

## NEOMODERNISM



# ART INQUIRY

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RECHERCHES SUR LES ARTS

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Volume XVIII (XXVII)

## NEOMODERNISM



Łódź 2016

# ART INQUIRY

Recherches sur les arts

Volume XVIII (XXVII)

*Neomodernism*

Łódzkie Towarzystwo Naukowe

Societas Scientiarum Lodziensis

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Sales office (+48 42) 665 54 48, <http://sklep.ltn.lodz.pl>, [www.ltn.lodz.pl](http://www.ltn.lodz.pl), e-mail: [biuro@ltn.lodz.pl](mailto:biuro@ltn.lodz.pl)

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Edited with the financial support of the Faculty of Philosophy and History, University of Łódź

Indexed by CEEOL, EBSCOhost, CEJSH, ERIH Plus, Index Copernicus and Ministry of Science and Higher Education, ProQuest, SCOPUS.

Full-text articles are available online at [www.ceeol.com](http://www.ceeol.com), [www.cejsh.icm.edu.pl](http://www.cejsh.icm.edu.pl) and [www.ibuk.pl](http://www.ibuk.pl).

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ISSN 1641-9278 / e - ISSN 2451-0327

Print:

2K Łódź Sp. z o.o., ul. Płocka 53/45, [www.2k.com.pl](http://www.2k.com.pl), [2k@2k.com.pl](mailto:2k@2k.com.pl)

The journal is originally an electronic publication

Wersja elektroniczna stanowi pierwotną wersję czasopisma

Printed circulation: 80 copies



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## INTRODUCTION

### NEOMODERNISM

The concept of “neomodernism” appearing in the statements of some contemporary artists and in critical texts on art has not yet become an object of more general theoretical reflection. It has received most attention from researchers on architecture and film, who have however understood it rather narrowly – as a return to the stylistics of the 1950s or 1960s in some current realizations. In this volume of “Art Inquiry. Recherches sur les arts” we propose to address the subject of neomodernism from a much broader perspective, taking into account various art disciplines and philosophical aspects of the issue.

The renewed interest in modernism can be traced to at least three sources. The first is Jürgen Habermas’s thesis of the “incompleteness” of the modernist project, dating back to the early 1980s. Contemporary artists are thus exploring the possibilities of its completion. Another inspiration has been the development of technology. Despite the critical debates in the recent decades, this development cannot be stopped. New technologies have an influence on art, which changes to accommodate them, inscribing itself in the modernist concept of progress. The third source of neomodernism is nostalgia, evident in the return to the stylistics of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This tendency finds its expression not only in architecture and film, but also e.g. in contemporary design.

The above notes on neo-modernist tendencies obviously do not exhaust the whole subject. The concept deserves wider analysis and discussion, which we hope to inspire in this volume of „Art Inquiry”.

Grzegorz Sztabiński  
Paulina Sztabińska

## WSTĘP

### Neomodernism

Pojęcie „neomodernizm” pojawiające się w wypowiedziach niektórych artystów współczesnych i w tekstach krytyków sztuki nie stało się dotąd przedmiotem ogólniejszej refleksji teoretycznej. Najwięcej uwagi poświęcili mu badacze architektury i filmoznawcy, ujmując jednak zagadnienie w sposób dość wąski – jako nawiązywanie w niektórych aktualnie realizowanych budynkach i filmach do stylistyki właściwej dla dzieł z lat 50. lub 60. W bieżącym tomie „Art Inquiry. Recherches sur les arts” problem neomodernizmu podjęty zostanie znacznie szerzej, z uwzględnieniem różnych dziedzin sztuki i filozoficznych aspektów zagadnienia.

Wśród aktualnych powodów zainteresowania modernizmem zauważalne są przynajmniej trzy motywacje. Pierwsza z nich odnosi się do pochodzącej z początku lat osiemdziesiątych koncepcji Jürgena Habermasa dotyczącej jego „niedopełnienia”. Rozważane są w związku z tym współczesne możliwości uzupełnienia projektu modernistycznego. Drugie podejście ma podstawę w nieprzerwanym rozwoju techniki. Niezależnie od formułowanych w ostatnich dekadach argumentów krytycznych, postępu tego nie da się zatrzymać. Nowe technologie mają wpływ na sztukę, która zmienia się ze względu na uwzględnianie ich, wpisując w ten sposób w swe przemiany modernistyczną koncepcję rozwoju. Trzeci zauważalny aspekt neomodernizmu ma charakter nostalgiczny i wyraża się w powrocie do stylistyk z I połowy XX wieku. Tendencja ta znajduje wyraz, obok architektury i filmu, np. we współczesnym wzornictwie przemysłowym (design).

Oczywiście zasugerowane tu odmiany występowania tendencji neomodernistycznej nie wyczerpują całego zakresu zagadnienia. Problem wymaga szerszej analizy i dyskusji, której poświęcony jest ten tom.

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## THE CONTEMPORARY DILEMMAS OF NARCISSUS AND PYGMALION. A STUDY OF THE AESTHETICS OF LIFE

**Abstract:** This article presents two characters from the Greek mythology: Narcissus and Pygmalion. They are two different symbols of human destiny, who share a hyperactive attitude towards unreality/fiction. In their case, what exists loses the dispute over existence with what does not exist. Contrary to Narcissus, who is the victim of this dispute, Pygmalion is its beneficiary. Narcissus loses the dispute, because he is fulfilled in contemplation; Pygmalion wins, as he has managed to make his life a part of an aesthetic experience.

**Keywords:** fiction, culture, myth, nature, modernity, image, lust

In all the universe man cannot find a well so deep that, leaning  
over it, he does not discover at the bottom his own face.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

There are two main protagonists in this essay: Narcissus and Pygmalion. They share the same passion for unreality and both have enormous expectations. At the same time, they differ in many respects. Pygmalion is a modern king; he lives in a hierarchically mature society, in which the human world is separated from the world of gods, but remains dependent on their divine whims and good

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<sup>1</sup> L. Kołakowski, "Karl Marx and the Classical Definition of Truth", in: *Marxism and Beyond: on historical understanding and individual responsibility*, transl. by Jane Z. Peel, London: Pall Mall Press, 1968, 66.

intentions. On the contrary, the world of Narcissus is permeated by metaphysical – I would say: postmodern – chaos. The blood of gods is often mixed with human blood; humans are often accompanied by creatures of uncertain identity.

## 1. The loneliness of Narcissus and Pygmalion

Nothing happened by accident in Narcissus' life. It seems that even the way he was conceived determined his uniqueness. He was born by Liriope, "a water-lady whom Cephisus raped within a winding brook."<sup>2</sup> Liriope wanted to know if her son would live "to great old age," but Tiresias replied cryptically: "only if never he comes to know himself."<sup>3</sup> We do not know whether Liriope managed to tell her son of Tiresias's prophesy, since he left her emotional companionship pretty early, "for when Narcissus reached his sixteenth year he seemed to be a boy as much as man; both boys and girls looked to him to make love, and yet that slender figure of proud Narcissus had little feeling for either boys or girls."<sup>4</sup> Narcissus did not want to accept any otherness that would fill the entire world of his life even for a moment. Naturally, it might have been otherwise – although Narcissus avoided something, he did not know yet what he did not want. Hope for fulfilment was a mystery that evoked his fear. Therefore, he chose a lonely life. Pygmalion also knew the feeling of loneliness, because he "knew these women all too well; even if he closed his eyes, his instincts told him he'd better sleep alone."<sup>5</sup> It was some wild pride that isolated Narcissus from other people. It is likely that Pygmalion, who gave up the companionship of women, also had a high opinion of himself. Both of them were convinced that other people had nothing to offer to them. Though the protagonists did not miss the companionship of other humans, the latter occasionally appeared on the margins of their lonely lives.

## 2. Betrayed loneliness

### A. Narcissus

Narcissus met the nymph Echo. On the one hand, he met her only for a moment; on the other hand, she was accompanying him to the end of his days. The girl

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<sup>2</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, transl. by Horace Gregory, New York: The Viking Press, 1958, 348.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, 75.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, 277.

“could not check her tongue while talking, nor could she speak till someone spoke to her”; punished by gods, she could only repeat “the last few words.”<sup>6</sup> Echo had nothing to say to the world because she could only repeat – always in a mutilated form – what the world had already told her. Echo fell in love with Narcissus, who meant the world to her, “secretly she glided, fired with love, to follow him, and as she came closer to his side, the very source of flames increased her heat.”<sup>7</sup> Echo desired Narcissus, even though he had done nothing to make it happen... The spell cast by a goddess made her unable to confess her love to him.

Might Echo have tried to rape Narcissus to become the mother of his child? This seems unlikely, because in a world of relationships between men and women, the nymph, who could only quote the last words of her interlocutor, placed herself in a position imposed on her by the rules of the traditional patriarchal society and was probably not strong enough to follow her own desire. The beautiful and sensual nymph remained faithful to uncertainty, which was a permanent feature of her existence. Once Narcissus felt the presence of Echo, he suggested: “Here we shall meet.” Echo replied eagerly: “Here we shall meet”, and “to make those words come true, she slipped beyond the shelter of the trees to throw her arms around the boy she would embrace.”<sup>8</sup> Narcissus, however, ran away from her, scared by this declaration of love/lust: “Take your hands away – he cries – may I be dead before I love you!” Echo could finally confess her love to Narcissus for the first time: “I love you.”<sup>9</sup> This is perhaps the most ironic declaration of love in the history of mankind. Echo could finally tell Narcissus that she loved him, because he had earlier categorically refused to love her.

## B. Hermaphroditus

The rejection of Echo’s sexual offer by Narcissus resembles the story of Salmacis, another incredibly beautiful nymph, who was in love with the unimaginably handsome Hermaphroditus. The culturally mutilated Echo could only count on the efficiency of her desire. The situation of Salmacis was easier because

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, 75.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, 76.

<sup>9</sup> Owidiusz, *Metamorfozy*, transl. by Anna Kamińska and Stanisław Stabryła, ed. by Stanisław Stabryła, Wrocław, Warszawa and Kraków: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, Kraków 1995, 76 (my translation). Here the author exceptionally refers to the quotation from the Polish translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, which is different from the English translation. Cf. Ovid, op.cit., 76.

she could reinforce her erotic desires with a verbal intrigue. Namely, as soon as Salmacis saw Hermaphroditus, "O how she yearned to take him in her arms!... She chose her words and spoke: 'O lovely boy, if you are not a god, then you should be one, ... But gladder than all these, your lucky bride. If she exists, then let our love take shelter in the shade, if not, then let us find our wedding bed.'" Then, the girl "asked him for a sister's kiss" and, moving on from words to deeds, she "was about to stroke his snow-white neck." Hermaphroditus, however, was consistent and so "he cried, 'Leave me or I must run away.'" <sup>10</sup> Contrary to Echo, who was paralyzed by self-restraint, Salmacis could not withstand the excitement and "wait to hold him naked in her arms." Being tricky and eloquent, she cried:

I've won, for he is mine...  
 ... she clung,  
 Fastening his lips to hers, stroking his breast,  
 surrounding him with arms, legs, lips, and hands...  
 The heir of Atlas struggled as he could  
 against the pleasure that the girl desired,  
 But she clung to him as though their flesh were one,  
 'Dear, naughty boy,' she said, 'to torture me;  
 But you won't get away.'<sup>11</sup>

At the request of Salmacis, gods united the two of them in an eternal embrace of love. Desire supported by the expression of cultural expectations and possibilities turns out to be more effective than sexual desire, which can only be the voice of nature.

### C. The fear of love

Narcissus cried with no fear in his voice: "may I be dead before I love you!" Is it not true that young people rave about death because it seduces them with the spectre of its apparent "toothlessness"? Therefore, Narcissus, the forever young boy, felt threatened not by death, but by the love of the beautiful nymph, who took a favourable opportunity to embrace his neck and express her desire to immediately commit herself to him. <sup>12</sup> Narcissus, however, took the firm stance of Eros' antagonist. He rejected the love that could possibly unite him with other

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<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, 102.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, 103.

<sup>12</sup> H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, London: Routledge, 2012, p. 49.



people. He thus expressed his objection to “the subjugation of sexuality under the order of procreation.” Narcissus’ readiness to put his own life at stake only to avoid a sexual intercourse with Echo could of course indicate his homosexual tendencies. The point is, however, that he also rejected numerous sexual offers made by boys. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suppose that Narcissus was intuitively afraid to enter a socially (more) mature stage of life. After all, if he had responded to Echo’s desire with his own desire, his life would have probably become incomparably more stable. After a few months, for example, he could have found himself in the role of a father. Within the limits of fatherhood, his hunting passion would have finally become a suggestive manifestation of his responsibility for the Other. Although Echo wanted to give Narcissus delight, he preferred to die – in his opinion, of course, only symbolically – rather than to sacrifice his sullen youth on the altar of social maturity, which is invariably associated with this responsibility.

#### D. The ubiquitous desire for love

The nymph, who could offer Narcissus only her beautiful and voluptuous body, lost it irretrievably. However, the experience that soon occurred in Narcissus’ life killed him. He tried to quench his thirst in “the bright well”, “yet as he drank another thirst rose up: enraptured beauty caught his eyes that trapped him; he loved the image that he thought was shadow, and looked amazed at what he saw – his face.” Narcissus became ecstatic about himself: “Fixed, bending over it, he could not speak, himself as though cut from Parian marble.”<sup>13</sup>

The more Narcissus resembled a statue, the more painful emotions and unbearable thoughts he experienced. First, he felt awe and admiration, “enchanted by the charms which were his own.” Admiration evoked desire and lust. As a result, “he sought himself and was pursued, wooed, fired by his own heat of love.” Narcissus experienced the presence of the Other for the first time in his life. The boy did not turn away from the Other but, on the contrary, he wanted to learn more and more about him and his feelings. Moments of suffering alternated with moments of equally intense happiness. Narcissus had no doubt that he was loved by his image: “your tempting glances tell me of friendship in your eyes. Even as I reach, your arms almost embrace me...”<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, a drop of water effectively separated the thirsty lovers. As a result, Narcissus began to doubt in the love of the image. After all, if the reflection had really loved the boy, their love would certainly have been fulfilled.

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<sup>13</sup> Ovid, *op.cit.*, 77.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, 78.

Suffering from the lack of fulfilment, Narcissus finally realized that it was his own image that was the real object of his love: "I've loved within the shadow of what I am, and in that love I burn, I light the flames and feel their fires within."<sup>15</sup> However, this cognitive achievement occurred too late in Narcissus' life, because it befell a man who was utterly in love and who could be – solely and exclusively – utterly in love: as he who loves, knows only love. Contrary to the popular adage, love is not blind. It is only the way it perceives everything that is different; due to this different perception, it is unable to imagine the end of love. Narcissus, who fell in love with his own image, could not stop loving it. Narcissus who utterly loved his image was – to put it somewhat differently – Narcissus who loved it to death.

The problem is that Narcissus ignored the obvious fact that the reflection did not refer to anything but him and that he was the source of this reflection. Although Narcissus could see himself, he knew little about himself; he did not know anything about himself, because he could only see himself in the water mirror. Narcissus who loved a reflection without knowing that it was his own did not know, in fact, who he was.<sup>16</sup> Let me repeat: no love is blind. Thus, Narcissus was not blind because he loved his own image to death: "I am dying at life's prime. Nor have I fear of death which ends my trials, yet wish my lover had a longer life..." Although Narcissus revealed the mystery of his love, whereas his analytically perfect self-knowledge exposed its tautological nature ("we two shall perish in one breath"<sup>17</sup>), this feeling did not become less tragic and less demanding. He who knows and loves at the same time, first loves and only then he knows. The Cartesian *cogito* (*Cogito ergo sum* – I think, therefore I am) was defeated by *love*, even though this was not the Augustinian *dilige* (*Dilige et quod vis fac* – Love and do what you want), which brings man closer to the eternal and infinite God. This was *amo*, which binds man with another man till death doth them part. Before Narcissus met his reflection in the river, he had lived in an existential and social space devoid of so-called true values, on the altar of which man has to occasionally sacrifice his own life. It must be remembered, however, that Narcissus preferred to die than to live with Echo and, in this sense, his clearly formulated need to avoid this kind of experience seems to refer to such a true value. Nonetheless, this value does not appear to go beyond the horizon of his monstrously egotistic life and therefore does not deserve to be called a true value. The first true love was the first true value in Narcissus' life, yet it also proved to be his last feeling. Narcissus died – "death

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<sup>15</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. J. Kristeva, 'Narcissus: The New Insanity,' in: *Tales of Love*, transl. by Leon S. Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, 1987, 107.

<sup>17</sup> Ovid, *op.cit.*, 79.

shut fast the eyes that shone with light at their own lustre” – in a somewhat operatic manner: when he tore his clothes and beat his naked breast with his pale hands, scarlet blood splashed against his wounded chest. He could not bear the grief that he felt at the sight of his beloved water reflection taking on “a purple shade.” “Death shut fast Narcissus’ eyes”, because he could not stand the sight of his suffering image, which he loved to death.

### E. Pygmalion

Narcissus chose loneliness, which sentenced him to love his own reflection. Loneliness, as can be seen, is not a good life companion, because it leads people to nowhere. Pygmalion was also led astray by his loneliness. He thought he would be able to live without women. A desire to have a woman was the unexpected result of this rational decision. In response to it, Pygmalion “took to art, ingenious as he was, and made a creature more beautiful than any girl on earth. A miracle of ivory in a statue, so charming that it made him fall in love”<sup>18</sup> Pygmalion’s love for the statue of the girl was by no means Platonic. On the contrary, it triggered a whole range of sensory needs and experiences: the protagonist “stroked her arms, her face, her sides, her shoulder...” There were even moments when he actively penetrated the statue: “it seemed to him that his fingers slipped into her body.”<sup>19</sup> Pygmalion performed not only sexual caresses. He also developed more social forms of seduction: he used caressing words, brought Galatea gifts that girls delighted to wear and dressed her up like a queen. The result of his efforts was astonishing. Namely, “all these were beautiful enough, yet greater beauty shone from her nakedness in bed”<sup>20</sup>. Because the statue represented a naked female figure, the traditional logic of seduction, whose aim is to get to the naked body of the partner, was reversed. Nudity turned out to be not the point of arrival, but the point of departure in Pygmalion’s strategy of seduction.

Narcissus and Pygmalion were victims of loneliness, which they thought to be the optimal way of life. Loneliness gave them energy to withstand the realities of their own interpretive imaginations. They turned away from their real partners in order to bow to imaginary figures. Therefore, the water image of Narcissus was more than just a water image of Narcissus, and the cold statue of Galatea was more than just a cold statue of Galatea.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, 277-278.

<sup>19</sup> Owidiusz, op.cit., 264. Here again the author exceptionally refers to the quotation from the Polish translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, which is different from the English translation. Cf. Ovid, op.cit., 278.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

### 3. The reality of fiction

#### A. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Although the difference between the water image of Narcissus and the statue of Galatea is ontologically significant, it is not important from the epistemological point of view. Their ontological statuses are very different. The water reflection of Narcissus evidently belongs to the narrative of liquid modernity. Although the boy can lead his efficient cause to death, he must die along with it. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde can be treated as a modern – ontologically more stable – continuation of Narcissus' story. The eponymous picture became Dorian's Christian soul, or rather had the mythological function of nectar and ambrosia in his life. Therefore, the portrait became uglier – to put it more precisely: it got older – with each vile act committed by Dorian. The main protagonist himself did not grow older. Like Narcissus, the eternally young boy hoped for death, because it was only death that could keep him from the suffering he expected to endure in the next moment of his life. Narcissus' reflection was, and at the same time was not, a picture. It appeared in the boy's life thanks to him (after all, there is no reflection of Narcissus without Narcissus). However, it was not Narcissus, but the coincidence of many circumstances that must be regarded as the cause of the water image. Narcissus did not paint his reflection. It occurred as a result of a number of coincident factors: Narcissus' body, the water surface and sunlight. The more Narcissus was passive, the greater was the power of his reflection. The statue of Galatea had to be carved to exist; before it was carved, the idea of the statue had already occurred in Pygmalion's mind. Therefore, from the epistemological point of view, the statue of Galatea offered Pygmalion exactly the same thing as Narcissus' reflection offered to the boy.

#### B. The ambiguous reality of art

The surplus value of the reflection and the statue resulted from their being more than just an image and a statue. In the everyday world, objects most often tend to represent only themselves. They show both their "kindness" and their "malice" within the limits of their material functionality. Objects cease to follow this rule in art, entertainment and the world of religious and love experiences – they cease to follow this rule whenever we can, want, or even – as it also happens – have to look at the objects in a different way. If one can love an image, he can also be afraid of it. This was experienced by Andreas Carlstadt, a sixteenth-century Protestant Reformer. In one of his writings, he admits:

I stand in fear that I might not be able to burn idols. I would fear that some devil's block of wood would do me injury. Although, on the one hand, I have Scripture and know that images have no power and also no life, no blood, no spirit, yet, on the other hand, fear holds me and makes me stand in awe of the image of a devil ...<sup>21</sup>

If one can be afraid of an image, he or she can also make friends with it. Joseph Addison, an English aesthete who lived at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, stated that "A man of polite imagination is let into a great many pleasures... He can converse with a picture, and find an agreeable companion in a statue."<sup>22</sup>

Roman Ingarden did not hesitate to use the language implying an analogy between an aesthetic and an erotic experience to describe some phases of an aesthetic experience. Ingarden stated that in the very beginning of the preliminary emotion,

it is a state of an excitement with the quality which has imposed itself on us in the object perceived. While not realizing, in the first moment, distinctly what kind of quality it is, we feel only that it has allured us to itself, impelled us to give attention to it, to possess it in a direct, intuitive contact. In this excitement there is also included a moment of a usually pleasant astonishment on account of the appearance of the preliminary excitement quality, or rather of astonishment that it is "such a one," though we have not yet even had time to attain a distinct, intended and conscious grasp of this quality. At first – to express ourselves metaphorically – it merely "touches" us, excites us, and stirs us up in a peculiar way. This excitement transforms itself into a form of falling in love (of "eros") with the quality which imposes itself on us.... Hence, the preliminary emotion undoubtedly includes an emotional element, there also distinctly occur in it some moments whose nature is rather that of desire, namely, of a desire directed to the *quality*, which is given to us at first against the *background* of an object perceived with our senses.<sup>23</sup>

Ingarden concluded that a unique intercourse occurs during the development of the qualitative structures.

<sup>21</sup> A. Karlstadt, 'On the Removal of Images', in: *A Reformation Debate: Karlstadt, Emser and Eck on Sacred Images: Three Treatises in Translation*, vol. 1, trans. by Bryan D. Mangrum, Giuseppe Scavizzi, Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1998, 39.

<sup>22</sup> *The Works of Joseph Addison: The Spectator*, vol. 6, ed. by G.W. Greene, New York: G.P. Putnam & Company, 1854, 324.

<sup>23</sup> R. Ingarden, P. McCormick, *Selected papers in aesthetics*, Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1985, p. 114.

### C. The ambiguous reality of love

Narcissus' love of his own reflection was doomed to a tragic end, because its existence was secondary to the existence of Narcissus. A shadow is only a shadow. Although the statue of Galatea was also a shadow of Pygmalion's desires, it existed independently of them in purely material terms. Therefore, Pygmalion tried to change his life by calling gods for help: "May the very Gods in Heaven give me a wife" – he could not say outright "Give me the girl I made."<sup>24</sup> However, Venus learned the intentions of the prayer. She was not offended by the scepticism of Pygmalion, who did not believe at all in the omnipotence of the goddess and thus he radically limited his request. The goddess decided to use her entire omnipotence:

Then he ran home to see, to touch again  
 The ivory image that his hands contrived,  
 And kissed the sleeping lips, now soft, now warm,  
 Then touched her breasts and cupped them in his hands;...  
 Pygmalion, half-dazed, lost in his raptures,  
 And half in doubt, afraid his senses failed him,  
 Touched her again and felt his hopes come true,  
 The pulse-beat stirring where he moved his hands.<sup>25</sup>

There is no doubt that the authors of the best *ars amandi* manuals took their inspiration from the above description of the statue's resurrection.

The life of Daphne was a reverse of the fate of Galatea's statue, which came to life thanks to the loving caresses of Pygmalion. When caught up by lustful Phoebe, Daphne exclaimed:

"Father, if your waters still hold charms  
 To save your daughter, cover with green earth  
 This body I wear too well," and as she spoke  
 A soaring drowsiness possessed her; growing  
 In earth she stood, white thighs embraced by climbing  
 Bark, her white arms branches, her fair head swaying  
 In a cloud of leaves; all that was Daphne bowed  
 In the stirring of the wind, the glittering green  
 Leaf twined within her hair and she was laurel.

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<sup>24</sup> Ovid, *op.cit.*, 278.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, 265.

Even now Phoebus embraced the lovely tree  
Whose heart he felt still beating in its side;  
He stroked its branches, kissed the sprouting bark,  
And as the tree still seemed to sway, to shudder  
At his touch.<sup>26</sup>

The story of Pygmalion and Galatea ends in a truly Hollywood manner. The man – who finally became real – “kissed the girl until she woke beneath him, her eyes were shy, she flushed, yet her first look saw at one glance his face and Heaven above it.”<sup>27</sup> The first truth that Galatea learnt was that her lover had something in common with Heaven. There is no doubt that this would definitely help her exist in a patriarchal world. Galatea blushed when kissed by her lover. It is not certain whether it was a blush of shame, or rather the announcement of bliss, which she would soon experience for the first time in her life.

#### 4. The contemporary contexts of Narcissus’ and Pygmalion’s fates

Narcissus and Pygmalion exist in our world as two theoretical perspectives on fate, in which every contemporaneity tries to understand itself.

##### A. Our Narcissus

When we look at our lives through Narcissus’ glasses, we find him in every possible thread. Firstly, Narcissus is present in our God who created man in his own image and likeness. God needs people as mirrors in which he can see his own greatness, magnificence, and uniqueness.<sup>28</sup> Man is the image of God thanks to which God can find Himself. The relationship between God and man is similar to that between Narcissus and his reflection. The boy’s reflection existed as long as he was faithful to it; if Narcissus had gone away from the stream, his receding reflection would have inevitably found itself in a state of visual nothingness. Although Narcissus would still have been there despite moving away from the stream, at some point his receding reflection would have

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<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, 279.

<sup>28</sup> S. Lacione, *Knowing Kings: Knowledge, Power, and Narcissism in the Hebrew Bible*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001, 211.

disappeared from the water's surface. The water image of Narcissus was only an ontologically miserable shadow of Narcissus. The Bible also suggests that man himself is only an image. Can man, as the image of God, live without God and outside God? This is a difficult question in so far as we want to find the answer in the language of the world in which a central place is occupied by the demanding attitude of some particular notion of absolute truth. Then, life can be either true (as long as it leads to God), or false (if it turns away from God). An utterly narcissistic attitude is also evident in the biblical commandment of love: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18), quoted, among others, by the characters of the New Testament. To love another person, you have to know how to love yourself. The love for your neighbour does not begin when self-love ends but, on the contrary, it develops and continues to exist within its borders. Thus, self-love is not a "carrier rocket" for the love for a neighbour, removed as soon as one becomes filled only with the latter form of love. Caring for one's own eternal salvation seems to be the guiding principle of the Christian life. In this sense, every Christian finds oneself in the egotistic mirror of this very care.

Paradoxically, however, as Julia Kristeva writes:

[The mythical Narcissus] is a modern character much closer to us. He breaks with the ancient world because he turns sight into origin and seeks the other opposite himself, as product of his own sight. He then discovers that the reflection is no other but represents himself, that the other is the presentation of the self. Thus, in his own way, Narcissus discovers in sorrow and death the alienation that is the constituent of his own image.<sup>29</sup>

Narcissus was doomed to his own image. On the one hand, this makes him similar to the Platonic idea that is doomed to emit shadows. On the other hand, the image offered the boy its companionship, thus taking away the monopoly of existence from him. It turns out that we exist in so far as we can find ourselves in our own images. Deprived of images, we can only stare at nothingness, which seduces us with its apparent "toothlessness". Therefore, we strive consistently for their benevolent presence. As we strive probably too consistently, the benevolent presence of images in our life gives way to their gluttony and excess.

## B. Our Pygmalion

Narcissus was a master of contemplation, which, having filled his life, led to his death. When Pygmalion gave up the companionship of women, he also seemed

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<sup>29</sup> J. Kristeva, *op.cit.*, 121.



to enter the path of contemplation, which could have doomed him sooner or later exclusively to self-experience. Nevertheless, this did not happen. Pygmalion desired to experience the presence of a woman (her body). The desire inspired him to carve her (its) substitute. As a result, Pygmalion experienced an illusion of the world – unlike Narcissus, who experienced an illusion of himself. While the former was a premature “disciple” of Kant, who learned to live in a world of the constructs of his reason, the latter was an early follower of Berkeley. However, Narcissus was in a more difficult position than his master. Although he lived in a world full of gods, he did not believe in the God who could prove the existence of the world. The choice of nothingness was the last gesture of his powerless life. Pygmalion managed to discover the world of his own reason. Therefore, he was able to oppose it and to become independent from it. His intention, however, was not to abandon it, but to make it the subject of his request addressed to the goddess. Kristeva concludes:

Deprived of the One, he has no salvation; otherness has opened up within himself. He no longer has the thinking *nous* of the ancient world that could have enabled him to approach the other as plurality, a multiplicity of objects or parts. He no longer has the Plotinian loving *nous* that could have led him to escape his otherness through a merging with the One. If he is alone, his otherness is not completed within totality, it does not become internality. It remains open, gaping, mortal, because deprived of the One. Is it then by chance that the images of psychological or aesthetic Narcissi accompany the crises of salvation religions, and are a compelling presence in our contemporary world, shaken by the death of the One God?<sup>30</sup>

### **Conclusion: Unfortunately, the God remains in a very good condition**

There are indications that this time again – a hundred years after Nietzsche’s famous declaration – the death of the One God was announced too hastily. Although we try to bury a dead God in the temporal illusions of popular culture, the God that we bury is still socially and morally alive, because all these values and concepts that form the idea of God cannot be dead as long as people agree – and even want – to sacrifice their lives for them. Though defined in many different ways in contemporary philosophy, art and literature, God’s funeral still unsurprisingly appears to the world as a parody of the funeral that has consistently been arranged by the One God. There is no place for a miracle in Narcissus’ world. Pygmalion’s fate shows that faith can move mountains. In my

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<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, 121.

personal opinion, we should leave the mountains alone and take care of what happens between them in some wise and postmodernly modern way.

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## WSPÓŁCZESNE ROZTERKI NARCYZA I PYGMALIONA. STUDIUM Z ESTETYKI ŻYCIA (streszczenie)

W artykule prezentuję dwie postaci greckiej mitologii: Narcyza i Pygmaliona. Są to dwa różne symbole ludzkiego losu, które łączy nadaktywny stosunek do nierzeczywistości/fikcji. W ich przypadku to co jest, przegrywa spór o istnienie z tym, czego nie ma. W przeciwieństwie do Narcyza, który jest ofiarą tego sporu, Pygmalion jest jego beneficjentem. Narcyz przegrywa, ponieważ spełnił się w kontemplacji; Pygmalion wygrywa, ponieważ udało mu się uczynić swoje życie częścią doświadczenia estetycznego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** fikcja, kultura, mit, natura, nowoczesność, obraz, pożądanie.

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## **NEO/MODERNISM – PHILOSOPHICAL AWARENESS IN ART**

**Abstract:** We are confronting a major problem with naming the artistic and philosophical moment we have found ourselves in. It should be perceived as significant that the numerous names for the artistic and philosophical responses to modernity pose as their goal the end of post-modernism – as if they were to heal modernism of its disease. Therefore, there have appeared numerous names for “the now”: metamodernism, hypermodernism, remodelnism, transmodernism or neomodernism – to enumerate just some of the proposed ones. They position themselves in-between challenge and extension, providing a critique – but also constructive scenarios that appropriate certain themes and methods. The interplay of resistance and perpetuation is ambiguous in all these instances. Nevertheless, the general stance is that their emergence is an attempt to transgress modernism and postmodernism. The problem with neomodernism is already based on the problem with modernism and the unanswered, open questions inherited from it. We are probably living in a trap that we invented ourselves – an interpretation *ad infinitum*. We may argue, however, that the most important feature of modernist art is that it is philosophical. It has the all-questioning, anaesthetic character. It could be called self-awareness of art or iconoclasm of art. The gaze (seeing) and thinking become one, thought is in the forms. Neomodernism may be a better name for what is happening than the crisis of art.

**Keywords:** modernism, postmodernism, neomodernism, art, philosophy.

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world – and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Are returns possible?

I was recently reminded that the "owl of Minerva" always arrives at night. Philosophical wisdom is supposed to come late. Philosophers are neither concerned with immediate reporting on events, nor with live transmissions.

But are they not? In the field of art, this no longer seems obvious. What does seem obvious, however, is that we are confronting a major problem with naming the artistic and philosophical moment we have found ourselves in. It should be perceived as significant that the numerous names for artistic and philosophical responses to modernity pose as their goal the end of post-modernism or even post-postmodernism – as if they were to heal modernism of its disease. "Because the very term post-modernism has come to represent controversy and criticism, many post-modernists avoid the label. Some argue that the word *post-modern* promotes a singular view of reality, encourages closure, and denies complexity. So they retreat from it to avoid its pejorative associations as something bizarre and frivolous."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, there have appeared numerous names for "the now". Among those "magic spells" that aim to interpret and alter our direction in culture we may find: metamodernism, hypermodernism, remodernism, transmodernism or neomodernism – to enumerate just several of the proposals. They position themselves in-between challenge and extension, providing a critique – but also constructive scenarios that appropriate certain themes and methods – and at the same time questioning what seems already invalid. The interplay of resistance and perpetuation is ambiguous, delicate, intricate and complex in all these instances. Nevertheless, the general stance is that their emergence is concerned with the transgression of modernism and postmodernism.

The new artistic and intellectual developments could be therefore viewed in terms of the Hegelian dialectics. This is how they are perceived within the orientation that calls itself neomodernism. The authors of the Neomodern

<sup>1</sup> M. Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into the Air*, Verso: New York, 1983, p. x.

<sup>2</sup> P. M. Rosenau, *Post-modernism and the social sciences. Insights, inroads, and intrusions*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1992, p. 17.

Manifesto, André Durand and Armando Alemdar, state therein: “Neomodernism acknowledges the primacy of the Hegelian Idea, upholds both figuration and abstraction, and resists the traditional distinction between old masters and modernist works of art.”<sup>3</sup> The novelty here is therefore the will to reconnect with the so-called tradition of old masters in the way that would not necessarily constitute an ironic pastiche. This seems to be the difference between neo-modernism and postmodernism. The latter did not take tradition to be a unilinear progression that could be continued. The difference between modernism and neo-modernism is that modernism broke free from tradition and rejected the monopoly of the mimetic principle. It seems that in postmodernism the crisis of representation was continued and radicalized:

The crisis of representation crosscuts post-modernism in every field from art to psychology, and in each case ‘The end of the Order of Representation’ is heralded. (...) What is really interesting cannot be represented: ideas, symbols, the universe, the absolute God, the just or whatever. Representation is alien to what postmodernists value: the romantic, emotions, feelings.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, the self-appointed representatives of neomodernism wish to restore representation as something powerful. They suggest a return to the easel, to painting, to the grand topics in the painting tradition. They view contemporary art as led astray. To support this thesis they quote Damien Hirst, who once stated that there has to be something wrong with the art world if one can ‘do’ it at the age of 32.<sup>5</sup> The abovementioned representatives wish to restore the Christian symbols – such as the lamb, or the grand themes – like the nude. On top of this synthesis of all the past and the future, they believe that they are pointing the way to a new direction in art. Whether the self-imposed new modernists are the true and only new modernists is a question we will try to pose by the end of this article. For now we need to note that their understanding of neomodernism – but also any vision that incorporates synthesis – would have to include a possibility of a progression, of a path towards completion. The past of art should be then perceived by a neomodernist in the following way: the initial thesis lacks empirical validation (modernism). Therefore, the second negative phase is to give the thesis the sense of the concrete to negate it (postmodernism). The tension between the project that dominated modernity (modernism) and its anti-project (postmodernism) leads us to a synthesis (neomodernism?).

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.andredurand-gallery2000.com/pages/manifesto>, retrieved 6.09.2016

<sup>4</sup> P. M. Rosenau, *op.cit.* p. 94.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.andredurand-gallery2000.com/pages/manifesto>, retrieved 6.09.2016

Many scholars, however, have abandoned the idea of progress, progression, or any linearity for the narrative of human experience. For them, looking through the lenses of linear development and seeing an unused potential in modernism is sheer naivety. Others may perceive neomodernism and some of the “-isms” cited above as a continuation of post-modernism, rather than unfulfilled modernist potential. Pauline Rosenau, for example, differentiates between affirmative and sceptical post-modernism. To stay consistent with its assumptions, sceptical post-modernism should probably not find its continuation at all, but the affirmative version of postmodernism (that which does not construe any overriding truth or meaning but is also not dogmatic about its inexistence) could be easily developed further, according to Rosenau.

Can we therefore be positive that neomodernism actually exists? Can we assume that it is a current unfolding in art and culture? Perhaps it is an intuition or an interpretation of the *zeitgeist* rather than a current? A wishful prognosis. If there is no certainty that it exists, how can it be discussed by philosophers? First of all, if it is uncertain whether something is or is not, then it is definitely a ground for philosophers. Secondly, maybe the owl turns out to be a falcon and its flying in circles makes it more predictable for those who observe the flight. The new and the old are not as separate as we would like to think. Or, perhaps, the owl is a swallow. The debate about whether it is the philosophers or the artists who intuit the earthquake is reminiscent of the hen and egg dilemma. Birds aside, apart from confronting all the new “-isms” and “types of modernisms”, we should face the fact that there must be an unsolved problem (or problems) with modernism – or at least with modernity – that is coming to surface. Apart from that, there are two more scenarios connected with this folly of names that I suggest confronting. The first is that we should abandon our hopes of finding a single “-ism” to describe our plural reality. And the second is that Minerva in the end is right: we cannot grasp phenomena while they last. We also never know when they actually come to an end.

What could be this problem with modernism and modernity that produces a compulsion to multiply names and scenarios? It was already the “make it new” slogan of modernism that turned out to be a trap in itself. Making things new is about breaking with tradition, but what happens if this tradition is already a tradition of breaking with tradition? How would it be possible to struggle to make modernism forever new? The keeping up of modernist tradition stands in opposition to making it new. It is not, however, impossible – as the representatives of neomodernism seem to demonstrate. But are they truly convincing with their script-based art? The neomodernism that they announce is not an *ensemble* of cultural movements that we recognize as animating art, literature, architecture and music. It is more of an effort to create it in the closed laboratory of their thoughts and works.

All in all, the paradoxical effort to perpetuate the avant-garde and the interruption of tradition – that modernism has indeed itself become – has been fiercely criticized by both the public and the art critics. This time we must really ask ourselves whether reality can be divided into notions, and whether this can be done in a preventive fashion, as a performative speech act, or just as a post-factum description. Some of us may actually think that modernism has never stopped having its impact since the very first tremors of this art-quake. But what would provide sufficient evidence that we have never abandoned modernism and that it is still there? Even if we do not sympathize with analytical solutions, they may at least be considered. Let us think of Occam's razor and envisage the possibility of acting in accordance with its simplicity principle. This heuristic technique teaches us that in choosing a theoretical model one can be guided by a preference for less complexity, since simpler theories are more easily verifiable. This is not an irrefutable principle, it is practical. Why use multiple instruments, if we need just one? Nevertheless, we can also perceive the situation from the opposite side: if four instruments are not enough, we need to add a fifth one. Maybe the argument that the modernist compulsion to make things new is indeed one of its essential features and therefore all other modernisms (postmodernism and neomodernism included) could actually be viewed as its mutations is stronger than Occam's razor.

## **2. What is modernism?**

In the light of the above, it seems that the question of the nature of neomodernism could also be reformulated as the question about modernism. Are we done with modernism? Can we search for a new name that indicates a certain rupture with what it was to respond to reality in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and before? Do we need the term "neomodernism" to signal a break from postmodernism or from modernism?

Finding a deep break between the past and the present has become both one of the least and the most favourite tasks in the social sciences. Although judging the beginnings and ends of phenomena has been lately perceived as somewhat arbitrary, we do recognize them when they are truly dramatic. We can, for example, observe the rise or the fall of such features as rationalism and instrumentation. We have been able to see how the Bible ceases to be the only point of reference for the deepest human dilemmas. What dramatic change can we pinpoint then between modernism and neomodernism? The dramatic changes that appear between modernism and its continuations seem to be the critique of the Western, Europocentric vision and the critique of universalism and utopia. For any optimistic project, utopia must probably loom in the distance.

But looming in the distance as the horizon of an unreachable ideal is not the same as being seen as an actual possibility.

The problem with neomodernism is already based on the problem with modernism and the unanswered, open questions inherited from it. Nevertheless, we should ask whether the existence of unanswered questions makes modernism a fiasco or rather shows its “never-ending now” as a potential to continue shaping our future through art and philosophy. Or is it perhaps in the nature of modernity that it is an open-ended project – an Open Work, a writerly text that is to be constantly rewritten by the reader? We are probably living in a trap that we have invented ourselves: the trap of an interpretation *ad infinitum*. Nevertheless, what we can consciously choose is an interpretation that suits our best intentions for the future. “In order to consciously take part in the project of modernity, one needs to be able to objectively differentiate oneself from modernization. Having said this, *modernization*, *modernity* and *modernism* are all made from the same clay.”<sup>6</sup> Differentiating oneself from modernization means that we remain distanced and critical towards the circumstances of our material existence in the world, e.g. the technological possibilities. Modernity is the now, modernization is the vector of the material conception for our living, and the modernisms are responses to it. What Greenhalgh means by “the same clay” is probably the context.

One should not forget that Modernism has its temporal and spatial characteristics as the European style that some trace back to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and others ascribe to the 1920-1960 period in visual arts. Nevertheless, Gallien Déjean highlights the fact that it was the 1950s and 1960s that constituted the moment of outstanding intensity in art. There appeared a lot of new artistic groups like GRAV, MID, NULL, Gorgona, Exat 51, G-58, Fluxux, collective ZERO. Of course there were differences in their programmes, but there were also important common elements. Déjean also sees a major difference between the 1940s, marked by the trauma of the war and concentrated on individual wounds, and the more distanced 1950s.

Modernism is far from being a simple concept and different researchers trace different origins for it. The temporally narrowest view of modernism is that of some researchers of design who see it as a style originating in the Bauhaus in the 1920s and ending in the 1960s. The broadest view, popular among philosophers, traces its roots to the Enlightenment with its combination of humanist and rational influences. There is also a third, “radical” tendency – to see modernism as an approach or attitude that is not fully defined by time.

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<sup>6</sup> P. Greenhalgh, *The Modern Ideal. The Rise and Collapse of Idealism in the Visual Arts. From the enlightenment to postmodernism*, V&A Publications : London 2005, p. 23.



This vision was represented in design by Dan Friedman, who wrote: “I view modernism in design as a broad, potentially open-minded, and inexhaustible way of thinking that began in the mid-nineteenth century and continues today among the majority of us who believe that we should use all existing means to understand, improve, change, and refresh our condition in the world.”<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, in his efforts to define modernism, Peter Gay writes jokingly in his book *Modernism. The Lure of Heresy*<sup>8</sup> that you know modernism when you see it. But this – even if true – cannot be enough for a scholar. What is more, it would make us confused about the question of modernity. “The word ‘modern’ (...) has allowed us, through the last century, to label ‘modern’ every painting, pot, dress, lampshade, sculpture, wardrobe or bungalow that has contained bright colour, flat surfaces or quirky angles, without too much thought.”<sup>9</sup>

To trace and understand modernism we have to know how we recognize it. The reason for sketching the impossible portrait of modernism reflected in today’s tendencies is an underlying belief that “For two and a half centuries, artists have struggled to create an art appropriate to the conditions of the modernized world. The outcome of this struggle has been modern art. Modern art remains a grand problem.”<sup>10</sup> One could ask why it remains a problem and also why it remains. When modernism is concerned there arises a number of questions, such as what is modern and what is contemporary, and how do we draw the line between the two; or what is the relation between modernism and the avant-garde; or what is the relation between modernism and postmodernism. It becomes clear that we are confronted with a constellation of interdependent notions of modernism, postmodernism, avant-garde, modern, contemporary. The centre of this constellation, however, seems to be a kind of prolonged now, rather difficult to delineate. If we accept the definition of modernity suggested by Paul Greenhalgh – “(...) to be concise at least on the definition: modernity is the name we give to our responses to the material modernization of the world”<sup>11</sup> – we may see that modernity can never end. Greenhalgh adds yet another notion to the constellation – that of modernization:

We (that is to say, some of us) have changed the physical world irrevocably over the last number of centuries. In doing so, we (all of us) were ourselves changed: modernity is the collectivity of responses to the change

<sup>7</sup> D. Friedman, *Radical Modernism*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 1994, p. 114.

<sup>8</sup> P. Gay, *Modernism. The Lure of Heresy. From Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond*. W.W. Norton & Company: New York, 2008, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> P. Greenhalgh, op.cit, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, op.cit, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, op.cit, p. 22.

modernization has wrought in us. Modernity is thus a state of being that exists in a tense, intertwined relationship with modernization. More than this, we (again some of us) *deliberately* modernized the world, but as a species we did not deliberately set out to change ourselves: it was the process of a modernization that changed us, bestowing on us a wholly novel set of experiences, and demanding of us that we respond.<sup>12</sup>

The aspect of a reply to the on-going process of modernization seems essential, as well as the fact of recognizing that the modernization of ourselves is both mental and physical, since technology reaches deep into our bodies. But are these the most important elements of the definition?

### 3. The atemporality of modernism

It is often repeated that it is the development of modern industrial societies that has shaped the modernist trend. However, the actual consequences of this “shaping” are not determined; the technological and industrial development is still ongoing. Thus, together with its new turns and consequences we can observe new reactions towards it in art. But are these reactions still modernist in their approach? And what would that mean? Continuous enthusiasm, shock, or an assimilation of forms and themes? Technology is still evolving, or rather undergoing revolutionary changes. We are more informed about it and sceptical towards it – but at the same time we are becoming increasingly dependent on it and even constituted by it.

Another important factor forming the identity of modernism is usually traced to the atrocities of World War I and World War II. However, the scholars of modernism adopt different standpoints in this respect. Some seem to ascribe the direct formative impact to the years just after the war. Gallien Déjean<sup>13</sup> writes that the practices of the 1940s were mainly based on individual traumas and that the artists largely inscribed those private scars into their works. Thus, she is more appreciative of the art of the 1950s, which – according to her – was freed from this individual dimension and concentrated on the development of the work of art as such. According to Déjean, the work of art in the 1950s was struggling towards the new dimensions of transitivity. It entered the domain of what Umberto Eco calls the Open Work. The features of the Open Work – the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>13</sup> G. Déjean, *Zéro et Nouvelles Tendances. L'enjeu transrégional* [in:] *Au nom de l'art.. Enquête sur le statut ambigu des appellations artistiques de 1945 à nos jours*. Publication de la Sorbonne: Paris, 2013, p. 157-170.

artist's decision to leave the arrangements of some constituents of a work of art undetermined, open to the readers' or viewers' interpretation or to chance, its multiplicity and plurality – persist until today. If Déjean is right, there is already a shift within the decades. Therefore, without an integral consistent character throughout the trend, how can we compare the *here* and *now* with the *then* and *there*? Shall we not rather seek the characteristics that are less related to temporality? The trauma of the war and the technological trauma (even if the technology had been met with enthusiasm) can never be really healed, but these events do not really shape our identity in the same sense as they did a hundred years ago. Perhaps instead of focusing on particular events, the criterion of modernist thinking should be the more general "responsiveness to a context". A different way of looking at the importance of the context has been suggested by Jacques Rancière, who – instead of using the problematic notions connected with contemporary art or trying to understand modernity which is the basis for the development in contemporary art – offers the notion of aesthetic regime. Each work of art is constituted by its context, its historical situation, and – according to Rancière – has its political implications. Therefore each conception of art positions itself towards the regime, where the regime means a number of assumptions that influence the meaning of the art works.

The complexity of the "here" and "now" versus "there" and "then" that opens up when we start confronting the notions of modernism and neomodernism if we use Greenlagh's perspective is that "For each artist and movement within the whole modern tradition, the problem has always been both the same and different. It has been the same, because the reason why modern art is made has remained the same; it is different, because the conditions in which it is made have constantly changed, demanding different aesthetic solutions."<sup>14</sup> It is disputable whether, as Greenlagh suggests, the reason to make modern art is the same. He does not even state this reason as if it were a very obvious one. It is a rare approach to treat anything as obvious in the realm of art and philosophy. To start with, the reasons to make art can be divided into those that concern immediate and material recognition and those that touch upon somewhat transcendent grounds (communicating a certain insight, creating a reality that can have a transforming power or a platform for sublimation of feelings etc.). It seems that each artist can have motivations of his/her own and that a given trend captures art as a slightly different entity. Isn't it true, then, that the reason to make art changes together with the understanding of what it is? However, this plurality of definitions and motivations constitutes one of the reasons why we have found ourselves at a loss to find a common label for contemporary artistic actions.

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<sup>14</sup> P. Greenlagh op.cit., p. 13.

Similarly to Greenlagh, Jacques Rancière points to a particular reason to make art. He says that being loyal to the general motive for art – figurative or any other kind – which has imposed itself since the times when it is no longer obligated by the norms of representation, is to make visible what is not seen, what finds itself underneath the visible: the invisible which makes the visible possible.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. Philosophical awareness in art

In the search for an atemporal dimension of modernism we may consult the views of Alain Viguier, who has highlighted the importance of the attack on the separation of the work of art and life in his book on the avant-garde entitled *Logique du cadre. Précédents et conséquences de la néo avant-garde*.<sup>16</sup> In his view, the avant-garde is about attacking the institutions or people trying to draw a borderline between life and art. This attack persists until today. Nevertheless, it also provides us with a problem concerning the criteria of recognizing art objects. If everything and anything could be an art object and if there is no division between art and life, we cannot tell the difference between an art object and a non-art object.

We may argue, however, that the most important feature of modernist art is its philosophicalness. It has an all-questioning, anaesthetic character. It could be called self-awareness of art or iconoclasm of art. The gaze (seeing) and thinking become one; thought is in the forms. What are the particular philosophical features of modernism? To enumerate just three:

- The wish to depart from point zero, to start everything anew without using the assumptions of tradition.<sup>17</sup> We see this method used by Socrates, Descartes, phenomenology.
- The turn away from the focus on perception and reception towards production (the processual context of creation rather than the structure or materiality of the work).
- The questioning of itself, of its goals and aims, methods, frontiers and characteristics.

<sup>15</sup> see : J. Rancière, *Figure de l'Histoire*, Presses Universitaires de France: Paris, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> A. Viguier, *Logique du cadre. Précédents et conséquences de la néo avant-garde*, Hôtel des Bains éditions: Verneuil-sur-Avre, 2005, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> E. de Chasse, S. Raymond (ed.), *Repartir à zéro, comme si la peinture n'avait jamais existé*, Musée des beaux arts de Lyon, Hazan: Paris 2008.

The first two characteristics should make us think of revolutionary moments in modern philosophy. In the first feature we hear the echo of Socrates, Descartes, Husserl, in the second that of Kant, and the third could actually be seen as characterizing philosophy as such. Although Wolfgang Iser has written his famous essay on “The birth of postmodern philosophy from the spirit of modern art”, we can clearly see – considering the three given characteristics – that the question of what is born from what is again reminiscent of the egg and hen dilemma. The self-questioning tendency of philosophy since ancient times is well-known.

Now it may become more clear that the goal of defining modernism in a definitive way is equally difficult, not to say absurd, as that of trying to define philosophy in one definitive way. This results from their very nature – the impossibility of separating them from life, the closeness which they both demand. We live them and their definition escapes us because it is continually enlarged by what we do. This is also the reason why defining modernism and philosophy always has a prescriptive aspect, as it is an equation of a somewhat tactical or strategic decision where to find its frontiers. Nevertheless, it is an important task that has to be regularly renewed. In this perspective, neo-modernism may be perceived as a new hermeneutical effort to understand modernity.

## 5. Neomodernism

Can we say, in regard to the relation between modernism and neomodernism, that artistic strategies and aesthetic solutions have been reused, although the conditions have changed? Would Peter Gay’s joke, mentioned in the beginning of this article, be still funny and true: that we know modernism when we see it? What are the ways in which modernism returns? Are they visual or rather intellectual? Perhaps they have to do with the continuation of certain visual philosophy which might have developed itself in the ways that it criticizes and negates. The clear use of the modernist visual conventions would probably be an act of reinventing the wheel. Perhaps we cannot say that we know modernism, or this time rather neomodernism, when we see it because, in order not to lose its meanings, it must adapt to the new context and use a new vocabulary of artistic tools that we are not yet able to visually recognize.

To approach this question much more practically, it seems indispensable to look at a particular example. Let us examine the painting of George Condo, an American artist born in 1957. When we look at most of Condo’s paintings we will see the large spectrum of conventions that he uses. And already here we shall stop and see that the “use” of conventions is not the same as the breaking

of conventions. Condo takes advantage of a vast, existing repertoire that brings us back to surrealist, cubist, abstract and pop-art paintings. Contemporarily, we can call them conventions because they have all by now been well established in art; meanings have been ascribed to them, their importance challenged by time. The allusions to cubism can be seen in the way the figures are posed, the use of colours, the geometrization and fragmentarization of the depicted people and objects. What is then the characteristic of his painting? Is it just a sum of the hybridizations of the earlier conventions? The “seeing” that is engaged here is not of an innocent character; it is experienced and well-informed.

Finally, we should thus ask what is neomodernism? It is interesting to see that one of the most important philosophers thought of as neomodernist does not use the word “neomodern” in her book that could seem crucial to the theory of neomodernism. Agnes Heller in *Can modernity survive?* refers to pre-modernism, modernism and postmodernism, but there is no mention of neomodernism. The same applies to her book *Aesthetics and Modernity*, written with John Rundell. She does, however, use such words as “humanisation” or “universalism” – which take us back to the modernist landscape.

Likewise, the term “neomodernism” is difficult to find in French philosophy; it is much easier to read about the avant-garde and its multiple waves. Peter Burger enumerates the practices employed after World War II – such as monochrome, ready-made, assemblage, collage, constructivist structure – to conclude that they can all be described as neo-avantgarde. In his *Theorie der Avantgarde* (1974), he writes that these are passive repetitions of a heroic period in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He also believes that the criticism towards traditional institutions has been neutralized. Buchloh and Foster have a different notion of the avant-garde: they do not describe it in terms of pastiche, but rather in terms of a historiographic re-reading of modern artistic tendencies, or in terms of retracing a certain discourse of the avant-garde that was repressed by the formalist discourse. The French theoreticians mention the first wave of neo-avantgarde, thus our contemporary situation could be described as the second wave of the avant-garde. The time period of the first neo-avantgarde may be delineated as 1950-1970.

We should ask ourselves if the differentiation between the terms “modernism”, “postmodernism” and “neomodernism” is needed only to divide the large stretches of time and the changing context. The change of name should follow a rupture, a change in identity, an overcoming of the initial flaws. In the Neomodern Manifesto, we can read that “Durand’s *Away from the Flock/Et In Arcadia Ego* is an emblematic ‘Neomodern’ picture, extending the dialectical movement from so-called high art to Postmodernism and beyond. Neomodernism restores the traditional and eternal values of art while contemplating the essence and potential of the present.”<sup>18</sup> Is it then a consciously constructed trend or is it

rather the sum of all the tendencies that we observe today and that bear some or many resemblances to the modernist trend? Is it a name for the times we are living in? A name that shows a rupture with postmodernist critique and a new effort to construct artistic and philosophical reality? Jacques Rancière reminds us in the chapter entitled “L’excès des mots” that letting ourselves be trapped by words means using the words which are improper, because they are not contemporary to what they name.<sup>19</sup> In fact, he is talking about Cobban and the Revolution – but the task of interpreting his words remains. It is impossible not to notice that the entire discussion about art and its role has become very politicized. Certainly, for Rancière, the dialectic of power and knowledge is a crucial one. Seeing as knowing thus becomes a life and death issue. The crisis of art that was announced a long time ago – over thirty years ago or more – is one of the possible names for what is happening to us now. Nevertheless, as Rancière tells us, the rhetoric of the criticism of this period of art may be more important for those who criticize than the object of the criticism.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps this is why “neomodernism” is still a better name for what is currently happening than “crisis”.

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## NEO/MODERNIZM - FILOZOFICZNA ŚWIADOMOŚĆ W SZTUCE (streszczenie)

Doświadczamy obecnie poważnego problem związanego z nazwaniem artystycznego i filozoficznego momentu, w którym się znaleźliśmy. Znaczący wydaje się fakt, że liczne nazwy artystycznych i filozoficznych odpowiedzi na nowoczesność dają sobie za cel zakończenie postmodernizmu – tak jakby miały wyleczyć modernizm z jego choroby. Nazwy, które pojawiły się, aby opisać nasze “teraz” to: metamodernizm, hypermodernizm, remodernizm, transmodernizm czy neomodernizm. Propozycje te stanowią zarazem krytykę jak i kontynuację dotychczasowych trendów. Każdorazowo dialektyczna gra pomiędzy oporem i kontynuacją jest wieloznaczna i skomplikowana. Jednakże ich pojawienie się w sposób ogólny można wiązać z przekraczaniem modernizmu i postmodernizmu. Problem z neomodernizmem oparty jest na nierozwiązanym problemie z modernizmem; odziedziczone zostają te same pytania. Wygląda na to, że żyjemy w pułapce, którą sami wymyśliliśmy, jest nią interpretacja *ad infinitum*. Można argumentować, że najważniejszą cechą modernistycznej sztuki jest jej filozoficzność, podający wszystko w wątpliwość anestetyczny charakter. Można nazwać ową filozoficzność samoświadomością sztuki lub jej ikonoklastycznością. Wzrok (patrzenie) i myślenie stają się jednym, myśl zawiera się w formach. Być może neomodernizm to lepsza nazwa na to co obecnie się dzieje niż “kryzys”.

**Słowa kluczowe:** modernizm, postmodernizm, neomodernizm, sztuka, filozofia.



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## **REDEFINING THE CONCEPTS OF THE AVANT-GARDE AS AN EXAMPLE OF A POSSIBLE RETURN TO MODERNISM**

**Abstract:** The paper is an attempt to demonstrate that expanding the definition of the terms relating to 20<sup>th</sup> century art makes it possible to return it to modernism. Such an approach is possible in relation to the issues that were topical both before the avant-garde and in postmodernism. This analysis was inspired mainly by the inconsistency of the views on the avant-garde content, further expanded by postmodern theories. Pluralism, both modernist and postmodernist, does not preclude references to the modernist ideas in contemporary scholarship.

I have based my reflections on the issue of autonomy in avant-garde art. The multidimensional character of this concept and the transformation of its scope in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the 20<sup>th</sup>-century pluralization of theories, directions and concepts makes it possible to analyze the problem from different perspectives, visible today from the post-postmodern perspective. Starting from the views of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller, I take into account the views of theoreticians as well as artists.

Taking into account the many meanings and contexts in which terms are used in modernism and postmodernism provides an opportunity to reexamine them. It also allows us, as I have demonstrated, to verify some of the views on the avant-garde, such as the notion of the end of art, the tendency of the avant-garde art to self-destruct, or the association of high art with hermeticism and elitism. It also validates the discussion on neomodernism.

**Keywords:** avant-garde, autonomy of art, art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, neomodernism.

Researchers today are still interested in the issue of art's autonomy and its associated problems. This applies not only to defining art's autonomy itself, but also the contexts in which the term is used. One of the theorists who studied it was Zygmunt Bauman. He pointed to the problems relating to the conceptual scope of the autonomy of art, in particular to identifying it with independence, which he believed to be wrong. He pointed out that

Independence does not necessarily mean autonomy, while the slogan 'art for the art's sake' demanded precisely autonomy: the right to self-government and self-assertion, not cutting ties with social life and surrendering the to influence its course[...] Independence is not the same as autonomy and freedom from worries / obligations of the non-artistic reality does not equal self-government.<sup>1</sup>

Bauman based his reasoning on the assumption that the separation of art and life is not a justification for the existence of art, and the juxtaposition of the art world and the world of everyday life has not been valid, since in the twentieth century "The present-day arts [...] care next to nothing about the shape of social reality; more precisely, they have elevated themselves into *sui generis* reality, and a self-sufficient reality at that."<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the autonomy of art can no longer be founded on the separation between art and life. Thus, Bauman objects to one of the traditional models of the autonomy of art, whose essence was the separation of art from other areas of life. In this model, the concept of the autonomy of art is often used in relation to works that "are devoid of any practical function and thus devoid, as works of art, of instrumental value."<sup>3</sup> Autonomous art is here, therefore, a particular human activity, characterized by its independence from other activities. One should bear in mind that such "art's autonomy is expressed not only in its difference from life, but also in its sense of self-worth and self-asserting resistance society."<sup>4</sup> This art has its own goals, which are usually considered to be beauty, selflessness, ingenuity, and creativity. It is not subordinated to the values characteristic of other disciplines of the humanities: philosophical and social ideas or cognitive and moral functions. Also, the artist is independent from non-artistic goals and values. However, even within such

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<sup>1</sup> Z. Bauman, *Ponowoczesność, czyli o niemożliwości awangardy*, in: *Awangarda w perspektywie postmodernizmu*, G. Dziamski (ed.), Poznań: Wydawnictwo Fundacji Humaniora, 1996, p. 27 (translation mine, based on the English edition of Bauman's works)

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> C. Haskins, Kant and the Autonomy of Art, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 1989, vol. 47, p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> R. Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992, p. 195.

a distinct model different approaches to the issue of autonomy can be found. For example, two major approaches can be distinguished: from the perspective of cognitive powers, found in the theory of Kant, and from a practical perspective, present in the writings of Schiller. However, neither of these philosophers presented the concept of art's autonomy in a strict sense, leaving no doubt as to its scope. Hence the opportunity to include two different perspectives: aesthetic and artistic, as well as to note (after Haskins) the existence of internal varieties of autonomy, namely direct and instrumental autonomy. The former represents the formalistic tendencies, and the latter the pragmatic ones. It is important for the further development of the concept of the autonomy of art, especially those of its aspects that are related to the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The art of the avant-garde exhibits the types of autonomy that I call formal and social. It seems to me that they echo precisely the direct and instrumental autonomy.

The perspective of cognitive powers was outlined by Kant, who linked art to beauty. Thus, he reserved a special place for art among other human activities, ensured its independent position in relation to the sciences and crafts, and removed the obligation of serving any utilitarian functions. He introduced the concept of the selflessness of beauty into the field of art, separated pleasant arts from beautiful arts and distinguished the beauty of art from the beauty of nature. At the same time, an analysis of Kant's writings demonstrates that his contribution to the reflection on the autonomy of art was not limited to the aesthetic content, as he examined not only the aesthetic experience, but also works of art and devoted a lot of space to the issue of form. For this reason the model of autonomy of art based on the separation of art from other human activities from the perspective of cognitive powers can be considered a type of aesthetic and artistic autonomy.

On the other hand, Schiller's practical perspective made it possible to place autonomous art within a social context – as a model, and thus as a means to achieve freedom and unity in society. Although, like Kant, Schiller linked beauty with art, he nevertheless rejected the principle of the purposelessness of art. Beauty, according to Schiller, is characteristic not only of art. It was beauty manifested in art that had a special ability to shape society. Therefore, art was a particular kind of human activity, one that was made different by beauty revealing itself through form, and which contained a social model within itself. However, such a model of the autonomy of art from Schiller's practical perspective can be considered as an aesthetic model, because its key element is the so-called "aesthetic state" evoked by a beautiful object of art.

A particular case of the autonomy of the model of art based on its separation from other human activities emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its essence was describing art by referring to aesthetic issues, so that the very thing that distinguished art became its characteristic feature and determined its boundaries. The quality

determining art – beauty – had been associated with art and now it became its goal. Thus, art gained independence from all external factors, and in addition it became self-regulating and self-asserting, realizing itself in the slogan “art for art’s sake.” This radical concept was, however, rather unstable, and autonomous art had to look for new arguments to defend its sovereignty.

The other model of art’s autonomy I have distinguished, one founded on the ability to reproduce reality by various disciplines, become obsolete in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This kind is derived from the analytical trends, which have been present since antiquity. It re-emerged in theoretical considerations in the Renaissance, developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, and reached its full potential in the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It can therefore be concluded that the model is fairly well known. The dispute over the primacy in a perfect imitation of reality, initially limited to the rivalry between individual disciplines of art, in the centuries that followed turned (largely due to Lessing’s theory) into the search for a language appropriate for visual arts, and later also their individual disciplines. It is noteworthy that this model was particularly evident in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which manifested itself in quite clearly separated disciplines of art based on their means of expression and the language of their forms. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, this model of autonomy occurred inconsistently. An example of its use is Strzemiński’s theory of art, in which he analysed each discipline of art separately based on the specificity of its features. According to Malevich, on the other hand, the autonomy of art does not require the autonomy of disciplines, because the traditional models of autonomy presented herein became insufficient with regard to the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As was pointed out by Bauman, “The postmodern arts have reached a degree of independence from the non-artistic reality of which their modernist predecessors could only dream.”<sup>5</sup> And thus they have not lost their autonomy. It follows that a change in the definition of the autonomy of art as well as an expansion of this concept are necessary.

Expanding the concept of the autonomy of art is important for disproving the theory of the end of art and the avant-garde art’s tendency for self-destruction, and what goes with it can be a serious argument against the criticism of the avant-garde. Bauman’s view on the autonomy of art that I have cited above also addresses this problem. The slogans proclaiming the death of art have often been based on art’s closeness to life and its loss of autonomy. What is more, the theorists heralding the end of art often draw upon a very narrow definition of autonomy. In his book *Malaise dans les musées*,<sup>6</sup> Jean Clair mentions the

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<sup>5</sup> Z. Bauman, op.cit. p. 26.

<sup>6</sup> J. Clair, *Malaise dans les musées*, cited from the Polish edition: *Kryzys muzeów. Globalizacja kultury*, transl. J. M. Kłoczowski, Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2009.

concept of the autonomy of art in the context of “art liberated from gods and rulers, the ‘creative spirit,’ ‘the fulfilment of the individual,’ the ‘right to blasphemy’ [...]”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, he identifies the autonomy of art with independence and freedom, encapsulating the notion of autonomy in a very narrow meaning. Diagnosing the situation of contemporary art, he writes: “that which is called ‘art’ is merely idiocy expressing childish whims of an individual who believes that he or she is accountable to no one.”<sup>8</sup> This sentence clearly suggests that the dominant feature of art is its detachment from reality and its subordination to the autonomous artist. Clair also criticizes the condition of museums, which are converted into “ordinary warehouse[s]”<sup>9</sup>, referring to their commercialization. In his opinion, museums are concerned only with “business and their own income.”<sup>10</sup> He is also pessimistic about the condition of contemporary culture, pointing to the transition “from cult to culture and from culture to ‘the cultural,’” where

the cultural disperses, degrades, disqualifies, and crushes with the weight of numerals: cultural matters, cultural activities, cultural actors, cultural engineers, cultural foundations, cultural industries... [...] The cultural means export, trade, politics of a calculating machine. Once we would meet people of culture. Today we only meet cultural officials.<sup>11</sup>

A recurring (and dominant) theme in Clair’s reflections involves art being linked to life through transferring the mechanisms of life into art. One of the consequences is the fact that by adapting to the methods used in everyday life in other areas of human activity, such as trade or advertising, art loses its identity and its meaning. Introducing an expanded notion of the autonomy of art requires a deeper and more detailed diagnosis. It also allows us to distinguish multiple, seemingly invisible, aspects of art. Thus, if Clair had begun his analysis by defining exactly how contemporary art is autonomous using this broader definition of autonomy, his diagnosis could have been more optimistic.

Similarly, Donald Kuspit in *The End of Art* criticizes art for operating on a commercial basis: “The best art can hope for – whatever calls itself art and the society agrees to call art (or is forced to do so by art administrators) – is to become a current, newsworthy social event”.<sup>12</sup> He also criticizes its return to everyday life. In his discussion he does not ignore the theme of art’s loss of

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<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, pp. 27-28.

<sup>12</sup> D. Kuspit, *The End of Art*, New York: Cambridge University Press 2004, p. 158.

purpose and emphasizes the role of the form, at the same time criticizing conceptual art. Growing closer to everyday life, art becomes of little importance, like most of our daily activities, and thus becomes worthless. Equally dramatic was Jean Baudrillard comment on the connections between art and life and his question about the work of art: "But art trying to recycle itself indefinitely by storming reality? The majority of contemporary art has attempted to do precisely that by confiscating banality, waste and mediocrity as values and ideologies".<sup>13</sup> The quoted passages show that art's entanglement with everyday life is sometimes equated with the loss of its higher values, which are a testament to its unique position and a guarantee of its autonomy. If, however, one were to introduce the expanded concept of autonomy of art into the discussion about the end of art, one which allows art to become closer to life without losing its identity, the thesis of the death of art should be re-examined and verified.

This problem is particularly important in the context of the avant-garde. It is precisely such an overly narrow understanding of the autonomy of avant-garde art, reduced to separating it from life and "governing itself"<sup>14</sup> that provokes the oft-repeated belief in the departure of the avant-garde from autonomy. Heinz Paetzold saw the emancipation of art as one of the problems of the avant-garde: "On the one hand, the separation of art from the sphere of everyday life has allowed aesthetic means to develop freely, on the other hand, however, it has sealed and approved social ineffectiveness (*Folgenlosigkeit*) of art. Avant-garde trends have attempted to change this situation by restoring art to everyday life."<sup>15</sup> In his opinion, avant-garde art, while autonomous, nevertheless sought to lose that autonomy. Misunderstanding regarding the evaluation of the avant-garde results from failing to note that "the question of the social role and place of art has been an important component of artistic ideology formulated by subsequent avant-gardes because each avant-garde formation tried to give meaning to their work exceeding the area designated for art by aesthetic ideology."<sup>16</sup> Expanding the concept of the autonomy of art and including the social type of autonomy of art that can be (and is) found along with the formal type, makes it possible to abolish such a double image of avant-garde art and restore its consistency within its assigned limits.

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<sup>13</sup> J. Baudrillard, *Le Complot de l'art*, cited based on the Polish edition *Spisek sztuki. Iluzje i deziluzje estetyczne z dodatkiem wywiadów o «Spisku sztuki»*, transl. S. Królak, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2006, p. 79.

<sup>14</sup> H. Paetzold, *Przemyśleć awangardę: pomiędzy Bürgerem a Lyotardem*, transl. G. Dziamski, in: *Awangarda w perspektywie postmodernizmu ...*, op.cit. p. 50.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>16</sup> G. Dziamski, *Szkice o nowej sztuce*, Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1984, p. 93.

Expanding the autonomy of art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century also had its consequences as a process that led to the abandonment of the hermeticism and elitism integral to high art. The separation of art and life, which became the basis for autonomous art in the traditional sense, led not only to ensuring art its own rights and objectives by subordinating it to aesthetic purposes, but also to the alienation of art. The acceptance of the traditional model of the autonomy of art highlighted the ambivalent nature of the avant-garde, caused by the separation of art from life. As rightly pointed out by Shusterman, "The idea of art's radical autonomy as totally divorced from socio-ethical praxis was aesthetically valuable and socially emancipatory in freeing art from its traditional role of serving the ideology of Church and court. But its rigid isolation from the praxis of life to preserve its purity is no longer so profitable or even credible."<sup>17</sup> It involved separating it from its consumers and thus losing them as a result. Those to whom high art was addressed, increasingly directed their attention towards mass art: "not only does the elitist equation of art with high art alienate and intimidate many people from seeking satisfaction in the fine arts,"<sup>18</sup> but sometimes it is also incomprehensible for them. Assuming the expanded concept of the autonomy of art, it turns out that art does not need to give up its emancipated position, an example of which is the non-formal autonomy of art achieved by its representatives in neo-avant-garde. The power of art made it possible to expand concepts and gave them a more universal character. Paradoxically, this expansion of concepts has been ignored or unnoticed by critics and art theorists. In these circumstances, the adoption of the expanded concept seems all the more necessary.

In the expanded concept of autonomy it is possible for several different types of autonomy to occur simultaneously, or for autonomy to be present only in certain aspects of art. Each model of autonomy implies specificity of art, its own internal objectives and rights, and its independence from external laws, however what varies are the individual aspects that are emphasized and their perspectives of looking at art. The presence of several types of autonomy is a result of the various sources of the specificity of art and its internal laws.

The autonomy of art in the expanded variant takes on different definitions, depending on the era in which it was formulated (avant-garde autonomy of art, neo-avant-garde autonomy of art) and the specific characteristics of the art concerned. One can talk about different varieties of autonomy, depending on the factors that are emphasized when formulating its definition. The definition of autonomy is also affected by who is talking about it and from what perspective (one

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<sup>17</sup> R. Shusterman, *op.cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 46.



concept of autonomy emerges from the statements by artists and a different one - from the writings of theorists). Importantly, the definition of the expanded concept of the autonomy of art, which has several varieties, must be regarded as descriptive, because it requires the scope of the presence of some factors to be determined and different perspectives and aspects to be taken into account. Very often it also requires an in-depth analysis of the works and as comprehensive an examination as possible.

The need to change the scope of the autonomy of art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is proof that its definition is closely related to the conceptual scope of art. Changing the categories that define art means that the factors determining its autonomy are also changed. In the case of the avant-garde, whose authors were largely preoccupied with analysing art from the perspective of its formal language, we see that the problems of the autonomy of art are primarily associated with its form, while in the 1960s and 1970s, when emphasis in the arts shifted into the conceptual area, the autonomy of art came to be defined by its functions and definition, while the issue of its form as a factor determining its autonomy remained in the background. Art was not subordinated to the external laws and objectives; what is more, one could observe a universalization of the formerly autonomous features of art, which was connected with the expansion and increase in the strength of its impact.

The attention of the theorists of art focused on placing the issue of the autonomy of art in a broader context, not only historical, but also conceptual. They take into account the changes that occurred in other disciplines of the humanities. The concept of the autonomy of art is explicated as part of the examination of other issues, and it is often used as an argument in defence of a theoretical stance – as in Greenberg's case, where it became a weapon in the struggle for the defence of high art against mass culture, and thus a characteristic feature of high art, one that ensures its further development and *raison d'être*. In turn, in the analyses by postmodernists the autonomy of art develops around the issue of the aestheticisation of the surrounding reality, which determines the concept of the autonomy of art and, in a sense, defines it. The issue of the autonomy of art that emerges from the theoretical writings is very often not explicitly defined but rather occurs as a result of broader considerations about art, life, recipients, artists and art institutions and the relations between them. In Peter Bürger's theory, it is evident how expanding the concept of art with an external component changes the notion of autonomy – art is autonomous in some aspects, and not in others.

In turn, theorists who examined later art started talking about its autonomy based on the concept of the aestheticisation of reality, therefore referring to the world outside art. The domination of aesthetisation and taking it outside the



area of art made it necessary to redefine some phenomena within art itself. Statements made on this issue by Odo Marquard and Wolfgang Iser as well as their analysis in the context of the autonomy of art attest to the fact that when the area of concepts traditionally associated with art is expanded, the expansion must also include the concepts of art itself, including the definition of its autonomy. Both theorists placed the concept of the autonomy of art in the field of art – reality relationship, thereby departing from the domination of form. What is important in their statements is the pluralisation and relativisation of concepts, which also applies to the autonomy of art.

The tendency to expand the scope of concepts has been particularly evident since the neo-avant-garde. As for the earlier times, the only one to suggest that there is a need to change the scope of concepts was Peter Bürger. The conservative tendency in defining autonomy was not without effect on the multiplicity of attitudes and the lack of a clear position on this issue. Another contributing factor was also the ambiguous character of the concepts used by the avant-garde, which could only be revised once the social aspect of the avant-garde was determined, as well as its reference to autonomy, which was the key area of conflict. In the traditional model of autonomy art and life were assumed to be separate; meanwhile, the formally autonomous avant-garde art was close to life. Introducing the concept of selected artists, I have demonstrated that the attitude of avant-garde art to reality and its social aspects were very important, despite the fact that they were often dominated by issues of form. Taking into account the simultaneous presence of formal and social aspects significantly affected the need to expand the concept of the autonomy of art which predominates in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

On the one hand, differentiating the types of concepts of the autonomy of art from artists' statements is easier because they are writing "from the inside," providing a glimpse into what is happening in their creative practice. On the other hand, however, there are many inconsistencies and inaccuracies found in art theories. Statements by artists are often filled with emotions and devoid of theoretical foundation. This does not mean that they lack sufficient knowledge of the various fields of the humanities, only that they often do not take it into account, adapting their theory only for the purpose of their own art and restricting themselves to answering questions stemming directly from their own works.

The expanded concepts of the autonomy of art present in the avant-garde can be divided into formal, dominant at that time, and social, which emerged alongside those based on the analysis of the language of art. Formal concepts may include the avant-garde laconicism of Strzemiński, the search for an appropriate language of art by Kazimir Malevich, and the search for the specific features of the new art by Wassily Kandinsky. In each of these cases, the artists

were looking for a specific language of art, distinguishing it from other types of human activity. Their works are autonomous according to the second definition of the concept of art's autonomy, based on the analysis of the forms of art disciplines. In this case, it is art that pursues its own goals and therefore also needs its own language and its own tools. It is interesting that the artists mentioned above had a different attitude to the issue of separating individual disciplines of arts, which indicates that the separation of disciplines of art is not a *sine qua non* condition for the autonomy of art. Strzeмиński attributed the autonomy of art only to some of the areas, while for Malevich the separation of art disciplines did not matter because he referred to the new art understood generally, trying to find a language of forms appropriate for it.

It yields some interesting conclusions to compare the ideas of the above-listed avant-garde artists with productivism, in which the autonomy of art is absent. Turowski associated the productivists' negation of the autonomy of art with their resignation from the formal achievements: "Over the course of its transformations, productivism eventually lost everything it owed to the avant-garde. Not having created its own form, it became helpless, ultimately losing its artistic identity. At that point it no longer created art and political ideology took the place of artistic utopia."<sup>19</sup> It follows that finding a language of forms appropriate for modern art is also insufficient to talk about the autonomy of art because we still need to maintain it. In the case of productivism, which "placed itself [...] in a position of a 'manufacturer of myth,'"<sup>20</sup> the most important aspects were the utilitarianism of art and its social usefulness; however, these were not art's own objectives, but political ones and those of the state. In this case, art was subordinated to a different purpose than its own, because the "'manufacturer of myth' was not productivism but the political power."<sup>21</sup> Art's insubordination to any external objectives and laws is a crucial feature when defining autonomy. The formal type of autonomy of art in the avant-garde consists in art keeping its own distinct goals and laws and having its own tools and its own language of forms. The form, however, is the basis upon which art's own objectives are set, so aside from the formal model, other models of autonomy should be differentiated because the base can be located elsewhere. The problem that arises here is that aside from the formal model, there is another one in parallel, which can be described as social.

The traditional understanding of art's autonomy requires that art be separated from life practice. It was associated with art pursuing its own goals while giving

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<sup>19</sup> A. Turowski, *Wielka utopia awangardy. Artystyczne i społeczne utopie w sztuce rosyjskiej 1910-1930*, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1990, p. 178.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem.

up on life-related, practical objectives. In the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which exhibited autonomous tendencies by returning towards form and developing largely on the basis of analytical inclinations, the insistence to “purify” the field of art of everything that comes from outside”<sup>22</sup> was ambiguous. This was because avant-garde

operates in different socio-political contexts, hence accentuating either the open ideological commitment, or at the various degrees of protest against the status quo [...]. Again, the explicit commitment to ideology was far from uniform, and the primarily artistic protest was always to some extent subject a process of ideologisation, if only because the author appealed to a certain ethos, finding its foundation in a specific code of ethics, in some religious sentiments, and sometimes in his chosen philosophy.<sup>23</sup>

The intention of the avant-garde was to become part of the socio-historical imperative while retaining the originality of form and finding a language appropriate for modern art. This duality of the avant-garde and the clear social context are particularly evident not only in Strzemiński’s considerations but also (which researchers fail to note), in Malevich and Kandinsky. Avant-garde art could still be autonomous, despite the fact that it affected society, and sometimes even served a very important role, for example creating a new reality, as is assumed in Kandinsky’s theory. The autonomy of art can be preserved provided that the social benefits of art were its own objective (for example, Kandinsky assumed that the objective of art is creativity, and creating a new reality is the realization of this objective).<sup>24</sup> This involves art searching for an objective function that would allow it “to find itself such a place in society that would not be designated by the aesthetic ideology and only justified by it, and therefore would not be purely conventional.”<sup>25</sup> However, art characterized by such an ambiguous attitude requires a new model of autonomy associated with expanding the concept, which is why I am proposing a social type of autonomy of art in the avant-garde, which must expand the scope of its own objectives, the catalogue of which determines its autonomy. Autonomous art can have social and life objectives if they are identified with its own objectives. The social type

<sup>22</sup> M. Giżycki, *Postmodernizm – kultura wyczerpania? Uwagi wstępne*, in: *Postmodernizm – kultura wyczerpania?*, M. Giżycki (ed.), Warszawa: Akademia Ruchu 1988, p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> S. Morawski, „Awangarda artystyczna (o dwu formacjach XX wieku)”, in: idem, *Na zakręcie: od sztuki do po-sztuki*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie 1985, p. 257.

<sup>24</sup> P. Piotrowski wrote about it in his book *Artysta między rewolucją i reakcją*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. A. Mickiewicza 1993, p. 141.

<sup>25</sup> G. Dziamski, op.cit., p. 55.

of autonomy is understood as a way of achieving socially relevant objectives, the realisation of which is the purpose of art. Therefore, the assumption that bringing art closer to life is tantamount to the loss of its autonomy is false, or at least partly false, because the autonomy of art does not have to mean isolating it from social problems. For this reason the development of autonomous art can be considered both in the process of art's own development, and in selected cases also in the process of human development.

Expanded concepts of art's autonomy found in the neo-avant-garde have changed compared to the avant-garde proposals. First of all, artists have moved away from emphasising the formal issues, which is why these concepts can be considered as extra-formal. The use of such terms as "informal" or "anti-formal" seems to me inappropriate here because the issue of forms does not disappear entirely, although it clearly moves to the background. The closer relationship between art and life is clear in the works and theories of the artists associated with the neo-avant-garde, as is the blurring of the boundaries between art disciplines. Still, we can speak of art's autonomy here although it is a different type of autonomy than in the avant-garde.

There are three universal concepts, which are "creativity" in the case of Beuys, "selflessness" in art displayed by the representatives of minimalism, and the "totality of artistic creativity" in the activities of the conceptualists. Beuys transfers the characteristics of art into all areas of life, making the value of creativity accessible to anyone. The minimalists direct their attention to the object and expand its definition beyond the aesthetic attitude, taking into account different ways of approaching it. Finally, the conceptualists break with the traditional limitations of artistic invention, which consists in making the work according to strict rules, imposing the themes and the iconographic program, by separating the domain of the execution from the concept of art. In this model, art is a new definition of art, and the artist can include its entire range within his or her inventiveness. In the neo-avant-garde the form of art is not irrelevant, but it is other values carried by art that determine the scope of the autonomy of art. The extra-formal model of art's autonomy makes it possible to dispense with the current condition of autonomy, which was the separation of art from life, and thereby to talk about autonomy in the case of art that is immersed in life and goes beyond the aesthetic value.

My analysis of the concept of the autonomy of art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century illustrates its expanded meaning both in the case of artists who put their reflections into practice, as well as in the writings of critics. Such distinction is significant because in their analyses critics use a different perspective in reflections about art, as it were "from the outside." That distance is a very important element because it makes it possible to put the concept of the autonomy of art in the broader context of its development, and also to link this development

with other disciplines of the humanities. Comparing how artists and critics understand the autonomy of art has given me an opportunity to consider the broad range of this concept's capacity.

The too narrow definition of the concept of the autonomy of art, insufficient in relation to the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, poses problems in many analyses. Writing about the work of Henryk Stażewski, Piotr Piotrowski introduced the concept of relative autonomy. He noted that the artist "is surrounded on the one hand by the discourses of geometry, colour, space and plane," and therefore form, "and on the other hand, these discourses in this particular place mean something more than just geometry, colour, space and plane – they mean the artist's attitude to a specific historical context."<sup>26</sup> Piotrowski points out that Stażewski's art "is part of a very interesting process, perhaps incomparable with the experience of the Western culture, of a relative autonomy of art – relative, as it means (also) something other than autonomy itself – [his art] is a reaction to reality, rooting oneself in praxis, in activity."<sup>27</sup> Piotrowski, therefore, not taking into account the expansion of the concept of the autonomy of art, introduced its new concept, although he did not define it. That relativity stems from the intuition of dissatisfaction inherent in the conceptual scope of the existing understanding of autonomy on the one hand, and on the other hand in the multitude of aspects contained within the avant-garde art and related issues. Evident here, therefore, is a discrepancy between the scopes of the concepts of avant-garde art and the autonomy of art, as well as the need for their verification, otherwise any analysis of the problem of the autonomy of avant-garde art would be incomplete. If in his discussion of Stażewski's art Piotrowski had applied an expanded concept of the autonomy of art and took into account different types of autonomy, it would be clear that any relativity of autonomy disappears. This is proof of the need to revise the concept of the autonomy of art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in relation to avant-garde art.

The ambivalence of the autonomy of art based on the traditional model and its inadequacy in the discussion on the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century confirms the presence of various conflicting attitudes. Richard Shusterman juxtaposed elite high art and mass art, thus exposing the defeat of disconnecting art from society, while Clement Greenberg saw this model of the autonomy of art precisely as a defence against mass art. Such a duality of attitudes is the result of approaching the problems associated with the avant-garde from different perspectives: Greenberg took into account the formal aspects of art, while the

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<sup>26</sup> P. Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu. W stronę historii sztuki polskiej po 1945 roku*, Poznań: Rebis 1999, p. 132.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem.

author of *Pragmatist Aesthetics* - the aspect of the social impact of art. Such mutually contradicting positions resulting from approaching the issue from different angles are found in the debate on the neo-avant-garde, which, according to Dziamski, sought to "abolish artistic creativity based on the autonomy of art and the independence and political neutrality of the artist involved only in defending creative freedom,"<sup>28</sup> while for Bürger "art of the neo-avant-garde is autonomous in the full sense of the word, which means that it rejects the avant-garde intention of bringing art back to life practice."<sup>29</sup> This serves as the basis for the fundamental dilemmas associated with the avant-garde, resulting from too narrow definitions. With such a broad concept as the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde, it is necessary to revise and expand its definitions, which also applies to the concept of the autonomy of art.

The concepts related to the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are not conclusive, and neither are the opinions regarding its position in the area of autonomy. As I have demonstrated, the situation can be simplified by the introduction of an expanded concept of autonomy, which makes it possible to consider the autonomous position of art from different perspectives, including its various types and even scopes. I agree with Shusterman, who said that "there is no compelling reason to accept the narrowly aesthetic limits imposed by the established ideology of autonomous art [...]."<sup>30</sup> There is all the less reason for maintaining this model of autonomy since the category of beauty, on which the traditional model of autonomy was largely based, ceased to exist in the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Shusterman proposed a new concept of autonomy, which arises from the social perspective of art, but it is based to a large extent on the institution of art and what can be defined as "the art world." According to him, such autonomy can be construed "merely in terms of art's having a distinctive productive and distributive framework for its works and its own characteristic modes for their reception, which can nonetheless overlap and intersect with non-artistic institutions and discourse."<sup>31</sup> This definition was not included in my analysis, since it was established on the basis of philosophical and sociological theories and not artistic ones, while I wanted to examine the issue of the autonomy of art precisely through the prism of art theories, which in this case make it possible to look at art directly. Of course, it would be impossible to omit the theories on the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, they only served to provide a fuller picture of the problem. Shusterman's proposal can be called an "institutional"

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<sup>28</sup> G. Dziamski, op.cit. p. 93

<sup>29</sup> P. Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde*, cited based on the Polish edition, *Teoria awangardy*, Kraków: Universitas, 2006, p. 74.

<sup>30</sup> R. Shusterman, op.cit., p. 143.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem.

definition of autonomy, while I am of the opinion that the concept of the autonomy of art in relation to the 20<sup>th</sup> century needs to be expanded so that it includes the multiplicity of models. In my view, such necessity arises from the ambiguity of concepts and perspectives associated with the art of that period and the possibility of using an expanded concept of autonomy in contemporary research. Another argument in favour of expanding the autonomy of art is the fact that "the avant-garde era is a time of pluralism, of several competing artistic trends existing simultaneously, none of which won the dominating position and imposed its own style on the entire period, as was the case in the previous eras."<sup>32</sup> Such a large number of differing directions and attitudes results in a lack of consistency in the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which in turn makes it necessary to include various aspects of such concepts as autonomy. However, a return to the concepts related to the avant-garde and their revision after post-modernism allows for a new approach to familiar problems, and at the same time opens up the possibility of new interpretations of broader issues.

An in-depth analysis of the concept of autonomy in 20<sup>th</sup> century art shows that its redefinition is one of the opportunities for a return to modernism. As for autonomy, it can be observed not only in the traditional sense of the word, based on separating art from life as well as on analytical trends, but also as formal autonomy and its varieties, including the autonomy of the separate disciplines of art (derived from analytical tendencies), social autonomy, and extra-formal autonomy, characteristic of the art of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We can therefore speak of a family of concepts. Taking into account the concept in its expanded sense and the presence of its various aspects make possible not only new interpretations of 20<sup>th</sup> century art but also searching for relationships between contemporary art created after postmodernism and works predating postmodernism, therefore opening the possibility of talking not so much about the return of modernism, as primarily about neomodernism.

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<sup>32</sup> G. Dziamski, *Słowo wstępne*, in: *Awangarda w perspektywie postmodernizmu...*, op.cit. p. 12.



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## **REDEFINICJA POJĘĆ AWANGARDY JAKO PRZYKŁAD MOŻLIWOŚCI POWROTU DO MODERNIZMU (streszczenie)**

W tekście tym staram się wykazać, że rozszerzenie definicji pojęć odnoszących się do sztuki w XX w. pozwala na powrót do modernizmu. Podejście takie jest możliwe w odniesieniu do tych zagadnień, które aktualne były zarówno przed awangardą, jak i w postmodernizmie. Do analizy takiej skłania przede wszystkim niespójność poglądów na awangardowe treści, pogłębiona teorią postmodernistycznymi. Pluralizm, zarówno modernistyczny, jak i postmodernistyczny, nie wyklucza jednak możliwości odniesienia się we współczesnej nauce do idei modernistycznych. Swoje rozważania przeprowadzam na przykładzie zagadnienia autonomii w sztuce awangardowej. Wieloaspektowość tego pojęcia i transformacja jego zakresu w XX w., przy jednoczesnej dwudziestowiecznej pluralizacji teorii, kierunków i pojęć pozwala na przeanalizowanie tego problemu z różnych perspektyw, które dziś, z popostmodernistycznej pozycji, są widoczne. Wychodząc od poglądów Immanuela Kanta i Fryderyka Schillera, biorę pod uwagę poglądy zarówno teoretyków, jak i artystów.

Uwzględnienie wielu znaczeń i kontekstów, w których pojawiają się pojęcia występujące w modernizmie i postmodernizmie daje możliwość ponownego odniesienia się do nich. Pozwala również, jak wskazuję, na weryfikację niektórych poglądów dotyczących awangardy m.in. tezy o końcu sztuki, o tendencji sztuki awangardowej do samounicestwienia, związanie sztuki wysokiej z hermetyzmem i elitaryzmem. Upoważnia także do mówienia o neomodernizmie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** awangarda, autonomia sztuki, sztuka XX wieku, neomodernizm.



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## LYOTARD'S LIBIDINAL MODERNISM

**Abstract:** The article discusses Jean-François Lyotard's conception of modernist-postmodernist shift and its dynamics in the light of Lyotard's studies concerning the energetic, libidinal potential of art and artistic structure (or apparatus, *dispositive*). According to Lyotard, the postmodern would constitute a continuous "quasi-analytical" process of exploration of the elements "repressed" by the modernist project in a struggle to gain freedom from the mechanism of repetition. Only in such context will we be able to draw some serious artistic consequences from his analysis of the cultural and philosophical changes. The second part of the article focuses on Lyotard's book *The Assassination of Experience by Painting, Monory* devoted to the French hyperrealist painter Jacques Monory with whom Lyotard collaborated in the late 1970s. The book was described by Lyotard as the "contribution of the paintings of Jacques Monory to the understanding of the libidinal set-up, and vice versa".

**Keywords:** Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Monory, modernism, postmodernism, libidinal apparatus, hyperrealism.

With the publication in 1979 of his famous "report" on the *Postmodern condition*, Jean-François Lyotard was hailed by some cultural critics as "the Pope of postmodernism" and by some of the less sophisticated critics as the main proponent of the "anti-modernist" movement. It is important to remember that neither Lyotard's definition of postmodernism, nor his attitude towards modernism and postmodernism allow us to easily put him in the "postmodernist", i.e. notoriously "nihilist", frame. Lyotard's statement that what we could call "postmodern" is an "incredulity toward metanarratives"<sup>1</sup> should be supplemented

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<sup>1</sup> „Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives” J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, transl. G. Bennington. B. Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1984, p. XXIV.

with the definition proposed in another, less often quoted essay "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" from 1982. We can read there that "A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant".<sup>2</sup> The first thesis stresses the scepticism towards the "transcendental illusion" of totalization<sup>3</sup>, of any kind of unity that would reconcile various language games, forms of life. One must remember that Lyotard does not write about "the fall of metanarratives" as it is sometimes misquoted. In fact he writes about the "ethical" attitude towards the scientific, political, and social, projects that are grounded in the all-embracing vision of any kind of "oneness". He points out that "The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience".<sup>4</sup> For Lyotard to rebel against totality (and this is the Frankfurt trace in his thought, although not an obvious one) is to look for the new rules, but if one goes on a search for new principles, one has to be aware that such quest is "blind" – i.e. based on experimentation rather than implementation of something that has already been established. "The artist and the writer" – Lyotard continues – "are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*".<sup>5</sup> To follow the rules, to believe in an achievement of any positive project is to be modern. To look for the rules, to rebel against any established order, to experiment and to confront oneself with what is "unpresentable" in the material singularity of the "event" is to be postmodern. That is why for Lyotard any true artist, any true philosopher who wants to touch the "unknown", that is something genuinely new, in his/her art or thought first has to become post-modern (has to be disappointed with what s/he comes across) to become "modern": "*Post modern* would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (*post*) anterior (*modo*)"<sup>6</sup>. Lyotard's definition is definitely affirmative, and not negative. In "Rewriting Modernity", he introduces the important Freudian concept of *Durcharbitung* ("working through")<sup>8</sup>. As Laplanche and Pontalis explain, "working through"

<sup>2</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?", transl. I. Hassan, in: *The Lyotard Reader* ed. K. Crome, J. Williams, Columbia University Press, New York 2006, p. 130.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. 132.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>7</sup> See R. Rorty, *Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity*, „Praxis International“, vol. 4, no. 1, 1984.

<sup>8</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, *Rewriting Modernity in: Inhuman. Reflections on Time*, transl. G. Bennington, R. Bowlby, Stanford University Press, Stanford California, 1988, p. 29.

is the "process by means of which analysis implants an interpretation and overcomes the resistances to which it has given rise. Working-through is taken to be a sort of psychical work which allows the subject to accept certain repressed elements and to free himself from the grip of mechanisms of repetition"<sup>9</sup>. Analogously, the postmodern would constitute the continuous "quasi-analytical" process of exploration of the elements "repressed" by the modernist project in a struggle to gain freedom from the mechanism of repetition, of what has already been. As Lyotard puts it:

If we understand 'rewriting modernity' in this way, like seeking out, designating and naming the hidden facts that one imagines to be the source of the ills that ail one, i.e. as a simple process of remembering, one cannot fail to perpetuate the crime, and perpetrate it anew instead of putting an end to it. Far from really rewriting it, supposing that to be possible, all one is doing is writing again, and making real, modernity itself. The point being that writing it is always rewriting it. Modernity is written, inscribes itself on itself, in a perpetual rewriting<sup>10</sup>.

It is worth noting that for the "pre-postmodernist" Lyotard, i.e. for Lyotard as the author of the two important books written in the 1970s: *Discourse, figure* (1971) and *Économie libidinale* (1974) one of the main announcements of theoretical and practical changes that showed up together with the acceptance of "certain repressed elements" was May 1968 in France. The revolt of 1968 was described by Lyotard as

a grand political narrative of emancipation. It was modern. [...] under its other guise, it escaped the grand narratives; it took life from another condition, one that we could call postmodern. To students, artists, writers, and scholars, developed capitalism commanded: be intelligent, be clever, your ideas are my future commodity. Prescription that the concerned parties ignored: devoting their care to the imagination rather than to the market, they urged themselves to experiment without limits<sup>11</sup>.

This is important to stress because very often Lyotard's diagnosis is treated as purely negative – as the rejection of any "positive" (implicitly modernist) values. What I would like to touch upon is the less described "energetic supply

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<sup>9</sup> J. Laplanche, J.B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, transl. D. Nicholson Smith, The Hogarth Press, London 1973, p. 488.

<sup>10</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, *Rewriting Modernity*, op.cit., p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> J.-F. Lyotard *Des dispositifs pullionnels*, Galilée, 1994, p. 9.

base”, so to speak, of the modernist – postmodernist dialectics. I would like to link Lyotard’s reflection upon the dynamics of the modernist – postmodernist shift with his studies concerning the energetic, libidinal potential of art and artistic structure (or apparatus, *dispositive*). Only then, I believe, will we be able to draw some serious artistic consequences from his analysis of the cultural and philosophical changes. I am going to focus on Lyotard’s book about the French hyperrealist painter Jacques Monory with whom Lyotard collaborated in the late 1970s. The book, *The Assassination of Experience by Painting, Monory* was described by Lyotard as the “contribution of the paintings of Jacques Monory to the understanding of the libidinal set-up, and vice versa”<sup>12</sup>.

But what exactly is this “libidinal energy”? *Libidinal Economy* opens with the strange “Joycean” sentence (I quote only the beginning):

Open the so called body and spread out all its surfaces: not only the skin with each of its folds, wrinkles, scars, with its great velvety planes, and contiguous to that, the scalp and its mane of hair, the tender pubic fur, nipples, nails, hard transparent skin under the heel, the light frills of the eyelids, set with lashes...<sup>13</sup>

Thus transformed body is turned into a strip which, if one would connect and twist its two ends, would resemble the Moebius band<sup>14</sup>. This is the place where desire (*désir, Wunsch*), i.e. pure energy incessantly circulates. Lyotard calls it the “Zero point” – one cannot go any further. When you touch the surface, when any kind of stimulus appears, the desire stops circulating, freezes and takes shape. It becomes something specified. It starts re-presenting something else: “Far from taking the great Zero as the ontological motif, imposed on desire, forever deferring, re-presenting and simulating everything in an endless postponement, we, libidinal economists, affirm that this zero is itself a figure...”<sup>15</sup>. Lyotard uses this figure as heuristic fiction in order to show how pulsional, instinctual (Freud’s *Trieb*) energy constitutes and supports the life of the living organisms. Such a hypothesis is rooted in Freud’s distinction of “primary” and “secondary” processes. The “primary process” (*Primärvorgang*) is a process

<sup>12</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, *Figurations*, 1973, p. 154, cited in: H. Parret, *Preface* in: J.-F. Lyotard, *L’assassinat de l’expérience par la peinture, Monory / The Assassination of Experience by Painting, Monory*, bilingual edition, English translation R. Bowlby, J. Bouniort, P. W. Milne, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2013, p. 30.

<sup>13</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, transl. I. Hamilton Grant, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indiana, 1993, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6.

where “psychical energy flows freely, passing unhindered, by means of the mechanisms of condensation and displacement, from one idea to another and tending to completely recathect the ideas attached to those satisfying experiences which are at the root of unconscious wishes (primitive hallucination)”<sup>16</sup>. In the „secondary process”, free energy is bound, “cathected” to some representation, it flows in a controlled manner. For Lyotard, art and artistic creation originate from the “primary process”, and this pulsional origin determines art’s ability to destabilize any given order, to experiment and to search for the radically new.

By introducing desire into the question of painting we in fact have recourse to a libidinal economy. And, by virtue of this fact, we also immediately have recourse to a political economy, because it is wholly impossible to take up one without taking up the other, wholly impossible to attempt to articulate one without articulating its connection with the other. It is necessary to think of desire as an energy that works (...). The important thing is energy insofar as it is metamorphic, metamorphosing and metamorphosed. (...) energy both as order and disorder, as Eros and death drive, and both always together<sup>17</sup>.

For Lyotard works of art can be treated as pulsional, or libidinal apparatuses (*dispositifs pulsionnels*), that is, as a means or systems that allow one to canalise, transform and transfer libidinal energy. That is why they have economic and political importance. Contrary to the established and petrified “dead” forms of exchange they can provoke radically new order, they possess the ability to introduce novelty. This is the affirmative side of any true work of art.

Modern ‘painting’ and ‘music’ are exemplary because they actively decompose and dissolve set-ups (*des dispositifs*) that govern individual regions (regimes, rules), including the region of ‘painting’ etc., showing the retroactively (*après coup*) as figures, arrangements. [...] The number of apparatuses is immense! The apparatus (*le dispositif*) is the system of connections that canalizes and regulates emerging and expenditure of energy *in all of the regions*<sup>18</sup>.

According to such view, art, especially the painting is the one of many forms of discharging primal instinctual forces in order to release the tension. Contrary to other spheres, modern, that is, contemporary, art can also show the

<sup>16</sup> J. Laplanche, J.B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, op.cit., p. 339.

<sup>17</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, *Painting as a Libidinal Set-up*, in: *The Lyotard Reader*, op.cit., p. 304.

<sup>18</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, *Sur une figure de discours*, in: *Des dispositifs pulsionnels*, Galilée, Paris 1994, p. 120.

very existence of those mechanisms and by attracting our attention can show us their conventional rules. This enables a radical change. One can become aware that in reality there are no pre-established, “objective” and unchangeable rules. The belief that there are such rules and divisions is a metaphysical premise. In reality there are neither divisions, nor oppositions between inside and outside, between figure and discourse, between *logos* and *mythos*. What is given is only the constant flux of energy, the “primary process”, and what comes as the second, that is, what is stable, because it stands for something else according to certain symbolic system, what re-presents follows from such undifferentiated energy. Such critical consciousness can save our culture from illusions of the metaphysical thinking. As Geoffrey Bennington remarked:

It would be a gross mistake to assume that because Lyotard is engaged in questioning unities and totalities, he is necessarily promoting some form of individualism. If it is true that totality is negatively marked term in his thought, the corresponding positive term is, rather, singularity. A singularity is not so much an individual, as an event...<sup>19</sup>

For Lyotard the ephemeral, eventual, passing desire is not a dark, Dionysian force that wants to destroy the rational order. It rather has a critical function. By looking at its artistic manifestations we can learn that any kind of community is relative and the rules that govern social and political life can be changed. By observing the artistic, aesthetic *différend*, we learn to act and to think differently. The analysis of the mechanisms of desire in artistic creation and artistic apparatuses is not regressive, it does not lead to the chthonic world of Thanatos, but rather has a critical function. It manifests the presence of affirmative, creative ever-changing forces that can be used to build a completely new order again and again and again.

But what about the art of Jacques Monory? Lyotard met one of the leaders of the French Narrative Figuration movement around 1972, as noted by Herman Parret<sup>20</sup>. Both men shared the same experience: going abroad to the United States and confronting its open spaces and free market. Lyotard gave his testimony in 1974, when he wrote *Pacific Wall*, a book about his Californian experience, in which he claimed that “American presidents are emperors, Washington is Rome, the United States of America is Italy, and Europe is their

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<sup>19</sup> G. Bennington, *Lyotard. Writing the Event*, Columbia University Press, Manchester University Press, Columbia 1988, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> H. Parret, *Preface in: J.F. Lyotard, L'assassinat de l'expérience par la peinture, Monory / The Assassination of Experience by Painting, Monory*, op.cit., p. 30.



Greece... Visiting professors on campus are mere Greek tutors: liberated slaves, clients proteges of Rome, sponsored with grants by American capital”<sup>21</sup>.

The book *The Assassination of Experience by Painting, Monory* consists of two essays: “Libidinal Economy of the Dandy” and “Sublime Aesthetic of the Contract Killer”. The first one, written in 1973 overlaps with the introduction Lyotard wrote to the French translation of Anton Ehrenzweig’s book on psychoanalytical aesthetics entitled *The Hidden Order of Art: A Study in the Psychology of Artistic Imagination*<sup>22</sup>. This is important because by referring to this text we can retrace the basic methodological traits of Lyotard’s analysis of Monory’s paintings.

Works of art: literary, painterly, musical and others are not signs and should not be treated as symbols. There is no such thing as the “language of art”. It is “methodological nihilism” to transform works of art into signs that stand for something else. Such an attitude is nihilistic because it treats the work of art as a vicarious object – it exists because something is missing, it should be penetrated in order to get something else, it is not independent but relies on a certain lack. For Lyotard, Ehrenzweig’s proposal of “applied psychoanalysis” is exceptional:

An account of the economy of works of art that was cast in libidinal terms (...) would have as its central presupposition the affirmative character of works: they are not in place of anything; they do not stand for but stand; that is to say, the function through their material and its organization. Their subject is nothing other than possible formal organization (...); and it conceals no content, no libidinal secret of the work, whose force lies entirely in its surface<sup>23</sup>.

The aesthetic experience of works of art is pleasurable not because it allows us to experience what is missing (content, hidden meaning, original presence), but because the libidinal content – the works’ energy – lies in “the formal labour that produces them on the one hand and in the work of various kinds that they stimulate on the other (...) we are dealing with transformations of libidinal energy and devices governing these transformations”<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, *Pacific Wall*, transl. B. Boone, Lapis Press, Venice California, 1990.

<sup>22</sup> A. Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art: A Study in the Psychology of Artistic Imagination*, University of California Press, Berkley, 1967.

<sup>23</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, *Beyond Representation*, in: J.-F. Lyotard, *Textes dispersés I: esthétique et théorie de l’art. / Miscellaneous Texts: Aesthetics and Theory of Art.*, transl. V. Ionescu, E. Harris, P.W. Milne, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2012, p. 123 – 125.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 127.

Also the capitalist American society that becomes the main object of Monory's large-scale, blue monochromatic paintings, painted from photographs, is a form of stabilized energy: "The desire which forms and sustains institutions is maintained by investments of energy in the body, language, the earth, cities, sexual and generational differences etc. Capitalism is one of these investments"<sup>25</sup>. Hyper-realist painters do not seek the unity of experience, they do not try to grasp "the origins", "being", something that lies outside the world of the exchange of goods. There is no nature, but only commodity, and many artists "are producing works which are affirmative and not critical"<sup>26</sup>. The hyper-realist strategy is not to oppose the commodified society's "critical", i.e. utopian or transcendent order or origin. Rather it grasps and firmly holds in an affirmative kind of way "the brave new world", it seeks something not "outside" the given order, but "inside" it:

(...) from now on it will be said – argues Lyotard – that it is not a question of nature, of a thing over there, but only of an object, whatever it may be (...) which is nothing if not re-presented, which therefore has no presence but which is never given here, on this canvas, if not in a second turn, so to speak, one already there not in the sense of an anteriority-exteriority but, on the contrary, in the sense of a given always already known at the moment it is given...<sup>27</sup>.

What makes such a diagnosis different from the one proposed for example by such critical postmodernist theoreticians as Jean Baudrillard<sup>28</sup> is that Lyotard does not reject the "simulacral" in the name of the lost reality. His approach is "affirmative", which means that he tries to show that one can find means within a given order to experiment. In the case of hyper-realism, as Lyotard writes, "If this painting has any force, it is due to the fact that is simply affirmative, repetitive and, because of this repetition, intensive. By painting photos, but powerful ones, hyperrealism shows how desire organizes itself in the process of production..."<sup>29</sup>. Hyper-realist practice can be treated then as the postmodernist counterpart to the modernist artistic process, for example that of Merleau-Ponty's Cézanne. On the other hand, since it puts stress on the manifestation of the organization of libidinal forces within the capitalist

<sup>25</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, *Dérivé à partir de Marx et Freud*, Union Générale des Editions 10/18, Paris 1973, p. 16.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 20.

<sup>27</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, *Sketch of an Economy of Hyperrealism*, J.-F. Lyotard, *Textes dispersés I: esthétique et théorie de l'art. / Miscellaneous Texts: Aesthetics and Theory of Art*, op.cit., pp. 103-105.

<sup>28</sup> J. Baudrillard, *America*, transl. Ch. Turner, Verso, London, New York 1989.

<sup>29</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, *Sketch of an Economy of Hyperrealism*, op.cit., p. 115.

society, it can be treated as the symptom of “libidinal modernism”, that is as the modernism at the nascent postmodernism from its libidinal origins. As pointed out by Bill Readings, “The understanding of postmodernity in terms of the event that Lyotard’s (...) writings propose is radically different from the thought of the postmodern as that of the contemporary historical moment. The figural force of the event disrupts the possibility of thinking of history as a succession of moments”<sup>30</sup>. Metamorphic libidinal forces in their ever changing flux do not allow for the formation of any linear order. By transforming himself into the mechanism of reproduction (a hyper-realist artist only represents what he has already seen through the lens of his camera that was pointed at the objects that had also already been seen by everyone everywhere) Monory manages to “return” – if this is a right word – to the libidinal forces that oscillate on the surface of any institution, any object.

That the techno-scientific capitalist world should be faithfully reproduced as an illustration, but with the paint-brush, is enough to establish the divide that is necessary to make visible what is not seen in illustrations, the quantitative infinite of knowledge and powers which has eaten away experiences and made us into survivors or experimenters<sup>31</sup>.

Hence his art is both modern, since it seeks the origin, although sceptically (Sarah Wilson calls him “postmodern romantic”<sup>32</sup>), and postmodern, since what it discovers is eventual, ephemeral, metamorphic like the present and the libido.

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<sup>30</sup> B. Readings, *Introducing Lyotard. Art And Politics*, Routledge, London 2006, p. 41.

<sup>31</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, *L'assassinat de l'expérience par la peinture, Monory / The Assassination of Experience by Painting, Monory*, p. 193.

<sup>32</sup> S. Wilson, *The Visual World of French Theory*, Yale University Press, New Heaven, 2010, p. 156.

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## MODERNIZM LIBIDINALNY LYOTARDA (streszczenie)

W artykule została przedstawiona koncepcja autorstwa Jean-François Lyotarda dotycząca przełomu modernistyczno-postmodernistycznego w kontekście studiów Lyotarda nad energetycznym, libidinalnym potencjałem sztuki i struktury artystycznej (bądź artystycznego urządzenia, *dispositive*). Wedle Lyotarda, postmodernizm wytwarza ciągły "quasi-analityczny" proces umożliwiający badanie elementów "zrepresjonowanych" przez projekt modernistyczny w celu wyzwolenia się od mechanizmów powtórzenia. Jedynie w takim kontekście uda się wywieść poważne artystyczne konsekwencje z analizy zmian kulturowych przedstawionych przez filozofa. W drugiej części artykułu skupiam się na książce Lyotarda poświęconej francuskiemu hiperrealistycznemu malarzowi Jacques'owi Monory, z którym współpracował w latach 1970-tych. Lyotard w książce *The Assassination of Experience by Painting, Monory* opisał "wkład dzieł malarskich Jacques'a Monory w rozumienie urządzeń libidinalnych i vice versa".

**Słowa kluczowe:** Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Monory, modernizm, postmodernizm, urządzenie libidinalne, hiperrealizm.

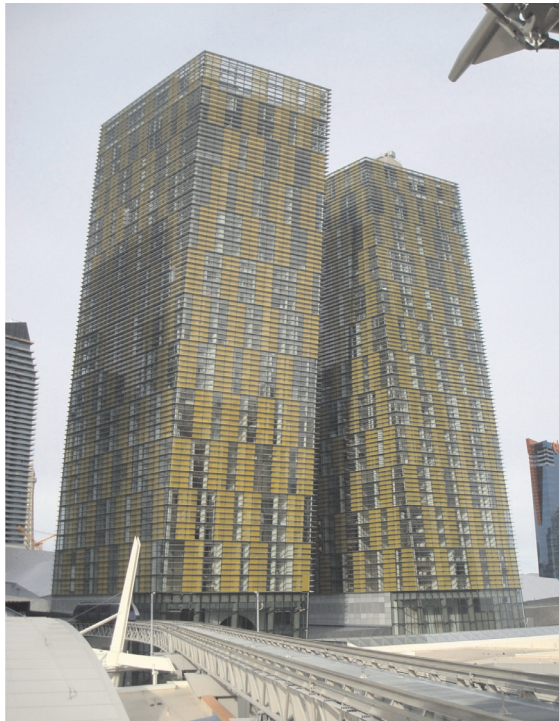


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## **THE VEER TOWERS OF THE NEW MODERNISM: PROCEDURALISM OR TIMOCRACY?**



Helmut Jahn, Veer Towers, 2010, City Center, Las Vegas,  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veer\\_Towers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veer_Towers) (28 Sept. 2016)

**Abstract:** Veer Towers (2010) – one of the architectural works designed by Helmut Jahn – is here only a good allegory of the healthy scepticism after 9/11, regarding the new modernism. They may be seen as being iconologically linked with the philosophical question of its founding, namely, with the reasons for its perception as new in relation to the historical modernism. To this end, it is first necessary to consider the concept of the end of modernity. We can argue that, contrary to the claims of Gianni Vattimo, postmodernism can be viewed as a necessary development or return of modernism, which is primarily the mission of the post-Kantian proceduralism of Jürgen Habermas. However, a major role in the proposed strategy for the sustainable inclusion of the Other should be again played by anger, as suggested by Peter Sloterdijk. Must then the new – contortive or loose – modernism veer into another disaster? Will this attempt to control resentments – such as the anger of the political Islam – force a turn to some timocracy well-known from the past, if proceduralism is in fact only a tortuously delayed voluntarism or quasi-occasionalism?

**Keywords:** anger, new modernism, proceduralism, public reason, timocracy.

The project of modernity, part of the wider phenomenon of modernism as a cultural formation, has been rightly linked with Jürgen Habermas and his theory of reason. In his book *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* (1985), he presented an analysis of the Hegelian concept of overcoming the dialectic of the Enlightenment and the reconciliation of the subjective and objective spirit in the self-created Absolute<sup>1</sup>. However, the philosophical and political programme of an *Aufhebung* of the pluralism unleashed after the Great French Revolution, according to the German philosopher remained “an unfinished project”<sup>2</sup>. In the same year Gianni Vattimo published *La fine della modernità*<sup>3</sup>, the work inconsistent in many aspects with the book of Habermas, because it is an apologia of the positive consequences of Nietzscheanism. In both cases, the diagnosis – counterintuitive in relation to one another – was equally loudly and widely commented, to give a chance to a possible synthesis, which I am trying to link with the problem of the new modernism.

Vattimo, like Habermas, also previously concentrated on the possibility of dialectical reason (*ragione dialettica*), considering that the weaknesses of the post-Hegelian tradition revealed in the face of hermeneutical reason (*ragione ermeneutica*) entitle one to talk about the end of modernity seen in the post-Nietzschean perspective of “fulfilled nihilism”<sup>4</sup>. However, Habermas – as

<sup>1</sup> J. Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne. Zwölf Vorlesungen*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1985; idem, *Filozoficzny dyskurs nowoczesności*, Universitas, trans. by M. Łukasiewicz, Universitas, Kraków 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, *Die Moderne – ein unvollendetes Projekt*, in: W. Welsch, ed., *Wege aus der Moderne. Schlüsseltexte der Postmoderne-Diskussion*, CH Acta Humaniora, Weinheim 1988, pp. 177-192.

<sup>3</sup> G. Vattimo, *La fine della modernità*, Garzanti Editore s. p. a., Milano 1985; idem, *Koniec nowoczesności*, trans. by M. Surma - Gawłowska, Universitas, Kraków 2006.

<sup>4</sup> G. Vattimo, *Nihilismus und Postmoderne in der Philosophie*, in: W. Welsch, ed., *Wege aus der Moderne*, op. cit., pp. 233-246.



*Verfechter der Moderne*<sup>5</sup> – has never accepted the postmodern section or rather vivisection of modernism and he devoted his later work to the criticism of this agonal resignation from the rightful claims of the human reason, but in a manner which accepts the valid elements present in postmodernism. Ultimately, however, he had to acknowledge at least some of the arguments of postmodernists, as can be seen from his concept of “public reason”. It seems that – as in the case of Wolfgang Welsch – the problem of postmodernism is shown in a reactive way, namely through the legitimisation of the post-Kantian theory of reason or rather its selective use. This lays the foundation for the further development of modernism. It would be “our postmodern modernity” (*Unsere postmoderne Moderne*) which commands respect for true pluralism<sup>6</sup> – with the help of the so-called “transversal reason”<sup>7</sup>. Similarly Habermas showed enough ingenuity to defend the liberal achievements of modernism, which – due to the nihilistic orientation of the postmodernists – are no longer obvious. Let us try to consider whether his demand for “the inclusion of the Other” may be a project that we could define as the new modernism. So, what would the adjective “new” mean in this context? Under what circumstances and for what reasons would it be possible to call this an innovation on historical modernism?

### **The problem of origins: *development or return of modernity?***

Vattimo, to recall his argument, associated the end of modernity and the coming of post-modernity with Nietzsche's concept of “perpetual return” and Heidegger's concept of the destruction of metaphysics. This perspective of Heideggerian post-metaphysical hermeneutic, which retains the Nietzschean concept of circular motion, gives one an opportunity to recognize the new modernism as a repetition, foreseen by postmodern thinkers as a return of a utopian idea – “an eternal charm” (to use the Marxist phrase for religion). The possible return of modernism would not go beyond the framework of “positive nihilism”. Therefore, the new project of modernization does not mean revisionism (still disseminated since 11 September 2001), according to which history comes back to life in all its monstrosity. The postmodern thinkers would be rather inclined to accept that the hypothetical new modernism is another

<sup>5</sup> S. Müller-Dopphm, *Jürgen Habermas. Eine Biographie*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Berlin 2014.

<sup>6</sup> W. Wolfgang, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne*, VCH Acta Humaniora, Weinheim 1987; idem, *Nasza postmodernistyczna moderna*, trans. by R. Kubicki and A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Idem, *Vernunft. Die zeitgenössische Vernunftkritik und das Konzept der transversalen Vernunft*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1995.

example of an unstable being, which cannot constitute a fundament, because it does not bring about anything fundamentally new and does not seem to be an eschaton. In the postmodern perspective, the main question is: why have we become so interested in our location in time, in history? Why does the issue of *Erörterung* take on particular importance for us again?<sup>8</sup> Where does this quite pointless appropriation of sense derive from – the counterproductive appropriation of history by the new modernism, which falls into the practical-inertial realm?

Another opportunity was seen by Habermas, for whom history did not end, but its course was only temporarily disrupted by postmodernism. However, this is understood in the end not as a threat, but as an inspiration. Thus, the continuity of the process of enlightenment would be still preserved here and Kantian ideas would be inspiring. This would – as Vattimo predicted – bring postmodernity into the frame of modernity<sup>9</sup>. The Italian philosopher believed, however, that such an act is impossible, because it would be as if suspended in a vacuum in the context of post-history (*post-histoire* described by Arnold Gehlen). If we consider an end to history, we also have to acknowledge the invalidity of the criterion of novelty. What then would be the use of the novelty of modernism as another one of its founding values, which have proved to be after all interchangeable and only utilitarian?

Vattimo asked the question about the possibility of a new beginning, after Heidegger and Nietzsche questioned the existing foundations without proposing any other grounds<sup>10</sup>. The question comes at the time when we have to choose whether we wish to localise ourselves in history, i.e. in modernity, or already in the area of thinking demarcated by the prefix *post*–? Is the location still valid for us at all, since the foundations of historical and progressive thinking have been undermined? Looking for arguments in favour of this location, which is like a return to the sources of modernity, to its basic principles, we have to find some sense or a vital necessity in what we are doing.

It is an opportunity that history is offering us, because finding such sense gives us a chance to reflect again on the great issues – the twilight of the West, which results from the past modernization processes as well as their current continuation. Here are some of those issues to be considered when assessing the possibility of new modernism:

1. The rapid and ongoing spread of technology, and especially the use of new information and communication technologies, shows that modern civilisation seems to be very much alive. Its progress has not been stopped, though since

<sup>8</sup> G. Vattimo, *Koniec nowoczesności*, op.cit., p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 2-3.

the 1930s it has been highly criticised and there has been increasing scepticism towards technocracy, especially in Heidegger's critique of the negative consequences of technology. In Poland, this trend was represented by Stanisław Piasecki – the editor of the nationalist weekly *ABC*, which was inspired in its criticism of modern industrialisation, standardisation, futurism, mechanism and productivism by Aldous Huxley<sup>11</sup>, Nikolai Berdyaev<sup>12</sup>, and some voices originating from American literature<sup>13</sup>. Similarly to Heidegger, the *ABC*'s linked its attack on technocracy with the rebirth of the nation<sup>14</sup>, contrary to the more humanist criticism of Bogdan Suchodolski<sup>15</sup>. However, the postmodern nihilists ignore both this battle, which resembles Don Quixote's struggle with the windmills, and the adaptation of nations to the advances in technology in the globalised world of today. They understand the increasing use of technology – absorbed or neutralised in the postmodern world – as a routine way of relating *Da-sein* to reality – the *modus operandi* based on the category of *Ge-Stell*, identified by Heidegger as a historical modus of human perspective initiated by Parmenides' henological metaphysics. The repeated aggressive and provocative attempts by technocrats to dominate “the World-picture” through the spread of technology are not a sufficient reason to believe that this makes possible a new modernism. After all, the progress of technology – the introduction of new models of machines – is a normal and regular feature of our everyday life. Therefore, there is no reason to commit ourselves to building a new idolatry of modernism. At this point one can say, after Heidegger and Vattimo: if the essence of technology isn't something that is technical<sup>16</sup>, similarly the mythical – or fabulous – essence of progress is not exhausted by the type of rationalism forcefully upheld by the naive technocrats.

2. The same holds for the question of catastrophism. Even the most expansive pessimism does not establish any important turning point in the postmodern culture – as well as the aforementioned optimistic progressivism, which is a reversal of catastrophism. Regress – for example, the fear of the economic crisis or nuclear annihilation, characteristic for the critical awareness of modernity, although still indelible – no longer paralyzes our imagination. Moreover, it has been pointed out that postmodernism is “a legalised crisis”. There are even

<sup>11</sup> S. Piasecki, *Nowy wspaniały świat życia ułatwionego i technokracji*, “ABC” 1933, no 74.

<sup>12</sup> *Walka z maszyną. Nowa książka Mikołaja Bierdiajewa*, “ABC” 1933, no 282, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> *Bunt amerykańskiej literatury przeciw maszynie i standaryzacji*, “ABC” 1933, no 84, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> M. Reutt, *Koniec industrializmu początkiem odrodzenia narodowego*, “ABC” 1934, no 101, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> B. Suchodolski „Oskarżenie techniki”, *Pion* 1933 (25 XI); idem, „Walka z maszyną”, *Pion* 1935 no. 17, p. 2-3.

<sup>16</sup> G. Vattimo, *Koniec nowoczesności*, op.cit., p. 25.

militarists who are considering the limited use of nuclear weapons for the so-called “de-escalation” of conventional military conflicts (in the official defence doctrine of Putin's Russia). “Shock and awe” (or “rapid dominance” inspired by Harlan K. Ullman's and James P. Wade's military doctrine) was withheld by George W. Bush. The expected paralysis of the enemy's perception of the battlefield and the destruction of its will to fight by the overwhelming power of the US Army and its spectacular display of force, were in fact unsuccessful in Afghanistan and Iraq. For the Muslim terrorists – for example the ones currently based in Syria – it is impossible to be paralysed by the fear of any humans because they fear only Allah. In this sense, in relation to modern catastrophism, Vattimo is right that pessimism (or regress) is fully tamed or neutralised by postmodernism as is progressive optimism. According to the governments in Europe and America, people have to learn to live alongside terrorists.

3. An unquestionable novelty is the disintegration of the unipolar hegemony of the United States of America, which is of course a geopolitical problem for the West. Its civilisation was the mainstay of modernity. The knowledgeable in this field argue that it has always been so in history that the hegemony of a superpower over the Rimland had to be replaced by the dominance of a new pretender (viz. Carthage vs Rome). Thus, the claims to reign in the Rimland by the new players, specially such as China, which – according to such experts as RAND Corporation<sup>17</sup> – will sooner or later lead to World War III, indeed marks a new quality for the global culture, focusing on the Asian patterns of the new centre of the world. The nations would be probably made to understand modernisation in another than liberal way. The possible reorientation towards the Far East, namely China, would radically reorganise our – individualistic rather than collective – perception of modernity. A horrible introduction to that was the modern totalitarianism in Europe since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Both Communism and Nazism began to rapidly grow in strength thanks to the fast pace of industrialisation and further militarisation of the state. China is showing now that another model of hybrid modernisation is not difficult to imagine in the face of the competition or an unpredictable scenario of the war – the so-called AirSea Battle – between China and the USA or – more generally – between the East and the West<sup>18</sup>.

5. The demographic catastrophe difficult to estimate – both an unprecedented population growth in Africa and the particularly shocking extinction of entire

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<sup>17</sup> J. Bartosiak, *A więc wojna*, “Nowa Konfederacja” 2016, no 9, <http://www.nowakonfederacja.pl/a-wiec-wojna/> (07.09.2016).

<sup>18</sup> Idem, *Pacyfik i Euroazja. O wojnie*, Centrum Studiów Polska-Azja, Warszawa 2016.

nations in Europe – undermining the liberal base of the civilization of the Old Continent, also creates a new context. It is estimated that in the near future the huge part of the population of Africa and Asia will move to Europe, which will fundamentally change its character. The massive and aggressive cultural migration of people from the underdeveloped areas of the world, which we now observe in southern and western Europe, is a major challenge and calls for appropriate responses. The current migration of people from Africa and Asia and the disappearance of civilizational and cultural borders pose a significant risk of impairing or nullifying the greatest achievements of the Enlightenment as a result of the undeniable Islamization of the West.

6. These challenges lead to a new tribalisation of Europe, creating – as a defensive reaction – sufficient concerns about safety due to the possibility of a religious war between the Europeans and the immigrants, or even a civil war, because of the increasing hostility between the pro-immigration radical left and the national fronts, especially in France, where the successive governments cultivate the neutrality of the republican state vis-à-vis religion. The most pessimistic prediction is that part of the Muslim society in Europe is facing annihilation. A genocide would be necessary in order to defend the current quality of life in the consumer society. This is a direct warning of the possibility of a new Holocaust, whose logic was reconstructed by Zygmunt Bauman. It is due to the structural repeatability of genocide – as Piotr Nowak has noted in his article “Are we preparing a Holocaust for the immigrants?”<sup>19</sup>, in which he discourages the refugees from settling in Europe. This is very probable, because the modern life – devoid of traditional, religiously motivated values – no longer possesses any inhibitions. In defence of their endangered welfare and comfort the permissive, consumer, opulent Western societies can and must commit a crime as great as in the past. To support its argument it refers to the situation of the old liberal democracies which have to live in fear every day and as if in a permanent state of emergency, restricting their civil liberties. Therefore, there is the danger that authoritarian governments will use force to manage large-scale conflicts.

All of the above points or circumstances are undeniably relevant to the new modernism or rather to the most important determinants of its possible return. Conditions 1 and 2 aren't new, because they were generated directly by the historical modernism and today seem quite tamed by postmodernism. However, conditions 3 – 6 are undoubtedly serious and decisively new, which

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<sup>19</sup> P. Nowak, „Czy zgotujemy imigrantom holokaust?”, *Plus Minus* – weekendowy dodatek do Rzeczpospolitej (02.10.2015), [http://www.rp.pl/Plus-Minus/310\\_029990-Czy-zgotujemy-imigrantom-holokaust.html#ap-1](http://www.rp.pl/Plus-Minus/310_029990-Czy-zgotujemy-imigrantom-holokaust.html#ap-1) (03.09.2016).

cannot be ignored or neutralized by saying that this is what happened more than once in the long history of the West. As in the case of the classic modernity from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century until the mid- 20<sup>th</sup> century, the new modernism would be also stimulated *in statu nascendi* by the social conflicts on the global scale, especially since the economic crisis of 2008. Their novelty would be determined by these conflicts, affecting the postmodern culture and slightly modifying its function compared to the original concept of Vattimo. In the near future the abovementioned conditions must initiate the processes similar to those during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when the contradictions of modernism reached the stage of crystallization and could not be further overcome, which led to World War II.

The new modernism – understood as a critical-regulative project – would therefore be primarily a reflection on the main tendencies which create the aura, the mechanisms and tools for generating a new form of social anomie. The processes of anomie – as Habermas has already observed in his theory of communicative action – has been the main focus of modern sociology. At present, it is hard to understand the critical-regulative sense of the new modernism, if we do not accept the possibility of a new Holocaust. The new modernists would therefore be aware that the danger of genocide cannot be removed from the social life. Postmodernism has attempted to minimise this risk by the deconstruction of the religious and ideological foundations of societies and by the reorientation of what Vattimo has called *pensiero debole* (weak thought). The belief in the potential inevitability of a Holocaust is therefore important, if it is argued that Zygmunt Bauman's diagnosis or treatment is correct. In his *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989)<sup>20</sup>, the Holocaust is no longer explained only as a result of anti-Semitism, but is viewed as a product of modernization – as a consequence of the post-Enlightenment sense of order (form) and of the efficient organization of work. Bauman was able – insightfully and in a completely new way – to encapsulate the significance of the historicity of the Holocaust, which originated in the old tensions in the Euro-Christian world, particularly the logic of the economy of that modern civilisation. At that time, genocide in the history of mankind had industrial, commercial or – as claimed by Bauman – engineering nature. Bauman has not exhausted the historical sense of the Holocaust, which goes back to the times of Homer and Moses. But his new research perspective has made evil less mysterious, opaque, metaphysical, religious and mystical or poetic. Evil in modernism is no longer so obviously irrational. The study of evil has become more exciting, since it has been found to possess a certain type of rationality. New modernism would have to view this

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<sup>20</sup> Z. Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Polity Press, Cambridge UK 1989.

attribute as an ineradicable unpleasant illness – a derivative condition of the fanatical cult of order, which may or even must be restored in the face of the new challenges of the postmodern society. Thus one can speak of new modernism in this sense.

### ***Thymós* in the public use of reason**

Ideological fundamentalism must assume a claim to the truth and thus be associated with what Nietzsche described as the will to power. This does not mean that one has to be a Nietzscheanist to recognize the relationship between fundamentalism and some sort of inevitable violence. A fresh look into this matter was provided by Peter Sloterdijk, who recalled the classic concept of the founding of social order by anger<sup>21</sup>. Anger is “the first word of Europe” – according to Sloterdijk, tracking its history in our world, shaped by the archaic *areté* of Homer's *Iliad*, God's anger of the Judaic and Christian apocalypticism, the tumults of the jealous and rebelling masses in the modern era. In modern times, the cumulation of hostility and anger exploded in bloody revolutions. This gave rise to avant-garde art, which is unthinkable without anger. Finally, it was in evidence during the two world wars, especially World War II, in the eliminationism and genocide, up till the post-communist era when the tormented Europe began to rebuild its societies, pacifying the overgrown totalitarian anger and distracting it in the era of the media. Sloterdijk's work *Zorn und Zeit* (2006) is a study not only of anger (Greek, *menis*), but also of the history of the validation of wrath as righteous anger (a virtue, like justified pride), known in the classical tradition as *thymós*, and of the clever capture of this rationalized passion (*fureur*) by modern cunning (Greek, *metis*). According to Sloterdijk, anger crops up in the peripheries, but it is not able to annex the center, which no longer exists in the postmodern networked society. The digital civilization – in its most advanced stages – can afford a flashmob of the various “outraged”.

But as has been demonstrated in the recent years, according to Sloterdijk's intuition, anger – despite of that “organized powerlessness” – cannot be reduced further and wrath still has a promising future, as we have seen during the Arab Spring (2010 – also the year of the death of the Polish President at Smolensk, which divided the Polish people<sup>22</sup>) or the Maidan in Kiev (2014) and during

<sup>21</sup> P. Sloterdijk, *Zorn und Zeit. Politisch-psychologischer Versuch*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2006; idem, *Gniew i czas. Esej polityczno-psychologiczny*, trans. by A. Żychliński, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2011.

<sup>22</sup> See the protest of some artists after the “scandalous” opening of my exhibition *Thymós. Art of Anger 1900-2011*, Center of Contemporary Art in Toruń, X 2011 - I 2012, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h767cfulx\\_E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h767cfulx_E) (30.09.2011).



Putin's recent aggression in the Ukraine. Sloterdijk's book met with the criticism of such researchers as Axel Honneth, alleging that the author is suffering from groundless ingenuity or an extremely fertile wit<sup>23</sup>. Honneth was annoyed by Sloterdijk's disbelief in the future free from resentment. But with time, after the careful consideration of the arguments of the Frankfurt school and the critical left, which wants to get rid of anger and – according to the classical theory of *thymós* – therefore of truth, we are closer here to the intuition of the return of history with its archaic demons: Hybris and Eris (with her daughter Ate) or Nemesis. *Reise in die Zukunft* is perhaps possible again<sup>24</sup>.

The new modernism, tackling the issue of its origins, faces the problem of a new outlook on this force, which already Platon tried to control in his concept of the harmonious co-existence of rationality (*nous*), impetuosity (*thymós*) and lust (*epithumia*). This concept represents a certain ideal of the philosophical formation of a citizen serving a well-organised state. That ethical and political demand has been discussed at length both by Aristotle, Kant and by the contemporary Kantians, such as Rawls and Habermas. The new modernism would also have to raise the question of justice and social order, and consequently should deal with the issue of its timotic motivation. It is impossible to ignore this problem, which is shown by Aristotle, particularly in the *Nicomachean Ethics*<sup>25</sup>, in the program of harnessing the unreasonable and dangerous anger born of the body, which seems unconsciously to govern people's actions. Therefore – according to Aristotle – it is difficult to reprove people for the acts performed against their will. On the other hand, calling the deeds performed in anger independent of our will seems absurd, since we should rightly explode with anger when provoked, ergo in the particular circumstances we have to look at anger as if it was desirable and excused. We are also able to control our anger, guided by our will and educating our nature, dispositions and virtues, that is doing everything in our power. Aristotle's aim was legitimizing anger in the heart of the man who knows how to value his dignity and justified pride. However, he also drew attention to the passions that abundantly disturb cognition, because they obscure the *nous* in *aisthesis*, thus undermining intuition – an important tool for acquiring scientific knowledge<sup>26</sup>. It is incredibly difficult for the person

<sup>23</sup> A. Honneth, *Fataler Tiefsinn aus Karlsruhe. Zum neuesten Schrifttum des Peter Sloterdijk* (25 IX 2009), <http://www.zeit.de/2009/40/Sloterdijk-Blasen> (30.10.2011).

<sup>24</sup> P. Sloterdijk, *Nach der Geschichte*, in: W. Welsch, ed., *Wege aus der Moderne*, op.cit., pp. 262-273.

<sup>25</sup> Arystoteles, *Dzieła wszystkie*. Vol. 5: *Etyka nikomachejska; Etyka wielka; Etyka eudemejska; O cnotach i wadach*, trans. and ed. by D. Gromska, L. Regner, W. Wróblewski, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1996.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 90.



who is guided in life only by passions to get to know the truth. And even when such a person has learnt the truth, it does not bring him benefit, as he is unable to control himself.<sup>27</sup> Although the irrational part coexists with the rational part in the soul, like convexity and concavity on the circle's circumference, which cannot be separated, from the cognitive point of view life which is "hellbent on pleasure"<sup>28</sup> is unproductive. Aristotle considers the passions, including anger, as some basic acts of the soul, but he separates them from the ability to experience the particular passions, and from the educated, rational and permanent disposition for experiencing passions. Thus anger is a passion, which we can but do not have to experience, because some individuals may be unable to experience the *menis*, and thus they are not able to develop rational anger – *thymós*. Anger must be subject to the right assessment by reason, if it is so easy to fall into wrath, and we can be angry too much or too little. Anger is in fact a passion with which we can deal properly or improperly<sup>29</sup>. Therefore, we can be angry in a wrong way. It is not the passion of the egotistical megalomania of someone with excessive ambition (*filotimos*) but of fortitude, virtue, honour, civic sense of injustice and an angry demand for justice with the right of vengeance. This claim is no longer a general commandment coming down from Heaven, from the Gods, for the human community. Now *ortos logos* – the "right reason" – is a situationally determined, empirical measure of anger (*phronesis*), and not an idealistic, a priori-understood justice with no place for revenge. Only if we accept that this measure should not be exceeded, will rage and mindless anger not wreak unnecessary havoc. But the person who cannot get angry and lets others get away with any kind of insult, because he is a man without ambition (*afilotimos*), is not worthy of respect<sup>30</sup>. Such a man is as harmful as an impetuous man, who knows no measure in anger and is not guided by reason. The person who is unable to get angry (*aorgetos*), does not reassert justice, because such a citizen has neither strength nor the will to fight for it, until finally this man starts doubting that righteousness is possible. Anger allows one to assess some of the people's actions and properties, their social status within the timocracy (the concept Aristotle inherited from Plato, who identified it with a political system based on ambition, accepting and conferring of honours and privileges<sup>31</sup>). Moral duty requires that we should learn to be angry, to recognize the person's position when angry, the degree of anger, its circumstances and time, as well as the purpose and the manner of expressing this passion. Rather than being

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<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 80.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 100.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 104, 113.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, p. 116.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, p. 117.

governed by furious anger, distending our nostrils like animals, we should approach this disturbance on the basis of knowledge, that is, without bravado and excessive wrath. One must foresee its consequences and should be always guided by fortitude, moderation, and tact or a good sense of the situation (*aisthesis*) in the practice of anger, which must have a clear and legitimate aim, and not a low, vulgar motivation – for example the pleasure of revenge. At a critical moment we must always choose a morally beautiful death, avoiding life in shame. Therefore, the rational disposition to experience anger, ambition and pride (*filotimia*), which opposes the inability to feel anger (*aorgetia*) and lack of ambition (*afilotimia*)<sup>32</sup>, is important in Aristotle's aretology.

As we know, the essence of modernism – according to Sloterdijk – was the capture of anger by cunning (*metis*). Modernism lost the sense of God and measure in the hostility and anger in the social life, and the critical response to this situation catastrophic for civilization gave birth to postmodernism. The new modernism – under the pressure of the return to history in the beginning of the current century – should be able to open postmodernity to timocracy. Sloterdijk – in his intelligent and vigorous style – has already criticized the European shaming of anger, defending *thymós* against the trivialization of anger by the Freudian psychology, and now by the welfare state (*Muttistaat*). Since World War II the modern timocracy has been effectively pacified and discredited. The angry emotional reactions or the various symptoms of more or less justified pride have been banished from the ideology of the European Union, which supposedly conserves its prejudices and the historic evil. Sloterdijk has rightly called this European society without resentments an institutionalized “old age retirement home”. The postcolonial societies of Africa and Asia – suffering from poverty, war and terror – claim their right to extrapolate their discomfort to the European states or to the total Western population, because the people in the West unjustly live in peace and harmony in their affluent, well-organized world (this rationalization of terror was well described by Sloterdijk). Bringing with them terror, suffering and menis, the strangers are a material for the new social engineers, postulating the need for an instrumental creolisation of the traditional, national communities in Europe.

Undoubtedly, one of these engineers of the new-left modernist order is Habermas – *der Skeptiker der Wiedervereinigung, des Deutschtums und des Nationalismus, der Philosoph als Weltreisender* – who in his book *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen* (1996)<sup>33</sup> has outlined a theoretical framework for the activity in

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>33</sup> J. Habermas, *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen. Studien zur politischen Theorie*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1996; idem, *Uwzględniając Innego. Studia do teorii politycznej*, trans. by A. Romaniuk, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2009.

the public sphere, which must be controlled by the principles of liberal democracy, based on the respect for constitutional order and the rule of the law. The new modernism is not something completely original, because it refers to the Kantian project of perpetual peace. Kantianism was largely the logic of the modern culture, whose primary feature was its critical-regulative function. Postmodernism has stopped the dynamism of this Enlightenment program, but it does not erase completely the ambition of this project. It is worth noting the very informative concept of the public reason, especially Habermas' objections concerning the philosophy of John Rawls and his theory of the public use of reason.

According to Rawls' theory of justice, the autonomy of the citizens is safeguarded by laws, which benefit them only if they are equal, free and moral persons<sup>34</sup>. Habermas does not want to identify laws with good or values, as was done by Rawls. Like Kant in his formalistic conception of the categorical imperative, he rejects any laws founded on the material ethics. In the post-religious and post-metaphysical society, organised by the radical pluralist democracy, which is subjected to the pressure of fallibilism, such references of the justice theory are difficult to maintain, as well as unnecessary. Habermas allows merely the deontological sense of the laws. Only the norms, when we recognize them, instantly have for us an absolute meaning of unconditional and universal validity, thus determining our fair actions. Habermas does not want to refer to any external goods or values as objectives of our action, because they must be redistributed or have yet to be achieved, and this needs time and the fulfilment of certain requirements. However, the recognition of the norms – in his opinion – immediately binds us unconditionally. The recognition, rejection of the norms, or refraining from applying them in our life is as instantaneous as assertoric sentences. If we identify laws with goods, then Rawls' deontological distinction between laws and goods makes no sense. For Habermas practical reason has only consistently procedural content, which is devoid of any substantial connotations<sup>35</sup>. Thus he interprets Kant's categorical imperative in the light of the ethics of discourse, which requires from people as the actors in a moral play to recognise the need for the public procedure of intersubjective demonstration of argumentation, which obligates all of the participants in this game to go beyond their interpretational perspectives and thereby successfully eliminate “the curtain of ignorance”<sup>36</sup>. Discourse ethics is inclusive and free from violence, because it concerns the free and equal participants, each of whom –

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<sup>34</sup> J. Habermas, *Uwzględniając Innego*, op.cit., p. 66.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, p. 69.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem.

on the basis of arguments – must be capable of assuming the perspective of the others as his own, that is, as the perspective of all of us. Each participant of this procedure is required to accept the solidarity perspective of *We*, appointed by the presuppositions of the public use of reason, which is inscribed into any reasonable activity<sup>37</sup>.

On the one hand, Habermas protects the public reason from the religious, metaphysical or other assertoric fundamentalism, in favour of legalism (the autonomy of the law, the supremacy of the Constitution within the legal system), but on the other – to be consistent with the procedural impartiality of the public use of reason – he cannot discredit completely the perspective of the theory of justice on the principles of a true, metaphysical or religious doctrine. Therefore, Habermas must be willing to listen to everyone who wants to contribute to the public debate. He must tolerate – from his perspective of *die Philosophie der nachmetaphysischen Moderne* – the followers of different religious doctrines, accepting on the input “a reasonable disagreement”, that is, a discord among the participants, controlled by the legal procedures of the public use of reason<sup>38</sup>. Thus, the new modernism from the start of the public debate takes into account a dispute, but it does not absolutize a hassle, like the postmodernists headed by Jean-François Lyotard. Incidentally, Habermas has finally appreciated the crucial element of postmodernity, that is, deferred knowledge. But he did not consider that this concept of meaning or sense delay is permanently binding. Like John Stuart Mill, Habermas believes in the power of ideas. According to him, today this is the only way of understanding justice, namely as a purely procedural fairness, based on the discursive ethics aimed at achieving a consensus. It is a transition from the material aretology (*die Tugendzumutung*) to the rational legitimacy of deliberative democratic decisions (*die Rationalitätsvermutung*). This desire for consensus in an intersubjective procedure opens the way for citizenship and sets out a framework for public statements. Only this is politically fair which is reasonable and common in these disputed systems of faith, and the truth of the procedural justice is deferred. What remains, according to Habermas, is the Lessingian tolerance for the non-rational images of the world, since today only such procedural legitimacy has primacy over the substantially – religiously or metaphysically – understood goods. Habermas's proceduralism as a framework for the perspective open to the activity of the Other resembles the precession of the perfectly horizontal and vertical lines in Helmut Jahn's design of the Veer Towers in Las Vegas (2010), described as a good example of the new modernism. The main character of the Other was played there by

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<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, p. 76.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, p. 77.

Richard Long, who applied mud – as Habermas did with religion etc. – in his hand-made drawings on the walls, in the lobbies of both the west and the east tower. After 9/11, the Veer Towers can be a good allegory of the new modernism with its proceduralism and timocracy.

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The concept of the public use of reason is thus a simple procedural foundation of the new modernism as its rational-legal legitimization, and this is what differentiates it fundamentally from the historical modernism, which was neither intersubjective, dialogic or inclusive (but rather highly individualistic or – on the contrary – collective and ideological or totalitarian) nor linguistic and diaporetic (but rather empirical, more materialistic, and dialectic or exclusive). The new modernism respects deliberative proceduralism and tries to avoid any dangerous angry motivation, consistently following the formalist ethics of Kant in the contemporary democratic society: “Deliberative politics acquires its legitimating force from the discursive structure of an opinion- and will-formation that can fulfil its socially integrative function only because citizens expect its results to have a reasonable quality”<sup>39</sup>. The context here is the larger issue of religions, myths, superstitions and resentments (*menis* and its instrumentalization by *metis* or anger rationalization as *thymós*) in the public use of reason. Habermas – *der Meister der Kommunikation* proposes to improve the procedures for the use of religion in his discussions with the assumptions of the justice theory of Rawls. Would they have to remain what they are with their dynamism, as Habermas has probably separated the public use of reason from the timotic, authentic claim to the truth? The hopelessness of this situation, involving both the fundamentalists, including the former fanatical modernists (and the nihilists) or the fallibilists and the supporters of proceduralism, is primarily psychological, because both sides equally fit the characterization of Carl Gustav Jung included in his *Psychology and Religion (The Terry Lectures, 1938)*: “It is true that an overwhelming majority of educated people are fragmentary personalities and have a lot of substitutes instead of the genuine goods”<sup>40</sup>. The proponents of timocracy tend to disregard procedures, while the supporters of proceduralism too easily ignore the spirit which needs to animate or warrant the self-sufficiency of these procedures. However, there are thinkers who recognize this attitude or philosophy of relying on substitutes as a chance. Religion, which in

<sup>39</sup> J. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, transl. by W. Rehg, MIT Press, Cambridge 1996, p. 304.

<sup>40</sup> C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, transl. by R.F.C. Hull, Bollingen Series XX. Pantheon Books, New York 1958, Vol. 11, p. 43.

the historical modernism was systematically excluded from the public sphere, would therefore be a good that allows modernity to restore its strength and shine. Religious timocracy would be an attempt to produce a center of thought, but its claims to the truth could be acceptable in the social life only through some admission procedures (see the Canadian criminal story of Mary Wagner – a Catholic anti-abortion activist). Timocracy can only be tolerated in the case of the public use of reason. Then, religion – especially in its most obscurantist, fanatical form, like the radical political Islam – would become again the field of modernization, which had been abandoned by the postmodernists in the recent decades. This process should not result in the unnecessary costs to our civilization, such as desacralisation, nihilism, the pragmatic idea of the death of God, and genocide (nevertheless, risk-taking is here a pre-requisite to making progress in the new modernism). The solution is not to focus on the postmodern conclusion that it is impossible to accept the idea of divinity as a fetish by theism or atheism, but rather on the inventiveness that provides the opportunities to involve the claims of religion in the process of the public use of reason. This would bring hope of overcoming the crisis of modern humanism, which was associated with theism since the anthropological creationism of Pico della Mirandola, before it was modified by the atheistic positive nihilism of Nietzsche. Here is the power, authority and mission of the new modernism. The result of this re-modernization in the West, for example in the UK, is the prevailing social practice of the transfer of certain cases of the crimes committed by Muslims against other Muslims to the sharia courts (contrary to the French Republican *idée fixe* of a purely secular space – for example, a beach unspoiled by burkini or habits). Obviously the field of art has also become a field of this mission. Therefore, some anti-Muslim artists face a safety gap. The Swedish cartoonist Lars Vilks must live under 24-hour police protection at his home, because he is the author of Muhammad's caricatures. Such anti-Muslim irreligion of the new modernism seems to reintroduce heroism to the clearly tired and resigned culture of the West, especially in the so-called Old Europe. Irreligious art which contests the radical political Islam can evoke positive images in the individual and collective imaginary of the postmodern societies, which have forgotten about optimism, determination, and faith, and their unique qualities. The new modernism can have nothing to do with the slogan *Alles wird gut!* recently extremely popular in Germany. Religious timocracy would tolerate both the misrepresentation and the normativity of the new modernity. But in the public sphere only such religion would be tolerated which manifests the desire for peace (as Habermas has predicted in the Kantian style, which is perhaps consistent with the positive nihilism of Vattimo). Thus, Islam would be subject to the obligation of modernisation (enlightenment or Europeanisation and Westernization). As we know, Christianity, especially the Catholic Church, has

decided to gradually renounce violence (as we have been recently reminded by Sloterdijk – a historical optimist as regards the education of the Euro-Islam).

It was – perhaps – written in a sneaky way by those who promote the idea of a more modernized federal Europe without islamophobia. But isn't it naive to think that it is possible to reach a consensus between the defenders of the Western civilization and the Islamists? The extreme philosophical interpretation of the Koran was formulated by Al Ghazali at the turn of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Western type of knowledge and faith cannot be founded on the basis of this occasionalism. This radical voluntarism of the Koran in Al Ghazali's interpretation is compatible neither with the Christian theology of the Incarnate Word of God (Jesus Christ as Logos) nor with the rationalism of the modern mathematical natural sciences. The causal links of the natural world, according to Al Ghazali, are only Allah's habits (sic!)<sup>41</sup>. The words of the ethical principles and legal procedures have no permanent sense, because their sense depends absolutely on the will or whim of Allah. The tradition of Islam consists of the method of invalidation (*naskh*) of some Koranic verses by others, and even – this possibility was introduced by Al Ghazali – some verses of the Koran could be annulled in the event of conflict by the practice of the Prophet Muhammad (*sunna*). Therefore, the voluntarism of Islam, especially its occasionalist interpretation, is highly destructive both to Christianity or even to the Muslim communities (let us recall the criticism of the ISIS' terror voiced by some moderate imams), and to the classical and modernist tradition in its rationalist trend (perhaps with the exception of the contemporary non-monotonic logic in which some conclusions can be invalidated *by* adding more knowledge). When we listen for instance to Peter Vogel, a German proselyte, it seems that after a period of postmodernism, the *Übermensch* in the new guise – of the Salafi scholar – has returned to Europe and has settled in Germany. On the other extreme are those modern imams who teach in a new manner, as Tareq Oubrou in Bordeaux – a pioneer of the “French Islam”, which respects and honours the republican principles and tolerance towards homosexuality. Moreover, it seems that the voluntarism of the Islamic theology is spreading quickly and taking over the authority in a peaceful and democratic way. Therefore, occasionalism can catalyse the new synthesis of voluntaristic and arbitrary morality of the West with the authoritarianism of Islam.

Similar comments can be made about Habermas' proceduralism as a special kind of modernised post-Kantianism in the context of fallibilism, since Kant had established directions for the development of Fichte's voluntaristic philosophy

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<sup>41</sup> J. Naify, *Al Ghazali*, in: R.H. Popkin, *Historia filozofii zachodniej*, trans. by A. Roman and Others, Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2003, pp. 191-198.



of action and German idealism. In *The Inclusion of the Other*, procedure gives occasion to dispute – it sets out its legal requirements and moderates – like God in the past – any possible content of the world under discussion. Will this purely procedural new modernism seen as deliberation be able to react suitably to the possible clash between the voluntaristic modernism and political Islamism, if it deprives itself of the substantial, real power that every civilization draws from the *thymós* for an illusion of purely formal, procedural coercion? Wouldn't the new modernism as a belief in “the force of the better argument” (Habermas), although it is badly needed and a dramatic cry of this moment, turn out to be another catastrophe resulting from our inability to debate in order to reach ideally justified decisions? According to Habermas, legitimacy is based on deliberation that combines descriptive and normative elements. But there still remains the sceptical argument of Philip Pettit's and Christian List's discursive dilemma that democratic deliberation does not guarantee successful implementation in practice of the best possible decisions. Paraphrasing this argument, it may be concluded that some participants wish to cast their vote for competent experts, others are calling for the full participation of laymen and ignorants (and even dangerous Others) in the dispute which may influence the quality of the deliberation. In the near future, it remains to be seen whether the soft or hard Euro-Islam should be – obviously in accordance with the procedures – a new proceduralism or a new timocracy. The Veer towers of the new modernism – which of them will be the first to collapse?

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## VEER TOWERS NOWEGO MODERNIZMU: PROCEDURALIZM CZY TYMOKRACJA? (streszczenie)

*Veer Towers* (2010) – jedno z architektonicznych dzieł zaprojektowanych przez Helmuta Jahna – jest tu tylko dobrą alegorią zdrowego sceptycyzmu po 11 IX 2001 roku, odnoszącym się do problemu nowego modernizmu, który musimy ikonologicznie powiązać z filozoficzną kwestią jego *ugruntowania*, mianowicie z uzasadnieniem możliwości tego, co w nim *nowe* w stosunku do modernizmu historycznego. W tym celu należy rozważyć najpierw koncept *końca nowoczesności*. Jeśli wykazemy, że wbrew Ganniemu Vattimo zaistniały warunki, by ponowoczesność wkomponować w konieczny *rozwój* czy *powrót* modernizmu, który byłby głównie misją postkantowskiego proceduralizmu Jürgena Habermasa, to i tak główną rolę Innego ponownie musi tu odegrać gniew, jak zasugerował Peter Sloterdijk. Czy wówczas nowy – *skręcający* czy *poluzowany* – modernizm nie *zboczy* ku kolejnej katastrofie? Czy jego próba zapanowania nad resentymentami – na przykład gniewem politycznego islamu – wymusi *skręt* ku jakiejś znanej z przeszłości tymokracji, jeśli proceduralizm to faktycznie tylko *pokrętnie* odwołany woluntaryzm czy quasi-okazjonalizm?

**Słowa kluczowe:** gniew, nowy modernizm, publiczny rozum, proceduralizm, tymokracja.

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## **NON-MODERN MODERNITY? NEOMODERN ARCHITECTURE**

**Abstract:** Neo-modernism, as both a philosophical and an architectural current, evolved as a critical response to postmodernism, the movement described by Agnes Heller as “neither conservative, nor revolutionary, nor progressive”. At the same time, neo-modernism adopted some post-modernist assumptions, resulting from the criticism of the modernist movement.

Rem Koolhaas emphasized that although contemporary architecture is clearly inspired by modernist aesthetics, it has little in common with the two major attributes of the modern movement – opposition towards context and towards history. Thus, neo-modernism can be described as “unmodern modernity”. According to Jürgen Habermas, being modern is closely related to being free of external axioms. Neo-modernism appears rather to be another form of eclecticism or “a strategy without an aim”, than a new modern movement.

**Keywords:** architecture, modernism, neo-modern architecture, modernity, eclecticism, Jürgen Habermas.

In a diversified pluralistic landscape of current architecture, we may notice a distinctive return to modernism. It primarily shows in the esthetic aspect of the newly-erected buildings whose creators draw inspiration from the construction industry of the 1920's and 30's. At the same time, the limited scope of those references triggers the question as to what the nature of neo-modernism in architecture truly is. To what degree is it a new and innovative phenomenon? Does it constitute a continuation of modernism or should we rather refer to it as a neo-style that has little in common with the original ideas of the modern movement? Finally, what is the relation of neo-modernism to the modernity?

### When did modernism end?

Neo-modernism, as both a philosophical and an architectural current, evolved as a critical response to postmodernism, the movement described by Agnes Heller as “neither conservative, nor revolutionary, nor progressive”<sup>1</sup>. Instead of “excessive pluralism”, it promoted a return to formal orderliness and designing by rules. At the same time, it adopted some premises resulting directly from postmodernist criticism of the modern movement.

Victor A. Grauer has described neo-modernism as a return to the formalistic doctrine of modernism<sup>2</sup>. This formulation seems very close to the common manner of talking about neo-modernist architecture. Popular definitions place the origins of the current at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Its characteristic features are claimed to include references to the forms typical of modernist architecture with the simultaneous rejection of any political and social content. A quick analysis of the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture clearly shows that those tendencies are nothing new. A progressive marginalization of the ideological aspects in favor of esthetics can be easily noticed in pre Word War II architecture. Leonardo Benevolo described the 1930s as the time when “the modern movement was reduced to the collection of formal rules”<sup>3</sup>.

Modernism in architecture had ceased to be associated with the revolution at the end of the 1920s. It was not only accepted by the privileged groups of society, but was also adopted as the so called “official style” in the countries with utterly conservative political and social systems. In the mid-1930s, tenement houses featuring luxurious modernist style were being built in numerous European metropolises, including Warsaw. The juxtaposition (although debatable) of the words “modernism” and “luxurious” itself already suggests that the social program promoted by the creators of modernism had been abandoned. In fact, they had created an architectural reinforcement of the “ancient regime” in a modern guise. Instead of cheap mass production, they offered high quality craftsmanship; instead of egalitarianism – the feeling of elitism. All that was clad in a glamorous modern costume based on Le Corbusier’s five points of architecture.

At the end of the 1930s, the tense political situation in Europe forced many avant-garde artists and architects to emigrate to America. This is how Euro-

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<sup>1</sup> M. Hopenhayn, *No Apocalypse, No Integration: Modernism and Postmodernism in Latin America*, Duke University Press, Durham 2002, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> V.A. Grauer, “Modernism/Postmodernism/Neomodernism”, *Downtown Review* 1981, vol. 3, no 1-2, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> L. Benevolo, *History of Modern Architecture*, vol. 2, M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1971, p. 552.

pean modernism reached the United States. At the same time, it underwent a transformation – the “modern movement” transformed into an “international style” and its extensive social program was replaced by the commercialized style of large corporations. The subsequent attempts to revive the movement did not bring the expected results<sup>4</sup>.

When did modernism end then? Did this happen with the reduction of the movement to a collection of formal rules, as described by Benevolo? Or did modernist architecture “die” in St. Louis on 15 July 1972 when the Pruitt Igoe housing project was demolished, as was claimed by Charles Jencks?<sup>5</sup> Or else, has it not ended at all, but has only undergone some transformations, as argued by many authors? It all depends on whether the concept “modernism” itself is given a narrower or broader interpretation<sup>6</sup>.

### The criterion of modernity

We must remember that the term “modern” has a double meaning in the Polish language and can be translated as both “modernist” and “up-to-date”<sup>7</sup>. Choosing one translation over the other automatically changes its interpretation and meaning (“narrower” or “broader”). The reason why this is important is that one of the founding myths of the modernist movement was centered on the cult of modernity, progress. In his tellingly entitled book *Myths and Utopias of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, in the chapter “The Myth of Modernity”, Jakub Wujek cites the founders of the Polish architectural avant-garde of the 1920s as claiming that “The closer will the work be adjusted to the time in which we live [...] the more [the minds – B.C.] shall be modern, more filled with modernism”<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, modernism could only be implemented in modern times.

It should be also stressed that it was not originally a future-oriented movement. “Modernism is the present moment”, wrote Szymon Syrkus in 1926<sup>9</sup>. The aim of the modernists was to solve the current problems of the “here and now”. On numerous occasions this was related to the “temporariness” of the chosen solutions and methods which, after being used to solve a given problem, lost their *raison d'être*. The sanatorium Zonnestraal in Hilversum for people

<sup>4</sup> J. Wujek, *Mity i utopie architektury XX wieku*, Arkady, Warszawa 1986, p. 75-81.

<sup>5</sup> Ch. Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, Academy Editions, London 1984, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> J. Tarnowski, „Czy powrót modernizmu w architekturze?”, in: *Powrót modernizmu*, ed. T. Pękala, Lublin 2013, pp. 223-246.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, p. 241.

<sup>8</sup> J. Wujek, *Mity...*, p. 221.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem.

suffering from tuberculosis was designed by the Dutch architect Jan Duiker in 1926. The designer assumed that tuberculosis, being a civilization disease, would be almost completely eliminated in 30 to 40 years, which is why he implemented rather non-permanent solutions, contradicting the Vitruvian principle of “firmitas”.

According to Jürgen Habermas, modernity equals the search and rejection of the external elements taken for granted. When modernism ceased to question and reconfigure itself, it reached a certain level of stagnation, thus becoming non-modern. As observed by Zygmunt Borawski, “Being modern means being non-dogmatic, versatile, and creative, but not forgetting one’s roots”<sup>10</sup>. Modernization projects carried out as part of the modernist philosophy reached far beyond modern esthetics. The avant-garde questioned the autonomy of a work of art understood as lacking the connection with “praxis”, with human life<sup>11</sup>. Habermas expressly stated that the interwar modernism was the first, and so far the last, movement that had such an effect on our everyday lives<sup>12</sup>.

Postmodernism, along with the subsequent postmodern movements, was not able to offer a program that would be equally powerful in its impact. Diana Ghirardo explicitly says that despite the bold attacks against its predecessors and its own delight over historical style, the designers responsible for a number of new buildings were not able to offer a richer theory, i.e. something other than anti-modernism, in order to give foundation to their activities<sup>13</sup>.

### Modernity vs. eclecticism?

Maciej Miłobędzki from the JEMS Architects studio sees the roots of neo-modernism in Polish architecture in the crisis of the late 1980s and in “yet another renaissance of modernism”<sup>14</sup>. However, as modernism is a closed period in history, the tradition of the interwar architecture has been reduced to the role of decorum. Therefore, neo-modernism can be perceived as yet another neo-style implemented in reference to a certain image of the symbolic aspect of the original.

<sup>10</sup> Z. Borawski, *Neoburżuazyjny anarchokonserwatyzm*, „Rzut” 2016, no 1, p. 56.

<sup>11</sup> P. Piotrowski, *Znaczenia Modernizmu. W stronę historii sztuki polskiej po 1945 roku*, Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, Poznań 2011, p. 129.

<sup>12</sup> J. Habermas, “Modern and post-modern architecture”, in: J. Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and Historians’ Debate*, transl. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1991, p. 419.

<sup>13</sup> D. Ghirardo, *Architecture after Modernism*, Thames and Hudson, New York 1996, p. 28.

<sup>14</sup> „W poszukiwaniu rzeczywistej wartości – rozmowa z Maciejem Miłobędzkim”, *Rzut* 2016, no 1, p. 43.

Walter Benjamin wrote that at the time of the French Revolution, France perceived itself as a recurrence of Rome. "It cited ancient Rome exactly the way the fashion cites the bygone mode of dress"<sup>15</sup>. Similarly, modernist forms transposed in such a way have become the background for the activities of the modern society of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. At the same time, it should be emphasized that smooth facades, cubic forms, and horizontal lines of windows are not necessarily the result of an underlying modernization program. Modernity has been reduced to the role of mere decoration.

If we take a closer look at two designs prepared by the JEMS Architects studio, we will be able to see that neo-modernist forms can convey a diversified message as well as enter the multi-faceted dialogue with the ideas of the modern movement. The complexes of office buildings – Platinum Business Park (Warsaw 2008) and Pixel (Poznań 2013), according to the assumptions of the designers, represent peripheral architecture. Their forms constitute a clear reference to the achievements of the avant-garde modernism, while the interiors are an example of homogeneous functional space. The concept of the headquarters of the AGORA SA media company (Warsaw 2002), a couple of years older, was primarily to be a symbol of a modern company, open to the world. The designers gave up monofunctionality in favor of a flexible, easily adjustable space (rational space, according to the distinction made by Adolf Boehne). This is how the building, whose concept was close to the modern movement, came to life, despite a completely unorthodox approach of the designers to modernist aesthetics.

Mies van der Rohe used to say that "architecture is not about inventing something new"<sup>16</sup>. Indeed, if we take a look at his designs from the time of his stay in the United States, we may conclude that what was considered as modern was not really modern at all. Van der Rohe and his followers (Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, among others) perfected framing and glass curtain walls. So called "glass boxes" became the hallmark of the progressive tendencies in the construction industry, even though they were not progressive as such. Thus, mature modernism brought about a particular kind of eclecticism, "different than the former one. It was a formal and functional eclecticism of any types of modernity"<sup>17</sup>. On the one hand, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century we may observe modernist (modern) eclecticism, while on the other hand, we are dealing with the phenomenon that came to function as its opposition. Charles

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<sup>15</sup> W. Benjamin, "On the Concept of History", in: W. Benjamin, *Selected Writings. Volume 4 1938-1940*, ed. H. Eiland, M. W. Jennings, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass. 2003, p. 395.

<sup>16</sup> P. Trzeciak, *Przegląd architektury XX wieku*, Nasza Księgarnia, Warszawa 1974, p. 214.

<sup>17</sup> K. Nawrotek, *Ideologie w przestrzeni. Próby demistyfikacji*, Universitas, Kraków 2005, p. 111.

Jencks defined postmodernism as “radical eclecticism”, at the same time pointing out certain analogies between the current architecture and that of the 1870-1910 period, when “numerous styles and ideologies”<sup>18</sup> were developing simultaneously.

As noted by Douglas Crimp, contemporary eclecticism reaches for the tools and methods once used by the eclectics, such as referencing or transforming already existing motifs. At the same time, their theory is intentionally avoided<sup>19</sup>. The lack of the “ultimate purpose” noticed by Jacques Derrida additionally indicates the crucial element of doubt. It was already mentioned by Charles Baudelaire who believed doubt was the basis of the 19<sup>th</sup> century eclecticism<sup>20</sup>. Regarding the architecture of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the lack of axioms and the inability to identify permanent values are very clear.

### Modernism en vogue

In the light of the above deliberations, neo-modernism in architecture should be regarded as one of the variants of contemporary eclecticism and a particular approach towards modernism.

In his lecture “Modernity’s Consciousness of Time and Its Need for Self-Reassurance” Jürgen Habermas cited Baudelaire, for whom modernity in a work of art is manifested in the union of “the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent” and “the eternal and the immutable” at the same time<sup>21</sup>. The quoted reference to fashion and the somewhat diluted motif of imitation that it contains, as Habermas writes, seems to have particular significance<sup>22</sup>. Neo-modernism is then the effect of modernism being in fashion. “Fashion has a nose for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago; it is a tiger’s leap into the past”, wrote Walter Benjamin<sup>23</sup>. However, “topical” does not have to mean “modern”.

The Cosmopolitan office building in Warsaw (2013) designed by Helmut Jahn’s studio is an example of neo-modernist esthetics based on the achievements of the international style. The composition of the glass boxes and the shiny

<sup>18</sup> C. Jencks, *The Language ...*, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> G. Sztabiński, „Eklektyzm dawny i współczesny”, in: *Eklektyzm i eklektyzmy. Materiały ogólnopolskiego seminarium naukowego*. Muzeum Historii Miasta Łodzi, listopad 1992, Stowarzyszenie Historyków Sztuki Oddział w Łodzi, Łódź 1993, p. 44.

<sup>20</sup> Idem, p. 45.

<sup>21</sup> Ch. Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, in: Ch. Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, transl. J. Mayne, Phaidon Press, London 1964, p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> J. Habermas, *Nowoczesność: świadomość czasów i szukanie pewności w samej sobie*, in: J. Habermas, *Filozoficzny dyskurs nowoczesności*, transl. M. Łukasiewicz, Universitas, Kraków 2000, p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> W. Benjamin, *On the Concept...*, p. 160.



surfaces of the glass curtain walls bring to mind the American designs of Mies van der Rohe. Even the marble panels with the characteristic veining used in the reception wall, seem to be taken straight out of the German Pavilion in Barcelona or the Tugendhat Villa in Brno! Helmut Jahn himself referred to himself as a creative continuator of the modernist movement, for whom there are no boundaries between the “local” and “global”, while architecture and engineering form an inseparable whole.

There is more to find in the fashion for modernism, however, than just a rational affirmation of the esthetics based on geometrical rules. It becomes a disguise, a curtain whose seemingly modern (therefore, relevant to modern times) form hides the non-permanent nature of contemporary architecture. The modernist disguise of steel, concrete, and glass has been mindlessly associated with modernity for years. Because of that, despite their ever quicker changing functions, we associate the buildings with the function and rank given to them by the investors and architects. In fact, however, the functional needs and technical capacity, and often also economy, would suggest using non-traditional solutions. Buildings could be perfectly non-permanent and quick changes of function should be made possible.

Meanwhile, modernism has become yet another historical costume. In 2014, the LIBIDO Architects design studio designed a villa near Łódź that features clear references to the 1920s modernism from Gdynia. The references here are not only related to a certain period in the history of architecture, but also to its specific local variety. The neo-modernist costume in which architects dress contemporary architecture is in reality no different from other neo-styles, and their approach no different from the attitude of those who in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were hiding the then modern reinforced-iron structure under the pseudo-historical stucco-work.

### Epigones and imitators

Is neo-modernism an unoriginal and imitative phenomenon then? Numerous examples demonstrate that just as with any kind of eclecticism, borrowings and references may lead to interesting effects that contain a strong creative element.

Wilfried Wang perceives the architectural works of Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron as a search for the intensity characteristic of minimalistic modernism of Mies van der Rohe or the purist works of Le Corbousier<sup>24</sup>. He

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<sup>24</sup> W. Wang, *Herzog & de Meuron*, Basel-Boston-Berlin 2000, p.9.

stresses their conscious affinity with the work of both Karl Moser and Hannes Meyer. However, from the moment when Wang analyzed the achievements of the Swiss designer duo over two decades ago, his words have not lost their significance. “Herzog & de Meuron do not seek to invent a new language, instead, they are looking to state clearly that which remains to be said with utter clarity”<sup>25</sup>. Wang has found a balance between idea and form in the works of Herzog & de Meuron and he contrasts them with the formalistic approach associated with the “modernist baroque” of Richard Meier<sup>26</sup>.

Meier’s sterile, white, glass buildings are reminiscent of Mies van der Rohe or Richard Neuter’s works. Seeking the essence of modernist architecture, Meier develops modernist methods of shaping the space inside a building. This does not, however, breach the fixed boundaries of the movement. It functions within it, using a set collection of elements it combines, thus forming ever more complicated compositions. Unlike Meier, Herzog and de Meuron openly admit using traditional solutions and construction materials in an unconventional manner: “Their traditional character disappears. Glass isn’t glass anymore, it’s solid and stable as stone or concrete. Conversely, by printing on concrete, it suddenly becomes porous or shiny like glass”<sup>27</sup>. The Swiss designers assign new roles to materials. They also engage in dialogue with seemingly inviolable architectural laws. Rusty sheet-metal plates and abundant vegetation on the walls of the Caixa Forum (Madrid, 2008) imply transience and perishability. The construction of the Olympic stadium in Beijing (2008) seemingly negates the rules of statics, while the maze of reinforced concrete beams and columns looks like a “dark and enchanted forest from close up and giant bird’s nest from afar”<sup>28</sup>. It is no wonder that Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van der Akker called them neo-romantics, remaining somewhat in opposition to neo-rationalists.

The Polish architect Robert Konieczny performs similar feats using traditional typologies that have been present in architecture for hundreds of years as well as our concept of the building that results from them. His Aatrial House (2006) is a reversal of a residential building centered on an internal patio. The Auto-Family House (2012), however, stands in contrast to the use of traditional functional zones in a residential building. At the same time, Konieczny willingly reaches for minimalistic, neo-modernist esthetics. White, simple solid structures are torn by enormous glazed surfaces while being based on perfectly balanced proportions and details limited to the minimum. However,

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<sup>25</sup> Idem., p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> Idem., p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> T. Vermeulen, R. van den Akker, “Notes on metamodernism”, *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 2010, vol. 2.

<sup>28</sup> W. Wang, *Herzog...*, p. 194.

also in this aspect, the architect is not a dogmatist, as his Dialogue Center Przelomy (Szczecin 2016) evidences a much more crude aesthetics dependent on the specifics of the context. The object simultaneously functions as a building and a town square.

The redefinition of traditional elements, assigning to them new, sometimes perverse meanings, seems to be far distanced from the sincerity-and truth-loving modernism, but rather close to postmodernism. The element of surprise, the intellectual game played with the recipient with the use of a system of codes and signs were also characteristic of 16<sup>th</sup> century mannerism. The artists of that time were distinguished by their eclectic approach. They strived for a harmonious combination of the experiences of their predecessors into one homogenous whole<sup>29</sup>. The complexity and contradiction found in postmodern architecture seems to be close to the mannerist attitude and therefore also to the eclectic approach. In this sense, neo-modernism is closer to them than it was to its 20<sup>th</sup> century prototype.

Paradoxically, we may find the continuation of the modern movement in the works of the artists who are not basically associated with modernist aesthetics. Each subsequent design of Rem Koolhaas is an answer to a different intellectual challenge. "The future is here, it just hasn't been evenly distributed (yet)", he claims. In turn, Alejandro Aravena, the 2016 Pritzker prize winner, focuses on the architect's social mission, as both a representative of the profession, and an individual. Aravena criticizes the buildings that have an excessively glamorous, unique form. His complaint that "They cannot be copied so in the context of serving many people, their value is close to zero", resembles the manifestos of the socially committed avant-garde of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the light of the above deliberations, neo-modernism, as one of the contemporary architectural movements using the means characteristic of the avant-garde architecture of the 1920s and 1930s, is an example of contemporary eclecticism. Stemming out of doubt, deprived of the "ultimate purpose", it becomes a costume, a decorum resulting from the "fashion for modernism". At the same time, neo-modernism is full of contradictions. It is perceived as a continuation of modernism, while contradicting its fundamental premises. It is associated with modernity, but it is not modern. It is a non-modern modernity or a postmodern modernism<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> G. Sztabiński, *Eklektyzm...*, p. 34-35.

<sup>30</sup> W. Welsch, *Nasza postmodernistyczna moderna*, transl. R. Kubicki, A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, Wydawnictwo Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 1998, p. 23.

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## **NIENOWOCZESNA NOWOCZESNOŚĆ? NEOMODERNIZM W ARCHITEKTURZE (streszczenie)**

Neomodernizm, zarówno jako kierunek filozoficzny, jak i nurt w architekturze, zrodził się jako krytyczna odpowiedź na postmodernizm, zdefiniowany jako ruch nadmiernie pluralistyczny, który sam w sobie nie jest „ani konserwatywny, ani rewolucyjny, ani postępowy”. Jednocześnie przyjął niektóre z postmodernistycznych założeń wynikających bezpośrednio z krytyki ruchu nowoczesnego.

Rem Koolhaas słusznie zwracał uwagę, że współcześni architekci chętnie sięgają ku modernistycznym wzorcom zapominając jednocześnie o dwóch immanentnych cechach ruchu nowoczesnego w architekturze – akontekstualności i ahistoryczności. Neomodernizm może zatem być określony mianem „nienowoczesnej nowoczesności”. Zgodnie z koncepcją Jürgena Habermasa, bycie nowoczesnym jest ściśle związane z odrzuceniem zewnętrznych pewników. Neomodernizm jawi się raczej jako kolejne oblicze eklektyzmu, „strategia bez ostatecznego celu”, niż nowy ruch nowoczesny.

**Słowa kluczowe:** architektura, modernizm, neomodernizm, nowoczesność, eklektyzm, Jürgen Habermas.



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## **(NEO)MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE OF MADRID: BETWEEN FORM AND THEORY**

**Abstract:** In the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a number of buildings with neomodernist elements were erected in Madrid. Modernist theory of forms should be juxtaposed with such residential buildings as Mirador (2005) and Celosia (2009) in the district of Sanchinarro, which were designed by the renowned Dutch office MVRDV in collaboration with the Spanish architect Blanca Lleó. Equally notable are the achievements of the Madrid-based architectural office, A-Cero (Joaquín Torres and Rafael Llamazares). Its main activity focuses on designing residential buildings: both entire complexes and individual houses (Vivienda 10, Moka House). The paper will not only present some of such buildings, but also the context of their creation, both in the formal and ideological terms. It is also worth considering the theoretical reflection on architecture whose authors are the architects themselves. The most interesting of them not only design, but also seek to present their artistic philosophy, in which we can find many neomodernist threads.

**Keywords:** contemporary architecture, Madrid, modernism, neomodernism, postmodernism.

### **Modernism, late modernism and neomodernism in architecture**

The term “modernism” can be used in different contexts, and has acquired various meanings. As pointed out by Charles Harrison,

the term acquires a different scope and penetration in each different academic discipline. The inception of modernism in music is typically located at the close of the nineteenth century, while to talk of modernism in English literature is to focus upon a relatively limited if highly influential body of work produced in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In the

history of art, on the other hand, the student of modernism can expect to run a gamut from the French painting of the 1860s to the American art of a century later a may even be directed as far back as the late eighteenth century<sup>1</sup>.

We understand this term in yet another way in relation to architecture. The first period described as modernism was Art Nouveau, and in Spain the term *modernismo* is very often used in reference to this particular trend. The books by Óscar Rocha Muñoz (*El Modernismo de la arquitectura madrileña*)<sup>2</sup> and Ricardo Muñoz Fajard (*Modernismo ausente y olvidado de Madrid*)<sup>3</sup> discuss Art Nouveau buildings.

However, according to the renowned theorist in the field of modern architecture, Charles Jencks, the modernist movement, or modernism, is usually associated with the functional, modern and purist architecture of 1920-1960<sup>4</sup>. Léon Krier points out the alternative and notionally confusing use of the terms “modernism” and “modernity”. In his opinion, the term “modernity” refers to a specific period, and thus has a purely chronological meaning, while the term “modernism” refers to a certain specific ideology<sup>5</sup>. Modernist architecture is characterized by universality and the lack of local varieties; it is devoid of historical, symbolic or metaphorical elements. The modernist style is utopian and idealistic, the forms of the objects are simple, determined by their function; the buildings are holistic projects (*Gesamtkunstwerk*)<sup>6</sup>.

Other construction trends, which the author characterises in his publications from the 1980s, are the two dominant styles: late modernism and post-modernism. Late modernism is largely influenced (often not fully consciously) by the forms and ideas of modernism and is characterized by the use of the latest technologies and materials. The structure and design of the buildings are often emphasized in an extreme way, turning into ornament. Although we can notice the rejection of history and metaphorical meanings, the constructions often display unintentional symbolism and humour.

In contrast, postmodernism functions in opposition to the modernist assumptions. Therefore, we have to do with constructions of a semiotic character,

<sup>1</sup> Ch. Harrison, “Modernism”, in: *Critical Terms for Art. History*, ed. R. S. Nelson, R. Shift, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London 2003 [1996], p. 188.

<sup>2</sup> Ó. Rocha Muñoz, *El Modernismo de la arquitectura madrileña. Génesis y desarrollo de una opción ecléctica*, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid 2009.

<sup>3</sup> R. Muñoz Fajardo, *Modernismo ausente y olvidado de Madrid. El Madrid que pudo ser y su arquitectura modernista*, Ricardo Muñoz Fajardo, Madrid 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Ch. Jencks, *Late-Modern Architecture and Other Essays*, Academy Editions, London 1980, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> L. Krier, *The Architecture of Community*, Islandpress, Washington, Covelo, London 2009, p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> Ch. Jencks, *Late-Modern...*, p. 32.



complexity of structures, variability of space and forms (both conventional and abstract ones). The buildings feature not only metaphorical references to history, but also symbolism and intentional humour. We can see an accumulation and combination of functions, frequent additivity of forms, as well as some visual strategies that can be described as mannerist and baroque. Postmodernist architecture is ambiguous and often surprises the viewer<sup>7</sup>. For Robert Harbison, one example of such “baroque” postmodernist solution is topping a 19<sup>th</sup>-century tenement house in Vienna with a metal and glass structure with very expressive forms by Coop Himmelb(l)au (Rooftop Remodeling, 1984-1988)<sup>8</sup>. In Madrid, this tendency is exemplified by the CaixaForum (2001-2005), designed by the Swiss architectural office founded in Basel in 1978 by Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron<sup>9</sup>. The removal of much of the base of the former power station from 1900 gives an impression of the building “levitating”. The brick body was also given a new finish – it was topped with a galvanized structure made of metal, covered with slabs of rusty iron. In the vicinity of the CaixaForum, a garden was placed on a vertical wall, complementing the project and introducing a colour element contrasting with the red-brick body of the building [III.1]. As observed by Charles Jencks, “this building summarises several post-modern themes with its contextual counterpoint and recycling of the older building, its stitching together of the urban fabric and expressing the green imperative, its appeal to history and the future, with its ironic signs dramatizing the old and new”<sup>10</sup>.

1984 was certainly a turning point for the theory of architecture. It was then that Jencks declared the “death of modernism”, assuming that the symbolic date was 15 July 1972, when the Pruitt-Igoe housing estate (or more precisely some of its panelák blocks) was blown up in St. Louis, Missouri. The estate, which had been built in accordance with the most progressive ideas of modernism, had failed to be a good solution in everyday life. The blocks were devastated and the constantly increasing crime rate proved to be the decisive factor in its downfall. It was blamed on anonymity, long, empty corridors, and inability to control the semi-private areas<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>8</sup> R. Harbison, *Reflections on Baroque*, London: Reaktion Books, 2000, p. 232; C. Himmelblau, “The Dissipation of Our Bodies in the City”, in: *Theories and Manifestoes of Contemporary Architecture*, ed. Ch. Jencks, K. Kropf, Chichester: Acedemy Editions 1997, pp. 286–287.

<sup>9</sup> Later, Christine Binswanger, Ascan Mergenthaler, and Stefan Marbach joined the team.

<sup>10</sup> Ch. Jencks, *The Story of Post-Modernism. Five Decades of the Ironic, Iconic and Critical Architecture*, London: John Wiley & Sons, 2011, p. 18; see also: pp. 110–113.

<sup>11</sup> Ch. Jencks, *Architektura postmodernistyczna*, transl. B. Gadomska, Arkady, Warszawa 1986 [1984], p. 9.

At the end of the 1980s, Charles Jencks introduced the concept of neo-modernism into his reflections on architecture. He dates the beginning of neo-modernist architecture to 1976<sup>12</sup>. In his view, this trend is closely related to deconstructionism and is something more than just the usual comfortable borrowing of philosophical concepts<sup>13</sup>. He describes the designers of neo-modernist structures in the following way: "the New-Moderns they say are no longer utopians who wish to change society but rather aesthetes who play with Modernist forms: their essential message is not ethical but stylistic, a new baroque elaboration of the language synthesised in the twenties"<sup>14</sup>. Neomodernism is quite hermetic, it should be formally placed somewhere "between styles"; the artists are autonomous in their choices and strive to achieve otherness. This architecture often becomes a record of individual codes and symbols<sup>15</sup>.

At this point, we can ask ourselves whether the architecture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which "draws" on modernism, should be still described as late modernism, neomodernism, or a completely different trend, for which modernism is just an inspiration. The distinctiveness of the neomodernist style seems indeterminate, and, in fact, architects and theoreticians of architecture often understand the concept quite differently. It is worth noting that neomodernist forms are fashionable among architects. A lot of contemporary architectural projects can be described as substantially modernist. Many architects admit to being fascinated by Le Corbusier (at least the early stage of his career), and they often point out that particular modernist buildings were a source of inspiration for their projects. But is that enough to define their architecture as neomodernist? Is there a clear, definite trend drawing on modernism and thus opposing the pluralistic post-modernity?

According to Antoni Taraszkiewicz,

neomodernists, like the creators of modernism, refer to universal values, striving in their works for the truth, sincerity and authenticity. In architecture, this translates into forms characterized by simplicity, purity and uniqueness. In its assumptions, neomodernism rejects local values, such as regionalism and historicism, recognizing them as transient, adhering to timeless and universal values, creating an «international style» oriented towards the future. This trend follows the pursuit of the latest trends in art and technology to express what at a particular time is considered to be the most avant-garde<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Ch. Jencks, *The New Moderns from Late to Neo-Modernism*, Academy Editions, London 1990, p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> A. Taraszkiewicz, *Postawy twórcze architektów a wyraz przestrzenny współczesnej zabudowy mieszkaniowej wielorodzinnej na przykładzie Trójmiasta*, in: *Habitat trzeciej fali EXPO 2010 - Wrocław*, ed. Z. Bać, Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Wrocławskiej, Wrocław 2003, p. 135.

In fact, this definition does not make it any less difficult to grasp the difference between modernism and neomodernism; the only distinction seems to be the time when the described projects were created.

The definition which seems much more consistent and characterizes the problem better is the one proposed by Cezary Wąs, who compares the features of the late modernism and neomodernism, concluding that these two trends are, to a great extent, variations of modernist historicism, in which the primary role is played by the reflective attitude towards the progenitors. In late modernism, turning to the past led most often to emphasizing the formal rules of the avant-garde modernism, which was manifested e.g. in the exaggerated emphasis on the structural or functional divisions of the buildings with an excessive display of the aesthetic values of the materials used (viz. the huge mirrored surfaces of the façades) or the multiplication of divisions (extremely isotropic space). Neomodernists returned to the sophisticated and delicate patterns of early modernist works, adding ornament, using traditional materials and expressive symbolism, rejected by the masters of modernism. In the area of ideology, they try to ignore a lot of existing contradictions and remain open to the traditional values of locality and customs.<sup>17</sup>

### Neomodernism and Madrid

Despite the doubts about the existence of neomodernism as a separate current, neomodernist trends (as I would still like to call them) can be seen in many parts of the modern world. I have selected certain architectural realizations in modern Madrid to discuss in this article.

In the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a number of modern buildings were erected in Madrid. The most famous ones, visible from afar and towering over the city, are certainly those making up the Cuatro Torres Business Area (CTBA) [Ill.2], located in the north of the city in the district of La Paz at Paseo de la Castellana. They are the tallest buildings in Madrid and in Spain: their height ranges from 225 m (the lowest one) to 250 m (the tallest one). Each of the skyscrapers has its own name: Torre Cespa, Torre de Cristal, Torre PwC, Torre Espacio.<sup>18</sup> In accordance with the architects' intent, they were built at the highest point of the city, and their height enhances the impression of loftiness. According to Enrique Álvarez-Sala, despite the simple forms, modern materials

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<sup>17</sup> C. Wąs, *Antynomie współczesnej architektury sakralnej*, Muzeum Architektury we Wrocławiu, Wrocław 2008, p. 253.

<sup>18</sup> M.C. Crosbie, *Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects*, Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag GmbH, 2013, p. 180; J. Barros Guerton, *About Urban Spain*, Lulu.com, London 2009, p. 82.

and design solutions, and dominance of glass, the architecture of the towers has a dynamic form, which varies depending on the viewpoint and creates a different view from every corner of the city.<sup>19</sup> Such architectural dominants also appeared in the late modernism, e.g. in the form of the famous (though controversial)<sup>20</sup> Torre de Valencia in Madrid (1970-1973), a concrete structure aspiring to the monumentalisation of urban landscape elements [Ill. 3], designed by Javier Carvajal, erected opposite the Retiro Park<sup>21</sup>. Certain architectural dynamics was also no stranger to modernism. Already in the early period, Adolf Loos, building houses devoid of historicizing decorations and removing excessive symbolism from residential areas, created interiors that became dynamic through the use of light – thanks to the windows devoid of curtains, which perhaps added intimacy, but shaded the interior, interpenetrating spaces and levels, stairs which increased the need for mobility, and thus provoked the dynamic perception of architecture. “A building has turned into a theatre of multiplying and simultaneous scenery”<sup>22</sup>.

Besides the CTBA towers visible from anywhere in the city, many other modern constructions, and even entire districts, were erected in Madrid. In some cases, we can talk about the inspiration from modernist architecture. This is visible mainly in the forms: pure, simple, devoid of ornaments. The architects-designers themselves admit to their fascination with the old modernist architecture. Apart from describing the visual aspects of the presented realizations, it is worth considering the theoretical reflections on this architecture: contemporary architects (especially the renowned ones) not only design, but also try to present their artistic philosophy, in which we can detect many “neo-modernist threads”.

## Somosaguas

In the 1960s, the housing estates designed for the representatives of the upper classes began to emerge in Madrid. This was associated with the population

<sup>19</sup> C. Rubio Carvajal, Enrique Álvarez-Sala, *Las Cuatro Torres. Madrid Arquitectura*, (<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVYvm2ZQTeQ>>) (accessed 15 June 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Controversies relate to the location of the tower in the centre of Madrid. The introduction of such dominant in the area of low architecture proved to be disastrous for the urban landscape. On the other hand, what should be appreciated is the purely architectural and functional value of the building; R. Guerra de la Vega, *Madrid 1920-1980. Guía de Arquitectura Contemporánea*, Ramón Guerra de la Vega, Madrid 1981, p. 95.

<sup>21</sup> M.a D. Antigüedad del Castillo-Olivares, V. Nieto Alcaide, G. Tusell García, *El siglo XX: la vanguardia fragmentada*, Editorial Universitaria Ramón Areces, Madrid 2016, p. 249.

<sup>22</sup> F. Espuelas, “Adolf Loos y el despertar”, *Rita*, 2014, no 2, pp. 102-105.

growth during this period and the rise of the standard of living. There was a growing group of residents who dreamed of a “mansion” outside the city.<sup>23</sup> The first suburban estates (*urbanizaciones*), created for the wealthy people, located around the city, were Somosaguas, Puerta de Hierro, and La Florida.<sup>24</sup> Until 1787, the town of Somosaguas functioned as a real estate (*finca*) and belonged to Count Clavijo; then it changed owners, until in the 1950s it became the property of the entrepreneurial group Banco Urquijo, which decided to create a luxurious residential district here.<sup>25</sup> It was then that the tradition of employing renowned architects to design the houses was established; until this day it remains one of the most characteristic features of this suburban district. One of the designers of the residential buildings was Javier Carvajal Ferrer. The best known constructions of the architect in Somosaguas include his own house, Casa Carvajal (1964-1965) and Casa García Valdecasas (1964-1965)<sup>26</sup> [Ill. 4].

Today Somosaguas consists of two parts. One of them is El Parque Empresarial La Finca – a complex of office buildings, housing the offices of Microsoft, Orange, Banco Santander, and other companies. It is a publicly available space, with modern glass structures, designed by Alberto Martín Caballero and José Antonio Factor. [Ills. 5-6 ] However, the dominant part of Somosaguas is the walled residential area designed for the upper class, those who are wealthy enough to settle in this area. The level of isolation and social segregation increases with the construction of more residential areas. The most luxurious one is the southern zone, and within it – the settlement of Los Lagos, a plot which had been planned in the 1980s to become a common park. However, the economic considerations and the lack of interest in a common space among the residents of the walled estates affected the decision to create a new, even more luxurious, estate. The architectural studio responsible for the project and the urban strategy was A-Cero, whose designers are referred to by the media as the “architects of the famous”<sup>27</sup>. The estate of Los Lagos aspires

<sup>23</sup> Previously, summer houses were built in the villages at the foot of la Sierra de Guadarrama, the towns turned into summer centres. What became an important place was the Escorial, preferred due to the historical and symbolic reasons. Its former prestige worked, the town as a holiday destination attracted wealthy Madrid residents, especially those related to politics and finances; M. Gaviria, *Campo, urbe y espacio del ocio*, Siglo Veintiuno de España Editores, Madrid 1971, p. 222.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 223.

<sup>25</sup> A. García Carballo, “Urbanizaciones de lujo y segregación residencial de las clases altas en Somosaguas, Pozuelo de Alarcón (Madrid)”, *Eria*, 2014, no 94, pp.125–144.

<sup>26</sup> Both houses, shortly after their erection, became the scenery for Carlos Saura’s film (*La Madriguera*, 1969); A. Espinosa García-Valdecasas, “La casa Carvajal en «la Madriguera»”, *Rita*, 2014, no 1, pp. 88–95. Also in the 1980s the architect made two designs for Somosaguas: Proyecto Casa Liñán. Somosaguas, Madrid (1981); Proyecto Casa Ojeda. Somosaguas. Madrid (1985).

<sup>27</sup> A. García Carballo, *Urbanizaciones de...*, p. 142.

to be “the safest estate”, not only in Spain, but also in Europe. It has three camera and infrared system circuits, two gates under constant supervision, private patrol cars: a protection system which operates 24 hours a day. Depending on the point of view, the estate is described as “a luxurious bunker” or a set of “twenty-first century palaces”<sup>28</sup>. Unfortunately, the connoisseurs of architecture who would like to see the famous buildings today must laboriously try to obtain an appropriate permission. An “ordinary person” must limit their sightseeing to glances from behind the fence.

### A-Cero

One-family houses erected inside the walled estates of Somosaguas have been designed by renowned architects and architectural firms; one of the authors of the luxurious residences is the abovementioned Alberto Martín Caballero.<sup>29</sup> [Ill. 7] However, the best known and most admired constructions have been designed by the A-Cero architectural office, based in Coruña and Madrid, currently a large company presided over by two architects: Joaquín Torres and Rafael Llamazares.<sup>30</sup> Although the architects would like to “avoid being pigeonholed”, the most famous designs of their firm are those of residential architecture. Their portfolio includes both whole apartment complexes, multifamily, and one-family houses. A separate section of the office’s business is interior decorating and furniture design. One of the most famous realizations of the A-Cero office is Moka House. [Ill. 8]

The houses of la Finca in Somosaguas are characterized by the simplicity of form, functionality, and lack of decoration or ornament. These are, undoubtedly, the qualities that anyone writing about architecture associates with the modernist movement, but in this case we would probably talk about some neomodernist features. The founders of the A-Cero architectural office write openly on their website about their fascination with the classics, such as Le Corbusier and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. However, their inspirations and fascinations have been changing with time: “A-Cero architectural geometries recreate a long evolution over a relatively short period of time, which has led them from the purism of Le Corbusier to the last glimpses of objectual clear curvilinearity of Zaha Hadid. Extreme curves and angles characterize the most recent works of A-Cero, both architectural structures and the interior and furniture design”.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *El Confidencial*, 02.04.2011 and *El País*, 18.04.2010; after: Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.estudiomartincaballero.com/arquitectura/residencial/casa130/index.html> (accessed 20 June 2016).

<sup>30</sup> J. Armesto, “A-Cero. El estudio de moda”, *La voz de Galicia*, 22 de septiembre, 2002, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> A-Cero, “El estudio”; <http://www.a-cero.com/index.php/es/origen-acero/estudio-arquitectura> (accessed 20 June 2016).

La Finca in Somosaguas remains a very important project of the office: “the construction of about 180 large houses, La Finca is to A-Cero what Oak Park was to Frank Lloyd Wright. The houses created by the studio are unique in their forms, even if they display a family resemblance or some seriality. They are based on Torre's and Llamazare's belief that in architecture function is as important as form.” It is a conviction worthy of neomodernists.<sup>32</sup>

Joaquín Torres, characterizing the artistic philosophy of the studio, says that each design is a unique project. Thus the starting point is always a concept, an idea; it is important to be careful and not to deprive it of “freshness”; and although there are always a lot of alternatives, again in line with the modernist movement, “the simplest solution is always the best”. The belief that it is the architect (or rather Architect with the capital A, thus undoubtedly an Artist) who shapes the tastes and needs of the consumers derives from the ideas of the avant-garde. As Torres says: “I think that people will buy what they are offered”.<sup>33</sup>

Living in the houses created by great designers at the estate of Los Lagos is certainly safe, but it is difficult to say whether it is convenient and comfortable, since the prestige of the place does not allow criticism.

### Mirador and Celosia

Let us now move north of Madrid, where new suburbs started to be established in the 1960s. One of them was Sanchinarro, which is interesting to us.<sup>34</sup> In the 1990s, due to the steady increase of the population of Madrid, the authorities drew up a program of urban transformations, assuming the expansion of several estates, including Sanchinarro. Two unique residential buildings were then erected in this area of the city: El Mirador (2001-2005)<sup>35</sup> and Celosia (2001-2009)<sup>36</sup>, both designed by the renowned Dutch company MVRDV<sup>37</sup> in collaboration with the Spanish architect Blanca Lleó.<sup>38</sup> The designers' objectives were clear, they have often spoken about them in inter-

<sup>32</sup> A-Cero, “El estudio”; <http://www.a-cero.com/index.php/es/origen-acero/estudio-arquitectura> (accessed 20 June 2016).

<sup>33</sup> A-Cero, “Filosofía: entrevista a Joaquín Torres”; <http://www.a-cero.com/index.php/es/origen-acero/filosofia> (accessed 20 June 2016).

<sup>34</sup> M. Gaviria, *Campo...*, p. 223.

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.mvrdv.nl/projects/mirador> (access date: 24.07.2016).

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.mvrdv.nl/projects/celosia> (access date: 24.07.2016).

<sup>37</sup> The MvRdV architectural office was established in 1991 in Rotterdam by Winy Maas, Jacob van Rijs and Nathalie de Vries.

<sup>38</sup> *Entrevista: Blanca Lleó*; “La vivienda para toda la vida ya no existe”, “El País”, 01.12.2006; [http://elpais.com/diario/2006/12/01/cultura/1164927610\\_850215.html](http://elpais.com/diario/2006/12/01/cultura/1164927610_850215.html) (access date: 24.07.2016).



views. The architects tried to give identity to modern and utilitarian forms and to break the overwhelming homogeneity of Madrid's residential suburbs. In the new housing estates on the outskirts of Madrid, newly built houses occupied entire quarters; they usually surrounded an inner courtyard. The architects decided to break with the principle of closed space and the structure of a built-up quarter.

El Mirador and Celosia, as social housing, were intended for the middle class, with affordable apartments of different structure, so that everyone could choose something for themselves, the space that best suited the customers' expectations, so that they could avoid unnecessary alterations.<sup>39</sup> El Mirador towers over a sprawling roundabout (Plaza Alcalde Moreno Torres) and the surrounding buildings.<sup>40</sup> It was designed in a vertical layout, and an "inner courtyard" was suspended at high altitude. The block is a reflection of a densely built-up quarter, but in a vertical layout. The individual residential areas were marked with white and grey, and the communication areas were painted red. This creates an interesting composition in neoplastic style [Ills. 9, 13].<sup>41</sup> The architects attached great importance to the design of the common spaces, such as a terrace, staircases, elevators, corridors and walkways, sometimes located on several levels.<sup>42</sup> As described by the architects themselves, the building was inspired by the modernist tradition; its direct inspirations include the Ministry of Transport building in Tbilisi (Georgia), designed by George Chakhava and Zurab Jalaghania and completed in 1975. [Ill. 12]. Although the overall structure of the buildings is different, the common elements are the viewing platforms [Ills. 10-11] and the additivity of the buildings' bodies, visible in Tbilisi in the accumulation of cubic forms placed so that they intersect at right angles, marked in Madrid with a different colour and texture of their façades.<sup>43</sup> El Mirador has become a showcase of the district. Its name in English means "a turret designed to command an extensive outlook"<sup>44</sup>, and in fact its function as a landmark and viewpoint is emphasized. The tower's observation deck offers

<sup>39</sup> M. Lubelska, *Mirador i celosia - różne formy tej samej idei*, "Czasopismo Techniczne. Architektura", vol. 107, 2010, p. 221-222.

<sup>40</sup> E. Canoso Zamora, *El espacio público abierto y el paisaje urbano de Madrid*, in: *El paisaje: valores e identidades*, ed. E. Martínez, N. Ortega Cantero, Ediciones de la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Madrid 2010, p. 158.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>42</sup> M. Lubelska, *Mirador...*, p. 221-222.

<sup>43</sup> <https://archidialog.com/tag/inspiration/page/4/> (access date: 24.07.2016).

<sup>44</sup> Spanish „corredor, galería o pabellón situados generalmente en la parte superior de un edificio, desde los que puede contemplarse el exterior; balcón cubierto y cerrado con cristales; construcción o lugar natural, generalmente elevados, desde los que se puede contemplar una vista o un paisaje" *Diccionario de uso del español actual*, ed. N. Almarza Acedo, Ediciones SM, Madrid 2002 [1997], p. 1309.



a wonderful view of both the city and the business district of the Cuatro Torres and Sierra de Guadarrama.<sup>45</sup> The building won the XX Premio de Urbanismo, Arquitectura y Obra Pública del Ayuntamiento de Madrid in 2005. It was a finalist of FAD (el Fomento de las Artes Decorativas) in 2006, and it was shown at the exhibition at MOMA in New York, "On-Site New Architecture in Spain" (12 February – 1 May 2006).<sup>46</sup>

The architectural concept of Celosía also stands in opposition to the idea of quarter architecture. This time its height is no different from that of the surrounding buildings. At first glance, the structure is traditional – an inner courtyard is surrounded by apartment blocks on all four sides. The buildings have an openwork form, which is alluded to in the name Celosía ("lattice strips, usually made of wood or iron, especially those installed in the windows or other similar openings to make it possible to look through them without being seen from the outside").<sup>47</sup> The modular elements are held together with terraces, which are semi-private spaces. The terrace roofing on the top floor was covered with flat slabs of concrete with openwork clearances with ordered geometric structures, whose form also refers to traditional Spanish bars – celosia. This construction was also noticed and nominated for Mies van der Rohe Award for Contemporary European Architecture 2011 (Barcelona, Spain).<sup>48</sup>

In both designs, the architects took care of the common space, regarding close neighbourly relations as improving the comfort of living. The aim of combining different types of apartments around the semi-private common spaces was to provide integration with other residents, a potential source of pleasurable experiences. The designers emphasized the positive aspects of encountering different people and different lifestyles.

Today, a few years later, we can already begin to see how this rather utopian vision, which classical modernists would not be ashamed of, functions in everyday life. Both buildings were made of cheap, commonly used materials, as befitted social housing. However, the choice did not turn out to be entirely correct. Already in 2007, the press pointed out some technical deficiencies, which the residents of Mirador complained about ("from avant-garde to trash").<sup>49</sup> The common spaces of Mirador were even less satisfactory. The

<sup>45</sup> M. Lubelska, *Przełamanie zamkniętego kwartału. Nowe formy architektury mieszkaniowej w mieście na przykładzie realizacji w Madrycie*, "Środowisko Mieszkaniowe", no 8, 2010, p. 57.

<sup>46</sup> E. Canoso Zamora, *El espacio...*, p. 171; *Edificio Mirador*, in: *On-Site: New Architecture in Spain*, ed. Terence Riley, The Museum of Modern Art, New York 2006, p. 270–271.

<sup>47</sup> "Celosia" meaning "enrejado de listones, generalmente de madera o de Hierro, especialmente el que se pone en ventanas o en otros huecos semejantes para poder ver a través de él el exterior sin ser vistos.", *Diccionario de uso...*, p. 399.

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.mvrdiv.nl/projects/celosia> (access date: 24.07.2016).

<sup>49</sup> *Deficiencias de construcción en el Mirador de Sanchinarro. De vanguardia a chapuza*, "El Mundo", 26.09.2007; as cited in: E. Canosa Zamora, *El espacio...*, p. 172.

building had been conceived as “a metaphor of a city with its streets, squares and districts”, a transformation of a traditional city quarter into a vertical form. The terrace on top was to serve the function of a common garden. In December 2008, a survey was conducted among the residents on the quality of life in this modern building. It turned out that they complained about the lack of privacy and the inability to isolate themselves from the rest of the residents, the high cost of living, the lack of the communicative functionality of the building and, ultimately, the dysfunctionality of the observation deck, which did not provide a sense of security and was used, as an empty isolated space, for the purposes other than recreation, becoming a dangerous place, avoided by most residents, which led to its closure.<sup>50</sup> Again, this brings to mind the modernist habitats of the blown-up blocks of the Pruitt-Igoe estate in St. Louis.

## Conclusion

Today, in the era of relativism, it is easier to describe and characterize than clearly segregate entities on the basis of a definition. Therefore, in my opinion, it is worth looking at them, thinking, searching for the inspirations, references and the widest possible contexts, but it is definitely not worth defining them and pigeonholing. Neomodernism does not seem to me to be a clear and recognizable trend with specific characteristics (despite the efforts of the theoreticians of architecture), though one can certainly perceive many inspirations of modernism and its new understanding in recent architectural projects. Thus neomodernist features – yes, a trend – no. As observed by Leon Krier:

in fact, we can affirm that a diversity of urban and architectural visions is a natural illustration of the diversity of political opinions. Modernity in architecture can no longer be conceived as a unitary and invisible phenomenon; it is irreversible plural, embracing widely divergent and even contradictory conceptions<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibidem, p. 171.

<sup>51</sup> L. Krier, *The Architecture* ..., p. 13.

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## **(NEO)MODERNISTYCZNA ARCHITEKTURA MADRYTU: POMIĘDZY FORMĄ I TEORIĄ (streszczenie)**

Na początku XXI wieku w Madrycie powstało wiele obiektów architektonicznych, w których można odnaleźć elementy neomodernistyczne. Warto do teorii i form modernistycznych odnieść chociażby słynne budynki mieszkalne *Mirador* (2005) i *Celosía* (2009) w dzielnicy Sanchinarro, które zostały zaprojektowane przez znaną holenderską firmę MVRDV we współpracy z hiszpańską architektką Blanką Lleó. W Madrycie działa także biuro architektoniczne *A-Cero* (Joaquín Torres i Rafael Llamazares). Jego główna działalność koncentruje się na projektowaniu budynków mieszkalnych – zarówno całych zespołów, jak i indywidualnych domów jednorodzinnych (*Vivienda 10*, *Moka House*). Poza zaprezentowaniem opisywanych obiektów ważny jest także kontekst ich powstania, zarówno w aspekcie formalnym jak i ideowym. Istotna wydaje się również teoretyczna refleksja na temat architektury, której autorami są sami architekci. Najsłynniejsi nie tylko projektują, ale starają się także przedstawić swoją filozofię artystyczną, w której możemy doszukać się wielu neomodernistycznych wątków.

**Słowa kluczowe:** architektura współczesna, Madryt, modernizm, neomodernizm, postmodernizm.



- III. 1. CaixaForum, arch. Jacques'a Herzoga i Pierre'a de Meuron, Madrid  
(phot. E.Kubiak, 2015)
- III. 2. Cuatro Torres (from the left: Torre Espacio, Torre de Cristal, Torre PwC y Torre Cepsa),  
Madrid (phot. E. Kubiak 2016)





Ill. 3. Torre de Valencia (1970–1973), arch. Javier Carvajal Ferrer, (phot. E. Kubiak 2016)



III. 4. Casa García Valdecasas (1964–65), arch. Javier Carvajal Ferrer





Ill. 5. El Parque empresarial La Finca, arch. Alberto Martín Caballero and José Antonio Factor, Somosaguas, Madrid (phot. E. Kubiak, 2016)



III. 6. El Parque empresarial La Finca, arch. Alberto Martín Caballero i José Antonio Factor, Somosaguas, Madrid (phot. E. Kubiak, 2016)





III. 7. Casa 130, La Finca, arch. Alberto Martín Caballero, Somosaguas, Madrid  
(phot. E. Kubiak, 2016)



Ill. 8. Moka House, La Finca, A-Cero, Somosaguas, Madrid  
(<http://www.archello.com/en/project/moka-house>, (accessed 20 July 2016))

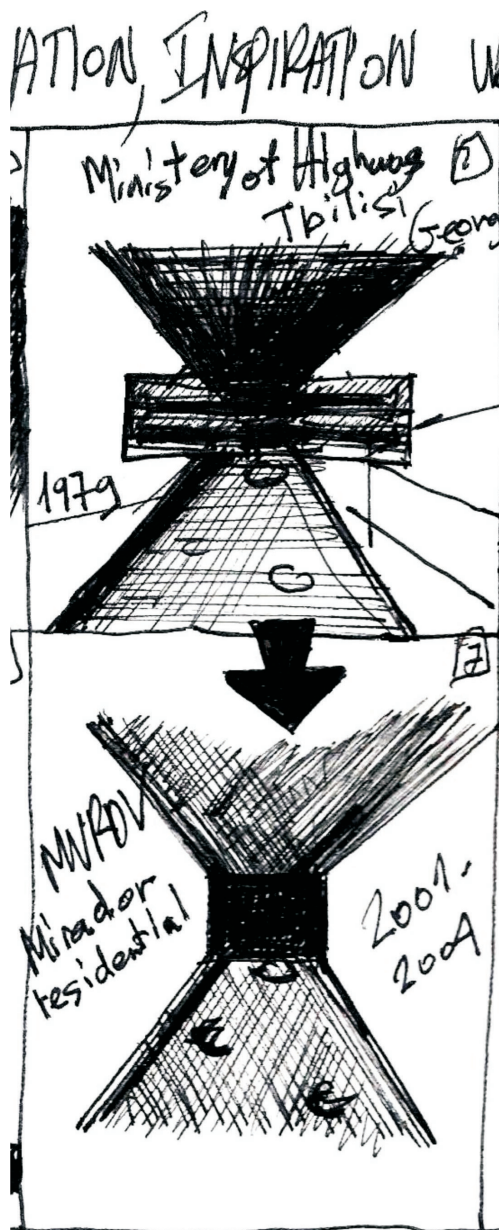


Ill. 9. El Mirador, MvRdV and Blanca Lleó, Sanchinarro, Madrid (phot. E. Kubiak, 2016)





Ill. 10. El Mirador, MvRdV and Blanca Lleó, Sanchinarro, Madrid (phot. E. Kubiak 2016),  
Ministerstwo Transportu, George Chakhava and Zurab Jalaghania, Tbilisi, Georgia,  
1975



Ill. 11. Ministertwo Transportu, George Chakhava and Zurab Jalaghania Tbilisi, Gruzja;  
El Mirador, MvRdV and Blanca Lleó, Sanchinarro, Madrid,  
(<https://archidialog.com/tag/inspiration/page/4/>, (accessed 24 July 2016).



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- III. 13. El Mirador, MvRdV and Blanca Lleó, Sanchinarro, Madrid (phot. E. Kubiak, 2016)





III. 14. Celosia, MvRdV and Blanca Lleó, Sanchinarro, Madrid (phot. E. Kubiak, 2016)



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## **THE GARDEN CITIES OF KATOWICE: A STUDY OF CITYHOLIA**

**Abstract:** Today we are witnessing some sudden changes concerning the perception of the urban space in Poland. The social and spatial consequences of the processes of rapid and chaotic development and transformation of the cities during the last two decades have been thoroughly investigated and criticized by the specialists from the fields of architecture, sociology and philosophy, and even covered in some recent popular bestseller books. It is thus not an exaggeration to state that the quality of the urban space is becoming an increasingly important issue for many Poles. It is striking, however, that the mentioned scholarly work offers more criticism than positive, innovative solutions for the future. It seems to be concentrated more on the defense of the modernist architectural heritage, the preservation of modernist urban developments and inventing new functions for old modernist buildings than creating ideas for the urban spaces of the future. The local Silesian context seems to fit perfectly into this pattern.

**Keywords:** garden, city, space, modernism, Silesia.

### **The myth of modernism**

Today we are witnessing some sudden changes concerning the perception of the urban space in Poland. The social and spatial consequences of the processes of rapid and chaotic development and transformation of the cities during the last two decades have been thoroughly investigated and criticized by the specialists from the fields of architecture, sociology and philosophy, and even discussed in some recent popular bestselling books.<sup>1</sup> It is thus not an

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<sup>1</sup> F. Springer, *Wanna z Kolumnadą, Reportaże o polskiej przestrzeni*, Czarne, Wołowiec 2013; M. Kozień, M. Miśkowiec, A. Pankiewicz (ed), *Hawaikum. W poszukiwaniu istoty piękna*, Czarne, Wołowiec 2015.

exaggeration to state that the quality of the urban space is becoming an increasingly important issue for many Poles. It is striking, however, that the mentioned scholarly work offers more criticism than positive, innovative solutions for the future. It seems to be concentrated more on the defense of the modernist architectural heritage, the preservation of modernist urban developments and inventing new functions for old modernist buildings than creating ideas for the urban spaces of the future. The local Silesian context seems to fit perfectly into this pattern.

The debate on the quality of the urban space of the Silesian metropolis was initiated by the controversial demolition of the old building of the main railway station in Katowice. The building, nicknamed *Brutal* by the city's inhabitants, was a modernist construction from the 1950s, designed in accordance with the brutalist tendencies in the modern architecture of those times. In its best years, it was admired for its concrete pillars in the form of chalices, however in its last period, it was also given as an example of a nonfunctional, oppressive and neglected space. In addition to this, many of the older citizens of Katowice still remembered that the local authorities had decided to tear down some precious old tenements in the historical center of the city to make space for the building. Despite those arguments, *Brutal* soon became the subject of the famous "battle of Modernism" in Katowice. As the demolition date was approaching, the building started to gain more and more defenders, including local artists, journalists and even sportsmen. The well-known Polish skier Marek Doniec carried out an interesting project at the object during its clearing in winter 2011. The action, called *Brutal*, was a mix of sport activities and artistic performance including the use of the infrastructure of the building as a site for a ski jibbing session and the documentation of the process of dismantling the former railway station in the form of an internet gallery and a photoblog. As the author stated, the project was intended both as a tribute to the unique building and also as an occasion to create new, temporal contexts for the decontextualized construction. After five years,<sup>2</sup> "The battle of Modernism" in Katowice continues. Its recent focus seems to be the building of the Bureau of Artistic Events, which is popularly rumoured as doomed for demolition. The artists grouped around the institution have already created the project

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<sup>2</sup> „PURE Magazine”, *Need For Street*, 2012, nr 2, [www.puremag.net](http://www.puremag.net) (accessed 05 Nov. 2012). Marek Doniec: „Moim najciekawszym projektem był Brutal, akcja dotycząca katowickiego dworca, który był architektoniczną perełką i został przeznaczony do wyburzenia, co wzbudzało kontrowersje i sprzeciw wielu środowisk. To stworzyło ciekawe tło działań. Zrobiłem stronę i videobloga, który jakoś upamiętnia ten budynek. Przy tym udało się wykonać ciekawą przejażdżkę. Działaliśmy tam bez żadnego pozwolenia, tak naprawdę pomiędzy robotnikami, ale obyło się bez żadnych incydentów. Mogliśmy chodzić po dachu dworca, dotknąć neonu, który był na froncie. Trzeba było mieć tylko trochę odwagi, żeby tam działać”.

called *Widmo* [*Phantom*], presenting the spaces and objects of an uncertain (i.e. phantom) status in Katowice and also raising the question of the reconstruction of the modernist center of the city.<sup>3</sup> The project includes an exhibition of installations, on-site activities and a publication containing interviews with the artists and a critical text by the renowned Silesian art historian Irma Kozina, recounting the story of Brutal.<sup>4</sup> Isn't it really curious that so many voices are praising in a nostalgic manner the quality of the old urban planning and architecture instead of asking for new sites fitting their current needs?

### Cityholia

Cityholia is an interesting term proposed by the renowned Silesian architect Tomasz Konior, the designer of the building of the National Symphonic Orchestra of the Polish Radio (*NOSPR*) in Katowice, intended as an important part of the Zone of Culture being developed in this city. In a recent interview for the Polish publisher Onet.pl, Konior points out that people living in modern cities have generally lost their traditional coordinates for the perception of the urban space.<sup>5</sup> In his opinion, such traditional points of reference as the perpendicular grid of the streets, frontages, town squares, and parks, are absent from modern urban planning today. They disappeared decades ago, as a result of the changes introduced by the modernist movement, which, according to the architect, disturbed the relations between the people, architecture, and the city.<sup>6</sup> It is striking, however, that in spite of that, modernism was still able to provide some kind of readable urban regulations, concerning the distances between the buildings, the location of the public places, the arrangement of the small architecture, etc. For many, modernism thus seems to appear as the last remembered period of order in urbanization. As Tomasz Konior says: "We were standing over the abyss in the Modernist period. Now we have made a couple of steps forward..."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Widmo*, art. exhibition curated by Marta Lisok, BWA Katowice 2016; [http://www.bwa.katowice.pl/p/517/widmo\\_\\_wernisaz\\_wystawy\\_29\\_lipca\\_o\\_godz\\_1800/](http://www.bwa.katowice.pl/p/517/widmo__wernisaz_wystawy_29_lipca_o_godz_1800/) (accessed 29 July 2016).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.rozswietlamykulture.pl/reflektor/2016/07/20/raport-ze-znikajacego-miasta-zapowiedz-wystawy-widmo-w-katowickiej-galerii-bwa/> (accessed 29 July 2016) <http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/tomasz-konior-dziecko-modernizmu-w-potrzasku-wywiad/5devzd>

<sup>5</sup> Tomasz Konior. *Dziecko Modernizmu w potrzasku* (accessed 01 July 2016).

<sup>6</sup> "I myself am a child of Modernism. Although I largely disagree with it, as it has lost the right proportions between people, architecture, and the city", Tomasz Konior. *Dziecko Modernizmu w potrzasku*, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

The sentimental comeback of modernism can be perceived as a result of the attempts to bring back some order into modern urban planning and also to restore the right proportions between the people and the structure, bringing back the right scale. Those seem to be processes of melancholic nature however, as the wish appears almost impossible to fulfil. As Konior observes, modernism made a brutal intervention into the important relations established during the almost two thousand and five hundred years of evolution, counting from the era of the Greek *polis*. What happened then could be described as a radical switch from the sensual mode of participation in the city structure to an abstract one. During the modernist period, the concept of citizenship changed its meaning – from the idea of psycho-physical participation in the local community to the concept of affiliation based on such abstract criteria as zone coding, administrative planning or affiliation with one's labor institution. What we lost then, according to Konior, is some kind of the "city genetics", a map of the city behavior natural to all its citizens.

### The City of Gardens

At a first glance, Katowice seems to be in the same difficult situation as thousands other cities worldwide, trying to redevelop their own, unique "city genetics" in the times when whole cultures and also particular cities frequently change their narrations and politics. However, during the city's preparations for competing for the title of The European Capital City of Culture 2016, it became apparent that it probably still possesses such a unique code natural to its citizens. To understand its nature, it is necessary to move back a hundred years to the period of the rapid industrial development of the whole Silesia region.

Among the Silesian cities, the 150 years old Katowice is one of the younger ones. In fact, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was still a loose project for a city, rather than a well-designed, organized urban area. However, that changed rapidly as a result of the unique ideas of Anton Uthemann, director of the huge mining company, Giesche. In 1905, just three years after the publication of the revolutionary book *Garden Cities of To-morrow* by Ebenezer Howard, Uthemann decided to build an ideal garden-city on the banks of the Rawa river.<sup>8</sup> In fact, not one, but two different huge projects were created in less than 15 years, in cooperation with the architects Emil and Georg Zillmann from

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<sup>8</sup> E. Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, Swann & Sonnenchein Co, London 1902, polish edition: E. Howard, *Miasta-Ogrody Jutra*, Fundacja Centrum Architektury, Gdańsk 2015.



Charlottenburg. Those two realizations, today two districts of Katowice known as Giszowiec and Nikiszowiec, seemed to establish the legend of Katowice as a “city of gardens”.

Although designed by the same architects, Giszowiec and Nikiszowiec are considerably different. They seem to be two alternative variants of garden cities rather than elements of one logical project. Giszowiec, with its rather irregular form, consisting of a loose network of green areas interspersed with small family villas, each of which was designed individually in accordance with the designs of the local, traditional village houses, is all about the appreciation of nature. The colony of houses appears as a shy addition to a huge garden. The German journalist Anton Klaussmann even described it as a pearl of architecture hidden in a forest.<sup>9</sup> Nikiszowiec, in contrast, is all about geometry. It is a compact set of block of flats, based on one universal standard form, copied in a regular pattern. Each of the blocks has an inner yard filled with urban green. Nature is present there, however it seems to be subordinated to the logic of the abstract architectural order. If to treat both of those urban realizations as essential for the development of the idea of Katowice as a city of gardens, it is not an exaggeration to state that each of them promoted a specific perception of nature in the context of urban architecture. One of them offers the experience of huge areas of urban green (parks, gardens, forests), the other, the experience of nature in a micro scale, in the form of small city gardens incorporated into the geometric frame of the city (the idea of *ajnfart*). Is it possible, however, to recreate those experiences in the present situation?

### **The City of Gardens: a hundred years later**

The city of Katowice competed for the title of the European Capital City of Culture 2016 with the slogan “Katowice – the City of Gardens”, in which the concept of garden was understood very broadly, including not only physical, but also metaphorical gardens, with all their associated complex and heterogeneous imagery. However, the idea of renovating the center of the city on the occasion was very down-to-earth and seemed to be based on a sentiment for the ideal cities of gardens such as the former Giszowiec and Nikiszowiec. In this context, it is important to mention that the center of the city had been reshaped in a modernist manner in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Not only was the new railway station built then, but also the buildings around the market square, and the huge sports and events hall called Spodek [Saucer]; in fact the whole center

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<sup>9</sup> A.O. Klaussmann, *Górny Śląsk przed laty*, MHK, Katowice 1997.

was rebuilt after World War II. Paraphrasing the words of Tomasz Konior quoted above, what had and still has to be done is to “take a couple of steps back from the edge of the abyss to remain on the ground”. This context tends to determine strongly the current debate on the actions to be undertaken both by the authorities and the local artists in the historic center of Katowice. The debate concerns not only the preservation of the heritage of modernism, but also the need to transgress the modernist architectural paradigm which had determined the character of Katowice’s city center, but is no longer compatible with the needs and standards of today’s urban living and seems not to correspond with the historical “city genetics” of Katowice, or the present habits of its citizens.

However, if we are to treat the metaphor of a “garden city” as a starting point for the project Katowice 2.0, we have to remember that the projects which the Zillmann brothers realized in old Katowice were not “garden cities” in the direct sense given by Howard in his book, but rather a kind of hybrid between “the garden city” and “the city as machine”. Just a few years after the publication of *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, the vision proposed by its author revealed its Utopian character. Howard’s ideal city was also a workers’ colony, however the project envisioned an equal balance between industrial and residential areas. Each garden city should be located in isolation from the industrial zone and another garden city. This, however, not only in the Silesian context, appeared as a mission impossible to realize. The dynamics of the growth of the industrial zones in those times was so high that the housing projects were developed not in anticipation of it, but rather in reaction to it, as the authorities needed to solve the mounting problems.

Referring this to the context of Katowice, it is important to note, however, that in the beginning of their existence, Giszowiec and Nikiszowiec perfectly fit the ideal project designed by Howard. Both colonies were built at some distance from each other, but it was easy to travel from one to the other, thanks to the local railway line nicknamed Balkan Express, which was free of charge. The workplaces were located in the neighboring cities of Janów (the coal mine Giesche, now Wieczorek), Szopienice and Roździeń (ironworks). Most importantly, both of the Zillmanns’ projects were built in a not yet determined context, in anticipation of the workers settling there in the future, so the architects were able to design housing for a limited number of people in accordance with the original idea of the “garden city” worked out by Howard. It was impossible, however, to maintain their “garden city” status for a longer time, as the development of the whole Silesian area was carried out by lots of independent agents. No other corresponding “garden city” projects were implemented, which resulted in the already mentioned change in proportions between the industrial and the green residential areas. In 1924 Giszowiec lost



its independent status at the administrative level and became part of the district of Janów. Nevertheless it preserved its unique spatial design until 1969, when the authorities of Katowice, in accordance with the global modernist trend, decided to promote the development of eleven-floor blocks of flats on its grounds.<sup>10</sup> In sum, the context of the garden cities in Katowice seems to be complicated, as the projects were realized only partially and did not determine the whole city structure. In addition to this, they interfered with the influence of modernism on urban planning, which developed in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, both Giszowiec (partially) and Nikiszowiec have preserved their unique character and can be treated as two ideal models of the special kind of experience of nature that developed on the scale of a city.

### The micro scale

*Ajnfart* is a word from the Silesian dialect. In a direct translation it means a gateway, an entrance to a building.<sup>11</sup> However, a large part of its meaning would be lost if we stopped there, as it has gained a strong emotional connotation during its history. To understand some of its aspects it is enough to take a look at a picture of the Nikiszowiec colony in the summer, taken from the perspective of an airplane. What strikes the eyes of the spectator are the colours: regular sectors of juicy green fill the spaces between the buildings built of red brick. This is quite a surprise, as we hardly expect a miners' housing colony being so green. In fact, of all of the Polish big urban areas, Silesia has the largest percentage of forests and urban green. To return to the *ajnfart* – what is important is that the space connoted by this term is not limited to the gateway or passage leading to a building, but it also extends to the garden situated in the yard of the tenement.

The cultural role of the *ajnfarts* was described insightfully by Małgorzata Szajnert in her bestseller book *Czarny Ogród [Black Garden]*, whose action takes place in Giszowiec and Nikiszowiec and focuses on the daily lives of their citizens. We learn that the *ajnfart* is not just an entrance space, but also a social space for relaxation, meetings, play and also for contact with nature for the people living in the industrial surroundings. This context of *ajnfart* was exploited by the local street artists from Katowice in the 2011 project entitled *Ajnfart Story*. The initiative was supported by the city authorities of Katowice, the

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<sup>10</sup> Historic details based on Hermann. Reuffurth, *Giszowiec – nowa górnośląska wieś górnicza Spółki Górniczej Spadkobierców Georga von Giesche Wg. Projektów Emila i Georga Zillmannów z Charlottenburga*, Miejski Dom Kultury, Szopienice-Giszowiec, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> *Ajnfart* derives from German *einfahrt* – ‘entrance, gate’.

cultural institution Katowice – The City of Gardens, and The Silesian Museum. The idea was to restore one of the old, neglected gateways near the Katowice railway station (12 Andrzejka street) by decorating it with a series of murals inspired by the *ajnfart*'s history and its climate.<sup>12</sup> The gallery of murals created by Mona Tusz, Raspazjan, Magda Drobczyk and Mischmasz, the artists known from their previous mural projects in Katowice, can be still viewed today.<sup>13</sup> The action was intended to draw attention to the *ajnfart* as a locus of daily activities, and the murals depicted a magic, ethereal dream world created in this space. However, to see the viability of the idea of the *ajnfart*, it is enough to enter one of those shady passages and discover that they are still a place to enjoy after work for many citizens.

### The macro scale

While the *ajnfarts* seem to involve an intimate contact with nature, brought down to a human scale, there is also another dimension of the urban green in Katowice. Its presence seems to be strongly correlated with the experience of the relational space and the idea of emptiness. The American pragmatist philosopher, Richard Shusterman, has studied this type of experience in the context of the development of post- Cold War Berlin.<sup>14</sup> After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the city gained a large number of mainly postindustrial and post-military areas, which according to the American philosopher established a new type of spatial experience, where large empty, decontextualized spaces present themselves in their emptiness. This kind of experience also seems to exist in the Silesian context, as the whole region is filled with a similar type of post-industrial areas accompanied by large areas of urban green. It is significant that the artists engaged in the *Ajnfart Story* initiative mentioned above also presented a video project entitled *Silens*, confronting the images of decontextualized industrial objects with their neighboring natural landscapes.<sup>15</sup> If we perceive the Giszowiec colony as a model in this situation, it should be remembered that the idea of an ideal garden city also foresaw a balance between the industrial zone and the large areas of the urban green, which were separated from each other, but

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.raspazjan.com/walls/spaz5jj.html> (access date 01.07.2016).

<sup>13</sup> *Ajnfart Story* at artists' home sites: <http://monatusz.art.pl/>, <http://www.raspazjan.com/>, (accessed 1 July 2016).

<sup>14</sup> R. Shusterman, *Estetyka pragmatyczna i doświadczenie nieobecności miejskiej*, tłum. Blanka Brzozowska, Kultura Współczesna, Warszawa, 2004/1.

<sup>15</sup> T. Rybok, J.W. Gawlik, *Silens*, a video project, artists home site: [www.uppersilesian.blogspot.com](http://www.uppersilesian.blogspot.com) (access date 01.07.2016).

produced a specific kind of tension in experience, as both of these different realms were experienced daily by the workers. The process of the destabilization of this equilibrium, which began in the modernist period in urban planning, created the large decontextualised spaces that started to determine the spatial experience of the city's inhabitants in a more dominant way.

Surprisingly, the experience of large empty spaces seems to be also regarded of value in the current urban plans for Katowice. Thus, it will be translated into architectural realizations in multiple ways. According to the Polish philosopher of culture Ewa Rewers, the architecture connoting emptiness often produces sad, nostalgic feelings. However, there are also some interesting attempts to incorporate emptiness in the form of the presentation, with no special connotations.<sup>16</sup> It seems that this has (partially) happened in the case of the newly formed Zone of Culture in Katowice. The zone is composed of four large institutional buildings: The hall of Spodek, The Silesian Museum, The NOSPR and The Katowice Congress Center. Of those four objects, three were built in the recent five years; only the characteristic, saucer-shaped hall of Spodek comes from the 1970s and is also known as an icon of modernism in Katowice. It is important to remember that the context of the zone is also determined by the huge modernist monument of the Silesian uprising, situated opposite the Spodek. The area of the Zone of Culture functions quite well as a whole. It is noticeable that two of the mentioned buildings provide strong relational context, which seems to project on the two others.

The Katowice Congress Center was designed by JEMS architects as an irregular block, covered by large geometrical areas of grass planted on its roof. It is important to note that contrary to the modernist tradition of architecture, the form is complicated and is not separated from the neighboring buildings. Thanks to a system of paths and footbridges, it is connected with the NOSPR building and The Silesian Museum. Strikingly, the latter one seems to have been built with the same concept of relational space in mind. The project consists of some old, renovated industrial buildings, accompanied by transparent new buildings in the form of cubes, revealing the installations located inside them, but also of empty, postindustrial areas in between the buildings. The concept of exposing the empty spaces in the form of urban green (The Congress Centre) and the industrial zone (The Silesian Museum), which interplay with the buildings, seems to correspond logically with the perception of such areas which had developed in the context of Katowice. It is really interesting that a similar phenomenon can be observed in Japanese urban planning. It was described by the leading Japanese architect Kishō Kurokawa in his book entitled

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<sup>16</sup> E. Rewers, *Post-Polis*, Universitas, Kraków 2005, p. 43.

*Intercultural Architecture: The Philosophy of Symbiosis*. Kurokawa points out that there seems to be a specific logic in Japanese design which finds its manifestation in contrasting dynamic oppositions. The phenomenon of *ma*, Japanese “transitional space,” provokes the senses and blurs the borders between the inner and the outer in experience. Trying to define *ma*, Kurokawa makes a comparison between architecture and calligraphy: “In Chinese calligraphy, the space between the signs is more important than the signs themselves (...) *Ma* does not force opposing elements into compromise or harmony, but provides the key to their living symbiosis”.<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that cities like Tokyo and Katowice are involved in very dynamic processes of reshaping the city structure, which are measured not in hundreds of years but definitely shorter time intervals; this probably accounts for the popularity of relational architecture in their urban planning.

In the described context, the whole project of the Zone of Culture appears as an attempt to transgress the modernist heritage of the city center, however not by negation, but rather through dialogue. That is how Tomasz Konior describes his own design of *NOSPR*, when he admits that the *NOSPR* building had to be somewhat modernist in character as a single, monofunctional object, however its context was designed to change this impression.<sup>18</sup> This strategy is also visible in other projects in Katowice, such as the vertical gardens in Katowice market square or the exposition of the Rawa river (city beach) in the same area, which also appear as attempts at overcoming the modernist, monofunctional character of those places. Does it make Katowice the dreamt city of gardens? Well, there is no cure for Cityholia, as the ideal city had never existed. Nevertheless the quality of the citizens’ life can be improved.

<sup>17</sup> K. Kurokawa, *Intercultural Architecture: The Philosophy of Symbiosis*, American Institute of Architects Press, Washington 1991, p. 109.

<sup>18</sup> „No cóż, NOSPR wyrasta z modernistycznych korzeni – wolnostojący duży obiekt na pustej działce. To było dramatyczne wyzwanie, już na etapie konkursu – jak związać go z miastem, żeby chcieli tu przychodzić ludzie poza koncertami. Chcieliśmy, żeby przechodzili z jednego placu do drugi, najlepiej przez budynek, żeby był „nanizany” na sekwencję przestrzeni, żeby był park nasycony atrakcjami, które sprawia, że ludzie przyjdą – ławka, fontanna, zabawka muzyczna, labirynt, amfiteatr, żeby ta przestrzeń żyła. I kiedy dziś widzę, że nawet w najbardziej ponure dni są tam ludzie, to czerpię z tego radość” .<http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/tomasz-konior-dziecko-modernizmu-w-potrasku-wywiad/5devzd> (access date 01.07.2016).

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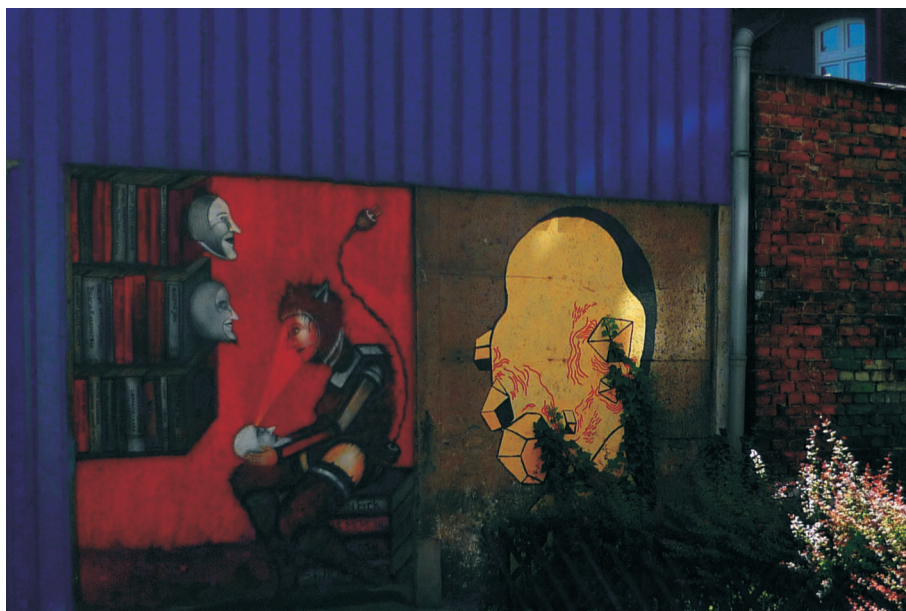
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## **KATOWICKIE MIASTA – OGRODY: STUDIUM MIASTOCHOLII (streszczenie)**

Jesteśmy współcześnie świadkami burzliwej debaty poświęconej przestrzeni miejskiej w naszym kraju. Jej efektem jest zarówno szeroka zmiana społeczna dotycząca postrzegania roli planowania miejskiego w codziennym życiu jak i intensywny rozkwit wyspecjalizowanego dyskursu w tej kwestii. Jakkolwiek, ten ostatni zdaje się zaskakująco często rozwijać w kierunku obrony modernistycznego dziedzictwa w architekturze i planowaniu miejskim przy równoczesnej krytyce rozwiązań współczesnych. Kontekst śląski nie jest w tej mierze odosobniony. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest ukazanie roli jaką pełnią pre-modernistyczne i modernistyczne modele urbanistyczne w powstaniu i realizacji idei Katowic jako miasta – ogrodów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** ogród, miasto, przestrzeń, modernizm, Śląsk.





1. *Ajnfart Story*, ul. Andrzeja 12, Katowice. Mural by Raspazjan
2. *Ajnfart Story*, ul. Andrzeja 12, Katowice. Mural by Raspazjan - detail



3. *Ajnfart Story*, ul. Andrzeja 12, Katowice. Inside the gate



4. *Ajnfart Story*, ul. Andrzeja 12, Katowice. Mural by Mona Tusz





5. *Ajnfart Story*, ul. Andrzeja 12, Katowice. Murals by Mona Tusz & Raspazjan

6. *Ajnfart Story*, ul. Andrzeja 12, Katowice. Murals by Mona Tusz & Raspazjan



7. *The Katowice Congress Centre. The hall of Spodek visible in the background*
8. *The Katowice Congress Centre. View on the NOSPR building*





9. View on *Spodek* from *The Katowice Congress Centre*
10. Irregular block of *The Katowice Congress Centre*



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*The public sphere is the site where struggles are decided by other means than war.*  
Alexander Kluge (1993)

*The Minaret asks where we - Poles - are in the process of opening ourselves  
towards strangers, aliens, and people [who are] not from here.*  
Joanna Rajkowska (2009)

## **THE MUSLIM QUESTION IN A POLISH CITY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF JOANNA RAJKOWSKA'S MINARET (2009) AND THE USE OF THE CITY SPACE**

**Abstract:** The structural transformation of the Habermasian public sphere from the salons to the streets is directly related to understanding the boundaries of the city and the dynamics among its inhabitants today. The process of “transnationalization” via the mass media results in further “deterritorialization”, which brings with it the ambivalence of locality and universality within the same city. As the “counter-publics” continue to lack material means to rational-critical debate in envisioning the links between the city and its inhabitants, questions remain on what institutional arrangements can best facilitate participatory parity among the citizens. Joanna Rajkowska’s *Minaret* (2009-2011) bears a critical relationship to the city of Poznań as a site of play upon heritage, time-space relations, as well as religion. Who is the city really for – the inhabitant, the investor... the artist? Following Lefebvre’s definition and work conducted by such organizations as the UN-Habitat (2005), “the right to the city” suggests that all urban dwellers are equal participants. Does Rajkowska’s *Minaret* employ the best means that can ignite counter-public mobilization for Muslim minorities in Poznań, or does it simply make itself a victim to the postmodern Other?

**Keywords:** contemporary public art, contemporary Polish artists, cultural heritage, public sphere, city space, minorities.

The story of the Polish contemporary artist Joanna Rajkowska's unrealized project, *Minaret* (2009-2011), began after the city of Poznań's mayor invited the artist to prepare a public art project in 2008. Rajkowska decided to transform an unused industrial chimney into a minaret, at the crossing of Estkowskiego and Garbary streets in Poznań. Rajkowska's proposal soon stretched beyond the city's local territory and divided the Polish public sphere in two. It inevitably spurred speculation in light of the then-recent Swiss referendum on banning the construction of minarets, as well as the overarching socio-political context of post-9/11 global media operations.

Even though the project was never realized, throughout the public uproar that came with it, Rajkowska remained very verbal about asking for people's attention, and she published an opinion piece in *The Guardian* that same year, titled "Building my own 'minaret'", in which she claimed the campaign to demolish her proposal for the minaret before it was even built was based on arguments designed to "reinforce the wall of ignorance and prejudice against Islam".<sup>1</sup> Different from Rajkowska's argument in her article, the following discussion proposes to focus on the spatial concerns raised by the two opposing voices pertaining to the project: the local architects and councilors objecting to it argued that "the project was 'culturally foreign,' and due to its visibility within the line of sight of a cathedral and former Synagogue, it could be read as a 'religious provocation'".<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the supporters responded by embracing the argument that "Poznań is not a closed homogenous zone where anything different crossing its borders is 'a foreign cultural element' and therefore damaging and threatening".<sup>3</sup>

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I chose the form of the minaret because I know it well from working in the West Bank town of Jenin in Palestine. (...) My aim was to allow this run-down fragment of Poznań to become a mirage of the Middle East. I wanted to convey to the residents of Poznań, not just my own enchantment with Middle Eastern culture, but also to ask them a question: are you ready to accept a foreign element – of another religion, ethnicity and culture – in your midst?<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J. Rajkowska, Building my own 'minaret', *The Guardian*, 19 December 2009, accessed 10 January 2015, available from <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/dec/19/Minaret-poznan-joanna-rajkowska>

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.

Situating *Minaret* inside the context of the post-9/11 global village, this paper aims to go further than pointing at public art's potential role in the ongoing public debate surrounding the Muslim minorities. Instead, the following discussion will evaluate the *Minaret* from a theoretical perspective, on the basis of a deconstructive approach, defining the fundamental factors that make this artwork worth discussing in the first place. A hopeless fantasy or a post-modernist apparition, Rajkowska's *Minaret* will appear to our eyes as the ghost of a failed spatial attempt in engaging the Polish public sphere in a debate on who owns the city of Poznań.

In addition to being concerned with a spatial divide, this paper argues that the tension surrounding the insertion of the minaret inside a space that is "foreign to itself" is only an emulation of a previously underlying tension – the lack of clear reasoning and conceptual subject matter for a public art project that barely holds any artistic value at all. This underlying lack is a result of Rajkowska's own groundless interest in creating a "mirage" based upon a fleeting personal affinity. In order to outline Rajkowska's project's conceptual and artistic failures, this paper will focus on its direct relationship to spatial concerns, experienced through the factors of time and distance, as well as through the literary divide between the terms 'space' and 'place.' Moreover, a brief remark on the global impacts of post 9/11 media operations in creating a mass consciousness concerning, particularly, Muslim minorities is followed by an introductory note on the spatial significance of the Habermasian public sphere. The elements acting upon the work in terms of revealing its lack of artistic or critical subject matter are discussed through reflections upon a few fundamental theories of space and spatial practices.

### Images of Islam in the post-9/11 context

The *Minaret* asks where we - Poles - are in the process of opening ourselves towards strangers, aliens, and people [who are] not from here. Why we have come to identify Islam with terrorism, what are the sources of our fear of Islam, and what image of Moslems we have created for ourselves? As well as silently agree to the presence of Polish troops in Iraq or Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> J. Rajkowska, *Minaret* (2009-2011), project website, available from <http://www.minaret.art.pl/index.php?lang=en>

Before entering into an analysis of Rajkowska's Minaret, it is relevant to reference some common-sense media influence upon creating hostile imagery. For the purposes of this analysis, in order to roughly outline the global post-9/11 socio-political context in which Rajkowska's Minaret should be evaluated, it is fair to take a quick glance at the position of Muslim minorities as represented by the mainstream North American and European media. To this day, the symbolic patterns utilized by the mainstream media feature a major theme of representation: the Muslims are the ultimate Girardian scapegoat of the post-9/11 "War on Terror".<sup>6</sup>

The Americans had no doubt that the war in Iraq had something to do with the terrorist attacks on September 11, and that it was "a war on those terrorists" as expressed by George W. Bush numerous times in his Presidential Address after the incident in 2001.<sup>7</sup> Ever since, the war on terror doctrine has consequential and continuous influence upon American and European global foreign policy and media, resulting in what is now commonly regarded as "Islamophobia".<sup>8</sup> Likewise, the specter of what is now known as "fear of Islamic terrorism" continuously feeds itself off the shocking imagery that globally circulates via mass media, as well as the derogatory analyses made by various academics, resulting in a rise in public hate crimes against Muslims and Islam at large throughout the world.<sup>9</sup>

Following up on the current Islamophobic debate, during her lecture at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw on 30 November 2014, Dr. Monika Bobako defined what she termed "the Muslim question" as "an example of counter-public mobilization in determining the political and social value of Islamic presence in non-Muslim regions".<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Bobako also defined the problematic rejection of Rajkowska's *Minaret* as a result of what she terms "the Minaret Effect" – which appears to be a universalization of a caricature image of Islam. Indeed, within the scope of

<sup>6</sup> See R. Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Le Bouc émissaire), transl. Y. Freccero. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.

<sup>7</sup> G.W. Bush, *Presidential Address*, CNN/US, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> N.R. Menon, "Islamophonic: New Styles in Reporting" in *Uncommon Media*, *ISIM Review* 2007 no. 20 (Autumn).

<sup>9</sup> Y.J. Proglar, "Islamic Imagery and American Policy" in *Covering Islam: Challenges & Opportunities for Media in the Global Village*, edited by S.F. Alatas, The Centre for Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs (RIMA), Singapore & Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAF), Singapore; 2005, available from [http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_7863-1522-2-30.pdf?090211042544](http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_7863-1522-2-30.pdf?090211042544).

<sup>10</sup> Notes from the public lecture held on 30.11.2014 at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw: „Art in Public,” discussion held by Dr. Monika Bobako (Interfaculty „Boundary Questions” Research Group, at Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland) and Joanna Rajkowska (artist, Warsaw, Poland).



Rajkowska's *Minaret*, "the Muslim question" tends to focus on Poland and the European Union in particular, however "the Minaret Effect" should rather be understood in the global context of an all-engaging public sphere.

While the media misrepresentation of the Muslim minorities is not the only factor in the negative response given by the Polish public to Rajkowska's project, *Minaret*, it is this global socio-political context through which Rajkowska's piece gains critical relevance, and it is from this perspective the artist's and the work's intentions should be evaluated.

### **The spatial transformation of the public sphere**

Rajkowska's *Minaret* oscillates between the private and the public spheres as it merges the definition of 'sphere' with that of 'space;' and yet it appears to be neither. While proposed as a public art project for the public space of the street, *Minaret* – simply by way of being a religious architectural element – inherently holds the senses of privacy, pertaining to intimate or domestic spaces, and emitting a kind of rhetoric on privacy that has been historically used to cast subjects like religion as personal or familial rather than public or exposed. Considering that prayers are made 'inside' the space of churches, synagogues or minarets, this particular rhetoric stands out as contradictory to the public terrain of the city space for which the project was initially intended. Admittedly, while making religion a private matter is already a problematic gesture that allows for the failed universalization of the notion of the public and the politics of exclusion, it is quite unclear whether Rajkowska herself is critically aware of this very problematic.

Another well-known piece by Rajkowska, *Oxygenator* from 2007 can be regarded as dealing with similar notions of urban space and play. *Minaret*, on the other hand, is far from taking a clear position. The artist's somewhat personalized and privatized objective in aiming to transform a piece of land, as she calls it, into a "mirage," seems unconvincing and bleak to say the very least. On another occasion, Rajkowska also remarked that the project was merely the result of a "personal affinity" aroused by the coincidental look and likeness of an actual minaret in Jenin, Palestine and the minaret at hand in Poznań.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> J. Rajkowska, *Minaret* (2009-2011), project website, available from <http://www.minaret.art.pl/index.php?lang=en>

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In evaluating the lacking elements of this work and whether or not it holds a public or a private position, it becomes necessary to investigate further the definition of the historical term ‘public sphere’. Interestingly enough, Jürgen Habermas’s key text, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) directs our attention to the commercialization of cultural relations via the transformation from a “culture-debating” society to a “culture-consuming” one, and demonstrates how “rational-critical debate” is replaced by mere consumer behavior.<sup>12</sup> Habermas’s diagnosis of the historical relationship between the bourgeois class and ideology bears major parallelism with today’s elite-ruled business and media corporations. However, today it has become more difficult to define the concept of the Habermasian public sphere in terms of national boundaries. As can be gathered from Negt and Kluge’s *Public Sphere and Experience* (1993),<sup>13</sup> the accelerated process of “transnationalization” – via the mass media and the new types of publicity they bring – results in a newer affair of “deterritorialization,” which brings with it highly ambivalent spatial forms of ‘locality’ and ‘universality,’ sometimes within the same city, and mostly concerning multiple localities and nationalities all at once.

We must note that Habermas’s contribution to the debate surrounding the public sphere rests precisely in his attempt to define it as a historical category, fundamentally linked to the historical transformation of emerging liberal capitalism and to the emerging bourgeois sphere’s political engagement with the city space. Another major contribution by Habermas is his recognition of the term ‘public’ in addition to and different from the state, the marketplace, and the rather intimate sphere of the family, which inherently carries a clear distinction from the term ‘private’. Even if not in the form of a spatial argument, Negt and Kluge question the Habermasian public sphere for its rather problematic “principle of generality,” which results in a territorial divide that excludes minority groups from entering into the ideally shared space of the public sphere.

Precisely this problematic becomes an entry point for the later studies on the notion of the public sphere and its direct interrelation with spatial concerns. Negt & Kluge’s notion of the “proletarian public sphere” and their emphasis on the questions of interests, conflicts and the use of power are parallel, for instance, to Michael Warner’s discussion on the formation and the

<sup>12</sup> J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, The MIT Press, 1991, p. 159.

<sup>13</sup> O. Negt and A. Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward and analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public*, University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

role of the “counter-publics” in challenging the exclusionary power structures that define territorial borders.<sup>14</sup> As also observed in “Rethinking the Public Sphere” (1992) by Nancy Fraser, moving away from the private space of the bourgeois salons to the public space of the streets stands out as an act that can empower the voice of the “subaltern” and “subordinate” groups. Likewise, as a rather contemporary phenomenon, the notion of “counter-publics” concerns itself with what institutional solutions can best help “narrow the [spatial] gap in participatory parity between the dominant and the subordinate groups”.<sup>15</sup>

While it becomes apparent that the historical transformation of the public sphere is a key ingredient in situating Rajkowska’s *Minaret* as a project that is clearly concerned with territorial divisions within the city space, and that directly concerns the Muslim minority’s position in the city, a few very basic questions remain yet to be answered: What are some of Rajkowska’s primary artistic goals? How does she intend to facilitate the visibility of the Muslim minorities? And is she successful in this venture? In order to suggest some answers to these questions, it is most relevant to turn to a theoretical ground, discussing the major elements of spatial practice that closely relate to Rajkowska’s project. These include the factors of time and distance, as well as the literary oscillation between the terms ‘space’ and ‘place’.

### The factors of time and distance

Louis Marin proposes the concept of “utopic degeneration” through a meticulous spatial study on Disneyland. Marin’s argument is that “a degenerate utopia is ideology changed into the form of a myth” or an example of modern imperialism and collective fantasy, which carries out a certain “process of neutralization” removing the spatial gap between a utopia and reality, and between the Freudian double and the other.<sup>16</sup> A great example of this process is the use of Disneyland money by the visitors to purchase goods and take part in the “utopian life” – something that cannot otherwise be done with real money. The exchange of money is also a symbol of entering into the utopian space and time.<sup>17</sup> Umberto Eco similarly reflects upon Marin’s study by moving from California’s Disneyland to the city of Los Angeles, and by analyzing the particular sense of fake

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<sup>14</sup> M. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, Zone Books, 2002

<sup>15</sup> N. Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy”, *Social Text*, 1990, No. 25/26. In this regard, see also R. Deutsche, “Art and Public Space: Questions of Democracy”, *Social Text*, 1992, no. 33, p. 66.

<sup>16</sup> L. Marin, *Disneyland: A Degenerate Utopia*, 1977 (pdf copy), p. 239-257.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 243.

illusion resulting from the collapse of time and space, and stimulating the desire for illusion in “the space of a few seconds”.<sup>18</sup>

This particular “space of a few seconds” is comparable to Rajkowska’s Palestinian *Minaret* appearing, as if accidentally, in the middle of the Polish city of Poznań. It is also associated with her act of provocatively promoting the project in the form of a coincidental Disneyland. Here, it may occur that the argument is as basic as: Hey! There is something fishy about the highly private and arbitrary Jenin – Poznań likeness, a quality which seems to be ruining the oh-so-progressive idea behind the artwork! Nevertheless, there is more to the argument. The criterion of likeness becomes a major issue, in that it cannot be applied at the level of the subject matter (i.e. the *Minaret* as a conceptual piece); instead, it can only remain a personal testimony at a certain point in time. According to Rajkowska, the main argument is simple: the two *Minarets* look alike; therefore, one can be persuaded that they are alike. In order for this to work, the locals of Poznań should be always already accepting of this supposed likeness, especially because it is an idea proposed by a popular and recognized local artist. This is possible, considering that most of the locals of Poznań have never been to Jenin anyway, and so Rajkowska’s personal testimony gone public on the legitimacy of the likeness between the minarets in Poznań and Jenin is the only resource available.

In trying to evaluate such a nad’ve, if not shallow, claim it is relevant to refer to Westphal’s project on “geocriticism” (2007) in order to be able to make a connection between the notion of time and the notion of distance. Even though it deals mainly with the ways in which literature interacts with the world, and tries to understand imaginary spaces constructed by fictional writing, Westphal’s study can also ring a bell when we try to evaluate Rajkowska’s artistic attempts at giving form to “personal affinity” via the experience of “spatio-temporality”. The notion of “spatiotemporality” is proposed by Westphal in the form of an overlapping collapse or “an overwhelming sense of compression of our spatial and temporal worlds” within the same “spatial pocket”.<sup>19</sup> Rajkowska strives for a Middle Eastern “spatial pocket” inside the city of Poznań, so that the locals can experience an artist-generated form of “spatiotemporality.” The main problem here is, however, that this form of an artistic spatiotemporality or a spatial pocket had not been sought after by the Poznań local community in the midst of their daily lives, or by the Muslim minorities of Poznań for any practical purpose.

<sup>18</sup> U. Eco, “Travels in Hyperreality” in *Travels in Hyperreality*, Harvest Book, 1990, pp.1-59. In this regard, see also G. Debord, *Theory of the Dérive*, Les Lèvres Nues #9, November 1956 (accessed November 2015), available from <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html> and G. Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*. Black & Red, 2000, p. 43.

<sup>19</sup> B. Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, Palgrave Macmillan, April 2011, 1e. 2007 (pdf ), p. 29.

This project was not created in a contextual void. Poznań has a sizeable Muslim minority, estimated at about 1,000 people. *Minaret* also poses the question of whether we, Poles, want to notice the presence of this minority – and how we do it.<sup>20</sup>

While Rajkowska insists that her intention is to support the Muslim minorities in Poznań for better visibility, there is no legitimate source suggesting that the thousand or so Muslim minorities in Poznań actually strived for better visibility in the first place. In her article for *The Guardian*, Rajkowska cites the local leader of the Muslim League of Poland, Sheikh Mohamed Saleh, who is said to have confirmed that her proposed work, *Minaret*, is just a building and has no religious meaning, but it deserves support, as it can “compensate for [the Muslim minority’s] invisibility”.<sup>21</sup> On the other end of the spectrum, the committee of Polish architects and councilors who rejected the project were quoted to have argued that the project was “culturally foreign,” and that “due to its visibility within the line of sight of a cathedral and a former Synagogue, it could be read as a religious provocation”.<sup>22</sup>

By pointing to a recognizable place, fiction allows itself to reference a real place, and transforms that place into a kind of fictional space. In the case of Poznań transforming itself into a mirage of the Middle East thanks to Rajkowska’s proposal, an artistically mediated spatiotemporality becomes an especially excessive and unwanted attempt, not even desired by the local community. Rajkowska’s attempt is perhaps closer to what Soja (1996) defines as the “spatial turn”<sup>23</sup> which had taken place as part of the postmodernist approach, and is therefore comparable to the increasing mobility of the 20<sup>th</sup> century tourist-traveler. Rajkowska stands out in the form of a ‘flâneur’ artist, for whom the temporal markers have already vanished.<sup>24</sup>

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On this note, it is necessary to highlight the direct relationship between the elements of time and distance, a close connection that dates back to the structural

<sup>20</sup> J. Rajkowska, *Minaret* (2009-2011), project website, available from <http://www.minaret.art.pl/index.php?lang=en>

<sup>21</sup> J. Rajkowska, “Building My Own Minaret,” *The Guardian*, 19 December 2009, accessed 10 January 2015, available from <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/dec/19/Minaret-poznan-joanna-rajkowska>

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> E.W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Blackwell Publishers, 1996 (Pdf copy).

<sup>24</sup> W. Benjamin, *Return of the Flâneur*, 1929 (pdf copy). In this regard see also Ch. Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, 1863.

transformation of spatial practices directly following the industrial revolution. The 19<sup>th</sup> century travelers gradually got accustomed to what at first seemed frightening: the demolition of traditional time-space relationships and the dissolution of reality from one train station to another.<sup>25</sup> Also understood in light of Simmel's "metropolitan system" (1908),<sup>26</sup> the demolition of time-space relationships furthermore reduces the majority of sensory relations between people to mere sight. Likewise, abstraction in its utmost state in the utilization of the railway system, appears in the form of an intensive experience of the sensuous world, terminated by industrial and scientific means, ultimately transforming into a new institution of photographic, panoramic and metaphoric value. In a way, spatial immediacy surrenders to abstract temporality.

The most interesting dilemma lies in the relationship between the construction of a photographic and imaginary conception of a particular 'place' in Rajkowska's mind as an artist, and soon after, her attempt in representing this as a fictional 'space' in the real physical setting of the city of Poznań. This particular overlap resonates closely with Soja's discussion of the notion of "conceived space" or in other words, "re-presentations of human spatiality in mental or cognitive forms".<sup>27</sup> In this regard, also borrowing from Lefebvre, we understand that "(Social) space is a (social) product (...) the further claim [is] that the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, or power; yet (...) it escapes in part from those who would make use of it".<sup>28</sup>

A perfect living example of such production of social space according to power relations is most likely the American city of Chicago's long-lasting territorial divides and housing problems, which stem not from mere racial prejudice, but are also rooted in the historical tradition of dismembering black communities from an efficient mortgage system that has been however made available to the white communities all along.<sup>29</sup> Keeping the living example of Chicago in mind

<sup>25</sup> W. Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, University of California Press, 1977; 1st ed. 1986.

<sup>26</sup> G. Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903) in: G. Bridge and S. Watson, eds. *The Blackwell City Reader*. Oxford and Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002. [http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/content/BPL/Images/Content\\_store/Sample\\_chapter/0631225137/Bridge.pdf](http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/content/BPL/Images/Content_store/Sample_chapter/0631225137/Bridge.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> E.W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Blackwell Publishers, 1996 (Pdf copy).

<sup>28</sup> H. Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 1974, p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> C. Smith, *The Plan of Chicago: Burnham and the Remaking of the American City*, The University of Chicago Press, 2006, and "The Case for Reparations – discussing Chicago's long lasting territorial divide & housing problems", *The Atlantic* 2014, available from <http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/05/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

we should note that one of the major problems posed by Lefebvre is that the social space is revealed in its particularity to the extent that it is “indistinguishable” from mental space (as defined by philosophers and artists) and the physical space (as defined by actual perception). Such an “illusion of transparency” or what Soja calls a “double illusion,” results in the reduction of physical and mental space to either strictly materialist or strictly idealist means, and this is the inevitable syndrome encountered in most social theory concerning space.

This is precisely what Rajkowska’s *Minaret* struggles with – trying to promote a Lefebvrian form of social space (in which the working class is an equal participant in deciding who owns the rights to the city) via a failed attempt in depicting a certain kind of physical space (in this case, her lived experience in Jenin) in the form of a conceived and imaginary mental place (in this case, her proposal to bring a reflection of Jenin to Poznań).

### Space vs. place

The chaotic layout of the buildings resembles a Middle Eastern city, especially the two blind walls facing the street. (...) If the *Minaret* materializes, the character of the whole area will change in a surreal manner. The familiar will become strange. The red-brick buildings, the empty walls, the surrounding wall and the billboards will present themselves in a different way. One will have to make an effort to recognize this place again, to understand and assimilate it. The *Minaret* will give the whole area an exotic flair, to turn it into a Place. This Place will be created by the tension between the familiar and the strange, the obvious and the puzzling.<sup>30</sup>

Rajkowska’s testimony cannot go farther than a personal affinity aiming to raise a public debate, and her description of the site in Poznań bearing likeness to a Middle Eastern city with a “chaotic layout” proves ignorant, simply because it reiterates a very simple proposition: Jenin is in the Orient, and the Orient is chaotic. In this regard, it would not be a harsh criticism to position Rajkowska’s proposal within the perimeters of Said’s definition of “the Orient” (1978).<sup>31</sup> Said observes that one aspect of the electronic postmodern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which “the Orient” is viewed. Accordingly, the character of the Oriental remains an “image,” because the falsity of this image is part of a general theatrical representation contained in the totality of a particularly spatial word, “the Orient”.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> J. Rajkowska, artist’s website, available from <http://www.rajkowska.com/en/projektyp/86>

<sup>31</sup> E.W. Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin Books Limited (UK), 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 66.



As we gather from Rajkowska's own words, it becomes apparently significant to consider the two terms as we experience them through her presentation: 'space' and 'place.' *Minaret's* superficiality is not only the result of art surrendering to the double illusion identified between the materialist and idealist means or a residue of collapsing time and distance; rather, it is also an inevitable consequence of an assumed, imagined, or better yet, underestimated linguistic moment. Another related suggestion is that *Minaret's* dilemma traces a transition from a Bergsonian conception of space (and time), which is always moving to a rather phenomenological understanding of place, which is always composed of points and distances.

Referencing once again Bobako's definition of "the Muslim question", Rajkowska's *Minaret* tends to bring visibility to the invisible Muslim minorities in Poznań. In this regard, it is assumed that the right to the city space for these minorities is a right to visibility. On the other hand, Henri Lefebvre's "The Right to the City" (1968) suggests that all urban dwellers – those who inhabit the city regardless of their legal or national status as citizens – have a right to participate in urban politics and to be included in the decisions that shape their environment. Lefebvre's original concept aims to protect all urban dwellers, and especially the members of the particularly threatened groups including poor or low-income groups, the homeless, women, victims of violence, senior citizens, persons with disabilities, youth, children, ethnic minorities, displaced persons, immigrant workers and refugees. Contemporary expansions of Lefebvre's concept by such organizations as the UN-Habitat also include the protection of "individuals and groups who are diverse on the grounds of ethnicity, religion, race, gender, age, physical mobility, resident/citizen status and sexual orientation, in addition to class" (Habitat International Coalition website).<sup>33</sup>

Most interestingly, it is essential to note that Lefebvre formulates the right to the city as a transformed and renewed right to urban life, thus presuming an integrated theory of the city and urban life. To do this, Lefebvre suggests using the resources of science and art. He suggests that art in particular brings to the realization of urban society "its long meditation on life as drama and pleasure".<sup>34</sup> Rajkowska's *Minaret* is far from successfully combining these elements as an influential art piece that can generate counter-public mobility. On the contrary, it remains controversial and restricted to the artist's own biases and projections upon an imaginary "enchantment" with the so-called Middle East.

<sup>33</sup> "Urban Policies and the right to the city", UNESCO-UN-HABITAT-ISS. Discussion Paper for the Seminar: *Urban Policies and the Right to the City*, Paris, 18 March 2005. Last accessed online: 10 January 2015 <http://www.hic-net.org/articles.php?pid=1686>

<sup>34</sup> H. Lefebvre, *Production of Space...*, 157.



In terms of a conclusion, it should be emphasized that Rajkowska's unrealized public project, *Minaret*, is unsuccessful in its artistic attempt in facilitating more visibility for the supposedly invisible Muslim minority of Poznań. This conclusion is a bit more critical if not pessimistic than the ideas which welcome everyday spatial practices that successfully undo the readable and the metaphorical surfaces of the planned city for purposes of creative engagement.<sup>35</sup> Rajkowska's *Minaret* is a failed attempt at such an engagement, because it actually maintains a clear divide between the 'them' and 'us'. By intending to turn the particular street in Poznań into a "Place" – a word intentionally and oddly capitalized by the artist – Rajkowska's *Minaret* does nothing more than the capitalization of the word Other, and hence, scapegoating and persecuting this imaginary place (the Orient) and its inhabitants (Muslims) over and over again, while leaving unanswered the question of who owns the rights to the city and why.

Trapped in a collision between elements of time and distance, as well as a linguistic overlap between space and place, the story of "the *Minaret* that never happened" remains a superficial representation of mere likeness at surface level. The superficiality arising from these conflicting features of Rajkowska's piece continues to unfold itself in the form of a somewhat populist, commonplace and self-directed speculative show, which holds an awkward position in the career of an otherwise fairly sensible artist.

Borrowing from both a postmodernist (particularly a Baudrillardian) apocalyptic hyperreality that has almost become a cliché,<sup>36</sup> as well as a post-modernist spatiotemporal turn stretched across the real and the imaginary, Rajkowska's *Minaret* remains an attention-seeker in the post-9/11 context, where Islamophobia is exhausted to the point of being outworn, and yet where we still insist staring in awe at distant Oriental lands from the limited space of our touch-screens and our impermanent, live-streaming temporalities.

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<sup>35</sup> Arguing for a positive image of society that is continuously written and read by the social subjects who are able to contribute directly to the creation of the everyday social system that they live in, from a surprisingly psychoanalytical perspective, de Certeau concludes that walking in the city, and hence the act of practicing space is "to repeat the joyful and silent experience of childhood: it is, in a place, to be other and to move toward the other" (p 110). M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, 2011; 1st ed. 1984.

<sup>36</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *America*, Verso 2010 (1st ed. 1989).

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## **KWESTIA MUŻULMAŃSKA W POLSKIM MIEŚCIE: KRYTYCZNA ANALIZA MINARETU (2009) JOANNY RAJKOWSKIEJ I WYKORZYSTANIA PRZESTRZENI MIEJSKIEJ (streszczenie)**

Strukturalna transformacja Habermasowskiej sfery publicznej z salonów na ulice jest bezpośrednio związana ze zrozumieniem granic miasta i dynamiki zachodzącej pomiędzy jego mieszkańcami. Proces „transnacionalizacji” poprzez mass media skutkuje dalszą „deterytorializacją”, która niesie ze sobą ambiwalencję jednoczesnej lokalności i uniwersalności w ramach jednego miasta. Ponieważ „kontr-publiczności” (*counter-publics*) nadal nie dysponują środkami materialnymi umożliwiającymi racjonalną i krytyczną debatę dotyczącą wizji łączących miasto i jego mieszkańców, pozostaje pytanie, jakie rozwiązania instytucjonalne mogą najsprawniej ułatwić zapewnienie mieszkańcom równego dostępu do uczestnictwa. W *Minarecie* Joanny Rajkowskiej (2009-2011) widać silne związki z Poznaniem jako miejscem gry dziedzictwem historycznym, relacjami czasu i przestrzeni, a także religią. Dla kogo jest miasto: dla mieszkańca, dla inwestora, czy... dla artysty? W myśl definicji Lefebvre’a oraz działań podejmowanych przez takie organizacje, jak UN-Habitat (2005), „prawo do miasta” oznacza, że wszyscy mieszkańcy miasta są jego uczestnikami w równym stopniu. Czy *Minaret* Rajkowskiej używa najlepszych środków, które mogą zainicjować kontr-publiczną mobilizację mniejszości mużulmańskich w Poznaniu, czy też po prostu staje się ofiarą postmodernistycznego Innego?

**Słowa klucze:** współczesna sztuka publiczna, współczesna polska artystka, dziedzictwo kulturowe, sfera publiczna, przestrzeń miejska, mniejszość.

*\*With special thanks to Weronika Boruc for the Polish translation of the abstract.*



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## **PERFORMANCE ART, PERFORMATIVITY AND THE ISSUE OF NEOMODERNISM**

**Abstract:** Body art and performance art are often discussed together, and even identified as the same thing. A careful analysis of these artistic trends and the accompanying theoretical commentary tends, however, to highlight their differences. Body art turns out to be a phenomenon manifesting significant similarity to the modernist conception of art in the spirit similar to the concept of Clement Greenberg, while performance art largely rejects these assumptions. Performative aesthetics developed by Erika Fischer-Lichte on the one hand stems from challenging modernist artistic essentialism, but on the other emphasizes the role of “the radical concept of presence” of the artist.

The article presents a detailed analysis of two new creative achievements of Marina Abramović, the artist associated both with body art and performance art: *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005) and *The Artist is Present* (2010). The indicated ambiguity of performance art has been radicalized in their case. They combine the modernist emphasis on authenticity, presence, and essentialism with the postmodern penchant for citing. The phenomenon of pastiche described by Frederic Jameson has been transformed in such a way that it is no longer empty but takes over the whole of the performer's self.

The term “neomodern” is used today in a variety of meanings. The issues discussed in the article suggest the possibility of understanding it as overcoming the oppositions characteristic of modernism and postmodernism, while maintaining some of the features of these two trends regarding their respective approaches to art.

**Keywords:** body art, performance art, performativity, modernism, postmodernism, neomodernism, Marina Abramović.

In the first chapter of her book *Body Art / Performing the Subject*, Amelia Jones writes: "Body art and performance art have been defined as constitutive of postmodernism because of their fundamental subversion of modernism's assumption that fixed meanings are determinable through the formal structure of the work alone."<sup>1</sup> She also cites the (unambiguous, as she puts it) opinion of Michel Benamou that "performance [is] the unifying mode of the post-modern."<sup>2</sup> The American author mentions "body art" and "performance art" in the same breath as it were, thus suggesting that they are closely interlinked. While she does acknowledge that some differences can be noted between these artistic phenomena, they consist only in the fact that in the late 1970s artists turned from relatively modest, raw body art projects towards the projects on a broader scale and incorporating other media besides the artist's body. Cited by way of example are Laurie Anderson's theatrical performative practices (e.g. *United States*) and performative photographic works by Cindy Sherman (her "film stills").<sup>3</sup> Reflecting on the derivation of performance art from body art, Jones offers a curious remark: "In the 1980, body art as conceived in the late 1960s and early 1970s was increasingly perceived and spoken of as modernist in the conservative, Greenbergian sense – especially by art historians and critics from England and the United States oriented toward a Marxian, feminist, and/or poststructuralist critical theory."<sup>4</sup> I think it is worthwhile to tackle this topic and consider the legitimacy of distinguishing between body art and performance art, as well as their relationship with modernist and postmodernist ideas.

From the feminist perspective, body art seemed to be modernist due to its "naive essentialism." It was in that spirit that Mary Kelly, artist and art theorist, wrote that it was characterized by a drive to replace the artistic subject with the presence of an active person, whose body was treated somewhat like the visual media in sculpture or painting. It was believed that the artist is an embodied "present and creative subjectivity," which is an expression of "absolute essential self-possession."<sup>5</sup> In the case of body art, therefore, an admittedly radical

<sup>1</sup> A. Jones, *Body Art / Performing the Subject*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1998, p. 21. In a footnote, the American author gives a long list of authors and titles of works in which this view was formulated.

<sup>2</sup> Cited *ibidem*, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> There are many more examples of the derivation of performance art from body art. One such clear example of the changes was the third International Symposium of Performance Art in Lyon, which took place in 1981. It was attended by leading world performers who presented actions and works of visual art (the symposium was accompanied by an exhibition of works of art by performance artists), on the basis of which art critics presented their conclusions similar to Jones Cf. 1979 / 1983. *Five Years Performance-Art in Lyon*, exhibition catalogue, Comportement Environnement Performance Lyon France, Lyon 1984.

<sup>4</sup> A. Jones, *op.cit.*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>5</sup> Cited *ibidem*, p. 22.

change occurred in the nature of the employed means, as compared to the old artistic media, but the approach of the subject itself remained the same. One could say that, as in Greenberg's concept of painting and sculpture, theories of body art assumed that all that art is meant to be is "to be good as art."<sup>6</sup> And according to the American modernist art critic, art is good when it focuses on the medium specific for the discipline. According to Greenberg, works of art (paintings or sculptures) are not just meant to teach, they do not need to celebrate or glorify anyone or anything, they do not need to fight for anything. Art in modernism "has become free to distance itself from religion, politics, and even morality."<sup>7</sup> Such an essentialist approach to paintings or sculptures was replaced in the case of body art by a similar understanding of the role of the artist's body. It is regarded as a field of autonomous artistic activities focused on the relationship between physicality and psyche, characteristic of body art (distinguishing such type of artistic practice).

Kelly challenged that position, writing that the "authenticity of body art cannot be inscribed at the level of a particular morphology, it must be chiseled into the world in accordance with direct experience."<sup>8</sup> Thus, while in the 1960s and 1970s it was thought that the body in body art should not serve any purpose, that nothing should be glorified by its actions or the actions performed on it, that it should not be used to fight for anything, in later years such views were rejected. Feminists recognized that the body is a "battleground" in the fight for the social issues important to women. Jones also believes that the earlier view on body art was based on "metaphysical statements," pointing out that feminist postmodernism rejected such notion, taking an "anti-essentialist" stance instead.<sup>9</sup>

Performative aesthetics seems to depart from performance art rather than from the concept of body art. Although the distinction between these two artistic phenomena may seem difficult or even impossible to outline accurately (especially since different authors describe the same artists, for example Marina Abramović and Gina Pane, using either of the two labels), it might be interesting to include it, at least from the point of view of an attempt to define the problem areas of modernism, postmodernism and neomodernism. While, as indicated in the example I have cited above, body art is associated with modernist attitude, consisting in the search for the essence of artistic phenomena, and requires compliance with media-specific boundaries of individual disciplines (according to Greenberg's assumptions and critical practice), performance (as well as the

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<sup>6</sup> C. Greenberg, *Modern and Postmodern*, "Arts Magazine" 1980, No. 54, p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>8</sup> Cited after A. Jones, op.cit., p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> A. Jones, op.cit., p. 23.



theoretical and critical reflection associated with it) departs from essentialist assumptions. What is preserved is the conviction of the special role of the body and the presence of the performer, but there is also an openness to other purposes of art and the exploration of the possibilities of the actions on the fringes. Therefore, unlike in the case of body art, there is no seeking to determine a specific scope in which artistic activity would refer to the body of the artist, like a painter using a flat surface on which he arranges patches of color, or a sculptor manipulating space and three-dimensional objects shaped over the course of the creative acts.<sup>10</sup> From the point of view of performance studies, which emphasize the relationship with performance art, what counts is not the “metaphysics of the body,” but rather the embodied action taking place in a specific location in relation to recipients who interact with the performer in visual, psychological, and sometimes physical terms. It was these features that Erika Fischer-Lichte pointed out when characterizing the aesthetics of performativity.

In her book on this subject she does not address the problem of body art as a separate issue, although she deals with what she calls “performances of self-mutilation” (e.g. Michel Journiac or Gina Pane). Self-mutilation was a particularly drastic and at the same time characteristic example of body art practices. One could even say that such actions were the essence of that artistic trend. However, the German author does not view this group of creative activities as a distinct variety of performative practices, but discusses them along with other types of performance and theater acting. She writes that although during self-mutilation the artists “refus[ed] to bestow specific meanings to their

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<sup>10</sup> This is how Roselee Goldberg characterized body art (using, as it happens, the name “performance” and only adding that she means its particular variety). She wrote that Vito Acconci’s art was “an attempt to transpose elements typical for one discipline into another means of artistic expression,” and for an artist who regards himself as a poet, the body is “an alternative to paper” (*Ciało artysty*, in: *Performance*, collective work, transl. K. Biwojno, M. Gutkowska, H. Siodlak, M. Śpik-Dziamska, M. Zamecka, Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, Warsaw 1984, p. 89). In the subsequent section of the text the artist describes the actions by Denis Oppenheim (writing, for example, that in *Reading Position for Second Degree Burn* “he addressed the problem of ‘color change,’ ‘the problem of the traditional painter,’ only in that case his own body was the ‘pigment.’ With a book spread out on his chest, Oppenheim lay on a beach until the hot sun burnt his skin, thus achieving the color change he wanted” [ibidem, p. 92] and Chris Burden [ibidem, p. 93-94]). (e.g. Goldberg considers the action *Shooting*, during which a bullet fired from a distance of 4.5 meters should have grazed his arm, but instead ripped off a piece of his flesh, as a new way of addressing the subject of danger, explored in canvas painting and stage plays [ibid., pp. 93-94]). There is a clear assumption of the separation of painting, theater and body art as essentially different disciplines, though related in certain ways. Greenberg referred to similar problems when considering the relationship of painting and music.

self-injuries, based on a two-world model. Instead, they literally embodied the violence done against themselves,”<sup>11</sup> the difference does not entail the need to separate these types of actions and assign a distinct character (essence) to each of them. On the contrary, Fischer-Lichte redefines the concept of “embodiment” so as to cover both of these varieties of artistic practices. She writes that “If the redefined concept of embodiment refers to all that performative acts bring forth, with which the performers first and foremost bring forth their own corporeality in performance, then this concept is particularly suited to grasp what the artists did in their self-mutilating performances.”<sup>12</sup> Such type of performances can be therefore better understood not through their separation and search for the autonomous principles which would bring out their uniqueness, but rather through the cancelling of opposites. Such cancelling of opposites is virtually alien to modernists and Greenberg would accuse it of “lowering the standards” of art.

Taking into account the above considerations, the performative turn can be associated with postmodernism and performative aesthetics can be deemed a manifestation of an approach to art appropriate for that turn. I believe that the basic issues of the aesthetics of performativity according to Fischer-Lichte can be reduced to the following:

1. It is not the work that counts, but the event: it has not been created by way of production, based on knowledge and skills, but it is an event, an incident, a publicly presented coincidence;
2. Emphasis is placed on embodiment and presence: emotion is provoked by a phenomenal (available to the senses) performer here and now, and not a character portrayed on a stage, played by an actor;
3. The acting person being viewed is characterized by “a radical concept of presence” – he/she is the visible “embodied mind”;
4. He/she makes a mark of him-/herself with his/her material presence: he/she is the perceived subject revealing itself;
5. Meanings appear on the principle of emergence, leading to a non-antinomic character of “presence” and “representation”;
6. The existing order of perception is abolished and a new one is formed, in which the viewed character is recognized as both “the bodily being-in-the-world” and a sign;

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<sup>11</sup> E. Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance. A new aesthetics*, transl. Saskya Iris Jain, Routledge, London and New York 2008, p. 91-92. The theory of “two worlds” is associated with acting and refers to the simultaneous presence on the stage of actor as himself and as the character he is playing.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 92.

7. One should assume “perceptual multistability,” which opens a possibility of new meanings emerging by way of association;
8. The act of perception touches the viewer bodily, as the signified and the signifier are one, which eliminates the search for intentional meanings: the reception ceases to be decoding;
9. Reception is not understanding, but reacting by responding psychologically and physiologically to what is presented, as well as generating a variety of associations;
10. An autopoietic feedback loop is formed: mutual observation between viewers, the appearance of interactions, and sometimes also taking joint actions to interfere with the action of the performer.

Fischer-Lichte outlined the concept of the aesthetics of performativity starting from Marina Abramović’s performance *Lips of Thomas*, to which she repeatedly refers discussing different points of her theory. That performance was held on 24 October 1975 at the Krinzinger gallery in Innsbruck. Thirty years later, the same artist presented a much discussed artistic proposal in the United States. A multi-element action called *Seven Easy Pieces* took place in 2005 at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. As part of the Festival of Performing Arts, the artist reenacted five historically important actions by other artists, and then repeated her own *Lips of Thomas*. Then, she gave one premiere performance. The reenacted actions were characterized by the fact that the physical presence of the artist was their crucial component. The question arises, however, whether it was the “radical concept of presence,” as Fischer-Lichte put it, with its associated energy, transformative power, etc. Another question concerns the relation of those actions to postmodern pastiche and citation practices. The latter were rejected both in the case of body art and performance art. From the point of view of both these trends of artistic actionism, activities cannot be repeated because each performance is to become a new fact.

The first performance to be reenacted was Bruce Nauman’s action *Body Pressure* from 1974. According to the original idea, it consisted in the artist pressing his body against the wall of the gallery as hard as he could, focusing his full attention on the task. In the text accompanying the performance, he wrote:

Form an image of yourself (suppose you had just stepped forward) on the opposite side of the wall pressing back against the wall very hard. [...] Think how various parts of your body press against the wall; which parts touch and which do not. [...] press hard and feel how the front and back of your body press together. Concentrate on the tension in the muscle, pain where bones meet, fleshy deformations that occur under pressure; con

sider body hair, perspiration, odors (smells). This may become a very erotic exercise.<sup>14</sup>

Re-enacting the performance, Abramović made several changes. The action took place in a large museum hall on the landing. Thus, the audience could see it from all sides as well as from the above, which was made possible by the unique architectural design of the museum. She pressed her body not against the wall but against a transparent glass pane, which revealed the deformations of the body that the audience of the original performance could only imagine. She performed her action at the intervals of five minutes for approximately seven hours from 5 PM until midnight. The text written by Nauman was recorded by Abramović and played repeatedly during the performance.

I have cited the description of that action on the basis of Shinya Watanabe's account, as it lets us visualize how Abramović carried out her re-enactments. Generally speaking, she took care to ensure that the event was a real spectacle. It could be viewed by more recipients and from all sides. Nauman's action was a personal experience.<sup>15</sup> His text indicates as much, as there is no reference to the viewers there. However, in Abramović's version it is a performance. Thus, Watanabe is right to note that "some original intention of Nauman was not honored," but she "had the impression that the work's original radical-ness had faded away."<sup>16</sup>

The above remarks can also be applied to other re-enactments. For example, Vito Acconci's performance *Seed Bed* from 1972 was originally held at a small gallery. The viewers stood on a specially built ramp. Looking at them, Acconci masturbated for eight hours three times a week. The sounds he made during this activity were heard through a loud speaker. Abramović's performance was held at the Guggenheim Museum, where she arranged a circular stage for the audience to stand on, while she masturbated hidden underneath it. Watanabe points out that she supplemented the natural sounds made while masturbating with "film lines": "Ohhhhhh, yes, I love you.... Oh, oh, yes, I need you.... [...]"<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Cited after S. Watanabe, *Selected Writings. Marina Abramović "Seven Easy Pieces" at the Guggenheim Museum Looking for Others Whom You've Never Seen*, [http://www.shinyawatanabe.net/en/writings/content\\_57.html](http://www.shinyawatanabe.net/en/writings/content_57.html) (accessed 2 Aug. 2016).

<sup>15</sup> This performance was regarded as conceptual, and therefore what mattered was not the visible but the mental level. It was designed not so much for the reception of sensory stimuli, but was meant to provoke thought.

<sup>16</sup> S. Watanabe, op.cit.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem. Watanabe suggests that the lines might have been used because it is difficult to masturbate without any direct visual contact. Acconci had been looking at the viewers in the gallery, while Abramović did not see them, so she may have had to imagine her sexual partner.

The additions introduced an element of acting into the action or suggested that the physical activity of the performer was accompanied by the ideas relating to a sexual intercourse. In any case, the formerly direct relationship between the performer and the recipients was made more complex. Abramović did not reveal herself to the audience, but played a game based on uncovering and covering things. The fact that the action was invisible to the audience also considerably restricted the scope of their activity. In fact, they could only listen to the sounds and, activating their imagination, to guess what was happening. All that was left of the scope of the autopoietic feedback described by Fischer-Lichte was only watching the reaction of the other members of the audience.

In the case of the next re-enacted performance, the starting point was Valie Export's action *Action Pants; Genital Panic*, which reportedly took place in 1969. It is not certain whether it was indeed carried out or if the Austrian artist only talked about it. In any case, it involved Export in crotchless trousers revealing her naked body, pacing during a screening of an erotic film and saying "what you see here is the reality." The performance made a significant reference to Fischer-Lichte's theory of performativity, and specifically to her reflections on the non-presence of the real body in media images, e.g. on film or television. In the case of watching erotic films, the illusion of reality of the viewed scenes is an important element of their impact on the viewers. In the described case the illusion was shattered. Abramović, as Watanabe emphasizes, offered a bold interpretation of the performance. There were two chairs in the middle of a round podium. The performer was sitting on one of them wearing a leather jacket and black trousers with the crotch removed. She was holding a machine gun. Posed like that, she gave an impression of strength and aggressiveness. The effect was reinforced by the resolute gaze directed successively towards the individual viewers. It is natural, Watanabe notes, that when seeing a woman in crotchless trousers, almost all recipients will direct their gaze there. However, Abramović's gaze made the viewers feel like voyeurs caught in the act. The effect was reinforced by the machine gun, usually associated with the possibility of immediate punishment. In that case, therefore, the act of perception was controlled by the artist. The reference to Export's performance became a pretext to create a situation problematizing the issue of the presence of women in public space and the correlation "to see / to be seen."<sup>18</sup>

In the re-enactment of *The Conditioning, First of Self-Portrait(s)* by Gina Pane (1973), Abramović lay on a metal bed, under which there was a line of 15 lit candles. Like the other re-enacted performances, it lasted seven hours,

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<sup>18</sup> Ibidem.

so she had to replace the candles when they burned out. When they were full-length, their heat was most likely burning the prone performer. Thus, there was a strong effect of the material presence of the body and the items affecting it. There was no acting, no pretending, no simulating. But for the viewers, as Watanabe writes, it was primarily a "beautiful performance," affecting them with its poetic atmosphere, while the other ones were shocking. Thus an opportunity appeared for the viewers to approach the event in two ways: material and only phenomenal. In the case of the former point of view, the prevailing element was the awareness of the materiality of the body and the severity of the burns. In the latter the materiality was forgotten, dominated by light effects and associations with images featuring similar scenes.

The fifth re-enacted performance was a reference to the action by Joseph Beuys *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, from 1965. Abramović copied the characteristic appearance of the German artist. She was wearing a man's shirt and a sleeveless fishing jacket, while her face was covered with gold flakes. Standing on the stage was a chair with one leg wrapped with felt, as well as easels and several canvases. During the event, she recreated Beuys' actions as he explained the images to a dead hare. Thus, she recreated both the outfit, the scenery and the actions of the original. This led Watanabe to conclude that the issue addressed by Abramović was also similar: the birth of a myth, the problems of civilization and culture. Thus, it was a full-fledged re-enactment (including both signifying and signified elements), achieved through staging what in Beuys' case had been a specific event. The original performance was transformed into a kind of theatrical work. It is difficult to say whether it was meant as a critique of the current state of performance art, which more and more often involves specific performances repeated in different places, or rather the consequence of noting that because of their documentation the historical performances lose the characteristics of embodiment and presence, turning instead into stories. Characteristically, in the described case the role of the male performer was played by a woman. This gender difference is striking, despite the applied characterization. It is immediately noticeable even when viewing photos of Abramović's action. Thus, in the re-enactment of this performance the story is similar but the narrator changes. In any case, this action was an explicit reference to the problem of discourse and narrative.

The sixth action was based on repeating / recreating Abramović's own famous performance, *Lips of Thomas*. While in the above-discussed case she imitated or personified Beuys, this time she was to be herself. However, thirty years had passed since the first performance. Perhaps wanting to draw attention to the problem of the passage of time, the artist incorporated a metronome in the re-enacted action; its sound accompanied everything she was doing during the performance. First, she ate honey. Watanabe notes that she repeatedly

licked the spoon, which had overt sexual connotations.<sup>19</sup> Then she opened a bottle of wine and drank it slowly, looking at the viewers. Next, she picked up a razor blade from the table and cut out a five-pointed star on her stomach. Watanabe notes that she did it very carefully, using a pattern previously drawn on her stomach. At this point the metronome slowed down.<sup>20</sup> This can be interpreted as a special emphasis on the repetitive, imitative nature of the action.<sup>21</sup> The rest of the re-enacted performance was even more different from the original one. The artist put on the boots placed on the stage (which she had previously used during the performance *The Lovers - Great Wall Walk* in 1988) and a military cap that once belonged to her mother (who had fought in the guerrilla war against Nazi Germany). The cap bore the same star she had cut on herself. At the same time a Russian folk song about the tragedy of war was playing from the loudspeaker, while the artist was sobbing loudly. Once the song ended, Abramović took off the boots and lay down on a bed of ice. This time there was no interference from the audience, unlike the first time, when the performance was interrupted by the viewers trying to end the suffering of the performer. This time the audience only said things like "Please, please, finish" or "You can't do that." Nevertheless, she did not end the performance. When she got up from the ice after a while, her body began to tremble and then shake with the cold.

I am citing Watanabe's fairly detailed description of this action to highlight how far it differed from the performance in Innsbruck in 1975. Apart from the minor differences, the most important one was the introduction of explicit references to World War Two. The star cut on her stomach, which originally evoked political associations, but whose impact was, as Fischer-Lichte stressed, primarily that of a real fact, in the re-enacted performance clearly took on the character of a sign. Also in the case of the blood seeping from it the semantics outweighed the material presence through the reference to the military cap with the very same star. Also the artist's body was semanticized. It was both a real and concrete body, present here and now, at the Guggenheim Museum, as well as a signified body that had given the same performance thirty years earlier. The present body pointed to the former body, designated it. Similarly complicated was the semantic situation of the repeated activities. It was the "radical concept of presence" in its pure state as described by Fischer-Lichte,

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem. It is not known whether she performed that activity similarly in 1975 in Innsbruck. Most likely not, because the earlier action was direct.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>21</sup> It is worth noting that the star cut on her stomach in Innsbruck was irregular, done spontaneously, as evidenced by photographs taken that day. However, in the Guggenheim Museum it was based on a diagram sketched earlier.



although it was not an actor's reproduction of a character. Both possibilities became intertwined, which enhanced the "perceptual multistability," although in slightly different areas than the German author had anticipated. In contrast, the autopoietic feedback loop was much weaker. The recipients were primarily members of the audience who respected the order of events planned by the author of the performance, perhaps because they sensed a certain narrative in it, the course of which cannot be interrupted.

The final performance, a premiere one, was entitled *Entering the Other Side*. A huge installation in the shape of a dress was created in the center of the Guggenheim Museum, perfectly fitting the unique architecture of the place.<sup>22</sup> The dress consisted of strips in different shades of blue. Located at the top of the structure, Abramović turned her body around, opened her hands and looked in all directions. When she was raising her hands it looked as if she was praying, invoking heavenly spirits, when she lowered them – she seemed to be calling upon the spirits of the earth. Before the end of the performance, which, like the other ones, lasted seven hours, she said:

Please close your eyes, please.

Imagine.

I am here, and now.

You are here, and now.

There is no time.<sup>23</sup>

Summing up the project, Watanabe writes that

this new performance work is not the thing that I can evaluate blindly. It may be said that the performance is beautiful, such as the masterpiece artworks created in the 1960s, but there is no situation to receive this work in the present age. This is very disappointing, but it suggests that it may be important to make something completely new in our contemporary society.<sup>24</sup>

The emotional tone of this statement, however, should not obscure the fact that *Entering the Other Side* is in many ways an expression of transgression. That transgression can be interpreted on different levels. Watanabe stressed the sensory-aesthetic and spiritual dimension of the event. I would like to include other issues as well.

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<sup>22</sup> Watanabe wrote that it evoked associations with the famous ten-meter-high dress designed by Yohji Yamamoto (ibid).

<sup>23</sup> Cited after ibidem.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem.

I believe that Abramović's new action concluding the series of re-enactments may be considered important from the point of view of the genre or medium. Prior to the action, a colossal installation was created. Its character was very well thought out. It was a perfect fit for the location where it was built. Therefore, as in the case of other important installations, it was the meeting with the place of the presentation that largely affected its character. The artist merged with the created structure. It is hard to imagine doing this same performance in a different location, for example in the gallery where *Lips of Thomas* was originally performed in 1975. During the action at the Guggenheim Museum Abramović's references to heaven and earth corresponded with the circles of the architectural structure reminiscent of the cosmic spheres. Also the appeal to the audience concerning everyone's location gained its appropriate meaning because the viewers were in different places of the museum and at different levels. As a result, the factors relating to architecture, installation and performance became impossible to separate, creating a unique whole transcending any divisions according to artistic disciplines. The performance became a total work of art. After postmodern dispersal and cancelling out of contradictions, the idea of a total work of made a reappearance.

Commenting on Abramović's re-enacted performances, Erika Fischer-Lichte did not see in them anything that would fundamentally alter the general character of her output. Instead of juxtaposing the artist's actions from the early 21<sup>st</sup> century with her earlier works, she regarded them as completely new, original artistic events, which, in some respects, referred to the performances of the past, but by no means repeated them.<sup>25</sup> She took into account the emergence of some previously absent elements, such as quoting from actions by other performers, but linked it with the artist's direct physical and mental presence, which she described in her book on performativity as "the radical concept of presence." It was this presence that made her view the new, concrete action of the physically present artist as the dominant factor in the re-performances, rather than the repetition factor, or the reference to the earlier performances. Amelia Jones, on the other hand, believes the opposite to be true. In her extensive article on both *Seven Easy Pieces* and the project which Abramović completed five years later, entitled *The Artist is Present*, she claims that we are not dealing with presence, but with "enacted 'presence'." She emphasized that "the life act itself *destroys presence* (or makes the impossibility of its being secured evident)," while Abramović's proposal was "inadvertent parody of the structure of authentic expression and reception of 'true' emotional

<sup>25</sup> E. Fischer-Lichte, *Performance Art - Experiencing Liminality*, in: Marina Abramović: *Seven Easy Pieces*, cited after A. Jones, "The Artist is Present" *Artistic Re-enactments and the Impossibility of Presence*, "TDR: The Drama Review" 2011, Vol. 55, No. 1, p. 32.

resonance that modernist art discourse [...] so long claimed for modernist painting and sculpture.”<sup>26</sup> She concluded, therefore, that what the re-enactments perhaps demonstrated was that the fact (emphasized by experts in performance art) that performance must be “showing doing”<sup>27</sup> will inevitably destroy all authenticity and disturb the real presence. In art, “authentic expression” – that utopia sought by modern artists – is impossible. Addressing Abramović’s *The Artist is Present* (Museum of Modern Art, 2010), which featured familiar objects used in the artist’s previous actions, as well as videos and documentary footage of her life and performances, reconstructions of her previous actions performed by dancers and other performers, and the artist herself sitting in a long, white dress<sup>28</sup> at the center of the exposition during the opening hours, Jones declared that all that makes one realize the paradox of trying to capture “‘presence’ as such,” which is “always already escaping into the past”.<sup>29</sup> As for the performers’ “claim of presence,” the American author was of the opinion that the 2005 and 2010 shows demonstrated that in the case of performance it depends on documentation. Jones claimed that

Looking at Abramović re-enactments in *Seven Easy Pieces* and her self-presentation in *The Artist is Present*, I find that what her recent projects expose [...] is that there cannot be a definitively ‘truthful’ or ‘authentic’ form of the live event even at the moment of its enactment – not even (if this could be imagined) as longed within the body that originally performed or experienced it. There cannot, therefore, be a re-enactment that faithfully renders the truth of this original event. Where would such a version of the live event reside at any rate?<sup>30</sup>

At first glance, both opinions on Abramović’s projects presented here seem irreconcilable. They seem all the more mutually exclusive if we realize that the early works of Abramović (including her action *Lips of Thomas*) are often classified as body art and even regarded as one of the most important examples of the genre. Does this mean that in the 2000s the artist turned away from the principles she had followed earlier? It is particularly important to address this issue given the fact that in her 2007 interview with Amelia Jones, Abramović declared that “redoing is still performance and performance is somehow *living*.”

<sup>26</sup> A. Jones, *Artist is Present...*, p. 18.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. R. Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, third edition, ed. S. Brand, Routledge, London and New York 2013, pp. 28-51.

<sup>28</sup> The dress, as well as the other two – red and blue, were designed by Robert Tisci, Givenchy designer specially for this event.

<sup>29</sup> A. Jones, *Artist is Present...*, p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, p. 19.

For me the performance only has sense when you perform; otherwise it's dead".<sup>31</sup> Is it possible that she contradicts herself in her "strong" (as Jones put it) statement? Or does she perhaps just want to draw attention to the different ways of understanding the meaning of redoing?

I believe that this problem can be explained by referring to the concepts of modernism, postmodernism and neomodernism. As indicated in the beginning of this article, the works of body art displayed several features compatible with modernist principles. Postmodernism, on the other hand, questioned such qualities of the artistic output as authenticity, presence, essentialist approach, etc. In postmodern painting or sculpture, the previously favored authenticity is replaced by inauthentic situations. One such example can be considered using the quote whose source is doubtful, or which is associated, as Achille Bonito Oliva defined it, with the "principle of betrayal".<sup>32</sup> Frederic Jameson examines this issue using the concept of pastiche. As he puts it, „The great modernisms were predicated on the invention of a personal, private style, as unmistakable as your fingerprint, as incomparable as your own body”,<sup>33</sup> while postmodernism is an era of pastiche, which is “the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language”.<sup>34</sup> Obviously, body art and performance art are not artistic styles. Their aim is not to create a work that would reveal a unique vision of the world held by a particular human individual. However, they can be considered as the radicalization of the modernist principle. Each performer as an individual identity faces his/her recipients as “the mind incarnate.” From this point of view, Abramovic's use of citation or pastiche may seem an unforgivable apostasy, the hidden causes of which should be discovered by art critics. That is why Jones considers the reasons for such a decision. Her statements are in contrast with the artist's declaration, in which she emphasizes that she is present during every performance, even one that is a re-enactment of another artist's action – she is present as “the mind incarnate.” Revealing oneself in this case is not fundamentally different from the situation where the reference associated with citing is absent. The performance remains “(a)live” because of the psycho-physical presence of the performer. Therefore, we can say that performance animates even those kinds of artistic activities that have lost their life. If a reenacted performance can be viewed as putting on a mask, it is a mask that adheres to the face and adapts its features so that they resemble the wearer's

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<sup>31</sup> Cited after *ibidem*, p. 26.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. G. Sztabiński, *Eklektyzm a postmodernizm*, in: *Sztuka i estetyka po awangardzie a filozofia postmodernistyczna*, ed. A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, Instytut Kultury, Warszawa 1994, p. 27.

<sup>33</sup> F. Jameson, *Postmodernism and Consumer Society*, in: *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Hal Foster, Bay Press, Seattle Washington 1983, p. 114.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

own facial structure. Such a pastiche ceases to be empty, as Jameson put it, and takes on the whole "I" of the performer.

I believe that if we trust Abramović's declaration, it may yield some interesting insights on how to overcome the artistic crisis of postmodernism, which is becoming increasingly discernible. The liberating power of creative nomadism, of the assimilation of the foreign, giving up the search for novelty and originality, freedom from the tyranny of unity and cohesion seems to be running out. At the same time a mechanical return to the questioned modernist values is impossible. This is why I interpret Abramović's suggestions expressed in *Seven Easy Pieces* and *The Artist is Present* as using the power of performance to animate even such varieties of artistic activities that are intended to appear in situations where the subject has died or was considered dead. Thus conceived neomodernism would not be restoring the forms of action, but their effects. Not superficial, stylistic effects, but the shaping forces, whose power has not expired, contrary to what may seem. One example would be the exhibition *The Artist is Present*, in which the artist's physical and psychological presence lent a performative quality to the different kinds of presented documentation and objects.

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## PERFORMANCE ART I PERFORMATYWNOŚĆ A PROBLEM NEOMODERNIZMU (streszczenie)

Sztuka ciała i performance art często omawiane są łącznie, a nawet utożsamiane. Uważana analiza tych tendencji artystycznych oraz towarzyszących im komentarzy teoretycznych skłania jednak do zaznaczenia dzielących je różnic. Body art okazuje się wówczas zjawiskiem wykazującym istotne związki z modernistycznym pojmowaniem sztuki w duchu zbliżonym do koncepcji Clementa Greenberga, natomiast performance art założenia te w znacznym stopniu odrzuca. Także estetyka performatywna rozwijana przez Erikę Fischer-Lichte z jednej strony wywodzi się z zakwestionowania modernistycznego esencjalizmu artystycznego, choć jednocześnie akcentuje rolę „radykalnej koncepcji obecności” artysty.

W artykule szczegółowej analizie poddane zostały dwa nowe dokonania twórcze Mariny Abramović, artystki łączonej zarówno ze sztuką ciała i performance art: *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005) oraz *The Artist is Present* (2010). Wskazana niejednoznaczność performance art została w nich zradykalizowana. Łączą one modernistyczne zaakcentowanie autentyczności, obecności, esencjalizmu z postmodernistycznym cytowaniem. Opisywane przez Frederica Jamesona zjawisko pastiszu przekształcone zostało w taki sposób, że przestaje on być pusty, a przejmuje pełnię „ja” performerów.

Pojęcie „neomodernizm” używane jest dziś w różnych znaczeniach. Omówiona w artykule problematyka sugeruje możliwość pojmowania go jako przekroczenia opozycji właściwych dla modernizmu i postmodernizmu, przy jednoczesnym zachowaniu pewnych cech obu tych nurtów myślenia o sztuce.

**Słowa kluczowe:** body art, performance art, performatywność, modernizm, postmodernizm, neo-modernizm, Marina Abramović.

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## NEOMODERNIST DIGITAL PAINTING

**Abstract:** Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we can observe a kind of revival of specifically modernist features, characteristics, and aims in the art practice which focuses on creating images. I presume that digital painting is neomodernist in its essence, and in the present article I will try to demonstrate that it can be understood within the characteristics of modernism, as Clement Greenberg has defined them. Digital painting continues to question the medium used by the critical investigation, by focusing on the flatness and on the aesthetic features devoid of any representational sense, and by its drive to touch the untouchable and present the unrepresentable – that is the absolute. As a case study, I present the works of the Polish artist Zbigniew Romanczuk and the Turkish artist Yaman Kayihan, who represent two different ways of creating digital paintings.

**Keywords:** digital painting, geometric abstraction, modernism, postmodernism, neomodernism, aesthetic values, medium, technologies.

### Introduction

An inquiry into neomodernism in contemporary art theory is of special interest, because we can observe a kind of revival of especially modernist features, characteristics, and aims in art practices which focus on creating pictures; at the same time there is a profound lack of reflection on neomodernism. The reason for this deficit may be that for the last half-century philosophical, aesthetic, and artistic discussions were focusing on postmodernism. Best defined by Francois Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, neomodernism is based in fluid narrative language games with neither objective



end nor aim.<sup>1</sup> Fluidity and inconsistency, devoid of any metanarration, have become popular theoretical ideas since the 1960s. Since that time they have also been implemented in artistic practice, with the appearance of Pop art in post-war America considered as the point of demarcation.

The new postmodern mindset has appeared to a large extent as a result of disappointment with the modernist promise of creating a rational and just world, and in the face of the tragic events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (in part a negative effect of the rationalisation and technologization of the human lives on a large social scale.)<sup>2</sup> Postmodernism has loosened the tight rationale binding each individual to a coherent identity characteristic of specific social, ethnic, national, political, sex, etc. groups. It has also freed us from the constant search for the pure origin of ideas, words, things, people, and all other wordly phenomena which we can conceptualize. Starting with Nietzsche as the originator, passing through Foucault, Derrida, Baudrillard, Lyotard, and finishing with Deleuze's and Guattari's writings from the 1980s – postmodernism had been decomposing, deconstructing, and denaturalizing our ideas, concepts, and ways of understanding. At the end of this deconstructivist work, hardly anything remains: a handful of puzzles, a bunch of pieces of kaleidoscope. These pieces are often considered flexible, to be assembled as we want in the concrete moment, and are neither assigned nor formative to any specific and important meanings. Temporary consensus on acceptable forms was thought to be all that we needed; however, it is noteworthy that a seemingly unordered kaleidoscope turns out to be a special kind of order – 'chaosmos,' as Deleuze and Guattari call it.<sup>3</sup> In this we can see a certain shift, from proliferating 'chaos' to 'cosmos,' which is defined (or rather, structured) by organic-like rhythm. A broader understanding of intersectional postmodernism should be developed in a separate study, as it contains various trends: an attempt to reinstitute traditional rationalism (Kantian or Fregean analyses being done, for example, by Robert Brandom<sup>4</sup> and John McDowell<sup>5</sup> from Pittsburgh School, in reference to pragmatism), as

<sup>1</sup> See: J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Transl. from French by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Foreword by Fredric Jameson. Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 10. Manchester University Press, Manchester 1984 (originally published in 1979 by Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris).

<sup>2</sup> For further discussion about the problems of post war leftism and radical artistic practice, after noticing how the Age of Reason was exploiting the masses, see for example: N. Jachec, *Modernism, Enlightenment Values, and Clement Greenberg*, in: Oxford Art Journal, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1998), p. 128. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1360617>

<sup>3</sup> G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Transl. and foreword by Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1987 (originally published in 1980 by Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris), p. 313.

<sup>4</sup> See for ex.: Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> See for ex.: John McDowell, *Mind and World*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

well as an attempt to constitute a new version of rationalism not in reference to Newtonian perspective, but rather to quantum physics (in up-to-date new materialism as developed by Karen Barad, among others.)<sup>6</sup> I must limit my considerations here to just one direction, and I want to investigate a symptomatic turn observable in contemporary art, the shift from postmodern to neomodern painting.

### The exhaustion of postmodernism in art practice

Postmodern art focused on kaleidoscopic modes of presentation, deprived of any specific sense, with individual senses and/or meanings in each encounter with an art piece – Pop art, Neo-Dada, Conceptual art, Minimalism, Video art, Performance, and Installation art, among others – in artistic practice, painting had been slowly relegated to the outskirts. If images or pictures were being created, with increasing frequency they were videos (later multi-channel ones) offering more possibility of unexpected juxtapositions devoid of any narration or fixed meaning. Therefore, hardly any aesthetic reflection has been undertaken concerning the image, entailing a paradox: in the times after the *iconic turn*, as proclaimed by W.J.T. Mitchell<sup>7</sup> – when we are now in our everyday lives immersed in the iconsphere – aestheticians, philosophers, and art theorists have not been talking much about images. Perhaps this is because while the “iconic turn” was announced within visual culture studies, in philosophical aesthetics and art theory there was a recognized “performative turn”, closely linked with Lyotard’s postmodern definition, focusing on the enactment and realization of meaning through performance (specifically in reference to John Austin’s performatives.)<sup>8</sup> The phenomena of performance, performative arts, performativity, performing, etc. not only forces us to recognize the transformative power of art, but also makes us focus on utterances, and on how their “effect upon the referent coincides with its enunciation”.<sup>9</sup> Discussions on the performative turn highlight the different postmodern forms of art introduced since Avant-garde;<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See for ex.: Barad, Karen (2007). *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press 2007.

<sup>7</sup> The ‘iconic turn’ or ‘pictorial turn’ – the second term was the one used first by W.J.T. Mitchell in his text “The Pictorial Turn”, published for the first time in 1992 in *ArtForum* and two years later in the book *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London 1994 (*The Pictorial Turn*, pp. 11-34.)

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>10</sup> *Zwrot performatywny w estetyce*. Edited by Lilianna Bieszczad, Wydawnictwo Libron, Kraków 2013.

I do not claim that the two turns I have mentioned are radically opposed or that we should accept one while denying the other. In my article „Obraz – akt wizualny“ („A Picture – A Visual Act“) I have argued that reflection on images and pictures should be included within a performative perspective, attempting to answer the questions of the performativity of the image, but I cannot develop that point at length here.<sup>11</sup> The neglect of painting within the postmodernist focus (in various forms) has led many artists to abandon the creation of pictures, due in part to their disillusionment: if the painter cannot represent anything in the world faithfully, if he or she cannot convey any specific meaning, if there is no origin and no aim, the activity of painting may seem to have no sense. At most one can start creating images which cannot be seen, either in a material form,<sup>12</sup> or without it (imaging images<sup>13</sup>). This is the dead end of postmodernism in artistic practice, especially in painting – the imagined, not externalized, image. Fortunately, this dead end of postmodernism in painting is not the dead end of painting as such, and in the last several decades we can observe some revival of painting in a manner which trespasses the postmodern limits. These artistic currents (which may refer to modernism, although not in an innocent and naive way, but rather after the experience of postmodernism) are geometric abstractionism and digital painting. I will not occupy myself here in detail with geometric abstractionism as considered by – among others – Paulina Sztabinska in her paper *Czy można dziś mówić/pisać o abstrakcji geometrycznej?*,<sup>14</sup> not because I neglect its importance, but because I would like to include it into the broader picture, treating it as a step towards digital painting and sometimes a very important part of it. I conjecture that digital painting is neomodernist in

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- <sup>11</sup> A. Łukaszewicz-Alcaraz, *Obraz – akt wizualny* in: *Zwrot performatywny w estetyce*. Edited by Lilianna Bieszczad..., pp. 321-332. I am arguing from the point of view of philosophical anthropology and phenomenology of Hans Belting, Georges Didi-Huberman, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty; however it can also be followed via the lines drawn from W. J. T. Mitchell, because his perspective supports a strong argument on the performative, active, agent-like power of pictures. Similarities exist on the Polish theoretical scene, see also Konrad Chmielecki (*Images are living things. Problematyka performatywności w studiach kultury wizualnej*, in: *Zwrot performatywny w estetyce*. Edited by Lilianna Bieszczad..., pp. 285-304.)
- <sup>12</sup> One example is of a canvas covered with chlorophyll and rolled so that it cannot be unrolled and seen, by Katarzyna Nawrocka, a student of painting in the studio of Prof. Wojciech Łazarczyk at the Department of Painting and New Media, Academy of Art in Szczecin in the academic year 2014-2015.
- <sup>13</sup> This can be done in various different ways starting from creating visions embodied just in human bodies until creating visual bio-environments experienced visually. See: *Węcej niż obraz*. Edited by Eugeniusz Wilk, Magdalena Zdrodowska, Ewelina Twardoch, Michał Gulik, Wydawnictwo Nukowe Katedra, Gdańsk 2016.
- <sup>14</sup> P. Sztabinska, „Czy można dziś mówić/pisać o abstrakcji geometrycznej?“, in: *Dyskurs. Pismo Naukowo-Artystyczne Akademii Sztuk Pięknych we Wrocławiu*, pp. 194-210. Dyskurs online: <http://www.asp.wroc.pl/dyskurs/Dyskurs4/PaulinaSztabinska.pdf>

essence, and that it often (though not always) includes geometric abstractionism as its synchronic or diachronic part.

### Towards "digital painting"

The term "digital painting" is somewhat problematic; some authors, such as Craig Staff, tend to trace the affinities between paintings – mostly understood in a traditional way – and "digital" techniques, trying to avoid the term "digital painting". Staff differentiates between paintings and the "digital," showing either the use of technology "as an instrument by which imagery can be generated," as is the case with Monique Prieto,<sup>15</sup> or as a critical usage of "*ideas* of the digital and a related set of thematics this heralds," as with Cheyney Thompson, among others.<sup>16</sup> Staff does not agree to accept the term "digital painting" to refer to images created within a computer and subsequently printed or displayed (like the work of John F. Simon Jr.) being of the opinion that painting is resistant to different strategies of appropriation.<sup>17</sup> I consider Staff's belief too conservative, observing how contemporary artists tend to understand their artistic practice as "digital painting," using an alternative medium to physical canvas and paints.<sup>18</sup> I decide to follow this line, and to distinguish digital painting differently, based on the form of exposition of the painting, which can be either printed on a physical substratum or displayed. In both cases I focus on the critical approach to the digital medium by artists using digital methodologies. The critical approach to the digital medium is one mark of the return to the medium in a modernist sense, as Clement Greenberg put it. I will try to show that digital painting can be understood as a continuation of modernist painting, along a line drawn by Greenberg. This argument goes against the sort of analysis conducted by Sztabińska, who regards geometric abstraction as either neoconstructivist or an abandonment of modernism.<sup>19</sup> I disagree with this alternative, as modernist painting reaches beyond the scope of Russian or international constructivism. The impression of this limitation may be perhaps especially felt in Poland because of the influential writings of Andrzej Turowski, who was occupied especially

<sup>15</sup> C. Staff, *After Modernist Painting: The History of Contemporary Practice*, I.B. Tauris, London 2013, p. 149.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, p. 149.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 165.

<sup>18</sup> Vinci M. Weng, „Re-imagining painting in digital fiction. Time, colour, and space in recent experimental moving images“, in: *Procedia Computer Science* 3(2011), p. 710 doi: 10.1016/j.procs.2010.12.117.

<sup>19</sup> P. Sztabińska, „Czy można dziś mówić/pisać o abstrakcji geometrycznej?“, p. 208.

with Polish constructivism.<sup>20</sup> On this point, I am closer to Staff, who investigates “the extent to which Greenberg’s claims with regard to painting still continue to inform both its production and reception (...) [and] how the physicality of painting, an *idée fixe* of Greenbergian aesthetics, continues to be staged approximately half a century later.”<sup>21</sup>

For these reasons I take as case studies examples from Poland and abroad, which may in some cases lean towards geometric abstraction, although not hand-painted on canvas. The examples I favor focus on the flat surface of the picture (1), use color non-figuratively in the purely aesthetic perspective (2), investigate their technologically defined medium in a critical way (3), and aim to the certain form of understanding the absolute (4). Before I examine the artworks, I would like to recall, in a general scheme, Greenberg’s thought on modernist painting as my basis to demonstrate the neomodernist character of contemporary digital painting.

### Clement Greenberg’s definition of modernist painting

Clement Greenberg dated modernist painting, radically different from traditional painting, to the early Renaissance in Italy; the Giotto and Florentine Schools aimed to represent reality as best as possible. Observing the historical trajectory of painting we have to agree with Greenberg that painting, until the discovery of photography in 1839, had been creating increasingly faithful and illusionistic representations with the use of achievements in mathematical perspective, and with the elaboration of color shading and modelling (which, in the Baroque, had reached peak excellence in Dutch painting.) However, since approximately the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, photography has taken over the function of accurately representing the world, and so has superseded painting and other representational arts – such as drawing or sculpture – questioning their status, function, and form beyond the representational function of realism. Painting, losing its representational function, had to ask itself: what is the reason for its existence? What is its objective? What is its specific nature? Greenberg, best known and important defender of modernism, did not define modernism as such. In his article „Necessity of ‘Formalism,’” he wrote that

Modernism is as specific a historical phenomenon as Romanticism was, but it doesn’t represent nearly so specific an attitude, position, or outlook.

<sup>20</sup> A. Turowski, *Konstruktywizm polski – próba rekonstrukcji nurtu (1921-1934)*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk 1981, p. 23.

<sup>21</sup> C. Staff, *After Modernist Painting...*, p. 150.

(...) In the context of what is signified by terms like Romanticism and Classicism when they are used *unhistorically*, Modernism as a whole distinguishes itself by its inclusiveness, its openness, and also its indeterminateness.<sup>22</sup>

Greenberg tried to define Modernism as a "movement," less as a program than as a kind of bias or tropism: bias towards aesthetic value; aesthetic value as such and as an ultimate.<sup>23</sup> This clarification can be understood in relation to the ideas of Ludwig Wittgenstein from the time of his *Philosophical Investigations*.<sup>24</sup> He observes that the term "modernism" shares the situation of the term "art," which we use despite being unable to universally define it, point to the objects and phenomena specific to art, state that something is or is not art basing on the unstable and unclear "family resemblances."

Clarifying the idea of modernism, Greenberg refers to history and points at some characteristic (but not exclusive) features of this movement; the most important characteristic features of modernist painting are its focus on the ideal of "pure art" and its basis in technical innovation. These two basic features can be analyzed more precisely and in their interrelation, because the explicit drive to innovate in art resulted in work far removed from representation and the return to the medium of painting as such, with its definitively characteristic qualities, especially its flatness.<sup>25</sup> The flatness of painting is its special characteristic that it does not share with arts like sculpture, dance, music, literature, or others. Although it allows the creation of visual illusions or of three-dimensional objects, this ability ceased to be necessary or anticipated since photography has taken over this function. Therefore painting is free to occupy itself with purely painterly qualities, becoming technologically and materially defined; it explores the possibilities of the painterly medium, effected with different ways of distributing the paint on the canvas, with changes in the composition underlying the importance of the painterly activity as such.<sup>26</sup> (Of

<sup>22</sup> C. Greenberg, *Necessity of 'Formalism'*, in: *New Literary History*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Modernism and Postmodernism: Inquiries, Reflections, and Speculations (Autumn, 1971), The Johns Hopkins University Press, p.171. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/468386>

<sup>23</sup> C. Greenberg, *Necessity of 'Formalism'*, p.171.

<sup>24</sup> See: L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Transl. by G. E. M. Anscombe, MacMillan, New York 1953.

<sup>25</sup> See: C. Greenberg, *Modernist Painting*, in: *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. 4, *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, edited by John O'Brian, The Chicago University Press, London 1993.

<sup>26</sup> „If modernism started by impressionists was based on the return to color, then this turn was paying attention to the technique used in putting the color onto canvas. The mode of laying out the paint was influencing the effect obtained, which in turn, by means of the technique used by Matisse and the change in the composition he made – from centripetal to centrifugal,

course these innovative ways of distributing paint and treating the painterly medium, as for instance by Eduard Manet, have inferred a lot of gripes and criticism, e.g. by Fromentin in the 1970s.).<sup>27</sup> For this reason Greenberg argues that modernism was "a reviver of an aesthetic quality," which moves to the fore.

The refreshment of the medium, which Greenberg mentions in reference to painting, is also true in reference to other types of art such as poetry, prose, music, or architecture. If faithfulness and informative-ideological functions are not the base for the existence of painterly images, the answer to the question about their purpose is in their medium and aesthetic values. This problem has been elaborated from another point of view, the political one. Especially after World War II, many debates focused on the question of how to be a non-Marxist socialist; Greenberg had been a socialist, however there is a difference between the Greenberg of the 1930s and of the 1960s.<sup>28</sup> In his later writings Greenberg argues, alongside other English-language scholars, that: "[w]hile the social and historical conditions of art production are not altogether ignored, they are however, 'relegated' (...) [and] formal concerns maintained a priority over, and an autonomy from, external and political ones."<sup>29</sup> There is much more which can be recalled about Greenberg's analysis of modernism and modernist painting, however that is not the point of this article. I would rather show, relying on Greenberg's clarification of modernist painting, that today we can observe a definite return of its most important characteristics. I will not refer here to the broader picture of the modernism's revival as such, but I would like to illustrate how contemporary digital painting in its different forms can be reasonably understood as neomodernist in Greenberg's sense of the term "modernism," or rather, "modernist painting." The focus on a technologically and materially defined medium is one of the paths I want to follow, the other relates to the purely aesthetic qualities removed from any informative and/or ideological function. These two paths converge, but I try to show that after the decline of postmodernism, which offered meaning at best in the form of a game, the time

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has affected the accentuation of the activity itself and of its technical side too, as in the case of Jackson Pollock's work" (from Iwona Kwiecień, „Obrona modernizmu”, in: *Estetyka i Krytyka* 15/16 (2/2008-1/2009), *DIALOGI I DIAGNOZY*, p. 318 (translated into Polish by A. L. A.).

- 27 Fromentin was a painter inspired by Delacroix, creating romantic works with enhanced colouring, also a writer and the one of the first "art critics" occupied with classical art works and with the Golden Dutch Age - *The old masters of Belgium & Holland*, Transl. by Mary C. Robbins, Boston and New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1896 (Originally published in 1876).
- 28 Nancy Jachec, „Modernism, Enlightenment Values, and Clement Greenberg”, in: *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1998), Oxford University Press, p. 124. Stable URL: <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1360617>>
- 29 Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, Editorial preface to "Modernist Painting", *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* Blackwell Publishers: London, 1992, pp. 685-686.



has come to reflect on contemporary pictures (and images), their media, and art as such in a more rational way.

### The characteristics of digital painting

Digital painting is a recent form of creating pictures and making art. It has appeared alongside the proliferation of computer technologies, which were also adopted by artists. It is not homogenous and there are at least two different ways of its creation. One method combines the traditional painterly medium – paints and canvas – with computer software so that the image is created first in the computer (in different forms) and then transferred to canvas with the use of highly advanced printers. The other way involves the use of virtual paints, brushes, colors, and canvas, leading to the creation of digital artwork. Both these methods of creating digital paintings focus on their medium, whether physical-electronic or just electronic,<sup>30</sup> exploring its potential and refreshing the aesthetic qualities of painting that had not been a point of interest for the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In order to be precise in explaining digital painting in terms of neomodernism, I will focus on two case studies concerning different forms of digital painting which I have mentioned above. Zbigniew Romanczuk, a Polish artist, can be placed within the realm of digital painting that combines physical and electronic matter, creating images in the computer and transferring them to canvas; Yaman Kayihan, a Turkish artist, creates completely digital artworks which cannot be displayed or seen without a computer and a projector.

### Zbigniew Romańczuk

Zbigniew Romanczuk is a contemporary Polish painter, who grew up from abstractionist painting, passing through expressionist abstraction<sup>31</sup> and geo-

<sup>30</sup> I agree with Polish philosopher Michał Ostrowicki (alias: Sidey Myoo) who prefers to use the term „electronic” reality, rather than „virtual,” because it eschews the implicated opposition to „real”. If we talk about „electronic” reality we acknowledge that it exists, that it is real. See Ostrowicki, M. O Pojęciu Wirtualności (On the Concept of Virtuality), in: *Wirtualne Realis. Estetyka w epoce elektroniki*, 15–19. Kraków: Universitas.

<sup>31</sup> There are two monographs dedicated to Zbigniew Romanczuk’s art. One is bilingual: *Wizualne reprezentacje. Zbigniew Romanczuk / Visual Representations. Zbigniew Romanczuk*, edited by Lech Karwowski, Muzeum Narodowe w Szczecinie, Szczecin 2013; and the other is dedicated to his more recent works: *Nowe pola obrazowania. Cyfrowe malarstwo na przykładzie Grid System Zbigniewa Romańczuka*, edited by Joanna Szczepanik, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Sztuki w Szczecinie, Szczecin 2015.

metric abstraction. Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century he has explored how technology and culture affect an image, the autonomy of an image, as well as the material, structure, and perception of a digital image.<sup>32</sup> He started by editing photographic images, altering their color, contrast, composition, and the juxtaposition of visual layers in a computer, in order to obtain abstract images. The result is an impression of a piece of nature, like a sea of delicate flowers, or a shaded countryside road. These digitally obtained images were printed out on large canvases and titled *Nature of an Image* (*Natura Obrazu*).



Ill 1 Zbigniew Romańczuk from the series: *Nature of an Image*, 2010

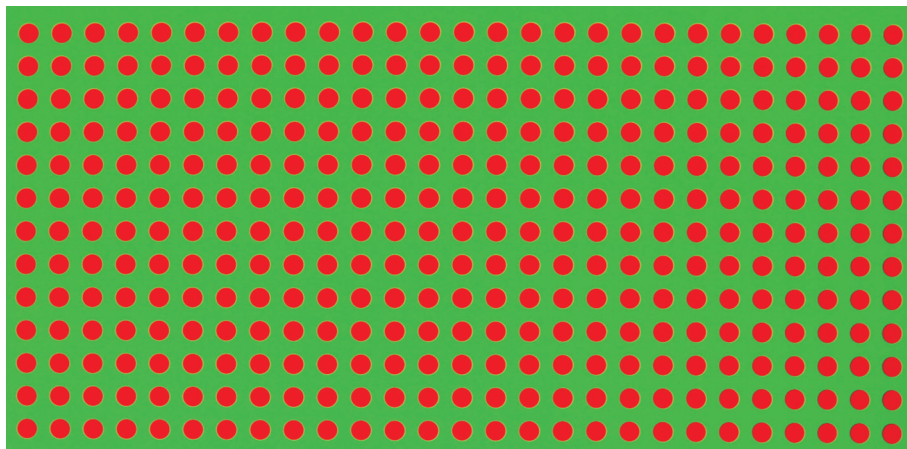
The next stage of artistic investigation into the nature of the image brought Romanczuk to artistically consider digital matter and ways of perceiving it. In another piece,<sup>33</sup> I have deeply analyzed the way to understand Romanczuk's paintings from that period (2010-2013) as a phenomenological investigation, as *epoche* conducted not with linguistic, but with artistic means, a possibility of what was first explicitly signaled by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in relation to Cezanne's paintings<sup>34</sup> and is now being recalled by – among others – Lambert

<sup>32</sup> The works belonging to that series have been displayed at many exhibitions, including: *Edited Images at the National Museum in Szczecin* (2013); *Spatial Screens* at the Gallery of Schloss Bröllin, Germany (2013); *Singularity of Image I* at Gallery ZPAP in Gdańsk (2014); *Singularity of Image II* at MS Gallery in Wakayama, Japan (2015); and *Moving Images* at the Gallery Profil CKZ in Poznań (2016).

<sup>33</sup> A. Łukaszewicz Alcaraz, "Forms of Visual Perception and Ontology of Image: Formal Aesthetics on Geometric Abstraction in Painting, on an Example of Zbigniew Romańczuk's Works", first presented during V Meeting of the Organization of Phenomenological Organizations, 08-12 December 2014, Murdoch University, Perth, Australia; now in print in the proceedings in the phenomenological series of Zeta Books.

<sup>34</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind", transl. by Carleton Dallery. In *The Primacy of Perception, and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History, and Politics*, Edited by James Edie. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, p. 21.

Wiesing.<sup>35</sup> In his next series, *Geometry of Color* (*Geometria Koloru*) Romanczuk based his creation on modular form and on the psychophysiological knowledge of human perception, not referring to any specific representation. Purely abstract forms using afterimages and other optical illusions tend to focus our attention on purely aesthetic experience, understood in a way going back to the idea of *aesthesis* rather than to classical categories of beauty. This is also why his endeavours can be readily compared with impressionism (especially divisionism) from one side, and with op-art (focused on optical illusions) from the other. This artistic practice fits Greenberg's analysis of modernist painting, pointing at modernism's "heightened sensitivity of the picture plane [which] may no longer permit sculptural illusion, or *trompe-l'oeil*, but it does and must permit optical illusion."<sup>36</sup> However, the interests of the Polish painter go beyond pure impression and optical illusions for their own sake, as he asks about the modes of perception of digital imagery outside representation, and about its mode of being – that is, about the ontology of the digital image. When a viewer concentrates on the form of Romanczuk paintings, for instance painting No. 5 (2013), showing regularly distributed red circles on a green background, he or she perceives a "disappearing image," the afterimages of red circles forming green circles of a different hue even after the viewer is no longer looking at the painting. This gives the effect of a picture flickering in perception, a similar



Ill 2. Zbigniew Romańczuk from the series *Geometry of Color*, 2013.

<sup>35</sup> L. Wiesing, *Widzialność obrazu. Historia i Perspektywy estetyki formalnej*, Translated by K. Krzemieniowa, Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa. 2008, p. 313.

<sup>36</sup> C. Greenberg, *Modernist Painting*, op.cit.

experience to a digital image on a screen. It hypnotizes the viewer. At this stage of investigation Romanczuk reaches the level of the pixel, the basic modular part of the digital image perceived by the viewer.

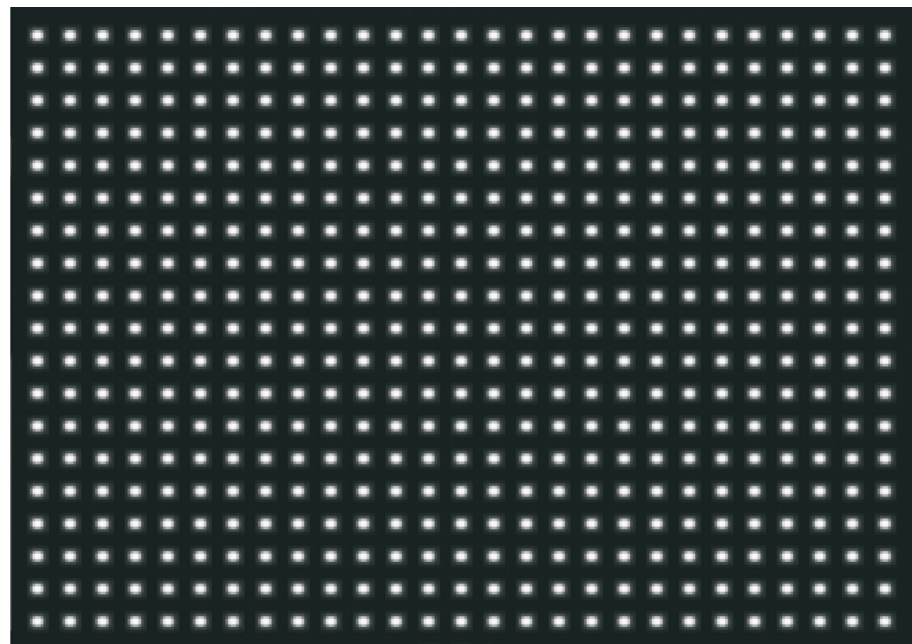
In his most recent exhibition, Romanczuk takes just a small fragment of one of his paintings from his "Geometry of Color," painting No. 6 (a black-white-grey grid) and enlarges it to the size of an autonomous image, showing its record in binary code. In that way he has constructed a picture from regularly positioned numbers, starting from {2, 2, 2} through {95, 95, 95}: digitally encoded hues from nearly black to grey. Every pixel carries information on the color, encoded in the sum of three elements: red (R), green (G), and blue (B). Each pixel is defined by these three numbers. For example a completely white pixel is defined as {255, 255, 255}, and a black one as {0, 0, 0}.<sup>37</sup> In this, Romańczuk goes beyond our (superficial) perceptions to the mode of surpassing the perceived reality. This line of artistic investigation shows his drive towards enabling phenomenal reality, though it is not presentable in our ordinary life, according to Greenberg's understanding of the absolute as neither religious nor spiritual.<sup>38</sup>

Romanczuk's digital painting is therefore a mixture of traditional painting, with the use of paints and canvas, and technical computer machinery, electronic operations. By these means Romanczuk explores the possibilities of his medium in both its historical forms. His exploration is, importantly, technologically mediated and defined, concentrated on innovation and research with epistemic aims (to understand human perception of digital imagery and its mode of existence.) He focuses on the flat, limited space of the painting, surpassing imitations of three-dimensional reality and trying to reach the mode of being as such. From this point of view I claim that Romanczuk's digital paintings fall into the category of neomodernism and are defined by characteristically modernist features as pointed at by Clement Greenberg, i.e. a critical return to the medium and its flatness, a focus on technologically mediated innovation, the purely aesthetic value of art, and on the 'absolute,' understood as the essence of the being of electronic reality.

<sup>37</sup> In the computer memory these numbers are recorded in binary code, while programmers, in order to avoid writing many numbers (as it is in binary code) use a hexadecimal system, in which there appear numbers from 0 to F, where {F, F} equals {255, 255, 255}.

<sup>38</sup> C. Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*, Beacon Press, Boston 1989 (originally published in 1961), p. 6.





III 3. Zbigniew Romańczuk from the series *Geometry of Color*, 2013

[illegible]

III 4. Zbigniew Romańczuk from the series *Digital Code*, 2016

## Yaman Kayihan

Yaman Kayihan, contemporary Turkish artist from Ankara, creates a different kind of digital paintings from Romanczuk; the computer is necessary not only for the creation of her paintings but also for their exposition, or rather, projection. Kayihan has been digitally painting, like Romanczuk, since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but she works with fluid abstract animation rather than optical illusions, impressions and numerics pervading her work beneath the perceived phenomena. Nevertheless, it is evident that Kayihan's general orientation is similar to Romanczuk's, as both are focused on innovative technologies used in art creation, especially painting. Kayihan herself calls her work kinetic pictures, but they are also explicitly analyzed as digital paintings, as Jale Erzen did in July 2016 during her presentation at the International Congress of Aesthetics in Seoul.<sup>39</sup> This analysis bears some similarity to the aforementioned definition in reference to self-understanding (by Taiwanese artist Vinci M. Weng, in his article "Re-imagining painting in digital fiction time, colour, and space...") although different from Craig Staff's understanding of John F. Simon Jr.'s work.<sup>40</sup> It is worth mentioning that all these pictures are animated digital images projected on a screen or LCD panels.

The art works of Kayihan are oriented toward purely aesthetic, painterly values. This is one case where digital imaging shows clearly how much more similar it is to painting than to photography, a stance taken by some philosophers nowadays, referring to the nature and status of technologically mediated imaging, starting with photography. One might remember here for example François Soulages, who, in the last sections of his book dedicated to the aesthetics of photography, argues that digital photography is a different mode of imaging than photography, due to its fluidity and uncertain indexality.<sup>41</sup> Another French theorist, André Rouillé, claims that "digital photography" is still being called "photography" only based on superficial similarities. It is already a different way of imaging, based not on indexality of physical and chemical matter, but on numeric code. This lack of indexality, along with an infinite number of possible transformations, in his opinion brings this form of creation much closer to a painting than to analog photography, due to its aesthetic values.<sup>42</sup> These opinions seem relevant and applicable to paintings by Romanczuk and Kayihan.

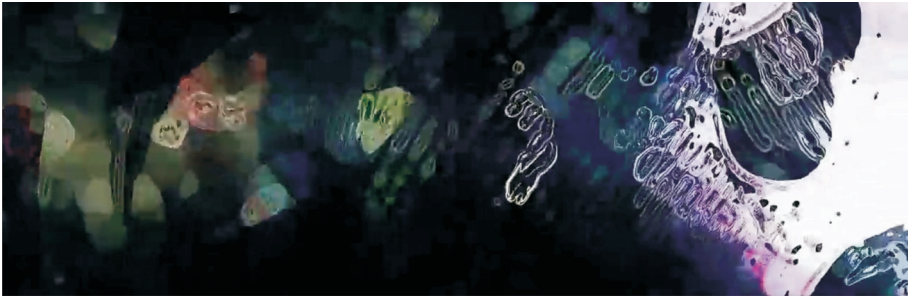
<sup>39</sup> Jale Erzen, *Digital Painting - a challenge to mass culture*, during the International Congress of Aesthetics, New Media session, Seoul National University, Seoul, 25th of July 2016.

<sup>40</sup> C. Staff, *After Modernist Painting...*, p. 157.

<sup>41</sup> F. Soulages, *Estetyka fotografii. Strata i zysk*, Translated into Polish by B. Mytych-Forajter, W. Frajter, Kraków 2007, p. 149-150.

<sup>42</sup> The opinion expressed during the series of lectures in Poland organized by A. Łukaszewicz Alcaraz on behalf of Academy of Art in Szczecin, 22-26 of November, 2011.

Kayihan's digital paintings are one to four minutes of digital animation accompanied by music, at first classical music (with a mysterious voice sometimes appearing, as in Kinetic picture 1) later replaced by experimental jazz (also sometimes digitally created.) The works have titles which appear in deliberately creative ways in the beginning and end of the painting. The time duration of the paintings marks the time of their perception, an extraordinary move. The time is not necessary to relay information, but is the time of contemplation, which bears some of the features of hypnosis. Approaching the "motion picture as a painting"<sup>43</sup> shows the double framing of the picture, by the physical frame of the display as well as by the time-frame. Within these frames Kayihan exhibits the phenomena she is interested in, the prime matter and its features, to which the use of innovative technologies can bring us closer: fluidity, radiance, oscillation of the first matter, of plasm or protoplasm that is self-forming and (photo)phosphorent. These interests are well exhibited in the names of her works, for example: „Kinetic picture 68: Self formation“, „Kinetic picture 58: Photophosphorescence“, „Kinetic picture 52: Radiance“, „Kinetic picture 54: Protoplasm“, „Kinetic picture 51: Oscillation“, „Kinetic picture 66: Fluid but fragile“, and many others. She visualizes the self-organization, oscillation, and radiance of the prime matter which is not human blood, but something much earlier („Kinetic picture 67: Not blood“) before its enclosure in the specific category of worldly things.

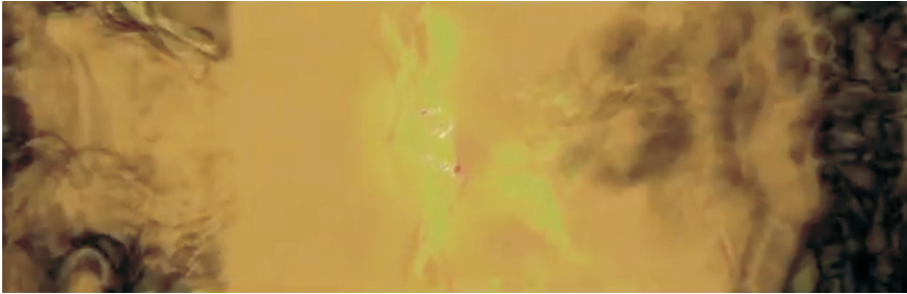


Ill 5. Yaman Kayihan, *Kinetic picture 67: Not blood*, (screen shot).

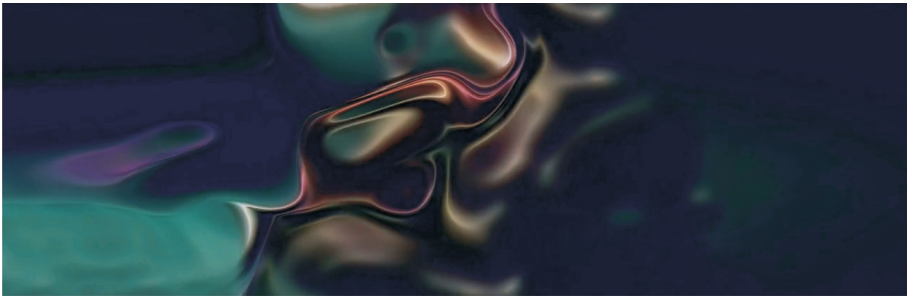
<sup>43</sup> Vinci M. Weng, *Re-imagining painting in digital fiction...*, p. 711.



The essential instability and fluidity of digital matter allows her first to recompose the representation (*Kinetic picture 48: Recomposed*), then to contemplate and reflect its liveliness beyond organic form. The only boundaries one can find in the plastic and open art works of the Turkish artist are the boundaries of time, which is the time of our perception, and the digital frame of the projection. The matter and its flux are permanently open. I claim that aesthetic reality and the presence of the absolute in that reality are simultaneous for Kayihan, as Greenberg noted in the case of modernist painting. Her work is that of an artist not imitating God, but treading a similar path, showing the process of formation of the prime matter.<sup>44</sup>



Ill 6. Yaman Kayihan, *Kinetic picture 48: Recomposed*, (screen shot)



Ill 7. Yaman Kayihan, *Kinetic picture 68: Self formation*, (screen shot)

Kayihan's works are therefore neomodernist at their heart. They investigate the possibilities of the digital medium to create purely aesthetic works, with no explicit informative value. Their epistemic input is on the side of the presentation, and not representation, of the fluid, digital matter as such. Innovation, technological

<sup>44</sup> C. Greenberg, *Art and Culture...*, p. 6.

determination, purely aesthetic features making themselves visible on the flat surface of the projection screen – all of these characteristics are again strictly neomodernist in Greenberg's sense of modernist painting. The drive to the absolute, to reach the prime matter beyond the boundaries of physical objects and beyond representation, is prominent in Kayihan's work, and serves also as the argument for its neomodernist definition. She suggests something not present in a phenomenal way, but existing underneath, which seems to be a kind of attempt to describe *the noumenon*; in doing so she precedes Lyotard's analysis of avant-garde endeavors in *The Sublime and the Avant-Garde*.<sup>45</sup> Kayihan's digital painting more closely approaches the unrepresentable absolute due to the features of digital images, still modernist in their essence, although they overcome the immobility of traditional painting. However, one may state, on the basis of Lyotard's writings, that in this way it loses the value of sublimity, due to the direct presentation of time.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

The presentation and analysis of modernism conducted by Greenberg allows us to understand not only the art of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>, but also contemporary digital painting developed since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which can be reasonably regarded as neomodernist because it is technologically defined, oriented toward "pure" aesthetic values, and critically approaching its medium. The critical approach to the medium of both traditional painting and technological media used to create digital painting allows it to present the unrepresentable either in non-phenomenal form as a record (digital code) or in its fluidity. It is not the absolute as such, as it is a created picture which is doublyframed – by the physical frame of the screen and/or by the time-frame of the animation. However, this confirms that Greenberg's claims about modernist painting are regaining their value<sup>47</sup> after the half century where its adequacy out of its historical context was hardly acknowledged.<sup>48</sup>

The digital art works created by Zbigniew Romańczuk and Yaman Kayihan examined in this article are but a fraction of digital art – the others mentioned

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<sup>45</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, *The Sublime and the Avant-Garde*, in: *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, Translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, Stanford University Press, Stanford California 1991, pp. 89-107 (Originally published in 1988 Editions Galilee as *L'Inhuman: Causeries sur le temps*).

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, p. 107.

<sup>47</sup> C. Staff, *After Modernist Painting...*, p. 150.

<sup>48</sup> Iwona Kwiecień, *Obrona modernizmu...*, p. 315.

include John F. Simon Jr. or Vinci M. Weng – arguably not paintings in a strict sense, because of the use of different technology for their creation and because of different material formats. If one wants to stick to a stricter way of understanding a painting, it does not change the main thesis of my article, which is that the contemporary digital means of creating images and pictures continues the line of modernist painting drawn by Clement Greenberg in its most essential characteristics. Elsewhere I argue that the difference in the material can draw the radical line dividing practices and objects – as in the case of analog and digital photography,<sup>49</sup> where the use of the term "photography" can be only metaphorical, relating to superficial visual features. However, we have to keep in mind the variations in time and the development of technology, compelling us to adopt unforeseen visions and to transform our concepts in unexpected ways. Therefore, it depends on us and on our interpretations what we decide to call digital art works, referring to photography and to painting; we may decide to base our definition on the physical substrate and its qualities, or rather on the form of their functioning in the human world.

Digital photography continues to shape our beliefs about the identities of different social groups and individuals, and on the world of our existence – as did analog photography, although the contemporary influence differs from the previous one.<sup>50</sup> Digital painting continues to question its medium by its critical investigation, focusing on the flatness and on the aesthetic features devoid of any representational sense, and by its drive to touch the untouchable and present the unrepresentable – that is the absolute. By these means, digital painting can be rightly claimed to be neomodernist – never mind if the term "painting" is used in a metaphorical or a straightforward manner.

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<sup>49</sup> For a broader version of the analysis see: A. Łukaszewicz Alcaraz, *Epistemologiczna rola obrazu fotograficznego*, Wywadnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warsaw 2014; a shorter one is found here: A. Łukaszewicz Alcaraz, *Epistemic Function and Ontology of Analog and Digital Images*, in: *Contemporary Aesthetics*, Vol. 13 (2015). <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=724>

<sup>50</sup> A. Łukaszewicz Alcaraz, *Epistemic Function and Ontology of Analog and Digital Images*.

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## NEOMODERNISTYCZNY CHARAKTER MALARSTWA CYFROWEGO (streszczenie)

Od początku XXI wieku obserwujemy odrodzenie specyficznych cech modernizmu w praktyce artystycznej zorientowanej na tworzenie obrazów. Twierdzę, że cyfrowe malarstwo jest w swojej istocie neomodernistyczne i w poniższym artykule postaram się wykazać, że można je rozumieć w kontekście charakterystyki modernizmu przedstawionej przez Clementa Greenberga. Cyfrowe malarstwo nadal podchodzi w sposób krytyczny do swojego medium, koncentrując się na płaskości i cechach estetycznych pozbawionych znaczenia przedstawieniowego, starając się dotknąć niedotykalne i przedstawić nieprzedstawialne – czyli Absolut. Jako studium przypadku posłużę się pracami polskiego artysty Zbigniewa Romańczuka oraz tureckiej artystki Yaman Kayihan, którzy prezentują dwa różne podejścia do tworzenia cyfrowych obrazów malarskich.

**Słowa kluczowe:** malarstwo cyfrowe, abstrakcja geometryczna, modernizm, postmodernizm, neo-modernizm, wartości estetyczne, medium, technologie.





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## THE POETICS OF MODERNISM IN THE GRAPHIC NOVEL. CHRIS WARE'S JIMMY CORRIGAN AS A NEOMODERNIST TEXT

**Abstract:** The present article seeks to analyze aspects of modernist poetics contributing to the unique, essentially neomodernist, aesthetics in Chris Ware's 2000 graphic novel *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*. Particular emphasis is placed on three aspects: (i) the status of the graphic novel as mass product/work of art in the context of Walter Benjamin's concept of "aura"; (ii) modernist architecture, and (iii) the modernist concept of time as non-linear and "subjective." First, I will address Benjamin's notion of "aura" and its importance for modernist aesthetics, which will allow me to analyze Chris Ware's explorations of the tensions between the mechanic and the unique. Next, I will turn to the role of modernist architecture in *Jimmy Corrigan*, which functions in the story as a sign of progress and is incorporated into the graphic novel's sequential structure. Finally, I will examine the notion of time present in the graphic novel and its links with modernist Bergsonian ideas of "duration." Ultimately, it will be demonstrated how Chris Ware adapts modernist techniques and themes into the genre of the graphic novel and thus complicates the graphic novel's postulated status of a postmodern text, proving that the poetics of modernism is a vital component of the contemporary poetics of the graphic novel.

**Keywords:** neomodernism, modernism, graphic novel, comics, Chris Ware, *Jimmy Corrigan*.

The graphic novel as a neomodernist text. Such a specification, at first sight, may seem surprising because the graphic novel as a genre and as a medium is very often seen as an inherently postmodern phenomenon, one which reuses and abuses old literary forms, combines them with visuals, and produces neo-teric hybrids. Indeed, Robert David Stacey has stated that "the rise of the graphic novel in the 1990s was part of the postmodern interest in the semiotic interaction of the visual and the verbal,"<sup>1</sup> while Jan Baetens considers the

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<sup>1</sup> R.D. Stacey, *Re: Reading the Postmodern*, The University of Ottawa Press, Ottawa 2010, p. 45.

graphic novel “to be a typically postmodern genre.”<sup>2</sup> Contemporary graphic novels, fundamentally products of the “pictorial turn”<sup>3</sup> defined in terms of the postmodern, postsemiotic, and postlinguistic, often question the very notion of literature, using such devices as irony, playfulness, and metafiction. W.J.T. Mitchell calls the graphic novel a “postmodern cartoon novel” and further observes that, for example,

*Maus* and *The Dark Knight* employ a wide range of self-reflexive techniques. *Maus* attenuates visual access to its narrative by thickening its frame story (...) and by veiling the human body at all levels of the visual narrative with the figures of animals (...). *The Dark Knight*, by contrast, is highly cinematic and televisual, employing the full repertoire of motion picture and video rhetoric while continually breaking frames and foregrounding the apparatus of visual representation.<sup>4</sup>

While graphic novels are firmly anchored in the postmodern aesthetics of deconstruction, as regards not only their formal aspects, but also the very concept of literary canon and “high art” (as texts which have their roots in popular comics), they also illustrate and inform the neomodernist tendencies in contemporary art and culture.

Indeed, as Monica Latham points out, postmodernist and neomodernist approaches should not be seen as competitors or alternatives that by definition rule one another out, but rather as trends that function concurrently. She notes that

Modernism therefore remains a vital impulse for today’s (...) fiction. Both postmodernists and neomodernists rework original modernist principles, commitments, and aesthetics; they dialogue with, revive, and extend their predecessors’ modernist heritage. (...) This implies a twenty-first century form of modernism, or, in other words, new and modern practices of engaging with formal modernist techniques.<sup>5</sup>

Contemporary graphic novels engage with their modernist literary and artistic heritage on many levels. Some authors, like Alison Bechdel in *Fun*

<sup>2</sup> J. Baetens, *Fun Home: Ithaca, Pennsylvania*, in: *Modernism Today*, ed. S. Houppermans et al., Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2013, p. 205.

<sup>3</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1994, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93-94.

<sup>5</sup> M. Latham, *A Poetics of Postmodernism and Neomodernism*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2015, p. 11-13.

*Home*,<sup>6</sup> openly revive and refer to modernist literature and modernist masters, including James Joyce and Francis Scott Fitzgerald,<sup>7</sup> while others, like David Small in *Stitches*,<sup>8</sup> explore the possibilities offered by the stream of consciousness and the interior monologue in the visual form. Indeed, as David Ball argues in his discussion of the “literary status” of the graphic novel,

[it] complicate[s] most conventional notions of modernism and post-modernism in twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature. (...) Contemporary graphic narratives’ characteristic ambivalence about their status as popular cultural productions repeats modernist anxieties about literary value that reemerge precisely at the moment graphic narratives are bidding for literary respectability.<sup>9</sup>

The graphic novel may thus be defined as both postmodernist and neo-modernist; it stems from popular comics, but it also embraces modernist literary conventions and formulas. One graphic novelist who engages with modernist techniques and themes in the most complex and intricate manner is Chris Ware. Apart from such characteristic features of modernist literature as “epistemological difficulty, moral ambiguity, formal experimentation, and a conspicuous rhetoric of literary failure,”<sup>10</sup> Ware also indulges in experimenting with the status of the graphic novel as a work that is simultaneously mass produced and unique, but he also references modernist architecture and experiments with the notion of time.

The present article seeks to present and analyze aspects of modernist poetics contributing to the unique, essentially neomodernist, aesthetics in Chris Ware’s 2000 graphic novel *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*.<sup>11</sup> Particular emphasis will be placed on three aspects, namely (i) the status of the graphic novel as mass product/work of art in the context of Walter Benjamin’s concept of the “aura” of the work of art; (ii) modernist architecture, and (iii) the modernist concept of time as discontinuous, non-linear, and “subjective.” First, I will address Benjamin’s notion of “aura” and its importance for modernist

<sup>6</sup> A. Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, Mariner Books, New York 2007.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of Modernist references in *Fun Home* see: J. Baetens, *Fun Home...*, p. 205-219 and A. Freedman, “Drawing on Modernism in Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*”, *Journal of Modern Literature* 2009, vol. 32, no 4, pp. 125-140.

<sup>8</sup> D. Small, *Stitches: A Memoir*, W.W. Norton, New York 2009.

<sup>9</sup> D. Ball, “Comics Against Themselves: Chris Ware’s Graphic Narratives as Literature”, in: *The Rise of the American Comics Artist: Creators and Contexts*, ed. P. Williams, J. Lyons, University Press Of Mississippi, Jackson 2010, p. 103.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 106.

<sup>11</sup> Ch. Ware, *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*, Jonathan Cape, London 2000.

aesthetics, which will allow me to analyze Chris Ware's explorations of the tensions between the mechanic and the unique in the graphic novel as regards the book's format and drawing style. Next, I will turn to modernist architecture in *Jimmy Corrigan*. It is presented as a sign of progress in the story and internalized as the organizing structure imposed on the sequential art of storytelling. Finally, I will examine the notion of time present in the graphic novel and its connections with modernist Bergsonian ideas of "duration" and "subjective time." Ultimately, it will be demonstrated how, thanks to the modernist techniques and features translated and adapted into the genre of the graphic novel, Chris Ware complicates the graphic novel's postulated status of a post-modern text and proves that the poetics of modernism is a vital component of the contemporary poetics of the graphic novel, which, as a work that combines the verbal and the visual, draws its modernist inspirations from a variety of sources, including philosophy, literature, and architecture. As a matter of fact, *Jimmy Corrigan* extends modernist innovations and revisits modernist "percepts of innovation, experimentation, creativity and artistic accomplishments."<sup>12</sup>

Published in 2000, *Jimmy Corrigan* is an award-winning graphic novel dealing with a difficult childhood, loss, loneliness, and a desperate need for love and understanding. The square and rectangular panels arranged in Mondrianesque grids depict the life of a thirty-six-year-old Jimmy Corrigan. Jimmy leads a solitary life in his hometown Chicago. He has a mundane office job, disrupted only by the frequent calls from his domineering mother. One day the protagonist receives a letter from his father and faces the difficult task of meeting him for the first time after years of abandonment. Jimmy travels from Chicago to a small town in Michigan and spends a Thanksgiving weekend with his father. Three storylines, that of Jimmy as a child, middle-aged Jimmy, and Jimmy's grandfather as a young boy (this part of the story is set during the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition), interweave throughout the nearly four hundred unmarked pages. The graphic novel was conceived as an intricate network of interconnecting storylines and, as such, may be regarded as informed by essentially modernist aesthetics. The story's graphic realization, however, adds still more depth to this initial concept of multiple interweaving plotlines, as it plays with the notions of originality, mechanical reproduction, and "aura."

The graphic novel and its progenitor, the comic book, are mainly associated with popular mass culture and "mechanical reproduction," but Ware has nevertheless managed to constructively engage with this heritage. Indeed, the reading of *Jimmy Corrigan* as a work that problematizes mass production is

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<sup>12</sup> M. Latham, *A Poetics...*, p. 11.

best investigated in the context of Walter Benjamin's "aura." In his now classic essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction",<sup>13</sup> Benjamin laid the foundations of modern aesthetics. The text reflects on how modern technological reproduction has changed "traditional" art and begins with Benjamin's discussion of such notions as originality, creativity, and genius. Benjamin points out that mass production influenced the world of images first via lithography, and then through photography and film. "Just as lithography virtually implied the illustrated newspaper," Benjamin writes, "so did photography foreshadow the sound film."<sup>14</sup> The effect of mass reproduction on the work of art is the loss of its "unique existence" and the devaluation of the status of the original.<sup>15</sup> The work of art loses its "aura" – its unique status of something "distant" and thus admirable. According to Benjamin, "reproduction as offered by picture magazines and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unarmed eye. Uniqueness and permanence are as closely linked in the latter as are transitoriness and reproducibility in the former."<sup>16</sup> Thus, modernism is seen as caught between the ideals of equality offered by the images circulating freely thanks to the modern modes of reproduction, yet at the price of the loss of their "aura," and the classical aesthetics concerned with elitism and autonomy.

Ware incorporates these different meanings of modernity in his work by skillfully exploring the tensions between reproducibility and uniqueness. *Jimmy Corrigan*, though truly a work of mechanical reproduction, first serialized in the *Newcity Chicago* newspaper and then sold in over 100,000 hardback copies,<sup>17</sup> resists and challenges the demands put forward by mass reproduction. To begin with, the format of the book is unique in itself. The page, a horizontal rectangle, is 6 and 1/2 inches tall and 8 inches wide, as opposed to the standard format of 10 and 1/8 inches by 6 and 5/8 inches used in most comic books and graphic novels.<sup>18</sup> The majority of the sequences is arranged horizontally, with two or three rows per page, yet from time to time the narrative deviates from this organizing principle and switches to a vertical format. The reader/viewer is thus required to turn the book around so that he or she can read the sequence,

<sup>13</sup> W. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in: *Illuminations*, ed. H. Arendt, Jonathan Cape, New York 1970, pp. 217-242.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 217.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, p. 218.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, p. 219.

<sup>17</sup> S. Rhoades, *A Complete History of American Comic Books*, Peter Lang, New York 2008, p. 189.

<sup>18</sup> As Ware himself observes, the decision to change the format of the book was a conscious choice to distance himself and his work from the format established by superhero comics and should thus be seen as significant in the interpretation of *Jimmy Corrigan* as "not-a-comic book." H. Chute, "Panel: Graphic Novel Forms Today: Charles Burns, Daniel Clowes, Seth, Chris Ware", *Critical Inquiry* 2014, vol. 40, no 3, p. 154.

which makes one actively engage with the work. The physicality of the graphic novel challenges the mass production models which one would like to enforce upon it and, consequently, strives to establish itself as a piece of handwork and craftsmanship. Indeed, as Thomas A. Bredthoft points out,

when Jimmy Corrigan was reprinted (...), it had a full set of new seeming-paratexts attached: brand new wrap-around artwork for the covers [which can be folded out and displayed as a poster – M.O.] and interior pages featuring selections from reviews (presented typographically) juxtaposed to a greatly reduced version of the artwork that first appeared on the interior of the hardcover's dust jacket (...).<sup>19</sup>

By emphasizing the non-standard physical materiality of the book, Ware plays with the notions of reproducibility and uniqueness. The author simultaneously explores two sides of modernism: one informed by machine-age aesthetics and the other informed by its elitist ideals. Although, as some critics claim, the defining modernist feature of contemporary graphic novels “is their continued desire to disassociate themselves from the mass media forms in which they were first produced,”<sup>20</sup> Ware is in fact much more nuanced in his approach. In a meaningful gesture, the artist addresses the notions of both “obscurity” and “reproduction” in two short paragraphs inserted on the inside of the book's cover. The postulated impenetrability of his work is ironically mocked<sup>21</sup> and the idea of reproduction is presented as a notion which conflates a number of both positive and negative meanings.<sup>22</sup> Thus Ware demonstrates that he is trying to absorb neither the populist nor the elitist version of modernism completely, but rather reworks the tensions, ideals, and contradictions present in both of them.

The exploration of similar themes can be found in Ware's approach to typography. On the one hand, Ware consistently uses hand-lettering in all word

<sup>19</sup> T.A. Bredthoft, “Comics Textual Production”, in: T.A. Bredthoft, *The Visible Text: Textual Production and Reproduction from Beowulf to Maus*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, pp. 147-148.

<sup>20</sup> D. Ball, *Comics Against...*, p. 106.

<sup>21</sup> The first lines of the paragraph devoted to obscurity read: “While it was not the intention of the author of this publication to produce a work which would in any way be considered “difficult,” “obscure,” or, even worse, “impenetrable,” (...) some readers, owing to an (entirely excusable) unfamiliarity with certain trends and fads which flow through the tributaries of today's “cutting-edge culture,” might not be suitably equipped to sustain a successful linguistic relationship with the pictographic theatre it offers.” Ch. Ware, *Jimmy...*, n.p.

<sup>22</sup> Ware inserts a short definition of “reproduce” which reads: “reproduce: to produce a counterpart, image, or copy of, or, to bring to mind again, as in a memory; to generate offspring, or, to undergo copying; to print, or to publish; to make valueless.” *Ibid.*, n.p.

balloons and captions corresponding to individual panels. These “signals” of the private, the unique, and the intimate, as the handwritten letters are to be interpreted,<sup>23</sup> are then confronted with the elegant “impersonal” lettering used on the book’s dust jacket and in the captions which provide connections between the respective panels with verbal clues such as “later,” “thus,” “and so,” or “a few minutes later.” Besides the mechanistic connotations, however, Ware’s lettering also evokes other associations. Its highly-stylized character brings to mind ideas of craftsmanship and nostalgia. Indeed, as Daniel Raeburn informs us, the artist “copied fruit, cigar and cosmetics labels in order to attain a proficiency, then a fluency, in the increasingly antique art of hand-lettering.”<sup>24</sup> In another meaningful gesture, Ware transforms the lettering associated with mass-produced newspaper advertisements into a unique work of art (he draws each letter by hand and does not use computers or ready-made fonts) and then turns it again into something that can be reproduced and circulated on a mass scale, yet retaining a slightly nostalgic aura.

The drawing style employed in *Jimmy Corrigan* also resonates with the different meanings of modernity explored by Ware. It is both craftsmanlike and mechanic,<sup>25</sup> charged with emotions and characterized by clean execution, signature and inspired by classic American comic strips from the early twentieth century, as well as the 1930s and 1940s. Indeed, Ware cites as his influences the early cartoon masters such as Frank King, George Herriman, Joe Shuster, Roy Crane, Ray Gotto, and Dick Calkins;<sup>26</sup> the contemporary classics, such as Art Spiegelman; but also Joseph Cornell,<sup>27</sup> Ernest Hemingway, Edward Hopper,

23 “[T]here is an intimacy to reading handwritten marks on the printed page,” Hillary Chute observes, “an intimacy that works in tandem with the sometimes visceral effects of presenting ‘private’ images.” H. Chute, *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*, Columbia University Press, New York 2010, p. 10.

24 D. Raeburn, *Chris Ware*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2004, p. 80.

25 The drawing and printing process is very time-consuming and arduous. The artist emphasizes that “It takes two days to write (draw) one strip, one day to ink it, and one day to color it. No one other than the fellow who photographs it and the printers – to whom I am weekly grateful – affect the outcome.” T. Littleton, *Popular Artifacts: An Interview with Chris Ware*, 2007, <<http://www.amazon.com/gp/feature.html?ie=UTF8&docId=128141>> [accessed 27 June 2016].

26 Ware confesses that he “came to prefer the earlier, more ideogrammatic cartooning of the thirties and forties (...). Their simplicity and awkwardness seemed more human and adaptable somehow.” J. Heer, “Interview with Chris Ware: The Art of Comics No. 2”, *The Paris Review* 2014, no. 210, <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6329/the-art-of-comics-no-2-chris-ware> [accessed 5 July 2016]. Jeet Heer discusses Ware’s cartoon and comic influences in detail in “Inventing Cartooning Ancestors: Ware and the Comics Canon” in: *The Comics of Chris Ware: Drawing is a Way of Thinking*, ed. D. Ball, M. Kuhlman, University of Mississippi Press, Jackson 2010, pp. 3-13.

27 The artist openly states that he “really love[s] Joseph Cornell, who [he] kind of think[s] kept this warmth and humanism alive through the whole twentieth century of not so warm art (...).” H. Chute, *Panel...*, 158.



and James Joyce.<sup>28</sup> Ware's varied and eclectic set of influences brings to mind Marianne Moore's engagement with the old masters, such as Dürer, paired with her admiration for avant-garde Cubist artists and popular American culture, or Joseph Cornell's combined interest in the Victorian era, Surrealism, Dada, Marcel Duchamp, but also popular culture, especially movies and film stars. Ware incorporates both popular and elitist influences and develops an idiosyncratic style which rejects the simplification and infantilization of traditional comics and the formal demands of traditional painting. Indeed, Ware alludes to modernist painting by reducing his style to the essentials, such as the line and flat color fields. The artist does not use perspective and essentially thinks of his work in terms of two-dimensional compositions limited and defined by the page, stating that he wants his drawings to be as "stylistically dead and flat" as possible for the sake of their utmost clarity.<sup>29</sup> This idea of reducing the page to its essentials and experimenting with the visual language of the graphic novel echoes Michel Fried's observations regarding modernist painting, inasmuch as

[w]hat the modernist painter can be said to discover in his work – what can be said to be revealed to him in it – is not the irreducible essence of *all* painting, but rather that which, at the present moment in painting's history, is capable of convincing him that it can stand comparison with the painting of both the modernist and the pre-modernist past whose quality seems to him beyond question.<sup>30</sup>

As such, with his explorations of the graphic novel's visual language, his interest in the early twentieth century comic art, as well as in modernist and contemporary classics, Ware contributes to the understanding of modernity as being in a constant relation with the past that is continually reinterpreted, revised, and revived by the present. In this sense, Ware is part of the modernist tradition that has never ended.

Such a vision of modernity is also reflected in *Jimmy Corrigan's* inter-connecting storylines, in which the past informs the present and vice versa.

<sup>28</sup> Ware points out that: "Maybe because of my grounding in visual art, I'm drawn to synesthetic vividness, especially to Joyce. His ability to implant images in the reader's mind with what are essentially page-surface incomprehensibilities astonishes me—poetic sensations in *Ulysses* that suggest certain shuffling sounds and grainy, hot impressions, and only by the end of the page does one realize Leopold Bloom has been walking on a beach. Comics, in some ways, are already structurally more synesthetic than "text-only" writing, with their combination of pictures and words inducing a flowing sense of movement and sound and sometimes even smell." J. Heer, *Interview...*, n.p.

<sup>29</sup> T. Littleton, *Popular...*

<sup>30</sup> M. Fried, *How Modernism Works: A Response to T.J. Clark*, "Critical Inquiry" 1982, vol. 9, no 1, p. 223.

The pursuit of progress and technological advancements initiated at the Chicago's World Fair of 1893, which plays a crucial role in one of *Jimmy Corrigan's* subplots, continued throughout the twentieth century, until the present day. The continuity of the modernist ideals is thus clearly emphasized. Jimmy's grandfather visits the Fair with his father, and their trip is presented on nine pages of the graphic tale. Highly detailed full-page drawings of the Fair's exposition buildings are accompanied by the captions which attempt to render the impact of the exhibition at its opening. "Exhibit, after exhibit in building after building..." Jimmy's grandfather gushes, "hundreds of them... more than anyone could possibly hope to see... machinery, agriculture, electricity, weaponry, everything."<sup>31</sup> The Fair in fact opened the door for modernity, especially when it comes to Chicago architecture. On the day the Fair opened, "the fondest (and also most megalomaniac) dreams of the architects were realized," David van Zanten writes, "and for a moment a new place clad in a new and glorious raiment of buildings (...) amazed an applauding public."<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Chicago marked the beginning of modern architecture with the erection of the first skyscraper with a steel frame construction, The Home Insurance Building, in 1885. The Chicago School adhered to the principles of pragmatism, simplicity, and functionality, and followed the famous slogan "form follows function." In the act of building on the different modernizing trends which made Chicago one of the American, but also international, centers of modernism, Ware employs the language of architecture. The artist engages with Chicago's rich architectural history on two main levels, by presenting modern architecture in his drawings and by exploring its structure.

Chicago's modern architecture shapes the story and influences its tone. The city is depicted as a modern metropolis full of skyscrapers defined by pure geometric forms and reductionist aesthetics, with clearly recognizable drawings of The Willis Tower, The Reliance Building, and the Manhattan Building.<sup>33</sup> What is more, Ware also inserts two posters in the visual narrative. One advertises Chicago as a modern metropolis and depicts the city's most famous buildings, including The Hancock Tower, The Willis Tower, The Wrigley Building, The Water Tower, The Tribune Tower, and The Merchandise Mart. This poster is then contrasted, but also complemented, with Ware's reproduction of a poster

<sup>31</sup> Ch. Ware, *Jimmy...*, n.p.

<sup>32</sup> D. van Zanten, "The Centrality of the Columbian Exposition in the History of Chicago Architecture", in: *Chicago Architecture: Histories, Revisions, Alternatives*, ed. Ch. Waldheim, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2005, p. 32.

<sup>33</sup> Ware's architectural drawings from *Jimmy Corrigan* were also featured at *The Comic Art and Architecture of Chris Ware* exhibition held from November 2014 to January 2015 at the Art Institute of Chicago and at the *Architecture in Comic-Strip Form* (The National Museum - Architecture in Oslo, Norway, October 2015 - February 2016).

advertising the 1893 Fair (it is a hand-drawn copy of the original poster, another instance of Ware's play with the mechanic and the unique), in which the words "art," "science," "industry," and "electricity" feature prominently next to the panorama of Chicago with its first skyscrapers. Indeed, Chicago, a city in which the modern skyscraper and the American Bauhaus flourished, is an emblematic city of forward-looking modernism and is adequately presented in *Jimmy Corrigan*.

Architectural design, the concept of "form following structure," and references to the steel-frame construction, the symbol of modern architecture, are employed not only in the graphic novel's storyline, but also in its "construction." Indeed, *Jimmy Corrigan*, with its rigid divisions into panels, frames, and sequences, suggests an obvious parallel with modern architectural design. As Jeet Heer points out, "[a]rchitecture is not usually thought of as a narrative art form but buildings exist in time as well as space."<sup>34</sup> In the graphic novel, and other forms of sequential art, time, i.e. how the story unfolds from one moment in the narrative to the next, is translated into space, that is an organization of panels and sequences on the page. The sequences in *Jimmy Corrigan* are devised in a unique manner. The grids and the entire organization of the page emphasize the physicality of the page, which is treated as the space of storytelling. This space is delineated by means of thick black lines, which could be said to be equivalent to steel columns and beams used in steel-frame structures. Most of the pages feature a wide uncolored margin (i.e. it is the same color as the page), firmly defined by a thick black outline which visually echoes the shape of the page. The arrangement of the page into individual panels is realized through a strict and rigorous intersection of black gridlines. Commenting on Ware's use of architectural design in his works, D.J. Dycus emphasizes that "rather than drawing upon comics to inspire his own work, Ware identifies the medium with other, more disparate artistic media."<sup>35</sup> The division into panels and sequences, equivalent to the architectural concept of steel-frame, supports and organizes the entire story. The clean, elegant lines of the panel outlines on the page echo the functionalist architectural form.

This emphasis on form and structure is not only rendered implicitly in how the graphic novel is organized but also finds its further explicit realization in some of Ware's drawings. Indeed, in the subplot which deals with Chicago's World Fair of 1893, Ware devotes entire two pages to the drawings which depict the steel-frame construction of one of the exhibition's buildings. As described above, both pages are rigorously divided into square and rectangular panels.

<sup>34</sup> J. Heer, *Sweet Lechery: Reviews, Essays & Profiles*, The Porcupine's Quill, Erin 2014, p. 223.

<sup>35</sup> D.J. Dycus, *Chris Ware's Jimmy Corrigan: Honing the Hybridity of the Graphic Novel*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne 2011, p. 101.

The first page is composed of, in all, 16 panels arranged in three rows. The first two panels in the first row at the top of the page take up half of the available space (i.e. they are half the width and height of the entire page). The following two rows of panels adhere to this principle of reduction by half. The height of the panels in the second row equals half the height of the panels in the first row and the height of the panels in the third row is half the height of the panels in the second row. The overall arrangement is characterized by a strict geometric order. Although they vary in size, all of the panels are parts of the same structure; they complement and correspond to one another. The structure established on the first page is then echoed on the opposite page, as the two pages face one another and together form an even bigger construction. Inscribed in the panels are the drawings of steel columns and beams which constitute the frame of one of the exhibition pavilions. This multiplicity of grids produces an interesting effect. The plot, the narrative which unfolds in *Jimmy Corrigan*, gives way to abstraction. The beauty of the arrangement, the simplicity and order of the geometric forms brings to mind the works of Piet Mondrian. Form follows function in sequential art, yet, as Ware also demonstrates, form may be captivating in itself. Even though, as Jeet Heer ironically observes, “[a]ll of us are boxed in. (...) Western architecture has never strayed far from its roots in Euclidean geometry, so the drama of our existence is played out on boxy stages defined by straight lines, right angles, squares, cubes, rectangles and other sharp-edged forms.”<sup>36</sup>

Although Ware puts great emphasis on the beauty of form, realized as a careful arrangement of vertical and horizontal lines which make up the grid, he also acknowledges the negative connotations of such a model of structuring a story. Ingeniously, Ware uses the “sharp-edged forms” of the panels to explore the representation of time and engage with the concept of time examined in modernist literature. Indeed, the question of how to conceptualize time in the narrative is of equal importance in both the contemporary graphic novel and the modernist novel. As has been noted above, graphic novels represent time as space. Scott McCloud insists that time and space in the graphic novel or a comic book are “one and the same,”<sup>37</sup> while Ware himself comments that

Art Spiegelman has defined comics as the art of turning time back into space, which is the best explanation of the medium I think anyone’s yet come up with. The cartoonist has to remain aware of the page as a composition while focusing on the story created by the strings of individual

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<sup>36</sup> J. Heer, *Sweet...*, p. 223.

<sup>37</sup> S. McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, William Morrow Paperbacks, New York 1993, p. 100.

panels. I think this mirrors the way we experience life – being perceptually aware of our momentary present with some murky recollections of our past and vague anticipations of where we’re headed, and all of it contributing to the shape of what we like to think of as our life. I try to flatten out experience and memory on the page so the reader can see, feel, and sense as much of all of this as possible, but it’s really not much different from composing music or planning a building.<sup>38</sup>

Time in the graphic novel has thus the capacity to be compressed and extended, depending on the size of the panels and the page layout.

The notion of time was also one of the key concepts in the modernist novel, mainly through the influence of the French philosopher Henri Bergson.<sup>39</sup> Bergson developed the concept of “duration,” that is time as experienced by an individual. Time is seen as “a mutual penetration, an interconnection and organization”<sup>40</sup> of moments. Indeed, the philosopher claimed that time should be interpreted as *durée*, that is a series of moments experienced subjectively and not measured “objectively” and “scientifically” by clocks.<sup>41</sup> As such, time in the modernist novel could be conceptualized as continuance or persistence, or, indeed, as a sense of timelessness. It could also be governed by other purely conceptual categories. What matters the most is the embodiment of time in which a modernist split between the subjective experience of time by the character and the “objective” passage of time in the narrative subordinated to the question “What happened next?” comes to the fore. A similar understanding of time and its representation, that is of time split into “subjective” duration and “objective” narrative, can be found in *Jimmy Corrigan*. In the process of reading, the organizing architectural structure realized as gridlines, a construction that supports the entire graphic novel, is revealed to present a truly modernist vision of time, experienced as “duration” and, as such, highly subjective. Ware is thus situated within a “multidisciplinary, avant-garde framework,” as his work “exposes and manipulates the language of comics in ways that demand a great deal of the reader and test the representational possibilities

<sup>38</sup> J. Heer, *Interview...*, n.p.

<sup>39</sup> As Morag Shiach observes, “Most modernists have been called Bergsonian at one time. William Faulkner stated his agreement ‘with Bergson’s theory of the fluidity of time.’ Virginia Woolf’s conception of time is frequently called “Bergsonian” (...).” M. Shiach, *The Cambridge Companion to the Modernist Novel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, pp. 48-49.

<sup>40</sup> H. Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, transl. F.L. Pogson, George Allen/Macmillan, London and New York 1910, p. 101.

<sup>41</sup> B. Randall, *Modernism, Daily Life, and Everyday Life*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, pp. 29-48.

of the medium.”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the gridlines constitute a powerful and defining element of each page. They both allow the story to proceed and “imprison” the moments in individual panels. Narration and experienced time challenge one another, as “modernist time passes through arrested moments.”<sup>43</sup> Ware explores this vision of time through the possibilities offered by the sequential art of storytelling.

On one page I wish to analyze in detail, such an understanding of time is examined through a sequence of different-sized panels. Jimmy is depicted in a bright yellow bathroom, as he is sitting on a toilet, obsessively thinking about his newly found father and half-sister – his father’s daughter from a new relationship.<sup>44</sup> Though it may appear grotesque and absurd, this moment in the graphic novel is actually an element of a wider tragic story. Jimmy’s father, long estranged from him, has been in a car accident and Jimmy spends two days at his hospital bedside. The yellow bathroom is the hospital bathroom adjoining the room in which Jimmy’s father is staying. Jimmy, who has never seen his half-sister Amy, is both anxious and excited to meet her for the first time. As far as the sequence’s design is concerned, it is a great example of what a carefully planned succession of images on the page may accomplish. The page comprises twenty square and rectangular panels in total. The first nine panels take up the top two thirds of the entire page and are arranged in four columns. The first panel is located in the top left corner of the page with panels two and three arranged in one column below it. Panels four and five, both vertical rectangles, equal the height of panels one through three and respectively take up the space of columns two and three. Panels six through nine in the last and fourth column on the right side of the page are horizontal rectangles arranged one under another. Panels ten through twenty are arranged in one row, taking up the bottom one third of the page. The structure of the page guides the reader/viewer presenting him or her with the suggestions on how to read the sequence and to interpret the time relations portrayed.

The reading begins in the top left corner of the page and ends in the bottom right corner. In the first panel, a vertical rectangle, Jimmy is sitting on the toilet, his pants down and his head in his hands. The bathroom is rendered sparingly with only a hint of a mirror and a washbasin on the left and a toilet paper dispenser on the right, as the perspective focuses on the protagonist. Next, one may move on to the two panels below. They are horizontal rectangles.

<sup>42</sup> D. Ball and M. Kuhlman, “Introduction: Chris Ware and the ‘Cult of Difficulty’”, in: *Comics of Chris Ware: Drawing is a Way of Thinking*, ed. D. Ball, M. Kuhlman, University Press Of Mississippi, Jackson 2010, p. x.

<sup>43</sup> M. Shiach, *The Cambridge...*, p. 57.

<sup>44</sup> Ch. Ware, *Jimmy...*, n.p.

Their combined height equals the height of the first panel, thus introducing a certain rhythm to the moment in the narrative that otherwise could be described as inherently static. Indeed, as Georgiana Banita observes, Ware in his comics resists the fast-paced rock and roll aesthetics of popular comics<sup>45</sup> and in the analyzed sequence time slows down for Jimmy and is experienced by him as prolonged duration. The second panel seems to be a reduced version of the first, presenting a close-up of Jimmy's chest and head hanging down in a gesture of depression. As far as visual representation is concerned, nothing spectacular is taking place. On the contrary, this two-panel structure appears repetitious and persistent. The only markers of passing time are the two word balloons invading the panels from the right, reading respectively "Just come down this hall and to the left, Ms. Corrigan" and "This was...". They do not correspond to the situation depicted in these two panels, however, and disrupt its silent and static character by letting in voices from the outside. At the same time, perhaps a bit ironically, the disruptive voices force a change in the progression of the visuals. The change comes – Jimmy lifts his head in the third panel, as if scared by the voices – while the space around him remains undisturbed, as the edges of the mirror and the washbasin on the left and the toilet paper dispenser on the right linger in their places.

The first panel creates some expectations in the mind of the reader/viewer, which require to be either fulfilled or contradicted. However, the second panel halts the narrative progress and exposes the expected progression of the story as futile. One is forced to either reread the initial two-panel sequence, looking for the signs of narrative continuity or proceed, only to find some signs of difference, but not narrative progression, in the third panel. Commenting on Chris Ware's work, D.J. Dycus points out that Ware believes that "cartoons are images that must be read. (...). [Ware] might fill a page with twenty small images, which means that a lot of information is conveyed, even though the story has not moved along very far at all due to the slow pace at which Ware narrates his story."<sup>46</sup> Thus, what the short three-panel sequence in question does is suspend the reader/viewer in the process of reading, exposing the fact that time may be experienced "subjectively." In his formal experiments involving the number and arrangement of panels, Ware references the modernist novel, in which the passage of time is presented as it is experienced within the minds of its characters, rather than as a plot that unfolds and advances forward. In fact, it can be said

<sup>45</sup> G. Banita, "Chris Ware and the Pursuit of Slowness", in: *Comics of Chris Ware: Drawing is a Way of Thinking*, ed. D. Ball, M. Kuhlman, University Press Of Mississippi, Jackson 2010, pp. 177-178.

<sup>46</sup> D.J. Dycus, *Chris Ware's...*, p. 90.



that the majority of Chris Ware's pages in *Jimmy Corrigan* are structured as "a rhythmic variation of multi-sized panels. These compositions interact with the diversity of the depicted scenes, sometimes alluding to a cosmic temporality, other times only to a few dreadful seconds. (...) Talking about 'reading time' and 'action time' would already reveal a lot about Ware's comics."<sup>47</sup>

Once the reader/viewer goes through this three-panel introductory sequence-within-a-sequence, he or she may proceed to the left. Panel four is a vertical rectangle whose height equals the total height of panels one, two, and three. The visual "movement" from a wider shot to a close-up, observable in the transition from panel one to panel two is now reversed as panel four as if zooms out from Jimmy's face, depicted in panel three, and shows his entire figure. Again, apart from the change in the perspective, the only marker of difference between panel three and panel four are the two word balloons near the left border of panel four. The word balloons contain an exchange between a nurse and Jimmy's sister. Panel five echoes panel four in its size and format. It maintains the slow pace of time as experienced by Jimmy, showing a side view (the only visual "movement" in an otherwise static sequence) of Jimmy sitting on the toilet. Panels six, seven, eight, and nine, similarly to panels one, two, and three, are horizontal rectangles arranged one under another. The perspective is narrowed again. In panel six, Jimmy is seen from the side from the top of his head to the end of his torso. An almost identical scene is depicted in panel eight. The two counterparts are separated by panel seven which shows the bottom edge of the bathroom door. Somebody's shoes, either the nurse's or Amy's, are visible in a narrow gap between the door and the floor. Panel nine once again presents Jimmy from the front. The image is very similar to the one in panel three. Considered as a whole, panels one through nine may be described as a game of doubles and redundancies. Images echo one another and make the reader/viewer unable to go forward in the tale. Instead, they arrest the reader/viewer in the moment and through their number and arrangement convey how Jimmy, the protagonist, experiences time.

The sequence delays any conclusive narrative elements and instead focuses on the relayed and prolonged experience of the present moment. As Jacques Samson observes in his analysis of Ware's work,

[t]he effect of repetition of the panels generates a feeling of *durée*, similar to the feeling of extreme slowness experienced during waiting. Here, time drags and demonstrates its dragging. Nothing seems to move, except

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<sup>47</sup> S. Conard and T. Lambeens, "Duration in Comics", *European Comic Art* 2012, vol. 5, no 2, pp. 100-101.

time itself. Rarely does one see time pass before one's eyes without it being wasted. Ware carved in the space of this page dead time.<sup>48</sup>

This extension in space, through the arrangement of no less than nine panels, corresponds to the extension in time, with respect to the process of reading the sequence and the duration of the portrayed scene.

Jimmy is presented as imprisoned in the moment, which appears to last forever because at this point in the narrative he is caught in a personal dilemma. Faced with the deteriorating medical condition of his father, Jimmy is unable to face his half-sister who has come to visit Mr. Corrigan in hospital. Instead of coming out of the bathroom to meet Amy, Jimmy postpones the moment of this difficult decision. Such a reading is further problematized in the bottom and final row of the entire sequence and the entire page, in which Jimmy transcends the sphere of the real and imagines himself going out of the bathroom to greet his half-sister. The escape from the subjective "duration" of the moment and the sense of closure provided by Jimmy taking action is illusory, however, because Jimmy only imagines the moment in which he leaves his retreat. Indeed, even the imagined moment of meeting Amy is divided into three panels and ultimately deferred, inasmuch as the panels present the reader/viewer with three different, but equally impossible, scenarios. As can be seen, even the moment in which Jimmy attempts to escape "duration" by taking action and leaving the bathroom is further prolonged by the separation into three frames. In the first "dream" panel, Jimmy goes out of the bathroom and says: "I'm Jimmy. How are you?". The following two "fantasy" panels show Jimmy at the door saying respectively "I'm Jimmy. I've heard a lot of nice things about you" and "What's up? I'm Jimmy. I just want you to know that I'm not afraid of black people! [Amy is black – M.O.]."<sup>49</sup> The three panels are arranged in a column, one under another, and thus the expected progress of the narrative undergoes further temporization. Ultimately, narrative progress is discarded as impossible to attain. Such a conclusion is further emphasized by the final two panels which show Jimmy sitting on the toilet unable to take any action and arrested in the moment. For György Lukács "modernist" time "appears as no

<sup>48</sup> "L'effet de répétition des cases engendre une sensation étirée de durée, telle l'impression d'extrême lenteur éprouvée dans l'attente. Ici le temps piétine, en exhibant son piétinement. Rien ne paraît bouger, sauf lui. Il est rare que le temps bouge sous nos yeux sans que ce ne soit en pure perte. Ware a sculpté dans l'espace de cette planche du temps mort." [translation mine, M.O.] J. Samson, «Micro-Lecture 2: Le Regard Furtif de Jimmy», in: B. Peeters, J. Samson, eds: *Chris Ware: La Bande Dessinée Réinventée*, Les Impressions Nouvelles, Brussels 2010, p. 149-150.

<sup>49</sup> Ch. Ware, *Jimmy...*, n.p.

longer the neutral, objective and historical medium in which men move and develop. It is distorted into a dead and deadening outward power. The passage of time is the frame within which a person suffers degradation. It turns into an independent and remorseless machine (...)."<sup>50</sup> Similarly here, time is presented as a deadening power which prevents any action. In a meaningful gesture, the final panel of the page in the bottom right corner is almost identical with the first panel in the top left corner. Jimmy is sitting on the toilet, his pants down and his head in his hands, which refers one back to "square one," emphasizing the sensation of time not moving forward.

As can be seen, Ware engages with modernism in *Jimmy Corrigan* by exploring a number of its formal and thematic aspects. He experiments with the graphic novel's status as a work that is simultaneously mass produced and unique on the levels of the book format, typography, and drawing style. The artist also creatively utilizes Chicago's rich architectural history. On the one hand, modernist Chicago architecture is depicted in his drawings, which is an obvious reference to the modernist ideals. Beside constituting a telling urban setting, however, modernist architecture is also integrated into the graphic novel's "construction." The structure of the steel frame and the modernist principle "form follows function" are realized as panels and frames in *Jimmy Corrigan*'s sequential structure. Finally, thanks to a careful organization of the page and the arrangement of the panels, Ware investigates the notion of time inspired by the Bergsonian concept of *durée*, in which time is experienced in a highly subjective fashion. Therefore, thanks to the modernist inspirations found in philosophy, literature, architecture, and the visual arts, Ware's creation demonstrates that the poetics of modernism is a vital component of the poetics of the contemporary graphic novel. *Jimmy Corrigan* establishes itself as a truly neomodernist text, one which creatively reworks and adapts modernist concepts. These neomodernist aspects of the graphic novel obviously complicate the popular definition of the form, which associates the graphic novel with postmodernism only. As *Jimmy Corrigan*'s example shows, the graphic novel in its inherent verbal-visual duality is able to embrace both postmodernist and modernist tendencies.

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<sup>50</sup> G. Lukács, *Essays on Thomas Mann*, transl. Stanley Mitchell, Grosset & Dunlap, New York 1965, p. 79.

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## **POETYKA MODERNIZMU W POWIEŚCI GRAFICZNEJ. JIMMY CORRIGAN CHRISA WARE'A JAKO TEKST NEOMODERNISTYCZNY. (streszczenie)**

Artykuł skupia się na analizie aspektów modernistycznej poetyki w powieści graficznej Chrisa Ware'a pt. *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* (2000). Poruszone zostaną w szczególności trzy problemy: (i) status powieści graficznej jako produktu kultury masowej / dzieła sztuki w kontekście koncepcji „aury” dzieła sztuki Waltera Benjamina; (ii) modernistyczna architektura; oraz (iii) modernistyczna koncepcja subiektywnego postrzegania czasu. Punktem wyjścia dla pierwszego problemu jest omówienie pojęcia „aury” Benjamina oraz jego znaczenia dla modernistycznej estetyki, co pozwoli na analizę eksperymentów Chrisa Ware'a ze statusem powieści graficznej jako dzieła kultury popularnej i elitarnej, w szczególności pod względem formatu książki i stylu rysowania. Następnie opisana zostanie rola architektury modernistycznej w *Jimmym Corriganie*. Architektura w analizowanej powieści graficznej jest prezentowana jako symbol nowoczesności oraz internalizowana jako struktura organizująca sekwencyjnej sztuki opowiadania. Ostatnim z analizowanych aspektów jest pojęcie czasu i jego prezentacja w powieści graficznej, która jest ściśle związana z modernistyczną ideą *durée* Henri Bergsona. Analiza powyższych trzech aspektów wykaże, jak Chris Ware adaptuje techniki modernistyczne na użytek powieści graficznej, a tym samym problematyzuje postulowany status powieści graficznej jako tekstu postmodernistycznego, dowodząc, że poetyka modernizmu jest istotnym elementem współczesnej poetyki powieści graficznej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** neomodernizm, modernizm, powieść graficzna, komiks, Chris Ware, *Jimmy Corrigan*.

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## **SPEEDING SLOWNESS: NEO-MODERN CONTEMPLATIVE AND SUBLIME CINEMA AESTHETICS IN GODFREY REGGIO'S QATSI TRILOGY**

**Abstract:** The article analyzes the various ways in which Godfrey Reggio's experimental documentary films, *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982), *Powaqqatsi* (1988) and *Naqoyqatsi* (2002), tend to incorporate narrative and visual conventions traditionally associated with neo-modern aesthetics of slow and sublime cinema. The former concept, defined as a "varied strain of austere minimalist cinema" (Romney 2010) and characterized by the frequent use of "long takes, de-centred and understated modes of storytelling, and a pronounced emphasis on quietude and the everyday" (Flanagan 2008), is often seen as a creative evolution of Schrader's transcendental style or, more generally, neo-modernist trends in contemporary cinematography. Although predominantly analyzed through the lens of some common stylistic tropes of the genre's mainstream works, its scope and framework has been recently broadened to encompass post-1960 experimental and avant-garde as well as realistic documentary films, which often emphasize contemplative rather than slow aspects of the projected scenes (Tuttle 2012). Taking this as a point of departure, I argue that the *Qatsi* trilogy, despite being classified as largely atypical slow films, relies on a set of conventions which draw both on the stylistic excess of non-verbal sublime cinema (Thompson 1977; Bagatavicius 2015) and on some formal devices of contemplative cinema, including slowness, duration, anti-narrative or Bazinian Realism. In particular, the images' evocative oscillation between nostalgic neo-modernist natural and technological sublime might stem from its employment of extended shot duration subjected to slow motion as well as panoramic, accelerated and long panning shots enhanced by the atmospheric scores of Philip Glass.

**Keywords:** American experimental documentary film, neo-modern aesthetics, slow and contemplative cinema, sublime cinema, Godfrey Reggio, *Qatsi* Trilogy.



In this article I present and analyze the various ways in which Godfrey Reggio's experimental documentary films, *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982),<sup>1</sup> *Powaqqatsi* (1988)<sup>2</sup> and *Naqoyqatsi* (2002),<sup>3</sup> tend to incorporate the narrative and visual conventions traditionally associated with the neo-modern aesthetics of sublime and slow cinema. The latter concept, defined as a "varied strain of austere minimalist cinema"<sup>4</sup> and characterized by the frequent use of "long takes, de-centred and understated modes of storytelling, and a pronounced emphasis on quietude and the everyday",<sup>5</sup> is often seen as a creative evolution of Schrader's transcendental style<sup>6</sup> or, more generally, neo-modernist trends in contemporary cinematography.<sup>7</sup> Although predominantly analyzed through the lens of some common stylistic tropes of the genre's mainstream works, including those of Tarkovsky, Bergman, Bresson, Antonioni, or Sokurov, its scope and framework has been recently broadened to encompass post-1960 experimental and avant-garde as well as realistic documentary films,<sup>8</sup> which often emphasize contemplative rather than slow aspects of the projected scenes.<sup>9</sup> Taking this as a point of departure, I argue that Reggio's *Qatsi* Trilogy, despite being classified as largely atypical slow films,<sup>10</sup> relies on a set of conventions which draw both on the stylistic excess of non-verbal sublime cinema<sup>11</sup> and on some formal devices of contemplative cinema, including slowness, duration, anti-narrative or Bazinian Realism.<sup>12</sup> In particular, the images' evocative oscillation between nostalgic neo-modernist natural and technological sublime<sup>13</sup> might stem from its employ-

<sup>1</sup> *Koyaanisqatsi*, directed by Godfrey Reggio (1982; Beverly Hills: Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 2002), DVD.

<sup>2</sup> *Powaqqatsi*, directed by Godfrey Reggio (1988; Beverly Hills: Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 2002), DVD.

<sup>3</sup> *Naqoyqatsi*, directed by Godfrey Reggio (2002; Santa Monica: Miramax, 2002), DVD.

<sup>4</sup> J. Romney, "In Search of Lost Time", *Sight & Sound* 2010, vol. 20, no 2, pp. 43-44.

<sup>5</sup> M. Flanagan, "Towards an Aesthetic of Slow in Contemporary Cinema", *I6:9* vol. 6, no 20 /2008. Online at [http://www.16-9.dk/2008-11/side11\\_inenglish.htm](http://www.16-9.dk/2008-11/side11_inenglish.htm); accessed 20 June 2016.

<sup>6</sup> P. Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*, University of California Press, Berkeley, California 1972.

<sup>7</sup> see e.g. R. Syska, *Filmowy Neomodernizm*, Avalon, Kraków 2014.

<sup>8</sup> M. Flanagan, 'Slow Cinema': *Temporality and Style in Contemporary Art and Experimental Film* (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> H. Tuttle, May 12, 2010, "Slow Films, Easy Life (Sight&Sound)," *Unspoken Cinema*, June 20, 2016, <http://unspokencinema.blogspot.com/2010/05/slow-films-easy-life-sight.html>.

<sup>10</sup> O.E. Çağlayan, *Screening Boredom: The History and Aesthetics of Slow Cinema* (PhD diss., University of Kent, 2014), p. 243.

<sup>11</sup> see e.g. K. Thompson, "The Concept of Cinematic Excess", *Ciné-Tracts* 1977, vol. 1, no. 2; A. Bagatavicius, *Sublime Cinema: Experiential Excess and Embodied Spectatorship in Godfrey Reggio's Qatsi Trilogy* (MA thesis, The University of British Columbia, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> A. Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image", *Film Quarterly* 1960, vol. 13, no 4, pp. 4-9.

<sup>13</sup> D.E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1994.

ment of extended shot duration subjected to slow motion as well as panoramic, accelerated travelling and long panning shots enhanced by the highly atmospheric scores of Philip Glass. These and related tropes not only reinforce the recurring existential concerns of Reggio's experimental films, which center around the destructive impact of urban life and technology on nature, but also tend to evoke a range of emotional states, such as an intensified sense of temporality, boredom, contemplation, awe, and terror, hence coming close to neo-modern slowness and sublimity.<sup>14</sup>

Although Godfrey Reggio's *Qatsi* Trilogy has been little explored in scholarly terms, it is widely believed to have broken new ground for postmodern documentary film due to its unprecedented aesthetic and emotional appeal. The three productions, *Koyaanisqatsi*, *Powaqqatsi* and *Naqoyqatsi*, labeled as Cinéma Pur (Pure Cinema),<sup>15</sup> have not only proved to be revolutionary and timeless in both its form and content, but they also continue to serve as a remarkable example of meaningful avant-garde works, providing a highly immersive cinematic experience with a message.<sup>16</sup> In Reggio's experimental pictures, the message is clearly environmentally- or New Age-oriented<sup>17</sup> and constitutes a still relevant comment on contemporary (post)industrial civilization. Solomon argues further that the films, especially *Koyaanisqatsi*, can be considered "a postmodern parody of traditional film documentaries" or "a postmodern denunciation of the culture of postmodernism" through its skillful use of non-narrative structure and a highly diversified range of juxtaposed imagery enhanced by Philip Glass's synthesized score.<sup>18</sup> The effect seems to be additionally reinforced by Reggio's reliance on a set of conventions characteristic for non-verbal sublime and contemplative cinema aesthetics, such as stylistic excess, natural and technological sublime, slowness, duration, anti-narrative or Bazinian

<sup>14</sup> J. Orr, *Cinema and Modernity*. Polity Press, Cambridge 1993.

<sup>15</sup> The term is usually applied to experimental cinematic works produced within the 1920s European avant-garde movement and characterized by opposing any form of narrative expression and advocating an employment of some unique visual and rhythmic editing techniques, such as time lapse, slow motion, dynamic cutting, trick and moving camera shots, etc. See R. Clair, "Cinéma pur et cinéma commercial", *Cahiers du mois* 1925, vol. 16/17, pp. 89-90; F.E. Beaver, *Dictionary of Film Terms: The Aesthetic Companion to Film Art*, Peter Lang, New York 2006, pp. 39-40.

<sup>16</sup> M. Dempsey, "Qatsi Means Life: The Films of Godfrey Reggio", *Film Quarterly* 1989, vol. 42, no. 3, p. 2; J. Solomon, "Our decentered culture: The postmodern worldview", in: *The Postmodern Presence: Readings on Postmodernism in American Culture and Society*, ed. A.A. Berger, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek 1998, p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> see e.g. G. Stephens, "Koyaanisqatsi and the Visual Narrative of Environmental Film", *Screening the Past* 2010, vol. 28. Online at <http://tlweb.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/screeningthe-past/28/koyaanisqatsi-visual-narrative-of-environmental-film.html>, accessed 21 June 2016.

<sup>18</sup> J. Solomon, *Our decentered culture...*, p. 37.

Realism. Hence, it might be inferred that the films' constant oscillation between neo-modern slowness and sublimity as well as their purposeful depiction of highly contrasting, discontinuous, disharmonious and disconcerting scenes, tend to contribute to their ongoing popularity and their worldwide appreciation as cult classics. Particularly *Koyaanisqatsi* was critically acclaimed and selected for preservation in the National Film Registry in 2000 as being "culturally, historically, and aesthetically significant".<sup>19</sup>

When the first and best known installment of the trilogy, *Koyaanisqatsi*, premiered in 1983, the name of Godfrey Reggio was mostly unheard of among the film audiences and critics. Before that time, he had no experience of film-making and, what is more, he had little opportunity to actually watch and analyze any cinematic works. Reggio was brought up in a distinguished and devoutly Catholic family in New Orleans, Louisiana, and at the age of fourteen he joined the Roman Catholic Congregation of Christian Brothers, where he spent another fourteen years leading an ascetic lifestyle and training to become a monk.<sup>20</sup> As he recalls:

I lived in the Middle Ages ... I was in a very strict, ascetic community and was practicing asceticism at 14. It made a tremendous impression on me. It also made me very crazy, because ... [the monks, who] were basically Calvinists, actually believed that the body was evil ... I had to have my head shaved, and I lived a very strict life of silence and manual labour and study from the age of 14 until 23; then I was more out in the world but still with vows and a member of the community ... I took it all very seriously. I wanted to be a saint, like you're supposed to want to be ... I collected holy cards, not baseball cards.<sup>21</sup>

In the 1960s and 1970s, Reggio became involved in social work with Chicano street gangs, particularly in New Mexico's poverty stricken barrios; one of his greatest accomplishments include co-funding La Clinica de la Gente, Young Citizens for Action and the Institute for Regional Education, all established in Santa Fe. In the early 1970s, he also contributed to the development of the American Civil Liberties Union of New Mexico by designing and organizing

<sup>19</sup> "Complete National Film Registry Listing," Library of Congress, accessed June 22, 2016, <https://www.loc.gov/programs/national-film-preservation-board/film-registry/complete-national-film-registry-listing/index-of-essays>.

<sup>20</sup> S. MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers*, University of California Press, Berkeley, California 1992, p. 381; P. W. Vivier, "The Postmodern Aspects Reflected in the Qatsi Trilogy" (MA thesis, Tshwane University of Technology, 2010), p. 55.

<sup>21</sup> M. Dempsey, *Qatsi Means Life...*, p. 2.

numerous media campaigns, where he successfully protested against the surveillance and promoted some post-Vietnam issues, such as the right to privacy. However, it was Reggio's disillusionment with the Congregation's hyper-conservative nature that finally led him to leave the monastery and turn to non-mainstream filmmaking.<sup>22</sup> Both Luis Buñuel's *Los olvidados* (1950) and Artavazd Peleshyan's *Vremena goda* (1975),<sup>23</sup> particularly the former's realistic portrayal of the impoverished children of Mexico City in the tradition of social realism and surrealism, are widely regarded as the director's first profound and life-altering cinematic experiences, which have exerted an everlasting influence over his working style and helped him choose a non-narrative and non-verbal experimental documentary film as the major form of artistic expression.<sup>24</sup>

Reggio's first work, *Koyaanisqatsi*, which took seven years to shoot, is usually described as "a feature-length montage juxtaposing the pristine beauty of unspoiled nature with the more ambiguous 'terrible' beauty of humanity and its creations".<sup>25</sup> The film was released only due to the efforts of Francis Ford Coppola, who was so impressed with the screening during its post-production period that he proposed to add his name to the credits and thus helped it to gain wider distribution and media attention, which eventually enabled the film to achieve an unexpected critical and commercial success. Commonly believed to be a revolutionary work within its own genre, *Koyaanisqatsi* presents a series of natural and urban landscapes, scored by Glass's mesmerizing compositions, with the aim of questioning the relationship between nature, technology and the consumerism of the American society. As poetically put by Dempsey, the documentary begins with

a slipstream of landscape images all but hallucinatory in their pellucid, unpopulated clarity (...). Then comes a cascade of pollution, freneticness, and soul-annihilating regimentation inflicted on the planet in the name of civilization, progress, and modernity. Reggio and his collaborators portray Earth as a living creature slowly being poisoned by its perversely suicidal passengers – as if in imitation of the scorpion that stings the frog carrying it across the river in Orson Welles's *Mr. Arkadin*.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> *Los olvidados*, directed by Luis Buñuel (1950; Mexico: Ultramar Films, 2004), DVD; *Vremena goda*, directed by Artavazd Peleshyan (1975; Yerevan: Yerevan Film Studio).

<sup>24</sup> A. Bagatavicius, *Sublime Cinema...*, p. 19; M. Dempsey, *Qatsi Means Life...*, p. 2; S. MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2...*, p. 381.

<sup>25</sup> M. Dempsey, *Qatsi Means Life...*, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem.

As it continues making forays into environmentalism-related concerns, the film exposes its audiences to some striking, evocative and contemplative imagery of awe-inspiring wilderness and state-of-the-art technology, including nuclear test sites, oil fields, traffic patterns, processed food factories, skyscrapers or a rocket lifting off. Reggio's moral message, centered around the destructive impact of the latter on the natural world, is clearly implied in the epilogue, which shows the translation of the titular word from the Hopi language ("1. Crazy life. 2. Life in turmoil. 3. Life out of balance. 4. Life disintegrating. 5. A state of life that calls for another way of living.") as well as "the translation of the Hopi Prophecies sung in the film".<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, the second installment of the trilogy, *Powaqqatsi: Life in Transformation*, focuses exclusively on the developing nations of the Southern Hemisphere, such as Hong Kong, India, Kenya, Nepal, Egypt, Brazil or Peru, and a vivid depiction of the conflict between the traditional ways of living and those imposed by rapid industrialization.

The central theme of progress and change is additionally enhanced by a number of natural shots as well as representations of everyday activities, including cultural and religious practices of the Third World nations. However, despite its original format and meditative quality reminiscent of its predecessor, the picture received average reviews from the critics and quickly disappeared from theatres after a brief run. Similarly, *Naqoyqatsi: Life as War* (2002), the final chapter of the trilogy, which came out nearly two decades later, has not proved to be successful and today is widely considered the weakest of Reggio's cult classics. While presenting the transformation of the natural world into a digital one and its detrimental impact on humanity, the picture utilizes a range of representational strategies through its adoption of computer-generated imagery as well as manipulated archive footage and stock images.<sup>28</sup> For this reason, the process of making the film, defined as virtual cinema on the DVD extras, has been criticized as largely lacking a metaphorical resonance or poetic and spiritual traits. As observed by Bagatavicius,

*Naqoyqatsi* often moves away from the incisive poetry or ballet between machines, natural landscapes, and trenchant satire towards a kind of visual blank verse and pastiche. It recycles imagery from the other two films and gives them a digital gloss, warps stock footage to suit its collage aesthetic, swaps the more embodied sublime moments from the other two films for the embalming capabilities of media vis-a-vis celebrities and other cults

<sup>27</sup> *Koyaanisqatsi*, directed by Godfrey Reggio (1982; Beverly Hills: Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 2002), DVD.

<sup>28</sup> P. Ward, *Documentary: The Margins of Reality*, Columbia University Press, New York 2005, p. 15.

of personality, and skirts around the dangerous topical edges of genetic experimentation, pharmaceuticals, warfare, and cosmetics using digital media as a vessel to navigate the waters of binary and virtual reality.<sup>29</sup>

Although differing in the use of imagery as well as optical and digital techniques and often criticized for containing trite or simplistic messages and clichés, both *Powaqqatsi* and *Naqoyqatsi* continue the tradition of *Koyaanisqatsi*, namely that of an experimental documentary with no vocalized narration. As explained by Reggio himself, this extremely non-narrative form has been implemented with a specific ideological purpose: “It’s not for lack of love of the language that these films have no words. It’s because, from my point of view, our language is in a state of vast humiliation. It no longer describes the world in which we live”.<sup>30</sup> The lack of dialogue, however, is successfully compensated by an almost hypnotizing juxtaposition of images and music, which has laid foundations for Reggio’s peculiar genre, often considered a revitalization of the city symphony:

Like many of the city symphonies, the film’s structure suggests the passage of a day, from dawn to night, beginning with largely rural images and then progressing to urban ones. Or it could be a creation myth, starting from fire, progressing to deserts, then water and cultivation, to technology. Gradually, inevitably, the film turns into a condemnation of our technological society.<sup>31</sup>

In terms of some generic categorizations, while Good, Godfrey and Goodall refer to Reggio’s works as “the spiritual documentary film”,<sup>32</sup> McDonald classifies them as belonging to avant-doc cinema.<sup>33</sup> However, as mentioned above, it might be hypothesized that the analyzed feature-length documentary films have derived primarily and specifically from the city symphony, an experimental style of documentary, which immortalized a complex spatial arrangement of urban environments through its reliance on kinaesthetic visual

<sup>29</sup> A. Bagatavicius, *Sublime Cinema...*, p. 61.

<sup>30</sup> *Essence of Life*, directed by Greg Carson (2002; Beverly Hills: MGM Home Entertainment, 2002), DVD.

<sup>31</sup> D. Eagan, *America’s Film Legacy: The Authoritative Guide to the Landmark Movies in the National Film Registry*, Continuum, New York 2010, p. 779.

<sup>32</sup> M. Goodall, J. Good, and W. Godfrey, *Film and representation: Three readings*, in: *Crash Cinema: Representation in Film*, eds. M. Goodall, J. Good, and W. Godfrey, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle: 2007, p. xix.

<sup>33</sup> S. MacDonald, *Avant-Doc: Intersections of Documentary and Avant-Garde Cinema*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014.

modes or rhythmic editing.<sup>34</sup> Some classic examples representative of the genre, including Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand's *Manhatta*, Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, Mannus Franken and Joris Ivens's *Rain* or Dziga Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera*,<sup>35</sup> constituted silent feature-length montage of lively shots and close-ups of urban spaces and their residents engaged in everyday activities. Although the city symphony turned out to be a rather short-lived form of documentary, which experienced a brief reemergence in the 1930s and 1940s with Ralph Steiner's *The City* and Arne Sucksdorff's *Rhythm of a City*,<sup>36</sup> its sensory aesthetics and focus on vast symbolic landscapes was later evidenced in Terrence Malick's, Michelangelo Antonioni's or Stanley Kubrick's works and, as pointed out by Bagatavicius, rejuvenated in Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi*.<sup>37</sup> In particular, it may be argued that some formal techniques characteristic for the genre, such as hyperkinetic camera choreography, speeded up sequences or time lapse photography, resurfaced in *Qatsi*, seen as the modern city symphony and founded on certain principles of both sublime and contemplative slowness.

The aesthetics of slow cinema, defined a "varied strain of austere minimalist cinema"<sup>38</sup> and characterized by a frequent use of "long takes, de-centred and understated modes of storytelling, and a pronounced emphasis on quietude and the everyday",<sup>39</sup> is often perceived as a creative evolution of Schrader's transcendental style<sup>40</sup> or, more generally, neo-modernist trends in contemporary cinematography.<sup>41</sup> The former notion, coined in Schrader's landmark work *Transcendental Style in Film*<sup>42</sup> and evident in the cinema of Yasajiro Ozu, Robert Bresson, Carl Dreyer, Roberto Rossellini and Budd Boetticher, is manifested in the spiritual quality achieved through the lack of editorial comment or editing, austere camerawork, and acting devoid of self-consciousness. In the light of

<sup>34</sup> K. Beattie, *From City Symphony to Global City Film: Documentary Display and the Corporeal*, "Screening the Past" 2006, vol. 20, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Manhatta*, directed by Charles Sheeler, and Paul Strand (1921; Hollywood: Image Entertainment, 2005), DVD; *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, directed by Walter Ruttmann (1927; Berlin: Deutsche Vereins-Film, 2008), DVD; *Rain*, directed by Mannus Franken and Joris Ivens (1929; Amsterdam: Capi-Holland, 2002), VHS; *Man with the Movie Camera*, directed by Dziga Vertov (1929; Kyiv: VUFKU, 2009), DVD.

<sup>36</sup> *The City*, directed by Ralph Steiner (1939; San Francisco: American Documentary Films Inc., 2007), DVD; *Rhythm of a City*, directed by Arne Sucksdorff (1947; Stockholm: Swedish Tourist Traffic Association).

<sup>37</sup> A. Bagatavicius, *Sublime Cinema*..., p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> J. Romney, *In Search of Lost*..., p. 43.

<sup>39</sup> M. Flanagan, *Towards an Aesthetic*...

<sup>40</sup> P. Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film*...

<sup>41</sup> R. Syska, *Filmowy Neomodernizm*...

<sup>42</sup> P. Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film*...



film criticism, however, rather than formulating a precise working definition of the proposed concept, Schrader provides his readers with a largely ambiguous, arbitrary and subjective description, with little potential for film analysis:

Transcendental style seeks to maximize the mystery of existence; it eschews all conventional interpretations of reality: realism, naturalism, psychologism, romanticism, expressionism, impressionism, and, finally, rationalism. (...) In motion pictures these constructs take the form of what Robert Bresson has called 'screens', clues or study guides which help the viewer 'understand' the event: plot, acting, characterization, camerawork, music, dialogue, editing. In films of transcendental style these elements are, in popular terms, 'nonexpressive' (that is they are not expressive of culture or personality); they are reduced to stasis. Transcendental style stylizes reality by eliminating (or nearly eliminating) those elements which are primarily expressive of human experience, thereby robbing the conventional interpretations of reality of their relevance and power. Transcendental style, like the mass, transforms experience into a repeatable ritual which can be repeatedly transcended".<sup>43</sup>

On the other hand, it seems that despite its weaknesses, Schrader's study of transcendental aesthetics has made quite a significant contribution to the development of slow cinema, seen as a distinctive genre of filmmaking. It has also given rise to some other transcendence-related theories, including Bird's spiritual realism, "in which cinema's technical properties become the vehicle of meditation",<sup>44</sup> or Sobchack's analysis of cinematic experiences from a phenomenological-existentialist perspective.<sup>45</sup> More importantly, however, it has fostered a broader academic discussion on the ways in which slow cinema tends to evoke the transcendental style and a contemplative register through the use of stylized editing patterns characteristic for the new wave of the 1960s and beyond.

The term 'slow cinema' was first coined by the film critic Jonathan Romney as late as 2010 with the aim of defining a trend within art cinema that surfaced as a distinctive genre of filmmaking during the 2000s. In the *Sight and Sound* article, Romney describes this tendency as a "varied strain of austere minimalist cinema that has thrived internationally over the past ten years", which

<sup>43</sup> P. Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film...*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>44</sup> M. Bird, *Film as hierophany*, in: *Religion in Film*, eds. J. R. May, and M. Bird, The University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, Tennessee 1982, p. 15.

<sup>45</sup> V. Sobchack, *Carnal of Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, University of California Press, Berkeley, California 2004.

“downplays event in favour of mood, evocativeness and an intensified sense of temporality”.<sup>46</sup> Originally, the core assumptions of slow cinema were theorized in reference to some contemporary auteurs, including Béla Tarr, Lisandro Alonso, Gus Van Sant, Tsai Ming-liang, Pedro Costa or Albert Serra, whose works were characterized by reduced narrative structures, aesthetics of emptiness, or the focus on symbolic landscapes. Quandt contributes to the debate by enumerating particular aesthetic properties that have been long associated with the genre:

adagio rhythms and oblique narrative; a tone of quietude and reticence, an aura of unexplained or unearned anguish; attenuated takes, long tracking or panning shots, often of depopulated landscapes; prolonged hand-held follow shots of solo people walking; slow dollies to a window or open door framing nature; a materialist sound design; and a preponderance of Tarkovskian imagery.<sup>47</sup>

Undoubtedly, both Romney and Quandt emphasize slowness as the most crucial descriptive factor, which, akin to the larger Slow Movement, deliberately opposes the majority of mainstream, fast-paced and commercial cinema productions. Meanwhile, a more elaborate discussion on “an aesthetic of slow” was fostered in Flanagan’s PhD thesis,<sup>48</sup> which provided a considerably accurate and detailed description of the history and some major stylistic traits of the films classified as closely related or belonging to the genre. The dissertation, which can be considered the first manuscript-length academic study of slow cinema, does not only attempt to reframe this cinematic trend in a much broader cultural context by encompassing various works of endurance art and experimental film, but it also questions the use of the label ‘slow’ in reference to the analyzed phenomena: “As a collective term, ‘slow’ too readily suggests a binary opposition based on speed and motion, and signifies a range of contemporary films, filmmakers, and styles in a manner that might be considered to be excessively panoptic”.<sup>49</sup> Throughout the whole work, however, Flanagan retains the term ‘slow cinema’ as “the most fitting container”, which has “become commonly accepted as a broad signifier of a certain mode of durational art and experimental film” and successfully accounts for “the complex network

<sup>46</sup> J. Romney, *In Search of Lost...*, p. 43.

<sup>47</sup> J. Quandt, *The sandwich process: Simon Field talks about polemics and poetry at film festivals*, in: *Dekalog 3: On Film Festivals*, ed. R. Porton, Wallflower Press, London 2009, pp. 76-77.

<sup>48</sup> M. Flanagan, “‘Slow Cinema’...”.

<sup>49</sup> M. Flanagan, “‘Slow Cinema’...”, p. 5.

of stylistic convergences referred to here with absolute precision”.<sup>50</sup> Flanagan encapsulates the major characteristics of the genre as follows:

The label ‘slow cinema’ refers to a model of art or experimental film that possesses a set of distinct characteristics: an emphasis upon extended duration (in both formal and thematic aspects); an audio-visual depiction of stillness and everydayness; the employment of the long take as a structural device; a slow or undramatic form of narration (if narrative is present at all); and a predominantly realist (or hyperrealist) mode or intent.<sup>51</sup>

Not surprisingly, the somewhat ambiguous nature of the aforementioned terminology has provoked a critical response from the blogger Harry Tuttle, who considered the epithet ‘slow’ insufficient or even redundant and suggested that it should be replaced with ‘contemplative’.<sup>52</sup> Despite Tuttle’s use of a largely colloquial rhetoric inconsistent with the widely established instruments of film criticism, some of his arguments are to some extent beneficial in theorizing the key features of the genre. Çağlayan distinguishes between the two labels and investigates the ways in which they can be adopted in film analysis:

The label contemplative rightly designates the central aspects of contemporary Slow Cinema, such as its aesthetic experience and mode of address. (...) much of Slow Cinema hinges on a negotiation between the spectator and the film in pursuit of a narrative meaning, motivation and/or resolution. While the films deliberately avoid and reduce narrative action, contemplation becomes the meaning-seeking process by which spectators can critically engage with the films. However, contemplative as a label overlooks the fact that contemplation in cinema is not wholly specific to Slow Cinema; in other words, many mainstream films outside the Slow Cinema circle invite their spectators to contemplate a topic or a subject by way of graphic provocation, witty dialogue or other means. What separates Slow Cinema from these films is their perpetual stillness and monotony; in other words, Slow Cinema is generally characterized by a persistent approach to the reductive manipulation of temporality and pacing, hence the label ‘slow’.<sup>53</sup>

Therefore, despite their descriptive vagueness and ambiguity, both terms, often used interchangeably, seem to be complimentary and should not be excluded

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<sup>50</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>51</sup> M. Flanagan, “‘Slow Cinema’...”, p. 5.

<sup>52</sup> H. Tuttle, May 12, 2010, “Slow Films, Easy Life...”

<sup>53</sup> O.E. Çağlayan, “Screening Boredom”..., p. 8.

from the academic study of the films categorized as belonging to the framework of slow cinema. As pointed out by Flanagan, whatever label one chooses to use in their research, it is intended to denote the kind of cinema that shares “an emphasis on the passage of time in the shot, an undramatic narrative or non-narrative mode, and a rigorous compositional form that is designed for contemplative spectatorial practice”.<sup>54</sup>

As suggested before, although predominantly analyzed through the lens of some common aesthetic traits of slow cinema’s mainstream works, the scope and framework of the genre has been recently broadened to encompass post-1960 experimental and avant-garde as well as realistic documentary films, which often emphasize both the contemplative and the slow aspects of the projected scenes and motives.<sup>55</sup> The trend toward slowness emerged in the postwar art and cinema, which either explicitly or implicitly resisted the dominant capitalism-driven ideologies of the mainstream culture, including cinema, mass media or saturation advertising still prevailing in European and North American countries.<sup>56</sup> Company points out that a new sense of temporality was soon adopted in some landmark works of Roberto Rossellini, Ingmar Bergman, Michelangelo Antonioni, Robert Bresson, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Andrei Tarkovsky, Krzysztof Kieślowski, Aleksandr Sokurov, and other important filmmakers.<sup>57</sup> A wide array of slow cinema conventions employed in those and related films did not only challenge the two-second average shot length of many Hollywood productions, but they also contributed to some representative canons of art cinema, originally proposed in Bordwell’s *Film Art*<sup>58</sup> and Neale’s *Art Cinema as Institution*.<sup>59</sup> While the former defines an art film as a realist picture incorporating elements of documentary realism as well as resisting the narrative mode and the cause-effect sequence of events,<sup>60</sup> the latter contends that cinema developed as an institution in response to classical Hollywood exports and their dominance in international exhibition markets during the silent era and beyond. Such representational modes, particularly leaning toward documentary realism and slowness, have been widely adopted in experimental film since the late 1940s. De Luca notes that a tendency toward realism in contemporary art cinema “is steeped in the hyperbolic application of the long take, which promotes a contemplative viewing experience anchored in materiality and

<sup>54</sup> M. Flanagan, “‘Slow Cinema’...”, p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> see e.g. M. Flanagan, “‘Slow Cinema’...”; H. Tuttle, May 12, 2010, “Slow Films, Easy Life...”

<sup>56</sup> D. Company, “When to be fast? When to be slow?”, in: *The Cinematic*, ed. D. Company, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2007, p. 10.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>58</sup> D. Bordwell, *Film Art: An Introduction*, Longman Higher Education, London 1979.

<sup>59</sup> S. Neale, “Art Cinema as Institution”, *Screen* 1981, vol. 22, no 1.

<sup>60</sup> D. Bordwell, *Film Art...*, pp. 57-58.

duration” and allows the spectators to “adopt the point of view of the camera and protractedly study images as they appear on the screen in their unexplained literalness”.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, while contemporary experimental documentary films tend to rely on a range of aesthetic principles traditionally associated with Bazinian realism, they are also likely to present an exaggerated and often deliberately distorted perception of reality. Some influential works representative of this trend include Roberto Rossellini’s *Germania anno zero*, Luchino Visconti’s *La Terra Trema*, Andy Warhol’s *Kiss or Empire*, Larry Gottheim’s *Fog Line*, Michael Snow’s *La Région Centrale*, Robert Fenz’s *Forest of Bliss*, Peter Hutton’s *New York Portrait: Chapter I or Study of a River*, James Benning’s *One Way Boogie Woogie or Los*<sup>62</sup> and many others.

According to Bordwell, the majority of the conventions employed in art and slow cinema clearly oppose some popular Hollywood devices by relying on the two distinctive principles, namely documentary and sensory realism, seen in its exposure of real life locations and problems as well as psychologically complex characters, authorial expressivity and ambiguity, often manifested in the use of open-ended narrative or pensive ending. Furthermore, Bordwell notes that although slow cinema quite evidently favours stylistic innovation over the actual plot, it also shares a number of characteristics with art cinema, including deep focus cinematography, ambiguous and casual narrative structures, long takes or reserved modes of storytelling.<sup>63</sup> Meanwhile, Flanagan analyzes this categorization further by indicating that the boundaries between art film, “non-narrative experimentation” and documentary can be deemed confounding and hybridized.<sup>64</sup> In his study, Flanagan quotes Mulvey<sup>65</sup> as one of the leading scholars focusing on the relationship between narrativity and avant-garde as well as experimental film operating within the framework of slow cinema:

61 T. de Luca, “Realism of the senses: A tendency in contemporary world cinema”, in: *Theorizing World Cinema*, eds. L. Nagib, R. Dudrah, and Ch. Perriam, I.B.Tauris, London 2012, pp. 183, 193.

62 *Germania anno zero*, directed by Roberto Rossellini (1948; Rome: Tevere Film); *La Terra Trema*, directed by Luchino Visconti (1948; Rome: Universal Film, 2002), DVD; *Kiss*, directed by Andy Warhol (1963; New York: Andy Warhol Films, 2004), DVD; *Empire*, directed by Andy Warhol (1964; New York: Andy Warhol Films, 2004), DVD; *Fog Line*, directed by Larry Gottheim (1970); *La Région Centrale*, directed by Michael Snow (1972); *Forest of Bliss*, directed by Robert Fenz (1986); *New York Portrait: Chapter I*, directed by Peter Hutton (1979); *Study of a River*, directed by Peter Hutton (1997); *One Way Boogie Woogie*, directed by James Benning (1977); *Los*, directed by James Benning (2001).

63 D. Bordwell, *Film Art...*, pp. 57-58.

64 M. Flanagan, “‘Slow Cinema’...”, p. 26.

65 L. Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*. Reaktion Books, London: 2006.

As Laura Mulvey has suggested in the context of cinema's convergence with new media, the films that comprise slow cinema aim to locate new ways of responding to the world by seeking to 'derive images from whatever the camera observed rather than a narrative aspiration to order and organisation'. Mulvey describes this approach as pertaining to a 'cinema of record, observation and delay', in which gaps created by the decline of action are filled by 'empty images of landscapes or cityscapes' and elongated shots that enable 'the presence of time to appear on the screen' (Mulvey 2006: 129). In this type of cinema, 'the oppositions between narrative and avant-garde film, between materialism and illusion, have become less distinct, and the uncertain relation between movement and stillness, and between halted time and time in duration, is now more generally apparent' (Mulvey 2006: 30). Such a slackening of divisions between narrativity and the avant-garde (that is, between action and delay), produces a conspicuous fluidity between divergent modes of representation.<sup>66</sup>

Not surprisingly, the *Qatsi* trilogy, classified as a non-narrative experimental documentary, which draws on a set of generic tropes related to the city symphony, tends to incorporate the ambivalence of the aforementioned oppositions and divisions. In this context, it is also worth mentioning a rather problematic distinction between art cinema, which, while drawing on concepts from modernism, aims to "pose questions that guide us in fitting material into an ongoing structure", and non-narrative experimental film, which operates entirely outside the classical film.<sup>67</sup> Although the general category of experimental film is often perceived as synonymous with avant-garde and underground film, the former, as suggested by Flanagan, "tends to alight upon singular events (in isolation, series or superimposition) rather than narratives, and its explicit function is to interrogate both the filmic apparatus and the spectator's perception of those events".<sup>68</sup> Therefore, in contrast to avant-garde cinema, experimental cinema is likely to consolidate disparate structural and realist works of Andy Warhol, Michael Snow, Jonas Mekas, James Benning or Peter Hutton. Specifically, non-narrative experimental filmmakers working in the realist mode, for instance, have sought inspiration from the early films of the Lumière brothers and, as a result, combined an "extremely reductive strategy" (as put by Hutton),<sup>69</sup> with uncomplicated observational practice.<sup>70</sup> Flanagan argues that these and related

<sup>66</sup> M. Flanagan, "'Slow Cinema'...", pp. 26-27.

<sup>67</sup> D. Bordwell, *Film Art...*, p. 210.

<sup>68</sup> M. Flanagan, "'Slow Cinema'...", p. 42.

<sup>69</sup> S. MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 3. Interviews with Independent Filmmakers*, University of California Press, Berkeley, California 1997, p. 246, 244, 247.

<sup>70</sup> P. Gidal, *Theory and definition of structural/materialist film*, in: *Structural Film Anthology*, ed. P. Gidal, BFI, London 1978, p. 3.

works of contemporary observational cinema are closely based on the representational modes of structural film, primarily the fixed frame and the extended duration, and tend to convey a largely unmediated or sometimes uninterrupted representation of reality. Similarly, it may be argued that Reggio's trilogy, while revisiting some visual tropes of slow cinema, exemplifies the tradition of both the city symphony and the structural film, defined as an experimental form of cinema in which "the shape of the whole film is predetermined and simplified" and whose content is "minimal and subsidiary to the outline" so that the spectators are offered few or no distractions or deviations.<sup>71</sup> For example, Hutton's famous city and landscape portraits, including *Budapest*, *Lodz Symphony*, *Landscape for Manon*, *In Titan's Goblet*, *Two Rivers*, *At Sea*<sup>72</sup> or the aforementioned documentaries, can be seen as representing both genres. Particularly the latter series provides its audiences with highly contemplative, sublime and luminist images constructed by means of observational strategy, which seems to be central to the evolution of slow cinema.<sup>73</sup>

Similarly, Reggio's non-verbal formula appears to rely on selected structural film and slow cinema conventions pioneered by experimental filmmakers engaged in creating unforgettable city and landscape portraiture, including Ruttmann, Warhol, Gottheim, Snow, Rimmer, Fenz, Benning, Hutton and other influential artists. Naturally, the primary cinematic effects, which tend to accentuate the contemplative aspects of the captured footage, are slow motion and superimpositions utilized abundantly in an attempt "not to romanticize the subject, but to monumentalize it so that we could look at it from a different point of view".<sup>74</sup> In his interview with McDonald, Reggio explains that recording at a rate of between 36 and 129 frames per second was particularly crucial in the case of *Powaqqatsi*, where "we're looking at a world that is intrinsically slow, that lives with the rhythms of nature, that is diversified, that is the opposite of the high kinetic energy of the industrial world".<sup>75</sup> He also points to his major motivation behind the use of this specific device: "In *Powaqqatsi*, the intention was to create a mosaic, a monument, a frozen moment of the simultaneity of

<sup>71</sup> P. Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943-2000*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002, p. 348.

<sup>72</sup> *Budapest*, directed by Peter Hutton (1984-1986); *Lodz Symphony*, directed by Peter Hutton (1991-1993); *Landscape for Manon*, directed by Peter Hutton (1987); *In Titan's Goblet*, directed by Peter Hutton (1991); *Two Rivers*, directed by Peter Hutton (2002); *At Sea*, directed by Peter Hutton (2007).

<sup>73</sup> S. MacDonald, *The Garden in the Machine: A Field Guide to Independent Films about Place*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2001, pp. 273-288.

<sup>74</sup> S. MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2...*, p. 388.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 395.



life as it existed in one instant around the Southern Hemisphere. (...) In both *Koyaanisqatsi* and *Powaqqatsi*, the intention was to see the ordinary from an extraordinary perspective.”<sup>76</sup> Bagatavicius provides a compelling interpretation of how “Serra Pelada”, the opening of *Powaqqatsi*, capitalizes on slow motion and varied shot types, especially long and aerial shots:

The shot types vary: isolated close ups of exhausted workers looking into or just beyond the lens; medium close ups tilted down above a stream of workers as they climb a ladder towards the lens; medium shots of workers tilted slightly upward from low angles with shallow focus landing on the centre plane of action and row of bodies; and (more rarely) long shots taken from the side of the mine reveal the collective rows of workers in silhouette, their movements bisecting the frame diagonally from the bottom left to the top right. (...). On the one hand, the slow motion heightens the workers’ sense of physical struggle and labour. This is especially notable during a seven second shot of extreme slow motion where a man exerts all his force to keep a sack hoisted over his head, but then dramatically slams the load down in sync with the music’s halted rhythm before the playback snaps into faster motion, and sparks a montage of ecological elements: perpendicular aerial shots of zebra herds galloping, molten lava stewing, a construction site shot from a jackhammer’s point of view, forest fires blazing, other workers in developing nations stocking produce and climbing scaffolding, and finally, a god’s eye view shot of the gold mine workers accompanied by a slow zoom that returns the viewer to the initial conditions of heavy duty labour. (...) The sensuous magic of slow motion is its ability to break down the actions of familiar forms into displays that can either be more staccato or smooth; it can emphasize the kinetic aspect of the image as much as its seductive fluidity”.<sup>77</sup>

A similar aesthetic effect, reinforced by the gradual deceleration of slow motion, is generated in the iconic ending of *Koyaanisqatsi*, showing the 1962 failed launch of the world’s first Atlas-Centaur rocket, Saturn V, which explodes over Cape Canaveral, Florida. Bagatavicius argues that due to its subjection to extreme slow motion and incremental micro-zooms, the image, besides producing the sublime response, “reshapes the viewer’s perspective until a trance-like state emerges from the full volatile arc that this rocket fragment follows”<sup>78</sup>. Specifically, the aforementioned cinematic devices accompanied by long takes and

<sup>76</sup> Ibidem, p. 338.

<sup>77</sup> A. Bagatavicius, *Sublime Cinema...*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>78</sup> Ibidem, p. 39.

elapsed shot time might contribute to distorting the spectators' temporal and spatial sensibility, simultaneously serving as a framing device for the whole work's meaningful content.

Some other visual tropes characteristic for slow cinema aesthetics and present in Reggio's trilogy are long tracking and panning shots, sometimes of depopulated landscapes, which appear to draw on numerous principles of documentary and sensory realism. In particular, *Koyaanisqatsi* makes an extensive use of slow tracking shots of natural landscapes and cities, viewed from both high and low angles, which give rise to an almost sensory or somatic relationship between the audience and the projected sequences. For instance, the opening scene of the film, which includes aerial shots of a desolate wilderness with majestic deserts and monumental rock formations, does not only render the viewer an almost omnipotent god-like figure capable of controlling nature, but it also reinforces the effect of the landscape, conjured in a number of the city symphonies. Bagatavicius suggests that, similarly to the latter genre, where the cinematic effectiveness of the landscape is "almost entirely dependent upon the lighting",<sup>79</sup> Reggio's focus on (symbolic) landscape is also intrinsically interrelated with the director's successful framing of natural phenomena, such as sunshine, mist, rain, fire or a configuration of clouds.<sup>80</sup> A skillful shot of optical effects, well evidenced in the final segment of *Powaqqatsi*, "From Egypt With Mr. Suso", which contains a mesmerizing take of a body of rippling water, over a minute long, additionally contributes to the sense of documentary and sensory realism, which can be literally absorbed by the audience. It might be further argued that the films' adoption of the long take or full duration within the shot can be considered derivative of Bazin's naive and reductionist notion of film realism, which, while drawing parallels between the indexical function of photography and cinema, favours non-fiction filmmaking seen as an imprint of reality. Although the theory has raised objections from many fellow critics, also known as "Bazin-bashing",<sup>81</sup> Flanagan hypothesizes that Bazin's model of modern cinema may prove to be helpful when analyzing some formal innovations of slow cinema, such as the sequence shot, durational style centered on the long take, the elimination of editing as well as contemplative spectatorial practice: "Slow cinema, then, returns to what we might call the Bazinian root of durational style, displaying a clear acceptance that film adequately registers an impression of the world as it exists in time, and a subjective striving for a realism of duration".<sup>82</sup> Taking such an assumption, it seems that the *Qatsi*,

<sup>79</sup> R. Arnheim, *Film as Art*, University of California Press, Berkeley, California 1957, p. 69.

<sup>80</sup> A. Bagatavicius, *Sublime Cinema...*, p. 48.

<sup>81</sup> P. Rosen, *History of Image. Image of History: Subject and Ontology in Bazin*, "Wide Angle" 1987, vol. 9, no 5, pp. 7-34.

<sup>82</sup> M. Flanagan, "'Slow Cinema'...", p. 98.

although it virtually never attempts an expression of the real sense of time, conveys elements of everyday reality both in a documentary and evocative style, particularly through its use of long panning shots and natural effects. Instead, it tends to deliberately distort and dramatize it, which renders it close to the concept of modernist time<sup>83</sup> and aims to amplify the emotional resonance of the imagery. As pointed out by Bagatavicius,

Qatsi trilogy capitalizes on aesthetic absorption as an actual experiential part of everyday reality. One of the deepest rooted powers of these films is that they wind back to spatial ingredients that are already present in reality; they hold up a mirror to pockets of culture around the globe and reify an innate magic in the world that, while some might have thought was lost, turned out to be simply forgotten. The countless bird's eye view shots of arid canyons, dense forests, savannahs, cloudscapes, and bodies of water are testament to this ever-present magic.<sup>84</sup>

It goes without saying that the focus on landscape in *Qatsi* highlights other characteristics associated with neo-modern slow cinema, such as the aesthetics of emptiness or a pronounced emphasis on quietude and the everyday. Although the latter stylistic traits only occasionally come to the fore in the films' visual content, they are easily detectable on its symbolic and metaphorical level, particularly due to their non-narrative and non-verbal form. Even more importantly, the sense of silence is rarely experienced on the audible level; instead, Philip Glass's elevating score is almost constantly present throughout the films, producing "a trance-like sublime effect", which "matches the mass proliferation and unfathomable quantity of visual units in the films".<sup>85</sup> In other words, the juxtaposition of images and music, specifically the serialism and rhythmic structures, constitutes a remarkable audiovisual register, which amplifies the visceral transformations of the imagery as well as reinforces its ambiguity. Bagatavicius notes that "the cyclical structure of Glass' music is the sonic equivalent to deep focused long shots and hyperkinetic montage; it allows active listeners to lock into an unbridled engagement with the film, or to simply 'look around' with their ears and float through its streams of repetition".<sup>86</sup> According to MacDonald, whether composed by the ensemble in the studio (*Koyaanisqatsi*), a symphonic orchestra featuring a solo cello (*Naqoyqatsi*) or simply assembled

<sup>83</sup> R. Syska, *Slow-Czas, Slow-Cinema. Warstwa Temporalna Współczesnego Neomodernizmu*, "Media – Kultura – Komunikacja Społeczna" 2014, vol. 10, no. 3, p. 76.

<sup>84</sup> A. Bagatavicius, *Sublime Cinema...*, p. 51.

<sup>85</sup> Ibidem, p. 27.

<sup>86</sup> Ibidem, p. 51.

from various sources of on-site world music (*Powaqqatsi*), Glass's compositions energize the image and are capable of producing a tremendous emotional response in the listener, like the trancelike and highly inspirational Vedic Hindu chants, which "open up the conscious and the unconscious mind to (...) another dimension".<sup>87</sup> What is more, as mentioned before, both the score and the visual language tend to stress the trilogy's ambiguity. Abundantly employed in art and slow cinema, the films' dependence on the category is clearly reflected in their lack of conventional meaning or clarity; instead, their interpretative potential to a large extent lies in the eye of the beholder. As implied by Reggio himself,

there can be as many meanings – or no meaning – for these films as there are viewers to see them. They strip cinema of its traditional foreground (characterization and plot) and make the background (the context of the story) the new foreground. The intention is to create ineradicable impressions. Einstein said the fish will be the last to know water. Perhaps humans will be the last to know technology – that unseen 'water' in which we swim.<sup>88</sup>

On the other hand, the films' non-narrative and non-verbal form seems to thrive with meaning and, quite paradoxically, the central ideological theme of each installment of the trilogy becomes apparently contextualized. Although often regarded as naive or simplified, *Qatsi* provides its audiences with a rather unambiguous message, which presents "a point-of-view facing the natural world – the technological milieu".<sup>89</sup> Solomon observes that "through its relentless display of the dehumanizing squalor of modern industrial civilization, the movie makes an eloquent, if unarticulated, plea for another way of living, for a return to preindustrial harmonies".<sup>90</sup> Interestingly, it is also worth noting that in one of his interviews Reggio insisted that *Koyaanisqatsi*, although it provides some deep insights into the physical and moral condition of contemporary American culture, has no distinctive message and remains open for individual interpretation: "These films are meant to provoke, they are meant to offer an experience rather than an idea or information or a story".<sup>91</sup> Simultaneously, by manipulating the footage, the director offers more attentive viewers a vast array of metaphors, which themselves might serve as a meaningful commentary on the impact of technology on mankind: "Comparing commuters to hot dogs on an

<sup>87</sup> S. MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*..., p. 378, 398.

<sup>88</sup> "The Qatsi Trilogy by Godfrey Reggio and Philip Glass. Director's Note," Pomegranate Arts, accessed July 19, 2016, [http://www.pomegranatearts.com/project-philip\\_glass/pglass\\_qatsi.html](http://www.pomegranatearts.com/project-philip_glass/pglass_qatsi.html).

<sup>89</sup> "The Qatsi Trilogy by Godfrey Reggio...

<sup>90</sup> J. Solomon, *Our decentered culture*..., p. 38.

<sup>91</sup> D. Eagan, *America's Film Legacy*..., p. 779.

assembly line, for example, or tilting up from clogged traffic to a billboard for a resort casino. Reggio holds onto shots until they practically shout ‘metaphor’: bees in a hive, ants on a hill, arterial freeways with cars as corpuscles”.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, Allen and Goodall, who analyze the framing in *Koyaanisqatsi*, suggest that the film, proposing a number of meta-messages, “reinforces a circularity of life although this circle is uneven and often fractured”.<sup>93</sup> According to the scholars, such an interpretation might stem from the fact that the whole picture is opened and closed with largely the same image, which depicts the launch of a NASA rocket rendered in slow motion.<sup>94</sup>

It seems that except for incorporating narrative and visual conventions traditionally associated with slow cinema aesthetics, Reggio’s *Qatsi* is likely to lean toward the concept of neo-modern sublime. Adopting such an assumption, it might be argued that the trilogy relies on a set of cinematic tropes, which draw on stylistic excess,<sup>95</sup> rooted in the natural and technological sublime.<sup>96</sup> The tradition of depicting sublime landscapes in American art and culture goes back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Hudson River School and its vivid portrayals of the American wilderness, widely exhibited and circulated in the East as well as attracting crowds similarly to today’s popular motion pictures.<sup>97</sup> The painters’ practices were mostly in accordance with the main principles of American romanticism, which gave rise to the nationwide appreciation of deistic wilderness recognized as one of the principal constituents of national self-esteem.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, among the most prominent characteristics of the movement was its preoccupation with the notion of romantic landscape, which stands in opposition to the scientific empiricism and secularism of the Western Europe and attempts to rediscover the presence of God and spirituality in nature. The two principal strands which evolved in the course of the school’s development, are pastoral elegy and scientific exoticism, also inseparably connected with visualizing the sublime and the picturesque,<sup>99</sup> first proposed in 18<sup>th</sup> century European aesthetics and further discussed by Burke, Kant,

<sup>92</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>93</sup> P. Allen and M. Goodall, “The power of the edge: Multimodal communication, space and framing in *Koyaanisqatsi*”, in: *Crash Cinema: Representation in Film*, eds. M. Goodall, J. Good, and W. Godfrey, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Cambridge 2007, p. 38.

<sup>94</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>95</sup> see e.g. K. Thompson, *The Concept of Cinematic...*; A. Bagatavicius, *Sublime Cinema...*

<sup>96</sup> D.E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime...*

<sup>97</sup> C. Carmer, *The Hudson River school. The first New York school*, in: *The Hudson River and Its Painters*, ed. J. K. Howat, Viking Press, New York 1972, pp. 19-24; J. Driscoll, *All that is Glorious Around Us*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY 1997, pp. 8-20.

<sup>98</sup> R. Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut 1982, pp. 67-68.

<sup>99</sup> J.L. Allen, “Horizons of the Sublime: The Invention of the Romantic West”, *Journal of Historical Geography* 1992, vol. 18, no 1, p. 27.

Schopenhauer or Gilpin. In the American culture, both concepts can be clearly related to Turner's Frontier Thesis, which successfully advanced the myth that pioneering the American West had played a substantial role in shaping the national character, as well as Manifest Destiny, which stresses the U.S. primacy in exploration and expansion across North American territories. The traces of these ideological stances manifest themselves in certain fragments of the trilogy, most notably in *Koyaanisqatsi*'s view of Monument Valley, which might serve as the archetype of the western frontier, a savage wilderness to be both conquered and revered.

Particularly the sublime mode, expressed in a number of the Hudson River School and luminist paintings, which portrayed some overwhelming, unique and often dramatic Wild West settings, evoked the feelings of awe and tranquility as well as uncertainty, fear and terror brought about by visualizing such conditions as vastness, darkness, danger, or solitude. This kind of aesthetics was later adopted in 20<sup>th</sup> century American cinematic landscapes, which often portrayed an infinite and immense sublime scenery, reducing the viewer to a metaphysical dissolution or a "vanishing nothingness" as well as bringing a sudden realization of an inevitable transience of one's own existence.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, Natali suggests that both the Hudson River School and contemporary film depictions of American landscapes tend to share ideological and iconological scenarios associated with "sublime imperial fantasies":

Film landscapes are never purely narrative backgrounds nor simply distracting spectacular settings. They bear the traces of political projects and ideological messages. They press onto viewers' senses, memories, and fears and become part of their memory, carrying the subliminal strength of a past, even archaic, worldview ready to come back as future progress. Like the footprints left on the surface of the moon by U.S. astronauts, Hollywood landscapes bear the footprints of the United States' recurrent manifest destiny.<sup>101</sup>

The statement, though somewhat simplified, may also serve as a comment on many independent and experimental productions, which often attempt at, as put by McDonald,

revivifying our sense of place in all its complexity – that is, for evoking

<sup>100</sup> A. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation. Vol. I*, transl. R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., London 1909, p. 266.

<sup>101</sup> M. Natali, "The course of the empire: Sublime landscapes in the American cinema", in: *Landscape and Film*, ed. M. Lefebvre, Routledge, London 2006, p. 100.

something of the original discoverers' wonder at where we are, something of the original explorers' excitement in transforming the possible into the actual, and something of the original settlers' understanding of the practical failures of their surround – while at the same time recognizing the problematic moral, environmental, and political implications of five centuries of European involvement in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>102</sup>

Similar emotions may be evoked by the technological sublime, which transferred the sense of “awe and wonder often tinged with an element of terror” from the natural environment to the technological achievements of the industrial revolution.<sup>103</sup> Originally proposed in Marx's famous work, *The Machine in the Garden*,<sup>104</sup> the concept was ideally supposed to strive for the “middle landscape” by reconciling the machine with the pristine and pastoral wilderness. One of its earliest descriptions, however, was proposed by Charles Caldwell in the 1832 issue of the *New England Magazine*:

Objects of exalted power and grandeur elevate the mind that seriously dwells on them, and impart to it greater compass and strength. Alpine scenery and an embattled ocean deepen contemplation, and give their own sublimity to the conception of beholders. The same will be true of our system of Railroads. Its vastness and magnificence will prove communicable, and add to the standard of the intellect of the country.<sup>105</sup>

Some more recent analyses of the technological sublime, the most notable of which include Nye's monograph, define the notion as a distinctively American formation and “an essentially religious feeling, aroused by the confrontation with impressive objects”, which has become one of the “self-justifying parts of a national destiny, just as the natural sublime once undergirded the rhetoric of manifest destiny”.<sup>106</sup> Both Nye and Noble suggest that the concept, seen in a close relation to the sense of national identity, is often indicative of a religious quest for morality, fulfillment, transcendence as well as scientific and spiritual development.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, Serres and Latour emphasize the quasi-religious dimension of the human relationship with technology: “Our god is the machine, the technical object, which stresses our mastery of our surroundings”.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>102</sup> S. MacDonald, *The Garden in the Machine...*, p. 91.

<sup>103</sup> D. E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime...*, p. xvi.

<sup>104</sup> L. Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1964.

<sup>105</sup> L. Marx, *The Machine in...*, p. 195.

<sup>106</sup> D.E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime...*, pp. 13, 282.

<sup>107</sup> Ibidem; D. Noble, *The Religion of Technology*, Penguin, New York 1999.



Unsurprisingly then, the focus on either natural or urban landscape in avant-garde and experimental cinema, often rendered with the sublime sensibility or implying some of the aforementioned ideological messages, can be seen as a rather persistent trend in the history of American filmmaking. Some influential narrative and non-narrative works representative of this tendency include Ralph Steiner's *H2O* (1929), Francis Thompson's *N.Y., N.Y.* (1957), Bruce Baillie's *Castro Street* (1966), Nathaniel Dorsky's two-part *Hours for Jerome* (1966-1970/82), Stan Brakhage's *Desert* (1976), Babette Mangolte's *The Sky on Location* (1982), Michael Rudnick's *Panorama* (1982) and many others.<sup>109</sup>

Meanwhile, the notion of cinematic excess was first proposed in Heath's article, "Film and System: Terms of Analysis"<sup>110</sup> and Barthes' essay "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills",<sup>111</sup> where the scholars discuss the relationship between the materiality of the image and a cinematic work's narrative structures of unity by asserting that the former tends to transcend or go beyond the latter. In other words, both imagery and sound create physical and stylistic structures accompanied by a set of excessive perceptual cues, observable, for example, in the tensions and interplay between plot and story or material and form.<sup>112</sup> Meanwhile, Thompson attempts to provide a working definition of excess seen as clearly opposing a film's homogeneity.<sup>113</sup> In her analysis of Sergei Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*,<sup>114</sup> Thompson claims that excess "implies a gap or lag in motivation" as well as reveals an "underlying arbitrariness of the narrative" and its presence can be detected in the composition of the visual elements, such as static, long and deep focus shots, close-ups, exaggerated style of acting and editing, authentic settings, unclear, problematic

<sup>108</sup> M. Serres, and B. Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan 1995, p. 141.

<sup>109</sup> *H2O*, directed by Ralph Steiner (1929); *N.Y., N.Y.*, directed by Francis Thompson (1957; Paris: Les Productions Artistes Associés); *Castro Street*, directed by Bruce Baillie (1966; United States: Canyon Cinema); *Hours for Jerome*, directed by Nathaniel Dorsky (1980; United States: Canyon Cinema); *Desert*, directed by Stan Brakhage (1976), *The Sky on Location*, directed by Babette Mangolte (1982), *Panorama*, directed by Michael Rudnick (1982).

<sup>110</sup> S. Heath, *Films and System: Terms of Analysis*, "Screen" 1975, vol. 16, no 1.

<sup>111</sup> R. Barthes, "The third meaning: Research notes on some Eisenstein stills", in: *Image Music Text*, ed. and transl. S. Heath, Fontana Press, London 1977.

<sup>112</sup> V. Shklovski, "The Resurrection of the Word", transl. R. Sherwood, "20<sup>th</sup> Century Studies" 1972, vol. 7-8, p. 46.

<sup>113</sup> K. Thompson, "The Concept of Cinematic Excess", *Ciné-Tracts* 1977, vol. 1, no. 2.

<sup>114</sup> *Ivan the Terrible, Part I*, directed by Sergei Eisenstein (1944; Moscow: Mosfilm, 2001), DVD; *Ivan the Terrible, Part II*, directed by Sergei Eisenstein (1958; Moscow: Mosfilm, 2001), DVD.

or indistinct props, etc.<sup>115</sup> She concludes that “a perception of a film which includes its excess implies an awareness of the structures (including conventions) at work in the film, since excess is precisely those elements which escape unifying impulses”.<sup>116</sup> Although many of the aforementioned elements can be found in Reggio’s trilogy, the essence of cinematic excess lies predominantly in the exposure of omnipresent and proliferating technological and mass culture artifacts.

The concept of sublime cinema itself was coined by Bagatavicius, whose M.A. thesis constitutes the first feature-length manuscript, which “provides a stepping-stone towards the development of a practical working methodology for sublimity that might be applied to (...) non-narrative films”.<sup>117</sup> While attempting to formulate a strictly filmic definition of the concept, Bagatavicius distinguishes the following set of salient characteristics, which might be applied to the genre:

holistic unity through excess, a shock to the viewer’s senses, visual hapticity (how visual text produces felt texture), embodied spectatorship, phenomenological inquiry, and liminality; largely non-verbal content; unconventional formats/structures; virtuosic camera choreography; evocative landscapes; defamiliarizing angles and cuts; a lack of plot and character; transformative special effects; and music that is in flush aesthetic contact with the image; the sheer ambiguity of the genre.<sup>118</sup>

In further discussion, Bagatavicius stresses another trait of sublime cinema, which is likely to draw on certain conventions associated with the early cinema of attractions:<sup>119</sup>

sublime cinema also resuscitates and evolves the universal language and communication of early cinema, as if the cinema of attractions has been caught up on the past hundred years of development, given an adrenaline shot, or rebooted entirely. (...) Like those formative films from the early 1900s, there is a utopian impulse at work here whose resonance smacks of both cultural growth and artistic magic, but is not limited by words, intertitles, or linguistic parameters. It takes the kinetic, affective, and ‘occult’ drawl of the cinema of attractions and infuses it with the sociocultural relevancy of

<sup>115</sup> K. Thompson, *The Concept of...*, pp. 57, 62.

<sup>116</sup> Ibidem, p. 63.

<sup>117</sup> A. Bagatavicius, *Sublime Cinema...*, p. 1.

<sup>118</sup> Ibidem, p. 22.

<sup>119</sup> T. Gunning, *The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde*, “Wide Angle” 1986, vol. 8, no 3-4.

this contemporary technological moment and the cinematographic techniques that have developed over the past hundred years.<sup>120</sup>

Basing his research on the aforementioned formal assumptions, Bagatavicius analyzes the various ways in which sublimity, seen as an aesthetic experience and an experiential response of the spectator, is formally generated through special effects, camera movement, and Philip Glass's music, as used throughout *Qatsi*. In other words, the scholar concludes that Reggio's use of slow motion, time lapse, natural effects, digital manipulation and computer generated graphics (CGI), camera movement, as well as score can be regarded as the major factors which render the trilogy a genuinely sublime spectacle.<sup>121</sup> Similarly to the previously discussed slow motion and camera movement, which tend to distort the natural qualities of a projected scene, time lapse sequences, generated with fewer frames in the shot, also disrupt the filmed subject, yet in a strikingly different manner. For example, *Koyaanisqatsi*'s "The Grid", inspired by the avant-garde time lapsed cityscapes of Hilary Harris' *Organism*,<sup>122</sup> or *Powaqqatsi*'s "From Egypt with Mr. Suso" may illustrate how a sequence of accelerated images convey the velocity of urban life in the city (*Koyaanisqatsi*) or the dichotomy between a motionless rusty car and the speeding, semi-transparent automobiles passing it along the two dirt roads (*Powaqqatsi*). The following fragment is Bagatavicius's interpretation of how the former chapter utilizes time lapse photography in order to invoke a sublime response:

Whereas there is a seamless, tranquil quality to the first three minutes of 'The Grid' where extreme long shots of whizzing car lights bask in the seductive glow of a full moon, captured with a zoom lens as it plays peekaboo by passing behind a skyscraper, the blurring together of endless people and units (hot-dogs and Twinkies) on assembly lines that follows is more agitating. The unfathomable quantities of people being paralleled with mass-produced consumer products makes the terrifying aspect of the sublime shine through; each individual unit cannot be visually accounted for as time lapse mashes them together into a conglomerate of commodities. The quick inserts of video game sequences reaffirms how time lapse can highlight a sense of commodification, with the Frogger sequence in particular boiling down serious events such as car crashes into a seemingly trivial game that only requires another quarter in order for the user/city dweller

<sup>120</sup> A. Bagatavicius, *Sublime Cinema...*, p. 24.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*..., p. 24.

<sup>122</sup> *Organism*, directed by Hilary Harris (1975).

to play again.<sup>123</sup>

Even more interestingly, “From Egypt with Mr. Suso” provides the spectators with a series of evocative low angle shots, which not only expose a striking contrast between the decayed and the phantom cars, but also symbolize the transient nature of technology and human civilization. Similarly, time lapsed photography used in the two chapters of *Naqoyqatsi* – “Naqoyqatsi” and “The Vivid Unknown”, which feature a starry night captured and (re)presented as dazzling meteor showers, creates a truly sublime spectacle and emphasizes the ambiguity of a manipulated image of the astronomical phenomenon.

The last remark leads to Bagatavicius’ discussion of digital representational strategies and their role in *Qatsi*’s visual and narrative content, particularly in its final installment, *Naqoyqatsi*, in which digital artifacting and 3D-imaging are the most prevalent. As argued by Bagatavicius, the picture “recycles imagery from the other two films and gives them a digital gloss, warps stock footage to suit its collage aesthetic (...) and skirts around the dangerous topical edges of genetic experimentation, pharmaceuticals, warfare, and cosmetics using digital media as a vessel to navigate the waters of binary and virtual reality”.<sup>124</sup> Hence, the sublime moments, re-assembled from the previous installments of the trilogy and facilitated through a sensory interaction with the synthetic image, resonate on the metaphorical level of the imagery, embodying an ephemeral nature of the human existence and depersonalization processes in contemporary Western societies. Examples of some computer-generated images, which expose problems and challenges of the post-modern, tech-dominated and violent world, include digitally altered landscapes presenting galloping animals, mushroom clouds from the atomic explosion, “phantom rides” through tunnels, speeding trains and automobiles, astronauts performing EVA, undocking and docking of a spacecraft in space, an x-ray of the human skeleton or a transformation of an outstretched human hand into an elongated alien’s hand. Also, as mentioned above, the soundscape, which remains an inseparable component of the whole trilogy, both conjures and amplifies the sublime and almost palpable experiences by adding momentum to the films’ visual, semantic and emotional content. While analyzing *Koyaanisqatsi*’s “Cloudscape”, Maycock asserts that Glass’ score additionally exposes the rich interpretative potential and the ambiguous nature of Reggio’s evocative images:

If you listen to the music on its own you are not required to imagine clouds

<sup>123</sup> A. Bagatavicius, *Sublime Cinema...*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>124</sup> Ibidem, p. 54.

as you listen, they are just the reason the musical material is as it is and the track title 'Cloudscape' is there to point you in that direction if you happen to be curious. The music works well enough for listeners who are not aware of the title and that is a measure of how convincing the artistic decision was.<sup>125</sup>

Similarly, the keyboard textures of *Koyaanisqatsi*'s "Slow People" or its titular chant are capable of intensifying sensuous or almost kinesthetic sensations as well as evoking a sense of physical space while featuring the Hopi Great Gallery pictographs or the demolition and collapse of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis. This hypothesis is somewhat confirmed by Reggio himself, who comments on *Koyaanisqatsi*'s audiovisual content as follows: "In the case of 'Koyaanisqatsi', I feel that the experience was perhaps too intense. At one point in the film, we were dealing with eleven polyrhythmic musical structures colliding all at once, for twenty-one minutes!"<sup>126</sup> Moreover, Bagatavicius interestingly points out that *Qatsi*'s ability to stimulate some profoundly tactile impressions in the viewers may lay foundations for the so called embodied film spectatorship, also known as haptic visuality.<sup>127</sup> The concept, located within the cinema of attractions, is usually defined as a sensual experience or a bodily perception of the filmed subject and, as proposed by Sobchack, is founded on the two related concepts – synaesthesia and coenaesthesia.<sup>128</sup> While the former stands for an involuntary, immediate, concrete and meaningful cinematic experience strictly dependent on the spectator's perception of a diegetic sound as colour, shape, or taste, the latter refers to "the perception of one's whole bodily state as the sum of its somatic perceptions".<sup>129</sup> Taking such an assumption, it may be argued that the trilogy's excessive audiovisual appeal as well as its experimental and non-narrative format only revivify an active or embodied mode of spectatorship as they invite the audience to garner potent meaning from its ambiguous content rather than impose it on them.

It seems that *Qatsi* makes an extensive use of the footage whose traits not only draw on some salient conventions of sublime cinema, but they also seek inspiration from neo-modern contemplative cinema aesthetics. Despite being classified as largely atypical slow films, the trilogy relies on a set of visual and narrative tropes, based both on the stylistic excess of non-verbal sublime cinema

<sup>125</sup> R. Maycock, *Glass: A Portrait*, Sanctuary Publishing Limited, London 2002, pp. 41-42.

<sup>126</sup> S. MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 2*..., p. 396.

<sup>127</sup> A. Bagatavicius, *Sublime Cinema*..., p. 54.

<sup>128</sup> L. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina 2000.

<sup>129</sup> V. Sobchack, *Carnal of Thoughts*..., pp. 67-68.

and on some formal devices of contemplative cinema, including slowness, duration, anti-narrative or Bazinian Realism. In particular, *Qatsi*'s dependence on nostalgic neo-modernism might stem from the use of slow motion and superimpositions, long panning, aerial and panoramic shots, high and low angles, natural effects, documentary and sensory realism as well as their focus on (symbolic) landscape and ambiguous "narrative". Meanwhile, the films' employment of stylistic excess and sublime qualities, rooted in the natural and technological sublime, is additionally conditioned by time lapse photography, digital manipulation and computer generated graphics (CGI), as well as some of the aforementioned aspects of camera movement and score. These and related tropes both reinforce the recurring existential concerns of Reggio's experimental pictures, which center around the destructive impact of urban life and technology on nature, and tend to evoke a range of emotional states, such as an intensified sense of temporality, boredom, contemplation, awe and terror, hence approaching the neo-modern slowness and sublimity.

Although *Koyaanisqatsi* was referred to as "a coffee-table film" and "an overblown non-narrative image piece"<sup>130</sup> shortly after its release, the film and its sequels have exerted a lasting influence on the mainstream culture and served as an inspiration for various media products and art forms, the most prominent of which include the BBC documentary *The Blue Planet*,<sup>131</sup> Hans Zimmer's score for *Interstellar* (2014)<sup>132</sup> or Rob Hubbard's soundtrack for the classic video game *Delta*.<sup>133</sup> The joint efforts of Reggio's visionary and socio-politically charged directing style, enhanced by Glass's scores and impressive work of some skilled cinematographers and editors, including Ron Fricke, Hilary Harris, Louie Schwartzberg, Graham Berry, Leonidas Zourdoumis, Iris Cahn, Alton Walpole, Russell Lee Fine and Jon Kane, brought the trilogy an unpredicted success and a generally positive critical response. However, this was not only due to the imprimatur of Coppola and the successive screenings at film festivals that *Qatsi*, especially its first installment, made a surprisingly long run at the box office and still cherishes an ongoing popularity among critics and selective audiences. It is also the trilogy's unconventional format, "devoid of any identifiable diegesis" and editorial comments which renders it a still unforgettable and highly captivating cinematic experience engaging the spectators primarily through alternate and visually rich fast and slow motion

<sup>130</sup> D. Eagan, *America's Film Legacy...*, p. 779.

<sup>131</sup> *The Blue Planet*, produced by Alastair Fothergill (2001; London: BBC Natural History Unit), Television.

<sup>132</sup> H. Zimmer, *Interstellar: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* (2014; New York, NY: Sony Music Entertainment), CD.

<sup>133</sup> *Delta*, Stavros Fasoulas (Thalamus Ltd, 1987).

shots of natural and urban landscapes.<sup>134</sup> A plethora of hypnotic, ethereal and lyrical images backed by some ambient circular musical themes help encapsulate Reggio's core message, "denouncing the sterile repetitiveness of modern life", and simultaneously contribute to the films' ambiguity by leaving room for creative interpretation.<sup>135</sup> Today the trilogy forms part of the larger tradition of experimental filmmaking, continuing the visual and editing strategies of the city symphony as well as the silent and more contemporary non-verbal documentaries, many of which make the National Film Registry. Somewhat surprisingly, Reggio's most recent picture, *Visitors*, released in 2013 and again tackling the question of "humanity's trancelike relationship with technology", has not managed to repeat the success of its predecessors, despite being praised for offering another stunning, wordless, visually sumptuous, graceful and dreamlike experience.<sup>136</sup> Perhaps however, the future of the avant-doc cinema might bring the world's audiences some new, visceral and even more stimulating projects of this brilliant director.

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<sup>134</sup> B. Lessard, Philip Glass. *Cultural recycling, Performance, and immediacy in Philip Glass's film music for Godfrey Reggie's Qatsi trilogy*, in: *Sound and Music in Film and Visual Media*, ed. G. Harper, Bloomsbury Academic, New York 2009, p. 493.

<sup>135</sup> J. Solomon, *Our decentered culture...*, p. 38.

<sup>136</sup> P. Bradshaw, "Visitors Review - 'Graceful and dreamlike'," *The Guardian*, April 3, 2014, accessed July 19, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/apr/03/visitors-review>.



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## **PĘDZĄCA POWOLNOŚĆ: NEOMODERNISTYCZNA ESTETYKA KONTEMPLACYJNEGO I WZNIOSŁEGO KINA W TRYLOGII QATS/ GODFREY'A REGGIO** **(streszczenie)**

Przedmiotem artykułu jest próba przedstawienia i analizy wybranych środków artystycznych wykorzystanych w eksperymentalnych filmach dokumentalnych Godfrey'a Reggio, *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982), *Powaqqatsi* (1988) i *Naqoyqatsi* (2002), tradycyjnie związanych z estetyką tzw. kina wolnego (slow cinema) oraz wzniosłego (sublime cinema). Nurt *slow*-kina, definiowany jako "różnorodny gatunek ascetycznego kina minimalistycznego" (Romney 2010) i charakteryzujący się częstym użyciem "długich ujęć, zredukowanych i powściągliwych modułów narracji, oraz ekspozycją ciszy i codzienności" (Flanagan 2008), jest często postrzegany jako kreatywna ewolucja stylu transcendentalnego Schradera lub, szerzej, tendencji neomodernistycznych we współczesnej kinematografii (Syska 2014). Chociaż atrybuty tejże stylistyki analizowane jest głównie w dziełach wiodących przedstawicieli gatunku, takich jak Tarkowski, Bergman, Bresson, Antonioni czy też Sokurow, ich obecność dostrzegana jest również w eksperymentalnym, awangardowym oraz realistycznym filmie dokumentalnym (Flanagan 2012), który w większym stopniu kładzie nacisk na kontemplacyjne aniżeli wolne aspekty ukazywanych scen i motywów (Tuttle 2012). Tymczasem analiza materiału filmowego autorstwa Reggio pod względem ww. cech gatunkowych może prowadzić do wniosku, iż trylogia *Qatsi*, będąca atypowym przykładem *slow*-kina, dosyć wyraźnie wykorzystuje konwencje oparte zarówno na stylistycznym nadmiarze wzniosłego kina niewerbalnego (Thompson 1977; Bagatavicius 2015), jak i walorach kina kontemplacyjnego, takich jak spowolnione tempo, trwanie, anty-narracja czy też realizm typu Bazinowskiego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** filmowy neomodernizm, wolne kino, wzniosłe kino, amerykański eksperymentalny film dokumentalny, Godfrey Reggio, trylogia *Qatsi*.





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