

Maria Slautina  
Graduate Student  
Institute of Fine Arts  
New York University  
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## David Wojnarowicz: Is “Untitled, Face in Dirt” a Co-Authored Work?

In 1991, during their last trip together, which would also be David Wojnarowicz’s last to the Death Valley, Marion Scemama took a photograph, which today is usually exhibited under the title “Untitled, Face in Dirt”. It represents Wojnarowicz’s face with closed eyes and slightly opened mouth, buried in a dry coarse ground with only his chin, his mouth, his nose and his eyes above the surface. This picture is considered to be their “last collaboration”<sup>1</sup>.

Marion Scemama remembers the moment of taking the photograph: “We stopped at an Indian village and David said, “There’s a photo I want to take. Follow me.” He took me through the village and climbed a little wall and down a cliff where nobody could see us. We couldn’t see the village anymore. He said, “You’re gonna help me make a hole, I’m gonna put half of my body in the hole, and then you’re gonna cover me with dirt.” We started digging with our hands. He took off his jean jacket, his sweatshirt, and then he lay down in the hole. Then I took the camera, stood above him with his body between my legs, and photographed him from different angles.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Marion Scemama” in Ambrosino, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

The question I want to explore is whether we use the term “collaboration” here, and whether it is possible to designate this piece as one of multiple authorship. As has been pointed out, not every collaboration—meaning joint efforts in producing an artwork—results in a joint authorship.<sup>3</sup> If we are to designate the author or the authors of this piece, who should be identified as such, Wojnarowicz, Scemama or both? To answer this question we need (i) to look into the history of the photograph, (ii) to think about artist’s intent, and (iii) to analyze the outcomes and the amount of creative participation from each side.

Reading the above step-by-step description of the photographing process, several things strike one. First, it is clear that the idea of the photograph belongs to Wojnarowicz, and it didn't appear in his mind spontaneously. He had a precise vision of what to do and how to do it. We also notice the language he presumably used (but without forgetting that his words are related through another person’s memories, and were recorded some fifteen years later), “I want to take”, “you gonna help”, “you gonna cover”. Furthermore, Marion took several shots of him from different viewpoints, so that they (or he?) could chose the right angle later.

We know precisely the moment when this image first appeared in David’s mind. In his diary from the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 1979 we read a description of his dream on that day: “They’ve buried me in the coarse brown earth, all the way up to my teeth; somehow the mouth must be openned wide so that filings of dirt spread within the jaw, over the white porcelain teeth, leaving one tooth exposed down

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<sup>3</sup> Livingston, p. 75. I will come back to this at the last part of the paper.

to the gum”<sup>4</sup>. This depiction has a lot in common with the photograph taken some twelve years later in the Death Valley.

Artist’s intention and its change over time.

Descriptions of dreams occupy a substantial part of Wojnarowicz’s diaries: he is keen to remember them, tells them to friends, and carefully writes many of them down. In some way they constitute a part of the ‘artistic vocabulary’ on which he draws. Maybe it is more appropriate to use the term ‘visions’ rather than ‘dreams’ here (although he himself mostly use the latter word) as it is not improbable that some of them were experienced under drugs. However we as simple readers of his journals are not in any position to distinguish between the two. One can perceive inspiration he gets from his dreams not only in the content of his works, such as his “Dream Series”, but also in the techniques he chooses, for example, collages. It is telling, however, that the artist hadn’t used the ‘dirt’ dream as a plot of an artwork before that day. Why would he let it remain a mere written description for all these years, not different from any other dream-description he filled his diaries with over all the years, and put it in a photograph only twelve years later?

One of the reasons might be that in late 1979 he yet lacks an ‘intention’ for such an art piece<sup>5</sup>. He wasn’t sure what such a piece would communicate to his public.

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<sup>4</sup> David Wojnarowicz Papers, p. 18. I kept the authorial orthography and punctuation.

At the time it may not have been more than a powerful visual image. At the same time, the dream entry doesn't end with the cited sentences. It continues with quite a lengthy description of him being in a foreign place in a suburban area. Then he suddenly comes back to the 'burial spot' trying to rescue his tooth from the ground, when "it breaks like an old egg, grey matter and movement come spilling out, I realize its filled with maggots, I feel faint, stomach turning, step away backwards trying to find the words for response, cant scream because its my tooth, a mixture of pity and anger and repulsion coming though"<sup>6</sup>. It ends with a morphine injection, after which "nothing matters so much as the warm sensation spreading towards the skull, all is solved and nothing wanted". The dream has some literary qualities, and calls for interpretation, but I will leave that to Freudian or Lacanian scholars and will stress only the fact that from the whole of this powerful and dramatic dream imagery the Wojnarowicz of 1991 kept only the first scene, the entrance to the dream plot. The dream, from being a psychological narrative and an excursion into artist's internal life, his struggles and fears, transforms into a photograph of a buried man with a serene expression. Is this man sleeping and having a dream, or is he dead? Isn't death a point when "all is solved and nothing wanted"? As Juhani Pallasmaa puts it, "artistic expression is engaged with pre-verbal meanings of the world, meanings that are incorporated and lived rather than simply intellectually understood"<sup>7</sup>. In this case the artist recycles the image, which over the years, from being merely

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<sup>5</sup> Here I refer to one of the evaluations of the term proposed by Richard Kuhns in his "Criticism and the Problem of Intention", namely, "an intention in that it exhibits moral and intellectual content". Cited by Steven W. Dykstra, p.211.

<sup>6</sup> David Wojnarowicz's Papers, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> Pallasmaa, p. 28

intellectual and visual, became his own lived experience. He skipped the middle of the narrative, translating to the picture only its frame. The Wojnarowicz of 1979, if he was to make an art piece out of this dream, might have chosen a totally different sequence.

Melissa Harris talks about the “obsessive intentionality” of Wojnarowicz as an artist. She says: “He worked on and through themes – metaphorical themes as well as the much-discussed political and cultural ones – with great purpose. He had a distinctive visual lexicon, with recognizable references and discernible meanings, upon which he was always building. As free-flowing as David’s work might feel – often with the raging, focused energy of an artist *seeing red* – there was a reason, an intelligence, behind every decision, every juxtaposition”<sup>8</sup>. Most art historians agree that the artist has some sort of understanding what he is about to do before starting to do it, which is why we have the cliché “*brilliantly conceived and executed*” where the two terms are thought to denote not merely temporally but also ontologically distinct phenomena, the one involving mental envisagement and the other physical embodiment”<sup>9</sup>.

Although we know the origin of the image’s conception, which I will discuss this later more in details, we don’t exactly know why Wojnarowicz decided to make this particular picture on that particular day. Did being in Death Valley and facing imminent death trigger in him memories of the distant dream, and for that reason he decided to execute this piece? Or did he read through his diaries

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<sup>8</sup> David Wojnarowicz, 2015, p.9.

<sup>9</sup> Hagberg, p. 62

before leaving, and then decide to execute it? Or did he perhaps have the idea of the photograph floating in his mind during all these years, but without yet an opportunity to accomplish it? In the context of this image researchers bring into light the photographs made by Wojnarowicz of Peter Hujar on his deathbed and the artist's intentions associated with this project. As he puts it himself in his essay "Postcards from America: X-Rays from Hell," which appeared in the catalogue for the Artists Space AIDS-related exhibition *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing*: "Each public disclosure of a private reality becomes something of a magnet that can attract others with a similar frame of reference; thus each public disclosure of a fragment of private reality serves as a dismantling tool against the illusion of ONE TRIBE NATION... <...> To turn our private grief for the loss of friends, family, lovers, and strangers into something public would serve as another powerful dismantling tool"<sup>10</sup>. He also thinks that photography can be a tool in documenting the life of people on the marge of society, gays and artists, to make them noticeable: "A camera in hand can keep our bodies and our psychic and physical needs visible in a country where those needs are being legislated into invisibility more and more"<sup>11</sup>. In this case, the project from being only a private affair of making Scemama a part of his "death experience", as she puts it<sup>12</sup>, turns into a public declaration, documenting the AIDS epidemic mediated losses in the homosexual art community, something that was marginal, underrepresented and underacknowledged in the public rhetoric of the time.

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<sup>10</sup> David Wojnarowicz, 1989, p. 10-11.

<sup>11</sup> David Wojnarowicz, 2015, p.53

<sup>12</sup> Ambrosino, p.140. I will come back to this quote later, and analyze it in the context of the collaboration question.

This problem became a very important part of Wojnarowicz's artistic and social activities in the late 80s, and remained so until his death.

Do we author our dreams?

Now let me come back to the authorship of the piece. The fact that the scene appeared to Wojnarowicz in a dream gives an interesting twist to the authorship problem. Livingston argues that "authorship does entail that the expressive utterance is an intentional action. We are not, then, the authors of our dreams or of things muttered in our sleep"<sup>13</sup>. He proposes to connect authorship to an act of "expressive intention", which can also "be referred to as a 'plan'", following which "is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition of all intentional actions, including the authoring of any utterance", or in our case, an image. He adds that his "proposed definition of authorship rules out perfectly secretive or private authorial acts, such as composing a poem in one's own head and never performing any publicly observable actions indicative of its content. As soon as the solitary author writes something down or utters the words aloud, his or her linguistic activity becomes publicly observable 'in principle', and so satisfies the stated conditions on expression"<sup>14</sup>.

This makes our authorship case multidimensional. Wojnarowicz first sees the image in a dream, and therefore, according to Livingston's concept of expressive intention for claiming authorship, he can't be considered to be its author. By then

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<sup>13</sup> Livingston, p. 71

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

writing it down in his diary, he made it potentially public, and by this act authored it. Wojnarowicz is, therefore, the author of his text, but not the author of the image. There appears to be here a more complicated hierarchy than we initially thought: an un-authored dream has become an authored text, which has become a script for a later photograph, acted by the author of the text and technically performed by a third person, Marion Scemama. To put it in other words, the dream is an idea of the artwork, the dream's typescript is its sketch, and the photograph is its original.

Some friends, such as Tommy Turner, thought that Wojnarowicz was inventing his dreams: "After years of hearing David's dreams over coffee shop breakfasts of eggs over easy, I began to doubt that they were dreams at all. Each morning's speech was more intense than the previous. I figured he was making them up. But then I thought about the possibility of thinking up that shit every day consciously, and that seemed even more unbelievable"<sup>15</sup>. Then Turner cites another episode that proves that Wojnarowicz's sleep was a creative phase, and that probably he was a bit of somnambulist: "I lay there, wide-awake, in the bed across from David's. Suddenly, he blasts up into a sitting position and says:

No... Life as a bird

A bird with a song in its throat

Flying over a wall

A low wall of a feeling

The logging call

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<sup>15</sup> Ambrosino, p 75



The fast left right

A quiet now

A quiet month

He drops back and is obviously again in a deep sleep. Shit, I thought, this motherfucker dreams in poetry!"<sup>16</sup> David clearly didn't invent all his dreams, but it is very likely that by writing them down or by telling them to other people he transformed them, drawing on the canvas of what he could remember, but creating a sketch or a draft. His friends attested on many an occasion his unwillingness to discard anything that could be used for making art, and dreams were potential building blocks as well.

Wojnarowicz himself seems to make a clear distinction between his dreams and his art projects, but he does use images from the dreams in his art. For example, in one of the "Dream Series", which I have mentioned above, he represents himself as an orange dinosaur, holding a green shoot in his mouth, on the background of a dream-like black-and-white collage. In another we see a sleeping man, represented as a map, and having a range of dreams. He also uses images of sleeping friends, such as the image of Peter Hujar in the piece "Peter Hujar Dreaming/Yukio Mishima: St Sebastian" (1982). Later on, while executing Hujar's pictures on his deathbed, he had chosen a similar angle, but from a different side. In "Untitled, Face in Dirt" we see the angle of the face as it is on the dead Hujar picture, executed in 1987, and not on the sleeping Hujar of 1982. He could have chosen to execute it in the same collage and stencil technique, but

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

decided not to. As Lucy R. Lippard points out, “the photographs have more in common with his writing than with his paintings, for which they provided raw material and vignettes”<sup>17</sup>. And, as in our case, sometimes the beginnings of the creative process were his dreams, which provided the material for photographs.

Recalling Pasolini.

Yet, as it happens, the “face in dirt” scene of the dream was not a product of David’s oneiric imagination alone, but in fact referred to an identifiable cinematographic source: a very similar, if not identical, scene appeared eleven years earlier at the final sequences of Pier Paolo Pasolini’s film “Teorema”. Emilia, the maid, touched by the divine spirit and after performing a miraculous ascension, asks an old woman from the village to bury her body in the coarse dirt of a suburban building lot, leaving only her eyes and her nose above ground (fig. 1). While the “Untitled: Face in Dirt” photograph has a striking pictorial resemblance with the close-up of Pasolini’s scene, especially in its original black and white version, the suburban setting in the film recalls more the narrative of the dream, which situates the scene “in a foreign town, american landscape turning from rural to suburban in a series of freshly asphalted roads and cool lawns and factory scrub fields and lots paved roughly with dirt and refuse <...>,”<sup>18</sup> rather than in a desert, where David chose to eventually execute it. It is worth noting, however, that the very next scene after the one representing the buried maid, which also is the final scene of the film, does take place in an

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<sup>17</sup> David Wojnarowicz, 2015, p.14

<sup>18</sup> David Wojnarowicz Papers, p. 18. I kept the authorial orthography and punctuation.

apocalyptic desert setting at the foothills of Mount Etna, highly reminiscent of the landscapes of Death Valley.

Pier Paolo Pasolini visited New York twice, in 1965 and in 1969. By then he was a significant figure for the city's artistic community, influencing and being influenced by a number of prominent poets and artists from Andy Warhol to Allen Ginsberg<sup>19</sup>. His "Teorema" was first projected there at the Coronet Theater on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April 1969, only a few months after its official premiere at the Venice Film Festival, in the version mixing color and black and white scenes<sup>20</sup>. Perhaps David was too young to see this premiere, but in the late 70s one would expect Pasolini to be a fixture in the city's art scene, especially among its artistic gay community, with his films regularly shown in New York cinemas and with several of his books translated into English. Indeed, a copy of "The Divine Mimesis" dating from 1980 was a part of Wojnarowicz's private library; and although the date of publication is not illuminating, for it could have entered the collection at any subsequent time, it proves David's sustained interest in Pasolini's works. It is not impossible that David at least partly associated himself with the famous Italian filmmaker. After all they had quite a few similarities: both held Marxist views and were vociferous critics of capitalist society and its commodification; both used their art to promulgate identity politics; both started with writing and then came to visual media; both tried their hand at a number of expressive means; both adored Arthur Rimbaud. Interestingly, the Visitor in "Teorema" at several points throughout the film reads from the collection of

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<sup>19</sup> Merjian, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Canby, 1969.

Rimbaud poems, "Oeuvres-Opere", a Feltrinelli publication of 1964. In Wojnarowicz's book collection we also find a volume of collected works by the French poet, titled "Illuminations and Other Prose Poems", published in 1957 by the New York publishing house New Directions/James Laughlin. Although the two selection do not entirely coincide, both texts are bilingual editions and contain the "Illuminations", the prose poems many of which Rimbaud had written in London between 1873 and 1875 with Verlaine by his side.

The affinities between Pasolini's and Wojnarowicz's filming styles also call for interpretation. Analyzing the camerawork in "A Fire in My Belly" Karl Schoonover calls "Wojnarowicz's artistic practice <...> a kind of writing in images <...>", which is a very Pasolinian characteristic indeed. He goes on explicitly to point out that his "<...> documentary or photographic footage becomes symbolic almost immediately. Not unlike Pasolini's aspirations for cinematic representations, Wojnarowicz's camera works to sanctify the raw footage of reality"<sup>21</sup>.

One can think of a number of common themes connecting the scene from "Teorema" with the photograph "Untitled: Face in Dirt": reflection about life and death; emphasis on solitude; juxtaposition of the human face and the inexpressive background; blurring of formal boundaries between portrait, landscape and still life. Moreover, the dream and the subsequent photograph point towards Pasolini's work not only in thematic, stylistic and visual ways, but

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<sup>21</sup> Schoonover, 2011, p. 8.

also biographically, at least if we consider David's private journal as a sort of autobiography. To look for biographical connections between the dream later translated into photograph and Pasolini's work we need only to read through the volume of the journal from the end of 1979, the volume in which David wrote his dream down. Expectedly, perhaps, in the light of artist's fondness for recalling his dreams, this inscription is far from unique. There are several other descriptions of dreams, one of them rather cinematographic, before the "face in dirt" dream appears in the diary on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December. Somewhat confusingly because not in chronological order, a few pages later there is a glued sheet of paper dated from the 8<sup>th</sup> of December, entitled "Loosing the Form in Darkness" (dream of federico/pasolini, 1<sup>st</sup> draft)<sup>22</sup>. It starts like this: "It is federico fellinni or more easily, pasolini in his dark bed by the roma ruins". Besides being the presumed protagonist of several scenes in the dream, there is another explicit mention of Pasolini later in the text: "It is the childlike rogue slipped from the white sheeted bed of pasolini, holding photographs of ghost images, moments sligned in a series of still movements as in the aftermath of dreams remembered across the countertop over the steam of morning coffee". The same words appear in an essay on the next page, entitled "Losing the Form of Darkness (From the waterfront journal)", which reads: "What it is the appearance of a portrait, not the immediate vision I love so much: that of the drag queen in the dive waterfront coffeshop turning towards a stranger and giving a coy seductive smile which reveals a mouth of rotted teeth, but the childlike rogue slipped out from the white sheeted bed of pasolini, the image of jean genêt cut loose from the

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<sup>22</sup> Wojnarowicz Papers, p. 21.

fine lines of fiction, uprooted from age and time and continent, and hung up slowly behind my back against a green tin wall”<sup>23</sup>. While the entry is not dated, it has its assigned place within the chronological narrative of the journal, and allows us to witness the fascinating process of migration of David’s ideas—from a dream to an essay, and from an essay to a book; for the same phrase appears almost unchanged in his 1991 book “Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration”<sup>24</sup>.

Although there is no explicit mention of “Teorema” in the journal, we can thus assume that Pasolini and his work were very much on David’s mind when he saw the “face in dirt” dream. If we believe that dreams reflect the experience of waking life at some level, then this oneiric image, bearing such a striking visual resemblance with a sequence of “Teorema”, could be born in David’s head after his exposure to the works of the Italian filmmaker. One cannot speak of a direct “source” or a straightforward “inspiration”, since the whole of the dream’s narrative does not repeat any scene of the film, and was clearly processed in David’s own imagination, while sleeping or awake. It is quite likely, though, coming back to the question of artist’s intent, that the final sequence of Pasolini’s film—a picture of a maid buried alive shot by gay filmmaker who was savagely murdered seven years later—had a direct influence on David’s choice to reenact the scene from the dream as a photograph shortly before his own untimely departure.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22.

<sup>24</sup> Wojnarowicz, 1991, 10.

## Co-workers or co-authors?

In the last interview that she gave to Glenn Wharton and Marvin Taylor, directors of “The David Wojnarowicz Project” at the NYU Fales Library, Marion Scemama suggests that as long as Peter Hujar was alive Wojnarowicz never took his photographic activities too seriously<sup>25</sup>. In this respect he was always feeling himself “in the shade” of his friend and mentor. “He never trusted his photos, because of Peter”, she says. He didn't have his own darkroom to develop films and print photographs, and insisted that his photographs were mere snapshots. Of course, he created the major photographic project “Rimbaud in New York”, but that was the only one in a period of about 10 years. At the same time Wojnarowicz was constantly taking photographs, apparently always keeping a camera with him<sup>26</sup>. It was his first medium; he started experimenting with it in his early teens “documenting a daily life on the drug-sex-and-hunger-haunted streets”<sup>27</sup>. The death of Hujar “liberated” the photographer in him, he moved to Hujar’s loft, started to use his darkroom, and “for the first time was able to go back over years and years of negatives”<sup>28</sup>.

When they first met in 1983, Marion Scemama was a French photographer settled in New York and interested in documenting the downtown art scene, while Wojnarowicz was already quite an established artist. She photographed

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<sup>25</sup> From an inedited interview with Marion Scemama of the 3rd of November 2015.

<sup>26</sup> *David Wojnarowicz*, 2015, p.11. He says “For years ever since then, I’ve always taken pictures – wherever I go, I usually bring a camera. I would take rolls and rolls of films – mostly black and white – and get them developed as contact sheets”.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p.15.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p.16.

him and his works at the Pier 28, and then he invited her to make the photo for the poster of his show at Civilian Warfare gallery. They started to meet very often, and occasionally collaborate, as, for example, for the show at Tim Greathouse Gallery. David even presented the owner of the Gallery with an ultimatum that he either participated in the exhibition with Marion or not at all<sup>29</sup>. This is the generosity that many of David's friends talk about, his ability to give, to share and to be together. This aptitude wasn't constant though, as is witnessed by numerous "break ups" and "reconciliations" with friends and acquaintances. In his diaries Wojnarowicz says how much he likes travelling in the company of friends, but also alone, and dreamily thinks about the ideal – being able to chose according to his needs. This desirable idyllic travel pattern can be used as an ideal metaphor for David's collaboration practices – together and yet alone.

An interesting light on the nature of the Scemama and Wojnarowicz collaboration of that period can be shed by the story of shooting the scene with Paul Smith, which appeared in "Silence = Death (1990). First, another person shot the scene on film, and David was disappointed with the result: he and Paul were just two men kissing without anything artistic or sensual about it. Scemama says "only somebody who was sensitive to his world and sexuality would have translated in image this very specific emotion of the encounter of two men <...> I suggested to David that we do the scene again in video and I shot it exactly the

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<sup>29</sup> Ambrosino, p.125



way I saw it ".<sup>30</sup> "That's when, she says, I really understood what my work with David could be. We were intellectually and emotionally very close. David used to say we were from the same brain and I used to call him my incestuous mind lover"<sup>31</sup>. But she also says "I had this camera that wasn't just an object but an extension of David's mind through my eye and my arm"<sup>32</sup>. The two factors together, her being emotionally very close but also an extension of his mind, made her a perfect helper and coworker. The question is whether David, had he been able to film himself while acting at the same time, would have asked for her help. Or did he feel that Marion had something to add, something he couldn't do himself? I can reformulate the issue in a different way. Although in this particular case Scemama seems to take on some form of agency, since according to her it was she who "suggested" doing the scene again, was *her* view important to him? Or did he agree for her to do it because he wanted it to be done by somebody "from the same brain", exactly as he would have done himself? The nature of her contribution, especially in the light of what she says in the interview, can be explained not as her artistic agency or as willingness to take responsibility of the work, but more as an ability to understand his disappointment and to foresee how *he* would make it, should he be able to do so.

The idea that all their common works were *his* concepts and *his* ideas is something Scemama articulates very clearly in the interview. She says that David *used* her to take photos of ideas he had in mind, with the exception of their first

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<sup>30</sup> Ambrosino, p. 132

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

session at the pier. In contrast to Peter Hujar, he wasn't afraid of her and was more open to articulate his thoughts, while she was there to produce, to realize them. She presents herself as pure executor, although she mentions that they used to speak a lot and exchange ideas. "Exchange" is the word she uses several times to describe David's collaborations. In the British Dictionary the verb "exchange" has two meanings. One is "give something and receive something in return". Another is to "give or receive one thing in place of another". I believe, if we take into account many details of David's collaborative processes, as Scemama describes them, we deal with the second kind of exchange. Ideas were by David, and what he was getting in return were two other pairs of eyes, similar to his own, and two other pair of hands, which could do the job as well as David would do it himself<sup>33</sup>. As Livingston puts it, "the nature of individual contributions, and of the relations between them, makes a difference to authorship"<sup>34</sup>.

Let's introduce here the theory of understanding and determining collaboration and authorship proposed by Livingston, a theory he calls "semi-technical"<sup>35</sup>. It may sounds reductive, but it helps to establish some boundaries and standards, which are more or less clear and applicable to multiple cases and medias. I have earlier mentioned the word "responsibility", and this is the concept considered crucial by Livingston. According to him, it is responsibility that makes the author: "<...> behind the question of authorship lies the interest we take in knowing

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<sup>33</sup> In the interview Scemama gives another example, of the David's portrait with a nest and a globe taken by Andreas Sterzing. She said Andreas took it, but the idea and the concept belonged to David.

<sup>34</sup> Livingston, p. 62

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 68.

who, on a specific occasion, has been proximally responsible for the intentional production of a given utterance”<sup>36</sup>.

Livingston says: “I want to argue that some item can be collectively *produced* in the sense of being the result of the efforts of more than one person, without having been collaboratively or jointly *authored*”<sup>37</sup>. He proposes to distance from the original sense of the word, which meant “working together”, and to look at more specific features, such as “the participants common knowledge of each other’s plans, mutual monitoring and a commitment to mutual support, meshing sub-plans <...>”<sup>38</sup>. He also insists on different levels of possible joint authorship, going from close collaboration in producing every bit of work to the “individual agents” producing “their own bit” in order to contribute to a common project.

He clearly defines a minimum condition for joint authorship: “<...> joint authors must share the aim of contributing to the making of a single utterance or work for which they will take credit (and blame); acting on that intention, they share in the making of relevant decisions and exercise control over the shape of the final product; and they must *intend* to realize their shared goal by acting in part in accordance with, and because of that Bratman calls ‘meshing sub-plans’. Basically, plans mesh when they are compatible in the sense that it is possible that they could be simultaneously realized <...>”<sup>39</sup> He insists that in art-making cases the “overarching goal must be shared and must provide the object of

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. 68.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 75.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 77.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*. p. 79.

mutual belief, just as the contributors' plans subordinate to that end must mesh sufficiently"<sup>40</sup>.

Although Scemama and Wojnarowicz do "engage in lengthy face-to-face discussions" and probably even "arrive at a reciprocal understanding of their common stance"<sup>41</sup>, the first stages necessary for joint authorship, the ultimate responsibility for the work always belongs to David, as well as the initial impulse or idea. Their work doesn't seem to satisfy the other criteria advanced by Livingston either. If we recall Marion's description of the shooting scene, we see that relevant decisions and control were exercised uniquely by Wojnarowicz. They clearly didn't have shared goals, since Marion tried to guess what exactly he meant to express by shooting this photograph. She says: "Then I realized he was giving me what he wouldn't be able to give me later: he had made me a witness to his death. He created this image because he knew he couldn't hold his promise and keep me next to him while he was dying..."<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, Wojnarowicz thus holds the status of being the executor of Marion's sub-plan as well, of which she was unaware while participating in the shooting. He knew about her desire to photograph him on his deathbed, and knew the impossibility of it. In this piece he realized his own sub-plan together with Marion's, making her a kind of pawn in his game, for which, after realizing it, she felt grateful. I believe she holds a mixed status of a muse, to some extent, and of the physical executor of his project. As for her artistic intention for making this particular

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p. 90.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* p. 78.

<sup>42</sup> Ambrosino, p. 140.

photograph, I believe that it was absent during the phase of the execution. Her intention as a photographer was to facilitate Wojnarowicz's plan. Therefore, this work fails Livingstone's test for joint authorship.

My analysis leads me to the following conclusion. Wojnarowicz had made numerous trips with his friends in the years since he had this dream, but he never felt a need or compulsion to execute it. The presence of Marion thus did certainly play a role. I believe that his imminent death, and the associated understanding that it may be the last opportunity to execute such piece, were also important. We see two distinct types of media deliberately chosen by the artist: one is photography, through which he decided to express this image; the second is Marion Scemama, who was chosen to take the picture. Thus one can advance the conclusion that "Untitled, Face in Dirt" has the status of an artwork conceived by David Wojnarowicz, executed by him according to his own goals, with the help of Marion Scemama but a work which only he took full control over, and responsibility and credit for. Therefore, this is an artwork with a single authorship.

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