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***Trompe l'oeil* and Bullshit— The Problem of the Truth of Realistic Depictions**

Abstract

The term *bullshit*, coined by the American philosopher H. Frankfurt, reflects communication within contemporary society as lies that do not stem from the truth and are often preferred over profound truths. The history of visual arts, specifically realistic art, employs *trompe l'oeil*—a visual depiction that pretends to be reality, even though it is not. It may give the impression of a real object when perceived, although it is a mere visual depiction. We will discuss *trompe l'oeil* from the perspective of the concept of bullshit through an analysis and interpretation of works of *trompe l'oeil* in contemporary Slovak art. We will address their problematic link with the truth by comparing both concepts using their similarities and differences.

Keywords

Bullshit, Trompe l'oeil, Slovak Visual Arts, Realistic Art, The Problem of the Truth

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Introduction

When the American philosopher, Harry G. Frankfurt, published his book, *On Bullshit* (Frankfurt 2005) in 2005 (originally it was an essay from 1986), he examined the problem of communication, typical within our society. Despite several disputes that were ignited by the theoretical concept (Fredal 2011), its impact on society was unquestionable. He managed to directly and unambiguously give a name to a problem that not only concerns the aca-

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democratic arguments based on the principles of truth and scientific exploration but also debates within society at large, directly impacting our everyday lives. Frankfurt built his concept of bullshit on the problematic relationship to the truth that he considers a key factor in our society's communication. He viewed an intense search for the truth as a fundamental pillar of our civilization; however, as he viewed the contemporary means of communication that have surrounded and formed us over the last few decades, he understood that this search is being devalued. The intense search for the truth has gradually been replaced by bullshit, statements that are not based on truth. Following the concept of Max Black, Frankfurt's work employs the alternation of the terms bullshit and *humbug*. It is a "deceptive misrepresentation, short of lying, especially by pretentious word or deed, of somebody's own thoughts, feelings, or attitudes" (Frankfurt 2005, 2). Thus, it is a form of lie with a highly problematic relationship with the truth. It may seem that bullshit and humbug are simply deceptive statements that mistake a lie for the truth. However, Frankfurt suggests that the difference between a lie and bullshit is quite substantial, even though both are deceptive and their relationship with the truth is problematic. While a lie aims to conceal the truth, it still cares about it, whereas bullshit ignores the truth. It intentionally distorts data and information in an attempt to convince others of its own view of reality. However, in the moment of the distortion of the truth, an intriguing phenomenon arises—the person who is intentionally distorting the truth also distorts their own state of mind. They convince themselves of the truth of the existence of the distortion. This distortion is why bullshit represents a more significant threat to the truth than a simple lie. Furthermore, although Frankfurt, when he coined the term bullshit, based his thoughts on communication in society and the contemporary state of society, we can still see this problem in a broader context, especially when we focus on the problematic relationship with the truth that is characterized by bullshit. Thus we may also be able to find possible parallels and differences in the visual arts—especially in their realistic forms (imitations) that are characterized by their relationship to external reality. Consequently, this relationship with an external reality is the reason for their problematic relationship with the truth. E.H. Gombrich fittingly calls this "*the visual truth*" (Gombrich 1985, 15).

According to E.H. Gombrich, the roots of "imitating" art and its theory can be traced back approximately to the middle of the 4th century to the period of the Greek revolution (Gombrich 1985, 112). In addition to other major factors, it was mainly formed by Plato's concept of *mimesis* (Plato 2001, 305-336, 599c-e), which considered visual art to be a way to obscure the view of

truth and lies. Imitating art has the ability to lie or form the impression that what the artist created is real and thus true. Plato claims that a painter does not display the real truth but only an impression of it. They distance the perceiver from the truth, from real knowledge, through an accumulation of impressions and illusions. They create copies of copies, shadows of shadows, imitations of imitations. In his dialogue, *The Sophist* (Plato 1995, 38, 235d-e), he continues with the contemplation of the mimetic arts and classifies them into two types: the art of making likeness and the art of making appearances, which may be understood in terms of illusions and fantasies. While the first type attempts to demonstrate the truth and carry a certain resemblance, the second is distant from the truth. It only shows illusions, lies, appearances, and fantasies. The term "appearance" has many synonyms (like vision, lie, illusion, hallucination, and fiction). But to what extent are these works of art linked to knowledge, understanding, and reason as attributes of truth? If Plato himself claims that we need not know anything about things, is it sufficient to make an appearance that we know something about them? According to Plato, the art of making appearances is not based on thought but on perception, which is why it results in an appearance of truth, not truth itself. At this level of thought, there might be certain resemblances with bullshit. If Plato suggests that imitating art does not have to know the real truth and that only appearances of truth suffice, is it a form of bullshit? This aspect is one of the key questions that I will try to answer by analyzing specific examples of realistic art.

According to Plato, artistic representation is deceptive in nature; it claims to be something that it is not. It pretends to be the truth (reality), but it is not. E.H. Gombrich also refers to Plato's theory in his concept of the existence of illusive depiction (Gombrich 1985, 237). He asserts that a painting can provoke amazement in its audience. Its visual deceptions can convince them that it represents the truth (Gombrich 1985, 47). According to Gombrich, this is where the essence of pictorial representation lies. Just as Plato stated, painted appearances may take different forms, and one of them is the so-called *trompe l'oeil*. Gombrich also speaks about it. It is a theoretical but mainly artistic concept that depicts an external reality that the artist aims to transfer to a canvas or the walls of a temple. Their desire to achieve a faithful representation, and thus the truth, is so great that they attempt to convince the audience that they see reality. When they view a *trompe l'oeil*, the audience is intended to believe they see a real excerpt from reality, not a painting. This intention is just another example of the problematic relationship with the truth since artists conceal the real truth through the language of

painting. They show their audience something that resembles the truth but is not the truth. Thus, may we speak of a theoretically older but long-present bullshit in the visual arts? Or is it the confrontation of lies and bullshit that Frankfurt spoke about? Through a more detailed analysis of *trompe l'oeil* and an interpretation of specific examples of *trompe l'oeil*, I will try to strive for either a positive or a negative answer. There are many examples of *trompe l'oeil* in the history of art. The focus on the work of contemporary Slovak artists is intentional since their work is compatible with the times of the thoughts of H. Frankfurt.

***Trompe l'oeil*—Means of an Illusive Game**

The term *trompe l'oeil* comes from French and translates as the deception of the eye. *Trompe l'oeil* deceives the human eye with such a perfect representation of the world that it persuades the viewer that it really exists. This notion was first employed by the French artist Louis-Léopold Boilly in 1800 in reference to his own paintings, but the roots of the artistic phenomenon itself go back much further—to the wall paintings of Greek and Roman times. It experienced its greatest boom in the times of the Renaissance perspective, the Baroque illusory wall paintings, and the Dutch paintings of the 17th century.

The concept of *trompe l'oeil* represents the artistic mastery of realism, perspective, shortcuts, the play of color, light, and shadow. And although E.H. Gombrich considers any visual depiction an illusion, he still admits that *trompe l'oeil* has its own particularities. It is not just the result of thorough observation and an imitation of the external world. Instead, its strength comes from the effects and games played with painting techniques. These origins were inspired by the artists' dissatisfaction, who submitted to various schematic conventions that did not permit them to improve their visual depiction (Gombrich 2019). Artists of the Greek revolution, as Gombrich designates the ancient artists and their followers, constantly modified and improved the system of depiction, attempting to approximate reality as far as possible. The advancement of painting techniques and processes also motivated the development of *trompe l'oeil*. As the visual language of artists advanced through their artistic experience, so did their mastery of *trompe l'oeil*.

The resulting masterly play of *trompe l'oeil* leads the viewer to assume that a two-dimensional visual representation is a three-dimensional reality. Gordon Graham goes as far as to give this concept the title of the acme of

realistic painting, which can deceive the viewer's eye to such an extent that it challenges all their existing sensorial experiences and deceives them (Graham 2017, 31). *Trompe l'oeil* is an illusory form of a game during which the observed object or scene appears to be so real that the viewer acquires the impression of the real. In the context of bullshit, the author of a *trompe l'oeil* could therefore deceive the viewer by presenting them with something that pretends to be the truth but is not. The image depicted in a *trompe l'oeil* may appear to be real, but it is not a representation of reality. Is it, therefore, bullshit? Does it ignore the features of truth and create its own version of reality? Does it conceal reality, and thus the truth? Does it create its own version of the truth? Not quite. A *trompe l'oeil* is above all a Gombrichian illusion, pretending to be something it is not—pretending to be a reality, which it is not. Although it is not reality neither, it is the absolute denial of reality, for it cares for the truth.

Illusion has its origin in the Latin word *illudere*,¹ hence it is characterized by that which is deceptive, false, or pretended. But we can also seek its origin in the Latin word *ludere*, which gives it an alternative meaning, that of a game or playing games. Illusion plays with and deceives the viewer at the level of sensorial perception, going as far as to, in the words of W.J.T. Mitchell, acquire power over them through the game: "Illusionism means the picture's ability to cheat, amuse, and amaze the spectator, or to otherwise acquire power over the spectator" (Mitchell 2016, 334). Illusion, fundamentally, concentrates its power on the perceiver of the painting at whom this game is targeted. The ability of an illusory game is fully demonstrated in the art of *trompe l'oeil*, which draws the viewer into its visual story and thus activates in them a fictive experience with the real.

A similar aspect is also discussed by H. Frankfurt, but not from the point of view of the percipient, but rather from the creator's point of view. In the initial phase of the distortion of truth, when the author of bullshit starts to distort something, an interesting moment must occur—they must distort their own state of mind. "To begin with, whenever a person deliberately misrepresents anything, he must inevitably misrepresent his own state of mind" (Frankfurt 2005, 4). But while the creator of a *trompe l'oeil* is aware of the difference between reality (the truth) and the picture, and they do not need to believe the lie, the author of bullshit deceives their own mind. They must believe the lie in order to spread it. In the case of a *trompe l'oeil*, the percipient is the only person who is lied to. With bullshit, there are two layers of

¹ Oxford Dictionary of English, third edition, ed. by Angus Stevenson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 872.

lies: firstly at the creator's level and secondly at the percipient. Another difference between *trompe l'oeil* and bullshit appears in the place where the lie figures. In the case of *trompe l'oeil*, it is in the eye of their percipient, and thus their sensorial perception, while with bullshit, the lie attacks both the mind of the creator and the percipient.

As said above, *trompe l'oeil* is a masterly work of realism. Therefore, they are works that can persuade the viewer that the depicted objects are real and truly present in the particular space. Thanks to this masterful ability, the paintings have a noteworthy effect—*trompe l'oeil* stands between reality and representation. Despite being a realistic depiction, *trompe l'oeil* is not and cannot be a faithful imitation of reality. In the opinion of David Freedberg (1992, 486), art can never copy reality because reality is the only essence. What it can do is to make a copy of a copy.

Even representation is taken as something a priori, in a Kantian way, there is still a fundamental tension at the core of the notion of mimesis. On the one hand, it is supposed to copy reality; on the other hand, it can never succeed in doing so since reality is essence, and all that we can do is to make copies of copies. Art can never produce true icons, only idols; and it is these, of course, not icons, that provoke the rejection of mimesis in book X of Plato's Republic (Freedberg 1992, 485).

Nevertheless, *trompe l'oeil* is neither a copy of reality nor its imitation. The objects depicted do not link to objects of tangible reality. They exist independently, without developing contextual relations, but with elements of similarity to reality. Is *trompe l'oeil* at least a representation? A representation that is the essence of realism is the confirmation of reality thanks to a dichotomy: painting and likeness, model and copy, original and reproduction, which is subsequently put into a hierarchy (Summers 2004, 31-46). A painting renders reality through representation. However, we cannot say the same about *trompe l'oeil*. The referential relationship does not apply here. In Jean Baudrillard's words, *trompe l'oeils* are actually "anti-representative" (Baudrillard 1996, 71). What *trompe l'oeil* represents is not the real reality, or its reproduction. It is just its apparent likeness. Baudrillard defines *trompe l'oeil* with the words: "a tactile hyperpresence of things, 'as if we could grasp them'" (Baudrillard 1996, 74). It is a simulacrum playing at reality; despite that fact, it is not reality. As Baudrillard calls it, this ironic simulacrum seduces us with its exciting attraction, with its ability to play with the perceiver's senses. It tries to instill in us the belief that the *trompe l'oeil* picture is truly a part of reality that we want to touch and confirm its existence through tactile experience. But the result of our touch is just further confirmation of an apparent or rather non-existent reality.

Just as interesting as the philosophical context is the psychological context that emphasizes the intense impact of *trompe l'oeil* on the viewer's perceptions (Nanay 2014, Ferretti 2018). According to E.H. Gombrich, the essence of an illusion is the power of our expectations rather than the power of conceptual knowledge (Gombrich 1985, 259). The essence of illusion is only fulfilled once we, through our expectations, are ready to perceive it correctly and accept the illusionary rules at play. He claims that illusions are a construct formed by our expectations. Werner Wolf, a German narrative theorist, claims that a percipient must be immersed in the illusive work (*immersion*) to experience it to its full potential (Wolf 2013).

The intensity of an illusion depends on a degree of immersion: ranging from a disinterested observation of the work up to complete immersion. This dependence means there is a perceptual difference between the normal perception of an image and the perception of a *trompe l'oeil*. But where does the essence of this different perception lie? Why does *trompe l'oeil* deceive our eyes? One of the arguments proposed by Gabriele Ferretti is the different approach to the perception of the surface of the image (Ferretti 2020a, 34). The surface of the canvas creates a pictorial barrier between the real and pictorial world, which we are clearly aware of in the case of non-illusive images. But when we perceive a *trompe l'oeil*, the situation is different. As the border between the real and the pictorial space, the surface of the canvas vanishes. Hence, if we cannot perceive the surface of the canvas, we gain the impression that the observed object is real. The disappearance of the boundary creates a space where the content of the illusion may exist, and we identify with the observed object.

Therefore, the only reasonable explanation for the illusory effect of *trompe l'oeil* perception is that, in this case, there is no possibility of relying on any perception of the surface, either conscious or unconscious: it is when the surface is not visible that we enter the illusion of the presence of the depicted object, this fostering in us a particular visual experience, as if we were in front of a real object (Ferretti 2020a, 37).

Thus, the illusion of presence is the key to the perception of *trompe l'oeil*; the depicted object looks real, even if only for a brief moment. It appears to be a phenomenon we may interact with (we may enter it, touch it, etc.). However, this moment only lasts for a very short time.

Just as important is the issue of the space from which the *trompe l'oeil* is perceived. Can a spatial shift by the percipient disturb the feeling of the presence of the *trompe l'oeil*? Ferretti offers an answer related to the theory of perception (Ferretti 2020b). Similarly, art history suggests a possible way

to explain that the viewer's position influences the illusory effect. If the viewer adopts the ideal position, they will receive the maximum illusive effect (Francastel 2003; Damisch 2000; Ferretti 2021). As a perfect example of *trompe l'oeil*, Maurice Pirenne suggests the wall painting in the Church of St. Ignatius in Rome by Andrea Pozzo (Pirenne 1970, 79-94). It is an example of a baroque wall painting that achieves perfection if viewed from a single ideal place. Through a spatial shift by the viewer, the illusive architecture is destroyed, and the illusive impression is not evoked. Similarly, an ideal spot for observation is also required in the case of anamorphosis² (Jiménez 2002, 33-48; Nanay 2015; Ferretti 2020b) or other *trompe l'oeil* works.

The Slovak Variant of *Trompe l'oeil*

High Renaissance, Mannerism, Baroque illusionism, and Rococo illusionistic compositions were responsible for the rather systematic development of the genre of *trompe l'oeil*. We could say that these historical periods represent a boom in illusionistic painting. But the modern art of the 20th century did not completely discard it either. It was, for instance, René Magritte, the Belgian surrealist painter, who created several compositions in the spirit of *trompe l'oeil* in the 1930s, such as the painting, *The Human Condition*, from 1933, that is part of the collections of the National Gallery of Art in Washington and another, eponymous, painting from 1935, which is part of the Simon Spierer Collection in Geneva. The phenomenon of *trompe l'oeil* takes the form of a painting within a painting. We can also find practitioners of *trompe l'oeil* among the pop artists (Andy Warhol), photorealists (Richard Estes), and hyperrealists (Duane Hanson), as well as among Slovak artists of the second half of the 20th century. Two Slovak artists from two different generations—Milan Bočkay and Marcel Mališ—have approached the creation of *trompe l'oeil* in different and yet similar ways. A member of the older generation of Slovak artists, **Milan Bočkay** (1946)³ has systematically worked on paintings and various painting strategies since the late 1970s. His work is especially dominated by games played with illusions, masking and the pre-

² It is a distorted depiction. In order for a viewer to see an anamorphosis in the correct perspective, they must look at it from a certain perspective or use an aid, most commonly a mirror.

³ Milan Bočkay (1946) studied at the School of Applied Arts in Bratislava with Rudolf Fila from 1961 to 1965. He attended the Academy of Visual Arts in Bratislava from 1965 to 1971, studying with Dezider Milly and later Peter Matejka. From 1981 to 2008 he taught at the Jozef Vydra School of Applied Arts in Bratislava. He is one of the founding members of the A-R artistic group founded in 1991.

tense of reality, which results in the deception of the viewer's senses. All these illusive games, typical of *trompe l'oeil*, take place on a two-dimensional canvas or paper, creating the impression of spatiality. Milan Bočkay's *trompe l'oeils* are characterized by three crucial planes that create this artistic phenomenon: 1. The regrouping and blurring of the borders between species—drawing and painting; 2. The relationship between the two-dimensional canvas and the effect of the space; 3. the play of a non-existent reality and an illusion of reality.

Typically created using oils, Bočkay's drawings and paintings do not represent complicated realistic compositions. They do not develop narrative stories, which are characteristic of the art of *trompe l'oeil*. Bočkay liberated himself from realistic storytelling and replaced it with geometric minimalism, which in his case became a new topic of *trompe l'oeil*. Although it might seem that such compositional simplicity may not be capable of pulling off the effect of *trompe l'oeil*, it is not so. Thanks to his compositional and motivic simplicity, the issue of representation and its relationship to the real vanishes, and the only focus left is the impression of the real, which is supposed to be the result of the perception of a *trompe l'oeil*. On the canvas, therefore, the undemanding linear line forms the core of the composition, the whole essence of the painting. There is no negation of one by the other in paintings where two different media meet. There is no battle of the media in Bočkay's paintings. One medium supports and highlights the other. The drawing becomes a means to render prominence to the *trompe l'oeil* in painting, as in the *Thickened Linear Line*, 1985 (oil on canvas, Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava). The web created from linear lines is realized on a canvas, creating an impression of spatiality for the viewer. The web which is projected out of the painting creates space. As in the painting *Three Similar Lines*, 1985 (oil on canvas, Museum of Art, Žilina), the whole composition is limited to two yellow, parallel lines placed in an empty two-dimensional space. However, to the viewer's eye, it appears to be a three-dimensional space, supported by the shadow cast by one of the lines, as well as the shading of the canvas itself. A thread stretched in the space is the impression evoked by drawing a simple line. Painting with oils creates the illusionary effect of a rippling canvas in space on a real two-dimensional canvas.

In the 1980s, Bočkay worked on another form of *trompe l'oeil*, where he used an alternative form of blurring borders in addition to the species borders between painting and drawing. Works such as *Paper XXXVII*, 1980 (colored pencils, Museum of Art, Žilina), *Paper XLIV*, 1981 (colored pencils on paper, Bratislava City Gallery), *Paper XLVI*, 1983 (colored pencils, Museum of

Art, Žilina) and *Paper LIX*, 1987 (colored pencils, Museum of Art, Žilina) were a synthesis of several visual techniques: drawing and painting were joined by collage. Crumpled and sometimes torn pieces of paper that cannot be glued back together anymore are covered with writing and drawings (Markusová, 2018). The word “drawing” and the statement “between the deception and the appearance” are written on paper using a pencil or with paint. Paper letters appear as if they are glued to the crumpled white paper. They project from two-dimensional paper in the form of plastic, spatial letters. But some letters evoke the directly opposite impression. They appear as if they are carved into the paper. After this intervention, we acquire an impression of a dramatic and irretrievably damaged piece of paper. Another form of the collage-like insertion of different materials is the drawings. In Bočkay’s case, this is a fragment of Michelangelo’s *Creation of Adam*. Next to the drawing of the touching hands of Adam and God, a small black-and-white photograph serves as a model and projects from the paper to which it is attached with a single pin. Upon a more thorough analysis of the drawing, the percipient discovers that once again, this is not a three-dimensional object placed on two-dimensional paper but a perfect *trompe l’oeil* that deceives the spectator’s eye in a sophisticated way.

The series of *trompe l’oeil* works from the 1980s concludes with the paintings entitled *Belle matière I*, 1988 (oil on canvas, Slovak National Gallery) and *Belle matière II*, 1988 (oil on canvas, Slovak National Gallery)—again very simple compositions that are almost abstract works. Under the influence of geometric abstraction, Bočkay creates square and rectangular grids. The cells of the grid contain blotches of color but give the strong impression of a paste-like or relief-like quality. At certain moments the viewer approaches the painting, needing to touch it to be convinced of its spatial existence.

Milan Bočkay’s *trompe l’oeils* are highly specific: freed from extensive narratives and dominated by simple features that resemble reality, whether it be the illusion of crumpled and torn paper, the wavy surface of the canvas, paste-like brushstrokes, plastic letters that project from the paper, shadows that are not real, drawings of photographs or references to other artists that give the impression of a pasted collage. Bočkay’s *trompe l’oeils* are an example of the classical concept of illusive works: they pretend to be reality and play with the viewers’ perception and are based on clearly defined rules both for the author and the percipient. In order to fulfill the essence of a *trompe l’oeil* and deceive the eye of the percipient, they must be viewed from the ideal position (Pirenne 1970; Damisch 2000; Ferretti 2021). If the

position of the percipient changes, the illusion cannot be perceived. In front of Bočkay's images, the percipient experiences an intense feeling of immersion (Wolf 2013), conditioned by the correct viewer position. If the opposite were true, the essence of the illusiveness of Bočkay's *trompe l'oeils* would not be fulfilled. And although it is apparent that Bočkay's *trompe l'oeils* have a problematic relationship with reality, since they only pretend to be it, they cannot be referred to as bullshit in the context of Frankfurt's concept. The image's composition is intentionally constructed to evoke the impression of a real thing in the percipient, to deceive their senses, and not to ignore the truth.

Then there is **Marcel Mališ**,⁴ who is part of the following generation of contemporary Slovak paintings. As a *trompe l'oeil* artist, he has been creating photorealistic paintings since 2003. Thanks to his work, photorealism, hyperrealism and the phenomenon of *trompe l'oeil* have attracted more attention in Slovak painting. As the generational "abyss" between the work of Milan Bočkay and Marcel Mališ was not properly filled by works from other Slovak artists,⁵ we can understand their work and experimentation with *trompe l'oeil* as two different ways to play with reality. Whereas Bočkay's games occur within the traditional relationship of painting and reality, Mališ's are more complicated because another medium enters this primary relationship, that of photography. Bočkay's paintings persuade us that they are real; Mališ's works lie to us about being photographs. He has used a photorealistic approach to the creation of pictures, especially in his *Lebensraum* series of paintings, realized since 2008. The whole series consists of over twenty paintings that depict a human head wrapped in the plastic bags of well-known shopping centers or designer brands. Photorealism is a technique that uses a photograph as the basis for the subsequent painting. That is how Mališ worked when he created these pictures. Through remediation (Bolter-Grusin 2000), the transfer of information from one medium to another, the photographs showing him with a plastic bag on his head are transferred to the canvas. Plastic bags tightly wrapped around a human head

⁴ Marcel Mališ (1978) studied with Professor Daniel Fischer at the Academy of Visual Arts in Bratislava from 2001 to 2007, where he completed his PhD studies in 2013. He has received a number of important Slovak awards. He was a finalist of the Painting prize in 2009, 2010 and 2011 awarded by the VÚB Foundation and a finalist of the Henkel Art Award in 2009. Currently he teaches at the Faculty of Education of Trnava University, where he heads the Studio of Painting and the Studio of Two-Dimensional Media. He actively exhibits both in Slovakia and abroad.

⁵ Except for the distinctive works of Veronika Rónaiová, who likewise ranks among hyperrealistic artists, but does not deal with the phenomenon of *trompe l'oeil*.

make the very existence of the human self impossible. Their expansion is so great that they suppress individuality and replace it with mass character and consumerism.

Where reality ends and fiction begins is not a metaphorical question asked by Mališ. It is the crucial issue of *trompe l'oeil*. Photorealistic and hyperrealistic works no longer seek their models in reality but in the photographic images recorded and made eternal by the camera's lens that has frozen the section of reality in a particular way. In his book *Camera Lucida* Roland Barthes says: "Painting can feign reality without having seen it. Discourse combines signs which have referents, of course, but these referents can be and most often are 'chimeras.' Contrary to these imitations, in Photography, I can never deny that the thing has been there. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past" (Barthes 2000, 76).

Thus, the painted photorealistic image displays a referential relationship with what was recorded by the camera and not with that which truly exists. Mališ's paintings do not create the "illusion of reality" as do Bočkay's *trompe l'oeils* but an illusion of photographic reality that is twice shifted from reality. The several degrees of improvement of the real lead to a situation where we have the impression that the reality presented to us by the hyperrealistic picture⁶ is better, more perfect, and truer than the reality. In the words of Barbara Stafford, "the hyperreal—that is something which is artificially intensified, and forced to become more than it was when it existed in the real world" (Bredenkamp-Stafford 2005). These several degrees of improvement of the real are what distinguish traditional *trompe l'oeil* paintings from hyperrealistic *trompe l'oeil*. Jean Baudrillard calls this moment the collapse of reality. By the remediation of one medium onto another, reality gradually evaporates and becomes an allegory of death. It becomes hyperreality (Baudrillard 2007, 73). Mališ's *trompe l'oeils* thus do not merely represent a fraudulent reality, which manipulates the view and perception of the spectator, but a fraudulent version of the reality itself. Thanks to Marcel Mališ's photorealistic works, the understanding of *trompe l'oeil* thus shifts from reality towards hyperreality, simulacrum. A hyperrealistic *trompe l'oeil* is twice removed from the truth. With the gradual remediation of one medium with another, the truth is dissipated, and the hyperrealistic *trompe l'oeil* only becomes a newer version. Apparently, no longer based on the truth. In the

⁶ Umberto Eco says that hyperreality connects the real and the artificial, imitated or illusory. The result of the connection is an impression of a perfect reality that, compared to the original, makes an even more real and perfect impression, because it is hyperreal. For more details see U. Eco (1998), *Faith in Fakes. Travels in Hyperreality*, London: Vintage.

case of Mališ's hyperrealistic *trompe l'oeil*, the relationship with the truth is even more complicated since, just like other hyperrealists, he works with one or even more photographs, which he repaints. This relationship leads to a realistic painting that shifts or deforms reality. Hyperrealistic *trompe l'oeil* more resembles what the camera captures rather than what the eyes see (Ferretti 2018, Note 30).

Conclusion

It is necessary to answer two fundamental questions: what is the difference between the *trompe l'oeil* of Milan Bočkay and Marcel Mališ, and the second question: what is the difference between *trompe l'oeil* and bullshit. The answer to the question of the differences between the *trompe l'oeils* of Milan Bočkay and Marcel Mališ may be sought in the texts of Jean Baudrillard (1996, 6). To the question of the relationship between the painting and reality, he responded that there are four phases of this relationship: 1. the painting is a reflection of reality, 2. the painting masks reality, 3. the painting masks the absence of reality, 4. the painting bears no relationship to reality. Milan Bočkay's *trompe l'oeils* correspond to Baudrillard's third phase, masking the absence of reality. They pretend that reality is present and that the painting itself is reality. But as this has already been explained above, that is not true. A painting cannot be a reality, and it can only deceive us and pretend to be reality. Based on the terminology of H. Frankfurt, Bočkay's *trompe l'oeil* could be classified as a lie that conceals the truth. It cares about the truth.

The aspect of truth is mostly determined by the relationship between the viewer and the *trompe l'oeil* paintings. Without intense participation by the viewer in the form of strong expectations, immersion, presence, or mental distance, the essence of a *trompe l'oeil* image would not be fulfilled, and the subject would not be deceived at the level of perception. Through the expressions mentioned above of intense perception, the viewer may have the impression of a real object (Aumont 2005, 108), a specific visual reaction to the artwork. In the case of a *trompe l'oeil* image, it is a brief yet very intense belief that the object in the image is real. This deception about the real in the real is conditioned by both the correct mental mindset and the ideal position for observation. The illusion of reality that a *trompe l'oeil* object can convey is primarily perceptual and psychological (Aumont 2005, 102).

Mališ's *trompe l'oeil* images correspond with Baudrillard's fourth phase: the image carries no relationship with reality. Mališ's hyperrealistic *trompe l'oeils* thus represent a more complex concept than Bočkay's. Through remediation, they distance themselves from the truth and may even deform it. The painter works with single or multiple photographs that he transfers to the canvas. The image captured by the photograph is subsequently modified to provide an ideal rendering. This process results in an image with such an excess of detail that the human eye cannot capture it without a "camera eye." The overly exposed details seen in Mališ's images challenge our observation skills. Hyperrealistic images of reality appear to be better and more accurate than our actual experience. Both types of *trompe l'oeil* share that they only provide an impression of illusion for a brief moment when viewed from the perceptive of the ideal position and have a relationship with the truth as we know it.

Bullshit and *trompe l'oeil* are two theoretical and visual concepts that share a problematic relationship with the truth (Frankfurt 2005). In the case of both concepts, we could convince ourselves that not everything we consider to be the truth actually is the truth—visual art also refers to a reality that is false, deceptive, and illusive. And since what characterizes both bullshit and *trompe l'oeil* is the problematic relationship with the truth, they may be very similar to each other. However, in their problematic relationship to the truth, they differ. For the *trompe l'oeil* of Milan Bočkay and Marcel Mališ to deceive our senses, they must have real experience. In order to create an illusion of reality, they must have known the true reality. This necessity is the fundamental difference when compared to bullshit, which may have no idea what the truth really is and may not even have any interest in the truth. Someone who creates bullshit does not deal with reality—they erase any knowledge of the truth. The *trompe l'oeil* adheres to it, albeit in a deformed way.

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