

## ADDENDUM B



During WWII, in the Drohobych Ghetto in occupied Poland, an SS officer took advantage of the artistic talents of Polish writer Bruno Schulz and had him paint murals in the children's playroom of his home. This SS officer had a rival, another German officer whose Jewish dentist was shot by the officer. The rival saw Schulz on the street outside the ghetto, after a night's work on the murals taking home a loaf of bread. He took his gun and shot Schulz to get back at his adversary.<sup>1</sup>

In his essay "The Mythisation of Reality" Schulz wrote: "The essence of reality is meaning. What has no meaning is not real for us. Every fragment of reality lives only because it plays its part in some universal meaning. The old cosmogonies expressed this by a sentence: 'In the beginning was the Word.' The unnamed does not exist for us."<sup>2</sup>

In *Castrum Peregrini*, Wolfgang Frommel gave Claus Bock a clear reprimand because he read a book about Shakespeare, as reading 'about' things made little sense in his opinion. According to Frommel, the secret was in the works of art themselves; thoughts or definitions would not add anything to that. Rather, citing, transcribing and translating poems would teach the reader all there was to

learn.<sup>3</sup> Even though Frommel's poetry books were overgrown with annotations and quotations, Frommel stressed that it was in the end all about the poem itself.

"Without its own effort, without being caught up in it, no poem has the power to magnetically organize life."<sup>4</sup>

Frommel's comments precede Barthes' and Derrida's notions that every work is eternally written here and now with each re-reading, because the origin of meaning lies exclusively in language itself and its impressions on the reader. As a reader, following Frommel, one needs to be respectful to the text. As a writer, following Schulz, one needs to be respectful to the words: "We forget when we use commonplace words that they are fragments of ancient and eternal stories, and that like barbarians we are building our homes from fragments of sculptures and statues of the gods."<sup>5</sup>

Art historian Claire Bishop recently wrote about the effects of the digital revolution on visual arts. Where photography and video, emerged in the 20's and 60's, were image based and had a self-evident relevance to visual arts, the digital, by contrast, is code. Code is a linguistic model and inherently alien to human, writes Bishop. This code based revolution might lead to literature and poetry, code based as it is, to be taking up the avant-garde baton.<sup>6</sup>

1 The officer supposedly had said to his rival: "I've killed your Jew.", to which the response was: "Fine, now I'll kill your Jew". See: D. Grossman, 'Too Much Hurt', *LA Weekly* May 1 2002.

2 B. Schultz, 'The Mythisation of Reality', <http://www.scribd.com/doc/24766098/The-Mythisation-of-Reality-by-Bruno-Schulz>, p. 1.

3 C.V. Bock, *Zolang wij gedichten schrijven kan ons niets gebeuren*, Amsterdam: Castrum Peregrini 2007, p. 16.

4 *Ibid*, p. 81.

5 *Ibid*, p. 2.

6 C. Bishop, 'Digital Divide', in: *Artforum* 2012-9, <http://artforum.com/inprint/issue=201207&id=31944>, p. 4.

One could argue whether code is inherently alien to human or even claim the exact opposite: is code not inherently human? Every code that can be recognized as such, is waiting to be decoded and understood.<sup>7</sup> As Schulz wrote: “The human spirit is tireless in its glossing of life with the aid of myths, its ‘making sense’ of reality.”<sup>8</sup> The second question is whether images and objects, are truly so distinct from code. We seem to read gestures, clothing styles, branded consumer products, jpegs of art works, just as easily, or arduously, as we read words.

Whether we are barbarians or poets, drawing from statues of gods or binary codes, words and signs exist because of their repetitive powers that cause them to be recognized. The unnamed—unregisterable and unprocessable as it is—might not exist to us, yet, in every new context, every new combination of signs, in a meeting with its receiver, a new meaning occurs. A new meaning waiting to be deciphered, read, written.

How long would the murals Schulz painted have been visible to the family of Felix Landau? Did the family move out straight upon Soviet liberation of Poland, that later became Ukraine? Although the murals faded as Roman fresco’s, and eventually were painted and plastered over, people continued to live in

the house in Drohobycz with the hidden paintings as an invisible décor.

In 2001, a documentary filmmaker discovered the murals.<sup>9</sup> A team of experts started to remove the outer layers of paint from the walls, and found indeed traces of the murals. While in the Ukraine the restoration of the paintings was being planned, the five fragments suddenly disappeared. They were removed from the walls together with the plaster and transported to Israel, to the Yad Vashem Holocaust museum, after which a painful and lengthy quarrel broke out between Ukraine and Israel. The painting were almost divided in two, when a deal was struck whereby the murals belong to Ukraine but are on long-term loan to Yad Vashem.<sup>10</sup>

The murals Schulz painted represented scenes from Grimm’s fairy tales, stories in its own right. The Schulz murals, as an inverted backdrop, have had myriad of stories unfold in front of them and they too became many stories.

A book becomes a reality, which becomes another book. And as long as this new book is read, or even invisible yet discoverable, the cycle will continue.

Marieke Berghuis, October 2012

7 In my thesis I made a reference to the documentary *Into Eternity* about the Finnish nuclear fuel repository, Onkalo. When building the repository, there was a debate whether the entrance of Onkalo should be marked with warning signs for future inhabitants of the region. Unlikely that in 100.000 years people would still be able to read the alphabet, different pictural warning signs were presented. In the end, it was decided to cover up the entrance as good as possible. The chance that discoverers of signs would search for meaning, for a hidden treasure, seemed more likely than that they would leave the signs. See M. Berghuis, *Pharmakon: De magie van het schrift* (graduation thesis Gerrit Rietveld Academie) 2012, p. 11-12.

8 B. Schultz, ‘The Mythisation of Reality’, p. 1.

9 B. Geissler, *Finding Pictures*, 2003.

10 E. Bronner, ‘Behind Fairy Tale Drawings, Walls Talk of Unspeakable Cruelty’, *New York Times* February 27 2009.