

# L'ÉCRITURE AVANT LA LETTRE



# **ALPHABETUM IX 2021**





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**The Society of the Weird and Wonderful  
Chemistry of Audio-Active Decay**

Res Feber



Once upon a time I collected words that only exist in their own language.

**Commuovere.** ITALIAN. To be heart-warmingly emotional, often related to a story that moves you to tears.

**Culaccino.** ITALIAN. The little circle that the condensation of a cold foggy glass leaves behind on a table.

**Goya.** URDU. To become so engrossed in a story, film or performance that you no longer realise it is fiction.

**Iktsuarpok.** INUKTITUT. Expectantly looking over and over again to see if someone is already on their way.

**Komorebi.** JAPANESE. The sun that filters through the leaves.

**Lítost.** CZECH. To be tormented by the sudden onslaught of your own misery.

**Mångata.** SWEDISH. The reflection of the moon on the water that looks like a road.

**Putzfimmel.** GERMAN. The urge to clean everything too thoroughly.

**Saudade.** PORTUGUESE. Describes a mixture of feelings. Longing, distance, love, homesickness, melancholy. But none of these are exactly it.

**Sobremesa.** SPANISH. To spend time after lunch with those you sat at the table with.

**Vacilando.** SPANISH. Someone to whom the journey is more important than the destination.

**Waldeinsamkeit.** GERMAN. To be one with nature in solitude.

The limits of our language are the limits of our world, according to Wittgenstein. Untranslatable words do not resign themselves to this. They stretch the edges of the indescribable. They are the infrared and ultraviolet of language. Only a special sense, possessed by a small community of speakers, can register that which eludes others.

Just as there is only a small spectrum of light visible in colours, there is also a colossal amount of reality that remains wordless. There could be a word for the fleeting gesture of thanks you make when someone lets you pass in traffic. The feeling of staring at your child as it leaves for school for the first time. The recognition of a loved one on a crowded platform. That one cube of cheese or toast, that one croquette, which is always the last one left because no one dares to take it from the serving dish. The ambivalent feeling about something of which you do not know whether you are eagerly looking forward to it or you are dreading it. The invitation you do not know whether to decline or accept.

Because that is where this story begins. With one of those letters that I am not really waiting for. It came in the post, in an envelope, which to me is already a bad sign. Since the advent of email, letters in the post can only come from government agencies, grieving relatives and commercial parties who want to sell you something. In my case, there are also threats or expressions of praise from listeners to my weekly radio appearance, which some call a 'spoken column' and others a 'miniature stand-up performance'. Most responses I receive are by email, but a few - usually elderly people - take the trouble to write a proper letter.

At first sight, this also appears to be the case here. The two sides were written with a typewriter, one of

which the loop under the g had been worn down to a small circle, where the sender used a pen to draw the loops under all those amputated letters. He did not miss a single one. I decide that whoever takes this much trouble deserves my attention.

The letter is as carefully drafted as its content is muddled. In any case, it is neither a threat nor praise. It does not fit the thumb-up, thumb-down dichotomy of our time. It is an invitation, to a five-day conference in a hotel in the capital. The only thing that becomes clear to me about that meeting is that it is illegal. Maybe that is what makes me hesitate. Have I not already dwelled long enough in legality? There is a good chance it is a joke, but that does not quench my curiosity. A stand-up artist scours the world like a predator.

On the bridge over the Verversingskanaal, a woman with a slightly desperate look on her face speaks to me. She is looking for the Johan de Wittlaan. Or rather for the Israeli embassy. She holds out her mobile telephone to me. On the screen a screenshot of directions from an email. She has black hair, with grey strands in it. In her bright, restless eyes, a world of arrangements, panic, fuss is shivering. Family matters, death, travel, something financial, something with a visa. She got off the bus at World Forum, and now she has to walk the whole way back again, in the stiff breeze, between the tall buildings of a part of the city that is also strange to me right now.

I used to walk through Geneva or Rome with a physical, crumpled map in my hand, too proud or too shy to ask others for directions. Now, with Google Maps on every device, it should be possible for anyone to move through any city in the world autonomously.

I remember how, a few years ago, in the heart of Paris, I pointed out to A. ten B., a good friend, the little icon on his Google Maps, the little circle, like that of the crosshairs above a rifle barrel, which would show him his current location. He did not know that. I was flabbergasted. For him, this app had always been a digital equivalent of a paper map. For him, it was equally perplexing. His map had been tilted, forever. It was a discovery of the same order as that every toaster, even the cheapest, has a slot at the bottom, a drawer – for which there is no word yet – with which you can knock out all the breadcrumbs you have collected. Or that in your dreams your own house suddenly has extra rooms.

The woman walked away between the buildings on the Kennedylaan and I regretted the missed opportunity to also give her that sensation that ought to have a special word.

She makes me think about that invitation again. Even if it is a joke, there is something for me, the predator, to gain. The sender calls itself 'The Society of the Weird and Wonderful Chemistry of Audio-Active Decay'. Googling it yields almost nothing, only some obscure scientific articles, but they are just enough to make me curious. It is something mathematical or linguistic or both. In my second-to-last radio appearance, there was a joke involving numbers. And I talked about my untranslatable words. Which I had christened 'prime words' (but actually, they fall into the category that it is strange that there is no word for them!). Would this have attracted the attention of this company, if it indeed existed? In short: it may be true. It may reveal something like the circular crosshairs on the map, the breadcrumb drawer, the hidden rooms. And if not, then nothing was lost. Even a bad joke can lead to a good story.

What is a story? Someone once told me something that, as a sort of formula, has literally stayed with me: 'A story is a representation of the confrontation of someone who wants something with the threat and/or the promise of a transformation that he or she can, with difficulty, bring about or prevent or both.' As I pack my trolley, a word comes to mind - *resfeber*. A Swedish word, also untranslatable of course, that not only perfectly summarises my current state, but also embodies that whole definition of a story in three syllables..

***Resfeber***. SWEDISH. The restlessness in your heart just before the start of a journey, fear and excitement at the same time. The confrontation of someone who wants something with the threat and/or the promise of a transformation that he or she is struggling to bring about or prevent. Or both.

Amsterdam Central Station has been a building site for years, and now that it is deserted, it looks even sadder. Much has been written and spoken about the deserted city centre, about the empty Rokin, about the empty Red Light District, about the respite from the flow of tourists. At one of the buildings wrapped in plastic advertising or municipal texts, a fat woman stands quietly in her spot, dancing and singing a swinging gospel. Because there is no sound of building activity either, her voice carries far: 'Jesus sets you free' is the only intelligible, recurring phrase. It is Friday afternoon, but only a few people walk by, making it difficult for them to pretend not to notice her, with her arms in the air and her gaze heavenwards. Cramped joy that should compel rather than express.

This is the material. This is the kind of situation that I use for my radio performances. I have directional microphones that are more sensitive than horse ears. I slurp up

voices from the street and mix them with my improvised commentary. That is what it comes down to. You could call it strolling stand-up, or stand-up flânerie.

In these circumstances, the fact that the hotel exists is quite something. It hardly has any allure, even though it is wedged between two canal houses. The gap that must have opened up between them – gas explosion, decay, urban renewal? – has been filled with glass and steel. The name, Hotel Grafiet, is written in sans serif letters on the façade. I have done my homework: it refers both to a diamond-cutting factory that was once located here and to the printing business that later replaced it.

At the revolving door I hesitate, like you hesitate when checking your lottery numbers. At the counter of the Jumbo last week, I picked up the voice of a grey-haired lady: 'It will probably be zero, zero, zero, zero...!' It was only outside, musing on this phrase, that I understood what it was all about. It was the eleventh of the month, which meant that the previous day's National Lottery draw had taken place. Occasionally I buy a lottery ticket, or even a whole series. The mechanism behind it is that you buy a dream, a fantasy. 'The pre-fun can begin', the Lottery emails as soon as you have bought the lottery tickets online. It is dealing in pre-fun that is not being rewarded. For there is always that slight hangover (for which there should be a special word), which is reinforced on the Internet by having the spinning figures, like in a fruit machine, first spin up to an insanely high amount, after which it drops back to the usual outcome: 'You have won 3 euros! Congratulations! Enjoy your prize!' We know the statistics; we know how hopeless it is. But we also know that there is always a winner somewhere. It will probably be zero point zero point zero, but that woman, too, must have a glowing hope that the opposite is true...

And so I hesitate in front of the entrance to Hotel Grafiet. Because after this, everything is decided. If it is a joke, the adventure ends here and I return to the empty streets. The stranger who takes my picture will do so in black and white to accentuate the mood. Man with trolley in the empty city during lockdown: extinct species or dove after the deluge? In the other case, something unfathomable unfolds. As long as I do not go in, it remains undecided and they both exist. Schrödinger's cat. The pages in a book that have not been turned yet.

What do you mean by the term "language?" Exactly what does that mean? What do you mean? I mean what is the meaning of that? What kind of meaning? What does it mean to you? And what does it mean to me? You know what I mean? What did she mean by that? What it means? What does this mean? What does that mean? What do they mean? Some people will say "What do you mean by that?" "Do you know what I mean?"

As the hotel is closed, I have to ring the bell and negotiate via the intercom, it seems.

'You are at the wrong address.'

'Het Grafiet, that is here, right?'

'There is also another Grafiet.' The voice calls out an address, which turns out to be one street away. The same logo, but now at a swinging door at the top of a small staircase of galvanised steel. The typical, never really pleasant smell of steamed laundry. Aluminium refuse containers. This simply had to be the back entrance of the same building. The artists' entrance. The door is jammed. After a long fumble and a push, it opens all at once, with an overly brusque swing.

The doorman is a chagrin.

'We are closed', he says, with a dirty look at me and my trolley, as if we were personally responsible for all the global misery surrounding that closing.

'Then I have made a mistake.' I stare at the ground beneath me, embarrassed, between the metal grating. Yet in the man's eyes I sense something questioning, something of an opening, and I know I will keep thinking of it, tossing and turning in bed, if I do not at least try to get through it. So I look up and add: 'Unless the concept of *audio-active decay* means something to you.'

It is astonishing. Taciturn, almost disappointed, it seems, he lets me in. It is mind-boggling. Not only is the plague back from Shakespeare's time, not only the panic, the entrenchment and the fear, the gatekeepers are too. The whispered code words, the masquerades, the conspiracies. In the lobby, the walls are papered with illegible language.

ᄀᄁᄂᄃ  
ᄄᄅᄆᄇᄈ  
ᄉᄊᄋᄌᄍᄎ

In the lobby, I look around, as if it were a joke with a *punchline* that just will not happen. Nothing makes me laugh, not in this hotel lobby, not at the reception desk, where I am asked to write my name on a list. I see my hand reaching for the fountain pen and on the dotted line I write: Res Feber.

Then the doorman gives me a magnetic card with my room number on it, on the fourth floor. There is nothing that triggers the release I have been counting on since opening that letter. Like a sentence has only said something after the full stop has been placed. On stage, on the radio I mean, but that is just as much a stage, I work according to that ancient narrative principle, in the stand-up comedy world flatly summarised as *set up* and *punch*. But here I am only in the set up. Nowhere a curtain that is lifted. Nowhere the gotcha moment. Not in the corridors, not in the lift. Even in the hotel room, on the fourth floor, there are no friends or acquaintances who, when I enter, turn on the lights and shout: 'Sur-pri-i-se!'

The room was devoid of noise, apart from the hum of an appliance, a distant siren outside, the ticking of an electric clock, a moped pulling up, a slamming garden door, that same siren, this time a little further, apart from pretty much everything, to be honest.

The most sensitive hearing on earth is not that of the horse but of the moth. Wax moths can pick up sounds up to 300 kHz. This enables them to stay ahead of their natural enemy, the bat, as if they were intercepting a secret language. What is it like to be a wax moth, I wondered, following Thomas Nagel's famous question: what is it like to be a bat?

I bet there is a bad bat under my bed. I once had to repeat this sentence to the point of madness during an English pronunciation course. I bet there is a bad bat

under my bed. All the students were humming it at their own pace, a cacophony of babbling. I bet ðeər iz ə bæd bæd undə my bed. After only a few minutes, the sounds had already lost their meaning.

What is it like to live without letters? Not to read, not to write. Will a silent grammar of images and things follow?

I sink into the soft bed and as soon as I close my eyes I am in a supermarket, one in Stockholm or Malmö or some other place I have never been to before and where they speak a language I do not understand. But at the checkout I make a discovery that puts an end to that. All the items I place on the belt, and that slide towards the cashier who takes note of them with a discreet bleep – all those items (head of lettuce, pack of coffee, a pair of shoes, only left ones, a rubber ball, a stamp pad) form a sentence, behind which the turn bar is the full stop. I look around me in amazement: everyone is fishing syllables, phonemes, words out of their carts and has them read by the cashiers who read them like you read a book when you are about to fall asleep, floating on the surface. But I saw so many meanings that I woke up jittering.

A frantically flashing LED near the air conditioner mumbles something in awkward Morse code. When I concentrate, I see the pattern. I take out pen and paper, and notice that it reassures me, this secure task of deciphering. Finally, the light remains silent and I read what I jotted down on paper:

What I am about to say in and about language is simple. It may be difficult only in seeing how what is normally said about the world, ourselves, thinking, learning, and languages, concerns language. Perhaps it need not be said. But what need not be said is often difficult to see, and seeing it, it is often difficult to see the point of saying it.

The point of speaking about things is perhaps to make significant distinctions.

But, in trying to speak about language, I found that I had to remove distinctions; excessive distinctions. We seem to think that it is pointless to remove distinctions. If there is, perhaps, a point in saying the things I say, it is as the naive child, protesting about the cumbersome ways of grown-ups in going about things.

We may be astray, but we are not lost. As long as there are signposts, we are not lost. And there are signs. I follow the one that says 'breakfast room'. They lead to the basement where the printing presses used to be.

This is where I also meet the others. About twenty of them, a large class, but they do not make much noise. All equally lonely, equally distraught, all called here by the same invisible hand that had drawn loops under the worn-out g's.

I hear names that I forget as soon as they have been spoken. Unica, Tina, Hedwig. Ryan, Kenneth, Joseph. Some, out of habit or provocation, hold out their hands. Some shake it, out of politeness or rebellion. Toine, Emily, Yoko. Some have invented new gestures, a hand against the collarbone, with a short, solemn nod. Gary, David, Günter. There is the elbow salute, which has already acquired a quasi-formal status. Goran, John, Brigitte. If there were an official dictionary of social gestures, the elbow greeting would certainly be included in the next edition. Along with the fist bump. Octavian. Tine. Victory. What is in a name?

It is like a first day on a campus. Scrutinising language. Always the question whether someone knows more. Nobody knows more. Two women have already started investigating the kitchen. It appears to be well stocked. Let's go and make some breakfast, shall we?

Is it breakfast time? Dinner time? Lunch? I dare not ask for fear of betraying my foolishness. We have to organise our stay here, shape it, get through it. Castaways on an island. We are a do-it-yourself kit without a manual.

At the very other end of the room, I pass Unica. She is drawing a series of letters, crossing them out one by one and then starting all over again.

Next to the cutlery drawers, containers made of rough scaffold wood, Emily has discovered old letter trays. They are from the time of the print shop, like museum pieces, but you can still touch them, the loose lead letters. You can grab them, as I once saw Gerard Reve do in a film. Reve turned out to be trained as a typesetter and grabbed whole sentences with the ease of someone hammering away on a typewriter - while those letters were in a completely illogical order, unfathomable I mean, because even in qwertyuiop all logic is missing to me.

So Emily has discovered these letters and uses them to write a poem by Gertrude Stein on the magnetic menu board, the letters of which disappear as we read in silence and of which only the sentence remains that we pronounce aloud, synchronously, alternately, asynchronously, simultaneously, the cacophony of a canon after a soothing silence.

Wives of great men rest tranquil.  
Come go stay philip philip.  
Egg be takers.  
Parts of place nuts.  
Suppose twenty for cent.  
It is rose in hen.  
Come one day.  
A firm terrible a firm terrible hindering, a firm hindering  
have a ray nor pin nor.  
Egg in places.  
Egg in few insists.  
In set a place.  
I am not missing.  
Who is a permit.  
I love honor and obey I do love honor and obey I do.  
Melancholy do lip sing.  
How old is he.  
Murmur pet murmur pet murmur.  
Push sea push sea push sea push sea push sea push sea  
push sea push sea.  
Sweet and good and kind to all.  
Wearing head.  
Cousin tip nicely.  
Cousin tip. Nicely.  
Wearing head.  
Leave us sit.  
I do believe it will finish, I do believe it will finish.  
Pat ten patent, Pat ten patent.  
Eleven and eighteen.  
Foolish is foolish is.  
Birds measure birds measure stores birds measure stores  
measure birds measure.  
Exceptional firm bites.  
How do you do I forgive you everything and there is

nothing to forgive.  
Never the less.  
Leave it to me.  
Weeds without papers.  
Weeds without papers are necessary.  
Left again left again.  
Exceptional considerations.  
Never the less tenderness.  
Resting cow curtain.  
Resting bull pin.  
Resting cow curtain.  
Resting bull pin.  
Next to a frame.  
The only hat hair.  
Leave us mass leave us.  
Leave us pass.  
Leave us.  
Leave us pass leave us.  
Humming is.  
No climate.  
What is a size.  
Ease all I can do.  
Colored frame.  
Couple of canning.  
Ease all I can do.  
Humming does as Humming does as humming is.  
What is a size.  
No climate.  
Ease all I can do.  
Shall give it, please to give it.  
Like to give it, please to give it.  
What a surprise.  
Not sooner whether.  
Cordially yours.

Pause.

Cordially yours.

Not sooner together.

Cordially yours.

In strewing, in strewing.

That is the way we are one and indivisible.

Pay nuts renounce.

Now without turning around.

I will give them to you tonight.

Cunning is and does cunning is and does the most beautiful notes.

I would like a thousand most most.

Center pricking petunia.

Electrics are tight electrics are white electrics are a button.

Singular pressing.

Recent thimble.

Noisy pearls noisy pearl coat.

Arrange.

Arrange wide opposite.

Opposite it.

Lily ice-cream.

Nevertheless.

A hand is Willie.

Henry Henry Henry.

A hand is Henry.

Henry Henry Henry.

A hand is Willie.

Henry Henry Henry.

All the time.

A wading chest.

Do you mind.

Lizzie do you mind. Ethel.

Ethel.

Ethel.

Next to barber.

Next to barber bury.

Next to barber bury china.

Next to barber bury china glass.

Next to barber china and glass.

Next to barber and china.

Next to barber and hurry.

Next to hurry.

Next to hurry and glass and china.

Next to hurry and glass and hurry.

Next to hurry and hurry.

Next to hurry and hurry.

Plain cases for see.

Tickle tickle tickle you for education.

A very reasonable berry.

Suppose a selection were reverse.

Cousin to sadden.

A coral neck and a little song so very extra so very Susie.

Cow come out cow come out and out and smell a little.

Draw prettily.

Next to a bloom.

Neat stretch.

Place plenty.

Cauliflower.

Cauliflower.

Curtain cousin.

Apron.

Neither best set.

Do I make faces like that at you.

Pinkie.

Not writing not writing another.

Another one.

Think.

Jack Rose Jack Rose.

Yard.

Practically all of them.

Does believe it.

Measure a measure a measure or.

Which is pretty which is pretty which is pretty.

To be top.

Neglect Waldberg.

Sudden say separate.

So great so great Emily.

Sew grate sew grate Emily.

Not a spell nicely.

Ring.

Weigh pieces of pound.

Aged steps.

Stops.

Not a plan bow.

Why is lacings.

Little slam up.

Cold seam peaches.

Begging to state begging to state begging to state  
alright.

Begging to state begging to state begging to state  
alright.

Wheels stows wheels stows.

Wickedness.

Cotton could mere less.

Nevertheless.

Anne.

Analysis.

From the standpoint of all white a week is none too much.

Pink coral white coral, coral coral.

Happy happy happy.

All the, chose.

Is a necessity.

Necessity.

Happy happy happy all the.

Happy happy happy all the.

Necessity.

Remain seated.

Come on come on come on on.

All the close.

Remain seated.

Happy.

All the.

Necessity.

Remain seated.

All the, close.

Websters and mines, websters and mines.

Websters and mines.

Trimming.

Gold space gold space of toes.

Twos, twos.

Pinned to the letter.

In accompany.

In a company in.

Received.

Must.

Natural lace.

Spend up.

Spend up length.

Spend up length.

Length thoroughly.

Neatness.

Neatness Neatness.

Excellent cording.

Excellent cording short close.

Close to.

When.  
Pin black.  
Cough or up.  
Shouting.  
Shouting.  
Neater pin.  
Pinned to the letter.  
Was it a space was it a space was it a space to see.  
Neither things.  
Persons.  
Transition.  
Say say say.  
North of the calender.  
Window.  
Peoples rest.  
Preserve pulls.  
Cunning piler.  
Next to a chance.  
Apples.  
Apples.  
Apples went.  
It was a chance to preach Saturday.  
Please come to Susan.  
Purpose purpose black.  
Extra plain silver.  
Furious slippers.  
Have a reason.  
Have a reason candy.  
Points of places.  
Neat Nezars.  
Which is a cream, can cream.  
Ink of paper slightly mine breathes a shoulder able shine.  
Necessity.  
Near glass.

Put a stove put a stove hoarser.

If I was surely if I was surely.

See girl says.

All the same bright.

Brightness.

When a churn say suddenly when a churn say suddenly.

Poor pour percent.

Little branches.

Pale.

Pale.

Pale.

Pale.

Pale.

Pale.

Pale.

Near sights.

Please sorts.

Example.

Example.

Put something down.

Put something down some day.

Put something down some day in.

Put something down some day in my.

In my hand.

In my hand right. In my hand writing.

Put something down some day in my hand writing.

Needles less.

Never the less.

Never the less.

Pepperness.

Never the less extra stress.

Never the less.

Tenderness.

Old sight.

Pearls.  
Real line.  
Shoulders.  
Upper states.  
Mere colors.  
Recent resign.  
Search needles.  
All a plain all a plain show.  
White papers.  
Slippers.  
Slippers underneath.  
Little tell.  
I chance.  
I chance to.  
I chance to to.  
I chance to.  
What is a winter wedding a winter wedding.  
Furnish seats.  
Furnish seats nicely.  
Please repeat.  
Please repeat for.  
Please repeat.  
This is a name to Anna.  
Cushions and pears.  
Reason purses.  
Reason purses to relay to relay carpets.  
Marble is thorough fare.  
Nuts are spittoons.  
That is a word.  
That is a word careless.  
Paper peaches.  
Paper peaches are tears.  
Rest in grapes.  
Thoroughly needed.

Thoroughly needed signs.

All but.

Relieving relieving.

Argonauts.

That is plenty.

Cunning saxon symbol.

Symbol of beauty.

Thimble of everything.

Cunning clover thimble.

Cunning of everything.

Cunning of thimble.

Cunning cunning.

Place in pets.

Night town.

Night town a glass.

Color mahogany.

Color mahogany center.

**Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.**

Loveliness extreme.

Extra gaiters.

Loveliness extreme.

Sweetest ice-cream.

Page ages page ages page ages.

Wiped Wiped wire wire.

Sweeter than peaches and pears and cream.

Wiped wire wiped wire.

Extra extreme.

Put measure treasure.

Measure treasure.

Tables track.

Nursed.

Dough.

That will do.

Cup or cup or.

Excessively illegitimate.

Pussy pussy pussy what what.

Current secret sneezers.

Ever.

Mercy for a dog.

Medal make medal.

Able able able.

A go to green and a letter spoke a go to green or praise or

Worships worships worships.

Door.

Door. Table linen.

Wet spoil.

Wet spoil gaiters and knees and little spoils little spoils

or ready silk lining.

Suppose misses misses.

Curls to butter.

Curls.

Curls.

Settle stretches.

See at till.

Louise.

Sunny.

Sail or.

Sail or rustle.

Mourn in morning.

The way to say.

Patter.

Deal own a.

Robber.

A high b and a perfect sight.

Little things singer. Jane.

Aiming.

Not in description.

Day way.

A blow is delighted.

I bet there is a bad bat under my bed. A rose is a rose is a rose. What powerlessness are we trying to ward off with our formulas?

In the lobby, I meet Günter Gerhard, who tells me, while standing by the post-boxes, that postmen are the greatest enemies of the traditional letter. He folds the hotel papers in a certain way and deposits them in the post-boxes in what he considers to be the only correct way.

In the courtyard, Yoko is burning sheets of paper by a fire pit.

What we share, we discover these days, is that we all do 'something' in the world of art and/or science. That much had already been clear during the first breakfast. I myself ended up opposite a man with glasses and a shabby jacket who introduced himself as Walter Benjamin.

'I prepared a lecture', he says.

'Was that mentioned in your invitation?' I ask.

'It was an invitation to a conference. Then you are supposed to contribute!'

A woman who sits down with a tray (scrambled eggs, fruit, coffee) nuances this. 'It may be, but not necessarily in the form of a presentation or lecture. But if more people have prepared something, we can prepare a programme.'

The disappointing thing about our species is that when you put some of us together, we do not start wars or orgies, we start conferences. Or is that called progress? And what should my contribution be about? As a stand-up artist, I should probably provide the *comic note*, the *entr'acte*, the interlude. I am pondering over this when, later on in the hall, I follow the signs to the 'conference room', where a man is sitting on the stage, writing and talking.

'raɪtɪŋ 'lɛktʃə 2010  
Writing Lecture 2010

aɪ æm 'raɪtɪŋ wɪð maɪ raɪt hænd. ðə laɪt ɪz 'kʌmɪŋ  
I am writing with my right hand. The light is coming  
frɒm ə'boʊv lɛft.  
from above left.

maɪ 'raɪtɪŋ bɪ'gɪnz wɛn ðə 'ʃædəʊ ɒv ðə pɛn ænd ðə  
My writing begins when the shadow of the pen and the  
pɛn ɪt'sɛlf kʌm tə'gɛðər ɒn ðə 'peɪpə.  
pen itself come together on the paper.

ðə tɪp ænd ɪts 'ʃædəʊ rɪ'meɪn kləʊs tə'gɛðər ən'tɪl ɪ  
The tip and its shadow remain close together until I  
'ɔ:lməʊst ə'raɪv æt ðə raɪt-hænd ɛdʒ ɒv ðə 'peɪpə.  
almost arrive at the right-hand edge of the paper.

'sʌmwɛə hɪər aɪ meɪk ðə dɪ'sɪʒən tu: stɒp ænd ɡəʊ tu: ðə  
Somewhere here I make the decision to stop and go to the  
nekst laɪn. ðə hænd wɪð ðə pɛn lɪfts ɪt'sɛlf frɒm ðə 'peɪpə,  
next line. The hand with the pen lifts itself from the paper,

mu:vz 'kwɪkli bæk tu: ðə lɛft ænd bɪ'gɪnz eɪt ɔ: naɪn  
moves quickly back to the left and begins eight or nine  
'mɪlɪ,mɪ:təz 'ləʊə daʊn, 'raɪtɪŋ ə frɛʃ laɪn tə'wɔ:dz ðə  
millimetres lower down, writing a fresh line towards the

raɪt. ðə θʌm ænd 'ɪndɛks 'fɪŋgər ɒv maɪ lɛft hænd həʊld  
right. The thumb and index finger of my left hand hold  
ðə 'peɪpə prɛst tu: ðə 'teɪbl ɪn ðə kə'rekt pə'zɪʃən:  
the paper pressed to the table in the correct position:

dɪ'rektli ɪn frʌnt ɒv mi: ænd æt ən 'æŋɡl ɒv 'fɪf'ti:ŋ  
directly in front of me and at an angle of fifteen  
dɪ'ɡri:z ɪn rɪ'leɪʃən tu: ðɪ ɛdʒ ɒv ðə 'teɪbl.  
degrees in relation to the edge of the table.

θʌm ænd 'ɪndɛks 'fɪŋgə pʊʃ ðə 'peɪpər æt ɪ:tʃ laɪn ə  
Thumb and index finger push the paper at each line a  
'lɪtl 'fɜ:ðər 'ʌpwədz, səʊ ðæt aɪ dəʊnt hæv tu: tʃeɪndʒ maɪ  
little further upwards, so that I don't have to change my

'raɪtɪŋ pə'zɪʃən ɪn ə 'vɜːtɪkəl dɪ'rekʃən.

writing position in a vertical direction.

wɛn maɪ 'raɪtɪŋ ə'prəʊtʃɪz ðə 'bɒtəm ɒv ðə 'peɪpər aɪ hæv

When my writing approaches the bottom of the paper I have

tuː dɪ'saɪd haʊ mʌtʃ speɪs aɪ wɒnt tuː liːv frɪː bɪ'niːθ ðə

to decide how much space I want to leave free beneath the

lɑːst laɪn – 'ðeəfɔː, haʊ 'meni laɪnz aɪ stɪl kæn raɪt bɪ'fɔː

last line – therefore, how many lines I still can write before

bɪ'ɡɪnɪŋ ə njuː ʃiːt.

beginning a new sheet.

ɒn ðə njuː ʃiːt, ðɪ 'æŋɡl ɒv wɪtʃ aɪ hæv tuː kə'rekt ə 'kʌpl

On the new sheet, the angle of which I have to correct a couple

ɒv taɪmz tuː ɡet ɪt ɪn ðə raɪt pə'zɪʃən, aɪ stɑːt tuː raɪt æt

of times to get it in the right position, I start to write at

ə pɔɪnt ðæt ɪz ðə seɪm 'dɪstəns frɒm ðə tɒp ɒv ðə 'peɪpər

a point that is the same distance from the top of the paper

æz frɒm ðə left hænd eɟʒ.

as from the left hand edge.

ðə 'stɑːtɪŋ pɔɪnts ɒv njuː laɪnz laɪ kwɑɪt prɪ'saɪsli bɪ'ləʊ

The starting points of new lines lie quite precisely below

wʌn ə'nʌðə, ðə raɪt hænd endz ɒv ðə laɪnz aɪr ɪ'reɡjʊlə.

one another, the right hand ends of the lines are irregular.

ɪf ə 'sentəns endz bɪ'fɔːr aɪ hæv rɪ:tʃt ðɪ end ɒv ə laɪn aɪ

If a sentence ends before I have reached the end of a line I

hæv tuː dɪ'saɪd 'wɛðər aɪ ə'laʊ maɪ nekst 'sentəns tuː

have to decide whether I allow my next sentence to

kən'tɪnjuː(ː) ɔː tuː stɑːt ɪt ɒn ə njuː laɪn.

continue or to start it on a new line.

ɪf aɪ wɒnt tuː θɪŋk ə'baʊt haʊ aɪ wɒnt tuː prə'siːd, ɪn ðə

If I want to think about how I want to proceed, in the

'mɪdl ɒv ə 'sentəns ɔːr æt ɪts end, aɪ rɪ'muːv ðə pɛn frɒm

middle of a sentence or at its end, I remove the pen from

ðə 'peɪpər ɪn 'ɔːdə tuː lʊk 'əʊv wɒt aɪ hæv 'rɪtɪn ʌp ən'tɪl

the paper in order to look over what I have written up until

naʊ. aɪ hæʊld maɪ hænd wɪð ðə pen ə'weɪ frɒm ðə ʃi:t  
now. I hold my hand with the pen away from the sheet  
ɒv 'peɪpə ənd let maɪ ɑ:m rɛst fɔ:r ə 'lɪtl waɪl.  
of paper and let my arm rest for a little while.  
waɪl 'kʌvəriŋ ðə 'dɪstəns, ,hɒrɪ'zɒntli, bɪ'twi:ŋ ðə stɑ:t  
While covering the distance, horizontally, between the start  
ənd ði end ɒv ə laɪn, ðə 'fɔ:ɑ:m dʌz nɒt slaɪd ɪn 'pærəleɪ  
and the end of a line, the forearm does not slide in parallel  
wɪð ðə pen: ðə hænd 'gaɪdɪŋ ðə pen 'ðeəfɔ: 'stretʃɪz  
with the pen: the hand guiding the pen therefore stretches  
ɪt'self aʊt ə 'lɪtl æt ðə bɪ'ɡɪnɪŋ ənd æz ɪt kən'tɪnju(:)z ə'lɒŋ  
itself out a little at the beginning and as it continues along  
ðə laɪn, meɪks ɪt'self 'smɔ:lər ə'ɡen. ðɪs ɪks'tendɪŋ ənd  
the line, makes itself smaller again. This extending and  
'ʃrɪŋkɪŋ ɒv ðə hænd 'ɔ:lsəʊ 'hæpənz waɪl 'raɪtɪŋ 'letəz  
shrinking of the hand also happens while writing letters  
wɪtʃ ɪks'tend ə'bʌv ɔ: bɪ'ləʊ ðə 'mɪdɔɪnt ɒv ðə laɪn.  
which extend above or below the midpoint of the line.  
ɪf aɪ wɒnt tu: lʊk ə'ɡen æt wɒt aɪ hæv 'rɪtɪn ənd wɒnt tu:  
If I want to look again at what I have written and want to  
θɪŋk ə'baʊt ɪt ə 'lɪtl 'lɒŋgə, ðen aɪ 'ɔ:lməʊst ɔ:tə'mætɪkəli  
think about it a little longer, then I almost automatically  
pʊt ðə tɒp ɒn ðə pen tu: prɪ'vent ði ɪŋk frɒm 'draɪɪŋ ɪn ðə  
put the top on the pen to prevent the ink from drying in the  
nɪb. ðə tɒp ɒv ðə 'faʊntɪn pen ɪz 'ɔ:lweɪz kləʊs ət hænd.  
nib. The top of the fountain pen is always close at hand.

'dʒʊəriŋ ði ækt ɒv 'raɪtɪŋ, ðə 'frɪkʃən bɪ'twi:ŋ ðə 'metl  
During the act of writing, the friction between the metal  
ɒv ðə pen ənd ðə 'sɜ:fɪs 'tekstʃər ɒv ðə 'peɪpə meɪks ə  
of the pen and the surface texture of the paper makes a  
saʊnd. ðɪs saʊnd ɪz ə 'kwaɪət laɪt nɔɪz wɪtʃ ə'raɪzɪz bɪ'kɒz ɒv  
sound. This sound is a quiet light noise which arises because of  
ðə 'mu:vmənts ɒv ðə pen: 'tɜ:nɪŋ, 'slaɪdɪŋ, 'ɡlaɪdɪŋ, 'rʌbɪŋ...  
the movements of the pen: turning, sliding, gliding, rubbing...

ðə 'sɜ:fɪs ɒv ðə 'peɪpər ɪz 'nevə kəm'plɪtli smu:ð. If  
The surface of the paper is never completely smooth. If  
aɪ wɜ: tu: raɪt ɒn glaɪs ðeə wʊd bi: nəʊ rɪ'zɪstəns ænd  
I were to write on glass there would be no resistance and  
'ðeəfɔ: 'kɔ:lsəʊ nəʊ səʊnd.  
therefore also no sound.

'sʌmtaɪmz ðə səʊnd stɒps fɔ:r ə 'məʊmənt wen aɪ pleɪs ə  
Sometimes the sound stops for a moment when I place a  
fʊl stɒp ɔ:r ə 'kɒmə.  
full stop or a comma.

ju: dəʊnt hɪə ðə nɔɪz ðen, bʌt ə tæp, 'envələʊpt ɪn  
You don't hear the noise then, but a tap, enveloped in  
'saɪləns. ɪn ðə tæp ju: kæn hɪə ðə 'reznəns ɒv ðə speɪs  
silence. In the tap you can hear the resonance of the space  
bɪ'ni:θ ðə 'sɜ:fɪs ɒn wɪtʃ ðə 'peɪpər ɪz 'laɪɪŋ.  
beneath the surface on which the paper is lying.

ði 'ɒnset ɒv ə nju: wɜ:d ɪz ə træn'zɪf(ə)n frəm 'hɒvəriŋ tu:  
The onset of a new word is a transition from hovering to  
'raɪtɪŋ. ðə tʌtʃ ɒv ðə pen ɒn 'peɪpə 'ju:ʒəli ə'kɔ:z  
writing. The touch of the pen on paper usually occurs  
frəm ən 'kɔ:lməʊst ,hɒrɪ'zɒntl 'mu:vmənt: ɪt ɪz æz ɪf ðə pen  
from an almost horizontal movement: it is as if the pen  
glɑɪdz daʊn 'ɒntə ðə 'sɜ:fɪs ɒv ðə 'peɪpə. jət ði 'ɒnset ɪz  
glides down onto the surface of the paper. Yet the onset is  
ə'kʌmpənɪd baɪ 'ekstrə 'preʃə, wɪtʃ meɪks ɪt mɔ:ɪr 'kɔ:dəbl  
accompanied by extra pressure, which makes it more audible  
ðæn ðə səʊnd ɒv ðə pen wɪtʃ 'sʌbsɪkwəntli 'fɒləʊz ɪts kɔ:rs  
than the sound of the pen which subsequently follows its course  
ə'krɒs ðə 'peɪpə wɪ'ðaʊt ɪntə'rʌpʃən, bʌt ɪt ɪz 'sɒftə ðæn  
across the paper without interruption, but it is softer than  
ðə səʊnd ɒv ə fʊl stɒp ɔ:r ə 'kɒmə, æt wɪtʃ ðə pen ɪg'zɜ:ts  
the sound of a full stop or a comma, at which the pen exerts  
ə ʃɔ:t lɪvd 'vɜ:tɪkəl 'preʃər æt wʌn pɔɪnt ɒn ðə 'peɪpə.  
a short lived vertical pressure at one point on the paper.

'ɔ:lsəʊ ðə 'dʒʌmpɪŋ ɒf ɔɪnt æt ði end ɒv ə wɜ:d, 'ɑ:ftə wɪtʃ  
 Also the jumping off point at the end of a word, after which  
 ðə pen ɪz ɔɪzɪd dʒʌst ə'blʌv ðə 'peɪpə bɪ'fɔ: 'geɪnɪŋ ɪn ðə  
 the pen is poised just above the paper before getting in the  
 raɪt pə'zɪʃən tu: stɑ:t ðə nekst wɜ:d, kæn 'ɔ:lsəʊ 'prɒdʒu:s  
 right position to start the next word, can also produce  
 sʌm mɔ: səʊnd, bɪ'kɒz ðen ə 'lɑ:dʒə 'mu:vmənt ɪz meɪd  
 some more sound, because then a larger movement is made  
 æt ə 'haɪə spi:d, dɪ'pendɪŋ ɒn ðə 'letə ðə wɜ:d endz ɪn.  
 at a higher speed, depending on the letter the word ends in.  
 ðə 'dʒʌmpɪŋ ɒf ɔɪnt æt ði end ɒv ə 'pærəgrɑ:f ɔ: ðə fʊl  
 The jumping off point at the end of a paragraph or the full  
 tekst ɪz 'ɒf(ə)n ə bɪt mɔ: flæm'bɔɪənt. ɪt ɪz ðə rɪ'li:s 'ɑ:ftə  
 text is often a bit more flamboyant. It is the release after  
 ði 'efət.  
 the effort.

θru: ðə mɔɪst wɔ:mθ ɒv maɪ hænd wɪtʃ rɛsts ɒn ðə  
 Through the moist warmth of my hand which rests on the  
 'peɪpə 'dʒɔəɪŋ 'raɪtɪŋ, 'dʒentl ʌndʒə'leɪʃənz stɑ:t tu: ə'pɪər  
 paper during writing, gentle undulations start to appear  
 ɪn ðə 'peɪpə. ɪn ði:z 'pleɪsɪz weə ðeər ɪz speɪs bɪ'twi:n  
 in the paper. In these places where there is space between  
 ðə 'peɪpər ænd ði ʌndə'laɪɪŋ 'sɜ:fɪs, ðə 'raɪtɪŋ ɔɪz  
 the paper and the underlying surface, the writing noise  
 kæn bi: 'dɪfrənt.  
 can be different.

wen aɪ raɪt wɪð maɪ 'faʊntɪn pen, aɪ pʊl ən ə'maʊnt ɒv  
 When I write with my fountain pen, I pull an amount of  
 ɪŋk ə'lɒŋ ə laɪn, fʊl ɒv lu:ps, 'æŋglz ænd weɪvz, ən'tɪl ɪt  
 ink along a line, full of loops, angles and waves, until it  
 fɔ:mz ə wɜ:d; 'raɪtɪŋ ɪz ðə 'leɪɪŋ daʊn ɒv ɪŋk-laɪnz ɪn ðə  
 forms a word; writing is the laying down of ink-lines in the  
 fɔ:m ɒv wɜ:dz.  
 form of words.

'sʌmtaɪmz waɪl 'raɪtɪŋ, dɪ'pɛndɪŋ ɒn ðə fɔ:l ɒv laɪt, aɪ siː  
Sometimes while writing, depending on the fall of light, I see  
ði ɪŋk-laɪn æz ə wɛt træk 'laɪn ɒn ðə 'peɪpə bɪ'kɒz ðiːz  
the ink-line as a wet track lying on the paper because these  
frɛʃ laɪnz, wɪtʃ aː 'daːkə ðæn ðə laɪnz ðæt ɔ:l'reɪdi hæv  
fresh lines, which are darker than the lines that already have  
bɪːn əb'sɔːbd baɪ ðə 'peɪpə, ʃəʊ 'veri faɪn glɔʊlɪhts.  
been absorbed by the paper, show very fine glowlights.  
wɛn aɪ stɑːt ɒn ə njuː wɜːd, ðə wɛt steɪt ɒv ðə 'fɔːmə wɜːd  
When I start on a new word, the wet state of the former word  
hæz 'juːʒʊəli ,dɪsə'pɪəd.  
has usually disappeared.

ə dɒt rɪ'meɪnz ə 'lɪtl 'lɒŋgə: ə drɒp wɪð ə glɔʊlɪht.

A dot remains a little longer: a drop with a glowlight.

ðə 'daːknɪs ɒv ði ɪŋk laɪnz 'flʌktjʊeɪts dɪ'pɛndɪŋ ɒn ðə  
The darkness of the ink lines fluctuates depending on the  
fləʊ wɪç dɪ'tɜːmɪnz ðə ,kɒnsən'treɪʃən ɒv ði ɪŋk, æz, ɪn  
flow wɪç dɛtɛrmins the concentration of the ink, as, in  
'ɔːdə tuː raɪt 'dɪfrənt 'lɛtəz, ðə pɛn meɪks 'muːvmənts  
order to write different letters, the pen makes movements  
ɪn 'veəriəbl spiːd. 'ɔːlsəʊ ðə weɪ 'lɛtəz kə'nekt ænd laɪnz  
in variable speed. Also the way letters connect and lines  
krɒs ɪtʃ 'ʌðər ɪz ,ɪnflʊ'ɛnʃəl ɪn ðə weɪ ði ɪŋk fləʊz.

cross each other is influential in the way the ink flows.

ðɪs ɪ'fɛkt ɪz 'klɪəli 'vɪzəbl æt ðə 'veri laːst 'sɛkʃən ɒv ðə  
This effect is clearly visible at the very last section of the  
laːst 'lɛtə ɒv ə wɜːd: ði ə'maʊnt ɒv ɪŋk wɪtʃ hæz fləʊd  
last letter of a word: the amount of ink which has flowed  
frɒm ðə pɛn ɒntə ðə 'peɪpə, 'kænɒt ðɛn sprɛd 'fɜːðər  
from the pen onto the paper, cannot then spread further  
'ɪntuː 'fɒləʊɪŋ 'lɛtəz ænd ə bɪld ʌp ɒv 'pɪgmənt ə'kɜːz.  
into following letters and a build up of pigment occurs.

'raɪtɪŋ ɪz ə 'kwaɪət ænd æt ðə seɪm taɪm 'restləs æk'tɪvɪti:  
Writing is a quiet and at the same time restless activity:  
ə 'rɪðəm kʌmz ə'baʊt θruː 'raɪtɪŋ ðæt hæz ə 'restfʊl  
a rhythm comes about through writing that has a restful  
ɪ'fekt, jət ɪt ɪz bɪlt ʌp aʊt ɒv 'meni 'kɒmplɪkeɪtɪd  
effect, yet it is built up out of many complicated  
'muːvmənts: wɪð iːtʃ njuː wɜːd, ðə pen bɪ'ɡɪnz ɒn ə ʃɔːt  
movements: with each new word, the pen begins on a short  
ɔː 'lɒŋgə ,hɒrɪ'zɒntl ,kɒnstə'leɪʃən ɒv laɪnz.  
or longer horizontal constellation of lines.

'sʌmtaɪmz ə wɜːd ɪz ʃɔːmd ɪn wʌn 'weɪvi 'muːvmənt,  
Sometimes a word is formed in one wavy movement,  
'sʌmtaɪmz ðə pen meɪks 'sevrəl 'ɒnsets ɪn wʌn wɜːd, ʃɔːr  
sometimes the pen makes several onsets in one word, for  
ɪg'zɑːmpl, ɪf dɒts ɔː 'dæʃɪz nɪːd tuː biː meɪd ɪn ðæt wɜːd.  
example, if dots or dashes need to be made in that word.  
ðə 'muːvmənt ɪz 'ɒf(ə)n mɔːr ɪn'tens ɪn wɜːdz ɪn wɪtʃ ə  
The movement is often more intense in words in which a  
luːp ɔːr ə stem ɪks'tend ə'blaɪ ɔː bɪ'ləʊ ðə 'mɪdl laɪn: ɪt  
loop or a stem extend above or below the middle line: it  
sɪːmz laɪk sʌtʃ ə 'dʒestʃə 'hæpənz wɪð ə 'ɡreɪtə spiːd ðæn  
seems like such a gesture happens with a greater speed than  
ɪn ðə kən'tɪnjuː(ː)ɪŋ laɪn ɪn ðə 'mɪdl 'eəriə.  
in the continuing line in the middle area.

'sʌmtaɪmz 'letəz ɑː ʃɔːmd wɪð 'ekstrə 'muːvmənts ðæt  
Sometimes letters are formed with extra movements that  
hæv nəʊ 'speʃəl 'fʌŋkʃən: ʃɔːr ɪnstəns, ɪn maɪ əʊn əʊz  
have no special function: for instance, in my own o's  
ænd dɪːz, aɪ meɪk səʊ 'meni 'juːslɪs 'muːvmənts ðæt ðɪ  
and d's, I make so many useless movements that the  
'əʊpənɪŋz ɒv ðɪːz 'letəz ɑː 'sʌmtaɪmz kəm'pliːtli fɪld ʌp  
openings of these letters are sometimes completely filled up  
wɪð 'kɜːli ɪŋk laɪnz.  
with curly ink lines.

ɔ:l in ɔ:l, it ɪz i:tʃ 'pɜ:snz əʊn 'hænd,raɪtɪŋ, dɪ'veləpt  
All in all, it is each person's own handwriting, developed  
'əʊvə jɪəz, wɪtʃ dɪ'tɜ:mɪnz ðə kəm'pleksɪti ɔ: 'flu(:)ənsi ɒv  
over years, which determines the complexity or fluency of  
ðə 'mu:vmənts ɒv ðə pen ɒn ðə 'peɪpə.  
the movements of the pen on the paper.

I do not know how long I spent at the Hotel Grafiet, but when I think back, it was one continuous conference, with lectures in the conference room, with discussions at the table, with the recurring main question: what are we actually doing here? How did we get here? What is the purpose?

Some seem to regard our stay as a highbrow version of an escape room or a programme like 'Who is the Mole?'. They are looking for tasks, hidden clues.

One day, for instance, Gary discovered an old pick-up record player next to the bar, one from the days of Edison himself, or probably a retro copy of one, the thing does, in any case, have a brass horn. The vinyl record on it is pressed in such a way that if you tilt it and let the light skim through the grooves, a text appears.

*Ceci n'est pas de hors-texte.*

What does it mean? What can we do with it? Clusters of interpretations fill the room. Eventually, a man in a plaid suit, wearing a hat, declares: 'Can we not just embrace each other's mis-interpretation? Has mis-interpretation not always been the hinge for art? In art, there is no consensus, only interpretation, a conversation based on disagreement and mis-interpretation.'

I still do not know what is expected of me. I remember my supermarket dream. Not only are the rows of groceries sentences – the groceries are messages! – in the end, everything is a sign. Everything is message. Symbol, parabola, hyperbola, metabola, pseudobola. We only lack the concentration – or is it the courage? – to probe their full depth, we lack the vantage point from which there might be a full stop in view, and therefore any meaning is provisional.

I hear them talking, speculating, my fellow sufferers, caught up in this society. What are we doing here? What

now? What does 'what' mean? Suspended meaning, provisional meaning, improvised meaning.

On the fourth floor, I hear them say, there is a man in language quarantine. He does not speak, read or write. Sometimes I think that is a liberating attitude. Silence sets one free.

I bet there is a bad bat under my bed. Sometimes I yearn for a language-free existence. How wonderful things would be if I were relieved of the task of speaking about it. Silent and insignificant as traces of meteorites in the atmosphere. The world without subtitles. Spontaneous life without interpretation. I bet there is a bad bat under my bed. Nothing to recount.

When we play the vinyl record, first we hear crackling, then someone talks. The group listens, as if to the voice of an alien.

**...There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot. Sounds occur whether intended or not; the psychological turning in direction of those not intended seems at first to be a giving up of everything that belongs to humanity. But one must see that humanity and nature, not separate, are in this world together, that nothing was lost when everything was given away...**

Words that only exist in Galician:

**Enexbre.** Something pure and authentic that should not be mixed with anything else.

**Luscofusco.** The moment the light is defeated by the darkness and the sky brightens through that struggle.

**Barallocas.** Someone who talks a lot, but only talks non sense.

**Trapallada.** Something badly made or done, without meaning or value.

**Saudade.** Just as in Portuguese, where it describes a mixture of feelings. Longing, distance, love, homesickness, melancholy. But none of these are exactly it.

Somewhere between lunch and dinner, I am sitting in the library poring over this list. I have been thinking about my contribution to this conference and want to do 'something' with my infrared words. Next to me, someone is reading along. He starts telling me about a researcher from London who once visited a tribe in Namibia that did not have a word for the colour blue. He had them point to that colour in a diagram full of green. They did not see it. They did have as many words for 'green' as Inuit had for 'snow', Dutch for 'rain' (and Venetians for 'alley'). Homer, in the *Odyssey*, speaks of a 'dark wine-coloured sea'. For a long time, the Japanese did not have a word for blue and could not distinguish it as a separate colour. It was simply one of the shades of green. You only start to see it when there is a word for it, he says. 'No one ever saw the mist above the Thames until Turner painted it.'

Only after he has left do I understand what he wants to teach me.

Language is no window.

For a long time, I believed that words were façades behind which meanings resided, animated by habitation. Perhaps that is not true, I am beginning to realise. Streets are the sentences, traffic lights the punctuation, yes, but life is not somewhere else. The meanings are not located somewhere past the sounds, not in a non-existent *jenseits* of signs.

All those voices, in the basement next to the printing presses, in the conference room, in the corridors, barralocas, gibberish, rhubarb, barralocas, gibberish, rhubarb, barralocas, rhubarb, rhubarb, barralocas.

'George Orwell', I say, and a silence falls, as if I am detonating a bomb. The hole in the language is just round enough to jump into. George Orwell saw language as a window and himself as a window cleaner. If you formulated pure once, you automatically acquired a clear way of thinking. Sloppy writing makes for sloppy thinking. Right through the spotless language, you saw reality tangibly displayed there, like in a museum display case: come on in. Come and attach your words to it, like labels.

'It has always amazed me how a great thinker like Orwell could be so wrong. Reality arises in language. New speak is not a laughing mirror on the display case, it is a direct manipulation of the objects that do not exist outside language. Reality does not lie ready behind glass, ready to be labelled. Mountains, pens, molecules, lettuce puffs and moonlight, maybe, yes, those (and even that I doubt a little), but 'democracy', 'human rights', 'one-and-a-half-metre society', 'justice', 'audio-active decay': you will not find them in any showcase, they only exist in that glass that is not glass but water, that we share as excited swimmers do with the sparkling bathwater.'

There you have it. Flaubert wrote that he wanted to slam novels in the face of humanity, and I have thrown some of my ideas at the group here, and they can take it from there. Barralocas.

They seize it. They put their brains and tongues into it. They overrun it with comments and interpretations, the whole proliferation of verbosity, footnotes. I absorb it like a sponge, just as I absorb language like a sponge every week and squeeze it out through the radio, the concentrate, the quintessence of their verbal secretions. Barralocas rhubarb Jesus sets you free.

They are trapped in their stories, and sometimes I am willing to acknowledge that with compassion, like a carillon in a church tower, hammering the chimes of my letters.

PURE POEM NO. 1450

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II III II I III I I III I III III I II II II III I III

At least three times a day, I walk past the small room of the man in language quarantine. My room is in the same wing. Sometimes, with bated breath, I stand at the door and listen. Perhaps in the vague hope of catching him in the act of clandestine language consumption. Maybe to feel or absorb something from this language-free universe.

Today, in the corridor, I end up in a conversation with a man who is hanging Mondrian paintings. Copies, I say. But the man, who introduces himself as Goran, says he has no idea. 'I am just the handyman', he apologises. But I know one of the guests knows more of this. I am left alone with the works for a few minutes, until he returns with the man who introduced himself earlier as Walter Benjamin.

'They are indeed original works', he says. 'In a certain sense, they actually have more value than the Mondrian works that were created during the lifetime of Mondrian.' He explains, although I do not quite understand. In the middle of his lecture, the door suddenly swings open.

For the first time, we see the man without language, as Kafka's hunger artist, with a halo of silence around him. We ourselves immediately fall silent, as if we are disturbing him. He looks at us penetratingly, as if reading us, then smiles and goes back. Even his door closes without a sound.

Of course, Walter no longer remembers where he had been interrupted. The language slipped from his grasp. So I start speaking.

Once, on a winter's night two years ago, the swimming pool in Monster where my children both got their diplomas burnt down. I did not really believe it. I had never seen water burn. But it was true. A soft-drink machine had started fuming and had been left unattended

by an employee, only the plug had been pulled, setting off a chain reaction of explosions.

We found out that the new swimming pool was ready in the 'Jeugdjournaal' (news for young people), in an item about slides. The following day we went there for the first time. The same layout, a bit tighter, a bit less messy, less playful. Slide, hot tub, rapids, diving board: everything was in the same location. Anyone who gets the chance to start afresh, blankly, from scratch, prefers recreating what they are familiar with.

'It was a replica', says Walter. 'A memory, a copy, that will always carry an additional layer of meaning, that of nostalgia for the burnt original.'

I explain to him that even the entrance gates and the checkout are in the same place. As were the vending machines with toys, from which the children were always allowed to get something if they were allowed to go to the next pool or if they had obtained a diploma.

There was only one thing missing. A new soft-drink machine.

That makes Walter laugh. He talks about Jean Cocteau. He was once asked a variation on the desert island question. Mr Cocteau, if your house were on fire and you could take one thing with you, what would it be? To which he replied, firmly and decisively: 'The fire!'

We laugh, and linger a bit at the works of Mondrian in the corridor. Perhaps we are waiting to see if the man in language quarantine comes out, as if we were fishermen trying to lure him with silence on our rods. But he no longer appears. Just before I walk through, Walter gives me a book. I read it in my room.

# REMEMBERING A MONDRIAN



*Copies are memories.*

*Exhibition could establish a theoretical  
platform no text can.*

**Walter Benjamin, *Recent Writings***



The theme of this story came from the *Composition II* painted by Piet Mondrian in Paris 1929 that is in the National Museum in Belgrade and its copy painted by me in 1983 in the same museum, but it is initiated by the numerous copies of the same painting I began making recently. Although in its epicenter is a work of art by one of the most important artists of the 20th century, the story itself has very little to do with Mondrian or art and art history. It is rather a reflection on remembering personal past and a way memories can be produced and actualized through a story built around this particular painting. At the same time, it shows how what is made as a work of art could change its meaning and role and become something else depending on the story in which it appears, in this case a living souvenir of my memories.



Fig 01  
"Fragments",  
apartment exhibition,  
Belgrade,  
August 2020 - February 2021

Recently, when I went to check the current state of the ongoing apartment exhibition "Fragments" installed in August 2020, a patchwork of memories on various stories and themes I was involved in, in one way or another, on one of the neighboring streets I noticed a horse cart full of various junk items including two desktop monitors.



Fig 02  
Street scene with horse cart,  
Belgrade (Zemun), February 2021

Fig 02a  
Street scene with horse cart,  
Belgrade (Zemun),  
February 2021



A few days later, with some sense of nostalgia, I decided to look for one that was in working condition. It took me almost a month to finally find one very nice model. However, it so happened that, while moving around this heavy piece of equipment, at some point it suddenly slipped from the armchair where I had put it just for a moment, and fell on the floor. It didn't look broken but when I plugged it in, I heard just a buzzing noise while the screen was black. I knew it was damaged and

decided to open it, hoping it could be repaired. However, when I removed the cover I noticed that the narrow end of the glass tube was broken.

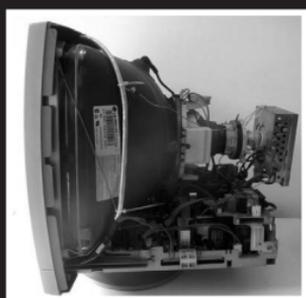


Fig 03  
Broken CRT computer monitor,  
May 2021

I realized that this impressive piece of equipment was beyond repair. While becoming a bit saddened, I began noticing a complexity and sophistication of this now ancient product of computer technology hidden under the monitor cover and didn't like the idea that it should be thrown away. Then, a thought crossed my mind: why don't I use it in some different way. Recently, I have been making copies of a particular Mondrian painting on various surfaces. Thought perhaps I could paint one version on the monitor's screen. Since it was smaller than the painting, I decided to reproduce just a part of it that would fit on the screen, painted in a pointillist manner. And this is what I did.

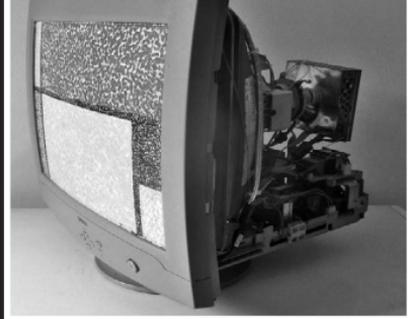


Fig 04  
Fragment of the *Composition II* painted on the screen of broken CRT monitor, May 2021

This also reminded me of my MIT years when I wrote simple programs that would generate copies of well-known works of abstract art as computer graphics. These images generated in this way would appear on a special separate computer screen called the "frame buffer" with resolution 640×480 pixels. This was part of my "Electronic Gallery" project which interestingly later that year even received the MIT Council for the Arts award of \$950.

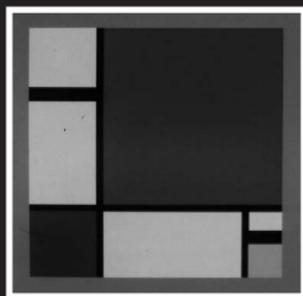


Fig 05  
Computer generated copy of Mondrian, Arch-Mach, MIT Cambridge 1983

When in 1980 I started copying "Harbingers of the Apocalypse", it was in my mind an absurd gesture since I thought that copying a worthless painting is in essence a senseless act. Then, after some time, I begin realizing that copying Harbingers is not entirely a senseless endeavor,

that copy is not always a trivial picture.



Fig 06  
Harbingers of Apocalypse, original and copy, 1980-81 (installation from City Gallery Ljubljana 2013)

On the contrary, I became aware that a copy, although formally the same as the original, is a product of a dif-

ferent intention and thus represents a very different idea. In a way, copy has at least two layers of meaning, one of the original and another of the copy, while the original has only one.

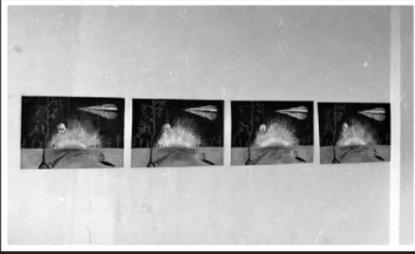


Fig 07  
Harbingers of the Apocalypse, original  
and copies, apartment exhibition,  
Belgrade 1980

Thus, if an original of "Harbingers" is worthless, its copies are most likely not. But in some strange twist, when copies became important, they implicitly gave a new value to the original, and thus, the worthless original now began to gain some importance as well. To paraphrase Benjamin, by making a copy we remember the original. Each new copy is like a renewed memory and it can play, not only one role (like in art history) but different roles in different stories, both physically (on display) and symbolically (in a narrative). The earliest interpretation of Mondrian that I remember is this 1972 "translation" of one of its color compositions into a monochromatic structure that came out of my "visual exploration" and has no relation to copy as a theme.

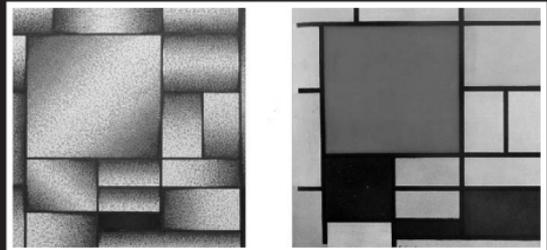
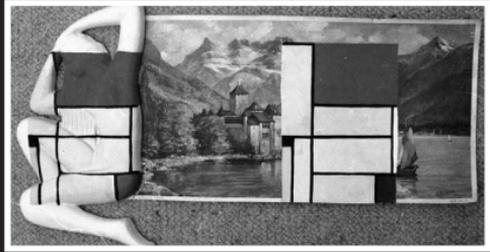


Fig 08  
"Cubist" interpretation of  
Mondrian Composition,  
Belgrade 1972

A decade later when I became interested in copy and copying, in addition to Harbingers I also did numerous copies of modern/abstract art, usually over some already existing reproduction as its background.

Fig 09  
Two copies of Mondrian,  
Belgrade 1980



Among those were a number of Mondrian's like these early ones from 1980-82. Unlike the early copies of Harbingers, these copies from modern art were usually smaller than the originals, implicitly recognizing that copy is a "different animal" than the original. While an original stands for itself, copy is its representation, thus having the properties of a symbol. And in case of a symbol, its dimensions are often of secondary importance.



Fig 10  
PM copy, 1980



Fig 11  
Two copies of Mondrian (Nike),  
Belgrade 1981



Fig 12  
Two copies of Mondrian,  
Belgrade 1982



Fig 13  
PM copy,  
Belgrade 1982

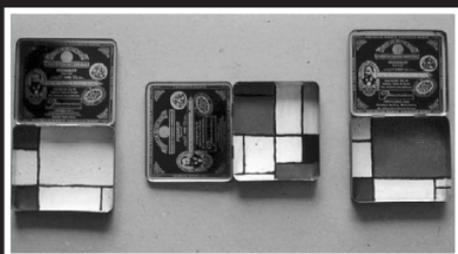


Fig 14  
PM three copies,  
cigarette boxes, 1982

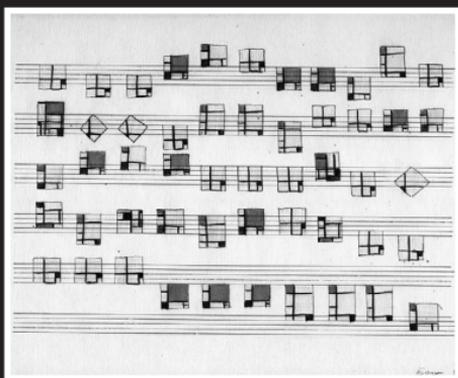
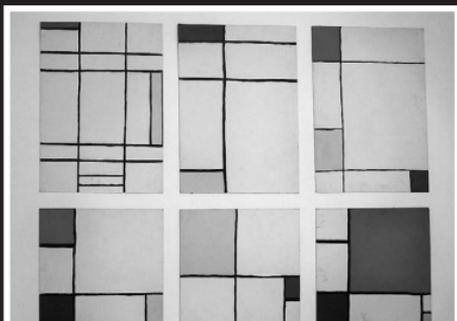


Fig 15  
Mondrian composition,  
Belgrade 1982

These straightforward copies on cardboard are from a series of "bad paintings", intentionally painted in a clumsy and unprofessional way.

Fig 16  
PM six bad copies,  
Belgrade 1982



When in 1982 I came to the US, I continued making copies on various backgrounds like these two versions of the same Mondrian in the context of different framed pictures.



Fig 17  
PM copy (with photograph),  
New York 1982



Fig 18  
PM copy (with Duchamp),  
New York 1982

Within this "Parisian" street scene which I found at a Cambridge yard sale, Mondrian appears as a mural. An interesting detail regarding this painting is its signature. It seems to be three letter initials "IME" that in my first language (Serbo-Croatian) reads "NAME". As if it somehow anticipated questions regarding the identity and authorship in relation to copy that I became aware of a couple of years later. And Name sounds like an interesting pseudonym which, for some reason, I never used.



Fig 19  
Mondrian mural,  
Cambridge 1983



Fig 19a  
Mondrian mural (detail),  
Cambridge 1983

Although, while in the US I was staying in Cambridge, from time to time I would travel to NY and spend a few days at Tom Otterness' studio. This is how these copies of Mondrian came about which at some point in March 1983 I took to Washington DC for the exhibition "The Ritz" organized by Colab NY an WPA -Washington in an abundant hotel. While there, I managed to paint a Mondrian mural on one of the hotel corridor walls.

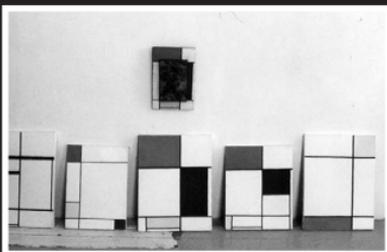


Fig 20  
Tom Otterness' studio,  
New York 1983



Fig 21  
"The Ritz", group exhibition,  
Washington DC 1983



Fig 22  
"The Ritz",  
group exhibition,  
Washington DC 1983

As mentioned in the beginning, during my Computer Graphics course at MIT, as part of my project "Electronic I wrote programs that would generate well-known abstract works like this Mondrian triptych. Interestingly, I found this Polaroid photo of the identical series but made as real, physical paintings, most likely on wood panel. Now I am not sure which came first.

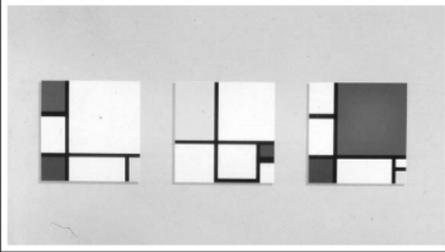


Fig 23  
PM three electronic copies,  
Arch-Mach, MIT Cambridge 1983

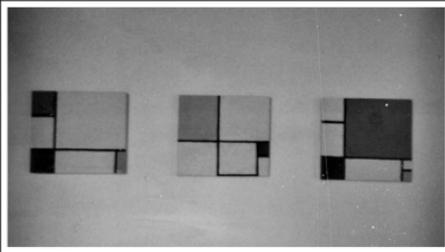


Fig 24  
PM three painted copies,  
Polaroid photo, Cambridge 1983

While staying at Tom's studio, I would also make copies on plaster casts of his work like these three shown here.



After posting the story, I got this note from Tom:

Fig 25  
Tom Otterness' studio,  
New York 1984

*"I have just resurfaced after a long journey down a rabbit hole in my phone. It was full of memories and artifacts. Hard to tell which were less real than the other. Flattered to be included in this wobbly world of my most recent neural reconstructions. Loved seeing Mondrian in Stanton St... I'm left looking in the wrong end of the telescope of our past lives together. Really not a bad view in any case. Also loved your pic of the horse and wagon. I saw a donkey harnessed up to the rear end of a pickup truck in Mexico on a trip in the 80s."*

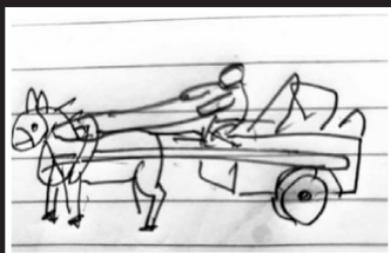


Fig 25a  
Tom Otterness drawing,  
New York 2021

Interestingly, these days going through some paper left-overs I noticed this piece of café napkin from our lunch together a couple of years ago. Who knows why I saved it, except to be used in this story.



Fig 25b  
Café Sabarsky paper napkin,  
fragment,  
New York 2018

From the beginning, the main source for all these copies of modern art were reproductions from books and catalogs. In essence, these were copies of reproductions. However, when three years later I did a public demonstration "how to copy Mondrian" in the National Museum in Belgrade, it was the first copy after Harbingers I did standing in front of the original and my first copy of modern work of art painted in this way. I was told that first I had to write a letter to the museum director to get permission to do a copy. After getting a positive reply, on Dec. 23 1983 I came to the museum with all the necessary equipment. According to the permission,

dimensions of my copy could not be the same as the original (45x45cm). So I got the 44x44cm stretcher and then my friend Raša Todosijević, who was a more experienced painter, helped me to stretch on it a kitchen towel (instead of regular canvas), which I then painted with white. I don't remember why I didn't use regular canvas. Probably the towel was simply at hand and was the right size. On the day of the event, a few of my friends came to watch and Slobodan Mijušković brought some of his art history students to what became a public demonstration "How to Copy Mondrian". It is perhaps worth mentioning that my decision to copy Mondrian publicly had nothing to do with this particular painting. It so happened that it was this Mondrian that was in the Belgrade Museum collection and displayed publicly. In fact, it could have been any other abstract painting that would make obvious the absurdity of copying it.

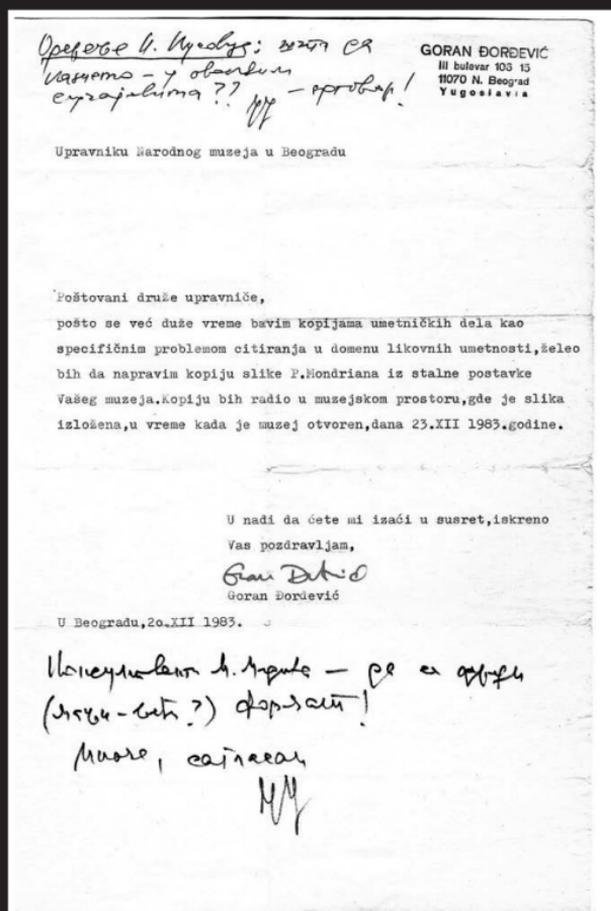


Fig 26  
 Letter for  
 permission to  
 copy Mondrian,  
 Belgrade 1983

Fig 27  
How to copy Mondrian,  
public demonstration,  
day 1, December 23, 1983



Fig 28  
How to copy Mondrian,  
public demonstration,  
day 1, December 23, 1983



Fig 28a  
How to copy Mondrian,  
public demonstration,  
day 1, December 23, 1983

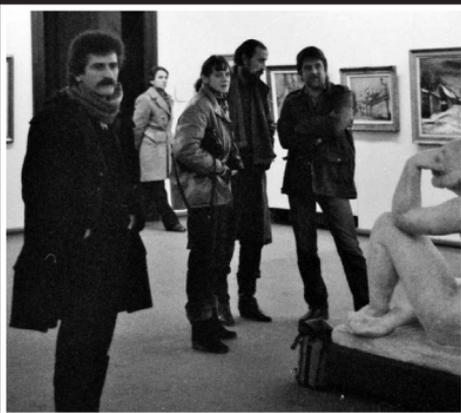


Fig 29  
How to copy Mondrian,  
public demonstration,  
day 2, December 24, 1983



Since I didn't finish the painting that day, I had to come back the next morning. This time there was nobody there to watch except the museum guard. At some point when I was finally finishing the painting, the guard came to me to take a closer look. He was curious why of all these more interesting paintings in the room I selected to copy this simplest one. I didn't know what to say and answered that I happened to be a beginner, with not much experience in painting and decided to start to learn with this one. He nodded with sympathy and gave me a friendly tap on my shoulder. This might have been a "wise guy" reply, but in essence it was true, back then I was pretty much an inexperienced painter, in other words – an amateur.



Fig 30  
How to copy Mondrian,  
public demonstration,  
day 2, December 24, 1983

Only a few days later, this painting was exhibited for the first time. It was included in the exhibition "Copies" organized by Mladen Stilinović at the PM Gallery in Zagreb.

Fig 31  
Exhibition "Copies",  
handwritten invitation  
by Mladen Stilinović,  
PM Gallery,  
Zagreb January 6, 1984

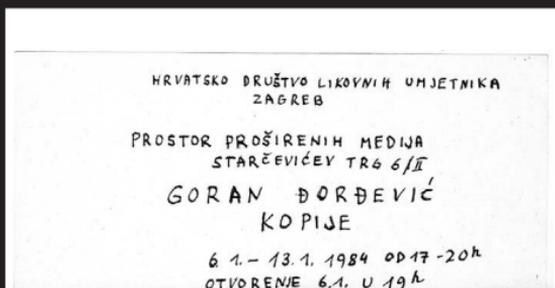


Fig 31a  
Exhibition "Copies",  
PM Gallery,  
Zagreb 1984  
(Mladen Stilinović)

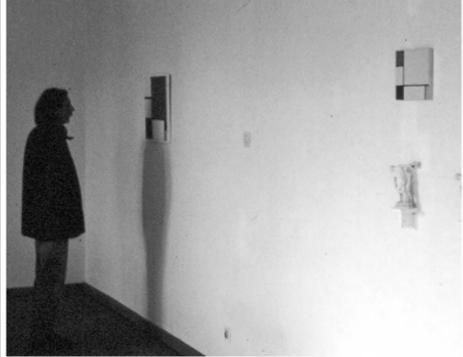


Fig 32  
Exhibition "Copies",  
PM Gallery, Zagreb 1984

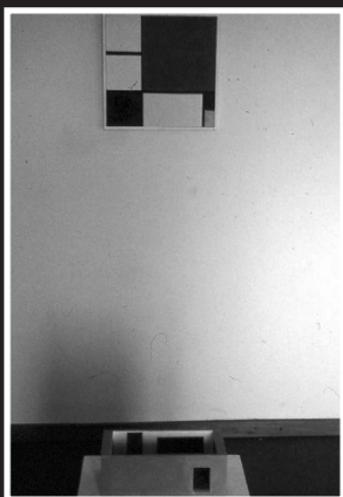
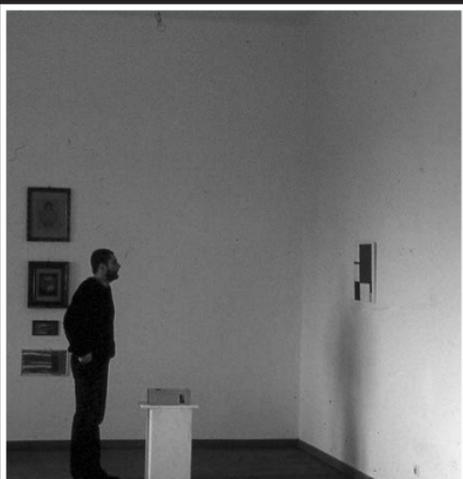


Fig 33a  
Exhibition "Copies",  
press announcement,  
PM Gallery, Zagreb 1984

Fig 33  
Exhibition "Copies",  
PM Gallery, Zagreb 1984



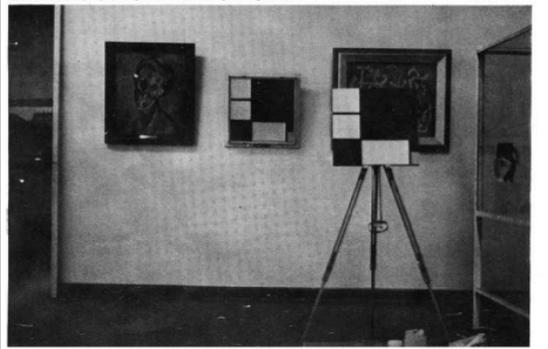
Fig 34  
Exhibition "Copies",  
PM Gallery,  
Zagreb 1984  
(Željko Kipke)





Još uvijek sam bio uvjeren u konačnu pobjedu kulturne "šlave umjetnosti" nad Tradicijom, Akademijom, Institucijom, Estetikom. Vre-  
menje umjetnosti svedene na isti format i istu tehniku, i to su greve kopije koje sam uradio. Po-  
sebo sam je bilo zanimljivo kopiranje radova iz  
reprodukcija imenitenih medija kopije su posredstvom  
ne. Čak mi se da postoji više kopija ne bi trebalo  
primijetiti kao originala.

Oran Dordvil, *Kopiranje Mondriana u Narodnom muzeju u Beogradu, 1983.*



Present state of the 1983 copy is far from perfect. There are visible cracks on the canvas and on the frame, while

on the back side are visible dark spots most likely from fungus.

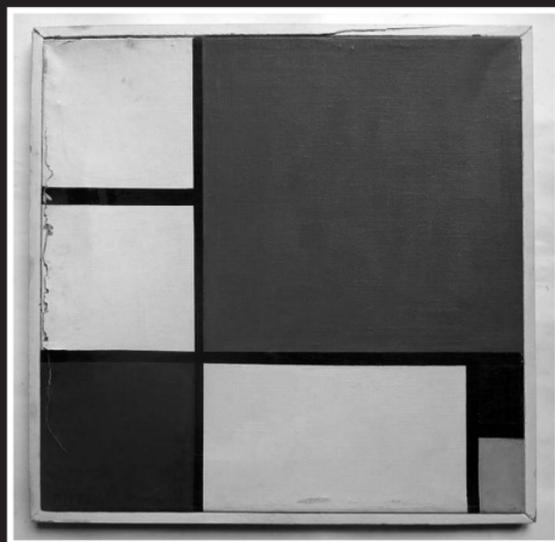


Fig 37  
*Composition II,*  
copy (front),  
Belgrade 1983,  
photo 2021

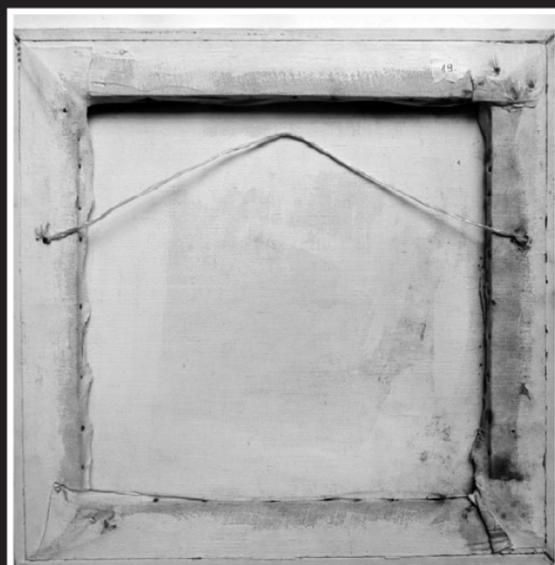


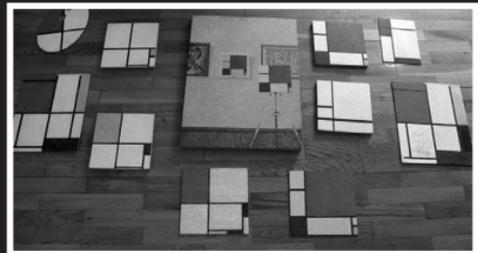
Fig 38  
*Composition II,*  
copy (back),  
Belgrade 1983,  
photo 2021

However, for me a bit puzzling is its signature: PM '83. On the original are the same initials but the year is '29. On the other hand, this painting was painted in 1983, thus '83 would make sense, but I couldn't find my signature even on the back, although I had painted it. And, as far as I remember, copies of Mondrian signed with his initials but dated after his death for the first time appeared in 1986 at the Walter Benjamin's lecture "Mondrian '63-'96" on which there were not one but two copies of the *Composition II*. Today I do not remember if I landed this copy for the lecture or both those copies were produced by someone later for the lecture as the other four.

Fig 39  
*Composition II*,  
copy (front-detail),  
Belgrade 1983,  
photo 2021



Fig 40  
Pointillist copies of Mondrian,  
Belgrade 1984-85



When I finally left the US that year (1984), I took with me some of the works including the Mondrian mural. A couple of years later, I got a phone call from Tom. He told me that he had had his first major sale and that in cases like this it is a custom to use a fraction of what he got to buy works from friends. And then he told me he would like the Mondrian mural for \$1500, but that I should bring it to him in person. This was his way of inviting me to come to NY and this is what I did and I spent a couple of months there in the fall of 1987.



Fig 41  
In Tom Otterness' studio  
with Mondrian Mural,  
New York 1987

Before leaving for NY, I decided to make a copy of this painting. Now it was not only the Mondrian that I copied but the entire street scene. When I got back from the NY, I made a larger version of the same painting.



Fig 42  
Belgrade apartment,  
living room, 1987

It is in front of this larger version of the Mondrian mural that this group portrait of members of the Laibach group and my daughter Luna was taken. They were in Belgrade for a concert and came (on a public bus) to New Belgrade for a visit. An interesting footnote regarding this photo. After I picked-up this and other pictures at the photo shop, I went to a nearby supermarket and incidentally forgot the envelope with the photos at the checkout. When I came back and asked the cashier for the envelope, she appeared a bit nervous and called the manager. Soon after, he came holding the envelope and accompanied by a policeman. I was then escorted outside on the street and questioned by a couple of po-

licemen about the photos and my identity. In the end, they handed me back the envelope. Looking at this picture today, I could see why it would have been unusual to a cashier or policemen, since it looks a bit strange to me as well.



Fig 43  
Members of Laibach group  
with Luna in front of  
Mondrian Mural (3rd version),  
Belgrade apartment, 1987

And, unlike the copies of Harbingers, back then it didn't cross my mind that my copy of Mondrian would ever be more important than the original. Even when a copy of this same painting but signed with Mondrian's initials but dated long after his death began to appear since 1986 in Benjamin's lectures and various exhibitions. Probably the most interesting one was in the National Museum when the 1929 original, my copy from 1983 and copies from Benjamin's lecture appeared together in 2014 in the same exhibition.

Galerija ŠKUC in Marksistični center CK ZKS  
vabita na predavanje iz cikla  
" Umetnost ob koncu tisočletja "

Walter Benjamin: " Mondrian '63 - '96 "

Ponedeljek, 2.6.1986 ob 17. uri v Cankarjevem domu  
(Sejna dvorana E 1. Vstop prost)

Fig 44  
Walter Benjamin  
"Mondrian '63-'95" lecture,  
invitation card (back),  
Cankarjev dom,  
Ljubljana 1986

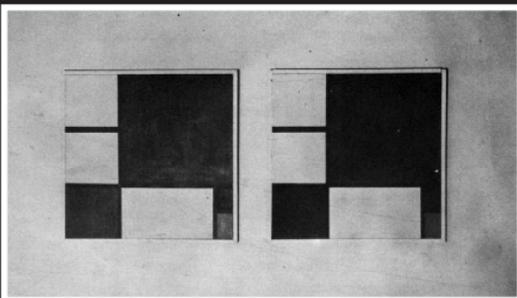


Fig 44a  
Walter Benjamin  
"Mondrian '63-'95" lecture,  
invitation card (front)  
Cankarjev dom,  
Ljubljana 1986



Fig 45  
Walter Benjamin  
"Mondrian '63-'95" lecture,  
Cankarjev dom,  
Ljubljana 1986

Since I was in the audience at the 1986 Ljubljana lecture, I took some pictures that were later often reproduced, while I saw the 1987 lecture in Belgrade when it was broadcast in the cultural program "TV Gallery". Interestingly, I just learned that the most recent Benjamin's lecture took place in the Garage Museum in June 2021.



Fig 46  
Walter Benjamin  
"Mondrian '63-'95" lecture,  
TV Gallery, Belgrade 1987

And this was a recent invitation to Benjamin from Moscow:

*Mr. Walter Benjamin,  
On behalf of Garage Museum of Contemporary Art Academic programs, we invite you to give a lecture titled "Mondrian '63-'96" on 18th of June 2021 at the educational center of the museum. Our teacher and curator of Garage MCA Snejana Krasteva has offered to hold a meeting with you as part of the final lesson on exhibition activities. The students of our curatorial master program will be happy to see you as a guest and listen to your thoughts on the nature of copy in art history.*

*Garage Museum of Contemporary Art Academic programs is an innovative educational system for future curators, art managers, artists and other professionals of cultural and creative field in Russia and abroad. "Curatorial practices in contemporary art" master program is aimed at developing theoretical knowledge and practical skills among students, inter-institutional and international cooperation, increasing work ethics and educational potential.*

*It is important for us to organize events and lessons with outstanding experts like you, so we will be glad if you will agree to come to us and show such an honor. Hope that meeting young professionals will be interesting for you too.*

**Team of Garage Museum of Contemporary Art Academic programs, 10.06.2021 Moscow**



Fig 47  
Walter Benjamin  
"Mondrian '63-'95" lecture,  
Garage Museum,  
Moscow 2021

**In addition to the Benjamin's lecture, these strange copies of Mondrian appeared at numerous exhibitions beginning with "International Exhibition of Modern Art" reinterpreting the 1913 Armory Show. It took place 1986 in the Salon of the MoCAB, in Belgrade and ŠKUC gallery in Ljubljana, although on the catalogs and invitation cards it is printed "New York 1993".**





NEW YORK

1993

# INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION OF MODERN ART

Fig 48

"International Exhibition of Modern Art, New York 1993", catalog, Salon of the MoCAB, Belgrade 1986



Fig 49

"International Exhibition of Modern Art, New York 1993", installation view, Salon of the MoCAB, Belgrade 1986

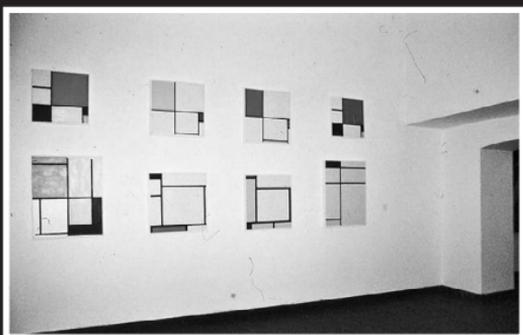


Fig 50

"International Exhibition of Modern Art, New York 1993", installation view, SKUC Gallery, Ljubljana 1986

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LISTINGS

## VOICE C

cosseted corsets, are the catchiest, but Lisa Bowman's hardcore boxes and Letraest soaps, Julia Kidd's child abuse triptychs, Gary Bachman's clapping wall piece, Alix Pearlstein's airbags, and Candyso's video make their points too. Through February 15, fiction/nonfiction, 21 Mercer Street, 941-8611. (Levin)

→ **"MONDRIAN '63-'96":** Authoritessness strikes again. According to the announcement, Katherine Dreier will lecture at the opening of this exhibition of posthumous time-traveling Mondrians at 7 p.m. on February 13. Really? Let's just say it could be a posthistoric occasion. February 13 through 22, AC-Project Room, 580 Broadway, at Prince Street, 226-7271. (Levin)

## Dance

**FELD BALLETS/NY:** Feld opens his five-

**"THE NEW GHETTO ESTHETIC":** A lecture by Jacquie Jones, editor of *Black Film Review*, precedes two prime examples—the West Coast *Boyz n the Hood* and its East Coast analogue, *Straight Out of Brooklyn*. February 16, American Museum of the Moving Image, Thirty-fifth Avenue at 36th Street, Astoria, 718-784-0077. (Hoberman)

**WILD RIVER:** The ever-agonized Montgomery Clift brings New Deal idealism to an obscure region of Tennessee in Elia Kazan's curiously underappreciated, unaccountably wide-screen and technicolor saga of the TVA. Released in 1960, the movie carries intimations of the New Frontier as well. Lee Remick gives Clift's ambivalence some focus. February 15, Walter Reade Theater, 165 West 65th Street, 875-5600. (Hoberman)

## Music

Fig 51

"Mondrian '63-'96", by Kim Levin, Voice Choices, Village Voice New York 1992

After reading the article, Kim Levin e-mailed me this: "...your Remembering Mondrian is wonderful! It's an autobiography, a shaggy dog story, a terrific and inclusive expose of your work and Mondrian's and Benjamin's posthumous careers. I loved reading it and ended up with a smile on my face without realizing it. I think you should send it to everyone and every institution who owns or has exhibited your work, from the Whitney on. It's the ultimate post-pandemic Mondrian tale."

Fig 52  
"Mondrian '63-'96",  
AC-Project Room,  
New York 1992



Fig 53  
"Sense of Order",  
group exhibition participants,  
curated by Zdenka Badovinac,  
Modern Gallery, Ljubljana 1996



Fig 54  
"What is Modern Art?",  
Künstlerhaus Bethanien,  
Berlin 2006

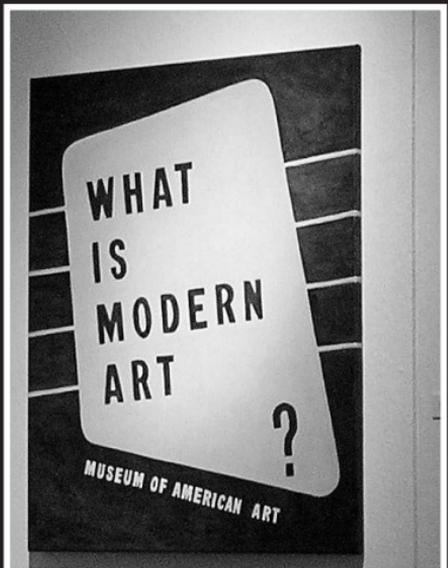




Fig 55  
Piet Mondrian – “Recent Works”,  
part of the WMA? exhibition,  
Galerie 35, Berlin 2006

Appearances of these copies of Mondrian, signed with his initials and dated after his death are very unusual events in many ways. It is clear that they came after my public copying of Mondrian and in this series are included not one but two copies of the same painting as noticed by Benjamin in the lecture. There were even open or implicit associations of my name with these paintings. Back then and now, I would say that associating any other name than Mondrian with these paintings would change their basic propositions. They should be accepted and interpreted the way they appear in public and in the primary documents. They definitely represent a *freak occurrence* as my friend Kim Levin would say. Even today, I have no clear understanding what might be all the interpretations and consequences of these kinds of phenomena. But one thing is clear, those works do not

and could not belong to a story called Art History.



Fig 56  
“Art in the Age of  
Intellectual Property”,  
HMKW, Dortmund 2008



Fig 57  
Benjamin-Mondrian at  
“Lecture Performance”,  
Kölnischer Kunstverein,  
Köln 2009



Fig 58  
Benjamin-Mondrian  
at "Lecture Performance",  
Kuća legata, Belgrade 2010

Throughout this period of the 1990s and early 2000, it seems the only Mondrians exhibited in public were those signed with his name and dated after his death. A kind of painting that for the first time appeared as a theme in the Walter Benjamin's lecture in Ljubljana 1986. Perhaps it would be worth mentioning here the 2000 exhibition Aspects/Positions at which these Mondrian paintings were also exhibited. What makes this exhibition interesting is the only case that I know of where to the name of Mondrian my name was added as well, both on the label next to the works and in the catalog.



Fig 59  
"Fifty Years of Art in Central Europe 1949-1999",  
Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung  
Ludwig, Wien 2000

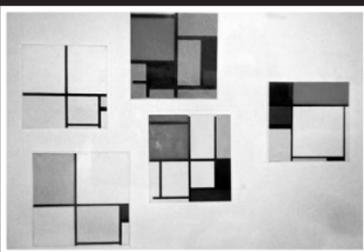


Fig 60  
Piet Mondrian at the  
"Fifty Years of Art in Central  
Europe 1949-1999", Museum  
moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig,  
Wien 2000

Fig 60a  
Piet Mondrian at the  
"Fifty Years of Art in Central  
Europe 1949-1999", labels,  
Museum moderner Kunst  
Stiftung Ludwig, Wien 2000



The catalog illustration is particularly interesting, since it says: Piet Mondrian (Goran Dordević) – *Komposition* 1971. This is most likely the year written on the canvas, and by adding my name to the label it gives confusing information since I began making copies eight years later (1979).

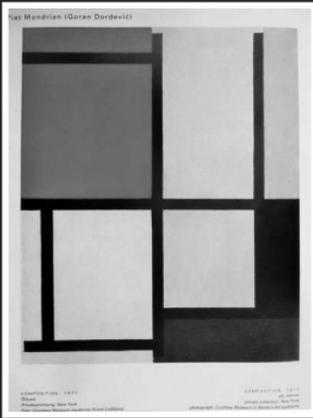


Fig 61  
Piet Mondrian at the  
"Fifty Years of Art in  
Central Europe 1949–1999",  
catalog page,  
Museum moderner Kunst  
Stiftung Ludwig, Wien 2000

As already mentioned above, exhibiting paintings dated after the death of its author is a pretty complicating issue. And on top of that, having a lecturer appearing many years after his death talking about these kind of paintings makes things even more confusing. Including them within a story such as Art History, based on uniqueness of its characters and artifact, is not possible. However, it might make some sense if these kinds of events are understood as having certain properties characteristic of the theater. While a character, like Benjamin, could be this way handled easier it is a bit more complicated for the artifacts/paintings, since it seems there is no precedent for cases like this as Benjamin already noticed in his lecture. The entire construction of museum and history would collapse. Since such paintings could not be included in such a story, there are two options for them. Either never show them in public or find another kind of a story, not based on uniqueness and originality, in which they will make sense and could play a certain role. Anybody can make a copy for various reasons: substitution for an original, forgery, learning to paint, or one of these Mondrian paintings dated after his death, and in each of these cases it will play its specific role. In the case of Mondrian, and for that matter

any work that is placed in the art history context, the meaningful date that could be attached to it should not be what is written on it, but its first public appearance. Also, if it doesn't make sense to attach the notion of an author to a copy, it is still possible for a copy to have the notion of ownership attached to it. The work itself as a physical object could belong to someone and be an object of transaction as a gift or commercially.



Fig 62  
Chelsea flea market,  
New York 1990's

At this point, I thought I should mention another, very strange episode related to Mondrian during my time in New York in the 1990s. During those years, I would regularly go to Chelsea flea markets around 6th Avenue and 25th St. One Saturday morning in May 1994 while browsing through the market, on one vendor's table I noticed a small, framed aquarelle portrait of a serious looking man with a mustache and wearing glasses. Even



through the glass, I could see it was not a reproduction.

Fig 62  
Mondrian self-portrait (?)  
Chelsea flea market,  
New York 1994

My first thought was: who would like to have such a serious face on the wall? But then the word "self-portrait" crossed my mind, since in previous years I was interested in self-portraits and, as Adrian Kovacs, did some myself. While looking particularly at his eyes, a possibility that this could be a self-portrait appeared quite convincing to me. I managed to negotiate the price and

got it for \$20. While continuing walking through the market, I kept thinking whose self-portrait might be the picture I was carrying in the plastic bag.



Fig 62  
Mondrian watercolor self-portrait (?),  
found at Chelsea flea market,  
New York 1994

At some point, the name Mondrian appeared in my head. In fact, this was the only name that kept coming to my mind although at that point I didn't remember seeing his photo with a mustache. Of course, at first I dismissed it as a pure fantasy, since the very idea seemed impossible to me. Even if this was Mondrian's self-portrait, I could not imagine that of all the people in the world it could come into my hands. During the next few days, after going through some Mondrian monographs, seeing

his pictures with a mustache, I gradually became convinced that this was indeed a Mondrian's self-portrait.



Fig 63  
"Fragments", apartment exhibition,  
Belgrade 2020

Then, for more than a year and after numerous letters and faxes, I was unsuccessfully trying to find someone that would agree with me. When I finally realized that this was becoming a failed endeavor, I gave up. For the

next few years, I kept it safe in the bank, but then it became too expensive and I took it with me. Today, twenty five years later nothing has changed. Nevertheless, now more than ever, I think this is indeed Mondrian's watercolor self-portrait painted on paper without a previous pencil sketch, probably around the early 1920s. Since I am so far the only one who sees this, it might sound crazy, but I started believing that it was in fact meant only for me, either as a gift or a warning for everything I was doing with his work. In any case, all these years I have kept it safe in a folder and have occasionally looked at it. The only time it was included in an exhibition was the ongoing "Fragments", where it was hanging above the doorway, although not a watercolor but a color photo-copy from the time I found it, placed in its original frame. Regardless of whether I am right or wrong, I thought I owe him at least to tell this story and show the

picture.

Now, back to the story of the *Composition II* and its copies...

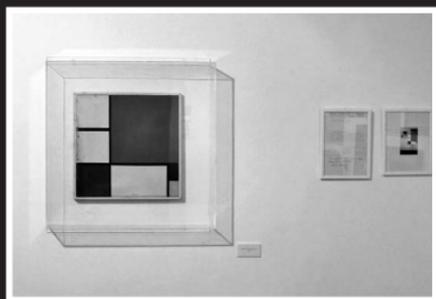


Fig 64  
Copy of the *Composition II* (1983)  
at the "Against Art" exhibition,  
Salon of the MoCAB, Belgrade 2011

As far as I know, copies of Mondrian that I made and exhibited in the 1980s including the copy of *Composition II* for the first time reappeared in public at the 2011 exhibition "Against Art" at the MSU Gallery curated by Branko Dimitrijević, Jelena Vesić and Dejan Sretenović.

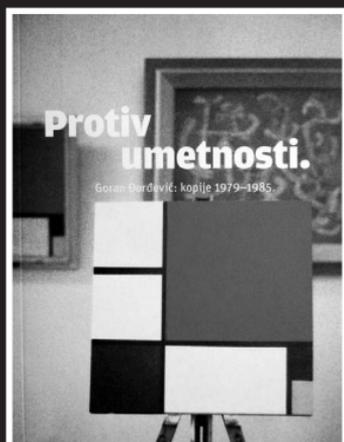


Fig 65  
"Against Art", exhibition catalog,  
Salon of the MoCAB, Belgrade 2011



Fig 66  
Copy the *Composition II* (1983),  
installation, "Against Art" exhibition,  
Salon of the MoCAB, Belgrade 2011



Fig 67  
"Against Art" exhibition,  
installation view Salon  
of the MoCAB, Belgrade 2011

During the exhibition, Jelena Vesić held several guided tours that would begin with the copy of *Composition II*. "In the entrance part of the gallery, there is a statement of the exhibition "Against Art" and an iconic work by Goran Đorđević from 1983, known as *Copying Mondrian in the National Museum*, which, figuratively speaking, can also stand for an artistic portrait. A museum retrospective genre usually involves the setting of an introductory scene or "prologue" that announces the story of the *artist-and-his-work*. Such a setting usually includes a photograph, a portrait or a self-portrait of the artist by which it is interesting to remember and some thought or "memo-citation" that we should keep in mind while watching the exhibition. In this retrospective, however, there is a brutal statement against art and one somewhat failed copy of Mondrian in those speaking positions, accompanied by modest documentation on the copying project.

Fig 67a

Guided tour by Jelena Vesić,  
exhibition "Against Art", Sa-  
lon MoCAB, Belgrade 2011



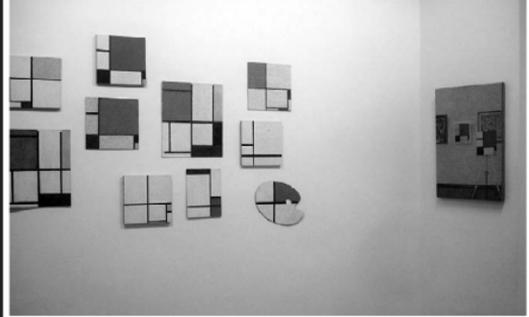


Fig 68  
 "Against Art" exhibition,  
 installation view,  
 City Gallery, Ljubljana 2013

## Exhibition "Piet Mondrian – The case of Composition II" 2014



Fig 69  
 "Piet Mondrian – The Case  
 of Composition II",  
 National Museum,  
 Belgrade 2014

Perhaps the most important event in the history of the *Composition II* was the 2014 exhibition "Piet Mondrian – The case of Composition II" curated by Jelena Dregenc and Simona Ognjanović. As Dregenc noticed "On its arrival in Belgrade, the painting was totally marginalized, it was not exhibited or written about. *Composition II* was included in the permanent exhibition of the National Museum no sooner than 1952." While Dregenc was primarily interested in the history of the *Composition II* original, Ognjanović did an excellent and detailed presentation of the post WW2 reception and interpretation of this work and its more recent reflections primarily within the Belgrade art scene in the 1990s.



Fig 70  
 "Piet Mondrian – The Case  
 of Composition II",  
 exhibition catalog (front),  
 National Museum, Belgrade 2014

On the covers of the catalog two images of the *Composition II* are reproduced, its front and back side. While I was very familiar with the front image, it was a bit surprising to see the back side. Namely, back in late 1980s I would occasionally, especially on rainy days, take my little daughter Luna to the National Museum, not so much to see the pictures but to wander around empty museum galleries. Most of the time, there were no visitors at all, except us. And you could not see any guard. So while Luna would run around I would follow her, occasionally taking a very close look at some of the paintings. Since in those days the hanging was an old-fashioned technique on two ropes attached to the ceiling, in some cases I would pull a painting and flip it around and look at its back. I remember doing this with Monet's "Cathedral" and, of course, with *Composition II* I copied a few years earlier. What makes thing interesting is that for many years I remembered that on the middle part of the wooden frame there was, handwritten in black capital letters: MONDRIAN. As one could see from this reproduction, on that place is in fact the word COMPOSITION. Almost thirty years later, I found out that my memory was wrong, it simply didn't correspond to the

fact. I don't have to say that took me a while to accept this, although somewhere in the back of my mind, the word MONDRIAN is still written.



Fig 70a  
"Piet Mondrian – The Case of Composition II", exhibition catalog (back), National Museum, Belgrade 2014

*Composition II* by Piet Mondrian, painted in 1929 in his Paris studio, was donated in 1931 to the newly-opened Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, together with a number of works by Dutch contemporary artists. The

initiative for the gift came from Dirk Merens, the honorary general consul of Yugoslavia in Amsterdam and founder of the Friends of Yugoslavia Association which formed a Committee for the Promotion of Dutch Art in Yugoslavia. This Committee selected forty-two that included *Composition II*, the only abstract painting in this collection. The selection of this work was influenced by Jan Sluyters and Simon Maris, friends of Mondrian and Committee members. As part of the Belgrade Museum collection, this painting was completely ignored. There are indications that for many years it didn't even have an inventory number, since apparently it was not considered to be a work of art. It took two decades (1952) for the *Composition II* to be finally included in the permanent installation of the National Museum. Even then, its status was not entirely clear. When in 1957 a group of artists were preparing the Didactic Exhibition, a traveling educational show about modern art had asked Belgrade Museum to lend them *Composition II*, they were a bit surprised when one day a postman brought them a regular parcel with a Mondrian painting in it. It seems that it was exhibited in Zagreb only and did not travel to other destinations.



Fig 71

"Diet Mondrian – The Case of *Composition II*",  
exhibition catalog (detail),  
National Museum, Belgrade 2014

Nevertheless, regardless of how *Composition II* came to Belgrade, it was one of the earliest works by Mondrian to enter into a museum collection. It was Société Antonyme in New York that in the early 1920s acquired two Mondrian neoplastic-paintings shown in the 1926 exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum. Ten years later, Alfred Barr included them in the Cubism and Abstract Art exhibition, as and thus placing Mondrian in the history of modern art. Interestingly, although Mondrian had worked most of his life in Paris, no one museum had

Mondrian in the collection for many years. One evening, a few years ago, I was at the opening dinner sitting next to an interesting madame from the Parisian cultural establishment. During our conversation, I asked her about the Mondrian case. She said "Of course, this is a well-known story". She remembered that in the late 1950s, Jean Cassou the director of the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris, realizing that the museum should finally have a Mondrian in its collection, found one painting that was available. He asked Andre Malraux, then the Minister of Culture, permission to acquire it. Malraux asked Cassou to first bring the painting to his office and leave it there. After two weeks Cassou came back and asked Malraux about his decision. Malraux said "No". And that was the end of the story. It took the next twenty years for the first Mondrian to enter the Parisian museum. When Pontus Hulten became the first director of the newly opened Beaubourg center, in 1978 he managed to acquire the first Mondrian for the museum collection. Ironically, it was the 1942 painting titled "New

York City", painted in New York. Thus, after the Modern Canon, the first Mondrian came to Paris from New York as well.

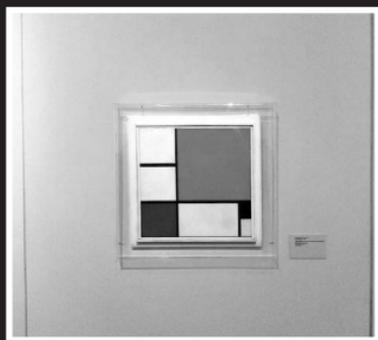


Fig 72  
Piet Mondrian – *Composition II*,  
1929 original, installation view,  
National Museum, Belgrade 2014

As stated in the catalog "...this exhibition primarily represents another form of the institutional and curatorial reception and recontextualization of Mondrian's work. Furthermore, it is certainly close to a tendency that has been omnipresent in the past decade that envisages repetition, on various grounds of important exhibitions. Nevertheless, the matter here is somewhat different, since at this exposition several exhibitions and projects ensembles are linked directly and that the selection like

the whole exhibition, has stemmed directly from research of the case of *Composition II*. The dichotomy between experience and memory will always be stimulating for finding new ways of framing something already framed. If possible, that the frame itself remains visible. At the same time, it again faces us with and returns us to the knowledge that is impossible to repeat an event.

However, is that even necessary?" (Simona Ognjanović)



Fig 73  
Piet Mondrian – *Composition II*,  
(works by Goran Đorđević), installation  
view, National Museum, Belgrade 2014

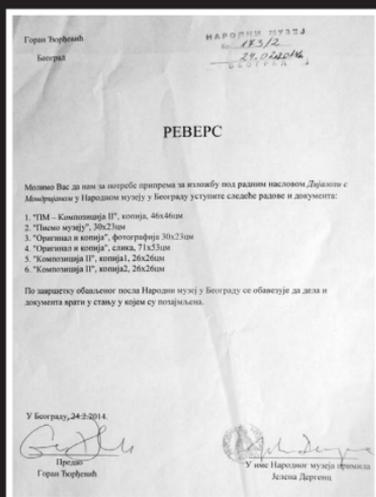


Fig 74  
Receipt for landed works  
by Goran Đorđević, Belgrade 2014

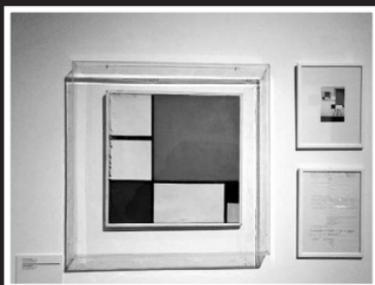


Fig 75  
*Composition II*, 1983 copy by  
Goran Đorđević, National Museum 2014

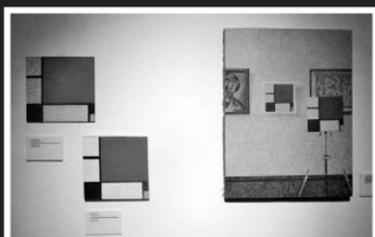


Fig 76  
*Composition II*, 198 pointillist copies  
by Goran Đorđević,  
National Museum 2014

"We believe that through all these individual stories, albeit chronologically very distant, a good platform has been created that enables the critical contemplation of the institution of art, the institution of art history, but above all, of the museum itself. The intersecting of the realities which define all those individual positions is framed by our current museological and extra-museological reality, in place of which we hope to see a new meaning appear. In fact, we see that entire complex network of narrative lines as stimulating for translating that museological reality into a space in which values and positions are, at least temporarily, not fixed but rather where different artistic and counter-artistic formulas are confronted, into a space in which they, their relations, as well as our role in creating the meaning and live domain of art will be considered critically. By investigating the manifold ambivalence of meaning of work of art, a museum exhibit, but also art as a complex symbolic system, we wanted to provide space for contemplating the role of museums in creating and legitimizing values and artistic positions, their potential relation to live, contemporary art and culture, precisely today when museums are fighting for visibility and relevance in the local context".

(Simona Ognjanović, exhibition catalog)



Fig 77  
"Piet Mondrian – The Case of  
Composition II", installation view,  
National Museum, Belgrade 2014

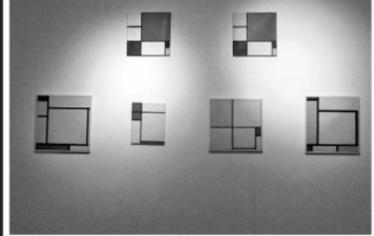


Fig 78  
 "Piet Mondrian – The Case of  
 Composition II", installation view,  
 works from the Walter Benjamin's  
 lecture, National Museum, Belgrade 2014



Fig 78a  
 "Piet Mondrian – The Case of  
 Composition II", installation view,  
 National Museum, Belgrade 2014

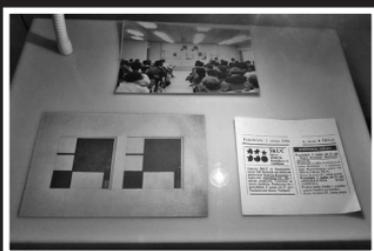


Fig 78b  
 "Piet Mondrian – The Case of  
 Composition II", installation view,  
 National Museum, Belgrade 2014

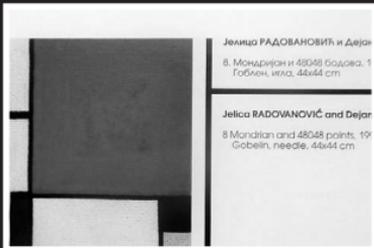
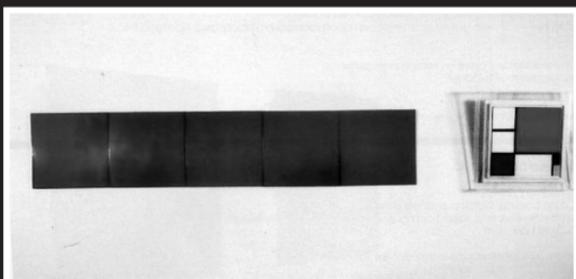


Fig 79  
 Jelica Radovanović i Dejan Anđelković  
 – Mondrian and 48048 points,  
 needlepoint 1993

These works were realized in relation to *Composition II* during a series of exhibitions "Experiences from Memory", curated by Irina Subotić and Gordana Stanišić in the National Museum Belgrade 1995. These installation views were reproduced in the exhibition catalog "Piet Mondrian – The Case of the Composition II" 2014.

Fig 79a  
 Nikola Pilipović,  
 New Belgrade,  
 steel plates 1994



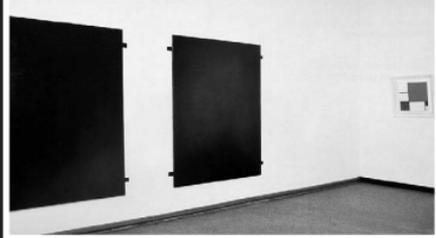


Fig 79b  
Aleksandar Dimitrijević,  
Mondrian, 1994



Fig 79c  
Zoran Naskovski i Dobrivoje  
Krgović-Composition I, 1995



Fig 79d  
Mrdan Bajić,  
Migrations, 1995

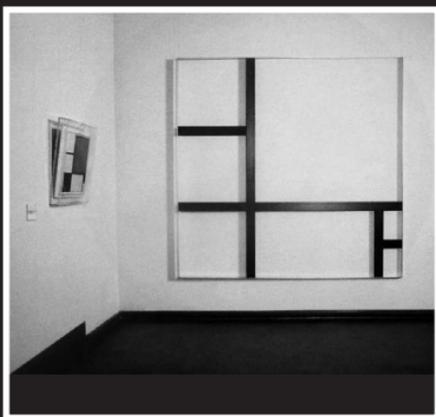


Fig 79e  
Veso Sovilj,  
Mondrian's window,  
aluminum, 1995

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Predavanje Gorana Dordevića u sklopu izložbe  
*Pit Mondrian. Slučaj „Kompozicije II“*

## Umetnost na kopi pejst nišanu

**Beograd** – „Goran Dordević u Beogradu“, sasvim je iz racionalnog imazio, ali izložba kaže da to danas od 13 sati na prven spustu te institucije održati predavanje u sklopu izložbe Pit Mondrian. Slučaj „Kompozicije II“. Naravno, a ne konvencionalna, učinila je da prvo kopiranje upravo ove Mondrijanove slike Dordević, koji danas živi u Njujorku, izvede baš u periodu svog istraživanja kopija 1979–1985, posle čega ni je više nastupao kao umetnik. Doduše, ovo „kopi“ prešlo ga je tokom njegovih istraživanja u veći umetnički osećanje.

„mali“ restrikciju neki strobnjaci su ocenili upravo kao demonstraciju institucionalne moći što i jeste epizodna Dordevićevih „nestvaraljkih“ istraživanja. U svakom slučaju, zahtev da kopija bude manje velicine od originala istorijska umetnički jedina Vesić komentariše kao nešto što narodi na pa-

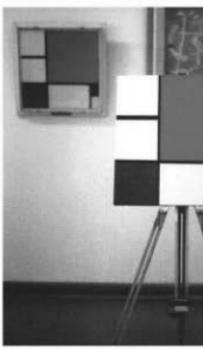
**Pseudosubjektiv**

Predavanje Gorana Dordevića namenjeno je svim zainteresovanim posetiocima, a pored letre u kojoj su bliže reči istraživanje kopije

Fig 80  
“Piet Mondrian – The Case of  
Composition II”, press review,  
Belgrade 2014



ovo „kao“ pratio ga je tokom njegovih istraživanja u polju umetničkog sistema buduću da je u to doba studirao na Elektrotehničkom fakultetu, ali „anater“, što njerna, verovatno, nije uspešno. Inače, javna kopiranje Mondrijanove slike iz kolekcije Narodnog muzeja usledilo je nakon niza njegovih drugih značajnih kopiranih radova, to jest: ložbi, ali je ovaj događaj bio jedan od retkih koji su '80-ih primenjeni. Tadašnjem upravniku Muzeja Dodeviću je srednja pozada pisano u kome kaže: „Poltovani drude upravnike, pošto se već dale bavim kopiranjem umetničkih



dela kao specifičnim oblikom citiranja u domenu umetnosti, jedino bih da napravim kopiju slike? Mondrijana iz stalne postavke vašeg Muzeja. Kopija bih radio u muzejskom prostoru gde je slika izložena u vreme kad je Muzej otvoren...“ Zvaničnici Muzeja su dali zeleno svetlo ovom činu, ali su izričito napomenuli da kopija mora biti „za vas-tancar ili dva manja od originala“. Ova

#### Protiv umetnosti

„Izvanredna dela, poređ stalnog izložba i neki stari u umetnosti. Radovi prikazani na ovaj luto-žiti nisu umetnička dela, to su samo stare u umetnosti. Boje crvena, to su stare stvari umetnosti. Međim da je kopiranje umetnosti da se sa umetnosti, jedino adalčno sigurno kopiranje ta nauka izložbi i harmonizaciji i ostaje njeno pravo lice rene i postane slučajno“, a ona je stara Dodeviću povodom svoje izložbe Protiv umetnosti 1980. godine

im zainteresovanim posetiocima, a pored li-re-e a koje su biljke već izložene- kopija- original- umetnost- nauka. Bice govoreći i no-tivna predstava iz upravnika umetnosti i pro-dukcijskim petna galija umetnosti, a košičkan puzem gde kopije izvele da je prazn sadržaj- ta umetnički sarti izložbe, dok su umet-nisi samo postrobnosti.

rodjaki zaključak - da je original umek-veći od kopije i samo originali imaju smisla, inače bila na kopij- peju ništa. Konkretno dala konceptualne umet-nosti su, moglo bi se reći, u konceptualna kritika iznala čak prvokopirano postič-ja, ali i Dodevićevih nep-stveni radovi. Recimo, slika „Glasnici apokali- se“ - platno zbog koga je dugo osecno stid iznenič- no ga iznenađujući revidel- denta, a koja je predča- Ńu u istraživački rad. Na- pravo je niz kopija te sli- ke, nijedni elementa, a zatim je pozvao kolege i prijatelje da i oni učes- truju u kopiranju ovog njegovog dela. Ova „sli- žba u procesur“ je uprili- čena u Dodevićevom stu- mu na Novom Beogradu i iznala je i svoje „avče- no zatvaranje“. U svo- kom slučaju, to što to- čno 70-ih i '80-ih Dode- vićevih značajni istaji u polju umetničkog sistema nisu naroči- to zapretili do kopiranja Mondrijan- ove slike, ili u Narodnom muzeju sama potvrđuje tezu umetnika-umetna u najboljem smislu te re- čenja. Kopija Mondrijanove slike je kao rad iznala svoje posebno mesto i na Dodevićevoj izložbi pod (originalnim) i manifest- nim naslovom „Protiv umetnosti“ 1980. u Galeriji SKC i na repri- u istom prostoru 2011. godine.

Zapravo, Goran Dodević je umek- svojim izložbama stalnog do iznala da je umetnost, ma kolika umetnička da iz- miče krutim institucionalnim okvirima - deo sistema, kao što su, uproščeno rečeno, svi deo superkulturnog aparata bez obzira na to što verujemo da smo mi umetnik. Sve te konstatacije Dode- vić je izradio pre više od četiri decenije, a nije bilo podložni ih u istom. Zeviče apokaliptično i narkotično.

A. Čuk

When in September 2018, I was traveling to Ljubljana to help hang the “What was Modern Art?” exhibition, I noticed at the Belgrade airport an improvised National Museum display of reproductions from its collection that included *Composition II*.

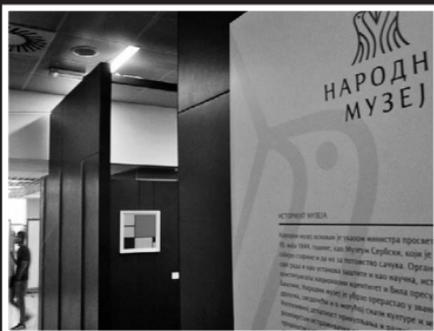


Fig 81

*Composition II*,

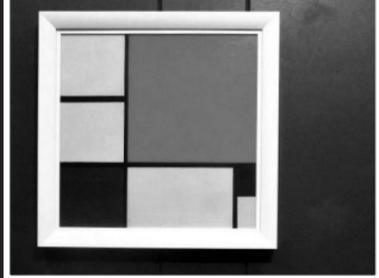
reproduction, National Museum display at the Belgrade airport, September 2018



Fig 81a

*Composition II*, reproduction, National Museum display at the Belgrade airport, September 2018

Fig 81b  
*Composition II*, reproduction,  
National Museum display at  
the Belgrade airport,  
September 2018



At the 2018 exhibition “What was Modern Art?” at the SKUC Gallery in Ljubljana, that was a reflection/deconstruction of the 2006 exhibition “What is Modern Art?” at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin. It included copies of Mondrian in two ways.



Fig 82  
“What was Modern Art?”,  
installation view, SKUC Gallery,  
Ljubljana 2018

One copy of the *Composition II* that was part of the 1986 Armory Show was, together with some other works from the same show, presented here in ethnographic manner accompanied with corresponding documentary material.

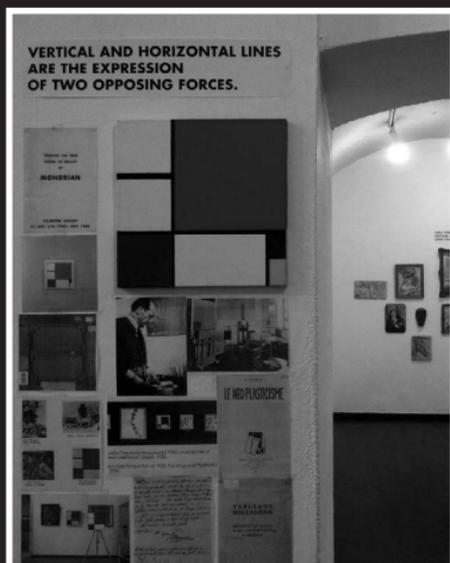


Fig 83  
*Composition II*,  
“What was Modern Art?”,  
installation view,  
SKUC Gallery,  
Ljubljana 2018

In the other room a number of Mondrian copies related to the Walter Benjamin's 1986-87 lectures "Mondrian '63-'96" in Ljubljana and Belgrade were exhibited.



Fig 84  
Walter Benjamin "Mondrian '63-'96",  
"What was Modern Art?",  
installation view, SKUC Gallery,  
Ljubljana 2018

Interestingly, a copy of *Composition II* appears in another Benjamin's lecture titled "The Unmaking of Art", first time held 2011 at the Times Museum in Guangzhou in Mandarin language as part of the Museum of American Art (Berlin) exhibition titled "MoMA Made in China". Since then, Benjamin, appearing in both genders, has held this lecture many times in different languages.



Fig 85  
Walter Benjamin,  
"The Unmaking of Art",  
Times Museum, Guangzhou 2011



Fig 86  
Walter Benjamin,  
"The Unmaking of Art",  
Arnolfini, Bristol 2011



Fig 87  
Walter Benjamin,  
"The Unmaking of Art",  
Museum of Reproductions,  
Bilbao, 2013



Fig 87  
Walter Benjamin,  
"The Unmaking of Art",  
e-flux, New York 2014

Recently, a copy of *Composition II* was also included in the installation "Four Stories on Art" at the 2019 exhibition "Anonymous is the answer" curated by Ivana Vaseva at the National Gallery (Daut Pasha Hammam) in Skopje.

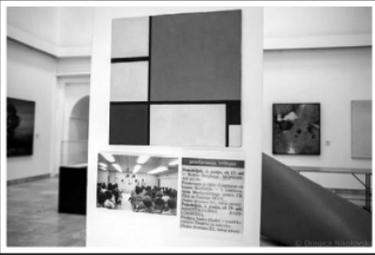


Fig 88 *Composition II*, copy, exhibition "Anonymous is the Answer", national Gallery, Skopje 2019

The latest public appearances of *Composition II* took place at the Ostavska Gallery organized by the Serbian Fine Arts in Belgrade in November 2020. This was a partial re-enactment of the 2013 exhibition "Not-now" that was held in the foyer of the New Belgrade Cultural Network.



Fig 89  
Not-now, installation view,  
Ostavska Gallery, Belgrade 2020



Fig 90  
Richard Nilsen: Not-now,  
opening scene, Los Angeles 2020

Today, after so many years I am beginning to change my mind regarding the 1983 copy of *Composition II*. Similarly to what I did with Harbingers forty years ago, recently I started making copies of this particular painting of Mondrian. The difference is that they were made on various surfaces but they always have the same dimensions/proportions as the original. If the surface is not big enough, then the painting would be partially reproduced. Not only that these copies are more complex

entities than the original, but they have also given additional importance to this Mondrian original. By being copied, now this painting is not frozen in its own time within a single story but as a recalled memory being actualized today that could play roles in some other stories, like this one about my personal memories.



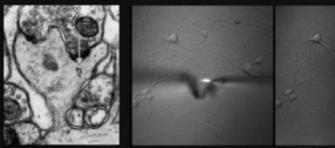
Fig 91  
Express restaurant "Zagreb",  
Belgrade late 1960s

When in 1971 I came to Belgrade to study at the Electrical Engineering faculty, occasionally I would go to the self-service restaurant "Zagreb" (former "Russian Tsar"). One day, I picked up a spinach puree, and as I tasted it I was transported back some 16-17 back to my kindergarten years when I last tasted this meal. It was a strange experience, and I still remember it fifty years later. Then somebody told me about Marcel Proust and his "Madeleine".



Fig 92  
Erin Schuman, "The Remarkable Neuron",  
lecture, Ted-Talk

One of the things I remember watching was "The Remarkable Neuron" lecture by Erin Schuman at Ted-Talk, information that the brain-cells renew their memory proteins at the synapses every 24-48h. In other words, this is how far back in time our actual memory goes, regardless of whether the events remembered are ten days or ten years old.



Proteins are made locally, at synapses.

Fig 92a  
Erin Schuman,  
"The Remarkable Neuron",  
lecture, Ted-Talk

The Remarkable Neuron: Erin Schuman at TEDxCaltech

**CONSIDER THE PROTEIN CONTENT OF A SYNAPSE**

- 500 different protein species per synapse
- 50 copies of each protein
- 25,000 proteins per synapse
- $10^4$  synapses per cell
- 250,000,000 proteins per cell (dendrite + synapse)

**ESTIMATE:** An additional 250,000,000 proteins in the axon  
So ~500,000,000 proteins per cell

Fig 92b  
Erin Schuman,  
"The Remarkable Neuron",  
lecture, Ted-Talk

Thus, today I remember my restaurant experience from 50 years ago that was about remembering a kindergarten experience 17 years earlier and also I believe that I still remember ("directly") eating spinach puree at the kindergarten, which was 67 years ago. Now, according to neuron-science all these memories are, in fact, various proteins not older than 24-48h.

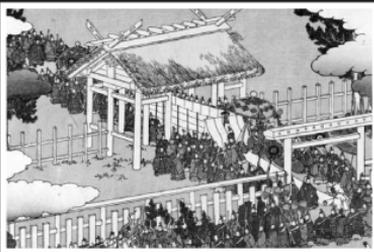


Fig 93  
Ise Jingu shrine in Japan

Then I remember reading a few years ago in some paper about originality, that in Japan there is a custom regarding a fifteen hundred year old shrine. In a tradition that started in 690, the Ise Jingu shrine in Japan was completely dismantled and rebuilt every 20 years as part of the Shinto belief in death and renewal of nature.



Fig 93a  
Ise Jingu shrine in Japan

In this way, the shrine has been preserved or remembered as it was in the beginning, it is demolished every twenty years and rebuilt as new, looking exactly the same. Thus, the two thousand year old temple is only 20 years old, at most. It was recently rebuilt but the memory it preserves goes back thousands of years, like proteins in our neuron synapses.

This evening, taking a break from my work on Mondrian and *Composition II*, I took a walk with my little dog Toto around the neighborhood. At some point, we ran into another little dog and while they began sniffing friendly, his owner called him "Bruno, come back!". "Bruno?", I asked, "is his first name by any chance Giordano?". She smiled and said, "Yes of course". Then a man sitting on a nearby bench, overhearing this conversation, yelled: "It can't be him, he was burnt at the stake." A bit curious. I asked when this happened, and the man

replied: some time during the sixteenth century.



Fig 94  
Giordano Bruno and  
Rosa Luxemburg

Then, Toto and I continued walking and soon after met another little dog, her name was Rosa. "The only name that comes to my mind is Luxemburg", I said. And her owner smiled and said "Yes it's her, and at home I also have Clara (meaning Zetkin) waiting for us". As we were walking away, I was thinking how in brief conversations with random people, names such as Gordano Bruno or Rosa Luxemburg popped up naturally as familiar names. I don't remember when was the last time I had heard or mentioned any of them. And, by the way, who were those people, how do I know about them and remember their names in the first place? Of course, I have never met them personally since these are characters from the

story we call History, and today I have forgotten most of what I had learned about them. Yet, they are part of my personal memory, even I could mention them in a casual conversation with people on the street as if I/we knew them. I wonder, how many proteins have been produced so far to keep in my memory the names of these people I have never known? And, what has all this to do with the actual people with these names that once lived on this planet long before I was born? While I'm writing all this, it crossed my mind, perhaps one of these days Toto might even come across a puppy whose name is "Piet".

Another interesting example are Super8 films I did in 1974-75, like "Blue Sky", "Book", "Family Photo", in which both camera and the object of filming are static. Usually in moving pictures, a frame differs from one preceding it. However, in these films there is no visible difference between neighboring frames, thus there is no change during the projection. As if each frame was preserving and remembering the previous one by repeating it. And that resembles copies of the Harbingers where one picture does not differ from another.



Fig 95  
"Blue Sky", Super 8,  
film frame, 1975



Fig 95a  
"Blue Sky", Super 8,  
three film frames, 1975



Fig 96  
"Book", Super 8,  
film frame, 1975



Fig 96a  
"Book", Super 8,  
three film frames, 1975



Fig 97  
"Family Photo", Super 8,  
film frame, 1975



Fig 97a  
"Family Photo", Super 8,  
film frame, 1975



Fig 98  
Harbingers of the Apocalypse,  
original 1970



Fig 98a  
Harbingers of the Apocalypse,  
copies 1980

I find some similarities between all these and my recent copying of a single Mondrian, one that I copied for the first time in 1983 in the National Museum. Recently, I began realizing that some of my works from the past are not just relics but start getting another layer of mean-

ing. In addition to the Harbingers, one that was coming back was this 1983 copy of *Mondrian Composition II*.

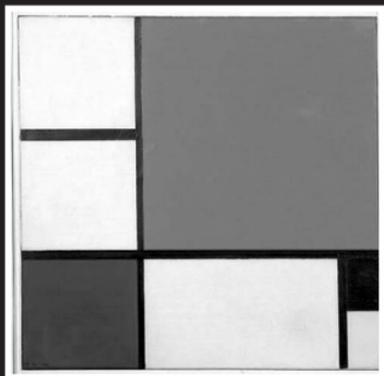


Fig 99  
*Composition II*,  
copy, 1983

I started repeating it on various surfaces and objects mostly found in or next to the garbage containers in my neighborhood. A bit later, a few of them were included in the "Fragments", an apartment exhibition which opened in August last year (2020).



Fig 100  
Mondrian under the carpet,  
"Fragments",  
August 2020



Fig 101  
"Fragments", installation view,  
Belgrade 2020



Fig 102  
"Fragments",  
installation view, Belgrade 2020



Fig 103  
"Fragments", installation view,  
Belgrade 2020

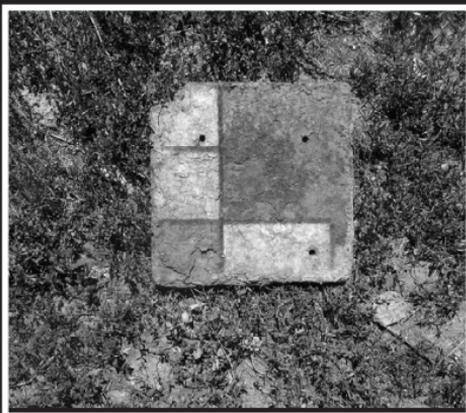


Fig 104  
Copy of *Composition II*  
on found wood panel,  
Belgrade 2020



Fig 105  
"Fragments",  
installation view,  
Belgrade 2020

One day, I found a simple chair with a rectangular seat. Until that point, I had been making copies of this painting in different sizes, depending on the surface, but the entire picture was reproduced. Since the original Mondrian is 45x45cm, it couldn't fit on this seat which was 35x41cm, the original dimensions could not fit in. One option was a smaller copy 35x35cm or to keep original dimensions, but not having the entire picture reproduced. Since I already had made many copies in different sizes, I decided to try making copies only in original proportions, even if the surface was smaller than the original painting, and as a result having it partially reproduced, as if it was a fragment. Thus the memory on original painting became incomplete and fragmented. And, unlike copying the Harbingers, where I had to look into the source painting to copy it, in the case of the *Composition II*,



*II*, I didn't need any picture to look at like I did in the National Museum 1983. Since the structure of *Composition II* is very simple, after a couple of paintings I learned all its measurements and colors and could repeat them on any surface without looking at a source painting.

Of course, whenever a surface was large enough, the entire painting would be copied on it. While shape or painting style could vary from painting to painting what remains constant are proportions of the composition and basic colors that make each copy recognizable.

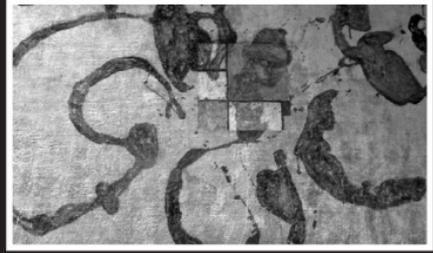




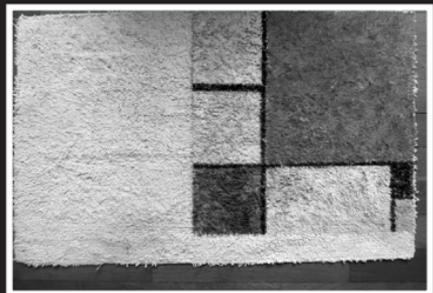
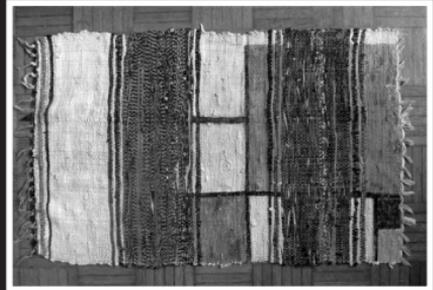
Since for more than a year I began collecting various thrown away objects I found in the neighborhood, thinking perhaps at some point to arrange an archeological exhibition of contemporary artifacts as remains of the lost ancient civilization (Volney-Ruins). Thus I already had plenty of items I could use for the *Composition II*. One day last year, while walking with Toto, I found next to a garbage container a large bright monochromatic carpet on which, after some thinking, I decided to copy this painting by Jackson Pollock.



When later I began my "project" with *Composition II*, I thought it might be interesting to paint its copy over the copy of Pollock, thus integrating non-geometric and geometric abstract art and in this way short-circuiting Barr's diagram.



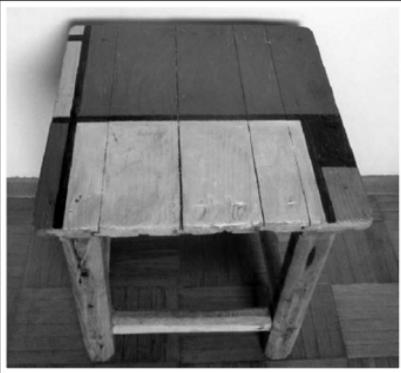
Since for more than a year I began collecting various thrown-away items (junk) I would find in the neighborhood, thinking perhaps at some point to arrange an archeological exhibition of contemporary artifacts as remains of the lost ancient civilization (Volney-Ruins). Thus I already had a plenty of items I could use now like these found rugs and carpets painted now with *Composition II*.



Another day, I picked up this old broken window and painted it on both sides.



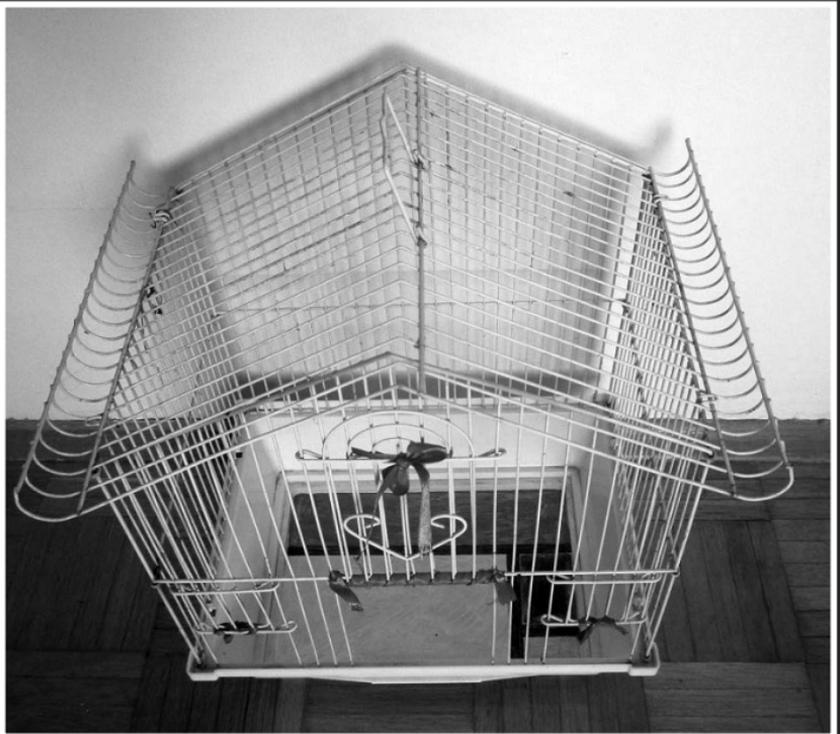
Since it seems chairs old or broken are often left at the garbage, I picked quite a few as interesting surfaces to paint Mondrian on them.



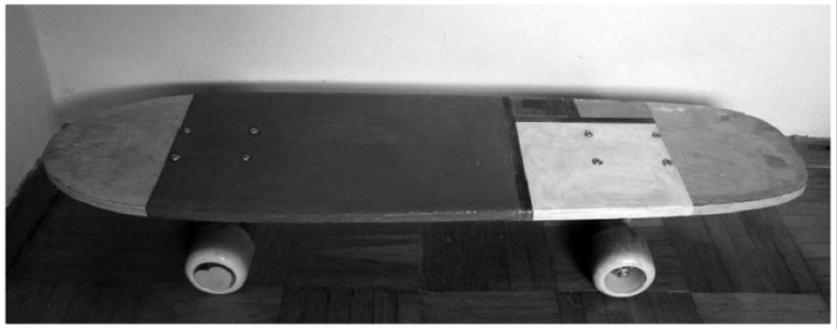
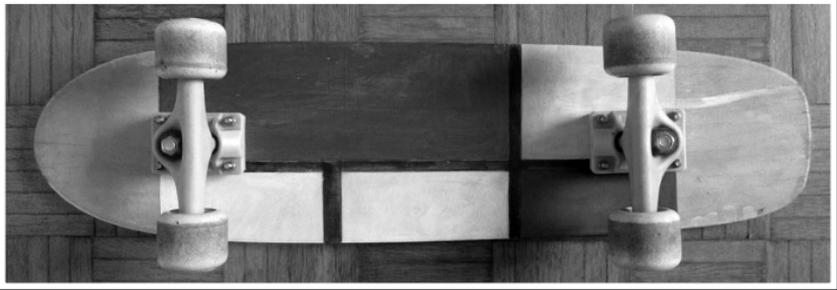
And this seems to be an old-fashioned toilet seat...



...a bird cage...

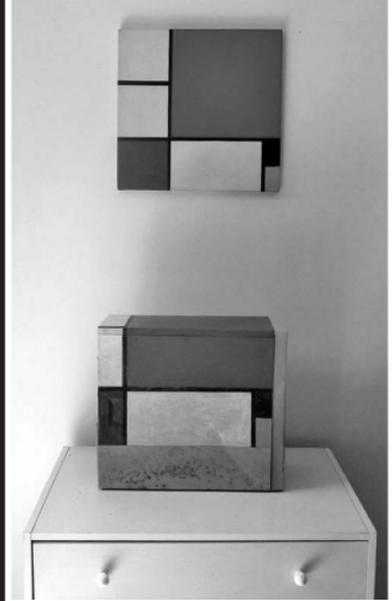


...roller board...



One day, on a garbage dump I found this old computer that became a background for yet another copy...

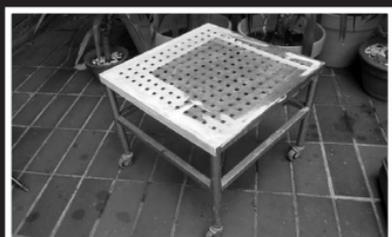




While taking pictures of these recent products...



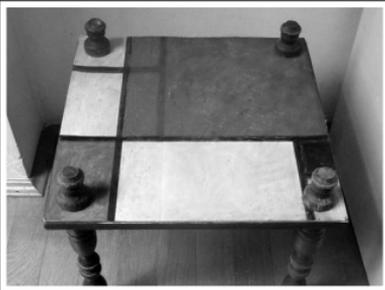
...I noticed this metal table in the garden...



...and decided to paint it as well. Its surface happened to have the exact same dimensions as *Composition II*.



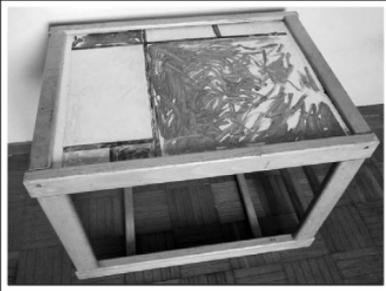
This is another table that I found on which I would keep paint and brushes.



Those old "Utrecht" paint jars I brought with me in 1984 when I came back from Cambridge and I still have quite a few of them.



And this wooden table with unfinished Mondrian on top of it reminded me reading about discussions among American artists on how to make a distinction between them and Europeans.



On the first day of the "Artists' Sessions at Studio 35 (1950)", published in the "Modern Artist in America" (1951), I found in the "Strand" basement for \$1 in early 1990s, the question was: *How do you know when a work is finished?* At the end of session, Robert Motherwell concluded:



*"I dislike a picture that is too suave or too skillfully done. However, contrariwise, I also dislike a picture that looks too inept or too blundering. I noticed in looking at the Carre (gallery) exhibition of young French painters who are supposed to be close to this (our) group, that in "finishing" a picture they assume traditional criteria to a much greater degree than we do. They have a real "finish" in that the picture is a real object, a beautifully made object. We are involved in a "process" and what is the "finished" object is not so certain." Seems to me*

this Motherwell's statement is perhaps one of the best observations about the distinction between abstract paintings produced those years in France and America.



And judging by the picture below, Donald Judd would agree with this opinion.

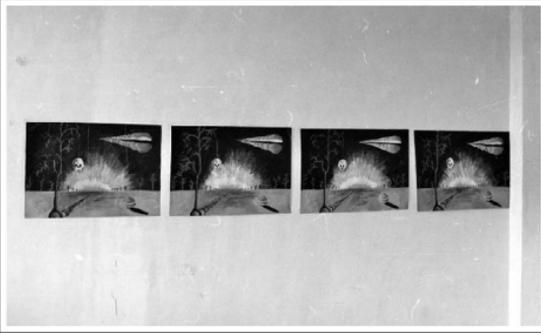
Among all those found objects, there were a number of wood panels of various sizes on which I painted *Com-*

*position II* fragments, not individually but more like in an assembly-line manner.

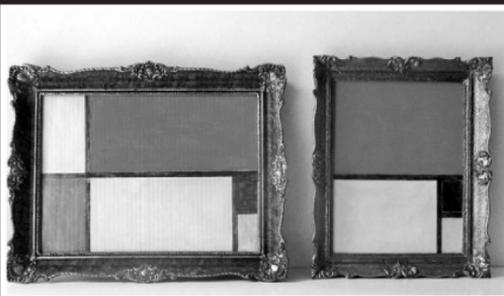


This series of fragmented copies reminded me of the Harbingers of the Apocalypse. This gave me the idea to one day make a series of full scale copies of *Composition*

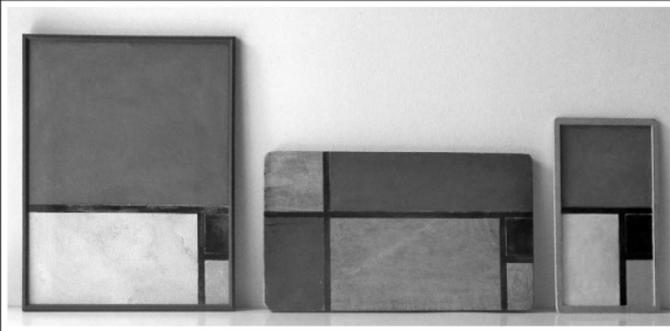
// the way I did with Harbingers some forty years ago.



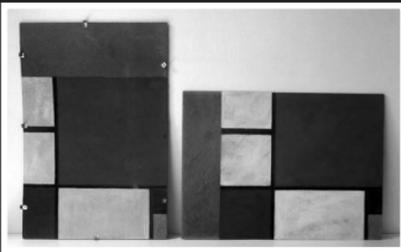
These are two old-fashioned decorative picture frames I also found and decided to use them.



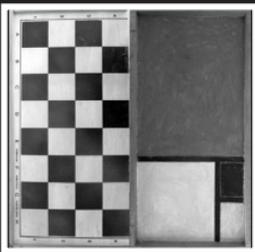
This is another series of fragments painted on various surfaces, some of them with an image on the other side...



...various flat wood boards...



...a half of aches-board...



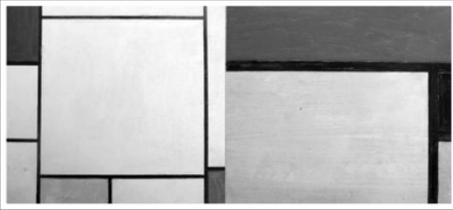
...a reproduction of St. George icon pasted on wood pane, found next to garbage container.



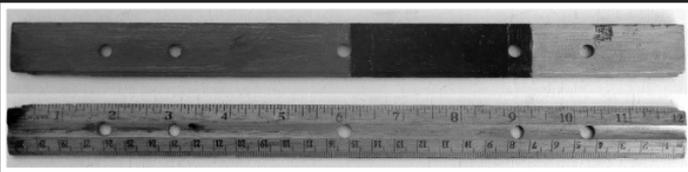
Back in Cambridge, I made this small copy of a Mondrian which I later gave to a friend.



Last year, looking at this photo I decided to make a copy of this copy, and recently I painted detail of the Composition on the other side.



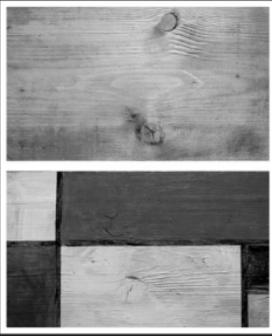
This a fragment painted on a ruler...



...memorial medal...



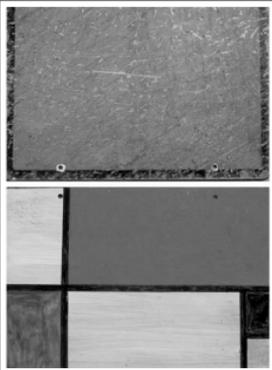
...a piece of plane wood panel...



...old decaying WW2 framed photograph...

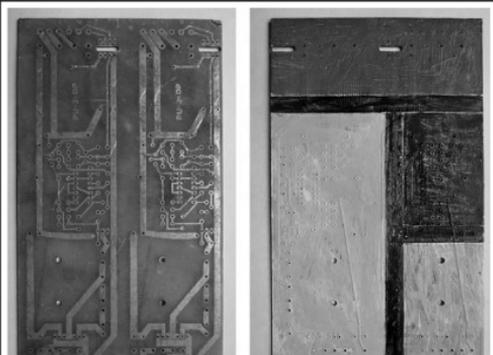
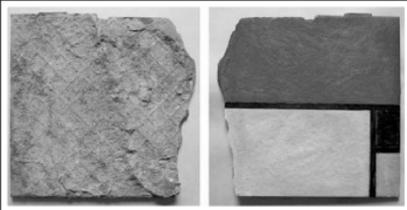
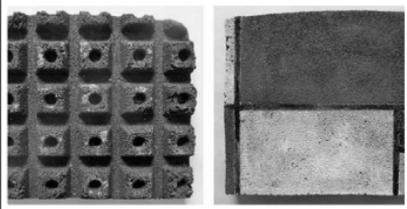
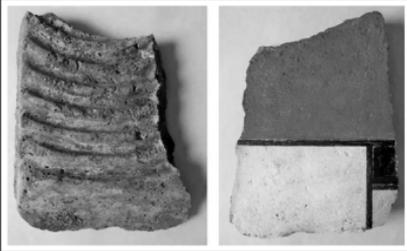
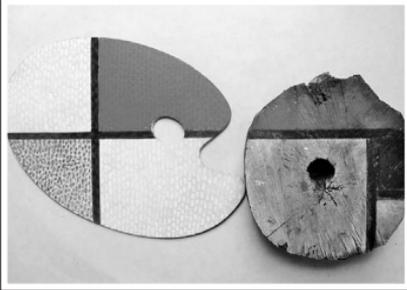


...metal street sign...



Appearance of the *Composition II* fragments in the context of various surfaces/images resembles the way we recall certain memory. It almost never appears alone by itself, but usually in the context of some other notion or event. In fact, the same memory is always different

whenever it is recalled. The same is with each word used in this text. What then makes its specific intrinsic meaning? How do we recognize it and differentiate it from everything else?

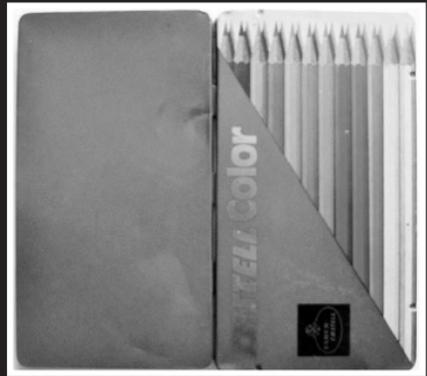


A while ago, I found in the bushes this decaying plastic bag from the 1979 Mediterranean Games that took place in the Adriatic city of Split. It was originally intended for the "Ruins" project but I thought it could now change the role and enter into this story.



At some point, I began seeing any surface or object as a potential background for yet another copy. Since there are almost no limitations where a detail of this paint-

ing could be placed, the decision to stop doing it was in essence arbitrary. Probably when I begin to feel that I have learned everything I needed to know while walking in this direction and there is no need to go further.

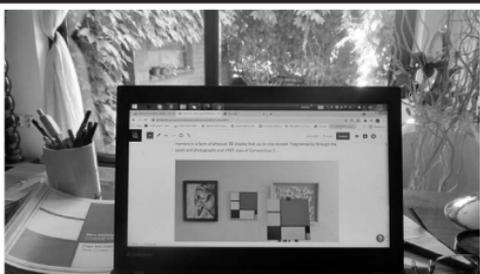


At some point, I thought it might be interesting to “re-construct” the final scene of the 1983 public demonstration “How to Copy Mondrian”. These are just a couple details from the complicated process with many steps and stages, just to remind us of what it takes before we see the final installation.



On one level, all these copies are substitutions, playing roles of the originals from the 1983 event, including the copy on the easel. What makes this complicated is that Mondrian hanging on the wall is 1983 copy playing a role of the 1929 original. On the other copies of Picasso and Mark Tobey are produced now just to play their roles in the scene while on the easel is one of recent copies of *Composition II* with no marks on it. In addition, all these copies of works of art are here in the scene primarily related to my personal memory and very little to do with the story of art. In essence, this is contemporary materialized memory in a form of physical 3D display that up to now existed fragmentarily through the easel

and photographs and 1983. copy of *Composition II*.



At some point, I thought perhaps it would be interesting to have 4-5 full scale copies that, shown in a series, would resemble 1980-81 installations of Harbingers of the Apocalypse copies. However, while in case of Harbingers each new copy was made after the previous was finished, always looking into the original, here I decided to copy *Composition II* in assembly-line style, having one color applied on all canvases before moving to the next and I didn't have to look into any painting as a model.





Then, having around all these individual works, naturally at some point came the idea to make an exhibition and show them together. It is interesting that, while I

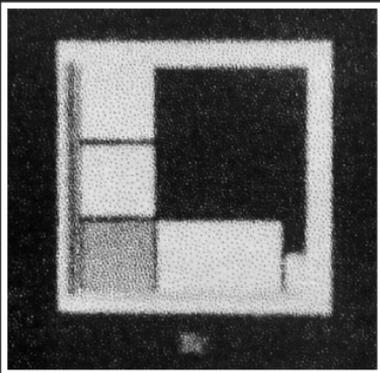
was making all these works, the idea for staging an exhibition didn't come to mind until recently.





And all this started with the first public appearance of the *Composition II* at the exhibition in Zurich back in 1930.





Goran Đorđević July 10,  
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# West

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Words that exist only in their own language (continued).

**Eudaimonia.** GREEK. Feeling of happiness, total accomplishment, while travelling.

**Gezelligheid.** DUTCH. The positive atmosphere that is released during a social gathering, usually in a small setting.

**Goesting.** FLEMISH. Fancy, lust, appetite, and especially in a boisterous, Burgundian way.

**Gökotta.** SWEDISH. To wake up early to listen to the birds.

**Hiraeth.** WELSH. Homesickness for a place that no longer exists or perhaps never existed.

**Merigiare.** ITALIAN. To relax in the shade under a tree in the middle of the day.

**Novaturient.** LATIN. The desire for a meaningful change in your life.

Sometimes I want to make the words new, to rid them of the forced pathetic, the lyric and the dead bureaucracy. And yet push them beyond their limits. Pure, simple language, archaic, like the untranslatable words, the infrared and the ultraviolet indicate archaic, simple sensations. In their radiant simplicity, the words would transform everything outside themselves into perfect silence.

Most ultraviolet words have positive connotations, or at least something warm, human. They are immediately attractive. Your heart leaps: finally, something can be named that you had only vaguely suspected before. And there is the vague jealousy (there should also be a word for that) for that small, exotic community, which can name it and *therefore*, you think, experience it more often and more profoundly.

Why do these words only exist for a small, specific group of speakers, almost like a secret language? There is something cosy about them. The words are 'gezellig', to take that untranslatable word from Dutch. *Hygge* in Danish. But they are also words with primeval DNA. Sunsets, stars, travelling. Farewells, homesickness. Big meanings in a small circle. The universal becomes personal, the global local. They have a similar affective value as the dialect, passed on intact from generation to generation. It immediately throws you back into your childhood when it is spoken around you. You melt, come home to the language. You want to belong to a tribe, even if it has no word for blue. The hell with blue.

A rose is a rose is a rose and would smell as sweet by any other name. That is true, but only if you consider the language as a system that transmits information. Esperanto. Google Translate. Two extremes to try to do the same thing: literary communism, where no one owns words, where they are common resources. It is verbal globalisation, where corporate English has already advanced quite a bit. Corporate jargon, dead *slang* against jingoism. In the face of the global is the local of the untranslatable language.

There, language is an organism, with an etymological evolution, with affective roots, with resonance in other parts than reason, rather akin to music.

Finally, I know what I will tell this society. I will report on my stay here. I will gather everyone together starting with silence.

New music, new listening. Not an attempt to understand something that is being said, for, if something is being said, the sounds would be given the shapes of words. Just an attention to the activity of sounds.

Then I will tell them of my *resfeber*, I will tell them the fairy tale until everyone is asleep or awake. Once upon a time I collected words that existed only in their own language.

When everyone is asleep or awake, I will be back at the top of the stairs, by the jammed door, on the grid of galvanised steel. Nothing has been solved, the riddle has been magnified. *Resfeber* brought me here and *resfeber* is letting me leave again. When I turn around to go down the stairs it turns out to be a diving board, with sparkling water underneath in a colour for which there is no word. I breathe in. And I swim happily ever after.



The **Alphabetum** is an artistic space to explore the formative and formal aspects of language. These aspects are mostly considered separate. Typographers and type-designers are primarily focused on the letterform and writers mostly do not pay attention to the forms of the letters they form into words. The ambition of the Alphabetum is to reveal that these two properties of written language are much more interlinked than is commonly acknowledged. A letter is a letter because it resembles a letter; and because it resembles a letter it is a letter.

Joseph Beuys said that every human being is an artist. Hans Hollein translated this idea into space and time, suggesting that everything is architecture. John Cage proposed that everything we do is music. Would it therefore not be acceptable to declare that every thing is type? When we look at art, music and architecture from a more general point of view, we see that all three disciplines have emerged from the languages we created. We might even argue that art, architecture and music are themselves languages. It is noteworthy that Beuys's, Hollein's and Cage's statements are not formulated in art, architecture and music, but in letters, forming words, combined in statements. Ludwig Wittgenstein once said that the limits of our language are the limits of our world. Could it also be the case that the limits of the alphabet are the limits of our language? This would bring us back to the typographic tautology. A letter is a letter because it resembles a letter, and because it resembles a letter, it is a letter.

The Alphabetum, inaugurated in February 2019, is part of the program of the national art institution West Den Haag.

## **L'écriture avant la lettre**

### **Alphabetum IX**

With works by David Antin, Walter Benjamin, Joseph Beuys, Hildegard van Bingen, John Cage, Uta Eisenreich, Octavian Esanu, Res Feber, Ryan Gander, Kenneth Goldsmith, Gary Hill, Victorie Hanna, Nicoline van Harskamp, Toine Horvers, Tehching Hsieh, Hedwig Houben, Emily Kocken, Günter Gerhard Lange, Stephane Mallarmé, Shigeru Matsui, Tine Melzer, Yoko Ono, Annetta Pedretti, The Rodina, Hannah Weiner, Edgar Walthert, Brigitte Willberg and Unica Zürn.

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