

## Summary

My doctoral dissertation is dedicated to visual arts in Michel Houellebecq's theory and artistic practice. Houellebecq (b. 1956) programmatically works in various creative fields, ranging from literature, through photography, cinema and music, to performative actions. While the artist's literary output has become a widely explored research area, analyses including his extra-literary pursuits are sporadically practiced. In academic studies, Houellebecq predominantly represents the world of literature. An attempt to include non-discursive forms of artistic expression, undertaken in this thesis, within the study of Houellebecq's oeuvre is guided by a possibility of drawing interesting intertextual connections, occurring between the artist's works executed in various media.

The thesis is composed of three main chapters as well as a sizable *Introduction*, *Conclusion* and an appendix featuring illustrations.

*Introduction* sketches out an outline of Houellebecq's oeuvre, discussing his work in literature, photography and cinema. It is indicated that Houellebecq, similarly to other writers of his generation, makes a highly dexterous use of media-performative potential of contemporary fields of cultural production. In the latter section, Houellebecq's work is situated in selected contexts from literary history and the arts, providing starting points for further discussions in the dissertation. An emphasis is placed on characteristically Houellebecqian heterogeneity and 'impurity', discernible both thematically and formally. Anchoring Houellebecq's work in the 19th-century tradition, I foreground those aspects of his output that suggest their examination in the light of post-modern practices, with a particular focus on *extrême contemporain* and transgressive fiction.

Chapter I, *Michel Houellebecq as a Critic of Art and Architecture*, centres on reception and conceptualisation of contemporary arts, instances of which are present in Houellebecq's novels and essays in the form of ekphrasis of works of painting, sculpture, architecture and intermedia. Research material in discussions of architecture extends also to Houellebecq's photographic output. Tracing motifs related to contemporary art in Houellebecq, I distinguish two subject areas; the first of which is representation of the body and its uses in the visual arts.

Use strategies of the body within contemporary art, instances of which can be found in Houellebecq's fiction, are discussed by means of such categories as: deformation, dismemberment and abject. The second subject area covers the problem of operations of contemporary architecture, grounded in Modernist precepts, within the space-human relationship. Analysing themes related to functionality and 'transparency' of modern architecture, I draw particular attention to those tropes that help to inscribe Houellebecq's reflections in a wider socio-anthropological context (Zygmunt Bauman's theory of liquid modernity; Marc Augé's theory of non-places).

Chapter Two is concerned with the aesthetics of the crisis in *The Map and the Territory*. It is an attempt at reading Houellebecq's novel in the light of contemporary research on the *Künstlerroman*. In my analysis of distinguishing features of the genre, I situate *The Map and the Territory* within its generic evolution and classify the novel in relation to its post-modern variants. The analysis assumes a sociological perspective, and follows Peter V. Zima in considering the *Künstlerroman* as a "barometre of social change." Such a sociological reading of *The Map and the Territory* aims to demonstrate transformations taking place in the era of supplanting art's symbolic with its market value. Therefore, social conditions of art, the status of artistic work and the artist themselves are subject to the process of constant relativisation, which is exemplified by the story of Jed Martin, the main protagonist of *The Map and the Territory*.

Another research method employed here is a strategy of reading the *Künstlerroman* as a novel concerning the writer, which foregrounds a meta-textual potential of the genre. According to the latest research postulates, my discussion is not limited to the thematic layer of the *Künstlerroman*, but also extends to its formal aspects. I analyse instances of critical language mimesis as well as manners and effects of employing hypotyposis, the very beginning of *The Map and the Territory*.

In Chapter III, *Strategies of (Ab-/)Pre-sence*, my research area goes beyond Houellebecq's finished artistic productions towards his modes of artistic practice. Its initial section investigates the conceptualisation of the dynamics of the creative process according to Houellebecq's formula of "staying alive" (*rester vivant*). The formula, based on the passive-active opposition, is an effect of assuming an "aesthetic position" towards the outside world. A leading theme of this part of my dissertation is the very title, *Rester vivant*, which Houellebecq employs on three occasions: in relation to a work of literature (his 1991 poetic essay), cinema (2016 film, *Rester vivant: méthode* [*To Stay Alive: A Method*]), and as the title of an exhibition staged at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris (*Rester vivant*, 2016).

The latter section of the chapter is dedicated to Houellebecq's strategies of self-invention, concretised in the field of literature, photography and film, but also in the public space and the media. A central consideration in the analysis is the tension the artist generates between his presence and absence. Proposed findings correspond to the notion of trans-mediality in the light of openness of the field of artistic practices and the tendency to redefine the concept of the medium as changing and processual. Discussed strategies of self-invention are presented and systematised as forms of resistance against models of behaviour dominant in the contemporary field of cultural production and attempts to 'stabilise' the author.

Conclusion of my doctoral thesis underlines a potential inherent in the reading of Houellebecq's work in the light of intertextual relations. I also draw attention to the fact that the discourse on art allows the writer to highlight the tendency to erase subjectivity in the domain of modern art and the contemporary field of art. Nonetheless, Houellebecq's approach confirms that the struggle to maintain one's own self in the era of liquid modernity remains possible.