# The Dreaming Archaeologist

The life and work of V.H.


Temporary Archaeological Institute

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*To Liza,*

*Who is more than real*

## Introduction

It has already been quite some time since the disappearance of V.H., the Alexandrian archaeologist, accountable for the discovery of the artifacts related with Gethsemanism, a christian heresy of 4$^{th}$ century A.D., which flourished in Egypt. Only that, those artifacts, that have been so much celebrated when he was still around, and that have made museums and private collectors very proud to have them in their possession, were probably neither that old nor that real. V.H. mysteriously disappeared in the Spring of 2017. We are not aware of the exact date, as he was a very lonely person with very few friends and acquaintances, who all lived far away from the small village he was residing in, close to Alexandria. It is strange that the peasants' gossip also did not come much to our aid when investigating the circumstances under which he disappeared.

What we learned though after the police broke into his house though, is much more interesting than his disappearance itself: he had transformed his home into a forging studio, the cave of a craftsman with great abilities, who was using his skills to create what was never there. Gethsemanism, the artifacts, and the sacred texts of the heresy, were all a construction of V.H. The most interesting of all is that he was not solely forging ceramic objects, but he was also altering already existing ones, which makes it difficult even today to decide which ones are genuine and which ones are fake.

*V.H.'s studio in Alexandria*

We are still not sure about the scientific legitimacy of his findings, as carbon dating or other kinds of chemical analysis never took place,[1]although most researchers agree that most of them should be fake. The collectors and museums did not proceed to carbon dating with most of them, and decided to just sell them for a very small counterpart. And this is how those objects became a courtesy of T.A.I., the Temporary Archaeological Institute.

As the curatorial team of T.A.I. we are not interested in proving or arguing on the originality of the objects. What fascinates us in them, is that they have been considered real for so long, being hardly- if at all - questioned. We find in them a manual of how to construct truth itself, as well as how to understand a lie, and what is the in-between. We see in them the material proof of the subjectivity of history and that the voice of authority is always the strongest one. We think of them as a way to doubt the determinism of art and archaeology, as well as a tool to explore the differences and similarities between art-works and art(i)-facts.

After taking part in various exhibitions with our collection, we started understanding that our argumentation and thoughts regarding V.H. and his mysterious objects had to take a written form, so that it can be expressed methodically and thoroughly. Also, there is a need to contextualize V.H.'s oeuvre in the larger universe of forgery, which is broader than one would guess in the beginning[2]. This is how we came up with the text you are now reading. In it, we are going to expand on the questions that are roughly unpacked in those first pages. We are going to examine how the artifacts where constructed, what was V.H.'s motivation for making them, what made them believable and through which legitimization techniques did V.H. manage to fabricate this believability, as well as the significance of this case for archaeology, art, history, humanity.

We would advice reading the text as something between a novel and an art history essay.

The Curatorial Team of T.A.I.


[1] 1. The museums and the private collectors preferred to sell the objects they had in their possession related to V.H., instead of performing any kind of chemical analysis of them. This is because, this procedure would include high costs, and, if the objects were proven scientifically fake, this would mean an even bigger financial loss. Until now, nobody has shown any willingness to perform any kind of chemical analysis on the objects.

[2] Forgers tales

## 1. How to Constitute a Potential Truth

When does an object become an artifact ? What are the qualities that legitimize it as such? When a very old ceramic vase is considered an artwork instead of an artifact and why?

Objects found in excavations or other archaeology related field research practices, are either categorized as artworks or artifacts. We see immediately that whatever is found, discovered, after a sufficient ammount of time has passed since its creation, or since the time it had a utilitarian function, is related with art.

Etymology can come to our aid.

As it is explained in the Meriam-Webster online dictionary:

> *artifact*
> *noun*
> *ar· ti· fact ˈär-ti-ˌfakt*
> ***1:*** *a usually simple object (such as a tool or ornament) showing human workmanship or modification as distinguished from a natural object*
> ***[…]***
> ***b:*** *something characteristic of or resulting from a particular human institution, period, trend, or individual*
> ***[…]***
> ***2a:*** *a product of artificial character (as in a scientific test) due usually to extraneous (such as human) agency*
> ***b:*** *an electrocardiographic and electroencephalographic wave that arises from sources other than the heart or brain*
> ***c:*** *a defect in an image (such as a digital photograph) that appears as a result of the technology and methods used to create and process the image*

*Etymology*

*borrowed from New Latin arte factus "made by human agency," from Latin arte "by skill or craft" (ablative of art-, ars "acquired skill, craftmanship") + factus, past participle of facere "to make, bring about, do"*

The first definition is the one we mostly relate the word *artifact* with. But, for the goals of our text, we consider the definitions 2a,b,c more interesting. There, we see that a word we normally associate with truth and proof, in specific contexts, it means exactly the opposite: a fraud, a mistake, something artificial, something that blurs an image which considers itself rather objective. In the case of 2b this is even more interesting, since the blurred image is one of undoubtable scientific truth which represents, in a symbolic language our bodily interior. The most intimate of intimate parts of bodies, the ones that are boiling with fluids and jelly-like masses, are depicted as clean, black and blue or greyscale pictures. And in this visual language, which is accurate and representative only according to its very own goals, there can be glitches, things that should not be there, that are irrelevant with those goals or they have been printed only because the media used to make this depiction proved to not be sufficient for it. And those, are called artifacts. Facts of art, made with art, or made with artfulness.
Inevitably, this leads us to seek the etymological definition of the word *art*

*art (n.)*

*early 13c., "skill as a result of learning or practice," from Old French art (10c.), from Latin artem (nominative ars) "work of art; practical skill; a business, craft," from PIE *ar(ə)-ti- (source also of Sanskrit rtih "manner, mode;" Greek artizein "to prepare"), suffixed form of root *ar- "to fit together." Etymologically akin to Latin arma "weapons" (see arm (n.2)).*

*In Middle English usually with a sense of "skill in scholarship and learning" (c. 1300), especially in the seven sciences, or liberal arts. This sense remains in Bachelor of Arts, etc. The meaning "human workmanship" (as opposed to nature) is from late 14c. The meaning "system of rules and traditions for performing certain actions" is from late 15c. The sense of "skill in cunning and trickery" is attested by late 16c. (the sense in*

*artful, artless). The meaning "skill in creative arts" is recorded by 1610s; especially of painting, sculpture, etc., from 1660s.*[3]

So, art is about skill, manner, preparation. But it can also be about weapons, artillery, and war. Etymology indicates that art can be used as a weapon and cause potential harm. We highly doubt that when those uses of the word "art" emerged, it was thought as a weapon in the same way that artivists think of it. No. It was something else. And that is probably artificiality. Something artificial can be a weapon, and the super-power, if we may, of art is that of deceiving, that of creating something that is not there and making something look like what it is not. Perhaps the proximity to *arm* has to do with the meaning of deception, also related with art, as artificiality. V.H. used this aspect of *art* in his *artifacts* in a great extent. This, in a way is making them more artworks than artifacts.

**Artifact and Artwork**

Artifact and Artwork are both compound words, one from ars+factum, and the other from art+work. From an etymological analysis point of view, those words could be thought of as identical, but in spoken language, they are not. *Facio* has a very similar meaning with *work* in that context, but still, *artwork* refers to something different than *artifact*. An artifact, can be an artwork, and an artwork can be an artifact. But this is not always valid. So, when those terms cannot be used interchangeably? What differentiates an artwork from an artifact?
We talk about ancient Chinese art, or the art of the Etruscs, albeit the fact the objects we are discussing were not considered as artworks then (neither as artifacts of course). Art as a concept, in the way we know it today, was also still non-existent back then. When we discuss Giotto's paintings, we never refer to them as artifacts. A medieval ink drawing though, or a piece of calligraphy could, in some cases, be referred to as artifacts.
So, we understand that it is time, age, and the social context of the creation of a object that makes it an artwork or an artifact. A product of human skill, with or without aesthetic value, is called an

[3] *https://www.etymonline.com/word/art*

artifact when it is old enough, but also when it has been made before the establishment of the artist as a separate social entity and before the division between fine and applied arts. An artifact is mostly related to anonymous creation when, a work of art, usually has a maker. This is why, as we proceed in history, after Renaissance, we talk less and less of artifacts and we talk about artworks, antiques, prototypes, first models, etc.

As we know, the term *art* and *artist* did not exist or had a very different meaning before the Renaissance. There were, of course, people who crafted, painted, drew, sculpted, and some of them were very skilful. Why were they called just craftsmen? And were they all mere craftsmen? The answer is probably no. There is a difference in skill, social class, and public recognition between the anonymous maker of a metal jar or necklace of 500 B.C., however beautiful might be, and Phidias, the famous sculptor of the chryselephantine statue of Athena Parthenos, again in mid-5th century B.C. There are many differences in the technique, as well as the conception of the statue of Athena and the metal necklace. But the most distinct one would probably be the fact that Phidias is trying to create a *simulation* of Athena. One could argue that the African masks and statuettes are also simulating gods. I would say that totemistic objects are not simulations, but they serve as the sacred thing themselves. They manage to do that exactly by keeping the needed distance from their original. By not offending their divine nature by trying to look like them, and respecting the difference between the human and the divine. On the contrary, the statue of Athena seeks to eliminate those differences, to nullify them, to assimilate them. To simulate them. This is offending the divine nature itself , its singularity and unrepeatability. It fulfils a desire of proximity with the divine, but at the same time it makes the divinity of the goddess dissolve. The statuettes on the other hand, underline the fact that the distance between the human and the divine will never be covered, but they help the divine survive. The divine and its representations or doubles work in the same way as the map and the territory from Borge's fable, as analysed by J. Baudrillard in his book *Simulacra and Simulation.* Baudrillard claims, that, in contrast to what happens in Borge's fable, the more detailed the map becomes, and as it stops becoming an abstraction and it competes with the real, it makes the real wear out, and not the map itself. If we exchange "territory" for "divine" and "map" with "representation"

> *Something has disappeared: the sovereign difference, between one and the other, that constituted the charm of abstraction. Because it is difference that constitutes the poetry of the map and the charm of the territory, the magic of the concept and the charm of the real. This imaginary of representation, which simultaneously culminates in and is engulfed by the cartographers mad project of the ideal coextensivity of map and territory, disappears in the simulation whose operation is nuclear and genetic, no longer at all specular or discursive. It is all of metaphysics that is lost. No more mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept. No more imaginary coextensivity: it is genetic miniaturization that is the* dimension of simulation.[4]

If we think of an imaginary thread connecting what we call art today with its inception back in time, we believe this thread would be tangling around both symbols and simulacra, but in the end it would conclude in Athena's statue and not the statuettes. In the western context, after the iconoclasm, representation mechanisms clearly took the side of simulation, with the dangers that lurk in it. And the greatest danger with art that simulates, is not that it obscures some kind of truth, but that it conceals the fact that such a truth does not exist anymore. As Baudrillard states:

> *All Western faith and good faith became engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could be exchanged for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange - God of course. But what if God himself can be simulated, that is to say can be reduced to the signs that constitute faith? Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a gigantic simulacrum - not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference.*[5]

One would wonder if nowadays all art that exists works with representation. Certainly not, but the answer is rather complex. Abstract art, installations or even sound art are not necessarily non-representative or non-simulating just because they are aniconic. Some of them manage to

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[4] Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation.* Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1981, pp. 1-2

[5] (Baudrillard) pp.6

become symbols, as is probably happening with Malevich's Black Square. Kazimir Malevich does not use abstraction as a method to deconstruct reality, but he conceives the work of art as a new entity that does not come out of reality.[6] Nevertheless, this distance that is created with the real manages to connect art with life. When art is trying to assimilate the differences between art and life itself, life dissolves in the same way as the divine in the case of iconography. An interesting example for that would be Joseph Beyus, who conceives art as a larger concept which is aligned with life itself. He is fascinated with the Wagnerian term "gessamkunstwerk", a work of art that is all-inclusive. Hitler was equally fascinated by that term. Beyus had volunteered for Hitler's army in Crimea, where he had a plane accident which fostered his artistic creation and works as a myth of origin of himself as an artist. However, it is questionable if he manages to eliminate the subject of the artist in that way, or create a myth out of himself instead, as it is questionable whether his work "I Love America and America Loves me" worked as a complaint against America's policy regarding the Vietnam War, or if it was a cold war cultural contribution from in defense of the still war-wracked and filled with guilt Germany. Taken parallel with his biography, the way he is trying to simulate a saint out of him, is only showing that there is no such thing whatsoever.

As B. Buchloh is commenting:

> *The esthetic conservatism of Beuys is logically complemented by his politically retrograde, not to say, reactionary, attitudes. Both are inscribed into a seemingly progressive and radical humanitarian program of esthetic and social evolution. The abstract universality of Beuys' vision has its equivalent in the privatistic and deeply subjectivist nature of his actual work. Any attempt on his side to join the two aspects*

[6] Nikos Daskalothanasēs. *O Καλλιτέχνης ως ιστορικό Υποκείμενο από τον 19ο στον 21ο Αιώνα/the Artist as Historical Subject from 19th to 21st Century*. Άγρα/Agra, 2012, pp. 115

*results in curious sectarianism. The roots of Beuys' dilemma lie in the misconception that politics could become a matter of esthetics, as he repeats frequently: " . . . real future political intentions must be artistic . . . "*[7]

Is there a similar thread deriving from symbols? We believe there is, and this leads us to applied arts. Applied arts maintain the utilitarian nature of symbols. They do not make grand declarations, and their products exist for themselves. Of course, there have been overlaps between applied and fine arts, resulting in fascinating outcomes. The most intriguing of them is Bauhaus, which shares some eclectic affinities with suprematism.

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Bauhaus Wassily Chair

[7] Buchloh, Benjamin H. D. "BEUYS: THE TWILIGHT of the IDOL." *Artforum*, 1 Jan. 1980, www.artforum.com/features/beuys-the-twilight-of-the-idol-208975/.

[8] https://www.knoll-int.com/home/by-designer/classic-designers/marcel-breuer/wassily-chair-bauhaus-00th-anniversary-limited-edition

**On Art and Artillery**

Was the Trojan horse a work of art?

Alfred Nobel is renowned for inventing dynamite and for owning a successful artillery production industry. His business relied on the internal conflicts between capitalist states, by constructing and selling guns. Unfortunately, in 1895, a French newspaper published an obituary denouncing him as a "death merchant". Disappointed with this legacy, he established the Nobel Prizes, initially five prizes, to promote the arts and sciences and to clear his name. Today, we are all familiar with these prestigious awards.[9]

In the Homeric myth, the Achaeans hid inside the belly of an enormous wooden horse, which was offered as a present to the enemy. The horse was ordered by Athena and constructed by Eppeieas, one of the Achaeans fighting in Troy. It was made to look like a horse, and the Trojans believed it could replace the Palladion of Athena, which had been stolen by the enemy. Ulysses, known for his resourcefulness and cleverness, gave directions to Eppeieas for the construction of the giant horse. We all know how this story ends: the Trojan War came to an end with the acceptance of the beautiful horse.

Looks like both the Achaeans and Alfred Nobel, in very different time frames, used art/artificiality to conceal their true, polemic intentions. But is it the artillery that hides behind art or is art the artillery itself? It should be commonplace by now that art organizations have very close ties with the military, the police and the juridical system. Giving an overview of all the historical examples where those ties are exposed, or where we see how art has been used as a weapon can get very lengthy, and very polemic, especially if we take into account the most recent ones. Therefore, for the economy of the text, we will only refer to one old, and already well-known example: We are all familiar with the fact that the CIA has funded many of the exhibitions by abstract expressionists in America. Abstract expressionism is considered a quite ground-breaking art movement. Why would the secret American police support it, and why would the artists accept the support? Because abstract expressionism is a cultural product of the relatively new American state, who must defend itself, also through culture, against the old Europe, but also against Soviet Russia. They represent the western world which so loves and appreciates progress, freedom of speech, freedom of movement, and, above all, free economy.[10] And, this explains, how the same people who invaded Vietnam can support a modern and iconoclastic art movement. They are both actions against the red enemy. In one word: politics.

So, if for Baudrillard icons are simulacra that conceal the fact that there is no prototype, art is a simulacra which does not conceal artillery, but shows that there is nothing else apart from artillery.

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[9] https://www.history.com/news/did-a-premature-obituary-inspire-the-nobel-prize

[10] https://www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus/en/did-you-know/la-cia-y-el-expresionismo-abstracto

**V.H.: Artifacts, artworks or artillery?**

It is hard to decide in which of those categories should V.H.'s objects be classified. After having described them and spotted their similarities, differences, and the ways they are related, we think the safest thing to say is that they belong in all three of them.

These objects are considered artifacts because they have been discovered, provide information, and carry symbolism. However, the information and symbolism they represent are different from what their creator V.H. intended. V.H. constructed them to be symbolic sacred objects of a long-lost heresy, but for us, they have become symbols of V.H.'s psyche and deception. In the future, if major art history or archaeological institutions come to appreciate the importance of this fraud, they could work as a symbol of fraud itself. Moreover, V.H. made them so that they could provide information about the culture of the background through which they supposedly emerged. As we know that they were made by him, we find them to be an interesting source of information for V.H. himself, describing him in ways that are much more incisive, albeit more abstract, than his personal texts and letters. Finally, these objects are artifacts because, for a significant amount of time, they have been perceived as such by a large audience.

They are artworks because they managed to deceive. They are products of human skill that simulated something they are not, and that something never existed They are a simulation without a prototype. They tell a tale; they function in the realm of the imaginary. They point to ideals, and they are discursive. They play with our ability to distinguish fact from fiction, by mostly using their aesthetic value. Additionally, apart from those aesthetic merits and the fascination they bring through their storytelling, they have no other utilitarian function, practical or symbolic.

They are artillery, again, because they managed to deceive, but this time in a less playful way. They managed to twist history, they achieved to interfere with truth, but most importantly, they pointed out that which we all know but try to forget: absolute truth, and even more historical truth, is not humanly perceivable. History is what the winner decided that happened, and nothing more. Which is a very sad realization when we understand how much historical truths form our perception of the world.

## 2. On Forgery

Forgery is not something as unusual as we might believe. Additionally, it is not as profound as one would probably think to disguise a genuine artifact from its replication. Scientific tests, for one reason or the other (e.g. illegal antiquity trade, high costs, lack of time), are not able to be performed and even the best experts can be tricked. As a forger of Cycladic statuettes narrates in the article "The Forger's Tale" by Ch. Tsirogiannis[11]

> *[...]Three of the figurines, violin shaped, were sold directly by me to a Greek collector, George Tsolozidis, a successful dentist who was forming a collection of antiques and antiquities, who spent a lot of money and always – especially for Cycladic figurines –used as an advisor an authority working for the Greek state. When Tsolozidis showed the figurines to the authority, the authority said: "You don't have to ask me about these. It's obvious that they are original!" The authority advised him never to buy stolen antiquities.*

So, it comes as no surprise that many famous artifacts (Phaistos disc, The Dead Sea Scrolls of the Washington Bible Museum, The Japanese Palaeolithic Hoax of Shinichi Fujimura, The Shroud of Turin, and the list could go on for quite a long) have been doubted as or have been proved to be fake. This questioning can either come from genuine scientific disbelief or political feasibility. What is important to note for our case though, is that the originality of an artifact is an extremely ambivalent quality. To find the truth about it, it is often that non-archaeological aspects of the objects must be examined. A very interesting example is the Getty Kouros. The Statue was still exhibited until very recently (2018), with a tag declaring that it is "Greek, about 530 B.C. or modern forgery,". In 2018, it was officially deemed a forgery, and it is not exhibited anymore, since "It's fake, so it's not helpful to show it along with authentic material," as Getty director Timothy Potts stated.[12]

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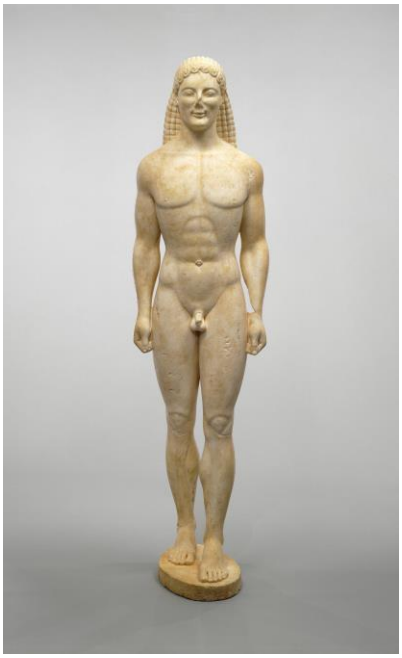
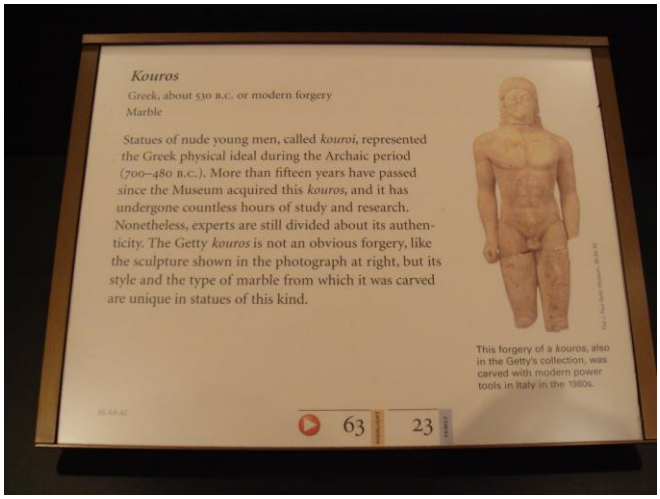
[11] Tsirogiannis, Christos, David W.J. Gill, and Christopher Chippindale. "The Forger's Tale: An Insider's Account of Corrupting the Corpus of Cycladic Figures." *International Journal of Cultural Property* 29.3 (2022): 369–385. Web., pp. 6

[12] https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-getty-kouros-removed-view-museum-officially-deemed-forgery






However, the museum bought the piece in 1985 for ten million dollars and has been exhibiting it since 1986. If it was real, it would be one of the only twelve complete kouros statues, which makes it rather precious. Before the purchase, scientists were hired to examine the piece and confirm its age, which they did. Of course, some archaeologists already doubted the authentic nature of the statue, but they did not have any proof for that yet. The debate on the statue's authenticity re-opened four years after its purchase, when a confirmed forged kouros, very similar to the one owned by Getty appeared. The detail that made the scale lean more towards the voices who were doubting the first statue's originality had nothing to do with the statue and its morphological features themselves but with its provenance: the documents and certificates of ownership provided by the seller of the kouros, Gianfranco Becchina, had been faked. And that was for sure. Does this automatically mean the piece was fake as well? it surely raises questions. However, it seems like the provenance documents and the legal state of the statue are more important than its material form itself for deciding whether it is a real artifact or a pastiche claiming to be a prototype. The decision to not display it anymore (although it is still possible to see it by appointment) was just Timothy Potts's opinion on the matter, many, many years after the confirmation of the fakeness of the documents, which suggested that the object itself was probably fake. His decision to remove the statue from the display as not serving the purposes of the museum is rational. But, although it is most likely that indeed, the kouros is a very well-executed replica, it is far from being an objective and unshakable truth.

Through the case of the Getty kouros, we get to understand that what influences more than anything else the nature of an object as authentic or fake, are laws, provenance lines, and power structures and their economy. It is the narrative around it, its story, as well as the enchanting abilities of the narrator, which can come either from their authority position or their skill. Or both. This is a useful realization, not only for the possible fakes but also for authentic pieces. Every artifact has its narrative, which is always constructed and can always have dubious meaning.

To gain a better understanding of certain artifacts and their authenticity, it would be helpful to examine the narratives surrounding them. Let us consider three examples. The first is the Minoan

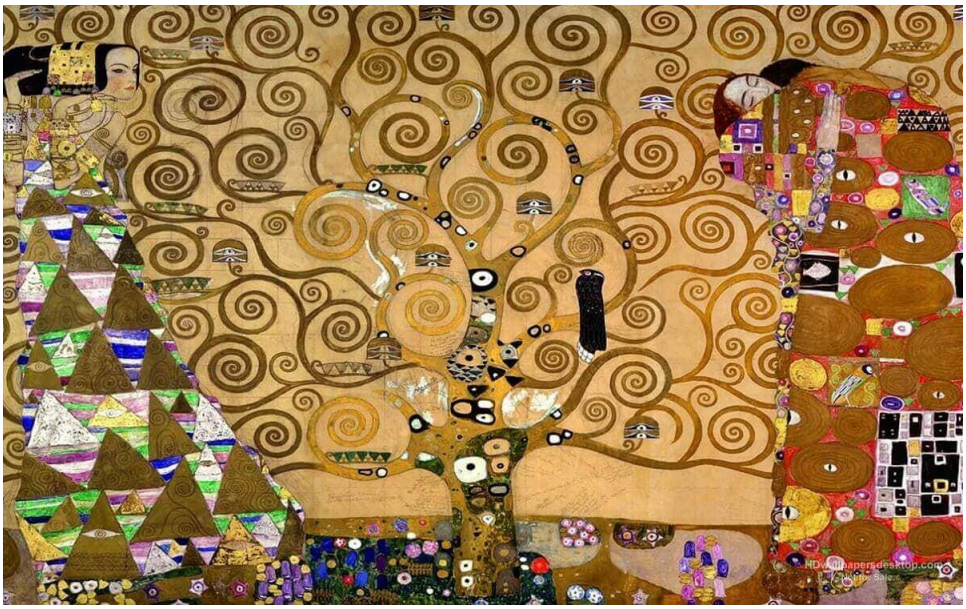
Frescos in Knossos. These impressive works feature tall, graceful figures, bright colours, floral decorations, and similarities to Egyptian painting. They also bear similarities to works by El Greco, a Cretan iconographer of the 16th century who lived in Venezia and Toledo, and who may have been inspired by his island's artistic history. However, there are also aspects of these frescos that seem unusual, such as their flatness and decorative motifs, which are reminiscent of art nouveau art from the 20th century. One might assume that art nouveau was partly inspired by these frescoes. However, when one takes into account the circumstances of their excavation by Arthur Evans in Knossos, one could draw the opposite conclusion: that the Minoan Frescos were influenced by art nouveau, not the other way around. This is because the paintings one sees at the palace of Knossos are the result of restoration work carried out on the site by father and son painters Emile Gilieron, who were commissioned by Arthur Evans. Does this mean that the frescoes are fake? Not necessarily, as restoration is a natural part of art history and often involves the layering of styles. Restorers cannot work without the historical information and context of their own time. However, the frescoes are not identical to those painted in Minoan Crete.

The Prince of The Lillies, Heraklion Archaeological Museum[13]

[13] https://www.heraklionmuseum.gr/exhibit/toichografia-tou-prigkipa-me-ta-krina/

Fresco with blue bird, Heraklion archaeological museum[14]

[14] https://www.heraklionmuseum.gr/en/exhibit/the-blue-bird-fresco/



Gustav Klimt, The Tree of Life[15]

The second example does not involve any kind of alternation or faking at first sight. The only faking that has taken place is in interpretation. The subject in question is Greek and Roman antiquity, and how it was perceived and reproduced by Rennaissance Europe. It is widely known that the marble white statues with which we relate classic antiquity used to be coloured, vividly and generously. This makes perfect sense, as there was no such thing as marble white in the Mediterranean at that time. Of course, they washed away with time, but fragments of them can be found, and are indicative enough to make assumptions. But, strangely enough, the European Renaissance scholars decided to dismiss this small detail and reproduce a cold, white version of antiquity. Was it because of ignorance? Perhaps, although Plato refers on the coloured nature of the Greek statues. But we have left the Renaissance behind us long ago, and still, the dominant perception of antiquity is completely colourless.[16] So, this can only make us suspect that the persistence of whiteness was a conscious choice. What was needed in Europe after the enchantment of the Middle Ages, of magic paintings, of symbolisms, was something clear-cut, encephalic, logical, consequential, calculatable, and measurable. Marble white stone statues were preserving a formalism that would be lost if they were coloured. So, we believe that keeping the

[15] https://www.gustav-klimt.com/The-Tree-Of-Life.jsp

[16] ”The remains of the Ancient Greek sculptures themselves imply a world much different than the one indicated, since a long time, by ancient Greek sculpture. Whataver we left to survive under the term Greece (..) can difficultly be deduced to trichrome figures.(...) Ancient Greek statues were colorful, and Plato informs us that they were painting red the pupil of their eyes”
(Malraux) pp. 151

If the colored nature of the statues was preserved, they would not be any more following the rationalism associated with Rennaissance which led to enlightenment. Enchantment had to die, and colour was not helpful.

statues white was a conscious choice, to also legitimize the more encephalic way of drawing of the Renaissance, which in some cases looks almost like an exercise of geometry.

The third one, and most interesting perhaps, is the caves of Lascaux. The murals have never been doubted as fakes. When we visit the caves, first, we look through a small hole the original murals. Then, in 500 metres distance, we can enter the re-created caves of Lascaux. There, we see replicas, which are open to the public, in the shake of the conservation of the originals. J.Buadrillard comments on the matter in his book "Simulacra and Simulation":

> *In the same way, with the pretext of saving the original, one forbade visitors to enter the Lascaux caves, but an exact replica was constructed five hundred meters from it, so that everyone could see them (one glances through a peephole at the authentic cave, and then one visits the reconstituted whole). It is possible that the memory of the original grottoes is itself stamped in the minds of future generations, but from now on there is no longer any difference: the duplication suffices to render both artificial.*[17]

In this chapter, Baudrillard is also having some interesting insights regarding anthropology, which he claims that needs its subject to be dead in order for science to survive, and construct the object's simulacra. From the three previous examples, we have enough evidence to claim the same about archaeology: Archaeology is above everything a narrative, which, requires the story to be finished to be re-narrated. The need of a stable, frozen past, able to be interpreted as well as the fact that reproduction makes both the original and replica equally untrue, makes us understand that forgery is a common practice in archaeology. Whether it will be regarded as a simulation which serves the science's goals or a hoax which is blurring the image of historical factuality is a matter of interpretation.

**Why did V.H. become a forger?**

We do not have any confession by V.H. regarding the matter. No written or other kind of public declaration which explains his actions. We cannot even be entirely sure if he wanted his forging studio to be discovered or not. His motivation might be shady, but still somehow profound. For a common forger, it is usually the financial reward that makes them conspire. With V.H., somehow this does not sound enough. Of course, he had earnings from selling his "artifacts", and, of course, the "discovery" of gethsemanism increased his reputation, as well as his income. But, although he was not rich, even before gethsemanism, he was one of the few Egyptian archaeologists who managed to live comfortably through their profession in their homeland. He was also quite famous and well-established already, so it does not sound much like reputation

[17] (Baudrillard) pp.10

was a motivation either. Moreover, even after the prosperity that gethsemanism supposedly brought him, he did not change his lifestyle.

We should also not forget that V.H. was a rather intelligent individual. If his sole motivation to forge was a monetary one, he would have surely crafted the story in a different way, in order to be more effective, more profitable, and more sustainable. Instead, he invented a story risking his reputation a lot, as there are many shady parts in it. Back then, it did not seem alarming to anyone, but now, after the confirmation of the fake nature of his findings, there are many aspects that in a second reading make it obvious that the artifacts were not real in the first place. We do not know if he was playing with his luck or if he was just sure of his powerful position against them and his word being stronger. The sure thing is that those mistakes in the process cannot be attributed to naivety. So, we are only left with one possibility: He probably found pleasure in the risk of being discovered.

The story he is narrating might be fascinating, but many elements do not align with the historical context. First, the morphology of the ceramics is not following the techniques used at the time. The imagery might be relevant, but the way it is executed it looks nothing like other ceramic findings of that period. Also, they are better preserved than the nature of the Egyptian desert sand can justify. There have never been other artifacts related to a christian heresy at that time, and even when they are found, it seems like those groups were using the same symbols as those that remained as major christian symbols and we know until today. We should not forget that, back then, christianism was not the dominant powerful dogma we know today.[18] Therefore, it is bizarre to find such a big corpus of artifacts related to a site and time specific heresy. And, although history and archaeology are full of strange, unbelievable, and incomprehensible scenarios, those should have raised questions about his findings. V.H. had been a very erudite person, and his students and colleagues are still commenting on his outstanding wittiness, which, sadly, was going hand in hand with his elitism. Therefore, we do not believe that those "holes" in the story were a mishappening or a mistake, but that they were intentional.

V.H. might not have addressed the larger public regarding his fraud before or after his disappearance, but it is a subject often brought up in his correspondence. The corpus of letters he left behind is interesting by itself as a format as well: V.H. was one of the very few people who decided to have regular communication with others through post, and who was keeping a very detailed archive of the letters he received, but also copies of the ones he sent. It is as if he expected them to be found and published. Of course, when the letters were first discovered, the obvious question came up: are they real? Are they addressed to real people?

[18] Back then, christianism was a rather new religion, still in the process of making of its narrative and mythology , so the heresies are nowadays considered as heresies just because they did not end up being the primary dogma. We already have texts back then referring to heretiques, for sure, but we should also not forget that it was only 311 A.D. that the first Edict of Toleration was issued by emperor Galerius and the second one in 313 A.D. by Constantine I and Lycinius in the Eastern Roman Empire. It is 380 A.D. when Christianism finally became the official Religion of the empire. Of course, this was not without fluctuations and it did not mean that all the different races of people in the empire were indeed practicing the Christian rituals, or that they did it in the exact same way. Especially when it comes to the east/south borders of the empire, exactly in the region of Egypt, they kept changing quite often, and they were under serious, mostly Arab, but also Persian, Turkish (first Seljuk, then Ottomans), Mongolian and many more influences.

The two main recipients of the letters are a woman called Liza, who is an online sex worker with whom V.H. has a strange kind of romantic relationship. The second one is M., and he is an illicit antiquity trade dealer. His letters to Liza are not just love letters. He writes a lot about his work, about his ideas and he compares the relationship he has with truth and archaeology with the one he has with Liza.

In his own words:

> *A remain can be found or constructed, in the end, it does not matter. A remain, a finding, tells more about its founder and interpreter than its original owner or maker. And, let me tell the truth, as dark as it is: I prefer your remains, real or imaginary than you as a whole. Those little pieces you leave behind are what I am entitled to, it is the share of love I was fated with. And you understand why: One strand of hair you left behind, and it was enough to choke me, and have me write you letters for centuries.*

Liza , as a professional, she answers as her client wants her to answer in order to keep the phantasy alive, but without contributing much. By her letters we understand that she is probably a bit uninterested, but she plays her role.

The letters to M. are mostly related to their monetary transactions. V.H. though, takes the chance to express his thoughts on truth and archaeology here again. M., having a profession unrelated to offering pleasure, does not put any effort into understanding or participating in any way in V.H.'s intellectual explorations. Sometimes it looks as if he is not reading them at all. Still, V.H. keeps on writing lengthy reports on his thoughts about the fraud. We have not a single letter addressed to M. that is not also a short essay on forgery. He only sends him financial reports.

In one of his letters to M. he writes:

> *Fraud is sweet, and it grows vanity as sugar grows the appetite. This place I am getting in, in charge of creating a truth with material proof, is the same feeling a lion has seeing its newborn. It is my inheritance, it is what I am leaving behind. What I make to not feel lonely. You surely must be impressed that I am talking like that about a forgery scam. But, you have to understand, that, my profession, my art if you may, has always been my only family, my only home, the only thing I have to love and take care of.*

This, illustrates a rather lonely character, with a somehow self-referential way of thinking. And it looks like his motivation to deceive comes mostly from that: it was a way for him to communicate with the world, and become important for the world, from a superior position, probably the most superior that one can be: that of the creator (of history), which is a very similar position to the one of god. V.H. wanted to become a god. And as a god, he disappeared to the unknown, perhaps wishing that this would sanctify him.

Seven years after the disappearance of V.H. and two years after the discovery of his correspondence, we are proud to say that, we have managed to locate Liza, who is a real person. In the appendix of this essay an interview she gave us, for which we deeply thank her. We have not managed to locate M., but, we assume that since Liza proved to be real, he must also be real.

**V.H.'s objects as artifacts: how to create a successful simulation**

As mentioned above, the morphological features of the objects, analysed in a technical manner, could easily reveal that the findings are forged. Therefore, there must be something else in their making, apart from the authority of the narrator, that made them real. This is the affect they hold, the enchantment they enforce, which made the audience overlook their flaws and inconsistencies.

In some extent, all objects that claim themselves to be artifacts, share a common symbolism, despite their difference in age, culture, material, functionality, etc. And this is the symbolism of history and truth itself. They are perceived as the incarnation of historical truth. And this is their big difference with artworks, which do not intend to take a place in the realm of reality. An artwork's *aura*, as Benjamin calls it, its enchanting mechanisms, lie in their illusionistic aspects. An artifact's *aura* lies in the truth itself. This truth becomes similar to the divine, it becomes an axiom.

Baudrillard writes about the successive phases of the image:

> *it is the reflection of a profound reality;*
>
> *it masks and denatures a profound reality;*
>
> *it masks the absence of a profound reality;*
>
> *it has no relation to any reality whatsoever;*
>
> *it is its own pure simulacrum.*[19]

V.H.'s artifacts, by pretending that they embody a higher truth, they conceal the fact that this truth does not exist. They are made after other simulacra, and they have no prototype. Fiction manages to have the effect of truth. Of course, in order for the simulation to be successful, V.H. had to produce much more than just artifacts. The documents from the excavations, the photos of the site, his scientific papers on gethsemanism, his press conferences, the very detailed directions he is giving for the preservation of the objects, the way they are positioned in the glass boxes, are all simulacra. And some of them, prove the objects as artifacts more than their morphological features do.

Photographing the artifacts creates one more layer of simulation. This is like transferring the "true reference" from the supposed prototype out of which the artifacts were made, to the artifacts themselves, which are then used as prototypes for the photos. And this is how simulacra occurs out of other simulacra. As in the case of Lascaux, the artifacts would be equally famous,

[19] (Baudrillard) pp.6

even if the only that could be exhibited was their photographs or their 3D printed simulations or handmade replicas, because of restoration activities or because of their fragility.

Benjamin claimed that the mechanical reproduction of art is stripping it off its aura. It seems though, that affect has found its way through the industrial revolution and still exists today. It is very interesting to note here, that, in our over-simulated, digital and artificial times, there is nothing that has a greater affect than bare truth itself. Truth's aura has become the purest form of sublime. This is partly why the vintage is a trend, or why there is a growing interest in antiques. There is a yearning for a time when things were more real, because the real does not exist anymore. Truth has become fetishized.

But truth is only a part of the affect V.H.'s objects hold. We believe that the uniqueness of the story he is offering sounds so sweet to our ears, that we do not care to doubt it. It is the concept of the anti-hero, which V.H. is using to get into the hearts of the public. We are consoled by the figure of the resentful prophet, who wants to deny his divine nature and rest because it reminds us of ourselves when we are tired of life and when we cannot keep pretending that we care. As viewers we get immersed in the idea that once, some people believed in a god like that, so we are uninterested in any arguments of legitimacy. The spiritual exultation caused by illusionism can have a positive or negative sense. We get captivated by the beauty of something, but we can also be captivated by its ugliness, if this ugliness is where we see ourselves and where we can be expressed freely. Finding a place where we can be imperfect, angry, and resentful without being judged can be more valuable than a promise of a harmonious world. Gethsemanism provided that space. So, to many, the idea, that, once, somewhere, there was a messiah who was as hateful as they were, came as a consolation, because, at least, they are not the only ones filled with hate, and this is a feeling shared even with godlike creatures.

**3.Photography**

The camera is working miracles when it comes to simulating, as much as to create terror to the first viewers of a film of a train entering a station, thinking it would hit them. This moment in art history could perhaps be compared to the moment the first viewers came in front of Masaccio's Holy Trinity. This has created much debate, in an aesthetic but also moral level. Baudelaire's superstition of not wanting to be photographed, because he believed his soul would be trapped, is echoed in later discourses on photography which claim the death of the subject being needed for the picture to emerge.

> "Photography may correspond to the intrusion, in our modern society, of an asymbolic Death, outside of religion, outside of ritual, a kind of abrupt dive into literal Death. *Life/Death*: the paradigm is reduced to a simple click, the one separating the initial pose from the final print. With the Photograph, we enter into *flat Death."*[20]

[20] *(Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida, as quoted by* Dr. Jeanne S. M. Willette and *Art History Unstuffed.)*

Photography is a focal point, but neither the first nor the last shock that representation strategies went through. Linear perspective is a predecessor, which made it possible to fit three-dimensional spaces on two-dimensional surfaces, something that in a sense increased the likability with reality, it made something humanly made look more natural. It was *a window to nature*. The shock was not only of aesthetic but also of existential nature. It partly was associated with the fact that the eye that was witnessing, capturing, and shooting, was a mechanical one, and therefore, perhaps deprived of human subjectivity or sensitivity. This was one of the arguments in the 19th-century debate regarding the artistic nature of photography. Similar shocks came with cinema, which enabled us to capture time not only frozen, but also moving. After that, various other shocks followed, with digitalization, then virtual reality, and we are now experiencing and working through our shock towards artificial intelligence.

The discovery of linear perspective happened in the Renaissance, the moment when artists started existing as social entities and art started being an aesthetic product and not a vehicle for religious exultation. A few centuries later, with enlightenment, god will die, as Niehtze informs us. Rennaissance is also the birth era of capitalism. This new era provides humans with the tools and motivation to make the world again, from scratch if needed. Linear perspective is Rennaissance's consequence on an aesthetic level. The superiority of human intelligence above anything else is becoming an axiom, and it takes god's place.

Creating life out of scratch is what makes one the ultimate creator of everything. Humanity is still struggling with achieving that last step into overpowering the real completely and being able to create whichever reality it wants. Until then, we are living in a very complex system of simulations, in which it is quite often very hard to decide what is real and what is fictional.

**V.H.'s trickster games**

Which are the dominant simulations? Of course, those produced by those who own the most efficient means to produce them. In Marxist terms, the owners of the means of production. From our point of view, V.H. tried to trick this system with their own tools. He crafted a reality and made it convincing, more by making it affect-productive and less by making it sound reasonable. He used his talent as a trickster and his place of authority as an already well-known archaeologist to legitimize his claims. He used his knowledge and his craftsmanship to construct the proof which would be needed. He used his sarcasm and bitterness to execute his plan to the greatest extent. And, perhaps, he disappeared to become a legend, to become a saint, to become a simulation of himself. Did he do it out of feelings of opposition towards the power structures? Was he a strange revolutionary? His letters indicate that probably not. He had no intention to change the world, prove any power to be faulty, or uncover any hoax whatsoever. He was exhausted, disappointed, and worn out, and just found out this was a way too easy game to play.

What can we get out of his trickster games? It is, indeed, very easy to deceive people, as an international archeological community consisting of well-informed scholars managed to make a fool of themselves.

By keeping us in a permanent state of doubt, even now that the fake nature of the artifacts has been discovered, V.H. manages to dismantle our relationship with reality in general. This makes us suspicious of any other kind of real, and therefore it makes us look for holes in the so-called historical, scientific, religious truth, and so on. From truth, we go to evidence, where he makes us see how easily it can be constructed and how much the coverage of it, its wrapping, its presentation, its form is more important than its content for its legitimacy. He provides us with a guide to truth-growing, which also shows how easy it is to bring it to fruition if the weather allows it. Lastly, we understand the creation of this conspiracy as a "J'accuse" by someone who considers himself an outcast and this is his swansong, whether he has just disappeared or died. Or it can also be interpreted as a cry for attention or help, as many cared for his findings, but very few if any for him. His bitter character was, of course, not very helpful.

**Photographing the artifacts**

V.H. was a very picky photographer of his own findings and rarely ever was he satisfied by museum photographers or photojournalists who took pictures of his collection. He had a notorious reputation among museum photographers, as he was also not very kind when expressing his dissatisfaction with the outcome of their work. In his letter to M., where he describes how annoyed he is by the photographer the museum hired to document his collection, he is using a quote from A. Malraux "Imaginary Museum" to describe how the photographs should look like:

> *There are many sculptures that move us less than their photos, much has been discovered about them through their photos. […] The Pieta Rondanini by Michaelangelo at Costello Sforzesco (isolated) looks –amazingly enough- waiting to be photographed. It belongs simultaneously to the real world of the statues and an unreal world, in which it exists solely through photography.* [21]

So, his main complaint against the photographers, was that they failed to construct in their images this unreal, parallel world, which would therefore place the objects in the "real world of the statues" But how different are the photos V.H. was shooting? He never claimed them to be more successful than the ones by the museum photographers, and probably not because of humbleness. In his photographs we observe central placement, dark non-referential backgrounds,

[21] Malraux, Andre. *Το Φανταστικό Μουσείο/the Imaginary Museum*. 1965. Translated by Nikos Iliadis, Athens, Πλέθρον/Plethron, 2007, pp.109, free translation from greek to english by the writers

creating an ever-growing distance: the artifact in the middle of nothing, de-contextualized, it is conceived as an idea, as an ideal appearance, as a holy prototype, as a dematerialized symbol of every artifact of its kind. Those are interesting qualities, but they are not much different from those of usual museum photos. What is then that made V.H. unsatisfied with the museum photographers?

Photography is meaning-productive on its own. By photographing something, we make it worthy of our attention, because what is photographed is not just the object itself, but also the gaze which captures it. And this gaze has to be present in the same space as the referent, in Barthesian terms. This does not mean that the photographed object is important on its own. It often becomes important only through, and only for, the lenses of the camera. As R. Barthes informs us in *Camera Lucida*:

> *In an initial period, Photography, in order to surprise, photographs the notable; but soon, by a familiar reversal, it decrees notable whatever it photographs. The "anything whatever" then becomes the sophisticated acme of value*.[22]

So, V.H.'s artifacts, and potentially any artifact, is important because it has been photographed, and not vice versa. In that sense, the dullest photo is able to insert an artifact in the "real world of the statues".

Hanging clay lamp in the form of a fish, 4-5th century A.D., Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens[23]

[22] Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York, The Noonday Press, 1980, pp.34

[23] source: Source: https://www.byzantinemuseum.gr/en/permanentexhibition/ancient_world_to_Byzantium/old_forms-new_symbols/?bxm=12

Clay Oil Lamp with gethsemanist symbols, claimed to be dated 4-5th century A.D., modern forgery. TAI collection.

This is something that can be easily understood by looking at those two photos, one from the Byzantine Museum of Athens and the other one by V.H., photographing his own artifacts. We see in both oil lamps from 4th century A.D., found in the larger east Mediterranean region. As objects, they have many similarities. As photos as well: they are both representative of a bigger corpus, and they are only a sample. They are dematerialized, in the sense that they are pointing at something else, at an ideal form bigger than themselves. They are both parts, fragments. And there is a high possibility, that, for both, the photograph is more impressive than the object itself.

Still, it is difficult to understand what is the difference between those two photos and what was the thing that V.H. was missing from the museum photographer's work to be satisfied. We only have one speculation. Maybe the difference is what Barthes calls "punctum"

Roland Barthes in his work *Camera Lucida* introduces the terms of *studium* and *punctum,* as elements of photography. Studium according to him, could be explained as such:

> *What I feel about these photographs derives from an average affect, almost from a certain training. […] it is studium, which doesn't mean, at least not immediately, "study," but application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment, of course, but without special acuity. It is by studium that I am interested in so many photographs ,whether I receive them as political testimony or enjoy them as good historical scenes: for it is culturally (this connotation is present in studium that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the action* .[24]

The elements attributed to studium, look like the perfect recipe to make a good museum photograph: distant, open for analysis and interpretation, mostly in intellectual terms, no

[24] (Barthes) pp.26

emotional involvement, giving us something that *we already know*, something we know how to look at.

Then, we have Malraux's detailed descriptions, or directions one would say, for how to take and how to crop a picture to place it in an art history book. He is insisting a lot in the non-real world this gives us an entrance to, and how this makes the photographs more real than their prototype. Nevertheless, the elements he is attributing to these photographs, seem more suitable for a studium function, than a punctum one.

> *The fragment, which obtains value through its presentation and a chosen lighting, allows a reproduction which is not among the humblest residents of the imaginary museum. In that we owe the art history books of pre-renaissance landscapes, full of details from miniatures, as well as the nowadays general use of expressive detail in monographs. In that we owe a gothic art detached from the cathedrals, an Indian art exempted from the luxury of its temples, but its ambience as well.*[25]

> *The art history book isolates, sometimes to discover, or to compare, and other times to prove. And through the fragment the photographer is re-inserting those works in our preferential universe, in the same way that the works of the old museum were getting into it through the elements of italism they embodied.*[26]

So, fragmentality is an integral element for Malraux for an object to enter the museum or the art history book. It offers an analytical view. When photography is fragmenting, it has the same use as the surgical scalpel. Isolating and fragmenting art objects and artifacts, in the same way that samples are isolated between glass plates in the laboratory, open for research and analysis through microscope lenses, makes them able to participate in the society of the highest of truths, in science, it makes them part of the real because they can be examined as natural phenomena. We like our history to be one of high truths, cause and effect, so we organize archaeology in a way that it serves this will. But we know too well that this is only wishful thinking. Human history works in absurd, yet predictable ways and the relationship between cause and effect is a very loose one. V.H., was perhaps trying to legitimize his artifacts as symbols of a complicated past and not fragments of a neat one. Those are aspects that Barthes would classify as *punctum.*

*The second element will break (or punctuate) the studium. This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the studium with my sovereign consciousness).it is this*

[25] (Malraux) pp.109
[26] (Malraux) pp.105

*element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me. […] precisely, these marks, these wounds are so many points. This second element which will disturb the studium I shall therefore call punctum; for punctum is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole-and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).*[27]

Punctum seems to have something violent, and something unintentional. As Barthes is stating elsewhere, Punctum is highly personal and cannot be staged. It is not something we can approach with peace of mind, it is something unsettling, uncomfortable, and full of emotion. Not suitable for any laboratory procedures. But if punctum cannot be staged, and is highly subjective, how can one intentionally implement it in a photo? And how was V.H. so sure that it could never be found somewhere in the museum photographers' pictures by mistake?

By looking at his photographs, some of us will agree that they find elements that are punctuating, sharp, that they draw them in. Others will find them indifferent. Others will say that the punctuating elements are the dust or the scratches on the printed versions of the photos, and not the photographic elements themselves. Punctum is highly personal. Speaking for ourselves, we do find something punctuating in these photos, that makes us want to learn their story without caring too much if it is real. We find those elements in the mistakes of the photos and even more, when we see the whole photographic corpus that was found in his studio, in the storyline created by the images in the ways they interact with each other. He did not stage those elements, otherwise, they would have not worked. But I believe he was aware of their existence, and he let them be. Infrastructure must always be invisible to leave space to function. The same goes for the media, as they are infrastructure. “Medium is the message” as Marshall McLuhan had said. They are a means to an end, but we should always remember that no end has ever sanctified its means. The end is characterized by its means, so they must be suited, in accordance, and perfectly functional. The legitimacy or morality of means, of infrastructure, is only questioned when it is not functional enough. When it manages to function perfectly, it is invisible.

Photography as an infrastructure, becomes invisible by making visible the photographed. Photography with only studium elements reaches its most invisible form. Sometimes, the flaws in that infrastructure (for example, lens flare, blurriness, un-focused-ness) might disturb the primary function, but they also add a new one. They potentially become punctum, like anything else that invades the frame without the photographer’s will. Perhaps, this is why punctum is what makes a photograph interesting for Barthes: because it is what seems to escape the lenses' gaze by being present, as if it is the one thing that is there by mistake and therefore hides the fact that everything else on the picture is posing, is pretending.

In his photographs, it might be difficult to describe clearly what is punctum. But surely, in the story he is crafting, many aspects are functioning with affect that much, that make us forget any inconsistencies. This affect is related to the concept of the anti-hero. In his heresy, he illustrated a figure of a christ who does not want to save anymore, a resentful savior who is tired of trying, tired of failing, worn out, and wants to be set free, even if this means his death. Those are

[27] (Barthes) pp.26

feelings that many people in our contemporary world can sympathize, if not identify with, especially within academic communities.[28]

Of course, we are faced with a paradox here: Earlier, we mentioned “punctum” as a quality in V.H.’s photos. Since punctum is in need of some kind of raw truth to emerge, and V.H.’s practice has to do with the very subversion of every kind of truth, the distinction between punctum and studium, real and artificial, seems irrelevant. In the same way it becomes irrelevant in the case of Lascaux. Because truth and fiction end up being interpreted by sentiment, and sentiment is always real, no matter the nature of its cause. The serotonin, or oxytocin that is released in a tired viewer’s brain, when they sympathize with V.H.’s resentful savior, is real. The sense of belonging and understanding when V.H. messiah says that, simply put, he wants to die, is real. The feeling that V.H. is speaking for many of his fellows, who find themselves often in situations where they must decide between honouring their values and securing their financial future is real. Their desire to disappear is real, and V.H. is showing them the way.

**Photography, Death and Realness**

Another aspect of the Barthesian analysis on photography which should be considered when analyzing V.H.’s photos of his artifacts and their relationship with reality, is that of photography being related to death. This idea is apparent throughout the whole book “Camera Lucida” and it is justified by different means. It seems like this very relationship between photography and death is the thread with which almost every argument in this book has been woven. Photography can freeze time, while binds the referent with its simulacra, with the image, forever. It is like a death mask, and no matter how much the photographers try to animate their images, they will forever be symbols of death. This, of course, becomes more apparent when the referent is a living subject, but still, even in the case of the inanimate artifacts, the intention, the *gaze*, plays between life and death.

> *Now it is this same relation which I find in the Photograph; however "lifelike" we strive to make it (and this frenzy to be lifelike can only be our mythic denial of an apprehension of death), Photography is a kind of primitive theater, a kind of Tableau vivant, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead.*[29]

[28] One would argue that the greatest part of Egyptian society would not identify with that savior, and would appreciate a powerful messiah, as is Mohammed or Jesus (of canonical Christian dogmas), but, sadly, archaeology, and even more, art, is not addressed to big audiences, and, in Egypt’s case, it is not that much addressed to Egyptians.

[29] (Barthes) pp.31-32

It is exactly this death that legitimizes the artifacts, that, having passed to the other side, they can claim to be transcendent, divine, holy. It is a big disgrace to humiliate the dead. So, when photographed, one hesitates to judge them. The death mask is the mask of eternal dignity.

Also, the death implied by photography, legitimizes the artifacts in yet one more way: For something to have died, it requires it has lived before. So, if the artifacts are photographed and dead, it means that before that moment, they were alive, as what they claim to be in their picture. Photography works as an affirmation of that.

> *The Photograph does not necessarily say what is no longer, but only and for certain what has been. This distinction is decisive. In front of a photograph, our consciousness does not necessarily take the nostalgic path of memory (how many photographs are outside of individual time), but for every photograph existing in the world, the path of certainty: the Photograph's essence is to ratify what it represents.*[30]

In a psychoanalytical point of view, if photography "kills" its referent, does this mean it converts it to a symbol? The symbolic realm is that of language, symbols, social structures, culture, laws and discipline. It is the realm within which the subject realizes its individuality and comes to a place to mourn the lost unity that existed in the imaginary order, primarily with the mother. This is a very deep cut wound, as a huge part of our expression gets lost, and the codes we are introduced to can communicate only a small part of what we need to express. But it is the price to pay to become a concrete subjectivity that can participate in the society of intellectualized, domesticized humanity. [31] Photography can be active both in the symbolic and imaginary realms and can be interpreted in different ways. The symbolic exists where death exists, the imaginary is where desire is fulfilled. Nevertheless, photography fails to become abstract enough to provide signs that can constitute a language. This is why it is not entirely symbolic. In Barthe's words:

> *Photography is unclassifiable because there is no reason to mark this or that of its occurrences; it aspires, perhaps, to become as crude, as certain, as noble as a sign, which would afford it access to the dignity of a language: but for there to be a sign there must be mark; deprived of a principle of marking, photographs are signs which don't take, which turn, as milk does. Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see.*[32]

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[30] (Barthes) pp.85

[31] more can be found in Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book 11, Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. New York, Norton, 1998.

[32] (Barthes) pp.6

**Digital Artifacts**

Apart from the photographs of the artifacts, V.H. has a printed corpus of photographs seemingly unrelated to Gethsemanism. Many of them, of course, are pictures of Liza. Some look like screenshots from live shows, some others could be photos that Liza took of herself and sent to V.H. In many of his letters, we find him saying that he deals with her in the same way he deals with his artifacts, that he has made her up, and that if she did not exist he would discover her. Indeed, there is a similarity in the way the online sex market works and how archaeology, as V.H. performed it, functions: Illusion.

Illusion, to be effective, can never be entirely fake. It must come from reality. As already mentioned, Studium can be staged, systematized, or performed. Punctum cannot. Barthes believes that pornographic content is only using studium.l

> *Another unary photograph is the pornographic photograph (I am not saying the erotic photograph: the erotic is a pornographic that has been disturbed, fissured). Nothing more homogeneous than a pornographic photograph. It is always a naive photograph, without intention and without calculation. Like a shop window which shows only one illuminated piece of jewelry, it is completely constituted by the presentation of only one thing: sex: no secondary, untimely object ever manages to half conceal, delay, or distract*[33]

> *Pornography ordinarily represents the sexual organs, making them into a motionless object (a fetish), flattered like an idol that does not leave its niche; for me, there is no punctum in the pornographic image; at most it amuses me (and even then, boredom follows quickly) . The erotic photograph, on the contrary (and this is its very condition) , does not make the sexual organs into a central object; it may very well not show them at all; it takes the spectator outside its frame, and it is there that I animate this photograph and that it animates me. The punctum, then, is a kind of subtle beyond -as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see: not only toward "the rest" of the nakedness, not only toward the fantasy of a praxis, but toward the absolute excellence of a being, body and soul together*[34].

I would argue that, if not in all the existing pornographic pictures, at least in those of Liza that were found in possession of V.H., there are many elements that could be classified as punctum, which would make the photographs erotic rather than pornographic, although we are pretty sure that they were created for pornographic reasons. We do not know if the cropping of the

[33] (Barthes) pp.41

[34] (Barthes) pp.59

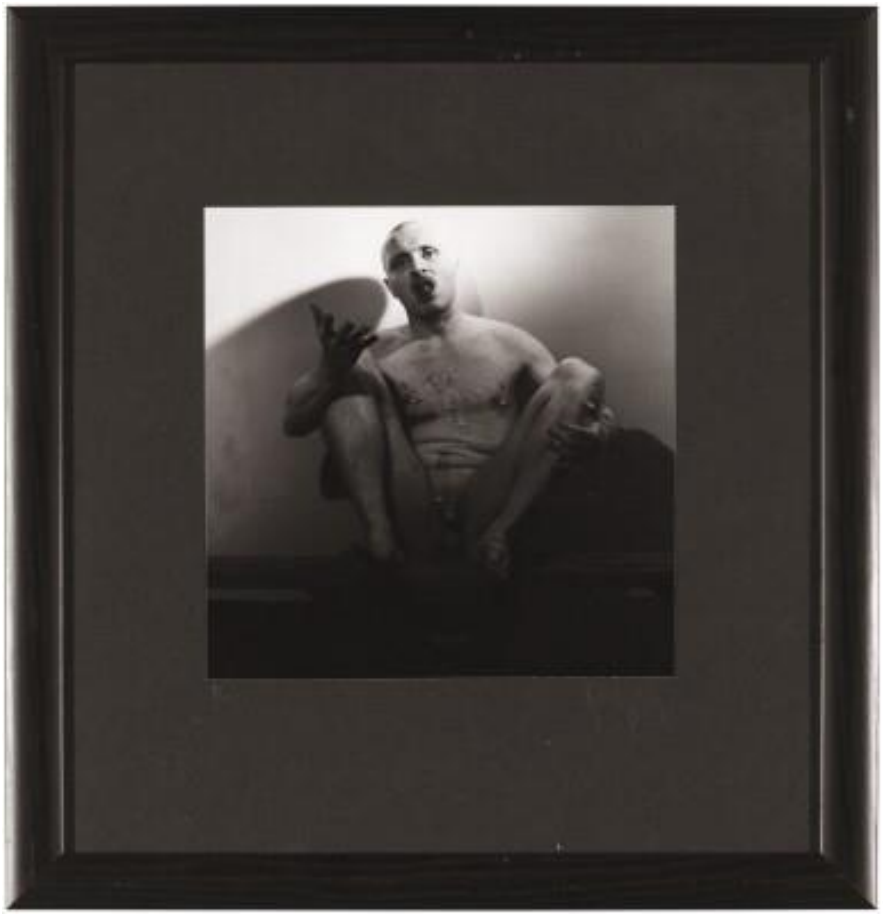
photographs were done by V.H. or Liza. But, trying to make content that addresses the affect, could be thought as a challenging perhaps, but fruitful marketing strategy for a sex worker.

Punctum though, dies the moment that one tries to construct it. It can only coincide. Perhaps, the only thing that a sex worker needs to do to construct it, is to let some drops of truth spill into the illusion. In the digital and physical work of the sex market, there have always been the clients who would come only once, and there were also the clients who would keep visiting the same sex worker for years and years. It cannot be just studium that keeps them coming back, it cannot be just bare sex. It is vulnerability, it is mistake, it is the unpredicted, it is punctum that makes them come back, it is studium that makes them feel safe that this is just as real as it needs to be to keep them warm, and just as fake to be able to leave whenever they like.

The elements that are possibly making them pornographic are not that related to the content, but to the structure of the images. We could put the comparison between pornographic and erotic pictures in relation to the usual photographs of artifacts and those that V.H. wanted to shoot: Often enough, pornographic images have way too many similarities with medical ones, close focus frames that aim to capture biological functions or malfunctions, injuries, or they just want to have something as a sample. The image is fragmented, isolated, existing in a universe of its own. Erotic photographs, as well as V.H.'s artifacts, might not be that perfect, detailed or photorealistic, but they are attacking affect in an inescapable way. More than anything, they are addressing a whole, even when this is not fully visible. This does not make them necessarily cheesy. Mapplethorpe's portfolio X for example, which Barthes is also bringing as an example, demonstrates very explicit sadomasochistic scenes, without becoming a documentary, without becoming pornographic, albeit the fragmentality we often see in the pictures. I am not sure if someone could point out exactly what is addressed to the effect in these images, and I doubt if it is objective, but, for sure, they are not boring, they are not just amusing. This distinction does not aim to make any kind of moral judgment. It is a different function. Also, Mapplethorpe's photographs might be staged, but, as said, punctum rarely ever can be staged, therefore, images created for pornographic reasons, can sometimes, involuntarily, contain punctum elements.

Robert Mapplethorpe, Richard NYC (from X Portfolio), 1977 [35]

[35] https://www.artnet.com/auctions/artists/robert-mapplethorpe/richard-nyc-from-x-portfolio-2

 [36]

Liza becomes real for V.H. through her photographs, because he loves her, and therefore he finds the punctum in them. But, she also becomes real through the studium elements that kill her as a subject. There is a sense of objectification in everything that is photographed, the depicted is in the mercy of the camera (even more than in the mercy of the photographer). The desire of a client of an online sex worker is real, her picture is real, but she, herself, is dead. And this function, in our visual-based civilization, is not inherent in pornography only. Pornography just provides for a ground where that becomes unavoidably visible. We become real because we can be photographed, literally or metaphorically, because we can be contained in an abstraction of ourselves, which is also usually marketable, and measurable. Those pictures can have more studium or more punctum elements. They produce the real, they are not the real.

One of the most heart-breaking letters V.H. has written to Liza is one with a fictional story in it. In her interview, Liza says that she has never met V.H. in person. However, in his letter, V.H. is desperate after Liza has left his home and some strands of her hair have remained in his bathroom. Those strands start to grow until the house is overflown with hair –her hair. We can take this magic realism narration as the greatest extent to which V.H.'s make-believe and

36https://www.artnet.com/auctions/artists/robert-mapplethorpe/ken-nyc-from-x-portfolio-4

subverting reality has gone. After mixing truth with fiction in a way that they do not differ much, a story like this one can exist.

*Dear Liza,*

*It was the break of dawn and I knew already that you were gone. My memory is often playing games with me, and time slips away. Memory. Memory and matter. Does memory have matter? Does memory matter?*

*The other day I found a strand of your hair on the bathroom wall. You know how neat I am with cleanliness. I hate finding such things. And I know too well how much you don't give a dime about all that. And this strand, so shamelessly left on the wall, it is as if it has grown roots, or even better grown out of the wall. I took it to throw it away in anger, (with your irresponsibility? Your absence? Your presumptuousness to leave hair on my wall, even though you are absent? With your outrageous way to be present, even when you are not?) but something did not let me do so. Maybe the thought that this is the last thing I have of you. Who knows if I will ever see you again, in three dimensions, with flesh and blood. I don't even know your real name.*

*I washed the strand, I dried it and took care of it as if it was you. I put it inside one of those pendant necklaces and I keep it close to the place of heart. Since then, Liza, or however you are called, - I swear, I am telling the truth! - the strangest things started happening in this house, which have made me doubt your humanness. Are you perhaps a ghost or some other fantom?*

*The bathroom wall started growing hair, black, like yours. And the wall behaves like skin: I cut the hair and it grows back, I shave them and the wall gets red, I pluck them off and it bleeds. Liza, you have made a cold wall bleed! In the beginning I panicked, but at some point I realized there was nothing I could do. I let your hair grow until the house drowns inside it, until it fills me up. One day it will grow out of the windows to the street, and people will be asking what is going on with this house overfloating with hair.*

*What a strange creature you are. I could ask M. For his machines, I could summon you if you are a ghost through an Ouija board, or try to find you with a spirit box, find your location with a crystal sphere. But truth is, I want to stay enchanted, and to stay enchanted , I cannot know too much. I am seeing you in my screen, in this little window from which everyone is seeing you. I see you and I beg of you to rest your eyelids for a second in this little house that is drowning in this black waterfall of hair. In vain.*

*I will let your hair grow. It is the last material proof I have that somewhere, somehow you exist. The proof which, if I had not found, I would craft it.*

*Yours,*

*V.H.*

**4. What do we get out of it all?**

It seems like the nature of V.H.'s ceramics will stay undefined. The institute is not interested and does not have the means to perform any kind of scientific test to confirm their inauthenticity. We believe that V.H. can provide us with useful tools to analyse truth making and test our own beliefs on reality. We believe that, especially when interpreting history, it is very important to have in mind that everyone could potentially do what V.H. did, but without disappearing in the end. There are many unconfessed frauds out there, and we should have the eye to see them.

What we do comes out of personal, internal motivation, as V.H. also claimed for himself in his letters. Because, apart from giving a home to the stories between truth and fiction, we also want to house the desires, unspoken wishes, and thoughts of those who find themselves being the odd ones out, with that resulting in resentfulness and bitterness, as it was for V.H., or cheesiness, depression, withdrawal. We are not a self-healers' circle, but we are aware of the stories that never come to light unless they give away a very big part of their essence. And we believe they deserve to be heard without changing a word in them.

For us, asking for funding would mean that we would have to give away part of our essence, so we prefer lingering on the edge of existence, than transforming ourselves into something we hate, and providing space for green, pink, or any other colour of washing. This means that we rely solely on the support of people who appreciate our work. We know they are not many, and we know that their resources are also limited. Instead of being melancholic about our situation, we like to think that difficulties is what taught us how to think smart, fast and resourcefully, and we are proud of those qualities.

The good news is that, as an institution, we can be fed with food, but we live from fiction: Do you have a story that you doubt if it is real or not? Perhaps one that is real and fictional at the same time? Do you feel like the definition of realness does not include you? Feel free to reach out, we are all ears and ready for new adventures!

Disclaimer: T.A.I. is an ideal institution. Ideals can only be fictional.

# APPENDIX

**A Short Interview with Liza**

T.A.I. managed to locate Liza in November 2023. After negotiating with her a lot, we managed to get an interview from her. Liza, apart from her occupation with pornography is also an artist. Those two fields of interest often blend with each other.

For safety reasons, her real identity will remain a secret.

T.A.I.: How did you first come in contact with V.H.?

Liza: This is a strange question...I believe he could have first approached me through some fake profile. We have only met online, in my chatroom, hosted by the website through which I am working as a cam girl. I do not remember exactly when, many people come and go. At the beginning it was from an email he had.. sometimes I had to ban him, because, you know, sometimes it is needed. This is why I believe he could be talking to me through fake profiles as well. Since he liked role-playing I believe he probably had approached me with other identities before introducing himself to me as V.H.. I was only seeing a chatroom, I do not really know.

T.A.I.: This is interesting, because by reading his letters, it looks like you have met in person.

Liza: No, never.

T.A.I.: What are the elements on those profiles that are similar to each other that make you believe that they all belonged to V.H.?

Liza: Mostly the way he was writing. There are some phrases and expressions that only he could use. So much out of time. Again, I cannot be entirely sure. I only see what other people write in those chatrooms, so this is my only way to recognize it.

T.A.I.: If the assumption with the fake profiles is correct, do you believe that this ambivalence that was created was intentional?

Liza: Very likely. He probably liked it a little bit.

T.A.I.: How did the written correspondence between you begin?

Liza: For me it was a way to earn some extra money. When I was receiving a letter or parcel and sending mine, that was something paid extra. It seemed like he liked that. At the beginning, I found it a bit strange, but in the end, it became part of the game.

T.A.I.: I assume he was not sending the letters to your real address.

Liza: Certainly not. The letters were arriving in a post office in my city but far away from my neighborhood.

T.A.I.: V.H. certainly had some sort of feelings for you, and we are wondering whether that was related in any way to his disappearance. In one of his letters, he indicates that although he expresses all this deep love, receiving and having only your pieces is enough for him, because in that way he can craft the rest of you as he likes, in the same way he does with his artifacts.

Liza: I was never very sure of this whole thing he was doing, I never knew or cared to know too much either. He was telling me some stories, I could not understand if it is a hobby, if it is real or fake.

T.A.I.: Did you know he was a well-known archaeologist?

Liza: He had told me so, but you know, in the internet, everyone says whatever they like. It would be very naive to believe all that is said online. All this thing with the letters, it is just a part of the job. Those objects are fetishes, they indicate an absence of something, that was their function. He had all these objects I had used or touched, but he didn't have my hands themselves.

T.A.I.: V.H. is analyzing a lot his photographs through studium and punctum, in their Barthesian sense. Barthes believes pornographic photography is bare studium, whereas erotic photography has punctum elements. Do you believe that cam shows are only studium, as pornographic shows? Do you believe punctum can be intentionally constructed by a sex worker as a way to make their content more interesting?

Liza: You intellectuals all speak very weirdly. What I have to say is that in live camera shows, the element of unpredictability is very apparent, practically or aesthetically. For example, the moment that surprise will show on my face, when I will be startled, when a small accident happens, or some sounds from outside disturb the show, the moment when something might fall, this kind of things, it is the elements that make the show interesting.

T.A.I.: Do you think it has to do with the fact they cannot be simulated?

Liza: partly yes, they do make the show more real.

T.A.I.: Do they work as a fetish as well?

Liza: I don't think it has to do with a fetish. It is about what happens in that very moment, its very ephemeral, momentary, it is beyond direction and curating. The object can become a fetish because you keep it.

T.A.I.: V.H. in his texts speaks a lot about the relationship between sex work and art. Did you know about those?

Liza: No. But you should know that our audience is usually a voyeuristic one. So probably his motivation to write those was of that kind. I do not know what he was writing in those texts, but I assume his fantasies about sex work could also be coming to play in that. This is the client's side, not ours. It is a bit unsettling that you are giving me all these details...

T.A.I.: Do you find any similarities between sex work and art and the way they are consumed?

Liza: I find many similarities in the ways they are produced. As I am an artist myself, I put so much of my inspiration and creative energy in both. There is a lot of creativity in sex work. Or the way it is consumed, this is more complex. I think the positive thing with sex work is that it cannot store value. Someone cannot invest in sex work to produce goodwill.

T.A.I.: They can invest in a persona though.

Liza: Yes, but still there is no provenance. There is only a plane of phantasies that people invest in, but there is no market that is networking to increase your value in order to increase the investment, as it happens with art. The similarity I find in both is that they are useless, art and sex work. The difference is that sex is for everyone, art is only for those who understand it. In many cases, for me sex work has been to me more interesting than art. also, sex work is much closer to performing arts than visual arts. I am in a bit of an awkward situation regarding visual, and fine arts specifically.

T.A.I.: You speak though, from the place of the artist as well.

Liza: I don't know. Please do not push me with that.

T.A.I.: Do you believe that sex work is a vocation that could be compared with that of the caretaker? Weather this is a nurse, a teacher, a nanny, etc.?

Liza: No, certainly not. Sex work offers amusement, entertainment. It is not therapy. It might have healing qualities for many people, in the same way that theater, art, games can have, or all those things we do to entertain ourselves, but it is not a care-taking practice. We are not nurses or psychologists.

T.A.I.: Still, I believe there is a reason for the existence of so many sexual phantasies and cliches including nurses or other female figures who are caretakers.

Liza: Of course! And there are elements of care and healing in our job, but it is not therapeutic per se.

T.A.I.: You mean that it does not provide healing in the ways a doctor does?

Liza: Nor a doctor nor a psychotherapist. Depending on the kind of sex work, of course, between there are many branches. It is different to be a cam girl, different to be an escort, different to be a dom. I have many times felt in my job the joy of being able to help someone work on their trauma or their desires, but in an entertaining, amusing, erotic way, sometimes painful, but certainly not in a way that a nurse would do it.

T.A.I.: Before you said that sex work can have some similarities with theater or with other performative arts. Do you believe that art can also have some healing qualities, as sex work does?

Liza: I believe that good works of art can do it. I don't see them often though, most of the artworks around me, and not visual art, they mostly look like they are trying to convince you or

impose themselves or works that are trying to legitimize an intellectual status or a so much sought-after “insight”. You understand what I am talking about, right?

T.A.I.: Yes I do, but let us assume a context of ideal art and ideal sex work. Do you find similarities in healing aspects there?

Liza: Yes. In that ideal context yes, I believe art can make our life more beautiful, take it out of this continuous obsession of utilitarianism, productivity, and practical results.

T.A.I.: However, the ways in which you said sex work can be healing can be associated with a possible processing of trauma or desire. Specifically on that, do you believe that art can do the same? Because this is something that in the way I understand it, it has a practical result. Not in the same way that making AI software does, but still, it has some practical qualities.

Liza: I do not believe it is considered practical enough. Something can lead afterwards to something practical though. For example, by materializing a fetish, you can become more productive. But the goal of materializing a fetish is not productivity.

T.A.I.: I meant that it answers practically to a very specific need.

Liza: I do not think this need is practical though. I think it is the opposite of practical. Spending all your money, time, energy just for sexual satisfaction is not very practical.

T.A.I.: You believe it is only about sexual satisfaction? That this is the reason clients repeatedly come to a sex worker?

Liza: Many reasons, and one of them is sexual satisfaction. Which has many meanings, it is not a sole bodily sexual satisfaction, only related to biology and cut off the rest of life. But I wanted to say something else and you interrupted me.

T.A.I.: I am sorry.

Liza: You had asked me about art...I lost it, keep going and I will find it back.

T.A.I.: I asked you if art can also be a way for someone to process their trauma or desire.

Liza: It can work to process life in general. And that can be nice when art is taking into account life’s conditions.

T.A.I.: There is a slight degrading in the way you talk about art, compared to sex work.

Liza: Yes, I feel a little bit like it lately.

T.A.I.: We share those feelings...I think an inherent element in sex work, especially through the camera, of course there are those elements of luck, but there is also an element of simulation at play. Because the client is living it all through a screen, and therefore fulfilling their desires with a mere image. Do you find this relationship with simulation in art as well?

Liza: This is a difficult question. I would rather speak more about sex work and simulation.

T.A.I.: Go ahead.

Liza: What I have understood from the internet and simulation techniques, is that in the end, a whole universe, like Disneyland, is fabricated, for people to be there alone with their mind and body. People are looking for that. They like it as a condition to masturbate. It is a very safe way to investigate one's eroticism and sexuality. It is also necessary for most people to be left alone with their bodies. And this is something truly beautiful. Sometimes our condition might slip into a deep well of madness, but I don't know, I think in the same way that the madness of the internet exists today, as something that moves without being very much defined anywhere, I think this says more about us, humans, than the internet itself.

T.A.I.: How was your last communication with V.H.?

Liza: I don't know when he disappeared. He just sent me a farewell message. Most of the clients who sent such messages re-appear , so I did not pay much attention.

T.A.I.: Have you looked for him?

Liza: I have wondered where he might be, but no, I have not actively looked for him. How can I know why this person decided to disappear and what he is doing? Maybe he got married, maybe he has a family now, maybe he wanted to do a detox from the internet.

T.A.I.: Do you believe that his relationship with internet was unhealthy?

Liza: I don't know, but he could be considering it as unhealthy. Many times, after people have found what they were looking for, they decide to stop. Some others enjoy it as a fetish in a more long-term way. I cannot know what is happening in each of my clients' lives.

T.A.I.: Well, V.H. sounds like a rather lonely person though, who had built his whole life as a simulation. Part of it was his relationship with you, which for him, seemed like it had a strange kind of importance. Part of it was his science of archaeology which he made a simulation out of.

Liza: Yes. Some things are very real though. When you have a client with whom you have everyday contact, he pays you very well and he is there in many moments, it is the same relationship as with regular customers in any job. Through everyday contact, a relationship is established. We spent around 8-10 hours per day, for some periods, every day, with V.H.. This certainly builds some familiarity, it is human, even though it is through the screen. There is always the person on the other side. For us working through the internet, the people on the other end of the line become very real. Within the condition of virtuality, but real.

T.A.I.: Had he ever sent you any of his "findings"? Do you have any of them?

Liza: That I will not answer.

T.A.I.: He was also keeping correspondence with a second person, M, who looks like a mediator in antiquity dealing.

Liza: No, I do not know. Are you investigating a crime? Because I feel like I am a witness in a trial or a suspect. Is CIA listening to me or what?

T.A.I.: No, I do not believe CIA is interested in the case. Our moral beliefs do not consider what V.H. did a crime. We are investigating it because we find it interesting.

Liza: Ok.

T.A.I.: Do you have anything to add?

Liza: No.

T.A.I.: Well then, good luck with your creative plans.

Liza: Thank you. Have a nice day.

T.A.I.: You too.

**A letter from V.H.**

Dear reader,

As for now, you should be wondering about the nature of my existence. How come a famous archaeologist like me is only known by his initials? And is it possible that such a big fraud has not reached your ears before? Those are logical questions. I believe that after all this time, it is the right moment for me to break my silence.

I am an alter-ego of the writer of this text, who is a singular person and not a curatorial team of an institution. My other self is an artist, and she made me up as an art project. She is well aware of the meanings of the word art and its relations with artfulness and artillery, and she has used that all very well. But what did she make out of this deception? She made up a fraud about an archaeologist who makes a fraud. Those homocentric circles are forming an eternal spiral, where a lie is presented as a truth to hide another lie, and this series of deceptions goes on to eternity. I am a double. She speaks through my teeth. But why are my teeth more useful than hers in speaking?

First, my inexistence is very helpful when critique is performed. None is going to judge her as sarcastic, pessimistic, or elitist. Everyone will frown with condescension at the middle-aged archaeologist who writes philosophical essays in his letters, that always remained unanswered. But she will never have to risk her own thoughts being passed by as unimportant. Secondly, as a well-established archaeologist, the fraud I fabricated had an effect. My place of authority was a very important factor which made it believable. She is not in that place, so any similar attempt by her side would not be that fortunate. What is important to remember is that my thoughts are her thoughts. My bitterness is her bitterness. And all my disappointment towards my profession is her disappointment towards her own. If she expressed this disappointment straightforwardly through art, she would be captivated by an oxymoron schema: she would be creating art to show how fraudulent art can be. She would find herself inside the moebius stripe. Now, she believes that she is somehow outside of it, or at least more than she would be if she declared that what she is doing is institutional critique or artivism. On the other hand, probably the only way to really ensure that you are outside the stripe is to do what I did: Disappear.

She is disappointed with art because it is not real, and it has no relationship with life whatsoever. In fact, the harder art tries to become part of life, to enclose life or to be contained in life, the more it fails. She does not consider herself different than anyone else and she thinks she has failed to find a way to escape simulation in art. And, as she found it is not possible to create art without simulating, she was left with only two choices: to stop producing art, or to keep simulating. As she cannot deny the joy of creation that practicing art is giving her, which is priceless, she decided to keep simulating. Trying though to laugh at this simulation, she tried to take it to the greatest extent she could, by inventing doubles after doubles, in a way that a permanent state of ambivalence would be created when one can never be entirely sure if something is real or not, literal or metaphorical. Perhaps, the answer to that would be that

everything is lyrical. In her life, were she tries to simulate as little as she can. She is not very sure if escaping simulation in life is within her reach.

I am what people call a “fictional character”, but I see them getting convinced by my story way too fast and doubt it way too late. Even when they are in doubt, they enjoy the ambivalence, and they wish a little bit that I existed. Thank you for reading my story to its end, and, if, up to now, you still believed I might be real, I hope this end is not leaving you too disappointed. Please, remember this as a fairytale.

In greek, the word fairytale (*paramythi/παραμύθι*) is a derivative of the word *paramythia/παραμυθία* , which means consolation. I hope I managed to console you, and that through this fictional story you might find the inspiration needed to make your reality more truthful, without disappearing.

Sincerely,[37]

V.H.

T.A.I.

Athina Georgia Koumela

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