

# Neophenomenological strategies in techno-images

## Towards the post-metaphysical ontology

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Recognitions of some contemporary philosophy and quantum physics seems to reveal the common background: the time of the metaphysics belongs to the past. Contrary to the current, post-modern interpretations, in this revelation I see not as much the “death” of the ontology itself, but the deconstruction of its rational comprehending in terms of “metaphysics of presence”, based on the subject-object duality. In my given here interpretation, the Reality would not be “gone”, but rather “claims” to opening its (essentially) unrepresentable, “liquid” dimension, beyond the cognitive schemes of perception. Post-metaphysical ontology, that is described here as negative ontology, needs a neophenomenological tool to be revealed. Characterized by a “wave” structure, beyond the “hard presence”, it can’t be defined as “being” or “non-being”. It is rather a kind of perpetual motion, determined by the trajectory of “photons of light”.

These recognitions seem to find an appropriate manifestation in a contemporary techno-culture. In my concept, in the field of media technology (analog film or digital new media art), the negative ontology may be experienced by strategies of neophenomenology, in which “suspension” (*epoché*) gesture would concerns first the “ground” itself, then the aesthetics and narration, constituted by the cognitive/rational act of consciousness. In my neophenomenological approach, the storytelling itself, as a part of cognitive consciousness which is projected on a (logocentric) representation, makes a way of concealing the “wave” Reality as it is. As an act that generates a schematic (“idolatric”) constructs of mind, it is closed to experience of what is the Other.

In other words, the visibility of the techno-image may be a tool of liberation of the perception from a cognitive/rational paradigm, directly connected with metaphysics of presence.

What should be underlined, in my proposal neophenomenology is not only the epistemology. The virtual image doesn't mean here the "phenomenology of imagination" / an epistemological "space of imagination"<sup>1</sup>, but it is directly related to negative ontology<sup>2</sup>. An intuitive, postsecular "transformation of vision", proposed here, that denudes the discourse of knowledge / representation, based on the subject-object duality, is provided by a various methods of "reversing" (scrutinizing), which include also (paradoxically) "slow" strategies, as a condition of revealing the "real movement" / the movement of Reality itself.

Exemplary materials to the outlined issues will be films by Béla Tarr and video installations by Bill Viola<sup>3</sup>.

### A theory of media machine by Jacques Derrida

Before I refer to a negative techno-image itself, showing its connection with ontology, first we have to take a look at the theory of techno-culture by Jacques Derrida, that will provide us with the wider horizon of understanding.

In the postsecular Capri Lecture entitled: *Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of "Religion" at the Limits of Reason Alone*<sup>4</sup>, Derrida undertakes a deconstruction of two traditional paradigms: the discourse of knowledge (comprehended as logocentrism / notional – binary thinking) and the discourse of dogmatic religion. He discerns that contrary to a current interpretation, which underlines the basic difference between the rational and the dogmatic discourse of revealed religion, they have in fact something in common. Both are based on a trait of certainty and pursuit to feel safe within the *episteme*, that implies appropriation what is the Other. Both paradigms of cognition are a part of metaphysics of presence, that comprehend the Reality<sup>5</sup> as an object which is put ahead and appropriated by the knowing subject<sup>6</sup>. In my approach, we are dealing with forms of the "idolatry" (mental constructions / cognitive schemes), that prevents the opening to experience of the Im-possible (the (real) Reality, which is unrepresentable, unnotional, inexpressible).

In this context, the postindustrial techno-culture Era brings a kind of "thaw". Contemporary primacy of the media machine: techno-science, tele-technological transcendence, may generates a new way/model of thinking and perceiving, which combines the faith and science in another sense. I define it as a perception of trust in *via negativa*<sup>7</sup>. It can be said that today we have to take the challenge on thinking the Unthinkable. In Derrida's interpretation, the media machine deconstructs the metaphysics of presence: both the logocentrism and the dogmatic religion. He discerns that media have



<sup>1</sup> In terms of philosophers of media such as G. Ulmer (*Teletheory: Grammatology in the Age of Video*, New York – London 1989), M. C. Taylor and E. Saarinen (*Imagologies: Media Philosophy*, London 1994) or V. Flusser (*Into the Universe of Technical Images*, Transl. N. A. Roth, Minneapolis-London 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Let me mention that – before this proposal – I have already published a book which deals with a (classical) variants of phenomenology treated as an aesthetic tool of reveal of a deep ontology of Werner Herzog's film images: *Ontologia i estetyka filmowych obrazów Wernera Herzoga*, Gdańsk 2014

<sup>3</sup> I have already taken on this complex of meanings in other articles (in Polish), i.a.: *Wobec Niemożliwego – estetyka negatywna i efekt obcości w audiowizualnych realizacjach Béla Tarra i Krystiana Lupy*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" 2014, No. 87/88; (Post)sekularna filozofia negatywna, media wizualne i ekstasis (dekonstrukcja jako wariant neofenomenologii), "Argument" 2016, No. 2; Kwantowe "oko w ogniu". W stronę apofatycznej techno-ontologii, [in:] *Widzialność wyzwolona*, Ed. A. Gwóźdź, Coop. N. Gruenpeter, Warszawa 2018; "Biały kamyk" epifanii. Postsekularna mistyka Bez-gruntu i jej filmowe manifestacje (przyczynek), "Konteksty" 2021, No. 3. In this article, after recalling the main assumptions, this will be developed in further analysis/recognitions.

<sup>4</sup> I interpret here selected aspects of J. Derrida's thought from his *Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of "Religion" at the Limits of Reason Alone*, Transl. S. Weber, [in:] *idem, Acts of Religion*, Ed., Introd. G. Anidjar, New York – London 2002, pp. 40-101.

<sup>5</sup> It should be underlined that Derrida doesn't use such terms as "reality" / "Reality"; this is my proposal.

<sup>6</sup> M. Heidegger (*The Age of the World-Picture*, [in:] *idem, The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, Transl., Introd. W. Lovitt, New York 1977) noticed that this model of cognition, initiated in the modern age, is based on an instrumental gesture of concealing the authentic Being; it's trying to perceive images into objects rather than seeing what's there.

<sup>7</sup> I do so in reference to apophatic mysticism / negative theology and the *kenosis* event – the death of Christ – but going beyond the known tradition.



<sup>8</sup> I recall here the term of the Rhine mysticism (*Ungrund*), where the Divinity is recognized as a groundless Nothingness. See more in: **Meister Eckhart**, *Selected Writings*, Transl. O. Davies, London 1994.

<sup>9</sup> **J. Derrida**, *op. cit.*, p. 78. The French philosopher is also considering the social, political and economic influences of the “mystic” tele-technology, but this is not the issue of my concept here.

<sup>10</sup> This recognition can be find in **M. Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)** (Transl. R. Rojcewicz, D. Vallega-Neu, Bloomington-Indianapolis 2012). The technique re-appears here as a tool of revealing of the nature (*aletheia*), beyond our human projections, in opposition to industrial way of perceiving the nature as an objective resource, where the technique indicates the gesture of pragmatic exploitation, whose domain is “instrumental reason”. About the instrumental way of using the technique see more in: **M. Horkheimer, T. Adorno**, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Transl. E. Jephcott, Stanford 2002; see also **M. Heidegger's The Question Concerning Technology...**

<sup>11</sup> **J. Derrida**, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.

a mystical character in their paradoxical / contrary dimension. By it's uprooted techno-ontology, on the one hand the machine denotes the movement of expropriation from *oikos*, from what is “identitarian” / “familiar”. On the other hand, however, it signifies at the same time the movement of renewed re-rooting, but (in my recognition) already in the space of “groundlessness”<sup>8</sup>. Derrida states:

“Mechanical” would have to be understood here in a meaning that is rather “mystical”. Mystical or secret because contradictory and distracting, both inaccessible, disconcerting and familiar, *unheimlich*, uncanny to the very extent that this machinality, this ineluctable automatization produces and re-produces what at the same time detaches from and reattaches to the family (*heimisch*, homely), to the familiar, to the domestic, to the proper, to the *oikos* of the ecological and of the economic, to the *ethos*, to the place of dwelling. This quasispontaneous automaticity, as irreflective as a reflex, repeats again and again the double movement of abstraction and attraction that at the same time detaches and reattaches to the country, the idiom, the literal or to everything confusedly collected today under the terms “identity” or “identitarian”; in two words, that which at the same time ex-propriates and re-appropriates, de-racinates and re-enracinates [...]<sup>9</sup>.

In other words, we may say that the media gesture has an apophatic nature. Derrida, like Heidegger, has recognized that mysticism and technique belong to each other, because they are the Other of metaphysics<sup>10</sup>: they transgress a binary logic of subjective being in control of the object of cognition. Thus, in my interpretation, media technology constitutes a tool to trigger the consciousness from the logic of subject-object duality; this is a tool of mystic transformation of vision.

### Deconstruction as a neophenomenology

It should be noted that Derrida identifies himself as a hermeneutist – as an “apostate” both of the transcendental, intentional Husserlian “phenomenology of light” (understood here as a light of [subjective and objective] presence) and Heideggerian phenomenology of *Offenbarkeit* (“revealability” as a source itself)<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, in my interpretation, the ecstatic specificity of the media machine, considered as technology visual media, lies not only in the uprooted (contradictory) ontology, but also in the element of visuality. In this approach, we need to remind the meaning of the greek word: *mystikós* – it's “seeing with your eyes closed; seeing with the inner eye”. Related to this context, in my proposal, deconstruction as *via negativa* in the audiovisual media area constitutes the neophenomenological *epoché* strategy (*reduction/denudation*), which results in going beyond the limits and conditions of the empirical and rational perception. Furthermore, it is held in the mode of intuitive contemplation,

that would have to be comprehended here not in a classical terms of a distance, but as an experience of immersion. The exclusion of the subject and object of cognition, death of the discourse of knowledge / representation, results in experience of emptiness that make space for the Other. It must be emphasized that new *epoché* strategy, which I propose here, not only denudes (*kenosis*) cognition of the “idolatry”, characteristic of the metaphysics of presence and the dogmatic religion, but also suspends the “source” itself, taking by this gesture another step further than Heidegger’s phenomenology and (traditional) *via negativa* in apophatic mysticism. That is to say, the experience of radical emptiness (Derridian *khora*) is a condition of an opening to the Im-possible.



<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 55.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 47.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 59.

### ***Khora***

The French philosopher conceptualizes the specificity of *khora* in a following way:

Nocturnal light, therefore, more and more obscure. Let us step up the pace in order to finish: in view of a third place that could well have been more than archi-originary, the most anarchic and anarchivable place possible, not the island nor the Promised Land, but a certain desert, that which makes possible, opens, hollows or infinitizes the other. Ecstasy or existence of the most extreme abstraction. That which would orient here “in” this desert, without pathway and without interior, would still be the possibility of a *religio* and of a *relegere*<sup>12</sup>.

Indeed, this “scrutinizing” of the cognition has a specific purpose:

Paradoxically, the absence of horizon conditions the future itself. The emergence of the event ought to puncture every horizon of expectation. Whence the apprehension of an abyss in these places, for example a desert in the desert, there where one neither can nor should see coming what ought or could-perhaps-be yet to come. What is still left to come<sup>13</sup>.

In this approach, it can be said that “desert in the desert” contains within itself and exceeds the *kenosis* event at the same time:

*Khora* is nothing (no being, nothing present), but not the Nothing which in the anxiety of *Dasein* would still open the question of being [...]; it says the immemoriality of a desert in the desert of which it is neither a threshold nor a mourning. The question remains open, and with it that of knowing whether this desert can be thought and left to announce itself “before” the desert that we know (that of the revelations and the retreats, of the lives and deaths of God, of all the figures of *kenosis* or of transcendence, of *religio* or of historical “religions”)<sup>14</sup>.



<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 58–59.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 99.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 56–57.

<sup>18</sup> *Idem*, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-portrait and Other Ruins*, Transl. P.–A. Brault, M. Naas, Chicago 1993.

As a result, *khora* signs the movement of a radical negation – “the emptiness of emptiness”:

*Khora* [...] not allowing itself to be dominated by any theological, ontological or anthropological instance, without age, without history and more “ancient” than all oppositions [...]. It is neither Being, nor the Good, nor God, nor Man, nor History. It will always resist them, will have always been an **utterly faceless other**<sup>15</sup>.

Finally, Derrida is interested in what is “unscathed” (the saintly; *das Heilige*) and in faith/trust (*Zusage*, which is an opposition to dogmatic *Glaube*) that combines in the experience of “witnessing”. He states:

If belief is the ether of the address and relation to the utterly other, it is in the experience itself of non-relationship or of absolute interruption. Here as well, the hypersanctification of this non-relation or of this transcendence would come about by way of desacralization, perhaps even by way of a certain “atheism”; in any case – by way of a radical experience of the resources of “negative theology” – and going beyond even this tradition<sup>16</sup>.

In other words, this faith without dogma makes its way through the risks of absolute night. Such a mystique is unjustifiable within the logic of what it will have opened. It is the decision of the other in the undecidable<sup>17</sup>.

### The negative image

In *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*<sup>18</sup>, Derrida concentrates on the seeing and the image (painting) issues. His recognition of “blindness”, concerning deconstruction of the subject and object of knowledge, is based on a metaphor of “night vision”. This figure signifies the act of perception as an unintentional, outlying gesture that is expropriated / uprooted from the visible center of the image, which has a linear structure of a logocentric discourse. It can be said that the act of perception is based on a death of the structure of representation and iconic heritage, situating “the eye opening” out of sight (out of “objective visibility”). The night image doesn’t see nothing: it is virtual, potential, dynamic; it is visual and audial, movable and tactile at the same time. Indeed, Derrida identifies the “objective visibility” with (rational/certain) knowledge and the “blindness” with a gesture of intuitive, undogmatic perception of trust.

In this approach, the “negative seeing” is a kind of *obscure lucidity*, that makes the opening force from the impasse of symbolization, from the “crack” of symbolic. The French philosopher recalls also Friedrich Nietzsche’s weep:

If tears come to the eyes, if they well up in them, and if they can also veil sight, perhaps they reveal, in the very course of this experience, in this coursing of water, an essence of the eye. [...] Deep down inside, the eye would be destined not to see but to weep<sup>19</sup>.

In this context, tears of purification and illumination constitute an authentic seeing: these are the “tears of joy”.

The above meanings resonate with the philosophy of the image (painting) by Georges Didi-Huberman<sup>20</sup>. His conceptualization is based on a contradiction between “visibility” and “visuality”. The category of “visibility”, that belongs to intentional consciousness, situates itself in traditional paradigm of representation / discourse of knowledge. The register of “invisibility” is also belongs to the discourse of classic semiology as an abstract notion. On the other hand, “visuality” begins where the “rupture”/“tear” in a structure of representation (and the category of sense, which is generated by the aforementioned representation) appears. Didi-Huberman underlines that “visuality” concerns not the “object” but the “event” (*kenosis*), that can not be read in the *episteme* key; it opens the “power of negativity” which brings death to the metaphysics of presence. To put it another way, a negative image breaks the visibility register that concerns a classic imitation in favor of a symptom – the visual trace of defiguration / decentralization. Thus, denudation of the image indicates a gesture of figures dismantle(s) (the philosopher recalls here the *kenosis* of Christ and apophatic theology).

In this approach, “visuality” means in fact “virtuality” – it denotes the way in which the register of “visual” moves us away from the generally accepted conditions of knowing what is “visible”. *Virtus* specifies the sovereign power of what cannot be seen with our own (external / empirical) eyes. *Virtus* names the “event” that never sets a goal/sense to the eyesight; it generates the power of “unintentional seeing”, considered as the “web of negativity”.

### My approach of the negative techno-image

In my concept, the perception of the negative image is constituted by the ecstatic movement: the visual “event”, on the way of *punctum*<sup>21</sup>, “tears apart” and “roots out” the empirical and logocentric structure of representation, denudes the subject and object of cognition, and, in the mode of “contemplative immersion”, within the experience of emptiness, triggers the intuitive “visual trust” which leans out towards the Im-possible / the Other.

In the field of (analog) film and (digital) new media art this neophenomenological strategy is based on a “reversing” (scrutinizing) movement that concerns the aesthetics and narration, and is constituted by cognitive gesture of intentional consciousness<sup>22</sup>. This ges-



<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 126–129.

<sup>20</sup> G. Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, Transl. J. Goodman, University Park (Pennsylvania) 2005, pp. 139–219.

<sup>21</sup> I refer here to the term of R. Barthes: *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Transl. R. Howard, New York 1985.

<sup>22</sup> It should be underlined that, in my interpretation, the term of “intentionality”, although belongs to the classical phenomenology, is comprehended as a part of cognitive way of perceiving, because still concentrated on the (present) “subject” and “object” of cognition. Alternatively, the neophenomenology proposed here is a strategy of going beyond the “intentionality” itself.



<sup>23</sup> This is especially evident in his: *Damnation* (Kárhozat, 1988); *Satan's Tango* (Sátántangó, 1994); *Werckmeister Harmonies* (Werckmeister harmóniák, 2000); *The Turin Horse* (A torinói ló, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> See e.g. L. Koepnick, *On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary*, New York 2014; J. Remes, *Motion(less) Pictures: The Cinema of Stasis*, New York 2015; E. Çağlayan, *Poetics of Slow Cinema: Nostalgia, Absurdism, Boredom*, Cham 2018.

<sup>25</sup> E. Çağlayan, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

ture generates the (idolatric) constructs of mind, which are closed to real, negative ontology (to experience of radical Otherness). It is very significant, that the great figure of negation, of this “reversing” movement in the image, is the “work of elements” (for example, the work of Wind or Fire), which involves the deconstruction of the structure of representation.

### Film negativity

In the analog techno-image film this movement of “scrutinizing” may concern: the classical, logic narration based on the schema of linear action, structures of empirical appearances of the represented world, means of expression (for example, in using inner-takes, when editing is only in the picture). We are dealing with “ruptures” in diegesis, un-diegetic sequences, de-dramatization effects, contemplative, slow rhythm of takes and the domination of the obscure, empty spaces. It all together emerges the “strangeness effect” (*unheimlichkeit*) and reveals the “visual web of negativity”, which – by “tearing apart” an empirical and rational register – opens up an intuitive seeing with the “inner eye”, that experiences the Image as the Nothingness.

The perfect example of this strategy may be the films by Hungarian director Béla Tarr<sup>23</sup>. In his *The Turin Horse* (A torinói ló, 2011), which visualizes the annihilation of the present world / return to Nothingness in six days, we are dealing with the (constant / repeatable in his films) “negative figures” that mirror the process of disappearance of presence: the desert landscapes of the Great Hungarian Plain (Puszta); the images of ruins, fire and lamps that burn and die away; the night and wind (in other films, also the fog and rain) as visual and acoustic elements of a film structure that scrutinize the texture of the represented world; long, static takes of (an unintentional / objectless) staring at the obscure window (as into Abyss); and finally, a trance-like, hypnotic rhythm of takes which are not integrated into a clear narrative line [Figs. 1–2].

My interpretation of Tarr’s films is not compatible with a certain interpretation of *slow cinema*<sup>24</sup>, represented, among others, by Emre Çağlayan, who argues that:

Bazinian realism is invested in the objective and unfiltered representation of reality in cinema, while slow cinema recasts this mode of realism as a different, exaggerated, mannerist and quite often distorted subjective perception of reality<sup>25</sup>.

Firstly, as I argue in this article, thinking in binary terms of “objective” and “subjective” still belongs to the metaphysics of presence, which is transgressed in my neophenomenological reading of Tarr’s images. Secondly, the negative ontology, which I reveal in Tarr’s im-



1. Béla Tarr, *The Turin Horse*, France - Germany - Switzerland - Hungary 2011.  
Photo from: <https://film-grab.com/2015/05/14/the-turin-horse/#bwg1685/105076> (access date: 17.03.2024)



2. Béla Tarr, *The Turin Horse*, France - Germany - Switzerland - Hungary 2011.  
Photo from: <https://film-grab.com/2015/05/14/the-turin-horse/#bwg1685/105059> (access date: 17.03.2024)

ages, has nothing in common both with the “substantial” and “subjective” reality; it is rather a revealed “emptiness”, that can be comprehend as a “groundless”/“sourceless” space of (for) the Other.

### New media negativity

It can be said that in new media technology this “negative seeing”, related to negative ontology, takes a step further. On the quantum physics basis, today we can assume that the techno-ontology status is a natural extension of the trans-media space: the apophatic ontology of Reality itself. It is worth noting that today physics makes an attempt to transgress an epistemological perspective and ontologize the wave function<sup>26</sup>. The ontology can be characterized by a wave structure: it can't be defined as “being” or “non-being”. Thus, in this approach, we may say that the material reality is not in fact a constant (hard) presence, but it is constituted by the Wave, which generates a flexible spacetime consisting of “photons of light”, which are staying in perpetual motion. The (real) Reality appears as a pure, vibrating stream of energy. It seems to indicate that all phenomena such as dark energy, the neutrino particles, blackbody radiation, the virtual particles emerging from nothingness – can be comprehended only by deconstruction of metaphysics of presence / the discourse of knowledge. Contemporary discourse of the quantum physics is beyond the binary logic and recognizes itself in Other logics: paraconsistent (based on a principle of contradiction) or intuitionistic (in Michał Heller's term it is “non-linear logic of loops”<sup>27</sup>). We may say that the movement of the quantum cognition has an apophatic nature in predication rather what the world is not, than what it is.

In my mystical re-reading the discourse of religion, the same gesture of negation of the idolatry seems to appear in the “work of elements” – it is especially intensive in the scrutinizing, transforming “work of Fire”. The elements also have a wave-structure: neither (hard) being, nor non-being. In relation to Greek natural philosophy, we can also recall here the arche-type nature of the elements itself, of which the cosmic bodies consist: their quintessence is the ether, which is staying in a perpetual movement<sup>28</sup>. Today we can state that the “ether” means in fact the “energy particles”, whose transitivity of forms is generated by frequency (wavelength) of vibration.

In new media technology this “negative seeing”, related to negative ontology, is perfectly presented, for example, in the video-installations by Bill Viola, which generate kind of “materialization” of quantum energy<sup>29</sup>. Video-installation *Martyrs: Earth, Air, Fire, Water* (2014) is a high definition, soundless polyptych in color, made of gas plasma display, which was displayed in Saint Paul's Cathedral in London [Fig. 3]. Video-installation *Fire Woman* (2005) is a color projection in High Definition, with a four audio channels, which was installed in Saint Carthage's Church in Parkville, Melbourne [Figs. 4–5]. Both

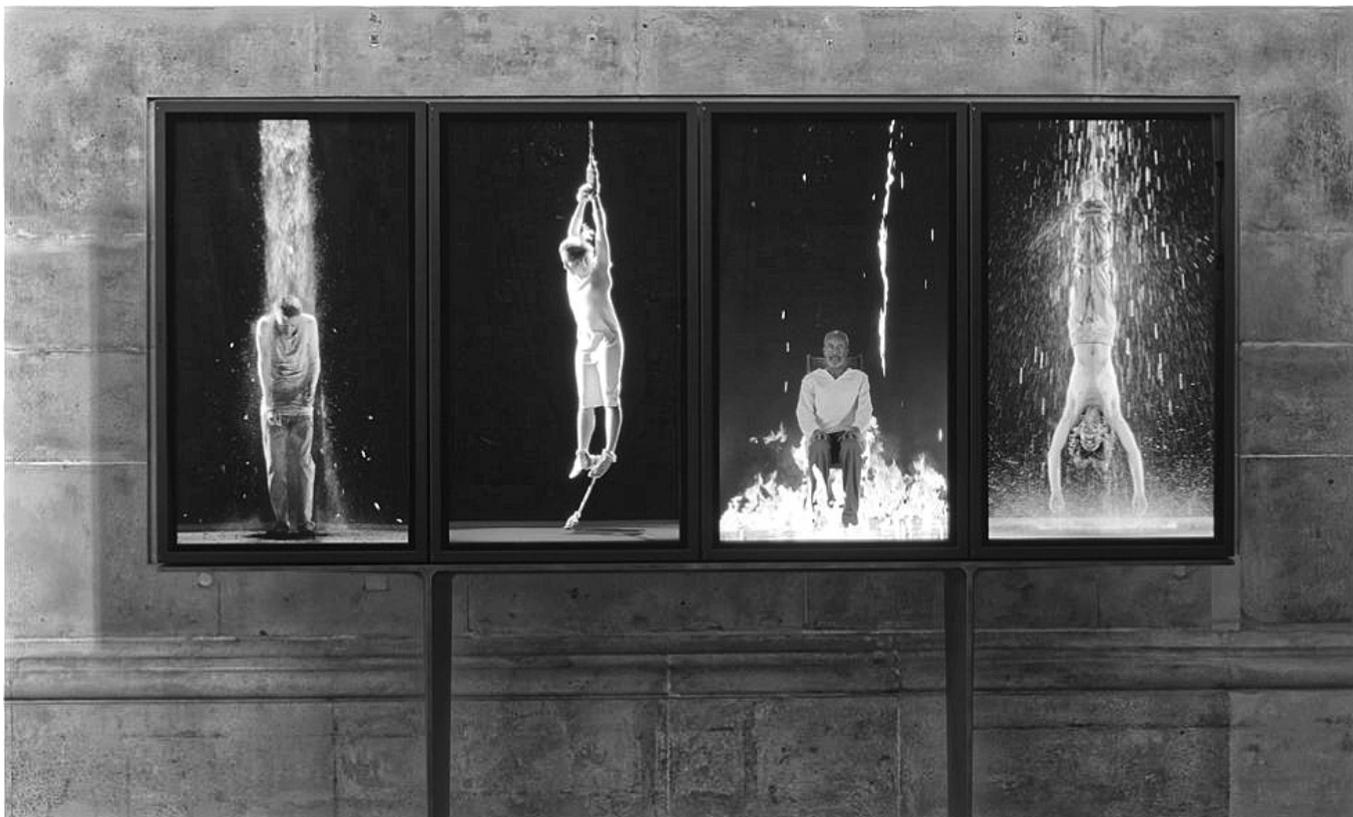


<sup>26</sup> See M. Pusey, J. Barrett, T. Rudolph, *On the Reality of the Quantum State*, “Nature Physics” 2012, No. 6.

<sup>27</sup> M. Heller, *Filozofia i wszechświat. Wybór pism*, Kraków 2006, p. 96.

<sup>28</sup> See K. Mrówka, *Heraklit. Fragmenty: nowy przekład i komentarz*, Warszawa 2004.

<sup>29</sup> Except for his works analyzed here, see also e.g. *The Reflecting Pool* (video, 1977–79), *The Passing* (video, 1991); *The Messenger* (installation, 1996), *The Crossing* (installation 1996); *Five Angels for the Millenium* (installation, 2001), *The Lovers* (installation, 2005); *An Ocean without a Shore* (installation, 2007).



3. Bill Viola, *Martyrs (Earth, Air, Fire, Water)*, 2014. Photo from: <https://www.epdlp.com/cuadro.php?id=6105> (access date: 17.03.2024)



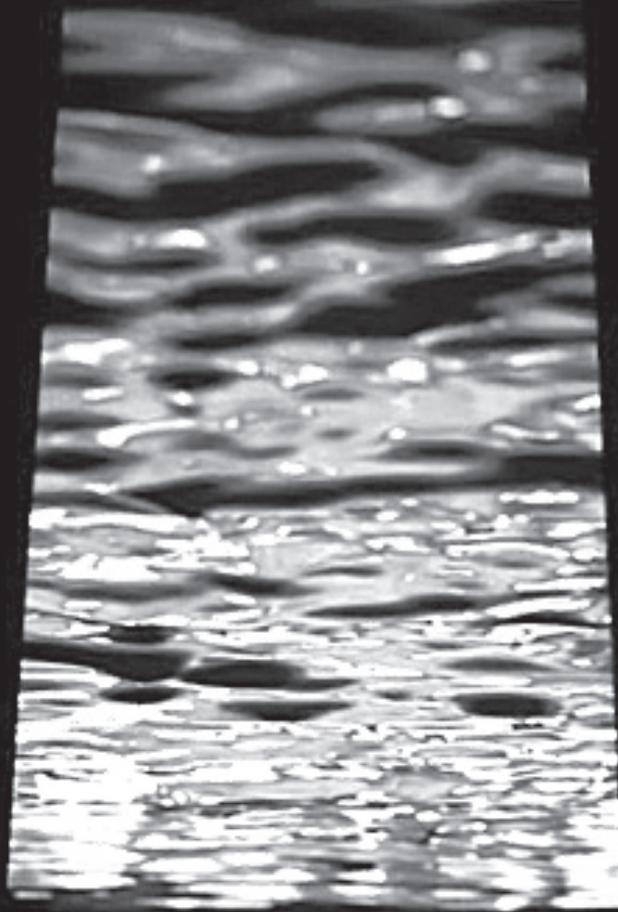
<sup>30</sup> It also seems interesting in the context of the latin meaning of “*diabolos*” – it’s ‘the one who divides’.

of them visualize an experience of transgression – the process of deconstruction (transformation) of human subjectivity (as a “constant presence”) and our perception. At this point, it is worth highlighting that in my mystical reading a movement of negation of the subjectivity doesn’t mean to lose it ontologically – paradoxically, just the opposite. The act of “letting go” really signifies a state of inner readiness of the subject to enter into transrational experience of recovering our selfless / egoless true Identity: the Other inside (beyond a traditional duality of the “inside” and “outside”).

In *Martyrs* this process is initiated by a “visual event”: an impact of elements / their invasion into a (mediumistic) body of the subject. The main goal of an ecstatic work of negation is to free the subject from ego-isolation, to purify / denude him from the false identity / state of separateness<sup>30</sup>. The concrete, visible bodies becoming visual, they start to be subjected to an act of (painful) scrutinizing, which is the condition to “make a place” / to become open to an incorporation of the Other. In the next phase, they start to illuminate / “shine from the inside”, trans-immanently, all immersed in a vibrating stream of photons of light. The final gesture of disappearance of presence means here, in a mystical and quantum approach, that the



4. Bill Viola, *Fire Woman*, 2005. Photo from: <https://imageio.forbes.com/blogs-images/yjeanmundelsalle/files/2014/12/MAIL-FireWoman1-1118x1940.jpg?format=jpg&width=1440> (access date: 17.03.2024)



5. Bill Viola, *Fire Woman*, 2005. Photo from: <https://aladyinthecity.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/bill-viola-fire-woman.jpg> (access date: 17.03.2024)

material separateness of each being signifies an empirical illusion. What is significant, both installations use the technique of reversed (inverted) projection or reversed image (reflection) [Fig. 3].

In *Fire Woman* the action of a “negative flame” more strictly, more holistic visualize the process of entrance of the subject into death as into experience of purification, which is here – literally – a leap into Unknown, and then – an emergence the Other way of Being. This transition from the light and fire into darkness and water indicates an experience of *obscure lucidity*, as the mystical union of opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*)<sup>31</sup>. The night of *episteme* (reason and senses)<sup>32</sup> is the condition of vision transformation and liberation from the metaphysics of presence, which is in fact the cognitive inversion<sup>33</sup>. The new, ecstatic vision, as an expropriation from the identity of the self (*Gelassenheit*)<sup>34</sup>, becoming identical with a pure energy of Being [Figs. 4–5].

It should be underlined that Viola’s works use the technique of *slow motion*, that can be read here as a neophenomenological *epoché* strategy. This technical gesture of eye precipitation from the time perceiving in an empirical and rational mode triggers an intuitive rhythm of the “inner eye” that places itself inside of a “permanent particles movement”, within the time of pure (naked) / quantum Being<sup>35</sup>. Thus, the aesthetics of “slow” opens us in fact to perpetual trans-movement of a wave Reality (*coincidentia oppositorum*).

### Summary

On the whole, it can be said that the only difference in using the slow strategy for the transformation of vision depends on the possibilities/specificity of the analog and digital medium: while Tarr’s images provide us with the annihilation of representation in an experience of radical emptiness (*khora*), Viola’s works bring us the step further: full immersion into the deep structure of negative ontology (into vibration of photons of light). In both, we receive the experience of the Im-possible / the Other. We are dealing with the identity of the epistemological and ontological images.

In general conclusion, it can be said that my concept of postsecular techno-image is related to Derridian apophasis in the “nocturnal light”. In my interpretation, the death of metaphysics of presence opens – paradoxically – the life-giving “desert breath in the desert” that appoints the progressive, infinite movement, which is like “The Wind”. So recognized up-rooted *khora*, in the media images, achieves status of seeing-in-transparency, under which the Im-possible manifest itself. The mystic eye of visuality, triggered from the discourse of representation by the gesture of night, becomes the medium of “exit” of dogmatic religion (towards the “religion without religion”), kind of “messenger” of transition into a permanent *ekstasis* state, which is the lucent affirmation of the Other. Furthermore, the



<sup>31</sup> The paradox of the *obscure lucidity* was well recognized in an apophatic theology, Rhine mysticism and Carmel mysticism, and the author of the term “*coincidentia oppositorum*” is Nicholas of Cusa.

<sup>32</sup> See more in: **John of the Cross**, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Transl. D. Lewis, Brewster (Massachusetts) 2010; **idem**, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Several Transl., Rewritten, Updated L. B. Hildebrand, Orlando (Florida) 2007.

<sup>33</sup> In this context, it can be recalled the latin meaning of the word “*luciferus*” – it’s ‘the one who brings the light of reason / the false light’.

<sup>34</sup> See more in: **Meister Eckhart**, *op. cit.*

<sup>35</sup> The analogous complex of meanings, with reference to Henri Bergson’s thought, is undertaken by **G. Deleuze**, in his theory of the time-image (*Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Transl. H. Tomlinson, R. Galeta, Minneapolis 1989), however, with a basic difference: the Deleuzian image is a simulacrum.



<sup>36</sup> The similar comprehending of this issue was undertaken by **D. Morgan**: *Spirit and Medium: The Video Art of Bill Viola*, [in:] *The Art of Bill Viola*, Ed. **Ch. Townsed**, London 2004, pp. 103-106.

techno-discourse of the “naked eye”, which visualizes a nondiscursive / quantum registers of Reality, reveals that the ontology of media and trans-media space constitutes (in the essence) the same “flow” of vibrating stream of energy, which is permanently liberated by the Groundlessness (*Ungrund*).

In this context, I state that technology visual media could become kind of groundless (divine) non-place of the spiritual “awakeness” and “re-birth”<sup>36</sup>. Neophenomenological “holiness” would signify here just an intuitive “pure seeing”. Generally, the work of negation and “slow”, in its movement of transgression of the subject-object duality, allows us to immerse into pure/wave Reality, which is the Other.

The technocultural discourse of the “naked eye”, interpreted in this way, seems to indicate the “third way” between two pointless (bipolar) options: thought which is fossilized, closed to the dynamics of the “element”, and indifferent, neutralizing thought.

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#### Słowa kluczowe

filozofia postsekularna, dekonstrukcja, neofenomenologia, ontologia negatywna, mistyka apofatyczna, kenoza, fizyka kwantowa, technologia, media wizualne

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### Summary

**JOANNA SARBIEWSKA (University of Gdańsk) / Neophenomenological strategies in techno-images. Towards the post-metaphysical ontology**

The article deals with the deconstruction of “metaphysics of presence”, based on the subject-object duality, in a postsecular/mystical approach. Post-metaphysical ontology, that is described here as negative ontology, needs a neophenomenological tool to be revealed. Characterized by a “wave” structure, beyond the “hard presence”, it can't be defined as “being” or “non-being”. It is rather a kind of perpetual motion, determined by the trajectory of “photons of light”. This recognition seems to find an appropriate manifestation in a contemporary techno-culture. In the field of media technology (analog film or digital new media art), the negative ontology may be experienced by strategies of neophenomenology, in which “suspension” (epoché) gesture would concerns first the “ground” itself, then the aesthetics and narration, constituted by the cognitive/rational act of consciousness. In other words, the visuality of the techno-image may be a tool of liberation of the perception from a cognitive/rational paradigm, which is closed to experience of what is the Other / the apophatic, wave Reality as it is. What should be underlined, in this proposal neophenomenology is not only the epistemology; the virtual image is directly related to negative ontology. An intuitive, mystical transformation of vision, proposed here, that denudes the discourse of representation, allows us to immerse into pure/“naked” Seeing and pure/“naked” Being. Exemplary materials to the outlined issues are films by Béla Tarr and video installations by Bill Viola.