VISUALITY FROM INTERCULTURAL PERSPECTIVES: TECHNOLOGIES OF IMAGING IN COMMUNICATION, ART AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

Edited by
Michael Fleming
and Aleksandra
Łukaszewicz Alcaraz





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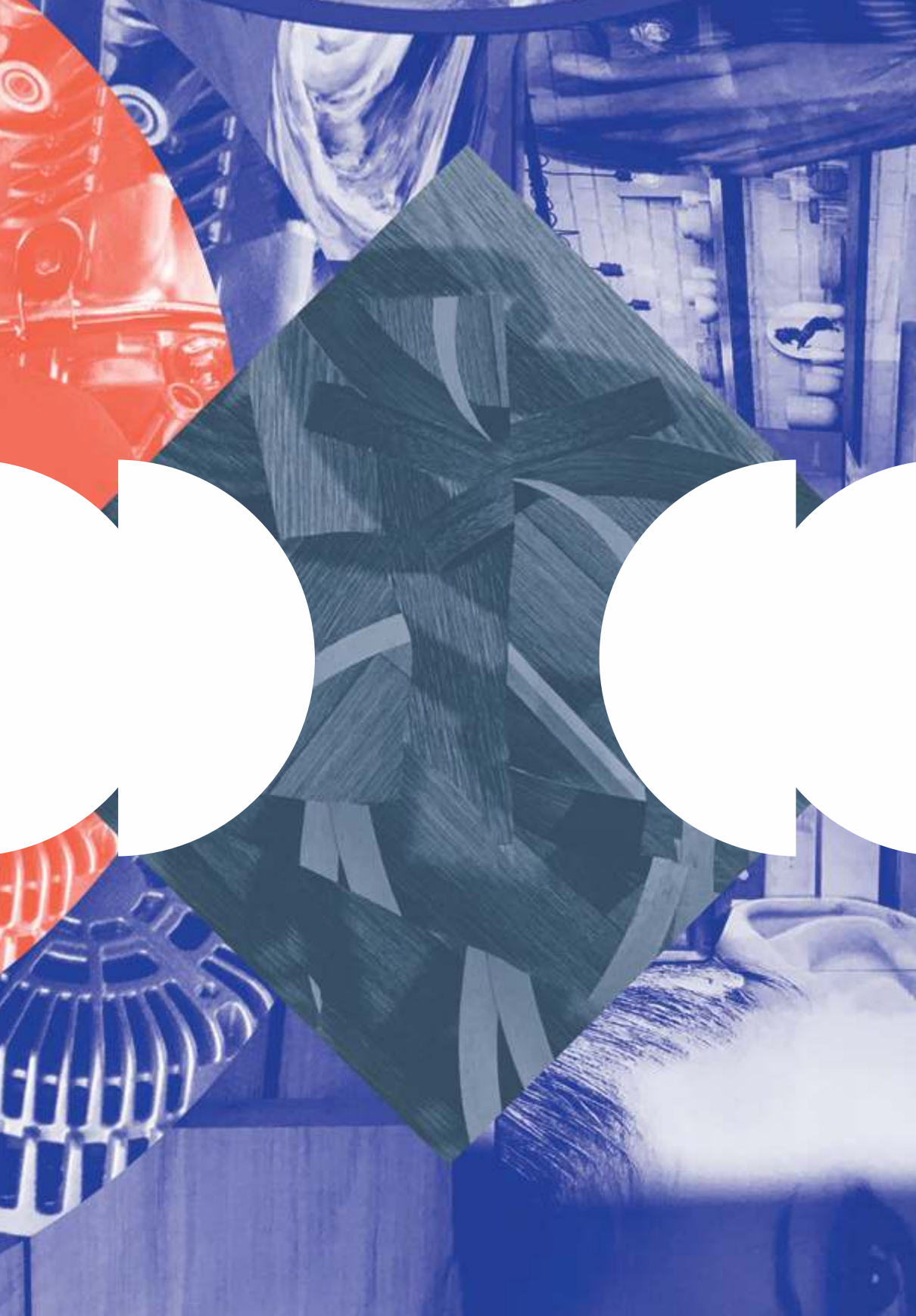
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Grażyna Czubińska is a Doctor of Health Science. Her research focuses on the Social Sciences, in particular Education and Comparative Studies. She researches the impact of acculturation process on contemporary social relations with reference to human rights. She is the Dirctor of the Institute of Social Sciences at the Polish University Abroad, London.

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Rosita Deluigi has a Ph.D in Education. She is an Associate Professor in General and Social Pedagogy, and teaches General and Intercultural Education. Her research fields are: Intercultural Education – with special attention to children of foreign origin, immigrants, and the second generation, and ways of creating inclusive and participatory environments; Social Animation and Inclusion – as an educational style and democratic method of intervention

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Michal Koleček (born in 1966 in Liberec, Czechoslovakia) is a curator of contemporary art and art historian who lives and works in Ústí nad Labem, Czech Republic. From 2007 to 2015, he was the Dean of the Faculty of Art and Design at Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem. He was appointed as a Professor of Visual Communication in 2016. During 2002 to 2003 he worked as a curator of the Collection of Modern and Contemporary Art of the National Gallery in Prague. Since 2016 he has been the artistic director of the Ústí nad Labem House of Arts. He focuses on suburban, socially deprived and excluded communities in the city and compares this disquieting situation with the educational potential of the local university. In this way art projects might include a social or cultural mission and help to eliminate the visibly frustrating imbalances in living standards, particularly in regards to access to cultural education and confrontation with contemporary visual art.

Jerzy Luty studied philosophy at Wrocław University, where he received his doctoral degree in 2006. His dissertation was published as John Cage. *Filozofia muzycznego przypadku* (John Cage: The philosophy of chance in music) in 2011. In 2018 his book *Sztuka jako adaptacja* (Art as adaptation) came out. He is the author of over twenty articles on aesthetics and philosophy, and he is preparing a Polish edition of Denis Dutton's *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure and Human Evolution* (forthcoming in Copernicus Press, 2019).

Aleksandra Łukaszewicz Alcaraz holds a doctorate in philosophy. She specialises in the fields of philosophical aesthetics and theory of culture and art. She makes use of an interdisciplinary approach that combines elements of aesthetical and social reflection with an analysis of artistic events. She is the recipient of various prizes and grants. These include a scholarship from the Kosciuszko Foundation for research on art, culture and aesthetics in the work of Joseph Margolis, and a grant to support the preparation of her book project on the theory of cyborg persons explained in terms of the metaphysics of culture.

Adéla Machová is an art curator and a cultural manager. She lives and works in Ústí nad Labem , where she graduated with a Master's degree in Curatorial Studies from the Faculty of Art and Design at Jan Evangelista Purkyně University. Since 2010, she has conducted research for her doctoral degree in visual communication. Her PhD research focuses on curatorial approaches for the presentation of contemporary visual arts. She has curated several exhibitions of contemporary young artists.

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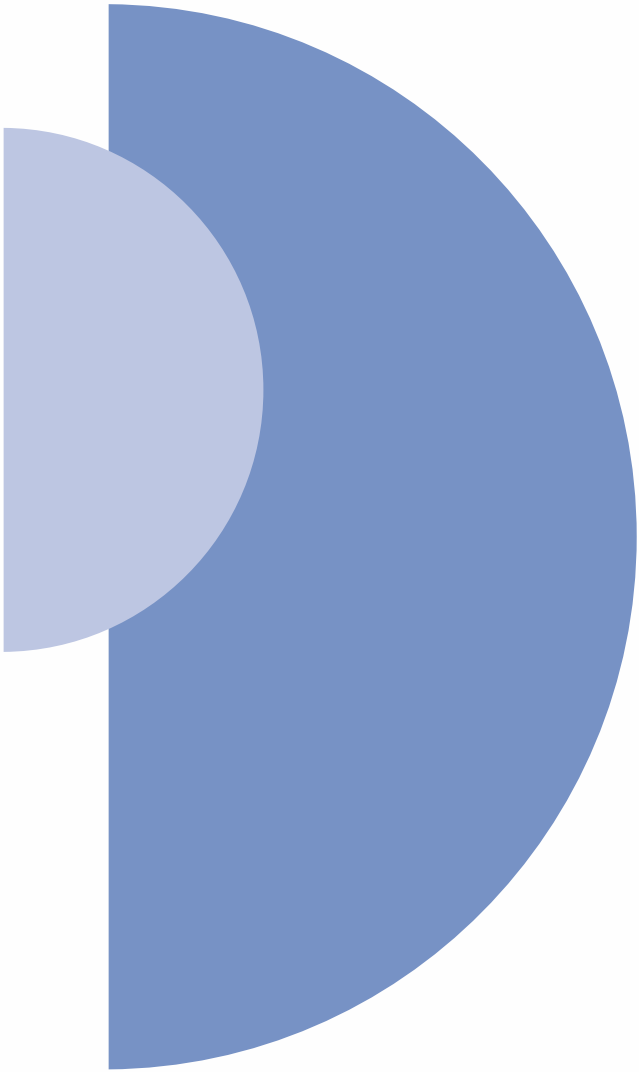
Lidia Sapińska was born in Moscow. She holds an MA from Szczecin Academy of Art. She is a user Interface designer with experience in internet marketing. She is interested in the evolution of culture (memetics). Several years working in an advertisement environment inspired her to start research on theories of information that can be used in art creating processes.

Flavia Stara is a Professor of the Philosophy of Education. Her interests concentrate on the History of Philosophy and Education, Comparative Studies in Cultures and Religions. Her present research focuses on how educational and cultural processes are challenged, in Western and Eastern realities, by contemporary social transformations referring to interculturalism, the scope of human rights and the spaces of ethics.

Agnieszka Szajner holds a doctorate in Social Science. For many years, she has focused on the topics of migrants and immigration as well as issues of integration and intercultural education. She is a deputy dean at the Polish University Abroad, London.

Preface

Michael Fleming



The articles in this volume constitute the early results of an ongoing collaborative research project funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme under the theme of 'Stimulating innovation by means of cross-fertilisation of knowledge'. The research project – *Technologies of Imaging in Communication, Art and Social Science* – includes researchers from the following institutions: The Polish University Abroad, London (United Kingdom); The Academy of Art, Szczecin (Poland); the Association of Education, Science, Culture (Poland); Jan Evangelista Purkyně University, Ústí nad Labem (Czech Republic); University of Macerata, Macerata (Italy); Pwani University, Kilifi (Kenya).

The broad objectives of the research project are to advance understanding of the functioning of visual space in different places and cultures and to investigate how different visual literacies shape communication within and between different communities. The project seeks to provide insight into how the visual (signs, messages, advertisements) functions in different contexts and to provide resources to improve education in visual literacy. An important part of the research includes raising awareness of the cultural specificities of visual literacy in business practices in different places.

In order to achieve these objectives, the research is necessarily interdisciplinary. Contributors to this volume work in a range of disciplines in the social sciences, in the humanities, as well as in business. By juxtaposing different understandings and approaches to the visual, the broad research project challenges practices of 'siloing' knowledge within defined academic disciplines, and seeks to develop productive synergies across disciplinary boundaries. On a more practical level, the project offers insight into ways in which visual communication may become more 'effective'
in different contexts.

The volume is divided into four parts. The first part, *Philosophy, Visual Studies and an Evolutionary Approach to Art and Visual Images*, provides frameworks for understanding visual culture. The second part, *Urban Visuality*, offers insight into visual cultures and visual communication in various urban settings. The third part, *Art and Culture Visuality*, provides insight into the relationship between art and culture visuality, including the role of public art and public space. Part four of the volume, *New Media Visuality*, considers contemporary communication practices, including signage and cultural representation.

Further information about the *Technologies of Imaging in Communication, Art and Social Science* (TICASS) project, including details of previous and forthcoming workshops and conferences, can be found at www.ticcas.eu

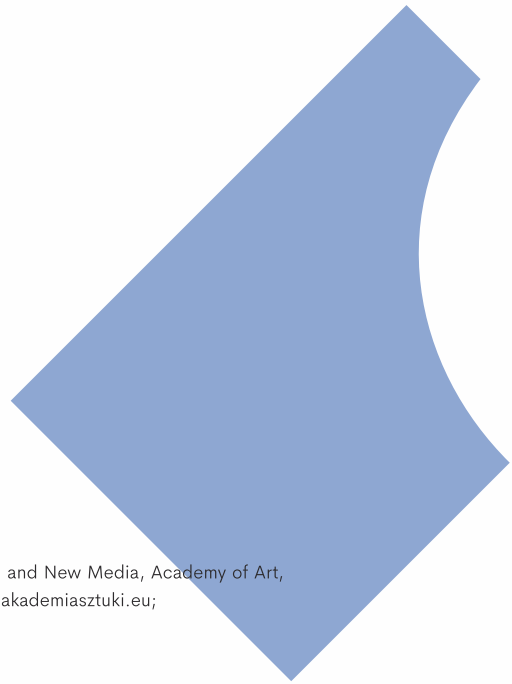

Part
1

Philosophy, Visual Studies and an Evolutionary Approach to Art and Visual Images

1

Iconic Language(s) – A New Lingua Franca or Incompatible Vocabularies? A pragmatic perspective on visual communication

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Abstract

The growing dominance of visual communication in contemporary culture is indisputable. It is present in public and private spheres. Visual communication informs us about events taking place all over the world, seduces us to buy certain products with specific media images, allows us to communicate emotions and moods, manages the forms of our mobility in urban spaces, influences the ways in which we experience the urban environment where we live our lives and the ways we identify ourselves as social subjects. William J. Thomas Mitchell's view that we live in times of the 'iconic turn' seems accurate. Mitchell rightly notes that it is not the first 'iconic turn' in our history, but it is essential for us today to analyse and understand our times.

In linguistic communication we can hardly find a common core that may be found in all languages. Even the generative grammar of Noam Chomsky does not respond to this, showing rather formal characteristics of language as such. I agree here with Richard Rorty that different sets of norms, rules and concepts in different languages are very often incompatible, impossible to directly translate and understand from the outside, because they are based on different worldviews. Rorty suggests that we can resolve this by enlarging our language and community by including others. Rorty makes this claim from the point of view of liberal democracy and he openly accepts that this view is ethnocentrically biased.

I recognise pragmatism as a useful theoretical approach to reflect on various social and cultural issues. I query whether visual communication is incompatible among different national, ethnic, and/or cultural groups, or whether we may anticipate that visual communication will guide us to some form of universal communication on a global scale.

Keywords: iconic language, visual communications, incompatible vocabularies, globalisation.

I consider it important to approach theoretically the problem that accompanies the phenomenon of proliferating visual communication – with the retreat of elaborated language communication on the one hand, and on the other, with the processes of globalisation appropriating and dominating different cultures. From this perspective I ask if we should talk about one iconic language, or rather if we should recognise different iconic languages that are incompatible with each other, in the same way that vocabularies originating from different cultures are incompatible. However, I have no ready answer, because this is not only a theoretical issue, but it should be researched in practice and analysed. I only hope that the TICASS project will bring us closer to an answer. In place of answering the question, I would like to explain this question more broadly, because it frames the investigation we are conducting on visual communication along the North-South axis from the United Kingdom to South Africa. Mapping the question philosophically, I wish to propose a theoretical basis for analyses of iconic language(s) or visual com-munication.

Due to my professional background as a philosopher specialising in aesthetics, I consider the proliferation of visual communication to be the consequence of our immersion in images. The fact that we live with images was recognised initially in later phenomenology – not in the form originated by Edmund Husserl (who hardly mentioned any examples from art), but by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, 2012), who focused on embodied perception, and initiated the French phenomenological school (Henri Maldiney and others), devoid of Husserlian transcendentalism. Anthropology of image according to Hans Belting (Belting, 2011), a contemporary German theorist, who has noticed that understanding images only within the sphere of art deprives images of their power, and human life of some important meaning. In his anthropology of image Belting explains the image as circulating between aesthetical form, medium and the human body, which is considered to be the basic and final medium of an image.

On the basis of such a background, I take up the anthropological point of view that is defined by the 'iconic turn'. This is a term proposed by William J. Thomas Mitchell, a theorist from Chicago (Mitchell, 1994: 11-34). Given that we live during the 'iconic turn', our understanding of the human condition should be based on an understanding of images created, interchanged, consumed, and criticised by humans. Mitchell's proposal is not so much historical or philosophical, but is oriented towards contemporary times and analyses of present day visual phenomena (Mitchell, 1993). Therefore, I analyse images and the structures of images in which we are immersed, not just the images/pictures that pertain to the world of art, because visual communication is beginning to dominate public and private spheres, as part of the effect of the current 'iconic turn'.

Visual communication is essential for many practices today because it informs us about events taking place all over the world; it seduces us to buy certain products with specific media images in advertisements and commercials that reach us via various media; it allows us to communicate emotions and moods without the need to explain them verbally; it guides our mobility in urban spaces, linking us to the transport structure of cities; it influences the ways in which we experience the urban environment in which we live our lives, and the ways we identify ourselves as social subjects.

In linguistic communication we can hardly point to a common essential core that may be found in all languages. The only common element seems to be a formal one: the generativity of human language as such, as presented in the generative grammar of Noam Chomsky (Chomsky, 1972). Chomsky's thesis is that the grammar of the human language has a generative character – it allows one to generate from a definite number of data an infinite number of infinitely long correct sentences, and to reject the incorrect ones. However, Chomsky interestingly disagrees with the common belief that language is a system of communication. For him, language serves to express thoughts and CAN be used to communicate (like other human phenomena such as ways of dressing, of walking, etc.). Therefore, the common core of language, its generativity, is a mental phenomenon and not a communicative one. It is possible to communicate by means not of language – which is the subject of Chomsky's research, that is, internal I-language – but by means of E-language, that is, its

social artefact. However, this does not say anything about the meanings, worldviews, or knowledges produced in different languages and in different language structures.

It is of scientific interest to know if visual communication and iconic languages can be considered as divided into different national, ethnic, and/ or cultural groups that are incompatible, or if we may rather anticipate that contemporary processes will guide us to some form of universal communication on a global scale. This issue brings us to another one, with a political connotation: if we may think about some form of universal communication on the global scale, would this communication be because of the dominance of neoliberal globalisation and its cultural hegemonic discourse, or rather due to the common human experience and condition?

The first question I approach in discussion with Richard Rorty is his belief that different sets of norms, rules and concepts in different languages are very often incompatible, impossible to directly translate and understand, because of being based on different worldviews (Rorty, 1991). This view is also present in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativism (Sapir, 1921), which Rorty refers to. According to this hypothesis, the language into which we are born and in which we grow up determines the way we perceive the world around us, the way we think and construct our worldviews. Rorty, similarly to Sapir and Whorf, believes that language determines human thinking and behaviour – that language structures decide an individual's perception of his/herself and put him/her in a certain epistemic and cultural structure.

Rorty notes the possibility of intercultural understanding (not just superficial communication on the operational level), but his proposal brings certain doubts. As a liberal ironist, he does not epistemologically favour any of the existing languages (or rather, any of the major vocabularies with their related discourses, knowledges, worldviews), but he also recognises his position as ethnocentric. From the liberal perspective he proposes to tolerantly incorporate elements of minor vocabularies, together with the corresponding parts and elements of other discourses, worldviews, and practices. According to Rorty, we should try to continuously enlarge our community, and include ever more different social and cultural groups into it. This can be done once a certain understanding is achieved, understanding within our terms, and we need adequate arguments to include parts of other discourses into ours, in order to enrich it, but not to change its general orientation. The general orientation, objectives, and structures are ours and we don't have reasonable arguments to get rid of them.

Considering Rorty's ethonocentrism in this way we easily notice that his tolerant proposal to include parts of other vocabularies (discourses) is given from the dominant position, appropriating the weaker and smaller vocabularies. Recognising Rorty's position at that point as controversial, I refer to Charles Taylor's ethical perspective, from which he states that we cannot translate one vocabulary into a culturally different vocabulary (what Rorty refers to as their incompatibility); and that we should neither try to incorporate culturally different final vocabularies (Rorty, 1989) (and what follows: knowledges, ways of expression as through art) from the dominant position, that is, from the liberal point of view (Taylor, 2003). What we should do, according to Taylor,

is to create a space to express the differences and to explain them, in order to better understand other cultures. Taylor, in his ethics of authenticity, expresses his belief that we should oppose dominating and homogenising structures of modernity in the search for peaceful co-existence of differences without the drive to appropriate them. I agree rather with Taylor's point of view, acknowledging elements of Rorty's reflections and putting them into the visual world.

This proposed ethical perspective sketches the vision of a common space for expressing differences without reaching an ideal understanding, and calls for a broader view on communication in cultural, social, and political space. The proposal of an intellectual approach to such common space can be found in Leszek Koczanowicz's writings on non-consensual communication and democracy (Koczanowicz, 2014). Koczanowicz's proposal trespasses on the Habermasian utopia of undisturbed communication in the social space (Habermas, 1984-1987), because we may neither talk about just one social space, nor can we dream about undisturbed communication and understanding in each particular social space or between social spaces with different cultural backgrounds.

Koczanowicz focuses his reflection on the communication and dialogue within a democratic community, though not necessarily one closed in national borders. He acknowledges that conflict is indispensable for a democracy. This claim has been considered from various points of view and with various conclusions drawn by philosophers. The Ancient Greeks differentiated between a conflict understood as *stasis* – between friends, and as *polemos* – between enemies (Koczanowicz, 2014: 146-147). Recently Chantal Mouffe contends that democratic politics based on antagonism should be transformed into agonism (Koczanowicz, 2014: 156-157). Koczanowicz criticises Mouffe's idea on the domestication of democracy, and transformation of social antagonism into agonism, and enemies into adversaries, because (1) it implies a strict separation of private and political life, (2) it considers the formal conditions of democracy as insufficient to change antagonism into agonism, (3) it demands a specific ethical attitude based on engagement of citizens in the activities of society (Koczanowicz, 2014: 157-158). He also observes that an antagonistic approach constitutes identities by marking differences. In place of identities construed on differences, Koczanowicz prefers to talk about similarities based on differentiations, permitting one to identify forces active in the social field and enabling a common social action (Koczanowicz, 2014: 159).

The Polish philosopher follows the pragmatic argument of George Herbert Mead and is of the opinion that the main function of political dialogue is to develop understanding of another point of view, which does not require acceptance and agreement with it (Mead, 1934: 281-289). Understanding and dialogue are the basis of democracy, and they can be found as an alternative for Mouffe's theory of agonism. Understanding does not mean agreement or conflict. It requires rather a certain openness to other perspectives, but it does not erase cultural and social differences and conflicts. Differences and conflicts arise from the differences in worldviews, which are incommensurable and impossible to translate. These differences and disparities are present not only between cultures and societies, but also within each culture and society,

and they also depend on the relational character of the meaning of words. Meanings do not represent things as they are, but they are rather tools that we use in various social practices. As Ludwig Wittgenstein argued, meanings are something that we use to coordinate our actions, and that we negotiate in practice (Wittgenstein, 1953).

> Dialogue does not serve to arbitrate conflicts or find one solution acceptable to all parties to the conflict. Dialogue that we have in mind here is a cornerstone of solidarity, because it does not enforce identity formation, but contributes to the constitution and fortification of similarity. Non-consensual dialogue is a political actualisation of features of language-as-action (Koczanowicz, 2014: 160).

In this structure it is also important to think interculturally and not only multiculturally, looking for dialogue between societies and cultures and not just acknowledging the existence of different cultures (for a broad discussion on the relation between interculturalism and multiculturalism that acknowledges the importance of surpassing the simple recognition of multicultural coexistence, with a view to intercultural dialogue and communication, see: Meer and Modood, 2011). The fact that we can communicate between different cultures does not mean that we will reach consensus about the truth, the meaning, the direction, the form. This kind of communication requires a certain openness of people's minds to bridge the difference.

Koczanowicz mostly focuses on communication, and not only on language as a specific meaningful generative structure that allows one to refer his or her words not just to language communication, but also to visual communication, both perceived as immersed in a political and cultural surrounding. Visual communication is a kind of discourse, realised not with linguistic symbols, but with visual ones, with images and signs. It is also realised within the social and cultural practices of coordinating actions and negotiating meanings, and can never provide objective representations of the world as it is. Visual communication is present in various practices within each society and culture, and globally. It is not univocal and requires dialogue and openness. Openness to others, learning about the perspectives of others requires one to re-think language, communication, visual communication, ethical attitudes and political views, and also rationalities and reason(s), but it does not mean abandoning one's own approach and practices.

This sounds good, morally and narratively good, for sure. However, in practice such intentions can be difficult to realise because of human imperfections. In addition, it appears to be difficult to think philosophically about different, sometimes contradictory perspectives together, and not seek an objective and universal truth, which should be accepted by all the parties. This reaches not just the level of communication and ethics, but also an epistemological one. The tradition of philosophy has taught us that in the case of two contradictory statements it is impossible for both of them to be right. It has been recognised for over a hundred years that there are various knowledges rather than just one. Identities and worldviews are paradoxical rather than coherent and devoid of contradictions. But it is still sometimes a challenge to

think about reason without glorifying it, or abandoning it, and to communicate without subordinating opponents.

This point is taken up by Wolfgang Welsch, who rejects both the 'Farewell to Reason' announced by some theorists, and the contentment with various rationalities without reason connecting different rationalities (Welsch, 2011). Reason, for Welsch, stays valid with the decline of the specific rationality built in the Western part of the world and strengthened in the Enlightenment. Welsch argues that reason is a formal power that allows one to negotiate meanings and that serves as a 'dynamic and intermediary faculty of transitions' allowing one to pass between forms of rationality; he calls this kind of reason 'transversal reason'. Welsch does not abandon Kant however, and transversal reason is still Kantian in its origin and basis, though it has a different orientation: not vertical, but horizontal, and so lacking the meta-order.

I am not that eager to accept the idea forged by Welsch of 'transversal reason' to define the formal characteristic of contemporary reason, because I doubt the Kantian finding of pure reason, the common formal power allowing one to compare, relate, to put into dialogue various rationalities and epistemologies. I agree here with Joseph Margolis (Margolis, 2015), who defines all our understanding as *sittlich*, that is, culturally embedded and formed in the continuous practice of interpretation; I also recognise the necessity of considering the evolutionary approach, showing that we may search for some universals not in idealistically conceived reason, but in our anthropological and evolutionary constitution (embraced in post-darwinian terms).

Therefore, I do not dare draw any ultimate conclusions on the existence of universal values and functions or the underlying practices of perceiving, interpreting, and communicating between diverse cultures and continents (which would be a kind of Chomsky-an approach.) I rather recognise the necessity of empirical and theoretical investigation, which can bring us closer to the answer. I suppose that at least we can expect that various particular rationalities, language communications, and visual communications systems – probably not all of them, but at least some – have the capacity for opening to the outside. This would be a sphere in between expressing differences, the one analysed by Charles Taylor. Still, it is possible that as we enjoy different rationalities and languages, we may need to make do with this sphere of expression of differences and not hope for undisturbed communication in either the visual or linguistic one.

There is one point that needs to be mentioned. Since the visual is connected deeper with our (human) anthropological core than verbal language, there might be a possibility to communicate with iconic languages (by means of visual communication) rather than with verbal ones, though we find here the limitation: some similarities between regional iconic languages may be not just superficial (which is also possible), but ancillary to the global consumerist discourse in the iconic sphere, which homogenises languages, communications, societies, and cultures for the sake of profit.

The precise answer to the question in the above article, on the possibility of one iconic language, needs empirical research on iconic languages and on visual communication in different cultures following the idea of 'thick description' proposed by Clifford Geertz (Geertz, 1973); this is being conducted

within the TICASS project, which aims at finding similarities and differences between iconic languages in the UK, Poland, the Czech Republic, Italy and the Republic of South Africa, in the North-South axis, and at analysing reasons for the resemblances and discrepancies found.

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Visual communication between art history and visual studies: The power of images with messages before and after Paul Martin Lester

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Abstract

This essay deals with the six 'perspectives' of image analysis introduced by Paul Martin Lester in *Visual Communication: Images with Messages*, by including his theoretical and practical proposals on the 'discussion on images' which has been worked out by art history from the beginning of the 19th century and which still lies at the heart of the debate in current visual studies. The essay suggests a synthetic revision of the discussion on the interpretation of images and on their communicative and persuasive power, and aims to provide a theoretical framework to the practical work of TICASS project. By using Lester's six 'perspectives', the project aims to read cases of visual communication in multicultural contexts. The analysis will focus on the opinions of some art historians, such as Aby Warburg, Erwin Panofsky, Michael Baxandall, as well as other scholars like Horst Bredekamp, William J. Thomas Mitchell and David Freedberg, who – starting from art history – have worked on the issue of the power of images in communicating messages.

Keywords: visual communication; *Visual Studies*; visual culture; *Bildwissenschaft*; power of images; iconography; iconology; art history

Introduction

The aim of this essay is to describe the six 'perspectives' of image analysis introduced by Paul Martin Lester in *Visual Communication: Images with Messages* (Lester 2011) by including his theoretical and practical proposals on the 'discussion on images' which has been worked out by art history from the beginning of the 19th century and which still lies at the heart of the debate in current visual studies. The essay is meant to be a synthetic revision of the discussion on the interpretation of images and on their communicative and persuasive power, and aims to provide a theoretical framework to the practical work of the TICASS project. By the use of Lester's six 'perspectives', the project aims to read visual communication in multicultural contexts. The scholars who will be mentioned and examined briefly in this essay, and are sometimes compared to Lester, are in my opinion scholars who can be useful for a conscious and better interpretation of images in visual communication, especially in multicultural contexts.

Lester's six perspectives

The first edition of *Visual Communication: Images with Messages* by Paul Martin Lester was published in 1995, and then republished in six other editions (the last one dates back to 2014) as a manual for students of communication and visual culture. It is still considered as the only text capable of providing a wide and multiperspectival approach to the study of visual communication by using images that tell stories (Kelly 2016). The date of publication is very significant: the nineties were the decade of birth of visual studies, of the pictorial turn, the moment in which in America and in Europe many scholars,

from different disciplines and not only from art history, started to analyse and question (artistic and non-artistic) images for their values as messages or historical evidence (Elkins 2003: 4-7). Influenced by the thinking of Wilson Hicks, a journalist who promoted photojournalism between the 1930s and 1950s and who was convinced that the combination of images and words would make mass communication more efficient and persuasive (Hicks 1952), Lester believes that 'the most powerful, meaningful, and culturally important messages are those that combine words and pictures equally and respectfully' (Lester 2011: x). However, according to Lester, whereas after the invention of movable types many grammars have been drawn up to read texts and verbal messages, the extraordinary spread of cameras and the extensive use of images on TV and in newspapers has not produced any grammar of the visual world (Lester 2011: x). This is therefore the aim of his volume: to provide a grammar to read images, since those who are able to read pictures are also able to conceive and to produce effective images in mass communication. The difference between effective and non-effective images is that only effective images become engraved in the observer's memory. The basic problem is thus the power of images.

In order to analyse images of various kind, in particular non-artistic images (although various works of art are mentioned in the volume), Lester proposes six steps, six levels of analysis, which he calls 'perspectives'. The choice of the word is rather interesting and significant, as since the Middle Ages 'perspective' has indicated the 'way of seeing', that is, a gaze guided by the mind towards an idea (Panofsky 1991; Belting 2011). In order to give an example of his method, the analysis deals with an image (illustration. 1; illustration. 2) on a wall of a private dwelling in the district of Mnarani, in Kilifi, a town on the coast of Kenya between Malindi and Mombasa.

The first step is *Personal Perspective*. It is a superficial analysis, based on a personal response, which reveals much about the person making the analysis, about his/her culture and his/her world. In this first stage the analysis will only have to based on his/her personal experience. The analyst indicates whether he/she appreciates the picture and expresses his/her feelings in observing it. The picture examined could, for instance, communicate happiness: the stream of animals coming out of the house seems a merry party going towards a field or a brook.

The second analysis level is *Historical Perspective*, which is fundamental to understanding the meaning of every image on the basis of one's history. The questions that should be answered are: 'When do you think the image was made? What major developments were happening in the area where the image was produced and throughout the world? Is there a specific style that the image imitates?' (Lester 2011: 123) In the case in hand, the image that is being analysed is contemporary, it was made in a peripheral district of Kilifi, that is Mnarani, the seat of the first urban settlement in the 14th century, built by Arabs (Kirkman 1959); nowadays it is mainly inhabited by Muslims. The neighborhood is made up of a main street with stonework shops and dwellings, and by many villages of huts in which peasants and small breeders live. The image seems to imitate Disney's cartoon style; in particular, the animals leaving the stable remind us of certain scenes from *The Lion King*, which was set in Kenya.

Technical Perspective analyses the techniques used to produce an image. The questions that should be answered are: 'How was the image produced? What techniques were employed? Is the image of good quality?' (Lester 2011, 124). Our image was handmade by using the ancient pouncing technique, since in some areas of the figures it is clearly possible to recognise a few marks which enabled the painter to reproduce the shapes on the basis of a cartoon used as a model. The author is a painter of brands, paid by the company producing and marketing the product, in this case 'Faida Feeds' which produces food for breeding animals[2]. Therefore, the image was conceived neither by an artist nor by a decorator acting independently; it is the outcome of an advertising campaign promoted by a specific company[3]. Compared to other images handcrafted by independent artists or decorators for the shops of the same neighborhood and of Kilifi, the quality of this picture is very high[4].

The fourth step deals with *Ethical Perspective*, through which aspects related to human behaviour and emerging from the picture are brought to light, even by trying to interpret the image as the mirror of some philosophical ideas (should it be possible) such as: 'golden rule, hedonism, golden mean, categorical imperative, utilitarism, and veil of ignorance' (Lester 2011: 125). In this specific case, the ethical meaning of the picture is made explicit by the Swahili writing *Faida ni Yako!*, meaning 'The benefit is yours!': words and image convey the practical value of the advertising image and the idea that eating meat is a correct and healthy behaviour (despite any vegetarian diet). The animals that file happily in the picture are well-fed by *Faida Feeds* and therefor may be killed and eaten without any problem, or rather you may benefit from eating them in terms of health (as the writing implies). Another detail related to the

[2] As a matter of fact, two sacks of pet food are standing on the right and left sides of the image, which is also overhung by the brand symbol and name ('Faida Feeds') and by the slogan "Faida ni Yako!', also mentioned below the image, as we shall see.

[3] The brand has been elaborated by the Mombasa Maize Millers, which is a Superbrand. 'Mombasa Maize Millers are the largest millers of maize and wheat in Kenya producing both maize flour and wheat flour under the Taifa brand and animal feeds under the brand name Faida Feeds. Founded by the brothers Islam Ali and Ahmed Ali in 1978, Mombasa Maize Millers is now managed by the second generation of the family, growing from a single small maize mill in Mombasa to become the largest miller of maize and wheat in Kenya'.
Cf. http://www.superbrandstv.com/?p=294, 11.06.2018.

[4] One of the most important aspects of the Kenyan costal area, between Malindi and Mombasa, is the extraordinary production of images having life and invading in urban spaces. Most shops, restaurants, hotels, are characterised by pictures made by three kinds of decorators: painters of brands, who – serving the major companies of Kenya (e.g.: Safaricom and Faida Feeds) – cover the city walls with advertisements painted by hand; painters who work for Western-tourist hotels and restaurants, making decorations showing African animals and safari scenes, and have a very high level of technical expertise; painters of signs, shops and the houses of local people, who produce figures characterised by a simple and more cursive language, but equally very effective in communicating a message (as can be seen in the advertisements of mganga, the local witch doctors). The images made by this category of artists are particularly ephemeral, as they are subject to destruction, due to the rapid change in the use of some premises. However, all these artists tend to sign their works and they define themselves as 'artists' and leave their telephone numbers in order to be contacted by new customers. Most of them prefer to work for big companies or for European customers, who are able to understand the artistic value of their works.



Faida Feeds Advertisement, Kilifi, Kenya (photo: Giuseppe Capriotti and Rosita Deluigi)



eating behavioursof Kenyan coastal areas emerges from the kind of animals depicted: a rooster, two chickens, a duck, a turkey, a sheep, a cow and a goat; among these animals, the pig is significantly missing – it is a rather controversial animal in a predominantly Muslim area and for this reason it is prudently avoided.

The following level of analysis is *Cultural Perspective*, which 'is closely related to the semiotics approach' and 'involves identifying the symbols and metaphors used in an image and determining their meaning for a society as a whole' (Lester 2011: 130). The questions that should be answered are: 'What is the story and the symbolism involved in the elements of the visual message? What do they say about current cultural value? What metaphors can be expressed through the work?' (Lester 2011: 130). The image taken into consideration does not tell a story, however, symbolism is evident: a happy animal family, if fed well, can in turn feed a happy human family, who can benefit from *Faida Feeds* indirectly (as the writing says).

The final step is *Critical Perspective*, in which a particular image is transcended to read the culture that accepts or rejects the image; the 'critical perspective redefines a personal's initial personal perspective in terms of universal conclusions about human nature' (Lester 2011: 131). If by the use of a cultural perspective it is possible to understand society, in this case, it is even possible to understand human nature. The questions that should be answered are: 'What do I think of this image now that I've spent so much time looking at and studying it? What lessons does it have for those who view the image' (Lester 2011: 131). In the case in hand, the advertisement by Faida Feeds tells us that it is meant for a culture based on animal breeding and agriculture; at the same time, the image tells the beholder that eating meat is absolutely lawful and healthy, if the animal is bred and fed well by using healthy food.

Lester's six perspectives start from an absolutely personal analysis and, through a historical and technical examination, the image is read as a reflection of behaviours or philosophical thoughts and then, by the identification of stories, symbols and metaphors, as a reflection of the society in which it was produced or even attitudes of the human soul. A similar approach – even though with many differences and various assumptions – was proposed by a specific branch of art history developed in Europe and America in the first half of the 20th century.

Art history and the interpretation of the content of images: Warburg, Panofsky, Baxandall

Aby Warburg was the first art historian who revolutionised the discipline towards an anthropological interpretation of the content of an artwork, according to an analysis of its context, to the function of the people who advised and commissioned it, and to the identification of its reference literary sources[5]. Warburg was obsessed by the theme of the survival of antiquity in the Renaissance

[5] For a general overview on the scholar, it is possible to use the classical, however dated, work by Gombrich (1970) and works by Cieri Via (2011) and Didi-Huberman (2002).

Age. For him it was not so much a simple revival of iconographical schemes, but a reactivation of emotions and contents crystallised in past images (*Pathosformeln*)[6]. Warburg went so far as to plan a picture atlas (*Bilderatlas*) that was carried out only partially, in which works of art from the past dialogue with press-cuttings and shots of daily life. Artistic and non-artistic images can be equally important to identify and to understand an historical path, like cultural survival in specific contexts from the past (Warburg 2000). This anti-hierarchical mixture of images of various kinds is an extraordinary modern element, which is at the base of the recent revolution of Visual Studies, in particularly in Europe (Bredekamp 2009).

The revolutionary significance of Warburg's approach to images can be understood thanks to the analysis of the material produced during his experience as an anthropologist among the Pueblos of North America – not only the well-known conference published as *A Lecture on Serpent Ritual*, but also the pictures taken by Warburg, the objects he bought and collected, the notes and the sketches taken during his journey[7] – in a culture that was totally different from the problematical core of his studies, which has always been the Italian Renaissance. As demonstrated by Salvatore Settis (2006), Warburg's experience among the Pueblos was not a marginal episode in his cultural production, and his reflections on Hopis are absolutely organic to his study of images[8]. In a letter to his parents, Warburg writes that he undertook this anthropological expedition because he believed that 'the deep comprehension of a primitive people's life and art is a valid corrective to the study of any artistic production' (quoted in Settis 2006: VIII). Therefore, Warburg sets out as an art historian who would like to correct the way of studying the Renaissance, who wants to investigate problems related to the birth of symbolic art, the origin of artworks and adornments. He ends up revolting against art history leaning towards aestheticism, against the 'chatter' of art historians, panegyrical art history that is only interested in formal aspects of artworks (Settis 2006: X). He immediately looks for vase pottery having symbols, meant as dense visual messages bearing meanings. He buys and gathers pottery artefacts useful for his work. He questions the recovery of formulas, which is one of his main interests. In particular, he sees that some modern female potters, Nampeyo for example, use previous decorations, taken from ceramic material emerging from pre-Colombian sites that American and Europeans were excavating. Nampeyo used to go to these excavations to look for some examples that she could use for the decoration of

[6] Salvatore Settis (2004) has written on the concept of *Pathosformel*, which is central in Aby Warburg's thoughts.

[7] Besides the text of the conference (Warburg 1939), there are many works on Warburg's experience among the Pueblos. For a general overview, it is possible to consult: Cestelli Guidi (1998), Cestelli Guidi (2004) and Ghelardi (2006).

[8] Both Fritz Saxl and Gertrude Bing (his first collaborators) considered the essay on 'The Ritual Serpent' – the text of the conference held by Warburg before the doctors and the patients in the hospital of Kreuzlingen – as proof of his recovery from mental illness, an absolutely marginal episode. Similarly, Gombrich, in Warburg's 'intellectual biography', considers the journey among the Hopis as an incursion made by an amateur anthropologist – thus having poor epistemological interest and value – and the conference on 'The Ritual Serpent' – at which Warburg shows how the Indians control their fear of thunder through symbols and rites – as a metaphor of the control of one's mind (Gombrich 1970, pp. 190-197).

her vases. According to Warburg, the experience of this potter serves as an example to explain what happened in the Florentine Renaissance: pre-Columbian civilisation is equal to our Classical Age; forced Christianisation of Hopi Indians represents the Middle Ages; Nampeyo's search for ancient formulas is our Renaissance. Among the Pueblos Warburg finds a Renaissance in action, still being active. The experience with the Hopi Indians is therefore a 'powerful corrective', as the comparison, the anthropological approach that Warburg borrows from his master Hermann Usener (Sassi 1982; Kany 1987), can provide a new dimension to art history: thanks to comparison, it is finally possible to come to the primordial and incandescent kernel of the *in statu nascendi* art.

Erwin Panofsky[9] did not fully understand the revolutionary significance of Warburg's approach to images and consequently did not strictly follow it. Nevertheless, he should be considered as one of the most important continuers of Warburg's thought. We owe him the codification of the iconological method, a method that, between the 1930s and 1950s, provided an interpretation scheme aimed at analysing the content and the message of a work of art, which has some analogies with Lester's model of the six perspectives (though Panofsky does not mention experience in the tradition of Warburg).

By using several ideas that he had already expressed in two articles dated 1932 (Panofsky 1932: 215-232) and 1939 (Panofsky 1975: 3-38), Erwin Panofsky definitively codified the iconographical method in an essay in 1955 (Panofsky 1962: 29-57), in which he provided a three-levelled system to read images, which corresponds to three 'acts of interpretation': *pre-iconographical description, iconographical analysis, iconological interpretation*. For every action, the author provides the object of interpretation, that is, what is going to be identified, the *necessary equipment for interpretation* – that is, the knowledge required for interpretation – and the *corrective principle for interpretation*, which avoids making mistakes. The whole process that allows a proper reading of the picture is outlined in a well-known tripartite horizontal scheme.

Through *pre-iconographical description* it is possible to identify the primary or natural subject matter, subdivided by Panofsky into factual and expressional, that is to say, the world of artistic motifs. The 'factual subject matter' is apprehended by the identification of a series of forms (lines, colours, volume) in the picture, which are functional and represent objects, plants, animals, men. The 'expressional subject matter' is, on the contrary, apprehended on the basis of personal sensitivity, by 'empathy', that is to say, by grasping expressional qualities in the figures represented, such as sorrow or peace. The necessary equipment for this act of interpretation is *practical experience*, that is, familiarity with objects and events in the picture, which can be recognised only if they are well-known and familiar. *Pre-iconographical description* provides answers to the question: *how* is the content of the picture represented?

[9] Unlike Warburg, who was always searching for polarity within a single culture, Panofsky aimed to interpret ages monolithically, on the basis of rather pronounced Hegelianism (Ginzburg 1986). At the same time, according to Didi-Huberman (2006: 87-97), Panofsky renounced and, to a certain extent, exorcised Warburg's central theme of *Nachleben* by reducing it to a simple 'influence'. According to Hans Belting, Panofsky's method can be applied to late medieval and Renaissance art only, whereas Byzantine art or the images of the so-called 'primitive' populations require other instruments in order to be read (Belting 1991).

Iconographical analysis allows apprehension of the *secondary or conventional object,* that is, the story or the allegory represented in the image. The equipment for interpretation is *knowledge of literary sources*, which allows one to recognise the episode represented: a story drawn from mythology or the Bible, the legend of a saint, a personification, an allegory. *Iconographical analysis* allows one to answer the question: *what* is represented in the image?

Thanks to the *iconological interpretation*, the intrinsic meaning or content is apprehended, that is, the symbolical values condensed into a picture, a thought or a concept spread over a geographical area or in a particular historical period, 'the underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion-unconsciously qualified by one personality and condensed into one work' (Panofsky 1962: 35). The equipment necessary for this act of interpretation is *synthetic intuition*, the capacity of recognising the concepts of an age, the essential tendencies of the human mind. As a matter of fact, iconology is 'a method of interpretation which arises as a synthesis rather than as an analysis' (Panofsky 1962: 37). The deeper meaning – which can also be 'above the sphere of conscious volitions' of the artist, who might accept attitudes belonging to his intellectual world, is as a matter of fact, 'a unifying principle which underlies and explains both the visible event and its intelligible significance, and which determines even the form in which the visible event takes shape' (Panofsky 1962: 33). Iconological interpretation allows one to answer the question: *why* is the content of the picture represented that way?

To avoid 'some danger that iconology will behave, not like ethnology as opposed to ethnography, but like astrology as opposed to astrography' (Panofsky 1962: 37), for each act of interpretation, the author provides correctives, lying in the history of tradition. The corrective principle of pre-iconographical description is the *history of style*: we are able to identify the artistic motifs of the image not so much on the basis of our practical experience, as on our knowledge of the conventions dealing with representations of particular historical periods[10]. The corrective principle of iconographical analysis is the *history of types*: being familiar with literary sources is not enough to identify correctly some images that maintain a high level of ambiguity[11]. The corrective principle of *iconological interpretation is the history of cultural symptoms*: the know-

[10] For this reason we are able to solve a few spatial inconsistencies in medieval art and to understand, for example, that the city floating over *Jesus that raises the son of the widow of Nain* in an Ottonian miniature, means that the event in the foreground takes place in the city, being conventionally represented above it.

[11] In the case at hand, the example given by Panofsky is a portrayal of *Judith* by Francesco Maffei, actually attributed to Bernardo Strozzi and kept in the Picture Gallery of Faenza. The artwork has been published as a portrayal of Salome with the head of Saint John the Baptist. The problem related to the identification of this picture was due to the fact that, according to the Bible, Salome holds a charger on which rests the head of Saint John the Baptist, but she does not hold any sword since she did not kill the saint with her own hands; as for Judith, she can hold the sword used to kill Holofernes, but she should not hold any charger with his head, as, according to the Bible, it was put into a sack by her maid. The *history of types* can help to solve the problem by creating an "iconographical series'. Since there are various paintings depicting an unquestionable Judith holding a charger on which rests the head of Holofernes and there are no 'types' of 'Salome with a sword', the picture of Faenza represents Judith and not Salome.

ledge of the culture of that age is not enough for an exhaustive and correct interpretation. To grasp the underlying principles of an artwork 'we need a mental faculty comparable to that of a diagnostician, a faculty which I cannot describe better than by the rather discredited term [...] 'synthetic intuition,' and which may be better developed in a talented layman than in an erudite scholar' (Panofsky 1962: 42). This intuition should be supported by contextualising the image with the highest number of contemporary documents explaining the political, poetical, religious, philosophical and social tendencies of the personality, period or country under investigation. The contribution of all humanistic disciplines is decisive and essential. Therefore, in every act of interpretation, historical knowledge can correct any possible mistakes made by iconologists, who are the exegetes of the contents and messages of artworks.

In short, although Lester does not mention explicitly the three levels of analysis of an artwork put forward by Panofsky, the passage from a personal into a truly historical analysis, to interpret the image as a reflection of a society and a culture, is shared, in one sense, by Panofsky's and Lester's methodological processes.

Even if he is against a merely symbolic analysis of a work of art, Michael Baxandall too can be placed in Warburg's galaxy, though with a quite particular attitude. He is rightly considered a bridge between traditional art history and Visual Studies (Helkins 2003: 2; Pinotti and Somaini 2016: 11-12). In particular, in *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, dated 1972, Baxandall introduces the concept of visual culture to investigate the relationship between the history of images and the history of ways of seeing. In the chapter dedicated to the period eye, the author states that despite the fact that the biological apparatus of a fifteenth-century man and that of a contemporary man are identical, their visual skills are deeply different. Such visual skills develop thanks to the beholder's daily experience in the various fields of social, religious and commercial life. Paintings by Beato Angelico can be analysed on the basis of sermons, offering many possibilities for interpretation, or on the basis of interior visualisation techniques widespread in monastic communities; paintings by Botticelli are associated with the *bassa danza*, performed by fifteenth-century Florentine society, members of which could immediately recognise in paintings the poses and attitudes observed during parties; Piero della Francesca's paintings are connected to the merchant's skill to gauge volumes and survey quantities. In conclusion, for Baxandall, a work of art should be read and interpreted with the specific mental equipment of a particular period; it can be reconstructed by thorough work of historical contextualisation, even by using sources not pertaining to the artistic production[12]. Therefore, it is a question

[12] Such a perspective has been attacked by George Didi-Huberman (2000), who maintains the heuristic value of anachronism in his volume *Devant le temps. Histoire de l'art et anachronisme des images*. The author rehabilitates the dangerous evil of historians, that is, anachronism, the intrusion of one age into another, the arbitrary projection of historical categories developed in some ages onto other ages. As for Didi-Huberman, it is not a mistake, on the contrary, it becomes a vital paradigm of historical questioning, since the time of images is plural, resulting from a montage of different and out-of-synch temporalities. An emblematic example of this phenomenon is the representation of veined marble in Beato Angelico's paintings, made by using the same means and the same results as those relating to American post-World War II Informalism. According to Huberman, reading Angelico's paintings by using the categories and the language provided by Cristoforo Landino (as suggested

of entering a culture through as many sources as possible, so as to question the work of art by using the same interpretative categories known y the beholder of a specific historical period. Many close correspondences can be found between such an approach and the *interpretative anthropology* developed by Clifford Geertz, who was a very good friend of Baxandall. In his book *The Interpretation of Cultures*, published in 1973, in a chapter dealing with the interpretation of the artistic productions of natives, Geertz largely focuses on the methodology defined by Baxandall. To interpret a culture it is necessary to consider the native's point of view and the categories he uses to reflect upon his culture. In order to read a past artwork, it is necessary to reconstruct the interpretative categories, the perceptive habits and the visual skills of a beholder of that period[13].

All these ideas were the cultural preconditions for the revolution brought about by *Visual Studies* in America and in Europe in the nineties, when Lester published his volume.

Visual studies and the search for the communicative power of images: Bredekamp, Mitchell, Freedberg

The birth of *Visual Studies* is linked to the discovery of the primacy of the visual world by other disciplines (besides art history). Images became an object of research. More generally, interest in the power of images was a result of media bombardment and the widespread use of images in the political, military, scientific and juridical fields (Mitchell 1994: 11-33). The genealogy of American visual studies has been recognised in cultural studies, which examine symbolic production by considering the conflicts between the upper and the lower classes, in feminist studies, which, being against patriarchal ideo-

by Baxandall) does not make sense, since Angelico and Landino are chronologically coeval, as well as culturally opposed and distant: the former Thomist and 'Latin', the latter humanist and 'vernacular'. In order to understand the veined marbles by Angelico, it is necessary to resort to 5th century mystical thought, dating back to Pseudo-Dionysius. In religious paintings, and not only in Renaissance paintings, variegated marble (rendered after the manner of Pollock) by means of an abstract language, made up by a speckled painting and by 'dissimilar' and 'absurd' figures, was used to convey a theological mystery which could not be expressed in a figurative way and at the same time to plunge the spectator into a meditation that should go beyond the surface of the images represented. Only thanks to Pseudo-Dionigi is it possible to understand a fundamental part of Angelico's paintings which has been ignored (and not even noticed) by art historians.

[13] It deals with the difference between the 'emic' and the 'etic' viewpoints singled out by anthropologists. The term 'emic', as opposed to 'etic', was coined by linguist Kenneth Pike in the 1950s, on the basis of the terms 'phonemic' and 'phonetic', used in anthropology, always together with its opposite, to oppose the observer's description and interpretation of the experience of reality to that of the observed person. Emic analysis emphasises the meanings shared by a native social group, the viewpoints of the community being studied. Etic analysis points out the data produced by an interpretive system built according to the anthropologists' theoretical models and categories (Olivier De Sardan 1998).

logy, investigate the thoughts of a male observer towards an observed female, and in postcolonial studies, which investigate how the West has considered and invented different cultures (Pinotti, Somaini 2016: 21-24). Unlike the American tradition, the European line of the research on images, represented by the German *Bildwissenschaft* (image science), has its origins in German art history prior to the 1930s. One of the most interesting exponents of this research line is Horst Bredekamp, who suggests returning art history to the status of *Bildwissenschaft* (Bredekamp 2009). According to him, before Anglo-Saxon visual studies scholars removed works of art from their field of study, art history had already been considered as an image science in Germany between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century: art historians had used any kind of images, from photographs to postcards, from films to posters and pictorial prints. It was an opportunity to broaden one's field of experience and to re-discuss one's methods and one's heuristic principles from the beginning. If, nowadays, art history restricts itself to 'fine arts', its deep vocation to be a historical comprehension of the world of images as a whole risks being consigned to oblivion. For Bredekamp, there is a fundamental difference between German *Bildwissenschaft* and Anglo-Saxon *Visual Studies*: the former studies any kind of image, the latter work on every image except for those considered as works of art. His *Bildwissenschaft* originates from Warburg. During the First World War, Warburg studied the printing campaigns carried out by means of images during the Reformation. Warburg maintains that art history should become the history of images in the broader sense of the term (Warburg 2008). The final act of this conception of art history, as a science of iconic forms, is *Atlas*, in which each kind of image contributes to the comprehension of the world.

As a scholar, Bredekamp becomes an image historian in the manner of Warburg. His conception of the art historian's task as a scientist of images leads him to write an essay in 1993 entitled *Florentiner Fussball: der Renaissance der Spiele* (*Florentine Football: the Renaissance of the Games*), in which he makes particular use of prints (Bredekamp 1993). Just as Warburg studied Florentine intermezzos, Bredekamp studies Florentine football – still played today in Renaissance costume in Piazza Santa Croce between the end of June and the beginning of July – which he considers an intermediate form between life and art[14].

Traditional art history is fundamentally challenged in the volume *Darwins Korallen*, in which Bredekamp (2005) works on the image of corals and Darwin's drawings, to highlight the contrast between a tree evolutionary model – organised according to the medieval genealogical tree – and a coral model, proposed by Darwin as a disordered and stemless model developing in all directions, thus without considering human beings as the supreme and final target of the evolutionary process. Bredekamp studies Darwin's sketches, which are images, regardless of their aesthetical value. Darwin's lifelike sketches are an extraordinary active support used by the scientist during the construction of his thoughts

[14] The game commemorates a particular match played in 1530 by young Florentine people before Charles V's cannons to deride the besiegers by kicking the head of the defeated enemy. Until its suppression in 1739 (the game was later re-established by Mussolini), football remained a distinctly Medicean feast, a sport enjoyed by the court more than ballets and tournaments; only pro-Medicean nobles used to play it – as evidence of their support.

and the elaboration of his hypothesis. Bredekamp's passion for scientific images issues in a trilogy dedicated to 'visual forms of thought': a book on *Leviathan* by Hobbes (2003), another on Leibniz's project as research based on the Kunstkammer model (2004), the last one on the use of images by Galileo (2007). His latest research focuses on the problem of the power of images: in *Theorie des Bildakts*, Bredekamp (2010), he works on the concept of 'iconic act' by considering the image as an action, as an object provided with energy, capable of having an effective influence on the observer's eye, by using the concept of *embodiment*, which is the focus of the topical debate on the power of images.

Issues relating to the power of images have also been dealt with by William J. Thomas Mitchell in the essay *What Do Pictures Want?* (Mitchell 1996; Mitchell 2005). The author proposes a mental experiment, that is to say that: images should not be considered as inert objects offered to our gaze, but as animated subjects with personhood, needs and desires. Images that can fascinate, influence and divert the beholder do not really have any meaning; they express a will; they want. The desire raised by images is conceived, by analogy, with the desire of two categories of subaltern subjects who have been examined by cultural studies, that is: colonial man and woman. The image, to a certain extent, the personified image, is a subject that should be given voice, by listening to and describing its desires. So far, according to the author, images have been examined for their meanings, or for their power in producing emotions and behaviours, by analysing the viewpoints of the producers or the consumers of images. In his proposal to single out what pictures really want, Mitchell mentions the example of the Uncle Sam poster designed by James Montgomery Flagg to persuade young men to enlist in the US army. The image – that thanks to the pointing finger and the fixed gaze wants to produce a 'Medusa effect' – has undoubtedly been conceived to encourage enlistment. However, it has autonomously developed new and unexpected directions, since the same pattern has been used many times to spread a completely contrary message to the message of the original image. This is the destiny of a few images 'that have legs' and that, once in the vital flow, generate new directions regardless of their producers' (artist and commissioner of the work) intentions. Such a concept was anticipated in art history by the last research carried out by Baxandall (1985). In *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*, the author discusses the implicit intentional fabric of a work of art, which consists of the intention of the artist – who has to resolve problems posed by his own 'agenda', the objective of the commissioner of the work – who is paying for a result, and the intention of the artwork – meant as an object provided with intentionality. The work of art has therefore the power to have effects in different historical epochs, regardless of its original function and regardless of the intentions of the artist and the commissioner who generated it. The intention to ask for and cause emotional reading and answers is always vital in the work of art, survives the author and the epoch in which it was generated; it bursts out differently, in unexpected and ever-new ways across time (Ferretti 2009: 81-112). This is the real power of images, that is, living their own lives.

The problem of the power of images is central to David Freedberg's studies as well. In *The Power of Images*, published in 1989, the author intends to analyse human reactions to all images, irrespective of their aesthetical value,

by renouncing the concept of beauty as anthropologists do. The power of images is evaluated by the reaction to them. Therefore, the image is an action in the world causing various human responses: adoration, destruction, sexual arousal, pilgrimages, visions, etc. Like ethnologists, Freedberg gathers a large amount of documented responses to images, regardless of cultures and historical ages, and then puts them in order and compares them as anthropologists do. However, his aim is not to highlight differences, but to recognise what is constant, universal, permanent in all cultures, in order to reach a basic level of response that goes beyond social, historical, cultural boundaries. The author analyses, for example, the concept of God's presence in the image – a key issue in anthropology of images since Jean-Pierre Vernant's studies (1983) – and observes that in many cultures the rite of consecration, used to invite the deity to reside in the image, makes it effective. As has been shown (Prévost 2003), these ideas lead him to postulate the existence of a power within the image, which is universal and identical in all cultures, thus developing a general theory based on a number of examples that he believes identical, renouncing the singular and the micro-paradigmatic. He looks for the principle of image effectiveness; he hypostatises the image and its presumed power. He forgets that images are a dynamic system of relationships in which the beholder plays a fundamental role, as his or her belief makes the image powerful, just as believing in magic makes the magician's actions powerful (Prévost 2003: 279-280).

As a response to the criticisms that he has applied an anthropological method, thus neglecting historical specificities for an unrealisable universalism, Freedberg has presented recent and very interesting research carried out with neuroscientists, in particular with a group from Parma gathered around Giacomo Rizzolatti and Vittorio Gallese (Freedberg, Gallese 2009). These scholars have discovered the existence of particular neurons in the human brain, the *mirror neurons*, which activate when a human being sees another person doing an action or expressing a feeling, and provoke the observer's empathy. Such a neuronal mechanism supports the empathic power of images since mirror neurons are activated even when we observe an image, causing the so-called *embodied simulation*: actions and emotions represented in pictures activate our inner representations *as if* we were experiencing that same action, emotion or sensation. Therefore, this would be the neural basis of empathy and of the power that some images have to arouse weeping, perturbation, sexual arousal, etc. This is why the Weeping Marias by Niccolò dell'Arca arouse the observer's sympathy, Michelangelo's prisoners convey the desire for liberation and Goya's disasters of war provoke horror (Freedberg 2007).

Freedberg's research into the communicative power of images, which began as a result of work carried out in anthropological disciplines, has developed in truly unexpected directions. It has also involved the exact sciences, to create what may be a new discipline or perhaps merely a space for real discussion in an area that has become something of a no man's land (Freedberg 2008).

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3

An Evolutionary Approach to Art and Visual Images: Darwinian Transformation in the Humanities

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Abstract

The introductory thesis of evolutionary aesthetics is the statement that art, in various forms (including all kind of visual images), is a human need without which human beings could not be who they are and which, in a considerable way, helped people survive a turbulent history (and even more turbulent prehistory). Art may be an adaptation in the biological sense. This article examines the theoretical proposals of Denis Dutton, the author of *The Art Instinct* with a special focus on the so-called Savannah Hypothesis that explains our universal responses to savannah-like landscapes, revealed in the famous artistic/sociological experiment by Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid.

Keywords: art, evolution, aesthetic theory, adaptationism, responses to landscapes

Introduction

The uniqueness of the so-called Darwinian transformation in the humanities stems from the fact that its disciples functioned over the last few decades within disciplines in which a completely different research paradigm, which may be referred to as 'constructivist' or 'cultural', was dominant. The theory of art and visual image studies, linguistic and cultural studies, cultural anthropology constructed their discourses around different versions of the same pattern derived from the social sciences, placing them within various contexts: cultural, historical, political, sexual, which determined research directions and horizons. The situation is slightly different in the case of the evolutionary paradigm, which does not deny the significance of cultural and historical analyses which, for example in relation to art, seem in every respect legitimate, but only states that apart from historical and cultural (and therefore changeable, non-universal) factors there is also a perspective allowing one to describe the studied phenomena (works of art, images, language, consciousness) in terms of empirical sciences, such as: neurobiology, behavioural genetics, cognitive science, paleoarcheology, anthropology, biology and evolutionary psychology.

This new science of evolutionary psychology, having its origins in the 1980s, examines the psychological mechanisms guiding human behaviour in terms of their evolutionary adaptivity. In contrast to cognitive psychology, it accepts that the human mind and its 'products' (strategies of behaviour, preferences) were formed as biological adaptations to solve life's problems which our evolutionary ancestors had to deal with. Researchers are trying to understand the mechanisms directing behaviour through the identification of the functions played by them in the evolutionary past in the context of survival and reproduction (Barkow, Cosmides, Toobey, 1992; Pawłowski and Daniel, 2009). The concept of evolutionary adaptation, which can be defined as an inherited trait subject to development, which is the result of natural selection, as it has helped in the survival or fostered the reproduction of the 'organism' in our ancestors, is one of the key tenets not only of evolutionary psychology, but also of the whole theory of evolution.

Evolutionary psychologists studying the various complex aspects of human reactions (such as: attraction, repulsion, fear, love, respect, etc.) willingly engage with areas previously reserved for aestheticians and visual image theorists. As Steven Pinker, a Harvard psychologist, writes:

> Art is a part of our nature – we have it in our blood, as was once said, or in the brain and in genes, as it could be said today (...). Children begin to participate in the [art] classes at the age of two or three, and the art takes perhaps even a distinct place in the structure of an adult human brain – a neurological damage may not affect a person's ability to hear and see, however, making a person unable to enjoy music or the visual beauty (Pinker 2005).

It is easy to see that the author of this statement is basically convinced that art is one of these adaptive or peri-adaptive activities referred to by the evolutionary psychology of the mind, and which is an integral component of human mental equipment. For confirmation of his argument he cites well-known facts: 'people dance, sing, decorate empty spaces, and tell and play stories in all known societies; (...) Painting, jewelry, sculpture and instruments appeared in Europe at least 35,000 years ago, and in other parts of the world' (Pinker, 2002: 404), probably much earlier, and they are there until today (Pinker, 2002; Dissanayake, 1995).

If we take these facts seriously (and we accept that the above-mentioned forms of activity are related to art both to its visual or performative kind), then there are no obstacles for the arguments behind them to be considered, if not decisive for the adaptive function of art, then at least proving that art is a phenomenon that is durable, versatile, naturally present and spontaneously manifesting in the history of mankind. Their relevance may also be indicated by the sources from which evolutionary psychologists derive their knowledge. They have quite a wide range of methods to empirically verifying the evolutionary hypotheses they put forward (e.g. comparing the biology of different species or the same individuals in different contexts), using among others data: from archaeological finds, from hunter-gatherer communities, from observations of the behaviours and habits of people, as well as from traces of all historical products of human labour, etc. (Buss, 1999; Pawłowski and Daniel, 2009). On the other hand, at the conceptual level they relate primarily to cognitive science, from which they also derive issues inspiring for further research.

An evolutionary approach to art

When studying various aspects of art and aesthetic tastes, contemporary evolutionary psychologists, as mentioned, have no doubt that art is part of human nature. Following the path set out by Aristotle, Hume, Darwin and his followers, today some art theorists (philosophers, aestheticians, literary scholars) refer to the achievements of ethological and cognitive sciences and ponder whether art is one of the evolutionary adaptations that helped prehistoric man to survive, on a par with the fear of spiders, the maternal instinct or the

ability to see depth (Dissanayake, 1995; Carroll, 2004; Boyd, 2009), or whether it is just a by-product of three other adaptations: the hunger for status, the aesthetic pleasure of experiencing adaptive objects and environments, and the ability to design artefacts to achieve desired ends (Gould and Lewontin, 1979; Pinker, 2002). Disregarding the degree of pertinence of justifications of the above hypotheses, it cannot be denied, then, that art is a universal phenomenon, naturally present and spontaneously revealing itself in the history of humankind.

At present, evolutionary aesthetics is an intriguing research field, within the disciplines of both philosophical aesthetics and evolutionary theory (Luty, 2015). It is borne out by the fact that the book *The Art Instinct. Beauty, Pleasure and Human Evolution* by Denis Dutton (Dutton, 2009), published on the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth and the 150th anniversary of publication of *On the Origin of Species* (Darwin Year), was at the end of 2009 among the 25 best-selling books in the United States. As noted by the author, a philosopher of art connected with the University of Canterbury, in accordance with the predictions of Darwin himself, we are currently observing an immensely productive application of evolutionary ideas, not only in aesthetic and visual image studies reflection, but also in a wide variety of exact sciences, among others in: anthropology, economics, social psychology, linguistics, history, politics, legal theory and criminology, as well as in the philosophical study of rationality, theology and value theory.

Before the publication of *The Art Instinct* (the book was a major publishing phenomenon – with a book tour featuring sell-out crowds at US Ivy League universities, TV and radio spots on prominent talk shows and so on), Dutton was known mainly for his original analyses of the issues of forgery in art, intentionalism in literary and artistic practice, and as a critic of postmodernism and advocate of tribal art. He debated with Arthur Danto, Nelson Goodman, and with anthropologists Ruth Bunzel and Marianna Torgovnick (Dutton, 1987, 1992, 1993, 1998), among others. He was also known for his contribution to the media – he was the founder and editor of the immensely popular website *Arts and Letters Daily* (established in 1998). He was also an editor and co-author of the first collection of philosophical papers devoted to theory of art plagiarism, *The Forger's Art: Forgery and the Philosophy of Art* (Berkeley 1983).

In his crucial book – as well as in a series of articles from 2000–2009 (Dutton, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2006) – Dutton, as the first art philosopher in history, combined two seemingly distant disciplines: art and evolutionary sciences. By arguing that human aesthetic preferences are not 'social constructs', but rather universal, cross-cultural evolutionary features shaped by natural and sexual selection, he still used traditional disputes present in aesthetic theory. Most of the philosophical and aesthetical issues that he addressed previously in an original way (postmodernism vs. intentionalism in artistic practice and criticism, universalism vs. aesthetic formalism, authenticity in art vs. forgery and plagiarism, and *cluster definition* of art) found application in his Darwinian analysis of art. As prominent literary scholar Joseph Carroll noticed, contrary to Ellen Dissanayake, Dutton concentrated more on the high arts of advanced civilisations – what Clive Bell called the 'cold picks of art' – and he cast new evolutionary light on issues that have often engaged theorists of modern aesthetics. What distinguished Dutton's aesthetic position (sometimes called evolutionary aesthetics),

however, was his specific marriage of theoretical naturalism and empiricism (in the late 1980s he conducted groundbreaking field studies on aesthetic norms in the sculpture of the peoples of Sepik River in New Guinea) and the conviction that 'many of the ways art is discussed and experienced easily cross culture boundaries, and manage a global acceptance without help from academics or theorists' (Dutton, 2009: 51).

Aesthetic preferences for landscapes and the adaptive value of habitat selection

Dutton, who as the first person to attempt to combine evolutionary sciences about art with the philosophy of art, replaces cultural anthropological language with natural science discourse. Constantly referring to the historical and philosophical context[2], he is initially attracted by a seemingly trivial issue: the sources of aesthetic preferences in landscape painting. The philosopher refers to the famous experiment in art by Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, first described in an evolutionary manner by Dissanayake (Dissanayake, 1998). The experiment considered the favourite paintings of people from different parts of the world, and was based on survey results (Dutton, 2009).

These two Russian artists living in the U.S. conducted in the 1990's a sociological study of human aesthetic preferences in ten different and distant countries. Within the study they asked the respondents about, among others, their favourite colour, season, animals, plants, shapes, and a historical figure. It turned out that irrespective of the place in which respondents were raised, all showed an aesthetic preference for landscape that contained the presentation of greenery, water, animals and humans, as well as open spaces covered with a low (or mown) grass, clumps of bushes and trees; visible in a central location a natural reservoir, such as a pond or lake. Preferences for a landscape comprising an open, spatial view to the horizon, with the presence of animals and birds and various plants, including flowers and fruit plants was recorded. In 1993, both artists presented to the public a painting *America's Most Wanted*, which, according to the results of the polls, reflected the most common aesthetic tastes of Americans (they also created similar works for the other nine countries)[3]. The results of the experiment were mocking images, emanating kitsch (e.g. the American version of the image depicted George Washington with the Hudson River in the background) that satirised what can be seen on almost every illustrated wall calendar at every latitude (a savannah-like landscape with a series of repeating elements).

The works of these two artists caused a huge debate among aestheticians and philosophers of art, not so much focused on the low level of art of 'the most desirable works of art' or on the questionable quality of aesthetic

[2] The theoretical horizon of Dutton's works is set by such figures as: Immanuel Kant, Leo Tolstoy, Clive Bell, Arthur Danto and, first and foremost, by Aristotle and David Hume.

[3] Paintings are available here: http://awp.diaart.org/km/homepage.html (accessed: 30.11.2017).

tastes disclosed, but on the degree of cross-cultural universality. A. Danto gave the following explanation: the universality of taste is linked to the universality of globalisation processes, specifically the popularity of calendar production, which reaches out to people around the world and, despite local cultural differences and the European Convention, implants them with a passion for a particular form of landscape presentation. As other studies have shown, although the majority of Kenyans have a calendar in their homes, they prefer the views that look more like those from New York than from Kenya (Danto 1997).

Dutton, on the other hand, who was not satisfied with Danto's reasoning, gave an explanation that at first glance seemed ridiculous. He argued that human responses to landscapes revealed in the Komar/Melamid experiment are characterised by an astonishing universality, as they result from instincts well-established in the course of human evolution, instincts which were formed during the Pleistocene, and which, showing preferences deep-rooted in man, had a crucial significance for man's survival in this period (Dutton 2003, 2004, 2009). The reductionist nature of this explanation would perhaps be a disadvantage, if it were not for the fact that the argument was confirmed in a study conducted several years earlier by psychologists Orians and Heerwagen (1992). In one test, they provided people from different countries and of different ages with images of some classical types of landscapes, including a deciduous forest, a rainforest, an open savannah with trees, a coniferous forest and a desert. Among adults none of the above categories was not named as a favourite (the only exception was the desert landscape, which came lowest in the ranking). The most preferred landscape among young children was a savannah with trees – or more accurately the landscape of East Africa, where early human evolution took place. In addition to the preference for a savannah (the test results became the basis for the formulation of the so-called Savannah Hypothesis), other general preferences were stated. These included landscapes containing water, open and wooded areas (indicating a hiding place and a place for a hide and seek game), trees with branches situated just above the ground (giving the possibility of escape) and with fruit growing a metre or two above the ground, landscapes with the presence of game animals or where these animals could be blended into the landscape, and images with various shapes of clouds. The results of the experiments appear to be non-accidental also in the context of the experiment of the Russian artists.

A savannah landscape is preferred, because in prehistoric times it was a guarantor of survival – of avoiding predators and acquiring food, and as a preferred and desirable view it is etched on our evolutionary memory of species with warm colours: it evokes positive emotions, especially in children untainted by socialisation and education in the field of aesthetics. As Dutton points out, it is the elements of this specific landscape, and not the others, which are not only repeated in the series of *Most Wanted*, but are constantly reproduced both on wall calendars, as well as in projects of public parks around the world.

Universal art criteria – the philosophical and aesthetic approach of Denis Dutton

The universalist interpretation of landscape preferences derived from the Komar/Melamid experiment is for the author of *The Art Instinct* a prelude to more general considerations about the evolutionary sources of art. In his view, evolutionary theorists of art open up research on naturalistic descriptions of aesthetic experience. They should submit empirical evidence on pure speculation and try to figure out why the arts, despite little practical value, can provide intense pleasure for both the creator and the recipient (Dutton, 2004). Their theoretical reflections, supported by empirical material, should centre on the following questions: Is the ability to create and receive works of art among the universal adaptive features of the human mind? If it is a part of the universal human psyche, does it constitute a component of human nature? And how is this immutable nature revealed in cross-cultural preferences for art and visual images? According to Dutton, by formulating answers to these questions, evolutionary aestheticians, rather than focusing on historical and cultural differences, seek to find a universal, cross-cultural basis for different art forms (including visual images), because according to the knowledge available to us, art creation and appreciation is an innate feature, the effect of a gene-culture co-evolution, and not, as culture constructivists argue, an exclusive product of culture and history.

However, given the fact that both creating works of art and admiring them is a common feature of all human communities (including the Japanese and the Sepik River people), Dutton has proposed a Universalist interpretation of art. For this purpose, he created a list of twelve 'recognition criteria' of art (present inter-culturally and supra-historically), which, in his opinion, will facilitate an understanding of what art is as a universal human phenomenon in its diversity and indeterminacy. These criteria are (Dutton, 2009: 51-59): (1) direct (impractical) pleasure, (2) skill and virtuosity, (3) style, (4) novelty and creativity, (5) criticism, (6) representation, imitation, (7) special focus, (8) expressive individuality, (9) emotional saturation, (10) intellectual challenge, (11) art traditions and institutions, and (12) imaginative experience.

As the author notes, the above list was not created to serve the formulation of some adopted theoretical perspective, which would compete with other points of view, but only to express the customary, universal, pre-theoretical ways of seeing objects or actions referred to as 'artistic', which, referring to the human instincts and intuition, are shared cross-culturally by people around the world. Therefore, the list created on the basis of what is (and in this sense, empirically grounded), and not on the basis of what 'should be', reflects, according to Dutton, a huge sphere of human experience of what people spontaneously, across history and cultures, identify as art, and not what the theory considers, or excludes, from the sphere of art. As he emphasises, the list does not specify what art is, but it is a neutral basis for theoretical speculation about

the universal human phenomenon. A reference to Searle's *cluster concept* is no doubt useful in defining art, and is a concept that has already been made use of, in different ways, by E.J. Bond (1975), Julius Moravcsik (1993) and Berys Gaut (2000).

The author of *The Art Instinct*, drawing from a wide repertoire of concepts taken from evolutionary psychology, seeks to provide us with the tools for an aesthetic-evolutionary analysis of art, conceived naturalistically and universalistically. His intercultural, supra-historical approach of art (which he extended for the domain of visual images), based on recognition, taken from the 'natural', statistical, pre-theoretical overview, in conjunction with an extraordinary aesthetic sensitivity and unconcealed admiration for 'breathtaking' masterpieces, is an important contribution to the discussion about the place of aesthetic theory in the theoretical field of humanities disciplines, and is a milestone in the development of naturalistic reflections on art and visual images.

Conclusion

In his groundbreaking essay *Let's Naturalize Aesthetics* Denis Dutton (2004) makes an interesting remark on the challenge that aesthetics should undertake:

> Why don't we try a little harder to open ourselves to naturalistic accounts of aesthetic experience that go beyond the legacy of formalism and its 'purity'? (..). Why not work with psychologists to understand better cross-cultural preferences in picture content? Are there psychological mechanisms that account for the satisfactions of group singing or of sharing an artistic experience as the member of an audience? Can we identify and statistically analyze recurrent themes and ideas in drama and literature? (...) Art has little practical value, but can deliver intense pleasure. Why? Aestheticians, please explain (Dutton, 2004).

When he lucidly notes that evolutionary psychologists insist that wherever an intense pleasure is found in human life, there is likely to be some reproductive or survival advantage connected with it, he formulates a fairly obvious conclusion: 'Not only are we destined to notice the subject matter of pictures, as a species we are persistently inclined even to prefer some subjects to others' (Dutton, 2004).

Even if such a claim were speculative to some extent, these 'persistent inclinations' would be, according to Dutton, the subjects of a 'truly naturalized, and therefore Darwinian, account of aesthetic experience'. Such an account would 'especially welcome experimental evidence that might tend to confirm or decisively disprove its hypotheses', and would 'not stand opposed to accounts of aesthetic experience in terms of unique cultural expression, but would enhance them by placing them in a universal perspective' (Dutton, 2004).

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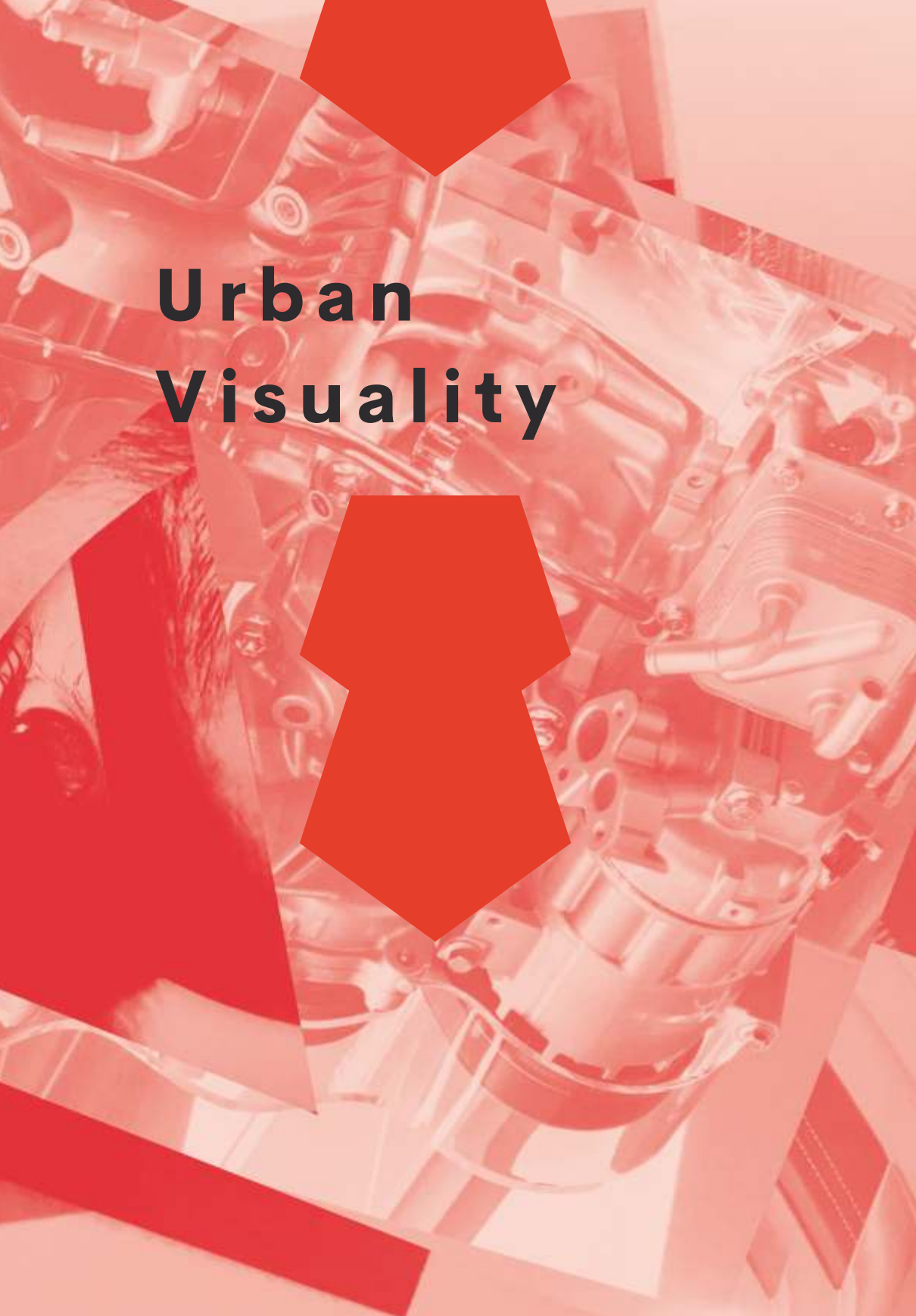
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Part
2



Urban Visuality

4

The question is not what you look at, but what you see (Thoreau): Visual communication in the public sphere from an emancipatory perspective

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Abstract

This article advances understanding of why and how people take for granted visual communication in the public sphere, how to prevent this and how to change it. The article focuses on the relation between the type of consciousness (in the meaning of Paulo Freire: intransitive, semi-transitive and transitive) and the way of reading visual communications. Different types of consciousness let/make people see and understand (or not) fairness and justice in literal and symbolic images. Instead of conclusions there will be some questions addressed to practices of education.

Keywords: visual literacy; communicative action; claims of validity; magical, naïve and critical consciousness; emancipation;

Introduction

Icons and signs are forms of communication as old as civilisation. The main information from the distant past we can 'read' are signs on rocks – petrographs and petroglyphs. Verbal-written communication is much more recent. Nowadays, we all live in cultures of signs, icons, images, in visually intense societies. Some of signs inform, others are performative or evocative. We are familiar with some of the signs, but we can also encounter strange, surprising, unexpected or even incomprehensible or misleading visual messages. This may lead to difficulties in attempting to understand and follow the information that a sign communicates. In spite of many 'global' elements of iconic language, there are still local types of info-graphics, which are understood, valued and used in human actions managing social relations in different cultural settings.

Signs can make information easily accessible. They are therefore useful in international and intercultural relations as well as being objects of research, both in specific fields and in the interdisciplinary approach. Some nonverbal messages (among them, for example, music or visual art – like paintings, sculptures – as well as proxemics of public space in certain environments) let people understand ideas, values, and how to interpret them according to preexisting rules and follow them in their own actions. Different forms, locations and contents of non-verbal communication can cause curiosity, uncertainty, fear, anxiety or protests.

Mass communication is a wonderful phenomenon. It is the first condition of participation in social life, making people members of the human family. But it is also a real source of oppression, manipulation, domination – especially when information, both verbal and nonverbal, is misused. Nowadays we receive a lot of news, some of it is fake news, produced intentionally, which abuses people's naivety or misleads them. Some mass communication is used to dominate, to establish and sustain hegemony, and for social stratification. That it is why it is so important to know which signs should be trusted and can be followed without critical consideration and which ones should stimulate an analytical approach. By means of visual communication one can sustain the social and political order, but through visual communication one can also express resistance towards that order. People can define

themselves or they can be defined and positioned by others, by bureaucratic authority. In the latter case, when people are being positioned by others, they have difficulties understanding their own historical and social situation. They can't understand why they are allowed to do something, to go in somewhere, or why it is forbidden for them. As I pointed out in the title: it is not important what you look at, but what you see. And what you see depends on not only on the condition of your sense of sight, but on what you know, what you understand and value, and how you are positioned in the social order.

I would like to briefly present one of the main sources of an active visual literacy. In order to do so, I first define visual literacy and present the conditions of ideal communication, I then introduce Paolo Freire's concept of people's awareness of their own historical and social situation. On this basis I try to formulate questions: Can ordinary people produce some form of visual communication for presenting their values? Can they act on their critical judgment? Can they use their own voice to express themselves, using their own right to self-expression? I consider these issues from the perspective of critical pedagogy.

Meaning of visual literacy

Over the past years we have grown accustomed to a visual overload. The proliferation of images in Western culture makes visual literacy, the ability to 'read' and 'write' images, vital skills. Since visual communication is socially produced, we are able to see and experience the social modality of images and signs as well as their functions. People interact with images or at least obey information transmitted by their means and act according to the communication. But people have to be prepared. They need to have skills for reading and for comprehending static and dynamic images, signs, charts, maps and so on that are transmitted one way, as well as those that appear in interactive communication. People need education to be literate. It is necessary to stress that visual literacy is a crucial competency of a modern man/woman.

We owe the concept and term of 'visual literacy' to John Debes, who introduced it in 1969. He formulated the following definition of this concept:

> Visual Literacy refers to a group of vision-competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences. The development of these competencies is fundamental to normal human learning. When developed, they enable a visually literate person to discriminate and interpret the visible actions, objects, symbols, natural or man-made, that he encounters in his environment. Through the creative use of these competencies, he is able to communicate with others. Through the appreciative use of these competencies, he is able to comprehend and enjoy the masterworks of visual communication (Debes 1969).

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the term of visual literacy is defined as the ability to recognise and understand ideas conveyed through visible actions or images (such as pictures, photos, graffiti, as well as tables, charts, drawings and figures). As Peter Felten states, that kind of literacy involves

the ability to understand, produce, and use culturally significant images, objects, and visible actions. With training and practice, people can develop the ability to recognize, interpret, and employ the distinct syntax and semantics of different visual forms. The process of becoming visually literate continues through a lifetime of learning new and more sophisticated ways to analyze and use images (Felten, 2008).

Visual literacy can, therefore, help us achieve two major objectives, namely: a) help people learn to read or to decode visual information and b) help people write or create visuals to convey information. These are very important aims of formal as well as non-formal education and of lifelong learning.

The dominant ideology functions to incorporate people into the system, and penetrates and infects the consciousness of people, so that people start to see and to experience reality through the lenses and conceptual categories of the dominant ideology. Every message in the public sphere is created for a specific reason, with some purpose in mind and with some more or less concrete intention to generate human action. Under the surface appearance of denotative meaning of the image, there are also deeper, sometimes hidden connotations. Visual literacy is a key goal for education, teaching people to see and understand differences between literal and symbolic meanings. It helps people to participate in public life.

The claims of validity in the context of visual literacy

The first condition of any kind of literacy is the proper 'language', that is, the language of community. Both visual literacy and 'visual language' are political and are one of the conditions of the social order. Signs and images in the public sphere are a kind of 'social hieroglyphs'. They shape, reflect and refract everyday reality. Thus, visual literacy can be defined as the competence of perceiving images and signs, of interpreting what is seen, and what one can learn from them why and how to behave according to them. On the higher level it is the ability to evaluate, apply or create conceptual visual representations. Visual communication is one of the key terms of communication, and the ideal communication situation (in Habermas's sense) is a result of the emancipation of the subjects of social life.

One should critically consider the 'reading and writing' of messages in the social sphere, both verbal and iconic, and make conscious use of Jürgen Habermas's theory of communication and his claims of validity. According to Christian Fuchs:

> One can also not talk about critical theory without talking about Habermas. When bringing up the notion of a critical theory of communication, most readers will inevitably first and foremost think of Habermas. Habermas' profound engagement with social theory, political theory and communication theory was one of the most influential theories of the twentieth century in the social sciences and humanities. Updating

> critical theory and communication theory therefore requires a substantial engagement with Habermas' works. There are many virtues of Habermas, not least that he is a true public intellectual who has intervened in everyday political debates (Fuchs, 2016:25).

First of all, we should keep in mind what communication in the public sphere is for. In an open, democratic society communication plays a crucial role. It allows responsible participation and facilitates common understanding and respect for the rules of the social order. This applies both to the use of information about publicly available events and the observance of standards of behaviour in the public sphere. Thus elements of visual language need to be seen as an immanent part of social communication, which performs the same functions as the speech acts distinguished by Habermas, namely:

> I. description, information, explanation: representing the state of affairs in the system of the external world,
> II. expression of expectations and hopes, i.e. representing the subjectivity of actors of interaction and
> III. promises and warnings, that is, presenting norms regulating the social order.

Foremost, what one should have in mind are claims of validity formulated by Habermas in his fundamental work *The Theory of Communicative Action*. For the purpose of exploring the meaning of visual communication in the public sphere from an emancipatory perspective, I will briefly present Habermasian validity claims both in verbal and non-verbal communication (Habermas, 1984:75). First of all it needs to be stressed that the functioning of the Subject in the public sphere requires free and equal access to common places, and respect for the human rights of freedom, autonomy and responsibility. This requires a Subject to understand his/her own situation and to have the ability to read signs filling the environment. This includes signs made by humans, such as technical, artistic and urban signs (sounds, traffic/pedestrian mobility), natural signs (like trees, bushes, flowers, or lack of them) and atmospheric ones (weather, temperature, humidity). Knowledge of the meanings of signs: orders, bans, instructions and information, as well as understanding the criteria of inclusion and exclusion, of acceptance or refusal, provide a basis for a Subject's action. The choice of reaction depends on one's critical judgment of a situation – that is, one makes a judgment about a message from the point of view of equality, social justice and the borders of freedom. In other words, functioning in the public sphere requires Subjective emancipatory competences: the synthesis of critical rationality, innovative thinking and civil courage. These intellectual, emotional and behavioural features of a Subject are the foundation for the critical reading of images-messages and for the ability to act responsibly in the everyday 'life world', which is filled by all sorts of information. From the point of view of the social order it is important that communication in the public sphere respects moral rightness, ethical goodness and authenticity, personal sincerity, and is of aesthetic value.

According to Habermas, rational and free communication, verbal and non-verbal, audial and visual, static and dynamic, as well as proxemics, is based on four claims of validity, namely: truthfulness/sincerity, adequacy, truth/moral rightness, and comprehensibility. Acts of communication, which generate human actions, should fulfil a set of validity claims; they should be true and sincere (non-deceptive), socially appropriate and morally right, factually adequate and accessible, understandable for all.

Types of consciousness according to Paulo Freire

Like traditional literacy, visual literacy encompasses different levels of skills. Apart from 'reading' signs, which means decoding the meaning of images, 'reading' in a wide context of communication, is equally important. Higher-level visual literacy skills require critical thinking, and they are essential for people to effectively and safely interact in public space.

Consciousness is a state of mind and emotions, and reflects seeing and understanding one's own position in the life world, one's own historical and social situation, and an ability to problematise it and generate action. Paulo Freire distinguishes three types of consciousness ('*conscientizaçao*'), namely: magical, naïve and critical (Freire, 2005:14). It needs to be emphasised that the concept of 'consciousness' covers intellectual, emotional, ethical, aesthetic representations of the elements of the life world and reactions to it in various realms. These are:

Magical, intransitive consciousness, which is a feature of the minds and emotions of people

I. who are defeated and dominated, though they do not know it,
II. who fear freedom, though they believe themselves to be free,
III. who follow general formulas and prescriptions as if by their own choice,
IV. who are directed, they do not direct themselves,
V. whose creative power is impaired,
VI. who are objects, not Subjects.

Naïve – semi-transitive consciousness, which is a state of mind and emotion characterised by

I. an over-simplification of problems,
II. a nostalgia for the past,

III. underestimation of the common man,
IV. a lack of interest in investigation, accompanied by an accentuated taste for fanciful explanations,
V. fragility of argument,
VI. a strongly emotional style,
VII. the practice of polemics rather than dialogue,
VIII. limitation of one's sphere of perception,
IX. impermeability to challenges situated outside the sphere of biological necessity,
X. confusion in the perceptions of the objects and challenges of the environment.

Critical consciousness, which characterises people:

I. who amplify their own power to perceive and respond to suggestions and questions arising in their context,
II. who increase a person's capacity to enter into dialogue not only with other people but with the world as such,
III. whose interests and concerns extend beyond the simple vital sphere,
IV. who enter reality and increase their capacity to make choices (and therefore their capacity to reject the prescriptions of others),
V. who perceive an effort towards humanisation as an imperative, who believe that the destiny of men and women is to become authentic human beings.

The magical and naive consciousness easily surrenders to domination and manipulation in each of the above-mentioned aspects, namely: intellectual, emotional, ethical and aesthetical. The judgments, opinions and actions of persons who have magical or naive consciousness reflect the interests of others. They are specific to the mentality of a slave and limit the possibility of achieving autonomy. Signs and messages (also visual) can restrict and oppress, but misreading or misunderstanding their meanings prevents people from protesting against them and from changing them.

According to the perspective of the pedagogy of emancipation, called by its pioneer – Brazilian pedagogue, Paulo Freire – 'the pedagogy of the oppressed', the aim of education is to develop critical consciousness. This is the condition for changing the dominant ideology and for changing the world and one's own position in it. Full humanity can be achieved by changing the social and political order in favour of justice, security and a peaceful environment. It needs to be stressed that a critical intervention into the world is not simply the unveiling of social reality through raising critical consciousness. Through perceiving an alternative to one's own role as an agent of visual communication in the public sphere, a change in human action can take place.

Conclusion

Education for critical consciousness and reflective communicative action as a condition of emancipation in a life world that is filled with signs, images and other forms of visual communication (contemporary 'hieroglyphs') rests on the idea that the social order ultimately depends on the capacity of actors to recognise the inter-subjective validity of the different claims on which human individual action and cooperation depends.

The way to attain this aim is to teach and learn all kinds of literacy, including visual literacy. This requires education for being and acting in visual space. But what does it mean to read an image and how can people develop the skills to do so? Who can we help and how can we help people not only to decode words but also to make sense of what they see and read. These issues demand a broad vocabulary, an experience in a particular content area, and critical thought. They pose new challenges to formal and non-formal education.

The dominant ideology functions to incorporate people into the system, it penetrates and infects the consciousness of people, so that they see and experience reality through the lenses and conceptual categories of the dominant ideology. Among the aims of education there should be a place for critical visual literacy. This is a condition for the responsible and courageous use of visual-graphic channels of communication. Respecting the validity claims as formulated by Habermas encourages democratisation of the social and political order, as well as individual and collective emancipation.

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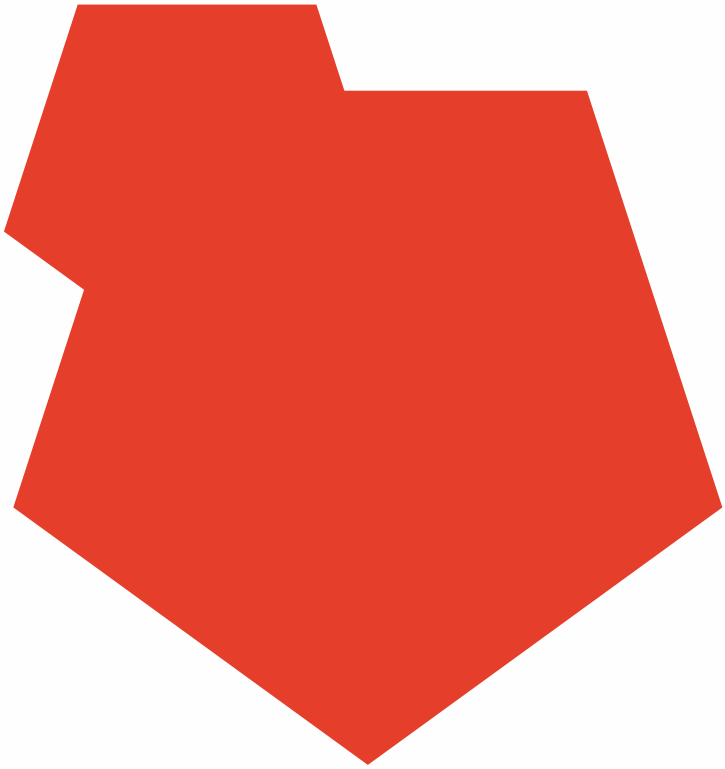
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5

Urban public space as a space of multi-dimensional communication

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Abstract

The public sphere understood as a place and space of communication is currently one of the basic analytical categories for the critical description of contemporary societies. In terms of conceptual solutions to the issues raised, the proposition of Jűrgen Habermas is interesting and is referred to in this article. The interpretive problems of Habermas's vision of the public sphere are clearly part of the current debates on social and cultural life, but also provide inspiration for reflection on the material elements of urban public spaces (one can notice the presence of these themes in the field of urban sociology or urban studies). Habermas's proposal is cognitively and methodologically relevant here and allows for setting new directions for analysis and interpretation, and for formulating new questions about the public and communicative nature of real urban spaces.

There are many perspectives on communication in the urban public sphere. It is presented as a 'space for communication', 'communicating space' or as a subject of public dialogue. The aim of this article is to try to characterise the urban public sphere (or rather urban public spheres?) as a space of multidimensional communication, which encompasses social communication and relations with material structures. The article presents debates that focus on the contemporary transformations of urban public space and on its increasingly accentuated crisis.

Keywords: public space, public spheres, urban public space.

Introduction

The urban agora is the subject of interdisciplinary interest. Theoreticians and researchers of this topic are currently focused on the problem of a specific urban crisis in the public sphere, at the same time ascribing to the city and its spaces (places in the city) a special social (public) character and significant importance in shaping the democratic behaviour of citizens and in creating a civil society. Lewis Mumford emphasises the cultural and civilisational aspect of the rise and development of cities. In his opinion,

> the city is a place of maximum concentration of what constitutes the power and culture of a given community. (...) In this community, human experiences are transformed into signs and symbols, patterns of behaviour and models of order (Mumford 1996: 5-7).

The city shapes society and its lifestyle, as well as the styles of 'being public'. It has enormous potential in creating the space of interpersonal communication, as well as the bonding potential in the field of social identification. Contemporary researchers of urban issues see in the process of recovery of urban public spaces a specific way to improve the quality of life of social communities, the quality of democracy and civil society. It is not insignificant, in the face of contemporary diagnoses, to indicate the numerous irregularities and threats to the public sphere (not only in the city). The city and the urban public sphere

are among problem areas requiring special interest, care and supporting activities. Among the questions opening the discussion around the issues raised in the title and in the introduction, there are a few basic ones: what is a contemporary city – a place or a space of social relations? What is the urban public sphere, how can it be characterised, how to determine it and how to find it? What is its crisis? How can the urban public sphere recover from this crisis? This article concentrates on these questions.

A city – a place or a space of social relations?

The search for the characteristics of communication and social potential of the urban public sphere motivates us to turn our attention to ways of defining the city. An explanation of this concept is important because the modern city is a diverse and dynamic civilisational creation with complex spatial and mental structures. Semantic difficulties are indicated by many authors, stressing at the same time that these explanations are also hindered by the interdisciplinary nature of interest in this subject matter and the resulting diversity of criteria determining what the modern city actually is. Hence, in terminological and research papers, the various elements constituting the phenomenon of the city are emphasised, including the number of inhabitants, the ratio of the number of inhabitants economically active in agricultural activity to the number of inhabitants employed outside agriculture, or the nature of the buildings. Bohdan Jałowiecki (Jałowiecki 1972: 7-12) sees the solution to disputes on the meaning of the term 'city' in the use of a mixed criterion in defining it, which includes various factors characterising the development of a given town in the ways of determining urban space. The application of this criterion, however, always requires a reliable and multifaceted analysis of the features and elements of a given city (e.g. population, ratio of working population employed in agriculture to those employed in other sectors, built-up environment structure, and so on).

The etymology of the word 'city' clearly indicates its description as 'place' (see Paszkowski, 2011: 12-16). Place is always significant, which is why the perception of the city in contemporary humanities accentuates the closeness of people living in a given place and clearly differentiates them from what we mean by the notion of space as an untamed, unknown, foreign land. However, the city is a place in the mental dimension and a space in the material dimension. Recognising the opposition of place and space, Yi-Fu Tuan emphasised: 'Space and place are ordinary words defining common experience (...) A place is safety, space is freedom: we are attached to the first and miss the other' (Tuan 1987: 13). Marek S. Szczepański, analysing the study of the quoted author (Yi-Fu Tuan), adds that space is a symbol of freedom in the Western world, it is open, it means the future and encourages us to act, and that only 'closed and humanized space becomes a place' (Szczepański, 2003: 139).

A place is a kind of a micro-space that can play the role of both the private and the public sphere. The city is such a place as a product of civilisation, a place of culture, exchange of goods, thoughts, a place of concentration of people, their mutual relations, competition, but also cooperation, professional activity and entertainment. Despite the heterogeneity of the urban society, the city is a place of creating relationships and specific ties aimed at identifying

with it and with the community that creates it. From this community, its identification with the place (with the city), its attachment or nomadism and sense of temporality depends largely on the development of local culture, customs, and the process of shaping the identity of the city, but also the identity of the social community. Urban nature is a quality shaped by civilisation and is a modern lifestyle. Florian Znaniecki describes the city as a 'non-spatial whole realized in human experience and activity' (Paszkowski, 2011: 12–16).

A contemporary city is a place and space (material and mental) of interpersonal communication, it is a place of realisation, but also a place for shaping human needs in the field of communicating with others – people, things – with human and inhuman actors. Richard Sennett (Sennett 2009: 72), stressing the humanistic, interactive and communicative dimension of modern cities, defines them as settlements where people meet strangers, but these meetings require special conditions. In order to achieve real interaction, the participants of these meetings must show good manners. Overall, according to Sennet, good manners allow actions that protect people against each other and at the same time allow them to enjoy each other's company. The essence of good manners is the wearing of a mask. Masks allow for pure socialising, separated from the power, bad moods and private feelings of those who wear them. The goal is to protect other people from ourselves (Sennett, 2009: 427–428). Good manners create opportunities for cooperation, at the same time allowing for the maintenance of a proper distance between people – the participants of social relations. Once we put on a mask we can hide our needs, emotions, joys and troubles. The mask can define (even guarantee) peace of mind and secure our private territory in social relations in a city. Although seemingly (as intuition suggests) it makes us withdraw from real interactions, it actually contributes to our involvement in such relations and manifests our motivation to collaborate with others (in the realisation of ideas and implementation of tasks).

On the one hand, a precondition for communication and interaction between strangers in the city is the presence of a physical space (public space) where people can meet, but on the other hand, we need a specific potential of that space which will give us the possibility to exercise our manners. The comment on the specific potential of that space seems relevant, since recently we have observed (e.g. Bauman, 2006a) a kind of 'unfriendliness' of public space in the city, which does not contribute to good social relations. The 'unfriendliness' is less reflected in the material dimensions of the space, but rather in its contemporary transformation, which deprives the public space of the important function of promoting and shaping social relations.

Urban public sphere – characteristics

In modern cities, many types of urban space and places can be distinguished, of which a large part provides the possibility to meet the needs of city residents in terms of public life (see Jałowiecki, Szczepański, 2009: 382–420). The term 'public life' is used in the sense of the whole of social life outside of home life, in the sense of the field of multiple subjective activities carried out

outside the household sphere, i.e. in those circumstances and situations characterised by spatial and temporal openness and potential inclusion (see Czerepaniak-Walczak 2004; see: Wnuk-Lipiński, 2005: 11). Thus, the public sphere includes all kinds of activities that take place outside the home, in which individuals take part outside of their family, kin, neighbour or friend communities (H. P. Bahrdt, for: Turowski, 1992: 13). In the sociological sense, the term 'public' is understood as the institutionalisation of a collective life, in which everyone has potential insight. It practically takes place in a democratic state and in all its institutions over which society exercises control. The form, structure and dynamics of the public sphere are the reflection of the dominant type of social order (an example of this is the civil society).

Among the components of public life, the following can be mentioned: political activity (related to, among others, the use of passive and active electoral law, participation in election campaigns, in the work of political parties, performing functions in local, regional and central authorities), economic activity (based on involvement in economic matters related to, for example, owning a small business or business on a larger scale, working in organisations and associations of an economic nature), educational activity (related to education and training of oneself and others, i.e. educational and academic institutions), cultural and scientific activity (including active and passive participation in culture, activity in artistic organisations and associations, e.g. a choir, orchestra, a dance group, it is also research and publishing activity in scientific societies and foundations), recreation and hobby activity (related to participation in the work of various interest groups, collectibles and hobby clubs, for example in an association of gardeners, anglers, hunters, sports, tourist and ecological organisations) and assistance activity (this activity is based on actions aimed at helping other people, those in need, in various rescue organisations, or working in self-help organisations – it is usually volunteer work to help and support others). The description of the public space presented above shows how diverse the field of public space is. It contains an abundance of fascinating phenomena that we can witness or participate in (accidentally or consciously). It is also clear that public space is entangled in a wider local and global context, which co-defines the conditions for the functioning of the public sphere.

In a relation to the analysis of the issues of urban space, the term 'public' means that this part of the city (these parts of the city) is owned by all its inhabitants, who can behave freely within it (although in accordance with the applicable legal, societal, and social norms and rules) and undertake a variety of activities related to public life. Public urban spaces are streets, avenues, squares, parks, stations, places where people meet, including strangers, establish relationships, interact, integrate and create local communities. The concept of public space is structurally connected with the definition of the public sphere, constituting the intangible part of dialogue, the place of those actions of citizens that are oriented towards achieving the common good (Habermas 2007).

It has been noticed that the concept of the public sphere understood as the place and space of communication has become one of the most important analytical categories in the social sciences, on the one hand to describe contemporary societies, on the other to realise critical analyses of social groups. Habermas's concept of the public sphere and the critical reflections (of a the-

oretical, practical and methodological nature) based on it, are located in the broadly understood discourse of social sciences on democracy and social and cultural life. Habermas (Habermas 2007: 95) defines the bourgeois public sphere as the one in which private persons meet, creating a body/community of public debate.

This sphere, understood as a forum for social dialogue over matters of public importance, is created by institutions located between the state and private entities, constituting the basic structure of civil society. It is a space of dialogue, a metaphorically understood space where individuals meet. It is this discursive space in which the relations between the state as a public authority and the private spheres of the family and the economy are negotiated, that makes democracy possible (Miciukiewicz 2006: 216).

The public sphere is consequently created as a kind of a means of dialogue and of building relations between the personal everyday lives of individuals and groups living in civil society and forms of domination/power belonging to the state. Therefore, it makes possible a truly civil, real, subjective (individual and collective) responsible dialogue without forms of domination and violence.

Habermas's concept of the public sphere, although directly related to the intangible space of dialogue, is undoubtedly an interesting inspiration for interdisciplinary reflection around material urban public spaces (geography, urban sociology and urban studies). Thus, it is cognitively relevant for new theoretical directions and research orientations conducted in the field of this subject. The issue of public space is still 'alive', since it is present in scientific and journalistic discourse and in questions currently recurring in publications discussing whether streets, parks, markets, squares, and stations are spatial (material) images of the public sphere in the city.

Is a rational discourse about space possible? Is it possible to formulate a vision of a 'good city' or a 'socially intelligent city'? (Miciukiewicz, 2006: 214). It is noticeable that by asking such questions, it is possible to understand the place (place in the city) as a communication space. In this approach, the city is a place of concentration of public spaces, which serves as a platform for meetings, social interactions, creating significant groups and local, urban communities.

When trying to characterise urban public spaces (places in a city where public life is possible for its inhabitants), it is worth paying attention to two dimensions: material and social (Frysztacki, 2005: 151-157). In regards to the material dimension, the urban public space is an open area accessible for all citizens and visitors who wish to use it. It is inclusive in its nature, open and accessible for everyone who wants to be there. Such a space is neither fenced, nor fitted with gates, and it remains open for passers-by; ideally, it is accessible from various points and everyone can enter into it from various directions and on different occasions. It is also a place one can enter accidently 'in passing', or a place situated close to major city transportation hubs, major roads, pavements, or avenues (Miciukiewicz 2006: 220). Below are two photographs showing examples of urban public spaces in the city of Szczecin in Poland.

In the social dimension, this space is to be clearly perceived, identified and indicated as a 'public space' by participants of public life. It is to be socially accepted and perceived as a tame, friendly and safe place in the broad sense of the term, that is, free from physical, material threats, but also for open, spontaneous





. Solidarności Square (public space), Szczecin (photo: Lidia Marek, 2018)



Orła Białego Square (public space), Szczecin (photo: Lidia Marek, 2018)



and free interpersonal contacts (Frysztacki 2005: 153). It is a space for multilateral communication and, as already emphasised, a place for creating but also shaping human needs in communication with others – people, things – with human and inhuman actors.

Konrad Miciukiewicz interestingly interprets the communication potential of the urban public space, pointing to its three basic dimensions (Miciukiewicz, 2006: 214-215). First of all, urban public spaces are places 'for' communication, in which one can meet with other people, express one's own thoughts, pursue various public activities and manifest one's own identity. These places are accessible to everyone; they are places of cultural and political debate and the spaces are open to gatherings, demonstrations, various forms of artistic presentation. Secondly, public places in the city are 'communicating spaces', informing and communicating certain messages. In this dimension space expresses specific information (message, symbol) about the participants of social relations taking place within it, about the conditions, principles and limits of communication between them. As far as the third dimension is concerned, namely the interpretation of the urban space from the communication point of view, in tcourse on new solutions pertaining to its structure or function (e.g. discussions involving a larger auditorium, in the press, about planned parks, streets, and housing estates). Miciukiewicz indicates that it is worth using Habermas's public sphere concept to analyse the city understood as a communication space. On the one hand, the public sphere provides a basis for normative material concepts of public space (in a sense ideal models for 'discourse materialised'), and on the other, it provides inspiration for a number of critical approaches to the crisis of public space in contemporary metropolises (see Miciukiewicz 2006: 215).

It can therefore be noted that Habermas's concept of public space finds its place in reflections on the definitions of material public spaces and on the established rules that actually apply to them. The features of the public sphere emphasised by Habermas, in particular the principle of inclusiveness and democratic access, and the principle of separation of private and public space, become an important element of model definitions, and thus the basis for building material public spaces that are to become a means of integration of the urban community (Miciukiewicz 2006: 220).

Summarising, the urban public space must be inclusive (open to anyone who can and wants to appear in it) in order to fulfil its real catalytic functions in the creation of social communities and public activity, in which democratic principles of access and separation of private and public space are in force. This space becomes a key place of identification, where collective identities, a sense of belonging to the urban community are formed. Here, common history and symbolism are important for urban communities. It is also a place and a kind of medium for dialogue and for creating relationships between the everyday lives of individuals and groups living in civil society and forms of state dominance. The city's agora is the place of an 'ideal communication situation', in which everyone gets an equal right to vote, a place conducive to the emergence of situations in which cultural and political debate is not disturbed, the sphere in the city which exhibits agreement and social integration.



Gated community, Szczecin (photo: Lidia Marek, 2018)

The crisis of the urban public space

Another important reason to include Habermas's concept of the public sphere into reflections on the modern city is the debate on the crisis of the urban public sphere – a phenomenon highlighted in the work of many researchers (Bauman 1995, Frysztacki 2005, Sennett 2009). There are more and more signals indicating the presence of a kind of 'inhospitability' of the city for meetings of people, public debates and manifestations of views and identities. In many urban spaces, there is no proper atmosphere for establishing and maintaining interpersonal contacts involving people in the public activities of local communities. Zygmunt Bauman writes about the inhospitable nature of spaces dominated by modern architecture, spaces transforming man into a consumer and the inhospitable so-called 'empty spaces'. The specific structure of streets, urban squares, schools or shopping centres often discourages pedestrians strolling around the city and forces them to use various means of transport, including individual transport, which limits city residents' interactions to spontaneous meetings and relationships.

Among the causes of the crisis (and degradation) of the urban public space, apart from specifically material, economic factors, it is also possible to point out social ones. The formation of closed settlements is a unique expression of the weave of material, economic, social and visual factors. Economic and social

factors related to, among others, anonymity and mutual distrust of relations between people – become a barrier difficult to overcome in the process of creating places conducive to interpersonal contacts and places friendly to public activity of residents of closed settlements. The crisis of the urban public space is favoured by a specific 'culture of fear', 'ecology of fear'. The establishment of 'gated communities' is one of the contemporary tendencies in the development of cities and at the same time a good example of limiting the urban public space. Jacek Gądecki defines protected housing estates as those 'in which normal public spaces are privatized' (Gądecki 2007: 91) and limited by formal architectural (walls, fences) and social (monitoring, protection) barriers. Anonymity and lack of involvement in activities in the public sphere prevail in these estates (apart from the local community of the housing estate). What counts above all is the artificially created 'safety of residents' as well as the preservation of their particular prestige.

Observations and analyses of contemporary cities' public space lead us to the phenomenon of metropolisation. Metropolisation gives big cities advantages (in specific fields, e.g. science, economy, mass media) over other cities in the region; they become stronger and relax their ties with smaller (weaker) cities. This clearly reduces the potential of smaller cities in regards to their economic and social development. Bohdan Jałowiecki (2009: 15-16) highlighted that metropolisation results in a number of consequences that limit cities' public space. One of them is the activity of multinational corporations that transforms central places (districts) in the city into office space, or creates new peripheral business districts and places for commercial activities in specially arranged facilities (usually outside the city centre). 'Such destructurisation and disorganisation of social life usually gives rise to a feeling of being threatened by <others> and <strangers>, which is not conducive to building local community and public activity. It favours the multidimensional phenomenon of gentrification (economic, social and symbolic). Gentrification of housing is most often accompanied by the gentrification of services (...) causing at the same time functional exclusion from the space of those who used to be users of nearby streets, clubs and parks' (Miciukiewicz 2006: 226). Gentrification of places is definitely (at least in the initial phase) a conflict, a complex and difficult situation between 'new' and 'old' inhabitants, and it creates an atmosphere that is not conducive to establishing closer acquaintance and public activity, but rather prevents the conciliatory intercourse of various social groups.

More and more often cities are dealing with semi-public spaces. They appear in public places that are in a specific way 'closed' and privatised. The privatisation of space in the city is another factor leading to the crisis of the urban public space. Its characteristic form is urban space in malls. Although this phenomenon has its origins in the 19th century, it is now that its particular progress can be noticed. Nowadays, we observe a significant 'reduction of street and square importance as the basis of urban life for passages, suburban malls, and in recent decades for urban shopping centres' (Miciukiewicz 2006: 224). Bauman describes such places as spaces that change citizens into consumers. In these places there is an opportunity to consume (eat, use) various offers (commercial, culinary, cultural, leisure activities), but there is no opportunity to establish real cooperation. Consumption, however, is more often an individual occupation. Those who are in 'temples of consumption' are a crowd, a gathering,



Shopping center 'Kaskada' (semi-public space), Szczecin (photo: Lidia Marek, 2018)

but do not constitute a community, are not a definite whole (Bauman 2006a: 151). They are connected only by apparent, physical and spatial proximity, but it does not encourage conversation, exchange of views or implementation of common goals. Consumption spaces are also most often private spaces, only publicly used, guarded by security guards acting as 'gatekeepers' and 'guardians of order', the order defined by the owners of the temple of consumption. This all limits the real public function of these places. Agora has been deserted – writes Zygmunt Bauman – 'but not the public square, on which it was located. However, today it is not a square of meetings, but an urban market in a transformed marketplace. (...) Crowds are present in the square as before. Only now these are crowds of consumers, not citizens; and the consumer (...) is the enemy of the citizen' (Bauman 2006: 23).

Public architecture is significantly impeded by modern architecture, which loses its catalytic function for interpersonal interactions and public activity. This is indicated, among others, by Zygmunt Bauman (2006a: 149-150) and Richard Sennett (2009: 27-30), who describe inhospitable places in the city for interpersonal relations. They are usually huge, glazed buildings, in which it is difficult to even locate the entrance/exit (door), or squares with concrete benches, resembling pedestals for monuments or museum exhibits, definitely not encouraging people to sit down and talk to someone. Next to such objects, people move in a hurry, passing them without any emotions. 'Such public space is a dead space, because neither human laughter nor human crying enlivens it' (Szatan 2012: 95). These are not places to rest, stop and establish relationships.

These spaces in a city are losing their real public character in a similar manner to Marc Auge's 'non-places'. These are standardised objects, in which only formally defined rules of behaviour are in force. Auge characterised 'non-places' in opposition to anthropological, relational, historical, and identifying places. 'Non-places' are:

> (…) air and rail routes, highways, mobile buildings called means of transport (planes, trains, cars), airports, stations and space stations, big hotel chains, amusement parks, supermarkets, complicated communication nodes, and finally – cable or wireless networks operating in extraterrestrial space and serving such a strange communication that it connects the individual only with another image of itself (Auge 2010: 53-54).

In 'non-places' everyone should do only what belongs to him/her, what is expected of him/her, but nobody should behave as if he/she were at home (Bauman 2006a: 159). Despite their public character, these are spaces that make it impossible to manifest oneself, one's own identity – their users are not expected to be creative, and engage only in anonymous and schematic behaviour.

Research focusing on the crisis of the city's public sphere points to 'empty locations' in a city (Kociatkiewicz, Kostera 1999: 43). These are insignificant places, neglected by people and not worth their interest. Such places virtually do not exist within 'private maps of a city'. Those are usually 'closed' to the public sphere, regardless of their development (they do not need to be physically separated with wall or gate). They simply lack any social significance for interpersonal relations.

Urban spaces, as indicated, undergo decisive transformations, which are not always beneficial for creating and sustaining the public sphere in the city. We can definitely talk about a specific crisis in this sphere. Cities have largely lost their social and public functions in favour of their metropolisation, privatisation and transformation into areas for consumers. Cities contain an increasing number of places that are inhospitable for people involved in public activity, places which attract 'few' and exclude 'many'. The urban public sphere definitely requires researchers' interest and concern, and the attention of urban planners planning ways to develop urban spaces so that the modern city can fulfil its real social functions. This requires taking responsibility for the common space, but also creativity, adapting urban development plans to the material and social circumstances of their functioning, and breaking schematic and repeatable patterns in creating spaces and places in the city.

Conclusion

Charles Montgomery (2015: 13) emphasises that a city is a means to reach a goal, which is a certain lifestyle. As such, it makes us reflect on what is the best in us, and that lifestyle can be anything we want. But, is there really so much potential in urban planning that it is able to decide about our happiness? Undoubtedly, this is an issue worthy of interest and reflection, because the message about a happy city gains followers all over the world (Montgomery 2015: 23). One of the elements of this message is the task of creating a modern,

happy city as a meeting place for developing and holding interpersonal relations, a place of multidimensional communication with other people, but also communication with elements of material, visual and virtual space. Ancient urban agoras were places that were unusual, majestic and full of dignity. They were vibrant with merchant life and the meetings of councils, judges and followers of religions (Montgomery 2015: 35-36). There were many visions of happiness of an individual and of a community in the disputes of philosophers and ordinary citizens. Everyone could demonstrate their views, take the floor, self-express, be creative.

Today, people need such places too. Building an urban agora should be the joint effort of citizens (urban public space itself becomes the subject of public dialogue, as previously pointed out), researchers investigating urban issues (city sociologists, anthropologists and geographers of the city, researchers representing interdisciplinary urban reflection studies) and urban planners. The adoption of joint duties of care for the material and social space of the city and the co-responsibility of groups of people genuinely involved in the construction of urban oases and multidimensional well-being have a chance of success. It can be an opportunity to meet strangers, creating an urban public sphere not only in the material dimension, but also, and perhaps primarily, in the mental dimension.

The goal is to create and recover places of various public activities in cities, to create an atmosphere of trust that fosters social relations and communication of people on many different levels and in many different ways using various means (visual and virtual communication). It is possible to change the reality of the city so that it is more conducive to the happiness of all interested residents, not only the privileged few.

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6

The influence of multicultural communities on London's public space

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Abstract

Cross-border mobility is a current trend influencing the development of societies today. Intercultural encounters concomitant to cross-border mobility are a result of interactions between individuals or groups of people living in different cultures. This relates to people who moved to London, too. This city has a particular multicultural mix. Its distinctive character developed through the imperial age and the 20th century. People who arrived in London from all over the world have transformed this astonishing city into a place full of cultural artefacts influenced by overseas societies. Some questions arise: Do multicultural communities shape London's public space? If so, how? And how much do these communities affect everyday social relations or even municipal infrastructure? Moreover, do multicultural communities imply a brand new multicultural space? Does such a space just evolve out of the different parts of a multicultural community or is there something particular about multicultural spaces in London? The article makes use of a basic theory of visual identity and links it with an intercultural approach to explore the issues outlined above.

Keywords: visual communication, interculturalism, multiculturalism, public space, immigration, London

Introduction

Many scholars in the humanities are increasingly interested in the influence of visual culture on everyday life. It is difficult to remain indifferent when images are everywhere and often support verbal messages. For the younger generation visual culture may be particularly accessible and understandable. Images are important in processes of interpersonal communication and, in a wider context, intercultural communication. There are different types of communication in diverse societies, and 'the visual' constitutes an important way to communicate information about oneself and the surrounding reality. Visual culture and visual communication raise particular methodological, analytical and interpretative challenges for researchers, and this article touches on some of these. This article considers visual and intercultural communication in urban metropolitan space. It focuses on the following crucial questions:

1. What is the role of images and visualisation in the contemporary world?
2. What makes any city in the world modern and how can we characterise the processes of communication in today's cities?
3. What is the communication process in urban multicultural communities?
4. How do identified images function in an urban iconosphere?



Heathrow, London 2017 (photo: Roman Mazur)

London is one of the world's largest cities, with people from many different countries living in it and creating it. Its cultural diversity provides an excellent opportunity to carry out theoretical and practical analyses of urban communication (perceiving and understanding) in a multicultural society.

Cultural space is a social creation that is expressed through the activities of social groups, organisations, institutions and individuals. First of all, it is a transcendent space interacting with different systems of values, beliefs, rules, norms, conventions and criteria created by the communities that create this space. Second, cultural space, like public space, is considered in relation to the values and activities that are characteristic for a social environment (community). Both spaces provide opportunities for multidimensional, interpersonal communication and interact with the wider environment (architecture) to encourage distinctive communication methods – linguistic, non-linguistic, visual and virtual (Rewers 2006: 187).

Non-linguistic methods of communication constitute an important part of the process of creating culture and the communication community (Rewers, 2006: 187). Images (visual objects and iconography) located within the social environment that they relate to play an important role in intercultural communication in a large city. The number of visual objects we perceive has a significant impact on social experiences in large cities. Malcolm Barnard claims that 'visual objects have become an important experience in people's lives. We've been increasingly exposed to and influenced by visual objects' (Sztompka, 2005: 11). Nicolas Mirzoeff notices the same thing: 'we can talk about fundamental importance of experiencing visual objects in everyday life' (Sztompka, 2005: 11).

We see that the 'city of life' – the place of our social experiences – is filled (sometimes overfilled) with visual objects (including images), which makes this place more expressive, diverse, somehow more intense and more spectacular. The things and images that we perceive constitute a particular spectacle with specific actors of social life. Each day, on the street, in squares, on public transport, we are confronted by visual advertising – posters, signboards, playbills or billboards. We pass expressively decorated shop windows and eye-catching monuments. We pass graffiti on walls and on underground trains. We see iconic images rather than informative text. Prohibiting and mandatory signs regulate traffic on the city roads. Visual signs direct passengers moving to and in airports, trains and bus stations, and guide tourists across the streets of the cities they visit (Sztompka, 2005: 11–17).

Visual culture rather than verbal culture dominate urban public spaces. Images with informative content that provide aesthetic experiences and express various emotions, norms or values play a significant role in interpersonal communication. The iconosphere isn't only informative or documentary. It is also commercial, advertising something or seeking to promote some propaganda. These functions are not mutually exclusive and usually interfere with each other in many different ways.

Every day we experience the specific multi-functionality of the image and iconosphere. At the same time we are immersed in visual culture, and it affects us in many ways, some of which we are unaware of. Mindfulness and in-depth reflection is often required to make use of some of the effects of visual culture.



Newham, London 2017 (photo: Agnieszka Szajner)



London Pride, London 2017 (photo: Roman Mazur)

An image is more than just the product of perception (Belting, 2007: 11-12). It is the consequence of the actions of individuals and groups. As a result of 'perception', or the processing and interpretation of sensory data, a phenomenon can be read as a picture or transformed into an image (see Belting, 2007: 11-12). 'Therefore, the notion of image, if taken seriously, may ultimately only be an anthropological concept' (Belting, 2007: 11-12). Understanding the image in this way has methodological, analytical and interpretative implications. Olechnicki argues that 'an anthropology of images is interested in the iconosphere on the one hand – the surrounding visual images as a reflection of the original cultural form of a social community, and on the other hand ... it uses images as the basis for research analysis' (Olechnicki, 2003: 8). However, persistent questions and difficulties remain, as a number of scholars have noted (see Gombrich, 1981: 312-313, Zeidler-Janiszewska, 2006: 5-8).

The communication space of London

London is a special place for our reflections on the visual context of the present day. The etymology of the word 'city' clearly indicates its meaning as 'place'. The term 'city' comes from the Latin: *civitas, civitalis, civis* – which means civilisation. The city is therefore a product of civilisation, a place of culture, exchange of goods, thoughts, a place of assembling for people to compete, to cooperate, to work, to play. Despite the heterogeneity of urban societies – despite age, gender, ethnic, racial and religious diversity – the city is a place to create special bonds that integrate us with it and with the community that creates it. 'Urbanity' is a civilised quality and a contemporary lifestyle. Florian Znaniecki defines the city as 'a non-spatial entity being carried out by means of human experience and action' (Paszkowski, 2011:12-16).

The expansion of modern European cities is closely related to their special social structure and status of the local community on a ladder of socio-economic roles and duties in the country. The expansion of cities also depends on the activities, plans and aspirations of inhabitants. It interacts with demography, immigration and emigration to provide the local, urban community with a stable or changing character. The expansion of modern cities depends largely on the local culture, customs and the process of shaping the identity of the city as well as shaping the community that creates the city. This community and the identification of its members with place (with the city), their tendency to settle in one place for a long time or to move frequently from one place to another, impacts on the expansion of the city.

Taking into account present theories about cultural space, one can think about the specific European cultural space. It 'is open to cultural interactions (in the mental sphere), despite the existence of local administration rules and borders between countries (Rewers, 2006: 188). Sometimes the common European culture is described as a kind of illusion or utopia, but it is difficult to deny some common features of this civilisation space. It is currently defined by common urbanisation processes (the spread of urban culture as a dominant global culture), increasing diversity as well as fragmentation (the coexistence of different cultural diasporas evolving out of gender, race, class, religion,



Liverpool Street Station, London 2017 (photo: Roman Mazur)

language or generational differentiation). Public space in the European cultural space is developing due to the everyday cultural activities of cultural diasporas (Rewers, 2006: 190–191, 193, 199–200).

The multicultural space of London

Anja Rudiger and Sarah Spencer (2003) draw attention to three models of integration. The first is a model of political assimilation in which the rights and duties of citizenship are binding on everyone regardless of people's origins. Such a model is practised in France, for example. The second model is an assimilation model that takes into account the ethnic origin of people. It is practised in countries which do not view themselves as places of immigration. Migrants tend to be seen as only temporarily residing within the state. This model is defined by differential exclusion – migrants may be included in the

labour market, but excluded from the civic and political spheres. Countries like Denmark, Austria, Italy and Greece have favoured this model. The third model is a multicultural model which rests on a pluralist idea of democracy. In this model, the presence of different ethnic and racial groups in a country is accepted and managed through anti-discrimination and equal opportunities laws. Access to full civil and political rights is straightforward. This model has been adopted in the UK (Ratajczak: 2014).

London is the focus of our reflections on the cultural context of visual objects because it is a multicultural city created not only by Britons but also by immigrants who arrived in London from many different countries from all around the world. Britain's multicultural policy is based on the idea of social inclusion. British legislation includes anti-discrimination and 'equal opportunities' laws. Legal immigrants have access to social benefits and some political rights. Diversity and equality are crucial factors in enabling people of all walks of life to engage in intercultural dialogue. This makes London a specific multicultural and multinational 'melting pot', or rather, a 'cultural mosaic' composed of many different elements, including ethnicity, religion and race. The difference between 'melting pot' and 'cultural mosaic' is primarily based on a common sense of belonging to a diverse community, as well as on people's individual sense of carrying out common goals regarding some shaping and developing of a 'common place' for all. We would say London can be both 'melting pot'[3] and 'cultural mosaic'[4].

The culture of this city is formed mostly by migrants arriving from all parts of the world to boost and transform it into a city of the sort described by Yngve Georg Lithman, who wrote: 'it is a sort of the co-operative, buffet-style culture table' (Rewers, 2006: 190), where everyone (residents and residing newcomers) can find what they are looking for (something like a favourite meal). The wide cultural offering in such cities is being fulfilled and enriched by traditions coming to them from the entire world. London offers opportunities for multi-dimensional cooperation, but its inhabitants do not take advantage of all the opportunities. The reasons for this are often an individual matter. It is likely that different cultural and social backgrounds as well as different life experiences play a role.

London as an international city

London is a metropolitan city with a cosmopolitan order and a very specific urban public, but the widely noted crisis of urban public space is also manifested in London.

London – as well as the United Kingdom in general – provides a wealth of opportunities, including that of experiencing multiculturalism. One of the authors of this paper lived in Athens for several years, prior to moving to London

[3] 'Melting pot' – cultural integration of different ethnic groups; allows identification with one's own culture and ethnic group up to the moment of its inclusion in public life, in which citizens form a cultural whole – for example the American culture, which is rooted in a variety of ethnicities.

[4] 'Cultural mosaic' – 'salad bowl' – with ingredients lying side by side, and not mixing. This serves to illustrate American society which has, after years of relative unity, started to fragment and differentiate, and we are dealing with the manifestation of ethnic traditions in public life.

five years ago, and has had the opportunity to compare various aspects of the migration experience in the United Kingdom and in Greece. For example, Greece's immigration policy is different from the British one. British policy seeks to foster the conflict-free coexistence of cultures and lets them co-define the image of the local community. Greece adopts a model of assimilation that respects ethnic diversity, but does not provide support for people who want to feel at home in Greece and who want to co-create their 'new community', their 'common place' in their everyday life.

London provides multidimensional opportunities. It is possible in this multicultural city to observe the presence of 'urban diplomacy'. This expresses itself through international contacts, both economic and cultural. It creates great development opportunities for the city itself and for its inhabitants. London is one of those cities that are considered to be strategically important at the level of global relations. Undoubtedly, history, cultural traditions and traditions relating to the building of local communities play a significant role in shaping such a global image of this city. London's economic growth, investment assets and intellectual potential enhance opportunities, too.

The visual culture of London

London, like every modern city, is deeply immersed in a culture of signs and visual objects. Images in the streets of this city are an important element of communication in a multicultural community, regulating many areas of its life. They play not only an informative role but also documentary and commercial ones. Moreover, they normalise the life of the urban community.

The commercial and consumption dimensions of images connect and divide the urban community simultaneously. Consumption with an aesthetic element becomes a social bond (in the same way that common history or social origin did in the past), but style, aesthetic taste, and cultural consumption also create social divisions (Rewers, 2006: 189).

There is also an artistic and aesthetic dimension. Sometimes it can be considered escapist – colourful images substitute, at least for a while, the shortage of colours in 'everyday life'. This is a trap concomitant to deep immersion in visual culture, in the world of images. Perception of the outer world is increasingly substituted by images, and this process of substituting is multidimensional. A picture builds and articulates our perception of our world. 'Visual sensitivity' – as Piotr Sztompka writes – 'replaces or at least fulfils (our) textual receptiveness.' (Sztompka, 2005).

Images play a significant and crucial role in open urban public space. Those in the streets, in squares, in parks, on public transport, are constantly influencing the senses of the people perceiving them, as they impact not only on our sight. Persuasive advertising, where a perfume is described (defined) by revealing its ingredients, allows us almost to 'smeel' it. We also almost taste on the tip of our tongue (especially when the weather is hot) the ice cream we see in a commercial on the screen.

Obviously everything we perceive in today's world can relate our present experiences to previous ones. Contemporary life in such a large city as London is full of visual signs we encounter everywhere on a daily basis, but we



City of London, London 2017 (photo: Roman Mazur)



Notting Hill Carnival, London 2017 (photo: Roman Mazur)

National Gallery, London 2017 (photo: Roman Mazur)



are not always aware of them immediately. This can be a focal point for creators of visual communication. Their messages can reach us later – they have a time-release effect.

Due to the leading and even overwhelming role of visual culture in our lives, it is important for us to read / decode the meaning of messages hidden (more or less) in perceived images. Cultural background impacts on the way images are read. Edward Hall notes that 'every culture creates its own perceptual world.' Hall (2001) highlights 'hot societies' (societies of visual expression strongly focused on such ephemeral things as body motion, unique clothing and even ornamentation of the body, clothes and their environment). There are also, in his opinion, 'cold societies', focused much more on verbal culture or even on a culture of the spoken word. Describing this interesting matter, Piotr Sztompka refers to memory images from the pilgrimage of Pope John Paul II, who pointed out different ways of carrying out a Christian mass in Africa and in Scandinavia (Sztompka, 2005: 18-19).

Cities and local urban communities also create a particular culture of 'imaging' and 'reading pictures'. Piotrowski (1976: 119) calls this phenomenon 'the personality of the city'. It includes everything that creates a specific scenery, atmosphere or climate of a given urban space. Undoubtedly, London's image is 'personified' in the red, double decker buses that we do not see in other British cities. They state the message 'we are in London' and are part of the city's symbolism and aesthetics.

As 'street researchers' who live in London and examine the city's visual culture, we have noted that London's iconosphere is dramatically differentiated across public space. There are different ways of perceiving images – their content, forms of creation and presentation. Representatives of different cultures may read images in different ways. One is free to interpret them according to one's own individual experience of multicultural London.

London is one of the most multicultural cities in the world, which makes it an inspiration for all kinds of human activities. Individuals from all walks of life bring to London their art, music, cuisine and many other unique things. It is a significant space for creativity, which many opportunities for creative people. London cannot be treated merely as the final product of their creativeness. We can only search, analyse and describe this city in etymological, anthropological, sociological, cultural, economic, political, architectural, psychological, philosophical, aesthetic or even futurological terms.

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7

Contexts of Visual Culture: Dialogue between Teenage Identities and Urban Spaces

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Abstract

This study investigates the plurality of perspectives that set the interpretative keys of visual languages. The multitude of messages that we receive every day requires a critical reading perspective. We are not merely passive users of images, but producers of images also. The visual dimension becomes a language for different cultures to question themselves, comprehend each other, and express co-created perspectives. Taking account of personal paradigms and cultural-geographical contexts of belonging, it is possible to deconstruct, with intentionality, fixed visions of reality and replace them with dialogic conflicting communicative trajectories. In this regard, we present an Italian project in which second generation migrant adolescents and Italian teenagers question the urban space, producing new visual narratives and explaining their sense of citizenship.

Keywords: teenagers, second generation migrants, urban spaces, visual language, citizenship.

Reference framework: Intercultural sketches

Within intercultural pedagogy there are some fundamental trajectories on which it is important to focus in order to create connections with visual culture and different meanings that can emerge from reflection and experience. During the first session of TICASS – *Technologies of Imaging in Communication, Art and Social Sciences*, held in Szczecin in May-June 2017, the international research team created spaces for dialogue between different approaches and competences that highlighted the need to deepen languages and research methodologies. The encounter between the multicultural contexts of visual culture and the intercultural educational approach can best be understood through some of the key words that formed the basis of the interpretation system between education and the visual.

Pluralities as a category takes into account the multiplicity of human beings, languages, interpretations and individual projects. Interculturalism recognises the value of each person and aims to create dialogue and interaction between people with different identities (Fiorucci & al., 2017). There is no static homogeneity in educational activities or in visual languages. Both require consideration of the context of action and the development of experiences that stimulate change and raise questions. Plurality is enhanced by an intercultural education that creates contacts, connections and links between those with different identities. Such an education undermines the ethnocentric paradigm that often characterises different communities (Burgio, 2015).

Heterogeneity is a constituent element of educational contexts, not just at the level of coexistence of different cultures (Zoletto, 2012; 2017). We must focus more on the plurality of the cultural experiences and biographies of each subject. It is not enough to describe cultures; we have to go further and understand different cultural and social interpretations and affiliations. In order to ensure that this process of discovery takes place, it is essential to rediscover

the stability of roots-traditions-belonging, which is too often taken for granted, and to re-read itineraries of communication and creative interaction based on the plurality of languages-interpretations-mediations.

Plural coexistence, therefore, means considering the presence of different references and horizons of meaning, and assuming the category of *uncertainty* as one's own. This is an essential element of educational practice as the promotion of the freedom, autonomy and responsibility of every individual. Making this process of liberation and awareness (Freire, 2002; 2004; 2008) a reality for individuals and communities, especially those represented and designated as marginal, involves the development of critical consciousness, inclusive dialogue and the sharing of differences. In this paradigm, attributable to *Critical Pedagogy* (Giroux, 2013; Kincheloe, 2008), there is an obvious educational responsibility in affirming, legitimising, and concretising interculture itself.

The *displacement* that we can experience in an intercultural dialogue is also found in the forefront of artworks and visual narrative paths that attract our interest by opening us up to healthy uncertainty (Stara, 2014), interpretative doubt, and reflective creativity. Being immersed in uncertainty (Bauman, 2003; 2006) and in the disquiet of differences (Wieviorka, 2008) requires a critical spirit, flexible references, crosscutting skills that can guide us and enable us to interpret the context (Fiorucci, 2011). Recognising that we must live in uncertainty and that we can coexist with porous cultural boundaries requires the courage to understand ourselves as 'incomplete beings' in a continuous interchange with others. To recognise ourselves as interdependent subjects requires paths of discovery of 'oneself with others' and of deconstruction of monolithic and functional identities defined by closure and conflict. This means opening up to new and other perspectives, world-views, representations of reality based on different historical and cultural baggage.

Accordingly, it is important to know oneself (personally, culturally, professionally, etc.) and to understand the backgrounds that determine the building of knowledge. Discovering and discussing the premises and orientations of knowledge can bring out different scenarios, move us closer to mutual understanding, and facilitate the discovery of the reasons for cultural diversity and similarities. Also in this case it is essential to develop open and dialogue-based thought that deconstructs the single perspective of a central culture vis-à-vis peripheral ones. We can promote a 'border pedagogy', which raises awareness of the fact that our fragile identities move across different cultural dimensions with a variety of languages, experiences and voices (Giroux, 1995). To this end, consideration of heterogeneous contexts and the assumption of post-colonial perspectives (Andreotti de Oliveira, 2011; Sirna, 2003, Zoletto, 2011) are of extreme importance.

Intercultural dialogues could be transformative if we could create places and times of reciprocity, in which 'I am interested in the other' and 'each subject is the other' in a continuous circle of equal dignity and reciprocity. In dialogue we do not necessarily resolve conflicts, but we can experience the proximity and anxiety of non-understanding, the need to know different perspectives. The choice of dialogue is what drives the discovery of ourselves and others (Deluigi, 2015; 2017); it is an intentional movement that consciously leaves us suspended; a place with room for differences, for hybridisation and cross-fertilisation.

Intercultural education envisages exchanges from the point of view of intersubjectivity and knowledge building. It is essential to distance oneself from seeking familiar references to learn how to move more easily between different meaning systems. If an exchange has really taken place, it will produce forms that diverge from the initial positions of the interlocutors, unlike the many closures in contemporary society (Bauman, 2016). The construction of an intercultural perspective questions certainty and creates plastic meanings that can be subjected to multiple perspectives, which in turn promote complex visions. This approach involves going beyond easy monocultural stereotyped deployments, with their closed insistence on objectifying events.

The interweaving of education and visual culture can open up paths for joint work to encourage subjects to question themselves and listen to different forms of 'otherness' and representations that redefine spaces of coexistence. Overcoming standard separations and categorisations means undertaking and promoting reflective trajectories and educational practices, in which ties and interdependencies reacquire a central role. The development of such dynamics is constantly evolving, but it is essential to have guidelines that can serve as the basis for the promotion of inclusive perspectives in contrast to the construction of rigid boundaries and insurmountable limits. Intercultural education has the task of building bridges, not walls or boundaries (Deluigi, 2016; Ruksza, 2015). This is not just a metaphorical proposition, but also an invitation to interconnection between the various 'bearers of culture'.

As educators we must try to think about the relationships between differences, taking on the complexity of the different personal, cultural, values-centred baggage, and to design meeting places to overcome (beyond one's self) those differences through multiple languages. This trajectory will lead us to discover our sense of belonging, to understand the extent to which we are able to deal with complementary encounters and ourselves. We have the responsibility to promote relational spaces, including the dynamics generated by differences, to outline encounters where, of necessity, we cannot live alone (Cima, 2009; 2017).

Unstable equilibrium and plural narratives

To consider the plurality of perspectives and the interpretative keys of visual languages we must first be aware of the stereotypes and prejudices we hold. They attack and impoverish the imaginary, condition the knowledge processes, and influence social behaviours and relationships from childhood (Zannoni, 2017). Intercultural education can help subjects to recognise and deconstruct them with critical thinking that becomes the premise and horizon of true contact with otherness.

Nomadic, wandering, travelling, migrant thinking requires a pedagogical intervention that seeks to form the idea of a 'multiple ego'. It is based on the ability to move away from one's own ways of looking at and codifying reality, by learning from other cultures and returning to one's own culture enriched by the comparison. But this is not sufficient without a willingness to integrate multiple perspectives and make them co-exist even in their inevitable speci-

ficity (Pinto Minerva, 2002; 2004; 2014). It is therefore necessary to develop the ability to build shared learning, with the awareness that intercultural processes need reciprocity.

Personal and cultural heritage can only exist in new communicative forms, in which the interacting parties consider one another as 'equals', if they leave behind an ethnocentric standpoint and open up to the idea of hybridisation, thanks to cultural creativity which can pave the way for brand new intercultural opportunities (Deluigi, 2017, 8). It is a continuous process of reciprocal departures and returns from Self to the Other and vice versa. Only in this way can we reduce the separations, isolations, and distances that define differences without any effective and affective interaction.

The multitude of messages that we receive every day requires a critical reading perspective to hypothesise different interpretations with which to engage in dialogue. The cultural orientations among which our existence functions are essential parts of the interpretative process. We must therefore, as researchers, educators and people, place ourselves in a dynamic equilibrium. This means crossing borders, listening to the voice of the other, immersing ourselves in disturbing sound experiences, having artistic and aesthetic experiences that raise doubt and uncertainty, crossing unknown knowledge fields and, above all, wanting and searching for interaction and encounter with the other. Moreover, if these processes take place in 'an elsewhere' (Moscato, 1994; 2009), in non-familiar territories, where the confusion is more immediate, it increases the criticalities and challenges of dialogue, interaction, and intercultural knowledge (Deluigi, 2017a), which require constant care.

Regarding visual language, we are not merely passive users of images, but producers of images also. We are immersed in visual communication, between the real and the virtual, in a reality that interconnects the local and the global. In postmodern society, a diffuse creativity has developed and art in everyday life has become diluted (Menna, 1968). We live in a world populated with images and we relate to forms of representation and narrative that become active subjects of our lives; the visual dimension is a natural and cultural framework, and images become real objects that interact with us (Mitchell, 2005).

Images form part of our collective memory. Events narrated with images remain among memories, creating a type of golden thread among those who witnessed the events themselves (Lester, 2006). Online distribution of an image provides access to the same visual information, but are the interpretations identical? What meanings do readers attribute to the image? Are readers part of the context? Or not? Were they 'closely' affected by the event? What levels of understanding and interpretation are activated?

Cultural output, representations and interpretations are plural and do not prescriptively describe a single reality. The visual dimension can become a language for different cultures to question themselves, to comprehend each other, and express co-created perspectives, if we are willing to deconstruct exclusively Western-oriented visions (Hall, 1980) and return to communicative and cultural interactions with more nuanced meanings.

Taking account of personal paradigms and cultural-geographical contexts of belonging, it is possible to overcome, with intentionality, fixed and limited visions of reality and replace them with dialogic conflicting communicative trajectories. From an educational point of view, the proposal is to revise

the concept of centre and periphery. Only communicative and expressive flows in which all subjects are considered equal can convey 'decentralized narratives' and offer everyone the opportunity to immerse themselves creatively in other worlds (Zizioli, 2017), to which we, as human beings, belong. Feeling the involvement of distances means moving towards greater openness to what appears distinctly far away, but which is relatively close.

'The Whole City is Mine' project: a field experience

In order to go further into the interactions between visual languages and intercultural dialogues, we present an Italian project in which second generation migrant adolescents and Italian teenagers question the urban space, producing new visual narratives and explaining their sense of citizenship. The project *The Whole city is Mine. Second Generation Citizenship Resources for Integration* is an initiative founded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in 2015/2016. Activities took place within Salesian aggregative and educational centres and involved three national associations[2]. Sixteen Italian cities took part in the project, involving 235 teenagers aged 14 to 18 (134 second generation[3] foreign teenagers and 101 Italian teenagers) and 128 significant adults (parents, educators, teachers, local community representatives, etc.).

The urban environments and identities of the teenagers were explored through an intercultural intervention that used visual language as a mediator of interactions, reflections, and cooperative practices. The teenagers brought their outlooks into play to discover cities and the identities, life contexts and dreams of new citizens. Ideas and operational proposals created more sensitivity and linkages to places and between people sharing common spaces. At the same time, plural lexicons and languages of representation, communication, and mediation were developed.

The aim was to intercept a number of social challenges: to build spaces of peer interaction with an intercultural approach; to understand how to make local contexts more attentive to the needs of the teenagers; to deconstruct fixed reference schemes and stereotypes tied to origin and migration (often incomplete); to give voice to and listen to the innumerable stories of adolescents during the course of the research.

[2] The project was coordinated by SCS (Salesiani per il Sociale). The other two associations involved were: the CGS (Cinecircoli Giovanili Salesiani) and the TGS (Youth and Social Tourism). We carried out the monitoring (with the educational team and teenagers), the evaluation (initial and final) and the academic supervision of all the local and national activities.

[3] The second generation teenagers, the so-called '2Gs' (Portes, 2006, Portes & Rumbaut, 2005) were Italian-born children of immigrant parents or children reunited with their parents by the age of 6, who live in urban environments in Italian territory and who, under the legal principle of *jus sanguinis*, do not have Italian citizenship.

Design Strategies

The working groups, consisting of educators, media/communication experts, and volunteers, supported the groups of teenagers so that they could express themselves through different communicative languages, thus becoming 'field researchers' (Save the Children, 2007; Granata et al. 2009). Listening to the second generation is a way of creating fuller exchanges, above all among peers, and of understanding how to support adolescent migrants, based on their dreams and needs, in an active citizenship perspective. The use of the visual also means that the teenagers could recount, photograph, film, and describe their living spaces, without necessarily being translated and interpreted by adults 'who speak about them'.

Through the methodology of *participatory research with adolescents* (Belotti, Cerantola, 2014; Cadei et al. 2016) we rediscovered, with the children, the meanings they attribute to citizenship and urban space. Groups of teenagers explored cities, highlighting differences and similarities in living in these spaces, and having opportunities for greater integration, comparison and debate on aspects that they share.

The figure of the adult-educator was decentralised to 'make space' for the teenagers so they could give an interpretation of 'being from the second generation', starting processes of communication and mutual recognition with the adult world (Ambrosini, Molina 2004; Deluigi, 2012; Granata, 2011). Giving voice to teenagers and their different sense of belonging means listening to the complexity of identities as they grow. Describing and crossing spaces common to teenagers is the first step in reinstating greater awareness – to children and adults – of the coexistence of more cultures, meanings and values, on which to build bridges. In this sense, the heterogeneous composition of the groups (second generation children and children of Italian origin) was essential.

The project was carried out within social multicultural contexts by promoting dialogue and exchange between participants. The use of plural languages for communication facilitated the abilities of the young people to express themselves, encouraging them to build thoughts and actions using multiple modes of expression and communication. The intersection between visual languages and inter-cultural education allowed the teenagers to make use of several expressive channels (videos, photos, interactive presentations, etc.) to represent themselves and the urban spaces they inhabit. Cultural interconnection shaped the encounter of the multiplicities, both locally, in the various cities involved in the project, and nationally, in the meeting between the participants and the presentation of the project outcomes.

Experimentation with visual languages took place through the following participatory methodologies:

I. *Learning by doing* – through the use of techniques and tools to portray and represent reality through the eyes of young people. The teenagers exercised a critical spirit and reflexivity towards sharing that required commitment, and personal and group planning.

II. *Participatory research with teenagers* – developing an incubator of ideas, suggestions and proposals in a context of trust. Knowledge is produced and shared by interpreting the project beneficiaries as interested parties and stakeholders. Greater awareness of self and others can become the foundation of more in-depth dialogues and greater social cohesion.

III. *Social participation* – as a way to activate community care and active citizenship. Research with teenagers can favour participatory planning, supporting the active presence of young generations in the local context and the emergence of innovative ideas and more inclusive forms of sharing.

Teenagers in Action

The national project was coordinated in 4 phases lasting 12 months with some main lines of work in relation to the expected outcomes:

I. *Knowledge, recognition and sharing of Personal Identity*. The formation of groups of teenagers meant that the young people could meet and get to know each other, then focus on the goals of the project. A positive climate was created, allowing beneficiaries to express expectations, points of view, reflections, and criticality.

II. *Discussion of different senses of belonging to a Collective Identity*. Through active discussion and the interplay of different representations (of self in context), the teenagers trained themselves for dialogue, acquiring tools for describing and analysing the surrounding reality, and identifying significant existing networks in the area.

III. *Experimenting with Ways of Communication & Active Citizenship*. The groups explored, described and designed, with concrete proposals, a 'tailor-made' territory. The teenagers discussed their reflections with significant adults of the context (public administrators, parents, teachers) by sharing the project outcomes and, at the end of the initiative, they met at a national level to exchange their experiences and share their perspectives on their own cities.

IV. *Use of Visual languages* to describe social context and ourselves. The teenagers produced a final output of their research on spaces and citizenship using multiple languages, and gained an increasing awareness of being able to be an active part of a reality, not just by speaking about it, but also by acting directly in urban areas.

Below we briefly describe the main activities conducted with the teenagers in order to highlight the steps that opened up dialogue on representation of self and of urban spaces. This dialogue challenged stereotypes on 'second generation' immigrants, teenagers' identity and social participation.

Table 1:
The ongoing planning process

1	Creation of the experiential group of teenagers	The educational team organised group meetings and facilitated knowledge and dialogue among the teenagers through active coordination techniques and dynamics. The context of trust and exchange promoted self-knowledge and expression and participation for working together towards shared goals.
2	The first shots	The teenagers explored the city by taking photos of significant locations using smart phones and digital cameras. Then they met in groups to tell themselves and each other the reasons for their choices and the stories that surrounded the shots. These first shots produced the themes highlighted by the teenagers (about the intertwining of identity, adolescents, migration, urban contexts) on which to focus their attention.
3	The 'development' of the shots	Through visual language, knowledge of places and teenage citizenship was expanded. Sharing the meanings of the photo shots was guided by the visual expert. The group started to plan communicative methods for sharing the results of the discovery processes (of themselves, the group and the urban spaces) with citizenship.
4	Me and my city	Each group produced a summary study using different expressive modes: photo exhibitions, videos, reportage, short films, etc. During this activity we reconstructed the golden thread that unites teenagers living in the city, the neighbourhood, and the specific context. Group dialogue made it possible to shed light on the dynamics of relationships, common values, interests, aggregation spaces and aspects of light and shade in explored identity and urban spaces.
5	Local restitution	The project outcomes were shared with families, local institutions, schools and associations to continue the dialogue from the completed proposal. The teenagers expressed their visual representations of citizenship and urban space in different forms of visual language.

5		The organisation of meetings was a further active citizenship experience as the teenagers were co-responsible and adults facilitated dialogue and intra- and extra-group dynamics.
6	The final seminar	At the end of the project, two days of workshops were organised by the teenagers to present their work. The final seminar was an interactive space for exchanging ideas and communicative modes to say #Noici Si@mo (#We@reHere) (hashtag summarising the itinerary of The Whole City is Mine). The hypotheses and discoveries of the different cities emerged from the activities described and narrated by the teenagers, with their shots, videos and direct testimonies.

Visual chronicle of the project

In the peer groups, teenagers could express themselves and understand each other better. Glimpses, gestures, words, hands and faces intertwined during a journey of discovery of oneself and of the city. Their perspectives highlighted spaces for relationships and places of participation. Shared ideas questioned the previously held beliefs of peers and of adults in the group.







Double shot, 2015 (photo: Ancona teenagers group)
Retro Selfie, 2015 (photo: Genova teenagers group)





Spezzano Albanese, A ride in the city, 2015 (photo: Spezzano Albanese teenagers group)
City mobility, 2015 (photo: Terni teenagers group)

The teenagers explored the cities and came into play as protagonists of the urban space. Becoming citizens and sharing one's point of view also means knowing the territory and being able to talk about it. The first shots became an object of reflection and deepened consideration, and they allowed the adolescents to describe their place in the city. Exploring different neighborhoods and everyday life allowed the participants to discover different details about their local place and to describe it in an alternative way. Selfies, individual paths and group shots, representations of oneself and the city, hidden corners, unveiled identities. All these elements brought to light various facets of youth participation and urban structure. Only by listening and observing humans and social intermingling is it possible to trace the links of inclusion and the areas of exclusion. The groups worked with visual language to live and tell new stories about citizenship.

During the explorations of the cities, teenagers brainstormed and made maps with important points of their urban space. This allowed better orientation between streets, squares and gardens and, at the same time, adults gained a better understanding of the perspectives of the younger generation.



Maps of relevant places, 2015 (smartphone photo: Cisternino teenagers group)





A photographer in the city, 2016 (photo: Spezzano Albanese teenagers group)

Thanks to the collaboration with experts in communication and visual languages, the groups were able to describe the urban spaces and their identities in an alternative and new way. The participants took numerous photographs in the neighbourhoods they belong to; they made videos and interviewed local people; they made hypotheses of redevelopment projects and imagined new ways of inhabiting urban centres. Proposals to describe the perceptions and experiences of citizenship were born from shared and situational reflections (with particular attention paid to second generation children).



Identity in the city, 2015 (smartphone photo: Pordenone teenagers group)



Aiming high, 2015 (photo: Ancona teenagers group)



Spaces of trust, 2016 (photo: Terni teenagers group)

Visual language became the mediator of children's thinking and, in this way, it was possible to build and share (with local citizens and with the participants of the project at the national level) the representations, motivations and ideas of adolescents. Peer groups became producers of cultural messages by using the media channels that they mostly use in everyday life. This passage determined a greater degree of youthful protagonism and awareness of the effective possibility of becoming active citizens.

The educational teams supported adolescents in working towards shared objectives, starting from the construction of an aggregative environment of trust and cooperation. Working together meant giving time and space to the kids so they could express themselves using different languages. Among the corners and open spaces of the city, educators saw local contexts with different eyes, paying attention to the needs of adolescents and offering them the opportunity to 'inhabit' the spaces together. Some of the photographs taken during the project are included in this paper to show the work of the teens and their way of moving around the city, to observe and narrate the neighbourhoods, to occupy the public space and to be an active part of it.

The sharing of the project results took place in two phases: local presentations and the national seminar. The first activity was essential to give a voice to adolescents and to share the cultural and educational process implemented with the whole population. Each group decided how to present their

ideas in urban events, in which the teens played an active role (from organisation to implementation).

It is not enough to create spaces for dialogue between adolescents; it is also necessary to enhance the intergenerational dimension of local citizenship. This strategy can lead to the strengthening of social networks and to another important step: that of returning the results of the project to public spaces and of implementing participatory processes in communities.

The last step of the project was the final seminar realised with the representatives of all the groups of teens involved. This event alternated moments of common reflection, of seminars conducted by experts in the field, of workshops and contest, in which the teens presented the visual products, of convivial moments and of aggregation. The interactive organisation of the final event created an additional space for listening to the ideas of adolescents and launched new planning hypotheses.

National seminar, Press Office SCS-Salesiani per il Sociale, 2016












up: Local presentation of the project, 2016 (photo: Palermo teenagers group)
right: Local presentation of the project, 2016 (photo: Cisternino teenagers group)

#NoiciSi@mo – #We@reHere

The educational supervision and evaluation processes accompanied and supported the whole project by listening to the views of the teenagers and the teams involved. Ongoing evaluations produced reflections, orientations and critical issues that enabled us to develop new plans and to support the replicability and sustainability of some parts of the project, focusing on youth participation and agency (Deluigi, 2016a).

The approach of *'The Whole City is Mine'* involved several intercultural trajectories. *Encountering and meeting* in welcoming and inclusive times and spaces to get to know oneself and each other, reflecting, discussing, revealing different identities, led to discovery of self and others. This was possible by *exploring* the city and by *experiencing together*, opening up new forms of coexistence and shaping social innovations.

Ultimately, the desire emerged to plan together again and to continue reflections and actions on the ground for and with growing teenagers. All the materials produced by the various groups were shared and made available, together with the training and educative itinerary[4].

[4] For example, the following is the link to the video that the teenagers voted the best during the seminar and the national presentation contest: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhkjY0r4kGA



#NoiciSi@mo - #We@reHere, 2016 (photo: Mirko Valente)

The different perspectives of the teenagers also produced many representations and ways to construct them. The use of multiple languages provided diversified and integrated opportunities for expression and interaction. The interconnections between visual and intercultural perspectives and methodologies expanded the possibilities of dialogue and integration, and opened up new channels of knowledge and communication. The development of inclusive relationships and participatory strategies encouraged the teenagers to become more aware of the different identities and senses of belonging that they carry with them, as well as the spaces they occupy.

We conclude our contribution with the words of the teenagers who, at the end of the project, created some slogans representative of the route they had travelled: '#NoiciSi@mo e non ci fermiamo! Tanti linguaggi, un'unica avventura!' (We're here and we're here to stay! So many languages, a single adventure!); 'Insieme per una città in cambiamento e in movimento!' (Together for a changing and moving city!); 'It's time to play the game!'

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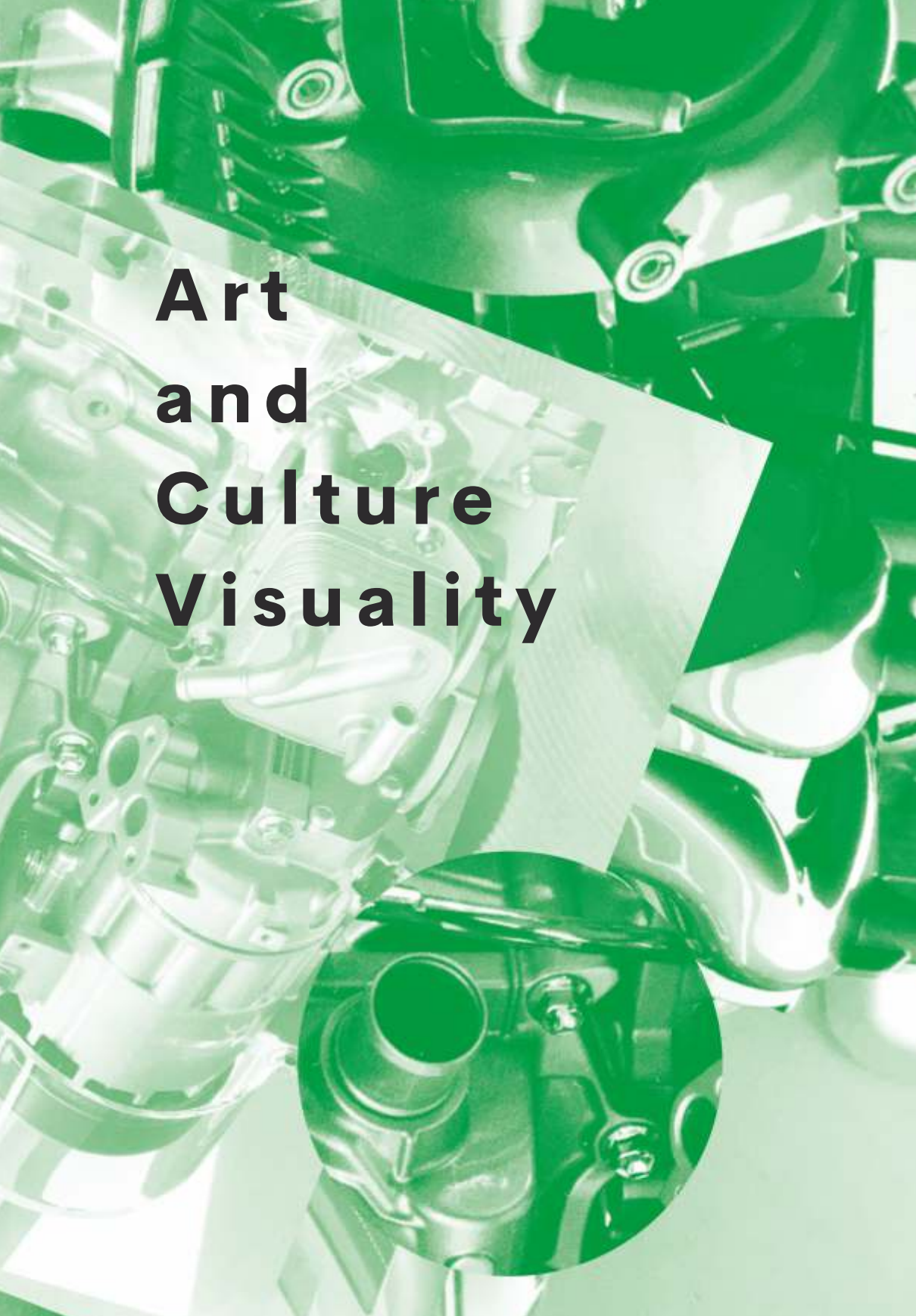
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Tables

Table 1. The ongoing planning process.


Part
3



Art and Culture Visuality

8

A Work of Art at the Centre of Public Interest – Stories, Characters, Forms and Values in the Process of Social Representation

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Abstract

As early as 2004, in his essay *Haven't We Had Enough?*,[2] the Slovenian art theoretician Igor Zabel called for the rethinking and cultural reinterpretation of the trauma associated with Central Europe's totalitarian past. This rethinking could not only return this territory into the all-European space once and for all, but might also significantly contribute to its search for a new identity in the face of the dramatic social and political challenges in the current globalised world. It is obvious that the situation in Central Europe has long been heading towards a deep crisis, which threatens a return to undemocratic social trends and political practices infamously familiar from the period of totalitarianism.

To follow the socio-cultural discourse found in current artistic production, we can focus on strategies that apply the principles of appropriation to significant visual indicators of totalitarian systems. Motivation for the use of such historicist references, however, is not primarily anchored in the past, but is open to a critical and often even painful investigation of the present. After all, the situations, events, processes and constant pressure that grew out of a totalitarian ideological and instrumental framework – elements which gradually deformed, and ultimately destroyed, the basic ethical standards of both the community and each individual – still insidiously affect our everyday lives, even in today's new context. The visualisation and artistic interpretations of these elements are paradoxically very restricted by the glut of media images which, through countless information channels, reduce our ability to understand current events and to give adequate conscious responses at both the personal and societal levels. Uncovering the historical layers of those visual icons that represent a basic societal consensus and revealing how they have been updated over time through artistic intervention and a shift in content towards the present-day context, constitute activation strategies which make it possible to identify the connections between the defective mechanisms of the totalitarian past and their existence today as seen in increasingly limited democracy.

Keywords: work of art, cultural monuments, artistic intervention, public space, history, community, social framework, education, transformation, democracy, open society.

[2] Zabel, I. (2012) *Haven't We Had Enough?* in Zabel, I. *Contemporary Art Theory*, Zurich: JRP/Ringier.

Introduction

> Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.[3]

Karl Marx – *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852)

> Haven't we had enough of Central Europe? Yes and no. 'Yes,' if we mean the political and cultural division and strategies of marginalization, ethnicization, exclusion, and (controlled) inclusion. But one cannot resolve such divisions by pretending that they do not exist and that they are simply an external circumstance that does not touch the 'essence'. It is only through repetition, through returning to and reworking the trauma, that it can perhaps be slowly resolved, and not by repressing, ignoring, and forgetting it. 'No,' if we mean a reevaluation of the social and cultural potentials of Eastern Europe and their ability to transform themselves and thereby transform European identity. [4]

Igor Zabel – *Haven't We Had Enough?* (2004)

Interest must be paid to reflection on art itself and to the mechanisms used by art to communicate with the surrounding reality. The principle of not revealing things in a direct and open way means that the widest possible group of those potentially interested is not reached. The metaphorical approach to the world measures the uttered against the unsaid and involves patiently finding connections and meaning in the gaps. This approach prefers palpation to designation, fragmentation to wholeness, movement to static position, simulation to reality, fissure to solidity, and doubt to certainty.

The metaphoric principle is one of the latent creative attitudes that always appear in the portfolio of options available to (fine) artists. Nevertheless, without any doubt, the current social paradigm renders the potential of metaphorical narrative more dynamic. It exposes the fragile membrane of communication scepticism between the author and his or her viewers. This scepticism is hard to overcome as it springs from people's increasing distrust in the functioning of key social mechanisms. We have not even acquired the social or civic confidence and self-confidence; yet, we are surrounded by general doubts again. And the possibilities that remain available to us are concentrated in the metaphor of a detail, in creating without a seemingly palpable purpose. Despite this or, in fact, because of this, such an aesthetic of loneliness and fragmentation has the potential to illuminate reality from an unusual angle and transpose its shadow on to the attached sensitive surface of the work of art, the image being frequently subjective and yet more acute than what we manage to see in the twisted and manipulated stream of everyday life.

[3] Marx, K. (1852) *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Published as the first issue of the magazine *Die Revolution*, New York.
[4] Zabel, I. (2012) *Haven't We Had Enough?* in Zabel, I. *Contemporary Art Theory*, Zurich: JRP/Ringier, p. 121.

When we lose imagination in connection with our own existence, when we are unable to define the consequences of the present for the future, it is necessary to focus on what is missing. This is not a destructive strategy. It is important to identify what is disappearing in a positive way so as to be able to strive for it again, to come to terms with its absence, to re-obtain it by giving it a name despite one's own bad memory or social manipulation.[5]

History and Problems of Identity in Eastern Europe

I focus on the problematic of revealing the discrepancies between political and social processes in the form of artistic installations that accent the dynamics of the public areas in a specific location – the city of Ústí nad Labem[6] and the community of people living there. The situation in Ústí nad Labem can be perceived as symptomatic for the part of Eastern Europe that radically changed its character in the 20th century as a consequence of the political decisions linked with the two world wars. Displaced or resettled Europe – including great parts of western and eastern Poland, the Czech Sudetenland[7], southern Slovakia, the Hungarian enclaves in Romania, Serbia and Croatia and other territories – is still determined by a feeling of loss, and its inhabitants have, in many respects, been unable to overcome the feeling of an unclear impropriety which endangers the integrity of the local societies. It is certainly not a coincidence that, in the ongoing social discourse within the European Union, in the majority of these territories one can trace shifts in opinion towards non-liberal and frequently ultra-national political systems. An ideologically manipulated interpretation of the past frequently plays one of the key roles in the ascendency of non-liberal views.[8]

[5] See more: Ross, C. (2012) *The Past is the Present; It's the Future Too: The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art*, New York: Continuum.

[6] The city of Ústí nad Labem lies at the confluence of the Elbe and Bilina Rivers in northern Bohemia, located approximately 80 kilometres from Prague and 70 kilometres from the German city of Dresden. It was established in the 13th century and since the second half of the 19th century has undergone uneven development with the spread of industry. Until World War II, the majority of the city's population were German speakers. During the Communist regime, both the city and its surrounding environment were exposed to extreme economic and environmental exploitation. Today, this city with a population of 100,000 faces a range of profound problems associated with economic development and the social structure of its inhabitants. Large areas of the city are populated by socially excluded communities.

[7] The Sudetenland – the border area of the Czech lands (Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia) – began to be colonised by Germans starting in the 13th century on the basis of an invitation issued by the Kings of Bohemia and, until 1945, the majority of the population were ethnic Germans. In 1918, after the establishment of Czechoslovakia, there were four Sudetenland provinces that declared their wishes to become part of German-Austria, and consequently Germany. The Czechoslovak government soon suppressed all efforts to separate this territory, and not even the German minority's call for autonomy was heard. The interwar borders of Czechoslovakia were confirmed by the Paris Peace Conference (1919) and the Treaty of Trianon (1920). The frustration of the Sudeten Germans, intensified by the great economic crisis (1929–1933), resulted in the political radicalisation of the majority and their tendency to sympathise with the Sudeten Germany Party and German nationalist socialism. As a result of the Munich Agreement, the territory of the Sudetenland became a part of Nazi Germany in November 1938 and remained so until the end of World War II.

[8] From the long list of symptomatic features representing the non-liberal and ultra-national tendencies in Central Europe, bear in mind, for example, the Dresden-based PEGIDA anti-Islam movement, the way in which Czech President Miloš Zeman uncritically supports Putin's aggressive foreign policy, the democracy-limiting steps taken by the new Polish government led by the Law and Justice Party, the ultra-right and xenophobic People's Party Our Slovakia, led by Marian Kotleba, which was elected to the Slovak Parliament, and the authoritarian Hungarian regime under the leadership of Viktor Orban's Fidesz Party.

The ostracised identity of these regions has been co-produced by residents' existence in a value vacuum, their inability to understand and fully self-identify with their surroundings, and their unjustified feeling of permanent danger. These regions' public areas are, nevertheless, constantly and often somehow despite reality, determined by architectural and artistic symbols with content and expression related to the willingly suppressed past that, from today's perspective, concentrates the combined frustration of the past winners and losers. Despite the fact that many of the monuments directly linked with specific historical events or characters have been demonstratively destroyed within the framework of various ideological frenzies, the functional urbanistic structure of specific sites, the specific meaning-carrying element of the architecture or the seemingly concealed ideological role of the sculptures decorating administrative buildings or temples of cultural life subconsciously co-determine the perception and value orientation of public areas even today.

However, it is also apparent that, due to a lack of sufficient self-confidence and the inability to name its own identity, today's community frequently gives up on its socio-cultural representation in a fatalistic manner. Therefore, in a way, the present of these resettled regions lacks the potential to stand up to the past and define its new meaning in respect to it. As a result, it is frequently contemporary artists through their autonomous subversive intervention who take the role of official cultural representation and clearly codetermine the character of the social discourse and of the shared public area. These artists react to those thorny subjects that determine the ability to undertake complex social self-reflection. It is as if their metaphoric narrative is naturally opened up to subjective experience, opening room for the necessary catharsis via an aesthetic experience and, in a way, also facilitating the raising of awareness of particular questions relating to the history and present of these regions in the context of the destiny of individual humans among a wider public.

Nevertheless, I will now revert to the city of Ústí nad Labem and try, within the framework outlined, to analyse selected representative historical cultural manifestations created in the city between the two world wars and under the totalitarian regime, and the significant artistic expressions created during the uneasy and still unfinished transformation following 1989. Using this unusual perspective, I will emphasise questions relating to the different ways of monumentalising the ideological frameworks of specific historical political systems as well as contemporary art's potential to contribute to the search for new ways to read the old and seemingly unalterable 'texts' that co-define and frequently also painfully determine the values and cultural orientation of the community.

Ústí nad Labem – its urban and architectural structure as well as the composition of its inhabitants – has witnessed major changes influenced by dramatic events connected with the history of the 20th century. The history and present of this city can be understood as a model example of the development of a specific place and of a specific community firmly anchored in the context of Central Europe. The general and local framework clearly defines the basic functioning of the shared social milieu, as well as of each individual within this geographical area. The area can be characterised by factors such as the fall of the multinational Austro-Hungarian monarchy following World War I,

the building of the new states ending violently with the formation of totalitarian regimes, the storm of World War II accompanied by the Holocaust and ethnic conflicts, the division of Europe by the Iron Curtain, the pressure of the *real socialism* guarded by the Soviet Union, the complicated and painful post-totalitarian transformation, and finally the current new search for the meaning of one's own history and fundamental democratic mechanisms.

Trying to briefly characterise the place of my interest, the place in which I am going to observe the anchoring and effect of selected artistic installations, I must mention its industrial and later post-industrial atmosphere, as well as its geographical location in the heart of the former Sudetenland. The rise and fall of extensive industrial production in this city – a symbol of wealth, importance and social status, but also a symbol of social conflict, destruction and environmental threat – can be understood as a metaphor for the city's euphoric gains and deep losses, a metaphor hypertrophied by the brutal deficit resulting from the post-war expulsion of more than 2.5 million ethnic German inhabitants from the region (including about 80 percent of the population of Ústí nad Labem).[9]

This intervention in the local community structure and in the atmosphere of the place itself could not be overcome, and this remains the case even more than seventy years after the end of World War II. This situation can be blamed both on the brutal totalitarian regime, which continued to escalate social and national antagonism, and on the inconsistent post-totalitarian reforms of the new neoliberal democracy following the Velvet Revolution of 1989. Today, we are surprised to find that the original linguistic border separating the territory of the former Sudetenland from the Czech environment has not vanished; rather, it has transformed itself into a border which is social, cultural, economic and, to a certain extent, political.

One can find many specific tendencies and characteristics which distinguish the resettled regions of Bohemia, and of course Ústí nad Labem, from the general milieu of present-day Czech society. It is not only a question of big data that can easily be found in statistical yearbooks – the lower levels of education, average salaries and life expectancy, and the higher unemployment and social exclusion rates. It is the question of the criteria that are harder to decipher, such as the contradictory relationship to the past, the insufficient self-identification with one's own community, the high influence of various extremist and xenophobic movements, but also the level of debt of the inhabitants and, last but not least, the results of the elections. The omnipresent defocusing of the contours of the local social context creates demand for comparing the present-day situation with the architectural coulisses of

[9] The expulsion, or resettlement, of Germans from Czechoslovakia – mainly from the Sudetenland – was based on the principle of collective guilt. It was carried out after World War II, between 1945 and 1947, and affected three million people. The decision to include specific individuals in the transports was made on the basis of their German nationality as determined according to the pre-war census. After the first unrestrained phase of 'wild' expulsions, which took place during the first weeks following the war and were accompanied by a number of both spontaneous and organised, often very brutal, excesses, the allied powers gave their blessing to the implementation of the official form of mass deportation based on the 'Constitutional Decree of the President of the Republic on the regulation of Czechoslovak citizenship of persons of German or Hungarian nationality'.

the past. The vast majority of the population pass by this architecture without understanding it or with scorn.

In small cities like Ústí nad Labem, big history has left its own traces in the form of works of art that enter the public space and which are understood as signs of the cultural representation of the different and frequently conflicting and antagonistic political and social systems. These works have often took control of the public space for at least a certain period. At the same time, they ritualised and co-determined the general social discourse and canonised the ideologised content and the official cultural taste while overlapping one another, facing different interpretations and frequently also vanishing, either irretrievably or for a time, only to immerse again in the general subconscious with the next social transformation.

Two seemingly different groups of artefacts are analysed. First, works of art which entered the public space of the city of Ústí nad Labem in the course of the 20th century and which have stayed there until this very day, and demonstrate the opinions and power of local political, social and economic representation. Second, artistic installations of contemporary artists who have operated in Ústí nad Labem after 1989 are considered. These works thematically offer a critical reflection on the historical and current social movements anchored in the local environment, and latently influence the character of the public space.

The series of historical installations opens with the sculptures decorating the new administrative building of the Society for Chemical and Metallurgical Production (*Spolek pro chemickou a hutní výrobu*, or *SPOLCHEMIE*) created between 1929 and 1930 by Hugo Lederer (1871–1940), a Berlin sculptor. The next example presented is the architecture of the city savings bank built between 1937 and 1939 by architect Franz Josef Arnold (1888–1962) in the style of Reich abstracted classicism. The post-World War II period is represented by the Monument to the Red Army by sculptor Emil Solařík (1921–1970), unveiled in 1955 in the municipal park, and the monumental mosaic structure by Miroslav Houra (1933–2006), completed in 1985, which deals with the history of the Ústí region through the prism of communist ideology.

The artistic projects of contemporary artists who represent the local cultural milieu interpret the environmental devastation of the region caused by extensive industrial and, in particular, mining activity (Jiří Černický – *Meteo Body Painting*, 1991), the wild urbanisation of the city centre and suburbs resulting in the destruction of natural social relations within local communities (Michaela Thelenová – *Landscapes*, 2006–2007), the transformation of the interpretation of the post-war historical development and landscape context (Martin Kuriš – *Expulsion*, 2016), or the socio-cultural and environmental deviation stemming from the drastic changes in the composition of the local population following the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans in the second half of the 1940s (Zdena Kolečková – *Made in Ghetto*, 2012).

One can frequently find surprising connotations between these seemingly unrelated artistic manifestations vastly separated in time, the works of the contemporary authors having the potential to reactivate our current cultural and social interpretation of the historical artistic installations still dominating the public area and often conforming to the predominant current political discourse.

Artistic Practice and Identity in Ústí nad Labem Industry

As already noted, Ústí nad Labem can be regarded as one of the exemplary cases of a city with a character and development vastly co-determined by the dynamic industrial development of the second half of the 19th century and especially of the first decades of the 20th century. That said, *SPOLCHEMIE*[10] was one of the key local businesses. Created in 1856, it would grow to become among the most important chemical production companies not only in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and later Czechoslovakia, but also within the whole of Central Europe. Between 1929 and 1930, the expanding company built a new administrative head office designed in the latest and highly appreciated expressionist style by Lossow and Kühne,[11] a highly reputable office of architects based in Dresden. The building has ten storeys and, at the time of its creation, was the highest building in the then Czechoslovakia. To make the façade, the company turned to Hugo Lederer[12], a professor from the Berlin Art Academy. Lederer created six abstracted figurative sculptures personifying Chemistry, Science, Business, Labour, Liberty (a Man with a Torch), and Prosperity (a Woman with a Cornucopia). These values not only represented the success of *SPOLCHEMIE* itself but could also be understood as general symbols of the then dynamic development of the city and of its predominantly German-speaking inhabitants. The building as a whole, and its sculptural decorations in particular, thus expressed the economic strength and success of both its owner and the community serving as the basis for its growth. Above all, however, it clearly represented the capitalist positivism of the time, associated with an uncontrolled extensive economic development which had not yet been confronted with the thorny negative social and environmental consequences of its own activity.

[10] *SPOLCHEMIE – Spolek pro chemickou a hutní výrobu, akciová společnost* – has been manufacturing high-quality chemicals for no less than 160 years. The very first day in the history of *SPOLCHEMIE* was 13 February 1856, when the joint stock company named the "Austrian Association for Chemical and Metallurgical Production" was established at the palace of the Duke of Schwarzenberg in Vienna, the centre of the then Austrian Empire. It took only one year to start chemical production in what was then the small provincial town of Ústí nad Labem. The established company played a key role in forming the structure of the Czech chemical industry during the Industrial Revolution as well as in the 20th century, and also in the development of the city of Ústí nad Labem itself. For more information, see: https://www.spolchemie.cz/en/homepage/about-Spolchemie.

[11] The Architectural Firm of Lossow and Kühne was established in 1906, when architect William Lossow (1852–1914) joined forces with his son-in-law, Max Hanz Kühn (1874–1942). Their first – and also best-known – joint endeavor was the monumental Classicist building of the main railway station in Leipzig. This firm had close ties with the Sudetenland, which culminated in the opening of a branch in Liberec in 1925. The most prominent client of the architectural studio in Czechoslovakia was SPOLCHEMIE in Ústí nad Labem.

[12] Hugo Lederer (1871–1940) was an Austro-Hungarian born German sculptor. He studied in Dresden under sculptor John Schilling from 1890, then briefly under Christian Behren. His greatest success came in 1902 with the commission for the Bismarck Monument in the centre of Hamburg. In 1919 he started to teach at the Academy of Arts in Berlin, where he worked for almost twenty years.



SPOLCHEMIE Building (Photo: Jáchym Myslivec) The building of the Association for Chemical and Metallurgical Production (SPOLCHEMIE) in Ústí nad Labem was built between 1929 and 1930 according to a design by the Dresden-based architectural firm of Lossow & Kühne; the sculptural decoration is the work of the Berlin sculptor Hugo Lederer.



This approach was rendered even more intensive by the two totalitarian regimes – the Nazi regime following the occupation of the Sudetenland and, later on, between 1939–1945, Czechoslovakia; and the post-war communist regime lasting until 1989. Overall exploitation and environmental devastation peaked in the 1980s, with the vast and deep brown-coal pits. These pits became the grave of hundreds of dwellings abandoned by their original inhabitants, including the nearby historical town of Most with its 30,000 inhabitants as well as the local romantic landscape. The smog produced by the incineration of low-quality coal would veil the city of Ústí nad Labem and its surroundings for months at a time.

In his exalted and subversive performance entitled *Meteo Body Painting*, local artist Jiří Černický[13] (born in 1966) reacted to this progressive destruction in 1991, in the euphoric times following the Velvet Revolution. In an effort to demonstrate the emerging generation's determination to seek a new relationship to the place where they lived and which was occupied by their parents or grandparents after the expulsion ('vertreibung')[14] of the original inhabitants, Černický, in an expressive gesture, opposed a monstrous ultra-large excavator which was framed as a symbol of the destructive ineffective industrial machinery.

Černický covered his naked body with a special emulsion made from petroleum jelly, body lotion and fizzy drink powder, and slipped into a deep pit made in a single move by a large excavator on the grounds of one of the brown - coal mines adjacent to the city. Subsequently, he put a spool of string in his anus with a paper kite flapping in the wind at the other end of the string. In a fierce spasm of his entire body, the author used all his strength to keep the spool in his anus and the kite high above the ground without using his arms while approaching the nearby-standing mining machine. This made his skin turn red, as the sweat produced by the fierce physical activity provoked a turbulent reaction with the drink extract. In this convincing social and aesthetic gesture, Černický's naïve, yet liberating, ritual attempt to frighten his rival in the form of an impersonal destructive mechanism became a clear indictment of the prevailing lack of respect for the surrounding environment. Černický's performance represented the young generation's longing for a new perspective for this region that has been resettled again and again.

[13] Černický, J. (2014) *Dolby Painting: Between Postmodernism and Neoconceptualism*, Prague: Dvorak Sec Contemporary. Černický, J. (2016) Wild Dreams, Prague: Galerie Rudolfinum.

[14] 'Vertreibung' – 'expulsion' is the term most often used by experts as well as the general public in Germany and originated chiefly in Bavaria – the federal German state with the highest concentration of activities carried out by the various compatriot associations established by the relocated Sudeten Germans. As compared to the term "resettlement" used in the Czech (Czechoslovak) historiographical context, the expressivity of the German term better corresponds with the dramatic events that took place and the fatal consequences suffered by both sides as a result of the mass exodus of Sudeten Germans from the Czech border regions. The disruption of traditional social and economic relationships and links with the cultural landscape, which had been cultivated for centuries, is still felt today within the Czech environment, or more accurately, in those specific border regions which lost the identity that had been formed over the long term, and of course also within the community of the Sudeten "expellees" and their descendants.



Jiří Černický – *Meteo Body Painting*, 1991, performance, documentation, brown-coal mine in Předlice (Photo: author's archive)

Urbanism

One of the dominant points at the very heart of Ústí nad Labem and its central square has, until the present day, been the magnificent building of the savings bank built between 1937–1939 in the Nazi style of architecture by Franz Josef Arnold[15], the city architect and head of its building control office. The fate of this important local architect clearly illustrates the atmosphere in the Sudetenland between the two wars. Arnold had been active in Ústí nad Labem since returning from the battlefields of World War I, and was among the progressive representatives of the local art scene. He was, inter alia, the co-founder and the first head of the local branch of Metznerbund, an association of local German fine artists in Bohemia, and he designed a number of quality buildings for the city, characterised by a tendency towards abstracted perception in the spirit of the latest trend.

The radicalisation of the majority of the German-speaking population in the Czech lands following Hitler's coming to power also led to changes in Ústí nad Labem's cultural milieu. These were manifested, inter alia, in Arnold's plan for the new head office of the municipal savings bank. The building turned out to be truly symbolic, as the *Aussiger Sparkasse*, as the client, maintained the deposits of more than 38,000 inhabitants of the city and its close surroundings. The bank represented the economic potential of the whole region. The edifice, dominated by six figures with Aryan features high on its front, was planned and started to be constructed during the Czech-German cohabitation crisis. This inclination towards a style characteristic of Nazi Germany could be understood as the local community's demonstrative support of solidarity with National Socialism and for the concept of annexing the Czech border area to Hitler's Third Reich, which became a reality in the autumn of 1938.[16]

It is true that Arnold's savings bank building has co-determined the atmosphere of the main square until the present day. Its immediate as well as more distant surroundings have, however, radically changed as a result of World War II and, later on, of the devastation of the city and its public area caused by the enforcement of communist ideology. First, the massive two-wave bombardment of the city that took place in April 1945 irreversibly damaged a vast number of buildings and whole urban complexes. Second, the demolition of historical buildings and their replacement with socialist apartments and public facilities, from the 1950s to the fall of the communist regime in 1989, aimed to marginalise or completely erase the still distinct pre-war, and thus to a large extent German, character of the city. The resulting hybrid atmosphere of public areas in Ústí nad Labem was captured by Michaela Thelenová[17] (born in 1969) in her extensive photography cycle entitled *Landscapes*, which also focused on the uncontrolled expansion of the built-up area into the surrounding landscape.

In her large-format digital prints, the artist focuses not only on the monitoring of the disappearance of unbuilt land, the infestation of the original areas with ugly residential buildings, and the gradual mingling of the once

[17] Thelenová, M. (2014) ***Na konci světa***, Ústí nad Labem: Faculty of Art and Design, Jan Evangelista Purkyně University.



Sparkasse Building (Photo: Jáchym Myslivec) The Aussiger Sparkasse building in Ústí nad Labem was built between 1937 and 1939 by the local architect Franz Joseph Arnold; the artist who created the sculptural decoration is unknown.



country landscape with the urban centre, but also on the extinction of the natural social functions of the over-sized buildings of the slowly decaying prefabricated housing estates spreading in the ruins of the original historical centre. Thelenová thus chronicles the gradual yet radical transformation in the lifestyle preferences of the city's inhabitants. She charts the loss of interest in addressing social issues which, to a smaller or larger extent, predestine inhabitants' lives, and draws attention to the risk of the society losing its ability to resist the destructive influence of extremist political opinions and movements, which is also a latent part of the story of Arnold's building of the savings bank.

Michaela Thelenová – Landscapes, 2006–2007,
print on banner, 100 x 133 cm (Photo: author's archive)





Man

In 1955 the extensive municipal park in Ústí nad Labem got a new ideological dominant feature in the form of a Monument to the Red Army. The monument was erected on 9 May, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the end of World War II. Thirteen years later, in 1968, the Soviet Army further deepened the existing political and economic occupation of Czechoslovakia, turning it into a physical occupation lasting more than twenty years. Emil Solařík[18], a local sculptor and the creator of the new monument, was one of the backwoods artists supported by the socialist regime. Besides, the concept of this sculptural group, consisting of a combination of a dominant standing figure and an adjacent relief block, makes one think of the monstrous Stalin Monument in Prague[19], a key work of the 1950s' Czechoslovak regime. It was unveiled on 1 May 1955, only a few days before the monument in Ústí nad Labem, and demolished in 1962 by a series of blasts made at night-time in reaction to the criticism of Stalin's cult of personality and the relaxation of the political situation. Solařík's Monument to the Red Army, however, did not, after 1989, see a fate characteristic of the majority of similar installations in major Czech cities, which were relocated from streets, squares and parks to graveyards or other ceremonial places in the suburbs to carry on fulfilling their role without continuing to control the central public area. Even today, his sculptural group dominates the urbanistic situation of the municipal park of Ústí nad Labem, while the other memorials, dedicated to the Holocaust or to the victims of the communist regime, can hardly compete with its location or mass.

Nevertheless, the questions as to who the real hero is, to whom the memorial was in fact dedicated, and who the addressees were, remain unanswered not only from today's perspective. In the dramatic course of the 20th century, basically all the temporary winners in Ústí nad Labem ended up faced with a fatal loss. This has shaped the current community, which is subconsciously controlled by latent feelings of frustration and disillusion. These always escalate at critical moments, thus limiting society's positive development towards democratisation and open self-confidence. Nonetheless, attempts to name other heroes – not infrequently those who were losers, forgotten or resettled, and whose destiny is the only way to obtain an authentic picture of the situation of today's man/woman rooted in the wildly matted historical context of the Sudetenland – begin to emerge gradually as part of a wider socio-cultural discourse, which is held in the shadow of the figure of the Soviet soldier, whose current interpretation oscillates between that of a liberator and an occupier.

[18] Emil Solařík (1921–1970) was an academic sculptor and graphic artist. He started studying at the School of Art in Zlín in 1942, going on to complete his studies at the Sculpture Studio of the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague. In 1949, he settled in Ústí nad Labem where he was active in the fields of architecture, memorial and portrait design, and ceramics.

[19] The Stalin Monument in Prague, built in honour of the Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, was completed in 1955. The statue was the work of the sculptor Otakar Švec and the architect Jiří Štursa. After a speech by Stalin's successor, Nikita Khrushchev, in which he condemned Stalin's Cult of Personality, the decision was made to demolish the monument and it was destroyed in 1962.



Red Army monument (Photo: Jáchym Myslivec)
The Monument to the Red Army by the sculptor Emil Solařík was unveiled in 1955 in the urban orchards in Ústí nad Labem.





Martin Kuriš – *Expulsion*, 2016, oil on canvas, 200 x 280 cm (Photo: author's archive)

Such an attempt is made by the painter Martin Kuriš[20] (born in 1973) who lives high above the River Elbe valley that winds its way through the hills in sight of the puffing city of Ústí nad Labem. The stories of his paintings are almost exclusively determined by the landscape and the community of people living around him. This, however, is not apparent immediately. To acquire this knowledge, you need to carefully observe the stories captured in his painting. In fact, Kuriš subconsciously opposes a fast reading of his paintings by frequently telling stories which resist everyday life. His narratives oscillate between folk mythologies in the form of a fairytale or mysterious thriller and hyperbolic portraits of his neighbours or monumental compositions capturing the complicated beauty of the local deserted cultural landscape. In addition to this, all these traits meet and mingle in a single cycle or painting, creating a fascinating set of voices whispering what should not be forgotten.

Although Kuriš does not define himself as an artist with a tendency towards social criticism or other activist strategies, his commitment to comment on the surrounding reality is contained in his work latently, in a specific way typical of his character. This is also clearly demonstrated by his monumental canvas entitled *Expulsion*, reverting in an exalted hyperbole to the departure of those who had been here before us. The painting depicts a family, as if curled up into itself, forever leaving the place where they had been living. The character of the space, the time circumstances, as well as the composition of the place in Kuriš's painting, are veiled by the painter's sensitive brushstrokes

[20] Kuriš, M. (2006) *Martin Kuriš: hořký kruh, elegie, dopisy Věře,* Kutná Hora: Felix Jenewein Gallery. Kuriš, M. (2014) *Lola*, Ústí nad Labem: Faculty of Art and Design, Jan Evangelista Purkyně University.

– the painting emanates in particular an insuperable feeling of emptiness open to anyone who has ever been confronted with the feeling of a fatal loss. And it is exactly this loss which gives rise to a specific way of presenting the landscape, a landscape in which Kuriš lives and which he shares with his neighbours. It is a static extra-spatial scenery, deserted and yet yearning to be resettled, knowing that life there is not free of ambiguity, as the suffering of those who left continues to be part of the life of the current inhabitants – accepting the fact that one is only secondary is a fate without mercy.

Memory

In the mid-1980s, there was hardly anyone left in doubt as to the impossibility of fulfilling the communist dream under the firm reign of the Soviet Union. Despite the fact that the so-called normalisation of society following the 1968 occupation had been completed 'successfully' within only a few years, President Gustav Husák's regime had been focusing on the pragmatic building of what was called *real socialism*[21]. Nevertheless, even during this period, the governing party tried to enforce the communist ideology in the public area on various occasions; at that time, however, the ideology was already completely bookish and separated from the real functioning of the state of the time. In Ústí nad Labem, a good opportunity to strengthen the official political doctrine and to reaffirm the 'new' identity of the Czech borderland presented itself before the mid-1980s on the occasion of the planned construction of the new head office of the National Committee of the Region of Northern Bohemia in the city centre, at a place where the original buildings had been destroyed during the war by bombing and, later on, by subsequent extensive demolitions partially motivated by politics.

The council of the region assigned this task to Miroslav Houra[22], a local artist whose fate to a certain extent personifies the post-war history of the Sudetenland. Born in central Bohemia, after his university studies in Prague he was assigned to Ústí nad Labem as a teacher in 1955. In the second half of the 1960s, while working as a university teacher at the local Pedagogical Faculty, he got involved in the democratisation process. After the occupation, he was expelled from the communist party and also forced to leave his job. Later, as part of the 'normalisation' process, he engaged in vigorous self-criticism, was readmitted to the Party and, most importantly, in the course of the 1980s, performed a number of extensive official and clearly ideologically-conditioned public contracts.

[21] *Real Socialism* refers to the political and economic systems in place in those countries led by Leninist Communist Parties – the Soviet Union and its satellites. The term was used in order to differentiate the actually existing regimes from the ideal socialism of theorists and West European socialist traditions. In Czechoslovakia, this term was also associated with the social situation in the 1970s and 1980s, when, after the invasion of the Warsaw Pact countries and the de facto occupation of the country in 1968, the Communist government attempted to "normalise" the situation, specifically through suppressing reformative political and economic processes. In exchange for the reduction in personal freedoms, the government then offered the Czechoslovak population relative economic stability and an overly expansive, and in many respects non-functional, social welfare system.

[22] Miroslav Houra (1933–2006) was a painter and graphic artist who realised many monumental works in public space. He received a degree in art education from the Charles University in Prague Faculty of Education in 1955. He lived and worked in Ústí nad Labem from that same year.



Miroslav Houra – monumental mosaic on the building of the National Committee of the North Bohemian Region in Ústí nad Labem, realised in 1985. (Photo: Jáchym Myslivec)



Miroslav Houra – monumental mosaic on the building of the National Committee of the North Bohemian Region in Ústí nad Labem, realised in 1985. (Photo: Jáchym Myslivec)

The protruding pylon of the new building of the National Committee of the Region bears Houra's monumental mosaic, which is 25 metres tall and 16 metres wide. This work was, in an epigonic way, inspired by the Mexican muralism of the 1920s as well as by Picasso's committed work from the Spanish civil war era, especially by the famous *Guernica* (1937). In a biased way, the mosaic, introduced in its centre by the first sentence of the then Czechoslovak Constitution stating that 'All the power in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic belongs to the working people,' interprets the past of the Czech borderland and thus of the former Sudetenland from the early Middle Ages to the then present day. The main focus of the work is on the development of the workers' movement as well as on the post-war economic and environmental exploitation of the local environment. This symbolised by the stylised wheel of an ultra-large mining excavator. Crowds of figures, referring to the myth of national history upheld by the communist ideology, parade in an infinite line, in a hieratic perspective. The real meaning of human existence and its basic relationship to the real history and principles that make existence meaningful are completely lost in the multitude of the exhibited figures and political ballast.

[20] Kuriš, M. (2006) *Martin Kuriš: hořký kruh, elegie, dopisy Věře,* Kutná Hora: Felix Jenewein Gallery. Kuriš, M. (2014) *Lola*, Ústí nad Labem: Faculty of Art and Design, Jan Evangelista Purkyně University.



Miroslav Houra – monumental mosaic on the building of the National Committee of the North Bohemian Region in Ústí nad Labem, realised in 1985. (Photo: Jáchym Myslivec)

In 2012, perhaps subconsciously inspired by this publicly dominant representation of the ideological totalitarian manipulation of local historical development, intermedia artist Zdena Kolečková (born in 1969)[23] started to collect various historical and often family recipes within the framework of her project entitled *Made in the Ghetto*. Before World War II, these recipes served the local, mostly German-speaking, population to make various products needed every day in a household, such as different types of fruit jam, wine, liqueur and herbal tea, as well as natural soap, detergents, aromatic essences, ointments and healing oils. These local products represented not only the ability of the original inhabitants to run their households economically, but also showed their deep unity with the environment and their ability to duly benefit from the possibilities provided to them by the surrounding nature.

Kolečková later made a number of these products, based on the original recipes, using natural ingredients (fruits, herbs, water) that she had picked in remote parts of the Ústí nad Labem districts adjacent to the industrial premises of the local chemical plants or closed-down open-cast mines, that is, in an area exposed to unprecedented environmental pollution during the post-war period. In the end, she sent the finished products to an authorised laboratory to have them tested for the presence of heavy metals, carcinogenic agents and other hazardous substances. Her subsequent installation included both the traditional homemade products and the results of the analyses proving the danger related to their consumption or use. Kolečková thus drew attention to the fact that the ideological intoxication dominating the public area under the communist regime was also accompanied by physical intoxication. The pompous pathos of the forms manifesting our brutal control over this area, however, cannot stand up to a simple comparison with a sincere, yet doomed-to-failure, attempt to use the riches of the region the same way as our predecessors – its expelled inhabitants – once used them.

Conclusion

> … the artwork whose import is true will succeed at simultaneously presenting itself when it presents import about something other than itself. When an artwork is cogent in such (self-) disclosure, we find it 'unique' or 'challenging', and we prize it for this. We also discover that it points us to its own world, one that can illuminate or disturb or re-orient our personal and social worlds.[24]

Lambert Zuidervaart – *Artistic Truth* (2014)

Art is an institution involving a need for freedom. This permanent, latently present conflict becomes ever more important whenever doubt and

[23] Kolečková, Z. (2013). *Lyrical Intermezzo*. Ústí nad Labem: Faculty of Art and Design, Jan Evangelista Purkyně University; Bialystok: Galeria Arsenal. Kolečková, Z. (2009) *It's Awful Not to Live But Only Sleep*, Ústí nad Labem: Faculty of Art and Design, Jan Evangelista Purkyně University.

[24] Zuidervaart, L. (April 16, 2014) *Imagining Another World: Social Justice and Artistic Truth*. Revised version of a speech originally given on 28 February 2013 at the Art, Social Justice, and Critical Theory Colloquium at Kalamazoo College in Michigan, USA.





Zdena Kolečková – Made in Ghetto, 2012, installation, variable dimensions (Photo: author's archive)



Zdravotní ústav se sídlem v Ústí nad Labem

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Zákazník : **Universita J. E. Purkyně**
Fakulta umění a designu UJEP
Hoření 13
400 96 Ústí nad Labem

Číslo objednávky : 12-10-15
Příjem vzorku : 15.10.2012 **Čas příjmu** : 14:40
Vzorek číslo : **26573/2012**
Místo odběru : viz poznámka
Název vzorku : **1. Bezinkový likér z Ústí nad Labem - Předlic**
Druh, typ vzorku : potraviny
Vzorkoval : zadavatel
Účel odběru : informace

Analýza zahájena : 15.10.2012 **Analýza ukončena** : 30.10.2012

Chemické ukazatele - kovy

Ukazatel	Hodnota	Jednotka	Limit	MS	MD	Nej.	Metoda	P	Akr.
As (arzen)	<0,01	mg/kg		0,01			SOP HK 200.02	1	A
Cd (kadmium)	<0,005	mg/kg		0,005			SOP HK 200	1	A
Hg (rtuť)	0,0014	mg/kg		0,0003		±10%	SOP HK 200.03	1	A
Pb (olovo)	0,05	mg/kg		0,03		±10%	SOP HK 200	1	A

Poznámka k odběru : lokalita: Marxova, U Jesli, Textilní ulice
Popis metody : SOP HK 200 část A - vody, vodné roztoky, výluhy; část B - odpady, půdy, výluhy; část C - potraviny, biolog.mat., léčiva, PBU, výluhy; část D - ovzduší, výluhy
SOP HK 200.02 část A - vody, vodné roztoky, výluhy; část B - odpady, půdy, výluhy; část C - potraviny, biolog.mat., léčiva, PBU, výluhy; část D - ovzduší, výluhy

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Dne : 1.11.2012

ZDRAVOTNÍ ÚSTAV se sídlem v Ústí nad Labem
Razítko laboratoře

Razítko a podpis
(osoby oprávněné k podpisu)

Ing. Ivo Šrámek

Zdena Kolečková – Made in Ghetto, 2012, installation, variable dimensions (Photo: author's archive)

emptiness become the centre of attention. Noticing the reduction or diminishing of the world can create a platform open to new beginnings, as it is imagination that gains importance when there is a vacuum of thought. New projections of human existence are born in the head, on the table or in the computer of artists each and every day. They overcome, replace or complement the old ones, and do not let the antagonistic and yet totally positive liquid social energy cool down.

In the system of the functioning of a democratic society that is endangered by slow destruction, artistic work improves its own defence mechanisms by opening a way to the symbolic imitation of what we are missing. Art thus becomes a gap in the system of control and manipulation mechanisms, a gap which is hard to notice and yet has the potential to boycott and distort this destructive process, a gap in which what we lose becomes an essential value invested in the future positive development of the community in which we are firmly anchored.

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9

Curators of Contemporary Art and Public Space

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Abstract

The curator of contemporary art often works on exhibitions in many specific places, not only in gallery institutions. Some exhibitions are held in churches, in summerhouses, in flats, or in old petrol stations, etc., but also in the public spaces of a city – streets, parks, squares. In this case it does not mean street art or mural pieces, but really creating an exhibition with artworks. This open space under the sky sets particular conditions for curatorial work and we can talk about a special curatorial approach. We know many examples from abroad, mostly exhibitions of sculptures or festivals of arts, but the focus of this article is on gallery platforms in a local public space. Some of these galleries are often called alternative, they have recently opened (or have irregular opening hours), some are 'roofed' and their location is in a public space where people walk every day or children play.

Keywords: curator of art, contemporary art, visual communication, art works, mediation of art.

The role of a curator of contemporary art

The curator of contemporary art plays a crucial role in the contemporary art scene. The curator mediates artworks to the public, categorises and qualifies them, and places them in a chosen context or framework. A curator becomes an explorer, a caretaker, an interpreter as well as a creator. Obrist states that:

In my practice, the curator has to bridge gaps and build bridges between artists, publics, institutions, and other types of communities. The crux of this work is building temporary communities, by connecting different people and practices and causing the condition for triggering sparks between them (Obrist, 2011: 166).

The sparking moment is thus not only the exhibition providing material to other agents participating in the process of interpretation, but also the context of the presentation and the theme or information it carries. In the framework of contemporary art, we need not hesitate to talk about sparking or bubbling, since this field, to a certain extent 'unexplored' and constantly being complemented, will always have something to offer.

Curatorial work in the artistic field has experienced significant changes because of a growing tendency to interpret art in a well-founded and mindful manner. A traditional perception of the curator's position as a caretaker of artefacts and of their values in museums and galleries is insufficient today.

While in the past the curator's role mostly consisted in guardianship and classification of artworks and artefacts, and the curator was rather a preserver and a connoisseur, nowadays their role is far more complex. The practices rooted in the 19th century's positivism, which were typical for curatorial methods – retrospective exhibitions, displays of works of art and artefacts based on the used techniques or materials, or an overview of the progress of artistic movements and styles displayed in chronological order – still remains popular,

but the most interesting and innovative exhibition projects have already separated from this canonised organisation of exhibitions (Pachmanová, 2009).

Mediator of art as a servant or a creator

The role of art curators in the process of creating and mediating artwork, and their position in the art scene, has been dynamically transformed along with the progress of art in the second half of the 20th century. We can thus divide curators into two basic groups, differentiating between the curator as a mediator of art (curator—a creator of the exhibition) and a curator of a collection[2] in a museum of art (a curator of a specialised department), who works with the historical legacy in terms of a previously defined historical or professional discourse. This second model of a curator can also be defined as a museum curator, who holds a position in an art museum and his/her job is to take care of the local collection (Hoare, 2016: 9). The curator of a collection partakes in establishing art history; contrarily, a curator working with contemporary art reflects the present and completes material for future art history. First of all, it is necessary to mention that this division doesn't limit the curator of collections in his creative approach to the exposition.

Naturally, a certain original way of thinking or creativity and experimentation can be found in the work of the curator of contemporary art, which is often supported, for example, by an alternative background of an exhibition area or by the temporariness of such exhibitions, compared to expositions funded by collection funds, which are expected to be presented in a cultural institution over a long period (as with permanent exhibitions).

The division into the two previously mentioned groups of curators serves us as a tool for defining the subject of this work position, in this case a curator of contemporary art, who uses exhibition projects as a means to create visual situations from selected artworks and in relation to current socio-cultural or thematic events.

Nowadays, a curator of contemporary art should have a wide range of skills and abilities. The curator is supposed to be the caretaker and active mediator of art, who is able to interpret the subject and the meaning of an artwork between the artist and the audience, and at the same time he/she needs to be a skilful production manager, editor, and narrator, since he/she also often writes texts accompanying exhibitions. Harald Szeemann describes the role of curators as that of flexible characters:

[2] The anticipated 'limitation of creative work' regarding the curator of a collection is based on the traditional institutional conception of guardianship of art from the defined art-historical or professional point of view, according to which such a curator specialises in a particular field and views it as an art historian, e.g. looks after collections of Japanese art, etc. However, from this position, a curator of collections can become a creator of an exhibition, while what matters is his/her active role in the process of mediating art as well as the level of his/her innovative approach in terms of his/her curatorial work presenting art.

> Sometimes they're a servant, sometimes an assistant, sometimes they help the artist with the presentation of their work. During group exhibitions, they function as a coordinator, and during thematic exhibitions, they become a discoverer. But the aspects most important for the curator's part are enthusiasm, love of work, and a little dose of obsession (Obrist, 2012: 90).

The curator of contemporary art thus becomes one of the key personas to define the direction of present-day art. Belgian curator Jan Hoet[3] claims:

> Always start from yourself, that is what the artist does also. I think a curator also has to have this kind of epistemological construction. That is absolutely necessary because it has to do with an identity, with an autobiographical analysis. Out of this autobiographical analysis, you construct new methods, new strategies, new networks, and so on (Gray et al., 2010: 107).

Even though the curator creates an influential concept or an innovative idea through the conception of their selection and the manner of presentation, they have to avoid burdening the audience with mere personal subjectivism as some contemporary artists do; the curator's interpretation has to comply with an intersubjective detached point of view. This intersubjective interpretation is based on the concurrent and substantiated subject matter, which can be shared with others. Despite an initial subjective view on the issue (based on subjective personal perception and decisions), the curator seeks shared similarities that lead him/her to intersubjective interpretation, which is later processed and used in presenting visual material, mediating art in the form of an exhibition to the future recipient.

Transformation of curatorial strategies in the second half of the 20th century

Since the 1960s, we have been gradually encountering more and more new curatorial intentions, which show progress in curatorial work. One of the reasons for this change is, besides other things, the development of new creative approaches to art, especially different from traditional methods in artistic work.[4] The theory of meaning and the idea of contextualisation of a work (contextual

[3] Jan Hoet (born 23 June 1936 – died 27 February 2014), curator of *Documenta IX*, Kassel, 1992; from 1970 the head of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Ghent, where he organised specific exhibition projects, e.g. *Chambres d´Amis* in summer 1986, to which he invited 51 artists to exhibit their works in private houses around the city. See Wade, G. (ed.) (2000) *Curating in the 21st century*. Walsall: New Art Gallery Walsall, p. 162.

[4] For instance, artistic demonstrations of conceptual art, represented by the well-known project of Yves Klein ('*Emptiness*') in Collette Allendy Gallery in Paris, realised in 1957, when the author hung 'invisible pictures' onto the white walls – an empty gallery space. More at: O´Doherty, B., (1996) 'The Gallery as a Gesture', in Greenberg, R., Ferguson, B.W. and Nairne, S., *Thinking about Exhibition*, London: Routledge, p. 323.

understanding of an artwork) are brought into focus by experts (Kesner, 1997: 12–15; Goodman, 2010). In the last fifty years, more curatorial exhibition projects have emerged, choosing various forms of presentation of art in relation to the process of mediating artwork to the general public.

From the latter half of the 1960s, we began to encounter art presented in public spaces (thanks to the artistic movement of public art), especially in the United States, breaking the traditional presentation behind the walls of an institution. The artwork leaves the institutional environment and the exhibition project is realised in a selected area with specific *genius loci*. This strategy targets the audience, brings a new approach to a space, and gradually spreads into the whole world.[5] In the Czech context, such projects have been realised not only regionally in cooperation with gallery institutions, but also, for example, at the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art in Prague during the last several years.

The curator, not only in a public space, has to be aware of a certain responsibility regarding his/her manipulation within the given area, and the need to be able to communicate the meaning and aim of art projects in a comprehensible manner. This responsibility for emphasised themes is also crucial for curatorial projects with an interdisciplinary range or social significance, which work with contemporary art and reflect present-day problems in the world around us. It is important to be aware of a fact emphasised in the introduction of the book by Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, *Thinking about Exhibition:* '...especially exhibitions of contemporary art— establish and administer the cultural meaning of art' (Greenberg, 1996: 2).

In the 1960s, the creative intention of curatorial work was secured; the curator worked with a selected theme and created a new context by means of exhibition presentation. Simultaneously, the need for legacy and therefore also a record of the exposition grew. A catalogue or a publication with text and photographic documentation became a crucial part of a project. Nowadays, thanks to the Internet and electronic media, the documentation of exhibitions and their course is recorded on social networks, blogs, or in the form of shared videos.

In the 1970s we notice an increase in social contact and a turn towards the audience in the field of mediation of art, but also a deviation from traditional chronology and classification, which was intensified by the relocation of the presentation of art. Simultaneously, gallery institutions focusing on contemporary art were developed, and places like Kunsthalle or centres of contemporary art strengthened. Their speciality was focusing on direct presentation; they opened up to present-day art creations and abandoned the phenomenon of a collection-making institution.

Site-specific tendencies and participation in curatorial work

Following the previously mentioned tendencies to realise exhibition

[5] In the Czech Republic, for example, the exhibition Artwork in public space realised by the Centre of Contemporary Art in Prague from 1997 to 1998 (altogether 37 art projects).
See cca.fcca.cz/archiv-projektu/vystavy/1997/umeni-ve-verejnem-prostoru/

projects in public space (a park, a street, etc.), non-gallery spaces are 'occupied' (these are called alternative gallery scenes nowadays — a gallery in a shopping centre, a gazebo, a petrol station, an apartment, a church, etc.[6]), which gives curators an opportunity to experiment in terms of mediating art. At first sight, art seems closer to the audience. However, the curator has to account for the initial distractedness, as the viewer arrives into a non-traditional space, in which a proper environment suitable for focused perception of the artwork is not always provided.

The environment always has an effect on the final experience as well as on the process of perceiving art, as many creators realise. Site-specific projects are a specific form of presenting an artwork. Such projects typically refer to the particularity of the site in a special manner, while the artist and the curator often cooperate closely. These projects mediate between the world of art and the perceiver offering an aesthetic experience to the latter.

In alternative and independent galleries, we often encounter a well-known strategy, when the artist is also the curator of the exhibition. Artist/curators experiment with the possibilities of presenting an artwork, searching for a certain idea of exhibiting an artwork, thus defining another curatorial approach and postproduction process.

We've witnessed the gradual growth of the interconnection of specific fields and the expansion of the field of research into other disciplines. In curatorial work, this mutual interdisciplinary cooperation has been present since the 1980s. The 1990s put a stronger emphasis on interdisciplinary cooperation. Participatory art projects invited viewers to take part in their realisation. The audience was the opportunity to gain insight into the process of artistic creation and to get acquainted with creative possibilities. A direct turn towards the viewer thus took place. The project *The Quiet in the Land: Everyday Life, Contemporary Art, and Projecto Axé* in 1999, realised in the Brazilian Centre for Defence and Protection of Children in Salvador, was constructed by artists with local children in the course of various programmes (Wade, Gavin, 2000: 165).

Playful and educative curatorial projects are a specific sort of curatorial strategy, allowing the viewer to play an active role in the exhibition and explore the world of art in an interactive way. This trend appears at the end of the 1990s. An example is the international project *ORBIS PICTUS PLAY*[7], inspired by the works of the humanistic thinker Jan Amos Komenský and created by a Czech artist and curators. The exposition aims to cultivate the senses in a playful manner and to develop the viewer's visual literacy. The artworks are used as tools to enhance the senses. They lose their artistic position and become rather a design act bringing play to a wider audience.

[6] For specific examples see the website Action Galleries, www.actiongalleries.info

[7] Mánes Exhibition Hall, Prague, 2010–2011, curators: Jiří and Radana Waldovi in cooperation with Petr Nikl. More about the project *Orbis Pictus Play*: www.orbis-pictus.com/o-projektu-orbis-pictus-play-p13.html. [15 Mar 2015].

Themes and postproduction in a curatorial strategy

The experiential-educational approach doesn't have to be based only on direct interaction between the artwork and the viewer. It can be formed by a communication platform based on programmes accompanying the exhibition, which carry both the experiential and the educational function, and support the perception and the interpretation of the work. Such exhibitions rely on the presence of the curator, artist, play, text, or new media, and they require motives of interaction.

Last but not least, institutional exhibition projects also focus on a topic or on new trends, regarding both the artwork and its presentation. The curators, independent or gallery-based, realise a distinctive exhibition presentation in their own innovative way, usually in an institution. Numerous curatorial projects helped to anchor new approaches to art (sound art, conceptual work, text-based art projects). One of the progressive exhibition projects was, for example, the exposition *Live in Your Head—When Attitudes Become Form* (Bern Kunsthalle, 1969), (Germano, 2013), curated by Harald Szeemann. Szeemann selected and invited artists to realise and present an artwork in Kunsthalle, while he himself took the role of an interpreter of art objects in the given space. The curator's own interpretation was used to break the traditional exhibition framework at institutions. This interpretation was grounded in situating artworks in a new context (social, temporal) and managed to introduce current tendencies in art. Szeemann was a key figure in the curatorial field and his approach helped to define the curator as an 'exhibition creator'— a person whose insights into a problem and whose ability to express theses by means of their texts accompanying exhibitions are crucial for defining the state of the contemporary art scene.

The curator Germano Celant enhanced this strategy when he transferred the previously mentioned exhibition to Venice in 2013 (Germano, 2013). He 'restored' an exhibition project, which can be described as postproduction curatorial work. In the artistic field, the term 'postproduction' appears at the beginning of the 1990s, as art begins to apply the principles of the reproduction, recycling, non-canonical interpretation of forms, and the transformation of the sense of the objects. In contemporary art, we distinguish new authorial approaches based on work with finished products, parts, and forms, newly processed by the authors. A better understanding of the term 'postproduction' can be found in film-making, where the term describes all kinds of processing of filmed material—sound effects, dubbing, adding subtitles, editing, etc. (Bourriaud, 2004: 3). A certain material, a product, is then further processed and goes through other phases of production, which means that 'something' follows after (post-), shaping the already made product. In this case, the prefix 'post' does not have a negative connotation or imply surpassing something, but 'denotes a zone of activities, a certain stance' (Bourriaud, 2004: 9). The 'production' also has creative potential; the term can therefore be transferred to the field of fine art.

In his book *Postproduction*, Nicolas Bourriaud traces new artistic tendencies in contemporary art and describes authorial creative approaches that use

methods of postproduction. Bourriaud outlines a typology of the art of postproduction and defines five spheres which specify this phenomenon of contemporary art in more detail. Bourriard observes and describes five creative methods present in contemporary art:

a) New programming of already existing works (...),
b) Dwelling in historical styles and forms (...),
c) Use of images (...),
d) Using the society as a repertoire of forms (...),
e) Entering the world of fashion and media

(Bourriaud, 2004: 5-7).

The art of postproduction primarily reacts to supply and demand in society, for instance by using complete sources (products), perceiving them as raw materials, i.e., a foundation of artistic work. Owing to society's overload with information and visual sensations, boundaries of forms are torn down and their use is transformed. Artists 'don't create a new form out of raw material, but they work with objects already circulating in the cultural market and thus carrying information input by other people' (Bourriaud, 2004: 3). The art of postproduction is created in a network of relational models, as its origin is conditioned by a certain type of relating to something already existing that is reshaped and used for a new purpose (the object is given a new context created by the artist, but may also be created by the viewer).

Visuality of public space formed by a curatorial approach

For many years public space at the borders of art museums has often been populated by artworks such as sculptures or paintings. These artworks revive the public space (including nature) and help us to see everyday life in brighter colours or especially from another point of view. The purpose is based on the artists' decision about the meaning and content of the work, but it is always a kind of reflection on similarities, differences, on social or political problems, on local characteristics, etc. Public art constitutes an effort to engage the public in public space. It is the fitting of the work into the specific area, the beautifying of the space, showing a problem to the viewers. But galleries managed by curators of art have an impact on visual communication in the public space of towns too.

The curator of contemporary art often prepares the exhibition in many specific places, not only in gallery institutions, on white walls. We know about creating an exhibition in a church, in a summer-house, in a flat etc., but also in the public spaces of a city. I do not mean street art or murals, but actually putting together an exhibition with artworks in some areas of the town. This open space under the sky sets particular conditions for curatorial work and we can speak about a special curatorial approach for presentation of artworks. We know many examples from abroad, mostly exhibitions of sculptures or festivals of arts, but I would like to focus on real gallery platforms in public space, not only on public art pieces. The source of examples will be from the local public

gallery scene in the city of Ústí nad Labem (Czech Republic), where I live and work. Some of these galleries are often called alternative. They are newly opened and can have a short duration or have irregular opening hours. Some are 'roofed', all these public galleries have some sort of flat surface or designed territory for the presentation of art, and their location is in the public space where people walk daily or children play. For example, Gallery Buňka (Cell) is a wooden block and there is a large sheet of glass on one side that allows us to look inside – on a white space known as the white cube for exhibition. In front of the glass part of the gallery is a space for standing or sitting, and people can enter this space, but they can also see the exhibition from a distance.

The nonstop open exhibitions are focused on contemporary Czech visual art, especially that created by young artists. At the beginning, Gallery Buňka was the idea of the curator Tereza Záchová, who sought to open up the presentation of art. The first site of the exhibition was the garden of the university. But the gallery was moved from the garden to a new location in the district of Ústí nad Labem – Střekov. This move enabled cooperation with students of architecture, who designed and built the present shape of the gallery in a public space (a small park near the river Labe and the local city district offices). The actual place of the gallery is a meeting point for people, children play games there, and others pass through the park to the local theatre, so the artworks have a lot of possibilities to communicate with viewers rather than simply being displayed.

Flat areas as communication platforms

Artworks presented in galleries that occupy public space are in contact with the public (viewers) all the time and speak the same language, or could send a specific message to the local community. This tendency to forward some message is often used in the Gallery *Deska* (Board), which is a big panel with a specific bulging shape.

Gallery Deska (Board) – Alexander Peroutka, *UNITY*, Ústí nad Labem 2017 (photo: Karel Konopka)





Gallery Deska (Board) – Štěpán Jirák, *The Ground and Blood* (*Půda a krev*), Ústí nad Labem 2016
(photo: Štěpán Jirák)

It is an outdoor gallery committed to a process of change and participation in contemporary art. At the beginning of this gallery project there was a shaped screen painted pink by the artist and architect Kristína Magasaníková. Gallery curators asked and invited artists to create work that related to the town or society every one or two months. The artists could change the colour of the board or use it for their own artistic ideas and creations. For example, artist Štěpánka Bláhovcová painted on the pink board a picture of a finger patch with the words 'Au' – 'Au' and 'sick' as an expression of pain. It was primarily a play on words that was used to formulate the actual situation in town (in the German language, the city Ústí nad Labem is called Aussig – sounds in English as 'au, sick' – and it has some painful history. The next artist, Vendula Chalánková, used part of a previous artwork (the finger patch and 'Au') and painted more symbols and a human figure who said 'Au'. The artwork on the board looked like a comic strip with words and it also contained the logo of a local theatre (the shape of an anvil). At the time of the realisation of this painting, politicians closed the local theatre. Other artists of this gallery platform reflected different social problems and regional politics or engaged with local communities in participative projects. They showed new approaches to contemporary visual art.

As part of the international project 'Billboart Gallery Europe', which aimed to present art in public space, an exhibition space on billboards in the city of Ústí nad Labem was created. The name of the gallery, 'Billboart', plays with the words that define it – billboard and art. The Billboart gallery in Ústí nad Labem is managed by students of the Curatorial Study programme at the



Billboart Gallery – TIMO, *Out of Love to the Czech Republic* (Z lásky k Česku), Ústí nad Labem 2016


Z lásky k Česku



Billboart Gallery – Karel Konopka, *'One country, one nation, one society, one Leader'*, Ústí nad Labem 2017

local university and is used as a platform for their academic projects, so the team of curators changes every year. The advertising board in the street offers a creative space for participation or social art which shares a visual message through artwork. Curators open this gallery space for an individual form of opinion exchange. The billboard form of presentation is addressed to accidental viewers and opens new potential for the communication of artwork.

Two examples of exhibition presentations at the Billboart gallery will serve to explain the conception of this gallery space. In summer 2016, three curators (Petra Widžová, Adéla Kopecká, Sára Davidová) prepared the billboard exhibition of the street artist TIMO. TIMO thought about the life experience of the local city's inhabitants and focused on current issues. He also shook society with the question of consumption. TIMO´s project called *'Z lásky k Česku'* (*Out of Love for the Czech Republic*) linked textual and visual messages to local problems and history. The original advertisement 'Out of love for the Czech Republic' was used by the store Kaufland and showed only the beautiful parts of local lands (nature and historical castles). The artist used only the textual message of this advertisement and looked at the problematic part of the Czech Republic, the North. On his billboard we could see a coal mine close to the Jezeří Baroque castle. The picture of the castle with a coal mine is real and current. But the artist added to the picture the well-known figure of a man from a 19th century romantic painting by the German artist Caspar David Friedrich, who often visited this northern region (North Bohemia). The man is looking aro-und and sees the landscape that was changed by industry over the years. He sees that mining ceased in front of the castle, but all local people know that it is still possible to break the allocated limits for mining in this area.



Směj se (Laugh, Art Group), *The Underpass*, site-specific painting and participation action (Pink Garden), Ústí nad Labem 2017 (photo: Směj se)

In January 2017, a billboard by the Czech artist Karel Konopka reflected the Czech political scene. The problem with a politician (minister of finances and the main owner of one of the big agricultural companies and owner of some newspapers) was presented. A considerable amount of economic, political and media power was concentrated in the hands of one politician. He was therefore sometimes referred to as an oligarch, but the artists used the word 'Leader'. Konopka used the word with the capital letter ('Vůdce' in the Czech language), which evoked the times of World War II and caused a misunderstanding of his message. The following was written in blue on the white background of the billboard: '*One country, one nation, one society, one Leader*'. The local newspaper published an article entitled *'A controversial billboard hangs at the university'* and the reaction of people was both negative and positive, depending on their understanding of the meaning of this artwork.

DIY – open spaces for exhibitions

Galleries in public space are certainly a specific phenomenon. Sometimes they look bizarre, sometimes they change the place. What makes them specific is the *genius loci*, but, for the first time in history, they are a part of everyday life. As an example of a bizarre looking gallery, I will try to describe the gallery called '*Procházka pod skutečností*' (*A Walk Under Real Life*), which was located in the underpass of a road in the centre of the city of Ústí nad Labem from 2011 to 2013. The dirt, smell and graffiti walls in the underpass cre-



Směj se (Laugh, Art Group), *The Underpass*, site-specific painting and participation action (Pink Garden), Ústí nad Labem 2017 (photo: Směj se)

ated a nonstop open gallery focused on sound art, site-specificity with sound effects and contemporary conceptual art.

Two students (Tomáš Petermann and Richard Loskot) in the role of curators prepared the sound experiences for pedestrians. This underpass is currently occupied by a young local artistic group called Směj se (Laugh), which has painted it pink, which is the colour of all their artworks.[8]

The occupation of free places for the presentation of art creations was and still is in the form of alternating exhibitions in open public space, especially in the city of Ústí nad Labem in the Czech Republic. It is mainly young artists, curators or students of the humanities who place the gallery in public space to show artworks. This kind of alternative gallery is formed in cooperation with the city or with the owner of the place. This new type of gallery presents work for a long period or just for one show.

For example, in public space, the promotional showcases of corporations or cultural institutions on walls of buildings are very specific places for

[8] The main aim of the Směj se (Laugh) group is to make Ústí citizens laugh or at least to disrupt the monotony of their lives. Consistent with this idea, a new artwork, 'The Underpass', has been created. In cooperation with Karel Karika, the vice-mayor of the city district, they were given an opportunity to re-create an underpass in the city. Since this part of Ústí nad Labem is a somewhat run-down industrial area, they decided to make the underpass a peaceful and happy place, literally the 'Pink garden'. They used the colour white together with two shades of pink to paint trees, bushes and small wild animals. While they were in the process of painting, several passers-by commented our work. Their words were always supportive and kind. The artists said: 'We hope that our idea has brought smiles to at least some faces'.



Gallery *In Vitro* – Michaela Spružinová, *Romani kerek / Roma Circle*,
installation with cooperation of Roma children, Ústí nad Labem 2014 (photo: Pavel Matoušek)



Gallery *In Vitro*, Opening – Michaela Spružinová, *Romani kerek / Roma Circle*,
Ústí nad Labem 2014 (photo: Pavel Matoušek)

gallery work. From 2009 to 2015 a gallery, *Vitrínky* (Showcases), was located on the wall of an old and beautiful industrial hall in the city district of Ústí nad Labem – Předlice. Two curators (Silvie Milková and Veronika Daňhelová) presented here mostly contemporary photography. Their motto was 'to interpret the Czech visual art scene with a specific kind of humour'. The curatorial strategy was to make an offer to young artists and provide them with a space for presentation (the artists paid for the printing of the photographs themselves). The flat area of the showcase and the glass cover provided very good conditions for the presentation of the medium of photography, and the 'visitors' were people walking to work or to school.

The second example to use showcases is Gallery *In Vitro*. This gallery is situated on the wall by the entrance to a closed theatre of music, which has been for sale for a long time. The wall borders the area of a chemical factory. Gallery *In Vitro* is a very experimental space, the showcases do not have glass and only their shape defines the exhibition place. The curatorial team is formed of young students from the Faculty of Art and Design at J. E. Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem. The characteristics of the curatorial approach are the concentration on experimental tendencies in contemporary art. The exhibition projects often go beyond the limits of the traditional gallery space. They usually constitute a one-day presentation because the gallery space is not protected and is close to the main road, so we can touch the artworks, but others can destroy it anytime.

Galleries in public space are a platform for communication between the viewer and the artwork. It is important for a creative and progressive curator to make space for watching, seeing, and interpreting visual messages in artworks. The visual messages inserted into art by artists mostly deal with local problems: a basic phenomenon, everyday life or the identity of a place and/or people. At first sight, the message may be incomprehensible, but this is true of all visual messages if we do not have enough knowledge or information (one's own 'encyclopedia' as Umberto Eco put it) for reading and understanding contemporary artworks. Comprehension thus depends on viewers and their visual perceptions as well as their level of knowledge about art.

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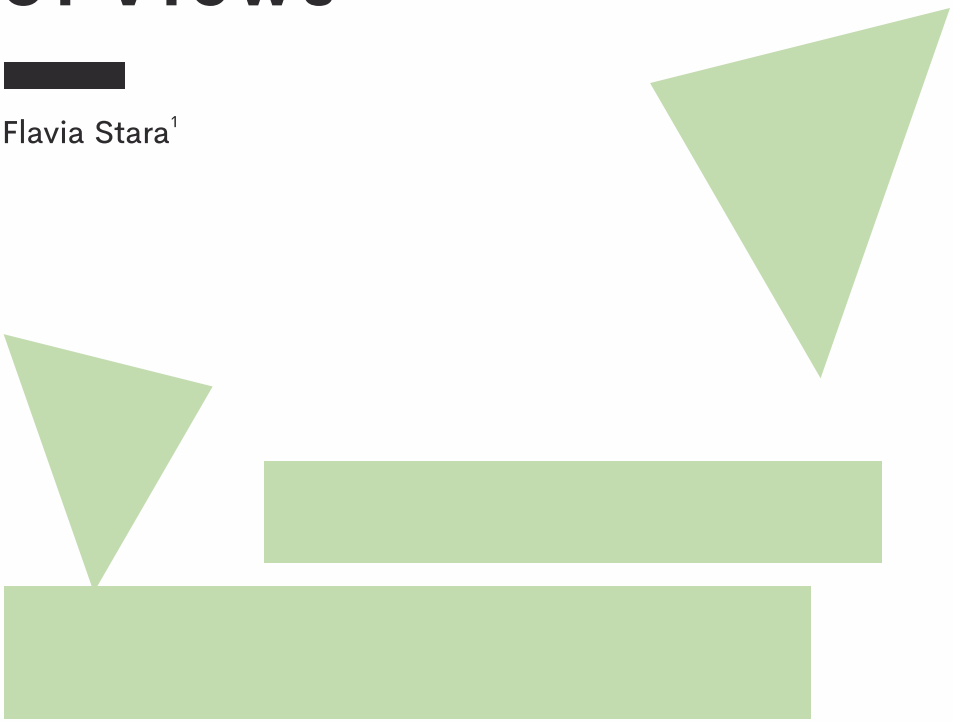
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10

New Canons of Perspective: Understanding Cultures through the Exchange of Views

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Abstract

This article discusses how the Western canon of visual perception, the perspective, drawn on a theory of vision conceived in a multicultural context, allows us to examine the notion of inter-cultural prospects. Tracking down the visual coordinates of Western culture means to regain a hybrid aesthetic tradition. Visual perspective founded the civilisation of the look on the sovereignty of the subject observer who becomes part of the image. Over the centuries images convey the evolution of the collective gaze that is an expression of social attitude and a narration of cultural change. The visual perspective, by producing displacement, contaminations, and intercultural exchanges, creates spaces of interpretation, of aesthetic-emotional participation, of production of meaning. The individual thus takes on multiple dimensions, becoming the crossroads of different views, rules, and social memberships.

Keywords: art, visual, perspective, canon, subject, inter-culturalism, interpretation.

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot

Premise on perspective

The concept of perspective as a canon of works of art – central to the study and teaching of art and the history of art for centuries – has often been questioned and somehow deconstructed. It still is, however, the hub of the traditions and the teaching of art history in many European countries, as it still shapes public perception of art. Various changes to the notion of this canon, which still informs scholarship in many disciplines – today as in the past, have occurred over time; these changes have been brought about by contemporary social issues as well as evolving and changing visual cultures.

This contribution analyses some historical and theoretical categories that structure the standards by which we look at the world. Erwin Panofsky in his *Perspective as Symbolic Form* – one of the great works of modern intellectual history that has dominated all art historical and philosophical discussions on the topic of perspective in the past century – points out how perspective is a central component of a Western 'will to form', the expression of a schema linking the social, cognitive, psychological, and especially technical practices of a given culture into harmonious and integrated wholes (Panofsky, 1991). Western culture has defined its canon of visual perception through perspective: this marked a fundamental historical change that took place in the way in which perspective was conceptualised; first approached as a technique for constructing pictures, it slowly became a metaphor for subjectivity (Elkins, 1995). Perspective founds the civilisation of the look on the sovereignty of the subject observer, who becomes part of the image. As more recent studies have pointed out, tracking

down the visual coordinates of Western culture means to regain a hybrid aesthetic tradition, drawing on a theory of vision conceived by an Arab mathematician within an Islamic religious context.

Visual perspectives/ Cultural perspectives

German art historian Hans Belting, in his work *Florence and Baghdad: Renaissance Art and Arab Science*, makes a compelling case that the vision of the Renaissance – a vision that still holds us today – began not in Florence, but in Baghdad, with important implications for both cultures.

The Italian Renaissance can be considered one of those amazing hinges of human history when civilisation made a great leap that continues to be felt today. According to Belting, this 'quantum leap consistent in the way perspective introduced the gaze into the picture and thus, at the same time, the human subject doing the gazing' (Belting, 2011: 25). Renaissance painters pull the viewer in and create another world full of figures more human than art had offered ever before. Before this type of view, as Belting argues, the artists of the Renaissance turned their gaze East, to the mathematical theories of perspective originating from Arab culture, specifically those of Alhazen, a Muslim polymath working at the turn of the first millennium to understand and improve upon the ancient mathematicians' ideas (Belting, 2011: 25).

Technically, perspective is the central projection of a three-dimensional space upon a plane. Practically, it is the way of making a picture on a flat surface in such a manner that the various objects represented in it appear to have the same sizes, shapes and positions, relative to each other, of the actual objects located in actual space, when they are observed from a determined point of view. The function of projective perspective was to rationalise the representation of space. Perspective is still the rule in virtual reality environments; objects are still conceived and represented within all the three-dimensional conventions of centuries of practice. Indeed, perspective is a cultural tool and not just an art technique, as it stimulates the right to a particular perception. In fact, perspective puts in action the project of transposing natural perception into image, so it transforms art as well as the whole culture. Images shape culture, and in turn they are moulded by it. Each society exerts its gaze collectively, even though each person perceives it personally (Belting, 2011: 50).

The scope of reference to perspective becomes controversial when applied in a broader sense to different cultures and contexts. In reference to this, some scholars argue that what makes perspective a socio-cultural issue is its definite link with the development of European colonialism as well as its strategic use in ballistics, which, during the sixteenth century, after the Chinese invention of gunpowder, facilitated Western dominance, due to more sophisticated techniques of warfare (Hanson, 2001). The globalisation of perspective – as Belting stresses – supported today by Western-model visual technologies, has a complex history of effects on the colonisation of other parts of the world. In India, China, and Japan, and in the Muslim world itself, perspective is manifested through Western political and economic power as a means of conversion.

The paradigm of perspective was virtually imposed on people of other cultures, who had to give up their own established modes of seeing. From Africa to Asia and to the Middle East, the Western way of seeing in perspective – individualised, human-centred prospect – has diminished all other ways of seeing, along with cultural ways of being.

Indeed, Belting observes that implications of Eurocentrism and colonialism might occur even when talking of the 'influence of cultural modes'; nevertheless, by reminding us that linear perspective is not universal but rather tied to a particular culture, he outlines more relevant aspects, other than dominance, in the story of cross-cultural exchanges. Taking always into account the historicity in which cultural views are produced, he points out the importance of one of the greatest assets shared by the Mediterranean regions: light, in all its power and greatness, both real and symbolic. In his articulate analysis of perspective, reconstructing a closer connection between the ancient and Islamic worlds, as well as between Islam and Italy, he strengthens an essential message: that human knowledge and human desire for beauty know no cultural boundaries.

Dialogue among perspectives

An exchange of views presupposes, almost by definition, that two people, no matter who or where they are, share an enormous number of ideas, traits, and habits in common. So the Arab mathematicians read the Greek philosophers without worrying about Eurocentrism or colonialism, or barriers of language. Both Islam and Christianity have such an intricately developed imagery of light because both bear the profound imprint of Plato. Across history, cultures practised dialogue and exchanged views, though this happened in different and not always peaceful ways. What is important to take into account for the quality of dialogue are not the views that cultures exchange with each other, but the views on cultures. Through perspective, viewing goes beyond the distance it actually achieves (Belting, 2011: 60).

Reconnecting to the discourse on the sources of perspective, the question that it may raise is: if the Renaissance took Arabic ideas to create a revolution in seeing, then why didn't Arabic culture anticipate the same process, hundreds of years earlier? The answer – as Belting explains – can be found in the analysis of the differences between the aniconic space and time of Islam and the icon-laden world of Christianity. For Muslims, to counterfeit life with realistic painting would make 'both those who produce it and those who own it guilty of the sin of forging God's creation, a form of blasphemy' (Belting, 2011: 70). To visually portray three-dimensional space would be like playing the role of God, by creating one's own world. Hence, Islamic art depicts a two-dimensional and abstract geometric design or designs based on vegetation, which lack the 'breath' of life inspired by the Creator. The idea of using mathematical perspective to make realistic pictures was inconceivable to Muslim culture. For Westerners, however, keen on more human-centred art, depicting the world as closely as possible as to their own eyes seemed not playing the role of God, but rather a way of getting closer to God. Even the window – an emblem of the image in Western culture – occupies an opposite role with respect to the Arab

one: in the first tradition the window faces the world to capture images, to dominate it, to establish distance; in the second tradition it allows light to filter through inlays and geometric patterns, often it consists of a lattice of intertwined wood, which reflects the fluctuation of the exterior.

The Other expresses itself by remaining Other. This is the challenge for a postmodern perspective on the world: recognising the status of Otherness as equal, not diminishing it by moving from a declared indifference towards distinction while attempting to maintain of power.

Discussing perspective as a visual art canon means to interrogate ourselves – as critics, scholars, teachers – on its metaphorical function by selecting, updating and reusing our cultural heritage. In recent times, it is the very notion of perspective that allows discussion on new canons of perception within the debate, occupying many scholars, on the expansion of the scope of disciplinary canons to intercultural, transcultural, postcolonial and gender studies. Questioning the traditional geo-cultural genesis of perspective and its rethinking makes it possible to conjecture multiple and alternative canons, according to a choice of different interpretative paths of reality that increasingly take into account a new inter-cultural context, with all the implications of the notions of border and centre it entails.

Some anthropological studies conducted mainly in South America during the last thirty years point out how the features attributed to communities populating the world depend not so much on the *a priori* definition of their essence, as on symbolic positions they occupy in relation to others (Viveiros De Castro, 2014).

There is no specific Subject/human being who creates a point of view on the object, but whatever remains in a point of view will be a subject. For this new anthropology, the perspective/perspectivism is not a representation – an image of the world – or a point of view – a spatial position from which the Subject looks at the world, but itself assumes the subject state as a concatenation of affections, habitus, biological behaviours. The subject becomes an event: not a point, but a place, a position, a site, a curve vector (Deleuze, Guattari, 1987: 29). What is called a point of view is the foundation of perspectivism. It is not exactly the abstract point of view that matters, but what remains of it within the subjective dimension. It is always a soul that includes in its folds what it takes from its point of view, in terms of habits, dispositions, or feelings.

From a psychological viewpoint, each individual encounter with the products of another culture is, like all encounters, part of the individual's personal development. We like to think that, to the optimal end, inter-cultural encounters may serve for what Gustav Jung called the transcendent function: through the use of the Other's symbols, one can become more fully oneself. To be fully oneself means to be fully situated in the context of humanity as wholeness; any attempt of separation from the whole is an act against fullness of identity. The implications for intercultural awareness are based on the recognition that there is only one Earth and one humankind, and no geopolitical distinction in East and West, or North and South, can rend humanity into different halves. According to Jung, psychic reality exists in its original oneness and human development moves toward a level of consciousness where one no longer believes in the partition but in the recognition of unity (Jung, 2002).

These reflections may provide tools for critical knowledge and experience: although we are differently structured, different experiences shape our egos and personal consciousness, our individual entities are really pathways and gateways between the collective unconscious and external reality. In terms of perspective, we cannot understand the Other's position until we understand our own, for it is always on the basis of oneself that one understands anything. Without the acknowledgement of one's own space and time as intercultural situativity, any perspective attempt is limited. (Situativity theory refers to theoretical frameworks which argue that knowledge, thinking and learning are situated – or located – in experience).

Physical spaces, loaded with shared social values, interact with virtual and imaginary spaces, just as ritual and ceremonial spaces interact with the anonymous spaces of non-places. Real visual spaces, shaped by historical events and people's heritage, as by natural transformations, are challenged by the visual hyperspaces of memories and dreams, in which ideological spaces often overlap.

In terms of research and professional practices, we ought to accept the fact that in order to take into serious account different social complexities, we have to position ourselves in a cross-cultural conceptual space from where it is rather questionable that specific operative and effective paradigms may constitute an all-encompassing frame to comprehend reality.

The analysis of perspective illustrates how it is an unusual kind of subject matter: it exists as a coherent idea, but no specific knowledge offers an adequate exposition of it. It can't be reduced to a resonant metaphor for subjectivity, or to a mere painter's technical tool, or to a conceptual hermeneutical practice, or to a canon for vision and representation. Perspective is at once a series of specific visual decisions and a powerful figure for our knowledge of the world. A new revaluation of perspective confirms the need to elaborate comprehensive forms of thought – centred and de-centred – able to grasp the plurality of questions that come from the coexistence of different fragments of reality.



Taj Mahal, March 2014 (photo: Flavia Stara)

Intertwining perspectives: The Taj Mahal, designated as the jewel of Muslim art in India and one of the universally admired masterpieces of the world's heritage is considered, from the Western perspective, to be the symbol of India. Recently, within India itself it has not been recognised as such and is questioned from a strict Hindu conservative cultural and political perspective.

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Part
4



New Media Visuality

11

Negotiating the representation of *Ubizo* (divine calling) in the South African television series *'Ubizo – The Calling'*

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Abstract

According to Zulu cosmology, *Ubizo* can be regarded as the awakening of the Shamanic state of consciousness or an activation of the pineal gland. It is still not clear whether *Ubizo* is not simply a mental disorder, and we may never reach consensus since beliefs about mental illness differ from culture to culture. This paper examines the representation of the understanding of depression in African spirituality. Considering what scholars in the field of film and television studies have written about the media representation of mental health in African societies, I see this research as an important contribution to this area generally. As a television text, *Ubizo* presents a plot where institutions and issues of the mind are cross-examined through the perspective of two cultures: that of the West versus the Nguni tradition (Southern African).

Keywords: film and television, traditional healers, Ubizo, South Africa.

Introduction

Ubizo ((2007)-directed by Krijay Governdor) is a mini-series first shown on television by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). *Show Max*, the subscription video on demand service, recently bought the rights to the mini-series. The television drama aired on an hourly slot on Thursday on the SABC 1 channel. The series was screened over a period of four weeks from 15 February to 8 March 2007. Briefly, *Ubizo* tells the story of a biochemist by the name of Nomathemba Mkhatshwa (Linda Sokhulu) who is suddenly called to become a *sangoma* (diviner). To avoid a cycle of evil in the family, she must undergo the sacred training of *ukuthwasa* (initiation into the African knowledge of healing). The series introduces the practices of Nguni traditional healers, especially how they train and heal their patients. The idea of sickness in the drama is not only limited to physical illness, as the word *isiguli* (patient) is also known as a person affected spiritually (Ngubane, 1977: 184).

This research asks what it means for a South African prime time television mini-series to represent African traditional healing through the genre of a psychological thriller. Genres on television are borrowed from several formats since television was only founded in the 1920s. It is only in 1976 that we can talk of television in South Africa, whereas film began in 1895. Glen Breezer (2008:5) argues that what separates the television format from other cultural production systems in the media is the studio system and the style. Others may argue that iconography and the narrative feature are distinctive but these are found in almost every medium. The style of television has to take into account the audience, and scheduling regimes which are often dictated by the owners of the production.

Ubizo opens to us issues that the television industry has shied away from. Depression and spirituality, for example, are rarely represented on shows, especially in narratives that link to finding solutions in 'alternative' modes of healing, such as going to *ukuthwasa*. The series acknowledges that some people are disconnected from the lives they are meant to live and are therefore exper-

iencing depression because of being displaced. The series explores the issue of identity loss as a result of migration, assimilation and displacement. The series deals with these issues by introducing the narrative of Noma and her mother who had to flee from their lands and were adopted by missionaries who trained them to think that their culture was backward and irrelevant. The effects of migration, assimilation and displacement on people's mental health deserve further scholarly study. Currently, 80% of citizens in South Africa battle with the issue of mental health.

Initially, *Ubizo* was supposed to have been a horror (Rorke, 2017). However, it could not fully follow the conventions of the horror genre. As a televisual text operating on family friendly scheduling on a public broadcaster, it could not adhere to the conventions of horror which include explicit, graphic and even extreme portrayals of violence, sex and murder. The mini-series was branded as a psychological thriller so that it could be easily identified as being among that set of texts for an already existing audience. It is common for African practises such as Voodoo or *ubungoma* to be depicted within the horror or gothic genre, but the problem with this classification is that it places spirituality themed television texts within the same categorisation as supernatural shows.

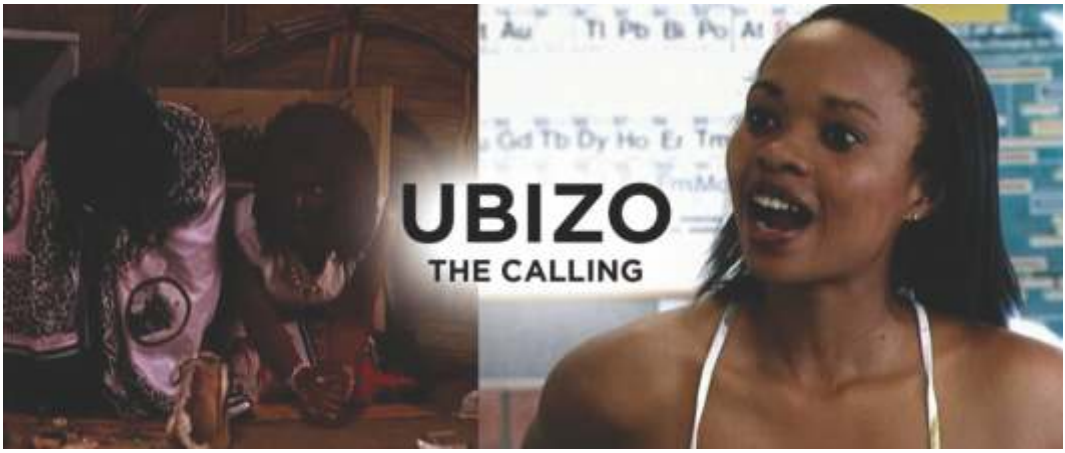
Background

Witchcraft, genital mutilation and *ubungoma* are used in cinema and television interchangeably, with little consideration paid to how these might differ. *Isangoma* and 'witches' are two different things. While a 'witch' possesses knowledge of harmful ingredients to destroy a person's well-being by killing or bewitching them, an *isangoma*, on the other hand, is a traditional healer who uses divination skills and medicine to heal. How did this come about? There are historical assumptions derived from not knowing about the practice itself. Witchcraft has been widely understood as an intention to harm or kill using medicine (Ashforth, 2005: 212). This type of medicine is usually referred to as being 'black magic'. *Ubizo* contributes to the stories that help correct a popular historical misunderstanding that *ubungoma* is witchcraft.

This research is motivated by the negative representation of *ubungoma* (traditional healing) and *izangoma* (traditional healers) on screen; that is; in fiction film and television drama. *Isangoma, izangoma* and *abangoma* are important to consider as subjects of representation, as they are a social and cultural presence in contemporary South Africa. South Africa is a democratic state in which freedom of religion and thought are constitutionally protected. Such freedoms do not make sense outside a framework of equality of sites of belief and knowledge production. Traditional healing and traditional healers form one example of these sites. Therefore, their presence on screen calls for critical vigilance to how they are represented and the implications thereof for attitudes towards African cultural practices and knowledge production.

There seems to me to be reluctance by scholars to address *ubungoma* as a site of knowledge production. Looking at what scholars have produced about knowledge related to issues of African society, I can say with some certainty that there has not been much focus on *ubungoma*. This is not to say that anthropology, philosophy and health sciences as academic disciplines have not paid attention to this discourse, as there have been scholars and authors such as

René Descartes (1649) who tried to understand spirituality by looking at the role the pineal gland played in awakening western philosophy. Credo Mutwa (1960, 2003) has studied philosophy using African spirituality and *ubunyanga*. Jo Wreford (2005) has examined African traditional healing using anthropology and *isangoma*. The anthropological research on African traditional healing is good. However, the problem has often been the failure of some researchers to suspend their own preconceived western beliefs about this mode of healing. Among some anthropologists, there is a tendency to view *ubungoma* as witchcraft, while some reduce it to being an indigenous practice. Health science's interest in *ubungoma* has worked to undermine African traditional healing. Health science researchers privilege biomedicine, as they believe it to be superior to all forms of indigenous healing systems. Unfortunately no one in the film and media discipline has taken the time to produce knowledge about African traditional healing.



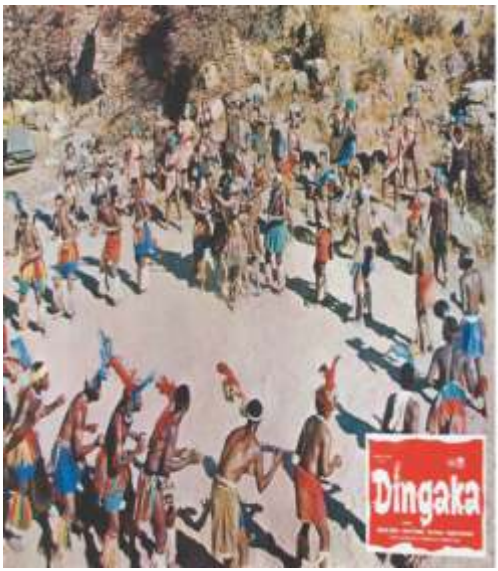
Screenshot from *Ubizo*

I have chosen *Ubizo* because the entire series deals with the issue of ubizo as suggested by the title of the series itself. *Ubizo* presents a counter-narrative to that often carried by media discourses about traditional healing. Images of characters with mental disorders seem to be frozen to the idea that some beliefs are unreasonable. Texts which often know very little about *ubungoma* liken it to witchcraft. *Dingaka* (d/ Jamie Uys, 1974), for example, presents traditional healers as nation killers with their medicine. The character of Ken Gampu as a Tswana healer gives all his clients the same medicine when they seek to eliminate their rival. Illustratively, *Dingaka* was primarily directed at a white audience who received the film as a form of entrainment that aimed to mock black practices. In the same way, *Mr. Bones* is directed towards the same audience at the expense of black people.

In the film *Ngaka* (d/ Simon Sabela, 1977), a patient is misdiagnosed as a lunatic by a Zulu traditional healer (*nyanga*) after his admission to the centre. The language used in the narrative links his condition to being mentally disturbed.

Through coded cues, *Ngaka* presents a traditional healer who harms his patient by giving the patient the wrong prescriptions. His assistant, on the other hand, harms patients by following healing procedures that are foreign to the

healing method of *ubunyanga*. *Ngaka* also showed how the traditional mode of healing complements western healthcare. At the same time, it trivialised the practice of *ubunyanga* and *ubungoma* and used the character of Mshefana (Ndaba ka Mhlongo) for comic relief. Traditional healers were depicted as fake, inexperienced healers who ripped off people for money. Such narratives are dangerous as they carry misleading information about healing in the African tradition.





Screenshots from *Dingaka* and *Ngaka*

Rationale

The process of democratisation in 1994 claimed to address racial discrimination that prevented a lot of marginal groups from accessing resources equally. 1994 marks the end of Apartheid, the end of colonisation that existed from the 18th century. Despite these changes, it does not mean that people suddenly reprogrammed themselves to believe that African spirituality is a sound belief. Within the tradition of the Christian faith, exorcism from demonic possession is possible (Nair, et al, 2011: 204), but an African with *ubizo* is usually diagnosed as being schizophrenic, bipolar or having a psychological disorder that requires psychiatric intervention, in accordance with western standards.

Traditional healing has, for many decades in South Africa and colonised Africa, been viewed simply as black magic. The archives in South Africa have captured how the colonial and apartheid governments demonised traditional healing (Masondo, 2011: 33). Colonial policies such as the Natal Code of Law of 1891 prohibited traditional healers from practising their medicine. Moreover, Apartheid laws such as the Witchcraft Suppression Act 3 of 1957 further made it impossible for traditional healing systems to thrive under an imperialism which promoted westernisation while looking down on the African indigenous systems.

Of late, being a *sangoma* is fashionable; decolonial projects and spiritual movements across a broad spectrum society embrace this identity, as do public figures who are now openly talking about it and writing books about it. Film and television too are doing the same with storyline written on behalf of *izangoma*. Nonetheless, very little research has been done on the representation of traditional healers with regards to how they are represented on film and television. *Ubungoma* is overlooked as an area worthy of academic study in the Film and Television discipline. It is as if scholars are protecting themselves from debating issues related to the discourse of mental health and spirituality on film and television. Keyan Tomaselli (2010) has written about ethnographic filmmakers reconstructing their own versions of *isangoma* in their work. Tuomi Mamatu (2012) has incorporated some of the topic in his critique of Leon Schuster and Jamie Uys by outlining the offences they get away with in mocking African practices. But since then, no one has questioned the way in which African-themed experiences adhere to particular genres.

For those who have made films about ubungoma, the storylines are either very neat or shallow as they fail to go beyond the surface in dealing with the ritual and customs of the practice, or the filmmaker bastardises the practice by linking it to sorcery and bloodthirsty witchcraft. This article is a response to the negative and misleading representations of *ubizo* in fiction film and television drama. Portrayals tend to glamorise or stigmatise this experience. It is still not clear whether *ubizo* is separate from being a mental condition. A plot of delusional persons, hallucinations and witchcraft is juxtaposed with a suggestion of African spiritualists battling with their own minds. It is not clear whether a character who has *ubizo* is actually a mental patient needing psychological intervention, because the language used to describe African medicine and spirituality in television scripts adheres to the conventions of gothic drama.

Lucia Saks (2010: 28) emphasises the importance of representation in diverse democratic societies. She asserts that the creation of the post-1994 South African nation is a celebration of diversity after a century of brutal and racist control (Saks, 2010:6). In a diverse country like South Africa, it is important for the issue of representation to be prioritised since the country has 11 official languages, a variety of ethnicities and groups, and is a multi-gendered society.

Furthermore, Nokuzola Mndende contends that through the adoption of the constitution in 1996, South Africa now gives voice to all citizens. It redresses the imbalances of the past whereby Christianity (since the arrival of missionaries in Africa) was privileged at the expense of the traditional religions in Africa. She argues that, 'This has been an advantage to the indigenous people of South Africa who are still practicing their religion because they can now declare their beliefs and practices openly' (Mndende, 2002: 1). Unfortunately, the status of traditional healers has been undermined. Currently, there is a lack of diverse images representing African spirituality and traditional healing. People with *ubizo* or *isangoma* are perceived as different from the rest of society as a result of structural inequality in society. Madness, for example, has come to be associated with those identified as having *ubizo*. This portrayal is very frequent within the television and film media; the characterisation of a spiritual person is linked to a mental disorder that fits the description of a mentally ill person.

A minority of privileged groups in South Africa produce and circulate knowledge. This elite frequently misrepresents *ubungoma* and *izangoma*. Marginal

groups, because they lack access to the spaces of knowledge production and circulation, cannot develop television programming in a way that is aligned with how they would like to be seen or understood. It is unfortunate that these marginal groups do not get involved in the production processes when such decisions are made in stories that are written on their behalf. Ultimately, the way in which marginalised groups are portrayed is defined by the director.

In a 'post'-indebted, 'post'-colonial and 'post'-apartheid South Africa, scholarship is silent on *ubungoma* in African cinema and television. Twenty-four years into 'democracy', institutions of higher learning and training dealing with film and television studies remain without even a single module or course that deals with African spirituality or African traditional healing in the media. New Age Spirituality is becoming increasingly popular within academic and arts industries. Films like, *Chula, A Peaceful Warrior, Sankofa, Daughter of the Dust, Samsara* and many others offer an alternative narrative about the god of the self. On television, *Ubizo* has depicted African spirituality rather than portraying a *sangoma* who has already gone through training.

Synopsis

Nomathemba (Noma) is unable to sleep soundly, experiences night terrors, has visions of unfamiliar places, sees figures that nobody else can see, and feels inexplicably anxious. Taking Western medication to suppress her symptoms does not help. Only when she acknowledges the calling from her ancestors and starts training as a *sangoma* and begins to understand the psychological process she is undergoing do her symptoms subside. This phenomenon is known in Zulu communities to happen to those who receive the calling (Crawford & Lipsedge, 2004:137).

Noma, a scientist from the city, has come to consult with the *sangoma*. But actually what she wants is to observe how *izangoma* dig their plants so that she can steal one for her research. She pays little attention to the divination performed by the woman *sangoma* for her. Thus, she ignores the *sangoma* when she informs her that there will come a time when her feet will fail her and that will be the time when she is supposed to answer her calling by becoming a *sangoma*. Firstly, Noma is not familiar with the ways of the Nguni tradition. The ordinary world for her involves being a scientist who believes in proof, nothing else but evidence for every argument made. And so she ignores the prediction and continues in her mission: stealing the plants for her research. The calling, however, follows her.

Edlozini is a fictional nation of the Swati people and it is not clear where it is situated, since Nomathemba resides in Johannesburg and has to drive a long distance to the area. From the language they speak, it may lie near the borders of Mpumalanga or even be in Swaziland as this is where most Swati speakers are found. Whilst Johannesburg is filled with wealth and technological advancement, Edlozini, on the other hand, is anything but developed in terms of technology. The *mise en scène* informs us of the *rondavels* and *kraals*. But the people have access to electricity, while their water is collected from the nearby river. The laboratories Noma works in are foreign to the local people. As a result traditional healers in the area largely rely on raw material; they dig

up indigenous medicine which they process by cooking and storing for their clients who come from as far away as Johannesburg. Noma comes to know of this place through her research on Alzheimer's.

In the end, the battle comes to Noma's daughter, Thandeka. Thandeka fights for her life in hospital, while her mother trains as a *sangoma* in an attempt to try and find solutions to return her daughter to life as she is unresponsive in an Intensive Care Unit. While this action is taking place, Noma has to fight Phil from taking over the land of the people without their consent. Additionally, she has to fight the evil powers of Zondi, who is the powerful witch responsible for herdaughter's plight. In a fight that takes a shocking turn inside a cave, Zondi lands a blow to Noma's newly acquired powers. There is resolution when Phil finally gets arrested, along with the corrupt official, and Thandeka recovers. The series ends with Noma telling her family that she still has to complete her training as a *sangoma*. By the end of this narrative, it is made clear to the audience that her choice to answer her calling has proved to be worthwhile since she now has healing powers that she will merge with her profession as a biochemist.

Women and Knowledge Production

Most *sangomas* are women while most *inyangas* are men. Mutwa himself declared himself as a high *sanusi*, meaning his rank as a man ranks higher than the *sangomas* that he trains. When looking at the archives of indigenous knowledge, we find that female *sangomas* existed before male ones (Mutwa, 2003: XX). 'Ancient shamanism was not an individual phenomenon but something that was practiced by the female group. And the power of the female group is biologically rooted in menstruation and the blood mysteries of birth' (McAndrew, 2006). The original isangoma or divine healers were women because the figure of the female body was a place known to be sacred enough to carry the rituals of the clan properly. A stronger sense of divine power was taken to reside with women as women are the bearers and givers of life. However, it is unknown when the shift to male *isangoma* occurred. Religion at some point controlled politics, and knowledge was no longer free. In South Africa it was once a crime to be a diviner.

Looking at things through post-colonial and post-modern lenses, one can identify factors which have hindered women's acquisition of power-knowledge. Black women's lives have been shaped by oppression and patriarchal powers. Because of cultural taboos, women are somewhat hindered in accomplishing that which their male counterparts have. For example, male authority within the home has contributed to decisions about how and when women can become *isangoma*. Additionally, high levels of domestic violence in homes have also contributed to who produces knowledge.

However, African women have claimed their distinctive voice by bringing together the themes of enculturation and liberation within the vocation of *ubungoma*. They question the romantisation of traditional African cultures, pointing out their oppression as women. They also critique the sexism of the Christian tradition and its alliance with colonialism as they find positive resources within to emancipate themselves. There is a larger number of female *isangomas* than male. Because of colonial and apartheid historical narratives the Western



Screenshot from *Ubizo* (Noma in a village)

academy doubts the existence of ancestor spirits. As a result, knowledge about herbs is slowly forgotten. But Noma acknowledges and tries to restore dignity to this knowledge. She serves as an agent recovering indigenous knowledge and ways of collecting it. Through her spirits she is able to interpret meanings which she also merges with western science. The series shows that the power of knowing is not just possible in one way; there are several ways of making information meaningful. Nevertheless, Noma's role empowers the modern black woman who is informed by her spirituality.

Screenshot from *Ubizo* (Noma, a scientist)





Screenshot from *Ubizo* (Noma in the laboratory)

Today the context of *ubungoma* has changed from the indigenous form it used have. *Izangomas* would have a medical practice at home or in the mountains and clients would come to him or her for consultation. *Izangomas* are now part of the new world, in so much as they attend to their spiritual calling while maintaining their careers. Due to urbanisation, democracy and the changing world of science and technology, most *sangomas* are now found in the cities, working in professional jobs which require professional training such as gaining a tertiary qualification.

Moreover, modernisation has forced *ubungoma* to incorporate western science, which mainly deals with modern technology, into its practice. This is demonstrated in the series as Noma's training in both western and traditional healing allows her to be a vessel to both epistemologies. She now works in the laboratories as a scientist, and consults with her clients as a traditional healer, digging up herbs which she will later analyse using the machines in her lab. Increasing numbers of women work in the workplace nowadays. Noma does likewise, and manages both her calling and her career. These two activities are complementary as she uses her calling to find answers to her work as a scientist looking for cures for brain diseases such as Alzheimer's. In the series we see organic plants being tested at laboratories. Nevertheless, this proves that synthesised medicine cannot provide cures to each and every disease. The series also shows how indigenous knowledge systems can complement and enhance modern medicine in the production of knowledge about healing.

As a modern woman, Noma wears western clothing, but by not letting go of her vocational clothes – which are codes – she can be identified as someone who has been called to the profession of *ubungoma*. For example, in the scene in which she goes to pick up her daughter from the hospital, she has wrapped her blue cloth around her waist to indicate that her training is still in

progress. She is exposed to people by whom, and facilities in which, her ongoing training is not appreciated. We assume that by the time she completes her training she will go back to her modern clothing, as a professional and urban woman. This is suggested by the clothing she wears when she temporarily returns to work as a biochemist. She wears her white coat, but has red and white beads around her neck to indicate that she is of the *bangoma* practice.

When speaking about the role of women as knowledge producers, it is also useful to consider the relationship between female and male characters in the series. For a long time male characters have enjoyed being given the leading roles, which place them in a superior position than their counterparts – women (as well as the LGBT community). Furthermore, the narrative has always centred on the male hero as the one who sets outs to find knowledge as he sees fit. This tradition has always kept female characters simply as bodies that are just there and whom we never really get to know or identify with. So, Noma represents alternative thinking as she leads the series. She is a female who sets out to seek knowledge using her own intuition and thinking.

The role of women in television has been linked to submission and male objectification of women for quite some time. But this is subject to change as we now see women taking leading roles. Additionally, their roles are no longer to simply give pleasure or look good for their male counterparts. We see this with the characterisation of Noma. As a black woman, she represents her gender and race. For many years black characters have been inferior to other racial groups on screen. They have either been absent or encumbered with negative roles. Noma is a strong willed and powerful woman who uses her capabilities and intuition even when patriarchal forces threaten to deter her.

Blood and cults

Ubizo attempts to open up the secrets of training under Nguni diviners. *Ubungoma* has remained secret for a long time because of the fragility of African knowledge production, which is always at risk of being stolen by other cultures without acknowledgement. There are rules to ensure that knowledge is only shared with people within the practice. How people conduct the process of *ubungoma* must reflect the spiritual, historical and scientific essence of the tradition. Carrying out the acts of blood drinking, cleansing, purging, detoxing does not at all mean that the person is more enlightened than those who have not been trained. However, these rituals allow for a healing process to take place, to make well that which is not right.

Illustratively, the series links sacrificial animal blood to gothic stories whose origins are in the West. During *imvuma kufa*, Noma goes through *imvuma kufa* without performinga ritual that involves getting rid of the illness. 'During imvuma kufa, the umkhwetha (novice) changes from ordinary clothing into the attire which he has been instructed to wear by the ancestors who communicate, through dreams, the type of animal skin or beads which need to be worn by the novice' (Mndende, 2002: 81). From this, it is required that the initiate drinks blood from this goat and wears its skin as wristbands while the bile is put on the head of the initiate. Red ochre will be applied all over the body. All this is to symbolise that the called is with spirits and is currently undergoing training. Ultimately, these beats are missing from the script, potentially making the sequence

confusing when we suddenly see Noma with a goat's bladder on her head without narrative explanations of how it ended up there. According to the narrative offered in *Ubizo, Imvuma* is depicted as a pagan ritual that is set to do harm to animals. Even Noma refuses to drink the blood of the animal and her daughter loses consciousness on the spot, leading to Noma's gobela's (guide) sudden death. In this narrative, Zondi's spirit is alive in Mary, who becomes an icon of witchcraft throughout the series. Since the text operates in accordance with the tenets of the gothic genre, it misrepresents *imvuma kufa* as it is taken out of context.



Screenshot from *Ubizo* (Imvuma)

The second meaning ascribed to blood in the series is the suggestion that it is the source of everything, even power. People are killed in the series due to the desire to be wealthy. The opening credits are in a large red font, written in blood. The text reads, in *Swati, Ingati- ingati, Ingati yakho ingumfthombo wako konkhe*- Your blood is a source of everything.

The series' initial sequences focus on a criminal partnership between Phil Monroe as the representative of MNC Global and the corrupt official at the Department of Land Affairs. Global wants a stake in Edlozini's rich land after the discovery of herbs that can maximise profits from a face cream the MNC wants to manufacture by recruiting Noma, who is unaware of where her research is going. To achieve their aims, they bribe the official to release the land to them without consulting the local stakeholders. We learn that Phil was sent from the United States as one of the representatives of the Global Company: a gigantic multinational corporation. Phil is a black American, whose history and background we do not know. But judging from the manner in which he sees the rural people of Edlozini, we nonetheless realise that he is not aware of the history of the place or of the role that traditional healers play in the knowledge pro-



Screenshot from *Ubizo* (Opening credits)

duction of the country. Speaking to the issues of intellectual property theft and Neoliberalism, *Ubizo* suggests a reason why traditional healing has tended to be kept secret from the public. This knowledge has remained sacred and hidden from the public because missionaries and colonialists used to take information about natural medicine without giving credit to its founders (Ashforth, 2005: 217). This is still evident in cases today when western companies come to Africa mainly to steal indigenous knowledge about plants like the African potato, Blue Cycad, aloe and others. These natural herbs have been privatised under western pharmaceutical companies that use them for their own benefit without crediting the original founders of this knowledge (Zulu, 2005). Noma lies to Phil by telling her she needs to be closer to the people she is doing research on, so that she can limit potential exploitation that may result from him knowing such information. He is portrayed as a power hungry mongrel who kills to get what he wants. He bribes Mary with gifts so that she tells him about Noma's whereabouts. Moreover, he hires people to murder Noma's friend, Maya, before she uncovers his true identity and his intentions regarding the land of Edlozini.

Nevertheless, the series pays tribute to the deaths of innocent people whose bodies are mutilated so that medicine can be made from their parts, which in turn enriches the sorcerer. Here, the director (Govendor) plays with the notion of witchcraft to connote vultures such as the Western neoliberal companies and organisations. Similarly to a witch, neoliberalism is an invincible force that operates namelessly without anyone really acknowledging where it comes from or how it tends to contribute to crises. Multiple corporations from the West have freedom to enter and exploit the sovereignty of other states, especially those with weak leadership.



Screenshot from *Ubizo* (Zondi)

If Noma's ancestors had willed it, she would be shot dead too. Phil manages to track Noma down since he discovers she lied to him about continuing her research in the *Bundus*. Instead she went for *ukuthwasa* and she progressed in her training. She is even able to find the correct missing bulb to add to her mixture to cure Alzheimer's. Not only does Noma have to fight the bloodthirsty Zondi, but she must defeat the power-hungry Phil. In the end, Phil is arrested for murder and corruption. It is a pity that there is no policy to charge imperialists for all the blood they continue to spill in non-western countries. Unfortunately, the witch keeps on lurking.

Zombie and horror

Science fiction horror presents itself as a reflection of postmodernism. Its main feature is to critically evaluate the influence of science and technology in the modern world. The story forces audiences to look inside themselves and outside, beyond the setting of society and its surroundings (2002: 6). Zombies in films, for example, have become instruments used to speak to dire societal issues. In so doing, the character of a zombie or a monster plays an interesting role in horror whereby it becomes a vehicle for the director to convey what is suppressed in society. McGee (2014: 196) argues that zombies have come to mean anything bad that is most likely to get much worse. He captures this very well when he contends that, 'zombies have become the favourite metaphor for all things modern. The financial crisis of 2007 has been blamed, among other things, on 'zombie banks' and 'zombie mortgages,' which, if taken literally, would seem ironically to claim that the financial system itself is a zombie—as well, it would seem, as those it consumes' 196). Besides monsters being fictional characters

that have come to be associated with horror, they nonetheless mirror certain ideas and individuals from the society we live in. Zondi is a superficial character, a monster, an invisible zombie, that allows the creators to continue the old patterns of stereotyping African cultures and masculinity without offending traditional healers in South Africa. Unlike the policies of the past that were abolished in 1989 and which banned traditional healers from practising their medicine, the 'new' South Africa ensures that everyone has a right to religion. The Constitution seeks to ensure that their rights (including how they are represented) are respected at all times.

Zondi's portrayal suggests that he lacks a human spirit and reasoning. Nevertheless this representation is taken from earlier imagery of black people, who were projected as savage humans incapacitated by lesser reasoning capability and lacking a spiritual heart, thus the need to convert them to Christianity. It is here also that Zondi is a monster that cannot relate to humans and he uses violence to get across his messages. Zondi as a supernatural monster with a blackened face emerges from spring water and is ready to kill anyone who gets in his way of acquiring Thandeka's blood. As an evil spirit, as depicted in the series, he represents witchcraft. He wears black and has smeared black make-up on his face and long-locked hair. 'The Africa that exists in the imagination of whiteness does not have to be as close to reality as possible, even if it is prostituted as such' (Mamatu, 2012: 21). As argued by Mamatu, African experiences have been taken for granted in terms of how they have been represented.

Ubizo – The Calling brilliantly subverts the narrative of the Black person who aspires to whiteness and therefore lives happily ever after. However, the extent of psychological oppression of Blackness is evident through the racist hegemonic Western ideology that is presented visually and through narrative. Noma is slim, attractive and light-skinned, with relaxed hair – markers of the Western South African standard of beauty (Sanger, 2009:139). Whereas the evil spirit plaguing her is presented as a Black man with *pitch-black* skin, and long dreadlocks, qualities presented as undesirable and 'wild' (Sanger, 2009:142). What has become to be known as 'black face' is a sport reserved for amusing whites at the expense of black people. During this ritual, a white person applies black make-up that will enable him/her to appear as if he/she is a black person. The colour black has come to connote anything ugly or bad in its nature. Racism towards African people began earlier than slavery, however this period marked the time when it became legal to discriminate against Africans who were being shipped from Africa to all the continents of the world, especially to the Americas. The end of slavery also heightened another form of racism whereby Africa was invaded by the same slave masters and their descendants, enforcing the very same treatment of the native people. The colour black has become likened to ugliness and dirt. Similarly, Govender presents black masculinity in the same manner. For her, black masculinity and African spirituality equals violence and barbarism. Evidently, Zondi has a black face in the series to make him appear darker than the 'usual skin tone of Africans near the Sahara'. Without doubt, the intended message here is to continue the idea of 'witchdoctors' as savages who have unkempt hair and are dangerous to their own people.

Further, Zondi seeks blood to further prove that African spirituality is rooted in bloodsucking monsters who are obsessed by the blood of young girls. This portrayal offers no distinction between witchcraft and healing. Conforming to



Screenshot from *Ubizo* (Zondi)

the conventions of a psychological thriller with monster characters, Zondi's characterisation is an epitome of patriarchal horror whereby male monsters seek young girls for the pleasures of sex and blood, as seen in films like *Psycho* (1960).

Conclusion

Ubizo – The Calling has given us an insight into an issue which is very rarely seen on television. *Ubungoma* is barely seen as a useful mode of healing. Instead, all we ever hear is the attack on indigenous knowledge as being backward and evil, while there seems to be perpetual praise for western healthcare. In the post-apartheid South Africa, *Ubizo* is one of the few television dramas that appear to be seriously reflecting on traditional practices. However, it falls short of linking this experience to properties of western understanding of African spirituality. By positioning the series as a psychological thriller, the experience of *ubizo* is linked to the conventions of horror, where monsters and blood cults point to suppressed human desires. The dangers of this choice include perpetuating a representation of what traditional healing means that may not necessarily correspond to any truth.

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12

Visual Communication 3.0: Communicating visually in the 21st century – using modern technologies and understanding various recipients' needs

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Abstract

Visual communication systems (VCSs) are made to communicate visually. This statement seems obvious, however many professionals involved in the VCS production process neglect (or consciously choose not) to include all target groups, so that modern VCSs are not able to communicate with more than two to three groups of recipients at the same time. Is that enough? What groups should they cover? Why? How can it be achieved? The aim of this research is to create an international standard (or rather a simple-to-use guide) that would be useful both for the designers and for the people who need and order various VCSs. To accomplish this task, much wider, deeper and long-term research is necessary. This article outlines the problem and suggests possible solutions, followed by numerous examples.

Keywords: visual communication, visual literacy, standardisation, typography, pictograms, globalisation, cultural differences

Introduction

The history of visual communication starts around 15000 years BC, when the first recorded hand-painted images appear on rocks. Later, ideograms, hieroglyphs, alphabets develop. Finally, and perhaps surprisingly, after hundreds of years of typography development, including the use of icons and symbols, emoji language appears. Let us consider rock paintings as 1.0 (or 1st generation visual communication) that consists only of simple and literal images. Then 2.0 would apply to everything that humanity develops later – a composition of images, symbols, texts and – in some cases – branding. Examples stretch from medieval prayer books and illuminated manuscripts, through maps, encyclopedias and detailed technical designs dating from 1600, to today's advertising posters and road signs. Assessing all forms of modern visual communication, it seems that there is not much that could be done to improve it. Or is there?

In the following article I will argue that we should think about visual communication 3.0. The '3.0' stands for 3rd generation visual communication, which uses all the tools developed so far, extended by deep analysis and the latest achievements of technology to maximise the efficiency of any VCS, in other words: to increase as much as possible the number of recipients that will understand the message.

The major changes in developed societies that have taken place within the last three decades, combined with rapid technology development, result in greater needs as well as much better ways to fulfil them. The world is shrinking – people are travelling, visiting, cooperating, buying and selling on global markets, and thanks to the Internet they are consuming lots of information created in almost every place in the world. We no longer spend our whole life in one, well-known, friendly place, surrounded by people that have the same national or cultural background as we do. Most of us have at least one friend, colleague or employee who does not speak our language or who professes another faith. Therefore, we have learned that the world is not uniform, and this should be reflected in the way we communicate. This especially applies to visual com-



Beijing Capital International Airport BCIA interior signs (Source: Wikimedia Commons, photo: Zhanyanguange, published under CC-BY-SA licence, 2010)

munication, since its main purpose is to communicate with groups of people, rather than with individuals; and the greater number of recipients to receive the message, the better. That is why one of the trends in visual communication systems development is the expansion of the audience. That expansion is not only limited to different nationalities or cultures. There are many other groups that have been ignored for centuries – the illiterate, the visually impaired, the mentally challenged, to name but a few. This was caused by two main factors: sociological (exclusion due to lack of knowledge and experience) and technological (limited tools to communicate in various ways simultaneously). Unfortunately, in the 21st century, many designers and people involved in VCS development still tend to think that the target audience is uniform and consists of groups of people with easily described parameters, like age or nationality.

Today, whenever working on a visual communication system, one must always define the main target, the audience. This is the largest group of recipients that will be receiving messages through this system. Once defined, every part of the system, like language, colours, fonts, symbols and shapes, is analysed through the prism of this group's needs. Naturally, there are some other targets taken into consideration, but, in most situations, additional groups are defined based on popular guidelines and stereotypes, like adding an English explanation to every information sign at Beijing airport (Illustration 1.) because there are many foreigners that cannot decipher characters written in Simplified Chinese. Moreover, it is common to see how designers sacrifice visual consistency when they have to add additional content at the last stage of design development



Information signage at the airport in Amsterdam. Note the lack of consequence in the multilingual approach: only one phrase is in Dutch and English, using the same font as a nearby subtitle written in English; various font and pictograms sizes (Source: Pexels.com, published under CC0 licence)

(Illustration 2.). Based on my own experience, the organisations ordering VCSs rarely perform deep enough analysis to include all required elements in the system specification they prepare.

There are other factors that define the audience, besides the spoken/written language. These are, for example: age, physical condition, mental condition, social status and cultural background. To properly address the needs of these groups, professionals involved in the VCS production process should have at least basic knowledge about the audience's possibly limited visual (and sometimes overall) literacy. They should also be aware of all available tools that can help to improve the VCS efficiency in that matter: translation, language simplification, pictograms, digital displays, interactive devices, personalised messages using dedicated devices or smartphones, global positioning system, 3D prints, induction loops, Augmented Reality and many, many more. So the term 'Visual Communication 3.0' stands for VCS designed with the widest possible audience in mind, using all available tools and technologies.

It is worth mentioning that there are documents which already standardise some specific visual communication issues, like packaging (ISO 55.020), device operation manuals (ISO 13485), requirements for translation services (ISO 17100) or testing methods of the comprehensibility of graphical symbols (ISO 9186-1). Each presents a comprehensive approach with tens or hundreds of guidelines, often based on regulations, less often on real-life user behaviours. However, the aim of this research is to create a user-friendly and less formal set of guides that will be used willingly by the people involved in VCS design.

Step 1 – defining the target groups

It has been proven during thousands of advertising campaigns that addressing all possible recipients at once reduces the impact – in the case of visual communication it will make the message blurry, less readable. Therefore the target groups must be chosen carefully – based on statistics, empirical knowledge and sometimes on a hunch. The key is to create a system that has a perfect balance between communicativeness and complexity. This balance can be (and should be) measured during every stage of production and implementation. Each element can be tested by the same method applied for testing the comprehension and effectiveness of pictograms, described in ISO 9186: if the message is perfectly or almost perfectly understood by at least 67% of recipients, the element is accepted.

The deep analysis of the target groups may reduce the time needed to find the perfect balance mentioned above. Instead of defining one or two main target groups, the population of recipients is first checked to see if it meets any of the special conditions (like limited literacy issues). Then, by intersecting these conditions with statistics (global, local, self-measured and assumed), a list of requirements is prepared. The VCS created with that list in mind is expected to reach the 67% intelligibility level sooner than with the standard approach. The factors that need to be analysed are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Relevant factors for deep analysis

Factor	Suggested options	Description
Age	children under 7 children 7 - 13 teenagers and young adults 14-25* adults 26-40 older adults 40-60 elderly 60+	There is a significant difference in literacy between children and adults. In developed countries children start reading at age 5-7. While most of the adults are literate, older adults and elderly people have various impairments. As well as having physical effects (weakened sight or hearing), natural ageing also affects cognitive thinking (Jolles, Verhey, Riedel, Houx 1995) and memory (Kester, Benjamin, Castel, Craik 2002).
Gender	male female other**	In the modern world gender differences tend to blur. However, while researchers search for evidence of gender equity, many differences in literacy still appear in statistical data, e.g. in Lesotho the difference between literacy among men and women is 18.2%, in favour of women (UNESCO, 2015).

* In some cases 'adults' should be defined also by the national definition of being an adult (e.g. 18 years old in Poland or 21 years old in the USA). It is irrelevant in the scope of literacy (sadly), but may define which messages are necessary for

Nationality and languages spoken (or at least understood in writing and listening)	For example: Polish, English, Ukrainian, Russian, Simplified Chinese, Kannada...	Nationality in this case defines the main language a target group can understand. In some cases it cannot be limited to a country. In India there are 415 languages and about 1600 dialects in use (Ethnologue 2017). In such countries a more precise description of languages spoken and understood is necessary.
Literacy (ability to read in at least one language)	A weighted average of literacy rates of the largest national target groups (defined in the previous step).	Overall literacy rate defines how letters and words are likely to be understood by recipients. A message board written in all four languages understood in Burkina Faso (French, Mòoré, Fulani and Dioula; André, 2007) will still not be understood by 64% of recipients. With illiterate recipients in mind, the messages will have to be communicated using images, symbols and spoken language.
Sight impairment	Age-Related Macular Degeneration Cataract Diabetic Retinopathy Glaucoma Myopia Retinitis Pigmentosa Presbyopia Colour Blindness Blindness	Sight impairment limits visual literacy in various ways, depending on the actual disease. To overcome these limitations a more complex designing approach is necessary. In extreme cases all visual information will have to be passed aurally. This topic is described in more detail later in the article.
Hearing impairment	Hearing Aid users Postlingual deafness Prelingual deafness	For the purpose of creating a VCS, only three groups are considered. Hearing Aid users will need additional communication techniques in situations where visual communication is enhanced with sound (e.g. multimedia content, warning sounds). Recipients with postlingual deafness have lost their hearing after learning their language, therefore they 'know' many sounds, including spoken language, and can often read lips or imagine particular sounds by reading written descriptions. People suffering prelingual deafness, if not treated when they are young enough, will only be able to read written words and understand sign language.

the recipients and which not (e.g. there's no need to put a message 'we're not serving alcoholic drinks to persons under 21' in a nightclub in which minors are not allowed).

** Since there are tens of different types of gender, some scientifically confirmed, some not (Larsson, 2017), it would not be reasonable to list them all in this document. For VCS design purposes, it is enough to specify whether there is a possibility of any 'other' gender members feeling uncomfortable or disrespected or not understanding the message correctly.

Level of understanding of the subject	Professional Basic understanding Uninitiated	A professional could be a graphic designer, an economist or a surfer – a person who is used to communicating using a specific language that his or her colleagues understand. A person with basic understanding of the subject could be a designer in an art gallery (understands aesthetic values and is aware of the effort put into the artwork, but may have problems understanding an art critic). Uninitiated persons are the graphic designer and art critic trying to talk about electromagnetic field equations. In other words, the *level of understanding of the subject* by the recipients defines the words, abbreviations, graphical symbols, etc. that can be used in VCS.
Mental disability	Low IQ Autism Asperger Syndrome	Mental disabilities limit the literacy of a recipient. A person with a significantly lower IQ (whatever the cause) may not understand the message properly or even notice it. While autistic people and those with Asperger Syndrome require special communication techniques to be used or need the amount of information given at once to be reduced. This subject is discussed/outlined in more details further in the article.
Physical disability	Limited access to space Limited access to information Ability to reach the place	People with physical disabilities are one of the groups that have been present in VCS design for a long time. Thanks to hundreds of ISO and EU documents that describe their special needs and ways to meet them, followed by numerous funding programs, physically disabled people can move around and function in public space in a much more comfortable way than people with non-physical disabilities. When designing VCSs it is important to consider people with limited access to certain spaces. This will require either separate signage (pathways, destinations) or additional description (e.g. additional multimedia content with description for people who can't access certain places but would like to gain knowledge about them).

		Another important group are wheelchair users, who will encounter problems accessing certain information (high-mounted wall signs or descriptions on high tables). Lastly, it is important to establish whether a physically disabled person can access the place by him/herself or not. If not, the VCS can be designed to communicate with the assistants of the disabled, and thus be less complex.
Ethnicity and cultural background	Define based on empirical data	Ethnicity and cultural background may have an influence on the way recipients understand symbols, colours. In extreme cases, poor understanding can lead to unintended offence.

Step 2 – Deep analysis

A deeper analysis is similar to the simple one. Once the target group is defined using certain factors, these are used to create a list of questions that need to be answered. The answers can be found in three main sources of information:

a. trustworthy statistics based on research (e.g. UNESCO report about literacy),
b. empirical data gathered from similar places (e.g. staff of the local museum),
c. assumptions based on common sense, experience and knowledge of the designer.

For example, let us consider a place that is visited by many different people – a museum. Let us start with parameters that are easiest to estimate, like age, gender and nationality/language – in all three cases, the answer would be 'all possible' as it is easy to imagine a family consisting of a five-year-old girl, her 35 year-old father and his 65 year-old father, all coming from a foreign country and only the oldest one speaking the local language. This approach clearly does not help to narrow the target at all. Yet a deeper analysis can. Table 2 shows how a deeper analysis based only on common sense and basic knowledge improves the results by narrowing the target in terms of age, gender and nationality.

For example, if the museum considered is located in Szczecin, Poland – the nationalities we would have to consider are Polish, German (closest neighbour) and Ukrainian (the largest local minority). And since the most commonly used foreign language in Poland is English, the 'nationality/language' parameter should be set to: Polish, German, Ukrainian and English.

The next set of parameters describe the target group communication abilities: literacy, eyesight, hearing, mental or physical condition. Literacy can be estimated based on location, for example in Sierra Leone only 48.1% of the population can read, while in Latvia this number reaches 99.9% (UNESCO 2015). Therefore, if in our museum most of the visitors come from Poland, the literacy rate is 99.8%. To predict the number of mentally, physically, visually or aurally impaired visitors is more difficult, but possible. It can be based on global statistics, statistics from a similar place in a similar location (e.g. another museum) or data provided by any local NGO focused on social inclusion. If we only base our estimation on global statistics, we would have to assume that 20% of our visitors might suffer for some kind of mental illness (National Institute of Mental Health. www.nimh.nih.gov, 2015) and over 14% report problems with basic activities such as walking or bending (EULFS 2011). As for the blind and other visually impaired people, there are 285 million of them around the globe (39 million blind and 246 million having low vision), being approximately 3.7% of the world population (WHO, 2010), so without empirical data we can already consider that some visitors will have difficulties reading and seeing the signage or exhibit descriptions. As far as sight impaired or physically disabled persons are concerned, most of us have a basic understanding of their special needs. Therefore an average designer will know that a blind person cannot see the message, so it has to be delivered aurally or by touch, and a person in a wheelchair cannot use all the paths in the building, so some wall signs might have to be duplicated. The deeper analysis however requires us to look closely at many other limited literacy cases, such as the illiteracy of the very young children, Alzheimer's disease among elderly people or dyslexia at any age.

Table 2: Analysis of VCS target group visiting a museum in Szczecin, Poland

Parameter	Simple analysis result	→	Deeper analysis result
Age	all possible	Visual communication system is not addressed to those who are too young or too old to walk around the museum by themselves.	6-99 years old
Gender	all possible	Visual communication systems in public places should not favour any gender.	all possible, consider friendly signage for other genders as well

Parameter	Simple analysis result	→	Deeper analysis result
Nationality / language	all possible	The largest group of visitors will understand the local language. The second largest group could either represent neighbouring countries or the largest local national minority. Lastly, most foreign tourists will expect to communicate using one of the most popular foreign languages in this area.	Polish, German, Ukrainian, English
Literacy	Literate and non-literate	Estimation based on nationalities and their literacy rates for people over 15.	99.8% (Poland), 99.0% (Germany), 99.8% (Ukraine) Assumed literacy for children and teenagers 6-15: 99%

The following table (Table 3.) is a set of examples that illustrate the suggested approach. As mentioned before, it is not yet the ultimate list of confirmed solutions – for that further research is planned.

Table 3: Limited communication examples cases.

Case	Symptoms in scope of visual communication	General guidelines for the designers
Intellectual disability[2]	Minimal intellectual disability (13.6%) – slightly limited ability to associate, may have difficulties deciphering acronyms.	Reduce usage of non-literal symbols and acronyms.
	Mediocre intellectual disability (2.1%) – limited ability of learning and remembering, lower care of own safety.	Avoid non-literal symbols and acronyms, increase repetition of messages, especially those related to safety.
	Severe intellectual disability (0.1%) – no ability to live, move and communicate independently/alone, always assisted by non-disabled person.	No limits – all messages are addressed to assisting persons.
Autistic disorder / childhood autism	Limited interpersonal communication skills, avoiding physical contact, not following spoken instructions, may react unpredictably to sudden sounds, very well developed visual and spatial skills. (Caniahan, Williamson, Christman)	Reduce amount of sound and multimedia elements that can distract recipient when receiving important messages, increase number of images and literal symbols.

[2] There are many factors and methods of measuring the level of intellectual disability. Given the controversy over IQ testing, it is difficult to specify fixed IQ ranges, to define problems people with intellectual disability may encounter while reading and understanding particular visual messages. Therefore, instead of using IQ levels, a simplified division is proposed. Using normalised IQ distribution in the general population (Kaufman 2009) it has been estimated how many people with minimal, mediocre or severe intellectual disability are in a sample group of 1000. Naturally, these results may vary depending on location.

Asperger syndrome	Intense preoccupation with a narrow subject, in some cases inability to understand non-literal messages (Casement, Carpio de los Pinos, Forrester-Jones 2017)	Messages should be 'packed' (divide content, use frames, blocks etc.), strictly avoid non-literal symbols and texts. Environment should be quiet and have no visually or aurally distracting elements (such as high contrast images not related to the message that is being communicated).
Presbyopia and other sight imperfections	Inability to read small fonts or complex/small/low contrast images.	Use large fonts, avoid complex symbols, reduce colour palette to 3 colours (e.g. black and red text on white background).
Colour blindness	Inability to distinguish colours (some or all of them, depending on type)	Use monochrome symbols, images and texts, avoid gradients.
Glaucoma	Limited field of view, in some cases high sensitivity to direct light (causes pain)	Avoid very wide elements (e.g. information plate that is 1.5m wide while font size indicates it should be read from the distance of 50 cm), increase low-light readability.
Cataracts	Blurred vision, lower light sensitivity	Increase contrast, increase light/space between elements and shapes.
Physical disability	In some cases they look from a lower height (e.g. wheelchair users), in others they are unable to look up; they usually need to use specific paths (e.g. excluding stairs), might have problems reaching interface elements, such as buttons, touch screens, etc.	Include separate signs and information points that are designed to be used by people who are physically disabled. For multi-floor buildings with lifts, increase the quantity of directions to the nearest lift.



Visualisation of six different sight impairments (bottom) compared to normal vision (top).
(Source: Eye Disease Simulations in National Eye Institute,
https://nei.nih.gov/health/examples#1, accessed in December 2017)

Ethnicity and cultural background

Ethnicity and cultural background are the most difficult (combined) factor and nearly impossible to standardise. They combine all delicate matters such as race, attitude to cultural heritage, various definitions of patriotism, political preferences, gender issues, stereotypes and political correctness. The difficulty lies both in specifying these matters (there are too many of them to make it simple) as well as in trying to assign them to specific groups (e.g. political preferences can't be clearly assigned based on age, gender or nationality). Since the aim of the research is to create a simple-to-use guide, these issues have to be specified based on empirical data that can be gathered from various sources (e.g. museum staff, subway ticket inspectors, local NGOs or ethnic minority representatives).

The main task in this step is to check, whether symbols, words, abbreviations, colours used in the VCS might be misunderstood or deemed to be offensive by any of the target group representatives. A common issue is a toilet sign that is understood by all, but could be offensive for people having a gender other than male or female; or an abbreviation that denotes a curse in a language of a local national minority. The same symbol can have a several meanings. For example, the hand sing 'OK' (Illustration 4.) would mean 'I'm alright' or 'I agree' in the US, but in several countries in Eastern Europe it means 'zero', while in South American countries it denotes 'anus' and might be considered offensive. Another good example could be the 'Ichtys' symbol, commonly called 'the Jesus fish'. It is widely used to identify people as Christians, but many years before it gained its popular meaning it was used in pagan cultures to describe the fertility and sexuality of a woman. Another good example of symbols or images being understood differently can be found in the popular social media or mobile text messages' emoji language. A woman with crossed arms (Illustration 5.) was originally designed to mean 'stay away from me', while in Spain it is often used as 'Kung Fu fighting' (Leonore Hinz Dresner, Herring, 2010, Griffiths, 2015).

An 'OK' sign (Source: Wikimedia Commons, author: NicP, used under CC-BY-SA-3.0 licence)



An emoji pictogram – 'stay away from me' (Source: emojiisland.com)







The International Symbol of Access (former version), (Public domain image)
The International Symbol of Access (new version announced in 2013) (Public domain image)

There is also a trend to abandon symbols that might carry secondary, often negative meaning – the international symbol of access (a person on a wheelchair), commonly used to mark facilities, parking spots and pathways for handicapped persons has been redesigned. Its former version illustrated a person recognised by many as passive, incapable and limited. It was so popular that inventing something that would have a positive meaning and be equally recognised seemed impossible. Yet, the new idea, being very similar to the old one, gave both recognition and positive association.

Colours are also important from a cultural point of view – a yellow car with a top-mounted sign (without the letters on it) in New York will be instantly recognised as a taxi. However this will not work in Bangkok since the taxis there are pink or half yellow-half green. In Europe the colour green is often associated with the environment and ecology, but it is traditionally forbidden in Indonesia as local legends state that people dressed in green will be swallowed by the sea when they get close to the water's edge (Jones K.C., 2014). Green stands for independence in Mexico. It represents fertility, wealth and luck in the Middle East, and in China green hats worn by men signal that their wives have committed adultery. Therefore, a designer should not only concentrate on aesthetic issues, like colour harmony, but check whether a specific colour is not offensive to the target groups defined for the VCS.

The right approach to colour is also important when designing interface elements or pictograms that refer to humans and body parts. For decades we were surrounded by symbols and pictograms designed and developed in western cultures, influenced by stereotypes and historical world views. These excluded non-Caucasian races. In the modern world it is important not to exclude any group of people based on their race. This should be reflected in any VCS – all symbols referring to body parts or humans should be either neutral (e.g. monochrome matching 2 colours of the background and text) or shown in a way that doesn't distinguish any race or ethnicity. Otherwise they must be substituted with another symbol (the next best recognised). A good example

Being politically correct, avoiding offensive signs or colours and keeping the VCS message short, clean and easily understood is one of the biggest challenges for designers. It is a constant struggle and requires never-ending research. One of the aims of 3rd generation visual communication is to give designers a ready-to-use list of tens or maybe hundreds of solutions that can be used safely. However, this requires further research. Until it is done, decisions should rely on tests performed on representatives of target groups and – when necessary – commonly used solutions should be replaced by new ones.

Although designing and defining new symbols sounds difficult, it is possible, and there are confirmed methods of doing so (as proved in case of the International Symbol of Access mentioned before). One of them brings the promise of achieving both the desired recognition and reduced time to find it. 'Design by consensus', invented by Alisa Strauss and Mike Zender, is a three-stage process that involves a relatively small group of participants (20-40 participants can give quantitative results), helping to create and instantly estimate the efficiency of suggested solutions. Phase one is creating a 'free list' – the participants are asked what other people (and they themselves) would prefer to see on a pictogram relating to a specific topic. A designer then makes a list of the keywords

The International Symbol of Access (former version), (Public domain image)

The International Symbol of Access (new version announced in 2013) (Public domain image)



that were repeated at least twice. Phase two, called 'pile-sorting', puts the most repeated keywords in groups that have similar meaning and a common subject or indicate a similar way of understanding the concept. The last phase is 'ranking' – the participants are again asked to match words from the pile-sorting list in sets of 2 or 3 that would be good for constructing a pictogram (Strauss and Zender 2017). Strauss and Zender's tests proved this method can help create visual messages (images, symbols, pictograms) that are more easily understood by significantly larger groups of recipients than symbols created based only on aesthetic values and/or the stereotypes held by the designers. I personally find this method much more effective as it is based on more sophisticated analysis than simple 'design, ask and count positive hits', as suggested in the ISO 9186 paper.

Social maladaptation

In every community there is a group of people who don't want to obey some or any general rules. Visual communication designers are not planning to put 'do not throw garbage on the floor' signs on every wall because they assume that visitors will follow general rules of using public spaces. But for socially unfit (for any reason) people these rules are not obvious, and they

An example of an informal warning on a fence at the zoo (Source: ivman's blague by Rob Loach, http://blog.ivman.com, accessed December 2017)



need to be reminded. The same approach is also recommended (and it is indeed widely practised) on the roads in countries where you drive on the left-hand side, like the UK or Japan. Although 'social maladaptation' in this case only refers to foreign drivers following their habits (driving on the right-hand side of the road), it is a good example, widening the meaning of 'maladaptation' – it doesn't mean that these individuals want to do wrong on purpose, they are just accustomed to doing things in a different way.

The groups suggested to be analysed in scope of social maladaptation include ex-convicts or any other people who have recently left a facility limiting their freedom; members of organisations professing extreme views, sect members; citizens living in small, isolated societies. These groups need to be reminded of seemingly obvious rules, along with a simple explanation as to why such behaviour is necessary. To overcome their initial disobedience, designers may use tricks such as informal language or even jokes, so that recipients feel entertained while being educated.

Step 3 – choosing the right tools for VCS based on their advantages and costs

Finally, the last factor is the budget. It would be great if every visual communication system could include all necessary elements to communicate with all target audiences. But it is always a compromise between quality and money spent. In other words: adding elements to the system (such as duplicated message boards or numerous translations) increases the costs of designing and production, which then have to be reduced to fit the budget. Therefore it is up to designers, as well as project managers, to find the golden mean. Hopefully, modern technologies allow them to create systems that are flexible and can adapt to different audiences. For example, an RFID[3] tag given to museum visitors will affect information screens to display the messages in the visitors' native language or show the way to the toilet without using the stairs for people who are physically disabled. A 3D printed plan of the interior and 3D printed wall signs could help blind people orient in the building. Finally, Augmented Reality[4] applications for smartphones can extend or replace all visual communication elements with content specially designed for the recipient.

Delivering the message to various target groups at the same time can be done in four ways:

a) adaptation – the message is constructed in a way that guarantees its legibility by the largest number of recipients (e.g. large font, high contrast

[3] RFID stands for Radio-frequency identification. A very small microchip that can be mounted to or under any surface, such as package, clothing or human hand. It is powered wirelessly from an external source using electromagnetic waves and, once powered, it can communicate on short distances with the receiver.

[4] Augmented Reality (AR) is a combination of reality (live image from camera) and digital media being displayed simultaneously on the screen of a smartphone, tablet, etc., in such a way that the viewer has the feeling that additional content exists in the space in front of him. The additional content is being 'placed' within the space using either specially designed markers (that have to be in the real space) or using any distinguishable image, such as a painting.

colours, international words followed by commonly understood pictograms);
b) multiplication – the message is communicated on separately to different groups (e.g. multi-language road signs, traffic lights in the USA with both pictogram and text);
c) personalisation – the message is fully customised and presented on the screen or personal device of each recipient;
d) a combination of any mentioned above.

Adaptation is the most challenging task and rarely gives as good results as the other two solutions. However, it is relatively cheaper in production. It involves much designing and tests, but results in a clean, compact and accessible VCS. It is based on the most popular technologies – surface (be it wall, paper, plastic or fabric) and printed content. While analysing numerous signage examples from airports all over the world, one stood out. It is a VCS implemented at Doha International Airport in Qatar – one of the busiest flight hubs in the Middle East. It is a perfect example of content multiplication in only two languages, accompanied by pictograms. It is always in high contrast and is clearly visible even from a considerable distance. The designers decided to stay with only one foreign language, vastly reducing the amount of content to be put on all signage, thus increasing font sizes and overall readability.

An Augmented Reality application used at the Museu de Mataró allows visitors to explore multimedia content related to the artwork on the wall (Source: Wikimedia Commons, author: Kippelboy. Used under CC-BY-SA-3.0 licence)







Signage examples at Doha International Airport, 2015 (photos: Radosław Nagay)

Multiplication uses the same technologies as adaptation, but costs more, since all the flyers, posters, wall signs must be larger (to fit the additional content, like translation) or printed in larger quantities (separately for each group of recipients). It may also use various digital displays that allow communication of the same message in a different way, changing over time. These can be observed at storefronts in popular tourist destinations, such as pharmacies in Thailand.

The most expensive, yet most efficient method is personalisation. It uses the latest technologies, such as smartphones, GPS, RFID or AR to communicate with each recipient in a fully customised way. An even more effective, yet still developing, technology are wearable AR glasses – the difference is that instead of the image being displayed on the smartphone screen, it is projected directly into the eyes of the visitor, creating the illusion that a virtual object is in fact part of the space he/she is looking at (Mason 2016). Lastly, digital technologies also help to create real objects. Thanks to 3D Printing it is much easier today to create a three-dimensional model of any interior or sculpture or even a painting. This significantly increases the quantity of information that can be acquired by visually impaired people, for instance.

A comparison between two different approaches of designing pharmacy signage on Koh Chang Island in Thailand. Multiplication in different languages on a single sign (left) and more compact, using LED display (right), 2015 (photos: Radosław Nagay)







A tourist information point (infokiosk) in Poznań, Poland. An example of a combination of printed and digital media, allowing content to be delivered in various languages as well as with increased font sizes or high contrast colours when necessary (Source: Wikimedia Commons, author: MOs810. Used under CC-BY-SA licence)

Conclusion

There is no such thing as a perfect visual communication system that can communicate with all its recipients without any exceptions. However, it is possible to significantly increase VCS efficiency in a few steps – using deeper analysis and modern technologies – so that the group of recipients can be easily widened. The principles of 3rd generation visual communication have been formed. Further research will reveal which design approaches and technologies give significantly better results – some of these are still in development. Furthermore, it is necessary to define more factors that can describe other groups of recipients. However, it is already possible to implement solutions based on the group specification analysed in this article.

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The Use of Marketing for Art's Sake

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Abstract

I explore the ways in which artists who are working within the new media field could utilise the tools developed by marketing in order to create and communicate artistic projects. What interests me is whether these tools can help artists to become better at creating new messages and moderating existing messages more efficiently. This, however, can be equally well understood as an analysis of the process of product targeting. I am interested in exploring whether a more comprehensive analysis of the language of new media could provide artists with tools to better control the messages they generate and prevent messages from becoming corrupted, for example by curators and art merchants. New media, due to their elasticity and transdisciplinary nature, have a tremendous potential for communication, which can be harnessed to create art that will serve as an example of how to consciously and purposefully manipulate information. Establishing a dialogue with the mechanisms of marketing can give artists the tools necessary to keep up with the rapid rate of change in the contemporary information landscape.

Keywords: information, marketing, art education, memes, information theory, new media art, memetics.

Introduction

Ever since the emergence of the Internet, the bandwidth and speed at which information can be shared, replicated or transformed has been rapidly changing. A single message can be spread at a pace never seen before in human history. However, as with any process of replication, copying the message can lead to unexpected changes, spreading mutations, which outright contradict the original message. This may lead to chaos in which, as has been described by David Berkowitz (Berkowitz, 2016), information does not follow the evolving, social order.

I want to explore the ways in which artists working with new media could utilise the tools developed by marketing in order to create and communicate artistic projects. What interests me is whether these tools can help artists to become better at creating new messages and moderating existing content more efficiently. My goal is to establish a dialogue between the artist and the changes in the contemporary information landscape. Doing this requires navigating through a maze of concepts and answering the following questions:

1. What is information and why is this knowledge important for establishing the true value of created messages?
2. Why art is information and what are the vehicles of its distribution?
3. What is the problem with understanding art?
4. Why does some information attract people more?
5. What is marketing?
    a. How does marketing attract audiences and how does it use art for its purposes?
    b. How does marketing work?
6. Why it is so unpopular to get inspired by marketing and what is in it for new media art (NMA)?

I will provide an answer to these questions and conclude by claiming that marketing can offer the arts tools to establish more effective communication and make them more accessible to a wider audience.

1. What is information?

Our present is fully dedicated to the idea of information. We live in an information era, and no matter what our personal preferences are – civilisation is moving towards greater dependence on information technologies. We may describe this info-era in a few different ways. One may simply specify it as a dimension of turning every existing message – visual, linguistic, sonic, etc. into a stream of digitally coded information. Others will probably put emphasis on the matter of uncontrolled access to publishing channels and the growing phenomenon of misinformation. Yet a different focus can be placed on privacy issues. These matters, which involve navigating the ever-changing boundary between the public and the personal, are complex, especially given the growing need to store and process an enormous amount of personal data.

What is information and what are the (so far) known patterns for understanding it? Among the available uses of the term 'information', I was able to distinguish three leading approaches:

1. Shannon's Mathematical Theory of Communication (MTC), which deals with such concepts as information entropy, communication systems, data compression and related topics. This multidisciplinary subject is primarily grounded in the fields of electrical engineering and mathematics with overlap in areas of computer science, physics, statistical mechanics, and even philosophy. However, all we need to keep in mind for the present moment is that it focuses exclusively on efficiently translating existing messages into packets of information, expressed, for example, in digits or bits – the very language of machines.

2. A more abstract and, for now, less useful example of information theory is the one of Carnap & Bar-Hillel, which explicates information using a theory of possible worlds. It analyses the subject by using the paradigm of possibilities. Like MTC it preserves the idea of information as a reduction of uncertainty. However, this method is only widely used in logic.

3. Fred Dretske has expanded on the classical MTC definition of information explained as correlation, by providing an account of context dependence on different existing relations (Dennett, 2017). For example, how much information, and to whom is it actually transmitted? What kind of information is it and who develops it? What kind of knowledge is possessed by the receiver? And so on...

The first two ways of understanding information are most useful as tools for building machines and creating new mediums rather than explaining how people understand messages. Therefore, the most reasonable way of analysing messages generated by humans would be closely related to Dretske's way of thinking about information.



Theories of information (author of the graphic: Lidia Sapińska)

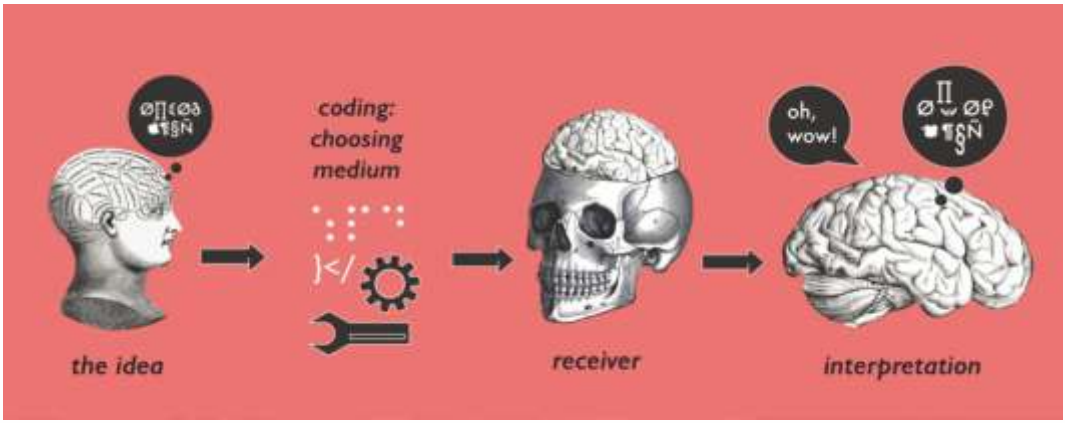
2. Why art is information?

There are several simple reasons for art to be considered as information. The main one is the idea of art as a language. It presents the artwork as a kind of complex message, which is created by an artist (or an art-collective) by being encoded into the art medium(s). This puts artistic creation in a position of being identified as information. Yet mediums, just as languages, are time-sensitive. They evolve, change, and mutate together with culture and technology. For example, once landscape painting revealed its inability to comment on common issues by becoming detached from social reality, it lost its appeal and became a purely decorative commodity.

On the other hand, Mieczysław Porębski for many years discussed art using terms of redundancy, macro systems and mathematics, to find its methodology or coding system. He tried to indicate that art is explainable separately from the humanist trap of subjectivity. But the final conclusion of the research did not see art reduced to a simple language structure. It was diagnosed as a matter of much higher complexity, albeit one with an information value.

Another hypothesis, which can bring the approach to art as information into focus, is Arthur C. Danto's consideration of what art is. He argues that a work of art is always defined by a trinity of crucial criteria: meaning, embodiment and interpretation. Meaning is an information load that characterises the specifics of an artwork, embodiment is an outcome of used crafts and skills (which constitute memetically gained information). And interpretation is created by both the above factors filtered through the information based on the audience's experience.

The mentioned information-era came with new opportunities and tools. These include nearly unlimited access to the Internet, a range of digital devices, different channels of distribution, and new ways of acquiring knowledge. With the formation of NMA the range of available mediums, and therefore encoding systems, began to grow. Unfortunately, it also brought some threats.



Why art is information scheme (author of the graphic: Lidia Sapińska)

3. What is the problem with understanding art?

The problem of a wider audience understanding art is a relatively new phenomenon. It is related to the development of academic structures. Obscure terminology and the increasing complexity of messages generated by highly educated theoreticians and practitioners of art are unclear to the average spectator. The rapid development of an academic approach has been dependent on the increasing popularity of art in institutions of education. Educational centres, as well as the galleries, started to appear in almost every significant city. This has also resulted in an increasing degree of contemporary art media participation in a variety of important public discourses.

This was the reason for the growth of the information flow involving art. The rapid generation of a large number of artworks made it accessible to a wider audience. Art wanted to escape the academic canon and become closer to people's everyday life.

The problem with information sharing occurs when the created message is not reaching the receiver, or it becomes highly deformed on its way. This may happen because of multiple reasons:

1. Noise. This occurs whenever a large quantity of existing information is being communicated at once. Even if messages are alike, they can distract the recipient from the core message. This may lead to misinformation because partial reception of the message increases the chance of changing the context in which it is to be understood. The noise may not only mutate our message, it can also make it invisible to the potential recipient.

2. Wrong coding. By this I understand the improper or inadequate selection of mediums. There are many different target groups for communication. Such groups may overlap and can, but need not, share multiple interests. Each group, of course, needs customised messages. For instance, if we (creators) decide to express our idea through a very complex sound installation, which we target at people with hearing disabilities, we may have failed from the start.

3. Imprecision. This can be easily illustrated with the example of poorly planned curatorial projects, where the preferred spatial presentation of the artworks has not been taken into consideration. Curators still place an enormous number of art pieces into one space without any reasonable narrative. By not placing the art message in a clearly defined context, such practices decrease the possibility of an artwork being understood.

Dorota Nieznalska – a young but iconic figure on the Polish art scene, can serve as a good example here. Her 2001 diploma work 'The Passion' attempted to tackle the difficult topic of the cult of masculinity. Unfortunately, due to the choice of mediums and symbols, Nieznalska's artwork has become the subject of scandal and gross misinterpretation. The main part of her diploma work is a cross-shaped object with a photograph of male genitalia attached in the middle. This artwork illustrates the problem of misalignment between the message and the iconography used to communicate it. The message did not reach the audience it was meant for, nor did it inspire a discussion on the intended topic. Instead, it offended religious feelings of people at whom it was not directed (Nieznalska, 2009).

The whole process of constructing an artist's message is very complex; it requires discipline and knowledge to avoid unexpected chaos. This is, of course, the commonly held assumption, but from the practical side the focus on the specifics of actual content is not sufficient. This creates a weak spot of the message, which separates the audience from understanding the idea behind the artwork. Can we do anything about it? Well, proper analysis during the creation or the conceptual process can help. With proper tools, knowledge and patience, the creator might be able to construct more precise messages, which can reach a much wider audience.

4. Why does some information attract people more?

Among the huge amount of content, the most visible is somehow valuable – aesthetically, ideologically or emotionally. We learn to tune out some of the tremendous variety of advertisements. Other content passes through our filter and grabs our attention. Usually, the more similar visual content we see repeatedly, the more indifferent we are. When browsing the Internet our minds are constantly exposed to a certain kind of message. Advertisement awareness is not fully dependent on our perception. Or I would rather say: it is not dependent on it at all. Let me explain why I think this is the case.

There are several existing meanings of 'perception'. It might be simply explained as the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses. However, it can also be described as the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted. In this second sense, perception is something that is variety of memes, thinking tools and experience, gained through our lifetime. Thus, it is mostly cultural construct. In this case perception is determined by the motion of marketing. The field of distributing information takes effectiveness as its main priority. The main aim of marketing craft is to set up particular loads of infor-mation in human brains. However, this is not done with the best interest of the subject, but for the sake of capital.

Through the decades of its existence, marketing has constructed and improved its structures for better use in commerce. Thus, it has generated a multiplicity of strategies each perfectly matched and combined with the present market demand (based on cultural evolution knowledge and psychology). Over the years one aim has remained constant: to construct a perfectly complex mimicry designed to fool human brains and make them want what marketers have to offer or at least to share the desire for our offer.

5. What is marketing?

a. How does marketing attract an audience and how does it use art for its purposes?

One could argue that ever since the Catholic Church commissioned its 16th Century promotional masterpiece – Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling, powerful corporations have been working with artists and using art as a marketing medium. Corporate art now makes up a significant portion of the $64bn art market. The digital marketing agency SYZYGY Group ran an experiment a few years ago (from 2010 to 2015) to test the effectiveness of marketing using artistic content. Working with a wide spectrum of digital artists, e.g. Mingarro Brothers, the agency chose a series of promotional digital art pieces meant to increase the visibility of the Group. They named it #20Things (SYZYGY Group, 2015). The art was showcased online and its effectiveness as marketing material was benchmarked against market reports and social media.

The mediums used in marketing practices are usually strongly artistic. Murals, paintings, performances, mappings, video installations, stencils and other examples of street art forms have become regular stock for marketing departments' art directors. These mediums are combined with very complex marketing strategies and copyright knowledge, creating main advertising branches such as: event marketing, image and social campaigns, guerrilla and ambient marketing, and so on. Since the possibilities of combining media with the achievements of numerous contemporary and historical artists are nearly endless, this has given marketing strategists a range of new tools for tempting the consumer.

Using art for commercial purposes can be compared to the common phenomenon of gentrifying post-industrial and low-income spaces, intended to increase their real estate value at a minimal cost. Due to the multiplication of the channels of communication, contemporary marketing had to subjugate numerous areas of human activity in order to re-present an old product as new and attractive. Few of us are susceptible to a refrigerator commercial meant to look like a scene from the life of a white, middle-class family. For a consumer primed to view the combination of functionality with aesthetics as a hallmark of luxury goods, the same product can gain in attractiveness once presented not as an everyday utility but a meticulously designed work of art.

This can be illustrated using the example of the car industry where, depending on the marketers' interests, the product can be imbued with the impression of sophistication and eliteness or a sense of freedom, playfulness,

and creativity. The Honda Accord 1989 commercial exemplifies the former trend. A man of nondescript age encounters a car 'parked' on a wall while strolling through an art gallery. He contemplates the car in silence when suddenly the engine goes off and the car drives away. The 1990's Citroen Picasso 'Robot Commercial' by Eric Coignoux, on the other hand, presents the hidden creative nature of a family car. In the clip we see assembly line robots expressively cover the car chassis with unexpected drawings resembling those of Picasso. However, they cover their creation up with a uniform coat of paint once a quality control manager appears. All that remains visible is a small model signature on the side of the car.

The continuous association of luxury products with the art world has perpetuated the perception of art as inegalitarian and closed off from the average consumer. This may be the reason behind big brands using artist signatures for indicating a limited product series and the attempt to make their products acquire the status of collectible items, such as Basquiat X Reebok Omni Lite edition (Hope, 2011). Another example of employing the elite demarcating function of art is stylising photoshoots and designing key visuals for social media campaigns as works of well known painters. Such is the case of the Gucci Hallucination (2018) campaign, in which promotional images were illustrated by Ignasi Monreal to resemble the works of Dutch Renaissance classics (Lux Exposé, 2017).

All of the above indicates that marketing has become interdisciplinary in the same sense in which the New Media Art has.

b. How does marketing work?

Today, the structure of marketing campaigns is not what it used to be just two decades ago. With a rapid increase in possibilities of distributing information, new communication channels and advertising methods have appeared in marketing, as well as in art. The ability to reach an increasing number of anonymous people, whose previously hidden consumer preferences have now become transparent, has required employing new tools of analysis. Consumer testing, quantitative and qualitative research, statistics have all become part of the marketing toolkit. At some point these methods have been enriched (and in the case of older ones – supplanted) by algorithms and data science allowing large swathes of consumer data to be trawled through.

Taking a deep look at social media marketing, we can observe how its dynamic interaction with consumers differs from traditional advertising. We can easily notice a complicated yet balanced structure. Thanks to constantly updated market analysis tools (Google Analytics, Keyword Tracker, etc.) and the use of psychological characteristics of the recipient groups, social media marketing provides a perfect example of the power of content targeting. For instance, promoted posts are only visible for a specified group of users, partitioned according to their age, ethnicity, location, sexual preferences, interests, or browser search history. This is a typical example of native advertising, i.e. one that appears disguised as a different kind of message. Powered by sophisticated algorithms, it invades our everyday lives silently, invited by our agreements to the 'terms of use' forms (Lieb, 2017).

The majority of popular platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Swarm, YouTube, and of course Google, offer us many different methods of advertising which can present our messages among desired channels or groups of users. Those tools are available for everyone, not only in the form of software. The essence of New Media Art consists in the dynamics, adaptability and tendency for creating ambiguous metaphors. Therefore, it might become a suitable environment for adapting the marketing tools for the purpose of New Media Art itself. There are plenty of lessons that marketing has taken from art, so is it not the right time for this art-field to take advantage of the knowledge that the marketing field provides?

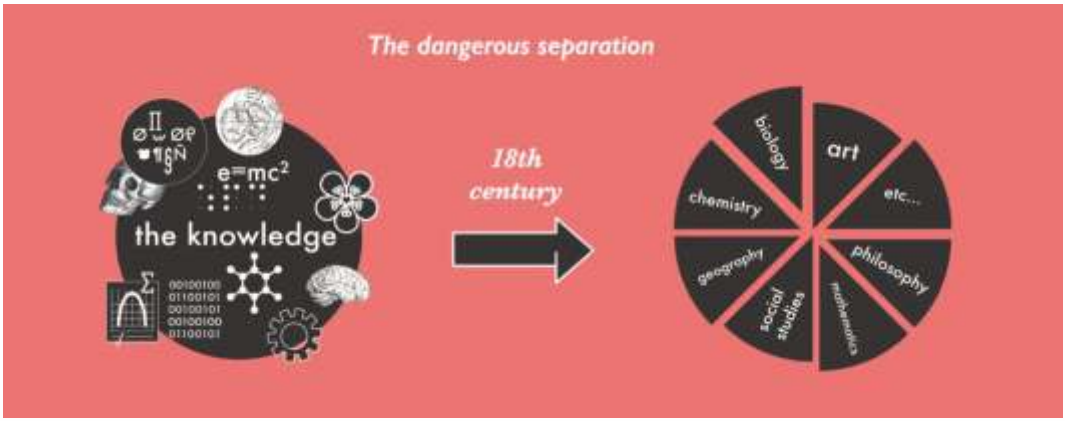
6. Why is it so unpopular to get inspired by marketing and what's in it for NMA?

The present coexistence of marketing and art can be seen as a very toxic and unspecified relationship, where the former receives disproportionately more advantages. The first problem is the issue of mislabelling. The word 'marketing' has a very complex and wide meaning. Any attempt at using it, while speaking of New Media Art, may give us the wrong impression of tying it to the art market. However, the commonality, which is highlighted here, is not about launching something on the market or sticking a 'price tag' to it, but concerns the issue of information development and communication.

The problem of disrespect towards the information distribution methods offered by marketing might be caused by the trend of separating academic fields. From the 18th century the polarisation of academic fields started to increase exponentially. The reason for this was the unrestrained desire for presenting every branch of knowledge as unique and independent. This enlarged the communication gulf between newly appearing disciplines of knowledge (Wallerstein, 2007).

The unfortunate tendency to separate research disciplines has often precluded us from the possibility of appreciating our own field of expertise from an unknown vantage point. Fortunately, NMA has become more interested in operating the basic tools of Internet marketing. The use of forms of communication such as video blogs, Instagram and Facebook accounts has become part of the common art environment. Artists and curators have gained an awareness of the ease with which their actions can be distributed and presented to audiences, the size of which would be impossible to obtain in traditional gallery spaces (Berlinger, 2017). Here, it is worth mentioning Katty Hessel, who in 2015 started an Instagram account named 'The Great Women Artists'. Her Instagram account became a sort of online gallery. She curated a wide selection of art works, created by different female artists (e.g. Angelica Kauffman, Njideka Akunyili Crosby, etc.). The success of this online gallery finally led Hessel to curate an analogue exhibition just two years later (Goldstein, 2017).

Nevertheless, the ability to successfully apply new digital tools requires not only practical proficiency but also certain knowledge and understanding of the ethical issues surrounding these methods of information distribution.



Separation of scientific fields illustration (author of the graphic: Lidia Sapińska)

Not all creators are aware that each new medium requires a thorough understanding of the implications of its use, just like not all audiences are aware of the complete context of the messages that they receive.

Due to their speed and the sheer scale of their reach, new media can be a very effective means of communication, when used appropriately. Yet the ease with which one can misuse them requires special care and precision in crafting messages. Marketing, first and foremost, can offer us a systematised body of knowledge about how this can be done. The tools it employs allow for effective identification of the recipients who are the intended target of artists' messages, therefore minimising the danger of miscommunication and misunderstanding.

Conclusion

Structuring the flow of information is one of the features New Media Art should learn from marketing. The ability to choose adequate tools for message construction may be supported with a wide spectrum of information development strategies. This would allow for understandable messages to reach a wider audience. By keeping the message clear and structured artists will be able to counteract misinformation and effectively deconstruct any formally unverifiable fake information.

As I have mentioned before, it is necessary to weaken our focus on marketing's tight relation to the art market and commercialism, and to put an emphasis on how it generates its informational structure. The fluent use of multiple information transporters, such as social media, a variety of software, or new technological solutions, is the common interest of both marketers and artists. These tools, however, are only an addition to the body of knowledge about the ethics and practice of creating a structured message which can be effectively communicated to the recipient without loss or misinformation. Consequently, if we trust in the functionality of art language, the popularisation of marketing techniques should become our first step. The goal, then, is to share the information about the changing environment, or dynamic reality that surrounds us, within a non-verbal language that is understandable for the largest number of recipients.

Using verified knowledge, reasonable mediums and structure increases the probability of being in control of the produced content and its further interpretation (Porębski, 1986). The solution to the problem discussed here would be some kind of reconciliation among the academic fields, leading to an introduction of new classes teaching the problems of structure and ethics of communication into the curriculum. Such classes would span, among others, subjects such as communication theory, data analysis, and ethics of information. Since the reality we live in is undeniably dedicated to information, we, the artists or the people who represent New Media Art, are holding a great responsibility of taking care of the quality of created information.

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Notes

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AKADEMIA SZTUKI W SZCZECINIE

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"This collection of essays centres on visual communication. Contributors to the volume investigate how different visual literacies shape communication within and between different communities and to the cultural specificities of visual literacy in business practices in different places. The essays, written by scholars, artists and visual communication professionals from a range of countries, are well researched and written. The essays offer theoretical insight and provide case studies on visual communication – public art, new media and architecture are among the topics discussed. Visuality from intercultural perspectives makes a valuable contribution to the historical and cultural understanding of visual communication"

Prof. Arnold Berleant

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