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Summoning survival after the death of Hungarian art history education

A hauntological reading of the end of art history

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Abstract

Recently, in Hungary, an important educational reform meant the revision of the National Core Curriculum (NAT). The NAT change brought about the removal of the art history subject in public secondary education. The decision prompted widespread reaction, largely taking place in public and social media. It was this site where many voiced their objection to the erasure of the art history subject. Some speculate on the futures the so-called "death of art history" will bring about. This thesis, by looking into the stratifications of discourse, asks the question, "What kind of understandings of progress may die with art history education in the NAT discourse, and what (im)possible histories might survive this end?"

The work draws on Jacques Derrida's deconstruction and hauntology and Walter Benjamin's concept of history and takes on a post qualitative approach to inquiry, entailing an approach where one composes with theory. Through this approach and framework, it looks at the public discourse forming around the perceived "death" of art history education and explores the ghosts that linger in it, informing understandings of art history and its supposed end. In the aftermath of the school subject's removal, the thesis fiddles with the moment of loss, not to disregard it, but to point out what is taken for granted as art history education's "essence/center," with it aiming to bring about an opening towards different understandings of art history and its education.

Keywords post qualitative inquiry; art history education; temporality; hauntology; Jacques Derrida; Walter Benjamin

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Introduction

Amidst notable political shifts in the Western world, education, too, goes through prominent changes. Recently, many countries carried out curriculum revisions in the arts (Oladipo, 2025; Østrup Andersen, n.d.; Rose, 2025; Tamás, 2023). These changes are often made in the name of modernizing education, efficiency, resource management, or safeguarding children. In Hungary, the most notable change in the past decade was the revisions made to the Hungarian National Core Curriculum (NAT), a core document, regulating public education (Madácsi-Laube, 2020).

The NAT revisions suspended the art history subject in public secondary education, implementing a four-year phasing-out period (Patakfalvi, 2023). Many in Hungarian discourse voiced their opinion, forming a relatively large group who opposed the curriculum change and the so-called erasure of art history education. Statements against the NAT change flooded both public and social media platforms (Fábry, 2023). Most who engaged in the discourse demanded art history education be placed back into the curriculum or speculated on the consequences of what the *killing* of art history education might mean, speculating on what consequences the *death* of the public school subject might bring about in the future.

Importantly, for many, a specific social media post served as the initial point of entry to discourse, informing them about the curriculum change. The post opened with the following statement:

> Secondary school art history education: lived 150 years. [*Középiskolai művészettörténet-oktatás: élt 150 évet*] (Nyáry, 2023).

This passage echoed (and framed) the demise of art history education, receiving around 4,000 reactions, being shared by 4,200 people, and in general becoming a popular post that many public media sources referenced when reporting on the 2020 NAT changes.

While it is undeniable that the end of art history has serious consequences for students and teachers, as well as for the cultural and tourism sectors, many arguments opposing the NAT change focused on articulating exactly these points (see Balogh, 2024; Mikó et al., 2025; MTA, 2023; Rafai & Kuklis, 2024; Szalóki, 2024; Székács, 2024). Upon the death of art history education, I was left wondering whether it is possible to stay with the moment of death and look at what kind of end it is. What is more, I wondered if it is possible to look at the art history subject and understand it beyond an either/or logic that makes it dead or alive.

This way, we may be able to point out what kinds of understandings are shaping art history. Put differently, drawing attention to ideas on which, like a grid, concepts of art history are built. This questioning led me to formulate my research question.

> What kind of understandings of progress may die with art history education in the NAT discourse, and what (im)possible histories might survive this end?

This thesis takes a post qualitative approach to inquiry, that is, research driven by poststructuralist theory (St. Pierre, 2011). In its approach, this is best understood as constructing/building with theory, forming a lens to read the NAT (con)text (Dillet, 2017). To formulate my lens, I use Jacques Derrida's (2012) concept of deconstruction and hauntology (a play on the words ontology and hauntology). The former allows me to recognize and challenge binary either/or arguments, while the latter helps me to see how erasure creeps back into the present troubling temporal concepts. Furthermore, I turn to Walter Benjamin's (1940, 2002a, 2002b) concept of history, translation and "now" time that complicates our understandings of history and time, thereby challenging the linear temporality that is often associated with history (Dawson & Sykes, 2019; Karlholm & Moxey, 2018). Through these theories, I summon a ghost (a lens) that helps read the NAT and complicate the idea of end/death, asking what we are mourning with the

"end of art history." Adding to this, I hope to bring in new perspectives during a time of grief.

In structuring this thesis, first I present the context of the history of the art history subject in Hungary, then detail the events of the 2020 NAT revisions to understand key changes and the governmental reasoning for suspending art history education. In the literature review, I meet several perspectives of curriculum theory and art education research, and I read each through a poststructuralist lens. With this approach, I give insight into the context in which the NAT occurred and show dominant narratives that shape our (those participating in discourse) understanding of art history. Building on a poststructuralist perspective on each theme, I demonstrate how both the NAT (con)text and its opposing discourse maintain specific notions of art history, giving the structure to what we recognize as art history.

While carrying out a literature review the above-described way incorporates some elements of analysis (this way taking an unusual thesis structure); they are important in building towards a framework that troubles and opens up the NAT (con)text in a way that the end of art history can be read *differently*, as something other than a binary event. In my theoretical framework, I compose a lens to read the NAT, for which approach I reason in the "Approach to Inquiry" chapter of this work. In reading the NAT, I read with the ghost/spirit I call upon through hauntology, and as a lens, I look at various texts that argue what the death of art history means. In the discussion chapter, led by the research question of this work, I explore how a constellational understanding ties in with the responsibility of doing justice to the past and how history gets complicated by such a lens, bringing about the possibility of understanding historical engagement as a deeply responsible practice, where one cares for past generations, their erasure and endured violence.

A note on the approach to writing, translation and thesis structure

While taming understanding is not necessarily my aim by making this note, I understand that there are some general standards for theses (making it accessible for one). Therefore, by starting the work with this passage, my goal is to try and clarify some decisions my reading of theory led me to take, which spans from writing practice and translation to the very structure of this work's chapters—aiming to give you a tool for understanding.

As this thesis is driven by a post qualitative approach to inquiry, this is reflected in my writing and approach to translation, which at times entails a fragmented/playful style, seen in the usage of "/" and "()" when I try to encapsulate multiple meanings, a ~~strike-through~~ when theory leads me to refuse certain phrases, a **bold selection** where I want to highlight key/returning concepts, and *italics* for terms when I use them with some hesitation. I also treat translation as unstable, which I reflect in using original Hungarian text next to English translations, which aims to signal (and trouble) an understanding that meaning is transmittable fully, without a fault (Benjamin, 2002b; Derrida, 2001; Graham, 2005; Haitham, 2025).

Most importantly, in its structure, this work also challenges the clear-cut chapters of a thesis, as it is driven by the understanding that there are no pure categories and groups. This results in a structure that is in conversation with other chapters. This approach allows me to construct and practice my method of inquiry by "composing with" theory rather than selecting and applying a theory or concept (Dillet, 2017). Therefore, my intention up until my chapter of "A reading of the NAT" is to build a lens for reading using post qualitative inquiry as my guide (though it is anything but a step-by-step guide). This means that both my review of literature and theoretical framework chapters make up a more considerable portion of this work, allowing me to build both an understanding and way of engagement with the NAT (con)text. That is, I do not "apply" hauntology as a tool of analysis, but through the back-and-forth reading of the (con)textual, I summon *a* ghost

that speaks to me—this séance is anything but a paranormal practice. Hence, I reject the idea of a methodology and call my work an "approach to inquiry" (St. Pierre, 2023). In the "Approach to Inquiry" chapter of this work, I further expand on what is written here.

(Con)textualization

I start this work by forming a historical understanding of the NAT. In this section, I explain some key provisions of the NAT, then focus on art history education, discuss attempts to merge it with other subjects, and address its suspension as an elective graduation subject in secondary schooling. In this way, the chapter aims to offer information about the Hungarian schooling system, describe the NAT reform along with both its art education and art history-related content, and explain how the NAT revisions serve as the (con)textual basis for this work.

As a Soviet satellite state after World War II, public education in the People's Republic of Hungary had a centralized administration, following the Soviet model (Cornelius, 2009). Post 1989, with the end of Hungary's Communist rule, a decentralized education system replaced the previous model. In 1993, the "*Public Education Act*" (Act) was introduced, providing autonomy for educational institutions, opening up the possibility for churches, citizens, civil organizations, and economic enterprises to organize education (Cornelius, 2009; Nahalka, 2018). While the basic structure of public education remained, the Act gave the responsibility of maintaining public educational institutions to schools. They subsequently played a crucial role in upholding laws and regulations and funding public education by establishing regional authorities (Cornelius, 2009).

Notably, after 1989, educational professionals expressed the need to organize public education, leading to the formulation of the National Core Curriculum by 1995, which today we refer to as the NAT. The curriculum aimed to ensure a coherent primary and secondary education across Hungary. Such goals were set to be accomplished through 1) establishing core content; 2) naming the key skills and competencies students should gain through schooling; and 3) broadly outlining methods of teaching and learning. (Madácsi-Laube, 2020)

Joining the European Union (EU) in 2004, Hungarian schools have seen a limitation in their autonomy to individually organize teaching; this was

understood as a result of complying with EU educational standards. The NAT three-tier curricular regulation introduced in 2000 outlines curriculum in lower primary school from grades 1 to 4, upper primary school from grades 5 to 8, and secondary school from grades 9 to 12. This structure has remained unchanged to this day. Between 2005 and 2010, the NAT functioned as a framework for organizing and planning teaching and learning, without outlining mandatory teaching content or desired learning objectives as teaching outcomes. (Nahalka, 2018)

As detailed, since 1995, the NAT has seen several amendments; notably, the current governing Fidesz party made its provisions to the NAT in 2012 (Madácsi-Laube, 2020). These amendments were made in the "*Government Decree 5/2020 (I. 31.) on the Amendment of the Government Decree 110/2012 (VI. 4.)*" in the 110/2012 (VI. 4.) "*Government Decree on the Issuance, Introduction, and Implementation of the National Core Curriculum*" (Constitution of Hungary, 2012; European Commission, 2024). At that time, the changes struck controversy in media discourse, pointing to a shift in the NAT's content that placed a larger emphasis on the formation of "a shared national identity," aimed to be fostered by relevant curriculum contents (Nahalka, 2018).

Since 2010, under the governance of the Fidesz party, a recentralization took place in education, and from 2021 on, the Ministry of Human Resources is responsible for educational policy (Nahalka, 2018). The Hungarian state remains in control of managing and guiding important aspects of public education, like creating the main curriculum according to the "*National Public Education Act CXC of 2011*" (CXC Act) (Constitution of Hungary, 2011). That is to say, as Madácsi-Laube (2020) points out, both the 2012 and 2020 provisions to the NAT are carried out under the same governing party.

In 2020, through a 4-year phasing-out period, amendments were introduced to the NAT. According to a 2021 study by the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Prague, while the 2020 NAT kept with the previous versions in highlighting the importance of incorporating core democratic principles in teaching to maintain democracy, since 2010 the NAT "hardly confirmed that

the governing Fidesz party would also [share] these values." (*The National Core Curriculum and the Education for Democracy | Heinrich Böll Stiftung | Prague Office - Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary*, n.d.) Like before, the 2020 amendments defined key competencies that students must acquire through learning and teaching processes (Imre et al., 2021, p. 4). Notably, among the learning objectives, expected outcomes include a strengthened "national identity," "love of the fatherland," and "pride in the past of our people." Furthermore, "social responsibility," "compliance with norms," and understanding of "self-sacrifice" and "heroism" are also emphasized (Madácsi-Laube, 2020).

It is under these circumstances that art education in the 2020 NAT faced reworkings in its secondary education subjects; consequently, art history education was suspended as an individual subject. A decision to which, in opposition, a petition garnered nearly 13,000 signatures, asking for art history to be replaced in the curriculum (Szalóki, 2024).

When reviewing the first draft of the 2020 NAT proposal, Andrea Kárpáti, PhD, appointed by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA) to review the subject of art education, noted that art education seems to be missing from the curriculum (MTA, 2019). Furthermore, at the time, she found it unacceptable that art history education is not part of the NAT in general; she emphasizes that "a creation-centered approach does not exclude, but rather presupposes the engagement with the works of others." [*Az alkotás-centrikus szemlélet nem zárja ki, sőt, feltételezi mások műveinek megismerését.*] (Csaba et al., 2019, p. 94)

The erasure of the art history subject (and its contents) contrasts with the Ministry of Interior's claims, which stated that the suspension of the art history subject was due to its merging with other subjects, with visual culture being the primary successor (Tamás, 2023b). Contrastingly, many pointed out that when reading the Visual Culture NAT document, art historical connections are hard to find (Csaba et al., 2019; Patakfalvi, 2023; Tamás, 2023a). In the document, the subject is defined as being "comprised of three subfields—fine arts, object and environmental culture, and visual

communication" [*három részterület – a képzőművészet, a tárgy- és környezetkultúra, valamint a vizuális kommunikáció – képezi*] (Oktatási Hivatal, 2020, p. 1). However, art history is mentioned in the document seven times and serves solely to contextualize the content (Tatai, 2022).

While the MTA made an exhaustive effort commenting on each subject of the NAT in 2019, a more profound public response emerged around 2023. In this work, I pay attention to some of these articulations, ones that mourn the so-called death of art history education.

A literature review: Constructing (con)textual understanding

Based on the research question "What kind of understandings of progress may die with art history education in the NAT discourse, and what (im)possible histories might survive this end?" The following literature contrasts modernist and some critical lenses of curriculum theory and art education with a poststructuralist reading. In doing so, I frame conflicting views of the listed themes and develop a layered understanding of the NAT curriculum change. This chapter aims, on one side, to show how different lenses make different readings possible, at the same time building towards a specific way of looking at the NAT.

With a poststructuralist lens applied to each given theme, I show how both the NAT curriculum and its opposing discourse keep up certain ideas of art history education, which determine the possibilities of the subject. Here, I am working towards the understanding that the erasure/death of art history education is final (which lays the base for a hauntological theoretical lens).

Throughout the literature review my aim is as follows: By looking at the theme of curriculum, I side with understandings that view the curriculum (and any text) as political material and possible to be changed. What is more, I frame the NAT as (con)text, both a text to analyze and a site that provides a space for discourse about art history education. Framing curriculum this way builds on Derrida's (1995) words, [there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte]*" (p. 158, original emphasis). Then, I move to the theme of art history, where I establish an understanding of the 2020 NAT revisions as a singular event, building on Derrida's (2012, p. 10) quote "[r]epetition and first time, but also repetition and last time." To establish such understanding, I present international debates that, while resembling the NAT change, are distinct from it, this way both giving a deeper understanding of the Hungarian context and also framing it as singular. This way I can argue that while the 2020 NAT revisions are not unprecedented and locate them within

international debates, they are singular due to the specific political and social environment they happen under/in.

Questions we leave this chapter with are, “What does the erasure of the art history subject tell us about how we understand art (history) education and its content?” And “How can we turn critically toward this understanding, opening up new possibilities?” These questions link directly to the research question and set the tone for the theoretical framework.

Framing the curriculum as political, troubling classifications

Curriculum, in its broadest sense, refers to the educational framework that guides the upbringing of individuals within society. As Cleo H. Cherryholmes (1982) explains, it is a practical profession aiming to foster social good through education. However, what is “good for the social” is a complex question. As Gülşah Coskun Yasar and Berna Aslan (2021) point out in their literature review, there are different lenses and understandings on what “social good” is, informing various curriculum theories. However, in general, curriculum as a directing constitution can be understood from multiple angles, like “intellectual planning, infrastructure, and ideological and philosophical perspectives” (Coşkun Yaşar & Aslan, 2021, p. 238). Prominent definitions in curriculum theory stem from figures like Spencer (1884), who asks the question, “What knowledge is of most worth?” This hierarchy, a competition to be *worthy* of being a part of general education, is still considered to be the backbone of curriculum theory (Coşkun Yaşar & Aslan, 2021).

When trying to define curriculum, content-focused definitions include ones like Geoffrey Squires (1990), who defines curriculum as “what is thought,” and Philip H. Phenix (1962), for whom curriculum is content(s) within a subject area learned in school. These definitions prioritize the transmission of content to students by utilizing specific thought processes. However, these perspectives contrast with, for example, the work of John F. Bobbitt (1918), who argued that curriculum should consist of both planned

and unplanned activities, all aimed at developing students' skills to help them fit into society and contribute meaningfully to the economy. While John Dewey (1902) shared the above definitions, he himself viewed the curriculum as planned experiences. Still, framing curriculum as a "path to society," he also took a child-centered stance, stating that children should be in the center of education, which is to an extent in contrast with views that suggest that children should be shaped to fit in society.

The above perspectives show how there are various views on what the curriculum is and what education and curriculums *ought to* do. However, as Cherryholmes (1982) points out, while there are key differences in the ways in which a curriculum should come to existence, in an international context, many build on the structure of Ralph W. Tyler's (2013) "*Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*," which gained prominence due to their "promised order, organization, rationality, error correction, political neutrality, expertise, and progress" (p. 26). These values then already shape understandings about the curriculum and what may fit into it.

Importantly, while the above-mentioned approaches show some key differences in views of what the curriculum is, many attempted to classify curriculum theories in hopes of a clearer overview of their ideological foundations.

Classifications of curriculum theories

To proceed with establishing curriculum as political material, it is worth touching upon various lenses to the curriculum. Many notable attempts to organize curriculum theories have occurred in the past century (Coşkun Yaşar & Aslan, 2021). However, Dorothy Huenecke (1982) points out that most classifications of curriculum theory tend to identify similar categories. In the literature review of Yasar and Aslan (2021), they review theories of Elliot Eisner and Elizabeth Vallance (1974), John D. McNeil (1996), George J. Posner (1995), William H. Schubert (1996), Allan C. Ornstein & Francis P. Hunkins (2017), Herbert M. Kliebard (2004), Arthur K. Ellis (2004), Michael S. Schiro (2013), and Wesley J. Null (2011) and conclude that indeed, these

works categorize curriculum theory similarly. Making Huenecke's statement stand today.

Considering the above-listed examples, approaches to the curriculum are often organized into four distinct categories; an exception is Null's (2011) work, "*Curriculum: From Theory to Practice*," where curriculum is divided into five groups. For the reason of being one of the latest comprehensive reviews of curriculum theories of the abovementioned, I use Null's work to give insight into main understandings in curriculum theory. This way, showing various lenses on what curriculum as material "ought to be."

Systemic: Here, emphasis is on shaping students' behavior through designed standards according to which skills should be matched and evaluated. Objectives are to prepare learners for society and their future as meaningful contributors to said society. (Null, 2011)

Liberal: In this group, the curriculum's objective is seen in providing access to the outstanding ideas and objects of, in our case, products of Western culture. This approach echoes views of Plato and Aristotle by setting its objective to transfer knowledge. Such transfer is seen as the "liberation of the mind" and sees the teacher and student relationship as the former transmitting knowledge to the latter (Null, 2011). Based on the views in this group, a curriculum's main purpose is "acculturation of students in the world of knowledge" (Coşkun Yaşar & Aslan, 2021, p. 243). This approach is not led by the concern for real-life applicability or individual student preferences, as it attributes a kind of virtue to knowledge and sees it as key for the "development of the mind" (Coşkun Yaşar & Aslan, 2021, p. 243). As Null (2011, p. 15) puts it, this category "should turn students into free thinkers who can draw upon many fields of knowledge, pursue truth, and solve problems."

Existentialist & Pragmatic: In this group, the objectives are for the curriculum to define performance standards that point to skills necessary for ensuring that learners can develop and define their needs and interests. This is considered a contributor to "finding their ways" in society. Important terms are autonomy for the child, a sense of freedom, and learning through

experience. Students' needs and interests are driving the curriculum; however, the view that there is a shared "nature" of each individual makes it possible to draw general objectives when designing the curriculum. (Null, 2011)

Radical: Here, curriculum is driven by the view that education has the capacity to shape society and possibly restructure it. Perspectives belonging under this group are set out to raise individuals who understand the social problems as not a given, but something that can be worked on. This lens to the curriculum views social problems as not tied to individual flaws but the result of structural inequalities, often also entailing the view that there is a certain mobility to society that can be actualized through educating students to gain critical awareness. Importantly, this group turns with criticality towards the power structures that shape society and are often reflected in the curriculum. (Null, 2011)

Deliberative: Englund (2015) draws three distinct characteristics of a deliberative lens to the curriculum. First, the making of the curriculum should engage citizens broadly and view education as a tool for the public good. Secondly, professionals and teachers should have the freedom to select content and define how they will teach it. Third, deliberation should have space in the classroom. While this categorization is challenging to match to the core curriculum, in this sense, the core curriculum should allow the possibility of deliberation. In Englund's (2015) reading, a deliberative curriculum is ever-changing:

> This view of curriculum content and school subjects implies that we see them as contingent moral and political constructions that are constantly reshaped, without definite limits, capable of being interpreted and realized in different ways, politically contested at all levels, and in an everchanging situation in relation to the struggle between different social forces. (p. 51)

For William Reid (1978), the curriculum is a matter of public welfare, and he integrates moral philosophy into his approach to a deliberative curriculum. This definition leads to the understanding that curriculum problems are moral in character, and the best way to solve them is by engaging participants as broadly as possible. However, while Null (2011) echoes Reid's understanding of necessary openness when making a curriculum, he limits such openness to "all citizens can contribute, provided they are willing to think clearly about the types of problems that curriculum poses" (p. 151). This way, advocating for a rather Fairclough and Fairclough (2013) type logic, that is to say, see how "citizen" and "thinking clearly" might limit participation.

While the above categorization can help navigate different views and understandings of the curriculum, it is important to understand that groups are not homogeneous. For example, the "radical" curriculum category that Null (2011) uses will look very different depending on whether one views, to use Null's examples in the book, the works of Michael Apple (2004) or Paulo Freire (2000). What is more, the curriculum can merge several groups; for example, in the case of the Hungarian NAT, there is 20% left for teachers to define activities and possibly localize their content during the year (Csókás, 2020). This approach, for example, may allow for the inclusion of deliberative methods in defining the curriculum—such as soliciting students' preferences or collaborating with local communities; however, it will not transform the curriculum into a fully deliberative one, and the specific approach taken by each teacher in designing that 20% will vary. Pointing out how curriculum escapes its frameworks.

Curriculum as political

Based on the classifications drawn above, I position this work closest to a radical and deliberative approach to understanding the curriculum. While I again acknowledge the reductive nature of such grouping, I base this decision on Null's (2011) and Englund's (2015) remarks, which state that both radical and deliberative approaches to curriculum treat education and the

structuring and governing of materials, like a curriculum, as inherently political.

Reading the curriculum as political leads to an understanding of the text as constructed, the result of dominant ideas of what education "ought to be"; therefore, it is open to change (Pinar, 2012). It is a view that the curriculum is not neutral; it entails a value judgment that constructs what is worth knowing and how, and for what reason.

However, it is to be noted that the "political" in a radical and deliberative curriculum is understood differently; what is more, these groups understand "more conservative" lenses (systemic, liberal, existentialist and pragmatic) on the curriculum as political too. This, as Null (2011) asserts, is in opposition to other groupings, which often see their curriculum as a result of objective and neutral synthesization of knowledge (for example, led by a utilitarian understanding that caters to the presumed needs of the majority) or aim to reproduce what is recognized as the inheritance of so-called "dominant traditions." For them a curriculum is a logical conclusion, assumed neutral. Importantly, for a lens that views the curriculum as political, there is space for critique and questioning of dominant ideas about education. The divergence lies in a deliberative curriculum's skepticism toward totalizing ideas of the "good life" and its willingness to open up debates, assuming that it includes diverse voices in these discussions. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that all approaches in Null's (2011) categories of the curriculum carry a normative agenda, providing an alternative interpretation of the "social good," though they come together through different practices.

To close this chapter, the understanding that a curriculum is both political and constructed, therefore governing, guides this thesis work. What is more, it refuses to fall under one of the categories of Null (as aligning on the understanding that the curriculum is political does not necessitate neatly falling under one group or the other). This is because each group, in its own way, aims to offer a solution (a deliberative approach to curriculum, taking the least recipe-like approach to a solution).

Hidden curriculum and null curriculum: Learning what is not taught

Curriculum design reaches beyond decisions made about whether one takes a systemic, existentialist and pragmatic, radical, liberal or deliberative approaches to curriculum. As many point out, while intentions about the curriculum are important, I return here to Bobbitt's (1918) definition of "unplanned" in curriculum, that is, the view that curriculum is the sum of both planned and unplanned activities.

On Bobbitt's remark, many have since elaborated. Here, understanding of "hidden" and "null curriculum" can be relevant. For Eisner (1979), there are three types of curriculum: "the overt curriculum which is taught and learned; the hidden curriculum which is not taught but learned; and the null curriculum which is not taught" (Cahapay, 2021, p. 1987). The term "hidden curriculum" is often associated with Jackson (1990), to whom it refers to values, rules, and assumptions implicit in the curriculum (LeCompte, 1978). As John P. Portelli (1993) understands, there is a formal and actual curriculum. The former is the official curriculum, which refers to the planned educational content, while the latter describes how it is implemented and includes unplanned elements that still convey lessons.

An example of the foregoing is what Wade Tillett and Jenna Cushing-Leubner (2021) view as the hidden curriculum of "winners and losers in learning." They state that ranking systems in education, such as grading, implicitly suggest that learning is a competition, or at least that there is a right way to do it (it governs). In this context, ranking itself becomes a lesson that is subtly integrated into the curriculum, teaching students that there is a correct way to learn and perceive information. What is more, there is a certain hierarchy tied to "getting it right." Regardless of if we view ranking and grading as correct or incorrect, important or not, Tillett and Cushing-Leubner (2021) share that with ranking a lesson is taught, regardless of its lack of explicitness. This reasoning can be linked to the NAT context too; for example, if art history education is the only subject being merged with

another, one may assume it is less important or its contents align with the visual culture, so there is no need for it.

Similarly, Popkewitz (2009) also points to this tension engraved into Western education after the Enlightenment. He asserts that, through education (but this dynamic is present in society as well), both meaning and value are recognized through hierarchies built on "identifying what is different" (p. 305). Once identified, the labelled different gets Othered by exclusion (this concept and engagement with the "Other" will be relevant later).

The concept of hidden curriculum refers to the underlying assumptions that shape our learning process and determine the value of knowledge.

Joining the idea of hidden curriculum—but also contrasting it—is the "null curriculum" ("null curriculum" is distinct from Wesley Null, the curriculum theorist). Simply put, the "null curriculum is what is not taught as opposed to what is" (Null, 2011, p. 93). Null (2011) sees schools as institutions harboring within them ways to shape students and condition what they think and, in very general terms, their idea of what a "social good" is, and with it, what a "good life" entails. This means that education and curriculum as **structuring material** have a role in shaping students' values; therefore, what is included and how it is framed are just as important as what is left out and erased from the curriculum (and the explicit and implicit reasons for this decision, if, indeed, it is a decision—which in the case of the NAT it is). Null (2011) highlights that these ways of omitting information are often not deliberate but simply due to the fact that "no school or teacher can teach everything," but he also highlights, "[a]ny curriculum, therefore, requires choices, and choices mean priorities" (p. 93). Cahapay (2019) explains that interpretations of the null curriculum have varied since Eisner's (1979) seminal work.

This means that, for some people, the null curriculum is related to what is intentionally excluded, while for others, it may result from cultural biases, or possibly both. In some cases, the null curriculum may occur by chance; for

example, certain content may be included in the curriculum, yet students do not learn it.

This work mainly understands the null curriculum as something *not* included in the curriculum (be it the NAT or the art history subject). What is more, it assumes that such exclusions are animated by hierarchies based on ideas and intentions of "what is worth knowing." With it, I am less focused on "what gets taught but not learned."

Curriculum, as a structuring material, inevitably means that certain knowledges are easier and seem more *reasonable* to include than others, especially if ways of knowing or information have been long marginalized in the curriculum or were never part of it (Mercer, 2024). Whether this viewpoint is right or wrong depends on the lenses through which we read the curriculum; certain systematic, existentialist, pragmatic, or liberal understandings may not prioritize these concerns. It also raises the question of how we interpret the intended action: whether it is to fix perceived flaws, to point them out, or to take no action. That is, reading a systematic curriculum with a radical lens will highlight certain types of issues, and vice versa; the same if we read it through Paulo Freire, Michael Apple, Thomas S. Popkewitz, or, in this work's case, the works of Walter Benjamin and Jacques Derrida. Importantly, with the lenses of this work, I am mainly concerned about "what is haunting" the arguments about art history education and its place in the curriculum rather than proposing actionable ways (that is, proposing a solution) for "fixing" something—hence, I pointed out the normativity of Null's categories.

This way, I attempt not to weaponize this work against the other perspectives on curriculum. As Schiro (2013) notes, ideologies that provide the various perspectives in curriculum theory historically led to a war to "dominate rival ideologies and control [education]" (p. 9). The normativity inherent in curriculum theories aims to convert both participants and overseers of education, thereby establishing a hierarchy centered around the curriculum. From my perspective, I view the NAT as a layered document, akin to a palimpsest, which builds on historical events that determine (and

distort) what should be included and how; I also perceive the art history subject's erasure as a political act rather than a neutral accident. However, in this thesis I hope to contribute to the discourse around the curriculum rather than offering a solution with the aim of overtaking the core curriculum as a whole. While admitting that, despite my intentions, from certain standpoints this approach to the NAT can be read as a threat or belonging under certain groups of Null (2011).

Poststructuralism in/on curriculum theory

As established, the curriculum theories presented up until this point are not homogeneous groups. However, in curriculum theory, there are groups that are more likely to embrace the Western essentialist understanding of knowledge and see education as tasked to unearth information, thereby coming closer to *the* truth. As Marla Morris (2016) emphasizes, this perspective contrasts with, but also fuels, a poststructuralist mode of looking at the curriculum. As for poststructuralism, "there is no foundation for knowledge, but only new ways of looking at things that are built on old ways of seeing. The new comes out of the old and transforms the old" (p. 257). In this sense, the curriculum theories listed above are not in an objectively hierarchical relation to one another (though a certain lens might perceive them that way) but are better understood as different lenses of what/how education "ought to be."

Morris (2016) points out that curriculum theory is built upon the work of key figures in the discipline. Many draw on Michel Foucault's (1995) "*Discipline and Punish*" to look at education and its governing structures. However, both Jacques Derrida's and Emmanuel Lévinas's works are considered seminal. While Null's (2011) curriculum theory can assemble clean groups from various theories, Foucault (1972) is critical of such groupings:

> I shall accept the groupings that history suggests only to subject them at once to interrogation; to break them up and

> then to see whether they can be legitimately reformed; or whether other groupings should be made; to replace them in a more general space which, while dissipating their apparent familiarity, makes it possible to construct a theory of them. Once these immediate forms of continuity are suspended, an entire field is set free. (p. 26)

This "setting free," putting groups up for play, is a seminal concept for a poststructuralist lens—though Derrida (1995) further complicates the idea of regrouping seen in Foucault, and through deconstruction, calls any grouping a violent erasure. For Morris (2016), a poststructuralist lens is compared to insanity. This dramatic comparison is recognized through the madness of a poststructuralist lens and understood to stem from the instability of the world, everything being in constant change, in flux. It means that there can not be alignment over "meaning the same thing," as there is no *thing in itself*. Indeed, the "world as is" always arrives to us through culture, deferring and distorting our understanding of its *true nature*. This way, access to a singular truth is impossible in endless variety. Which means big trouble for knowing *one thing* through learning (or pointing out with certainty what is erased). As Morris (2016, p. 308) puts it, for the "children of the Enlightenment," this instability can cause discomfort, as they are used to (conditioned to) thinking in straightforward rational logic and reasoning. Pinar (1995), too, insists that we all, to some extent, crave the clarity of straightforward narratives. However, as Morris (2016) reads it, for those who can sit with the ambiguity of not knowing for certain—which, as Jacques Daignault (1983) makes clear, does not equal a nihilism of not knowing—poststructuralism can mean embracing the complexity of reality, leading to an acceptance of uncertainty. Yet, to my ears when reading Morris' language, there is a sense of hierarchy that embraces the poststructuralist lens as higher than others (building a binary between those who are "able to endure" sitting with ambiguity compared to those who stay with what is normalized). In this work, I would stay on the fence with this implicit hierarchy, as it joins back to what Schiro

(2013) points out regarding curriculum theory: the urge to build hierarchies and justify one's preferred lens to the world accordingly. For this thesis, I would strictly see poststructuralism as a different lens to curriculum, rather than of a higher order, and a result of "more criticality towards" or "putting more work in" the questioning of dominant (Western) ideas. This lens also offers vastly different solutions than the ones explored in previous chapters (while never stopping to differ in itself).

Strictly focusing on what a poststructuralist lens may offer (which of course is not one thing), one is led to approach curriculum by looking at what the material frames as "ought to be known." For example, it might be a questioning of the curriculum theories categorized by Null (2011) and the inherent futurity in all; in other words, how all "lenses" recognized by Null are oriented towards an ideal of what a better future "ought to be" and how it is education that supposedly should pave the path to said utopia.

A relevant and early example of poststructuralism in curriculum theory is Peter Taubman's (1980) work. Taubman pays attention to a gender structure that all curriculum theories share, making a discursive framework. He does it at a time when critical attention to gender in the curriculum gained prominence (Pinar, 1995). In his doctoral thesis "*Gender and Curriculum: Discourse and the Politics of Sexuality*," completed in 1979, Taubman focused on both the dominant and opposing discourse, which both built on figures of "man" and "woman," and furthermore, on "heterosexual," "homosexual," and in general, "sexuality" in so-called sexual political discourses. Pointing out the Möbius-strip-like structure of the discourse—in other words, how both "sides" take for granted the structure of what is attributed to the dominant side's "oppression." His poststructuralist contribution to curriculum theory shows how the gender binaries present in the discourse limit what is possible to think. In other words, Taubman highlights the conflict between two understandings of the curriculum: one that treats knowledge as neutral and another that applies a radical lens, emphasizing the structuring and limiting qualities of these perspectives. Taubman's work is relevant for this thesis, as it too looks at the grid-like

confines of a given context (this, in the NAT opposing discourse, I understand as the idea of "the death" of art history education). Furthermore, through the above example, it becomes clear that a poststructuralist approach to curriculum as (con)text must do something other than reverse what is hidden or erased, rejecting the building of a new, reversed hierarchy—here, one can also rely on Derrida's deconstruction, which means a "double gesture" (Bernasconi, 2014), first the reversal, and then the dissection of the hierarchical binary (thinking the impossible). The double gesture of deconstruction, the two-sided operation for Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2019), first ruptures "what is," then, in the absence of the original context, takes up new meaning. In other words, "it transforms the situation it effects." (Blair, 2004, p. 157)

However, through a normative lens, a poststructuralist reading can appear, for example, radical due to its unwillingness to preserve and reproduce the status quo. But as I made clear, both "radical" and "deliberative" as a group erase the wild varieties that make up (and escape) such a group; therefore, we should stay suspicious of what poststructuralism is reduced to by this grouping. This is also true for education, as both more (hidden curriculum) and less (null curriculum) are being learned when teaching the overt curriculum, which is a very Derridean (Caputo & Derrida, 1997) understanding of both the *nature* of the subject, being both less and more than/by what it figures, and the curriculum as something hollow.

A poststructuralist lens to the curriculum still asks what "ought to be known," but turns toward a **responsibility** in the moment that brings together doing justice to the past, transforming the present, and, with it, what the future can be.

> [*D*]*éconstruction* . . . has nothing to do with destruction. That is to say, it is simply a question of (and this is a necessity of criticism in the classical sense of the word) being alert to the implications, to the historical sedimentation of the language we use—and that is not destruction." (Derrida, 1988, p. 271)

What is more, it is something different than just doing away with all categories. So, poststructuralism (and deconstruction) is not destroying structure but paying attention to the layered character of a given (con)text.

With a poststructuralist lens, we can point out the violence inherent in structures, like a curriculum that governs what counts as knowledge. Here I refer to the work of Daignault, a poststructuralist curriculum theorist. Daignault's oeuvre spans beyond taking up concepts from poststructuralism and is well versed in "languages and currents of these [poststructuralist] movements" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 480). For him, all knowledge, and therefore curriculum, is a governing entity of what can and should be known; it functions as a hunt and is connected to **violence**. As Daignault puts it clearly, "running after rigorous demonstrations and after confirmations is a hunt: literally . . . to know is to kill" (1992a, p. 198-199). In other words, knowledge implies an exhaustible and fixed subject, that reduces the play and multiplicities in meaning.

This notion of truth as reachable and knowable, of course, is what makes Western thought and informs the Enlightenment project (Pinar et al., 1995). To reject this idea is "in opposition to the [Western] history of thought" (Foucault, 1972, p. 27). Serres (2019), too, connects the notion of "knowledge as exhaustible" in Western thought to Plato, stating, "knowledge is a hunt. To know is to put to death . . . To know is to kill, to rely on death . . . The reason of the strongest is reason by itself. Western man is a wolf of science" (p. 198). As Pinar et al. (1995) explains, this hunt treats knowledge as identity (identity is a reduction of difference, which I elaborate on later) that brings about homogeneity. This sematized, domesticated non-difference—pressed into *One thing,* like a school subject—is seen as a violent act and is a reduction (with it an erasure) itself (of itself).

A poststructuralist lens rejects final declaration, knowledge as totalizing, and curriculum as stable and finished. For Daignault (Daignault, 1992, p. 202), it means "to translate life in joyful wisdom, gay knowledge. Thinking maybe." For Derrida, it is something like a "perhaps." That is to say, everything that promises justice through change should stay as "perhaps,"

suspended, deferred, a justice to come, to h(a)unt all articulations that claim a fixed meaning (Martel, 2011).

Understanding art history as hollow and different

When talking about art history, we often mean both the subject of science and the field of science itself. Art history can be defined as the study of works recognized as artistic and deemed impactful on the histories of societies and cultures. Furthermore, it is the study of how art is present in what we recognize as our human history. (Marosi, 2013)

In this chapter, I first look into how art education and art history as a subject have been framed both internationally and in the Hungarian context. In other words, I will examine how it is "justified" within the curriculum. This analysis should deepen understanding of the NAT context and help explore dominant ideas in art history education (as we know it). With it, help understand the reasoning behind why art (history) education is considered relevant and explore past struggles around "keeping it relevant." Once we understand expectations toward art (history) education, we may ask what is taken away or gets erased as a consequence of the 2020 NAT revisions.

A place for art (history) education in the curriculum: International justifications echoed in the Hungarian context

In the following chapter, I give some background to art history's past in the Hungarian context as a discipline of science to support a contextual understanding of the NAT, with it, to emphasize what makes the 2020 NAT revisions unique. Turning to art history to understand Hungarian specificities, one can take a brief look at how art education as a subject in public education was first formed. Furthermore, as pointed out, the erasure of art history education in the NAT happened by merging some of its contents with (primarily) the subject of visual culture. To understand the rationale behind this merger, I examine the debates and tensions between the subjects of art history and visual culture, as well as their respective objectives. As the United States' (next to British and German) context provides an important

backbone of art education in Hungarian public education, many examples are brought in from this context (Kárpáti & Gaul, 1985). Through these perspectives it is possible to situate the Hungarian case and see where they align or contrast with larger/parallel art educational discourse. By touching on the above topics, I deepen understanding of both international perspectives on art history and the nuances of the Hungarian case and context.

To start, art education became a mandatory subject in Hungarian education in 1777, introduced by the Austro-Hungarian Empress, Maria Theresa, in the Ratio Educationis. With time, Hungarian art education strongly built on Barkan's (1966) three-part division. Barkan's subject framework understands art education as consisting of the following subjects: art history, art criticism, and art studio practice (Eisner, 2003). Art studios should offer both fine art classes and design classes. Interestingly, sharing Broudy and Smith's (1967) views, Barkan suggests that studio practice should have a larger emphasis in early school years, and as the student's education progresses, there should be more focus on art history and art criticism. Andrea Kárpáti (1984, p. 14) explains that it is these three pillars that the Hungarian model builds on, stating, "Hungarian art curricula include [sic] art appreciation, criticism, and history of fine arts in an increasingly sophisticated combination with studio practice." Indeed, the Hungarian model in public education keeps with these principles: studio practice often involves both fine art classes [*rajzóra*] and design/technical classes [*technika óra*], while art history (and visual culture) comes later into the curriculum. However, art criticism largely remains a suggestion in the curriculum, mainly in the form of encouraging students to reflect on their own work during art classes (Csaba et al., 2019). This approach seems to echo what Tavin (2000) calls "uncritical-critical thinking," one devoid of the ethical and political dimensions of criticality (this understanding also shows how a variety of practices fall under a term like "critical thinking").

Broadly speaking, keeping with Barkan's (1966) art education categorization, art history as a subject has a very different purpose and

structure in the curriculum compared to studio art practice and art criticism. The former aims to contextualize art and connect it to a historical understanding, one that often builds on a view of **history as progress** and events **that bear significance** (Erickson, 1979; Marosi, 2013). (Note that too often, "bearing significance" is understood as an event being significant by virtue and less as a result of social signifying practice). Similarly, it also differs from visual culture, which, in simple terms, aims to connect students with (contemporary) culture and its visual elements and to analyze social and cultural narratives (Tavin, 2000). This way, visual culture can challenge principles of art history as a subject that builds on an understanding that what is worth introducing to students are examples of "high art" (Marosi, 2013). To situate the above, if we look back at Null's categories, the above resemble ideas from a "liberal" group, consequently meaning that "the best of human civilization" is a designated label for certain cultural artifacts, societies and cultures.

In Hungary, the study of art history has only emerged as a scientific discipline since the late 1800s. (Kárpáti and Gaul, 1985) Art history as a subject and area of research officially started in 1872 with the opening of the Department of Art History at the Eötvös Lóránd University (ELTE), located in Budapest. The opening of the department was justified by the need to "research into the course and laws of artistic development" [*a művészeti fejlődés menetének, törvényszerűségeinek kutatása*]. This way, art history in Hungary has a part that favored "historical and archaeological questions, as opposed to theoretical and aesthetic elements" [*kezdetben az elméleti, esztétikai elemekkel szemben a szorosabban vett történeti és archeológiai kérdések jutnak vezető szerephez*]. Understandably, this perspective made its mark on the curriculum and informed the approaches of art educators trained in academia who were later entering public education as teaching staff. (Marosi, 1975)

This past emphasis on the modernist aim to think history through "laws of artistic development" and treat art history as linear, progressing time, where art is linked together in a teleological manner, formed the basis of the

discipline. Art history was understood as set on a singular teleological timeline, and what is thought in the subject is considered to be the most remarkable work of art in human history (Marosi, 2003).

Decades ago, the above-described perspectives attaching universal value to artifacts were a key point of contention and debate internationally. Indeed, debates around art history and visual culture are, in actuality, not an unprecedented case in art education's past. Around the early 2000s, a substantial debate emerged in the United States regarding the subjects, but conversations about the legitimacy of visual culture in art education started decades earlier (Tavin, 2005). This event is worth briefly elaborating on, as, to some extent, arguments made for visual culture during this time are seemingly echoed in the NAT discourse, especially in remarks of the Ministry of Interior that deem visual culture to be more "modern" than art history and, with it, justify the erasure of the latter in the curriculum (Dzsubák, 2023b).

A key difference between visual culture debates in the United States and Hungarian contexts is, for one, how visual culture in the States allowed an element of "activism" into the field of art education, opening up toward "radical" and "deliberative" curriculum possibilities, which for many in the field was either a motivating or deterring characteristic (Hope, 2005). While this is true in an international context, Hungarian approaches to visual culture differ, though attempts were made to draw attention to multicultural realities in Hungary, with Albert Hurwitz being a returning figure in the 1970s, advocating for multicultural approaches in Hungarian art education (Kárpáti, 2019). Looking at the reviews of the core curriculum on the art education subject, with its visual culture, it becomes clear that criticality and student activation for debating social issues—prerequisites for implementing activist approaches in the curriculum—are largely absent (Oktatási Hivatal, 2020). Instead, the listed practices maintain a framework focused on promoting national identity (Csaba et al., 2019; Madácsi-Laube, 2020). Of course, a topic in itself does not limit "deliberative" or "radical" approaches. However, paying attention to the learning objectives discussed in the "(Con)textualization chapter" of this work helps understand how the framing

of these topics might turn into the uncritical-critical thinking Tavin (2000) speaks about.

This difference between what visual culture may stand for in education is intriguing, as from the 1970s to the early 2000s, a main area of contention regarding art history and visual culture in the United States' context was tied to a disagreement over what art education "ought to be," a debate that can be seen in Europe too (Heinich, 2012). Schiro (2013) characterizes this disagreement as a "culture war" in education, where competing ideologies wrestle over the objectives of education. We can understand this event as a clash between Null's (2011) systemic or liberal approaches and the radical (or sometimes deliberative) perspectives of curriculum. Main areas of criticism of art history were not limited to the lack of radicalism but also took issue with the high culture/low culture binary implicit in art history and its education, while some also criticized colonial histories that shape what is deemed as art and how it is taught and, more generally, the temporal implications of art history as a subject (Heinich, 2012; Tavin, 2005).

Indeed, these arguments are nothing new, as both Hans Belting (1987) and Arthur C. Danto (1998; 1997) were occupied with the "end of art history" and the "end of art," claiming that the area of science is insufficient to examine art after the postmodern turn (Scheemann, 2012, p. 60). In effect, their contributions in some cases led to a turning away from art history; in other cases, they meant the reimagining of art history by opening a department that worked with contemporary art. The Hungarian Art History Department at ELTE also took this latter approach (Marosi, 1975). These developments meant a break from an understanding that has long dominated art history, that is, the idea that only art in the distant past can be analyzed objectively (Schneemann, 2012). This claim of distance (time passing) as gaining objectivity dominated the Hungarian art history discipline, which for decades after Imre Henszlmann started teaching art history in the 1870s at ELTE only taught art history up until Rubens and Rembrandt, and he was asked by the department to focus his classes on ancient art, as everything after was deemed "too close to be judged." Indeed, even in the 1910s, Antal

Hekler, who taught art history at the Department of Art History, claimed that "the discussion of the art of the present is in motion, therefore historically unassessable, so it cannot be our task" ["[*A] szorosabban vett, történetileg még meg nem ítélhető, mozgásban levő jelen művészetének tárgyalása nem lehet feladatunk"*] (Gosztonyi, 2008).

In contrast to these views, many countries today have adjusted their curricula by embracing contemporary art and reflecting on the arguments made about this topic in both the United States and Europe (Heinich, 2012). Contrastingly, when the NAT was published, literary historian and NAT committee member Mihály Takaró made the following remarks: "The NAT and the framework curriculum aim to convey normative values. So only completed and reliably assessable bodies of work are included in it." [*A NAT és a kerettanterv normatív értékeket akar közvetíteni. Tehát csak lezárt és biztosan megítélhető életművek szerepelnek benne.*] Here, "reliably assessable bodies of work" are meant for the oeuvre of passed-away figures. Showing how the idea of the distant past and death seemingly equates to information being reliable. On this reliability the NAT strongly builds on (Csókás, 2020).

To summarize this chapter, while the critique of art history education in the United States stemmed from a largely radical perspective that in part also brought a socially engaged focus, in the Hungarian context, today the government by no means aims to radicalize (towards a radical or deliberative direction, that is) its curriculum (Madácsi-Laube, 2020; Nahalka, 2018). Therefore, we should pay attention to the question of erasing art history by merging some of its contents with the visual culture subject, which the Ministry of Interior understands and claims will lead to a more "modern" art educational curriculum (Dzsubák, 2023a). For them, a "more modern" curriculum means something different than what Tavin (2005) asks for in the United States (a cut with binaries that build hierarchy between art history and visual culture as high culture/low culture and an opening up to views addressing the deeply political character of art education). Rather, for Hungary, the "modernization" of the art education curriculum as "progress"

can be best understood as a shift from an "academic" to a "systemic curriculum."

That is to say, "progress" as a concept is entirely and utterly hollow. Meaning that "more modern" or "progress" does not mean one thing—but rather can have various meanings and is context dependent. For the Hungarian government, the terms "progress" and "modernity" seem to encompass something other than socially engaged art education as a form of progress, while in other contexts progress often meant embracing and incorporating the political layers of what is taught during art education. Simultaneously, many who oppose the NAT acknowledge the concept of "progress" by restoring art history education to its prior-to-2024 state. The (con)text dependency of progress therefore cannot be measured or understood in a universal manner; by rejecting the idea of "progress as universal," we may think with difference instead. Différance for Derrida (1982) is as follows:

> [T]he signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself . . . every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences. (p. 11)

As a summary, the above chapter aims to show the complicated history of the NAT and point out how ideas seemingly echoed in a larger discourse deeply differ from the Hungarian (con)text. This is to point out that (at)tending to the NAT has to happen with the understanding that its event is deeply singular (which for me will later justify a post qualitative approach to inquiry). I find Derrida's (2007) remarks fitting to understand the singularity of the event:

> [A]n event took place that cannot under any circumstance be reduced to its analysis, an event that cannot be reduced to any saying. (p. 460)

What is more, understanding the layered and complex past of art education aims to inform what is possible to think in the NAT discourse; consequently, I am able not to judge the discourse but to explore what seems impossible, led by a sense of care and responsibility. In other words, it allows identifying the structures that shape discourse so I can address the research question of this work.

On temporality and (art) history: an archive of collective memory

The study of temporality in the humanities and social sciences is mainly concerned with studying individual and social understandings of time. Here, one's understanding of time is considered a construction, and its perception is subject to change (Dawson & Sykes, 2019). This understanding is relevant to address, as it already indicates that art history and its historical understanding presuppose certain views of time that are the product of the social (Karlholm & Moxey, 2018). What is more, often art history is tied to historical metanarratives (Skender, 2023). Ones that, famously, Jean-François Lyotard's (1984) skepticism of grand metanarratives complicated, bringing about a questioning of the objectivity of historiography. With the postmodern turn, art history too got troubled by the critique of coherent narratives. Marosi (2003) points out in the case of art history, what is labeled as "the best of human civilization" is always on the move:

> Although the temporal succession of memories makes the changes in art history perceivable, their selection, that is, the judgment with which we recognize them as works of art, presupposes that we have a prior concept of what art is. In this sense, a memory is something that we consider as such according to our current understanding of art and scientific concepts.
>
> [*Bár az emlékek időbeli egymásutánja is érzékelhetővé teszi a művészettörténeti változásait, már kiválasztásuk, vagyis az az ítélet, amellyel műalkotásokként ismerjük el őket, feltételezi, hogy előzetes fogalmunk van a művészet mibenlétéről. Ebben az értelemben emlék az, amit aktuális művészetfelfogásunk és tudományos koncepciónk szerint annak tekintünk.*] (p. 81)

This framing ties back with the previous chapter, where Serres (2019) speaks of the violence in knowledge, in naming the artifacts of art history.

While Marosi (2003), with the above quote, speaks of the changing definitions of what is deemed as art, it is not certain whether he means such a play in art historical understanding as deeply political or views it as art history is on a teleological trajectory, where change in definitions of art speaks of an "evolving nature" of the arts, getting closer to understanding what art *is*. Such a distinction will be important later on.

With the loss of objectivity, historical understandings render history (as memory and remembering) political (Dawson & Sykes, 2019). Its political character is understood as legitimizing some forms of knowing while erasing others: "remembering and forgetting are political acts intimately entwined with relationships of power and privilege" (Martin & Myers, 2023, p. 991). As Martin and Mayers (2023) explain, "representation" of the past has various effects; it may justify authority, inform a sense of morality, and even condition populations to recognize something as (imagined/constructed) culture or identify culture "as such." It can also form a sense of (national) identity and belonging. However, some are suspicious about the idea of history, of the past "represented," as representation might contribute to an understanding of the past, as neutrally accessible "true to itself" or able to "speak for itself" (Benjamin, 1940).

If one accepts that remembering is political (with it, the erasure of some past events and highlighting of others), the past becomes less stable. In the sense that even if a given event is fully represented (of which Benjamin is very suspicious), the erased histories already tell a fabulation of the past. Benjamin (1940) states:

> There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another. (p. 4)

In this reading, what is remembered carries violence, and the very act of inheritance—to insist on remembering—is violent. Indeed, the object of remembrance encapsulates violence, not only because it dominates the past

and often gets treated as an artifact of a progressing storyline but also because it steps in the place of all that existed beside it (in plurality) and erases those histories. Therefore, instead of clinging to the materials of the past as if they are telling *their own story*, one might come into relation with them. This relation will get center attention in later pages. For now, this passage serves as a distinction between art historical understanding as one of change due to progress, placed in a teleological trajectory, and one always in play, deter(min)ed by (con)textual and political forces.

Theoretical framework: Loosening the conceptual limits of the end

In the previous chapters, I aimed to explore relevant themes that support a contextual understanding of NAT while also troubling ideas that point to some objective/universal interpretations of the NAT event, supported by poststructuralist ideas. In the theoretical framework chapter, I now turn to the specific lenses that make the backbone of this work, further specifying *a way* of reading the NAT.

As explained, poststructuralism stays suspicious of any definitive meaning that claims a totalizing end or a stable identity. Therefore, it makes sense to stay on the fence in declaring art education in public Hungarian schooling to be dead. Rather, we may understand it as a structuring idea that limits what is deemed possible in discourse. However, for poststructuralism, structures are never stable or static (Caputo & Derrida, 1997). To explore this notion further, I turn to two specific works that help me point to/out certain structuring concepts in NAT discourse. For this, I point to the temporal understandings as a key concepts, both in how they inform the "end" and even "death" of art history education and also how they are implicitly informing what we understand as art history. By looking at the concepts that limit what end/death can be for the NAT discourse, we can then start exploring what loosening these conceptual limits might mean. Ultimately, this work aims to reframe the erasure and death of art history education as something other than final, while also acknowledging that art history did end due to the 2020 NAT.

I start with loosening the idea of art history as an identity (the understanding that when we talk about art history, we speak of one/same thing). Exploring in-betweenness through poststructuralism is acknowledging the violence in any structure that homogenizes and solidifies understanding into an identity, as identity is perceived as a fixity—something that poststructuralism is outwardly against. Put more precisely, the condition

necessary for poststructuralism is the instability of identity. This point is made obvious by Derrida (Caputo & Derrida, 1997) too:

> [T]he people who fight for their identity [say art history education in our case] must pay attention to the fact that identity . . . implies a difference within identity . . . Once you take into account this inner and other difference, then you pay attention to the other and you understand that fighting for your own identity is not exclusive of another identity, is open to another identity." (pp. 13–14)

Importantly, there is a violence in making something into an identity, which, of course, raises a lot of relevant questions in the context of the NAT and the end of art history education. Putting the "fight for art history" up in play. Indeed, if we consider the curriculum change itself to be a form of murder of art history education, what type of death does art history endure? And how is this death troubled by the fact that art history education in Hungary died over and over? (See the "Understanding art history as hollow and other" chapter in the literature review, where I detail these events.) Consequently, based on the mere fact that Hungarian art history has died multiple times before, what does this mean for art history? How does this challenge the idea of the death of art history upon the NAT change?

With the above questions, I am pointing out that art education has already faced various deaths; therefore, it is not as stable as we may think. Upon its death in 2024, we can then interrogate its life after death, with Derrida's words, this can mean to "[read] the phenomenon of 'survival' as the structure of surviving," while one does not believe "someone lives post mortem" (Derrida & Ferraris, 2002, p. 80). Poststructuralism, with it, hauntology occupies a space between the either/or logic of life and death, murder and nihilism; it neither seeks transcendental knowledge nor rejects all will to know. Rather, as Daignault (1983) frames it, it is an attempt to live in a messy middle, where we are not tempted to turn education into a tool of terror, reducing it to an instrument of efficiency or manipulation, which, according

to Schiro (2013), most of Null's groups would make it into. Instead of naming ways to transform the NAT and, by conversion, reach a certain social agenda, we can instead ask what responsibilities are we conditioned to take on by understandings of art history? What is more, this approach entails a different kind of responsibility towards the past and engaging with a given (con)text, which I approach from different directions in the upcoming chapters.

In the following chapter I build on the works of Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin. These themes trouble the understanding of art history as final, messing with ideas of "continuous time" of "art as such" (Marosi, 2003, p. 82). In the process, I explore themes such as survival, translation, temporality, history, and ghosts/spirits (as in hauntology). The purpose of this framing is to explore how to *open up* what the NAT discourse *can be* . With it, attempting to salvage the despair of loss without claiming that this *kind of* opening up resurrects art history (Derrida, 2012). Importantly, the following chapter strongly builds on Dillet's (2017) phrase of "composing with" theory. Meaning that in the process of framing the NAT change through Derrida and Benjamin, I am also in the process of building my own method of inquiry, which is informed by a post qualitative approach (St. Pierre, 2011). Composing with theory to read the NAT means the construction of a kind of lens.

By the end of this chapter, we can ask: Through the specific poststructuralist lenses on curriculum change and its opposing discourse, how might we (re)think the meaning of death? Once rethought, what new forms might art historical understanding take? This inquiry aligns with the work's research question and establishes the foundation for a reading of the NAT.

Responsibility and survival: A mode of engagement with the (con)textual

I begin with responsibility and its link to survival (and later, I link survival to hauntology). As Morris (2016) explains, the act of representing something

means attributing it significance—caring for it. Morris reads Derrida this way, too:

> [T]he way in which a scholar represents a particular history reflects the scholar's perspective and interpretation as well as the actual event at hand. Even though words, as Derrida suggests, do not represent events exactly as they happened, words can capture gists and patterns that are filtered through interpretation and culture. This does not mean, however, that anything goes and that any representation will do. We try to honor the event or the words of the scholar upon whom we draw and we try to get it right; that is, we try to understand things the best way we can, knowing that we can never get behind a text or understand fully what the words of another mean. (p. 290)

This passage points to a layered character in the interpretation of the (con)textual that has a level of contingency to it, a kind of play, if we like. It also emphasizes a responsibility to understand the origins of the text (regardless of how impossible it is to do in its totality). Importantly, responsibility is not solely tied to the way one reads and understands a text but also to the *kinds of* texts we engage with. Engagement leads to attributing significance to something: a will to preserve and **practice survival**. This survival is not transcendental; at least for Benjamin (2002b) it is something other than a material's essence. Rather, it means the engagement that animates and assigns significance to particular (hi)stories. That is to say, for Benjamin (and for Derrida), a responsible way to engage with materials is, on one part, trying to "stay true" to it, and on the other, the practice of making something survive.

In "*Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview*," Derrida (2007) himself claims that it is the concept of "survival" that he is mainly occupied with, but survival is something distinct from living and dying:

> All the concepts that have helped me in my work, and notably that of the trace or of the spectral, were related to this "surviving" as a structural and rigorously originary dimension. It is not derived from either living or dying. No more than what I call "originary mourning," that is, a mourning that does not wait for the so-called "actual" death. (p. 26)

In her work Niranjana (1992) claims that for Benjamin too, a key concern is *überleben* "surviving death" and *fortleben* "living on, continuing to live." For Benjamin, reads Derrida (2007), survival means:

> [überleben is] surviving death, like a book that survives the death of its author, or a child the death of his or her parents, and, on the other hand, fortleben, living on, continuing to live. (p. 26)

Indeed, for Benjamin both translation and engaging with history (in what he sees to be the correct way) are practices that give materials an afterlife: "a translation issues from the original—not so much from its life as from its afterlife . . . translation marks their [the materials'] stage of continued life" (2002, p. 71).

In summary, we can frame engaging with the NAT as a responsibility towards the (con)textual, aiming to stay true to its contents, but also giving art history education a continued life upon facing erasure, making survival when keeping it in discourse. This phase of survival cannot resurrect art history but brings about new understandings.

Stratifications between life and death: ghost as survival

From the above chapter, a key point is the concept of "responsibility tied to survival." As established, there is a layered responsibility when engaging with a (con)text, being a non-neutral act, animated by a certain sense of responsibility. It also brings together the past and the future in the present

moment. That is to say, when engaging with the (con)textual, we have a certain responsibility towards whose work we turn to. For Benjamin (1940) it affects and (re)shapes both the present and the past.

So often, one has a sense of responsibility towards future generations; however, Benjamin is primarily concerned with past generations. Importantly, as Jill Petersen Adams (2007) suggests, while from Benjamin's works the concept of the future is largely missing—Benjamin being concerned with the past and present—this care for the past is ultimately animated by a care for the future. In contrast, Derrida devotes a significant amount of his attention to the future. When working with the two together, it would be obvious to look at their (conflicting) interpretations of the "messianic," however as Adams (2007) points out, it is the theme of mourning (which brings with it the theme of survival) one can find a bridge between the two of them.

It is in mourning that Benjamin and Derrida come together, sharing an "orientation to the past, the disrupted sense of time, and the obligation to the dead" (Adams, 2007, p. 142). This responsibility to the past, to what is dead, impacts the future. In other words, Benjamin's concept of weak-messianic points to a structurally open present (an understanding that we cannot raise the dead, and we cannot undo the wrongs done to them; we can only offer remembrance and mourning for the dead). It is the weak-messianic, where past and present come together for Benjamin, much like in Derrida's (2012) dislocated, out-of-joint time.

In Adams's (2007) words, this means that:

> [a]s for Benjamin, for Derrida these dead have a claim on us which is not settled easily. Here too lurks a secret agreement between the generations. The present generation exists in the mode of inheritance of the past, of duty to the dead. (p. 142)

This duty (a responsibility) to certain figures of the past can be practiced by giving them a "continued life"; in other words, making them survive by

practicing remembrance and signification (one way is my attempt through this thesis work).

As established for both Benjamin and Derrida (echoing Benjamin's words), survival is both "surviving death" and "living on," distinct from living and dying. Someone in between life and death is recognized by Derrida in a ghostly figure emerging from hauntology.

Summoning ghosts as way to practice responsibility to the past

Hauntology [*hantologie*] is a pun coined from "ontology" [*ontologie*] and "to haunt" [*hanter*]. In "*Specters of Marx*," Derrida (2012) put forth an argument that communism haunts from beyond the grave. "*Specters of Marx*" is published at a time when Francis Fukuyama (1992) just declared the "end of history as such," naming Western liberal democracy as the ideal and final form of human evolution. With the opening passage of the "*Communist Manifesto*" (Marx & Engels, 2010, p. 14) Derrida echoes Marx's words, "A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism," through which he points out that the idea of "Western liberal democracy" is haunted by the spectre of Communism.

Broadly speaking, hauntology refers to either the return or a persistence of the past that, like a ghost, still haunts the present moment, ultimately pointing to both lost pasts and, consequently, futures (Adams, 2007). Importantly, Derrida (2012) explains the return of these ghostly figures is not a repetition as replication, not a "going back" to the past, but a return as haunting that is different from an either/or logic (the ghost is not dead nor alive but rather *figures* survival). For Derrida, there is no return to the past, since the past can't repeat itself as replication:

> Repetition and first time, but also repetition and last time, since the singularity of any first time, makes of it also a last time. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a

> hauntology. This logic of haunting would not be merely larger and more powerful than an ontology or a thinking of Being (of the "to be," assuming that it is a matter of Being in the "to be or not to be," but nothing is less certain). It would harbor within itself, but like circumscribed places or particular effects, eschatology and teleology themselves. It would comprehend them, but incomprehensibly. How to comprehend in fact the discourse of the end or the discourse about the end? Can the extremity of the extreme ever be comprehended? And the opposition between "to be" and "not to be"? Hamlet already began with the expected return of the dead King. After the end of history, the **spirit** comes by coming back [revenant], it figures both a dead man who comes back and a ghost whose expected return repeats itself, again and again (p. 10, own emphasis for the next chapter).

What is more, hauntology troubles our teleological understanding of time by thinking with ghosts, blurring the clear-cut line between past and present, being and not being:

> To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. (Derrida, 2012, p. 161)

In other words, all origins and starts are already haunted by past concepts/figures/ideas, which challenges ontological understandings. What is more, with the appearance of a ghost, time gets dislocated. Hence the Shakespearean (2003, p. 69) reference, "the time is out of joint," which Derrida links with the spectral presence (a haunting). The "out of jointness" of time, as Adam Harper (2009) understands, is the "past inside the present" for him; hauntology refers to

> [T]he problematic, intangible and paradoxical ontology that such spectres, in their incessant haunting, pose for discourse on history. Hauntology describes the haunting of a historicised present by spectres that cannot be 'ontologised' away.

However, Fredric Jameson (1999, p. 38-39) disagrees with a "past inside the present" definition. For him, a haunting (with its spectrality) does not mean that the past lives in the present (as continued life is not the same as the passed life), nor do we have to believe in ghosts to work with hauntology. Rather, for Jameson,

> Spectrality is not difficult to circumscribe, as what makes the present waver: like the vibrations of a heat wave through which the massiveness of the object world—indeed, matter itself—now shimmers like a mirage . . . Spectrality does not involve the conviction that ghosts exist or that the past (and maybe even the future they offer to prophesy) is still very much alive and at work, within the living present: all it says, if it can be thought to speak, is that the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be; that we would do well not to count on its density and solidity, which might under exceptional circumstances betray us. (pp. 38-39)

Same as the present being unreliable, one should extend this uncertainty to hauntology and working with ghosts as well and as established in the previous chapter, the (con)textual too. That is, site, text, translation, and history. Put differently, "a spectropolitics is never straightforward" (2013, p. 93). When working with ghosts, one should keep in mind that we are not all-knowing beings, able to "separate out the good from the bad ghosts" (Derrida, 2012, p. 107). Indeed, Davies (2005) explains, engaging with ghosts can be a deeply ethical practice insofar as one treats the ghost as Lévinas's (2011, p. 300) Other, which asks us not to claim we fully understand and know the

ghosts of the past. Rather, to accept them as something entirely different from us, impossible to completely understand.

Put into work, hauntology turns away from questions of binary being/not being and looks at what is in between absence and presence: ghosts that emerge from past events that inform/haunt our understanding today. As Colin Davies explains (2005, p. 373) "hauntology supplants its near-homonym ontology, replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive." This approach pierces through the binaries by paying attention/turning to the ghosts that live in between the binaries of discourse. Binaries that "legitimize one form of culture over another and in turn presuppose particular ways of life" (Tavin, 2005, p. 102).

Hauntology and specters may help us see the NAT as a question of what survives with art history education, a question distinct from life or death. We can see what ghosts reside in the stratifications of the NAT discourse.

Besides, the practice of summoning ghosts is giving them a continued life; when calling upon them, we may do so with responsibility in mind and ask, "Which ghosts do we feel a sense of duty for?" With this question, we acknowledge that discourse with ghosts is a claim on the past, practicing both a responsibility/duty that Benjamin talks about. What is more, it is also practicing justice, which Derrida (2012, p. 91) explains when he distinguishes the "Future" from the concept of a "future to come" [*l'avenir*]. A justice in a "future to come" "must necessarily remain unfulfilled: necessarily unfulfilled because any given determination of the ethical would already be the effect of a violent exclusion" (Colebrook, 1998, p. 353). Ghosts, then, are not to resurrect the dead nor to establish a reversed order in place of a current one (as such an action would join back the binary logic ghosts live in between), nor is it naming a utopia. Indeed, as pointed out, it is treating the ghost as Other. For Derrida, in Adams' (2007) words, the Other is seen as follows:

> In mourning one wants to appropriate the dead Other, to take that Other into oneself, making her as present as possible. Yet

> the dead never can be present, and mourning must necessarily fail: we cannot raise the dead. In mourning, then, we must not only attend to the dead Other, but attend to her as wholly Other, in her singularity. (p. 143)

This engagement with the Other, which leads to a failed mourning, is essential to remember when working with ghosts. Engagement then becomes a task to show a not-so-certain present, rather than insisting on an alternative future, as if we know what/who the Other *is*. A haunting's (non)presence can be grasped by attending to what is erased in discourse, ultimately practicing a responsibility toward the past by giving it significance. This work, then, is a signifying practice, an insistence on the impossibility of closure, as long as a ghost can resist resting in oblivion (in total amnesia).

Ultimately, this approach enables a (re)turn to/of art history and the questioning of what we can let go of and what remains a "nagging presence" made tangible in our love, loss, and mourning (Ewing, 2020). This approach dislocates death by creating an afterlife where, to use Blanchot's (1999, p. 27) words, "the dead came back to life dying." It keeps art history education animated through a haunting while at the same time questioning its ghosts (questioning structuring ideas in discourse). In the following chapter, I summon/name a ghost who emerges to me from the NAT discourse. Consequently, I appropriate Benjamin through Derrida and approach the survival from another ~~angle~~ angel, and name/call upon the lens of reading.

The spirit of Angelus Novus as a ghostly presence

In Hebrews 1:14 the following describes angels: "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?" (Catholic Book Publishing Corporation, 2011b). Two key remarks based on this quote are important to highlight here. The first being that the word "spirit" refers to angels, while at the same time it is often also used for ghosts (see Merriam-Webster, 2025), making it *undecidable* to distinguish their difference. Second, while the Bible quote places relatively large autonomy, or deciding

power, in the hands of its angels, for Benjamin (1940), the spirit of "Angelus Novus" is anything but a "ministering spirit"; indeed, it is prevented from being in service of others (past generations, that is).

Figure 1: Paul Klee's Angelus Novus

Note. Paul Klee's Angelus Novus painting (1920), referenced by Benjamin (1940) in "On the *Concept of History*."

Rather, as described in the "On the *Concept of History*" the Angelus Novus is as follows:

> A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make

> whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin, 1940, p. 5)

Although the angel is turned away from the future, Benjamin's spirit of Angelus Novus cannot remain in the present moment to care for who are dying. Instead, with movement suspended by the forces of progress, the angel spirit is only able to witness the violence of history while being pushed by the winds of the storm.

The storm of progress has a temporal implication that is led by a teleological historicist understanding. Which Benjamin (1940, p. 7) calls "homogenous, empty time." This concept, Adams (2007, p. 141) explains, is a time that "marches on, and the historicist surveys the past and fills it with a mass of data that serves to enforce the good name of 'progress.'" The future is predetermined by progress and closed in by its linear structure." In history, understood as "homogeneous empty time,"Benjamin is critical of it, as it has no place for "convoluted time." However, in opposition to the historicist, a historical materialist's view—which Benjamin favors—"convoluted time" emerges, leading to "'Now' time" [*Jetztzeit]*.

In terms of temporality, the concept of "'Now' time" treats past events as entirely singular and, importantly, ones that disrupt and point out how "[t]he time of historicism [homogeneous empty time, that is] is a "closed" time, one in which the past, present, and future are all parts of a vision of progress" (Adams, 2007, p. 141). Ultimately implying a practice that highlights, like a flash, past events that disrupt teleological narratives of history (Benjamin, 1926). Benjamin (2002a) explains in the "*Arcades Project*" the flash as follows:

> It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on the past; rather, image is that

> wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent. – Only dialectical images are genuine images (that is, not archaic); and the place where one encounters them is language. (p. 462, [N2a,3])

A constellational understanding of time rejects the view of time as progressing in a linear manner towards a determined end (complicating much of art historical understandings shown in the "Literature review" chapter). Rather, it is understanding history as a constellation (coming together in the flash of the present moment). This ultimately changes the relational understanding of past and present (and consequently the future too).

> Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, though events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the 'time of the now' which is shot through with chips of Messianic time. (Benjamin, 1940, p. 9)

When giving a past event significance, it is with an understanding that, like a flash, we bring in relation snippets of stories. It rejects the idea, that we (in the present moment) have an understanding of clear causal relationship between past events. Rather, by attributing significance to a *passed* event we

understand the past and shape our view of the present. When reading with Angelus Novus, we can point out ideas that reject history as a constellation and treat the past as if we have direct access to it, as if it is destiny marching to a defined end, and draw attention to articulations in the NAT discourse where the end of art history education is viewed as *destiny interrupted* (regardless of how counterintuitive that phrasing is). With this framework it is possible to invite those engaged in discourse to think about what violence the idea of "destiny" as progress leads to and justifies. This approach is giving art history a continued life (occupied with different questions than life or death).

Summary and orienting the theoretical framework

When looking at the NAT context, the spirit of Angelus Novus meets Benjamin's angel and Derrida's ghost for me, giving a lens to read the NAT. In this sense I see this work as a translation and align my theoretical framing with a quote Derrida makes on working with Benjamin's (Benjamin & Jephcott, 1986) "*On Language as Such and on the Language of Man*" in "*Des Tours de Babel*" (Derrida, 1985, p. 175). The quote goes: "I prefer here . . . to attempt to translate in my own way the translation of another text on translation." That is to say, in this chapter I tried to show how, for me, Benjamin's concepts of history and translation, with Derrida's hauntology, meet in the intersection of the theme of "survival," which, as established earlier, is distinct from living and dying and lives through "mourning" (Derrida, 2007). This way, through Angelus Novus as a ghost, I built a lens that is based on deconstruction and hauntology and read these theories through Benjamin's work, meeting them in a spirit figure. I am not alone in making this correlation, as I pointed out; Adams (2007) connects Derrida and Benjamin through mourning rather than their definitions of the "messianic." Furthermore, to summon the Angelus Novus as a ghost, I strongly built on Niranjana's (1992, p. 141) work, in which she wonders, "Yet another puzzle: the post-structuralist emphasis on intertextuality should

have ensured at least an internally interleaved reading of Benjamin's work." What is more, reading Benjamin through Derrida (and vice versa), I practice "composing with" theory, which Dillet (2017) ties to working with poststructuralism.

In this chapter, I brought together concepts from texts like "On *the Concept of History*" (1940), "*The Arcades Project*" (2002), "*The Task of the Translator"* (2002), "*Specters of Marx*" (2012), and "*Learning to Live Finally*" (2007) and showed how engaging with ghostly spirits has a lot to do with responsibility, survival and mourning. Furthermore, both temporality, in how ghosts collapse teleological time, and also translation, in how engaging with ghosts is not a practice of transmitting knowledge but translating it, giving it a continued life. Reading these works, I called on a ghost-spirit figure (who makes the theoretical framework, a lens to read the NAT). She both asks what logics may die with art history education and helps to practice survival.

Surely, reading this chapter, one might wonder: why not just apply hauntology in the NAT context? I do expand on this question in my ~~methodology~~ "Approach to inquiry" chapter, but I'll spare a few words for it here too. The more and more I read the public and social media posts concerned and opposing the end/death (if death can be opposed) of art history education, the more the ghost of progress—an appropriated Angelus Novus—started to speak to me, leading to Derrida and Benjamin. What is more, the question regarding the relevance of working with ghosts today might also emerge.

Indeed, "*Specters of Marx*" was originally published in 1993, making Adam Harper (2009) claim, "I'm all too aware that it's no longer 2006, the year to blog about hauntology." This quote is antithetical to hauntology in my view, as it treats time as a progressing one, where to think with a concept is only relevant the closer it is to its supposed "origin." Let us remember that there is no originary thought, as there is no destination for justice, democracy, et cetera. In other words, there is no "there there." When Derrida asks in 1993, "Is there there … ?" (2012, p. 10), Stein already answers in 1985

(p. 251), “There is no there there.” Putting time out of joint. Allowing us to think in constellations and be transformed by them. As long as we cling onto the moment, wanting it to bring an end after itself, there are always ghosts that will trouble such a desire. The NAT discourse, in my view and as I will try to show it, theorizes the end of time for Hungarian art history education, speaking of a closed time that leads to certain devastating ends. This logic leads to mourning but is oriented away from the concept of art history. Rather, in the NAT discourse, many mourn the end of art history as if a tool has been taken away that should have led us to a better future (a “there there,” a destination). Progress like this limits art history education and makes it into a tool that leads to a mythical end—placing art history into a teleological trajectory.

Reading with Angelus Novus as a ghost, I try to complicate this notion, not to put a stop to the mourning of *an* end, but to reorient it. This rerouting happens through showing care for ignored pasts with it, asking, “To whom do we have a duty to mourn?” At the same time, pointing out how arguments echo structuring ideas in education (preventing caring for those ignored in the past).

Angelus Novus, in her ghostly figure speaking, is no paranormal experience; rather, it is simply the interweaving of texts, relating to one another, both affected by and affecting how *I* understand the NAT context. History and translation figure a ghost, instilling a sense of responsibility regarding the question of survival.

(A post qualitative) approach to inquiry

From early on, in this work I aimed to show and distinguish between various lenses on curriculum theory and art education and establish a poststructuralist understanding and relevant approach to the above themes. In contrast to modernist and some critical approaches, working with poststructuralist theory implies stark differences in approach and understanding of methodology in general; hence, this chapter is named "approach to inquiry."

This naming is mainly based on Derrida's remarks when he talks about a deconstructive reading—hauntology is derived from deconstruction (Fisher, 2012). Derrida (1983) states that a deconstructive reading of a given (con)text is something other than analysis, critique, or methodology. Derrida dismisses all characteristics that would describe established/replicable ways of engaging with the (con)textual:

> All the same, and in spite of appearances, deconstruction is neither an analysis nor a critique and its translation would have to take that into consideration. It is not an analysis in particular because the dismantling of a structure is not a regression toward a simple element, toward an indissoluble origin. These values, like that of analysis, are themselves philosophemes subject to deconstruction. No more is it a critique, in a general sense or in Kantian sense. The instance of krinein or of krisis (decision, choice, judgment, discernment) is itself, as is all the apparatus of transcendental critique, one of the essential "themes" or "objects" of deconstruction. (p. 3)

In this light, how could one speak of methodology when it comes to deconstruction or hauntology? This would require a "deconstructionism" or "hauntologism" that is antithetical to them, as both treat engaging with (con)text as a singular occurrence, entirely Other. Therefore, this work insists

on being unrelated to qualitative research, with its "conventional humanist qualitative methodology and marks a turn toward poststructural . . . inquiry" (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 1). I position this work closest to the Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre (2011) coined "post qualitative inquiry." Which, by her own definition, similarly to Derrida's, rejects the idea of a methodology, and invites us to "think and do educational inquiry outside normalized structures of humanist epistemology, ontology, and methodology" (St. Pierre, 2014, p. 1).

> [P]ost qualitative inquiry is not a methodology nor is it a variety of qualitative methodology. It has nothing to do with qualitative research methodology. And you can't do a qualitative study and then make it post qualitative after the fact. Post qualitative inquiry begins with poststructuralism and its ontology of immanence. So you have to read and study poststructuralism before you do post qualitative inquiry; you have to let it guide your inquiry. (St. Pierre, 2023, p. 24)

As Kuecker (2021) explains, while post qualitative inquiry is not siloed in its approach, meaning it has no clear boundaries, it can be understood as inquiry led by the relentless reading of theory that leads and generates inquiry. Importantly, post qualitative inquiry is animated by poststructuralist theory and is a critique of the drive of both quantitative and qualitative research, mixed-method research, and, in general research that is in search of objective truths and a general notion to unveil truth in its singular, stable essence (St. Pierre, 2023). Therefore, as St. Pierre (2023) explains, inevitably there are methods and approaches to inquiry that are incompatible with post qualitative inquiry (ones that treat research or its subjects as stable). For example, St. Pierre includes interviewing the subject in qualitative research as a method that is "grounded in the humanist subject poststructural theories refuse" (p. 21), as they treat the subject as stable in their identity and consequently refuse the relational, constructed and highly contingent character of the social post-structuralism builds on.

What is more, St. Pierre (2023) emphasizes the ontological shift in much research that still takes on a critical approach, like in the work of Sandra Harding (2015) in "*Objectivity and diversity: Another logic of scientific research*," in which Harding argues that objectivity is too contested of a term to just abandon and calls for its reframing. Or similarly, Ann Oakley's works (1981, 2016) "*Interviewing women: A contradiction in terms*" and "*Interviewing women again: Power, time and the gift*," which critique the pursuit of objectivity understood as a distance from the researched in qualitative research, emphasize situated knowledges, entanglement, and reciprocity in research. Approaches like the above do not pose ontological questions. While these approaches challenge the ways in which we understand the quantitative-qualitative binary, for St. Pierre (2023), it is a theory born out of the questioning of identity, with it the emergence of identity politics (race theories, queer theories, feminist theories, et cetera). They helped to open up the epistemological question of "what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts" (p. 21). However, they were either unconcerned with the questioning of ontology or, due to their objectives, left the question largely untouched. For St. Pierre, the question is, "Why [would] we need to think about the nature of being [in academia] when the task is to produce another bit of knowledge to fill an imagined gap?" (p. 22).

As Johanna Oksala (2012, p. 10) argues, "ontology is politics that has forgotten itself." This understanding points to the very foundation of post qualitative approach to inquiry. As established early on, "political" comes with the understanding that *stuff* is constructed, not a given. With a post qualitative approach, one starts questioning the ontological, consequently poking holes in the myth of a fixed, transcendental meaning, which can lead to the questioning of the epistemological. As St. Pierre explains, Derrida's affirmative deconstruction brings the recognition of failure in all structures—including qualitative research—which opens up the possibility of thinking something different (in my research question the term "impossible" refers to this opening up: what seems impossible due to the structural limits of the NAT context). Post qualitative inquiry raises the question, "How might one

inquire after the onto-epistemology of poststructuralism has ruined qualitative methodology?" (p. 26) These questions highlight the philosophy of science that underpins this work[1].

As Gerrard et al. (2017) claims, post qualitative inquiry is not something "beyond" or "more developed" than qualitative inquiry. Rather, post qualitative inquiry asks different questions that are unthinkable within the modernist traditions that animate quantitative research and in a Man's rib-like relation to it: qualitative research (Genesis 2:21-22, Catholic Book Publishing Corporation, 2011a; St. Pierre, 2011). Think about it this way: given the research question of this work, how could one think the "impossible" through a modernist lens? After all, modernist approaches are concerned with what is possible (to prove); they are bound to epistemological questions (Beck Holm, 2018).

Developing and applying a (post qualitative) approach to inquiry

There are two key elements in my approach to post qualitative inquiry: one, as St. Pierre (2023, p. 24) explains, is to read theory before starting inquiry, then understand a context led by a theoretical lens, and read back and forth a given context and theory. For me, in this project's case, meant for an extended period during my final semester of studies reading various theories. With it, came utter confusion, a fluctuating sense of stability, and an always-shifting understanding of the NAT, until its ghosts started to speak to me. Consequently, with a post qualitative approach came a substantial amount of groundwork seen in the literature review and theoretical framework of this thesis, as it required me to treat various theories as lenses to a given topic and build a poststructuralist understanding and framing of a given theme. Furthermore, a post-qualitative approach also meant that I do

[1] Up until this point, I incorporated, described and framed a poststructuralist approach in the context of this thesis work. Therefore, I omit a distinct "Philosophy of Science" chapter because I argue that by this point, the philosophical underpinnings of this work are well grounded, and including a separate chapter would only prolong the discussion and reiterate what has already been established.

not simply apply hauntology as if it is a method. Rather, it resulted in an understanding that treats poststructuralism not as a method but as a way to, as Dillet (2017) articulates, "compose with" theory, making/calling on my lens, led by theory and (con)text coming together. In the previous chapters, "composing with" theory in practice means a reading where themes fold into one another, like contrasting various lenses in curriculum and art education or reading Benjamin through Derrida: reading hauntology with other (con)texts (Benjamin, the NAT) and summoning a spirit who it is timely to call on: Angelus Novus in a ghost form. Much of this project, then, is paying attention to a context and looking at it with the lenses various theories provide and learning to read with it. I used the quote from Blanco and Peeren (2013, p. 93), "a spectropolitics is never straightforward," and that there are good and bad ghosts (Derrida, 2012, p. 107). In my understanding, summoning who to converse with is connected to responsibility as nothing is originally bad or good. Then the question becomes, who is the right ghost to summon? For me, summoning the ghost of "progress" seems fitting for the NAT context, as it complicates the death of art history education, points to ideas that limit what art history education can be, and rejects the perishing of the subject by haunting what we mean by a "more modern" art education.

In practice, my approach to material selection first included manual scraping of articles and social media posts about the NAT. When exploring the NAT (con)text, Angelus Novus was informed by gathering 55 social media posts (Facebook) and their comments and 64 news articles and video reports (across all Hungarian media outlets that engaged with specifically art history in the context of the 2020 NAT change), focusing on the NAT change. In searching I used keywords like "2020 NAT change" [*2020-as NAT-változás*], "end of art history" [*művészettörtönet vége*], "art history education suspended" [*művészettörténeti oktatás felfüggesztve],* and "NAT erases art history" [*NAT eltörli a művészettörténetet*], and the combination of these phrases. Once working with Derrida and Benjamin made sense, I strictly focused on articulations that justify the need for art history through the idea of progress. At this stage, due to ethical considerations, I decided to include

relevant news articles and social media posts from public figures, as a concern for the privacy of social media users.

Orienting the specific lens to read discourse

As this work engages with the (con)textual through various texts from media platforms, I here want to elaborate on my approach to looking at discourse. Keeping with a stance established in the literature review, I start from an understanding that media materials and information from various platforms construct truth(s) and are not neutral "channels" to share information. As Carpentier and De Cleen (2007, p. 274) state, instead, they are "specific machineries that produce, reproduce and transform social phenomena." However, beyond such a definition, different lenses for looking at discourse, like discourse theory analysis and critical discourse analysis, entail rather different approaches and have key differences (Zienkowski, 2019). The former refers to the work of social or political analysis, while the latter can entail a "critical spin" in its approach to looking at discourse, where those engaged in discourse analysis "frequently venture into the domains of political philosophy and social theory to engage with questions of power, (in)equality and/or (in)justice" (Zienkowski, 2024, p. 187). As I am working with the materials from Derrida and Benjamin to build a lens to read the NAT, the latter definition seems more fitting to inform my approach. I reason for this as follows: to start, as Carpentier and De Cleen (2007) explain, while the two approaches have certain similarities, discourse theory analysis (DTA) can be distinguished from critical discourse analysis (CDA) based on the former's "explicit poststructuralist and post-Marxist agenda, which remains absent within CDA" (p. 276). According to Howarth (2000), while both approaches look at the social as constructed and both aim to analyze the political, for DTA, such an approach also entails showing the contingent character of the social by demonstrating how discourse gets influenced and constructed by the social and the historical. Philips and Jørgensen (2002) point out, for CDA, discourse is a social dimension, which stands in a

dialectical connection to other dimensions that do not operate discursively. In contrast, DTA "rejects the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2019, p. 107). That is to say, for DTA, everything is discursive, much like how Derrida claims "in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse" (Derrida, 1988, p. 280).

Furthermore, as Jan Zienkowski (2024) explains, participation in discourse results in a constant negotiation of meaning, keeping with a poststructuralist understanding that there is *no thing* in itself. For Zienkowski (2024), discourse is understood as follows:

> [S]ocial actors guide each other's gaze and orient each other's reflexive or metadiscursive awareness in particular ways. The point is that 'context' can never be grasped in its entirety. Context does not overlap with a 'reality' that is objectively out there. It is rather a precarious outcome of negotiations over symbolic resources, their interpretive functions, and the aspects of (discursive) reality. (p. 208)

Making Zienkowski's definition contrast with ideas that advocate for orienting discourse to spark social action. Indeed, the perception and action of social actors in discourse are impossible to be fully organized or understood. What is more, certain ideas, views or ways of responding are not closer to *the truth*, as the truth is not "out there."

In practice, looking at discourse, I find a DTA approach (that applies theory to discourse) more fitting. For this work, I named a ghost as Angelus Novus as my primary lens. This means looking at public and social media discourse about the NAT change and paying attention to ideas of progress and erasure of art history education, while understanding that in the process an opening up is the aim, not unearthing/accessing a certain truth about art (history) education.

The impossible task of translation and writing

As a post-qualitative inquiry entails an entanglement with theory, it makes sense to me to grow less certain in the meaning of translation and text. Keeping with Benjamin and Derrida, I am mindful in my understanding of translation. To reflect on Derrida's notes in "*What is a 'Relevant' Translation*" (Herzog, 2014), I acknowledge my position, which could be described as being caught up in between languages and sites. To reflect the paradox of translation, that it is both necessary and impossible in its totality (Derrida, 1985; Haitham, 2025), I included both Hungarian versions and my English translations in my thesis. Keeping both Hungarian and English texts, acknowledging my fragmented understanding of them, is led by how Herzog (2014, p. 141) understands Derrida's work on translation: "[T]ranslation is the sign of a utopian wish to connect opposed worlds. And at the same time, it embodies the limits of its possibility and the criticism of that very wish."

In my writing, I also try to reflect on this. In practice, I support my approach to writing with concepts of Derrida (1997) that speak of the instability of writing and, more generally, meaning. What is more, to make space for the instability of meaning building on Barad's work "*Ma(r)king time: Material entanglements and re-memberings: cutting together-apart*" (2013), which emphasizes the complex, contested relationship between concepts. With it, I join Varga and Monreal (2021), who use various markings in text (detailed in the "Introduction" sub-chapter of this work) to signify the instability and dual or multiple meanings of the text.

~~Analysis~~ A reading of the NAT

Reading with the Angelus Novus as a ghost, in the following chapter, I approach the idea of progress, led by selected public and social media texts. Importantly, and made clear in earlier chapters, the emerging themes are *a* reading of the NAT with a progress-enduring ghost providing a theoretical lens for DTA. The themes below are all built on/come from a framework that looks at ideas of progress present in discourse. Tied to it, I am deeply interested in the temporal implications/understandings that the idea of progress brings with itself. Therefore, while the forthcoming themes can be recognized individually, they are deeply intertwined, "facing towards" the idea of progress.

To start, I bring here again a social media post I kept returning to throughout this text, which states:

> Secondary school art history education: lived 150 years. [*Középiskolai művészettörténet-oktatás: élt 150 évet*] (Nyáry, 2023).

This quote frames art history education through a final death. However, art history in the past was suspended from the curriculum both in 1940 and 1957, which already troubles the finitude of death (Mátraházi, 2024; Nyáry, 2023). Once troubled, we can ask: isn't keeping the discourse alive, through public and social media posts, articles, and comments—and through this thesis work—fiddling with a definitive end by again and again summoning art history?

Led by this remark, with Derrida's deconstruction and hauntology, I pay attention to the violence Angelus Novus as a ghost endures due to the promise of progress (based on Benjamin) and the binaries built around teleological narratives (based on Derrida's deconstruction and hauntology). By doing so, I aim to point out either/or arguments and how many qualities of art history education are taken for granted in discourse, consequently making the grid for articulating both dominant and opposing arguments.

Importantly, in articulations that oppose the NAT, I recognize "progress" as the loss of development, as advancement interrupted by the 2020 NAT. In my view, in a Möbius-strip-like fashion, the arguments that frame progress and being interrupted still join back into the temporal understanding of history as progress towards a "there there" (that is, a defined destination). Meaning, interruption means solely the disruption of a certain lens/ideology of what art history education "ought to be"—see Schiro's (2013) remarks in earlier chapters. Below, I aim to show that, despite the various lenses presented by Null (2011) in earlier chapters, articulations about the 2020 NAT I bring in are strictly focused on the binary question of "living/dying" rather than engaging with the ghost in stratifications of the concept of art history. While mourning death at the point where art history education is erased from the curriculum is understandable, I aim to call attention to how arguing in a binary manner (for life or death) structures an ontological understanding of art history (that is, Oksala's remark on politics forgetting itself) that likely leads to its death recognized as replication, not repetition with difference.

On the loss of culture

The first theme in reading with Angelus Novus emerges as the idea of losing culture due to the erasure of art history from the NAT. The mourning of such loss appears in various ways, but as an umbrella term, I use culture. Upon the NAT revisions gaining prominence in discourse, many expressed their concerns for students and the losses they endure due to the curriculum change. Some argued that taking away art history comes with a loss of knowledge:

> Where young people cannot learn about the history of visual arts and its defining creators, they are deprived of the opportunity to understand and comprehend the world.

> [*Ahol tehát a fiatalok nem ismerhetik meg a képzőművészet történetét és meghatározó alkotóit, ott a világ megismerésének és megértésének lehetőségét veszik el tőlük.*] (Nyáry, 2023)

Here, art history means the loss of access to knowledge (not *a* knowledge). As a door, art history "as such." Those considered discipline's key figures give an entry to knowledge that provides a tool to comprehend the world "out there." This framing treats the educational subject as *the* door to *the* world. Reading with Angelus Novus, we should be reminded how such a framing carries a violence in it that, for one, suggests access to truth through learning, and for two, forgets that art history itself always comes with erasure, its key "defining creators" always figuring *a kind* of art history giving access to *a kind* of world. Already, if one thinks of Null's groups and the various worlds and objectives they advocate for, we can recognize that each group's defining creators likely align on some figures and diverge in others, speaking of a play in meaning. What is more, each overt/hidden/and null curriculum that makes *A Lesson* will teach something different (Edelman, 2011; Tillett & Cushing-Leubner, 2021).

Such a "door to knowledge" for some means an armor/anchor against external influences.

> Today's young people have to deal with as much visual stimuli as almost never before; anyone who considers art history unnecessary after this fact does not really know where and when they live. Moreover, it [NAT revision] is being done by a government that considers itself a proud defender of European Judeo-Christian traditions. A significant part of our tradition are the visual arts, music, and architecture; it hasn't harmed anyone to be able to say who István Ferenczy was. By the way, the irony of the whole thing is that art history was part of traditional Hungarian education, and not by

coincidence. Therefore, this step undermines Hungarian traditions.

[*A mai fiataloknak annyi vizuális ingerrel kell megküzdeni, mint korábban szinte soha, aki ezek után a művészettörténetet feleslegesnek tartja, nem igazán tudja felmérni, hol és mikor él. Ráadásul teszi ezt egy olyan kormány, amely az európai zsidó-keresztény hagyományok büszke védelmezőjének tartja magát. A hagyományunk egy jelentős része képzőművészet, zene, építészet, nem tett még rosszat élő embernek, ha meg tudta mondani, kicsoda Ferenczy István. Amúgy a vicc az egészben az, hogy a hagyományos magyar oktatásnak része volt a művészettörténet-oktatás, nem is véletlenül. Ezért ez a lépés rombolja a magyar hagyományokat.*] (Ungár, 2023)

In the above argument, the loss of culture brings about various threats, making art history an armor against dangerous influences. Art historical knowledge safeguards those who learn it, and helps navigate the modern age; to reject such knowledge is an insult on the "governing elites" being out of touch with today's age, who champion themselves as defenders of European Judeo-Christian traditions. Here, knowing "defining creators" is framed as merely "not harmful".

Interestingly, arguments about "harmful contents" in education/civil life (see Azon Global, 2023; Boonaree et al., 2023; Bruce, 2017; Greenberger, 2023; Hamade, 2023; Rossuck, 1997) have a deep-rooted heritage in the very "European Judeo-Christian traditions" the article claims the Hungarian government is a "proud defender" of, and with its NAT revisions acts against such a role. One could also argue that the so-called "Hungarian tradition" of erasing art history is also continued with the 2020 NAT. What is more, arguing for the art history on a logic of being harmful/harmless joins back into what I called a Möbius-strip-like logic before: favoring familiar/harmless content and seeing it as adequate for education ultimately

embraces the dominant structures (the article aims to critique) as it recognizes the familiar, that is what has been normalized.

Moving on from how the NAT change supposedly affects the students/future generations, for some, the loss of culture brings about a loss of speaking of *virtuous* themes, a loss of high culture.

> Has the general level of knowledge of art history in Hungary risen to such a high standard that the subject's school education has become unnecessary? In conversations on buses, is it more common to discuss Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's thoughts on the Laocoön Group (for example, that a work of visual art, which is fundamentally a spatial creation, can also depict a story, thus making its subject temporal) than to talk about what was for lunch, whether the dog is sick, or the fate of public funds, why the healthcare system is like this, why the situation of those working in education is so dire, whether we need battery factories if we have neither enough energy nor water for them, etc.
>
> [*Vajon olyannyira magas szintre emelkedett Magyarországon a művészettörténet ismeretének általános szintje, hogy szükségtelenné vált a tárgy iskolai oktatása? A buszokon folyó társalgásokban gyakrabban kerül szóba az, hogy Gotthold Ephraim Lessing a Laokoón szoborcsoportról megosztott néhány gondolata (például: hogy egy képzőművészeti, tehát egy alapvetően térbeli alkotás is ábrázolhat történetet, azaz ezáltal lehet időbeli a tárgya), semmint az, hogy mi volt az ebéd, beteg-e a kutya, vagy mi a közpénzek sorsa, miért ilyen az egészségügy, miért ilyen sanyarú az oktatásban dolgozók helyzete, van-e szükség akkumulátorgyárakra, ha sem energiánk, sem vizünk nincs elég hozzá, etcetera.*] (Balogh, 2024)

In what Null (2011) characterizes as a "liberal" approach to curriculum, the above passage views art history as an access to "high culture." Building a binary between high and low culture (though here, discussing ordinary events makes up the other end of the binary), art history should *elevate* daily experiences. In the attempt to establish the need for art history education, the above lines pierce into the desperate reality of many ongoing Hungarian events in ordinary lives, and as a result of economic and political hardships endured, many are tightly linked to the Fidesz party's policies, governing since 2010. In the high culture/low culture binary, violence is committed on art history education itself (by naming its purpose, making it to figure an identity, therefore deducing it) and being ignorant of the structural hardships many people face daily. An erasure is done when stating that art history education, as if a tool, when kept in the curriculum, brings about discussing "high culture" on buses (understand as in everyday life). With Angelus Novus as a ghost, I am keen to stay alert to the violence that is cast upon those who struggle in the ordinary. What is more, thinking with the ghost this thesis is in conversation with, I can point out the violence in treating art history as a recipe for structural liberation and the implicit suggestion that if only art history is kept in the curriculum "long enough," we may see the dissolution of devastating realities. With Angelus Novus, it is possible to refuse the suggestion that art history and what is deemed to be "high culture" should bring relief in hardships that are structurally rooted. That is to say, despite the above quote taking a stance against the government policies that erase art history (for many, recognized as a violence in itself) and siding with the political left, one can still advocate for progress (interrupted by the NAT change), making their argument carry a certain violence.

In the above theme, I aim to show how imaginaries of what a lost culture will bring about appear in different ways, from the fear for students' future to a concern for losing "high culture." With the loss of culture, fears of low culture, ignorance, and defenselessness emerge, framing the ordinary experiences as a lesser Other.

On taking away the future as “there there”

In several articulations, they mourned the “lost futures” that become unreachable upon art history’s erasure from the curriculum. In late 2023, the objection letter from the MTA became one of the key documents informing the public about the state of art history education (Dzsubák, 2023a). In their objection letter, the MTA made the following remarks:

> Knowledge of the history of the arts facilitates the conscious care of universal, European, and national artistic heritage, as well as the maintenance and nurturing of our architectural, painting, sculpture, applied arts, and photography heritage. The removal of this body of knowledge from the realm of general education also signifies the devaluation of our national artistic heritage, ultimately leading to a weakening of our cultural competitiveness.
>
> [*A művészetek történetének ismerete elősegíti az egyetemes, európai és nemzeti művészeti örökség tudatos gondozását, építészeti, festészeti, szobrászati, iparművészeti, fotóművészeti örökségünk fenntartását és ápolását. Ennek az ismeretanyagnak a kiiktatása az általános műveltség köréből nemzeti művészeti örökségünk lebecsülését is jelenti, végső soron kulturális versenyképességünk meggyengüléséhez vezet.*] (MTA, 2023)

Here, the idea of progress gets interrupted by the 2020 NAT decision, rerouting Hungary in its competitive journey against other nations. Progress appears as a race, where art historical knowledge serves as a tool to stay ahead in the competition, as if culture can be measured universally and utilized for “getting ahead.” Thinking with Angelus Novus and Lévinas’ (2011) Other, I wonder about the histories erased for the myth of culture solely understood as a strategic advantage. What is more, in the “race of cultures,” an inevitable hierarchy is building that rejects embracing the Other

as something impossible to fully understand, favoring the idea of sameness: similarity between cultures, that is, building a hierarchy.

While the MTA's remarks highlight the threat of a lost future, others lament the lost future that art history supposedly promised:

> Where young people cannot learn about the history of visual arts and its defining creators, they are being deprived of the opportunity to understand and comprehend the world.
>
> [*Ahol tehát a fiatalok nem ismerhetik meg a képzőművészet történetét és meghatározó alkotóit, ott a világ megismerésének és megértésének lehetőségét veszik el tőlük.*] (Dzsubák, 2023a)

Similarly to the previous chapter's quote, the loss of art history education here means being deprived of understanding *the* world (of the arts). With the ghost of this text, I remain skeptical of art history education as a tool to provide a *uniform* access to understanding *the* world. What is more, it leads me to think of the artifacts left out of education that speak of other histories. Think, for example, how in Csaba et al. (2019), Andrea Kárpáti, while reviewing the draft of the 2020 NAT, calls attention to how folk art is missing from the framework. Adding to this, think how in Hungarian "Minority Ethnology" classes there is a dedicated body of studies for minority arts. While included in some forms to the curriculum, they remain distinct from the art history subject, this way figuring something *other than Hungarian* art history, only to study for ethnic minorities (Vámos et al., 2004). Art history, as such, was always already an act of erasure, framing what can be recognized as "art as such." It would be a mistake to assume that it is due to some divine qualities that make art history into what *it is*. It is an image projected into the future (and the past) that informs the selection of what gets recognized as "divine/high art."

For others, the loss of art history means a broadening class divide too, leaving the future of art history to the "elites":

> This subject, after all, promotes image comprehension, image reading, and a better understanding of the social context of images, and this is what the visual culture subject can then build upon. So it isn't about pretentiousness here, but about developing critical thinking. The current situation ultimately results in increased segregation, increasing the gap between the elite social strata and the rest. Understanding and mastering visual culture remains the privilege of the elite.
>
> [*Ez a tantárgy mégiscsak a képértést, a képolvasást, a képek társadalmi kontextusának jobb megértését segíti elő, és ez az, amire aztán ráépülhet a vizuális kultúra tantárgy. Itt tehát nem szépelgésről volt szó, hanem a kritikai gondolkodás fejlesztéséről. A mostani helyzet végső soron azt eredményezi, hogy növekszik a szegregáció, növekszik az a szakadék, amely az elit társadalmi rétegek és a többiek között van. A vizuális kultúra értése és egyben uralása az elit kiváltsága marad.*] (Gergely, 2024)

Despite its class-conscious framing, this reading of the loss of art historical knowledge takes a meritocratic understanding: it presents art history (and with it, critical thinking skills) as the path to self-determination, as if through critical thinking skills one has a better chance (as if a contract) to *jump up* social classes and to "understand and master visual culture." It also names critical thinking as tied to art historical knowledge (which Tavin would be suspicious of; think earlier remarks on "uncritical-critical thinking"). It is also critical thinking that saves art history from being "pretentious" to something "useful." Art history, then, should lead to greater self-determination, which in the previous quote helps circumnavigate structural challenges. However, structural hurdles are to be overcome by the individual (as long as art history education aids them). If we think back to Null's groups, the existentialist and pragmatic lenses on curriculum seem to be echoed here.

With the ghost of this thesis, we may be reminded that art history is not a fixed *subject*, nor does it grant/guarantee a certain future. Furthermore, we can trace ideas that are so tied to the construct of art history education that it almost seems like it has an essence or a fixed meaning of "what it does/is," be it the assumed ability to erase class difference, aid economic growth, or support the individual in understanding the world that exists "out there." When turning away from such determined ends we expect art history to bring about, we can turn towards the question of survival, making art history deeply present. Working on the survival of certain knowledges cannot be found in arguing for what they mean or what is lost by them; such naming always fails, and in the moment of naming, escapes art history. Rather, survival (an appropriation of life and death) happens in the very practice of mourning, remembering, and attaching it to the present moment, the ordinary.

Moving on, in some cases, the idea of art history as a tool getting us "there there" takes the shape of Europe, speaking of a binary that makes a teleological timeline (getting from the present to a more favorable place):

> If we want to get closer to Europe, it can only be done with well-thought-out projects and comprehensive subject curricula.
>
> [*ha Európához szeretnénk közeledni, azt csak átgondolt projektekkel készült komplex tantárgyi tantervekkel lehet.*]
> (Millei, 2024)

In these lines a myth of Europe emerges that articulates and stands in for "there there." Despite Hungary being geographically located in the region recognized as Europe, being part of the European Union, and so on, the idea of Europe figures as a homogeneous goal that can only be reached with a well-rounded curriculum and education. This idea of getting closer to Europe has a long history of naming a goal for Hungarian education. As Marosi (2013, 1975) continuously addresses, art history education in Hungary took various

directions led by the idea that it should advance closer to Europe (always meaning a Western European ideal), though admittedly, some worked on studying Hungary in a Central European context (Marosi mentions Rudolf Eitelberger von Edelberg as an early figure).

I am wondering how the idea of *Europeanness* justifies what art history can be. Furthermore, with Angelus Novus, we can ask what values, attributed to whom, are against the idea of Europe? (As based on the above quote, Hungary seems to be on a journey towards such a goal). I wonder, what knowledges and whose art cannot fit the progressing narrative of art history and gets sacrificed to get closer to the myth of *Europeanness?* Framed differently, how may the idea of Europe shift once Hungarian realities be embraced and not erased in the march to get "there there" to reach the myth of *Europeanness*? With the ghost of this text, we should be reminded that there is no "there there," making Hungary already European, this way, both figuring and troubling the concept.

Interestingly, in another framing, the fear of not getting "there there" brings the fear of losing codes and knowledges that connect us.

> But without the teaching of art history, not only do concepts get lost, meaning we cannot name a part of the world around us, but also our knowledge about the layering and the building upon of eras will be lost. — For an increasingly wider audience, any reference to art history will become unnecessary because they won't understand it. We will understand even fewer codes together from the paintings, or we may not even be able to name the perspective itself. Thus, Hungary takes another step towards the culture of mumbling—thanks to our people's leader and the current government.
>
> [*De a művészettörténet oktatása nélkül nemcsak fogalmak vesznek oda, azaz nem tudjuk megnevezni a minket körbeölelő világ egy részét, hanem elvész a rétegzettségről, a*

> *korok egymásra épüléséről alkotott tudásunk is. — Egyre szélesebb rétegek számára fölösleges lesz bármilyen művészettörténeti utalás, mert nem érti. Még kevesebb kódot fogunk közösen érteni a festményekből, vagy magát a perspektívát sem feltétlenül tudjuk nevén nevezni. Ezáltal egy újabb lépést tesz meg Magyarország a nyökögés kultúrája felé – hála érte népünk vezérének, s a regnáló kormánynak.*] (Balogh, 2024)

While the above passage points to the violence in progressing narratives and acts of erasure, it also implies that the fabric of meaning is in constant flux. Meaning that the zeit**geist** always defines and shifts what is recognized as codes. However, we should remember that the "codes" in the arts, the "naming of the thing itself," are never fully possible, as in the above quote it is already implicitly implied how codes and naming practices are always shifting. Reading with Derrida (1995), the changing character of understanding practices does not lead to a "culture of mumbling," as what gets recognized as culture is always (con)textual, always different (also from itself), rather than more/less. That is to say, that change (even with erasure) does not lead to scarcity. It isn't becoming lesser necessarily, but it changes; this change, of course, can lead to various directions. Zienkowski states, "Metapolitical projects may be democratic or anti-democratic" (2019, p. 143). This understanding is important, as by virtue, change does not inevitably lead to one direction or the other. The loss of art history can open up new, more democratic understandings but can lead to furthering illiberal measures (as the NAT happens under a self-proclaimed illiberal regime, this fear is valid); however, codes and communication only change.

What is more, we should be reminded that even in mumbling-speaking, our understanding is never through the transmission of knowledge. In other words, "referencing art history" itself is impossible, as it assumes a transmission of art historical knowledge. Embracing translation as the means of understanding frames art history as never fully knowable, always

on the shift, with it what "culture," or the idea of "there there," signifies too (this logic makes place for various definitions to coexist too). With the ghost of this (con)text, instead of looking at discourse as a referencing practice, we can treat the discursive quality of art history as a signifying practice, always on the shift, always partially realized and comprehended. With it making it our task to (in)form its meaning. This understanding defeats the violence in justifying a "there there" of art (history) education and opens up the possibility to view art history as something that comes together in the present and makes a *kind of sense*, instead of universal truths.

In this chapter, we can ask: What can we open up without a "there there" for art history? Instead of mourning the assumed loss of a destination, by acknowledging that history/time is not teleological, we may embrace a different approach to temporality that does not articulate a favored destination, justifying what gets erased or named inferior.

In summary, I sought to demonstrate that articulations against the NAT reveal progress hindered by the deprivation of seemingly certain/fixed futures. The mourning of stolen futures appears through the grief of the myths/predictions of their impact on the nation, its economy, or its people. Reading with Angelus Novus makes me insist on emphasizing that art history education—while being erased—already is an act of erasure (histories of art, like folk art, minority arts, et cetera).

On the idea of (democratic) backsliding

Reading the NAT discourse, there is the concept of (democratic) backsliding that I find prominent. Democratic backsliding refers to a regression to previous historical states (in our case caused by the elimination of art history education) (Enyedi, 2018). For many the educational changes under the governing Fidesz party's self-proclaimed illiberal democracy lead to the understanding of democratic backsliding (Nahalka, 2018; Orbán, 2014). That is, the idea that in the past decades some countries in the West endured a shift in their democracy, leading to an erosion of their liberal

democratic models (Enyedi, 2018). Year by year, this reality takes ever-new forms, always changing in devastating ways in how it affects people's lives. In the following chapter I pay attention to the logic of (democratic) backsliding, while not devaluing its significance.

By linking the event of the NAT to the past, as progress interrupted, the concept of regression emerges:

> Since József Eötvös's educational reform, art history has been part of the high school curriculum. It was only temporarily removed during two dictatorial periods. Now they are doing it again.
>
> [*Eötvös József oktatási reformja óta része volt a gimnáziumi képzésnek a művészettörténet tantárgy. Csak két diktatórikus korszakban vezették ki egy időre. Most megint ezt teszik.*] (Mátraházi, 2024)

Indeed, as emphasized during the literature review of this work, art history indeed had a limbo-like life, erased during authoritarian regimes. However, in some cases, drawing a correlation between past dictatorial regimes and the current Hungarian government, there is a suggestion that the present times are turning back to the past. This understanding can be seen in the following quote:

> In the spirit of patriotic education, there will be a subject on basic military knowledge: how much more important and useful it is! — Regardless, this too, is a value judgement. While the arts represent freedom—both the freedom of creation and the freedom of the receptive person; they teach how to understand the world and how the arts, with their unique tools, reveal and demonstrate the laws that shape human relationships. Military knowledge, on the other hand, trains individuals in discipline, obedience, command, and the

> execution of orders. To each their own. Obviously, in a system driven by authority, an art subject that embodies the idea of freedom is considered harmful, even dangerous, while a subject that embodies the "ethos" of command-obedience aids the functioning of the system.
>
> [*A hazafias nevelés jegyében lesz katonai alapismeretek tantárgy: ez mennyivel fontosabb, hasznosabb! — Akárhogy is, ez is értékválasztás. Míg a művészetek szabadságot jelentenek – alkotói szabadságot és a befogadó ember szabadságát is; arra tanítanak, hogy a világot hogyan lehet megismerni, s hogy a művészetek sajátos eszközökkel hogyan tárják fel és mutatják be, milyen törvényszerűségek alakítják az emberi kapcsolatokat, addig a katonai ismeretek a fegyelemre, engedelmességre, a parancsra és a parancs végrehajtására szoktatnak. Kinek mi a fontos. Nyilván egy akarat vezérelte rendszerben a szabadság eszméjét megjelenítő művészeti tantárgy károsnak, sőt veszélyesnek minősül, miközben a parancs-engedelmesség "ethoszát" megjelenítő tantárgy segíti a rendszer működését.*] (Fábry, 2023)

Here art history is contrasted with patriotic education and understood as the latter stepping in place of the former. What is more, patriotic education is considered a sign of an authoritarian regime (which historically speaking has its roots) (Dancs & Fülöp, 2020). In contrast, art history is supposedly understood as educating for freedom, as if art history as a subject in its essence carries the promise of freedom and signifies liberal democracy. Placed on a binary of positives and negatives, art history fosters liberal democracy; patriotic education, on the other hand, brings (liberal) democratic backsliding. With a ghost in stratifications, we should stay suspicious of such binary and hierarchic logic and articulations that speak of

the essence of art education: as they behave as a solid-centered politics, forgetting themselves (Oksala, 2017).

As shown in the literature review, while the United States' art education influenced the Hungarian context, it varies vastly in its debates and realities regarding art history. Earlier, I argued that views on art history were influenced by lenses to the curriculum that Null categorizes as either radical or deliberative. Hungary has a very different art educational history and approach to art history as a discipline (of course, always influenced). What is more, I argued that in the contemporary Hungarian context and how the NAT works, critical approaches to the curriculum, like radical or deliberative ones, may be harder to implement/voice in public education. Therefore, we should not assume that with art history by virtue comes liberation or radical attempts to free the individual or the nation. Especially under an illiberal democratic regime. Assuming art history's liberating essence while ignoring the regimes, locations (even within a country), and histories they operate under/are influenced by erases the multiplicity of art history subjects.

An example I want to bring in here. Upon the NAT entering into force, some took action to counter the curriculum change. An example is the Hungarian University of Fine Arts (MKE), which, in the hope of providing the possibility for students in secondary education to learn art history, opened their doors, making several of their art history lectures public (Magyar Képzőművészeti Egyetem, n.d.). This way offering an entry to knowledge that otherwise gets erased due to the NAT. With Angelus Novus in mind, however, I am led to emphasize the importance of locating the NAT event and tying it together with historical understandings of the place of art education and art history in education. Bringing to the forefront the imaginaries and logics that define the themes of art history and pointing out dominant framings, as these very understandings might be the contributors to finding it reasonable to erase certain events/times/subject. Insisting on art history purely on the basis that it is "tradition" or "heritage" navigates around the deeply political layer of what art histories these terms favor and within which they nest. Rather, with the spirit of this text, we may explore how

moments of history come together in the present, like a flash, informing, shifting and changing our understanding of past and present.

From looking at how articulations claiming an essence of art history education can erase the plurality of art educations, I now turn towards the idea of backsliding. It cannot be ignored that when framed in a way that art history gets linked together with past erasures, admittedly, there are some eerie similarities. Indeed, there appears to be a recurring pattern in the marginalization of the arts in certain times. See, for example, the quote used throughout this work, which declares the death of art history education, stating that the subject "lived 150 years." However, it is to be noted—and in the NAT discourse, some point it out—that the subject before 2020 was already dead two times prior: art history as a subject in Hungarian public education was suspended during the Second World War, when, in 1940, it was deemed unnecessary and was changed to the patriotic education subject. After a brief reintroduction in secondary schools from 1945, it was then abolished until 1957, as the subject was considered to contribute to "bourgeois degeneration." (Nyáry, 2023)

However, the reality is way messier than simple backsliding. What is more, I argue, the idea of backsliding itself contains a violent erasure. On one hand, the Hungarian government has indeed been in a limbo between "state of emergency" and "state of danger" since the spring of 2020 (Iván-Nagy, 2024), which, in theory, both grants and requires special actions, meaning it was under *dangerous* times that art education got suspended. What is more, this measure, then, at first glance, aligns with how times of crisis treated art education. Furthermore, a siloed focus on the state of art education during times of crisis overlooks the extensive literature regarding how "what stays in" the curriculum and how it is framed also faces massive changes (see Charland et al., 2021; Eisner, 1965; Miller et al., 2023; Poindexter et al., 2021).

That is to say, overarching truths and correlations cannot be derived from the current NAT change, as they run to simple, generalized conclusions (that

subscribe to an idea of the future as reachable, through which lens "backsliding" gets defined, and therefore are teleological).

However, when considering the ideas of Derrida and Benjamin, it would be reductive to interpret the NAT's event as merely a "going back" to the past. Put more precisely, reading with Angelus Novus, we must reject the possibility of "going back" as a replication of the past. Rather, thinking with the singularity of the event, we can read the NAT as repetition with difference; this way, we do not devalue its occurrence and may ask what it might mean that the revisions made to the NAT happen today. How does the event of the NAT itself challenge narratives of progressing/evolving time/(art) history?

What is more, with a constellational understanding, we can step away from narratives of progress that aid our preferred teleological timeline in place of another—remember how such an approach leads to culture war according to Schiro (2013) and is not deconstruction (with it not being hauntology) according to Derrida (1995).

Instead, we can explore how our understandings of democracy, progress, and illiberal regimes come together in a flash. When thinking with a flash, history does not become reduced to a singular timeline (in a way liberal/conservative lenses of timelines do, in the process of trying to take over the other in a totalized fashion), but we can turn toward our understandings of the present and ways of making sense of the past. Making a comparison between past dictatorial regimes and the present by stating that "backsliding as replication" happens, we erase the singularity of a given time, with its many faces, violence, tenderness, and the rest in between. Reading with Angelus Novus as a ghost, a "returning back" is impossible. In fact, it is the erasure of new forms of violence and tenderness cast upon ever-changing masses recognized as certain groups. I find Butler's (2024) words important to state here, as they point to this logic:

> The **specter** of fascism is often invoked on the Left, yet we are no longer sure whether that is the right name. On the one

> hand, the term is bandied about too easily. On the other hand, we would be wrong to think that all its possible forms have already existed and that we can call something "fascist" only if it conforms to established models. (p. 162, own emphasis)

Embracing the singularity of the event and treating it as Lévinas' (2011) Other (never fully knowable), it is possible to stay open to ever-changing ghosts, violence, tenderness, democracy, or illiberalism—even ideas of art history. In my view, it is this approach that can bring about an opening up, a thinking with the impossible. It treats the present as singular and understands the past as coming together with the present in a flash. At the same time, it recognizes that the past moment has changed forever, *passed* when we summoned it to form our understanding. Leading to the past and present differing from each other and differing in themselves.

Discussing closing (?) remarks on history as an archive/collection

Reading with Angelus Novus as a ghost, I aimed to point out structuring ideas in the discourse opposing the 2020 NAT, that erased art history as a subject from public secondary education in 2024. For many, the event of the NAT led to an understanding, that art history content was practically erased from the curriculum (Csaba et al., 2019; Gergely, 2024; Révész, 2024). I stated that upon the erasure of the secondary school subject, media discourse largely focused on advocating for art history to be placed back into the curriculum.

However, with Angelus Novus as a ghostly figure, I pointed out that calling for such a "placing back" is not a neutral act; art history *itself* is never neutral. Throughout the literature review of this work, I showed various lenses of curriculum theory, framing how these perspectives will understand differently the purpose of the curriculum and what it is "ought to be." For this, I built on Null's (2011) classifications of curriculum theory. At the same time, I argued that all of Null's classifications are led by the concern to disseminate values of what they understand would lead to the "good life," turning art history into a tool, naming it *into* one thing. What is more, I contextualized the NAT event by reviewing dominant narratives on what art education *is*, both in national and international contexts, this way being able to argue for the "singularity of the event." That is, embracing that the NAT itself and art history's erasure are a repetition with difference, not a replication. This distinction ultimately asks us not to compare but to care (take on a responsibility) for this event, embracing its singularity (singularity, of course, does not mean that ghosts do not echo in it).

This remark deeply informed my approach to inquiry. On one side, it linked me to post qualitative inquiry, which calls for reading a (con)text through poststructuralist theory, and, on the other, also led me to refuse *methodologizing* the reading of the NAT. Ultimately building my own lens for reading: using Jacques Derrida's deconstruction and hauntology with

Walter Benjamin's theses on history and the figure of Angelus Novus. I brought together these ideas in a moment of mourning (I named media discourse as the site of NAT mourning, making it my focus for reading). In public media, being a site for mourning, my main focus became to point out logics that place arguments on a binary in the name of progress, this way limiting art history to one thing and committing violence on various subjects in the name of "resurrecting" art history education. This way, I stated they operate in a Möbius-strip-like fashion; joining back to the same logic that erased art history or named what art history *is* in the first place. Importantly, as the NAT revision did not come from nowhere, I paid attention to the idea of democratic backsliding and how such a framing has a reductive character. I argued that we should be conscious about the illiberal context art history existed in and then got erased from, as ignoring such a fact can reproduce othering and totalitarian imaginaries. Importantly, upon the very tangible erosion of various frameworks that make space for plural understandings both in Hungary, Europe and the United States, this contextual awareness is important.

In the following section, I also want to address various concerns/questions that might arise upon my reading of the NAT. To start, one could see Angelus Novus as fitting into groups of Null (2011) that understand the curriculum as political. What is more, might argue, it is not fair to treat Null's groups as lenses and then critique understandings of art history that would likely fall under systemic/existentialist and pragmatic/liberal curriculum theoretical understandings. As I pointed out earlier, my approach in this work takes contingency as its basis while also seeing the NAT (con)text as political, which can be interpreted as radical (though I reasoned why I am hesitant about this understanding).

As I also argued, Null's lenses reading each other will take different issues with one approach or the other. However, in my view, the mere fact that the NAT discourse formed speaks of the political fabric of the social. When I say this, I assume that those who join in the discourse as opposing voices (against the NAT change) join with the belief and understanding that change is

possible (when opposing a decision, they voice their opinion thinking that it is possible to bring about change). Therefore, I find it worthy to point out if at the same time, in the articulation of their opposing opinion, they argue for an art history education that refuses contingency and change. Here I mean arguments that talk of a transcendental value of art history and argue for it in the name of "tradition" that treats the subject as if it were a monolith, replicated and transmitted to generations. With the political, we welcome the idea of change. With the understanding of difference, nothing can be the same.

In an illiberal context, one could argue that after the NAT's erasure, there is no point in looking at the stratifications, as, after all, if erased, what is the point of reflecting on the violence in art history contents or the articulations made in discourse?

I see this as a perfectly valid reasoning; however, personally I also believe that the logic practiced through the case of art history may inform other (currently considered living) cases that are threatened by an illiberal regime. Furthermore (turning back to the art history subject), it is also important to understand that upon the NAT's erasure, one not only fights for keeping art history alive but also advocates for a kind of understanding of history. Meaning that when opposing the NAT and asking for art history to be placed back to the core curriculum, we also legitimize and affirm the kind of art education the illiberal democratic government allowed in the curriculum since its first educational reform in the early 2010s (that within a decade led to art history's so-called death). When we name critical thinking; liberating qualities; self-exploration; care for tradition, or empathy as inherent qualities of art history, we ignore the very context art history and its contents are informed by. That is to say, simply opposing "*one side*" of politics does not necessarily lead to escaping the very logics that animated art history's erasure.

Importantly, teleology and the urge to get "there there" violently reorients mourning itself. That is to say, as shown in the "Reading the NAT" chapter, a binary logic turns mourning into grieving of the end(s) of art history.

Mourning with Angelus Novus as a ghost can redirect the attention to art history by pointing out some arguments that treat art history as a means to an end; it shows how, hiding under the veil of opposition, articulations can reproduce dominant logics. As stated, by thinking of art history as limited to its death/life, we give up on art histories; we commit violence. What is more, when art history is placed on a teleological trajectory, on one hand, we grow blind to the violence that erases knowledges to highlight others—here, Benjamin's (1940) quote comes to mind, that names all documents of civilization at the same time as a document of barbarism.

When the concept and stability of art history get troubled in an affirmative manner, ~~new~~ *different* ideas and understandings of how to practice responsibility for art historical knowledge might emerge, opening up different paths to understand and translate knowledge. Upon the death of art history and a government that casts illiberalism and limits imaginaries, exploring different paths to engaging with the historical can be important. Indeed, how can we turn to erased histories? How might we develop tracing practices that trouble the narratives shaping our understanding of history? Once embraced, how do these histories change our concept of art history? What is to mourn, and what is to preserve? How to cope with the possibility of what has been preserved being acts of violence in the name of objective value? On the other hand, how do we not devalue the power attached to materials that provide us a sense of commonality?

Importantly, while these questions can lead to challenging our understanding of time and history, it is important to remember that Benjamin talks of a certain kind of engagement with the past that entails some specific views on art history. As Juuso Tervo (2017) points out, thinking the past as constellation, coming together in the moment we engage with it, as a flash does not mean purely embracing the plurality of understandings, though in the end, its engagement is plural.

When I say this, I find Benjamin's (2025) remarks in "*Unpacking My Library*," helpful. Benjamin links spirits, ghostly figures, to the act of collecting. Benjamin names a little genii—the spirit creature of "inheritance"

and “responsibility as ownership” who comes into play between a collector and their *stuff* (Benjamin, 2025).

> Actually, inheritance is the soundest way of acquiring a collection. For a collector’s attitude toward his possessions stems from an owner’s feeling of responsibility toward his property . . . O bliss of the collector, bliss of the man of leisure! . . . For inside him there are spirits, or at least little genii, which have seen to it that for a collector—and I mean a real collector, a collector as he ought to be—ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to things. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them. (p. 492)

This reading, questions the dominant understanding of history as something “out there.” In the act of collecting, we can turn away from the violence in urging for universal truths that justify the act of collecting. Benjamin remarks, reorients this way of engaging with texts, and makes it deeply relational. In collecting *like this*, we can turn away fromdominant narratives, and focus on meaking sense of meaning, that is tied and fielled by past and present. That is to say, to speak with/through Derrida here (1995, p. 17) “[t]he archivization [as collection] produces as much as it records the event.”

What is more, it grants us (the collector) agency to question what we feel responsible fot to make into a collection while also being transformed by such materials. I find the above quote relevant, as it still has a spectral connotation, yet helps reframe the understandings of ghosts I worked with up until this point, prompting us to be on the lookout for other spirit figures that can inform and trouble our understanding.

Making space for an art history after its so-called death, in mourning with Angelus Novus, we can stay with mourning art history and explore what it’s continued life makes it into. The impossible is opened with the death of art history in the NAT, pointing to an understanding that was not possible without naming the end of art history.

Conclusion

Throughout this text, I aimed to stay with the mourning of the NAT and show how we can treat its event as singular, informing ways of engagement and understanding. This way, I pointed out a position that taps into the impossible (in the NAT context): thinking of historical meaning-making as characterized by change, difference and constellations. This means a turning away from an "either/or" logic (arguing for art history's life or death, that is). This breaking with "either/or" arguments can lead us to turn to/think with the "and/or." This shift, as Barbara Johnson (Derrida & Johnson, 1981) states, is "a revolution in the very logic of meaning" (p. xiii).

In my exploration of the (im)possible, I read theory and NAT (con)text together and pointed out how in mourning sometimes we want to make the subject (art history) fully knowable so we can mourn for futures that will never come. With Angelus Novus as a lens, I both aimed to trouble articulations that speak of what this change means and, at the same time, offered a different understanding of art history that breaks with teleological narratives that only comprehend art history as a tool to get "there there," contributing to violence in the name of progress. This remark I find timely upon growing totalitarian regimes taking newer and newer forms that utilize past knowledges to their own benefit. Angelus Novus in a ghost shape tampers with dominant narratives.

Ultimately, I argued that art history cannot die with the NAT change but takes new forms and is in constant change, so each time we try and define it as one thing, it becomes another (it figures an identity but also a difference within identity). With such logic, comparing loses meaning; what is more, Angelus Novus as a ghost may rest its wings and center its gaze, as with a constant difference, progress "as such" loses meaning.

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