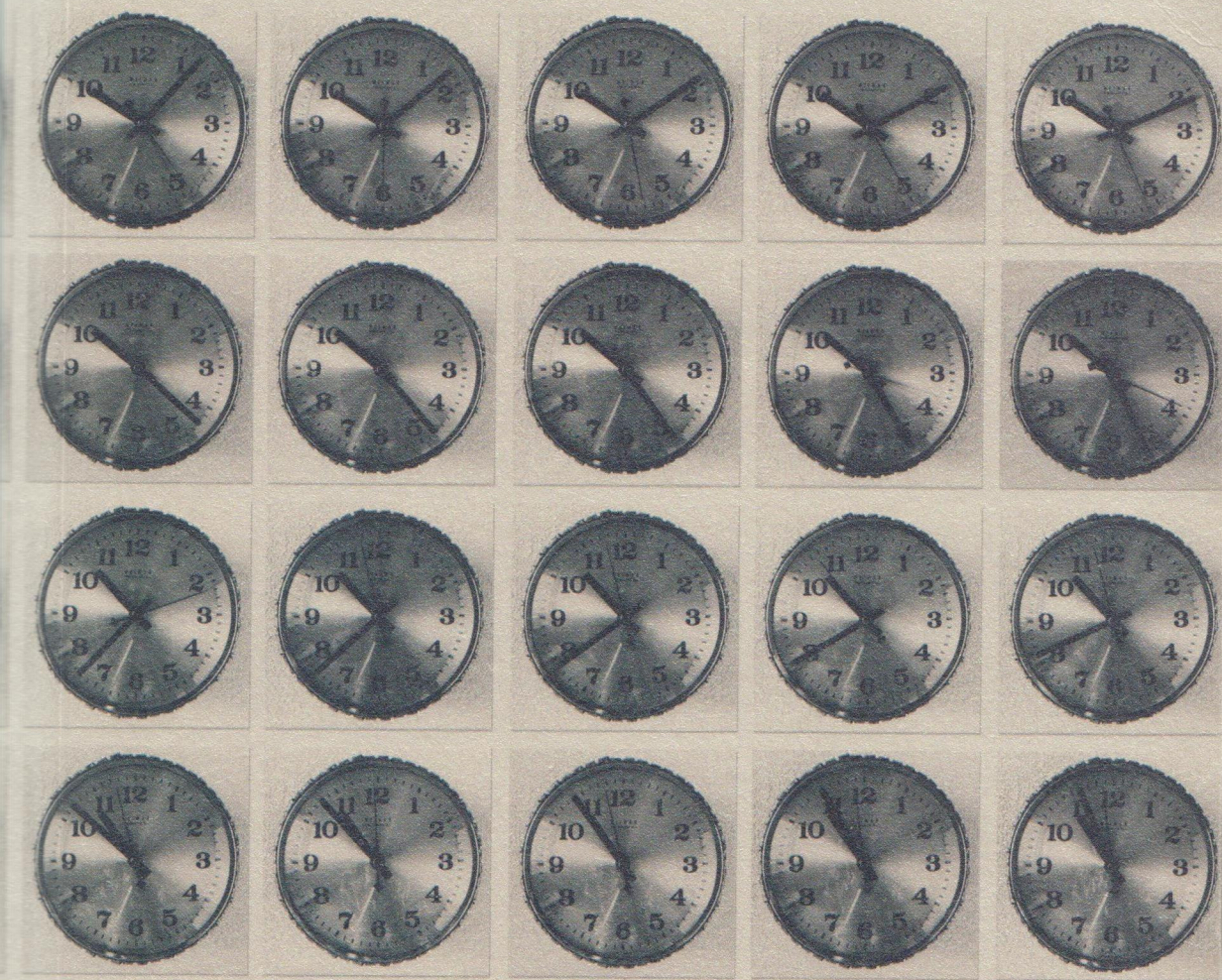




Ирина Генова

Tempus fugit / Времето лети

За съвременното изкуство и визуалния образ



Tempus fugit / Time is Flying

On Contemporary Art and the Visual Image

Irina Genova

Book series
for philosophy,
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zeitgeist

Правдолюб Иванов. *Един час.* 1996
60 черно-бели фотографии, 20x20 см. всяка
Колекция Д-р Гриппи, Милано

Циферблатите и стрелките, отмерващи човешко време в инсталацията на Правдолюб Иванов, ме привличат магнетично. Трудно ми е да кажа с какво точно – с абстрактно-естетската чистота и строгост, със сребрилата печал по неотменно отлитащото лично време или с метафоричното пространство на прекъсването.

Pravdoliub Ivanov. *One Hour.* 1996
60 b/w photos, 20x20 cm each
D-r Grippy's Collection, Milan

The face and hands of the clock, measuring human time in Pravdoliub Ivanov's installation, attract me as a magnet. It is difficult to say what exactly appeals to me – their abstract and aesthetic quality and austerity, the silver woe over the inevitably flying personal time or the metaphorical space of a break.

In and Out – Doubling Vision

Luchezar Boyadjiev's cycle "In/Out..., in again" –
installation of digital works on paper, exhibited at the Swiss Embassy
Residence in Sofia, June – July 1999

The halls are light and festive. Ambassador Ruff receives the guests, speaking in three languages. Opposite him, framed on the wall, the doubled image of the entrance hall, in which he receives us, reveals itself. "Do you recognize it? ...Attention, il y a des pièges! (Watch out, there is a catch!). I go in. A peasant woman with a bunch of onions appears in the framed entrance hall. I turn around and cannot see her beside me – she has entered only the printed picture.

Behind His Excellency, in another frame, a long queue is winding in front of the Swiss Embassy – are these people waiting for Luchezar Boyadjiev's exhibition, am I amongst them? (I remember other queues for great exhibitions – in front of the Grand Palais in Paris, in front of the Pushkin Museum in Moscow). I stare at the printed image. Not very likely. The festive expectation of an exhibition is missing. The people seem to be elsewhere – where the woman with the onions is, in some / somebody's everyday life – they appear only through a visual crevice.

My initial sense of being involved in another reality / image / story, the feeling that I am being observed (just as in *The Truman Show*, directed by Peter Weir, 1998), soon dissolves. I begin to discern images. Walking by the walls with the prints, I find myself either in the Swiss Embassy, which seems doubled (yet not exactly), in the halls dense with materiality, or in the streets of Sofia, having penetrated the interior – among mothers with perambulators, road crews, dogs, and stalls. This is the everyday version. In a more dramatic version, I find myself next to the National Assembly in flames or by a man, dead in the street.

The gaze has to discover and distinguish yet another world having penetrated through the crevice – the artist's home. The virtual interaction is both in-and-out, interiors and streets, and in-and-in – "...why shouldn't their homes interact as well?" (text from the installation).

The interiors of all the halls appear photographed, manipulated, printed and framed. Cracked and disturbed by other images, which flood and transform them. The second line of images is enlarged newspaper coverage photos (from

The 24 Hours daily, as L.B. clarifies) as well as some photographs of the author's personal spaces (of his apartment and of some of his previous works).

Are we, as exhibition spectators / guests at the embassy / Sofia residents, present in the visual duplicate, in the installation? Are we invited to go in /out of the frame?

The milieu "outside" the frame is very active this evening – at moments I have the feeling that the visual installation is engulfed and has sunk into collective non-perception. At other moments, the work seems to take control of the situation. I have a desire to follow the intrigue and the characters.

The text runs in English, printed (in Arial, 36), not at the bottom, like the subtitles of a film, but at the top, like the headlines, the hot news.

"He had heard many rumours about the country. It was difficult to understand what the truth was"; "He woke up early one morning and this is what he saw. He was in Sofia"; "It sounded strange, but the streets of the city were full of energy and life, especially in the summer. It was so pleasant to go out incognito and to walk, recognized by nobody"; etc. Fifteen inscriptions above each of the works. The reading / viewing can be done in different orders.

"He" is the main character of the story – the fictional double of Ambassador Ruff. The text is for "him". "He" is a text and an image.

Where is the author situated, writing his narrative as a witness? Is he also a part of the work or is he outside it? Whose is the viewpoint in the structured spaces of the digital photographic images?

Luchezar Boyadjiev strives to facilitate us to the maximum. He distinctly positions the doubled image of the author "in and out", within and beyond the frame, in action, boundary transitions, exchanges.

Similar to his character, the author is both in the halls and in the streets; both in Switzerland (the arrayed elsewhere) and in Sofia (the chaotic here). In contrast to him, however, he positions himself in a somewhat timeless present so as to testify about the character in the past.

Thus, Luchezar Boyadjiev stakes the reading of his work on his own artistic doubling in it. (We remember the motif of the doubling in the Twins' story in "Consolidation of Faith", 1992) The author simultaneously appears as a participant in his capacity as witness and as creator of the rules of participation, of testifying. With the distinct image orders, with the texts and the technical procedures, with his choice of framing and installing in space, the author, in his outside presence, gives clear instructions for the possible reading of the work.

The manipulator exposes the manipulation. The creator is the interpreter too – the possible variants are under control. The author is both “in and out”.

I leave – the Embassy, the installation, and the frame.



„He woke up one early morning and this is what he saw. He was in Sofia”
„Той се събуди една ранна утрин и ето какво видя. Беше в София”

On the following day the halls are empty. Luchezar Boyadjiev meets me. I go in again.

I follow the situations in which I am involved as a solitary and attentive spectator. Isn't the catch (piège) exactly in their predictability?

The doubled, somewhere even tripled, collaged and mounted space, as well as the verbal narrative, lead us to familiar artistic "frauds", trompe-l'oeil, to René Magritte's "The Deception of Pictures" ("This is Not a Pipe"). The translation and the transition between words and images create the opportunity for an incessant unfolding of relationships...

The frame, distinguishing the image from its physical double, presents a move towards a sequence of representation and perception frames – we remember Diego Velázquez's "Las Meninas". The author, however, grants his artistic double the privilege of an observer, of a witness outside the frame and thus includes him, verbally, but not visually, in the image. Like Velázquez, yet, for Luchezar Boyadjiev, the picture is the artist.

The author has been doubled by means of his space (Luchezar Boyadjiev's home, studio) and self-reference – L.B. with nails in his mouth (after Günther Uecker). There are other possible references suggested, for instance, of a sequence of "artists' studios" (I remember Vermeer, Rembrandt, Manet and Monet – it must be due to initial art history education, Luchezar Boyadjiev's too).

The cracking open of the entity of the images and the flooding of other spaces into the visual installation evoke in the memory the anamorphoses of Hans Holbein the Younger's "Ambassadors". I am really happy about the discovery – the link with the installation's character (the ambassador) is direct. Has Luchezar Boyadjiev envisaged (preconditioned) it or does it appear only in my perception?

Other discussion variants are determined by technical procedures – the media (the digital photo image) presuppose opportunities for perfection and freedom of the image mixes. The photos in the newspapers are a public space, but it intervenes in and contaminates the private so as to remind us, through visual surprise, that today the boundaries are blurred and impossible to set precisely. Technical reproduction devalues the context of objects, creates opportunities for the comparison and equalization of images, and compromises the idea of the authenticity of the work (after Walter Benjamin). In the installation,

photography is namely the eye of the artist; the hand is Kalin Serapionov's (a Bulgarian video-artist).

There is another possibility suggested, the one of social / political "entry", through the plots as well as the multiplied impact, the expected reproducibility (of images, ideas, and discourses) and distribution. Physical / object existence yields precedence to viewing reproductions of the work (for instance, on the pages of the *Kultura* newspaper), to its exhibition value.

The listing of possibilities for interpreting the installation seems to close a circle and to resemble a glossary of contemporary art criticism ideas. The careful study of each of the variants can turn into a learning task.

Luchezar Boyadjiev has constructed his work as a **perfect meaning-generating machine**. It overwhelms me with variants. Has the author traced all of them? Hardly. Yet, he has definitely acquired the mechanism for developing them. Whichever I choose, I feel like a diligent student who knows / has guessed in advance the existing answers. (I worry, though, whether I have missed an important one?)

I feel the urge to run away from every predicted and predictable reading of the work. I am looking for free territory, for an opportunity to project my experience into the interpretation. Has this possibility been considered?

I go back to the entry / exit – I have not studied the work above the door. The printed picture doubles the Embassy's entrance with the green arch above it, turning it into a subway exit. Coming in / going out – the actions, named and promised to the spectator at Luchezar Boyadjiev's exhibition at the Swiss Embassy, are also a wink at the sight's erotica. The title of the installation sounds appealing. All I have to do is turn it into a possibility – to penetrate, but also to escape, the labyrinths of its doubled space.

(1999)