

Transformation of vision

Igor Bošnjak is an artist whose projects illustrate the evolving relationship between the camera and the human body. His artistic practice is based on the use of automated drone imagery, which he uses in various forms in the production of his work.

Drones expand the body's ability to perceive the world. The human eye is hindered by weaknesses, such as mobility limited to the framework of a very specific place/body, myopia, and ineffectiveness in conditions of reduced visibility. On the other hand, the performance of the drone imitates the eye, but also compensates for all of its shortcomings: it can achieve heights and distances unreachable to the eye, and it can see in different conditions. Drones can be remotely controlled and operated from a distance. Although they function automatically, and their artificial senses are controlled by computer programmes, they appear to have autonomous intention and action. Drones are robots of omnipotent vision. In the last forty years, there has been a synchronization and symbiosis in the characteristics of the camera, computer and drone. There's no need to look through the lens anymore because focus and exposure are automatically calculated. You can calibrate the camera to record without standing behind the lens. With the new recording technology of motion detectors, remote controls, surveillance cameras, CCTV systems, web cameras, Google street view and the development of robotics, the camera can function without human involvement.

Drones also have a role in reconnaissance and military missions. Their use is such that they have completely changed the models of warfare that history has witnessed thus far, so it has become clear that future wars will be increasingly automated. Simultaneously, the drone in the modern world is increasingly finding its social, practical application, and we are seeing a growing trend of amateur interest in piloting drones. However, their role in the military industry and societal use in surveillance systems is triggering ethical debates about privacy.

The idea of automation of vision and its connection with war was first discussed by Paul Virilio as early as 1989. The relationship between war, technology and vision is at the heart of his work and corresponds well with the practices of many contemporary artists. In his iconic work *The Vision Machine*, Virilio explores the artificial extensions of the body that are useful to humans, from optical to institutionalised ones, which are a type of extensions of bodily abilities/inabilities. The author demonstrates how the military industry is guided by the logic of perception, shifting the field of vision from humans to weapons, through cameras and other military equipment. By synchronising missiles and built-in cameras, through increasingly faster and more efficient drone camera zooming, images are produced in which the view below ends with a close-up. Any kind of aerial photography (drone or satellite) has a strong military connotation, which has been reinforced by the media coverage of war conflicts in recent history. This dematerialised world is reduced to an informational image. The more we rely on that image, the less we use bodily experience and bodily techniques in fear that the body can no longer provide us with a full experience of the environment. And if it is a given that non-human aspects can result in non-human practices, it is precisely in these non-human aspects that bear creative potentials.

Drones are a continuation of the human quest to see the world from above. In the 1960s, the French photographer Nadar flew a balloon to take the first aerial photographs of Paris.

Hito Steyerl also says that we should get more and more used to the "God's eye" view. In her essay *In Free Fall*, which follows the archaeology of perspective, she notes how the

linear perspective that has long shaped our view of the world has been dismantled and replaced by a vertical one, making the view from above the dominant paradigm of perception today, which has implications for our overall experience of the world and living.

In many respects, the artist Igor Bošnjak continues this tradition of seeking a higher point of view from which to observe the surface of the Earth. Since 2015, he filmed visual documentation related to the monumental cultural heritage of the People's Liberation Movement in Yugoslavia on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the help of a drone. Most of the monuments dedicated to the war were erected during the 1960s and 1970s. They were built at the sites of important historical battles in the Second World War or at locations where a large number of civilians lost their lives.

The futuristic appearance and creativity of Yugoslav monuments leaves a strong impression of a modernist vision, qualities that are not typical of the social realist style that dominated Eastern Europe. This influence of abstraction and deviation from the established narratives of socialist realism is the promise of a not so exclusive orientation in the creation and maintenance of a culture of memory with the need to affirm collectivism and a sense of belonging. The relationship to these monuments as we see it now, especially in the sense of interest shown by contemporary art, partially reflects the long-term success of the efforts of their authors. Following the collapse of Yugoslavia, most of the legacy institutional architecture remained desolate, in a state between conversion and reuse, or continued to exist as modern archaeological ruins. Contemporary artists have re-inhabited these spaces, rediscovering them after they had become forsaken alongside the ideologies that they embodied. The sense of nostalgia that we feel while looking at the monuments is at odds with the ideas of progress and collective faith in a future born out of struggle. However, freed from the ideology that created them, these monuments survive and continue their life in the future, and are rediscovered as a new heritage which reappears and takes unexpected forms that surprise us.

The recent war in the 1990s once again made this region dangerous, and some of these historical places have become stages for conflict as well as places occupied for military purposes. Igor's work explores this landscape of conquest, conflict and invasion, where monuments still stand as symbols of some forgotten fiction. Through the view of the drone, these works discover a historical landscape, and a landscape that is constantly changing, marked by recent conflicts, porous from oblivion. Perhaps this is exactly what the landscape of the future looks like.

At the exhibition *Future Repeats Itself More than History Used To*, we have the opportunity to see video works that are in the spirit of film classics, such as *Transformers*, *Monument to Fallen Fighters of the Future War*, *Every man land*, *Macha Sightings*, *Drome*, *Future Repeats Itself More than History Used To*, *Spinefield*, *Sentience* and *Four Seasons*.

The closeness between the photographic/video image and the monument resides in a simple analogy. They are both fighting against time and oblivion. In that sense, this type of imagery is a modern form of a monument. But Igor's intervention does not exist solely within the framework of archiving and preserving, but rather takes those monuments into the future by creating new archives. His work brings forward a new vision that transcends histories and ideologies and becomes a creative process that conveys principles that are non-linear and unpredictable. The artist transforms the objectivity of the monument into a fluid image, an image of contemporaneity.

Igor's video and photographic works contain a split perspective. The artist's view framed by the screen is far from direct contact with the filmed scene, the all-powerful eye of the machine is governed by the artist's vision, through the visions of an aircraft that is unattainable to the artist's body. The artist's eye and the machine's eye are no longer part of the same perspective. From the camera obscura to today's hand-held camera, perspective developed from the point of the photographer's body, whether it was aerial or ground shots. But today, in this kind of divisive situation, the artist's entire body can fall into the frame.

This mechanical aspect of visualisation is not new, it has emerged in the early days of photography, for example in the works of Alexander Rodchenko or László Moholy-Nagy. The vision offered by the drone took a step further on this path by deviating from the human-centred visualisation process. Therefore, we are not seeing machine vision that is replacing human vision; rather, we are seeing a recognition of the mutual intertwining of the organic and mechanical, the technical and discursive in the creation of an image of the world.

The drone offers an image that expands the horizon of our perception, providing us with views of the world and its forms as a map, which we can explore through an aerial perspective. These new characteristics correspond very well with the new 3D technology. In Igor's more recent works such as *Sentience* and *Four Seasons*, we see the integration of this vertical perspective and 3D that is characteristic of the way video games are configured. One could almost say that these two dimensions naturally overlap, thereby creating a new type of visualisation that integrates military, surveillance technologies and applications used in the entertainment industries.

By connecting with the automated drone apparatus, and exploring our connection to machine vision, Bošnjak engages with a fundamental problem that has occupied many philosophers of technology who have seriously pointed out that "there is no room for human freedom within the realm of automated and programmed apparatuses"¹, and thus raised a question about how can we "show the way in which it is still possible to open space for freedom?"² Such an endeavour is much needed according to Vilém Flusser, who sees it as the only form of revolution available to us. He invites us to become visionaries, to accept this technical image, the apparatuses that produce it, and turn it against its own state of automation.

That is why artists like Igor Bošnjak are important because their works show a prudent and effective way in which we can imagine the transformation of our relationship to the world, which does not have to be directed against the machine, but in work in cooperation with our co-constitution as a recognition of kinship. His video works include, but also transcend the human, using an apparatus that reaches far beyond our eyes and thus mobilises the creative impulse of life, in which the world is seen as a camera. He invites us to detach the eye from the body and accept the vision of the machine and thus be open to a radical post-humanist analysis.

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¹V. Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2011, 37.

²Ibid., 45.