

## ***Higher Actuality. Contemporary Visual Adaptations of Dante's Divine Comedy***

### **Description for the General Public**

What contemporary art has to say about a poem from the Middle Ages? Is a TV series able to explain the intricacies of the various interpretations of the Last Judgment? Is living in the contemporary world tantamount to the total isolation from the tradition or maybe we still encounter its traces and use categories formulated within it? Can contemporary images serve to show the present time or are they only a veil covering it with pointless strivings and empty excitations? In our research project we will search for answers to those, and many other, questions. It would concentrate directly on three contemporary visual adaptations of Dante's *Divine Comedy*: Robert Rauschenberg's drawings illustrating *Inferno*, the project of the series *TV-Dante* initiated by Peter Greenaway and Tom Phillips and cinema works by Pier Paolo Pasolini. In all of these cases artists used Dante's text to show the character of their times. In other words they went on a journey to the distant past in order to find the meaning of the surrounding world. In this way they created explicitly modern – sometimes even postmodern – forms of artistic expression, which nonetheless stay in close connection with tradition.

In the framework of the project we will analyze the consequences of this singular idea to read the present from the signs of the past, which are often taken for a "faded" ones. For it means that what we call the present – both in a more local and more global understanding – is in no sense homogenous, and not easily separable from what we call tradition. To put it differently the actual time is always anachronistic, since it contains remnants, traces and echoes of the past and is based on experiences combining different temporal dimensions and staying against the simple logic of cause and effect. Moreover, images – for instance those produced by Rauschenberg, Greenaway or Pasolini – are exactly the vehicles of these anachronistic experiences and as such they can serve to both describe our epoch and criticize its often-simplistic categories. Through the detailed analysis of the formal, historical and political aspects of contemporary visual adaptations of *Divine Comedy* we will also seek to create theoretical frames for the reflection on the anachronism of images, and eventually to find useful tools to describe the present in the perspective of this anachronism. These kinds of deliberations – increasingly popular in today's humanities – could bring the answer to the question which is no longer about what this epoch can say about Dante but rather about what he can tell us about our own times.