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# IMAGINATIONS

REVUE D'ETUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE L'IMAGE • JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES

**ELICITATIONS CATALOGUE 2024**

Issue 15-2, 2024



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Imaginations is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies at York University, and the Department of Humanities at York University

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## INTRODUCTION

MARKUS REISENLEITNER

*Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies / Revue d'études interculturelles de l'image* understands itself as an academic journal dedicated to “cross-cultural and intersecting epistemological fields that have at their root a determined focus on the role and power of the image in contemporary culture and in cultural communications” (Editors). As an open-access, online, peer-reviewed journal that follows established processes of editing and review, the timelines of publication do not always do justice to the rapid ebbs and flows of contemporary visual culture or the sometimes unconventional formats of engagement with the cultural texts of contemporary visual culture apposite for the practices we are interested in. The *Elicitations* section of the journal is meant to address these epistemological considerations by complementing regular issues of the journal with think pieces about visual culture, reviews, interventions, and other forms of timely engagements that are ineluctably academic yet do not fit into the established parameters of journal articles (and their publication timelines). We therefore publish *Elicitations* on a rolling basis but have also come to realize that in a landscape of aggregation and multiple distribution of journal issues, not having *Elicitations* collected into a single issue does not give them the same kind of lasting visibility and archiving as our regular issues. We have therefore decided to publish annually a catalogue of *Elicitations* that collect them into a single issue.

This catalogue collects *Elicitations* published during 2024. In “Bimbos and Bombs: The Barbenheimer Phenomenon,” Cate Alexander and Camille Intson engage with the memes, public discussions, and

situated analyses of the simultaneous 2024 theatrical release of two blockbusters: Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* and Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer*. Marko Vučković uses visual arguments to challenge Marcello Vitali-Rosati's canonical critiques of authorship in "If One Has the Floor, Does One Also Need to Dance?", an Elicitation that itself elicited a response from Vitali-Rosati, namely, "Who is the Writer?" Lindsay Freeman draws our attention to a visual genre that is rarely in the spotlight: miniatures. "Small Elegies for America" explores, through a close analysis of the works of Michael Paul Smith, Thomas Doyle, and James Casebere, how these small-scale artworks mobilize the nostalgia inherent in the genre to address the complexities and challenges of contemporary American life. Finally, in "Video Art and Collective Memory in Turkey," Merve Captan analyzes how time and collective memory are represented in the video art of Ali Kazma, Halil Altındere, Erkan Özgen, and Seza Paker.

As a compilation, these Elicitations demonstrate the range and importance of visual culture in contemporary media and the need for timely interventions and provocations. We look forward to receiving more Elicitations over the next years.

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## BIMBOS AND BOMBS: THE BARBENHEIMER PHENOMENON

CATE ALEXANDER AND CAMILLE INTSON

**O**n July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023, a tidal wave of pink and existentialism crashed into movie theaters. The simultaneous theatrical release of two highly anticipated blockbusters—Greta Gerwig’s *Barbie* and Christopher Nolan’s *Oppenheimer*—generated unprecedented post-pandemic box office sales, cultural commentary across the political spectrum, and, of course, memes.<sup>1</sup>

Both *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer*, spawning the portmanteau “Barbenheimer,” exist as strong markers of Western culture and cultural history; whereas the former is a postmodern feminist comedy about an iconic children’s fashion doll, the latter is a brooding biopic of the nuclear physicist behind the Manhattan Project. Through fan-made memes, social media campaigns, and merchandise, the “rivalry” between the two films was commodified by moviegoers, making “Barbenheimer” a global phenomenon. Juxtaposed affectively and aesthetically, Barbie’s hyper-feminine, positively pink aesthetics were jarringly contrasted against the grays and blacks of Nolan’s wartime biographical thriller. But instead of “picking a side,” many moviegoers saw both films back-to-back. They argued about the best order to see them in, dressed up in pink, searched out theatres with 70 mm film screening capability, and, in short, committed to the full “Barbenheimer” experience.

As two Oscar-nominated auteurs, Gerwig and Nolan have both achieved a cult-like status among their respective (and often differently gendered) audiences. Audiences are similarly protective of their esteemed directors, causing social media outrage at any per-

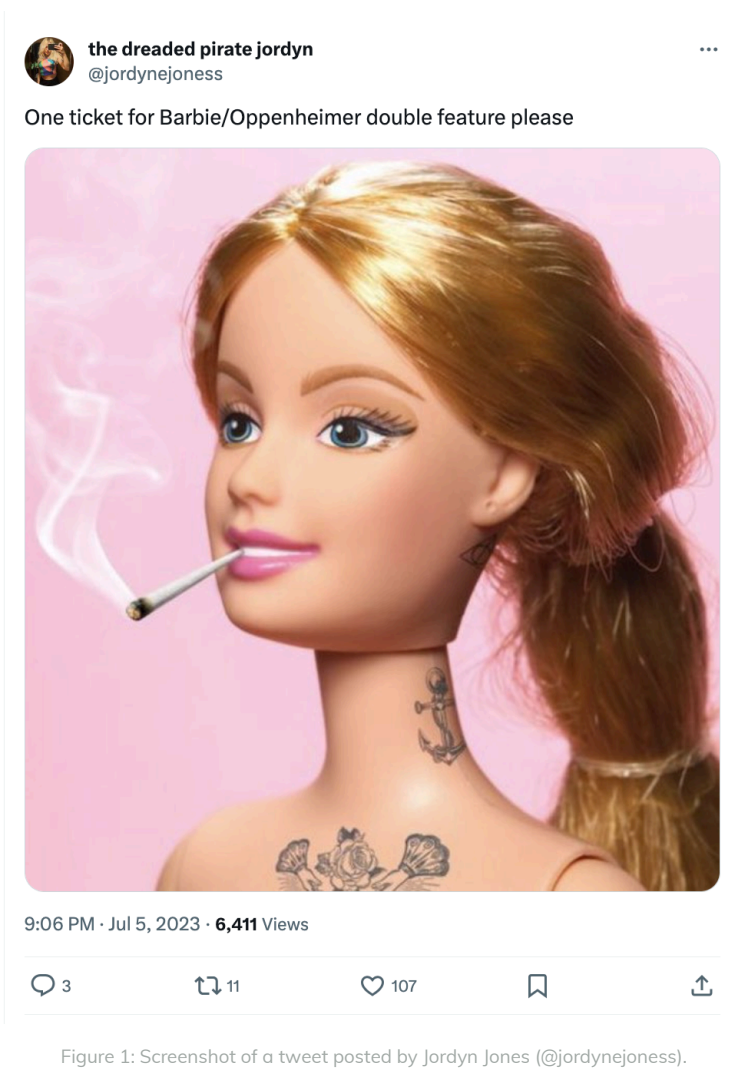


Figure 1: Screenshot of a tweet posted by Jordyn Jones (@jordynejones).

ceived awards season “snub.”<sup>2</sup> Whereas Gerwig’s feminist-forward cinema often features transgressive female characters rebelling against their restrictive environments, Nolan’s movies focus on introspective male personae framed by unconventional narrative struc-



Figure 2: Screenshot of a tweet posted by Sean (@\_sn\_n).

tures, elaborate special effects work, and explorations of time as an artificial construct. Gerwig began her career as an actor in numerous independent films, gaining acclaim through her Golden Globe-nominated performance in *Frances Ha* (2012); she has since gained widespread notoriety as a solo filmmaker, notably with her coming-of-age drama *Lady Bird* (2017) and her adaptation of Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* (2020). Nolan, on the other hand, dubbed a “Philosopher of Screen” by Michael Caine in *Time100*, is widely acclaimed as a Hollywood blockbuster-maker and pioneer of 21<sup>st</sup>-century cinema. His films, including *Inception* (2010), *Interstellar* (2014), and most recently *Tenet* (2020), are largely metaphysical and existential in nature.<sup>3</sup>

 **DiscussingFilm** ✓  
@DiscussingFilm

Barbenheimer poster art by @SteveReevesArt



12:52 PM · Jul 11, 2023 · 10.4M Views

713 26K 191K 3.5K

Figure 3: Screenshot of a tweet posted by Discussing Film (@DiscussingFilm). Poster art by Steve Reeves (formerly @SteveReevesArt).



Figure 4: Screenshot of a tweet posted by Becca (@littlebeckyb).

The “Barbenheimer” phenomenon is driven by the perceived duality of these directors and their differently gendered films. Gerwig’s film is suffused with costumes, dance numbers, omnipresent pinkness, critiques of patriarchy, and relationships between women: a decidedly feminine film. *Oppenheimer* is a jarring contrast with its serious tone, complex political and temporal terrain, and virtual ocean of white male actors. At first glance, the contrast between *Barbie*’s fun and feminine appeal and *Oppenheimer*’s serious and menacing marketing aesthetics seems to reinforce a gendered binary wherein the former is perceived as the light, unserious film and the latter as existential and important. One senior media analyst described *Bar-*



Figure 5: Screenshot of a tweet posted by Iana Murray (@ianamurray).

*bie* as a “pink-tacular romp” and *Oppenheimer* as a “weighty atomic bomb drama,” stating that “*Oppenheimer* is going to appeal to a more mature demographic.”<sup>4</sup> An otherwise complimentary review stated, “I was excited, in spite of higher ideas about myself, to see Gerwig’s film.”<sup>5</sup> Many “Barbenheimer” enthusiasts recommended seeing *Oppenheimer* before *Barbie*, comparing it to having dessert after your meal.

But, ironically enough, despite this playful marketing ploy, *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer* converge in their explorations of existential anxiety. In Gerwig’s film, a “perfect day” in Barbieland is disturbed by Stereotypical Barbie’s utterance of the now-iconic phrase “Do you ever think about dying?”<sup>6</sup> These thoughts of death incite a journey of self-discovery from Barbieland to the real world—yes, that means flat feet and (gasp!) cellulite—as Barbie ultimately surrenders her toyhood for mortality. Existential concerns also drive the plot of *Oppenheimer*, as the titular character (characterized as a 20<sup>th</sup>-century Prometheus) grapples with the politics, implications, and effects of creating the atomic bomb. The spectacular sound design of the movie engrosses the audience with a looming sense of dread and death.

Taking their parallels further, Cillian Murphy’s *Oppenheimer* and Margot Robbie’s *Barbie* are similar figures in their own respective narratives. Both films highlight the internal and existential journeys of their two titular characters, who are represented as figureheads—or even products—of their institutions. Things are perhaps

not so different between Mattel's Barbieland and the Manhattan Project's Los Alamos Laboratory, representational diversity aside.<sup>7</sup> Both protagonists begin their narratives as valuable commodities to their institutes but end up as outcast figures of resistance at their end. Barbie rebels against Mattel wanting to keep her as an "idea," which is to say a perfect and immortal emblem of stereotypical femininity: an object acted upon, not one that acts. The film ends with Barbie choosing humanity over dollhood, with all its joys and messiness, including an impromptu trip to the gynecologist—one final challenge to feelings of embarrassment and discomfort around feminized bodies.<sup>8</sup> In Nolan's film, Oppenheimer fervently opposes the development of the hydrogen bomb, which, along with his past Communist Party associations, results in his losing his security clearance, his access to the technology he created, and his career as a nuclear physicist. Oppenheimer and Barbie are mirror protagonists marked by institutional, corporate, and/or governmental transgression.

But what is the place of these narratives of transgression in popular culture, especially when commodified by institutions of power? The billion-dollar *Barbie* movie playfully appraises consumerism at every turn, critiquing Mattel's male-dominated enterprise; yet the success of the film has inspired a successful line of Mattel dolls and an entire "Mattel Cinematic Universe," the project itself a revival plan for a brand with decreasing revenue.<sup>9</sup> On the flipside, for all its protagonist's transgressions, *Oppenheimer* is a film painfully entrenched in the white male gaze. Depicting histories of the bomb has always been tricky in the United States, as demonstrated by the Enola Gay exhibit.<sup>10</sup> However, there are significant and troubling choices about how history is depicted in this film, including:

- Prioritizing Oppenheimer's trauma over the trauma of Japanese people (as Scottish comedian Frankie Boyle has said, "Not only will America go to your country and kill all your people ... they'll come back 20 years later and make a movie about how killing your people made their soldiers feel sad.")<sup>11</sup>

- A refusal to discuss or depict the racism and anti-semitism that would have been prominent at the time.<sup>12</sup>
- A strange hyperfixation on Kitty Oppenheimer's alcoholism, and not the massive alcohol and amphetamine use that would have been happening around her.<sup>13</sup>
- The historically unfounded and appropriative use of a Hindu holy text during a sex scene.<sup>14</sup>
- The choice to depict New Mexico as empty land, ignoring the forced displacement of New Mexicans, mostly Hispanic and Indigenous peoples, who built and worked in Los Alamos and who were the first victims of nuclear colonialism and nuclear weapons.<sup>15</sup>

These critical conversations are sacrificed for more scenes of Jean Tatlock (Florence Pugh) languishing naked or Kitty Oppenheimer (Emily Blunt) being a drunken shrew, reducing women's representation in the film to either the seductress or the nagging wife. The capitalist appropriation and historical choices of these films cause one to pause, and they merit a longer discussion than we can provide in this review. Are we playing back into the hands of Mattel's consumerism? Are we participating in the regurgitation of a specific brand of history, one which perpetuates and incentivizes the white male gaze?

At the end of the day, both films capitalize on nostalgia. Nostalgia enabled the hybrid creation of "Barbenheimer" as a symbol of contemporary American culture as much through their opposition as their commonalities. Gerwig adopts a revamped 60s aesthetic that features many iconic Mattel outfits and toys recognizable to any Barbie consumer, as well as a custom-built movie set reminiscent of Golden Age Hollywood musicals. *Oppenheimer's* opening scenes lean heavily into the aesthetic of Dark Academia, which became particularly popular during the isolation and campus shut-downs of COVID.<sup>16</sup> (If Oppenheimer poisoning his professor's apple before fleeing along dark-wood lined corridors to a lecture isn't Dark Academia, we don't know what is.) As Robbert-Jan Adriaansen argues in their article ex-





Figure 6: Screenshot of a tweet posted by Culture Crave (@culturecrave).

amining the relationship between aesthetics and affect, this “historical outlook is pastiche and affect-driven: rather than remembering specific pasts it creates a blended image of artifacts, literature, art, fashion, and architecture” (105). The aesthetics of these films, though diametrically opposed, create a similar affective feeling of recognition and nostalgia that fetishizes its subjects—yet incentivizes its audience to partake in their spectacle. And participate we did, in our bright pink ensembles and iconic wartime fedoras.

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IF ONE HAS THE FLOOR, DOES ONE ALSO NEED TO DANCE?  
TOPOLOGY, CHOREOLOGY, AND THE STRUCTURE  
OF DIGITAL SPACE

MARKO VUČKOVIĆ

**M**arcello Vitali-Rosati offers texts of rarely paralleled clarity on what can be termed “applied ontology.” The project seeks to theorize the structure of digital space—long assumed to have an unstructured, oceanic topography—as instead having a specific ontological architecture. That architecture is, according to him, one which involves not a *choreography*, which implies a mapping of objects in space and so an opposition between space and object—but more properly a *choreology*, a space which is identical to the objects “dancing” in it. And it is this dancing of digital space which opens the pathways of the subject not simply dancing with, but altering, directing, leading, even controlling such a dance. In a different metaphorical key, equally serviceable, this implies a subject which is both a product, an architecture, but also an architect: a producer or a co-creator of (digital) space.

Why this discussion is important should quickly come to light. What is revealed in the digital age in a direct and immediate way—scarcely developed and rarely glimpsed in previous times—is not the addition of a separate but interacting world of immaterial/imaginative objects and relations in parallel with the world of material objects and relations. Instead, it is more properly a world which is, in a sense, always its own (impossible) inside. It is a world which, apropos the set-theoretical paradoxes, acts as a set which contains all sets as members—containing even the sets which do not contain themselves. This

characterization, loose as it is for the moment, allows for a passage away from an ontology of substances and their attributes, toward a (meta)ontology of substantive predication emphasizing plurality and multiplicity (Vitali-Rosati and Larrue, *Media Do Not Exist: Performativity and Mediating Conjunctures* 61ff.).

An illustration will help. For this, think of the motif from the phenomenal dark comedy film, *Good Bye, Lenin!* (Becker and Lichtenberg), which explores the ironic structure of desire in the communist GDR. Alex Kerner lives with his mother and sister in East Berlin at the cusp of the collapse of the Union. Treading in the path of their politburo luminary mother, Christiane, Alex's sister, Ariane, is a promising economics student at the city university, while Alex is your random "everyman," a somewhat deadbeat social activist caught taking an active role in a freedom of the press protest. The chief complaint metonymically present in this protest, and in the lives of the main characters, is the inability of the communist government to provide the fulfilment of its citizens' desires. The irony can be seen best with Alex and Ariane, who, in their quest for participating in bringing about a political framework capable of delivering the objects associated with their desire (blue jeans, pornography, new music) end up in a situation which stifles their desires far more than before. Alex ends up leading a life practically identical to that of his old, now defunct, life in East Berlin: he is not only hilariously stuck in a simulation of his former communist oppression (he must re-create East Germany in his mother's apartment, whose heart is too unstable after a collapse to "handle" the collapse of the republic she has interpellated herself in), but also pursues a moving and highly energized, yet monogamous love interest which is at one and the same time conventional (he could have accessed this selfsame relationship in the GDR) and at odds with the radicality of his desire (for pornography, for a repudiation of these very norms of convention). In short, under the new regime of capital, Alex is robbed of his symbolic excuse for mediocrity, and ends up further behind in relation to his "potential" than before. His sister Ariane ends up in the role of a Burger King cashier in full, humiliating costume, in clear contrast to the



upwardly mobile position as economics student with a powerful and deeply connected mother in the GDR government.

The irony here, to be fully appreciated, must be seen in its properly ontological dimension: the desire they sought to liberate from its external impediment in communist stagnation has been simultaneously both present to them all along and yet is now further from fruition. The structure of their space, in short, is digital in the very way Vitali-Rosati claims: the forbidden “inside” of citizens’ desire in the GDR, unable to find its complementary object in the outside world, is relocated as an externalized, unfulfillable demand to enjoy accompanied by its impossible, fleeting object. It reconfigures their desire such that, now, in contrast to the communist oppression, their desire is barred from the inside. The only way “out” for Alex or Ariane is now “in” the very social-symbolic networks (in capital) that repeat their desire’s ossification under communism: via substantial predication, the ability to be the product, but now also producer, of the very networks they are embedded in. The film for its part ends with this ambition dramatically unfulfilled. Nevertheless, the configuration of Alex and Ariane’s social positioning is consistent with what Vitali-Rosati calls “the surface of contact between the inside and the outside” (Vitali-Rosati, *The Chiasm as a Virtual: A Non-concept in Merleau-Ponty’s Work (with a Coda on Theatre)* 289).<sup>1</sup>

The present paper will argue that this ontological picture is *almost* just right. This is vital for the discussion of digital spaces and for the desires it demands, promises, sustains, and frustrates, today. We have said goodbye to Lenin, yes, but not to the “spirit” of Lenin, as Slavoj Žižek once entertainingly remarked (Žižek, *Repeating Lenin*). There is indeed, as Žižek says, a formal—but **not** substantive—feature to be recovered here. My thesis then is twofold. First, that there is something wrong with the form of Vitali-Rosati’s case: that the inside-outside structure he theorizes is a little too heavy on the “inside,” foreclosing a genuinely transcendent subject. And second, that there is something wrong with the content of Vitali-Rosati’s case: that—to borrow the immensely expressive formal schema of Lacan’s Discourses—it implies a hysterical social-symbolic link which fore-

closes the very transcendence necessary to transfer the subject from its role as product of digital space into the role of genuine producer. Vitali-Rosati says his system can get this done; I will argue that it cannot, but I will do so while accepting his conclusions about *how* the emancipatory process in the digital context might look as it develops.

What follows is a discussion in three parts. The first part is what follows in this section here, namely a groundwork for establishing theoretical commonalities and substantive touchpoints between Vitali-Rosati's position and the one I will seek to defend in the third part below. The second part, which I call the "first moment," is my attempt to reconstruct Vitali-Rosati's dual thesis, starting with the masterful "The Writer is the Architect" (Vitali-Rosati, *The Writer is the Architect: Editorialization and the Production of Digital Space*) while supplementing these thesis components with a discussion of his other, complimentary texts available in English. And third, in the "final moment," I will provide a critique by way of a repositioning of his case: the corrective will take place as a shift from the (all too) immanent subject available in his writings to a subject capable of accessing a genuine "outside" from which to co-construct digital space *with remainder*—without that construction being tainted with and swallowed up by the traces of the subject's position as purely immanent product of that space. The upshot of my critique is not to question Vitali-Rosati's helpful conclusions about how to manage digital space to ensure a radical vision of public domain and open access (Vitali-Rosati, *On Editorialization: Structuring Space and Authority in the Digital Age* 86-103). I rather question the ability of his "choreological" system to deliver these goods root and branch (Vitali-Rosati, *The Writer is the Architect: Editorialization and the Production of Digital Space* 16ff.). Before that, two pieces of groundwork should be addressed in the form of shared presuppositions.

#### GROUNDWORK: FIRST PRESUPPOSITION

Vitali-Rosati puts together an elegant case as to why the virtual ontology he terms "metaontology" must be viewed as a

symbolic system privileging space as its central ontological component. Space is, in his terms, “a dynamic structure that unfolds like a melody played by several different actors—people’s actions, infrastructures, speech,” with its accompanying irreducible ontological multiplicities. This is to be contrasted with the systems privileging the equivocity or pure incommensurability of time with respect to space in the Bergsonian key of duration and simultaneity (Vitali-Rosati, *The Writer is the Architect: Editorialization and the Production of Digital Space* 5). Bergson’s system, if correct, would imply a vitalist ontology which denies an irreducible multiplicity of ontologies, opting instead for an ontology of the “One” as universalized lived experience. To show this is wrongheaded Vitali-Rosati must show that space is itself a structure which negotiates with and internalizes time, which bakes in time as a constitutive and operational element, and in so doing would short circuit Bergson’s insistence of a unified ontological field under the rubric of duration or lived time. The specific mode Vitali-Rosati employs to generate this result will be discussed in the “First moment” below.

For now, my point is to claim that this analysis should be endorsed because it is confirmable through independent argumentative pathways. Take the following argument as illustrative. Let’s continue to victimize Bergson out of Vitali-Rosati’s list of time-privileging philosophers. And let’s take it for granted that Bergson has in mind to argue that it is time, not space, which provides the fundamental dimension from which to interpret the subject (Bergson 104, 236). Then via *reductio* we are left with the following challenge: if time is the privileged dimension from which to interpret the nature of the subject and time is exclusively divided between duration (lived time) and simultaneity (clock time), then it must be asked what the *difference* between duration and simultaneity are. If time is the privileged axis, then the difference should appeal to a category referring to time, as either simultaneous (punctiliar) or durational (extended).

Yet this turns out to entail a dilemma for Bergson: if the difference between duration and simultaneity is cashed out in terms of simultaneity, then it is space which is inadvertently and illicitly privileged—since space would be needed to mark the “two” of simultane-

ity, as in, one and the same time, two places. And the difference can't be cashed out in terms of duration either, since this too ends up privileging space as the mediating term: duration can negate the duration-simultaneity opposition only by externalizing the lived experience of time (as duration) as a spatialized "map" of time as clock measurement more proper to simultaneity (Pickstock 90f., Note 108). But now we would be right back at the issue of simultaneity mediating the difference, which we have seen it cannot. Thus, it turns out that it is space that mediates this difference, and that time cannot supply the content of its own minimal difference with itself (O'Connor 21).

To put this simply, there is an inconsistency between dividing a term exclusively and exhaustively (at the same time and in the same way) such that Bergson cannot appeal to both to characterize his fundamental ontology. Either duration and simultaneity are not exclusive divisions, in which case there is a third category regulating the production and differentiation of both; or else they are exclusive but at the price of not being exhaustive, calling for a mediating term which is compatible with both. In either case the answer is that *space* is the left-out term regulating both duration and simultaneity.<sup>2</sup> In this Vitali-Rosati and the perspective of critique here are in complete alignment.

#### GROUNDWORK: SECOND PRESUPPOSITION

I need to spell out one final and important commonality, which lays out the theoretical basis for both the exposition of Vitali-Rosati's ontology of the subject and my subsequent critique. It has been pointed out in genealogical studies of the term "subject" that recognizable philosophical articulations of subject-hood focus on an interplay between one or more of the following three thematic components: that of subjectness, of subjectivity, and of subjection (Balibar, Cassin and Libera 1070). The interplay allows for a glimpse into the history of the term and the place Vitali-Rosati locates his notion of subjectivity in his metaontology. The first notion—of subjectness—draws on the Greek ὑποκειμένον and connects the notion of the logical subject (the subject whose negation is the predicate) with

the corporeal subject (the substance whose negation is the accident) into a continuous ontological amalgam of the subject as guaranteed correlation between its being/ existence and its logical properties, as a substantive subject stitched to the predicated subject. The second—of subjectivity—draws on the Kantian rereading of the subject which reads a conflict where *hypokeimonon* sees cooperation, between the predicative and substantial components of the term (Balibar, Cassin and Libera 1081f.). This notion relocates the subject in the transcendental, a priori negative, field, decoupling the link between the subject's status as substance and the subject's status as signifier. The third notion—that of subjection—extends between strata in the social hierarchy the corresponding conflict within the transcendental subject in the second sense (Balibar, Cassin and Libera 1083, 1085). The lack of fit between the corporeal subject and the logical subject is projected outwards as the locus of sociocultural and institutional tension between subject and State. The subject here, like one of earth's minerals, is forged in the pressure resulting from the interplay of these forces.

This third and final sense touches on the point between the theoretical commitments between Vitali-Rosati and the position describing and critiquing his ontology the sections to follow. Both see the subject in this dual position as produced and producer. Vitali-Rosati's digital metaontology presents this complex dialectical interplay between symbolic to social (and back) as an ontological-political link which realizes the negation of the Kantian transcendental as the negative a priori (the "first" negation), bringing about the self-intersecting surface architecture of the subject as surface of contact between inside and outside (Vitali-Rosati, *The Chiasm as a Virtual: A Non-concept in Merleau-Ponty's Work (with a Coda on Theatre)* 286). The subject, as a "fold" in this surface, negotiates its boundary position between being (via subjection) a product of the intersection of social-symbolic surfaces and being (via transference) a producer of this space, too (Bruno 201f.). Tracing this root to its branches will be the methodological strategy in the discussion to follow.

## FIRST MOMENT: CO-CONSTRUCTION

### Space (is structured)

Concerning his metaontology, Vitali-Rosati is clear that the first step to recognizing the character of space's structure is to recognize before all else that (digital) space *is* structured. He is spectacularly successful in this line of argument. Since the chiasm emerges as the theoretical structure mediating the difference between inside and outside—characteristic of any space—Vitali-Rosati can motivate the thesis that the external components of a space regulating its boundaries and operations—“values, practices, technologies, and infrastructure” (Vitali-Rosati, *The Writer is the Architect: Editorialization and the Production of Digital Space* 8)—are not purely external, but show up in the internal and private sectors of that space as constitutive and formative features. “Digital space,” he puts it, “is a well-structured material space” (Vitali-Rosati, *On Editorialization: Structuring Space and Authority in the Digital Age* 7).

Vitali-Rosati's argument is not circular but approaches this conclusion from empirical observation. The illustration he cites, sufficient to prove this part of his case, could not be more faithful to the experiences of those whose formative experiences took place in the digital age. The inside-outside surface brings the “bedroom”—what is somehow still a euphemism for an activity which has long since ceased to be exclusively practiced there, if it ever was so confined—into the shared space of commerce and public interaction (Vitali-Rosati, *Pornspace* 308f.). This observation plays on the same situation with the desire of the characters of Alex and Ariane (from *Good Bye, Lenin!*), how it encountered a new “bar,” a new series of internal prohibitions under capital which were (interpreted as) merely external in the commune. This internalization of structure is what Vitali-Rosati has in mind in the digital world, and pornography is his graphic example. It is in pornography where a privileged vantage for the strict and nonnegotiable *structure* of digital space is encountered: pornography, far from being a space full of the plasticity of the pure flux is rather a space of rigidly ossified objects and relations (Vitali-Rosati, *Pornspace* 312, 317).

This component of his case must be endorsed unequivocally; space has a structure. But how does he get to *the* structure?

Τόπος and χορός: two structures of space

We have already introduced the chiasm. This is of course Vitali-Rosati's answer to the above question. However, the path he takes to get there has not yet been traced, and it is worth doing so. We have already seen from the "first presupposition" above that space is the basic ontological axis of being. To parse out the specific character of space's structure, Vitali-Rosati turns to two Greek terms to supply a differential between alternative choices. These are given under two rubrics of the relationship the form of space has with its objects, namely τόπος (*topos*) and χορός (*choros*). The former signifies topical location or differential position of objects in a grid or mappable plane. The latter is a performance, a festive dance implying round, circular motion (Vitali-Rosati, *The Writer is the Architect: Editorialization and the Production of Digital Space* 6).

If both have a logic, then the topological space, according to Vitali-Rosati, is a static space which is *given*, already fully in place when objects are introduced into it. The *choreological* space, by contrast, is not given but "produced," a dynamic situation in which objects do not get introduced but co-construct the space itself. The logic of the "first presupposition" must be repeated here. According to how he has set things up, choreology, but not topology, offers the authentic space of second negation, since the opposition between object and vector in space is undercut in the choreological option alone.

I will later wonder whether Vitali-Rosati has topology all wrong, but for now we follow his lead in the dance.

Χορός as the choice between these structures

Choreological space is identical to the structure of the "chiasm" or of "metaontology" as previously described. The point Vitali-Rosati has in mind here is to motivate the idea that topology fails to offer the concepts needed to articulate the co-production of space by objects characterizing not just the digital age—although best visible

there—but also of ontology as such. He is less successful in this charge, but I will leave that until the “final moment” below.

The point for now is to deepen this discussion of the chiasm—the “how” of space—to discern its relationship with being—the “what” of space. And for this the logic of the *choros* is vital, namely that objects are not given “to” space and have relations “in” space, but that space itself is identical to the surface of dancing objects as such—that the relations of objects is itself the space in which these relations play out. To shift to the metaphorical key in my title, this is to say that, for choreology, there is no opposition between dance floor and dance; there is only the dance, which constructs its own “floor,” its own coordinates of unfolding, as the floor in turn helps configure the dance. Vitali-Rosati explains this in terms of an irreducible multiplicity of spaces: the “core principle” of the chiasm “is that Being is always the result of a mediation process. [This] implies an original multiplicity of Beings, and therefore a multiplicity of ontologies” (Vitali-Rosati and Larrue, *Media Do Not Exist: Performativity and Mediating Conjectures* 63). The chiasm as such is the “nothing-being” which traces the surface of dance/ dance floor (Vitali-Rosati, *The Chiasm as a Virtual: A Non-concept in Merleau-Ponty’s Work (with a Coda on Theatre)* 289).

The upshot of this deepening is to recognize the relationship Vitali-Rosati sees between the chiasm and transcendence. For him, the chiasm represents the space entirely enclosed in the inside-outside surface, a surface with no depth. The question, though, is not whether there is something wrong with this a zero-thickness surface, but whether, as Samo Tomšič points out, what is to be done about “the surplus produced by the manipulation” of this manifold (Tomšič, *Psychoanalysis and Antiphilosophy: the case of Jacques Lacan* 99).<sup>[^3]</sup> The idea of surplus has already been introduced without being named. It is the minimal gap between something and itself which is revealed in the passage from the first negation (which secures an oppositional pair) and the second negation, which introduces a space which negates the opposition itself, opening up a third option which is not limited by the boundaries of its components: the surplus is the “very precondition” of space (Kordela 105) because it draws the



boundary between inside and outside itself, is itself “boundary” as surface of contact—just as Vitali-Rosati claims it is.<sup>[4]</sup>

Notice however that, for Vitali-Rosati’s choreology, this surplus cannot produce an exception to the virtual field as he describes it. This is precisely because this space already maximally includes as an immanent feature the objects and relations which configure its architecture, and constitutively excludes any objects or relations which in principle do not “fit” as synergistic, co-constructive features of the dancing manifold. This is why the choreological space is “non-representational,” so “cannot be interpreted using a truth-based model” (Vitali-Rosati, *On Editorialization: Structuring Space and Authority in the Digital Age* 8). This foreclosure of a truth-principle commits Vitali-Rosati to the thesis that the virtual field is a space with maximized scope with no “windows,” no limits to its scope and no exceptions to its immanent frame (Falque 37). It is a space that in principle forecloses the transcendent<sup>[5]</sup> and so offers, as I will complain later, “no way out.”

Nothing escapes the virtual fold, and nothing gets in. This foreclosure is Vitali-Rosati’s thesis concerning the surplus: that it cannot be an exception, that everything is “already there” in the manifold, that one can co-construct the dance but never in principle set oneself as an exception to it, containing a remnant unaffected by the chiasmic flux. Vitali-Rosati thus provides a picture of ontology as an inconsistent and open space but does so at the expense of being able to make room for counterexamples to his own proposals concerning the structure of the virtual.

## FINAL MOMENT: CRITIQUE

### What is...

I spoke of revolution just now. Famously Lenin asked the question, *Что делать?*, “what does one do?” or “what is to be done?” and got, from the standpoint of history, almost exactly where he began. It is in fact even a question of whether Lenin was able to implement—or even envision—a genuinely revolutionary economy (Paxton). We can

thus ask, in the spirit of this inquiry, what is to be done about the minimal difference between Lenin and himself: or, rather more generally, help pin down exactly what is to be done about what I called Vitali-Rosati's *almost* satisfactory ontology.

The issue at hand, as I see it, is whether there is any space of a priori negativity—any genuine opposition or authentic disruption—available in digital space which can serve as a (transcending) exception to the pure immanence of the chiasm. I think there is, and for that the following argument is instrumental. Marshall McLuhan famously offered the distinction between “hot” and “cold” media among other things meant to classify the pathways of interaction between the subject and the new digital manifolds (McLuhan 22-31). The difference is cashed out between high-resolution content which resists creative and co-constructive input from its viewers due to the fine-grained information embedded in the presentation (hot)—and low-resolution content which invites creative completion by its viewers (cold). A Marvel flick is hot; a Dungeons & Dragons oral narration game is cold. In the former there is “nothing left to the imagination,” the viewer is purely passive and is formed by the text—and in the latter there is plenty left to allow the viewer to meaningfully and actively participate to co-construct the text.

Now what is striking is that the minimal difference between something and itself, between what I said was the difference between a signifier and its subject, is something which must be pushed to its radical limit. To do so will eventually expose what's missing from the chiasm. What I mean here is that *in a signifier* there is a minimal difference between it as corporeal marking and itself as logical subject. This difference should be cashed out in terms of McLuhan's distinction: a term, say “Lenin,” is a relatively hot form of media—it is univocal in meaning, invites little participation, functions in predictable ways in sentences, evokes similar social effects in polite conversation, etc. Yet any of its component letters, say the “L,” is itself cold, as cold as can be—the shape of the markings is deeply ambiguous and can be seen as a sort of visual amphiboly.<sup>[6]</sup>

This minimal difference is spectacularly exploited in the internal logic of Lacan's "Discourses," where the social link structuring a space is explored (Žižek, *Can One Exit from The Capitalist Discourse Without Becoming a Saint?*). Recall here that space, as Vitali-Rosati puts it, includes the entire inside-outside package of objects and relations, the "values, practices, technologies, and infrastructure" as Vitali-Rosati says. Lacan's Discourses offer a network of ways in which this space's symbolic/ theoretical structure produces effects in its social/ practical operation. To formalize this, the discourses appeal to a (clockwise) rotating matrix of four symbols in the form of an ordered quadruple ( $\$, a, S_1, S_2$ ). Notice immediately that these symbols are cold in McLuhan's sense: they are deeply ambiguous, featuring shapes which are not only complexly and amphibolously related to the concepts they symbolize but also rich in conceptual and imaginative association taken as markings on a surface in themselves.

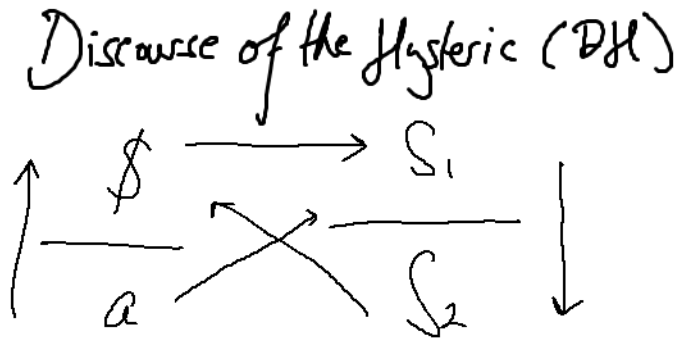
The symbols signify the subject ( $\$$ ), the master-signifier ( $S_1$ ), the knowledge system ( $S_2$ ), and the surplus ( $a$ ). We have said what the  $\$$  is, the subject. And the  $a$  is the surplus.  $S_1$  is what can be called a linchpin symbol, guaranteeing the (artificial) completeness and consistency of a system of knowledge,  $S_2$ . The master-signifier,  $S_1$ , for a racist like Oswald Spengler (say), is the mystical notion of the "blood" of a people, the "expression of existence... [the] life history of ripening and withering, its deep relation to the creative acts, the myths and the cults of the same Culture" (Spengler 101). "Blood" for Spengler provides (what is supposed to be) a belief which affects all other beliefs contained in the system, yet which cannot be affected retroactively by the network of beliefs available to the expressive capacity of that system. The signifier is "master."

Of course,  $S_1$  appears in non-racist systems of thought too, even in allegedly revolutionary ones; we will see how this works with Vitali-Rosati in a moment.

And the symbols are in a matrix of four fixed places, clockwise from the top-left (the II-quadrant in a coordinate plane): (1) agent, (2) other, (3) loss, (4) truth (Bruno 114ff.). The agent is the "positive" pair in

an opposition, any opposition. The truth is the signifier connecting the agent's subject (as logical subject) to its correspondence with external reality. The other is the agent's first negation, the oppositional member in the ordered pair of (positive claim, negation). The loss is what is lost, quite literally, what cannot be recovered in the schema and must be forfeited to accept the hypothesis under investigation.

There are five such discourses; each captures a configuration of the social space in a way homologous to the structure of the symbolic system implied in the formalization. Right now, I focus on one, the Discourse of the Hysteric (DH) (Žižek, *Can One Exit from The Capitalist Discourse Without Becoming a Saint?* 49of.). Let me now draw what the DH looks like and then parse it out—draw it to emphasize the “cold” ambiguity of the shapes and the minimal difference between the variables and the written architecture of their symbols themselves:



The arrows indicate the direction of inference, how to pass from one position to the next in the circulation. Let's place Vitali-Rosati's system into this, what we have (because he has) variously called metaontology/ choreology/ the chiasm/ the virtual. What will guarantee the accuracy of this reading will be an a posteriori fit between Vitali-Rosati's system as already described and the outcome here. Only some hidden inferences will now be able to be made. It does

not matter in which order I list these in what follows, since these are meant to be in circulation; the same structure will be made clear if we follow the patterns suggested by the formula.

The agent of Vitali-Rosati's metaontology is the subject, understood in its (subjugated) role as the surface of contact between social institutions and an individual's "inner" space of subjectivity. For Vitali-Rosati this is the agent as subject who is in the unique position of co-producing space as architect, his positive claim (Vitali-Rosati, *The Writer is the Architect: Editorialization and the Production of Digital Space* 18). It is the subject who is the "agent," the architect, of change.

The truth (behind the subject) for Vitali-Rosati is the factor which I have not encountered him mentioning, but fits exactly into his system where it ought to: he mentions that it is Deleuze who aboriginally sees the virtual in its authentic, chiasmic structure (Vitali-Rosati, *The Chiasm as a Virtual: A Non-concept in Merleau-Ponty's Work (with a Coda on Theatre)* 286). We can infer then that for Vitali-Rosati, as it is for Deleuze, at least in his late period, is the so-called "body without organs" (Deleuze and Guattari 9-15). The body without organs, as Alenka Zupančič says, is for Deleuze "in itself the real scene of emancipation," the pre-symbolic object which has erased the minimal difference (between it and itself) and has absorbed all surplus into its foam (Zupančič 177f.). This makes sense of Vitali-Rosati's position: the chiasm is this space of "no-escape," which structurally guarantees its own ontological exhaustivity. The body without organs cannot have an exception associated with it because it is itself beyond opposition, so beyond negation, and so beyond exception. This makes sense also of why Vitali-Rosati says the chiasm is not truth-functional: the body without organs, as with the virtual, is beyond all opposition and so is by entailment also beyond the truth-falsity opposition. It is a "truth" which is no-truth, or rather, pre-truth.

The other for Vitali-Rosati is the first negation of the agent, which is the chiasm. Because the master-signifier,  $S_1$ , is positioned here in DH, this means that the other—the space of negation of the chiasm—is the symbol which guarantees the chiasm's exhaustiveness.

The other here is the system of privatized oppression in the digital space which makes the subject a passive product of the institutional structuring (Vitali-Rosati, *The Writer is the Architect: Editorialization and the Production of Digital Space* 5). This, recall, is the negation of the chiasm only insofar as the behemoth of privatization represents a “shade” in the spectrum of public and private space within the chiasm: “I propose that the public and the private be placed on a continuum rather than in a discrete opposition to one another” (Vitali-Rosati, *On Editorialization: Structuring Space and Authority in the Digital Age* 94). This makes sense not only of Vitali-Rosati’s ontology of the pure multiple, but also of the notion of body without organs as the “truth” beyond all opposition as the corresponding “reality” to the chiasm.

Let’s pause for a moment and re-visualize the formalization by substituting Vitali-Rosati’s tenets for the variables in DH. This will allow us to see the final variable,  $S_2$ , in its position of loss in the chiasmic ontology. I will replace the variables with short descriptions, written by hand.<sup>[7]</sup> The other markings, such as the arrows, are left out for clarity:

Vitali-Rosati's Metaontology:

<u>the subject as agent for change</u>	<u>the chiasm as inside-outside surface</u>
body without organs; the material reality beyond antagonistic opposition	the system of knowledge — the institutions controlling digital space

This allows us to visually process the position of loss in Vitali-Rosati’s schema. What is in the position of loss in DH is the system of knowledge itself, or  $S_2$ . Now an implicit inference needs to be pulled

out, which is obvious but full of surprises. It is that—obviously—no individual subject is in possession of the exhaustive, maximal scope of knowledge contained in any system at least as expressive as those natural-language systems of knowledge found in human communities.  $S_2$  is therefore not a glimpse into what a particular member of a discursive community knows or can “prove,” but rather is an admission that it is the other who really knows (Lacan 230ff.). This implies, further, that there is something “missing” from the subject who knows according to  $S_2$ , that what is missing is this maximal scope of knowledge which only the other can know.

Now I want to piggyback on this to make two claims by way of critique of Vitali-Rosati’s overall project, at least in the sample of texts surveyed in this study. The first is that I want to motivate the thesis that there is real, authentic, genuine opposition between the subject and its other. Recall that it is opposition, that is negativity, as such which is foreclosed in the chiasm, denied having anything more than an apparent presence in the manifold. The second is to point out that it is right at this juncture where Vitali-Rosti’s system breaks down. The system of knowledge characterizing digital space is controlled, or at least in the position to be controlled, by institutions (as he admits). And it is these institutions which encourage the passivity of the subject—the continuity between privately owned and public domain digitality—which stands in the position of the other (top-right) in Vitali-Rosati’s DH configuration. Since it is this inside-outside continuum, the chiasm, which stands in this position, it is the chiasm which is the “other” who knows what the individual subject cannot. Now here’s the rub: if it is the system of knowledge,  $S_2$ , which is lost, then it is precisely the continuum of privatization/public domain digital architecture which is lost, forfeited, in Vitali-Rosati’s theory. But insofar as the privatized sphere is a metonymic part of the continuum—which is the oppressive factor within the chiasmic structure of digital space—and it is this system which is “lost,” then according to Vitali-Rosati’s own insights *there must be no oppression*.

This is the import of the “hysterical” discourse: that it alters the very system of knowledge by producing a claim to know the conditions of oppression and, in so doing, internalizes those conditions of oppression into the very subject who seeks to be liberated from it (Tomšič, *The Capitalist Unconscious: Marx and Lacan* 208f.). For Vitali-Rosati, this means that the chiasm has anticipated the exhaustive nature of virtual transformation, composition, and division characterizing digital space and prevented, ahead of time, any possibility of escape or exemption or refusal. The subject, for Vitali-Rosati, is one which can co-construct digital space only from a position already radically subjugated—“produced”—by the very institutions it seeks to change. The word “radical” here is key, since there is for Vitali-Rosati no remnant left over in the subject which resists the status of product and so acts only from and through the position it is placed in by the “powers that be.”

Notice also from the first thematic diagram of DH that the arrow from loss does not travel horizontally to the left to the position of truth; the loss is truly lost, forfeited. The arrow from the loss is instead directed diagonally toward the agent, which “fills” in the loss, being left with the burden of replacing the loss. But here the agent—the subject, for Vitali-Rosati—fills in the inexistence of oppression with its revolutionary activity; only now, the revolution is transformed (degraded?) into resistance for its own sake, because there is nothing—literally—to revolt against. There is, in short, no ontological antagonist in this story.

An illustration from fiction may help clarify the problem associated with Vitali-Rosati’s no-escape solution. Brian Moore’s phenomenal novella *Catholics*, first published in 1972, explains the circularity affecting an institution which internalizes its own space of revolutionary permutation (Moore). In this alternative future, the Catholic Church is freshly rebounding after a fourth Vatican council which has secularized the church such that that its entire ecclesial, theological, and sacramental life has been eliminated in favour of a series of formalistic practices of “spirituality” which—the narrative indicates—is preparing the Church for its definitive merger with the institutions of (pantheistic) Buddhism.



The dilemma facing the traditionalist monks is homologous to the no-way-out of the chiasm: they cannot revolt against the (fictional) Vatican IV changes—however objectionable they would really be if they had been made—without ceasing to be members of the Catholic Church, precisely because it is the Church itself which makes those changes. Against this, the return to traditionalist practice (the Latin liturgy, the direction the priest faces during divine services, espousing a “high” sacramental theology, etc.) even if it is “Catholic” in some symbolic sense homologous to historical practice, still counts as abandoning the universal church. But, according to the traditionalists, so is staying with them, given Vatican IV. Hence the no way out.

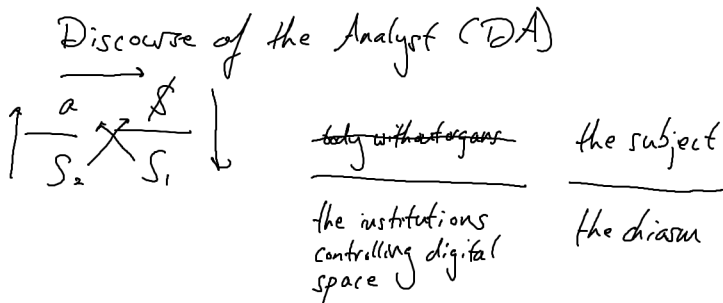
The main axis of thematic and theoretical struggle in this book—treated in explicit parallel with the dramatic conflicts unfolding in the plot—is that even a final stronghold of traditionalist Catholic practices practiced by monks and their abbot (in an inaccessible monastery called Muck in the remote Irish isles) is unable to provide an exception to the system-wide internalization of (historically) non-Catholic practices into the life of the church. In the very last frame of the story, the abbot, Father O’Malley, who has ironically long since lost his faith in both the existence of God and in the theological and sacramental authenticity of Catholic practice, says that “prayer is the only miracle... If our words become prayer, God will come.” The rub here is that O’Malley *cannot* pray, because when he does, as the narrator informs us, he “enters null. He would never come back. In null” (Moore 108).

This must be interpreted as O’Malley’s admission of the final and inescapable immanence characterizing the traditionalist position at large: the *ecstasis* (standing-out, escape) of the subject out of the immanent and into God (in traditional Catholic doctrine of sacramental participation) is blocked in favour of a metonymic and self-folding immanence which secures ahead of time the inclusion of all objects and relations in its maximal domain (pantheism).<sup>[8]</sup> Prayer is the only miracle, but one cannot pray, so there are no miracles. And so it is with Vitali-Rosati’s subject: it can “pray”—pray for a shift of media goods and services to the public domain, for a distribution of wealth

and equalization of power imbalance, for a reconfiguration of financial incentive, for a revolution in institutional practice, or for a grass-roots change in mass psychology—but this attempt (cuing O'Malley) will fail to deliver the miracle. It cannot act, because the “sacramental” exception, the surplus which really, truly escapes the chiasmic fold, is foreclosed in the “null,” never to come back from there.

...to be done?

With tongue in cheek, I want to propose a return to the mode of traditionalist “catholic” intervention: I want to propose a shift to a mode of discourse capable of recovering the field of negativity, of authentic antagonism, of “miracle.” To do so I will turn to the Discourse of the Analyst (DA), constructed via a single clockwise turn of each symbol. It places the variable of surplus (*a*) into the position of agent. And it places the variable of the chiasm, into the position of loss. Here is the shift that is needed to correct the immanentization of the subject under the chiasm, and why we must see the chiasm, as Samo Tomšič does, as a “fold” in Lacan’s more simple, more expressive, and more explanatorily powerful system (Tomšič, *Baroque Structuralism: Deleuze, Lacan and the Critique of Linguistics* 131). DA is written out as follows:



I read this as follows: the surplus being in the position of agent allows for “the means of production of that which eventually realizes

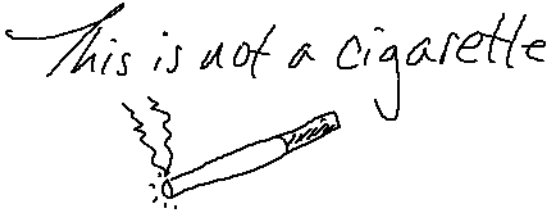
this ‘emancipation’” at the level of the signifier (Zupančič 177f.). From a Lacanian standpoint this is not achieved via a body without organs, because this generated signifier is not beyond opposition. I have therefore rendered it ~~body without organs~~. Rather, for Lacan, acting from the standpoint of exception (to the system) is the vantage capable of achieving change—whether it is empirically successful at a given historical moment. The truth this agency generates is the (ironic) elevation of the exception to the “normal” life of the institution itself. On the surface this is a contradiction in terms, but its logic must be seen in its superposition between Vitali-Rosati’s claim that digital space is maximally inclusive and the (mutually incompatible) claim that nevertheless, there is an exception to this space—that is, the subject who secures a place as a remnant, a leftover (Brillaud 247ff.).

Notice there is passage from the position of truth diagonally to the position of other. This means that it is by means of self-inconsistent institutions (regulating virtual space) which passes into the subject, in the position of the other. But recall that for Vitali-Rosati, too, it is the subject (in itself) who is oppressed, antagonized by the institutions controlling digital space which subjugate it and “produce” it. At any given moment a positive claim can have several negations: the other of the surplus is the subject in the DA schema, but the other of the subject in itself is its *oppression*.<sup>[9]</sup> This means that the other in the DA schema can be traced to the axis of subjugation and of production within the subject—that the other of the agent of change is the very aspect of the subject’s being which is crafted and designed by the institutional modes of domination.

And notice what is lost: it is the chiasm. This makes perfect sense, since it is the chiasm which, as we established previously, prevents the subject from standing out (ec-stasis) of the manifold in the position of genuine exception.

I think we need to accept this loss with open arms on ontological grounds. Markus Gabriel has expressed what I have called the loss of the chiasm in a lasting and memorable way which spotlights the significance of abandoning it as the correct account of being (Gabriel

119). Consider the famous 1929 painting by René Magritte: *La Trahison des Images*. Modifying it to express a more popular past time, we can render that image thus:



Gabriel points out that the very associations and inferences which compel us to say that no, in fact, this is not a cigarette (but rather an image of one) should compel us to say that no, in fact, that is not a sentence *but only an image of one*. Gabriel's point is that the image of a cigarette does not create the ontological object of a cigarette, and that this relation must be admitted for language, too: the image of a sentence neither creates a sentence, nor its meaning, nor its social effect, nor its speaker. For that, we must have subjects which extend beyond the plane of the letter, which stand in genuine opposition to the text. I therefore want to claim that Vitali-Rosati gets it exactly backward: it is the chiasm which is generated by the hybrid space of the virtual field, not vice versa. Put another way, I want to say that *the opposition is primary*, meaning that the fictive standpoint which fantasizes about a space beyond or before opposition (such as the body without organs or its metonymic projection in the chiasm) is itself a "moment," a fold in the surface of a topological field which is not constrained by that fantasy.

To render this point in the key of my title: if one has the floor then no, in fact, one does not also need to dance—the floor and the dancers

are *given*. But, I claim, there is no “myth”<sup>[10]</sup> associated with this given: one must have *something*—a floor and a dancer, say—to have a dance; and it is only after this that the virtual architecture (re)configures the space as a hybrid, virtual feast. What Vitali-Rosati further misses in missing this is that the topology which he dismisses already includes the discursive social link.<sup>[11]</sup> Vitali-Rosati only sees one half of this claim, the construction of the empirical by means of the (theoretical) chiasm. But it is the chiasm which is one of the products of this space; it is never one of its producers.

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

To return to an earlier moment of the piece, I suggested in the “first presupposition” that there is a constitutive incompatibility between claiming exhaustivity and exclusivity of division when it came to critiquing Bergson’s temporal, vitalist ontology. I am suggesting here, as a closing comment to the piece, that Vitali-Rosati commits this same fallacy, only in reverse. Let’s call it the “fallacy of decomposition,” and say that Vitali-Rosati attempts to provide an exhaustive subdivision of fundamental ontology in the chiasm (as inside-outside) while in the same breath maintaining that only that which is postulated by the chiasm is admissible, that is, that there is no exception to this space. This is a claim to exclusivity, and needs to be marked as central to the failure of this ontology: what is left out of consideration is exactly what the difference between the subject and the institution is *in the chiasm*. Given Vitali-Rosati’s system, there is no difference, and that is why it fails to carve out a space of ontological power for the advancement of the subject beyond its status as product in the virtual.

I really must emphasize my indebtedness to Vitali-Rosati for thinking through the subject of digital emancipation from the standpoint of the politically subjugated citizen. All I have sought to add is the ironic distance which Barbara Cassin so aptly expresses in the ironic comment: let open access have its day, let the internet go public, if it did it would “all [be] there: free open access for all, links and indexation—all except for the algorithm itself” (Cassin 48). I want to short

circuit this algorithm by proposing an account of the subject as an ontological refusal to be mere product and to provide a way out to bypass the pure immanence which produces it. But for that I think the chiasm needs to be relocated away from its position as hysterical demand for a new master and into the position of just another one of the fantasies of the social space.

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## NOTES

1. Interestingly, the dénouement of *The Matrix Resurrections* (Wachowski, Mitchell and Hemon) offers a peak into a successful attempt at this way out. I rather think the attempt isn't so successful; this argument is explored in the "final moment" below.↔
2. The "theoretical problematic" can be equivalently put into another set of terms which will be utilized in what follows. This is the application of the logic of Hegelian "negation of negation" to the inside-outside opposition, or, in the case of the virtuality of the digital world, the reality-virtuality opposition. The so-called "first negation" generates an epistemological opposition between the negated terms, as "inside," on the one hand (as what privately happens on our screens), and "outside" on the other (as what happens in the public world at large containing the screens and their viewers). Negation taken in its "second"



sense “consists in the destruction and internal critique of the propositional form of thought that occurs when negation affects each part of the [opposition] in turn, thereby critiquing the abstract hypothesis of their separation” and should thus be seen in its full ontological import (David-Ménard 1202). What survives this negating of the negation, to put it squarely, leaves us with the properly ontological hypothesis explaining the nature of the explananda at hand: it is the “underlying” reality supporting the space between the opposing terms, consistent with each individually and able to explain their difference. This is why space ends up being the privileged ontological dimension of the present age, because it is the category which survives the application of the logic of negation to itself in its second sense (Vitali-Rosati, *The Writer is the Architect: Editorialization and the Production of Digital Space* 6). [<sup>3</sup>]: It is this surplus which I am connecting with transcendence in the ordinary sense of the term—as a feature which “transcends” the limits of the relations that leave it out. Later I will make clear how surplus is to be connected to a genuine “outside,” since I will describe systems which re-absorb it into its immanent frame. Here I will say that the surplus is not structured as *exception*—and the surplus which is I will call genuinely transcendent. [<sup>4</sup>]: Note 2 touches on this. [<sup>5</sup>]: I am getting this language from Pierre Bruno (Bruno 22). This work will be my implicit background for claiming that the subject has a remnant which transcends the deadlock of the symbolic—or, in the key here, of the virtual. [<sup>6</sup>]: Trying to decipher old handwriting sometimes feels like a forensics puzzle. This is a moment of this form of amphiboly I allude to. This will be taken advantage of in the main text in a moment. [<sup>7</sup>]: I also tried not to edit these images: relative lack of forethought in design, slip ups in scale, and messiness in lettering is kept in my initial attempts at writing. This is also a part of my method. [<sup>8</sup>]: Notice from the example that it is not a matter of whether there is a change taking place—clearly the Catholic Church is being changed in Moore’s novel. It is also not a matter of whether the “people” are changing the church—that is also made clear in the structure of the narrative. The example might therefore furnish evidence for Vitali-Rosati’s thesis. However, it is rather that in *Catholics* there is no other option except for Catholicism, and that’s my point: to stay is to abandon the church, and yet to go is to abandon the church. But then there’s no difference between staying and going: the institutional church has ceased to be a domain with definitive specificity such that one can properly identify it to rebel against it. And so it is with the chiasm, I claim. [<sup>9</sup>]: A spectacular moment in Marx’s *Grundrisse* touches

on this: “The real *not-capital* is *labour*” (Marx 274). [<sup>10</sup>]: I am playing on the famous “myth of the given” here which I claim my account bypasses. [<sup>11</sup>]: That Lacan’s discourses are constructed through empirical observation grants more credence to the point, that the social-symbolic is a system which is itself in superposition between the empirical and the theoretical (Bruno 114).↔

## WHO IS THE WRITER?

MARCELLO VITALI-ROSATI

### IN AN INTRICATED NETWORK OF TEXTS,

This text has several pre-texts. It is the continuation of a dialogue between several writings, and its aim is to try to grasp the significance of these writings and of their enunciatory functions and, above all, the relationship between them. It will be necessary, first of all, to give an overview, or rather a brief schematization, of this network of texts. It would, of course, be impossible to give an exhaustive account of all the textual relationships that weave the fabric of this discourse, for the cross-references, presuppositions, sources of inspiration, repetitions, and pastiches are too numerous—even if theoretically finite.<sup>1</sup>

This text chooses a precise point as the centre of its analysis and looks at the emergence of the network from this centre. The centre is the interaction—or, as will be proposed later following the proposal of another text (Barad), the intra-action—between two texts: *The Writer is the Architect. Editorialization and the Production of Digital Space* (Vitali-Rosati) (from now on: *WA*) and *If One has the Floor, does One also need to Dance? Topology, Choreology, and the Structure of Digital Space* (Vučković) (from now on: *OFOD*).<sup>2</sup> From this center, the network will be followed in a group of other texts that are also signed with the name Marcello Vitali-Rosati (from now on: *MVR*)—in part cited by *OFOD*.

This group of texts will serve here to try to answer the question: “who is the writer?” Or, in this specific case: “who is *MVR*?”

### TO PRODUCE A RESEARCHER,

It is useful to compare the exercise of this response with what is required in France to obtain an “Habilitation to supervise research” (Habilitation à diriger des recherches or HDR). This diploma recognizes a researcher’s research experience and enables them to direct doctoral dissertations (“Arrêté du 23 novembre 1988 relatif à l’habilitation à diriger des recherches”). The composition of the file required to obtain the HDR is defined by each university, but normally the file must contain a document—of variable length—that presents the candidate’s research activity, telling a kind of scientific biography of the candidate.<sup>3</sup>

This scientific biography is a veritable way of producing the researcher themselves. It is a matter of taking a collection of scientific texts, often published over a long period of time, and trying to assemble them into a coherent unit. This unit will ultimately be the candidate’s scientific “essence,” it will be “the researcher” and their name. A series of often scattered, hard-to-connect activities, the motivation for which has sometimes been completely contextual and not at all “necessary,” must be considered as if they were the fruit of a single, coherent intention, with a sure and clear orientation from the outset: the intention of an Author. This scientific biography is thus the production of this Author: an essence embodied in a name, a signature. Here, the writer is the product of their<sup>4</sup> writings. And, in France, this writer is necessarily institutionalized. Their existence and essence must be stamped by the authority of the institution which, in effect, transmits to a signature a certain authority in the field of knowledge production and research. “X is a true researcher.”

### PLEASE FIND A THREAD

This text attempts a similar enterprise, even if it does not ask for the stamp of the French institution: it tries, from a series of texts, to produce MVR. To do so, it has to find a common thread, a coherence, a single guiding main theme in a series of scattered writings. And, with

a certain taste for *mise en abyme*, this common thread is the question: “who is the writer?”

In short, the answer to the question “who is the writer?” here is: the writer is the result of a set of texts asking the question “who is the writer?”

Indeed, it is possible to identify this recurrent question in texts published under the name MVR between 2002 and 2023: the main pre-occupation seems to be that of redefining the relationship between inside and outside, between subject and object. The relationship between writer and writings is paradigmatic in this sense: it raises the question of who writes, who produces, who is active, and who is passive. Is it the writer who produces *their* texts, or rather—as the HDR’s scientific biography seems to suggest—are the texts that produce the writer?

#### AT THE CENTRE OF THE NETWORK.

But it is necessary to start from the beginning, and therefore from the centre chosen by *OFOD: WA*. So, here are the theses that seem to emerge from *WA*—in its interaction with *OFOD*’s reading of it:

- digital space is a real and habitable space
- writing is the material of which digital space is made
- digital space becomes the main living space for what *WA* often calls “us”—what this “us” refers to is precisely the crux of the problem
- digital space is not given, but is the result of production, of writing
- “we” (as writers) can be the protagonists in the production of digital space.

Yet these theses are put at the service of a need that seems to impose itself right from the start of *WA*: if it is possible to write digital space, this would enable “us” to *resist* against spaces “given” or imposed by

the big digital corporations (the GAFAMs, even though this acronym is not used in *WA*).

In *WA*'s words:

"We can say that we are now living in a digital space and that this space is constructed by writing. [...] The objects that surround us are the result of a writing process.

This situation implies a huge risk—that of remaining passive while private companies organize and develop these spaces for us. How might we avoid this risk? Is it possible, in the digital age, for us to be central to the production of the spaces in which we live? How might literature constitute a tool for the production of the spatial imaginary that enables us to reappropriate the places and territories managed by the information industry?"

*OFOD* notes a paradox in *WA*'s argument: if space is the fruit of the writer's production—or put another way, using concepts present in other texts, if space is the chiasmatic<sup>5</sup> result of a contact between outside and inside, between object and subject—then against what could the writer resist? *WA*'s thesis would be hysterical, for it proposes that the subject resist something of which it is itself the origin. The subject produces the space against which, in order to express its subjectivity, it tries to resist.

Hence *OFOD*'s title: either there is a "floor," something given, objective, before which something else (a subject?) can resist—but in this case the subject's action (the dance) cannot co-produce this given "thing"—or this something is not given; it is co-produced, but then there is nothing against which to resist.

THERE ARE NO "THINGS";

*OFOD* is right. For it puts its finger on what seems impossible to say, and what *WA* effectively fails to say: the fact that the two poles—subject and object, writer and writing, dance and floor—are not two

poles. Or better: the two poles *are not*. In the strongest ontological sense, the two poles have no essence, they are not two “things.”

Hence the recurring question: who is the writer? This question is now revealed in all its ontological significance. It is a question about essence, or, even more precisely, it is a question about Being. What matters in the question “who is the writer” is precisely the “is,” the verb to be. The question is ultimately a fundamental metaphysical one: what is Being?

The constant that can link the various texts in the network thus becomes an ontological constant. The texts in question, as *OFOD* precisely grasps, are texts that attempt to bring out a “metaontology.”

#### FROM THE STANDPOINT OF METAONTOLOGY.

The proposition of metaontology—present in several texts of the network considered here, since 2003<sup>6</sup>—is the key to answering the question “who is the writer?” Metaontology is an ontology that assumes a multiplicity of multiple-Being that are always folding dynamics. Being is always multiple-Being. And these multiple-Being are never stable essences, but the intra-action<sup>7</sup> between forces.

In short, here are the main theses which structure metaontology:

- Metaontology is an ontology. As such, it proposes an ontological approach to the world. It aims to develop a discourse on Being itself.
- Metaontology is based on an irreducible and originary multiplicity and it considers this multiplicity as an originary characteristic of Being. The topic of metaontology is multiple-Being.
- Metaontology is an ontology of mediation. It considers mediation as the formal structure of thinking and it considers Being as inseparable from thinking. Multiple-Being are thus originally mediated.
- Metaontology considers mediation and thinking always as inscribed material forms. This inscription is prehuman: thinking,

according to metaontology, should not be considered a human action.

- Metaontology is one ontology among other ontologies. It is not a super ontology. It is a metaontology because it allows the finding of relationship between different ontologies, but it does not reduce them to a unique final metasystem.
- Metaontology develops formal logic systems to create relationships between different ontologies without reducing one to the other.

### HOW TO SAY THAT?

In a 2003 text (Vitali-Rosati, *Riflessione*), this idea was presented using the notion of “planes of reflection.” A plane of reflection is a fold of Being that manifests itself as such. In other words, reflection, meaning, and thought are not the production of a subject. There is no subject with an intention that manifests itself in reflection. Meaning is the emergence of a multiple-Being. And there is not something like an “immediate Being” which would be given and then “perceived,” “seen,” or reflected by a subject: Being is always a multiple-Being, already reflected, already folded. The polarity object/subject is reduced to the original multiple unity of multiple-Being.

To name this folding of Being, several notions can be mobilized. One is that of chiasm.<sup>8</sup> Instead of two poles interacting, there is first and foremost the entanglement<sup>9</sup> of these two poles. Instead of a subject looking at an object, there’s a chiasmatic blend of subject and object, exterior and interior.

This is what *WA* is trying to say by using the idea of “movement”—particularly in the final section, which calls on Valéry. There’s no such thing as a stable, fixed essence. There are only dynamics, movements; everything is virtual, the actual is an *après-coup* of the virtual.<sup>10</sup>

But *OFOD* is right to point out the inadequacy of such an argument. A chiasm necessarily always refers to the pre-existence of what is



encountered in the chiasm. The chiasm follows the destiny of all antidualistic thought: it ends up admitting a pre-existing polarity for the simple reason that it is unable to adequately name the alternative to this polarity.

It is a limit that seems to be constitutive of language—or at least of philosophical language.<sup>11</sup>

### TO GO BEYOND THE OPPOSITION,

*WA* tries to go beyond the inside/outside opposition, and in the text, in fact, there is never any mention of a “subject.” The term is proposed in *OFOD*’s reading of *WA*. This interpretation is not really abusive, as *WA* is not really able to go beyond the opposition between inside and outside. The opposition is re-proposed, and typically imposed in the pronoun “we,” which ends up in opposition to space. There is a space and a writer who writes it. *WA*’s problem is a trouble expressing the fact that the two poles, inside and outside, space and those who inhabit it, writing and the writer, are not “things,” are not “essences.” These poles are not the starting point, but the result of their intra-actions.

The path proposed by Louise Merzeau—with the notion of *choros*, which should replace that of *topos*—goes in the same direction and suffers from the same problem: the space as *choros* is certainly chiasmic, but this chiasm continues to refer to an actor who dances, an active subject who faces a place (the “floor” as *OFOD* puts it) where they dance.

### USING THE THEORY OF EDITORIALIZATION

The theory of editorialization, as articulated by Vitali-Rosati (“What is Editorialization?”; *On Editorialization*), points to this problem. While Merzeau clearly asserts the need for human intentionality to produce meaning—the dancing subject—Vitali-Rosati, on the contrary, attempts to affirm the emergence of meaning without intentionality, and above all without human intentionality. The opposition to be avoided, in the field of editorialization theory, is embodied

particularly in the “man vs. machine” poles. On the one hand, there would be a human being endowed with intentionality, who can produce meaning, and on the other, something passive and given, the machine, which does not produce meaning. On the contrary, Vitali-Rosati (“What is Editorialization”; *On Editorialization*) asserts that meaning is the result of a series of dynamics from which emerge, as after-effects, the poles of opposition. In other words, the notions of human being and machine do not pre-exist intra-action. This thinking, which emerged in the 2010s, is obviously even more topical in the LLM era. Vitali-Rosati (2021) insists on this point, explicitly proposing the idea of a meaning that comes *before* the human being.

In this sense, the theory of editorialization is neither a form of technological determinism,<sup>12</sup> nor a reclamation of human freedom in the use of technical environments. Because, according to editorialization theory, there is neither technology nor human beings, the very concepts of “technology” and “human being” are the result of a series of intra-actions, not the two poles of an interaction.

#### IN A NON ESSENTIALIST WAY

The most recent definition of the concept of editorialization is consistent with this approach, and stems from a critique of previous definitions,<sup>13</sup> which remained fundamentally essentialist:

“Editorialization is the set of dynamics that constitute digital space and that allow the emergence of meaning. These dynamics are the result of different forces and actions that subsequently determine the appearance and the identification of particular objects (people, communities, algorithms, platforms ...)

[...]

An example may clarify the definition. An individual X is the result of a series of dynamics that define this individual and make him appear. X is what emerges from an ever-changing process that involves different forces and actions: algorithms,

clicks, data structures ... All these forces determine, for instance, that the query "X" on Google Search gives some particular results, that the profiles of X on different platforms are more or less visible, displayed one way or another and that, finally, X is that particular person. These dynamics are inscribed, they are material mediations: if I can think about X, this means that digital environments can think about X in the same way. X exists via this thinking. Access to X and his being are the same thing. The only exception here is that this access is not human, it is present, inscribed, recorded, concrete, material, even without us." (Vitali-Rosati 2021)

This is why *OFOD*'s assertion that: "The agent of metaontology is the subject" is false. The very idea of metaontology is that there is no subject: multiple-Being are always mediated. These mediations are the very structure of multiple-Being themselves. There is no place for an inside/outside structure, because there is not such a separation. The chiasm comes before. Being is the chiasm which consists in a multiplicity of multiple-Being.

And again, *OFOD* affirms: "one must have something—a floor and a dancer, say—to have a dance; and it is only after this that the virtual architecture (re)configures the space as a hybrid, virtual feast." The approach of metaontology is to claim that there is never "something." The "something" is always the result of an intra-action.

### INTRA-ACTIONS HELP.

To better understand the idea of metaontology, it is time to introduce a pretext that is, in fact, a post-text from a chronological point of view. The notion of metaontology was first sketched out in Vitali-Rosati (*Riflessione*) in 2003. But it plagiarizes, by anticipation (Bayerd) Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway (MUHW)*. This book expresses and explains in the most convincing way the idea of a realistic, anti-essentialist ontology. An ontology in which there are not things, but processes and intra-actions. Based on Niels Bohr's philosophy-physics, this book demonstrates that "things" are always the result of intra-actions. The term is coined in an attempt to avoid

falling into what the idea of “interaction” presupposes: for there to be an interaction, there must first be the “things” between which this interaction will take place. In the case of intra-actions, this is not the case. Intra-actions come first. Things are precisely the result of intra-actions, not the other way around. The materiality of intra-actions guarantees the realism of the ontology, which is in no way constructivist: there is indeed the real, except that this real is not made up of essences, but of actions. This is therefore an “agential realism.”

If there are no things, the aim of an ontological analysis is no longer to identify essences, but to understand how boundaries emerge precisely by creating identification effects, or in other words, by making “things” emerge.

In this sense, according to *MUHW*, there are no such things as human beings. The human is not an essence. And so there can be no opposition between humans and machines—for example—or humans and space, or humans and digital infrastructures. *MUHW* affirms: “My posthumanist account calls into question the givenness of the differential categories of human and nonhuman, examining the practices through which these differential boundaries are stabilized and destabilized” (66).

#### WHO IS THE WRITER, THEN?

Now, from a theoretical framework of this kind, it is possible to reaffirm *WA*’s point in another way.

There is, in fact, no difference ontologically between subject and object, inside and outside, dance and floor. The idea is to try to understand how and why boundaries emerge to identify and differentiate things (and so also “subjects” and “spaces”). Some chiasmatic intra-action can be analyzed as producing, say, a “collective” and a “power,” or a “human” and a “machine,” or a dancer and a floor. Why are the boundaries stabilized in order to produce a subject and a space? What are the intra-actions to look at in order to be able to produce these two poles?

It would be possible to achieve in another way what *MUHW* calls the agential cut, the cut that chooses some particular intra-actions in order to isolate them and establish boundaries. With another agential cut, instead of a “digital space” and a “subject,” there would be, for example, communities, such as the free software community. This community is made up of a set of practices, interests, values, discourse, code... The notions of human and machine, in this case, are less relevant to the analysis.

It is therefore necessary to examine the ways in which boundaries emerge, so that something stabilizes itself as a “thing.” *WA* proposes the case study of the Trans-Canada Highway. In this case, attention needs to be paid to the intra-actions that cause the highway to stabilize as an infrastructure with some characteristics, and a person crossing it to become a user with some other characteristics. A certain type of agential cut would make the highway look like a useful and efficient infrastructure, designed to speed up the transport of goods. This infrastructure has as its counterpart a user—the human—who is characterized as having production as their primary goal. The user quickly crosses the highway to get from point A to point B as efficiently as possible. The human and the infrastructure that emerge here have definite essences, but these essences are the result, not the starting point, of intra-actions.

In the *transcan16* experience, there is no longer a highway and highway users, but a series of different, heterogeneous inhabitable spaces: those described by literary works, those photographed, those imagined ... and on the other side, readers rather than “travellers” or “users.”

*WA*’s point—at least as this text is interpreted here—is not to affirm the freedom of a subject, but to lay the foundations for an analysis of the emergence of meaning in which the subject is not only not a protagonist, but also not an actor at all.

So, *OFOD* claims: if there is no difference between inside and outside, it is impossible to affirm the freedom of the subject. Yes, ok, so do not affirm it; just forget about the subject.

Who is the writer then? And who is MVR?

The writer is also the result of intra-actions. It is neither the free actor who—by dancing—produces the space/object in front of it, nor the automaton<sup>14</sup> whose gestures are determined by a technological environment. It could be both, or something else entirely, depending on the agential cut, on how the boundaries emerge.

There is no such thing as MVR. MVR is not a thing, it is not an essence. What is interesting politically and institutionally is to question how boundaries that isolate, define, and circumscribe MVR emerge, how they stabilize and how they destabilize.

This insight and analysis is perhaps at the heart of the activity of philosophy.

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## NOTES

1. Some of them are cited in the text, some in the bibliography, some stay implicit, some of them are actually unknown, e.g., the set of texts on which DeepL’s language model, which plays a role in the emergence of this text, has been trained.↵
2. It is important to underline that this center has been chosen by *OFOD*, which is not a text signed by MVR. The center is thus eccentric, in some ways, as the following pages are going to show.↵
3. Wikipedia (“Habilitation à diriger des recherches”) talks about “une biographie (appelée aussi « égo-histoire », document faisant la synthèse de l’activité scientifique des candidats),” “a biography (also known as an “ego-history,” a document summarizing the candidate’s scientific activity).” The notion of “ego-history” seems very appropriate here: this history is, in fact, the very production of the ego, of the subject.↵
4. And the possessive adjective comes too soon here, because there’s no “their” before the texts.↵

5. The notion of “chiasm” comes from Merleau-Ponty (*Le visible*) and is central for Vitali-Rosati (*Corps; Égaréments*) and other.↔
6. The first formulation is in Vitali-Rosati (*Riflessione*).↔
7. Below, this concept will be better explained.↔
8. See footnote above.↔
9. It is an interesting term. In French, Levinas (*Totalité*)—which is the pretext of Vitali-Rosati (*Riflessione*)—used the word “intrigue” that could be translated with the English “entanglement.” This word is the one used in quantum physics and the concept is at the very foundation of Barad, which, as it will be shown below, becomes central in the argumentation of more recent texts of the network analyzed here.↔
10. The notion of the virtual is explored in several texts (Vitali-Rosati *Corps; “Auteur”*) that establish a dialogue with other pretexts (Merleau-Ponty *Phénoménologie*; Deleuze; Bergson *L'évolution*).↔
11. Ce sujet des limites du langage est ici envisagé dans la continuité du dialogue autour des textes de Lévinas, cf. en particulier Derrida; Lévinas (“En ce moment”); Ricœur.↔
12. The ideas proposed by Kittler (*Discourse Networks*) can be interpreted as a form of technological determinism, because there is a clear opposition between the intentionality of a human being—who wants to write something—and the determination of a pre-written machine.↔
13. Especially Vitali-Rosati (“Mais où”).↔
14. The idea of automaton is proposed by Matteo Treleani.↔

## SMALL ELEGIES FOR AMERICA

LINDSEY FREEMAN

Miniatures open us up to childhood memories, daydreaming, and nostalgia, but they can also alert us to the dangers and disappointments of our times. Many contemporary artists are utilizing small-scale artworks to represent difficult truths of contemporary American life, such as alienation, disenchantment, precarious housing, and economic insecurity writ large. In this essay, focusing on the artists Michael Paul Smith, Thomas Dolye, and James Casebere, the imaginations that encircle homes, neighborhoods, and small towns are complicated through utopian and dystopian art works that draw attention to past attachments to the future and the need for large changes now.

Les miniatures nous ouvrent aux souvenirs d'enfance, à la rêverie et à la nostalgie, mais elles peuvent aussi nous alerter sur les dangers et les déceptions de notre époque. De nombreux artistes contemporains utilisent des œuvres d'art à petite échelle pour représenter des vérités difficiles de la vie américaine contemporaine, telles que l'aliénation, le désenchantement, le logement précaire et l'insécurité économique au sens large. Dans cet essai, axé sur les artistes Michael Paul Smith, Thomas Dolye et James Casebere, les imaginations qui entourent les maisons, les quartiers et les petites villes sont compliquées par des œuvres d'art utopiques et dystopiques qui attirent l'attention sur les attachements passés au futur et le besoin pour de grands changements maintenant.

**W**hen we were children, we were also accidental geometers. The genesis of our spatial training came from the first places we lived. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard writes that our childhood homes are “physically inscribed”

in us.<sup>1</sup> In geometry, to speak of inscribed shapes means that they fit snugly in other shapes. Bachelard goes on to show how the process doesn't stop when we move out of these homes, but instead we take these impressions with us as long as we live. As we dwelled in those homes, they dwell in us.

When we move through the world, we exscribe the habits we honed in our first homes on each other and on the world. This all goes quite smoothly if our childhoods were secure, if cultures remained stable, and if social worlds tumbled out gently from one generation to the next, but for most of us living in the twenty-first century, the mutual dwellings—the homes inside us and the homes we live inside (if we are so lucky)—have become architecturally, emotionally, and socially incompatible. We question their very foundations. How can we confront the enormity of this?

One way to begin to grasp the current state of destabilization of American life, especially in terms of housing, is through thinking with miniatures. As Jack Davy and Charlotte Dixon write in “What Makes A Miniature?”, a miniature that “resembles a particular thing can simultaneously be a representation of something else, something less tangible.”<sup>2</sup> In this essay, I think with miniatures to get to the complex feelings of stress, distress, and disappointment held by a large swath of contemporary Americans unable to find consistent housing and supportive communities. Inside this swirl of mixed emotions there are elegiac feelings—sorrows of perceived lost chances, sadness at social connections that slipped away, and the sense that something beautiful that was just out of reach is now gone.

Susan Sontag writes that “being a spectator of calamities ... is a quintessentially modern experience.”<sup>3</sup> And while this is certainly true, making sense of these calamities is not so easy, as Sontag shows in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, her book exploring representations of atrocity. When a catastrophe is seen firsthand, the scale of the event can be hard to take in; when it happens slowly over time, such as the erosion of the chance at a good life that includes housing stability, it can be harder still to contemplate. When disasters are brought to our attention through texts, photographs, or films, it can be difficult

to feel the immensity of the losses, even if they register on a factual level. More than an exercise in morose mini-mimesis, miniatures that draw attention to the housing crisis and loneliness of this particular moment can help us to think through how we got here through triggering emotions, memories, and affects that we can then begin to decipher and critically assess.

As I have written elsewhere, “when the gigantic ... threatens to overwhelm us completely, we turn to miniature.”<sup>4</sup> Miniatures enhance our ability to take in information, making things that might be too overpowering when experienced through other media, such as documentary photography or video, more intelligible. Small-scale models force us to look closely, and at the same time, they can allow us to do so without the guilty feelings of voyeurism that can sometimes come with photography or film. As Susan Stewart writes: “the miniature becomes a stage on which we project, by means of association or intertextuality, a deliberately framed series of *actions*.”<sup>5</sup> Through their affective infrastructures, miniatures of catastrophe and lonely endings serve as reminders of the ways in which we can be harmed by individuals or institutions and how we can fall out of intimacy and sociality, but they can also help us to remember the ways in which we are implicated in the hurt and care of and for others.

Miniatures hold our attention through a replication of cultural architectures and gestures made small, which are processed through the imagination, memory, contemporary technologies, and social relations. Miniature worlds draw us close. And by bringing us “in,” they bring us into immediate contact with parts of our interiority that are lit up by the encounter, where “values become condensed and enriched.”<sup>6</sup> As John Mack writes in *The Art of Small Things*, “The processes of creating small things are not simply technologies for reducing scale but also imply a corresponding exaggeration of content.”<sup>7</sup> Miniatures, created through minifying processes, have magnifying capabilities.

In this essay I think with miniature artworks from three contemporary artists: Michael Paul Smith, Thomas Doyle, and James Casebere. All three work with similar motifs, including: houses, neigh-

bourhoods, nuclear families, small towns, suburbs, and swimming pools, with atmospheres that exude loneliness, nostalgia, and resignation. Although each artist does this in his own way, all three depict small, elegiac architectures infused with the expired dreams of progress held by past generations, which become layered on the present-day nightmares of ecological, economic, and domestic insecurity. What we see in the work of artists such as Smith, Doyle, and Casebere are the exposed beams of greed and grief at the heart of the contemporary American housing crisis and the ongoing failure of the United States to provide stable grounding—both material and emotional—for the majority of its citizens. At the heart of this crisis, is a failure to understand that times have changed.

### THE ARCHITECTURES WE BUILT AS CHILDREN

**F**or over twenty-five years, Michael Paul Smith created the fictitious town of Elgin Park, a dreamy place set in the American Midwest in the mid-twentieth century. Elgin Park exists as an immense collection of forced perspective photographs staged by placing diecast model cars and handcrafted architectural miniatures in the real-life spaces of Winchester, Massachusetts. In the images from Smith's imaginary town, fragments of a prosperous America are layered with some of the darker ambiguities of the age. For example, in one photograph, there's a handsome two-toned red and cream station wagon at the A&P on double coupon day, an illustration of Americans' love of a deal, supermarkets, and abundance. In another image, we see a silvery-blue El Camino with white-walled tires parked jauntily in front of the Superette, promising style, along with groceries, speed, and convenience. Another photograph features a toy store at night after closing, its bright banners offering a colourful contrast to the gray and empty street. The shop is full of eye-catching items, including a poster of a tiger on a pink background, a candy-red truck, and even a seaplane suspended from the ceiling, but what causes me to pause is a Pinocchio doll in the corner of the window. Pinocchio, much like Elgin Park itself, gives off the appearance of a toy about to spring to life at any moment. The most foreboding photograph, to me, in the entire series reveals a mysteri-

ous research building at the edge of town, where I can imagine all kinds of secret experiments conducted by men with serious glasses and austere haircuts draped in white coats. The images that make up the town highlight particular dreams and material desires intrinsic to many twentieth-century Americans; they are scenes of near-fulfillment for a predominantly white middle and upper-middle class world with the nuclear family at its core, but they leave a space for something still wanting, which makes them mesmerizing.

This wanting is similar to “the desire to animate” that Stewart identifies when writing about toys, where “the desire is not simply to know everything but also to experience everything simultaneously.”<sup>8</sup> It is a desire for possibility, maybe for a different life, or maybe for just more of the life suggested in the scenes—a Pinocchio who does become a real boy, triple coupons, extra superette, longer fins on your shiny automobile.



Figure 1. Michael Paul Smith, *The 1959 El Camino in Profile* (Elgin Park, 2011)

Every photo of Elgin Park creates a tender and slightly unsettling microclimate of yesteryear in 1:24 scale. The combination of atmosphere, artifice, and reality create an illusion that feels lived in, somehow real, even though we know these are fabrications. Smith is proud of the fact that he doesn't use photoshop or other digital manipulation software. Instead, he positions his models in such a way that the atmosphere appears natural, and then he takes photographs with a simple, two-hundred-dollar point-and-shoot camera. Smith was not formally trained as an artist or photographer, but he has a unique and varied employment history, and as a result, a wide variety of skills, which he brings to his art. He has worked as an architectural model-builder, illustrator, postal worker, wallpaper hanger, and museum display designer. Smith is a talented craftsman, but he also has an uncanny ability to create ambiance of bygone days. His photographs have a consistent mood where the not-quite-real past—miniaturized—is weirdly representative of the feeling of a childhood that both was and wasn't part of American history. This is memory work for memories that don't quite work. His photographs create the backdrop for an alternate history, where America could be a place good enough to be nostalgic for.

With Elgin Park, Smith invented a whole world—one that seems to expand as soon as we enter it, then to close us within its sphere. He refers to this opening and enveloping quality as “spookiness.”<sup>9</sup> This spookiness is a particular flavour of the uncanny that is produced through interaction with miniature things. The feeling can be eerie, like in Elgin Park where you become transfixed by the sensation of a temporal stretchiness, as if you are looking at vanished time. With this diminutive town, Smith creates “a past that can be all the more spellbinding,” because as Walter Benjamin writes, “it is not his own, not private. Nevertheless, it always remains the time of a childhood.”<sup>10</sup> It matters that the childhood Smith wishes to fashion is *a* childhood, and not a complete replica of his own, even if his past undeniably permeates Elgin Park. Smith grew up in the 1950s in Sewickley, Pennsylvania, a steel-mill town just north of Pittsburgh, bordering the Ohio River. Sewickley comes across as the per-



fect town to miniaturize, measuring just one square mile. Its smallness creates the illusion of knowability and containment.

The landscape of Smith's youth is at the heart of his work and provides both a historical referent and an emotional tether for Elgin Park.<sup>11</sup> The childhood he taps into is a dreamworld of small-town America steeped in victory culture following World War II.<sup>12</sup> It is a place of security, inventiveness, and material wealth for normative white Americans longing for upward social mobility. As Smith defines the era: "The 50s and 60s had a sense of hope about them. Television had come in, new cars came out every year and everyone avidly looked at science fiction hoping to get a glimpse of what the future would be like. The future was tangible, and it just made it worthwhile getting up in the morning to see what was going to come down the pipe next. It was an amazing time."<sup>13</sup> This spirit of American optimism colours the magic geography of Elgin Park, but shades of loneliness and apprehension seep through as well. Today, the future no longer feels so optimistic or hopeful for most of us, as it did for Smith in his youth, and of course for many Americans, the United States never elicited this kind of promise. In our times marked by ecological crisis, political division, and the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic, it's hard to be excited about what is "going to come down the pipe next." Will it be a new form of acid rain? A never-seen-before dangerous flu? Another crime committed by a president? Another murder of a Black citizen? More misogynist legislation? For me, the separation between present-day America and Smith's quaint twentieth-century scenes saturates them in an anxious radiance.

Smith's own upbringing had its share of darkness mixed in with the comforts of growing up in what has been called the "American Century." He was bullied for being gay, and there was a history of violence in his family that included murder and mutilation.<sup>14</sup> Although the details were never clear, there were missing family members and hints of foul play. As part of his model-making practice, Smith built the house he grew up in, a process he described as a kind of therapy.<sup>15</sup> The small version of his boyhood home added an element of realism into the mythological space of Elgin Park. The replica took



Figure 2. Michael Paul Smith, Research Building Parking Lot 1958 (Elgin Park, 2009)

longer to make than many of his other creations because he went deeper into the interior than he normally does. Smith made every effort to reproduce as faithfully as possible the contours and quirks of the space. He took care with the details, such as tracking down the exact shades of pink and gray floral wallpaper that had adorned the walls, in order to reproduce them in miniature for his model. He also painstakingly sliced faux-wood contact paper with an X-Acto knife to mimic the wood-grained linoleum that his parents put down over the original pine plank floors, which had been painted in a deep burgundy.<sup>16</sup> Sparing no detail, he even carefully affixed the original house number “239” to the façade.

Smith’s attempt at working through memory with a model of his childhood home, and Elgin Park more generally, resonates with the Italian artist Alice Pasquini’s sculpture of an abandoned dollhouse, which she sees as an enactment of the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott’s theories of play, creativity, and transitional spaces. Pasquini describes her deserted dollhouse as an example of the fact “that time



Figure 3. Michael Paul Smith, *Another Giant Head* (Elgin Park, Childhood Home, 2011)

does not change [us] and that the architecture we built as children are the same ones we inhabit as adults.”<sup>17</sup> For Bachelard, it is not only our dollhouses, but our first homes, that we always live inside (as they live in us). In a meditation on the spaces of our early addresses, he writes: “The feel of the tiniest latch has remained in our hands.”<sup>18</sup>

All those latches, doors, and rooms of our first homes are intrinsic to the formation of our habits and haptics. Those spaces work on us our whole lives, like the language of our youth, where instead of sentences, we translate all the spaces we encounter back to this first way of knowing and feeling our bodies in space.

To visit Elgin Park is to experience what Freud called “the factor of the repetition of the same thing,” which mimics the feeling of “some dream-states.”<sup>19</sup> In Elgin Park, specific cars, houses, buildings, and even numbers return again and again. One of the things that repeats is the address “239,” where the number functions as both a synonym and synecdoche for home. Before Smith recreated his childhood res-



Figure 4. Alice Pasquini, *The Unchanging World* (photo Alessandro Sgarito7)

idence in miniature, he had already been working with the house number on a different structure. In fact, 239 hangs on one of his most used and photographed models, a mid-century bungalow painted in the same muted green tones as the house he grew up in, offering a numerical, chromatic, and even stylistic nod to his first home.

In the bungalow 239 there are rugs which are tiny copies of those once owned by his parents, as well as dollhouse-sized crisp linens and a tan-and-green plaid bedspread reminiscent of that earlier era. The kitchen features period-appropriate miniaturized food canisters and birch plywood cabinets sitting above a shrunken simulacrum of linoleum from a 1955 pattern from Sears. The house is also equipped with a folding ironing board, a porch rocker that rocks, along with a glider that really glides. The bungalow is featured in many of the photographs of Elgin Park, which adds to the dreamlike feel of the place. Like other buildings of this meticulously made miniature town, the house does not stay put, but instead moves around, appearing within different scenes and against changing backgrounds and topographies. It is with these recurring, mimetic, and movable mod-



Figure 5. Michael Paul Smith, 55 Oldsmobile with Bungalow (Elgin Park, 2008)

els that the town starts to feel paradoxically quite large, while space and time seem loose and shaggy around the edges.

Even when Smith focuses mainly on exteriors and surfaces, one of the most compelling things about this ersatz, nostalgic Midwestern town is how realistic many of the images look—at a glance they pass as historic photographs. Some of this is the result of Smith's spatial knowledge, honed during his letter carrier days. He intimately understands how city streets are laid out into patterns for traffic and pedestrians, at what precise angles buildings would face the street, and the peculiar beauty of the modern geometry of parking. The figure of the well-parked vehicle is often the focal point of Smith's scenes. The model cars he utilizes are from the heyday of American automobile culture chosen from his extensive collection to fit the mood of each particular photograph.<sup>20</sup>

There are no representations of people in Elgin Park, and as a side effect the cars carry the emotional weight. Although some viewers have sworn that they have seen small out-of-focus figures in the im-

ages, this is only the work of their imaginations or the aftereffects of a reverie.<sup>21</sup> Smith deliberately constructed his photographs without people in order to allow for a feeling of openness that lets viewers place themselves in the town.<sup>22</sup> Elgin Park conditions “visitors,” in the terminology Smith uses, by gently disrupting their senses, in a way that may not even be noticeable to them. Through this interruption of the normal perceptions of lived space, Elgin Park becomes strangely habitable, at least in a daydream.<sup>23</sup>

In his work Smith strives to reach the emotional register he calls “okness,” but there is something fragile and contradictory about Elgin Park. It is an imaginary town with a name pulled from the Utopia of nowhere, bearing the qualities of, in Smith’s words, a “neutral place,” a place with “no conflict.”<sup>24</sup> “The Neutral,” following Roland Barthes, is something that “outplays” or “baffles the paradigm.” The neutral is not something benign, or passive; it can “refer to intense strong, unprecedented states.”<sup>25</sup> The neutrality of Elgin Park can feel almost hallucinatory. To visit is to be immersed in an idealized town that carries an aching uneasiness. By Smith’s design, there is no outward conflict, but there is an unmistakable diffuse tension in the work. This tension cannot be resolved, but it is productive—it works to show the shifts in culture over generations and the fantasies of other times that continue to nag at our present.

Smith’s final contribution to the mythology of his miniature town was a message, resembling a postcard, addressed to those who follow his art: “I’ve moved to Elgin Park!” written in a buttery-yellow script against a periwinkle-blue background of sky hovering above a photo of a single-family home with a shiny maroon-coloured car in the driveway. Smith had pancreatic cancer and organized to have this message posted after he passed away. His last work as an artist fit perfectly with all the representations of Elgin Park that preceded it. The image carried an air of quietness and tenderness that faced squarely the difficult realities of life and death. On the postcard is Smith’s model of the bungalow, house number 239, a citation of his childhood home transported into the gentle haunting, uncanny space of Elgin Park, “the most visited fake town in the United States.”<sup>26</sup>



Figure 6. Michael Paul Smith, *Moved to Elgin Park* (Elgin Park, 2019)

### STANDING ABOVE SOMETHING SO DELICATE

Thomas Doyle creates sculptures featuring houses that symbolize the fantasies of economic safety and middle-class confidence in the United States slipping away.<sup>27</sup> In his art, we see the homes many Americans were socialized to desire emerge from an effluvium of decay or teeter on the edge of the abyss. His sculptures contain human figures, but they have no facial expressions; it is the houses in his works that radiate feelings ranging from contentedness to despair. The homes show everything, as if the affective valences they usually contain have been externalized and transformed into architecture. Houses function in the scenes as characters, almost as family members. The small human figures, by contrast, give off

the impression of being universally oblivious to what is happening around them. When the houses are under duress, the people usually go on, unbothered. It is only when they are caught at the steps of something collapsing that they extend themselves, their arms stretched for someone or something beyond saving.

The one- to two-inch human figures Doyle uses in his sculptures come from a German model train company. They are mostly people waiting for trains; the kind of waiting that takes place in what Barthes calls “dilatatory spaces,” narrative spaces of gesture and delay between the beginning and the ending that refuse to come to a conclusion.<sup>28</sup> These are figures designed to live in readiness and expectation, or boredom and resignation. They are handy to use out of the box as raw material, but their bodies are rarely in the exact position Doyle wants, so he basically remakes them. He takes them apart, removes their limbs, repositions their arms and legs, glues them back together, sands and then repaints them. Once reconfigured, they are then positioned in the scenes: German postures corrected for American nightmares.

While Doyle’s sculptures contain both houses and human figures, they do not resemble dollhouses. The interiors of the homes are only visible when they are blown to bits or sawed in half, like small echoes of Gordon Matta-Clark’s *Splitting*. Further, the feeling one gets when looking into a dollhouse, the sensation of spying on a secret world of domesticity and often, familial bliss, is absent in these works. Instead we are made aware of a something that has been cooking for a long time, a microcosm of America stewing, like Sylvia Plath writes in *The Bell Jar*, in its “own sour air.”<sup>29</sup>

The German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk theorizes that every social form has its own “bell jar of purpose,” where “people form a social sphere, come to understand themselves in that space, form and reform it.”<sup>30</sup> But what happens when the atmosphere sours, time and space start to slip away, or, if you’ve never been able to fully understand yourself in those forms in the first place? Doyle’s works offer a hefty skepticism about what kinds of renovations can happen in ongoing emergencies. His sculptures are documents of an Ameri-



can suburban ideal grown nightmarish and turned topsy-turvy. They draw our attention to the false sense of security brought and bought through consumption of the American dream. The scenes seem to mock the whole endeavour of private property and the imagined financial soundness that comes with home ownership. Models of the family home are cracked open, and there the vertiginous nerve of class stability is exposed for what it is—something that hangs like a live wire, alluring, but dangerous, and difficult to grasp and hold steady.

In Doyle's sculptures, the tiny houses, rendered in 1:43 scale or smaller, are always in danger: frequently, they are crumbling or partially destroyed; sometimes the houses are sinking into the earth in a great concavity; occasionally, they are already completely subsumed; and often, they are flung into the air or about to fall from great heights. For example, in the sculpture *Tremble* a once-beautiful home, painted in seafoam green, is bookended by two strong trees sitting on a foundation that looks anything but sturdy. The house is all alone without neighbours. The vulnerable structure is surrounded by a narrow ring of grass, and large chunks of earth appear to be in the process of falling into a void. A miniature man in a dark red jacket and khaki pants reaches for a tiny woman wearing an apron over a pink dress on the porch; she is holding on to a pillar for support. It is not clear that their hands will meet. It looks possible the man will fall to his death. The piece further pushes the viewer to question if it would even matter if these two manage to connect with each other. The house and the whole little world we see here feels destined to collapse, to crumble into a pile of snarlings at the bottom of a bell jar creating a small puff of dust that will momentarily rise and then settle into a portrait of nothingness.

Some of Doyle's sculptures appear to explode rather than implode. In *A Corrective* a golden-yellow house sits in a perfect circle surrounded by debris. The broken fragments and ruined objects that wreathe around the house seem to be the exact quantity of materials that would be produced from an explosion set in the heart of the home. A small human figure—a blonde girl in a pink dress—stands on the lawn with her head bowed inside a halo of destruction. She occu-



Figure 7. Thomas Doyle, Tremble (2012)

pies a middle zone between the safety of home and the rubbish-laden chaos of the world. The figure of the white child, so often used to signify the promise of the future, is here either what is to come or what remains of something broken or destroyed. In Doyle's work any idea of innocence is irrelevant and useless. He shows how we are all



Figure 8. Thomas Doyle, Tremble (detail, 2012)



Figure 9. Thomas Doyle, *A Corrective* (2010)

caught up in this precarious moment, how we are all implicated and affected by the multiplying catastrophes of our times.

A prominent theme in Doyle's art is the creep of nature over human civilization after a disaster. In these spaces, the garden has gone feral and the forest has run rampant; nature is actively eating everything in its path, including human homes. We can imagine that these homes once—both symbolically and concretely—provided order and protection. For example, in the work *Beset*, we see a house and a group of people, who appear to represent a family—its inhabitants—who have been almost fully swallowed by greenery. We do not know how long the natural world has been gnawing at this dwelling, but we do know it is no longer fit for human habitation, and that the people, now half-vegetal, no longer seem fit to be housed either. The scene has a strange air about it, an image of paralysis, where folks just stopped living as they had been and let the dirt, vines, and moss devour them and their whole world. It is a disaster in slow motion.

Many of Doyle's sculptures are spherical and enclosed in glass, which creates a distance between the scene and the viewer, but para-



Figure 10. Thomas Doyle, *Beset* (2013)

doxically draws us in. As Walter Benjamin writes about toys, “the smallest and most exiting” are “those you can’t touch because they’re behind glass.”<sup>31</sup> Glass creates split worlds by sectioning off what’s behind, while at the same time invites looking in, which can take the form of either voyeurism or witnessing. Glass has a magical property: it steals attention. For evidence, just watch a shopper walk a street lined with stores, and then observe how the items displayed behind shop windows are made all the more alluring, sometimes lit-

erally halting the shopper in their tracks and coaxing them to consider what is behind the glass.

Miniatures, like glass, work as lures for looking and invitations for study. A dollhouse, for example, can inspire the contemplation of all matter of homes we might have lived in, admired, or even noticed for one reason or another. When glass and miniatures combine, attention and contemplation are magnified. This dual process interrupts the feeling of a normal flow of time, and simultaneously makes time and space more mesmerizing. The glass containers and the small spherical worlds they hold make us aware of fragility, and how little effort it would take to smash this small world of model characters and their fictive lives, and by extension the larger American lives so many of us keep trying to live.

#### UNSLEEPING DESIRE OF AMERICA

James Casebere captures the shift from suburban malaise to suburban anxiety in the wake of the subprime mortgage crisis in his photographic series *Landscape with Houses (Dutchess County, NY)*. The series is composed of tabletop models that are set against composite digital backgrounds and then photographed. He created nine model homes as a start, then quickly made many more, building out in all directions in order to mimic the effects of suburban and ex-urban sprawl. The models were originally handcrafted, and then as the series grew, they were made with the help of a computer program that smoothed out some of the rough edges, although they were still based on the original design. The model houses are made from simple stuff—wood, cardboard, plaster, and cheesecloth—but in the photographs they appear almost immaterial, ethereal. Actual Dutchess County residents would likely recognize their neighbourhoods in the images, but any realism Casebere conveys is affective, rather than material. These models are designed to look like models; they are dreamlike architectural rhymes, but not miniaturized replicas of the buildings they represent. For Casebere, “it’s the gesture that counts, not the realism.”<sup>32</sup>

In these photographs of Dutchess County made phantasmagoric, we never see humans, or any other creatures for that matter, but somehow the exterior of the homes (all we ever see) are exceptionally tidy and the lawns immaculately maintained, almost perversely so. The absence of people despite the evidence of human activity—lights in windows, burning fires, a bicycle leaning against a wall—creates a disquieting space. Casebere’s images are portraits of what the novelist Thomas Wolfe calls the “unsleeping desire of America,” which is shuttered behind facades, lonely and secret.<sup>33</sup> Collectively, the images produce an out-of-body and out-of-time experience, a kind of vertigo, that lets thinking loose, but also makes thoughts feel unmoored, like the fuzziness that comes with a bout of insomnia, or the space between dreaming and waking.

It is not possible to tell that the skies are added in post-production, but there is something about the artificialness of the cosmos that matches the cookie-cutterness of houses. In Casebere’s little suburb, the light is often soft, like the light of morning or evening. Although, occasionally, all is candescent, as if a lamp was turned on in an interrogation room. The scenes are candy-sweet, but they create a feeling of emotional isolation and longing; this is a place where intimacy is perpetually deferred. In Casebere’s *Dutchess County*, the suburban imaginary is on full display, stealing a bit from both the urban and the rural, without being quite either one. Everything conforms to a familiar pattern, but the typical nature of the scene feels exaggerated, and too ordinary not to be something else, too. Plus, it is important to remember that normalness is always sinister in a violent country.

In *Landscape with Houses (Dutchess County, NY), #1* the homes appear to bob like swimmers in a sea of green. The houses and streets are neatly ordered, but they are set on the rolling hills characteristic of the Hudson Valley, a place where human efforts towards symmetry ride on the waves of an ancient topography. A vigorous docility colours the atmosphere; the only hint of movement is a light grey car on the top of a hill, just on the edge of escape from the neighbourhood near a dense clump of trees. We cannot see if the vehicle has a driver, and it seems equally likely that the car will head off to the



Figure 11. James Casebere, *Landscape with Houses (Dutchess County, NY) #1* (2009)

city or the countryside, or that it might simply roll down the hill, a ghostly vessel controlled only by gravity.

Casebere's series shows the waning of an exuberant American way of life in delicate hues. With cheery colours, like those found in Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands*, he creates an uncanny landscape filled with McMansion style homes and grass as lush as cashmere. In *Landscape with Houses (Dutchess County, NY) #4*, the faintest rainbow graces the bright sky, a soft echo to the colours of the homes it arcs above. Meanwhile, the same grey car occupies the same grey space of road, while down the hill an American flag snuggles its pole, barely showing itself, and a couple of sturdy-looking wooden swing sets signify the desire for a future that is healthy and fun. The neighbourhood is an upper-middle class dream; it is not a place of extreme affluence, but a place where an above-ground pool is fine enough.

In *Landscape with Houses (Dutchess County, NY), #8*, the neighbourhood looks as if it sprung from the edge of a ruler. There's a small, well-maintained road flanked by sidewalks separated by a slender





Figure 12. James Casebere, *Landscape with Houses (Dutchess County, NY) #4* (2010)

stripe of grass, while more gentle stripes, which appear to have been created by a lawnmower, corduroy the landscape. Already-made driveways sit adjacent to lots waiting for homes to take shape: a small portrait of an America ever hopeful for ongoingness. Snuggled next to homes, satellite dishes signify the possibility of news and stories from elsewhere, a technological promise of wide connection without leaving the living room. The yards and wooded area just beyond the development are dotted with trees sweated in the red, orange, and yellow shades of fall, while windmills are lined up like toy soldiers at the perimeter, stilled, but coiled and hungry for energy.

Casebere's focus is on the neighbourhood as a whole, and individual homes are important chiefly for their conformity to the overall aesthetic. It is important to note that the houses are not identical; they reflect the owners' desires, but in their subtle differences we see a lack of originality, or at least an embrace of the concessions to the genre: suburban home. The houses seem to share a reserved sense of



Figure 13. James Casebere, Landscape with Houses (Dutchess County, NY) #8 (2010)

belonging, as if they've made some kind of pact, while at the same time concealing a secret, separate life. Each image of this oversaturated landscape depicts an alternate reality that we know as our own. Not a place where, as Bachelard writes, "the house's entire being would open up, faithful to our own becoming," but a place where things feel closed, where we are on the outside, not even able to look in, our futures becoming something else.<sup>34</sup> Yet in our outsidership, there is a lingering feeling that we were once inside, or that we somehow belong in there, by the hearth; as if we have been accidentally locked out, but for a very long time. Or maybe the feeling is closer to an amnesia where we can only remember our childhood homes, not where we sleep now.

## NOT A SUBTLE TRUTH

**A**t first glance, artworks created in small scale can seduce us with an invitation to mastery that taps into our formative years spent controlling toys and creating worlds for our dolls and action figures to inhabit. Miniatures can invite nostalgic feelings of childhood that provoke memories of malleable experiences, pretensions to innocence, and a sense of protection. While the sweet, lulling iterations of miniatures get the most popular attention in our culture of distraction, there is a whole other universe of miniature artworks that demand thinking and feeling on different registers. These are the kinds of artworks I've been concerned with in this essay.

Smith, Doyle, and Casebere show that a miniaturized scene can represent an enormous amount of a social world paused in time. As Susan Stewart argues in *On Longing*: "A reduction in dimensions does not produce a corresponding reduction in significance."<sup>35</sup> Miniatures, like art works in general, can conjure a feeling of the times in which we live. As Stewart writes, they have the ability to amplify time by "means of a miniaturization of its significance," where "the miniature is the notion of the moment and moment's consequences."<sup>36</sup> The miniature artworks considered in this essay, which I call small elegies for America, have a double capacity: they cause a reckoning with a particular American middle-class longing for the past while simultaneously inspiring a drive to pre-emptively mourn dreamed futures, which already feel foreclosed. A theme that they share is that innocence is not a useful category for thinking through these precarious times. We are all implicated in this moment. They ask any of us interpolated by the feelings of anomie they provoke to contemplate: how did we get here? And then, hopefully, lead to thinking about how we might live differently to avoid more of this fate. The homes, neighbourhoods, and small-town geographies in these works convey the fact that much of American life is empty and deliriously lonely: this is not a subtle truth.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the artists and their family members for their generosity, and with appreciation to my research assistant Dionne Co.

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## IMAGE NOTES

- Figure 1. Michael Paul Smith, "The 1959 El Camino in Profile," *Elgin Park*, 2011.
- Figure 2. Michael Paul Smith, "Research Building Parking Lot 1958," *Elgin Park*, 2009.
- Figure 3. Michael Paul Smith, "Another Giant Head," *Elgin Park*, a replica of the artist's childhood home, 2011.
- Figure 4. Alice Pasquini, *The Unchanging World*, photographed by Alessandro Sgarito.

Figure 5. Michael Paul Smith, “55 Oldsmobile with Bungalow,” *Elgin Park*, 2008.

Figure 6. Michael Paul Smith, “Moved to Elgin Park,” *Elgin Park*, 2019.

Figure 7. Thomas Doyle, *Tremble*, 2012.

Figure 8. Thomas Doyle, *Tremble* detail, 2012.

Figure 9. Thomas Doyle, *A Corrective*, 2010.

Figure 10. Thomas Doyle, *Beset*, 2013.

Figure 11. James Casebere, *Landscape with Houses (Dutchess County, NY) #1*, 2009.

Figure 12. James Casebere, *Landscape with Houses (Dutchess County, NY) #4*, 2010.

Figure 13. James Casebere, *Landscape with Houses (Dutchess County, NY) #8*, 2010.

## NOTES

1. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, (1994: 14).↔
2. Davy and Dixon, “What Makes a Miniature?” (2019: 7).↔
3. Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, (2004: 180).↔
4. Lindsey A. Freeman, “Catastrophic Snow Globes as Oneiric and Mnemonic Gadgets,” (2016:1).↔
5. Susan Stewart, *On Longing*, (1992: 54).↔
6. Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, (1994:150).↔
7. John Mack, *The Art of Small Things*, (2008:1).↔
8. Susan Stewart, *On Longing*, (1992: 57).↔
9. On “spookiness,” see: Danny Yourd (2015) *The Man Behind the Mysterious Miniature Town*.↔
10. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, (2002: 416).↔
11. Originally Smith did intend to make a model of Sewickley, but over time he realized it was the essence of a time and a place that he was af-

- ter, not a particular town. See: Gail K. Ellison, “Welcome to Elgin Park,” (2011: 10).↵
12. For more on “victory culture,” see Tom Englehardt’s *The End of Victory Culture*, 1995.↵
  13. Ameya Pendse, (2013) “Crafting Scenes of Iconic America,” Flickr blog.↵
  14. Henry Luce, “The American Century,” (1941: 61-65); Danny Yourd (2015) *The Man Behind the Mysterious Miniature Town*.↵
  15. The model of Smith’s childhood home was part of the exhibit *Otherworldly: Optical Delusions and Small Realities* at the Museum of Arts and Design, New York. June 7 – September 18, 2011.↵
  16. Smith documented the process on his Flickr page: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/24796741@N05/5508211698/in/album-72157604247242338/>. Accessed 5 September 2019.↵
  17. Alice Pasquini, “The Unchanging World,” art show, January 19 – February 17, 2018, Philobiblon Gallery, Rome, Italy. [www.alicepasquini.com/alice-pasquini-solo-show](http://www.alicepasquini.com/alice-pasquini-solo-show).↵
  18. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, (1994: 15).↵
  19. Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” (1919: 236).↵
  20. Most of the model cars Smith uses in his photography are from either the Danbury Mint or the Franklin Mint; both companies are known for their quality and staunch attention to detail.↵
  21. Gail Ellison, *Elgin Park*, (2011: 19).↵
  22. Smith does occasionally photograph himself with his dioramas, but only in order to show their scale and constructedness.↵
  23. On how dioramas reorder our relationships to the senses and make their spaces appear habitable, I am indebted to Kimberly Mair’s essay “Transitory Formation and the Education of the Senses,” *The Senses in Society* 7:1 (2012: 53 – 71), especially, p. 68.↵
  24. Danny Yourd, (2015), *The Man Behind a Mysterious Miniature Town*.↵
  25. Roland Barthes, *The Neutral*, (2002: 6).↵
  26. Neil Genzlinger, (2018), “Michael Paul Smith, 67, Founder of a Beloved Imaginary Town, Dies.”↵

27. The section title is taken from a comment made in an interview I watched with Thomas Doyle from Hunger TV (2013). The video is no longer available online, but was accessed by me on December 13, 2015.↩
28. Roland Barthes (1975), *S/Z* and *The Pleasure of the Text*.↩
29. Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*, (1999: 185).↩
30. Peter Sloterdijk, *Bubbles, Spheres 1: Microspherology*, (2011: 57).↩
31. Walter Benjamin, "Berlin Toy Tour II," (2014: 48).↩
32. Rima Yamazaki (2011), *James Casebere and Landscape with Houses*.↩
33. Thomas Wolfe, *Of Time and the River*, (2016: 536).↩
34. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, (1994: 14).↩
35. Susan Stewart, *On Longing*, (1992: 46).↩
36. Susan Stewart, *On Longing*, (1992: 46).↩



## VIDEO ART AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN TURKEY

MERVE KAPTAN

Turkey's thriving art scene reflects the growing interest in the international contemporary art market in countries outside the Western world. Istanbul has become a major hub of cultural exchange between the Eastern Mediterranean region, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. Video art is a popular art form in Turkey, and its popularity has been growing in recent years. The aim of this article is to present and study contemporary video practices since the 2000s in Turkey through the representation of time and collective memory. The article presents the four video artists who have structured the video art scene in Turkey: Ali Kazma, Halil Altındere, Erkan Özgen and Seza Paker. The selected videos present autobiographical memories or references to collective memory to explore how time is represented in video art.

La scène artistique florissante de la Turquie témoigne de l'intérêt croissant du marché international de l'art contemporain pour les pays extérieurs au monde occidental. Istanbul en particulier est devenue une plaque tournante majeure des échanges culturels entre la région de la Méditerranée orientale, le Caucase et le Moyen-Orient. L'art vidéo est une forme d'art populaire en Turquie, et sa popularité ne cesse de croître au cours des dernières années. L'objectif de cet article est de présenter et d'étudier les pratiques vidéographiques contemporaines depuis les années 2000, en Turquie, à travers la représentation du temps et de la mémoire collective. L'article présente les quatre vidéastes qui ont structuré la scène de l'art vidéo en Turquie : Ali Kazma, Halil Altındere, Erkan Özgen et Seza Paker. Les vidéos choisies présentent les souvenirs autobiographiques ou des références à la mémoire collective afin d'explorer la façon dont le temps est représenté dans l'art vidéo.

## INTRODUCTION

**L**a scène artistique en pleine expansion en Turquie traduit l'élargissement du marché international de l'art contemporain aux pays souvent considérés comme périphériques. En particulier, la ville d'Istanbul est devenue une véritable plate-forme d'échange culturel entre les Balkans, le Caucase et le Moyen-Orient avec le reste du monde. Avec ses foires internationales, ses biennales, ses expositions et ses nombreux musées, la scène artistique est en train de vivre un fleurissement jamais vu auparavant. Selon Fanny Roustan, l'accumulation du dynamisme intellectuel et l'infrastructure économique à Istanbul mais aussi en dehors des grandes villes à partir des années 1990 constituent l'une des raisons de ce boom<sup>1</sup>.

L'instauration d'un régime libéral et l'immigration avec les années 1990, des petites villes ou encore des zones rurales vers les grandes villes, alimentent également l'expansion des politiques néo-conservatrices. Ainsi, en 2002, avec l'accession au pouvoir du parti islam-conservateur AKP (le parti de la justice et du développement) qui soutient sans réserve la mondialisation économique et culturelle, Istanbul acquiert un statut de métropole régionale<sup>2</sup>. Cette immigration, en grande partie composée des musulmans et des kurdes vers les grandes villes apporte également une transformation sociopolitique qui pourrait englober toutes les différences et les oppositions dans la société et la ville, par conséquent dans l'espace public. Cette multiplication sociopolitique nécessite un développement urbain rapide et la promotion de l'image de la ville pour se faire entendre parmi les compétitions commerciales et touristiques. Donc, d'un côté, la culture 'avec un grand C' ouvre ses artères populaires avec la construction de nouvelles salles de concert, de cinéma et des galeries d'art. D'un autre côté, la naissance d'une nouvelle classe dominante conservatrice altère ses propres valeurs culturelles pour s'adapter à la globalisation culturelle et à son marché.

Par conséquent, vers les années 2000 on assiste à une augmentation du nombre de galeries d'art et des musées tels que Borusan Sanat, Proje 4L-Elgiz Musée d'Art Contemporain, İstanbul Modern, Garanti

Platform, Musée Pera, Musée Sabancı, Kasa Galeri, Siemens Sanat, Santral İstanbul ainsi que des commissaires d'exposition comme Ali Akay, Erden Kosova, Başak Şenova, Levent Çalikoğlu. Ainsi, le secteur s'ouvre considérablement sur le monde alors que 20 ans auparavant les œuvres des artistes turcs n'étaient achetées que par une petite partie des collectionneurs du pays. Avec l'émergence des questions nouvelles et la formation des perspectives différentes, les moyens d'expressions se multiplient conformément à l'esprit des années 2000. En particulier, les nouveaux médias sont devenus un territoire pour les artistes à investir. Alors l'art vidéo, comme le médium le plus accessible des nouveaux médias, constitue l'un des territoires les plus importants de l'art contemporain en Turquie, dès le milieu des années 1990 mais surtout à partir des années 2010.

Dans mon article, je me penche sur les pratiques vidéographiques contemporaines, à savoir depuis les années 2000, en Turquie, à travers la représentation du temps et de la mémoire collective. Le rapport entre les images vidéographiques et sa technique de construction m'a conduit à la notion du temps parce que tout simplement la technique pour produire ces images construit des temporalités, des durées, des rythmes dans et à travers les images. Par cette corrélation temporelle, on entend deux idées complémentaires : La première est la construction d'une temporalité synthétique par les paramètres techniques spécifiques qui dégagent des formes esthétiques propres à la vidéo. Par cette question, j'ai cherché à voir quels gestes esthétiques les vidéastes ont utilisé/mis en œuvre pour créer chez le spectateur l'expérience de la temporalité à travers les images.

La deuxième se définit autour du questionnement critique de la mémoire. Selon la définition d'Aby Warburg<sup>3</sup> la mémoire collective est une collection d'excitations qui se forme dans les archives mentales suivant des lois qui sont formées à partir d'une nouvelle manière de comprendre les images par le biais de leur juxtaposition. Dans le cas des images vidéographiques, une manière de créer la juxtaposition passe par créer des temporalités qui relient les images. Par conséquent, j'ai évalué ces qualités temporelles pour déchiffrer les traces

que les images vidéographiques peuvent laisser dans la mémoire collective de la Turquie.

Quand on suit ces deux idées complémentaires découlant de la corrélation temporelle, ma recherche se trouve face aux deux problématiques qui se complètent : l'une est de voir comment les paramètres techniques spécifiques de la vidéo construisent une temporalité synthétique. Cette question en entraîne une autre : comment cette construction participe à l'ouverture d'un questionnement sur la mémoire et de l'histoire ? Je soutiens que l'image vidéographique, en tant qu'une forme technique et conceptuelle, a son propre modèle de construction du temps qui participe également aux révisions nouvelles de la mémoire et l'histoire collective.

Mon terrain de recherche concerne les images vidéographiques produites par les vidéastes de la Turquie. En Turquie, ce n'est que vers la fin des années 1990 que les artistes ont commencé à utiliser la vidéo pour produire de l'art. Pourtant c'est à partir de 2000, avec l'amélioration des moyens de production et d'exposition que la vidéo trouve la possibilité de se répandre en Turquie. Par conséquent, mon corpus comprend les vidéos qui sont exposées à partir de l'année 2010. J'ai choisi quatre vidéastes plus connus qui offrent une idée générale pour représenter cette scène artistique en Turquie. Ils sont : Ali Kazma, Halil Altındere, Erkan Özgen et Seza Paker.

Citer les plus connus de la scène artistique après 2000 devient un travail relatif et plutôt subjectif puisque le critère de la décision comprend la notion de réputation qui ne donne pas un avis objectif ni sur la qualité des œuvres ni sur celle des artistes. Alors dans ma méthodologie de choix, j'ai avancé en suivant trois critères :

- Les citations des historiens et des critiques d'art les plus connus comme Hasan Bülent Kahraman, Ali Akay, Levent Çalikoğlu, Beral Madra.
- Les vidéastes les plus cités dans les ouvrages sur l'art contemporain en Turquie.

- Leur participation (en termes quantitatifs) aux expositions qui offrent une visibilité dans le réseau national ainsi qu'international comme les biennales.

En suivant cette méthodologie, j'ai obtenu une quinzaine de noms de vidéastes. Puisque le sujet principal de ma recherche est la représentation du temps, il était également important que ces vidéastes, d'une manière ou d'une autre, aient leur propre technique pour communiquer le temps dans leurs vidéos. Par conséquent, il fallait diminuer le nombre des artistes en faveur de cette étude. Dans ce cas-là, j'ai choisi quatre vidéastes qui permettent davantage d'offrir une analyse concernant le temps.

Comme ma problématique concerne la représentation du temps, j'ai choisi les vidéos dans lesquelles nous trouvons soit les propres mémoires de l'artiste comme son enfance, un moment important ou intéressant dans sa vie, soit une référence à la mémoire collective à travers l'histoire, une transmission de tradition, un problème socio-politique ou encore une relation avec les espaces publics. En premier lieu, j'ai fait une description à la fois du contenu et de la structure des vidéos. En deuxième lieu, j'ai cherché à définir la forme des représentations du temps afin de faire ressortir le temps comme durée, comme présent éternel ou comme vitesse à partir des gestes esthétiques tels que la répétition et le mixage. Enfin, en troisième lieu, je me suis interrogée sur la question de la mémoire à travers les motifs de l'incarnation et de la confrontation avec le memento mori tout en cherchant à voir comment chaque œuvre a contribué à la construction de la mémoire collective à travers la scène artistique en Turquie.

### QUELQUES REMARQUES SUR LA SCÈNE ARTISTIQUE EN TURQUIE

**N**ilgün Tunal<sup>4</sup> explique qu'avec l'accession de l'AKP au pouvoir, afin de séduire de nouvelles clientèles vers la Turquie et Istanbul, les politiques promotionnelles ont changé vers "la recherche d'une plus grande part de marché dans le domaine du tourisme culturel." Par conséquent, vers les années 2000 on assiste à

une augmentation du nombre des galeries d'art et des musées tels que Borusan Sanat, Proje 4L-Elgiz Musée d'Art Contemporain, İstanbul Modern, Garanti Platform, Musée Pera, Musée Sabancı, Kasa Galeri, Siemens Sanat, Santral İstanbul ainsi que des commissaires d'exposition Ali Akay, Erden Kosova, Başak Şenova, Levent Çalikoğlu. Ainsi, le secteur s'ouvre considérablement sur le monde alors que 20 ans auparavant les œuvres des artistes turcs n'étaient achetées que par une petite partie des collectionneurs du pays.

Murat Pirevneli, galeriste, souligne que la crise économique qui a eu lieu en 2001 était un avantage pour le développement de l'art contemporain parce que le marché d'art établi ne valait plus comme auparavant et cela a fait place à une nouvelle forme d'art :

Avec la crise [...] les objets d'art qui valaient quelques milliers de dollars, tout d'un coup, sont devenus sans valeur. C'était le tournant pour l'art actuel. Frais et sans valeur dans le marché. La majorité des institutions présentes telles que Istanbul Modern, Proje 4L, Aksanat avec leur nouveau programme et des galeries appartenant à d'autres banques ont tous vu le jour après cette date. Bien que l'augmentation dans le nombre des galeries n'était pas particulièrement sensible, l'art contemporain est vraiment devenu un secteur<sup>5</sup>.

Cependant, İlker Birkan<sup>6</sup> souligne que le classement d'Istanbul en capitale culturelle de l'Europe en 2010 est l'une des raisons de cet intérêt artistique qui en même temps attire les investissements vers Istanbul et surtout vers l'aspect culturel de cette ville. Il explique qu'il ne faut pas ignorer la relation entre l'augmentation du nombre des touristes en Turquie et le nombre de visites au musée.

La conséquence d'une telle richesse culturelle se montre également dans la scène artistique d'aujourd'hui à travers les sujets abordés par les artistes qui se rassemblent autour des questions d'identité (y compris genre, ethnique, culturelle, urbaine et l'altérité), la critique des médias et de l'État, la globalisation, l'urbanisation et la déterritorialisation. Avec l'émergence des questions nouvelles et la formation des perspectives différentes, les moyens d'expressions se mul-

tiplient conformément à l'esprit des années 2000. En particulier, les nouveaux médias sont devenus un territoire pour les artistes à investir. Alors l'art vidéo, comme le médium le plus accessible des nouveaux médias, constitue l'un des territoires les plus importants de l'art contemporain en Turquie, dès le milieu des années 1990 mais surtout dans les années 2000.

### L'HISTOIRE DE L'ART VIDÉO EN TURQUIE

**L**e sociologue/curateur Ali Akay<sup>7</sup> défend que la vidéo en tant que médium artistique trouve sa place dans le marché d'art d'Istanbul dans les années 2000. Bien que les expositions, biennales et foires nationales ou internationales dans la deuxième moitié des années 1990 participent à l'intégration de ce médium dans le monde de l'art, la production et la diffusion des œuvres vidéographiques ont augmenté, surtout parmi les jeunes artistes, dans les années 2000. Il se peut que cette expansion ait plusieurs raisons. Je me suis penchée sur l'aspect économique de ce développement parce que tout simplement l'élargissement du marché international de l'art contemporain et le développement de l'art vidéo en Turquie ont pris place dans les années 2000, grâce à l'amélioration des moyens de production et d'exposition.

La définition de l'art contemporain en Turquie a pris une voie différente après les années 2000. Avant cette date, la vidéo, l'installation et les œuvres qui concernent l'espace tenaient une place plus expérimentale ou alternative pour les spectateurs qui avaient la seule possibilité de les rencontrer lors des biennales. En plus, on ne leur attribuait pas une valeur de marché car le nombre de galeries n'était pas si élevé<sup>8</sup>.

Pourtant être visible et être intégré dans le marché de l'art sont deux choses différentes. Alors que dans les années 1990, grâce aux biennales et les expositions organisées par quelques commissaires d'exposition, l'art vidéo devenait visible dans l'histoire de l'art en Turquie, le fait de son intégration au marché aurait lieu dans les années 2000. Même si toujours avant-garde dans les années 1990, les recherches sur la vidéo au sein de GİSAM METU à Ankara et les

efforts des activistes de vidéo (comme Karahaber, Videa et Xurban) sont des exemples qui nous montrent que les artistes avaient déjà commencé à produire à Ankara.

C'est aussi l'idée qu'Ege Berensel soutient<sup>9</sup> : dans les années 1990, Ankara et surtout GISEM était le centre de la production artistique sur la vidéo bien que son intégration dans le marché d'art ait eu lieu à Istanbul, après 2000. Pourtant la pratique artistique était tout à fait différente de ce que nous entendons aujourd'hui par la pratique vidéographique en Turquie. Les artistes d'Ankara avaient leur propre langage artistique qui n'a pas trouvé de voie ailleurs. Cette pratique suivait la ligne de l'artiste Ursula Biemann au sens que les adeptes produisaient des images vidéographiques plutôt avec une approche documentaire. Cette approche documentaire est différente de ce que fait penser l'art vidéo au monde de l'art aujourd'hui. Ce qui est dominant aujourd'hui comme travail artistique dans le cadre des images vidéographiques n'est pas de la même famille que les recherches documentaires des années 1990 à Ankara. En plus cette pratique dominante avec laquelle la vidéo est intégrée dans le marché de l'art en Turquie dans les années 2000, n'est pas non plus créée seulement par les artistes stambouliotes mais Diyarbakır, en tant qu'un centre assez important, jouait un grand rôle dans la production artistique des images vidéographiques.

Parallèlement à cette perspective, Melis Tezkan<sup>10</sup> défend l'idée que la vidéo se fait légitime en répondant aux besoins d'artistes avec sa facilité de transport pour la production et son caractère semi-professionnel financièrement accessible. C'est l'une des raisons que dans une ville comme Diyarbakır, du sud-est de la Turquie avec une population de majorité kurde, les artistes choisissent la vidéo pour répondre aux problématiques sociales et politiques de leur communauté locale. Dans ce sens-là, Tezkan souligne que les artistes contemporains portent un intérêt beaucoup plus intense que la génération précédente pour les micro-cultures, les communautés et les problématiques sociales. Cela a été entraîné par "la difficulté d'être politisé ailleurs que dans le milieu relativement libre de l'art" et "la diversi-



fication des origines locales des artistes, amplifiée par le développement de la politique culturelle<sup>11</sup>”

C'est vers les années 2000 que les salles d'expositions ont commencé à s'équiper des vidéoprojecteurs pour la diffusion des pièces vidéographiques. Également, Beral Madra, critique et curatrice, situe également cette période comme le point de départ de l'expansion des pratiques vidéographiques en Turquie.. Elle écrit : “Les ateliers concernant la vidéo et les projections des images vidéographiques que l'on a organisés en 1995 dans le centre de l'art contemporain BM<sup>12</sup> avec la participation de Angela Melitopoulos (une ancienne étudiante de Nam June Paik) et Clause Blume, un vidéaste allemand, ont ouvert la voie pour l'expansion de l'art vidéo dans les années 2000<sup>13</sup>”

### LES THÈMES COMMUNS DANS L'ART VIDÉO EN TURQUIE

**I**nterrogé sur la question des thèmes et approches communs chez les artistes de la Turquie, le commissaire d'exposition René Block répond que l'art contemporain en Turquie ne suit pas une direction spécifique ou un style comme le futurisme, Zéro ou Fluxus qui étaient manifestés par l'avant-garde occidentale mais que les artistes sont en recherche de leur individualité.<sup>14</sup> Par contre, il soutient que ce qui est commun est leur utilisation des nouveaux médias comme la photographie, la vidéo et les installations, ce qui est en fait une caractéristique globale de l'art contemporain.

Cet argument suggère que l'art contemporain privilégie des technologies réactives, capables de capturer et de diffuser rapidement, telles que la vidéo et la photographie. Les perspectives politiques dissidentes sont plus faciles à documenter et à communiquer à travers ces médiums. Comme on le voit chez les artistes qui produisent après les années 2000 en utilisant la vidéo, et qui se penchent de plus en plus sur la résistance ou la capitulation. En prenant en compte la situation socio-politique en Turquie après les années 2000, on peut peut-être soutenir que la présence d'un gouvernement religieux suivant l'intérêt du marché capitaliste a poussé les artistes vers la résistance ou la capitulation en y ajoutant l'humour du désespoir. Cet

aspect commun est assez visible, par exemple, à travers les œuvres des artistes comme Halil Altindere et Erkan Özgen. On peut même en conclure que les artistes travaillent comme les documentaristes ou sociologues en produisant leurs vidéos et qu'ils composent ou écrivent une histoire visuelle critiquant ou satirisant l'histoire officielle.

Les artistes tentent d'apporter une lumière sur les problèmes politiques, économiques et sociaux de la Turquie, à des échelles majeures et mineures tout en posant la question de l'individu avec des perspectives existentialistes. Pourtant, il ne faut pas en conclure que les artistes de la génération précédente ne partageaient pas une attitude pareille. Les contenus similaires étaient également produits dans les années 1980 et 1990. Ce qui a changé est la technique utilisée : dans le passé récent, ce contenu était accompagné par d'autres médiums alors que dans l'art après les années 2000, la technique utilise ce qui est rapidement saisissable et facile à déplacer, comme le médium vidéo

#### LA REPRÉSENTATION DU TEMPS ET DE LA MÉMOIRE COLLECTIVE À TRAVERS ALI KAZMA, HALIL ALTINDERE, ERKAN ÖZGEN ET SEZA PAKER

**A**fin d'avoir une idée générale sur les vidéastes de la scène artistique en Turquie, le corpus de cet article contient les vidéastes majeurs qui font partie de cette scène depuis le début des années 2000.

Ali Kazma

Le premier vidéaste dont il faut parler est certainement Ömer Ali Kazma. Il est connu à l'échelle internationale avec sa présence à la Biennale d'Havane en 2006 et de Lyon en 2007, à la Biennale de Sao Paulo en 2012 et celle de Venise en 2013. Il a exposé trois fois à la Biennale d'Istanbul (2001, 2007, 2011) avec ces œuvres traitant généralement de la relation que l'homme entretient avec le travail manuel.

À travers la plupart de ses vidéos, Kazma traite la possibilité de notre existence dans le temps à travers la production et la temporalité de l'espace. Capturant les espaces de production ou de maintien comme des usines, des ateliers de danse ou de céramique, une salle de chirurgie, un abattoir ; l'artiste met l'accent sur l'effort existentialiste de l'homme face à cette deuxième loi de thermodynamique. Sa vidéo intitulée *Le Maître-horloger* (2006) de 15 minutes appartenant à la série *Obstructions*, prend comme sujet un maître-horloger du palais Dolmabahçe. Le vieil homme démonte, nettoie, répare et remonte de mémoire une horloge du XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle. Ses mains sont en gros plan et, la plupart du temps, on les regarde travailler sur l'horloge. On voit son vieux visage, son œil plissé portant un monocle en gros plan. Parfois on jette un coup d'œil dans l'atelier dans lequel les murs sont couverts avec diverses horloges et montres anciennes. Dans la salle d'exposition, il est difficile d'entendre le son. Enregistrés en prise directe, les sons d'atelier – en fait seulement les bruits de l'horloge- constituent la seule source sonore du film. D'ailleurs dans les vidéos de Kazma il y a souvent l'ambiance sonore de l'espace au lieu de musique ou des conversations.

Le mode principal de représentation de l'artiste est le mode plastique. En d'autres termes, dans son champ de pratiques vidéographiques, la vidéaste est loin de faire usage du mode narratif et fictionnel. Plutôt, il choisit de construire le sens dans les images par le biais de la répétition. Mais il faut y faire attention. Par la répétition, on n'entend pas simplement les mêmes images qui se répètent l'une après l'autre mais un outil théorique dont on se sert pour exprimer un motif spécifique dans le temps. Dans ses vidéos, cet outil théorique est la répétition des images des mains par différentes perspectives et cadres mais toujours en gros plan. Les activités quotidiennes liées au travail, les habitudes ou bien les gestes appris sont aussi d'autres images que l'artiste préfère filmer. Dans une interview, il s'explique :

Dans toutes mes œuvres, je suis très intéressé par le point de communication entre l'homme et le monde. Comment un homme touche le monde, et bien sûr, comment le monde lui répond. À cette interaction circulaire que je dirige ma caméra la plupart du temps. L'homme touche le monde par ses mains.

Je suis fasciné par ce merveilleux organe/outil et c'est pourquoi on les voit souvent dans mes vidéos<sup>15</sup>.

Ainsi, Ali Kazma filme patiemment l'intelligence de la main, documente l'espace qui s'insère entre les gestes de la main et le temps. Le spectateur, en regardant les mouvements répétitifs des mains, se met à contempler directement le temps au lieu de chercher un sens dans le mouvement. Dans cette répétition, le temps se rend visible.

Par le biais des répétitions et des retours d'images, il réalise un travail sur la direction des regards du spectateur. On dirait que les œuvres d'Ali Kazma rendent le temps visible.

Par le biais de cette répétition, la sensation de la durée disparaît : ce que l'on regarde semble avoir ni passé ni avenir. C'est une continuation infinie des gestes de la main qui lie le passé et l'avenir dans un présent éternel. C'est ainsi que ce travail nous renvoie à l'idée de l'éternité. Le geste existentialiste de l'homme qui produit, repère, maintient sans cesse fait allusion au mythe de Sisyphe. Il nous fait penser à la relation entre le temps et l'existence humaine et d'un autre côté, au combat contre l'entropie en créant un temps virtuel propre à la vidéo dans lequel l'ordre est gardé par le biais de la répétition.

Quand Barthes comparait le cinéma et la photographie dans *La Chambre claire*, il s'expliquait ainsi la raison pour laquelle il préfère le cinéma : le spectateur du cinéma est toujours pressé. Il n'a pas du temps pour s'arrêter en face de l'écran, penser sur ce qui se passe et y ajouter quelque chose de ses expériences. Il ne peut pas fermer ses yeux parce que quand il les ouvre, il voit d'autres images. Contrairement à cet argument, on peut donner comme exemple la dernière scène de *400 coups* de Truffaut dans laquelle on regarde pour un bon bout de temps le visage figé d'Antoine. Truffaut savait créer du temps pour le spectateur pressé du cinéma. De la même manière, les images vidéographiques de Kazma, même si elles sont mobiles, par le biais de la répétition crée la possibilité de faire l'expérience d'un présent éternel.

Dans une deuxième perspective, on dirait que la répétition des images communique également le sentiment du rythme. Par le rythme on entend la vitesse et la structure de la succession des plans, ou parfois, encore plus vaguement, la structure temporelle d'un plan un peu long. Dans le cinéma, le contenu des images joue un rôle trop important pour qu'on puisse trop facilement calculer et déterminer les rythmes. Dans le cas de la vidéo, c'est plutôt la durée des plans qui nous transfère le sentiment du rythme. Le rythme du *Maître-horloger*, par exemple, nous renvoie aussi à l'idée du temps en tant qu'un présent éternel par les gros plans qui se répètent à peu près dans la même durée.

La répétition des gestes comme dans la vidéo de Kzma peut être interprétée comme une manière de combattre l'impuissance du corps face au temps. L'artiste documente les formes impressionnantes de résistance et de la production du corps humain face au temps. Il le confirme également ainsi :

Je vois des choses disparaître qui me semblaient être de bonnes choses pour l'être humain ; c'est une honte de les perdre. Je veux les garder en sécurité même si ce n'est qu'à travers mes images. Je ne veux pas les oublier.<sup>16</sup>

Cette citation nous renvoie à sa relation avec le concept de mémoire. Dans *Image et mémoire*, Agamben écrit :

Les solutions stylistiques et formelles, adoptées chaque fois par les artistes, se présentent comme des décisions éthiques définissant la position des individus et d'une époque par rapport à l'héritage du passé, et l'interprétation du problème devient, par la même, un diagnostic de l'homme luttant pour guérir ses contradictions et pour trouver entre l'ancien et le nouveau, sa propre demeure vitale.<sup>17</sup>

Dans ce sens, les œuvres de Kzma nous montrent la propre demeure vitale de l'homme sous la forme de la production et la transmission du savoir-faire. Kzma documente l'existence des capacités de production individuelle, de compétence technique, voire d'impressionnantes formes du travail humain contre l'entropie. En plus, *Le*

*Maître-horloger* est peut-être le meilleur exemple parmi ses vidéos pour démontrer comment le temps est conservé dans les lieux et les choses que l'artiste enregistre avec sa caméra. Il ne serait pas erroné de soutenir que cette vidéo constitue un des meilleurs exemples artistiques pour mieux comprendre l'idée de rétentions tertiaires du philosophe Bernard Stiegler : Tout ce qui appartient au passé résiste contre le temps éphémère et existe dans les empreintes culturelles, historiques et sociales, à savoir les rétentions tertiaires. À travers un objet, nous pouvons lire l'organisation culturelle dont il est issu. Une horloge nous dit à quel monde elle appartenait. Cet homme, le maître-horloger que nous regardons avec admiration pour le travail méticuleux qu'il est en train de réaliser, restaurer cet outil qui synchronise la société. Il rétablit sa condition originale pour mesurer le temps avec une précision parfaite. Parce que l'horloge porte les empreintes de l'histoire, elle nous montre la mémoire collective issue de cette historicité : le savoir-faire technique mais aussi l'importance donnée à la maîtrise du temps.

#### Halil Atindere

L'artiste et l'éditeur Halil Altindere vient de Mardin, la ville au sud-est de la Turquie où cohabitent plusieurs religions et ethnies telles que les kurdes, les turcs, les arabes et les assyriens. Ses pièces reflètent l'influence de cette atmosphère multiculturelle de la région. Il expose sa première vidéo intitulée *Hard&Light* en 1999. Dans cette pièce, les paquets de cigarettes Marlboro deviennent un symbole pour l'attraction sexuelle au sein de l'espace public. Suivant le même symbole, il réalise en 2002 *Yürüyüş (La Marche)* où il crée un animal à partir du paquet Marlboro, interrogeant ainsi les valeurs du système capitaliste. Il se focalise sur des thèmes tels que les valeurs du système capitaliste, la question de transmission de la culture et de mémoire ainsi que les aspirations identitaires, libertaires et égalitaires dans notre société contemporaine.

On peut voir en détail sa vidéo *Réfugié de l'espace* réalisée en 2016 pour mieux comprendre sa perspective artistique :

Le 22 juillet 1987, le président de la Syrie Hafiz Al-Assad écoutait son pilote de l'armée devenu le premier astronaute de son pays, lui en-

voyer son profond respect et amour. Muhammed Ahmed Faris avait été choisi pour devenir un astronaute auprès de la station spatiale soviétique. Il avait passé deux ans à Moscou pour son entraînement et sept jours en orbite. À l'époque, il est devenu le héros national de millions de Syriens. En 2011, quand les protestations du printemps arabe ont commencé, Faris était général dans l'armée de l'air syrienne. Face aux réactions brutales du gouvernement syrien, il a quitté la Syrie pour manifester son désaccord, en expliquant qu'il ne pourrait pas tuer son propre peuple. Aujourd'hui, il vit dans un appartement à Kocamustafapaşa, un quartier conservateur d'Istanbul, avec cinq autres membres de sa famille.

Dans cette vidéo, à travers l'histoire de Faris, Altindere soulève des questions à propos de la guerre civile, des effets de la migration et du futur de l'humanité, en y incluant la politique et la satire. Cette œuvre sarcastique met l'accent sur le sort des réfugiés syriens dont plus de deux millions sont accueillis en Turquie. (La Turquie est le second pays d'accueil après le Liban.) Mélangeant le passé astronaute et le présent réfugié de Faris, l'artiste présente un faux documentaire sur les réfugiés syriens qui planifient d'aller sur Mars pour y commencer une civilisation de la même manière qu'ils ont fait sur la Terre il y a des siècles

Même si les vidéos d'Altindere renvoient à l'humour, elles sont basées sur une condition terriblement sérieuse. Le montage des différents plans l'un après l'autre nous montre bien l'absurdité de cette condition sévère : les séquences appartenant à la jeunesse de Faris dans lesquelles on le voit dans son costume astronaute, les images d'archives de la conquête spatiale soviétique ainsi que celles de la guerre syrienne, Faris racontant son passé et les images des trois jeunes syriens se promenant sur la surface du Mars. Le fait de voir dans un ensemble les images appartenant aux différentes périodes dans le temps restitue un autre sens que leur signification d'origine. En d'autres mots, le regroupement des images hétérogènes en vitesse et en signification crée un nouveau lien entre les différentes temporalités. Enfin, rapprocher ces différentes temporalités crée une nouvelle durée qui renvoie à l'absurde ou à une fantaisie où l'exode

des réfugiés sur Mars devient une autre réalité, une autre histoire si l'Histoire avait pris un autre tournant.

Ce faisant, l'artiste incarne dans la construction mémorielle du spectateur un mode de réception différent des images et de ses conséquences. Les images empruntées ou prises par l'artiste, appartenant aux différentes époques dans le passé, deviennent une mémoire que le spectateur peut choisir de voir sous différents angles : une fantaisie de l'artiste, un faux documentaire, une dystopie ou même une utopie pour les leaders européens qui seront assez contents de se débarrasser des réfugiés en les envoyant sur Mars.

Faire un mixage des images hétérogènes est une manière d'incarner la possibilité d'une autre réalité dans la construction mémorielle du spectateur. La juxtaposition d'un sens Warburgien des images aide l'artiste à créer une autre histoire, une science-fiction absurde. À travers cette juxtaposition des images filmiques des événements historiques (la guerre civile, le succès scientifique de l'U.R.S.S et le passé héroïque de Paris) Altindere produit une nouvelle signification culturelle : une confrontation avec la prétention et l'absurdité du discours des dominants.

#### Erkan Özgen

Un autre artiste contemporain kurde, Erkan Özgen, vit et travaille à Diyarbakır. Il utilise majoritairement la vidéo et la photographie dans sa production artistique comme ces deux supports sont peu chers à la production et à la diffusion. Dans ces œuvres, Özgen questionne le conditionnement de l'individu par le pouvoir, le kémalisme et le militarisme qui règnent en Turquie depuis la fondation de la république. Il met également l'accent sur la situation absurde et tragique dans laquelle se trouve le peuple kurde en Turquie. Comme son travail artistique confirme son engagement politique, il se définit en tant qu'un artiste-activiste.

Dans sa vidéo la plus caractéristique, *Le Corps perdu* (2005), Özgen nous montre une paire de rangers avec des jambes nues tournant le coin du mur, dribblant une balle blanche. La caméra suit les jambes à partir du niveau des genoux. Le chemin de terre est assez étroit,



partiellement boueux avec des murs en pierre à deux côtés, moitié ensoleillé, moitié dans les ténèbres. Le tempo est lent, on dirait que la personne qui conduit la balle au pied est une sorte de passante baudelairienne si elle ne portait pas ces bottes militaires. Il s'agit d'un tout petit village, même abandonné, pourtant on entend les bruits lointains des enfants. L'homme, balle au pied, continue d'avancer sur le chemin qui nous semble circulaire car il est difficile de dire s'il passe par les mêmes rues ou non. Est-ce un soldat qui s'ennuie ? Le fou du village ? On n'en sait rien. Petit à petit, il commence à accélérer le pas, la tension s'élève. Nous entendons même l'haleine du joueur et attendons pour témoigner la scène de violence. Une sensation de vertige apparaît chez le spectateur avec ce nouveau tempo et de multiples montages des scènes en gros plan. On regarde une lutte de contrôle entre le jeune homme et la balle, qui de temps en temps devient difficile à regarder à cause de cette sensation de vertige. Essayant de suivre la balle, on se sent même perdu virtuellement dans ce village. A la fin, il presse la balle contre le mur et la fait éclater.

Les rangers signifient sans doute une sorte de violence physique et émotionnelle. D'une perspective, c'est un jeu de balle mais d'une autre, on sait bien qu'il s'agit d'une lutte entre le pouvoir et ce qui est soumis. Comme son titre l'indique, l'individu en tant que soldat perd son identité et devient un moyen du pouvoir pour contrôler et manipuler les peuples soumis. Le pouvoir militaire représenté par les rangers, contrôle à la fois les corps des soldats et ceux des soumis même par violence si c'est nécessaire. L'angle de la caméra, la tension élevée, les mouvements répétitifs du joueur créent une atmosphère d'inquiétude et de gêne. De la même manière qu'avec ce corps perdu dans les impasses et les rues circulaires, le spectateur finit par se sentir mal à l'aise à cause de la tension agressive de la vidéo.

Özgen fait souvent l'usage des métaphores et des symboles. Si on en fait une analyse plus détaillée, on peut constater que la relation politique et sociale entre le pouvoir et ce qui est soumis est placée ici dans un jeu de balle. Les paires de rangers signifient la tyrannie alors que la balle symbolise les corps soumis à cette force. Le visage du joueur est caché derrière un foulard, ce qui fait référence au fait que la tyrannie n'a jamais d'identité et qu'elle est impersonnelle. En

fait, la seule règle du jeu est que le joueur n'ait pas d'identité, il est partout et il détermine les règles du jeu, construit le langage et dévore les corps.

La répétition comme geste esthétique tient une place importante dans cette œuvre d'Özgen. Dans un premier lieu, le mouvement circulaire du joueur dans les mêmes rues nous renvoie à un présent éternel : on sent que ce mouvement n'a ni début ni fin. Ce qui est principal est le caractère infini du temps. Alors, le sens ou la signification du mouvement perd son importance et la perception du spectateur se met en rapport avec la pensée au lieu de se concentrer sur l'action elle-même. Par conséquent, nous pouvons défendre l'idée que cette répétition circulaire souligne l'aspect l'image-temps de cette vidéo. Cet aspect se fait visible également à travers les images qui se répètent. Pendant les quatre minutes et demie la caméra ne montre que les jambes, le visage caché, les bottes du joueur et la balle. Après un moment, voir les mêmes images nous fait penser qu'il n'y aura pas de nouvelle action et que l'artiste nous offre assez de temps pour pouvoir trouver des perspectives différentes à interpréter le sens.

L'absence de l'identité du joueur signifie également que l'on ne peut pas le relier avec une histoire, une action ou un acteur. Du coup, le pouvoir qu'il représente manque les limites temporelles (comme le début et la fin) et renvoie à l'idée de l'éternité ou de l'intemporalité. Alors, on se pose la question suivante : comment cette vidéo reflète-t-elle la mémoire collective ou quelle est sa contribution aux archives de mémoire ?

L'usage de répétition comme geste vidéographique peut constituer un choix pour l'expression de memento mori et que cela nous dirige vers une lecture des vidéos dont le sujet est le corps humain. Dans cette vidéo, le corps qui contrôle la vitesse et la direction de la balle contrôle également le rythme de la vidéo et les répétitions des images. Au lieu de combattre avec le memento mori, l'artiste accentue la force invisible qui joue avec les vies des autres, qui dévore les corps. On dirait qu'il fait ressortir ou encore fait visible le pouvoir moderne qui est même en contrôle de la vie et de la mort des autres.

Donc, la réponse à notre question sur la mémoire collective est que l'artiste ajoute dans les archives de nos signes collectifs le caractère inévitable, envahissant de la force militaire ou du pouvoir politique particulièrement dans son pays, qui construit, modèle et dévore les corps de la même façon qu'une paire de rangers fait éclater une balle contre le mur.

#### Seza Paker

Seza Paker, artiste contemporaine, vit et travaille à İstanbul et Paris. Elle utilise divers médiums comme formes d'expressions, tels que la photographie, l'installation, le collage, le dessin et le son. A travers ses images, elle fait souvent référence à l'histoire de l'art, aux passages du temps, à la seconde guerre mondiale et aux subjectivités des perspectives. Dans ses vidéos, elle fait souvent usage des images statiques (des photos) qui gagnent de la mobilité à travers leurs relations au temps, à l'histoire et aux mémoires des spectateurs.

Sa vidéo, intitulée *La Longue marche*, réalisée en 1999, nous présente une série de photographies en noir et blanc, disposées les une après les autres. Ce sont des photos appartenant aux archives personnelles de l'artiste, prises par son père dans les années 1950. Les photos ont été prises lors de la fondation d'Israël, au nord du pays. Sur les photos, des animations de tulipes en couleur rouge et violet sont créées à l'aide d'un ordinateur. La musique au même titre que l'œuvre accompagne les images. C'est la pièce musicale de Max Roach et Archie Shepp, inspirée par la marche de Mao Zedong, le chef de la lutte communiste chinoise. On dirait que c'est un hommage à la batterie et aux batteurs. Le rythme de la musique et la diffusion des images sont dans une totale harmonie. Dans cette vidéo qui dure 4 minutes et demie, on voit les visages heureux et pleins d'espoir des hommes et des femmes. Ils travaillent dans un champ, construisent une maison, voyagent dans une voiture à chevaux...Tous souriaient à un avenir attendu depuis assez longtemps. Les tulipes apparaissent et disparaissent près des figures, en coordination avec la musique. Contrairement aux photos, les tulipes sont toujours mobiles. Elles s'ouvrent, tournent, se ferment, fleurissent, grandissent... Parfois on voit des oiseaux dans le ciel, toujours en noir et blanc, accompagnés par une

nouvelle forme de tulipe. Après cinq ou six photos, la vidéo se termine avec une photo de singe derrière une cage.

La longue marche, qui s'étend sur environ 12.000 kilomètres de l'Armée rouge chinoise dans les années 1934 et 1935, demeure comme le plus important symbole de victoire de la lutte communiste chinoise. Cependant, le conflit israélo-palestinien n'est pas résolu depuis des dizaines d'années et l'espoir que l'on voit clairement sur les visages des personnes sur les photos se fanent comme des tulipes. Est-ce une longue marche à parcourir encore pour les décennies à venir ? Ou ces peuples sont-ils destinés à rester prisonniers de leur sort, comme le singe dans la cage ? Au lieu d'apporter des réponses ou faire des remarques sur la situation politique contemporaine, Seza Paker nous laisse avec des questions pour une interrogation beaucoup plus profonde.

Seza Paker fusionne les images fixes et les images mouvantes, à savoir les photos et les images mobiles produites à l'ordinateur. Fusionner des différents médiums déconstruit également les formes connues afin de créer de nouvelles possibilités d'expression. Par conséquent, même si elle utilise des images figées dans un médium mouvant comme la vidéo, l'intégration des animations sur les photos rend l'image toujours dans un état de devenir. Le temps ne nous ramène pas dans le passé, même si les photos appartiennent aux années 1950.

Dans son livre sur Seza Paker, intitulé *Refleksif Akışkanlıklar* (Les Fluidités instinctives), Ali Akay interprète cette fusion ainsi :

L'histoire, au lieu d'être le passé ou le présent, est traînée vers un devenir et par conséquent, en s'ouvrant vers le futur par un devenir mineur du passé et du présent, Seza Paker pose des questions ouvertes. Paker, au lieu d'être dans le temps et s'adosser sur ce qui est populaire, actualise dans son art le concept intempestif, intemporel de Nietzsche, en débordant le temps sur lui-même<sup>18</sup>

Devenir mineur est expliqué par Deleuze et Guattari comme une transformation qui produit "son propre point de sous-développement, son propre patois, son tiers monde à soi, son désert à soi"<sup>19</sup>. On

entend par l'art en état mineur, l'art qui est à l'opposé de la culture populaire/commerciale, de la standardisation. Ainsi, Paker est marginale par rapport à son temps. C'est un art qui rompt les conventions de son temps. Elle se place à l'opposé de la pensée, de l'idéologie majeure, dominante de son temps. Il s'ensuit que Seza Paker ne traite pas l'histoire comme un passé ni comme un présent où il faut en conclure les conséquences mais elle pose des questions ouvertes qui nous emmène vers le futur.

Elle nous montre les photos de l'Israël des années 1950 mais ce n'est pas pour exposer un témoignage de cette époque. Au contraire, par le biais des tulipes dans un état de devenir sans cesse, Paker nous montre le temps en tant qu'une durée qui s'ouvre vers les futures interrogations. Superposer les animations et les photos crée une multitude des couches d'images permettant de relier les temporalités avec plus de possibilités. Cette technique de mixage s'ouvre vers la production d'une nouvelle temporalité comme dans le cas de *La Longue marche*.

Le mixage comme geste esthétique sert à conceptualiser la vie des images par le motif de l'incarnation. L'incarnation, au sens de l'ouverture de l'image au spectateur, se fait par l'intégration du temps comme une extra dimension aux images. En gagnant une autre dimension, les photos dans *La Longue marche*, ne nous rapportent pas au passé qu'elles étaient prises mais elles se comportent toujours vivantes. On peut ainsi dire que les images de Seza Paker se comportent comme une mémoire vivante qui est en train de se construire, toujours dans un état de devenir.

L'artiste vient d'une famille immigrée de la Palestine à Istanbul. Cette vidéo se forme lors de sa deuxième visite en Israël en 1999, au-dessus de la mémoire des archives des photos appartenant aux années 1950. Elle laisse la politique actuelle de côté. Par conséquent, ce qu'elle ajoute à ces archives personnelles va plus loin qu'une interrogation sur l'identité, sur les rêves de socialisme ou sur l'indépendance /la domination des deux pays. Elle transforme les images génériques de l'histoire en un devenir toujours ouvert aux questionnements mineurs, qui se situent à l'opposé de banal, des normes dominantes.

## CONCLUSION

**L**e geste/ la technique esthétique, comme la technique de la répétition, renvoie à une représentation du temps comme un présent éternel, tandis que la dilatation ou la contraction des durées évoque la notion de vitesse. Enfin, on avait noté que le geste du mixage représente le temps comme la durée.

Les images de memento mori sont généralement liées à la mortalité du corps qui fait surgir le sentiment d'incapacité ou d'impuissance face au temps. Par conséquent, représenter le temps par le biais de la répétition dans les images vidéographiques, comme on l'a vu chez Kazma et Özgen, nous conduit souvent aux images du corps humain via le concept de memento mori. Il s'agit à la fois de formes impressionnantes de résistance et de la production du corps humain face au temps ou encore du pouvoir moderne qui est en contrôle de la vie et de la mort des autres.

Ce premier geste esthétique est suivi par l'utilisation du celui de mixage. Dans les vidéos de Halil Altındere et Seza Paker, le mixage est la technique choisie pour souvent regrouper les images hétérogènes. Ce regroupement rapproche les histoires séparées et les relie dans une même durée. En général, ce sont les histoires appartenant à des individus différents qui se trouvent dans une même situation difficile à surmonter, comme les réfugiés syriens dans la vidéo d'Altındere. Dans le cas de Seza Paker, les images génériques de l'histoire sont transformées en un devenir toujours ouvert aux questionnements mineurs, qui se situent à l'opposé des normes dominantes. Ainsi, une image appartenant au passé s'incarne dans le présent et même dans le futur en tant qu'une mémoire toujours vivante. Ce motif de l'incarnation est également visible dans les deux vidéos précédentes.

Par ailleurs, à travers la vidéo de Halil Altındere, une nouvelle signification culturelle de l'absurdité du discours dominant est présentée par le biais de la juxtaposition des images filmiques des divers événements sociopolitiques.

Une piste de réflexion ultérieure serait d'ajouter d'autres gestes esthétiques/techniques à ceux de mon étude. Comme la vidéo est un

art contemporain, elle est toujours dans un état de devenir et de s'actualiser. Par conséquent, il faut suivre les plus récentes productions artistiques et en déduire les divers gestes et perspectives. En plus, la technologie se développe à une vitesse très rapide tout en ouvrant de nouvelles possibilités d'enregistrement d'images.

Une deuxième piste de réflexion serait une étude qui aurait comme projet de voir comment les images vidéographiques s'intègrent dans la technologie tout en gardant son aspect de temporalité.

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