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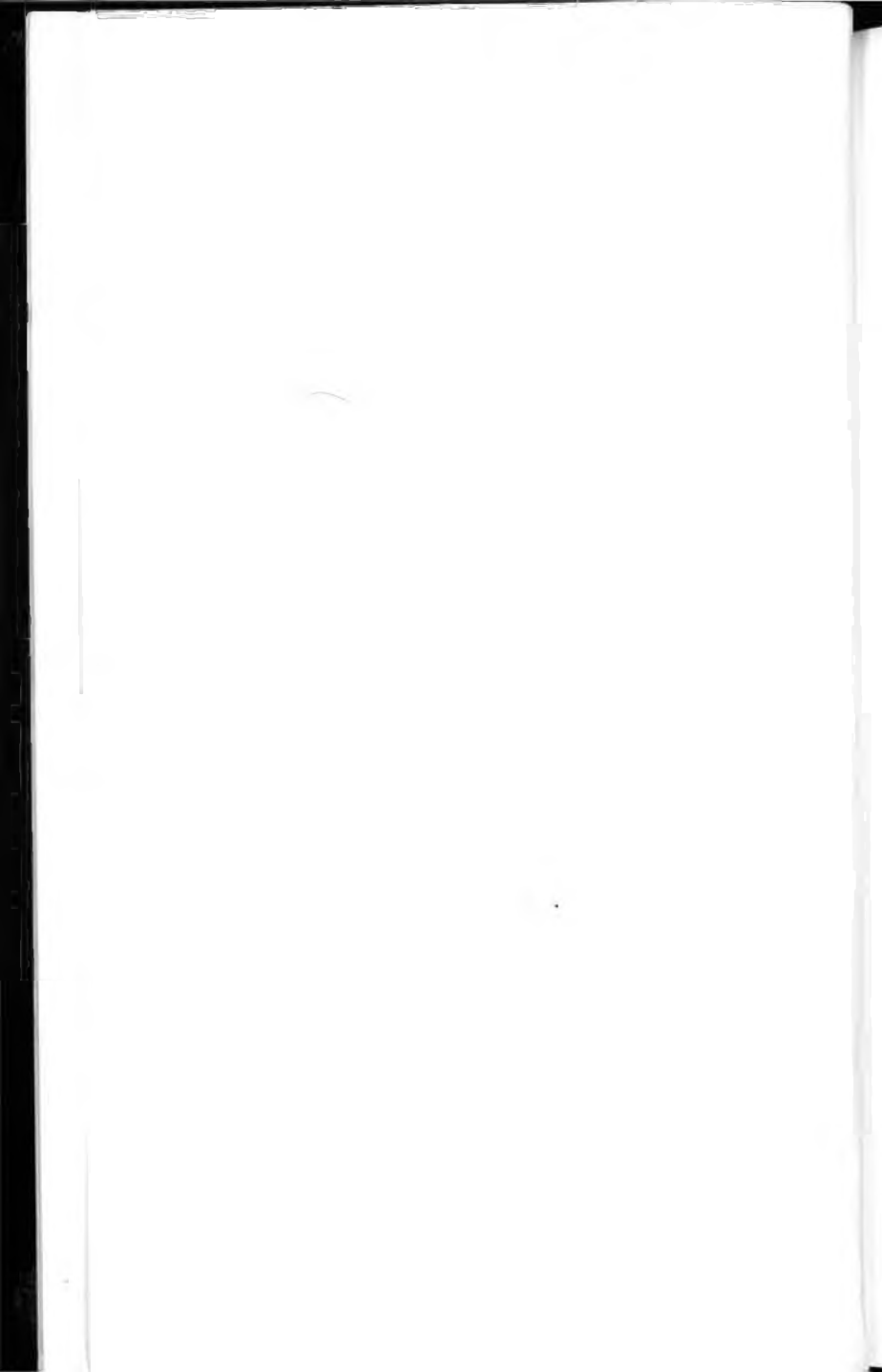
FICTION RECONSTRUCTED

EASTERN EUROPE, POST-SOCIALISM &
THE RETRO-AVANT-GARDE



(Hg.) **springerin**

e d i t i o n s e l e n e



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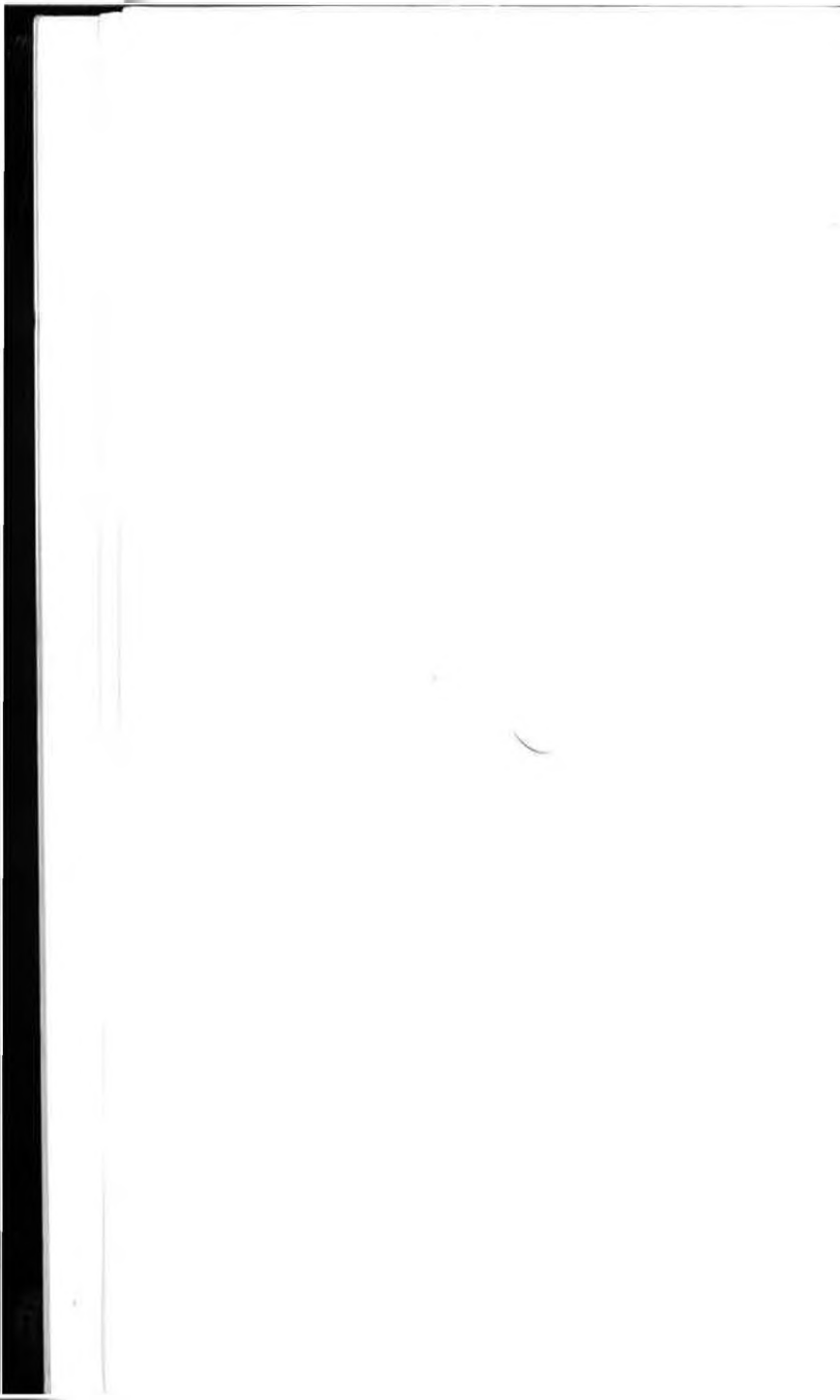
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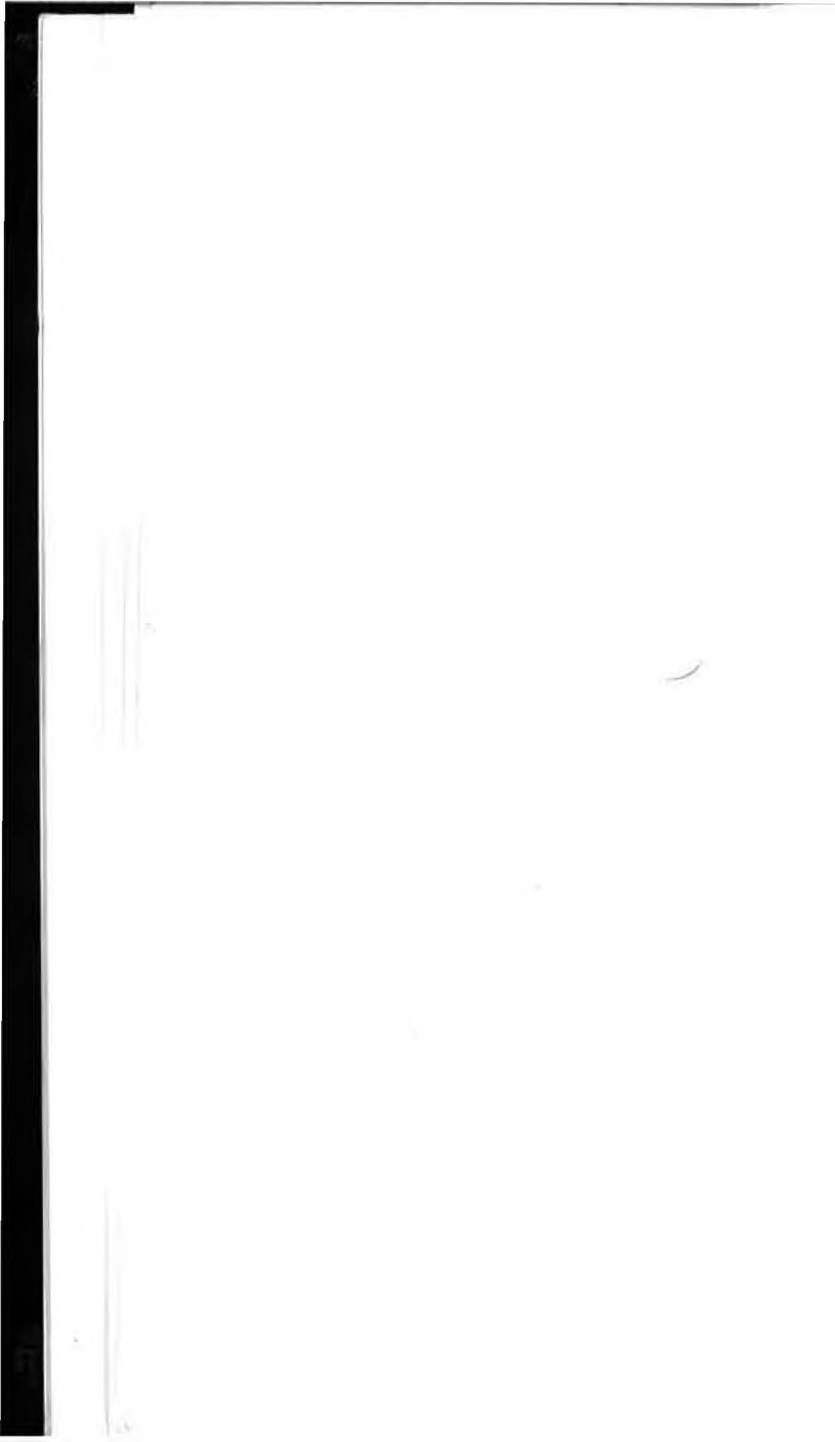
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Preface

In this book, my point of departure is a difference between Eastern and Western Europe that I try to conceptualize philosophically, insisting on a difference – a critical difference within and not a special classification method marking the process of grounding differences, such as apartheid, as Trinh T. Minh-ha has suggested. The question of who is allowed to write about the history of art, culture and politics in the area once known as Eastern Europe must be posed alongside questions of how and when those events are marked.

Trinh T. Minh-ha has proposed a model for re-thinking Asian space and the so-called third world through the concept of the “inappropriate/d Other”. This can also be seen as a possibly useful tool to develop specific concepts of reading – the former Eastern European territory. It is time to find and to re-write paradigms of specific spaces, arts and media productions in Eastern Europe. This book can be perceived as a radical theorization of a particular (Eastern European) position; here positioning means repoliticization.

The biggest part of the book focuses on selected artistic projects and concepts by Mladen Stilinović (Zagreb), Kasimir Malevich (Belgrade, 1986), and the group Irwin (NSK) (Ljubljana), which were developed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, and continue to function, develop, and mutate. These projects are read via dialectic positioning (i.e., thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis) within not only countries of the former Yugoslavia, but also Eastern Europe in general. Finally, they are linked with the notion of ‘Retro-Avant-garde,’ or, as I label it, the new ‘ism’ of the East. ‘Retro-Avant-garde’ has developed before the entrance to the third millennium and represents, metaphorically speaking, the ‘soft revolution’ in Eastern European art and culture. However, these artistic processes, as I demonstrate, can be ascribed to numerous philosophical about faces brought on by the media culture itself. They not only visualize and conceptualize the processes of thought

developed within new media and technology, but also conceptualize the system in itself and the operational logic of new media and technology. Within the framework and context of these works, it became possible to detect models of thought and perception, which allows one to question the visible and the political. Moreover, similar strategies are now being developed by new media technologies and interpreted philosophically and theoretically. Consequently, classical arts strategies and concepts have acquired a radically different meaning compared with this reversed media logic.

If these projects give 'only' the appearance of dissimilarity and idiosyncrasy, we should consequently question the genesis of this appearance, and attempt to decipher how and by which mechanisms the events themselves created this phantasmagoric surface.

Set in relation to foreign Western European and American capital centers, the media events (i.e., virtual reality, the Internet, the 'media obsession' over the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, etc.) literally metastasized from day to day, opening up innumerable interpretations. I treat new media in an attempt to redefine certain fundamental concepts in the history of philosophy and theory, notably the subject, real/virtual, (public and media) space, in relation to the real war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the virtual war of the subject with its so-called double in virtual environments.

I deal therefore with political and ethical questions concerning processes of the (de-)visualization and re-articulation of space and time in relation to new media. I inquire whether it is possible to provide – and if so, how – a positive political image of the visible, which opens new possibilities for creating emancipated politics and, albeit in a limited scope, the project of the positive social environment.

The very process of negotiating the mutations of Post-Socialism requires the development of new visual and media strategies that problematize representation and self-representation. In the last part of the book, I propose models and paradigms of

alternating identifications that question familiar forms of representation and allow the formation of new forms of articulation. However, and this is the interesting twist, such an interpretation can be also used for positioning and for raising questions of reflection on and articulation of the Post-Socialist 'Eastern European' condition. There is something very definite about this condition – it produces a specific spectralization of representation, space and time.

Fiction Reconstructed is also placed within a certain personal interpretative system, a logic in which to develop the theory of aesthetics and politics, and to re-philosophize the Eastern European region. It is the successor to the book entitled *In the Line for Virtual Bread. Time, Space, Subject and the New Media in the Year 2000* (ZPS, Ljubljana 1996), in which I presented, linked and supplemented for the internal, Slavic space, the general paradigms of theories and philosophies of the new media in connection with our post-socialist reality. *Fiction Reconstructed*, on the other hand, offers a very detailed inquiry into specific Post-Socialist art and media strategies.

The essays in the book are therefore the fruits of more than a decade of writing about the artistic, cultural and media events that have taken place in the former Yugoslav territories throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Over the years, a number of these essays have been widely published in Slovenia and abroad.¹ All the essays presented in this volume are revisited.

In many ways, the East has not provided the West with the relevant theoretical and interpretative instruments to recognize

¹ In this respect I would like to draw the reader's attention to two books published parallel to this volume in which two of my essays, from the same context of inquiry as in the present volume, are included: Marina Gržinić, "Exposure Time, the Aura, and Telerobotics" in *The Robot in the Garden: Telerobotics and Telepistemology in the Age of the Internet*, ed. Ken Goldberg (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000) and Marina Gržinić, "Strategies of Visualisation and the Aesthetics of Video in the New Europe" in *Culture and Technology in the New Europe: Civic Discourse in Transformation in Post-Communist Nations*, ed. Laura Lengel (London: Ablex Publishing Company, 2000).

the uniqueness, idiosyncrasies, diversity and originality of artistic projects in Eastern Europe. There is very little documentation of this history, and sometimes it seems as though even the cultural and theoretical domain of Eastern Europe is incapable of offering interpretation or self-reflection on these projects and phenomena. I hope that this book will help to fill that void.

ONE

1. THE SPECTRALIZATION OF EUROPE²

I would like to define a break (rather than continuity) between what is often referred to as two stages in the Western-Eastern European Community. The first stage, lasting until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, may be described as the concept of relations between Western Europe and Communist Eastern Europe. The second stage, considered as commencing in 1989 (the year imposed on Eastern Europeans as that which today denotes without exception *le passage a l'acte* [the passage to action] of Eastern Europe toward freedom and democracy), is the relation between Western Europeans and their Post-Socialist neighbors.

One may compare this break to the break between Freud's first and second concepts of transference. Today an almost ferocious campaign is attempting to fill the gap between these two breaks and to simulate continuity between them. The slogans of this campaign (demanded by the West and serviced in the East, or vice versa) are 'BIOGRAPHY rather than THEORY' and 'THERAPY rather than THEORY'. The later slogan is nearly an antidote proposed by a large number (though not all) of Western European (Media) Activists.

This introductory gesture describes the manner in which the word "Europe" in the title of this chapter is deployed. This gesture should be seen as that of the hero of a Hollywood action film: he makes order of a messy table, onto which he

² This essay, in a slightly modified form, was published in *Spectralization of Technology. From Cyberfeminism to Elsewhere and Back*, ed. Marina Gržinić and Adele Eisenstein (Maribor, Slovenia: MKC, 1999). It was presented in part at the Symposium *Translocation* at the Generali Foundation in Vienna, January 1999, a symposium organized by the art and cultural review SPRINGERIN, Vienna.

outlines the plan and draws the action. Not a gentle touch, but a gesture of erasure, of a clearing away of everything.

This moment before the gesture of erasure is similar to the void that Slavoj Žižek, together with Lacan, formulated. The answer to the question – Is it possible to call, to perceive, the void, i.e., to be found before the gesture of subjectivization, a subject? – is YES, although this question was answered in the negative by Althusser, Derrida and Badiou. The subject is both at the same time: the ontological whole, the gap in the absolute contraction of subjectivity and the cut of the connections of the subject with reality. This is illustrated by the “cleansing of the terrain,” described above, which thus opens the space for the new symbolic beginning that will be supported by the newly resurrected master-signifier.

I would like also to offer some directions for spectralization. In his book, *Spectres de Marx*, Jacques Derrida put into play the term ‘spectre’ to indicate the elusive pseudo-materiality that subverts the classic ontological oppositions of reality and illusion. Žižek argues that perhaps we should look here for the last resort of ideology, for the formal matrix onto which are grafted various ideological formations:

“We should recognize the fact that there is no reality without the spectre, that the circle of reality can be closed only by means of an uncanny spectral supplement. Why, then, is there no reality without the spectre? [Because for Lacan] reality is not the ‘thing itself,’ [rather] it is always-already symbolized ... and the problem resides in the fact that symbolization ultimately always fails, that it never succeeds in fully ‘covering’ the real ... [This real] returns in the guise of spectral apparitions. ‘Spectre’ is not to be confused with ‘symbolic fiction’ ... reality is never directly ‘itself’; it presents itself only via its incomplete-failed symbolization, and spectral apparitions emerge in this very gap that forever separates reality from the real, and on account of which reality has the character of a (symbolic) fiction: the spectre

gives body to that which escapes (the symbolically structured) reality."³

This also explains the title of this book: *Fiction Reconstructed*. It is possible today, at the start of the new millennium, to identify two matrices of active players with regard to Eastern and Western Europe and the new media reality: i.e., the Western European "Scum of Society Matrix" and the Eastern European "Monsters Matrix."

The first tendency concerns the individuals or groups that act as a kind of entity without a fixed historical or geographical position, while consciously occupying the position of the scum of society. However, this "The Scum of Society Matrix," which refers mainly to the positioning of the so-called critical Western European and North American participants, users and on-line community circuits, is also a kind of parasitic body trying to acquire everything it can from the already established social structures. The scum of society matrix proposes a new autonomous economy and new structures developed from the appropriation and restructuring of those that existed before. It proposes a return to writing only (e-mail boxes) as a possible countercultural intercommunication strategy, and not simply developing the Internet, i.e., to erase the images – and the pushy Internet software industry – in the background. In the guise of such a utopian mindset, it is possible to find strategies for fighting and acting, not simply reproducing, through technology.

As Peter Lamborn Wilson (aka Hakim Bey) stated in his lecture at the Nettime meeting in Ljubljana in 1997⁴, entitled "Beauty and The East," the Second World has been deleted/made obsolete, and what is left are the First and Third Worlds. Instead of the Second World, Bey argued, there is a big hole from which

³ Slavoj Žižek, "Introduction: The Spectre of Ideology," in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London and New York: Verso, 1994), pp. 26–28. See also Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx* (Paris: Galilée, 1993).

⁴ See Hakim Bey, lecture at the Nettime meeting *Beauty and the East*, Ljubljana, 22–23 June 1997.

one jumps into the Third. I will name this hole and the second tendency "The Matrix of Monsters" as a travesty of the general title of the Nettime conference "Beauty and The East" (already a paraphrase of the fairy tale, Beauty and the Beast). When it comes to the differences between East and West, the actors from 'the black hole,' the so-called Eastern European critical WWW users, clearly aim not to simply mirror the First World – the developed capitalist societies – but to articulate and interpret a proper position in this changed constellation. The question of who is permitted to write the history of art, culture and politics in the area once known as Eastern Europe must be posed alongside the questions of how and when.

These two matrices raise not only questions for reflection, but they also offer elements of political and analytical intersection that require further, and more radical, discussion and articulation. This is what I intend to do in this chapter.

Eastern Europe as the indivisible remainder or a piece of shit

One might say that the modern subject does not exist without the self-reflective understanding that on a certain level, from another perspective, 'I am a piece of shit.' In fact, modern subjectivity arises when the subject sees itself out of joint, cut off from the positive order of things. The cyborg, as conceived by Donna Haraway and seen from the exteriority-intimacy position that Lacan coined as extimacy, is exactly this piece of shit. I have developed the thesis that virtual reality is the place where the subject sees itself as 'out of joint.' Let us consider briefly what happens in the classic scenario of virtual reality. The user finds him/herself in a specific inter-subjective relation with his/her double. Being in virtual reality means seeing one's own hands grasping the virtual object, one's own body behaving this way or that. In short, this double is a kind of exteriorization a spectral creature or double – an immortal libidinal object – the famous Lacanian lamella. One may refer

to this spectral creature as an excremental protuberance, an indestructible object of life beyond death that has no a fixed position in the symbolic order. This implies that not only is cyberspace constantly revealing that out there (outside of the virtual world) a kind of terrifying remainder, impossible to wholly integrate into the virtual world, is waiting for us, but that this remainder, too, may be seen from time to time in virtual and cyberspace.

This split between the image and the real (sometimes displayed as a formless remainder on the computer screen as well, if we are in a position to meet the "cw4t7abs") demonstrates precisely the disintegration of reality in that which is almost without substance on the one hand (appearing on the Internet), and the raw material remainder of the real that was not integrated into the picture on the other.

The disgusting remainder also comprises the NEUE SLOWENISCHE KUNST (NSK) EMBASSY PROJECT by the group Irwin of Ljubljana where, instead of the Embassy, we are faced with the extimacy of the public space in a private apartment that suffocates us with an almost claustrophobic domesticity. Not a real Embassy, but a mise-en-scène around the kitchen table. Or the Russian artists – Oleg Kulik's horrendous biting animals and Alexander Brener performing as a boxer – all these liminal works and experiences demonstrate to us the extimacy of the disgusting remainder, before it might perhaps become the sublime.

Let us jump into the actual space of Europe, as it is discussed on the Internet in such lists as the Nettime list or the Syndicate list, among other; lists that are developing a critical view on media. There one may read (and respond to) many interesting contributions on Eastern Europe which I can synthesize thus: "Despite the initial euphoria Western Europe showed for Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Eastern Europe has failed. It did not succeed in being inscribed on the map of important political, cultural, artistic events in Europe." The disappointment about Eastern Europe's failure to become a sta-

ble social space is also detectable in the works of such prominent philosophers as Badiou and Rancière.

It is a fact that the main presentation of the last Documenta in Kassel (dX in 1997) included only two or three artists from Eastern Europe. And if we are to believe the interviews, according to the words of the curator (Catherine David), this was due to the fact that there was nothing to select, in fact. The elision, or the de facto elimination, of the Eastern European artist from the Documenta was, according to her own words, the result of the void proper to Eastern Europe, and was not a result of the selection. It seems that Eastern Europe has been lost for the second time, after it was just in the process of being refound in 1989.

According to Slavoj Žižek's interpretation, the negative gesture by the Eastern Europeans who said NO! to the Communist regime is much more important – in fact crucial – for an understanding of what has occurred to catalyze this later failed positivity. For Lacan, negativity functions as a condition of impossibility or possibility of the later enthusiastic identification – it lays the base for it.

What is Eastern Europe after the fulfillment of its destiny, after now nearly a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall?

A similar question is raised by Lacan. In his reading of the Oedipal myth, Lacan focused on the field which is left out of most usual readings of the Oedipal complex: What is beyond Oedipus – what is Oedipus himself – after he has fulfilled his destiny? – a question that may be posed after watching such films as *Bladerunner* or *Seven*. What happens on the day after? Or so to speak, after life goes on in its usual rhythm? As Lacan put it in *Seminar II*, from the beginning of the tragedy, everything leads us to the fact that Oedipus is solely an Earth rest, a remainder, a Thing that is robbed from every surface.

What we have here is a field that may be called, according to psychoanalysis, the field between two deaths – between the symbolic and the real death. The ultimate object of horror is this life beyond death, which Lacan called lamella, as an

immortal – indestructible object, i.e., life that is voided, evacuated, from the symbolic structure.

It seems that after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Eastern Europe has found itself in a horrible intermediate position, whereby it has been changed into an inseparable remainder, a substanceless spot of a crumb of reality that has already swallowed all the potential that was generated by its previous existence.

Eastern Europe found itself in a position similar to the one psychoanalysis develops in re-articulating Oedipus's position following the fulfillment of his symbolic destiny (i.e., when Oedipus, incognizant, kills his father and marries his mother). After he has fulfilled his symbolic destiny, Oedipus is an indivisible remainder. He is the embodiment of that which Lacan calls *plus-de-jour*, surplus enjoyment, the surplus that cannot be explained by any symbolic idealization. But – and this is crucial for understanding the changed, so-called failed position of Eastern Europe for the Other – when Lacan uses the *plus-de-jour* notion, he plays with the double entendre of the term in French comprising simultaneously surplus, and no more, enjoyment! Oedipus is, following the fulfillment of his destiny, *plus d'homme*, which means simultaneously surplus man and no man. Oedipus is conditionally man; he is a human monster, and, as such, a paradigmatic example of the modern subject, as his monstrosity is structural and not accidental.

In keeping with this definition and the similarity of positions, we may define Eastern Europe as *plus d'Europe orientale*. Eastern Europe is surplus of Europe (as it was before the fall of the Berlin Wall: too little, or not enough, European) and no Europe.

Eastern Europe is forced to take, or is in, the position of an excremental remainder. Please allow me here to change the optics of the discourse and to emphasize that this is not necessarily a bad thing. With a view from the lamella point – “the modern subject does not exist without an understanding that on a certain level, from some other perspective, I am a piece of shit” – we may say that this is actually the first condition

required for Eastern Europe to take upon itself all the characteristics of a modern subjectivity. It is now from this inherently excremental position that Eastern Europe can arise or can be perceived finally as a subject. As Žižek writes, "If the Cartesian subject wants to arise on the level of enunciation, it must be described as almost nothing of ready to be thrown in the disposal garbage/trash on the level of a statement."⁵

Perhaps it is only now, when Eastern Europe is on the level of a statement reduced to an almost nothing, to an excremental trash ready-to-be-thrown-in-the-disposal (wasn't it, for example, at Documenta, reduced precisely to this nothingness?), that it can arise on the level of enunciation. In this case of a correlation between Cartesian subjectivity and its excremental double, we have the split between the subject of utterance and the subject of statement. If the Cartesian subject wishes to appear on the level of utterance, then s/he must be changed into shit on the level of the statement. This is the zero-point of subjectivity: we begin to be something once we have been absolutely nothing, after going through (completing) the zero-point. Nothing that has the value of something is, according to Žižek, the most condensed formula of the Lacanian barred subject.

Furthermore, the classical ontology, according to Žižek, focused on the triad of the truthful, the beautiful and the good. For Lacan, these three notions press near the limit, and show that good is the mask of diabolical evil (e.g., Oleg Kulik the Russian artist dog, or the performances entitled *Was ist Kunst?* by the artist Rasa Todosijević from Belgrade. In the 1970s, Todosijević, in this series of performances, literally tried to drag the answer to – What is art? – out of women by force, slapping their faces with black color in the most shocking manner of body-art.); beautiful is the mask of ugliness (e.g., Irwin's series of 100 pictures also entitled *Was ist Kunst?* In this series,

⁵ See Slavoj Žižek, "Alain Badiou kot bralec svetega Pavla" [Alain Badiou as the Reader of St. Paulus] (pp. 115–149, in *Sveti Pavel: Utemeljitev univerzalnosti* [St. Paulus: The Foundation of Universality] (Ljubljana: Analec-ta, Problemi, No. 5–6, 1998), p. 135.

and in the exhibitions of *Laibachkunst*, persons who are supposed to have been part of the period of Nazism are portrayed along with members of the banned Laibach group; they are engraved into the iconography of the paintings, as their busts or torso sculptures decorate numerous paintings of the *Was ist Kunst?* project); and that truthful is the mask of the central void, around which gravitates every symbolical structure (e.g., the Romanian flag, after the so-called Romanian Revolution, a hole instead of the star). In short, writes Žižek, there is a field beyond the good, the beautiful, the truth, that is not filled with everyday banalities, but presents a terrifying source, which is constitutive for the background of the good, the beautiful and the truth. If it is a politico-ethical motto of psychoanalysis, then it is subsumed in the view that all of the greatest catastrophes of our century (from Stalinism to the Holocaust) are the result not of being seduced by the morbid fatal attraction of this beyond, but, on the contrary, of the constant efforts to elude the meeting with it and to immediately install, saving a confrontation with it, the reign of truth and good.⁶

Emancipation? Resistance ? Or ...

The manner in which I have posited the subject and re-framed the Eastern European Monster Matrix allows for further discussion on the possible ways of acting (and living) in Europe and on the net, and furthermore, allows us to rethink emancipation and resistance. We should first distinguish, according to Jelica Šumić-Riha, between modernist emancipation and contemporary postmodernist resistance. The modernist solution of insisting on a fidelity to politics, where politics seems to be deemed a precious treasure, suggests that in the final analysis nothing has happened. Hence the modernist emancipation functions from today's point of view as the so-called university discourse,

⁶ Ibid, p. 141.

developed by Lacan, that attempts to dispose of the effects of the event for the symbolic structure, and therefore does not recognize any change in the actual political situation and leaves the actual defeat of politics untaught, anathematized. Postmodernist resistance is, on the other hand, possible to delineate as a hysterical discourse, as the constant production of the doubtful 'no' that simply turns resistance against thought.⁷ This may also be grasped with a quite impressive crusade against theory and theoretical knowledge, as is especially sustained by some media theorists and activists today.

To arrive at a resolution, let us briefly contemplate the four discourses evolved by Lacan in dealing with the truth and events. Lacan distinguished the discourse of the master, the university discourse, the discourse of the hysteric and the discourse of the analyst. The master names the event, changing it into a new signifier-master that will guarantee the continuity of the consequences of the event. The master integrates the event within the symbolic reality. The hysteric holds the doubtful position of division toward the event. The master wishes to keep continuity, the hysteric the gap. The university discourse aims to fill the effects, to neutralize the effects as if nothing has happened. To understand the significance of the four discourses for today's political involvement in media theory and art practice, let us try to answer a question never before posed in debates on media and activism: Which of the four discourses is occupied by the famous cyborg, conceived by Donna Haraway, as our politics and ontology for the next millennium?

My answer is this: Haraway has positioned the cyborg as a hysterical discourse. This is possible to grasp if we travel with Haraway to Virtual Space. To finally arrive there, Haraway moves through three other regions: Real Space, or Earth; Outer Space, or the Extraterrestrial; and Inner Space, or the Body.

⁷ Regarding these distinctions, see Jelica Šumič-Riha, "A Matter of Resistance," in *Filozofski Vesnik*, No. 2/1997, Spec. Number on Power and Resistance, ed. Jelica Šumič-Riha and Oto Luthar (Ljubljana: FI ZRC SAZU, 1997), pp. 127-153.

Donna Haraway's semiotic square of Virtual Space from *The Promises of Monsters*.⁸

REAL SPACE OUTER SPACE

VIRTUAL SPACE INNER SPACE

(Please note that all graphs and diagrams displayed in this chapter are executed in the mode of such popular books as *Postmodernism for Children*, *Marx for Children*, etc.)

The virtual world is positioned in Haraway's semiotic square in such a way that the truth of these four spaces is to be found in the virtual space. We should also consider the fact that Haraway conceptualizes the cyborg as a piece of shit and, at the same time, as a sublime object. The power of the cyborg resides in its position of extimacy that is between the disgusting and the sublime. This means that I will position the cyborg as an object *a*. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, object *a* represents the double entendre of the *plus-de-jouir* notion, meaning simultaneously a surplus of, and no more, enjoyment. Taking all of these important elements into consideration, we should then take as a conceptual equivalent of Haraway's semiotic square the Lacanian discourse of the hysteric. It looks (again from a child's point of view) like this (Lacan in *Scilicet* 1–4)⁹:

\$ S1

a S2

Crucial is the positioning of object *a* within the structure of the Lacanian discourses; in the hysterical discourse, object *a* is

⁸ See Donna Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula A. Treichler (New York and London: Routledge, 1992).

⁹ Jacques Lacan in *Scilicet* 1–4: *Scritti di Jacques Lacan e di altri* [*Scilicet* 1–4: *Texts by Jacques Lacan and Others*] (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 1977), p. 19.

positioned in the place of truth (truth is positioned in all four discourses at the lower left), whether for the subject (the bared \$) – in the hysterical discourse, reserved the role of the agent (the agent is positioned in all four discourses at the upper left). To provide a clearer understanding, allow me to offer a few additional details. The four Lacanian discourses articulate four subjective positions. The signifiers of the four structures are presented by the following mathems: **S1** is the master-signifier; **S2** represents knowledge; **\$** (the bared **S**) the subject and **a** the surplus-enjoyment. All of these entities occupy a different place in the structures of the four discourses. What is significant is that the four places have a fixed meaning in all four discourses. This means that no matter which signifier or mathem (**S1**, or **S2** or **\$** or **a**) will take the upper left position in the structure of the discourse, this position is the place of the agent. These are the fixed meanings of the respective places in the discourses:

agent	other
truth	production

We are now ready to draw the consequences of this homographical act. The virtual space and the cyborg as refracted in Haraway's semiotic square of Virtual Space from *The Promises of Monsters* occupied the same position as truth and the object **a** in the Lacanian discourse of the hysteric. Hence the truth is covered by this sublime-disgusting cyborg object, while the entire discourse is still enunciated from the Earth. The agent is therefore still out there (the Real Space of *The Promises of Monsters* is in the same place as the **\$** in the hysterical link – the **\$** over **a** represents the subject-agent who is traumatized by the question of what role to play in the Other's desire), to be found on the Earth or in the Real Space. Production, the fourth term in the matrix of discourses, is in the Lacanian hysterical link occupied by knowledge – **S2** in Haraway's matrix by the Inner Space or the Body. The Inner Space

of the Body can be understood, as Žižek puts it, as not simply for the result, but rather for the 'indivisible remainder,' for the excess that resists being included in the discursive network.

Is this then an answer to how we should be positioned between emancipation and resistance? Are we to act as hysterics, questioning everything in order to resist the existing symbolic order by refusing to assume the role assigned to us by this order, as the hysterics taught us? The answer follows shortly, after a brief consideration of the fourth type of discourse: that of the analyst. It also seems that we have lost, in the meantime, the Matrix of the Monsters which simply proclaims that – I am this piece of useless trash here. Or maybe not!

Jacques Lacan formulates his position as an analyst as follows: "The more saints, the more laughter; that's my principle, to wit, the way out of capitalist discourse – which will not constitute progress, if it happens only for some."¹⁰

Designating the saint as the site of resistance, he clearly indicates that a resistance to capitalism can only be theorized in terms of some resistant instance, which is, strictly speaking, neither exterior nor interior, but rather, is situated at the point of exteriority in the very intimacy of interiority, i.e., the Lacanian extimacy (exteriority-intimacy).

Conceived in terms of extimacy rather than in terms of pure alterity, resistance therefore consists in the derivation from within capitalism, of an indigestible kernel, of an otherness, which has the potential to disrupt the circuit of the drive for growth.¹¹

The discourse of the analyst is presented as follows¹²:

a	\$
S2	S1

¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, *Television*, trans. J. Mehlmann (New York: Norton & Co, 1990), p. 16.

¹¹ See Jelica Šumić-Riha, "A Matter of Resistance."

¹² Lacan in *Scilicet 1-4: Scritti di Jacques Lacan e di altri*, p. 191.

In the discourse of the analyst, object *a* is posited as the agent/agency, whereas knowledge (represented by *S2*) occupies the space of truth (which again, is positioned in all four discourses at the lower left). In the Lacanian analyst discourse, the agent *a* reduces itself to the void, provoking the subject to confront the truth of its desire. Doesn't the Matrix of the Monsters, incidentally, imply just such a subjective position? Furthermore, knowledge, *S2*, is in the position of truth below agent *a*, and the knowledge here refers to the supposed knowledge of the analyst, and simultaneously, according to Žižek, "signals that the knowledge gained here will not be the neutral 'objective' knowledge of scientific adequacy, but the knowledge that concerns the subject (analysand) in the truth of his subjective position."¹³

Perhaps herein lies the path of my explicit reorientation towards theory and away from therapy when discussing the Eastern European Matrix of the Monsters. Moreover, here I would like to make a small but important detour in my thesis. It is possible to say: 'I am the monster' only under specific conditions. According to Robert Pfaller, who discusses a similar situation – to say: 'I am in ideology' – "only under a certain condition we are allowed to say that we are in ideology. Only if we are within science we can say such a thing without lying or being presumptuously modest. Only under the condition that we have arrived at the positive space of science are we legitimated to say that we are in ideology."¹⁴

Thus, *mutatis mutandis*, we can clearly state, without lying or disingenuousness, 'I am the monster,' if and only if we are within theory, or relying on theory. Žižek's further elaboration of the relation between science and ideology, relying on R. Pfaller's paradoxical relationship between science and ideology, can be additionally useful. Žižek argued that ideology

¹³ Slavoj Žižek, "Four Discourses, Four Subjects" (pp. 74–117), in *Cogito and the Unconscious*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (Durham: Duke University Press 1998), p. 80.

¹⁴ Robert Pfaller, "Negation and Its Reliabilities: An Empty Subject for Ideology?" (pp. 225–247), in *Cogito and the Unconscious*, p. 235.

does not exclude science, but rather it tries to integrate it into its domain.¹⁵ The relation between ideology and science is described by Žižek as "clinging," similar to the situation in the boxing match, when instead of fighting the opponent's body, one clinches it. Thus the difference between ideology and science is visible only from the side of science. It is likewise possible to say that between therapy and theory, the therapeutic approach clinches on a theoretical thesis of the Eastern European "survivor" as the mute victim who needs to share that victim's experience through small biographical anecdotes and traces, if s/he wants to be integrated into the long chain of theoretical backgrounds in the West.

What makes it possible then for the saint to evade the deranged machine of production? Lacan puts forward a solution which consists ultimately of identification with that which is left over – with the trash – as we see that the agent/agency occupies the position of the useless trash remainder (object *a*). The saint upon which Lacan models the analyst's refusal to be useful, to surrender to the demands of capitalism (thereby redefining the notion of agency) is a singular structural apparatus/effect of the structure rather than a vocation. Or, as formulated by Žižek: "The answer to the question: where, in the four subjective positions elaborated, do we encounter the Lacanian subject, the subject of the unconscious, is thus paradoxically in the very discourse in which the subject undergoes 'subjective destitution' and identifies with the excremental remainder that forever resists subjectivization."¹⁶ We see that the agent/agency occupies the position of the useless trash remainder (object *a*). In short, between emancipation and resistance, via Lacan, we can put forward an absolutely political solution, a radical politicization of the Eastern European position, which consists ultimately in the identification with the useless trash remainder – with the piece of shit!

¹⁵ Žižek, "Introduction: Cogito as a Shibboleth," p. 8.

¹⁶ Žižek, "Four Discourses, Four Subjects," pp. 108–9.

I have stated that at the end of the millennium, the two matrices, the Western European "Scum of Society Matrix" and the Eastern European "Monsters Matrix," not only raise questions of reflection, but also offer elements of political and analytical intersection that need to be discussed and articulated further and in a much more radical way. Establishing the difference between East and West only on historical premises can lead us to a DISCURSIVE limit, and I would like to proceed in a different way, albeit in a way not indifferent to history; I will attempt to explicate some generative principles between the matrices and their complex functioning using Lacanism.

Thesis One: The East and West are not predicates, which means that rather than increasing our knowledge of the subject, they qualify the mode of the failure of our knowledge; because failure is assumed, according to Copjec, to be singular.

Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Judgment* first made the distinction between the two ways in which reason falls into contradiction with itself. In both works he demonstrated that the failure of reason was not simple, but based upon an antinomic impasse through two separate routes: the first failure was mathematical; the second was dynamical. The first thing to note is that the two propositions that compose each side appear to have an antinomic relation to each other, i.e., they appear to contradict each other. Subsequently, in his Seminar XX entitled *Encore*, drawing upon the Kantian antinomic relations, Lacan defined the two formulas of sexuation (OF SEXUAL DIFFERENCE) as two ways, or paths, of failure: the male and the female.

In her book *Read My Desire*¹⁷, which may be defined as a handbook or bible of Lacanism, Joan Copjec strongly emphasized these two antinomic ways as two ways of failures.

The antinomies and the formulas of sexuation are presented through a scheme that is clearly divided between the left and

¹⁷ See Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1994).

right sides. The left side of the scheme is designated as the male side, while the right side is female. The left, male side corresponds to the Kantian dynamic antinomies, and the right, female side, corresponds to the Kantian mathematical antinomies.

Thesis Two: The Eastern European Monsters Matrix occupied, and is homologous with, the right, female side, and therefore represents the Kantian mathematical failure; while the Western European Scum of Society Matrix is homologous with the left, male side, or the Kantian dynamical failure.

You may, doubtfully, pose the question: How is this possible? What allows for such a homologous positioning?

Of crucial importance is the fact that Lacan deploys the terms in his formulas of sexuation as argument and function, instead of subject and predicate (as they are referred to in the Kantian formulas). This substitution marks an important, and for us a critical, conceptual difference. The principle of sorting is, according to Copjec, no longer descriptive, i.e., it is not a matter of shared characteristics or of common substance. Copjec states, "Whether one falls into the class of males or females (and I would add, whether one falls into the Scum or Monsters failure matrix – M. G.) depends, rather, which enunciative position one assumes." You may remember that in the first level of considerations, I argued with Žižek that, "If the Cartesian subject wishes to arise on the level of enunciation, it must be described as almost nothing ready to be thrown in the disposal garbage/trash on the level of a statement".¹⁸ Perhaps it is only now, when Eastern Europe has been understood on the level of a statement to be an almost nothing – ready to be thrown in the disposal – excremental trash (at the Documenta, as we stated, as in many other cases, it was reduced precisely to this nothing), that it is time for Eastern Europe to arise on the level of enunciation.

¹⁸ Žižek, "Alain Badiou kot bralec svetega Pavla" [Alain Badiou as the Reader of St. Paulus], p. 135.

The antinomies should be read as positions on a Moebius strip. There is an unmistakable asymmetry between the mathematical and the dynamical antinomies, and again, according to Copjec, on moving from one to the other, we seem to enter a completely different space.

The right, female side: mathematical failure and the Eastern European "Monsters matrix"

I learned while I was living and working last year in Japan that before talking further, you have to show your card – the famous *meshi* in the Japanese language. I apologize for making you wait for so long.

Marina Gržinić – I am that useless trash, I am the monster. Therefore, I will continue firstly with reference to the right side – the female side, the mathematical failure. But beware: you have noticed already how much I enjoy being the useless trash. I am not starting with the monsters because I would like to elicit some compassion from you. As opposed to the fairly common prejudice that psychoanalysis constructs the woman as secondary – as a mere alteration of man – these formulas suggest, according to Copjec, that there is a kind of priority, an advantage of sorts on the right side.

This reading of the formulas is consistent also with the privilege given to the mathematical antinomies by Kant, who grants the mathematical synthesis a more immediate certitude than its dynamical counterpart. In Kant's analysis, it is the dynamical antinomies (the male side of the formulas, or the Western European's Scum Matrix in our reading) that appear in many ways secondary, a kind of resolution to a more complete impasse manifested by the mathematical conflict.¹⁹ I will proceed in a very schematic way to reach my point.

What is a mathematical antinomy? First, every antinomy is com-

¹⁹ Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists*, p. 217.

posed of two propositions: thesis and antithesis. The mathematical antinomy we borrowed from Kant is occasioned by the attempt, speaking generally, to think the world. The thesis of the mathematical antinomy is this: the world has a beginning in time and is also limited in regard to space. The antithesis of the same mathematical antinomy is this: the world has no beginning and no limits in space but is, in relation both to time and space, infinite.

*"After examining both arguments, Kant concludes that while each successfully demonstrates the falsity of the other, neither is able to establish convincingly its own truth. This conclusion creates a skeptical impasse, and the solution he arrives at is the following: rather than despairing over the fact that we cannot choose between the two alternatives, we must come to the realization that we need not choose, since both alternatives are false. The thesis and antithesis statements, which initially appeared to constitute a contradictory opposition, turn out to be contraries."*²⁰

We might note that we can find in a mathematical antinomy the structure of a contrary opposition that produces a joke of the Žižekian type:

*In your village there are no cannibals anymore.
When did you eat the last one?*

The form of the question does not allow the addressee to negate the accusation implicit in the question, but only to choose among contraries. Having demonstrated the impossibility of the existence of the world, Kant can then dismiss both the statements of thesis and antithesis. Kant's two statements regarding the solution of the first mathematical antinomy formally reduplicate those that Lacan gives for the woman, who, like the world, does not exist.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 218.

Lacan argues that a concept of "woman" cannot be constructed because the task of fully unfolding her conditions cannot, in actuality, be carried out. Since we are finite beings, bound by space and time, our knowledge is subject to historical conditions. Our conception of woman cannot run ahead of these limits and thus, cannot construct a concept of the whole of woman. And here we come to the most important point:

*"The ex-sistence of the woman is not only denied; it is also not condemnable as a normative and exclusionary notion; on the contrary, the Lacanian position argues that it is only by refusing to deny – or confirm – her ex-sistence that normative and exclusionary thinking can be avoided. That is, it is only by acknowledging that a concept of woman cannot exist that it is structurally impossible within the symbolic order, that each historical construction of her can be challenged. After all, nothing prohibits these historical constructions from asserting their universal truth; witness the historical assertion that a general, trans-historical category of woman does not exist."*²¹

It is crucial to see that the woman is the consequence, and not the cause, of the nonfunctioning of negation. She is the failure of the limit, not the cause of the failure.²²

Now, following this rude and schematic re-cutting up of one part of the excellent chapter on the forms of sexuation in Copjec's book *Read My Desires*, we must return to our Monsters Matrix – to accept the consequences of such a homologous positioning.

Thesis Three: Similarly to Lacan's positioning of the nonexistence of the woman, we can speak of the nonexistence of the Matrix of Monsters. If the (Matrix of) Monsters do(es) not

²¹ Ibid., p. 225.

²² Ibid., p. 226.

exist, this is because it cannot be refound. The Matrix of Monsters cannot be constructed because the task of fully unfolding its conditions cannot, in actuality, be carried out. Our conception of the (Matrix of) Monsters cannot run ahead of these limits and thus, cannot construct a concept of the whole of the Matrix.²³

The ex-sistence of the (Matrix of) Monsters is not only denied; it is also not condemnable as a normative and exclusionary notion; on the contrary, the Lacanian position argues that it is only by refusing to deny – or confirm – its ex-sistence that normative and exclusionary thinking can be avoided. That is, it is only by acknowledging that a concept of the (Matrix of) Monsters cannot exist, that it is structurally impossible within the symbolic order, that each historical construction of this Matrix can be challenged. As long as it can be demonstrated that the world or the (Matrix of) Monsters cannot form a whole, a universe, then the possibility of judging whether or not these phenomena or signifiers give us information about a reality independent of us vanishes. It is crucial to see that the (Matrix of) Monsters (is) are the consequence, and not the cause, of the nonfunctioning of negation. It is the failure of the limit, not the cause of the failure.²⁴ We are obliged to recognize that the (Matrix of) Monsters (is) are indeed a product of the symbolic.

The left, the male side: dynamical failure and the Western European "Scum of society matrix"

Where the thesis and antithesis of the mathematical antinomies were both deemed to be false because both illegitimately asserted the existence of the world, the thesis and antithesis of the dynamical antinomies, the dynamical failure, are both deemed by Kant to be true. In the first case, the conflict

²³ Ibid., p. 221.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 226.

between the two propositions was thought to be irresolvable (since they made contradictory claims about the same object); in the case of dynamical failure, the conflict is resolved by the assertion that the two statements do not contradict each other. The thesis of the dynamical antinomy is, according to Kant, the sequent: Causality according to the laws of nature is not the only causality operating to originate the world. A causality of freedom is also necessary to account fully for these phenomena. The Kantian antithesis of the dynamical antinomy, or failure, is: There is no such thing as freedom, but everything in the world happens solely according to the laws of nature. Kant says that the antithesis in the dynamic antinomy is true, just as Lacan confirms the existence of the universe of men. Since the existence of the universe was regarded in the case of the woman as impossible because no limit could be found to the chain of signifiers, it would be logical to assume that the formation of the all on the male side, in fact, depends on the positing of a limit.

Moreover, the shift from the female to the male side is a subtraction. The thesis and antithesis of the mathematical failure, according to Kant, said too much. On the dynamical side, this surplus is subtracted, and it is this subtraction that installs the limit. Which means that on this side it will always be a matter of saying too little. Incompleteness on the dynamic side, and inconsistency on the mathematical part.

Furthermore, according to Copjec, the question of existence that caused the conflict on the female side is silenced on the male side because it is precisely existence – or being – that is subtracted from the universe that is formed here. Kant taught us that if one were to say that a man existed, one would add absolutely nothing to this man, or to the concept of man. Thus we could argue that this concept lacks nothing. And yet, it does not include being, and is in this sense inadequate.

Again, the two failures or forms of sexuation according to Lacan consist of the following: the woman and the man are not to be treated symmetrically nor conceived as complements of

each other. One category does not complete, or make up for what is lacking in, the other. While the universe of women is simply impossible, a universe of men is possible only on the condition that we except something from this universe. The universe of men is then an illusion based, according to Copjec, on a paradoxical prohibition: do not include everything in your all! The sexual relation fails for two reasons: it is impossible, and it is prohibited. And this is why we will never come up with a whole.

To recapitulate: an easy solution would be to say that, like the Eastern European Monsters Matrix, the Western European Scum of Society Matrix does not exist. But we have on the left side, homologous to the Lacanian sexuation table, no problem in locating it. Kant taught us that, if one were to say that the Western European Scum of Society Matrix existed, one would add absolutely nothing to the concept of the Western European Scum of Society Matrix. Rather than defining a universe of men that is complemented by a universe of women, we can define, by relying on Lacan, the Western European Scum of Society Matrix as the prohibition against constructing a universe, and the Monsters Matrix as the impossibility of doing so.

Hence, my conclusion:

1. The Western European Scum of Society Matrix does exist, and the Monsters Matrix does not exist. This is because, as I demonstrated in the first part of this essay, the Eastern Europeans perceived as pieces of shit are subjects in a pure sense of the word; the subject is nothing else but the name of the division in a pure form. On the right side, therefore, on the part of the mathematical failure, we have the subject as its purest.
2. When Lacan argues that truth has the structure of fiction, that it is not-all and lacks a structure of totality, he highlighted the fact that through these two moments (fiction and lacking of totality) truth touches the real. The Eastern European Monsters Matrix has the status of not-all and the structure of fiction precisely because it is part of the order of the Real. So it is not

surprising that theoreticians spoke about Eastern Europe as a generator of concepts in the field of art and culture that are connected with a traumatic real (Peter Weibel, for one).

3. What we can learn from the positioning of the two matrices, similarly to the formulas of sexual difference, is that in post-Communism, a kind of traumatic reality is emerging through the surface of the works.

4. *It is not red, it is blood, is the indivisible post-Communist remainder that is not (yet?) possible to re-integrate into the global (media) world.*

TWO

2. RETRO-AVANT-GARDE, OR MAPPING POST-SOCIALISM²⁵

One always searches for some symbolic point where it is possible to claim that something ended and something else began, even though there are no beginnings and no endings. From a Western European or an American point of view, the tearing down of the Berlin Wall symbolically marked the changes that affected Eastern Europe. From an ex-Yugoslavian perspective, this point would be the death of Tito in 1980. Sol Yurick asked himself how will we be able to denote this developing, but as yet incomplete, New World Order? He called this world post-industrialist, post-modern, post-nationalist, post-neocolonial, post-structural, porous-bordered, cannibalistic, post-materialist, hyper-polluted and so on, *ad infinitum*.²⁶

I will call it 'post-Socialist.' By what other possible symbolic, social, artistic or political space can we refer, if we want to talk about art and culture in the territory of ex-Yugoslavia and Central/Eastern Europe? I will use the term 'post-Socialism' in order to deconstruct the modern myth of a global world, a world without cultural, social or political specificity, and a world without centers and peripheries.

What strategy, other than a post-Marxist model, could we use for (de)coding the topic of post-Socialism? Here I will refer to Frederic Jameson's basic text about postmodernism, 'The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' (1984), in which he proposed an aesthetic of cognitive mapping. For Jameson, the cognitive map is not exactly mimetic in the classical sense; rather, the

²⁵ See Marina Gržinić, "Myths About the Global World," in *The Island* (Zagreb and Dubrovnik (Croatia): SCCA and Art Radionica Lazareti, 1997).

²⁶ See Sol Yurick, "The Emerging Metastate Versus the Politics of Ethno-Nationalist Identity," in *The Decolonization of Imagination*, ed. Jan Nederveen Pieterse and Bhikhu Parekh (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995).

theoretical issues it poses allow us to renew the analysis of representation at a higher and much more complex level. What is a cognitive map called upon to do? It allows one to create a situational representation for the individual subject of that vaster and logically unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole. An aesthetic of cognitive mapping will necessarily have to respect this enormously complex representational dialectic and invent radically new forms in order to do the theory justice.²⁷

This is a possible way of understanding the notion of 'mapping' post-Socialism. How do we, however, understand post-Socialism itself, as it seems to have been for most of the Central/Eastern European block, the basic cultural, social and political condition? We must not understand it as a new mode of production. Since nobody seriously considers alternatives to Capitalism any longer, it seems easier to imagine the 'end of the world' than a far more modest change in the mode of production. It is as if liberal capitalism is 'the real' that will somehow survive.²⁸ I will develop the idea of post-Socialism as a generative matrix that regulates the relationship between the visible and non-visible, between the imaginable and un-imaginable. This is an act of mapping that charts not the point at which differences manifest themselves, but the point on the post-Socialist map where the effects of these differences are represented.

I will try to pinpoint the coordinates of this generative matrix in the territory once known as Yugoslavia through the projects of three artists/groups: Mladen Stilinović, Kasimir Malevich and, last but not least, the group Irwin, especially their Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) Embassy projects. With regard to Malevich, I will focus not on the 'original' one, but on the

²⁷ See Frederic Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in *Jameson, Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), p. 51.

²⁸ See Slavoj Žižek, "Introduction: The Spectre of Ideology," in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London and New York: Verso, 1994), p. 1.

1980s artist from Belgrade and Ljubljana, and on some other projects of copying and reconstructing works of art from this century's avant-garde and neo-avant-garde movements, realized in Yugoslavia in the 1980s.

I propose that we reread the term post-Socialism in ex-Yugoslavia through different visual displays. Why? A visual display is related to exhibitionism rather than scopophilia. As Peter Wollen has notes, Jacques Lacan demonstrated, in his notorious seminar on Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter*, how display might be the best method of concealment. Whereas in *The Purloined Letter*, the police chief overlooks and misses the incriminating letter (the signifier on display), the uncanny Dupin (the figure of the Lacanian psychoanalyst himself) immediately sees the signifier displayed in full view, just as the signifier desired. This demonstrates (despite Guy Debord's contestation) that in modern times, an excess of display has the effect of concealing the truth of the society that produces it, and for which it can still have a revelatory power. It is through modes of display that regimes of all sorts reveal the truths they mean to conceal. Each historic period, according to Wollen, has its own rhetorical mode of display, because each has different truths to conceal.²⁹

All three artists, groups, or art projects utilized specific strategies and techniques of visual display to portray aspects of Socialist and post-Socialist ideology. I will focus my discussion on the manner and ideologies that were envisioned and presented as a changing system, through the different rhetorical styles of presentation in the territory of ex-Yugoslavia and, more widely, in the so-called countries of 'real Socialism.' This is also the best way to grasp the post-Socialist system itself. In other words, we might ask to which social bodies the 1980s Malevich, the Irwin-NSK Embassy, and Stilinović belong. The essence of the presentation of this triad represents a journey

²⁹ Peter Wollen, "Introduction," in *Visual Display*, ed. Lynne Cooke and Peter Wollen (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995) Dia 10, pp. 9–10.

from frontier to frontier – a journey by which the inexorable presence of artifacts materializes the dialectical, cultural, political and, above all, artistic environment that is coded as Eastern Europe, stigmatized as the Balkans, and traumatized as the former Yugoslavia.

To recap, my primary thesis is that post-Socialism may best be grasped through the analysis of the modes of displaying the ideology of the Socialist and post-Socialist systems. A fitting subtitle to this chapter, 'Envisioning Post-Socialism: Ideology on Display,' is a rhetorical play on Susan Buck-Morss' essay 'Envisioning Capital: Political Economy on Display.'³⁰

One might ask to what extent ideology (or the artistic articulation of ideology) has to do with the existence of what numerous artists from Eastern Europe refer to as 'non-existence at the margins.' In relation to Western Europe, this is perceived as a precise reflection of the Eastern European artists 'living and working conditions.'³¹

In his seminar on Poe, Lacan derived ex-istence from in-sistence, i.e., from an obsessive persistence of the chain of signification. Insistence (Latin in-, on + sistere, to stand) is the correlative to existence (Latin ex + sistere). Existence is for Lacan an eccentric place, and it has much to do with taking or maintaining a position or a concept, or to be more precise, with the kind of automatism of repetition (*Wiederholungszwang*) of a specific stance. For Lacan, the automatism of repetition is put into force only through the insistence of the chain of signification. Through insistence in the existence, we can also understand the depth of the most intimate human relations; in fact, they are captured by the symbolic. The three artistic projects/artists I discuss here obsessively insist precisely on this automatism of repetition. They relocate their (obsessive) insistence in (the eccentricity of) existence.

³⁰ Susan Buck-Morss, "Envisioning Capital: Political Economy on Display," in *Visual Display*, pp. 111–142.

³¹ See Slaven Tolj, thesis for the international exhibition and symposium *Island*, (manuscript), Dubrovnik 1996.

Herein lies the other task of deconstructing post-Socialist ideology: to designate the elements in the guise of utopian narratives (as by the 1980s Malevich) as possible but failed alternative histories. These alternatives point towards the system's antagonistic character and thus ' estrange' us from the self-evidence of its established identity. 'Mapping post-Socialism' is not meant as a critique of post-Socialism; my initial concern is post-Socialism displayed through specific artistic and cultural projects.

In the 1990s, Peter Weibel re-launched a discursive matrix in an exhibition catalogue of the *Steirischer Herbst* (Graz), in which he coded the ex-Yugoslav territory from 'outside,' subsuming the productions of Stilinović, the 1980s Malevich, and Irwin under a common moniker: the 'Retro-Avant-garde.' The trio repeated this matrix themselves in an exhibition entitled 'Retroavantgarda' or 'Retro-avant-garde' in Ljubljana in 1994. While in the past, I had reflected on their work individually, this exhibition gave me the opportunity to develop a kind of dialectical loop between the projects. I constructed a dialectical interrelationship within which I designated their positions as those in a Hegelian triad: Mladen Stilinović as the thesis; Malevich and the projects of copying as an antithesis; and Irwin, with the projects of the NSK EMBASSIES (presented within the framework of the *NSK State in Time*), as synthesis. Although I concluded that these specific artistic productions took the place of the (retro-) avant-garde movement, I never fully succeeded in answering the question concerning the exact key referential moment that put all three of them together as a movement, and allowed us to consider them dialectically. The answer here and now is – ideology. Ideology is the generative matrix of these specific post-Socialist art projects.

At stake here is the problem of the status of the word 'and' as a category. According to Žižek, in Louis Althusser's theory of ideology, the word 'and' functions as a precise theoretical category. Žižek argues that when 'and' appears in the title of some of his essays, this little word unmistakably signals the con-

frontation of some ambiguous notion with its specification contained in what is coming after the 'and.' What is coming after 'and' tells us how we are to render concrete the initial notion, so that it begins to function as non-ideological, and as a strictly theoretical concept.³² Hence, I say that Stilinović, Malevich, Irwin, and Ideology enable us to unmistakably denote the hidden mechanism that regulates social visibility and non-visibility, and generates these specific concepts.

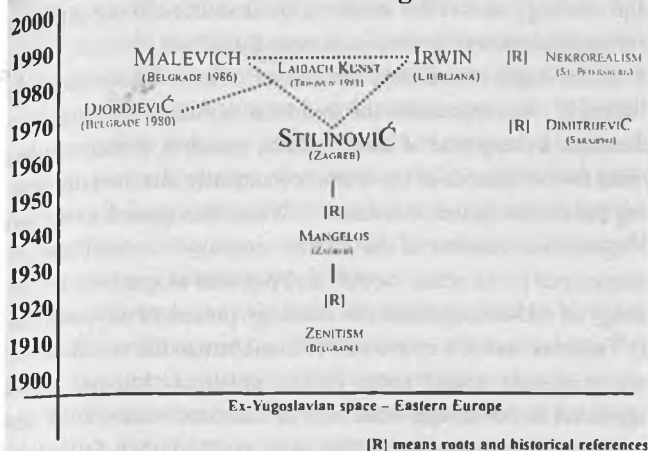
Allow me to explain exactly what I mean by 'Ideology.' As, Slavoj Žižek pointed out, ideology has nothing to do with illusion, nor with a mistaken and distorted representation. Ideology is not simply a false consciousness, an illusory representation of reality, but is being itself, insofar as it is supported by false consciousness. An ideology is thus not necessarily false, since what really matters is not the asserted content as such, but the way this content relates to the subjective position implied by its own process of enunciation. We are within ideological space in an inherently non-transparent way: the very logic of legitimizing the relation of domination must remain concealed if it is to be effective. The outstanding mode of this lies in the guise of truth that is today known as cynicism, as in: "They know very well what they are doing, yet they are doing it," instead of the classical Marxist formula, "They do not know it, but they are doing it."³³ For Žižek, ideology occupies the same place as that of a commodity. The task of trying to develop a consistent critique of ideology is not to penetrate, for example, into the hidden kernel of human labor consumed in production, but, rather, to explain why labor is assuming the form of the value of a commodity. Why can it only affirm its social character in the commodity form?³⁴ In his 'Introduction' to *Mapping Ideology*, a book he edited in 1994, Žižek not only tried to present, through his own texts and those of other

³² See Žižek, "Introduction: The Spectre of Ideology," pp. 23–24

³³ Ibid., p. 8.

³⁴ Ibid.

Retro-Avantgarde



philosophers, the importance of the notion of ideology today, he also proposed to read “the logico narrative reconstruction of the notion of ideology” as a Hegelian triad of Ideology In-itself, For-itself and In-and-For-itself.³⁵

In what follows, I will juxtapose the Retro-avant-garde triad with Žižek’s Hegelian scheme.³⁶ I will present not only the possible equivalents of each triad, but will also try to elaborate on when and how the post-Socialist ideology, as such, can be reread through these specific artistic projects. My task is not to penetrate the hidden kernel of the works of art in post-Socialism, but to explain how particular works, artists and groups assumed their relationships with ideology, and why it was possible for them to affirm their socio-political character only in the form of a specific critique of ideology in the field of art. To perceive the work of the triadic ‘Retro-avant-garde,’ we do not have to leave the dialectical Hegelian-Marxist structure, but to double it. Instead of directly evaluating the adequacy or the ‘truth’ of different notions of ideology, one should read the

³⁵ Ibid., p. 10

³⁶ Ibid., p. 10–15.

proposed reversals of ideology – ideology in-itself, for-itself, and ideology in-and-for itself – also as indices of the different concrete historical situations of post-Socialism.

1. Let us begin with Žižek, who wrote, "First we have ideology 'in-itself': this represents the imminent notion of ideology as a doctrine, a composite of ideas, beliefs, concepts, and so on, destined to convince us of its 'truth,' yet actually unavowedly serving particular power interests."³⁷ When transposed to the ex-Yugoslavian context of the 1980s, ideology 'in-itself' can be recognized in the ideas, beliefs and political slogans of the ideology of self-management, an ideology presented as specifically Yugoslav and as a new mode of Socialism in the world. Allow me to simply recall some of the political slogans, which appeared as newspaper headlines at that time: order, work and responsibility; more work, less talk; etc.³⁸ Mladen Stilinović, who began his artistic career in the 1970s with detailed linguistic research and whose work I have presented in detail elsewhere³⁹, is the one within the trio who assumes, through his own specific critique of ideology, the critical position of ideology in-itself, developed in the specific Socialist and then post-Socialist contexts. Stilinović explored the relationship between the visual sign and colloquial speech by decoding verbal and visual clichés, and trying to detach language from everyday political ideas and imposed connotations.⁴⁰ As the artist claimed, "If language is the property of ideology, I too want to become the owner of such language; I want to think in it with its consequences."⁴¹ Stilinović knows very well that stepping out of (what we experience as) ideology is the very condition of our

³⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

³⁸ For an accurate analysis of today's processes, slogans, etc., see e.g., the *Feral Tribune*, an independent weekly newspaper published in Split, Croatia.

³⁹ See the chapter "Mladen Stilinović: Strategies of the Cynical Mind," in this volume.

⁴⁰ See Branka Stipančić, "Words and Images," in *Words and Images*, ed. B. Stipančić (Zagreb: SCCA, 1995), p. 31.

⁴¹ Ibid.

enslavement to it. The greatest dangers for totalitarianism are people who take its ideology literally, and Stilinović does this in an obsessive and fanatical way, finally displaying the status of an almost ethical position in his work. Avoiding the simple metaphors of de-masking and of throwing away the veils that are supposed to hide raw reality, Stilinović succeeded in developing a changed concept of the critique of Socialist and post-Socialist ideology. Stilinović succeeded in subverting and twisting totalitarian ideology – by literally repeating it. This could also be said of Laibach in the 1980s.

2. What follows is the step from ideology in-itself to ideology for-itself, to ideology in the externalization of its otherness. For Žižek, this step is articulated in the process of producing ideology by the Althusserian notion of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA's). This passage designates the material existence of ideology in ideological practices, rituals and institutions.⁴² The key consequence of Louis Althusser's theory of the "ideological apparatuses of the state" and, more generally, of this coinage in the field of art and culture, is that he showed how the crucial role of such apparatuses (e.g., through schools and the media, etc.) focused on the production of entities such as 'national painting' and 'classical art.' Most significantly, he highlighted the role of ISA's in creating and maintaining the hierarchy between different artistic and cultural practices and values; in forming the so-called institution of art with all its system of values, facts and methodologies; and in reinforcing the art market as a driven and reproductive force. These apparatuses seem to be entirely 'external' to one's immediate perception of the artistic. In fact, because of their 'external' position, these apparatus define, in the most 'internal' way, the so-called immediate artistic 'non-mediated' experience. The ideological apparatuses of the state also reinforce the contradictory relations of non-equality and subordination between different artistic and cultural practices. In the field of post-

⁴² See Žižek, "Introduction: The Spectre of Ideology", p. 12.

Socialism, this 'passage' was both marked and constantly produced by the 'resurrection of Malevich' in 1980s Yugoslavia. His resurrection was announced in a letter by Kasimir Malevich (postscript: Belgrade, Yugoslavia), which was published in *Art in America*, September 1986, with the following sentence: "Why? Why now (again), after so many years?" The step from in-itself to for-itself, to ideology in its externalization of otherness, is also elaborated in post-Socialism by other projects that took place in 1980s ex-Yugoslavia. These projects were known to the public only by their titles, and were supposedly autographed or carried out by renowned, but already deceased, painters and philosophers.⁴³ And what do we get by eliminating the differences between the past and the future, when everything suddenly becomes the present and attempts are made to arrest time in a closed narrative form, as is the case with the temporal logic of the copies? In this case, the meaning-producing machine, is in opposition to the (hi)story of rational scientific progress and linked to progressive politics, on the side of a rather 'a-modern gaze' (Bruno Latour's phrase) which abides by the absence of a beginning, an enlightenment and a finality. We cannot interpret these projects simply by stating that they play around with the original and its 'criminal' negation, the copy, for the simple reason that an art market does not yet exist in the East, and that in the 1980s, there was no sign of it. The production of copies in the 1980s in Western art was deeply connected to the market and the context of postmodernism. Artists Mike Bidlo, Sherry Levine and Cindy Sherman put a clear signature on the recycled and copied works that could be easily identified and incorporated in both history and the market. In the projects of copying from the 1980s in ex-Yugoslavia, the real artist's signature is missing, and even some of the 'historical' facts are distorted (e.g., dates, locations, etc.). One may regard these 'copying' projects as a direct attack on

⁴³ See the detailed presentation about the Belgrade Malevich and the projects of copying in the chapter "The Copy and The Original" in this volume.

the art developed primarily as 'Institution,' and empowered with a single and authoritative 'History.' One could even claim that the sanctity of the History of Art was distorted as such. While it may seem that the question of ideological consequences is secondary in the context of a capitalist art-market, the opposite applies to the ex-Socialist societies, where until now, there was no such 'art market.' From my point of view, the production of copies and reconstructive projects from the avant-garde art period in (post-)Socialism had a direct effect against 'Art' perceived as an 'Institution' and 'History,' which was (and is perhaps still) completely totalized in (post-)Socialism. These projects can also be interpreted as a different *mise-en-scène* of the tautology "Art is Art" that is at work in the midst of social reality itself, and not a fantasy image of social reality. The fact that the last foundation of Art's authority lies in its process of enunciation, also articulates the power circle of every authority, especially the totalitarian authority. Through the production of different histories, these works elaborate the point that what is repressed in Art and Society is not some obscure origin of Art (or Law), but the very fact that the legal and artistic authority is an authority without truth. In other words, the original is nothing other than the 'universalized and institutionalized copy.'

3. The next step, in our re-conceptualization of art and culture under the influence of post-Socialist ideology, is when the ideological externalization is 'reflected into self': ideology In-and-For itself. What takes place in this third step of the conceptualization of ideology is the disintegration, self-limitation and self-dispersal of the notion of ideology. It seems that the system, for the most part, bypasses ideology in its reproduction and relies on the economic and legal coercion of the State's regulations. Here however, as Žižek warns us, things become blurred again, since the moment we take a closer look at these allegedly extra-ideological mechanisms that regulate social reproduction, we find ourselves in ideology. What we come across here, therefore, is the third reversal of non-ideol-

ogy into ideology. All of a sudden, we become aware of a for-itself of ideology at work in the very in-itself of extra-ideological actuality⁴⁴, the form of consciousness that fits post-Socialism in the 1990s and late-capitalist post-ideological society. In the NSK Embassy projects, Irwin presented these assumptions in an almost concentrated form. What they developed is not ideology in its material existence (i.e., the institutions, rituals and practices that give body to it), nor an obsession with the Institution of Art, but the "elusive network of implicit, quasi-spontaneous pre-suppositions and attitudes that form an irreducible moment of the reproduction of the so-called non-ideological elements."⁴⁵

In his recent book, *Spectres de Marx*,⁴⁶ Derrida puts into play the term 'spectre' to indicate the elusive pseudo-materiality that subverts the classic ontological oppositions of reality and illusion. Žižek argues that perhaps we should look here for the last resort of ideology, the formal matrix onto which are grafted various ideological formations: "We should recognize the fact that there is no reality without the spectre, that the circle of reality can be closed only by means of an uncanny spectral supplement. Why, then, is there no reality without the spectre? ... [Because for Lacan] reality is not the 'thing itself,' [rather] it is always-already symbolized ..., and the problem resides in the fact that symbolization ultimately always fails, that it never succeeds in fully 'covering' the real ... [This real] returns in the guise of spectral apparitions. 'Spectre' is not to be confused with 'symbolic fiction' ... reality is never directly 'itself,' it presents itself only via its incomplete-failed symbolization, and spectral apparitions emerge in this very gap that forever separates reality from the real, and on account of which reality has the character of a (symbolic) fiction: the spectre gives body to that which escapes (the symbolically structured) reality."⁴⁷

⁴⁴ See Žižek, "Introduction: The Spectre of Ideology", p. 14.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx* (Paris: Galilée, 1993).

⁴⁷ Žižek, "Introduction: The Spectre of Ideology," pp. 26–28.

In an attempt to emphasize the synthetic dialectical moment developed in the NSK State In Time, and in order to arrive at a conclusion, we are compelled to ask ourselves how we can label this spiritual element of corporeality (NSK State In Time) and this corporeal element of spirituality (embassies in concrete private spaces)? SPECTRES – The NSK State In Time is the spectre of the state; NSK Embassies are the spectres of Embassies.

The domain for dealing with concepts of art and culture in the Eastern European context is already delineated by the subtitle of this part of the book: Retro-Avant-garde and Post-Socialism. With the inexorable presence of exhibited artifacts Mladen Stilinović, Kasimir Malevich (or a project signed by an unknown artist with the same name as the great Russian Suprematist), and the group Irwin, especially their Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) Embassy project,⁴⁸ attempted to materialize and dialecticize its own activities. I will follow their work from the former Yugoslav area of self-management and Socialism into the realms of the post-Socialism of the 1990s and try to (re-)define their inner – spiritual, and their outer – ideological structures. The triad is essentially concerned with a process of articulation of its own artistic and historical positions. Ultimately, they are all concerned with the existential position of those (as cyborg theoretician Donna Haraway would say) who cannot, and would not, accept the dominant contemporary account of identity and politics.

The projects under scrutiny refer to visual production in the wider sense of the word, although most of them concentrate on painting. Julia Kristeva commented that we should take into consideration that semiotic practices, along with painting, are activities similar to other social practices. "Obviously, the differences which valorize painting as a symbolic/realistic act do not seem pertinent to us. The social value of a given semiotic practice depends on a global model of the world realized by this practice."⁴⁹

After all, our interventions in specific artistic practices are directed toward them as practices that, in all their operational complexity, function above all as objects of knowledge among other social practices. Therefore, if we want to approach the transformation of a certain object which has been completely nullified by a (prevailing) ideology into an object of knowledge, it is necessary in the first place to de-construct various discourses about painting which are currently imbued with ideology.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ See *Retro-AvantGarde. Mladen Stilinović, Kasimir Malevich, Irwin*, Exhibition catalogue (Ljubljana: Visconti Fine Arts, 1994).

⁴⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Recherches pour une sémantique* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1969), p. 51.

⁵⁰ See Marcelin Pleynet, *L'Insegnamento della Pittura* (Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta, 1974), p. 28.

3. THESIS

MLADEN STILINOVIĆ: STRATEGIES OF THE CYNICAL MIND

Mladen Stilinović is one of the major Croatian artists of the 20th century. In the 1970s, he was involved in experimental film, and in the 1980s, the creator of several happenings and performances. He was one of the pioneers of the conceptual movement generated in Croatia (and in Yugoslavia previously) known as the New Art Practice in the 1970s. In 1975, he was a member of the Group of Authors (with Boris Demur, Željko Jerman, Vlado Martek, Sven Stilinović and Fedor Vučemi- lović), as well as of the 'Podroom' group (artists gathered around the Expanded Media Gallery in Zagreb). In the 1980s and '90s, he became one of the most important artists of the so-called post-conceptual movement in Croatia, extensively showing at home and abroad (including Gallery Dante Marino Cettina, Umag/Croatia, several galleries in Zagreb, the Sydney Biennial and Venice Biennial, etc.). During the early stages of his career, Stilinović subjected his output to scrupulous linguistic research. Later on, he upgraded it through the exploitation of 'dead visual codes,' as he himself named the project.

The project *Exploitation of 'Dead Visual Codes'* lasted for several years (1984–90), and involved the recycling of the visual, ideological and sign systems of Constructivism, Russian Suprematism and Socialist Realism, as well as the familiar red and the black colors, the star and the cross of those movements. Within Stilinović's aesthetic poetic, the exploitation of dead codes can be understood as a 'civilized' cannibalization of the Eastern European avant-garde movements, as a visual treatise on the extent to which, and in what manner, Eastern European avant-garde artists and their work are incorporated into history. For Stilinović, this is directly linked to such questions as how the history of art was created under Socialism and (just for Russia?) Communism, how avant-garde movements shifted and concealed themselves, and, finally, how the bearers of



the avant-garde were eliminated. Exploitation and obsession are closely related to power and authority, not only of the State, but also of museums; and, at the same time, they are necessarily related to death. An exploitation of the dead codes and the codes of the dead in Stilinović's manner is possible first as a sum of dead corpses, and only then as a re-representation of the artistic codes pertaining to them. This is why hand-painted crosses on paintings (does there exist a more romantic epitaph?) make us clearly understand that death, for example, in Malevich's *The Last Futurist Exhibition 0.10 /zero-ten/ (1915/16)*, is the principal force which exploits itself so that a surplus can be created. If, from the position of an authoritarian system, surplus value is a statement about the one and only History without corpses (which, moreover, is skillfully packaged), then Stilinović's self-positioning is much more complicated because, with a precise representational form (hand-painted crosses, for instance), he constantly asks who 'made up' history with a capital H, and swept from it the corpses of Eastern European avant-garde artists.

On the other hand, Stilinović's work is also marked by some kind of transparency and authenticity of iconography, since a worker and Tito, for example, symbolize the world which we can understand without having any knowledge of the conceptual context of art, and without having to live in former Yugoslavia, or Eastern Europe. This also holds true, at least at first sight, for the dinar (the currency of the former Yugoslavia), as well as the cream cakes, biscuits and forks, used in his work. Although Stilinović, metaphorically speaking, drowns himself in Yugo-dinars and cakes, his work is incredibly complex. This complexity is a result of his precisely calculated method of exhibition, which is marked by a subtle dissection of the (post-) Socialist conceptual strategy of poverty, kitsch and an almost obsessively tautological radiography of socialist and post-Socialist ideology, through which he rearranges the boundaries of art and ideology.

To reflect on Stilinović's position means that in (re)defining

contemporary constructions of power and authority in art, we have to deal with a variety of relations: East – West, Socialist – Capitalist and (naïve) ideology – cynical reason. Not, however, in the current manner of the media, who tend to present a cheap differentiation between the totalitarian East and the democratic West, but so that this differentiation will encompass the very process of the fabrication of the East as a bastardized (developed) West. I will, therefore, make an attempt to articulate: (a) Stilinović's difference in a taxonomy of artistic maps of the East and the West in relation to ideology and ideological discursive mechanisms, and (b) his persistence in a different geometry of time and articulation of space. What can be immediately stated as a kind of postulate is that the basic principle of Stilinović's constant production of different, or shifted, temporal and spatial coordinates, and his presentational and denotative system in art, is a form of the author's constant and precise self-positioning.

An Interface: ideology

If we wish to continue with our analysis of the artistic work of Mladen Stilinović by placing it between (naïve) ideology and cynical reason, as a means understanding his artistic strategy, we must first establish the basic nature and method of the operation of ideology, and demonstrate how it is reproduced at the level of the subjective economy of individuals. According to the predominate, obsolete view, ideology is a 'false consciousness' – i.e., an idea with a long and 'respected' history. "A spontaneous, unavoidable effect of talking about ideological 'masks' or 'illusion' is that they represent an ideology as something which is, so to speak, floating in the air, as a complex of notions, conceptions, desires."⁵¹ It is the materialization of ideology in

⁵¹ Slavoj Žižek, *Filozofija skozi psihoanalizo* [Philosophy Through Psychoanalysis] (Ljubljana: DDU Univerzum, 1984), p. 123.

the ideological apparatus of the State that emphasizes the key role of the material weight of ideology, which is not limited to merely ideological State apparatuses, e.g., in the education system, political organizations and in print as the major media of 'indoctrination.' It permeates the whole system down to the 'pure' economy.⁵² As Althusser has established in his texts on ideology, it has to originate from a presentation of ideology itself that each 'subject' who has 'consciousness' and believes in 'ideas' ... has to 'work in accordance with their own ideas'. This means that although s/he sees the existence of 'ideas' exclusively as 'ideal' or 'spiritual' (a notion that originates from the ideology of ideology itself), the ideas have to exist in his or her actions.⁵³ However, if we take as a starting-point the thesis of the primacy of 'ideological apparatus of the State' and their practices, it becomes necessary to include these actions, as Althusser did, in the practice of the ideological State apparatus. Rituals dictated by ideological State apparatuses determine these practices, and in this way, they are inscribed into the material existence of individual ideological apparatuses. Therefore, it turns out that 'ideas' do not have an ideal spiritual existence, and that ideology is not 'an illusion floating in the air,' but rather, that it is 'material,' i.e., a number of material practices are involved in it. Subjection to an ideological material ritual is what subjects a subject – a servant – to a certain ideology.⁵⁴ "Kneel down, move your lips in prayer and you will believe."⁵⁵ Pascal's formula vividly states that what an ideological process is composed of is not the logical proof of itself,

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ See Louis Althusser, "Ideologija in ideološki aparati države" [Ideology and Ideological Apparatuses of the State], in *Ideologija in estetski učinek* [Ideology and the Aesthetic Effect], ed. Zoja Skušek-Močnik (Ljubljana: CZ, 1980), p. 70.

⁵⁴ Žižek, *Filozofija skozi psihoanalizo* [Philosophy Through Psychoanalysis], p. 104.

⁵⁵ See Louis Althusser, "Ideologija in ideološki aparati države" [Ideology and Ideological Apparatuses of the State].

but subjection to an ideological ritual: "Do, as though you have faith, and faith will come"⁵⁶; or, to be even more precise: ideology on the level of the subjective economy of individuals is not reproduced through its argumentative power, but through an extent, which Pascal calls the extent of a machine, or an automata. Here, it would not be inept to set down the following warning by Žižek: such a standpoint can demonstrate itself to naïve enlightenment critique only as an example of an extreme dogmatic blindness – blind subjection to authority. If we begin with the thesis of the primacy of 'the ideological apparatuses of the State,' we can, in the meantime, quickly see its 'materialistic core'; an ideological and symbolic ritual is far from being just an outer expression of 'inner faith,' something which would in the last instance be inessential or secondary. On the contrary, it is of constituent importance for 'inner faith'; a path to real faith can lead only through 'a machine.'⁵⁷

That ideology is conceptualized through the automatism of its own material ritual, means that ideological ritual itself, through its practice – through functioning as 'a habit' – re-establishes the symbolic reality, which is being discussed in it; and by so doing, it blocks the exposure of a deception or self-concealment which is essential for the successful reproduction of ideology. In the last instance, the automatism of a 'nonsensical' ideological ritual also means that our most reflective, witty, arguable, culturally subtle and enriched ideological enthusiasm is based on a 'habit' – that all our wit has merely the role, to summarize Pascal, of presenting this ritual as 'justified,' and covers its real 'beginning.'⁵⁸ The entrapment of a subject/servant within a 'nonsensical' ideological ritual (the meaning of which has already been shown) misleads us to think that ideological consciousness is some kind of 'naïve' consciousness – that is a consciousness

⁵⁶ See Žižek, *Filozofija skozi psihoanalizo* [*Philosophy Through Psychoanalysis*], p. 103.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 106.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 108.

that is not conscious of its actual suppositions and conditions. Therefore, this 'naïve' ideology can be compared to Marx's in the first chapter of *Das Kapital*: "They do not know it, but they are doing it."⁵⁹ We, therefore, take into account the fact that ideology never reveals itself to its subjects/servants in a literal sense. Ideology always reproduces through a distance, which has different modes in different ideological epochs. Pascal's claim would be demonstrated as follows: I know there is no God, but I do things as though (I believe that) he is.⁶⁰ This is self-distancing maintained by traditional ideology, with the idea that "Belief in God, as testified by our own deeds, is subconscious."⁶¹ Such 'naïve' ideological consciousness has a corresponding counterpart in a critical and ideological procedure of enlightenment, an ironic reaction, which reacts, for example, to official ideology not so much with intellectual arguments, but mainly by parodying, impugning – by facing it with concrete, living examples, or, as Marx says, "let's play to false consciousness its own melody, we compel it to a reflection of its own suppositions."⁶²

The inadequacy of the explanation of ideology as false consciousness is demonstrated by the implication that an authentic consciousness could exist. But we can never be in the privileged position from which to 'see' reality as an actuality. Moreover, we can only see reality through representation, and there is definitely no other reality for us existing outside of this representation. Indeed, there is no privileged position outside ideology from which we could observe or correct it, since ideology is immanent to each form of representation. It is not sufficient to differentiate between what individuals imagine their lives to be, and what those actual lives are, as Marx's formula of false consciousness is usually explained: "Within this

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 114.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 110.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 111.

⁶² Ibid., p. 114.



M. Stilinović, *Tito Bread*, 1991 (above),
Geometry of Cakes, 1993 (right)



explanation, 'illusion' is on the side of consciousness and truth on the side of being, although this "is alienated from itself, and as such, produces false consciousness. The inadequacy of such an explanation lies precisely in its loss of the moment of deception – in its loss of the 'illusion' – which is already at the core of 'being' itself and at the core of what individuals 'do'."⁶³ Following Peter Sloterdijk's book, *The Critique of Cynical Reason*⁶⁴, it is possible to introduce conceptual tools with which we can outline characteristics valid for contemporary ideologies, and without which it is impossible to understand contemporary processes in culture and art, and, moreover, impossible to intervene creatively in discussions which conceptualize the relationship between artistic production and the predominant culture/ideology. A quote from Sloterdijk will serve to introduce this change, or logic, which is specific to contemporary ideologies, and which means a shift within: "Uneasiness in culture assumed a new quality; it shows itself as a universally spread cynicism. Traditional criticism of ideology is powerless before it. It does not see where leverage for enlightenment should be exerted in cynically awakened consciousness. Modern cynicism appears as that stage of consciousness, which

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ See Peter Sloterdijk, *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft I-II* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1993).

comes through naïve ideologies and their enlightenment. In it there is an actual reason for the obvious exhaustion of the criticism of ideology. This criticism remained more naïve than the consciousness that wanted to expose it. In its brave rationality it could not follow the turning-points of modern consciousness in the direction of cunning multi-realism."⁶⁵ What follows from this statement? If ideology, as we have already pointed out, is always reproduced through a distance, which in different epochs has different modes, then cynicism, or as Sloterdijk calls it more precisely, 'cynical reason,' is the specific form of auto-distance characteristic of contemporary ideologies.

What constitutes 'cynical reason'? And what constitutes contemporary ideological consciousness? Modern cynical consciousness is a paradox of reflected false consciousness: "Cynicism is an enlightened false consciousness – unhappy consciousness in a modernized form," writes Sloterdijk⁶⁶; a cynical subject is fully aware of the falsity of the ideological complex according to which it operates. Nevertheless, it still continues to do so; reflection is included in its position. Therefore, the formula for the operation of 'cynical reason' – the outstanding mode of this lie in the guise of what truth is – is: 'They know what they are doing, and they are still doing it,' instead of the classical Marxist formula of 'naïve' ideology: 'They do not know what they are doing, but they do it.' This means that cynical consciousness is fully aware of the particularity hidden behind ideological 'universality,' but at the same time, it resignedly agrees to the necessity of an ideological mask.⁶⁷ Especially significant is that cynicism is the answer of the ruling ideology to cynical provocation, and it is more efficient than direct repression, than a violent return to 'reality,' a direct denial of a difference between 'false consciousness and

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 33.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 399.

⁶⁷ See Žižek, *Filozofija skozi psihoanalizo* [*Philosophy Through Psychoanalysis*], p. 114.

actuality.' "A notion of cynicism has been spared for the answer of those ruling and the ruling ideology to cynical provocation; they constantly see what is real in cynical provocation, but they still repress it. From now on, they know what they are doing."⁶⁸

But that is not all. Žižek claims that the most likely traditional Hegelian-Marxist answer to the 'climate' of cultural and political cynicism would be "that this kind of cynical consciousness is still far from reflecting actual suppositions and conditions: that its bearers would reflect their own actual historical role."⁶⁹ Cynical reason is no longer naïve, but a paradox of an enlightened false consciousness: we are fully aware of falsity, but we do not give it up because of that. Cynicism is therefore some kind of perverted negation of negation of the official ideology; yet it is not a direct position of immorality, but rather morality itself, which has entered into the service of immorality. An ideological text can no longer be subjected to a symptomatic reading; cynical reason takes into account this distance beforehand.

With Stilinović, we somehow face a double turning point for the cynical position: here it is not morality placed at the service of immorality, but immorality at the service of morality. Stilinović's slogan, "Work is Illness. – Karl Marx (1981–1984)," is, as Branka Stipančić argued, an invented Marxian quotation, "which Stilinović uses as his own alibi for 'sacrilegious thoughts.'"⁷⁰

An Artist at Work (1976) is a paraphrase of the Socialist understanding of an artist's work, which the system understood, especially in the case of conceptual artists, as parasitism. And how do artists work according to Stilinović? They sleep! They are

⁶⁸ See Sloterdijk, *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft I–II*, p. 400.

⁶⁹ See Žižek, *Filozofija skozi psihoanalizo* [*Philosophy Through Psychoanalysis*], p. 116.

⁷⁰ See Branka Stipančić, "Words and Images," in *Words and Images*, ed. B. Stipančić (Zagreb: SCCA, 1995), p. 32.

represented in the way that morbid Socialist ideology constantly demonized them. Or, if we consider the Stilinović work entitled *Written in Blood* (1976), which is not alien to the West, and even less to the East, we can see that art, with a capital 'A', is propagated so as to be produced in the intestines, in the hidden depths of the soul. *Written in Blood* is a cynical incision into this specific understanding of art, since all statements in this work are literally written in blood, so it really is 'bloody art.' Had Stilinović stood up to Socialist ideology and presented in his photograph an artist who really works, instead of one sleeping, or had he written 'the truth,' namely that Socialism was settling accounts with each and every form of avant-garde, and especially politically-oriented art, so that it characterized it as an ordinary parasite on the back of the working class, we would have been faced with some kind of naïve enlightened critique. As I demonstrated with a contextualization of the first intermediary interface, ideology, we would not get much help from an avant-garde artist who reveals the truth by saying that the system lies, and that the dominant ideas are those of the ruling Communist class. By retaining that form which was genuine to ideology itself, and to its functioning, he actually seized it from within, from its very point of utterance. The idea that ideology holds its subjects/servants at the level of machines means that it reveals itself as some kind of "a mystical irrational given, as some kind of boundless, tautological facticity."¹¹

The cynical practice of the ruling ideology is becoming perfectly suited to culture. This cynical turning-point, realized by the ruling 'practice' in culture, could also be picturesquely characterized by contrasting the old proverb, 'Cheats never prosper,' which implies the naïve belief that truth will win in the end, with the warning by Oscar Wilde: "If you tell the truth, they will catch you sooner or later," the aptness of which has already been realized in different cultural practices. Therefore,

¹¹ See Žižek, *Filozofija skozi psihoanalizo* [*Philosophy Through Psychoanalysis*], p. 106.

for Stilinović, the ideological symbolic ritual, shown at the level of language, is far from being just an outer expression of, let us say, ideological blindness. On the contrary, the repetition of a ritual and its form is not something that, in the last instance, would be inessential or secondary, but it is rather constitutive of the 'inner' functioning of ideology itself. With such an intervention, neither a masquerade nor a travesty of ideology and the system, but instead a strategy of the 'machine,' or an 'automaton,' Stilinović shows that ideology can be comprehended only through its own form. The path to ideology leads through the externalization of the automatism of its own material ritual.

Stilinović, like a passionate gambler, carried out projects such as *A Discussion while Drinking Coffee* (1983), which documented the ritual of coffee drinking as an artistic act in the period between 1979–83. He researched the context and sub-context of art with the aid of a cup of coffee. What, after all, with (cynical) Stilinović's photomontage and photo-notes on 'an artist who is his own complex,' feels better than a cup of black coffee?

An interface: ideological discursive mechanisms

Stilinović's subtle symptomatic reading, and his insight into the operation of ideology, will be illuminated further by an analysis of material discursive mechanisms. Stilinović is well aware of the materiality of the performative, i.e., the level of utterance that, by speech itself, and by an act of speech, establishes the reality to which it refers. As demonstrated by Althusser, and later developed by Pecheux in regards to materialistic discourse theory, ideology has a material existence, not only in the ideological apparatus of the State, but also in discursive operations. By a symptomatic reading of material discursive mechanisms, Pecheux "establishes a conceptual apparatus which encompasses material discourse and its oper-

ation/activity – that is, its ‘political’ operation – discourse as a material force in the reproduction /transformation of social proportions.’”⁷² Let us consider a statement by that type of art critic who persistently propagates the idea of “personal, emotional and spontaneous paintings, which are not ‘tied’ to the critic of society, and which are concerned with neither ‘theory’ nor ‘ideology.’” A critique of such a ‘critique’ might look like this: “It is easy to talk about humanity and spontaneity when we know that these artists make a lot of money precisely on the basis of that humanity and emotionality.” But such a critique is hopelessly naïve. It is based on the supposition that a ‘painting,’ and the artist who creates it, is a positive given and, as such, can be objectively defined and impugned. In this way, it overlooks the extent of a performative, i.e., of ‘the level on which an act of speech establishes that ‘reality’ which is being talked about within it.’ Such ‘critiques’ which propagate ‘personal, emotional and spontaneous paintings therefore do not refer to an artist or a picture, etc., as a positive given, but first and foremost establish a criterion for what an artist is, and what s/he should do. A counter-argument that such an exposed trick is a simple deception, would still be possible here because an unspoiled and healthy mind tells us what an artist or a painting really is, and that such tricks can mislead someone who has already been blinded. What such counter-argumentation ignores is precisely the performative extent of these ‘critiques,’ and moreover, if such statements are made by the authority which legitimizes itself as the representative of the interests of the State and national art institutions, etc., then with it, a new ‘symbolic reality’ is formed, a type of social link in which artists have to operate as those who are only establishing ‘Art, which should return to the essence of humanity.’

To avoid a misunderstanding, here we have presented an extremely radical lie. Although the most important thing is that

⁷² See Zoja Skušček-Močnik, “Uvod” [Introduction], in *Ideologija in estetski učinek* [*Ideology and the Aesthetic Effect*], p. 16.

AN ARTIST WHO CANNOT SPEAK ENGLISH IS NO ARTIST

M. Stilinović, *An Artist Who Cannot Speak English Is No Artist*, 1992

this lie is not an illusion which can be eradicated, if turned toward concrete 'reality,' but that a symbolic reality itself is organized as a 'lie': the whole network of social links works as though art means 'that which returns to humanity,' or that a painting is 'something which has nothing to do with theory and ideology.' In every ideological structure, we find a kind of non-ideological essence; if ideology is to become operative, it has to ground itself in some kind of non-ideological visions, e.g., reducing itself to so-called elements of humanity, individuality, etc. And to grasp ideology from its internal point means exactly to point to this non-ideological essence, to this internal constitutive point, which makes ideology ultimately operable. In 1977, Stilinović wrote the following text in red on pink silk: *An Attack on My Art is an Attack on Socialism and Progress*. Stilinović's statement/work does not refer to art as a positive given, but first and foremost defines what art is/was in relation to Socialism. In the ideological space of the former Yugoslavia, where self-management ideology lost a certain naïve quality, the State authority(as opposed to real Socialism) was no longer persuading workers that it properly represented them, but that it was they themselves who directly managed the social process, and that in reality there was no State authority. Although self-management ideology questioned the cynical context within which the omniscience of the Communist Party had been legitimized and took as its starting-point the notion that no one can

represent the working class and achieve historical progress in its name, we cannot overlook its cynical potential. Its cynicism lies in the distortion between ideological universality and a particular power, the Party, since the actual role of ideological universality is merely to legitimize the limitless power of its embodiment. Whoever was against the Communist Party was not only against a particular political organization, but against History itself and also against an embodied historical mind, so to speak.⁷³ Stilinović's attack synthesized exactly the essence of the cynical phraseology used in Communist times to fight against those attacking the Socialist ideology, since *An Attack ...* encoded beforehand a field of utterance, and in a such a way that secured its own actions against critique by universalizing each attack or critique as an attack on Socialism and its modus vivendi – progress as a whole. And if a Communist political authority, which was a kind of unmistakable instance, uttered this statement, we can only imagine what that new symbolic reality, established by this act, was like. *An Attack on My Art is an Attack on Socialism and Progress* is the display of the machine of totalitarian power at its purest.

What is Stilinović constantly searching for in his improved system of self-positioning, when he is analyzing or constructing artistic statements? His research into language, linguistic structures and tautological masterpieces concerns the subject of utterance. The fact is, however, that the history of art is only a history of interpretations defined by the various ideological mechanisms in which the subject of utterance has been trapped. Therefore, there is a split between a subject of utterance and a subject of uttering art/history of art: behind the history of art, – self-evidentially with the calming reassurance that this is art – is always hidden a subject of utterance, an obscene factor which is the other side of this self-evidence – of this neutral facticity, the one through which the history of art/art is being uttered. We

⁷³ See Žižek, *Filozofija skozi psihoanalizo* [*Philosophy Through Psychoanalysis*], p. 119.

can illustrate this phenomenon by revisiting Žižek's widely known cannibal story, which eloquently demonstrates this split within the subject – in this case, a subject of law: "When asked about cannibalism, an aboriginal scientist answers, 'No, there are no cannibals in our village, we ate the last one last week.' Here, the difference between the subject of utterance and the subject of uttering is demonstrated in its pure form, so to speak: on the level of the subject of utterance, there are no more cannibals, but the subject of uttering is precisely that 'we' who ate the last cannibal, so that there aren't any more of them."⁷⁴ What follows from this, is that a condition for a law to be carried into effect – a ban on cannibalism, for example – is to avoid a certain extreme meaning of an 'obscene' factor – e.g., the one that eats the last cannibal in order to ensure the rule of law and culture; a condition for a universal law to be brought into effect hides precisely the subject of uttering, which received its validity and legitimacy by this law.

Therefore, we are able to state that the tautology 'Art is art' (with which we could replace the question of what artists produce, and answer, 'Art'), which is, in the last instance, always based on itself – on its own process of uttering, loses its empty, formal character as soon as we question the subject of uttering this tautology. That is, a condition for the history of art, or the tautology 'Art is art,' to be brought into effect is the avoidance of that obscene factor, which has to conceal, 'swallow,' overlook some artists and artistic practices and productions, which are 'not at the level of the task,' in order to constitute a certain history of art; an avoidance of the subject of uttering, which is defined by various ideological mechanisms, in which it is caught.

Something similar holds true of *A Dictionary* (1978). The derivation of individual words, which follow one another, page upon page in Stilinović's *Dictionary*, is an example of the most established tautology. Exactly how does Stilinović 'subvert' this 'meaningless' tautological circle? By introducing a subject

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 91.

of uttering, inscribed by the word *bol* ('pain'); only by this word, written with every word in the dictionary, are we actually moved, and ask ourselves about the sensibility of a ritual of writing the word 'pain' with other words in the dictionary, and about its meaning (pain). This seemingly meaningless ritual outlines, or opens up, the domain of all the other words, which fill thousands of dictionaries. 'Pain' is an incision in meaning and simultaneously introduces the extent of the subject of uttering. Something similar occurred in the project *Linguistic Games* (1992). Here, Stilinović also questions the name of a name, or a subject of uttering. Since it is linked with authority and institutions, he uses the only possible form of encoding the subject of uttering – as a coded message, indicated by dots and a small circle, in place of the name.

Stilinović de-constructs various ideological discourses in art, constantly struggling with the self-evident, tautological 'Art is art' formula, which is, at the same time, a logic of institutionalized (fine art) criticism. Through the sieve of institutionalized criticism, the history of (fine) art is constantly recorded as the history of national (fine) art, since the ruling ideology needs artists and art in which it will recognize itself as ruling. In other words, criticism functions as the practice of the ideological translation of art into the speech of the ruling ideology; translatability into the already tested ideological discourses is a measure of the statehood and state-formation of each and every discourse.⁷⁵ This translation practice faces insurmountable difficulties when confronted with two discourses which are not constitutively bound to a mother tongue, with theoretical discourse and the 'artistic word'; and it is, at the same time, a process of the establishment of a special kind of comprehensiveness.⁷⁶

The criterion of comprehensibility is chiefly a means of intervention for the ruling ideology in the artistic discourse, a

⁷⁵ See Zoja Skušek-Močnik, "Uvod" [Introduction], in *Ideologija in estetski učinek* [Ideology and the Aesthetic Effect], p. 26.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

means of ideological possession, use, control, and direction and (ultimately,) the obstruction of this discourse. It transforms artistic discourse into a technique of the ruling ideology – into its ‘rational’ stronghold, its own scientific instrument. The ruling ideology comprehends artistic discourse “only as its own technique, or it does not notice it at all.”⁷⁷ Of course, this logic of the ruling artistic institution—its omniscience in relation to authority – holds for all states, but with an essential difference between those under Western (developed) Capitalism, and those under real Socialism. The cultural establishment absorbed avant-garde movements in the West. They took over the leading role as a dominant current within a certain artistic product. While in the East, they were completely nullified by the Socialist system. In the 1990s, Stilinović began dealing with zeros, and with his great series of white works. Collectively, these could be referred to as his ‘White Works,’ since the paintings, objects and ambience are all determined by white, implying absence, emptiness and implosion.

One of the last projects by Stilinović, in 1994–95, consisted of the tautological vivisection of the position of post-Socialist art as it became a part of the market. This position is condensed in one of Stilinović’s pieces as the statement in English: “An Artist Who Cannot Speak English Is No Artist.” This statement is structurally and critically a condensation of a position held by Eastern European artists, Africans or Asians, who perhaps cannot read it because they do not know the English language, even though they are artists. The trick is that if they do not know English, they cannot make such a statement, and therefore, they are not artists – they are not a part of the Western art market taxonomy. How uninventive this otherwise cynically real statement about the site of intersection between art, the market and ideology would have sounded had Stilinović written it simply and critically. But Stilinović is a great

⁷⁷ See Braco Rotar, *Govoreče figure – eseji o realizmu* [*Speaking Figures – Essays On Realism*] (Ljubljana: DDU Univerzum, 1983), pp. 9–10.

researcher into tautology, and a connoisseur of representational forms, and he knows that each of them, no matter how critical or politically correct it could be, has to have its exact aesthetic form. Nowadays, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, this is encompassed in the statement: "An Artist Who Cannot Speak English Is No Artist." Stilinović successfully resists the ideological temptation to make more accessible and appealing the rules of the Capitalist art market for the artists who, until now, have had no access to it. Displaying clearly one of the rules of the art ideological machine, and not maintaining a distance from it, in order to portray the critic in a more human way, he directly points to the core mechanism of its functioning. This machine functions chiefly by exclusion and segregation. Were Stilinović simply distanced from it, he would precisely double its mechanism. The distance from it, far from signaling the limitation of the Capitalist art machine, is the constitutive positive condition of its workability.

Between the normalizing and the specificizing speech of public communication, between its role as a norm and as a transgression of the symbolic 'order,' of a symbolic 'law,' which would lead us toward some pre-symbolic process, Stilinović chooses the symbolic order, the 'law' which, above all, also commands us – orders us – to enjoy! There are many cream cakes in Stilinović's!

To put this more precisely, and in conclusion, Stilinović does not stage the transgression of the Law, but he is constantly questioning the very act of its installation. Though the Law functions for the artist as the agency of prohibition – something that is not to be discussed directly – for Stilinović, the law itself is the main topic of his work, the object of his desire.

4. ANTI-THESIS

THE COPY AND THE ORIGINAL

In this chapter, I will consider the projects and/or authors defined by a number of complex problems of assumed authorship and non-authorship. With reference to the projects in question, the authors have presented themselves merely through exhibition titles, and often by signing their work with the names of famous and deceased painters and philosophers, or by using pseudonyms.



G. Djordjević, Malevich, Lichtenstein, Kossuth: 1 in 3 pictures – copies, 1980

The Harbingers of the Apocalypse

In 1979, Belgrade artist Goran Djordjević created *A Self-Portrait with a Model*. On a parallelepiped, he glued a kitsch reproduction of an artist painting a woman, encircled by her companions in a garden full of flowers and greenery. "I am very fond of this painted scene, because it treats the subject of the artist in a very simple and genuine way; there is also a touch of perversity in the idea that such a painting should be combined with a pure, minimalist form. As the formal diametrical feature of a minimalist object and a variegated kitsch reproduction did not automatically include their opposition on the level of meaning."⁷⁸ Djordjević claims that a completely reduced minimalist

⁷⁸ Goran Djordjević, "Original in kopija" [The Original and the Copy], an interview with the artist by Slobodan Mijušković in *Moment*, Belgrade 1985, p. 9.

form can (like every object of orthodox kitsch) also be an expression of extreme opportunism.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Djordjević began his series called *A Short History of Art*. "Pencil drawings in the same format and with the same technique are the first copies that I really made. It was especially interesting for me to copy works of contemporary art (Malevich, Duchamp, Manzoni, Beuys and Smithson, etc.). I liked the absurdity of copying Kosuth's definitions. It was then that I felt copying could be interesting. If attributes exist which define modern art, then these attributes are the new, the original, the authentic and the imaginative. Copying is quite the opposite: it repeats and reproduces; it is non-original, sterile and non-imaginative."⁷⁹ Slobodan Mijušković concludes that Djordjević does not create paintings to master slowly the painting profession and to become a good painter, but to realize certain ideas which cannot be understood on the basis of the characteristics of the artistic medium in which they are mediated to us. "It seems to me that you paint pictures that we should not treat as paintings."⁸⁰

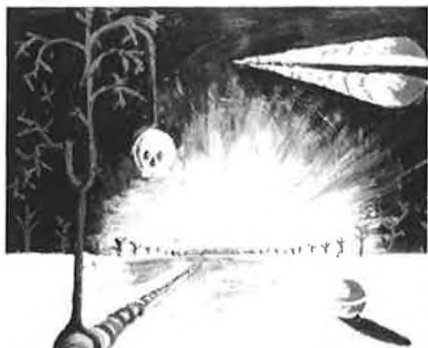
The Harbingers of the Apocalypse, which Djordjević first exhibited in 1980, is among the works that decisively marked and bounded the concept of copying in the 1980s.⁸¹ The picture, which Djordjević had painted as a high-school graduate in the early 1970s was described by him as an "ugly, tasteless and besides all that, *dilettante* painting, of which I was ashamed for years, ... my first serious attempt at painting. Ten years after it was done, I decided to make preparatory sketches for it, because I was acquainted with the fact that numerous important paintings from art history were produced on the basis of many drawings, sketches and studies. I decided that *The Harbingers of the Apocalypse* would become an important work of art."⁸² In March

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ First in Belgrade, then in Ljubljana and Zagreb.

⁸² Djordjević, "Original in kopija" [The Original and the Copy], p. 10.



G. Djordjević,
*The Harbingers
of the Apocalypse*, 1980

1981, at the ŠKUC Gallery in Ljubljana, he presented some 50 more or less identical copies of *The Harbingers*. He later explained this seemingly ludicrous task: "If the original is without value, does that hold true of its copy? I believe that the copies of *The Harbingers of the Apocalypse* are more important than their original, although they do not differ from it."⁸³ Copies contain not only all the parameters of the painting that is being copied, but a lot more: the idea itself and the act of copying! Copying makes repetition and reproduction intrude into the features characteristic of modern art, such as the new, the original and the authorial; it is not there to falsify and to forge the original, but seems to question the current, canonized foundations of modern art: the identity of the artists and their work, the meaning and significance of the work, and its interpretation. "Contrary to philosophy, which traditionally uses words and sentences, I used a painting. I believe that questions such as the relation between the original and the copy, truth and falsehood, sense and non-sense are legitimate subjects of philosophical discussion. I believe that *The Harbingers of the Apocalypse* can call into question the exclusive nature of verbal expression in philosophy."⁸⁴ In 1984, the Slovenian fine art group Irwin, within its *Back to*

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

the USA project at the Ljubljana ŠKUC Gallery, displayed copies and reconstruction of paintings, photographs and installations by American artists whose works had toured Western Europe as part of an exhibition bearing the same title that year. The Slovene version of *Back to the USA* was an audacious appropriation of the American dream and of all the parameters of what American art was supposed to mean in the 1980s. It was done in a way, which was legitimate within the strategies and tactics of an impoverished and indigent Socialism and its artists. (Given the impossibility of paying high art insurance fees, and the fact that at that time there was no Art Market, the only possible way of exhibiting *Back to the USA* was as a copy, a reconstruction and as symbolic repetition.) Besides the reconstruction of paintings, photographs and installations of American artists⁸⁵ participating in the original version of *Back to the USA*, the Ljubljana project also displayed a considerably enlarged copy of the copy of *The Harbingers*, done in the style of a graffiti painting by Jonathan Borofsky at the end of the 1970s. Borofsky was asked by Goran Djordjević to make the copy of *The Harbingers*, as Djordjević was by the end of the 1970s already developing the concept that *The Harbingers* was to become an important work of art. The copy of the copy of *The Harbingers of the Apocalypse* by Borofsky, therefore, confirmed that the entire ritual of the reconstruction and repetition in the *Back to the USA* project was not an attempt to falsify, but rather to analyze the conceptual processes in art and culture. Did this constant movement on the edge of art not also demonstrate the independence of painting from its parasitic existence in the ritual of unique creativity? The entire problem, as demonstrated in the process of copying and its constant self-questioning of the artistic status of a work of art, can be described in the words of Walter Benjamin: the problem of losing an 'aura of originality' in an era which is defined and deter-

⁸⁵ Nicholas Africano, Jonathan Borofsky, John Aherarn, Richard Bosman, Neil Jenney, Rober Kushner, Matt Mullican, Cindy Sherman.

mined by the media of mechanical reproduction. If "the use of non-artistic media were characteristic of the 1970s, then in the 1980s we have the non-artistic use of a traditionally artistic medium."⁸⁶ The process of reproducibility in the aforementioned projects was driven to extreme limits. "It is true that my copies are not the result of an intention to gradually master the art of painting, although I used to strive to make a good copy. I don't know who would improve the art of painting by copying Mondrian's compositions or Malevich's Suprematist paintings. Conceptually, copying is a very simple procedure. We choose a piece of work, which is called or designated as the original, and we try to repeat its formal characteristics. The result of such a procedure is a copy, which does not differ from the original if the procedure is carried out consistently. For example, there is hardly any difference between Mondrian's composition and the copy I made. But the painting by Mondrian is most probably the result of his interest in the relationship between surface and color, while its copy is a result of my interest in the very problem of copying itself. We can conclude that these paintings, which are formally the same, are completely different on the levels of meaning. But that's not all. The object of Mondrian's interest is recognizable in the painting, but we cannot say the same of its copy. The copy is a painting according to all the parameters of painting, but its idea lies outside the painting. (...) The idea of copying *The Harbingers of the Apocalypse* originates from the moment I realized that copying is completely meaningless. This impression becomes more and more intense with every new copy. So all copies are similar to one another. The same painting and the same idea. No difference. This is actually an anti-historical work. We would be equally confused had we seen Mondrian's painting in the museum, and then copies of this painting a few rooms later, placed in another historical context."⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Djordjević, "Original in kopija" [The Original and the Copy], p. 10.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

According to Mijušković⁸⁸, we may also understand the copies as a specific interpretation of the originals. In some projects, Djordjević copies Mondrian, Andre and Buren as soapy scenes from kitsch reproductions, thus placing their work in an iconic context which already has a certain meaning. A similar effect is achieved when someone paints elements of Mondrian, Male-



G. Djordjević, *Piet Mondrian – 2 copies*, 1980

vich or Stella onto small objects. Thus, a reading is also contextualized through the very basis on which these works are copied, and it depends on its characteristics (and also the material of which it is made), and on how and where the copy of the work is placed. Old paper and frames introduce 'noise' into the chronological location of famous works of art. "After all, are the works of Buren, Beuys and Andre not presented in the 'History' of art precisely by the aforementioned kitsch reproductions? Moreover, these works are similar to *A Self-Portrait with a Model* due to the unusual co-existence of two different views of the world: the kitsch and the avant-garde. The pieces of hardboard on which I made copies of Malevich also have their own visual and semantic value (material, color and form), that therefore influences the change in meaning of the known Suprematist forms. This also proves that there are no neutral bases; everything by which a work is realized influences the context of an individual work."⁸⁹ In order to gain an easier

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

comprehension of the procedures described, let us recall the so-called strategic model, conceptualized by Hubert Damisch in his book *Fenêtre jaune cadmium*.⁹⁰ This is a fourth model which follows the perceptual, technical and the symbolic, and which was established in relation to painting as a theoretical operator and as a creator of models; Damisch conceived of this idea when he reformulated Dubuffet's notion that "Painting can be a machine communicating philosophy" as "Painting can be a machine which already elaborates this philosophy."⁹¹ According to Yve-Alain Bois⁹², Hubert Damisch founded his strategic model on the basis of Claude Levi-Strauss' *The Way of Masks*, which shows that a work of art has, first of all, a meaning according to what it is not, and then according to what it opposes, in any case, according to its own position and value in a stratified field which, above all, has to define its own rules.⁹³ Yve-Alain Bois stressed that a strategic model does not originate from an opposition between works, and does not directly refer to pictorial inventions, but rather refers to the possibilities of its own appearance. The strategic reading is completely anti-historical in that it does not believe in the disappearance of things, in linear genealogy, or in a homogenous time without interruptions. If the perceptive, technical and symbolic models mainly show the mechanisms of painting as a theoretical operator, then the strategic model (as well as the copy) confronts us with forms of its historicity and/or anti-historicity.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ See Hubert Damisch, *Fenêtre jaune cadmium, ou, Les dessous de la peinture* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁹² See Yve-Alain Bois, "Painting as Model," in *October*, vol. 37, 1986, pp. 125-38.

⁹³ 'When discussing this special problem, I hope I have managed to prove that a mask, first of all, is not what it represents, but what it transforms, that is, what it chose not to represent.' See Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Way of Masks* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), p. 144.

⁹⁴ See Yve-Alain Bois, "Painting as Model," pp. 136-37.

*The authentic, historical avantgarde, and the imitative, repetitive neo-avantgarde*⁹⁵

Rosalind Krauss has said that a copy can be a challenge for history, because instead of uniqueness, unity and a single entity, it offers a spectrum of multiplicity, a numerousness that threatens to explode this unity (she takes the art of Paolo Veronesi as an example).⁹⁶ In structuralist terminology, repetition is a substitute that is the always 'already here present' moment of the production of desire, but only if the desire reproduces the desire of someone else.⁹⁷ "Without that always preceding, according to Roland Barthes, *Book and/or Statute Book* there are no desires nor jealousy: Pygmalion is in love with the imaginary being of a sculptural code; Paolo and Francesca love each other and take their example from the passion of Lancelot and Guinevere."⁹⁸ Within the framework of certain historical links to the problem concerning the original and the copy, there is an interesting discussion by Benjamin H. D. Buchloch⁹⁹, which treats the problem of the original on the basis of repetition. Buchloch introduces the discussion from the unjustified thesis of Peter Bürger that the "neo-avantgarde"¹⁰⁰ has institutionalized avant-garde art, and by so doing,

⁹⁵ See M. Gržinić, "Modernism i avantgarda: Walter Benjamin: Mondrian '63-'96, Drobne rysy w cigłej katastrofie," in *Obecność Waltera Benjamina w kulturze współczesnej*, ed. Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Instytut Kultury, 1993), pp. 151–156. See also M. Gržinić, "Modernity and Artistic Avant-Garde," in *La Modernidad como estética* (Madrid: 12th International Congress on Aesthetics, 1994), pp. 194–99.

⁹⁶ See Rosalind Krauss, "Originality as Repetition: Introduction," in *October*, vol. 37, 1986, pp. 35–41.

⁹⁷ See Analysis of seven oil paintings by J. A. D. Ingres, 'Paolo and Francesca,' between 1814 and 1857, in Krauss, "Originality as Repetition: Introduction."

⁹⁸ Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), pp. 73–74.

⁹⁹ See Benjamin H. D. Buchloch, "The Primary Colors for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant Garde," in *October*, vol. 37, 1986, pp. 41–53.

¹⁰⁰ Neo-avantgarde art is generally dated between 1951–61, avant-garde art,

has eliminated and destroyed the authentic avant-garde objectives."¹⁰¹ Bürger's interpretation is based on an opposition between the original 'authentic' historical avant-garde and the intuitive and repetitive post-War neo-avant-garde. It is obvious, says Buchloch, that Bürger's understanding of the 'authentic' original, when compared to a 'fraudulent' copy, originates from the binary opposition, which is still founded in the cult of the original's aura.¹⁰² Furthermore, Buchloch claims that we are witnesses to a specific practice of repetition, which we cannot treat merely with concepts of influence, imitation and authenticity. If we speak of repetition, then this is a Freudian concept of repetition, and, above all, the actual circumstances of reception and changes in avant-garde paradigms need to be analyzed.¹⁰³ In his analysis, Buchloch tackles the comparison of the neo-avant-garde repetition of monochromatism, which appeared for the first time between 1919 and 1921, in the context of post-Cubist painting, as one of the most important reductionist painting strategies of the historical avant-garde. He writes, "Exactly thirty years later, the work of the French artist Yves Klein, for many reasons the quintessence of the neo-avant-garde artist, shocked the Parisian art world, and it seems he managed to persuade this world that he invented monochromatic painting."¹⁰⁴ As Buchloch stresses, it is also important to understand the simultaneity of these re-discoveries and repetitions of avant-garde paradigms by other artists of the same period. This enables the introduction of an interesting hypothesis: that the formation of modernist discourse has generated its own historical and evolutionary dynamics. If we

or the so-called "classic" avant-garde, is placed in the period between 1910–25.

¹⁰¹ See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 61.

¹⁰² See Benjamin H. D. Buchloch, "The Primary Colors for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant Garde," p. 42.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

assume that the visual paradigm operates analogously to the linguistic, then the language of modernism itself could constitute neo-avant-garde 'speakers,' who then constantly replicate and modify its 'words.'¹⁰⁵

Bürger's analysis rejected neo-avant-garde charlatanism, as the one which cannot be compared to the authenticity and sublime seriousness of 'the original' critical project of the historical avant-garde. However, with chromatic formal and structural elements seemingly similar to the avant-garde, the repetitive structure of neo-avant-garde work shook the perception of an internalized, eternally valid meaning, and executed a shift in the structure of avant-garde work. If we also take into consideration Bürger's efforts at defining the concept of art as a fragment – an open structure – then it is incomprehensible why Bürger does not accept that, within such an open work, not all formal, material and iconographic characteristics can function in the same, traditionally semantic way.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, we may ask (with Buchloch) whether what Bürger calls the 'semantic atrophy' of a work and production was, in fact, indicated in the avant-garde alone by the neo-avant-garde.¹⁰⁷

Walter Benjamin: Mondrian '63–'96

Let us recall the problem of repetition on the level of the art discourse. With this, I refer to a lecture called *Walter Benjamin: Mondrian '63–'96*, given in June 1986 in Ljubljana.¹⁰⁸ It is unnecessary to point out here that the lecture was given by a German philosopher who had been dead for almost half a century, while Piet Mondrian, a Dutch painter and the founder of abstract painting, had died four years after Benjamin (in 1944).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ The lecture was organized by the ŠKUC Gallery, Ljubljana.

"The theme of tonight's lecture is, as was already announced, the work of Piet Mondrian created between 1963 and 1996, at least as it can be concluded on the basis of the dates on the paintings themselves. (...) So, you will ask, 'Why are so many of Mondrian's paintings gathered in one place in this city?' I believe that most of you will find it almost incredible. Even if we believed, just for a moment, that by some miracle it was possible to collect original Mon-



*Walter Benjamin: Mondrian '63-'96,
Cankarjev dom, Ljubljana, 1986*

drian's just for this occasion, we would soon be confused by the data found on the paintings themselves. Whoever looks at them closely may notice that they really have Mondrian's signature, but the dating seems, to say at the very least, rather strange. The paintings are dated with the numbers 63, 79, 83, 86, 92, 96. This means that the earliest was painted in 1963. And what are we to do? Since we know that Mondrian lived from 1872 to 1944, we can simply conclude that these are not his original paintings. Even if we suppose that, for some unknown reason, Mondrian was able to date or anti-date his paintings in this way, a scientific analysis would soon prove that these paintings were done after his death. Therefore, we must pose a new question: Who is the real creator of these paintings? Can we, for example, assume that these are original works by some unknown mod-

ern artist, painted in Mondrian's style? However, by examining the literature, we can see, and you can take my word for it, that each of these paintings represents a more or less faithful copy of a Mondrian original. (...) And now we can feel sure when we claim that these are copies of Mondrian made by an unknown painter. However, we should not forget the possibility that these copies were made by several hands. Since only Mondrian's initials sign the pictures, and there is no other information on them that would lead us to their real creator, we can assume that the answer to the question of who made these copies remains unknown. If we cannot establish who made these paintings, is it possible to answer the question of when they were produced? We can see that the signature on the pictures does not lead us to who painted them; consequently, it is understandable that the dates do not provide the time of their origin either. If 1963 and 1979 still seem like the time when these paintings could have been produced, what would we then say about the two dated 1992 and 1996? I do not know whether it would be reasonable to say that this picture was painted in 1996, or whether it would be more correct to say that it will be painted in 1996.¹⁰⁹ It is becoming obvious now that the dates on these paintings are not reliable data regarding the time of their production. If we do not know the answer to the question of when these paintings were executed, and by whom, would it be possible, then, to give a satisfactory answer at least to the question of why they were done? But why would anyone copy Mondrian? We know that copying is not alien to artists' work. Copying the Great Masters has quite often been a practical way of acquiring skills for many artists and students over the centuries. So, for example, copying in the previous century was a part of the course at the Academy of Fine Arts in Paris. (...) Copying great artists can somehow be understood, but who would have thought that by copying

¹⁰⁹ The text of the lecture was written in 1986.

the work of Mondrian they would acquire painting skills? I find it difficult to believe in such a possibility. Besides, if we take a closer look at the copies, we can see that they are not exactly perfect. (...) So why were these pictures painted? Is it actually not extreme nonsense to make copies of such simple paintings, paintings by an artist as well known as Mondrian? If I had to answer this question, my answer would be in the affirmative. Yes, it is nonsensical even to think of copying Mondrian. And what now? It seems as though we have come to an end. To an end of reason, or to an end of understanding. Because I don't know how it would be sensible to talk about the results of nonsensical behavior ... Or it is possible anyway? We could, for example, say that nonsense is the sense of origin of these paintings. (...) Let us say now that in the same museum where the original is exhibited, this copy is also displayed, but in a room, which corresponds to the time, these paintings first appeared in public. This means that the painting would be exhibited together with works, which represent the 1980s. And one sunny day, we set off to the National Museum. (...) And suddenly we have the feeling that we have seen something familiar. We are sure it is a mistake or an error, and at first we reject the idea that we have already seen the painting we are observing. (...) We rub our eyes and look again. Quite definitely, Mondrian. And it is the same Mondrian we saw a few decades earlier. (...) Suddenly, we feel that the earth beneath us has begun to shake. We quickly look at the wall. It, too, is shaking. We are struck by the thought: earthquake! (...) But what is happening to our painting? With that other Mondrian's painting? It is completely still – it is actually floating in its non-existent space, as though what is happening around it does not concern it. (...) Still shaken by the previous dramatic events, we make ourselves a cup of coffee, sit on the floor, light a cigarette; and when we think about everything that has happened, our eyes accidentally, almost absent-mindedly, flow off to the wall where we have placed the painting. In an

*almost empty and half-lit room, on a wall, which once was white, two Mondrian's are hung: an original and a copy. We would not be even slightly surprised by their similarity. Formally, they are actually two, the same paintings. But we know that only one is the original, painted as a result of Mondrian's interest in the problems of space, plans, verticals, horizontals, primary colors: gray, black, yellow and red. And all this can be seen in the painting. We look at the copy: everything about it is just as it is in the original. (...) But we can say for sure that the unknown painter of the copy was not concerned with horizontals, verticals, colors and background when making the painting. (...) We say that the sole sensible reason for this copy being made was the fact that copying Mondrian is nonsensical. The subject of the artist's interest was the copy itself and its relation to the original. What we have before us, therefore, are two paintings, which are the same, but with two completely different ideas hidden behind them. We can see in the original what its idea is, but we could not say the same of the copy. This means that the copy contains the idea of its ideal, as well as its own idea: the idea of a copy. Hence it follows, paradoxically, although seemingly truly, that the copy can be multi-layered in its meanings and more complex than its original. (...) Can we now imagine what good old Mondrian would have to say to all of this? Instead of a problematic understanding of art as a reflection of the uncertainty of the human soul, Mondrian says of modern art that 'it is denoted by a certainty which does not ask questions, but offers solutions. Human consciousness clearly rejects the subconscious, and in art, it expresses itself by establishing balance, and therefore excludes any questions.'*¹¹⁰

The *Walter Benjamin: Mondrian '63–'96* lecture not only emphasizes the so-called 'semantic atrophy' of historical works

¹¹⁰ A lecture, *Walter Benjamin: Mondrian '63–'96*, 1986, manuscript.

of art, as presented by Buchloch, but it also makes a critical discussion 'a critical return' so badly missed by the French theoretician Marcelin Pleynet¹¹¹, when in 1970 in Paris, more than 25 years after Piet Mondrian's death, a great retrospective exhibition of his work was staged. Pleynet's demand for a critical return to Mondrian's work was a demand for a self-critical questioning of the painter's double historical situation, a critical return to Mondrian and his work in the period when he lived, and in the time when the exhibition was held (1970).¹¹² Approximately 45 years after Mondrian's death, in 1986, we can say that 'our' *Walter Benjamin* staged this double return, so badly desired by Pleynet. Instead of the old, but constantly repeated demonstration by Michel Seuphor on Mondrian and naturalist abstraction, based on the flatness of Dutch landscape painting and the well-known theory of verticals and horizontals, the whole of *W. Benjamin's* philosophically discursive treatise has cut decisively into the evolutionary demonstration of Mondrian's work, which as such, could only correspond to "some closed and already completed history, which is only waiting for its recurring repetition in the form of an abstract idea."¹¹³ According to Marcelin Pleynet, the catalogue prepared by Michel Seuphor in 1956 about Mondrian, is highly typical: "... outside any chronology, the artist figure is the only determining and important organizing element of the artistic opus, which is now already defined as a dictionary (and the artist's task, therefore, is only to ensure the already proven representative effects). This is why, in this chronology, Mondrian's self-portrait is put in the first place; the artist's name needs to be embodied, if we wish this name to ensure the effects of representation. With the self-portrait, the artist confirms his own 'talent' as an arranger of images, and ensures his own credibility in

¹¹¹ See Marcelin Pleynet, *L'insegnamento della pittura* (Milan: Gabrielle Mazotta, 1974), pp. 120–53.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 120.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

the cultural sphere, so that it can assume an almost natural confirmation."¹¹⁴ All this is possible only within a cultural model and its interpretative order, which operates through continuous self-confirmation, and whose speculative system (work/author) ensures, in this case under the name of Mondrian, the existence of a homogenizing totality, which makes it easier to censor the oppositions which could take away its order.

Here, it is possible to introduce an analogy (in contrast to the concepts of copying) to certain projects and copiers who have already won recognition in the developed North American and Western European Art Markets – artists such as David Diao or Sherrie Levine. Although their artistic concepts are based on the copying of renowned avant-garde and neo-avant-garde artists, 'the system of verification through the pair work/artist' is constantly maintained here as the artists pay special care to their own identity and names by consistently signing their copies. Contrary to this, in projects such as *The International Exhibition of Modern Art – the Armory Show* and *Walter Benjamin: Mondrian '63–'96*, we witness the total concealment, or assumption of identities and names, and therefore, also the complete loss of the artist's body. Hence, it is not surprising that such artistic concepts appeared in the 1980s in the countries of (real) Socialism, especially, if we recall the psychotic discourse by which these Socialist countries predominantly functioned.

In November 1986, a project entitled *The International Exhibition of Modern Art – the Armory Show* was staged at the ŠKUC Gallery in Ljubljana. It presented copies of artworks, which were exhibited for the first time in New York from 17 February to 15 March 1913, along with a representative selection of copies of avant-garde and various modernist artistic movements. Although (perhaps by a miracle) these could actually have been originals on exhibit for the first time in Ljubljana, this notion would soon be confounded by the dates on the paintings: they were signed with the names of the artists that the paintings supposedly

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

*The International
Exhibition
of Modern Art –
the Armory Show,
ŠKUC Gallery,
Ljubljana 1986*



belonged to, but dated 1905, 1913, 1932, 1969, 1988, 1990 and 2019. "They may say what they want about it, but repetition is the right expression for what 'recollection' was to the Greeks (*anamnesis* in Plato's idealistic, cognitive philosophy). Just as they were taught that cognition is recollection, the new philosophy also teaches that all life is repetition. The only recent philosopher who had a foreboding of this was Leibniz. Repetition and recollection are the same movement, but in opposite directions. All we remember happened and is repeated in reverse, while real repetition remembers in advance. Repetition, therefore, makes people happy, while remembering makes them unhappy."¹⁵ More than copying and imitating, this is a matter of repetition. Repetition and remembering are not communicative, since authors began recollecting in order to arrive at repetition. Consequently, we can also understand these procedures as a vivisection of painting referents.

Copies vs. replicants

Copying enables the conceptualization of at least four elements, which constitute the postmodern period, and the conditions for its existence: schizophrenic temporality, spatial pastiche, iden-

¹⁵ Dragica Vuković, "Korekcija perspektive," [Correction of the Perspective], 1987, manuscript, pp. 1–3.

tity and history, and the role of simulacrum and simulation. According to Frederic Jameson¹¹⁶, schizophrenic temporality and spatial pastiche are the major notions, which now comprise the postmodern era. The notion of schizophrenic temporality, as developed by Jameson, and based on Lacan's understanding of schizophrenia, essentially denotes a break in the relationship between signifiers, which originate from a failed encounter with the symbolic. Pastiche, on the other hand, denotes a process of erosion, a corrosion of differences. According to Jameson, this is the aesthetics of citation driven to its extreme boundaries. When Jean Baudrillard looks for a connection with the postmodern era, he speaks of a scroll in the relation between what is real and its reproduction or imitation, and where the process of imitation is driven to its extremes. According to Baudrillard, "the real is not what can be reproduced, but what has always been reproduced, the hyper-real which is all in the simulation."¹¹⁷ Copies, which seem like authentic paintings, which are even signed as originals, can be compared with the replicants created by Ridley Scott at the beginning of the 1980s in his film, *Blade Runner*. According to Giuliana Bruno¹¹⁸, the replicants are 'a complete fraud'; they seem human, they speak like humans and they have feelings, but no history. 'The machinery of imitations, copying and serial nature' confirms the fiction of reality, not only in *Blade Runner*, but also in the projects of copying. Jean Baudrillard describes a simulacrum as "an operational duplicate, a double, meta-stable program, a completely descriptive machine, which ensures total changeability for all signs of reality."¹¹⁹ Therefore, "... it is that hallucinatory simi-

¹¹⁶ See Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Ed Hal Foster (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983), pp. 111–25. See also Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in *New Left Review*, vol. 146, 1984, pp. 53–92.

¹¹⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1982), p. 146.

¹¹⁸ See Giuliana Bruno, "Ramble City: Postmodernism and *Blade Runner*," in *October*, vol. 41, 1987, pp. 61–75.

¹¹⁹ See Baudrillard, *Simulations*, p. 4.

larity of the real with itself."¹²⁰ Simulation is more complex than to imitate or to pretend. To simulate, writes Bruno, implies the production of a characteristic in something, which one wishes to simulate. It is a matter of the internalization of signs or symptoms to the point where there is no more difference between the fake and the real, the real and the imaginary.¹²¹ But before Philip K. Dick wrote the short story *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*¹²², on which *Blade Runner* was based, a simulacrum had already been described by E. T. A. Hoffmann in his narrative *Der Sandmann*. According to Bruno, this story also inspired Freud's contemplation of evil. The copy in Hoffmann's time was more a matter of imitation, which still brings meaning to the real, in contrast to the replicants directed towards serial nature, and so it referred neither to any original as the point of comparison, nor to the difference between the real and the copy.¹²³ As Gilles Deleuze says, a simulacrum is the negation of both the original and the copy, and finally, the worship of falsification as power and the power of falsification.¹²⁴ Copying imitates a previously existing model of real life, while simulation creates the supposition of a nonexistent reality: It simulates something, which does not exist. Simulation, in contrast to imitation, which preserves the belief in a previously existing organic reality, retroactively 'denaturalizes' reality itself by revealing the mechanism that is responsible for its existence. That an imitation is too successful means that, in some way, the original itself is a fake, that has itself the status of an ironic imitation. Serial nature and the definition of a simulacrum as a negation of both the original and the copy – all this is placed almost as a manifesto in the very foundations of the projects of copying.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 142.

¹²¹ See Bruno, "Ramble City: Postmodernism and Blade Runner," p. 68.

¹²² See Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982).

¹²³ See Bruno, "Ramble City: Postmodernism and Blade Runner," p. 68.

¹²⁴ See Gilles Deleuze, "Plato and the Simulacrum," in *October*, vol. 27, 1983, pp. 45–56.

These projects not only establish the difference between the original and the copy, but build a certain specific background of reference, against which it is possible to articulate the copies and the models of the socialization of vision as part of the new paradigm in the 1990s, and with which it is possible to construct new models of subjectivity and to reflect the changed dialectic of the gaze. Not only do copies not have a history, but their entire temporality is fragmented and schizophrenic. We are witnesses to the presentation of schizophrenic conditions in Lacan's sense. "For Lacan, temporality, the past, the present, the future and memory belong to a linguistic order, which means that the experience of temporality, and its representation, are the effect of speech. It is the structure of speech that allows us to recognize temporality such as it is, and to present it in its linear development from the past to the present and the future. The experience of historical continuity is therefore based on linguistic suppositions. (...) Schizophrenia is the result of a failed entrance into a symbolic order, it represents a breakdown in language, which consequently results in the breakdown of temporality. (...) There is no past, no future, at the two poles of what is becoming a perpetual present."¹²⁵ "A schizophrenic does not have an experience of temporal continuity, but is condemned to life in a perpetual present, with which the different moments of their past are barely connected, and for which there is no future on the horizon."¹²⁶ Thus, the schizophrenic temporality, as represented by the copies, like replicants, obstructs entrance to the social order, the continuous, closed and always determined history and its interpretation. Schizophrenia and the logic of the simulacrum influence historical time. They change the meaning of history and the way it is represented. Replicants, in the position of outsiders to the order of language, as Bruno says, need to be eliminated; as our copies, they represent a dysfunction, which can question the order of the language and

¹²⁵ See Bruno, "Ramble City: Postmodernism and Blade Runner," p. 70.

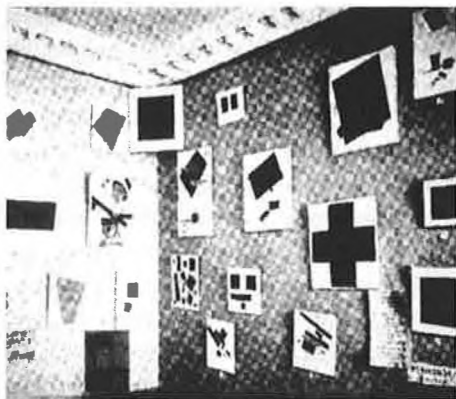
¹²⁶ See Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," p. 120.

law.¹²⁷ The schizophrenic temporality displayed by the copies therefore represents an opposition to the tendency to integrate art fully into a social order, or in a continuum of the forever closed, delineated one History of Art, and its interpretation. If replicants wish to survive, they have to set their lives in order. Their future is in the ability of acquisition, in the attainability of the past; their future is in constant attempts to form a persistent identity in time. Its traveler's diary is the journey of Oedipus. To survive in time, they have to accept sexual difference and sexual identity. According to Bruno, only one of them succeeds in *Blade Runner*: the replicant Rachel has a document, a photograph of her with her mother, and that is her history, her mother coming before her. Replicant Roy does not want to accept the symbolic castration, which is a condition for entering the symbolic order, so he commits an Oedipal crime: he scratches out the eyes of his putative father, and so repeats what has been inverted. In this exchange of the pre-Oedipal and oedipal imaginary and symbolic orders, the image of the mother is of key importance. 'My mother, I'll tell you about my mother,' states replicant Leon, and kills his interrogator. Which is why replicant Rachel tries to persuade herself and all those around her that she is not a replicant with a photograph: "Look that's me with my mother."¹²⁸

The Last Futurist Exhibition 0.10 (zero-ten), shown in March 1986 at ŠKUC Gallery in Ljubljana, and signed by 'Kasimir Malevich,' presented a construction of the exhibition of the same title, staged in its original form by the great Russian Suprematist Malevich in St. Petersburg, between 17 December 1915 and 19 January 1916. The project was first presented in Belgrade in a private apartment in 1985, and then in Ljubljana (1986), as well as in a fragmented version, again in Ljubljana in 1994. The reconstruction was created from the sole photograph of the original exhibition, which is reproduced in every

¹²⁷ See Bruno, "Ramble City: Postmodernism and Blade Runner," p. 68.

¹²⁸ Ibid., pp. 70–71.



*The Last
Futurist Exhibition
0.10 (zero-ten),
St. Petersburg
1915–1916*

serious art history compendium. The curious artistic exploit also included a series of new Neo-Suprematist paintings, which translated Suprematist elements into the technique of petit point, or combined them with classical relief and sculptures. Here, we are witnesses to an iconodulity that verges on the kitsch. This is not an attempt to copy the original as such, nor to create ‘forgeries’ on the basis of photographs of a specific period and reproductions of the originals, but an attempt to (re)create a system of art that has built the institution of contemporary art as we know it today. *The Last Futurist Exhibition 0.10* from the 1980s established a special relationship with



*The Last Futurist Exhibition 0.10 (zero-ten),
ŠKUC Gallery, Ljubljana 1986*

the photograph by literally reconstructing it through copying the objects and paintings in the photograph and, later, by duplicating the position of the exhibits at the site of the show; therefore, a special relationship with history was established. In a letter published in September 1986, in the art journal *Art in America*, the very same Malevich (with the added postscript: Belgrade, Yugoslavia) writes:

Dear Friends, I was very surprised when I learned from the 'Diaorama' article (Art in America, March 1986) of an artist, David Diao, who copied my work on the basis of a photograph, The Last Futurist Exhibition 0.10 (the only



*The Last Futurist Exhibition 0.10 (zero-ten),
ŠKUC Gallery, Ljubljana 1986*

existing photograph of the St. Petersburg exhibition, Diao reproduced as a two-dimensional painting), taken in St. Petersburg between 17 December 1915 and 19 January 1916. I was a little confused when, in the same text, I found that some other artists in your beautiful city of New York had used my work. I cannot stop wondering why. Why now, after so many years? (...) When I was hanging my little Suprematist paintings on the wall, at random, I could not have imagined, even in my dreams, that a photograph of this

installation would become so famous, and that it would be published in thousands of books and newspapers. I don't remember exactly who took the picture, but there is only one black-and-white photograph. No colors. I have a feeling that this photograph is becoming even more important than my Suprematist paintings. And that was the main reason that for years I kept thinking of staging the same exhibition again. But for obvious reasons, this was not possible in St. Petersburg. I decided to stage *The Last Futurist Exhibition 0.10* precisely on its seventieth anniversary (from 17 December 1985 to 19 January 1986) in a small apartment in the beautiful city of Belgrade. Part of the exhibition is an exact repetition of the St. Petersburg installation, but this time there are no labels with titles on the walls, no numbers and no chair. Another part of the exhibition shows some of my recently completed Neo-Suprematist paintings. Suprematist icons on antique relief and sculptures, and Suprematist icons, made in the Gobelin tapestry technique. I know this letter will be a great surprise to you, as most people think that I died in 1935. I know ... Suetin's coffin, the great procession through the streets of Leningrad ... A 'black square' on the grave. Yes, many people believe that I died. But did I really?¹²⁹

The creation of copies, striving to be authentic, and the authenticity of paintings (Neo-Suprematist paintings), which, in the context of repetition and copying, seem like copies, thwart the simple contextuality and the reading of each part of the project. We could refer to art as a space for a cultural diversion in which there are no sacred values, where everything may be questioned. The photograph as a document, to use Barthes' terms, 'of what was'¹³⁰, is a document of history, its discarded

¹²⁹ "A letter from Kasimir Malevich, Belgrade, Yugoslavia," published in *Art in America*, September 1986, p. 9.

¹³⁰ See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) p. 77.

existence. Michel Foucault says that history turns documents into monuments. Not only is photography the medium, which, according to Foucault, enables society to create masses of documentation with which it is consequently inseparably linked¹³¹, but photographs also produce memories and (invented?) stories. "When I was hanging my little Suprematist paintings on the wall, at random, I could not have imagined, even in my dreams, that a photograph of this installation would become so famous, and that it would be published in thousands of books and newspapers." Belgrade Malevich visually and discursively deconstructs and constructs a photograph, and with it, creates new history. Foucault describes this procedure as follows: "History organizes documents, selects them, distributes them, and places them on various levels; it forms a series, establishes a difference between what is important and unimportant, discovers elements, defines wholes, describes relations between people."¹³² Bruno believes that a historical referent is occupied by a photographic referent. In a world of fragmented temporality, the differentiation of history ends in finding its image, a photographic simulacrum, although it itself remains outside our reach. Eclectic history and pastiche, introduced by projects entailing copying, can be interpreted as a repurchase, a salvation of history, which implies its transformation and reinterpretation in the tension between loss and desire. Pastiche dictates a need for drawing history, deconstructing its order, its specificity and diachronic nature. With the logic of pastiche, a simulacrum of history is established: the tension between a radical loss of duration and an attempt at its repeated appropriation. This is a tension in which the painting signifier searches for the fiction of history and rewrites it with the help of recycling.

¹³¹ See Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), p. 7.

¹³² Ibid.

The Mimicry of Painting

In his eleventh seminar, *Four Basic Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, in the chapter entitled 'What Is a Picture?', Jacques Lacan states that "mimicry is no doubt the equivalent of a function which, in man, is exercised in painting."¹³³ It is appropriate to discuss the function of mimicry in relation to six paintings by Adrian Kovacs, called *Self-Portrait*, which he exhibited in numerous galleries in the former Yugoslavia during 1989. The concept of the *Self-Portrait* project is a six-fold repetition, involving copies of the well known and widely reproduced self-portraits of Cézanne. But, are not the copies of Cézanne's self-portraits now only portraits? And, if it holds true of self-portraiture that it is a site for inscribing the 'I' as another, then through Kovacs' procedure, with this double negation of the I, the realization of the subject is even further emphasized. Lacan argues that

In mimicry, we are dealing with something completely different. Let us take an example chosen almost at random – it is not a privileged case – that of the small crustacean known as caprella, to which is added the adjective acanthifera. When such a crustacean settles in the midst of those animals – scarcely animals – known as briozoaires, what does it imitate? It imitates what, in that quasi-plant-animal known as the briozoaires, is a stain – at a particular phase of the briozoaires, an intestinal loop forms a stain; at another phase, there is something like a colored center. It is to this stain-shape that the crustacean adapts itself. It becomes a picture – it is inscribed in the picture. This, strictly speaking, is the origin of mimicry. And, on this basis, the fundamental dimensions of the inscription of the subject in the picture appear infinitely more justified than a more hesitant guess might suggest at first sight. (...) Certain scientists claim to

¹³³ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 109.

see in the register of coloration merely more or less successful facts of adaptation. But the facts show that practically nothing that can be called adaptation – in the sense in which the term is usually understood, that is to say, as behavior bound up with the needs of survival – practically nothing of this is to be found in mimicry, which, in most cases, proves to be inoperant, or operating strictly in the opposite direction from that which the adaptive result might be presumed to demand. On the other hand, Caillois brings out the three headings that are, in effect, the major dimensions in which the mimetic activity is deployed: travesty, camouflage, and intimidation.¹³⁴



Adrian Kovacs, *Self-Portrait*,
1989



Adrian Kovacs, *Self-Portrait*,
1989

The 'self-portrait' projects function not only as an interpolation, as stains which subjectify the audience and determine it as their own subjects, but they also develop a number of strategies and tactics of representation, i.e., new representational models. These projects enable us to comprehend how the subject is formed, reformed, deformed and transformed. There is *no* subject in the self-portrait projects, since the one being depicted can appear precisely because it is absent. Therefore, a portrait as a commemorative monument can replace the subject. The

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 99.

other is now inscribed in this transition from a self-portrait to a portrait that refers to the image, memory, history and cliché. It seems as though we are faced with "a kind of meta-metaphor, which may be an accidental figure; it is actually a place where differences, taken to the point of intersection, produce similarities, although not those of circumstance, but instauration."¹³⁵

It is generally known that mimicry is used to protect, to conceal and to adjust, but Kovacs' six 'self-portraits' include elements which cannot perform this function: they are dated 1989, signed AK and, in contrast to Cézanne's self-portraits, they are black-and-white. These projects are not here to cover and accommodate; on the contrary, they seem like stains – like provocation. Lacan speaks of this truth of mimicry when he says that, in contrast to a certain stereotypical knowledge, the function of mimicry lies not in accommodation, but in the difference between the function of the eye and the gaze; the function to which Kovacs' portraits are so obviously directed (consider the *International Exhibition of Modern Art – the Armory Show*, etc.), since 'the gaze is prior to what is given to be seen.' There is always something which does not correspond to the gaze and which breaks its wholeness. In connection with the *Walter Benjamin: Mondrian '63–'96* lecture, these are the dates; in *The International Exhibition of Modern Art – the Armory Show*, the years 1905–2019, etc. We are faced with an isomorphism, which inscribes within the viewer's gaze the cognitive, theoretical, scientific, fictional and imaginary oscillation of the distance to the work, which is, at the same time, both too close and too far away, and in which the image is more real than the 'object' it represents, since a simulacrum in the Platonic sense has a higher level of being than a paradigm which reproduces it. Thus, according to Jacques Derrida¹³⁶, Walter Benjamin was

¹³⁵ René Berger, "Entre magie et voyance," in *3e Semaine Internationale de Vidéo Saint-Gervais* (Genève: Centre Saint-Gervais, 1989), p. 12.

¹³⁶ See Jacques Derrida, *Istina u slikarstvu* [*The Truth in Paintings*] (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1988), p. 163.

aware that, from the moment when what can be reproduced are not only works suitable for differentiating between production and reproduction, but also other works to which reproduction broaches the structure of the source, the function of art is no longer founded in ritual, but in the practice of politics. Moreover, special attention was intended for the portrait in this new function of art. It was to have a borderline role, a privileged place between cult art and technical reproduction. According to Walter Benjamin, in an era of technical reproduction and the loss of the specific aura of the artistic, the face is the only thing that has retained its value. "When 'the value of demonstration' (*Ausstellungswert*) breaks 'the value of cult' (*Kultwert*), this value again shows in a human face. In the cult of memories of dear, distant or dead beings, the cult value of a painting finds sanctuary in the lost expression of a human being (here barely a human being) ..."¹³⁷ The painted face, with its (negative) presence, points to the absence of that living, or in Kovacs' case, (self-)portrayed being, to which this, now merely painted face, is to belong. The face and the image as 'hieroglyph,' says Derrida in his analysis of *A Drawing for the Portrait of Walter Benjamin* by the artist Valerio Adami, "of a certain biography, theory, politics – the allegory of a 'subject.'"¹³⁸

'I owe you a truth about painting and I will tell it to you,' writes Cézanne in his letter to Emil Bernard of 23 October 1905, and perhaps it is encompassed in the 'portrait' of Adrian Kovacs' self-portrait. Kovacs' projects of copying self-portraits, which function as portraits, can be compared to the portraits of the insane, photographed by Théodor Géricault in the early 1820s. Kovacs' work functions as "the institution of a subject within the visible,"¹³⁹ as a special procedure of inscription within a

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 67.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Jo Anna Issak, "Mapping the Imaginary," in *The Event Horizon*, ed. Lorne Falk and Barbara Fisher (Toronto and Banff: The Coach House Press & Walter Philips Gallery, 1985), p. 139.

social body, which places us in the very foundations of the functioning of society and its institutions.¹⁴⁰

The original as a universalized copy

Finally, the projects of copying, repetition and recycling enable us to develop a logic of re-marking (*re-marque*).¹⁴¹ Slavoj Žižek asks, "How do we get from a mark (*marque*) to a re-mark? Why does every mark have to be re-marked? Derrida's starting-point is that a tissue of marks is differential: every mark is merely a differential trace, a sheaf of differences from other traces, where this differentiation needs to be driven to self-reference, every string of marks as sem/ant/ic (bearers of meaning) 'has to contain some additional topological movement with which the mark itself refers to that which demarcates, marks, to white spaces among marks which place different marks in a reciprocal relationship.'¹⁴²¹⁴³ He continues,

"In short, in the string of marks, there is always at least one which functions as 'empty,' 'a-semic,' that is, which re-marks the differential site of the inscription of marks: only through re-marking does a mark become a mark, since it is the re-mark which opens and maintains the place of its inscription. (...) Is it not the basic feature of the logic of a signifier that a string of signifiers has to contain at least one surplus sig-

¹⁴⁰ See also the chapter "Spectralization of Representation: Photographic Real Effect vs. Hyper-Real Mutations" in this volume.

¹⁴¹ See Slavoj Žižek, "Spremna beseda: pripombe k neki razpravi o Heglu" [Introduction – Remarks On a Discussion on Hegel], in *Ukradeni Poe* [Stolen Poe] (Ljubljana: Analecta, 1990), pp. 124–80.

¹⁴² Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of The Mirror: Derrida and The Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 219, cited in Žižek, "Spremna beseda: pripombe k neki razpravi o Heglu" [Introduction – Remarks On a Discussion on Hegel], p. 136.

¹⁴³ Slavoj Žižek, "Spremna beseda: pripombe k neki razpravi o Heglu" [Introduction – Remarks On a Discussion on Hegel], p. 136.

nifier, which represents the absence of the signifier itself, i.e., which, to use terms which are now already jargon, is a signifier of the signifier's lack of signification? Inasmuch as the order of the signifier is differential, the difference between the signifier itself and its absence also has to be written on it. Is this 'valence, which is not only one among others'¹⁴⁴ not the Lacanian S1, the signifier-master, the 'a-semantic' signifier-sans-signified, which always adds itself to the string of S2, and by so doing, enables it? Is it not in fact the empty space, represented by a re-mark, in the Lacanian *sujet barre*, the subject of a signifier? This most elementary matrix enables us to construct a Lacanian definition of a signifier, as the one 'representing a subject for another signifier': the re-mark represents the empty space of inscription for the string of other marks."¹⁴⁵

For the logic of re-marking, "we could find great examples in art, from music through painting (a relation of the painted object to its 'background')"¹⁴⁶ to film, which leads us exactly to where we wanted to go. Žižek outlines the logic of re-marking in Hitchcock's movies when he describes a famous scene from *The Birds* (1963)

"which shows, from a great height, a general plan of the city and a fire in it; suddenly, a bird flies into the shot from the right, from behind the camera, and then another two, and then the whole flock; the same shot is re-marked by that; what seemed as an informative, general view of the event, shot from a neutral 'objective' distance, is subjectivized, and suddenly turns out to be a threatening view of the birds

¹⁴⁴ See Gasché, *The Tain of The Mirror: Derrida and The Philosophy of Reflection*, p. 221

¹⁴⁵ See Žižek, "Spremna beseda: pripombe k neki razpravi o Heglu" [Introduction – Remarks On a Discussion on Hegel], pp. 136–37.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 137.

themselves on their victims. (...) Some element is aufgehoben, i.e., eliminated and at the same time saved, so that it is re-marked within a new frame, included in a new symbolic network ... in the above-mentioned scene from The Birds, the primary plan (the 'objective' view of the city) is eliminated, and at the same time, saved, when it is again re-marked as the 'subjective' view of the birds themselves. Put slightly naïvely, 'the thing remains the same as before, but it suddenly gains a completely different meaning'; as a mark, it remains the same, only differently re-marked. In this sense, a dialectical inversion always takes the form of a re-mark: a thing itself in its direct given does not change; what changes is its inscription within a symbolic network. In this sense, it becomes somewhat clearer why the mark is the Lacanian SI, the signifier-master or point de capiton: the effect of 'quilting' appears exactly at a time when what seemed to be a defeat, turns out to be a victory, when we look at it from a new re-marking, a new perspective. (...) In some totalized field, 'a re-mark' is a moment which, with its 'stability,' identifies with itself, with its massive presence, with (mere) being, prevents other moments of totality from coinciding with themselves, from becoming fully realized."¹⁴⁷

This can be precisely traced in the lecture *Walter Benjamin: Mondrian '63–'96*, which revealed the only sensible reason for a copy being made: the non-sense of such activities as copying Mondrian. Therefore, we have the same two paintings before us, but two completely different ideas behind them, which means that a copy contains both the idea of its ideal, as well as its own idea: the idea of a copy. Paradoxically, the copy is multi-layered and more complex in its meaning than the original. The copy functions as a re-mark, which constitutes the entire network of inscriptions of originals and copies that follow. Žižek says, "It is of key importance that the infrastruc-

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 138 and 143.

tural site of the inscription of marks cannot exist without a re-mark; the re-mark does not 'represent' some previously established infrastructural network, but it constitutes it through its representation."¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, when we write that the concept behind such projects as *The Harbingers of the Apocalypse*, *The Last Futurist Exhibition 0.10* and *The International Exhibition of Modern Art – Armory Show*, or the copying of Cezanne's self-portraits is not in concealing the difference between the original and the copy, but in emphasizing a much more tragic trait: that of non-authenticity as the most authentic concept in the art of the 1980s, we emphasize precisely what Žižek formulated as the achievement of dialectical analysis. The achievement is in "precisely, let's say, recognizing the uppermost rhetorical effect when referring to a truth which arrogantly devalues rhetoric as a secondary means/obstacle, and in recognizing a hidden mythological basis in logos, which mockingly treats 'a mythical way of thinking,' etc.; or, to return to the above-mentioned relation between Law and crime, recognizing in 'Law' the universal crime. The external opposition of particular crimes and universal Law has to be resolved into 'an internal' opposition of the crime itself: what we call 'law' is nothing more than a universalized crime. Thus, 'The dialectics of law and crime' lies not only in the fact that 'there is no crime without law,' etc., but, above all, in that law itself is nothing more than a universalized crime."¹⁴⁹

In short, what we call the original is nothing more than a universalized copy. And the dialectics of the original and the copy lie not in there being no copy without the original, but, above all, in the fact that the original itself is nothing more than a universalized copy.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 144.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 147.

5. SYNTHESIS

IRWIN: NSK – A STATE IN TIME

NEUE SLOWENISCHE KUNST, New Slovenian Art, or NSK for short was established as an art movement, or rather, an organization, in the early 1980s in Slovenia, and was comprised of the musical group/rock band LAIBACH, the visual arts group Irwin, the 'retrogarde' theatre SESTER SCIPION NASICE (later re-named the RED PILOT COSMOKINETIC THEATER, which took the name of THE NOORDUNG COSMOKINETIC THEATER in the 1990s), the design group NEW COLLECTIVISM and THE DEPARTMENT OF PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY.

NSK proclaims itself to be an abstract social body situated in a very socio-political space which simultaneously represents a Western and an Eastern phenomenon. Its structure and organization resemble that of a capitalist machine – a corporate system, which, nevertheless, cannot be found in the Western art world (for there, such an organization is possible only if is linked to real financial capital). Thanks to its Socialist heritage, NSK was able to appear on purely ideological foundations. Laibach (and eventually other NSK members) used all the classic methods of the avant-garde: manifestos, collective performances, public provocation and intervention in politics. NSK projects revealed a new cultural context and contributed to the rapid disintegration of the aesthetics and ethical standards of the Communist and post-Communist culture and identity. For NSK, the ability to radically question the representational models, the presentation and the circulation of artistic works employed in Slovenia, and more broadly, in Eastern Europe, is characteristic. Therefore, NSK was able to intervene in the historical 'continuity' of Slovenian and, more generally speaking, Eastern European, artistic output.

NSK in the eighties: the shift from signifier to object, or the de-naturalization of already 'natural' cultural values

Laibach appeared in the context of the Slovenian/ex-Yugoslavian punk movement, but nevertheless the group was immediately connected with 'Nazism' because of the specific artistic actions they had carried out from the very beginning. The group's first lead singer played with cut lips and a bloodied face, a practice consistent with his insistence on adopting the costume and pose of Mussolini (he was wearing a pseudo-military uniform). Contrary to the standard musical performance, where chaos is transformed into money, and the satisfaction of the audience into the phrase, 'We'll come again,' the rigidity and consistency of Laibach's live performance reached all the way to the destruction of a fascinatingly constructed set involving flags, horns, light and background film projections, etc. The suspense was not achieved by a parallel montage of these elements, but by the establishment of affinities between them: between the film material, the architecture, the stage design and the live performance. The aim was to destroy the very concept of a rock performance and to reject every superfluous picturesque feature, and even the creation of a standard atmosphere, whilst retaining on stage only what Laibach believed to have mediatory value. This is also connected to the disappearance of the classical music performer. Performers are held back, without any individuality or psychological depth, because the more feelings are restrained, the stronger the are emotions. The Communist authorities considered Laibach a menace to the existing social order.

The essential element of every Laibach concert is the form of its performance, which is repeated from one song to another. The ritual becomes almost obsessive. Our expectations, as far as 'content' is concerned, are not fulfilled. Instead of critical distance, mockery etc., Laibach performed, one might say, a (hyper-)literal repetition of the totalitarian ritual. Instead of a direct subversion, we are faced with an almost fanatical identi-

fication with the totalitarian ritual performed by the group on the stage. The ideological totalitarian structure is undermined not by parodic imitation-subversion of the totalitarian codes, but by the identification with it. This new art strategy, introduced into the Eastern European context by Laibach contains, according to Slavoj Žižek¹⁵⁰, an obscene subversion of the totalitarian ritual in the very form of its performance. Instead of a direct subversion, Laibach publicly staged the phantasmatic structure of the totalitarian power in all its obscene ambiguity, and with all its incognizant moments of obscenities – obscenities that the power structure needs constantly to conceal in order to reproduce itself.

Given all of the incongruous elements of their performance, Laibach demonstrated clearly that the feature which in reality sustains identification with totalitarian power is not singular and evident, but consists of several different, sometimes even not obviously (perceptibly) visible, elements.

Moreover, when Laibach displays the obscene phantasmatic support of the, already codified totalitarian ideology structures, this implies nothing absolutely revolutionary and avantgardist. The sight of a person on stage wearing a pseudo-military uniform, declaiming sentences in Italian, while insistently holding a Mussolini pose, is something rather more repulsive than avantgardist.

The former Yugoslav State conducted a organized campaign against Laibach, claiming they were a force seeking terror and destruction, and banning their live performances between 1983 and 1987. But, by casting Laibach in such a role, the state merely reinforced the opinion that 'terror and destruction' resided in its own core. The State attempted to mask the fact that it functioned through a system of production and exploitation of terror by projecting these characteristics onto Laibach. Furthermore, the putative choice which was offered by ideo-

¹⁵⁰ See Slavoj Žižek, *Filozofija skozi psihoanalizo* [*Philosophy through Psychoanalysis*] (Ljubljana: DDU Univerzum, Ljubljana 1984), pp. 100–30.

logical and a-historical discussions in the 1980s as to whether to allow or ban the performances of the group Laibach, again confirmed the phantasmal value of 'the forbidden.' Such questioning soon gained the status of an index of pluralism in Slovene social reality. This process has had the effect of a phantasmal signifier, which forced a homogenous social 'mass' into polarization, and which therefore demanded segregation. The ban not only emphasized the status of the subversive element that the power discourse has endlessly tried to dominate, but, even further, split the power discourse itself, from within.

The Communist State functioned thus by constantly censoring its own hidden libidinal foundations. This may be more clearly understood, if I revoke here the case of psychotic censorship carried out by the Communist power against the design group, *New Collectivism*.

The design group, *New Collectivism*, a part of NSK, was the object of ferocious censorship in 1987 for its design of a poster simultaneously celebrating the birthday of President Tito and 'The Day of Youth 1987.' The poster, which had been judged and accepted by the federal jury of the Yugoslav Youth Organization, a youth branch of the Communist party, initially won public acclaim for its graphics and 'politically' appropriate design. However, a letter published in a Serb newspaper drew attention to the fact that the poster was a 'remake' of a Nazi work, *The Third Reich*, by Richard Klein (1936). *New Collectivism* had inverted the Nazi symbols and changed them into Socialist symbols: a star replaced the swastika from the original poster, and so on. The most cynical point of all was not the inversion of the symbols, but, as it was pointed out in numerous analyses, the complete identification of the federal jury with the posters' visual ideology. The federal jury, after all, had initially selected the poster designed by *New Collectivism* as the most appropriate one. The exposure of their 'mirroring' of the Communist imagery with the transvestite Nazi symbolism (the latter being, so to speak, the obscene hidden supple-

ment of the former), – prompted the Communist power machine to attempt, unsuccessfully, to put the group in jail. The power structure mechanism is operative as long it remains concealed. At the moment when New Collectivism made visible the hidden structure of the libidinal foundations of the Communist Power, that target reacted furiously.

We might say, a repetition of history – and Herbert Marcuse's interpretation ascertains that global historical facts and people that occur 'literally twice,' do not occur a second time as 'farce,' but as tragedy. As Russell Jacob wrote, there is a history that remembers, and there is also a history, which results from the need to forget.¹⁵¹

New Collectivism's concepts of design awaken memories of historical and avant-garde movements, especially Russian Constructivism, Productivism, Bauhaus and De Stijl, which very quickly expanded their artistic concepts with research into typography, and the 'construction' of books and theater design, etc. Benjamin H. D. Buchloch, in *Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art*, for example, comments that, "Grosz and Heartfield, as early as 1916, when they invented the strategy of montage, became aware of the artistic and cultural power of allegorical appropriations, comparisons and fragmentations."¹⁵² The defined procedures for the decomposition of historical codes thus become analytical and legitimate, founded also on the history of art and the knowledge of it. We may define Laibach's and New Collectivism's output as a special process of montage, on the basis of which (following the retro principle) iconographic and symbolic elements from the history of Slovene and world art are again constructed and deconstructed. NSK counts on the power of surprise, which disturbs habits acquired with the daily experience of looking, with the mechanism of shock, density, optical movement, new

¹⁵¹ Russell Jacoby, *Družbena amnezija [Social Amnesia]* (Ljubljana: CZ, 1981), p. 8.

¹⁵² Benjamin H. D. Buchloch, "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art," in *Artforum*, September 1982, p. 43.

methods of coloring and printing, and with a complex symbolic value in the painted figures and signs. The result is a concept of artistic design, which neither places itself in the role of judge, nor strives for a simplified presentation. The new strategy of artistic production and presentation introduced by Laibach and NSK can be characterized as the process of the denaturalization of already 'natural' cultural values and rituals. Upon examining the productions of the NSK groups throughout the 1980s, we can generalize that through their strategies and tactics, it seems that (according to Jean Baudrillard¹⁵³) the symbolism employed is no longer material or spiritual, but above all designates social relations. Or, in the words of Carlo Argan: the criterion for the social function of art becomes a measure of its aesthetic value.¹⁵⁴

Was ist Kunst?

Was ist Kunst? is one of the most important projects created by the group Irwin.¹⁵⁵ Irwin began to develop *Was ist Kunst?* in 1985, and up to the present, has shown more than one hundred paintings as part of this project. Although this project followed the *Back to the USA* project¹⁵⁶ and the construction of a large painting entitled *The Resurrection of the Theatre of the Scipion Nasice Sisters*, it was through *Was ist Kunst?* that Irwin developed most radically its principal concept of painting: the 'retro principle,' the retrograde maxim.

¹⁵³ See Jean Baudrillard, "Sumrak znakova," [In the Twilight Zone of Signs] in *Dizajn i kultura* [Design and Culture], ed. Ješa Denegri (Belgrade: Radionica SIC, 1985), pp. 167–85.

¹⁵⁴ See Giulio Carlo Argan, "Industrijski dizajn" [Industrial Design] and "Kriza dizajna" [The Crisis of Design] in *Dizajn i kultura* [Design and Culture], pp. 15–23.

¹⁵⁵ Irwin first appeared under the name R Rose Irwin Selavy and later "deconstructed" its name into R IRWIN S and finally into Irwin.

¹⁵⁶ See the chapter "The Copy and the Original" in this volume.



IRWIN, *Malevich Between the
Two World Wars*, 1985

Paintings from the *Was ist Kunst?* project, which may be characterized as conventional (i.e., oil, canvas and frame), are, above all, montages: a repetition of inventions which constitute specifically the Slovenian history of art, and more generally, the Socialist Realism and modernism of the Socialist 1960s. The latter can be characterized as a negative experience, arriving late after the modernism of the West, as a kind of production of kitsch. (The Slovenian philosopher Braco Rotar asked whether this is not retro-modernism, since it is a copy of Western modernism in the Eastern European context.) On the other hand, all the paintings from *Was ist Kunst?* refer thematically to images connected with the images of the members, performances or iconography of the group Laibach. The nature of pictorial iconography in the paintings is almost strictly referable to the Eastern European context and, more particularly, to a Slovenian context, even when it does not concern the reinterpretation and the recreation of past artistic models, but those of contemporaneity; i.e., the use and reinterpretation of Laibach's iconography. Irwin stated that

"A return to 'bourgeois culture,' to the manner of its formal execution – easel painting (oil, canvas and frame) – enables

us to give reference to the market and implies the incisiveness which needs to be invested in the iconography of a new painting, which is present here through its own form; new solutions need to be sought in painting. (...) This is the retro principle, as a regulative matrix, as the framework of an operational procedure and not as a style; the retro principle as a means for analyzing the historical experience of Slovene fine arts. Hence, also the dictate of a motif which differs from project to project, depending on the intention of each project. Intensified eclecticism means the recollection of a historical experience, especially of Slovenian fine arts, and reinterpretations and recreations of past artistic models, or even those which are simultaneous (as in the exhibition *Back to the USA*). This concerns eclecticism par excellence, a total conservatism and, simultaneously, a total novum, based on the provocativeness of the iconography which is linked to Laibach.¹⁵⁷

Through the combinatory nature of pictorial iconography, Irwin does not merely address the history of art – the history of Slovenian art – but constructs it within the practice of painting. When referring to art history, Irwin is not interested merely in simple ‘quotation,’ ‘copying’ and ‘correspondence,’ but in the procedures of construction and deconstruction. Irwin establishes representational models of Slovenian fine arts as ‘the history which remembers’; it emphasizes, makes explicit and interprets the suppressed points in the prescribed history of Slovenian art, but without romantic nostalgia. The penetrative force of the *Was ist Kunst?* project is to be comprehended through the stains on the otherwise ‘classically’ defined easel, painting. This point of address is where the members of Laibach are portrayed on the canvas; the point which subsequently colors the painting differently and which transposes its meaning. These are the places within the paintings that subjec-

¹⁵⁷ Irwin, *A Diary of Work*, manuscript (no pagination).

tify the observer – determining her/him as a subject – through interpolation.

What we seek to emphasize here is precisely that Irwin are dealing with: the production of a subject in art which is in direct contrast to the modernist problem of the subject of production. The Slovenian philosopher Rastko Močnik, in his lecture on post-modernism, stressed this by analyzing Irwin's painting, *A Resurrection of the Theater of the Scipion Nasice Sisters*. According to his explanation, this painting is "a special study of perspective, which not only enables observers to see the construction of perspective in paintings, but moreover themselves watching this perspective."¹⁵⁸ *Was ist Kunst?* affirms the features of fine art in the classic sense of pictorialism/pictorialness. The iconography of various paintings from *Was ist Kunst?*, based on repetitions and combinations of different painting techniques (e.g., montage of printed graphics on canvas, techniques combining drawings in different perspectives, the use of procedures and techniques of the kinetic arts, etc.), reveals itself, according to Irwin "... as a recreative procedure which produces a new fine art language. The history of painting is the history of repetition, which is why it is necessary to encompass its theme precisely and as well as the intervals which show certain turning points in history, either defined very imprecisely. If modernism is, at the moment, in the phase of its own negation, as thousands of times before, in minimalism, expressionism, anachronism, etc., this phase needs to be defined and transcended. A content as an eclectic collage of various styles and inventions is a procedure which predominates the form, not as a new style, but as a procedure of recreating painting iconography in a more demanding way."¹⁵⁹ Irwin's aesthetics is therefore a fusion of different lev-

¹⁵⁸ See Rastko Močnik, "Postmodernizem in alternativa" [Post-modernism and Alternative] I. and II., part in *Ekran*, vol. 5/6 and vol. 7/8, Ljubljana 1985.

¹⁵⁹ See Irwin, *A Diary of Work*.

els, broken denotative strings, erased boundaries and erosion, all demonstrated by a decrease of distances between different temporal and spatial levels. *Was ist Kunst?* quotes not only from different spatial structures, but also different temporal structures. We are witness to the breakdown of syntactic rules, which are replaced by 'para-syntactic' rules. However, the links are not a matter of coincidence. They are balanced by logic, which supports quotations that are synchronic and diachronic at the same time. According to Charles Jencks, the result is a hybrid balance, a harmonization of opposing meaning, a procedure which takes over – absorbs – conflicting codes and tries to create (if we refer this time to Robert Venturi) 'a difficult whole' which encompasses ugliness, banality, bitterness and what can, in general, be described as a radical eclecticism.¹⁶⁰ The aesthetics of quotation includes 'dead' styles as an attempt at re-reading the past, memory and history. Roland Barthes commented that "History is hysterical: it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it – and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it."¹⁶¹

The 'novum,' brought by Irwin's *Was ist Kunst?*, lies not only in the form, on the level of a demanding way of constructing representational pictorial models, but also in the strategy of displaying it. Irwin's *Was ist Kunst?* was, in the 1980s, exhibited in a private apartment – a strategy which encompasses 'the intimacy of a Slovenian home,' and it is structured in an inwardly ideological manner. Exhibiting in different private apartments was additionally subjectified by the choice of the owner and visitors. The 'ideological mystification' of the exhibition space is defined by the fact that 'history of art' in the last instance is not defined by paintings (a painting is not the subject of painting), but by interpretations. The history of painting is not something which would belong to History a

¹⁶⁰ See Charles Jencks, *The Language of Postmodern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977), p. 90.

¹⁶¹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 65.



IRWIN, *Vade Retro*, 1988

priori, but is rather a product of the power of conjuring, coincidence or, finally, of a class struggle in society. Exhibiting in various private apartments accords with the privacy and the reticence of the domestic circle of a Slovenian home and, at the same time, shows a constant 'closure' of art within a circle of connoisseurs.

The method of displaying the *Was ist Kunst?* paintings in private apartments in Ljubljana, only to be viewed by an invited audience, can therefore be interpreted as the presentation and problematization of privacy and the confinement of a place where the history of art is constituted. At the same time, this conscious ideological mystification is an attempt to externalize the constituent ideological background of the entire *Was ist Kunst?* project, i.e., the ban on Laibach's performances in Ljubljana in the mid-1980s. The presentation in private apartments articulated and intensified the negative presence of Laibach in Ljubljana. We should take into account the fact that Irwin's paintings refer directly to Laibach's iconography, and that through the paintings (so to speak, in effigy), the portraits of the members of the group Laibach were displayed publicly. It is important to note that the Irwin pictures from the *Was ist Kunst?* series are constantly and inherently related to a truth-event, i.e., the ban on Laibach's performances in Ljubljana, and not to some pseudo-

events or motifs merely imitating or staging them as an aesthetic spectacle bereft of any element of Truth.

The archaeology of knowledge and the logic of strategy

The Irwin group could be described as new archivists, as Gilles Deleuze dubbed Michel Foucault when *The Archaeology of Knowledge*¹⁶² was published: "[T]he inconstant (archivist) (op. cit. M. G.), who will be placed in a certain diagonal and will make visible what was once concealed and what could not be said elsewhere, to be precise, a proverb, a statement."¹⁶³ An archivist who, with precision and patience, moves in a whirlpool of values and who, with an almost documentary spirit, pits the ethics of classification against meta-historical interventions, offers an advantage to the analysis of artistic events prior to their description. Classification can be understood as a fundamental procedure; as Barthes says, "Nothing is so important for the constitution of society as the classification of its languages. To change this classification, to move a word, means to make a revolution."¹⁶⁴ But Foucault adds,

"By an archive, I do not mean the totality of texts which have been preserved in a certain civilization, nor do I mean a cluster of traces which have been saved from destruction, but a game of rules which determine the appearance and disappearance of proverbs, their perseverance and erasure, their ambiguous existence, such as that of events and things. To analyze the facts of discourse within general, primary matters of the archive, means not to consider them as documents (of a certain hidden meaning or rules of construction), but as monuments, which means, excluding any

¹⁶² See Michel Foucault, *L'archeologia del sapere* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1971).

¹⁶³ Gilles Deleuze, "Un nuovo archivista" in *Gilles Deleuze* (Cosenza: Lericci, 1976), p. 11.

¹⁶⁴ Roland Barthes, *Critica e verita* (Torino: Einaudi, 1969), p. 41.

genealogical metaphor; without determining the origin, and without the slightest gesture in the direction of the beginning of a certain arché, that we can name, according to the ludic rules of etymology, a certain thing as archaeology."¹⁶⁵

The concept Irwin-NSK can be described as the archaeology of knowledge, as the utterance of 'what has already been uttered,' as that which encroaches on the domain of a certain visual map, on the domain of 'what has been uttered and what is being uttered.'¹⁶⁶ In contrast to the archaeology of silence, with the archaeology of knowledge it is possible, to operate and conduct research on the surface of discursive variety where everything is 'real and where every reality is uttered.'¹⁶⁷ Like Foucault's archaeology of knowledge, the Irwin group is also coded by a logic of strategy, one, which, according to Foucault, will replace the logic of the subconscious. In stating this, Foucault emphasizes the significance of tactics.¹⁶⁸ The order, which Irwin introduces into the framework of their visual map, is, to borrow again from Foucault's terminology, a strategy of subjectivization, a certain 'regulative machine,' something like a ritual of oppression, *à la Barthes*.¹⁶⁹ Irwin intervene in an area which could be defined as that place where discourse and the visual topology of art intersect with the genealogy of power. This is not some homogenous body of discourse, but the site of a mass of sequences where constantly repeated decipherings consequently occur. In *Birth of a Clinic*, Foucault outlines his explanatory activity as that which "attempts to emphasize the dual base of a word in a place where the word recognizes itself in identity with itself, and which can be only near its truth;

¹⁶⁵ Michel Foucault, *Due risposte sulla epistemologia* (Milan: Lampugnani, Nigri, 1971), pp. 11-12.

¹⁶⁶ See Michel Foucault, *L'archeologia del sapere*, p. 126.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ See Maurizio Ciampa, "Introduzione," in *Il sapere e la Storia*, ed. Maurizio Ciampa, (Milan: Savelli Editore, 1979), pp. 8-9.

when we utter what has been said, we repeat what has never been uttered."¹⁷⁰

Mapping, as carried out by Irwin, can be summarized as follows: "What needs to be revealed (made visible, op. cit. M. G.), is a complex of conditions which, at a certain time and place, arranges the phenomena of uttering, their preservation, the bonds that are formed among them, the way rules are combined, the roles they play, a game of values and sacralizations to which they are entrusted, the way they are placed in practices and behaviors; the principles upon which they circulate are rejected, forgotten, destroyed or again active."¹⁷¹ And if Foucault calls these procedures the institutionalization of discourse, then in the case of Irwin, one might call them 'the institution of the subject and things within the visible.'

In *Was ist Kunst?* by Irwin, and in the exhibitions by Laibach-kunst, persons who are supposed to have been part of the period of Nazism are portrayed along with members of the banned Laibach group; they are engraved into the iconography of the paintings, as their faces or torso sculptures decorate numerous paintings of the *Was ist Kunst?* project. From a certain perspective, this is an extremely absurd procedure, especially as we are acquainted with the historical intention of portraiture as essential in recording an exact social position in a hierarchy of power. Therefore, these projects and the iconography they introduce are impossible objects and represent a categorical scandal – since the persons portrayed have been removed from all levels of hierarchy (if we recall the ban on Laibach's public performances and appearances in the 1980s). The portrayed were those who could not be located on the map of society – whose portraits should not be painted. This idea also holds true for the anathematized personalities from the so-called period of 'Nazikunst.' The activities of NSK in the 1980s sought to question the very mechanisms that compel us to think, as Norman Bryson puts

¹⁷⁰ Michel Foucault, *Nascita della Clinica* (Torino: Einaudi, 1969), p. 11.

¹⁷¹ Michel Foucault, *Due risposte sulla epistemologia*, pp. 11–12.

it, "of a terror intrinsic to sight, which makes it harder to think what makes sight terroristic."¹⁷² NSK did not posit the gaze as a menace, nor as a natural fact, but rather showed that this menace was a social product determined by power. The result of NSK's ideas, strategies and tactics in the 1980s was therefore a specific process of denaturalizing the previously 'naturalized' Socialist cultural values and rituals. However, there was something more. Through their entire conceptual strategy, NSK laid the foundations for a different mode of politics, and moreover, for a different 'politics of sight.'¹⁷³ It was only through the totality of their concepts and the complexity of their productions and presentation that NSK managed to win a place in the social and cultural reality, which was completely dominated (if not totalized) by political discourse. I have to further emphasize this important point: The process continued by NSK was not a further unconditional politicization of the whole social life, as the social and cultural reality of Communism was already completely politicized, but an aesthetic postponement, or even delay, of the political. This was carried out through a constant display and questioning of the extra- or non-ideological elements that were at the core of this politicization.

A chain of transpositions

Four female faces in *The Four Seasons* (painting/installation) project by Irwin (1988) represent four seasons. The installation is composed of four huge paintings of female faces set above four doors constructed especially for this installation. The faces, like territories, are bounded (Irwin displaced and erased the boundaries of faces), engraved and imprinted by other images (namely, images of the members of Laibach). If the characteris-

¹⁷² See Hal Foster, "Preface," in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. H. Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), p. XII.

¹⁷³ Ibid.



IRWIN, *Four Seasons*, 1988

tic feature of Irwin's dictate of the motif is its cult value, then it is hardly surprising that they recycle faces and portraits. According to Walter Benjamin, in an era of universal, technical reproduction, and the loss of the specific aura of a work of art, the face alone is able to retain cultic value. That is, with their negative presence, painted faces point to the absence of the person to whom these now merely painted faces belonged. Faces map and condense history (of course, we have to ask ourselves to which history they belong), the strategy of narration (is this history not only a story?) and the strategy of suspense (from whom were they taken, whose history ceased with them?).

Art is shown as a chain of infinite transpositions of the meaning of images. The female faces, despite their inter-subjectivity, pointed to history rather than psychology, and became a text about it, which this time is written in images. This transposition can be read entirely conceptually. If, in the 1970s, the Belgrade artist, Rasa Todosijević, in his series of performances called *Was ist Kunst?*, literally tried to drag this answer out of women by force, painting their faces with colors in the most shocking manner of body-art, at the beginning of the 1990s, only the portraits hang before us. In the 1990s, there is no longer a question, but rather only answers – an accumulation of symptoms.

If the subject is abandoned as the unit of measure for things in the world, what is to replace it? Its *mise-en-scène*!? Faces are

stained and colonized with a certain accustomed knowledge. Irwin's writing in images can be compared with the work of Christian Boltanski in his *Lesson of Darkness* project. In this case, faces are also colonized by the observer's knowledge. Because of a certain stereotypical knowledge, we identify in *Lesson of Darkness* the hundreds of faces in the photographs as the faces of victims of the Holocaust, while in the work of Irwin, we can identify the female portraits with some forbidden iconography. With *The Four Seasons*, we can also see that Irwin developed more subtle attitudes to the topic of Nazi representation in the 1980s. Despite *The Four Seasons*' depiction of four monumental female portraits in the portraiture tradition of the Nazi period, we cannot base our criticism purely and solely on this impression. The importance of this work should be recognized through the (de)constructive and almost subversive act of its recycling method, which does not impose a glorification, but a distortion. In *The Four Seasons*, Irwin displays the inner structure of the (deeply rationalized) system of perceptual codes that directed the mode of representation of women during the Nazi period. In such a way, the invisible logic that structured the portraits of the period is made visible to the spectator. What Irwin tried to learn from Social Realism (and later from the Nazikunst trend) was not the psychology of the re-presented images, but how the paintings, which belong to these two periods, should look. Thus, they were not trying to comprehend Socialist-Realist authenticity in presenting the images, but the Socialist-Realist or Nazikunst logic of depicting an image – a logic which places the visual within a rational system of perceptual codes.

Irwin represent the body as destroyed, the face as a mask, and art as that domain which, metaphorically speaking, no longer belongs to 'nature,' but to history or the Other. History is also articulated with only partially legible faces. A certain morbidity and cynicism, as well as the effect of the mannerism of Irwin's work, can be felt as the images are condensed into a predictable and established way of painting. But at the same

time, we can also comprehend a certain 'ethics of resistance,' to paraphrase Achille Bonito Oliva: An almost fetishistic effort at recycling themselves is also a means of transposing and undermining their own, established artistic structure.

The ruin of representation

Through their own strategy of representation, Irwin developed not only alternatives in relation to dominant visual principles, but procedures and visual models of false representation (i.e., misrepresentation). This is a concept developed by Griselda Pollock¹⁷⁴, which explores the means by which a subject is produced. Misrepresentation develops "the ruin of representation"¹⁷⁵ precisely on the basis of an unrepresentable object, creating a meaning from its absence. This is confirmed (manifested), for example, by the ruined bodies and faces of female images belonging to the period of 'Nazikunst' in *The Four Seasons* project. This is a specific strategy of resistance, and an opposition to corporate systems of representation, which, in terms of gender, class and race, precisely determines which images can be represented. This logical inversion may be summarized in the words of Baudrillard:

"After all, it was capital which, throughout history, fed on the destruction of every referentiality, every human objective, which completely loosened every differentiation between false and real, good and evil, in order to introduce a radical law of equivalence and exchange, the iron law of its power. Capital was the first to perform intimidation, abstraction, de-territorialization, non-connectedness, etc. (...) Nowadays this logic is turning against it. And when it

¹⁷⁴ See Griselda Pollock, "Feminist Film Practice and Pleasure: A Discussion," in *Formations of Pleasure*, London 1983, p. 157.

¹⁷⁵ See Jo Anna Isaak, "Women; The Ruin of Representation," in *Afterimage*, April 1985, p. 6.

tries to fight against this spiraling catastrophe, by concealing the last gleam of reality in which it was supposed to be the last thunder of power, it only multiplies the signs and accelerates the play of simulation."¹⁷⁶

The representational strategy developed by Irwin could be termed 'double narration,' which operates simultaneously in opposite directions, and which could be seen as a kind of masquerade or posture, presenting itself as something else. Recycling and artistic appropriation are possible strategies of 'double narration,' about which Derrida wrote that they are resistant to the point where it is no longer possible to separate 'false' (nominal and semantic) and original features, and thus, they can no longer be included in the binary philosophical oppositions which they resist and disorganize, without attempting to create a third meaning.¹⁷⁷

How can the same object be both disgusting scum and a sublime, charismatic apparition?

Irwin's project *Red Districts* (1986) is composed of paintings constructed as enlargements of original linocuts from the 1950s by the Slovene painter and graphic artist Janez Knez. The enlargement of original linocuts of Knez to the format 100 x 140 cm through an episcopo, cut from lino(leum) and printed on paper impregnated with pig's blood, is not adequately explained as an attempt to use yet another of the many graphic techniques, but must be seen as the realization of objects and graphic works produced through painting techniques.

To these enlargements were added gilt frames, coal (functioning as a passe-partout box) and a small brass plate labeling the

¹⁷⁶ Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," in *Art and Text*, Spring 1983, p. 28.

¹⁷⁷ See Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, Chicago 1981, p. 43.



IRWIN, *Red Districts*, 1986

project – all of which show the internal logic of bourgeois culture in the constant production of fetish-objects in painting.

Glass on a wooden frame, under which is graphic work – coal and blood on the paper have the function of establishing a distance between the observer and the relic, a fetish-object, and between the real gallery space and the sacred space of the object; these procedures can also be understood as a precise reflection of museum art. The use of natural and organic materials (e.g., blood, coal and paper) and inorganic materials (e.g., gold and glass, etc.) has a specific connotation and a specific symbolic meaning – to double the structure of the surface print; the left and right sides of the enlarged original linocuts are also changed, and so, between the original and the copy – the newly made graphic work – another transposition occurs. The change also appears in the signing and numbering of the prints. The author of the originals signs new prints. The transformation of the graphic work is thus marked by double inversions.¹⁷⁸

In the final phase, these objects look completely monumental and sacred, to the point that we might designate them as con-

¹⁷⁸ See Irwin, *A Diary of Work*.

temporary relics. But they are a special kind of relic: they are specific products of Socialism: Socialist Realism in art and culture. They are displayed here as the mark of the hidden logic of the art and history of the Eastern European block, of Socialist Realism; as the Communist representational visual strategy, which has been kept quiet for a long time and suppressed throughout the 1970s, as something which should be forgotten – as a negative experience. With Irwin's *Red Districts*, we get the repetition of the Social-Realist iconography, but with an excrescent bloody surplus: the one that colored the lives of thousands of painters, artists, whose Revolutionary abstractions were stifled in the bloody Stalinist purges (if we recall only Russian avant-garde history). Irwin's repetition has provided the artwork with a repulsively obscene element of Truth.

With *Red Districts*, we are witness to the tormenting, inert presence of fetish-objects. The presence of a fetish-object becomes denotative, according to Slavoj Žižek¹⁷⁹, especially when we comprehend that it functions merely through its 'negative' presence; i.e., that the object (as a positive given) is, in its presence, an embodiment, a pure confirmation and a sign of its own absence, its own minus. Or, to put it another way, Irwin's graphic works are fetish-objects, which, in their positivism, are pure symbol, 'signifiers' of absence, a minus in the art history of Socialist Realism. This is why, beyond every ideology of a return to authenticity and to rootedness, this shift 'from a signifier to an object' (as Žižek has stressed) enables the exposure of 'a rational center' in the theories of postmodernism. The effect of this transposition, or rather, the effect of the act of de-sublimation, which is performed constantly by Irwin, lies precisely in the fact that we experience all the fascinating features of an object in the very object itself and, at the same time, notice 'what we are dealing with' when we experience that the same object can simultaneously be both disgust-

¹⁷⁹ See Slavoj Žižek, *Problemi teorije fetišizma* [*Problems of the Theory of Fetishism*] (Ljubljana: DDU Univerzum, 1985).

ing scum (blood and coal) and a sublime, charismatic apparition (monumental and sacred). What determines this difference is merely a symbolic 'unary stroke' which is entirely structural, determined by the structural position of the object and not by its 'actual features.'¹⁸⁰

*Irwin: NSK – a state in time*¹⁸¹

One of the most attention-grabbing projects of the NSK movement in the 1990s has been the *State in Time* project, carried out principally by the group Irwin. The NSK EMBASSY and NSK CONSULATE may be perceived as specific social installations, which symbolically and artistically simulate the transfer of the phenomenon of NSK into a different cultural, social and political context.



IRWIN, *NSK Consulate*, Hotel Ambasciatori, 1993

NSK Embassies were realized in Moscow (1992), Gent (Belgium, 1993) and at the Berlin Volksbühne (1993). Consulates

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ See M. Gržinić, "Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK): The Art Groups Laibach, Irwin, and Noordung Cosmokinetical Theatre Cabinet – New Strategies in the Nineties" in *Slovene Studies*, vol. 15/1, Edmonton 1993 (published in 1995). See also M. Gržinić, "Transcentrala egzorcizma," in *Zemljopis vremena* [*Geography of Time*] (Umag, Croatia: Dante Marino Cettina Gallery, 1994).



IRWIN, *NSK Embassy*, Moscow, 1992

were opened at the Hotel Ambasciatori in Florence (Italy, 1993) and in the kitchen of the private gallery-owner Marino Cettina in Umag (Croatia, 1994).

Irwin established the NSK Embassy in Moscow in a private apartment (address: Leninsky Prospekt 12, apt. 24) in May and June 1992. The facade of the apartment building was embellished with an artistically articulated insignia of a State Embassy. The group Irwin exhibited paintings from the *Capital* series. Posters, design products and video work by Laibach and footage of the Noordung Cosmokinetic Theatre Cabinet performances were also presented. Various lectures and public discussions were held with participating guests, critics, theoreticians and artists from Slovenia, Russia, Croatia and Serbia. The establishment of the Embassy in Moscow took place in the context of the internationalization of one of the great Eastern European phenomena, APT-ART (Apartment-Art), a phenomenon of artistic production and exhibition in the private apartments of the Moscow art underground. The APT-ART project, which began in the 1980s, represents an attempt to seek political and personal/artistic paths, which run parallel to official institutions and are physically linked to them, although politically and culturally very distant. It enabled the survival of artists and the avant-garde in the Soviet Union during the period prior

to Perestroika and Glasnost. The purpose of APT-ART projects was to make visible what had been hidden. APT-ART, which emerged during the reign of Brezhnev, was also an ironic paraphrasing of the American Pop Art movement. The APT-ART projects were organized by the Moscow artists and art critics Elena Kurljandzeva, Victor Misiano, among others.

The APT-ART movement in Moscow emphasized the status of private spaces transforming them into centers of communication organized by those most excluded. The 'phantasm' that structured artistic life in the former totalitarian Eastern European countries was completely grounded in the private sphere (in the private apartment, at the kitchen table and surrounded by artworks, so to speak), within the context of the post-Socialist European paradigm, which today reviews this phantasm on a completely metaphorical level, so that it forgets to include fear: 'the fear with which we lived.' The NSK Moscow EMBASSY project represented a new actualization of the phenomenon of life and creation in private apartments during the era of Communist totalitarianism. The NSK-EMBASSY MOSCOW project did not attempt to achieve equilibrium in the opposition between the totalitarian ideology and the 'non-ideological,' private, untainted sphere (although it is true that it holds onto something of a totalitarian style of claustrophobia), but rather tried to imagine both spheres as two sides of the same coin (Žižek's formulation) that will both disappear with post-Socialist democracy.

The NSK Moscow Embassy marked the beginning of Irwin's journey in the direction of the epistemological heritage of (Eastern) Europe meeting Western Europe. In this intermediate period, when East is still East, and is only beginning to acquire its bastardized Western form, the question of the inner spiritual art and cultural structure, which has lived in it unrecognized for over a century, is of major importance. This was a process of mirroring and reflecting itself and its own Eastern position, where the recycling of different histories is not directed towards the West, but to the reflection of its own, internal position and the possibilities for creation. Instead of the hitherto sole valid

option of reading 'the East in the mirror of the West,' if we are to paraphrase Homi Bhabha, the NSK Moscow Embassy now offered us 'the East that reads the East,' i.e., itself.

Soc-Art

A lot has been, and still is being, said in different ways about the Soc-Art movement, which began in the early 1970s in the Soviet Union, principally in Moscow. It is usually referred to as Soviet Conceptualism, the unofficial Soviet art that produced Moscow's art underground. A Moscow theoretician, Josif Bakstein, defined Soc-Art as an attempt to express in images the *mise-en-scène* of political beliefs and efforts of the underground artists, which produced a specific sign structure and semantics of images.

Boris Orlov (b. 1941), one of the founders of the Soc-Art movement, in his Soc-Artistic monument, *A Group Portrait with Sashes of 1987*, 'chiseled out' the names of those who founded and defined the Soc-Art movement: Vitali Komar (b. 1945), Alexander Melamid (b. 1945), Grisha Bruskin (b. 1945), Erik Bulatov (b. 1933), Ilya Kabakov (b. 1933), Alexander Kosolapov (b. 1948), Dimitri Prigov (b. 1940). Most of the artists were concerned with their voluntary placement at the bottom of Russian society: 'to belong to an artistic underground,' says Bakstein, meant 'to live as though you did not exist.' Thus Ilya Kabakov, now one of the most important Russian artists in the West, when he had completed an education which would provide him with a stable academic career, consciously opted for the underground. The first Soc-Art project was an exhibition by Komar & Melamid in 1967, held in a Moscow cafe.¹⁸² However, it was not until 1972 that Soc-Art

¹⁸² If we refer to the cataloguing and reflections on Soc-Art published in the magazine *Dekoratивно izkustvo ZSSR* (vol. 397, Moscow 1990), which has been entirely dedicated to the recapitulation of this phenomenon.



Komar and Melamid,
Lenin, 1987–88



A. Kosolapov, *Lenin – Coca-Cola*, 1982

acquired a name, and only following a five-year break, could it continue.

The first official presentation of 'the non-socialist-realist art of the post-Stalinist era,' as this phenomenon is referred to by critic Margarita Tupicinova in *Flash Art*¹⁸³, occurred in 1975 in Moscow, in the famous grounds of VDNH, 'in the paradise of the Communist achievements.' The essence of Soc-Art lies in a certain fundamental inversion of the details of Socialist Realism, i.e., the appropriation and rearrangement (Bakstein speaks of a *mise-en-scène*) of details and observers of Social-Realism (i.e., Lenin, Stalin). Their juxtaposition in a different context is the first and inevitable condition of Soc-Art strategy. In other words, Soc-Art attempted to change everyday life into the subject of art by using visual images, which already existed, and, as we know, it was the iconography of Socialist Realism that had primacy in the construction of these images. Inversion, which, with its ironic pose, produced confusion, rather than a smile, as, for example, when reading slogans by Komar & Melamid: 'our desire – Communism.' Works such as *The Glory of the CPSU* (the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) by Erik Bulatov

¹⁸³ See *Flash Art* (a contemporary art magazine published in Milan). In 1975 Tupicinova emigrated to the West.

(1975), or *The Bank* by Dimitri Prigov (1978) (a scribbled box for collecting alms is, according to Prigov, the quintessence of the Russian bank), are among the most representative Soc-Art works. *The Nest Group*, for instance, at the end of the 1970s, pushed the ironic base of Soc-Art to a menacing absurdity with their performance, *The Iron Curtain*. An iron plate, lifted like a curtain, with 'IRON CURTAIN' written on it, personifies all the misery of the global political credo of the Cold War.

For those who look for parallels in Slovene territory, I should mention a live sculpture/project *TRIGLAV (Three-headed)* in 1968 by the world famous Slovenian conceptual group OHO, which carries an undoubtedly ironic political meaning¹⁸⁴: "Triglav, as one of the symbols of Slovenia and, if based on linguistics, means tri glave – three heads = 3D – Three-headed." To mention this project in this context could be misleading, however. The OHO project was not the result of the search for an ironic tradition – for some kind of "soc" inversion of everyday imagery – but rather a result of more elementary, and above all, quite different questions: for research into the function of art, the meaning and sense of an artist in the world, identity, the conditions and boundaries of art. If it is true of Soc-Art that it is some kind of mimicry of existence as such, then the entire activity of the OHO group needs to be read through different optics: through the context of the so-called "concrete utopia," which was not unknown to the Russian art scene, though it was used differently.

For the Soc-Art artists who emigrated to the West, mainly to the USA, this meant the placing of inverted Socialist-Realist elements within the context of American Pop Art, where Lenin occupied the place of an American cowboy.

To speak of Soc-Art nowadays is not merely a matter of the trendy disclosure of some other, unknown, usually 'undernourished face' of post-totalitarian societies, but rather the consequence of the East that reads the East, and of a few great retro-

¹⁸⁴ See *OHO*, ed. T. Brejc, catalogue (Ljubljana: ŠKUC Gallery, 1978).

spective exhibitions of Soc-Art around the world. Alexei Kosolapov, who has lived in the USA since 1975, presents himself with works such as *Malevich – Marlboro* or *Gorbi* (Gorbachev, painted in the manner of Warhol's Marilyn Monroe), while Komar & Melamid financially ravage the American market with the classics of Soc-Art, as, e.g., *Stalin and E.T.*, *Lenin and the Muses*, etc. In contrast to the early works of Soc-Art, which present a rational analysis of Soviet ideology, the post-Soc-Art period brought about the ruthless production of kitsch.

The Moscow Declaration

Attempts made to form an 'alternative' history of cultural and artistic production in the East express a demand for a redefinition of this (alternative) attitude within existing, contemporary East-West constructions of power. Some of these demands are articulated in *The Moscow Declaration*, written at the time of the APT-ART project whereby the Irwin-NSK Moscow Embassy was established:

1. We, the artists and critics from Ljubljana and Moscow who gathered in Moscow on May 26, 1992 on the occasion of the Apt-Art and Irwin project NSK Embassy, recognize the following facts:

A. *The history, experience and time* and space of eastern countries of the 20th century cannot be forgotten, hidden, rejected or suppressed.

B. The former East does not exist anymore: the new eastern structure can only be made by reflecting on the past, which has to be integrated in a mature way in a changed, present and future.

C. This concrete history, this experience and this time and space have created the structure for a specific subjectivity that we want to develop, form and reform a subjectivity that reflects the past and future.

D. This specific eastern identity, esthetical and ethical attitude



OHO, *Triglav*, Ljubljana 1968



Group Gnezdo ('The Nest'),
The Iron Curtain, Moscow, end of the '70s

is common to all of us and has a universal – not specifically eastern – importance and meaning.

E. The condition of this common situation is not only individual but belongs to the social, political and cultural experience, identity and physiognomy of Europe as a whole.

F. The experience of oppressive regimes (totalitarian, authoritarian), found in all more or less developed states throughout the universe, is common to more than half of the population. This is a universal experience.

G. This context and developed subjectivity are the real base for our new identity, which is taking a clear shape (also in the form of new social, political, and cultural infrastructures) in the last decades of this century.

2. This text should have the following practical goals:

A. To articulate the basis of this new consciousness which is in the process of formation and reflection.

B. To implement and materialize the presented ideas in reality through a formation of new infrastructures, a two-way communication and a new repository of information.

C. To make an appeal to everyone who corresponds with the principles of this declaration.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ The declaration was conceived and signed by Josif Bakstein, Eda Čufer, Marina Gržinić, Olga Kholmogorová, Irwin, Elena Kurlandzeva, Georgy Litichevsky, Victor Misiano, Dimitri Prigov, Konstantin Zvezdiochiotov.

The Moscow Declaration emphasizes the key issue of how to, in contemporary international circumstances, maintain specific cultural contexts and avoid standardization; in other words, how to present and interpret the specific identity of other cultures and productions within the one-sided and established perspective of the dominant Western culture. In it, we discover some key facts concerning the reflection of Eastern European systems, and specific historical, social, political, cultural and artistic experiences, which were molded within these systems. They are given as the coordinates of a condition which, analogous to a great, post-modernist synonym; we could call 'the eastern post-Socialist European paradigm.' The declaration also speaks in favor of the materialization of this paradigm with the formation of necessary infrastructures, two-way communication and a repository of information. It stresses the key question of how to preserve specific paradigms within this international constellation.

Geography needs to be understood as political *genius loci*. When we speak of differences, we consequently need to talk about conditions, although it may happen that productions are similar, we have to be aware that the conditions are different and, consequently, the effects are also different. It is this different context that APT-ART (International) and the NSK Embassy projects were meant to indicate.

After all, APT-ART is a place where we can ask ourselves (likewise with the Russian artists Komar & Melamid) what can happen to monumental propaganda nowadays, without its being condemned as preserving a totalitarian tradition, and how we can change Moscow into 'a phantasmal garden of post-totalitarian art.' Numerous discussions, which took place during the NSK Moscow Embassy project, demonstrated that Communist totalitarianism, with its epicenter in Russia, destroyed all possibility of forming other discourses. In this respect, Slovenia presented a rather different story, since it was on the margins, at the periphery of this absolute totalitarianism. This enabled Slovenia to preserve a relative freedom and a coexistence of different political and artistic discourses.

Let us take a look at another important dimension of Irwin's NSK Embassies. The paintings produced after the NSK Moscow Embassy projects, called *NSK Moscow Embassy – Interiors* (1992–93), are impossible objects. Onto black-and-white photographs over one square meter in size – of the goings-on and artifacts in the private Russian apartment during the establishment of the NSK Moscow Embassy – are fastened real paintings taken from Irwin's *Was ist Kunst?* and *Capital* series. The black-and-white photographs of the Embassy interiors are literally upgraded with paintings; some of those documented in the photographs were subsequently tied onto the photographs. The paintings/objects, attached to photographs, are sciotoicons, optical preparations for viewing the black-and-white photographs. Paintings tied onto photographs by straps and belts, in a skillful double move, prompt us to think about a territory with certain characteristic features; a region which smells of the East – and of the war. New Europe, therefore, as inscribed on one of the paintings, is portrayed as a trans-central of exorcism.

With photography, the Irwin group reaches into the core of historical memory. For Irwin, the photograph, which counterfeits history by retouching, erasing, cutting and editing, functions not only as the most efficient, but also as the most legitimate means, especially in the Eastern European context, of discussing history and its phantasms. On the other hand, these enormous black-and-white photographs also represent a categorical scandal, since the private apartment is removed from the hierarchy of cultural spaces and, consequently, should not be placed at its core. Here we must ask ourselves which recorder of time so obsessively coded the past and the present of Eastern European countries. Photography, of course! Furthermore, was it not through photographs that the history of the Eastern European countries has been (re)constructed – for example, the facts, scenery and actors of the Russian Commu-



IRWIN, *NSK Embassy*, document-photography, Moscow 1992 (above)

IRWIN, *NSK Embassy Moscow – Interiors*, object + photography, 1992–93 (right)



nist Revolution? Did not the political event *par excellence* in the 1980s in Slovenia (i.e., the arrest of Janez Janša in 1988, who in the 1990s became the first Minister of Defense in independent Slovenia) assume its material dimension exactly through the photograph?

The arrest of Janez Janša assumed its material dimension through a photograph taken surreptitiously by Tone Stojko on May 31, 1988. Stojko's photograph of Janša's arrest not only signified an incision in the artistic and documentary photography then current in Slovenia, but also created a precedent in the history of political photography in Slovenia. *The Arrest of Janez Janša* is the first photographic, and the only visual, documentation of a political arrest in former Socialist Yugoslavia, published parallel to the event itself. Because of this concrete photograph, taken by the hidden eye of the camera, this political event, among the most obscene political events, assumed an almost physical, material dimension. A photographic image was created which insistently testified that what is shown had really taken place. With this photograph, Stojko made us think about the ambiguity and obscenity of political documentary photography. Political photography is the nexus of the visual topology of society and the genealogy of political power, and this is exactly why it constantly demands a repeated decipher-

ment. Therefore, the physics and chemistry of photographic processes has remained almost unchanged, but what has changed is the context which, by establishing a relationship between photographic media and reality, conditions the interpretation of a photograph. Each photograph can tell several different stories, but photographic 'appearance' no longer



IRWIN, *NSK Embassy Moscow – Interiors*,
object + photography, 1992–93

ensures veracity. It seems to me that Stojko would have radicalized even further this 'already mythical succession' of the Slovenian Political Spring, had he served us, paradoxically and metaphorically speaking, with an enlarged negative of Janša's arrest, which in its form would already imply the possibility not of the deciphering of Antonio's *Blow-Up*, but of *Blade Runner*. Allowing, as does Harrison Ford in the film *Blade Runner* (1982), as both an exterminator and a replicant, the analysis of a photograph down to the smallest detail with the help of sophisticated digital technology.

And was there not created around *The Last Futurist Exhibition 0.10 (zero-ten)* by the Russian Suprematist Kasimir Malevich, organized in St. Petersburg from December 17, 1915 to January 19, 1916, an entire mythology and reinterpretation on the

basis of the only surviving black-and-white photographic document of this exhibition?

The project *Office for Issuing Passports in Amsterdam* (1993) even further subverted this paradoxical quality of the photograph. When the Irwin group used canvas as the background for portrait photography, it actually emphasized that the portrait nowadays only has a meaning as a photograph in official documents. If we take a cynical stance, we can argue that this meaning is even greater in the so-called ex-Eastern European countries, as well as in Africa and the Asian Third World, where an officially issued passport with a portrait photograph is the equivalent for entrance into the developed Western world. If portrait photography today has any meaning at all, it is exactly there where it appears least artistic, i.e., in passports, where, as Jo Anna Issak writes, a portrait functions as 'the institution of the subject within the visible,' as a special procedure of inscription within a social body, which places us within the very foundations of society's functioning.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, as today, the limits or boundaries of space itself have come into question, and we are faced with the idea of a space that is, due to new information and communication technologies, a non-physical, de-materialized and not least significantly, a spectral space, the notion of the boundaries of a space is gradually replaced by the concept of interface. A passport is such an interface, which not only mediates through states and political systems, but which is, in itself, mediated; a passport is an absolute sign of a metonymy of lack: it is an object which is not simply lacking, but which, through its positivism, materializes a lack.

Just as the photographs in the paintings *NSK Moscow Embassy – Interiors* document events around a large kitchen table, surrounded by works of art, the works displayed as part of the

¹⁸⁶ See Jo Anna Issak, "Mapping the Imaginary," in *The Event Horizon*, ed. Lorne Falk and Barbara Fisher (Toronto and Banff: The Coach House Press & Walter Philips Gallery, 1985), p. 139.



IRWIN, *NSK Consulate*,
kitchen in the private apartment
of the owner of the Gallery
Marino Cettina, Umag, Croatia,
1994

NSK Umag Consulate project similarly focus on questions concerning the public and the private, citizens and the state, real and imaginary, fiction and history. On September 10, 1994, the NSK Umag Consulate was inaugurated in the kitchen of a private apartment belonging to gallery owner Marino Cettina (at Dante Alighieri 20, Umag, Croatia). The kitchen above the Dante Gallery was turned into a Consulate. The NSK Consulate project in Umag took place within an already historical context (i.e., in a context of extremely strict security and strategic measures leading up to Pope John Paul II's historical Sunday Mass in Croatia), transforming the privacy of the family kitchen, hidden from the eyes of gallery visitors, into a place of historic significance. This provoked some crucial questions concerning the artistic context, and the political and social strategy of art. The issuance of passports at the exhibition opening of the NSK Consulate project in Umag was in fact only one of the various elements of this project. Similar to the NSK Moscow Embassy in 1992, the NSK Suhl Territory in 1993, or the NSK State in Berlin in 1993, this project again questioned the rhetoric of the space of a new Europe. Other elements of the Consulate project in Umag included the exhibition of drawings / objects / paintings from the series *Irwin – Project Proposal for the NSK Embassy in Beijing* (also installed in the kitchen), and three large photographs. The photographs, which documented the kitchen and the entire Cettina family, (the portrait of the Irwin

group with the gallery-owner, his wife and his two children), as well as the Irwin group engaged in their obsessively libidinous and bureaucratic act – the issuing of passports – started immediately to function as historical documents. They gave the kitchen the role of a historical place. From a historical viewpoint, the NSK Moscow Embassy and the NSK Umag Consulate are directly linked to the essence of the functioning and presentation of the NSK projects in the mid-1980. In 1985, Irwin was shown for the first time in a private apartment with the *Was ist Kunst?* project.

Therefore, both the NSK Moscow Embassy and the NSK Umag Consulate may be seen as a kind of conclusive, vertiginous act of virtually existential options (was not the essence of APT-ART survival?). From this series of transformations, transpositions and exchanges of meaning (a kitchen-consulate, a passport-artifact, a photograph-document-testament), it is possible to derive great philosophical pleasures, and displeasure in art which, in the transgressive garb of Irwin, is, above all, a treatise.

In the 1990s, Irwin has presented an accelerated elaboration of the NSK Embassy, which, in a symbolic, simulative and artistic manner, explored the transfer of the NSK phenomenon into another cultural, social and political context: into the corpus of space which is a figure, a construction, an artifact, a transposition. The Embassy project, as an investigation of sensors, aids for artificial sight, etc., is placed in dependence on miniature screens, which are no longer a surface, but enable one to enter and penetrate not a hyper-space, but a space which is neither outside nor inside, neither saturated not empty. In this extreme utopia, Irwin/NSK Embassy does not only mean a break with analogy, but also a break with representational models on the basis of which we founded our certainty through similarity. We are dealing less with the circumstances of projection into a space, and more with the space of difference, the space of the Other, and with the modality of interference: the translation, integration and determination of data from heterogeneous political, artistic and social environments. The Embassy is nei-

ther a self-presentation nor the mapping of a site where differences are manifested; it is a map of the effects of this difference and, therefore, a return to the interior of a claustrophobically 'virtual' space.



IRWIN, NSK Embassy,
Beijing, China, 1997

THREE

6. FICTION RECONSTRUCTED¹⁸⁷

"Experience may also be re-constructed, re-membered, re-articulated. One powerful means of doing so is the reading and re-reading of fiction in such a way as to create the effect of having access to another's life and consciousness, whether that other is an individual or a collective person within the lifetime called history."¹⁸⁸

As Frederic Jameson suggests, "The truth of experience no longer coincides with the place in which it takes place, but is spread-eagled across the world's spaces; (...) a situation arises in which he can say that if an individual experience is authentic, then it cannot be true; and that if a scientific or cognitive mode of the same content is true, then it escapes individual experience."¹⁸⁹

Since January 1993, in a ground-floor apartment in New York's Soho, the exhibition *Salon de Fleurus* has been open for viewing.¹⁹⁰ *Salon de Fleurus* is a staged repeat presentation of one of the most significant collections of modern art from the turn of this century, which was created by the American author and literary critic Gertrude Stein (1874–1946), a Jew of German descent, with the help of her brother Leo Stein, in their Paris apartment at 27, rue de Fleurus.

¹⁸⁷ See Marina Gržinič, "Fiction Reconstructed," in *Filozofski vestnik no. 2* (*Fictions*), Ljubljana 1994. See also Marina Gržinič, "Fiction Reconstructed" – lecture at the International Symposium: *The Butterfly Effect*, Műcsarnok, Budapest 1996.

¹⁸⁸ Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), p. 113.

¹⁸⁹ Fredric Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Illinois: Urbana, 1988), p. 349.

¹⁹⁰ *Salon de Fleurus* is exhibited at 41 Spring Street, Apt. 1 AR, 10012 New York, NY.



Picture displayed at the Salon de Fleurus,
New York, 1993

We can only relate and describe the actual appearance of the New York Salon because the artist or artists, who wish to remain anonymous, do not permit photographs to be taken on the premises.¹⁹¹ *Salon de Fleurus* is situated in a private apartment in New York, in two rooms connected by an oval atrium. The apartment is furnished with antique furniture and paintings. Carpets cover the floors and old, decorative curtains hang over the windows. Table-lamps and candles discreetly light the paintings. The music that pervades the dwelling is French popular music from the 1920s and '30s played on an old radio, also of the period.

All the paintings exhibited in the *Salon* are in ochre hues, painted on wood and emphasized stylistically with extraordinarily incongruous frames. Thematically they refer to paintings from the collection of Leo and Gertrude Stein, chiefly from the period 1905–13, and to the collection itself as a com-

¹⁹¹ We are publishing exclusive reproductions of the pictures which are exhibited in the *Salon*, as well as some extracts of the conversations with the anonymous artists.



Photography, taken in the period 1904–1920
used as a base for the picture

plex artifact. That is why the paintings in the *Salon*, as emphasized by the artists, can be placed into two categories: painted reproductions from the collection (Picasso, Matisse, Cézanne, etc.), and paintings depicting the collection, originating from black-and-white photographs.

We are witnesses here to an exact painted facsimile of a particular era which has much to do with life, history, fiction and art. We also see the exaggerated iconic duality, which borders on kitsch, while the Cubist paintings are transposed to our present time in the manner of Russian icons. Their painting technique is clearly amateur, with the emphasized disharmony of the 'Rococo' frames. But rather than label this an attempt to copy original paintings, producing 'fakes,' using photographic records of the period and reproductions of the originals, we may talk here about the attempt to rearrange and reinterpret the system of art from the turn of the century – a system which influenced the modernist world as such. Certainly, Picassos, Cézannes and Matisses are exhibited before us, but rather than being concerned with an individual item, we are concerned here about the system, not in the sense of a specific recon-

struction of space or an installation, but a reconstruction of a system of thinking – one which exactly 80–90 years ago elaborated the institution of modern art as we know it today. Therefore, in the New York *Salon*, we can purchase not only paintings, but also furniture and all the items in both rooms. Every painting sold is substituted with a copy of the same one, or with another from the same period. Thus the *Salon* continuously regenerates and transforms itself at the same time.

The paintings in the *Salon* may be compared to the pre-Renaissance icons, which, instead of mythologizing the antique or Judeo-Christian world, now do so with a crucial pre-modern period. Kim Levin described the *Salon de Fleurus* thus: “When systems collapse, freak events such as these rise up through the cracks,” and she states, “this is more than purely a simulation – it involves a magical realism.”¹⁹² Spaces of very different worlds seem to collapse here upon each other, much as the world’s commodities are assembled in the supermarket, and all manner of subcultures get juxtaposed in the contemporary metropolis. We can interpret the project in two ways. First, making reference to the concept of David Harvey’s time-space compression¹⁹³, a term used to signal processes that so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time, that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves. We have been experiencing, these two last decades, an intense phase of time-space compression that has had a disorienting and disruptive impact upon political-economic practices, and the balance of class power, as well as upon cultural and social life.¹⁹⁴

The time-space compression is the exact term to compress the time-space condition of the ‘virtual’ Gertrude Stein, taken to traverse the space and time of approximately 90 years. The

¹⁹² Kim Levin, Review of the *Salon de Fleurus*, in *Village Voice*, January 19, 1993

¹⁹³ David Harvey, *The Condition of Post-modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 240.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

greater the ephemerality, the deeper the questions of meaning and interpretation that arise. Photographs, particular objects (e.g., a clock, a chair) and events (e.g., the playing of a piece of music) become the focus of a contemplative memory and hence, a generator of a sense of self that lies outside the sensory overload of consumerist culture and fashion. As I stated earlier in this essay, the *Salon de Fleurus* is furnished with antique furniture and paintings. Carpets cover the floors and old, decorative curtains hang over the windows. Table-lamps and candles discreetly light the paintings. The music that pervades the dwelling is French popular music from the 1920s and '30s played on an old radio, also of the period.

And there is also the question of the exhibition in the private apartment. Whereas modernism looked upon space as an 'epiphenomenon of social functions, postmodernism tends to disengage urban space from its dependence on functions, and to see it as an autonomous formal system, incorporating rhetorical and artistic strategies, which are independent of any simple historical determinism.'¹⁹⁵ It is appropriate that the post-modernist developer should be indebted "more to (at least on the outside) the spirit of fiction than of function."¹⁹⁶ For his part, Jameson views the "spatial peculiarities of post-modernism as symptoms and expressions of a new and historically original dilemma, one that involves our insertion as individual subjects into a multi-dimensional set of radically discontinuous realities, whose frames range from the still surviving spaces of bourgeois private life all the way to the unimaginable decentering of global capitalism itself."¹⁹⁷ As Harvey pointed out: "Home becomes a private museum to guard against the ravages of time-space compression. From this stand-point, we have to accept the argument that post-modern fiction is mimetic of something, much as that the emphasis

¹⁹⁵ A. Colquhoun, "On modern and post-modern space," cited in Harvey, *The Condition of Post-modernity*, p. 304.

¹⁹⁶ Harvey, *The Condition of Post-modernity*, p. 286.

¹⁹⁷ Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping," p. 351.

upon ephemerality, collage, fragmentation, and dispersal in philosophical and social thought mimics the conditions of flexible accumulation. But it is exactly at this point that we encounter the opposite reaction that can best be summed up as the search for personal or collective identity. Place-identity that implodes in upon us, because everyone occupies a space of individuation (a body, a room, a home)."¹⁹⁸

The fact that the paintings are made from photographs, and not vice versa (at the time when computer processing makes it possible to produce even more perfect photographic simulations) corresponds to Stein's maxim: "Painting is still worth something; photography isn't." The paintings in the *Salon* present themselves as a successful mimicry of a certain state of mind; an imitation that is even more controversial because until recently, the birth of modern art had so explicitly referred to scientific analysis, whilst here it is completely mythologized.

Finally, we can ask ourselves: what was that period like, or who was Gertrude Stein? Nevertheless, there is no sense in recapitulating the biography of Gertrude Stein, given the fact that in the world until now, there have been numerous more or less salacious details of Gertrude's life story already published. One fact of even more significance (as confirmed by the *Salon de Fleurus*) is that Stein not only created one of the best collections of modern art, and materially and spiritually directly supported the whole pleiad of avant-garde artists, but she established a format for the specific reading and comprehension of the history of modern art. She actually presented this history with herself as simultaneous heroine and legend.

Her short hair cut, her thunderous laughter, her collection of paintings and Ford's automobiles (precisely in that order) have built up the legend of Gertrude Stein. She had such a strong personality that, for example, in 1937, while the reputation of her picture collection was only a memory of the golden days (although her popularity as a writer was becoming increasing-

¹⁹⁸ Harvey, *The Condition of Post-modernity*, p. 302.

ly strong), she sat on the commission of one of the global exhibitions of modern art. The legend about her collection lived on even when her collection was split in two, and also when she had to sell it. 'Eat Cézanne,' as she wrote in one of her many autobiographies and pieces of prose, in order to survive World War II (she sold work to buy food for herself and her lifelong



Picture displayed at the Salon de Fleurus,
New York, 1993

companion, Alice Toklas). But despite the more or less true stories about her life, certain facts do hold true: in 1903, following her arrival in France from the USA, she moved to her brother's apartment in Paris at 27, rue de Fleurus (where despite travelling around Europe and America, she remained until her death). This move to Paris preceded her intense friendship with her brother Leo, and a lesbian experience with May Bookstaver in the USA. Subsequently, in 1907, she met Alice B. Toklas, who became her lifelong companion, first working as a typist, then doing everything else: cooking, gardening, etc. Above all, she was someone who made her life comfortable – as she herself responded upon her victorious arrival in the USA in the mid-1930s to journalists who asked, Who is Alice B. Toklas? Distinct from her position as a notable

modernist writer who was only in her development phase in the 1920s, her reputation as a collector of works of art was established, although it was entirely based on purchases which were made during the period 1905–13. As a designer of the Museum of Modern Art in a private apartment, and one of the last adherents of Cubism in the 1920s, Gertrude Stein was indeed a patron of the arts and a pioneering, visionary woman. In 1905, she acquired the painting *Femme au Chapeau* by Henri Matisse, which crucially defined Fauvism. As can be determined from *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, the decision to purchase this item, which was made by Leo, was in fact made by Gertrude. She didn't only acquire, but also posed for the key Cubist portrait, painted by Pablo Picasso in 1906.

The book by Gertrude Stein entitled *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, published in 1933, definitively established Gertrude Stein as a literary star, and is paradigmatic for her work and life, as well as for the paintings from the *Salon de Fleurus*. (After all, isn't the initial slogan in the title of each painting *From the Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*?) In that book, which she began to write with the encouragement of a publisher in the autumn of 1932, Stein presents her life together with Alice B. Toklas, with whom she lived for almost 25 years. Primarily, she reveals the history of modern art through deliberation, conversation and the sometimes infantile observations of Alice B. Toklas. *The Autobiography* describes the heroic times of Cubism, the life of the lost generation ('Hemingway and the rest,' as Stein termed them), and the beginning of modern art through anecdotes and aphorisms, which supply an abundance of details that transformed history into a mythological narrative. By imitating the style of Alice B. Toklas, Stein builds a mythological presentation of her own self and a narrative style worthy of the pulp fiction of the 1890s. Stein discussed the history of modern art in terms , as she remarks towards the end of her *Autobiography*, in the same way Defoe wrote the autobiography of Robinson Crusoe. This literary game, which Stein reveals to the reader in the last paragraph of

the book, could be the consequence of Stein's love for detective novels and also for superb and subtle mimicry. Incidentally, the responses to *Autobiography* were quite predictable: Hemingway 'thanked' her for her recollections with the following verse: "A Bitch is a Bitch is a Bitch is a Bitch."

The time, which we are attempting to clarify at the Salon De Fleurus, is circular, not linear, i.e., with a beginning, middle and end. It is similar to Cubism, which interpreted time as being synchronized, and combined the past and future in the present. By abolishing the differences between the past and future, everything becomes the present; the myth is therefore not transferred from generation to generation. Gone, more importantly, is any sustained sense of the autonomy, in space and time, of gross and visible individual human actions. And if 'actions' are now invisible, then our fates are likewise beyond our grasp. We no longer feel that we penetrate the future; the future penetrates us.¹⁹⁹ By constantly returning to the beginning, we halt the possibility of reaching the end.

What do we obtain by abolishing differences between the past and the future, when everything suddenly becomes the present, and time attempts to halt itself within a closed narrative form (what is possible to detect in the time logic displayed by the copies)? The "constant present" which, if we refer to a terminology used by Gertrude Stein, is the result of the process of copying and, at the same time, the *raison d'être* of the entire *Salon* exhibition, is a method of keeping an object or a standpoint outside of time in order to discover its reality. In such a case, the copy/signifier/machine which produces the meaning is, in opposition to the rational and scientific (hi)story about progress, instead, favorable toward an a-modern approach to progress and history (Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway). This supports the nonlinear historical view, that with a codified beginning, enlightenment and end.

¹⁹⁹ See John Clute, "Introduction," in *Interzone: The Second Anthology*, ed. John Clute (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), pp. VII-X.

Salon de Fleurus is not a part of the world where we have become what we are. It probably proclaims or represents a part of another world, which may not be seen as yet but which the *Salon* lets us feel. We are witnesses to "the decisive end of the present period of art, when an old system (which could be a new one under altered circumstances) is returning to art. (...) The three tenses of decisive action – past, present and future – have been surreptitiously replaced by two tenses – real time and delayed time – the future having meanwhile disappeared via computer programming, and on the other hand, in the corruption of this so-called 'real' time, which simultaneously contains both a part of the present and a part of the immediate future."²⁰⁰

At this point, we can begin to develop a second approach that goes in two directions: the first concerning reality/factuality/virtuality and the second past/present/future. But aren't they interconnected?

In the face of the representational dilemma the *Salon de Fleurus* embodies, the philosophical questions of plausibility and implausibility override those concerning the true and the false. The shift of interest from the thing to its image, and especially from space to time, leads to a shift from the old black-and-white, real-figurative dichotomy to the more relative actual-virtual.²⁰¹ "In two hundred years, the philosophical and scientific debate itself has thus shifted from the question of the objectivity of mental images to the question of their reality. The problem, therefore, no longer has much to do with the mental images of consciousness alone. It is now essentially concerned with the instrumental virtual images of science and their paradoxical facticity."²⁰² Furthermore, this is one of the most crucial aspects of the development of the new technologies of digital imagery and of the synthetic vision offered by

²⁰⁰ Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine* (London, Bloomington and Indianapolis: British Film Institute and Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 66.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 70.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 60.

electron optics: the relative fusion/confusion of the factual (or operational, if you prefer) and the virtual.²⁰³

The age of the formal logic of the image, blossoming in the 18th century, was the age of painting, engraving, etching and architecture. The age of dialectical logic is the age of photography and film or, if you like, the frame of the 19th century, and the actuality of the dialectical logic governing photographic and cinematic representation.²⁰⁴ The age of paradoxical logic begins with the invention of video recording, holography and computer graphics ... as though, at the close of the 20th century, the end of modernity were itself marked by the end of a logic of public representation.²⁰⁵ With paradoxical logic, what gets decisively resolved is the reality of the object's real-time presence. In the previous age of dialectical logic, it was only the delayed-time presence, the presence of the past that lastingly impressed the plate and film. The paradoxical image thus acquires a status something akin to surprise, or more precisely, that of an 'accidental transfer.'²⁰⁶

In the *Salon de Fleurus*, the real-time image dominates the thing represented; real time subsequently prevails over real space, virtuality dominates actuality, turning the very concept of reality on its head; and, therefore, in accordance with Virilio, we can say that paradoxical logic emerges here. Parallel to the representational logic of the *Salon de Fleurus*, the virtualities of the paradoxical logic, which appertain to the videogram, hologram or digital imagery, the *Salon de Fleurus* seeks to question the familiarity with the reality displayed by the formal logic of traditional pictorial representations.

We are discussing the Salon here and now, thanks to several projects which took place in the 1980s in Belgrade and Ljubljana, known to the public only by exhibition titles, and supposedly

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ See Gilles Deleuze, *L'image-mouvement* (Paris: Minuit, 1983) and Gilles Deleuze, *L'image-temps*, Minuit (Paris: Minuit, 1985).

²⁰⁵ Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, p. 63.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 64.

autographed by famous, deceased painters: *The International Exhibition of Modern Art – Armory Show*, *The Last Futurist Exhibition*. The lecture purportedly given by Walter Benjamin in 1986, entitled *Mondrian '63–'96*.²⁰⁷ 'Kasimir Malevich' himself signed in 1986 the *Last Futurist Exhibition*. The exhibition was a reconstruction of the exhibition of the same name, originally staged by the great Russian Suprematist in St. Petersburg in the winter of 1915–16. In a letter published in *Art in America* (September 1986), the same 'Malevich' (with the postscript Belgrade, Yugoslavia) stated: "... I could not even dream that the photograph of that installation would become so famous. I have the feeling that the photograph of the *Last Futurist Exhibition 0.10* (zero-ten) in St. Petersburg in 1915–16 has become even more important than my Suprematist paintings. Therefore for years I have cherished the idea of remaking the exhibition!"

These projects elaborated the so-called tactical position of the artist who conceals his own identity, and the strategies not only of postmodern art, but also the post-Socialist condition of art. At the very moment in which postmodernism proclaims the 'death of the author' and the rise of anti-auratic art in the public realm, the art market becomes ever more conscious of the monopoly power of the artist's signature and of the questions of authenticity and forgery.²⁰⁸

Within the metaphors and fictions of postmodern discourse, much is at stake, as electronic technology seems to rise, unbid-

²⁰⁷ The lecture was given in Ljubljana by a German philosopher who had been dead for almost a half of century, whereas Piet Mondrian, Dutch painter and innovator of abstract art, had died four years after Benjamin, in 1944. See Ale _Erjavec, Marina Gržinič, *Ljubljana, Ljubljana* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1991), pp. 130–31.

²⁰⁸ According to Rosalind Krauss, 'the copy' poses a challenge to history. Instead of extraordinarity, uniformity, or the entity of one, 'the copy' offers a spectrum of multiplicity, threatening to undermine uniformity itself. In post-structuralist terminology, repetition replaces that 'always already present' moment of wish production, but only if that wish reproduces somebody else's wish. See Rosalind Krauss, "Originality as Repetition: Introduction," in *October*, No. 37, 1986, pp. 35–41.

den, to pose a set of crucial ontological questions regarding the status and power of the human being. It has fallen to science fiction to repeatedly narrate a new subject that can somehow directly interface with – and master – the cybernetic technologies of the Information Age, an era in which, as Jean Baudrillard observed, the subject has become a “terminal of multiple networks.”²⁰⁹

Perhaps what we have here is a kind of new subjectivity, which we can name “terminal identity.”²¹⁰ As Peter Weibel has stated:

When Descartes defines us as res cogitans, we can show that machines can perform parts of thinking activity; it does not mean that these machines are subjects. We are only saying that we have formulated our ideas of the subject incorrectly. Mathematics, calculating as a part of thinking, has nothing to do with the foundation of the subject. The subject is found in something else. This is not the disappearance of the subject as we find it in a post-structural theory; it is a disappearance of the historical definition of the subject. So, our historical ideas of how we construct the subject are clearly vanishing by the advent of these new machines and projects as autonomous agents. We have called them autonomous agents because we have to redefine ourselves. (...) So instead of Descartes, who defined the subject as res cogitans, which signifies something limited, my idea of the subject is anything, anywhere, anytime. This is a basic universal desire. The subject is trying to become a fatal attractor; this is what the subject really wants: to bend, to distract the environment according to his will.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Jean Baudrillard, “The Ecstasy of Communication,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), p. 128.

²¹⁰ See Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity. The Virtual Subject in Post-modern Science Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 2.

²¹¹ Marina Gržinić, “Multiple zones of individuality and variable zones of visibility,” interview with Peter Weibel; quoted from the manuscript; subsequently published in *Mars*, Ljubljana, December 1994/January 1995.

Finally, we can perhaps suggest that the *Salon de Fleurus* project may be re-read, or indicated, as a daemon, as something that is disturbing the linearity of history, of art, of science. The best-known examples are Maxwell's daemon²¹², Gödel's trickster²¹³ and Haraway's coyote²¹⁴.

²¹² Maxwell was a famous scientist who discovered electromagnetic waves. But only in theory: he could not prove it. It was proven by Heinrich Hertz 20 years later. Nevertheless, it was Maxwell who put forward a theory saying that there must be something in this world called 'electromagnetic waves.' There is a famous second law of thermodynamics, which says that in each system, the energy must be constant. But Maxwell proposed this: Imagine two spaces. Between the two spaces, you have a door with a little slit. One space of gas is very hot, and the other is very cold. Normally when you open the door, following the law of thermodynamics, both spaces will be the same temperature. However, Maxwell could mathematically prove that the hot space would become hotter, and the cold space become colder. So this was a riddle, a paradox, Maxwell's daemon. (...) But then, along came Zurek, a scientist, who wrote an article in 1984, 'Maxwell's daemon, Szilard's engine and Quantum measurement.' He solved the paradox in such a way that it could even obey the second law of thermodynamics. He said: This daemon is doing work. Somebody is doing work. Even when he just counts molecules, this also uses energy; this also uses information. So when something is becoming hotter, and something is becoming colder, we can exactly measure this difference of energy, and we can say this is an amount of information, that is energy which the daemon uses for himself. We could explain it even within the second law of thermodynamics. He calls this daemon 'Quantum Daemon.' – Peter Weibel, "Ways of Contextualisation," in *Place, Position, Presentation, Public*, ed. Ine Gevers (Maastricht and Amsterdam: Jan van Eyck Akademie and De Balie, 1993), pp. 232–3.

²¹³ "Gödel came up with a famous thesis, which showed us the incompleteness of arithmetic. He showed us that each arithmetic sentence produced a sentence which cannot be proved; thus, the sentence is indecisive: you will never know if it is true or not within the system. It was already an attack, a postmodern attack against modernism, because mathematics was the highest modernist project ever: it tried to show that everything real was verifiable, and that for everything, a rule can be constructed." In Weibel, "Ways of Contextualisation," p. 230

²¹⁴ "Perhaps the world resists being reduced to mere resource because it is – not mother/matter/mutter – but coyote, a figure for the always problematic, always potent tie of meaning and bodies." Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature*, p. 201.

As Weibel stated, projects such as 'Malevich' (*The Last Futurist Exhibition* in 1986) and the *Salon de Fleurus* are in this very moment in art, science, and history, functioning like a daemon.

"People who work on endophysics are people who are inventing a new kind of daemon. I also try to support somebody like Malevich"²¹⁵ because he is a such a daemon in the art world today. I also try to find scientists and artists who can act as daemons and promoters of parallel worlds and viruses in science and the art world. I think they really exist; therefore, I am the camera trying to synchronize my motions with the motions of the daemon. What is really interesting about this topic – following Jeremy Bentham's panopticum – is the idea that everything is transparent, and everything is visible. Postmodernist art at its best, which already started with surrealism, shows us that you have variable zones of visibility. In postmodern societies, many things are not transparent; the 'social unconscious' of Frederic Jameson shows this clearly. All those transparent glass buildings that try to provide you with the illusion of total transparency are a panic reaction in relation to the social unconscious, to the fact that we have zones of visibility and zones of invisibility. That means that the panopticum envisaged by Bentham, where all is visible, and everything is transparent, no longer holds true. At the same time that you know you have variable zones of visibility, you also have variable zones of identity. We have multiple zones of individuality, and we have variable zones of visibility."²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Here, Weibel refers to the project of the reconstruction of *The Last Futurist Exhibition*, which took place in Belgrade and Ljubljana in 1985/1986 and was signed by Kasimir Malevich.

²¹⁶ See Marina Gržinić, "Multiple Zones of Individuality and Variable Zones of Visibility."

FOUR

7. SPECTRALIZATION OF REPRESENTATION: PHOTOGRAPHIC REAL EFFECT VS. HYPER-REAL MUTATIONS

The very process of negotiating the mutations of Post-Socialism requires the development of new visual and media strategies that problematize representation and self-representation. I would like to propose models and paradigms of alternating identification which question familiar forms of representation and allow the formation of new forms of articulation. However, and this is the interesting twist, such an interpretation can be also used for positioning and for raising questions of reflection and articulation of the post-'Eastern European condition.' There is something very definite about this condition: a specific pathology, a specific spectralization, of presence that develops precisely out of absence.

*Hysteria: physical presence, juridical absence, and AIDS:
physical absence, juridical presence*²¹⁷

I will examine the term 'presence' and its counterpart 'absence' from two perspectives.²¹⁸ The first is a historical perspective, as historical constructions situated within the framework of contemporary discourses, practices, and applications. My question

²¹⁷ See Marina Gržinić, "Hysteria: Physical Presence and Juridical Absence & AIDS: Physical Absence and Juridical Presence," in *Filozofski vestnik*, (*The Seen*), no. 2, Ljubljana 1996. pp. 44–65.

²¹⁸ See Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Who is Speaking Thus? Some Questions about Documentary Photography," in *The Event Horizon*, ed. Lorne Falk and Barbara Fischer (Toronto and Banff: The Coach House Press & Walter Philips Gallery, 1985), pp. 195–96.

is how this binary pair (which has played one of the key roles in post-structuralist theory) is to be conceived today, and to what extent it differs from that of the 19th century. I will approach these binary terms within the discursive contexts and representational systems of the 19th- and 20th-centuries in order to better grasp the roll they play, the assumptions they have fostered, and the belief systems they have confirmed. Essential is to determine to what degree the representational politics of presence/absence were/are used in the past and present.

Second, I will approach the duality of presence and absence semiotically, as part of a larger system of visual and representational communication: as both a conduit and an agent of ideologies – as a sign system which contains a contingency of visual and signifying codes, which, in turn, determine reception and instrumentality. The “aesthetics and politics of presence/absence” is (if we refer to Victor Burgin) fundamentally concerned with the articulation of representational politics.²¹⁹ If we are to answer these questions adequately, we must ask, what is the “real of representation?”²²⁰ We may claim that the binary terms of absence/presence function to ratify and affirm the complex ideological web that, at any moment in historical time, is perceived as reality ‘*tout court*.’ It is also for this reason that there is an initial reference to semiotics. According to Julia Kristeva, “what semiotics had discovered is the fact that there is a general social law, that this law is the symbolic dimension which is given in language and that every social practice offers a specific expression of that law.”²²¹ Kristeva “links semiotics to the social.

²¹⁹ This term was suggested by Abigail Solomon-Godeau in reference to Victor Burgin’s essays “Looking at Photographs” (1977) and “Photography, Phantasy and Function” (1980). See Solomon-Godeau, “Who is Speaking Thus? Some Questions about Documentary Photography,” p. 197.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

²²¹ *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 25. For a helpful account of Kristeva’s general approach to semiotic issues, see Heinz Paetzold, *The Discourse of the Postmodern and the Discourse of the Avant-Garde* (Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Akademie, 1994), pp. 58–70.

She calls societal law the 'symbolic,' which is deeply embedded in language; the task of semiotics is to study the various social practices which express this social law."²²² Thus, the function of semiotics is to "establish a heterogeneous logic of signifying practices and locate them by way of their subject in the historically determined relations of productions."²²³

To grasp the politics of representation of presence/absence, I will relocate it within the discursive contexts and representational systems of two illnesses: hysteria and AIDS, each representing the sexual illness *par excellence* of its century. Each illness functions, as I intend to show, not only in relation to the duality of presence and absence, but moreover, through specific ways of their representational politics, as a part of a larger visual-communication and social system.

Two additional important implications contribute to my decision to focus on hysteria and AIDS. First, both illnesses are used to describe phantasmatic and marginalized correspondences, acknowledging specific historical conditions. Hysteria embodied the mainstream discriminatory male characterization of women.²²⁴ AIDS, on the other hand, is overtly connected to another discriminatory mainstream image, that of gay men.

The second implication concerns my interest in analyzing the binary terms of presence/absence in connection with the way these terms correspond to a specific representational strategy, that focusing on the human body (i.e., representations of historically, gender and class-determined bodies). Hysteria, the illness of the incongruence of image and thought, was recognized as an illness only by making visible the woman's hysterical body. On the other hand, due to specific representational techniques practiced in the mass media for the general public,

²²² Paetzold, *The Discourse of the Postmodern and the Discourse of the Avant-Garde*, p. 58. See also Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur. Essai sur l'abjection* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1980).

²²³ *The Kristeva Reader*, p. 32.

²²⁴ See Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

AIDS coincides with new media technologies, virtual environments and/or cyberspace, which insist on and foster the erasure of the body. My thesis is that mass media representing AIDS foster the absence of the 'real' sick body, in a similar way that contemporaneity fosters the disembodiment of the subject within new media technologies.

Mainstream films and film documentaries portraying real persons suffering from or dying of AIDS are rare, although over the past several years, the film and video underground has developed a very important network for the presentation and distribution of such works. My interest, however, is situated in so-called mainstream and mass media images: the ones that shape and construct the view of the general public, and specific cultural forms and attitudes. Within such a context, we may say that the process has gone so far today that one of the theoretical options of the investigation of the politics of representation of our present is to find ways of putting the body, especially the (real) ill body, back into the picture.²²⁵

In the concluding section of this essay, I will attempt to synthesize various interplays between presence/absence and hysteria/AIDS by recycling N. Katherine Hayles' and Donna Haraway's applications of the semiotic square, which they presented in the 1990s. The semiotic square was developed by A. J. Greimas to disclose the implications inherent in binary relationships, thus making explicit the 'hidden' meanings which 'stabilize' and generate significance. In this specific theoretical context, following Donna Haraway's semiotic square of virtual space, and N. Katherine Hayles' semiotic square of the virtual body, I will attempt to present the semiotic square of AIDS.

²²⁵ See N. Katherine Hayles, "Embodied Virtuality: Or How to Put Bodies Back into the Picture," in *Immersed in Technology: Art and Virtual Environments*, ed. Mary Anne Moser and Douglas MacLoed (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p. 4.

The first part of the title of this essay refers to a formulation which appears in Norman Bryson's study, *The Logic of the Gaze*. There, Bryson interprets the work of Théodore Géricault, who, in the early 19th century (1822–23), studied the influence of mental states on the human face, and believed that the face accurately revealed the inner character, particularly in dementia and in cases of instant death. He made studies of inmates in hospitals and institutions for the criminally insane, where he himself spent time as a patient. Bryson claims that if the historic purpose of the portrait genre is to record a precise social position (a particular instance of status in the hierarchy of power), then Géricault's portraits of insane people, from the first moment, exhibit a contradiction. For Bryson, the portrait of the insane is, therefore, an impossible object and a categorical scandal, since the insane are those who have been displaced from any social hierarchy, who cannot be located on a social map, and whose portraits consequently cannot be painted. Bryson concluded that Géricault fused the categories of privilege and social void, society and asylum, and physical presence and juridical absence.²²⁶

Martin Charcot's photographs of hysterical patients taken at Salpêtrière Hospital (1877–80) served the same purpose.²²⁷ Due to the invisibility of the underlying pathology of hysteria, Charcot doubted that hysteria was a disease at all. In contrast to Pierre Janet, one of the early researchers of hysteria, who believed that paralysis occurred in the hysteric because s/he was unable to form an image of his/her limbs, and therefore was unable to move them, Charcot thought that hysterics were

²²⁶ See Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 143.

²²⁷ See Jo Anna Issak, "Mapping the Imaginary," in *The Event Horizon*, p. 137. In the first section of this chapter, I am following and reconsidering Issak's thesis regarding hysteria and representation from her essay "Mapping the Imaginary."



T. Géricault, *Insane Woman (Envy)*,
1822–23, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon

unable to obliterate pre-existing images of paralysis. For both, hysteria was a problem of representation: the incongruence of image and thought, a disease occasioned by a problem of representation. To anchor this mobile disease, Charcot enlisted the aid of photography. With photographs of the hysterics, Charcot attempted to make visible this disease that could not be acknowledged except through behavior or representations.²²⁸ Just like Charcot's photographs, Géricault's previous studies functioned "as the institution of the subject, in the case of the insane persons, within the visible."²²⁹

This institution of the subject within the visible was done according to a precisely chosen representational mode of the epoch: photography; therefore, using modes and techniques that over-determined visibility in a more general way within the period discussed. The categories of absence and presence are hence in a dual relation to the institution of the subject within the visible. Joan Copjec points out that hysteria is an illness of the imagination, and threatened knowledge. In confusing categories of real and unreal illnesses (true perception and false images), the physician was made a potential victim of trickery and deception, casting doubt on his senses that were

²²⁸ See Jo Anna Issak, "Mapping the Imaginary," pp. 137–138.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

the foundation of his knowledge.²³⁰ The issue, therefore, was not only to discover the relation between representations and hysteria, but to use the most appropriate regime of representation for this kind of restoration.

Charcot, who was an adherent of Géricault's theories, learned from his works, such as *The Insane Woman, Envy* (1822–23),



J. M. Charcot, *Attitudes Passionnelles: Menacé* from *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière*, 1877–80

“not how malicious mischief or envy would manifest itself on the human face, but what the photographs taken at Salpêtrière hospital 50 years after Géricault should look like.”²³¹

When looking at Géricault's “Envy” series, the art historian Gardner argued that Géricault's *Insane Women* had a peculiar hypnotic power, as well as an astonishing authenticity in the presentation of the psychic facts. For Gardner, *The Insane Women* are another example of the increasingly realistic core of Romantic painting.

The closer the Romantic involved himself with nature, sane or insane, the more clarity he gained, thus moving closer to the ‘truth.’ Increasingly, this meant painting the optical truth, as

²³⁰ Joan Copjec, “Flavit et Dissipati Sunt,” in *October* 18 (Autumn 1981), p. 23.

²³¹ Issak, “Mapping the Imaginary,” p. 142.

well as truth with regard to "the way things are."²³² What Charcot learned from Géricault was not the 'authenticity in presentation of psychic fact,' but the Renaissance notion of the artist who is instituting the visible within a rationalized system of perceptual codes.²³³ Photography, then theorized as both the outcome and the servant of positivism (objective, unmediated and actually imprinted by the light rays of the original form), was the ideal representational mode to utilize in order to bring the disease into a discursive construction.²³⁴

In summarizing Charcot's and Géricault's methodologies, I would conclude first that a physical presence was not a question of authenticity in the presentation of psychic facts, but was, in the 19th century, a process of instituting the visible within a rationalized system of perceptual codes. In the case of Charcot, this was a Renaissance notion: of the artist as a quantifier within the medium of photography, the latter theorized as both the product of, and subordinate to, positivism. If the reference to hysteria is understood as a blind spot in the positivist genealogy of illnesses, then we can theorize Charcot's attempt as a method to bring something, which previously had not been subject to the rules of visibility, into the system of 'presence' and representation. Jo Anna Isaak argues that Charcot did this through his reference to Renaissance paintings, utilizing Renaissance perceptual codes, such as linear perspective. Linear perspective was used to facilitate impersonal objective statements producing identical meanings within all viewers, referring to cumulative and repeatable effects.²³⁵ It is unnecessary to go into details concerning the Renaissance perspective system. However, I would like to stress, as Isaak implies, that perspective was extremely useful to Europeans, who needed to develop a visual language of newly discovered territories (in order to possess them).

²³² Louise Gardner, *Art Through the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), p. 737.

²³³ Issak, "Mapping the Imaginary," p. 142.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

²³⁵ Samuel Edgerton, "The Renaissance Artist as Quantifier," in *The Percep-*

This, however, was the case in the 19th century; but how do these processes operate today? I will draw a parallel between the categories of absence/presence and the different systems of representation with regard to AIDS, attempting in this way to chart the process, or perhaps progress, of the institution of the subject within the visible today. AIDS also presents the problem of homogenous representation and depiction: the incongruence of the image and the gaze. In the case of AIDS, in contrast to hysteria, the underlying pathology of the disease is horribly visible, and the whole process of representation and visibility therefore operates differently, in an effort to erase and/or conceal the conspicuous nature of the disease. The 'identification' of the spectator with a sick person, or with the disease of AIDS itself, is transferred to a metonymy, whose purpose is to hide the presence of the 'real' sick body. Those persons who are afflicted with AIDS are, in general, listened to rather than looked at.

An artistic (creative) articulation of the above thesis is the feature film, *Blue*, directed by Derek Jarman in 1993. For 75 minutes, a blue screen is projected before the spectator. It is the sole image throughout the film, which provides a canvas for the audience, who listen to evocative words, music and sounds. Various methods of communicating the text are used in the film: inner speech, repetitious preoccupying phrases, unconscious spoken thoughts.²³⁶ My interest lies not in a sociological reading or reinterpretation of the text in the film, but in the representational system superimposing and depicting the text in the film on the blue-colored canvas.²³⁷

tion of Pictures, Vol. I., ed. Margaret A. Hagen (New York: Academic Press, 1980), p. 182.

²³⁶ The text in the film is about AIDS, about dying from AIDS, and the inner feelings of a sick person who knows exactly that his/her end is near. Jarman develops a strong critique about the hospitalization process of a person suffering from AIDS, about the quantity of drugs needed to slow down not the disease, but the process of dying, and, last but not least, about the whole social system (medical, social and legal), which is unfavourable to persons affected

In Jarman's film, the institution of the subject within the visible is represented by the disembodied voice of an ill person who deliriously speaks throughout the film, anchoring the disease in the field of discourse. If we make a parallel between this regime and the one depicting hysteria, we may posit that AIDS is represented by the physical absence of an actually sick body. Nevertheless, an urgent appeal for juridical (judicial) presence and for legal rights in the various sectors of society which cross or border the sick body pervades the text of the film. A similar example is, this time, a mainstream film about AIDS: *Philadelphia* (directed by Jonathan Demme in 1994). In the film, the actor Tom Hanks portrays a character who is a pale image of an authentic AIDS patient. In spite the absence of an 'authentically sick body' on the level of representation, we are confronted with, nevertheless, in this particular film, a clear fight for juridical presence, and for the rights pertaining to juridical proceedings of those persons inflicted with AIDS, especially gay men.²³⁸

The binary terms of presence-absence in relation to the representation of the sick body and its social counterpart in the juridical system culminate in two ways simultaneously: through technological interventions and discursive practices. It is possible, however, to conceive of the relation of a social area in which the collision of bodies and reproductive technology (e.g., photography, film) takes place within the politics of power as it functions through the juridical system. Such a relation is also that between the invention/discovery of photography and the logic of the photograph's regime of representation with

by AIDS. Jarman meticulously describes the whole personal drama of a sick person, especially the loss of vision and impending blindness: "My retina is a distant planet. I played this scenario for the last six years. ... My vision will never come back ... The virus rages, I have no friends now. I lost the sight ... I shall not win the battle with the virus ..."— Citation from the film *Blue*.

²³⁷ Jarman: "I am helpless. I can't see him. Just the sound. In the pandemonium of the image I present you the universe of blue." — Citation from the film *Blue*.

²³⁸ Andrew Beckett (actor Tom Hanks) is a young lawyer with a splendid career before him, who is suddenly found incompetent by the law firm for

hysteria, on the one hand, and the invention of new technologies/media and their regimes of representation with AIDS, on the other. What I am proposing here is not to recuperate some notion of pure investment of the category of absence and its counterpart – presence, but to outline the discursive-visual terrain in which such issues have functioned, both in the past and in the present. In both cases, the camera, photography and film produce representations – iconic signs – translating the actual into the representational via the categories of absence/presence. The meanings ascribed to the categories of absence and presence, sometimes inconsistent, amorphous and epistemologically vague, are constantly in flux, repositioned and reoriented, and involve larger discourses which engender them. The photographs of incarcerated hysterics commissioned by Dr. Charcot “prove and demonstrate the speculative nature and morphology of hysteria.”²³⁹ The success of photography as a technology for and of image-making in anchoring the disease

which he works. Beckett knows that the real reason is that he is gay and has AIDS. Beckett decides to fight and to defend his professional reputation, and through this act, the rights of other gay people with AIDS. Joe Miller (actor Denzel Washington), a black lawyer of high reputation, at first decides not to take the case because of his own personal prejudices against gay people with AIDS, but finally accepts the case. One of the most striking conclusions of the trial, resulting from Miller’s conduct of the case in court, is that gay people and AIDS are subjected to a double process of injustice, and that the fight for juridical rights in the case of gay people with AIDS is, more generally speaking, also a fight for gay rights against society’s prejudices.

Joe Miller: “People with AIDS are submitted to social death which precedes the physical death ... What is it all about? ... About our fears of homosexuals.” The judge: “Mr. Miller, justice is blind regarding race and sex in this courtroom!” Miller: “But your Honor, we are not living in this courtroom.” – Citation from the film *Philadelphia*.

This specific situation recalls that modernity as a cultural and social project brought about the distinction between law and morality. It makes sense to measure the legal and political acts of the state against the criteria of morality, but it is not possible to conflate them into one sphere.

²³⁹ Solomon-Godeau, “Who is Speaking Thus? Some Questions about Documentary Photography,” p. 201.

had precisely to do with its confirmatory aspects. The latter enabled photography to succeed in rapid expansion and assimilation within the discourses of knowledge and power. This structural congruence of different viewpoints (i.e., the eye of the photographer, the eye of the camera and the spectator's eye) in photography covers the quality of pure, but delusory presence.²⁴⁰ Gardner spoke of Géricault's increasingly realistic core of representation, i.e., of his obsessively intentional and representational methods of acquiring the optical truth – the truth of the way things 'were.' In analyzing the mechanisms internal to the media apparatus in question (i.e., photography), Abigail Solomon-Godeau claims that the most important is the "reality effect," and that "a further structuring instance lies in the perspective system of representation built into camera optics in photography's infancy."²⁴¹ Modeled on the classical system of the single point monocular perspective invented in the Renaissance, camera optics were designed to yield an analogous pictorial structure. As Abigail Solomon-Godeau argues, natural vision and perception have no vanishing point, are binocular, without boundaries, in constant motion and marked by the loss of clarity in the periphery. The camera image, like many Renaissance paintings, offers a static, uniform field in which orthogonals converge at a single vanishing point.²⁴² "The world is no longer an 'open and unbound horizon.' Limited by the framing, lined up, put at the proper distance, the world offers itself up as an object endowed with meaning, an intentional object, implied by, and implying the action of the 'subject' which sights it."²⁴³ Furthermore, if we consider the act of looking at a photograph with respect to gender or the operations of the psyche (e.g., the complex acts of projection, voyeurism, fantasy and desires that

²⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 208–209.

²⁴¹ Ibid., p. 209.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," in *Apparatus*, ed. Theresa Hak (New York: Kyung Cha, Tanam Press, 1980), p. 26.

inform our seeing), we cannot, as Solomon-Godeau argues, abandon the earlier, innocent belief that the camera presents us with visual facts that are simply 'out there,' and which we now disinterestedly observe and register. We have to accept that there are ideological effects inherent to the photographic apparatus, and that these effects influence relations, scopic commands, and the confirmation or displacement of subject positions.

With regard to the first established connection between representation, photography and hysteria, we may conclude that the fusion of physical presence and juridical absence in the photographs of the hysterics also offers a counter-reading. On the one hand, this specific institution of the subject within the visible was possible, or was the result of the specific ideological mechanisms of the optical truth intrinsic to the photographic apparatus. On the other hand, this same apparatus reinforced the position of juridical absence of the insane person. As Pierre Bourdieu commented, discussing the social uses of photography: "In stamping photography with the patent of realism, society does nothing but confirm itself in the tautological certainty that an image of reality that conforms to its own representation of objectivity is truly objective."²⁴⁴

AIDS: physical absence and juridical presence

Thus far, I have presented (with reference to Jo Anna Issak and Abigail Solomon-Godeau) the relationships between the invention/discovery of photography, hysteria and the notions of absence/presence, as well as those of physical presence and juridical absence. I shall proceed with the relationships between the logic of representation of the new technologies/media and the representation of AIDS.

²⁴⁴ Cited in Rosalind Krauss, "A note on Photography and the Simulacra," in *October* 31 (Winter 1984), p. 57.

People afflicted with AIDS show dramatic visual signs of bodily deterioration (in the advanced stages of the disease): the disintegration of the skin, sarcomas, blindness, and the degeneration of the body as a whole. Jarman has incorporated into the film *Blue* his own blindness, a consequence of AIDS. Jarman chooses to depict this with a blue canvas: the zero degree of representation. Jarman moved from the disintegration of film structure to that of the viewer's sight. The institution of the subject suffering with AIDS within the visible is carried out by the absence of a 'truly sick body.' Moreover, Derek Jarman not only refused to reiterate the conventional pieties surrounding the representations of individuals suffering with AIDS, but brought to light (paraphrasing Sally Stein) the hidden agendas inscribed in the particular mode of representation of our culture and times.²⁴⁵ In the film *Blue*, this is carried out more with the strategically incorporated logic of the visualization of new media, and the regime of visibility carried out by new media technologies, rather than the medium itself: film.

Jarman successfully conveys the complexities that support information systems and various subject positions via the way in which meaning and identities are constructed and endlessly re-negotiated. Using the establishment of blindness in the film as the zero degree of representation, Jarman subverts some of the basic parameters of the new paradigm of visuality produced by new technology and the position of the eyewitness within it. Today, all methods of proving a statement depend on technological instruments and tools, and the constitution of scientific 'truth' is, to a profound degree, mediated by technology.²⁴⁶ Pragmatic acceptance of axioms and specific methods of proof have entered a variety of sciences. Scientific statements have to be effectuated and are thus decisively mediated by technol-

²⁴⁵ Sally Stein, "Making Connections With The Camera: Photography and Social Mobility in the Career of Jacob Riis," in *Afterimage*, Vol. 10, No. 10, (May 1983), p. 14.

²⁴⁶ See Paetzold, *The Discourse of the Postmodern and the Discourse of the Avant-Garde*, pp. 14-21.

ogy. Pragmatic performativity is the post-modern sense of truth.²⁴⁷ Lyotard emphasizes repeatedly the increase of acquiring scientific knowledge through its mediation with technology. The whole process is thus a process of seeing through its mediation through technology.²⁴⁸

Allow me to clarify, as well, this process 'of seeing through its mediation through technology' by returning for a moment to photography and by summarizing its inner principle by referring to Paul Virilio (despite the fact that he was not referring here to photography). "Everything I see is in principle within my reach, at least within reach of my sight, marked on the map of the 'I can.'"²⁴⁹ Photography enables the encoding of a topographical memory by establishing a dialectical loop between seeing and mapping. As Virilio claims, it is possible to speak of generations of vision, and even of visual heredity from one generation to the next. However, following Virilio²⁵⁰, the perception developed by new media and technologies (called the 'logistics of perception') destroyed these earlier modes of representation preserved in the 'I can' of seeing. The logistics of perception inaugurates the production of a vision machine and the possibility of achieving sightless vision, whereby a videocamera or virtual technology would be controlled by a computer. Today, new media apparatus (from virtual reality to cyberspace) confer upon us a whole range of visual prosthetics which confront us with an ever-changing positioning of the subject. Changes are effectuated within our bodies, as well, as we are facing a systematic 'production' of blindness, and an absence of certainty within the visibility of our world. As Virilio would say, the bulk of what I see is no longer within my reach. We have to ask ourselves: What does one see when one's eyes, depending on the

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

²⁴⁸ See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 42–52.

²⁴⁹ Paul Virilio, *Vision Machine* (London and Bloomington, Indiana: British Film Institute and Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 7.

²⁵⁰ Ibid. See also chapters 1 and 2.

instruments of new technology, are reduced to a state of rigid and practically invariable structural immobility?

Nonetheless, this is only one side of the paradigm of new media technology. On the other hand, in the 20th century, science is increasingly permeated by technology. "Technological instruments and apparatuses hold a central role within scientific research processes. These technological tools cost huge amounts of money. Consequently, the state and political institutions function as important and decisive mediators in the accomplishment of scientific knowledge. The process of knowledge is increasingly judged in terms of input (quantity) and output (quality). Science is linked to the system of political power."²⁵¹

The blindness of the naked human eye is thus paradoxically reinforced by the growing tendency to use increasingly sophisticated electronic technologies, not only in science, but also in the leading ideological and repressive state apparatus (particularly within the legal system and among the police). Virilio speaks of hyper-realist representational models within the police and legal systems, to the extent that human witnesses are losing their credibility; the human eye no longer remains an eyewitness. On the one side of the paradigm of new media technology, we are witnessing the systematic production of blindness, and on the other, the frightening hyper-realism of a system of total visibility, which is particularly reinforced in legal and police procedures.

The tendency of the leading scopic regime of new media technologies is to produce blindness, while simultaneously creating a whole range of techniques to produce the credibility of the presence of objects and humans, rather than trying to demonstrate their real existence. Today, this latter process may be illustrated with military and espionage strategies: "It is more vital to trick the enemy about the virtuality of the missile's

²⁵¹ Paetzold, *The Discourse of the Postmodern and the Discourse of the Avant-Garde*, p. 15.

passage, about the very credibility of its presence, than to confuse him about the reality of its existence."²⁵²

These primary features which are currently produced by new media technology (e.g., blindness of the natural human eye, hyper-realism in legal and police procedures, and a whole range of techniques for producing the credibility of the presence of objects, people, etc.) are strategically incorporated and subverted in the film *Blue*. With the establishment of blindness in the film via the blue canvas as the zero degree of representation, Jarman emphasizes this duality. The absence of the sick body and furthermore, of *any* physical body in the film, creates the illusion of total disembodiment, and is paradoxically a subversive answer to the constant production of disembodiment through new technologies.

The manufactured illusion of disembodiment thus raises the question which I posed at the beginning of this essay: "How do we put bodies back into the picture?"²⁵³ One possible answer is, based on Jarman's film *Blue*: as juridical presence. The bodies of people infected with AIDS, 'objects' already lost, are shaped by their very absence. On the other hand, with the text heard throughout the film, thoroughly detailed in the existential, medical and legal particularities of the postmodern condition of persons suffering from AIDS, a clear demand is made for juridical presence and the rights of those afflicted with AIDS, within the structures of power in contemporary society. Through this relationship between the logic of representation of the new technologies/media and the representation of AIDS, it is therefore possible to elaborate a different logic of representation of absence/presence as was previously proposed in the case of hysteria. Instead of physical presence and juridical absence, physical absence and legal presence is produced. Physical absence and legal presence, as proposed by Jarman,

²⁵² See Virilio, *Vision Machine*, pp. 43–44.

²⁵³ Hayles, "Embodied Virtuality: Or How to Put Bodies Back into the Picture," p. 4

subvert the logic of a mass-produced simulated presence on the one hand, and a mass blindness of the 'natural' human eye on the other.

Looking to the binary pair of presence/absence in connection with the film *Blue*, and with the new media/virtual environments, one may also argue that the common characteristics of emerging technologies and virtual environments are the elimination of duration – the collapse of time into real time. In the film *Blue*, these characteristics serve as reminders of the dimension of time, which, as Paul Virilio suggests, is under siege by real time technologies. "They kill 'present' time by isolating its presence here and now for the sake of another commutative space that is no longer composed of our 'concrete presence' in the world, but of a 'discrete telepresence' whose enigma remains forever intact."²⁵⁴

The experiential reception of the image

If a "bounded image is seen from a distance ... it exists unto itself and offers a perceptual experience. Images that implicate the viewer in some way, however, as is the case with interactive or immersive media, are unbounded. They require experiential cognition. The latter puts the critical viewer in an untenable position: one must assimilate an image to comprehend it, yet it must also be dismantled in order to reflect upon it."²⁵⁵ For Timothy Druckrey, the discursive operations of information systems in the late 20th century, as proffered through cyberspace, are characterized by going beyond identity and meaning

²⁵⁴ Paul Virilio, "The Third Interval: A Critical Transition," in *Re-thinking Technologies*, ed. Verena Andermatt Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 4.

²⁵⁵ Timothy Druckrey, "The Transient Image," in *A Symposium on the Changing Status of the Image*, Banff, Canada, November 4 and 5, 1994, cited in: Mary Anne Moser's, "Introduction" to *Immersed in Technology: Art and Virtual Environments*, p. XVIII.

formations to provide a catalyst for agency, and therefore empowerment. The creative potential of different visual systems is represented through an interface, or 'connections'.²⁵⁶ Meaning and phenomenology, representation and perception, are merged. The moment of reading an image within such a system has the effect "not as a navigation of the image, but of a lived moment, so that the efficacy of an image is equal to the experience of it."²⁵⁷ Thus, it is the lived moment of being connected which is charged with possibilities. "It is the passion of this lived moment of connection between the user, part of the real world, and the controlled system of predictable outcomes encoded into the software of the symbolic, accessed through the hardware, which offers scope for disruptive nihilistic behavior."²⁵⁸ The film *Blue* introduces these questions of the re-examination of the human body experientially in an age of virtuality, which is concerned with the apparent de-materialization of experience. Scrutinizing the reception of the blue canvas in more detail, we may argue that it is framed as a film screen, but due to its insistent and suspended immateriality, which lasts for more than an hour, the blue canvas functions as an immersive spatial container, which slowly forces the viewer into a specific interactivity – an immersion of sight and body. The film confirms Druckrey's statement regarding the reception of the cinematic image by the viewer that has not only the effect of navigation by the image, but of a lived moment. The effect of the image is an experience of the encounter not simply with the blue space, but with a person who is dying of AIDS, embodied through his proper experientiality within the blue canvas before us. This question can be

²⁵⁶ I am referring here to Helen Cadwallader's report and evaluation of the presentation of Timothy Druckrey's paper, "Crash, Crisis, Containment and Cyberia," given at the *5th International Conference on Cyberspace, Cyberconf*, Madrid, June 1996, in: Helen Cadwallader, '5th International Conference on Cyberspace', *Mute*, No. 6, London 1996, p. 4.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

re-phrased to ask: How does this specific practice of text/image relate to society? The practical dimension is found in emphasizing the practical impact, which includes, first and foremost, a reinforcement of experience centered in personal subjectivity. There is a demand for a 'subjectivity' which perceives the contradictions within the social body because this subjectivity explores its own desires and drives.²⁵⁹

The implications of this shift to the experiential from the perceptual reception of the image may be drawn from Gianni Vattimo's juxtapositioning of Walter Benjamin and Martin Heidegger. Vattimo tried to explain the essence of Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) through Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1936), emphasizing that both accentuate the disorientation in contemporary perceptions of art as the direct result of contemporary art works. For Heidegger, as well as for Benjamin, the essence of technology is the manipulation of all things. Technology expresses simultaneously the completion and the end of metaphysics. Benjamin as seen through Heidegger, and Heidegger interpreted via Benjamin, offer new aesthetic concepts that can and will take on the challenges of a postmodern society, which is a society of mass media conglomeration. Benjamin purportedly links the experience of art within the media society, with the experience of a 'shock,' whilst Heidegger makes use of the term '*stoss*' (translating to 'blow'). 'Shock' and '*stoss*' mirror the urbanites' nervous and intellectual fluctuations, inconstancies and hypersensitivity. Vattimo argues that in aesthetics, a shift from the focus on work to a focus on experience must occur.²⁶⁰ This is just what we

²⁵⁹ Paetzold, *The Discourse of the Postmodern and the Discourse of the Avant-Garde*, p. 63.

²⁶⁰ See Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 58. For a helpful account of this, see Paetzold, "Vattimo and the 'Weak' Being," in Paetzold, *The Discourse of the Postmodern and the Discourse of the Avant-Garde*, pp. 44-45.

witness in the film *Blue*. Jarman's dismantling of the image, resulting in its zero point, causes an overlap of the experience of a person with AIDS with the viewer's experience of immersion in the blue canvas.

The semiotic square and AIDS

In this final section, I have recycled the semiotic square, as it was re-developed and re-designed by N. Katherine Hayles and Donna Haraway in the 1990s to re-examine the implications inherent in the selected binary pairs, and to make explicit the hidden terms that help to stabilize meaning and generate significance in the their backgrounds.

The semiotic square is a technique of discursive analysis, which begins with the choice of a binary pair.²⁶¹ Presence and absence can form a pair, and the primary duality of such a square. The duality of presence and absence in the semiotic square signifies concepts in dynamic interplay with each other, rather than as independently existing terms. The purpose of choosing the second duality is to detect the implications contained in the first pair. Since my interest lies in representations of the body in relation to presence/absence within the juridical terrain, I will choose hysteria (physical presence, juridical absence) as the third term. The fourth term is generated by taking the negative of hysteria: AIDS (physical absence, juridical presence).

Since the interplay between presence and absence generates a specific material inscription in the social-political context (through the juridical system and other apparatus connected with law), the axis connecting these terms should be named as the juridical (material) inscription:

²⁶¹ I am, to a large extent, relying on the application of A. J. Greimas' semiotic square, developed by N. Katherine Hayles. See N. Katherine Hayles, "Embodied Virtuality: Or How to Put Bodies Back into the Picture," pp. 7-10.

juridical (material) inscription

Presence \longleftrightarrow Absence

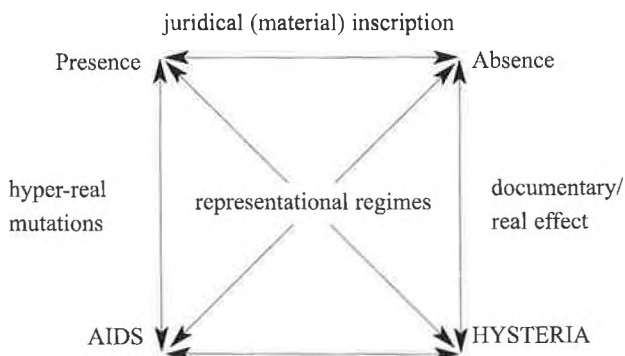
The interplay between hysteria and AIDS generates different representational inscriptions; the axis connecting these terms should be named as representational regimes:

representational regimes

AIDS \longleftrightarrow Hysteria

Now that both sets of duality are in place, the semiotic square can be used to investigate the implications of the shift from the real effect of photography to the impact of the virtuality of new media technologies towards different systems of representation, in particular, a shift towards different ways of inscribing the body within the visible and the political context.

These implications are made explicit by considering the relationships that connect different terms.



The diagonal connecting presence with hysteria can be labelled 'replication.'²⁶² Where presence and hysteria coincide, object and form are united without dissonance or separation. This is the

²⁶² Ibid., p. 9.

realm of mimesis, ruled by common sense assumptions about objects that retain their form. The diagonal connecting absence and AIDS can be labelled 'disruption'.²⁶³ Just as absence disrupts the abundance of presence, AIDS disrupts the mimesis effect that has, until now, been sufficient to anchor the disease within the social field, making it visible, but not going much farther than that. The vertical axis connecting absence and hysteria alludes to the 'real' effect of documentary photography. We can label the vertical axis connecting presence and AIDS (as a result of the interplay between the axes of juridical material inscriptions with representational regimes) hyper-real mutations. When AIDS becomes physically manifested in an image, it 'disappears'; the image is disembodied. AIDS is thus capable of disrupting the established and accepted conformity of the photographic documentary effect of hysteria at any moment.

The four nodes of the semiotic square, according to Hayles, recall the four quadrants of a Cartesian graph, which helps to explain why the positive term of the second pair, hysteria, is placed on the lower right, rather than lower left.²⁶⁴ In Cartesian grids, the lower right quadrant represents a positive x-value combined with the negative y-value.

We should recall that hysteria is generated by the absence of the positive first term: presence. The fourth term, AIDS, is produced by the negative of the third term, hysteria, which is already marked by negativity. "Thus the fourth term represents a negation of negation. Because of this double negation, it is the least explicitly specified of all the four terms and therefore the most productive of new complications and insights."²⁶⁵ It is from the double (elusive) negativity of the fourth term that the 'new' is likely to emerge. For the fourth term carries within it the most open and critical potentiality.²⁶⁶

²⁶³ Ibid.

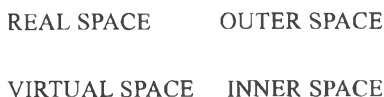
²⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 10. Numerous commentators, including Fredric Jameson and Shoshana Felman, have pointed this out.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

The same semiotic square was used by Donna Haraway to travel to Virtual Space: "To get through the artifactual to elsewhere, it would help to have a little travel machine that also functions as a map." (A. J. Greimas' "infamous" [Haraway's term] semiotic square.)²⁶⁷ The semiotic square, as Haraway stated, so subtle in the hands of Frederic Jameson²⁶⁸, was used in a more rigid and literal way in her essay: to keep four spaces in differential and relational separation, while she explored how certain local/global struggles for meanings and embodiments of nature occur within them. The four regions through which Haraway moved were: Real Space or Earth; Outer Space or the Extraterrestrial; Inner Space or the Body; and finally, Virtual Space or the SF world. Virtual Space takes the same position as AIDS in my semiotic square.

Donna Haraway's semiotic square of Virtual Space from *The Promises of Monsters*:



What can we learn from such an application of the semiotic square? It schematically demonstrates possible relations that can emerge when the juridical realm and representation influence each other, thus providing a theoretical framework in which such apparently diverse ideas can be understood as different manifestations of the same underlying phenomena. The devastating effects that this interplay between AIDS and presence within the realm of representation can have on traditional concepts of identity appear in different modes. One mode shows

²⁶⁷ See Donna Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others" in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula A. Treichler (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 304.

²⁶⁸ Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," p. 305. See also Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).

that the physical durability of the body is just an illusion. On the one hand, the specific institution of the subject within the visible established in hysteria was possible (or at least was the result of a specific ideological mechanism of the optical 'truth,' which is intrinsic to the photographic apparatus). On the other hand, this same apparatus reinforced the position of the juridical absence of the hysterical person. The disruption of the visibility of hysteria by AIDS is therefore as inevitable as, at present and in most cases, the linkage of AIDS with death.

No person in the film *Blue*, including the narrator, is seen on screen. As viewers, we are eavesdroppers in a one-sided conversation from places and persons totally outside the depicted fictitious space of the film – a space that is both familiar and alien to that occupied by the audience. The viewer's initial *jouissance*, or sense of wholeness, is disrupted when it becomes evident that the camera, not the viewer, controls the gaze. In *Blue*, this occurs from the very first moment. Throughout the film, we await the point of subversion, for the unmasking by the camera – but only the color blue remains. Thus, the highlighting of the information which the camera controls causes intense displeasure for the viewer. The narrative authority, often signified by the soundtrack of a voiceover, is displaced from its naturalized associations to the 'Other' by a radical dispersion of narrative space. This radical decentralization of the narrative space is produced by the absence of a visible physical presence. In a traditional narrative form, the speaker would most likely be shown. The film forces the viewer to ask 'who is speaking?' and to dismantle traditional hegemonic narrative structures. The speaker, whom the film is about, does not emerge as a subject, but is referred to indirectly, and is therefore present by his absence, existing as a void in the text. Maybe this alternating identification is what Jarman was implying with *Blue*'s extreme immersion into discursivity, which allows people afflicted with AIDS not only to be represented differently, but also to be the ones who will participate in the production and articulation of new meanings concerning their own condition.

8. SPECTRALIZATION OF SPACE: THE SPACE OF THE REAL AND THE VIRTUAL SPACE

Simultaneous collective reception and communication processes in cyberspace have become the central determining metaphor for the new media environment. What is happening on the Internet is increasingly seen and utilized as the new public space. The is becoming the space which is not simply parallel to the public one, but increasingly a substitute for it. So-called public opinion is formulated via the Internet and perhaps substituting the actual. It is the gradual process of substituting the *res publica* with random information, and public opinion with re-forwarding of e-mail communications.

In the beginning of 1997, opposition forces and students protested in Belgrade because the party in power (led by Slobodan Milošević) refused to recognize the victory of the opposition forces in the municipal elections of Belgrade. The first-hand information transmitted initially via e-mails, and then spread through the WWW – lacking additional analysis and reflection (e.g., regarding the actual events in Belgrade, and the participants in the protests) – seemed to be enough to lead some of the ‘inhabitants’ of the WWW to proclaim that they were also taking part in the ‘Serbian Revolution’ – simply because they were obtaining first-hand and eyewitness information through the web. Every day, the Internet seems to come closer to attaining the position of the prime media and ideological communication force of the so-called ‘New World Order’ called Post-Democracy.²⁶⁹

We need to reconsider both the public space – the new media space – and the actors, agents and subjects within it, in their processes of transformation. We have to ask ourselves, in the manner of Frederic Jameson, what space, which actors, whose agents and what subjects?

²⁶⁹ See “Post-democracy, Politics and Philosophy,” an interview with Jacques Rancière, in *Angelaki*, 1 : 3, London 1994.

I lived through the ten-day war in Slovenia via the television. At that time, in June 1991, TV Slovenia was broadcasting 24 hours a day, and I had my television on continuously. Even when I managed to snatch an hour's sleep, the TV set stayed on. I just turned down the volume. It kept the vigil for me, and I would wake regularly on the hour to hear how the war was 'progressing.' The only time I turned my television off was when I ran down to the cellar with my infant son to hide from a potential air raid on Ljubljana by the Yugoslavian Army, at that time still known as the 'People's Army.' When the war in Slovenia stopped, rumors started spreading that the bombing business had been staged to impress the foreign press, and, with them, the rest of the world, in the hope of moving foreign politicians into action, since Europe (it was said) would never allow Ljubljana to be bombed. It was said that the more frequently the foreign press reported running into air-raid shelters, the less likely it was Ljubljana would actually be bombed. We kept repeating this to ourselves (from Ljubljana to Vukovar to Sarajevo, Srebrenica and so on): that Western Europe, European peace movements, civil associations and, last but not least, millions of TV viewers and other 'squatters' would be dumbfounded by the images on TV. These horrors were happening not somewhere in 'far-away Russia'²⁷¹, but in the heart of Europe. Edmond Couchot²⁷² taught us that turning on the TV set actually means establishing a connection with the place of broadcast and being literally and continually present at the birth of the

²⁷⁰ See M. Gržinić, "The Media and the War," in *Art and Design*, No. 35 (New Art From Eastern Europe, Identity and Conflict), London 1994, pp. 19–28.

²⁷¹ When part of this text was originally written, in December 1992 and January 1993, this statement seemed to be only a cynical allegory. With the war in Chechnya in 1995–96, 1999–2000, it turned out to be a frightening reality.

²⁷² See Edmond Couchot, "La question du temps dans les techniques électroniques et numériques de l'image," in *3e Semaine Internationale de Vidéo* (Genève: Centre Saint-Gervais, 1989), pp. 19–21.

picture. The television picture materializes literally because of a short circuit between the place of transmission and the place of reception. But due to the speed of transmission of the electronic signal, the television picture is practically simultaneous, and we are not cognizant of the time lag. Thus we can, with the aid of television, or more precisely, with the aid of the television video signal, establish a physical contact with the most traumatic events of our time.

I experienced this physical contact when watching the 'Romanian Revolution' on television, which was broadcast, at least in the beginning, 'live' into the world, thanks to Belgrade. The TV viewer experiences events as though they are happening in the here and now, in front of her/his eyes, and not perhaps a thousand miles away in a different time and place. But reliance on this almost physical contact between the viewer and television to be contact which will rouse the world, turned out to be an outstanding theoretical construct, and an erroneous empirical one.

It may be true, as René Berger says, that television has freed us from physically moving from one place to another, and has changed us into 'squatters' of satellite and cable television²⁷³; but it has also saved us from much turmoil. On the threshold of the third millennium, information about the war crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina is, thanks to a certain short-circuit, not only simultaneously broadcast, but also simultaneously tolerated in all parts of the world (at least until the war is really over, and this is no longer merely wishful thinking).

The majority of European and world TV viewers know there is a war raging in Bosnia. As long as this is documented in the media, we can suppose that they will not forget about Bosnia. Or maybe they will. Precisely because it is always exposed and, thanks to television, simultaneously so close and yet so far away. We are witnessing the paradox of television aesthetics. The aesthetics which have offered us the coordinates of

²⁷³ See René Berger, "Entre Magie et Voyance," in *3e Semaine Internationale de Vidéo*, pp. 11-14.

time and place as interminable electronic scanning, and the world as a simultaneous recording and transmission, have turned us away from remembering and establishing a balance between the past and the future in relation to the almost obsessive present of the television medium. The notion of time, according to J. G. Ballard²⁷⁴, has started to die out. Following the 1930s and 1940s, after decades of accelerated changes, the Holocaust of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, eradicated, at least symbolically, the concept of the future. If the future died in the 1950s with the explosion of the atomic bomb, in the 1970s, people literally lost interest in the future, as well as in the past. The events of the 1980s showed us that the concept of time is dismantled. The electronic media of the 1990s show us that not much time is left.

The conflict in the Balkans makes a mockery of the supposed omnipotence of the media. The old notion that a counter-effect can be achieved by showing horrifying visual material is no longer true. Each time, it seems as though events in Bosnia have reached their peak, and the TV broadcasts even greater horrors, everyday TV reporting seems inconsistent with the logic of the TV informative-realistic effect. It seems that the reports produce fiction: that the escalation of horrors (concentration camps, massacres, thousands of raped Muslim women) transforms fact into fiction. In 1987, Ernie Tee wrote in the catalogue for the exhibition *Art for Television* that film was the medium of illusion, television the medium of reality and video the medium of metamorphoses²⁷⁵, but with the war in Bosnia, television has become the medium of fiction. Sensationalism drew the short straw in this war. Daily reports from the battle zones are not sufficient coverage of the events in Bosnia. Under the noses of Europe and America, it is as if the media

²⁷⁴ See J. G. Ballard, "Myths of the Near Future," in *ZG*, special number, New York 1988.

²⁷⁵ Ernie Tee, "The Irreality of Dance," in *The Arts for Television*, ed. Kathy Rae Huffman and Dorine Mignot (Los Angeles and Amsterdam: The Museum of Contemporary Art, and Stedelijk Museum, 1987), p. 62.

were frightened of offering a different slant on the events happening in Bosnia.

Perhaps this war also shows us another internal media process, in particular a process of society? This war can be also seen in another way. According to Peter Weibel, we can think about this war in relation to the idea of what it means when we leave a historically defined position which imitates (even in the arts) the natural world of our senses.²⁷⁶ Our experience of place, position and so on depends on what we call natural interface: the body is, for example, a natural interface, and therefore we have a natural approach to space and time. Our interpretation of the media is experienced through natural interfaces. Our senses and organs are being channeled and mediated by an ideology of naturality, neglecting the artificiality of the media. But the media of our time shows us that we have the possibility of an artificial interface, which is the media. According to Weibel, when McLuhan defined media as an extension of man, he just missed calling it an artificial extension.²⁷⁷ And in this artificial media space, we see that the basic concept of how to construct space and time are examples of non-naturality. The media world is dominated by non-identity, or difference. The 'real' is replaced by the 'virtually' real.

Necessity is replaced by possibility or contingency.²⁷⁸ Thus we are obliged to think about 'reality' precisely as 'unreality' in a manner of speaking, a socially constructed fiction (i.e., the war in Bosnia on television has become the medium of fiction). What we call reality, according to Jacques Lacan, constitutes itself against the background of a bliss, a bliss being an exclusion of the traumatic real.²⁷⁹ What Lacan has in mind when he says that fantasy is the ultimate support of reality, is that reality stabilizes

²⁷⁶ Peter Weibel, "Ways of Contextualisation, or The Exhibition as a Discrete Machine," in *Place, Position, Presentation Public*, ed. Ine Gevers (Maastricht and Amsterdam: Jan van Eyck Akademie and De Balie, 1993), p. 225.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 228.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 230.

itself only when some fantasy frame of a symbolic bliss fore-closes the view into the abyss of the 'Real.' This is far from being a kind of dreamlike web which prevents us from seeing reality as it effectively is. It shows us that reality itself is already a dreamlike construct. The functioning of the media, e.g., television in relation to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, shows us all the dimensions of so-called normal, active reality – a 'reality' that is already ideologically and virtually constructed.

Moreover, to insist on the consciousness of the TV viewer, relying on an almost physical contact between the viewer and television – the contact which will rouse the world(!), perhaps we are counting too much on the privileged position of the social as a positive. What we have seen is a changed, or rather, a different position of the television, particularly in relation to the war. According to Arthur Kroker and David Cook, this is a precise re-reading of Baudrillard, the collapse of the normalizing, expanding, and positive cycle of the social into its opposite: an implosive and structural order of signs. The triumph of signifying culture means the eclipse of genuine social solidarities.²⁸⁰ As I mentioned previously, information about the war crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina is, thanks to a certain short-circuit, not only simultaneously broadcast, but also simultaneously tolerated in all parts of the world. Hence this war not only changes the perception of the media as such, but also of the perception of society. We face a kind of exteriorization where strategies of normalization are replaced by the simulation of the masses. Here the 'hyper-reality' of culture indicates a great dissolution of the space of the social.²⁸¹

In the old world of the social, according to Kroker and Cook, an emancipatory politics entailed the production of meaning: the control of individual and collective perspectives against a

²⁸⁰ See Arthur Kroker and David Cook, *The Postmodern Scene. Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), pp. 172–173.

²⁸¹ See Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (New York: Jean Baudrillard and Semiotext(e), 1983), pp. 3–4.

normalizing society which sought to exclude its oppositions. Society was constructed on the notion of the emancipatory subject who demanded a rightful inclusion in the contractual space of the political economy.²⁸² On the contrary, Baudrillard's political analysis represents a radical departure from both the sociology of knowledge and theorizations of power/'the norm.' His thought explores the brutal processes of de-historicization and de-socialization, which structure the new communicative order of a signifying culture.²⁸³ In *Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, Baudrillard provides three strategic hypotheses about the existence of the social, all having a murderous effect. The first hypothesis is that the social may only refer to the space of delusion; the social has basically never existed. The second hypothesis sees the social as residuum, and the third the end of the "perspective space of the social."²⁸⁴ One consequence is that, if the social is a simulation, then the likely course of events (massacres, rapes, etc.) is a brutal de-simulation.

The above also refers to two of the four great refusals of Jean Baudrillard concerning the classical (or perhaps rather 'modernist') models of society's functioning: a rejection of the naturalistic discourse of the historical, and a rupture with the normalizing conception of power.²⁸⁵

In such a 'new' world, television has the unreal existence of an imagistic sign-system, in which one may read the inverted and implosive logic of the cultural machine. Thus TV, according to Kroker and Cook, is not just a technical ensemble, a social apparatus, which implodes into society as the emblematic cultural form of a relational power. TV is not a mirror of society but just the reverse: it is society as a mirror of television.²⁸⁶

²⁸² Kroker and Cook, *The Postmodern Scene. Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics*, p. 175.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ See Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, pp. 3-4.

²⁸⁵ Kroker and Cook, *The Postmodern Scene. Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics*, p. 171.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 268.

Television's major form of social cohesion is provided by the pseudo-solidarities of electronic television images, whose public is, according to Baudrillard, the dark, silent mass of viewers. They are never permitted to speak while the media elite, which is allowed to speak, 'has nothing to say.' The explosion of information and the implosion of meaning are the keynotes of mass communications; a massive circularity in which sender is receiver, an irreversible medium of communication without response. Such is the strategic consequence of television as society.²⁸⁷ Martin Jay, in his book, *Force Field*²⁸⁸, refers to a similar idea in the Derridean coinage "destinerrance," which suggests the impossibility of messages ever reaching their assigned destinations. The TV audience may be today the most pervasive type of social community. If this is so, then it is an anti-community, a social anti-matter, an electronic mall which privileges the psychological position of the voyeur, a society of the disembodied eye, or the cultural position of the tourist in the society of the spectacle.²⁸⁹ What else are Western Europe, European peace movements, civil associations and, last but not least, millions of TV viewers and other squatters, but a social anti-matter? Baudrillard's hypotheses about the media in connection with hyper-reality and simulation, so ferociously criticized by 'serious' philosophers as to be a theoretical simulation (almost science fiction) seem, in the context of the war in ex-Yugoslavia, to warrant serious re-evaluation.

In my opinion, the most striking turn of the TV positioning of the war in the territory of ex-Yugoslavia occurred when the Serbs (or more precisely, the bloodthirsty Yugoslavian army under Serb control) kidnapped Bosnian President Alija Izetbegović, who was returning to Sarajevo after one of the innumerable international negotiating sessions. The only means of communication between the kidnapped President, the Yugosla-

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 176.

²⁸⁸ See Martin Jay, *Force Fields* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993).

²⁸⁹ Kroker and Cook, *The Postmodern Scene. Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics*, p. 274.

vian army and the rest of the Bosnian Presidency in a half-demolished Sarajevo, was by way of the then barely functional Sarajevo TV station. The talks and negotiations, the ultimatums and demands were carried out in their entirety and without censorship in front of the global TV auditorium. This happened before the international public got involved in the affair and mediated Izetbegović's release. All those involved could only communicate via TV telephone frequencies while the TV station was broadcasting live! The image of a competent newsreader was broadcast mediating between the Generals, the President and the Presidency. Paradoxically, the broadcast was transformed into radio, and temporarily became the medium of drama and information *par excellence*. In this instance, television functioned in the way it was supposed by theorists, to dumbfound audiences in the broadest sense of the word and to force them into action.

Nevertheless, the edge of the general media situation is not ecstasy and decay, but the addiction of hyper-primitivism and hyper-imaging. Baudrillard describes the current mood in *Simulacres et Simulation*: "Melancholy is the quality inherent in the mode of disappearance of meaning, in the mode of volatilization of meaning in operational systems. And we are all melancholic."²⁹⁰ Melancholia is thus, Jay suggests, not simply an illness, but a kind of permanent dimension of the human condition. A great number of authors distinguish between melancholia and mourning, which are not specific states of mind, but two different attitudes toward the world. Relating to Freud's text "Mania and Mourning" from 1917, Jay points out that the refusal to test reality can still help us to make sense of the distinction between mourning and melancholy. It is precisely the ability to do so that distinguishes the former from the latter.²⁹¹ Melancholy, with its manic depressive symptoms,

²⁹⁰ Jean Baudrillard, "Sur le Nihilisme," in *Simulacres et Simulation* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1981), p. 234.

²⁹¹ Martin Jay, "The Apocalyptic Imagination and the Inability to Mourn," in Jay, *Force Fields*, p. 90.

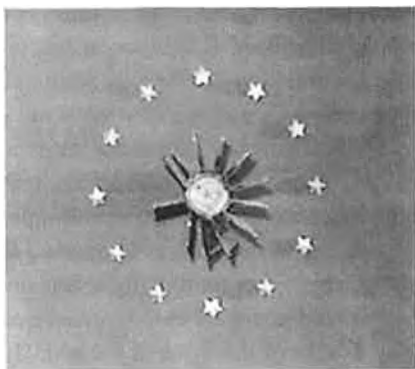
suggests the inability to mourn, or to reflect reality. "Melancholy," wrote Jay, "seems to follow the logic of what Freud calls elsewhere disavowal or foreclosure, in which inassimilable material seems to be cast out of the psyche and reappears in the realm of a hallucinatory 'real.' Instead of being able to consciously identify what actually has been lost, he or she remains caught in a perpetually unsubstantiated dialectic of self-punishing fear and manic denial."²⁹² Mourning is important, as it allow us the strategical and emotional process of reflexivity, which allows us to survive this transitional period. On the other hand, mourning as a complete working through of lost material, is itself a utopian myth. The hope of finding a means to completely transcend the repetition and displacement characteristic of apocalyptic melancholia is necessarily doomed to failure.²⁹³

The 'paradigm of melancholy' can be useful for working through the mode by which (Western) Europe and its civil institutions deal with the war in the territory of former Yugoslavia, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This specific 'mode' can be interpreted in similar terms as the object which is confronted by the impossibility of the conscious working through it. The questions that such a hypothesis raise are obvious: What is the object (or objects) whose loss cannot be confronted? Why does it remain so resolutely disavowed and so resistant to a conscious working through?²⁹⁴ We are trying to locate a specific historical trauma that resists the mourning process. According to Jay, "The monotheistic religions like Judaism and Christianity sought to replace the predecessors of their mother-goddesses with a stern patriarchal deity, then perhaps the lost object can be understood, in a sense maternal. Mourning would mean working through the loss produced by the archaic mother's disappearance. An inability to renounce the regressive desire to

²⁹² Ibid., p. 93.

²⁹³ Ibid., p. 97.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 94.



Nedžad Begović, *War Art*, video, SaGa, Sarajevo 1993

reunite with the mother in a fantasy of recaptured plenitude, when accompanied by the unconscious self-reproach that her death was covertly desired, would result in melancholia instead.²⁹⁵ It seems that 'civilized' Christian Europe is regulated by the symbolism, with a desire to reunite with the remaining Christian parts of Europe. This is constantly fortified and destabilized by the Muslim 'other.' Tomaž Mastnak wrote: "European peace has never parted from war. The way of freeing Europe from wars was to export them to non-European territories, or to the margins of Europe. Moreover, the idea of European unity is intimately connected to the idea of war, or a real war, against an enemy from without, and as a rule that enemy is the Muslim. The Muslim is the symbolic enemy of Europe, and I do not believe that it is by accident that Euro-Serbian policy has made Muslims out of the Bosnians. The image of the warring Muslim invokes both the Urangst of the Christian, cultured, and civilized West, and the more recent spectre haunting Western politicians and intellectuals: that of 'Islamic fundamentalism.' The Slavs, it is true, are only second-class, or potential, Europeans, but Muslims simply do not belong to Europe. That is why it is assumed that the Bosnians are not

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

Slavs."²⁹⁶ The Muslim reality in Europe, if I may cynically paraphrase Derrida, is understood as a poison and a cure.

*The virtual space*²⁹⁷

What taught us the 'real' space of Eastern Europe stigmatized by the war in relation to the electronic media and especially TV? That through this space thoroughly articulated and hegemonized by mass media, we are able to grasp even better the logic of the functioning of the space of the real. Here, the general elaborate non-historical essence of media theories received, so to speak, its historical traumatic embodiment and allowed us to clearly discern, to determine the shift in the very edifice of space imbued with electronic media, and to measure the impact of /non/naturality and /anti/community. But, to further explore local and global struggles for meanings and embodiments of space in space and through space, we must step into that space which seems to keep the space of the real in continuous differential and relational separation: into the virtual space.

Issues such as the nature of the human, the difference between reality and the real, and those of changed parameters of space and time, seem to be, not even more deeply, but rather differently questioned by the theme of virtual reality, with its postulated construction of perfect, simulated environments.

If I attempt to delineate, by means of an introduction, in a Readers' Digest form, the passages and translation in the paradigm of space in art from the Renaissance to the present day, a bird's-eye view would trace out a path that begins with perspectival space in painting, and continues through the illusionist spaces of panoramas and dioramas that were so popular in the 18th and 19th centuries, right up until the space created by the cine-

²⁹⁶ Tomaž Mastnak, "A Journal of the Plague Years: Notes on European Anti-nationalism," in *Lusitania*, No. 5: *For Sarajevo*, New York, 1993, p. 89.

²⁹⁷ See Marina Gržinić, "Identity Re-read, Re-worked, Re-coded by New Media and Technology," in *COIL*, no. 2, London, 1995, pp. 40-46.

matic moving picture. This leads all the way to the virtual space of the 1990s, and into cyberspace. Despite all the talk that it takes only the click of a button on a remote control to enter cyberspace, the latter remains localized and spatially limited, unlike the Internet, whose totally virtual nature (excluding the only possible material side of the Internet, the computer console) means it is based on communicative non-limitation.

The essential point is that all of these paradigms or concepts of space in the sphere of the visual are related to a broader context of conceptions of time and space, and the subject within them. For example, the industrial and technological revolution, and the associated industrialization and urbanization of the towns and environment, turned on its head the paradigm of visuospatial experience at the turn of the 19th century. In his book about various *Productions of Space*, Henry Lefebvre characterizes the period around 1910 as a watershed in the constitution of the paradigm of space. It was around that time that the space of classical perspective and geometry, which developed from the Renaissance onwards in the tradition of Greek Euclidean logic, began to disintegrate. Until then, a certain shared space of knowledge and political power, grounded both in the everyday discourse and in abstract thought, was shattered as a result of ever increasing industrialization. This disappearance of embodied spatiality, of the very concept of space, had far-reaching consequences for a shift in the field of representation. Classical models of vision were destroyed together with stable spaces of representation that had previously been formed by various techniques of perspective composition, techniques for deceiving the eye and imitating nature.

It was this change in the production of space and the spatial model – which means an ever greater meditation of space, and at the same time the loss of direct experience of space – of its sensory apprehension by means of one's own body – that permitted the various technical advances in observing the subject in space or the viewer in the visual sphere. The explosive proliferation of optical, illusionist toys, exhibitions and settings

(the panoramas and dioramas of the 18th and 19th centuries) was also a kind of surrogate for the reduced role of direct sensation of the individual in contact with space. Other theorists and researchers of different paradigms of space and the subject argue that this re-configuration and adaptation of space which followed in the wake of new forms of industrialization brought many positive changes for the viewer. Alongside the development of various forms of observation in space, also developed were, thanks to kaleidoscopes and magic lanterns, very special forms of human perception which effaced the duality of body and mind, science and technology.

What happens, for example, with the paradigm of space in the field of moving pictures? Does the projection of moving pictures onto various kinds of screens mean we are speaking about 'screen arts'? What has happened in one century to the space of the screen? If in film, 'space' as a montage of attractions is beamed onto a remote white canvas, then the screen of electronic images, or the TV receiver, has enabled the space of illusion to enter our living rooms and literally affix itself to our eyes in the form of virtual reality. The monitors of the data helmets we must put on in order to enter the virtual world have brought space right onto our eyes. The altered paradigms of space are not evident in the human body, but are the form of its special inscription in space. It is not just a matter of the subordination of the body within new structures; its colonization; this inscription of space (as an artistic gesture) is also a form of compensation for the loss of the direct sensory experience of space.

With the aid of the new technologies, the viewer may even enter his own body. Technology allows him to turn it into various spectacles and views by means of prosthetic extensions. In the past, microscopes and telescopes extended human perception away from the body, towards the infinite and infinitesimal, while in the 1990s, one's own body has become the object of research: the skin and the face are territories of the most inter-subjective space, or the base of the prosthesis.

To grasp appropriately some of the radical changes in the models, perceptions and structures of space, time and the subject, allow me to first of all, schematically and narratively, explain 'virtual reality.' A helmet apparatus feeds the subject visual and auditory information about a virtual environment. Sensors in the helmet respond to head, even eye movement. The computer literally knows 'where your head's at ...' Cables are connected to sensors, providing a computer with information regarding the subject's bodily orientation. The helmet apparatus, or the data glove (the so-called interface) has thus become the crucial site of virtual reality: a significantly ambiguous boundary between human being and technology. The more invisible the interface, the more perfect the fiction of a total immersion within the force fields of a new reality (Scott Bukatman²⁹⁸).

According to Francine Dagenais²⁹⁹, virtual reality technology provides the participant with the illusion of moving through space without a body. The body is isolated, the senses – cut off from their reality – find an alternate environment. A dissociation results between the head as privileged sensory receptor, and the body as substituted by the hand/index. Thus we may speak of Deleuze/ Guattari's *corps sans organe*: the headless body is contrasted with the traditional conception of the organic body governed by a central nervous system and brain. Decapitated by the virtual reality experience, the body loses its definition. The body is caught in the ambiguity of wholeness/loneliness, and is forced to eliminate the distinctions of within and without. The medium is the body.

Catherine Richards³⁰⁰ describes the situation of capturing one's imaginary body as "losing the self-definition of the body." In my opinion, this is crucial for understanding what is currently happening in the virtual reality context. She writes: "I put on

²⁹⁸ See Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 186–192.

²⁹⁹ Francine Dagenais, "Perfect Bodies," in *Bioapparatus*, ed. Catherine Richards and Nell Tenhaaf (Banff: The Banff Centre, 1991), p. 43.

³⁰⁰ Catherine Richards, "The Bioapparatus Membrane," in *Bioapparatus*, p. 58.

the virtual environment technology. I see my imaginary body right before me. I move my finger, the image moves. If the spectral image lags behind my living hand, it misses me. If it catches up, it crosses a body threshold racing to capture my imaginary body within its image. Now, when I move, I inhabit the virtual materialized image of my imaginary body. I move within the semblance of my living body, a simulation of my physical and imaginary experience that is travelling back and forth across my thresholds, taking me away. What am I here? My body is mediated experientially, my imaginary body is materialized into a phantom image. One is intertwined with the other, each one reading the other, simulating the living cohabitation of my body and the imaginary."³⁰¹

To be installed into such a virtual apparatus is to exist on two planes at once. Scott Bukatman has formulated this idea as follows: While one's objective body would remain in the real world, one's phenomenal body would be projected into terminal reality. In an ecstatic exaggeration of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological model, world and body comprise a continual feedback loop, producing a terminal identity without the terminal – named in the cyberspace as cybersubject.³⁰² Virtual reality has become, according to Bukatman, the very embodiment of post-modern disembodiment. Sherry Turkle characterizes this aspect of computer interaction with the body as producing the quasi-personality complex that she calls the second self. It derives from the complex inter-relationships between human and computer, thus partially from within the human; and it exists partially.³⁰³

Derrick de Kerckhove³⁰⁴ highlights this aspect, arguing that perhaps the most challenging aspect of the 'bio-apparatuses' (which is only one of the optional denominations for the rela-

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² See Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, p. 187.

³⁰³ Cited in Allucquère Roseanne Stone, "Virtual Systems," in *Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter, *Zone 6*, 1992, p. 619.

³⁰⁴ Derrick de Kerckhove, "Bioapparatusstalk," in *Bioapparatus*, p. 100.

tionship between the body and the machine) concerns its epistemological consequences. The thinning of boundaries between the viewer and the viewed (including the more critical separations between the private/public self and the private/collective consciousness) addresses the possibility that new forms of consciousness are being developed – not merely private or collective, not merely computer assisted nor independent – but intermediate, self-organizing and cybernetic.

I have tried to show that virtual reality cannot be reduced to a mere technological not to a discursive object. It is a complex social amalgam, whose existence as a textual figure is inseparable from its machinic use. Pierre Lévy³⁰⁵ has pointed out in exactly the same manner that, up until now, we have mainly envisaged virtual realities as simulating physical spaces. Alternatively, we need to speak of the production of symbolic spaces in the form of virtual worlds as expressive of significations, and of knowledge characteristic of a collectivity. These virtual worlds, as Levy declares, express acts of collective communication in real time, with the direct involvement of, and the tactile component suggested by, words. The deepened split between the physical realities, including the dangers of urban life and the phantasmatic world of 'on-line' sociality, is both encouraging and depressive.

One implication is that cyberspace has the potential, according to Margaret Morse³⁰⁶, to be the most powerful and effective means of surveillance and social control, not merely of the user in cyberspace, but of the external material world (yet to be invented). Currently, I do not wish to take you in this direction – the direction for example of Baudrillard's simulated Gulf War, or the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina – in part, because I have already discussed some of these implications.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ See Pierre Lévy, "Toward Super-language," in *ISEA 94 Catalogue*, Helsinki 1994.

³⁰⁶ See Margaret Morse, "Enthralling Spaces. The Aesthetics of Virtual Environments," in *ISEA 94 Catalogue*, Helsinki 1994.

³⁰⁷ See Marina Gržinić, "War and The Media," in *Art and Design*.

Michael Heim has called cyberspace 'a tool for examining our very sense of reality.' The cyberscopic vision of electronic para-space (while "the helmet apparatus feeds the subject visual and auditory information about the virtual environment") is based upon the ultimate lesson of 'virtual reality.' The virtualization of the most 'true' reality: by the mirage of 'virtual reality,' the 'true' reality itself is posited as a semblance of itself – according to Slavoj Žižek³⁰⁸, a pure symbolic edifice. Has our 'true' reality itself become virtualized, and conceived of as an artifact itself? This paradox could also be formulated by way of the ambiguous ontological status of 'virtuality' itself, which, in its capacity of a 'mere possibility,' as opposed to actuality, possesses an actuality of its own. Slavoj Žižek has stated that computer-generated virtual reality provides an exemplary case of reality conceived through the detour of its virtualization (i.e., of a reality wholly generated from its conditions of potentiality. Potentiality designates, according to Žižek, something that is 'possible' in the sense of being able to actualize itself, as well as something that is 'merely possible,' as opposed to being actual. Potentiality already possesses a certain actuality in its very capacity for possibility. This surplus of what is in the case of potentiality more than a mere possibility, and which is lost in its actualization of the real as impossible.

The classical virtual reality situation, according to Margaret Morse,³⁰⁹ involves the field of view in the virtual world as constantly being reconstituted in real time by a computer from a digital store through devices which track the position of somebody's head and hand. That is, in a virtual world, the space itself is interactive. Friedrich Kittler suggests that the virtual environment can appear to be something alive that we cannot acknowledge as subject, nor persona in the traditional sense,

³⁰⁸ See Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

³⁰⁹ See Margaret Morse, "Enthralling Spaces. The Aesthetics of Virtual Environments," p. 83.

but which nonetheless constantly demonstrates that it sees us without revealing itself.

Then how can we finally define the actual/virtual position of the subject in this virtual context? I have made reference to several writers who highlight a specific situation that can be designated as the deprivation of self-identity in virtual reality. This is crucial for understanding the changing position of the self and identity in virtual reality. Integrated into the field of intersubjectivity, s/he builds her/himself a new identity. What is at stake in virtual reality is the temporal loss of the subject's symbolic identity. S/he is forced to assume that s/he is not what s/he thought her/himself to be, but somebody-something else. The virtual environment occurs cinematically, as a kind of reversal of face-to-face intersubjectivity, relating the subject to her/his shadowy double which emerges from behind her/him as a kind of sublime protuberance.³¹⁰ In virtual reality, what we are seeing is the concentration of the field and counter-field within the same frame.

What we have here in the relation of the subject with her/his imaginary body is a paradoxical kind of communication. Not a 'direct' communication of the subject with the fellow creature in front of her/him, but a communication with the excrescence behind her/him, mediated by a third gaze – the gaze of the virtual machine, as if the counter-field were to be mirrored back into the field itself.³¹¹ This confers upon the scene its hypnotic dimensions: the subject is enthralled by the gaze that sees what is in (her/him)self more than (her/him)self.

What am I in virtual reality? My body is mediated by my imaginary body that is materialized into a phantom image. One is intertwined with the other, each one reading the other, simulating the living cohabitation of my body and the imaginary. To

³¹⁰ See Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, pp. 107–8.

³¹¹ "I must, to begin with, insist on the following: in the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture." In: Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 106.

grasp the implications of the radical shift at work in virtual reality, one has to reach, as Žižek has suggests, the Cartesian-Kantian problematic of the subject as pure, and as substanceless. Kant fully articulates, according to Žižek³¹², the inherent paradoxes of self-consciousness. What Kant's term 'transcendental turn' renders manifest is the impossibility of locating the subject in the 'great chain of being' (i.e., the whole of the universe). The subject, in the most radical sense, is out of joint. It constitutively lacks its own place. In Descartes, this out of joint state is still concealed. Kant, however, brings to light a kind of vanishing mediator that is, in short, the Lacanian Real. The paradox of self-consciousness is that it is possible only against the background of its own impossibility – and this is also at the core of virtual reality.

To put it another way, where is the *cogito*? Where is the place of my self-consciousness, when everything that I actually am is an artifact – not only my body, my eyes, but even my most intimate memories and fantasies? Everything that I positively am, every enunciated content I can point at and say: that is me, is not I; I am only the void that remains, the empty distance which approaches all content. Or it is only when, at the level of the enunciated content, I assume my replicant status, that, at the level of enunciation, I become a truly human subject.³¹³

'I am a replicant' is the statement of the subject at its purest. If we return to virtual reality, the capture of the imaginary body does not offer the 'direct' communication of the subject with her/his fellow creature in front of her/him, but rather, communication with the excrescence behind her/him.

In short, the implicit thesis of being in virtual reality is that of the replicants. Replicants are pure subjects precisely insofar as they testify to the possibility of positive, substantial content, inclusive of the most intimate fantasies – not as 'their own,' but as already implanted. If we try to answer the question: what

³¹² See Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, pp. 12–44.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

is it that the third gaze sees? What is in the subject more than her/himself? – our answer must be: nothing – a hole – a void. The very notion of self-consciousness implies the subject's self-decentering, which is far more radical than the opposition between subject and object.³¹⁴

I would like to make an additional clarification that will allow me to point out the radicality of my approach, and to draw a line between the 'de-centered subject' in the virtual environment or cyberspace of my theory and similar deconstructionist de-centered approaches. When deconstructionist cyberspace ideologists try to present cyberspace, they usually focus on how cyberspace 'de-centers' the subject. The two most well-known approaches are those presented in Sherry Turkle's *Life on the Screen. Identity in the Age of the Internet*³¹⁵ and Allucquère Rosanne Stone's *The War of Desire and Technology*.³¹⁶

When Stone and Turkle compare how the subject is de-centered in cyberspace, they refer to two basic de-centering modalities. For Stone, the subject in cyberspace is de-centered through a multiple externalizing subjectivity process, realized through the Multiple User Domains (MUD). When I play anonymously in MUD, I can present myself as a promiscuous person and engage in activities which, were I to indulge in them in real life, would bring about the disintegration of my 'real' personal identity. For Turkle, the de-centering of the subject in cyberspace is similar to the dysfunction known as Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD). Multiple Personality Disorder defines the so-called multiple personalities (who proliferated in dramatic numbers in the 1970s and 1980s), and indicates individuals who show signs of failing to process and integrate different viewpoints of the identity, memory and consciousness. For these people, it is typical that a number of very

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ See Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen. Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).

³¹⁶ See Allucquère Rosanne Stone, *The War of Desire and Technology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995).

different personalities inhabit one person's body. This illness was termed Dissociative Identity Disorder in 1994.

Cyberspace phenomena, like MUD, endorse the dissemination of the unique 'Self' into a multiplicity of competing agents, a plurality of self-images, without a global coordinating center. Playing in virtual spaces enables one to discover new aspects of oneself through a wealth of shifting identities – masks without a 'real' person behind – and thus, to experience the ideological mechanism of the production of 'Self,' the imminent violence and arbitrariness of this production/obstruction. The screen persona I create for myself can be 'more myself' than my 'real-life' person, insofar as it renders visible aspects of myself I would never dare to admit in real life.

MUD describes the situation of the de-centered personality in cyberspace when we have several personalities from one body. I can act out my 'real life' difficulties in virtual reality (MUD). Through cyberspace or virtual environments, I become aware of the inconsistency and multiplicity of the components of my subjective identities (MPD syndrome) and work through them. The de-centered subject that I try to conceptualize in cyberspace or in the virtual environment, is neither the MUD one nor the MPD one. Furthermore, this de-centered subject is not the one which can take place in-between these two deconstructionist options. This de-centered subject is the Lacanian one: "When deconstructionist cyberspace ideologists try to present cyberspace as providing a 'real life' 'empirical' realization of the deconstructionist theories, they usually focus on how cyberspace 'de-centers' the subject. However, the 'multiple selves' externalized on the screen are 'what I want to be,' the way I would like to see myself, the figurations of my ideal ego; as such, they are like the layers of an onion: there is nothing in their center, and the subject is this 'nothing' itself. It is therefore crucial to introduce here the distinction between 'Self' ('person') and subject: the Lacanian 'de-centered subject' is not simply a multiplicity of good old 'Selves,' i.e., partial centers; the divided subject does not mean there are simply more

Egos/Selves in the same individual, as in MUD. The 'de-centering' is the de-centering of the \$ (the void of the subject) with regard to its content ('Self,' the bundle of imaginary and/or symbolic identifications); the splitting is the splitting between \$ and the phantasmatic 'persona' as the 'stuff of the I.' The subject is thus split even if it possesses only one 'unified' Self, since this split is the very split between \$ and Self. In more topological terms: the subject's division is not the division between one and another Self – between two contents – but the division between something and nothing, between the feature of identification and the void. 'De-centering' thus first designates the ambiguity, the oscillation between symbolic and imaginary identification: the indecisiveness as to where my true point lies – in my 'real' self or in my external mask – with the possible implication that my symbolic mask can be 'more true' than what it conceals: the 'true face' behind it. At a more radical level, it points towards the fact that the very sliding from one to another identification, or among 'multiple selves,' presupposes the gap between identification as such and the void of \$ (the barred subject) which identifies itself, i.e., which serves as the empty medium of identification. In other words, the very process of shifting among multiple identifications presupposes a kind of empty band, which renders possible the leap from one to another identity, and this empty band is the subject itself."³¹⁷ It is important therefore, in this time of oblique transparency, when discussing how the relation of cyberspace and the electronic media affects specific subjects, to dismantle the very process, not of production, but of post-

³¹⁷ See Slavoj Žižek, "Cyberspace, or, the Unbearable Closure of Being," 1996 (manuscript). Similar is the process of mediatization that is going on in the space of the real (as I shown through the process of the mediatization of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, etc.) and which stripped the subject of the direct, immediate right to make decisions. When the body is mediatized (caught in the network of electronic media), the subject is potentially reduced to the pure barred subject \$, since even his personal experience can be stolen, manipulated and regulated by the machinical Other.

production: of the editing, pasting, copying and clearing of these relations into the social mode of production.

Both spaces, the real and the virtual, are wiping out, albeit from different perspectives but simultaneously, the paradigm of identity, precisely by conversing deceptive and hypocritical old identities, of the socially positive and fully realized individuals, etc., on the Post-Socialist and Post-Capitalist subjects. Instead, today we are faced with leaving a historically defined position, which imitates the natural world of our senses. With new media and technology, we have the possibility of an artificial interface, one dominated by non-identity, or difference. Instead of producing a new identity, something more radical has to be proposed: the total loss of identity. The subject is forced to assume that s/he is not what s/he thought her/himself to be, but somebody-something else. The moment when familiar models of identity are lost is perhaps the moment when a (Post-Communist) subject is constructed.

9. SPECTRALIZATION OF TIME: THE VIRTUAL-IMAGE AND THE REAL-TIME INTERVAL

One could argue that virtual reality and cyberspace are merely fashionable passwords to contemporary culture; however, this chapter takes the position that addressing questions of virtuality may enable a fuller understanding of some of the fundamental changes deeply affecting the notion of aesthetics today. Wolfgang Iser, in his book *Undoing Aesthetics*, asserts that aesthetics is undergoing a process of epistemologization, referring no longer only to questions of the beautiful and the sublime. Iser argues that we are witnesses to a profound aestheticization of knowledge and reality, time and space, and even truth itself.³¹⁸ On the other hand, a similar shift in the definition of the paradigms of reality and time can be traced through the function (i.e., definition, meaning and significance) of cyberspace and virtual reality. I intend to explore the changes in the space-time paradigm produced by cyberspace and virtual reality and the changes effectuated in the real time interval.

Ken Hillis makes a useful distinction between cyberspace and virtual reality, or VR for short. "To date, no single technology or machine circumscribes this emerging technology/medium of virtual reality – a term confusingly interchanged with cyberspace, but here understood as the technical means of access to the 'parallel' disembodied and increasingly networked visual 'world' named cyberspace."³¹⁹ What is important to comprehend here is that in virtual reality, data-environments some of the issues that arise are those relating to the sense of distance and weight, and questions of mass and time. The same is true for real-time telecommunications, operating at the absolute

³¹⁸ See Wolfgang Iser, *Undoing Aesthetics* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), pp. 20–22.

³¹⁹ See Ken Hillis, "A Geography of the Eye: The Technologies of Virtual Reality," (pp. 70–99), in *Cultures of Internet*, ed. Rob Shields (London: Sage Publications, 1996), p. 5.

speed of electromagnetic waves, allowing local users of the Internet to communicate with any point on Earth without leaving – Tokyo, for example – as if there is no geographical or spatial distance. Finally, precisely this constructed character of the paradigm of time-space, makes it subject to constant re-articulation.

The cinematic image

To understand the significance of a shift in the space-time paradigm, I propose a mapping out of a (historical) discursive timeline; to interpret the results of changes in the time/space paradigm, and in its experiences and sensations, as produced by the various technologies of the moving and digital images, e.g., photography, the film apparatus and virtual reality. This is a necessary step also if we are to go beyond the kind of theoretical stasis we currently face in re-philosophizing cyberspace and virtual reality. This stasis is the almost exaggerated quantity of mainly excellent descriptions awaiting classification. One of the aims of the essay in this chapter is to begin to articulate a possible and/or hypothetical approach to such a classification. To do so, I will first make use of two paradigms, or time models, developed by Gilles Deleuze in the 1980s in two books: *The Movement-Image* (first published in 1983)³²⁰ and *The Time-Image* (first published in 1985)³²¹. The books examine mutations in the history of cinematic signification. D. N. Rodowick, in his compelling book *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* explains that, for Deleuze, "the semiotic history of film is coincident with a century-long transformation wherein we have come to represent and understand ourselves socially through

³²⁰ See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

³²¹ See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

spatial and temporal articulations founded in cinema, if now realized more clearly in the electronic and digital media.”³²² For Deleuze, it is not to produce another theory of film, but to realize how aesthetic, philosophical and scientific modes of understanding converge to produce cultural strategies for imagining. What is specific to the image, writes Deleuze, “is to make perceptible, to make visible, relationships of time which cannot be seen in the represented object and do not allow themselves to be reduced to the present.”³²³

I would like to present some of the elements of the two principal time-machine paradigms of the image conceived by Deleuze: the movement-image and time-image – in order to suggest a third model: the virtual-image – which would be appropriate for an understanding of the temporal and spatial characteristics of cyberspace.

Deleuze linked the notion of the movement-image to the classical cinema, for example, to the films of Eisenstein, Keaton, etc. In short, Deleuze’s movement-image draws on the American silent cinema, the Soviet school of montage, and the French impressionist cinema, whereas the time-image originates in the modern European and New American cinema (for example, the films of Resnais).

The following outline of the two Deleuzian models of time – images is extremely schematic, but for the purpose of this chapter, I can summarize their importance: it is their respective spatial rendering of time (i.e., time through space) which divides the movement-image from the time-image. The main basis of this unusual idea derives from Deleuze’s re-thinking of the interval – the space or division between photograms, shots, sequences – and how the organization of intervals informs the spatial representation of time in cinema. According to Deleuze, in the movement-image (e.g., in Eisenstein and

³²² D. N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze’s Time Machine* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), p. xiii.

³²³ Deleuze, *Time-Image*, p. xii.

Keaton films), time is reduced to intervals defined by movement as actions, and the linking of such movements is accomplished through montage. The movement-image can only provide an indirect image of time. On the contrary, when reality in the film image is represented in a dispersed way, and the linear actions dissolve into the form of aleatory or random strolls, then, as result of this, the action-reaction schema of the movement-image begins to break down, producing a change in the nature of both perception and affect. Since the linking of images is no longer motivated by action, the nature of space changes, becoming disconnected or empty. Acts of seeing and hearing replace the linking of images through motor actions, as in the case of the movement-image. In the time-image, the interval is no longer part of the image or sequence either as the ending of one action or as the beginning of another. In the time-image, the interval becomes an autonomous value, giving us a direct image of time. The interval no longer facilitates the passage from one image to another in any detectable manner.

The movement-image and the time-image, however, each manage this relation with time differently. The former provides us with an indirect image of time, and the latter, a direct image of time. On this basis, in the time-image model, according to Rodowick, the interval functions as an irreducible limit, the flow of images or sequences bifurcate and develop serially, rather than continuing as a line, or integrating into a whole. The time-image produces a serial rather than organic form of composition,³²⁴ as is the case in the movement-image.

Whereas the cinematic movement-image presents an indirect image of time as exteriority, or extensiveness, in space the cinematic time-image presents a direct image – the anteriority of time as creative evolution, the pure form of time as change or Becoming.³²⁵ What happens, we have to ask ourselves, when actions no longer master time? Deleuze, through Rodowick,

³²⁴ Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, p. 14.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49.

argues that the image must turn from exteriority in space toward a process of genesis in mental relations of time.

The virtual-image

Here, in proposing the third image – the virtual-image – I would argue that what occurs is, first and foremost, the reversal of the Deleuzian established basic relation of time and space: instead of the spatial rendering of time (i.e., time through space) we experience in the cinematic image, with the virtual-image, space is rendered through time.

To comprehend the time-space features of this possible third model, or paradigm, of the virtual-image that I would like to propose here, I will make use of its time-space characteristics as described by Edmond Couchot:

"In fact, virtual space and time obey laws different from those of the reality we perceive with our senses. Data space is an exclusively symbolic space: neither largely substrate in material, nor in energy, even though the computer circuitry (hardware) itself is a part of our physical reality; it is made up of information. It has no dimensions per se, no set permanent place or topos. Hence it's fundamentally utopic character. Yet it can also merge with real space as interfaced. Likewise, corresponding to this utopic space is a simulated virtual time, itself with its own extraordinary properties. That is, 'it seems' (phrase added by the author, M. G.), an autonomous time without past, present or future, wholly beyond any deterministic or non-deterministic becoming, or again, of any living sense of becoming. A time that partakes not of chronos, but is an uchronic (or better to say, achronic – added by the author, M. G.) time, hence its ability to also merge – hybridize – with the time where dwells the manipulator or observer. (...) Uchronic time comes into its own in the immediacy of image-calculations and simulation-

al-model parameter modifications without any delay in the unfolding of the visualized phenomenon. Changes in parameter value take effect the very moment the equations are being calculated, intervening in 'real-time,' as the technicians say, upon successive operations and displaying the results instantaneously via realistic or abstract images according to the models simulated, giving these simulation technologies fantastic effectiveness. Under such conditions, we can thus speak of creating a reality and modifying it at the rate of creation, as if 'real' computer time took the place of temporal reality, in such a way that reference time loses – at least partially – its pre-existence. In a sense, synthesized virtual time marks the end of time. In these virtual time-space relations, the determinant factor is no longer the speed of information transfer, but rather the speed of data calculation time. It's as if that invisible barrier, the speed of light at which television and radio information circulate, were at the point of being overtaken by the immobile speed of calculation."³²⁶

In short, changes in parameter values take effect the very moment the equations are being calculated, intervening in real-time. And real-time, which is time entirely processed by the computer, is equal to zero space. For example, for Mark Poster too, this point of the real-time interval in virtual reality is crucial. Virtual reality is, according to Mark Poster, close to real-time, which "arose in the audio-recording field when splicing, multiple-track recording and multiple speed recording made possible times 'other' to that of clock-time or phenomenological time." In virtual reality, the normal or conventional sense of time has to be preserved by the modifier 'real,' exactly as in the coinage: real-time. Real-time is, according to Kac, an immediate transmission and reception of a signal as it is pro-

³²⁶ Edmond Couchot, "Between the Real and the Virtual," (pp. 16–20), in *Annual InterCommunication '94* (Tokyo: ICC, 1994), pp. 16–17.

duced by a device, without delays; live television is a common example of real-time transmissions.³²⁷

In the virtual-image, the interval disappears; real-time is not direct time, but a time without intervals, where space has the value zero. Moreover, the non-place, which may be defined as a cyberspace interval, produces a meaning in which the distribution of information is a result of a synthesized process of calculation. This is not the movement-image's differentiation and integration of meaning, nor the time-image's relinking of irrational divisions, but a simulational process. Instead of the organic form of composition that belongs to the movement-image, and the serial form of composition that belongs to the time-image, the virtual-image produces a synthetic one.

I would like to propose the following models of time-images, according to the following temporal, spatial and compositional characteristics, respectively:

the movement-image – indirect-time interval – exteriority of space – organic form

the time-image – direct-time interval – anteriority of space – serial form

the virtual-image – real-time interval – non-space – synthetic form

It is important to re-emphasize the constructed character of the discourse of space, as the space paradigm is, so to speak, never grounded in space, but is always ex-, an- or non-space. "The non-place of cyberspace," as Nguyen and Alexander pointed out, "contains innumerable networks resting on logical lattices abstracted from unthinkable complex data fields that unfold

³²⁷ See Eduardo Kac, <nettime> "More Glossary Items" (Online). Available: nettime-l@Desk.nl, 1998.

across an endless virtual void."³²⁸ A non-space can be understood here and now, not as a form of utopic space, but above all, as a conceptual matrix, a paradigm of such a space.

At this point, one path to follow might a reverse mode, taking spatial modalities inherent in cyberspace as a starting point and transposing them back into reality. That means that some of these paradigms can perhaps be functional outside the realm of the computer. Or vice versa, we might ask how radicalized, spatial organizations manifested in reality may serve as models for active intervention in cyberspace. Such a case again the project of the Slovenian visual art group Irwin's, NEUE SLOWENISCHE KUNST (NSK) STATE IN TIME, part of a larger project developed by the NSK movement in the 1990s titled "State in Time". It was within the context of a paradigm of this sort that the NSK Embassies and NSK Consulates were realized. In an attempt to emphasize the synthetic dialectical moment developed in the NSK State in Time, I labeled this spiritual element of corporeality "NSK State in Time" and this corporeal element of spirituality "Embassies in concrete private spaces as SPECTERS. I wrote: the NSK State in Time is the specter of the state," and the specter of time and NSK Embassies are the specters of Embassies.³²⁹ As Richard Beardsworth has shown in his important book *Derrida & The Political*: "Any country, any locality, determines its understanding of time, place and community in relation to this process of 'global' spectralization."³³⁰

On the other hand, we can re-articulate the NSK STATE IN TIME also as a precise articulation of the evacuation of the specific historical, social and political space of the former Eastern Europe, after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Peter Lamborn Wilson (Hakim Bey) stated in his lecture at the Nettime meet-

³²⁸ Dan Thu Nguyen and Jon Alexander, "The Coming of Cyberspacetime and the End of the Polity," (pp. 99–125), in *Cultures of Internet*, p. 102.

³²⁹ See Part Two in the present volume.

³³⁰ Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida & the political* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 146

ing entitled "Beauty and The East" in Ljubljana in 1997, that the Second World has been erased, and only the First and Third Worlds are left. In place of the Second World, Bey argued, there is a big hole from which one jumps into the Third.³³¹ NSK STATE IN TIME is a transposition, as much as it is also a specularization, of the evacuation of the specific historical, social and political space of the former Eastern Europe, of this non-space condition. It is possible to find the same condition in the center of the myth of liberating and innocent cyberspace. "What you discover (in cyberspace – added by the author, M. G.) is always," according to Oliver Marchart, "your own image in a reversed form. (...) This sentence – since obviously, it paraphrases the Lacanian communication formula – has an axiomatic status. Wherever you go, you are always already there."³³² And this is exactly to what the Irwin NSK STATE IN TIME project is pointing a finger. The group Irwin has the power to articulate its proper position using the same mechanisms and matrices that seem, at first glance, to be part of another "absolutely virtual" territory.

Contestational errors

Since what I am proposing here is a research into the discursive constructions and articulations of the changes of time and space paradigms produced by image technology, to look also at the characteristics of the time-space paradigm developed and sustained in the photographic image would offer more insight into the latter stages of such a proposed research.

In his "Short History of Photography", Walter Benjamin focuses on how the problem of time characterized the evolution of early photography. I will summarize briefly Benjamin's in-

³³¹ See Hakim Bey, lecture at the Nettime meeting *Beauty and the East*, Ljubljana, 22–23 June 1997.

³³² Oliver Marchart, <nettime> "Greetings from Neutopia" (Online). Available: nettime-l@Desk.nl, 1998.

sights, relying on D. N. Rodowick's presentation: "Neither the indexical quality of the photograph nor its iconic characteristics fascinated Benjamin as much as the interval of time marked by exposure. In the technological transition from an exposure time requiring several hours to only fractions of a second, Benjamin marked the gradual evaporation of aura from the image. The idea of aura invoked here is clearly related to Bergson's *durée*. For Benjamin, the longer the interval of exposure, the greater the chance that the aura of an environment – the complex temporal relations woven through its represented figures – would seep into the image, etching itself on the photographic plate. (...) More concretely, the temporal value of the interval determines a qualitative ratio between time and space in the photograph. In the evolution from slow to fast exposure times, segmentations of time yielded qualitative changes in space: sensitivity to light, clearer focus, more extensive depth of field, and significantly, the fixing of movement. Paradoxically, for Benjamin, as the iconic and spatial characteristics of photography became more accurate by decreasing the interval of exposure, the image lost its temporal anchoring in the experience of duration, as well as the fascinating ambiguity of its 'aura'."³³

Rodowick attempted such a summary because he is interested in Benjamin's commentary on the photographic exposure time, which can be seen simultaneously as the accumulation of duration and as a reduction of the time intervals, as a kind of a prototype of both of Deleuze's time-image models. In face of this, I myself am interested in this contraction of the interval of exposure time because it depicts a process of erasure, the desire to rid ourselves of the uncontrollable movements and mistakes that can occur over such long exposure times. Furthermore, today we are witness to, metaphorically speaking, the constant decreasing, the constant shortening, and the condensation of the interval of exposure, on the trajectory moving from photography through cinema to cyberspace. This amounts to a process

³³ Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, pp. 8–9.

of cleaning and leaving behind the mistakes. With the virtual image and its real-time interval – when the speed of light at which television and radio circulate information is overtaken by the immobile speed of calculation – we experience an ever more exact and radical process of complete image evacuation, or emptying. The result is an aesthetic process of the sterilization of the image. With the arrival of the new media, and with digitalization, a physicality of the connection of the image within reality-time is lost. Mistakes in the image, which were evidence of its reality-temporality existence, are traumatically lost. With mistakes, one might say, the subject finds ways to make a place in time. With the virtual image's real-time contraction, with the contraction of the temporal-reality intervals, the image undergoes a process of complete 'emptying out.'

In short, I want to emphasize the technical constitution of temporality. "The temporalization of time thus changes with a change in the technical process that forms it."³³⁴ Moreover, it is possible to detect a process of constant tension between the nature of the technical tools that allows the mediation of time and the human experience of time. This tension can be named, again, as spectralization. At stake in this process of spectralization lies the human experience of time.

"Most immediately, it is clear that with the digitalization of memory support-systems, our experience of time is being rapidly foreshortened, creating, among other things (...) the tension between the international nature of the electronic and digital gaze and the corporal realities that make up much of human life. Less immediately, but more profoundly, it is also clear that future technical intervention on the genetic 'ingredients' of the human will accelerate processes of evolution at such a speed (if this remains the right term) that present conceptions of history, inheritance, memory and the body will need to be dramatically reorganized, if the

³³⁴ Beardsworth, *Derrida & the political*, p. 161.

'selection' of what is 'human', and what is not, is not to become the monopoly of an organization between the technosciences and capital. Just as these techniques together with developments in machine intelligence will soon wish to suppress human 'failure(s)' (precisely our submission to time), so the real time of the teletechnologies risks reducing the difference of time, or the aporia of time, to an experience of time that forgets time."³³⁵

This process of evacuation reached its limit of absurdity, for example, with the virtualized visual scenarios of the Gulf War, which can be contrasted with the lack of information about the 'dirty' and very real war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Instead of the direct images from the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, we were, in most cases, via the so-called live, real-time programming connections, confronted, on the one hand, with old televised images, and on the other with the voice of the radio amateur reporting live, in real-time.

Dimitris Eleftheriotis notes a similar process in a different, though complementary, field. According to Eleftheriotis, "'The Digital Image Stabilizer' is a popular feature of many new camcorders: it operates through a digital analysis of each frame, which detects and eliminates 'abnormal' movements. In a similar fashion, visual surveillance technology depends upon the identification of 'abnormal' or 'irregular' movements which disrupt the 'normal' flow of people in a street, a shopping center or supermarket – research currently undertaken looks for ways in which the detection of abnormal movement can become an automaton built into the system."³³⁶ Both processes can be understood as the opposite parts of the same mathematical, legal, as well as aesthetic operation, the emptying out and sterilization of the image. As Mark Lajoie has stat-

³³⁵ Ibid, pp. 147–48.

³³⁶ Dimitris Eleftheriotis, "Video poetics: technology, aesthetics and politics," (pp. 100–112), in *Screen*, 36: 2, 1995, p. 105).

ed, "The distance between the user on one side, and the seeming space on the other is absolute. It should come as no surprise that many of the technologies involved in the virtual reality interface have their origin in machinery designed for performing tasks in environments inhospitable to human beings – chemical factories, nuclear power plants, vacuum space. Cyberspace offers to do the same with all relations to the material, treating the material as a toxic agent, or poisoned environment, to place an imperceptible yet omnipresent barrier between all material relations with others."³³⁷

In contrast to the clean, pure space of virtual reality, the material becomes an object of horror and disgust because it cannot be integrated into the matrix. In other words, the material becomes an abject. As Julia Kristeva has pointed out, "It becomes what culture, the sacred, must purge, separate and banish so that it may establish itself as such in the universal logic of catharsis."³³⁸ Materiality is entirely extracted from cyberspace, and reduced from object to abject – a senseless, obscene intervention.³³⁹ The entrance of mistakes in perfect, simulated environments can be viewed, therefore, as a point of developing new esthetical and conceptual strategies, as the mistake as object of horror and disgust cannot be integrated into the matrix. Antiorp, a mysterious Danish composer whose gender – or even humanity – is unknown, promotes the idea that technology used to create art inevitably becomes the subject of the art itself. Of errors, for example, Antiorp writes, "Generally, (people) aren't anticipating errors, browser deconstruction or denials of service. Incorporating these into programming generates an element of intrigue, seduction and frustration. Error is the mark of the higher organism, and it presents

³³⁷ Mark Lajoie, "Psychoanalysis and Cyberspace," (pp. 153–170), in *Cultures of Internet*, p. 163.

³³⁸ Kristeva, "Psychoanalysis and the Polis," p. 102, in Lajoie, "Psychoanalysis and Cyberspace," p. 165.

³³⁹ See Critical Art Ensemble and Richard Pell, <nettime> "Contestational Robotics" (Online). Available: nettime-l@Desk.nl, 1998.

an environment with which one is invited to interact or perhaps control."³⁴⁰

What matters in cyberspace is namely the possibility to interact concretely, hence materially, by means of different devices – from joysticks to datasuits – with the virtual world. It is exactly at this precise point of contact, at the interface between the virtual and real, that the user is called to insert his or her fingerprints, and ultimately, his or her material body also in the form of a mistake. The interface can be considered an obscene stain constantly reminding the user of his or her inability to become fully subject in cyberspace, and we might also say the same with regard to the mistakes. Mistakes in the image are like a fingerprint on the film, a scratch or scars on the skin – the evidence of the existence of the image. To make a mistake is to find a place in time. A mistake is like a wound in the image; it is like an error in the body, or, as formulated by Beardsworth, failure(s) represent(s) precisely our submission to time.³⁴¹ This is a situation of producing a gap, a hiatus, where we can insert not only a proper body, but also its interpretation.

We must continually engage to locate ourselves in the world in relation to others – human and non-human. "I am conscious of my body via the world, that it is the unperceived term in the center of the world towards which all objects turn their face; it is true for the same reason that my body is the pivot of the world: I know that objects have several facets because I could make a tour of the world through the medium of my body."³⁴²

In December 1997, TV Tokyo suspended the weekly regularly broadcasting of the popular 'Pocket Monster' cartoon, known as 'Pokemon,' because nearly 700 people nationwide, mainly children, were taken to hospitals after watching the show on 16 December. The TV viewers were afflicted by an outbreak of

³⁴⁰ See antiorp@tezcat.com /=[cw4t7abs/](#) <nettime> "=[cw4t7abs](#) 0+2 || !nter.bzzp" (Online). Available: [nettime-l@Desk.nl](#), 1998.

³⁴¹ Beardsworth, *Derrida & the politica*, p. 148.

³⁴² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962), p. 82.

convulsions and faintness, ending with catalepsy. The scene from *Pokemon*, which was suspected of sending hundreds to hospitals, can be described as four seconds of flashing red, blue, white and black lights. It was a kind of strobe flash, like second sunlight, something so hyper-bright that it resulted in both blindness and catalepsy.

Through this example, raises other important points in connection with the relationship between our physical body and the image. While I wish to avoid falling into the trap of mass-psychological hysterical readings of the eternally bad and dangerous influence of TV upon generations of viewers, I will try to establish an almost heretical interpretation of the event. We could say that the TV-induced epilepsy-like illness brought back to a mass of TV viewers the reality of their physical bodies. The human body has been, for more than a century, captured or frozen as images through photography. It has been approximately 120 years since the psychiatrist Martin Charcot, at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris, photographed his hysterical patients with the intention of making their illness visible. Now, in the 1990s, the body fights back! With the hysterical suffering body of *Pokemon*, we witness a reaction, a disobedience, to the until now immobile, or frozen, body's relation to the image. The success of photography in capturing hysteria had to do precisely with the mechanisms internal to photography, which are connected with its "reality effect," and with the photographic apparatus' potential to freeze the convulsive and hysterical body.

It seems that today, in a world supersaturated with images, to make the body visible – to simply remind ourselves that we have a physical body – the body had to fall back again into hysteria, into an outbreak of convulsions and faintness. On the other hand, *Pokemon* allows us to discuss the idea of total visibility constantly produced by the mass media. But this kind of total visibility is just media-processed; it is simply another form of misconstruction. In reality, we have, as Peter Weibel once noted, zones of visibility and zones of invisibility. The *Pokemon* 'Cataleptic Tuesday' event (*Pokemon* aired every Tuesday since

April 1997) brought us not only to the core of the processes of representation, and to the so-called zero-point of representation in relation to the physical body, but it represents an almost psychotic appearance of these phenomena, by the constantly hidden zones of invisibility in mass media. These zones flashed for a moment so brightly on the surface of the image, they allowed the body to become blind and hysterical.

This phenomenon may also be described through the perspective of Paul Virilio, who claims that the introduction of computerized technology simply makes visible what had been assumed or, I would suggest overtaken, – the fleeting time of exposure in instantaneous perception, which results in “a collapse of mnemonic consolidation.”³⁴³ It is a process showing that the observer’s moment of perception is no longer in sync, no longer integrated into the time of exposure, in the topographical perception and memorization processes impressed in the time of exposure. For Virilio, what characterizes the replacement of the depth of space by the depth of time, is a splitting of viewpoint, the sharing of perception of the environment between the animate (the living subject) and the inanimate (the object, the seeing machine). The vision(s) of this viewpoint, its visualizations, are what is already there in the eye of the camera(s), remaining in a “state of latent immediacy in the huge junk heap of the stuff of memory, wanting to reappear, inexorably, when the time comes.”³⁴⁴

To reappropriate the place of this memory, of virtual memory, in the modern way means, therefore, no longer to use traces – as virtual memory is no longer in a function of the past, but of the future – but instead it means to use mistakes, as the speed of light at which TV and radio information circulates are on the verge of being overtaken by the immobile speed of calculations.

³⁴³ Paul Virilio, *Vision Machine* (London and Bloomington, Indiana: British Film Institute and Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 7.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

