

# Art History and Postcolonialism: A Lithuanian Case

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This article concentrates on the problems of applying postcolonial theory in post-Soviet art history. The postcolonial perspective remains a subject of debate in the field of art history, partly because the theory itself is mostly based on literary research. Another part of the problem lies in the very way in which this theory is applied, as well as in the choice of postcolonial concepts. With a focus on existing (mis)uses of postcolonial theory in Lithuanian art historical analyses, I examine different concepts of postcolonial theory and various (dis)advantages of their application to writing the history of Soviet art.

One of the reasons to consider the application of postcolonial theory in writing the history of Soviet-period art is related to the general upsurge of Soviet studies in Lithuania. A number of publications dedicated to the research on late Soviet society and culture have been published in recent years.<sup>1</sup> Despite differing research objects and methods, what the authors of these studies have in common is the attempt to re-think the relationship of the oppressed individual (or nation) to the Soviet system. The theme of the oppressor and the oppressed became entrenched in the Lithuanian Soviet studies discourse during the years of the ‘singing revolution’, and was dominant in the 1990s. That period’s authors were concerned primarily with the behaviour of the oppressed subject, which was usually considered in the framework of two opposite poles: conformism, on the one hand, which meant the individual’s conscious or unconscious collaboration with the Soviet authorities by carrying out the latter’s instructions, and resistance, on the other, which meant open or covert disobedience of the norms of the

<sup>1</sup> I will mention only books and dissertations, omitting a number of academic articles: N. Putinaitė, *Nenutrūkusi styga: prisitaikymas ir pasipriešinimas sovietų Lietuvoje* [Unbroken chord: conformation and opposition in Soviet Lithuania]. Vilnius: Aidai, 2007; A. Švedas, *Matricos nelaisvėje: sovietmečio lietuvių istoriografija (1944–1985)* [In the captivity of the matrix: Soviet Lithuanian historiography (1944–1985)]. Vilnius: Aidai, 2009; V. Klumbys, *Lietuvos kultūrinio elito elgsenos modeliai sovietmečiu* [Behavioural models of Soviet Lithuania’s cultural elite]. PhD dissertation. Vilnius, 2009; V. Ivanauskas, *Lietuviškoji nomenklatura biurokratinėje sistemoje. Tarp stagnacijos ir dinamikos (1968–1988 m.)* [Lithuanian nomenclature in the bureaucratic system. Between stagnation and dynamics (1968–1988)]. Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 2011; T. Vaiseta, *Nuobodulio visuomenė: vėlyvojo sovietmečio Lietuva (1964–1984)* [Society of boredom: Lithuania in the late Soviet period (1964–1984)]. PhD dissertation. Vilnius, 2012.

Soviet system.<sup>2</sup> The authors of contemporary studies of the Soviet period are critical of the 'totalitarian' vision of the Soviet period, based on the model of victim and oppressor, and call for a more complex and nuanced picture of life under the Soviet regime.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most notable 1990s notions used to describe the Soviet-period artists' relationship with the regime is 'semi-non-conformism', coined in 1992 by the local art critic Alfonsas Andriuškevičius.<sup>4</sup> Attempting to delineate the contours of the history of 1956–1986 Lithuanian painting, the author claimed that grouping Soviet-period artists into conformists and non-conformists was inadequate. Only a small number of Lithuanian artists openly collaborated with the Soviet authorities, expressly carrying out their orders. Even fewer artists can be called radical nonconformists who ignored the authorities' instructions and therefore had very limited visibility in the public art life. According to Andriuškevičius, 'most ... Lithuanian artists who were active during the mentioned period participated in the government-controlled cultural game, followed its rules, and even took advantage of the benefits that the participants in the game were eligible for ...; yet at the same time they [the artists] violated the tenets of the so-called socialist realism, and for this the authorities reproached and in some cases punished them.'<sup>5</sup> Disobedience to the Soviet system took different forms in different periods, such as depicting socialist realist subject matter (the themes of labour, proletarian struggle etc.) in modernist forms, employing the means of irony and deformation, which contradicted the Soviet optimistic ideology, and so on. To describe the situation of the majority of Lithuanian artists, Andriuškevičius proposed the term 'semi-non-conformism', which referred to the artists' non-radical position in relation to the Soviet regime, a position that involved both partial compliance with the Soviet system's norms and partial violation of the requirements of socialist realism. This term not only became entrenched in the Lithuanian discourse, but also spread internationally, when in 1995 Andriuškevičius's text was published in the catalogue *From Gulag to Glasnost* – the first publication of this scale to present the art of Soviet Lithuania to the English-speaking audience.<sup>6</sup>

In the spirit of the self-reflective trend of Soviet studies, in 2007 the culture analyst Skaidra Trilupaitytė attempted to deconstruct the term 'semi-non-conformism', analysing its meanings in the geopolitical context.<sup>7</sup> According to the critic, in the early

2 In this article, the terms 'collaboration' and 'conformism', on one side, and 'resistance', 'opposition' and 'non-conformism', on the other, are used as synonyms, as the aim of the article is not to analyse the meaning of these terms, but to reflect on the binary scheme that they form.

3 For instance, in a 2011 discussion on writing the history of the Soviet period, younger-generation historians argued: 'It is difficult to explain many late-Soviet phenomena, socio-cultural dynamics, and the behaviour of members of society from a strictly totalitarian perspective. A contrary approach rests on conceptual insights cultivated by the post-revisionists, who claim that next to the government structures there existed a networked society, which had developed its own peculiar culture of survival and adaptation to the regime, and was capable of manipulating the official rules of social and political life' (Sovietmečio istorikų priedermė – ieškoti baltos varnos? Diskusija [The duty of Soviet historians – to search for a white crow? Discussion]. – Kultūros barai 2011, no. 1, p. 16).

4 A. Andriuškevičius, *Seminonkonformistinė lietuvių tapyba: 1956–1986* [Semi-nonconformist Lithuanian painting: 1956–1986]. – Kultūros barai 1992, no. 12, pp. 15–19.

5 A. Andriuškevičius, *Seminonkonformistinė lietuvių tapyba: 1956–1986*, p. 12.

6 A. Andriuškevičius, *Semi-Nonconformist Lithuanian Painting*. – *From Gulag to Glasnost: Nonconformist Art from the Soviet Union*. Eds. N. T. Dodge, A. Rosenfeld. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995, pp. 218–226.

7 S. Trilupaitytė, *Soviet Art Evaluation in Post-Soviet Lithuania*. – *Different Modernisms, Different Avant-Gardes: Problems in Central and Eastern European Art after World War II*. Ed. S. Helme. (Proceedings of the Art Museum of Estonia 4.) Tallinn, 2009, pp. 383–393.

1990s the evaluations of Baltic and, by extension, Lithuanian art were influenced by the presentation of Russian art to the West as the Cold War was drawing to a close. Russian unofficial art, which was exhibited and bought in the West in the 1970s–1980s, was called nonconformist with the aim of giving it a tinge of political resistance, which was important in the Cold War context.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, Lithuania's art life in the late Soviet period differed from that of Moscow: there were fewer official restrictions on artistic style, and Lithuanian artists had stronger ties with the Western artistic tradition, and thus an active artistic underground did not emerge. Yet in the early 1990s, as the negative view of the Soviet period as a totalitarian system became entrenched, the issue of Soviet artists' non-conformism became relevant in Lithuania as well. Trilupaitytė argues that the retroactive coining of such terms as Lithuanian non-conformism or semi-non-conformism was paradoxical. According to her, while this term symbolised an attempt to de-Sovietise the national art, it also stood for an effort to link the latter to dissident, non-conformist Russian art, which was in high demand in the global art market, and thus fill the lack of underground, openly resistant art in Lithuania. Trilupaitytė noted that this term was not only self-contradictory, but also open to manipulation, and pointed out that non-conformist art, 'under different circumstances, [can] also be reclassified as conformist'.<sup>9</sup>

The same can be said about related terms, such as official/non-official art, which are constructed around the same fundamentalist, vertical axis. (The issue of official/non-official art was established in the post-Soviet Lithuanian art history by the notion of 'silent modernism', introduced by the art historian Elona Lubytė in 1997, which described the semi-non-official art life under the Soviet regime.<sup>10</sup>) Trilupaitytė was right to criticise the use of such terms, demonstrating that they expressed a desire to secure a niche in the Western market by producing more "heroes" of artistic opposition in one's country's past.<sup>11</sup> The author sees the politicisation of Soviet art and political evaluation of it as the main weakness of Soviet studies, which 'often overshadowed the possibility of analysing discourses on art history in more neutral terms'.<sup>12</sup> The desire to depoliticise an inquiry into Soviet culture is quite understandable and can be interpreted as a certain post-Soviet hangover after the years of over-politicisation of culture and its interpretations imposed by the Soviet regime. However, it is doubtful that writing the history of art, just as in artistic practice, can be a politically and ideologically neutral activity in principle. My position is closer to the trend of the New Art History, which emphasises inevitable inter-connections between aesthetics and ideologies/politics. According to the pioneering art historian T. J. Clark, ideology is inherent in every art work implicitly, as 'imaginary content' which appears, first of all, through the choice of objects and means of representation available in the historical

8 S. Trilupaitytė, *Soviet Art Evaluation in Post-Soviet Lithuania*, p. 387.

9 S. Trilupaitytė, *Soviet Art Evaluation in Post-Soviet Lithuania*, p. 391. As one of the examples, Trilupaitytė mentions the Lithuanian artist Silvestras Džiaukštas, whom Andriuškevičius presents as a semi-non-conformist, while in Matthew Cullerne Brown's book *Socialist Realist Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) he is the only Lithuanian to represent socialist realist art.

10 E. Lubytė, *Tylusis modernizmas Lietuvoje 1962–1982 [Quiet modernism in Lithuania 1962–1982]*. Vilnius: Tyto Alba, 1997.

11 S. Trilupaitytė, *Soviet Art Evaluation in Post-Soviet Lithuania*, p. 392.

12 S. Trilupaitytė, *Soviet Art Evaluation in Post-Soviet Lithuania*, p. 383. (My emphasis – L.D.)

period: 'Ideology is what the picture is, and what the picture is not.'<sup>13</sup> In the case of the interpretation of Soviet art, I would emphasise the problem of the binary logic typical of value judgement (the use of such binary oppositions as conformism – resistance, official – non-official, etc.) rather than the issue of the politicisation of art and art history, proceeding to discuss the problem of binary thinking in the framework of post-colonial theory.

The application of postcolonial theory in the analysis of former Soviet states' culture has long been an object of debate.<sup>14</sup> If the postcolonial critique is based on the scheme 'Europe as the coloniser and non-European cultures as the colonial 'Other'', is it possible to attach the role of the colonial 'Other' to the Baltic states, which identify themselves as European, and Russia as the oriental 'Other'? Can we view the socialist USSR as an empire equivalent to the capitalist empires of Western Europe? These and similar questions are still subject to debate<sup>15</sup>, although numerous studies that reveal the colonialist nature of the USSR have been published in the past decade<sup>16</sup>. Without going further into this discussion, let me just note that postcolonial theory has found a niche, albeit marginal, in Lithuanian culture studies, especially in literary theory, primarily thanks to the efforts of the expatriate scholar, renowned feminist and post-colonial literary critic Violeta Kelertas. In the 1990s, a number of Lithuanian scholars did internships at the Department of Lithuanian Studies of the University of Illinois in Chicago, which Kelertas was head of at the time. These scholars began publishing the first texts about the use of postcolonial theory in post-communist studies as early as the late 1990s.<sup>17</sup> Kelertas herself made a significant contribution to the promotion of the concept of Baltic postcolonialism.

13 T. J. Clark, *The Conditions of Artistic Creation*. – *Art History and Its Methods: A Critical Anthology*. Ed. E. Fernie. London: Phaidon, 1996, p. 251.

14 For a long time, neither Soviet nor Baltic colonialism was included in the postcolonial studies discourse, which became popular in the West in the late 1980s.

15 In the newest study focused on this problem, Epp Annus argues that these and similar questions are associated not so much with historical facts as with the present cultural and geopolitical situation of the Baltic states, as well as with the nostalgia for the imperial past that today's Russia openly demonstrates. See E. Annus, *The Problem of Soviet Colonialism in the Baltics*. – *Journal of Baltic Studies* 2012, vol. 43 (1), pp. 21–45.

16 The present article does not seek to review all of the arguments that different authors used to define the Soviet regime as colonialism. I will limit the list to two examples: one of the earliest and one of the most recent attempts to discuss this issue. In his groundbreaking 2001 article 'Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Towards a Global Postcolonial Critique', David Chioni Moore based his arguments on a comparison of the Soviet (and partially tsarist Russia's) occupation with Western empires' colonialism, discerning the classical traits of colonial order in the former ('lack of sovereign power, restrictions on travel, military occupation, lack of convertible money, a domestic economy ruled by the dominating state, and forced education in the colonizer's language', p. 25). The author treats the peculiar features of the Soviet expansion, such as the fact that the occupied territories were not overseas lands, and that a part of the non-Russian population welcomed the Bolshevik regime, as deviations from the classical colonialism model. At the end of the text, he reaches an important conclusion: '...for Western postcolonialist scholarship to privilege the Anglo-Franco cases as the colonizing standard and to call the Russo-Soviet experiences 'deviations', as I have done so far, is wrongly to perpetuate the already outdated centrality of the Western or Anglo-Franco world. It is time, I think, to break with that tradition.' (D. C. Moore, *Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Towards a Global Postcolonial Critique*. – *Baltic Postcolonialism: On the Boundary of Two Worlds – Identity, Freedom, and Moral Imagination in the Baltics*. Ed. V. Kelertas. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2006, p. 28.) Another example is the aforementioned Epp Annus's 2012 study. It stands out in that it concentrates on one aspect of Soviet colonialism – namely, Baltic colonialism – and scrutinises the political and legal issues of the Soviets' invasion of the Baltic states. Such analysis makes it possible to draw the conclusion that the Baltic states experienced military occupation, rather than colonisation. Yet occupation (the term that still has greater currency than 'colonialism' in the Baltic states) eventually turned into a colonial order, with its characteristic economic, social and cultural models (E. Annus, *The Problem of Soviet Colonialism in the Baltics*, pp. 21–45).

17 A. Samalavičius, *Postkolonializmas ir postkomunistinės Lietuvos kultūra* [Postcolonialism and postcommunist Lithuanian culture]. – *Metmenys* 1999, no. 79, pp. 151–167.

The problem of Baltic postcolonialism first entered international scholarship in 1998, when a special issue of *World Literature Today*, dedicated to the Baltic states, was published. This issue featured works by several North American scholars, émigrés from the Baltic states, which were presented at the 1997 Modern Language Association meeting in Toronto. While this issue of *World Literature Today* marked the breakthrough of Baltic postcolonial studies, the 2006 compilation of articles entitled *Baltic Postcolonialism*, edited by Violeta Kelertas, sought to firmly establish this field of research. This publication contained studies of Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian culture and literature. The articles can be grouped into two categories. Articles of the first category present analysis of cultural texts (mostly literary ones) from the perspective of postcolonial theory. Other articles focus more on the problem of Baltic postcolonialism itself and discuss the validity of applying this theory to the Baltic states.<sup>18</sup> To this purpose, David Chioni Moore's article with the revealing title 'Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Towards a Global Postcolonial Critique' is reprinted in the book. Moore's text, first published in 2001, is particularly valued for two reasons. First, it offers critical reflection on the factors that led to the absence of Baltic or Soviet colonialism in Western postcolonial studies.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, Moore was not an émigré from the Baltics, and thus his perspective is viewed as being impartial.<sup>20</sup> In the introduction, Kelertas mentions the statements made by some other noted scholars, such as the classic of postcolonialism Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and the anthropologist Katherine Verdery, as 'signs that the concept of postcoloniality is becoming accepted with reference to the former Soviet bloc'.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the establishment of the concept of Baltic postcolonialism was seen as the main aim of the book, hoping to encourage further debate '...not on *whether* postcolonialism fits the Baltic case, but *how* it applies in the wider context of post-Soviet nations.'<sup>22</sup>

Extending Kelertas's question 'how', I would like to further examine the application of postcolonial theory in writing post-Soviet art history. The postcolonial perspective remains an object of debate in the field of art history, and not only because the theory itself is applied in studies of literature on a much greater scale than in those of the visual arts.<sup>23</sup> A part of the problem lies in the very way in which this theory is applied, as well as in the choice of postcolonial concepts. Let me give you an example.

The first and so far the sole Lithuanian study in which postcolonial theory was applied to Lithuanian visual art of the late Soviet period was published in 2003 (fig. 1).<sup>24</sup> Its

18 For example, Karl E. Jirgens, 'Fusions of Discourse: Postcolonial/Postmodern Horizons in Baltic Culture'; Kārlis Račevskis, 'Toward a Postcolonial Perspective on the Baltic States'; Vytautas Rubavičius, 'A Soviet Experience of Our Own: Comprehension and the Surrounding Silence'.

19 Moore describes these factors as silence of two types (p. 17). On the one hand, Western Marxist scholars who are reluctant to identify the USSR as an empire keep silent about Soviet colonialism. On the other hand, the representatives of the former Soviet colonies who do not want to identify themselves as the colonised keep silent as well. See D. C. Moore, *Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?*, pp. 17–21.

20 Although the author himself admits that his grandmother was Lithuanian (D. C. Moore, *Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?*, p. 13).

21 V. Kelertas, Introduction: *Baltic Postcolonialism and its Critics*. – *Baltic Postcolonialism*, pp. 4–5.

22 V. Kelertas, Introduction, p. 2.

23 The most prominent creators of postcolonial theory – Edward W. Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha and others – focus mostly on literary works and other written sources.

24 D. Lapkus, *Potekščių ribos: uždraustos tapatybės devintojo dešimtmečio lietuvių prozoje* [Boundaries of the subtext: forbidden identities in Lithuanian art and prose from the 1980s]. Chicago: A. Mackus Publishing Foundation, 2003.

author is the diaspora scholar Danas Lapkus, a student of Violeta Kelertas's. Although Lapkus had completed art history studies in Vilnius in the early 1990s, his book, written in the United States, focuses primarily on Lithuanian literature of the 1980s, yet it also dedicates considerable attention to the visual arts. Basing his analysis on post-colonial theory, Lapkus examines a whole range of paintings of the 1970s–1980s. As the book's title *Boundaries of the Subtext* suggests, its primary object of research is the subtext, or 'Aesopian language'. Employing Edward Said's technique of contrapuntal reading, the author analyses a number of public art works of the late Soviet period that were approved by the censors. Lapkus's main idea is that Aesopian language enabled many artists of that period to deal with multiple forbidden topics: the occupation of Lithuania, guerilla warfare, deportation to Siberia etc.<sup>25</sup>

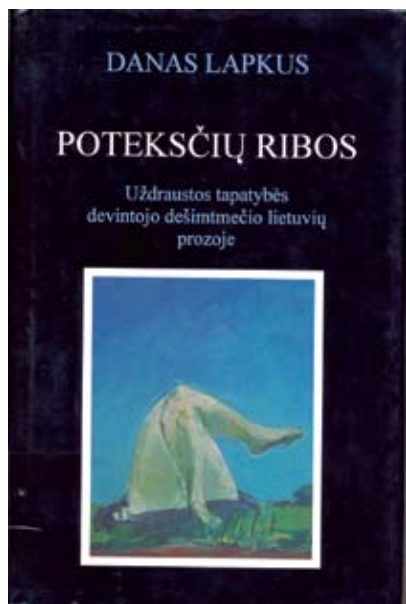
Let's take a case-study from the field of visual arts. According to Lapkus, one of the examples that indirectly express the state of a colonised nation is the painting *Woman with Sausage* (1974), by the famous late Soviet period painter Kostas Dereškevičius (fig. 2). Analysing the structure of the painting, the author argues that it looks like a 'banal, merry portrait' only at first sight. To quote Lapkus: 'the golden jewellery and the sausage ... appear to mean happiness. Yet the look in the woman's eyes is completely blank, ... her lips ... are twisted in half grimace of pain, half ironic smile, while ... the format of the composition ... resembles propaganda photographs of prisoners of war. The woman poses against a net or bars, behind which is the yellow-green-red tricolour.'<sup>26</sup> The author is referring to the colours of the flag of independent Lithuania, which was forbidden in the Soviet times. He finishes his analysis with the following conclusion: 'The painting interweaves the façade identity implanted by the strangers, the submission or resistance to this implantation, the acceptable limits of behaviour, and our own ridiculous look when we are discussing these problems.'<sup>27</sup> Lapkus states that the subtext of this portrait conceals the tragedy of the colonised individual in a desperate situation.

Indeed, if one takes a closer look at the original painting, one notices not only the clear yellow and red spots, but also the dark green layer that is covered by the blue and black lines of the net. Therefore, it is possible to trace references to the Lithuanian tricolour in this picture; yet would such an interpretation not be merely a retroactive attribution of meanings to the painting? I would like to propose a different, perhaps complementary interpretation of this painting by stating that Dereškevičius's painting *Woman with Sausage*, above all, represents an ambiguous notion of gender, typical of the late Soviet culture. I base this statement on the contextual analysis of the painting's meanings, limiting myself to several contexts. The first one is the context of the artist's work. It must be noted that the painting *Woman with Sausage* is a part of the series of the artist's works from the 1970s that represent women. The formal qualities of these works more or less correspond to those of the traditional portrait: they are of a small, 1 by 1 metre, format, and the figure is usually depicted in half-length, *en-face*, and in the foreground of the picture. Yet one important aspect distinguishes

25 D. Lapkus, *Poteksčių ribos*, p. 71.

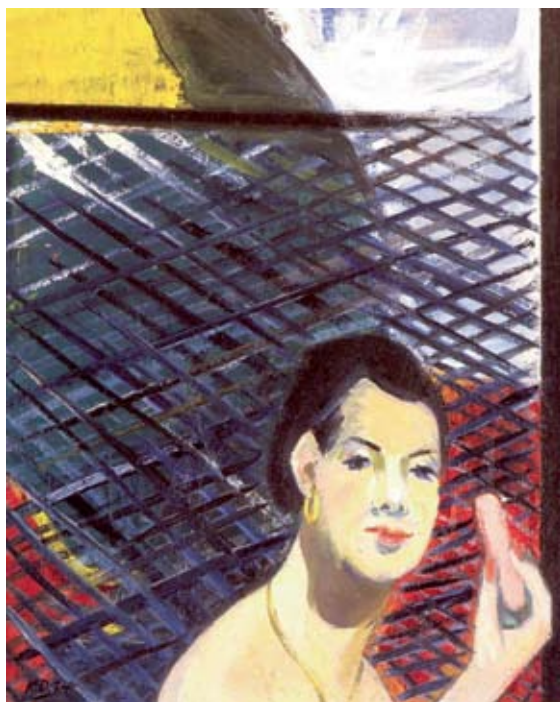
26 D. Lapkus, *Poteksčių ribos*, p. 103.

27 D. Lapkus, *Poteksčių ribos*, p. 103.



1.

Cover of the book *Boundaries of the Subtext: Forbidden Identities in Lithuanian Art and Prose from the 1980s* by Danas Lapkus (2003), with a reproduction of the painting *Having a Rest* (1982) by Kostas Dereškevičius.



2.

Kostas Dereškevičius. *Woman with Sausage* (1974). Oil on cardboard, 73 x 60 cm. Private collection.



3. Kostas Dereškevičius. *Woman of the Resort* (1976–1978). Oil on cardboard, 81 x 60 cm. Courtesy: Lithuanian Art Museum.



4. Back cover of the magazine *Tarybinė moteris* (*Soviet Woman*), 1973, no. 5.



them from the traditional portrait: the image of woman is usually serial, anonymous and depersonalised.

The second context is that of the Lithuanian art of the late Soviet period. Dereškevičius belongs to the generation of the 1970s. In 1973, a few years after graduation from the State Art Institute of Lithuanian SSR, he, along with Algimantas Kuras, Arvydas Šaltenis, Algimantas Švėgžda and Algirdas Taurinskas, organised an exhibition in Vilnius, which made them famous and prompted art critics to discuss the new values that characterised this generation. According to the critics of that time, the themes depicted by Dereškevičius and his colleagues were different from those of the generation of Khrushchev's Thaw: instead of heroic characters, they portrayed the 'small man', instead of grandiose panoramas, the everyday environment and banal objects. Soviet art critics identified several innovations in this context, which were also characteristic of the representation of women in Dereškevičius's works: the de-idealisation and de-romanticisation of the depicted individual, or even the grotesque.

The third context is the socio-cultural one. Before the 1970s, gender differences were practically unarticulated in Soviet Lithuanian art; the abstract images of woman as mother or woman as muse prevailed. These reflected the ideal of the Soviet woman, which was based on a de-sexualised, disciplined and often androgynous body. Thus, the main innovation of Dereškevičius's work was the sexual representation of the female figure. The fact that the artist was primarily concerned with gender issues was confirmed by his response to a question about his future plans in a 1975 interview: 'I would like to paint a blonde'.<sup>28</sup> In his portraits of women, the artist paid great attention to gender marking, primarily through the cultural signs of the female body surface. Dereškevičius's women appear to have descended from the pages of popular magazines of that time, which contained increasingly more information about the Western fashion and lifestyle in the 1970s (fig. 3 and 4). (It is known that many of these paintings were painted after photographs from popular magazines.)

Moreover, Dereškevičius not only provided his female figures with gender, but also openly sexualised the female body. Formally – through fragmenting the body, fetishising the separate parts of the body, exposing it from up close. Thematically – through portraying women who demonstrate and offer themselves, or appear passive and submissive. It is difficult to say today what effect these images had on the viewer's imagination. Yet it is interesting to note that Soviet critics' opinions were divided: some wrote about 'the beauty of the body', while others saw the grotesque in the paintings. Some of the critics' views can be easily translated into the language of feminist/psychoanalytic theory: the bodies of Dereškevičius's women are objectified and eroticised.

This short contextual analysis shows that the meanings of the female images created by this Soviet-period artist are ambivalent at the very least. On the one hand, the figure of a stylish, sexy woman created by the artist, and the exposure of the body as an object of desire opposed the Soviet norms of femininity and supported the sexualised image of women typical of (Western) consumerist culture. On the other hand, this image of women is clearly a fantasy of sadistic voyeurism (to use Laura Mulvey's term<sup>29</sup>).

28 A. Andriuškevičius, *Trys jaunesnieji* [Three young artists]. – *Nemunas* 1975, no. 3, p. 44.

29 See L. Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. – *Screen* 1975, no. 16 (3), pp. 6–18.

The woman is 'punished' in Dereškevičius's paintings by reducing her image to a promiscuous, demonstrated, passive, amorphous and 'fleshy' body. Such bodies attract a misogynistic rather than a desiring gaze, which projects guilt and expresses controlling power. This way of imag(in)ing women was completely in line with the patriarchal mentality rooted in the Soviet system.

Thus, my postcolonial interpretation, mixed with a feminist reading of the image<sup>30</sup>, differs from Lapkus's interpretation in two aspects. First, the opposition to Soviet norms is seen here not through (attributed) signs of national resistance (the tricolour), but rather through the construction of a new gender image. Secondly, the analysis of the gender image demonstrates that the painting's relationship to the official gender discourse is ambiguous, as it both opposes and embraces the latter. Or, perhaps the terms 'opposition' and 'conformism' are irrelevant in general in this case.

I would now like to draw attention to the use of different concepts in these two interpretations. Lapkus applies early postcolonial theory, represented by such works as the pioneering book in this field, Edward Said's *Orientalism*<sup>31</sup>, or the works of the art historian Linda Nochlin, who applied Said's ideas to art historical research on Oriental art as early as in 1983<sup>32</sup>. This strand of postcolonial theory emphasises the division of West and East, 'the coloniser' and 'the colonised', as if these were separate cultures that did not influence each other. In the context of Soviet studies, such an approach once again highlights the confrontation between art (or the artist) and the system. As the discussed case has shown, this approach is hardly productive, as it is based on retroactive attribution of (resistance-related) meanings and an idealistic rather than realistic notion of Aesopian language. To refer to Edgaras Klivis, here Aesopian language is understood as a perfectly functioning system of communication: it is comprised of allegorical messages that are incomprehensible to the censor (for various reasons, e.g. lack of education or different national background), and thus reach the target audience intact, when this audience decodes them correctly.<sup>33</sup>

Another strand of postcolonial theory, in contrast, does not concentrate on the separation of different cultures and instead refers to the hybridity inherent in the colonial culture. The biological term 'hybrid', which means an offspring produced by two different species, in postcolonial theory is employed as a metaphor for the description of interaction and exchange between different cultural traditions. The leading postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha derives the idea of hybridity from the critique of the principle of binary thinking. He argues that the dualistic view of the situation comes from colonialism itself, which bases its power on strict binary opposition between 'I' and the 'Other', the civilised centre and the wild periphery. It is the coloniser himself

30 Postcolonialism and feminism are quite cognate theories in that both are based on a clearly political evaluation of any kind of oppression, and speak out against hegemonic, including patriarchal, systems. Some theorists combine both perspectives, for instance Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who notes that colonialism affects genders differently, and that women experience double colonialism. See G. C. Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak? – The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Eds. B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin. London, New York: Routledge, 1998, pp. 24–28. (Originally published in 1988.)

31 E. W. Said, *Orientalism*. London: Routledge, 1978.

32 L. Nochlin, *The Imaginary Orient. – Art in America* 1983, vol. 71 (5), pp. 118–131, pp. 187–191.

33 E. Klivis, *Ardomasis prisitaikymas: cenzūra ir pasipriešinimo jai būdai sovietinio laikotarpio Lietuvos teatre* [Destructive adaptation: censorship and the ways to resist it in Lithuanian theatre of the Soviet period]. – *Menotyra* 2010, vol. 17 (2), pp. 126–127.

who imagines that, by fulfilling the civilising mission, he is bringing a superior culture (for example, socialist realism) to second-class natives, who are forced to adopt it, and imitate it. Bhabha reveals the paradoxical nature of colonial imitation or camouflage mimicry, showing that the coloniser, by imposing his culture, desires to change, to reform the colonial 'Other' who, through imitation, acts as 'almost the same, but not quite'.<sup>34</sup> Bhabha continues: '...the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.'<sup>35</sup> Because of its paradoxical nature, mimicry is only a partial adaptation of colonial norms and through this partiality it also disturbs them, reveals their internal contradictions and thus contributes to the disruption of colonial power. So, the colonial culture should be seen as a specific interaction between the coloniser and the colonised, which changes the mentality and behaviour of both.

In her article on Baltic colonialism<sup>36</sup>, Epp Annus uses the term 'hybridity' in analysing historical and legal aspects of the Soviet invasion of the Baltic countries after World War II. The author suggests distinguishing between the occupation and the colonial periods in the Baltic states, holding that the middle of the 1950s marked the end of the former, when overt opposition to the foreign regime – guerilla resistance – ended. She also associates certain types of social behaviour with these periods, stating that '...the period of occupation ... developed into a period of colonial rule, as the modes of resistance turned into hybrid coexistence with the new power.'<sup>37</sup> According to the author, the scheme of collaboration-resistance is valid only for the occupation period, which is usually temporary and is characterised by 'reasonable hope that the occupation can end'.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, this scheme is not adequate for the colonialist order. Therefore, the notions of collaboration and resistance should be rejected in the analysis of the hybrid coexistence typical of the colonialist order.

At least two ideas from this strand of postcolonial theory may be useful for art historical research of the Soviet period. Firstly, there is the notion of colonial culture, which should be seen not as a phenomenon imposed by a foreign country on a colonised nation but as a space of interaction between two different components, and thus an ambivalent, hybrid culture. The application of this kind of notion to the Soviet culture may solve, for example, the problem of dividing Soviet heritage into 'our own' and 'foreign'. This problem often appears in constructing museum exhibitions devoted to the Soviet past, where a place for official or socialist realist art is always under discussion.<sup>39</sup>

The second idea is more related to the methodology of the research on colonial culture. Applying postcolonial theory to his analysis of Soviet theatre censorship and the

34 H. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. New York, London: Routledge, 2004 (1994), p. 122.

35 H. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 122.

36 E. Annus, *The Problem of Soviet Colonialism in the Baltics*, pp. 21–45.

37 E. Annus, *The Problem of Soviet Colonialism in the Baltics*, p. 37.

38 E. Annus, *The Problem of Soviet Colonialism in the Baltics*, p. 36.

39 For example, the section devoted to the post-war period in the permanent exhibition of the National Gallery of Art, which opened in 2008 in Vilnius, does not present socialist realism and the scale of its influence in Lithuanian art, but tells a story about efforts made by Lithuanian artists to resist a foreign doctrine by means of modernist aesthetics. For more about this subject, see L. Dovydaitytė, *Post-Soviet Writing of History: The Case of the National Gallery of Art in Vilnius*. – *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi* 2010, vol. 19 (3/4), pp. 105–120.

ways of resisting it, Klivis notes that the stricter the censorship of art works, the less control the censor or the coloniser has over the viewers' fantasies, which result from the fact of censorship itself.<sup>40</sup> This means that the analysis of Soviet heritage should focus more on the audience's role in creating the meanings of an art work, rather than that of the artist.

The question is how to investigate the audience's imagination. One possible way is to look for the 'public' in critical texts of Soviet times. The analogy between the public and Freud's theory of the conscious and unconscious, suggested by T. J. Clark, may be useful to Soviet studies: 'The unconscious is nothing but its conscious representations, its closure in the faults, silences and caesuras of normal discourse. In the same way, the public is nothing but the *private* representations in the discourse of the critic. [Thus the public appears at] the points at which the rational monotone of the critic breaks, fails, falters.'<sup>41</sup> Keeping in mind that the official critical discourse was regulated by the Soviet system, the separation of rational monotone from slips of the tongue appears particularly relevant. Interestingly, the interpretations of Dereškevičius's portraits of women differed depending on the critic's gender. Another important source in the analysis of the perception of Soviet art is formed by the habits of image consumption in the society of the late Soviet period: for instance, the use of gender images, as in this case. It is important to consider how photographs and reproductions from popular magazines were used in the private space in the absence of a public discourse on sexuality. The third option is the analysis of empirical data about the audience: for instance, the examination of exhibition visitors' comments in museums' books of visitors.

Perhaps these postcolonial ideas on the hybridity of the colonial – in this case, Soviet – culture will allow us to look at the art of the late Soviet period more analytically, without reducing it to the dualist scheme of conformism and opposition, but without the illusion of being politically neutral. Postcolonial theory can also be useful for art history in a broader sense, as an incentive to re-think the writing of art history, which is itself usually an act of cultural domination, the creation of canons, and the representation of the 'Other'. The most important lesson of postcolonialism for art historians may be the rejection of the superior position and alleged objectivity ('here is how it really was'), an awareness of the biased nature of one's activity, and constant critical reflection on the political and ideological circumstances that inevitably influence any sort of history writing.

40 E. Klivis, *Ardomasis prisitaikymas*, p. 130.

41 T. J. Clark, *On the Social History of Art*. – T. J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999 (1973), p. 12.