



"Stasis" by Ovidijus Talijunas

## Shadowing the Scene: Negativity in Affects, Politics, Aesthetics

*Interdisciplinary Conference on Affect and Visuality*  
*September 26-27<sup>th</sup>, 2014, Vilnius, Center for Contemporary Art*  
*Organized by the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute*

A stalker of light, an ambiguous threshold, an imprint of the real: shadow is brought to give depth and texture to a surface, only to obscure it at next choice. It frightens, hides, protects, invites play, for animals, children, performers. A creative sublime or a perpetual negative: the grave of Capa's soldier, the homoerotic of Caravaggio's paint, film noir's pick of the obscene. The hideaway and the stage of the horrendous, traumatic, lurid. The metaphor and device for clandestine wars, unaccounted economies, illicit affairs. An extension of our bodies, far from a stable entity, it is always in ubiquitous inaction. "Life's but a walking shadow" is Macbeth's answer to the death of his sleepwalking queen – how do we respond to this?

Proposing to elaborate and extend on the indexical and metaphorical notion of *shadowing*, as active process rather than empirical state or static quality, this conference invites critical and creative interventions into the conceptual bases shared by affects, aesthetics, and negativity.

The so called "affective turn" in the humanities, that posited affect as the unsignifiable intersubjective intensity of bodily potentiality akin to but in excess of emotion, has recently been criticized for a hasty dismissal of language, loose interpretations of the neurosciences, and overemphasis on non-representability. Moreover, while affect theorists productively explored how neo-liberal affectual labor and micropolitics within cinema, art, photography and media work our bodies beyond discursive registers and through non-human agents, an affectual life was seen as a positive ontological force; constitutive of a post-human condition and the possibility of affirmative politics.

Taking into account these developments but deflecting from affirmative ontological and post-human assumptions, this conference centers the notion of

aesthetics on the idea of the distribution of the sensible; “delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience” (Rancière 2006). Inviting us to rethink the visual and the political at stake in *the shadowing* – the aesthetic and affectual work of the negative – it asks:

- How are the fatal, stigmatic, horrific, and abject, which emerge as particular affects of life, its shadows, subscribed and distributed by a neo-liberal regimes of representation? Or, how do the affects of the negative define or elide contemporary forms of visual representation?
- What is the relation between ‘non-representability’ and the affects of the negative – historically, conceptually, politically?
- What specific role does the interrelation between the affectual and the aesthetic play in the current political conditions and the simultaneous visual production of such, what after Crapanzano (2006) we call ‘the scene’ (e.g. political protests, hunger strikes, city riots, AIDS/HIV epidemics, marginal wars and crises)?
- How could the negative in aesthetics and affects be employed for a reconceptualization of zones of precarity, abandonment, and disability? And how could it be rethought or imagined for a critical political engagement vis-à-vis neo-liberal projects and normative ideologies?

### **Keynote Lecture**

*Mediating Perception and the 'Unrepresentable': Hearing Voices and Visualizing Negative Affects*

Prof. Lisa Blackman, Goldsmiths, University of London

*Lisa Blackman* is Professor of Media and Communications at Goldsmiths, University of London. She is the author, among other, of *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation*, (Sage, 2012), *The Body: The Key Concepts* (Berg, 2008) and *Hearing Voices: Embodiment and Experience* (Free Association Books, 2001). She is the editor of the journals *Body & Society* (Sage) and *Subjectivity* (with Valerie Walkerdine, Pelgrave). She is particularly interested in phenomena which have puzzled scientists, artists, literary writers and the popular imagination for centuries, including automaticity, voice hearing, suggestion and telepathy. She is currently working on a new project, *Haunted Data: Social Media, Queer Science and Archives of the Future*.

## Conference Programme

Friday, September 26<sup>th</sup>

13:00 – 13:30      *Registration*

13:30 – 14:00      *Opening remarks*

### **Keynote Lecture**

14: 00 – 15:30      *Mediating Perception and the 'Unrepresentable': Hearing Voices and Visualizing Negative Affects*

Professor Lisa Blackman, Dept of Media and Communications,  
Goldsmiths, University of London

15: 30 – 16:00      Coffee Break

### **Session I. Historicizing negativity**

Chair Nerijus Mileris, Dept of Philosophy, Vilnius University

16: 00 – 16:30      *Aesthetics and abjection in orientalist photography*  
Branwyn Poleykett, CRASSH, University of Cambridge

16: 30 – 17:00      *Debt of the dead: hunting for treasures in what was once also Western Armenia*  
Alice von Bieberstein, Dept of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge

17: 00 – 17:30      Discussion

17:30 – 17: 45      Coffee break

## Performance

17:45 – 18:30      *True history. Joseph Beuys*  
Ute Kilter, independent artist, Odessa, Ukraine

19:30                      Dinner

Saturday, September 27<sup>th</sup>

## Session II. Emplacing affective economies

Chair Eirini Avramopoulou, Dept of Sociology, University of Cambridge

9:30 – 10: 00            *“Beautiful People”*: Collectively imprinting the psychedelic trance ethos  
Leandros Kyriakopoulos, Dept of History, Archaeology and Social  
Anthropology at the University of Thessaly, Greece.

10:00 – 10:30           *Affective enslavement of contemporary labour*  
Kasparas Pocius, Lithuanian culture research institute

10:30 - 11:00           Panel discussion

11:00 – 11:30           Coffee break

## Session III. Visualizing bodily matters

Chair Danute Baceviciute, Lithuanian culture research institute

11: 30 – 12: 00           *Can the other live in me? Immunity and contagion in the biopolitical frame*  
Audrone Zukauskaitė, Lithuanian culture research institute

12: 00 – 12: 30           *Bearing the unbearable: Or, destabilizing the political economy of visibility*  
Eirini Avramopoulou, Dept of Sociology, University of Cambridge

12: 30 – 13: 00           *Life, time and the anxieties of finitude in the age of biotechnology*  
Abou Farman, Dept of Anthropology, New School for Social  
Research, New York

13: 00 – 13: 30           Panel discussion

13: 30 – 15:00           Lunch Break

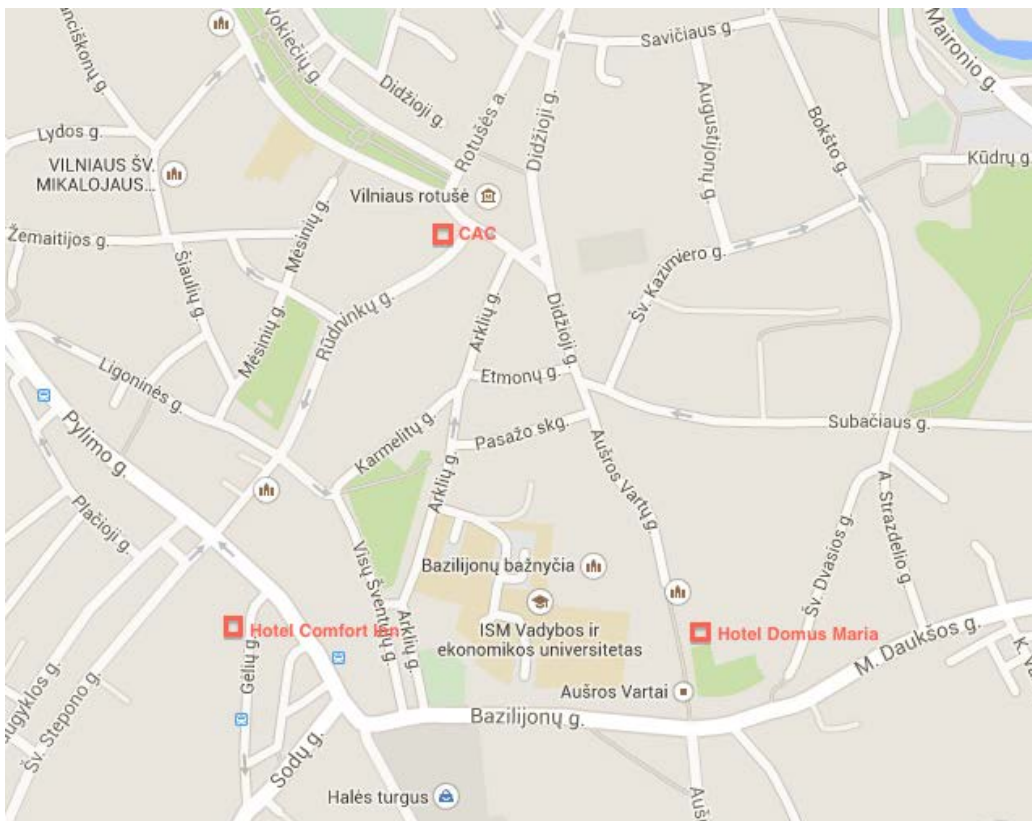
## Session IV. Shadowing the aesthetic

Chair Renata Sukaityte, Institute of Creative Medias, Vilnius University

- 15: 00 – 15: 30      *A Performative Materiality of the Hypothetical*  
Mindaugas Bundza, VDU, Lithuania
- 15: 30 – 16: 00      *Images of Absence*  
Mantas Kvedaravicius, Lithuanian culture research institute
- 16:00 – 16: 30      *Aikhu senses*  
Ovidijus Talijunas, independent artist, Vilnius
- 16:30 – 17:00      Panel discussion
- 17:00 – 17:15      Coffee break
- 17:15 – 18:00      Concluding discussion and final remarks
- 18:00                Reception

## Location

The conference will be held in the Contemporary Art Centre (CAC), Reading Room, in the heart of the Old Town: Vokieciu 2, LT- 01130, Vilnius. It is approximately 5 min walk from the places of accommodation.



## Abstracts

### **Mediating Perception and the 'Unrepresentable': Hearing Voices and Visualizing Negative Affects**

Professor Lisa Blackman, Dept of Media and Communications, Goldsmiths, University of London

This lecture will stage a conversation between the "unrepresentable" (Ranciere), specifically in the context of 'negative affects', and work on mediated and distributed perception in the context of affect studies. In response to Ranciere's essay, 'Are some things unrepresentable?', I will explore how machinic approaches to perception open up a distributed mode of visualizing the 'unrepresentable', which takes psychological processes out of a singularly bounded subject. This 'assemblaged body' enables the construction of a collective psychic apparatus, which allows the 'unrepresentable' to take form across fragments, traces, gaps, silences, echoes, murmurs and erasures. This approach, and the politics of aesthetics that it engenders, will be illustrated by taking the phenomena of hearing voices as subject matter. This approach and the source material will be taken from my longstanding collaborations and research with the Hearing Voices Network, an activist user movement, which challenges the assumption that voice hearing is always and necessarily a sign and symptom of a discrete disease process. Rather, I will illustrate how voice hearing can be approached as a modality of communication, which entangles the technical, somatic, affective, political, culture, aesthetic, historical and experiential. The lecture will develop work first presented in my book, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation* (Sage, 2012), and developed in my forthcoming book, *Haunted Data: Social Media, Queer Science and Archives of the Future*.

### **Aesthetics and abjection in orientalist photography**

Branwyn Poleykett, CRASSH, University of Cambridge

The third plague pandemic was a global epidemic event interpreted through multiple medical, social and political frames. Although in some places it was heavily represented and mediatised, in others plague was a more muted visual event, suppressed because of the challenges an epidemic posed to imperial

prestige and hygienic modernity. This paper discusses the search for traces of plague in the shadows of an orientalist photographic archive containing images of early twentieth century North Africa. I mix, compare, and counterpose genres of medical photography, landscape photography, and orientalist portraiture to ask how we can use this counter-thematic approach to explore an occluded global history of plague photography. An aesthetic analysis more historically attuned to colonial ways of seeing might allow us to reconsider the inner dynamics of this complex corpus of photography and to encounter both the poetics of the medical gaze and the clinical or diagnostic function of orientalist photography. This paper explores these questions through a visual analysis and also through a reflection on encounters in the archive, paying attention to the kinds of affective and aesthetic meanings that attach to these photographs as archival objects.

### **Debt of the dead: hunting for treasures in what was once also Western Armenia**

Alice von Bieberstein, Dept of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge

Hunting for treasures in Eastern Turkey/Northern Kurdistan/Western Armenia is an officially criminalized yet tacitly tolerated passion pursued almost exclusively by men who spend fortunes on the acquisition of tools and expert knowledge in the hope of finding what is also commonly referred to as 'Armenian gold'. Besides the libidinal pleasures of transgression and digging - mostly in the dark of the night, treasure-hunters are enthralled by the jewellery, statues, coins and other objects that emerge from the ground and are bathed in an aura of singularity and historicity. This presentation follows the question of how the practice of treasure-hunting and the engagement with sought-out or found objects articulates a relation - or not - to the Armenian past of the region and the disappearance of its Armenian population during the 1915 genocide. While the emergence of objects from the ground might prompt both experiences of loss as well as questions of how to relate to the origin and makers of these objects, fuelled by a broader nostalgic discourse on the lost skilful craftsmanship of Armenian artisans, this 'Armenian' past remains a generic, irretrievably lost time while the objects are submitted to an essentially future-oriented reading, pointing to ever more potential riches. The force of loss, though, returns in the form of the state, in whose hands most treasures eventually land, and in moralised tales of the gold's essentially destructive force, cursing finders through illness, death and poverty.

## **True history. Joseph Beuys**

Ute Kilter, independent artist, Odessa, Ukraine

The main myth by Joseph Beuys established on the story with his saving by Crimean Tatar during the II World War. BUT, the II World War wasn't on the territory of the USSR! And in my country, Ukraine, only several persons head about this myth. But all of us knew the history with resettlement of Crimean Tatar, like Ukrainians or Lithuanians to Kazakhstan and Siberia. Last 70 years in USSR and then in Russia Germans were presented only and specially as a beast. No words about cooperation between Stalin and Hitler regime, no words about cruelty of Red Army and specially about GULAG. Germans were totally changed, and Russians? Their totalitarian regime last and last, more over expanded! In Ukraine still exist decident group "Nurnberg-2"... But there are just words about my performance. I'd like to create a plastically true image, which bind Beuys myth, objects from his famous shelves with consumer goods necessary during the Cold War and our desire to deliberate from Communist regime. Music for my video dance performance is constructed from fragments of the "Thenody to Victims of Hiroshima" by Krzysztof Penderecki, Ukrainian folk song about Putin and "Ich will" by "Rammstein". Video include pictures from Euromaidan in Odessa and Beuys shelves from biennale "Manifesta".

## **"Beautiful People": Collectively imprinting the psychedelic trance ethos**

Leandros Kyriakopoulos, Dept of History, Archaeology and Social Anthropology at the University of Thessaly, Greece.

Psychedelic trance (psytrance) festivals belong to the lineage of rave parties which flourished in the late eighties as a novel apparatus for dancing entertainment. Psytrance culture, in particular, is a manifestation of sixty's psychedelic aesthetics, youth nomadism, drug consumption, music innovation and the soundcrafts. Since the early nineties and the popularity India's famous coast, Goa, acquired due to its emblematic affinity with these developments, psytrance festivals have become the ambassador of the euphoric, colorful and wandering qualities this culture embeds as phantasmatic possibilities. In this context, "beautiful people" is a native appreciation of a wide affective state that reveals the materiality of psytrance culture's spectrum. At the same time, "beautiful people" belongs to a tank of



allegories that function as appetitive elements which engage the subject to the utopian appeal of a joyful connectedness. What I want to argue is that “beautiful people” is not a given experience of the festive collective, always alternative to the “grey” everyday life of urban existence or successfully resistant to the supposedly alienated character of modern social affections. It is rather a repetitive performative product that draws from and enriches a gamut of aesthetic impressions that unfolds as the horizon of psytrance experience. This (virtual) product cannot be separated neither from the socio-logical connotations of the festival’s techno-installment nor from the utopian specters that govern its performance. It is a product of enacted technical and aesthetic mimetic of the apparition of the free, adventurous, out of social and cultural norms figure, that implicitly renews the psytrance festive’ s spectrum of recognizability. Even more, it is evidence to the shared aestheticization of the face able to communicate the social nervousness of the psytrance establishment.

### **Affective enslavement of contemporary labour**

Kasparas Pocius, Lithuanian culture research institute

In his book „Willing Slaves of Capital“, Frederic Lordon problematizes the Spinozist concept of conatus. Given that conatus means an innate inclination, or desire of a thing or individual to continue to exist and enhance itself, the everlasting problem is heterogenization of our multidimensional desires from what Lordon names the master-desire – capital. It is especially difficult to ask this question in the times of the real subsumption of emotions and affects. However, it is urgent. What does make people „willing slaves of capital“? What kind of affects are produced work in large international retailing industry and in small – scale enterprise? Can these intensive emotions experienced during the working day help create new places of resistance? Can our conatus be liberated from the overwhelming stratification machine of capital?

### **Can the other live in me? Immunity and contagion in the biopolitical frame**

Audrone Zukauskaitė, Lithuanian culture research institute

Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito introduces a new approach to biopolitics which he organizes around the notion of immunity. Esposito takes the term of

immunity from the biomedical sphere and redefines it in such a way that it could be expanded to the politico-juridical order. On the one hand, immunization can be seen as a negative practice of protecting both the organism and the political body (individual, property, liberty) from outside intruders. On the other hand, immunization can be seen as an affirmative practice of incorporation, including the dangerous element within itself. Esposito himself concentrates on the negative practices of biopolitics, such as Nazi eugenics; what remains unthought in Esposito's theory is the way in which the immunitary paradigm could take an affirmative turn.

In my paper I will analyze the experimental performance "May the Horse Live in Me", which took place in Ljubljana in 2010. The performance was conducted by a French artistic duo **Art Orienté Objet** (Marion Laval-Jeantet and Benoît Mangin) and was about transfusing horse blood to Marion's body. In order to do this, they excluded from the horse blood some toxic red blood cells and left immunoglobulin, which transfers information within the body. In this way the injected blood could bypass the defensive mechanism of the artist's body and forced her organs to respond directly. In this sense the performance breaks the immunity system of an individual body and questions the limits between different species. To the immunitary logic of protection, defense and negativity it opposes the logic of contagion, which can be seen as the possibility for an affirmative biopolitics.

### **Bearing the unbearable: Or, destabilizing the political economy of visibility**

Eirini Avramopoulou, Dept of Sociology, University of Cambridge

In this paper I will focus on Ana Hoffner's transgendered (FTM) performance which took place in Istanbul during the 16th Pride Week of 2008 while accusations of harming the morality of Turkish society and family structure aimed at the closure of the LGBT organization Lambda and when Pride Week was being marked by police's sovereign presence and by the recent death of several transsexual people.

Focusing on Ana's performance, I will analyse the different reactions it ignited and ask: under which kinds of bodies, sexualities and genders can one enter the sphere of public visibility and hence dispel the ghosts haunting the 'shadowy realms' of public life (cf. Butler 2000)? Or else, how are we to understand what haunts the 'shadowy realm' of the public sphere when confronted with social prohibition,

ensorship, and the unspeakable in desire? Moreover, how are we to think of and theorise the excess in certain affects and aesthetics of sexuality that destabilize common sense and hence become unbearable? In other words, what is 'unbearable' (cf. Berlant and Edelman 2014) in seeing and sensing an-Other desire? By posing these questions I am interested in exploring desire within the 'political economy' of visibility that I define both in terms of the effects of neoliberal processes of commodification affecting identity claims and gender performances and also as an affective and aesthetic process mediated by the cultural and legal regulations working to discipline bodies and legitimise civic and social policing of genders, sexualities, desires, pleasures and satisfactions.

### **Life, time and the anxieties of finitude in the age of biotechnology**

Abou Farman, Dept of Anthropology, New School for Social Research, New York

In the age of biotech, the body has become a time-reckoning device thanks to the measuring tools and protocols of biotechnology. Biological crises get translated into temporal crises – biology and time run out together. Research on circadian rhythms and methods that assess likelihood of future disease (life time risk) focus on the internal temporalities of the body as though these operated independently of social time frames. Reflecting on cancer and cosmology, some artwork, and field research on groups seeking to achieve immortality by technological means, this talk, and its slides, will examine the notion of nested timeframes, ways in which time works in the body (as an affect) as well as on the body (as a frame), from the inside out and vice versa.

### **A Performative Materiality of the Hypothetical**

Mindaugas Bundza, VDU, Lithuania

A situation is said to be a hypothetical one if its relation to the initial conditions does not limit or delineate the situation's potentiality in its gesture of offering. That is, hypothesis is not an extension in a way prosthesis is: the relation of the former to those initial conditions is that of the future. Thus, a hypothetical situation, in a gesture of a question, puts the original on hold just for a moment: experimentation.

Our interest here lies in the performative origins and aspects of the materiality of this moment of the experiment. In other words, when the situation is said to be a hypothetical one? It is a political question because it asks about the composition and its rhythmic properties. The rhythm is always present. And then, we say: no shadow is produced out of this rhythmic constellation of the hypothesis because logos as the light is not in time to illuminate it. It slips, that is to say, it is performed.

Following Michel Serres' insistence to maintain Lucretian distinction of turba and turbo, we will position the political – that is, the hypothetical – precisely between the two: navigation through the passage conditioned by and in a tension of extremes – hard and soft, slow and rapid, organic and synthetic, etc. In a word, 'there are those of sources and those of canals'. This undecidability, which manifests itself only in a performance of a kind, escapes, that is to say, it skips the production of the shadow: there is a certain asynchronicity between the materiality of the thing and the possibility of its mediation.

'Hope is in these margins, and freedom.'

### **Images of Absence**

Mantas Kvedaravicius, Lithuanian culture research institute

This paper explores the theoretical tension between the claims that consider unrepresentable states of being in terms of ontological absences and the analysis that sees such absences rendered (in)visible by the specific modes of representation. The paper invites to rethink this tension as the limit of representability of the states of bodily pain and mutilation while drawing on the fieldwork material from the counter-terrorist Zone in Chechnya and setting up the dialogue between Jacques Rancière and Alain Badiou.

Jacques Rancière (2007) famously argued that aesthetic regime of modernity, concerned to demonstrate that certain objects, materials, and events are always in excess of the means of artistic expression, is actually producing and dramatizing this excess, while placing it back into materiality of things. Alain Badiou (2001) on the other hand maintained that the singularity of the unknown or unthinkable should be understood, not solely as the product of a particular regime of representation, but as a rupture of the consensual situation

of subjectification and signification, which demands the rendering of the unknown into the existent rather than presenting it as unrepresentable.

The paper argues that, while this tension could be employed to examine the political implication for ethnographic representation, the account of body and its states remains inadequate in such discussions. Bringing the images and narratives of torture and disappearance in Chechnya, the paper insist on the need of the specific figuration of words and images that would expose the limits of representability while conveying the bodily states it depicts.

### **Aikhu senses**

Ovidijus Talijunas, independent artist, Vilnius

