolina, Black Mountain College, and then in Yale. He encouraged art schools to stop communicating predefined knowledge, methods and rules, in order to shape not the "trained individuals," but creative, curious, and therefore masterful artists. These principles, such as supporting experiment and experience rather than supporting artists' self-expression, prioritising the process over the result, implemented by Gropius in his education process in Bauhaus, influenced the European and American systems of artistic education. Since the post-war era, art departments at universities in the USA, have been running primary programs aimed to give students an understanding of the fundamentals of art, whereas academic education encouraged the development of personalities able to solve modern problems in all forms of visual art, to raise and research new issues (Singerman, 1999).

The concept of transformation was Albers' most extensively addressed pedagogical issue: a thing becomes something different from what we expected because

the artist can make people see things that are absent (Horowitz, Danilowitz 2006). He focused students' attention on the formal interactions between elements, on the perception shift depending on their transformations. In his pedagogical theory, it was manifested as "perception learning." Craftsman skills, advocated by Gropius as means to overcome the artist's academic isolation, were replaced by the field of vision and the basic principles of art (Singerman, 1999). Educational programs in the departments of American universities, renamed from "fine art" to "visual art," are now built on teaching the basics of all creative acts in the field of visual arts, no matter if it is fine arts or applied arts, and they are built on teaching the fundamental elements, the same for architecture, sculpture, and painting, the universal means of creativity – the visual language (Singerman, 1999).

At the other extreme, during the Cold War, in the Academy of Arts in Warsaw, the architect Oskar Hansen was implementing the same approach. In 1952, he became the head of the Solids and Planes Composition Studio, an obligatory class for the first and second year students from all departments. This name was kept until 1970, when it was replaced by the Visual Structures Studio, while in 1981–1983 it was renamed to Interdepartmental Faculty of Integrated Visual Arts. Hansen's pedagogy was based on the Open Form theory and required integration and collaboration between architecture and visual arts. Continuing the pre-war practice of Wojciech Jastrzębowski, a Warsaw's Academy teacher, Hansen stated that he taught not art but a visual language (Gola, 2014).

Artistic education, supported by the idea of general aesthetic education, was widely spread as a medium of developing human sensual apparatus. In *When Form Has Become Attitude – And Beyond*, Thierry de Duve described the basis for modernist education and noted that a new educational paradigm was grounded in the idea that all people had innate talents of perception (basic capability of reading and identifying) and imagination (basic capability of writing), thus, the function of education was to develop them, because everyone could be taught the visual base if not the manual technical skills. According to Gropius, art became a medium for training the viewer's "common language of visual communication" (1948). With that said, the specialisation of visual arts means specific training and development of visual perception and imagination, whereas creativity is a modern name for their combination.

Creativity and field of vision that exist in the present and look into the future, became an educational basis replacing tradition, rules and conventions. Comparing educational models, de Duve describes the modernist one as a model that replaced academic one in the post-war era in Western Europe and America through the new notions of "creativity," "medium" and "invention" that took over "talent," "metier" and "imitation." Learning representational drawing, in its academic pattern, changed into the research of means taking the position of an ultimate goal, instead of being merely an instrument of reaching mimetic goals. As opposed to observation and imitation of external models, artists switched to the internal and started observing and imitating the means of expression themselves. In the new modernist

paradigm, art is distinguished due to the specificities of its means (painting, sculpture etc.) and not due to continuing earlier tradition. Thus, a painter is now not a qualified specialist, in the specific field with its history, but a person who raises the question of painting as a medium. Nevertheless, this approach, supported by the authority of Greenberg, the theoretician of modernism, imprisoned the artist inside the discipline again.

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the scientific approach to artistic education started to be implemented in art schools – in Vkhutemas in Moscow and Kyiv Art Institute, the research of objective teaching methods and creative issues analysis was pursued, while in Bauhaus, teaching artist like Johannes Itten, Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky were researching the main qualities of a visual world and were working on the programs of colour studies, painting theory, and theory of forms. Pursuing scientific practice, both experimental and theoretical, artists gained new roles (Goldstein, 1996).

Understanding art as a scientific field helped find its place in the university (Singerman, 1999). Along with the shift of understanding of the role of academic artistic education – the shift from maintaining and reproducing tradition to developing new approaches of working with the visual material in the science institutions and laboratories – independent scientific research moved to the foreground and producing new knowledge replaced commenting on and reorganising the old one. The artist's place in a university was guaranteed because he/she became the researcher of the visual.

The academy, as an experimental laboratory, allowed Hansen to develop his subject and to spread his ideas among the young generation in Poland (Sienkiewicz, 2014). Hansen used self-made educational instruments, aimed at helping students to test materials and technological features, at the same time encouraging their imagination and inventiveness (Gola, 2014). The Open Form theory and Hansen's ideas of social cooperation influenced the structure of students' work itself, and art became perceived as a form of communication, dialogue or group collaboration aimed at achieving balance between individual expression and the necessity of building a community. The process itself quickly became more valuable than the work as an object (Sienkiewicz, 2014).

Albers also stated that artistic education should not be separated from life and paid attention to the political dimension of forms. While teaching formal interactions, he compared the imperatives of form and the imperatives of society (Horowitz, Danilowitz 2006). Black Mountain College, founded in 1933 in North Carolina, was a geographically isolated "laboratory" with a rather small amount of students, where ideas of Albers, such as free experimenting and interdisciplinarity, supporting individual experience and communitarianism, prioritising a process over a result, teaching a method instead of a content, were fully embodied.

The shift from Abstract impressionism to conceptual and linguistic practices in Black Mountain College was linked with the presence of John Cage and Merce Cunningham. Their practice at the intersection of painting, music and performance

could happen only in an academy with no separate workshops and disciplines (Pas, 2014).

Black Mountain College significantly affected art and education of the 1960s, while in America and Europe a new wave of artistic education critique was raised that was connected to the conceptual art practices. Rethinking the concept of art, neo-avant-garde artists often focused their attention on academies and embodied their ideas in the form of manifests, books, and alternative pedagogical practices, which radically influenced the notion of art and education in general.

Neo-avant-garde practices forerunner, abstract painter Ad Reinhardt, who was teaching in Brooklyn College in New York during his lifetime and occasionally in Yale and other universities, published a tragicomic text in 1953 – *Twelve Rules for a New Academy*. It was a list of things that artists should avoid (1953). It was primarily a denial of rules of the specific art practices of the time: it was emphasised that these practices used art for self-expression or action focused on the public, for cooperation with the government, business and war.

On the contrary, an experimental book by Robert Filliou, *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts*, published in 1970, had a positive program. Filliou suggested using participation techniques for solving artistic education problems, and he implemented them in happenings, environments, street performances, action, and visual poetry. One of the chapters from this book contains interviews with artists – John Cage, Allan Kaprow, George Brecht, and Joseph Beuys, among others. Filliou wanted to know their opinion on subjects such as art as freedom, art as providing the potential revolutionary set of values, art as leisure. Also, he wanted to know whether they believed that teaching and learning could be conceived as performing arts (1970).

In 1971, when Joseph Beuys was teaching at the sculpture department at the Arts Academy of the city of Düsseldorf, Germany (Staatliche Kunstakademie of Düsseldorf), he opened his class for everyone interested, pointing out that only a university fully open to creation could free artistic education from bureaucratic limitations. The concept of creativity became a major one again. When he founded the Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research with Heinrich Böll in 1974, their idea was to create a social organism as a piece of art. They claimed that every person had a creative potential, but its development was being stopped by competition and struggle for success, hence the goal of their school was to recognise and develop this potential (Beuys, 1973).

Collaborative aspects of visual art and “intermedia” were conceptualised and adopted in practice by Joseph Beuys and other artists from the Fluxus movement. “Art is one of the ways that people communicate” – this is the opening line of the *Statement on Intermedia* by Dick Higgins, who implemented this notion in describing new intersections of painting, poetry, dance, and composing practices. According to him, the central problem is now not only the new formal one of learning to use them [intermedia], but the new and more social one of what to use them for (1966).

Since then, collectivity became a new paradigm: interaction, collaboration, communication were perceived as art's new tactics. Academies became responsive to these ideas. Under the influence of conceptual art, which opposed modernist postulates in the late 1960s, art was considered no longer dependent on specifics and purity of means, which was strongly advocated by Greenberg; instead, it was considered grounded in a concept instead of means. Art found a new basis – language, and it began to focus on research practices and to use strategies from other disciplines, therefore becoming interdisciplinary.

Critique and text became important products in the system of artistic education. Means relevant to the new art came from the intellectual scientific field – from philosophical, sociological, political studies. Thus, theory entered academy and replaced learning in workshops. It provided students with critical vocabulary and intellectual instruments. The new politicised discourse of art and its relations with society was built, and gradually became dominant and institutionalised owing to the forward-looking art schools. This is how Thierry de Duve described a new situation of artistic education, adding new terminology to the above-mentioned to define these changes: “position,” “practice” and “deconstruction” (1994).

Traditional academic artistic education requires a patient, diligent, obedient body that cherishes its talent though the mastery of making a piece in assiduous manual work. Following the mimetic demand of an eye, the hand is trained until it becomes able to register what is seen and intended instantly and credibly (since academic tradition tends to idealise nature). Mastering means and forms of representing the visual world in a way that it can be recognised is the task of a professional academic paradigm education, in opposition to which the future attention focuses on training a perceptive eye, active body and inventive artist's mind ready to intrude into reality. The mastery is changing from handwork skills to verbal ones, therefore, the work of art is perceived as a statement.

New art practices, grounded in communicative features, do not tend to make a material work as a final product. They act in the area of the invisible and, along with art's refusal to serve the ruling discourses, i.e. to be “practical, useful, related, applicable, or subservient to anything else” (Reinhardt, 1953: 37–38), they become elusive. Artistic activity acquires performativity: it challenges the potentiality of the language itself, it contains a goal inside itself, and even though it is embodied in time, it does not have purposes focused either on the past or on the future, although it can re-establish current things in reality as continuities. It is another type of work that has a political constituent. Meanwhile, practice, communication and positioning, being spectacular, can also be products, while art, as a social institution, becomes actively involved in the system of capitalist economy.

In the learning process, an artist creates him-/herself, challenges him-/herself, develops his/her communicative and creative skills – the body itself and its capabilities become means of art. After education, the “art scene” becomes the main place for the artist's self-affirmation. According to Pascal Gielen, the art scene, as a place of social interaction, “involves a work ethic in which work is always

enjoyable – or should be; in which dynamism is boosted unconditionally by young talent; and in which commitment outstrips money” (Gielen, 2015: 110–116). Cultural production requires constant commitment and self-exploiting. In this way, new educational programs prepare cross-functional graduates who value adaptability and flexibility: generally, project-oriented nature of work provides temporary responsibilities and puts an artist in a position dependent on current trends.

Educational institutions in the art field prepare the employees of non-material work requested for new working conditions of non-material part of economy, where language and communication skills, immanent and integral for a human, are the means of production. It is required from a professional to be devoted to work, to be ready to work anytime engaging creativity and enthusiasm, to have flexible working hours, to be mobile and dynamic, to react quickly to a new context, and to put forward fresh ideas. The work of a creative employee, unstable and cheap, since the symbolic capital is mainly enough payment, is a base for the development and growth of creative industries with their demand for constant innovations and involving all human nature. The nature of work changes in general, and artistic activity occupies a special place in it. As Paolo Virno has noted, the cultural industry, industry of communication, acted as an industry of means of production (Virno, 2013: 68).

Recently captured general dynamic is marked by the universities’ loss of autonomy that should guarantee place and time for experiments free from goal-setting. Along with the signing the Bologna declaration in 2010, European universities took the responsibility to provide an internationally comparable education. From now on, the notion of efficiency becomes important and the quality is evaluated through quantifiable measures – economic features.

Nowadays, in neo-liberal economy conditions, when labour considerably matches the language, the rules of normalising creativity and methods of mechanising reactions, emotions, and thinking appear. Thus, the artist’s abilities, trained owing to pedagogical innovations in art academies and university departments, are at risk of becoming the product of a new type, a valuable resource of creative economy, while counteraction determines new challenges for education.

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## Artistic Education and the Artist's Work: the Way out of Producing Objects

### Abstract

In this article, the changes of the principles of teaching art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are discussed. The artist's path from producing objects to conducting sensory experiences, from producing representations of reality to taking an active part in the construction of reality, was reflected in the process of educational transformation. New art practices grounded in communicative features, interaction, collaboration, do not tend to make a material work as a final product, but they act in the area of the invisible. In the new conditions of the neo-liberal economy, the artist's abilities, based on language and developed owing to pedagogical innovations in the

art academies and university departments, are at risk of becoming a product of a new type, a valuable resource of creative economy, while counteraction determines new challenges for education.

**Keywords:** Contemporary art, art education, objectlessness, creative economy

**Słowa kluczowe:** sztuka współczesna, edukacja artystyczna, bezprzedmiotowość, przemysł kreatywny

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## Vanishing Taste: On the Sensual Experience of an Artwork

The aim of this article is to consider various aspects of taste experience in art. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century “taste” had been an important issue in aesthetics, but only it was understood metaphorically, as an ability to recognise a beautiful object. Taste as one of the senses was not considered a subject appropriate for aesthetic reflection. Carolyn Korsmeyer (2002) wrote about various reasons that led to this exclusion. The sense of taste was thought to be too subjective to become a suitable matter for philosophical inquiry. Moreover, its bodily, physiological aspect was a major drawback that made it seem inadequate as a part of artistic experience. Food was not perceived as a proper artistic medium, since it was linked with biological needs and therefore could not meet the requirements of disinterested judgment that was central to Kantian aesthetics. The idea of hierarchy of senses is deeply rooted in European philosophy and culture, and it shaped the aesthetic discourse in which only vision and hearing were defined as aesthetic senses (Korsmeyer, 2002: 11–12). The senses of taste, smell, and touch were considered animalistic and even primitive and thus they were not appreciated. Taste was condemned for epistemological and moral reasons, as well. Kant (1996) divided the senses into objective (touch, hearing, sight) and subjective (taste and smell); he argued that the latter “are more subjective than objective, that is, the idea obtained from them is more an idea of enjoyment, rather than the cognition of the external object” (41). The philosopher neglected the epistemological potential of the lower senses. Mark M. Smith (2007) emphasised the moral aspect of taste, as it was believed that it had to be disciplined, because the indulgence in taste-related pleasures could lead to the sin of gluttony. Reasons listed above led to the longterm exclusion of taste from the scope of interest of aesthetics.

Nowadays, scientist and philosophers recognise the complexity and value of taste. With the growing interest in food, investigated in the context of both social practice and scientific research, taste becomes a prominent topic. Karen Grøn (2017: 7) noticed that “using food, we can comment on particularly anything: social problems, cultural habits, our identities, our understanding of nature, setting

boundaries, our sensibilities and our visions of the future.” This interest can also be observed in the art world, as more and more artists look at food and eating as “sapid” topics.

This article concentrates on various aspects that are related to the presence of taste in art: its multisensory properties, ability to communicate various meanings, ephemerality, its emotional aspect and potential to evoke memories. I would like to address all those issues to reflect on why and how artists engage taste in their projects and how it changes the way we perceive an artwork.

For ages food was an important motif in art and it was often saturated with religious and/or symbolic meaning. Obviously, the actual taste experience was absent from artistic representations of food (but it does not mean that artists did not attempt to visually represent taste). With the emergence of avant-garde movements, food actually started to be present as an artistic medium and used in performance art (Bottinelli, D’Ayala Valva, 2017). The avant-garde developed an interest in food but also in eating, where taste was taken into consideration as an element of engaging with an artwork. The rising numbers of artists who engage in food art and use food as a medium of their artworks proves that it is important to reflect on how taste is experienced.

One of the most important aspects connected with the use of real food products as an artistic medium is that experiencing art becomes multisensory. Food and eating engage various senses – taste, smell, touch, sight and even hearing. Barry C. Smith (2017: 62) described this complexity of taste as follows:

We don’t just taste with the tongue. What we call tasting is always a combination of touch, taste and smell: the texture and temperature of food in the mouth, the aromas reaching the nose from the plate and from the mouth all add to the taste sensations on the tongue. The brain has to weigh and integrate all these factors in order to arrive at single, unified perception of flavour.

This way, Smith emphasises the role of various senses in taste experience. For instance, the sight of the meal contributes to its taste; also the feeling of the texture of the food is important. Even sound can affect taste. This aspect was present, for instance, in Heston Blumenthal’s famous dish, *Sound of the Sea*. In our everyday experience we do not often reflect upon our taste experience and its complexity. Nevertheless, taste is not a simple physiological act, it is shaped by various factors. The fundamental aspect of taste experience is also its connection with smell. The relation between those two senses is so essential that it is impossible to perceive flavour if the perception of smell is somehow disrupted.

Martin Yeomans (2008, see: Smith, 2017: 63) claims that “multi-sensory integration may be at its most extreme in the case of the flavour perception, since few other experiences offer opportunity for concomitant stimulation of all major senses.” The multisensory aspect of taste is a rich field of inspiration for artists. For instance, Australian artist Jo Burzynska experiments with wine and sound, as she tries to study how different tones affect the taste of alcohol. Multisensory qualities

of food were also very important for the Futurists. For Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (2014) cuisine was one of the crucial elements of the futurist utopian project in which the fundamental feature was the creation of a “new human.” The future lifestyle of new Italians required agile and slim bodies, and this was to be achieved with novel, light diet. Therefore, food became one of key issues in futurist writings and art. In the famous manifesto of futurist cooking, Marinetti (2014) condemned the Italian predilection for eating pasta, as he believed this particular food product made them slow and lazy. The futurist interest in cuisine resulted in the opening of the first artistic restaurant, *The Holy Palate*, in Turin. This place quickly became the centre of culinary experiments. Most of the futurist experiments were aimed to astonish restaurant visitors. Reading the famous futurist cookbook one may discover that playing with the senses was one of the key features of futurist cuisine. For instance, Marinetti or Fillia (2014) proposed dinners during which no food was actually eaten. Instead of being consumed, food products were only touched or smelled. Futurists were well aware of the multisensory aspects of eating and of how the whole environment and setting affect the experience of food and taste. Therefore, for instance, in *Tactile Dinner Party*, Fillia proposed to concentrate on the haptic aspects of the feast. Waiters served salad without cutlery, so that the diners had to touch it; the meal was also accompanied by music. Futurists fully acknowledged that surroundings affect the taste experience so they concentrated not only on meals themselves but also on everything that went with them. The taste itself was also important in Marinetti’s vision of the cuisine of the future. Marinetti (2014: 35) proposed the “abolition of traditional mixtures in favour of experimentation with new, apparently absurd, mixtures” and the abolition of “everyday mediocrity from the pleasures of the palate”. For Futurists, taste had an important social and even political meaning, and the new cuisine was a key aspect of their vision of the future society.

After Futurists, more and more artists became interested in cuisine as art and they launched their own restaurants (for instance, Gordon Matta-Clark and Daniel Spoerri). There are many artworks and performances in which artists use food products. But it is important to indicate that not every artwork or project that uses food concentrates on taste. Many artists focus on the social and relational aspects of eating and they use food to create a certain social situation. For example, in her performances, Elżbieta Jabłońska prepared simple meals for the audience. For her, the communal aspect of food and the bonds that are created when people gather to eat together were crucial, for which reason actual taste of prepared dishes did not convey any particular meaning. In such projects, the consumption of food and the “disappearance” of taste is not an obstacle that a researcher has to face during analysis. Similarly, taste is not a significant issue when an artwork is only made of food products, but it is not destined to be eaten, so the actual taste experience is absent (for example, Kijewski/Kocur’s sculptures made of jellies and sweets).

However, there are artists for whom, just like for Futurists, flavour is a very important aspect of their projects. For instance, in the works by Anna Królikiewicz,

taste is fundamental. She often concentrates on physiology of taste perception and creates unusual and surprising taste experiences. Królikiewicz uses taste and smell (which is in some cases inseparably linked with taste sensation) experiences to create narratives about memory, loss and longing. In her work, *Flesh Flavour Frost*, she treated the audience with ice cream whose flavour was to resemble the taste of human body. With the addition of cumin, she wanted to create an aroma that brings to mind the smell of human skin on a sunny day. As artist recalls she used also “Japanese tofu, almond milk, smoked salt, birch-tree juice and black truffles” (Stronciwilk: 2018) because of their biological-like smell. Królikiewicz also spoke about the response of the audience, most of the members of the audience seemed to enjoy the taste, although it was unusual. Only two persons reacted with the disgust response, however the response did not occur during the tasting but afterwards when artist revealed to them that the taste was thought to resemble the taste one feels when their tongue comes in the contact with human skin. This example proves that the disgust reaction is not only physiological but often it is based on cultural associations. In this case it was not the taste itself that was perceived as disgusting but the idea that it resembles the taste of human body. The concept of transgressing one of the most powerful food taboo – the anthropophagy became the source of repulsion.

Deborah Lupton argued that tastes are strongly connected with emotions as she wrote that “there is particularly strong link between senses of taste and smell and the emotional dimensions of human experience” (1996: 31). This is another reason which makes tastes an inspiring artistic medium. Tastes are often linked with very intimate and personal memories. Also, our response to taste sensation is very direct and immediate. *Flesh Flavour Frost* is an emotional narrative about loss, absence, and longing, since the work she created was a response to the absence of a particular body. In Królikiewicz’s projects, taste experience is linked with place, memory and emotions. It is especially visible in her projects in which she works with the memory of a certain place by creating smells and tastes that are in various ways connected with the history of the site (e.g. *Drugstore*, *Absolutes*). For instance, her work *Drugstore* (2012) was placed in a closed shop in Gdańsk which once offered soaps, perfumes and cosmetics (often with oriental provenance). In *Drugstore* Królikiewicz prepared a special set of sweets – cakes, muffins to which she added a distinctive aroma of patchouli and lavender. Therefore, Królikiewicz created a scent and taste based experience which was a reference to the history of the site. The members of the audience were experiencing the presence of the past through their bodies and sensory stimulus. Interestingly, artist concentrated on her own olfactory memory, translated it to tastes and scents and allowed others to participate in it. Also in this case Królikiewicz recalls that some members of the audience considered the “sweets” she prepared inedible, especially the strong patchouli flavour was something they described as repulsive (Stronciwilk: 2018). Nicola Perullo (2017) tried to discuss the issue of relation between cuisine and art. Perullo describes various aspects of cuisine considered as an artform, for him the cuisine is

an art of joy and pleasure – therefore he does not see a possibility of creating deliberately distasteful or repulsive dishes:

Now, if in contemporary art one can research expressions that provoke disturbing feelings in the viewer that are distressing and shocking, the same is not possible for cuisine for theoretical reasons. [...] This expressive limit in cuisine has often been used as an objection to its artistic possibilities (Perullo: 2017: 37).

Artists who refer to cuisine are not constrained by such limitations; therefore, they can often experiment with taste(s) in wider aspect than chefs. For Perullo, the pleasure of the eater lies in the core of the cuisine, even if it is creative and experimental. Examples of works by Królikiewicz show that artists are more open to experiment with tastes which are not pleasant, as for them the expressive aspect of taste is more important than the comfort of the “viewer” (or rather eater). Interestingly this creates a different, new and fresh space for gastronomical inquiry – art is a space where the cultural and social boundaries of taste can be examined.

The fact that taste is intertwined with memory is another key aspect of flavour that makes it a fascinating medium for artists. The famous “Proust effect” refers to olfactory memory and ability of smells and tastes to evoke memories. Scientists prove that such memories are different from those evoked by words or images, they are more emotional, long lasting and they are often connected with early stages of life (Chu, Downes, 2000).

Jennifer Fisher indicated that situations that involve “eating art” are both “ephemeral (they can’t last) and contextual (they present edibles in a particular situation)” (1999: 39). This ephemeral and contextual aspect is clearly visible in the works of Królikiewicz, which are often designed for a particular place. Many of Królikiewicz’s artworks are narratives about memory and how sensory experience is intertwined with embodied memory. Consequently, she also allows her objects and installations to become only a memory in the minds and bodies of those who experienced them.

Ephemerality is a persistent aspect of contemporary art practices. With the development of Conceptualism, dematerialisation of the art object has become one of the most significant aspects of artistic production. Also, performance artists accustomed the audience to the momentous and ephemeral ontology of art. Many contemporary artists use non-permanent materials, while decomposition of the artwork becomes an important aspect of its meaning. When artists decide to use food products as a material for an artwork, it becomes almost inseparably linked with ephemerality. I would like to emphasise the difference between art that uses food and an artwork that is actually edible. I believe that there is a significant difference between the ephemerality of an artwork that can be documented/photographed and an edible artwork that is based on taste experience. For instance, it is easier to reconstruct and analyse performance pieces that are mostly visual than performance art that focuses on taste sensation. In the latter case, taste is a medium for the meaning –flavour carries and evokes memories and emotions. The

crucial aspect of this kind of sensory artworks is presence, as they can be perceived only with the actual presence of the viewer. They cannot be transmitted, recorded or photographed, or, more precisely, documentation of this type does not tell anything about the essence of the artwork, which lies in the direct and embodied sensory experience. Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008) noted that an actual experience of performance requires that the viewer is present at the site where it takes place (32). Still, watching a recorded performance can give us some insight into its meanings and how it was conducted, even if it does not mean that doing so we can fully experience it. However, it is different in the case of edible artworks where taste, touch and smell experiences define their essence. Sensory experiences cannot be recorded or transmitted, therefore photographs of Królikiewicz's installations, for instance, are almost absolutely useless for the researcher. Of course, visual aspect is also important for her, and photographs can give us some idea about what her artworks looked like, but it is taste that is crucial and therefore visual information is insufficient to provide the insight into the meaning of the artwork. Unlike with traditional, visual artworks (for instance painting), one cannot go to a gallery or museum to perceive the artwork, as it usually no longer exists.

It might seem that the only way to somehow preserve a taste-based artwork is to collect recipes, but Królikiewicz does not reconstruct her artworks or installations. They are often site-specific and they are linked with the memory of a particular place, so they cannot be recreated in other conditions. Moreover, what is very important is that following the recipe does not guarantee recreating the exact taste. What is particularly difficult in reconstructing taste is that taste itself is affected by many factors. Therefore, even the same ingredients in the same amount will not produce exactly the same taste, as the quality or *terroir* of ingredients may vary. Even though collecting recipes does, unavoidably, contain the risk of imperfection of reconstructed works, still it could be one of the important ways of documenting food art. However, not every artist would be eager to share their recipe, as they do not accept it as a form of preservation of their art. What is more, food art often concentrates not only on what is eaten but also how, where and with whom, just like it was in the case of futurist banquets.

Królikiewicz's artworks are mainly documented with photographs and descriptions. However, what seems the most important for her is not the object but the experience. Food-based art completely blurs the distinction between the subject and the object, as the artwork is incorporated into the body of the viewer. It might almost seem that experiencing the artwork is inseparably connected with its destruction. Yet the main aspect of those artworks is the sensory experience itself, not the edible object. Therefore, Królikiewicz accepts the consequences of creating sensory and ephemeral artworks: since they cannot become a part of museum collection, they cannot be collected or preserved. What remains from her artworks are often only leftovers – both in literal and metaphorical sense. Metaphorically, those leftovers are memories, narratives and photographs that can only give a glimpse of the actual artwork.



As in any sensory experience, taste vanishes when the stimulus is no longer present. This aspect concerns every sensory experience, even visual and audial, but I believe that in case of experiencing smell or taste, documentation and reconstruction becomes especially difficult. But what is also crucial is that perhaps some of those artworks do not require such attempts, as artists accept the ephemerality and vanishing of taste. The desire to preserve the object is somehow typical for an art historian, or museologist. However, conceptual art made us accustomed to the fact that the object is not fundamental. We accepted the fact that ideas and concepts are equally important and thus they can be preserved, regardless of the existence of the object. But in case of some food-based artworks it is the bodily experience that is crucial, not only the concept that lies behind it. Very often, the sensory experience of taste cannot be repeated or reconstructed. This is also because taste experience cannot be separated from the subject who experiences it.

Jim Drobnick (1998) wrote about olfactory dimension in contemporary art, but his writings can also be referred to taste sensations, as those senses are strongly linked. In this context, Drobnick mentions (1998) “the difficulty of writing about volatile, ephemeral works”; he also points out the “general indifference towards artistic production that resists categorisation as enduring (and marketable) visual objects.” He also emphasises the tradition of reduction of sensuous stimuli in the space of “white cube.” The gallery space was thought to be devoid of any “unnecessary” sensuous stimuli. The experience of an artwork was considered purely intellectual, and the body remained absent.

The lack of vocabulary used to describe taste and smell experiences makes it even more difficult to reconstruct that kind of experience. Therefore, a researcher who tries to describe a food-based artwork often faces major difficulties. The abundance of taste sensations one experiences are produced from only four types of tastes: salty, sour, sweet and bitter (McLaughlin, Margolskee, 1994). Even if the fifth taste – umami is added, still it is difficult to describe the complexity of this sensation with such limited vocabulary. It seems reasonable that when studying food art, a researcher should “borrow” vocabulary from gastronomy and chefs, since artists who use food often experiment with various gastronomic techniques. It can be seen that nowadays researchers struggle with the description and analysis of food- and scent-based artworks. The language of art history is almost purely visual, so a significant amount of vocabulary of the discipline is not useful in describing artistic projects that focus on taste. Drobnick (1998) emphasised an immediate aspect of such artworks stating that “in culture heavily dependent on images and texts as the means by which to access art, the privileging of presence serves an effective counterpoint”.

The fact that the taste or smell experience is difficult to verbalise can also be understood as a way artists want to avoid the textual reading of an artwork. Therefore, the problems which appear with the description of taste-based artworks should not perhaps be perceived as a kind of drawback, but rather as an important aspect of these artworks. Artists try to create different and very direct way of

experiencing art which requires not only the presence of a viewer in a certain place and time but also their opening for the radical proximity and incorporating the artwork inside one's body. The artwork is experienced **inside** the body. It cannot be perceived as an outside object. To not incorporate it is to miss its full significance. It reveals its meanings only when it is eaten and tasted. This could be challenging, as artists sometimes propose tastes that are surprising, not evident and even not pleasant.

In many examples of food art, the bodily experience is more important than the verbal interpretation of the artwork, which often reveals the insufficiency of language to describe the experience of taste. However, it is also crucial to highlight the fact that taste experience can still convey meanings even if they are difficult to verbalise.

A sensuous experience of an artwork becomes very intimate and personal, but on the other hand, tastes and aromas can communicate meanings and emotions because they have cultural and social dimension. An actual experience of taste will be different with every individual, but sensory experiences are also deeply rooted and shaped by culture. In some cases, artists refer to almost universal taste dislikes or preferences to evoke certain reactions, memories or emotions. For instance, in Królikiewicz's *Tear Flavoured Ice-cream*, the bitterness of the ice-cream is a way to convey its meaning related to bitter emotions. The taste of the ice-cream was a bit unpleasant, as the dislike of bitter taste is almost universal. Researchers indicated that bitter taste often signals poisonous food (Rozin et. al., 2006). Consequently, people have a tendency to avoid it, and it often triggers their disgust. Another almost universal tendency is the liking of sweet flavour. Those almost universal aspects of tastes can be used by artists to elicit certain emotions or reactions. But most food artworks are based on more nuanced taste experiences. For instance, *Tear Flavoured Ice-cream* consisted of not only bitterness but also a salty aftertaste of a tear and an addition of a sweet flavour. Therefore, they reflected contrasting emotions what can be read in the context of the Black Protest, since the *She-Gastronomes* exhibition during which they were sold was linked with it. This example proves that tastes can have critical and political meaning, as well.

Flavours can communicate various meanings because we exist in particular culture and we are accustomed to dominant taste preferences. This aspect was visible in Oskar Dawicki's performance piece, *The Treatise on the Anatomy of Bad Taste* (2011). Every dish he proposed with an anthropologist Ryan Bromley during the performance was edible, but taste combinations were so unusual that the feast became somehow unpleasant for the diners. Bromley (2016: 26–27) recalls that he

conceived and developed a menu of canapes which were aesthetically pleasing, yet which were subtly distasteful. An example was a truffle made of 100% chocolate, which is bitter and cloying, with finely diced pith from a grapefruit rolled within the chocolate so if the participant was to try to replace the bitter-cloying flavour of the chocolate truffle, they would find it instead heightened by a salty panna cotta with mildly fermented berries.

The only drink available during the feast was meat infused vodka; although meat and vodka are very often consumed together, combined in one liquor they created an unusual and even unpleasant taste. In the video-documentation of the performance Dawicki raises the toast with this special drink, and it is visible that it is difficult for him to swallow as he starts to expectorate. The important aspect of the project was the contrast between the plausible visual presentation of the food and its unusual, disturbing tastes.

Dawicki's performance was an experiment in which taste preferences were examined. The dual meaning of "taste," as an aesthetic category and as a sense, seems crucial for this performance, which can be read as a word game with these two meanings. But the reason why Dawicki's feast could affect the audience in certain way is because of the cultural aspect of taste. Therefore, even if absolutely edible, some taste combinations are perceived as inadequate or even disgusting. Dawicki's performance raised the question about the standards of taste – both in the context of art and food. The visitors, faced with "distasteful" dishes, did not behave as they would have behaved had it been an ordinary everyday situation, because rather than rejecting the food, they started consuming it. Bromley (2016: 27) wrote: "Rather than following their biological signals to reject the distasteful food the audience began instead to celebrate the violation of this chemical safeguard. Culture trumped physiology as a cultured audience celebrated the violation of their bodies and descended together towards the boundary between their cultured and bestial natures."

The performative space became a laboratory in which each individual experimented with neglected taste sensations as well as with their own and cultural taste restrictions. Dorota Koczanowicz (2018: 329) states that the complexity of sensory perception lies in the fact that on the one side the senses are a source of "subjective experience but at the same time private feeling is a subject of cultural and social conditioning." The experience of taste is both extremely private and socially shared. Priscilla Ferguson argued that taste is the most singular of all the senses and that "tasting subject requires heightened intimacy with the taste object defined by corporeality and ephemerality" (Ferguson, 2011: 371). She writes about "egoism" of taste, as in the strictest sense no one can taste the same object at the same time as someone else. But taste is shared in other ways, as "every culture works to counter the physiological singularity of food" (Ibid.). Ferguson mentions such social practices as "samplings that extrapolate from the tasting of a dish, language that communicates tastes; and a focus on the common gustatory space of the meal." The same concerns food art, where tastes can be perceived individually by various individuals but also shared when they communicate and discuss their sensations. Individual dislikes (or preferences) and food avoidances do not exclude the existence of shared taste associations.

Examples discussed above prove that taste experience is both ephemeral and persistent. Tastes often carry with them certain meanings, associations and emotions. But those meanings are even more difficult to grasp than in the case of visual

artworks. Tastes and smells do not have codified meanings, they do not have fixed symbolism, but it does not mean that they cannot be used to communicate a message or form a statement. Drobnick (1998) wrote that: “these meanings may vary considerably from context to context, from community to community, smell factors prominently in acts of memory, social affinity and definitions of place, character, mood” and this can also be referred to taste. As in many cases in which artworks are edible, taste itself disappears with the consumption of the artwork. But again, very often it is not the food itself that is crucial, but the whole situation around it – the space, surroundings etc.

The stories created by tastes are contextual, unobvious and not everyone will be able to “read” them. But even when the meaning of the taste remains unclear, what is always present is the bodily sensation – pleasant, disturbing, thought provoking, surprising, etc. When experiencing art pieces of this kind the audience experiences the object and their bodily reactions at the same time. The body and art become inseparably linked and intertwined in a complex, multisensory taste sensation. Some artistic works of this type can therefore be referred to Richard Shusterman’s project of somaesthetics. The philosopher wrote about reflective and heightened somatic self-awareness emphasising that “intensified body consciousness need not disrupt but rather can improve our perception of and engagement with the outside world by improving our use of the self that is the fundamental instrument of all perception and action” (2008: 8). Artistic projects that focus on sensory experience can often raise the awareness of bodily sensations among members of the audience. As they engage with unfamiliar and novel tastes, they might reflect on the taste experience itself.

What makes tastes so appealing for artists is their ephemerality, the fact that they engage the body and blur the distance between the subject and the object. This is a different way of experiencing the artwork, as it has to be incorporated into one’s body. Focusing on tastes and smells opens up the possibilities of non-verbal and non-pictorial communication. It might seem that aspects of food art that are most challenging for the researcher are the same that make it so exceptional and fascinating. Also, regardless of whether the art historian accepts it or not, the fact of vanishing of taste often lies in the core of food art projects and it supplements their meaning.

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## Vanishing Taste: On the Sensual Experience of an Artwork

### Abstract

The main aim of the article is to analyse the uniqueness of taste experience and its presence in contemporary art. Ephemerality of the sensual experience becomes an important challenge for researchers, art historians, and conservators. The article concentrates on the various aspects of experiencing taste, its place in aesthetics and different ways in which artists engage this sense in their works. The analysis is focused on artworks and performances of two Polish artists: Anna Królikiewicz and Oskar Dawicki. What remains as the taste vanishes? How to "preserve" taste? Why contemporary artists concentrate on non-visual senses? Those are the main issues raised in the article.

**Keywords:** taste, aesthetics, food art, Anna Królikiewicz, Oskar Dawicki, senses in art

**Słowa kluczowe:** smak, estetyka, jedzenie w sztuce, Anna Królikiewicz, Oskar Dawicki, zmysły w sztuce

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