

# Marián Paukov

## Photography for Tomáš Thomas' magnifications

### Abstract:

In this paper, I demonstrate the transcultural dialogue which is happening on the basis of partial problems of both Russian and non-Russian art. This dialogue happens in a historic and a „spatial“ context, which, as a phenomenon, should correspond to the future of geocultural hyperthinking. A huge tradition of antique culture, together with Apollonian clarity, has found its own continuation in older classical and modern Russian art. The Holy Trinity of Andrej Rublov and the Mason by the futurist D. Rurljuk serve as a great example. In the movie „Blowup“, by Michelangelo Antonioni, the various connotations of the protagonist's name - Thomas - have been mostly left ignored. There is a plethora of options to choose from - ranging from Thomas Aquinas up to associations with the biblical figure of the doubting Thomas. Furthermore, through paying my respects via photography to an important art critic - Tomas Strauss

- I took upon myself to make use of this paper to try and ponder the nature of photography per se, in the context of its various types and its place within the art genres. Humans are able to perceive an exemplar stability, or photographic affinity, of the world, as we can conclude from the metaphor: „Humans are beings inbetween God and a frog“. Frogs can not react to static impulses, only humans can. A cinematograph, as a technical principle, appeared only after the invention of photography, but as an innate way of seeing the world predates photography by ages.

### Key Words:

Art. Blowup (movie). Cinematograph. Michelangelo Antonioni. Photography. Theology. Tomáš Štrauss.



After watching the movie *Blow-Up*, by Michelangelo Antonioni closely, it is possible to assert, that the movie had not just one, but two co-protagonists - Thomas and photography. These two were simply cooperating within a much more complex realisation of the authors' goal<sup>1</sup>. Antonioni himself reached an impressive age of 90 in the year 2002 and thus became the last pioneer of modern. Another thing, that went mostly unnoticed, was the conflict between visuality and audivity in the movie, which is a great topic of the Euroamerican transcultural dialogue. In S.M. Heidegger's words - „to see the hearable“. In layman's terms, the conflict lies between the eastern and western view of visuality. To be more precise, in the later movies, Antonioni showed an explicit confrontation between eastern and western worldview per se. There is also a recurring theme within the context of this movie, which is the observational mania. This was a big Nietzschean topic about illusionism, perspectivism, simulacronism, but also about the untold emptiness and an in-between space in reality. These are all topics instrumental to postmodernism later on. These motives played their own part in Russian cultural context from the 19th century up until their transformation in the modern age.

<sup>1</sup> see: ANTONIONI, M.: *Kuželník u Tiberu*. Praha: Odeon, 1989. The Italian director took a cue from a short story published by J. Cortázar called *Las Babas del Diablo*. This received a Czech distribution on the magazine *Svetová literatura* in 1968 under the name *Blow-up*.

The same motif, albeit in a new post-modern tonality, has surfaced in the movie *The Belly of an Architect* by Peter Greenaway, where the director references Antonioni, through the bloating of the architect's belly. In our case, I am trying to greet and salute prof. Tomas Strauss via, although a hyperbolized, „game with Thomas“.

### Wenders, Antonioni's descendant

The material presented at the colloquium of his celebration is hereby framed by these starting and ending chapters, same as Wenders framed the material of 4 unique Antonioni raw short stories in the movie *Behind the Clouds*. The reason for this is simple - my hope is that by viewing this on a pedestal of sorts, the connection between Tomas and Thomas, and maybe other Thomases of this world, becomes clearer. My other hope is that this will make my own hypertext genre, which has been nurtured by Tomas Strauss, be heard. The fact, that the director of *Blow-up* might have deliberately named his protagonist Thomas in connection of Thomas Aquinas, or even the biblical doubting Thomas, went long without mention. Only by interpreting the artwork, J. Lotman identified this phenomenon, as he identifies the „healing“ metaphor. The ill photographer Thomas is unable to heal other people, precisely because he himself is in need of healing. Healing via art does not succeed only through artistic characters, but also through the artistic language, with all its unique coloration, granulation, intonation, and even in Antonioni's case, a unique fragility and fondness. This started to show in Antonioni's movie „Night“

and went further in his later work. G. R. Hocke especially concentrated on comparing the historic manierism with the special movie manierism of Antonioni, where he goes into great detail and analyses glass reflections, compositional decentrilasation and many other typical manierical methods on both sides.

### Egyptian origins

Throughout the history of Europe, we can observe the importance of visual and verbal constructing of cultural reality and the conflict between them. On one hand, we have the russian culture, which is mostly centered around literature. Postmodern, or at least a branch of it, tries to dethrone visuality, with oculocentrism being the biggest thorn in the eye. Specifically, if we observe the portfolio of the russian-american Vladimir Nabokov – Boris Paramonov described him as an „egyptian writer“. It is Nabokov's *Lolita* that correlates with egyptian memory of their beauty Canon and with magic of the seen and obseration. The cult of the eye enabled to observe a apolonian clearness. The egyptians created elegance, condensation and simplifyfication. The source of greek and roman classicism – clarity, order, proportionality and balance – was egyptian in origin.

### The first characteristic image of clearness is a twofold icon

This brings us upon the central problem – which of the two images – or icons, in a modern sense – are the better embodiment of modest clearness, both in old and new art per se? The first image might be defined with the ikon of the Holy

trinity from Andrej Rublov. Russian art especially, was really unique in its hyperbolizing of implemented styles. For instance, russian baroque can be considered to be even more „italian“ than the original italian baroque itself, much like the russian version of french classicism.

This way, russian culture did not simply serve as a cultural recipient, but also as an extender to western culture. Italian baroque, which was originally vertical in a geocultural context, needed some horizontality for its further evolution – in this case, an infinite russian soil, in both a figurative and a literal meaning. As an example, let us observe the italian family of Rastrelli's. The father, C. B. Rastrelli, a sculptor, and his son, B. F. Rastrelli, an architect, the latter of which was a pioneer of a sculptural-aquatical concept, which provided new dimensions for baroque evolution. Even the language of russian elite was french originally. Then it phased into german and finally into anglo-american. Russian culture- which is widely thought of as „eastern“, was actually oriented in a completely different way. The biggest factors probably were K. E. Ciolkovsky and L. N. Tolstoj. The biggest, and probably first real conceptual art was the foundation of the city of St. Peterburg by Peter the Great. It shows, that especially something regarded as the most russian is actually a completely different creature altogether.



### Sacrifice and „meta-sacrifice“

The symbol of antique neo-platonism, when everything converged into unity, was prominent in the movie *Nostalgia* by Andrej Tarkovsky. Many regard this movie, together with the movie *Victim*, as the most beautiful metaphors ever filmed. The game of four antique elements, where even the christian message has its own place, is shown as a scribble on Domenik's wall – 1+1=1. We can induce the meaning of meta-sacrifice from this, as Domeniko has burned himself for the sins

of humanity, but the remains of the charred body were put into the hands of Christ. The symbol transformed into a metasymbol and thus the piece has become more clear in the context of itself and its artistry without sacrificing its communication. Alfred Schnitke, a russian composer, was so classicistic and transparent, that many russian recipients have mistaken his opuses and film music for pieces done by composers from the 19th century. Many russian culture analytics nowadays think that russian cultura from the 20th century actually becomes more antique in comparison to the gold and silver age of russian culture.

### The suprematistic funeral of Kazimir Malevic

The scenes taken at the so-called suprematistic funeral of Kazemir Malevic are well-known, they can be understood as his





posthumous metagrin upon the poor people left behind. This shines light unto the suprematistic and consolidated renaissance period in his career, and puts it into masked proportions willed by him. This was mostly done though due to the toiling political climate in Russia at the time. The idea of antique transparency is represented in both the Rublov's icon of the Holy Trinity and in the Tarkovsky movies.<sup>2</sup>

### The glass bee frequency

Before getting to the merit of the metakey issue, it is important to mention the novel by Ernst Jünger – Glass Bees – which is from a completely different cultural environment. Dead bees transformed honey into sun in this piece, with the paradoxical connection between sun and night being weaved throughout it. Meanwhile, the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé in his work Windows lets his protagonist suffocate by the blinding light and unbearable clearness of his stains. It is debatable whether this was a unique analogy to the eidetic reduction of Edmund Husserl. It was his work, that had to meticulously subject the object to the most radical and fantastic deformations, which helped to determine at what point the object loses its identity. We do not see the glass bees, unless we are blinded ourselves. This motif is almost

2 PAUKOV, M.: Ikony a moderné umenie (O kruhoch). In *Miesto pre modlitbu. Zborník z konferencie*. Bratislava : Vysoká škola výtvarných umení v Bratislave, 2000. p. 70-73.

biblical, as it is such strong light that it creates darkness. Either way, it speaks volumes about the duality of Russian culture, which rejected the trinity model, as it lacked the neutral western zone.

### The second characteristic modern image of transparency - the figurative icon

Now back to the root issue – the metakey. Simply defined, a metakey “has 4 eyes and yet does not see”. This definition is exactly put upon canvas in the picture from David Burljuk – the stonemason – painted in 1910, presented in the Russian museum in 2000 as a part of the Russian futurism exhibit. Of course, even our reads and interpretations pertain a certain amount of misreading. D Burljuk was not only the main character of Russian futurism, but

was also a window for other Russian futurists, who wanted to peek into a transparent future with the help of the doubled 4 eyes of the self-portrait of Burljuk. We can now safely induce that they did not indeed see anything anyway. Or, indeed they have seen so much that it has blinded them. We simply cannot know, as I have already stated with the glass



bee analogy. Another example is the gesture by Vladimir Majakovsky or the poet N. S. Gumil'ov, who was describing a worker who is manufacturing a bullet for a weapon which kills him later on. Indeed, in a later time during the time of human mass murders, N. S. Gurmil'ov was indeed gunned down. This led to the motif of finding peace and forgiveness to prevail in Russia. This ranged from reminding the suffering of others up to the suffering of ones enemies. This does not lose meaning even in a global social scale. Perhaps this symbolic was instrumental when creating the Stonemason, as it pertains some, almost suggestive, magic. This leads me to believe that the glass-lookers could be described as the little brothers to the freemasons. Their self-definition can be found in their quasi manifesto: If the earth sends a message to the heavens through stone, heaven sends the signal back to earth through glass.

One can even assert, that D. Burljak was almost a prophet in terms of an antique fatalism. This motif – glass eyes looking up into the sky – translated to the morbid all-seeing mummified body of V. I. Lenin.

### Elements I - The difference between the elements in the USA

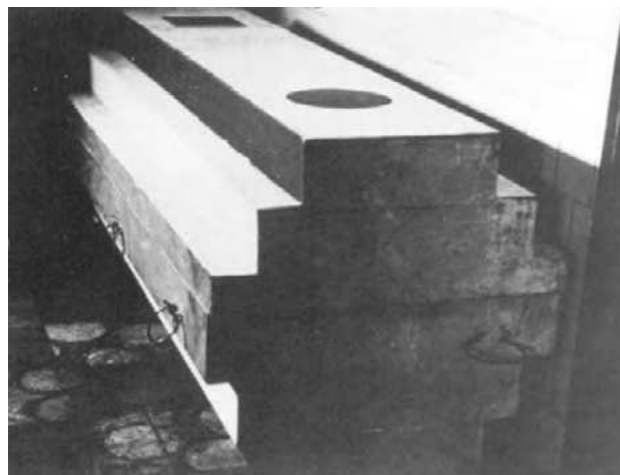
### and Russia

There is a disparaging difference between russians and americans in reacting to various elements according to the russian-american M. Epstejn. Russians were always fascinated by fusing them together. They fused fire and air together, same as earth and water. This made nature softer for them to perceive. This fascination was not at all present in America and so this „smellism“ did not only not develop, but was actually perceived borderline rasistically. Furthermore, Nietzsche always pointed out, that the existence of a huge shadow always has to precede huge options and lights. Even through ongoing economic and social crises, a huge part of russian culture has the tendency to compare itself to pre-capitalistic and pre-modern societies. Archaism is tied together with futurism in it.

### Internet as an agora and as a contemporary saloon

The Internet in Russia is often contexted with an unfinished dream of antique intellectuals. This is due to the apparent hypertext communication akin to an agora the internet has to offer. Greece had a „true“ projective culture in contrast to the roman political culture. O. V.





Romanov asserts that the internet is a unity of past, present and future cultural thinking. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari came to a similar conclusion. In Russia, the internet is widely considered a saloon from the 18th century France of sorts. This is due to the revival of internet essayism. The paradox with these essays is, that altho their form is indeed written text, the way we consume them is with a live tongue, at least within ourselves. Internet provides the perfect birthing ground for marginalised genres of old, counting even old-fashioned internet galleries.

These enable to collect the whole life-work of a single author and are the bane of plagiarism and piracy. On the other hand, russian avant-gardists had a habit to copy from eachother. Intriguingly, they did not regard it as just plain plagiarising, but as „gifting“.

T. Stange asserts, that the internet might still be out-lived by better technology, same as the telegraph was replaced rather early with more advanced technology in his book *The Victorian Internet*. This enables us to view the internet platform as a start of a new technological cycle.

The contemporary virtualisation of reality calls upon the whole cultural-social spectrum. Right now, they feel like a combination of technology that brings people to awe and a lowly opereta. This is due to the fact, that they lack well-made dramaturgy or a sort of inner poetry.

#### Project Vodka in Moscow and St Petersburg in culturologic coordinates

Due to the russian affinity for fusing elements together, alcoholism as a subject of art and philosophy is very important. Russians have had problems with discerning this fire-watery element in their lives. Russian authors actually typify 2 types of alcoholism - a maternal-oceanical type and a patriarchal-humanistic type. The focus of this element can lie in both water for diluting and fire for forgetting. This motif is so prevalent, that the russian gallery of Marat Gelman exhibited alcoholism as its curation project. This is due to the fact that alcoholism shows both as a problem of the past and the present for the



russian society. One could even argue that alconauts existed before actual cosmonauts in Russia.

The exhibition focused on 2 main regions of Russia - the european-centric St Petersburg and the asiatic Moscow. The difference, according to A. Jakimovic, was that the written art in Moscow was certainly not meant for a sober reader: "If he is sober, he is certainly not going to grasp the text, but if he is drunk, he does not need to read the text anymore, as he already is There." The texts in St. Petersburg, while also obviously being written in a non-sober state, are completely understandable even to a sober reader. They are also almost surprisingly democratic and social.

#### Wenders, or finally there is a photo on the scene

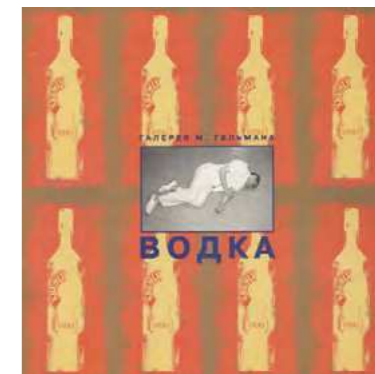
This is where we go full circle and come back to the hypertext reference of Photography for Thomas. How does it correlate with what we've discussed and asserted

so far? The answer is rather simple now - photography can be translated as a writing made out of light. Especially in Russia, where writing and drawing is actually one and the same word.

H. Bergson contemplated, that the „Mechanisms of our daily lives have a cinematographic character.“ Our perception of the world around us is then done through these cinematographic mechanisms. This can only mean, that while cinematography per se has only started evolving with the invention of the camera, our perception was cinematographical all along, and the camera only exacerbated it.

#### The human is a creature between a frog and God

It is only now that it is possible to assert the actual point, even





though hidden behind an anecdote – a frog is able to perceive movement, but cannot ascertain static objects around it. This means, that the difference between us and a frog is the ability to observe the stable exemplarity of the world.

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#### Profile of the author

After absolving high school, Paukov continued his studies at the Faculty of Arts at Comenius University in Bratislava in field of art science. He gained the title Candidate of Sciences in 1989 Lomonosov Moscow State University. In the years 1990 - 2002 he worked in the Department of Theory and History of Art at Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava, where he was focusing on aesthetics and contemporary art and also did curatorial activity part-time. Since 1993, he is working as a lecturer at the Institute of languages and sports on the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering at Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava. In his research, he focuses on fusing art, science, architecture and technology in a historic and phenomenological context. He does this in cooperation with the Institute of Philosophy at Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava. He also likes to practice art himself and in free time travels the world to know it in a cultural-technical context.