

Art in a Glass Box: Phantasies, Disasters and Shelters in the (Post-)Human Zoo



Umjetnost u staklenoj kutiji:
Fantazije, užasi i
utočišta u (post)humanom
zoološkom vrtu



PRETHODNO PRIOPĆENJE
Primljen: 25. ožujka 2024.
Prihvaćen: 12. prosinca 2024.
DOI: 10.31664/zu.2024.115.07

PRELIMINARY PAPER
Received: March 25, 2024
Accepted: December 12, 2024
DOI: 10.31664/zu.2024.115.07

SAŽETAK

Tekst „Umjetnost u staklenoj kutiji: Fantazije, užasi i utočišta u (post)humanom zoološkom vrtu” uspostavlja teorijsku poveznicu između Sloterdijkovih „Pravila za ljudski vrt”, osnovnih postulata Foucaultova disciplinarnog društva i Deleuzova društva kontrole te detektira reflektiranja tih stavova na umjetnost našeg doba. Učinke represivnih metoda socijalnog pripitomljavanja i (pre)odgoja, institucionaliziranih „programa uzgoja” i dresure čovjeka, prirode i života, restriktivnih pravila biopolitike s logikom i praksom *zatvorenih mjesta* te arogantne učinkovitosti sociotehnoških mehanizama društvene kontrole i njihove destruktivne društvene i ekološke reperkusije — sve to reflektiraju umjetnički radovi organizirani upravo kao zatvorena mjesta, kao antropocenski vrtovi, kao krivotvorena staništa, kao (pre)osjetljivi i nestabilni, umjetni mikroekosustavi. Polazeći od „čiste situacije”, prozirne staklene kutije u kojoj se događa „mala čarolija” kondenziranja vode, *Condensation Cubea* Hansa Haakea iz 60-ih godina prošlog stoljeća, pionirskog rada eko umjetnosti, tekst širi složenu interpretativnu mrežu oko niza umjetničkih konstrukcija iz 2000-tih.

→

ABSTRACT

Whether experiencing the oppressive “Rules for the Human Zoo” as inspected by Sloterdijk or “long shadows” of Foucauldian disciplinary-biopolitical society or/and being situated within the Deleuzian society of control, we are witnessing how “shelter” (the word ecology comes from the Greek word *oikos* meaning nest, house, shelter) has become the “box,” the “glass-shouse,” the entrapment where disciplining and controlling forces that constrain us, dis-able us, disjoin us also hypnotize us with the phantasy of life, euthanized life that is shimmering like a spectacle “larger than life”. Here selected artworks (Haake’s, Quinn’s, Hirst’s, Kulik’s, Wertheim, *Sea & Sun (Marina)* performance), arranged in/with glass boxes or as enclosures, function like a magnifying glass that might, under a certain theoretical or interpretative angle, cleanse or sharpen the view on those “crime scenes” of the Anthropocene. mancipatory trajectory within the theory of Foucault, Deleuze, Sloterdijk, Guattari and Haraway, traced here in specific artworks, is not about preventing or controlling natural disasters, climate changes or guiding rules of the Anthropogenic Garden. It is about *staying with those troubles*, living attentively and caringly. Art shows the capability of imagining or rehearsing a new or renewed world in which humans become caring towards and sheltered within themselves and the indiscriminate, knotty environments they inhabit.

KEYWORDS

Art in glass tanks, artificial garden, anthropogenic zoo, biopolitics, phantasmagoria, Michel Foucault (care for the self).

UMIJEĆE INTERPRETACIJE | UMIJEĆE INTERPRETACIJE

Svetlana Racanović

Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Montenegro /
Fakultet likovnih umjetnosti Cetinje, Univerzitet Crne Gore

To su umjetni vrtovi u „staklenicima”: silikonski raj za umrlo cvijeće Marca Quinna; vivariji za „vječni život” životinja Damiena Hirsta; serije fotomontaža *Windows* Olega Kulika kao digitalno konstruirane distopijske scene, heterotopije u kojima poziraju mrtve životinje u kadriranoj prirodi i mi kao „fantomski” promatrači, kao slike/odrazi na reflektirajućoj/emitirajućoj površini; suvremena opera/performans *Sea & Sun (Marina)* grupe litvanskih umjetnika iz 2019., opskurni *tableau vivant* u kojem improvizirana plaža na kojoj performer i odigravaju scene malih ljetnih uživanja postaje *set up* za operno lamentiranje nad svijetom koji nestaje pred olujom ekoloških promjena; stakleni akvariji u kojima umjetnice Margaret i Christine Wertheim održavaju u (umjetničkom) životu umjetne koralje ispletene od šarenih ili bijelih niti — glamurozna „opera” ili monokromni „rekvi-jem” za umirući život.

U gustom interpretativnom tkanju teksta, ove se umjetničke inscenacije prezentiraju kao vrsta suvremenoga makabrističkog spektakla. U njima se detektira učinak uhodanih mehanizma proizvodnje, pakiranja, reklamiranja i prodaje estetiziranih prizora destrukcije i smrti plasiranih kao siguran život, kao normalnost, kao užitak u blještavim fantazmagorijama postindustrijskog kapitalizma. U biti funkcionirajući kao antropocenske „scene zločina”, ti nas radovi suočavaju s našim iznevjerenim snovima o dominaciji nad prirodom, s porazom našeg projekta njezina pripitomljavanja, popravljanja, usavršavanja i njegovim devastirajućim učincima na globalni ekosustav. Ti radovi zavode, začaravaju, hipnotiziraju umjetno stimuliranim i simuliranim životom, nude iluziju dosežnoga i održivoga ovozemaljskog raja, a istinski pružaju morbidni užitak, draže svojom zastrašujućom ljepotom, generiraju osjećaj tjeskobe i nemoći da se kontrolira i reparira šteta, da se zaustavi pad. Stoga se o ovim prizorima govori kao o testamentarnim svjedocima same naše propasti.

Drugi dio teksta usmjeren je na teorijsku elaboraciju teme, emancipacijske koncepte Petera Sloterdijka i antropotehnike i Foucaultova koncepta brige o sebi, kao propozicija ili praksi za iscjeljujuće rekonektiranje Guattarijeve *Tri ekologije*: okoliša, društvenih odnosa i ljudske subjektivnosti. Na neupadljivom primjeru, projektu *Weather Reports* Davida Lyncha, Iakoća, vedrina, nepretencioznost individualnog čina umjetnika, njegov „otočni život” kroz dnevna mikro-uživanja i kreativna činjenja manifest su koncepta brige o sebi, koji se afirmira i prevodi u čin bliskosti, brižnosti, povezivanja, zajedništva, solidarnosti, u ono što Donna Haraway naziva *kinship*, u spajanje otoka u arhipelag smislenog života unutar ljudskoga zoološkog vrta. Tekst ne nudi strategije za sprječavanje ili kontroliranje štete umjetnošću (ekoloških katastrofa, klimatskih promjena ili disciplinirajućih „pravila za ljudski vrt”), već promovira vještinu imaginiranja i „uvježbavanja” čovjekova nježnog, brižnog, svjesnog situiranja sebe i svijeta u kojem živi.

U birana mjesta u tekstu umeću se odabrane filmske referencije, poziva se na *Le Temps qui Reste* François Ozona,

Poor Things Yorgosa Lanthimosa, *Perfect Days* Wima Wendersa, referira na na određene filozofe i teoretičare (Waltera Benjamina, Siegfrieda Kracauera, Zygmunta Bauman a i Slavoja Žižeka). Ove su referencije postavljenje kao točke oslonca za ključne teze i zaključke teksta.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

umjetnost u staklenim spremnicima, umjetni vrt, antropogeni zoološki vrt, biopolitika, fantazmagorija, Michel Foucault (briga o sebi).

Anthropocene is defined as a human-dominated or human-influenced era, where humans and societies cause environmental crises and impact global ecosystems in catastrophic ways. The term *Anthropocene/Anthropogenic* is frequently used in this article, not with a tendency to put it in focus, but to both justify and trouble¹ the language of Anthropocene, its scientific or popular definitions, application, and relevance. In addition, it is not my intention to use it as a cardinal term on which the whole conceptual framework of this article is based. The term relates to the infamous and controversial speech by Peter Sloterdijk and subsequent essay from 1999, “Rules for the Human Zoo: A Response to the Letter on Humanism.” The speech/essay is used as a starting point to consider the nefarious mechanisms and methods of “social gardening,” programs of biopolitical engineering with destructive social and ecological repercussions, and to explore their reflection in artworks created as enclosures, artificial gardens, or micro ecosystems but also for envisioning possible “exit strategies” for the reconsolidation of the abused world.

With its “tentacular”² structure and interpretive methodology, this article loops Sloterdijk’s concept of the Human Zoo (Anthropogenic Garden), Foucault’s society of surveillance and discipline and Deleuze’s society of control with a series of selected artworks. Those works (Haake’s, Quinn’s, Hirst’s, Kulik’s, contemporary opera/performance *Sea & Sun (Marina)*, installations by sisters Wertheim) are not simply listed as individual case studies that would be organized around a key case but as a chain of conceptually interconnected works that trace major theoretical concepts. The second part of the article spurs towards “possible worlds,” intertwining another Sloterdijk’s concept, the emancipatory concept of Anthropotechnics and the pearl of the late Foucault, the concept of the *care for the self*. Their twinning is seen as the “golden thread” to reconnect Guattari’s *Three Ecologies*: the environment, social relations and human subjectivity.

Selected film references within the article (Ozon’s *Le Temps Qui Reste*, Lanthimos’ *Poor Things*, Wenders’s *Perfect Days*) and passages and quotes of philosophers and theoreticians (like Benjamin, Kracauer, Bauman, Žižek) are not interwoven into the article as cameos that serve as its decoration. They function as strong matches for the key ideas and conclusions extracted from the densely woven conceptual fabric made from the interpretation of the artworks and underlying theoretical propositions.

This article poses the questions (and “spells” possible answers): could the artist function not (only) as the “etiologist,” the one who deals with the investigation or attribution of the causes, or as the “symptomatologist,” who deals with symptoms, but (also) as a “therapist,” the one who proposes certain healing methods or recovering techniques? Could art envision Anthropos not only as environ-former/transformer/destroyer but also as a reformer capable of positive and creative reworlding?

¹ The compulsive use of the term Anthropocene in many discourses is critically examined within theoretically elaborated and thought-provoking concepts such as *Plantationocene* (name for the devastating transformation of human-tended farms, pastures, and forests into enclosed plantations, relying on forms of exploited and alienated labour), then Donna Haraway’s invention, the abundant and all-embracing concept of *Chthulucene* that proposes how to break through the destructive patterns of Anthropocene with wide kinship structures or within James Lovelock’s new age called *Novacene* in which both Gaia and Anthropos will cooperate with hyper-intelligent beings that emerge from existing artificial intelligence systems. *Capitalocene* refers to the age immensely ruled by the capital on a global scale.

² The term *tentacular* is used by Donna Haraway to name a sort of *spidery* and *coralline* growing and spreading of sorts and thoughts, bringing up *many-arms*, forking, permeative and swirling paths and connections.

The ecosystem in its totality, the World-Ecology that would be a self-correcting, self-balancing and self-healing organism, is a grand illusion, an imaginary self-sustainable bubble. Along with that, when facing the reality of natural disasters, dreadful climate changes and the oppressiveness of the rules of human gardening, the Anthropos more often “chooses” apocalyptic scenarios, paralyzing horror, a sense of too lateness, incapability to cope with the unpredictable and uncontrollable. This article proposes *staying with those troubles* through the ecology of the self, self-care strategies and practices that escape human exceptionalism and bounded individualism and evolve into kinship, the care for all the overflowing richness of different “Others” that we influence and depend on. Can that strategy turn Anthropogenic’s malware into Anthropotechnic’s smooth operation that could make us, as Haraway says, capable of “cultivating with each other in every way imaginable epochs to come that can replenish refuge.”³ Anna Tsing argues that, even in the Holocene, the places of refuge, the shelters, still existed to support reworlding,⁴ to sustain living with biosociodiversity. Modern times have twisted the shelter into boxed-up, closed systems of Anthropogenic Zoos. Can contemporary art project the “unboxing” of the refuge, re-fertilizing the social and natural garden by thinking out-of-box, by uncatchable “tentacular” thinking and practice? These are not rescue phantasies but artistry that might be embedded in light-hearted and joyful, small-scale human acts that weave the fine threads between the individual and social, man and the environment, inner and outer, insignificant and momentous and bring, as Haraway says, “solace, inspiration, and effectiveness”⁵ to the world. In this article, the potential for those “attentive practices of thought, love and care”⁶ is recognized in David Lynch’s *Weather Project* or Wim Wenders’ *Perfect Days*, in appreciation of the kinships. Those might be “exit strategies” or strategies for resistance, repair, and recuperation.

*Art works are hermetically sealed off and blind, yet able in their isolation to represent the outside world.*⁷ (Theodor Adorno)

Hans Haacke, considered the pioneer of environmental art and occasionally related to eco-art,⁸ created the *Condensation Cube* between 1963 and 1965 by pouring and sealing a small dose of water in a transparent Plexiglas box placed on top of a refrigeration unit. This rudimentary setup turns into a sensitive structure that responds to changes in the outer world. Temperature instability within the exhibition space, caused by people moving around, had an effect on the interior of the cube. The water would change its aggregate state and shape, condensing, “dancing” inside, and “crawling” in drops on the cube’s glass walls. A cooling system controlled and “calmed” the inside, keeping the system in balance. *The shape of water* became the mediator and indicator of the delicate interdependence of the inside and the outside, closed and open, human and machine, natural and social, which requires constant monitoring and regulation. This basic formula that resonated with the preoccupations of the 1960s has since been upgraded into more complex

and controversial artistic formulas and solutions that pierce into the aporias of the Anthropocene. It evolved into artistic arrangements of artificially stimulated and simulated life, vivariums encapsulated in a “box” that reflect and react to the paradigm and practice of socially organised and controlled enclosures.

From 1998, artist Marc Quinn started cultivating artificial gardens in glass boxes. He was cryogenically freezing different species of plants, drowning them into liquid silicone within glass tanks that he placed atop a refrigeration unit to control this sensitive micro-climate. This method of preservation came as the result of the artist’s expensive and extensive experimentations carried out in collaboration with engineers and botanists to research how to protect plants from decay and preserve them in their apparent *eternal beauty* and *immaculate perfection*.

Quinn’s vivariums are not the Garden of Eden, not even the Garden of Earthly Delights (even if we may find in them traces of Hieronymus Bosch’s “gardening”). Those are artificial micro-ecosystems, gardens-turned-laboratories that nurture life without growing and death without decay. Life simulated and stimulated by machines, supported by silicon “shots,” sustained by being denaturalised, operates as the model for the macro-social system’s functioning, for biopolitical “gardening.” In his highly controversial speech and then essay from 1999, *“Rules for the Human Zoo: A Response to the Letter on Humanism,”*⁹ Peter Sloterdijk regards cultures and civilisations as anthropic gardens, “anthropogenic hothouses” managed by domestication, training, making the “human beast” adapted and tame, as Zarathustra would say, “made the wolf into a dog and the human being itself into the human’s best domestic animal.”¹⁰ In the anthropic garden, there is no room for vivacity, liveliness, or naturalness. Inside the anthropogenic “box,” life is controlled, instructed how to “grow,” how to look, persuaded to accept the “box” as a shelter, a safe space, a “garden” in which it would be possible to “bloom” albeit in sterile, artificial, and controlled conditions.

In Quinn’s vivariums, the (still) life of artificial gardens speaks about society’s obsession with the body, young, healthy, and beautiful, subjected to technologies and techniques of rejuvenation and keeping fit. The body becomes a project and raw material for reconstruction, revitalisation, correction, reshaping, upgrading and preservation. Therefore, death seems not only postponed, even denied, but almost turns out to be an unnatural phenomenon and, as life itself, is subjected to unnatural laws. Slavoj Žižek said that nature is no longer “natural” but “adapted” to human interventions and human “pollutions,” and the two are in a “shaky and fragile balance.”¹¹ We might say that immense human management over nature effectively and substantially converts (and perverts) nature into a denaturalized environment deprived of fertility and growth.

When Damien Hirst, in his *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), simply replaced the

3
Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, 100.
4
Ibid.
5
Haraway, “Tentacular Thinking.”
6
Ibid.
7
Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 257.
8
The terms environmental art and eco-art, which are sometimes used interchangeably, imply and require a fine distinction between them. Environmental art is often used as an encompassing term that includes natural art, land art, and eco-art, even if environmental art does not necessarily involve ecological issues. While eco-art relates to the ecosystem and calls for (public) engagement/intervention in its protection and restoration and in re-envisioning ecological relationships, environmental art explores both natural and social conditions that create, influence and (re)shape our living environment.
9
Sloterdijk, “Rules for the Human Zoo: A Response to the Letter on Humanism,” 12–28.
10
Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and Nobody*, 147.
11
Žižek, “Censorship Today: Violence, or Ecology as a New Opium for the Masses.”

decomposed body of a shark sank in formaldehyde with another dead shark, he brutally manifested, or self-ironically deconstructed, the parable of primacy and immortality of artistic concept over matter/body. By simply supplying the new body, he entrepreneurially protected his artistic idea. Plants, animals, and human beings equally, whether dead or alive, are denied the right to decide, intervene, resist, grow “wildly,” the right to self-determination and individuation and the right to fade and disappear naturally. They have become just one of many of their kind, organic matter that might be easily and continuously replaced by another body/nobody in the spectacle of the anthropogenic zoo.

“There is a magical transformation from reality into art, but it stays looking the same... It is a miracle. It is like the transubstantiation or the ascension into heaven. Art is [the process of] transforming something before your very eyes,”¹² says Quinn. We might believe that his gardens bring the testimony of the creative or magical power of art, Art “in Glory” that is capable to immortalise, to resurrect. However, their truth is that a living body needs to die (to be killed) to be capable of “resurrecting” in art. The artist is both the executor and “resurrector” but the “resurrected” body does not prove the existence of the afterlife nor does it guarantee the persistence of that body resurrected in silicon. This “renewed” body keeps the likeness, the appearance of the living, natural self but, substantially, it is artificial(ised), (re) created in such a way to keep the illusion of immortality and eternal beauty.

Quinn’s artworks in glass tanks do not confirm the mystical power of art, its capacity to transform, transubstantiate, or “raise from the dead.” Art is here to show that there are no mysteries and miracles; here, truth becomes fully visible, completely exposed. It tells about the fatal disturbance of natural laws and the upsetting impossibility of allowing mere naturalness (natural light and air on which depend the living flowers are banished in Quinn’s gardens as “dangerous substances” that may cause the discolouring and decay of the frozen flowers). It is the truth about art which is “made from the same atoms” as the living organism conducting its mortification and mummification not to prove its eternity but to expose their ephemerality, fragility and fatal dependence on external (social, technical) mechanisms and devices of support and control. It is the truth about the terrifying manipulation of life through programs of social gardening promoted as their “external support system” and the incapability to bypass that system. “Their perfection is really a dead thing, and if you turn off the freezer, decay sets in, but of course, when the rotting begins, it is life reasserting itself,”¹³ the artist said. The price must be paid for escaping the system, for unplugging the “box”: it is death and disappearance, but at the same time, there is a reward, a return to the full circle, to the “mystery” of birth, life and demise.

Vivariums or glass boxes, such as those that sustain Quinn’s exuberant gardens, also resemble the store windows which Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer described as a



Fig. / Sl. 1 Oleg Kulik, *Windows (Eagle)*, 2000 – 2001, c-print, 245 × 750 cm.

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THE UNIMMACULATE
CONCEPTION OF THE ANTHROPIC
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The state of deep rupture between the “two worlds,” the image and body, nature and culture, man and animal, life and death and the stitch between the two are marked and made visible and sensible in a series of large-scale proto-montages titled *Windows*, 2001 (Fig. 1), made by the internationally acclaimed Ukrainian-born Russian artist Oleg Kulik. These “windows” do not embody the classical Western conception of a picture as an open window, a “realistic” illusion of the continuation of the tangible world that invites the spectator to look through. Instead, they “instruct” one to stay fixed and locked into a single point of view. The spectator is excluded here from the world presented, incapable of reaching the “beyondness” of the vanishing point, of trespassing the

12
Romaine, “Marc Quinn: The Matter of Life and Death.”

13

Ibid.

14

Buck-Morss, *The dialectics of seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, 254.

15

Ibid.

frontier between the two worlds. Kulik’s *Windows* are digitally processed images in front of which our sense of reality of where we are and what we see becomes blurred and dispersed between different layers of reality that overlap, intersect, and strangely coexist as equally tangible and vanishing realms. Shots of different landscapes taken from different parts of Montenegro, images of pure nature, the artist “populated” with species of animals that do not belong to these Balkan habitats. By “implanting”/installing gorillas, giraffes, and seals into these environs, he created an impression of awkward intrusion, a scenery of forced and unnatural displacement of species. They look like a testimony of an ecological catastrophe, of a profound disruption of laws of the natural world, of nature becoming so confused that these random migrations emerge as its new order, new “naturalness.” However, those arranged landscapes (may) truly exist somewhere. Their disturbing strangeness does not lie in the apparent outlandish migration of life but in its striking simulation with a taste of exotic adventure. Namely, the representatives of animal life are not photographed alive. They are taxidermy animals, implanted in man-made arrangements, in a kind of modern *Wunderkammer*, or “posing” for the camera in the glass vitrines of natural history museums. An image of a real landscape becomes just an illusionistic background in these phantasmagorias.

A number of hypothetical spectators are also installed in these sceneries, like reflections and ghostly images on the glass cover. They resemble ordinary observers equipped with photo cameras that usually look around and take photos while visiting museums, natural sites, public places or events and tourist hotspots. Are they watching and pointing cameras at the dead animals in the landscapes, or at us in front of these digitalised *tableaux vivants*, or both? They are excluded and included into our world and the world of these phantasmagorias. Moreover, we share with them the position of the subject and the object of watching. We identify with them, with their twice virtualised bodies (images of absent bodies). They “possess” our living bodies as we adopt their bodies as our virtual double. The “ghostly” images of these spectators challenge the ontological barrier between the body and image, subject and object, vacuum and space, nature and culture, life and death, yet making that frontier permeable, and even denied. Similarly to vivariums with plants and liquid silicone, in Quinn’s gardens, the walls are covered with mirrors and the glass surfaces of these glass boxes are also reflective so we see ourselves as a multiplied image, a multiplied reflection, both as “planted” in the garden and “expelled” from it; we belong and not belong there. As Quinn notes: “We see ourselves in the Garden through a mirror, but we perceive ourselves as being in the real world.”¹⁶ Projected/introjected spectators in Kulik’s and Quinn’s worlds don’t (only) haunt us but “fully” represent us in the world that radiates, assembled as the hall of mirrors in which our presence is shattered, ricocheted and dispersed between gazes and reflections on the mirrors and screens that constitute our living environment and shape our identity. Finally, if we manage



Fig. / Sl. 2. *Sun & Sea (Marina)*, opera-performance. Artists: Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, Vaiva Grainytė and Lina Lapelytė, the 58th International Venice Biennale, Venice, 2019. PHOTO: Jean-Pierre Dalbéra. / *Sun & Sea (Marina)*, opera-performans. Umjetnici: Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, Vaiva Grainytė i Lina Lapelytė, 58. Venecijanski bijenale, Venecija, 2019. FOTO: Jean-Pierre Dalbéra.

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“THE LAST OF US”
IN THE “GARDEN OF EARTHLY
DELIGHTS”

to escape identification with those imaginary tourists, we are “ambushed” by the images of dead animals arranged to look alive in a set-up that looks natural. We cannot resist a sense of our equal condition, a shared destiny in the “(post-)anthropogenic garden” where not only “Humans and Other Animals” might merge, or as the artist Kiki Smith¹⁷ would say, human and non-humans (other-than-human), but also where, beyond a dual matrix, interfere a myriad of kinds of living environments, the (bio)politics, media, technology, virtuality installing the inhuman or post-human, abiotic and inanimate perspective.

We are caught up in a kind of plot of mixed realities, in the loop of the inverting game of continuous searching-finding-searching for a place to belong to, a place to be. Artistically created realms of Kulik’s vivariums recreate us in turn. They emerge as our new (un)natural habitat where we, dazed and confused, drown in the self-indulgent game of watching and being watched. We are caught up in the perspective of “seeing” ourselves as extinct species, “taxidermised” bodies “stuffed” with programs of social control and domestication, imprisoned in anthropic gardens that we arranged, alienated from our bodies that were once the locus of experiential and sensitive connections, but are now mere shadows and ghosts on the screen. We were facing our broken phantasies about domination and possession of nature when we tried to domesticate it, rearrange it, exoticiise it, aestheticise it, mortify it: the broken illusions of our capacity to “resurrect” it through simulacrum of life. And that becomes the scenario of our own demise. An apparent testimony of ecological disruption turns into a testament to our phantasmagoric life.

Kulik’s *Windows* “looking at” Quinn’s gardens face us directly and deeply with something strange, bizarre, uncanny but also hypnotic. We are moved and shocked by them, caught up in the feeling of deep melancholy and sadness, a sense that something went wrong and could not be repaired and that it is happening to us, touching our intimacy and a sense of our own destiny. The same mist envelops *Sun & Sea (Marina)* (Fig. 2), a mesmerising performance/contemporary opera presented in the pavilion of Lithuania at the 58th Biennial in Venice and in different venues around Europe. From a balcony on the second floor of the architectural “box” of an abandoned warehouse in Venice, viewers look down at the staging of an ordinary leisure scene from the beach. On the sandy podium covered with towels and parasols, a variety of performers enjoy the usual, easy-going, “all-inclusive” day on the beach. Accessorised with books, magazines, phones, bicycles, chairs, toys, and snacks, they are having fun, being lazy, and doing nothing. The distant sound of seagulls and ice cream trucks makes the simulation more convincing and complete. A common tourist idyll.

¹⁶ Romaine, “Marc Quinn: The Matter of Life and Death.”

¹⁷ *Humans and Other Animals* is the title of the exhibition of Kiki Smith organised at the Dots Gallery in Belgrade, September /October 2022.

Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman defines a tourist as one of four types of post-modern identity and a paradigm of post-modern living. Equipped with cameras, screens, and information, a tourist is a seeker of new experiences, strange and bizarre, craving to be thrilled, amused, and pleased. At the same time, their world is equipped with "safety cushions," and the danger and oddity "is tame, domesticated and no longer frightens."¹⁸ A life that "turns into an extended tourist escapade as a tourist becomes a mode of life and the tourist stance grows into the character,"¹⁹ that is aestheticised life, states Bauman. That is a life of disengagement and commitment avoidance where the aesthetic impulse replaces the ethical and cognitive ones. Susan Buck-Morss relates the concept of aestheticisation to the anaesthetic impulse as the state of numbness (seeing too much and registering nothing). It is a defensive mechanism in the modern overstimulating environment, a "safety cushion," but it "destroys the human organism's power to respond politically even when self-preservation is at stake."²⁰ The aestheticisation of politics, capital, life, "death and disasters," everything that surrounds us and that we encounter in a gilded cage of the anthropogenic zoo, that will lead us, as Walter Benjamin warned, to "experience [our] own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order."²¹

"The piece has to do with ecological issues and the Anthropocene,"²² the creative team behind the *Sun & Sea (Marina)* explains. However, nothing apocalyptic, catastrophic, or even dramatic is happening in this staging of a leisure day on an improvised beach; nothing pathetic nor didactic nor judgemental, nothing thrilling or spirited. "It's about nothingness — nothing is happening."²³ And that nothingness is aestheticised as a nicely arranged beach scenery on a typical tourist postcard and as opera carried out by performers singing, one by one, about small life inconveniences and misfortunes, about losing ordinary, little joys and about their everyday worries, complaints, and frustrations. This is how irregularity and disasters translate into new normality and acceptance. A relaxed, swinging, joyous life event, a lazy day on the beach, turns here into a contemporary obscure *tableau vivant* professionally performed, carefully assembled and "squeezed" indoors. It appears as an animated and enlarged version of some specially designed brick toy set showing a day of summer holiday and encapsulated in a kind of a giant transparent globe that is cracked, barely kept together, but we still wish to watch it, keep it, play with it. We have reached the stage where practicing little daily things does not come out from happy life appreciation but as picking up of its last scattered pieces that find their "rest in peace" with other drained and flavourless things that we hail as bearers of a joyful life.

"Contemporary crises unfold easily, softly — like a pop song on the very last day on Earth,"²⁴ explains the team of this project. "The end of the world as we know it"²⁵ will emerge from our idleness, indifference, solipsism, from worrying, complaining, inhibiting, fantasising, from those inert, slow, and low forces evolving into a state of great exhaustion.

"Exhaustion, exhaustion, exhaustion, exhaustion....," performers sing together at one moment. Writing about Beckett, Gilles Deleuze defined the exhausted (*L'épuisé*)²⁶ not as a state of "simple" fatigue, a loss of subjective possibilities, but as exhausting all of the possible or, we may say, emptying out the possibilities of life to transform, to heal itself.

In the movie, *Le Temps Qui Reste* (2005) by François Ozon, a fashion photographer with terminal cancer chose to die alone on a busy beach on a sunny summer's day. Alone in the crowd, he was taking photos of people that surrounded him, unaware of his presence and his life expiring. Watching the world and the vividness of life through a camera lens is not only a dying man's farewell to his profession and life itself but becomes a mournful parable of the state of fatal exclusion and terminal isolation. In *Sun & Sea (Marina)*, the crowd performing life's little pleasures and acting ordinariness is literally singing a farewell song to its world, which is fading away. A nice day at the beach turns into mourning over broken things which they are too weak to repair. And we, the audience, the crowd watching the scenery from a safe distance, from an "omnipotent" position above, are apparently "luckily" excluded from this enclosed world that looks foreign and remote (the opera singing additionally brings a sense of estrangement to the scenery, aestheticising the tragedy). And yet, we belong to the same enclosure, feeling strangely and helplessly hooked to its shores, surrendered to its oddity, splashed by the overwhelming sense of impotence (or exhaustion) in which we are already drowning. Now we know it, cannot deny it and are hardly resisting it.

MAKING THE ARK IN
THE BOTTLE

The impossibility of denying the ecological crisis and the effects of the Anthropocene and turning that impossibility into extravagant artistic action occurs in the large-scale project of the Australian duo, sisters-artists Margaret, and Christine Wertheim. Continuous manual work, the crocheting of corals as replication (or "reanimation") of the depleting and disappearing maritime life, connects scientific tools, critical theory and art working. It connects two sisters with a large number of volunteers internationally, who help them manufacture these art(ificial) organisms "planted" in glass aquariums. This skilful, dedicated and ecstatic manual work transcends the status of prosaic housewives' pastime or the label of a quaint hobby. Maritime life "cultivated" by artists and volunteers tends to re-establish social bonds, make a social appeal and grow into responsible, sympoietic engagement, collective making, and braiding of creative and caring connections.

On the other hand, the proliferation of crocheted corals, the blooming and pulsation of their forms and colours, splashing as though they will never know fatigue or completeness, continue to spread like a "sweet" fever. They evolve and expand with the same frenzy as the extermination of natural

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18
Bauman, "From pilgrim to tourist — or a short history of identity," 29.
19
Ibid., 30.
20
Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered," 18
21
Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 20.
22
Halperin, "It's Hard to Make Good Art about Climate Change. The Lithuanian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale Is a Powerful Exception." 23
Ibid.
24
Ibid.
25
The verse from the song *It's the End of the World as We Know It (And I Feel Fine)* by American rock band *R.E.M.*, which first appeared on their 1987 album Document.
26
Deleuze, Uhlmann, "The Exhausted," 3–28.

life, in a dead heat between art and the natural environment on the playground of the Anthropocene. However, they are not a compensatory endeavour that would replace nature for artistry or art for artifice. These crocheted corals, colourful in the memory of nature’s past life or bleached, colourless in empathy with its present state, become a glamorous and flamboyant opera or a monochrome requiem for a dying world. Either encapsulated in glass vitrines to demonstrate how the protection of endangered species became their entrapment or crawling out of aquariums to demonstrate how “liberation” looks like weeds spreading, colonies of crocheted corals appear both hypnotic and scary, enchanting and “contagious.”

The people singing the opera about the demise of their world while taking a rest on the artificial beach in *Sun & Sea (Marine)* are sharing the same state and fate with frozen gardens and thousands of “blooming” flowers in Marc Quinn’s glass vitrines and with the colourful, abundant world of crocheted coral “organisms” “planted” in glass boxes of Margaret and Christine Wertheim. In these modern chambers of wonders, life is aestheticised and anaesthetised. However, they are neither created only to please or amuse us, scare us or excite us, or sedate us in a state of “sweet” indolence. They are neither designed to protect us from the disturbing reality nor to comfort us while facing its terrors and our own fears and faults. They blatantly show how the well-known, clear and simple natural mechanics of death, decay and disappearance unfold nowadays into a new, cold and clean, “upgraded” program, which is mediated, elaborated, technologically driven, organised as a spectacle, both controllable and unpredictable and certainly unstoppable, carried out in the anthropogenic gardens we cultivate. And this is the imaginary and desperate program of conquering death. On the other hand, they show how the highly controlled, technologically advanced, overdeveloped, and oversupplied hyper-world of ours is dying rapidly, also easily, silently and ordinarily “erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.”²⁷

Marc Quinn made a personal “blood sacrifice” to this pursuit of entropy by exhibiting his self-portraits (*Self*, 1991 – present) made of his frozen blood in sealed aquariums. They are death masks made of an organic, life-giving substance that owes its consistency to the cooling machine while critically depending on it and which, therefore, may at any second disappear. In this ongoing project, every new self-portrait expresses new signs of ageing, of progressive life dissipation that no preservative or machinery could save. It erodes the romantic notion about art and life sharing the same substance but also shockingly and deliberately proves that the project of their shared preservation is not only vulnerable but tragically absurd. In this vast melancholic spread, art and life, nature, and machine, literal and symbolic, the artist’s body and body of work crashed into each other to be able to outlive this collision.

27
Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, 387.
28
Deleuze, *Foucault*, 92.
29
Sloterdijk, *You must change your life: On anthropotechnics*, 34.
30
Gros, “Course Context,” 513.
31
Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*, 537.
32
Sloterdijk, *You must change your life: On anthropotechnics*, 452.

Another macabristic story, Yorgos Lanthimos’s horror phantasy *Poor Things* (2023), is a terrifying parable of life in the anthropogenic garden told with the laughter of the Joker. Even the so-called God in this film, the creator, carries within himself the devastating experience of being abused by the Father (both religious and patriarchal matrices are castrated in this film), turning him into, literally speaking, an experimenter in blood who converts death (corpses) into freakish life (living creatures). He gives his freaks home, which represents enclosure, and even the permission to leave that protection prison in order to explore and discover the world, accumulate experiences and gain self-recognition moving through the chain of different artificial, glamorously aestheticized enclosures (the city, the boat, the slum, the brothel, the family house, the garden). Inside them, social and religious rules and prescriptions of modesty, obedience, shame, guilt, forgiveness, grief, charity, endurance, but also the “sins” of insatiability, cruelty, revenge, and punishment are all weirdly cross-bread in this mishmash of humanity. Excessive testing of the body through dirty delights becomes a brutal parodic deconstruction of the life mission as learning, knowledge acquisition on the path of emancipation, of “bettering oneself.” In the end, the once-created-freak became herself the experienced cold experimenter ready to apply the “Rules for the Human Zoo” in her true garden, to continue the program of creating *poor things* (or “damaged goods”), of making “a human being itself into the human’s best domestic animal.” However, this lavish fantasy amuses us and also terrifies us but keeps us at a safe distance. We praise this excessive phantasmagoria as something too fictional to hurt us truly.

POST SCRIPTUM OR
EVERYONE , HAVE A GREAT DAY !

In the non-fictional realm of enclosures that encapsulate us in the contemporary world, are we “doomed” to live as *poor things*? Is death and disappearance the only way to the return to nature and naturalness? Is it possible to cultivate a kind of eco-aesthetic-ethic paradigm for resistance, breakout or escaping the “box”? For Gilles Deleuze, to resist means to extract the forces of a more affirmative life.²⁸

In his book *You Must Change Your Life*, Peter Sloterdijk introduces the term anthropotechnics as “self-referential practicing and working on one’s own vital form.”²⁹ It evolves from Nietzschean “vertical tension” and self-elevation and relates to Michel Foucault’s technologies of the self, care of the self, self-governmentality. It offers physical, mental, and spiritual exercises for self-mastering when the subject becomes “no longer [as] constituted [by]” but rather as “constituting itself *through* well-ordered practices.”³⁰ Those practices are not only self-transformative but also relational, both autopoietic and sympoietic. Foucault highlights that care of the self is “a real social practice,” an “intensifier of social relations.”³¹ Sloterdijk says the same: “the good habits of shared survival in daily exercises.”³²

“He really is making art 24 hours a day. You’re at his house, and if he’s not cutting or writing or shooting, he’s in the wood shop making furniture, or he’s painting, or he’s filming birds, or telling the weather.” This is how the actress Laura Dern and muse of film director David Lynch explains his calming daily routine.

His *Weather reports* (Fig. 3) are simple and brief (about 30 seconds long) records of weather conditions in Los Angeles. They were accessible through David Lynch’s website during the 2000s. Then he continued broadcasting them on his personal YouTube channel David Lynch Theatre from his apartment in Los Angeles (until the end of 2022). During the time of the coronavirus pandemic of 2020, when the world stumbled into lockdown, i.e. enclosures, weather reports came into focus.

The “Rules for the Human Zoo” are older than the pandemic, but the lockdown made them painfully obvious and undeniable, and also something we should no longer ignore playing dead or pretending life.

David Lynch’s weather reports are also something older than the pandemic measures, and they have been pretty much the same before and during the pandemic. “We’ve got blue skies, several white fluffy clouds, and a lot of golden sunshine,” said Lynch on May 20, 2020 and this repeated with small variations. He was reporting while sitting in his “bunker,” his home office in Los Angeles, under the window open to the clear sky. And he was ending with a good wish: “Everyone, have a great day!”.

Those weather reports were not boring, conventional talks about weather, chitchatting when you wish to avoid certain topic or small talk when you do not have something meaningful to say. These reports, as a daily routine for the reporter and for the listeners, have become a sort of mental exercise, almost Zen ritual, focused, devoted, but also relaxed repetition of ordinary actions for calming the body and clearing the mind. Agent Cooper, the main character in Lynch’s legendary *Twin Peaks* series, would say: “Every day, once a day, give yourself a present.” In his interviews, Lynch is predicting a world “more spiritual and much kinder” that would “bring us all closer together in a really strong and beautiful way.”³³ But until that hoped-for world, he sees potential in being in closed, small space under one’s own conditions: “So many things can happen in a small space... It’s an opportunity for a bunch of different experiments.”³⁴

Weather reporting started as Lynch’s own project, as wishful isolation in his home where he was repeating different self-care practices and continued to do so during the time of government-mandated closures. Minor changes and unnoticeable differences in weather conditions in Los Angeles and in Lynch’s weather reporting were a lucky coherence that fostered a sense of duration, constancy, and reliability. However, this regularity is not with a stiff, rigid touch, not a matter of responsibility, predictability, or monotony, but



Fig. / Sl. 3 David Lynch, *Weather Report* (May 11, 2020). Source: David Lynch Theater YouTube Channel / David Lynch, *Weather Report* (11. svibnja 2020.). Izvor: David Lynch Theater, kanal YouTube.

↑

blooms like an unpretentious, soft, slow, calm, clear, light, fluid, sensuous and jolly delicacy that keeps us untied and sweetly light-hearted. Even when serious political issues briefly make an appearance in Lynch’s weather reporting, they do not bring a sense of insecurity, helplessness, fear or rage but become interwoven in this light fabric of life where nothing deserves special attention, nothing is more important than the other, and it is up to us which “window” will be opened. During the pandemic, his weather reports were giving people comfort, a sense of solidarity, care, and interconnectedness. Fictitious existence through online profiles and conversations, virtual, pseudo-identities and electronic bodies is one of the most widespread “pandemics” nowadays, but the recent real pandemic has explored and proved the potential to “heal” the living bodies through shared vulnerability, need for consolation, and the chance of a breakthrough. Lynch went further on an untraceable route. By opening different layers of his virtual window, into his home “box” and from that box to the outside, into a clear sky with clouds and into his, “magical” in their straightforwardness, weather “spells”, his modest phantasmagorias do not trigger hopes and expectations, respond to fears, desires or phantasies. They do not call for an open fight, escape from the zoo or numbing ignorance. They exercise the appropriation of the “box” through personal joy and alertness so light, loose and unremarkable that they might stay “below the radar” of the “guardians of the camp” and “cool down” the urgencies of the burning world.

In the film *Lucky* (2017), David Lynch plays Howard, who is grieving the disappearance of Roosevelt, his beloved pet tortoise who has taken advantage of an open gate and taken leave to, presumably, a “path of self-discovery.” The fact that Howard decided to leave his inheritance to his escaped tortoise is almost typical Lynchian parodic spin to relativize the supremacy of logic, seriousness, common sense and the institution of possession as “ownership, control, or occupancy of any object, asset, or property, by a person.”³⁵ And praise the one like tortoise who is “noble as a king, and as kindhearted as a grandmother,”³⁶ the one who neither dramatizes nor patheticises the inevitability of death (as Howard claims, tortoise carries the shell as its shelter during the lifetime and it becomes the coffin after its death); and the one who is ready to forsake the “petting” rule of the zoo and take leave in an unpredictable direction. Eventually, this “case” might hint at a quite unconventional, poetic and potentially sympoietic or symbiotic mesh of bonds between humans and non-humans suitable for some new –cenes.

POST SCRIPTUM OR
PERFECT DAYS

Ecological art today deals with diagnosing and calculating environmental damage, attributing responsibility, contributing to awareness-raising campaigns, becoming the striking fist of critical ecology, and creating eco-friendly artworks. The works like Quinn’s vivariums or *Sea & Sun (Marina)* do

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33
Sharf, “David Lynch Predicts a ‘More Spiritual, Much Kinder’ World After Quarantine Ends.”
34
Ibid.
35
“Possession.”
36
Nordine, “David Lynch as Actor: How His Onscreen Persona Has Evolved From ‘The Cleveland Show’ to ‘Lucky.’”

not only imply ecological or environmental criticism but show how an ecological crisis evolves from the "rules for the human zoo" as their natural soil. They also indicate that eco-art or art practice carrying specific eco-dimension are invited nowadays to imagine and propose the exit strategies from the "anthropogenic garden." Since our existential horizon, as Jean-Luc Nancy claims, is marked by resignation, disappearance, and impossibility, this horizon must be challenged, constantly denied, and we "must go farther than all possible horizons."³⁷ Art needs to teach us to think "transversally" (Guattari's concept), to "cut" diagonally through the "box", to interrupt its "strict" lines of segregation and disciplinary boundaries and to start to transversally heal relations between the Three Ecologies.

Félix Guattari proposes *Ecosophy* as an ethico-political-aesthetic paradigm that might modify and reinvent the ways in which "we live as couples or in the family, in an urban context" and in natural environment, to work from the molecular level of "sensibility, intelligence and desire," to reinvent our relation "to the body, to phantasm, to the passage of time, to the 'mysteries' of life and death,"³⁸ to organise "new solidarities, a new gentleness."³⁹ That means continuous production of subjectivity as a relentless (re)invention of concepts, as creative thinking and intellectual nomadism, as a revival of sensibility, sociability, naturalness, as the development of the "sense of responsibility, not only for our own survival but equally for the future of all life on the planet, for animal and vegetable species, likewise for incorporeal species such as music, the arts, cinema, the relation with time, love and compassion for others, the feeling of fusion at the heart of cosmos."⁴⁰ Donna Haraway would say: production of the man of kinship, the one that develops cross-spices connections (we may add: becomes intra and inter-connected) and accepts the challenge of "staying with the trouble," chooses ongoingness, the artistry of living in a mutilated world.⁴¹ For Guattari, this is not the ability and privilege of the scientists, but something that artists (should) do. "Perhaps artists today constitute the final lines along which primordial existential questions are folded."⁴²

Proustian repetitive and therapeutic listening of the "little phrase" from the Vinteuil sonata or other refrains made of small scale and unremarkable events like Lynchian repetition of weather reports or Wim Wenders' last film hero who lightly and joyfully performs the same duties and routines every day like it is always a "Perfect Day," all might be recognized as a sort of "re-creative influence," the lucky chance to sense, "all of a sudden, a change of air and surroundings, or a new course of treatment, or sometimes an organic change" in oneself, "spontaneous and unaccountable," that the one "begins to envisage the possibility, hitherto beyond all hope, of starting to lead belatedly a wholly different life."⁴³ For Guattari, reaching the level of creative autonomy on "the most miniscule level" encourages conquests in other domains, becomes "the catalyst for a gradual reforging and renewal of humanity's confidence in itself"⁴⁴ and confidence in bonding with the world through attentive practice of love,

care, inspiration, and solace.

David Lynch's little weather talks do not target directly or significantly the concerns and burning issues of today's world but show how a "small calibre" tool, unintentional, low-fi anthropotechnic's pursuit of care for one's own "more affirmative life," the bliss of micro-utopias on a subjective and everyday basis, might promote the possibility for the extraction of the social ecology not as it's fictional but its natural fruit. "Art was intended to prepare and announce a future world: today it is modelling possible universes [...] ways of living and models of action within the existing real."⁴⁵

Along with its human-centeredness and decisive human influence, the Anthropocene has always been more than human. It tells about our inevitable interconnectedness with and interdependence to nature and the environments "be it social, animal, vegetable or Cosmic."⁴⁶ The *more-then-human-Anthropocene* and the Anthropos still need to enter the assemblage of different intra/inter-actions, forces and substances within and out of human control, from multi-faced, powerful Gaia to microbe or feral level but in a kin manner. The Anthropocene needs to experience infiltration into or absorption by other more inclusive or all-inclusive *-cenes*, by "stories (and theories) that are just big enough to gather up the complexities and keep the edges open and greedy for surprising new and old connections."⁴⁷ Or it needs stories small enough, unpretentious and light, cheerful and calm, intimate and inviting, capable of gradually re-writing or undoing the "Rules for the Human Zoo."

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37
Nancy, "The Inoperative Community," 59.
38
Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 28–35.
39
Ibid., 51.
40
Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, 119–120.
41
Donna Haraway proposes reconfiguring and revitalising the relations between people and other critters through kinship as building sym-poietic and symbiotic alliances. In: Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*.
42
Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, 133.
43
Proust, *In Search of Lost Time, vol. I: Swann's Way*, 252–3
44
Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 69.
45
Ibid., 13.
46
Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 27.
47
Clifford, James, cited in: Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, 101.

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