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# Temporality and its Effect on the Painting Medium of Expression as an Ontological Tool

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## Abstract

This article starts from certain more recent perspectives on contemporary painting seen as both a consequence of media hybridization and a condition of *Post-Medium* (Krauss). In this techno-scientific era of conquering new territories of knowledge, modern painting has reflected its perpetual overcoming of the limits offered by its medium of expression through the so-called revolution of forms, ultimately leading to surpassing the spatial (two-dimensional) limits of the canvas by borrowing from the spatiality and performative nature of temporal manifestation which unfolds to the viewer step by step. At the same time, in this study, new needs for deeper understanding and clarification arise regarding the possibility of painting (art) for ontological revision manifested over time by probing its temporal implications - the way it relates to the past, present, or future - which have influenced these transformations within its medium of expression for understanding the present and shifts in thinking within the new paradigms through comparative analysis.

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## Introduction

The shift of interest towards the future, evolution, and progress in human and the emergence of major technological transformations has had direct consequences on the history of painting. The invention of mobile support gradually allowed it to gain independence from architecture and its illustrative and decorative function (by observing the human body beyond its exterior image, seemingly insignificant details from nature, daily life, and surrounding objects). Putting colours in tubes marked another step in achieving this mobility, providing the option of observing reality directly and attentively in virtue of leaving the studio and approaching real life world. In modern art, the invention of the camera has brought mimetic representation to a sort of crises, even though it was never truly the main objective in the history of painting but rather the curiosity to discover and understand the world as best as possible and to appropriate it beyond the immediately visible plane. Simultaneously, we can say that the process of knowledge is synonymous with the emancipation of man based on increasingly profound self-discovery and the subsequent transformation of the world followed by the adaptation to these changes.

"The new is made comfortable by being made familiar since it is seen as having gradually evolved from the forms of the past. Historicism works on the new and different to diminish newness and mitigate difference. It makes a place for change in our experience by evoking the model of evolution so that the man who now is can be accepted

as being different from the child he once was by simultaneously being seen—through the unseeable action of the telos—as the same. And we are comforted by this perception of sameness, this strategy for reducing anything foreign in either time or space to what we already know and are." (Krauss, 1979, p. 277)

Man can assimilate new knowledge and experiences only by referring to what is already known to him. This natural, human-specific process of understanding and classifying the things around us, sedimenting them into knowledge, and introducing them into the collective memory, or his archive; Into what Boris Groys calls *memory structured on hierarchies necessary for historicization*. Krauss points out that these forms are sometimes emptied of their constitutive content for a more fluid placement in certain categories through universalization and gradual formalization by attenuating differences. At the same time, novelty is at the base of this process, because the basic principle of structuring cultural archives consists in the necessary adoption of the new and ignoring the imitations. That which simply reproduces what already exists is rejected by organized cultural memory as superficial and tautological (Groys, 2003).

This study aims to situate itself between these two tendencies - the attenuation of differences and the permanent valorization of the new as defining factors of the cultural process, while maintaining a critical distance from both situations. This serves to keep visible the differences required for a deeper observation of this temporal process, according to the past, present, and future necessary for the spatial arrangement of things, which is also in a permanent oscillation of meaning over time. Starting from these premises of the new and the archive, it is not surprising that in art too, the need for elucidation and structuring of the initially unknown will perpetually be the focal point of the evolution of things through curiosity and knowledge. Such that that everything highlighted at first will have to correspond to the new and innovation.

This explains why the curiosity of artists travels in tandem with everything novel discoveries in all fields of knowledge. For example, what is foreshadowed in the art of the transition decades to the 20th century and throughout it illustrates the assimilation of multiple scientific knowledge such as physics, biology, psychology, etc., as well as the emergence of new areas of interest - anthropology, psychoanalysis, mechanics, optics, etc., and the openings they offered beyond the simply visual plane of perception. However, this knowledge constituted a peak moment also due to the orientation towards the future given to all these discoveries that were driven by curiosity and the need for new, which had been cultivated for a long time through great territorial shifts and conquests.

This may lead us to say that spatial shifts (territorial conquests) underlie the evolution and transformations of man and society, fact reflected in the morphological trajectory of painting. Some of these spatial shifts were made by the artists themselves, the transformative effects of these experiences on their creation being well-known, and the predominant condition of today's artist as a migrant, foreigner, or tourist undoubtedly speaks of these new characteristics.

As a result, the revolution of *forms* in the painting of the late 19th and early 20th centuries is a direct consequence of man's capacity for abstraction through knowledge and the assimilation of all new knowledge that lies in the

subsidiary, at the same time contributing to their evolution. We can say that this evolution was also based on an increasingly profound and complex knowledge of the human body, its perceptual possibilities and their extension through the creation of new auxiliary instruments. The awareness of these correspondences between various senses and modes of perception (synesthesia) will, over time, shape a more complex and comprehensive image of mankind and the specificity of our body's functions. The increasing role of abstraction as fundamental in painting lies precisely in the discovery of these correspondences and the borrowing of knowledge and operational specificities from music, literature, physics, biology, mechanics, etc., which involve a mode of theoretical abstraction specific to their own language. Therefore, we can start to see the installation of the phenomenon of hybridization of mediums of perception, and fields of knowledge.

Marcel Duchamp, therefore, is not to be uniquely credited with pushing things in this direction of the *technicality/dehumanization* of art (the industrial society, the mechanization, and division of labor made most of the social and economic functions of craftsmanship unnecessary) through his interest in the rigorous expression devoid of the *emotionality* and sensitivity of the artist's hand (Duchamp, 1956), derived from the mechanics of machines and the adoption of art as objects that are no longer made directly by the human hand but already made through a manufacturing process, he only anticipated this course of things, assuming it strategically and thus more visibly. However, to a similar extent, all other new directions of early 20th-century art responded to a scientific curiosity about what needed to be discovered, such as giving credit and probing unseen levels (in abstraction) or those not directly perceived but only with the help of scientific instruments, or even the unknown, not fully understood levels - hazard, irrational, subconscious, which belong to a stratification and deepening of self-knowledge of man (other realities).

From our perspective, all these knowledge interferences have influenced the spatial displacement and morphological trajectory of painting (from the subsidiary), coinciding with a process of *conquest*, expansion, and spatial reconfiguration, in order to disperse into real life (*blurring the boundaries between art and life* – the modernist ideal) out of the simple need to appropriate reality and understand it in depth. The extension of physical reality into what will later become the simulation of reality in invented/alternative realities (virtual reality) probably constitutes a point where all the interferences between media proved increasingly fluid. Moreover, imagining new points of view - new realities is the *modus operandi* of art. And if everything that constituted the technological orientation of the 20th century valued aspects of the deeper knowledge of the human being to reproduce human physiological functions (McLuhan, 2007), becoming in certain cases a kind of extensions of the body, of the organs, or a kind of prostheses of these, this being the ultimate goal related to AI, then all this knowledge developed simultaneously and motivated each other.

If abstract art initially drew its essence from physics, music, literature, etc., by creating systems of understanding similar to these through the borrowing of knowledge/methods, what constituted, for example, Sound Art or happening/performance meant even the borrowing of the language/medium itself, and looking at directions like BioArt or New Media, we can even observe the borrowing of working tools specific to the laboratory or new technologies.

We thus face a paradox if in the fields of science, where the division and specialization of fields have been pursued for the deepening and acceleration of knowledge, the Humboldtian effect of transgressing boundaries towards the multidisciplinary occurred as a natural, unconscious phenomenon, always fully tolerated. Similarly, in the field of painting/art, we face the same phenomenon of hybridization, that found multiple ways to follow its own path despite some positions taken to conserve the specific area of media and forms of resistance to change. However, change is the condition of the new and is the only certainty, it can be seen simultaneously both as a cause and a solution to current existential issues; But it remains to be seen if it can be possible through another mode of articulation with space and time that reconsiders progress, spatial displacement forward as the only mode of evolution.

### **Spatial and Temporal Displacements in the Medium of Painting/Art**

We consider that the assumed spatial displacement of painting/art, beyond the natural process of orientation towards the new as a fundamental characteristic of it and of the human condition, begins with the Avant-garde. Through the glorification of innovation, the deliberate projection of the future, and putting things into what we might call *mechanical* motion. The preparatory steps of this moment pass through the Renaissance (but do not start there) with the stratification of reality and the beginning of the process of emancipation of the gaze.

These steps then tread through Romanticism—with the observation of the actual reality of nature and the anticipation of the implications of knowledge in the technological field—and Impressionism/Pointillism, through the beginnings of the actual incorporation of scientific knowledge into the medium of painting. They later pass through Cubism with spatial movement and the simultaneous perception of forms, marking the appearance in art of a process of abstract thinking similar to that of scientific order. Beyond the apparent revolution of forms, as the modernist period was considered, which mirrored this phenomenon, the great battles for legitimization and redefinition of art will take place on the level of concepts and reflexivity, despite the focus being more on the formal transformation of things, sometimes detaching from content, as a result of the process of historicization, and attenuation of depth differences. Krauss also notes this regarding, for example, the search for the roots of minimalism in the formal and material aspects (plastic, inert geometries, factory production) of constructivism, "never mind that the content of the one had nothing to do with, was in fact the exact opposite of, the content of the other." (Krauss, 1979, p. 278).

Approaching things from the perspective of the evolution of thought, we can say that the spatial exit of painting into the three-dimensionality of actual physical space and the interference with other forms and media of expression was first prepared within the painting itself in relation to the space of architecture (frescoes) and its three-dimensional implications. For centuries, through all forms of spatial extension of the composition in an illusory sense, through perspective rendering—as if it were real—as well as through niches, compositionally incorporated windows, as extensions of the space rendered in painting. This subsidiary need to break the two-dimensional spatial boundaries of the flat support (the wall) and the need for mobility is anticipated.

Having been freed from the spatiality of architecture, painting, through Van Eyck's mirror in the *Arnolfini Portrait*

(1434), re-extends spatiality beyond what is directly visible. Édouard Manet's *Balcony* aims to occupy the border between the frames (interior and exterior), practically constituting a passage. Later, we have the fusion of the interior with the exterior, through the spatial non-differentiation between them, in Henri Matisse's obsession with the *Open Window(s)*. Canceling the space of the canvas by placing the forms or grids directly on the undifferentiated background between the painting and the wall, by Malevich or Mondrian, shift the attention on the extended gaze beyond the visible but felt level to the sensible world (of abstraction). Finally, through the literal cutting of the canvas (a performative, temporal gesture), by Fontana, the distance between the spatial reality of the painting and the real physical space will be definitively eliminated. All these alternative forms of reporting to space actually mean a dynamic and flexible process in time and denote a fluctuating placement of attention in relation to the different levels of reality.

The incorporation of other materialities through the implications of collage and the evolution towards the pictorial object or apparatus is another line of exit of painting from two-dimensionality, and the questioning of the possibilities of perception. Magritte's painting—*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*—offers yet another possibility of accepting the various forms of aggregation of the object (matter, things), of what is initially configured mentally, through the need for understanding and explaining/classifying, practically showing us that all these alternatives of configuring and perceiving things (the two-dimensional representation of the object, the meaning of the object, or the object itself) are actually convergent and can be substituted for each other.

Even if the spatial manifestations in Land Art, Minimalism, or Conceptual Art seem to oppose, through their appearance, the flatness and pictoriality of painting, the transformations that have already occurred within it over time have actually generated their appearance and orientation. Through more distant gestures, we have been able to observe, or more recently produce within Abstract Expressionism, the questioning of rendered and perceived reality. This is done through the insertion of other materialities into the medium of painting, the release of the canvas from its support, performativity and experimentalism of the act of painting, the use of new tools instead of brushes, etc. Despite (or perhaps by virtue of?) the efforts to restrict what is fundamentally specific to painting—the flatness of the support, by Clement Greenberg, things will continue the path of spatialization that had already begun long before this moment.

One can already notice that the implications of temporality, initially announced in the avant-garde as a predilectic orientation towards the future (developed by futurists, constructivists), towards movement and spatial displacement symbolically incorporated in the expression of forms in painting, will gradually become part of the artistic process, at the level of performative manipulation of the matter of painting. This can be observed in Abstract Expressionism or through other gestures by European artists such as Yves Klein, Jean Dubuffet, Piero Manzoni, or Lucio Fontana.

Yves Klein returns painting to the use of only one pigment, becoming a fluid substance, which is absorbed by the sponges, fixed on the canvas, for more materiality or with which he paints performatively, accompanied by musical symphonies that support the choreography of the bodies that have become brushes.

Similarly, Jackson Pollock, and indeed all of Abstract Expressionism, will be defined primarily by experimental, performative (rather than classical tools and processes) processes of placing color on canvas that tend to go beyond the rectangular surface of this one.

And with the removal of the canvas from the chassis (Jackson Pollock), the painting will defragment, over time, into its constituent components taken separately, in the activity of the Support Surface group, becoming a spatial landscape (installationist) that the public is invited to cross it. There are countless simultaneous examples of transgressing the boundary of the painting immediately after World War II. Manzoni eliminates colour altogether to allow for tactile experiments with the canvas substituted to gain more structural substance. In Fontana's conception, the fusion of painting-sculpture leads directly to the transition into physical space through the slits cut in the canvas.

The gesture draws attention to the illusory, insubstantial nature of Western art tradition, which used the painted canvas as a "window" through which the viewer had access to an apparent world. By slashing the canvas, the artist created real spatiality and opened a path to a concrete world, also drawing attention to the material world, which can become a support for artistic ideas. Fontana is also the initiator of the *White Manifesto* (1946), in which he reiterated the precepts of Italian futurism, promoting a synthesis between painting and sculpture and advocating for the abandonment of conventional plastic materials, emphasizing the importance of new technologies regarding the arts, as an influence between art and science. This idea is based on the conviction that scientific and philosophical evolution has transformed the human psyche to such an extent that traditional forms of "static" art and the differentiation of artistic disciplines have become outdated, advocating for a new synthetic art that will involve the dynamic principle of movement in time and space. In the manifestos of the so-called *Spazialismo* (1947), he promoted an art that would involve not only the visual but also sound, movement, and time.

In turn, at the end of the 1960s, Robert Morris began to introduce indeterminacy and temporality into the artistic process, called process art or anti-form, where things seemed to have stabilized through the interest in using neutral prefabricated materials devoid of the painter's sensitivity in Minimalism. By cutting, sorting, or stacking everyday materials such as felt or rags, Morris emphasized the ephemeral nature of the artwork, which would ultimately change each time it was installed in a new space. This replaced what Morris proposed as the fixed, static nature of minimalist or "object-type" art. Kinetic art, also practically sedimented over time, from Naum Gabo's *Kinetic Construction* to the 1960s, through its configuration, all these tendencies—involving the dynamics of forms, temporalised perception, spatial expansion, etc.

Painters like Jean Dubuffet, Yves Klein, Frank Stella, Sol LeWitt, Daniel Buren, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Francis Alÿs, etc., fulfill that profile of artists who have successively occupied different places within the expanded field, conceptually delimited by Rosalind Krauss from the perspective of the status of sculpture, where the hybridization of working procedures is so organic that naming various objects as painting, drawing, sculpture, action, or installation depends on the degree of affection of the artist with one or the other of these media, but all involve, in one way or another, a deployment in space and time.

“With regard to individual practice, it is easy to see that many of the artists in question have found themselves occupying, successively, different places within the expanded field. And though the experience of the field suggests that this continual relocation of one's energies is entirely logical, an art criticism still in the thrall of a modernist ethos has been largely suspicious of such movement, calling it eclectic. This suspicion of a career that moves continually and erratically beyond the domain of sculpture obviously derives from the modernist demand for the purity and separateness of the various mediums (and thus the necessary specialization of a practitioner within a given medium). But what appears as eclectic from one point of view can be seen as rigorously logical from another. For, within the situation of postmodernism, practice is not defined in relation to a given medium—sculpture—but rather in relation to the logical operations on a set of cultural terms, for which any medium—photography, books, lines on walls, mirrors, or sculpture itself—might be used.” (Krauss, 1979, p. 288)

In Krauss's view, it becomes evident that the logic of the space of postmodern practice is no longer organized around defining an environment based on material or perception of material. This perspective is clearly different from the approach of historical thinking specific to form, and assumes the acceptance of definitive ruptures and the possibility of viewing the historical process from the standpoint of logical structure.

“Installation art, like conceptual art and the ready-made, are constructed out of a negative relation with painting, opposing physical form, flatness, pictoriality, with what Krauss terms a <post medium condition [...] the material properties of a merely physical object like support> where art is no longer confined by Installation art attains a post medium condition as an inverse logic structured on the ontological absence of painting. In the current decade artists enter the professional field of painting where ‘not painting’ is their starting point. Whatever is done from there is determined by relational movements away from painting. Consequently artists who abandon painting for a rainbow alliance of media and skills, ultimately move along the same path, away from concerns for a flat image towards object and time based practices. In this way expanded painting could just keep expanding and become a kind of total painting, an absorption and <synthesis of all the arts under painting>. This kind of total painting seems to go beyond our understanding of medium, to require either a new definition of medium or a new discourse around the <post medium condition>”. (Titmarsh, 2010, p. 136)

The transition to Postmodernism, assuming the combination of domains/mediums in the expanded field or hybrid of all possibilities, outlines more clearly, assimilating everything already defined as an experimental field where reciprocal borrowing of knowledge subsequently led to the reciprocal borrowing of mediums or their fusion, highlighting an increasing tendency towards involvement and borrowing of tools specific to various fields. Nam June Paik, the artist who created the first robot, is certainly an illustrative example in this regard. Even before Neil Armstrong's "first step" on the moon (1969), thanks to Nam June Paik, the first step of a robot on the street took place, operated by remote control (1964), preceding the actual legitimization of robotics. Only after robots appeared in film and literature did science begin to pay attention to the construction of such machines. The possibility of art to anticipate the future, a clichéd characteristic often attributed to it, constitutes another intrinsic relation to temporality. The degree of experimental and innovative character of artworks is defined by this foresight that art has in relation to the present, showing us the increasingly accelerated course of evolution, from the perspective of progress.



Barbara Stiegler concluded in her book *We Must Adapt! On a New Political Imperative*, following in the footsteps of Nietzsche and Foucault, that the current feeling of being behind the demands of the future was already felt two centuries ago. Like us, those people already experienced the anxieties and joys of acceleration, delay, and haste, increasingly acute with the development of capitalism and the sense of permanent revolution imposed on all social rhythms, from the beginnings of the Modern era to the industrial revolution.

The change in the approach to time in art over recent decades, a period that has begun to be accepted as Post-Postmodernism, seems to come with such anticipations of possible new changes regarding the perception of time, offering alternatives to this linear progression in all planes of existence.

For a more comprehensive understanding, a deeper exploration is required from multiple perspectives regarding the approach to temporality in art, which could provide us with new reference points, even beyond historically classified time.

### **Copy and the Status of the Original in Painting - a Temporal Transfiguration of Image Morphology**

It is now known that from a psychological perspective, humans are capable of managing and assimilating new life experiences only by relating them to past experimental contexts. The only exception to this is early childhood, where imitation serves as the starting point for all experiences, alongside the awareness of oneself as a distinct individual. Viewing things from this perspective, we understand the importance of myths and legends passed down through generations and the perception of one's own existence as tied to divine will, which gained justification and meaning over a long historical period of humanity.

Taking into account the teachings (norms, rules) of the past, following the same path, respecting the same rituals has less to do with a sharp awareness of one's own individuality and more with being an integral part of a category, a social community. Extracting human existence from the will of the gods and assuming overwhelming self-responsibility, under the weight of the revelation *Cogito ergo sum*, opens the way to an accelerated succession of ages - *mechanical, biological, electronic, atomic, quantum*, etc. - to which humans have had to adapt at an increasingly rapid pace, thus facing the consequences of their own discoveries in relation to themselves and the world.

Painting has always incorporated all these transformations into its medium of expression. From the magical influencing of the future through the visual projection of the desired image on the wall, in cave paintings, to the perpetual wandering of humanity with its existential dramas, illustrated in frescoes, in a historical time that needed to be recorded in the memory of future generations, to the representation illusory reality and the glimpse of deeper layers beyond appearance, equivalent to the beginnings of venturing into the true realm of human knowledge. The imitation or reproduction of experiences lies, therefore, at the foundation of acquiring

knowledge of the past and technical skills. Similarly in painting, reproducing the experience manifested by those who came before was an important lesson in appropriating knowledge in the workshops of past masters.

How the notion of copy or replica changes over time, but also that of the original, of a work belonging to a distinct personality expressing original/new/innovative ideas about the world and existence, which mirrors the mode of relating to past references, to present existentialism, and implications regarding the future, has fluctuated more than one might believe to date.

After Édouard Manet updated subjects from the past (*Olympia*), shifting attention to current existence, to the present moment, to the instant (Impressionism, Post-Impressionism) and to the spatial dynamics of works (Cubism, Futurism) through the assimilation of the scientific knowledge of the time or ways of life and artefacts brought from other continents (Primitivism), etc., the amalgamation of all these influences will primarily express the subjectivity of the painter's attention and personality. For example, for Picasso, copying a work from the past is no longer a lesson in rendering forms or technical mastery but an opportunity to highlight the formal gap from the past and to emphasize the painter's originality through an unmistakable stylistic imprint.

The avant-garde has recognized this condition of originality, all the more evident the more (apparently) decisive the break from the past is. Francis Picabia's work *The Cacodylic Eye* (1921) is a work that ironically reflects the new twist of things - a collection of signatures that can sufficiently replace any manifestation of artistic mastery. However, the version of intentionally oriented towards the future, as reflected in societal plans through the implications of totalitarian regimes, will be able to disappoint. Futurism and Constructivism have often been associated with orientations towards progress and change with such political ideologies. Somehow escaping time, Dadaism and Surrealism may have successfully escaped suspicion of the political influences that art could have. They were concerned with playing with the immediate perception of the randomness of things, with the unconscious automatism of the mind, which cannot be fully controlled and anticipated in relation to a much larger and stratified reality that reveals the unknown and dark sides of man, which can lead, as seen over time, even to the use of scientific knowledge to wage wars, to genetically control the new man, with the extermination of others, or to create nuclear bombs. Moreover, Duchamp will speak clearly in his artistic creed (Duchamp, 1956) about his belief in the non-involvement of art and the artist, which he wanted free from such implications. The gesture of putting a moustache on the *Mona Lisa* (just an intervention on a replica multiplied by printing) can be interpreted in the sense of keeping art on a plane of imaginative mental games/tests, which ridicule and undermine excessive confidence in the supposedly exclusively rational ability of man to build a definitively beneficial future. The dismantling of all templates and mental blocks seems to be Duchamp's main objective; nothing is as it seems, and nothing that is, is the ultimate truth but a series of strategic moves on a chessboard. The provocative gesture of legitimizing a urinal as a work of art was intended to test such mental mechanisms, even the successive replicas he himself made over time of this work, neither identical nor entirely different (and they are only simple objects produced serially and technologically) come to relativize and reconsider notions of copy and original in the age of mechanical reproduction, which, as has been observed, has not remained foreign to artistic implications thereafter.

Postmodern pessimism and mistrust of the new and progress continued this line, except that it becomes increasingly critical of the present and wholly disengaged from the future. The past is no longer cancelled, but it becomes only a reference in relation to the present, now different, for a clearer observation of it through updating and contrast. For example, Sherrie Levine's replica of *Fountain*, extending the notion of "ready-made," initiated

by Duchamp, to the entire art in general, does not bring a truly notable innovative contribution, somewhat overshadowing the transgressive nature of the initial work. Such approaches that apparently fail to stand out, for example, the "disturbing-repulsive" works (innovative procedure) versus the "disturbing-captivating" works (procedure that denies innovativeness), as categorized by Nicolas Bourriaud, actually speak of a major transformation of the situation that has occurred in the meantime because we have in this latter case a seductive relationship to the public, with a very different effect (Bourriaud, 2007).

In Postmodernism, the question arose of what sense the new makes if it cannot change anything socially, thus justifying a preference for the old. This reversal, however, becomes a new cultural gesture, breaking with the rule that imposed attention to the new and paradoxically creating another "radical new." Now questions are raised about the actual possibilities of art innovation, its social role, and originality, a situation that gradually leads to closure in a cynical attitude that feels no obligation to provide solutions.

The re-staging of Yves Klein's *Leap into the Void* by Ciprian Muresan is a reflection of this state of affairs. Yves Klein's leap, originally staged in an avant-garde sense, the artist being able to put himself in danger to experience the unknown, expresses in Muresan's version the broken wings of Icarus, the artist being put to the ground, as a kind of surrender.

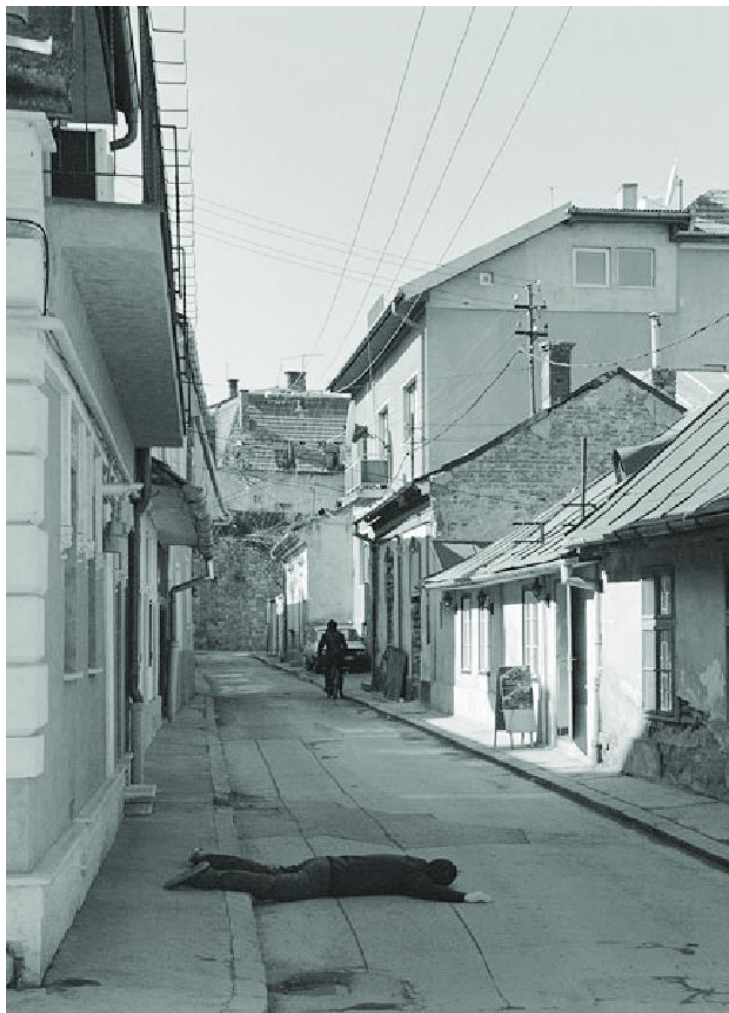


Image 1. Ciprian Muresan, *Leap into the Void, after Three Seconds*, 2004

‘‘The old’’ needs to be updated and rediscovered each time; therefore, all Renaissances are at the same time great renewals and updates. In conclusion, in Postmodernism, with the revisitation and updating of the old for understanding the present, the perception of things from the perspective of the old-new dichotomy is no longer justified because no spatial displacement is possible (outside of drift) without setting an intention and hope for an outcome. Moreover, this type of attitude is not beneficial for long-term existence. As can be observed, you cannot develop as a healthy human being if you live in a constant focus on what is not going well, in a lack of perspectives, which ultimately leads to anxiety and depression (the disease of our time, of imaginary fears), at a time when man (lacking the will of God) has become solely responsible for how he conducts his existence.

Kris Martin, through the reproduction of the ancient statue of Laocoon entwined by serpents together with his sons in the work *In the Hands of God* (2006, MOMA), by eliminating the source of the contortion of the bodies, speaks directly about these imaginative sources of stress in the contemporary world, in the absence of real danger, which justifies the tensions of the mind and body, leading us through the antinomic intervention of the title, even to the gained individual freedom of modern man, which is increasingly difficult to manage. He also, through another conceptual work called *I thing is certain - friedrich nietzsche is dead*, refers to the consequences of this fact found in examples such as the (erroneous) interpretation of Nietzsche's statement "God is dead!" attributed directly, not as a warning of times without the exercise of divine will, which he foresaw.

Although the natural course of evolution requires artists to engage in innovation and dialogue with the present, which is often in antithesis to the past, the ties to the past cannot be completely severed, even if it is only taken as a reference (as in Postmodernism). Erasing or nullifying the past entirely is an impossible action and perhaps not even desirable, because analysing and understanding the traumas of the past could positively influence the future. Such a gesture remains necessary, at least on a symbolic or imaginative level. As the history of art has shown, alongside these "tendencies" to "burn down museums" (as stipulated in the manifestos of the futurists), samples of traditional/primitive art brought from other continents, such as African (African masks) or Asian (Japanese prints), have played a major role in the evolution of modern art. The best example in this regard is the case of Brâncuși, who left Rodin's workshop to return to a more primitive (traditional) form of art through direct carving, paradoxically managing to remain innovative and revolutionize the possibilities of sculpture.

However, in Postmodernism, things have been pushed to the point where even the notion of "new" (the "new man" – a Hitlerian, fascist ideal) itself no longer inspires confidence, just as notions of "total" (total art – the synchronicity of all arts), "pure" (absolute purity in abstraction), or "radical" changes are considered outright threats because they seem to be derived from totalitarian ideologies. The history of art is abound with such examples, so in art, it is not a matter of ignoring or depreciating the past, but of how these models from the past are updated and re-contextualized to meet the existential needs of the present. This goes beyond mere technical and stylistic appearances, which are not sufficient and justified in themselves, without that conceptual substratum, of the evolution of ideas, even when we propose revaluing the old over the new.

If we refer to the Post-Postmodern period, with "terra incognita" no longer existing, as Nicolas Bourriaud noted, artists' interest is now oriented towards the updating of history and geography, towards what has already been

cataloged and mapped. History is "a new continent that needs to be discovered," a history that can be infinitely rewritten (subjective histories, not the history of the victors, but of the defeated...). A clearer distinction must be made here between that procedure of "appropriation" of historical references, specific to postmodernism (by replacing the unknown/new with the familiar) and this new tendency that belongs to Post-Postmodernism practice.

Culture is defined by the hierarchical sedimentation/archiving of cultural values over time and is constituted by the content of libraries, museums, and archives. The basic principle of structuring archives is that they necessarily incorporate the new and ignore imitations, and "in a certain sense, nothing is more traditional than the need to orient towards the new," Boris Groys concluded in his study *On the New. Essay on Cultural Economy*. This is why some artists work directly with the notion of the archive, by introducing the "new" into what is already archived. Currently, the interest is not so much in the new, in itself, but in the manipulation of what is already organized, classified, and documented in archives, museums, collections, with the aim of discovering new perspectives on understanding things, with the aim of writing "new histories."

Taking yet another step in what has been the difficult overcoming of the blockage (the postmodern loop), that is, in reconsidering the relationship with the past, present, and future, we can more recently speak of initiatives to rewrite the past, which we could consider finds a correspondence in another stage of human development, namely in the mental reprogramming of today. We can look at the multiple gestures of repositioning some examples from the past by artists, but not only to analyse the present, but to imagine new scenarios and accept other possible realities, depending on a differently imagined past. If the "citation" of some of Van Gogh's paintings, such as *The Sunflowers* (2019) in the work of Adrian Ghenie, or the image of Hitler kneeling in a piece by Maurizio Cattelan, *Him*, respond to practices of "appropriation", where the past of yesterday contrasts with the present of today, Fred Wilson, on the other hand, through his intervention *Metal Work* (1793-1880), rearranging existing exhibits in museum display cases, redefines a historical path by placing pleasure objects, such as sumptuous metal vessels symbolizing prosperity during colonialism, alongside objects of oppression – chains that deprived and oppressed slaves. *Mining the Museum*, an exhibition at the Maryland Historical Society in 1992, was the first major presentation of Wilson's practice of transforming historical research into evocative exhibitions that examine different perspectives on historical circumstances. Samples of the past are no longer copied – repainted, transcribed, quoted, etc., but rearranged – rewritten.

Through a somewhat similar gesture in message, Colombian artist Doris Salcedo, with her intervention *Shibboleth* in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern in London, 2007, conducts an institutional critique of how modern art museums implement this form of exclusion, as 20th-century modernism histories have so far failed to address the contributions of non-European cultures. The artist stated in 2007 that the crack in the iconic space of Tate Modern reveals a "colonialist and imperialist history [that] has been ignored, marginalized, or simply erased ... the history of racism, parallel to the history of modernity" (Herbert, 2007, p.2).

Such amendments and restorations regarding certain injustices, prompted by the cultural programs of institutions in collaboration with the artists who initiated them, result in a new Western cultural orientation towards acknowledging these past injustices and emphasizing the sense of guilt as a consequence of the so-called evolution

and prosperity of more civilized societies, built on the destruction of other worlds, sometimes more balanced and beneficial existentially, whose ways of existence have influenced, even rethinking the articulation of their own worlds (e.g., the drafting of Human Rights).

Things are taken further in the creation of Pierre Huyghe to show us other perspectives on the specific human perception of things in relation to that of other living beings or the environment in general, as well as on the perception of time, which becomes both subject and medium. For example, the starting point of the retrospective at the Centre Pompidou in 2011 was set in the verses of T.S. Eliot: "Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future, / And time future contained in time past". Indeed, the entire exhibition involved a mix of animal and human presences, with which viewers were invited to interact equally in this expanded universe, suggesting a kind of equivalence between them, in life and art. Among the exhibits was a re-contextualization of Constantin Brancusi's Sleeping Muse portrait, alongside a live crustacean, placed to coexist in an aquarium in the *Zoodram 4* installation, as a new way of relating between humans and things that we should discover and practice. Each cultural tradition can have its own archiving systems and can have a heterogeneous and thus relative character, while at the same time, one can observe a gradual universalization and formalization of cultural archives as a result of globalization.

This is also why Nicolas Bourriaud speaks in terms such as "New Perspectives" or "Altermodern" (another modernity), alter meaning multiplicity, in which he sees a kind of "dream capture" – a multiplicity of aspirations that could generate a new modernism relevant to our times. Giving a new meaning to the *mélange*.

If we consider this condition of human evolution, sometimes through undesirable paths, only from a modern and Western perspective, the vulnerability felt today can also equate to self-sabotage and placing this world in imminent danger. However, this characteristic of humans to evolve with territorial movements and the conquest of new physical and knowledge territories has always existed and is found globally from the very beginning, regarding the human condition, where the most unexpected contrasts coexist: progress-destruction, supreme good-torture, developed-terrorism, construction-anarchy, etc.

How do we ensure not to overlook in this process of rectifications the great self-discoveries of the human being and the liberation of the body, mind, and spirit, which have occurred, culturally, over time (despite sometimes coinciding with the dark aspects of achieving them) or that this vulnerable but reflective and capable world of transformation has now become the main bastion of defending these? Perhaps more attention should be given to these dark parts of becoming. Furthermore, it raises the question - if simple re-imagining, rewriting, or mental reprogramming can truly change anything in actual reality.

We will attempt to answer starting from Humboldt's conceptions, whose trans-disciplinary vision led him to reflect on the relationship between man, imagination, and reality from a young age when he was also concerned with aesthetic aspects. He took Kant's concept of a posteriori imagination as a reference, according to which there is no longer a contradiction between real and imaginary, but imagination is an implicit component of reality (we behave towards objects and beings based on the characteristics and possible reactions we imagine they should have according to their concept).

Unlike Kant, whose theory he takes as a reference, Humboldt considered that there is also another type of imagination - productive (also a posteriori), of artists. Here, it is not about filling of the space between the partiality of perceptions and the totality required by a rational concept, but on the contrary, about overcoming conceptual barriers. The artist "imagines", sees things from new perspectives, thus determining new possible modes of visibility.

Joseph Beuys, the author of the expanded vision of art and life, believed that this power of reflective imagination is inherent to all humans because creativity is a specifically human characteristic that can be exercised and used by everyone (in a collective sense), not necessarily in the service of art but of life. He considered art as a kind of science of freedom, and the energetic ensemble of the world itself, determined by the energy of each individual, once put in the service of freedom, as a growth impulse given to the world, could lead to a phenomenon of collective social remodeling (Mercioiu-Popa, 2013).

Furthermore, Beuys believed that society is like an organism, whose functions should collaborate and self-regulate, but which in his time's society was at the most advanced point of a disease. For this reason, he also considered that both art and the human being in general (valuing their creativity) should act like nature, probably to fit into that natural growth impulse. He also advocated for the restoration of the triad – mind, body, and soul of the human being, believing that only in this way can it be fully balanced. Joseph Beuys was, however, considered the last of the utopians, the last of the artists who still believed in the human capacity to beneficially influence their environment of existence before the plunge into Postmodernism.

After Humboldt's disappearance, a period of specialization and classification of research fields began. His interdisciplinary approaches were criticized for decades because, according to the beliefs of that time, only a deep understanding in a single field of research could lead to new discoveries. However, confronting today's problems has led to a reevaluation of these concepts, making it evident once again that it is necessary to look beyond strictly defined research fields to perceive the confluence of interdependent factors (complexity theory). Humboldt viewed existence as a dynamic, complex system that can only be understood if we see it as a whole in which all geological phenomena, all organisms, chemical factors, and human actions interweave, implicitly extending to the natural mode of human evolution – the technological development that was emerging.

Through this intervention, made in the greenhouse, at the Young Naturalists' Resort in Timișoara, I reduced human existence to just 7 steps, a lapidary passage through the major stages of life (symbolized chromatically and by writing a verb), which the public crossed. These temporal implications play a role in observing the daily shortcuts in achieving immediate goals that define our existence, leaving us consumed by time, without building a real relationship with the physical world/nature within us and around us. For this reason, I propose another level of perception, arranged aurally, by inserting a neon text, written/read in a loop - *Everything depends on...*

Ioana Nemes, another Romanian artist who left us too soon but who won the bet with time, had an artistic trajectory deeply marked by the subjective perception of time in relation to daily self-evaluation. *The Wall Project* (2001) and *Monthly Evaluations* (2004) are refined methodologies of systematic self-evaluation of one's efficiency across multiple planes of existence, through which things could be constructed or freely reorganized.

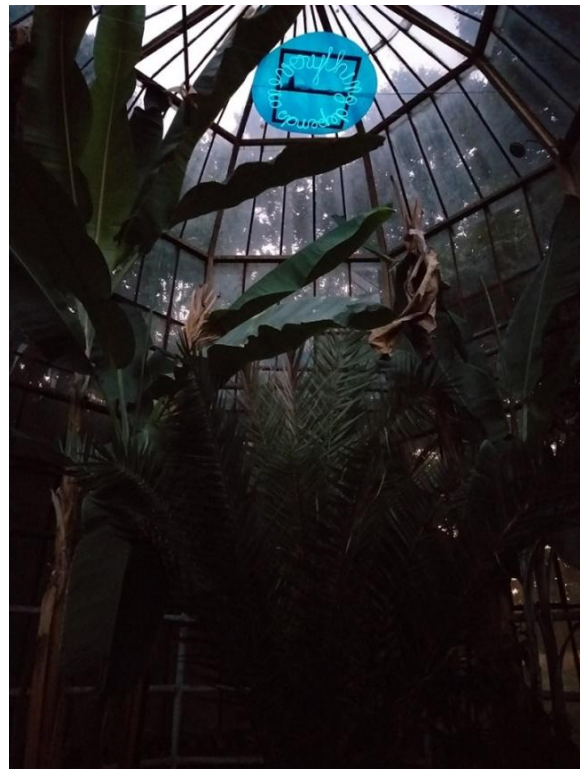
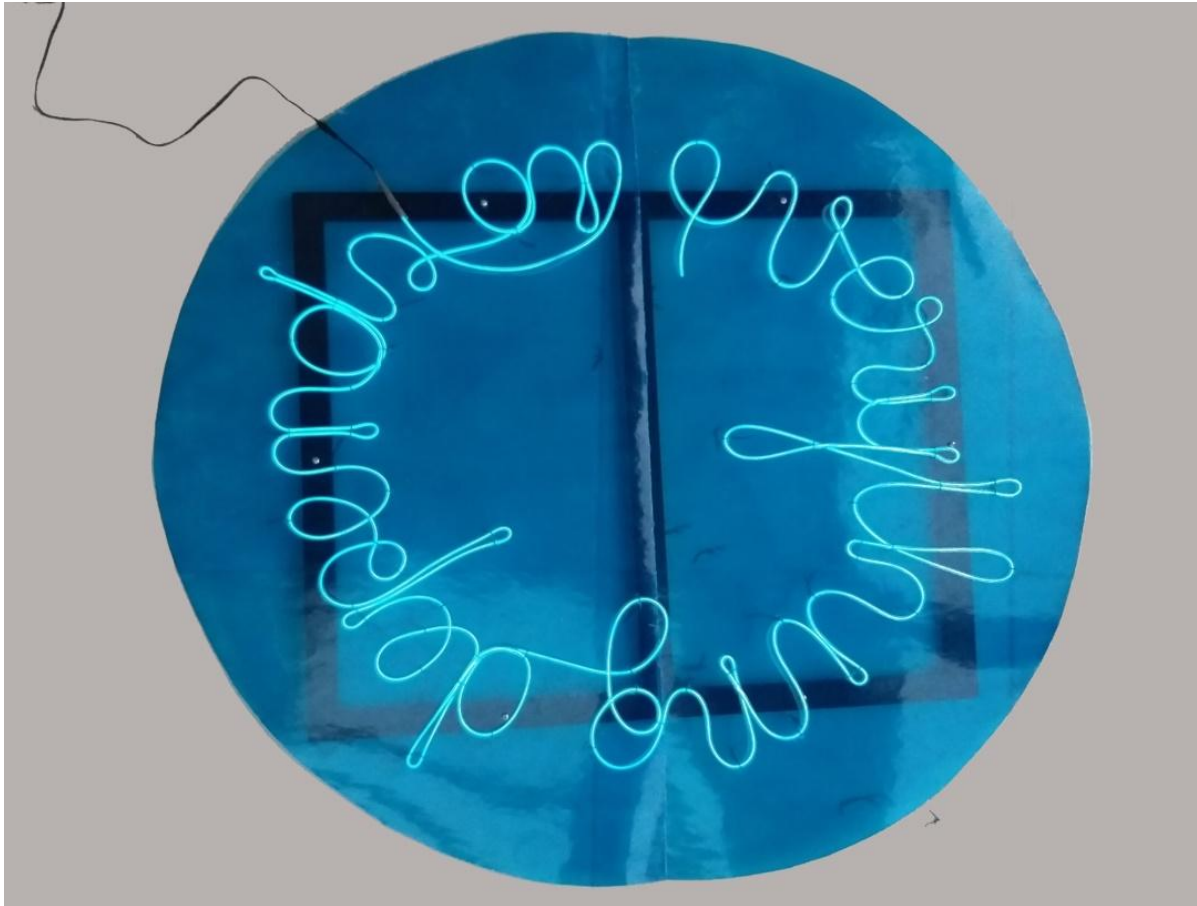


Image 2. Liliana Mercioiu Popa, *Spectrum of Celebration* (overview photos - details), Young Naturalists' Resort in Timișoara, 2021





Image 3. Liliana Mercioiu Popa, *Concentric Spatialities* (overview photos - details), Meta Spațiu Gallery gardenin, Timișoara, 2023



Image 4. Ioana Nemes, *Birdman (Positive & Negative Ring)*, 2009

The wall intervention titled *Birdman (Positive & Negative Ring 2009)* seems to recall the previously mentioned verses of Eliot, where temporal movement moves beyond linearity, becoming circular, so that the past, present, and future contain each other equally. 'And so I wonder if Nemes's evaluation system could be a gesture of

counteraction. Perhaps it is an attempt to counteract the concept of time to which our existence submits every second, dividing life into past and future, with an alternative structure following individually established parameters. Thus, "Monthly Evaluations' captures the daily passage of time, but above all, Nemes subjected herself to a logic beyond the given units of time." (Roessler, 2014)

## **Conclusion**

Perhaps the ability of humans to regain trust in humanity and faith in its deep, immediate connections with nature/the sentient world, passing through the process of awareness, acceptance, and healing of collective past traumas and mitigating the sense of guilt by rewriting these experiences, and once again, the ability to regain trust in one's imagination to complete the whole and visualize new perspectives, to reassign hope and meaning, and to act accordingly in the present, will depend on the ongoing balancing of existential difficulties. Perhaps, therefore, a revision of our relationship with time – not the scheduled, progressive projection of the future (which excuses the means of actions and sustains the acceleration of consumption), but following the evident fact (now, in the current age of neurolinguistics) that the present is simultaneously written in both past and future, resulting in a kind of equivalence between them.

The multiplex perspective Bourriaud wished to confront us with involves reassessing all aspects of our lives, how we understand the multifaceted nature of the world and the correspondences/influences between them, digging in each direction within the walls of a slope, as Michel, Foucault and Noam Chomsky in their dialogue *About human nature*, in hopes of possible and beneficial encounters capable of supporting the whole.

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- Image 1. Ciprian Muresan, *Leap into the Void, after Three Seconds*, 2004 / courtesy Ciprian Mureșan.
- Image 2. Liliana Mercioiu Popa, *Spectrum of Celebretion*, Intervention, Young Naturalists' Resort in Timișoara, 2021 / courtesy Liliana Mercioiu Popa.
- Image 3. Liliana Mercioiu Popa, *Concentric Spatialities*, Meta Spațiu Gallery gardenin, Timișoara, 2023 / courtesy Liliana Mercioiu Popa.
- Image 4. Ioana Nemes - *Birdman (Positive & Negative Ring)*, 2009 in the exhibition *Relics for the Afterfuture (Brown)*, Jiri Svestka Berlin / courtesy Ioana Nemes Archive.

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