Ирина Генова
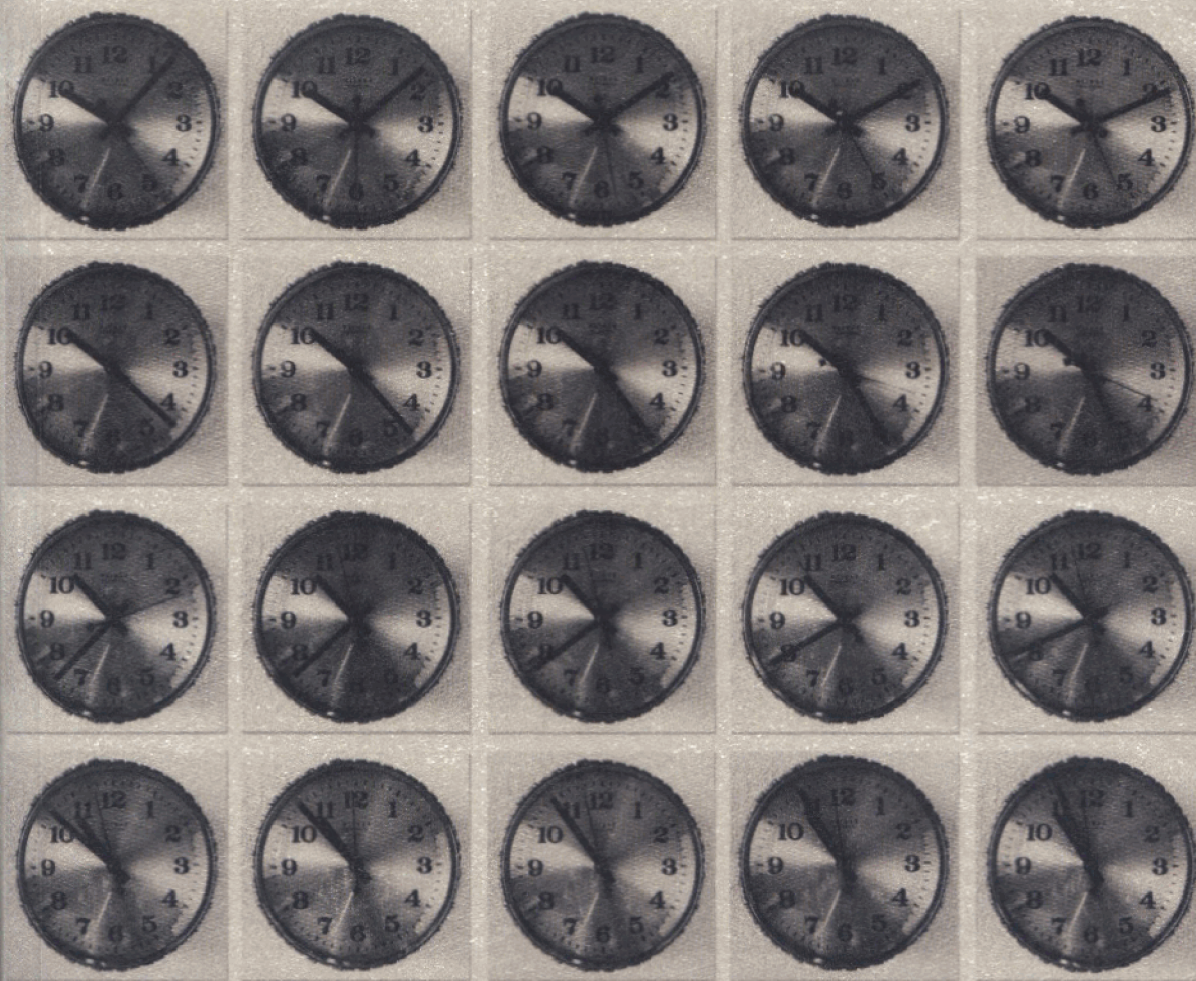
Tempus fugit / Времето лети

За съвременното изкуство и визуалния образ

Tempus fugit / Time is Flying

On Contemporary Art and the Visual Image

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The Spectator: Changes in the Situation.
Between the Expert Spectator and Visual Literacy

The spectator before photography
The situation of the spectator and image reproduction techniques
The spectator in a time of crisis (competition, substitution)
of materiality
Virtual collections, image appropriation. Spectator and user
The limits of the body and the limits of the imaginable. The spectator
of contemporary art practices
Between the expert spectator and visual literacy

It seems that we are never prepared for the image that affects us. The image presents itself to us from the very outset as a unity and, if we are affected by it, we share our time and experience of acquiring a particular attitude to it. Boundaries are blurred: the time of "the spectator in the picture"[1] and the gazes of a number of other concrete spectators (beside me) of this very image seem to become my experience. Sometimes the length of the perception changes the conditions of our looking at and movement towards the image.

Authenticity and simulation, art and visual environment, form and content, objecthood and virtuality, painting and object painted, frame and image, etc.: the spectator's participation is articulated in the juxtaposition of these concepts and the obliteration of their boundaries.

1. The spectator in the art collection. Before photography

The spectator practises his/her activity through contemplation of (familiarization with, admiration and exploration of) the work. As a concept related to the work of art, the *spectator* probably emerged at the same time as the concept of the work of art itself. During the Enlightenment, alongside the appearance of concepts like that of art history and the work of art/chef-d'oeuvre, as well as the appearance of public museums, the concept of the *spectator* also came into use.

As in the field of theatre, here, too, it is difficult to construct a common viewpoint to accommodate the different approaches to the spectator.[2] Despite the indeterminacy of the spectator's activity of looking at/admiring the work

of art (spectators differ with respect to age, gender, educational background, profession, psychological attitude, motivation, etc.), the different specific situations of the spectator can be conceived and compared – according to Eric Michaud, the work of art makes of every spectator an object of experience ("…l'œuvre d'art faisait de tout spectateur un objet d'expérience"),[3] and, thus, the art historian, the art critic, the artist and the amateur art lover find themselves in a similar situation.

The word *situation* means, among other things, "the aggregate of biological, psychological, and sociocultural factors acting on an individual or group to condition behavioral patterns".[4] Of particular interest to me here are those specific changes in the spectator's situation that occur with the development of the possibilities for the reproduction and circulation of **images that have been separated from their objects**.

The visitor/the person who has been granted access to the art collections of the Enlightenment, the spectator of art before the advent of photography, could be called an "immediate", "sensory" spectator, the connoisseur of "object" images. Let us imagine these displays (kunstkammers, studiolas, galleries) of objects – objects curious, rare, beautiful, artistic. When these objects were offered to people outside the collectors' circles to look at and admire, when they were made publicly accessible, they had to be named and, if possible, dated; they had to be placed in a way that made it easier for spectators to look at them, and the paths that joined them had to offer a continuous narrative. (The objects could be linked together in terms of time, author, form, etc.)

Artists, scholars, rich lovers of art used to undertake journeys in order to see and study Europe's early art collections. Alongside this access to art collections, during the Enlightenment, art's other institutions – art history, art education, the author, the work of art – also came into being.

One example of this process is Johann Joachim Winkelmann (1717-1768), who is regarded as the author of the first conception of art history. Winkelmann had to move to Dresden in order to be able to view and study collections of Classical and Renaissance art and to write his *Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture* (1755). After Dresden, extensive collections drew him to Rome, where he researched his major work *The History of Ancient Art* (1764). Another example is Eugène Fromentin (1820-1876) and his work *The Old Masters* (*Les Maîtres d'autrefois*, 1876) – a record of his impressions of

collections in the Netherlands and Belgium, which he saw during a journey that he undertook in 1875.

Outside the places that housed them, the collections of that time could be talked about but not shown; and so lovers and students of these objects/works of art had to travel, to cover great distances and invest a lot of time in order to visit the collections of royalty, aristocracy, universities, the Pope.

2. The situation of the spectator and image reproduction techniques

With the invention, perfection and spread of photography, the spectator's situation underwent a change. Photography made it possible to study and discuss works of art that were not physically available. Alongside the "immediate" spectator of "object" images, alongside the connoisseur spectator, the "mediate" spectator of "objectless" images, or the spectator of reproductions, came into being.

Around the middle of the 20th century, art collections were being reproduced on a scale that made possible the study of art history in places that had no large art museums (e.g. a place like Sofia), or, in other words, the study of art history without physical access to the works of art themselves. Thus, the "mediate" spectator began to obliterate the boundary between the lay person and the expert, and the connoisseur's role seemed to become emancipated from collections and museums.

The subject of the present text presupposes a reference to Walter Benjamin and his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935-36). However, what interests us here is not the change in the status of the work of art, but rather the change in the activity of the spectator. Benjamin sees the cause of the change undergone by the nature of art, the concept of the work of art and the "withering" of its "aura" in the development of the means of mechanical reproduction.[5] He warns us of politics' growing interest in the image. In his preface to the 1989 Bulgarian edition of Benjamin's essay, Atanas Natev discusses the need to assert the "intellectual independence of the work of art" in this new situation and thus draws attention to the problem of the (circulated, multiplied) image and politics.[6]

The rapid development of the means of the reproduction and circulation of images, of their popularization and manipulation, as well as of their dissemination in the general informational and material environment, makes every one of us a "mediate" spectator of museum images. We do not need to go into a museum – even if there are none in our particular environment,

even if we have never been to a museum, we can assume the role not merely of spectators (of reproductions and remakes), but even that of educated spectators (thanks to reproductions).

In the first year of my studies in art history at Sofia's Art Academy, I was disappointed, even briefly depressed, by the fact that I could get an excellent mark at an exam on art works (e.g. the art of ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia) which I had never even seen "live" – not even a single one. What had I expected? That Sofia would in some miraculous way acquire a museum comparable to the Louvre, to the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts or to the British Museum? Or that we, students of art history, would be travelling all the time, visiting museums in order to be able to practise our skills as immediate spectators? Subsequently, however, I came to be interested in my (situation though not one of my own choice) of a spectator of reproductions, of a specialist who is educated (and would possibly educate others) through reproductions. Could this situation perhaps have some advantages? Postcards, catalogues, albums – all of these I can look at "in private": at home, in a café, in the library. The gap between the lay spectator and the expert spectator shrinks. I can gaze for ages at even universally acknowledged masterpieces (without the pressure of museum limitations and other visitors' impatience), I can go back to them again and again, I can assimilate them, I can compare them in any way I choose. Reproductions present images as comparable (in size, material, function), and this changes my way of looking, my desire, the pleasure I gain from contemplating a work of art. I acquire a taste for the paper body of the book of reproductions, for postcards of different sizes, for calendars: I acquire an interest in the possibilities of the printing arts.

Susan Sontag reflects on the possibility of collecting photographs: "To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed", and even though this is only a "semblance of appropriation", photographs can be collected, arranged and rearranged in albums.[7] In our case, the photographs are of a special kind – photographs of objects that have the status of works of art.

Reflections on collecting images, on the way they are arranged, rearranged and linked together, lead us to the studies undertaken by Aby Warburg (1866-1929). The virtual collection, the collection of images of objects in an imaginary museum, was a major Warburg project.[8] He set out to create an atlas of images – of photoreproductions – which he called *Mnemosyne*, after the goddess of memory. The idea came into being with the advent of photography – at the time, a new technique for the reproduction of images.

Warburg focused his attention on visual symbols, on their existence, and on the changes they undergo in social memory. His atlas contains about 1 000 photographs, arranged in groups against a background of black fabric – not only photographs of works of art, but also advertising and documentary photographs from newspapers. Such juxtapositions, within the same space, of images belonging to different orders would not have been possible before the advent of photography; now, in the digital image environment, this is so much easier.

Photography changed the way and the resources through which the spectator makes meaning. It made possible the broad juxtaposition, the construction of series of signs amidst vast masses of images.

Today, we enjoy the possibility of collecting and rearranging images for the purpose of iconographic studies, of interpretations of form and style, of contextual approaches, of visual semiotics. Interpretative approaches change with the refinement of the means of "appropriating" images, of juxtaposing reproductions of images belonging to different periods and different orders. These new possibilities go beyond the importance of the purely instrumental.

3. The spectator in a time of crisis (competition, substitution) of materiality

What changes occur in the spectator's situation at a time when art collections can be digitally re-created? What changes do the motivations for collecting and bringing together images undergo in the process of collecting and rearranging digital images? What are the ramifications for art's institutions – for museums, art history, art education, the work of art, the author? Who are the agents, the creators and propagators of the new "collections" and connections in the era of computer memory and digital images? Are their activities subversive of the old art institutions of the Age of the Enlightenment? Have information, catalogues, encyclopedias replaced, for the spectator, interpretation, enjoyment, fancy and material worth as the justification for making a collection?

The invention of the computer, the development of computer technologies, digital memory (which equates pictures, text and music) have radically shifted the problem of the circulation, viewing and "collecting" of art work reproductions. And if "the most grandiose result of the photographic enterprise is to give us the sense that we can hold the whole world in our heads – as an anthology of images",[9] then the development of the computer has created a

feeling that the entire world – in images, text and music – is inside the "network" and the computer's memory.

The possibility of a virtual collection of images (physically existent or not) radically changes our perception as spectators and affects, it seems, all thematic and methodological outgrowths in critical writing on the image.

At the turn of the 20th century, with the advent of photography, and at the turn of the 21st century, with the advent of the digital image, we witness a significant change in the meaning, functions and the possibilities for impact of the modern institutions of art – art collections, museums, art history, art education, the work of art, the author.

The wish to marshal my thoughts confronts me with a need determined by the requirements of the verbal record, and subsequently of book printing: I need to start somewhere and continue in sequence, establishing connections along the way in accordance with the destination I have in mind. But where the description of a painting is concerned, the linear sequence of language produces an asymmetry: as Michael Baxandall points out, in the description of a painting, the structures of language continually upset the model of perception of the painting, since we do not view a painting (which presents "a simultaneously available field") in a "temporally linear" way.[10]

Today, with my experience of the digital environment and the Internet – the experience of non-linear connections and the possibility of a multiplicity of nodes – I am drawn to the possibility of such a non-linear account: an account that remains open to and connected with other topics, naming them but not necessarily tracing them. For me, this possibility stimulates a new organization of thinking: one which branches out, or one which is like that of a map, one of whose routes we choose to follow, while a number of other routes also remain possible. Such an account would come closer to the painting and would upset the conventional model of text reception.

With the refinement of the techniques of image reproduction and circulation, the perception and the terms in which works of art are discussed also change: the focus is now on their visual aspect rather than on their material substance. Could this situation of a new "viewing" also be bringing about a new writing about art, based on high-quality (digitalized) re-productions?

Instead of perceiving immediately, through all our senses, the works of a given artist, we can look at photographs or, even better, digitalized photo reproductions. Instead of moving objects around in space or walking around
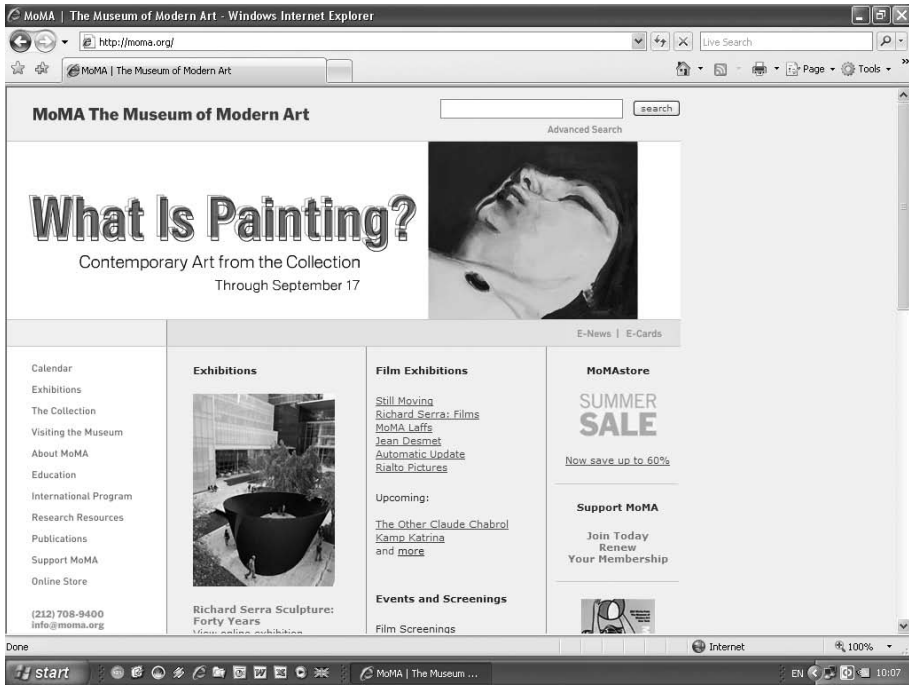
them (where sculpture or architecture are concerned this involves considerable difficulties), we can look at them on the computer screen in any order we choose, we can juxtapose them, we can examine details without making any physical effort.

This new situation of viewing reproductions presupposes a study of the visual impact of the image (what we can see) as divorced from the impact of the object (upon all our senses – the sense of touch, the body's position in space, etc.). Thus, it seems to put on an equal footing writers on art who have access to physical collections and writers on art who do not, centres of culture which boast extensive collections and a dense artistic materiality and cultural non-centres which lack any significant art collections and have only a tenuous materiality.

In this situation of informational equality, differences appear to be cancelled. However, the globalization of visual information is not a globalization of the material environment, and the possibility of appropriating images does not directly entail the possibility of appropriating objects and the meanings related to them.

The cities of the modern era, the urban spaces we move about in, are repositories of memory and information. But it seems that what is most important about their physiognomy is the concentration of experience in materiality. The objects we see at different cities' flea markets reveal a lot about their material environment. A place seems to be shaped by its museum collections and flea markets.[11]

In the Bulgarian environment, we typically have access not to objects but to reproductions of objects' images. Let us assume that thanks to my access to the virtual collections of vast museums around the world I am able to interpret images even though Sofia itself has no significant foreign art collections. Could my writing on images have the same status as (be on an equal footing with) writing practised where the objects themselves are? Is there a connection between the creation of objects (or, with respect to new art forms, the creation of technologies and equipment), their possession, and the control over interpretation? In the information they spread, in their virtual presence, museums wield power: they make policy; they select images – the images to be put into circulation in mass

knowledge and in education; they provide opportunities for their assimilation and appropriation; they create interpretations.

From as early as my student days I have been drawn to Vermeer's works. I have seen about half of his attributed works "live" in museums, and I can freely view (and in this sense "possess") all of his works on CD-ROM. If I tried interpreting these works (and got my interpretations translated into English or French), would my texts stand the same chance as the texts of a colleague in Berkeley or in EHESS?[12]

Today, museums are losing their complete control over the image, while retaining possession of the object. The number of images moving freely in the information network is spiralling, and museums, as institutions, are beginning to lose control over the conditions in which these images are viewed. With respect to the visual, the spectator is becoming emancipated from museums, but still remains attracted to the objects, whose repositories museums are.

Where contemporary art is concerned, however, museums seem to be losing the objects as well: with the practices of situationality, of ephemerality, the works seem to elude the status of objects and thus evade the museums.

4. Virtual collections, image appropriation. Spectator and user

For the spectator, easy access – at home, on his/her personal computer – to the multimedia space of museums, bookshops and educational institutions, makes it possible to replace the experience of objects (works of art, books) with their digital image. In this respect, the radically new situation seems to be globally valid. While high-quality reproductions and the books containing them, their production and ownership require investment and are thus not widely accessible, the Internet and CD-ROM collections are readily available. I am occasionally told by my students, in response to my questions about where a particular painting is to be found, that the painting is on the Internet, that they "got" it from there. (They have obviously not "got" it from the museum housing it.) Sites like www.art.com offer reproductions arranged by artist, by subject, etc. Along with visual information about paintings by Van Gogh, it also offers us pictures of the latest Lamborghinis. (Where cars are concerned, it seems that the distinction between image and object is easier to make.)

Could the possibility for anyone to create their own imaginary museum on their personal computer be at the root of the "end of the museum", the "end of history", the end of the concept of "art"? Today, we talk about exploring images,

not works of art, and this is a reflection of the new environment. Could rapidly developing technologies be the chief agent of this shift?

Images are being appropriated not only by "expert" spectators (interpreters of works of art), but also by creators of images (that serve different purposes) and "Sunday" or lay spectators – by the so-called (in the Internet environment) users. Images are born of images. And although this possibility has always existed, in the new situation of the easy reproduction, the rapid spread and the saturation of (physical and informational) space with images, this possibility appears to be unlimited.

The appropriation of images takes place in individual memory as well. I have often felt unsure whether I have seen a particular painting "live" in a museum, in a reproduction, on CD-ROM or on the Internet. My memory has assimilated and stored the painting, has found a place for it among others without retaining the connection with the context of its original viewing. And couldn't the image be, in fact, a figment of my imagination?

In its symbolic expression, the text too is an image. "The operation by means of which the verbal text is duplicated as a picture/icon belongs to the same order as the memorization and reproduction of images." (I have just duplicated a fragment of a text I wrote in 1997. In: Bulgarian Art Book, p. 7.)

In the Internet environment, thanks to computer memory, we can compile our own text collections or libraries. The environment becomes standardized – even fonts are standardized (through Unicode). The text or idea circulated has left its "body" and only remains in the form of information and memory. Could the "collection" of texts be comparable to the "collection" of images? And further: could the text born of texts be comparable to the image born of images?

For the user, reference to one's virtual collection of images and texts replaces the erudition and quotation – by time, subject, author, tradition of thought – that are disciplined by the order maintained in a physically existent library or museum. Uncertainty about origins is also uncertainty about the authorship of images and texts appropriated piecemeal in someone's virtual space.

What would change for me if in virtual collections (of digital reproductions) there also appeared imaginary images which do not exist as objects? Some years ago, I wrote a text in which I put forward the idea of creating collections of simulations of works of art that have not been realized in physical space. My suggestion was that in places that lack the resources necessary to materialize

ideas, to store and exhibit works in physical space, it would be possible for the works to be simulated in virtual space. "The ambiguity of the new means results from the fact that they can be used for documenting but also for intervention, modification, and, consciously or unconsciously, for forging of documentation."[13]

If, however, places are reversed and the place of the material object is instead taken by a project or simulation, the equivocalness, the doubt about correspondences will be dispelled. Let us imagine images which have their original existence in a computer environment. (The possibilities of refinement matter.) A collection of such images would be as perfect as the images themselves. Could their immaterial, virtual nature raise the status of the pictorial arts in Plato's hierarchy?

The virtual collection/image can be thought of as physically feasible. In a possible material realization, mimesis – an artistic practice that was abandoned by modernity – can determine the relation between the single artifact and the immaterial ideal prototype, the virtual image.

"And the maker of either [beds or tables] makes a bed or he makes a table for our use, in accordance with the idea … but no artificer makes the ideas themselves: how could he?"

"I think … that we may fairly designate [the painter] as the imitator of that which the others [God, the creator of the idea, and the artificer, the maker of the object] make".[14]

The title that Susan Sontag gave to the first essay in *On Photography* is "In Plato's Cave". For her, "the photographing eye changes the terms of our confinement in the cave, our world".[15]

The boundaries between the situation of the creator and the situation of the spectator/user seem to become blurred. After photography, which "divorces" the image from the work's objecthood, computer technologies have now made possible a virtual image that simulates objecthood.

5. The limits of the body and the limits of the imaginable. The spectator of contemporary art practices

The TV (or computer) screen can provide a repetition of framed images and sounds of a disastrous accident, but not the feeling of calamity in the space of my body – not the smoke, the heat, the smell of death. I seem to be prepared for the reproduced image by previous images, simulations and reporting, but I do not seem to be prepared for the reality of disaster.

The virtual reproduction and simulation of situations cannot give us a sense of the body and of space. They make it impossible to bring up existential questions about human limits, and thus create the illusion that there are no such limits. Virtual experience is rather a sign of the lack of another experience, experience in physical reality – like photographs, which are "both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence".[16]

The attraction of contemporary art practices – I hesitate to designate as "art" proper the striking situations created today by different means – is hardly due to constructs like uniqueness, authorship, historical narrative. Contemporary works are being conceived of and presented as events, not as an eternally present objecthood.

The heterogeneous nature of objects in contemporary image practices also presupposes a different kind of participation on the part of the spectator. Sometimes, the spectator is being informed, at others, he/she is being emotionally affected. These are more often than not temporary situations; temporary by design, they play with the effects of time and the environment.

The situational, evental character of contemporary art prevents works from being fixed in perpetuity. The spectator cannot see them more than once (except in the form of "mortal remains"[17] in tomblike rooms). The encounter with the works takes place in the urban or natural environment, in both predictable (e.g., the centres of contemporary art) and unpredictable "places for happening", for the ephemeral, for what desires its own disappearance.[18]

Hence the concern, the insistence on documenting and cataloguing these event-works.

Virtual repositories (not just a single one) of the memory of works and interpretations (on-line, CD-ROM) are suitable and adequate to the evental character of contemporary art practices. Virtual agents seem to be appropriating a substantial part of the resources museums have for the education (refinement) of and impact on the spectator.

But is there today an ideology/ideologies of presentation capable of constructing the ideal spectator and empowering the figure of the expert spectator – the agent of virtual collections and documentation?

7. Between the expert spectator and visual literacy
The visual experience which the spectator/the person affected by contemporary art forms needs is different from that which a museum spectator needs. This visual experience consists in the knowledge of art history (for

me, this is imperative), but also in the experience of the urban environment, the moving image (TV and cinema), a virtual communication space (the Internet).

If the ideal "museum spectator" is the expert spectator who has been trained in the history and criticism of pictorial arts, how are we to conceive of the ideal spectator of contemporary art practices? "Visually literate" seems to me an appropriate designation (referring us to literacy after Gutenberg and to visual literacy after the expansion of the image).

However, we do not yet have a formally designatable academic subject in which this ideal spectator could be trained. In order to be able to determine the character of various images and the differences and distinctions between them, in order to be able to follow their dynamics and find his/her way around image references and intervisual connections, the spectator needs to be motivated to acquire special experience in various fields. He/she needs to conceive of art practices as being related to different spheres, to social and personal problems, to religion, politics, philosophy, medicine, bioengineering, etc. He/she needs to have skills in recognizing and interpreting images belonging to different cultures and times. The history of art is an indispensable but insufficient part of this experience.

Can I ascribe a universal value to the fact of my being affected by a work? I don't think so. I can express my associations in words, I can put forward arguments of different kinds – but I can hardly exceed the limits of my experience.

I step into the role of spectator. The length of the perception (through sight or touch) induces in me a particular attitude to the images. I can relate them to other aspects of my visual experience.

In the garden of the building housing the Zograf Publishing Company in Varna, amid the shady greenery and against the background of a stone wall, my attention is attracted by a sculpture: the torso of a woman of classical shape and proportions.[19] Because, perhaps, of its environment and the light, it puts me in mind of the white stone Madonna in the garden of a Catholic monastery in Dijon. The sculpture in Varna is made of cellophane, suggesting the opposition of permanence and impermanence, form and surface, original and copy, etc. But the effect of this cellophane classicism in the garden in Varna seems to obliterate the boundaries between these concepts.

The concept of the authentic original is a part of discussions of contemporary art in Bulgaria (a given work is said to convey or fail to convey a sense of authenticity). The number of a work's duplications lends it significance. (Here again we cannot but think of Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction".[20]) Let me try to compare the different meanings of the word "authentic":

"1. not false or copied; genuine, real;

2. having an origin supported by unquestionable evidence;

3. entitled to acceptance or belief because of agreement with known facts or experience; reliable; trustworthy; 5. *(Obs.)* authoritative [1300-50; ME autentik; LL authenticus; Gk authentikos = authent(ës) perpetrator, doer]."[21]

Does a framed image from our daily life convey a sense of authenticity? Is the visual environment of the quotidian today fundamentally different from and opposed to the "art" displayed in museums and exhibition halls? Are the means of producing effects in the one and in the other compatible, is an obliteration of boundaries possible?

It is hardly possible today to construct an ideal spectator – and, in that sense, to create him/her through formal education. Contemporary art forms and practices play with a dense, heterogeneous and dynamic visual cognitive environment. What inevitably defines the spectator of contemporary art is the fact of his/her being affected by the image, which motivates – lastingly but each and every single time – an effort to achieve visual literacy.

I cannot be prepared for the image that affects me. It is always unexpected and always puts me to the test.

(2003)

Notes

1 "The spectator in the picture" is a loose allusion to "the reader in the text" in literary reception theory.

2 On the difficulty of constructing such a viewpoint in theatre, see Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*, University of Toronto Press, 1999.

3 Eric Michaud, "Photographie et description", in *Le texte de l'oeuvre d'art: La description. Études réunies par Roland Recht,* Presses universitaires de Strasburg, Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar, 1998, p. 105.

4 Webster's College Dictionary, 1991.

5 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in *Illuminations*, Fontana, 1973, p. 223.

6 Atanas Natev, Preface to *Hudozhestvena misal i kulturno samosaznanie*, Sofia, 1989 (a collection of Benjamin's essays translated into Bulgarian by Ventsislav Konstantinov).

7 Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1977, pp. 4, 24.

8 See Philippe-Alain Michaud, "Zwischenreich. Mnemosyne, ou l'expressivité sans sujet", in *Les Cahiers de MNAM*. No 70 Hiver, 1999-2000.

9 Sontag, *ibid*, p. 3.

10 Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1985: "Introduction: Language and Explanation", p. 3.

11 Here is an illustration of the scale of these material differences: Marché aux puces (the flea-market) in Paris is the largest antiques exchange in the world, yet many of the objects we can see on sale there would, in Sofia, be housed in the Museum of International Art. A colleague from Paris who was visiting Sofia a few years ago to give a series of lectures asked me to take him to Sofia's flea-market. My attempts to explain that Sofia's flea-market has nothing in common with flea-markets in other cities of the world did not convince him. Seeing the place for himself did. According to my idea about situational connections, having visited Sofia's museums, my colleague should have trusted me about the lack of interesting objects at the flea-market.

12 Berkeley, USA; EHESS - École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris. For instance: Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the 17th Century*, University of Chicago Press, 1983; Tzvetan Todorov, É*loge du quotidian*, ed. du Seuil, 1993, 1997.

13 In: Art Planet. A Global View of Art Criticism. The AICA Press, 1999, p. 27.

14 Plato, *The Republic: Books VI - X*, translated into English Paul Shorey, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000: Book X, pp. 427-428.

15 Sontag, *ibid*, p. 3.

16 *Ibid*, p. 16.

17 The metaphor is Georgi Lozanov's.

18 The situational character of contemporary art practices is discussed in Angel V. Angelov's book *Concrete Utopias: Christo's Projects*, The Open Society Publishing House, Sofia, 1997. See, more specifically, "Stage and participations" (pp. 84-100) and "Participation in the artifact makes it a work" (pp. 109-115).

19 The sculpture is by Stefka Georgieva and was first displayed during the *August in Art Festival*, Varna, 2002 (curated by Rumen Serafimov).

20 See note 5.

21 Webster's College Dictionary, 1991.