Aisthesis

Pratiche, linguaggi e saperi dell'estetico

Bodies and cultures.
How we become ourselves

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Some Introductory Remarks on Embodied Cultures and Scenarios for the Times to Come[1]

Chiara Cappelletto

> *On the soft fibres of the brain*
> *is founded the unshakeable base of the soundest*
> *of Empires.*
> Joseph Michel Antoine Servan, *Discours sur l'Administration de la Justice Criminelle*, 1767

It is generally agreed today that the living human body should be conceived of as a transcendental, in whose light not only our cognitive activity, our intentionality, and our pathic states but also the status of the subject itself must be understood. The human sciences have largely adopted a materialist approach (Apter [2016]) and are increasingly inclined and able to pursue dialog with the life sciences. This convergence of research perspectives suggests a conclusion to the long and tempestuous phase of interdisciplinary discussion that has characterized the last thirty years of scholarship, during which the human sciences, the life sciences, and neuroscience challenged one another routinely before finally settling on a common area of inquiry under the umbrella of "embodiment."

The notion of embodiment is implicated in any stance that more or less openly opposes the mind-body dualism or that subsumes this dualism in the nature-culture polarity, thus turning an epistemological and ontological question into an anthropological one. It is, at the same time, a notion compatible with a wide variety of approaches. It admits the possibility of considering the body both as a substratum onto which thoughts and artifacts that complement it are graft-

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[1] The essays collected here take up and expand on the topic discussed at the international conference *Bodies and Cultures: How We Become Ourselves*, co-hosted by me and Carmine Di Martino, which took place on May 17 and 18, 2017, at the University of Milan and the Milan Natural History Museum.

ed, allowing it to realize its full potential, and as a live constraint that can (or must) be mastered and from which one can be emancipated by virtue of intelligence and technology. The selection of the body as a condition of possibility *and* think-ability for the humanity of our life need not, however, entail any claims to its superiority. That is, we must not repeat the same move that modern philosophy made with the mind by *valorizing it*—epistemically, heuristically, cognitively…

The set of disciplines that take the processes of embodiment as a common denominator is prompting aesthetics—itself finally free of "gnoseological inferiority"—to rethink its own grounds and aims, and to extend its field of inquiry to the point of a fruitful dialog with philosophical anthropology, cognitivism, neuroscience, and media and cultural studies. The three «fundamental anthropological laws» set out by Helmuth Plessner (1928), the idea of «freedom from bodily limits» put forward by Paul Alsberg (1922), and the notion of «techno-aesthetics» drawn up by Gilbert Simondon (1982), along with the interpretation that John Dewey proposed of pragmatism (1925), are fully integrated into the current aesthetic debate, which also benefits from the viewpoints of more recent authors, such as Antonio Damasio (1994), Shaun Gallager (2005), Erika Fisher-Lichte (2008), Alva Noë (2009), Lambros Malafouris (2013), Tim Ingold (2013), and Vittorio Gallese (2020), among others. These multidisciplinary grafts are but symptoms of the widespread need for a fundamental renegotiation of what exactly constitutes the humanity of human beings, at a time when the «dark foreboding danger [scil. overshadowing] life,» which Ernst Jünger sensed almost a century ago (1934: 3), is consubstantial with the very idea of the Anthropocene. It seems to me that to meet this need we must accept the thesis—deemed «self-evident» by Pietro Montani in the pages that follow—whereby «the forms of life with which the genus *homo* experimented in the course of its evolution are primarily characterized by a set of practices related to its specific *technical creativity*.» It is therefore not possible to discuss the question of embodiment without considering the now widely-held position that human history is a «continuum of human-prostheses inter-relations» (Ihde-Malafouris [2019]: 196), although the locations of the cut-off points between such open-ended practices remain to be established (Barad [2003]).

The convictions that, as Carmine Di Martino writes, «technology is separable neither from the rough course of the hominization of the individuals (phylogeny) who make up the species *homo sapiens* nor from that of their humanization (ontogeny),» and the processes of embodiment remain incomprehensible if this inseparability is not taken into account, are not based on the results of theoretical and experimental research alone. In my view, the fact that the body is conceived of as the original cognitive and sensible agent insofar as it is rooted in a world scene that it manipulates, and no longer as an obstacle to the whole affirmation of our human nature, represents the final and fullest affirmation of biopolitics. This development stands to influence not only economic choices and institutional practices but also the very critical thought devoted to finding the best strategies of what I would call "body management," to the point of finding surrogates for our living organism when the body's performance is not fulfilling. Bruno Bonnell, the former director of Infogrames/Atari, predicts that the first soccer game between humans and robots will be played in 2050, with the victory going to the latter (Blouin [2011]: 34). Widespread AI is the next step on the road after that.

The current alliance between criticism and special interests from the industrial, pharmaceutical, military, and entertainment spheres, is so pronounced that the "body turn" currently at hand is in jeopardy of repeating those logics of domination that it actually means to deconstruct. It runs the risk of reducing the qualitative richness of plural bodies and (contradictory) individual sensible experiences to statistical data and predictive hypotheses tailored to "standard" neurobiological and anatomic mechanisms, so as to map out a paradoxically idealist notion of the body, whereby "a body *as such*" exists.

To unmask the ideology of such an idealism, it is useful to recall that the relationship between life and technology, and its impact on the evolution of human beings, has a history, which is not linear and incremental (Corbin, Courtine, Vigarello [2005]). Introducing this history into the debate, for instance, by reflecting on the co-dependence of matter, imagination, and machines, as Barbara Grespi does further ahead, makes it possible to resist the homologating effect of the rearview mirror while implying that no teleology is legitimate. Even more to the point, it presents the body as a theoretical object where epistemic outlooks and political plans participate in ongoing processes of becoming, rather than as the last resort for finding an answer to long-standing questions about identity, cognition, and the purposiveness of life. The current neo-animist shift itself prompts a reconceptualization of the idea of the human body-mind as coextensive with the physical, social, and cultural environment, revealing the significance of prosthetic and technological dilations attached to adaptable biological beings, and therefore of the impact of goods, products, and lifestyles introduced by empires old and new. If our inherent plasticity rescues us from a biologically deterministic fate, it also makes us a favored site for projection, manipulation, and product placement (Bahri [2017]: 6).

Any investigation of the body as a material apriori must thus be inscribed in the wake of Maurice Merleau-Ponty as much as in that of Frantz Fanon.

Gender studies and, above all, Judith Butler have long been committed to exposing the normative and conservative character of a notion of Body that neglects the phenomenology and power games entailed thereby. In looking back on her idea of the "construction" of identity, Butler has stated: «Basically, I am saying that a body emerges in the world in a state of dependence with respect to other bodies and institutions, and that as a consequence, the body is "outside of itself" and in the social in order to exist, in order to survive» (Butler [2011]: 86). Yet, the idea that the body is exposed to practices—including those of a juridical, medical, pedagogical, reproductive,

athletic, culinary, ornamental, and ritual nature—that shape it, seems to me to come too late. Of course the body's situatedness is expressed in processes and metamorphoses influenced by dynamics of domination to which it contributes in turn and that enable it to meet the demands of an ever-greater identitary articulation—male versus female, young versus old, white versus non-white, cisgender versus transgender—better than a universal mind could do. But this plasticity does not guarantee that every individual is recognized as determined. Invoking the plasticity of an embodied mind does not suffice to exhaust the question of the processes of individuation. On the contrary, individuals can—once again—be placed in the service of the One: Jean-Francois Toussaint, in collaboration with the IRMES, has determined that "the" human body will reach its peak athletic power in 2060. It is then to compensate for the fact that the athletic body is ineluctably doomed to exhaust its own potential that more and more space is given to the Paralympics, whose contestants have a greater margin of improvement in their competitive results than able-bodied subjects (Blouin [2011]: 25 and 31).

The question is how human bodies trigger, partake in, and/or direct the reflexive processes carried out by subjects in environments that are always already inhabited by other living and artifactual bodies, and within what limits they can and should realize their own "technical creativity," knowing that this opens the door to new material possibilities but also to the destruction of the same. The question is thus in fact an eminently aesthetic one. If we insist on the reflexive and autopoietic capacity of the body, the variety of its forms and their evolution will no longer stand out as exploitations of the norm but as variations of a type whose "naturalness" is the result of an original collaboration between organisms and tools. Resisting the intellectual partisanship between apologetics and apocalyptics about the co-dependence of humans and technology, our present discussion therefore sets its sights on the legality governing the imbrication of bodies and prostheses.

Whereas in the human type that was being

developed at the beginning of the 20ᵗʰ century, and that has since come into its own, Jünger detected «the presence of a "second" consciousness» that «reveals itself in the ever-increasing ability to see oneself as an object. […] [For w]e are not only the first creatures to work with artificial limbs; through the use of artificial limbs we also find ourselves in the process of erecting unusual realms with a high degree of accord between man and machine» (Jünger [1934]: 14), in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin hints at a similar kind of «accord», which we would describe today in performative terms. Countering the idea that humans are passively subjected to artifacts and their codes, he draws a distinction between a «first» and a «second technology»: «The first technology [which, scil., «made the maximum possible use of human beings»] really sought to master nature, whereas the second [which, scil., «reduces their use to the minimum»] aims rather at an interplay between nature and humanity» (Benjamin [1935]: 107). The second technology—which we are currently experiencing—originates where «human beings first began to distance themselves from nature» (Benjamin [1935]: 107)—that is, from their biological givenness.

Understanding this distance is crucial to clarifying the reach of the notion of embodiment, which renders the distinction between an environment *outside* the anatomical boundaries of the human body and an environment *inside* these boundaries inadequate. Elsa Dorlin rightly observes, for example, that «masculine and feminine, taken as so-called "natural" identities, are products of Bayer, Sanofi-Aventis and Pfizer-Wyeth» (Dorlin [2011]: 18). This elision of borders means not only that—as Elisa Binda and Dario Cecchi, respectively, write in the present issue—«the [scil. human] body itself becomes an interface, a *medium*, that is performatively engaged in commerce with the things around it,» and that «the human body manifests [scil. the tendency] to be prolonged by technological proxies», but also that, in the words of Roberto Redaelli, «it is necessary to rethink the relationship between the

apriori and material level, starting from the normativity inherent to the sphere of *aisthesis*», since the mediality of the body is not a biologically neutral given.

It seems to me that this rethinking must start from a discussion of the polarity of endo and exosomatization, of internalization and externalization, which makes Montani's and Ian Tattersall's focus on the emergence of language as an «externalized attribute,» whose corporeality is certainly not reducible to its thinghood, and whose meaningfulness is not reducible to its discursivity, all the more relevant. This polarity plays a part in the feedback movement produced by such attributes— a broad movement encompassing senses and feelings, which, as Cecchi stresses, «enhance the exchange with the surrounding world» through being, in Montani's terms, «technically attuned».

It would therefore be apt to investigate new possibilities for conceptualizing the human form at the precise moment in which it is taken as becoming—that is, as genetically artificial. This could enable us to understand the technological device, not as a tool that is in itself special by virtue of extra-natural powers, but as a *pharmakon*, the quality of whose effects depends on the quantity and the modes of administration, and includes unforeseen secondary effects as well as achievements and failures that may or may not have occurred or occur in the future. I therefore subscribe to the incisive claim put forth by Tattersall in his valued contribution to the present issue: admitting the possibility that there were elements of chance in our becoming what we are, he contends that «we are optimized for nothing, and thereby not condemned to be anything». One thinks of the Speedo and Jaked 01 swimsuits, used since the 2008 Beijing Olympics, which make it easier to float so that swimmers can limit their exertion to thrust and speed by reducing the impact of muscle mass (Blouin [2001]: 29). «*Technology is our uniform*», writes Jünger (Jünger [1934]: 11). How exactly we wear it is the crux of the matter.

There are two possible roads here. Either we opt for the binary choice whereby technology functions as a mask that at degree zero assimilates

individual identities and at its maximum degree diversifies them through hyperspecialization; or, we interpret the significance of technology's intervention in life as an expression of the fact that the body is a medium—that is, a mode of organizing intentional and unintentional processes. In this second case, the human being is not a variable of technology but a technical agent, and imagination—not the effectiveness of the tool or the usefulness of the result—plays a privileged role in our embodied cultural formation. «Thanks to a long series of externalized experiences», the imagination is able to «gradually achieve […] a self-consciousness of its articulatory function» (Montani). This ongoing achievement is at the core of any inquiry about the living body.

Finally, the abandonment of the idea of biological givenness has three orders of consequences that deserve to be further investigated. The first is on the order of substance. Taking the body as transcendental does not imply thinking of the human being as the inevitable result of the activation of neuro-anatomical mechanisms conditioned by the environment. On the contrary, the very fact of culturally qualifying our innate readiness to action when we encounter inorganic matter allows us to reflect on the original self-alienation of the human animal, on its eccentricity, and on its freedom. In order to understand the reach of a self-experience that is genetically vicarious, indebted to the technical devices whereby human beings are co-constituted, it is necessary to refine the investigation of embodied cultural practices and to assume a heterological point of view. This is the same point of view that runs through the pages of *A Cyborg Manifesto* by Donna J. Haraway (1985), of the less well-known *Postcolonial Biology* by Deepika Bahri (2017), and of certain recent studies on pregnancy—deserving of attention from contemporary academic aesthetics—that focus on the natural situated condition during which the pregnant subject has a salient and developing experience of her own duality (Young [1984], Depraz [2003]).

The other two sets of problems are methodological in nature. In order to think the body heter-ologically, it is useful to reason by way of simulation, outlining "scenarios"—as Tattersall does here. The idea of the scenario updates that of the traditional "thought experiment" by better adapting it to research in which scholars are required to form hypotheses about recurring behavioral patterns in a variety of contexts and cultural habits but that does not dispense with empirical evidence and historical sources. This methodological choice is exemplified in the work of Richard D. Alexander, who makes use of the notion of «surrogate scenario-building» in his research on human behavioral evolution (1989), and Vilayanur Ramachandran, who considers art to be «nature's own virtual reality» in his neuroaesthetic studies ([2011]: 243).

In order to operationalize the notion of scenario, we need to bring up that of performance, as used first by Simondon, and later by Malafouris (unfortunately without citing the former). In *L'Individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information*, the French philosopher begins his reflection on individuation with the example of the production of a clay brick, which entails more than the mere application of a rectangular shape to passive matter (2005). This discrete and specific artifact comes into being through the intentional manipulation of a given material, which expresses its own possibilities thanks to the involvement of a particular human being, whose contingent action is in turn shaped by *that* clay. In *Creative thinging* Malafouris calls attention to «the feeling of and for clay,» referring specifically to the «dynamical process of creative material engagement, wherein material and human agency are coupled to each other and allow action to gain a "life of its own"» (2014: 151). As not all actions are performative, such a coupling of natural element and human intervention must be held mandatory in order to understand life as a historical performing process in itself.

The arguments that I am proposing here find support in the essays by Grespi and Christoph Wulf, the second of which has the merit of linking culture to sociality, allowing us to understand the former not as a mere knowing (how to make) but as a situated and relational know-how. Perfor-

mances—which intervene in external objects and in the living body itself—are in no way a reproductive but rather a productive activity that proposes "altered" versions of the initially available model: independent variations on the theme. Thus, as Wulf claims, «while maintaining continuity», performances «also offer scope for discontinuity» such that «alterity is conveyed through performativity.» "Conveying" is produced by a broader set of technical-corporeal gestures. These types of gestures govern the ways in which each body acts in its own environment. This is why «the gesture,» as Grespi writes, «is no longer [to be conceived of as] an involuntary, corporeal manifestation of emotional states, but rather an interface between a subject and the world, a creative form of thought that rejects both rationality and the dimension of the drive.» The historicity of man is ultimately expressed through a series of practices that interact, challenging the very idea of human "evolution".

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This issue of Aisthesis is enriched by a focus on Florens Christian Rang, William Shakespeare, and Walter Benjamin. Marina Montanelli presents here for the first time an Italian translation of Rang's *Vom Weg messianischer Deutung* (*On the Way of Messianic Interpretation*), the introductory essay to his work on Shakespeare's sonnets. The translation is accompanied by Montanelli's comment paper on Rang's text, *Florens der Christ. Un commento a* La via dell'interpretazione messianica *di Florens Christian Rang*. This paper aims both at contextualizing the figure of Rang and his work on Shakespeare and at addressing the most important conceptual issues of messianic interpretation, work of art, and faith work that Rang's essay presents. Fabrizio Desideri's paper, *Hamlet or Europe and the end of modern Trauerspiel. On some Shakespearean motifs in Walter Benjamin*, deals with the possibility of interpreting Hamlet's time as the time of an "interim" in light of the claims Benjamin makes about Shakespeare's drama in his book on the German Trauerspiel. Taking into account the interpretations of Pavel Florensky, Lev S. Vygotsky and Carl Schmitt, Desideri shows how Benjamin's characterization of Hamlet reveals something about the nature of modern consciousness and the aporetic character of modern politics. Lastly, Alice Barale's «Unbewaffnetes Auge»: Benjamin's interpretation of comedy in Shakespeare and Molière examines two early works by Walter Benjamin on Shakespeare's comedy *As you like it* and on Molière's *Le malade imaginaire*. The paper deals with the role of the comic within Benjamin's philosophy, including in its relationship to mourning and what Benjamin writes about it in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*.

Aisthesis

Evolution and Human Cognition

Ian Tattersall

Abstract. There can be no reasonable doubt that our living species Homo sapiens is fully integrated into the great Tree of Life that unites all living organisms on this planet. But it is also obvious that we are not just another run-of-the mill primate. But what distinguishes us most strongly from those relatives – and all other organisms – is something more abstract: the unusual and unprecedented way in which we process information in our minds. That is not so in our case, and a useful shorthand descriptor of the difference between us and them is that we think symbolically. In other words, we mentally deconstruct our exterior and interior worlds into a vocabulary of discrete symbols and then rearrange them, according to rules, to describe those worlds not only as they are, but as they might be.

Keywords. Evolution; Human Cognition; Symbol.

There can be no reasonable doubt that our living species *Homo sapiens* is fully integrated into the great Tree of Life that unites all living organisms on this planet. But it is also obvious that we are not just another run-of-the-mill primate. There is, after all, a long list of physical features differentiating us even from our closest living relatives, the African apes, most of them relating in one way or another to our unusual bipedal form of locomotion. But what distinguishes us most strongly from those relatives – and all other organisms – is something more abstract: the unusual and unprecedented way in which we process information in our minds. The great apes are highly intelligent beings, who nonetheless react more or less directly to their environments, albeit sometimes in remarkably sophisticated ways (Cohen [2010]). They live essentially in the world as Nature presents itself to them. Not clear that is not so in our case, and a useful shorthand descriptor of the difference between us and them is that we think *symbolically*. In other words, we mentally deconstruct our exterior and interior worlds into a vocabulary of discrete symbols and then rearrange them, according to rules, to describe those worlds not only as they are, but as they *might* be. And as a result of this, we actually live for much of the time less in the "real" world than in the worlds we individually reconstruct within our heads.

This is not, of course, to suggest that the cognitive processes of primates and other vertebrates cannot be very complex indeed. For example, apes can readily recognize and respond to symbols, both visual and verbal. And they can even use them additively, to make and understand simple statements, such «take … red … ball … outside». But this basic additive treatment of symbols is hugely limiting; and what apes evidently do not is to engender multiple alternatives by rearranging such symbols in the human fashion. And as a result, there is a narrow but hugely significant gulf between the cognitive styles of human beings and all other organisms.

Nonetheless, given our deeply embedded position within the Tree of Life, there can be no rational doubt that our symbolic and linguistic species *Homo sapiens* was descended from an ancestor that was neither of these things. Which means that, at some point in our evolution, the symbolic and linguistic gulf *must* have been bridged. This is an almost unimaginable event; and it is hardly surprising that, while many have pondered upon how this bridging was achieved, resulting conclusions have diverged greatly. Some scientists have concluded that such attributes as language and symbolic cognition are so complex and deeply ingrained in our species that their roots must extend far back in time (Pinker, Bloom [1990]). Others alternatively believe that they are "either/or" traits that probably originated in short-term events (e.g. Berwick and Chomsky [2016]). The implications of these two scenarios are not only starkly different, but they are hugely consequential for our ideas of who we are as a species. The gradualist viewpoint implies that our behavioral features have been slowly honed by natural selection over the eons and are thus deeply encoded within us, making us to a significant extent the behavioral prisoners of our biological heritage. In sharp contrast, the sudden-origin notion eliminates natural selection as a driving force in the origin of the unique modern human form of consciousness, thereby admitting the possibility that there were elements of chance in our becoming what we are. If this view is correct, it is more
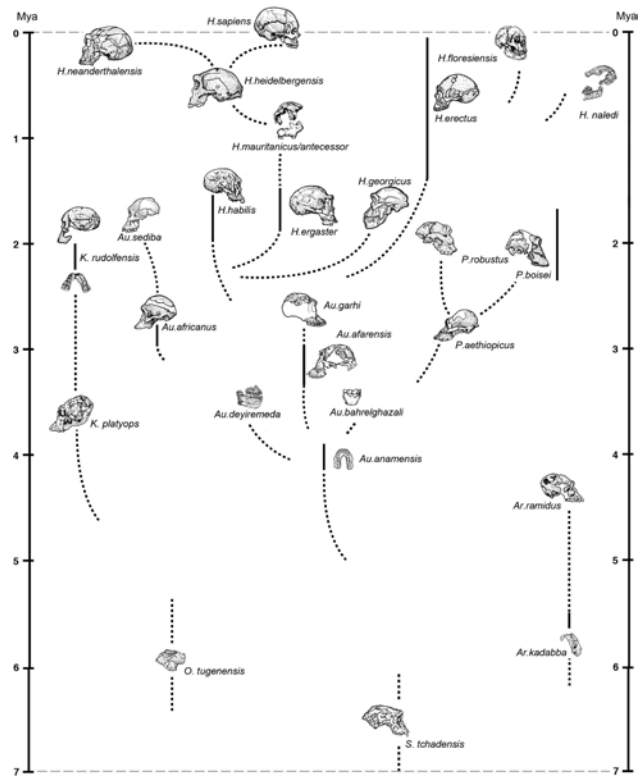
Figure 1. Outline schema of hominid evolution, showing that several hominid species typically coexisted at any one point in time; it is *Homo sapiens* that is highly unusual in being the only hominid on the planet. Drawn by Kayla Younkin.

probable that our behaviors are not closely channeled by our genetic heritage, and that we possess a significant latitude in our behavioral repertoire.

In choosing between these options, only empirical evidence will help. And, since cognition itself obviously does not preserve directly and such factors as the brain sizes and external morphologies of our extinct fossil relatives have proven rather disappointing in this respect (Tattersall [2012]), we have only two places to look for such evidence. One of these is the overall pattern of human evolution, which is reflected in the family tree given in Figure 1. This might be expected to show a basically linear form if our evolution had been dominated by steady within-lineage natural selection, whereas more adventitious influences would be expected to produce a bushier profile. And as the figure shows, this highly speciose tree shows a vigorously branching pattern in which

numerous hominid species were evidently spun off to do battle in the ecological arena, with both their relatives and more distantly related competitors, and to succeed or more likely fail. The pattern is one of diversity. It shows active experimentation with the hominid potential, rather than the smooth and gradual change that might be expected from improvement via within-lineage selection.

The second source of information on evolutionary process is the archaeological record, the direct if sometimes rather murky material register of ancient hominid behaviors. For the Pleistocene epoch, roughly the two million years over which our genus *Homo* evolved, this record is pretty limited, consisting for the most part of stone tools and butchered animal bones, and of the ways in which those elements are spatially disposed at occupation sites. And although technological indicators of this kind may in the aggregate be indicative of general complexities of lifestyle, it is hard to argue that any of them is a good proxy for any specifiable cognitive condition – which is one major reason for the disputes already alluded to. Still, while many Paleolithic stone-working techniques are certainly witness to very sophisticated cognitive states, it seems pretty evident that few of them, if any, can be used in isolation to infer the specifically modern human symbolic cognitive style: something that may be particularly relevant in light of the fact that learning by imitation can extend to some extremely complex processes indeed. And this, for the most part, leaves us only with explicitly symbolic artifacts as reliable proxies for the specifically modern symbolic cognitive style.

But then again, opinions may legitimately differ as to what might or might not be considered a symbolic artifact. Can we consider as symbolic a roughly-altered lump of stone that looks vaguely anthropomorphic to a modern observer? Were colored gastropod shells, presumptively pierced for stringing, necessarily part of a symbolic ornamentation system? Does the simple presence of ground ochre in archaeological deposits necessarily imply that this functionally-useful pigment was also used for symbolic bodily decoration? There

will always be difficult cases like these, but fortunately certain early expressions were more overtly symbolic. Such expressions include the realistic animal representations that began to be produced around 40 thousand years ago, by artists who were clearly our cognitive peers. Perhaps even more importantly, symbolic thought allows hominids with clever hands not only to remake the world in their minds, but to shape the world around them to conform to what they have imagined. Symbolic *Homo sapiens* has transformed the landscape in a remarkably short lapse of time, and if any other hominid lineages had possessed this ability, we should surely expect to find it expressed in some visible inflection in the archaeological record.

Given all this, it seems worthwhile to look briefly back over the long record of the hominid family, to see at what point in human evolution we are able to reasonably infer the possession of modern symbolic behaviors. To begin at the beginning, long before we have any archaeological record to hand, the earliest probable hominids consist of a handful of generally poorly-known and rather ill-assorted African forms, between about 7 and 4 million years (myr) old, all of which owe their hominid status largely to claims that they were upright bipeds when they moved on the ground. Much better documented are the so-called "australopiths" of between about 4 and 1.5 myr ago. These relatively diminutive and short-legged human precursors were clearly bipedal on the ground, but they also retained numerous features of the skeleton indicating that they were agile in the trees. Their brains were slightly larger than those of the living apes and the earliest hominids, but they were still small, and they had large chewing teeth housed in protruding faces. Not for nothing have the australopiths sometimes been called "bipedal apes". Still, from the very beginning they seem to have shown different ecological preferences from today's apes, exploiting a much wider range of resources in the expanding Plio-Pleistocene African woodlands and bushlands.

By around 3.4 myr ago there are already hints that early hominids had begun to use sharp stone flakes to butcher mammal carcasses; but deliber-

ately-made stone tools actually begin to show up rather later, at sites in Kenya and Ethiopia dating from about 2.6 myr ago. And it is with these simple implements, small cutting flakes bashed from one small cobble using another, that we have the first definitive evidence that hominids had moved cognitively well beyond the ape league. Still, despite this radically new behavior, the earliest stone tool makers seem anatomically to have been standard-issue australopiths. And this gives us the first indication of another significant pattern we find repeated throughout the hominid record. Namely, that new kinds of technology tend not to be introduced by new kinds of hominid: as far as innovation is concerned, the archaeological and fossil records are clearly out of phase.

This certainly held true for the earliest well-characterized members of our genus *Homo*, whose fossils begin to be found in Africa at sites a little under 2 myr old. For, as physically advanced as they may have been, these hominids of the species *Homo ergaster* appeared in association with simple flake tools identical to the ones their predecessors had already been making for half a million years. Still, in other ways, they were indeed radically new creatures: tall, slender, long-legged, and with significantly expanded brains. Physically, they were adapted for life in the expanding bushlands of the time, far from the protection of the forest. And for energetic reasons it is reasonable to conclude that they had already assumed an at least partly predatory way of life.

Once more, it took a while before the new hominids started regularly to manufacture a new kind of implement: the large and bifacially-flaked "handaxe" that was made to a predetermined form and that became common at about 1.5 myr ago. What is more, although several kinds of *Homo* apparently came and went in the intervening period, it was not until over a million years after the introduction of the handaxe that a conceptually new kind of stone tool began to be regularly used. This was the so-called "prepared-core" tool in which a stone nucleus was elaborately worked on both sides until a final blow, or blows, would detach a more or less finished implement. And,

once again, these conceptually more complex tools appeared well *within* the tenure of an existing species, in this case the world's first cosmopolitan hominid, *Homo heidelbergensis*. This hominid appeared in both Africa and Europe at about 600 thousand years (kyr) ago, and it boasted a brain only slightly smaller than that of today's *Homo sapiens*. Within its time span several other radical technological innovations were also introduced, among them the hafting of stone tools, the construction of artificial shelters, the regular domestication of fire, and the first finely-shaped wooden throwing spears. But significantly, virtually nothing produced during its tenure is uncontestably symbolic. The clear message of *Homo heidelbergensis* is that a hominid can be resourceful, smart, behaviorally flexible, and technologically sophisticated in the absence of symbolic reasoning, or at least of any deeply embedded inclination to express this cognitive style (Tattersall [2012]).

We can also say more or less the same thing for *Homo neanderthalensis*, which evolved from indigenous European predecessors at about 200 kyr ago. The Neanderthals had brains as big as ours, they were wonderful craftsmen in stone, and they left us an incomparable record of very complex lives. They flourished in an age of difficult climates; they hunted some fearsomely large animals; and, at least occasionally, they buried their dead. There is even genomic evidence of occasional interbreeding with *Homo sapiens* (Green et al. [2010]), although there is actually nothing surprising about interbreeding among very close relatives. But despite some equivocal and disputed expressions mostly in very late times, the Neanderthals bequeathed us very little convincing evidence of any consistent tradition of symbolic activity. And in a record as geographically, temporally, and materially as expansive as theirs is, if the Neanderthals *had* been symbolic thinkers, they would surely have left us more convincing indications of this fact. Of course, to say this is not to disparage the Neanderthals in any way. Clearly, these were complex and sophisticated beings, clever exploiters of their environments. Nonetheless, it is hard to avoid the impression that they interacted with the world around them very differently from

the way in which *Homo sapiens* typically does.

Perhaps even more amazingly, the same identical thing also appears to have held for the earliest fossil representatives of our very anatomically distinctive species *Homo sapiens.* Fossils showing substantially modern morphologies have been found at Ethiopian sites dating between about 200 and 160 kyr ago. And those early anatomically modern humans are associated with some notably archaic toolkits. Now obviously, members of our species eventually began to reason symbolically, or we wouldn't be discussing the issue today. But it is not until around 100 kyr ago that we start finding the first plausible indications of this unprecedented cognitive style. And again, those indications first show up in Africa and nearby. At about this time, pierced marine shell beads and ochre deposits start to show up at sites around the Mediterranean and in South Africa (Bouzouggar et al. [2017], d'Errico et al. [2009], Henshilwood et al. [2011]). Such objects may on their own be arguable as indicators of modern cognition. But they are soon supplemented by more direct evidence, the best of which comes from Middle Stone Age (100-70 kyr-old) occupation strata at Blombos Cave, on the southern African coast. This evidence consists of smoothed ochre plaques engraved with geometric designs, the best of which dates from some 77 kyr ago (Henshilwood et al. [2002]).

Hominid fossils are sparse at MSA sites, but the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that these early expressions of behavioral modernity in South Africa were the work of members of our own anatomically distinctive species *Homo sapiens.* And, as a result of this evidence, a fairly firm scenario of modern human origins and geographical dispersion is emerging. What seems to have happened is that *Homo sapiens* appeared as a distinctive anatomical entity in Africa at about 200 kyr ago. At first, members of the new species behaved much as had their predecessors and hominid contemporaries. But at around 100 kyr ago they began to show new and unprecedented behavioral tendencies that included the production of symbolic objects. And very soon after that,

populations descended from those first symbolic humans exited Africa and rapidly took over the world. Earlier, non-symbolic *Homo sapiens* had forayed into the Levant without displacing the resident Neanderthals, or even gaining a lasting foothold. But these later symbolic emigrants from Africa clearly had a cognitive edge that allowed them rapidly to displace the hominid competition throughout Eurasia. From *Homo erectus* in the Far East, to *Homo neanderthalensis* in the far west, all hominid competitors promptly disappeared.

In the best-documented case of early behaviorally modern penetration of remote Eurasian regions, the dazzling tradition of European cave decoration had already begun by around 40 kyr ago, accompanied by an amazing record of musical instruments, notations, portable art, and evidence of unprecedentedly sophisticated economic strategies. What's more, animal images have now been dated to around 40 kyr ago in Sulawesi and Borneo, suggesting that the tradition of representational art in Europe and Asia had originated earlier yet. The most plausible place of origin is Africa, and the timing would have been soon after the emergence there of symbolic cognition.

Of course, human beings are complex creatures descended from complex precursors. And occasionally we do find unusual expressions in the record those precursors left. For example, half a million years ago someone incised a zig-zag pattern on a mollusk shell found in Java, in putative association with *Homo erectus* (Joordens et al. [2014]). At the other end of the timescale, a deep hash engraving was found in a site were very late Neanderthals had lived (Rodriguez-Vidal et al. [2014]). But one swallow (or even two) doesn't make a summer; and, while intriguing, these items and a small handful of others are floating points that were not embedded in any identifiable symbolic tradition. Whereas, in dramatic contrast, the entire tenor of human life was clearly and dramatically changing among *Homo sapiens* in the later African Middle Stone Age, adding up to a fundamental behavioral transformation that sparked a revolution in the way in which hominids did business in the world. Previously, hominids had met

environmental challenges by adapting old technologies to new purposes, rather than by inventing new ones. Hence the typical stasis in stone tool kits. But with the emergence of behaviorally modern *Homo sapiens* a totally unprecedented entity was on the scene: one that clearly possessed the very same restless appetite for change that increasingly dominates our own lives today.

So, how do we explain the rapid emergence of this extraordinary and basically unprecedented new neophile phenomenon? Virtually overnight in evolutionary terms, human beings were behaving in an entirely unprecedented new way; and it was clearly not long-term natural selection that precipitated a sudden event that, moreover, clearly took place *within* an existing species. Further, the acquisition concerned was a behavioral one; and that such a behavioral event could have taken place at all can only be explained by the recruitment of neural systems that already happened to be in place. So how and when might those systems have been exaptively acquired? The only obvious possibility is the radical developmental reorganization that resulted, some 200 kyr ago, in the highly derived skeletal anatomy of the new species *Homo sapiens*. The genetic alteration involved in this event was almost certainly a rather minor one at the molecular level (likely involving changes in gene expression rather than in the protein-coding genome itself), but it evidently had cascading developmental consequences throughout the body; and there is no reason to believe that those consequences should necessarily have been confined to the skeletal and dental systems which are all that the fossil record preserves.

Still, the lag in the archaeological record indicates that the new cognitive potential lay fallow for a short but significant time. During this time, anatomical *Homo sapiens* continued to behave in the old manner, producing an unremarkable archaeological record. But then something happened to stimulate the recruitment of the new behavioral potential inherent in an adventitiously rewired brain, much as ancestral birds rather tardily discovered that they could use their feathers to fly. So what might the necessarily purely cultural stimulus for this change have been? By far the most plausible candidate we have is the spontaneous invention of language, which several factors combine to make particularly attractive in this role. First, language is the ultimate symbolic activity. Indeed, from our modern perspective it is virtually impossible to imagine thought in isolation from language. The linguist Wolfram Hinzen has, for example, recently recalled that the «close connection between grammar and thought» was a consistent theme in early studies of generative grammar, and he has provided persuasive arguments for reviving the view not only that language and thought are «not two independent domains of inquiry», but that thought itself is inherently grammatical. In other words, among modern people language and thought are so closely intertwined that they appear functionally, if not conceptually, inseparable.

In terms of interpreting the material archaeological record one can of course object that, while all human beings are symbolic, they do not all necessarily leave traces of this proclivity in objects that might be preserved. But over the long haul, and over the entire expanse of its distribution, we would surely expect any species that processed information in the modern human manner to have left some consistent material indication of its unusual cognitive status, just as we ourselves have so dramatically done in recent millennia. And we simply do not find anything equivalent in the case of any extinct hominid species, even the big-brained and well-documented Neanderthals.

Significantly, there is no reason to question the notion that the invention of language by a biologically predisposed hominid might have been a more or less instantaneous event. On a theoretical level, for example, Noam Chomsky and his colleagues have recently argued that the algorithmic basis of language is extremely simple (Berwick, Chomsky [2016]), so that an "either/or" switch is highly likely, much as in the case of the structured sign language observed to emerge virtually instantly among a community of deaf but "language-ready" children in Nicaragua (Senghas et al. [2005]). This property of suddenness not only

makes language a particularly credible driver of symbolic reasoning, but also distinguishes it from such rival stimulants of symbolic thought as theory of mind, which all demand long-term directional selection. Just as importantly, language is not only a portal to thought but is an externalized attribute that would have been poised to spread rapidly within a population that was already biologically-enabled for it.

In the scenario envisaged here, language and symbolic thought are inextricably intertwined. And the two were more or less simultaneously acquired by *Homo sapiens* in a single, short-term feedback event – an event that was both recent and emergent.

And it was *ex*aptive, rather than *ad*aptive. It was a randomly occurring event, rather than one driven by eons of natural selection. Exaptation is the routine evolutionary process whereby novelties arise in contexts entirely other than the ones in which they will eventually be co-opted. And neatly, this very same evolutionary mechanism also explains how the highly derived modern vocal tract needed to produce articulate speech was in place at precisely the point when it was needed for the expression of language – having originated as no more than an incidental byproduct of the retraction of the face beneath the braincase that is the most fundamental cranial specialization of *Homo sapiens*. Interestingly, this renders the long-running argument over the condition of the larynx and various other structures of the upper vocal tract in fossil hominids irrelevant to the precise point in human history at which language was acquired. The vocal tract simply happened to be there first, as of course it had to be.

The notion that the human brain recently underwent a recent and sudden algorithmic shift, a radical change in the way in which it worked, is supported by the rather counter-intuitive fact that, after two million years of steady expansion, our brains have apparently shrunk significantly since the end of the last Ice Age, some 10 kyr ago.

Both the Neanderthals and the early modern European *Homo sapiens* who replaced them some 40 to 30 kyr ago seem to have had brains of approximately equal volume, making both almost 13 percent bigger than the brains of people today. And, especially because brain is metabolically a very costly tissue, this fact strongly suggests that the ancestral intuitive brain operated on a "brute-force" algorithm, in which "intelligence" scaled more or less directly with brain volume (Tattersall [2017]). In contrast, the new symbolic algorithm proved to be a much more metabolically frugal one, demanding less energy input to produce an emergently different cognitive product: a product that made its possessors significantly more effective in the competition for ecological space than any hominid that had previously existed. And hence our lonely status as the only hominid in the world today.

All this having been said, we unquestionably share vastly more similarities with our closest ape relatives than we show differences from them. And, for all its peculiarities, our cognitive style is clearly built upon a long and complex series of acquisitions over almost half a billion years of vertebrate brain evolution. Yet our unique mode of information processing was clearly acquired amazingly recently, in an abrupt and emergent event that was entirely random with respect to adaptation. And that, in turn, strongly suggests that we human beings as we are today have not been programmed by eons of evolution to behave in specific ways, as some scientists like to suggest. The algorithmic change shifted all the rules by which humans play the evolutionary and cognitive games, allowing us to stand back and rationally appraise the situations in which we find ourselves. Knowing that the rules themselves have changed is incredibly important, because it helps us to understand a lot about our condition, why it differs from those of other organisms, and why it is so difficult to pin down. For we are optimized for nothing, and thereby not condemned to be anything. The fact that we can envisage alternatives makes all those alternatives at least conceptually available to us, and it gives us an astonishing latitude in the behaviors we exhibit. Our genotypes may incline us to respond in particular ways to the situations we find ourselves in, but we nonetheless have free

will to the extent to which we are consciously able to modify those responses. And that also endows us with a peculiar kind of responsibility: one that, sadly, it is all too easy to ignore.

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Aisthesis

Dance as Experience Field of the Body: A Contribution to Aesthetics

Christoph Wulf

Abstract. I will focus on dances as performances that bring a knowledge of man and his body to the representation, which would not be visible and comprehensible without it. Dances will be conceived of as patterns in which collectively shared knowledge and collectively shared body practices are staged and performed, and in which a self-expression and self-interpretation of a common order takes place. These are productive, and not reproductive, activities that create communities and cultural identities—namely, by working through difference and alterity.

Keywords. Dance; Experience; Body; Aesthetics.

Dances are one of the most important forms of expression of people and their bodies. In them, cultural identity is expressed, and the self and world relationship of the people represented. They are multifarious. Depending on culture and historical time their forms vary (Wulf, Kamper [2002]). They reflect social and cultural structures. Dances are productive; they create their own field of cultural practice in which many characteristics condense (Junk [1930], Sorell [1983], Baxmann [1991], Brandstetter [1995], McFee [1999]). They bring a knowledge of man and his body to the representation, which would not be visible and comprehensible without them. They show different images, perspectives and interpretations of human physicality. Dances embody a knowledge of man, bring it to the representation and make it experienceable in mimetic processes. At its center are the human body and its movements. These are subject to the dynamics of space and time in which the movements of the body unfold. From the dance movements, which take place in space and time, arise rhythmic dance configurations in which the dynamics of a collective and an individual imaginary are expressed (Wulf [2014]). Bodies in dance are media of human self-expression and self-understanding. They make aesthetic experiences possible.

Dances have synaesthetic effects produced by several senses. Especially important are the movement, hearing, tactile and visual

senses; but also, the senses of smell and taste have meaning for the effects of the dance. Like rituals and games, dances are central to the formation of communities. Synaesthesia and the performativity of dance create an emotional and social similarity between people who dance together. Dances have a synaesthetic and a performative surplus, out of which their social dynamics and meaning develop. Dances are physical, performative, expressive, symbolic, regular, non-instrumental; they are repetitive, homogeneous, ludic and public; they are patterns in which collectively shared knowledge and collectively shared body practices are staged and performed, and in which a self-expression and self-interpretation of a common order takes place. Dances have a beginning and an end and thus a temporal communication and interaction structure. They take place in cultural spaces that shape them. They have a prominent character; they are ostentatious, their meaning is determined by their respective framing.

Dances are varied.

In the wide spectrum of dances, stage dance is just one of the many forms of dance movement. Dances are also created in connection with rituals, festivals, religious ceremonies and pop culture events. Their forms of expression are extremely diverse and cannot be subsumed under a few universal principles. Dances stage body images and movement codes. They create and document body myths; they are expressions of aesthetic representations and inventions. (Brandstetter, Wulf [2007]: 10)

They bring body knowledge to the presentation, which is a silent knowledge whose "blurring" is characteristic for body knowledge (Kraus, Budde, Hietzge, Wulf [2017]). Dances can be analyzed under many aspects. In the context of UNESCO, they are understood as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. They are an important element of the cultural heritage, encompassing practices from many cultures that are not handed down in the form of documents and monuments whose importance to the culture and beyond is undisputed. Among the Intangible Cultural Heritage practices, dances, rituals, oral traditions and

expressions, as well as the practices of dealing with nature and traditional craft knowledge, play a particularly important role. If one tries to determine the peculiarity of these, above all, practical traditions, the following anthropological dimensions are especially suitable for the development of cultural heritage:

- body and performativity;
- mimesis and mimetic learning;
- otherness and alterity;
- anthropological structural features;
- interculturality and anthropological research.

BODY AND PERFORMATIVITY

When the human body is the medium of dance, it results in consequences for the perception and understanding of dances. They result from the temporality of the human body and are determined by the dynamics of space and time. The practices of dance are not fixed but are subject to important transformation processes that are bound to social change and exchange. Since dances are performed with the body, it is important to pay special attention to the physical side of their staging and performance. The question of which historical and cultural body images and body practices are expressed in dances is of importance. For dances to be successfully staged and performed, individual body knowledge and knowledge of how dancers relate to the other dancers is required. The moments of a dance that create a community are closely linked to its physicality and materiality. In its staging and performance, the corporeality and materiality of the individual bodies create a collective (dance) body that is multifaceted and emanate aesthetic effects on the audience. Two aspects are particularly important for the performativity of dance. One is that dances are cultural performances in which societies represent and express themselves and help them to create communities. The second aspect of performativity characterizes the aesthetic side of the body-based performance of dances, without whose experience dances cannot be adequately understood

(Wulf, Göhlich, Zirfas [2001], Fischer-Lichte, Wulf [2001, 2004], Wulf, Zirfas [2007], Wulf [2004a, 2004b]). Because of their performative character, dances create communities and create cultural identity; they also work on difference and alterity. They are important cultural heritage practices that convey traditional values and help to adapt them to people's current needs. When dances no longer express people's attitude towards life, they are changed, or new dances from other cultures are "imported", which then better express people's current attitude to life. This leads to new cultural products in which different cultural traditions mix; hybrid dances are created with new forms of expression and physical representation.

MIMESIS AND MIMETIC LEARNING

The practices of dancing are learned in mimetic processes in which the body knowledge required for dance is acquired. This is done by the perceptive and above all by the practical participation in dances. Through the mimetic reference to dancing role models, the body knowledge required for the performance of dancing is acquired. Such processes of imitation are not aimed at copying the role models; the aim is rather a process of creative imitation that leaves room for the individual design of the dance. The process of approximation differs from one person to another and depends on many individual factors. When a dance is related to a previous one, there is a desire to do something like the other dancers. This desire is based on the desire to become like the others, but at the same time to be different from them. Despite the desire to become similar, there is a desire for differentiation and autonomy (Gebauer, Wulf [1992, 1998, 2003], Wulf [2005, 2013]). At the same time, the dynamics of dances push for repetition and difference, thus generating energies that drive the staging and performance of dances.

Repetition is about taking a "copy" of earlier dances and referring to new situations. The repetition of the dance never leads to the exact reproduction of the earlier dance, but always to the production of a new staging and performance in which the difference to the former is a constructive element. In this dynamic lies the reason for the productivity of mimetic actions. While maintaining continuity, they also offer scope for discontinuity. Performances of dances make it possible to negotiate the relationship between continuity and discontinuity. The respective conditions of individuals and groups play an important role in the different manipulations of implicit patterns and schemes. For the transmission of a practical knowledge of dance, the sensuality of the mimetic processes, which is bound to the human body, relates to human behavior and is often unconscious. Through mimetic processes, people incorporate images and patterns of dances and make them part of their inner imaginary and imagination. Mimetic processes transfer the world of dance expressions into the inner world of humans. They contribute to culturally enriching and expanding this inner world through images of dance. The resulting mental images and their associated synaesthetic experiences vary from culture to culture, generation to generation, milieu to milieu. Since practical knowledge, mimesis and performativity are mutually interlinked, the repetition plays an important role in the transmission of the knowledge of dance. Dancing competence arises only in cases in which behavior is repeated and changed in the repetition. Without repetition, without the mimetic reference to something present or past, no cultural competence arises. Therefore, repetition is a central aspect of transmitting practical dance knowledge (Resina, Wulf [2019]).

OTHERNESS AND ALTERITY

When dances are physical representations of cultural identity, they also give people experiences of alterity (Todorov [1985], Gruzinski [1988], Waldenfels [1990], Greenblatt [1994], Wulf [2016]). They are an expression of cultural diversity and can be used to communicate cultural heterogeneity, i.e., sensitize for otherness and alterity. Only by developing a sense of alterity a standardization of

culture because of the globalization processes can be avoided. With the help of dances from other cultures, people can be made aware of the importance of the diversity of cultural heritage. Only with the help of this experience they are able to deal with strangeness and difference and develop an interest in the non-identical. Individuals are not self-contained entities. They consist of many contradictory and fragmentary elements. Arthur Rimbaud found the still valid expression «I is another» for this experience. Sigmund Freud's experience that the ego is not master in his own house points in the same direction. The integration of the parts of the subjects excluded from the self-image is a condition for being able to perceive and respect differences and alterity externally. Only when people can perceive their own alterity are they able to perceive the alterity of dances and the otherness of other people and to deal productively with both. If one succeeds in perceiving the other in one's own culture, interest arises in the foreign in other cultures and willingness to appreciate it. For this it is necessary to develop the ability to perceive from the other, i.e., heterologically, and to try to see oneself with the eyes of others (Wulf [2006]).

The development of this ability is opposed by several factors. Among the most important are the factors of rationality and individuality that are particularly valued in European cultures and which correspond with certain patterns of world experience and interpretation. Often, these are so determinative that they do not allow for experience of alterity. In dances, these two forms of reduction of strangeness play a minor role. Because with them it is the corporeality, the movements and rhythms that mediate alterity and that are hardly limited by rationality and individuality. In dances, alterity is conveyed through performativity. In mimetic processes, dancers and spectators reproduce foreign figurations, allowing them to capture and incorporate them. Insofar as movements, rhythms and figurations from foreign cultures are assimilated, new forms, rhythms and movement are created. In the age of globalization, hybrid formations are particularly widespread, in which the origin of individual structural ele-

ments can no longer be clearly identified. Since today more and more people live in different cultures at the same time, hybrid forms of expression are becoming more and more important (Wulf [2016]). The transnational youth culture and the avant-garde of contemporary dance theater contain many examples of this (Wulf et al. [2018], Brougère, Wulf [2018]).

ANTHROPOLOGICAL STRUCTURAL FEATURES

If dances are considered to be central expressive forms of the human body and thus in an anthropological perspective, then some structural features can be sketched, which designate important dimensions of the dance and the body.

SPACE AND TIME IN THE DANCE

Dances are tied to the spatiality and temporality of the human body and unfold their figurations in space and in time. They aesthetically are connected by movements in which the human body moves alone or with other bodies in temporal sequencing in space. In this process, the context and the framing of space and time play an important role. They incorporate historical and cultural, collective and individual elements that define the representation, expression and atmosphere of the dance. The pictorial scenarios, the virtual spaces and the multi-dimensional temporal orders of the contemporary avant-garde dance create conditions of space and time that expand the potentials of physical expression.

DANCE AND MOVEMENT

In the movements of dance, the body experiences itself, with the music and the movements of the dancers. In its movements, it develops the ability of the design, it forms and becomes an instrument that is used, without going into functional use. The movements of the dance contain a "surplus of meaning" in representation and

expression. In them, figurations are imagined and acted upon. The movements of dance form the body that produces them; they create imaginations and realize them in repeated stagings and performances. They are regular and expression of order. The movements of the dance reveal the docility of the body; it presents itself in exercises and repetitions (Resina, Wulf [2019]). In the movements of the dance an implicit knowledge arises, whose spectrum is very extensive. Depending on the type of dance, its movements are embedded in social power structures or, as with the contemporary avant-garde, largely released from them.

DANCE AND CULTURAL COMMUNITY

Cultural communities without dances are unthinkable. Through the symbolic content of the forms of interaction and above all through the performative processes of interaction and the generation of meaning, dances contribute to the formation of community. The techniques that make dancing possible are based on the repeatability of the necessary procedures and their controllability. Informal communities formed around dances are characterized not only by the space of a collectively shared symbolic knowledge, but also by the corresponding forms of interaction of the dances in which and with which they perform this knowledge. These productions can be understood as an attempt to ensure self-expression and reproduction of the community and its integrity. Dances create communities emotionally, symbolically and performatively; they are staged and expressive, without achieving a comprehensive agreement on the ambiguity of dance and body symbolism.

DANCE AND ORDER

As interactive patterns of action, dances develop a specific order and regularity. Correspondences and similarities can be identified and analyzed between the dances and the structures of their culture of origin. This is illustrated, for example, by a comparison between the dances at the

French court and the dances of bourgeois society at the beginning of the 20th century. Dances can therefore become sources for the analysis of social body images, order and power relations; an analysis of the social order, in turn, can provide clues to understanding the structures of dances (Lippe [1974], Braun, Gugerli [1993]). In the dance a rhythmic dynamization of movements and a ludic handling of the production, change and dissolution of orders takes place.

DANCE AND IDENTIFICATION

Mimetic processes lead to the identification with the dancers and the dances and thus also to the identification with the body movements and body images implicit in the dances, the feelings they trigger and their inherent values and norms. Not occasionally, this also involves processes of inclusion and exclusion. Through identification with certain dances, an identification with lifestyles, milieus and groups is created and embodied in dancing.

DANCE AND MEMORY

Dancing creates memories. These include movements, rhythms, sounds. These are where you will find: atmospheres, erotic experiences, feelings of "flowing", of intoxication and sometimes even of ecstasy, memories of intensities, of rhythms in which people feel themselves and the others. They are synaesthetic memories that include multiple senses. Some are collectively shared memories, others are highly individual. Some memories are primarily related to mental images, others to sounds, yet others to movements. In all, the corporeality of the remembered dances plays a central role.

DANCE AS DIFFERENCE PROCESSING

In many dances differences are worked out that result, among other things, from gender, age

and ethnic differences. By dancing together, different people fade the otherwise existing differences between them. Their dance moves succeed only when they relate to each other and cooperate. They work on the differences that separate them by miming each other in dance and making themselves known to each other. By deferring differences, they create a sense of belonging in rhythmic movements. In dance, in which collective feelings are generated, confirmed and changed, ritualized forms of staging, physical action and play practices as well as mimetic forms of circulation become the focus. Therefore, a performative community of the dancers is understood as an area of action and experience characterized by staged, mimetic and ludic elements (Wulf et al. [2001, 2004c, 2007, 2011]).

DANCE AND TRANSCENDENCE

In many cultures dances are related to the cosmic order, gods, spirits, dead and unborn. With the help of dances an attempt is made to gain influence on the powers of the hereafter. In many cases, these dances are part of sacrificial rituals intended to favor gods and spirits. Mostly this happens with magical dances, in which people with the help of masks and other "props" ascribe supernatural powers, with which they can banish the evil gods and spirits. Not infrequently, through din and ecstasy, these dances mobilize "superhuman" forces to ward off the threat and endangerment of the world. In these dances, people establish order and power with the help of exclusion and inclusion, through which they seek to secure the cosmic order as well.

DANCE AND PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

Who dances learns much more than just dancing. Dancing develops into a physical competence which goes far beyond the dance and which is also important for other life contexts. It is accompanied by a sensitivity for movements and rhythms, for space and time, for sounds and atmospheres. Dance creates practical, body-based

knowledge that is acquired in mimetic processes. In this, the actors take pictures, rhythms, schemas, movements into their imagination. Their mimetic appropriation leads the practitioners to a practical knowledge that is transferable to other situations. Practical knowledge is practiced, developed and changed in repetition. The knowledge thus incorporated has a historical and cultural character and as such is open to change (Boetsch, Wulf [2005]).

DANCE AND AESTHETICS

Because of their representational and expressive nature as well as their performativity, all dances have an aesthetic dimension that makes it clear that dances are human expressions that make them valuable components of the cultural heritage of humanity that cannot be replaced by anything else. Aesthetic dimensions include dances at the court of Louis XIV and the avant-garde of contemporary dance, as well as the magical dances of the conjuring of the gods and the spirits, the folk and ballroom dances of the 20th century and the contemporary dance forms of the youth. The cultural diversity of dances corresponds to different implicit aesthetics, which are characterized by several similarities, but above all by serious differences.

INTERCULTURALITY AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH

When dances are cultural representations, they also reflect the diversity that defines cultural life in the world despite the unifying tendencies of globalization. If the development of human coexistence requires more than ever to be able to cope with cultural diversity, the practices of the "immaterial" cultural heritage, not held in monuments, and in particular the dances, offer opportunities open to the stranger and gain experience in dealing with cultural diversity. In the field of education, too, there is a challenge and opportunity here; today more than ever, education has to be understood as an intercultural task (Featherstone [1995], Wulf [1995, 2006, 2016]).

OUTLOOK

Dances are forms of expression and expression of people and their bodies that make something tangible that would not be experienced without them. In many dances, people experiment with themselves and their bodies, with their history and their culture, trying to express something that cannot be presented and performed differently. Therefore, many dances, especially in the field of dance art, have an experimental claim that encourages dancers to invent and explore through the means of staging and performing the body, which contributes to the knowledge of man. If one approaches this knowledge today from the side of anthropology, three paradigms of anthropological research, with which an anthropologically oriented dance and body research can be constituted, are particularly suitable. This is philosophical anthropology, as it was developed in Germany, which emphasizes the inherently open character of human history and the possibilities of human perfectibility; the historical anthropology of the School of Annales developed in France in the first half of the 20th century and its further developments, which focus on the historical character of the human body and culture as well as questions of mentality research; as well as Anglo-Saxon cultural anthropology or ethnology with its interest in cultural diversity and heterogeneity (Wulf [2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2010, 2013]). On the basis of these paradigms is the development of a historical-anthropological dance and body research, which is not limited to certain cultures and epochs and which is in the reflection of its own historicity and cultural ability, to overcome the Eurocentrism of large parts of the body research and the aesthetics. This requires a transdisciplinary and transcultural orientation as well as a reflexive self-criticism.

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Aisthesis

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Technical Creativity, Material Engagement and the (Controversial) Role of Language[1]

Pietro Montani

Abstract. For several hundred thousand years, the genus homo deployed a characteristic technical creativity, communicating and transmitting its outcomes, together with its operative protocols, without the available recourse to articulated language. The thesis proposed here is that the aforementioned functions should be attributed to a complex intertwining of embodied abilities, which can in turn be ascribed to the classic philosophical concept of imagination. It is through imagination that the human becomes involved in material engagement (Malafouris), by virtue of which its extended mind takes part in the processes of producing artifacts and is in turn shaped by them. The main issue of this article consists in investigating how this involvement occurs (§§ 1 and 2) and the part that articulated language plays in it, following the invention of the latter (§§ 3 and 4). The latter's emergence can indeed be traced back to the transformation and specialization of a recursive element, already present in the pre-linguistic work of imagination, whose ability to implement a denotative semantics is discussed in particular (§ 5).

Keywords. Technical creativity; Extended mind; Imagination; Language; Denotative semantics.

1. LIVING BEINGS AND THE INORGANIC

The forms of life with which the genus *homo* experimented in the course of its evolution are primarily characterized by a set of practices related to its specific *technical creativity*. Regarding this thesis, which I am inclined to take as self-evident, it seems to me that particular attention is due to the issue of empowerment: namely, the process of acquisition, via interiorization, of skills previously experimented with for a long time according to the externalized[2]

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[2] "Externalization" is a largely current, albeit unfortunate, expression. It is frankly deceptive inasmuch it makes us think that the process at stake here

modes typical of technical action. To clarify what is to be understood by "technical empowerment", and what is important about it, one need only consider two particularly powerful technologies: articulated language and writing. My aim is to reflect on the former in particular, starting from the idea that, generally speaking, articulated language – when not suppressed as irrelevant or even misleading – has not been adequately investigated within the overall context of technical creativity.

My starting point here is the concept of "material engagement" introduced by Lambros Malafouris in a recent influential book (Malafouris [2013]). Malafouris's approach has the merit of integrating the phenomenon of technical creativity into a highly efficient and persuasive paradigm, *Material Engagement Theory (MET)*, with which I largely agree. Recently, Malafouris, together with Don Ihde, reaffirmed the programmatic character of this approach, proposing anew the classic figure of *homo faber*: if we humans correspond primarily to this figure, rather than to that of *homo sapiens*, this is not so much on account of our propensity for creating artifacts, but because «we make things which in turn make us» (Ihde, Malafouris [2018]: 195). The reversibility of this relation, along with the emergences that derive from it at each turn, is thus the main requirement of MET.

I cannot enter into the details of the theory presented by Malafouris, whose debt with regard to the concept of "extended mind" I assume is recognized (Clark, Chalmers [1998]). After all, Malafouris himself defines *MET* as a «strong version of extended mind theory» (Malafouris [2013]: 227), and relates it to a "hylonoetic field", while focusing on the «importance of *mediation* in human thinking» (italics are mine), in direct opposition to the classic "hylomorphic" conception, according to which a design conceived by a human mind gives shape to lifeless matter. For its part, "mediation" should be understood as the general techni-

cal action constituted by the *equal interactive relation* established among the different "contractors" of the processes governing the emergence of artifacts. Among the many cogent examples offered by Malafouris, let us take the case of a vase produced through the proper molding of a piece of clay; I will come back to this example several times. Considering this process in the light of *MET* implies, on the one hand, emphasizing the extent to which the affordances exhibited by the clay – pliability, flexibility, relative permeability, resistance, and so on – contribute *as much as* the sensitivity of the potter's hands and the movement of the wheel to the emergence of an artifact. On the other hand, it highlights the configuration of the whole productive operation as a complex *cognitive event*, in the course of which the extended mind taking part therein ends up being re-modeled in its own turn and initialized to intentional competencies that did not exist prior to the event itself.[3] In other words, intentionality itself is an emergence within the process of material engagement, not something instructing it in a privileged way. One last point needs to be underlined: the technical creativity related to material engagement and the empowerment processes is as old as the genus *homo*. This means that this creativity had been at work long before something like language even remotely emerged. I therefore assume that material engagement can be considered a general sensorimotor agency of the human body, to which we can give the classic name of "imagination", while taking care not to lose sight of its fundamental embodiment and constitutively interactive character. Human beings "imagine" with their whole bodies – and, of course, primarily with their hands. Likewise, it was an increasingly complex system of sensorimotor protocols that drove the communicability of the human being's interactive routines for thousands of years. In spite of that, it does not seem justified, strictly speaking, to grant these forms of communication (and learning) the status of "language" (Corballis [2002], Everett 2017).

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consists in "putting outside" something already conceived "inside". As will become clear in the following pages, this movement from inside to outside must be radically questioned.

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[3] This description essentially coincides with what I have called "technical empowerment".

Before focusing more closely on MET in connection with the emergence of articulated language, I would like to add that, if we consider a large number of disciplinary approaches that are mutually diversified but significantly representative of the status assumed by the humanities vis-à-vis the hard sciences for the last forty years, it is possible to observe a broad consensus concerning the theoretical paradigm that Malafouris ascribes to the field of cognitive archaeology. In other words, the idea that we should focus on the embodied character of human cognition and its communication systems is broadly shared across the anthropological, neuroscientific, paleontological and psychological fields today (Gallagher [2005, 2017], Gallese, Lakoff [2005], Grusin [2017], Ingold [2001, 2013], Latour [1999], Noë [2009], Tomasello [1999]). In short, the mode of formulating the question of human cognition and experience at stake here – beyond specific, and sometimes important and significant, divergences – can be identified with a philosophical orientation characterized by the clear and rigorous delimitation of a precise system of incompatibilities (for instance, with representationalist, intentionalist or innatist theories of the mind, etc.). To that end, it applies methodological protocols that are increasingly scrupulous about the empirical adequacy and the experimental import of the theoretical hypotheses proposed.

Two points in particular deserve to be underlined. The first, already mentioned, is the radical dismissal of the "hylomorphic" paradigm (Ingold [2013]). According to this paradigm, the inorganic is nothing but a lifeless matter more or less compliantly available to receive the seal of a form following from an intentional design previously conceived by somebody's mind. The second point is that the "imaginative" performance of *homo faber* largely precedes, and deeply instructs, that of *homo symbolicus* (Malafouris [2013]: 153-177, 227-49). The two points are obviously interrelated: as we saw, on the one hand, material engagement implements and oversees the active participation of the inorganic in the emergence of the human mind; on the other hand, the temporal development of material engagement produces cognitive infrastructures, preparing the field for the emergence of the symbolic. The emergence, in particular, of something like a *phonetically articulated* and *semantically denotative* language – a technology whose implications for the radical reorganization of the human forms of life, where it likely introduced an element of discontinuity, are indeed difficult to underestimate[4] – is the specific issue that I would like to discuss.

The problems arising in connection with this event are impressive and far from being adequately formulated, let alone settled. I limit myself to listing a few of them, to which I will return in the conclusion of this article: Is it more likely that the appearance of articulated language had the character of a "sudden" irruption, or rather that of a long and gradual development? Is the phonic-articulatory trait more likely to be discriminating or rather interchangeable with resources coming from other systems of organization on the plane of expression, for instance, gesture? Is the semantic-denotative property of enunciation, that is, its "objectivity" or "aboutness", likely to determine the characterization of this technology, or rather only to integrate it into other pragmatic, communicational and expressive properties? Is the degree of self-consciousness governed by an articulated and denotative language likely to be in every way comparable with that imputed to the imaginative practices, both operative and performative, of *homo faber*, or rather to mark a significant and irreversible transformation?

2. MODES OF "CORRESPONDENCE" BETWEEN THE LIVING BEING AND THE MATERIAL WORLD

It might be useful to differentiate the *equal interactive relation* paradigm – as I have defined it in general, with reference to Malafouris's theses – from the specific theoretical inflection that a similar interpretation of human technicity assumes

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[4] I will take a position on this point, which is among the most debated, in my closing remarks.

for an anthropologist such as Tim Ingold (2011, 2013). As I have already pointed out, these two conceptions, and others besides them, share a radical critique of the matter-form model, as it has been conceived for thousands of years, in terms of a hylomorphic approach. By contrast, these two conceptions can be distinguished, as it were, by the description of the "role play" discernible within this very relation, starting from the rather significant fact that, per Ingold, the concept of "interaction" should be dismissed in favor of that of "correspondence", and extending to a similar, even overly scrupulous, censure of other conceptual tools, such as embodiment and agency, which are usually associated with the idea of an extended mind.

In many respects, Ingold presents his position, starting with his terminology and recurrent examples, as a conciliatory and reassuring version of Martin Heidegger's reflections on technics – especially the oft-cited Heidegger (1949). More precisely, Heidegger's anti-humanism seems to resurface here, in the form of a non-anthropocentric humanism that willingly grants the human being's propensity to enter into a deep resonance with those "things" whose most authentic nature essentially consists in keeping their "thing-ness" in a state of flow, unlike the deplorable "objects", which Ingold considers to be stiffened products of a representational *hybris*. The result is a remarkable view of technical mediation, understood as the invention of a system of "transductors"[5] capable of setting the parallel course of two energetic flows – namely, the flow of human life and the many-sided flow of inorganic matter – into a synchronic relation, to be renewed at each turn. Here, Ingold's thought intentionally resonates with that of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980). Ingold offers several examples, all of which are extremely evocative and presented with irresistible commitment. Among these is Malafouris's driving exam-

ple: namely, the particular material engagement through which artifacts – or rather, "things" – referable to the kind of "pottery", emerge. Desiring to maintain a rigorously non-anthropocentric position and, moreover, having opted to eschew the concepts of agency – whether human or material– and embodiment, Ingold describes the productive process according to the following scheme: the "correspondence" of the human being – and more precisely, its fluid proprioception – with the flow properties of clay is made possible only by the mediation of a transductor, which, for the matter at hand, is the potter's wheel. In the aforementioned "role play", Ingold's working model thus assumes a precise *triadic configuration*: the correspondence between human being and the fitting and fluid overabundance of *physis* – although Ingold prefers to speak of "world" – must be *creatively* mediated by the invention of transductors that actualize and "phase" it, so to speak. The place for this encounter is simply the "thing", considered in its irreducible difference from the object. This argument is commendable not only for its ability to put Heidegger in dialogue with Deleuze-Guattari, against the backdrop of a vitalist and conciliatory phenomenological *Stimmung*, but also for its effort at modeling the role of *homo sapiens* from a perspective that fosters technical creativity, outside of any lust for dominion. This *Stimmung* is the very "second technique" that Walter Benjamin (1935) connected to the ideas of play and *mimesis* qua "enhancements" of nature and neutralizations of any will to power (or destiny to submission[6]), although Ingold's (2013) text lacks this reference.

Another remark is warranted before we can assess if and where Ingold's approach encounters challenges. One might indeed wonder why such a rich and creative harmony with the fluid superabundance of the world only characterizes the

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[5] Ingold is careful to distinguish between his use of this term and the concept of transductivity advocated by Gilbert Simondon (1992), an author whose original theses he values and reechoes to a certain extent.

[6] Granting the legitimacy of another Heideggerian reference, one could also speak of "production in the cradle of *physis*". Nevertheless, the fact that so many authors, so different one from the next, can stay together – or "correspond" – in the irenic problematic space opened by Ingold could be reasonable cause for suspicion.

existence of human beings, and not that of other living beings as well – or at any rate, why only the former is characterized as so powerfully marked by determining and downright catastrophic evolutionary turns. Indeed, since Ingold cannot resort to the traditional explanations that lead us, in some way or another, to consider certain cognitive, presumably species-specific, functions as innate, he appeals to the human quality that, amongst all others, seems the least anthropocentric: "feeling", understood as an *aisthesis* attuned to the paradoxical, but far from counterintuitive, condition of an ek-static and decentered proprioception[7]:

> To correspond with the world [...] is not to describe it, or to represent it, but to answer to it. Thanks to the mediating work of transduction, it is to mix the movements of one's own sentient awareness with the flows and currents of animate life. Such mixture, where sentience and materials twine around one another on their double thread until [...] they become indistinguishable, is of the essence of making. (Ingold [2013]: 108, italics are mine)

It is therefore by virtue of an *aisthesis* that is particularly open, mobile and free from selective filters that, of all living beings, the human being alone seems capable of corresponding with the world in the creative and transductive, which is to say, technical, way considered above. As we will now see, this last position of Ingold's must be maintained, though it cannot be taken at face value. Indeed, it does not suffice to say that the human being "feels" the fluid superabundance of the world in a "different" way than the tick or the chimpanzee does, let alone that this "diversity" is responsible for historical effects unknown to other living species – or perhaps for history *tout court*. I would now like to turn back to Malafouris's work, in order to present the problem that I left open in

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[7] Indeed, the prospect of a "decentered proprioception" sounds like an oxymoron. However, as a very simple exercise of insight should suffice to convince us, it is a condition readily available to intuition. For instance, it should suffice to relate it to the experience of beauty.

a new and potentially more appropriate way. I am referring to the question of articulated language as a benchmark of the specific role played by the human being within the radical and equal interaction that characterizes material engagement.

3. ANTHROPOCENTRISM OR ANTHROPOMORPHISM? AESTHETICS AND TECHNO-AESTHETICS

Ingold and Malafouris, along with many others, share an explicit suspicion toward the anthropocentrism that is likely to have supported the objectifying position at its origins and throughout its development: namely, toward the isolation of (human) agents from things, which is underwritten by the representative and hylomorphic approach. Malafouris responds very sharply to this position by definitively reaffirming a thesis that we have already examined:

> If there is such a thing as human agency, then there is material agency; there is no way human and material agency can be disentangled. *Or else, while agency and intentionality may not be properties of things, they are not properties of humans either; they are properties of material engagement.* (Malafouris [2013]: 119, italics are mine)

Nevertheless, Malafouris is quite aware that the kind of entanglement evidenced by the material engagement in which the human being takes part has something peculiar about it and is not entirely generalizable. He specifies this peculiarity by distinguishing between anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism. He writes that «to engage in anthropocentrism is to perceive humans at the center of reality; to engage in anthropomorphism is to perceive reality in human terms», adding that this «is a biological necessity of the human condition that we need to embrace» and that it would be impossible even merely to imagine what it would mean, for us as humans, to live and think without the constituent metaphorical apparatus on which our perception of the world – interwoven with deeply embodied sensorimotor schemes,

such as up/down, front/back, interior/exterior, and so on – is based. It follows that anthropomorphism must not be thought of «as a problem that we failed to overcome, but as a central characteristic of human projection and material engagement that demands attention and understanding» (Malafouris [2013]: 131).

The epistemological scope of this issue needs to be clarified and developed even beyond the methodological boundaries to which Malafouris confines it. More precisely, we should question whether the concept of "perception" used here is entirely appropriate, or whether it would be preferable to speak, as Ingold does, of a more general and indeterminate "sentient awareness", namely, the characteristic *openness* of human *aisthesis*. I mean to say that the reference to a specifically "aesthetic" element could help ensure a better understanding of the anthropomorphic perception to which Malafouris refers, as well as of the ek-static proprioception advocated by Ingold. Now, the "anthropomorphic" need noted by Malafouris is clearly foreshadowed in its specific epistemological status in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, the work in which Immanuel Kant (1781) unveils his aesthetics. Kant speaks of a "purposiveness of nature", to be understood as a "subjective" principle of the reflecting faculty of judgment. That is, namely, the principle of the particular cognitive activity whereby we formulate hypotheses concerning the existence and positive detection of regularities within the natural world. Kant writes that, in the exercise of this fundamental activity, we thus behave "as if" an intelligible design were concealed behind the great and apparently irreducible "variety of forms" with which "nature" confronts us, although this design remains entirely to be discovered. In so many words, we behave "as if" the internal structure of nature were anthropomorphically attuned to our way of knowing. It is a question, however, of a non-objective principle, a sort of hypothetical simulation, on whose grounds the reflecting faculty of judgment gives itself, and not nature, a procedural rule. Now, the point that most interests us here is that, according to Kant, the form of the anthropomorphic projection whereby nature

is taken "as if" it were spontaneously attuned to our deepest expectations, that is, available to be dwelt-in and known, is a "feeling of pleasure and pain" – a feeling of something together with a feeling of oneself. It is therefore something very close to the "correspondence" claimed by Ingold, whose primary place is *aisthesis*, and not perception – as Kant would agree, insofar as the latter is interwoven with conceptuality – much less understanding (which is the seat of conceptuality).

The question set aside at the beginning – namely, of what is at stake in the "role play" between the contractors of the equal interaction in which material engagement consists, and in which the technical creativity characteristic of *homo faber* is performed – thus points toward the possibility of an aesthetic answer. The human being enters such play initially by virtue of an extremely intense, but also indeterminate and open, feeling that orients its imagination in the course of the entanglement of material engagement. And it is clear that the import of this feeling has to do with the specific creative adaptation of a living being that is compelled to find the resources for survival technically because it lacks them biologically.

On this last point, it is noteworthy that, in the *First Introduction* to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (which was subsequently replaced), Kant defines the principle of the reflecting faculty of judgment as a "technique of nature". This definition is less comprehensive than the definitive one, but more revealing. Put otherwise, what is felt as anthropomorphic in nature, in a purely hypothetical and "simulative" way, is first and foremost nature's conformation to a broad and indeterminate technical texture. It follows that, from its origin, human *aisthesis* has been a technically attuned feeling: a *techno-aesthetics*[8].

In Kant's original formulation, the commitment assigned to the agency of the human being through its attunement with a constitutive technicity needs to be given its proper weight; this is one possible reason, and not the least important

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[8] Simondon (2014) uses the term "techno-aesthetics" in a different acceptation from this one.

one, for the philosopher's subsequent recourse to the much more indeterminate "purposiveness". If we take this last scenario seriously, the framework that we have hitherto established for relating Malafouris and Ingold in spite of their respective differences undergoes a rather fundamental change. Indeed, not only does Ingold's conciliatory *Stimmung* make room for a certain uncanny *compulsion to technical creativity* – recalling the *deinotes* that Sophocles attributes to the intrinsic technicity of the human being in the first stasimon of the *Antigone* – but in addition, the repeatedly invoked "equality" of the elements contributing to material engagement is, at least partly, called into question by the excessive activism and spectacular plasticity displayed on the part of one of them. This last aspect needs to be better defined.

4. HYPER-INTERACTIVITY OF IMAGINATION: SALIENT AND SUPERVENIENT AFFORDANCES

A final reference to the philosophical system of Kantian aesthetics will be useful for formulating the problem according to a conceptual scheme that I deem appropriate and intend to adopt for the rest of this article. While describing, in analytic terms, the aesthetic feeling whereby we humans feel an agreement, or correspondence, with nature, Kant speaks of a "free play" between imagination and understanding. More precisely, he speaks of a free play between the indeterminacy of the former and the determinateness of the latter. I will stress a few points from this well-known definition without excessive concern for philological rigor. What does it actually mean that imagination has to do with the indeterminate? It means that imagination's task consists in going through[9] the affordances of the empirical data, configuring the manifold possible synthetic unifications[10]. In the clay-work example, for instance, these involve not only the affordances manifested through the pliability of the material but also those that make the material's reactivity to a rotatory movement emerge. In the first case (pliability), one might speak of salient affordances; in the second (sensitivity to the rotatory movement), one might speak of supervenient affordances.

The point that I want to highlight is the following: in the "free play" that Kant describes, we are bound to note a focused and attentional orientation – governed, according to Kant, by understanding – along with another orientation, this one decentered and indeterminate – governed by imagination. Far from being compelled to distinguish between two faculties, as Kant does, we can attribute these two "phases" of the process to an attentive and at the same time unbiased hearing of the material: clay, in our case. It is a hearing that proves capable of focusing on the salient affordances and, at the same time, *keeping a distance from them* – a disinterestedness, as Kant would say – in order to anticipate hypothetically the supervenient affordances. In other words, a *disengagement* is at work in the play. Such a disengagement is also temporal: it is a mode of delay, among other things. This disengagement is enacted with regard to the formative cogency of the moment of salience and focused attention (Desideri [2011], Nanay [2018]). In short, the play involves a *deliverance*, capable, as it were, of displacing the sensitivity to an area at a distance. Or rather: it is a sort of *débrayage* or real *disembodiment*, which realizes a *reflective and recursive distancing* within the imaginative event itself[11]. If this were not so, the element

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[9] In a surprising passage of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant [1781]), Kant uses this very verb, *durchgehen*, to describe the synthetic action of imagination. In another passage in the third *Critique*, Kant speaks of "different proportions" of the relation between determined and indeterminate.

[10] In § 21 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant describes this imaginative process in detail.

[11] Lev S. Vygotsky was the first to present this situation in terms of recursion (Vygotsky [1934]). The aspect of the disengagement (*débrayage*) and of the following modification of the sensorimotor schemes is the pivot of a remarkable experiment with a group of macaques (Iriki et al. [1996]) that Malafouris reports (2013: 164-69) with precision. He speaks of a process of "disembodiment", which is necessary to the formation of a new skill. The concept of *débrayage*, used here in a non-formalized way,

that Ingold calls transductive would not be able to emerge. In the case in point, this element is easily discernible, not only in the wheel, but also, for instance, in the firing that the artifact must undergo to ensure its resistance and impermeability.

We must extract and highlight two points from this brief discussion. The first concerns what could be called a hyper-interactivity of the human imagination: namely, the latter's inclination to work with provisional syntheses while keeping open the possibility of grasping other profiles from among those offered by the affordances of the material world. The second concerns the reflective and recursive distancing discussed above, and more specifically, the setting up of this distancing as the condition of a process destined to favor a detachment from "things" that is sufficient to situate them in the position of "objectivity". It should be noted that this same process must be thought of as subtending the phenomenon of *scientific observation* from an epistemological perspective. Indeed, it must be understood that the objective representation (*ob-jectum*, *adaequatio*, *Richtigkeit*, *aboutness*, etc.) is not a mistake of Platonic metaphysics or the Cartesian *cogito*; it is an event with an evolutionary advantage, born of a joint action: on the one hand, of the need to identify and emend the technical errors necessarily encountered through the material engagement[12] of *homo faber*, and on the other hand, of the onset of verbal articulated language qua *specialization* of the work of profiling and articulating, spacing and segmenting, already performed by the hyper-activism of imagination for hundreds of thousands of years.

It is by no means necessary to suppose that this very function of imagination, as an immediate forerunner of language, should have somehow escaped the emergent and co-evolutionary process that Malafouris in particular elucidates.[13] Over time, in fact, imagination gradually achieved a self-consciousness of its articulatory function, thanks to a long series of externalized experiences, as one can clearly see in the earliest practices of *intentional inscription*, such as those found in the Blombos Cave dating back eighty thousand years. Here, imagination was at work in a hand as it traced lines or carved spots, testing itself out qua potential proto-writing and proto-language: this practice would later be taken up in the production of a real mnemo-technique (d'Errico, Colagé [2018]). By virtue of this technique, it would be possible to implement the similarly externalized formation of the operative concept of number (Malafouris [2013]: 106-16).

5. REFLECTIVE DISTANCING AND LINGUISTIC ARTICULATION

But the second point is even more important, as evidenced by the fact that it can be considered a specific characteristic of *homo sapiens*, whereas the previously discussed scriptural phenomena are also observable in other families of hominins. On this specific point, André Leroi-Gourhan (1964), an author respected by both Ingold and Malafouris, provides a guideline that is as valuable as it is neglected by the specialized literature. Leaving aside the fact that the periodization and terminology used by Leroi-Gourhan has been substantially reconfigured by the most recent discoveries in the field, the theoretical import of the basic guideline that he provides us stands largely independent of any potential weight attached to its precise dating. The guideline is the following: in a timeframe attributable to the Middle Paleolithic period, «a very important evolution in the field of lithic tools» took place, whereby the block originally used as material for obtaining an artifact (e.g. an amygdala, i.e. a bifacial flint) began to be exploited to produce

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belongs to the theoretical terminology of semiotics (Greimas, Courtés [1982]).

[12] The derived and corrective character of the scientific attitude, with regard to technical creativity, is one of the guidelines in Georges Canguilhem's thought. For an introduction to this thinker, see Fiorenza Lupi & Stefano Pilotto (2019).

[13] «The knapper first thinks *through* and *with* the stone before being able to think *about* the stone and hence about himself as a conscious and reflective agent» (Malafouris [2013]: 176).

a certain number of splinters, which would in turn be reworked to obtain diversified tools. According to Leroi-Gourhan, this implies that:

> *the tool function had shifted from the mass initially intended to constitute the tool to the flake derived from that mass. […] We shall see later that this process is generally characteristic of the more developed industries. In other words, from being the tool itself the lump of stone has become a source of tools (as we shall see, an additional stage was to be introduced from the Upper Paleolithic onward). The blade or flake would then no longer constitute the tool but would be divided into sections providing the starting point for the making of the tool proper. (Leroi-Gourhan [1964]: 100)*

In this text, Leroi-Gourhan speaks of a "shift". However, in a highly significant essay, Emilio Garroni (1977) argues that the transformative process that Leroi-Gourhan describes should be recognized as a full-fledged discontinuity[14]. Indeed, it was not just a question of the enhancement of previous productive protocols but of the emergence of a new component, identifiable with the assumption of a specific role by the reflective and recursive trait of material engagement, which I traced above to the configuration and imposing of a process of objectifying distancing. It means that an original element was introduced into the radical and equal interaction of material engagement: this element was able to redirect material engagement toward completely new evolutionary trends, thanks in part to the decisive processes of *exaptation* concerning the phonatory and auditory apparatus (Lieberman [2007], Tattersall [2016], Cox [2018]). In short, only on this basis was it possible for something like an articulated and denotative proto-language to appear.

If this account is coherent, the problems raised at the beginning of this article could be reconsidered in a new light. Here, I must limit myself to making a list and save a proper discussion for another time.

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[14] Several paleoanthropologists agree about this specific discontinuity, on the basis of many other convergent clues. For all of them, see Ian Tattersall (2008, 2016).

More precisely, on the question of whether the appearance of articulated language had the character of a "sudden irruption" or a long and gradual development, one could answer that a gradual development was doubtlessly necessary, so as to allow for a reflective and distancing element to arise within the material engagement of the *homo sapiens* (and of it alone). This element would find, in phonic articulation, an extraordinarily effective medium for actualizing the work of profiling and segmentation imputed to imagination. As a consequence, we should answer the second question as follows: the phonic-articulatory trait should be considered decisively discriminating with respect to the resources of other systems of organization on the plane of expression, such as expressive-gestural ones. After all, it is clear that only once language had emerged could a large part of its articulatory properties be easily projected onto the structure of gestural communication. As to the third question, we should acknowledge that the semantic-denotative properties of enunciation, that is, its "objectivity" or "aboutness", are determining for the characterization of this technology. Furthermore, while language is integrated with other pragmatic, communicational and expressive properties, recognizable in the forms of pre-linguistic communication, it *radically reorganizes these properties*. This point leads us to another question, the one that I raised first, which now returns in all its theoretical scope and complexity. It is precisely what I called the «degree of self-awareness governed by an articulated and denotative language» that now appears incomparable with the one assigned to other communicational and performative practices governed by imagination, not only on account of the degree of grammatical formalization attainable by the subtlety of this self-awareness, but also, and above all, because language supplies the specific form of metadiscursivity to the recursion already at hand in material engagement. As Emile Benveniste (1966, 1974) in particular underlines, articulated language is indeed the only semiotic system that is able to consider itself – that is, its constituent units and enunciations – as the object of enunciation.

Without a doubt, in the end, the incredible technological innovation that articulated language represented would go on to reorganize the "role play" of material engagement in a profound and irreversible way, by introducing the absolutely original element of a denotative semantics. The latter, of course, is a very powerful device, albeit one that depends fundamentally on the work of imagination: only this work can supply it with objectual meanings – *Bedeutungen*, as Kant calls them (1781) – and indeterminate senses (Kant [1790], Garroni [2005], Montani [2017]). In other words, once language had been invented and had assumed its articulatory properties, the inexhaustible synthetic movement of imagination alone ensured the continued rootedness of the linguistic units in the world of praxis, together with the extension and reorganization of the latter. This point is hardly discussed in the studies examined here, perhaps in part as a consequence of a conception of articulated language aligned with what is essentially a conventionalist interpretation. It happens not only that language took over, with an unparalleled power, the articulatory work ("profiling", "segmentation") previously entrusted to imagination, as well as to the scriptural events that I briefly discussed above, but also that this work empowered many other actors in the "role play" of material engagement (Gahrn-Andersen [2017]). Some of these actors may be undesirable and uncanny. I refer in particular to the irresistible tendency of recursion to behave, and understand itself, not only in terms of metadiscursivity but also in terms of *self-reference.*

In other words, it is as if language were capable of forging the contribution of imagination (in the very broad sense given here) and autonomously providing for the constitution and reorganization of the order of reference. It is not by chance that this process, reminiscent of autistic pathologies, evinces parallels with other symbolic practices that have a significant historical bearing. In late modernity, for instance, the sphere of images, media (Manovich [2001, 2014]), and the arts (Danto [1986], Andina [2012], Velotti [2012]) has concerned itself with phenomena of this sort

in a rather characteristic way, and – somewhat convergently (Cecchi [2013]) – so has the economic sphere based on the tools of financial capitalism: one need only think of the intrinsic self-reference of so-called "futures". In our time, in short, material engagement is likely to unfold in a field so deeply permeated by technological mediation (Grusin [2017], Cecchi, Feyles, Montani [2018]) that a general reorganization of its model of understanding seems to be in order: in the new model, the crucial question of articulated language and its effects on material culture – at times controversial and at times even enigmatic – should be granted its rightful place.

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Corpus sive cultura. Nota su tecnica e corpi

Carmine Di Martino

Abstract. Even before turning to instruments, we already have a technical-cultural body, since our body always keeps track of the action of technology and culture. It is indeed thanks to both technology and culture that our body had become what it is, that is a human body, meaning a sort of biological paradox - a body unfit for survival, unspecialized and unadapted, but extremely plastic. This does not imply that the action that current technologies have upon our bodies, with their extraordinary capabilities of manipulation, does not have any consequences or cause concerns. We do nothing alien to our "nature" when we expose ourselves to the action of technology, as well as we do nothing alien to us when we set limits to technology, and not only to it. The continuous process of self-limitation is in fact a necessity for men. And setting limits to the possible (and to what can be done) is also the only way to safeguard it.

Keywords. Technology; culture, body; return effect; responsibility.

1. LA MARCIA DELLA TECNOLOGIA

Lo sviluppo della tecnica rappresenta un tratto essenziale, ad un tempo affascinante e inquietante, dell'attuale scenario mondiale. Pensiamo per esempio al rapporto tra l'uomo e i nuovi dispositivi tecnologici, tra i nostri corpi e le manipolazioni a cui essi possono venire sottoposti, tra l'ambiente naturale e gli interventi artificiali che ne hanno modificato e ne modificano profondamente la fisionomia. Qualunque prospettiva si abbia, è difficile non cogliere relativamente a tale rapporto, per come esso si è configurato negli ultimi decenni, un certo carico di problemi. I piani sono molteplici e assai diversi tra loro. Possiamo qui solo menzionarne alcuni: la discussione sull'Antropocene, con i connessi interrogativi sui tempi di sopravvivenza del pianeta Terra ovvero sulla possibilità di un suo collasso imminente; gli avanzamenti dell'ingegneria genetica e della bio-ingegneria, con implicazioni di vario genere, alcune delle quali vanno sotto il titolo di trans-umano o post-umano; i progressi dell'intelligenza artificiale, accompagnati da grandi ambizioni e da altrettanto grandi allarmi, per esempio relativi alla possibile incontrollabilità dei poteri delle macchine; lo sviluppo straordinariamente

efficace e pervasivo delle tecnologie comunicative e informazionali, che, poste al servizio del neuro-marketing, ci stanno trasformando, connessione dopo connessione, in consumatori telecomandati (la sinergia tra le scoperte neuro-scientifiche sui processi cognitivo-emotivi e l'algoritmo PageRank ci profila senza sosta, plasmando i nostri desideri e predeterminando le nostre scelte). Sono solo accenni e suggestioni. Il dibattito intorno a questi temi è molto ricco e, come si può immaginare, la prima pagina è occupata soprattutto dalle posizioni estreme, quelle degli opposti fronti di apocalittici da una parte e apologeti dall'altra. Ma proprio in tale polarizzazione si mostra la nostra insufficienza, relativa tanto a un pensiero della tecnica quanto a un pensiero dell'umano.

Pensare l'essenza della tecnica. Questo sembrava a Martin Heidegger il problema decisivo per la filosofia del ventesimo secolo. Vale ancora per noi? Sì, ma esso non può a nostro avviso venire affrontato nei termini heideggeriani: essi non ci consentono di cogliere il fenomeno ad una sufficiente e concreta profondità. Heidegger, è vero, ci invita a non farci catturare dalla concezione antropologico-strumentale della tecnica, cioè a non fare della tecnica una questione semplicemente morale, di usi adeguati o inadeguati dei suoi prodotti, a non intenderla come un semplice mezzo in vista di fini o come una mera attività dell'uomo. Ma quando egli afferma che l'essenza della tecnica non è nulla di tecnico, poiché essa è un «modo del disvelamento» (un modo di dispiegarsi dell'orizzonte di manifestazione dell'ente) che precede e rende possibile (anche) l'azione tecnica e che non dipende da decisioni di singoli o di gruppi, questo non fa compiere alcun passo nella comprensione del senso originario – costituente e performativo – della tecnica. Heidegger è catturato da una visione "metafisica" (storico-destinale) della tecnica, che ci propone due grandi epoche, quella della tecnica antica (*techne*) e della tecnica moderna (*Ge-stell*), della "pro-duzione" e della "provocazione", come esiti di rispettivi invii destinali dell'essere e non di escogitazioni dell'uomo.

Heidegger risale dunque alle radici platoniche della tecnica, ossia alla *techne*, per mostrare che originariamente essa non significa fabbricare o approntare qualcosa, ma indica quell'atteggiamento conoscitivo che coglie l'ente nella luce dell'*idea* e si dispone così a dominarlo (a manipolarlo in un modo peculiare). In tale cornice, la tecnica moderna rappresenta l'incarnazione conclamata e culminante della vocazione al dominio (una vocazione implicitamente nichilistica) della *techne* greca. Nel modo del disvelamento che ci concerne oggi e che Heidegger chiama, appunto, *Ge-stell*, impianto, imposizione, provocazione, pretesa, sfruttamento violento, e che comporta la riduzione della natura a fondo impiegabile, si evidenzia nei suoi risultati estremi un seme di violenza e di dominio che appartiene all'alba della razionalità occidentale. A cominciare dalla *techne* platonica, l'atteggiamento teoretico-obbiettivante verso l'ente prende il posto del *thaumazein*, dello stupore, che caratterizza il rapporto originario dell'uomo greco con la *physis*, con la presenza delle cose, con la totalità dell'ente, inaugurando così un trattamento dell'ente che si incammina nella direzione del soggiogamento della Terra.

Questa concezione heideggeriana, con tutte le sue innegabili profondità e con i suoi salutari risvolti antimoralistici, non porta tuttavia molto lontano sotto il profilo di una concreta comprensione della tecnica e della sua azione, del suo rapporto con l'umano. Se si parla dell'uomo, di quel vivente che noi stessi siamo, dotato di un certo corpo, con una certa conformazione, capace di certe prestazioni, emotivamente comprendente e parlante, la tecnica non può essere intesa come qualcosa che viene ad aggiungersi dal di fuori, a contaminare o a corrompere un rapporto col mondo che si sarebbe potuto mantenere nella sua originaria e pre-tecnica purezza. L'uomo non ha la tecnica fuori di sé, tanto se la si pensa heideggerianamente come un determinato atteggiamento conoscitivo verso l'ente (fondato in un «modo del disvelamento») quanto se la si pensa, più comunemente, come un mezzo in vista di fini e come una attività dell'uomo.

Non vi è da una parte l'uomo e dall'altra la tecnica. Non si tratta, però, semplicemente di concepire il rapporto fra essi come una necessità a poste-

riori. L'affermazione che l'uomo ha bisogno della tecnica poiché il suo corpo, sprovvisto delle opportune capacità di difesa e di offesa, deve dotarsi di strumenti artificiali per affrontare la sfida della sopravvivenza non è sufficiente a farci comprendere il senso della tecnica e può addirittura fuorviarci. Anche quando interpretiamo la relazione tra uomo e tecnica come una necessità in vista della sopravvivenza possiamo infatti continuare a pensare il rapporto tra i due poli nei termini di una originaria esteriorità o di una contrapposizione.

Ciò che qui vorremmo mostrare è che la tecnica non si aggiunge all'uomo, al suo organismo, al suo corpo, dall'esterno, *nemmeno* come indispensabile ausilio alla sopravvivenza, ma inerisce essenzialmente al suo stesso costituirsi, al suo divenire "umano". La tecnica non è separabile né dall'accidentato percorso dell'ominazione (filogenesi) né da quello della umanizzazione (ontogenesi) degli individui appartenenti alla specie *Homo sapiens*.

2. RINUNCIARE AL "DIFETTO D'ORIGINE"

Nel panorama filosofico degli ultimi decenni non sono mancate notevoli riflessioni sul tema della tecnica. Esse hanno ripensato e condotto a una nuova profondità ciò che era già apparso all'inizio del secolo scorso ad opera della nascente antropologia filosofica: «La tecnica è vecchia quanto l'uomo», essa «è insita nell'essenza stessa dell'uomo», scrive per esempio Arnold Gehlen (1957: 32-33). Viene in primo piano l'essere essenzialmente tecnico dell'uomo. Tra gli apporti più recenti spicca per consapevolezza filosofica quello di Bernard Stiegler. Ci riferiamo qui in particolare al primo volume di *La Technique e le Temps. La faute d'Epiméthée*, in cui, rileggendo il mito di Prometeo e di Epimeteo, Stiegler sottolinea l'originaria interdipendenza dell'uomo e della tecnica. Il mito di Prometeo e di Epimeteo non va interpretato come un mito dell'origine, ma del «difetto d'origine», un difetto assolutamente necessario («*un défaut qu'il faut*»). La dimenticanza di Epimeteo nel procurare agli uomini le qualità specifiche e i mezzi necessari per sopravvivere provoca il dono da parte di Prometeo della perizia tecnica e del fuoco, che consente agli esseri umani di vivere sulla terra: la tecnica si rivela perciò come una compensazione originaria, costitutiva dell'umanità, di un difetto d'origine. In virtù di tale difetto l'uomo si rivela come essenzialmente bisognoso di protesi per esistere – per sopravvivere, socializzare, esprimersi ecc. –, è costretto a vivere mediante strumenti che suppliscono alle sue mancanze e lo conducono oltre sé.

Ciò che Stiegler intende affermare, sulla scorta della ricerca paleoantropologica di André Leroi-Gourhan, è che il processo di ominazione incontra la tecnica sin dagli inizi, o meglio, come il suo stesso inizio. Egli scrive significativamente:

> *La comparsa dell'uomo è la comparsa della tecnica* […]. *Leroi-Gourhan dice in effetti che è lo strumento, ossia la techne, che inventa l'uomo, e non l'uomo che inventa la tecnica. O ancora: l'uomo si inventa nella tecnica inventando lo strumento –* «esteriorizzandosi» *tecno-logicamente. Ora, l'uomo è qui* «l'interno»: *non esiste esteriorizzazione che non designi un movimento dall'interno verso l'esterno. Tuttavia, l'interno è inventato da questo movimento: non può perciò precederlo. Interno ed esterno si costituiscono di conseguenza attraverso un movimento che inventa, al tempo stesso, l'uno e l'altro: un movimento in cui si inventano l'uno nell'altro, come se vi fosse una maieutica tecno-logica di ciò che si chiama l'uomo. (Stiegler [1994]: 152)*

È chiara, dal passo appena citato, l'asserzione dell'essenziale dipendenza di ominazione e tecnica, intese – queste ultime – come i due lati di uno stesso movimento, in cui nessuno dei due precede l'altro e in cui ciascuno concorre alla emergenza dell'altro.

A fronte della decisa proposta di una «tecnicità originaria», tuttavia, il lessico (di ascendenza derridiana) del «difetto d'origine» lascia sussistere sullo sfondo, malgrado tutto, una prospettiva teorica all'interno della quale la tecnica appare come la «compensazione» di un *deficit*, di un difetto, cioè come un rimedio o un «supplemento» destinato a rispondere a posteriori a una mancanza che si trova già là, come un appello ad essere colmata.

L'ottica stiegleriana, certo, impedisce di attribuire alla tecnica il senso, che aveva in Heidegger, di contaminazione di un originario o di contrapposizione a esso, ma, proprio in virtù della semantica del «difetto» e del «supplemento», essa mantiene in vita un altro senso: quello della compensazione di una incompletezza, del rimedio a una sprovvedutezza originaria. Ciò comporta, nonostante le dichiarazioni in senso contrario e al di là delle intenzioni dell'autore, il rimanere nell'orbita di una concezione dell'uomo come l'essere originariamente «carente» e della tecnica come una necessaria risposta a tale carenza.

Quella della carenza è una prospettiva che ha avuto una certa importanza nell'antropologia filosofica. Essa non consente però di cogliere il senso originario della tecnica e la co-appartenenza di ominazione e tecnica. Per pensare in maniera più radicale il ruolo della tecnica – in accordo, crediamo, con l'intento della riflessione stiegleriana – occorre abbandonare il paradigma del "difetto d'origine" e in un certo senso rovesciarlo. Si tratterebbe, in questo senso, per usare ancora il lessico derridiano familiare a Stiegler, di spingere fino al suo punto estremo la logica della supplementarietà, così come Jacques Derrida ce la propone nel contesto di una discussione sul segno: «Qui appare – egli scrive – la strana struttura del supplemento: una possibilità produce a ritardo ciò cui è detta aggiungersi» (Derrida [1967]: 128). Tradotto nei termini del nostro problema questo significa: il fare tecnico, l'uso di strumenti artificiali, produce a ritardo la carenza (fisiologica e neuro-psichica) a cui "è detto aggiungersi", a cui cioè si presume risponda o ponga rimedio. Occorre pensare, allora, riprendendo il mito citato e in una sorta di inversione, che è il dono di Prometeo a produrre la mancanza lasciata sussistere da Epimeteo, rispetto a cui si misura la sua dimenticanza. In questa logica, il supplemento, la protesi, non interviene a rimediare a qualcosa che la precede nella forma di un *deficit*, di un inadattamento: il *deficit* è piuttosto il risultato della supplenza. Il supplemento non supplisce, dunque, bensì produce la carenza che sembrerebbe chiamato a compensare. Con ciò, naturalmente, il concetto di supplemento è spinto fino alla sua autocancellazione, fino a richiedere la sua stessa sostituzione, e la carenza perde la sua patente di originarietà: essa si mostra, nell'ottica della struttura del supplemento derridianamente concepita, come ciò che è prodotto «a ritardo» dalla compensazione che sembrerebbe deputata a soccorrerla.

3. IL DIS-ADATTAMENTO DEI CORPI

È precisamente il rovesciamento del paradigma del difetto d'origine (l'idea cioè di una causalità che va dalla mancanza originaria alla compensazione tecnica) uno degli assi principali dell'opera di Paul Alsberg, *L'enigma dell'umano*, del 1922, una fonte a lungo oscurata e spesso fraintesa della antropologia filosofica primonovecentesca. Si deve a Peter Sloterdijk (2001), che si avvale del prezioso lavoro di rielaborazione di Dieter Claessens (1993), il merito di avere riportato l'attenzione su quest'opera e sulla fecondità della sua idea centrale. È stato Alsberg, osserva Sloterdijk,

> *a porre i fondamenti essenziali per una teoria dell'evoluzione umana. Alsberg riconobbe il meccanismo chiave dell'antropogenesi in quella che egli chiama la "liberazione dai limiti corporei". Si tratta di un concetto che coglie il punto critico delle possibilità storico naturali dell'evoluzione culturale; con il suo aiuto possiamo mostrare come possa venire pensata la storia naturale della presa di distanza dagli ambienti naturali. (Sloterdijk [2001]: 149)*

L'intento di Alsberg è quello di gettare luce sulla differenza tra viventi umani e non umani e quindi sull'ominazione, ritenendo insufficienti tutte le spiegazioni sino ad allora fornite della modalità di evoluzione che conduce alla apparizione del genere *Homo* prima e della specie *Homo sapiens* poi. Dall'interno della cornice darwiniana, egli cerca di identificare un principio evolutivo che sappia rendere conto adeguatamente del processo di ominazione, facendo in tal modo compiere alla teoria evoluzionistica stessa un deciso passo in avanti. Dando per assodato infatti che non ci si possa affidare a ipotesi che ignorino la ricerca

scientifica e che si sottraggano al quadro stabilito dalla teoria evoluzionistica darwiniana, non ci si può tuttavia accontentare, secondo Alsberg, di una teoria meramente "incrementale" dell'ominazione, che riconduca l'apparizione dell'uomo al semplice incremento delle caratteristiche proprie di certi primati: per quella via non si può giungere a una chiarificazione soddisfacente del fenomeno che si ha di mira. Occorre percorrere altre strade.

È stato proprio Darwin, sottolinea Alsberg, a portare l'attenzione sul nesso tra l'organizzazione corporea degli animali e il loro ambiente, suscitando così, indirettamente, osservazioni comparative relative alla struttura della corporeità umana. Possiamo riconoscere con piena evidenza come tutti gli animali si siano adattati attraverso il corpo a ciò che li circonda e come la lotta per l'esistenza abbia fatto emergere i differenti meccanismi di adattamento e protezione. Nell'animale, scrive Alsberg, «tutto è adattamento del corpo» (Alsberg [1937]: 74). Nell'essere umano le cose stanno assai diversamente.

Il punto di partenza delle considerazioni alsberghiane è l'osservazione delle caratteristiche del corpo umano: a esso «*mancano tutte le garanzie necessarie per la sua sopravvivenza e per la conservazione della specie*, sulle quali può invece fare affidamento con certezza l'animale grazie al suo corpo perfettamente adattato alla natura» (Alsberg [1937]: 74). Va detto però che, se anche i predecessori degli esseri umani avessero avuto la stessa sprovvedutezza organica, essi avrebbero perso la scommessa della sopravvivenza: non avrebbero potuto provvedere a loro stessi e nemmeno assicurare la prosecuzione della specie. Bisogna dunque ipotizzare che, come tutti gli altri animali, essi fossero stati completamente adattati alla natura. Da ciò deriva che, nel corso della loro evoluzione, tali esseri abbiano «in qualche modo *perso* il meccanismo fisico di difesa di un tempo» (Alsberg [1937]: 75).

È qui che si apre lo spazio per le teorie della carenza. Ci si è infatti spinti a pensare che, nel corso del suo sviluppo, l'essere umano abbia *dapprima* perso la sua capacità difensiva e quindi, a causa di un tale stato di carenza, sia stato sollecitato, se non costretto, all'invenzione di nuove e compensative maniere di difendersi (si tratta di una direzione che va da Herder a Gehlen, passando per Nietzsche sul versante filosofico e per Bolk e Portmann su quello scientifico). Per Alsberg, questa ipotesi porta tuttavia in sé un controsenso. Infatti, se le capacità di adattamento e di difesa non fossero state *dapprima* adeguatamente sostituite, il periodo di indebolimento organico avrebbe certamente comportato l'estinzione dei primi ominini. Per tale motivo, le teorie della carenza sono state talvolta accompagnate dall'ipotesi di una nicchia ecologica protetta, priva di predatori, una sorta di "paradiso terrestre", determinatosi per circostanze fortuite e per un certo tempo, in cui le prime popolazioni di ominini poterono trascorrere un periodo di transizione, in attesa di maturare possibilità alternative di difesa e di adattamento. Ma tale congettura, secondo Alsberg, costringe a supporre un uomo prima dell'uomo, un essere umano delle origini già straordinariamente intelligente e avanzato, in grado di escogitare pressoché d'improvviso soluzioni tecniche atte a compensare la mancanza di difese organiche. Egli la ritiene perciò del tutto improbabile e in definitiva insostenibile.

Considerando le condizioni di sopravvivenza di tutti gli esseri viventi sulla terra, l'unica interpretazione plausibile è che, in ogni fase della sua evoluzione, al pari di tutti gli altri viventi, l'essere umano si sia adattato alla natura circostante e si sia equipaggiato nel migliore dei modi per sostenere la sua lotta per l'esistenza. Se si vuole rendere conto della attuale e particolare condizione dell'uomo, in quanto essere sprovvisto degli adattamenti corporei richiesti per sopravvivere, bisogna allora formulare l'ipotesi che esso abbia realizzato l'indispensabile capacità di adattamento e di difesa in altra maniera e che a motivo di ciò non abbia più avuto bisogno dei meccanismi fisici di adattamento e di protezione ereditati dai suoi antenati animali. Tali meccanismi, per via del loro mancato uso, si sono poi progressivamente deteriorati attraverso una graduale regressione. È dunque recisamente in virtù della acquisizione di altri mezzi di difesa e di resistenza che, in un secondo momento, l'organizzazione corporea dell'essere umano ha potuto indebolirsi.

Ma – ed è questo il punto decisivo della teoria alsberghiana –, poiché i meccanismi alternativi di protezione dell'essere umano non si trovano all'interno della sua corporeità, essi non possono che trovarsi fuori di essa. Di qui la conclusione che qualifica la prospettiva di Alsberg: sono stati gli strumenti artificiali a provocare l'indebolimento del corpo e non il contrario, come invece afferma la teoria della carenza, che interpreta la produzione dello strumento come compensazione, cioè come conseguenza del deperimento del corpo o del suo mancato sviluppo. Gli *strumenti artificiali* si sono dunque assunti il compito dell'adattamento alla natura «*al posto* del corpo» (Alsberg [1937]: 77). Nella piena osservanza del precetto darwiniano, con l'essere umano si verifica allora un rovesciamento della tendenza rintracciabile nell'evoluzione animale: non si va verso un sempre maggiore adattamento del corpo alle condizioni ambientali esterne, ma verso un suo sempre maggiore disadattamento, disimpegno, ossia verso una sostituzione di funzioni e azioni del corpo mediante la produzione, l'uso e lo sviluppo di strumenti artificiali. Si annunciano qui due direzioni antitetiche dell'adattamento: somatica, nell'animale; esosomatica, nell'essere umano. «Per l'*animale*», scrive Alsberg, «il *corpo* è tutto» (Alsberg [1937]: 78), perciò l'evoluzione animale si muove verso il massimo grado di adattamento del corpo. Per l'uomo le cose stanno al contrario. L'evoluzione che concerne l'uomo «si muove in maniera altrettanto mirata verso l'utilizzo, il perfezionamento e l'accrescimento dello *strumento artificiale*. Perciò "tutto attorno" all'essere umano, indipendentemente dal corpo e fuori di esso, fiorisce un regno della *tecnica* fondato su se stesso, mentre il corpo stesso, sollevato attraverso lo strumento dal suo compito originario di adattamento alla natura, regredisce» (Alsberg [1937]: 78).

Ciò spiegherebbe come mai i corpi dei viventi non umani e dei viventi umani presentino, in rapporto all'ambiente, caratteristiche strutturali diametralmente opposte: perfettamente equipaggiati e adatti i primi, sprovveduti e inetti i secondi. L'adattamento esosomatico darebbe luogo perciò a una regressione del corpo: in proporzione a quan-to l'onere dell'adattamento all'ambiente si trasferisce sul conto degli strumenti artificiali, si ingenera un conseguente disadattamento del corpo. Si stabilisce, cioè, un «evidente parallelismo» (Alsberg [1937]: 77) tra progresso tecnico e regressione corporea. Corrispondentemente allo svolgimento dei compiti dell'adattamento mediante strumenti esosomatici, si produce una liberazione del corpo, un disimpegno di funzioni e di organi, con conseguenti trasformazioni somatiche in direzione di forme umane. «Nel corso della sua evoluzione», scrive Alsberg, «l'animale ha perfezionato il corpo; all'inverso, nel corso della sua evoluzione l'essere umano ha disattivato il corpo» (Alsberg [1937]: 78). Tale opposizione (perfezionamento/disattivazione) corrisponde ai due opposti principi evolutivi: «Il principio evolutivo dell'animale è il principio dell'"adattamento del corpo (*Körperanpassung*)"; il principio evolutivo dell'essere umano è quello della "disattivazione del corpo attraverso strumenti artificiali (*Körperausschaltung mittels künstlicher Werkzeuge*)"» (Alsberg [1937]: 79).

4. L'AUTONOMIA DELLO STRUMENTO

Ciò che fa da ostacolo a una genuina comprensione del principio evolutivo dell'adattamento esosomatico ora richiamato è, secondo Alsberg, una «erronea interpretazione del concetto di strumento» (Alsberg [1937]: 83). Il principale fraintendimento è costituito dalla tendenza a concepire lo strumento come mera amplificazione o estensione delle capacità corporee. Si è insistito, a suo dire, in maniera fuorviante sulla equiparazione tra «strumenti» e «organi»: in tale prospettiva i primi utensili non farebbero che prolungare il corpo. Il bersaglio dichiarato di Alsberg è la filosofia della tecnica di Ernst Kapp (1887), che considera gli strumenti una «proiezione organica»: tutto sarebbe già nel corpo e gli strumenti proietterebbero semplicemente gli organi corporei fuori del corpo. Vi sarebbe insomma una proiezione inconscia dell'organismo negli strumenti tecnici. Una interpretazione analoga, che non poteva essere conosciuta da Alsberg, è quella di Leroi-Gourhan,

il quale, ne *Il gesto e la parola*, parla dell'utensile come di una «vera e propria secrezione del corpo e del cervello degli antropiani» (Leroi-Gourhan [1964]: 109). Sicché, al paleoantropologo francese sembra ovvio «applicare» agli «organi artificiali» le stesse norme degli «organi naturali». Ciò che, secondo Alsberg, è contestabile nella concezione dello strumento come «proiezione d'organo» (e, aggiungiamo qui, come «secrezione del corpo») è la sua intrinseca tendenza a biologizzare la tecnica, a portare gli strumenti dal lato del corpo, a incorporarli, e a non distinguere tra organi e strumenti: ciò impedisce di comprendere il rapporto effettivamente intercorrente tra lo strumento esosomatico e il corpo, che non è di mera estensione, di semplice prolungamento, bensì di sostituzione, anzi, più precisamente, di sostituzione disattivante. Nella prospettiva della «proiezione d'organo» viene cioè occultata la specifica e determinante azione del mezzo artificiale sul corpo – vi torneremo fra breve – e viene conseguentemente preclusa la comprensione del processo di ominazione, che ha propriamente a che fare con essa.

Serviamoci dell'esempio fornito da Alsberg. Il martello, assunto come prototipo dello strumento, risulterebbe, nell'ottica di Kapp, «un semplice *prolungamento* o *rafforzamento* del pugno» (Alsberg [1937]: 83). La prospettiva della «proiezione organica» potrebbe trovare in questo caso un supporto nel fatto che è il pugno a dirigere il martello e che l'effetto del martello può essere inteso «*come se* il pugno fosse prolungato e rafforzato». Ma, a ben vedere, il martello non appartiene al pugno né, soprattutto, offre una prestazione che potrebbe essere compiuta dal pugno: al contrario, il martello svolge il lavoro «al posto della mano», dunque sostituisce e «disattiva» la mano come tale. Il limite della teoria kappiana si evidenzia ancor meglio allorché consideriamo uno strumento tecnico moderno come un calcolatore. Qui ovviamente non potrebbe essere l'azione della mano che digita i tasti a venir prolungata o rafforzata, ma si potrebbe pensare che lo sia quella del cervello: è chiaro, invece, con ancora maggiore evidenza, che la macchina entra in funzione «al posto» del cervello, «disattivando» il cervello esattamente in

relazione alla specifica operazione del calcolare (come avviene oggi con i navigatori satellitari dei nostri *smartphone*, che sostituiscono e disattivano la nostra capacità di orientamento).

Si delinea dunque una diversa concezione dello strumento: esso è un mezzo per la disattivazione del corpo e può svolgere tale compito proprio in quanto si trova *fuori* del corpo, in una essenziale esteriorità e autonomia rispetto a esso. Se diciamo che lo strumento è un mezzo «artificiale», è proprio perché è «esosomatico» e agisce «al posto» del corpo. Può sembrare incongruo parlare di disattivazione corporea, dato che il corpo è coinvolto nella produzione e – nella gran parte dei casi – anche nell'uso dello strumento. Ma occorre opportunamente distinguere qui tra l'azione di fabbricazione e utilizzo dello strumento, che è compiuta dal corpo, e l'azione-operazione per la quale un certo strumento è creato e impiegato, che è realizzata in proprio da quest'ultimo. Il tipo di prestazione non dipende infatti dal grado di coinvolgimento del corpo, bensì dal grado di perfezionamento dello strumento. E, relativamente alla prestazione fornita, il corpo (in senso ampio: parti, organi, funzioni, processi) è sostituito e disattivato. Ciò risulta ancora più chiaro se prendiamo in considerazione le attuali tecnologie, il cui funzionamento si è largamente autonomizzato rispetto all'intervento umano ed è altamente disattivante.

La fabbricazione e l'utilizzazione di strumenti che lavorano al posto del corpo inaugura secondo Alsberg una via senza ritorno e una direzione in tutti i sensi decisiva. Lo strumento artificiale permette prestazioni che non potrebbero essere ottenute soltanto dal corpo e offre enormi vantaggi. Per quanto si dispieghi in tutte le sue potenzialità, l'organo corporeo rimane infatti all'interno dei confini predeterminati dalla sua struttura, mentre lo strumento è suscettibile di uno sviluppo imparagonabilmente più ampio, se non illimitato, e porta il corpo oltre i suoi limiti strutturali (non possiamo volare con il corpo, ma possiamo farlo con gli aerei e in modo da superare tutte le capacità organiche di volo di altri viventi; con gli strumenti artificiali possiamo ottenere, in rapporto alle pressioni ambientali, risultati del tutto preclu-

si al nostro corpo e a qualunque altro corpo). In sintesi, se si vuole intendere il principio evolutivo dell'essere umano e il ruolo della tecnica nell'ominazione bisogna, secondo Alberg, sgombrare il campo da una equivoca concezione dello strumento, che lo assorbe nell'organo e ne fa un suo semplice potenziamento: «definisco *"organo"* una qualsiasi *parte*, anatomica o funzionale, *appartenente alla struttura del corpo*, definisco invece *"strumento" un qualsiasi mezzo esosomatico (artificiale) con il quale si produce una disattivazione del corpo»* (Alsberg [1937]: 86). L'ambito degli strumenti è dunque essenzialmente distinto da quello degli organi ed è straordinariamente vasto: vi compaiono a giusto titolo tanto i ciottoli scheggiati degli ominini di due milioni di anni fa quanto gli *smartphone* di ultima generazione, il fuoco deliberatamente acceso e il linguaggio (di cui normalmente si tralascia la dimensione di "strumento"), ossia qualsiasi mezzo esosomatico atto a disattivare in qualche modo il corpo (e la parola è uno di questi).

5. EFFETTI DI RITORNO PRETERINTENZIONALI

Messo a fuoco il concetto alsberghiano di strumento, possiamo ora tornare sulla azione che esso esercita rispetto al corpo, completando gli accenni sopra compiuti. Dove conduce la sistematica utilizzazione di strumenti «al posto» del corpo? A una duplice liberazione: una liberazione *del* corpo, la quale implica correlativamente una singolare e specifica liberazione *dal* corpo (il termine impiegato da Alsberg, *Körperbefreiung*, contempla entrambi i significati). In primo luogo, lo strumento libera il corpo dall'onere dell'adattamento, sollevandolo dal compito di una reazione diretta alle sollecitazioni esterne, e soprattutto lo libera dai suoi limiti, dagli stretti confini delle sue possibilità strutturali (è ciò che inizia ad avvenire con l'uso sistematico del ciottolo scheggiato e si prolunga fino all'uso degli aerei, del telefono, dei computer ecc.). Tale liberazione *del* corpo comporta una corrispondente liberazione *dal* corpo,

vale a dire una sua trasformazione in direzione di quel «caratteristico stato di indigenza» che ha costituito la constatazione di partenza dell'analisi alsberghiana, ossia la carenza: il corpo subisce un processo di impoverimento, di perdita delle specializzazioni e delle capacità di difesa e protezione. Sostituito da strumenti artificiali incomparabilmente più efficienti, il corpo arretra, si ritira, non occupa più un ruolo centrale nell'adattamento, e si trova aperto a inedite possibilità di trasformazione. Alsberg afferma: «*L'animale sta sotto il principio evolutivo della "costrizione del corpo", l'essere umano sotto quello della "liberazione dal corpo"»* (Alsberg [1937]: 87).

In che consiste e come avviene questa seconda liberazione (*dal* corpo)? Se non vengono utilizzati, gli organi del corpo si atrofizzano e regrediscono, mentre con l'utilizzo essi si rafforzano e si perfezionano: questa è la regola generale richiamata da Alsberg. Disattivazione significa dunque regressione. Non solo, però. Essa significa anche progressione: la costante sollecitazione del corpo attraverso gli strumenti provoca infatti una modificazione fisiologica anche sul versante opposto. Prendiamo ad esempio la mano. Se consideriamo l'originaria capacità di brachiazione, essa subisce una regressione, diventando di gran lunga meno efficiente di quella di una scimmia. Se invece consideriamo la destrezza e la versatilità, essa acquisisce un notevole grado di perfezione, con possibilità di manipolazione uniche e completamente diverse da quelle dell'arto anteriore di una scimmia. Ovviamente, il concetto di perfezione ha qui esclusivamente legittimità in relazione allo strumento. Un altro organo con un'evidente tendenza regressivo-progressiva è il piede d'appoggio, che fa la sua comparsa grazie all'andatura eretta. Con l'uso sistematico degli strumenti, la capacità del piede di arrampicarsi sconta un drastico ridimensionamento (regressione), trasformandosi però in un solido organo d'appoggio (progressione). Anche in questo caso, l'acquisizione progressiva è tale soltanto in relazione all'utilizzo degli strumenti.

La disattivazione corporea conseguente all'uso degli strumenti plasma dunque il corpo in un intreccio mobile di regressione e progressione, con

l'atrofizzazione di alcuni organi e funzioni, come la dentatura o la brachiazione, e il potenziamento di altri. Scrive Alsberg: «La forma del corpo umano si rivela così come una regolata mescolanza di formazioni progredienti e regredienti. Nella sua dipendenza monocausale dallo strumento questa mescolanza è però la migliore dimostrazione che si possa pensare per la nostra tesi *che l'evoluzione umana è stata unicamente determinata dallo strumento» (*Alsberg [1937]: 89). Pur con una certa unilateralità o ingenuità, dovuta anche allo stato di avanzamento della ricerca nel suo tempo, Alsberg illustra chiaramente, sebbene non lo teorizzi in questo modo, ciò che altrove abbiamo chiamato "tecnogenesi preterintenzionale dell'umano" (Di Martino [2017]: 105). Quando afferma che la carenza, lo stato di indigenza del corpo umano, è un «risultato» (Alsberg [1937]: 88) della disattivazione tecnica del corpo, ovvero «un effetto storico-evolutivo dell'uso di strumenti» (Alsberg [1937]: 92), egli mostra di aver perfettamente compreso la dinamica dell'"effetto di ritorno".

È alla luce di tale dinamica che viene operata la duplice messa in questione della teoria della carenza da una parte e del paradigma "incrementale" dall'altra. Sul primo lato, bisogna allora affermare non che l'uomo, essendo incapace di sopravvivere a causa della sua sprovvedutezza biologica, ha dovuto sviluppare la tecnica, ma, al contrario, che ha potuto divenire ciò che è, vale a dire un essere singolarmente dis-adattato e de-specializzato, e perciò straordinariamente plastico, proprio grazie alla tecnica, all'uso degli strumenti e al suo effetto retroattivo sull'organismo. In questo senso, non è solamente l'uomo che inventa la tecnica, ma, nella stessa misura e più originariamente, è la tecnica, l'uso degli strumenti, che inventa l'uomo. Per questo, sul secondo lato, non si può rendere conto, nel quadro della teoria dell'evoluzione, dell'apparizione dell'uomo se non si integra il genecentrismo classico, imperniato sul principio "mutazione-selezione", mediante il riconoscimento del ruolo attivo degli individui (dei loro comportamenti, delle loro attività, delle loro forme di vita) nell'evoluzione, nell'ottica – diremmo oggi – di un pluralismo eco-evolutivo e di una considerazione

del legame tra dimensione biologica e culturale-comportamentale (nella fattispecie, tecnico-culturale).

L'idea alsberghiana della «disattivazione del corpo attraverso strumenti artificiali», in cui è adombrato il principio genealogico dell'effetto di ritorno, si potrebbe esprimere oggi, in modo più compiuto e scientificamente fondato, nei termini della teoria della «costruzione di nicchia» di Olding-Smee (1988, 2003) e Laland (2003). Con essa si indicano quei processi in cui gli organismi, attraverso specifiche attività o comportamenti, giungono a modificare componenti importanti degli ambienti in cui vivono, dando luogo a cambiamenti che influenzano le pressioni selettive, le quali, una volta modificate, agiscono retroattivamente sugli organismi modificandoli (ciò non riguarda solo i nostri remoti antenati, ma tutti i viventi, sebbene per i primi il fenomeno abbia avuto proporzioni e conseguenze immensamente superiori). I processi di costruzione di nicchia intervengono sui fattori ecologici che sono alla base del meccanismo selettivo, mantenendo una certa autonomia rispetto alla selezione naturale, rappresentandone cioè non un semplice prodotto, bensì anche un agente modificatore. Non possiamo sviluppare qui questo tema, di cui ci siamo occupati più da vicino in altra sede (Di Martino [2019]).

Dal punto di vista filosofico e per i nostri scopi, decisivo è il principio dell'*effetto di ritorno*. L'uso degli strumenti – che sostituisce il corpo nei compiti dell'adattamento – produce effetti retroattivi sugli utenti, sui loro organismi, occasionando significative trasformazioni che vanno anzitutto nella direzione di una crescente plasticità fisiologica e neuropsichica, aprendo a sviluppi che non erano in alcun modo previsti o prevedibili nelle intenzioni degli utenti. Si tratta di conseguenze del tutto *preterintenzionali*, connesse a utilizzazioni orientate a tutt'altri scopi, sempre determinati (per esempio lanciare, tagliare, nutrirsi, coprirsi ecc., se pensiamo ai nostri lontani predecessori). È in queste trasformazioni – con la mescolanza regolata di regressioni-progressioni, per usare le parole di Alsberg – che si delinea l'ominazione. Que-

sto è il punto che si tratta di evidenziare: gli effetti dell'uso degli strumenti superano la prospettiva del *problem-solving*; l'agire tecnico, infatti, "torna indietro" sugli utenti modificandoli, comporta cioè *effetti retroattivi autoplastici e preterintenzionali* sui loro organismi. Ciò non avviene direttamente – come pensava Alsberg –, bensì indirettamente, nei termini cui abbiamo accennato: i comportamenti "tecnici" modificano l'ambiente, inducendo un rilassamento delle pressioni selettive esterne che interferisce con la dinamica dei processi evolutivi. Si innesca così un movimento ricorsivo: gli organismi modificano gli ambienti da cui sono a loro volta modificati.

6. IL CORPO-CULTURA

Se ci siamo serviti della prospettiva alsberghiana è per mettere in evidenza, anche nella sua scia, un nodo che ha a che fare con il titolo che ci siamo assegnati. Alla luce del principio genealogico dell'effetto di ritorno, in consonanza con il processo di costruzione di nicchia, il fare tecnico-culturale (la progettazione, la fabbricazione e l'utilizzazione di strumenti) si è annunciato come responsabile di conseguenze (autoplastiche e preterintenzionali) che interessano il livello bio-evolutivo e che portano in primo piano l'intreccio tra processi genetici legati alla selezione naturale e comportamenti tecnico-culturali. Si tratta di elementi inclusi nell'orizzonte della Sintesi Evoluzionistica Estesa attualmente in via di elaborazione, che si propone di integrare la teoria Standard della Evoluzione (Parravicini [2016]; Pievani [2016]). L'uso degli strumenti, l'adattamento attraverso il fare tecnico-strumentale, ritorna – in maniera mediata – sul corpo disattivandolo, liberandolo dai suoi limiti, perciò anche trasformandolo nel senso accennato. Vale a dire: l'uso degli strumenti non si aggiunge semplicemente all'organismo, né per compensarne le carenze permettendo a esso di sopravvivere né come una appendice che ne rafforzi occasionalmente le prestazioni (com'è per varie specie animali, che si servono all'occorrenza di strumenti, senza che su di essi ricadano gli oneri dell'adatta-

mento).

Al contrario, con l'assunzione della stazione eretta e la conseguente liberazione – che è più propriamente una istituzione – delle mani, l'uso degli strumenti configura un adattamento eso-somatico che tende a sostituire quello somatico e interviene nelle dinamiche di costituzione dei corpi, concorre al loro *divenire* umani. Con le parole di Alsberg: «nella forma del corpo umano si dovranno trovare, come legittima reazione all'utilizzo di strumenti, accanto alle manifestazioni di regresso accertate anche le rispettive nuove acquisizioni di tipo progressivo» (Alsberg [1937]: 88). Si tratta quindi di riconoscere una dimensione tecnica e culturale dell'ominazione, inseparabile dal piano bio-evolutivo: l'individuo umano, il suo corpo, viene emergendo e prendendo forma per una via che è anche «eso-somatica», grazie cioè agli strumenti tecnico-culturali e all'azione retroattiva che questi esercitano su di esso (è così che il cranio degli ominini si è ovalizzato, la loro faccia si è accorciata, i caratteri del volto si sono ingentiliti, i tempi di maturazione sono diventati più lenti, il volume e la plasticità del cervello si sono accresciuti, le attitudini socializzanti si sono sensibilmente incrementate ecc.).

Possiamo dunque parlare di una tecnogenesi del corpo. Vi è una costituzione "tecnica" e "culturale" del corpo che ci invita a pensare altrimenti il rapporto tra corpo e cultura, corpo e tecnica. Non vi è cioè il corpo umano "più" la tecnica o il corpo umano "più" la cultura, ma un corpo-tecnica o un corpo-cultura: è già tecnico, in se stesso, questo nostro corpo "naturale", al di qua di qualunque attuale ricorso a dispositivi tecnici e a strumenti culturali; la tecnica, la cultura, è infatti entrata nel corpo, nella formazione stessa della sua forma e, in questo preciso senso, non si aggiunge a esso dall'esterno. Siamo originariamente dei cyborg, prima ancora di considerare che molti organismi umani sono tenuti in vita da oggetti tecnologici (come le macchine per dialisi) oppure ospitano in se stessi protesi tecniche (da quelle dentarie ai bypass ecc.). Abbiamo un corpo tecnico-culturale prima di qualunque ricorso a strumenti, poiché è anzitutto il corpo stesso a essere "tecnico", "cultu-

rale", vale a dire a portare inscritta nella sua forma l'azione della tecnica e della cultura (Alsberg dedica in proposito un intero capitolo alla «retroazione del linguaggio sulla formazione del corpo»; Alsberg [1937]: 95), grazie alla quale esso è divenuto quello che è, un corpo umano, una sorta di paradosso biologico, inadatto alla sopravvivenza, de-specializzato e dis-adattato, eccezionalmente plastico. Bisognerebbe chiamare qui nuovamente in gioco la strana struttura del supplemento: «una possibilità produce a ritardo ciò cui è detta aggiungersi», impiegandola per significare la retroazione trasformatrice degli strumenti esosomatici e degli abiti tecnico-culturali su quei corpi a cui tali abiti e strumenti sono normalmente detti aggiungersi.

7. POLITICHE DEL LIMITE

Che non si debba parlare, quanto agli esseri umani, di "corpo + tecnica" o di "corpo + cultura", ma di "corpo-tecnica" o "corpo-cultura" dice qualcosa di particolarmente importante relativamente a un aspetto delle questioni sollevate all'inizio del nostro percorso sul rapporto tra l'uomo e la tecnica. Vale a dire: noi non facciamo niente di estraneo alla nostra "natura" quando ci esponiamo all'azione della tecnica, poiché tale esposizione ci ha caratterizzato originariamente, ha plasmato la forma stessa dei nostri corpi. L'irruzione della tecnica è già da sempre avvenuta, inaugura e accompagna quella deriva "neotenica" che caratterizza gli organismi umani, dando luogo alla nostra peculiarità fisiologica, neuropsichica e cognitivo-sociale (come abbiamo tentato di fare altrove, occorrerebbe sottolineare, tra le altre cose, l'inseparabilità di socialità e cultura, cioè di cooperazione, cura e tecnica, per evitare l'equivoco di una assolutizzazione della tecnica quale dimensione unica e isolabile del processo bio-tecno-culturale di ominazione: lo sviluppo di capacità tecnico-culturali è correlata in modo essenziale a un "surriscaldamento" della dimensione sociale e a una organizzazione di gruppo sempre più strutturata in senso cooperativo; Di Martino [2019]).

L'intrinseco carattere tecnico (o tecnogeno) dei corpi dei membri della specie *Homo sapiens* – che motiva l'espressione *corpus sive cultura* – non ci autorizza tuttavia in alcun modo a concludere che l'esposizione dei *nostri* corpi all'azione delle attuali tecnologie, con le loro straordinarie possibilità di manipolazione, non comporti problemi, non ci autorizza cioè a un atteggiamento ingenuamente apologetico né di disinvolta denegazione. Se in un certo senso la consapevolezza della "natura tecnica" dei corpi ci preserva dalle lusinghe degli apocalittici, non ci risparmia però i loro interrogativi, impedendoci di passare, armi e bagagli, dal lato degli apologeti. Alla luce di quanto detto riguardo alla "liberazione dai limiti corporei", alla de-specializzazione e plasticità che ci caratterizza, occorre sottolineare infatti che agli organismi "umani" appartiene anche una peculiare assenza di limiti, di prescrizioni istintuali proprie della specie, che implica la necessità di una (continua) autoposizione di limiti. Gehlen parla in proposito di «eccesso pulsionale» e identifica nelle «istituzioni» l'indispensabile argine al potenziale distruttivo di quell'eccesso. In analogia con ciò, vi è l'altra singolare e determinante assenza di limiti (che chiamiamo libertà), cioè la possibilità che l'uomo ha di scardinare le condizioni della propria esistenza, di venir meno a se stesso, di mettere in atto comportamenti distruttivi o "malvagi" (una possibilità che non appartiene agli altri viventi; un animale non può mai essere "malvagio", sebbene talvolta ci esprimiamo in questi termini, poiché non può uscire dai suoi "limiti": esso non può perpetrare ciò che noi definiamo "violenza", né tantomeno quella violenza assolutamente gratuita, puramente distruttrice, di cui gli esseri umani sono "capaci").

Raccordando i due ultimi rilievi, dobbiamo allora dire: gli uomini non fanno nulla di estraneo alla loro "natura" *sia* quando si espongono all'azione della tecnica *sia* quando pongono a essa, e non solo ad essa, dei limiti, dei confini. Il problema del limite, anzi, si pone necessariamente a "noi uomini" e con esso quello della responsabilità. Günther Anders lo rimette al centro a suo modo, in chiave apocalittica, denunciando il fatto che nell'epoca della terza rivoluzione industriale il poter-fare sia

diventato un dover-fare, la possibilità si sia tradotta in ingiunzione: «il possibile è quasi sempre accettato come obbligatorio, ciò che si può fare come ciò che si deve fare (…) Non solo ciò che si può fare si deve fare, ma anche ciò che si deve fare è ineluttabile» (Anders [1980]: 11). Tale denuncia costituisce un modo paradossale di sollevare il problema del limite e della responsabilità, nella forma di una rappresentazione della sua impossibilità: ma, nel momento stesso in cui è formulata, essa diviene attestazione della capacità del «no», del distanziamento e del poter-non-fare.

Che posizione prendere, dunque, rispetto alla fattibilità (trasformabilità, manipolabilità) tecnica che si rivolge oggi in modo nuovo ai *nostri* corpi (che pure sono originariamente tecnici nel senso detto), alle *nostre* identità? Quando, e dove, collocare un limite? Non ci inoltreremo ora in una discussione sul tema, ma ci limiteremo ad avanzare un principio generale: porre limiti al possibile (al fattibile) è anche l'unico modo di salvaguardarlo, di tenere aperto l'avvenire dell'uomo e del suo corpo tecnico.

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Aisthesis

Dal soggetto trascendentale al vivente umano. Corpo e artefatti in Helmuth Plessner

Roberto Redaelli

Abstract. The aim of this paper is to reconsider the relationship between living body and artefacts in the perspective of Helmuth Plessner's aesthesiology. According to the outcomes of Plessner's aesthesiology, I present two main theses: 1) artefacts are not created, but rather discovered (*entdeckt*) and expressed by human agency, and 2) the bodily dimension of the human being is the condition of the "discovery" of material and symbolic artefacts. To argue these theses I highlight a) the process of "somatisation" that engages the Kantian transcendental model of subject in Plessner's philosophical anthropology, b) Plessner's rejection of the Kantian profile of Uexküll's theory of Umwelt as an application of this transcendental model of subjectivity in the biological field, and c) the development in Plessner of a type of transcendental aesthetics, which can be linked with S. Crowell's recent theory of perception.

Keywords. Aesthesiology; Transcendental Aesthetics; Philosophical Anthropology; Living Body; Helmuth Plessner.

1. PLESSNER E IL NEOCRITICISMO. PER UNA CRITICA DEI SENSI

Gran parte della filosofia neokantiana ha assunto, nel corso del Novecento, la veste di filosofia astratta, apriorica, disancorata dal piano empirico-concreto, di cui ha indagato le condizioni di possibilità, posando ineluttabilmente lo sguardo oltre la sfera mondana. A tracciare tale immagine del neocriticismo ha di certo contribuito la nozione di soggetto trascendentale, quale soggettività disincarnata e sovraindividuale, astratta immagine del soggetto empirico. Con essa, infatti, la dimensione corporea, al pari di quella psichica, è introiettata, per così dire, ingoiata nell'alveo di un soggetto, la cui propria *Heimat* non riposa in seno al movimento proprio della vita[1], bensì su un piano formale, svuotato di un contenuto suo proprio. Tuttavia, accanto al predominio della coscienza trascendentale – predominio in gran parte motivato dall'intento di affrancare il soggetto d'indagi-

[1] Alla vita e alle sue categorie si riferì, in modo particolare, la filosofia diltheyana, che su Plessner esercitò un notevole influsso. Cft. Plessner (1949).

ne gnoseologica dalle antiche pastoie di qualsivoglia forma di psicologismo, biologismo e antropologismo – è possibile scorgere, in alcuni momenti del variegato movimento di ritorno a Kant, una sorta di resistenza alla riduzione dell'uomo a tale soggettività, priva di sangue e carne, dotata – secondo la celebre espressione diltheyana – della sola «linfa annacquata della ragione» (Dilthey [1883]: LXI).

Accanto a tali resistenze, tra cui occorre ricordare quella di Heinrich Rickert, che, negli ultimi anni del suo magistero, avviò, parallelamente all'indagine *erkenntnistheoretisch*, un processo di riabilitazione della dimensione corporea del soggetto in seno a una più ampia riflessione antropologica[2], si staglia, nello scenario filosofico di inizio Novecento, un peculiare programma teoretico che, benché non sia riconducibile nell'alveo del neokantianismo, intese integrare l'impianto critico attraverso una rinnovata riflessione sui sensi di carattere trascendentale. Tale programma, che assunse la foggia di una estesiologia dei sensi, di una critica dell'*aisthesis*, è stato realizzato, a più riprese, da Helmuth Plessner, il cui nome è indissolubilmente legato a quel movimento di pensiero che prese forma in area tedesca, alla fine degli anni Venti del Novecento, sotto il titolo di Antropologia filosofica[3]. Ma, benché, Plessner sia ricordato, insieme a Scheler e Gehlen, quale massimo rappresentante della *Philosophische Anthropologie,* non si possono dimenticare gli anni di apprendistato trascorsi dal filosofo a Heidelberg, fortezza della scuola neokantiana del Baden, e l'influenza che tale scuola ebbe sullo sviluppo del suo pensiero. Di quegli anni di formazione, in ambito biologico e filosofico, spesi al capezzale di Windelband e Lask, lo stesso Plessner reca, infatti, memoria nella sua *Selbstdarstellung* (Plessner [1975]: 304-308), così come negli scritti giovanili, in cui il confronto con il neocriticismo prima e

con la fenomenologia poi informa il ginepraio di questioni e problemi che il giovane filosofo stava affrontando all'inizio del suo percorso intellettuale[4]. L'influenza esercitata dal neokantismo non si arrestò, tuttavia, ai soli lavori giovanili di Plessner, bensì raggiunse, seppur forse solo nominalmente, anche la sua opera capitale *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch. Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie*, che si apre, non a caso, ricordando gli «anni di studio della zoologia a Heidelberg, come allievo di Bütschli e Herbst, Windelband e Troeltsch, Driesch e Lask» (Plessner [1928]: 3).

Quegli stessi anni, in cui Plessner fu a contatto con filosofi e scienziati della natura in una Heidelberg straordinariamente prolifica dal punto di vista culturale, il cui centro d'attrazione era costituito dal *Weber-Kreis*, lasciano la loro traccia nel fitto dialogo che il filosofo seppe intessere con l'opera di Kant, il quale costituì un fecondo interlocutore lungo il suo intero *Denkweg*[5]. Una decisiva testimonianza di tale dialogo è offerta dall'opera del 1923 *Die Einheit der Sinne*, in cui è elaborata quella estesiologia *critica* dei sensi che condurrà Plessner al lavoro di «fondazione a priori della realtà psicofisica umana» (Rasini [2006]: XIII) realizzato nelle *Stufen*. Questa fondazione, che ricolloca al centro dell'indagine filosofica l'uomo in carne ed ossa – il vivente umano – si può realizzare, agli occhi di Plessner, già nello scritto del 1923, mediante un radicale ripensamento dell'estetica trascendentale presentata da Kant nell'impianto della prima *Critica*, ed in particolare mediante una reimpostazione del problema dello schematismo trascendentale[6]. Altrimenti detto, è necessario riformulare la relazione tra piano apriorico e materiale a partire dalla normatività intrinseca alla stessa sfera dell'*aisthesis*, che non è riducibile a *medium* neutrale. Nell'*Anthropologie der Sinne* (1970), che costituisce il *pendant* dell'opera del

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[2] Sulla tematica antropologica nella filosofia rickertiana si veda, in modo particolare, Rickert (1934): 146-233.
[3] Per uno sguardo d'insieme sul movimento di pensiero della *Philosophische Anthropologie* si confronti Fischer (2008).

[4] Tali scritti sono raccolti in Plessner (2015); Plessner (2016).
[5] Sul ruolo svolto dal pensiero kantiano in seno allo sviluppo della filosofia di Plessner si confronti l'istruttivo Rasini (2013b).
[6] Cfr. Plessner (1970): 30.

1923, seppur affrancato dal grigiore dell'impostazione kantiana, Plessner libera, infatti, i sensi tanto dalla subordinazione all'intelletto, quanto dalla riduzione di essi a semplici trasmettitori di informazioni[7], di *input*, come vorrebbero le scienze positive. Differentemente da tali posizioni, in cui la dimensione sensibile è, in qualche modo, marginalizzata rispetto alle funzioni intellettive, per il filosofo, i sensi possiedono leggi strutturali, che dischiudono determinate possibilità all'uomo e, con esse, un mondo a cui è assegnata una peculiare guisa: «nei modi che la nostra organizzazione sensibile ci mette a disposizione, nei modi del rapportarsi, del percepire, del sentire – scrive Plessner – si costruisce una corrispondente fisionomia del mondo: esso ha un aspetto, risuona, è palpabile... Ciascun senso ha il proprio fondamento oggettuale in ciò che esso e solo esso lascia emergere» (Plessner [1970]: 74).

A partire dalla natura normativa[8], dalle legalità dei sensi, Plessner pone nel cono di luce della sua riflessione la dimensione squisitamente corporea dell'umano, il suo peculiare avere ed essere corpo, nel suo ineludibile intrecciarsi al mondo culturale, costituito da artefatti materiali e simbolici. In questo senso, le sue ricerche si collocano legittimamente nella scia di quella riscoperta del corpo, e della corporeità del soggetto umano che contraddistingue buona parte dell'orizzonte filosofico del Novecento, tanto che il suo nome può essere asso-

ciato, com'è stato fatto dallo stesso Plessner nell'opera del 1928, a quello di Sartre e Merleau-Ponty[9].

Ora, della trama ordinata dalle indagini plessneriane intendiamo qui restituire le linee principali, le fughe, l'intrecciarsi di temi divergenti in modo armonico, al fine di mettere in luce quel processo di ridefinizione realizzato dal filosofo che investe la relazione sussistente tra corpo umano e artefatti. A tale ridefinizione, per cui gli artefatti non sono creati dall'uomo bensì, in un senso ancora tutto da chiarire, sono *scoperti*, Plessner perviene attraverso un radicale procedimento di somatizzazione del modello kantiano del soggetto trascendentale, un procedimento che conduce a superare la tradizionale dicotomia tra cultura e natura, a favore di una ricomprensione unitaria, globale dell'umano nel suo essere un vivente dotato di un mondo culturale. Come accennato, tale ricomprensione avviene, in Plessner, grazie a una complessa indagine dedita alla sfera sensibile, i cui esiti più fecondi, come vedremo al termine del nostro percorso, possono contribuire, nel presente, a ripensare il decisivo ruolo svolto dalla corporeità nella costituzione del mondo culturale squisitamente umano.

2. OLTRE LE CATENE NEOKANTIANE IN DIREZIONE DEL VIVENTE UMANO. PLESSNER E IL SOGGETTO TRASCENDENTALE

Gran parte degli scritti giovanili plessneriani sono volti a un serrato confronto con la tradizione kantiana e neokantiana, ed in particolar modo con l'idea di sistema da essa veicolata, ossia, in ultima istanza, con la «natura architettonica della ragione» (Russo [2000]: 205). Legato al neokan-

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[7] Più precisamente, nell'*Anthropologie der Sinne*, Plessner afferma che «il significato antropologico dei sensi non si esaurisce evidentemente nelle loro informazioni. Certo sono anche fonti di informazione, cui è per esempio rimessa tutta la nostra motricità, che però è molto più esposta a disturbi di quella animale in virtù della capacità dell'uomo di riflettere sulle proprie membra e su se stesso» (Plessner [1970]: 15).

[8] Sul carattere normativo dei sensi quale oggetto d'indagine dell'estesiologia, Plessner in *Über die Möglichkeit einer Ästhetik* precisa che «correttamente intesa dal punto di vista metodologico, l'estesiologia dello spirito è allora una critica dei sensi così come l'aveva in mente Goethe, critica e non psicologia, scienza delle possibilità e del significato normativo dei sensi nell'ambito dell'attività complessivamente dotata di valore dello spirito umano» (Plessner [1925b]: 76).

[9] Nella premessa alla seconda edizione de *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch,* Plessner mette in luce una certa continuità tra le proprie ricerche e quelle dei due filosofi menzionati: «in Sartre, soprattutto nei suoi primi lavori, e in Merleau-Ponty si trovano talvolta delle concordanze sorprendenti con le mie formulazioni, così che non sono il solo a essermi chiesto se essi non conoscessero *I gradi dell'organico e l'uomo*» (Plessner [1928]: 25). Sulla relazione tra le riflessioni plessneriane e quelle svolte da Merleau-Ponty si veda il recente lavoro di Coolen (2014).

tismo fu, tra l'altro, il primo maestro di Plessner Hans Driesch, la cui *Die Logik als Aufgabe* aveva ispirato l'opera d'esordio del giovane filosofo *Die wissenschaftliche Idee. Ein Entwurf über ihre Form*, che destò da subito l'attenzione di Wilhelm Windelband, capofila del neocriticismo badense[10]. Ma, durante il lungo noviziato in ambito filosofico, Plessner non apprese esclusivamente l'uso degli strumenti concettuali offerti dal rinnovato trascendentalismo kantiano[11], bensì guadagnò familiarità anche e soprattutto con il metodo fenomenologico promosso da Husserl. Di quest'ultimo Plessner seguì fedelmente le *Vorlesungen* a Göttingen, progettando di addottorarsi sotto la sua egida, con uno scritto dedicato, non a caso, al soggetto trascendentale sviluppato da Fichte nella *Wissenschaftslehre*, in comparazione alla forma di soggettivismo presentata dalle husserliane *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*. Benché naufragato tale progetto – a causa del trasferimento a Friburgo di Husserl, dove il filosofo ereditò non solo la cattedra che fu di Rickert, ma anche la stima del suo allievo Heidegger – Plessner continuò ad apprezzare l'ethos, l'attitudine filosofica promossa dalla fenomenologia, che fu posta al centro, a dire il vero non senza problemi, de *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, pur volgendo alla svolta idealistica husserliana (di cui il primo volume di *Ideen* fu portavoce) una chiara rimostranza[12]. La nozione di soggetto trascendentale, comune, seppur con le dovute differenze, tanto al neokantismo quanto alla fenomenologia, assunse, difatti, agli occhi di Plessner, entro alcuni luoghi dell'opera del 1928, i contorni di un pallido soggetto, di una marionetta.

Alle aporie cui incorre tale tipo di soggettività, alla quale si lega non solo il nome di Kant, bensì anche quello di Cartesio, ribatte Plessner – pur rimanendo ancorato, almeno fino alla metà degli anni Venti, su un terreno, ancora in parte, criticista – attraverso un'indagine che ha per oggetto l'organizzazione sensoriale dell'uomo. Tale tipo d'indagine, perseguita dapprima ne *Die Einheit der Sinne*, appare fin da subito informata da una duplice tensione: da un lato, essa risponde all'esigenza goethiana[13] di completare, o sarebbe meglio dire *perfezionare*[14] l'indagine trascendentale kantiana mediante uno studio, a sua volta trascendentale, dell'*aisthesis*; dall'altro lato tale teoria può perseguire l'obiettivo prefissato solo liberandosi dalle catene kantiane e neokantiane che assegnano ai sensi un ruolo subalterno nel processo cognitivo[15]. In questo senso, alla rinnovata fedeltà all'impostazione critica si accompagna, nell'opera plessneriana, un tradimento, consumato principal-

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[10] Per un profilo biografico di Plessner rimandiamo, in lingua italiana, a Russo (2000): 519-521; Ruco (2007): 56-58.

[11] Tra tali strumenti vi è di certo una deduzione a priori di natura kantiana, di cui il filosofo si avvale nelle *Stufen*. Sulle difficoltà derivanti da tale deduzione si veda la precisa analisi di Russo (2000): 320.

[12] Una lucida analisi della svolta idealistica di Husserl è offerta in *Bei Husserl in Göttingen* (Plessner 1966). Per una ricognizione della ricezione plessneriana della fenomenologia si confronti Rasini (2005).

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[13] Sul profilo goethiano dell'impresa plessneriana riporta l'attenzione lo stesso filosofo in *Über die Möglichkeit einer Ästhetik* (Plessner [1925b]: 76). A tale proposito significativa è anche la citazione plessneriana della missiva goethiana indirizzata a Eckermann in cui il poeta auspica un'integrazione della filosofia trascendentale kantiana mediante un'analisi, a sua volta, trascendentale della sensibilità. Cfr. Goethe (1829): 317-318 e Ruco (2012).

[14] Sull'intenzione di perfezionamento dell'idealismo kantiano si cfr. Plessner (1970): 29. Nella *Selbstanzeige der „Einheit der Sinne"*, Plessner descrive il progetto filosofico realizzato nell'opera del 1923 non tanto nei termini di perfezionamento, bensì di depurazione del metodo critico: «la tendenza fondamentale del libro è: costruire un'antropologia che permetta di conoscere l'uomo e la natura in modo equo e in pieno sviluppo, e depurare il metodo critico attraverso la sua piena applicazione» (Plessner [1925a]: 72).

[15] A proposito del ruolo subalterno dei sensi nel processo cognitivo, Plessner osserva che, «in quanto generico "sostrato del pensiero", delle loro specifiche funzioni si fa di tutt'erba un fascio, quasi si trattasse di individuare collaboratori o avversari della componente razionale della conoscenza. Una simile prospettiva risulta datata e, in fondo, considerata soltanto dal lato dell'interesse conoscitivo umano, facendo perno sulla capacità di astrazione e di ideazione che consente infine all'uomo di affrancarsi dai sensi e di considerarli una *qualité négligeable*» (Plessner [1970]: 11).

mente dal filosofo nell'*Anthropologie der Sinne*, per mezzo di un affrancamento dell'estesiologia dalle strette maglie del criticismo kantiano. Quest'ultima opera, infatti, si presenta al lettore nella veste di un'antropologia dei sensi, che individua il proprio campo d'indagine nelle «strutture stesse della percezione sensoriale» (Plessner [1970]: 9) relate ai modi di agire e operare del vivente umano: invero, scrive Plessner, «un'estesiologia dello spirito rende necessaria una teoria della comprensione che, libera da catene neokantiane, conduca a una problematica più ampia: a un'antropologia dei sensi. Quali specifiche possibilità ottiene l'uomo (come persona) dai suoi sensi, quelli a cui normalmente si affida e da cui dipende?» (Plessner [1970]: 21).

Come appare chiaro già da questi brevi accenni, al centro di tale interrogazione Plessner non colloca il soggetto trascendentale, bensì l'*uomo in carne e ossa*, e le possibilità offerte a questo essere vivente dai propri organi di senso. Da questo primato d'interesse per la sfera sensoriale-percettivo sorge poi l'esigenza, più volte ribadita da Plessner nel suo *Denkweg*, di fondare la ricerca filosofica sul fertile terreno offerto dal sapere biologico[16], con il cui aiuto è possibile riformulare la questione antropologica. Tale questione coinvolge, infatti, non solo la posizione dell'uomo nel mondo, bensì il mondo stesso, inteso nella duplice veste di natura e sfera culturale. Pertanto, la posta in gioco chiamata in causa entro la plessneriana critica dei sensi non è altro che la possibilità di avere un mondo così come esso è dato all'uomo tramite gli organi sensoriali, ossia nella forma di un mondo visibile, udibile, palpabile, odorabile, gustabile, entro il cui spazio possono sorgere le pratiche di vita e di sapere tipiche del genere umano. Detto

con maggiore precisione, a tale mondo co-appartengono strutturalmente i comportamenti umani, il suo operare e gli artefatti che da esso prendono vita sulla base di una correlazione tra spirito e natura, la cui definizione rappresenta uno degli aspetti più innovativi dell'indagine plessneriana. A tale indagine antropologica va, infatti, il merito di lumeggiare quella complessa trama che coinvolge il «farsi sensibile dello spirito e il farsi spirituale dei sensi» (Plessner [1928]: 57), ossia il «sistema delle condizioni reciproche interne che domina tra le forme simboliche e l'organizzazione fisica» (Plessner [1928]: 57), in altre parole, il rapporto sussistente tra ciò che è offerto ai nostri sensi e i prodotti culturali, e quindi, in ultima istanza, l'istituzione del mondo della cultura a partire dallo schema percettivo.

Ora, seguendo il filo che intesse la trama formata da organi di senso e prodotti culturali, Plessner traccia, con una riflessione teoretica di straordinaria efficacia, le linee di una estesiologia della vista, dell'udito, del sistema propriocettivo, alla ricerca di quello che è stato definito da Erwin Straus «il senso dei sensi» (Straus [1935]) o unità dei sensi, di cui le scienze, agli occhi del filosofo, ben poco possono affermare. Ed è proprio in seno a questa ricerca, che tocca tanto le diverse arti (dalla pittura alla musica fino alla danza) quanto le diverse forme di sapere, che emerge la cifra del filosofare plessneriano, in virtù di cui, già nell'*Einheit der Sinne*, l'estetica della prima *Critica* è perfezionata – precisiamo ora – attraverso il ricorso alla fenomenologia husserliana[17]: alle vuote forme di spazio e tempo, squisitamente kantiane, il filosofo sostituisce le modalità sensoriali, di chiaro sapore husserliano, che rivelano le cose stesse. Perciò, nell'inedita *Selbstanzeige der „Einheit der Sinne"*, risalente al 1925, Plessner può affermare che «le proprietà strutturali delle cose e le modalità della sensorialità si *adattano* reciprocamente. La natura senza un occhio che la vede, un orecchio che la ascolta non sarebbe effettivamente luminosa, ma possibilmente luminosa, non sonora, ma possibilmente sonora. Occhio e orec-

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[16] A proposito dell'importanza della biologia ai fini dello sviluppo dell'antropologia filosofica, nelle *Stufen*, Plessner dichiara che «siccome l'uomo è l'essere più sviluppato nella scala degli organismi ed è quello che ha raggiunto più tardi la sua forma di vita attuale, e poiché tutte le sue manifestazioni della vita spirituale poggiano sulle sue proprietà corporee, l'antropologia deve avere come infrastruttura una biologia, sia sul piano filosofico sia su quello empirico» (Plessner [1928]: 102).

[17] Cfr. Plessner (1925b): 76.

chio come organi del corpo vivente di una persona portano soltanto la condizione dell'obiettivazione delle proprietà reali delle cose» (Plessner [1925a]: 68-69).

Con tali parole, Plessner, esegue, in un sol colpo, nell'opera del 1923, secondo quanto presentato nella *Selbstanzeige*, una duplice operazione: ripensare *criticamente* i sensi, senza cedere alle lusinghe intellettualistiche del vuoto formalismo kantiano. Questo ambizioso compito è realizzato dal filosofo grazie al riconoscimento di una correlazione, di un'intenzionalità tra sensi e *sensibilia*, tra percezione e percetto, che coinvolge non solo la visione, bensì l'intera organizzazione percettiva, ossia il corpo vivente dell'essere umano, immerso nelle sue pratiche di vita. Con un solo gesto, possiamo ancora affermare, il filosofo risomatizza il soggetto, offrendogli un mondo mediante i sensi. Questo mondo non è, però, ridotto a mero prodotto della soggettività, bensì esso si presenta al soggetto per il tramite dei canali sensoriali, seguendo precise leggi estesiologiche. Si può così scorgere, entro le pieghe dell'impianto plessneriano, una peculiare logica dei sensi, al cui contraltare non si situa un materiale amorfo, al quale le regole che soggiacciono alla percezione assegnerebbero una forma, bensì un mondo già formato, di cui i sensi rivelano la fisionomia: «tanti lati, tanti sensi; ma anche: tanti sensi, tanti lati» (Plessner [1970]: 74). Il mondo si offre, dunque, al soggetto umano secondo un'accordanza, ossia una relazione bilaterale tra soggetto e oggetto, in cui, come ben osservato da Ruco, «le qualità delle cose sono per Plessner le modalità di relazione sensoriale tra la sfera soggettuale e la sfera oggettuale e risiedono nelle proprietà reali, strutturali delle cose stesse» (Ruco [2007]: 16).

Ora, l'introduzione nel discorso filosofico di quello che lo stesso Plessner definisce l'apriori materiale, del quale Kant non possiede concetto (Cfr. Plessner [1975]), a cui si accompagna una riabilitazione della dimensione somatica, sensibile del soggetto, scardina la nozione di coscienza trascendentale che informa buona parte della riflessione filosofica dei primi decenni del Novecento, fornendo, al contempo, la base per lo sviluppo di un'an-

tropologia filosofica, quale quella plessneriana, che ha come suo fondamento una filosofia della natura di carattere evidentemente non idealistico. Solo con il passaggio dal soggetto trascendentale all'essere vivente si apre, dinanzi allo sguardo del filosofo, la via a una considerazione globale dell'uomo che possa legittimamente assumere come campo d'indagine tanto i fenomeni limite, quali ad esempio il riso e il pianto, quanto la stessa posizione dell'uomo entro il mondo naturale nella veste di organismo tra gli organismi, facendo questione, in ultima istanza, del suo essere non solo un vivente, ma anche e soprattutto un soggetto culturale.

Quest'ultima foggia dell'umano, il suo essere *Kulturmensch*, emerge già con forza nell'estesiologia dei sensi, poiché tra corpo e mente, come accennato, vi è un'accordanza, grazie alla quale i sensi offrono il materiale e, al contempo, la direzione stessa in cui l'espressione e il senso veicolato dall'espressione possano manifestarsi. Più precisamente, le forme culturali hanno il loro differenziale nella materia stessa così come si offre alla sensibilità; una materia che non è, dunque, indifferenziata, ossia priva di forma, bensì è già strutturata secondo determinate possibilità d'azione. Perciò, la cultura, nelle varie fogge in cui si manifesta, ha come propria condizione di emergenza il piano naturale, la dimensione corporea-percettiva dell'umano nella sua interazione con l'ambiente. Come vedremo ora, tale assunto conduce, nel ricco orizzonte tracciato dalle indagini promosse da Plessner, ad una radicale risemantizzazione delle sfere naturale e culturale, sottoposte a un *focus* che ne mette in luce l'intima interazione, la quale è costitutiva di quella dimensione stratificata e proteiforme del vivente umano che è al centro dell'antropologia filosofica sviluppata dal pensatore.

3. LA POLIFONIA DEL SOGGETTO UMANO E IL DESTINO DELLE CATEGORIE NELL'ANTROPOLOGIA DI PLESSNER: UNA CRITICA ALL'IDEALISMO ZOOLOGICO DI UEXKÜLL

L'istituzione plessneriana di uno spazio di riflessione – che armonizzi, almeno nelle inten-

zioni dell'autore, motivi kantiani e fenomenologici – volto ad indagare l'organizzazione percettiva, ridefinisce lo statuto stesso dell'umano: l'uomo è soggetto naturale e culturale. Ciò significa che egli è parte del regno organico e, al tempo stesso, produttore di una sfera culturale: il secondo aspetto si abbarbica sul fertile terreno dissodato dal primo. Per tale ragione, possiamo affermare che corpo e psiche non sono, secondo il filosofo, due sfere ontologiche indipendenti, bensì due aspetti dell'umano legati da una peculiare processualità. Di questa processualità, che esibisce il carattere polifonico dell'uomo ne è testimone il destino a cui è piegata la nozione di categoria entro le strette maglie della trama concettuale intessuta dal filosofo.

Tale nozione, centrale nella riflessione promossa da Kant e il neokantismo[18], assume, infatti, nella teoria a priori dei caratteri organici presentata da Plessner, un'originale veste, per così dire, relazionale. Essa non è più una funzione logica ascritta all'intelletto, bensì un principio che regola il rapporto tra organismo e ambiente:

> "Categoria" significa una forma a cui si adatta l'esperienza, ma che non deriva dall'esperienza; una forma il cui ambito non si esaurisce con la sfera del soggetto, ma si estende alla sfera degli oggetti, ragione per cui non solo l'esperienza che si fa degli oggetti, ma anche gli oggetti stessi le sottostanno. Pertanto le categorie sono forme che non appartengono né soltanto al soggetto né soltanto all'oggetto, e che in virtù della loro neutralità permettono all'oggetto e al soggetto di incontrarsi. […] tali categorie avrebbero il valore di funzioni categoriali poiché, per quanto non siano né forme derivate dal

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18 A proposito delle categorie nel pensiero kantiano, e della loro relazione con la sensibilità, Plessner afferma, chiarendo in modo inequivocabile la sua posizione a riguardo, che «la ricchezza empirica dell'essere, che nel presentarsi e nel modo individuale di presentarsi è indipendente dalla mia soggettualità e oppone resistenza alla mia volontà, questo mondo *di conseguenza* reale, dal momento che si manifesta, *non differisce dalla media delle modalità di manifestazione*. Tuttavia in Kant e in tutti i kantiani lo faceva. Questi conoscono soltanto spazio e tempo, la sintesi figurale e le categorie come presupposti soggettuali» (Plessner [1925a]: 67).

mondo che ci sta di fronte né forme imposte a quel mondo dal soggetto vivente, esse stabiliscono a un tempo la struttura del mondo e del soggetto vivente che si inserisce in esso. (Plessner [1928]: 90-91)

Da quanto emerge dalle parole plessneriane, la categoria informa l'interazione tra soggetto e oggetto; essa struttura la relazione tra mondo e soggetto vivente. Tali categorie assumono, pertanto, nella riflessione antropologica sviluppata dal filosofo, secondo la precisa espressione offerta da Russo, la veste di «principi metaempirici che sorreggono la congruenza, connessione, concordanza, armonizzazione […] tra il vivente e il suo ambiente» (Russo [2000]: 326). Così intese le categorie sono, dunque, ancora trascendentali, ma in un senso ben diverso da quello assegnato loro da Kant e dai suoi originali interpreti. Nella declinazione relazionale del categoriale si può, difatti, scorgere il definitivo congedo di Plessner dalle posizioni kantiane e neokantiane, che furono presenti, attraverso un peculiare processo di naturalizzazione, all'inizio del secolo scorso, anche in campo biologico. Un esempio di tale trascendentalismo naturalizzato, con cui Plessner si confrontò a più riprese nel corso del suo *Denkweg*, è offerto dalla celebre dottrina della *Umwelt* proposta dal fondatore dell'etologia moderna, Jakob von Uexküll.

Secondo tale dottrina, presentata da Uexküll dapprima nella *Theoretische Biologie* e poi nel capolavoro *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen*, a ogni specie animale corrisponde un ambiente suo proprio articolato in una sfera percettiva ed una operativa. Più precisamente, organismo e ambiente formano un'unità ben definita e un circolo funzionale strutturato secondo determinate regole, al cui centro si staglia la legge stimolo-risposta. Questa teoria, che riconosce un inscindibile rapporto di reciprocità tra organismo e ambiente, è sposata da Plessner, giacché l'organismo rappresenta ai suoi occhi «soltanto la metà della propria vita […] qualcosa di assolutamente bisognoso, che esige completamento senza il quale non può sussistere» (Plessner [1928]: 220).

L'acquisizione da parte di Plessner della teoria uexkülliana del mondo-ambiente non è però sce-

vra da critiche e revisioni. In modo particolare, il filosofo non condivide la piega squisitamente kantiana che tale teoria assume: l'ambiente, secondo Uexküll, è prodotto dall'organismo animale. La teoria della *Umwelt* mette capo a ciò che è stato giustamente definito nei termini di un «solipsismo ambientale» (Brentari [2011]: 237), per cui l'apriori non è una forma del rapporto tra organismo e ambiente, come lo è nell'alveo dell'antropologia plessneriana, bensì rappresenta «una struttura del soggetto animale che solo in un secondo tempo verrebbe trasposta o proiettata all'esterno» (Brentari [2011]: 237). In altri termini, nella visione uexkülliana, l'animale costituisce il suo ambiente, esso è creatore della sua nicchia ecologica. In questo preciso senso, si può leggere la biologia teoretica proposta dall'etologo nei termini di una declinazione in veste naturalistica del trascendentalismo kantiano. Infatti, se indiscusso merito della rivoluzione copernicana di Kant è stato l'aver esibito il modo attraverso cui gli oggetti si costituiscono a partire dall'applicazione alla materia delle forme soggettive, fine ultimo della biologia, secondo Uexküll, è indagare le diverse modalità mediante cui i differenti soggetti, sulla base delle loro caratteristiche peculiari e dell'interazione con l'ambiente, istituiscano essi stessi l'oggettualità dinanzi a cui sono posti nella veste di soggetti.

Ora, data la derubricazione della funziona costitutiva dal piano squisitamente categoriale, Plessner non può che prendere le distanze dal profilo, ancora kantiano, della teoria della *Umwelt*, pur accogliendo la tesi dell'unità organismo-ambiente. A questo proposito il filosofo scrive ne *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, in modo inequivocabile, che «Uexküll non ha ragione nel sostenere che "l'ambiente per come si rispecchia nel mondo oggettuale dell'animale è sempre una parte dell'animale stesso" […] Questo è in un certo qual modo idealismo zoologico. Al posto di una coscienza creatrice del mondo verrebbe messa un'organizzazione creatrice del mondo» (Plessner [1928]: 283). Contro tale idealismo zoologico, abbracciato dal «"kantiano" Uexküll» (Plessner [1928]: 94), il filosofo fa valere la relazione bilaterale sussistente tra ambiente e vivente.

Com'è emerso dalla nostra indagine, tale relazione bilaterale è presente, dal punto di vista sensoriale, anche nella sfera umana: il modo di datità del mondo è indissolubilmente legato ai sensi, benché non risolto in essi. Difatti, le modalità con cui si presenta la sfera mondana corrispondono, o forse sarebbe meglio dire si accordano alle modalità con cui l'uomo struttura la propria esperienza, pur senza che il mondo sia ridotto a prodotto meramente umano, ad artificio. Ciò implica, in ultima istanza, un'unità dell'esperienza che ci è data tanto dai sensi quanto dallo spirito; unità entro la quale il mondo può manifestarsi, pur permanendo in un'eccedenza insuperabile. Tuttavia, è necessario precisare ora che, secondo Plessner, tale correlazione tra organismo e ambiente realizzata a livello sensoriale non garantisce all'uomo un rapporto stabile con l'ambiente circostante. Per il filosofo, infatti, la posizione eccentrica[19] dell'umano, il suo essere sospeso, a distanza da se stesso, decentrato, rende la relazione che sussiste tra organismo e ambiente per lo più instabile, incerta, e perciò bisognosa di essere continuamente ritemprata e ridefinita mediante diversi strumenti, che danno luogo al mondo artificiale della cultura. La necessità umana di garantirsi un equilibrio (Plessner [1928]: 334) rispetto al mondo è, dunque, il movente che spinge questo essere vivente non specializzato ad *attrezzarsi*, divenendo un essere *naturalmente* artificiale: l'uomo «è per natura *artificiale*» (Plessner [1928]: 334) e «la

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[19] Sulla nozione di eccentricità, già ampiamente indagata dalla letteratura secondaria sull'autore, rimandiamo a Fischer (2000) e Rasini (2013a). Particolarmente efficace è, inoltre, la sintesi della nozione plessneriana di posizione eccentrica offerta da Gehlen in *Der Mensch. Seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Werlt*, per cui «nell'uomo, il centro della *posizionalità*, sulla distanza dal quale rispetto al suo corpo proprio (*Leib*) si fonda la possibilità di ogni datità, acquista distanza rispetto a se stesso. Egli perciò sa di se stesso, è osservabile a se stesso e, in questo, è "Io", il punto di fuga, situato "dietro di sé", della propria interiorità, il quale, sottratto a ogni possibile attuazione della vita a partire dal proprio centro, costituisce lo spettatore di fronte allo scenario di questo campo interiore. È così attuata la scissione in campo esterno, campo interno e coscienza» (Gehlen [1940]: 299).

cultura non è seconda, ma prima natura» (Russo [2000]: 375). Ora, questa identificazione dell'umano con l'essere culturale non solleva comunque l'umano dal suo essere un organismo vivente, anzi possiamo ben dire che la cultura rimane ancorata, nell'ottica plessneriana, al sostrato corporeo. L'uomo inadatto ricerca un completamento innaturale, senza per questo ridurre l'innaturalità della cultura a qualcosa di svincolato dalle occasioni concesse dalla sua natura e dalla natura in generale, ossia dall'ambiente che lo circonda.

Questa dinamica è espressa chiaramente dalla prima legge antropologica elaborata dal filosofo in chiusura alle *Stufen*. Secondo tale legge, l'uomo vive, al contempo, come organismo animale nell'immediatezza della natura e come essere eccentrico nella mediazione culturale. Per tale duplicità, qualcosa si può dare all'uomo nella veste di utensile solo a partire da una ineludibile continuità con la natura:

> se si crede quindi che le cose del nostro commercio e utilizzo ricevano il loro senso pieno, la loro esistenza, unicamente per mano del costruttore, si vede soltanto mezza verità. Poiché altrettanto essenziale è, per il mezzo tecnico di ausilio (e per tutte le produzioni e la regolamentazione della forza creativa umana), il suo peso interno, la sua oggettività, che appare in esso come ciò che può essere soltanto trovato e scoperto, non fatto. Ciò che dunque si concretizza nella sfera della cultura mostra il suo essere vincolato all'autorialità umana e insieme (nella stessa misura) la sua indipendenza. (Plessner [1928]: 344)

In linea con l'abbandono di qualsivoglia soggettività creatrice di stampo kantiano, o, forse sarebbe meglio dire, in conseguenza di tale abbandono, la cultura non è, agli occhi di Plessner, il mero prodotto di un qualche ente che lavora *ex nihilo*: essa non è fatta, bensì trovata e scoperta. Ciò significa che il fare umano si abbarbica sulla sfera corporea, nel suo intimo legame con l'ambiente circostante. In questo senso, la mano del costruttore è parte di quell'organismo mediante il cui schema sensoriale è dato all'uomo un mondo, a partire dal quale possono sorgere i suoi saperi e il suo operare. Secondo un esempio richiamato

più volte da Plessner, la geometria non è il risultato esclusivo delle nostre capacità intellettive, bensì anche e soprattutto di quelle visive e della nostra capacità di orientamento nello spazio. Tale capacità coinvolge tanto la stazione eretta quanto quella mano che si libera dalla locomozione per afferrare ciò che dalla vista è dischiuso. Attorno al nostro corpo si apre, dunque, un mondo fatto di possibilità ben determinate, di strutture che sono rivelate dai nostri organi di senso; un mondo che non è il mero risultato della nostra azione, bensì di un peculiare incontro, di una correlazione, seppur instabile, tra l'uomo e l'ambiente.

4. L'ESTETICA TRASCENDENTALE PLESSNERIANA: SCOPRIRE GLI ARTEFATTI, SCOPRIRE L'UOMO

Riannodando i fili del discorso fin qui svolto possiamo osservare che, secondo la prospettiva inaugurata dall'estesiologia plessneriana, gli artefatti si legano al corpo come occasioni che sono date all'uomo nel suo commercio intramondano; pertanto l'essere umano «deve riconoscere che non è stato il loro creatore originario, bensì essi sono stati realizzati solo come *occasionati* dal suo fare» (Plessner [1928]: 334). Come abbiamo visto, a tale tesi, secondo cui gli utensili, gli strumenti, il mondo artificiale della cultura non sono creati, bensì scoperti, Plessner può giungere solo mediante una peculiare operazione teorica: egli affranca il soggetto dal primato assegnato da Kant alle attività sintetiche dell'intelletto, cui erano asserviti i sensi, e presenta, in opposizione al soggetto trascendentale e alla sua funzione costitutiva, un modello di soggettività che non crea un mondo, bensì lo accoglie e gli corrisponde originariamente mediante la percezione.

A partire da tale posizione, di contro alle teorie spiritualistiche e naturalistiche relative all'antropogenesi, secondo cui, l'uomo «si è, per così dire, inventato di sana pianta la cultura» (Plessner [1928]: 336] in virtù dell'intelligenza o della destrezza, Plessner può legittimamente sostenere che «l'uomo non inventa niente che non scopra»

(Der Mensch erfindet nichts, was er nicht entdeckt). L'oggetto, l'utensile, l'opera d'arte sono scoperti dall'uomo. Essi non sono una sua mera produzione: i mezzi tecnici, così come le creazioni artistiche, hanno un peso, un'oggettività che si "distacca" dall'agire umano.

Per Plessner, questa oggettività è data, in ultima istanza, dalla «correlazione tra l'elemento a priori e a posteriori, per come esso in generale regola la situazione dell'essere vivente» (Plessner [1928]: 344); una correlazione che rinvia, nella sfera umana, tanto alla posizione eccentrica quanto alla «struttura della realtà cosale» (Plesnner [1928]: 345). Esclusivamente sulla base di una tale correlazione è realizzabile ciò che il filosofo nomina *scoperta*, laddove con tale termine egli intende una prestazione espressiva che si appoggia sul materiale offerto dalla natura, dal cui fertile terreno sorgono tanto la tecnica quanto la cultura quali, per l'appunto, espressioni, forme, mediante cui si manifesta un contenuto.

Come abbiamo visto, a questo contenuto l'uomo ha accesso solo in seno alla dimensione mondana dischiusa dal sistema percettivo. Per tale ragione, un'indagine volta all'essenza della tecnica, dell'arte, del sapere umano è legittima solo se condotta nell'alveo di una più ampia analisi sui sensi, scandagliati nella complessa relazione strutturale che li lega al mondo. A un tale tipo di analisi si rivolgono gli sforzi teoretici di Plessner, che mettono capo a un'estetica trascendentale di ispirazione fenomenologica[20], con cui è perfezionata la riflessione kantiana sui sensi sviluppata nella prima *Critica*. Difatti, Plessner sostiene, di contro ad ogni sterile formalismo, che l'ambito percettivo sia regolato da norme a cui rispondono i contenuti intenzionali e che le percezioni trovino il proprio fondamento nella relazione corporea che l'umano intrattiene con la sfera mondana. Dunque, il corpo vivente è coinvolto nell'esperienza sensoriale, nella

rivelazione di un mondo, in cui l'uomo, che è corpo ed *ha* corpo, agisce.

Occorre osservare ora che quest'ultimo carattere dell'uomo in quanto *embodied agency*, messo in luce dalla riflessione plessneriana, è oggigiorno al centro di un ampio spettro d'indagini che si appellano alla fenomenologia al fine di operare una rivalutazione della sfera percettiva. Un esempio virtuoso di tale tipo di indagine è offerto dal recente studio di Steven Crowell *The Normative in Perception*. In esso, Crowell riconosce alla percezione – a partire dalle celebri riflessioni husserliane sulla sintesi passiva, ma spingendo la riflessione ben oltre di esse – il peculiare statuto di pratica, la cui intrinseca normatività non emerge, come voleva il padre della fenomenologia, dalla coordinazione tra *kinaesthetic* e *presentative sensations*, bensì dal suo «essere 'fuori per' qualcosa, dal suo tentativo di eseguire un compito» (Crowell [2012]: 99). Difatti, per Crowell, «pratiche e abilità come camminare attorno a una candela o giocare a tennis o scrivere a computer sono competenze *corporee* che non possono essere ridotte a relazioni covarianti tra sistemi di fenomeni nella coscienza» (Crowell [2012]: 98-99).

Secondo tale prospettiva, dunque, i nostri comportamenti senso-motori non sono guidati dalle funzioni intellettive e dalla loro normatività logica, bensì hanno il loro terreno d'insorgenza in quella dimensione ante-predicativa del corpo umano che è strutturalmente relazionata al mondo. In questo senso, il modo di essere proprio del corpo, non più ridotto a un sistema di sensazioni da cui deriverebbe l'*embodiment* (Crowell [2012]: 104 n. 32), diviene la condizione d'emergenza della stessa normatività nel campo percettivo, a cui segue quella concettuale. Per tale motivo, Crowell parla, a ragione, di *perceptual practice*, di pratica percettiva, contraddistinta da fini non necessariamente mediati concettualmente, che orientano le nostre abilità, indissolubilmente collegate alla fatticità del corpo (*facticity of the body*).

A un tale tipo d'indagine, che pone nel cono di luce della sua riflessione la pratica percettiva, può contribuire l'estesiologia plessneriana con la sua felice integrazione tra teoria della percezione

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[20] È necessario precisare, seppur *en passant*, che, per quanto Plessner si avvalga del metodo fenomenologico entro le sue indagini, egli non abbraccia l'idealismo coscienzialistico che per certi versi è riscontrabile nelle indagini husserliane a partire dal primo volume di *Idee*.

e antropologia filosofica, la quale restituisce all'uomo quella dimensione corporea – l'avere ed essere un corpo – verso cui la stessa fenomenologia rivolge lo sguardo ancora nel presente. L'antropologia elaborata da Plessner ha, infatti, l'indiscusso merito di lumeggiare le prestazioni dello schema sensoriale-corporeo che precedono il piano concettuale-culturale, mostrando una particolare attenzione a ciò che oggigiorno è definito nei termini di *embodied intentionality*[21]. In virtù della tematizzazione plessneriana di tale intenzionalità, possiamo riconoscere, in seno al tracciato teoretico del filosofo, quello spostamento di interesse dalla temporalità della coscienza trascendentale all'*embodiment*, che rappresenta, agli occhi di Crowell, la cifra della riflessione proposta dalla fenomenologia esistenziale post-husserliana (Crowell [2012]: 84).

Come abbiamo mostrato, a tale cambiamento capitale Plessner può pervenire mediante l'oltrepassamento del soggetto trascendentale di stampo kantiano in direzione del vivente umano, con cui è ridefinita la stessa relazione che sussiste tra l'uomo e i suoi artefatti. Infatti, nell'alveo dell'antropologia filosofica plessneriana, tale relazione non assume più la forma di una riduzione degli artefatti a meri prodotti dell'azione umana, bensì coinvolge quel «mistero della creatività» che «consiste nella *mossa riuscita*, nell'incontro tra l'uomo e le cose» (Plessner [1928]: 345). Un incontro attraverso cui, possiamo precisare ora, l'essere umano mette a nudo non solo le possibilità che gli sono offerte dal mondo, bensì se stesso nella veste di soggetto senziente e agente. Dunque, secondo il dettato plessneriano, scoprire gli artefatti del mondo significa scoprire l'essenza stessa dell'umano, ossia il suo carattere eccentrico, alla cui base non vi è, secondo il pensiero dominante la tradizione filosofica occidentale, la ragione o l'intelletto, bensì il corpo e i suoi sensi.

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[21] A tale tema è dedicato, a partire da una prospettiva plessneriana, il recentissimo testo di M. Wehrle, *Being a body and having a body. The twofold temporality of embodied intentionality* (2019).

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The Technical Object and Somatic Thought. Theories of Gesture between Anthropology, Aesthetics and Cinema

Barbara Grespi

Abstract. This essay explores the lines of thought focused on the relationship between gesture and technique, examining the theories which have conceptualized the transfer of gestural matrices into inert matter, and understood technique as a result of this process. Although associated mainly with the writings of the palaeontologist André Leroi-Gourhan, this thought actually predates his work, and consists of multiple branches: having first taken root at the end of the nineteenth century, it became diffused throughout the following decades in different forms. These nevertheless shared a constant reference to cinema, both as a privileged place that captures gestures, and as a technique that can absorb their quintessence. From Espinas to Simondon, via Jousse and Eisenstein, the theory of gestural transmission breaks down various polarities, such as body and environment, organic and inorganic, animated and inanimate, performativity and inner life. It foregrounds the imaginative logic of the body and the many forms of somatic thinking developed by man. Such forms lie at the heart of the creative processes and have found their highest appreciation in cinema, as a machine that, from its very origins, has been grafted not only on the eye but on the whole body.

Keywords. Gesture; Film theory; Body agency; Prosthetics; Mimetic.

*Technical gesture is the producer of forms, deriving them
from inert nature and preparing them for animation.*
Leroi-Gourhan (1965)

Contemporary neo-animist thought, which attributes life and agency to inorganic bodies, from artefacts to technical objects, can find possible connections and roots in the philosophical-anthropological theories of the gesture which emerged in France at the end of the nineteenth century and matured midway through the twentieth. The main thread of this thought connects Alfred Espinas to Marcel Mauss and Marcel Jousse to Leroi-Gourhan, and its various stages of development include some of Gilbert Simondon's most famous reflections. Here the gesture is no longer an involuntary, corporeal

manifestation of emotional states, but rather an interface between a subject and the world, a creative form of thought that rejects both rationality and the dimension of the drive. Being translated into an autonomous act of corporeal imagination, gesture moves therefore towards the dimension of technique, and achives this through a twofold trajectory. The first establishes an apparently reflexive relationship between the two terms, interpreting the gesture as a technique that the body learns through different forms of knowledge; the second imagines a transitive relationship, maintaining that technique is a human gesture transfused into inert material.

Let us briefly examine the first, which is the more recent and more well known, albeit less relevant to the neo-animist shift. The idea was born of a famous essay by Marcel Mauss, *Techniques of the Body* (1936), which focuses for the first time on the way in which socio-cultural conditioning affects our uses of the body. Mauss asserts the ways we use it are never natural, that everything is the result of having learned *techniques* that were constructed, historically and culturally, in various societies and traditions. These techniques are still tied to a biological element, that, while not exactly denied, is nonetheless considered secondary to the huge process of re-writing to which bodies are constantly subjected, including by the media. The pioneer of the French school of sociology thus identified a border-space between the biological and the social, where an old object – the body – becomes new:

> *The body is man's first and most natural instrument. Or more accurately, not to speak of instruments, man's first and most natural technical object, and at the same time technical means, is his body […]. I made, and went on making for several years, the fundamental mistake of thinking that there is technique only when there is an instrument. I had to go back to ancient notions, to the Platonic position on technique – for Plato spoke of a technique of music and in particular of a technique of the dance – and extend these notions.[1]*

The body's ability is technical precisely because it invents, perfects and modifies its own efficient acts, using its skills to form «pairs of mechanical elements», as Mauss writes. However, the body's technique is only partially innate, due to its exposure to the social: the body is an object which is created by culture, and culture models its gestures, postures and motorial actions – and not only its mental ones, as one might expect. In the «semi-unconsciousness» through which they are performed, techniques of the body intersect with traditions, and this factor led Mauss to his famous definition of technique as «effective and traditional actions», where the two adjectives have equal importance. His «borderline» science, as it has been defined (Karsenti [1998]: 230), consisted in an extensive deconstruction of the apparent organicity of corporeal acts with the aim of locating the convergence point of the various forces that condition bodies, and therefore troubling the boundary between nature and culture. As Mauss writes, the body's techniques are «physiopsychosociological assemblages of series of actions»[2], and he identifies three principal factors that compete in their formation. In brief: the nerve and muscle synergies made by the body, for physiological reasons (the first factor), «engage» (or not engage) according to a psychological drive (the second factor); subsequently they can be reinforced thanks to solidarity with the social context (rewarding them as virtuous, making them ritualistic, exhibiting them, etc.) (the third factor). Such forms of recognition and exhibition include, as mentioned, media representations – and especially those circulating through cinema, as Mauss suggests. For example, the medium diffused a specific walking style for girls, a wavering strut that Hollywood screens introduced across Europe in the first post-War period. Cinema's role as the great modeler of gestures and bodily techniques has recently been rediscovered in filmology, in particular by Bulgakova (2005) and Blümlinger (2017). The former turns to Mauss in order to expand on a post-War context, and in particular on the explicit re-edu-

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[1] See Mauss (1936): 82-83.

[2] See Mauss (1936): 92.

cation of bodies through film as an essential part of the stimulation of democratic thought in post-Nazi Germany[3]. The latter focuses on the Tayloristic experiments of Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, who created chronophotographs, some even in 3D, of the labour gestures that produced minimal energy dispersion, in order to model the actions of workers and develop the most productive body techniques possible[4].

It is not by chance that the current revival of gesture theory was inspired by film studies: if, as Vilém Flusser argues, the analysis of gestures would necessitate the foundation of an entire discipline, or rather an inter-discipline that aspires to be a «means of orienting ourselves in the circumstances in which we found ourselves with respect to things and people»[5], then it is also true that there is a platform where many twentieth-century theories of gesture meet and interact, and this common ground is represented by cinema itself. The success of Giorgio Agamben's reflections on cinemas as the «homeland of the gesture»[6] can also be explained in terms of this shared perception, i.e., that cinema is a «stakeholder» in discourses on gesturality; that it is the key instrument of its interception, archiving and transmission, and therefore also a privileged means to think through the gesture and its elusive dimensions.

Some of these nodes emerge more fully in the other trajectory where the relationship between gesture and technique has developed, thus far put aside: the transitive model[7]. Here, the technique is

considered as a human gesture transferred to matter, a form of worldly intelligence based on imagination and the production of resemblance, with a resulting distribution of agency to things as a prerequisite of their animation (we can read this in the above epigraph by Leroi-Gourhan; a sign, as we will see, of the work that preceded his own). The transitive theory of the gesture was developed in three phases: the first straddled the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the second emerged in the thirties, and the third in the fifties and sixties. It builds on scientific concepts, especially biological ones, which enabled theorists to conceive of transition first as a bio-chemical reaction of the matter, a kind of paradoxical contagion between the organic and the inorganic; in a second phase, in relation to animal mimicry, a phenomenon that destroys the boundaries between the living and the inert, between body and environment; and finally as the transcendence of the prosthetic into the idea of the autonomous machine, a sort of sub-species of the human.

The following pages will attempt to reconstruct this line of thought, illustrating how it found a testbed in cinema. More than any other, the medium of the moving image inspired the reactivation of animist thought, which emerged most fully in the so-called «lyrosophic» vision of Jean Epstein[8]. The animation of images and of the bodies inscribed within lies at the foundations of this notion of cinema-as-technique, one that breathes life into the inanimate. However, the transition that is infused into such images derives concretely from a human gesture, and this can be imagined during the camera's act of creation, according to a specific idea of the relationship between man and the world. This is why transitive theories of the gesture relied on cinema, and why they have served to reconsider the medium from an anthropological perspective.

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[3] The 2005 book is mainly about the Russian context; the application of Bulgakova's research to the German context is presented in Bulgakova (2018).

[4] Blümlinger (2017) and Blümlinger, Lavin (2018): 341-360.

[5] See Flusser (1991): 161.

[6] See Agamben (1991): 57.

[7] The imprint of gesture onto technical tools is different from Benjamin's idea of innervation. According to Benjamin, the nerves that growing through skin and muscles tissues so as to permit the transmission of motor impulses to different organs continue their ramifications into technical apparatuses, which amplify and externalize this process (see Pinotti [2018]: 88). In the transitive theory of the gesture, the point is rather the propagation of the

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form (and meaning) of a human attitude through technology.

[8] Epstein defines his own reflection on cinema as «lyrosophy (*lyrosophie*)», intending a form of thought that unites a rational component with an emotive and affective one.

1. PRELUDE: PROJECTIONS AND RESONANCES

This discursive field, presenting the gesture as progressively absorbed by objects utilized by the body, united anthropologists and aestheticians. At the end of the nineteenth century, these thinkers demonstrated a shared interest in biology, a key field that helped to evade the swamps of various spiritualisms. The first such thinker was the philosopher and anthropologist Alfred Espinas (1844-1922), Marcel Mauss's teacher at the University of Bordeaux, friend and colleague of Théodule Ribot and promoter of a «scientific» sociology that looks at human phenomena from a biological perspective, searching for the rules of nature that govern the actions of men within their social life. Regarding the themes at issue here, Espinas's volume on the origins of technology (1897) is particularly relevant. Though predominantly a social history of antiquity, the volume also introduces two key notions: first, the idea of *praxéologie*, the study of simple and spontaneous human actions that are governed by social rules and followed unconsciously; second, the theme of the prosthetic, adapted from the German philosopher Ernst Kapp – the first to have elaborated this concept in an explicit way. In his pioneering *Elements of a Philosophy of Technology*, Kapp interprets technique as a *continuation* and a *projection* of limbs, organs and senses, from the concave hand as a bowl to the neural system as telegraph cables[9]. This produced a very important intuition, the full relevance of which Espinas fully understood. Kapp's idea of «projection» represents the first materialisation of the notion of technique as reproduction of a form; it meant not only the intensification and extension of the body's functions, but also the transfer of a *conceptual matrix*, from the organic to the inorganic. Espinas then adopted Kapp's key concepts, addressing the question from a specific slant: emphasizing the unconscious, uncontrolled and unacted part of the extension of the body in tools. «The tool and the worker are one», Espinas writes, «the worker uses it like an extended limb, barely ever remarking on its structure, nor seeking to understand how its various parts adapt so well to their aim» (Espinas [1897]: 45). In use and design, the process is therefore «naturally» an imitation, and thus Espinas's work establishes a first idea of the body-machine.

The machine is no longer a projection of the limb's extremities, but of the articulation that unites them with each other and with the torso, enabling them to be, to act upon each other, to carry out certain movements and to exclude others. A machine is a combination of rigid and elastic pieces that are put together in such a way that the application of force to one part of the system produces movement in another, the only possible movement, that is perfectly designed for a useful objective.[10]

The same year that Espinas's *Les origines de la technologie* was published also saw the release of *De la correlation des sons et des couleurs en art* by the musicologist Albert Cozanet, under the *nom de plume* Jean d'Udine[11]. The synesthetic theory of art that d'Udine developed in this volume was the first step toward his more comprehensive theory of the gesture. It then found a more definitive form in *L'art et le geste* (1910), a very influential essay that profoundly conditioned the work of Francis Picabia[12] and left its mark, as we will see, on the work of Sergei M. Eisenstein too. D'Udine adapted the notion of the gesture from the work of Swiss musician and pedagogue Jacques-Dalcroze, the father of eurythmics. He moreover combined it with the ideas of another key figure from his education, the doctor and biologist Félix Le Dantec, who provided a source of inspiration in particular for his studies of the imitative behaviours of protoplasm. D'Udine's bio-aesthetic project covered many of the arts, with the curious exception of cinema, though the musicologist had come close in his synesthetic experiments – enough so to invent an apparatus that could

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[9] See Kapp (1877). On his fundamental role to the theory of the prosthetic see Somaini (2018).

[10] Espinas (1897): 46 (my translation).
[11] See D'Udine (1897).
[12] Pierre (2002): 102.

project colours to accompany sounds (Guido [2007]: 147). In the chapters of his extensive treatise, however, he addresses sculpture, painting, architecture, literature and music, and identified the primary role of dance: a naturally synesthetic art since it converts sounds into movements of the body according to a rhythmical meaning. With Dalcroze, d'Udine believed that the gesture was originally born of the body's immediate reaction to an auditory stimulus, a muscular contraction that was an instinctive imitation, but which could be sophisticated and strengthened through specific learning. He hence formulated an initial definition of the gesture as human imitation and restitution of the natural rhythms of things. This however followed Le Dantec's definition of imitation, i.e., not as a mere reproduction of appearances but rather as *resonance*, as the result of an affinity between two immeasurable systems that are harmonized through a shared interface (Le Dantec [1902]). The interface is guaranteed by the Dalcrozian «muscular sense», a hyper-sense which unites all others and which consists in a vast, rhythmic memory stored within cells. This organic database is accessed every time a gesture is used in response to a stimulus, which resonates in the colloidal nodes (made of suspended microparticles in perpetual movement). Among the nodes lies protoplasm, the base material of living cells, which reacts to the stimulus by vibrating and reproducing the external rhythm in an undulating movement. Continual interceptions and translations of rhythms constitute a physiological question that also has significant psychological resonances, therefore inspiring d'Udine to introduce a second definition of the gesture: «The gesture is the plastic form of our "state of mind", and not only its emanation; it is an integral, essential part of it, and constitutes an inseparable rhythm, the breadth of which directly influences the intensity of our passion»[13]. Though he strays into the realm of expression, d'Udine does not reaffirm the classical idea of the gesture as a symptom of a passion located elsewhere (i.e. in man's unfathomable

«interiority»); rather he argues that gesture and state of mind are two parts of the same rhythmic phenomenon. This can find other sensorial translations including, as he suggests in one of the text's most well-known sections, in colours, volumes or words. Indeed, the arts are grafted onto this first conversion of rhythm into gesture, after each one has retraced a gesture according to its own specific sensorial modality. The aesthetic process that d'Udine describes is therefore similar to a kind of contagion, it is a circular chain of intermediated transmissions of gestures: the rhythm infects the muscular sense and becomes gesture/affect, these grow together into an «aggregation of matter»: the work. Even though it is inert, the latter can always reproduce the original gesture, transferring it to other individuals and enabling them to feel the same emotion. In this way, the artefact becomes a kind of fossil, which contains the «plastic form of a state of mind», the creative gesture translated and transferred but always ready to be re-activated. In this way, the visions of the anthropologist and the musicologist meet, in the shared idea that to create is to model matter according to a gesture, projecting onto it a framework which consists in a series of rhythmic combinations that identify operative models or forms of feeling.

But is it really worth insisting on the latter distinction? Are there ultimately some gestures that are purely technical and serve only to manipulate, and others that are essentially expressive, so limited to externalizing a state of mind in a symptomatic or symbolic way? This is one of the most elusive questions relating to the gesture, and one of the unresolved knots that cinema highlighted in a particularly explicit way, not only in film theory but also through the force of its images. When Kubrick portrayed a hominid in the exact moment it understands the potential of a dried-out tapir bone, creating the first aggressive-defensive tool, he used montage to show how the monkey's gesture is simultaneously an efficient action and the expression of a feeling. First the hominid is looking for food, it digs with its back legs but keeps its snout close to the carcass to get organic remains into its mouth quickly. But then, under the influ-

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[13] D'Udine (1910): 214 (my transl.).

ence of the infamous monolith, it stops, it repeatedly tilts its head from side to side, as though seeking the perfect angle to take in what stands before it. It attempts to hold a femur as a club, first allowing it to fall languidly to the ground two or three times, enough to note the destructive effect of its impact on the skeleton. In that moment, its body has begun to imagine, its arm carries out more and more consciously the percussive and violent gesture through its weaponized limb, depicted carefully in all of its parts through slow-motion (and made triumphant over Strauss's musical notes). In a sense, the use of slow-motion transforms the technical object into an expression, or, perhaps trying to nuance the concept, foregrounds the feeling that it accompanies. Without doubt it shows that exercising a gesture in all its technical functionality introduces an excess of some kind: the more precise its execution, the more the gesture transcends its performative limits and filters what it affects. As soon as the club has been invented, hand and mouth are separated in an energetic, upward outburst of the body: a medium shot becomes a close-up of the monkey's face as it howls and bears its jaws, as though the hand gesture has continued into the face, in the form of an expression; the mouth *expresses* what the hand *does*; in this sequence we see ground zero, the moment in which the two corporeal actions coincide. At the same time, beating the ground with the club has its own expressivity, determined by the intensity of the blow, its frequency and its efficiency. As the monkey beats the bone languidly we see its mental condition, its state of perplexity and suspension; analogously the more the impetus grows, the more we see aspiration, desire, fury, and the development of a dominating posture. In this cult sequence, cinema therefore «thinks», via images, the precarity of the confines between technique and expression, re-articulating the profound dialectic within the human gesture[14].

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[14] In the first decade of the nineteenth century, many thinkers discussed the relationship between technique and expression, from Wilhelm Wundt – who believed

2. THEME: REFLEXES AND IMITATIONS

The Kubrickian sequence therefore helps us to conceive of how a gesture impressed in an object consists in two elements, one performative and the other affective, combined in varying proportions. The motif of the composition of gestures returned, later, in the work of two extremely different thinkers, as regards their formation and contexts: the Jesuit anthropologist Marcel Jousse (1886-1961), a student of Mauss that, through the latter, had access to Espinas's philosophy; and the director and film theorist Sergei M. Eisenstein. Their work makes more explicit the question of imitation posed by d'Udine, and achieves this returning to the important theme of mimetic ability, the irrational basis of which was meanwhile the object of much discussion in the 1930s. In 1933, for instance, Walter Benjamin wrote *Doctrine of the Similar* and *On the Mimetic Faculty*, in which he touches a set of questions that Jousse, almost contemporaneously, placed at the centre of his own anthropological approach, including the link between primary gestures in dance and cosmic movements, the Wundtian problem of the gestural origins of language, the question of animal camouflage and the mimetic power of infants (Benjamin [1933a] e [1933b]). At the same time, research on the physiological foundations of the psyche was translated into the explosion of reflexology, culminating in the English translation of Vladimir M. Bechterev's volume *General Principles of Human Reflexology* (1932), while in France the legacy of Théodule Ribot and especially Pierre Janet had a strong impact (for example on Henri Delacroix and his ideas of automatic imitation as «the body's reflected and undefined plasticity»,

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that technique (and especially language) was, on the contrary, a by-product of expression (since initially labial gestures had been mere expressions) – to Ludwig Klages, who saw the expression as a metaphor of the action. Subsequently, Helmuth Plessner absorbed this dialectic within the broad idea of «human eccentricity», a condition of existence consisting in being at the same time *a* body, *in* a body and *outside* a body, with the consequent split of each gesture into technique and affect.

Delacroix [1927]: 56). At the end of the nineteenth century, Janet had explored «the inferior states of consciousness» in their ability to highlight the body's automatisms, and shed new light on the phenomenon of hysteria (Janet [1889]). Roger Caillois, an anthropologist from an entirely different tradition, had begun to study animal mimicry from an anti-evolutionist perspective (Caillois [1934]), referring specifically to Janet's terminology in defining the state of the animal in the moment it occurs: *psychasthenia* (and not the survival instinct), a psychological condition of abandon, the abandon of the Self as it strays into the other, an ambiguous pleasure in fusion based on cellular mimesis with environmental conditions.

Osmosis between the body and the environment, as well as the coincidence of somatic changes and affectivity, exhibited so strikingly in animals, became a point of reference for the gestural theories of Jousse and Eisenstein, both of which were developed in relation to cinema. Jousse elaborated his own anthropological approach to the gesture in around a thousand lessons, held at l'École d'Anthropologie at the Sorbonne and l'École des Hautes Études, between 1931 and 1957[15]. His courses had a widespread impact, defining the mood of that historical moment even without ever proving disruptive, instead circulating a form of knowledge that continued to re-emerge even decades later and in the most disparate of contexts[16]. Jousse's thought was constructed around a neologism that sought to appropriate a particular form of logic, halfway between imitation and animal mimicry, that informed human gestures. He defined *mimism* as man's ability to understand the world somatically, assimilating her/himself through gestures, a primordial tool that was the subject of his most famous sentence: «in the beginning was the gesture», a testament, moreover, to an unconfessed debt to d'Udine[17].

The gesture remained the only tool through which man could capture and participate in the universe's extremely intricate network of relationships. It provides a form of somatic[18] intelligence that advances in phases and makes use of all the body's organs, because, as Pierre Janet – Jousse's teacher at the Collège de France – wrote, «we think as much with our hands as we do with the brain, we think with the stomach, we think with the whole body»[19]. The skeleton serves only to «attach» gestures, Jousse writes, while muscles and nerves are directly connected to the imitative process, since their fibres respond immediately to environmental triggers, reflecting them and initiating the mimismologic process. This first neuro-mimetic phase constituted a reflexological reconsideration of the late-nineteenth century question of muscular sense, adopting comparisons to the animal kingdom, where this process is most fully visible. While the animal does not go beyond this phase, humans begin a second one, *rejeu* (replay), which consists in a remodelling of the reflex as a gesture, a tool through which they reproduce the environment in the way they discern it. Only in the third phase, *formulism*, are gestures encod-

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[15] His lectures have been recently digitalized by the Association Marcel Jousse, Paris (Jousse [2002]). At the time they were professionally shorthanded, but Jousse never wrote them in full before presenting them to students. Jousse (1969) provides a collection of his ideas, assembled by his pupils.

[16] Jousse was the main reference for artists such as Jacques Lecoq, but he also inspired theorists. In Agamben (1991) many of Jousse's arguments resurface, including the juxtaposition between gesture and image, and the idea of modernity as a loss of gesture, that is partially redeemed by cinema.

[17] Considering his familiarity with the Gospel, Jousse may have autonomously adapted the verse «In the beginning was the word» – though D'Udine had certainly done this some decades earlier (1910: 86), reformulating Hans von Bülow's postulate ("In the beginning was the rhythm"), making it, as d'Udine said, more precise.

[18] Throughout this essay, I prefer to define this form of thought as *somatic* rather than *bodily*, to foreground the body not as an object seen from outside, but in the proprioception of its owner, living through it as a mixture of sensations and movements, both of which are central factors in gesturality. Doing so, I follow theoretical work from the past fifty years in the field of dance, sport sciences and psychotherapy. See Eddy (2009).

[19] Jousse quotes this phrase often, for instance Jousse (1925): 39.

ed and fossilized, losing their vital element and becoming simply a code of communication or a rhetorical tool. Jousse writes off this degenerative moment rather hastily, concentrating instead on *rejeu* as a knowledge of forms. Intercepted and extracted from the environment, these forms can nevertheless also come back to it: with the creation of the instrument – for the first time defined here as an *extension of a human gesture* – man deposits them *within* matter.

One of these instruments, the most important one is cinema. Cinema does not simply extend any gesture, but rather the quintessence of the gesture, that is, its mismological capacity; hence it becomes anthropology's principle tool[20]. Cinema is an intelligent machine that thinks by miming. Humans – congenitally capable of miming – have transmitted to film their gestural abilities, or perhaps invented an "imitative" technique that prolongs them, therefore simultaneously making visible (and studiable) the process that most fundamentally characterizes themselves[21]. Jousse insists on the parallelism between cinema and the human body: the two «machines» function in the same way, since man is «a plastic film camera that records and assembles gestures with his own body, his own hands, his own ocular musculature»[22], and cinema is the mechanical translation of this chain of impressions and replays, a means of prolonging it but also of becoming a part of it («I ask of the cinematic technique to provide me with an extension of my gesture – *nota bene*, an extension»[23]). Cinema's gesture begins with an impression of the film that is traced out by the energetic waves of the real, in the way of our nerve receptors, and it ends with montage, a tool of replay, of the creation of chains of affinity in which the «environment's gesticulations» are connected to those of the individual[24]. Cinema provides the possibility to observe the creation of these links: slowing down or accelerating the flow of film reveals how a gesture passes from one being to another. «Today», Jousse writes, «thanks to technical and scientific tricks that the screen allows, cinema lets us witness that fluid passage from one being to another, that gradual and imperceptible fusion of a man and an object, through which he realizes and 'makes successive' his own actions and gestures»[25].

The nodes that cinema creates – the subtle links between the animate and the inanimate, the individual and the environment – also inspired film theory at that time, with which Jousse entered into close dialogue, even if only indirectly[26]. The most animistic inflection of Jousse's discourses can be found, with incredible precision, in the work of Jean Epstein. Epstein considered the use of the camera as a rational technique, a «metal brain» that thinks through mechanical synapses, thanks to the complexity of its inner workings[27]. Gestures tied together on screen create connections and develop thoughts, especially when observed at twice the speed (the «trick» that Jousse also mentions); this makes them visible even when formed by plants or stones. Their transit remixes and radically re-articulates the scale of the various kingdoms, allowing us to observe the movement of forms between the organic and the inorganic, to see continual transfusions of gestures that in the end are deposited, in Epstein's work too, in objects and tools[28].

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[20] «With cinema, the anthropology of gesture has found its instrument», see Jousse's 26 March 1936 lecture at Sorbonne (Jousse [2002]: 269) (my transl.).

[21] Jousse dealt with cinema in many of his courses, for instance: *L'analyse cinématographique du mimisme* (12 December 1932), *Les mimogrammes cinématographiques* (1 April 1935), *L'anthropologie et le cinématographe* (8 April 1935), *Le livre cinématographique et la science* (19 March 1945), *L'anthropologie du mimisme et le cinéma* (6 March 1952). See Jousse (2002).

[22] See Jousse's 5 November 1934 lecture at l'École d'Anthropologie (Jousse [2002]: 8).

[23] See Jousse's 26 March 1936 lecture at the Sorbonne (Jousse [2002]: 271).

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[24] See Jousse's 1 April 1935 lecture at l'École d'Anthropologie (Jousse [2002]: 357).

[25] Jousse (1969): 125.

[26] Jousse's lectures were echoed in national newspapers, where his approach to cinema is often reported (see for instance "Le Monde", 24 November 1928); however, cinema theorists of his time do not mention him.

[27] Epstein (1946): 309.

[28] Epstein mentions the laborer's gesture of screwing-in and defines it as «moving», because he perceives it as

Though Epstein's anti-physiognomic and anti-psychological notion of the gesture is unique in film theory, the important questions that Jousse raises also return in Eisenstein's last work. In the essay *Opredeliaiushchii zhest* [The Underlying Gesture] (1939-1940), as yet untranslated but summarized by Anna Hedberg Olenina and Irina Schulzki (2018), Eisenstein drafts a general theory of the gesture as a fundamental component of pre-logical thought, a primitive force that structures the work of art and models the aesthetic experience of its user. He argues that the film image takes root in the director's psycho-physiological gesture, in one of his/her specific expressive movements that constitutes the somatic embryo of the film, from which its chain of images and sounds emerges and is broadcast. This perspective is coherent with Jousse's vision of the gesture as a bodily intuition, and the impression is further confirmed both in an essay written one month before the director's death (Eisenstein [1948]) and in a passage of the unfinished volume *Metod*, in which his early reflections on expressive movement are connected to the gestures of film direction[29].

In *Metod*, Eisenstein interprets «the system of the creation of images as a superior stage of expressive movement, and of its manifestation»[30]. Human gestures find their ideal continuation in the creative act, which gives form to the work, where giving form itself (in the case of cinema, to images) consists in a an out-pouring of body matrices that are at the same time manipulative and expressive[31].

This point is made more clearly in Eisenstein (1948), which presents the concepts of *mise-en-jeu*

and *mise-en-geste* (literally, «putting into play» and «putting into gesture»). Both of these correspond to Jousseian equivalents; however, these terms do not refer to the abstract operations of the film camera but rather to the concrete work of direction. Constructing a scene implies making a series of directorial decisions that are consistent with the initial gestural matrix, but translated into a system of relationships between bodies and objects within a specific spatial orientation. This conversion of a subterranean motif into structures of images corresponds to *mise-en-jeu*: affect, conflictual themes, forms of movement, all these become concrete in the specific traits of the scene («embodiment in action») (Eisentein [2014]). In a way, *mise-en-jeu* re-introduces a corporeal intuition and distributes it among various environmental factors, and in this sense it very much resembles Jousse's concept of «rejeu». For Eisenstein, the phase of *mise-en-geste*, on the other hand, refers exclusively to the character, to their choices of movements and positions. Here, on the contrary, the specific configuration of the scene must be absorbed and reinstated in the body of the actor, whose gestures are therefore not motivated on a narrative or psychological level but, if anything, justified by rational «cover stories», not unlike those that hypnotized people use to give meanings to their manipulated actions. In another contribution, Eisenstein argues even more radically for a need for the actor's «auto-hypnosis of the nerves»[32], as though the ultimate objective of his/her work was something similar to mimicry, at a neuro-mimetic level[33]. Moreover, as well as recalling the inferior states of consciousness (hypnosis) that, via Janet, were of great interest to Jousse, he also makes recourse to the phenomenon of animal mimicry in order to illustrate the continued interchange, in film itself, of gestural material between bodies and environments. Following d'Udine, whom he cites explicit-

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the endpoint of a chain of transmissions (Epstein [1921]: 100).

[29] This essay from the unfinished book *Metod* (Eisenstein [2002]) has been translated into Italian by A. Cervini, and included in Eisenstein (2009): 91-119.

[30] See Eisenstein (2009): 93 (my transl.).

[31] Pietro Montani asserts that «the integral dramaturgy of the filmic form finds its germinal cell precisely in the biomechanics, in the intrinsically "expressive" movement of the anthropologically qualified *bios*». See Eisenstein (2009): 9 (my transl.).

[32] Eisenstein (2009): 49.

[33] Cf., however, the circularity of this concept in Eisenstein's *Montage 1937*, in which he presents gesture as the concentration of *mise-en-scène* in a person, and *mise-en-scène* as gesture exploding into a spatial sequence (Eisenstein [1994]: 21).

ly[34], Eisenstein interprets colour as the translation of a gesture, and compares the creation of a film as a chromatic surface to the corporeal elaboration of colour by the chameleon, which oscillates continually «from the objective colouring of its surroundings to its objective recreation»[35].

Through the work of Jousse and Eisenstein, cinema therefore became the principal space for interchanges between body and its surroundings; its anthropological dimension, as a medium that allows man to confront his/her own way of understanding the world somatically, therefore emerged fully. It is not so much a reinforced eye, but a body that imitates and replays, a body that is both mechanical and biological thus bringing together together the logic of machines and animal behaviour, legitimating the movement from organic to inorganic, and ultimately presenting gesture as a vital form that can animate the inanimate.

3. CODA: EXUDATION AND CRYSTALLIZATION

This brings us to the renowned perspective of the French palaeontologist André Leroi-Gourhan, who reinstates an emphasis on technique in the strictest sense. In the pages of his writings, he clarifies the transitive hypothesis, though in part deprived of its complexity and audacity, since the idea of gesture that he adapts is more traditionally operative. Already in work written in the forties, the palaeontologist had defined the tool as «the exteriorization of an efficient gesture»[36] as «an interaction of matter with the means to transform it»[37]; in the fifties, he began to formulate the concept of the operational sequence (*chaîne opératoire*), which would then become central to his most important contribution (Leroi-Gourhan [1964-1965]). In this work, technique is defined as the interweaving of «gestures and tools organized in sequence by a

true syntax», and this syntax of actions is, for the most part, devoid of those irrational components that had characterized previous definitions of technique, in the thirties. What therefore emerges here is the difference between humans and animals: animals use their own bodies, or body parts, as tools; man learns to separate the support and the gesture, increasingly able to transfer the latter into an object that is separate from the body. «The tool», as Leroi-Gourhan writes, is in some way «"exuded" by humans in the course of their evolution», thus departing from an animal condition of total incorporation, as for the crab, whose «claws and jaws are all of a piece with the operating program through which the animal's food acquisition behavior is expressed»[38]. In the passage from primitive tools to modern techniques, the key point is that the gestures of which they are descendants are no longer recognizable. While for machines of the first phase of industrialization they were still intuitable, by the information revolution (and in digital culture even more so) the gesture is obscured within an operative matrix that is increasingly abstract and sophisticated. With the creation of artificial memory, the operative programme is entirely externalized. As such, new machines become autonomous and therefore are denied the status of prosthesis (something that beforehand was recalled constantly, in the memory of a prolonged gesture). Rather they are effectively promoted to the level of thinking bodies, as «something like a real muscular system, controlled by a real nervous system, performing complex operating programs through its connections with something like a real sensory-motor brain»[39]. This conclusion appears coherent with Jousse's and Eisenstein's anthropo-bio-aesthetics, as the proximity between the technical object and the animal world is made explicit and noticeable. «A biologist», Leroi-Gourhan writes, «will find it hard to resist comparing the mechanisms of animals whose evolution is already completed with

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[34] We find a direct quotation from d'Udine in Eisenstein (1949): 150.
[35] Eisenstein (2014), digital edition.
[36] See Leroi-Gourhan (1943): 319.
[37] See Leroi-Gourhan (1945): 333.

[38] See Leroi-Gourhan (1965): 239.
[39] See Leroi-Gourhan (1965): 248.

these organisms which, in the last analysis, constitute a parallel living world»[40]. But in the 1960s, with the explosion of mediatization, sensibilities changed. In this parallel world of tools that were no longer dependent on humans, they began to be perceived as threatening and conflictual. This is clear immediately, for instance, reading the observations – which even then were somewhat dated – that the palaeontologist made about cinema, and more generally about audio-visual media. As a medium that demands that we listen and watch movement, cinema can be accused of producing passive forms of perception, penalizing man's imagination and and thinking in his place, rather than allowing him to think freely. «Audiovisual techniques really seem to represent a new stage of human development»[41], he writes, hypothesizing an anthropological mutation: one probably caused by a misunderstanding of the idea of the transition of living components to objects, but considered rather in terms of their theft underwent by man.

In order to find less anxious models that maintain the enthusiasm of previous historical moments, we can look to the work of Gilbert Simondon. Here, I limit myself to evoking his well-known rehabilitation of the technical object. At the end of the fifties, Simondon reinserted technique into the circuit of human action, moreover emphasizing the gesture as a component that remains connected to the machine and creating a link between man and nature – man's nature that goes beyond pure rationality and ability to operate, to include somatic and affective thought. His work begins with these famous words:

Culture has constituted itself as a defense system against technics; yet this defense presents itself as a defense of man, and presumes that technical objects do not contain a human reality within them […]. The opposition drawn between culture and technics, between man and machine, is false and has no foundation […]. Behind a facile humanism, it masks a reality rich in human efforts and natural forces, and

which constitutes a world of technical objects as mediators between man and nature.[42]

The human reality that exists within machines – defined as «a human gesture fixed and crystallized into working structures»[43] – consists in the *expression* of a certain relationship between man and the world, which makes the object beautiful. That beauty, however, is naturally not the result of design, but dependent on the perception of a connection to the real that one is able to rediscover. «It is never the object strictly speaking that is beautiful», Simondon writes, «it is the encounter – which takes place about the object – between a real aspect of the world and a human gesture» (Simondon 1958) (Simondon [2017]: 202). Cinema returns within this discourse (even though the part of his work dedicated to film is incomplete), and in particular it inspires concepts once again, starting with the definition of film as «a psycho-social reality» that generates interindividual relationships and establishes a new regime in the relationship between man and himself. Simondon writes that cinema represents «the return of man's reality to man's knowledge, and of the gesture to consciousness of the gesture»[44]. We are tempted to perceive an echo of the transitive theory of gesture in this sentence, even though it is difficult to grasp exactly what the philosopher had in mind. This is especially true in a project constructed on such a complex structure, consisting of «Cinema and the Past; Cinema and the Present; Cinema Itself; Cinema and the Future» (of these only the first part was written). In «Cinema and the Past», Simondon invokes various technical gestures made by the machines of moving images, and attributes them to the sphere of magic. He lingers on the enlargement of forms that were made to appear for projective means, and concludes that cinema took the place of Greek thaumaturgy. His argument is left incomplete, but what we can extract from his suggestions, like from the theories of the technical gesture in gen-

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[40] See Leroi-Gourhan (1965): 251.
[41] See Leroi-Gourhan (1965): 213.

[42] Simondon (1958): 15.
[43] Simondon (1958): 18.
[44] Simondon (2014): 308 (my transl.).

eral, is the need for a systematic reconsideration of cinema's gestural dimension, that the digital era seems to have rediscovered and enhanced in every respect. The gestures represented in films – which remodel and often re-invent «natural» ones, creating techniques of the body – are in turn the result of a filmic gesture, consisting in an interpretation of what was inscribed in the camera in the moment of its invention. The director can decide whether to support or subvert the implicit «prescriptions of use» of his tool, but his way of generating images must always be contrasted with the indications inscribed in the machine. By following the close interweaving of these three forms – the *cinematographic gesture,* the *filmic gesture* and the *filmed gesture*, it may be possible to reconsider the way in which the main medium of the twentieth century became grafted, from its very origins, onto our bodies.

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Sugli effetti di ritorno della nostra creatività tecnica

Elisa Binda

Abstract. The essay aims to reflect on the question about how we become ourselves finding an answer in our species-specific technical creativity. By using the reflexions of Gilbert Simondon, Lambros Malafouris and Don Ihde, I want to suggest that through the modifications imported to the environment by virtue of technical mediations, human beings are in the condition of acting upon themselves. Our very technical mediations reorganize our cognitive and sensitive experience of the world.

Keywords. Simondon, Techno-Aesthetics, creativity, transduction, Material Engagement Theory, Malafouris, Ihde.

In un breve scritto, datato 8 settembre 1953, il filosofo francese Gilbert Simondon ferma sulla carta alcune suggestive riflessioni: tratteggia immagini di case alte, un dedalo di pontili, un camion carico di operai, la luce che li illumina. Descrive il granito che brilla, lo scisto che si sfalda, un ponte che si inarca da una collina all'altra. Intorno a lui, «in armonia», convivono elementi naturali e artificiali. Infine, conclude: «noi siamo degli esseri naturali che hanno un debito di tecnica [τέχνη] per pagare la natura [Φύσις] che è in noi; il germe di natura [Φύσις] che è in noi si deve dilatare in tecnica [τέχνη] intorno a noi» (Simondon [2014]: 24). Secondo Simondon il legame tra essere umano e tecnica è dunque così serrato da assumere la forma di un *debito*; siamo spinti, costretti, a manifestare tecnicamente, al di fuori di noi, la nostra natura di essere umani. È in questo movimento dall'interno verso l'esterno che si è sviluppato il nostro processo evolutivo il quale ci ha condotto, nel succedersi delle ere, a quella che è definita oggi come *Antropocene*, dove l'azione umana condiziona in una forma profondamente inedita gli aspetti strutturali, climatici, ambientali, chimici e fisici del mondo in cui si propaga.

In questo contributo intendo considerare in particolare il movimento opposto - e conseguente - a quello dell'esternalizzazione. La specie cui apparteniamo, infatti, è tale non soltanto per la sua tendenza a prolungarsi esternamente in artefatti, ma perché sussiste un

movimento di ritorno, di *retro-azione* che la modifica e la modella, tanto a livello cognitivo quanto sensibile. Siamo diventati noi stessi manipolando i nostri ambienti di vita. Secondo questa prospettiva viene a cadere non soltanto la dicotomia tra natura e cultura (intesa qui come insieme in cui confluiscono tutti i prodotti della creatività umana), ma anche quella tra interno ed esterno. Intendo dunque far convergere su questo tema le riflessioni di alcuni studiosi, filosofi e non, più e meno recenti.

1. ESTENDERSI

È ormai entrata a far parte del senso comune l'idea che i nostri dispositivi siano una sorta di prolungamento di ciò che siamo; riconosciamo come il nostro modo di incontrare il mondo sia costantemente mediato da ciò che teniamo a portata di polpastrelli o che addirittura indossiamo. Queste esperienze possono far riferimento a un complesso di idee di stampo scientifico, filosofico, artistico, che si arricchisce sempre di più e che cerca di rendere conto di come i nostri processi cognitivi, affettivi, emotivi, individuali e collettivi, si originino e si estendano in ambienti sempre più tecnicizzati. Sul concetto di esternalizzazione inteso come tratto specie-specifico si è costruito il lavoro, ormai classico, del paletnologo André Leroi-Gourhan. I suoi studi lo portano a ravvisare una completa coincidenza tra il processo di ominazione e quello di tecnogenesi, tanto da affermare che «il solo criterio d'umanità *biologicamente* innegabile è la presenza dello strumento» (Leroi-Gourhan [1957]: 63). È qualcosa di apparentemente "innaturale", di artificiale, ma che possiede in realtà un carattere radicalmente *biotico*, a permettere di identificare la forma di vita umana. Leroi-Gourhan evidenzia come la strada evolutiva percorsa dalla nostra specie si sia sviluppata al di fuori delle coordinate strettamente corporee: «tutta l'evoluzione umana contribuisce a porre fuori dell'uomo ciò che, nel resto del mondo animale, corrisponde all'adattamento specifico» (Leroi-Gourhan [1964]: 277).

Gli esseri umani non sono semplicemente delle creature "naturali" o "biologiche" e non sono nemmeno soltanto il prodotto di ciò che definiamo "cultura". Nell'annullamento di questa presunta dicotomia – nel venir meno di polarizzazioni imposte, meramente concettuali, tra «"nature" and "culture" or "mind" and "matter"» – risiede il nostro «mode of being» che, secondo le parole del filosofo della tecnica Don Ihde, può essere descritto come un «continuum of human-prostheses inter-relations» (Ihde-Malafouris [2019]: 196). Questo riferimento al concetto di protesi permette di sottolineare come lo stretto rapporto tra umano e tecnica sia profondamente iscritto nella sua *aisthesis*, nella sua peculiare sensibilità, in via di principio connotata da specifiche qualità – prima tra tutte la sua illimitata apertura allo stimolo – e capace di prestazioni che la predispongono a prolungarsi in artefatti inorganici (Montani [2014]: 21 sgg.). A questo proposito, Bernard Stiegler individua nella nostra specie una "originaria tecnicità", riconoscendo le protesi non più come «un simple prolongement du corps humain», ma, piuttosto, come ciò che costituisce «ce corps en tant que "humain"» (Stiegler [1994]: 162). L'evoluzione delle protesi, attraverso le quali la nostra specie ha costruito i suoi habitat, ha irrimediabilmente condizionato il modo di procedere del nostro arco evolutivo; il progresso del non vivente è interconnesso a quello del vivente: «ciò che rimane delle attività tecniche è quindi la sola testimonianza, accanto ai resti dello scheletro, dell'aspetto puramente umano dell'evoluzione. [...]. In altri termini si può considerare uno sviluppo parallelo e sincrono degli uomini e dei loro prodotti» (Leroi-Gourhan [1943]: 19).

È Simondon a trovare un termine per indicare efficacemente come la nostra sensibilità sia da sempre tecnicamente alterata. In una lettera scritta, ma mai inviata, a Jacques Derrida nel 1982, conia il concetto di *tecno-estetica* e ne descrive i diversi possibili aspetti. La tecno-estetica indica, innanzitutto, la dimensione fondamentalmente attiva della nostra esperienza, quella che «non ha come categoria principale la contemplazione» (Simondon [1992]: 34). Gli esempi messi in gio-

co da Simondon, i quali spaziano dal dipinto della Gioconda al martello, passando per chiavi inglesi e strumenti musicali, mostrano come nel nostro rapporto quotidiano con il mondo la componente pratica, la quale coinvolge in prima istanza il nostro complesso senso-motorio[1], sia imprescindibile. Il nostro ambiente circostante viene così attivamente riconfigurato attraverso le nostre protesi tecniche, le quali ci permettono di cogliere nuovi modi di orientarci nell'ambiente. Simondon sottolinea inoltre la presenza di un «piacere» provocato dall'interazione con l'oggetto, il quale si può cogliere, ad esempio, nel forgiare o nel lavorare il legno, in cui «il corpo dell'operatore dona e riceve» (Simondon [1992]: 34). Il corpo stesso diviene in questo senso un'interfaccia, un *medium*, performativamente coinvolto nel suo commercio con le cose che lo circondano. Ma è nella parte conclusiva della lettera che Simondon giunge a definire l'aspetto più radicale della tecno-estetica, dal quale si può ricavare «un altro senso, *più primitivo, più pienamente corporeo*»[2]: «Il sentimento tecno-estetico sembra essere più originario rispetto al solo sentimento estetico o all'aspetto tecnico considerato semplicemente sotto l'angolazione della sua funzionalità, che è penalizzante» (Simondon [1992]: 46).

Con queste parole il filosofo giunge ad affermare con chiarezza quanto il nostro modo di nascere nel mondo e di farne esperienza sia già di per sé tecno-estetico. Ciò significa che la tecnica non può essere intesa come qualcosa che si aggiunge solo secondariamente a un presunto e

più primitivo incontro dell'essere umano con il suo habitat; non vi è un sovrapporsi successivo della tecnica a un rapporto con l'ambiente semplicemente sensibile, corporeo. La sensibilità tecno-estetica dell'umano è quindi tale perché è più originaria rispetto al solo sentimento estetico (che potremmo definire il polo "naturale" della dicotomia natura-cultura) o al semplice aspetto tecnico (il polo "culturale"). La nostra *aisthesis* è da sempre innervata tecnicamente. Utilizzando le parole di Merleau-Ponty, uno dei maestri di Simondon, si può così riconoscere come «il nostro corpo è sempre altro da ciò che è […] radicato nella natura nel medesimo istante in cui si trasforma mediante la cultura, mai chiuso in sé e mai superato» (Merleau-Ponty [1945]: 271).

L'umano è, secondo Simondon, in grado di incontrare la «realtà data» dell'ambiente in cui si trova, di organizzarla in «nuove forme», grazie alla sua sensibilità tecno-estetica e a una strumentazione cognitiva altamente plastica e creativa (Simondon [1958]: 56). Questa produzione di «nuove forme», che in misura esponenziale è connessa alle nostre mediazioni tecniche, ha, tra le sue notevoli conseguenze, quella di dare origine a ciò che Simondon definisce un *ambiente associato*, quel tipo di ambiente inedito che l'oggetto tecnico istituisce all'interno dell'ambiente nel quale si installa. L'ambiente associato è un ambiente rinnovato, misto, perché composto da elementi naturali e artificiali, condizionato dalla presenza di un oggetto tecnico e a sua volta in grado di condizionarne l'evoluzione. Quando Simondon formula questa nozione, ci troviamo nel 1958. Gli esempi di ambienti associati che il filosofo ha sotto i suoi occhi, e cui fa riferimento, sono le ferrovie, le strade, le reti di comunicazione televisiva e la radio. Basti ricordare che non era ancora giunta la rivoluzione di Internet. Ma oggi?

Oggi, con l'avvento delle tecnologie digitali, di tutti i dispositivi con cui ci interfacciamo quotidianamente, degli schermi che abitano i nostri spazi, della *Augmented Reality* e delle *Wearable Technologies*, siamo totalmente immersi in vasti ambienti associati, sempre più complessi. L'intreccio serrato, di cui parlava Simondon, tra aspet-

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[1] La sensibilità tecno-estetica si può riferire così a quel tipo di apprendimento che Francesco Antinucci definisce di tipo senso-motorio, «il sistema cognitivo più fondamentale e più antico che abbiamo», il quale sfrutta «il costante flusso interattivo con l'ambiente prossimale» (Antinucci [2011]: 23).

[2] Ritengo molto significativo che nel momento in cui Simondon descrive il significato più radicale della nozione di tecno-estetica, introduca il termine greco *aisthesis;* in questo modo riconduce la parola "estetica" alla sua origine etimologica la quale indica la sensibilità, la sensazione. L'estetica non è riferibile soltanto a una teoria dell'arte, per quanto, nel corso della lettera, Simondon indaghi brevemente anche questo aspetto.

ti naturali e tecnici, in cui ci troviamo a vivere, può essere definito come un chiasma tra ambienti mediali che sono anche media ambientali (Montani [2015]: 79). È in questo chiasma che si inscrive la storia evolutiva della nostra specie.

Alla base di queste considerazioni vi è la convinzione secondo la quale un individuo non è mai pensabile senza il suo ambiente. A questo rapporto Simondon ha dedicato la sua monumentale tesi di Dottorato, nella quale si impegna a mostrare come, grazie a questa relazione, tanto l'individuo quanto l'ambiente si modifichino mutualmente. Il filosofo chiama questa modificazione reciproca *individuazione*. Con questo termine intende indicare il processo attraverso cui si origina l'individuo, ma soprattutto vuole sostenere come esso non possa mai essere considerato un'entità definita, determinata: l'individuo è sempre aperto a continui processi di individuazione, potenzialmente infiniti, mai compiuti. La possibilità che questo processo sia indefinitamente sollecitato è data dal fatto che l'individuo non può mai esistere isolatamente: innanzitutto, «ciò che l'individuazione fa apparire non è solo l'individuo, bensì la coppia individuo-ambiente» (Simondon [2005]: 34). Detto altrimenti, un individuo è tale soltanto perché è implicato in quella serie di rapporti, i quali si instaurano nel momento stesso in cui viene a generarsi, che intrattiene con il suo circostante: «le effettive proprietà di un individuo risiedono a livello della sua genesi e, per questa stessa ragione, a livello della sua relazione con gli altri esseri poiché se l'individuo è l'essere in grado di continuare sempre la sua genesi, è nella relazione con gli altri esseri che risiede il suddetto dinamismo genetico» (Simondon [2005]: 124).

Simondon, per far emergere il carattere costitutivo di queste relazioni, prende a prestito un concetto dalla fisica, ovvero quello di trasduzione (*transduction*). Attraverso questo termine il filosofo intende rendere evidente che la relazione non può mai essere intesa come ciò che si interpone tra elementi già individuati; la relazione è, piuttosto, condizione necessaria alla loro costituzione. Secondo Simondon «individuazione e relazione sono inseparabili; […] non vi è limite tra l'individuo e la sua attività di relazione» (Simondon [2005]: 170). Siamo esseri *di* relazione, più che esseri *in* relazione. La relazione è, in altri termini, occasione di individuazione. Per la specie umana, in modo particolare, questa occasione è originata dall'interfacciarsi costante con ciò che produce: «l'individuo si individua», si modifica, «nella misura in cui percepisce altri esseri, agisce o fabbrica, è parte del sistema che comprende la sua realtà individuale e gli oggetti che percepisce o costruisce» (Simondon [2005]: 333).

Queste riflessioni di Simondon ben si accordano con le posizioni teoriche assunte da Don Ihde e Lambros Malafouris. I due autori riconoscono come la nostra specie, secondo modalità differenti rispetto alle altre specie animali, «have been altering their paths of development by creating new material forms and by opening up to new possibilities of material engagement». Ihde e Malafouris aggiungono che «we become constituted through making and using technologies that shape our minds and extend our bodies» (Ihde, Malafouris [2018]: 195). La nostra specie è capace di creare nuove modalità di interazione con l'ambiente che la circonda proprio grazie al ricorso ad artefatti, in particolare tecnologici, e questa capacità genera effetti retroattivi sulle sue strumentazioni cognitive e sensibili. È proprio su tale movimento di ritorno che questo contributo intende ora focalizzarsi.

2. EFFETTO FEEDBACK

In un testo recente, scritto a quattro mani, Ihde e Malafouris hanno indagato il peculiare tipo di rapporto che lega l'essere umano ai suoi artefatti, ciascuno a partire dalle loro prospettive di ricerca: Malafouris da studioso di archeologia cognitiva e promotore della *Material Engagement Theory* (MET), e Ihde da filosofo della tecnica di matrice post-fenomenologica. Formulando una *Material Engagement Theory*, Malafouris intende riconsiderare le modalità attraverso cui va intesa la relazione tra umano e materia. Attraverso l'idea di un coinvolgimento materiale, e riferen-

dosi, tra le altre, anche alle riflessioni di Leroi-Gourhan e di Stiegler, l'archeologo cognitivo descrive la nostra evoluzione come intimamente connessa con gli oggetti che manipoliamo e che produciamo. La nostra struttura cognitiva e sensibile è frutto della nostra evoluzione biologica tanto quanto è prodotta e costantemente riconfigurata da noi stessi in quanto esseri originariamente tecnici. Il presupposto della *MET* è che la nostra cultura materiale non possa essere intesa come semplice sfondo, come contesto nel quale siamo immersi, in quanto «things mediate, actively shape, and constitute our ways of being in the world and of making sense of the world. Things also bring people together and provide channels of interaction. Things envelop our minds; they become us» (Malafouris [2013]: 44). Ciò avviene in forza di ciò che Malafouris definisce una *metaplasticità* dell'essere umano; il fatto che «we have a plastic mind which is embedded and inextricably enfolded with a plastic culture – might well be the locus of human uniqueness *par excellence*». È proprio questa caratteristica della nostra specie a renderla «in grado di accogliere l'impatto della tecnologia nella sua bio-genesi» (Parisi [2015]: 143).

Sullo sfondo di queste riflessioni sono presenti le teorie dell'*Embodiment* e dell'*Extended Mind*. Anche grazie alle conquiste teoriche delle neuroscienze, supportate da tecniche di *Brain Imaging* sempre più affinate, si è messa in crisi la convinzione secondo cui il cervello-encefalo basti a spiegare l'intera complessità dei nostri processi cognitivi e affettivo-emotivi. La presenza pervasiva di una tecnologia intimamente connessa alla nostra vita rende quanto più urgente riflettere sulla «questione della frontiera tra corpo e oggetto, e quella tra corpo e cervello» (Bruner et al. [2016]: 31). Al corpo è opportuno riconoscere un'importanza fondamentale per la nostra cognizione; esso è elemento attivo, ponte delle relazioni tra il nostro sistema nervoso e l'ambiente esterno. Si utilizza dunque il concetto di *incorporazione* (*Embodiment*), per spiegare come nella nostra esperienza cognitiva sia necessariamente integrata quella corporea, senso-motoria; come scrive Malafouris, «the mind is to be understood as embodied,

indeed as extended beyond the body, and beyond the individual, and as interacting with the things of the material world» (Malafouris [2013]: xi). Il termine "things" viene qui usato nel suo senso più ampio e indica «material forms and techniques – it refers to the materiality of mundane objects, tool and artefacts as much as it refers to modern technologies and new form of digital culture» (Ihde, Malafouris [2018]: 196). A una *Embodied Mind* si correla così una *Extended Mind*: l'ambiente, che per la nostra specie, come abbiamo visto, «significa innanzitutto cultura e, in particolare, cultura materiale, tecnica», diventa una vera e propria «estensione extra-neurale del nostro sistema nervoso» (Bruner et al. [2016]: 32)[3].

Come i contributi che compongono questo numero di *Aisthesis*, così anche Ihde e Malafouris intendono riflettere su come diventiamo noi stessi. Non è il semplice utilizzo di strumenti a fini di adattamento a identificarci come specie. Numerosi studi attestano l'impiego, talvolta complesso, di utensili nelle altre specie animali. L'accento va piuttosto posto sul tipo di relazione che ingaggiamo con gli oggetti: «humans are self-conscious fabricators that become (ontogenetically and phylogenetically) through their creative engagement with the material world» (Ihde, Malafouris [2018]: 200). Non si tratta dunque di una semplice interazione, ma di ciò che Malafouris e Ihde propongono di definire, con un riferimento alla filosofia di John Dewey e alla teoria della *Niche Construction*[4], una *transaction*. Con questo termi-

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[3] Come scrive Andy Clark, uno dei massimi esponenti della teoria della *Extended Mind*, possiamo distinguere «two distinct, but deeply interanimated, ways in which biological cognition leans on cultural and environmental structures. One way involves a developmental loop, in which exposure to external symbols adds something to the brain's own inner toolkit. The other involves a persisting loop, in which ongoing neural activity becomes geared to the presence of specific external tools and media» (Clark [2003]: 78).

[4] Anche la posizione filosofica di Simondon è avvicinabile alle recenti teorie della *Niche Construction,* gruppo di ricerca composto, tra gli altri da F. J. Odling-Smee, K. N. Laland e M. W. Feldman. Si tratta di riflessioni che considerano ogni forma di vita come risultato di una co-

ne sottolineano la necessità di abbandonare qualsiasi prospettiva di ricerca che consideri individuo e ambiente come pre-esistenti alla loro messa in relazione. Appaiono immediatamente evidenti le somiglianze con il concetto di trasduzione elaborato da Simondon: soltanto riconoscendo il carattere non semplicemente interattivo della relazione con il nostro mondo materiale si potranno cogliere gli esiti trasformativi che essa produce sugli elementi che pone in rapporto. Perciò, se, grazie alle riflessioni fino a qui condotte, abbiamo colto come il nostro tratto specie-specifico sia da individuare nella nostra tendenza all'"esternalizzazione", nel particolare tipo di rapporto che intratteniamo con gli artefatti, è ancor più opportuno comprendere che a questo consegue un movimento di "internalizzazione" il quale genera potenti effetti retroattivi che, in un circolo di *feed-back*, dall'esterno ritornano e agiscono sull'individuo.

Simondon è ben consapevole che il nostro modo di diventare quello che siamo, di individuarci in quanto specie umana, si costituisce proprio in questo circolo. In un testo del 1965, intitolato *Cultura e tecnica*, il filosofo riflette sulla tecnica non come mero mezzo, ma come «fase di un'attività di relazione tra l'uomo e il suo ambiente» (Simondon [1965]: 266). Nel corso di questa fase, l'individuo stimola il suo ambiente introducendovi una modificazione e l'ambiente modificato propone e apre a sua volta un nuovo campo d'a-

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evoluzione dell'essere vivente con l'ambiente. In particolare, la teoria della Nicchia ha constatato non solo che gli organismi trasmettono alle generazioni successive i loro geni, ma che possono farlo anche attraverso le modificazioni dei loro ambienti. Gli organismi, dunque, non solo si adattano all'ambiente, ma in parte lo costruiscono, e questa costruzione ha un effetto di ritorno potente sull'organismo stesso e sui suoi discendenti: «Dal punto di vista dei teorici della *Niche Construction* la corrispondenza evolutiva tra organismo e ambiente, cioè l'adattamento biologico, andrebbe intesa come prodotta dall'interazione tra il processo di selezione e il processo di *Niche Construction*. (...) In pratica gli individui della generazione neoformata oltre ad ereditare dalla generazione parentale i geni, erediterebbero anche un ambiente trasformato durante la costruzione della nicchia» (Forestiero [2009]: 269).

zione possibile: «l'energia del gesto tecnico, essendo progredita nell'ambiente, ritorna sull'uomo e gli permette di modificarsi, di evolvere» (Simondon [1965]: 266). Simondon mostra allora come questi effetti di ritorno innescati dal gesto tecnico imprimano dei risultati sulla nostra esperienza cognitiva e sensibile:

> *tutto avviene come se lo schema corporeo della specie umana fosse stato modificato, si fosse dilatato, avesse ricevuto delle nuove dimensioni, con il livello di grandezza che cambia e il sistema percettivo che si ingrandisce e si differenzia. Nuovi schemi di intelligibilità si sviluppano, come quando il bambino lascia il villaggio e misura l'estensione del suo paese. Si tratta di una incorporazione, (...) dell'apparizione di una nuova forma vitale. (Simondon [1965]: 269)*

L'azione di ritorno esercitata dal gesto tecnico è paragonata alle scoperte acquisite da chi abbandona la propria casa per aprirsi al mondo; essa produce «nuovi schemi di intelligibilità», un significativo ampliamento delle nostre prestazioni cognitive, nuove occasioni di apprendimento; ma ciò si accompagna ad un'altrettanto significativa riconfigurazione delle nostre capacità percettive. La nostra sensibilità risulta trasformata, il nostro schema corporeo si dilata e si arricchisce di nuove dimensionalità; la nostra «rete percettiva» si amplia e si differenzia maggiormente. Queste modificazioni incorporate dall'individuo umano favoriscono l'insorgenza di nuovi approcci all'ambiente, di tipo cognitivo e percettivo-motorio. L'evoluzione umana e l'evoluzione tecnica si trovano in un rapporto di interazione reciproca; in questa mutua configurazione ne va anche della modificazione, dell'ampliamento o, in taluni casi, della riduzione del nostro assetto percettivo e sensibile che si riorganizza attraverso la relazione con l'ambiente tecnico nel quale, di volta in volta, si dispiega. Inevitabilmente queste riflessioni richiamano un celeberrimo brano di Walter Benjamin, contenuto nella prima edizione del fondamentale testo *L'opera d'arte nell'epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica*: «Nel giro di lunghi periodi storici, insieme coi modi complessivi di esistenza delle collettività umane, si modificano anche i modi e i generi della

loro percezione. Il modo secondo cui si organizza la percezione umana - il *medium* in cui essa ha luogo - non è condizionato soltanto in senso naturale, ma anche storico» (Benjamin [1955]: 24).

Benjamin evidenzia come la nostra percezione risulti profondamente modificata dai dispositivi tecnici che costituiscono il *medium* in cui si dispiega. La percezione dell'uomo contemporaneo, più che in passato, sta in mezzo ad un ambiente sempre più tecnicizzato: è di questo che Benjamin tiene conto, confrontandosi con il cinema, con la radio e con la sempre più vasta industrializzazione. Tutti questi dispositivi costituiscono il «medium della percezione» che viene «incessantemente configurato, plasmato, modulato, scolpito, da un'*Apparatur* tecnica in costante evoluzione» (Somaini [2013]: 118). Il nostro corpo è dunque «innervato» dai dispositivi tecnici: «l'innervazione è una modalità dell'incorporazione in virtù della quale medium tecnico e corpo umano cessano di essere contrapposti come l'artificiale e il naturale, ma si integrano reciprocamente in un complesso protesico funzionale» (Pinotti, Somaini [2012]: 10).

Questo aspetto di incorporazione presente nella relazione tecnica-umano viene considerato nel testo di Malafouris e Ihde attraverso due esempi. Il primo, di tradizione fenomenologica, è il bastone utilizzato dal non vedente: tale strumento cessa di essere un semplice oggetto e diventa parte del sensorio, estendendone l'area tattile; lo schema corporeo dell'individuo si amplia, incorporando lo strumento. Ma si può far riferimento a un modello ancor più recente di questo tipo di relazione protesica: l'*Esoscheletro* robotico progettato da Miguel Nicolelis e dal suo team, il quale ha permesso a un ragazzo paraplegico di tirare il calcio d'inizio dei Mondiali di Calcio 2014 in Brasile. Si tratta di un congegno guidato dalle onde cerebrali in grado di restituire dei *feedback* sensoriali a chi lo indossa e che permette di lavorare con pazienti incapaci di camminare in conseguenza a paralisi degli arti inferiori dovuta a lesioni del midollo spinale in seguito a incidenti, cadute o ictus.

Il secondo esempio riportato da Ihde e Malafouris è quello dell'utensile bifacciale acheulano, prodotto per primo dall'*Homo erectus*, usato soprattutto per la macellazione e nella lavorazione del legno. Secondo Malafouris il processo di scheggiamento che porta la pietra ad assumere quella tipica e simmetrica forma a mandorla, non può essere spiegato come risultato di uno schema mentale pre-formato che si applica a una materia inerte. Scheggiare la pietra è piuttosto l'esito di un'esplorazione possibile solo grazie alla collaborazione, potremmo dire alla relazione trasduttiva, tra umano e la «material agency». La creazione di questo strumento comporta dunque una cognizione non soltanto *embodied*, nella quale il corpo del nostro antenato era coinvolto, ma anche *extended*, poiché comprende la pietra stessa: «the stone, like the knapper's body, is an integral and complementary part of the intention to knap» (Ihde-Malafouris [2018]: 207-208). In questa primitiva esplorazione è presente ciò che, grazie alla riflessione di Simondon, abbiamo definito un sentimento tecno-estetico, considerato anche nel suo aspetto di piacere. Ogni colpo dato è in collaborazione con una materia che mostra la sua lavorabilità o una sua resistenza, che rivela nuove opportunità di manipolazione, di coinvolgimento materiale. È indicativo che lo stesso Malafouris si riferisca a un sentimento: «One of the first things the knapper must learn comes from the senses and relates to the skill of understanding the qualities of stone as formless material-what we might call the "*feeling*" or "tactility" of stone» (Malafouris [2013]: 174).

Malafouris e Simondon condividono l'intento di opporsi a qualsivoglia posizione teorica di stampo ilemorfico. Ne *L'individuazione alla luce dei concetti di forma e informazione*, infatti, il filosofo francese avvia la sua riflessione sull'individuazione proprio a partire da questo punto. L'esempio di cui si serve è quello della produzione di un mattone di argilla per il quale non si tratta di imporre una forma rettangolare a una materia semplicemente passiva. L'artigiano avverte le potenzialità colloidali dell'argilla, le quali partecipano, tanto quanto il suo apparato cognitivo e il suo sentire tecno-estetico, alla creazione di un oggetto utile. Lo schema ilemorfico presuppone e sostanzializza forma e materia, e non coglie dunque l'aspetto trasduttivo dell'atto produttivo.

L'essere umano, "frequentando" e modellando la materia, si modella a sua volta. Attraverso questi esempi – che rappresentano alcuni dei casi di ciò che Montani definisce *empowerment*, poiché realizzano «una singolare *unità di organico e inorganico*, capace di scoprire se stessa, e le sue potenzialità, solo nel corso di un'effettiva attività» (Montani [2017]: 8) – appare dunque opportuno ridefinire i confini che separano cervello, corpo e cose.

Ogni giorno siamo continuamente sollecitati dalle numerose relazioni che intratteniamo con i più disparati dispositivi tecnologici. Viviamo in ambienti associati che ci sottopongono costantemente a possibili occasioni di individuazione che conducono a esiti adattivi, ma anche restrittivi. La comprensione del potere trasformativo e potenziale delle nostre esternalizzazioni tecniche sul nostro modo di vivere e di abitare il mondo che ci circonda è il punto di intersezione tra le riflessioni dei vari autori che sono stati qui considerati. Le mediazioni tecniche prodotte e utilizzate dagli esseri umani non possono essere considerate come passive o neutrali: esse riconfigurano attivamente ciò che siamo[5]. Il dualismo che opporrebbe natura e cultura, come abbiamo visto, perde definitivamente di significato, non è infatti in grado di trovare una risposta all'indagine che cerca di capire come diventiamo noi stessi: è la nostra relazione, il nostro coinvolgimento, con gli artefatti che produciamo e manipoliamo a produrre ciò che siamo.

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[5] Su questo cfr. il concetto di *Mediazione Radicale* di Richard Grusin (2015).

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Devices in Experimentation: The Work of Art in a Pragmatist Perspective, between Somaesthetics and Techno-aesthetics

Dario Cecchi

Abstract. John Dewey puts aesthetic experience at the center of his reflection on art and beauty, reconsidering it dynamically. Nowadays, this view opened the path to somaesthetics, a term coined by Richard Shusterman, and aesthetic anthropology. Here, it is argued that the contribution of pragmatist aesthetics could be further developed by exploring its analogies with techno-aesthetics, a paradigm proposed by the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon in the early 1980s. Art occupies accordingly a special place within the different forms of aesthetic experience, being considered as a way of experimenting the impact of new technologies in the human experience. It is a process by which technologies create "devices" for experimenting perception and reflection: namely, ways of reconstructing the nature of the human mind in-between body and technology, and by means of their interaction. Cinema reconsidered by Dewey's fellow George H. Mead, offers an exemplary case as both artistic and technological devices.

Keywords. Techno-aesthetics; Somaesthetics; Art; Aesthetic Experience; Philosophical Anthropology.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary philosophy, above all pragmatism, is especially engaged in rediscovering the meaning and import of bodies to the human experience. The formulation of a new paradigm of aesthetics is exemplary of this trend. It is the case for Richard Shusterman, who coined the very expression of "somaesthetics" – *soma* being the Greek word meaning "body". Somaesthetics is symptomatic of some of the interests and claims animating the contemporary philosophical debate. On the one hand, we see the appeal to the reformation of aesthetics. As every reformation, Shusterman's idea of rethinking aesthetics as "somaesthetics" is also a way of reconsidering its theoretical premises: for aesthetics, according to the idea if his founder, Alexander G. Baumgarten, was originally meant to be the doctrine of the «sensible or inferior cognition (*cognitio sensitiva seu inferi-*

or)». And as far as sentience is concerned (Shaviro [2016]), bodies constitute an unavoidable reference, which still needs to be adequately investigated. The aim of the present paper, however, is not to consider the body as an independent entity, no matter whether aesthetic or not. Bodies will be rather considered here as means for developing cultural and cognitive structures, by which data are not only gathered but also elaborated. This idea leads to the way Kant reconsidered the theoretical status of aesthetics in 1790, with the publication of the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, about forty years after Baumgarten's foundation of aesthetics. When speaking of the interrelationships existing among understanding (cognition), imagination (sense-data elaboration) and feeling (sentience) in the formulation of aesthetic judgments, Kant actually argues, among other things, that the elaboration of experience cannot be isolated from its constitution in (Desideri [2011]). In the present paper, I argue that pragmatist aesthetics, as this latter is theorized by John Dewey, is more consistent with Kant's insight than what somaesthetics would think; pragmatist aesthetics just puts a stronger emphasis on the bodily interaction with the surrounding world in the course of experience.

Soamesthetics also argues against any sharp and rigid division between popular and eye-brow culture. As soon as the emphasis passes in aesthetics from old categories, such as contemplation, to the newly considered category of the body, the abovementioned distinction between "high" and "low" phenomena in culture loses some of its legitimacy: for, at any rate, bodies express or perform values that cannot be judged according to highly spiritualized standards. In other words, aesthetic distance, that is, the need for removing any direct emotional commitment, is no longer, at least not necessarily, a discriminating standard for judging artworks. Let us take pop music. The evaluation of its aesthetic import cannot be reduced to melody and lyrics, although these features still play a role. Pop music occupies a place in our lives, from love to leisure time, which leads us to consider its aesthetic value as having creative effects to the atmospheres of our everyday life (Di

Stefano [2017]; Griffero [2016]; Matteucci [2015]). However, a charitable interpretation of the pragmatist criticism of the eye-brow culture should lead us to consider the possibility of "re-embodying" the official culture (painting, classic music, drama, etc.) into new patterns. This phenomenon is well epitomized by the filmic adaptation of novels and dramas. By the way, this was John Dewey's attitude toward art experience.

The common trait of these phenomena is that aesthetic experiences address a living body, rather than a reflecting mind: for instance, movies ask the beholder an identification that goes beyond beliefs and opinions and appeals to a virtual embodiment into the hero's deeds (Mead [1926]). This is even more relevant to the contemporary process of the aestheticization of politics: let us only think to the importance given by politicians to the bodily appearance – often by means of the social media – and its power of creating collective identities.

Nonetheless, pragmatism does not usually provide an analysis of the body's nature, rather focusing on its agency and performance. Other philosophical schools have developed this issue at length. Let us only think of phenomenology: the interest of this school for the body starts with Edmund Husserl's (1960) distinction between *Leib* and *Körper*, that is body considered as an organic living entity, interacting with the rest of the world, and body as a purely physical entity. Or Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1968) concept of "flesh" (*chair*), which does not correspond entirely to Husserl's *Leib*, inasmuch the former argues the ontological mutual implication of the perceiver's flesh and the world's flesh within the process of perception. And of course, we must consider the approaches which are critical of phenomenology, though being inspired by it: from Helmuth Plessner's (1980) idea that *Leib* and *Körper* are mutually implied to Gilles Deleuze's (2005) belief that the most significant experience with which painting could ever supply its beholder, as happens in Francis Bacon's art, is not the "flesh of the world" but rather the inorganic and dead-like character of reality, its being "meat" (*viande*).

Such insight into the nature of the human body is likely to be found in pragmatism: its interest being rather the *interaction* between the world and us. Of course, this interaction finds in the body its unavoidable means. But, behind the emphasis on interaction, pragmatism seems to be more interested in its expressive, rather than its receptive agency: on how it exposes the state of the mind *outside*, rather than how it configurates it *inside*, in accordance with the object of experience. Expression is, of course, not addressed to any special target, but refers to the configuration of the expressive self as such. In the pragmatist perspective defended by Dewey, this is the very target of expression in aesthetic experiences: not this or that object, but the general address of the "live creatures" to their surrounding environments considered (in general) as the means of their life. According to some accounts, this is a reference to the biological survival of the species (Ottobre [2012]) or the psychological condition of the self (Alexander [1987]). To Dewey, however, there is a difference between the bare discharge of a biological need through a bodily "motion" and the embodied expression of an "emotion". Both refer to life, though at different degrees and stages.

Nonetheless, somaesthetics tends to overlap motion and emotion. But if my approach is right, the aim of pragmatist aesthetics is rather to understand why emotion is able to absorb and reshape motion while exceeding its scope in the expression of feelings. My argument is, therefore, that we are bodies – that is, living beings, whose thoughts are inseparable from their deeds – inasmuch we have "interactive feelings" – that is, feelings which enhance the exchange with the surrounding world. That's why interaction has been the center of the aesthetic concerns in pragmatism, since John Dewey and George H. Mead, who was Dewey's fellow at Chicago University and applied the former's aesthetic theory to his own studies in the psychology of identification. But this is true also for a philosopher like Susanne K. Langer, although she was critical to Dewey's sympathy for non-traditional art experience. Nevertheless, whilst she draws her examples from some very traditional contexts – but surprisingly for her age, not only from the usually called "fine arts" – and refuses any aesthetic implication in ordinary life and objects, she develops a concept of interaction that is totally consistent with the pragmatist method of investigating experience.

I shall proceed as follows: in the next paragraph, I reconstruct Dewey's concept of interaction as it emerges in his account of aesthetic experience; in the third paragraph, I consider the cognitive implications of this account of aesthetic experience, according to some of its most recent readings; in the last paragraph, I make some final remarks about Mead's notion of aesthetic identification, which I shall consider as one of the best candidates to explain the relevance of the bodily interaction to culture as a concrete experience. The first paragraph supplied with the general paradigm of aesthetic interaction; the second one help argue the meaning of aesthetic experience as a device available to the human subject: namely, a structure being able of establishing the conditions of experience anew; the third one let me theorize the work of art as a sort of *technology of attention* orienting and redirecting the audience's perception by giving it a cultural – and technological, as far as art is a form of technique – framework. In other words, an aesthetic experience so construed arguably designs and shapes human subjects as constitutively exposed to the technological reconfiguration of their cognitive and emotional agency (Ihde [2002]; Stiegler [1998-2010]).

In the light of the German philosophical anthropology, above all Plessner (2019), one could speak of the human position – in the world as well as in itself – as essentially "decentered". But unlike the German philosophical anthropology, with its claim for technics as a sort of "compensation" for this decentered position, pragmatism is consistent with the idea of "techno-aesthetics". Techno-aesthetics is a word coined by the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon (2014), in his 1982 letter answering Derrida's request of suggestions concerning the foundation of the Collège international de Philosophie. According to this letter, the meaning of this new branch of philosophy is

manifold: it ranges from the reconsideration of the aesthetic experience in terms of technique – the beholders of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* admires her smile because they integrate it with the movement of her lips, as if their vision was a filmic montage – to the discovery of the aesthetic features of both technological devices – the Eiffel Tower – and technology-oriented artworks – as happens for the Futurist movement – to mention only of the most influential versions of techno-aesthetics argued by Simondon. The version mostly consistent with the present paper sounds as follows: as far as the work of the senses is especially concerned in the human interaction with the world, which is even considered its primary task, we discover that our sensations refer not only to passive (or rather, receptive) states of our minds, but also to an active engagement in technical operations of manipulation or transformation of the physical matter of our experience. Drawing an example from ordinary experience – an example of mine, not of Simondon – the sensations we receive from food as we cook (colors, flavors, texture of the food) cannot be isolated from the concrete act of cooking, that is, transforming those natural elements into a dish ready for being tasted. Accordingly, Simondon argues that even the aesthetic delight we take in beauties is, at least originally, inseparable from some technical disposition toward the subject-matter of our experience. Architecture is particularly suitable to this case: as far as we take delight in the shape and decoration of a building, we also appreciate its "fitness" for the function it was designed for. Nor is beauty subordinated to function, and neither is the opposite true: it is rather plausible that beauty and technical functionality are two interdependent factors in the process of building and dwelling. If we consider the reuse of pagan temples as Christian churches in many places throughout the territory of the former Roman Empire, or the passage of the same holy site from and to being either a church or a mosque, we see how far aesthetic, cultural and technological factors interacted in defining the "form" of those sites. Most importantly, we are led to acknowledge that we are unable to fully appre-

ciate that form outside a joint evaluation of its aesthetic, cultural and technological agency: the brilliancy in reusing a certain space for a new liturgical need, without losing its aesthetic effect, can be considered as one of the highest virtues of the architects who worked to those buildings in different ages and having different purposes. Simondon (1954) considers the radical separation of aesthetic and technical motivations in the evaluation of a work as a later product of modernity.

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE ACCORDING TO JOHN DEWEY

John Dewey develops his aesthetic theory in a period of time that is also a fundamental step in his philosophical elaboration. In 1925, with the publication of *Experience and Nature*, Dewey offers a synthesis of his philosophy and presents his method of investigation. *Experience and Nature* contains a chapter on aesthetics, the title of which is *Experience, Nature and Art*. *Experience, Nature and Art* already contains the heart of Dewey's aesthetic theory, although some remarkable differences can be found, with regard to his later reflections on aesthetics. However, his general idea of the aesthetic remained unaltered. In 1934, he publishes his best-known treatise on aesthetics, *Art as Experience*, in which he gathered and ordered the lectures he gave the year before on that very topic. Between 1925 and 1934, he published short essays, in which he deals with special issues concerning aesthetics. One of the most interesting is *Individuality and Experience* (1926), in which Dewey enquiries the importance of art education, as well as the relevance of this form of education to a proper understanding of aesthetic experience at large.

In *Art as experience*, Dewey famously argues that we should consider the aesthetic "in the raw" before passing to the most refined aesthetic experiences available to our civilization, such as works of art. To have such a "raw" aesthetic experience, one just needs to go out and have a walk throughout the city: noise, sounds, colors, the shape of the

buildings, the speediness of the cars, the crowd occupying the streets and squares being busy with their affairs – all of these aspects being as many triggers to the experiencer's sensibility.

Actually, Dewey did not make his account of the aesthetic in the raw depend on any previously argument or theory on the human sentience and perception. On the contrary, the remarks contained in his aesthetic essays seem rather to depend on his general account of the aesthetic experience as a whole. This is, of course, an effect of the "empirical method" Dewey presented in first chapter introduced in the second edition (1929) of *Experience and Nature*. According to this method, the pragmatist philosopher should never start her enquiry from an abstract conception of the subject's mind or perception: the nature of these entities should rather result from the actual investigation of experience, just as happens with nature, the reality of which cannot be fully detached from the experience we have of it. But if what I have just said is true, then experience is but a name for a form of interaction that puts in mutual contact the subject's inward life and the reality outside them, as well as each one of them with the others. Or at least, this is the case for aesthetic experience.

The reference to mind activities at work in the process of experience, together with the establishment of their relationship to the world outside, is especially mentioned by Dewey in the last part of *Art as Experience*, when he argues that, before being a noun, "mind" is a verb ("to mind") designating our special care for the persons, things and affairs surrounding us. Dewey is not only committed to the mind-body problem, as clearly stated in *Experience and Nature*. His remarks actually foreshadow the Extended Mind Theory, as he imagines mind as a reality existing in-between the brain's inward processes and the reality of the world available to our knowledge and action. One of the main functions of experience is, therefore, that of recreating the mutual connection between thought and reality anew. Every kind of experience fulfills this task in a way or another: educational experiences do it for the sake of the youth's

education and intellectual growth; cognitive experiences do it for the sake of getting a deeper knowledge of nature; ethical experiences do it for the sake of redirecting more adequately emotions to the objects of their interest. This is just to mention some of the most eminent examples of human experience and their task with a view to the enhancement of the mind.

But what is the task of aesthetic experience? The answer to this question is in fact much harder than one could believe. Before answering this question, let me only remind that the idea that aesthetic experiences have a task must be intended in a broad sense. It is precisely the sense according to which, following the Kantian paradigm, aesthetic experiences have the power of supplying us with the experience of the non-empirical conditions of experience generally construed (D'Angelo [2011]). In other words, aesthetic experiences have the "task" of reorganizing the cognitive faculties of the mind and enhance their agency, though only in an indeterminate way, that is, having no immediate cognitive purpose (Garroni [1976]; Kukla [2006]; Marcucci [1988]; Palmer [2011]). The idea that aesthetic experiences have such an indeterminate and mediated task becomes even stronger in a pragmatist perspective. As a matter of fact, since Dewey, pragmatist philosophers often refer the sense of aesthetic experience to the reorganization of the human form of life, considered either biologically (Noë [2015]) or culturally (Shusterman [1992]). If we consider experience from the point of view of its outcome, we come to the following conclusion: the outcomes of either the cognitive or the ethical experience are much more easily recognizable than that of the aesthetic experience. Cognition and behavior offer easy references for such outcomes, being respectively the outcome of either investigation or deliberation. The solution is less evident when we pass to the case for education. Education is relevant as far as art education occupies an important part in Dewey's (1988a) account of aesthetic experience. Dewey's (1988d) influential views on education are largely based on the idea of cooperation between teacher and student. Scholars in education usually investigate the para-

digm of the "learning by doing" education according to this preference given to cooperation in the educational process. But there are some other aspects implied in this process, which are maybe more interesting for a philosophical account of the aesthetic experience. As far as art is concerned, Dewey cares for the fact that teachers are "masters" whose task is not limited to share an already accomplished knowledge with students – who are considered as "apprentices". Education is a process of growth, the conclusion of which coincides with the recognition that students, the youth, have become autonomous individuals: they are able and free to behave and have experiences independently from their teachers' directories. Furthermore, teachers are now in the condition of learning from their own students' outcomes, in order to revise their previous know-how. If we consider aesthetic values (beauty, harmony, style, decoration, etc.) as elements of such a know-how, we acknowledge then that aesthetic values stay neither entirely on the teachers' side, nor in the students' side. Aesthetic values lie rather in-between them.

Dewey's remark on art education are relevant to his aesthetic theory at large. They point out, in fact, to a new model of autonomy in art, conceived not subjectively in the facts and intersubjectively only in theory, as might be argued for Kant's theory of the reflecting judgments. Having an independent insight into art creation implies *cooperation*: for cooperation is the pragmatic enhancement of the human interaction with environment. This position recalls Friedrich Schiller's arguments in the *Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795) when arguing the anthropological basis of aesthetics. It is not by chance that Dewey admired Schiller's way to aesthetics, whilst criticizing Kant's one – needless to say, largely misunderstanding this latter. Nonetheless, as far as we are concerned with Dewey's way to art education, his ideas could sound even closer to Kant than to Schiller. I am referring to what Kant writes in § 46 of the third Critique about the difference existing between "imitation" (*Nachahmung*) and "emulation" (*Nachfolge*) in the affairs concerning beauty. One imitates somebody else's taste

or genius when one attempts to reproduce them mechanically, as if they could be reduced to a set of rules – which is impossible in principle. Contrariwise, one emulates somebody else when one takes the somebody else's taste or style as a model for her own aesthetic judgment or creativity, while keeping in mind that emulation does not replace her freedom in judgment and creation, but is rather a means by which they can be fostered and enhanced. The difference between imitation and emulation is epitomized quite easily and immediately if we refer to art. The Italian historian, critic and theorist of art Cesare Brandi (1986) considers Mannerism as an art movement in which creativity was reduced to the reproduction of two styles: namely, those of Michelangelo and Raphael. The painters belonging to the Mannerist movement followed either the former or the latter in matters of style: paintings were considered not really as pictures by the artists of Mannerism, but rather as "signs" witnessing their belonging to either the former's or the latter's school. This is imitation, properly speaking. And by the way, it may lead to remarkable aesthetic results – as happens to many Mannerist painters, such as Andrea del Sarto, Pontormo or Rosso Fiorentino – but still lacks originality. On the other hand, emulation is experiment in art when analogies can be discovered between an artist's work and other artists' works or other genres and styles. It is so for Caravaggio's *Vocazione di San Matteo* (1599-1600) (Prater *et alii* [2012]). It is a painting in which the artist probably applied the devices and even the tricks he learnt while training in making a genre of art inspired by ordinary life, which followed different standards than official historical, mythological and above all religious art. The cycle of St Matthew for the Contarelli Chapel was Caravaggio's first commission in religious art. Furthermore, many observers suggested that Jesus' gesture of indicating the publican Levi with his finger, while being accompanied by a certain degree of ambiguity that was unusual in religious painting and more typical of profane art, could be inspired by Adam's hand gesture toward God Father in the Frame of the Creation of Adam in the vault of the Sist-

ine Chapel. By means of a web of art "quotations", Caravaggio's painting would be therefore nourished by a series of theological references, while presenting the scene taken from the Gospel as a scene of ordinary life. In this case we have emulation, rather than imitation: the artist did not follow his models slavishly, but took them as patterns of inspiration. By the way, emulation seems to require a good degree of interpretation. Another example of this sort of experimented emulation in contemporary art can be found in Francis Bacon's variants of Velásquez' portrait of Pope Innocenzo X. In this case, Bacon finds new meanings, concerning his own views on humanity and its bodily condition, in a masterpiece of the Baroque art of official portrait (Deleuze [2005]).

Not mind alone but mind in action – which is an embodied mind, by the way – operates in Dewey's account of emulation in art. Arguably, the art creator, before designing the work of art she has in mind, imagines a *virtual body* by which she is able to *simulate* the interactions with the work, both during the creative process and at the moment of reception (Dewey [1988b]). In this perspective, *culture is the complex of all bodily operations and affections that can be designed and simulated with regard to the world of artworks available at a given moment*. In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey argues indeed in favor of a special task of art – or "fine art", as he calls it, recovering this word from the language of the modern theory of art and renewing its meaning. "Art in being, he writes, the active productive process, may thus be defined as an esthetic perception together with an *operative* perception of the efficiencies of the esthetic object" (Dewey [1981]: p. 281). For this very reason, considered from the audience's point of view, art is "a device in experimentation carried on for the sake of education. It exists for the sake of a specialized use, being a new training of modes of perceptions" (Dewey [1981]: p. 293). Dewey does not isolate art from the aesthetic realm: he rather finds the proper place for art within the manifold manifestations of the aesthetic quality of experience, that is, the several different ways by which human beings, the "live creatures", are able to organize the raw and

scattered matter of their sensible interaction with the world into *an* experience.

According to the quotation mentioned above, art is likely to perform its powers more especially on *perception*: it trains or educates us to a new perception of reality. As I said, the overlapping between training and education is typical of Dewey's pragmatist approach to education, which brings him to develop a philosophy of education based on the principle of "learning by doing". The analogy between works of art and tools (microphones and telescopes) strengthens this belief. Nonetheless, it could be misleading: for technologies offer new tools for having further experiences, which might be in turn scattered and result in no organic experience, whilst the work of art is created for fulfilling the second task, which is an aesthetic enterprise properly speaking. To put it in a formula, one can say that microphones, telescopes and every sort of capture technology supply us with perceptions made available by a certain operability: the aesthetic quality of these perceptions, that is, their pointing out to the dynamic unity of experience, is left for further elaboration. Contrariwise, works of art present this very elaboration and so empower their audience to larger areas of operability than before. This is the meaning of the feeling of liveliness often bound – by Dewey, among others – to the aesthetic experience. This is what Dewey calls sometimes the "consummation" of the aesthetic experience, which emerges in the interplay with its "instrumentality". Experience is momentarily liberated from both the routines of already assumed habits and behaviors, and the fragmentation of pure contingence, in which the only standard to evaluate facts and events is dictated by the law of impulse. Expression, as Dewey repeatedly states, differs from mere impulse as far as the latter is triggered by immediate needs, whilst the former entails a larger and deeper consideration of reality and engages all the forces available to the self to support this interaction. We can say now that expression is but the general phenomenon concerning the set of operations and affections by which a body simulation becomes available to cultural exchanges. If this statement

is right, then aesthetic perception acquires a fundamental importance inasmuch it is the moment when the cultural import of art, that is, a form of body simulation, proves its efficacy. In other words, it is through perception that minds discover whether and how far bodies are available to their designs and imaginations. Works of art can be therefore considered as "strange tools" (Noë [2015]), the function of which is to either enhance or stabilize the identity of living organisms governed by a reflecting mind – human beings, for example. Furthermore, they provide these organisms with devices that either implement or expand their communicational agency. In that sense, works of art are not just "strange tools": they are, more precisely, *perceptual and emotional devices*[1]. This is peculiarly true for those technologically supported works of art that are movies – as well as, of course, for their contemporary expansions: video installations, web documentaries, etc.

THE WORK OF ART AS PERCEPTUAL
AND EMOTIONAL DEVICE

Art seems therefore to be a device being able to orient perception, in order to trigger its agency. Accordingly, aesthetic experience does not lose its instrumental quality when developing a new consummation of reality. On the very contrary, it reorganizes the mind's (and the body's) relationship to the world: now, it is the search for new consummation – that is, renewed pleasure taken things and events, accompanied by the acquisition of new meanings concerning those things and events, as well as reality at large – that leads instrumentality, whilst in the ordinarily utilitarian experience, it is the instrumentality of this experience that seeks the repetition of already experimented consummations. Of course, the concept of instrumentality does not entail the actual use of technologies. However, it sheds a special light on

the human practical intercourse with nature: for it foreshadows that every practical interaction with nature is oriented to the discovery, development or refinement of some tool or technique. For that very reason, one might argue that, far from forerunning somaesthetics, Dewey's aesthetic theory could be considered as an original version of techno-aesthetics.

Nonetheless, in Dewey's account of the technical import of aesthetic experience, bodies matter to a techno-aesthetics much more than in Simondon's original formulation of this concept. As we saw above, Dewey reaffirms the analogy of works of art with technics. But this relationship is much different than it was conceived during antiquity – although Dewey aims at finding some continuity with the Greek thought, arguing that as far as *techne* indicated in Greek a skilled and expert interaction with a special kind of objects, this is the equivalent of his conception of experience. But Dewey addresses especially the issue of how minds, bodies and eventually cultures are engaged in the imaginary simulation and technological design of experience. The category of "work of art" must be considered here at large. Dewey considers also new media – radio and newspapers, for instance – as artistic devices that newly design the citizens' participation to the public sphere and the very process of deliberation[2]. This phenomenon points out to a sort of "proxification" of the body, in the broad sense of body argued here. By "proxification" I mean the tendency the human body manifests to be prolongated by technological proxy. This phenomenon is more evident in

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[1] In a recently published book, Giovanni Matteucci (2019), in a philosophical perspective comprehending Dewey and pragmatism, suggests a revival of the argument that works of art are "devices".

[2] Honneth and Farrell (1998: 775) argue that, in Dewey's perspective, the public sphere functions as a "cognitive medium". I agree with their perspective in Dewey's political theory; however, I believe they do not consider how far media, in the narrow, technological sense of the word, are necessary to establish the public sphere as a cognitive medium amid political agents. Furthermore, they do not consider that Dewey actually considers these media as artistic devices, in a sense that emphasizes their power on perception and sensibility. Accordingly, we should speak of the public sphere as both a cognitive and an aesthetic medium.

the case of capture technologies (microscopes, for instance), which extend one of our sense organs (mainly, but not only, the eye). It is less evident, but still relevant, in the case of media, such as newspapers and radio. But it becomes extremely significant for new media, which create duplicates of ourselves, acting in our place and are our representatives in a public virtual sphere: let us just think to the use of tweeter, blogging, YouTube and even holograms as means to political action, and sometimes replacement of traditional political identities. New media intercept their artistic import as far as we consider them as necessary proxy of the acting and communicating selves: they provide them with a «radical mediation» (Grusin [2015]) of their deeds, speeches and imagery.

As a matter of fact, in all of the abovementioned cases, technological devices enact an artistic power while keeping their nature of device. Furthermore, these devices depend on the interaction between technological device and the body, but do not necessarily replicate the body's structure and functioning: bare intensification of the body's "natural" powers is only one of the manifold solutions available to technology. On the contrary, this latter is able to shape the body's form and identity: as has been noted, media environments are for instance able to make visitors literally feel sensations and feelings to which they have no access in their ordinary lives (Pinotti 2018). Are these experiences part of our bodily memory, as much as those offered by real life? I believe they are as far as virtual or augmented reality (Diodato 2013; Montani 2014) affects us, shapes our habits[3] and orients our behaviors: they are instrumental to a new consummation of reality, to use Dewey's words. Nor such experiences always end with the reduction to natural bodies: artistic devices sometimes establish new stable "hubs" for our identities, as happens for instance to our social media accounts. Most noteworthy is the fact that the reflecting mind does not precede the inter-

action among body, technology and reality, but rather emerges during this interaction as a sort of dynamic background of experience, as Dewey argues in the last part of *Art as Experience.* As a matter of fact, we deal with natural objects having in mind the purpose of discovering new properties of them: this means, in a pragmatist perspective, that we make them available not only to our present action but to an indeterminate and virtually infinite series of future actions – an operability, the meaning of which appears inexhaustible: namely, indefinitely available to our consummation. Most importantly, we make them available to forms of common use and exploration: to this purpose, body simulation becomes pivotal. And the design of perception through artistic and technological devices is the primary target.

Interactive video installations, such as *Carne y arena* (2017) by Alejandro González Iñárritu or Studio Azzurro's narrative museums and sensitive environments, are good examples of this situation: mind is able to develop its tools for elaborating experience only after and with reference to a new organic alliance between the body and the technology we apply to[4]. Noë (2015) applies a techno-aesthetic perspective on aesthetic experience and especially art, although he never calls his theory in this way, in order to enlarge the horizons of the Extended Mind Theory and apply it to the aesthetic realm. But to do that, he needs to open the perspective of this theory to biology broadly construed, in particular the idea of organism, while arguing the role of technics in building a properly human culture. The aim of this strategy in argumentation is not reductionist: aesthetics is still a part of philosophy, not of science. Narrowly speaking, conceiving works of art not just as "strange tools", but also and more importantly

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[3] For the role played by habits in Dewey's philosophy, see Dreon (2016).

[4] I use the term "organic" in the same sense as Noë (2015) who, in a pragmatist vein inspired by Dewey, argues that technics is able to literally reorganize human life outside the boundaries of biological organisms, and that works of art are "strange tools" that do not apply to any special task in particular, but enhance our consciousness of how far our identities can be established only through the displacement of our bodies onto technology.

as perceptual and emotional devices, I argue that to have an aesthetic experience by the means of art implies the fact of being charged by the establishment of new cultural values, in order to make sense of, or reject, the new affections triggered by the encounter with a given work. Accordingly, we need to formulate some hypotheses concerning the emotional attitude we have in the course of the aesthetic experience. The hint for such hypothesis is given by George Herbert Mead's reconsideration of Aristotle's notion of *katharsis* in his article *The Nature of Aesthetic Experience*, appeared on the *International Journal of Ethics* in 1926 and largely influenced by John Dewey.

George H. Mead's interests as a scholar mainly went to the psychology of the self and social psychology. Philosophically speaking, he was largely inspired by John Dewey's pragmatism. With Dewey, he contributed to the development of the University of Chicago, where they were colleagues. Mead devoted only few articles and essays to the issue of the aesthetic. This issue, however, could but play a key role in the definition of the psychology of the self, in the light of its social meaning. As far as aesthetic experience is concerned, Mead seems to appropriate Dewey's aesthetic theory. However, Mead develops an issue that Dewey seems not to consider in his aesthetic writings, and with the outmost originality. Dewey was much concerned with contemporary mass phenomena in aesthetics, and was sometimes reproached for this reason (see Langer [1957]: 27, 110-111); nevertheless, he never elaborated a theory upon cinema. By the way, cinema is often considered as the forerunner of the contemporary experimentations with video art and interactive technologies (Grusin [2015]). In his article about aesthetic experience, Mead fills this gap; however, the scope of this article is not limited to filmic experience and entails a general pragmatist conception of the aesthetic. Furthermore, the originality of Mead's contribution is not bound to the fact of filling a gap in Dewey's theory. Mead elaborates here an original view concerning the role of emotion in the aesthetic experience: he recovers Aristotle's classical notion of *katharsis* and recon-

siders its meaning in the light of the new forms of narrative, that is, at his times, cinema. The import of Mead's contribution is therefore twofold: on the one hand, he discovers a new connection between pragmatist aesthetics and the previous conceptions of art in the history of philosophy; on the other hand, he specifies what happens when emotion is not aesthetically oriented generally speaking, but is triggered by an artistic device.

Mead considers a mass consume product of the Hollywood cultural industry of his times: adventure movies. Accordingly, he wonders as follows:

> Does this discovery of a situation in which one may enjoy unreproved the terrors and fright of another quicken the old impulse and render him callous to sufferings of others? I think not. I think the experience is rather a catharsis, in an Aristotelian phrase, than a reversion. Nor does physically timid man become more courageous from watching with compensatory delight Doug Fairbanks annihilate a nest of bandits. But there should be a certain release, and relief from restraint, which comes from the fulfilment of the escape reaction with a richness of imagery which the inner imagination can never offer. If these escape reactions play any legitimate part in the economy of keeping house with one's self, and I think they do, the elaboration of them at just the point where the imagination fails should emphasize that function, and the enjoyed imagery is genuinely aesthetic. (Mead [1926]: 392)

Otherwise – Mead concludes as he applies the same consideration to modern literature, such as Joyce's *Ulysses* – imagery would be only a "private affair", lacking any social meaning (Mead [1926]: 393). Interestingly, Mead's insight into "catharsis" as a filmic device is consistent with the interpretations of Aristotle's notion, developed by both hermeneutics (Gadamer [1960]) and the aesthetics of reception (Jauss [1972]) during the second half of the 20th century: the end of this purification from "terrors and fright" is that the spectator finds her place in the world and recognizes reality as her own reality anew. Every theory based on the idea of the spectator's direct and immediate identifica-

tion with the "hero" are here rejected as too naïf.

But Mead is interested in the psychology of the audience: namely, to what happens to their bodies as their emotions are triggered by some movies. He seems to forerun the recent application of the concept of "embodied simulation" forged by the neurosciences to film theory (Gallese&Guerra [2015]). According to the Embodied Simulation Theory, the spectator who watches, for instance, a scene characterized by suspense activates the same neuronal networks as if she is undergoing the same experience. Many sequences in Hitchcock's movies are likely to be designed according to this principle. However, Mead gives us an important indication concerning how to avoid any form of reductionism in applying this theory to cinema and art in general. He distinguishes, in fact, between the individual's "imagination" and the movie's "imagery": the former is limited as far as it depends on the individual's constituency, habits, behaviors and past experience, whilst the latter is intrinsically social. Mead's remarks on the social value of film go exactly in the opposite direction than those proposed by Adorno and Horkheimer (1973) about twenty years later: filmic imagery does not expropriate the individual's imagination of its freedom in "schematizing" experience; on the contrary, the former has the power of nourishing the latter.

When we consider works of art as perceptual devices, the idea of "proxy", that is, a mere extension of sense organs, is consistent with our consideration. However, when we pass to consider them as emotional devices, our reflection upon the technological import of art needs to be reconsidered too. To conclude, I would like to argue that, as far as emotions are concerned in art, the very concept of device needs to be reformulated. In the ordinary experience, emotion appears to be a special tie between subjects and objects, or subjects and subjects: the capability, or incapability, of handling objects or relationships to other subjects seems to be an essential drive in the phenomenology of emotions (Nussbaum 2001). In the aesthetic experience, things stay in a different way. Here,

emotions target not a dual but a triple relationship: subjects, objects and the devices connecting them. The subject's emotions contemporarily refer to some objects (stories, images, sounds, etc.) and devices (the media used). The expertise required to handle these media triggers an emotional condition as much in the use (broadly construed) of the artistic media as in the experience of the very content of the work of art. Arguably the emotion oriented to technology is an essential component of our aesthetic pleasure as much as the emotion oriented to content: for both of them concur to the reorganization of the subject's cognitive attitude at large. Here it is one of the possible senses of the connection between aesthetics and the Extended Mind Theory (Noë 2015; Matteucci 2019): our interactions with works of art considered as devices provide us with new "landscapes" for our cognitive activity.

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Florens der Christ.
Un commento a La via dell'interpretazione messianica *di Florens Christian Rang*

Marina Montanelli

Il suo spirito era attraversato dalla follia come un massiccio è solcato da forre. Ma la moralità di quest'uomo faceva sì che la follia non guadagnasse nessun potere su di lui. Sì, ho conosciuto il mirabile clima umano di questo paesaggio intellettuale: aveva sempre la freschezza dell'alba.

Ricordo di Walter Benjamin di Florens Christian Rang, da una lettera a Gershom Scholem del 12 ottobre – 5 novembre 1924

Vom Weg messianischer Deutung – Deute, secondo il manoscritto originale – è il titolo che porta il saggio introduttivo dell'opera di Florens Christian Rang dedicata ai sonetti di Shakespeare e che qui presentiamo per la prima volta in traduzione italiana. Il libro, pubblicato postumo dal figlio Bernhard soltanto nel 1954 (Rang muore nell'ottobre 1924), si sarebbe dovuto intitolare *Shakespeare und unsere Religion*. Come *Shakespeare der Christ. Eine Deutung der Sonette*, viene invece dato alle stampe, tradendo dunque una scelta ben precisa del curatore: evidenziare il tratto primariamente cristologico del commentario paterno (cfr. Nicolaus [2004]: 123)[1].

L'opera doveva consistere in due parti: una prima con la traduzione tedesca, con testo a fronte, dei sonetti e la seconda con l'inter-

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[1] Per gli interventi effettuati sui testi da Bernhard Rang nel lavoro editoriale di curatela si vedano rispettivamente Steiner (1989) e Jäger (1998). I manoscritti di Rang sono conservati presso l'*Akademie der Künste* di Berlino, dove ha sede anche il *Walter Benjamin Archiv*.

pretazione degli stessi. A quest'ultima parte doveva poi seguire, in forma di appendice, un capitolo filologico, di analisi critico-testuale e linguistico-formale delle poesie, rimasto però abbozzato solo nella sua struttura preparatoria. L'edizione curata da Bernhard Rang, e su cui ci si basa per la traduzione del testo qui proposta, è l'esito di un «raggruppamento sintetico delle parti compiute» del solo capitolo interpretativo, presentando il lavoro – queste le motivazioni del curatore – tanto nella sua interezza quanto in alcune sezioni decisive, un carattere ancora «frammentario» o talvolta troppo «digressivo» o «datato» (Rang [1954]: 201).

Di quest'opera che considera il proprio «testamento spirituale (*geistiges Testament*)» (Rang [1954]: 201), e che lo vede impegnato dal 1915 fino alla sua morte, ancora in vita, Rang ne invia una parte a Hugo von Hofmannsthal, pensando a una possibile prima pubblicazione parziale sui *Neue Deutsche Beiträge* (dove pure ha già pubblicato il saggio *Goethes Selige Sehnsucht*; cfr. Rang [1922]): nella lettera del 25 giugno 1923 a Hofmannsthal indirizzata, allega così proprio l'introduzione sull'interpretazione messianica, insieme al manoscritto non ancora corretto della sezione interpretativa dei sonetti e al più vecchio saggio sulla *Historische Psychologie des Karnevals* (Hofmannsthal, Rang [1905-1924]: 429 ss.). Hofmannsthal rimane profondamente colpito dal commento delle poesie shakespeariane e sua intenzione sembra di far uscire sulla propria rivista non solo l'introduzione, ma anche un altro paio di capitoli (Hofmannsthal, Rang [1905-1924]: 432 ss.). A causa di questioni tecniche – i capitoli da lui individuati, in termini di estensione, eccedono i limiti della rivista, andrebbero quindi abbreviati – il piano infine fallisce.

L'elaborazione e l'inizio della stesura del lavoro shakespeariano si collocano in uno dei tanti momenti di crisi, meglio di "conversione" – nel senso proprio del concetto come vedremo fondamentale di *Umkehr* – della vita di Rang: in seguito alla morte in guerra del figlio primogenito (1915) e sul finire del primo conflitto mondiale, questi non solo lascia, per la seconda volta, le cariche amministrative, ma rompe con l'ideologia conser-

vatrice del prussianesimo, che aveva sin qui profondamente segnato la sua esistenza come la sua riflessione. Di lì a poco, tra il 1919 e 1920, conosce Walter Benjamin e costituisce un nuovo circolo intellettuale – dopo quello berlinese di Potsdam del 1914 – insieme a Martin Buber, Alfons Paquet, Ernst Michel, Paul Natorp, Theodor Spira, Rudolf Otto, Pfarrer Schafft, Eberhard Arnold; espressione della discussione interna alla cerchia di amici e pensatori, è la *Deutsche Bauhütte*, dove Rang ricusa in termini inequivocabili ogni possibile convergenza, in passato sostenuta, tra «*Reich* politico e *Reich* divino» (Rang [1924]; cfr. anche Desideri [1983]: 17).

Non è questo il luogo per poter anche solo abbozzare un ritratto esaustivo di una figura tanto eclettica quanto, spesso, enigmatica e impenetrabile; e tuttavia risulta necessario ripercorrere perlomeno i momenti principali della sua vita, i punti di svolta che hanno dato corpo e rinnovata forma alla sua riflessione, per riuscire a districarsi nella densa, a tratti sfingea, trama concettuale e linguistica del testo sull'interpretazione messianica.

Nato il 28 gennaio 1864 a Kassel, da padre cattolico e madre evangelica, Christian Rang viene battezzato cattolico, ma poi educato in senso protestante, in seguito anche alla conversione paterna alla confessione luterana. Nel solco della tradizione familiare, studia diritto per intraprendere successivamente la carriera burocratica all'interno dello Stato prussiano. Ed è dopo i primi anni di incarichi amministrativi, e nonostante i successi e le promozioni all'orizzonte, che avviene la prima *Umkehr*: nel 1895 Rang interrompe la carriera da funzionario, decide di studiare teologia e di diventare pastore. Ma, dopo soli cinque anni, si strappa di dosso anche la veste pastorale, perché avvertita come «una camicia di Nesso» (Hofmannsthal, Rang [1905-1924]: 403; cfr. anche Rang [1954]: 202), intrisa quale è dell'«elemento rovinoso del Cristianesimo» ecclesiastico (Rang [1959]: 450; cfr. anche Desideri [1983]: 9-12). Torna così alla professione amministrativa – assumendo la carica di consigliere governativo a Coblenza –, senza però per questo abbandonare gli studi teologici, in particolare di storia della religione (è in questo

periodo che lavora all'opera rimasta incompiuta *Abrechnung mit Gott*). Al contrario, sotto il segno della rinascita spirituale generata dalla rottura con l'asfissiante e moralizzante sistema ecclesiastico e segnata dall'aspirazione messianica, "fiorisce" il suo nuovo, secondo nome, che da adesso in poi anteporrà a Christian: Florens (cfr. Paquet (1926-1927): 133; Rang [1954]: 203; Rang (1959): 452). Durante la prima decade del '900 stringe amicizia con Richard Dehmel, Hugo von Hofmannsthal e il poeta olandese Frederik van Eeden. Ed è nel 1909 che tiene a Vienna la conferenza, pubblicata poi postuma sulla rivista "Die Kreatur" nel 1927/28, sulla *Historische Psychologie des Karnevals* (Rang [1909-1927/1928]). Nel 1914 con van Eeden, Martin Buber, Theodor Däubler, Erich Gutkind, Gustav Landauer, Poul Bjerre e Henri Borel dà vita a Berlino al *Potsdamer-Kreis* (o anche *Forte-Kreis*, avvenendo la ratifica definitiva del circolo nell'agosto del 1914 a Forte dei Marmi). Rang è tra i principali ideatori del programma metafisico-spirituale del circolo: l'ideologia nazionalista e conservatrice prussiana è alla base del pensiero del rinnovamento dell'umanità; tanto da scorgere nella guerra alle porte l'avvento di una «nuova epoca della fede» (Buber [1897-1918]: 368; Desideri [1983]: 15-16). Ma proprio il militarismo e il nazionalismo interventista costituiscono i punti di rottura del *Kreis*: in particolare Landauer – con gli stranieri van Eeden, Borel e Bjerre – ne sancisce la dissoluzione, opponendosi in maniera radicale al suddetto posizionamento, viziato a suo avviso da un «apocalittico mare di nebbia di generalità religiose e metafisiche indicibilmente confuse» (Schaeder [1972]: 65). La prima guerra mondiale porta però, come già accennato sopra, nuovi, profondi cambiamenti nella vita personale e intellettuale di Rang, l'ultima *Umkehr*: ritiro a vita privata, abbandonando non solo le cariche amministrative, ma anche, nel 1920, quella di presidente della Cassa rurale di credito assunta tre anni prima; sconfessione del prussianesimo, nonché contestazione dell'ideale nazionalista a partire dal lavoro col nuovo *Kreis*; torsione messianica nella critica al Protestantesimo ecclesiastico, individuando un'ulteriore «immane […] causa» del processo di

addomesticamento di cui proprio il messianismo è stato vittima: l'idealismo tedesco (Rang [1954]: 204). Così, abbeverandosi della più ricca e limpida acqua sorgiva del Nuovo Testamento (cfr. Paquet [1926-1927]: 134), Florens Christian Rang giunge alla fine dei suoi giorni, quando, a soli sessant'anni, la malattia cancerosa al midollo spinale lo spegne.

Con la forza di un testo programmatico si impone al lettore *La via dell'interpretazione messianica*: non solo per quel che concerne l'interpretazione dei sonetti di Shakespeare a cui dà avvio e indirizzo, ma, più in generale, relativamente all'ultima riflessione di Rang. Per usare un'immagine che ricorre in queste pagine, di fronte si ha un «cristallo» in cui risultano *addensate* e *abbreviate* le «grandi tappe» del suo pensiero, del suo «mondo» teologico-filosofico. Un cristallo ruvido, opaco, segnato dallo stile espressionista tanto oscuro quanto visionario, che induce il figlio Bernhard a paragonarlo alla scrittura eraclitea (Rang [1954]: 202), Hofmannsthal a definirne «astrusa (*abstrus*)» la lingua (Nicolaus [2004]: 125).

Incamminarsi dunque su questa «via» è operazione tutt'altro che agevole. Volgendo lo sguardo all'«eone messianico» si potrà forse affiancare, come Rang suggerisce, alla traduzione l'interpretazione. Ma solo mantenendo fedeltà alla «filologia» – che «è filosofia» –, al «recupero» meticoloso «della forma e del senso letterali» – come qui si è tentato di fare –, la seconda lingua avrà forse qualche possibilità di effondere una porzione di quella forza generatrice che è in seno all'interpretazione messianica (Rang [1915-1924]: 13-14, 20; *infra*, pp. 110, 113].

Critica nel senso più profondo del termine, si legge tra le prime righe del saggio, è «innalzamento giudicante (*urteilende Aufrichtung*)»: il giudizio in questione è quello universale, del Tribunale di Dio. La prospettiva messianica contesta infatti l'autonomia dell'arte. E, inserendo «l'opera d'arte nella serie di tutte le opere» della creazione divina (Rang [1915-1924]: 13, 15; *infra*, pp. 109, 111], genera un'inversione, meglio, una «conversione (*Umkehr*)» della percezione della realtà. La critica

d'arte messianica si rivela allora essere «solo un caso particolare della critica universale messianica (*messianische Weltkritik*)», alla lettera, della «critica del mondo (*Welt-Kritik*)», che al mondo si riconverte e re-indirizza (Rang [1915-1924]: 14-15; *infra*, pp. 110-111].

L'autoinganno che ha condotto la critica classico-romantica, da Rang definita pneumatica, all'«idolatria artistica» che separa l'opera d'arte dall'«opera del mondo (*Weltwerk*)» si basa fondamentalmente su un falso concetto di *pneuma*: spirito suddiviso in due, letteralmente, scorporato, per cui, da un lato, si pongono esperienza, fatti, mondo e, dunque, scienza e, dall'altro, l'arte come «puro rispecchiamento di forme». Puro rispecchiamento che, però, come tale può darsi soltanto in Dio, pertanto l'interpretazione pneumatica finisce in un vicolo cieco, in sé contraddittorio: l'arte necessita infatti, sul piano del contenuto, di fatti ed esperienza mondana, pena il palesare il carattere «infinitamente vuoto» di un simile rispecchiamento. Questo sdoppiamento dello spirito ha quindi determinato lo sguardo unidirezionale del Romanticismo all'«infinità di Dio»: di conseguenza, l'«impulso alla perfezione» ha sbarrato l'accesso al corpo, l'idea di Dio offuscato il «Dio-uomo (*Gott-Mensch*)», ovvero «l'uomo in cui Dio stesso prende forma» (Rang [1915-1924]: 15, 14; *infra*, pp. 111, 110). Parafrasando *Der Grundschaden des deutschen philosophischen Idealismus*, l'uomo non è più colto nella sua interezza, perché l'elemento corporeo è rimosso, lo spirito assume un tratto solo intellettuale (Steiner [1989]: 242)[2] e il Regno di Dio viene «derealizzato» attraverso il pensiero dell'infinità, posto cioè su un piano di «mera immaginabilità» (Greiert [2011]: 239).

Ma l'ora della *metanoia* evangelica ha suonato di nuovo: l'interpretazione messianica chiama a una rinnovata, decisiva *Umkehr*, perché «il Regno dei cieli è vicino» (Mt 3, 2; 4, 17), non più trasposto in una sfera di pura idealità. Una con-versione, scrive Rang nella *Deutsche Bauhütte* – ricordando

come questa parola, *Um-kehr*, sia «la grande parola di tutte le religioni» che intendono il mondo compreso tra la creazione e il Regno di Dio –, che coincide col movimento di «rivoluzione» che dice «sì!», «alla vita», al mondo (Rang [1924]: 120). La direzione dunque si inverte: dall'infinità alla «finitezza di Dio» (Rang [1915-1924]: 14; *infra*, p. 110), il verbo torna a farsi carne (Gv 1, 14; cfr. anche Greiert [2011]: 238-239). In tal senso Rang si proclama cristico (*christisch*) e non cristiano (*christlich*) (Rang [1915-1924]: 14; *infra*, p. 110): dalla parte, del partito di Cristo e non della religione istituzionalizzata dal Cristianesimo. Così, «la volontà che lo Spirito sia nuovamente attraversato dalla passione, che il *logos* cristiano trabocchi nuovamente in *pathos*, che la vita corrisponda alle parole evangeliche, sia *ethos* cristiano», è, come ha avuto a scrivere Fabrizio Desideri, «quanto mina e fa esplodere il Protestantesimo di Rang» (Desideri [1983]: 11). Anche il Protestantesimo ha infatti «stralciato la legge del Vangelo» (Steiner [1989]: 248), addomesticando la vocazione messianica del Cristianesimo originario attraverso un processo di spiritualizzazione che ha provocato la disdetta (*Absage*) del rapporto con il mondo (Greiert [2011]: 239; Rang [1924]: 120). Nel contesto della *messianische Kritik* non c'è più spazio per l'esperienza intesa come «puro, interiore *Erleben*» (Desideri [1983]: 11), piuttosto questa deve stabilirsi sulla «superficie» lacerata, densa di contraddizioni, della realtà, assumendo che all'«Esterno» non corrisponde più «alcuna profondità», «alcun Interno» (Rang [1926-1927a]: 368).

Sono questi i tratti della lotta per Cristo (*Ringen um Christus*) di cui Rang si fa portatore (Rang [1922]: 11), tratti tragici, perché fanno i conti con l'impossibilità stessa del Cristianesimo, della totalità sistematica e sistematizzante della parola teologica (Rang [1926-1927b]: 111-112): nella rivendicazione di un Cristo che, nietzscheanamente, «non è più maledizione della vita, ma benedizione di essa fino alla turpitudine della morte – fino ad amare il "malvagio"» (Desideri [1983]: 26), fino a non rimuovere, nella cura per la creaturalità, l'abisso e la lacerazione del mondo (*Welt-Zerrissenheit*) (Rang [1926-1927b]: 108, 93), si espri-

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[2] Il dattiloscritto è ancora inedito, dunque qui lo si cita secondo la restituzione offerta da Uwe Steiner nel suo *Die Geburt der Kritik aus dem Geiste der Kunst*.

me il rifiuto del Cristianesimo come «religione che copre» tramite la riduzione del nome di Dio in concetto teologico (Desideri [1983]: 21). «Cristianesimo assassino che fanaticamente vuole ostinarsi a capire la realtà, la piena-realtà, la piena pacificazione […] [che] getta ponti non vacillanti per un vacillante piede […]; e chi vi mette piede precipita, attraverso di essi, nell'abisso» (Rang [1922]: 114). La parola poetica allora, «per amore di Dio[,] deve sbarazzarsi di ciò che è cristiano», proprio come se ne sono sbarazzati Shakespeare e Goethe, «i due poeti della nostra ultima religione, la protestante, che porta il Cristianesimo alla tomba» (Rang [1922]: 120).

«*Farsi mondo* per guardare nell'abisso» (Desideri [1983]: 22) è il gesto proprio della *Umkehr* che Rang invoca. Gesto insieme distruttivo e costruttivo: se da un lato manda in frantumi l'illusione dell'Idealismo e, con essa, lo stesso concetto di arte, dall'altro sostituisce all'opera d'arte l'opera di fede (*Glaubenswerk*), che, nella sua rinnovata immersione nella corporeità creaturale, sola, può sprigionare la «forza plasmatrice» di nuove configurazioni. Per far questo la fede stessa deve liberarsi sia dei contenuti che delle forme di chiese, religioni e dottrine (Rang [1915-1924]: 16; *infra*, p. 111). Si tratta di tornare allo stato della creazione (*Schöpfungsstand*) – nella *Deutsche Bauhütte* parlando della *Umkehr* Rang nomina il «ritornare alla radice (*Zurück-gewandtsein zur Wurzel*) […] di Lao-Tse» (Rang [1924]: 120) –, intendendo però con questo movimento un tornare dove *non* si è già stati. «[L]a conversione è inerente alla creazione sin dall'inizio; è la direzione del corso del Regno di Dio» – pertanto il suo tempo non si calcola a partire da Gesù, ma inclusi sono anche il paganesimo e l'ebraismo –, si legge nel quarto paragrafo del testo sull'interpretazione messianica: la creazione stessa procede secondo questo moto permanente della conversione, il massimo amore di Dio si esprime nel «divenire-creatura (*Geschöpf-Werdung*)», la quale, a sua volta, in Dio rifluisce, per essere reindirizzata da Lui nell'esteriorità corporea. Questo continuo, divino disfarsi e riconfigurarsi delle forme per l'uomo «significa libertà e opera» (Rang [1915-1924]: 18; *infra*, p.

112). «[L]ibertà della responsabilità» di fare i conti con l'ingresso dell'«eone messianico», di «dare seguito al volatilizzarsi dello spirito», fino in fondo, con afflato quasi nichilistico, per rendere possibile la nuova «incarnazione (*Verleiblichung*)» (Rang [1915-1924]: 16, 18; *infra*, pp. 111-112): la preparazione del «corpo spirituale (*Geistleib*) del mondo, la "resurrezione della carne"» (Steiner [1989]: 248; cfr. anche Guerra, Bellanda [2006]: 72; Greiert [2011]: 238). Nella dissoluzione di tutte le forme che provoca il primo movimento della conversione, l'uomo può essere risucchiato dal «nulla divino (*göttliches Nichts*)» in cui, nell'infinità del Suo «mare divorante», niente più sussiste; a lui dunque la responsabilità di fare essere ancora se stesso, il mondo e Dio, di innescare il secondo movimento della conversione, quello che torce «la creazione […] nuovamente in forma». «Scongiurare il terribile», ossia la «la fuga di tutte le forme» è il gesto liberamente responsabile richiesto all'uomo (Rang [1915-1924]: 16; *infra*, p. 111). Quell'arresto che raccoglie la pluralità fuggevole dei fenomeni sensibili nell'unità dell'idea platonica o della monade leibniziana, secondo i termini dello confronto che Rang ha con Walter Benjamin – confronto, come noto, decisivo per l'elaborazione dell'*Origine del dramma barocco tedesco*. Rinnovata filosofia eleatica, che riconduce lo spirito a unità – nonché all'ebraico Dio unico (*Adonai echad*) – che traspone il movimento «dall'ambito della natura e delle cose […] in quello della libertà del rapporto – basato sulla creazione – dell'uomo con Dio» (Jäger [1998]: 168-169; Benjamin [1928]: 404-405)[3].

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[3] La citazione è tratta da una lettera di Rang a Benjamin del 22 novembre 1923, secondo la trascrizione fatta dallo stesso Rang nel proprio taccuino *Heft Tyrtaeus* (conservato presso il *Walter Benjamin Archiv*) e restituita da Jäger (1998): 168-169 e in traduzione italiana da Alice Barale nella nuova edizione dell'*Origine del dramma barocco tedesco* (Benjamin [1928]: 404-406). Sullo scambio intercorso tra Benjamin e Rang inerente alla gestazione dell'opera sul *Trauerspiel* si veda Benjamin (1974): 887-895, Benjamin (1928): 403-417, Barale (2018): 45-50, Barale (2014). Riguardo alla problematica rangiana della forma come unità nella pluralità cfr. anche Guerra, Bellanda (2006): 64-65, 70.

La parola poetica di Shakespeare si offre allora come un «cristallo» della «creazione artistica umana» tra le rocce della «montagna» della «creazione del mondo divina». Contro la fascinazione romantica per i suoi drammi, è nei sonetti che «si incarna la conversione (*Umkehr*)» (Rang [1915-1924]: 17; *infra*, p. 112). In essi Rang individua «un programma contro la "fuga dal mondo dello spirito"» (Nicolaus [2004]: 124). «Dure pietruzze» che raccolgono, concentrata nella sua interezza, la vita creaturale, addensamento delle «grandi tappe della creazione» (Rang [1915-1924]: 17; *infra*, p. 112), esibiscono la parola che nomina «l'unità messianica del corpo con lo spirito» (Guerra, Bellanda [2006]: 73). La parola che lotta sempre di nuovo per questa nominazione, indefessa ricerca del *Glaubenswerk*, la sola che, «dopo la mezzanotte della disperazione», può portare la luce rosea dell'alba messianica (Rang [1915-1924]: 21-22; *infra*, pp. 114-115).

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La via dell'interpretazione messianica

Florens Christian Rang

Traduzione di Marina Montanelli

1

Nel richiedere una spiegazione si dà la grandezza come la limitatezza di un'opera poetica. Non per chiarirne l'oscurità, ma per farne risplendere la luce. La sua limitatezza esige di essere tolta dallo spazio angusto del moggio[1] e posta sul candelabro che ne fa rifulgere il significato (*bedeutender Leuchter*); la sua grandezza fornisce la più alta forza interpretativa (*überdeutende Kraft*).

"Beato tu sei, se sai quello che fai"[2]. La mano che estrae la poesia dalla sua forma poetica, perché la sua luce più chiaramente risplenda, effettui il suo servigio rendendo conto alla propria via! La critica, affinché diventi di nuovo ciò per cui lo spirito tedesco al suo culmine la apprese, innalzamento giudicante, deve avere metodo! Altrimenti, spegne la luce.

Secondo i dettami del tempo universale, Shakespeare rifulse per la prima volta per noi tedeschi nella creazione di drammi; ed egli e questa sono ciò che, per la prima volta, illuminò lo spirito tedesco nell'arte interpretativa critica della poesia. Dallo *Sturm und Drang* fino al Romanticismo. Si scorse in alto la stella e si credette alle leggi dell'interpretazione. Poi calò la nebbia su di un secolo: la luce del mondo e l'occhio umano non si incontrarono più; nell'ambito della critica, lampeggiò tremolante, al posto del sapere, l'opinione, che vide soltanto la superficie terrestre e non il messaggio delle stelle. Se oggi lo spirito vuole nuovamente venire alla luce, non è casuale

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[1] Cfr. Matteo 5, 15; Marco 4, 21; Luca 8, 16 e 11, 33 [*N.d.T.*].
[2] Citazione tratta da una variante manoscritta del *Codex Bezae* a Luca, 6, 4 [*N.d.T.*].

che la creazione shakespeariana, quella dei sonetti questa volta, presenti di nuovo a noi la richiesta di essere compresa dal mondo più alto, superiore.

Il roteare dell'ora del mondo ha spostato la visuale. Essendo però quest'ultima il nostro puro presente, possiamo basarci su di essa solo nel corso dell'interpretazione; non può essere spiegata preliminarmente, come se fosse qualcosa di dato prima dello sviluppo. Di poesia in poesia deve restituirsi a noi, finché anche la forma creativa stessa, alla fine, una volta esaurito il suo contenuto, non si sia pienamente compiuta.

L'interpretazione è necessaria a fianco alla traduzione. La traduzione non introduce immediatamente alla comprensione. Non ha questo scopo. Piuttosto, quello di infondere il compreso nella parola tedesca. Solo ciò che confluisce nell'ampiezza della cultura comune ce lo si può aspettare, tradotto, già pienamente intelligibile. Monumento linguistico di una figura peculiare prorompente – e anche di un contenuto inaudito; entrambi si condizionano a vicenda – sgorga in un altro flusso linguistico con l'esigenza di farne crescere l'ampiezza in altezza. La traduzione obbliga innanzitutto ad afferrare il potere della lingua stessa, finché, trascinando il contenuto – senza voler lasciare indietro niente –, lingua e cosa non coincidano. Perciò qui può darsi soltanto la traduzione poetica, quella, cioè, che delimita la forma, che impone alla seconda lingua di formarsi e consolidarsi nuovamente con lei. La traduzione istituisce un parlare più efficace. Questo emerge anche dalla forza generatrice della forma spirituale. Per quanto solo in piccola parte, la traduzione deve oggi indirizzarsi all'eone messianico.

2

La parola d'ordine, distintiva per la nostra epoca e anche per la nostra interpretazione, è stata pronunciata. In essa l'interpretazione raccoglie tutto ciò che ha da dire. Come una critica che prevede la sua fine – vista in breve: qui la base, lì l'apice –, essa forma già nel seme l'insieme della pianta. La critica classico-romantica ancora non si intese così. Si diresse verso l'infinità di Dio. La nostra

si dirigerà verso la finitezza di Dio. Certamente anche quella non volle spingere l'ideale in una lontananza eterna irraggiungibile; il respiro della rivoluzione soffiava già in lei: qui e oggi il Regno di Dio doveva diventare realtà. Ma il suo impulso alla perfezione non trovò alcun accesso nel corpo. Si esaurì nel tentativo di cogliere Dio in una forma. Dinanzi all'idea di Dio essa non poté vedere il Dio-uomo; l'uomo in cui Dio stesso prende forma. Anche noi non lo vediamo, ma i nostri occhi guardano in attesa di vederlo. Poiché si è avvicinata l'ora critica, in cui la critica del mondo (*Welt-Kritik*) si erige al massimo: noi dobbiamo fornire un'interpretazione messianica, laddove quella è ancora pneumatica. Noi siamo cristici (*christisch*)[3] – tutt'altro che cristiani (*christlich*)! La spiegazione messianica è morte e rinascita. In lei il bambino lacera la madre, la quale vive in modo più alto in lui. All'interpretazione pneumatica questa lacerazione apparve ancora quasi come un gioco; l'interpretazione romantica ancora lo poté chiamare "ironia"; ancora poté stare a guardare, nel proprio autocompiacimento, il progresso in cui la forma si annullò per superarsi: la poesia divenne prosa.

La critica messianica pensa a sé in modo più doloroso: le doglie si sono intensificate e incalzano troppo. La fervida illusione, che l'interpretazione e la critica diano più forma di una poesia, è per lei passata. Ciononostante essa non può fare a meno di de-formare l'opera poetica, trasformandola in prosa, che per lei ha meno valore della poesia; o meglio: le svaluta entrambe. La direzione messianica, così vorremmo chiamare questa critica innalzante, deve compiere l'opera di passione; essa *sacrifica* l'opera. L'opera d'arte come la scultura. La sacrifica completamente, non conservando la forma per la figura. Questa critica sacrifica l'immagine al Dio privo di immagine, senza che le si mostri come ricompensa già l'Uomo figlio di Dio; messianicamente ancora non sa del Messia. È sì

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[3] La desinenza *–isch* sta a indicare l'essere seguace, adepto di un partito, in questo caso quello di Cristo (cfr. *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm,* Erstbearbeitung (1854–1960)*,* digitalisierte Version im Digitalen Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache, <https://www.dwds.de/wb/dwb/christisch>) [*N.d.T.*].

così critica l'ora, che lo spirito critico non sa affatto se Questi si mostrerà mai. Il nostro spirito non può concedersi il piacere di costruire il futuro, di confortare, di sviluppare forma su forma, piuttosto deve, senza garanzia di raggiungere un punto più alto, sbarazzarsi di tutte le sue immagini perché troppo basse e liberarsi di tutte le forme. Simile ad Abramo, che dovette sacrificare l'unico figlio, pegno della promessa. Simile a Dio, che diede in sacrificio il suo unico figlio. Perché noi siamo alla fine del protestantesimo; compiendolo, lo dobbiamo uccidere. Noi siamo gettati nella nuda, più povera fede. L'interpretazione pneumatica divise l'opera d'arte dall'opera del mondo, separò, nello spirito, la riflessione delle idee dall'osservazione delle cose. Con questa suddivisione in due dello spirito – che gli offrì qui scienza, esperienza, fatti, mondo, lì arte come un puro rispecchiamento di forme, cioè dello spirito, che è di Dio –, l'interpretazione pneumatica, tuttavia, attribuì segretamente all'arte, che vive dell'infinità di Dio, un contenuto costituito da fatti finiti, da esperienza mondana: senza i quali, certamente, ogni rispecchiamento di specchi sarebbe infinitamente vuoto. La direzione, l'interpretazione messianica ha riconosciuto questo autoinganno dell'idolatria artistica; essa inserisce anche l'opera d'arte nella serie di tutte le opere, e la sua critica si rivolge a tutte allo stesso modo. La critica d'arte messianica è solo un caso particolare della critica universale messianica, del Giudizio universale. Questo non fa sussistere alcuna creazione; anche la forma artistica e l'opera d'arte devono essere fatte di nuovo in pezzi insieme al concetto di arte del passato. Esse sono completamente succubi del Giudizio, già prima che il giudizio stesso venga pronunciato, perché gli posero dei limiti come se l'arte fosse stata tolta dalla sua competenza e avesse un proprio ambito e una propria giurisdizione. Questo involucro deve essere strappato dall'interpretazione messianica.

3

A quel che si va strappando corrisponde però qualcosa di più costruttivo. L'opera di fede sostituisce l'opera d'arte; proprio con la liquidazione del concetto di arte la fede intenderà se stessa nella sua forza plasmatrice: sul bastione, caduto per ultimo, della forma.

L'opera d'arte fu l'ultima opera in sé valida nel protestantesimo del rifiuto delle "buone opere", moralmente valide per il Cattolicesimo. Anche la fede deve di nuovo liberarsi della forma, prima che possa servire a una nuova configurazione. Non deve soltanto svuotarsi dei suoi contenuti storici, del *cosa* delle chiese, delle religioni e delle dottrine, ma anche del *come* di ogni atto di fede, non appena essa vuole prendere una qualche forma, di tutto ciò che concede la forma come un qualcosa di stabile: come quiete, confine, persistenza; che sia anche solo persistenza in progresso e meta. Certo, noi nuotiamo nell'infinità di Dio; nessuna forma costruisce un'arca in questo mare divorante; nel nulla divino non c'è un qualcosa che ci trattenga. Siamo completamente gettati nella libertà della responsabilità, verso il punto infinito: nel profondo del nostro sé noi dobbiamo scongiurare la fuga di tutte le forme; decidere se "noi", se mondo e Dio in genere possono ancora essere. La creazione si è trasformata nella sua conversione (*Umkehr*). A noi è dato il potere di farla decadere dalla sua forma, di disciogliere, dopo tutte le forme, anche la forma del mondo dietro cui, poi, nessuna forma della forma giace nello spirito. Noi dobbiamo soltanto dare seguito al volatilizzarsi dello spirito, così questo oltrepasserà la linea a partire da cui non è più possibile il suo ritorno nel corpo. Ed è già segno della rarefazione dell'intelligenza delle cosiddette persone colte e del prevalere di meri uomini dal corpo di bestia che questo pericolo, ed entrambe le cose come suo segno, già non vengano più avvertiti. Ma a noi è dato anche il potere di scongiurare il terribile, mettendovi fine – il potere di far sì che la creazione si converta (*sich umkehren*) nuovamente in forma, che l'uomo divino si generi nella conversione del mondo (*Weltbekehrung*) e che questi generi perfettibilità dall'infinità. A noi, i privi di opera, ciò è dato come l'ultima – e anche la prima – opera della fede.

4

Così, opponendosi alla fuga del mondo, la critica messianica trova sulla sua strada le nostre poesie shakespeariane. E trova la visuale a partire da cui queste sono per noi importanti. Non perché parlino di Cristo o della fede. Ma, come nell'immagine dell'immagine, in esse giacciono impresse e rispecchiate le stazioni evolutive del corso della creazione. La parola compare qui con una così potente fermezza, che essa di proposito vuole superare e rovesciare la fuga del tempo e il flusso delle parole. Il mondo si sviluppa da questa parola onnicomprensiva, che, consapevolmente, mette un ordine al suo sviluppo. Così, l'interpretazione messianica viene travolta dal compito di rispondere alla domanda e alla tensione inerente al rapporto tra poesia e religione; vale a dire: tra creazione artistica umana e creazione del mondo divina, tra cristallo e montagna. Queste dure pietruzze shakespeariane rappresentano, in quanto pietre miliari e di confine, tutta l'arte poetica; in loro si incarna la conversione (*Umkehr*). Come nel *miraculum naturae*, nel diamante che va incurvandosi, quel che è cristallo si volge alle forme del rigonfiamento della vita. Non importa quanto il valore o meno di queste poesie venga apprezzato: il loro addensare le grandi tappe della creazione in un nocciolo dal guscio ristrettissimo, la loro direzione dallo spirito verso il corpo, sono un fatto, e unico. Come in una città ricca di chiese belle e magnificenti lo studioso di architettura può essere attirato, trascurando quelle, da una cappella inapparíscente, la cui conformazione manifesta la nuova volontà architettonica, allo stesso modo l'interpretazione messianica si avvicina ai sonetti di Shakespeare.

La concentrazione del mondo è quel che San Pietro volle esprimere con la sua cupola e che gli venne occultato con l'estensione della navata centrale; nei sonetti di Shakespeare sull'amicizia ciò è architettato in maniera udibile, anche se in piccola scala; sì, proprio in piccola scala, cioè massimamente concentrata! Così fermamente non si racchiude nel suo corpo nessuna poesia medievale e neppure, da allora, alcuna più recente. Per quanto Dante sembri accatastare la sua creazione,

in modo ciclopico, nel cerchio della forza propria della sua poesia, egli stesso la rende tuttavia dipendente dalla religione; per amore di Cristo e di Dio, dinanzi a cui la parola poetica decade, non può osare di incarnare il mondo interamente in Beatrice: poiché lei tace quasi timorosa davanti a Cristo e sprofonda nel silenzio della sopraffazione di fronte a Dio Uno e Trino. Così, anche la parola poetica di Dante spiritualmente soffia via.

Diversi sono però i gironi della poesia antica: Omero, Pindaro, i drammi attici. Ma qui si spalanca un abisso che non possiamo rinserrare subito, piuttosto lo dobbiamo per ora aggirare. Perché adesso si schiude la domanda: perché proprio Shakespeare e non il mondo antico si presta all'interpretazione messianica? La risposta al riguardo non può suonare: perché l'antichità proviene da un'epoca del mondo precristiana; calcolando, quindi, il tempo della conversione (*Zeit der Umkehr*) a partire da Gesù e dal cristianesimo. No, la conversione è inerente alla creazione sin dall'inizio; è la direzione del corso del Regno di Dio; è l'amore di Dio per la creatura, che costringe questa a voler rifluire in Lui stesso in modo non amorevole; è il più grande amore inespressamente espresso che vuole esprimersi nel divenire-creatura (*Geschöpf-Werdung*). Anche il paganesimo e l'ebraismo sono compresi in questa conversione di Dio (*Umkehr Gottes*); da sempre, in ogni istante, la creazione si riprecipita in Dio e Dio la reindirizza, sì che essa si inveri in un corpo esteriore; e da sempre, in ogni momento, questo reindirizzamento divino nell'uomo significa libertà e opera. Quale significato Gesù abbia avuto in questa umanazione (*Vermenschlichung*) – quanto queste linee non abbiano proceduto avanti e indietro in modo continuativo, ma abbiano creato un vortice nel mezzo del tempo –, se il Messia del compimento, che è anche quello dell'umiliazione, se la conversione stessa debbano di nuovo sacrificarsi – se sulla strada dell'incarnazione (*Verleiblichung*) tra mondo e uomo come stadio intermedio si spinga solo il popolo di Dio, oppure, invece, l'uomo di Dio, persona individuale che oltrepassa il popolo; o se, al contrario, ciò è di nuovo soltanto un pezzo di fuga: tutte queste domande

abissali, che mandano in frantumi il cristianesimo e l'ebraismo (o: l'ebraismo e il paganesimo; poiché il cristianesimo è diventato cristianesimo dei gentili; i popoli del mondo contro l'unico popolo), tutte queste domande, devono anche, certamente, tanto quanto le domande tra cattolicesimo e protestantesimo, essere condotte alla soluzione dalla direzione messianica; interpretazione messianica, però, non significa ancora la loro soluzione; solo dibattendosi con loro essa vi si avvicina.

Se in questo modo l'interpretazione cristiana non può propriamente assumere la posizione cristiana, così non può partire dal subordinare la poesia antica a quella cristiana, considerandola appartenente a uno stadio precedente o mettendola sul suo stesso piano, bensì deve temporaneamente rinunciare, perciò, alla sua interpretazione. Deve tralasciare, in particolare – o ancora porla –, la questione se questa poesia antica non sia forse più apparente che realmente incarnata, o, invece, se essa, che è apparentemente pagana, non richiami forse l'attenzione proprio sul Gesù cristiano, preannunciando la sua redenzione nelle sue soluzioni tragiche. Come comprendere l'antichità è ancora più problematico di come comprendere Shakespeare. Che Shakespeare realizzi il movimento contrario alla poesia di natura cristiana che l'ha preceduto, non possiamo dubitarne: così la sua poesia assegna al compito della fede, che consiste nel dare un indirizzo messianico, quello particolare di comprendere l'opera poetica all'interno di questa direzione. La poesia shakespeariana immagine dell'uomo è il luogo dove evocare l'arte poetica come immagine di Dio.

5

Evocare: nel senso religioso originario di questa parola. Perciò oggi si prestano all'interpretazione i sonetti di Shakespeare e non i suoi drammi. I drammi hanno fornito il materiale all'interpretazione pneumatica – la brama di infinità e la colossalità, la distruzione della forma e la distruzione attraverso il destino, su entrambe, infine, un resto sfuggente di indicibile, che si risolve nella rasse-

gnazione o nel comico –, così essi si corrispondono. A offrire a noi i sonetti è il loro carattere opposto a quello dei drammi: mai in una forma più arida è stato abbreviato il mondo; il ciottolo di parola più duro, nel cui cristallo è sussurrato il corpo miracoloso del principe delle fiabe; ma proprio la legge del cristallo è questo corpo.

Il primo principio dell'interpretazione messianica relativamente a questa poesia shakespeariana è allora: partire dalla sua forma, non dalla propria fede; questa fede non deve verificare la parola di Shakespeare, piuttosto verificarsi attraverso di essa: poiché la parola di Shakespeare è già lì e la fede ancora sta cercando la propria parola. Questi duri sonetti sono chiave e lucchetto nella mano del padrone di casa della parola, del padrone del mondo della parola, oppure spezzano, invece, la mano falsamente imperiosa. L'interpretazione messianica non vuole né mostrare né provare che Shakespeare si accordi con lei. Non ne ha bisogno: in qualità di fede, ci crede; sentendo la vita nella parola, vi sente la vita affine; aspirando alla forma, rispetta la forma spirituale estranea. Piuttosto digressiva apparirà talvolta la sua interpretazione; poiché essa cerca di comprendere l'opera poetica puramente dall'opera stessa, ovunque divaghino i suoi singoli elementi; la fiducia della fede è troppo piena d'amore per non credere nell'amore corrisposto, nel legame più intimo.

Anche all'interno dell'opera d'arte poetica la vivente interpretazione corporea sente il polso della vita delle poesie soltanto parola per parola. L'interpretazione messianica pone la filologia sul trono della filosofia; poiché filologia è filosofia – lei, la Cenerentola oggi delle scienze dello spirito. Regni il metodo filologico così rigorosamente che la spiegazione si leghi alla successione dei sonetti, benché raccolti solo in ordine sparso, e subito cominci con la spiegazione testuale del primo sonetto. Il lettore non si spaventi davanti a questa fredda ascesa; ne vale la pena. Anche per il non esperto di inglese; anche egli capirà le spiegazioni letterali, confrontando la traduzione al testo originale; solo, senza poter verificare linguisticamente. Esercitiamoci in questa meticolosità di un recupero preciso della forma e del senso letterali, supe-

riamo così la voglia di lasciarci eccitare solo sentimentalmente, cosa dei pigri di spirito.

L'amore per la parola è però libero dalla schiavitù dalla parola. È inutile e pedante spiegare in questo modo tutti i sonetti uno dopo l'altro! Disconoscerebbe anche il differente grado del loro impeto. Solo da alcuni l'interpretazione si sente attratta in virtù delle illuminazioni sgorganti particolarmente ricche. Nella critica messianica la scienza dell'amore per la parola (la filologia) deve procedere per gradi, sulla via del ritorno dello spirito nel corpo. La sua interpretazione formale va dalla forma somigliante al contenuto a quella più simile alla forma; da quella ancora maggiormente spirituale a quella già più corporea; dalla configurazione fluttuante a quella già delineata, che è perciò più chiara, perché proviene da un atto configurante. E noi non vediamo niente a cui non si indichi qui la via verso l'interezza.

Ai sonetti è profondamente legato il poema *La fenice e la tortora*; al di là però della loro forma, di cui ne esibisce, quindi, la sola provvisorietà. Questo poema va pertanto collocato alla fine della nostra interpretazione. Così i singoli capitoli del nostro libro interpretano di volta in volta uno o più sonetti e per questo devono essere provvisti di titoli inerenti al contenuto; che, certo, solo come un accordo preludiante, alludono alla direzione, ma non racchiudono affatto già l'intero tema melodico.

6

I sonetti hanno per noi il significato di un cristallo, nella loro dura scorza; ma essi stessi si ergono anche come una montagna. Al tempo, non alla singola persona, è dato di comprenderli come la più grande altezza della parola del nostro passato. La loro eccezionale importanza si impone a noi. L'altezza del duomo si vede a distanza di miglia solo in rapporto alle altre chiese della città.

L'eterno vira: noi ci troviamo nel punto di una nuova epoca dello spirito. Ma perché questo lo sappiamo, possiamo anche osare di definire quest'epoca; nella conversione eterna (*ewige*

Umkehr) l'ora si è temporalmente approssimata a quella dell'ignoranza; adesso è l'ora dopo mezzanotte – dopo la mezzanotte della disperazione. Nell'alternarsi dei giorni, un secolo ha vissuto: il caldo mondo di Goethe della trasfigurazione del tramonto e il rabbrividire del Romanticismo sul quieto cammino delle lontane stelle, ma poi la fitta, folle notte: del materialismo – il vagare in cerca di cibo delle rapaci belve notturne dell'umanità, attività sovversiva, ululato, impietoso colpo di grazia: la scaltra civilizzazione dell'intelletto e della volontà; il grasso sonno che si nasconde di milioni di uomini che non vogliono vedere: bruciati gli stoppini di tutte le candele dello spirito; e il tenere lo sguardo fisso dei pochi svegli nelle tenebre sul nichilismo del pensiero terrificante che non esiste niente che è. Sì, l'angoscia di questo pensiero terrificante li prese alla gola strozzandoli. Gola da cui avevano appena urlato i pochi portavoce d'Europa – i Dostojewski, Nietzsche, Strindberg – quel che doveva essere il canto del gallo della speranza del mattino; ma il loro canto fu una rinnegazione, poiché non vide il mattino, lo finse. Questi veggenti videro male: guardandosi intorno in direzione dell'alba. E senza vedere che stavano – come noi tutti – di fronte all'impenetrabile parete della casa del futuro che sbarra lo sguardo e mura i nostri occhi. Parete, oltre e attraverso la quale nessuno sguardo scorge l'oriente. Troppo vicino agli occhi, troppo lontano dal mattino ciò che loro proclamarono oriente: la loro terra russa, la loro terra ariana, la loro terra promessa! O anche estremo oriente indiano o cinese; se pure oriente dello spirito al di là di ogni terra.

È giunta l'ora terribile, in cui non è neanche più notte, ma tutto ingrigisce. Le stelle sono impallidite, il mondo è inaridito, la terra è dura e fredda; questo è il tempo del più rigido gelo; la rugiada delle lacrime cade pungendoci con punte di brina; la nebbia fa montare il freddo vapore. Oh, speriamo di resistere! – resistere all'ora della *seconda* disperazione! È il mattino che, grigio, albeggia – può essere l'alba[4]. La svolta della grazia

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[4] Forse Rang ha voluto qui giocare con l'ambivalenza semantica di *grauen*, che si ripete più volte nel periodo:

non si rivela, però, seguendo l'ora. Non smettiamo di guardare le cime, le punte più alte! Fino a che – o beatitudine! – un raggio roseo non fiammeggi su di esse, luce vivente sulla vecchia umanità e la consumata potenza della terra. Fino a che le erubescenti statue non indichino l'artista divino, che agisce alle nostre spalle, e noi, dimentichi di esse, sappiamo: il sole è qui! – di nuovo cammina sulla terra il Signore celeste!

Ancora taccia ogni giubilo; ancora persiste l'attesa colma di angoscia. Ma non diventa un po' lattiginosa l'aria? Non aumenta la luce? Non ci appare già l'immensa vetta di Shakespeare come una figura più luminosa?

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nella prima frase con il verbo *vergrauen* (ingrigire) e in quest'ultima dove scrive «Es ist der Morgen, der graut – es kann Morgengrauen sein». È possibile che Rang abbia voluto sottolineare come questo presumibile albeggiare (*grauen*) avvenga non solo nell'atmosfera letteralmente grigia del principio del giorno, ma anche cupa perché quella dell'«ora terribile», della «*seconda* disperazione»; così, l'alba – *das Morgengrauen* – che potrebbe essere arrivata, oltre a darsi nella densità nebbiosa di questo grigio, potrebbe pure essere un mattino terrificante: *das Grauen* è infatti il terrore e *grauen* significa anche avere paura [*N.d.T.*].

Aisthesis

Hamlet or Europe and the end of modern Trauerspiel. On some shakespearians motifs in Walter Benjamin

Fabrizio Desideri

Abstract. Hamlet's character sets, under different shapes and extents, the benchmark against which a large part of the European philosophy of the very long «short twentieth-century» behind us has had to measure. In the name of Hamlet as the most enigmatic among Shakespeare's creatures, even Europe, its spirit and destiny, is identified, according to the well-known claim by Paul Valery.

Common trait to a big part of these interpretations – from the juvenile works of Pavel Florenskij and Lev S. Vygotskij (respectively written in 1905 and 1915) to Carl Schmitt's *Hamlet* oder *Ekuba. Der Einbruch* der *Zeit in* das *Spiel* (1956) – is offered by the detection, in Hamlet's figure, of the contradiction inherent to an epochal transition: the time of an unresolved passage between two ages that only knows the endless pain of an "interim". My paper concerns the possibility to interpret Hamlet's time as the time of an "interim" in light of Benjamin's claims about Shakespeare's drama contained in his book on the German Trauerspiel.

While Florenskij interprets both the time and the figure of Hamlet as tragic, in my essay, in my essay - moving from some observations on the " Hamlet Problem " by the young Franz Rosenzweig - I consider the original Benjaminian thesis about the character and the drama of Hamlet as the end of the modern Trauerspiel. Starting from a statement by Theodor Adorno in the famed *Hornberger Brief* to Benjamin of August 2, 1935, I outline, therefore, how Benjamin characterizes the figure of Hamlet. This, from his early writings on the relationship between tragedy and Trauerspiel up to the great book on the Origin of the German Trauerspiel.

In the frame of Benjamin's interpretation, exactly by virtue of its distance from the thesis on the duality of tragedy (evoked by Florenskij's interpretation as well as other ones), the Shakespearian *theatrum* of consciousness, paradigmatically represented in the figure of Hamlet and in the intimately dialectic character of his drama, is accounted for as necessary correlate of the Cartesian's *theatrum* of consciousness. From a theoretical point of view, the Benjaminian characterization of Hamlet's figure reveals, therefore, something of the nature of modern consciousness and of consciousness in general in relation to the problem of truth and its representation. Hence the end of modern Trauerspiel coincides with the original incompleteness of its time. Consequently, I also claim Hamlet's dramatic figure to represent the aporetic characters of modern politics. This contrasts the thesis of Carl Schmitt who (in direct controversy with Benjamin) speaks, instead, of the Shakespearean drama as an expression of a premodern barbaric time.

Keywords. Walter Benjamin, Shakespeare, Hamlet, Trauerspiel (End of), Melancholy, Carl Schmitt, Pavel Florenskij, Paul Valéry, Franz Rosenzweig, Th. Adorno,

OUVERTURE

Hamlet's figure sets, under different shapes and extents, the benchmark against which a large part of the European philosophy of the very long «short twentieth-century» behind us has had to measure. In the name of Hamlet as the most enigmatic among Shakespeare's creatures, even Europe, its spirit and destiny, is identified, according to Paul Valery's words in a famous passage contained in the text of 1919, *La crise de L'Esprit*:

« *Maintenant, sur une immense terrasse d'Elsinore, qui va de Bâle à Cologne, qui touche aux sables de Nieuport, aux marais de la Somme, aux craies de Champagne, aux granits d'Alsace, —l'Hamlet euro-péen regarde des millions de spectres.* »[1].

At the end of a world conflict that would have brought to the old continent everything but peace and progress, the identification of Europe with the protagonist of the Shakespearean drama could have the meaning of reopening the wound from which modernity derives its origin: reopening and proposing it again as the scene of a drama that no longer has its perimeter in the royal courts or in the chancelleries. The formula implicated in the passage of Valéry (*Hamlet or Europe*) could also be in connection with that *Die Christenheit oder Europa* Novalis wrote in another point of catastrophe, in another critical break in European history. 1799, the year in which the Novalisian script was written (first published only in 1826, in the third edition of the *Schriften*, with the subtitle *Ein Fragment*), is the year in which Napoleon, returned to France, is preparing to overthrow the Directory and the Great Coalition is reconstituting itself for a new war, while no one is sitting on the papal throne after the death in exile of Pius VI. Avoiding to understand the famous Novalis' text in a nostalgic-reactionary key and rather catching his Johannine spirit and the prophetic-messianic tone, Valéry's expression could also sound like the origin and, at the same time, the outcome of that

drama of the affliction, of that *Trauerspiel* able to unify, in his different representations, the sense of history involved in the theological-political formula that identifies Europe with *Die Christenheit*. A drama of which we can see in the present time, in the *Jetzt-Zeit*, the extreme and exhausted forms, even more ominously endowed with unknowns.

In querying the crisis of an age in the name of Hamlet, as if in his enigma - "Hamlet" as the most enigmatic of Shakespearean creations! - the character and destiny of Europe is condensed, Paul Valéry is certainly not alone. Many are the other voices that precede and follow him, interpreting the question in other ways. Common trait to a big part of these interpretations – from the juvenile works of Pavel Florenskij and Lev S. Vygotskij (respectively written in 1905 and 1915) to Carl Schmitt's *Hamlet oder Ekuba. Der Einbruch der Zeit in das Spiel* (1956) – is offered by the detection, in the Hamlet's figure, of the contradiction inherent to an epochal transition: the time of an unresolved passage between two ages that only knows the endless pain of an "interim", the time of an unresolved transition between two ages that doesn't want to make a decision. All in all, doesn't Hamlet himself emphasize that "the *interim* is mine" (cfr. Hamlet 5.2.73)? From this emphasis to identifying the Hamletic problem in its non-action, in its inability to resolve itself in a decision, in the action capable of responding to the paternal appeal that comes from the spirits' world, the interpretative step has often been short, as if it had the strength of consequentiality. "Hamletic" becomes, therefore, synonym to the inability to decide, abdication from sovereignty over events and personal faith first, even before than over a State.

1. FRANZ ROSENZWEIG AND «DAS HAMLET ,'PROBLEM'»

In a diary note dated 21 October 1906, significantly entitled *Das Hamlet 'Problem'*, a young Franz Rosenzweig states this is not the right way to deal with the character of Hamlet and the

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[1] P. Valéry, *La crise de l'Esprit*, in « NRF, août 1919, pp. 321-337.

issue it represents. The reason is the fact that the numerous 'Hamlet-Theorien' do not account for the drama as a work of art, but rather as an actual reality. All these theories – Rosenzweig holds – ask themselves "why does not Hamlet take the action". But Shakespeare didn't seek to represent this "why?", this "Warum?", but "rather the non-acting". By detaching such "why" as a powerful and autonomous singularity to set against the dramatic plot and the non-acting of its protagonist, the *Hamlettheoretiker* (and who is not? - remarks Rosenzweig) fail to see its inseparability from the character of Hamlet himself. Simply put, they do not see "what Shakespeare proposes them not as a problem but as a happening"[2].

By accepting and developing the thread of Rosenzweig's argumentation, we can sustain, preliminarily, that the outcomes and fertility of a confrontation between the XXth century's (as well as the contemporary) philosophy and the Hamlet-problem depends at large stakes from the awareness of facing a *Kunstwerk*, a work of art whose specific language we are asked to listen and grasp. Thus, in the very case of the Shakespearian work we must not neglect what might appear so obvious as to be forgotten, that is: the happening of which Hamlet is at the same time protagonist and victim is a happening in form of representation. Not action, but rather *mimesis* of the action, to resume the matter under its classic terminology. The *theatrum*, the human theatricality represented in itself, is, therefore, the philosophical core of Shakespearian's Hamlet, up to be reflected in the knot that constitutes the intimate relationship between its form and its content. So forth, it is only as *mimesis* of a possible action (in the Aristotelian sense) that Hamlet's acting has to be grasped by its necessity: in the necessity of the mimetic bond it intends to represent. And so also as non-acting, that is as position of the problem that the non-acting reveals, as expression of something that cannot be decided: of the undecidable

that precedes every *decision* to the point of carrying in itself the cut (the caesura) it implies. This something, the same thing in question in the Shakespearian play, I argue, must be identified with the figure of consciousness, of which Hamlet epitomizes the dramatic and dialectic nature, by showing, staging its literal and – at the same time – reflected drama: its *theatrum*. That the Hamlet's conflict was essentially an irresolvable, hence tragic conflict between two kinds of consciousness, that of bloodline (of the revenge it recalls) and that of a superior justice, is the fundamental intuition of the interpretation given in the eponym essay by Pavel Florenskij, who resembles the drama to a "gigantic monologue"[3].

Likewise to Florenskij's reading, also that of Walter Benjamin, contained in particular in the fundamental *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, reveals and develops the connection between the drama of conscience and the dramaturgical structure (the plot staged), albeit denying that this connection can be understood in tragic form. Precisely because *Trauerspiel*, a Baroque dramatic form that secularizes that of the medieval *Mysterium*, the drama of Hamlet - in Benjamin's interpretation - cannot be resolved into tragedy. Of the European *Trauerspiel* (in its dual meaning of dramatic form and apperception of history), *Hamlet*, like other Shakespearean dramas, rather means its fulfillment.

2. DESCARTES, HAMLET AND THE THEATRE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Exactly by virtue of this distance from the duality of tragedy (evoked by Florenskij's interpretation as well as other ones), the Shakespearian *theatrum* of consciousness paradigmatically represented in the figure of Hamlet and in the intimately dialectic character of his drama, can be accounted for as necessary correlate of the Cartesian's *theatrum* of pure *cogitare*.

This is where the formal distance from Shake-

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[2] F. Rosenzweig, *Der Mensch und sein Werk. Gesammelte Schriften, 1 Briefe und Tagebucher. 1. Band 1900-1918*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague 1979, p. 61.

[3] P. Florenskij, *Amleto*, tr. It., Bompiani, Milano 2004, p.46.

speare's own poetic-literary presuppositions draws: from the saga in which Hamlet - according to Saxo's version, "becomes king and reigns happily". Here the reading of Benjamin converges, at least for this aspect, with that of Giorgio de Santillana. In the words of the latter: «Shakespeare has focused exactly right. He has avoided restoring the brutal, heroic element required by the saga, and made the drama instead wholly one of the mind.»[4] Precisely for this reason, the drama as dramatics of consciousness (interweaving of voices in its plural and therefore literally pluri-logical constitution) can be understood as an essential counterpoint to the Cartesian *theatrum* of the mind.

A theatre of consciousness, that of both the *Discourse on the Method* and the *Meditations*[5], much of the contemporary philosophy of mind urges to tear down, just as if it was a pure illusion that could be dispelled by the self-reflexive certainty under which the cogito forces any doubting. If the performativity of Cartesian's *ego cogitans*, in its own utterance, already supposes an *audience*, someone else listening, Hamlet's inner drama reveals the irreducible plurality of actors, masks, instances composing and deploying the life of human consciousness in the sense of the theatrical acting: a *theatrum* of representation and self-representation in which a *spectator*, sited before the difference between effective action and non-action, is always constitutively implicit.

The one of consciousness is a both a literal and allegorical drama that during the course of the story, as the several monologues of Hamlet manifest, tends to coagulate in conflicting polarities and ripping differences: from the hiatus between impulse to action and execution, to the paralyzing tension between "the native hue of resolution" and "the pale cast of thought" (Hamlet, 2.1.84-85), down to the wide-opening of a gap – almost an

intimior intimo meo of the drama – between what is left to the sphere of appearance, of the semblance ("These indeed 'seem'", Hamlet, 1.2.83), that is the whole complex or *theatrum* of actions "that a man might play", and that which is moving by the inside of the soul exceeding any chance to be expressed and shown ("which passet show", Hamlet, 1.2.85).

Also for this irreducible plurality of consciousness voices attempting to reach for a chord, Hamlet confirms itself as the political drama par excellence. As also attested, after all, by the explicit connection, also in form of parody, it sets with the *Julius Caesar*, where the matter of consciousness as self-knowledge is immediately defined by the need of self- reflecting-knowing in the other "as in a mirror". It is Cassius, in fact, to reveal to Brutus, in the opening dialogue, he knows nothing about himself, since he owns access to his own sight only "as by reflection" (cfr. *Julius Caesar* I, 2, 66-69). Thus, the persistent possibility for the nature of consciousness to turn, catastrophically, in a radical internal conflict derives from its native confrontation with otherness, from its constitutively political disposition. To the point to let Brutus, in the first scene of the II act, when the conspirators decide to kill Caesar, give voice to the internal turmoil of consciousness from which such decision derives:

> *Between the acting of a dreadful thing / And the first motion, all the interim is / Like a phantasma or a hideous dream: / The genius and the mortal instruments / Are then in council; and the state of man, / Like to a little kingdom, suffers then / The nature of an insurrection." (Julius Caesar, II, 1, 61-69).*

Only the awareness that through such action the form of the *respublica* will stay safe, allows such insurrection, internal to the soul, to convert in heroic act. Here is where the exhortation to "kill him boldly but not wrathfully" (JC, II, 1, 172) comes from. It is, in fact, a matter of counteracting the spirit, to which blood does not pertain. Though, on the other hand, blood is the only thing that might solve such contrast. It is, there-

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[4] G. De Santillana, H. von Dechend, *An Essay Investigating the Origins of Human Knowledge and its Transmission through Myth*, David R. Godine, Boston Mass. 1992, p. 19.

[5] Cfr. F. Desideri, *L'ascolto della coscienza. Una ricerca filosofica*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1998, pp. 150-155.

fore, only this intimate connection between blood and spirit, totally internal to the dialectic of such act, to give Caesar's death the political value of necessity. His passing is a destiny setting itself apart from pure contingency, from chance – as indeed the obscure inceptive omens announce, by the warning of the "soothsayer".

Perfectly understanding this political-sacral nexus, René Girard insists, in his crucial book on Shakespeare[6], on the sacrificial character of Caesar's murder: "Let us be sacrificers, but not butchers, Caius" (JC, II, 1, 166) claims Brutus strongly. In the words of Girard himself, here «sacrifice is the violence that heals, unites and reconciles in opposition to the bad violence that corrupts, divides, disintegrates, undifferentiates.»[7] What is established is thus a connection between sacrifice and the rationality of politics; a connection from which derives the transformation of the rite into political theatricality in parallel with that at work in the theater itself, where the victim's immolation is only simulated. However, while, - unlike Girard's understanding - in the classical tragedy a memory of its sacrificial origin is maintained, in the modern Trauerspiel this origin is erased in the secularized space of the Court. The Julius Caesar is still on the threshold of this secularization, by its very theme, intertwining the end of the *Respublica*'s *ordo* and that of the tradition that founds it with the immanent crisis at the creatural origin of sovereignty. But the *stasis*, that inner turmoil in Brutus' soul that nurtures the decision to kill Caesar as a scapegoat able, with his sacrifice, to maintain the ancient republican order, reflects itself in a specular way on the political effect of the civil war it causes. This is how a fatal correspondence between the past of a consciousness-internal insurrection and the historical-political future of the civil war is established. A nexus both historical and dramaturgical that, according to Girard, has the effect of revealing in the *Julius Caesar* the

crisis of the sacrificial logics immanent to the construction of the political rationality, showing the violence of the mimetic rivalry that gives it birth. With respect to the meaning of such connection (from the turmoil of consciousness to civil war), *Hamlet* offers an inverse path, departing from the extreme contingency marking the death of both the prince and the king.

Through *Hamlet*, the harshest exterior political conflict is rooted back, at its origin, to the dramatic-dialectic phenomenology of the life of consciousness, being this one the distinctive feature of human nature. Not only because consciousness is in charge of self-governance, but also by virtue of the ability it has to query itself about its own destiny and the meaning of its actions. Therefore, Hamlet's drama does not account for consciousness as an abstract generality, but is rather addressed to each one's, exactly because it is represented (known) as that *quintessentia*, that super-fragile *proprium* of man who is, in turn, constantly on the verge of dissolution, of revealing himself as nothing else but ashes and dust: "And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?", asks Hamlet (*Hamlet*, 2,.2. 307-308).

Besides, to understand this character of consciousness, to grasp it through and beyond (at the borders of) the doubting at its foundations, means to bring the drama to lap the meta-ethic root of the Self, the one that can only be attested for its being anterior to the individual self-differentiating, anterior to the destiny of the single being, and, for that reason, susceptible of being paradigmatically expressed and symbolically represented by the royal figure. Albeit with the promise-announcement of a new political order, the Shakespearian drama ends without a king, bringing to completion the aporias immanent to the creatural character of sovereignty. A conclusion, this latter, that could be understood as totally internal to *Trauer*'s logic, to the feeling of mourning that drags down and drowns the very existence of the "sweet prince" in a faith sealed by a hopeless fail. As if the dialectic arising from the ashes of *Trauerspiel* could only be a negative one.

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[6] R. Girard, *A Theatre of Envy. William Shakespeare*, OUP, Oxford 1991.

[7] Ivi, p. 214.

3. ADORNO ON ODRADEK, HAMLET AND THE END OF *TRAUERSPIEL*

Perhaps Adorno had something similar in mind while establishing with penetrating lucidity, in the course of the famed *Hornberger Brief* to his friend dated 2 August 1935, a parallel between the Kafkian *Odradek* and the *Hamlet* in the context of that relationship between the *Passagenarbeit* and the *Trauerspielbuch* Benjamin himself had postulated:

> We have the promise of immortality in commodities and not for people, and - to develop the relationship to the book on the baroque, which you rightly established - the fetish is a treacherously final image for the nineteenth century, comparable only to the death's head. It seems to me that this is where the decisive epistemological character of Kafka lies, especially in Odradek, as the commodity that survives to no purpose: surrealism may come to an end in this fairy tale, just as the Trauerspiel does in Hamlet.[8]

The useless and forgotten reel, a mere material thing devoid of any exchange value since transcending any possible use, relates to the end of Surrealism as Hamlet does to that of *Trauerspiel*. By criticizing those that, according to his advice, were Brechtian motifs inherent to the *Paris, Capital of the XIX Century*'s Exposé – themes levering on the critical potential of the notion of use value in relationship with the "character of commodity" – Adorno rather claimed the need for "a radicalization of dialectics down to its incandescent theological core". If with respect to the nexus Odradek-Surrealism, Benjamin's theory of the dialectic image might already configure itself as an opening to understand history as something that could not be separated from theological categories (that is the theme *par excellence* of the latest phase of Benjamin's thought, down to the *Theses on the concept of history*), then exactly the link between *Hamlet*

and the end of *Trauerspiel* offers a masterful proof, often overlooked by Benjamin's interpreters, of a radicalization of dialectics in a theological sense. A dialectic which, by showing itself in the both historic-critical and critic-gnoseological relation with aesthetics, politics and *theatrum*, concerns the drama intimate to the problem of representing the idea of *Trauerspiel* at its origin. In order to see how this drama does not solve in pure negativity, we need to patiently analyze the meaning and the role the *Hamlet* plays, as work of art, in the book on German baroque drama, also in the context of a broader relationship that the philosophy of Benjamin institutes with Shakespeare.

4. "OUT OF JOINT": THE *TRAUERSPIEL* AS *ZWISCHENFORM*

Already in one of his earlier writings, signed under the pseudonym of Ardor – the text *Dornröschen*, wherein youth is identified with the sleeping beauty a prince could set free – Benjamin quotes two famed Hamlet's lines recalled in the title of this very talk:

> The time is out of joint. O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right! (Hamlet, 1, 5, 188-189).

As the wisest commentators[9] do not fail to see, there is irony in Hamlet's words and the reader/spectator of the drama can't stop asking himself whether this huge task (to reset time back into joint) is performed or even performable at all by the protagonist. The way Benjamin gives continuity to this quote from Shakespeare, in his writing of 1911, does not and could not tell anything about that. Hamlet's task of setting back the time is here foreshadowed in a purely ethical-voluntary key or identified in that 'suffering for an ideal' which is proper to other dramatic characters drawn by the likes of Ibsen or Spitteler. And

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[8] W. Benjamin, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin. 1910-1940*, M. R. Jacobson, E. M. Jacobson (eds.), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994, p. 498.

[9] See, for example, Keir Elam in W. Shakepeare, *Amleto*, cura, introduzione e note di K, Elam, trad. it. di G. Baldini with an essay by Viola Papetti, BUR, Milano 2016, p. 199.

yet, as Benjamin says in a *Lebenslauf* of 1912, it is exactly during this age that the Shakespearian *Hamlet* as well as the Goethean *Tasso* are objects of accurate studies. He certainly keeps these researches under consideration in the two short essays – both of 1916 – containing *in nuce* the book on *Trauerspiel*, that is *Trauerspiel and tragedy* and *The role of language in Trauerspiel and tragedy*. Notwithstanding the fact that in the letter to Hofmannstahl dated December, 28th 1925, Benjamin claims not to be "a real connoisseur of Shakespeare" and to have "approached him but singly and intermittently" (OGT., cit. p.448) probably willing to amend himself from the task of explaining the role of the metaphor in Shakespeare (to which Hofmannsthal had him solicited), both the writings of 1916 would be incomprehensible without an either explicit or implicit, though distinctly perceptible, reference to the Shakespearian work and to *Hamlet* in particular. There is no doubt we are accounting for a romantic Shakespeare, here. In fact, in the dissertation on the *Begriff der Kunstkritik*, Benjamin, on the basis of romantic thinkers as Novalis and the Schlegel brothers, will underline in Shakespeare's dramas the strategic value of the retarding moment, of what, along with action, delays fulfilment. This is how, at the core of *Trauerspiel and Tragedy*, is set the contraposition between the completeness of tragic time, where "the hero dies because no one can live fulfilled in time"[10] – hence he dies of immortality – and the constitutively incomplete and enclosed character of time in *Trauerspiel*.

As it represents an unfulfilled time, that of *Trauerspiel* is a "Zwischenform", an intermediate form. An intermediate dramatic form, which is destined not to be overcome as governed by the principle of repetition. In a sense, however, completely antithetical to the way in which repetition characterizes the time of myth. While in myth the form of repetition is nestled in that of destiny, catastrophically marking the epilogue of the tragedy

with the force of a vertical break, in *Trauerspiel* the repetition principle works as the variation of a scheme which represents the specular and symbolic image of another spectacle. In such figural variation, defining, by its repeating, the time of *Trauerspiel*, death is drowned as well, for it does not end the show in which everyone is acting, but rather restarts it in another world.

Thus, the character of death is seen as transition to a higher form of life as well as entry in a world of spirits. As confirmed above all in the second essay, so in the language of the *Trauerspiel* manifests an unsurpassable split between the sound and the sense, that difference between the creatural character of the word and the shattered world of meanings that, in the book, will lead to the theming of the allegoric form. "In the midst of this unfolding – as Benjamin observes, lapidary – errant feeling gives voice to mourning in lament" (OGT, cit., p. 270).

5. HAMLET'S DEATH BY CHANCE: *THEATRUM* AND *META-THEATRUM*

Mourning resounds, and in this resonating as echo of the lament, such feeling finds its redemption. Consequently, death does not represent the last word of *Trauerspiel*. A motif, this latter, already explicitly formulated in the essays of 1916. But this time with a difference, compared to the great development such theme will experience in the second part of the book. In the essays of 1916 as much as in the work of 1925, the end of *Trauerspiel* is intended by Benjamin with reference to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. However, in the first case "the rest is silence" is romantically converted in "the rest is music". The end of *Trauerspiel* is therefore seen in music, as the beginning of language and of the symphonic unfolding of the characters of drama: in music as "that redemptive mystery – the rebirth of feelings in a suprasensuous nature" (OGT, cit., p. 269).

Albeit remaining substantially true to the spirit of this conclusion, the *Trauerspielbuch* silently moves away from its romantic resolution. This

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[10] W. Benjamin, *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, Eng. Transl. of H. Eiland, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2019, p. 261 (OGT).

happens in terms of a speculative sobriety reflecting, in an enigmatic foreshortening, the complex architecture of the book, starting from its *gnoseological-critical Foreword*. In fact, only by evoking the figure of Hamlet and the entire drama to which it gives its name can we grasp the idea of *Trauerspiel* in the essential boundaries that separate it from tragedy and define it as a dramatic form characterized by the constitutive incompleteness of an interim. Provided, however, that the Shakespearian drama is considered as an aporetic representation and as a manifestation of the crisis immanent to the politic theology proper to baroque. This, moving from the radicalization that in this work meets the theme of the creatural nature of the sovereign as pivotal to every *Trauerspiel*. In such radicalization, the Hamlet-character is set as inaugural figure of modern consciousness, as opposed to the expression of a barbaric past claimed by Carl Schmitt in his *Hamlet and Hecuba* in direct controversy against Benjamin. If on the one hand Schmitt is definitely sharp in noting that the paradigmatic trait of the *Hamlet* – what makes this dramatic work a reference benchmark for any other one – consists in the implication of a play into the play (a *Spiel im Spiel*), on the other hand the theoretical consequences inferable from the short observations which Benjamin in the *Trauerspielbuch* dedicates to the Hamlet are opposed to Schmitt's theses. While for Schmitt such motif represents one of the main reasons why the Shakespearian drama transforms in tragedy, implying a break-in of historical time in the time of representation (Schmitt, p.86), for Benjamin the play into the play defines the very nature of *Trauerspiel* in its boundaries, endowing the *Hamlet* with a self-reflexive meaning with respect to its own form: *theatrum and meta-theatrum* at the same time.

The *Trauerspiel* can eventually reach to its literal conclusion exclusively thanks to Hamlet as "spectator by the grace of God" (cit., p. 158): spectator of his own destiny and, therefore, truly *consciens* – witness of himself down to reaching its redemption. In Hamlet's ending, in the "flight of angels" singing him to his rest (Cfr. Hamlet 2, 5, 346), the perfection of an eternally unfulfilled time shows itself

in enigmatic quietness. Indeed, it is exactly this one aspect to subtract the work to that succumbing, and at the same time triumphant, confrontation with the destiny which is specific to the death of the hero in tragedy. Hamlet is the pure character, parting with his destiny without any heroism. As testified by the ultimate dialogue with Laertes, before challenging the florets for the duel (cfr. Hamlet, 5.2.220-235). Here Hamlet, opposing himself to himself as the one who has wronged Laertes ("And when he's not himself be ta'en away, / Then Hamlet does it not; Hamlet denies it", 5.2.230-31), states how the dialectic of consciousness passes through the threshold of otherness. Hence Hamlet gets to the point of accounting for himself as someone else, not only recognizing his own insanity but also denying that his identity might be doomed and determined by the spirit of revenge[11], which, in turn, cannot amend itself from the logics of intrigue in order to find fulfillment. Taking leave of this logics *in extremis*, Hamlet acknowledges that the mechanism of the intrigue as it is, is suffocating even for he who bears the illusion of dominating it. This, however, also means setting apart from the phantom of the father, without denying the force it exercises on the drama as a whole. Only with this passage or with the distance from the spirit of the father, when he rejoins him (with his world), Hamlet's conscience reaches the transparency of the crystal. In a paradoxical return in itself, Hamlet's consciousness finally finds redemption. In Benjamin's words, what we understand particularly in the talk with Osric (where a subtly deadly irony is reserved to the courtly courtesy of the latter), is Hamlet "wants to imbibe the fate-saturated air, like a poisonous substance, in one deep breath" (OGT, cit. p.138). A heavy air of which Hamlet seems to free himself with the levity of a breath, even if extreme, going towards death as an event in the sign of pure contingency: violence of exteriority

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[11] We feel in debt, here, with the interpretation given by Girard to the theme of vengeance up to considering the *Hamlet* as a subversion of such spirit: dialectic even with respect to its being alike to a revenge drama. cfr. R. Girard, *A Theatre of Envy. William Shakespeare*, cit., pp. 271-289.

subtracted to every logic and reason, first and foremost that of sacrifice.

"Let four captains / Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage" – Fortinbras orders conclusively. In such ending we might also see an ironic counterpoint to the exposure of Caesar's body as the showing of a scapegoat. Hamlet's body is exhibited on stage; it is *theatrum* to the second power: representation of the very same principle of theatricality. Taken under this perspective, the symbol of regality comes to an irreversible transformation because of which *The King's Two Bodies*[12] separate functionally. Through Hamlet's death-by-chance, the principle of contingency finally breaks into the historical-political space of the court. With the effective development of such principle, the secularization of Christian eschatology becomes perfect, emptying from the inside the symbolic-substantial power of regal sovereignty. The fact that Hamlet's purpose to "catch the conscience of the king"[13] by a theatrical staging concurs to this emptying, reinforces the idea hitherto defended, that the dramatic heart of the work is the question of the *theatrum* of conscience and the problem of its representation, in permanent tension with what only "seems". This tension feeds both on Wittemberg's philosophy and on the rebellion against it:

"What sense was there to human life if, as in Calvinism, not even faith had to be tested – if, on

one hand, faith was naked, absolute efficacious and, on the other hand, there was no difference between one human action and another?" (OGT, cit. p. 141)

At the climax of a feeling of world's devaluation, which opens up to the gaze of the melancholic who sees himself «interposed in existence as in a rubble field of half-completed, inauthentic actions» («als in ein Trümmerfeld halber, unechter Handlungen»), «life itself lashed out against this» (ibid.). In the intuition-contemplation of the world as an enigmatic mask, the feeling of mourning knows, in extreme intensification, the bottom of his object as a chance of a paradoxical over-turning, almost a return in itself. This is the step that Benjamin sees accomplished in the figure of Hamlet, in the light that glows from the bottom of his brooding: "only in this prince does melancholy immersion attain to Christianity" (OGT, cit., p. 164), so that the *Trauerspiel* reaches "the bright gaze of self-reflection in its Interior" (OGT, p.164). "The rest is silence", and so it remains.

If « only in this prince does melancholy immersion attain to Christianity» [«nur in diesem Prinzen kommt die melancholische Versenkung zur Christlichkeit»] (ibidem), the german *Trauerspiel*, Benjamin comments in conclusion to his brief excursus, is destined to remain opaque to itself. A similar fate will, then, concern the form itself of the Trauerspiel, its perpetually unfinished drama by virtue of its very origin and, precisely for this reason, still expressing the time assigned to us, of the Jetztzeit?

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WARBURG'S SYNDERESIS: IN PLACE OF A CONCLUSION

What we have to ask ourselves, in other words, is whether the glance of the self-reflection of the winged genius of melancholy can see beyond the empty throne and hear a music where not only the notes of affliction are dominant. In the melancholic feeling - in its dimension not merely afflictive (mindful of the "heroic" melancholy of Ficino

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[12] Cfr. for this notion the fundamental book of E. H. Kantorowicz*, The King's Two Bodies*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1957.

[13] «The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.» (Hamlet, 2.2.603-604). In terms of the Platonic *Sophist*: a mimetic art par excellence as the theater is here in function of a ktetic art, where it is a question of capturing a prey. Significant in this regard is that the extraordinary book by Gilberto Sacerdoti, *Sacrificio e sovranità. Teologia e politica nell'Europa di Shakespeare e Bruno*, deals with the theological-political problem of sovereignty in modern times just starting from a curious deer hunting scene, in which the princess who came to visit the King of Navarre dedicated herself, in the first scene of the fourth act of *Love's Labour's Lost*. See now the new edition with an introduction by Michele Ciliberto (subsequent to the first one published by Einaudi in 2002) Quodlibet, Macerata 2016.

and Melanchthon) - is still perceptible that spark of thought capable of nourishing in minds a new European spirit? 1928, the year in which Benjamin publishes his book on the *Trauerspiel*, is the same one in which Aby Warburg discovers Giordano Bruno[14] and in particular discovers the theme of *synderesis*, that medieval notion reserved for conscience as an indefectible principle, apex animi, which the Nolanus resumes In the Epistola Esplicatoria of the *Spaccio de la Bestia Trionfante*, his most political-programmatic text published in the Elizabethan London:

> *Yesterday afternoon Cassirer was here: he listened with evident and participated consensus the brunian travel report. And what we could wish for most was that he himself had already analyzed Synderesis as a keyword even in relation to Shakespeare. What more could we have wanted?*
> *Salvation!*
> *God in detail.[15]*

Here, with these words the circle of reflection is not closed but opens up. That meeting which, for many reasons (some of which were entirely contingent) did not occur between Benjamin's and Warburg's research, sounds to us as a task for thought, in particular with respect to the new facies of European Hamlet.

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[14] To this discovery Warburg is prompted by a Leonardo Olschki's article and also comforted by Cassirer's research; see for this the essay by C. D. Johnson, *In cammino verso Bruno. Synderesis e "intuizione sintetica"* in A. Barale, F. Desideri, S. Ferretti (edited by), *Energia e rappresentazione. Warburg, Panofsky, Wind*, Mimesis, Milano 2016, pp. 17-39.

[15] A. Warburg, *Tagebuch der Kulturwissenschaftlichen Bibliothek Warburg*, in Id., *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. VII, a cura di K. Michels, Ch. Schoell-Glass, Akademie Verlag, Berlino 2001, p. 484.

Aisthesis

«Unbewaffnetes Auge»: Benjamin's interpretation of comedy in Shakespeare and Molière

Alice Barale

Abstract. This essay examines two texts that Walter Benjamin wrote in 1918, during his period in Bern, on Shakespeare's comedy *As you like it* and on *Le malade imaginaire* by Molière. When these texts are considered together, a question arises. What is the role of the comic inside Benjamin's philosophy, in this period and also in the years to follow? Is the comic really only the other side of mourning, as Benjamin writes in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, or does it also have another significance, a significance of its own? Moreover, why should Shakespeare's comedy be the opposite of Molière's comedy, as Benjamin writes in the paper on Molière?

In order to answer, we are going to set a connection between Shakespeare's «unarmed eye» (*As you like it*) and the «innocence» (*Fate and Character*) that Molière's comedy indicates. This will also lead us to another text that was of much significance to Benjamin (GB, 02/02/1920 et al.), Stendhal's *Charterhouse of Parma*. Here too, as in *As you like it*, there is an innocent protagonist trying to escape from the evil of a court. Yet Shakespeare's *As you like it* ends with the reconstruction of a court. What does Benjamin mean, then, when he states that in *As you like it* «everything ends in loneliness»?

The answer will provide a point of convergence between Shakespeare's and Molière's comedy. Benjamin's idea of «Weltlichkeit» (ibid.), of which comedy is a necessary part, will prove to be an alternative to the "armed" character of the court.

Keywords. Benjamin, comedy, Molière, Shakespeare, Weltlichkeit.

1. INTRODUCTION

This essay examines two texts that Benjamin wrote in 1918, one on Shakespeare's comedy *As you like it* and the other one on *Le malade imaginaire* by Molière (Benjamin [1918a], [1918b]). They are part of a group of three texts that Benjamin wrote on comedy in the same year. The third one is on a play by Bernard Shaw, *Frau Warren's Gewerbe* (Benjamin [1918c]). When these texts are considered together, a question arises. What is the role of the comic inside Benjamin's thought, in this period and also in the years to follow? Is the comic really only the other side of mourning, as Benjamin writes in the *Origin of German Trauerspiel* (Benjamin [1928b]: 123-4), or does

it have also another kind of significance, a significance of its own? It is known that Benjamin wanted to write about French comedy, just after he finished his *Trauerspielbuch* (Benjamin [1928]d: 78), yet why[1]?

Focusing on some documents from the period of the *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, it becomes clear that Benjamin was very interested not only in Shakespeare's tragic dramas and tragic characters, but also in his comedies[2]. In a letter he writes to Hofmannsthal in 1925, he deals with the *Tempest* and with the figure of Caliban, who is indeed a comic character (Benjamin [1928c]: 439; see Lupton [2000]).

In order to understand what role the comic plays inside Benjamin's thought, it is first necessary to examine the relationship between the paper on *As you like it* and that on Molière.

2. SHAKESPEARE AND MOLIÈRE

In his text on The Imaginary Invalid, Benjamin says something that is initially quite difficult to understand:

Molière's dramas stem from a noble dramatic tradition that begins probably even before the Greeks but clearly arises for the first time, from a historical point of view, only with the Greeks themselves. This tradition goes on in the Latin comedies of Plautus and Terentius and leads, more or less, first to the Middle Ages of Hroswitha of Gandersheim and finally to Molière. It is not clear whether Molière has any followers in this tradition, i.e. the drama of the mask [...] The mask is involved in all greatest problems

of drama and of the classical spirit of drama, whose opposite is represented by the romantic Shakespeare. (Benjamin [1918b]: 612; my trans.)

Molière's comedy, as Benjamin states in this passage, is very near to the ancient Greek and Roman comedy. On the other hand, Shakespeare's comedy is the opposite of Molière's and also of the ancient comedy. Why? The answer lies in the way Benjamin describes the two types of comedy in the two papers.

Beginning from Molière, the first question to ask is why, in the quoted passage, Benjamin writes that *Le malade imaginaire*, and Molière's comedy in general, is a comedy of the mask. This is not something which is immediately clear, in fact Molière's characters have no masks.

What does it mean then to have a mask and why is this type of comedy important, for Benjamin? Perhaps an answer can be found in the paper on *Fate and character* that Benjamin writes in the following year, 1919[3]. In the *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* Benjamin quite often refers to the essay on *Fate and Character*, but only to the part on ancient tragedy. The essay on Molière refers to the other part of *Fate and Character*, that on ancient comedy:

[...] a great comic playwright—for example, Molière—does not seek to define his creations by the multiplicity of their character traits. On the contrary, he excludes psychological analysis from his work. It has nothing to do with the concerns of psychology if, in L'avare *and* Le malade imaginaire*, miserliness and hypochondria are hypostatized as the foundation of all action. About hypochondria and miserliness these dramas teach nothing; far from making these traits comprehensible, they depict them with an intensifying crassness. If the object of psychology is the inner life of man understood empirically, Moliere's characters are of no use to it even as means of demonstration. Character develops in them like a*

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[1] The question of the comic inside Benjamin's thought is scarcely considered in the critical literature. Two exceptions are Bontea (2006) and Braider (2012). For the theme of «cheerfulness», «play» and «laugh» in Benjamin's The Work of Art in the Age of its technical Reproducibility see Desideri (2019).

[2] In order to understand Benjamin's relationship with Shakespeare, it is important to consider his friendship with Florens Christian Rang. See on this Benjamin (1928c): 447-8 and 403-17. See also Rang (1954). On Rang's personality and writings see Desideri (2008).

[3] On Benjamin's interpretation of comedy in this essay see Benjamin (2013): 87-90; Friedlander (2012): 120-21. On the part on ancient tragedy see Birnbaum (2009). On Benjamin's Bern years, from 1917 to 1919, see Tagliacozzo (2018).

sun, in the brilliance of its single trait, which allows no other to remain visible in its proximity. The sublimity of character comedy rests on this anonymity of man and his morality, alongside the utmost development of individuality through its exclusive character trait. While fate brings to light the immense complexity of the guilty person, the complications and bonds of his guilt, character gives this mystical enslavement of the person to the guilt context the answer of genius. (Benjamin [1919]: 205)

What Benjamin states here is that the protagonists of Molière's plays don't have many features, but they have just one «single trait» that always remains the same. This is their mask. This «single trait» is important, because it allows them to show their innocence against the «complications» of fate.

The imaginary invalid has a mask then, as Benjamin writes in the paper on Molière. He has «the mask of a man who thinks himself to be ill» (Benjamin [1918b]: 612). This is also something that the actor who plays this role must not forget: he should not move with too much agility through the scene, as Benjamin remarks (ivi: 613). In fact, in Molière's comedy there is a very funny passage in which Argan, the imaginary invalid, starts to walk without his walking stick and his housemaid, Toinette, suddenly reminds him that he can not: «"Tenez, Monsieur, vous ne songez pas que vous ne sauriez marcher sans baton". "Tu as raison"» («"Here, sir; you forget that you can not get about without a stick". "Oh, yeah, you are right"»). (Molière [1673]: III, 2; my trans.)

Having examined Benjamin's interpretation of Molière's comedy, it is now possible to return to the first question: why is Shakespeare's comedy the opposite of that of Molière and of the comedy of the mask in general? An answer lies in Benjamin's paper on *As you like it*. Here Benjamin says that in Shakespeare's comedies, and in *As you like it* in particular, the reader can see Shakespeare's capacity of letting everything «dissolve» [«sich auflösen»] into the infinite, like «clouds on a summer's day» (Benjamin [1918a]: 610-11; my trans.). This

is a romantic feature indeed[4], but it is also something more radical in Shakespeare than in the romantics, as demonstrated further on.

It is first necessary to briefly consider the plot of *As you like it*. In this comedy there is a duke who is usurped by his younger brother and has to escape with his court. He arrives to a forest, the forest of Arden, where he decides to live. The duke reassembles his court in the forest. It is a different court, without all the injustice and the violence of the previous one. People here live in harmony, dancing and falling in love with each other. However, this will not last for a long time – and that is the first element of *Auflösung*, of the dissolution of things. The duke and his court will have to return to reality beyond the forest, at the end of the play.

Moreover, and this is a second element of *Auflösung*, some of the protagonists will not remain unchanged at the end of the play. The most obvious case is that of Rosalind: she is a beautiful girl who is disguised like a boy when she arrives in the forest, where she then plays a sort of theatre where she, as a boy, pretends to be a girl. This causes a lot of confusion. Yet, at the end of the play, Rosalind loses her disguise and her true identity is revealed again.

It is easy to see the contrast with the comedy of the mask, with the imaginary invalid, who should never forget his walking stick and mask.

This, however, raises an important question: if the two types of comedy – Molière's comedy and Shakespeare's comedy – are opposite, how can they have something in common, how can they have a common meaning?

3. THE CLIFF THAT IS NOT A CLIFF

A possible answer can be found in another passage of Shakespeare that was very important for Benjamin. Benjamin writes about it much later, in 1931, when he is discussing with Brecht about the epic theater (Benjamin [1931]: 483), but

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[4] On Benjamin and Romanticism see at least Brüggemann, Oesterle (2009); Hanssen, Benjamin (2002).

he says that it was important to him for a long time. It is a passage from *King Lear*, the famous passage of «the cliff that is not a cliff» (ivi).

In this episode of Shakespeare's drama, the count of Gloucester has become blind, because his enemies gouged out his eyes, and he wants to reach a very high cliff by the sea from which to throw himself and die. His son Edgar is asked to guide him to the cliff, but Gloucester doesn't know that Edgar is Edgar, because he is blind and also because Edgar is pretending to be someone else, a madman called Tom. Yet what is important in this context is that Edgar makes Gloucester believe that he is climbing a cliff, but he is not. He also makes him believe that he is throwing himself off the cliff, even though he is not. Gloucester throws himself forward and falls on the floor. It is also interesting what Edgar says to the public before he jumps: «Why I do trifle thus with his despair/ is done to cure it» (Shakespeare [1605-6]: IV, 6, 33-4). In fact Gloucester thinks, when he falls down, that he fell off the cliff and survived, and decides for this reason that from that moment on he will bear his affliction «till it do cry out itself/ "enough, enough", and die […]» (ivi, 76-7).

When Benjamin writes about this passage, in 1931, he says that for the first time it gave him an idea of the fact that «there were other possibilities for theater» than those indicated in a famous work by Gustav Freytag, *Die Technik des Dramas* (Freytag [1863]). What does that mean? Of course in this passage from *King Lear* there is a clear connection with Benjamin's meditation on the epic theater of Brecht: the identification with Gloucester is broken through the fact that the cliff is not a cliff. This makes him an «untragic hero» (Benjamin [1939]: 304)[5].

Firstly, it is necessary to notice that this is already true for the baroque dramas. When Benjamin writes the *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, he already criticizes the classic idea – which is also found in Freytag ([1863]: cap. 2, par.2) and comes from a very common interpretation of Aristotle

– of the dramatic process as a series of five successive moments: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, denouement (what has been called later "Freytag's pyramid")[6]. It is not by chance that already in this passage of *King Lear* the «denoument» is combined with the «climax». Moreover, the comic and the dramatic moment meet and there is no definite border between them: this is something very important in the *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* (see for ex. Benjamin [1928c]: 182-5). Yet there may also be something else in this passage, which concerns the question of the comic more directly.

In a paragraph of the *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* Benjamin states that Greek ancient tragedies ended with a «non liquet», something that was not solved – tragedy was not a definite solution to injustice and to violence – and it is for this reason that it was necessary to place the comic element of the satiric play after the tragedy: «only the élan of the comic can prepare for or react to the non liquet of the process presented» (Benjamin [1928b]: 113). Comedy, then, is something that helps generate new beginnings, just like in the passage of *King Lear*. Does this mean that comedy is only a sort of consolation to pain and to injustice[7]? Maybe not, it is definitely something more.

4. THE COURT

To identify the full significance of the comedic element, it useful to consider the beginning of *As you like it*. This comedy begins with another pair of brothers, not the duke and his brother, but two young noblemen, Orlando and Oliver. Oliver, the

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[5] On Benjamin and Brecht see Wizisla (2004) and Wizisla (2017).

[6] See Freytag ([1863]: cap. 2, par. 2): «Durch die beiden Hälften der Handlung, welche in einem Punkt zusammenschließen, erhält das Drama, — wenn man die Anordnung durch Linien verbildlicht, — einen pyramidalen Bau. Es steigt von der Einleitung mit dem Zutritt des erregenden Moments bis zu dem Höhenpunkt, und fällt von da bis zur Katastrophe. Zwischen diesen drei Theilen liegen die Theile der Steigerung und des Falles».

[7] On pain inside Bennjamin's thought see Ferber (2014).

eldest brother, hates Orlando, who for this reason has to escape into the forest. In this context, the most interesting thing is the reason why he hates his brother:

Now will I stir this gamester: I hope I shall see an end of him; for my soul, yet I know not why, hates nothing more than he. Yet he's gentle, never schooled and yet learned, full of noble device, of all sorts enchantingly beloved, and indeed so much in the heart of the world, and especially of my own people, who best know him, that I am altogether misprised: but it shall not be so long; this wrestler shall clear all: nothing remains but that I kindle the boy thither; which now I'll go about. (Shakespeare [1599]: I,1)

Orlando has no instruction, then, but he is «learned» and «gentle». His virtue and his beauty are something natural. This recalls, in some way, what Jago says of Cassio in the Othello: «He hath a daily beauty in his life» (Shakespeare [1603]: V, 1). Moreover, it recalls another work that was very important for Benjamin, which belongs to another historical context but has nevertheless an important connection to the issue at hand, i.e. *The Charterhouse of Parma* by Stendhal (Stendhal [1838]; see Benjamin [1919-24]: 73, 76 and Id. [1931-34]: 86, 89)[8].

In this book, as in *As you like it*, there is a protagonist, Fabrizio, who is trying to escape from the evil and the complications of a court, the court of Parma, and a courtesan, who is one of Benjamin's favorite characters, the count Mosca. Mosca is the counselor of the prince; he is a real counselor in the sense of the *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* (Benjamin [1928b]: 123-5): he is an extraordinary comic figure as well.

In the *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* the court is a very important subject (Benjamin

[1928b]: 82, 88), it is the symbol of the arbitrium [Willkür] of our thought and of our language (ivi: 201, 257-8). It is interesting to know, then, that Benjamin liked this book by Stendhal so much and even that his favorite character was Mosca.

In fact, Mosca regrets that he can not be like Fabrizio: he can not escape from the court and from its lies. Yet on the other hand he knows that it is not really possible to escape: Fabrizio will find some peace for only a few moments, on a rock by the lake and inside an old churchtower (Stendhal [1838]: 161 ff.) – here too there is a flight into nature – but at the end he will die inside the charterhouse of the title. Mosca, on the other hand, does not meet such an unfortunate end, as the last few lines of the book inform us:

The prisons of Parma were empty, the Conte immensely rich, Ernesto V adored by his subjects, who compared his rule to that of the Grand Dukes of Tuscany.
TO THE HAPPY FEW. (Stendhal [1838]: 510)

What is the solution to the evil and the complications of the court, then? This is a very important issue not only in the Nineteenth Century, but already in the baroque culture, as Benjamin shows in the *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*. It is also to be found in an extraordinary way in *Le malade imaginaire*. Here too there is a court: a court of doctors, who give – as Argan's brother, Beraldo, says – «words for arguments and promises for results»:

Argan: «Mais toujours faut-il demeurer d'accord, que sur cette matière les médecins en savent plus que les autres».
Béralde: «Ils savent, mon frère, ce que je vous ai dit, qui ne guérit pas de grand-chose, et toute l'excellence de leur art consiste en un pompeux galimatias, en un spécieux babil, qui vous donne des mots pour des raisons, et des promesses pour des effets». (Molière [1673]: III, 3)

It is also interesting what Beraldo suggests against this. Talking about Monsieur Pourgon, the doctor, he tells his brother: «Songez que les princi-

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[8] In 1920 Benjamin writes: «In den letzten zwei Wochen habe ich eines der herrlichsten Bücher gelesen: die *Chartreuse de Parme* von Stendhal» (Benjamin [1919-24]: 73). And in 1932: «Ich lese zum zweiten Mal die *Chartreuse de Parme* […] Es gibt kaum Schöneres» (Benjamin [1931-34]: 86).

pes de votre vie sont en vous-même» («remember that the principle of your life is in yourself») (ivi: III, 6).

In the *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* Benjamin says that when thought and language diverge from life, in order to dominate it, they kill themselves (Benjamin [1928c]: 294). How is it then possible to avoid this?

5. WELTLICHKEIT

In his paper on *As you like it* Benjamin states that in this comedy «everything ends in loneliness» (ivi; 611; my trans.). This is not immediately understandable, because *As you like it* concludes with the reconstruction of a court. Couples get married and leave to build another court outside the forest. There is an important aspect of Benjamin's paper, however, that is yet to be considered. It is a passage in which Benjamin states that Shakespeare is more radical than the romantics in his dissolution of things, because he does not try to «keep anything». There is no «Sehnsucht» in him, and this is the basis of his «Weltlichkeit»: his "wordly" or "terrestrial" character (ibidem).

What is the *Weltlichkeit* of Shakespeare, the *Weltlichkeit* Benjamin is talking about? It is of course not the *Weltlichkeit* of the courtesan, the *Weltlichkeit* of Mosca, and not even that of Monsieur Pourgon…

One last passage of Benjamin's paper on *As you like it* offers a potential solution. At the very end of the text, Benjamin writes that Shakespeare, among all great English poets, is the only one who has an «unarmed eye» (ibidem). The comparison is with Sterne, who has the microscope, and with Swift, who has the telescope. The adjective «unarmed», however, is probably not by chance. It brings to mind the question of violence, which is central to this comedy: there is no violence inside the forest, except the famous episode of the killing of a deer (Shakespeare [1599]: II,1). Furthermore, it also brings to mind the «innocence» of the comic character in Molière, as Benjamin describes it in *Fate and Character* (Benjamin [1919]: 205). This

innocence – as the quoted passage of *Fate and Character* shows – is the capacity of being "just that". This is the «loneliness» to which Benjamin is referring. Something can be "just that" in two ways: by remaining "just that" all the time (and this is Molière: the imaginary invalid who remains unaltered with his mask); or something can be "just that" by losing its more complicated appearance (and this is *As you like it*, when Rosalind loses her disguise).

It is here that Shakespeare's and Molière's comedies meet. The comic, in all its different forms, happens through an unarmed eye; and it brings us back to the world, to the *Weltlichkeit*, in order to play with it and to play with ourselves. Just like Argan does, at the end of the play, when he dances with a group of fake doctors, in order to be proclaimed a doctor himself (Molière [1673]: III, 14).

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Revolutionary Laughter: The Aesthetico-Political Meaning of Benjamin's Chaplin

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Abstract. This paper discusses the aesthetic and political motivations of the great importance that Walter Benjamin gives to Charlie Chaplin in *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (1935-1936). First, it proceeds to identify the main paragraphs that Benjamin devoted to Chaplin's films in the different versions of his famous essay. Then it examines Chaplin's reception in Weimar Germany both in the field of avant-garde art and that of press criticism, highlighting the philosophical, ethico-political and psychological arguments exchanged in a wide and intensive debate on the human dimension of the Tramp character. By focusing on Sigried Kracauaer's and Rudolf Arnheim's chronicles, it seeks to illustrate two approaches that are contemporaries to Benjamin's *Rückblick auf Chaplin* (1929), a brief review based on an essay written by the French surrealist poet Philippe Soupault. Lastly, it analyzes some notes on Charlot's gestuality discarded from this famous essay and a fragment in which, six years before *The Great Dictator* (1940), Benjamin compares Chaplin to Hitler.

Keywords. Film art, Chaplin's reception in Weimar Culture, German avant-garde, Humor, Hitler.

In *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (1935-1936), Walter Benjamin presents Charlie Chaplin as the hero of his art theory. As Fabrizio Desideri points out, he finds in Chaplin's movies «the most significant expression of his thesis about the "new form of art" that is affirmed with film and with the principle of reproductibility of image vitality whose structure it defines» (Desideri [2012]: xl)[1]. In the following pages, I will intend to unravel the aesthetic and political motivations by which Benjamin attached such importance to Chaplin within the framework of the deep cultural transformations that accompany the emergence of cinema. First, I will proceed to identify the main paragraphs that Benjamin devoted

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[1] All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. Any modification of existing English translations are marked [tm] = translation modified. I thank Laura Guidi for her collaboration on the final wording of this paper.

to his films in the five versions of *Das Kuntswerk* compiled in the critical edition of Benjamin's work. Then I will examine Chaplin's reception in Weimar Germany both in the field of avant-garde art and that of press criticism, highlighting the philosophical, ethico-political and psychological arguments exchanged in a wide and intensive debate on the human dimension of the Tramp character. By focusing on Sigried Kracauaer's and Rudolf Arnheim's chronicles, I will illustrate two approaches that are contemporaries to Benjamin's *Rückblick auf Chaplin* (1929), a brief review based on an essay written by the French surrealist poet Philippe Soupault, where he found relevant information later used in *Das Kuntswerk*. Lastly, I will discuss some notes on Charlot's gestuality discarded from this famous essay, and a fragment in which, six years before *The Great Dictator* (1940)*,* Benjamin compares Chaplin to Hitler.

THE FIRST OCCUPANT
OF THE MODERN STAGES

Benjamin's most famous remark on Chaplin in *Das Kuntswerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* is undoubtedly that referring to the modification of mass aesthetic behavior vis a vis cinema in contrast with modern painting: «*The extremely backward attitude toward, for example, a Picasso painting changes into a highly progressive reaction to a Chaplin film*» (Benjamin [2012]: 81, 128, 187, 236-237; [1935-1938]: 116; [1938-1940]: 264). The progressive attitude toward Chaplin's is defined in terms of «an immediate, intimate fusion of pleasure – pleasure in seeing and experiencing – with an attitude of "expert appraisal"»; such a fusion would be an important «index» of the social role of film, as it eliminates divergence between enjoyment and criticism, which affects the reception of traditional artworks, including those of Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism or Surrealism: «As it clearly seen in the case of painting, the more reduced the social impact of an art form, the more widely criticism and enjoyment of it diverge in the public. The conventional is uncriti-

cally enjoyed, while the truly new is criticized with aversion» (Benjamin [2012]: 81, 128-129, 187-188, 237; [1935-1938]: 116; [1938-1940]: 264).

Another comment on Chaplin appears, in the third and the fifth German versions of *Das Kuntswerk,* in an extensive footnote headed by a quote from André Breton's *Position politique du surrealism* (1935). It illustrates how traditional art forms, at certain stages in their development, strain laboriously for effects which are later effortlessly achieved by new art forms: «Before film became established, Dadaists performances sought to stir in the audience reactions in the public which Chaplin then elicited more naturally» (Benjamin [2012]: 133-134 n., 162, 241 n.; Benjamin [1935-1938]: 118; Benjamin [1938-1940]: 266).

The next assertion, removed from the fifth version, serves to exemplify Benjamin's idea of film as the paradigm of a «assembled artwork» (*montierbar Kunstwerk*): to produce a movie like *A Woman from Paris* (1923), «which is 3,000 meters long, Chaplin shot 125,000 meters of film» (Benjamin [2012]: 32, 66, 111-112, 176; Benjamin [1935-1938]: 109). Chaplin's first proper feature length film shows that a new quality of the artwork has become crucial with cinema, as an art form entirely determined by its reproducibility. This quality is «its capacity for improvement» (*Verbesserungsfähigkeit*) and places it in the opposite pole from that of the Greeks, amongst whom the sculpture was the art form which expressed the ideal of perfection and its products were literally all of a piece: «The finished film is all but a *one* shot creation; it is assembled from many images and sequences, amongst which the editor has the possibility to choose from – images that can even be improved at will from the initial take to the final cut» (ibid.).

One more statement about Chaplin, also eliminated in the fifth version of *Das Kunstwerk*, is connected to the representation of modern social scenarios and the notion of «optical unconscious» (Benjamin [2012]: 37-38, 83, 131, 190; Benjamin [1935-1938]: 118). Most of the aspects of reality recorded by the camera, magnifying and minimizing objects, slowing down and speeding up imag-

es, lie outside «*normal* spectrum of sense impressions», points out Benjamin: «Many of the deformations and stereotypes, transformations and catastrophes which can assail the optical world in films afflict the actual world in psychoses, hallucinations, and dreams» (Benjamin [2012]: 84, 131, 190; Benjamin [1935-1938]: 118). With cinema, distorting perceptions, sadistic or masochist fantasies have become ordinary for the first time; however, this was not achieved by providing «representations of the oneiric world», but rather through the creation of «characters from the collective dream, such as the globe-encircling Mickey Mouse» (Benjamin [2012]: 84, 132, 191; Benjamin [1935-1938]: 118). The same «*technification*» that has engendered «*dangerous tensions*» in the masses has also produced «*the possibility of psychic vaccination* (psychische Impfung) *against such mass psychoses by means of certain films in which the forced development of sadistic fantasies or masochist delusions prevent their natural and dangerous maturation in the masses* (ibid. [tm])».

The laugh that these films produce, Benjamin writes in the first version of the essay, is «a revolutionary laugh» (Benjamin [2012]: 37). «Collective laugher», he points out in the following versions, «is one such preemptive and healing outbreak of mass psychosis […] American slapstick comedies and Disney movies cause a therapeutic explosion of the unconscious» (*eine therapeutische Spregung des Unbewussten*) (Benjamin [2012]: 84, 132, 191; [1935-1938]: 118 [tm]). It is no coincidence that the triumph of «eccentric films» (*Exzentrikfilme*) dates back to the early twenties, «when the world revolution seemed possible» (Benjamin [2012]: 37). The character of the «eccentric» was their forerunner; in the new «rooms for play» (*Spielräumen*), the scopes for action and imagination opened up by film, «he was the first one to be at home: its dry dweller (*ihre Trockenwohner*)», its first occupant, says Benjamin: «In this context Chaplin has his place as historical figure (Benjamin [2012]: 84, 132-133; Benjamin [1935-1938]: 118 [tm])[2]. The image of the Berliner

proletarian homeless, to whom the real estate speculators left to occupy a flat in a new building without paying until the plaster of the walls dried and made the house legally fit for inhabitation, replaces the no less suggestive one of the first version: the eccentric as a «professional» of the spaces originated by the camera, «where he organizes the maneuvers in which a new type of human is practiced» (Benjamin [2012]: 38)[3].

GERMAN AVANT-GARDE ART AND CINEMA POETRY

Benjamin's quoted observations in *Das Kuntswerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* should be seen within the broadest context of Chaplin reception in Weimar Republic. Even years after the First World War had ended his comedies were unknown, in contrast with the frenzy they caused in the most important metropolis around the world. As far as we know, the first critic to talk about Chaplin in the German press was the Berliner journalist and writer Hans Siemsen (see Hanisch [1991]: 26). In *Zwei Postkarten und ein Buch*, a chronicle published in March 1920 in the pages of *Die Weltbühne*, forum of postwar leftist intellectuals, he described Chaplin's figure from two Swiss postcards: the first one was a portrait of Charles Spencer, smiling and without makeup, whose pale dehumanized face evoked «the mask of a Chinese actor»; the second one reproduced a scene of the short film *Dog's Life* (1918), in which the character of the Tramp, with very sad eyes, big shoes and «an absolutely impossible hat», was sitting on the landing of a staircase next to his puppy (Siemsen [1920]: 84).

Siemsen asserts that he had heard much about Chaplin in Paris among the young French poets and artists, but he had no idea of his appearance. Suddenly, on a long train trip from Osnabrück to

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[2] For an illuminating discussion on Benjamin's literal and figurative use of the term *Spielraum* as «room for play»

and «field of action» and interaction in this and other texts see Hansen (2004) and (2012): 183-204.

[3] On the historical figure of the *Trockenwohner*, see Grimm (1917), 22: 761, Rosenhaft (1983): 10-11, Ritter and Tenfelde (1992): 582, 617.

Bremen in a lonely and cold third-class car, fate had placed in his hands those two photographs and «a beautiful and tremendous» book by Emmy Hennings, Hugo Ball's companion and co-founder of the Cabaret Voltaire, whose title *Gefängnis* (1919) he took as a historical metaphor of the order to which «our thought, our laughter and our language» were subjected (ibid., 87). Siemsen's intuition on the link between Chaplin and German avant-garde art had corroboration in the *Erste Internationale Dada-Messe*, an «exhibition and sale» of about 200 hundred «Dadaist products» that was held from June 30 to August 25, 1920 in a Berlin gallery owned by Dr. Otto Burchard, an expert in Song period Chinese ceramics (see Herzfelde [2003]: 93). Georg Grosz has presented there two pieces alluding to Chaplin, probably the items 132 and 153 of the fair catalog: *Der Schmerz des Kronprinzen über die Fahnenflucht seines Vaters. Charlie Chaplin gewidmet* and a collage titled *Ehrenporträt von Charlie Chaplin* (see Grosz, Hausmann and Heartfield [1920]: 4; Simmons [2001]: 7, n. 19).

Maybe the first German avant-garde artist to emphatically celebrate Chaplin as an icon was the Alsatian poet and play-writer Yvan Goll. He had emigrated to Switzerland during the Great War and was friendly with the Dadaists of the Cabaret Voltaire. He lived then in Paris and, some years later, he would become a rival of André Breton's group, which also worshiped Charlot's movies, for the interpretation of the term *surréalisme* coined by Guillaume Apollinaire[4]. This «Courtelaine expressionist» – as Bertolt Brecht called him with admiration (Wackers [2004]: 54, n. 124) – wrote the essay *Apologie des Charlots*, published in *Die neue Schaubühne* in February 1920, within the framework of a series of critical texts on theater and cinema (Goll [1982]: 220-222). «To condemn war, hate the bourgeoisie, and become indignant

with corruption, is stupid», states Goll emphatically. «One cannot other than ignore them. Complain and litany, *after* the crime has been executed and consummated are merely good to concierges» (Goll [1982]: 220). What men and women of the new generations are expecting to arise in these times of decadence is not «the resurrected Christ proclaimed by all engraving artists, writers of manifests and supreme chiefs of the Salvation Army, but rather a fool that makes them laugh» (ibid.). It is needed «a tremendous satire, an excessively grotesque funny face that entails for us a yell of ingenuity, something that comes from childhood» (ibid.). Charlot, the little man with a little moustache, a cane and a bowler hat who smiles and makes everybody laugh from the screens, responds to that demand: «he is the greatest philosopher», «the most shameless of all contemporaries», «the genius of our times» (ibid., 221).

Goll's optimism in this defense of Chaplin contrasts with the rather somber vision that he printed in *Die Chapliniade. Eine Kinodichtung*, which appeared in Dresden in 1920, illustrated with four drawings by Fernand Léger[5]. Written in verse and prose, the plot of this cinema poem – Sabine Hake comments – «praises Chaplin as the embodiment of modernity» and «speculates on his importance as a figure of reconciliation between art and technology, high culture-educated and mass society» (Hake [1990]: 89). One day, Charlot comes out from a street poster and walks through a large metropolis that roars «with a tumult of lies, the stupidity of telephones, the craziness of telegrams» (Goll [1960]: 60; Goll [1965]: 510). With sorrow, he sees how people have become worried about banalities and that poetry has vanished from the world. To his surprise, everybody will see him as a Caesar, a prophet or demigod destined to perform «the communism of the spirit»

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[4] About this dispute, see Behar (2002): 113-130, Stubbs (1997), Ronsin (1994), Tonnet,-Lacroix (1979) and Ibarlucía (2016). On the texts Louis Aragon, Philippe Soupault and Paul Éluard devoted to Chaplin in this period, I remit to Ibarlucía (2013): 82-92.

[5] The piece was published in French with the title *La Chapliniade ou Charlot poète. Poème, drame, film*, in the July number of 1921 of "La Vie des Lettres et des Arts", and collected two years later in "Le Nouvel Orphée", as *La Chapliniade ou Charlot poète poème cinematographique,* together with four other plays (Goll [1923]: 9-41).

and «free humanity from boredom» (Goll [1960]: 61; Goll [1965]: 510). Horrified by how men have become material and their love false, Chaplin escapes to the Black Forest, where he lives in the company of a deer, surrounded by birds, writing bucolic poems with a *«verse making machine»* (Goll [1960]: 62; Goll [1965]: 512). His love words turn the deer into Reha, a beautiful young girl, but after a while she reproaches him for his sentimentalism and his «miserable hypochondria» and leaves with a hunter. «I believed in dreams:/but even the nymphs have become bourgeoise», says Chaplin with sarcastic melancholy (Goll [1960]: 63; Goll [1965]: 513). Desperate, he tries to hang himself from a tree and, as he fails, he decides to put an end to his life by drowning in a pond. With the water to his knees, as Reha is being shot dead, he exclaims:

> *Now I am poorer than the first day!*
> *My fate trickles down me like raindrops,*
> *My heart is frozen like a dead watch:*
> *And that is Chaplin!*
> *Lonelier than the others!*
> *Europe laughs, New York laughs, and all the cities laugh*
> *And do not believe in my deep sorrow.*
> *Even she, the little mother behind the curtains,*
> *Who for more than twenty years,*
> *Has been waiting for a letter from Charlie:*
> *She, the only one who has never gone to the movies,*
> *If she saw me sobbing,*
> *She would laugh too! (Goll [1960]: 63; Goll [1965]: 513-514 [tm])*

THE PHILOSOPHER AS A COMEDIAN

Between 1921 and 1922, Chaplin's comedies, with the exception of *Shoulder Arms* (1918), whose anti-Prussian plot failed to escape German censorship, finally opened in the Weimar Republic. Siemsen then published a series of articles in *Die Weltbühne*, later collected in a book (Siemsen [1924]), in which he established the four axes of the reception of this «little and great artist», whom the Germans until that moment only knew by

hearsay, but who was already «the national hero of the rest of the world» (Siemsen [1922a]: 367). Praising Chaplin's talent as a librettist, Siemsen began by pointing that his comedies were not only the best in the cinema, but also «the first and really the only cinematographic poems» ever written (Siemsen [1922b]: 387). From a political point of view, he stated secondly, «the content of the chaplinades» was invariably the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressors: «Chaplin is always the oppressed, the weak, the small, the persecuted; he is never the general, the bank director, the magistrate, the rich bourgeois, corpulent, powerful. He is always the subordinate, the prisoner, the employee, the servant of the house» (Siemsen [1922c]: 415). Third, Siemsen said that Chaplin embodied «a new type of actor, the film actor, who has basically broken with the theatrical tradition» (Siemsen [1922d]: 447). Lastly, he asserted that Chaplin had built his motion pictures with a taste, with an eye that only in Daumier, Toulouse-Lautrec, Henri Rousseau and Picasso can be trained (Siemsen [1922e]: 473) and emphasized his ability to delight ordinary people and the most refined audience alike, erasing the boundaries between art and entertainment, between high and low culture:

> *He destroys barriers. He makes human beings be what they should always be: human beings. He demolishes all the things that stop them from being human beings: barriers related to social status, education, upbringing, titles, hierarchy, power, lack of intelligence. This little and funny clown is the greatest thing a man can be: a world perfectioner. (ibid., 474)*

Charlot's humanity and universalism was also highlighted by Kurt Tucholsky. In an article published in the "Prager Tageblatt" in July 1922, under the title *Der berühmteste Mann der Welt*, the great Berlin writer and journalist stated that Chaplin had created «a comedy of nonsense that is quite outrageous» (Tucholsky [1975]: 230). Chaplin, said Tucholsky, «has an extraordinary power of observation, a stealing eye» (ibid., 231) in order to imitate the characteristic gestures of all trades. He manages to ridicule other people by his mere

appearance: «All he has to do is come up with the little hat, with the little stick, with the little mustache, waddle on his impossible legs – and everything around is suddenly wrong, and he's right, and the whole world has become ridiculous» (ibid., 231). If Chaplin's movies are for children, they are in a much deeper sense of what is said: «the reflexive comicality» and «the funny tragicity» bring out «the child within every human being, which has remained the same for all peoples: the indestructible strength of youth»: «He represents that in the most primitive way, but genially. And he shows how ridiculous it is being an adult who takes himself seriously» (ibid.). Chaplin, «like all great comics», is a philosopher: «Do not miss to look at him. You will laugh your head off and will be grateful for that laughter as long as you live» (ibid., 232).

Edging into the philosophical implications of Chaplin's films, a considerable part of the German press argued that, in comparison to Buster Keaton, Fatty Arbuckle or Harrold Lloyd, he stood out because of what Hans Pander had defined in the influent magazine "Der Bilwart" as his «human content». Thomas Saunders explains: «Some identified this human content as his support for the mass of downtrodden and oppressed; others as his exploitation of the underlying link between the tragic and the comic; others as his transcendence of the mechanical world» (Saunders [1994]: 187). The «profoundly human dimension» of the character of the Tramp served to label Chaplin's cinema and made of it «the exemplar of artistic values which antedated the motion picture, indeed which belonged by and large to a world which interwar Germans felt had been lost» (ibid.). By contrast, journalists like Kurt Pinthus, a promoter of Expressionism, and Alfred Polger, theater critic of "Die Weltbühne", rejected this humanist interpretation and refused to derive «ethical or philosophical principles» from Chaplin's movies, alleging that «their meaning lies in their meaninglessness» and the «suspension of conventional logic and morality» (ibid., 182-183). On the other hand, in the eyes of an ultraconservative critic like Michel Wilheim, who wrote books about Rain-

er Maria Rilke and Friedrich Hölderlin, Chaplin was the demon of the Americanism that corroded Old Europe, the incarnation of moral and cultural decadence of the Western culture, «the hero of the subhuman», «a little half blood without a race» (Hake [1990]: 91).

The debate about Chaplin's comedies, which had spread to the intellectual circles in Vienna, acquires a peculiar light through a contemporary text of Sigmund Freud. In 1927, when the wave of Chaplinism was at its height, he wrote *Der Humor*, a brief essay read first by his daughter Anna at the "10. Internationales Psychoanalytischen Kongress" of Innsbruck and published months later in the "Almanach" of the Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag. Freud returns in this text to the developments of the seventh chapter of *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten* (1905) to lay out a hypothesis about the role of humor that connects with two Benjamin's complementary remarks in *Das Kunstwerk* that we have highlighted above: on the one hand, the analogy of the cinematographic perception and the psychotic hallucination and, on the other hand, the cathartic function of Chaplin's comedies and Walt Disney's cartoons, that is, the psychic immunization against mass psychoses, the «therapeutic explosion of the unconscious» they cause in the audience (Benjamin [2012] 16: 84, 132, 191; Benjamin [1935-1938]: 118 [tm]).

In his essay, Freud holds that humor «has not only something liberating like the joke and the comic, but something of grandeur and elevation»: its power «clearly lies in the triumph of narcissism, in the victorious affirmation of the ego's invulnerability» (Freud [1991]: 385; Freud [1999]: 162). Through «the rejection of the claims of reality and the imposition of the pleasure principle», it approximates to «the regressive or reactionary processes» so extensively studied by psychopathology (Freud [1991]: 385-386; Freud [1999]: 163). Humor builds a defense system analogous to «the methods which the human psyche has deployed in order to evade the compulsion to suffer»; it emphasizes «the invincibility of the ego by the real world and victoriously maintains the pleasure prin-

ciple», without resigning the psychic health, unlike what occurs in neurosis and delirium (Freud [1991]: 386; Freud [1999]: 163 [tm]). Although these two operations may seem to be incompatible, humor combines both in such a way that the person «over-staffs» his/her super-ego and becomes dominant (Freud [1991]: 388; Freud [1999]: 165 [tm]). In other words, «*humor would be the contribution made to the comic through the mediation of the super-ego*» (ibid.). While in all other psychic fields the super-ego appears as «a severe master», it condescends here to enabling the ego to obtain a small yield of pleasure by «repudiating reality and serving an illusion» (Freud [1991]: 388-389; Freud [1999]: 166). That is why we feel humorous pleasure especially liberating and elevating. The super-ego tries to console the ego and protect it: «The main thing is the intention which humor carries out, whether it is acting in relation to the self or other people. It means: Look, here is the world that seems so dangerous. A children's game, just good to joke about!» (Freud [1991]: 389; Freud [1999]: 166, [tm])

THE MIRRORED LABYRINTH
AND PLATO'S CAVERN

Before going further, I would like to focus on the texts written by two important German film critics around the time that Benjamin released his first approach to Chaplin. At the beginning of November 1926, Siegfried Kracauer published in the "Frankfurter Zeitung" a review of the *The Gold Rush* (1925). He held in it that Chaplin's film art seemed to be inspired in remote and almost secret resources. The Tramp character – pointed Kracauer establishing an analogy with Grimm brothers' *Märchen* – resembled Hans Dumb and other characters from fairy tales who are «no heroes at all» and led to the fulfillment of Lao-Tsé's proverb according to which «the world is moved by the weakest» (Kracauer [2004a]: 269). Charlot has no will and no conscious ego; he is «a man without surface», aside from social relations: «In pathological terms, this is called dissociation

of the self, schizophrenia. A hole. But out of the hole shines the pure, breakable and disconnected human good» (ibid., 269-270). Before this fragile little man, who walks scornfully on the ledge of a snowy mountain, nature's elementary violence is reversed: «Even the bear becomes friendly with him, like a fairy tale bear. His helplessness is dynamite; his comedies conquer laughs and collect more than emotion, because they move the foundations of our world» (ibid., 270)[6].

In a second chronicle, published in February 1928, Kracauer asserted that *The Circus* (1928) had no comparison with *The Gold Rush,* Chaplin's masterpiece. The story was conventional, the dramatic resources were overused, and the screenplay moved through a comedy of errors that can barely provoke laughter. The whole merit of the film resided in the mosaic of gags it was composed of. The mirror maze scene, however, seemed highly revealing for Kracauer: persecuted through the fair by a policeman, who has mistaken him for a pickpocket, Charlot takes refuge in a labyrinth, where he is trapped among the crystals that mockingly multiply his fragmented and distorted image. According to Kracauer, Chaplin's entire film art turns around this disturbing idea: «Chaplin lives in the mirrored cabinet of the world» (Kracauer [2004b]: 33). At the end of the movie, the circus leaves and he remains seated on a box, in the middle of the abandoned ring, under the open sky: «His face is old, as it had never been seen before, old and overwhelmed. Will the mirror break into pieces? Will the nightmare ever end? Then he gets up and does a pirouette; he is a little man funny to see from behind» (ibid., 35).

In 1929, the German psychologist and historian of art Rudolf Arheim, whose book *Film als Kunst* (1932) is quoted by Benjamin in *Das* Kunstwerk *im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, wrote in "Die Weltbühne" an article titled *Alte Chaplinfilme*, which offered a complementary interpretation of Chaplin's film art. «When Plato

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[6] For a complementary reading of this review in relation to Benjamin's considerations on Chaplin, see Hansen (2012): 47-48.

tells in his *Republic* the famous parable of the people who sit in a dark cave seeing in front of them only the shadows of real things», affirms Arnheim, «it is obvious that he is speaking of cinema, but he would never have dreamed that technological progress would allow the shadowy representations on the wall to take on a more real appearance than life itself» (Arnheim [1929]: 21; Arnheim [1996]: 311 [tm]). In Chaplin's movies, however, this happens in a way that is not the widely proclaimed realism. The «mythical creatures» of Chaplin's world have «mysterious occupations» that, if examined more carefully, show them to be «the occupations of everyday life, changed by a strange twist of fate into ghosts and madness» (ibid.). The simple fact that «this romantic with the nerves of a sarcastic oddball» has succeeded in conquering a planet «buzzed by radio waves and Morse signals with his extreme un-American worldview should give the apostles of "Objectivity" an occasion for reflection» (Arnheim [1929]: 21-22; Arnheim [1996]: 312-313 [tm]).

Chaplin's first movies «are fifteen years old, and nothing in them has aged except the heroine's hairdo», argues Arnheim: «They have their style, which in the history of film art will one day be called the early style [*Frühstil*] because it is shaped by a very primitive idea of the possibilities of film» (Arnheim [1929]: 22; Arnheim [1996]: 313). The majority of the good films, even the most recent ones, become quickly obsolete: the lighting and special effects, the scenography and facial expressions of the actors seem outdated. By contrast, Chaplin shows that in film, as in the other arts, «technical progress for the first time does not entail the devaluation of previous works» (ibid.). His early movies are masterpieces, «just as the frescoes of a Masaccio», which «have not lost their value because one understands better today how to draw a squatting figure» (ibid.). The most vehement development of cinema won't destroy what Charlie Chaplin, as well as Buster Keaton and other American comedians, have achieved:

In seventy years time, there will be a film museum, and film lovers will sometimes go into a cool projection room, where the best years are

stored, to see an old master verified as authentic by a report from Privy Councillor Coogan[7], and valued at a hundred thousand marks in the art market. There they will wriggle in their seats for an hour, and then, with eyes rolling, stagger into the street like drunken ducks and then whisper each other's ears bulging ears in a perfectly synchronized and veiled voice: "No trick, an authentic Chaplin!". (Arnheim [1929]: 23; Arnheim [1996]: 314, [tm])

CHARLOT'S EXPRESSIVE WORLD

Benjamin devoted other writings to Chaplin, closely related to the developments of *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit,* although not very much considered by the critic. The first one is a brief review, titled *Rüblick auf Chaplin*, which appeared in "Die Literarische Welt" in February 1929, a few months after the essay *Der Sürrealismus. Die letzte Momentaufnahme der europäischen Intelligenz*[8]. Apparently polemicizing with Kracauer's conclusions about *The Circus,* Benjamin writes: «*The Circus* is the first late work (*Alterswerk*) of film art. Charlie has grown older since his last film. But he also performs that way» (Benjamin [2011]: 170; Benjamin [1927-1930]: 222 [tm]). With these ironic words, far from suggesting the aging of Chaplin's movies, Benjamin intends to exalt his expressive maturity, for «what makes this film so moving is the feeling that Chaplin, overlooking now the circle of his potential effects, is resolved to achieve his goal with them and only with them» (ibid. [tm]). The variations on his most significant subjects reach their peak in the persecution inside the mirrored labyrinth, the imitation of the automats exhibited in one of the fair stalls and Charlot's unexpected apparition, under the circus tent, during the act of magic.

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[7] Arheim alludes to Jackie Coogan, the child star of *The Kid* (1921).

[8] See the scheme of this review in Benjamin (1892-1940), VI: 137-138 and Benjamin (1927-1930): 199-200. About Benjamin's essay on French surrealism and its politico-historical context, allow me to refer to Ibarlucía (2017).

«The lesson and the warning that emerge from this great work» – states Benjamin at the beginning of the following paragraph – have led Philippe Soupault «to attempt the first definition of Chaplin as a historical phenomenon» (ibid.). In the November edition of 1928, the Paris review "Europe" published an essay by the surrealist writer «containing a number of ideas around which a definitive picture of the great artist will one day be able to crystallize» (ibid.). Chaplin's comicality, argues Soupault in the French text, is of a «superior essence», like the one that animated surrealism; as Henri Bergson has observed, «if the comic illusion is an oneiric illusion, if the logic of laughable is dream logic, it is expected to find in the logic of laughable all the particularities of the logic of dream» (Soupault [1928]: 392; Bergson [1917]: 192). Chaplin's humor is often attached to poetry, «daughter of dream»: «It is not only random that in almost all of his movies the main character is overcome by a dream. Also, it is difficult to separate some of Chaplin's comic findings from his poetic findings. In his films we can assist to the materialization of poetic images, eternal images that are always new» (Soupault [1928]: 392). In this sense, comments Benjamin, Soupault is right when pointing out that «Chaplin's fundamental relationship with his movies is not that of the actor at all»; following his reasoning, «it can be said that Chaplin, seen its totality, is so little actor as the performer William Shakespeare» (Benjamin [2011]: 170; Benjamin [1927-1930): 222 [tm]; see Soupault [1928]: 392).

The undeniable superiority of Chaplin's films, Soupault writes, is founded on the fact that they are «tinted with the poetry that we experience within ourselves without ever being aware of it» (Soupault [1928]: 392). Obviously, Benjamin points, this not only implies that Chaplin is «the author (Dichter) of his films scripts», but, in a broader sense, that he is also «the author of his films, that is to say, the régisseur», or, as it is literally expressed in Soupault's French text, «a director of first order» (Benjamin [2011]: 170; Benjamin [1927-1930]: 222 [tm]; Soupault [1928]: 393). This last aspect is for Bejamin of the greatest importance:

Soupault has seen that Chaplin was the first (and the Russians have followed his example) to construct a film with a theme and variations – in short, with musical composition – and that all of that stands in complete opposition to the traditional concept of suspense action. This explains why Soupault has affirmed more forcefully than anyone else that the pinnacle of Chaplin's production is recognizable in L'Opinion publique. In this film, as it is well known, he does not appear, and it was premiered in Germany with the silly title Die Nächte einer schönen Frau [The Nights of a Pretty Woman] (The Kamera Theater ought to show it every six months. It is a foundational document of the film art). (Benjamin [2011]: 170-171; Benjamin [1927-1930]: 222-223 [tm]).

The reference to *A Woman of Paris*, premiered in Paris with the title *L'Opinion publique*, gives us a clue about the non-explicit source of the remark on this movie in *Das Kunstwerk*. As we have indicated above, opposing the «capacity for improvement» of the «assembled artwork» of the age of technical reproduction to the one-piece work of Greek sculpture, which has consecrated eternal values as a paradigm of traditional art, Benjamin writes: «To produce *L'Opinion publique*, which is 3,000 meters long, Chaplin shot 125,000 meters of film» (Benjamin [2012]: 32, 66, 111, 176; Benjamin [1935-1938]: 109). The same information about Chaplin's feature length motion picture is taken from Soupault's essay and appears also at the beginning of a paragraph of *Rückblick auf Chaplin*:

Learning that for this 3,000-meter work, 125,000 meters were shot, gives us an idea of the enormous devious work that is behind Chaplin's masterpiece. It also gives us an idea of the capital this man requires, and this is at least necessary to him as it is to a Nansen or an Amundsen to make his voyages of discovery to the poles of film art. We must share Soupault's concern that Chaplin's productivity may be paralyzed by the dangerous financial claims of his second wife, as well as by the competitive struggle of American trusts. It is said that Chaplin is planning both a Napoleon-film and a Christ-film. Shouldn't we fear that such projects are no more than gigantic screens behind which the great artist conceals his

fatigue? (Benjamin [2011]: 171; Benjamin [1927-1930]: 223 [tm])

Benjamin evidently agrees with Soupault's assertion on Chaplin's international reception: the audience «loves Charlie, Charlot or Carlitos», while those who are called by the «nasty name of *cineastes*» have not understood him at all (Soupault [1928]: 396). Snobs have underestimated his talent and «considered him a clown» or «a mere notable actor»: «They expect to forget that Chaplin has modified the cinematographic point of view. Do they actually know – adds Soupault – that for *L'Opinion publique* he used 125,000 meters of negative film to make a 3,000 meter movie?» (ibid.) But Benjamin's accordance with Soupault is even deeper and it is based on Chaplin's election in favor of popular cinema, a position which Benjamin defends openly in the *Passagen-Werk*, warning about the risks entailed in abstraction for the exploitation of revolutionary energies in cinema:

> *It is impossible not to mention the fact that Charlie Chaplin deliberately detaches from the so-called artistic cinema that was in vogue a few months after the projection of The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari and which was mainly the result of the efforts of German producers.*
> *Charlie Chaplin considers, in effect, that cinema should only deal with life; that it should make us see better than the way we see through our eyes, and that the more it detaches from life, the higher the risk of losing it.*
> *The recent Russian films that have more or less consciously adopted Chaplin's point of view seem to give him reason[9]. (Soupault [1928]: 393)*

Benjamin greets the fact that, when the time passed starts resembling on Chaplin's factions, Soupault evokes his youth and the local origins of his art, tracing a profitable comparison with Charles Dickens, «the creator of modern English novel»: «Both of them were going to satisfy a huge

public and they both sought to capture what they called life» (ibid., 395). Neither the popular storyteller of the country of the Industrial Revolution that attracted Karl Marx, nor the film maker most beloved by the proletarian masses have known how «to avoid the pitfall of sentimentality» and have extracted «all their inspiration almost only from their infancy, elapsed without joy in the streets of London» (ibid., 395-396). Chaplin's art, writes Soupault in a paragraph translated into German by Benjamin, has its roots in his personal experience of the great metropolis:

> *Walking untiringly by the streets with red and black houses, Charlie Chaplin learned to observe. He himself has said that, watching the little employees walk by the strand, he had the idea of creating the character of the man with the top hat, stuttering walk, little short mustache and bamboo cane. With this appearance and clothing, he pretended to capture the will of a man «who has his dignity». It is also in London where Chaplin finds all social kinds which appear in his movies: the sweet and shy, naive and charming young girl, the «bully» always ready to fight and escape when he realizes they are not afraid of him, the pretentious man generally dressed up in a top hat[10]... (Soupault [1928]: 380; see Benjamin [2011]: 171-172; Benjamin [1927-1930]: 223)*

With his art, Benjamin states, Chaplin confirms the old romantic intuition that «only an expressive world (*Ausdruckswelt*) that is firmly supported by a national and territorial society, is able to evoke the great, uninterrupted, yet highly differentiated resonance that exists between nations» (Benjamin [2011]: 172; Benjamin [1927-1930]: 223-224 [tm]). In Russia, people cried when watching *The Pilgrim* (1923); in Germany, they are interested in the «theoretical implications

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[9] For testimonies and reflections on Chaplin made by Soviet directors, see Einsenstein, Bleiman, Kozinzev, Lukevic (1955).

[10] Benjamin quotes this passage of Soupault's essay also in his radiophonic writing *Kinderliteratur* (1929) and highlights the fact that during the interview with a German journalist (*Der große Eindruck meiner Kindkeit*, in "Die literarische Welt", 2 yr., number. 49, December 3, 1926) Chaplin, when asked about his favorite childhood book, answered: "*David Copperfield*" (Benjamin [1892-1940] VII, 1: 254-255).

of his comedies»; in England, «they like his sense of humor» especially:

It is no wonder that Chaplin himself is puzzled and fascinated by these differences. Nothing points so unmistakably to the huge significance of film as the fact that nobody comes up, or may come up, with the idea of subordinating it to an instance higher than the audience. In his movies, Chaplin appeals to the most international and revolutionary emotion of the masses: the laughter. «Admittedly», says Soupault, «Chaplin just makes you laugh. But aside from the fact that this is the hardest thing to do, it is socially also the most important». (Benjamin [2011]: 172; Benjamin [1927-1930]: 224 [tm]; see Soupault [1928]: 402)

CHAPLIN AGAINST HITLER

Amongst the successive versions and variants of *Das Kunstwerk*, Benjamin has left some other reflections on Chaplin. The most extensive, on which Desideri has drawn attention, is found in the first version of the essay (see Desideri [2012]: LXI). It points out that the characteristic «continuity» of mass industrial production finds its correlate in the filmband, which technically consists in an assembly line of «discontinued images» (Benjamin [2012]: 38). If Chaplin's movies have been more successful than any others, it is because they take advantage of this process: «Chaplin's *gestus* is not properly that of a theater actor. [...] His singular meaning consists in the fact that he assembles human gestures – the corporal as well the spiritual attitude – according to film. This is the novelty in Chaplin gestuality: it disintegrates the human expressive movement in a sequence of tiny innervations. Every of his single movements are made up of a series of chopped particles of movement» (ibid.). Thus, in the way he walks, in the way he moves his cane or pulls up his hat, one can see «always the same fractional succession of minimum movements that elevates the film law of the sequence of images to the law of human motricity» (ibid.).

The remaining comments form part of the texts grouped in the critical edition of the essay as *Manuscripts and notes for continuation*. In one of them, Benjamin appeals again to Soupault to support the idea that Chaplin «interprets himself allegorically» (Benjamin [2012]: 259). In this case the explicit source is the preface of *Charlot* (1931), in which Soupault reproduces one of the statements Chaplin made about the character of the Tramp to the French journal "L'Intransigeant": «The cane represented his dignity, the moustache was his pride and the ankle boots expressed the tediousness of the worries from down here» (Soupault [1931]: II; Pattison-Knight [1931]: 1 and 3). Another short quotation comes from the page 212 of the first edition of *Film als Kunst* by Arnheim: «The special feature of Chaplin's character [...] which shows the dispossessed from the perspective of the property owners. The cheeky melon hat, the smoking jacket, the dandyish swagger stick and the moustache are: the poverty as lack of wealth» (Benjamin [2012]: 263-264; Arnheim [1932]: 178). Immediately below, Benjamin transcribes a statement from Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach's *Histoire du cinema* (1935): «The most certain aspect of Charlot [...] a sort of somewhat equivocal femininity, born of humiliation» (Benjamin [2012]: 264; Bardèche and Brasillach [1935]: 132).

All these last remarks are thematically related to a fragment of Benjamin, dated August 1934 in Svendborg, during his visit to Bertolt Brecht, which traces an astonishing contrast between the attributes of Chaplin and Hitler:

Hitler's diminished masculinity –
 to be compared with the feminine cast of the dispossessed as portrayed by Chaplin
So much luster surrounding so much shabbiness
Hitler's following
 to be compared with Chaplin's public
Chaplin – the ploughshare that cuts through the masses; the laughter loosens up
 the masses
 the ground of the Third Reich was stamped down hard and firm, and no more
 grass grows there
Ban on marionettes in Italy, of Chaplin movies in the Third Reich –

every marionette can make Mussolini's chin and every inch of Chaplin's can make
 the Führer
The poor devil wants to be taken seriously, and instantly must call upon all
 hell
Chaplin's docility is in front of everyone; Hitler's only in front of his clients
Chaplin shows up the comic of Hitler's earnest; when he acts the fine man,
 then we know how things stand with the Führer
Chaplin has become the greatest comedian because he has incorporated into
 himself the deepest fears of his contemporaries.
Hitler's fashion prototype is not that of the military but of the better gentleman
 (der bessere Herr); the feudal emblems of lordship *are out of date*; there
 remained only men's fashion. *Chaplin, too,* looks to *male's fashion. He*
 does this in order to take the master caste at its word. His little cane
 is the rod around which the parasite creeps *(the vagabond is no less*
 a parasite than the gent) and his bowler hat, which no longer sits so
 securely on his head, betrays the fact that the rule of the bourgeoisie is tottering
It would be wrong to interpret the figure of Chaplin in a purely psychological
 light. Rarely do such popular figures fail to carry with them sundry
 properties or emblems that, from without, set the right tone for them.
 In Chaplin's case, this role is played by the accoutrement with the
 cane and the bowler hat.
 "That happens only once, and never comes again".
Hitler did not accept
 the title of president of the Reich; his aim was to impress upon the
 people the uniqueness [*Einmaligkeit*] of his appearance. This *uniqueness*
 works in favor of his magically transferred prestige.
(Benjamin [1892-1940] VI: 103-104; Benjamin [1931-1934]: 792-793 [tm])

The comparison between Hitler and Chaplin may be associated in turn with an important paragraph of the second version of *Das Kunstwerk*, reduced to a footnote in the third version. Benjamin expresses here that politics, as well cinema actors, have experimented a deep transformation as a consequence of their «exhibition» in front of the machines: «*The crisis of the democracies can be understood as a crisis in the exhibition conditions* (Austellungsbedingungen) *of the political man*» (Benjamin [2012]: 75, 122 n.; Benjamin [1935-1938]: 128 n. 23 [tm]). Liberal democracies participate in an auratic regime, exhibiting the politician, in their own person, before the other representatives: «The parliament is his public» (ibid.). With the development of mass media, which allow orators to be listened to in the radio by an unlimited number of listeners, their voice be registered gramophonically and their image be reproduced in the news projected in cinemas, being exhibited in front of the microphone and the camera is the predominant tendency in the way of doing politics: «Parliaments become depopulate at the same time as theaters» (ibid.). The qualified performance of the professional cinema actor applies equally to the politician: «It tends towards the exhibition of testable, even supervisible performances under certain social conditions, just as sports first has already promoted them under certain natural conditions» (Benjamin [2012]: 76, 122 n.; Benjamin [1935-1938]: 128 n. 23 [tm]). Thus, the production techniques start up in the age of capitalism a sort of Darwinian process of selection before the apparatuses, «from which the champion, the star, and the dictator emerge as victors» (ibid.).

It is certainly surprising that, six years before Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, Benjamin opposes the figure of the *Führer* and the character of the Tramp. The first statement, that agrees with Bardèche's and Brasillach's comment on the «equivocal feminity» of Charlot, allows to establish an association with Curzio Malaparte's portrait of Hitler in his *Tecnica del colpo di Stato* (1931), an essay which had originally appeared in Paris in 1931 and was quite discussed at that time amongst the French leftwing intellectuals. Emma-

nuel Berl, an author closely followed by Benjamin, wrote a bibliographic review about this text for the magazine "Europe" (Berl [1931]: 585-588). Echoing the «singular judgment» of a certain Russian revolutionary, Malaparte argued that Hitler's spirit was in fact «profoundly feminine: his mind, his ambitions, even his will» were not «in the least virile» (Malaparte [2014]: 200; Malaparte [1932]: 238]. According to the Italian writer, «something confused, equivocal, something morbidly sexual», was inherent in «Hitler's opportunist tactics»:

In the history of nations, at moments of great misfortune, after wars, invasions, or famines, there is always one man who rises above the masses and enforces his will, his ambition and his bitterness; who «wreaks a woman-like revenge» upon the whole people, for all the freedom, power and happiness that has been lost. In the history of European countries it is Germany's turn now: Hitler is the dictator, the «woman» Germany deserves. The feminine side of him explains Hitler's success, his domination of the crowd and the enthusiasm he rouses in the youth of Germany. (Malaparte [2014]: 201-202; Malaparte [1932]: 239)

On the other hand, Benjamin seems to approximate «Hitler's fashion prototype» to the character of Hugo Möbius in Walter Hasenclever's *Ein besserer Herr* (1926), a hugely successful comedy of the New Objectivity (see Spreizer [1999]: 120-125)[11]. Möbius is an astute middle-aged swindler who sees in Lia Compass, the daughter of a wealthy industrialist, the opportunity to rise socially. He runs efficiently a marriage agency and boast of dealing «with emotions» and having converted «the need of love into a technical formula» (Hasenclever [1926]: 71). In his first encounter with Lia, Möbius tries to impress her by acting the man of distinction who has just returned from Africa, but he ends falling in love with the young

girl and revealing his true profession. The final scene of the play is very significant in relation to Benjamin's remark upon «Hitler's docility in front of his clients». Möbius is accepted by Herr Compass as his son-in-law under the condition that he closes his agency and joins the family company. «You are the only one who measures up to me», says the captain of industry, extending his hand. «The country needs such strong men. Hail and victory!». The parvenu exclaims: «Long live business!» (ibid., 106)

In the closing paragraph, Benjamin stated in quotation marks a verse of a song, played by Lilian Harvey in Eric Charrel's musical comedy film *Der Kongreß tanzt* (1931), to satirize the reasons that Hitler employed, at the beginning of August 1934, immediately after Paul von Hindenburg's death, to justify the unification in the figure of the *Führer*, of the president's and chancellors' charges through the Laws of the German Empire (see Koepnick [1999]: 105; Benjamin [1892-1940], VI: 691). Lastly, when Benjamin says that Hitler did not accept the title of president in order to increase «his magically transplanted prestige» by reinforcing the «uniqueness of his appearance» before the masses, he seems to echoe distantly the reflections that, in *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft* (1924), Helmuth Plessner dedicated to «the force of the nimbus», incorporating a concept closely related to that of the de aura in the fields of philosophic anthropology and social philosophy (Plessner [1980-1985], 5: 79-94; Plessner [1999]: 129-147).

It's hard to believe Benjamin was not acquainted with this book in which Plessner criticized the ideal of a hierarchic society and the cult of the leader promoted by Gustav Wynecken, founder of the *Jugendbewegung,* to which Benjamin had belonged years prior to the Great War. To explain the nature of what he called *nimbus*, Plessner said that, in modern societies, «the unassailability of the individual is purchased with a representational meaning», which places distance from the others and «as compensatory form, counteracts a devaluing of the person in his appearance» (Plessner [1980-1985]: 84; Plessner [1999]: 135). The nimbus is «the simple respect before the unreal-

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[11] A German film version of *Ein besserer Herr* – premiered in English as *A Better Master* – was made by Gustav Ucicky in 1928. After World War II, the play was performed in England and the United States under two different titles: *Man of Distinction* (1957) and *The Magnificent Hugo* (1961).

ity that presents itself in a certain form and function» (ibid.). All the social prestige of the individual depends on it: «The more inaccessible a position is, the greater attention and honor it will be accorded» (Plessner [1980-1985]: 84; Plessner [1999]: 136). Thus, in replacement of the «original nimbus», vulnerable and destructible, of all human beings, «an indestructible nimbus steps through the unrealization of the individual, one that solves the riddle to make a person maximally visible and secret at the same time» (Plessner [1980-1985]: 84-85; Plessner [1999], 136 [tm]). The «natural magic» in which a person appears as a mystery that awakens both seduction and rejection, fascination and reserve, gives way to the «artificial magic of the indestructible», which resolves the antinomy by transforming real personality into «mask and face» (Plessner [1980-1985]: 85; Plessner [1999]: 136).

Whether or not it is implicitly present in the elaboration of this critical fragment on Chaplin and Hitler, Plessner's theory of nimbus sheds some light on the approximation that Benjamin establishes in *Das Kunstwerk* between the cult of the movie star and the cult of the *Führer* fostered by the Nazi propaganda art. Hitler's «magically transferred prestige» is analogous to that «magic of the *personality*», with which the film industry «responds to the shriveling of the aura» (Benjamin [2012]: 32, 184, 231; Benjamin [1935-1938]: 113; Benjamin [1938-1940]: 261). It can be said that the artificial building of the personality, both of the movie star and of the *Führer,* seeks to preserve that magic «which has long been no more than the putrid magic of its own commodity character» (ibid.). Chaplin, the hero of Benjamin's materialistic theory of art, is the revolutionary opponent of Hitler in the battlefield of images in the age of their technical reproductibility. He has been banned in Germany, because he is a threat. He undresses Hitler's weakness behind his virile appearance and reduces to hilarity his aspirational emblems and bombastic gestures, revealing him as a mere puppet of capitalists.

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A proposito di realtà percettive artificiali

Andrea Togni

Abstract. While shaping and defending a criterion to individuate the sensory modalities, philosophers have to deal with groups of perceptual states that don't fit into the catalogue of the senses comfortably. I call these groups «grey areas». In this paper, I present the «artificial grey area», which is about perceptions obtained through artificial devices that replace or augment one's sensory abilities. More precisely, the spotlight is on the results that the experiential criterion, the experiential-ontological criterion and the subtractive criterion provide when artificially-assisted perceptions fall under their scope. The main theses of the paper are that each sensory device allows users to access a peculiar sensory world, and that each of these worlds should be associated with a peculiar, independent sensory modality.

Keywords. Individuation of the senses, artificial grey area, sensory substitution devices, experiential-ontological criterion, subtractive criterion.

1. INTRODUZIONE

Il dibattito sull'individuazione dei sensi si compone di una domanda metafisico-definitoria, che indaga che cos'è una modalità sensoriale, e di una domanda classificatoria, che indaga in che modo è possibile distinguere tra loro i sensi (Togni [2018]). Al fine di rispondere a queste domande, sono stati sviluppati dai filosofi una serie di criteri, tra cui il criterio fisiologico, il criterio fisico, il criterio oggettuale, il criterio comportamentale, il criterio del senso comune, gli approcci pluralisti e il criterio esperienziale.

In base a quest'ultimo, le modalità sensoriali sono tipi di stato fenomenologico-esperienziale, e ognuna di esse si distingue dalle altre in virtù del proprio peculiare carattere fenomenico-qualitativo. In Togni (2019), ho articolato e difeso due varianti del criterio esperienziale, il criterio esperienziale-ontologico e il criterio sottrattivo. Essi lavorano in modo complementare, e sono così definiti: 1) *Criterio esperienziale-ontologico* — I sensi dovrebbero venire studiati nel contesto dell'ontologia. Ogni modalità sensoriale è associata a un peculiare tipo di realtà percettiva; 2) *Criterio sottrattivo* — Ogni modalità sensoriale si caratterizza per la possibilità che avvengano

due tipi di «spegnimento»: A) *Spegnimento totale* — È possibile che le esperienze in una modalità sensoriale siano precluse a un percipiente. Questo si verifica nel caso egli nasca deprivato di un senso posseduto dai conspecifici, nel caso egli lo perda nel corso della vita, nel caso di modalità sensoriali possedute esclusivamente da altre specie e nel caso di modalità sensoriali meramente possibili; B) *Spegnimento temporaneo* — Un percipiente esperisce spesso l'alternanza tra l'accensione e lo spegnimento dei propri stati percettivi. Per esempio, la vista si caratterizza per le accensioni e gli spegnimenti che avvengono quando si aprono e chiudono gli occhi, quando si entra e si esce da una stanza buia, e via di seguito. Ogni modalità sensoriale è caratterizzata da regolarità esperienziali connesse alle diverse tipologie di spegnimenti temporanei.

In questo articolo, mi concentro su come il criterio esperienziale, il criterio esperienziale-ontologico e il criterio sottrattivo possono essere applicati a ciò che chiamo «zona grigia artificiale»[1]. Le zone grigie (Togni [2018]) circoscrivono gruppi di casi problematici con cui i difensori dei criteri atti a tassonomizzare le modalità sensoriali si devono confrontare. All'interno della zona grigia artificiale rientrano le percezioni ottenute per mezzo di strumenti costruiti dall'uomo al fine di modificare o trasformare il modo naturale di percepire dell'utente. La mediazione dello strumento sensoriale rende complesso individuare la modalità sensoriale di appartenenza delle percezioni tramite esso ottenute; in genere, queste vengono classificate o sotto la modalità sensoriale sostituente, o sotto la modalità sensoriale sostituita, o sotto un nuovo senso.

In quanto segue, prima presenterò la zona grigia artificiale, poi studierò come le tre varianti citate del criterio esperienziale permettono di classificare le percezioni artificialmente assistite nel catalogo dei sensi. L'indagine ha lo scopo di mostrare che la combinazione tra il criterio esperienziale-ontologico e il criterio sottrattivo

consente di tassonomizzare le realtà percettive artificiali in modo più articolato e fine rispetto al criterio esperienziale tradizionalmente inteso; inoltre, verrà difesa l'idea per cui l'utilizzo di uno strumento sensoriale apre agli utenti l'accesso a un mondo percettivo peculiare, e non si limita a integrare o modificare le esperienze nelle modalità sensoriali classiche.

2. LA ZONA GRIGIA ARTIFICIALE

Lo sviluppo tecnologico ha permesso di mettere a punto una serie di strumenti sensoriali atti a compensare, sostituire, incrementare le capacità percettive degli utenti. Wright e Ward (manuscript: 9-10) distinguono quattro tipi di strumenti sensoriali: 1) Le protesi sensoriali consentono di ripristinare una funzionalità sensoriale danneggiata, di correggere un deficit percettivo. Occhiali e impianti cocleari ne sono un esempio; 2) Gli strumenti di sostituzione intramodale manipolano l'informazione percettiva pur mantenendone la modalità sensoriale. Per esempio, i malati di lebbra che perdono sensibilità agli arti possono indossare un guanto i cui recettori sono accoppiati con dei vibratori posti sulla fronte o su un'area non danneggiata: gli utenti, dopo sufficiente allenamento, riferiscono le sensazioni fornite dai vibratori alle dita della mano (Bach-y-Rita, Kercel [2003]: 541); 3) Gli strumenti di sostituzione sensoriale intermodale rendono disponibili le informazioni normalmente processate da una modalità sensoriale a un'altra modalità sensoriale. Questo gruppo è quello maggiormente approfondito nella letteratura sull'individuazione dei sensi; 4) È possibile sfruttare il principio alla base dei dispositivi di sostituzione sensoriale per rendere disponibili informazioni normalmente non percepibili, come, per esempio, quelle concernenti il campo magnetico terrestre. Gli strumenti sensoriali appartenenti alle quattro categorie citate possono essere suddivisi tra semplici e complessi: i secondi, ma non i primi, implementano un algoritmo atto a trasformare l'informazione ricevuta dal dispositivo prima di trasmetterla al senziente (Wright, Ward [manu-

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[1] Per ragioni di spazio, non discuto, in questa sede, l'applicazione dei criteri alternativi alle tre varianti esperienziali citate alla zona grigia artificiale.

script]: 10).

In questa sede, ci si concentrerà sul terzo e sul quarto gruppo di strumenti sensoriali. Essi permettono di porsi la domanda su quale sia la modalità sensoriale in cui andrebbero catalogate le percezioni da loro mediate.

Tra gli strumenti sensoriali, quelli maggiormente studiati dai filosofi interessati al dibattito sui criteri per definire e distinguere i sensi sono i dispositivi di sostituzione sensoriale (DSS), i quali sono progettati per convertire le informazioni normalmente elaborate da una modalità sensoriale persa (solitamente, la vista) in informazioni processabili mediante un canale sensoriale non danneggiato (solitamente, quello uditivo o quello tattile)[2]. Oltre a questa definizione operazionale, è possibile dare dei DSS una definizione funzionale, tale per cui essi sono strumenti atti ad assistere pazienti impossibilitati a svolgere determinati compiti a causa della perdita o del grave danneggiamento di un senso (Visell [2009]: 39, 48; Wright, Ward [manuscript]: 5)[3]. Al giorno d'oggi, il progresso tecnologico rende possibile l'utilizzo dei DSS anche per *aumentare* o *migliorare* le capacità sensoriali degli utenti in una varietà di domini, come, per esempio, quello aerospaziale, quello della realtà virtuale, quello della chirurgia di precisione e quello militare (Bach-y-Rita, Tyler, Kaczmarek [2003]).

Molti DSS sono caratterizzati dalla presenza di un accoppiatore elettronico: «A sensory substitution system can be decomposed into three components. A sensor permits the conversion of a certain form of energy (light, sound, mechanical, or other) into signals that can be interpreted by an (electronic) coupling system which is then responsible for the coordinated activation of a stimulator» (Lenay et al. [2003]). Tali dispositivi, grazie all'interfaccia uomo-macchina, consentono di trasformare un'informazione ambientale non percepibile mediante un canale sensoriale in uno stimolo prossimale processabile da un canale sensoriale intatto.

Al fine di introdurre la discussione su ciò che i sostenitori dei criteri esperienziale, esperienziale-ontologico e sottrattivo hanno da dire sulla zona grigia artificiale, viene ora brevemente esposto il funzionamento di quattro strumenti sensoriali: il Tactile-Visual Substitution System (TVSS), The vOICe, Feel Space e Sonic Guide.

Il TVSS[4], sviluppato da Bach-y-Rita a partire dagli anni Sessanta del secolo scorso, nonché primo esempio di DSS con interfaccia uomo-macchina, viene utilizzato per fornire ai ciechi informazioni visive mediante stimoli tattili. Le immagini raccolte da una videocamera, normalmente montata sulla testa o tenuta in mano, sono tradotte dal TVSS in modo tale che una matrice di vibratori applicata sulla pelle o sulla lingua fornisca stimoli elettrotattili o vibrotattili in base a un algoritmo di conversione prefissato. L'aspetto principale da tenere in considerazione è che l'utente, dopo un sufficiente allenamento, non percepisce più gli stimoli sulla pelle, ma gli oggetti a distanza registrati dalla videocamera, in modo paragonabile a quanto avviene con le percezioni spaziali visive. Una

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[2] In Ward, Wright (2014: 26) si sostiene che studiare i dispositivi di sostituzione sensoriale significa studiare la covarianza sistematica tra la modalità sensoriale sostituita e la modalità sensoriale sostituente. In Farina (2013: 640) si legge che l'intervento tecnologico in questione ha come target la relazione tra gli stimoli prossimali forniti dal dispositivo al percipiente e gli stimoli distali recepiti e trasformati dal dispositivo. Tuttavia, come si vedrà, è possibile sostenere che le percezioni ottenute per mezzo dei DSS sono di nuova e irriducibile fattura.

[3] I processi riabilitativi in questione non riguardano solo gli aspetti strettamente percettivo-sensoriali. Per esempio, il Braille e il linguaggio dei segni, che da alcuni, ma non da tutti, sono considerati DSS, permettono di intervenire sulle abilità comunicative e simboliche degli utenti. Il punto mostra quanto sia difficile disegnare confini precisi tra le sfere percettive e le sfere non percettive della vita mentale.

[4] Per un approfondimento, si rimanda il lettore alla vasta letteratura prodotta da Bach-y-Rita e colleghi. Si veda anche il lavoro di Amedi (https://www.brainvisionrehab.com/). Mentre il TVSS non è in grado di fornire informazioni sui colori, il dispositivo di cui è dotato Neil Harbisson ha la funzione specifica di tradurre i colori in suoni (https://www.ted.com/talks/neil_harbisson_i_listen_to_color). Il tema della relazione tra gli aspetti spaziali visivi e i colori è, ovviamente, centrale per gli autori interessati all'individuazione dei sensi e alla zona grigia artificiale.

questione interessante concerne dunque la modalità sensoriale cui le percezioni ottenute tramite il TVSS andrebbero, in ultima istanza, riferite: essa potrebbe essere il tatto (coinvolto a livello di stimoli prossimali), la vista (coinvolta a livello di stimoli distali), la percezione amodale dello spazio, o una categoria di nuova fattura.

The vOICe è un sistema di sostituzione sensoriale che, invece di convertire le immagini catturate da una videocamera in vibrazioni, le traduce in suoni da recapitare all'utente tramite un paio di cuffie (Ward, Meijer [2010]). Ogni secondo, il dispositivo produce un *soundscape* a partire dall'immagine catturata dalla videocamera: la dimensione verticale della scena visiva viene mappata con la frequenza tonale dei suoni prodotti dal dispositivo; la dimensione orizzontale viene mappata in termini temporali e in modo da sfruttare gli indizi percettivi connessi alla disparità biaurale; la luminosità della scena visiva viene mappata in termini di volume sonoro[5]. The vOICe, come il TVSS, permette agli utenti di discriminare oggetti a distanza, di localizzarli, di produrre giudizi percettivi di stampo tipicamente visivo. Anche in questo caso, è interessante chiedersi quale sia la modalità sensoriale cui riferire le percezioni ottenute tramite il dispositivo.

Feel Space (Nagel et al. [2005]) è costituito da una cintura che vibra in relazione alla direzione del polo magnetico terrestre posto a nord: se questo è alla destra dell'utente, la cintura vibra a destra; se è alla sua sinistra, la cintura vibra a sinistra. Esiste una versione del DSS che può essere connessa in modo wireless a un cellulare dotato di app come Google Maps e che può fungere da navigatore. Feel Space permette ai soggetti di percepire informazioni relative al campo magnetico terrestre che altrimenti non sarebbero disponibili alla specie umana. Il risultato è che gli utenti possono esperire il mondo come più ordinato ed esteso, e possono migliorare le proprie capacità di orientamento. L'utilizzo di Feel Space comporta un

mutamento nell'esperienza percettiva, e, forse, la comparsa di una nuova modalità sensoriale, anche se gli sviluppatori sostengono che sarebbe preferibile caratterizzare l'esperienza ottenuta come una modificazione della percezione amodale dello spazio.

Sonic Guide (Lopes [2000]: 46-49) è un sistema che permette agli utenti di ecolocalizzare gli oggetti esterni. Esso emette ultrasuoni, calcola il tempo di ritorno dell'eco, e produce suoni concernenti tale eco udibili dall'utente. Il soggetto ottiene così informazioni circa le caratteristiche spaziali dell'ambiente circostante. Sonic Guide è d'interesse per lo studio della percezione dello spazio; si potrebbe anche indagare se esso permette o meno di entrare in possesso di una nuova modalità sensoriale, quella dell'ecolocalizzazione.

Gli strumenti sensoriali e i DSS propongono sfide impegnative per i filosofi dediti alla ricerca dei criteri per discriminare le modalità sensoriali. Anzitutto, è opportuno chiedersi sotto quale modalità sensoriale cadano le percezioni ottenute tramite tali dispositivi. I candidati *prima facie* più naturali sono la modalità sensoriale sostituita, la modalità sensoriale sostituente e una nuova modalità sensoriale irriducibile alle prime due. Tuttavia, porsi acriticamente questo interrogativo significa sposare ciò che Deroy e Auvray (2015) chiamano «assunzione percettiva», secondo cui tra le percezioni ottenute tramite i dispositivi sensoriali e i sensi classici è tracciabile un parallelismo molto stretto. Chi rigetta l'assunzione percettiva (invero, una stretta minoranza) sottolinea il ruolo degli aspetti comportamentali e cognitivi coinvolti nell'uso degli strumenti sensoriali a discapito del ruolo degli aspetti sensoriali e percettivi. Deroy e Auvray (2015: 11) si spingono ad affermare che gli studi sugli strumenti sensoriali «will be of no relevance in the debates regarding the definition or individuation of the senses and will not constitute canonical examples of what it is to perceive in a certain sensory modality». Questa tesi è troppo ardita. Primo, il fatto che le percezioni ottenute tramite gli strumenti sensoriali non siano canoniche non significa che non siano rilevanti per il dibattito sulla tassonomizzazione dei sensi; al contrario, la

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[5] La PSVA (Prosthesis for Substitution of Vision by Audition) (Capelle, Trullemans, Arno, Veraart [1998]) e The Vibe sono altri DSS volti a sostituire la vista con l'udito.

loro peculiarità permette di portare alla luce aspetti di quel dibattito che rimangono normalmente nascosti. Secondo, se anche il coinvolgimento delle sfere cognitive (o, in generale, non strettamente percettive) risultasse necessario per spiegare cosa accade quando si utilizzano gli strumenti sensoriali, non seguirebbe l'inutilità dello studio della zona grigia artificiale per l'individuazione dei sensi, a meno che non si voglia sostenere che le modalità sensoriali e le altre sfere della vita mentale siano segregate da confini impermeabili. Come vedremo, i difensori del criterio esperienziale-ontologico non hanno bisogno di affermare che ogni esperienza artificialmente assistita è caratterizzata da un *quale* atomico, semplice, puramente sensoriale: le realtà percettive artificiali sono complesse, e si compongono di aspetti non solo percettivi, ma anche, tra gli altri, affettivi e cognitivi.

Molte questioni intersecano il tema del rapporto tra zona grigia artificiale e discriminazione dei sensi (Connolly et al. [2013]), tra cui quella relativa al tipo di apprendimento che è possibile ottenere tramite gli strumenti sensoriali, quella concernente l'interazione tra i dispositivi artificiali, le strutture neurofisiologiche degli utenti e le fenomenologie percettive, quella riguardante il ruolo dei qualia affettivi nel momento in cui si utilizzano i dispositivi sensoriali, quella relativa ai limiti tecnologici loro connaturati, e altre ancora[6]. Per ragioni di spazio, nelle pagine a venire l'attenzione sarà centrata su quanto il criterio esperienziale, il criterio esperienziale-ontologico e il criterio sottrattivo hanno da dire sulle percezioni ottenute per mezzo degli strumenti sensoriali.

2.1 La zona grigia artificiale e il criterio esperienziale

Molti filosofi tendono a impostare il dibattito sulla zona grigia artificiale e sui DSS a partire dalla dicotomia tra modalità sensoriale sostituita e modalità sensoriale sostituente: o le percezioni ottenute tramite i DSS cadono sotto la prima, o cadono sotto la seconda. Tuttavia, non è necessario sposare questa impostazione. I sostenitori del criterio esperienziale hanno a disposizione, oltre alle due opzioni citate, la possibilità di dichiarare che le percezioni in questione appartengono a una nuova modalità sensoriale, o che comunque non sono catturabili mediante il solo riferimento al senso sostituito e a quello sostituente.

I difensori del criterio esperienziale possono sfruttare a proprio vantaggio la difficoltà di immaginare in prima persona cosa significa percepire tramite uno strumento sensoriale. Nel caso non si sia mai usato, per esempio, Sonic Guide, la conoscenza dei dettagli del suo funzionamento, del tipo di informazioni processate, del tipo di stimoli ricevuti, e via di seguito, non permette di catturare gli aspetti qualitativi delle percezioni ottenibili per suo mezzo. Nonostante la discussione sulla zona grigia artificiale sia spesso impostata in modo da minimizzare, per quanto possibile, i riferimenti ai caratteri fenomenici delle esperienze in prima persona, evitare del tutto l'argomento non è possibile né desiderabile. Lopes (2000: 448-449), trattando di Sonic Guide, sottolinea come il carattere fenomenico delle esperienze da esso assistite non sia necessariamente lo stesso di quello delle esperienze visive o uditive aventi il medesimo contenuto. Anche se fosse possibile spiegare in termini fisico-fisiologici la genesi causale del lato qualitativo delle esperienze artificialmente assistite, anche se fosse possibile afferrare completamente le leggi sensorimotorie connesse all'uso dei dispositivi sensoriali, la realtà fenomenologica delle percezioni ricadenti sotto la zona grigia artificiale può essere colta solo in prima persona[7].

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[6] Sia la letteratura filosofica, sia la letteratura empirica sono ricche di spunti interessanti sulle percezioni artificialmente assistite. Oltre agli articoli filosofici citati nel corso del presente articolo, si segnalano Myin, O'Regan (2001), Keeley (2002), Block (2003), Hurley, Noë (2003), Prinz (2006), Matthen (2007), Kiverstein, Farina, Clark (2015). Oltre agli articoli di matrice empirica citati nel corso del presente articolo, si segnalano de Volder, et al. (1999), Arno et al. (2001), Kupers, Ptito (2004), Pascual-Leone et al. (2005), Ptito et al. (2005), Poirier, de Volder, Scheiber (2007), Proulx (2010), Haigh et al. (2013).

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[7] Le difficoltà implicate dall'affidarsi esclusivamente ai report in prima persona possono essere stemperate integrando metodologie che studiano la coscienza in terza persona e intersoggettivamente, come l'eterofenomenolo-

I report di soggetti facenti uso di DSS non sono frequenti in letteratura. Inoltre, questi report sono raccolti in situazioni molto diverse tra loro. Dato che, per esempio, un report di un soggetto normopercipiente che usa per la prima volta un DSS non è direttamente paragonabile al report di un utente esperto e deprivato di una modalità sensoriale, è opportuno essere prudenti nel trarre da essi conclusioni eccessivamente forti.

Interessanti sono le risposte fornite dai normovedenti studiati da Auvray, Hanneton e O'Regan (2007) durante il processo di apprendimento dell'utilizzo della PSVA, un dispositivo di sostituzione visuouditivo. Nei compiti di localizzazione effettuati con la PSVA, tre soggetti descrivono le loro esperienze come visive, due come simili a quelle che si avrebbero con un sonar, uno come visive e tattili; nei compiti di riconoscimento e discriminazione, tre soggetti descrivono le loro esperienze come uditive, uno come tattili, uno come visive, uno come visive e tattili. Tale variabilità, per quanto prevista dai sostenitori del criterio esperienziale, rende difficile operare una classificazione delle percezioni artificialmente assistite che non sia idiosincratica.

Ward e Meijer (2010) riportano i casi di CC e PF, i quali, dopo aver perso la vista in età adulta, hanno utilizzato The vOICe per molti anni raggiungendo un livello di competenza molto elevato. Per esempio, nonostante The vOICe fornisca un *soundscape* al secondo, essi, gradualmente, hanno imparato a esperire alcuni movimenti come fossero continui, senza interruzioni temporali. Inoltre, PF riesce a sfruttare la memoria delle esperienze visive passate per assegnare colori agli oggetti, nonostante The vOICe non codifichi nessuna informazione a riguardo. Per CC, usare il dispositivo significa possedere un nuovo paio di occhi, i quali forniscono informazioni più dettagliate rispetto al paio severamente danneggiato. PF sostiene che il DSS gli fornisce un particolare tipo di vista, la «The vOICe sight» (Ward, Meijer [2010]: 498). Queste ultime due dichiarazioni sono almeno in parte dovute al fatto che essi possono paragonare le percezioni artificialmente assistite con quelle visive avute in passato. Nondimeno, tali affermazioni sono ambigue: si potrebbe ricavarne che i due incorrono per mezzo di The vOICe in esperienze qualitativamente visive, o che esso innesca un nuovo tipo di esperienze, simili ma non identiche a quelle visive. Come che stiano le cose, i difensori del criterio esperienziale possono argomentare in favore di entrambe le interpretazioni.

Sarebbe interessante comparare i report di ciechi *congeniti* che utilizzano da anni The vOICe con i report di PF e CC: purtroppo, non sono a conoscenza di studi che affrontano la questione. D'altra parte, è dubbio che si possano accostare direttamente questi due tipi di report. Infatti, i ciechi non congeniti, ma non quelli congeniti, possono paragonare le percezioni ottenute tramite il dispositivo con le percezioni visive avute in passato; il significato del termine «vista» è diverso per i due tipi di soggetto. Non c'è dubbio, comunque, che i report di ciechi congeniti esperti nell'uso di un DSS fornirebbero spunti molto interessanti per il dibattito sull'individuazione dei sensi, sul criterio esperienziale e sulla zona grigia artificiale.

Il criterio sotto esame è ben posizionato per rendere conto della peculiarità delle esperienze ottenute per mezzo di strumenti che forniscono informazioni percettive normalmente non a disposizione della specie umana. Per esempio, è possibile inserire sotto la pelle delle dita dei piccoli magneti, i quali, quando stimolati, si muovono leggermente andando ad attivare i meccanorecettori normalmente responsabili delle sensazioni tattili (Wright, Ward [manuscript]: 13-14). Uno degli utenti sostiene che questo dispositivo dischiude un nuovo mondo esperienziale: ogni oggetto è percepito come circondato dal proprio peculiare campo magnetico, come dotato della propria forza e della propria struttura. Qualcosa di simile avviene con Feel Space, un dispositivo costituito

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gia di Dennett (2003) e la fenomenologia sperimentale di Bozzi (2003). Il dibattito sull'affidabilità delle metodologie in prima e in terza persona trascende i confini del dibattito sull'individuazione dei sensi: il punto mostra come quest'ultimo non possa essere trattato in isolamento dalle più ampie tematiche che attraversano la filosofia della percezione.

da una cintura che vibra in accordo con la direzione del polo nord magnetico (Nagel et al. [2005]). In questi casi, i difensori del criterio sotto esame possono appoggiarsi alle esperienze degli utenti per argomentare in favore dell'esistenza di nuove modalità sensoriali. In alternativa, si potrebbe sostenere che gli impianti magnetici sottopelle e Feel Space ampliano il raggio d'azione del tatto. Tuttavia, il fatto che alcuni utenti dichiarino, sulla base delle proprie esperienze, che il mondo appare strutturato differentemente, in un modo mai sperimentato in precedenza, gioca a favore della prima interpretazione.,Che sia quantomeno possibile utilizzare gli strumenti sensoriali per creare nuove esperienze e nuove realtà è dimostrato dagli sviluppi tecnologici concernenti le realtà virtuali e aumentate. Wright e Ward (manuscript: 15) affermano che «since a simulated world need not follow the physical laws of nature, it is possible to use virtual sensory augmentation to create entirely novel sensory modalities, devoid of any connection with natural phenomena». D'altra parte, non è necessario trascendere il mondo fisico per scovare nuove modalità sensoriali. Lenay et al. (2003: 9) sostengono che è inappropriato etichettare dispositivi come il TVSS con il termine «dispositivi di sostituzione sensoriale»: «The term "perceptual supplementation" is more appropriate than "sensory substitution". This new term implies that these devices do not exactly remedy a deficit, but rather that they introduce perceptual modalities that are quite original». Un punto non troppo dissimile è espresso da Auvray e Myin (2009: 1053) nel momento in cui interpretano i DSS come *mind-enhancing tools* completamente integrabili nel proprio corpo[8].

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8 La discussione sui DSS come *mind-enhancing tools* apre il problema delle relazioni tra le proprietà fenomeniche delle esperienze sensoriali artificialmente assistite e le proprietà fenomeniche legate alle sfere mentali non strettamente percettive. Nella letteratura sul criterio esperienziale il tema non viene problematizzato a sufficienza. Come vedremo, il criterio esperienziale-ontologico consente di abbandonare la nozione di "*quale* sensoriale semplice" e di descrivere la fenomenologia delle percezioni artificialmente assistite prendendo in carico anche gli

Una posizione interessate e in bisogno di ulteriori studi e approfondimenti è quella per cui le sostituzioni sensoriali sono concettualizzabili come sinestesie acquisite. A seguito di un danno sensoriale agli organi visivi, le regioni cerebrali uditive, tattili e multisensoriali instaurano nuove connessioni con la corteccia visiva (Ward, Meijer [2010]; Farina [2013]; Ward, Wright [2014]). Quest'ultima viene così resa in grado di processare gli input uditivi o tattili forniti da The vOICe o dal TVSS, nonché, talvolta, di innescare sensazioni qualitativamente visive. Con la pratica, il dispositivo diviene sempre più trasparente e integrato nel corpo dell'utente. Tuttavia, questo non significa che il soggetto perde completamente consapevolezza dello stimolo e delle sensazioni sostituenti: secondo Ward e Wright (2014: 33), l'esperienza in cui gli utenti incorrono è duale, in quanto possiede caratteristiche tipiche della modalità sensoriale sostituente e di quella sostituita. Il fatto che PF e CC ottengano esperienze visive quando, una volta tolto The vOICe, odono suoni simili a quelli da esso forniti, gioca a favore di questa tesi (Ward, Meijer [2013]: 498). Inoltre, le percezioni artificialmente assistite posseggono molte caratteristiche di quelle sinestetiche, tra cui l'occorrere automaticamente, il favorire l'apprendimento percettivo, l'essere costanti nel tempo e l'essere spazialmente estese (Farina [2013]: 649-652). I sostenitori del criterio esperienziale possono semplicemente lasciare ai senzienti l'ultima parola riguardo la categorizzabilità delle *loro* esperienze sotto il cappello della sinestesia, sotto il cappello della modalità sensoriale sostituita, sotto il cappello della modalità sensoriale sostituente o sotto il cappello di una nuova modalità sensoriale. Come si può intuire, se è vero che questa strategia ha il vantaggio di tenere in conto la particolarità e variabilità dei fenomeni percettivi ricadenti nella zona grigia artificiale, è altrettanto vero che ha la controindi-

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aspetti non strettamente percettivi. Certamente, la relazione tra fenomenologie percettive e fenomenologie non percettive costituisce un campo di indagine che non solo i sostenitori delle diverse varianti del criterio esperienziale hanno interesse ad approfondire, ma di rilevanza per la filosofia della percezione in quanto tale.

cazione di rendere volatili le classificazioni delle percezioni artificialmente assistite.

2.2. La zona grigia artificiale e il criterio esperienziale-ontologico

Nella sezione precedente, si è visto come i difensori del criterio esperienziale possano sostenere che, qualsiasi sia l'etichetta sotto la quale si decide di classificare le percezioni artificialmente assistite, essa deve essere applicata sulla base delle esperienze degli utenti. Questa strategia permette di dare adeguato spazio alle peculiarità caratterizzanti mondi sensoriali in cui la maggioranza dei percipienti non incorre. Dunque, i difensori del criterio esperienziale, basandosi sui report dei soggetti, possono tentare sia di ricondurre i caratteri fenomenici associati all'uso di un certo DSS a quelli della modalità sensoriale sostituente, sia di ricondurli a quelli della modalità sensoriale sostituita, sia di studiare eventuali relazioni sinestetiche tra i due, sia di delineare categorie sensoriali autonome per ogni DSS.

Il criterio esperienziale-ontologico (Togni [2019]) è una variante del criterio esperienziale che interpreta le esperienze associate a una modalità sensoriale in termini di «realtà percettive». Il criterio esperienziale-*ontologico* si chiama in questo modo proprio perché le esperienze sensoriali vengono descritte come delle *realtà*. Tali realtà non sono semplici e atomiche come i *qualia*, né sono circoscritte da caratteri fenomenici puri. Piuttosto, i mondi percettivi sono complessi, e possono essere caratterizzati da sfumature non solo percettive, ma anche, per esempio, emotive, cognitive o motivazionali. Le realtà percettive non possono essere pienamente afferrate con strumenti teorici, in quanto sono anzitutto *percettive*. Nondimeno, se ne può dare una definizione ostensiva: per esempio, la realtà visiva è quella realtà con cui abbiamo a che fare ogni volta che abbiamo gli occhi aperti e oggetti colorati si palesano a essi; il profumo del piatto di pasta al ragù che ho appena preparato contribuisce a costituire il mio mondo olfattivo, e si spera che presto lo stesso accada alla realtà gustativa. Inoltre, metodologie in terza persona quali l'eterofenomenologia di Dennett (2003) e la

fenomenologia sperimentale di Bozzi (2003) consentono di non vincolarsi a un approccio esclusivamente introspettivo e di aprire le porte allo studio intersoggettivo delle esperienze sensoriali[9].

Tra le quattro opzioni classificatorie aperte ai difensori del criterio esperienziale in merito alla zona grigia artificiale, la preferibile, anche se non l'unica difendibile, dalla prospettiva esperienziale-ontologica è quella secondo cui l'utilizzo di uno strumento sensoriale consente l'accesso a una realtà percettiva peculiare, irriducibile ai mondi percettivi associati ai sensi tradizionali. Il punto può essere efficacemente difeso se si prendono in esame i dispositivi che forniscono ai soggetti informazioni altrimenti precluse alla specie umana. Per esempio, Feel Space permette di estrarre informazioni dal campo magnetico terrestre e aiuta i soggetti a orientarsi con maggiore facilità. Dal punto di vista del criterio esperienziale-ontologico, l'utilizzo di tale dispositivo consente l'accesso a un mondo percettivo nuovo, per quanto, ovviamente, in costante relazione e interazione con le realtà associate agli altri sensi spaziali. D'altra parte, è plausibile pensare che anche DSS classici come il TVSS e The vOICe forniscano agli utenti mondi percettivi non pienamente riconducibili alla modalità sensoriale sostituente e alla modalità sensoriale sostituita: vedere non è fenomenologicamente lo stesso che percepire tramite il TVSS o The vOICe, non solo a livello della quantità di informazioni elaborate, ma soprattutto a livello qualitativo. Per confermare o smentire questa impostazione è necessario entrare in possesso di descrizioni dettagliate delle realtà percettive esperite da utenti con diversi gradi di competenza nell'uso dei DSS, nonché confrontare i report di utenti congenitamente privi di una modalità sen-

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[9] La questione dell'esprimibilità linguistica delle proprie esperienze sensoriali rimane a tutt'oggi uno dei grandi problemi aperti per i filosofi della percezione. Nonostante sarebbe poco caritatevole chiedere agli autori interessati all'individuazione dei sensi di risolvere tale problema, lo studio delle diverse varianti del criterio esperienziale, della zona grigia artificiale e delle altre zone grigie può fornire indicazioni utili per affrontare il punto da prospettive non comuni.

soriale con quelli di utenti che hanno perso tale senso in età adulta.

I difensori del criterio esperienziale-ontologico dovrebbero resistere alla tentazione tipica degli autori che difendono la variante tradizionale del criterio esperienziale di individuare le percezioni artificialmente assistite per mezzo di qualia semplici e atomici. Nella letteratura sulla definizione e classificazione dei sensi abbondano le obiezioni di stampo metafisico-definitorio contro le teorie atomiche della sensazione. È interesse dei difensori della variante esperienziale-ontologiche lasciare emergere la complessità delle realtà percettive associate all'utilizzo degli strumenti sensoriali. Primo, tali strumenti hanno un impatto non solo su come i soggetti percepiscono, ma anche sulle loro emozioni e sulla loro sfera cognitiva; la discussione proposta in precedenza circa l'assunzione percettiva mostra come sia periglioso il tentativo di tracciare confini netti tra le modalità sensoriali e le altre sfere della vita mentale. Secondo, l'assunzione, spesso fatta propria dai difensori delle versioni tradizionali del criterio esperienziale, secondo cui esistono esperienze pure, ovvero esperienze associabili a una e una sola modalità sensoriale, appare semplicistica e fuorviante alla luce dei recenti dibattiti filosofici ed empirici in materia. Le percezioni artificialmente assistite, proprio in virtù della loro natura peculiare *e* ibrida, non soddisfano i requisiti di purezza spesso avanzati dai difensori del criterio esperienziale classicamente inteso. Terzo, nulla, nella nozione di «realtà percettiva», implica che i mondi sensoriali artificiali *debbano* essere semplici, atomici, perfettamente delimitabili. È interesse dei difensori del criterio esperienziale-ontologico lasciare che siano gli utenti a portare alla luce le sfumature delle realtà sensoriali artificiali e i loro intrecci non solo con le realtà percettive associate al senso sostituente e al senso sostituito, ma anche con la vita mentale nel suo complesso.

2.3. La zona grigia artificiale e il criterio sottrattivo

Discutendo di come il criterio esperienziale-ontologico permette di individuare le percezio-

ni artificialmente assistite, ho sostenuto che ogni DSS dovrebbe venire associato con una peculiare realtà percettiva. Il medesimo risultato può essere ottenuto facendo uso del criterio sottrattivo. In base alla proposta difesa in altra sede (Togni [2019]), il criterio esperienziale-ontologico e il criterio sottrattivo lavorano in maniera complementare: il primo permette di individuare i sensi a partire dalle esperienze e realtà percettive che viviamo ogni secondo della nostra vita, il secondo consente di compilare il catalogo delle modalità sensoriali a partire dagli spegnimenti totali e temporanei di tali esperienze e mondi percettivi. In altri termini, rilevante per i dibattiti sull'individuazione dei sensi, sulla zona grigia artificiale e sulle varianti del criterio esperienziale non è solo cosa accade quando incorriamo in un'esperienza sensoriale, ma anche cosa accade quando *non* vi incorriamo.

La possibilità di spegnere totalmente i mondi percettivi artificiali non è in discussione, in quanto nessun uomo è mai nato dotato di DSS. D'altra parte, lo spegnimento totale delle percezioni artificialmente assistite è ottenibile anche in un modo che non trova paralleli nelle modalità sensoriali classiche. Infatti, mentre è possibile togliersi i DSS e riporli lontano dal proprio corpo, non è possibile fare altrettanto con i sensi di cui siamo naturalmente dotati. Spogliarsi di un dispositivo sensoriale comporta la perdita totale della realtà percettiva a esso associata, ma, a differenza di quanto accade con gli spegnimenti totali classici[10], è possibile tornare a indossare lo strumento sensoriale in un secondo momento e riaccendere il relativo mondo percettivo. Questa peculiarità è ciò che mi ha spinto a definire il primo tipo di spegnimento come «totale» e non come «permanente», nonostante questa seconda dicitura sia complementare al termine che definisce il secondo tipo di spegnimento, ovvero «temporaneo». Infatti, gli spegnimenti ottenibili togliendosi uno strumento sensoriale sono totali ma non permanenti, in quanto le realtà percettive artificiali possono essere recu-

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[10] Per esempio, gli spegnimenti totali della vista e dell'udito implicano, rispettivamente, la cecità e l'essere sordi.

perate vestendo nuovamente lo strumento in questione.

L'applicazione della clausola dello spegnimento temporaneo alla zona grigia artificiale è resa complessa dal fatto che poche persone hanno avuto modo di testare in prima persona i DSS: pertanto, sono disponibili poche informazioni e pochi report circa l'alternanza tra le accensioni e gli spegnimenti delle realtà artificiali. D'altra parte, è possibile operare un parallelo con i mondi percettivi tradizionali. Si consideri il TVSS: lo spegnimento temporaneo della realtà percettiva a esso associata potrebbe avvenire oscurando l'obiettivo della telecamera (spegnimento dell'organo di senso artificiale), entrando in un ambiente privo di stimoli da essa registrabili (spegnimento degli oggetti distali), impedendo alla matrice di vibratori di stimolare la pelle del soggetto (spegnimento degli stimoli prossimali), impedendo l'elaborazione delle informazioni veicolate dalla matrice (spegnimento dei percorsi neurofisiologici), e impedendo all'utente di adoperare attivamente il dispositivo (spegnimento delle contingenze sensorimotorie artificiali). In tutti questi casi, il mondo percettivo associato al TVSS viene temporaneamente spento in modo paragonabile a quanto avviene per le modalità sensoriali classiche. Il fatto che entrambe le condizioni del criterio sottrattivo siano applicabili alle percezioni ottenute per mezzo del TVSS convalida la loro inclusione nel catalogo dei sensi. Inoltre, in base al criterio esperienziale-ontologico il mondo percettivo associato all'utilizzo del TVSS non è riducibile né a quello visivo, né a quello tattile. Il punto è confermabile per mezzo del criterio sottrattivo. I modi con cui tatto e vista vengono temporaneamente spenti non sono identici ai modi con cui il TVSS viene temporaneamente spento. Per esempio, è ardito instaurare un'equivalenza fenomenologica tra il «chiudere la telecamera» e il chiudere gli occhi, così come il venir meno delle vibrazioni della matrice collegata alla telecamera non trova un corrispettivo diretto nei modi con cui il tatto può essere reso insensibile nella vita di tutti i giorni. Queste osservazioni spingono in direzione della categorizzazione autonoma delle percezioni assistite dal TVSS. Considerazioni sulla falsariga di quelle testé proposte sono sviluppabili in riferimento agli altri strumenti sensoriali.

Un ulteriore punto a favore dell'indipendenza delle modalità sensoriali artificiali da quelle naturali è che i normopercipienti possono aggiungere le realtà percettive artificiali senza spegnere quelle classiche e senza sostituire le prime alle seconde. Per esempio, i normopercipienti possono utilizzare il TVSS in contemporanea con gli occhi, e la parte del corpo su cui è applicata la matrice può essere stimolata grattandola. Considerazioni analoghe valgono anche per i DSS atti a sostituire la vista con l'udito, nonostante i rumori provocati da tali dispositivi interferiscano in modo fastidioso con il normale funzionamento del senso sostituente. Inoltre, nel caso di strumenti come Feel Space e Sonic Guide in grado di fornire informazioni normalmente indisponibili alla specie umana, è evidente che nessuna realtà sensoriale esistente viene spenta a causa dell'accensione dei mondi associati al loro utilizzo. In sintesi, dato che le realtà percettive artificiali presentano pattern di accensioni e spegnimenti almeno ad un certo grado indipendenti da quelli caratterizzanti i mondi percettivi classici, andrebbero categorizzate in maniera autonoma.

3. CONCLUSIONE

In questo paper, ho analizzato come il criterio esperienziale tradizionale e la coppia formata dal criterio esperienziale-ontologico e dal criterio sottrattivo possono essere applicati alle percezioni ricadenti nella zona grigia artificiale. È possibile ricavare alcune conclusioni di carattere generale. Primo, non è necessario ricondurre le percezioni artificialmente assistite alla modalità sensoriale sostituente o alla modalità sensoriale sostituita, in quanto a ogni strumento sensoriale potrebbe essere associata una nuova, autonoma modalità sensoriale. Per quanto l'opzione di introdurre nuovi sensi artificiali nel catalogo delle modalità sensoriali sia aperta ai difensori di tutti i criteri, essa viene raramente discussa in letteratura. Secondo, il criterio esperienziale-ontologico e il criterio

sottrattivo ben si adattano a rendere conto delle peculiarità delle percezioni artificialmente assistite: i loro sostenitori posseggano buoni argomenti per ricondurle sotto etichette irriducibili a quelle associate alla modalità sensoriale sostituente e alle modalità sensoriale sostituita. Questo vale non solo per i dispositivi sensoriali che rendono disponibili agli utenti informazioni normalmente precluse alla specie umana, ma anche per i dispositivi di sostituzione sensoriale come il TVSS o The vOICe. Terzo, i criteri esperienziale-ontologico e sottrattivo costituiscono un'alternativa al criterio esperienziale tradizionalmente inteso per gli autori interessati a individuare i sensi tramite strumenti di matrice fenomenologica. Se è vero che i risultati ottenibili tramite le due strategie sono, almeno in parte, sovrapponibili, è altrettanto vero che l'uso combinato delle varianti esperienziale-ontologica e sottrattiva comporta vantaggi significativi. Tra gli altri, la nozione di «realtà percettiva» consente di evitare le semplificazioni implicate dalle teorie atomiche della sensazione, e il criterio sottrattivo consente di rendere conto non solo della presenza, ma anche dell'assenza dei caratteri qualitativi delle esperienze artificialmente assistite.

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Aisthesis

The «Musicalised Image»: A Joint Aesthetic of Music and Image in Film

Josep Torelló Oliver, Josephine Swarbrick

Abstract. Despite traditionally having been studied within the field of Musicology, the analysis of music in film should be approached as an aesthetic study of the relationship between «image» and «music» which is central to the cinematographic framework. From this interdisciplinary perspective numerous theoretical and methodological issues emerge. The aim of this article is to investigate, using both a synchronic and diachronic focus, some of the key issues arising from this joint music-image approach, in an attempt to develop a theoretical framework for a joint aesthetic of music and image: a study of «cinematographic expression» that brings together the visual and the sound dimensions and which we call the «musicalised image», a neologism of our own creation.

Keywords. Music, Aesthetic music-image, Film, Musicalised image, Cinematographic analysis, Cinema.

1. INTRODUCTION[1]

The study of music in films can be approached from various different academic perspectives. Given the nature of the subject, the proposal adopted by many scholars has been to use theories developed as part of Musicology in their investigations. Studying music in film from this perspective implies the articulation of an analysis of the musical language present in a given film; in other words, to carry out a study of the musical forms present in the audiovisual product. From this standpoint, the object of the analysis can vary; from the study of the score —the formal analysis of musical notation—, to an aesthetic musical study of the pieces analysed. The academic work that gave rise to this trend was *Composing for the Films* (2005) by Theodor W. Adorno and Hanns Eisler, published in 1947.

When considering a purely audiovisual aesthetic, as opposed to a musicological approach, this perspective has one major draw-

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[1] All citations taken from sources originally in Catalan, French or Spanish are translated into English by the authors.

back: it puts the focus of the analysis only on the music, instead of analysing the cinematographic whole. In other words, a study is not made of the combination of the music and the image projected simultaneously during the viewing of the film. In the musicological approach, the cinematographic aspect becomes a «context» for analysing a piece of music. Consequently, the epistemological perspective of an investigation based on the aforementioned parameters, does not undergo any substantial variation when: 1) carrying out an analysis of the music that is articulated in film; 2) when analysing musical compositions present in other dramaturgic representations, such as theatre or opera; or 3) when the music that is analysed forms part of the mechanism of a ritual liturgy that does not fall within the ambit of «artistic representation». In short, there are various «contexts» for just one theoretical approach.

Although at a fledgling stage, it is important to mention that the study of music in cinema is increasingly being approached from perspectives that go beyond an analysis of the musical forms present in a film. As a result, the film is not just a «context» from which the music is isolated in order to be studied, but instead the intent is to analyse «the image» and «the music» as a whole. The object of analysis are those signifiers and signifieds of cinematographic or audiovisual language which are articulated through the conjunction music-image; in other words, the «cinematographic sign». Therefore, the cinematographic signifier, which is produced by the union of image and music, must be understood as a unique aesthetic entity.

This perspective, however, faces the complicated challenge of integrating what has mostly been articulated by separate disciplines; it must reconcile, on the one hand, the analysis of the iconographic elements of the audiovisual —the analysis of which has stemmed predominantly from cinematographic theory—, and, on the other hand, the sound and/or musical elements which, in the case of music, have generally been studied from a musicological standpoint.

Of course some of the issues surrounding the relation of the image with sound or music have previously been subject to academic study. The synchronisation of soundtrack and film, towards the end of the 1920s, led the soviet filmmaker Sergei M. Eisenstein to expand on his theory of cinematographic montage and propose the concept of «vertical montage» (see Eisenstein [1991]). In this work he drew a parallel between the vertical evolution of musical notation on the stave and the movement and rhythm of the image, in an attempt to achieve «the inner synchronicity between picture and music» (see Afra [2015]: 34). Later, the aforementioned Adorno and Eisler criticised Eisenstein's perspective as they claimed it established an arbitrary relationship between music and image (see Adorno and Eisler [2007]: 105). In its place they proposed the concept of «counterpoint» —from musical theory— in order to articulate the aesthetic relationship between music and image within a cinematographic framework. In any case, from our point of view neither of these perspectives approaches the analysis of the binome music-image as an inextricable aesthetic whole —as a unique aesthetic entity—: the analysis of the presence of music in the audiovisual continued to be studied from a musicological standpoint.

Therefore, conceptually, from a Film Studies perspective, what we call the «sign», the «text» or the «cinematographic image» —in order to employ recurrent terminology from the bibliographic canon— is, to paraphrase the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, a flux, a continuum (see Deleuze [1986]: 2). The expression that ultimately captures the movement of the world and allows for the (re)presentation[2] of a modern and cinematographic space-time (see Duran [2013]: 63) is an iconographical construction that has its own epistemological field. Owing to the synchronous soundtrack of the cinematographic film, it combines at its heart the three dimensions of the representation of iconographic space as well as the sound dimension, a whole that Eisenstein conceived of as «the filmic fourth dimension» (see Einsenstein [1988]).

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[2] (Re)present: present again; present a reality that has already taken place by way of a representation.

Some of these issues have been discussed previously, although we would emphasise that they represent a minority among the bibliography. A few of the difficulties relating to the articulation of this flux —*how are image and music expressed conjointly within the framework of cinematographic language?*— have been defined within what the theorist Michel Chion calls «audio-vision» (see Chion [1994]). The concept *audio-vision* expresses the way in which the two-dimensional image that unites the graphic and the sound dimensions is received, in the spectator's lived experience, when both expressions are presented on a cinema screen.

This article aims to set forth a series of issues that we consider to be fundamental when it comes to deciding the theoretical framework for a study of the combination of music and image from a cinematographic and audiovisual perspective.

2. CONCERNING THE STATE OF THE ART

Although there are some great intellectual precedents, such as the aforementioned *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (1994), this interdisciplinary approach to the study of music in film has a limited heritage.

The bibliographical corpus that refers to the status of music as an element of the theoretical cinematographic device is, quantitatively speaking, relatively easy to narrow down. Having said that, when attempting to conceptually summarise the bibliographical whole and adjust it to the proposals and issues presented by cinematographic theory in general, the discipline begins to demonstrate its great complexity and innumerable peculiarities.

From a Film Studies perspective, the most complex task is to extract relatively paradigmatic conclusions from the bibliography that may answer the question: *what defines the status of cinematic music within the theoretical framework of cinema?* That is to say, the principal question posed by the articulation of the discipline's theoretical framework is that which attempts to define the «contribution of music to the aesthetic of a film».

There is a degree of difficulty and a distinct lack of consensus at the heart of academia, when it comes to examining these issues. The complexity to be found in the interpretation and synthesis of the bibliographical corpus may stem from the fact that the study of music and image, in an audiovisual framework is, to a certain extent, constantly being re-established. When revising the pertinent bibliography, it becomes evident that it is possible to refer to either many or few *roles of music in cinema* depending on the work consulted. Specific phenomenologies can be categorised in various ways and taxonomies seem to be articulated randomly according to criteria adapted in the analysis.

These considerations allow us to extract some initial conclusions as to the theoretical framework of the discipline: 1) the current framework is wide-ranging and disperse, consisting of numerous bibliographical references, and is currently being developed in the academic field; 2) although it is a productive bibliographic corpus —and perhaps somewhat chaotic—, it is relatively accessible; and 3), due to a series of historical issues, as well as the specificity of the subject in question, although the discipline is undergoing an important period of evolution (see Fraile [2008]: 23), the field of study concerning music in film has not yet structured itself around a solid, panoramic and complete theoretical paradigm. A paradigm which would also be academically functional.

3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR A JOINT MUSIC-IMAGE AESTHETIC

In order to begin to articulate a competent theoretical framework, we believe it is important to attempt to answer the following question: what are the theoretical foundations for studying music and image when visualised together on screen? Answering this question would allow for the laying of the epistemological foundations of a joint music-image aesthetic.

We begin with the idea that the musical phenomenon present in any given film is an element

that necessarily forms part of the «sign», the «text» or the «cinematographic image». Or, as we prefer to express it using a term that, in our opinion, is more concise than the aforementioned, *music and image form part of the «cinematographic expression»*[3]. Image and music, within a contemporary setting, become a flux that is jointly expressed.

From this particular disciplinary approach, the question —*what does music contribute to the aesthetic of cinema?*— necessitates further research into how the formal conjunction of music and image can be categorised and, furthermore, which are the theoretical difficulties involved. It is important to remember that since the birth of cinema both elements have shared the same representational space —the same *proscenium*—, although not initially in a synchronised manner —during the age of live music in cinema—. Latterly —following the introduction of mechanised cinema soundtracks—, both elements were assimilated into the same epistemological field, forming part of the same flux and ultimately belonging, to use philosopher Michel Foucault's term, to the same «episteme»[4] (see Foucault [1994]: xxii).

As we will see, a genuinely contemporary image is based on the iconographic-sonic duality. The ideas of three prominent academics act as a basis for focalising and justifying the study of certain foundations of the conceptual theoretical framework of this duality.

1) The academic and musician Michel Chion, in one of his many works dedicated to the analysis of sound and music in cinema, writes that «[…] three notes from a music box, in cinema, form as big a world as a whole tetralogy» (see Chion [1997: 21]). This aphorism underscores the fact that, from an aesthetic perspective, the study of music in cinema must not be circumscribed to the analysis of the musical forms present in an audiovisual text. Instead, it must be situated in the study of the articulation of music-image as a whole. Otherwise, how could we explain why Chion would state that, in cinema, three notes reproduced by a toy can have an equal or superior aesthetic value to the Wagnerian cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen* —a proposition that could not be accepted in Musicology—? It depends, in any case, on its articulation within the audiovisual skein, and on its relation with the image. Nevertheless, viewed from this perspective, Chion justifies the distancing of academic analysis from musicological approaches. Thereby, he is able to investigate which are the mechanisms used to articulate music together with an image in a film. It is in the relation music-image that we find the aesthetic and significative construction that is unique to the audiovisual[5].

2) The academic Noël Burch argues that «the fundamental dialectic in film, the one that at least empirically seems to contain every other, is that contrasting and joining sound with image» (see Burch [1981]: 90). That is to say, the conjunction and opposition of the iconographic and sonic dimensions define the nature of the film. Cinematographic art is the fruit of the clash of two elements which, as we will see in the next section, in some

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[3] We have designed and use the concept «cinematographic expression», in the belief that it correctly expresses the aesthetic and cinematographic duality at the heart of this article. In any case, we believe that *cinematographic expression* is a term that defines the duality of the filmic, and does so in a more delicate manner than other concepts, regularly cited in the bibliography, which express similar ideas, such as «cinematographic texts» and «cinematographic image».

[4] «Michel Foucault referred to the underlying, and therefore subconscious structure that delimits a field of knowledge, the ways objects are perceived, categorized and defined, as episteme or "epistemological field"» (Ferreter Mora [2012]: 1039). Our proposal makes a much narrower use of the concept «episteme», which we limit to the «cinematographic episteme» or the «cinematographic epistemological field». In other words: the primary epistemological structure from which cinematic discourse arises.

[5] An example of this can be found in a sequence shot from Nanni Moretti's film *Caro diario* (1993) in which the protagonist takes a walk in Salina, in the Aeolian Islands. The music articulated here is not particularly complex, but in our opinion, cinematographically speaking, it gives the sequence, which is of very little narrative value, a great poetic and audiovisual strength.

of their ontological aspects are essentially opposites. From Burch's perspective, the genuine character of the film —its unique ontology when compared to other art forms— arises from this opposition: the relationship of a confrontational, tense, complementary or any other nature, which plays out between the picture and the sound. Ultimately, Burch locates the essence of cinematographic language in the aesthetic relationship between the iconographic and sonic elements of a film.

3) Béla Balázs, one of the first heavyweight cinema critics of the 20th Century, highlights the ways in which moving images are articulated, as well as the role of music in their construction: «[Music] is organically and structurally as much a part of the film picture, as are light and shadow» (see Balázs [1948]: 279). This is a very interesting perspective as it explains how the cinematographic signifier is constructed using distinct elements that come together to form a whole: iconographic representation and spatial dimensions, image movement, montage, photography, the sonoric dimension and music. The author emphasises that graphic audiovisual representation has an intrinsic musical dimension. This perspective, however, brings us to a paradox and one of his theoretical conflicts: the apparent contradiction in claiming that *music forms part of the cinematographic image*. Despite the contradiction, it is evident that music is an element, one among many, that defines, delimits and constructs the «image»: the dual and contemporary «cinematographic expression».

Regarding these authors' ideas, there are three considerations that we consider important to highlight:

A) Following on from Chion's idea, we claim that the aesthetic appreciation of music within a cinematographic framework should not be reduced to its musical or harmonic value, and that instead it should be studied in relation to its significative capacity when articulated along with an image.

B) We argue, in line with Burch's point of view, that the genuine aesthetic of the «cinematographic expression» is defined by the counterpoint of its visual and sound dimensions.

C) Balázs' idea leads us to the conclusion that the study of the presence of music in films must be structured in relation to the cinematographic image, taking music as a *mechanism of image:* understanding image and music as two expressive elements —one of them figurative, iconographic; and the other non-representative, or abstract— coexisting in one episteme, namely cinematography.

The first of these considerations (A) justifies the general perspective of our proposal, which attempts to explain the role of music in cinema as an ontological construction of the film: we believe its analysis must be framed within the academic hypotheses of Film Studies rather than Musicology. As a result of this proposition it becomes necessary to formulate a theoretical proposal that seeks to combine music and image in a joint analysis of the «cinematographic sign», in other words: an aesthetic that explains the role of music as part of a «cinematographic image».

We develop the second consideration (B) thus: the phenomenological particularity of a film must be studied as originating from the opposition music-image. This represents a synchronic approach to the discipline. We assess some of its difficulties with the use of several aesthetic theses put forward by the philosopher Friedrich W. Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1956). This point will be developed further in the following section.

Finally, in section 5 we focus on theoretical questions raised by the third consideration (C) —the genealogy of «cinematographic expression»—. Taking in this instance a diachronic approach to the issue, we analyse the way in which the image has been articulated throughout the evolution of its various epistemes and how it has incorporated music into its structure, how music has become a *mechanism of image.*

4. A SYNCHRONIC APPROACH: A NIETZSCHEAN JOINT AESTHETIC

Now we return to the initial question: upon which theoretical groundwork can a joint aesthet-

ic of cinematography and music be constructed? From an aesthetic point of view, the question is not conceptually simple. The main difficulty when establishing a functional interdisciplinary aesthetic is the fact that the theory must integrate two elements of a contrasting nature and phenomenology —elements of an iconographic character and of a musical character—. Phenomena that belong, ultimately, to two distinct aesthetic dimensions, even representing different ontological categories. We believe that the aforementioned heterogeneity —the conjunction of two elements that emerged from different traditions appearing in one episteme: the film— has given rise to some confusion on a theoretical level.

In order to investigate this duality further, it is pertinent to examine Friedrich W. Nietzsche's work, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1956). In this, the philosopher's first composition, originally published in 1871 under the title *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (The Birth of Tragedy in the Spirit of Music), Nietzsche analyses the genealogy of Greek tragedy. Many of the aesthetic questions that he poses —the combination of ambiguities that, in his opinion, forms the works— can be applied to the cinematographic problem that concerns us here.

In Nietzsche's view, the development of Hellenic tragedy —the most authentic artistic expression of the ancient world—, and even the development of art and its dialectic in general,

owes its continuous evolution to the Apollonian-Dionysiac duality [...]. It is by those two art-sponsoring deities, Apollo and Dionysos, that we are made to recognize the tremendous Split, as regards both origins and objectives, between the plastic, Apollonian arts and the non-visual art of music inspired by Dionysos. The two creative tendencies developed alongside one another, usually in fierce opposition, each by its taunts forcing the other to more energetic production, both perpetuating in a discordant concord that agon which the term art but feebly denominates: until at last, by the thaumaturgy of an Hellenic act of will, the pair accepted the yoke of marriage and, in this condition, begot Attic tragedy, which exhibits the salient features of both parents (Nietzsche [1956]: 19).

From our point of view, there is a clear parallel: the film —fruit of a contemporary «will», to use similar terms to those chosen by Nietzsche— is finally able to articulate the contradiction between figurative art —the moving image, which evidently is indebted to painting and photography— and non-figurative art —music— in a single «cinematic expression», representing «the most emblematic art of modernity» (see Pezzella [2004]:11). The film is a work of art that is, conceptually and technically, both Dionysian and Apollonian —just as Hellenic «will» produced Greek tragedy in those same dichotomous terms—. Film is an expression that brings together the figurative and the non-figurative. Therefore, to a certain extent, the ontology of film repeats many of the issues of the antithetical relationship described by Nietzsche.

It is necessary to analyse in more detail the aesthetic proposal of *The Birth of Tragedy*. On the one hand, Nietzsche presents the issue of iconographic (re)presentation and links it to figurative art. The «image» is an attempt at a mimesis of a physical reality, but it is a construction based on an illusion: the Apollonian is a shadow of the world, not reality itself. The nature of the image is that of a «footprint». The «image», according to Nietzsche's proposal, is, from a phenomenological point of view, closer to dreams than reality; it is an *a posteriori* (re)presentation —and therefore a copy, an interpretation, a representation— of a reality that has already taken place. It is relevant to mention that the film theorist André Bazin understands the cinematographic image in terms which are conceptually similar to those of Nietzsche. Bazin conceives of the mechanical production of analogue photography —and by extension the moving image— «as a molding, the taking of an impression, by the manipulation of light» (see Bazin [1967]: 12).

On the other hand, music is a *Dionysian essence,* which is expressed in Hellenic art as the other face of the god Apollo. The Dionysian is defined by *intoxication*, as opposed to a *dream.* The sublime is not a representation of reality, it is the reality in which man, by means of a musical impulse, dilutes the Schopenhauerian concept of

principium individuationis (see Nietzsche [1956]: 22-23). Music does not have a mimetic or copy-cat relationship with reality in the same way that the image does; Dionysian music does not require mediations in order to interpret reality, since it is an object of the world itself; ultimately, music is not in any way a representation of anything; music simply *is*. As Adorno was to write later: music «does not correspond to a system of signs» (see Adorno [2000]: 25).

The ambiguity expressed by Nietzsche works to explain how a figurative element, articulated along with a non-figurative element, can produce a new form of artistic expression. This approach allows us to contextualise the issue we have put forward concerning image and music within a cinematographic framework. When cinematographic theory claims that *the fundamental dialectic in film is that contrasting and joining sound with image,* it places the emphasis on this complex dichotomy. The Nietzschean perspective provides a theoretical starting point for studying this dialectic: we observe how the Apollonian-Dionysian opposition —«intoxication» and the «dream», the tension between the figurative and non-figurative, the mediate or non-mediate relationship with reality, etcetera— is expressed in epistemological fields that go beyond Greek tragedy. We can find this duality in an expression that is contemporary; an expression that unites image and music in one artistic episteme and which is, ultimately, a strictly cinematographic field: film.

5. A DIACHRONIC APPROACH: THE CONSTRUCTION OF «CINEMATIC EXPRESSION»

We must also pose the question: in what way are music and image articulated in one episteme? How can the union of the moving image and sound or music be explained? How can we substantiate the idea that *music is a mechanism of the image*, as Balász claims?

In order to explain how the two expressions come together in the same epistemological field,

it is necessary first to understand the genealogy of the image —the representation of the world using iconography—, how this has been articulated over time, and how the image has evolved into various typologies that allow for the diversification of visual creation, right up to the contemporary period.

Josep Maria Català has described the current *status quo* of the study of the image from a diachronic approach (see Català [2013]). A summary of his views on the issue allows for research to be conducted into the epistemological characteristics of the various typologies of the image, and for these characteristics to be categorised. His analyses permit us to determine a useful periodisation of the evolution of the «image» episteme, from the Renaissance to the present day, over the course of which we can contextualise the birth of, among others, the «photographic image» and the «cinematographic image».

Català states that: «In broad strokes [...] we can say that there are three phases in the history of the image in the modern era that, at the same time, give way to three very different typologies of the image» (see Català [2013]: 95).

He defines three historical periods that give rise to three epistemes that are, ontologically speaking, completely different from one another: the invention of photography gives rise to an iconographic typology that is categorised as the «solid image»; cinematography transforms this image into what Català describes as a «fluid image»; and, finally, digitalisation converts this last mutation into what he categorises as a «contemporary image»[6].

To begin with, the Renaissance articulated a visual representation ruled by the techniques of perspective (see Panofsky [1987]); a profound

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[6] We will not evaluate the issues relating to the «contemporary-image», since we believe that, due to the scope of the subject, it should be dealt with independently in other studies. Suffice it to say that, when it comes to the present, for Català digitalisation gives shape to a new typology of the «image», a new stage that belongs to a new state of mind: «we are experiencing a rupture as or more transcendental than that which separated the medieval mentality from that of the Renaissance» (Català [2013]: 95).

change in the way the world was represented visually. With perspective came the endeavour to objectively record a given reality (see Català [2013]: 96). It is around this mimetic attempt at iconographic representation that a feature of iconographic typology categorised as a «technical image» or a «scientific image» is constructed[7].

The typology of the «technical image» or «scientific image», which characterizes European modernity, undergoes a transcendent transformation with the arrival of photography —the «solid image»—; and, subsequently, a new revolution with the birth of the *cinematographic image* —the «fluid image»—.

Català does not consider the hegemony of the «solid image» —the photographic image— to be, at least initially, an epoch that breaks away from its predecessor —although ontologically speaking of course it does—[8]. On the contrary, he argues that the birth of photography is the end of an aspiration: the photographic image represents a step forward in the formulation of the «technical image» —that scientific struggle to represent reality—, the evolution of which begins with the articulation of perspective in Renaissance painting and evolves further with the invention of photography.

Subsequently, towards the end of the 19th Century, the photographic image, by way of the technological transformation of its episteme, became the «cinematographic image». Although the race to animate and give movement to photography had begun several decades earlier, it was in the year 1895 that brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière invented the cinematograph —*kinema* plus *graphia*—: image in movement.

This new image typology, arising from cinematography, engenders a new episteme that Català names «liquid image». In the epistemological field of the «liquid image», the achievement of movement is not, conceptually, a sum of «solid images» —ordered one after the other and transmitting, due to the optical effect produced by persistence of vision, the illusion of the portrayal of movement. Instead it represents a new category: the «image» is, ultimately, a flux; the movement flows from the episteme itself and the image itself is movement. In fact, Deleuze names this category «image-movement» (see Deleuze [1986]).

In a way, the drive toward mimesis of the «technical image» closes an important stage when it captures the world's movement; modernity achieves, through the «liquid image», a reliable (re)presentation of movement. With regards to the space-time dimensions, however, the earliest «liquid image», represents only space. In this historicist vision of the evolution of the «image», the theorist Noël Burch makes a relevant contribution to the previous explanation. He explains that the analytical and descriptive will that can be found in early cinema —as explained in his discussion of the Primitive Mode of Representation— continues to have its origin in a «technical» representation of reality, in the desire for mimesis (see Burch [1990]: 8).

Projecting music and/or sound and image together on a cinema screen —although not in a synchronised manner— is inherent to the invention of the cinematograph, but it is not until the end of the 1920s that a synchronised soundtracking of the episteme «liquid image» is achieved. In other words, a sonic dimension is added to the flux of movement which defines temporality and which becomes, from that moment, an enduring element of its episteme.

The significance of time in the construction of the contemporary image is key. One well-known quote by Andrei Tarkovski illustrates this well: «What is the essence of the director's work? We

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[7] The desire to mimic reality is the principal characteristic governing the modern epoch of the image —pictoric, photographic, audiovisual— that only with the advent of digitalisation is starting to come into question, ontologically speaking.

[8] As we have mentioned, from an ontological perspective the photographic image is, according to the theorist André Bazin, a «footprint» of reality; it is fixed within a physical support by means of a chemical process (see Bazin [1967]: 12). We cannot say the same of Renaissance painting, even though perspective may have been based on the *camera obscura,* it is not, ontologically speaking, a chemical «footprint» of light.

could define it as sculpting in time» (see Tarko-vski [1989]: 63). Here Tarkovski proposes a cin-ematographic aesthetic in which it is necessary «*to take an impression of time*» (see Tarkovski [1989]: 62)[9]. When considering the theory of image and time it is also important not to forget Chion: the «soundtracked image», that image which incor-porates a temporal dimension into its episteme, transforms itself into a «chronograph» —*kro-no* plus *graph*—: the image of time (see Chion [1994]: 13-17). In fact, the addition of sound and/ or music causes Deleuze to speculate that «image-movement» evolves into a new and more complex category that he labels «time-image» (see Deleuze [1997]); which incorporates a temporal dimension from physical reality —sound— something that previous images were incapable of articulating.

Seen from the point of view of striving for a mimesis of reality, «cinematographic expression» manages to capture the movement of reality as well as the time in which an image occurs; space is represented, time is reproduced.

Synchronised soundtracking of images is therefore a transcendent moment in 20th Cen-tury iconographic construction and evolution; a fact that the bibliography on the issue, in gen-eral, does not sufficiently evaluate within the state of the art dealing with the iconographical sys-tem (see Aumont *et al.* [1996]: 43). But is there any doubt that this transformation increased the expressive capacity of images as a whole or that it established a new ontology within the visual para-digm? Furthermore, if cinema —as in photogra-phy— possessed an «objective character» in the reproduction of the Real (see Bazin [1967]: 13), could it not be that the synchronous articulation of a musical element and an image in movement gives rise to a singular and hitherto unprecedented audiovisual expression, completely different to one which simply produces diegetic sounds? Music,

unlike direct or studio sound, does not have a mimetic aspiration. Music is Dionysian; it does not represent. From a Nietzschean standpoint the cinematographic image becomes a fuller expres-sion, not only mimetic but also expressive and oniric.

For us, it is essential to highlight this moment in the evolution of the construction of «cinemato-graphic expression» and emphasise its study. As Chion writes «music is the most flexible element in film» (see Chion [1997]: 218), and there is no doubt that, in cinematographic language, its artic-ulation is essential, permitting the representation of both ontological and narrative aspects such as flashbacks, ellipses, temporal or historical contex-tualisation, etcetera[10]. For this reason, by way of a conclusion, we propose a new categorisation that defines that iconographic representation that fea-tures a sound dimension and musical expression: «the musicalised image».

6. CONCLUSION: THE «MUSICALISED IMAGE»

This article has explored several theoretical issues surrounding the joint analysis of music and image within the framework of the audiovisual. All effort has been made to outline an academic framework centred on two matters: the first; to identify the theoretical issues surrounding the complex dialectic music-image from a synchro-nous viewpoint; the second, to explain and justify in what way the episteme of the cinematographic image is articulated within the context of mod-ern iconographic construction —a diachronic approach—.

Based on the issues examined here, we believe it would be useful to categorise and study that «image» that combines, in its structure, on the one hand the portrayal of the three iconographic rep-resentations typical of modern visual articulation

[9] There are several examples to support this theoretical perspective in almost all of Tarkovsky's cinematic praxis. To cite just two: one of the final sequences in *Nostalghia* (1983) in which the protagonist Andrei walks slowly holding a candle in a sequence shot lasting almost nine minutes; and the final sequence of *The Sacrifice* (1986).

[10] By way of an example, Chion explains how in the open-ing credits of the Michael Curtiz film *Casablanca* (1942) music allows the audience to situate itself within a spe-cific geographical and historic narrative framework (see Chion [1997]: 131-132).

and, on the other hand, the sound dimension typical of musical language. We define and introduce this category with the neologism «musicalised image»: an image that incorporates the representation of time and space dimensions through music within one epistemological field; an image that captures the flux of movement and at the same time articulates a musical expression. In this way, we are able investigate the relationship that forms around image and music as part of the mechanisms for articulating a film.

We define the «musicalised image» in the following way: *it is the flow of vibrations and waves, of sound and light that brings together the iconic and musical dimensions of the* «image» in one episteme. The «musicalised image» is essentially an episteme of modernity, bidimensional; since it is an expressive device that combines elements of a diverse, if not contradictory, nature.

It is a complex task to come up with an adequate terminology to define the aesthetic relationship that comes into being between image and music in just one flux.   The use of this term is an original contribution to Film Studies and its vocabulary, distancing itself from the Musicology perspective. We believe that the «musicalised image» can be an interdisciplinary theoretical tool that allows for the development of a joint aesthetic of music and image in «cinematographic expression» and the audiovisual.

 Finally, it is important to add that the concept of the «musicalised image» may be used beyond the field of Film Studies. In this case, its use would be to define or study any image combined with music, whether that be in an audiovisual format or something else —pictoric, performative, computing, video games, etcetera—. These and other means of investigation —the definition, using the indicated theoretical framework, of a status for music in relation to an image and a cinematographic narrative, and the «musicalised image» expressed outside of films— remain open as possible fields of investigation for further academic work.

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Street Art and the New Status of the Visual Arts

Graziella Travaglini

Abstract. This paper explores the «nature» of street art, highlighting its innovative features, the new socio-political status, and the differences between this emerging art form and dominant trends in contemporary visual art. This examination builds on the premise that artistic phenomena can only be considered from a critical perspective that situates questioning within a historical and specific gaze. Therefore, my aim is not to place this art movement within categorial boundaries, identifying the necessary and eternally true characteristics of street art, but to identify the motives and tendencies that constitute it as a movement that runs against the dominant orientations in contemporary art. Building on this comparative analysis, the *construens* part of this paper explores the salient features of street art more thoroughly and more extensively, through an examination of the works of certain street artists.

Keywords. Street art; Visual Arts; Walter Benjamin; Image.

This work aims to develop a reflection on street art, building on a question posed by Walter Benjamin in the essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, where the philosopher claims that Dadaist art manifests, through its own expressive means, that which can be satisfied only by adopting the technical tools of filmmaking:

> *It has always been one of the primary tasks of art to create a demand whose hour of full satisfaction has not yet come. The history of every art form has critical periods in which the particular form strains after effects which can be easily achieved only with a changed technical standard – that is to say, in a new art form. The excesses and crudities of art which thus result, particularly in periods of so-called decadence, actually emerge from the core of its richest historical energies. In recent years, Dadaism has amused itself with such barbarisms. Only now is its impulse recognizable: Dadaism attempted to produce with the means of painting (or literature) the effects which the public today seeks in film. (Benjamin [1936]: 38-39)*

The analyses developed by Benjamin in this essay on the "destiny" of panting[1] seem to trace a final phase of its history, where

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[1] Consider the passage where Benjamin (*ibid*: 35) compares the painter to the

traditional arts give way to new poietic forms based on mechanical reproduction, filmmaking and photography. Echoing Benjamin, we can speak of the «past character of the traditional visual arts» – paraphrasing Hegel's well-known phrase from his *Aesthetic Lessons* on art in general –: the progressive loss of value of such poietic forms, which goes hand in hand with the increasing separation of art from the world of life.

Nevertheless – as Hegel himself claims – paintings and sculptures are still being produced, such that, paradoxically, in response to the crisis announced by Dadaist art, there has been a proliferation of new pseudo-avant-garde movements in art: neo-Dadaism, Informal art, Action painting, Abstract expressionism, Body art, etc.. The birth of these movements is always accompanied by the announcement of a rupture with tradition – a decadent rite that is often celebrated «within the Museum ordered space» or in the institutional circuits of the art world:

The transformation of contemporary art is getting way too easy. A new trend is born and the next day it is already time to rush to its funeral; just enough time to fulfil such a sad duty, and immediately after we are informed that a new one will arise tomorrow. The expectation, as short as it may be, is worthily filled with the small chores of the moment: choice of a name for the new-born, determination of its favourable or unfavourable astral influences, the putting on alert of godparents and godmothers as well as with all due caution, all of those who will become inconsolable fans. (Urbani [1963]: 27, trans. by author).

Starting from Benjamin's reflections and from the concerns manifested almost fifty years later by the art historian and conservator Giovanni Urbani about the destiny of the traditional visual arts, it seems urgent, in the present, to ask ourselves the following question: is it possible to find a *way out* of this? Is it possible to locate a terrain

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of the visual arts whose products are able to arise and grow, to re-open the closed circuits of the art world, whose laws seem to be dominated solely by the logic of the exploitation of art itself? Given the development of visual productions in our time, may we hope that the last word on its destiny, and on its «sense of the past», has yet to be spoken? We can raise these questions without in any way intending to rescue the alleged purity of art from the mechanisms of market exploitation. Rather, they can be raised in the hopes of identifying and focusing on an artistic phenomenon the origin, existence and function of which are not primarily or uniquely legitimated and determined by the laws of the cultural industry – an artistic phenomenon that has the function of redefining and extending the boundaries of the art world, helping to bring its plural nature to the surface[2], and that constantly pushes the limits of this world through a movement of authentic transformation, the impulses of which lie in the irreducible otherness of the historical, social, political and natural world.

1. STREET ART AND THE REDISCOVERY OF THE MATERIAL DIMENSION OF ARTWORK

In the last decades of the twentieth century, a new constellation of visual productions came to light. This artistic movement was «defined more by real-time practice than by any sense of unified theory, movement, or message. Many artists associated with the "urban art movement" don't consider themselves "street" or "graffiti" artists, but as artists who consider the city their necessary working environment» (Irvine [2012]: 235).

Defining «street art» by listing univocal and evident features is difficult because, in general, artistic phenomena defy unitary paradigms: absolute definitions are inadequate to express their complex nature. Like all contingent phenomena, they respond to what Aristotle defines as the law of what is «for the most part», «*epi to polu*» or

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enchanter. It is important to remark that the word «destiny» stands merely for «historical development», with no commitment towards a teleological conception of history, as may be found in Hegel.

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[2] We should start talking of «worlds of the art» instead of the «world of art».

«*anagkaion ex hypotheseos*», namely the tendency of «contingent phenomena» to be actualized in a certain way, a tendency that cannot be assimilated with «absolute necessity», conforming instead to the principle of «probability»[3]. Starting from this assumption of the contingent nature of art, I will try, in the following pages, to capture the salient aspects of street art. Above all, I will attempt to highlight those characteristics that constitute street art as a moment of radical breakdown, of discontinuity with respect to the orientations of what is called «contemporary art». To develop this argument, it will be necessary to start from the assumption that by «contemporary art» I do not mean a set of heterogeneous artistic tendencies that are linked merely chronologically, but rather a set of *tendencies* defined within a certain paradigm.

Street art has rapidly taken on global importance, incorporating the forms, styles and contents of heterogeneous aesthetic movements. Beginning as a form of protest art, it arose spontaneously from the urban fabric in an attempt to give meaning and *utterability* to social phenomena of alienation generated by the reality of life in big cities. Within urban reality, it has secured the materials with which to create its cultural and expressive project[4]. Its images often take shape in abandoned parts of cities, in crumbling structures, in architectural skeletons, and at times in places that are ignored and hidden from view. Locations in which the city reveals an image of urban development oriented by an economic logic and the law of the exploitation of territory, in which healthy cultural and life is not envisaged. Street art seems generated by these artefacts, which manifest themselves as inert material products or the waste of human technology and capitalist development, reshaping them and giving them new value within a cultural, political and communicative project:

For contemporary visual culture, street art is a major connecting node for multiple disciplinary and institutional domains that seldom intersect with this heightened state of visibility. The clash of intersecting forces that surround street art exposes often suppressed questions about regimes of visibility and public space, the constitutive locations and spaces of art, the role of communities of practice and cultural institutions, competing arguments about the nature of art and its relation to a public, and the generative logic of appropriation and remix culture (just to name a few).
Street artists exemplify the contest for visibility described by Jacques Rancière in his analysis of the «distribution of the perceptible», the social-political regimes of visibility: the regulation of visibility in public spaces and the regime of art, which policies the boundaries of art and artists'legitimacy. (Irvine [2012]: 236)[5]

The new phenomena of urban art burst like a moment of rupture from the trend, dominant in contemporary art, of self-determination on the basis of theoretical apparatuses and conceptual interpretations. They do so by leading production activities back to their privileged connections with the sphere of sensitivity and perception, redefining the forms of urban space in the direction of an explicit «socio-political value of visibility». A new status of aesthetic experience takes shape compared to the prevailing orientation of contemporary production, even though street art takes its images, styles, forms and techniques from postmodern culture in its entirety. The contiguity, from a stylistic point of view, of many street works with some contemporary art movement is evident. A noteworthy example is the affinity with Pop art; an affinity that is also evidenced by the biography of certain artists, such as Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat, who started as writers and street artists and soon joined the Factory. Artistic phenomena, like all social phenomena, are complex, pluriform, interconnected and contaminated in its

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[3] See *Metaphysics* XI, 8, 1065a 4: «for all science is of that which is always or for the most part, but the accidental is in neither of these classes».
[4] Riggle (2010: 243-245). affirms that street art is an art form that has developed in antithesis to the art world, a form of «post-museum art», at 246.

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[5] The redefinition of the visibility of urban spaces in socio-political terms is also highlighted by Bacharach (2015: 481). Bacharach identifies two characteristics that distinguish street art from the two forms of art that border it, i.e., public art and graffiti.

own origin. Identifying moments of rupture does not mean denying that there is also continuity and similarity between these phenomena[6]. However, one of the essential difference between street art and the other tendencies of visual art is the fact that it takes and combines all stylish elements of postmodern culture to use them as materials to be moulded and reinserted into the multifaceted, complex, stratified canvas of metropolitan.

Compared to the contemporary art paradigm, street art marks a break that consists in the rediscovery and rehabilitation of the artwork's material dimension (which goes hand in hand with its «post-museum» dimension). In an essay entitled *From Modernity to Contemporary: The Work of Art Beyond the Object,* Giuseppe Di Giacomo seeks to identify, beyond a chronological characterization, a founding paradigm of contemporary art, locating it precisely in the cancellation of the object produced by the artist:

> *Let's think of four emblematic moments that announce the advent of contemporary art: the urinal submitted by Duchamp in 1917, De Kooning's drawing, erased by Rauschenberg in 1953, the sheet of paper slashed by Murakami in 1955, and the void exhibited by Klein in 1958. All four exemplify the four major genres of contemporary art: Readymade, Conceptual art, Performance and Installation. What they have in common, and, by the way, what is particularly unintelligible to those who adhere to the modern paradigm, is the fact that the work of art is no longer in the object proposed by the artist. That's because there is no longer an object other than the simple container (a sheet of paper, the walls of a gallery) and because the object has no more value or existence (one example is the «urinal», which, although it was lost, was never prevented from becoming an icon of contemporary art). The common point of these multiple ways of extending the work beyond the object is the narration that goes with their creation, without which nothing would remain, which is to say that contemporary art has essentially become an art of «story-telling» and that the object is*

nothing more than a pretext for setting in motion the work of art. As a consequence, far from being reduced to its object material limits, the artwork is likely to become available to all sorts of interpretations, and it is this reality that needs to be expressed in order to enter the paradigm of contemporary art. All this pulls our attention to what inscribes the artistic work in acts that are not only means but that coincide with the realization of the «artwork»: a process that moves from the object to the act, where the dematerialization of the artwork to something informal takes place, its conceptualization inside the idea, its turning into the ephemeral matter of performance. (Di Giacomo [2014]: 3, trans. by author)

Such extreme freedom in art making, which emancipates itself from the «material limits of the object [and] is susceptible of enriching itself with all interpretations» – supported by contemporary art theorists – is defined by Urbani as the «slavery of freedom»: an obsessive and self-referential attempt to free the art making from previous forms, which leads to the extreme outcome of denying the existence of the artwork. The artist's freedom is translated, in a complementary way, into a presumed freedom of infinite interpretations that actually needs «instructions for use» – as Di Giacomo underscores – without which the intelligibility of the artwork would not be accessible, or, better, would not exist. Performances, Installations, Conceptual art, Happenings: they all reveal their ephemeral character, and the truth of the art passes from the object to the action, to the *making* that brings it into being. The truth of the artwork lies in the narration of the action that leads to its being. This narration allows for its diffusion, its reproduction and the perpetuation of its expositive value. However, this results not in the de-subjectivation of the work – as Di Giacomo claims – but rather in its total dependence on the attitude and the story that the artist makes of it, which often translates into a creation of the situation and the context in which the work itself was recreated, from time to time, in conformity with personal needs and, above all, with the needs of the market. Artworks that, in the words of Di Giacomo, *donate to thought* the infinite liberty

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[6] On the ties between street art and the artistic movements of the twentieth century, see Irvine (2012: 248).

of its interpretations are in reality transformed into pseudo forms of work that generate profit[7] but have no utility whatsoever. The work of art is transported, reassembled e recreated from time to time in different venues, the only element that guarantees its continuity is the persistence of a subject's will, which belongs to the institutional apparatus of art (the artist, the gallery owner or the critic, who are capable of selling and giving visibility to the event wherever it is recreated). The existence of the artwork is secured by laws established by the same world, where the price of the artwork increases through procedures similar to those «operations inaugurated by hedge funds in the banking or fiduciary field» (Clair [2013]: 52, trans. by author). Clair then goes on to mention the market value of some works by artists such ad Koons and Hirst; more interestingly, he remarks how the paradigm of the creative genius has been carried into the present days, and even strengthened: «just like God offers his body to mankind, the artist offers his waste, the slag of his own body under the heading of "artwork", so that it may be revered as relics. Thus body humours, purulent drainage, sweat, sperm, blood, hair, nails, urine, and finally excrements, will be set up as objects of worship for the new believers, the connoisseurs of contemporary art». In order to exemplify this tendency, Clair questionably conflates Duchamp, Dalì and Schwitters with Gina Pane, Louise Bourgeois, Günter Brus, Hermann Nitsch, Win Delvoyte, Piero Manzoni: «the list is endless».

Yet the former, and especially «the Dadaists turned the artwork into a missile. It jolted the viewer, taking on a tactile [*taktisch*] quality» (Benjamin [1936]: 39); with the latter, on the other hand, art seems to have fired that bullet at itself, or perhaps it has been playing with toy guns, outliving the repeated staging of purportedly unsettling or desecrating gestures, of clashes and shocks that paradoxically reproduce in an empty, deca-

dent, and self-referential repetition, set within the framework of a mechanism of cultural industry that Adorno characterized as the industry of mass entertainment: the bleeding body in Gina Pane's performances, the body exposed provocatively by Şükran Moral, and the famous Balkan Baroque by Marina Abramovic. And still: Nitsch's Dyonisian orgies, Louise Bourgeois' psychoanalytic sculptures, all seem to be counterexamples to what has been said concerning the immaterial character of contemporary art[8]. The focus on the material character of the work has become a trait that defines certain currents of contemporary art, such as the Informal Materic art and New Materialism. Regarding her art, Kath Fries observes that «the New Materialism discourse sees one of its tasks as creating new concepts and images of nature that affirm matter's immanent vitality». Yet the trunks, the «living materials» that create trees, flowers, branches, with which Kath Fries is «interconnected», generate works that, when inserted into the space of the museum, provide us with an intellectualistic view of nature, a mummified nature, which the aseptic and uncontaminated spaces of galleries and museums seem to place on a "mythical" dimension in which our sensations are also canalized.

It is once again Jean Clair (2001) who provides us with a compelling reading of such phenomena, drawing from Agamben and centered on the distinction between *bios* and *zoe*. Elaborating on his analysis, we might say that body and flesh are employed in these performances in order to produce a sort of *aesthetization of bare life*: the human

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[7] On the relationship between artistic activity, market production and work as it has been determined in the United States since the 1950s and 1960s, see Steinberg (1972).

[8] Lyppard (1973) introduced the concept of the «dematerialization of art» in the field of art history studies, circumscribing it to Conceptual art. This concept is understood in the context of this work in a broader and, in philosophical terms, deeper sense. A meaning that invests the status of the production of images in the post-modernity age. This is a much-debated topic: in this context, it seems appropriate to refer to Virilio (1989), who speaks of an «aesthetics of disappearance» and who claims that contemporary art has contributed to bending this phenomenon to the needs of the cultural industry. See Baudrillard (1981), who highlights the pervasiveness of image simulacra, in which it is always the dimension of contingency and otherness of the "real" that tends to disappear.

body, open to the outer world and to the *communitas*, is degraded to mere flesh, secluded within the bounds of an indidivuals' biological survival. The welding of art and market ultimately brings forth the image of bodies as waste, as suppurating, bleeding masses, bodies that call for the paying viewer's attention but emit no "words". Thus displayed and displaced in an aesthetic space, flesh is increasingly regulated by the laws of consumption aesthetics.

Productions of this sort certainly relinquish the traditional concept of artwork, as Emilio Garroni has pointed out in *Relazione interna, relazione esterna e combinazione delle arti* (Internal relation, external relation, and combination between arts), where he identified precisely this feature as the one that best characterizes contemporary art, without any privileged reference to specific works: such artifacts may well be said to exhibit «a sheer abandon, in the name of a manifold and heterogeneous agency which fades into random agency or into every day's heteroclite reality» (Garroni [2003]: 239-240, trans. by author). Thus, the aesthetic space harbours a radical version of the traditional cleavage between appearance and essence, twisted in the shape of a radical dualism, whereby a multifarious, inarticulate, erratic physical world bursts into the sphere of art as unrefined material, which can only be processed into an image by virtue of meanings that transcend it. Such meanings "position" the image into the traditional and "imperishable" space of a museum, and/or within the media circuit, where they are soon swallowed up in a game of acquiescence and «theatrical showcase of contingent reality». Garroni concludes his essay as follows: «What we claim is not the rights of "art" – for we do not know for sure what art is, and in what form it is going to survive, if at all, and whether we should even wish that it survive – but merely the right to resist the inevitable dissipation and outright nonsense of daily contingencies, let alone their near-sacralization: the right, as far as possible, to understand such contingencies, to govern, rearrange, and *bestow a meaning* on them»[9].

The *eidos* of the artefact is thus defined through a perfect correspondence between the «creative principle» and the laws that govern the world and the art industry, an *eidos* that is embodied in exemplary elements such as the caption[10], the story of the artist's experiences and the nature and implementation of his or her creative process. Without the repetition of these subjectivist instances, which recreate the figure of the genius (in this case, produced by the art market), the work of art would disappear into the silence of its own senselessness. Therefore, the work is designed to muster its potential admirers, who actively take part in the life of the work in the role of consumers, recreating it, from time to time, within the various exhibition spaces. The alleged, radical freedom of artistic production, which produces a corresponding freedom of infinite interpretations, is translated into the strict conceptual constraint of the «illustrative leaflet» or the «instructions for use» provided by the artist; indications without which the work would produce only generic interpretations of the nature of art, valid for any other similar work.

With street art, artistic production marks a clear discontinuity with the status of contemporary art (as defined thus far), re-establishing the priority of the produced object. In this respect, continuity with the definition of *poiesis* that Aristotle provides in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (VI, 2, 1139b 1-3 and V, 4, 1140, 4-12)*,* through the distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis*, is re-established. In this work, Aristotle affirms the «autothetical» character of action that is an end in itself, an aim in an absolute sense. The produced object is distinguished from the production process; once created, it possesses a proper autonomy in relation to the process of making and to the maker himself. This Aristotelian definition of *poiesis* has characterized the experience of art

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[9] It must be stressed that Garroni does not share the unconditional rejection of contemporary art professed by Clair.

[10] «Caption» is the name of Alberto Garutti's retrospective at the PAC in Milan (2012). The title of the exhibition takes its name from one of the works specifically designed for the PAC: stacks of hundreds of colored sheets on which the artist has printed the captions of his works.

for centuries, even if in the ancient Greek context it did not imply a separation between art and the ethical-practical domain. These two spheres of human experience, while having a different essence, were at the same time constitutively connected. As previously noted, in contemporary art what becomes fundamental is the act of producing, the activity that leads to the coming to be of the work (in terms of Aristotle's doctrine of the four causes, constitutes its «efficient cause»): this replaces the work itself as the artistic object. With street art, we are witnessing a phenomenon that arises on the basis of a political-social condition that implies a limitation of the role of creator[11]. The figure of the street artist takes shape when he manages to discover an origin that grounds his art in the architectural fabric of the metropolis and in the various phenomena of marginality and social hardship that the cities themselves create – cities that reveal their double face. On the one hand, there are city centres, which flaunt forms of economic prosperity through the way in which their spaces are inhabited, crossed, cared for, adorned, and pervaded by images that respond to a «taste» that is increasingly made uniform with the logic of profit. The law of economic exploitation has caused a rapid decrease in the wealth and plurality of social components that characterized them up to a few decades ago, resulting in the migration of less-well-off social groups to the outskirts. On the other hand, there are the suburbs, which reveal the dark, chaotic, shapeless and violent aspects of capitalist urban development. These take shape in architectural conglomerates that contribute to the creation of lifestyles characterized by isolation, solitude, and alienation – spaces designed for the survival of biological life, in which the forms of the urban landscape inure the sensibility of those who live there to segregation and detachment from social, political and cultural life. The dominance of the law of territory exploitation also pro-

duces a vast amount of garbage and architectural waste, especially in the suburbs, which becomes something of a landfill of capitalist urbanism with its buildings, industrial structures, and entire sections of decaying cities (in Italy, this process of abandonment and neglect has also unfortunately affected historical centres, strewn with abandoned buildings, churches, and historic gardens). It is from this dark matter and this potential nucleus, continually removed and pushed to the limits of our ability to give meaning to our inhabitation of urban spaces and our social and collective life, that street art was spontaneously generated – on a radically heterogeneous terrain with respect to the institutional circuits of art. It succeeded in re-establishing a constitutive correlation between aesthetic experience and the world of life, re-characterizing both in an ethical and political sense.

As we have seen, these new forms of production have among their basic characteristics the fact that the moment of the production of the work does not emerge as its primary factor. In the past, and frequently today, street artists paint on every artificial surface possible, breaking the law and trying to avoid the police. Their works often appear unexpectedly under our gaze or arise in the light of day as if from nowhere. The condition of possibility of the work itself and its semantic legitimacy become completely independent from the artist's explanation. Their origin presupposes as a condition the fact that the work alone speaks to its spectator because the artist cannot *promote* it or offer viewers a connected interpretation or attached «instructions for use». Text sometimes appears in street works as a title or a form of performative language, but it belongs to a composition in which the narrative dimension has a symbolic, iconic value – in which the synthesis and the sensitive form, not the conceptual narration, remains dominant[12].

Reconstituted as an original bond with the multifaceted and inexhaustible network of rela-

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[11] Tomaso Montanari (2016) dedicated a meaningful article to Banksy (*Who is Banksy? The kind art of anonymity*), in which he debates the theme of the cult of personality in the art world.

[12] The idea that aesthetics is not able to access the essence of art is at the foundation of the thought of Danto (1981). The importance of aesthetic aspects in the works of street art is emphasized by Riggle (2010).

tionships that makes up the world of the art-work, street art productions live an «autonomous life» with respect to the production process that brought them into being and with respect to the activity of the maker. They live in that diffused and «distracted» reception[13], which unconsciously and pervasively redefines the forms of our visual perception of urban spaces. Street art redefines them by giving them meaning, regenerating our relationship with the city, opening up symbolic and communicative glimpses in spaces where we usually experience the solitude and deprivation of the community and political dimension. The aesthetic experience that invades the urban fabric through street works produces a break with the usual and ordinary. However, this *non-contemplative* reception of works does not imply their dissolution into the indistinct and chaotic fabric of everyday images. By defining themselves through aesthetic values, in a completely different direction from a formalistic idea of art, they become distinguishable and *distant* from what appears usual and ordinary. At the same time, however, it is precisely this distance that allows these images to redefine and renew our experience and perception of the city.

It is true that the phenomenon of street art is progressively entering the traditional circuits of the art world. The works of street artists have entered museums and galleries, and the artists themselves have become protagonists of festivals. An emblematic example of this trend is undoubtedly the exhibition *Art in the Streets*, which was held at the MoCA in Los Angeles in 2011 and then subsequently at the Brooklyn Museum. This event brought together a hundred artists, exposing the history of graffiti and of street art from the 1970s up to today.

However, street Art has «entered» the institutional circuits of the art world, infusing it with new values, radically redefining its boundaries,

and making it a reality intrinsically linked to the complexity and conflicts of civil society. This does not trivially mean that the artwork is inserted into a historical-social context, but rather that, giving meaning to what appears chaotic, formless and meaningless, it can redefine and deeply regenerate our experience, thus contributing to redesigning the essential traits and boundaries of our world. To see the world differently is to transform it: in this way, art expresses not only utopian values but also ethical and political ones. It is true that the utopian values of street art are sometimes expressed in naïve, controversial, unelaborated forms. The «iconographies of the marginal» (Branzaglia [2004]: 276) have flowed into it, sometimes taking the form of protest slogans, immediate expressions, lacking the interpretative skills, of social unease. But this is the physiological implication of its peculiar innovative and civil value, of its will to redefine the forms of the visible and the sensible not in the direction of a subjective experience (private and internal, which belongs to the sphere of inner life), but in the direction of refiguring the horizon of common, dialogic and intersubjective sense.

As noted above, street art operates in light of, provides a countermovement for, the dominant trend that characterizes contemporary culture, oriented towards the dematerialization of images:

> Street art provides an intuitive break from the accelerated «aesthetics of disappearance», in Paul Virilio's terms, a signal-hack in a mass-mediated environment where what we see in the regime of screen visibility is always the absence of material objects. The placement of works is often a call to place, marking locations with awareness, over against the proliferating urban «non-places» of anonymous transit and commerce – the mall, the airport, Starbucks, big box stores – as described by Marc Augé. Street art is driven by the aesthetics of material reappearance. (Irvine [2012]: 239-240)

Street art reveals the postmodern aspects of the loss of aura, of the hic et nunc of the work of art. The character of a specific experience through production, linked to a place and time, is over-

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[13] The well-known Benjaminian theorization of the «reception in distraction» that characterizes the reception of art in our age, but which «finds in the cinema the most effective instrument on which to practice» (Benjamin [1936]: 39-40), is appropriate for defining how we engage as spectators of street works.

come when it originates in interdependence with network and television culture: it is inserted in an expositive and reproducibility logic that pertains constitutively to its techniques (stencils and posters are exemplary in this regard). However, and at the same time, productions of street art are inextricably linked to the body of the city, to its material structures, to its contents, to its messages and the visual codes that it produces. Street works seem to be born spontaneously from the tumult of the symbolic universe of the city and from the inert materials that it uses and discards. Testimony and criticism of alienation, massification, serialization and the reification mechanisms of urban society, street art do not respond, as the traditional visual arts of the twentieth century did, through the creation of a separate, autonomous dimension (a dynamic that remains even when there is a tendency toward indistinctness between creative production and serial products); rather they respond via creativity with a political and community vocation.

2. STREET ART BETWEEN UNIVERSALISM AND THE MANIFESTATION OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Given the characterization of street work as a production that always arises in the material and specific context of the multiform, fluid, complex and chaotic fabric of the city, what kind of universality does it entail? What conditions lie at the foundation of its complex capacity to produce new forms by adhering to that indiscernible network of sense in which different cultures consist and, at the same time, to expand in a world in which globalization tends to uniformity and the annulment of the diversification of symbolic mechanisms? How is the ability to conjugate the universal and the individual, the contingency and the necessity, actualized in the works of street art?

As noted above, in these new forms of production, the aspect of diffused and distracted reception becomes dominant. This kind of reception is, according to Benjamin, an essential aspect of this

profitable process of the development of aesthetic experience, which consists in «politicizing art»[14]. The phenomenon of «reception in distraction» has been actualized in the works of street artists in the fabric of the suburbs, thus producing a profound mutation of techniques and, more generally, of the status of the traditional visual arts. Street works are made in a chaotic material context, aimed at an audience that lives and/or commutes primarily in the suburbs and in places of passage: overpasses, underpasses, building facades, crumbling structures, poles, pylons, garbage containers, street signs, fences, subways corridors. These spaces require that the images painted on their contaminated surfaces, observed by passers-by in a distracted manner, are designed according to techniques that make immediate communication possible. The attention of the spectator is captured by adopting techniques that are similar in certain respects to those adopted in advertising posters. However, these constructive procedures are adopted to unmask the underlying logic and to overturn political assumptions from within. For these reasons, street art has privileged and has rediscovered figurative forms, in contrast to the majority of contemporary art movements. It is true that some street artists have made non-figurative formal choices, but their works, not included in the museum circuits (in which a conceptual, contemplative and reflective reception of the work can be expressed), arise in the urban context as a mere formal exercise, a work of design.

On the other hand, it is also true that the figurativeness of street works often takes on a cartoonish style, since the techniques, imposed by

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[14] Benjamin counterpoises the phenomenon of the «aestheticizing of politics» on the one hand with «politicizing art» on the other, seeing in the first a tendency to make technological reproducibility an instrument in supporting, legitimizing and increasing the power of the dominant classes, and in the latter he sees a means that can contribute to the emancipation of the subordinate classes, a means of exerting criticism of the perpetuation of power: «*Such is the aestheticizing of politics, as practiced by fascism. Communism replies* by *politicizing art*». (Benjamin [1936]: 42)

the material conditions in which the work is produced, tend to simplify forms. This is a limit that sometimes leads to naive and unelaborate images; at other times, however, it borrows an expressive and dreamlike power from comic books. The latter is the case with the French artist Seth – with his child-like visionary images – whose works are painted on the walls of the Rome metro[15].

I have already highlighted the global and international character of urban art, combined with its ability to take root in specific situations and in the material conditions in which images are produced. The universality of contemporary art language is based, in analogy to the formal languages of science, on a progressive dematerialization of the artwork, until it seems to cancel itself in the void of mere self-reflexivity and to remove any contamination from the sphere of *praxis* and from the sensible dimension.

The «action» and «event» character of contemporary artwork, which is located in the contingency of its being recreated in different times and spaces, is in reality only a simulacrum of becoming and mutation, because its actualization is determined mostly from the pervasive and reifying laws of the globalized art market. Its relationship with the public is a receptive dislocation that condenses the work, channelling it towards a paying spectator. The visibility, the tactility, and the spatial-temporal dislocation of the work are not meant to construct a «different imaginary» compared to that which is aligned and standardized by an aesthetic of consumption, and indeed these seem to contribute to the perpetuation of commodity fetishism.

The example of the French street artist Seth shows us how street art has inserted itself into the globalization phenomenon, conjugating it with the ability to interpret the identity forms of cultures
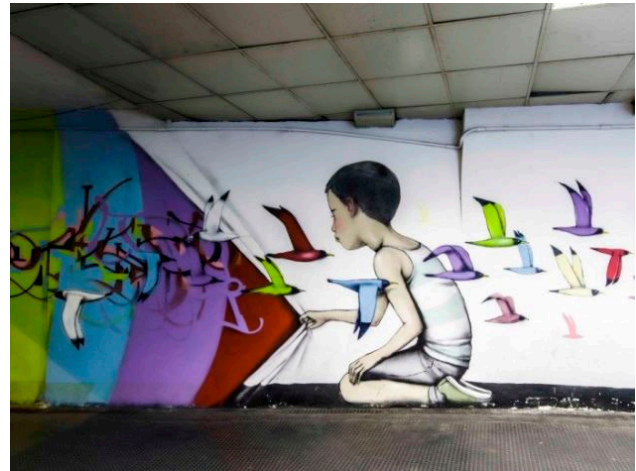
Rome (Fig. 1)

and of places, which redefines visibility and on which, at the same time, his images are inscribed.

Seth's children explicitly thematize the original dimension from which philosophy and art are born: the attitude of amazement and wonder – the *thaumaston* to which Aristotle, in the first book of his *Metaphysics*, traces the birth of philosophy and which, in *De Partibus Animalium*, he describes as a cognitive feeling that grounds *mimesis poietike* – that dimension in which the essential questions are continually proposed, removed from the sphere of daily existence, which concerns our being in the world. Thus the child is able to discover and free the many forms of nature, its birds and its colours, within the cement landscape: colourless, bleak, the non-place of the corridors of the Rome subway, which incorporates those who pass through it, people on the horizon of an alienating *techne* which creates a radical rift between the human world and the natural world.

Seth, like most street artists, is a wandering artist, a traveller who explores places through a gaze aimed at giving visibility and sense to what remains hidden from our perception. Even where the urban landscape has become a place of ruins, evidence of the degradation, the violence, and devastation of the capitalistic development of the city, a spectacle that meets us with chilling silence, even here, through art, emerges the ability and willingness to communicate, the stubbornness of

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[15] In 2014, the association 999Contemporary and Atac carried out a project in the subway, in particular in the corridors of the Piazza di Spagna station. The walls of these corridors became the background for 14 works, occupying a total of 400 square meters of surface. Several famous French and Italian street artists took part in the project, free of charge.
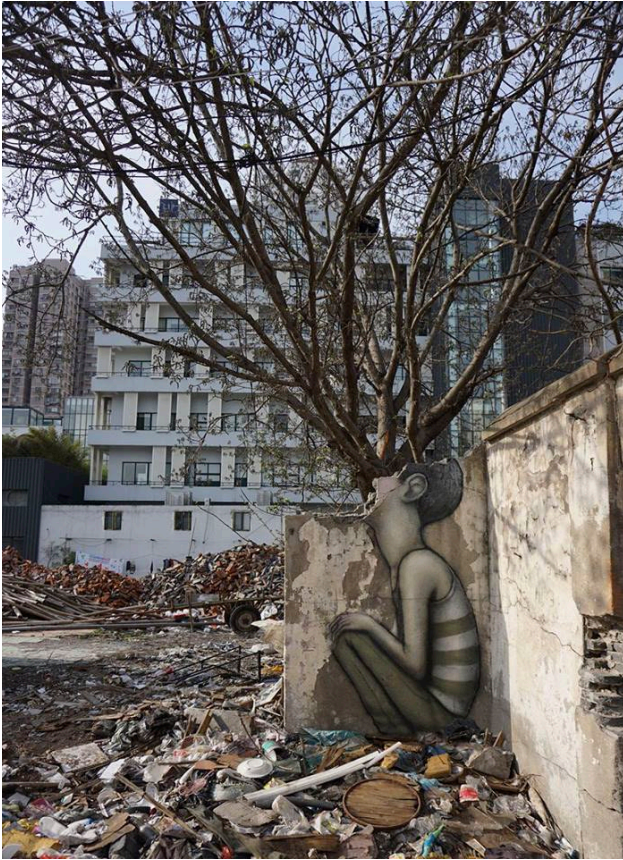
Shanghai (Fig. 2)

Shanghai (Fig. 3)

not wanting to succumb to that dark and chaotic evil which resists all attempts at interpretation. The indistinct and widespread groan of downtrodden children, which cannot take the form of speech, finds on a patch of wall, which stands among the rubble, a medium and place on which to become language through art.

The image assumes the capability to interpret and discovering the peculiarity of forms – or of what appears as shapeless and chaotic – that different cultures have produced, adhering to the material context, to radically different sensible situations, to revealing and reinventing infinite worlds through art.

The imagination of the children as a way «to escape» from dominant reality isn't a manner to seek refuge into a dream-like dimension, but a way to oppose the violence of the capitalist development of cities that destroys the old

neighborhoods where traditional forms of life still survive.

Shanghai: the children and the pervasive, implacable violence of capitalist development of the city. The children and the violence of the segregation and the war: Seth at the Aida Refugee Camp, Bethlehem, Palestine. The girl gives/owns the key to the border wall.

The wall of a building in the refugee camp of Aida. Gazing over Palestine, the child kneels next to a door that opens to the roof of a building. The image is situated in a border area between the devastation produced by man and the sphere of freedom, which opens up to the sky and which, according to mythical tales, is symbolized through

Bethlehem (Fig. 4)

Bethlehem (Fig. 5)

the flight. This flight directs our gaze towards the ideal and the possible, towards the utopia that provides us with the image of another story. Are these pigeon-travellers messengers of peace or of war?

These works by Seth tell us that the essence of art is disseminated far from the institutional places[16], far from the hyper-sponsored architectures of contemporary art museums, with their aseptic spaces and uncontaminated by the richness, plurality, and multiformity of «reality», which seems to come only in the form of celebrating the reification of world. These works tell us that we find the essence of art far from the closed places where, in a reiterated way, the self-referential rite of its narcissistic incommunicability is celebrated; we find it in *praise of a restlessness* of which Chatwin was the narrator.

If changing the world means imagining it differently, then street art takes this leap into the imaginary, distancing and suspending itself, effecting a rupture with the habitual, with the real experienced as the omnipotence of the existent, with the reified world perceived as a totality of manipulatable entities, with reality as a system built by simulacrum images. But the jump into the imaginary is, at the same time and paradoxically, a movement of distancing and belonging, a creative and reflective act, which does not produce a

dualism between image and reality but creates a heuristic force capable of continually extending the boundaries of our world, freeing resources of meaning from within, discovering unexpressed potentialities in it. It is in this capacity to invent, to create worlds by interpreting and taking root in situations and social, political, urban, geographical and environmental contexts, that street art reveals both its utopian and its realistic aspects. And it is in this attitude of continually referring to otherness that its ability to open itself to dialogue is based: that language modality that intertwines the singular and the universal, without ever reducing the one to the other.

3. THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT TAKES SHAPE IN THE IMAGES OF STREET ART

In the previous section, I referred to works located in the urban reality of Rome. This is because my primary aim is not to engage in debate on the most important street artists but rather to show how this form of art is connected to the material world of the city. Rome, in this sense, can be seen as a specific but exemplary case of the way in which this connection has now developed. Over the past years, many of its suburban neighbourhoods have become the centre of the street art world[17]. I have chosen to start with Rome's urban reality, however, in part because this setting poses in an exemplary way a question that, from the Renaissance onward, but especially from the modernist avant-garde until today, has become salient to both the production of and reflection on art, namely the problem of dialogue between the art of the past and that of the present, the relation-

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[16] Nevertheless, Seth is an artist who exhibited his works in a museum (e.g., the exhibition *Like Child's Play*, at MoCA of Shanghai, 2017).

[17] For example, the project Big City Life was realized in the Tor Marancia neighbourhood (2014), the project SanBa was set in San Basilio (2014), and M.U.R.o was realized in the neighbourhoods around Casilina Street (2010). The project Big City Life was selected as an entry in the International Architecture Exhibition of Venezia. Artribune recently described Rome as the European capital of street art.

ship that exists between tradition and contemporaneity – starting from the modernist avant-garde, has become problematic and difficult.

The Roman routes of street art offer works that are particularly significant from this point of view. Here I am referring to the productions of Borondo, a Spanish street artist, whose works often reproduce images from classical mythology, for example, the myth of androgynous (taken from Plato's *Symposium*), the myth of Narcissus, or the Pietas. This revival of tradition is achieved not only on the level of content but also on the level of form and style. The human figure, which is the constant subject of Borondo's images, is composed according to a revival and transfiguration of the classical canons, recalling a figurative tradition in clear discontinuity with contemporary production. Incorporated into his art is criticism of the trend, characteristic of our age, of removing history and of sacrificing the forms of our past in the name of a fictitious conception of progress and the improvement of our cities and living conditions.

Borondo's training was carried out in connection with the activity of his father, who was a restorer; in this way, Borondo has brought the images of his memory to the spaces of the city. This memory is marked by classical paintings, by the harmony of proportions and lines, and by drapery. Using contour lines, at times incisions or scratches on glass, Borondo defines bodies that combine the expressionistic drama of colour spots with classical figurative harmony:

> *In his works, initially, he used to trace outline lines as if they were real preparatory sketches, but now the lines have been replaced with scratches which «frame» the stain obtained with the paint and laid with the roller. The discovery of the roller is a further step that has allowed him greater speed, uniformity and compactness. It has become his brush, and his works appear airier, the lines more expanded and aimed to cover large portions of space[18].*

Rome (Fig. 6)

The images created by Borondo undermine the unitary composition of forms through a process that is realized, primarily, by the fusion between the pictures and the peeling, irregular, discontinuous architectural surfaces on which the works are made. This «dissolution» of forms is accomplished, moreover, through the mode of distracted reception, often fragmented and disturbed by obstacles, people, and machines placed between the observer and the image. The result is a work in which the forms of the past authentically become our contemporaries in a dialectical conflict that is a dynamic of distance and presence, the familiarity and extraneousness of the past. The images of the past thus live in our everyday life outside a museological and conservative conception, that tends to mummification and objectivation of our tradition.

The result is that images of mythical stories, forgotten or unheard of by most passers-by, appears before our eyes. The picture of the Platonic myth of the androgyne appears on the façade of a building, home to the Italian gay association Arcigay.

The artwork was produced on an irregular, peeling surface made discontinuous by electric wires and by a door located between the unity/duality of the figure: elements that are constitutive of, not extrinsic to, its truth. It is also "contaminated" by writing, incorporated into the vision of advertising posters, a railing, and

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[18] Sabina de Gregori, from the exhibition Catalog Isterofimìa, Borondo (trans. by author).

cars parked outside the entrance of the building. The deconstruction of the formal and compositional tradition becomes constitutive of the truth of the work, both at the time of its production and at the moment in which it is returned to the world of the spectator, in the locations of its reception. But Borondo's work, with its reference to classical images, in both style and content, does not renounce its task of «synthesiz[ing] the heterogeneous»[19], the act of composing that identifies and gives form, gives sense and meaning, to our experience. The image of street art traces a form that constitutively reopens and exposes itself to the complexity of the world with which the artwork merges, redefining its boundaries of sense.

From Rome to London: the myth of Narcissus. Because the work is produced on a section of wall between two large bridges, the observer is able to see the image in the mirroring water that reflects it. This work is exemplary of an image's ability to insert itself and interconnect with the surrounding architectural structures, which is typical of all street work. The painted face is inverted on the wall, appearing upside down on the surface, but the reflected image, when observed from across the river, returns the image of Narcissus to a «natural» orientation. In this way, we perceive that the representation that is closer to «human reality» is precisely the reflected image, which takes on blurred and evanescent outlines. The theme of the double and of the mirror goes together with the narrative of human pathological degeneration when the dimension of the *Other* is nullified. This theme transmits to us what is constitutive of human existence, and of the otherness that marks it essentially, rendering the boundaries of its identity fluid and evanescent. This Narcissus has his eyes closed to the world, but the inability to look «outside» at the same time implies the impossibility of recognizing and understanding oneself. Borondo's work allows us to participate in a truth about the human condition and the way in which

London (Fig. 7)

we stand in the world: the definition of our existence, indeed, is marked by radical otherness and contingency.

4. THE SOUL AND INORGANIC FORMS

Let us return to the underground of the Piazza di Spagna. Just before the branch of the road that leads to Villa Borghese, a few meters from the dreamlike figure of a child who releases colours of nature, we find the uncanny images created by Eron, certainly one of the most interesting street artists on the international scene. The artwork is part of his project *Soul of the Wall*: in this case, the work represents peeling and rusty signs bearing the inscription «for sale». A halo of rust drips down the walls below, revealing fuzzy

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[19] In order to define the *mythos*, Paul Ricoeur ([1983]: 110) borrows this expression «*synthèse de l'hétérogène*» from Aristotle.

and ghostly human faces. These are images of the souls of those who have crossed these corridors, with their burden of suffering, of love, with the weight of everyday worries, and of those who have stopped in these places seeking refuge or a place to die. The rust, executed by Eron's spray paint cans, causes the invisible traces of memory to appear; traces which do not manifest themselves in our daily, direct perceptions of things. On the walls appear images of ghosts, mysterious, impenetrable presences that evoke an unfathomable and abysmal dimension. The nuanced technique, masterfully realized with spray paint, creates images that seem to be spontaneously generated by the walls. These pictures are a testimony to the erased identity of the space, which bears the traces of those who have inhabited and walked through it, erased by the conditions and the rhythms of reifying life – in which man has also been put on sale, himself now a commodity – all of which create silent victims, sacrificed to the laws of capitalist exploitation.

Still in Rome, on the occasion of a conference on graffiti and street art held on 9 April 2016, Eron created a work on the wreck of a boat found in a shipyard in Rimini and transported for the occasion to the courtyard of Palazzo Mattei, home of the Treccani Institute. With the same technique used to create the pictures in the Rome subway, Eron created the work *Soul of the Sea* live, on the side of this wreck. The work depicts the faces of women and refugee children who emerge like ghosts, evanescent creatures against the rusty hull, a memory of the soul of our seas, a testimony to the losers and the victims of a story that may never be written[20].

These images of ghosts (*phantasmata*) seem to refer not only to the soul of places, of things, of people and of history, characterized by strong ethical and political values, but to conditions of possibility of artistic production.

Through Eron's images, reality transpires, filters through walls and surfaces, as a revelation

Rome (Fig. 8)

Rome (Fig. 9)

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[20] The phenomenon of migration is one of the most represented themes in street art; see Al-Mousawi (2016).

Rome (Fig. 10)

of what is not commonly seen, something hidden from our habitual experience, something not evident or certain but ambiguous and disorienting; a trace that art has an ethical and political duty to represent and that the spectator has a responsibility to interpret. Paradoxically, the artwork's characteristic trait seems to be the manifestation of the unrepresentable, explicitly proposing, in its language, a fracture, a hiatus, the sign of a difference that always recurs and whose meaning can never be saturated by a definitive and exhaustive interpretation. This inexhaustible reference to otherness is characterized in the works of Eron by a strong ethical value. In the *Soul of the Sea* cycle, the horror of the deaths at sea refers, on the one hand, to the astonished suffering that cannot be put into words yet that, paradoxically, calls on us to fulfil the duty of «testimony» (Montani [2004]: 19). For this reason, the reflective aspects of these productions, which refer to the essence of art, emerge only in interdependence with the dominant ethical-practical implications and heteronomous character of the images.

CONCLUSION

In his 1936 essay *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger wrote about the Hegelian claim regarding the character of the past of art – the claim that «the last word is not yet said» – waiting for the advent of a new way of being medi-

ated by the poetic word. In the same way, we can affirm by mirroring and answering, after so many decades, Benjamin's thoughts on painting and the painter as expressed in his essay *The Work of Art in the Era of its Technical Reproducibility*, where he observes that painting no longer has the character of the past thanks to the birth of street art. This new constellation of visual phenomena has been able to gather and to give a certain form (one that is extremely heterogeneous, complex, and dynamic) to the emergence of a whole mass of aesthetic and symbolic manifestations, which contribute to creating the articulated, complex and chaotic fabric of our city. The identities of our cities and our historical centres are constantly changing, especially as a result of globalization and migration. One of the fundamental tasks assigned to art, and which street art has made its own, is to challenge itself with the problem of interculturality and «aesthetic contamination» (Contini [2009]). Artistic experience is able to extend the horizons of sense – as they emerge from the work – to radically redefine the way we look at the world and to regenerate our experience, the power to see reality and history in terms of their unexpressed potentialities: today, all this is historically determined as a need to confront the intercultural nature of art. This area of human experience can indeed constitute a valuable instrument for expanding, deepening and transforming our understanding of cultural boundaries; understanding through which may emerge an individual and cultural identity that is plural, «contaminated» and dispersed. Art thus becomes an experience in which the challenge of encountering the otherness and unfamiliarity that constitutes us as human beings becomes a task that we consciously assume and a responsibility that involves us daily. This assumption of our human condition leaves us bewildered, strangers in the world, beings whose definition is marked by an endless search, a process that never finds a definitive goal, because it is continuously handed over to the sphere of otherness in its many forms: another thing, another man, another language, another place to which we are always «hostage» and in which man has always been «hosted» and «welcomed». We inhabit a lan-

guage and a culture that is entrusted to us by the other and which we donate to the other; thus our identity and our culture become a sort of phantom that we build through «waiting without horizon of a language that is able only to make itself wait». (Derrida [1996]: 94)

The visual arts, in their contemporaneity, have responded to this challenge through a form of «colonial violence» that attempts to universalize the abstract and empty language of contemporary art, which is meant to enter the global market and to be enclosed in the circuits of art hypermarkets[21]. The nomadic culture of street artists (a culture of boundaries and difference) responds to this derive, building its proper universality on radical, historically and spatially determined, alterity, a radical alterity that makes us feel like strangers to ourselves and our world, at the same time perennially in dialogue and familiar with every possible «other», with whom we share our vulnerability and our constitutive contingency.

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[21] Huang Yong Ping, one of the most famous artists of the contemporary scene, has introjected into his art the themes of globalization and cultural differences. His work *The History of Chinese Painting and The History of Modern Western Art Washed in the Washing Machine for Two Minutes* (1987-1993), that marks the starting point of his career, reveals its meaning in the long and explicative title already. The theme of the relationship between cultures remains a constant of this artist (also for biographical reasons: 1989 immigrated to France). In the last Maxxi exhibition dedicated to him, Huang Yong Ping shows his work *Travel Guide for 2000-2046, La Charte du Monde* (2000-2001). This work represents the earth as having been cut and peeled like a fruit and skewered by copper needles, each with a label indicating the chronology of future disasters. The Prophecies are inspired by the book *The Future Century* by Li Yu (1993) and highlights future threats such as earthquakes and droughts, wars and conflict.

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Note & Recensioni

Kathleen Stock, *Only Imagine: Fiction, Interpretation, and Imagination,* Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017, 222 pp.

Chiunque abbia letto o ascoltato *Cappuccetto Rosso*, sa che è vero in base alla fiaba che il lupo mangia Cappuccetto Rosso, ma è falso che Cappuccetto Rosso muore. Si può inoltre trovare un significato simbolico nel constatare che l'ingordigia del lupo gli si rivela fatale. Kathleen Stock, nel suo libro *Only Imagine*, sostiene che il contenuto di un qualunque racconto di finzione include non solo ciò che è letteralmente scritto nel racconto, ma anche aspetti simbolici o implicati; e che tale contenuto è determinato unicamente dalle intenzioni dell'autore di finzione. La sua tesi è pertanto quella dell'*intenzionalismo estremo* riguardo ai contenuti della finzione: l'idea è che l'intenzione del narrante è condizione necessaria e sufficiente per stabilire il contenuto della finzione.

Vale innanzitutto la pena di considerare come l'intenzione dell'autore di finzione stabilisca un contenuto *p*. Stock individua tre condizioni: (i) l'autore ha l'intenzione che i fruitori della finzione immaginino *p*; (ii) l'autore ha l'intenzione che i fruitori della finzione riconoscano la sua intenzione e (iii) l'autore ha l'intenzione che i fruitori della finzione immaginino *p* proprio perché hanno riconosciuto la sua intenzione.

L'intenzionalismo estremo è una tesi molto screditata nella letteratura filosofica e nella critica letteraria; e gran parte dei primi tre capitoli del libro sono dedicati a riabilitare con grande abilità questa posizione teorica dalle obiezioni che possono essere sollevate.

Ad esempio, nel capitolo 2, si considera l'obiezione in base alla quale ci sono regole sociali per stabilire il contenuto della finzione indipendentemente dall'intenzione del suo autore. La replica di Stock è che non ci sono strategie interpretative che possano valere per tutti i lavori di finzione e che l'intenzione dell'autore è sempre lo strumento determinante per stabilirne il contenuto.

Nel capitolo 3 viene affrontata un'altra obiezione all'intenzionalismo estremo, quella del contenuto nascosto. Secondo questa obiezione, l'intenzione dell'autore di finzione non è sufficiente per stabilire il contenuto della stessa, perché egli (come chiunque altro) può

fallire in svariati modi nel rendere manifesta la sua intenzione. Stock replica che l'intenzionalismo estremo lascia spazio per una divergenza fra le intenzioni dell'autore di finzione e gli strumenti adottati; e per questa ragione si può criticare l'autore per gli errori commessi nel trasmettere il contenuto della finzione.

La risposta dell'autrice all'obiezione del contenuto nascosto non è molto convincente a mio parere. Infatti, in base all'intenzionalismo estremo, il contenuto della finzione rimane lo stesso sia che l'autore usi strumenti adeguati sia che non li utilizzi. Ad esempio, se l'autore di finzione intende scrivere "nero" (e intende far immaginare qualcosa di nero ai suoi lettori), ma per sbaglio scrive "verde", in base alla teoria dell'intenzionalismo estremo il contenuto della finzione include "nero" e non "verde", perché questa è l'intenzione dell'autore. L'intuizione invece della maggior parte delle persone è che il contenuto di finzione include "verde" e non "nero". Anche se troviamo una prova indiscutibile dell'intenzione dell'autore di finzione di scrivere "nero" invece di "verde", resta il fatto che l'autore ha scritto "verde" e che questo errore ha avuto conseguenze sul contenuto della finzione. E se il testo di finzione viene rivisto dall'autore per una ristampa, ad esempio cancellando "verde" e scrivendo "nero", il contenuto della finzione viene modificato.

Certo, si può replicare, come fa Stock, che è difficile che un errore così grossolano venga compiuto da un autore di finzione senza che se ne renda conto. Ma la mia osservazione va ben al di là di questo esempio banale; un autore di finzione può presentare un testo con un'intenzione moraleggiante, ma tale testo può essere interpretato come ironico; o l'autore di finzione può avere l'intenzione di proporre un testo ironico che può essere recepito come noioso e moraleggiante. In questi casi, Stock direbbe che i fruitori della finzione non hanno colto il contenuto. Forse – e questa è la mia posizione - si può anche pensare che il contenuto sia sfuggito al controllo dell'inesperto autore di finzione.

Stock reagirebbe probabilmente alle mie osservazioni mettendo in evidenza che se si limita la portata dell'intenzione dell'autore (come fanno altri filosofi, sostenitori dell'intenzionalismo moderato, dell'intenzionalismo ipotetico e dell'intenzionalismo dei valori) emergono altri problemi. Ma, a mio parere, i problemi segnalati dall'autrice non sono decisivi.

Consideriamo il seguente esempio proposto dalla stessa Stock: supponiamo – probabilmente a torto – che nello scrivere *Le onde*, Virginia Woolf avesse l'intenzione che i suoi lettori riconoscessero incontrovertibilmente che il personaggio Rhoda è lesbica. Su questa attribuzione a Rhoda di inclinazioni omosessuali i critici si sono accordati in tempi piuttosto recenti. Ora, mentre un intenzionalista estremo può dire che faceva parte del contenuto di finzione fin dall'origine che Rhoda è lesbica, un sostenitore dell'intenzionalismo ipotetico – e questo è il problema sollevato da Stock – è costretto a sostenere che il testo ha cambiato contenuto perché in base all'intenzionalismo ipotetico il contenuto di finzione dipende non solo dalle intenzioni dell'autore ma anche dalle capacità dei fruitori.

A mio parere, anche supponendo che Virginia Woolf avesse l'intenzione di far immaginare che Rhoda è lesbica, il testo di finzione non autorizza questa lettura incontrovertibile e i critici sono riusciti a riconoscere questa interpretazione solo dopo aver saputo diversi fatti della vita della Woolf, e aver riconosciuto richiami criptici ad altre opere di finzione. Mi sembra quindi francamente azzardato ritenere che facesse parte del contenuto della finzione che Rhoda è lesbica pur essendo così difficile da cogliere; forse è più ragionevole ritenere che il contenuto di un testo vari a seconda delle conoscenze e della sensibilità dei suoi fruitori.

Gli ultimi tre capitoli del libro (capitoli 4-6) sono dedicati a mettere in evidenza i vantaggi che l'intenzionalismo estremo ha nell'affrontare alcune questioni filosofiche importanti come ad esempio: la resistenza immaginativa, la definizione di finzione e la natura dell'immaginazione.

Per ragioni di spazio mi concentro sulla cosiddetta resistenza immaginativa (considerata nel capitolo 4). Con resistenza immaginativa si inten-

de il fenomeno in base al quale i fruitori della finzione non riescono ad immaginare quello che leggono o ascoltano nella finzione, ad esempio è presumibile che un fenomeno del genere emerga in un fruitore di finzione che legge: "Bianca ha fatto bene a sparare a Bruno perché si attardava ad attraversare la strada ostacolando il traffico". Stock osserva che, in questi casi, l'autore di finzione non si limita solo a riportare un evento da immaginare, ma aggiunge anche una considerazione generale che si aspetta venga accettata dal lettore per il mondo reale (cioè, nel caso specifico, che sia un bene sparare alle persone che si attardano ad attraversare la strada ostacolando il traffico). E Stock afferma che è proprio perché il lettore non vuole impegnarsi a questa considerazione generale, che evita di immaginare. Stock osserva acutamente che, però, in alcuni casi (quando l'intenzione dell'autore di finzione è ironica, grottesca, gotica ecc.) questa resistenza scompare. In questo modo mostra che la resistenza immaginativa non dipende da ciò che è raccontato, ma dall'intenzione dell'autore nello scrivere la finzione.

La spiegazione è sofisticata e interessante, tuttavia anche in questo caso vale la pena di chiedersi se la prospettiva del lettore su un testo di finzione (a seconda che lo consideri un testo moraleggiante o un testo ironico) non sia decisiva per la sua reazione, o se l'intenzione dell'autore sia il solo elemento determinante per stabilire la reazione da parte del fruitore della finzione come propone Stock.

Com'è chiaro dalla mia presentazione del libro di Stock, è possibile sollevare molti dubbi sulla proposta teorica del libro. E questo non è forse sorprendente dato che l'intenzionalismo estremo non solo è minoritario nella letteratura, ma è davvero difficile da sostenere. Il testo di Kathleen Stock è però ammirevole per il coraggio con cui difende una tesi contro-intuitiva, ed è in ogni caso ricco di osservazioni e argomenti interessanti che vale la pena di considerare attentamente.

Indice: Introduction; 1. Extreme Intentionalism about Fictional Content; 2. Intentionalist Strategies of Interpretation; 3. Extreme Intentionalism and its Rivals; 4. Fiction, Belief, and 'Imaginative Resistance'; 5. The Nature of Fiction; 6. Back to the Imagination; Conclusion.

Nota biografica dell'autrice

Kathleen Stock è Professoressa di Filosofia presso l'Università del Sussex. Ha lavorato prevalentemente su immaginazione e finzione, e recentemente si è occupata di questioni riguardanti il genere, il sesso e l'orientamento sessuale.

(di Elisa Paganini)

Julie Cheminaud, *Les évadés de la médecine. Physiologie de l'art dans la France de la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle*, Vrin, Paris 2018, 294 pp.

Il volume di Julie Cheminaud descrive un episodio all'interno dell'ampio paesaggio dei rapporti tra arti e scienze. Come recita il titolo, lo fa stringendo il campo su di un momento preciso (la seconda metà dell'Ottocento francese, con frequenti rimandi alla prima) e su un tipo molto particolare di scienza, quella medico-psicologica che proprio in quegli anni andava consolidando il suo prestigio sociale e l'esattezza dei suoi metodi. Cheminaud, complici gli interessi in filosofia e in storia dell'arte, sceglie inoltre di evitare le astrattezze di una discussione solo teorica, e intreccia i suoi argomenti con frequenti richiami ai casi concreti della pittura (Delacroix, Moreau, van Gogh), della scultura (Degas) e soprattutto della letteratura (la prosa di Zola, Huysmans, Bourget etc.). Se proprio deve essere indicato un assente, all'interno della fitta trama qui costruita, è probabilmente la musica, la cui espressività "pura" resta uno degli ingredienti fondamentali per tutta la riflessione dell'epoca (come mostrano gli studi recenti di Verónica Estay-Stange).

Ma si tratta di un aspetto che riesce a emergere qua e là nel corso della discussione (i riferimenti a Wagner o a Berlioz) e che, soprattutto, non inficia la tenuta del quadro generale in esame. Gli "evasi" dalla – o *della* – medicina, come scrive il

medico e storico Augustin Cabanès (1896), sono tutti coloro che hanno intrapreso un tale percorso di studi prima di dedicarsi per intero alla propria arte (Flaubert, Ibsen, Segalen, etc.). Ma, passando al campo "opposto", sono anche coloro che fanno riferimento alle opere d'arte per supportare o verificare le loro ipotesi cliniche, come Charcot e Richer con i quadri di Rubens (neurologia), o Brierre de Boismont con i drammi di Shakespeare (psichiatria). Infine, sono quelli che hanno sviluppato una tale maestria nella descrizione dei loro disturbi (o di quelli dei loro personaggi) da diventare un riferimento comune anche all'interno della più aggiornata letteratura scientifica.

Il libro si concentra in particolare sugli spazi di relazione e confronto tra il polo medico e quello artistico, su quei processi che hanno portato all'elevazione di un "sapere" sul corpo (in senso foucaultiano) a paradigma unico della creazione e della fruizione di un'opera. Anche se il vero protagonista di queste pagine è una figura antica, che sembra aver percorso per intero la storia della nostra cultura: quella dell'artista «malato», il folle di genio che, nell'epoca del trionfo della razionalità industriale, si erge col suo pessimismo a individualità solitaria. Un *dandy* nevrotico che è in grado di "vedere" in un attimo ciò che gli altri impiegherebbero anni a notare: un uomo superiore, secondo Nietzsche (che si voleva medico-filosofo), quando è in grado di rivolgere le sue forze verso scopi "terreni"; nient'altro che un condannato e un ribelle secondo Baudelaire, che lo paragona piuttosto a un «sole al tramonto» declinante e superbo, un figlio di Saturno senza oramai più calore.

Si tratta, precisa Cheminaud, di una rielaborazione del *topos* medico-letterario del melanconico, il temperamento che secondo la teoria umorale di Ippocrate era legato a un eccesso di bile nera (un fluido freddo e secco, collegato con l'elemento terrestre). Un concetto che nei secoli del Medioevo era passato a un significato quasi esclusivamente metaforico, ma che in questi decenni torna alle sue originali radici corporee, evolvendo in una "nervosità" – o iper-sensibilità (*hypersthésie*) – che altera e mette in pericolo l'intero apparato percettivo del soggetto. Ma che è anche la base

comune da cui si diramano sia la pratica artistica sia, per certi versi, quella clinica: in entrambe si deve infatti essere in grado di intuire il dettaglio e scorgere in questo modo le analogie e le «tendenze significanti» che si nascondono nel tessuto del reale. La "prontezza" di sguardo non va intesa qui come una semplice acuità di visione, ma piuttosto come una risposta corale dei sensi; e la "realtà" a cui si riferisce come una somma continuamente cangiante di immagini. Queste ultime derivano sì dalle nostre sensazioni, come scrive Taine nel suo fortunato *De l'intelligence* (1870), ma per loro natura tenderebbero spontaneamente a farsi allucinazioni: perché diventino una base coerente su cui fondare la nostra vita mentale c'è bisogno di un continuo lavorìo di confronto e rettificazione reciproca.

Il grande artista, esattamente come il grande medico, è colui che è in grado di cogliere le più "vive" tra le immagini che ininterrottamente si affacciano alla nostra coscienza. In entrambi i casi, con maggiore riferimento alla pratica artistica, non si è più alla ricerca di una fonte trascendente d'ispirazione (o di ratifica), né ci si accontenta di una semplice copia della Natura (nonostante la fortuna crescente del modello fotografico): si assiste piuttosto al consolidarsi di un metodo «impressionabilistico» che possa rendere conto della rielaborazione individuale attraverso il prisma della percezione. Anche nel caso di una diagnosi clinica, quando è davvero *geniale*. I fratelli Goncourt o Maupassant sostenevano che l'arte non consiste tanto nella stretta aderenza al reale (che finisce per soffocarlo), ma in uno "scarto" da esso. Il lato negativo di questa sensibilità superiore alla media è però l'eccessiva identificazione con lo stimolo esterno, o – peggio – con i frutti della propria immaginazione: resta famoso l'episodio in cui Flaubert, facendo bere dell'arsenico a Madame Bovary, fu sul punto di avvelenare se stesso («j'avais si bien *le goût d'arsenic dans la bouche*, [...] que je me suis donné deux indigestions coup sur coup», scrive in una lettera a Taine).

È contro eccessi di questo tipo che si scaglieranno infine, negli ultimi vent'anni del secolo, le aspre critiche di difensori della classe medi-

ca come Cesare Lombroso o Max Nordau (che si diceva allievo del primo). Con le dovute differenze, il loro è un approccio che si concentra sugli aspetti di *degenerazione* dei grandi artisti (e degli scienziati, in alcuni casi) e di quelli che molti additano come i loro capolavori; un punto di vista esplicitamente "progressista" che arriva a eleggere valori come la salute, la forza di volontà o il bene comune a criteri normativi per ogni giudizio estetico e morale. Nordau, nel suo intransigente "igienismo", si spinge fino a profetizzare una graduale ma definitiva scomparsa dell'arte: un'attività ormai quasi inutile che si spiega soltanto come un residuo psicologico atavico (una fase infantile della scienza, come la metafisica lo era stata del pensiero positivo). Un impulso emotivo che il XX secolo avrà il compito di relegare a distrazione per donne, pazzi e forse bambini.

È qui che si interrompe questo particolare tentativo di intersezione fra scienza e arte, un progetto di impianto «fisiologico» incapace in fondo di trovare gli adeguati strumenti pratici e teorici, e contrastato sul finire del secolo dall'entrata in scena di paradigmi di ben altra portata (come quello di Freud). Ed è qui che si interrompe, nonostante il lungo epilogo, la ricostruzione di Cheminaud: una ricognizione di un terreno vastissimo e ancora in gran parte inesplorato, una ricca opera prima (derivata da una tesi di dottorato discussa nel 2012) che scongiura il rischio della germinazione di teorie, di "scuole" e di autori grazie alla precisione dei riferimenti e alla chiarezza della scrittura.

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Nota biografica dell'autrice:

Dopo studi in filosofia alla ENS di Lione e alla Université Paris IV, dal 2016 Julie Cheminaud è *Maître de conférences* in "Filosofia dell'arte" alla Université Paris Sorbonne. Durante l'anno accademico 2015-2016 è stata *pensionnaire* della Académie de France a Roma (Villa Medici), per la sezione "Théories et histoire de l'art".

(di Leonardo Capanni)

Carla Carmona, Jerrold Levinson (ed. by), *Aesthetics, Literature, and Life: Essays in Honor of Jean-Pierre Cometti*, Mimesis International, Milan 2019, 220 pp.

Jean-Pierre Cometti is, no doubt, a philosopher with an enviable level of erudition and an ability to plunge deep beneath the surface of ideas to uncover connections that are not evident at first (and perhaps, second and third) glance. Had he written and published in English, he would likely have the stature of someone like Richard Rorty or Alastair McIntyre in the Anglo-Saxon world. His

legacy does not neatly fall into pre-existing categories. He has authored numerous books on problems in aesthetics, pragmatism, Wittgenstein, and contemporary American philosophy, but he is not simply an eclectic thinker – much less one who is subservient to his intellectual heroes; rather, he is a thinker with a unique intellectual style and a remarkable ability to draw on a variety of sources in order to develop his own ideas. We find many of the same qualities – depth, erudition, distaste for mere intellectual subservience, and an engaging writing style – in the volume edited by Carla Carmona and Jerry Levinson, intended as a Festschrift in Cometti's honor. The book is more than a celebration of Cometti's work: many of the essays take up themes that interested the French philosopher but approach those themes in novel ways. The result is a book rich in insights and deeply cultured, one whose contributors succeed in connecting to the reader in a way that feels almost intimate. Given the wide diversity of topics covered, I cannot, unfortunately, discuss the different contributions in any detail, but in what follows, I will summarize the main ideas and flag for the reader some of the issues I found particularly thought-provoking.

The book consists of 4 parts plus a preface that offers a helpful overview. Part I, "Cometti on Wittgenstein and Musil" contains essays by the editors, Carla Carmona and Jerrold Levinson, plus an enjoyable interview with Cometti conducted by Carmona. From Levinson's chapter, we learn, for instance, that in the early novel *The Confusions of Young Törless*, Musil raises, and Cometti emphasizes, a problem Musil will return to in subsequent work, namely, that of the power – or powerlessness – of "cold" reasoning, uninformed by emotion and feeling. I note that when Antonio Damasio raised a similar question in his 1994 book *Descartes' Error*, in light of empirical research, the endeavor was widely perceived as highly original, and no doubt, it was. But Musil raised this question, and explored it with literary means, in the beginning of the 19th century, almost 90 years earlier.

Carmona's essay and her interview with Cometti are suggestive and a delight to read. By way of giving the reader a taste of her contribution, Carmona has this to say about the protagonist of Musil's unfinished novel: "Ulrich felt that the qualities he had achieved during his life had to do more with each other than with him, that they belonged as much to the rest of their bearers" (51). This is a remarkable insight and one well-worth exploring in detail. It contains much of what is true about situationism – the idea that people do not have stable, global traits – but it goes further than that. Situationists have argued that we do not have deep dispositions that are so stable that they express who we "really" are. But if we accept the situationist thesis, we still have to explain the relative consistency in people's day-to-day behavior. Musil has a suggestion to make, one Cometti emphasizes and Carmona relates: our qualities "cluster" in ways that seem non-arbitrary, but perhaps, this is not because they express who we are; maybe, it is because they are connected *to each other*. One may see this as a kind of coherentist – as opposed to a correspondence – conception of personality, a highly original idea.

Part II, "Art, Music, Literary Criticism, and the Spirit of a Culture," contains essays by Lamarque, Severin, and Hagberg. Lamarque defends 10 (!) interesting and provocative theses, for instance, he argues that the so-called "authorial intention" debate is only marginally relevant to literary interpretation and that so is the "meaning" of a work: what's relevant, in Lamarque's view, is not meaning but appreciation. Severin discusses the question of sentimentality and why it is a flaw, if it is. He criticizes two accounts according to which sentimentality is a moral flaw and suggests that the flaw in question is aesthetic. In the final chapter of this section, Hagberg turns our attention to Wittgenstein's views of language and music. Language can do a lot more than describe, according to Wittgenstein; this much is probably familiar. But on Hagberg's interpretation of Wittgenstein, *so* can a melody. Moreover, music and thinking are closely related. There is such a thing as "musical thinking." A melody can, "assert, proclaim, question, answer, reinforce, look back, promise much,

represent, motivate, show a way, develop an idea, establish a mood, inflect a mood, change a mood, redirect attention, summarize, expand upon, quietly close, and countless other things" (107).

Part III, "Literature as a Key to Understanding Wittgenstein," includes 4 essays that, each in its own way, draw connections between Wittgenstein and literature. In the first chapter, Tore Nordenstam argues that the form and content of the *Tractatus* are so intertwined with each other that the book is very much like poetry and quite unlike standard academic philosophy. But poetry and fiction, in turn, can serve the clarificatory purposes Wittgenstein envisioned for philosophy, according to Norestam. For readers who have never quite known how to classify the *Tractatus*, Norenstam's chapter offers a way, moreover one that has a good deal of intuitive appeal. In the next chapter, Allan Janik suggests that Wittgenstein approached philosophy neither as an artist, nor as a traditional philosopher but rather, as a craftsman. The idea is that the philosopher seeks to develop techniques that remind us of important things whose very familiarity prevents us from really seeing them, for instance, we may fail to notice that a plurality of very diverse activities gets classified as "thinking" (153—154) (one may be reminded here of meditation and mindfulness practices, which also offer techniques meant to allow the practitioner to notice the extraordinariness of seemingly ordinary things. The role of the philosopher according to Wittgenstein may, perhaps, be seen as parallel to that of the person developing such techniques). Nicolás Sánchez Durá's chapter is on Wittgenstein and Tolstoy's *Hadji Murat* tale. We learn from Durá that Wittgenstein liked this novella so much, he read it several times and recommended it to several people, including Bertrand Russell and Wittgenstein's sister Gretl. Moreover, despite the evolution in Wittgenstein's philosophical thinking, his attitude toward morality and religion as well as his assessment of *Hadji Murat* remained stable over time. What about Tolstoy's novella so impressed Wittgenstein? The answer is not a simple one. Tolstoy's approach to Murat's ethical quandary in *Hadji Murat* is, we are told, close

to Wittgenstein's own approach to problems: it is *anthropological*. Murat's ethical commitments are not presented as better or worse than those of his enemy, Shamil, and in many ways, they are very similar. The story also raises questions about what a hero is and what heroism means, a question that interested Wittgenstein greatly, according to Durá. The key ingredient in heroism, according to Wittgenstein, is not doing great feats for justice but rather, overcoming fear, finding an inner reservoir of strength. The world is unpredictable, and it is impossible to tell in advance what one must do even assuming that an ethical code has been specified. But one can face whatever comes as a hero does; as Murat does. In the last chapter of Part III, Salvador Rubio Marco takes up a suggestion Cometti makes in his *Ludwig Wittgenstein et la philosophie de la psychologie* of connecting Wittgenstein's discussion of "seeing," "seeing as," and "blindness about aspects" to Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. Marco disputes a common trope about Wittgenstein: that all seeing, according to Wittgenstein, is *seeing as*. Seeing *as* implies a duality or plurality of possible interpretations. I can say I see the duck-rabbit *as* a duck because I can *also* see it as a rabbit. By contrast, Don Quixote does not see the windmills *as* knights. He *sees knights*, or at least, that is his subjective experience. Marco goes on from here to draw lessons about the (un)tenability of coherentism.

The last and final section IV of the book, "Toward an Anthropological Aesthetics. In Conversation with Jean-Pierre Cometti," contains four chapters on anthropological aesthetics inspired by Cometti in different ways: an essay by Jacques Morizot on Cometti's late thinking about contemporary art and aesthetic agency; a chapter by Roberta Dreon on aesthetic consumption; one by Bertrand Rougé on the value and market price of an artwork; and a piece by Jean-Maurice Monnoyer on the commodification of art objects that takes its cue from Cometti's work. Morizot's chapter provides an excellent overview of some of the main ideas that emerge from late Cometti's work. For instance, we learn from Morizot that Cometti saw realism and relativism not so much as

the opposites they are generally taken to be but as strange bedfellows that share a key common assumption: that of an objective-subjective duality, an assumption Cometti questioned. In the next chapter, Dreon builds on Cometti's idea that art is not an "autonomous" sphere, insulated from the rest of life. The "autonomous art" theory, according to Cometti and Dreon, is a pernicious myth: on the one hand, it precludes art from playing any sort of critical role in ethical and social matters; on the other, it leads to increasing reliance on various gatekeepers – critics, curators, and so on – who, under the pretense of a purely aesthetic consciousness, end up controlling the market price of artworks and possibly excluding people whose "aesthetic hunger" thus remains unsatisfied and who may seek to satisfy it in some other way. In the next essay, Rougé takes up a theme from Cometti's work that he and Cometti approach different: anti-essentialism about art. Rougé suggests that anti-essentialism leads Cometti to overlook a key feature of art: its "aboutness." Consider the question of how it is that a Warhol Brillo Box or a US banknote painted by James Boggs may be much more valuable than the original box or dollar bill. It is true that artists do not have a magical power to add value to objects. What they do is produce works that are *about* something. A dollar bill is just a bill, it offers no reflection, it is not about anything. A banknote painted by Boggs, on the other hand, is not *just* a bill: it is an artwork about money. Finally, in the volume's last chapter, Monnoyer focuses on Cometti's reflection on the "aura" of a work of art, those elusive and intangible qualities of artworks we tend to attribute to those works. Here, the volume makes full circle and returns to Cometti's dialogue with his intellectual hero, Musil. I said earlier that Musil introduced the idea of a "man without qualities." Cometti, Monnoyer tells us, makes a claim about art similar to the one Musil makes about character. Monnoyer quotes the following passage from *La nouvelle aura*: "The objects and the practices that we elevate to the sublimity of works of art do not possess naturally, or by essence, any of the properties that we attribute to them: they are, in effect,

without qualities" (269). Monnoyer goes on to raise some objections, but the discussion seeks to preserve what is insightful about Cometti's original suggestion.

I would have liked to have space to discuss in more detail several of the ideas that stayed with me after I finished reading this volume. Take, for instance, Severin's interesting essay on sentimentality and the question of what flaw sentimentality is. One may ask whether context matters in answering this question. Severin does not distinguish between attraction to sentimental art and sentimentality in personal relations with others. But I for one would like to see the two clearly distinguished: some of the most sophisticated people I know, people who have a refined taste for art and who deeply appreciate nuance, complexity, ambiguity, and so on, can be quite sentimental in their dealings with other people. How are we to make sense of this? Is there difference between the standards we use to evaluate a person's taste in art and the standards we apply in assessing her taste for personal gifts and notes so that sentimentality comes out as an aesthetic flaw in one context but not in another? Or take Lamarque's provocative suggestion that the debate over authorial intention is of only marginal relevance to literary interpretation. Lamarque rejects the idea that philosophers must choose between such positions as "actual intentionalism," "anti-intentionalism," "hypothetical intentionalism" and so on. But it seems to me that Lamarque's view can only come as a fairly late stage in natural progression of thought that begins with the different positions in the very debate he pronounces irrelevant. Even if Lamarque is right, then, the preceding debate is needed in order for us to ever get to his thesis. But I am not sure he is right. On his own admission, the intentions of an author are relevant to literary interpretation, and only the philosophical debate over authorial interpretation is insignificant. One wonders, however, whether we can make sense of the relevance of intention without any reference to the different positions in the intentionalism debate. Take the following question: why does it seem impossible to interpret Shakespeare's *King Lear* as being

about Imperial China? It seems we can't even if there was a Chinese emperor who was very much like Lear in several ways relevant to the plot. The answer must have something to do with Shakespeare's intentions and what Shakespeare may have had in mind. But I am not sure we can explain that connection without reference to the debate on authorial intention in aesthetics and the different positions that have emerged in that dabte.

I make these remarks in the friendliest of spirits. I found the collection highly stimulating. The chapters are actual essays – they are characterized by intellectual exploration and focus on sharing thoughts and insights that one does not find often in contemporary work. This is a volume that cannot be faulted for being dry and technical. It is one that prompted me to go back to Musil and Wittgenstein, and it left me wondering what has been lost due to a lack of dialogue between contemporary aestheticians writing in English and Jean-Pierre Cometti.

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(by Iskra Fileva)

Report on "Jean Baudrillard, l'intelligence du temps qui vient", Centre Culturel International de Cerisy, Cerisy, France, 9-16 August 2019

The illustrious and historical Cerisy Château hosted from the 9th to the 16th of August 2019 a colloquium on "Jean Baudrillard, l'intelligence du temps qui vient / Jean Baudrillard: understanding the times to come". Françoise Gaillard and François L'Yvonnet, who organised this colloquium, both delivered penetrating presentations and consistently provided insightful counter-responses thanks to their deep knowledge of Baudrillard's work and milieu. During their own presentations on the first and last days respectively, rich parallels were made to their research interests, for instance on Roland Barthes in the case of the former and the sinologist François Julien in the case of the latter.

The colloquium was however plagued by a significant number of last-minute presenter-dropouts. Marine Baudrillard, Baudrillard's second wife and widow, was absent and no mention was made of the Association dedicated to Baudrillard called 'Cool Memories' (named after his published diaries). In addition, Edgar Morin, Paolo Fabbri, Bonaventure Veondo, Li Chi Ming, Serge Latouche, Katharina Niemeyer, Catherine Gfeller, Norbert Hillaire, Diane Rubenstein, Miroslaw Loba had all been on the initial programme, but did not

attend the colloquium. Edgar Morin was only able to attend 'virtually' by means of a video filmed before the colloquium in which he spoke about his ambivalent relation to Baudrillard. On first reading Baudrillard's book *Le Système des objets* (1968), Morin recollected finding the book both a "stroke of genius" and a "bit crazy" ("génial et un peu fou"). Morin, with reference to Heraclitus, emphasised Baudrillard's immense contribution to understanding the problem of our human condition, condemned as it is to being "awake while asleep" ("Éveillés, ils dorment"). For Morin, Baudrillard confronts the lack of reality within reality and forces his readers to interrogate themselves.

The reduced line-up of presenters was a blow to the colloquium's initial ambitious statement that "Baudrillard's work is indispensable for understanding our times". Nonetheless, and in tune with Baudrillard's own trans-disciplinary work, an eclectic range of presenters did honour the colloquium. Young free-lance journalists, video-artists and researchers in communication and media studies delivered vibrant presentations on how Baudrillard lives on and inspires their work.

During the colloquium, many presenters lamented that Baudrillard is a very 'under-researched' thinker in France. Benoît Heilbrunna, a Professor in the Marketing Department of European Business School (ESCP) who spoke on "Baudrillard and the society of consumption", emphasised that there is no study dealing with Baudrillard's extensive work on consumer society in France. Heilbrunn rightly pointed out that the Anglo-Saxon secondary literature on Baudrillard is far more advanced and he directed the audience towards Rex Butler's (1999) excellent study on *Jean Baudrillard: The Defence of the Real.*

Marc Guillaume, who had a close collaborative relation to Baudrillard, also pointed to the discrepancy between the limited reception of Baudrillard's work in France compared to the rest of the world. Referring to Deleuze and Guattari's (2006) book *Kafka. Towards a Minor Literature*, Guillaume regarded Baudrillard as first and foremost a "writer", who "digs a foreign, minor language within a dominant language". Such a "minor" language is at once a part of and apart from the "major" language; in the world but not quite of it.

Without mentioning that Baudrillard (in his *Forget Foucault*, 2007: 47) challenges Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the "minor", Guillaume underlined that Baudrillard's book had been generally misunderstood and that it is an "affectionate" exercise in critique. Guillaume went on to discuss "reversibility" and "ambivalence" as important "operators" in Baudrillard's work, and he made numerous references to Bataille, Hölderlin and Heraclitus in the process.

Drawing on Baudrillard and Marc Guillaume's (2008) collaborative work *Radical Alterity*, Flavien Enongoue, the ambassador of Gabon, delivered a presentation entitled "Digression on the migrant, a spectral figure of alterity". Using Baudrillard's concept of "spectral-ity" as a platform to analyse the figure of the migrant, Enongoue sought to distinguish the latter from both the "voyager" and the "tourist", also referring to, in this respect, to Kant, Kristeva and Jean Luc Nancy.

The colloquium was indeed punctuated by various fresh parallels between Baudrillard and other philosophers and writers. Isabelle Riusset-Lemarié looked at Kant in relation to Baudrillard; Nicolas Poirier scrutinised Baudrillard in association with Gombrowicz; Pierre-Ulysse Barranque scrutinised the connection between Baudrillard and Benjamin; Didier Lamaison contrasted Baudrillard and Heidegger concerning "the death of death"; Edouard Schaelchli explored the possible and impossible links between Ellul and Baudrillard. Picking up on Guillaume's earlier point that we should read Baudrillard as a "writer", Schaelchli started by praising Baudrillard's linguistic elegance compared to Ellul's "disruptive" formulations as well as his "catastrophic syntax". The connection between Ellul and Baudrillard is an important one in light of the focus of the colloquium, as both writers placed the question of technology at the centre of their thinking already two decades ago.

Several presentations revolved around Baudrillard's relation to art. Jean-Philippe Domecq

focused on the controversy surrounding the 1996 publication of Baudrillard's essay *The conspiracy of art* in the French newspaper *Libération*; Didier Vivien dealt with the theme of photography and Jean-Louis Violeau addressed Baudrillard's ambivalent relation to architecture. Vincent Chanson spoke on Baudrillard's relation to New York, drawing on Baudrillard's analysis of graffiti in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*.

Jean-Baptiste Thoret delivered an in-depth presentation on Baudrillard and American cinema. He too began by accentuating the minimal presence of Baudrillard in French academia, before going on to specify that his presentation sought (in the spirit of the colloquium) to "prolong" the thinking of Baudrillard. Thoret was not interested in analysing which specific films "conform" to Baudrillard's thought, rather his point was that cinema itself "produces thought" which is something that Baudrillard himself deeply understood (with the "precession of the simulacrum").

In the same vein, Alan Shapiro, American media and science fiction theorist, discussed Baudrillard as a "poet of techno-culture" and as a "media philosopher". Shapiro provided an international perspective and an overview of "Baudrillard studies"; his presentation returned directly to the overall theme of the colloquium by focussing on "the importance of Baudrillard for the future" and in the process he introduced post-Baudrillardian-era films.

On Thursday, the final day of presentations, L'Yvonnet went through various objections that have been made to Baudrillard's work in order to conclude that these were not based on a "correct reading" of Baudrillard. It is important to "enter" Baudrillard's work, to "dare" to go elsewhere, "to be disoriented". L'Yvonnet's focus on "entering" as opposed to "introducing" is similar to Rex Butler's (1999: 16) point that "we… can never be introduced to Baudrillard, can never see him as he truly is, and have already been introduced to or perhaps seduced by Baudrillard". It is therefore necessary to attempt to read Baudrillard's work "on its own terms" (Butler, 1999: 16). Although it is in the tradition of Cerisy to dedicate the final

morning to a "synthesis and discussion", Gaillard announced that such a conclusion to a "colloquium on Baudrillard" would be "absurd"; so instead, "the final word was given to Baudrillard" already on Thursday afternoon, in the form of Leslie F. Grunberg's documentary film "Mots de Passe", based on the book by Baudrillard (*Mots de Passe*, 2000) bearing the same title. A final discussion on the colloquium's achievements and weaknesses would have been helpful however, so as to encourage and justify a further event dedicated to Baudrillard.

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