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Writing Conceptual Artworks: Inner Dialogue and Psychological Restoration ¹

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Abstract

This article proposes a methodological framework for psychoanalytic research on conceptual artworks through the systematic transformation of visual representations into written texts (*diegesis* from *mimesis*). The approach prioritizes objective description of formal composition – geometry, color, spatial arrangement, and material elements – before engaging in interpretation, thereby avoiding premature subjective projections that distort the artwork’s latent meaning. Through case studies of Remedios Varo’s painting *Woman Leaving the Psychoanalyst* (1960) and Bill Viola’s video installation *The Sleep of Reason* (1988), the author demonstrates how rigorous formal analysis reveals the “normativity” embedded in the work and facilitates the emergence of internal acoustic-verbal dialogues within the spectator. The methodology culminates in a “literary-psychoanalytic” model inspired by the *Bildungsroman* genre, positioning the spectator as an “epic hero” who, through engagement with the artwork, may restore fragmented dialogues, negotiate emotional ruptures, and initiate psychological transformation. By emphasizing empirical description over speculative diagnosis, this approach offers a disciplined pathway to access both the manifest structure and latent dimensions of conceptual art while respecting the integrity of the artistic object.

Keywords

conceptual art, psychoanalytic methodology, diegesis, spectator-hero, inner dialogue, *Bildungsroman*

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Создание концептуального произведения искусства: внутренний диалог и психологическое восстановление

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Аннотация

В статье предлагается методологическая модель психоаналитического исследования концептуальных произведений искусства через систематическое преобразование визуальной репрезентации в письменный текст (*диегезис* из *мимесиса*). Подход предполагает строгое описание формальной композиции – геометрии, цвета, пространственного расположения и материальных элементов – до перехода к интерпретации, что позволяет избежать преждевременных субъективных проекций и сохранить латентный смысл произведения. На примере картины Ремедиос Варо «Женщина, покидающая психоаналитика» (1960) и видеоинсталляции Билла Виолы «Сон разума» (1988) демонстрируется, как детальный формальный анализ выявляет «нормативность», заложенную в произведении, и инициирует внутренний акустико-вербальный диалог у зрителя. Методология завершается «литературно-психоаналитической» моделью, вдохновленной жанром *воспитательного романа*, где зритель выступает в роли «эпического героя», способного через взаимодействие с искусством восстановить фрагментированные диалоги, преодолеть эмоциональные разрывы и инициировать психологическую трансформацию. Акцент на эмпирическом описании вместо спекулятивной диагностики обеспечивает дисциплинированный путь доступа к манифестной структуре и латентным измерениям концептуального искусства.

Ключевые слова

концептуальное искусство, психоаналитическая методология, диегезис, зритель-герой, внутренний диалог, воспитательный роман

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Aesthetic experience is thus not the result of any methodical deciphering of an artwork but is the phenomenological event of the artwork speaking to us²

Davey (2005:143)

Wer Geschichte(n) erzählt, kann sich von Traumata befreien³

Agus Nur Amal Pmtoh. (2022:48)

1. Purpose of the Transformation of Visual Representations into Written Texts

In accordance with the alternative framework we wish to suggest here for carrying out psychoanalytic research on conceptual artworks, we propose, as a first methodological step, a process of conversion or permutation of the image observed by the researcher-spectator into written text (Reiche, 2011; Sonntag, 1990; Oevermann, 1993). The work, which can be still or moving, as in the case of video installations, or three-dimensional productions, some containing sound elements, requires a metamorphosis, through which we move from the optical-auditory world to that of literacy. This means that we reproduce a text that faithfully describes the formal structure of the work based on an exact description that includes dimensions, lines, materials, position, and color, as well as the specification of its context, semantics, location, language and setting or placing.

We then move from “mimesis”—a term that refers to the visual, performative, or material pictorial exhibition or display of people, acts, or situations, whether figurative or abstract—to “diegesis.” Under this condition, we carry out their description or representation through the written, spoken, or acted word, coinciding with what Danto (1995:1-2) describes in relation to both terms. Following this idea, and in accordance with the methodological strategy mentioned above, in which we highlight Freud’s (1907) primary work with Michelangelo’s “Moses” (see Chapter 1), we propose the transformation of the work into a written text. The image then becomes a secondary or collateral reference within the written narrative, since both its physical characteristics and its actual location have been distorted and removed from the original presentation in the gallery or museum setting. The written text then takes precedence. Our first methodological step indicates that the work is then converted into writing – the “diegesis” –, so its content must be focused on describing its formal composition, as we emphasized.

By carrying out the reproduction or broadcast process in a written work protocol, we fulfill the essential requirement of having what we call “empirical”

² “The aesthetic experience is not the result of a methodological deciphering of a work of art, but rather it is the phenomenological event of the work of art speaking to us.”

³ “Whoever tells stories will be able to free themselves from trauma.”

material, which will later be useful for preparing the analysis and evaluation. Precisely from this written material arises the formulation and reformulation of the object of interdisciplinary study, in which the interaction and interrelation (dialogue) between spectator and work, as also between work and spectator proves to be the fundamental logical structure for analysis and interpretation. The systematization of the protocol's contents around these interactions leads us to provide the researcher with a "literary-psychoanalytic" model, which derives from the "*Bildungsroman*" genre. In the latter, the spectator takes on the role of an "epic hero," as previously announced, who seeks, confronts, and resolves aspects of early interactions expressed through "verbal-acoustic" dialogues versus "inner hollows" aroused by events of misunderstanding experienced with interlocutors that resulted in the emergence of emptiness and silence. The spectator-participant will then eventually be able to restore and heal through the rapprochement, creation, and emergence of alternative, complementary dialogues, fostered by their interaction with the content of the conceptual work. The possible transformation resulting from the dialogue, in which a negotiation between "vocation and renunciation" (Koval, 2008) is present, would certainly open the possibility of visualizing in its spectrum of the self-knowledge a "post-hero" or "novelized" hero, that is, a character who constructs new dialogues and stories of daily life, in which successes and failures, loves and heartbreaks, triumphs and errors coexist alternately, instead of a solely "heroic fate".

Returning to our methodological purpose, we suggest that the steps to follow particularly require making available to the "reader-researcher-listener" a systematic narrative, initially provided with objective, concrete, and visible elements. We focus on describing only what we observe, primarily based on its structure and formal design. This implies a written description of the geometric aspects of the artistic project, including perspective, angles, design, location, among others. We also consider elements of coloristic, auditory, or performative expression, where applicable. Although we emphasize the need to exclude, in the first instance, any type of interpretation, comments, opinions, or other additions determined by the subjective-intersubjective aspects of the researcher. These latter are the main elements that give meaning to the configuration of the text as a whole—as is the case with this text.

In this sense, we believe that authors who engage in psychoanalytic research on art routinely and frequently find themselves altering, disrupting, and frequently violating the meaning of the work by being distant from or lacking knowledge of their own subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Based on this argument, the resulting impact arises not only on themselves but also on their critiques, analyses, or commentaries related to the content of artistic works. Sonntag (1990:10) rightly comments on this matter when she points out that: "*Interpretations based on a highly dubious theory that a work of art is composed of elements of content violate art. They turn art into a useful article for arrangement within a mental scheme of categories.*" Let's look at an example that objectively demonstrates the above statements.

2. Traditional analysis of a work of art:

“Woman leaving the psychoanalyst” 1960 (Remedios Varo)

An example of the methodological procedure indicated, which, in accordance with our methodological strategy, deviates from its premises, can be seen in a section of historian Gallo's (2010:110) excellent work on the reception of Freud in Mexico. Regarding the analysis of the image of Remedios Varo's painting entitled *“Woman Leaving the Psychoanalyst”* (1960) (see: Figure 1), the author's description of the painting in question is as follows:

“...It depicts a woman exiting her doctor's office – A plaque on the door frame identifies him as “Dr. F.J.A.” a name Varo explains as a condensation of “Freud, Jung, Adler” – and stepping

into a small courtyard. There she “throws her father's head into a well”, an act Varo considered as “the correct thing to do after leaving the psychoanalyst”, as she explained in a letter to her brother. In her right hand, she carries a basket containing “a clock symbolizing the fear of arriving late”, as well as “other psychological refuse”. She is draped in an elaborate cloak: only her eyes, forehead and hair are visible; the rest of her body is concealed under folds of thick fabric. A Venetian-looking mask, made of the same fabric, hangs over her neck: if she were to put it on, she would look like a woman in carnivalesque purdah... The scene takes place in the most unusual setting: the woman stands in the middle of a closed circular courtyard without a visible exit. There is a door to the left, but without a knob or lock it appears to be sealed shut. The courtyard is enclosed by towering, fortified walls, and the only openings to the outside world are well above eyes level. There seems to be no way out of this circular labyrinth, except perhaps through the well - an exit that would require a perilous and potentially deadly underwater plunge”.

In the description of the painting, the artist's information is interspersed with that of the author; we believe the methodological purpose is intended to provide greater solidity to the subsequent presentation and analysis. However, regarding the clock's meaning, we read an interpretation, which we do not know if it comes from the author or the artist, then the indication that the aforementioned door does not have a “lock” or “latch” is striking, since both the perspective and the implicit shading in the painting prevent us from seeing the door frame and the door itself in its entirety. However, what stands out most in the previous description is the argument about a *“closed circular courtyard with no apparent exit.”* With this, the author

assumes as a fact that the woman is trapped in a *“circular labyrinth,”* with no other option except the well.

The assertion assumed by the author contradicts, in the first instance, the action suggested by the title of the work, which is: ***“Woman Leaving the Psychoanalyst”***; then, in order to reaffirm this argument, the author makes the risky proposal that the painting could be called *“Woman Not Leaving the Psychoanalyst,”* arbitrarily

and unfoundedly contradicting the artist's proposal. Based on these arguments, the author offers a rather controversial explanation related to a series of possible clinical conditions that could possibly be attributed to the woman in question, and in which we are faced with speculation about various psychological disorders such as "obsessive neurosis," "paranoia," or perhaps "borderline psychotic," according to the his opinion (Op. Cit. p. 112). Unlike what would be objectively constructed diagnoses, we believe that here we are dealing rather with "verdicts," obviously unjustified, which clearly and definitively fall far short of a clinical assessment that could be sustained or supported by elements observable and verifiable directly in the reference painting, thus leaving the reader-spectator impassive and unable to verify and validate the clinical symptoms described. The reader remains in a situation analogous to confinement, as the author himself has defined it, that is, in a labyrinth with no way out. If this were a real case, the patient could not be discharged, as well.



Fig. 1. Remedios Varo. "Woman Leaving the Psychoanalyst" (1960) Oil on canvas.

71 × 41 cm. Museum of Contemporary Art, Mexico City

Source: <https://www.lacamaradelarte.com/2019/03/mujer-saliendo-del-psicoanalista.html>.

Accessed March 12, 2020

For our part, we affirm that the selection of the mentioned diagnostic categories regarding the content of the work is definitively determined and permeated by intersubjectivity-subjectivity; in other words, by transferential issues from the researcher-historian to the artwork. In this sense, we suggest that a lack of empirical reference elements and methodological facts for validation, has consequently created a fabrication or an unfolding of the author's own fantastic world, which has to do with particular personal conceptions not explicit in the text. Under these circumstances the scientific criterion that could allow or be indicative of any objectivity in the formulation of the clinical hypotheses is completely nonexistent, as we have indicated. Based on these assessments, we once again share Sonntag's (1990:12) opinions in directing our attention to the element of the "form" in art. The author expresses it as follows:

"If an exaggerated emphasis on content leads to an arrogance of interpretation, more extended and complete descriptions would silence it. What we need is a vocabulary—a vocabulary of forms, more descriptive than prescriptive. The best criticism, and this is not common, is the kind that dissolves considerations of content, giving precedence to those of form."

If we try to make sense of the above statements—also in line with the proposal to faithfully and systematically adhere to our descriptions of what we observe in the formal composition of the work—the artwork made by Remedios Varo indicates, on the contrary, that there is indeed an "exit." This statement runs against to what the historian describes in his text, since the mentioned exit is found at the level corresponding to that of the spectator who witnesses the painting. Therefore, in relation to the circle, we see that the painting undoubtedly shows a little more than half a circle corresponding to the central courtyard—or rather, three-quarters of it—but by no means do we see the complete circle in the painting. It is evident, therefore, that a "circular labyrinth" is never completed in the painting, as the author notes, since the circle is open precisely in front of the spectator, remaining between him/her and the "woman leaving the psychoanalyst". In addition to the above, it is clear that both the woman's gaze and the eyes of her mask—which, we certainly agree, is gradually symbolically peeling off as a result of psychoanalysis—are directed toward the spectator, whom she looks at head-on; this indicates that in front of the enigmatic woman lies a visible, open, different external world, which she is preparing to confront. We can conclude this by observing the woman's frontal body posture and the position of her legs, which have been positioned as if she were "taking a firm step forward of the painting" as well as the visible fact that she is wearing "pointy" shoes, which are also pointed toward the viewer, that is, in a position of "defense" and response to a possible "attack."

The above approach, seen from the perspective of a psychoanalytic "transference" effect that flows from the spectator to the painting, allows us to deduce that, metaphorically, the woman was unable to establish or continue a dialogue within an

emotional relationship, and so the silence kept her trapped. We believe it was probably a suspended dialogue between her and the patriarchal male figure—represented by the decrepit, ancient figurine of a senile head, in the moments before she was dropped into the well, also symbolized by the surrounding context. Our proposal regarding objective description, that is, of forms in painting, leads us to hypothesize that, as a result of psychoanalytic dialogue, the much-needed conversation has been reestablished, leaving behind a disruptive or silent interrelationship, which is about to be dissolved by the “heroine” in the painting when she symbolically “absorbs” or introjects the father, while the well

is representing the inner part of the woman. Therefore, it is finally possible to see her on the path of transformation from the Oedipal renunciation of the father. From there, we now see our protagonist on the path of confronting the uncertain or unknown, which is what we have described before, and which is located in a third space, that is, the one located between her and the spectator, which is imprecise and enigmatic; therefore, we can affirm that it is a magical, mysterious space, in the process of definition and realization. Instead, talking about the traditional analysis proposed by the author, the “heroine” remains trapped in an epic level, even though she is completely victimized by the medical discourse, while, under our proposal of “formal analysis”, we experience a “novelized heroine”, that is, a maker of a future yet to be defined, built and restored, following Bakhtin’s proposal (1999:10) about the construction of the hero in the “*Bildungsroman*”.

We clarify, therefore, that our purpose and function is to try to discover that which “is not seen” but “it is seen” in the work, or rather, taking into account Adorno’s idea (cited by Reiche, 2011:75), who states that: “every image is an image of something,” understanding that this “something” is hidden and different from what we see in the image. In our opinion, the latter shows an object of study that does not correspond to the image itself, but rather to the various elements it represents, and which, in this case, are precisely those that trigger and promote an internal acoustic-verbal dialogue or an “in-listening” in the listening, who here finds himself face- to-face with a committed woman. In this context, the question arises: What dialogues should arise from this encounter? We take into account, however, that the consideration of the work as an objective and real presence is precisely where we start to find that “something” or perhaps those “some,” which effectively point to that which may be “latent” in the work and “unconscious” in the viewer, as we have seen in the magnificent and renowned surrealist work studied above.

We have observed in this example that our methodological program suggests being able to account for the possibilities we discover based on the development described, which leads us to conclude that instead of representing the world through images with their internal verbal and acoustic contents, we must now rely on the written word as a function of a “diegesis.” The above brings us closer to the genre of literary narrative favored by both: firstly, by the exact description of the form, and secondly, by the writing style used. On the other hand, and in relation to the literary characteristics of the proposed writing, we will have to capture the epic act

implicit in the narrative, including, if possible, the emotional impact caused by the approach-interrelation between the work and the spectator, who in case, as we have observed, has acted with amazement and fear at the same time.

An analysis of the painting in question shows how the author-historian, through the construction of his story, has given greater importance to the surrounding or secondary motifs, such as the supposed and non-existent “circular labyrinth”, as well as the towers, the well, among others, relegating the central figure, that is, the woman – the motif of the painting – who undoubtedly turns out to be a “heroine” in the process of experiencing the transition from the epic moment characterized, for example, by a pleasure-suffering dichotomy or impasse, to now being able to be recognized as a subject, a person and an acting-thinking female. She finds herself in the process of shedding her mask facing the inherent difficulties of confronting the outside world, determined by the “outside” of the painting, which is precisely where the spectator is. Remedios Varo’s surrealist painting reminds us, even more so, of the image later created by Joseph Beuys, entitled “*La Rivoluzione siamo noi* (1977)”, extensively studied in the previous chapter. In it, the artist appears to emerge from a door and walk head-on toward the viewer, maintaining a firm and defiant attitude, similar to the “*Woman Leaving the Psychoanalyst*”.

Based on our analysis of the work’s formal structure, the artist in question leads us to recognize a great fear of what a female affront could mean. Therefore, we believe that in this example, the historian-researcher is attempting to “confine” and “label” women, subjecting them to clinical-diagnostic considerations, which, as we affirm, show little validity and limited clinical recognition. We have seen that her assessments indicate that they are based on ignoring her own subjective and intersubjective elements, which, we believe, she unconsciously spills over into the content. Her arguments then lack reliable and verifiable sources, thus continuing with the conventional format of “traditional art study.” From an ideological perspective, we can recognize the author’s identification with a hegemonic patriarchal position that subjects women to the subjugation of women based on a supposedly “medicalized” as well as an unsustainable diagnosis.

3. Objective Analysis of a Conceptual Work of Art: “*The Sleep of Reason, 1988*” (Bill Viola)

The methodological strategy we diligently implemented in this regard under the previously proposed modality, now applies to a conceptual work of art, i.e. a video installation.

This involves the study—formal description, deep analysis, and psychoanalytic interpretation—of the sound-visual work entitled “*The Sleep of Reason, 1988*” (see: Figure 2), created by the renowned North American video installation artist Bill Viola. This complex work was exhibited, among several others, in a solo exhi-

bition held gradually in various museums in the United States (USA), from February 12, 1988, to May 10, 2000, as well as subsequently in other European countries.

3.1. "Protocol No. 1":

Approach and Formal Description of the Work

"As the spectator enters through a small, dark hallway of regular dimensions, she/he arrives at what could well be a "pseudo-bedroom" or dormitory with light-painted walls. It is

striking that the room lacks windows. The space is furnished only by a medium-sized, antique- style chest of drawers made of ochre-colored wood, probably mahogany or cedar, placed near the front wall of the entrance. A lit table lamp rests on the chest, creating a cozy atmosphere by

projecting a dim coppery light that illuminates a large portion of the soft carpeted floor. Also on the chest of drawers, we see a digital clock that reads 4:52 p.m.; next to this last object, the artist placed a vase with white and yellow artificial roses, as well as a monochrome monitor. This device shows a close-up of the camera on the face and head of a sleeping person; it is a middle- aged man. resting on his left side on a white pillow. Because the floor of the room is completely covered by the aforementioned soft carpet, the silence, the atmosphere of calm, and the

tranquility are substantially enhanced, thus contributing to a natural immersion in the installation.

"While the spectator observes the described objects and, with great curiosity, adapts to the peaceful atmosphere of the place, an unexpected power outage occurs, causing both the lamp and the monitor to shut down. Once total darkness prevails inside the room, a series of images briefly and fleetingly appear projected onto three of the four walls. These images, in turn, originate from a video projector embedded in the upper part of one of the walls. The order of appearance and content of the images is as follows: The first shows three white owls with their wings spread, flying frantically toward a light source; the second depicts an out-of-control fire with a series of burning trees planted on the outskirts of an urban neighborhood; next, we see X- rays of animals, as well as people holding a cigarette between their lips; finally, a man runs quickly and with violent movements makes a recording using a video camera in the middle of a nocturnal forest, while purebred dogs try to attack him, as they fiercely direct their jaws toward the protagonist, also turning toward the spectator."

"Each image lasts no more than three or four seconds before moving on to the next, while the dizzying flow of images is accompanied acoustically by a piercing scream resembling a beastly roar mixed with groans of profound human pain. Likewise, the visual and acoustic din described above suddenly ceases, and both the monitor and the dim lamp light turn on, reappearing the initial scene of serenity and tranquility." (The spectator, for his/her part, does not know when the next power outage will occur, with its corresponding, rushed sequence of images, followed by

the aforementioned intense visual and acoustic stimulus, which has been left out of any order or cycle, occurring suddenly, unexpectedly, and intermittently.)



Fig. 2. Bill Viola. "The Sleep of the Reason, 1988". Video/Sound Installation, 4.3 × 8.2 × 9.4m (14'×27'× 31')

Source: <https://historia293.wordpress.com/> accessed March 12, 2020.

3.1.1. Characteristics of the report in "Protocol No. 1"

As we can see in our preceding text, we have primarily emphasized its composition and architectural design, qualitatively describing its geometric characteristics and approximate dimensions. We have also highlighted the environmental composition, the material content or presence of objects, the colors used, and other data as we observe them directly and objectively. We have recognized each of the tangible elements in particular, as well as their function and location within the setting or "frame" of the installation. Therefore, in analogy to a painting

where we appreciate a picture, the installation turns out to be the "picture," and each of its elements takes the place of the formal content. In addition to the above, we have also described the atmosphere and the environments found, as well as the subjective-intersubjective mood from which emotional aspects emerge that, according to our perception, the work generally seeks to evoke in the viewer. In this example, the palette of emotions is varied—ranging from tranquility and calm to surprise, bewilderment, and horror, concluding in an ambivalent state of stillness

and speculation, or even uncertainty. This is based on the different states or phases that randomly and arbitrarily compose and intersperse the installation, in direct allusion to the method by which dreams appear during sleep.

As a summary of the above, we have described the work in its architectural design and original form, transforming it into an alternative version, which is precisely the written text. This text contains a description of its isolated and separate characteristics, along with a complementary overall view. We have also focused on certain indicators of the emotional impact the artist seeks to evoke in the spectator, as we relate from our own perception, considering the intersubjectivities involved in our role as researchers. In approaching the goal of understanding and interpreting the “painting,” we have focused on a faithful description of the individual objects, as well as the interrelationships established between each of them; later, we will consider their meaning within the sociocultural-artistic, institutional or organizational, and collective context in which they are located and presented.

We begin, of course, by analyzing the reception of the “hero-spectator”—or, more precisely, by its transference to the work, which, similar to the installation, can encompass different levels of projection and emotion fostered or suggested by the arrangement of formal characteristics, as well as by the adjacent narrative construction fostered by the artist. Technically, this work includes an interactive acoustic, both manifest and latent, such that, as mentioned above, it is the spectator who, in psychoanalytic terms, develops a “transference” to the work.

3.2. Methodological requirements for the linguistic analysis of the text

The transformation of the work into a written document puts us in direct contact with its semantics and signifiers, which we take as the object of study to carry out an extension, breakdown, and paraphrase of these (Sandner; 1988:336); In this way, we are able to redefine them in the linguistic context, also using sources of information or references that the text itself requires for its explanation and understanding. The accuracy of the language at the time of the description has been one of the most relevant data to consider; likewise, objectivity is reflected in the writing style, grammar, syntax, length and depth, these elements being a product of the transfer to the work, as we indicated. Our proposal for expanding or breaking down the text pursues the objective of bringing to light a hidden meaning (see: Argelander; 1982:701), in this case immersed in the conceptual work, combined with achieving a change by introducing, reproducing or creating a (new) internal verbal-acoustic dialogue previously absent, with the participation of two people (subject-subject interaction) involved affectively and symbolically. The above dynamic aims to reestablish the interlocutor or the person who was previously absent, thus forming an internal dyad with whom a dialogue can be re-established. In terms of the research we are conducting, the disaggregation or disarticulation of the work aims to create an empirical database from which we can obtain a latent “common denominator” or “unified meaning.”

Considering the methodological precepts outlined here, and continuing with the analysis of the installation at hand, it is striking, for example, that its title, *"The Sleep of Reason, 1988"* implies both a metaphor and a discordance. Reason, which is predominantly present in waking states, "does not sleep" by itself. It is the subject who sleeps, and the subject, in turn, dreams when entering the state of rest. In this way, the opposite of "reasoning" occurs in dreams, since they are governed by their own rules, as we will see later. During sleep, reason as such—that is, that which is composed of higher mental functions such as attention, memory, concentration, and judgment, among others—are canceled, diminished to the extreme, or latent. Therefore, dreams emerges in the state of sleeping, which, according to its physiology, is characterized by the so-called REM phase (rapid eye movement), defined as the moment in which the subject finds him/herself dreaming, as opposed to the other three additional phases (alpha, beta, and gamma) that precede it. As we know, the REM phase is characterized by a brief duration of no more than

2 minutes, repeating intermittently and unexpectedly throughout the duration of the subject's sleep cycle, which in adults consists of 7-8 hours a day. Similarly, as shown in the installation by artist Bill Viola, dreams arise unexpectedly during the sleeping cycle, without any prior order or systematization; this is because "reason sleeps," ruling over the unconscious language seen through dreams.

It is at this first level of argumentation that we can observe that the artist has created an ad-hoc scenario in which he virtually places a sleeping male subject within the necessary space that fosters a physiological and psychological state, whilst building up a symbolic "painting frame" materialized in the form of a pseudo-bedroom with a soft carpet and bedroom furniture, thus fostering an atmosphere of tranquility conducive to rest. As a result of the subject's natural act of sleeping, whom we see on the monitor screen, sleep then arose. For this purpose, using the usual physiological mechanics, the artist produced and created a series of dreamlike images in the sleeping subject, externalizing them and showing them to the spectator with all possible vehemence and intensity, having been assisted in this process by a series of technological resources. The latter are largely useful for expressing an allegory related to the surrealist art method, as we observe, for example, in some collages by the painter Max Ernst, in which we see manifestations of the dream world rendered in a drawing-like manner. In Bill Viola's installation, the architectural, geometric, and design characteristics invite the viewer to become part of a painting in the style of the great American modernist realist painter Edward Hooper, to whom Bill Viola seems to pay special tribute with his installation, to the extent that it seems as if we were entering one of Hooper's paintings, as we will see later.

Upon entering the scene and participating in this atmosphere, we observe a strange combination of hyperrealism/surrealism on the one hand, while on the other, an emotional charge related to longing, isolation, and loneliness arises, similar to that evoked by the paintings of Hooper. It is then that we are purposefully induced and absorbed into the theme at play, created both by the iconographic elements of the installation, as well as, by the visual and acoustic development of its content. As

a result of the combination of these elements, we, the spectators, are also involved in the same process, experiencing an illusory—or, we might add, delirious state—where, apparently, deep unconscious anxieties manifest themselves, expressed through what appears to be a “nightmare” or persecutory dream, and at the same time, collectively, creating an aesthetic experience of panic and horror.

The construction of this written account also leads us to confirm and reaffirm the presence of the “*hero-spectator*”, a participant in the play, a protagonist on stage, who is faced with the dilemma of confronting persecutory anxieties, and where the possibility of carrying out a possible transformation exists. Although, as a defensive measure, there is also the alternative of leaving the facility when feeling “threatened,” even “mistreated,” in what could be a form of flight and escape. Under this last option, the play would lead us to recognize a certain difficulty on the part of the spectator in confronting anxiety, which, moreover, would require analysis, clarification, and resolution, in a manner analogous to what might happen in a psychoanalytic session, in which the analysand tells the analyst about a dream that causes him anxiety, whether repetitive or not. As we have explained, our model considers of lesser importance, and steers clear of, the establishment of psychopathological diagnostic categories such as those used by the traditional psychoanalytic critique discussed in previous sections, since the central objective is directed toward the study of the psychology of the spectator-subject in relation to a probable encounter with a new or complementary counterpart constituted as an internal and unconscious acoustic-visual object, determined from the history of its affective and emotional interrelationships.

3.3. “Protocol No. 2”: From the exterior plane to the latent plane in the text

3.3.1. Characteristics and Requirements for Dream Description

As a consequence of the previous approach, in the next methodological step, we are compelled to follow the sequence of the descriptive text of the work. Due to the characteristics of this example, this text leads us to delve into the dynamics of dream interpretation. Based on the discoveries and contributions of Freud (1900:283), we know that dreams are regulated by mechanisms of repression, condensation, displacement, projection, and symbolization. In terms

of the installation at hand, and with the aim of recognizing these mechanisms, we see that, unlike the work “*Woman Leaving the Psychoanalyst*”, here on the contrary, it seems that the title of the work could be “*Spectator Enters the Psychoanalyst’s Office*.” Our task, therefore, is to analyze the entire work as described up to this point, along with the dream content and the emotional impact on the viewer, induced by the artist.

Continuing our proposition that the viewer has symbolically entered the psychoanalyst’s office, we see that they have initially found a peaceful, tranquil environment within an architectural design and interior arrangement that favors the emergence of “free association,” part of which is the narrative of a dream. There-

fore, as we move beyond the exterior to the latent plane, we find ourselves not only within the installation, but “inside” a dream, which is where, in effect, “our reason is absent.” Immediately afterward, a series of images appear in a confusing, disordered, and incongruous manner, accompanied and reinforced by audio emissions, making it seem as if the dream had somehow materialized, or “come to life” through the sequence of sound images. The story we originate upon awakening would speak of that “reality” experienced in the dream, however, since we are located in the role of researchers-spectators-participants in a state of wakefulness, that is, where “our reason” has a certain priority, we require a coherent description, a dream protocol combined with that of the installation that allows us to carry out an exercise of systematized hermeneutic and psychoanalytic interpretation, since we are trying to create a written text, unlike the interpretation (“*Deutung*”) carried out by the living voice of the analyst and the listening of the analysand in the psychoanalytic session.

The scope of this agreed-upon objective proposes that, specifically in this example of Bill Viola’s installation, our next activity will lead us to the creation of a narrative or protocol, one that meets the characteristics of coherence, congruence, and semantic logic required for the comprehension and understanding of dream phenomena, thereby enabling the dream to be “analyzable” in the context of the installation. Therefore, Protocol No. 2, in our understanding and subjectivity, is carried out as shown below.

3.3.2. Breakdown and Linguistic Inquiry of the Dream Text in the Installation

A) **Creation of a text narrating the dream:** “Last night I dreamed it was nighttime and I entered my bedroom, probably to sleep or rest. The scene changed. Suddenly, I found myself in a forest, which was bursting into flames. There was a raging fire, and the animals were running away in terror. Three white owls flew overhead, and I saw furious purebred dogs, which were definitely trying to attack me. The houses near the forest were also burning; some animals were charred, and I could see their skeletons. I felt horrified and very scared. I heard terrible screams and wails, although I didn’t know whose they were coming from. They were coming from the houses that were burning, probably from some of their inhabitants. I wanted to go help, but all I could do was grab my video camera and run through the woods, filming. The scene was terrifying. At that moment, I woke up, distressed, and turned on a cigarette” (end of dream).

B) **Scriptural analysis of the dream:** In line with our methodological proposal stated above and applied to the linguistic breakdown of the description of the work, we carry out the same hermeneutic operation in the written account of the dream, focusing on a work of disarticulation, decoupling, exploration, and expansion of the text in a manner analogous to that demonstrated by Freud (1900), Argelander (Op. Cit.), and Sander (1988) for the systematic written analysis of dreams. To achieve this purpose, we develop a series of semantic units composed of sentences or grammatical units (in our current example, we propose a total of seven units

of analysis), which are accompanied by a respective scrutiny and amplification. The process can be carried out as follows:

1) *“Last night I dreamed it was nighttime and I entered my bedroom, probably to sleep or rest”*. When the protagonist—sleeping in the installation—begins his account of the dream by stating, “Last night I dreamed it was nighttime...etc.” We assume this is a double dream or a dream within a dream, since “last night” (1) he dreamed it was “nighttime” (2), which is why he went to the room conducive to such activity. Understanding the above event in terms of the viewer, the latter has entered a state of drowsiness when he enters the installation through the described hallway, preparing to sleep, and evidently to dream.

2) *“The scene changed, and suddenly I found myself in a forest, which was bursting into flames”*. Once asleep, the sleeper begins their dream with a scene reminiscent of childhood, when a parent or other nearby adult would read or tell a children’s story just before falling asleep. Often, the stories in these tales take place in wooded or forested settings, surrounded by rivers and mountains inhabited by animals, which, in the story, are capable of speaking, performing activities, or taking on human functions, as we see in classic children’s literature tales, such as those by the Brothers Grimm or Christian Anderson, among others. In the dream of the installation, the character enters a “forest,” an action that leads us to consider it an entrance to their inner world, that is, to the place where memories are housed; both the most precious ones, which are from childhood and represent a “treasure,” and the most hidden desires, fantasies, illusions, and feelings.

3) *“There was a raging fire, and the animals were running away in terror. Three white owls flew overhead, and there were enraged dogs that were definitely trying to attack me”*.

Similar to what often happens in children’s stories, a particular event also occurs that turns out to be threatening and persecutory, which, in this case, is related to the outbreak of a forest fire. This event causes the inhabitants to flee, like the owls—who represent parsimony and wisdom—that here flee in disarray from the fire, while the traditional guardians—the dogs, representing nobility and loyalty—violently attack their human companions, as well as, the spectators outside the video camera. The above fact provides clear evidence of the presence of fractures in the protagonist’s inner world, in which we see a loss of balance, tranquility, and equanimity, resulting in a catastrophic and extremely fragile situation. This leads to great anguish as the protagonist’s inner world turns against him.

4) *“The houses near the forest were also burning, some animals were charred, I saw their skeletons”*. Houses, for their part, represent refuge, shelter, and protection, as well as the place where family dramas occur and unfold, such as Oedipal infatuations during childhood; later, the utopia versus dystopia debates characteristic of adolescence occur; these refuges, the houses, are the place where these unfold; in the dream, they are also prey to fire, thus increasing the dreamer’s state of anxiety and torment.

5) *"I felt horrified, I was very afraid. I heard terrible screams and wails, although I didn't know whose they were coming from; they came from the houses that were burning, probably from some of their inhabitants"*. As a consequence of the dire and unfortunate events expressed in the previous scenes, affectivity manifests at a completely visible and palpable level: one of fear, apprehension, and horror—in short, of profound despair. This scene seems to be the corollary of the destruction and devastation that had previously begun, so the corresponding affects now emerge in the dream without much opposition from the mechanism of repression, thus revealing the prevalence of primary, primitive, and threatening processes, which invade the conscious, rational part.

6) *"I wanted to go and help, but all I could do was grab my video camera and run, filming through the woods"*. In this next scene, the need to rescue the dangerous and deteriorating inner world arises, so the dreamer, in an act of desperation and survival, takes action by grabbing a camera and videotaping the events. With this action, the "hero" proposes a possible path to protection and "negotiation," as he acts by "collecting" and "compiling" the vestiges or remains of a past he attempts to escape and transform through his video camera, turning events into images. This action therefore opens up the possibility of "recovering reason," giving rise to the intention of reconstructing (reediting = reflecting) or remaking and organizing them, in an initial act of substitution and reparation.

7) *"The scene was terrifying; at that moment, I woke up anxious and lit a cigarette"*. The feeling of anxiety becomes so intense that the dreamer attempts to cancel it by reaching the level of consciousness, that is, reason, seemingly leading the dreamer to awaken, immediately revealing the reality of his daily life, such as lighting and smoking a cigarette to seemingly reduce anxiety. However, this activity remains part of an illusory, equally dreamlike process, intended to alleviate the sadness and affliction. It is then that the viewer reacts, finally awakening from the dream and leaving the installation, aiming to regain their daytime "reason" by moving on to the next rooms of the museum and the exhibition.

4. Comments Concerning the Use of the Literary-Psychoanalytic Method

At the moment in which the *"hero-spectator"* achieves the tranquility that comes from finally finding himself on a level of "rational" reality, we reaffirm, with this action, that this is a dream within a dream. That is, the spectator, as a transient visitor, observes from an external level both the setting that makes up the installation and the visual and auditory development of the scenes within it. In this way, the spectator forms part of the first level of the dream, in which he becomes involved when he begins to experience emotional reactions, such as surprise or stupor, corresponding to a transference system. Simultaneously, as the spectator observes the sleeper on the small television in the process of dreaming, the possibility of establishing an identification opens up.

The objective of achieving a comprehensive interpretation of the work therefore leads us to consider the following elements: a) the observation of the physical and material components of the installation (protocol No. 1); b) the linguistic analysis of the dream content (protocol No. 2);

c) the interaction and interconnection between elements a) and b). These 3 steps lead us to clarify that, in addition to the interpretation of the dream, as we have seen, we must analyze the installation in its entirety as a meta-observation, that is, we investigate the meaning of the dream in conjunction with the representation of tangible objects, their location, color, dimensions, the plot of the “hero,” among others, following the parameters recently stated at the beginning of this text.

We see that the installation then emerges as a metaphor and interpretation of reality, which is why, in line with Reiche (2011:78), we allow ourselves to recognize as a basic rule for the analysis of conceptual works the ability to decipher “*the implicit story from the surface*,

unlike dreams, in which, to discover their meaning, we need to delve into the depths of the unconscious.” In the example of this installation, both opportunities are offered equally, since we have an installation whose meaning we decipher from its surface (protocol No. 1), while for the investigation of the dream material we follow the rules of dream interpretation (protocol No. 2). The narrative of the work thus allows us to place all its elements on a single, present-day level, following the style of Russian pre-Renaissance icons in which we see the unfolding of events (in this case mostly of a religious nature), distributed in smaller panels within a single large frame. Each frame is somehow independent of the other and susceptible to analysis, while as a whole they form a linear, coherent exposition based on the affect, drive, desire, or conflict that gave rise to the pictorial composition. In the case we are studying, we are speaking of an architectural/acoustic-visual composition.

Regarding our object of research, our perspective focuses primarily on the systematic study of the work’s formal structure, as well as its impact and “*transformative force*”. Therefore, we propose to observe, analyze, and present it through the exercise of writing within a “literary- psychoanalytic” model. It is evident that we presuppose the presence of an “epic hero” (the spectator), who inter-subjectively assigns certain aesthetic criteria—of beauty, ugliness, horror, or rejection, among other possibilities—to an image, an object (the installation), as well as to a human body in motion (“performance”), thus entering into a frank interpellation-confrontation- interrelationship with significant figures within it, in the manner of a “hero” who “wages a battle,” following the “*Bildungsroman*” style.

Since the work itself is governed by a “normativity” or “latent implicit rule,” it is with this that the spectator comes into contact and communicates, thus creating a “third space” or “intermediate space,” from which a diatribe emerges, giving rise to “complementarity” or “opposition.” The first is recognized as a “reencounter,” which translates into the reestablishment of a dialogue; thus, the spectator “hears” familiar voices from interlocutors, both past and recent, thereby reestablishing or reinstituting an internal verbal exchange, which can be either “dissonant” or “con-

structive.” The second corresponds to the “void” or “hollowness” and, evidently, to silence, thus giving the spectator the opportunity to restore the character and, thus, the lost dialogue. Both operations, the reunion and the restitution, imply a “heroic action,” another struggle in the course and performance of the spectator’s autobiography, from which in this case arises the possibility of a change or a “transformation” from a “negotiation” as we have indicated, that is, it opens the possibility of creating one’s own narrative focused on the definition of a trajectory or the one’s own life’s project.

5. Comparative Models for the Study of Images

We have repeatedly indicated that, in terms of the writing process relevant to our object of study, we are approaching the novel genre “*Bildungsroman*.” Our objective is to be able to configure written narratives in a “formative” (pedagogical) and literary manner, resulting from systematic observations and analyses by the researcher-spectator in relation to his/her object of study. However, based on the fact that this proposal marks a substantial difference with other models of image research, we consider it important to highlight the particularities of the methods commonly used in empirical and psychological sciences. This would be the example of the clinical-psychological research method, which, among others, uses as one of its instruments of inquiry the use of inkblot images corresponding to the “*Rorschach Psychodiagnostic Test*” (Phillips and Smith, 1953). The use of the latter is intended to study the structure of personality in its deepest components, including its affective and psychopathological manifestations. Another example is the test called the “*Thematic Apperception Test*” (TAT) (Bellack, 1979), applied primarily to populations of adolescents and adults. The latter consists of a series of photographic images of people in specific and everyday situations, which lead us to interpret certain types of human relationships established by the subjects under study, as well as the various ways of resolving interpersonal conflicts.

Below, we present a compilation of different models for studying images with their characteristics (see: Table):

6. Analysis of the formal structure and normativity embedded in the installation “*Sleep of the Reason, 1988*”

Our literary hermeneutic model outlined above has led us, first and foremost, to an objective observation of the architectural plan (methodological step 2) in the installation at hand.

We see that geometrically, the two figures are three-dimensional. The first shows an elongated rectangle with uniform lines (entrance hallway), which is joined by a cube (pseudo-bedroom with an exit door), both maintaining a certain balance and symmetry. The additional elements (furniture and ornamentation), with their characteristics, contribute to the emergence and induction of the initial state of tranquility mentioned above, while also preventing a possible emotional overflow in

the different phases or cycles of activity outlined in Protocol No. 1. Based on this architectural composition, the installation acquires a formal structure while establishing a set of rules, which adequately adapt to the institutional space and time (the museum exhibition).

Regarding the rules of the work, it is noteworthy that while the decoration and furniture used indicate a symbolic intention to provide “rest” and “stillness” for the occupant, the layout of its interior deviates from the parameters and minimum conditions of what could be a pleasant place for such purposes at any time of day. Despite the atmosphere of tranquility and rest that this room initially evokes, it lacks windows or other openings that would allow a ray of daylight to enter or a view of the night sky. Therefore, visitors accustomed to conventional architecture will face an initial imbalance, or a first rupture. This is when a kind of “seduction” emerges in the installation, as the space presents a single source of light, an artificial one that provides a clear, transparent, and intimate luminosity, contributing to and determining the emotional involvement. From the combination of artificial light, architecture, and decoration, an ambivalent mixture of ideas or fantasies emerges, related to both “confinement” and “entrapment,” as well as “containment” and “involvement,” essential elements for the development of the dreamlike activity included. In this sense, our written reconstruction of the installation indicates that the actions corresponding to the dream within the dream, when carried out within a dark, cave-like environment, intentionally provoke in the spectator initial sensations of rapture, surprise, and stupor, followed by several more. This is why we agree with Michalski (1996, cited by Reiche 2011:16), who points out that by abruptly and violently breaking the limits, in this example, of the acoustic space, as we pointed out before, it incurs a loss of aesthetic boundaries, thus promoting an affront or a direct challenge to the spectator. The previous author designates this type of expression as belonging to “heteronomous” art, as opposed to “autonomous” art; in the latter, the artistic manifestation adheres to the framework and regulations established by the work itself. In this way, the psychological regression with the prevalence of the primary unconscious process in the “*Sleep of the Reason, 1988*” finds its way of expression in the acoustic and visual aspects, which combine and complement each other, thus ratifying a second break with the conventional model, thus establishing the specific characteristics or normativity of the installation.

The description provided is comparable to that of a first manifest narrative of a dream, with the peculiarity that in this work it is not enough to have simply described the approach of the spectator in this “painting-installation”, but rather we have a second, additional and coinciding manifest narrative about a subsequent reason why we speak of a “dream within a dream,” in a similar way to how we observe a “painting within a painting.” The previous description of the interrelationship between both spaces allows us to associate it with the style of some renowned works, for example, that of the Dutch Baroque painter Jan Vermeer (see: Figure 3).

According to Hodge (2008:14), the importance of this duplicity lies in the dialogue and tension established between one level and the other; in the case under

Comparison of image production study models and their research methods. (A. Psychoanalytic method; B. Empirical-clinical method; C. Psychoanalytic-Aesthetical (literature) method)

Image production systems or programs	Affects Conflicts Fantasies Drives	Investigation of mechanisms and structural elements (defensive)	Protocol for research	Results
A. Traditional Psychoanalytic Model				
1.1. Dreams Production of dream images (imaginative resources used in the analytical session) 1.1.1 Free associations concerning the dream narrative	Unconscious level	Condensation Displacement Projection Repression Symbolization (Freud, 1900)	Verbal protocol of exchange (speaking and listening from free associations). Analysis of speech-word: symbols, personal history, and current personal, family, and social circumstances.	“Deutung” (Elaboration of the dream and associations in relation to the dream and the daytime remains)
B. Clinical-Psychological Model				
1. Rorschach Test Conscious observation and description of inkblot images by the subject	Unconscious Level	Projective identification (Klein, 1946). Defensive mechanisms (Freud, A., 1950)	Associations to inkblots. Enquire to gather responses to determinants: location, shape, content, chiaroscuro, shading, perspectives.	Interpretation. Clinical diagnosis of personality structure. Affectivity Psychodynamic and psychopathological elements.

2. Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)	Unconscious Level Preconscious Level	“Adaptive perception” versus “Apperceptual distortion” (Bellak, 1982)	Written capture of the spoken story related to the images. (Thematic classification)	Diagnosis of the type of interpersonal relationships and socialization as well as pathological processes
C. Psychoanalytical-aesthetical (literature) Model				
1. Conceptual Artwork (The Idea)				
Still image (painting, graffiti, photography, tattoo)	Latent Level	Sense of Structure (Reiche, 2011)	Formal Reconstruction of Composition	Writing of a «Bildungsroman»
1.1. Visual image (videos)	Normativity hidden in the work	“Hero-Spectator” Interaction with Artwork (Reestablishment of Internal Acoustic-Verbal Dialogues)	Objective Analysis of Form (Objective Hermeneutics) (Oevermann, U. 1993)	The spectator as an «epic hero» related to the artwork
1.2. Objects (installations)				
Audio-image				
1.3. Architectural interventions				
Photography			Literary Interpretation	(renunciations, changes, negotiations, and transformations)
1.4. Performance (body in motion)			Psychoanalytic	

review, between “reason,” which is determined by the formal structure of the installation (“*protocol No. 1*”), and the “*Sleep of the reason, 1988*” represented by the dream within the installation (“*protocol No. 2*”). As we indicated, the viewer is “trapped” between the tension produced by both levels of experience, thus creating a “third space,” mentioned above. This interaction allows for greater depth of engagement and, above all, knowledge. Following this idea concerning the “third space”, we also notice one more “third space” created by the tension between “*Protocol No 1*” and “*Protocol No. 2*” in this text.

Hodge (Op. Cit. above) points this out in the following way: “*It seems to me that the meaning of Vermeer’s painting lies not in the main painting nor in the painting within the painting, but rather in the tension created between the space between the two, in which multiple meanings can be constructed. This is what gives the painting an aura of mystery and ambiguity*”. Undoubtedly, we find ourselves facing a parallel experience in Bill Viola’s installation, as the viewer is caught between the architectural/semi-illuminated space and the visual-auditory narrative.



Fig. 3. Jan Vermeer. “De Schilderkonst” (1666) (“*The Art Painter*”) Oil on canvas. 120.0 × 100.0 cm
Source: <https://es.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archivo:Clio.jpg> consulted on January 22, 2022.

6.1. Additional Contextual Pictorial Aspects

The answers to our questions about the installation's meaning, arising from the recognition and attention to our intersubjectivity as researchers-spectators, can be complemented when we elucidate and understand different additional contextual pictorial aspects, such as those previously observed from our theoretical and experiential knowledge. In particular, for example, in the pictorial work of the previously mentioned artist Edward Hooper, we see it as related to the creation of particular spaces. The characteristic that stands out in his paintings is that in which we find an exaltation and apology for the phenomenon of "loneliness," "confinement," and "isolation" that occurs in such spaces. Following this line of reasoning, we believe that the structure of Bill Viola's installation would correspond to a "special space", belonging to the motif captured, for instance, in the oil painting entitled "***Rooms for Tourists (1945)***" (see: Figure 4). In this painting, the intense interplay of darkness and artificial lighting, similar to that of Viola's installation, set inside a seemingly empty residential building, certainly invites familiarity and rest, thus leading the spectator to project a primary desire: that of satisfying the imperative need to settle in a place that provides comfort, shelter, and warmth by occupying one of the rooms, at least temporarily, in analogy to a tourist or nomadic visitor who, in search of refuge or shelter, enters a hotel room for one or more days. In Bill Viola's installation, we perceive the alleged tranquility; however, it is abruptly interrupted by the sudden representation of a haunting dream, as indicated.

We believe that, whatever the reason for approaching, what stands out as imponderable is the moment, both of seduction and longing, for that peaceful and meaningful space invoked, which we see equally in Hooper's painting "***Rooms for Tourists (1945)***" and in the installation "***The Sleep of the Reason, 1988***". The place referred to is none other than the one where the interior of the "hero-spectator" is symbolically located, and which, understood from a psychoanalytic perspective, has to do with a search for and a reunion with the roots and foundation of one's own identity, one's antecedents and past, one's genealogy, family and collective history; in a more retrospective and profound way, with the memory of a "maternal bed-breast," in full and complete nostalgia for the warmth, affection, and care received or perennially required.

Since the "hero-spectator" is located within Bill Viola's installation, and approaches an experience of isolation and loneliness, it often becomes threatening and persecutory. This experience is reinforced by conditions analogous to those of the aforementioned cavity, which also takes on or acquires emotional characteristics very similar to those captured in another famous painting entitled "***Study for the Nurse in the Film Battleship Potemkin***" (1957) by the British figurative artist Francis Bacon (see: Figure 5). In it, we see the image of a woman represented and captured within a geometric space pictorially very similar to that of Bill Viola's installation. The central female figure expresses, in an abstract and symbolic way, an immense and profound pain, equivalent to that heard in the soundtrack of the installation "***The Sleep of the Reason, 1988***". Based on these associations, we can

conclude that Bill Viola takes up figurative experiments to transfer and place them within an architectural space built expressly to evoke emotions and sentiments of anguish and fear, because it manifests and reflects a great inner emptiness.



Fig. 4. Edward Hopper. "Rooms for Tourists" 1945. 107.06 × 76.83 cm. Oil painting
Source: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/edward-hopper/rooms-for-tourists>, accessed March 20, 2024.

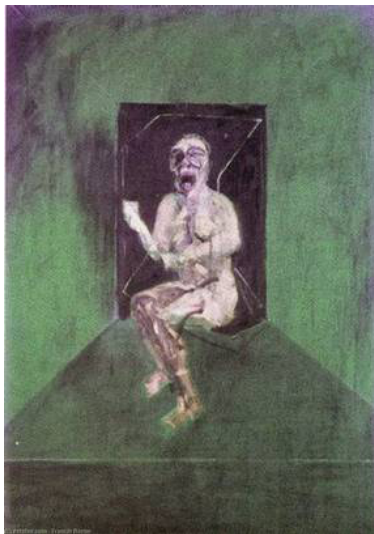


Fig. 5. Francis Bacon. "Study for the nurse in the film Battleship Potemkin" 1957. Oil painting.
198.0 × 142.0 cm
Source: <https://sammlung.staedelmuseum.de/en/work/study-for-the-nurse-in-the-film-battleship-potemkin> accessed March 20, 2024.

7. Synthesis and proposal for comprehensive interpretation

According to our method described in this text, interpreting the work involves starting from a general, superficial level and moving toward a deeper, latent one. Based on this premise,

the transmutation of the magnificent and complex conceptual artwork *“The Sleep of Reason, 1988”* into written text (protocols No. 1 and No. 2) has allowed us to analyze its formal structure, including its semantics, symbolism, and language (protocols No. 3 and No. 4). We understand the written exposition of the process as the narration of an “epic adventure,” in which the video- installation artist masterfully manages to bring and transform a “regular viewer” into a “*hero- spectator*” giving him/her an aesthetic experience, thus opening up the possibility of possible negotiation and change. In the latter, both the resurgence as also the particular experience related to a broad “palette” of emotions and feelings of great intensity have been promoted, all of them concerning emotional disconnections such as abandonment, loneliness, and the resulting longing for, among others, primary bonds or elemental emotional interrelations.

The use of visual and auditory technological resources, along with the deployment of an architectural stage design created for this purpose, enables the artist to bring the “*hero-spectator*” to a symbolic reunion with diverse experiences throughout his life, in which intense feelings of anguish and dependency caused by loss, separation, or absence have been present, summarized in psychological grief, apparently without completing of the necessary processes of psychological elaboration. Descriptive writing about the observed events and phenomena has led us to define it within a psychoanalytic-literary framework, in which we describe an “epic adventure”: through this, the spectator is invited to place him/herself within an architectural enclosure and a particular iconography that is conducive to dreamlike activity, in which they become involved, creating a “transference” by identifying physically and emotionally both with the character represented in a video recording and with the activity of sleeping and dreaming, which is purposefully induced so that the dream can “materialize.”

By being participant within the installation, the artist transforms the spectator from an impassive or neutral spectator into an active and leading one. An objective and linguistic analysis

of both the text and the dream has led us to understand that the “epic adventure” entails an emotional involvement of the “hero” with the work; therefore we are speaking of a “transference” in psychoanalytic terms. The latter begins when we literally “enter” the installation, initially expressing emotions of curiosity or anticipation within a seemingly tranquil environment. Later, as events unfold, this emotion transforms into surprise and anguish, transforming into a hostile and threatening environment that the hero must confront, as we see in epic and legendary tales, thus mirroring real life experiences.

The special characteristics of the symbolic “cave” or “bedroom” in terms of architecture, furnishings, colors, and “seductive” atmosphere lead the “*hero-spec-*

tator” to surrender and experience a sense of shelter and protection within a kind of “lair.” It is precisely here that the moment arises in which the protagonist’s “reason” sleeps peacefully, preparing for the activity of sleep, that is, dreamlike activity. In this way, when the “*hero-spectator*” becomes involved, he/she wages an “epic battle” against ghosts, specters, and terrors, characterized by uncertainty, confusion, betrayal, and fear (all heightened and heightened by the technological resources of the installation), thereby capturing experiences and events embedded in his life, resulting in a situation of extreme vulnerability. As part of a restorative outcome to this adventure, the protagonist seeks complementarity and the reestablishment of emotional bonds, contrary to emptiness and loneliness, both indicative of previous experiences of possible abandonment, in an attempt to transform the course of the “epic adventure.”

This occurs despite the deafening sound inherent in the installation attempting to silence or quiet him/her; symbolically, it makes us think of a great internal acoustic pollution within the viewer, which, acting as a great resistance, prevents him from reestablishing dialogue. By situating the transference mechanism within the composition of the work as a whole, including

the dream material with its threatening characteristics, we observe that the perception and identification of the architectural structure, being decanted and having real measurements and limits within a particular structure and normativity, project and manifest, in a countertransference manner, a series of internal resources, in which we can evidently “hear” dialogues between them. On the one hand, allowing for a certain release of emotional burden, and on the other, thus avoiding a definitive internal rupture, which could eventually hinder and impair the functioning of “reason” in the waking state.

As part of these resources, the expected response in this dialogue, newly initiated after the visual and auditory vortex fostered during the persecutory dream, would be that of the spectator rediscovering themselves. Thus, in the dream, the symbolic “portrait” of the somewhat fortuitous events captured by the video camera has been “retained” and safely preserved, opening up the possibility of subsequent manipulation or even considering their complete cancellation, for example, upon the activation of the sublimation mechanism. The above would then give way to the creation of a work of art, such as the present one, which we are dealing with here, so it is precisely with this action, that is, with the opening of the internal dialogue, where the interest, desire or need of the artist, -and in this case mainly of the one who writes this text- merges with that of the “*hero-spectator*”. The above has the objective of complementing a process of psychological elaboration, reestablishing the acoustic-verbal dialogue and inner listening, therefore, the hero obtains with it, the perspective of emerging “victorious” from “his/her” personal adventure, being able to manifest the firm desire to carry out a creative act.

To conclude this text, we move from the individual to the collective, therefore, allowing ourselves to translate the message of Bill Viola’s work as an externalization of the ravages of abandonment and social disdain, which leads the subject-spec-

tator to sign the renunciation of the self, and with it the loss of their personal and communal identity. For our part, in our role as “spectator-researchers,” we become both witnesses and participants writing about such an event—the mythical heroes—since we are also part of the history of postmodern, contemporary man, in which we are involved. Regarding the latter, we can add that, faced with the feeling of harassment and despondency caused by tensions, pressures, shocks, demands, and uncertainties—all of them belonging to and emanating from the complexities of globalized social stress—contemporary men and women often seek ephemeral and palliative peace in solitude and existential emptiness, that is, in the hollow, where ghosts and dystopia emerge.

When we find ourselves occasionally in this role of “mythical heroes,” we may find ourselves without refuge, unable to put down firm roots that provide a solid identity, unable to inhabit a safe, warm emotional refuge where we can find solace, enjoy, and be aware of existence, freedom, and agency. It is then that confusion, restlessness, and despair emerge, in which, as a consequence, creativity, critical thinking, and “reason”—ultimately, access to knowledge and the continuity of its search—sleep. By becoming aware of the inabilities and disabilities for expression and evolution, Bill Viola’s work offers, however, an alternative to concluding the narrative of the “mythical hero,” transforming this epic into a story in which it is possible to rescue and construct a more stable future recognizing personal, cultural, and ecological needs and its characteristics, among others. With his exceptional video installation, the artist creates an allegory analogous to that posed by Plato in the “Republic” about the myth of the cave, where the expressed duality opens a debate between light and darkness, between knowledge and emptiness, between utopia and dystopia, offering the “*hero-spectator*” the alternative of making a decision to continue their life project, to write their own novel of development, formation, and reflection.

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