

Journey for a prepared mind

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Following from her poetic *A Place To Hold You* (2017), a study of proxemic interactions through pared-down geometry and light- and sound-tempered energy, Knezevic traverses into *Voiding the Void* (2019). A motion through a string of beads strung next to each other on a thread, or perhaps a traction through a capsule version of the 555 Buddhist Sutras, *Voiding the Void* furthers the idea of the work of art not as an object or event but the experience engendered within the mind.

Knezevic would have read Alan Watts' lectures and is familiar with his use of the term which she borrows for her title. An intellectual ferment of East and West, *Voiding the Void* is based primarily on the assertion that the Ideal is more actual than the real, and that a space in one's mind is more actual than any attempt of its representation in material. In this sense, Knezevic follows the classic tradition (Coptic, Egyptian, Greek, Chinese) with the aim to awaken the faculty of sight that exists already, but has been tuned in the wrong direction. Socrates' maieutic approach, based on the process of assisting a person into bringing into consciousness their own latent conceptions through the method of conversation and questioning (rather than lecturing), is a philosophical birthplace of *Voiding the Void*: "Our argument shows that the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already; and that just as the eye was unable to turn from darkness to light without the whole body, so too the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being."¹

In an earlier essay about Ana's work *A Place to Hold You* I have touched upon the rising tendency within VR art to create instant transcendence, "the amplification of the modified inner echo chamber"², so I won't dwell on it here, but it is important to note its seductiveness inherent in VR as a medium. So what does this VR envirotecture³ consist of? Just like moving through physical environment is a motion through a path-contingent sequence of scenes, each consisting of a particular space, place and meaning, in *Voiding the Void* we

¹ Socrates, Plato's *Republic*, [360 BC], trans. Benjamin Jowett, New York 1991, pp. 258-9.

² Alexandra Lazar, 'A Place to Hold You' in *Ana Knezevic – Geometry of Void*, Belgrade and New York 2017, p. 32.

³ Envirotecture (as defined by Philip Thiel in *People, Paths and Purposes. Notation for a participatory envirotecture*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1996) is the use of architecture and audio-visual experience with intention to guide individuals (users-participants or UPs) to experience a "milieu" for the purpose of immersion into an emotional and physical experience.

encounter five linked spheres with equal three-dimensional boundary (space), each encapsulating its own inherent DNA of smooth geometric surfaces in divergence or convergence with respect to our body-axis (place). These semi-transparent objects serve as gates to a walled city, an entrance to a castle, which we pass by finding the point of entry established within its code, much like the Japanese *chiashitsy* (tea-ceremony room) offers a humble entrance as a gateway to its inner space.

The behaviour-setting interior of the place offers a continuous thread of light and sound, which maintain a sense of isolated ethereal experience. While the quality of light remains minimal, it nevertheless contains colour: the undecorated, neutral white of the salt farms on the beaches, or the white cascades of wisteria and deutzia blossom, denoting the month of May; it shifts from a pale porcelain haze that falls short of translucence and washes into the colour of opaque Shino glaze, reminiscent of the thawing surface of frozen snow. Its inherent VR blandness is thus tempered and softened. The audio is generated by the manipulation of the sound of Crotales cymbals used by the Tibetan monks (tingsha), which are sounded to mark the beginning and end of a period of meditation. Crotales were historically intoned to play the ancient pentatonic scale devised by Phrygian musician Olympos (7th century B.C.), the scale still used in the Japanese koto music. The distinct pulsation of sound further combines materiality and etherealness of the scenes.

As Agnes Martin said, “classicists are people that look out with their back to the world”.⁴ Knezevic adapts classic ideas to her artistic practice and language, resulting in reduced, harmonious structure that invites behavioural, discursive and symbolic shift inward. In *Voiding the Void*, Knezevic creates a resonant VR envirotecture that can be seen as a journey for a prepared mind, that seeks conversion of stimuli into a subjective phenomenological transformation of the viewer.

⁴ Agnes Martin, 'The Untroubled Mind', notes for a lecture at the Cornell University, Jan. 1972, as quoted in *Writings of Agnes Martin*, ed. D. Schwarz, Kunstmuseum Winterthür, Edition Cantz, 1991, p. 37.