Visualizing fiction, verbalizing art,
or from intermediation to transculturation

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PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Comparative literature as a typical 19th-century positivist and Eurocentric discipline was based on specific analytical operations such as comparison, looking for similarities rather than differences, and rigid disciplinary and geo-local divisions. It operated in terms of influences, borrowings, typological affinities and constellation of national literatures within the restricted core-European idea of world literature and habitually sought Oriental and African motifs in Western fiction and never the other way round, because it was grounded in the modern human taxonomy constructing a negative image of the other in order to affirm the same.[1] Today the previous division into the West and the rest is dysfunctional at best, as serious and ironic borrowings and influences work both ways – which does not mean that the structural asymmetries are gone.

Western and non-Western theorists have come up with different definitions for this complex and chaotic contemporary situation. French aesthetician Nicolas Bourriaud addresses this tendency under the name of altermodern aesthetics, which has appropriated and politically neutered the concepts of transit and creolization borrowed from the postcolonial genealogy of knowledge (2009b). Bourriaud claims that both postmodernism and multiculturalism are now passé and we are living in a homogenous global culture of mixed and lost origins, marked by intensified and simplified contacts, journeys and migrations, translations and subtitles, a culture from which any artist regardless of his or her genealogy can borrow techniques and devices. The main motif of altermodernity then is wandering in time, space and various media forms (2005).

Arguing with Bourriaud and other Western neo-universalizing positions that ignore and erase the continuing structural inequalities and lingering Western canonical dominance, decolonial artists, theorists and activists have come up with a different transmodern (in the sense of overcoming modernity) idea of aesthesis instead, as opposed to the Western-tailored aesthetics (*Estéticas Decoloniales* 2010, Mignolo 2013, Tlostanova 2013). This on-going debate demonstrates the way the old Orientalism/Occidentalism divisions are being reformulated in today's glocalized culture.

The two important contemporary tendencies in the interaction of art and fiction can be defined as transculturation and intermediation, marked by specific forms of

intertextuality and interdiscursivity. The visual forms of art are actively narrativized and sometimes theatricalized, whereas the narrative forms go through a considerable visualization. This blurring and merging of media is accompanied by processes of transculturation, understood here as a tendency to counterbalance the mutual and dynamic influence of the dominant culture and that of the suppressed ones,[2] and multi-spatial hermeneutical exchanges or, in decolonial terms, a pluritopical hermeneutics in which understanding is performed by means of crossing spaces or traditions which do not have common models of understanding and understandability (Panikkar 1975, Mignolo 1995). Stressing the social, political and ontological dimensions of any understanding, the pluritopical approach is not interested in relativism or cultural diversity as decidedly Western monotopic ways of treating other cultures. Pluritopical hermeneutics helps to understand something which does not belong to our horizon through a dialogic and experiential (not merely interpretative) learning from the other. The understanding subject is placed in a colonial periphery/non-Western tradition/any marginalized space, thus disturbing the habitual Western vantage point and questioning the position and homogeneity of the understanding subject.

CANONICAL COUNTER-DISCOURSE, INTERACTIVE FICTION AND OTHER MODELS OF ART AND FICTION MUTUAL INFLUENCES

It has become a platitude that in today's increasingly visual culture verbal arts are experiencing hard times. The same refers to the classical visual arts, for instance, easel painting, which has largely become an outdated art form. What prevails instead is synthetic and new media forms such as cinema, video-art and video-game, installation and performance. However, it would be too radical to assume that fiction and art have completely abandoned their previous relational models of influences and affinities. For example, even the latest novels may still contain references to art on a traditional *fabulaic* level when an important art work acts as a plot mover, as a source of *peripeteias* and key imagery, as a creator of a specific mood and aesthetic perspective, as an inspiration for the characters or the author.

A recent example is Pulitzer-winning Southern US writer Donna Tartt's novel *The Goldfinch* (2013). *Het Puttertje* (1654) by Dutch painter Carel Fabritius, who was Rembrandt's pupil and Vermeer's teacher (Fabritius 2015), not only lends the novel its title but also serves as a powerful plot activator. There is an important structural parallelism between the main character's growing up (as this is partly a *Bildungsroman*) and the painting itself, grounded in the boy's identification with the artist, who, as it seems to Theo, has encoded himself in the image of the chained bird taught to draw water from a bowl. This parallelism is linked to the author's and the main character's reflections on human solitude and the essential unfreedom of an artistic or any other independent and pensive individual, the complex relations of art and artists with their patrons and buyers, and the sad obligation to play an unnatural and degrading role in society.

A more problematic and multi-layered postcolonial canonical counter-discursive

interaction of art and fiction is presented in British-Guianese poet David Dabydeen's long poem *Turner* (1994), where European and West-Indian verbal and visual texts and canonical images clash and intersect. Dabydeen's usual strategy is to take marginal characters from famous Western (usually British) paintings and give them a voice and subjectivity in literary form. In *Turner* he applies a more complex canonical counter-discourse starting and departing from the British seascape painter's well-known work *Slave Ship* (1840) depicting a shipwreck and slaves throwing the dead and dying bodies overboard to survive. The decidedly marginal or even simply invented images in Turner's work, such as a drowning slave's head and an unborn child in its dying pregnant mother's womb, become the real agents in Dabydeen's poem, taking decisions about their future, inventing bodies and biographies for themselves and creating their ruined and silenced worlds anew.

Turner multiplies and incorporates the real painter, the imagined captain of the slave ship, the unborn child, becoming a symbol of all Whites or even all men, and also the Guianese 'Dutchman ghost' turning into a postcolonial ghost of the wiped-out or never-born self. Dabydeen plays on canonical European fine arts imagery through his ironic rendering of the sanctified Western aesthetic principles perfectly demonstrated in the sublime style of Turner's works grounded in his personification of the sea and inanimate nature in general. This move camouflages the contrast between the peaceful, detached optics of Turner's seascape and the awful rather than noble (in John Ruskin's terms) subject of the painting itself: the slaves, dehumanized to the status of 'goods lost at sea'.

Dabydeen's canonical counter-discourse stands at the border with a different type of art and fiction interaction: the presence of fine arts in fiction on poetological and aesthetic levels, when particular devices and approaches, principles and aesthetic goals traverse from visual art to fiction. This is less common today because in the contemporary flexible, changing and blurred sphere of art there are almost no clearly definable artistic movements any more with manifestos or strictly defined rules and aesthetic principles that fiction could repeat or recreate. The time of cubism expressed both in Pablo Picasso's canvases and Gertrude Stein's unreadable works is gone, as well as the symbolist experiments in visual and verbal arts or expressionist paintings and poems. Yet, the traces of this previously common tendency are still readable in the general modality to be found in verbal, non-verbal and synthetic arts. For instance, it may be expressed in a penchant for baroque excessiveness and in the use of specific styles and ornamental and rhythmical patterns in paintings and fiction.

One of the most symptomatic processes for art and literature interaction nowadays seems to be a metamorphosis of fiction itself into some bordering media forms with a much more pronounced visual element. Fiction does not simply borrow certain techniques from the cinema or the arts as it used to do before, for instance in the well-known case of Sergei Eisenstein's cinematic montage applied in a number of modernist novels such as John Doss Passos's *USA* (1938). It does not merely get inspired by certain plots, characters and situations from other kinds of art but transforms into a new entity in which fiction as an invented reality is often rendered in unusual non-verbal forms.

The merging of the visual and the verbal and the blurring of the boundaries between various kinds of art and fictional and non-fictional media-forms that are often neglected by traditional literary criticism are manifested also in so-called digital activism and activist writing in the form of mini-narratives – narratives fusing verbal and visual elements, non-fiction collages and collective memoirs. Often these digital forms of testimony and resistance to inequality, xenophobia and environmental violence presented through imaginative, metaphoric and visual means are the only available ways of addressing insoluble problems by disenfranchised communities, causing a global resonance in response. Graphic examples include the site of the *International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal* combining official documents and victims petitions with emotional first-hand testimonies of the catastrophe (ICJB 2015), and the website *Ural Chernobil: Tragedy of Tatars* which resurrects the erased story of the 1957 Kyshtym disaster – a radiological contamination accident at the *Mayak* plutonium production factory and the subsequent establishment of the East Ural Nature Reserve in the midst of a radioactive zone, where thousands of never resettled Tatar people have been used as living material for experiments on the effects of radiation on human beings (Ural Chernobil 2015). The video and short narrative testimonies of survivors are superior in their effect. In the words of an environmental activist, theorist and writer Rob Nixon, 'we have entered the age of the world, the text and the critic in 140 characters or less…What it means to be a public intellectual is becoming more visual and less and less verbal' (Dawson 2011).

The extreme cases of visualization in verbal arts are so-called interactive literature in the form of a specific kind of video game. Visual novels and *manga* (a special kind of Japanese comic combining Meiji tradition aesthetics with the influence of post-war American cartoons) are the most widely spread examples of this tendency, when the author's function shifts from the creator to an engineer, a recycler of what has been created before and someone engaged in the selection of cultural objects and their placing into new contexts (Bourriaud 2002, 2009a).

With further development of technologies and their more subtle and deep interaction with ontological and existential issues there emerge more complex versions of visual novels and narrative computer games where the characters cannot be fully managed by the player and an illusion of their freedom and indeterminacy is created. Such games differ from previous psychological fiction where the logic of the characters' behaviour sometimes contradicted the initial author's design. And the difference is mainly in the carefully constructed effect of an increased palpable relationality and the player's freedom as opposed to previous prescribed passive contemplation. It seems to be closer to postmodernist open/multiple ending fiction. Such are the recent popular narrative games *Galateya* (2000) and *Façade* (2005) in which the player is supposed to type his/her sentences into the computer. The latter reinstates in new forms the verbal element as a connection with traditional fiction.

Emily Short – the designer of *Galatea* (whose title and main character once again take us back to ancient myths and plastic arts) also stresses the importance of the open and multiple Borgesian endings in the philosophy of her game, the unpredictability of results and of Galatea herself:

I don't want people playing to particular endings. I want them to play the game and get whatever result comes naturally, because that is what the game is built for. It's a dispenser of stories, customized to the individual who is playing at the moment. That's my vision as the author (…) Galatea is horribly Protean; her moods change and you don't always know exactly why; she responds differently to the same question at different times, and this makes it difficult to recover endings that one has already reached once. From my point of view as an author, these features were all desiderata, and I worked hard to produce them, in the name of realism and complexity and richness. From the point of view of the (re) player, they can get confusing after a while. (Short 2014)

In spite of such external postmodernist features as protean unsteadiness and multiple endings (they work for the player but not for the author), the computer narrative game, due to its technological designing specificity if nothing else, in fact goes back to the high modernist principle of building an order, a separate and often hermetic artistic world out, and in spite of, the chaotic reality around us, but in this case doing it with the help of advanced technology and not just the author's imagination.

THEATRICAL INTERSECTIONS OF ART AND FICTION

Contemporary theatre acts as a site for intersections between visual and verbal arts. Narrativization of visual forms of art and visualization of preeminently verbal forms goes parallel with transculturation and creolization of Western and Eastern motives, ideas, devices, aesthetic and poetological principles, and transformation of Orientalism into ironic and interactive-anthropological forms. I would like to dwell on the example of the Uzbek theatre company Ilkhom (2012), defying continuing Orientalism and critically rethinking the caricature or exoticist image of the East created by the West, questioning both Western modernity and ethnic nationalist or religious fundamentalist discourses. This had become obvious already in Ilkhom's production of Karlo Gozzi's *Happy Beggars* (1993). The show was built on the hybridization of seemingly mismatched sources and traditions: commedia dell'arte, Uzbek street theatre, 'maskharaboz' and the latest European theatrical experimentation. Negating Gozzi's Orientalism, which saw Samarkand as merely a fantastic dystopia fallen out of time and progress and a conventional fairy tale locus, Ilkhom's version presents Samarkand as a lively place populated with recognizable characters originating not only from commedia dell'arte, but also from the latest post-Soviet history of migrants, refugees, infamous imperial war veterans, the homeless, vagabonds, crooks, beggars and transcultural misfits. Dressed in hybridized clothing from different times, cultural, social and religious traditions, they mix Russian, Italian, Yiddish and English on stage. Quite appropriately the performance takes place at a dilapidated train station as a perfect symbol of transition and the early post-Soviet unhomed Babylonian existence fallen out of history yet finding itself suddenly at the global intersection of continents, mentalities and value systems. Out of such experiments emerge Ilkhom theatrical principles, grounded in jazz-like improvisation, tricksterism and a multilinguistic and mutlidirectional code-switching on many levels, from language to culture, from religion to mixed media. Thus in the *Flight of Mashrab* (2006) Mozart's music is played with the help of national Uzbek instruments to intensify the parallels between the 18th-century Uzbek Sufi poet and prophet

Mashrab and the Austrian composer. In *Happy Beggars* the comic song devoted to the impostor Muzafar is sung in Russian and to the tune of the Klezmer (Ashkenazi Jewish) song/dance *Seven Forty*, whereas the constant switching from Russian to Italian, Uzbek and Yiddish and back, and especially the improvisational linguistic interpolation can be fully appreciated only by the Tashkent audience, which is used to living in the multilinguistic atmosphere of this multicultural city.

An interesting example of such aesthetics is *The Ecstasy with a Pomegranate* (2006). The play was co-written by Mark Weil (Ilkhom's founder and first director) and Valery Pecheykin (under the pseudonym of Dmitry Tikhomirov), a then young and aspiring playwright who has since become famous in Moscow. The title recreates the name given by critics to the untitled work by Russian artist Alexander Nikolayev (1887–1957) which is now in the collection of the State Museum of Oriental Art in Moscow. The play is loosely based on the artist's life story, focusing more on his spiritual and artistic metamorphoses than on actual events. So it is not a biopic in the usual sense. For instance, the story is moved back in time before the Bolshevik revolution, whereas in reality Nikolayev only came to Turkistan in 1920. The main character is tragically killed (which rhymes with the plot of Nikolayev's *Ecstasy with a Pomegranate* and Weil's own early death), whereas Nikolayev died of natural causes even though he was imprisoned and had to live a double life for many decades.

Before coming to Samarkand the painter was a student of Kazimir Malevich, and although none of his Suprematist works survived, the general aesthetic principles of Suprematism are obviously rethought in an original way in his own artistic world, emerging as a result of Nikolayev's fascination with the East, particularly in its forbidden homoerotic overtones such as the Bacheh-baazi tradition of young boys cross-dressing and performing for male clients, and also his subsequent adoption of Islam and ardent interest in Sufism (he even changed his name to Usto Mumin, which means Gentle Master).[2]

Malevich himself was attracted by mystical movements of theosophy and was looking for ways of expressing spiritual reality beyond the physical dimensions through art (he called it the fourth dimension – the pure feeling without the object). The artist stressed the supremacy of pure artistic feeling, pointing out that Suprematism brings into being an altogether new and direct form of representation of the emotional world. Like other forms of avant-garde, Suprematism rhymes with 'primitive marks (symbols) of aboriginal man which represented, in their combinations, not ornament but a feeling of rhythm' (Malevich 1926). Malevich was attracted by iconography as well as primitivist signboard painting, although his interpretation of the icon was purely pictorial and compositional (and not religious). It is this element of Suprematism that survived in Nikolayev's works. The delicacy and sensuality of Nikolayev's colour leitmotifs combined with his enchantment with Sufi esoteric aesthetics led to a specific artistic world recreated in Weil's theatrical performance through various media.

Nikolayev was in an indirect and complex relationship with the so-called Turkistan avant-garde (*The Desert*) which came into being later than the Western European version and, as usual for the Russian mimicking of modernity, recycled Western

modernist and Orientalist motifs and devices in its own way, due to the specificity of Central Asian aesthetics, so that often this peculiar Orient overcame the unoriginality of the Turkistan avant-garde. Nikolayev testified: 'I knew…the classical case of an important French painter Paul Gauguin who had lived on the Island of Tahiti for seven years as an indigene, following all their rituals and customs. I fancied the idea of repeating this experience myself' (*The Desert*). Nikolayev's resulting aesthetics and his return to figurative painting clearly contain references to the avant-garde but in a subdued and digested form, freely quoting from Persian miniature, particularly of the Shiite Sufi tradition, iconography and various other sources.

His *Ecstasy with a Pomegranate* is a curious example of this mixture; it is created using the iconic technique of tempera on wood and recreates the classical genre of hagiographic icon consisting of a series of images reflecting the key events in the life of a saint. But the stylistic decisions and closeness to ornamental art are reminiscent of Eastern miniatures. Remaining faithful to figurative art, Nikolayev at the same time encrypts Sufi and homoerotic symbolism into his work. This narrative icon at the intersection of different kinds of art tells a tragic story of two youngsters falling in love, getting married and subsequently dying. The word 'ecstasy' in the title was not picked up by chance, as in Sufism it stands for the joy a human being experiences when approaching God through esoteric rituals. Here the Suprematist predominance of feeling unexpectedly comes forward through a Sufi practice. One cannot interpret this work merely as an apology for homosexuality, because in Sufi tradition (both pictorial and especially poetic) love always means heavenly love (in this sense the characters actually marry God and not each other) and not carnal passion. When this and Nikolayev's other pictorial works are back-projected onto a rolling and moving (breathing) screen during Ilkhom's performance it creates an almost otherworldly sensation in the audience (Ecstasy 2012).

The director combines seemingly incongruous genres and techniques: animated esoteric sensual painting gives way to documentary photographs of the time; the general postmodernist all-out citation principle functions on many levels in a conglomerate of intersecting meanings, from narrative archetypes to color leitmotifs, from persistent reemergence of particular metaphorically interpreted objects to rhythmical repetitions of sounds – the verbal and the musical. The intertextual and interdiscursive sources of this play come both from the West and from the non-West, leading to a peculiar transculturation effect. Nikolayev's own trajectory of influences is accompanied by Weil's series of relevant narratives and images. The artist's passion for the young pomegranate seller rhymes with the unbearable story of the doomed aging writer/composer obsessed with the angelic boy in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912) and with Luchino Visconti's cinematic version of the same story (1971). Another intertextual source is Sergei Paradzhanov's film *The Colour of the Pomegranate* (1968) with its encrypted homoerotic and also Armenian visual overtones of embodied collective and personal memories. The pomegranate is a symbol of Armenia but also more generally a symbol of love, blood, the unity of the world, of marriage and fecundity overlapping with a specifically Muslim interpretation of the pomegranate as a holy fruit of paradise.

Ecstasy is a transcultural and transmedia phenomenon in its presentation as well as in its creation. The androgynous batcha dances were directed by American dancer, director and founder of the modern interracial dance group *Reality* David Rousseve who managed to merge Caribbean dance movements with local Uzbek tradition. An Uzbek artist, Babur Ismailov, whose paintings are peculiar examples of theatricalization (that is, another trans-media phenomenon in which canvases look like theatrical decorations, and characters often resemble the costumed actors torn out of specific scenes, whereas the general composition is reminiscent of a *mise en scene*), adapted Nikolayev's works for animation presentation during the show. A Korean-by-origin composer, Artyem Kim, created the delicate, sensuous and suggestive soundtrack for the show, based on rhythmical leitmotifs repeated in various media, from traditional musical instruments to voice and even pebbles in a big metal pot. As a result, a border performance emerged, balancing on the verge of narrative and visual art forms, languages (Weil used Anzaldua's type of bilingual repetition with variation when a phrase is first said in Uzbek then repeated in Russian but with a slight deviation from the original), rhythms (traditional Uzbek rhythmic structures mixed with Caribbean) and symbols (e.g. queer semiotics interchanges with Sufi symbolism).

FROM MUTE VIDEOS TO TALKING MUSEUM OBJECTS

In their turn visual and synthetic arts often go through narrativization and dramatization. An interesting example is to be found in the works of Avarian-by-origin but Western-educated performance-and-video artist Taus Makhacheva whose critical cosmopolitanism does not prevent her from maintaining links with her native culture, however constructed and symbolic they might be. Similarly to Jamaican sociologist and writer Erna Brodber, Makhacheva acts as an anthropologist-cum-artist who applies some anthropological methods to better understand the contemporary culture and social and political reality of Dagestan (an autonomous republic in the Northern Caucasus that still belongs to the Russian Federation and features several dozen ethnicities and languages) yet avoids the classical anthropological presumably objective vantage point, instead preferring to be a part of the community she attempts to understand. She started with more the traditional mute video art in which the narrative element was almost exclusively expressed visually. In the past several years the artist has turned to mixed verbal and visual narrative forms with a more and more pronounced verbal element, sometimes theatrical and sometimes leaning more in the direction of a documentary, oral history or sociological and/or anthropological interview, all of which are created with a realization that it is a fictional narrative and not an objective scientific truth.

Gradually, and reluctantly at first, Makhacheva has come to a more verbal narrative realm in her two recent succeeding works *Let me be Part of a Narrative* (Makhacheva 2012) and *The Way of an Object* (Makhacheva 2013). The first one tries to problematize stories and histories as no more than arbitrary narratives that can be promoted as official versions or buried in favour of some other master narrative. In this case it

Taus Makhacheva: *Let me be part of a narrative*. Screenshot from a three-screen video installation, 2012

refers to the invisibly present negative image of Dagestanian culture created in the Russian mainstream media and significantly simplifying the multiple ramous local histories. The problematic narrative in Makhacheva's project is born at the juncture of two items of documentary footage – the old Soviet propaganda film about the famous Dagestanian wrestler Ali Aliev who held the world champion title for many years, demonstrated side by side with the contemporary story of the Dagestan Shepherd Dog Fighting Championship, made by the artist herself in the form of several interviews with dog-breeders (Makhacheva 2012).

In both cases the artist detects the same impulse – the competitive spirit as a form of self-expression and a way of converting male violence into peaceful forms. The emulating drive corresponds to a particular masculine honour code, as well as courage to meet one's defeat with dignity. Dog fights as well as traditional wrestling have existed as specifically male forms of socializing and self-affirmation in Dagestan from time immemorial. But Makhacheva's narrative is not an antiquarian recreation of some frozen social pattern but a flexible and dynamic story with unexpected modern interventions, such as a young girl dog-breeder who obviously has her own project of displaced gendered self-assertion.

The structural juxtaposition of the two videos also plays an important role in the narrative, as it adds an ambivalent reflection on the dynamics of the Caucasus masculinity. On the one hand it helps to recreate the unstable niches for masculine self-expression across the urban and the rural, reinstating identities shuffled by modernity and often devoid of previous grounds due to social and economic problems. On the other hand recreating and retracing previous social links and connections, the institute of dog fights risks being commercialized. But what is important in the end is, once again, the problematic and subjective quality of any interpretation. Even in the documentary, Makhacheva creates her own narrative, her own story which is
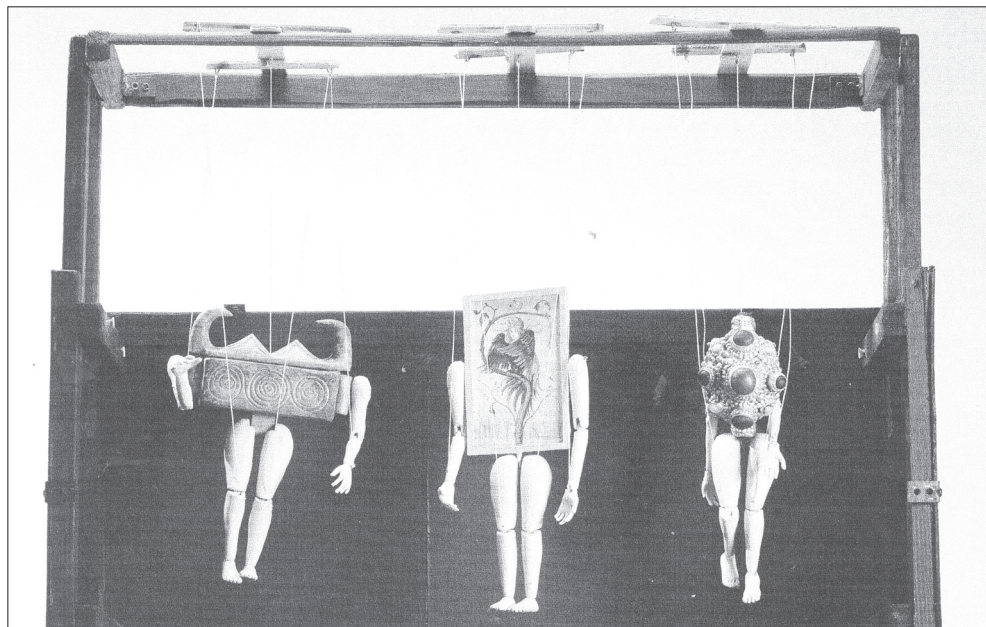
Taus Makhacheva: *Way of an object*. Screenshot from a marionette theatre performance, 2013

only one of the possible versions, not necessarily innocent. The artist is well aware of this fact, drawing our attention to the manipulative element in any documentary. This double video narrative then becomes a reflection on how history is made and constructed, how the official and non-official individual and collective versions of history coincide. History then becomes a constellation of narratives – often framed one into another – none of which has a monopoly of truth but each of which enriches our understanding of a particular culture, community, event or individual. And the key notion here is how we experience history, how it interactively folds into some meaningful interpretation as a result of our perception.

In *The Way of an Object* (Makhacheva 2013, 68–76) Makhacheva manifested even more pronounced tendencies of merging the verbal and the visual through the medium of street puppet theatre. There is a verbal script written for the three peculiar characters –animated exhibits from the local museum made into puppets. Without this text – the actual narratives and arguments of the Avarian salt box, the Kubachi wedding bracelet and Victor Vasnetsov's painting *The Bird Gamayun* (1895) – Makhacheva's project would not be possible at all. Here the accent shifts to rethinking the idea of narrating multiple histories in relation to a museum exhibition.

The audience is tempted into interpreting the whole project as a museum intervention. Among the epistemic shifts taking place in museum today, one of the main trends is giving the mute and muted objects the right and ability to speak again, in a sense, restoring their agency yet fully realizing the impossibility of any objective, neutral, disinterested principle of representation. Often the main focus in the museum is not on the (material) collection itself but rather on a narrative which a curator builds around a set of objects or in spite of them and even in the mode of

objectless storytelling. Something similar we find in the case of Makhacheva's carefully selected characters. The artefacts of Dagestanian culture are torn out of their context and depraved of their socio-cultural, utilitarian and cosmological functions and abilities when they are put in the museum, which is organized according to the Western progressivist and objectifying principle. Vasnetsov's painting is also torn out of its original context and becomes a dead representation of someone else's impenetrable canon, brought to Dagestan long ago to educate the local people according to Western/Russian aesthetic norms and therefore carrying a colonialist and condescending agenda.

This problematic is often touched upon in contemporary art, for example in Fred Wilson's museum interventions and site-specific installations, such as *Mining the Museum* (1992) and *The Museum: Mixed Metaphors* (1993) where the artist is 'bringing historical information to the aesthetic experience in order to reveal the imperialist reality of how museums obtain or interpret the objects they display. Doing so makes clear the complexity of things on display' (qtd. in Putnam 101). Wilson often creates a form of assemblage in which real objects from historical and ethnographic collections mix with his fictitious creations to form larger installations questioning 'how history gets told, what gets left out, how we as audience members interact with institutions such as art and history museums' (Crane 307). This is an intersection of the postmodernist Foucauldian reading of the museum as a heterotopia which is capable of accumulating, negating and interrupting time (Foucault 26), and the postcolonial rupture of the progressivist model of the museum as a decentring of the official narrative. Makhacheva's puppet theatre recreates this tendency on a smaller scale.

TOWARDS SYNTHETIC VISUAL-VERBAL FORMS

Today we are witnessing a tectonic shift in the previous taxonomies of art forms and kinds, visual, verbal and old and new mixed media, positioned at the intersection and based on the interaction of ethnic, cultural and linguistic traditions. All of this brings further erosion and problematizing of the very borders between traditional verbal forms and pictorial arts, as well as between art as a fiction in a wider sense and social and cultural reality, bringing forward more general categories and concepts, capable of uniting in a transversal way literature, cinema, theatre, art, computer games and other media forms. One such fundamental category is obviously narrative, which is being de-centred, multiplied, and subjectivized in its complex relations with history and memory and in various canonical counter-discursive practices often grounded in the destabilizing of Eurocentric Orientalist assumptions. Several of such examples were briefly analyzed above. Narrativization of previously strictly pictorial kinds of art and visualization of verbal arts leads to the emergence of experimental transgressive forms which are sometimes able to revive the outdated genres and kinds of art but also may create completely new artistic phenomena. In the coming decades it will become clear whether this process will lead to the final closure of contemporary fiction and pictorial arts and the shrinking of these outdated art forms entirely into a historical antiquarian mode.

NOTES

[1] For more details on the coloniality of comparative literature see Mignolo (2001), Tlostanova (2005).

[2] For more details on Nikolayev's life and work see *The Desert of Forbidden Art* (2010) and Shafran-skaya (2014).

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Visualizing fiction, verbalizing art, or from intermediation to transculturation

Visualization. Verbalization. Intermediation. Transculturation. Canonical counter-discourse. Interactive fiction. *Ecstasy with a Pomegranate*. Theatricalization. *Let me be Part of a Narrative, Way of an Object.*

The article departs from the idea of erasing the boundaries between visual, verbal and synthetic arts and their interpenetration, as part of the process of intermediation going parallel to dynamic multidirectional transculturation. The author dwells briefly on various existing models of interaction between art and literature – from more traditional leitmotifs and concrete art works activating the literary plot, to the use of particular common aesthetic devices in fiction and pictorial arts, from postcolonial canonical counter-discourse to the creolized forms of interactive fiction and digital activism. The article closes with a detailed analysis of the ways these tendencies are manifested in the play/show *Ecstasy with a Pomegranate* – a mock biopic of Russian avant-garde artist Alexander Nikolayev, staged at the Tashkent theatre company Ilkhom and marked by increased experimental visualization, and the works of Dagestanian video and performance artist Taus Makhacheva based on the growing theatricalization and verbalization of previously strictly visual forms.

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