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(Re)construction, (Re)evaluation, or (Re)interpretation of the Past: What Happens When the Past Meets with the Present?¹

Abstract

The image of the ancient past represents just a fragment. When we stand in front of such an image, we are standing in front of time. This text reflects the possibilities of aesthetic evaluation of ancient artifacts with the emphasis on the contextual perception of received phenomena. The defining concept of context is based on Jan Mukařovský's approach. The aim of the paper is also to present aesthetic interpretation as a regular method of verifying prehistoric artifacts.

Keywords

Context, Archaeo-Context, Evaluation of the Past, Aesthetic Interpretation, Possible Worlds

Archaeology is a science that examines the oldest or most fragmented and “shattered” past of humankind. What is less well-known is that archaeologists also study the recent past. It can complete some already known facts. Furthermore, it can be (as Foucault illustrated) understood as a methodology of theoretical thinking, or research. Bearing all this in mind, this paper is more interested in deep history to which we only have access to some blurry and crumbled picture of our past. I would also like to use some of the inter-

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nal mechanisms of archaeology, not just the science itself, in showing some possible approaches toward the past and past objects that are almost exclusively categorized as examples of the oldest art. There is also the possibility to interconnect the past with the present and to evaluate already existing relations between them and explore some new connections. A great example is, as I will illustrate, the exhibition *Ice Art Age: The Arrival of the Modern Mind* (hereinafter IAA exhibition) which was organized in 2013 by The British Museum in London, where it was an exhibition of a productive and contemporary reinterpretation of prehistoric art from the perspective of artistic modernism. Let us start, however, at the beginning, with an aesthetic examination of the oldest past, which is challenging since past facts are alien to us.

The main requirements for exploring and aesthetically identifying, or categorizing, past phenomena, objects, and content that are preserved only in a fragmentary form are: (1) an acceptance of the communicative (and receptive) relationship between the past and the present, and; (2) a willingness to admit that past facts are legible and also beneficial in their fragmentary and partial form, which in the end; (3) can provide us with sufficient indications to outline the image of our past or the aesthetic form of our ancestors. However, the situation is much more complicated. A contemporary recipient, theoretician, critic, or researcher is influenced by phenomena that come from their cultural tradition,² education, and social situation, so if they identify past facts they naturally look at situations through their view. At opposite ends, there is the past and the present and also the person of the past and the person of the present, who are not identical. Whitney Davis (2017) pointed out brilliantly in this respect the empirical difference that we somehow miss. He was convinced that if an image resembled something, it might not automatically depict it. Nelson Goodman (1968, 5) supports Davis' belief by saying: "The plain fact is that a picture, to represent an object, must be a symbol for it, stand for it, refer to it; and that no degree of resemblance is sufficient to establish the requisite relationship of reference. Nor is resemblance necessary for reference; almost anything may stand for anything else." They both denounce the system of representation, but not the principle on its own, but our ability to identify the correct (or original) meaning of some image, or depiction.

² Kateřyna Dytrtová (2018) leans towards this differentiation and often argues that we cannot mix up both standpoints. She also emphasizes that there is always some We and They in the process of evaluation and that it's often just the choice of the objectifying or subjectivizing viewpoint (Dytrtová 2019).

Contrary to this, the identification of the shape (Gestalt) of any visual form is an established way of archaeological evaluation (even the IAA exhibition was installed in this manner), including assessing the site, dating found artifacts, identifying formal features and lines of the artifact and then looking within the culturally determined schemes for similarities between the found fragment and existing ideas, symbols, or artistic productions. As part of the work of an archaeologist and the effort to incorporate the discovered artifacts into a culture, or possibly to identify the place of production, it is a regular, and even necessary step, but Davis, supported by Goodman, urges theorists to exercise caution, skepticism, and (to some extent even deconstruction) careful verification, where we do not integrate things into a certain framework but identify them in their own structure.

The aim of the submitted analysis is not to deconstruct historical knowledge and to question any possibility of exploring past phenomena, although the consequences of the Derridean approach are still present. The real intention of the paper is to explore the mechanisms, possibilities, and concepts that will make possible to overcome the paradox of time and distance and allow us (no matter how positivistic it sounds) to approach more objectively prehistoric (or otherwise ancient) facts that may be aesthetically interesting, and maybe in some sense also contemporary. I will try to illustrate that in the reception and examination of the past, we are always creating/reconstructing only a possible version of everything that we are interfering with. It is possible only by coming to terms with the paradox of time, when nobody can truly meet with the mind, or ideas of prehistoric people, but needs to initiate a communication with them. All this is possible thanks to the notion of context, and the fact that every identifiable element of the past can be also the holder of some information, which is the evidence (in the case of decoding) of cross-historical connections. Nevertheless, the main question might be: How can we approach the past?

An Image in/of the Time or Time in/of the Image

When we stand in front of an image, we stand in front of time which is, as George Didi-Huberman claimed (2006, 10, 19, 48), alive, variable, and appears and reappears, regroups, and soaks into the image: we stand in front of the arrow of time. An image can be understood as an element capturing a certain moment or event of the human past, but also as a sample and residue of a certain story (Panofsky 1981), or as a cluster of times and layering of narratives. An image, as a visual representation or a moment of

processed facts, is in true essence an elementary form of our perception, in which reality appears, and at the same time a form through which we communicate (See Baudrillard 2007; Virilio 2002) and through which we acquire reality (Cassirer 1944). Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004) for instance understands the image in a much more classical way, as something that has its own meaning even across one historical period and probably even across different cultural contexts. This notion of meaning which can be passed on in the form of (some) information from one culture to another, or from one time to another, is the foundation of subsequent examination when archaeology and its methodology is crucial also for the aesthetic approach.

In this broader sense, an image is not only a privilege of fine art or art in general, but rather a common and universal form, or even a way of existence, perception, and interaction. Besides, Didi-Huberman says that art history (but perhaps not only art, but culture too) “consists of images and not stories” (2006, 129); after all, stories are formed by a cluster of images. In essence, it is the basic (not the smallest) form that carries the most fundamental meanings and thus requires, or enforces, a combination with other images and facts.

In reaction to several authors (especially Aldhouse-Green 2004; Didi-Huberman 2006), there is a possibility to think of any cultural object, even a prehistoric/ancient artifact, as a somewhat limited image; a specific image of its time, but at the same time a self-referent and self-sufficient entity that can enter into aesthetic interaction with the recipient. The appeal of Walter Benjamin (according to Didi-Huberman 2006) to become *antiquarians and collectors* of our past and its documents is a motivation and a way that enables the conceptual extension of the notion of image and more accurate perception of various fragments and ‘small’ objects of our past, or their (axiologically) adequate inclusion in the scheme and structure of our knowledge. It is precisely the relicts of the primeval past, which we often evaluate only intuitively, respecting the schema of knowledge, which are suitable examples of isolated ‘images’ and their ‘fragments,’ which need to be recombined together and somehow interconnected. An image in terms of a human creation (or the framework of our perception of reality) could therefore also be understood as an object that we approach with aesthetic interest and which refers to something outside itself, outside its borders. At the semiotic/reference or the communication level, it is an image as a denotational mechanism that is dependent on the possibility of reference, even when it needed to be constantly questioned (Davis 2017). This determines an image and its ontic nature (Goodman 1968). ‘Ordinary’ and ‘every-

day' objects cannot compete with works of art or artifacts that were created to fulfill a referential function (denotation, symbolization, expression, exemplification), at least in the number and intensity of referential relations. The aim is not to make this comparison, but only to show its existence and importance. Exceptions may be again prehistoric (even ancient and generally old-time) artifacts that compensate for the absence of (preserved and decodable) meaning and reference layers by the 'number' of returns of different productions of time and their reintegration or discovery in other situations and realities in different contexts.

An image, by which we can imagine anything, represents a means (but also a source) of confronting and meeting two times. An image is essentially a breaking point in time: the time of the origin and the life (Aldhouse-Green 2004, xvi; Benjamin 2013) of a work of art/artifact (its ontological and existential nature) with a recipient who carries their cultural, social, and experienced time. Both times are two separate worlds that come together and collide in the process of interaction, which raises the question of adequate aesthetic evaluation or assessment of aesthetic interaction and possible reconstruction, interpretation, and contextualization of the past world.³ The IAA exhibition was a curious example of this breaking point. The curiosity lies in the fact that this confrontation of times was intentional, and at the same time, three different times were colliding during the exhibition: a) the original time of prehistoric art; b) the original time of modern paintings, and; c) the different times of the recipients. Visitors to the gallery were interacting and rather confused because they were trying to reach for all three times and were trying to connect each artwork based on the possible depiction, and manufactured relations. Jonathan Jones (2013) from *The Guardian* comments on the concept of the exhibition as follows: "I am looking at women with floppy breasts, massive hips, and eyeless faces. Their bodies are deeply alien—disturbing in their total lack of what the modern world sees as desirable. Nearby, the British Museum has installed two nudes by Matisse, in one of many attempts in this exhibition to draw parallels between the earliest art and that of our era. But this comparison just adds to the unease." In some sense, it was a functional proof of Davies' (1997) thoughts, which does not disqualify this kind of approach, but shows the flaws in the historical examination of prehistoric art from today's perspective, and requires some functional, and more structured, change in approach.

³ This also happens in different fields of analysis (Migašová, 2019b). For example, moral philosophy repeatedly tries to reconstruct, interpret, and contextualize the past to understand the present. Today cannot be adequately explained without the past (Kalajtzidis 2019).

From Context to Archaeo-Context and Back to the Past

When explaining, understanding, and aesthetically evaluating, these artifacts-images, it is necessary to find the form and type of referential relationship that links the past and the present and can work as a starting point at the same time. From a methodological point of view, the position of 21st-century humans researching the distant past is decisive. Although we can look into the past and try to simulate or reconstruct the 'original facts,' in the end, our interaction with the work and our evaluation of the circumstances of its reception will necessarily be transformative (and maybe also destructive) to past meanings. The ideal would, therefore, be the position of the *Archimedean point*, implicitly required by Erwin Panofsky (1981), in which the recipient is not influenced by any external effect and can (mentally) exist outside temporal realities, and therefore be objective. However, as Ján Bakoš (2000a, 310-311) correctly notes in the critique of Panofsky's approach: "He naively believes that it is possible to find principles by which to analyze and interpret the works of all periods and cultures, regardless of the opinion of the historian." It is an illusory point that works productively only in its ideal form, which is not practically possible, especially if it is a stable point and the theoretician and the recipient always 'shift' places.

Therefore, any evaluation (including aesthetic interpretation) of past works always necessarily takes place between two poles:

(1) *U p p e r b o r d e r*: it is based on an effort to interpret an object, phenomenon, item, activity, or idea based on the abilities, skills, and empirical, cultural, and social experience of the perceiving subject. The investigated phenomena are explained through our point of view.⁴

(2) *L o w e r b o r d e r*: represents the exact opposite pole, or the tendency to explore. It is an effort to express our thoughts adequately about the period under review and to examine how the object, item, or phenomenon could be presented to the society or community for which it was created and with the intentions of the ideas of which it was formed (Makky 2012, 399-400).

⁴ Jana Migašová (2019a) reminds us that the contemporary percipient's point of view is influenced by the modernist preference for the primitive, or so called primitivism, which is still actively present in the viewer's gaze, in spite of its post-colonial critique. This we can see more than elsewhere in the perception of the IAA exhibition, although in Migašová's conception, it's more just like a reminder of the change of perceptive abilities of the recipient over time.

This polarization of our approach and also some substitutability of each position was already to some extent revealed by Gadamer (1976, 97) “[...] a work of art, which comes out of a past or alien life-world and is transferred into our historically educated world, becomes a mere object of aesthetic-historical enjoyment and says nothing more of what it originally had to say.” What, then, does it tell us about the IAA exhibition? In both examples, the recipients were trying to shift from one pole (e.g. what was the prehistoric person thinking when they created these small sculptures and for what function) to another (e.g. how do I feel, or what do I think about these small pieces), and from one period (the late Palaeolithic) to another (Modernity), and didn’t gain any answer about the relationship of both periods. I cannot say this outcome is undesirable. On the other hand, this exhibition was a correct answer to creating and answering new questions and also a provocative way of showing some ‘cross-cultural’ or ‘intertemporal’ principles of art.

Eddy M. Zemach brings, in this regard, a strong theoretical position to the issue, insisting “[...] that no work of art cannot be understood beyond its context”⁵ (2010, 229). If an experience with artwork is an encounter with the world (Gadamer 2004), maybe, just some fragment of the world, there’s no other choice but to work with, or follow, the context. Context is an element that reveals the functionality, purposefulness, and overall place of any object in the physical, mental, and ideological reality and sets the pace of our interpretation. By revealing the place of every artistic production or aesthetic object within culture and society, we discover what made the phenomenon specific and what made it exceptional: if such a criterion and differentiation exists. Here, it shows the peculiarity and distinctiveness of artistic production, which would otherwise lose the ties that stabilize it in society and culture and would be a flexible reality that could be incorporated into ‘anything’ based on some intuition. Context can, therefore, also be understood as a filter correcting conclusions, understandings, and findings (Ricoeur 1993, 196), which is necessary both in the assessment and in the interpretation of the work of art.

Context is a stable and intrinsically invariable constant that helps to identify and evaluate a particular phase of the integral structure development present in the work (Fořt 2006). “It is a sequence of semantic units [...], a sequence which cannot be displaced without changing the whole, in which meaning gradually accumulates [...]. Only at the moment of termination of

⁵ According to Dyrťová (2018), context is the crucial frame of evaluating and interpreting artworks from any period.

the context does the entity and each of the individual parts of meanings acquire a definite relation to reality [...]” (Mukařovský 2007, 42). Regarding this understanding of context, any artifact of an unknown culture can be treated as a circumscribed part of cultural reality that is in some way firmly related to the overall and dynamically changing structure. On the one hand, each artifact has a fixed place that determines the context, on the other hand, it can be flexible and adapt to the nature of the general structure of which it is only a small part. The whole is dependent on each individual component and the relocation of this fact, this reality in the overall structure, may mean the transformation of the whole and its decontextualization. Inadequate integration or evaluation of an artifact that is part of the whole can thus lead to inadequate evaluation of the structure and thus a real misunderstanding of a particular culture or artistic activity.

An artifact is always part of a context that gives us an idea of how we can approach that artistic fact, but which we can only reveal by studying archaeological material, given that we do not have access to the original context in the true sense. We only know its fragments. Identifying the mutual links and relationships of the individual components of the structure (within the context) is crucial. Since it is a terminated sequence of meaning units, it is a construction of meaning “happening in time [...]” (Chvatík 1994, 63) and dependent on time. Context is by no means a separate thing. It is a summary of facts that are connected to each other and only after some time a coherent meaning is created. It becomes a determinant and generator of other meanings and relationships. The context is completed and therefore retrospectively identifiable for us only when the meaning of individual facts has stabilized at a given time and is not transformed anymore. In historical identification, we look for this stable moment and understand the found facts as decisive and determinative.

However, in archaeological practice and the evaluation of findings and relics, we do not reconstruct only the original context, which can clarify the original place and value (meaning) of the artifact-image, and thus the context of the time when the artifact originated. By creating an archaeological map, assigning artifacts to a cultural territory, comparing them with each other, and finding parallels between them, we build, step-by-step, the context of archaeological research or archaeological findings. It determines and at the same time verifies the new life of the artifact within which it is currently beginning to function, and this second context: the archaeo-context becomes structurally superior (because of better accessibility) to the original context, which, although undergoing reconstruction, remains only a par-

tial position. Prehistoric artifacts thus live a double life. They have: 1) their original meaning within a certain context, which we are still trying to discover and; 2) in different ways and at different levels they enter into contemporary culture, thus updating their existence and reincarnating to a new form (Makky 2017). The second life of prehistoric artifacts was clearly shown at the IAA exhibition, where every contextualized piece of information combined in creating some image of the prehistoric mind, which was confronted with the much more familiar mind of modern people. This connection resulted in the creation of a world where some elements of thought were possibly the same, or a visitor to the gallery could think so at least, therefore maybe the subtitle in the name of the exhibition: *A R R I V A L o f t h e m o d e r n m i n d*, but I would have preferred a question mark at the end.

Although the structure that we gradually discover in the learning of the original context is incomplete and intrinsically dependent on our capabilities and abilities to identify it, the context cannot be integral until the archaeological research is structured and hence the archaeo-context is fully known (or discovered) to us. Without this sequence, the original meanings and connections cannot be traced. The relationship between the archaeo-context and the (original) context is, thus, cyclically intertwined and revealed at the same time. In other words, we can say that there is a proportional relationship between context and archaeo-context, but it is not absolute, nor arbitrary, not even stable, but rather flexible and dynamic. However, what if the concept of archaeo-context, or context in the historical meaning, is not sufficient for the analysis of prehistoric art?

Tools of Aesthetic Reconstruction

A suitable strategy seems to be the application of the thoughts of Jan Mukařovský (1966), who worked with a specific triad: aesthetic function, norm, and value, which can be regarded as the tools of the aesthetic contextualization of past phenomena. For a thorough understanding of his approach, it is necessary to start talking about aesthetic function, which is an essential element of the definition of aesthetic reality. Already in 1936, Mukařovský first broke established aesthetic boundaries and wrote; “Any object and any action (whether natural or human) can become a bearer of an aesthetic function” (1966a, 18) which is “[...] the ‘evoker’ of what is called aesthetic pleasure” (Mukařovský 2008, 9). An aesthetic function always stands at the birth of aesthetic experience, at the beginning of aesthetic reception, and that is what arouses the recipient’s interest.

An aesthetic function can isolate, or rather separate, the object it carries (Sládek 2015) to make it exceptional. What makes aesthetic function and its identification—in other words, what determines its place in the perception of the recipient, one of the dominant elements of revealing the original context—is its relationship to other functions. The very place of aesthetic function among other functions is an indication of reading and revealing meaning but also the social and cultural context of any artifact and any culture. The dynamics and also intensity of a dialectical relationship of functions that signals every internal change in culture, every change in perception and evaluation of any artifact, as well as every change in an object's status, is a 'guaranteed' way of revealing connections and intracultural relationships that are key to determining the context.

Květoslav Chvatík (2001, 65) understands the function of a structural entity as a unifying relationship of partial processes. Aesthetic function unites the manifestations of prehistoric creativity into a culture with identity and specific outcomes, and one could say that in examining ancient manifestations and verifying the perspective of the chosen aesthetic methodology we look for these central 'binders,' which show this connection also on the semantic and aesthetic level. The power of the aesthetic function consists in the ability to attract and draw attention to itself, to awaken the attention of the recipient, but also to bring together aesthetic phenomena. The aesthetic function is a thin line, a fine binder that, from our perspective, identifies aesthetic phenomena across history, but also within a single cultural period. Examining prehistoric artifacts and aesthetic facts of long-lost and forgotten cultures must therefore imply the identification and observation of an aesthetic function, which determines the direction of our examination by its ability to interconnect and unify aesthetic aspects. Walking along the path defined by the aesthetic function, we can identify aesthetic facts on a case-by-case basis and see the connections between them. Therefore, the form of contextualization and the structuring of the past and past phenomena through aesthetic function must be the dominant form of identification of areas where aesthetic function prevailed in the past or the search for intensity and ways of executing aesthetic function.

Another instrument that helps to identify the context is aesthetic value: its recognition is usually one of the main steps of assessing, interpreting, and evaluating an aesthetically perceived object. It is mostly associated with artistic production, but artifacts of art are not the only type of objects aesthetically assessed. Aesthetic value cannot be understood as an objective property of an object, activity, or phenomenon and cannot be approached as

an uncritical and mechanical subject. It is not an arbitrator and a real feature of the object. As with function, this is also an aspect of the relationship between a human and the world (Chvatík 2001). "For structural aesthetics, the aesthetic value is not merely a set of formal 'procedures', nor any particular substance transcending people and their social being, but structural unity and the integrity of the non-aesthetic values and significance of the work. [...] The aesthetic value is qualitatively a new rearrangement of elements into a whole in the process of reception work [...]" (Chvatík 2001, 86).

Mukařovský's approach, representing the aesthetic norm as the third central constant of structuralist perception and exploration, in essence, leads to the paradoxical denial of normative aesthetics: the hidden violation of the norm is constantly present. Chvatík (2001) points out that by complete stabilization, the norm would transform into law and the development of art would cease. This is one of the reasons why Mukařovský himself speaks of the "seeming illusion of aesthetic norm" (2014, 28) and Peter Michalovič adds that aesthetic norm is "a typical example of the loosest regulatory power" (1997, 19). Mukařovský's definition of the aesthetic norm as a rule (only) seeking universal validity, which cannot be achieved. Therefore, it dynamically transforms itself and repeatedly creates new rules. This rule is for art a sufficient measure of obligation, which on the one hand directs it, but on the other hand, does not bind it in any way. It is even a so-called 'law' that satisfactorily explains the historical transformation of art and the alternation of individual styles with certain rules (valid for a while), but with reasonable freedom for rules to be abandoned when a sufficiently progressive work of art arrives from previous developments. The norm wants to be substituted, updated, or rather replaced by its transformed and innovative form.

The aesthetic norm is primarily a means of regulating and stabilizing the aesthetic effect of the object adhering to it (Michalovič, Zuska 2009). However, it does not determine the presence of aesthetic function. The aesthetic norm is dependent on the aesthetic function and at the same time, it is inherently dependent on aesthetic value. In art, value is the element that determines the form of the aesthetic norm. Outside of art, this relationship is the opposite. The aesthetic norm created by the original work is dynamic energy determining or prescribing aesthetic value.

How do we use these tools to contextualize prehistoric artifacts, and find a proper way of evaluation? In short, we use the aesthetic function to identify the area of aesthetic effect (again we tend to use our position, but in the end, we move between the upper and lower border of evaluation) and

look for stabilization. Then we look for the aesthetic value and the extent of its realization, which helps us to identify the hierarchy of aesthetic reality, and finally, by the reconstruction of the aesthetic norm, we reveal the desired forms of aesthetic objects and the taboos of each era. Of course, the process of contextualization needs broader material, illustrating the cultural picture, not just one area of aesthetic achievement.

The Thin Line of the Possible Interpretation of Past Images

Examination and reconstruction of the past aesthetic form is in essence a gradual decoding of the reality that the past offers us through artifacts. Based on the identification of certain (mostly formal) signs, their understanding, and subsequent evaluation, it is possible to gain some knowledge and arrive at some understanding. This process of acquirement is on the border of reconstruction, interpretation, examination, and re-evaluation. Although interpretation is the key and perhaps, in the final evaluation, the most important step in exploring old and thus foreign cultures. However, some doubts about interpretations in historical research is understandable. It may arise from the fact that if it is the starting point of research in a non-contextualized form, it is historically incorrect, individual, and subjective. However, the correct setting of interpretative processes can reveal many new connections and discoveries, especially if it follows the findings and follows the (acquired) intuition of the theorist. It is important, above all, that two foreign worlds (ours and theirs) meet one another somewhere and do not confront each other; confrontation and comparison can never give rise to mutual understanding, productive dialogue, or new knowledge, but only one-sided criticism and one-sided preference.

Interpretation is one of the basic processes of knowing the recipient reality offering mainly empirical findings, which we realize daily: it is directly an elementary method. Ján Bakoš (2000b) conditions the understanding of a work of art precisely by interpretation. He (2000b, 13-14) considers the interpretation of a particular artwork to be “the foundation stone (assumption) and the starting point of the entire architecture of historical image of art [...] it is also seen as the goal of research in it—the ultimate value of research: providing the inner content of the work of art to the layman, bringing it closer, and thus multiplying its impact”. The interpretation illuminates all the context and facts that are being examined and is therefore irreplaceable in clarifying the fragments of the past. We decode and resolve the mes-

sage intended for decoding: there is a need to know the code. Thus, we find ourselves in semiotics, which understands any communication and interaction (in its most basic form) as the transferring of information from one place to another. The reading of this information is possible only (at least partially) by successful decoding/translation of the transmitted information. H.-G. Gadamer (2004) explains the translation in the relation of understanding, and decomposing one medium into another medium, without losing or changing any meaning, and therefore as one conclusive explanation of interpretation, which is useful in the context of prehistoric art. In short, in the process of interpreting prehistoric artifacts (for example, a sculpture of a woman with line patterns), the perceived object is a medium of some information, and we are decoding or translating it, through another medium (words) into mutual understanding: understanding between prehistoric and modern humans. The change in medium (the original medium is foreign to us and is also to some extent destructed) usually results in misunderstanding and incomplete translation. The participant in this dialogue is paradoxically enough only as a recipient leading or rather initiating the dialogue with the object (and the cultural background behind it). By asking appropriate questions, the recipient penetrates the surface of the received object and, due to the dialogical nature of the interaction, receives the desired answers, for the reading of which knowledge of the code is necessary. The absence of a full code, to which the dialogue with prehistoric art and artifacts is sentenced, complicates this conversation and therefore cannot take place without context and archaeo-context.

The theory of possible worlds offers an interesting perspective on how to understand ascertained and anticipated facts. A possible world determines possible situations of our reality even if they may not always be exactly distinguishable from the reality in which we live. Alvin Plantinga understands possible worlds as states of things that: (1) do not violate the law of logic in the broader sense of the word, and (2) are maximum or complete (Pavel 2012). Every theoretical construct is, basically, only one version of the (possible) world we are trying to reconstruct. When we talk about it in this sense, every historian reconstructs only one alternative of the past, only one image that is not an image of the whole world and therefore reconstructs only one possible world. The curator of the IAA exhibition decided to reconstruct that version of the world, where the potential of modern art and the modern mind in the biological sense (as a genetically existing condition⁶) arrived in

⁶ Even if this subtitle of the exhibition and present conclusions are more of a metaphor, Colin Renfrew (2008) speaks in this sense about the paradox of intelligence, or the

Europe in the year 40 000 BCE, and in some way waited a long time for fulfillment. Any interpretation can thus reveal new contours of a possible past. The sum of these diverse findings then results in parallel and intersecting alternations. Until the situation of conflicting worlds occurs, all parallels are possible alternative and possible worlds within the analyzed discourse. Our research is, therefore, a review of structural functionality and at the same time creates possible worlds that are modular images of our past. To conclude on possible worlds, I would add that “[P]ossible worlds are based on a logic of ramification determining the range of possibilities that emerge from an actual state of affairs [...]” (Ronen 1994, 8).

Concluding Remarks

Even if the main principle in a successful aesthetic evaluation of prehistoric phenomena, artifacts, and cultures is to reduce expectations about possible findings and resign from absolute knowledge, this process of evaluation is not unnecessary. Although objective findings are an illusion, we should not give up and dissolve past aesthetic phenomena in the field of subjectivity or resign from the possibilities of research and settle for the receptive side of the evaluation of prehistoric objects (which also has its benefits but always, although not completely, tends to the upper borders of interpretation). In the receptive evaluation of prehistoric art, there is a tendency to analyze only the second life of artifacts, not the contextual facts; therefore, the recipient and contemporary mind of humans, is in the scope of the examination.

Also, as I tried to show, the meeting of two periods may not be seen as an insurmountable obstacle, but as an opportunity for a creative dialogue that can reveal new and unexpected circumstances at the same time. The IAA exhibition was a good example of a productive reinterpretation of prehistoric art from the perspective of the present time, where both sides (all three of them) of this communicative relation affect each other and created aesthetically interesting work. Although at the same time, we see an example of decontextualization, where it seems like only the receptive aspects are desired. It is almost as if the context was violated: the context of prehistoric art and also the context of modern art. To conclude, this ‘provocation’ created an open laboratory of contextualized and decontextualized perceptions of art and proves the existence of upper and lower borders of interpretation.

so called *sapient paradox*, which refers to the developmental gap (hiatus), where the already existing features of a species *Homo sapiens* needed some time to take effect.

In a theoretical endeavor it is enough to concentrate on the context and those aesthetic constants (function, norm, value) that allow us to reconstruct the primordial aesthetic world, or to create a possible world of our ancestors and to this extent be satisfied with it. It is important to accept that we will never be able to translate what one thought in ancient times or what one thought was aesthetically valuable. The most appropriate starting point, but also the aim of aesthetic reflection of past phenomena, should be based on the contextualization, which allows us to assemble at least a fragment of an existing 'mosaic,' supplemented with interpretative findings, while the theoretician should never leave the hypothetical level of his construction of meanings. Any theoretical evaluation of our past is a theoretical construction and a possible version of what the past looked like and how it worked, without the possibility of verifying conclusions in any way. Every new discovered 'version' of a past world offers some new chance to review the current state of knowledge and challenge it.

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