

## The essay and interdiscursivity: Knowledge between singularity and *sensus communis*

MARKO JUVAN

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### THE ESSAY AS A GENRE OF TRANSVERSAL DISCOURSE

The essay is a hybrid genre that crosses the singularity of literary prose (as defined below by Timothy Clark) with the conceptual language of thought. Georg Lukács and Theodor W. Adorno, in their meta-essays, that is, essays about essays, pointed out that the production of knowledge and its renewal in history is becoming increasingly disciplined and systematic, which is especially true of post-Enlightenment modernity and its rationality. At the same time, since the disintegration of the ancient myth, they discovered in European societies a need, albeit marginal, for a type of discourse that, in their view, is embodied in modernity precisely by the essay. This genre oscillates between the aesthetic-fictional connotativity of word art and the conceptual interpretation of reality. In the essay *Über Wesen und Form des Essays*, written in the form of a letter to his friend Leo Popper, Lukács states that “the essay form has not yet, today, travelled the road to independence which its sister, poetry, covered long ago – the road of development from a primitive, undifferentiated unity with science, ethics and art” (1974, 13). Therefore, according to Lukács, “the essay always speaks of something that has already been given form, or at least something that has already been there at some time in the past; hence it is part of the nature of the essay that it does not create new things from an empty nothingness but only orders those which were once alive” (10). Lukács’s reflections are further developed by Adorno in his “Der Essay als Form” (1958; “The Essay as Form”, 1991):

With the objectification of the world in the course of progressive demythologization, art and science have separated. A consciousness for which intuition and concept, image and sign would be one and the same – if such a consciousness ever existed cannot be magically restored, and its restitution would constitute a regression to chaos. (6)

For him, too, the essay is a form that does not follow the discursive differentiation of modern culture and eludes definable fields of knowledge:

The essay, however, does not let its domain be prescribed for it. Instead of accomplishing something scientifically or creating something artistically, its efforts reflect the leisure of a childlike person who has no qualms about taking his inspiration from what others have done before him. (4)

Adorno argues that the essay as a genre represents an alternative to “a compartmentalized culture” and its “ideals of purity and tidiness” (7). In the essay, the experience of an individual is compactly preserved, which this genre paradoxically achieves through its fragmentary character. With its non-wholeness, its hybridity, and its attachment to the particular experience of the author, the essay critically opposes methodological knowledge, a system of disciplines, and the reduction of reality to the truth of science or theory:

In its relationship to scientific procedure and its philosophical grounding as method, the essay, in accordance with its idea, draws the fullest conclusions from the critique of system. [...] The essay [...] is radical in its non-radicalism, in refraining from any reduction to a principle, in its accentuation of the partial against the total, in its fragmentary character. [...] The essay does not play by the rules of organized science and theory [...]. Because the unbroken order of concepts is not equivalent to what exists, the essay does not aim at a closed deductive or inductive structure. In particular, it rebels against the doctrine, deeply rooted since Plato, that what is transient and ephemeral is unworthy of philosophy [...]. The relationship to experience – and the essay invests experience with as much substance as traditional theory does mere categories – is the relationship to all of history. (9–10)

Lukács and Adorno, then, evaluated the essay as a genre whose language transgresses the boundaries between established cultural practices, neglecting disciplinary power and verification of knowledge, and bypassing its institutional accessibility. Or, as Peter V. Zima puts it, the essay is an “anti-systematic genre” that opens only to individual experience, focuses on the particular and incomplete, and avoids systematic perfection and conceptual deduction; the potential of essay writing lies in “a spontaneous synthesis between the particular and the general,” and in “bridging the gap between experience and the concept” (2010, 69). Finally, the discourses, such as in the hybrid genre of the essay, are characterized by the *transversal* connection of specialized fields in the system of knowledge. Transversal discourses draw on the knowledge from different disciplines, confront and intertwine them, reveal what they are incapable of thinking, and test conceptual generalizations in the heterogeneity of experience, its contradictions, incompleteness, and linguistic diversity.

The oldest of the transversal discourses, as Lukács also suggests, is the literary one. Jørgen Dines Johansen contends that literature emerged from what he calls mimetic discourse, which for millennia has created images of reality and mimetically imitated and confronted other social languages, from mythology, philosophy, religion, or science to history, technology, morality, and mores. The language of literature interweaves their partial grasps of reality and models them through exemplary imaginary worlds, individualized perspectives, narratives, and characters. The textual worlds of literature allow addressees to reflect and re-experience the limits and horizons of other discourses (2002, 89–109, 415–432).

Gutenberg’s invention of printing in the mid-15th century was crucial to the development of transversal discourses, including the literary one. Peter Burke summarizes the broader historical role of the press as follows:

The importance of the new medium was not limited to spreading knowledge more widely and taking relatively private or even secret knowledges (from technical secrets to secrets of state) into the public domain. Print also facilitated the *interaction between different knowledges*. [...] It standardized knowledge by allowing people in different places to read identical texts or examine identical images. It also encouraged skepticism [...] by allowing the same person to compare and contrast rival and incompatible accounts of the same phenomenon or event. (2000, 11, emphasis added)

As the medium on which capitalist modernity and nation-building depended, the press accelerated the exchange between different fields. This also reinforced the mimetic-exemplary interdiscursivity of literary genres, most strongly in the novel. Mikhail Bakhtin has shown that the novel, as both the central and the most popular genre of modernity, articulated its openness and semantic incompleteness and, in light of this, critically and dialogically examined existing cultural codes, including its own generic past (1981, 3–40, 259–422).

On the horizon of the Gutenberg galaxy, literature was joined by a new type of transversal discourse, which, like the modern novel, focused on the present, on the unfinished and contradictory events of reality – namely, journalism (cf. Vogrinčič 2008, 148–152). Newspapers brought various topical contents from the world and the country: political, religious, moral, social, commercial, entertaining, educational, etc. With their thematic diversity and topicality, they served the information needs of the literate population, adapting to and reflecting their social environment, in this way influencing the formation of public opinion. This is why they were constantly controlled by the authorities (Martin 2003, 5–6, 9; Kay Baldwin 2003, 91).

In addition to weeklies and dailies, the early learned cultural journals, such as *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* containing articles on deceased scholars, book reviews, and the like were published from the second half of the 17th century onwards (Burke 2000, 29, 168). In the following century, literary journals and moral weeklies, e.g., *Tatler* and *Spectator*, entered the scene (Vogrinčič 2008, 50–51, 184–190). They also introduced the genre of the periodical essay with exemplary function. It displayed and disseminated patterns of polite conversation and manners, eloquently proclaiming the personal opinions of authors on various literary, cultural-artistic, sociable, moral, political, and learned topics, which also lent themselves to elegant café debates (Kay Baldwin 2003, 94; Vogrinčič 2008, 50–51, 168, 184–190).

Journalism became closely associated with literary discourse in the 19th century when newspapers advertised, published, and critically reviewed literary production. In addition, print media helped to enable the autonomy and recognition of literary producers by admitting writers to the ranks of journalists who were paid for their work, and newspapers became a source for mimetically oriented literary genres, which based their structure, themes, and style on journalistic discourse.

## SINGULARITY, SENSUS COMMUNIS AND THE AESTHETIC IDEA

Literature and newspapers, as a transversal discourse characteristic of the age of print, confront specialized knowledge systems and their internal self-regulation with a complex and contingent semiosis of experience. Fictional literature produces and

transforms its kind of knowledge differently than a newspaper – in the mode of singularity.

In his work *The poetics of singularity*, Timothy Clark notes that the concept of singularity has emerged in literary studies since the early 1990s in its “counter-culturalist turn”. According to Clark, the term “singularity” refers to a literary work’s mode of being that resists description by general categories and conceptual systems common in sociology, psychology, economics, or philosophy. A literary text is unique (singular) not only because it resists intelligibility through universal orders, but also because of its critique of the generalizing discourses that attempt to colonize its meaning, and because it creates an unrepeatable event of meaning out of repeatable cultural structures. The “natality” of literary meaning breaks with given signifying practices so that this meaning cannot be understood as a token of a type, but itself configures the context in which it can be grasped (2005, 2–4, 12, 28–29, 125–126). Before Clark, Derek Attridge explained singularity as that which distinguishes a literary work from other such works. It is a specific difference that, through the innovative reshaping of the cultural codes of an individual’s knowledge (i.e., their “idioculture”), allows for the emergence of otherness – that which was improbable in those codes and which could not previously be thought or written about. Singularity, for Attridge, means above all the introduction of new perspectives and relations between given discourses. According to him, it is articulated in a singular form, a structure of the text’s semantic and phonetic material that is revealed only to the responsible act of reading (2004, 20–40, 63–73, 136).

Therefore, it is surprising that there is a transitional area between such different kinds of transversal knowledge as fiction and the non-fiction of newspapers. An essay is also set on this area, which is determined by *sensus communis*. First, this term can be understood in the logical-rhetorical meaning of “common knowledge”, “common sense”, or “what everyone already knows or can experience”. This meaning is appropriate for newspapers because they represent and shape public opinion. Second, the term *sensus communis* leads to the idiosyncratic Kantian meaning of *Gemeinsinn* (common sense), understood as the precondition of aesthetic judgment. This judgment relates to works of art and underlies the essay’s *literary* relation to non-literary knowledge.

In his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790; *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 2000), Immanuel Kant paves the way for thinking singularity through reflection on “the modality of a judgment of taste” (2000, 121). According to Kant, we connect the feeling that an object pleases us with the idea of the beautiful through the “exemplary” kind of necessity that no law justifies (121). The aesthetic judgment expects everyone to agree, although it is “an example of a universal rule that one cannot produce. [...] The judgment of taste ascribes assent to everyone, and whoever declares something to be beautiful wishes that everyone *should* approve of the object in question and similarly declare it to be beautiful” (121). The purely subjective and non-conceptual feeling of aesthetic pleasure expressed in the judgment of taste thus presupposes “universal validity”, grounded in the principle of “common sense” (122). Kant is aware of the common understanding of the phrase “common sense (*sensus communis*)” and

highlights what distinguishes his concept. While ordinary common sense judges according to concepts and “obscurely represented principles”, the aesthetic notion of the same term is about a subjective feeling and an imagined universality – such common sense is “the effect of the free play of our cognitive powers” (122).

Kant’s interpretation of aesthetic judgement and the beautiful, which “is cognized without a concept as the object of a *necessary* satisfaction” (124), is advanced by modern conceptions of singularity, as Timothy Clark points out. Indeed, judgments of taste are the purest examples of Kant’s “reflective judgments” (2000, 149), in which “a particular thing or things are presented to us but we lack a general term or concept by which to determine them” (Clark 2005, 5). Clark illustrates singularity with Charles Dickens’s novels, in which general social, moral, and other issues are addressed through “unique and idiosyncratic characters, situations, and images” (6), and with Kant’s example of the peculiar power of the poetic imagination to express “indeterminate quasi-concepts” – Jupiter, depicted as an eagle with lightning bolts in its claws (Clark 2005, 6). In this way the image of Jupiter-eagle

gives the imagination cause to spread itself over a multitude of related representations, which let one think more than one can express in a concept determined by words; and they yield an *aesthetic idea*, which serves that idea of reason instead of logical presentation, although really only to animate the mind by opening up for it the prospect of an immeasurable field of related representations. (Kant 2000, 193)

Kant’s notion of the “aesthetic idea” thus proves to be a blueprint not only for current notions of singularity in literature, but also for Lukács’s, Adorno’s, and other theories that emphasize an anti-disciplinary knowledge of the essay in which conceptual thought hybridizes with an open-ended imagination. In sum, the spirit of the essay corresponds to Kant’s concept of subjectively imagined “common sense” as the basis of the subject’s aesthetic judgment and his “aesthetic idea”, conceived as an anti-discursive fusion of ramified representations and connotative evocation of a signifying surplus over conceptual systems.

The aesthetic mode of cognition is not less inherent in the signifier “essay” itself. The etymology of the French word *essai*, first used by Michel de Montaigne in 1580–1588 for the title of his texts, is not only about the familiar meaning of “attempt” or “test”. This semantics is significant because it signals the genre specificity of the essay, that is, its provisional, empirically experimental, skeptical, critical, and individual (singular) relationship to the authority of traditional knowledge, the book and the letter. However, the word *essai* also contains the culinary meaning of “to taste” (Schlaffer 2007, 522). This, in turn, locates the genre of the essay in the conceptual field of taste, and thus of sensual cognition and aesthetic judgement and ideas, all of which are implied by the concepts of aesthetics and literature.

## THE ESSAY BETWEEN THE SYSTEM OF KNOWLEDGE, THE SINGULARITY OF EXPERIENCE, AND COMMON SENSE

Citing David Hume’s 1742 *Of essay-writing*, Peter V. Zima shows that the genre developed out of a compromise between the “learned” and “conversable” worlds. The essayist Hume saw himself as “a kind of resident or ambassador from the do-

minions of learning to those of conversation, and shall think it my constant duty to promote a good correspondence betwixt these two states, which have so great a dependence on each other” (1998, 1–2). In Hume’s interpretation, the essay mediates between the secluded learning of “men of letters” on the one hand<sup>1</sup> and the flexibility of conversation on the other hand. The latter suits the tastes and experiences of individuals engaged in pleasurable sociability of the “elegant part of mankind”. With such a compromise, appropriate to the enlightened society of wealthy (predominantly male) circles, the essay writing formed its partial, incomplete, perspectival, provisional, and aesthetic truth – that which corresponds to Kant’s description of the “aesthetic idea”.<sup>2</sup> Adorno could have borrowed from Hume when he claimed that the essay “thinks conjointly and in freedom about things that meet in its freely chosen object” (1991, 11).

The general view is that the essay is a prose genre that emerged in the late Renaissance based on humanistic anthropocentrism, empiricism, and skepticism. The notion of intellectual freedom that does not submit to metaphysical systems and religious dogmas is even more characteristic of it (cf. Kos 1979, 48; Poniž 1989, 9). Francis Bacon, with the three editions of his *Essays* (1597, 1612, 1625), and Montaigne are both involved in what Foucault calls the transition from the traditional “commentary” of the knowledge authorities, typical of antiquity and the Middle Ages, to “criticism”, that is, modern empirical and critical attitude toward learning (1994, 78–81). As Graham Good notes, the essay, though inclined to critique, did not subscribe to the critical-empirical systematics of modern science, its disciplinary self-regulation, and progressivism. Rather, it insisted on the principle of singularity inherent to literature: a new literary work does not in any way override or limit the truths of its predecessors, as happens in the sciences (1988, 1–8).

But whatever we know about the literary singularity and criticality of the essay, its recourse to common sense (*sensus communis*) cannot be overlooked, not only in Kant’s meaning of a necessary precondition of aesthetic judgment but also in the sense that Kant rejects.

First, the essay reaches the realm of the rhetorical-logical *sensus communis* right at its origin. Indeed, Montaigne’s early essays took shape through intertextual reference to common places (*loci communes*), that is, to traditionally verified, commonly accepted, consolidated, and authoritative substitutes for independent argumentation. Montaigne’s first essays developed from his glosses and commentaries on classical works, including collections of sentences such as Erasmus’s *Adagia*. Bacon’s essays also draw abundantly on authoritative treasure books of *sententiae* and *exempla* collected from antiquity (Good 1988, 1, 26–54). For example, in his moral reflection *On Death*, in which he presents death as a natural fact, Bacon cites *exempla* and classical winged words to support his claim that good spirits do not bow to the threat of imminent death:

It is no less worthy to observe, how little alteration, in good spirits, the approaches of death make; for they appear to be the same men till the last instant. Augustus Cæsar died in a compliment: *Livia, conjugii nostri memor, vive et vale*. Tiberius in dissimulation, as Tacitus saith of him: *Jam Tiberium vires et corpus, non dissimulatio, deserebant*. Vespasian

in a jest, sitting upon the stool: *Ut puto Deus fio*. Galba with a sentence, *Feri, si ex re sit populi Romani*, holding forth his neck. Septimius Severus in dispatch: *Adeste si quid mihi restat agendum*. And the like. Certainly the Stoics bestowed too much cost upon death, and by their great preparations made it appear more fearful. Better saith he, *Qui finem vitæ extremum inter munera ponat Naturæ*. It is as natural to die as to be born; and to a little infant, perhaps, the one is as painful as the other. He that dies in an earnest pursuit is like one that is wounded in hot blood; who, for the time, scarce feels the hurt; and therefore a mind fixed and bent upon somewhat that is good doth avert the dolours of death. (2012, 28–29)

Second, *sensus communis*, understood in Kant’s meaning of the “common sense” as implied in aesthetic judgment, is present in the essay through the “aesthetic idea” as a mode of cognition. As a semi-literary genre akin to autobiography, the essay oscillates between the quasi-judgments of literature, which in their unverifiability construct a fictional person or implied author, and the verifiable judgments of science, philosophy, and other non-fictional forms of discourse. The essay takes the judgments and terms of one or more disciplines interdiscursively but reworks them in such a way that the definitional determinacy of the adopted terms, following the model of Kant’s “aesthetic idea”, transitions poetically into the promiscuous linking of the signifier.

The knowledge represented by the essay thus acquires an ambiguous status: it does not consist of pure propositions, separable from the subject of the utterance, whose truth can be verified outside the text, but they are contained in a modality through which a particular perspective is revealed to us in the aesthetic experience and the fictional presence of the person (author) represented by the text. Consequently, the criterion for the validity of the aesthetically mediated testimony is no longer conformity to extra-textual, disciplinary standards of truth but authenticity or, in other words, the singular presence of the implied author, that is, the character of the essayist whose existence reveals itself in writing. An inseparable feature of this singularity is not only the personal experience of the essayists (in this respect the essay is related to autobiography), but also the value of their idioculture expressed in the text, that is, the value of the unrepeatable structure of learning acquired by a particular subject of knowledge. Only such authenticity, insofar as it is attributed to the speaking subject on the basis of the rhetoric and interdiscursive saturation of the essay’s text, constitutes an inverse *ad hominem* argument that disentangles the essay’s particular judgments from the fictionality of the aesthetic idea and gives them the status of credible judgments with potentially universal value.

Montaigne’s introductory address to the reader of his *Essays* is exemplary in this regard:

This, reader, is an honest book. [...] I have had no thought of serving you or of my own fame; such a plan would be beyond my powers. [...] Had it been my purpose to seek the world’s favour, I should have put on finer clothes, and have presented myself in a studied attitude. But I want to appear in my simple, natural, and everyday dress, without strain or artifice; for it is myself that I portray. [...] So, reader, I am myself the substance of my book, and there is no reason why you should waste your leisure on so frivolous and unrewarding a subject. (1993, 23)

The singularity that produces, as in fiction, the image of the essayist character with whose individualized, embodied mind the reader can identify is paradoxically a condition that makes possible the non-fictional reception of the essayist's argument – a tendency to agree with what the author says.

Finally, trivial meanings of *sensus communis* are also relevant to the essay: “common sense”, “common knowledge”, “commonly understood, perceptible”. Montaigne, Bacon, and many others after them deal with subjects that cannot be assigned to any particular discipline but belong to the general knowledge of life accessible to everyone. Thus, in addition to the topics of learned culture, Montaigne (1993) wrote about idleness, liars, friendship, smells, books, presumption, vehicles, or the art of conversation, while Bacon (2012) reflected on death, truth, revenge, parents and children, envy, love, travel, marriage and single life, and the like. Essayists interpret these topics with interdiscursive references to the insights of historical, poetic, philosophical, political, or religious authorities, as well as with examples selected from personal experience.

The *sensus communis* is thus a condition of the essay's singularity, even in the form of stereotypes, prejudices, and common sense. Essayists tend to criticize all this, but on the other hand, they unconsciously accept it. The commonplaces of public discourse find their way into the essay through ordinary language (or Hume's cultivated conversations) as essayists seek to adapt their opinions to the tastes of their readership. Stereotypes can also enter the essay through the communication channel. The original medium of the genre was the printed book (the essay collections of Montaigne and Bacon were published in multiple editions), which gave the essay the noble appearance of a timeless work of art. Beginning with the mid-18th century, however, the genre often moved to periodicals, where it served as an ongoing, topical forum expressing personal views and opinions on moral, social, political, artistic, scientific, and other subjects (Good 1988, 55–57).

## SINGULARITY AND SENSUS COMMUNIS IN THE MODERN SLOVENIAN ESSAY

Literary genres typically develop through intertextual and metatextual relationships to genre prototypes (Juvan 2011, 141–160). The structure and meaning of these relations in a given period depend on historical changes in the universe of discourse. Each epoch, with its changing intercultural transfers and its repertoire of prominent genres, themes, and forms, reinterprets the genre tradition, gives it new accents, and reshapes its code, but at the same time reinforces certain family resemblances with the prototypes. In the case of the essay, it is the intersection of the singularity of literary existence, disciplinary knowledge, and *sensus communis* that links the classic Montaigne and Bacon with the modern Lukács and Adorno.

Such interventions in the genre code can also be observed in modern Slovenian texts of this genre. The prize for the best Slovenian essay is rightly named after Marjan Rožanc (1930–1990). In my opinion, Rožanc stands out among Slovenian essayists for his modernization of the Montaignian textual subject. Rožanc's intellectual quest cannot reconcile itself with any seemingly final truth. His conflictual think-

ing locates the fragmentariness, provisionality, and contradictoriness of knowledge in the equally destabilized speaking subject and its biopolitical condition.

His prominent themes include, for example, the tensions between Christianity and modernity, devotion to the transcendent power of God and the ceaseless struggle for personal freedom, the sacred and the profane, the mind and the body. The essayist insists on the contradictory nature of his existence and portrays it from the perspective of singularity:

My whole life – in these years, more than ever – two main obsessions have reigned over me: God and sexuality. The first, as a powerful, insatiable curiosity, the second, as a constant insatiable passion. The first, as my spirit's desire for purity and eternity, the second, as my body's desire for the world... And, to boot, always in this indecent mutual relation. And the more these disparate forces reigned over me and tore me in two, the more pressing and urgent it became for me to somehow connect them. [...] However, I was never successful in this. (Rožanc 2015, 58)

All this can only lead to a self-critical, sincere, and humble attitude. Rožanc's essays transfer knowledge from various fields (sports, history, literary history, philosophy, theology, politics, etc.) and weave it transversally through digressive allusions typical of the genre's anarchic composition or in a more organized form close to a scientific treatise. Following Montaigne's example, Rožanc self-reflexively limits his knowledge to the conditions of his singular, provisional, and elusive experience. In his essays, streams of transversal intellectual reflection informed by philosophy, theology, history, and other disciplines are embedded in a discontinuous autobiographical narrative of the search for identity. Reflection is captured in the unique, irreplaceable, limited body of the essayist and subjected to a textual profanation similar to that of the aging Montaigne. Rožanc's thinking body is imperfect, at times excessive, sexualized and transgressive, at times sick, suffering, and even dying:

Fear of love, for love is the ecstasy of death. Fear of knowing, for it is attainable only through pain. [...] To love is to strive for the glamour of self-destruction. That is, to throw oneself into the contradiction that the entire culture around me has never admitted [...]. The more I puff myself up and pretend that I'm special, the more I realise that I don't even exist. The more I, in my desire to be exceptional, dig into the past and into the world, into personal history and cosmopolitan space, the more I confirm that I am, in fact, just a conventional Slovenian. And not only that: increasingly, I have to admit that I am not even an entity, because all my life is stretched between, and summed up by, two poems that were written long before I came to be, between Cankar's "Iz moje samotne, grenke mladosti" (From my lonely, bitter youth) and Gradnik's "Eros Thanatos." Summed up in a cultural and artistic archetype that has been present in the world since its inception, and which was formulated in Slovenia between the time Cankar published his poem in 1902, in the second edition of *Erotika*, and the publication of Gradnik's poem in 1922 in *Pot bolesi* (Path of Sorrow), eight years before my birth. These two poems, thus, had been the essence that was present before my existence and to which I, through my being, contributed absolutely nothing. (Rožanc 2015, 137)

Yet Rožanc also does not avoid the *sensus communis* in his singular configurations of meaning. He bases his insights into the modern individual's existential, metaphy-

sical, and social conditions on commonly known representations (also spread by the media), such as basketball or football, which he presents as the “20th-century mass”:

To write about football with the sobriety with which I plan to devote myself to it here, to examine football not as a Sunday spectacle or some opiate, but as a human reality which is no less real than our other realities – that is, of course, still a somewhat sacrilegious undertaking. (15)

He even draws on national stereotypes, such as the myth of the Planica ski jump:

The four-thousand-year-old myth of Icarus, of the ambitious young man and his over-ambitious flight towards the sun, has been told in countless variations throughout history – perhaps as many variations as there are nations and peoples. In our Slovenian version, this myth is aptly expressed by the original idea of a man-bird on skis who, through creative courage, struggled through a long series of difficulties until the establishment of ski jumping as an independent sports discipline. Mainstream acceptance removed none of the sport’s mythical aspects, since it always played itself out in the dichotomy between man’s unfulfilled dreams and his actual abilities. And our nation, which is known more for its petty-bourgeois orientation than for its inventive risk-taking, reveals, in the context of this myth, its surprising second face: an unheard-of creative expansion and courageous exploration of the very edges of the possible. [...] In the beginning, Planica was just the collective naivety of a handful of enthusiasts, a craftsman’s simulacrum of something already familiar and accomplished: they would build, in the valley below Ponce, a ski-jump for one of the FIS championships. However, this naivety was of the youthful variety, not only of one or two people, but the fresh naivety of an entire, small, non-historical nation than suffers in its non-historicalness and wishes, from the confines of its limitations, to burst out into the broader world, no matter the cost. [...] In truth, Planica is an outcry against the Slovenian nation’s inhibitions. (24)

Moreover, his fragmented autobiographical narrative about his identity problems caused by the metaphysical crisis of modern individualism – represented by inter-discursive borrowings from Kierkegaard, Unamuno, Camus, Teilhard de Chardin, Kocbek, and others – is organized according to a matrix of Slovenian Catholicism. Its structure consists of disjunctive equations “God = meaning of life/no God = absence of meaning”, associating post-Enlightenment liberal humanism with nihilism. In terms of such a cliché, the possibility of existential meaning outside of any theistic transcendence is denied a priori. This stamp of religious *sensus communis*, however, is set in a heretical direction: By radicalizing the Christian prototype of the Incarnation, Rožanc hybridizes Christian existentialism and Teilhard de Chardin’s teachings of the “noosphere” with the immanence of the vulnerable body, sexuality, and the contingencies of life.

## CONCLUSION

In my article, I have tried to show that the essay as a genre, following Lukács and Adorno, represents a continuing need for an intersection of disciplinary learning and the totality of experience, while knowledge is increasingly organized by disciplines. Foucault treats the prototypical essays of Montaigne and Bacon in the context of the transition from medieval commentary to the empiricism and critical consciousness of modern science. The essay, however, does not submit to the systemat-

ics of science, but persists in the singularity of the literary work. It interdiscursively confronts personal experience with various discursive fields and constructs a fragmentary, perspectival, and aesthetic mode of truth. Notwithstanding the literary singularity of the essay, which corresponds to Kant's "aesthetic idea", the genre also relies on *sensus communis*. Since the 18th century, the essay has established itself in newspapers, where it has become susceptible to stereotypes and ideologies. The tension between singularity and (media) common sense is a genre feature that persists in the modern essay and is also evident in the contemporary Slovenian essays of Marjan Rožanc.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This kind of knowledge was, according to Hume, endemic to the philosophical tradition and modern science.
- <sup>2</sup> "In a word, the aesthetic idea is a representation of the imagination, associated with a given concept, which is combined with such a manifold of partial representations in the free use of the imagination that no expression designating a determinate concept can be found for it, which therefore allows the addition to a concept of much that is unnameable, the feeling of which animates the cognitive faculties and combines spirit with the mere letter of language" (Kant 2000, 194).

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## The essay and interdiscursivity: Knowledge between singularity and *sensus communis*

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Essay. Disciplinary knowledge. Interdiscursivity. Singularity. Common sense.

The disciplines increasingly organize knowledge, but according to Lukács and Adorno, the essay represents a continuing need for an intersection of disciplinary knowledge and the totality of experience. According to Foucault, the essays of Montaigne and Bacon embody the transition from medieval commentary to modern science's empiricism and criticalness. The essay does not submit to the systematics of science but persists in the singularity of the literary work. It interdiscursively confronts personal experience with various discursive fields and constructs a fragmentary, perspectival, and aesthetic mode of truth. Notwithstanding the literary singularity of the essay, which corresponds to Kant's "aesthetic idea", the genre also relies on the *sensus communis*. Since the 18th century, the essay has established itself in newspapers, where it has become susceptible to stereotypes and ideologies. The tension between singularity and (medial) common sense is also evident in contemporary Slovenian examples (Marjan Rožanc).

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Prof. Marko Juvan, PhD.  
 Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts  
 Institute of Slovenian Literature and Literary Studies  
 Novi trg 2  
 Ljubljana  
 Slovenia  
 marko.juvan@zrc-sazu.si  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5326-7276>