THE DIALOGUES · POST-INTERPRETIVE CRITICISM AND SNE

When Interpretation Becomes Authority

Alexander V. Markov × Dorian Vale

A research dialogue between Post-Interpretive Criticism and the Semiotics of Non-intentional Ephemerality

Editorial account by Dorian Vale · Museum of One

Research Dialogue · Version 1.0 · October 2026

Post-Interpretive Criticism and the conditions of encounter

Post-Interpretive Criticism begins with a responsibility to the encounter: an account of a work must not quietly take the place of what it claims to attend to. What does critical language make possible, what does it displace, and what does it leave for the next viewer? Restraint is not a preference for saying little. It asks that the authority of an interpretation remain answerable to the work and to the circumstances in which the interpretation is used.[1,3]

There are two afterlives to distinguish: the trace a work leaves in its viewer, and the subsequent life of the account written about it. A reading may become a label, a catalogue description, a teaching convention or a term by which a collection is searched. Its qualifications can disappear while its conclusion survives. The painting need not change for the conditions of approaching it to change. This inquiry follows the account's afterlife without claiming to replace the viewer's encounter.[1,3]

Alexander V. Markov and the reason for the exchange

Alexander V. Markov is a full professor in the Department of Cinema and Contemporary Art at the Russian State University for the Humanities. He holds a Doctor of Sciences in Philology (2014), following a Candidate of Sciences in Philosophy (2002). The Doctor of Sciences is the higher of Russia's two research-doctorate levels. His institutional record also documents a part-time leading-researcher appointment in the Department of Christian Culture at Lomonosov Moscow State University from 2006 to 2020.[11–13]

I approached him on 4 September 2026 because his work brings together semiotics, the verbal representation of art known as ekphrasis, and the theoretical history of art. The immediate point of contact was *Protocol and the Unstable Sign: A Revision of Asignifying Semiotics for the Algorithmic Age*, written with Oksana Shtayn. Their Semiotics of Non-intentional Ephemerality examines signs whose existence depends on rules of production, timing and disappearance. It met a specific PIC question: what happens when criticism gives an encounter a durable account, although the conditions of that encounter will change? His work offered a way to examine both what language means and how it comes to operate beyond the intentions of its author.[1–2]

Our letters soon moved from an initial comparison of PIC and SNE into theoretical work. Markov proposed the semantic protocol, developed a hypothetical history of correction and later lapse, and subsequently asked that a restriction's effectiveness be considered according to place and role as well as time. My proposals and objections from PIC raised further questions for his account of semiotic systems. The accompanying Museum of One study brought these distinctions to a documentary case.[3–4,7,9–10]

How the inquiry extends PIC

Records and institutional procedures belong here because they can prepare an encounter before the viewer arrives. Careful writing cannot determine how a later custodian will excerpt or reuse it. The inquiry must follow those uses: who gives an account authority, what it is allowed to determine, and whether an objection can change its role. A viewer who inherits a description and an institution that installs it do not possess the same power or bear the same responsibility.[3–4]

The extension makes PIC's ethical demand more specific. We distinguish a text's survival from its continuing authority, a changed statement from a changed governing use, and an effective correction from a record that merely declares one. Institutions were already part of PIC's concern; the exchange develops ways to examine how their arrangements sustain, limit or renew interpretive authority. SNE does not become a subdivision of PIC, nor PIC an application of SNE. Their differences give the shared inquiry its work to do.[3–8]

The accompanying study, *After the Interpretation Changes*, does not offer another explanation of what Simon Maris's *Isabella* means. It asks what successive titles and their later uses permit the researcher to conclude. Historical documentation, a current heading and the older name of an image file need not exercise the same authority. The study separates the withdrawal of a racialized title, the fulfilment of an announced naming intention, and the uneven presentation of that completion. The evidence tests these distinctions and, in this case, requires the stronger theoretical claim to be withheld.[9]

The viewer remains central without becoming an object to be made completely legible. A record that cannot establish what an encounter meant must not supply that meaning by default. Nor must every viewer produce a statement before an institutional claim can be questioned. This extension of PIC asks how authority can become more answerable without the encounter becoming more fully captured. What remains at stake is an encounter in which the work can exceed the account already waiting beside it.[1,6–7,10]

The following exchanges are condensed paraphrases of written correspondence, arranged by theme. The names indicate whose position is being summarised; the wording and arrangement are mine. This is not a transcript, a record of spoken conversation or a jointly authored statement. Where a proposal has not been accepted, it remains a proposal.

The work and what gathers around it

4–6 September 2026

Dorian Vale: Starting question

Critical language acquires a second life when it is repeated in catalogues, labels, teaching and later criticism. A reading offered from one encounter can become an expectation inherited by another viewer. The work need not change materially for the conditions of its visibility to change. PIC's concern is with that inheritance: what does an interpretation enable, what does it displace, and what authority does it acquire over a person who never encountered the original argument?

Alexander V. Markov: Response

The relation to SNE is close, but it needs a distinction. A rule-bound system may act without understanding what passes through it. Critical language remains meaningful even when its circulation exceeds the critic's intention. It can acquire a procedural role without ceasing to say something. The initial suggestion that interpretive sediment belongs to the work's material reality therefore needs correction: what changes is the field of encounter. Inherited interpretation enters the world through which the work is approached.

Dorian Vale: Clarification

The point is not to recover a pristine encounter beneath all mediation. Such a return may not be historically available. The task is to examine what prior accounts are doing now, while preserving the distinction between the artwork and the language that has accumulated around its reception.[1]

When a proposition becomes a condition

6–8 September 2026

Dorian Vale: Proposal

Protocolization names a change in the way an interpretation operates. The sentence still makes a claim, but it can also set the terms under which later claims must be made. A viewer may reject an inherited reading while finding that its categories determine what must be rejected or explained. The issue is therefore not only assent. It is whether one account has become the compulsory point of departure.

Alexander V. Markov: The semantic protocol

The semantic protocol names an intermediate condition: circulating meanings acquire procedural force without their combined effects being governed by a single intention. A curator selects a phrase; an editor removes a qualification; one account becomes easier to find than another. Each choice can be understood and questioned, while their cumulative effect exceeds any one person's purpose. The comparison does not reduce criticism to a mechanical procedure. Meaning remains active within the practice.

Dorian Vale: Further distinction

The quantity of interpretation is not decisive. Many competing accounts can enlarge an encounter. The more important question is which accounts are readily returned to the present and which are difficult to recover. An archive can preserve a plurality of readings while its arrangements for retrieval, display and teaching repeatedly install only one as the default.[2–3]

Preserve the text; reconsider its jurisdiction

6–8 September 2026

Alexander V. Markov: Objection

Interpretive sediment is not only a burden. It can give an encounter historical depth and provide resources for resistance. A criticism that celebrates its own disappearance could impoverish the archive or evade responsibility for a claim by declaring that the claim was never meant to last. The temporary is not automatically the ethical.

Dorian Vale: Revision

What needs to be temporary is not necessarily the text. It is the privilege attached to its preservation. An earlier reading may remain available indefinitely and still be required to justify a new governing use. This separates the durability of criticism from the duration of its default authority. It also permits forceful interpretation: the argument need not relinquish conviction in order to relinquish an automatic jurisdiction over future encounters.

Alexander V. Markov: Deactivation

Deactivation becomes more exact than disappearance. The interpretation remains recoverable, but it no longer governs without having to answer for that role. Whether such a change has occurred cannot be decided by checking only that the text survives or that the institution calls it historical. Its present use must be examined.[3-4]

Responsibility after the critic

8 September 2026

Dorian Vale: Distributed responsibility

The original critic cannot control every later use of a sentence. That does not dissolve responsibility, either at the point of writing or at the point of reuse. Selecting, shortening, translating and teaching are further acts through which authority can be renewed. Responsibility is also unequal: someone who inherits a label does not possess the same power as an institution that controls what is preserved and what visitors can readily find.

Alexander V. Markov: A normative extension

SNE can describe how effects exceed intention; PIC asks what follows for those who sustain them. The distinction matters because a system without a single author still contains positions of greater and lesser power. The relevant responsibility concerns the capacity to make one account the default, retain its qualifications, preserve alternatives, or repair an exclusion. Describing emergence must not become a way of excusing the acts through which it is sustained.[3-4]

Openness that changes something

8 September 2026

Dorian Vale: Five responsibilities

A practice of contestability would preserve the origins of a claim, retain qualifications that matter to its use, keep competing accounts accessible, distinguish historical documentation from present endorsement, and require renewed justification when inherited authority is reactivated. These responsibilities concern the conditions of return, not a prescribed interpretation of the work.

Alexander V. Markov: The ceremonial danger

The same responsibilities can become rituals. A catalogue may mention alternatives without making them accessible. A label can declare its limitations while continuing to determine every relevant route of attention. A completed procedure is therefore not enough. The question is whether an objection can reach the authority it challenges and make a consequential difference to its use. Even the arrangements intended to protect contestability must remain open to scrutiny.[4]

Three ways authority can survive revision

11–14 September 2026

Dorian Vale: Three proposed mechanisms

Successional authority concerns the renewal of a governing question through new answers. An institution may commission conflicting readings while leaving the premise of the commission beyond discussion. The deactivation gap concerns organising effects that outlive an interpretation's declared withdrawal. Recognition closure concerns a selectively produced record being treated as sufficient evidence for the adequacy of the categories that produced it. The mechanisms are distinct; their interaction may explain why extensive revision leaves some conditions of encounter unchanged.

Alexander V. Markov: Development and qualification

Authority need not persist by refusing change. New readings can supply it with fresh occasions of use, while inherited classifications and selective records sustain it elsewhere. Yet a productive question is not necessarily a compulsory question. An interpretation preserved solely as historical evidence need not retain jurisdiction. And a missing response does not reveal why it is missing. The concepts become useful only when they distinguish these cases rather than turning every survival into closure.[5]

What an accurate record permits us to conclude

15–23 September 2026

Dorian Vale: The scope of a conclusion

A museum can record the choices visitors make among a set of descriptions accurately without showing that those descriptions encompass everyone's encounter. The accuracy of the record supports one conclusion. Treating it as a comprehensive account of reception needs further reasons. A correction might concern that inference rather than the recording practice: the museum could retain a useful record while limiting what it is entitled to determine.

Alexander V. Markov: Three distinct operations

Verification establishes that specified conditions have been met. Warrant migration concerns evidence for one conclusion being recruited in support of a broader one. Reauthorization concerns the renewed standing or governing role of a claim or rule. They can be related without being identical. Successful operation can justify continued reliance for a limited purpose; it does not, by itself, justify every extension of that reliance.

Dorian Vale: The consequence for revision

Structural revision need not replace an entire framework. It may change the relation through which a record acquires authority. The record itself can remain unchanged while ceasing to stand as an adequate account of everyone's reception. Conversely, a new description can leave the disputed inference intact. The question is what the record is permitted to govern.[6]

A correction that was real, and was later lost

23–24 September 2026

Alexander V. Markov: A hypothetical history

Consider a museum whose records of visitor choices remain accurate throughout. First, their use as a general account of reception is challenged. The museum accepts the objection and alters the reports and practices through which that claim was made. Later, a change in those arrangements restores the stronger claim without answering the objection. When the problem is raised again, the museum points to the correction it made before. The earlier change was real; its later maintenance failed. Reauthorization by default describes authority returning in practice without a fresh justification.

Dorian Vale: Reasons across transitions

A correction's earlier effectiveness does not establish that it remains effective now. We have to follow the particular use and the interval in question. The proposed continuity of justificatory burden makes a related ethical claim: a relevant objection does not disappear when people or administrative arrangements change. Restoring the use requires reasons that answer the grounds for restricting it, or show why those grounds no longer apply. That is not an instruction to preserve the first decision forever. Its reasons must remain open to reconsideration too.

Dorian Vale: A counter-possibility

Forgetting should not be treated as an inevitable law. A corrected arrangement may itself become the default and survive after its reasons are no longer consulted. The restriction then persists, but risks becoming an inherited instruction. Practical durability, the availability of reasons and the capacity to act on them can separate in more than one direction. This remains a proposal for testing, not a general account already settled by the exchange.[7-8]

What the museum case would not prove

October 2026

Dorian Vale: The documentary study

The study of Simon Maris's *Isabella* separates two changes. The 2015 retitling withdrew a racialized descriptor. The adoption of *Isabella* in 2020 fulfilled an earlier intention to replace a neutral title when a name became available. The second event need not show that the naming rule was reconsidered. Planned completion explains the sequence without requiring maintenance through modification, the stronger reading initially considered.

Alexander V. Markov: The value of the negative result

A case serves the inquiry by limiting its claims as well as supporting them. Successive titles need not instantiate structural persistence through semantic change. Where completion of an existing intention is sufficient, the more ambitious account should be withheld. The study's refusal to force the evidence into that account is a contribution to the framework's discipline, not a failure to advance it.[9–10]

Which change reached which use?

October 2026

Dorian Vale: Circulation and distinct roles

The examined records present different naming histories. The Rijksmuseum gives *Isabella*. Europeana retains the descriptive title and provisional identification, while treating the earlier racialized descriptions as historical. Commons keeps the descriptive wording in the name of its image file but supplies *Isabella* in its account of the work. Europeana thus reflects the earlier withdrawal without reflecting the later completion. At Commons, the older file name does not displace the newer title. What survives must be understood according to the role it performs.

Alexander V. Markov: Time, place and role

The case requires place and role to be considered alongside time. A restriction may govern one presentation and not another, or one part of an entry and not another. A heading, the name of an image file and the description of the painting are not equivalent uses. Nor does an older account reveal whether a later revision never reached it or arrived and was subsequently lost. Those histories require evidence from the intervening period. The distinction makes the task of inquiry more exact; it does not supply the missing evidence.

Dorian Vale: The study's limit

The documents establish different presentations, not the cause of their difference. They do not demonstrate restoration of the rejected naming use, an objection dismissed after a lapse, or the effectiveness of the restriction in every institutional setting. Nor are records on different websites independent accounts of everything the museum's own documentation may exclude.[9–10]

The viewer need not complete the record

October 2026

Dorian Vale: Unfinished attention

A visitor who makes no choice among the descriptions has not thereby assented, resisted or failed to encounter the work. The blank cannot decide among those possibilities. Questioning the museum's generalisation need not require extracting a more complete account from the visitor. Someone may have grounds to challenge the use of a classification without supplying a complete alternative classification. Sometimes what needs correction is the institution's claim, not the incompleteness of its record of the person.

Alexander V. Markov: The same limit on the inquiry

The restriction on inference applies to the research as well as to its institutional object. A collection of public records cannot turn the absence of a recorded challenge into evidence that no challenge exists. A careful case can establish a local change while leaving both the viewer's experience and the institution's broader answerability undetermined. The record's limits should limit the conclusion.[6–7,10]

Changing an answer, or changing what governs it

The continuing inquiry

Dorian Vale: The question returned by the study

A correction, a later completion and the circulation of either cannot be treated as a single success or failure. Following their separate histories makes the inquiry more exact. The remaining difficulty is how those local findings bear on the authority of the arrangements through which names, records and objections are handled.

Alexander V. Markov: The next question

What would a structural revision of naming practice look like? A museum might change a title by applying an existing criterion successfully. A different kind of event would reconsider what that criterion is entitled to determine. Should a title identify, classify, or serve another purpose? The inquiry must ask how such a reconsideration could be recognised, including where changed practice leaves little explanatory documentation. It must also explain how several local findings could support a broader structural conclusion rather than merely accumulate beside one another.[10]

A shared inquiry, not a finished doctrine

The exchange has developed through mutual correction. PIC's concern with what criticism leaves behind has become more specific about records, uses and institutional responsibility. SNE has been pressed toward systems in which meaning acquires procedural force through both local choices and impersonal arrangements. The inquiry is unfinished, but its question is now more demanding: what would count as a change in authority, rather than another change made under its protection?

The work continues where the distinction becomes answerable to evidence.

Sources and editorial provenance

The letters are preserved in the Museum of One research archive, together with Markov's response to the documentary study. The dates and page references below identify the contributions being paraphrased. Selection, framing and wording are my responsibility. Neither the named exchanges nor this edition should be cited as verbatim speech. The account preserves an evolving inquiry, including disagreement and proposals that have not been adopted by both correspondents.

1. Dorian Vale and Alexander V. Markov, correspondence, 4–6 September 2026, Museum of One research archive, pp. 1–3, 5–6, 12–14, 17–18 and 24–25. These letters establish the approach to Markov, interpretation's afterlife and the distinction between the work and its conditions of encounter.

2. Alexander Markov and Oksana Shtayn, "*Protocol and the Unstable Sign: A Revision of Asignifying Semiotics for the Algorithmic Age*," *Southern Semiotic Review*. The article introduces SNE. The correspondence summarised here is between Markov and Vale; no participation by Shtayn is implied. Published article

3. Vale and Markov, letters of 8 September 2026, archive pp. 32–34, 42–44 and 55–58. I distinguish preservation from jurisdiction and develop reauthorization through local acts. Markov proposes the semantic protocol in response.

4. Vale and Markov, letters of 8 September 2026, archive pp. 55–58 and 71–74. I propose five responsibilities of contestability and an unequal distribution of responsibility; Markov develops the argument, defines deactivation and examines ceremonial openness.

5. Vale, letter of 11 September, and Markov, reply of 14 September 2026, archive pp. 137–142 and 168–170. Successional authority, the deactivation gap and recognition closure are my proposals, subsequently examined and developed by Markov.

6. Vale and Markov, correspondence, 15–23 September 2026, archive pp. 201–206, 241–244, 284–288 and 332–336. These letters distinguish semantic from structural revision and separate verification, warrant migration and reauthorization. Successful operation can provide relevant, limited justification; the question concerns unsupported extensions.

7. Markov, letter of 23 September 2026, archive pp. 332–336. The four-stage museum history is hypothetical, not the Rijksmuseum case. The formulation "claim less from the record" originates in my letter of 20 September, p. 287, and is restated by Markov on p. 334.

8. Vale, letter of 24 September 2026, archive pp. 385–392. Continuity of justificatory burden, the distinction between earlier and continuing effectiveness, and the alternative histories of correction remain proposals from this letter. Markov's subsequent engagement does not establish acceptance of them all.

9. Dorian Vale, *After the Interpretation Changes*: Correction, Completion, and the Circulation of Museum Titles (Museum of One, Research Working Paper No. 2, Version 1.0, October 2026), especially the sections on correction, completion and circulation. The original documentary research was conducted on 7–9 October 2026. This is my separately authored study; the correspondence supplies conceptual provenance, not independent evidence about the museum.

10. Alexander V. Markov, response to *After the Interpretation Changes*, October 2026. Markov distinguishes transmission from maintenance, proposes attending to time, place and role together, and asks how local findings bear on a structural judgment. The account above paraphrases that response rather than reproducing it.

11. Ideas and Ideals, "Markov Alexander," author profile. Lists a Doctor of Sciences in Philology and a full professorship in the Department of Cinema and Contemporary Art at the Russian State University for the Humanities. The affiliation identifies his academic position, not institutional sponsorship of the exchange. Checked on 17 October 2026. Journal profile

12. ISTINA, "Марков Александр Викторович," institutional research profile. The profile records the degrees of 2002 and 2014 and the former part-time leading-researcher appointment at Moscow State University, 2006–2020. Profile consulted 12 October 2026; the publication record and dissertation entry rechecked on 17 October. The main profile was not accessible at the later check. Institutional publication record

13. Asia-Pacific Network of National Information Centres, "Education system of the Russian Federation," section on doctoral programmes. Distinguishes Candidate of Sciences from the subsequent Doctor of Sciences degree. Checked on 17 October 2026. Education profile

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