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Poetics of the Visual Arts (XIX – XX centuries)

ABSTRACT

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The dissertation consists of an Introduction, three chapters, a Conclusion, Contributions, a Bibliography, and an Appendix. The total length of the dissertation is 180 pages, including 160 pages of main text. The bibliography comprises 135 references: 63 in Cyrillic, 51 in Latin-script languages, and 21 online sources.

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II. General Characteristics of the Dissertation

Relevance of the Research Topic and Research Problem

This dissertation examines the poetics of the visual arts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through the transformations of the concept of mimesis and its role in the formation of the artistic image. It argues that, beyond its classical understanding as imitation, mimesis functions as a dynamic and processual principle of artistic formation.

The relevance of the topic stems from the need to reconsider the traditional conception of mimesis in the context of modern and contemporary visual art. The emergence of abstraction, conceptual art, video art, and bioart has challenged classical models of representation and called for new theoretical approaches to understanding the artistic image. Within this context, the dissertation offers an interpretation of mimesis as a process of artistic formation through which the image emerges in the interaction between perception, imagination, materiality and artistic action.

Among the concepts that shape the poetics of the visual arts, mimesis occupies a central position. Historically, it has been understood primarily as imitation, which has led many theorists to assume that its relevance diminishes with the development of modern and contemporary art. Yet the evolution of the visual arts demonstrates that the image increasingly ceases to function as a copy of reality and instead becomes a process of generating new relationships between the human subject, matter, and the world.

This raises a fundamental question: has mimesis truly been superseded by modern art, or has it undergone a transformation that reveals deeper and more archaic dimensions of the concept? Addressing this question constitutes the central concern of the dissertation. The study demonstrates that modernism and contemporary artistic practices reactivate the transformative model of mimesis, whose continuity can be traced from Antiquity to contemporary interdisciplinary art.

State of Research. The concept of mimesis has a long philosophical and aesthetic tradition, extending from Antiquity to contemporary theories of art. The classical formulations of Plato and Aristotle established the foundations for understanding the relationship between image and reality, while twentieth-century philosophy substantially reinterpreted the concept.

Despite the extensive body of scholarship, the relationship between poesis, mimesis, visual thinking, and the processual formation of the image has not been examined systematically. In particular, mimesis has rarely been analysed as a dynamic formative principle applicable both to modern art and to contemporary interdisciplinary practices such as bioart. Building upon Eva Keuls' interpretation of pre-Platonic mimesis as fundamentally kinetic, the present dissertation develops the concept of dynamic mimesis, which serves as a theoretical model for explaining both the historical continuity and the transformations of the mimetic within the visual arts.

Rationale for the Choice of the Research Topic. The choice of the topic is motivated by the need to reconsider the poetics of visual art since modernism through a reinterpretation of mimesis beyond imitation, as a dynamic principle of artistic formation.

The topic arises both a theoretical interest in the philosophy of the image and sustained reflection on artistic practice, which suggests that representation is often only the starting point of a creative process in which the image acquires its own internal dynamics. This perspective is developed through the ideas of Paul Valéry, Gaston Bachelard, Jean-Paul Sartre, Eva Keuls, and contemporary bioart practices. **The object** of the dissertation is visual art from modernism to contemporary artistic practices, examined through the transformations of mimesis and the poetics of the image. **The subject** of the research is the poetics of the visual arts, with particular emphasis on their development during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, interpreted through the concept of dynamic mimesis as both a poetic and a cognitive principle, according to which the artistic image functions as a process of meaning formation.

Aim and Objectives of the Study. The aim of the dissertation is to trace the transformations of the poetics of the visual arts from Antiquity to the present, with particular emphasis on nineteenth- and twentieth-century modernism, in order to demonstrate that mimesis extends beyond imitation and functions as a transformative principle of artistic formation. On this basis, the dissertation introduces the concept of dynamic mimesis as a theoretical model for analysing the transformations of the artistic image in modernism, postmodernism, and contemporary visual art.

The study argues that modernism constitutes a decisive turning point in the historical development of mimesis, reactivating earlier meanings associated with movement, embodiment, and transformation. These characteristics are further developed in contemporary interdisciplinary bioart practices, where the relationship to nature shifts from representation and contemplation toward participation in the processes of life, emergence, and image formation.

The research sets the following tasks:

1. To trace the historical development of the poetics of the visual arts through the concept of mimesis and its principal philosophical and aesthetic interpretations from Antiquity to the present.
2. To analyse the relationship between poesis, mimesis, imagination, and the artistic image within the poetics of the visual arts.
3. To examine the transformations of the mimetic in nineteenth- and twentieth-century modern art and to substantiate the concept of dynamic mimesis as a theoretical model for their interpretation.
4. To investigate contemporary bioart and interdisciplinary artistic practices situated at the intersection of art, science, and technology, in which the mimetic operates as a process rather than as imitation.

5. To evaluate the applicability of the proposed theoretical model through the analysis of selected artistic practices.

Research Methodology. The dissertation combines philosophical analysis with insights derived from artistic practice. The research employs historical-philosophical, comparative, and interpretative methods in analysing the concepts of poesis, mimesis, imagination, the artistic image, and visual thinking.

The methodological framework draws upon both classical and contemporary philosophical theories of mimesis and the image, including the works of Plato, Aristotle, Paul Valéry, Jean-Paul Sartre, Gaston Bachelard, Paul Ricoeur, Walter Benjamin, and others. The study also includes interdisciplinary models from biology, neuroscience and systems theory. The concepts of autopoiesis and conceptual cells are employed as heuristic models and conceptual analogies for analysing processes of artistic formation. The approach is interdisciplinary, retains while maintaining its primary focus on the philosophical interpretation of the artistic image. The proposed theoretical framework is tested through analyses of works of modern, contemporary, and bioart practices, including a case study of Iglia Hristova's concept of "living drawing". **The central research thesis** of the dissertation is that the poetics of the visual arts preserves mimesis as a fundamental category. Rather than disappearing in modern and contemporary art, mimesis undergoes a historical transformation through which its function expands beyond imitation, revealing its formative and transformative capacities. These characteristics correspond to the pre-Platonic understanding of mimesis as movement, embodiment, and participation. On this basis, the dissertation introduces the concept of dynamic mimesis as a theoretical model whose historical continuity can be traced from Antiquity to contemporary interdisciplinary art.

The dissertation is situated within the fields of aesthetics, philosophy of art, and visual arts theory while incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives from cultural studies, biology, neuroscience, and systems theory. The selected philosophers, artists, and artistic practices have been chosen for their contribution to the development of the central argument rather than for the sake of historical completeness.

Limitations of the study. The dissertation does not seek to present an exhaustive history of the concept of mimesis. The analysis focuses on those historical and theoretical transformations of mimesis that are relevant to the poetics of the visual arts and to the understanding of mimesis as a developing concept within the poetics of visual art. The interdisciplinary nature of the study implies the use of concepts such as autopoiesis, conceptual cells, and biological matter, which serve exclusively as conceptual analogies and heuristic tools, and not as a basis for biological or neuroscientific research. The selection of authors and artistic practices is likewise not intended to be exhaustive but is guided by the requirements of the central research argument.

The selection of authors and artistic practices is likewise not intended to be exhaustive but is guided by the requirements of the central research argument.

Structure of the Dissertation. The dissertation comprises 179 pages, including 160 pages of main text, as well as a bibliography and an appendix. It consists of an Introduction, three chapters, a Conclusion, a Bibliography, and an Appendix.

III. SUMMARY OF THE DISSERTATION

Overview of the Dissertation. The dissertation is organized into three chapters that progressively develop, substantiate, and verify the central research thesis. The first chapter has a theoretical and historical orientation and traces the development of the concept of mimesis from Antiquity to modernity, arguing for its interpretation as a dynamic and processual principle. The second chapter examines the transformations of the image in modern art and demonstrates that mimesis does not disappear but rather changes its mode of operation. The third chapter explores contemporary interdisciplinary artistic practices, particularly bioart, in order to test the applicability of the proposed concept of dynamic mimesis.

The first chapter (*I. Poetics and Mimesis: From Antiquity to Modern Visibility*) establishes the theoretical foundations of the dissertation by tracing the development of the concept of mimesis from Antiquity to modernity. Particular attention is given to the work of Eva Keuls, who argues that in its pre-Platonic context mimesis referred to dance, movement and embodied action rather than imitation in its later representational sense. This interpretation is compared with Plato's conception of mimesis as reflection and Aristotle's understanding of the mimetic as a process of formation.

The third section of the chapter (*I.3. The Road to Modernism: Transformations of Artistic Language*) examines the emergence of realism as both an artistic and theoretical paradigm, in which the aspiration to observe reality is combined with an increasing interest in movement, change and the instability of the visible world. Within this context, photography is discussed as a decisive moment in the history of visual representation. Through examples from the work of Julia Margaret Cameron, Bill Brandt and Nan Goldin, the dissertation analyzes the tendency toward the deliberate softening or blurring of the photographic image, moving away from the ideal of objective representation and opening possibilities for subjectivity, interpretation and the transformation of the visible.

A central role is assigned to the philosophy of Henri Bergson, whose understanding of the image as a process unfolding in the flow of time makes it possible to conceive mimesis not as static resemblance but as a dynamic principle connected with movement, perception, and the artistic formation.

The chapter concludes by demonstrating that mimesis should be understood as an evolving concept, thereby establishing the theoretical foundation for the subsequent analysis of modern and contemporary visual art.

The second chapter (*II. Visual Arts (Painting, Photography, Cinema): Ontology, Phenomenology, Boundaries and Interpretation*) examines the transformations of the visual image in modern art and traces the transition from the representational model to an

understanding of the image as a process of perception, imagination, and formation. It follows the development of the visual image from painting through photography to cinema, demonstrating how movement, temporality, and process gradually become defining characteristics of the artistic image.

The chapter begins with the work of Paul Cézanne, in whose painting the act of seeing becomes an active process of constructing form (*II.1. Modernism and the Phenomenology of Vision*). The discussion then turns to the emergence of abstract art through the ideas of Wassily Kandinsky and the relationship between painting, music, and inner necessity (*II.2. Symbolism: From Poetic Vision to the Thought of the Image*). The chapter also examines the ideas of Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Valéry, whose writings contributed to the emancipation of artistic form from direct reference to external reality.

Particular attention is devoted to drawing as a mode of visual thinking and to the conceptual turn introduced by Marcel Duchamp (*II.3. Poetics and the Conceptual Revolution: The Relationship between Image and Word*). Through the readymade, the artistic gesture shifts from resemblance to selection and signification, fundamentally transforming the traditional understanding of mimesis.

The concluding part of the chapter (*II.4. Dynamics of Consciousness*) analyses new media and video art through the work of Nam June Paik, alongside the abstract painting of Mark Rothko and Georges Mathieu. These examples demonstrate that in modern and postmodern art mimesis is not abandoned but reconfigured as a process of internal organisation, gesture, experience, and temporality.

The final section (*II.5. The Mimetic in an Expanded Field: The Image Beyond the Visible*) explores the role of imagination through the philosophies of Jean-Paul Sartre and Gaston Bachelard, focusing on Sartre's concept of the analogon as a mediator between perception, imagination, and the image. Whereas Sartre conceives the image as a structure of consciousness, Bachelard emphasises the active role of matter within the imagination. Imagination thus emerges as a process generated through the interaction of perception, memory, materiality, and the image. The chapter argues that the mimetic functions as a means of establishing relations between consciousness and external reality without being confined to visual resemblance. The final subsection (*II.5.1. Imaginary, Imagination, and Plasticity (Sartre, Bachelard, Rothko)*) relates Sartre's concept of the analogon to Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs*, demonstrating how the artistic image can simultaneously operate as object, representation, and concept. This analysis extends the notion of the mimetic beyond visual resemblance and redefines it as a process of meaning formation situated between materiality, perception, and language.

The second chapter occupies a pivotal place in the overall argument of the dissertation. It demonstrates that the rejection of classical representation does not entail the disappearance of mimesis but rather the transformation of its functions. On this basis, the dissertation formulates the concept of dynamic mimesis, which serves as the theoretical bridge to the third

chapter, where its applicability is examined through bioart and contemporary interdisciplinary artistic practices.

Chapter Three (*III. Metaphysics of the Image: From Mimesis to Bioart and Scientific Visualizations*)

The third chapter examines the development of dynamic mimesis in contemporary interdisciplinary artistic practices, with particular emphasis on bioart and the interaction between art, science, and living matter. Building upon Gaston Bachelard's concept of the material imagination, the image is understood as the outcome of the interaction between matter, imagination, and processes of image formation.

The chapter first discusses Rosalind Krauss's theory of the expanded field (*III.1. The Expanded Field and New Regimes of Realism (Krauss): Between Modernism and Postmodernism*), which provides the theoretical framework for understanding how modernist and postmodernist practices transcend the traditional boundaries of artistic media and broaden the possibilities of the mimetic.

To extend this framework, the concepts of analogon, autopoiesis, and conceptual cells are introduced as interpretative models for exploring the relationships between perception, imagination, memory, and the artistic image. These concepts make it possible to conceive of the image as a processual structure emerging through the interaction of consciousness, materiality, and visual experience.

Drawing is then examined (*III.3. Drawing as Pleasure and the Opening of Form: The Contemporary Gesture as a Translation of Realism*) as a cognitive and exploratory practice through which the artistic gesture becomes a means of observation, discovery, and transformation. Drawing is interpreted through Paul Valéry's understanding of it as a synthesis of vision, thought, and bodily action, as well as through contemporary interdisciplinary practices in which technological mediation expands the possibilities of artistic perception, allowing drawing to be understood as an expanded field of perception and knowledge that remains connected to reality while continuously transforming it.

Particular attention is devoted to bioart, where living matter becomes an active agent in artistic creation. Here, mimesis is understood as a process of participation in the emergence, transformation, and generation of forms rather than as the imitation of existing reality.

The final section (*III.3.3. Between the Visible and the Invisible: "Living Drawing" as Artistic Research*) analyses the artistic practice of Iglia Hristova and the concept of living drawing as a case study for testing the proposed model of dynamic mimesis. The analysis demonstrates that contemporary drawing can function as a processual field in which artistic intention and living matter jointly participate in the formation of the image.

The chapter concludes that contemporary interdisciplinary practices reveal mimesis as a generative principle through which the artistic image emerges from the interaction of life, matter, imagination, and artistic action. Rather than disappearing, the mimetic retains its formative function by connecting biological processes with artistic creation. In this way, the

applicability of the proposed concept of dynamic mimesis to the poetics of contemporary visual art is confirmed.

The analysis of Iglia Hristova's work is further supported by an original interview with the artist, which clarifies the concept of living drawing and the role of biological matter in artistic form generation. The interview demonstrates that living drawing is not merely a metaphor but an actual artistic process in which the image emerges through interaction with living matter. Consequently, artistic practice shifts from the imitation of nature toward participation in natural processes, thereby confirming the applicability of the proposed model of dynamic mimesis.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Main Findings

The first chapter demonstrates that in its pre-Platonic context, mimesis does not denote imitation in the narrow sense of copying, but action, movement, embodiment and participation. The analysis reveals that the Platonic understanding of mimesis as reflection represents a historical stage in the development of the concept, and not its only meaning.

The second chapter demonstrates that modern art does not abolish mimesis, but transforms the way it functions. In the works of the analyzed authors, the mimetic moves from external similarity to the processes of perception, imagination, gesture, time and image formation.

The third chapter demonstrates that contemporary interdisciplinary practices and bioart extend this transformation, with the artistic image emerging through the interaction between imagination, materiality and living processes. Mimesis functions as participation in processes of form generation, not as imitation of pre-existing forms.

The historical reconstruction of mimesis from antiquity through modernism to contemporary interdisciplinary practices reveals that it does not disappear with the crisis of representation, but is established as a dynamic principle of formation and transformation, structuring the poetics of the visual arts through the processes of perception, imagination and form generation. On this basis, the dissertation formulates the concept of dynamic mimesis.

The applicability of the model is verified through a specific analysis of the “living drawing” in the work of Iglia Hristova. The case study confirms that the artistic image can arise as a result of the interaction between artistic intention, materiality and a living process, thereby supporting the applicability of dynamic mimesis to contemporary interdisciplinary artistic practices.

The dissertation therefore argues that the poetics of contemporary visual art can be understood as a processual system of artistic formation, in which dynamic mimesis functions as a principle mediating the interaction between perception, imagination, materiality, and artistic practice.

Contributions

1. Develops the concept of dynamic mimesis as an interpretative model for the study of the poetics of the visual arts. The study demonstrates that the mimetic functions as a dynamic principle of artistic formation and transformation, and traces the reactivation of the pre-Platonic understanding of mimesis—associated with movement, action, and process—in modern and contemporary visual art.

2. Demonstrates that modern and contemporary art does not abolish mimesis but transforms its relationship with poesis, whereby the artistic image participates in processes of formation and transformation rather than mere representation. The interaction between mimesis and poesis is thus understood as a dynamic relationship between art and life.

3. Proposes an interpretative model of the artistic image is proposed, integrating Sartre's concept of the *analogon*, Bachelard's *material imagination*, the concept of *autopoiesis*, and Quiroga's *conceptual cells*. Within this framework, the image is understood as emerging through the interaction of perception, imagination, materiality, and memory.

4. Develops an interdisciplinary framework for the interpretation of bioart and hybrid artistic practices, demonstrating the applicability of dynamic mimesis as an analytical model for understanding processes of emergence, transformation, and artistic form generation in contemporary visual art.

5. Verifies the applicability of the proposed concept of dynamic mimesis through a case study of Iglia Hristova's concept of *living drawing*. The analysis demonstrates that the pre-Platonic understanding of mimesis as embodied action and movement is reactivated in contemporary drawing as a process of artistic formation.

V. PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION

- Hicheva, J. (2024). *The Sublime as a Phenomenon of the Visual Arts in European Modernism (19th–20th Centuries)*. *Problems of Art*, No. 2, pp. 33-41. ISSN 0032-9371: <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1246599>
- Hicheva, J. (2026). *Art between Techne and Aura*. *Philosophical Alternatives*, No. 3, pp. 130-137. ISSN 0861-7899: <https://philarchive.org/archive/AWENWT>
- Hicheva, J. (2026). *Contemporary Drawing between the Visible and the Invisible: Interdisciplinary Approaches Beyond Postmodernism*. *Philosophical Alternatives*, No. 2, pp. 89-96. ISSN 0861-7899: <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1421075>
- Hicheva, J. (2026). *Imagination and Aesthetic Freedom in the Value of the Image*. *Nota Bene*, No. 71, c. 58-67 ISSN 1313-7859: <https://notabene-bg.org/read.php?id=1795>