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## The Eternal Return of the Real? Or, concerning Different Forms of Realism in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art

### Abstract

In discourses about the Fine Arts, both theoretical but mainly artistic, there is a tendency to refer to realism, realist depiction, reality and imitation in some periods. Such a tendency can also be seen in 20<sup>th</sup> century art and art theory. The key problem in the submitted text will be the question: to what extent can the Platonic term mimesis also be applied to modern realist art and how the current interpretations of mimesis enrich the view of realist art with respect to creativity and cognition.

### Keywords

Realism, mimesis, demiurgos, cognition, 20<sup>th</sup> century, visual art

In discourses about the Fine Arts, both theoretical but mainly artistic, there is a tendency to refer to realism, realist presentation, real model, faithfulness, reality and imitation during more or less regular, periods of time. Whether it was the efforts of the ancient Greek painters Zeuxis and Parrhasios, who wanted to paint renderings of the objects so faithfully that they could deceive animals and humans and convince them that they were real

and thus true.<sup>1</sup> Or the Renaissance artists who, following the example of L. B. Alberti, understood a painting as a window into nature,<sup>2</sup> or the Dutch artists who elevated their realist style of painting to perfection. However, it was also realism itself, formed by the background of 19<sup>th</sup> century social events, its subgenres: naturalism, a new realism, socialist realism, photorealism, or the hyperrealism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and other trends, for which the presence of the real became a key problem of their creation. The element of realist and faithful reproduction has thus become a kind of guide through the history of art and at some times has also been a basic requirement imposed on art. Although transformed through time and artistic experience and routine and interpreted differently, this requirement has become the simplest criterion of how to define realist art. Although the term realism has systematically appeared in fine-art texts from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>3</sup> only those critical

<sup>1</sup> PLINIUS, G. S.: *Kapitoly o přírodě*. Prague : Svoboda, 1974, p. 272-273.

<sup>2</sup> ALBERTI, L.B.: *O malbě. O soše*. Prague : Vladimír Žikeš, 1947, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. COURBET, G.: *Realist Manifesto - An Open Letter from 1861*. [online]. [2020-03-15]. Available at: <<https://arthistoryproject.com/artists/gustave-courbet/realist-manifesto-an-open-letter/>>.

interpretations that appeared during the 20<sup>th</sup> century began to look at realism from a different point of view, influenced by other disciplines such as philosophy and the science of literature. Thus the monotonous discourse on realism was expanded to include new theoretical interpretations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century realist movement, but also stimulated discussion on realism and realist art as such. This, along with its principles, also began to be addressed by modern artists who tried to revive the visual art forms of the school of realism, which they would subsequently use in social reflections or in new artistic strategies. Mainly, it was the *New Objectivity* movement (*Neue Sachlichkeit*), which formed in the 1920s as a reaction against the idealism and utopianism of German expressionism. The artists of the *New Objectivity* movement wanted to revive order in visual art and therefore they returned to the original realist forms. The key artists were Max Beckmann, Otto Dix and Goerge Grosz, who focused on themes of the social problems in post-war Germany. The realist painting was also discovered by those who were originally avant-gardists and even initiators of new art forms such as - Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso, André Derain or Pierre Bonnard, who felt the need to return to more harmonious forms after World War I and the most revolutionary early avant-garde period. They found them in realist depiction. In Great Britain in 1938 the *Euston Road School* was formed (Victor Pasmore, Claude Rogers, Sir William Coldstream, and Graham Bell). The members of the group were also

mainly members of the Communist Party; therefore they focused on the theme of social problems in society. In the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the themes of so-called *American realism* (John Sloan, George Bellows) and *regionalism* (Grant Wood, Edward Hopper) especially resonated with North America. This trend affected artists and their paintings as well as literature and music. The American social realists uncovered contemporary issues of ordinary life and societal problems arising from class inequality. They were also *socialist realists*, who definitively replaced modern abstract art in European communist countries and considered the idealism of reality within an ideological representation of socialist values as the only acceptable artistic method. Among younger artists who declared themselves to be realists we can also include Balthus (born Blathasa Klossovski de Rola), Lucian Freud and Andrea Wyeth, whose artwork stood in opposition to the expansion of abstract expressionism. The term realism can equally be found in the name of the European movement, *New Realism* (*Nouveau réalisme*) founded in the late 1950s, which, in the words of Pierre Restany, wanted to bring a new, sensitive approach based on a different way of perceiving reality. It was an experimental way of working, as was their relationship to objective reality that digressed from traditional realist art. They wanted to appropriate the reality. Their assemblages incorporated objects of everyday reality, building on the "ready-made" works of Marcel Duchamp. Another development in the form of realist depiction, that meant the denial of reality, can be seen in the work of *photorealists*, who capture reality using a "photographic eye", which they subsequently reproduced using

painting tools on a canvas. Or, in the end, the *hyperrealists* of the 1970s whose works resemble a multiple enlargement of a photographic image, thus exceeding reality and creating a new hyperreality.

Although these trends and movements refer to realism and reality, which they consider to be the starting point for their work, a reflection of reality itself, its depiction, and especially the degree of real, is completely different. While the representatives of *New Objectivity*, *social and socialist realists*, and the artists of *American realism and regionalism* were strongly socio-ideologically involved, mainly preferring to consider social problems in society, the younger generation of artists in the realist movement chooses more understated themes that depict the family environment and human intimacy. However, they do not stay on the surface, but rather try to make a more analytical dive into the inner human. From a realist depiction point of view, *The New Realist*,<sup>4</sup> presented an unconventional approach, they based their work on the products of everyday reality, perceiving them as significant indicators of a materialistic and consumerist society. On the other hand, *photorealists* and *hyperrealists* started to use other media - photography, which they consequently reproduced on canvas. Photography, for them, became a mediator between reality and the picture. Their relationship with reality and what is real was not, as such, direct, but mediated by photography. The result was no longer a presentation of reality, but

<sup>4</sup> SEDLÁŘ, J.: *Nový realismus*. In *Universitas - revue Masarykovy university*. Brno : Masarykova univerzita v Brně, 2009, Vol. 42, No. 4, p. 55-63.

rather the creation of a new reality – a simulated reality.

Thus, a question arises here: if all the above-mentioned trends refer to reality and realism and their approach to what is real is not identical, then how do we define realism, a realist depiction and their relationship to reality itself? In some cases we even have the impression, that the term realism is used so widely<sup>5</sup> that it has lost its unique meaning, or that we consider realism to be any realist presentation that opposes abstractism. Roman Jakobson was probably thinking in this way in 1921, when he spoke, in his early study *On Realism in Art*<sup>6</sup>, about the uncritical use of the term realism, or even about its elusive nature. He stated his view on the reasons for this terminological elusiveness thus: “By failing to distinguish among the variety of concepts latent in the term “realism,” theoreticians and historians of art – in particular, of literature- are acting as if the term were a bottomless sack into which everything and anything could be conveniently thrown.”<sup>7</sup>

In recent times Boris Röhrhl also wrote in his book *World History of Realism in Visual Arts 1830–1990: Naturalism, Socialist Realism, Social Realism, Magic Realism, New Realism and Documentary Photography*:

“Today, the discussion about realism seems to have lost much of its actuality, and dealing with realism has no practical application.

*For these reasons, an unbiased and factual view on its evolution seems to be possible. No writer in the field of humanities can lay claim to objectivity, because the philosophical background of an author determines, whether consciously or subconsciously, his discourse. Beware of this; this book was an attempt to provide a neutral description of different central theories incurred in connection with their world view.”<sup>8</sup>*

Is realism a term of such wide meaning that it is not bound to any terminological frames? Are all the trends that we see in the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that refer to realism necessarily bound to reality, or are the deviations from reality that they include absolutely legitimate? Finding adequate answers to these questions is likely to be more than difficult as the term realism hides in itself the intricate ways of possible approaches. To find the simplest approach we head to the French realist movement of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century – and to painters such as Gustave Courbet, Jean François Millet or Honoré Daumier.<sup>9</sup> Gustave Courbet himself, in his Realist Manifesto of 1861,<sup>10</sup> defines the area that should become the meaning and purpose of a realists painting. It should be within the everyday

reality that an artist should look for beauty. It is found in nature, hard work as well as in the depiction of a working man. The basis of realism thus becomes an effort to look for the charm in everyday life and the beauty of man. According to him:

*“It is a completely physical language, the words of which consist of all visible objects; an object which is abstract, not visible, non-existent, is not within the realm of painting.”<sup>11</sup>* Thus, in Courbet’s understanding visibility becomes one of the key aspects of a realist work of art. However, we can only prove the existence of the visible through our own experiences.<sup>12</sup> The second aspect, according to Comte’s theory of positivism,<sup>13</sup> to which the realist movement responded, could be empiricism. Thus, visibility and empiricism could be seen as determinants in the context of the realist movement. But if we looked at the artistic trends and movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which include the term realism or that refer to reality, then we would not find both aspects in all of them. While we could find an effort to depict the visible and empirically known in *social-tuned realism*, in *socialist realism* we would not find it. Rather than a real visible form, they preferred its idealised version modified by ideology and involvement. On the other hand, the younger generation of the

realist movement (*Balthus, Freud*), holding on to realist forms based on real models, rather wanted to uncover the inner, worrying world of young girls and women. Within *photorealism* and *hyperrealism* it is a complicated problem of hyperreality and simulated reality, while the *new realists* implement everyday objects into their work as an assemblage, but do not adhere to a faithful reproduction. Thus, the aspect of the visible and empirical is disappearing in these cases, and we can only observe certain “realism games,” or rather deviations, that go beyond the strict framework of realist art. Thus, the criteria that Courbet spoke about can only be applied to the realist art of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, which was at the birth of the realist movement. However, it cannot be applied to the artistic trends of the 20<sup>th</sup> century we have mentioned. Therefore, these two attributes of realist art that are valid for the realist movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be considered to be generalised terms applicable to all types and forms of realist art. At the same time, we can see that such an approach to the definition of realism is only one of the possible forms that is strictly orientated to the particular principles of the realist movement. It is understood as an artistic-historical form of realism connected to a particular historical period. Within it, a whole cultural discourse is created, which applied these principals of realism to both visual art as well as to literature. The second form of realism is more complicated because in the words of Martin Hrdina it concerns: “*the fundamental artistic constant of all historical periods whose first theoretical formulation is the principle of mimesis in Aristotle’s Poetics.*”<sup>14</sup>

### Mimesis – Probability – the Reality Effect

The second approach to realism, which is implied by the quotation from Hrdina, refers to a more complex meaning of this term. He defines it as an “artistic constant”, which appears in certain periods during the history of art and is found in nearly all historical periods, where its first theoretical formulation is Aristotle’s principle of *mimesis* as elaborated in *Poetics*. It is more or less found in an unchanged form as late as the 1940s in the key text by Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946), which understands *mimesis* as a faithful imitation of reality. He proves its existence using examples of western literature over a wide time frame from Vergil to Virginia Woolf. The criterion for evaluating these works was the realist principle of evaluating the work on the basis of the faithfulness of the depiction of reality. A similar approach as that taken for literature can also be found for visual art, which until the 19<sup>th</sup> century was also looking for a solution to the problem of the faithful reproduction of reality. Metaphors that refer to a mirror as a means of imitation or to an open window into nature have accompanied the entire history of the art movement of realism. For centuries the realist movement worked on “improving” art forms<sup>15</sup> that supported the desire to reach a certain degree of artistic perfection and with it also the illusion of reality. Their evaluating criterion, from *mimesis* point of view, was also the degree of faithfulness.

literatuře. In *Česká literatura*, 2014, Vol. 62, No. 3, p. 373.

<sup>15</sup> See: GOMBRICH, H. E.: *Umění a iluze. Studie o psychologii obrazového znázorňování*. Prague : Odeon, 1985.

However, the mimetic principle that evaluates a work of art on the basis of its faithfulness, rate of reality, or even truthfulness came under doubt and the measure of realism was no longer the degree to which it imitated reality. Also, thanks to Roman Jakobson’s study *On Realism in Art* (1921), realism ceased to be seen as a reflection of reality, but as a cultural discourse that deals with a certain linguistic code. Jakobson called attention to the ambiguity of the term realist art, when he defined it in different ways: 1. it is a tendency according to which realist art is meant to be a work, which the author intends to be possible; 2. a work which a reader perceives as possible; 3. a summary of the characteristic features of a certain artistic trend; 4. the intensification of the narrative by pictures assigned according to consistency, i.e. the transition from self-naming to metonymy and synecdoche; 5. the requirement for consistent motivation, the use of poetic principles. Such interpretations of the term realist are in some way dioecious: it defines realism as an art trend whose aim is to reproduce reality with the maximum possible use of probability as the basic criterion of realist depiction. Realism is thus interpreted as an art trend that is relevant for a specific historical discourse whose basis is in the reproduction of reality but at the same time it is a more constant understanding that considers *probability* to be the criterion for realist depiction. The probability is seen from two points of view: that of the author and also of the reader/viewer. To consider an artwork to be realistic, it must be created by author in such a way that the concept is probable and from the reader/viewer’s point of view it must be clear that the features of the work are probable. Thus, Jakobson does not define realism using

<sup>5</sup> From the perspective of 20<sup>th</sup> century art we could also speak about magic realism, critical realism and even documentary photography.

<sup>6</sup> JAKOBSON, R.: *O realismu v umění*. In *Poetická funkcia*. Prague : Nakladatelství H&H, 1995, p. 138–144.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 144.

<sup>8</sup> RÖHRL, B.: *World History of Realism in Visual Arts 1830–1990: Naturalism, Socialist Realism, Social Realism, Magic Realism, New Realism and Documentary Photography*. Hildesheim : Georg Olms Verlag, 2013, p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> Literary realism included, for example, Émile Zola, Honoré de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert.

<sup>10</sup> It is a statement rather than a purposefully written manifesto. It was inspired by a group of young dissatisfied students of the École des Beaux-Arts, who had asked Courbet to open his own school or course that would teach them the theory and method of realist painting. Courbet explained his new approach to realist depiction in an open letter to the students dated 25<sup>th</sup> December 1861. It was this letter that was later considered to be a realist manifesto.

<sup>11</sup> COURBET, G.: *Realist Manifesto – An Open Letter from 1861*. [online]. [2020-03-15]. Available at: <<https://arthistoryproject.com/artists/gustave-courbet/realist-manifesto-an-open-letter/>>.

<sup>12</sup> René Wellek summarises the requirements on realistic art as follows: “*The art should provide the true depiction of real world: it should, by detailed observation and careful analysis, examine current life and morals. It should thus do without prejudice, impersonally, objectively.*” In WELLEK, R.: *Koncepty literární vědy*. Prague : Nakladatelství H&H, 2005, p. 111.

<sup>13</sup> COMTE, A.: *A general view of positivism*. New York : Speller & Sons, 1957, p. 444.

the terms faithfulness, similarity, *mimesis* or rate of real, but using the term *probability*. A picture can be considered to be realist because it is probably close to reality and such a form of reality could probably exist. The picture can never be absolutely faithful and identical to reality. However, it can approach it if it has the features of the *probable*.<sup>16</sup> In the 1960s there was another fundamental challenge to *mimesis*. The new wave of literary science was based on the idea, that the language of art cannot imitate reality because it is autonomous of reality and of the world. The language of art has no ability to depict. It can only refer to language but not to reality. The new interpretation, in the words of Antoine Compagnon, defended:

“the thesis of the primacy of form over substance, of expression over content, of signifier oversignified, of signification over representation, or even of semiosis over *mimesis*.”<sup>17</sup>

What the language of art does is to code reality. The code or system of presentation is always determined by culture as they set their own standards for the code and systems of presentation. Therefore, even a realist artwork cannot be an imitation of reality; it can only create an illusion through the presentation codes. Compagnon claims that thanks to this conceptual change it is no longer possible to ask how art copies reality, but through what strategies art convinces us that it copies reality.<sup>18</sup> One answer is the

*reality effect*, which was elaborated by Roland Barthes in the study *The Reality Effect (1968)*. Roland Barthes says that a typical sign of realist art is the descriptiveness associated with a detailed description of a seemingly unimportant thing, situation or communicative relationship between people. As an example, he chooses Flaubert’s description of the town of Rouen in the novel, *A Simple Heart*.<sup>19</sup> In his description of the town and house where the main character lives, Flaubert describes with great precision objects and events which are not important to the story and that do not interfere with the story. The author of the novel makes every detail important, which is a key factor of a realist description and the connection to reality. Although these are descriptions which do not develop the story and therefore they are not crucial for narrative development, but their task is to call attention to themselves because they are real. They become the so-called *reality effect*.<sup>20</sup> When we talk about Flaubert there are, for example, details that characterise the French burgher society of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century such as a piano (a symbol of the burgher society) and cardboard (a symbol of the untidiness or even loneliness of the main character). Descriptiveness and precision can therefore be considered to be a textual, or a more novel-like linguistic strategy, which Flaubert uses to give the reader the impression that the story is real, because these “redundant details” connect it to reality. However, above all these features mentioned

is the so-called *realist imperative*,<sup>21</sup> which rivets our attention to reality. Referring to historical discourses, Barthes says, that while history has always been associated with the truth, probability has belonged to art (the scene probably could be real, because we can find objects – details – that refer to reality).<sup>22</sup> But while classical culture asserts that these two discourses are incompatible – Barthes even differentiates between the *old probability and modern realism*<sup>23</sup> – so in our modern culture, thanks to realism, through the *reality effect*, this strict incompatibility is no longer applicable. The modern *probability* which works with the *reality effect* becomes a new artistic strategy that elicits the impression of reality. The redundant details that create the *reality effect* refer to themselves and thus they confirm they are real. A realist work thus does not refer to reality, but to its own language strategies through which it creates the so-called *illusion of reference*.<sup>24</sup>

#### Mimesis as Demiurgos and Cognition

On the basis of the relationships between art and reality we have mentioned, we can talk about two basic approaches: the first refers to the Platonic tradition and developed

21 Ibid, p. 79.

22 We can see this specification as early as in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, where a historian and an artist confront each other. While the historian must describe the story faithfully, exactly how it happened, he must portray truth and objectivity, the artist has more options. He can describe the same event exactly as it happened or as it probably might have happened. History talks about events and facts, which really happened and art presents what could have happened from a probable point of view. On one side there is the historical narration of events, on the other there is art fiction. In ARISTOTELES: *Poetika*. Prague : Nakladatelství a vydavatelství GRYP, 1993, p. 9-14.

23 BARTHES, R.: Efekt reálného. In *Aluze*, 2006, Vol. 10, No. 3, p. 80.

24 Ibid, p. 81.

through the Renaissance and mimetic theory. It claims that an artwork is a representation of reality. Art has to imitate reality and an artwork is a kind of mirror of reality. The second approach, influenced by the theories of Roland Barthes, considers references to only be an illusion and the interpretation of *mimesis* shifts to the artistic text itself. The artistic text, or artwork cannot refer directly to reality, it only refers to certain cultural texts, which are defined by the cultural codes of a given society. Thus, an artwork does not talk about anything else, only about itself. In that case we can approach realism as art which does not refer to reality, but only to itself and develops intertextual links. Both of these polarising theories offer strict interpretation of realist art as well as the term *mimesis*. However, one alone, without the other, is not able to answer the basic questions: What does realist art have to present in the context of mimetic theory: nature or culture, external or internal forms? What is the meaning of realist art, if its function is not to refer to reality, but only to itself? What does this type of art give us – the percipients, if it does not have references to reality? And one more specific question: how meaningful is the realist art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that we have talked about, if it does not unequivocally refer to external forms of reality, but also refers to internal forms; it is not an absolutely faithful transcription of the real, but often only warning of a pressing social problem. The answer to these and other questions is offered by Antoine Compagnon, when he says, that it is necessary to return to balance and proximity. Paraphrasing his words:

“If literature is about literature, it can also be about the world. If human beings developed the ability

to speak, why they should not talk about things that do not relate to language.”<sup>25</sup>

Compagnon’s concept is based on a new interpretation of Aristotle’s term *mimesis*, which he elaborated in his *Poetics*. *Mimesis* is no longer interpreted passively, as something that only imitates and lifelessly copies external forms of reality. Art does not only create a faithful copy of something that already exists, but the contrary. It imitates the creative principle (*demiurgos*), which is by its nature highly diverse. In the words of Aristotle in chapter II:

„Since the objects of imitation are men in action, and these men must be either of a higher or a lower type (for moral character mainly answers to these divisions, goodness and badness being the distinguishing marks of moral differences), it follows that we must represent men either as better than in real life, or as worse, or as they are. It is the same in painting. Polygnotus depicted men as nobler than they are, Pauson as less noble, Dionysius drew them true to life.”<sup>26</sup>

In contrast to Plato, Aristotle emphasises an important aspect of mimetic presentation: the artist has several methods of presentation available. Either to show people as better than they are, as worse than they are or as they really are. This possibility of choice is exactly what allows the artist to use their own creative potential in the creation

25 COMPAGNON, A.: *Démon teórie. Literatúra a bežné myslenie*. Bratislava : Kalligram, 2006, p. 137.

26 ARISTOTLE: *The Poetics of Aristotle* (a translation by S. H. Butcher). Pennsylvania : The Pennsylvania State University, 2000, p. 5-6.

of the imitation because *mimesis* is basically *demiurgos*. An emphasis on creativity in the process of presentation allows us to look at *mimesis* as a very active, dynamic and energetic process. Aristotle, however, takes his thoughts about *mimesis* even further, when he writes in chapter IV:

„Poetry in general seems to have sprung from two causes, each of them lying deep in our nature. First, the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated. We have evidence of this in the facts of experience. Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity: such as the forms of the most ignoble animals and of dead bodies.”<sup>27</sup>

Thus, cognition that arises from the observation of reality as well as from art is in Aristotle’s interpretation another key aspect of *mimesis*. *Mimesis* is primarily cognition, not only a simple copy. It is the cognition that forms our philosophy of life, our approach to our worldly existence. *Mimesis*, thanks to this interpretation, becomes of key importance. Through *mimesis* and thus through cognition we create our relationship to the world. This argument was more closely elaborated by Paul Ricoeur in his trilogy, *Time and Narrative*, where based on Aristotle, he also understands *mimesis* as a creative activity and sporadically he even identifies it with *mythos*, which is

16 JAKOBSON, R.: O realismu v umění. In *Poetická funkcia*. Prague : Nakladatelství H&H, 1995, p. 138.

17 COMPAGNON, A.: *Démon teórie. Literatúra a bežné myslenie*. Bratislava : Kalligram, 2006, p. 103.

18 Ibid, p. 117.

19 FLAUBERT, G.: *Prosté srdce*. Prague : Československý spisovatel, 1958.

20 BARTHES, R.: Efekt reálného. In *Aluze*, 2006, Vol. 10, No. 3, p. 78.

27 Ibid, p. 7.

inseparable from time and is an arrangement of events, a plot. Each narrative or presentation (*mythos* creation) is, according to him, the result of creative mimetic activity which arranges events and occurrences into a more meaningful whole. Once again *mimesis* is not understood as an austere process of creating a copy, but as a creative imitation. *Mimesis* is a creative activity that supports our cognition of the world.

### Conclusion

Thus, the term *mimesis*, thanks to the philosophers and literary theorists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, stepped past its limiting interpretative bounds. The faithful imitation of reality, through which the artist was limited by external forms of reality, was gradually extended to new interpretations. They understood the term *mimesis* more comprehensively, but at the same time treated the artist as a creative being, as *demiurgo* who always exercises choice in their artistic creation. Thus, their work is not limited to an austere copy, but to real creative work. Another important aspect of the new interpretations of *mimesis* and for realist art the most important aspect, is its ability to convey cognition, whether this be cognition at the level of the author or percipient. This ability of *mimesis* to have knowledge significantly changes our relationship to the ability of art to imitate as well as to realist art. Realism, especially the 20<sup>th</sup> century version, is no longer understood as an artistic movement, trend or form with strict characteristic features, whose main task is to present reality. The question of truth and truthful representation is no longer the priority, neither is the requirement for realism. Realism, or rather the realist system of art, does not

imitate the real because it is a part of the real itself. Through an artistic depiction it recognises not only its external form, but mainly its internal form. Dissatisfaction with reality, the disruption of interrelationships, warnings about internal failure and conflicts as well as positive aspects of the relationship to reality have become the new impulses of realist presentations. The modern system of realist art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can thus be understood as an expression of feelings and the internal state of reality experienced, presented in the form of figurative language. Realism does not describe reality as it is, but how it is perceived by the artist. Realism is an option available to the artist as well as providing knowledge which enriches them. This is one of the main reasons that modern realism has been presented in various forms without a uniform language. Social realism characterised by its naturalistic expression only focused on social problems that arise from everyday reality, the propagandist form of socialist realism celebrated a new form of socialist hero and American regionalism highlighted specific scenes from the American Midwest. Despite these thematic and formal differences they were joined by reality and a strong need to reflect it.

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