

Foreword

Back in 2016, *Aisthesis* published its Vol. 9(1) titled “Aesthetics of streaming”: an issue aimed at accounting for the huge impact that the global-sized leap towards broadband internet access had on arts and aesthetic experience.

The main concern was the morphing of aesthetic experience at a time when artistic institutions of all kinds, all over the world, got no further than a few clicks away and new forms of art had taken advantage of the latest technologies available. “Aesthetics of streaming” gave a wide range of answers, however the modalities accounted, albeit widespread, at that time constituted a side-track and only a few actually had significantly endangered other canonical forms of art diffusion (one might cite the rivalry in music between physical and digital supports).

Nobody could foresee what was about to happen four years later, when all of a sudden the pandemic released before our eyes the whole power of digital technologies in all its pervasiveness.

As of today, habits, models of organization, socio-political dynamics and economic assets have displayed all their frailty within an ever-new shape of «fear», whose overcoming strategy translated into a call to safety and unity paradoxically demanding for distance and separation. At the same time, however, all kinds of cultural interactions have efficiently advocated their right to exist: vehiculating themselves through the digital route, morphing rather than dismissing their function and content.

Thus, there is no room for hesitation in claiming that, in light of this portrait, the COVID-19’s pandemic represents a very plausible spot of *punctuational change* in the evolution of the paradigms

of aesthetic experience. The *distal* character of interaction, transmission, fruition and creation has risen with enough force to give the ultimate spin to a reorganization of fundamental categories of the aesthetic experience: contact, proximity and distance.

What the first section of this special issue aims at is gazing towards a possible aftermath, straight into the present and the future of new kinds of highly resilient-yet-diverse human interactions and towards the expectations linked to communicative habits soon to come. The very first contribution comes from Michel Deguy: his *Coronation* poem (translated by Fabio Scotto and analyzed by Michela Landi) casts a profound gaze on the pandemic, critically ironic, on one hand, while metalinguistic on the other.

Further attempts at catching the pandemic’s implications on communication, modes of intellectual transmission, art, proxemics and circulation of ideas come from: Fabrizia Abbate, Valentina Bartalesi, Dario Cecchi, Marco Innocenti, Sonja Surbatovic, Liga Sakse, Guntur Ponimin and Annachiara Sabatino.

The *Focus* section, “Stupidity and European Spirit: starting from Musil”, might be told to account for a superior-order implication that is, the historical point about the difference between culture and civilization. Such crucial *distinguo* relies on the ability to organize the complexity and variety of an era’s manifestations, positing that life and spirit hinge on an unstable equilibrium which is always an “irrational remnant”, an unforeseen residue that slips away from rules established by

default. This hiatus is what makes indispensable tools as precision and rigor inefficient to the task of rendering the “big picture” and, to this extent, “years without synthesis” is perhaps the formula that best sums up such irrational bond. This is what “stupidity” is really about and the contributions of Francesco Valagussa, Marcello Barison and Giacomo Gambaro shine in motivating why and how this concept does not indicate an intellectual inadequacy. It is, instead, an inflated insult that signals a crisis in the feeling of trust normally granted to “human nature”. Rather than an over-simplification, “stupidity” can be accounted almost as a “form of life” and, most of all, a symptom of imbalance between individual intelligence and the intelligence of a whole era. Something that *our* era and the present times seem to highlight with undeniable strength.

The *Varia* section offers insights on: the idea of “substantive arts”; Clement Greenberg; aesthetics of transition; Robert Walser and Edward Bond. These contributions come from, respectively: David Alvargonzález, Camilla Froio, Giovanni Ferrario, Luigi Azzariti Fumaroli, Tahereh Rezaei and Asiyeh Khalifezadeh while the familiar section *Note e recensioni* folds up this one-of-a-kind, conspicuous issue.

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