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PLAY FROM (BEHIND) THE MIRROR:  
FROM MIMESIS TO THE AUTHOR'S RE-CREATION IN SELECTED WORKS  
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Abstract

Questioning the mimetic character of art, on the one hand, and the power and limits of creative imagination, i.e., the author's creation using words and images, on the other, this paper aims to show how, in selected literary and video artworks, the authors use the motif and 'the mechanism' of the mirror to – regardless of the author's oeuvre, origin, and the medium in which they create – send the same message: the viewer and the viewed (the sender and the recipient) do not stand in binary opposition, but mirror each other in a constant play between surveillance and introspection, spirituality and technology, the space of intimacy and the (counter)hegemony of (new) media. The paper analyzes and contextualizes Sylvia Plath's poem "Mirror" from 1961, "Raport stražara iz Pompeja" [A Report of the Pompei Guard] by Vlado Gotovac, a poem published in his collection *Osjećanje mjesta* [A Sense of Place] in 1964, and the most famous video work, i.e., the still-exhibited installation of 'the father of video art' Nam June Paik, titled *TV Buddha*, first exhibited in 1974. Bearing in mind Jakobson's language functions, the paper will try to show how in textual and audiovisual media artistic languages are foregrounded to send strong and constantly *re-created* messages to the recipient who becomes a co-author. The mirror serves as a motif and a tool/mechanism to examine the sender–message–recipient relationship. Both roles of the mirror refer to the self-referential potential of art. Applying the methodology of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Derrida's poststructuralist idea of 'the signifier's transfer' (through 'skipping' the direct signified–signifier relationship), the analysis will show the metamorphoses of the (lyrical) subject and the consequent jumps/skips in the *re-creation* of the identity of the reader/viewer, whereby art is reaffirmed as a space for play and pushes the boundaries of freedom.

Key words: (artistic) identity, (counter)hegemony, freedom, mass and new media, reflection(s)

## 1. Introduction

Due to its large potential for symbolism and the correlation with mimesis,<sup>1</sup> the mirror has been a common motif in art since ancient times (some of the most famous literary pieces using the power of mirror include the myth on Perseus and the myth on Narcissus<sup>2</sup>). The mirror's potential is enabled by its reflective properties (this also refers to other mirrorlike surfaces such as water, metal, glass, plastic, etc.). Throughout the centuries, first as a motif, and then as a tool, and lately as a (new) medium of the screen, the mirror has been fulfilling various functions in art, including directing the look inward and outward. The mirror seems to be intriguing to modern and contemporary art, and can be explored using works belonging to different types of art. This paper will try to show how the potential of the mirror is used in juxtaposing images in poetry and video art. While poetry is one of the oldest forms of artistic expression, video art emerged in the late 1950s and 1960s as a form of moving-image art that offered new possibilities for artistic experimentation. Thus, it can be speculated whether and in what ways video art can widen and/or (re)interpret poetic/literary topics. Despite using different media (textual vs. audiovisual) to communicate their messages, poetry and video art show great expressive potential. According to Roman Jakobson, the expressive or emotional language function is dominant in (lyric) poetry along with the poetic or aesthetic function, which refers to message-oriented communication (cf. Lešić 2008: 305-306) in which language is foregrounded. Foregrounding language through meter, rhythm, and sound repetition makes the basis of poetry (cf. Culler 2000: 93). Therefore, a poem is both an act of a writer/reader, an act within the history of literature, and a structure composed of words (Culler 2000: 88). Jakobson's functions of language can be applied to video art and its different types of 'language.' On the one hand, as will be shown in the further analysis of one video sculpture/installation, the focus is on the viewer and the viewed (the expressive and conative function) as well as on the way in which the message is communicated (the aesthetic function). What poetry establishes through the special use of language (for example, rhythm, metaphors, and symbols that distinguish poetic from everyday language), video artworks establish through the use of new media (for example, a closed-circuit camera system). Both poetic texts and video artworks with a dominant aesthetic function are self-referential, with strong imagery. Furthermore, they both ask for interaction on the part of the recipient whose role in (re)interpretation is crucial. Based on the above, this paper will focus on the convergence of poetry and video art using the example of the metaphor of a mirror. Relying on postmodern theories

- 1 Mimesis is one of the central concepts in European literary tradition explaining the way that art constructs and transfers its meanings. One of the oldest interpretations of mimesis relates to artistic representation and the *recreation* of reality, which has been both supported and questioned throughout the history of aesthetic thought. While Plato understands mimesis of 'inert arts' (sculpture and painting, which back in the ancient Greece included art models) as pure imitation, Aristotle recognizes representative role of 'progressive arts' such as poetry and music. Contemporary understanding of fictional potential of art does not neglect the aesthetic distance between an artwork and its recipient (cf. Lešić 2008: 21, 29; Biti 2000: 316).
- 2 In the context of the paper, it can be mentioned that Lacan "pinpoints primary narcissism as starting in the mirror phase of the three stages of psychosexual development, where the subject becomes erotically attracted to the misrecognized perfect image" (Goscilo 2010: 7).

which increasingly stress an active role of the recipient in interpreting artworks, it will be analyzed how in poetry and video art the mirror as a motif and as a mechanism can be used to reaffirm the playful and creative nature of art. The first part of the paper will offer a close reading of the selected poems written by Sylvia Plath and Vlado Gotovac, and an analysis of a video sculpture by Nam June Paik. Despite the different contexts of their production and reception, selected artworks intersect (1) in the rich symbolism of the mirror and a number of juxtaposed images/reflections presented to the reader/viewer to depict a metamorphoses during meditative and reflective states of the subject of the poem/video sculpture, and (2) in the endless dialog in which the viewer and the viewed mirror each other. These two common points justify the selection of artworks for analysis, but it should be noted that similar parallels can be sought in other pieces of art, as the mirror is a common artistic motif whose meaning has been redefined with the occurrence of new media. In the second part, the three artworks will be analyzed in the context of selected ideas presented in Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis (with a special focus on 'the mirror stage') and Jacques Derrida's post-structuralist theories on *différance* and the indefinite chain of signifiers. The analysis will show how art – which rejects the negative notion of mimesis as purely imitating/copying external reality and relies on an author's (and recipient's) re-creation instead – enriches its creative potential and creates pleasure in recipients.

## 2. The symbolism of Sylvia Plath's "Mirror"

The poetry of American poet Sylvia Plath (1932–1963) is usually seen in the light of the internal drama of her own being, whereby in the center of her poetic attention are fragmentation and a delayering of the consciousness in an obsessive insistence on the same themes (cf. Sepčić 1995: 173–174). In this context, it can be said the motif of a mirror runs through Plath's poetry, culminating in the poem "Mirror" (1961).<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, it is precisely in the 1960s (which saw the publication of both this poem and Vlado Gotovac's poem to be analyzed in the following section) that many materials with mirrorlike properties were used in the visual arts, and the same decade saw the consolidation of theories of interpersonal perception and group behavior, which suggests that both artists and psychologists investigated the dialog between subjective and intersubjective dimension of existence (Albu 2016: 3; 18).

The following several interpretations of Plath's poem "Mirror" will rely on an initial hypothesis that using the mirror in literature (but also in the visual arts, as will be shown later) suggests: 1) introspective modes of a reader's (viewer's) engagement and (2) an active role in perceiving the artwork. This active introspection also examines the complex relationship with the Other, thus blurring the boundaries between the viewer and the viewed. An initial reading of Plath suggests that the mirror becomes a symbol of hegemony (seemingly) causing disturbances upon women's inability to see their 'real' images, as well as an inability to confront those 'wrongly' perceived. By becoming slaves of the mechanism of their reflection,

3 The poem was written in 1961 and posthumously published in the *New Yorker* in 1963. The citations from the poem in this paper are taken from the 2008 Harper's edition of the collected poems by Sylvia Plath.

women ultimately become confined in the mirror. A closer look at the poem might suggest a different interpretation, a subversion made by the lyric subject through the use of irony. The woman as an active subject thus (re)creates her identity by recognizing the irony of the mirror and accepting a challenge to play. Moreover, woman herself becomes a mirror, i.e., not only passively viewed but also an active viewer (cf. Freedman 1993).

We will start from the assumption that the mirror in the poem can be interpreted as a tool of (counter)hegemony depending on the meanings assigned to this seemingly clear term. First, through the use of prosopopoeia, the reader is being addressed by a mirror as an inanimate object which offers a reflection of a woman's body. In the first part of the poem, the emotionless mirror, "unmistaken by love or dislike," (Plath 2007: 173) presents us with the facts, like an omniscient narrator in fiction. The mirror appears "exact" and with "no preconceptions." (2007: 173) Consequently, the woman's perception, and not the mirror, is responsible for her dis/satisfaction with the image. In contrast to the 'realism' seen in the first part of the poem, in the second part the mirror turns into a lake, giving the poem a romantic tone. The lake is positioned somewhere "in the middle," between the truthful mirror and the "liars, the candles or the moon" (2007: 174) which offer a blurred image by concealing the woman's physical imperfections. By looking in the mirror/lake daily, the woman sees herself growing older and her "tears and an agitation of hands" (2007: 174) are proof of her displeasure with her reflection and are wrongly interpreted by the lake as a reward. The wrong interpretation could refer to the mirror's/lake's innocence – after all, the mirror says it is truthful, "The eye of a little god" (2007: 173). Thus, the mirror tells the story it witnesses daily. Since the mirror is 'objective,' it cannot have any influence over the image nor over the woman. Only at the end of the poem, when it has already turned into the lake, which is more romantic than the mirror and thus more subjective, does the mirror give its final comment, comparing the appearance of the old woman's image with the rising of "a terrible fish" (2007: 174). The mirror in this *literal sense* affects the woman indirectly, by offering her physical reflection without having any other kind of influence over her.

Following the above more general narrative on the mirror, there are counternarratives in the forms of *feminist interpretations* of the poem as well. Plath announces a typical preoccupation of second-wave<sup>4</sup> feminists. pointing to the mystification mechanisms (American) women were subjected to in their attempt to become an ideal woman (cf. Bužinjska, Markovski 2009: 432). In this sense, the lyric subject is struggling with the stereotypes of female beauty (and seen more generally, with stereotypical female roles in society) imposed by the patriarchy, and the mirror could symbolize a man or male-dominated society; the woman sees herself through the eyes of a man. She is unable to see her real image because it is distorted by the expectations and restrictions imposed upon her by imperialistic society. Even though the mirror, as an inanimate object, can offer an "exact" reflection, it becomes blurred by the media-supported (mis)perceptions of women, and is never good enough. The lyric subject, both as the viewer and the viewed, is misled and subjugated.

4 The poem was written just before the start of the second wave of feminism in the USA, and Sylvia Plath is considered a great feminist writer.

In another feminist counternarrative, the mirror could relate to a woman herself. A woman as her own torturer/persecutor. Being brought up on the mirror myth, or the 'beauty myth,'<sup>5</sup> she is to be blamed more than men or the media. In a society "made up of sexual clones, men who want objects and women who want to be objects" (Wolf 1991: 144), her repeated looking in the mirror leads to constant self-inspection and self-loathing. One of the gravest consequences of this is death (again, a common point with the myth of Narcissus and his pining away) – whether seen as a consequence of plastic surgeries as suicide, or as the death of feminine identity, death is symbolized by "a terrible fish" (Plath 2007: 174) at the end of the poem. The motif of death and self-destruction is typical of Plath's poetry and presented with powerful images such as Lady Lazarus who finds dying "an art" and "eat[s] men like air" (2007: 245; 247) or the image of Ariel, "God's lioness," "The dew that flies / Suicidal" (2007: 240).

The following interpretation differs from the previous three as it subverts the above-said and relies on the use of *irony*. Here, irony will be understood as a stylistic device used to express the opposite of what one thinks and a device which suggests new meanings, which are not contained either in the denotative or connotative meanings of the expression, thus foregrounding the active role of the reader/interpreter (cf. Škreb 1998: 338; Lešić 2008: 229). The mirror (with all its possible meanings, including those explained above) is ironic and the woman recognizes this. She does not allow herself to be captured in the mirror but goes beyond its imposed myths and establishes her identity in a mosaic way. She is aware that all the images seen in the mirror are but fragments of her identity, and she decides what fragments will be incorporated in the whole picture. This can be seen in the finishing lines, "In me she has drowned a young girl and in me an old woman / Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish," (Plath 2007: 174) which implies that the woman – rather than getting lost in the mirror by seeing only fragments – actually redefines her identity by seeing the 'whole,' unblurred image. While the body of the woman grows older, her character can develop from innocence to experience and become able to accept the changes in her reflection. "An old woman" presents wisdom and maturity, while "a terrible fish," slippery and reticent, is a symbol of a self-conscious, cunning woman, hard to deceive. Similarly, the woman becomes aware that beneath the "silver" and "pink" facade of a "perfect" woman there is "a terrible fish." Accepting the terms "young" and "old" as different parts of her identity, she redefines the concept of beauty, and "real" beauty thus becomes a product of the woman's self-awareness; it is already present in the mirror, but it depends on the woman whether she will recognize it. This is in accordance with a claim by Judith Butler, a philosopher and writer who influenced third-wave feminism: "Identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted" (Butler 1993: 105). (Feminine) identity is thus reaffirmed in the reconstruction of the mosaic, which again shows how identity is an open category. Building on the presented feminist interpretations, there is also a *self-referential* note of the poem "Mirror," proposed also by Freedman (1993): "...the glass (and lake) in 'Mirror' is woman-and more particularly the woman writer or artist for whom the question of mimetic reflection or creative transformation is definitive." As Annas (1988: 11) claims, for many women writers searching in the mirror is ultimately a

5 The term used by supporter of third-wave feminism Naomi Wolf (1991).

search for the self, often for the self as artist. Mid-twentieth century women poets including Plath, confronted with “a long and overwhelmingly male tradition of poetry whose concerns, images, and language were not necessarily the same as theirs must have felt considerable conflict as they mediated between what they needed to say and what was considered sayable” (Annas 1988: 7). Seeing their works as a mirror of themselves, and vice versa, women writers, especially perfectionists like Plath, demand continuous artistic *reassessment*, wondering if their work was good enough. (Women) writers become their own readers, or mirrors. Ultimately, the mirror in Plath’s poem becomes a symbol of poetry itself. The “young girl” might have grown old writing and her poetry might depict her life. She has to reassess both her life and her poetry by looking into the “mirror,” especially since her roles of a wife/mother/daughter and writer are considered to be mutually exclusive. On the other hand, unlike in many other of Plath’s poems where the lyric subjects are images of the woman who inanimately animate the “mirror of the male-inscribed literary text,” e.g., dolls, mannequins, stones, patients (Gilbert and Gubar as ctd. in Freedman 1993), in “Mirror,” the lyric subject redefines her identity through a self-conscious act of writing, and thus a mirror as a symbol of literature is not an obstacle anymore, or something causing disturbance. It becomes “the locus of authorial self-discovery,” like in much of 19th- and 20th-century women’s poetry and fiction (cf. Gilbert and Gubar as ctd. in Freedman 1993). In that case, the mirror images which are created by an active subject and not by a politicized society are not fake anymore, but become proof of the versatility of the subject. The woman in “Mirror” has finally become aware of the fact that her identity consists of multiple poles – not only of “silver” and “pink” but also of “a terrible fish,” too. The numerous repetitions of the pronoun “I” in the poem, together with the doubles seen in the mirror and accepted as parts of her identity, would then refer to exploring and *redefining* her identity. Furthermore, the latter understanding of mirror can be related to one of essential characteristics of fragmented and disorderly *écriture féminine*<sup>6</sup> which “refuses to submit to aesthetic norms of integration and wholeness against which it is diagnosed and judged” (Rose 1991: 27–28), thus celebrating the lack of cohesion, continuity, and straightforwardness. *Écriture féminine* is challenging the phallogocentric language<sup>7</sup>

6 The term denotes both women’s writing in terms of feminine writing style and one of the most influential theories in French feminist literary criticism. Though it culminates in 1970s, led by French writer and literary critic H  len   Cixous, *  criture feminine* can be applied to reading Plath as it presents a specific discourse stressing emotions, the body, the unconscious, and the unsaid (cf. Bu  injska, Markovski 2009: 439–440). Relying on the subversion of male discourse in themes and style, Plath’s works are suitable for feminist readings. Also, since her discourse often includes fragmentariness, ellipses, the unsaid, and a complex relationship with the Other (often the Father), there is a justification for connecting Plath with Lacan’s psychoanalysis in this paper.

7 In the 1970s, feminist literary critics claimed that there is no place for feminine writing style in so-called “phallogocentric” language. In philosophical terms, a woman should not define herself as the Other (in relation to her lack of the phallus), while in literary terms, a woman should find her own discourse opposing the phallogocentric literary tradition. What H  len   Cixous (1976: 886–887) suggests is “writing through the body,” i.e., focusing on emotions, sexuality, freeing syntax from conventional male-imposed rules, thus “flying in language and making it fly.” Relying on the concepts of phallogocentrism and logocentrism, Jacques Derrida coined the term phallogocentrism to refer to traditional model of Western philosophical thought privileging the masculine as the norm (cf. Bu  injska, Markovski 2009: 459).

and constantly rewriting itself offering multiple representations and expressions. Such piece of literature requires reinterpretations both at the thematic and stylistic level, and consequently an active role on the part of an introspective reader who engages in the reconstruction of meanings. As shown above, Plath's poetry, seen as a piece of *écriture féminine*, along with the presented (constructivist) interpretations of the poem "Mirror" relying on the symbolism and polysemy, confirm the hypothesis on introspection and action from the beginning of this section.

### 3. Vlado Gotovac: the mirror as a unifying tool in an act of (re)creation

While the previous passages relied on a close reading of Plath, suggesting different interpretations of the selected poem depending on the symbolism of the mirror, the concept of the mirror in works written by Croatian poet and politician Vlado Gotovac (1930–2000) will be analyzed on two levels: (1) the poet's theoretical and philosophical approach to poetry, which rejects the remnants of mimesis typical of Croatian literature in socialist realism,<sup>8</sup> and (2) a close reading of the poem "Raport stražara iz Pompeja"<sup>9</sup> [A Report of the Pompeii Guard] (1964). The analysis of the selected essays and the poem will show how Gotovac sees the mirror as a tool of counterhegemony.

In his collection of essays *Isto [The Same]*,<sup>10</sup> which genre-wise Škvorc (2007: 148) characterizes as "a hybrid text, news, document, reportage, essay-novel," Gotovac reflects upon various personal and social/political preoccupations, trying to (re)define the concepts of literature, the relationship between an individual and society, Croatian (political) myths, etc. In the fragmented essays on literature, he expresses a concern for a crisis of poetry and criticizes "mirror art" (Gotovac 1990: 52), i.e., the mimetic role of art understood only as a mere "mirror devoid of magic; because it is determined by the fate of what it reflects, because it is submerged by the reflected. A play that does not define its boundaries or its meaning; the delusion of the dreams of our freedom, the apparition of its suffering on the fragile paths of the case of an individual" (Gotovac 1990: 15). Gotovac contrasts this kind of mirror with a mirror in God's hands, "without beginning and without end" (Gotovac 1990: 16). He considers the poem a linguistic fact; language must not be an instrument that shows the relation/world/truth, "but a place where relations are contained as possibilities;

8 Back in the 1950s, Croatian art workers, notably Miroslav Krleža in his speech at the literary congress in Ljubljana (1952), rebelled against formulas of socialist realism and Stalinist "engineering of the spirit," i.e., party literature dictated from the political top. Milanja (2000: 13–14, 53) notes two key periodization points of Croatian poetry and literature in general: (1) the year of 1952 as the end of socialist realist aesthetic impositions and the year which saw the publication of the literary journal *Krugovi* (the journal advocated pluralism and freedom of creation and rejected the mimetic approach in literature, led by Vlatko Pavlečić's claim that "art is an expression, not a reflection"), and (2) the years 1968–1971, when literature and poetry become defunctionalized and dedicated to themselves.

9 If not indicated otherwise, the citations from poems in this paper are taken from the 1964 book of poetry *Osjećanje mjesta* [A Sense of Place] by Vlado Gotovac. The translations of the quoted poems and essays were made by the author of the paper.

10 As noted in the introduction (Gotovac 1990: 5–6), the first part of the book (*Strepnja i oblik* [Anxiety and Form], "Tekstovi o raznolikosti" [Texts about Diversity] and "Anex") was written by 1969 and conceived as a whole, but due to going to prison, Gotovac gave up on the idea. The other 15 texts (in the second part titled "Naprotiv, let po strani" [On the Contrary, Flying on the Side]) were created from 1966 to 1988.

relations that sometimes are not materialized outside of the poem – but they do not lose their presence in the world, nor the accompanying obligation” (Gotovac 1990: 172). The world of literature is thus primarily linguistic and autonomous, yet not without connection to the real world. This concept is not new in theory of literature,<sup>11</sup> but presents an attempt of the (literary) subversion needed in Croatia in the socialist period. To understand this view better, it is good to remember that Gotovac joined Croatian art workers who in the 1950s opposed the previous writing, done in the spirit of socialist realism, and undertook small outsider ventures, sharing a passion for “freedom of thought, freedom of design, freedom of creation” (Gotovac 1990: 199). As one of those ‘outsiders’ (a term which will be assigned to him as a poet and as a politician his whole life), Gotovac assigns a new value to the work of art, stressing the performative rather than representative role of art: “The value and power of a work is that it becomes the world, that it becomes the bearer of its arrangement, its meaning” (Gotovac 1990: 177). In verse, the same idea will be expressed, again emphasizing that the poem is not a (bad) mimesis and that the literary work is somehow above reality: “Jer ona nije ni slika ni oslabljeni život / U njoj je i danas sve a gubitak je u životu” [Because it is neither a picture nor a weakened life / Even today, everything is in it, and the loss is in life] (“Dvije uvodne meditacije” [Two Introductory Meditations], Gotovac 1964: 61).

It can be noticed how the figure of the poet in Gotovac’s writings always remains perceived as subversive in his originality, always in a rebellious relationship with society, always an “individual case” (cf. Gotovac 1990: 139).<sup>12</sup> Škvorc notices how Gotovac applies the poetics of the journal *Krugovi*<sup>13</sup> that advocates postmodern construction through language play and reference to the unspoken and unspeakable. In such poetics, big stories crumble into individual cases, and only in language games do they form a community (Škvorc 2007: 145–147). In this sense, the mirror is perceived as a hegemonic instrument limiting creative expression and promoting art of no value. This can be seen in the light of Gotovac advocating the freedom of an individual which is a precondition for the freedom of society. For him, cultivating

11 In their discussions, Bodmer and Bretinger, back in 1740, built on Leibniz’s theory of ‘possible worlds,’ recognizing in poetry the creation of new imaginative concepts which do not have to be materialized in the existing, real world. The more unusual the concept, the greater the (aesthetic) pleasure (cf. Biti 2000: 317).

12 Gotovac (1990: 75, 113) opposes the then-myths of Croatian society: the myth of the infallibility of the Communist Party, followed by “the mythical connection of Yugoslavism as a world stage, the Croatian question as a reactionary schism and internationalism as an immanent perspective of Yugoslavia.” He opposes any theory on totalitarian identity and finds a solution in constructing a community which respects the individual. Thus, he advocates the idea of Central Europe and Western culture which accepts differences and includes small nations from the Baltic to the Adriatic (Gotovac 1990: 268–269). This might suggest Gotovac’s visionary idea of Europe as united in diversity, which is the motto of the European Union from the 21st century. Yet, his liberal and antitotalitarian ideas were not welcomed in the then communist system. After publishing seven ‘suspicious’ articles written by himself, and 16 articles written by other authors in *Hrvatski tjednik* in 1971, he was imprisoned from 1972 to 1976. He went to prison again in 1981 due to giving interviews to Swedish and later Italian journalists. He was expelled from the cultural life of Yugoslavia and Croatia for 16 years (cf. Čurković-Nimac 2010: 95–96).

13 Gotovac belongs to the generation of supporters of *Krugovi* born between 1922 and 1932, but in terms of his poetics, he is somewhere in between the supporters of *Krugovi* and supporters of *Razlog*, another Croatian literary journal from the period of the so-called ‘second moderna’ (cf. Milanja 2007: 9).



national awareness, with liberal views and ideas, implied creating free-minded people in the nation, in the country, thus forming a concept of individual freedom that does not exclude responsibility, but also does not support repression (cf. Zoričić 2022: 15, 111–112).

To sum up the above, Gotovac, as a poet with philosophical aspirations and political engagement, sees an individual/poet as contrasted with the power from (behind) the mirror. Such an individual figure strives not to merge with the mirror and in quite an active and self-aware way subverts the mass who holds the opposite view, but remains alone and misunderstood in his subversion. The mirror in this sense is a symbol of dominance and hegemony, a destructive mechanism working against true values (among which freedom is the highest value) and creative individuals.

An example of such subversion in form and content is Gotovac's postmodern poem "Raport stražara iz Pompeja" [A Report of the Pompeii Guard], published in his book of poetry *Osjećanje mjesta* [A Sense of Place] in 1964. The poem offers a perspective of a guard witnessing one of the most famous world disasters. Yet, a closer look at the poem reveals that the guard and his town are only seemingly put in determined spatial and temporal coordinates. The repetition of the initial verse, "Proljeće se ulicama ljujalo gore dolje" [Spring was swinging up and down the streets] (Gotovac 1964: 36), and the verbs "to swing" and "to sway," suggests a repetition of events in a 'circle' which is directly mentioned by the end of the poem: "A u krugu prolaze mnogi kao da vrebaju plijen / I vrate se i eto kako se rodi ova bliskost" [And many pass by in the circle as if they are stalking prey / And they come back and that's how this closeness is born] (1964: 37), and again in the last stanza, the circle is announced: "Mene su pozdravili i ja pozdravljam vas / Pred istim događajima" [They greeted me and I greet you / Before the same events occur] (1964: 37). The use of polysyndeton, including the most frequent use of the conjunction 'and,' reinforces the impression of a continuation. Thus, in the form and in the content, the poem suggests a kind of repetition, an unavoidable sequence of events from the ancient times. The guard becomes the symbol of any individual witnessing a disbalance, a rupture, a sudden disaster, breaking the carefree play "in the imperial garden":

Kao da ih je obuhvatila ova laka igra  
Sve su mjere pokazivale bezbrižnost  
I moje se oružje sjalo kao ljupki pribor ljubavi  
I korak mi je bio jednak pokretu u igri  
Grad je živio ko u carskom vrtu uzvanici.

[It was as if they were caught up in this easygoing game  
All measures showed carelessness  
And my weapon used to shine like a lovely instrument of love  
And my step was but a movement in the game  
The city lived like a guest in the imperial garden.] (Gotovac 1964: 36)

After the city falls down into the death, the guard passes into silence, into a space-in-between ("Ne pripada životu tko s mojim licem život gleda" [He who looks at

life with my face does not belong to life]) (1964: 37), thus becoming a mirror (“(...) ja bivam ogledalo unutra a vi gledate sa mnom / Kako se grad za gradom naginje (...)” [(...) I become a mirror inside and you watch with me / How city after city tilts (...)] (1964: 37), caught up between the past and the future (“Mi smo samo dvostruki plijen što ga obilaze zvijezde i potomci / Svaki na svom putu” [We are but a double prey surrounded by stars and our descedants / Each on a path of their own]) (1964: 37), and is destined to tell the story, to reflect the disaster. Relying on the Gotovac’s above-claim that poetry creates an autonomous world in which relations are contained as *possibilities* and sometimes are not materialized outside of the poem, we can interpret the poem regardless of the historical and political circumstances in which it was created, yet somehow the knowledge of the figure of this poet, who was politically active and wrote philosophical texts, enriches the picture. In this sense, the guard is the mentioned outsider who watches the downfall of Croatian society (and Croatian literature), burdened by totalitarian myths. Going beyond the national framework, the guard is a self-aware individual witnessing any kind of world disaster, unable to prevent it (“I mi ne možemo spasiti ni grad ni svijet” [And we cannot save the city or the world]) (1964: 37); the guard is the poet who can only write a ‘report,’ i.e., reflect what he sees, thus becoming a mirror. Finally, readers are all guards as they, together with the guard from the poem, watch the course of events and are all in the same circle:

A u krugu prolaze mnogi kao da vrebaju plijen  
 I vrate se i eto kako se rodi ova bliskost  
 S kojom ja bivam ogledalo unutra a vi gledate sa mnom  
 Kako se grad za gradom naginje jer smrt je uvijek teška  
 Ustupam vam ovaj vidik (...)

[And many pass by in the circle as if they are stalking prey  
 And they come back and that’s how this closeness is born  
 With which I become a mirror inside and you watch with me  
 How city after city tilts because death is always hard  
 I hand over this view to you (...)](Gotovac 1964: 37)

Subversion in poetic form is seen in the partially agrammatical, fragmented, and blurred ‘narration,’ which does not correspond with the style of a ‘report,’ while in terms of content, the subject/the guard is subversive, being the only figure who “passes down into the silence” and “detaches from the city,” while others are united in death. Ironically, it is the guard’s silence which creates a resonating report in the form of a poem. In this sense, the poem itself is a guard, the only surviving witness of the disaster, in accordance with the famous Latin proverb *scripta manent*. Much like in Plath, this self-referential note of the poem ultimately becomes a mirror of the events and a call for the subversion of the dominating discourse. While Plath subverts phallogocentric discourse, Gotovac redefines the mimetic potential of the mirror to oppose the rigid concept of mimesis in the literature of the time; the poet uses motifs from history on which to build a literary world, thus making not a copy

of the real world but recreating the famous disastrous event. Insistence on repetition in form and content suggests the inevitability of the course of disastrous events in any temporal and spatial coordinates. The mirror becomes the symbol of poetic (re)creation and a unifying tool. While others are united in a destructive death, the mirror enables unity in a playful act of re-creation. Another common point with Plath lies in the loss of the dichotomy between the viewer and the viewed; the guard is the only witness to the event and simultaneously a participant in it. He is a kind of inner mirror (“ogledalo unutra”), addressing the readers to join him in this act of viewing, and even asking them to continue his act of witnessing (“Ustupam vam ovaj vidik”), i.e., create the active introspection mentioned earlier in the paper.

#### 4. Actualities of the self in Nam June Paik's TV Buddha

In the above selected literary works, the mirror was presented as a powerful tool of (counter)hegemony, and the aim of this section is to examine whether such a concept can be applied to non-literary artworks. Much like in the case of Plath and Gotovac, the third artist was chosen by relying on the personal and professional interest of the author of this paper, meaning that similar parallels could be searched for in other forms and works of art, but we will focus on video art, precisely on a video sculpture. As a major contemporary artist and a founder of video art, Nam June Paik (1932–2006) uses a basic style to cross cultural and physical boundaries between art and technology, past and present, East and West, order and chaos (cf. Heo 2018: 95). Linking two worlds and cultures (in his life and work),<sup>14</sup> Paik redefines the playful potential of art. In this paper, we will explore the concept of the mirror represented by a monitor in Paik's 1974 video sculpture *TV Buddha*. This video sculpture is one of the canons of the media concept of reduction and auto focus, where the artist links watching television and Zen Buddhist meditation, motifs which have been present from the very beginning of video art. Though Paik made multiple versions of *TV Buddha*, all of them include a seated Buddha statue watching his image on a TV monitor placed before him. At the same time, a closed-circuit television camera installed behind the monitor captures the statue, and its image is projected on the television in real time. Thus, a camera, an object, and a screen create a feedback loop, which is frequently used in Paik's other works (cf. *Catalogue* 2023).<sup>15</sup> *TV Buddha* reflects much of Paik's art philosophy and strivings to bring together the dichotomy of Eastern nature and Western technology, to blur their boundaries, which could suggest the deep influence of Shamanism, as one of the most primary and deepest spiritual characteristics in Korean society. Relying on the concept of shamans who act as a kind of mediator between heaven and earth, the artist thus assigns himself the role of “a cross-cultural shaman to reconcile the boundaries between the national and international and the local and universal” (Heo 2018: 96). This connection between (video) art and shamanism is reinforced by knowing that one

14 Paik was born in Seoul in 1932, studied in Tokyo, and then moved to Germany in 1956 to explore European philosophy and modern music. He developed his video art in full swing in the US (cf. *Catalogue* 2023).

15 For example, the installation *Untitled* (1984) includes an image of a person who seems to talk inside a television set and reflects the author's idea to change television, a one-way medium, into a two-way communication medium.

of the roles of a shaman is writing poetry and acting in dramas (Hoppaal as ctd. in Heo 2018: 99). Thus, a shaman, much like an artist (in Plath: the woman artist, in Gotovac: the guard), uses this mechanism to sign themselves in and out of the 'real' and the illusion/fiction. The mirror/monitor in this context, similar to the mirrors as explained in Plath and Gotovac, functions much like a self-referential piece of writing, which is an instrument for the viewer, and is influenced by the viewer, but also influences the viewer's identity formation, establishing them as self-reflective figures. Moreover, the mirror/monitor links the natural and the digital. Interpreting the versions of *TV Buddha* where the monitor is sunk into the ground or sand, Heo (2018: 106) concludes that the television images are the earth's humus for the existence of natural living things in the plant world and artificial living things in the media, of both material and immaterial phenomena.

Another interpretation of this video sculpture could refer to criticizing surveillance from the outside, where the viewer is the oppressor, and the mirror is a symbol of hegemony (much like in one of the interpretations of Plath's "Mirror" and Gotovac's "A Report..."). In this sense, the work presents a critique of the omnipresent mass media which do not allow intimacy even in moments of meditation and contemplation. The figure of Buddha only reinforces the irony; if an enlightened being is caught up in the media loop and feels exposed, how can anyone be introspective in the digital age when we are constantly being presented with the same images and exposed to the public? Much like in previous interpretations of the literary works, we will explore how the mirror can be seen as a tool of subversion. Here, Lim's idea of the influence of Zen Buddhism<sup>16</sup> in Paik's work might be helpful. He claims that Zen Buddhism strives to capture the essence of the self by transcending from irrational secular ideas and blind stereotypes and reaching the state of *yi* – or unconventional naturalness:

The literal meaning of *yi* includes the concepts of escape, seclusion, wandering, extemporization, and evanescence. Thus, in the works of *yi*, the artistic rules of the familiar edge are rejected and dissolved. Instead, humor, jokes, weirdness, nympholepsy, illusion, absurdity, and the like appear because distortion of the established rules is more effective for expressing the deepest inner world of self or that of self-transcendence. (Lim 2019: 93)

Seen in this light, Paik's work presents a playful attempt to subvert dominant rules of behavior and thought and to orient toward the inside. A mound, when used in the installation, can only reinforce this symbolic death<sup>17</sup> to the world, but not in the sense of completely shutting down and escaping from the real. The closed-circuit installation allows for a constant interchange between in and out, so the viewer is also the viewed and his/her critical reflection enables control over the mirror rather than merging with an illusory image and drowning in the desperate desire for perfection. In that sense, identity is not more fragmented, but accepts the existence

16 Paik never declared himself as a follower of Zen, which does not prevent thinking of his work in terms of Zen, especially bearing in mind he spent youth in Asian Zen Buddhist surroundings.

17 Smith (2000: 365–366) claims that the mound in this installation is very similar in form to a *stupa*, which is a grave mound and here symbolizes the death of the Buddha who will never be reborn again, thus reaching the ultimate and transcendent state of nirvana.

of “two actualities’: (the actual self and the self on the screen) as a mechanism to consider *benxing* 本性 (one’s original nature) on the screen as an actuality” (Lim 2019: 103). The new self thus encompasses another actuality and all possible actualities and moves from the real to the illusory and backwards. While in literary works mirroring is portrayed through repetitions, metaphors, and symbols, this piece of video art enables a more direct way of presenting the reflection. Also, this reflection is clearly two-way as allowed by the closed-circuit system, and the very piece of art could be said to belong to participatory art,<sup>18</sup> as it includes a higher degree of the viewer’s agency, and “can also contribute to a greater awareness of the mechanisms of control and segregation embedded in society” (Albu 2016: 12).<sup>19</sup> This brings us back to the initial hypothesis confirmed in Plath and Gotovac, that using a mirror in different forms of art requires both the reader’s (viewer’s) introspective engagement and their active role.

### *5. Playing with the mirror: an interpretation of the selected works in light of Jacques Lacan’s and Jacques Derrida’s theories*

The following passages will try to find the common point(s) in the selected works by Plath, Gotovac, and Paik by relying on the role of the mirror in constituting meaning, which in this context will be linked to constituting identity. The analysis will show how meaning/identity is constituted in the Other, in the unconscious (structured like a language, as will be explained later), which is where true selfhood lies in accordance with Lacan’s famous quote, “I am where I think not” (Barry 2002: 79). Though this might imply the hegemony of the unconscious and the subject’s inability to get free from ‘the mirror,’ in poetry – which is the ‘art of words’ – this dominance of language over external reality is seen as creative potential (realized in the use of metaphors, symbols, and polysemy) and forms a feeling of pleasure in readers. In the context of non-literary arts, with a special focus on video art, this potential is seen in different interpretations which are only suggested to the viewer, who on their own co-constructs different meanings by guessing or inventing metaphors and symbols while trying to decipher the messages of the observed artwork.

We will start from Lacan’s theory on the mirror stage,<sup>20</sup> which is based upon his claim that humans are always born as premature babies, incapable to cope with the world around them.<sup>21</sup> In his essay “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function,” Lacan explains the mirror stage as a process occurring in 6–18-month-old children who are

18 “Participatory art is a term that describes a form of art that directly engages the audience in the creative process so that they become participants in the event” (*Participatory Art* 2024).

19 Another example of participatory art, which perhaps more clearly illustrates the term, is Paik’s *Participation TV* from 1963. The sound that the viewer speaks is transformed through manipulating electronic circuits inside the TV, thus producing visual patterns of lines on the TV screen which further transform into unpredictable images depending on the rise and fall of the speaker’s volume.

20 Prior to Lacan, the mirror stage was discussed in 1931 by psychologist Henri Wallon, who used a mirror test (*épreuve du miroir*) (Roudinesc as ctd. in Matijašević 2006: 125).

21 The consequence of this prematurity is that visual perception is much better developed than motoric perception, and it is through the visual that a baby will construct its identity rather than recognize it in a mirror (Matijašević 2006: 126).

at this age capable of recognizing their image in the mirror,<sup>22</sup> which Lacan (2006: 76) refers to as the 'imago.' The concept of the imago(s) will form the base for a further interpretation of the selected poems and video sculpture as the mirror stage is a step in the process of identity formation and not a chronological phase in a child's development. Since this imago is perceived as perfect, whole, and the child at this age is still dependent on others (primarily the mother), the child identifies with the image (either their own image or the image of the mother or caregiver who holds the child in front of the mirror) and throughout life tries to attain this perfect image (Lacan calls this the 'desire of the Other'), which can cause various psychosis and neurosis. The function of the mirror stage is to establish a relationship between an organism and its reality (between *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt*) (Lacan 2006: 78). Yet, it causes alienation of the subject and the Other as this perfect and wholesome imago much differs from what the child perceives of their imperfect, fragmented real body. Since this step in the identity formation is not reserved to children exclusively, the fragmented image of the body is regularly manifested in dreams (e.g., disconnected limbs or growing wings) (Lacan 2006: 78) and – what is of particular interest to us here – in literature in the shape of metaphors and symbols. At the end of the mirror stage, the 'specular I' turns into the 'social I' (Lacan 2006: 79), which marks the end of the imaginary, pre-linguistic stage, and the beginning of the symbolic or the realm of language, which is another form of the Other.<sup>23</sup>

As stated above, the mirror stage is an early step in constituting identity, but this identity in Lacan is always dependent on the Other, which is at the same time something outside, something foreign, and yet close, inseparable from the subject (Pavić 2017: 26) who is in a way captured in the other, reflected in the Other, identified with the Other. This means that the ego is created in the process of alienation. In other words, the subject exists only in their relationship to an imaginary view of the Other; the ego is constructed in a relation to an imaginary opposite (cf. Wright 2001: 41; 58).

Building on Lacan's theory, it is important to note his idea on the network of signifiers which impacts our lives to a large extent. While the first theory explained imaginary identification, this (linguistic) theory explains the symbolic side of identification. Following the famous linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, Lacan gives importance to language but reinterprets de Saussure's definition of language: for Lacan, language is not a system of signs but of signifiers/symbols (cf. Biti 2000: 356), which determines us, as we find out about ourselves through what others tell us. Contrary to de Saussure, Lacan claims that the signifier is primary and creates meaning (Wright 2001: 63). In his psychoanalysis, Lacan (1986: 211; 217–218) starts from the assumption that the unconscious is structured in the same way as a language. Lacan argues that the two 'dream work' mechanisms identified by Freud, *condensation* and *displacement*, correspond to the basic poles of language identified by the linguist Roman Jakobson, that is, to *metaphor* and *metonymy*,<sup>24</sup> respectively (Barry 2002: 78). In the unconscious,

22 The mirror in Lacan does not stand only for a glass surface reflecting an image, but can also mean anything or anyone (adults, peers etc.) reflecting/copying/imitating the child (e.g., its gestures), thus making a kind of child's 'double.' It is important to note that the child always perceives the reflected gesture as more complete and perfect in the double than its original gesture.

23 Words are never our own, as we are born in a linguistic universe of our ancestors and forced to learn our mother tongue. Hence the feeling of the alienation from language as the Other (cf. Fink 2009: 6–7).

24 Barry (2002: 79) illustrates this with two examples, where in the case of metonymy he refers to synecdoche as a type of metonymy: "1. In metonymy one thing represents another by means of the part

there is the field of the subject and the field of the Other. The Other is the place where a chain of signifiers is formed. (This chain will be elaborated on later in the section on Derrida, who also claims that identity is constructed in relation to the Other, i.e., in difference.) By looking in the mirror/the Other, the subject defines themselves. Identity is constituted in this relationship between signifiers. According to Pavić (2017: 26), language is the earliest and the most important Other for a child as it serves the child for perceiving themselves. Yet, as the imaginary stage is prior to the symbolic stage, i.e., it is pre-linguistic, the child does this while still captured in the Other/imago and feeling alien to itself. The only way for a subject to attain authentic subjectivization and stop being captured in the Other is to adopt the Other, making it authentically their own (2017: 35). In other words, it is necessary to stop the desire to identify with the Other or, which can also happen, to eliminate the Other, and to start adopting the Other by using the mechanisms of self-aware, control, and shifting from one meaning to another as the subject sees fit; to use the potential of the symbolic, in our context, refers to the potential of poetry and video art contained in polysemy and openness to different meanings/interpretations. This is why such shifts in art do not mean weakening identity but enriching it.

In Plath, this can be illustrated with different reflections in the mirror perceived by the woman. First, the mirror shows a pink wall with speckles, then it turns into a lake and shows the woman's back, tears, and an agitation of hands. By the end of the poem, there are reflections of a young girl, an old woman, and finally a terrible fish. All these are imagoes of the woman's identity, and there are two possible reactions of the (lyric) subject: (1) to identify with the image(s), yearning for their illusive perfection and thus alienating from her true self (this would correspond to the child's reaction in 'the mirror stage'), (2) to subvert the gaze from (behind) the mirror by embracing the imago(es) as 'pieces' of identity and self-consciously 'activating' these parts of the 'mechanism' of her being/identity as she sees fit. The first choice will end up in identifying with 'persecutors' and constantly feeling subordinated, while the second choice will mean that the woman understands that she is in control of the pieces and relationships among them as she is an active subject in the process of identification and responsible for her existence.<sup>25</sup> The woman thus becomes aware that the perfect wholeness of the imaginary is only illusory, but accepts this play and incorporates it into the larger picture of a complex identity which is to be a

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standing for the whole. So twenty sail would mean twenty ships. In Freudian dream interpretation an element in a dream might stand for something else by *displacement*: so, a person might be represented by one of their attributes; for instance, a lover who is Italian might be represented in a dream by, let's say, an Alfa Romeo car. Lacan says this is the same as *metonymy*, the part standing for the whole. 2. In *condensation* several things might be compressed into one symbol, just as a *metaphor* like 'the ship ploughed the waves' condenses into a single item two different images, the ship cutting through the sea and the plough cutting through the soil."

25 Here we will remind that Sylvia Plath became a symbol of romantic self-destruction and later hailed by the feminist movement in the late sixties and seventies as a victim of a male-oriented society (Sambrook 1994: 10). Though the aim of this paper is not to apply a biographical approach to interpretation of Plath's work, the question may be raised as to would the course of events have been changed if the poet managed to deal with the 'mirror' and the 'persecutors' in her own life. Oates (as qtd. in Plath 2008: 8) finds the reason for the lack of her struggle and (mis)identifications in poet's solitary ego and inability to identify with anyone as she is a romantic genius, an isolated individual who perceives others as 'enemies'.

whole and stable mosaic. This mosaic thus includes both the imaginary (not only all those projected imagoes but also all *possibilities* of reflection, everything she might see in the *chain* of reflections in the mirror one day) and the symbolic (the meanings inscribed in the subject by the symbolic order). This is when the woman becomes an active subject who has a bigger potential than the imaginary, which is only seemingly perfect, whole, and stable. True qualities are actually constructed, not given, and consist of being in control of all possible reflections, deciding which pieces of the mosaic will stay and which will be replaced, and when. This could be the moment when, in Lacanian terms, the subject transforms the desire of the Other or the desire *to have* into the desire *to be* (cf. Pavić 2017: 177–178).

In poetry, this (re)construction of identity works on the level of rich metaphors and the sliding of signifiers, seen as a kind of a play rather than a disintegration of identity. This play can be varied with every new reading of the poem where the reader is the one who assigns the meaning to the signifiers. Similar examples can be found in Gotovac's poem "A Report..." while trying to answer who is speaking in the poem: is it the guard, the mirror, the writer/scribe (not to be equated with the figure of Gotovac as the author of the poem), or the poem itself, thus suggesting self-referentiality? And what is the poem about: the famous historical Pompei earthquake, the 'shaking' of the then-Croatian reality, or the general disbalance and ruptures in an individual's existence? The suggested repetition of events which the guard warns the recipients of implies again an indefinite chain of signifiers.

In Paik's video sculpture analyzed here, there are no direct symbols or metaphors, they are only alluded to and depend on the viewer. Some of them might include the metaphor of the viewer (where the signifier is the actual Buddha statue) as Big Brother, or the critical self, or a self-referential potential of art, while the viewed (Buddha on the screen) might be understood as an endangered hegemonized individual, the observed self, etc. What this non-literary work offers is the direct presence of the loop and the double mirroring enabled by the closed-circuit system, an advantage of broadly understood digital/new media. Interestingly, the same media which are possibly criticized in one of the interpretations of Paik for their excessive surveillance and control, are actually used in the same installation and vividly demonstrate this process of (self)reflection.

Furthermore, when speaking of metaphor as the most powerful mechanism in the three artworks presented in this paper, it is interesting to investigate where metaphors come from. According to Fink's (2009: 18) interpretation of Lacan, there are two parallel processes, two chains of discourse which can interrupt each other and/or intervene in each other: speaking (using a chain of words which have no fixed value on their own) and unconscious thinking (a process which takes place mostly independently of speech). It is precisely in the complex processes of our thinking apparatus that the unconscious comes to the surface in the form of coded language. Here, it is important to add to Lacan's theory Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance*, which "punningly unites the senses of 'to differ' and 'to defer'" (Derrida 1988: 122) and according to which linguistic meaning is created rather than given. Namely, in offering his "interpretation of interpretation," Derrida (1988: 121) builds on de Saussure's theory and the Nietzschean "joyous affirmation of the play of the world,"



claiming that the signifier achieves its meaning only in relation to other signifiers in the system, while its relation to the signified is arbitrary.<sup>26</sup> The signifier in language does not refer so much to a specific phenomenon in the world (this is where its arbitrariness comes from), but to another signifier, which then refers to another one, etc., thus creating an infinitely long chain (the term already used in Lacan) in which meanings are *inscribed* and contextualized rather than given directly (cf. Pavić 2017: 195; Bužinjska, Markovski 2009: 174; 396; 406). Consequently, this means two things which are essential for our topic: (1) that we get to know the world indirectly, through language as a mediator, and (2) that an important feature of language is polysemy, as meaning is never completely given but deferred and constantly changes in the infinite play of differences.

Using Saussurian terminology, it can be said that Plath varies her signifiers (mirror/eye of a little god/lake) and puts them in a paradigmatic relationship using the stylistic device of metaphor.<sup>27</sup> The three signifiers in the above parentheses acquire new meanings while at the same time the 'chain of signifiers' acquires a meaning which, before reading the poem, did not exist in the linguistic world of the reader. The imaginary meaning which has been assigned to the signifier by using the mechanism of metaphor thus intrudes in the symbolic register (cf. Pavić 2017: 143). It is here that the voice/subject from the poem identifies with the imaginary signifier, but this identification is illusory when seen from the real world. The signifier only *seems* to be stable in the imaginary, while actually, such a stable identification is impossible in reality as identity is prone to change.

Applying the above ideas, in Plath the meaning of the mirror is created only in relation to other signifiers, and not to the signified: the lake which offers a more romantic and blurred picture and the candles and the moon which do not offer a faithful reflection of the woman in the poem: "Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon. / I see her back, and reflect it faithfully." (Plath 2007: 174). On the other hand, in the chain of the same signifiers, a completely different meaning is created if we think that the mirror is deceitful and that the poem has an ironic tone. Hence the different narratives and counternarratives on the mirror, presented in earlier passages. The true meaning is thus hidden not in denotative or connotative meanings but in their interrelations which are (re)constructed while rereading the poem, i.e., in the difference, in the infinite play of meanings which Derrida will refer to introducing the term *dissemination*.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, in Gotovac's poem, there is a play of (un)spoken signifiers: the guide identifies himself as a witness, as a mirror, then as prey, and finally as a writer. In Paik's installation, the signifiers could be identified as the actual Buddha, a mirrored Buddha (who slides into the viewer), the viewed, the oppressor, the oppressed, etc. All these meanings create a chain and, if omitting just one link,

26 An illustrative example of this post-structuralist thinking is the diagram showing two identical lavatory doors, one headed 'Ladies' the other 'Gentlemen.' This shows that the same signifier may have different signifieds, and that the signified incessantly slides under the signifier. The meaning, thus, has 'a life of its own,' not dependent on external reality but on other signifiers (cf. Barry 2002: 78).

27 Following Roman Jakobson, Lacan equates de Saussure's paradigmatic axis and syntagmatic axis of language with mechanisms of metaphor and metonymy (cf. Pavić 2017: 110).

28 The term dissemination in Derrida replaces the hermeneutical term of polysemy, thus suggesting the dispersal of meaning, the lack of the hegemonic center, the lack of the ultimate truth or true/authoritative interpretation (cf. Bekavac 2015: 105).

the meaning of the other links changes, thus changing the meaning of the chain as a whole. Again, in *différance*, a work of art is assigned new meanings, in an infinite chain of signifiers. While in psychoanalysis, the creation of new meanings, of new metaphors, of unexpected metamorphoses of the subject in this process of constant slippages and displacement, actually is only a symptom leading the psychoanalyst into the realm of the unconscious – in art this process is seen as a linguistic play with meaning and presents pleasure to the recipient by shifting the borders of (artistic) freedom. In this playful act, the recipient becomes an active participant and a co-creator of the artwork, which is in accordance with postmodern theories on the role of the reader (cf. Compagnon 2007), while the piece of art reaffirms itself as a unique and unrepeatably event (Bužinjska, Markovski 2009: 398).

### 6. Conclusion

The paper analyzed the symbolism of the mirror in two poems and one video installation. After giving several possible interpretations, selected ideas presented in Lacan and Derrida were used to show how the power of literary and non-literary arts lies, for example, in the infinite mirroring seen as a creative potential. It can be concluded that Lacan's and Derrida's theories deconstruct the liberal humanist notion of unique, individual selfhood and give priority to language, which forms identity even before the individual enters the linguistic sphere. While in psychoanalysis this 'hegemony' of the unconscious might not be perceived as something positive, in art, it can be used as a creative potential whereupon new interpretations are incessantly formed by recipients. Rejecting the negative connotations of mimesis as pure imitating and relying on the author's (never-ending) act of re-creation in which the (postmodern) reader/recipient has an active role – in the abovementioned chain or network of signifiers, the meaning, the reflection in the mirror, is never fully 'captured,' but only alluded to. And this is where the recipient's pleasure comes from: to accept the challenge offered *from* and *behind* the mirror and indulge in this linguistic play of creation *with* the mirror.

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## IGRA IZ(A) OGLEDALA: OD MIMAZE DO AUTORSKE RE-KREACIJE U ODABRANIM DJELIMA SYLVIJE PLATH, VLADE GOTOVCA I NAMA JUNEPA PAIKA

### Sažetak

Propitkujući mimetički karakter umjetnosti, s jedne strane, te moć i granice stvaralačke imaginacije, odnosno autorskoga stvaranja riječju i slikom, s druge strane, cilj je ovoga rada pokazati kako se u odabranim književnim radovima i videouradcima autori koriste motivom i 'mehanizmom' ogledala kako bi – neovisno o autorskom opusu, podrijetlu i mediju u kojem stvaraju – odaslali istu poruku: gledatelj i gledano (pošiljatelj i primatelj) ne stoje u binarnoj opoziciji, već se međusobno preslikavaju u neprestanoj igri između nadzora i introspekcije, duhovnosti i tehnologije, prostora intime i (kontra)hegemonije (novih) medija. Rad analizira i kontekstualizira pjesmu „Mirror“ Sylvije Plath napisanu 1961. godine, zatim „Raport stražara iz Pompeja“ Vlade Gotovca, pjesmu objavljenu u zbirci *Osjećanje mjesta* 1964. godine, te najpoznatiji videouradak, odnosno još uvijek postavljenu instalaciju „oca videoarta“, Nama Junea Paika, pod nazivom „TV Buddha“, prvi put postavljenu 1974. godine. Uvažavajući funkcije jezika Romana Jakobsona, u radu će se nastojati pokazati kako su u tekstualnim i vizualnim medijima jezici umjetnosti u prvome planu u cilju slanja snažnih i neprestano *re*-kreirajućih poruka primatelju koji tako postaje suautor. Pri tome ogledalo služi i kao motiv i kao alat ili mehanizam kojim se ispituje odnos između pošiljatelja, poruke i primatelja. Obje uloge ogledala tako upućuju na autoreferencijalni potencijal umjetnosti. Uz metodologiju psihoanalize Jacquesa Lacana i poststrukturalističke ideje Jacquesa Derridaea o „prenošenju označitelja“ (odnosno „preskakanjem“ izravnog odnosa označeno – označitelj), analiza će pokazati moguće metamorfoze (lirskoga) subjekta i posljedične skokove u *re*-kreaciji identiteta čitatelja/gledatelja, pri čemu se umjetnost još jednom pokazuje kao prostor za igru i pomicanje granica slobode.

Ključne riječi: (umjetnički) identitet, (kontra)hegemonija, masovni i novi mediji, odraz(i), sloboda